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Vladimir Soloviev. *Politics, Law and Morality: Essays by V. S. Soloviev.* Russian Literature and Thought Series. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. xxix + 330 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-07995-1.

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The Christian Westernizer

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In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Vladimir Soloviev held a place in Russian life comparable to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Although they disagreed profoundly about major issues, these three Russian thinkers shared a conviction that a world view grounded in Christianity was the prerequisite for solving Russia's vexing problems. Today, works by and about Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are available in English at your local bookstore, but you will not find much by or about Soloviev there. In part, this is because he was not a novelist, but it also reflects the fact that he is something of an enigma.

He was on the one hand a renowned lay theologian and a philosopher whose metaphysics was grounded in the divinity of Jesus. But at the same time, he was a "Westernizer" closely associated with the very secular liberal movement. As a result, Soloviev has been woefully under-translated and his significance under-appreciated. This new collection of Soloviev's writings, translated and edited by Vladimir Wozniuk, makes a major contribution toward rectifying this situation.

Since his death in 1900, English translations of Soloviev's work have appeared occasionally, starting with two different translations of *Three Conversations on War, Progress and the End of Universal History*, his controversial final work, in 1915, followed by a translation of his ethical treatise, *Justification of the Good*, in 1918.[1] In the 1930s and 1940s, translations of *The Spiritual Foundations of Life*, *Lectures on Godmanhood*, and *The Meaning of Love* appeared.[2] In 1950, S. L. Frank edited an illuminating selection of Soloviev's work in English translation which provided an excellent introduction to his thought.[3] In 1965, three scholars brought out a three-volume anthology of Russian philosophy in English which included significant chunks of Soloviev.[4] In recent years, Lindisfarne Press has published four of Soloviev's works, including, once again, *Three Conversations*.[5] These and other translations reached limited numbers, and in any case, tended to highlight his philosophic work at the expense of his extensive social and political writings. From 1888 to his death in 1900, Soloviev was a key contributor to *Vestnik Evropy* [Messenger of Europe], the leading liberal journal of the time, and an active member of its editorial circle. The virtue of this new anthology is that it presents Soloviev as a philosopher/theologian who was deeply concerned about social and political issues such as Russian anti-Semitism, state censorship, capital punishment, and peasant poverty.

Soloviev's written work is extensive, and Wozniuk faced difficult choices in assembling this collection. I believe that he made an excellent decision when he devoted half of the book to two parts of Soloviev's work which are important, never before translated, and generally overlooked even by students of Russian intellectual history. The first of these is the "Sunday Letters," a collection of twenty-two short newspaper essays published in 1897 and 1898. In these short pieces, Soloviev commented on Russian social and political life from the point of view of a Christian intellectual. For example, he criticized the government for the forced Russification of non-Russians and the religious persecution of the non-Orthodox, and he argued in favor of academic freedom and an expanded public role for women. The second work was first published in 1897 under the title *Law and Morality: Essays in Applied Ethics*. In this book, which was intended to complement *Justification of the Good*, Soloviev laid out his theory of the relationship between morality and criminal law: "law is the coercive requirement of the realization of a certain minimal good or of an order that does not allow a certain extreme manifestation of evil" (p 148). Here he also argued that the death penalty was not only useless in deterring crime, but also "spiritually harmful" to society because it was "a profane, inhumane, and shameful act" (p. 179).

The rest of this anthology is somewhat of a grab bag, and it is difficult to grasp the rationale governing the

selection of the various pieces. There are several short works which touch on Soloviev's views of politics, law and morality, but others which seem less clearly related to this theme. For example, Wozniuk includes the seminal "Politics and Morality" from 1883, where Soloviev first articulated his ideas of "Christian politics," the chapter on the Christian state from *The Spiritual Foundations of Life* , and an article from *Vestnik Evropy* on the ethics of nationalism which later became a chapter in *Justification of the Good* (although the editor does not identify the piece as being from that book), among others. However, the volume also includes two works which are philosophic studies: "Plato's Life-Drama" and "The Idea of a Superman," a critique of Nietzsche. The volume concludes with "A Brief Tale of the Anti-Christ," the final section of *Three Conversations on War, Progress and the End of Universal History*. Although this final piece is the subject of much debate, it is not clear why it appears here, especially since it is readily available elsewhere in English. It might have helped if the editor had selected works which clearly charted Soloviev's historical development as a political thinker, or works which helped place Soloviev within the spectrum of social thought in late Imperial Russia.

The lack of a clear focus is reflected in Wozniuk's introduction. He does a good job of describing Soloviev as a social Christian intellectual of great range and talents, but he does not try to explain why Soloviev, who started out as a conservative academic philosopher in the Slavophile tradition, instead became a ferocious critic of Slavophile nationalism, and as Andrzej Walicki has demonstrated, one of the creators of a modern liberal philosophy of law in Russia.[6] Instead, Wozniuk repeats the traditional view that Soloviev was equally alienated from both the conservative nationalists and the liberal Westernizers (p.xxi). Soloviev's close personal ties to the liberal intellectuals who made up the editorial circle of *Vestnik Evropy* , and especially to M. M. Stasiulevich, its executive editor, are not mentioned.[7]

More problematic is Gary Saul Morson's foreword, which argues that Soloviev can be understood as part of a tradition which includes the Slavophiles and Dostoevsky. Morson suggests that Soloviev's significance lies in the fact that he joined with Dostoevsky in prophetically exposing the errors of the left. Although Soloviev did consistently criticize Marxist materialism, after 1888 he spent most of his intellectual energies attacking the conservative nationalist heirs of Dostoevsky, while writing in the pages of a liberal journal which Dostoevsky would have considered an enemy. In any case, Morson's comments seem out of synch with the Soloviev writings that follow, most of which Dostoevsky could not have endorsed. For example, Soloviev dedicated *Law and Morality* (unfortunately the dedication page is omitted from the translation here) to his friend and colleague Vladimir Spasovich, the famous criminal lawyer and liberal law professor. This was the same Spasovich who Dostoevsky bitterly satirized in *The Brothers Karamazov* through the character of the lawyer Fetiukovich.[8]

These problems aside, the volume is a significant contribution to Russian intellectual history. Wozniuk has succeeded admirably in his goal of providing clear and precise translations of Soloviev's prose. He also has provided useful annotations which explain many of Soloviev's allusions to contemporary events, individuals and texts. The book also has a general index and even an index to biblical references. The volume fulfills the goal of Yale's Russian Literature and Thought Series, which is to bring to light neglected aspects of the Russian tradition.

Notes:

[1]. *War, Progress and the End of History, Including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ: Three Discussions by Vladimir Soloviev*, trans by Alexander Bakshy (London: University of London Press, 1915); *War and Christianitŷ-From the Russian Point of View: Three Conversations by Vladimir Solovyof*, trans. by Stephen Graham (London: Constable, 1915); *Justification of the Good*, trans. by N. Duddington (New York: Macmillan, 1918).

[2]. *God, Man and the Church: The Spiritual Foundations of Life*, trans by Donald Attwater (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1938); *Lectures on Godmanhood*, trans by Peter Zouboff (New York: International Universities Press, 1944); *The Meaning of Love*, trans by Jane Marshall (New York: International Universities Press, 1947).

[3]. *A Solovyov Anthology*, trans by Natalie Duddington, edited and introduction by S. L. Frank (New York: Charles A. Scribner's Sons, 1950).

[4]. "Lectures on Godmanhood," "The Meaning of Love," and "Foundations of Theoretical Philosophy," trans. by Vlada Tolley and James P. Scanlan, in *Russian Philosophy*, edited by James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan and Mary-Barbara Zeldin, 3:55-135 (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965, reprint, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976, 1988).

[5]. *The Meaning of Love*, trans by Thomas R. Beyer, Jr. (Hudson, N.Y: Lindisfarne Press, 1985); *War, Progress and the End of History: Three Conversations including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ*, trans. Alexander Bakshy (Hudson, N.Y. :Lindisfarne Press, 1990); *Lectures on Divine*

Humanity, ed. by Boris Jakim (Hudson, N.Y.: Lindisfarne Press, 1995); *The Crisis of Western Philosophy (Against the Positivists),* trans. by Boris Jakim (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1996).

[6]. Andrzej Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

[7]. M. M. Stasiulevich is mentioned in the present volume only in a footnote, and there his name is misspelled (p. 302). Stasiulevich founded *Vestnik Evropy* in 1866 and edited it for 42 years. Soloviev was one of *Vestnik Evropy*'s most prolific writers during the 1890s, and a close confidant of Stasiulevich, who thought of him as almost a member of his family.

[8]. Walicki, p. 76.

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