The Reign of Nicholas I, 1825–1855, and the New Intellectual Climate

Here [in the army] there is order, there is a strict unconditional legality, no imperious claims to know all the answers, no contradiction, all things flow logically one from the other no one commands before he has himself learned to obey, no one steps in front of anybody else without lawful reason: everything is subordinated to one definite goal, everything has its purpose. That is why I feel so well among these people, and why I shall always hold in honor the calling of a soldier. I consider the entire human life to be merely service, because everybody serves.

—Nicholas I

Our common obligation consists in this that the education of the people be conducted, according to the Supreme intention of our August Monarch, in the joint spirit of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.

—S. S. Uvarov

Every age, every nation contains in itself the possibility of original art, provided it believes in something, provided it loves something, provided it has some religion, some ideal.

—A. S. Kholmakov

The reign of Nicholas I can be treated in terms of continuity as well as of change. Indeed, it resembled in many important and less important ways that of his older brother and predecessor.1 Neither sovereign challenged the fundamental Russian realities of autocracy and serfdom. Both, however, enacted certain more modest and limited reforms. Nicholas I’s reorganization of state peasants can be considered a rather substantial contribution to the kind of partial improvement in peasant life...
Reign of Nicholas I, 1825–1855

inaugurated by such measures of Alexander I as the law concerning the free agriculturists. Similarly, Speransky’s codification of Russian law represented a logical continuation of improvements to the structure and functioning of the Russian government and policy in the earlier reign. In foreign policy, the younger brother was only too conscious of continuity with the older, of the legacy of the Congress of Vienna and the alliance system. In terms of principles, Nicholas I maintained the Russian tradition as both the head and the first servant of the state, and he admired Peter I fervently. Even as to character, it is worth remembering that Alexander I too was a perfectionist and a drill sergeant, suspicious, given to rages, and determined to keep all authority to himself in matters great and small. Both militarism and obscurantism existed in Russia before 1825 as well as after.

But the difference was also important. It was as if Nicholas I’s rule reproduced and developed comprehensively and consistently many basic aspects of his brother’s rule. Alexander’s reign, however, like the emperor’s baffling and contradictory character, had another side, which Nicholas’s regime and Nicholas conspicuously lacked. Alexander I was an autocrat, but an autocrat in love with constitutions. He was a despot, but a despot who believed in Enlightenment. Ever his foreign policy could not be simply summarized as legitimism and a defense of the status quo. Whereas Alexander I talked to Prince Peter Viazarinsky and others about his determination to introduce Novosiltsev’s constitution in Russia, a project that was to him “sacred,” Nicholas I, after the recapture of Warsaw, wrote as follows to Prince Ivan Paskevich, the Russian commander, concerning that same constitution, which the Poles had found and published.

Chertkov brought me a copy of the constitutional project for Russia found in Novosiltsev’s papers. The publication of this paper is most annoying. Out of a hundred of our young officers ninety will read it, will fail to understand it or will scorn it, but ten will retain it in their memory will discuss it—and, the most important point, will not forget it. This worries me above everything else. This is why I wish so much that the guards be kept in Warsaw as briefly as possible. Order Count Witt to try to obtain as many copies of this booklet as he can and to destroy them, also to find the manuscript and send it to me.

Novosiltsev, to be sure, remained as a senior statesman of the empire. Indeed, the efforts and aspirations of such figures as Novosiltsev, Kochubei, and Speransky himself, under Alexander I and under Nicholas I, illustrate admirably the continuity, but also the change, between the two reigns.

Nicholas I was well suited to follow a simple and straight line of behavior. By contrast with his predecessor’s psychological paradoxes, ambivalence, and vacillation, the new sovereign displayed determination, singleness of purpose, and an iron will. He also possessed an overwhelming sense of duty and a great capacity for work. In character, and even in his striking and powerful appearance, Nicholas I seemed to
be the perfect despot. Appropriately, he always remained an army man, a junior officer at heart, devoted to his troops, to military exercises, to the parade ground—in fact, as emperor, he ordered alterations of the uniforms, even changing the number of buttons. And in the same spirit, the autocrat insisted on arranging and ordering minutely and precisely everything around him. Engineering, especially the construction of defenses, was Nicholas's other enduring passion. Even as a child, "whenever he built a summer house, for his nurse or his governess, out of chairs, earth, or toys, he never forgot to fortify it with guns—for protection." Later, specializing in fortresses, he became head of the army corps of engineers and thus the chief military engineer in his country, perhaps his most important assignment during the reign of his brother; still later, as emperor, he staked all on making the entire land an impregnable fortress.

Nicholas's views fitted his personality to perfection. Born in 1796 and nineteen years younger than Alexander, the new ruler was brought up not in the atmosphere of the late Enlightenment like his brother but in that of wars against Napoleon and of reaction. Moreover, Nicholas married a Prussian princess and established particularly close ties with his wife's family, including his father-in-law, King Frederick William III, and his brother-in-law, King Frederick William IV, who ruled Prussia in succession. Devotion to the defense of the established order against subversion and revolution implied pessimism. In contrast to the organic optimism of the Enlightenment and its expanding vistas, the new intellectual and emotional climate stressed duty, endurance, holding the line, performing one's task to the end. And Nicholas bore his immense burden faithfully for thirty years, into the catastrophe of the Crimean War. When his diplomatic system collapsed, the weary monarch commented: "Nothing remains to me but my duty as long as it pleases God to leave me at the head of Russia." "I shall carry my cross until all my strength is gone." "Thy will be done." Rarely does one find such congruity between a historical period and a man's character and convictions.

The government ideology, which came to be known as Official Nationality, was proclaimed on April 2, 1833, by the new minister of Education, Sergei Uvarov, in his first circular to the officials in charge of the educational districts of the Russian empire. Uvarov (1786–1855), that "fortunate and flexible nature," a precocious product of the Enlightenment and even something of a freethinker, as well as a scholar, a writer, and from 1818 the president of the Academy of Sciences, belonged to those liberal European aristocrats, who, in changed political circumstances, discovered religion, authority, and tradition. It was Uvarov who, in the circular quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, declared that all education in Russia must be conducted in the joint spirit of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.

The minister proceeded to propound and promote his three cardinal principles throughout the sixteen years during which he remained in charge of public instruction in Russia. In report to the emperor, as well as in orders to subordinates, he presented these principles invariably as the true treasure of the Russian people and the
Russian state. For instance, Uvarov discussed the matter as follows in the survey of his first decade in office, submitted for imperial approval.

In the midst of the rapid collapse in Europe of religious and civil institutions, at the time of a general spread of destructive ideas, at the sight of grievous phenomena surrounding us on all sides, it was necessary to establish our fatherland on firm foundations upon which is based the well-being, strength, and life of a people; it was necessary to find the principles which form the distinctive character of Russia, and which belong only to Russia; it was necessary to gather into one whole the sacred remnants of Russian nationality and to fasten to them the anchor of our salvation. Fortunately, Russia had retained a warm faith in the sacred principles without which she cannot prosper, gain in strength, live. Sincerely and deeply attached to the church of his fathers, the Russian has of old considered it the guarantee of social and family happiness. Without a love for the faith of its ancestors a people, as well as an individual, must perish. A Russian, devoted to his fatherland, will agree as little to the loss of a single dogma of our Orthodoxy as to the theft of a single pearl from the tsar’s crown. Autocracy constitutes the main condition of the political existence of Russia. The Russian giant stands on it as on the cornerstone of his greatness. An innumerable majority of the subjects of Your Majesty feel this truth; they feel it in full measure although they are placed on different rungs of civil life and although they vary in education and in their relations to the government. The saving conviction that Russia lives and is protected by the spirit of a strong, humane, and enlightened autocracy must permeate popular education and must develop with it. Together with these two national principles there is a third, no less powerful: nationality.⁶

It was for his long service to the three sacred principles that Uvarov was made a count. Still more appropriately, Nicholas I granted him the words “Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality” as his family motto.

The doctrine of Official Nationality constituted the Russian version of the general European ideology of restoration and reaction that accompanied the fall of Napoleon and a substantial restoration of the old order on the Continent. “Orthodoxy” referred to the official Church and its important role in Russia, but also to the ultimate source of ethics and ideals that gave meaning to Russian life and society. “Autocracy” meant the affirmation and maintenance of the absolute power of the sovereign, which was considered to be the magnificent and indispensable foundation of the Russian state. “Nationality”—narodnost in Russian—referred to the particular nature of the Russian people, which, so the official doctrine asserted, made this people a mighty and dedicated supporter of its Church, dynasty, and government. However, with some proponents of Official Nationality, especially professors and writers such as Michael Pogodin and Stephen Shevyrév, “nationality” acquired
far-reaching Romantic connotations. In particular, the concept for them embraced a longing for a great future for Russia and Slavdom. The dynastic and the Romantic emphases continued to be present in the doctrine of Official Nationality, in mutual support but also in opposition and strife, throughout the effective existence of that doctrine, that is, not only until the death of Nicholas I in 1855 but until 1917, although in the government, at least, the dynastic approach prevailed.10

Many poets, writers, professors, and journalists proved eager to echo Uvarov’s battle cry, sometimes with a respectful bow in his direction; Stephen Shevyrev, to give one example, followed the minister in 1841 in his analysis of Russia and the West for the first issue of the journal the Moscovite. He asserted, in his usual ponderous and involved manner:

But even if we did pick up certain unavoidable blemishes from our contacts with the West, we have on the other hand preserved in ourselves, in their purity, three fundamental feelings which contain the seed and the guarantee of our future development. We have retained our ancient religious feeling. The Christian cross had left its sign on our entire religious education, on the entire Russian life. . . . The second feeling which makes Russia strong and which secures its future well-being is the feeling of our state unity, again derived by us from our entire history. There is certainly no country in Europe which can boast of such a harmonious political existence as our fatherland. Almost everywhere in the West dissension as to principles has been recognized as a law of life, and the entire existence of peoples transpires in heavy struggle. Only in our land the tsar and the people compose one unbreakable whole, not tolerating any obstacle between them: this connection is founded on the mutual feeling of love and faith and on the boundless devotion of the people to its tsar. . . . Our third fundamental feeling is our consciousness of our nationality and our conviction that any enlightenment can be firmly rooted in our land only when it is assimilated by our national feeling and expressed by our rational thought and national word. . . . Because of the three fundamental feelings our Russia is firm, and her future is secure. A statesman of the Council of the Tsar, to whom are entrusted those generations which are being educated, already long ago expressed them in a profound thought, and they have formed the foundation of the upbringing of the people.11

In addition to the Moscovite, a score or more other periodicals proclaimed “Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality” as their articles of faith. They ranged from the fantastically reactionary, obscurantist, and nationalist Lighthouse to formal and pedantic government publications, such as Uvarov’s own Journal of the Ministry of Education. A newspaper with a very wide circulation, the Northern Bee, published by the grammarian Nicholas Grech and the most notorious journalist of the period, Thaddeus, or Faddei, Bulgariin, was of particular assistance in disseminating the
minister’s views throughout the length and breadth of Russia. So was a similarly popular magazine, the Reader’s Library, produced by another notorious and fantastic Pole who was a gifted orientalist: Joseph, or Osip, Serkovsky. In fact, until the end of the reign of Nicholas I, Uvarov’s brief formula dominated most of the Russian press. The three sacred principles appeared in many different works, in and out of context, but they became especially common in textbooks and popularizations with a wide circulation.

Indeed, before long ‘Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality’ came to represent much more than Uvarov’s attempt at philosophizing, more even than the guiding principles of the Ministry of Education. The formula expanded in application and significance to stand for the Russia of Nicholas I. Military cadets were enjoined to become “Christians,” “loyal subjects,” and “Russians,” in that order. The entire nation was to rally for “faith, tsar, and fatherland,” the phrase used, for instance, in the famous, and to many contemporaries and later scholars baffling 1848 manifesto defying the revolutionary West. The emperor himself dedicated his life to the service of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and Russia, and everyone else in the government was expected to follow the monarch. At the same time, a considerable part of the educated Russian public, led by prominent professors, writers, and journalists, hoisted the three words as their banner. These adherents ranged from some figures of surpassing genius, such as Gogol, Tchaikov, and, to some extent, Pushkin, to humdrum scribblers and poets, from true believers to careerists and adventurers. Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality” were interpreted to mean the past, the present, and the future of Russia, Russian tradition as well as Russian mission, Russian culture as much as Russian politics.

To be sure, the proponents of Official Nationality did not do full justice to the first article of their creed, Orthodoxy. While emphasizing devoted membership in the Orthodox Church and proclaiming Orthodox Christianity as the ultimate measure and goal of human existence, they were generally suspicious of all philosophy, even of theology—practiced, for example, by some of their Slavophile contemporaries. Nor, whatever their goodwill and intent, were they successful in implementing their Christian ideals in life. Instead, the Russian school system and the literature of Official Nationality teemed with moral lessons intended to edify and instruct the Russian people. Crudely at best, these lectures became extremely cheap and vulgar when dispensed by such shady and facile journalists as Bulgarin, with his innumerable moral tales. But, avoiding Bulgarin, one might cite a true literary giant, Gogol, whose Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends, published in 1847, gave an equally authentic, even exaggerated, expression to official ideology and produced a scandal in Russian intellectual circles. For example, Gogol advised a landlord:

Take up the task of landlord as it should be taken up in the true and lawful sense. First of all, gather the peasants and explain to them what you are and
what they are: that you are the landlord over them not because you want to
rule and be a landlord, but because you are already a landlord, because you
were born a landlord, because God will punish you if you were to exchange
this condition for any other, because everyone must serve God in his own
place, not someone else's, just as they, having been born under authority,
must submit to the same authority under which they were born, for there is
no authority which is not from God. And right then show it to them in the
Gospel so that they all, down to the last one, will see it. After that tell them
that you force them to labor and work not at all because you need the money
for your pleasures, and, as a proof, burn right there in front of them some
bills, and make it so that they actually see that money means nothing to you.
Tell them that you force them to work because God decreed that man earn
his bread in labor and sweat, and right there read it to them in Holy Writ so
that they will see it. Tell them the whole truth: that God will make you
answer for the last scoundrel in the village, and that, therefore, you will all
the more see to it that they work honestly not only for you, but also for them-
selves; for you know and they know it too, that, once he has become lazy, a
peasant is capable of anything—he will turn into a thief and a drunkard, he
will ruin his soul, and also make you answerable to God. And everything that
you tell them confirm on the spot with words from Holy Writ: point with
your finger to the very letters with which it is written, make each one first
cross himself, bow to the ground, and kiss the book itself in which it is writ-
ten. In one word, make them see clearly that in everything that concerns
them you are acting in accordance with the will of God and not in accor-
dance with some European or other fancies of your own. 14

A different instance of the religious mentality of the proponents of Official Na-
tionality is the following statement by Count Alexander Benckendorff, the chief of
gendarmes and one of the closest associates of the emperor: "Kiev was selected as the
place for the new university; this city being, on the one hand, the ancient cradle of
Orthodoxy, and, on the other, the headquarters of the First Army, which offered all
the necessary facilities for the surveillance of a large gathering of young people." 15
No wonder that the appeal to "Orthodoxy" in the doctrine of Official Nationality
has frequently been considered a gigantic fraud or, at least, a thorough misuse of
religion. Religion was utilized to preach obedience to the emperor, the officer, and
the landlord. The government, which taught meekness and charity, distinguished
itself by despotism and brutality. Even the Church itself was controlled by the state
and generally did its bidding. Unfortunately, it fell to those living in the twentieth
century to witness the work of governments totally unencumbered by religious and
moral principles.

The second article of the creed of Official Nationality, "autocracy," usually
included at least two items: the absolute nature of imperial power, and the link
between the emperor and God. The law of the land declared: “The tsar of all the
Russias is an autocratic and absolute monarch. God Himself commands us to obey
the Tsar’s supreme authority, not from fear alone, but as a point of conscience.”
For, in the last analysis, God provided the foundation for the authority of the tsar;
and most proponents of Official Nationality were well aware of the connection.
Such statements as “the heart of the tsar is in the hand of the Lord,” Pogodin’s
favorite, indicated this awareness. It also found expression in the constant joining of
the images of the monarch and of God, one of the most common motifs in the
poetry and the prose of Official Nationality. Typically, in such composite pictures
the tsar was represented as the absolute ruler of his great realm yet begging guidance
and support from the ultimate ruler of the world, God.

The belief in autocracy was also based on the conviction of the inherent weakness
and even wickedness of human beings, and of the resulting need for a strong,
authoritarian rule over them. As is true of most conservative or reactionary teach-
ings, Official Nationality was a profoundly pessimistic doctrine. Its low estimate of
humanity fitted neatly into the Christian framework, if at the cost of neglecting cer-
tain basic aspects of Christianity. One of Uvarov’s favorite arguments, in his class-
ical research as well as in six other writings, dealt with “the fall of man from his initial
state of grace, the fact which alone contains the key to all history.”
Similarly, Pogodin found everywhere “proofs of the fall of man (which continued in us),
of our impaired nature.”19 Grech’s Memoirs refer to mankind as a “despicable and
ungrateful tribe” and note, in connection with Alexander I’s sponsorship of the
Bible Society, that “human viciousness turns even a medicinal drink into poison,
and by its machinations extracts damage and poison from the Word of God.”
Even Senkovsky’s allegiance to Official Nationality has been credited to his skeptical view
of the Russian people.20 The same pessimism and disillusionment constituted funda-
mental traits in the personality of Nicholas I himself.

Because men were feeble and perverse, they had to be driven by a benevolent
supreme authority in order to achieve desirable social ends. Pogodin combined loud
praise of the Russian people, in line with new Romantic philosophy, with some
reservations on the subject. As early as 1826 he observed: “The Russian people is
marvellous, but marvellous so far only in potentiality. In actuality it is low, horrid,
and beastly.” And he went on to assert that Russian peasants “will not become
human beings until they are forced into it.”21 Grech proclaimed dogmatically: “Men
are not angels; there are many devils among them. Therefore, police and a severe
police, is a necessity both for the state and for all private individuals.”22 He com-
mented as follows on the reign of Nicholas I as contrasted to that of his predecessor:

Pepper too is required in a salad! Alexander was too meek replacing during
the first years fineness of character with kindness and compassion. This
is too good for the vie human species. Now there, I love our Nicholas! When
he is gracious, he is really gracious, but when he hits, then willy-nilly they
singing: “God, save the tsar!” Truthfulness, directness, sincerity compose, in my opinion, the greatness of any person, especially of a tsar. Why be crafty, when one can issue orders and use the whip? 23

While social betterment depended on government initiative, the state had a still more immediate and fundamental task to perform: to preserve law and order. Bulgari wrote with unusual conviction:

It is better to unchain a hungry tiger or a hyena than to take off the people the bridle of obedience to authorities and laws. There is no beast fiercer than a raging mob! All the efforts of the educated class must be directed toward enlightening the people concerning its obligations to God, to lawful authorities and laws toward the establishment of the love of man in the heart, toward the eradication of the beastly egoism inborn in man, and not toward exciting passions, not toward generating unrealizable hopes. Whoever acts differently is a criminal according to the law of humanity. One who has seen a popular rebellion knows what it means. 24

The government knew, Nicholas I and his officials proceeded to emphasize above all the perfect maintenance of discipline and order, punishing relentlessly all opposition and disaffection. In theory, too, Tiutchev and other ideologists stressed the role of the Russian emperor as the mainstay of law, morality and civilization against individual license, subversion, and revolution.

Not only did an autocrat embody the ideal form of supreme rule, but at lower levels of government, too, everything depended on men. Echoing Karamzin’s earlier opinions, and in particular his emphasis on fifty good governors as the true need of Russia, Pogodin explained the matter as follows.

There is no institution or law which cannot be abused, something that is being done promptly everywhere; therefore, institutions and laws are not as important as the people on whom depends their functioning. 25

One educated, zealous, active superior—and the entire department entrusted to him is, under the system of publicity, aiding other departments by its example, organization and training officials. One governor with such qualities—and one-fiftieth part of Russia is prosperous, a second, a third—and all the people cannot recognize themselves, they will be the same and yet not the same in this general uplift. 26

Force had to be at the ready, and sometimes it had to be applied, but the political and social ideal of Official Nationality remained not state terrorism but a paternal or patriarchal relationship. Pogodin, the historian, wrote:

There it is, I shall add here, the secret of Russian history, the secret which not a single Western sage is able to comprehend. Russian history always depicts Russia as a single family in which the ruler is the father and the subjects the
children. The father retains complete authority over the children while he allows them to have 'all freedom. Between the father and the children there can be no suspicion, no treason; their fate, their happiness and their peace they share in common. This is true in relation to the state as a whole, but one notices a reflection of the same law also in parts; the military commander must be the father of his soldiers, the landlord must be the father of his peasants, and even servants in the house of every master were called children of the house in the expressive old language. As long as this union is sacred and undamaged, so long there is peace and happiness—as soon as it begins to waver, no matter where, there appear disorder, confusion, and alarm. 27

Gogol made the same general point: "Do not forget that in the Russian language . . . a superior is called father." 28

As Pogodin's discussion of "the secret of Russian history" indicated, autocracy found justification not only in religion and in the nature of man, but also in history. Sharing in new currents of thought, the proponents of Official Nationality showed a remarkable awareness of history and the historical approach. Nicholas I read avidly everything dealing with the Russian past, both original documents and secondary works. It was in his reign that chairs of Russian history, as distinct from world history, were established in the universities of the empire, and large sums of money were devoted to the gathering and publication of source materials. Historians and historians of literature, such as Pogodin and Shevyrev at the University of Moscow and Nicholas Ustrialov at the University of St. Petersburg, made important contributions to the development and dissemination of the ideology of the state. Academic writing was supplemented by journalism and fiction. The age of Romanticism proved to be especially favorable in Russia, as elsewhere, to historical drama, novel, and story. Their qualities ranged from such rare masterpieces as Pashkin's Boris Godunov to Michael Zagoskin's trite novels, Nestor Kukolnik's feeble plays, and even Bulgarin's insipid tales about the early Slavs. Most of these works were very poor in story, but they helped to provide sustenance and form to the interest in the past. History, in one way or another, became the center of attention and controversy. "The historian represented"—in the words of Pogodin—"the crowning achievement of a people, for through him the people came to an understanding of itself." 29

The work that presented best the salutary impact of autocracy on Russia was Karamzin's brilliant twelve-volume History of the Russian State, interrupted at the Time of Troubles by its author's death in 1826. 30 Karamzin held the position of official historian, and he also won immense favor with the reading public. Repetitions of his theme and variations on it became extremely common in the reign of Nicholas I. Autocracy received incessant praise for binding the Russians together and leading, or driving, hem to new prosperity, power, and glory. Highly representative of this approach was Ustrialov's Russian History, which Uvarov adopted as a
textbook in the schools of the empire and which he commended enthusiastically in a report to the monarch. 31

The entire history of Russia foreshadowed and justified Nicholas I's regime, but its direct line of descent stemmed from Peter the Great. The proponents of Official Nationality, from the monarch himself downward, admired, almost worshiped, the titanic emperor. The historians among them, Pogodin, Sheyrev, and Ustrialov, paid special attention to his personality and reign. Pogodin, to take the most interesting example, fell in his youth, if not earlier, under the fascination of the great reformer, this "Russian to the highest degree," the "human god." 32 Later, although specializing in an earlier period of Russian history, he taught a course on Peter the Great's reign, collected documents related to it, and wrote on the subject both as historian and publicist. The reforming emperor even inspired Pogodin to compose a tragedy in verse, "Peter I," which dealt with a particularly painful episode of Peter's life, his condemnation of his own son Alexis to death, and which was written as an apotheosis of his sense of duty and of his services to Russia. 33

Pogodin's preoccupation with Peter the Great was dull, blunt, crude, and obsessive. Pushkin's treatment of him was brilliant, graceful, and sensitive but also obsessive. The difference emphasized the chasm between awkward prose and magnificent verse, and, beyond that, between mediocrity and supreme genius. Yet both writers were under the spell of the great emperor, and the themes they kept repeating in their works showed profound similarities. Pushkin dealt with him in such accomplished pieces as "Poltava" and "The Bronze Horseman," as well as in notes, letters, and conversation. He was working on a history of Peter the Great when he was killed in a duel. Pushkin's Peter, as well as Pogodin's, was above all the glorious hero of Poltava, the almost superhuman leader of his country, who gave Russia new life and a new history, symbolized by St. Petersburg, Pushkin's beloved city. He stood for reform, light, progress, for the present strength of the nation, and for its future destiny. Still, Pushkin was concerned for the common man withering in the clutches of the leviathan emperor and state. In his extensive study of the time of Peter the Great, the poet became increasingly impressed by the ruthlessness and cruelty of the overwhelming monarch and his measures. Pushkin's own life seemed to repeat the same tale: he found himself controlled, restricted, directed, and generally hounded at every turn by Peter the Great's state and by Peter's successor, another powerful and autocratic emperor, Nicholas I.

These elements and, no doubt, many others went into the making of Pushkin's masterpiece "The Bronze Horseman." In this story of a poor, ordinary man, Eugene, who lost his beloved in a St. Petersburg flood, went mad, dared challenge the bronze statue of the builder of the city, and then ran in mortal terror, pursued by it, the poet presented both the might and the harshness of Peter the Great and of Russian autocracy. While extending sympathy to the unfortunate Eugene, Pushkin depicted the Bronze Horseman as an infinitely majestic, almost divine figure, the greatness and permanence of whose work the poet affirmed powerfully in the introduction.
Reign of Nicholas I, 1825–1855

The astounding lines devoted to the emperor, not those describing Eugene, became a treasure of Russian verse. Pushkin’s tale is a tragedy, but its composite parts are not evenly balanced: above all rises the autocratic state sweeping on to its grand destiny, undeterred by the obstacles of nature, such as swamps and floods, and impervious to the pain, the sorrow, and even the opposition of the individual, exemplified by Eugene’s miserable plight and his pathetic rebellion. Pushkin’s “Bronze Horseman,” as well as his treatment of Peter the Great in general represented his closest approach to the doctrine of Official Nationality. It was, soto speak, the poet’s compromise with Russian historical reality: one course open to those who were fortunate to survive 1825 unharmed. 34

The third article of the government creed, narodnost, or nationality, was at the time and has since remained the most obscure, puzzling, and controversial element of the official trinity. While “Orthodoxy” and “autocracy” were relatively precise referring to an established faith and a distinct form of government, “nationality” possessed no single, generally accepted meaning. It has been most often interpreted as merely an appendage to “autocracy,” an affirmation that the Russian people were happy, docile, and obedient subjects of their tsar and their landlords. According to that view, it served mainly as a propaganda device and possessed no significance of its own. Indeed, it has been equated by some simply with the defense of serfdom.

This assessment of “nationality” is largely valid, but it is incomplete. For, and to repeat, the term also had, in addition to its reactionary, dynastic, and defensive connotations, a Romantic frame of reference. And on the Romantic plane, “Russia” and “the Russian people” acquired a supreme metaphysical, even mystical, importance, leading to belief in the great mission of Russia, to such doctrines as Panslavism and such practices as Russification. Theories attempting to buttress the antique Russian regime met German Idealistic philosophy with its dizzying new vistas: Restoration met Romanticism. As mentioned earlier, the dynastic and the nationalistic elements in Official Nationality not only complemented but also contradicted each other. Their contrast and antagonism found expression in the strife between different groups of government geologists. It was reflected more subtly in the change of position by certain proponents of the state views, while it still other instances, the contradictions remained concealed and implicit. In general, the concept of nationality accounted for the tensions and conflicts within the government doctrine—all the way to 1917.

The dynastic view was represented by Nicholas I himself, as well as by most members of his government and his court. It also found expression in such a loyal newspaper as the Northern Bee with its well-known editors, Grech and Bulgarin. The nationalist wing was led by the Moscow professors, Shevyrev and especially Pogodin, and it included the poet and publicist Tutchev, as well as numerous participants in the Muscovite. The members of the latter group stood close to the Slavophiles—who will be discussed later—although they remained separated from them, primarily by the issue of the nature and role of the Russian state. 35 Moreover,
judging by Barsukov’s meticulous listing of Pogodin’s contacts, nationalist student reactions, gendarmerie reports, and other evidence, they enjoyed considerable support among the Russian public. Indeed, the nationalists possessed, together with their much humbler background, a much wider appeal than the proponents of a dynastic orientation. But Romantic, nationalist ideas penetrated even the Russian government, increasingly affecting some of the ministers and other high officials, although they never grew strong enough to replace the essentially dynastic and ancien régime outlook of the emperor and of most of his aides. The proponents of the dynastic view centered in St. Petersburg, the capital; the nationalists in Moscow.

Uvarov, in his key position of minister of education, reflected these opposing influences in a striking manner. An aristocrat by origin, an outspoken defender of serfdom, and a man fully identified with the existing Russian regime, he nevertheless patronized nationalist professors, dabbled in quasi-Romantic ideology in composing the famous riple formula, and wanted to play the role of a forward-thinking intellectual. The revolutions of 1848 made him recoil from nationalism and toe the line of extreme Russian reaction. Yet his support of official policy was found to be insufficiently complete and single-minded, and in 1849 Uvarov was forced to resign his ministry.

Official Nationality was part and parcel of European reaction, and all of its intellectual proponents were intimately connected with the West and Western culture. In fact, with the single important exception of Karamzin, no Russian writer influenced them as much or as significantly as did dozens of Western ones. A certain crudeness and lack of talent of the school served only to emphasize the derivative nature of its thought. Even Shevyrev’s extravagant account of the decline of the West was borrowed, in part, from a French publicist, Philarète Chasles. When, after the revolutions of 1848, the government decided to isolate Russia completely from the intellectual development of the rest of Europe and proceeded to institute a ban on philosophy, Alexander Nikitenko noted in his diary: “Again a persecution of philosophy. It has been proposed to limit its teaching in the universities to logic and psychology, entrusting both to the clergy. The Scottish school is to serve as the foundation.”

The impact of the West varied, of course, in each individual case, being decisively affected by such factors as Uvarov’s thoroughly cosmopolitan education and interests, Pogodin’s and Shevyrev’s voracious academic learning and eager travels abroad, Tuchchev’s residence abroad, including some twenty years in Munich, where he came to know Schelling well personally, Grech’s German background and Lutheran faith, Zhukovsky’s immersion in Romantic literature and his marvelous ability to translate and adapt Western originals from many lands, or the aristocratic upbringing in the tradition of legitimism and Restoration of Nicholas I himself. Particular differences and nuances were very many. Yet at least one more general point needs to be made. The nationalists had an extremely high opinion of German Idealistic philosophy, above all of Schelling, and they were profoundly affected by

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that philosophy. Nicholas I and most of his dynastically oriented followers, on the other hand, paid no attention to Schelling and were suspicious and critical of the entire German school. It was at this intersection of opinions most especially that old reaction met new Romanticism.

Second rate at best intellectually, Official Nationality proved historically important for one reason: for thirty years it governed Russia. In particular, Nicholas I’s reign reflected in a striking manner both the character and the principles of the ruler, that “most consistent of autocrats.” Nicholas’s regime became preeminently one of militarism and bureaucracy. The emperor surrounded himself with military men, to the extent that in the later part of his reign, there were almost no civilians among his immediate assistants. He relied heavily on special emissaries, most of them generals of his suite, who were sent all over Russia on particular assignments to execute immediately the will of the sovereign. Operating outside the regular administrative system, they represented an extension, so to speak, of the monarch’s own person. In fact, the entire machinery of government came to be permeated by the military spirit of direct orders, absolute obedience, and precision, at least as far as official reports and appearances were concerned. Corruption and confusion, however, lay immediately behind this facade of discipline and smooth functioning.

In his conduct of state affairs Nicholas I often bypassed regular channels, and he generally resorted to formal deliberation, consultation, or other procedural delay. The importance of the Committee of Ministers, the State Council, and the Senate decreased in the course of his reign. Instead of making full use of them, the emperor depended more and more on special devices meant to carry out his intentions promptly while remaining under his immediate and complete control. As one favorite method, he made extensive use of ad hoc committees standing outside the ordinary state machinery. The committees were usually composed of a handful of the most trusted assistants of the emperor, and because these were very few, the same men in different combinations kept forming committees throughout the reign. As a rule, the committees were secret, thus adding to the confusion.

The first, and in many ways the most significant, of Nicholas I’s committees was that established on December 6, 1826, and lasting until 1833. Count Victor Kochubei served as its chairman, and the committee contained five other leading statesmen of the period. In contrast to the restricted assignments of later committees, the Committee of the Sixth of December had to examine the state papers and projects left by Alexander I to reconsider all major aspects of government and social organization in Russia, and to propose improvements. The painstaking work of this select group of officials led to negligible results: entirely conservative in outlook, the committee directed its effort toward hair-splitting distinctions and minor, at times merely verbal, modifications; and it drastically qualified virtually every suggested change. Even its innocuous “law concerning the estates,” which received imperial approval, was shelved after criticism by Grand Duke Constantine. This abysmal futility became the characteristic pattern of most of the subsequent committees during the reign of

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Nicholas I, in spite of the fact that the emperor himself often took an active part in their proceedings. The failure of one committee to perform its task merely led to the formation of another. For example, some nine committees in the reign of Nicholas I tried to deal with the issue of serfdom.

His Majesty’s Own Chancery proved to be more effective than the special committees. Organized originally as a bureau to deal with matters that demanded the sovereign’s personal participation and to supervise the execution of the emperor’s orders, the Chancery grew rapidly in the reign of Nicholas I. As early as 1826, two new departments were added to it: the Second Department was concerned with the codification of law, and the Third with the administration of the newly created corps of gendarmes. In 1828 the Fourth Department was formed for the purpose of managing the charitable and educational institutions under the jurisdiction of the Dowager Empress Mary. Eight years later, the Fifth Department was created and charged with reforming the condition of the state peasants; after two years of activity, it was replaced by the new Ministry of State Domains. Finally, in 1843, the Sixth Department of His Majesty’s Own Chancery came into being, a temporary agency assigned the task of drawing up an administrative plan for Transcaucasia. The departments of the Chancery served Nicholas I as a major means of conducting a personal policy that bypassed the regular state channels.

The Third Department of His Majesty’s Own Chancery, the political police—which came to symbolic to many Russians the reign of Nicholas I—acted as the autocrat’s main weapon against subversion and revolution and as his principal agency for controlling the behavior of his subjects and for distributing punishments and rewards among them. Its assigned fields of activity ranged from “all orders and reports in every case belonging to the higher police” to “reports about all occurrences without exception.” The new guardians of the state, dressed in sky-blue uniforms, were incessantly active:

In their effort to embrace the entire life of the people, they intervened actually in every matter in which it was possible to intervene. Family life, commercial transactions personal quarrels, projects of inventions, escapes of novices from monasteries—everything interested the secret police. At the same time the Third Department received a tremendous number of petitions, complaints, denunciations, and each one resulted in an investigation, each one became a separate case.

The Third Department also prepared detailed, interesting, and remarkably candid reports for the emperor, supervised literature—an activity ranging from minute control over Pushkin to ordering various “inspired” articles in defense of Russia and the existing system—and fought every trace of revolutionary infection. The two successive heads of the Third Department, Count Alexander Benckendorff and Prince Alexis Orlov, probably spent more time with Nicholas I than any of his other assistants; they accompanied him, for instance, on his repeated trips of inspection.
throughout Russia. Yet most of the feverish activity of the gendarmes seemed to be to no purpose. Endless investigations of subversion, stimulated by the monarch's own suspiciousness, revealed very little. Even the most important radical group uncovered during the reign, the Petrashevtsy, fell victim not to the gendarmerie but to its great rival, the ordinary police, which continued to be part of the Ministry of the Interior.

The desire to control in detail the lives and thoughts of the people and above all to prevent subversion also guided the policies of the Ministry of Education, and in fact served as inspiration for the entire reign. As in the building of fortresses, the emphasis was defensive: to hold fast against the enemy and to prevent his penetration. The sovereign himself worked indefatigably at shoring up the defenses. He paid the most painstaking attention to the huge and difficult business of government, did his own inspecting of the country, rushed to meet all kinds of emergencies, from cholera epidemics and riots to rebellions in military settlements, and bestowed special care on the army. Beyond all that, and beyond even the needs of defense, he wanted to follow the sacred principle of autocracy, to be a true father of his people, concerned with their daily lives, hopes, and fears.

Education continued to attract the attention of the emperor and his assistants. During the thirty years of Official Nationality, with Uvarov himself serving as minister of education from 1833 to 1849, the government tried to centralize and standardize education; to limit the individual’s schooling according to his social background, so that each person would remain in his assigned place in life; to foster the official ideology exclusively; and, especially, to eliminate every trace or possibility of intellectual opposition or subversion.

As to centralization and standardization, Nicholas I and his associates did everything in their power to introduce absolute order and regularity into the educational system of Russia. The state extended its minute control to private schools and even to education in the home. By a series of laws and rules issued in 1833–1835, private institutions, which were not to increase in number in the future, except where public schooling was not available, received regulations and instructions from central authorities, while inspectors were appointed to assure their compliance. “They had to submit to the law of unity which formed the foundation of the reign.” 42 Home education came under state influence through rigid government control of teachers: Russian private tutors began to be considered state employees, subject to appropriate examinations and enjoying the same pensions and awards as other comparable officials; at the same time, the government strictly prohibited the hiring of foreign instructors who did not possess the requisite certificates testifying to academic competence and exemplary moral character. Nicholas I himself led the way in supervising and inspecting schools in Russia, and the emperor’s assistants followed his example.

The restrictive policies of the Ministry of Education resulted logically from its social views and aims. In order to ensure that each class of Russians obtained only
“that part which it needs from the general treasury of enlightenment,” the government resorted to increased tuition rates and to such requirements as the special certificate of leave that each pupil belonging to lower layers of society had to obtain from his village or town before he could attend secondary school. Members of the upper class, by contrast, received inducements to continue their education, with many boarding schools for the gentry being created for that purpose. Ideally, in the government scheme of things—and reality failed to live up to the ideal—children of peasants and of the lower classes in general were to attend only parish schools or other schools of similar educational level; students of middle-class origin were to study in the district schools; secondary schools and universities catered primarily, although not exclusively, to the gentry. Special efforts were made throughout the reign to restrict the education of the serfs to elementary and “useful” subjects. Schools for girls, which were under the patronage of Dowager Empress Mary and the jurisdiction of the Fourth Department of His Majesty’s Own Chancery, served the same ideology as those for boys. Educational opportunities for women were limited, not only by their social origin but also by their sex. As in other countries, women had no access to higher education.

The inculcation of the true doctrine, that of Official Nationality, and a relentless struggle against all pernicious ideas constituted, of course, essential activities of the Ministry of Education. Only officially approved views received endorsement, and they had to be accepted without question rather than discussed. Teachers and students, lectures and books were generally suspect. In 1834, all-time inspectors were introduced into universities to keep vigil over the behavior of students outside the classroom. Education and knowledge, in the estimation of the emperor and his associates, could easily become subversion. With the revolutionary year of 1848, unrelieved repression set in. “Neither blame, nor praise is compatible with the dignity of the government or with the order which fortunately exists among us; one must obey and keep one’s thoughts to oneself.”

Still, the government of Nicholas I made some significant contributions to the development of education in Russia. The Ministry of Education spent large sums to provide new buildings, laboratories, and libraries, and other aids to scholarship, such as the excellent Fulkovo observatory; teachers’ salaries were substantially increased—extraordinarily increased in the case of professors, according to the University Statute of 1835; and in general, the government of Nicholas I showed a commendable interest in the buildings and equipment necessary for education and in the material well-being of those engaged in instruction. Nor was quality neglected. Uvarov, in particular, did much to raise educational and scholarly standards in Russia in the sixteen years curing which he headed the ministry. Especially important proved to be the establishment of many new chairs, the corresponding opening up of numerous new fields of learning in the universities of the empire, and the practice of sending promising young Russian scholars abroad for extended training. The Russian educational system, with all its fundamental flaws, came to emphasize aca-
German thoroughness and high standards. Indeed, the government utilized the standards to make education more exclusive at all levels of schooling. Following the Polish rebellion, the Polish University of Vilna was closed; in 1834, a Russian university was opened in Kiev instead. The government of Nicholas I created no other new universities, but it did establish a number of technical and “practical” institutions of higher learning, such as a technological institute, a school of jurisprudence, and a school of architecture, as well as schools of arts and crafts, agriculture, and veterinary medicine.

But Nicholas I, demanding and decisive in little things, could not even approach major reform. The emperor personally disapproved of the serfs. He saw that it produced misery in the army and in the country at large, and he remained constantly apprehensive of the danger of insurrection. Besides, he had no sympathy for aristocratic privilege when it clashed with the interests of the state. Yet, as he explained the matter in 1852 in the State Council: “There is no doubt that serfdom, as it exists at present in our land, is an evil, palpable and obvious to all. But to touch it now would be a still more disastrous evil … The Pugachev rebellion proved how far popular rage can go.”4 In fact, throughout his reign the emperor simultaneously feared two different revolutions. There was the danger that the gentry might bid to obtain a constitution if the government decided to deprive the landlords of their serfs. On the other hand, an elemental popular uprising might also be unleashed by such a major shock to the established order as the coveted emancipation.

Determined to preserve autocracy, afraid to abolish serfdom, and suspicious of all independent initiative and popular participation, the emperor and his government could not introduce fundamental reforms. Important developments did nevertheless take place in certain areas, where change would not threaten the fundamental political, social, and economic structure of the Russian empire. Especially significant was the codification of law and the reform in the condition of the state peasants. In spite of its defects, the new code, produced in the late 1820s and the early 1830s by the immense labor of Speransky and his associates, marked a tremendous achievement and a milestone in Russian jurisprudence. In January 1835 it replaced the ancient Ulozenie of Tsar Alexis, dating from 1649, and it was in effect until 1917. The reorganization of the state peasants followed several years later, after Count Paul Kiselev became head of the new Ministry of State Domains in 1837. Kiselev’s reform, which included the shift of taxation from persons to land, additional allotments for poor peasants, some peasant self-government, and the development of financial assistance, schools, and medical care in the villages, received almost universal praise from prerevolutionary historians. However, the leading Soviet specialist on the subject, N. M. Druzhinin, claimed, on the basis of impressive evidence, that the positive aspects of Kiselev’s reform had a narrow scope and application, while fundamentally it placed an extremely heavy burden on the state peasants, made all the more difficult to bear by the exactions and malpractices of local administration.45 Finance Minister Kankrin’s policy and, in particular,
his measures to stabilize the currency—often cited among the progressive developments in Nicholas I’s reign—proved to be less effective and important in the long run than Speransky’s and Kiselev’s work.

But even limited reform became impossible after 1848. Frightened by European revolutions, Nicholas I became completely reactionary. Russians were forbidden to travel abroad, an order that hit teachers and students especially hard. The number of students without government scholarships was limited to three hundred per university, except for the school of medicine. Uvarov had to resign as minister of education in favor of an entirely reactionary and subservient functionary, Prince Plato Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, who on one occasion told his assistant: “You should know that I have neither a mind nor a will of my own—I am merely a tool of the emperor’s will.” New restrictions further curtailed university autonomy and academic freedom. Constitutional law and philosophy were eliminated from the curricula; logic and psychology were retained, but were to be taught by professors of theology. In fact, in the opinion of some historians, the universities themselves came close to being eliminated, and only the timely intervention of certain high officials prevented this disaster. Censorship reached ridiculous proportions, with new agencies appearing, including the dreaded “censorship over the censors,” the so-called Baturin committee. The censors, to cite only a few instances of their activities, deleted “forces of nature” from a textbook in physics, probed the hidden meaning of an ellipse in an arithmetic book, changed “were killed” to “perished” in an account of Roman emperors, demanded that the author of a fortunetelling manual explain why in his opinion stars influenced the fate of men, and worried about the possible concealment of secret codes in musical notations. Literature and thought were stifled. Even such a staunch supporter of Nicholas I and of Official Nationality as Pogodin was impelled in the very last years of the reign to accuse the government of imposing upon Russia “the quiet of a graveyard, rotting and stinking, both physically and morally.” It was in this atmosphere of suffocation that Russia experienced its shattering defeat in the Crimean War.

Official Nationality not only dominated Russia for thirty years but also found application in foreign policy. Indeed, it had emerged as part of the reaction of established European regimes against the French Revolution and Napoleon and thus had been international from the beginning. Nicholas I was determined to maintain and defend the existing order in Europe, just as he considered it his sacred duty to preserve the archaic system in his own country. He saw the two as closely related, as the whole and its part, and he thought both to be threatened by the same enemy: the many-headed hydra of revolution, which had suffered a major blow with the final defeat of Napoleon but refused to die. In fact, it rose again and again, in 1830, in 1848, and on other occasions, attempting to undo and reverse the settlement of 1815. True to his principles, the resolute tsar set out to engage the enemy. In the course of the struggle, the crowned policeman of Russia became also the “gendarme of Europe.”
Although not to the exclusion of other considerations, this determined championing of legitimism—that international equivalent of autocracy—and established order explains much of Nicholas I’s foreign policy in regard to such crucial developments as the Münch:engrätz and Berlin agreements with Prussia and Austria, Russian policy toward the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, including the large-scale military intervention in Hungary in 1849, and the Russian emperor’s persistent hostility to such products of revolutions as Louis-Philippe’s monarchy in France and the new state of Belgium. The great Polish uprising of 1830–1831 only helped to emphasize to the monarch the direct connection between European revolution and revolt in his own domains, and, long after the military victory, the suppression of the Polish danger remained his constant concern. From Don Carlos in Spain to Ernest Augustus in Hanover, Nicholas I was ready to support, or at least sympathize with, all manifestations of European reaction.

Yet even for Nicholas I not every issue could be entirely clear. Unusually complex and difficult in his reign was the so-called Eastern Question, which led to a war between Russia and Persia in 1826–1828, to the naval battle of Navarino in 1827 and a war between Russia and Turkey in 1828–1829 in connection with the Greek struggle for independence, and to such striking diplomatic developments as the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi of 1833, the Treaty of London of 1840, and the Straits Convention of 1841—and which finally exploded in the Crimean War. Still, although opinions differ on most particular points, it would seem rash to dissociate Nicholas I’s policy in the Near East from his general orientation. The Persian dynasty survived its defeat, the Russian emperor refusing to support its revolutionary opponents. The Treaty of Adrianople of 1829 represented a moderate settlement that might have saved the Ottoman empire from destruction. The Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, whatever its exact nature and implications resulted from Nicholas I’s quick response to the sultan in his hour of need against Mohammed Ali of Egypt, another revolutionary rebel in the eyes of the tsar. Even Nicholas’s eventual interest in partitioning the Turkish empire can be construed as a product of the conviction that Turkey could not survive in the modern world, and that therefore the leading European states had to arrange for a proper redistribution of possessions and power in the Balkans and the Near East, in order to avoid popular self-determination, anarchy, revolution, and war. In other words, Nicholas I’s approaches to Great Britain can be considered sincere, and the ensuing misunderstanding all the more tragic.

However, one other factor must also be weighed in an appreciation of Nicholas I’s Near Eastern policy: Orthodoxy. The Crimean War was provoked partly by religious conflicts. Moreover, the tsar himself retained throughout his reign a certain ambivalence toward the sultan. He repeatedly granted the legitimacy of the sultan’s rule in the Ottoman Empire but remained, nevertheless, uneasy about the sprawling Muslim state, which believed in the Koran and oppressed its numerous Orthodox subjects. To resolve the difficulty, on one occasion Nicholas I actually proposed to the Turkish representative that the sultan become Orthodox! Once the hostilities
began, the Russian emperor readily proclaimed himself the champion of the Cross against the infidels. 30

Yet there was intellectual change as well as political torpor in Russia in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and the intellectual situation in the country at the end of Nicholas I’s reign was different from that at the beginning. Significantly, the single sovereign Enlightenment image of Peter the Great, which had presided over Russia for more than a century, was replaced by three competing images. More exactly, the great Enlightenment image of the emperor split in two. One of the two, that is, Official Nationality, as already discussed, emphasized such elements as power, a leading role in Europe, and a modern and effective organization of the state with a paternalistic care for all its inhabitants. The other of the two, which came to be associated in particular with the Westernizers, stressed progress, the West, and a further modernization of Russia. But before turning to the Westernizers, it is appropriate to recognize the third and new image of Peter the Great and his work a comprehensive negative image provided by the Slavophiles.

Whereas Official Nationalit continued the eighteenth-century ideology of the beneficent ruler, put on the defensive, so to speak, by the French Revolution, it also acquired, as already indicated, a Romantic wing, with its wild dreams and sweeping vistas. As to Slavophilism, it was all Romantic. In fact, it represented the fullest, most cohesive, and most authentic expression of Romantic thought in Russia.

As was usual after Peter the Great, Russia was borrowing from the West, where in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Romanticism and German Idealistic philosophers—I treat the two very broadly speaking together—replaced the Enlightenment and French philosophes as guides for much current thought. The new intellectual Nietzsche affirmed deep, comprehensive knowledge, often with mystical or religious elements, in opposition to mere rationalism, an organic view of the world as against a mechanistic view, and a historical approach to society in contrast to a utilitarian attitude with its vision limited to the present. It also emphasized such diverse doctrines as struggle and the essential separateness of the component parts of the universe, in place of the Enlightenment ideals of harmony, unity, and cosmopolitanism. And it stressed the supreme value of art and culture. In the new world of Romanticism, such strange problems as the true nature of nations and the character of their missions in history came to the fore.

Romanticism and Idealistic philosophy penetrated Russia in a variety of ways. For example, a number of professors, typified by Michael Pavlov, who taught physics, mineralogy, and agronomy at the University of Moscow, presented novel German ideas in their lectures in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Educated Russians continued to read voraciously and were strongly influenced by Schiller or Scott and other brilliant, as well as not-so-brilliant, Western writers. They knew French and sometimes other foreign languages and they traveled and on occasion studied abroad, especially in German universities. These Russians kept learning and had much to learn. Yet at best their response was supremely creative, as in the
case of Lermontov's, or Tiutchev's, poetry. And they cannot be logically kept apart, whether on the grounds of uniqueness or backwardness, from other educated Europeans of the age.

In particular, two German philosophers, Schelling first and then Hegel, exercised strong influence on the Russians. Schelling affected certain professors and a number of poets—the best Russian expression of some Schellingian views can be found in Tiutchev's unsurpassed poetry of nature—and also groups of intellectuals and even schools of thought, such as the Slavophile. It was largely an interest in Schelling that led to the establishment of the first philosophic "circle" and the first philosophic review in Russia. In 1823 several young men who had been discussing Schelling in a literary group formed a separate society, with the study of German Idealistic philosophy as its main object. The circle chose the name "The Lovers of Wisdom" and came to contain a dozen members and associates, many of whom were to achieve prominence in Russian intellectual life. It published four issues of a journal, Mmemosyne. The leading Lovers of Wisdom included a gifted poet, Dmiiri Venevitinov, who died in 1827 at the age of twenty-two, and Prince Vladimir Odoevsky (1803–1869), who developed interesting views concerning the decline of the West and the great future of Russia to issue from the combination and fruition of both the pre-Petrine and the Petrine heritages. The Lovers of Wisdom reflected the Romantic temper of their generation in a certain kind of poetic spiritualism that pervaded their entire outlook, in their worship of art, in their pantheistic adoration of nature, and in their disregard of the "crude" aspects of life, including politics. The group disbanded after the Decembrist rebellion in order not to attract police attention.

A decade later, the question of the nature and destiny of Russia was powerfully and shockingly presented by Peter Chaadaev. In his Philosophical Letter, published in the Telescope in 1836, Chaadaev argued, in effect, that Russia had no past, no present, and no future. It had never really belonged to either the West or the East, and it had contributed nothing to culture. In particular, Russia lacked the dynamic social principle of Catholicism, which constituted the basis of the entire Western civilization. Indeed, Russia remained "a gap in the intellectual order of things." Chaadaev, who was officially proclaimed deranged by the incensed authorities after the publication of the letter, later modified his thesis in his Apology of a Madman. Russia, he came to believe, did enter history through the work of Peter the Great and could obtain a glorious future by throwing all its fresh strength into the construction of the common culture of Christendom.

Chaadaev's postulates were truly seminal, although their separate impact should not be overemphasized, because much of the general European and even already some Russian thought was going in the same direction. The affirmation of Peter the Great and his work in Apology of a Madman, Peter the Great who wrote on a blank sheet of paper "Europe" and "the West" and thus gave meaning to his country and determined its future, had an absolute metaphysical character, much beyond the Enlightenment calculations of reasonableness and utility. It could well serve as the
slogan or the mantra of Westernizers for generations to come. But Chaadaev’s central argument of religion activating culture and history was to be developed by the Slavophiles, not the Westernizers, although, of course, they were to stress the positive impact of Eastern Orthodoxy, not of Roman Catholicism. From a different angle, the entire teaching of the Slavophiles has been sometimes considered as their answer to Chaadaev’s shattering declaration in the Philosophical Letter that Russia had no past, no present, and no future.

The Slavophiles were a group of Romantic intellectuals who formulated a comprehensive and remarkable ideology centered on their belief in the superior nature and supreme historical mission of Orthodoxy and of Russia. The leading members of the group, all of them landlords and gentlemen-scholars of broad culture and many intellectual interests, included Alexis Khomiakov, who applied himself to everything from theology and world history to medicine and technical inventions; Ivan Kireevsky who has been called the philosopher of the movement; his brother Peter, who collected folksongs and left very little behind him in writing; Constantine Aksakov, a specialist in Russian history and language; Constantine’s brother Ivan, later prominent as a publicist and a Pan-Slav; and George Samarin, who was to have a significant part in the emancipation of the serfs and who wrote especially on certain religious and philosophical topics on the problem of the borders of the empire, and on the issue of reform in Russia. This informal group, gathering in the salons and homes of Moscow, flourished in the 1840s and 1850s, until the death of the Kireevsky brothers in 1856 and of Khomiakov and Constantine Aksakov in 1860.

Slavophilism expressed a fundamental vision of integration, peace, and harmony among human beings. On the religious plane, it produced Khomiakov’s concept of sobornost, an association in love, freedom, and truth of believers, which Khomiakov considered the essence of Orthodoxy. Historically, so the Slavophiles asserted, a similar harmonious integration of individuals could be found in the social life of the Slavs, notably in the peasant commune, and in such other ancient Russian institutions as the zemskii sobor. Again, the family represented the principle of integration in love, and the same spirit could pervade other associations of human beings. Constantine Aksakov wrote as follows on the peasant commune, the most beloved social institution of the Slavophiles, which was to leave a remarkable record in Russian intellectual, as well as general, history:

A commune is a union of the people who have renounced their egoism, their individuality, and who express their common accord; this is an act of love, a noble Christian act, which expresses itself more or less clearly in its various other manifestations A commune thus represents a moral choir, and just as in a choir a voice is not lost, but follows the general pattern and is heard in the harmony of all voices; so in the commune the individual is not lost, but renounces his exclusiveness in favor of the general accord—and there arises the noble phenomenon of a harmonious, joint existence of rational beings
As Nicholas Berdiaev commented: “The Slavophiles were under the influence of their narodnik illusions. To them the commune was not a fact of history, but something imposing which stands outside the realm of history. It is the ‘other world’ so to speak within this world.”

As against love, freedom, and cooperation, stood the world of rationalism, necessity, and compulsion. It, too, existed on many planes, from the religious and metaphysical to that of everyday life. Thus it manifested itself in the Roman Catholic Church—which had chosen rationalism and authority in preference to love and harmony and had seceded from Orthodox Christendom—and, through the Catholic Church, in Protestantism and in the entire civilization of the West. Moreover, Peter the Great introduced the principles of rationalism, legalism, and compulsion into Russia, where they proceeded to destroy or stunt the harmonious native development and to seduce the educated public. The Russian future lay clearly in a return to native principles, in overcoming the Western disease. After being cured, Russia would take its message of harmony and salvation to the discordant and dying West. It is important to realize that the ill-embracing Slavophile dichotomy represented—as pointed out by Fedor Stepun and others—the basic Romantic contrast between the Romantic ideal and the Age of Reason. In particular, as well as in general, Slavophilism fits into the framework of European Romanticism, although the Slavophiles showed considerable originality in adapting Romantic doctrines to their own situation and needs and also experienced the influence of Orthodox religious thought and tradition.

The problem for Russia was to move from the second stage, that of Petrine rationalism and alienation, to the third stage of Orthodox unity and harmony. It must be emphasized that the Romantic ideological structure was typically threefold. Furthermore, the third stage consisted of a return to the first. Often the pattern has been described as union separation, and reunion. Yet the third stage, reunion, usually did not mean the exact replay of the initial union but, rather, a union made somehow richer through the experience and the overcoming of the period of stage of separation. In philosophical and historical terms, the Romanticists frequently defined the third stage as a conscious union, in contrast to the original unconscious one, as a fully understood and articulated and therefore stronger condition. It is remarkable to what extent that pattern prevailed throughout Romanticism.

Ivan Aksakov applied the Slavophile dialectic to St. Petersburg—that concentrated essence of Petrine Russia—as follows.

St. Petersburg as the embodiment of a negative moment of history can not create anything positive in the Russian sense. According to a well-known dialectical law, it is possible to return to the positive only through a negation of the negation itself, in other words through a negation of the St. Petersburg
period, through a negation of St. Petersburg as a political principle that guided Russian life for almost two centuries. The result will be a Russian nation freed from exclusiveness and called into the arena of world history. Is that clear?  

The direction and the destination were clear. But the timing remained unknown. Like Romanticists in general, the Slavophiles situated themselves at the very end of the second stage and the impending coming of the third. They cited their own group on the one hand and what they considered the collapse of Europe and the failure of the Petrine course in Russia on the other as evidence for forthcoming change. That stance, with its clash of the two stages, provided much of the urgency and the dynamic of the Slavophile ideology. It also made Slavophilism unlikely to last, for the millennium would not arrive. Ivan Aksakov, for one, might have become a Pan-Slav in the hope that a cataclysmic battle between the Slav and the Teuton would shake Russia to its very essence and thus bring about the third Slavophile stage.

In its application to the Russia of Nicholas I, the Slavophile teaching often produced paradoxical results, antagonized the government and baffled Slavophile friends and foes alike. In a sense, the Slavophiles were religious anarchists, for they condemned all legalism and compulsion in the name of their religious ideal. Yet, given the sinful condition of man, they granted the necessity of government and even expressed a preference for autocracy: in addition to its historical roots in ancient Russia, autocracy possessed the virtue of placing the entire weight of authority and compulsion on a single individual, thus liberating society from that heavy burden; besides, the Slavophiles remained unalterably opposed to Western constitutional and other legalistic and formalistic device. Yet this justification of autocracy remained historical and functional, therefore relative, never religious and absolute. Furthermore, the Slavophiles desired the emancipation of the serfs and other reforms, and above all, they insisted on the “freedom of the life of the spirit,” that is, freedom of conscience, speech, and publication. As Constantine Aksakov tried to explain to the government: “Man was created by God as an intelligent and a talking being.” In addition, Khomiakov and his friends opposed such aspects of the established order as the death penalty, government intrusion into private life, and bureaucracy in general. No wonder Slavophile publications never escaped censorship and prohibition for long.

At the beginning of Alexander II’s reign, Constantine Aksakov presented to the emperor a memorandum expounding the nature and the proper roles of the Russian people and the Russian government. He asserted that “the first relationship between the government and the people is the relationship of mutual non-interference,” and concluded as follows:

May the ancient union of the government and the people, of the state and the land be reestablished on the firm foundation of true, fundamental Russian
principles. To the government the unlimited freedom of rule, which is its exclusive possession to the people the full freedom of both external and internal life, which the government safeguards. To the government the right of action, and consequently of law; to the people the right of opinion, and consequently of speech.38

On other occasions, too, the Slavophiles kept emphasizing this division of spheres and the need for the government to remain strictly in its own area. "Defense in general, that is the meaning and the duty of the state. Its guardianship consists in providing greater comforts of life, and not at all in managing it. The state is in no way a preceptor."39 "Its entire virtue must consist of its negative character, so that the less it exists as a state, the better it accomplishes its aim, as is the case in England."40 And to eliminate all possible doubt: "The fewer points of contact the government has with the people, and the people with the government, the better."41 A repudiation of enlightened despotism could hardly be more complete.

The fullest Russian expression of Romanticism and German Idealistic philosophy, Slavophilism disappeared as its few proponents died and the intellectual climate changed. These "early Slavophiles" ("ramnie slaviansfily") were actually the only Slavophiles who ever existed, for none of their supposed successors shared with them the complex intellectual structure essential to Slavophilism. Yet, in a broader sense, the teaching had a major impact. It offered educated Russians a new identity, different from, indeed opposed to, the Enlightenment image of Russia that had been dominant for well over a century, opposed to the government, and also opposed to the emerging liberal, essentially radical, Westernizers' reading of the Petrine inheritance. While there were no true disciples, elements and aspects of the Slavophile synthesis apparently had their impact all the way from Herzen's and very many other radicals' emphasis on the peasant commune to some brilliant twentieth-century theory by Russian émigrés in Paris. Not always, to be sure, a matter of simple direct causation, the impact seems to be widespread and impressive enough to establish Slavophilism, broadly speaking, as a continuous part of Russian intellectual life and search for identity.

I shall mention only two or three examples, of necessity brief and fragmentary. Reference has already been made to Panslavism, which profited greatly not only from the tireless activities of Ivan Aksakov, both a Slavophile and a Panslav, but also from the writings and personal interests of Khomiakov, as well as from the general high standing of Slavon in the Slavophile doctrine, where it occupied, nonetheless, a tertiary or secondary position at best. Or consider the following passage of Khomiakov and think of Dostoevsky, Vladimir Soloviev, and still other later Russian ideologists:

Look at Germany. More than any other people of Europe she denied her nationality, was even partly ashamed of herself, and what happened? . . . Was this temporary renunciation really fruitless? No: Germany was rewarded by
the fact that when she returned to self-consciousness and self-respect, she
brought with her from the period of her humiliation the ability to under-
stand other peoples much better than a Frenchman, an Englishman or an
Italian understands them. She practically discovered Shakespeare. We also
renounced ourselves and humiliated ourselves more, a hundred times more
than Germany. I hope, I am certain that when we return home (and we shall
return home—and soon), we shall bring with ourselves a clear under-
standing of the entire word, such as the Germans did not even dream of. 62

Or, as a still different example of the Slavophile connections with the future, assess
the elements in Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s ardent and continuous preaching against
the West.

But to return to the reign of Nicholas I, Slavophilism had been formulated in the
main by 1839 or 1840; and the following five or seven years witnessed the celebrated
debate between the Slavophiles and another group of young intellectual enthusiasts,
who came to be known as the Westernizers. The two circles read the same books,
attended the same lectures, visited the same salons, even wrote in the same periodicals.
Monday evenings were usually spent at Chaadaev’s, Friday at the Sverbeevs’,
Sunday at the Elagins’, Thursday at the Pavlows’.

The whole large literary society of the capital (Moscow) assembled there
on Thursdays; there enthusiastic arguments continued late into the night:
Redlin with Cheyrev, Kavelin with Aksakov, Herzen and Kriukov with Khomiakov.
There the Kreevskii used to appear, also Iuri Samarina, then still a
young man. Chaadaev was a constant guest there, with his head as bald as his
hand, his unexceptionable society manners, his civilized and original mind,
and his eternal poising. This was the most brilliant literary time of Moscow.
All questions, philosophical, historical, and political, everything that inter-
ested the most advanced contemporary minds, were discussed at these
assemblies, to which the competitors came fully armed with opposed views,
but with a store of knowledge and the charm of eloquence. At that time Khomiakov led a fierce struggle against Hegel’s Logic…. Similarly vehement dis-
putations concerned the key problem of Russian history; the reforms of Peter
the Great. Circles of listeners formed around the debates; this was a constant
tournament in the course of which knowledge, intelligence, and resourcefulness
were all displayed. 63

Intellectual closeness was even more important than physical proximity or com-

...
Reign of Nicholas I, 1825–1855

Russian Identities: A Historical Survey, Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, p. 157

The Westernizers were much more diverse than the Slavophiles and their views did not form a single, integrated whole. Besides, they shifted their positions rather rapidly. Even socially the Westernizers consisted of different elements, ranging from Michael Bakunin, who came from a cultured gentry home like those of the Slavophiles, to Vissarion Belinsky, whose father was an impoverished doctor and grandfather a priest, and Basil Botkin, who belonged to a family of merchants. Yet certain generally held opinions and doctrines gave a measure of unity to the group.

The Westernizers started from similar assumptions of German Idealistic philosophy, but they came to different conclusions. While Khomiakov and his associates affirmed the uniqueness of Russia and the superiority of true Russian principles over those of the West, the other party argued that the Western historical path was the model that Russia had to follow. Russia could accomplish its mission only in the context of Western civilization, not in opposition to it. Naturally, therefore, the Westernizers took a positive view of Western political development and criticized the Russian system. Contrary to the Slavophiles, they praised the work of Peter the Great, but they wanted further Westernization. In addition, whereas the Slavophiles anchored their entire ideology in their interpretation and appraisal of Orthodoxy, the Westernizers assigned relatively little importance to religion, while some of them gradually turned to agnosticism and, in the case of Bakunin, even to violent atheism. To be more exact, the moderate Westernizers retained religious faith and an essentially idealistic cast of mind, while their political and social program did not go beyond mild liberalism, with emphasis on gradualism and popular enlightenment. These moderates were typified by Nicholas Stankevich, who brought together a famous early Westernizer circle but died in 1840 at the age of twenty-seven, before the movement really developed, and by Timothy Granovsky, who lived from 1813 to 1855 and taught European history at the University of Moscow. The radical Westernizers, however, largely through Hegelianism and Left Hegelianism, came to challenge religion, society, and the entire Russian and European system, and even on occasion to call for a revolution. Although few in number, they included such major figures as Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848), Alexander Herzen (1812–1870), and Michael Bakunin (1814–1876).
Belinsky, the most famous Russian literary critic and editor, exercised a major influence on Russian intellectual life in general. He had the rare good fortune to welcome the works of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol and the debuts of Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Nekrasov. Belinsky's commentary on the Russian writers became famous for its passion, invective, and eulogy, as well as for its determination to treat works of literature in the broader context of society, history, and thought, and to instruct and guide the authors and the reading public. Belinsky's own views underwent important changes and had not achieved cohesiveness and stability at the time of his death. His impact on Russian literature, however, proved remarkably durable and stable: it consisted above all in the establishment of political and social criteria as gauges for evaluating artistic works. As Nekrasov put it later, one did not have to be a poet, but one was under obligation to be a citizen.

Belinsky began his intellectual odyssey in the Stankevich circle, where he had much to learn from the better educated members, notably Stankevich and Bakunin. His devotion to Hegel and German Idealism reached its height when in 1839 and 1840, together with and probably following Bakunin, he interpreted Hegel's statement that the rational was the real as an affirmation of all reality, Russian reality in particular, and most especially Russian autocracy. Not surprisingly, the infatuation did not last long, and Belinsky wrote what became the most famous denunciation of Hegel and German Idealism philosophy in Russian intellectual history. Always in search of faith, he turned instead to a belief in the individual and to the principle of what he called "sociality," perhaps best described as a humanitarian concern for fellow human beings. In the name of the individual and of "sociality," Belinsky reaffirmed his support of the great French Revolution and of the entire progressive development in the West. As to Russia, that country needed "another Peter the Great," another mighty effort to advance along the common road of civilized humanity. Belinsky died in 1848, of consumption, thus probably escaping an imminent arrest.

Both Michael Bakunin and Alexander Herzen were to live much longer than Belinsky and to follow their striking debuts as Westernizers and as "men of the forties" with explosive, seminal, and inimitable prominence in the radical movements in their country and, in the case of Bakunin especially, also all over Europe. Bakunin's infatuation with Russian autocracy and Nicholas I lasted no longer than Belinsky's. After leaving Russia and arriving in Berlin in 1840, he joined actively and enthusiastically in German intellectual life, and he moved rapidly to the Left. Bakunin's arrival and establishment in the Prussian capital corresponded with Arnold Ruge's publicistic activities, the appearance in 1841 of Ludwig Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity, and in general the emergence of the so-called Young Hegelians. The sustained effort of the Hegelian Left to interpret Hegel's teaching as a theoretical justification of radical action suited Bakunin to perfection: it left many of his Hegelian, metaphysical, and even mystical premises intact, yet it offered him what he longed for most, rebellion. Fully converted in the winter of 1841–1842 and never one to keep in the background, Bakunin published in October 1842, in Ruge's
Deutsche Jahrbücher, a remarkable article entitled “Reaction in Germany: From the Notebooks of a Frenchman,” signed “Jules Elyard.” Typically, he argued especially against the compromises, the people in the middle. There could be no compromise. The issue of the day was the struggle between democracy and reaction. The victory of democracy would produce a new heaven and a new earth. In the meantime, however, only the struggle, only negation mattered. The article concluded:

All peoples and all men are full of presentiments. Everyone whose living organs are not paralyzed sees with trembling expectation the approach of the future which will utter the decisive word. Even in Russia, in that limitless and snow-covered empire, of which we know so little and which has before it perhaps a great future, even in Russia the dark storm clouds are gathering! The air is sultry, it is heavy with storms!

And therefore we call to our blinded brothers: Repeat! Repent! The Kingdom of God is coming nigh.

Let us put our trust in the eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unsearchable and eternally creative source of life. The passion for destruction is also a creative passion.

Michael Bakunin was well on his way to becoming “founder of nihilism and apostle of anarchism.”

Alexander Herzen also followed the road from idealistic Westernism to radicalism. A brilliant writer, publicist, and polemicist, the author of perhaps the most remarkable depiction of that entire period in his autobiographical My Past and Thoughts, and eventually an inspiration to the entire Russian intelligentsia to which he had contributed so much. Herzen was born in the memorable year of 1812, an illegitimate but pampered son of a cultured and misanthropic landlord. His childhood and boyhood combined social and perhaps emotional isolation with fluency in three languages, including his mother’s German, voracious reading, and the usual aristocratic education of private tutors. He studied at the University of Moscow and at the same time organized a circle of young intellectuals parallel to that of Stankovich. In 1834, however, Herzen was arrested when the government reacted very sharply to a few signs of disaffection among students. Although nothing could be demonstrated against Herzen beyond his interest in the writings of Saint-Simon, he had to spend ten months in prison and five more years in exile in provincial towns, distant Vyatka from 1835 to the end of 1837, and then Vladimir until 1840. Prison and government service in the provinces both separated Herzen from his intellectual and social world and offered him a new look at Russia. When he was finally pardoned in May 1840, Herzen returned to his intellectual pursuits with his friends and proceeded, for several years, together with Granovsky, to carry the main burden of the Westernizer side of the celebrated debate with the Slavophiles.

Herzen liked to emphasize that he displayed early a more social, political, “French” orientation than those of his Romantic associates and his claim is justified.
to an extent. Yet he was also a splendid representative of the age of Romanticism and
German Idealistic philosophy. As a leading specialist has put it: "Young Herzen's
main interest in Saint-Simon's doctrine was the philosophy of history, the revelation
of a new religion and the announcement of a new ‘organic age’. In Herzen's Weltan-
schauung, the influences of Saint-Simon and Pierre Leroux coexisted happily with
the equally strong influences of Schelling and German Romantic philosophy."68
Indeed, Schelling and certainly Schiller, Hegel, and some other German writers were
at the foundation of Herzen's thought. And it was Herzen who immortalized in his
autobiography the fantastic obsession of contemporary Russian intellectuals of his
and related circles with Hegel and other German Idealistic philosophers. Herzen
and his bosom friend, the poet and a kind of Schellingian Nicholas Ogarev, lived
their Romantic convictions. Their celebrated friendship, which they seemed to
attach a supreme, even at times a metaphysical or quasi-religious importance, was
itself a remarkable product of the age. Their loves were equally notable. In particu-
lar, Herzen's courtship of and marriage to Natalia Zakhariana, during his exile, had
almost cosmic overtones for the future great radical: Natalie became his reconcilia-
tion and his salvation, almost his religion and his philosophy, in a manner no
Voltairean could comprehend.

While it is impossible to exclude Herzen from the history of Idealism and
Romanticism in Russia, he refused to be permanently confined to that Weltan-
schauung either. A student of Hegel led to the Left Hegelians. It was Herzen who
referred to Hegelianism as "the algebra of revolution." "The world is complete only
in action . . . the living unity of theory and practice."69 Finally, in 1847, Herzen left
Russia forever, to publish eventually the Bell and become one of the most important
and celebrated émigrés in Russian history. Yet abroad, too, Herzen could find no
new satisfactory intellectual framework, let alone ideological security. He quickly
discovered disasters in the West to match those in Russia. The optimistic Western-
izer belief in Peter the Great and progress had to be abandoned, for the last time,
after Herzen's total disappointment with the emancipation of the serfs and other
"great reforms" as they were enacted by the Russian government. Bakunin's running
after revolutions appeared to be childish and completely ineffective. If Herzen was
maturer as man and thinker, he was maturing essentially toward skepticism and
despair. Isaiah Berlin concluded on Herzen:

The heart of his thought is the notion that the basic problems are perhaps
not soluble at all, that all one can do is to try to solve them, but that there is
no guarantee, either in socialist nostrums or in any other human construc-
tion, no guarantee that happiness or a rational life can be attained, in private
or in public life.70

In 1844 Herzen had been accused of reading Saint-Simon; in the spring of 1849,
the police in St. Petersburg arrested a whole group or society of young men gathering
on Fridays at the home of Michael Rutashevich-Petrashevsky and studying the
works of another strange French utopian socialist, Francois-Marie-Charles Fourier (1772–1837), and other radical literature. The meetings had, in fact, been taking place from 1845. Fourier preached a peaceful transformation of the world into small, marvelously integrated and self-supporting communes, which would also provide for the release and harmony of human passions, according to a fantastic scheme of Fourier’s own invention. The all-important point was to establish these initial phalanxes, or even a single phalanx, for after that, the obvious blessedness of the phalanx life and eager imitation by the outsiders will accomplish the rest. The world would become paradise. The Petrashevtsy, as these Russian enthusiasts of Fourier came to be known, were to be sure, an informal group, with a considerable variety of opinion on many issues (for instance, on religion, especially because Fourier also advocated totally fantastic religious views of his own) and, for some of them, an unfortunate predilection to combine Fourierism with attacks on the situation in Russia and even on Nicholas I himself. And the year 1849, after the revolutions of 1848, was a very bad one for the unfortunate culprits. Nicholas I would not found a phalanx. Instead, twenty-five men were sentenced to death, although the sentence was changed at the place of execution to less drastic punishment. It was as a member of the Petrashevtsy that Tostoevsky faced imminent execution and later went to Siberia. The Petrashevtsy, it might be added, came generally from lower—but educated—social strata than the Lovers of Wisdom, the Slavophiles, and the Westernizers, and included mostly minor officials, junior officers, and students.

The reign of Nicholas I has been described as a period of political despotism, social stagnation, military defeat in the Crimea, and economic backwardness and crisis, but also as part of the Golden Age of Russian literature, and as a creative and seminal segment of time for Russian intellectual development. Herzen referred to an amazing period of outward political slavery and inward intellectual emancipation. A lesser participant and observer, Paul Annenkov, focusing principally on the 1840s, called these years “a marvelous decade” (zamechatelnoe desiatletie). What these two and many other Russians glorified was the new richness of Russian thought and literary culture, no longer led and controlled by the government.

And the government knew it. Although finding widespread support in Official Nationality, the authorities generally considered ideologists and ideas highly suspect. Nicholas I never distinguished sharply between the two, and perhaps with reason. The Lovers of Wisdom disbanded their society in time and caused no trouble. Chaadaev, however, insisted on making his statement and had to be proclaimed insane. The government was offended by the Slavophiles in more ways than one. In addition to expressing nonsensical but clearly critical and oppositionist views, they usually failed to serve the state either in the army or the bureaucracy. Scions of good landholding families, they seemed to be engaged in some kind of gentility front. As a reprisal and a security measure, the authorities interfered drastically with Slavophile publishing, while no member of the immediate group obtained a position in the imperial educational establishment. The Westernizers
ranged from suspicious liberal professors who had to be watched constantly to outright rebels, such as Bakunin and Herzen. The Petrashevtsy were worse, if anything. Lacking organization and professing a peaceful ideology, they seemed nevertheless to threaten the government with their bitter hostility. Moreover, their appearance marked, in a sense, a new stage in the alienation of progressive intellectuals from the state. Whereas Chaadaev, like some of the Decembrists, stood at one time close to Alexander I, and whereas Nicholas I could still admonish the Slavophile Samarin in person and even be impressed by Bakunin's stunning written confession to the autocrat, no such ties existed between the young men who gathered at Petrashevsky's on Fridays and the rulers of Russia. In fact—although at the time this, of course, could be at best sensed rather than known—the Petrashevtsy, and possibly even more so the members of a related circle organized by the poet Sergey Dunov, were in composition and attitude quite similar to the later revolutionary groups of the 1860s and 1870s. While the Petrashevtsy were holding their meetings in St. Petersburg, authorities uncovered yet another subversive society, the Brotherhood of Cyril and Methodius, in Kiev, arresting its members in March 1847. These few members, who included the historian Nicholas Kostomarov and the great Ukrainian poet of serf origin Taras Shevchenko, believed in the Messianic role of the Ukrainians and in a free democratic federation of Slavic peoples centered on Kiev.

How can one account for all these developments? What were the reasons that terminated, or at least so greatly impaired, the more than century-old intimate alliance between the government and the educated public in Russia, transforming the apparently monolithic image of the eighteenth century, and, still, of the 1830s, with the government virtually in complete control, into a picture of alienation and opposition? Most prerevolutionary Russian scholars and many Western specialists blamed directly the government itself, and more specifically Nicholas I. With a characteristically liberal, and occasionally radical, bias, they saw the educated public, in particular its intellectual leaders, as bearers of light and the conscience of Russia. These leaders naturally supported progressive Petrine reforms, and they offered their strong backing to the activities of Catherine the Great and the projects of Alexander I. But with Nicholas I, cooperation ceased. The new emperor refused to solve the pressing problems of the country, and he established a regime of unbearable reaction, oppression, and militarism. The last harrowing years of his rule, which followed the revolutions of 1848, raised oppression to an insane pitch and made a fundamental break between the state and all aware and self-respecting Russians inevitable. One is reminded of Alexander Nikitenko's bitter comment that the main failing of the reign of Nicholas I consisted in the fact that it was all a mistake. And yet, at least in its simple form, the liberal view fails to carry conviction. For one thing, the last years of Nicholas I's rule were probably more painful than decisive in the relationship between the government and the educated public in Russia, because the split between the two had preceded their onset. More important,
Nicholas I was not called the most consistent of autocrats for nothing. The emperor's beliefs, aims, and policies remained essentially the same in the 1820s, 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. It was the educated public that changed.

The educated Russian public was affected by many factors of diverse kinds and potency. Among the most persistent and important was the course of Russian foreign relations and the role that Russia played on the world stage in an increasingly nationalistic age. Peter Christoff spent much effort in his valuable books on the Slavophiles demonstrating that the hearts of his protagonists belonged to Russia. Soviet specialists kept insisting, again needlessly, on the patriotism of their radical heroes. In fact, every educated Russian—and many an uneducated one, for not quite the same reasons—was a patriot in that bright and naive dawn of Romantic nationalism in Russia, over which there shone the luminous light of 1812. That was true, in his own desperate way, even of the Chaadaev of the first "Philosophical Letter" (and not only of the Chaadaev of Apology of a Madman or the Chaadaev who fought at Borodino). Observers and later scholars noted for instance, in what a united manner the Russian educated public reacted against the Poles when they staged their rebellion in 1830–1831. Throughout his reign, Nicholas I was concerned not by any lack of patriotism but by the nationalist wing within his own Official Nationality and by other nationalists outside government circles. Benckendorff kept citing in his annual genciane reports "Russian patriots" or "Muscovite patriots" as the greatest source of critical discussion and discontent in the country, at least outside Poland, and, conversely, he continually reiterated his belief that nothing gained the sovereign so much approbation and support as measures meant to enhance the Russian national spirit. A dedicated patriot himself, Nicholas I was also a convinced conservative or reactionary, as well as the man actually responsible for state policies and their results. By temperament, conviction, and also certainly because of his position, he could not endorse the irresponsible nationalistic enthusiasms of many of his subjects. Tension and hostility, therefore, developed and are reflected in the writings of the Slavophiles and of many other educated Russians, including representatives of the nationalist wing of Official Nationality. The Crimean fiasco at the end of the reign constituted a terrible disaster for Russians in general, but especially for the nationalists among them. The government looked so strikingly isolated in 1855 precisely because it had lost all nationalist support.

In another respect, too, in regard to the West, the decades of Nicholas I's rule proved to be on the whole disastrous as well as, once again, highly significant for Russian public opinion. Throughout the eighteenth century and the reign of Alexander I, Russia enjoyed good press, everything considered, in other European countries. Many disparate phenomena, ranging from Catherine the Great's skill in dealing with the philosophes to a virtual European idolatry of Alexander I following his victory over Napoleon, contributed to this favorable image. Most important, the cosmopolitan European Enlightenment welcomed Russia as a promising, as well as enthusiastic, disciple. By 1813 or 1815, the land of the tsars was, to all appearances,
already repaying its debt, leading other countries in the overthrow of Napoleonic tyranny and in the establishment of a new age of peace, stability, and happiness.

In subsequent years, and especially in the reign of Nicholas I, the image of Russia changed. The change was primarily determined by the increasing polarization of European politics and by the cooling of the alliance of the Russian empire with the Right. Nicholas I’s personal devotion to the conservative cause and his directness and rudeness accelerated and sharpened the process. In any event, whereas Alexander I had been hailed as the liberator of Europe, Nicholas I came to be known as its gendarme. Whereas Catherine the Great had been eulogized by Voltaire, Diderot, and d’Alembert, and whereas Alexander I had received praise from Jefferson, all liberals and radicals denounced Nicholas I, his system, and his country. Nor was the condemnation limited to the Left, no matter how broadly defined. The most famous literary attack on the Russia of Nicholas I, La Russie en 1830, was mounted by Astolphe Marquis de Custine, a conservative French aristocrat. After Russian troops in the summer of 1849 suppressed the Hungarian revolt against the Habsburg crown, hatred of Nicholas I and of Russia became in a sense part of the Hungarian national creed. While the Hungarians reacted to a single decisive intervention, the Poles remained a constant enemy and source of trouble for the Russian ruler and state. Following the defeat of their rebellion in 1830–1831, many Poles migrated to the West, especially to Paris but also to London and other cities, where they formed effective centers of Polish nationalism and anti-Russian propaganda. Mickiewicz’s great voice was only one of many calling attention to the tragedy of Poland and the brutality of its Russian oppressor. Violent denigration of Nicholas I reached remarkable extremes. Even the emperor’s closest foreign associates, the rulers and governments of Prussia and Austria, were dissatisfied: the Prussians resented the fact that Nicholas I had taken the side of Austria during the momentous developments of 1848–1850; the Austrians felt that their interests were in conflict with those of Russia in the Balkans both chafed under Nicholas’s overbearing solicitude. The British, in addition to their general disapproval of Russian autocracy, developed an exaggerated dread of Russian designs in the East, fearing even for British India. As to France, Nicholas I hated both the July Monarchy, which was brought to the throne by a revolution, and Louis-Napoleon, after he declared himself Emperor Napoleon III. In the Crimean War, Russian isolation in European public opinion paralleled the diplomatic isolation of the country.

The situation at home was also alarming. Most specialists refer to a midcentury crisis of gentry agriculture, and almost all emphasize that serfdom had outlived its usefulness. Yet, although serfdom clearly represented both a major economic and a major moral problem, the government of Nicholas I failed, as we know, to do anything substantive about it. A student of the period notices that economic worries were prominent in the correspondence of such generally successful landowners as the Slavophiles; that science of leading families, such as Prince Peter Viazemsky, had to enter state service to make ends meet; that Boris Chiche’ in’s aforementioned cel-
Reign of Nicholas I, 1825–1855  165

ebrated account of social life in Moscow in the 1840s becomes, unexpectedly, a series of gentry bankruptcies. Less impressionistic is the enormous indebtedness of the landlords to the state on the eve of the emancipation. State service, too, created discontent, because of its perceived obsequiousness, stupidity, and stultification.29 All the while the Russian educated public was becoming larger and more articulate, with a better, more varied, and more extensive periodical press, a greater number and more effective distribution of books, and higher standards in schools and universities. Even the very reactionary policies of the last years of the reign failed to stop that general advancement. The origins of the Russian intelligentsia, the establishment of writing in the country as an independent, as well as a brilliant, profession, the full participation of Russia in European university culture, and much else of similar importance are often dated from the reign of Nicholas I.

The issue of Russian identity and of the definition of Russia—referring always to the educated public—underwent striking, even explosive, changes in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Russia experienced then two intellectual transformations: the change from the ideology of the Age of Reason, dominant for over a century, to Romanticism and Idealism, and the disintegration of the new worldview, or rather worldviews. The first change could well be considered by the government a blessing. Surely metaphysics, religion, art, or poetry were less of a threat in the eyes of the determined autocrat and of the Third Department than an active interest in society in politics would have been. Even better, historical, traditionalist, religious, and authoritarian arguments of the Romantic age were used to define and uphold the doctrine of Official Nationality. It was no mere coincidence that the Russian educated public did not mount a single violent attempt against the state throughout the entire age of Romanticism and Idealism, from the late Enlightenment of 1825 until the 1860s, when a neo-Enlightenment had become an active force.

Yet, as it turned out, the Russian government obtained its peace and the Russian educated public its more or less successful reconciliation with reality at an exorbitant price. The philosophy of the Enlightenment was probably the last truly unifying ideology of the Western world. In Russia, as elsewhere, it was followed by division and fragmentation, the common language of the rulers and the educated public by a babel of tongues. The pregnancy and the special tragedy of the Radishchev episode had been due precisely to the fact that the critic and Catherine the Great belonged to the same intellectual camp. Even the Decembrists had found it difficult to separate their intentions and actions from those of the government of Alexander I, and their emotional attitude to their rulers had remained ambivalent to the end. But there was no way for Benckendorff to understand the Slavophiles, or for Nicholas I the Petraievtsy. At the same time the thought of Russian intellectuals, and to a certain extent of the government, too, was becoming increasingly unreal. While scholars still argue whether an implementation of Speransky’s main proposal would have fundamentally changed the course of Russian history, or dispute the practical merits and demerits of Novosiltsev’s, Nilits Muravev’s, and even
Pestel’s constitutions, no such debate swirls around the Shvophile program, Butashevich-Petrashevsky’s rhalanx, or Bakunin’s anarchism.

To be sure, Russian intellectuals in the Romantic age made a valiant effort to formulate an effective new Weltanschauung, and they displayed in the process a greater originality of thought than had their predecessors in the Age of Reason. The Russians were offered a choice from three national identities instead of a single one, not to mention Petrashevsky’s Fourierism, which bid to eliminate the very concept of national identity. But Official Nationality, eclectic and even contradictory to begin with, suffered greatly from the performance of the government for which it stood. Slavophilism, the most stable, complete, and impressive Russian Romantic ideology, led nowhere and remained in glaring contrast to reality. The Westernizers did try to come closer to that reality. It was the Westernizers who moved by thesis and antithesis, or at least through contradiction and argument, from Schelling to Hegel, the Left Hegelians, and beyond. It was thus they who exhibited best the disintegration of Romanticism and Idealism. The total picture was that of confusion, collapse, and defeat, with only some central concepts, such as “people” (narod) or “peasant commune” (obshchina, mir) as seminal legacies, in changing contexts, for a new and vastly different period of Russian intellectual history.