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Remarks on Russian Philosophy, Soviet Philosophy, and Historicism

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This paper concerns two themes: my personal experience of Russian philosophy and Russian philosophers, on the one hand, and historicism on the other. My account of my limited experience of Russian philosophers and philosophy will be mainly autobiographical. My remarks about historicism will concern a single aspect of the philosophical consequences of the Soviet experience for Russian philosophy.

Some Russian philosophers I have known

My interaction with Russian philosophy and Russian philosophy began in the late 1970s, when I had the occasion to listen to a talk by N. V. Motroshilova, an important contemporary Russian philosopher, at a Hegel meeting in Stuttgart. At that point, Russian philosophy was still unfolding within the framework of the Soviet Union. In practice, this meant that Soviet philosophy was dominated by the Soviet version of Marxism as it emerged in the Soviet space after the Russian Revolution. Her thesis was that in the Soviet Union they liked Hegel and they liked Marx, but they liked Marx a little better.

At the time, I did not realize what was at stake. Later I came to be friendly with Motroshilova and a long list of other Russian philosophers, mainly those associated with the Institute of Philosophy (Институт философии) that then belonged to the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, and later to the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation. I gradually became aware of some of the many constraints under which Soviet philosophers were working. Motroshilova, for instance, impressed me even at the first meeting as bright, resourceful, and capable. As I learned Russian, I read her early book on Husserl, in which she developed a Marxist critique of his form of phenomenology as an expression of bourgeois society (Motroshilova, 1967). I was struck by the fact that there was less attention directed to phenom-

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enology's philosophical dimension than to its political dimension. At the time, this merely appeared odd to me since I did not grasp the constraints under which it was written. Husserl, of course, was mainly uninterested in politics, though he did become a German nationalist at the time of the First World War. I continued to follow Motroshilova's later writings. Her study of *Hegel's Road to the Science of Logic*, which I reviewed, was politically neutral, limited only by what appeared to be the still limited access to texts in the later days of the Soviet Union. Later, after it broke up and disappeared, Motroshilova (2003) returned to Husserl, her initial concern, about whose position she wrote a lengthy study in which political considerations were scrupulously absent.

My next interaction with a Soviet philosopher occurred at the World Congress of Philosophy in 1982 in Montreal. I remember going over to the table displaying books of Soviet philosophers where I encountered T. I. Oizerman. Oizerman was a leading contemporary Russian philosopher and a full member first of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and later of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He was for many years the most prominent representative of the orthodox Marxist philosophical point of view. I had already become interested in Marx, and I used the occasion to ask a question about the possible circularity of his position. Oizerman, in response, pointed out that he had written this book and that book, but said nothing about my query. I then repeated my question and received the same sort of reply. I was puzzled since I did not understand it was personally risky to interact with foreigners and especially with those like myself who did not hold a version of the 'official' Soviet philosophical perspective.

At the time, I did not know much about Soviet philosophy. I knew even less about Oizerman. I did not understand either his central position in the Soviet philosophical establishment or the importance of his own philosophical writings. My next meeting with him occurred during a philosophical congress on Philosophy and the Contemporary World in Varna, Bulgaria, probably toward the middle of the 1980s. There I had the occasion to see him again and to become acquainted with V. A. Lektorsky, a distinguished philosopher of science who was also editor of *Вопросы философии*, the leading Russian language philosophical journal. I remember talking to him about my doubts about official Marxism. I already believed then, as I still believe, that Marx's position is very different from the views attributed to him by Marxism. Lektorsky, as I recall, agreed with me but said it was too early to express such views in the Soviet Union.

Later I became friends with both Oizerman and Lektorsky. Oizerman, who became a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences very early, has been an Academician now for decades. He is a prolific writer, with many books to his credit, who has trained generations of Soviet philosophers. Over the years I have continued to remain friendly with Oizerman. He continues to write actively today at the age of 94. When I go to Moscow, whenever possible I try to visit with him. I have also become friendly with his son, Ilya Kasavin, who works on the philosophy of science, and who is currently a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He, like his father before him, works in the Institute of Philosophy.

Oizerman's interests have changed greatly over the years. When he was young it was not possible to challenge received philosophical Marxist orthodoxy and remain

in the philosophical establishment. For a long time, he defended and even defined the official line. It is not false to say that he became a legend in his own time. A visitor to the Institute of Philosophy can see his picture as a young soldier at the time of the Second World War in the stairway of the Institute of Philosophy. Yet his own views, although supposedly orthodox during the Soviet period, were also unorthodox, subtly critical of the official line. His consistent stress on Marx against the background of classical German idealism called attention to a historical approach in Marx very different from the ahistorical approach in the writings of Engels and many later Marxists. I will come back to this point below.

Oizerman is undoubtedly a product of the Soviet system. Yet his writings after the disappearance of the Soviet Union reflect a freedom from ideological constraint that could not have been anticipated. Perhaps not surprisingly, he turned to praise of Marxist revisionism that would have been anathema in Soviet times (Oizerman, 2003). More recently he told me that, because of Marxist orthodoxy, Kant had been 'unfairly' neglected in Russian-language philosophy.

Lektorsky, who is also a full member of the Academy of Sciences, is not only very competent and well informed, but also very receptive to ideas from outside Soviet and later Russian philosophy. After our meeting in Varna, I did what I could to arrange for him to be invited to the Center for Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh. After contacting many colleagues, the invitation was arranged and he was able to spend a semester in Pittsburgh in the early 1990s. During that time, we became good friends, and we continue to meet and occasionally to collaborate. He kindly arranged for me to participate in one of the early meetings of the Russian Philosophical Society in St. Petersburg. As editor of *Вопросы философии*, he has played an extremely useful role in focusing attention on what happened in philosophy during the Soviet period. This has enabled younger Russians to become aware of important but now lesser known figures such as Shpet and Bakhtin. He is also extremely attentive to developments outside Russian philosophy. From time to time I have contributed an article to his journal. Most recently I attended a lively seminar on epistemological constructivism he organized in his section (Сектор) of the Institute of Philosophy.

Through Motroshilova and Lektorsky I have been fortunate to meet a number of other Russian philosophers over the years. Four of the most interesting are Vyacheslav Stepin, Natalya Avtonomova, Gaiane Tavrizian and Marina Bykova. I do not remember how I met Stepin for the first time. But it was probably at a meeting in Moscow, where I presented a paper on historical epistemology. To my dismay, he quickly objected that there was nothing new about my view, nothing that was unfamiliar in Russian philosophy!

Stepin was in Minsk for many years before he came to Moscow where beginning in 1987, he became a full member of the Academy of Sciences, and where he was for many years the Director of the Institute of Philosophy. As head of the Institute, he arguably occupied the central 'official' position in Russian philosophy. A man of great energy, he is a rare specialist in philosophy of the natural sciences who is also fully trained in the sciences, especially physics, as well as in classical German philosophy. He is the only specialist in the philosophy of physics and the 'hard' sciences I have ever met who also takes a recognizably Hegelian approach to the philosophy

of science. We have developed very cordial relations and I was pleased to contribute a paper for his Festschrift.

Avtonomova studied with Lektorsky. Her book on reason, which was originally her dissertation, made a very positive impression on me (Avtonomova, 1989). She has worked over the years in Lektorsky's section with special attention to the human sciences as well as to practical and theoretical problems of translation. She came to philosophy after studies in philology, which she later combined in her work on translation. She is, for instance, the translator of Jacques Derrida (2000), whom she has helped to introduce to Russian readers. She often teaches in France, where we have met frequently over the years.

Gaiane Tavrizian and Marina Bykova were both very helpful to me when I visited the Institute of Philosophy at the invitation of Nelli Motroshilova in 1989. Tavrizian came to Moscow many years ago from her native Yerevan. She works principally as a translator from German or French into Russian. She has a specific interest in the work of Gabriel Marcel. We were in touch for a number of years, and through her I met her daughter Marina Balashova. Marina, who emigrated to the US, received a PhD from the School of Medieval Studies at Notre Dame University. In preparing her dissertation, she found answers to the questions she was concerned with and subsequently has devoted herself to raising her son. Her husband, Yuri Balashov, a philosopher of science, has tenure at the University of Georgia. Marina Bykova was a young assistant professor when I met in Moscow in 1989. Later I kept in touch with her after she emigrated first to Austria and then to the US, where she has tenure at North Carolina State University. Since she also works in the area of classical German philosophy, I see her from time to time at meetings. She made the difficult transition from Russian to German and then to English and has now begun to publish actively in English.

After communism: constructivism and the legacy of Soviet philosophy

I turn now from describing my encounters with some of the Russian philosophers I have known to my impressions of contemporary Russian philosophy. The contemporary philosophical scene in Russia is lively and interesting in a way that resembles the very best aspects of philosophy anywhere. There seem to be no visible taboos of any kind. Russian colleagues are informed and eager to discuss. And the debates are interesting.

As someone used to visiting the Institute of Philosophy from time to time, I can report that the change from the Soviet to the Russian era is simply remarkable. There is apparently a seamless transition from Soviet to Russian philosophy as concerns personnel. After the break up of the Soviet Union, to the best of my knowledge most of the people in the Institute of Philosophy, including a large number of colleagues who were important in Soviet times, simply remained in place. This apparent continuity contrasts with the situation that prevailed, for instance, in the former German Democratic Republic, where with very few exceptions the East German philosophers were systematically excluded from their jobs, hence deprived of the possibility to continue their philosophical work. In that particular sense, the transition from the

Soviet to the new Russian philosophical era was relatively seamless, marked by continuity rather than discontinuity.

Yet there were obviously important changes. One is the effective disappearance of the official Marxist component of Soviet philosophy. This does not mean that there are no longer social imperatives, which continue to exist in all societies. Yet after the disappearance of the Soviet state there is no longer anything approaching an official reason to adopt or reflect an official political view in philosophical texts or discussions, nor to conform to an 'official' Soviet model, a model based on a particular Soviet form of Marxism.

It goes without saying that Soviet philosophy was not the only instance where political pressure was exerted to produce a result that reflected political orthodoxy. Philosophy has always taken place within prevailing social conditions. The trial and death of Socrates is only an early example of the social pressures that are sometimes brought to bear on philosophical debate. This is unfortunately still the case. It can perhaps be noted that in the People's Republic of China foreigners can say and publish what they want. But Chinese colleagues who criticize official Marxism do so at the risk of their jobs.

Philosophy in the Soviet era was politically restricted by the Soviet conception of Marxism. That was not good but obviously bad, deleterious, unhealthy for philosophical discussion. It is always bad when philosophical discussion is restricted by anything other than itself. It would, however, be a mistake to believe that, merely because in the Soviet era there were restrictions on debate, the experience was negative, even wholly negative. One of the most interesting positive legacies of Soviet philosophy lies in the current Russian philosophical concern with a historical approach to knowledge.

When I come to Russia, I am always surprised by the degree of interest in a historical approach to knowledge, an interest that, so far as I know, is unique to Russian philosophy. To put this in perspective: if I give a paper on a historical approach to knowledge in the United States, I am likely to be met with resistance, even hostility to the idea that cognitive claims might be relative to time and place, relative in one formulation to the historical moment. Western thinkers consciously or unconsciously often favor a version of Husserl's view that historical relativism is only a sophisticated form of epistemological skepticism. But, as I have discovered from my own experience, if I give the very same paper in Russia I am likely to be asked what about my view is new since this approach is widely familiar.

This difference in perspective as concerns the historical character of cognitive claims needs to be explained. It needs to be explained why contemporary Russian philosophers and contemporary Russian philosophy are so hospitable to a historical approach to knowledge, an approach which has always been unusual, even rare, elsewhere. My hypothesis is that there is a link between the contemporary Russian interest in a historical approach to knowledge and Soviet philosophy.

By Soviet philosophy I have in mind the philosophical discussion during the Soviet period marked by the political imposition of the Soviet national variant on Marxism. The political role of Marxism influenced the philosophical debate during the Soviet era. An important instance is the controversy in the 1920s opposing the mechanists and the Deborinists about the proper interpretation of dialectic.

Since its origins in ancient Greece, philosophers have continued to propose variations on the theme that it is central to the good life. That is not often taken seriously in the West where few people outside philosophy take its claims seriously or are even familiar with them. But it was important in Soviet times where political legitimacy depended on being able to point to a relation to the views of Marx and Marxism, a link which was itself taken as indispensable to realizing the good life. In other words, political Marxism in power in the Soviet Union was at least 'officially' concerned to realize the Greek view of the social role attributed to philosophy.

This 'official' intervention in a philosophical debate makes sense in the Soviet Union where philosophy played an overt ideological role. In that context, it made political sense for political figures, often with little or no philosophical baggage, to decide philosophical questions. And it made sense as well for philosophers to take political imperatives seriously in working out their views. Though philosophy in the Soviet Union legitimated a certain political approach, that country, hence that role, have now passed into history.

It is tempting to say that political interference in philosophy resulted in a sterile period in which nothing of value took place. I do not believe that to be the case. But rather than considering Soviet philosophy, I would like now to make a few remarks, but only a few, about the shape of Russian philosophy.

Russian philosophy, as it now exists, is a new incarnation of what remains of a tradition that began before the Soviet Union was formed and that, together with new problems and interests that later grew up, has now partly re-emerged after the Soviet period. Now in one sense Russian philosophy in the short period since the end of the Soviet Union is in the process of beginning again. Yet it cannot just begin again as if the Soviet Union had never existed. Since Russian philosophy today is influenced by Soviet philosophy from yesterday, we can ask the following question: what of Soviet philosophy remains in contemporary Russian philosophy? One very interesting part of the Soviet philosophical heritage lies in the current Russian philosophical interest in historicism, or the approach to knowledge claims as intrinsically historical.

Historicism has different forms, one of which is linked to constructivism. This is a term that has become popular in the last twenty years and that often refers to Kant's critical philosophy. The central point of his so-called Copernican revolution lies in the idea that we can only reliably claim to know what we in some sense construct. This yields a contrast between two approaches to knowledge. On the one hand, there is the concern to represent mind-independent objects, or in other terms the world as it is, and on the other there is the idea that we can only know objects we construct in experience but nothing beyond it. Constructivism can further be ahistorical, as for Husserl and Carnap, or historical, as for Hegel and Marx.

If we follow out the constructivist insight as it developed after Kant in later German idealism, we come to several consequences. One is that the cognitive subject is always one of more finite human beings. Another is that claims to know are relative, or more precisely relative to the historical moment. A third consequence is that we construct and, hence, only can be reliably said to know in a historical space. In other words, knowledge turns out to be a historical process.

Since this is not a discussion about epistemology, I will not develop the arguments

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that can be formulated to justify these claims. It will be sufficient for present purposes to call attention to the link between epistemological constructivism, empirical realism, and historicism, or a historical conception of knowledge.

All too often theories are described as realist or anti-realist, but there are many different forms of realism. There is an obvious contrast between grasping the way the mind-independent world is at it is, or in itself, and how it appears in ordinary experience. The former view is described by what is often called metaphysical realism and the latter by the term empirical realism. At least since Plato, philosophy in the West has often, even mainly been committed to various forms of metaphysical realism. Western philosophy, which is basically ahistorical, appeals to two main epistemological strategies. One consists in various types of naïve or direct realism, which Putnam, who has recently turned to this approach, describes as knowledge without an interface. The other consists in variations on the theme of the causal theory of perception. This general approach unites such different thinkers as the rationalist Descartes, the empiricist Locke, and the critical thinker Kant. Kant's critical philosophy features two different, disparate approaches to knowledge, approaches that cannot be united in a single overall position. For purposes of this discussion, I will call them representationalism and constructivism.

Representationalism is the general view that to know consists in analyzing, or again in getting clear about the relation of representations to mind-independent objects. In short, objects are said to appear to us through their representations. Representationalism usually presupposes a causal theory of perception, in which the ideas in our mind are understood to be effects caused by the mind-independent world. Understood in this way, the problem of knowledge consists in making the 'backward' inference from effect to cause. The difficulty is that there is apparently no way to infer reliably from effects to causes, from ideas in the mind to the way the world is, no way to analyze the relation of representations to objects, no way to demonstrate that representations reliably represent.

For this reason, although much complex argumentation is required to establish this conclusion, it is sometimes believed that representationalism in all its many forms fails as an approach to knowledge. Constructivism is an alternative epistemological strategy, which was invented independently in modern times by Hobbes and Vico, and then later by Kant. It is the central insight in Kant's so-called Copernican revolution. Constructivism can be defined informally as the insight that we can reliably claim to know only what we in some sense construct. Kantian constructivism is extremely influential on the later discussion. A short list of others since Kant who belong to constructivism might include Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, the usual list of post-Kantian German idealists, Marx who arguably belongs on this list, Cassirer, the great Marburg neo-Kantian, the American pragmatist Dewey, on some readings the later Carnap, and so on.

Constructivism, which is obviously close to some forms of idealism, can be paraphrased as an interaction between a cognitive subject situated in a social and historical context and the mind-independent, unknown, and unknowable world. From this perspective, there is no prospect of knowing the world as it is in itself. The best we can do is to formulate theories about what is given to us in experience, against which we test and modify our views. This way of understanding the process of

knowledge leads to two inferences. First, at this late date it is hopeless to persist in trying to know the mind-independent world as it is. This suggests the need to give up metaphysical realism in favor of something else, such as empirical realism, which does not exceed the limits of our experience, which are also the limits of what we can reliably claim to know. Second, the process of arriving at an acceptable theory, which is always subject to correction by further experience, is based on trial and error in a historical context. What we believe is always in some way linked to the historical moment in which the belief is formulated.

A historical conception of knowledge is, as already mentioned, a persistent theme in Russian philosophy. Philosophy of history was already important before the Soviet period in such thinkers as P. Ya. Chaadayev, A. S. Komyakov, I. V. Kirevsky, K. S. Aksakov, A. I. Herzen, N. Ya. Danilevky, and K. N. Leontiev. During the Soviet period, a version of this interest was maintained by 'official' Marxist-Leninism, understood as including both Marx and Marxism. In this respect, it is important to be sensitive to the difference between Marx and Marxism. Marx was, like Hegel, a deeply historical thinker. Marxism, which has always maintained a claim for strict continuity with Marx, in fact is an ahistorical approach. Engels, who invented Marxism, insisted on the so-called reflection theory of knowledge (*Widerspiegelungstheorie*) of the way the world is. The idea that there is in fact a way the world is, which is presupposed by Marxism, but not by Marx, is incompatible with the view of history as an ongoing process.

'Official' Marxism is now over and should be forgotten. Contemporary Russian philosophy is the heir to what was best about Soviet thought, namely its emphasis on Marx. Marx, who should not be confused with Marxism, influences contemporary Russian philosophy in its emphasis on a strongly historical approach to knowledge. This emphasis, which is so striking to a visitor from the West, is a continuous thread running from pre-Soviet Russian philosophy through Soviet Marxist-Leninism to contemporary Russian philosophy. It is especially striking in contemporary Russian philosophy of science.

We can end this paper with several examples drawn from the general field of philosophy of science. I will have in mind the views of Lev Vygotsky, the important Soviet psychologist, Lektorsky's writings about Vygotsky's theories as well as his own views, and Stepin's work in philosophy of the natural sciences. All three feature historicism, especially historicist forms of constructivism, in their writings.

Russian constructivism ranges widely from an approach to art and art objects developed early in the twentieth century to mathematics. Vygotsky is, like the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, with whose position his theories are often contrasted, a psychological constructivist. For Piaget, mind develops as a biological process under the influence of social factors. For Vygotsky, the development of the human psyche is not biological but due to the cultural-historical experience of humanity that acts on the child through the influence of adults (see, for this comparison, Pass, 2004). Vygotsky, who is clearly influenced by Marx and Marxism, is often called a social constructivist. Vygotsky stresses the importance of social context for cognitive development. He is especially interested in the link between the collective and the individual consciousness situated in the collective subjectivity produced historically by what is called joint-collective enactment. Unlike Freud, the social external world is

not understood as a fixed and self-sufficient superstructure, but takes shape historically through collective participation and contributions from its members. The collective subjectivity is not only larger than the sum total of individual beings, but also possesses a qualitatively different existence.

Lektorsky works mainly in the social sciences, especially psychology. He is also one of the most important Russian students of Vygotsky. Lektorsky's interest in Vygotsky goes back to his early study (1980). In the first chapter of his book, *Reflection. Object-Related Practical Activity and Communication*, he sketched Vygotsky's idea that internal psychical processes are a result of 'interiorisation,' that is, 'growing in' or transposition onto the inner plane of those actions of the subject which are originally performed externally and directed at external objects in stressing social-historical experience.

Lektorsky's approach to Vygotsky stresses the historical dimension of a full-fledged psychology in the social space. He is further personally committed in his own work to a historical form of constructivism. In a recent paper on 'Kant, radical constructivism and constructive realism in epistemology', Lektorsky (2005) sketches the outlines of a historical approach to knowledge along constructivist lines. He begins from the alternative between constructivism and representationalism, which is based on the old view of knowledge as the 'mirror of nature'. For Lektorsky, Kant is unquestionably a constructivist thinker, who in denying efforts to know things in themselves limits cognitive claims to what we construct. Lektorsky goes on to examine the links between the constructivist views he finds in Kant to more recent theories due to von Glasersfeld, Maturan, Varela and others in relation to the view of the English philosopher and psychologist Rom Harré, who develops a social and historical view of the subject. He concludes that the interest of recent constructivism lies in further developing Kantian epistemological impulses.

Another example of the historicist approach to science is provided in the writings of Stepin, who is arguably one of the most important contemporary philosophers of natural science in the world today. Stepin's postnonclassical approach to scientific rationality follows the nonclassical one in which only the method was integrated (as in the theories of relativity and in quantum mechanics). In a recent study, Stepin (2005, or. 2000) develops a comprehensive conception of science, which stresses the role of construction in scientific explanation. Stepin intends his complex historical systematic model as an alternative to a simpler mechanistic, self-regulating model. In Stepin's theory, we see another inning in the dispute between mechanical and dialectical thinking, a dispute that earlier opposed the mechanists and the Deboronists. Stepin is concerned with a form of this problem in respect to natural science. He stresses, like Hegel, by whose philosophy of science he is influenced, that science is a historical enterprise.

In reasserting the subjective element eliminated by a classical approach to science, Stepin distances himself from positivism of all kinds in adopting an overtly historicist point of view, in which science incorporates both intra-scientific and extra-scientific factors, such as those which are value-related. Stepin's historicism is not directed at disqualifying earlier conceptions of science, which it regards as limited, and superceded by new systems and norms of cognition. Yet this view of science is also not neutral with respect to the social world. It rather functions as one among other ways

of responding to the perceived problems confronting finite human beings. A consequence of the historicist approach is that rationality is regarded as open, not closed, potentially always subject to revision in light of the changing values and priorities of human beings.

Unlike Kuhn, whose view of science remains ahistorical, Stepin considers changes in specific problems due to such historical factors as new ways of organizing science as a discipline and changing conceptions of science. For instance, he usefully abandons the pose of disinterested scientific neutrality in attempting to assess the real utility of science that, like other cognitive domains, such as philosophy, can be understood, as Dewey suggests, as arising out of the stresses and strains of human existence. The historical approach helps us to consider various scientific models as so many hypotheses which can be praagmatically verified in use as it were.

Special interest attaches to Stepin's view of the scientific construction of hypotheses. Stepin's view of theories as theoretical models of idealized or abstract objects, in a word as theoretical constructs, helpfully depicts the scientific investigator as literally constructing, if not reality, at least a theoretical scientific representation of so-called extra-scientific, extra-linguistic reality. Stepin's approach to the philosophy of science advantageously exploits the lessons of a historical approach to cognition within the scientific field. It usefully discerns stages in the increasing power of man over objects as a result of which human beings acquire mastery over nature. It understands the development of successful technology as the precondition for technical and social sciences. It provides an account of the historical process through which different disciplines arose, leading to the systematic organization of idealized objects that are so many scientific constructs that, despite Carnap, should not be confused with real objects. In Stepin's account, theoretical schemes are constructed on the basis of fundamental models, which are initially presented as mere hypotheses whose usefulness is later verified.

A central part of his account is the distinction between three types of scientific rationality. According to Stepin, classical rationality, for instance Newtonian mechanics, insists on the elimination of human subjectivity. Nonclassical rationality, for instance relativistic quantum mechanics, makes knowledge dependent on the conditions through which the object is cognized. Through the complex term postnonclassical science Stepin points to a historicist approach to knowledge which integrates not only the real activity of knowing an object, but also, as he points out, the social goals and values of such activity.

Stepin is, I think, correct to insist that there is no reason to think we ever know the world as it is but know only what we in some sense construct, and this construction is necessarily carried out in historical space. Stepin is on firm ground in my opinion in pointing out that scientific claims to know are inevitably historical, not only in time but also dependent on the historical moment, hence intrinsically historical and never beyond the historical flux. In pointing to the interest of a historicist, constructivist approach to science Stepin helps us to understand that even science, with mathematics one of the two main exemplars of human cognition, should be understood as a historical form of human construction. As a philosopher of science, Stepin is concerned only with this field. Yet the interest of his important point is, however, more general. For science and mathematics are only a special case of human knowl-

edge in general which, when it concerns the world and ourselves, has always relied on historical forms of epistemological constructivism.

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