

Practical Session Plan No. 9

Russian Philosophy

Blocks: 1) Uniqueness and Genesis · 2) Slavophiles vs. Westernizers · 3) Solovyov · 4) Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Cosmism · 5) Silver Age

Seminar focus

Genesis of Russian thought, historiosophical debate, total-unity, anthropologism, cosmism, and the Silver Age.

Format

Short lecturer prompts, key terms, and ready-to-use comparison lines for classroom discussion.

Outcome

Students should connect ethical, religious, literary, and cosmological dimensions of Russian philosophy.

Seminar Roadmap

OVERVIEW

From the moral orientation of Russian thought to freedom, spirit, and cosmic responsibility

1. Uniqueness and genesis

Russian philosophy privileges the question “How should one live?” Literature becomes a philosophical medium, and Chaadayev opens a dramatic reflection on Russia’s historical path.

2. The great dispute

Slavophiles and Westernizers argue over community, rationalism, reform, and the value of personality in Russian history.

3. Solovyov

Total-Unity, Godmanhood, and Sophiology attempt to reconcile metaphysics, religion, culture, and historical purpose.

4. Anthropologism and cosmism

Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Fyodorov, and Vernadsky rethink evil, conscience, resurrection, space, biosphere, and noosphere.

5. Silver Age

Berdyayev, Frank, and Ilyin focus on freedom, spirit, intuition, the unfathomable, and moral-legal consciousness.

6. Concept work

Pairs of concepts show how Russian philosophy joins ethics, religion, metaphysics, science, and historical destiny.

Uniqueness and Genesis of Russian Thought

BLOCK 1

- Russian philosophy is markedly ethical: it asks not only what is true, but how a human being ought to live.
- Its “pan-moralism” differs from Western gnoseologism, where problems of knowledge often occupy the center.
- Literature becomes a philosophical laboratory: Dostoevsky and Tolstoy can express metaphysical and moral insight through narrative rather than system.
- The philosophical voice is therefore often personal, dramatic, historiosophical, and existential rather than purely scholastic.

Discussion prompt

Why does Russian philosophy so often speak through moral choice, spiritual drama, and historical destiny instead of through formal conceptual systems?

Chaadayev as a turning point

In the “Philosophical Letter,” Russia appears as historically isolated—a civilization compelled to ask what role, if any, it has played in universal history.

Historiosophical Dispute: Slavophiles and Westernizers

BLOCK 2

Slavophiles

- Sobornost means free spiritual unity grounded in faith, love, and inner communion.
- Kireevsky criticizes Western rationalism for fragmentation and proposes “integral knowledge” — the unity of reason, faith, intuition, and moral life.
- Peter I is seen as a disruptive force who broke organic Russian development through external imitation.

Westernizers

- Belinsky and Herzen defend the dignity of personality, civic development, and openness to European progress.
- Peter I becomes a central reformer who inserted Russia into world history.
- The dispute is not only political: it is a disagreement about the meaning of history, personhood, and civilization itself.

Vladimir Solovyov: Total-Unity and the Russian Idea

BLOCK 3

- Total-Unity (Vseedinstvo) presents the world as an organic whole rooted in divine being.
- Science, religion, and art are not enemies: they are different modes of approaching the fullness of truth.
- Godmanhood interprets history as cooperative labor between God and humanity rather than a random sequence of events.
- Sophiology uses the image of Sophia, Divine Wisdom, to think the living bond between Creator and creation.

Seminar question

How does Solovyov try to overcome fragmentation — between spirit and matter, knowledge and faith, God and world, individual and history?

Teaching emphasis

Solovyov is useful as the metaphysical center of the course: many later concepts either deepen, secularize, or challenge his integrative vision.

Anthropologism: Dostoevsky and Tolstoy

BLOCK 4

F. Dostoevsky

- Theodicy becomes concrete in the image of the “child’s tear”: can any harmony justify innocent suffering?
- Dostoevsky treats freedom as both a gift and a terrifying burden.
- Suffering is not glorified abstractly; it becomes a path through which conscience, compassion, and spiritual awakening are tested.

L. Tolstoy

- “Christian anarchism” rejects coercive violence and external domination.
- Non-resistance to evil by force is not passivity but radical ethical discipline.
- The sovereign person obeys the law of conscience rather than the machinery of power.

Russian Cosmism: Fyodorov and Vernadsky

BLOCK 4

N. Fyodorov · “Common Cause”

- Humanity has a moral duty not merely to contemplate the world but to transform it.
- Victory over death, care for ancestors, and even the conquest of cosmic space become ethical tasks.
- Science is reimagined as filial responsibility elevated to a universal project.

V. Vernadsky · Biosphere and Noosphere

- The biosphere names the planetary sphere of life.
- The noosphere marks a new stage in which rational human activity becomes a decisive geological force.
- Russian thought thus moves from metaphysics toward a planetary ethics of knowledge and responsibility.

The Silver Age: Freedom, Spirit, and the Unfathomable

BLOCK 5

- Berdyaev's "objectification" describes the fall of living spirit into rigid institutions, external forms, and cultural mechanisms.
- Frank's intuitivism insists that reality exceeds pure logical grasp; the deepest layer of being is "the Unfathomable."
- Ilyin links religious faith with healthy legal consciousness, arguing that law must be animated by moral and spiritual depth.
- Together these thinkers defend interior freedom against dehumanizing forms of external compulsion.

Key contrast

Russian philosophy repeatedly opposes living inner unity to dead mechanical order — from sobornost to anti-objectification.

Teaching cue

Ask students whether freedom needs institutions for protection or whether institutions inevitably distort spirit.

Concept Connections · Part I

EXERCISE

Sobornost ↔ Objectification

Organic, free spiritual unity stands against the degeneration of living relations into cold external forms. Berdyaev helps clarify what Khomyakov's ideal is threatened by.

Total-Unity ↔ Noosphere

A metaphysical image of universal wholeness becomes, in Vernadsky, a scientific vision of planetary development shaped by reason.

Godmanhood ↔ Common Cause

Solovyov's religious-historical cooperation of God and man becomes, in Fyodorov, a radical practical project of resurrection and cosmic action.

How to use in class

Ask students to state whether the second concept develops, secularizes, radicalizes, or criticizes the first.

Concept Connections · Part II

EXERCISE

Personality ↔ Non-resistance to evil by force

Belinsky's defense of personal dignity finds an ethical continuation in Tolstoy: the person becomes sovereign precisely by refusing violence and obeying conscience.

Integral Knowledge ↔ The Unfathomable

Kireevsky's synthesis of reason, faith, intuition, and moral life opens toward Frank's claim that ultimate reality cannot be exhausted by abstract logic.

Mini-assignment

In 2–3 sentences, explain how one term complements, develops, or denies the other. The goal is not simple definition, but philosophical relation.

Core Vocabulary for Philosophical Discourse

VOCABULARY

Foundational terms

- Sobornost — free spiritual unity
- Integral Knowledge — unity of reason, faith, intuition, and moral experience
- Total-Unity — organic wholeness rooted in divine being
- Godmanhood — cooperative spiritual history of God and humanity
- Sophiology — Sophia as the link between God and world

Anthropological and ethical terms

- Theodicy — the justification of God in a world containing evil
- Non-resistance to evil by force — Tolstoy's principle of radical nonviolence
- Objectification — spirit reduced to dead external forms
- The Unfathomable — reality beyond rational closure

Cosmic and historical terms

- Historiosophy — inquiry into the meaning of history
- Providentialism — history under divine guidance
- Biosphere — planetary sphere of life
- Noosphere — phase in which reason transforms the planet
- Anthropocentrism / Axiology / Intuitivism — key support terms

Wrap-Up: Why Russian Philosophy Matters

SUMMARY

- It links philosophy with literature, history, religion, ethics, and national destiny.
- It repeatedly prioritizes personhood, conscience, and spiritual depth over abstract formalism.
- It develops powerful models of unity: sobornost, total-unity, common cause, and noosphere.
- It asks whether freedom can survive institutions, violence, historical rupture, and metaphysical fragmentation.

Final discussion

Is Russian philosophy best understood as moral philosophy, religious philosophy, philosophy of history, or philosophy of the person?

Seminar ending

Invite students to choose one concept that still feels relevant today and justify why it speaks to modern life.