

METAPHYSICS OF THE ECONOMY

The Religious and Economic Foundations of P. N. Savitskii's Eurasianism

Martin Beisswenger

AMONG the leaders and ideologists of the Eurasianist movement Petr Nikolaeovich Savitskii has attracted particular scholarly attention. No doubt, this attention is partly the result of his eventful biography. Born in the Ukrainian city of Chernigov in 1895, Savitskii experienced the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the Civil War, and subsequently emigrated from Russia. In 1921 he moved to Czechoslovakia, where he lived under German occupation during the Second World War. He was arrested by Soviet forces in 1945 and spent ten years in Stalin's Gulag. In 1956 he returned to Prague, where he died in 1968. At the same time, however, the broad interest in Savitskii's person is also the result of the originality of his ideas, in particular of his attempt to answer once and for all the fateful question of Russia's identity by claiming that Russia was neither Europe nor Asia, but a self-contained continent apart—Eurasia.¹

Unfortunately, the secondary literature on Savitskii has hitherto focused primarily on his writings on Russian geography.² In order to acknowledge a few of his many other intellectual interests, some scholars have characterized his ideas as “economic-geography,” “geosophy,” or “geopolitics.”³ In fact, however, the sphere of Savitskii's interests was truly universal. As this chapter will argue, Savitskii's ideas were essentially a quest for synthetic and univer-

sal thinking, a quest primarily based on economic and religious principles. Initially Savitskii's ideas were entirely secular. In the early 1920s, however, his thinking was fused with a strong religious element and he attempted to create a new and comprehensive political economy subordinated to the teachings of the Orthodox Church. This new political economy, Savitskii was convinced, would not only be more holistic than West European economic teachings but would also fit the particular conditions of "Eurasia." It would promote Russia's harmonious economic modernization, yet, at the same time, allow the preservation of the country's religious potential. It would enable Russia to accomplish its spiritual mission, the resurrection of the "East." Thus, political economy provided Savitskii with the theoretical tools to conceptualize his ideas and made possible his Eurasianism—as a coherent system of political, cultural, scientific, and religious thought.

Savitskii's economic ideas, in particular those of his master's thesis "Metaphysics of the Economy," stood firmly in the epistemological discourse of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian thought, characterized by neoidealist attempts to reaffirm the relative autonomy of the "metaphysical" sphere of philosophy against the exclusively empirical claims of materialist positivism.⁴ Like the authors of the almanacs *Problems of Idealism* (1902) and *Signposts* (1909), Savitskii affirmed the role of "metaphysical" principles in science and searched for a new spiritual foundation of reality. In this respect, Savitskii was a typical representative of the so-called Russian Silver Age, a heterogeneous anti-materialist cultural, political and religious revival that shaped the intellectual life of early twentieth-century Russia.⁵ At the same time, however, Savitskii was also a prominent participant in a larger, pan-European "revolt against positivism," a trend that rejected a simplistic materialist worldview in favor of more complicated models of man and society.⁶

Savitskii's religious and economic understanding of Eurasia and his call for the country's economic modernization sharply distinguished his Eurasianism from the views of many other Eurasianists. As we shall see, Savitskii's particular economic views became the subject of contention among leading Eurasianists. This fact suggests, as the present chapter also argues, that the Eurasianist movement in general was conceptually more heterogeneous than commonly assumed.

Young Savitskii and the Economic Modernization of Russia

Savitskii's synthetic thinking emerged gradually from the early 1910s until the mid-1920s. Growing up in Chernigov, he was interested in economic theory and practice. Very likely this interest was stimulated both by his family's involvement in the affairs of the local *zemstvo* administration and by the country's rapid industrialization at the turn of the century.⁷

Already then Savitskii never saw economic questions isolated from other issues. For instance, he promoted the modernization of the local economy with the help of the region's artistic traditions. Moreover, Savitskii's quest for universal knowledge and its practical application revealed itself when, soon after his graduation from high school, he self-consciously demanded curricular changes. The teaching of natural sciences, he argued, should be balanced with that of the humanities. Historical education must give more than a mere listing of the facts of political history, these need to be complemented with history of culture, and the history of social and economic life, art, and everyday life. Only then could schools produce those "conscious and firm activists in the sphere of the social and economic construction" whom the country desperately needed.⁸

After Savitskii became a student at the St. Petersburg Polytechnic Institute in 1913, under the influence of his teacher P. B. Struve, his economic ideas acquired a more explicitly political twist. Following Struve, who in his 1908 programmatic essay "Great Russia" had openly embraced Russian nationalism and imperialism in the Black Sea region, regarding them as important values for a future democratic and economically strong Russia,⁹ Savitskii called for the Russian Empire's continuous imperial mission in the East. There it could create "an organic imperial entity," resembling the Hellenistic monarchies of the East and the Roman Empire, because "Russian culture is able to become strong enough to reinvigorate the cultural life of these people, who had left such wonderful traces of their bygone culture."¹⁰ Russia's "organic" imperialism, the result of its empire's "continental" rather than "colonial" character, was far superior to that of Germany and Britain.

Russia's imperialism, Savitskii claimed, avoided its imperial rivals' almost exclusively economically motivated imperialism. It allowed for a mutual cultural interaction between the "imperializing" and "imperialized," and created a new supranational culture with "equal economic strength and equal rights of all people."¹¹ In order to realize its imperial future in the East, Savitskii was convinced, Russia needed a balanced agricultural-industrial economy.

And for that reason any assessment of Russia's productive forces needed to consider the country as a whole, including its Asian territories. "Russian industry," Savitskii assumed, "can find the riches of natural resources for its development not in the European plain but in the mountains of Asia."¹²

Already in his earliest writings, thus, Savitskii examined aspects of Russia's economic development that later would constitute essential components of his Eurasianist works, such as the economic integrity of the country and its imperial mission. It was not until 1917, however, that his economic thought acquired an explicitly metaphysical component. In his master's thesis "Metaphysics of the Economy and Its Experimental Cognition" (1917–1920),

Savitskii argued that political economy was a complex discipline, standing somewhere between the “exact” sciences and the humanities, in particular philosophy and art.¹³

Although this study was largely based on Bulgakov’s *Philosophy of the Economy* (1912) and Struve’s *Economy and Price* (1913), Savitskii attempted to transcend them and thus to build the new economic theory merely anticipated by his mentors.¹⁴ The main goal of Bulgakov’s *Philosophy of the Economy* was to counteract positivism and materialism and to bridge the gap between the Kantian “thinking subject” and the “external world,” the *Ding an sich*. Bulgakov introduced the concept of “labor” as the central element of human agency and the means to overcome this division. According to Bulgakov, by engaging in “labor” the “laboring subject” interacts with the divinely inspired sphere of “Sophia” and thus partakes in divine creation.¹⁵ Savitskii acknowledged the metaphysical dimension of labor, but criticized Bulgakov for not precisely demarcating the empirical and metaphysical economic spheres. Savitskii advanced a more narrowly focused definition of the economic sphere than Bulgakov: “The economic world is the world of [material] objects that can be acquired by human beings. This world is characterized by a certain correlativity but it is opposed by the absoluteness of beings, which are self-sufficient, can neither be sold nor bought, and are sociologically not interchangeable.”¹⁶

Whereas Bulgakov had approached the economy from a metaphysical, “sophic” perspective, Struve had criticized traditional economics from an empirical standpoint. Unlike Bulgakov’s metaphysical speculations, Struve’s argumentation was concrete and historical, focusing on Marx’s concept of “value.” In his *Economy and Price* Struve sought empirically to demonstrate that prices are not determined by their labor content, as Marx would have it; instead the empirical prices themselves had always defined the value of goods.¹⁷ Unlike orthodox Marxists, Struve acknowledged that the economic sphere contained metaphysical components and thus conceptually his ideas did not contradict those of Bulgakov or, later, those of Savitskii. Unlike them, however, Struve was not interested in exploring metaphysical aspects of economic activity beyond the acknowledgment that they did exist. On the contrary, Struve’s main goal was to safeguard the empirical sphere of political economy against metaphysical “contamination,” Marxist or otherwise.¹⁸ Although Savitskii did not explicitly criticize Struve, he did not agree with his teacher’s rigorous empiricism. He observed ironically that if even an empiricist like Struve had reluctantly acknowledged the metaphysical element in economics, there was no question that the metaphysical sphere in the economy in fact existed.¹⁹

Neither Struve nor Bulgakov, taken alone, could satisfy Savitskii’s thirst

for synthesis. It goes without saying that Marxism did not satisfy Savitskii either. Unlike Struve and Bulgakov, who had been youthful adherents of Marxism, Savitskii never sympathized with Marxist ideas. Strangely, for Savitskii central Marxist precepts proved the necessity of implicit metaphysical assumptions in political economy.²⁰ One typical example of such a metaphysical assumption was Marx's "labor theory of value," where "value" is defined as a "congelation of labor."²¹

This definition, Savitskii argued, was clearly an abstract a priori statement, plainly lacking any "substantiation, taken from the empirical reality." "Labor, as a 'substance,' as the 'reason' of value, can only be its 'ultimate,' but never its empirical 'reason.'" To be sure, Savitskii explained, such claims were not necessarily faulty, but they should be taken for what they actually were, that is, a priori assertions not empirical statements.²²

The presence of metaphysical assumptions a priori in Marxism was thus, in Savitskii's opinion, a crucial piece of evidence in support of his thesis that political economy was a synthetic all-encompassing discipline, truly combining the empirical and metaphysical. He defined its place in the continuum of academic disciplines as between the empirical natural sciences on the one end and pure metaphysics on the other. Political economy encompassed and adapted for its purposes all other academic disciplines. Political economy, Savitskii claimed, "can be characterized as a cognitive method with a complex composition." It was at the same time "metaphysical," "deductive," and "inductive." From such a synthesis of the empirical and the metaphysical both sides could only gain, they did not contradict each other, but, on the contrary, were mutually beneficial, fertilizing and inspiring each other.²³

Savitskii's enthusiasm for his discipline was the result of his personal searching for integral and universal knowledge, and of his interest in natural sciences, art, philosophy, and politics. There is little doubt that he was talking about himself, when he emphatically exclaimed that "[a] researcher who loves an abstract-logical way of thinking usually devotes his attention to mathematical investigations—someone who likes to think 'geographically' devotes himself to geography. To the economy, however, can devote himself and receive satisfaction someone whose heroine is the Beautiful Lady of Abstract Thinking, [and] someone who is under the spell of 'geographic pathos.'"²⁴ Economic thought ideally satisfied Savitskii's spiritual need, his passionate quest to solve the "ultimate" questions of life. In a passage that doubtlessly expressed Savitskii's very own personal attitude toward the purpose of his research, he confessed: "Human reason aspires to find the 'cause of causes,' some single source and center of economic phenomena; the human mind seeks the explanation of those goals, which the Supreme Reason has insinuated in the creation of the economy: [human reason] aspires not only to cognize but also

to 'evaluate' the present empirical world and to determine if the human being himself can set forth some 'universally applicable' goals."²⁵

Thus, "Metaphysics" was perhaps Savitskii's most personal work of scholarship. It came from his deepest intellectual convictions and cognitive aspirations. It summarized his earlier interests in art and economy and set the tone for his widespread activities throughout the 1920s and beyond. "Metaphysics" made it clear for him that it was in principle possible to gain synthetic knowledge, to combine the empirical and metaphysical, to interact with one's environment and still to serve a higher purpose.

The "Blessed Economy" of Eurasia

Although Savitskii was baptized as a child, until 1921 there are few indications that religious principles determined his scholarly work or philosophical outlook. By late 1921, however, after the dramatic events of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, this had changed in a way that strongly suggests that he must have experienced a religious awakening. It is quite possible that this awakening was initiated by Savitskii's encounter in Sofia in early 1921 with four other Russian émigré intellectuals: the musicologist P. P. Suvchinskii, the linguist N. S. Trubetskoi, the theologian G. V. Florovskii, and the future priest A. A. Liven. Suvchinskii later characterized this meeting a "miracle."²⁶ This group formed the nucleus of what over the next year would emerge as the Eurasianist movement and, in particular after the publication of its first almanac *Exodus to the East* in August 1921, gained broad publicity among Russian émigré circles.²⁷

In any case, in a November 1921 letter to a friend Savitskii made his religious fervor explicit when—already an ardent Eurasianist—he declared that he had chosen the Russian Orthodox Church as the foundation for his new economic ideas. Compared to other religions, Savitskii explained, Orthodox Christianity was an active religion with extraordinary relevance for the contemporary human soul. Having himself thus experienced the power of faith, Savitskii invited his friend to join him in his newly discovered spirituality. After all, only together and united within the Church, Savitskii claimed, was it possible to rebuild Russia.²⁸

Savitskii's religious passion now provided the basis for his economic thought. It explicitly motivated his rejection of Marxism, materialism, and positivism. Savitskii's new economic theory would avoid the rational one-sidedness and deification of goods characteristic of European economic materialism. It would be the perfect synthesis: "practical mysticism, idealist practicality." Capitalism needed to be "infused with a soul." The era of capitalism, together with the achievements of science and technical progress, had to be given higher meaning and to be transformed into an "era of faith."²⁹ The economic

reconstruction and resurrection of Russia, Savitskii was convinced, were possible only under the banners of Russian Orthodoxy and with the help of a “blessed economy,” as Savitskii now called his alternative political economy. To this noble cause he was willing to devote himself and all his power.³⁰

Just as the “blessed economy” was not an end in itself but inevitably served a higher metaphysical purpose, so too the economic reconstruction and resurrection of Russia were not ends in themselves. Savitskii was convinced that the new political economy would turn the reconstruction of Russia into a salutary event, into a first step toward the Transfiguration of the whole world. “Russia’s current spiritual task is precisely the creation of a new chemical combination, a combination of practicality and mysticism. If it can do so, Russia will outgrow the world.”³¹ Savitskii boldly declared that the economic reconstruction of Russia-Eurasia was transcending the merely material and empirical sphere: it represented a kind of religious deed, the accomplishment and realization of a divine commandment: “We will build the earthly city, as God grants us space and materials, and we have to build it, but in our souls we will carry the Heavenly City.”³²

Savitskii turned to the New Testament as a valuable source of economic guidance. In late 1921, for instance, he carefully combed the Gospels for examples of economic activities, in parables and otherwise, and compiled them into a comprehensive survey.³³ He was firmly convinced that the teachings of the Gospels “comprehensively cover the entire spectrum of contemporary earthly necessities.” Religious knowledge, Savitskii explained, did not contradict other forms of knowledge. On the contrary, acquiring economic knowledge was mandated by God, who had lifted the burden of economic necessity only from saints. To all others, Savitskii explained, to those

who are far from being perfect, to us, as God’s serfs, was given the parable of the talents. Economic activity is blessed by all possible images, by the ideas of the parables of the Gospels. In them the Heavenly Father is depicted as a good master: ‘For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder’ [Mathew 20: 1–15]. . . . Doesn’t that mean that it is a rightful and blessed thing to be a master? . . . The same is true for knowledge. Because how can we have the right to demand miracles, if the whole universe, as it is now revealed by science is a permanent miracle?³⁴

In addition to the Gospels, Savitskii claimed, there were other religious sources of divinely inspired knowledge about the economy. His own views on economic values, for example, had greatly benefited from the writings of the Fathers of the Church, who had produced “a comprehensive system of economic teachings, the most comprehensive of all those known,” besides the classical school of political economy.³⁵

According to Savitskii, atheist scientists can never comprehend in full the astounding construction of the universe, because their perception is limited and one-sided only. A scientist, economist, or politician believing in God and his creation will look at the world with different eyes; his way of cognition will be more comprehensive and on a higher level; he will, so to speak, receive a surplus value in whatever he is doing in his field of specialization.³⁶

The religious mode of cognition, the application of the “blessed metaphysics” to the empirical and scientific cognition of the world, Savitskii implied, made it essential for human beings to make use of all technological and scientific achievements. From a religious perspective, he claimed, it is not only legitimate to employ modern technology, but imperative to do so, because it is “a means to the realization of the Covenant, made by the Creator with the human race: ‘And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth’ [Genesis 1: 28].” To realize and uphold this “metaphysical” Covenant, human beings have to make use of the benefits provided by empirical science.³⁷

Throughout the first half of the 1920s Savitskii continued to develop his project of a new Orthodox political economy. His ultimate goal was the creation of a coherent system of thought that by 1925 he called “masterocracy,” yet another label for what had earlier been his “blessed economy.” In his essay “The Master and the Economy,” Savitskii focused on the central element of this intended system: the “master,” a holistic subject, firmly rooted in the economic sphere, yet able to reach out into other spheres as well.³⁸

Perhaps Savitskii’s fascination with the Gospels and with the figure of the “master” had been stimulated by his evacuation from Crimea to Constantinople and thus to Asia Minor in November 1920. There, at Narli in the “Holy Land of the Apostles,”³⁹ in the immediate vicinity of the “Second Rome,” his parents had acquired a small farmstead. Savitskii’s description of the agricultural work there and of the organization of the enterprise reflected the “blessed economies” of the Gospels. Indeed, Narli appears as the perfect reproduction of the ideal economic enterprise, a “blessed economy.” The estate comprised twelve desiatinas of irrigated vineyard and six desiatinas of vegetable garden, four thousand desiatinas of mountainous pasture with five hundred goats and six cows.⁴⁰ The whole enterprise, although formally a cooperative, was firmly guided by Savitskii’s father, who in this capacity was indeed a prototypical “master.”

Although, in Savitskii’s view, the “master” was the ideal type of human being engaged in economic activities, regrettably, contemporary European economic doctrine did not know this concept and thus overlooked the econ-

omy's most important principle. Instead European economic theory focused on the "entrepreneur," an economic actor merely interested in the technical aspects of the economy and in gaining the highest possible net profit. Not so the "master." Besides purely economic aspects, Savitskii claimed, the master's relationship to his activity was determined by a "striving for preservation, consolidation, and widening of the fullness of functioning and fullness of development" of the "living and tangible whole," of "human beings and things," seen as a "spiritual system." In this respect, maximizing income was only one economic goal among others.⁴¹ The concept of the "good master," Savitskii maintained, was neither merely a myth nor an aesthetic fiction. It was an economic reality, going back to the evangelical image of the "Good Master," that is, to figures depicted in the Gospels, the protagonists of numerous parables.

To be a "good master" meant several things in Savitskii's interpretation. First, the master had to know that the basis for his economy was the human being engaged in it. He had a special, caring relationship toward the people working for him in his economy. For them he was even willing to suffer material sacrifices because he knew that only on the basis of devoted personnel his enterprise could develop and flourish. He provided for the material well-being of his employees but also promoted good personal relations with them. In larger economic enterprises, where personal relations were difficult to establish, the master's charisma and his assistants could replace his personal presence. The same caring attitude would be exercised toward the equipment under his supervision—such as machines, animals, buildings, the soil, and so on. Not unlike his divine counterpart, the worldly "master" transcended material economic self-interest. His strivings necessarily included a more general interest in the well-being of his neighbor, and in the harmonious well-being of the whole world. In sharp contrast to the entrepreneur, the "master" pursued a holistic approach to the economy, just as God cared about his creation. The unrestrained quest for maximum profit, Savitskii cautioned, endangered the economic interests of future generations; it raised the danger of "overstraining" human resources. Not so the "masterly economy," which provided for economic "sustainability." The master would preserve capitalism as a "technical principle," but reject the "capitalist spirit."⁴²

On a more theoretical level, Savitskii's "masterly" approach to the economy was an attempt to "bridge" the gap between the two spheres of "relative" and "absolute" values, to reconcile the "empirical" and the "metaphysical." A "masterly" attitude to the economy, Savitskii explained, often emerged from religious convictions and was permeated by a strong impulse toward the Absolute. "There were and are masters, who actively, to the limits of their ability, strove to emulate the Supreme Master of the world, toward Whom, in His Existence and in His masterly evaluation of the world, they had turned

their searching eyes.”⁴³ In other words, economic activities, as Savitskii (and before him Bulgakov) understood them, ultimately turned into deeds of faith. “Masterocracy,” as Savitskii envisioned it, was thus more than mere economic theory. Ultimately, it would generate a new society, providing something that neither capitalism nor socialism were able to achieve: the consolidation of the person in the economy.

“Masterocracy,” Savitskii was confident, could provide a third way between capitalism and socialism. Only in a “masterocracy” could human beings realize themselves as persons. Only “masterocracy” could “connect the economic personality with God, consolidate a God-confessing instead of a godless personality. Its tie with the Absolute determines the personality of the ‘masterocracy’ not as an atomized, but as ‘conciliar’ principle.”⁴⁴ Although, in Savitskii’s opinion, the Russian-Eurasian tradition appeared particularly well suited to develop the concept of the “masterocracy,” as a universal principle it was potentially available to the whole world.⁴⁵

Religion, Economy, and Savitskii’s Eurasianism

Despite its potentially universal implications Savitskii’s religiously inspired political economy was first and foremost to serve the Russian-Eurasian cause. In this respect it represents the central component of his Eurasianism—the spiritually guided economic modernization of Russia-Eurasia to which he devoted his best-known Eurasianist publications. In his *Geographic Particularities of Russia*, for instance, no doubt Savitskii’s magnum opus, he revealed the country’s specific Eurasian character from a geographic point of view, on the basis of a complex examination of vegetation and soil. Establishing a regular, flag-shaped outline of Eurasia’s vegetation zones, Savitskii intended not only to facilitate the comprehension of the country’s geographic specifics but also, and more important, to promote its economic development. In fact, this study was deliberately designed as only the first step of a comprehensive examination of Eurasia’s natural resources. It was intended merely as the introduction to a second volume on agriculture, where “the phenomena and zones, determined by characteristics of vegetation and soil will be compared with and related to analogous phenomena and zones according to agricultural characteristics.”⁴⁶

Unfortunately, this second volume, particularly important for Savitskii’s argument about Russia-Eurasia’s extraordinary economic potential, was never realized. Instead Savitskii focused on the industry, in a sense the third step of his “masterly” examination of Eurasia. In his *Place of Development of Russian Industry*, Savitskii enthusiastically surveyed the geographical distribution of Russia-Eurasia’s abundant mineral resources. He concluded that “only through the orientation toward the East, only through transforming

Russia into a genuinely *Eurasian entity* can the development of Russia's heavy industry be accomplished."⁴⁷ In other words, only through a comprehensive and systematic examination of Russia-Eurasia's geography, natural environment, and mineral resources could Russia accomplish its Eurasian mission, the economic modernization and resurrection of the East, the synthesis of economy, science, and religion.

Russia-Eurasia's mission in the East, Savitskii was convinced, was more than just technical modernization. It was the perfect synthesis of science and faith, nature and spirit. It would create a new Garden of Eden. "Everyone, who has seen the Near and Middle East," Savitskii claimed in 1921, "knows that these areas are 'cultural graveyards,' in a sense hundreds of times more real than is true of Western Europe." These countries desperately needed Russia's support to awaken from their passivity. Because postrevolutionary Russia was in a state of heightened activity and was spiritually closely connected with the East, Savitskii predicted that "Russia can become a factor in the renaissance of these countries. . . . Retaining to a certain degree its potential as a European people, Russia in its historic role will become the leader of the Asian peoples." Savitskii foresaw the economic rebirth of the most exotic places in present-day Afghanistan, China, Kyrghizia, and other Central Asian countries and their beneficial influence on the new Russian culture of the future:

Oases located in the depth of the continent: Balkh and Mazar i Sharif, Kashgar and Yarkand, Tufan, and Kuldzha . . . Now endless necropolises give evidence of past life, of times, when these countries, located in the heart of the continent, were centers of world trade, stretching from one edge of the continent to the other. In the economic sense, Russia is called to *rehabilitate the continent*. Turned into a forgotten and superfluous desert by the contemporary epoch of "oceanic" economy, [the continent] will again be watered by fountains of living water; once again caravans will move through its depths, roads will traverse it; but this time not only trains of camels but railway trains.⁴⁸

Absorbing the vibrant religiosity of the East, where in contrast to present-day Russia and Europe, the "era of faith" had never been replaced by an "era of science," Russia-Eurasia would be able to produce a harmonious synthesis of both. With this achievement, Savitskii was convinced, Eurasia would set an example for the rest of the world, it would become the location of a great spiritual synthesis of particular Western and Eastern qualities: the East will contribute faith and religion, whereas Russia will contribute the "European" values of knowledge and economic skills, qualities the country had acquired through its participation in a process of Europeanization.⁴⁹

Savitskii's heroic vision forecast the emergence of a land of plenty, a blessed and sacred landscape, a Eurasian Paradise on Earth, the economic reconstruction of Eurasia.⁵⁰ This utopian vision, although most prominently proclaimed in the early 1920s, remained a central component of Savitskii's thinking for the rest of his life.

To a certain extent Savitskii's ideas were shared by some of his fellow Eurasianists, for example his fascination with the "East" or, more important, his idea that individual phenomena could never be entirely understood if they were examined in isolation—the direct consequence of his holistic economic theory. For the study of Eurasia's geography this meant that "every geographical description, regardless of how particular it might be, allowed one to see the entire space in all directions of the described section, as if through a 'magical crystal.'" Such a description and new form of vision would allow scholars "to see the concrete and detailed in the *totality* of its phenomena." Only if the whole and the particular were seen together, Savitskii declared, was it possible to determine the relationship between the particular and the whole. The concept of "Eurasia," for instance, made it possible "to comprehend the most diverse phenomena from the point of view of *one* regularity." Thus, this concept reduced complexity and promoted scientific progress by allowing scholars to detect the "connections between phenomena," to uncover the deep structure of history, and to provide a "holistic understanding of the world."⁵¹

Savitskii's concept of the structural interrelationship of the whole and its parts is the perfect example of what more recently (with reference to linguistic structuralism) has been called the "systemic principle." This principle emphasizes "the interconnectedness of all elements within a system and the impossibility of defining the features of any element without considering its relation to other elements and its position in the system as a whole."⁵² It was probably no coincidence that Savitskii summarized his ideas in the very same city and at the very same time that Prague School structuralism emerged.⁵³ He was introduced to the group through his fellow Eurasianists Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetskoi and participated both in the school's conferences and its publications. It is quite probable that central principles of Jakobson's structuralism were influenced by Savitskii's ideas. For example, Jakobson's influential 1929 essay "On the Contemporary Preconditions for Russian Slavic Studies" clearly echoed Savitskii's ideas. In this essay Jakobson established a Russian "structuralist" tradition and characterized Russian science as being dominated by an emphasis on regularities and correlations. This science decisively rejected positivism, which was seen merely as the result of mechanical influences from abroad.⁵⁴

Despite obvious formal parallels, in their ultimate significance Savitskii's

structuralist ideas differed from those of Jakobson and Trubetskoi. For them structuralism was primarily a new and promising scholarly approach. For Savitskii, however, structuralism was aimed toward the sphere of the divine, toward the solution of ultimate questions. It aspired to explain the universe in its totality as a “system of systems.”⁵⁵ Empirical science, Savitskii was convinced, had explicitly gnostic qualities. “From a religious point of view,” he declared, “empirical science is the revelation of the picture of God’s world. And in proportion to the achievements of knowledge this picture is becoming more and more perfect and complete, more and more clearly revealing the Wisdom of the Creator.”⁵⁶

Savitskii among the Eurasianists

Although many of Savitskii’s Eurasianist ideas were shared by other members of the movement, some of them were ignored or even rejected. Characteristically, for example, Savitskii had to publish his *Geographic Particularities*, soon to become one of the most popular Eurasianist publications, at his own expense. In fall 1926 he was denied funding by the movement’s treasurer, P. N. Malevskii-Malevich, who wanted to devote the available financial means to the propaganda of Eurasianist ideas among Russian émigré veterans rather than to the publication of a sophisticated scholarly work. Only after the book’s apparent success in early 1927 were Savitskii’s expenses reimbursed.⁵⁷

Moreover, the reaction of Savitskii’s fellow Eurasianists to his central concept of the “master” was predominantly critical. Only Trubetskoi ultimately considered Savitskii’s programmatic article “The Master and the Economy” somewhat useful. Suvchinskii bitterly complained about Savitskii to Trubetskoi. Suvchinskii found in the article too many remnants of Savitskii’s classical economic education with Struve and not enough combative Eurasianism: “I cannot say that I wholly liked [the article]. We argued about it a lot, and [Savitskii] revised numerous passages. There are ‘Struvisms,’ and there is also ‘economic sentimentality.’ The ‘good master’ is most likely a proper category, but every now and then [Savitskii]’s account turns into a ‘landscape’ from the Venetian school.”⁵⁸

Already after the publication of the Eurasianist almanac containing Savitskii’s article, Trubetskoi judged it in a somewhat more conciliatory fashion: “Despite all its shortcomings ‘Masterocracy’ is a valuable contribution nevertheless.” Yet his wife, Vera Trubetskaia, more critical and still unconvinced, added: “And in my opinion the ‘Master etc.’ doesn’t lead anywhere, and those essentially valuable ideas are presented in such a way that they turn people away from ‘Masterocracy’ for good!”⁵⁹ In answer to Trubetskoi’s letter, Suvchinskii and P. S. Arapov, another leading Eurasianist, expressed their

full solidarity with Vera Trubetskaia: “[We] fully agree with her opinion concerning the ‘masterocracy.’ Terribly sugary and pretentious. Besides that, the ‘consistent individualism’ quite heavily sticks to one’s teeth.”⁶⁰

Savitskii’s views on political economy as he had them developed and announced in early 1925 in the form of a “masterocracy” remained a permanent source for intra-Eurasianist conflict for years to come. For instance, in late 1928, just a few months before Eurasianism would experience its most serious crisis, Suvchinskii again took issue with Savitskii’s economic ideas, in particular with his rejection of purely materialist, Marxist explanations of economic conditions. To be sure, by this point personal antipathies between the leading Eurasianists, in particular between Suvchinskii and Savitskii, had virtually paralyzed the Eurasianist movement. Ideological contradictions, however, played a no less important role in the movement’s ultimate “schism.”⁶¹ By now Suvchinskii had developed a particular interest in the social question and a fascination with Marxism. No wonder that he was shocked when Savitskii sent to him for publication in the upcoming issue of the *Eurasianist Chronicle* several essays that dealt with the economic development of the Soviet Union from a nonmaterialist perspective.

Most of all Suvchinskii was enraged by an analytic essay by the economist and statistician D. I. Ivantsov, Savitskii’s colleague at the Russian Agricultural Cooperative Institute in Prague, who argued against the common perception of the labor movement as a mere “offspring of material needs.” Suvchinskii resolutely rejected any attempts to replace Eurasianism’s “pathos of social justice” by any kind of “doubtful scientism.” “It turns out,” Suvchinskii complained, “that (according to Ivantsov and probably also to [Savitskii]), the whole trouble is that the workers are prevented from following their ‘economic instinct!’”

First of all, Suvchinskii claimed, what else if not material needs prevent workers from exercising their “instinct.” Second, poverty was a “fully real and self-sufficient category.” In its assessment of reality, Suvchinskii argued, communism was right: “In the present it is impossible to accept capitalism in the name of economic scientism (?!), or to deny the obvious necessity to find new ethical and morally healthy forms of social life. To the devil with ‘science’ if it can defend only the Stinnes, Rašins, Cotys [i.e., capitalists like the German Hugo Stinnes, the Czech Alois Rašín, the French François Coty] and other scum.” In order to have an effect on communists and workers, Suvchinskii insisted, the Eurasianists had to address them in language and with ideas they actually understood. And all of a sudden, here again was Savitskii with his appeal to “common sense” and to “Struvianist vulgarities.”⁶²

Those “vulgarities” that so enraged Suvchinskii, we may assume, were

once again Savitskii's ideas for a careful, yet effective modernization of the economy, his call for the workers to become conscious of themselves and their spiritual goals, to engage in meaningful, sustainable economic activities, and thus, ultimately, to become "masters."

The critical reaction of several leading members of the Eurasianist movement to Savitskii's economic ideas is highly indicative of the movement's intellectual heterogeneity. Each of the Eurasianist thinkers contributed a certain set of ideas to the movement as a whole. Some of these ideas overlapped with the ideas of other Eurasianists. Others, however, were not shared or were even rejected by some Eurasianist thinkers, yet remained of essential significance for their authors and even found support among non-Eurasianists. In this respect Savitskii's religious-economic concept of the "master" is a particularly revealing case in point. This concept was the result of Savitskii's profound and lifelong interest in economic and religious issues. It symbolized the possibility of a synthetic approach to the economy that would integrate both its metaphysical and empirical aspects. No wonder, Savitskii was unable to abandon it, even if his persistence ultimately contributed to the split of the Eurasianist movement.

Whereas some Eurasianists, such as Suvchinskii and Arapov, passionately objected to Savitskii's "masterocracy," other Russian émigré scholars recognized in this concept traditional ideas of a Christian socialism or the well-known West European economic principle of the "homo oeconomicus," albeit hidden under a "thick and smoky curtain" of Savitskii's idiosyncratic terminology.⁶³ Indeed, Savitskii's "master" can also be interpreted within the long tradition of Christian stewardship.⁶⁴

In fact, many of Savitskii's ideas and models were not as unique as he might have claimed. Some of his ideas clearly echo similar attempts to redefine and spiritualize political economy undertaken by contemporary European scholars. In particular Savitskii's effort to interrelate economic activity and religious principles and his use of the phrase "capitalist spirit" strongly suggest Savitskii's familiarity with the German sociologist Max Weber's famous study on the influence of a Protestant work ethic on the development of capitalism.⁶⁵ Although there is no clear evidence that Savitskii actually knew Weber's study, he was familiar with Weber's work on the economy of the ancient world and his examination of the *oikos* (household), in a sense the smallest unit of the master's economic activity. Furthermore, as part of his exam preparation in 1922 Savitskii had studied Ernst Troeltsch's lecture *Religion and Economy* and thus must have known how economic models can be related to religious foundations.⁶⁶ Finally, Savitskii's construction of the "master" as a positive alternative to the profit-seeking "entrepreneur" strikingly echoes

Werner Sombart's juxtaposition of the positive figure of the "entrepreneur" and the negative type of the "bourgeois," without, however, sharing Sombart's racism.⁶⁷

Savitskii's familiarity and engagement with the European intellectual tradition of his time strongly suggest that his importance by far transcends the rather narrow limits of being merely a Eurasianist geographer. In fact, he was an ambitious and gifted economist who dreamed of Russia-Eurasia's economic modernization that would preserve the country's cultural and religious identity. At the same time, however, like many other prominent early twentieth-century thinkers, he also attempted to overcome some of the central contradictions of modernity and reconcile science and religion, knowledge and faith.

BETWEEN EUROPE & ASIA

**The Origins, Theories, and
Legacies of Russian Eurasianism**

Edited by

**Mark Bassin, Sergey Glebov,
& Marlene Laruelle**

University of Pittsburgh Press

The editors would like to express their deep appreciation to the Baltic Sea Foundation (Stockholm), whose financial support helped make this publication possible.

Published by the University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa., 15260

Copyright © 2015, University of Pittsburgh Press

All rights reserved

Manufactured in the United States of America

Printed on acid-free paper

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

<CIP DATA SHEET TO COME>

CONTENTS

Introduction	
<i>What Was Eurasianism and Who Made It?</i>	
Mark Bassin, Sergey Glebov, & Marlene Laruelle	000
1. A Revolutionary and the Empire	
<i>Alexander Herzen and Russian Discourse on Asia</i>	
Olga Maiorova	000
2. The Eurasians and Liberal Scholarship of the Late Imperial Period	
<i>Continuity and Change across the 1917 Divide</i>	
Vera Tolz	000
3. N. S. Trubetskoi's <i>Europe and Mankind</i> and Eurasianist Antievolutionism	
<i>One Unknown Source</i>	
Sergey Glebov	000
4. Conceiving the Territory	
<i>Eurasianism as a Geographical Ideology</i>	
Marlene Laruelle	000
5. Eurasianism as a Form of Popperian Historicism?	
Stefan Wiederkehr	000
6. Metaphysics of the Economy	
<i>The Religious and Economic Foundations of P. N. Savitskii's Eurasianism</i>	
Martin Beisswenger	000

7. Becoming Eurasian	
<i>The Intellectual Odyssey of Georgii Vladimirovich Vernadsky</i>	
Igor Torbakov	000
8. Spatializing the Sign	
<i>The Futurist Eurasianism of Roman Jakobson and Velimir Khlebnikov</i>	
Harsha Ram	000
9. Eurasianism Goes Japanese	
<i>Toward a Global History of a Russian Intellectual Movement</i>	
Hama Yukiko	000
10. Narrative Kulikovo	
<i>Gumilev, Russian Nationalists, and the Troubled Emergence of Neo-Eurasianism</i>	
Mark Bassin	000
Postface	
<i>The Paradoxical Legacy of Eurasianism in Contemporary Eurasia</i>	
Marlene Laruelle	000
Notes	000
Contributors	000
Index	000