

SOPHIC EDUCATION: WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

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ABSTRACT

Challenges to education today are part of a wider cultural context. Dewey, Heidegger, and certain Russian thinkers have remarkably similar diagnoses of our post-Cartesian reductive condition. In education this complex appears as “educational materialism.” In contrast, a “sophic education” would be similar to Bulgakov’s “sophic economy.” The discovery of Chauvet Cave shows an original human situation where the practical and the spiritual were integrated and “sophic.” For Americans, Plymouth Colony’s commitment to “the general good” and Roger Williams’s advocacy of democracy and freedom of conscience were also nonreductive and suggest a direction for an integrative, sophic education.

The upheavals in education in recent years are a secondary phenomenon. In order to properly understand them, it is necessary to look at the larger cultural context that has engulfed Western culture at least since the time of Descartes. This larger context has been addressed in some detail by thinkers from different nationalities including American, German, and Russian. In particular, John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, and several Russian literary and philosophical thinkers have—perhaps surprisingly, given their different nationalities—come to very similar conclusions about the issues involved. By showing what has happened to us—where our “treasure” is, in Pavel Florensky’s terms—they all also at least suggest the beginning of a way forward for us, which could be called, after Sergei Bulgakov, a “sophic” education, an education that is open to the multidimensionality of existence and resistant to reductionism in its various seductive forms.

From an American perspective, it might be well to start with Dewey’s diagnosis. In his 1919 lectures on “Reconstruction in Philosophy” at the Imperial University of Japan, Dewey notes that scientific progress has brought “serious new moral disturbances” such as World War I.¹ After praising the contemplative attitude, he notes that in science “there is something hard and aggressive in its attitude toward nature unfavorable to the esthetic enjoyment of the world.” Indeed, he goes on, “there is no more significant question” than the question of the reconciliation of the attitudes of “practical science and contemplative aesthetic appreciation.” Dewey warns, “Without the latter, mankind might become a race of economic monsters, restlessly

driving hard bargains with nature and with one another.”² “Economic monsters” is pretty severe—comparable to the scene in Dostoyevsky’s 1866 novel *Crime and Punishment* where Raskolnikov responds to the businessman Pyotr Petrovich’s praise of “economic truth” versus “Love your neighbor” by saying, “Take what you were preaching just now to its conclusions, and bumping people off is perfectly acceptable.”³ Nearly one hundred years later this diagnosis seems as timely as ever, with perhaps Dewey’s “might” being in fact too soft, given the Great Depression, World War II, atomic bombs, and our more recent wars in oil-rich nations.

Dewey’s relation to Russia was more than literary. He made a trip to Russia in 1928 and had this to say following his visit to an educational experiment station less than 100 miles from Moscow. He was impressed with the “moving aspiration and devotion. As it is, I feel as if for the first time I might have some inkling of what may have been the moving spirit and force of primitive Christianity.”⁴ He confessed to “a certain envy” of intellectual and educational workers “because a unified religious social faith brings with it such simplification and integration of life.”⁵ He lamented the following year in his Gifford Lectures on “The Quest for Certainty” that such integration was missing in the West, where there was “the almost frantic domination” of life by material interests and organization of social life by economic forces, and “there is no widely held philosophy of life which replaces the traditional classic one as that was absorbed and modified by the Christian faith.”⁶

In his lectures on art in 1931 at Harvard, Dewey continued to dwell on the problem of the fragmentation of experience in contemporary society. For one thing, the application of science to industry today is mechanical, he said, “and the mechanical stands at the pole opposite to that of the esthetic.”⁷ More importantly, for human beings art and science itself were not originally separate. For the Greeks, they “were both called *techne*. Philosophy was written in verse.”⁸ And before that, “The mysterious movements of serpent, elk, boar, fell into rhythms that brought the very essence of the lives of these animals to realization as they were enacted in dance . . . , or limned on the walls of caves.”⁹ Here was that integration, that unity of experience, and organic synthesis which he hoped would come to pass in modern culture and whose seed he believed he had caught a glimpse of in Russia.

A look at a recent discovery in Paleolithic culture will give more perspective on the issue of unity and fragmentation. “On the eve of December 18, 1994 we were the first three people for perhaps twenty thousand years to set foot in one of the world’s most beautiful decorated caves: Chauvet,” write the three speleologists who were the modern discoverers.¹⁰ Beautiful, but remarkable also. Sophisticated painting techniques such as perspective and shading are now known to date back to more than 30,000 BP, indicating not only the great antiquity of the paintings but also suggesting a high order of artistic and mythic traditions at the very beginnings of human culture—at the “dawn of modern human education,” we might say. Some have tended to think of early humans

as being narrowly utilitarian in outlook, focusing on bare survival, but at Chauvet—that is, at the site of the oldest examples of modern human culture—over 60 percent of the animals depicted—animals such as lions,¹¹ bears, and rhinoceroses—were *not* part of the Paleolithic diet.¹² Much more was at stake here than mere physical survival.

Paleolithic culture was one of profound unity. Dewey's remarks about "savages" would be applicable here. He compares them—positively—to animals, who show us the "sources of esthetic experience"¹³ and are "reminders and symbols of that unity of experience which we so fractionize when work is labor, and thought withdraws us from the world. The live animal is fully present, all there in all of its actions." Similarly, when the human being in primitive cultures "is most alive, he is most observant of the world about him. . . . He is as active through his whole being when he looks and listens as when he stalks his quarry."¹⁴

In this shamanistic culture of cave art, as Jean Clottes describes it,¹⁵ there was no domination of nature as in contemporary culture but instead an "interconnection" of beings—animals and humans, animals and humans,¹⁶ and also a "fluidity": humans could transform into animals, and animals into humans.¹⁷ And there is "permeability"¹⁸: The world is not closed, compartmentalized, and rigidly predictable; spirits are immanent everywhere, and humans can access the spirit realm, especially in deep caves. These caves were not only prehistoric sanctuaries and settings with flickering torchlights that facilitated contact with the spirit realm, but the caves themselves have been "likened to female genital organs," and entering them would have had the quality of entering a "primordial womb."¹⁹

The whole phenomenon of sophisticated cave art is very similar to Russian Orthodox sensibility expressed in churches and icons. There is a cave-like quality to the churches, and I would mention here especially the famous Holy Trinity Cathedral²⁰ with its shrine of St. Sergius and iconostasis (the screen bearing icons and separating the sanctuary from the nave)²¹ with icons by Andrei Rublev at the Trinity Lavra (Monastery) in Sergiev Posad, just northeast of Moscow. There is also the large and imposing Cathedral of Christ the Savior²² (where Pussy Riot in 2012 made their demonstration against President Vladimir Putin) in Moscow, and also the small Kazan Cathedral²³ in Red Square. In all of these there is a quality of entering into a darker environment containing sacred representations and objects, much as in the Paleolithic caves. These churches are not, of course, natural objects like caves, and indeed are rife with humanly constructed religious and political symbolism, but the primordial human sensibility for darkness, light, and sacred representations remains in full force in these sanctuaries.

Clottes says that the cave paintings allowed the cave's visitors "to enter into contact with the supernatural reality" and that they had the function of "capturing a power and perpetuating it by drawing it."²⁴ This is very much like how the iconostasis and icons are described by the "Russian Leonardo," Pavel Florensky (1882–1937), a polymath learned in mathematics, physics, philology, engineering, and theology.

Before he was arrested under Stalin, sent to Siberia, and then murdered, Florensky lived and taught for a time at Trinity Lavra. The Lavra was shut down in 1921, and Florensky was appointed to the Committee for the Electrification of Russia and worked in that capacity (wearing his priest's cassock, much to the consternation of Trotsky) from 1921 to 1924.²⁵ Despite his extraordinary talent, after some time he became relatively unknown even in Russia. According to Florensky, the iconostasis—which would be comparable in some respects to the wall of a cave—is “a boundary between the visible and invisible worlds.”²⁶ The invisible world surrounds us like the sea, but we in our present condition are like creatures at the bottom of the sea who are unable to see the light and are in need of a “window,” the icons. A window is what it is because it opens us to a region of light beyond it. And the window is not “like” the light. Rather, it “is that very light itself,” and if it isn't, it doesn't achieve its purpose as a window, and neither does the icon as an icon, which would be just glass and wood.²⁷ All of which brings us back to the cave paintings: when they achieve their purpose, they open out into the invisible world; otherwise, they are just markings on stone.

In view of the feminine quality of the caves, it is worth mentioning that the feminine dimension is very prominent in Russian Orthodox churches. Mary, the Mother of God, and Christ are the most important of the icons on the iconostasis, and Florensky observes that “it is through Her that Christ came into the world . . . ; and it is through Her that we pass into heaven. That is why She is commonly compared to the heavenly door.”²⁸ The feminine aspect is foundational both in the Paleolithic caves and in Russian sensibility.

Clottes tells us that the images of Paleolithic cave art were “props for myths, or were created within the framework of traditional mythical tales, as in the case for images present in Christian churches.”²⁹ Moreover, the extremely high quality of the representations requires “the existence of organized and traditional teaching,” which “related to both the representation of animal forms . . . and to their significance (myths, social importance, cultural role, power),”³⁰ and this teaching lasted for twenty to twenty-five thousand years, the longest such educational tradition in human history.

All of which means that at this “Dawn of Human Creativity,” as Clottes describes it, there was also the first dawn of modern human education. When we first find early modern humans, we also find a *unity* of education and culture, an “encyclo-paideia,” a rounded, broad, holistic education. This instruction was part of the unified experience that Dewey valued so much and found missing today. We might observe that even a term like “humanities,” with its suggestion that “divinity” would not be included, is a much more recent term (*studia humanitatis*), and it is misleading when considering Paleolithic humans since the whole point of cave art was opening up humans to the experience of the invisible world that surrounded them at all times.

What happened to bring about the division and fragmentation of culture and a loss of the importance that had previously been attributed to an “encyclopedic” education?

One answer, provided by Heidegger, is the loss of “things.” *Ding* in German and “thing” in English both have the original meaning of “gathering.” This meaning is clearly seen in Icelandic, where the *Alþingi*, “general gathering”/parliament, met in *Bingvellir*, the “gathering plains.” In his 1950 lecture on “The Thing,” Heidegger emphasizes that in the “gathering” that is the essence of the thing, “the thing stays the united four, earth and sky, divinities and mortals, in the simple onefold of their self-united fourfold.”³¹ This is the “unity of experience” whose loss Dewey lamented. Heidegger introduces his lecture with a discussion of “nearness” and the abolition of distances with radio and TV, which does not yet bring about nearness—as the atom bomb and hydrogen bomb testify. The contemporary world has, instead of things, “objects,” and science—whose sphere is objects—“already had annihilated things as things long before the atom bomb exploded.”³² The Paleolithic world of Chauvet was full not of objects but things—spears, elk, fires, caves, cave bears, woolly mammoths, trees, the sun, moon, and stars—and it is “terrifying” and “unsettling” that that world has been annihilated, and “despite all conquest of distances the nearness of things remains absent.”³³

There is a prophetic quality to such an assessment when we recall that Heidegger was saying all this decades before the rise of the Internet and the advent of “virtual” education and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). The severity of Heidegger’s condemnation of modern culture is often underestimated, especially when he is taken as obtuse about the suffering of people, and Jews in particular, in World War II. In his lecture—omitted from the published text—“The Question Concerning Technology”—Heidegger said this: “Agriculture is now motorized food industry—in essence the same as the manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of nations, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.”³⁴ From what Heidegger says in the essay of the same title, this does not mean that, in the unity of the fourfold, human beings and wheat are equal in value, but rather that as the fourfold world is annihilated, so are human beings with it as everything is “framed” and leveled down as it is ordered to “standing reserve,”³⁵ somewhat like a gasoline station. Now things are no longer even scientific objects. Modern technology is “in essence” destructive of the original human world of Chauvet. Moreover, it is part of the nature of this predicament that this fact goes undetected by our commodifying culture’s built-in covering-up of nature, all working quite against not only the “unity” that Dewey desired or the “onefold of the fourfold” that our ancestors enjoyed, as Heidegger has it, but even against a fundamental and systemic awareness of the overwhelming magnitude of the problem. Heidegger had in fact used an airliner as an example of standing-reserve, and a dramatic current example of this is the much-discussed United Airlines incident on April 9, 2017, when a passenger—a 69-year-old physician, David Dao—who refused to give up his seat was dragged from a plane to make room for some United employees and bloodied in the process. This was clearly visible and in fact caught on video by passengers, but less visible predations on ordinary

people are a common, everyday occurrence in a society dominated by the financial and corporate segments, only such things usually do not become apparent unless events like the Great Recession and foreclosures occur, and even then there is a resistance to fundamental questioning of the whole system.

Heidegger in his *Der Spiegel* interview in 1966 spoke against “the technical organization of the university,”³⁶ which puts the university in the same “framed” situation as everything else. “We don’t need any atom bomb. The uprooting of man has already taken place. The only thing we have left is purely technological relationships.”³⁷ And this is the new cultural foundation for education. Putting it differently, the only thing that might show people what their situation really is—that is, education—becomes a tool to help keep people in darkness about their condition, an education that is “framed” and ordering teachers and students to standing-reserve, as fuel stations for the economy.

If to these facts is added the observation that for decades the United States seemed to be involved in a perpetual war related directly or indirectly to areas of the world with significant energy reserves, and this in turn causes hundreds of thousands of people to suffer injury, illness, and death whether they want to be involved in the war or not, then the whole situation seems very dim indeed. Moreover, Sen. William Fulbright’s December 13, 1967, speech, building on what Eisenhower said in his Farewell Address on January 17, 1961, was entitled “The Military-Industrial-Academic Complex.”³⁸ Now, Heidegger in his infamous May 1933 Rectorial Address at Freiburg University had called for the unity of labor, the military, and the university.³⁹ Heidegger has been roundly criticized for his Nazi sympathies at the time, but he was asking for something then that the United States has in fact now achieved. In view of the all-encompassing “framed” human situation in our technological age, surely it is not surprising that in 1966, decades after his Rectorial Address, Heidegger concluded, “Only a god can save us.”⁴⁰ And that would apply to education as much as to anything else: it is a part of the complex and exists at its good pleasure; we do not control the complex, it controls us.

In his 1951 lecture “Building Dwelling Thinking” Heidegger says: “To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell.”⁴¹ This dwelling includes “building” in two senses: cultivating things that grow and constructing. Thinking, too, belongs to dwelling, and all of this is in the context of the oneness of the fourfold of mortals, earth, sky, and divinities. Heidegger does not directly discuss education here, but it certainly belongs to “cultivating” things that grow, and in fact Dewey described education as fundamentally *about* growth.⁴² There is also a constructing aspect to this building if we think of “forming” and “formation” (German *Bildung* here as “education”) as part of the growth. In a more narrow sense, there would not have been “cultivating” for the hunter-gatherers in the

Ice Age in Chauvet, but there clearly was careful education and craft in teaching the myths of the people and in teaching apprentices the craft of the cave art that illustrated and made present the realities addressed by the myths. The dawn of education was here in the “building” required for these Paleolithic mortals dwelling on the earth, under the sky, in touch with divinities.

For “dwelling” Heidegger is using the German *wohnen*, and the English in fact has some advantage here in view of his interests. Following his lecture on “The Thing,” Heidegger received an inquiry from a student and he replied a few days later. Here he warns that thinking is “highly errant.” As a path, “it is at most a field path.” The necessary “step back” from representational thinking and explanation, “is fraught with error.”⁴³ It happens that the current English meaning of “dwell” as “to remain for a time” is from the Old Norse, but the Old English had the sense of “to lead astray.”⁴⁴ It is not hard to see that this suggests that human beings, in their dwelling on this earth, are not only likely but *sure* to go astray, to err. This is a sobering thought, but it also has the ring of truth to it. Thinking of individuals or nations, it is difficult to see many examples where there is a lack of erring. Perhaps this is of some real significance for education, taken as an opportunity to appreciate not only achievement and truth but also error at work in human beings as they go about dwelling on the earth. Perhaps the old virtue of *humilitas*, which St. Benedict made so much of in chapter 7 of his *Rule*, has a realism to it that is underappreciated in the context of traditional American optimism.

Russian resources for gaining some perspective on foundational problems for humanities education are disquieting, to say the least. For most Americans, Russian culture is a very foreign land. There are many reasons for this, but here are two. First, what we think of as “occult” or “esoteric” ideas and practices were common among Russian intellectuals. Americans, of course, typically shun this sort of thing as a matter of course. Second, there is a strong preference for not going halfway or compromising but going for broke, so to say—no matter how idiosyncratic this might appear. For example, what since 1992 (under Boris Yeltsin) has been called the Russian State Library was formerly the Lenin Library (from 1925 on). Outside the “Leninka” is an imposing statue of Dostoyevsky. Dostoyevsky in turn was influenced by Nikolai Fedorov (1829–1903)—whom most Americans haven’t even heard of—the seminal thinker and librarian who was the driving spiritual force behind the library’s earlier incarnation before the October Revolution. Here is a description of him by George Young:

He lived alone . . . , usually renting a closet-sized room. . . . He slept on a hump-backed trunk, sometimes bare, sometimes covered in newspapers, placing under his head not a pillow but some kind of hard object, usually a book. The only coat he wore every day, summer or winter, was more a rag than a coat, and strangers easily mistook him for a beggar on the streets He drank only tea, ate hard rolls, sometimes accompanied by a piece of old cheese or salt fish.⁴⁵

This strange man—his *The Philosophy of the Common Task* was assembled by his supporters; 480 copies were printed, marked “Not for Sale,” and given out to libraries and interested parties⁴⁶—was admired by many of the most brilliant minds of the time, but with reservations. He impressed not only Dostoyevsky but also Vladimir Solovyov, the original Russian sophiologist (making Sophia or Divine Wisdom a fundamental principle of the universe) and author of the highly influential *The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists* (1874), and also Tolstoy, who could hardly praise him enough: “If I didn’t have my own teaching, I would become a follower of Nikolai Fedorov’s teaching.”⁴⁷ The single portrait of him was done by Leonid Pasternak, Nobel Prize winner Boris Pasternak’s father, and is today in the Tolstoy Museum in Moscow. The portrait⁴⁸ shows, left to right, Fedorov, Solovyov, and Tolstoy. Putting all these together, there is a real Russian intellectual cocktail, just across from the Kremlin: Fedorov, Solovyov, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky.

What was Fedorov’s teaching? It was basically a war on entropy. He saw humanity’s “common task” as overcoming death, which, he said, was not essential to humanity. In his *Philosophy of the Common Task* he says, “Death is . . . a condition but not a quality without which man ceases to be *what he is and what he ought to be*.”⁴⁹ Three foundational elements were given by Fedorov himself in papers found posthumously. He there mentions three clear memories from childhood: “black, very black bread” on which the peasants were fed during famine; that in reply to his question about war, he was told: “In war people shoot each other!”; and that “some people are not one’s kin but strangers, even among one’s kin some are not kin but strangers.”⁵⁰ In response to these, he developed a project of scientifically controlling nature and feeding everyone, universal brotherhood, an end to war, and ultimately even an end to the finality of death through a universal resurrection, all of which was inspired by his interpretation of Russian Orthodoxy. Dostoyevsky and Solovyov embraced the grandness of his cosmic scheme but rejected a materialistic view of resurrection and the future cosmos. Dostoyevsky said, “Solovyov and I . . . believe in a real, literal, personal resurrection” although that body will not be like this material body but perhaps like Christ’s resurrected body.⁵¹

Fedorov believed that society as it is, without such a transformational program, is the hell of a “pornocracy” where people are dominated by the erotic instinct, which leads to conflict and war, and to other things such as childless couples forgetting their parents and as they themselves age becoming preoccupied with youthfulness and trying to continue to be sexually attractive. “The triumph of Easter, of filial and brotherly love—this is a conscious, natural task; and, on the other hand, the victory of pornocracy . . . , this is the anti- or contra-Easter” (Young, *Russian*, 89). The pornocracy is also a condition of “cannibalism” where people take life from their predecessors and give them nothing in return.⁵²

As futuristic as his ideas were, Fedorov rejected nineteenth-century “progress” as it was currently understood. “Liberty, equality, fraternity” has it all backwards.

Without brotherhood coming first, liberty amounts to pornocracy and the violence it necessarily generates. As Fedorov believed there is no fraternity without fatherhood, he looked to a future world united under a Russian tsar who would be the father of all peoples, much like the traditional Russian idea of “Moscow, the Third Rome.”⁵³

A pragmatic element—“What is to be done?” as in the title of Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s 1863 novel—was an element typical of Russian thought. Before Fedorov was a librarian, he was a teacher, and in a manner similar to Dewey, he thought that learning should be not a matter of “-ology” but of “-urgy,” that is, not abstract knowledge unconnected with life but an active knowledge willing to *do* something. A focus on this sort of learning, he believed, would overcome the divide between the learned elite and the unlearned masses. His example of such learning was Vasily Karazin (1773–1842), who proposed to the tsar a project to generate electricity by way of control of meteorological phenomena. Fedorov called Karazin a “meteorurgist,” not a “meteor-ologist,” and it was this kind of thinking that could provide “salvation from famine.”⁵⁴ Bread, peace, brotherhood, and the universal resurrection were what knowledge was all about.

It is not very difficult to see that Lenin pursued an eschatologically driven, all-or-nothing program very similar to Fedorov’s, only in his case it was bread, peace (especially in regard to World War I but finally the whole world), the end of class distinctions, and the withering away of the state. And Lenin also had a Russian pragmatic approach. Like Chernyshevsky, he too had his *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), where he argued that the time for “freedom of criticism” was over and the need was for the Russian proletariat to take revolutionary action as the “vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat.”⁵⁵

“Separation of Church and State” is foreign to the Russian mentality: in the Kremlin itself there are seven churches of one kind or another. Atheist though he was, Lenin was a Russian Orthodox atheist, which would be true of many Russians. In 1893 friends asked Lenin to be the godfather for their baby, and in 1898 he was married in the Orthodox Church. The leader of the 1905 “Bloody Sunday” protest march to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg was Fr. Gregory Gapon.⁵⁶ When Fr. Gapon fled Russia, Lenin met with him at length in Geneva and they exchanged books. In many respects, Gapon and Lenin were on the same page. “All Land to the People” was Gapon’s slogan, which in fact went further than Lenin’s program.⁵⁷

The religious dimension of Lenin’s program has been noted before, as Dewey remarked on in 1928. Already in 1925 John Maynard Keynes had made a trip to Russia, which he wrote about in a collection that he described as “the croakings of a Cassandra who could never influence the course of events in time.”⁵⁸ Capitalism was, he thought, certainly irreligious with its materialistic, avaricious “egotistic atomism.”⁵⁹ Keynes had no use for Marxist economics, but he thought that in the strong religious element in Russian communism—the overwhelming devotion to

a common cause to build a society not ordered by the love of money—"some speck of the ideal [for society] might be hid."⁶⁰ The Russian Communist spirit was catching. At Cambridge by 1935 Marxism "was the most important intellectual force in the university."⁶¹ Keynes had given Ludwig Wittgenstein a copy of his book, and in 1935 Wittgenstein made a trip to Russia. He was offered a teaching position but wanted to be a simple laborer, and this was not possible, which was probably just as well. In his 1925 trip, Keynes had a long debate with Grigory Zinoviev, one of the original members of the Politburo. In 1936, Stalin began his "show trials" and purges, and Zinoviev was "tried" and executed.

The religious importance of Lenin lives on, as is evidenced by the popularity of the Lenin Mausoleum. The guide who took my wife and me to the holy town of Sergiev Posad had had Communist parents. She herself was very religious, and said pointedly that the Soviets deliberately played off Russian religious traditions, which are full of pilgrimages, saints, and relics. When my wife and I visited Lenin's tomb, there was a huge line to get in, but our guide got us in near the front, and despite the large line, the guards let us go in by ourselves. Religious decorum was required: a guard inside ordered me to remove my hat. The viewing area was dimly lit and perfectly quiet, like in a church. We were allowed to be there, alone with what many believe is Lenin's body, for a couple of minutes or so. My wife had no particular expectations about this excursion, but to her surprise was profoundly moved by the experience, to the point of being rendered speechless. Such colossal dreams for humanity, such terrible events that followed.

And the violence continues. At St. Basil's cathedral (really a composite of eight chapels around a core) on Red Square, after hearing a choir sing hymns in one of the chapels, our guide led the two of us to a window in a nearby chapel from which we could see the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge on which opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was assassinated in February 2015. In whispers, the guide said that Nemtsov was with his "escort" who was not injured; the four shots were clean hits, professionally done. This is from St. Basil's, where you can see the Kremlin, Lenin's tomb, and the Kremlin Necropolis where Jack Reed, the idealistic American author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919, with an introduction by Lenin), about the October Revolution, was buried in 1920. Just a single glance from St. Basil's can take in scenes telling of monumental spiritual and physical struggles.

Lenin showed an atheistic direction in which Fedorov's philosophy could be taken. But there was also a spiritual direction, one taken by Sergei Bulgakov and Pavel Florensky, both of whom rejected Fedorov's materialistic notion of universal resurrection but retained a cosmic view of human life and society. Bulgakov, the son of a priest in a priestly family for six generations or more, was originally a Marxist but later had a conversion back to his Orthodox tradition and in 1912 rewrote economics from this new perspective. But before this he had undergone several religious

experiences that formed part of the basis of his conversion. One occurred in 1898 at the Zwinger Gallery in Dresden when he viewed the Sistine Madonna⁶² by Raphael. The Madonna's eyes made him dizzy, and "ice melted on my heart, and some kind of knot in my life was resolved."⁶³ Another revelatory experience occurred on the death of his four-year-old son Ivashechka in 1909: "The revelations I experienced by his coffin cannot be compared to anything."⁶⁴ After these experiences, Bulgakov began to think that as important as Marxism was, it wasn't enough. Economic materialism may be appealing to our modern age since it seems to be "scientific," but it in fact reduces the economy to material forces and is "economism."⁶⁵

Catherine Evtuhof translates Bulgakov's 1912 *Filosofia khoziaistva* as "Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household" because the Russian *khaziaistvo* means both "economy" and "household," making it much closer to the Greek *oikonomia* ("household managing") than our English "economy."⁶⁶ From the broader, philosophical perspective that Bulgakov wants to take, the world itself is one big household; it is not just an interaction of mechanical forces, as "positivism" would have it. Just as a household has material forces at work but also life and purpose and a struggle against death, so does the world as a whole. Bulgakov agrees with Fedorov's emphasis on death and resurrection. In our world, life is "in a constant struggle with death,"⁶⁷ and "*economy is a function of death*, induced by the necessity to defend life."⁶⁸ Against this entropic condition of our "fallen" world, economy works to re-create, resurrect an ideal relationship with nature, that is, an economy that is "sophic," embodying Divine Wisdom.⁶⁹ Against Marx, who was willing to sacrifice the present for a future "withering away of the state," however, Bulgakov was no utopian: the ideal community and complete resurrection cannot occur in this entropic world. Rather, he wrote in 1917, there will be, beyond history in the eschatology of economy, "the new heaven and new earth."⁷⁰

The key term that Bulgakov used for the unifying reality that would bring together material and spiritual dimensions of the "household" of the world was "Sophia," a loaded concept among Russian sophiologists in philosophy and theology such as Solovyov and Florensky, among others. Literally, of course, "sophia" is wisdom, in this case, "Divine Wisdom," especially as described in the biblical book of Proverbs. Discussions of this can be as lofty and complex as you please, but the reality itself is also down-to-earth, manifest in "the universal connectedness" of things. Indeed, "Sophia shines . . . in the charm of a child and the enchantment of a fluttering flower, in the beauty of a starry sky or a flaming sunrise."⁷¹ The economy itself is a sophic struggle of life against death. It is, in other words, a modern incarnation of the prehistoric life manifested at Chauvet Cave, which combined in one organic whole a concern both for material necessities and for the spiritual dimension.

For Bulgakov, education at its best—especially the creativity of humanities, culture, art, and science—is all sophic, "that is, it partakes of the divine Sophia."⁷² One could

say “the economy is for mortals” just as “education is for mortals.” The humanities are well situated to show the “universal connectedness” of things and encourage people living in Fedorov’s pornocracy to attend to what is there in “the charm of a child.” In fact, one might think that, apart from religion, education is the “sophic” enterprise par excellence. But for our time, something has happened to education similar to what happened to economics. There is an “educational materialism” or “educationism,” we could say, that is a part of the economic materialism that drives the American economy and which underlies the kind of concerns showing in book titles like “The University in Ruins” and “The University in Chains.”

As an epigraph for *Philosophy of Economy*, Bulgakov chose a passage from the Lame Girl’s story in Dostoyevsky’s 1872 novel *Demons* (or *The Possessed*). Marya Timofeevna is secretly married to Stavrogin, one of the leading characters, and she lives with an alcoholic brother who beats her. She relates how an old woman had said to her, “The Mother of God is our great mother the moist earth, and therein lies a great joy for man.”⁷³ This wisdom is uttered by an old woman in a convent and related by an unstable woman who barely feeds herself, while the respected intellectual leaders of the town in fact are possessed by “demons” (positivism, nihilism, materialism, atheism—all of which Bulgakov is opposing), and are ready to commit murder and suicide for their various causes. For *Demons*, Dostoyevsky himself chose as an epigraph Luke’s account of the Gerasene demoniac (8:32–36), making the local intellectuals into possessed swine. The university lecturer in *Demons*, Stepan Trofimovich, says, “It’s exactly like our Russia. These demons who come out of a sick man and enter into swine— . . . all the . . . demons accumulated in our great and dear sick man, in our Russia.”⁷⁴ It certainly seems that American education is similarly “possessed” today by our cultural demons.

On January 4, 1923, Lenin dictated an addendum to his final political testament that included these words: “Stalin is too crude.”⁷⁵ Lenin wasn’t given to understatement, but in view of later Soviet history this might have been one instance of it. Bulgakov would be shipped off, literally, on a “Philosopher’s Ship” in 1922 when the Soviets expelled over one hundred intellectuals who didn’t conform to the new Soviet vision. This might sound harsh, but it in fact saved many thinkers from certain death under Stalin. Pavel Florensky was not so lucky. In 1933 he was arrested, and on December 8, 1937, he—Russia’s “Leonardo”—was executed. Before Bulgakov was deported, Florensky and he were close collaborators. (In May 1917 Mikhail Nesterov painted *The Philosophers*, a portrait of the two walking in Florensky’s springtime garden in Sergiev Posad.)⁷⁶ Florensky had published his first major work, *The Pillar and the Ground of the Truth*, in 1914. In his second major work, *At the Watersheds of Thought* in 1922, which was not published until after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Florensky discussed his hope for a new Middle Ages—by which he meant an age much like the culture of Chauvet—where science

and religion would be integrated in one organic whole.⁷⁷ But for now, he cautioned, there was a period of suffering. With an allusion to the Sermon on the Mount and the saying about where your treasure is, there your heart will be (Matthew 6:21), he says that “every world-understanding has a center, or treasure, of the spirit Our heart remains with it and begins to receive juices of life or death.”⁷⁸ In 1922 the Russian treasure was materialism, and this was bringing everything else along with it, even the church.⁷⁹

Where is our treasure today? Deeply immersed in educational materialism, education is occupied with strategic plans, mission statements, core values, action plans, research-based practices, rubric-rich syllabi, measurable goals and objectives, standardized testing, and on the horizon adaptive-learning computerized courses, which no longer need teachers. Educational materialism in America followed the “scientific management” of F. W. Taylor and the testing ethic of Edward Thorndike⁸⁰ and ignored Dewey’s foundational principle, which puts quality first, not quantity: “The world . . . is preeminently a qualitative world.”⁸¹ The embodiment of these ideas has turned our institutions, students, and teachers into Gerasene swine. It is Heidegger’s “framing” applied to students who will be “standing reserve,” like airplanes, ready to contribute to the military-industrial-educational complex. And it is, at least in our day, “always already there”—where our heart is.

The seeds of an American version of a sophic education are already here in our foundational myths and thinkers. The Puritans who drew up the Mayflower Compact aboard ship following a mutiny did, in their biblical language, “covenant” with one another for “the general good”; and in the early colony they provided medical care (due to illness, around 50 of the original 100 died after just two or three months), and there were no beggars.⁸² They were as action-focused as could be imagined, every bit as much as Russian thinkers—after all, they were settler-colonists and had a society to establish. Their Puritan economy was a “household” under Divine Wisdom, just as Bulgakov called for: they affirmed everyone’s “vocation” to do their own particular work, and this was all within God’s providence and a nature that was “creation”—“sophic,” in Bulgakov’s terms—and not mindless matter to be manipulated in a godless world in order to establish a pornocracy.⁸³ They were reform-minded⁸⁴ and striving to further the establishment of the Kingdom of God, but they—again, like Bulgakov—were not utopian since, according to their Calvinist theology, human beings were fallen and characterized by “depravity.”⁸⁵

Add to Plymouth, Roger Williams’s espousal of democracy and freedom of conscience in Providence Plantations, and the spiritual foundation for America is very nearly established.⁸⁶ In *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* (1644), Williams argued that Scripture itself—that is, Divine Wisdom/Sophia, in Bulgakov’s theology—demands “permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or anti-christian consciences and worships be granted to all men in all nations and countries.”⁸⁷ That is, Williams gave a theological argument for freedom of conscience in a democracy,

and this during the English Civil War. (Of course, one can accept liberty without affirming a theology, but theology was the origin in this case.) This was as revolutionary in its own way for his day as Lenin's arguments and practice were for his, only Williams had the spiritually larger, more inclusive position.

In Heidegger's letter to a student mentioned above, he counsels that it is necessary to appropriate what is "gathered, is presencing, of the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching of Jesus."⁸⁸ In fact, in a very different historical situation, this is precisely what the Puritans with their classical education and biblical knowledge were attempting to do. Williams established the groundwork for a truly sophic education in an American context. Once democracy and liberty are in place and "framing" and educational materialism are recognized as the basic threat to society generally and education in particular, then the exact details of how to proceed depend on historical circumstances, as Dewey argued. Computer technology, for example, was not even a question 100 years ago, but today it is. It must be dealt with in a way that not only overcomes "distance" (spying, hacking, and weaponized computing do this), as Heidegger cautioned, but actually brings people *nearer* to each other, which helps them to "gather" with other mortals for "the general good" like the Plymouth colonists, and gather freely as Williams urged, in a world with "things" that are gatherings of the earth, the sky, divinities, and mortals. Perhaps we can come to recognize the fundamental problem, see where our "treasure" actually is (in spite of our often lofty but market-driven self-descriptions), and face the "demons" possessing us. If so, then with openness and generosity of spirit it should be possible to construct a rich and creative experience that would offer an integrative and deep—sophic—education for our own time, much like education 30,000 years ago at the dawn of modern human education in the day of Chauvet Cave.

NOTES

1. John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Capricorn, 1960), 125.
2. Dewey, *Quest*, 127.
3. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Oliver Ready (New York: Penguin, 2015), 142.
4. John Dewey, "Impressions of Soviet Russia," accessed May 9, 2017, <http://ariwatch.com/V5/JD/ImpressionsOfSovietRussia.htm#chapter6>, 245–246.
5. Dewey, "Impressions," 246.
6. Dewey, *Quest*, 76.
7. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee, 1980), 341.
8. Dewey, *Art*, 149.
9. Dewey, *Art*, 148.
10. Jean-Marie Chauvet, et al., *Dawn of Art: The Chauvet Cave* (New York: Abrams, 1996), p. 15.

11. See the depiction of lions at Chauvet pictured here: https://ichef-1.bbci.co.uk/news/624/media/images/82470000/jpg/_82470458_143cba32-625b-4fb2-a950-c5b3dfb9ce80.jpg
12. Chauvet, *Dawn*, 126.
13. Dewey, *Art*, 18.
14. Dewey, *Art*, 19.
15. Jean Clottes, *Cave Art* (New York: Phaidon, 2008), 24.
16. Jean Clottes, *What Is Paleolithic Art? Cave Paintings and the Dawn of Human Creativity*, trans. Oliver and Robert Martin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 91.
17. Clottes, *Paleolithic*, 92.
18. Clottes, *Paleolithic*, 93.
19. Clottes, *Paleolithic*, 102.
20. See the Holy Trinity Cathedral pictured here: http://www.eurocarb18.com/wp-content/uploads/1280px-Holy_Trinity_Church_Sergiev_Posad_11.jpg
21. See the shrine of St. Sergius and iconostasis pictured here: <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-OodpQdjJuiQ/VkRt5lAkX3I/AAAAAAAAAWfs/iBU1RGirjaQ/s1600/DSCN1493.JPG>
22. See the Cathedral of Christ the Savior here: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d6/Moscow_July_2011-7a.jpg
23. See the Kazan Cathedral pictured here: <http://www.photoshelter.com/img-get/I00001H7rOXTYdaU/s/950/694/Kazan-Cathedral.jpg>
24. Clottes, *Paleolithic*, 124.
25. Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius. The Tragic and Extraordinary Life of Russia's Unknown da Vinci* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 146.
26. Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1996), 62.
27. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, 65.
28. Pavel Florensky, *At the Crossroads of Science and Mysticism*, trans. Boris Jakim (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2014), 17.
29. Clottes, *Paleolithic*, 144.
30. Clottes, *Paleolithic*, 163
31. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 178.
32. Heidegger, *Poetry*, 170.
33. Heidegger, *Poetry*, 166.
34. Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1991), 130.
35. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 17.
36. Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 96.
37. Wolin, *Heidegger*, 106.
38. Henry Giroux, *The University in Chains* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2007), 14.

39. Wolin, *Heidegger*, 35.
40. Wolin, *Heidegger*, 107.
41. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 325.
42. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1938), 30, 50.
43. Heidegger, *Poetry*, 185.
44. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C. T. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966).
45. George Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 69.
46. Young, *Russian*, 85.
47. Young, *Russian*, 67.
48. See the portrait of Fedorov, Solovyov, and Tolstoy pictured here: http://pereprava.org/uploads/posts/2014-12/1417854825_nikolay-fedorov-vladimir-solovev-lev-tolstoy-risunok-leonida-pasternaka.jpg
49. Young, *Russian*, 43.
50. Young, *Russian*, 53.
51. Young, *Russian*, 64.
52. Young, *Russian*, 90.
53. Young, *Russian*, 89.
54. Young, *Russian*, 12.
55. Vladimir Lenin, *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. Henry Christman (New York: Dover, 1987), 72.
56. On January 22, 1905, the Imperial Guard fired on unarmed demonstrators; the massacre provoked widespread strikes. This is thought by some to be the beginning of the Revolution of 1905, and is part of the events leading up to the October Revolution of 1917.
57. Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2000), 172.
58. John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: Classic House, 2009), 1.
59. Keynes, *Essays*, 166.
60. Keynes, *Essays*, 169.
61. Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 348.
62. See the Sistine Madonna pictured here: <https://www.italian-renaissance-art.com/images/xRaphael-Madonna-Child-sisti.jpg.pagespeed.ic.wRjNAA3IAV.jpg>
63. Catherine Evtuhof, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy, 1890–1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 44.
64. Evtuhof, *The Cross*, 135.
65. Sergei Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, trans. Catherine Evtuhov (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 41.
66. Evtuhof, *The Cross*, 146.
67. Bulgakov, *Economy*, 68.
68. Bulgakov, *Economy*, 73.

69. Bulgakov, *Economy*, 146.
70. Sergei Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, trans. Thomas Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 267.
71. Bulgakov, *Economy*, 151.
72. Bulgakov, *Economy*, 145.
73. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1994), 145.
74. Dostoyevsky, *Demons*, 655.
75. Service, *Lenin*, 469.
76. See Mikhail Nesterov's painting *The Philosophers* (1917) pictured here: <https://uploads3.wikiart.org/images/mikhail-nesterov/the-philosophers-portrait-of-sergei-bulgakov-and-pavel-florenskiy-1917.jpg>
77. Pavel Florensky, *At the Crossroads of Science and Mysticism*, trans. Boris Jakim (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2014), 7, 17.
78. Florensky, *Crossroads*, 120.
79. Florensky, *Crossroads*, 117.
80. Todd Rose, *The End of Average* (New York: HarperOne, 2015). As a sign of the times, Rose does not so much as mention Dewey, who was as every bit as interested as Rose is in the development of the individual.
81. John Dewey, *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), 93.
82. James Dietz and Patricia Dietz, *The Times of Their Lives* (New York: Anchor, 2000).
83. Leland Rykan, *Worldly Saints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 15.
84. David Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (New York: Knopf, 2011).
85. Rykan, *Worldly*, 16.
86. John Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul* (New York: Penguin, 2012).
87. Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, 1644, accessed May 18, 2017, <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/bdorseyl/41docs/31-wil.html> .
88. Heidegger, *Poetry*, 184.

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