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Historiosophy of K. D. Kavelin in the Context of Formational and Civilizational Approaches

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Abstract. The article aims at analyzing the specifics of the historiosophical concept of the outstanding Russian scientist K. D. Kavelin. One of the problems usually diagnosed when considering the doctrine of this thinker about the history of Russia is the impossibility of unequivocally attributing it to any of the conceptual and ideological (Westernism and Slavophilism) or philosophical and methodological (Hegelianism and Positivism) trends that existed in the scientific and social Russian environment of that time. Problematizing this research topic to a greater extent, we reveal that Kavelin's perceptions also cannot be 'placed' neither in opposition to the formational and civilizational approaches, nor do they fit into various 'palliative' attempts to integrate these extremes. Kavelin clearly realized the impossibility of studying history in the same methodological mode in which natural processes are studied on the one hand, as well as the inapplicability of universal metaphysical principles in describing the historical movement on the other hand. It seems to us that in the study of the history of Russia, which Kavelin carried out in comparison with the history of Europe, he was close to the doctrine that is called 'non-linear historical dynamics' nowadays.

Keywords: K. D. Kavelin, historiosophy, formational and civilizational approaches to history, Slavophilism, Westernism

Research area: history of philosophy.

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Историософия К. Кавелина в контексте формационного и цивилизационного подходов к истории

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Аннотация. Статья имеет своей задачей проанализировать специфику историософской концепции выдающегося российского ученого К.Д. Кавелина. Одной из проблем, обычно диагностируемой при рассмотрении учения этого мыслителя об истории России, является невозможность однозначно отнести его к каким-то из концептуально-идеологических (западничество и славянофильство) или философско-методологических (гегельянство и позитивизм) трендов, существовавших в научной и общественной российской среде того времени. Еще более проблематизируя эту тему, мы показываем, что воззрения Кавелина не «помещаются» также в оппозицию формационного и цивилизационного подходов, а также в различные «паллиативные» попытки объединения этих крайностей. Кавелин четко осознал невозможность изучения истории в том же методологическом режиме, в котором изучаются природные процессы с одной стороны, а также неприменимость при описании исторического движения универсальных метафизических принципов с другой. Нам представляется, что при исследовании истории России, которое Кавелин осуществлял в сопоставлении с историей Европы, он был близок к той доктрине, которая в наше время получила название «нелинейной исторической динамики».

Ключевые слова: К. Д. Кавелин, историософия, формационный и цивилизационный подходы к истории, славянофильство, западничество.

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The history of Russia has become a paradigm for the national intelligentsia in the interpretation of modernity. Such comprehension can be attained through the experience of the past, via a gamut of precedents that allow to build assumptions about the future, and through a tradition of glorious deeds to be proud of (even if we only use a baseline period of the second half of the 18th- to the first half of the 19th-centuries). It has been going along with the beginning of Russian his-

toriography proper, as well as with the reign of originally German sovereigns who tried to construct a special Russian cultural identity (from Catherine the Great to Nicholas I). Evidence in favor of this lies in the fact that ancient examples, such as Alexander the Great, Caesar Augustus, Constantine the Great, were usually provided as historical models for the early ‘Russian’ Romanovs. Of the Russian rulers, Vladimir the Great (Saint Vladimir) was solely traditionally mentioned, Peter the

Great's reforms began to be regarded exclusively in the 'white-black' mode already in his lifetime. He is considered either a great supporter of progress and new standards of life, or the Antichrist. Accordingly, the past of Russia, as K. D. Kavelin correctly observed in *Thoughts and Notes on Russian History*, was a sphere of something indefinite and 'foggy' (Kavelin, 1989: 172–173). We would add that sometimes the history of Russia was and is still regarded in a purely Manichaean manner as a black-or-white issue. The Pre-Petrine era became either primeval, 'bast-shoe' and 'unenlightened', or 'holy'. The Post-Petrine era was either modern and cultural, or 'satanic'. The fault into two dually understood epochs does not at all create (and, perhaps, has not created so far) a sense of history. To grasp it, either something third, the forthcoming or the bygone, is necessary, which is distinctively different from the other two, but explains the existence of these periods. Either can it be the ability to accept and justify the past as the early Christian Church was able to achieve first in relation to 'Old Testament times', and then in relation to antiquity. In Russia, the period of such a 'conjugation' with the past' would begin under Catherine the Great, but only in the 40s and the 50s of the 19th-century did this process gain momentum.

The work of Konstantin Dmitrievich Kavelin was an attempt to 'conjugate' the past and future of Russia hardly according to 'Western' and 'Slavophile' scenarios, especially during the period that began in the mid-1850s, as we are going to reveal further on. Kavelin's historiosophical concept describing the nature of Russian civilization is undeservedly underestimated by modern researchers. His biographer, Dmitry Alexandrovich Korsakov, Professor of the Kazan University, drew attention to such underestimation of Kavelin's works, being on the periphery of the consideration of his contemporaries and writers of the second half of the 19th-century. Arising as a reaction to the attempt of national scientists of the first half of the 19th-century (and, first of all, Karamzin) to describe the past through analogies of historical, political, and cultural processes that took place in the West, it offers a peculiar interpre-

tation of history. Interestingly enough, in some aspects it seems to anticipate the discourses of Russia that can be found among the prominent representatives of the 'civilizational' model of the historical process of the 20th-century, such as Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. However, Kavelin in no way created a 'civilizational' doctrine, which we are going to discuss below.

Nevertheless, two works, written at different times and from different methodological positions, help us understand the unity of principles governing the evaluation of the past of Russia by D. Kavelin, the two being *A Look at the Legal Life of Ancient Russia*, and *Thoughts and Notes on Russian History*. Kavelin begins the first essay with a fundamental distinction between the Medieval civilization and the civilization of Ancient Russia. The criteria for this differentiation that seem obvious to him are the feudal system vs. partnership (*tovarishchestvo*), appanage vs. family, the presence or the absence of aristocracy, the presence vs. the absence of the estates of the realm (*sosloviya*), etc. In other words, for Kavelin, there were the Middle Ages as a chronological period in Russia, but there was no feudalism as a special formational period. This thesis in different modalities has been consistently repeated in Russian historiography, and is becoming repeatedly relevant nowadays (see an example of polemics in: Ermolaev, 2011: 165–175). Nevertheless, without analyzing the thesis, let us pay attention to the fundamental conclusion that follows from here: if there was no feudalism in Russia, then is it possible to say that in Russia during the time of Kavelin there are prerequisites for Capitalism (if we use the basic formational concepts of political economy), or Modernity (if we use the concepts of the history of discourses)? Many scholars whose research focuses on the presuppositions of Modernity and Capitalism make a number of arguments in favor of the fact that the very structures of the Western European medieval world civilization became a prerequisite for the structures and discourses of Capitalism. *Magna Carta* of 1215 is the first obvious example of the emergence of not just an idea, but also the reality of 'negative

rights', being one of the most important signs of liberalism in the Modern era (cf. Svetlov, 2016: 211–216). No less indicative is the active entrepreneurial activity of medieval Western European cities as a special environment from which Modern entrepreneurship will grow.

Getting back to Kavelin, he considered the fundamental specificity of Medieval Russia to be the absence of an individual principle (*individual'noye nachalo*), which distinguished it from Western Europe. The Russian Slavs lived within the framework of purely family- and kinship-related life and, unlike other Slavs, did not mix with other, more developed, peoples. For example, the so called 'calling of the Varangians' ended with their assimilation with the Eastern Slavs. While in other European countries, the Germanic tribes imposed their forms of government, in Russia they adopted local customs and manners. The Great-Russians (*velikorosy*), according to the historian, are generally speaking a special ethnic type, since they emerged as a result of the fusion of East Slavic settlers and Finno-Ugric tribes, the inhabitants of the East European Plain. For this reason, Kavelin was rather cautious about the thesis of the cultural and axiological unity of the 'Slavs' (Kavelin, 1989: 16–19).

The family life of the early Slavs was not the result of their reasonable choice, but of the essence and the very context of their life, and therefore was broken over time. Under the early Rurikoviches, the tribal system of gentile constitution dominated, but it could not ensure the state unity, and consequently was destroyed by the Rurikoviches of Moscow in the 15th-16th-centuries. The return from the tribal system to the family principle now takes place on the scale of the whole of Great-Russia. The instrument turned out to be so efficient and resilient that, as we remember, Nicholas II designated his "occupation" as "Lord of the Russian Land" (*khozyain zemli Russkoy*) in the 1897 Census,

The transfer of the features of the 'home' to the state led to the emergence of a special form of the imperium of supreme power. Its most important source is the authority and the derived power of the Father as the personifi-

cation of the family principle, which defeated the tribal principle (the concept of the state as 'des Guts und Hausherrn') with the land under this authority being additionally attached and essentially important. The territory itself does not create power ("I do not see everywhere that the land creates a state: the way we adopt the Christian faith can hardly be used as an argument against me", Kavelin, 1989: 89). But the scale of the land made the 'fatherly' imperium in Russia simply grandiose.

There is an interesting difference in views on the existence of estates of the realm (*sosloviya*) in the Pre-Petrine Russia between K. Kavelin and K. Leontiev, which allows us to see their fundamental differences in the interpretation of the structure of Russian society. Kavelin claims that there were no estates in Russia, while K. Leontiev, on the contrary, believes that they were a very real phenomenon, at least since the 'fragments' of Byzantium reached Russia, to become the most important feature of the 'Byzantism' of Russia in the future (Leontiev, 2010: 33–34). Obviously, the difference is in the fact that Kavelin treats them explicitly in the Western European manner as a three-estate system made up of the clergy, the nobility and the burghers. While K. Leontiev interpreted the category of estates not as the presence of groups of people united by forms of activity and property relations, but as a hierarchical and functional diversity of power, implying very real social elevators. Such an understanding, however, from Kavelin's point of view, can be explained by the fact that Leontiev transfers elements of family life, having grown to a national level, to the sphere of social structures. After all, even in the family (at least in what is called the 'big' or 'traditional' family) there are structures that have their own functional and symbolic meaning.

We essentially see the above idea of Russia in Kavelin's works of his mature period. Kavelin believed that the specific nature of Russia, being still largely misunderstood, originates from the enforceability of the externally introduced projects. None of them (with the only exception of Christian Orthodoxy) has caught on, including Greek ones

under John III, Polish-Lithuanian ones in the 17th-century, and the Western under Peter the Great. Russia still remains a certain decentralized object of power. This observation is strikingly reminiscent of the judgments made about Russia many decades after the appearance of Kavelin's works. It should be mentioned here that O. Spengler would consider the Russian Empire a pseudomorphosis, where the form (the state system brought from the West) did not correspond to the content (the Russian 'soul' (*russkaya dusha*) that has not yet developed its own form of culture). A. Toynbee would also believe later that Russia of both tsarist and Soviet times was to develop amid constant discrepancy between, on the one hand, the tendency to close off and build an Orthodox-Byzantine civilization, and, on the other hand, to westernize in order to be able to respond to the challenges of the West. This was the main 'nerve', the characteristic feature, of Russian history. Even the Bolshevik revolution, according to Toynbee, appears to use a Western instrument (Marxism as a heresy of the Capitalism era) against the West. For Spengler and Toynbee, such Western formats contradict some inexpressible principle that is clearly different from the West.

It seems Kavelin is talking about something similar. He, for example, believes that Russia before Peter the Great is a 'monosyllabically simple society', without its own culture and associated morality, which is held by an external discipline borrowed from Byzantium (and, as we may add, from the Tatar-Mongolians). A kind of social 'rhizome', which continued to persist, despite all the efforts of Peter the Great and other sovereigns-enlighteners, primarily due to the preservation of serfdom and pronounced 'paternalism' in public relations. However, Peter the Great himself in Kavelin's depiction becomes a manifestation of this ambivalent force: "Peter the Great from head to toe is a Great-Russian nature, a Great-Russian soul. There is an amazing liveliness, flexibility, mental sharpness about him; a practical mindset without any shadow of reverie, groundless reasoning, abstraction, or phrases; resourcefulness

in trouble; concomitant promiscuity in the means to achieve practical goals; boundless revelry, lack of measure in everything, including work, passions, and sorrow. Who fails to recognize in these features the nature of the Great-Russian, so close and dear to us? (Kavelin, 1989: 240)

And here we would like to note the important methodological side of Kavelin's reasoning. With the similarity of some of his judgments with the concepts of 'civilizational' thinkers, it would be wrong, therefore, to connect him with them for the following reasons. The confrontation between the civilizational model of history and the formational one was just beginning at that time. Nevertheless, Hegel's philosophy of history, as well as the Marxist philosophy of history generated by it, had already created the prerequisites for considering the historical movement as a total process governed by objective laws. As we know, the main message of the 'civilizational' theory is to deny the existence of such laws, to defend the fundamentally diverse nature of various cultural and historical types. However, in reality, even the opponents of the formational approach are forced to introduce universal laws 'under-the-counter', being those who describe the very phenomenon of a cultural and historical type. As it is known, comparisons from the life sciences are most often chosen to express the laws that govern this phenomenon (see K. Leontiev's "blooming complexity", biological images in the descriptions of cultures and civilizations by N. Danilevsky and O. Spengler, biological parallels of the concept of 'challenge and response' by A. Toynbee). No matter how differently 'historical time' flows in different cultures, they all go through the same stages as other living organisms: birth, youth, maturity, old age and decay. K. Leontiev even believed that he could assume the duration of these stages, which was the reason for his concern about the future of Russia, which, perhaps, was losing the time allotted for "blooming complexity". As a result, the dominant law (being biological in this case) turned out to be equally immutable, as it simply manifested itself in a different form. One can, of course, say that the references to examples from the kingdoms of life among the support-

ers of the civilizational theory are just metaphors. However, in this case, we are faced with obvious evidence in favor of how the metaphor from a means of expression becomes a force that governs discourse. However, the appeal to biological metaphors was somewhat natural. In the 19th-century the life sciences showed such heuristic efficiency that the recourse to them by scientists from other scientific fields cannot be surprising.

Kavelin cannot just be called a historian who speaks of historical laws that operate with the same necessity as natural ones. The age of the people entering history is naturally an important factor for him (thus, the time of Peter the Great, from his point of view, is a “heroic era”, i.e. the era of youth). He naturally compares cultural integrity with a living organism, but it does not follow from this that we should apply the laws of physics or biology to social life. “When a historian tries to ‘construct’ personalities and circumstances, he only misleads himself and others, because history is not the disclosure of an algebraic formula” (Kavelin, 1989: 235–236). From Kavelin’s point of view, “there are not any unconditional beginnings or principles in the world, as everything is conditional and relative in it” (Kavelin, 1899, 881).

According to Kavelin, the variability of the circumstances in which historical subjects exist (in this case, by subject we mean the state) is as great as it is great in relation to an ordinary person. It is impossible to predict the specific plots of history; one can only speak in general about the direction in which they can develop. Despite the fact that representatives of the formational and civilizational theories can also talk about the impossibility of accurate predictions of specifics in the field of historical changes, they see the future being nevertheless predetermined, as the realm of freedom, or as the line beyond which the fate of a particular civilization ceases to exist. One can also imagine a combination of these two theories, when the path to the realm of freedom (“communism”, “a just state”, etc.) goes through local civilizations, each of which brings a bit of its own originality to this movement. But Kavelin would not have been a supporter of either of

the first, the second, or ‘mixed’ approaches. He chose his own vision of goals and related approaches to the study of Russia’s past. He was interested neither in the ‘general historical’, nor in the ‘individually unique’, concerning the fate of Russia. He was looking for very specific parameters of Russian history that would allow him to construct a hypothesis about the possible future.

In the 20th-century, formational, civilizational and mixed models would be criticized both for violence to historical facts and for creating some kind of an ‘overall’ view of the historical process, which, in turn, allegedly forms false ideas about the ‘mainstreams’ of the development of the humanity, predetermining the creation of state ideologies. Although the two most famous models of the historical process of Modernity, represented by the names of F. Fukuyama and S. Hattington, are associated with formational (first) and civilizational (second) projects, nevertheless, the opinion that historical laws cannot be described in methodology of the natural sciences, that the degree of spontaneity and situationality of historical movement is akin to the path of evolution of the living beings. Constant trial and error comprise the lot of history, which only in its most general form is a process where goal-setting is the maximum good for everyone. However, goal-setting in this case is not a guarantee of achieving this good.

The rejection of notions of a ‘linear’ or ‘spiral’ path of history is especially vividly presented in K. Popper’s famous book *The Poverty of Historicism*. The impossibility of constructing an unambiguous prognostic model based on an analysis of historical events is illustrated by him in various ways (largely by the example of the interpretation by Marxist theory of the nature and fate of Capitalism). The indication of various ‘historical laws’ that serve as the basis for competing schools of historicist thought leads to the fact that interpretational hypotheses that can well complement each other (and this form of scientific research is quite understandable for Popper) are replaced by theories, which on the contrary exclude each other. The latter become the source for ideologies and state proj-

ects like the Soviet Union. Therefore, almost at the end of his work, K. Popper says: “The main driving force of evolution and progress is the diversity of the material from which the selection occurs. As for human evolution, this is ‘the freedom to be unusual and not like your neighbor’, ‘to disagree with the majority and go your own way’¹. Holic control, leading to an equalization of minds, and not at all to equality in rights, means the end of progress.” (Popper, 1993: 182–183).

One of the results of such an evaluation of the historical process and the applicable methods of studying is the concept of non-linear historical dynamics, a well-known representative of which was I. Wallerstein. Non-linearity means the absence of historical epochs and forms of development that are common for all regions of the world, and it does not matter whether these are forms of the linear path of the formational model, or a type of the common destiny of civilization. Of course, the capitalist ‘world-system’, which is most interesting to Wallerstein, possesses the laws of its existence, for example, the law of ‘economic waves’ inherent to capitalism by N. Kondratiev. But these laws are not of a metaphysical nature (while the laws of the supporters of civilizational and formational doctrines are essentially metaphysical, initially ‘wired’ into the historical process), but quite natural (Wallerstein, 1998: 105–123). The rejection of metaphysical ‘philosophies of history’ allows us to see new ways of describing Modernity. For Wallerstein, this is the emerging confrontation between the North and the South.

Why is it necessary to make this anachronistic digression? It seems to us that Kavelin, avoiding the extremes of Westernism and Slavophilism, as well as formational and civilizational models, actually moved away from the abstract idea of the linearity of historical processes and was somewhat in tune with modern approaches.

It is important to mention that no matter how he distinguished between the historical paths and Russia, the following position was still important for him: “we are the European

people” (Kavelin, 1989: 13). The main thing for Kavelin was the preservation of the importance of the personal principle. From the time of his passion for the Hegelian philosophy of history, he believed that this was the result of the natural course of history, which in Russia, however, is not carried out according to the same model as in the West. The non-linearity of the path to the values of a more ‘open’ nature than those that were characteristic of paternalistic Russia manifested itself, according to Kavelin, in the role of the state, which assumed the role of a power that brings liberal innovations to public life. If in the West the personal principle made its way through the class struggle, the revolutionary movement, anti-monarchist upheavals, before the state became a zealot of these values, then in Russia, starting with Peter the Great, reforms have been carried out to awaken this principle. The uniqueness of this situation indicates that a coherent linear movement in history is impossible, we can only talk about some general trends, which in themselves are not sufficient conditions for historical change.

The evolution of Kavelin’s views on the historical movement of Russia was also associated with a positivist reaction to the Hegelian schematics of the world process (Tyulina; Kochukova). And he was not alone in his considerations (it is enough to recall the views of S. M. Solovyov and his methodology of historical writing). The turn to positivism, we believe, was associated not only with a change in philosophical fashion, but also with the resistance of the Russian givenness to the scheme of the historical movement of the Spirit, which was proposed in the Hegelian philosophy of history and philosophy of law. Of course, Kavelin, like many authors of his time, believed that the ‘personal principle’ was some natural manifestation of the rational nature of a human being, and with this he was close to the views of the supporters of natural law. But even in this case, the historical manifestation of human nature was not conceived by him as a teleologically predetermined process. Even though he turned out to be ‘too liberal’ for the court of Alexander II and ‘too conservative’ for supporters of a decisive transformation of Russia, he still be-

¹ Popper quotes from *S. N. Waddington. The Scientific Attitude. Pelican Books, 1941, pp. 111, 112.*

lieved that this 'revolution from above' would become an effective tool for gradual change in Russia.

The October Revolution broke out thirty-odd years after Kavelin's death, and it did not at all meet the aspirations of the thinker about the future of his Homeland. But it definitely confirmed the thesis that the historical process fol-

lows neither an unambiguously linear path, nor a path of civilizational peculiarity. An attempt to become a 'fuse' for the world revolution, and then to make a transformational leap from a predominantly peasant world to an industrial socialist world, created Soviet civilization, which formational and civilizational models can hardly describe.

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