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Liberal Perceptions and the Emergence of an Academic Knowledge of Russia and the Slavs in France

Ezequiel Adamovsky

As I have argued elsewhere, a peculiar image of Russia emerged in France between c. 1740 and c. 1870. In that period, conflicting representations of things Russian clashed and affected each other in France. For some of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, such as Voltaire, Russia was the example of the powers of reason when applied to politics. Thus, according to old man of Ferney, monarchs such as Peter I and Catherine II embodied the promise of enlightenment politics in its struggle against the remnants of superstition, privilege and despotism of the dark ages. Later on, other writers challenged Voltaire’s optimism. Thus, Rousseau found in Russia the best exemplification of the destructive effects of the enlightenment’s universalism, which had destroyed the national idiosyncrasy of the local culture. In the nineteenth century, as France moved away from the Ancien Régime, conservative writers found in Russia an example of the hierarchical order they regretted so much –one of firm monarchic power and strong religious observance. Later on, some romantic authors (whether conservatives or socialists) found in Russian and Slavic society –particularly in the patriarchal/egalitarian peasant communes– the blueprint of a social order that would bring harmony to the much convulsed European society. For the conservatives, the Slavic communes offered the example of a bucolic, patriarchal order, whilst some socialists found in the lack of private ownership of the land and in the communal customs an anticipation of the communist future that they dreamt of. However, in this clash of conflicting images, it was the liberal representation of things Russian and Slavic that eventually became hegemonic. For liberals such as Hugo, Guizot, Rabbe and others, Russia was a barbarous “land of absence”, a land of despotism and backwardness –the exact opposite to the land of “freedom” and “civilisation” that they were trying to build in Europe. Thus, in liberal quarters Russia (and the Slavic world in general) was constructed as a negative mirror-image of liberal Europe. Thus, a “Western” Europe was imagined as the land of civilisation, economic progress, cultural development, equality before the law (not to be confused with *social* equality), a strong civil society inhabited by free, voluntary “associations”, and freedom. In turn, all these elements were conceived as emerging from the presence of a particular class, the bourgeoisie or “middle class” –the engine of progress and the guardian of freedom. By contrast, “Eastern” Europe was constructed as a land that lacked all the elements of civilisation precisely because it supposedly lacked a strong middle class or

bourgeoisie, and/or a strong civil society. Hence its absence of civilisation, its economic backwardness, its cultural handicaps, its dangerously egalitarian customs, and the concomitant the lack of individual and political freedom (see Adamovsky 2001, 2003 and 2004).

In this paper, the impact that the liberal image of Russia had on the first steps of the development of Russian academic studies in France will be analysed. It will be argued that the political concerns that informed the liberal perception of Russia can also be found in the academic understanding of that country, which began to be developed (some areas earlier than others) from the 1850s to the early 1880s. Moreover, if drawing a clear line between knowledge and politics is never easy, the distinction between ‘politicians’ and ‘scholars’ becomes particularly blurred in the case of the beginnings of academic knowledge of Russia in France. As will become evident, most of the academics who first studied the Russian economy, Russian society, politics and history were liberal thinkers themselves, and some of them were even important liberal politicians. However, the specificity of the development of an academic knowledge allows for a particular treatment of this issue. For the academic field, as is well known, serves to *normalise* knowledge, by distinguishing valid (‘scientific’) knowledge from the ‘unreliable’ realm of ‘ungrounded’ opinions and perceptions. However, the academic field, including all the networks of universities, institutes, publications, specialists, conferences, and so on, serves not only to know reality better, but also to establish a hegemonic representation of the world. Once the hegemonic representation of an aspect of the world is established by means of the support of an academic field, the struggle of representations tends to give way to one ‘objective’ version of ‘reality’. And yet, the academic field is far from being immune to struggles in the political realm, whether of class, gender, race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, and so on. On the contrary, it may be argued that, to a great extent, the academic field has constituted up to the present an indispensable device to legitimate the supremacy of certain social groups. This chapter will attempt to show how an ideologically biased perception of Russia became the accepted academic knowledge. In order to explore this, the field of statistics and economics, and the works of the first three academic specialists in Russia –Louis Leger, Alfred Rambaud, and Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu– will be examined.¹

I The Slavist and the Historian: Louis Leger and Alfred Rambaud

¹ Other historians will surely find other relevant academic fields to investigate. I have found some interesting pieces of evidence in the field of positivist psychology. For example, measurements of the skull among the Slavs as compared to other races were discussed in the *Association française pour l'avancement des sciences* in 1876 (see *Revue scientifique*, no. 12, 16/9/1876, pp. 277-78). More important, in his widely read positivist treatise **Esquisse psychologique des peuples européens**, the important reformist liberal theoretician Alfred Fouillée argued that Slavonic blood was not purely “Arian”, but mixed with that of Asian races. The shape of Slavonic skulls confirmed this Oriental pedigree. Hence their “absence of intellectual life”, “sensitivity”, “melancholy”, “love for equality” even in servitude, “passivity”, “simplistic” reasoning, superstitious and “fanatic” approach to religion, and so on. The Russians in particular seemed to be the most “primitive”, “passive”, “inert”, “unbalanced” and unsuitable to “capitalism” of the Slavs, due to their “Turanian and brachycephalic” element. Needless to say, Fouillée presented scientific evidence of the superiority of the Western psychology (the French in particular) (FOUILLÉE 1903: 397-452).

After the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, France's academic world showed a renewed interest in the study of other nations, not least because of the need to overcome France's isolation (see Hogenhuis-Seliverstoff 1997; Ziejka 1991). With the appointment of Louis Leger as *Professeur Titulaire* of the Chair of Slavonic Languages and Literatures at the *Collège de France* in 1885, Slavonic studies finally started to become a professional academic field in France.² An enthusiast of things Slavic since 1863, Leger became a world-pioneering Slavist when in 1868 he presented his doctoral dissertations on the introduction of Christianity into the Slavic world and on the Russian Primary Chronicle. From the 1880s and until his death in 1923, Leger contributed personally to the development of Slavic studies in the universities of Lille, the Sorbonne, Dijon, Lyon and Strasbourg, and was involved in the establishment of the *Institut d'études slaves* in 1919. As a professor and researcher, he trained the next generation of French Slavists together with Alfred Rambaud and Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu. When Leger died, R. W. Seton-Watson, the eminent British Slavist, called him "the Nestor of Slavonic Studies in the West" (Seton-Watson 1923: 423).³ His professional biography, his role as pioneering Slavist, and his contributions to the field are well known (see Cooley 1971: 144-51; Desmarais 1973: 56-78; Butenschön 1978: 74-83; Labriolle 1978; Abensour 1978; Makarenkova 1986; Marès 1997; Aloe 2000). We shall focus here only on the influence of the liberal perceptions of Russia in Leger's works.

Unlike Rambaud and A. Leroy-Beaulieu, Leger does not seem to have been very interested in politics. Very little about his political opinions can be deduced from his writings. We know that he was a moderate, and that he was a friend of some moderate politicians, such as his colleague Alfred Rambaud and Saint-René Taillandier. He was not russophobic at all; on the contrary, he loved the Slavic nations in general, not least because he expected the Slavs to be France's allies against Germany. Leger's effort to depict the Slavs in the best colours is apparent in most of his works. Perhaps for these reasons or because of the themes and style of his studies –more descriptive than analytical and more prosaic than polemical– the hints of the liberal perception of Russia in his many works are very scanty. Although he considered that Russia was undeniably a European nation, he also considered that she represented a "transition between Europe and Asia" (Leger 1875: 219). Regarding Russia's problems, in an article about nihilism written in 1880 Leger argued that in order to avoid the extremes of "despotism" (that is, "the old Russia") and "anarchism" (that is, "the new Russia") the Russian "middle class" should play a more important role (Leger 1880-1886, vol. 2, p. 93). Curiously enough, Leger does not seem to have been at all interested in the debate about Russia's "communism", or even in the Russian peasants' customs.

² The Chair had had a rather erratic life before, especially under Mickiewicz and Cyprien Robert. Its third holder, Professor Chodzko, was more serious than his predecessors, but still not professional enough for academic standards.

³ Nestor was the twelfth-century monk who is credited with compiling the "Russian Primary Chronicle", the first written account of Russian history.

In the case of Alfred Rambaud, the author of the first reliable first-hand research on Russia's history in France since Pierre-Charles Levesque's book, the liberal bias becomes more clear and unequivocal. As historian, Rambaud was part of the generation with which the professionalisation of historiography in France began. Formerly a history teacher and specialist in Byzantine history, Alfred Rambaud became interested in Russia after the Franco-Prussian war; like many Frenchmen of his generation, he set great store by an alliance with that country. In 1872, 1874 and again in 1877 he visited Russia. His erudite **Histoire de la Russie**, published in 1878 and several times reprinted in France well into the twentieth century, immediately gained international acclaim. It was translated into Russian, Croatian, Danish, German and English (an American edition included) and remained one of the most important works on Russia for many decades. In Russia, Rambaud's work was used as a school textbook. In the 1880s and 1890s Rambaud also wrote or edited important contributions to the history of civilisation in France and in Europe.

Besides his academic occupations, Rambaud was very active politically. As a republican representative in the early 1870s he met Jules Ferry, for whom he worked as head of cabinet and private secretary from 1879 to 1881. It is not unlikely that Rambaud wrote some of Ferry's speeches and even some of his famous educational laws. Later on, Rambaud was elected a senator (1895) and became Minister of Public Instruction, Culture and the Arts (1896) (Vidal de la Blache 1908; Cooley 1971: 202-25; Desmarais 1973: 191ff.; Butenschön 1978: 83-90).

Rambaud also wrote works on the history of France, and here, quoting extensively from Guizot, Michelet, Thierry, Montalembert, Henri Martin, Mignet, Thiers, Quinet, and Tocqueville, he emphasised the central role of the "middle classes", urban development, individual rights, local self-government and "associations of free men" in the development of France's freedom and "civilisation" (Rambaud 1885-1887, vol. 1, pp. 37, 90, 103, 281, 504-5; vol. 2, pp. 601-36). On the other hand, he firmly condemned all types of "communism and collectivism", on the grounds that they "annihilate the individual" and bring about "despotism" (Rambaud 1888: 417).

Not surprisingly, his history of Russia and his general explanation of the otherness of "Eastern Europe" come into view as a negative image of his narrative of French and "Western European" civilisation. Firstly, in a typical move, Rambaud argues that the Tatar yoke played an important role in Russia's history, for it isolated her from "the West" (implying that civilisation is only possible if a nation is 'in touch' with the West) and accentuated her "oriental" and "despotic" characteristics. Secondly, the weakness of the bourgeoisie and of commercial life in general, and the gap between the two social classes of serfs and nobles also appear as a source of underdevelopment. Finally, the lack of private property and Russian communal tenure of the land ("rural communism") are strongly emphasised as causes of backwardness in Russian history (Rambaud 1878: 123-45, 243-44, 255-56, 479, 484, 35, 244, 254, 256). Moreover, in an addition to the seventh edition (1918) Rambaud praised Stolypin's land reform on the grounds that, by introducing private property, it fostered the principles

of “freedom and emancipation” and so destroyed “collectivism” and the peasant’s dependence upon the commune (Rimbaud 1918: 910).

Thus, whilst in Leger’s works the liberal perception of Russia is only insinuated, Rimbaud’s **Histoire de la Russie** reproduces most of the liberal themes that we have mentioned earlier in this work.

II Statisticians and Economists

The relatively recent development of Statistics as a discipline is related to the modern state’s increasing need for reliable social and economic data and the necessity to unify the systems of measurement. Although the French state decreed the establishment of its first statistical bureau in 1800, and the *Statistique générale de France* was founded in 1833 as a part of the Ministry of Commerce, Statistics only gained strength and recognition as an academic discipline after a small group of statisticians founded the *Société statistique de Paris* in 1860 (Desrosières 1998: 31-35, 151-54).

The only French professional statistician (or at least recognised as such) who wrote significant works about Russia in the period of our interest is Jean-Henri Schnitzler. The author of the impressive four-volume statistical treatise **L’empire des tsars au point actuel de la science** (1856-1869) and at least other five books on Russia, Schnitzler had travelled and lived in that country in the 1820s. In his general ideas, he was of liberal economic and political beliefs, and supported the doctrinaire idea that in France the “middle class” was the legitimate representative of the whole nation (see Schnitzler 1842, vol. 2, pp. 425-26; 1846, vol. 1, pp. 465-66 and vol. 2, p. 67). Always optimistic about Russia’s capability to develop according to the European model, Schnitzler pointed out, nevertheless, the deep differences between Russia (which he sometimes called simply “Eastern Europe”) and the West. Firstly, Russia lacked a “third estate” (the “guardian of freedom”), and her urban and industrial development was too weak (Schnitzler 1831: 28-29; 1847: 2; 1856-1869, vol. 3, p. 226; vol. 4, p. 348-50 and 446). Secondly, Russia never received (or received deficiently) the three traditions that shaped “our modern civilisation”, that is, the Greek-Roman genius, “Germanic freedom” and Christianity (Schnitzler 1847: 1-2; 1856-1869, vol. 4, p. 346). Thirdly, some of Russia’s social institutions, such as the peasant commune, the collective ownership of land, and the *artel*, posed an obstacle to economic progress; moreover, the lack of private property was an impediment for the moral development of the “individual” and of “personal dignity” (Schnitzler 1856-1869, vol. 2, p. 4; vol. 4, p. 67). Indeed, Schnitzler was one of the first authors to discuss Russia’s “communism”. Making use of the old argument of the *tabula rasa* in a work of 1847, he wondered if it was in Russia that “communism” would be implemented for the first time. For that doctrine, “impossible among us”, was probably more “feasible” in “new” and “uncultivated” countries like Russia, where “everything is still to be done”, and where the monarch himself was the owner of a great part of the land and the people who inhabit it (Schnitzler 1847, vol. 1, p. 33). However, in later works Schnitzler argued that Russia’s “customs of a

natural socialism” deserved to be carefully analysed, and that they had nothing in common with Fourier’s reveries. Moreover, Schnitzler argued against those who believed that “the plague of communism” had arrived in Europe from Russia. Nevertheless, he conceded that the *artel*’ and the communes implied “a certain communism with regard to property”.

Interestingly enough, Schnitzler also observed an important difference between “Eastern” and “Western” Europe, regarding “civil society”:

L’administration c’est l’ordre. Dans nos pays d’Occident, l’ordre existe solidement dans les rangs de la société civile, et c’est à ce point que le mécanisme marche et fonctionne régulièrement, même au milieu des révolutions [...] Il n’en est pas encore ainsi tout-à-fait dans l’Europe orientale...

And he ends by criticising the heavy weight of the Russian “bureaucracy” (Schnitzler 1856-1869, vol. 3, p. 3, 131-32, 198-200, 737-39). Needless to say, many of Schnitzer’s statements were profusely accompanied with tables and statistical figures, which provided a ‘factual’ and ‘scientific’ appearance for the usual perceptions of Russia.

Fortunately for our research, some of the most important French economists of the second half of the nineteenth century wrote books and articles on Russia, and themes related to that country were often discussed in the most important academic journals. Indeed, the emancipation of the peasantry and the reforms in Russia gave the French economists the opportunity to discuss on a very broad scale the appropriate measures for an underdeveloped country that seeks economic progress.

The professionalisation and institutionalisation of economics in France, as Lucette Van-Lemesle has shown, was carried out by a small group of interest committed to the defence of liberalism against the protectionist policies of the state after 1815. Thus, beginning with Jean-Baptiste Say, but especially during the July Monarchy, this group of liberal economists succeeded in establishing a powerful academic network, including chairs in the most important institutes and universities, a specialised publishing house (Guillaumin), the *Société d’économie politique* (founded 1842) and a number of periodicals –*Journal des économistes* (1841), *Le libre-échange* (1846), and later on *L’économiste français*. This network gave the liberals the undisputed monopoly of the academic field for most of the nineteenth century; indeed, the very word ‘economics’ was synonymous with ‘liberalism’ in those days (Van-Lemesle 1991; see also Etner 1987; Mosca 1998; Eatwell et al. 1998, vol. 3, p. 492). Let us analyse the image of Russia in the works of some of the economists of this liberal mainstream.

II.1 Léon Faucher and the *Dictionnaire d’économie politique*

Perhaps one of the best examples of how seriously the liberals took the challenge of the romantic-socialist image of Russia can be found in the four-volume **Dictionnaire d’économie politique**, edited by Coquelin and Guillaumin in 1852. The summa of the economic knowledge of the time, the **Dictionnaire**... compiled articles on every significant theme, written by some of the most important economists. Amongst these articles, a discussion of the Russian commune can be found in “Property”,

one of the longest and undoubtedly focussing on a central part of the liberal doctrine. The author was Léon Faucher, the prominent liberal economist, journalist and moderate politician. Both as journalist and politician –he was elected as a deputy in 1846, and became Minister under Barrot-Falloux after the revolution of 1848– he fought the socialists and the radical republicans. It is not surprising, then, that “Property” argues for the unrestricted individual right to property and against socialist ideas. “Civilisation” and “prosperity”, Faucher argues, are in direct relationship to the extension and security of private property. Hence the “barrenness” and “immobility” of the “Orient” –of which Russia is a good example– and the wealth and high development of the “West”. Interestingly enough, Faucher deals with the Russian commune under the heading “On communism and socialism”, where he argues that all the experiences of communism or socialism have been ephemeral and ended in failure. True, the Russian commune seemed to prove the contrary; but it was not a complete form of communism (the houses and the harvest remain the property of individuals), and it would surely disappear quite soon (Faucher 1852: 460-70; see also 1847).

Two years later Faucher wrote an article in the *Revue des deux mondes* about the financial situation of the Russian Empire, in which he argued that in that country there was nothing “apart from the state”, and “individual resources” remained undeveloped. The peasants lived “under the ties of communism”, that is, the most “immoral” of practices (Faucher 1854 [2]: 813-15).

II.2 Louis Wolowski: a Tocquevillean Approach

Although born in Poland, Faucher’s brother-in-law Louis Wolowski became one of France’s leading economists (see Lutfalla 1991). Professor and member of the *Institut de France*, Wolowski also played a major role in France’s political life; he was elected as a representative of the nation to legislative bodies in 1848, 1849, 1871 and 1875. In both his writings and his political positions he opposed socialism and defended economic and political liberalism (see for example Wolowski 1848; Rambaud 1882).

In an article that Wolowski wrote on the eve of Russia’s ‘great reforms’, in 1858, the liberal worldview and the use of the image of that country for political purposes become particularly clear. “In a time of despair”, Wolowski argued, when some people regret “the ties of mutual protection and dependence of the past”, whilst others dream of “the ideal constructions of communism”, Russia’s example was very enlightening. The reason was that that nation, which was based on an absolute power at the top and “communist practices” at the bottom, was now getting ready to march toward “European civilisation by assuring the rights of human liberty and the guarantees of property”.

After stating this thesis of his work, Wolowski went on to describe the Russian peasant commune, which he compared to the projects of the “communists” at home, and the utopian communes established in America. He concluded that it was a type of “oppressive organisation” that destroyed “individual energy”, for it negated property, “the vital principle of modern societies”. Far from being a model for the future, the Russian peasant commune was a relic of the past, and thus

served to show that “each step towards property has been a step towards the progress of freedom”.⁴ Those who criticise the “individualism of modern societies” should take a look at the Russian peasant commune, to see “where the absence of the individual principle leads”. In Russia, “the individual disappears, absorbed by the community”; in turn, equality “impedes the formation of an intermediate class”, that is, “the most active element of social development” thanks to which “civil society [*société civile*] amalgamates into a harmonious whole”. That class “is movement, life, whilst the communist practice means slumber and death”.

In this text Wolowski still expected that the Tsar would establish private ownership of land as a part of the emancipation of the peasantry. However, he warned that the kind of “communism” that would result if private property was not in the Tsar’s mind would be even more harmful, for it would lead to the unchecked rule of the “bureaucracy”.

Interestingly enough, Wolowski also discussed the administrative aspect of the Russian “communal principle”, beyond the issue of land ownership. But again in this case, he argued that, if Russian “local government” was to play a positive role, it must be accompanied by private property and constitute a “voluntary aggregation of men with different rights”. In short, the Russian commune “should be transformed according to the image of the communes of the USA”, for the “spirit of association” and “the use of social superiorities [sic]” for the “general interest” are the two most important elements to introduce in Russian society (Wolowski 1858 [1]: 318, 326-27; [2]: 617, 620, 624-25; [3]: 431-38, 444-46). Six years later, when it became clear that the Russian reform was not what Wolowski expected, he studied the financial situation of the Russian state to conclude that Russia was “poor” and remained “backward in the road to civilisation”. His article caused a bitter debate with some Russian writers (see Wolowski 1864).

Thus, Wolowski’s Russia displays the whole set of liberal images that we have mentioned earlier in this work. The use of Russia as an example in polemic against radical equality at home becomes particularly clear, as does the Tocquevillean emphasis on the importance for civilisation of (certain) associations and the maintenance of forms of inequality.

II.3 Gustave de Molinari, Specialist in Russia

Although he was not French either, the Belgian Gustave de Molinari also became one of the leading economists of France, where he spent most of his career. He was “the most extreme member of the French Liberal School”, part of the *Société d’économie politique* and, after 1881, editor of the *Journal des économistes* (Eatwell et al. 1998, vol. 3, p. 492). His extreme economic liberalism was accompanied by no less extreme political beliefs. A central theme in many of his theoretical works is the absolute primacy of the individual over society, and the rejection of socialism and of any form of state intervention in the economy (Molinari 1880; 1884; 1896; 1899; 1901). His commitment to the

⁴ It is worth noting that Wolowski uses the expression “Eastern Europe”, and in his text the dichotomy Past vs. Modernity overlaps with the other “Orient” vs. “Western Europe”. Thus, “communist practices” are a characteristic of the past and of Oriental societies.

rule of the higher classes is explicit in several of his works. Thus, as he argues in 1873, a “temperate” or “*juste-milieu*” republic with “counterweights” against the “sovereignty of the greater number”, is the only option if the “propertied classes” are to remain in control of the state. The idea that free “associations” and local self-government should play a central role in the society of the future is also fundamental in his works; and, although he distrusted democracy (“political communism”), the model of the USA was one that Molinari called upon his readers to imitate (Molinari 1873: 1-4, 86-88; 1884; 1876).

Molinari was a real specialist in the Russian economy, on which he wrote a book, **Lettres sur la Russie** (1861), and several articles. His interest in that country seems to have started c.1852 (see Molinari 1852). In 1857 the *Économiste belge*, edited by Molinari, celebrated Russia’s commercial policies; from 1858 on he collaborated regularly in the Russian journal *Russkii Vestnik*. In 1860, 1865 and 1876 Molinari travelled in Russia, where he delivered a series of highly acclaimed (although controversial) lectures (Ronin 1993; Braet 1989). The aim of his first trip was, as he stated himself, to “publicise in Russia the principles of economic freedom and *self-government*” (Molinari 1877: V-VI: in English and italics in the original).

In Molinari’s analysis of Russia’s economic problems, the set of liberal images of that country reappears. After the first period, before the emancipation, when Molinari believed that Russia was on the road to liberalism, his perception of that country became gloomy. Thus, Molinari complains that the emancipation of the serfs did not abolish the “ignorant and brutal” *mir* and the “communist” (“primitive”) tenure of land. Having no private property, the peasant has only changed the tutelage of the noble for that of the commune and the “bureaucracy” in a “half-socialist, half-protectionist” system. This serious mistake would probably lead Russia to the road of “nihilism” and revolution; for “state socialism”, in Russia as elsewhere, encourages “revolutionary socialism”. To avoid this fate, and to improve Russia’s economy, the Tsars should complete emancipation by establishing private property (Molinari 1877: 393-94; 1884: 451-52, 458-59n.; 1881: 13-14, 28; 1874 passim; 1866: 336-37). Molinari also points out the weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie and the negative role of the “bureaucracy”, and proposes a series of political, financial, commercial and taxation measures (Molinari 1877: 30-31; 317ff.).

Thus, as in Wolowski’s works, in Molinari’s perception of Russia’s problems the realities of that country merge with the author’s liberal worldview and his political concerns at home, that is, socialism and state interventionism. This combination, in turn, informs the scholarly programme of reforms that Molinari proposed for Russia.

II.4 Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and Collectivism in Russia and at Home

The theme of Russia in relation to socialism also appears in the works of Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, another of the most important French economists. The brother of Anatole, the famous Russianist, Paul was professor of economics at the *Collège de France*, member of the *Société d’économie politique* and director of the professional journal *L’économiste français*. A member of the highest bourgeoisie in

France, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu was always politically active; he was elected as a departmental representative for the *Conseil général*, and stood as, but failed to become a deputy in the 1880s. His orthodox economic liberalism –he was an enemy of any redistributive measure, not to mention socialism– was accompanied by conservative political ideas: in the tradition of the Orleanists, he was a supporter of the constitutional monarchy and of elitist politics, even when he accepted the republic in the 1870s (Warshaw 1991; Baslé 1991).

In a series of articles on Russia for his *L'économiste français* Paul Leroy-Beaulieu pointed out the weakness of the “middle class” and the “bourgeoisie” in Russia, and the strength of “agrarian communism”, as sources of backwardness (Leroy-Beaulieu 1876a: 718; 1878: 99). Later on, in his capital anti-socialist work **Le collectivisme, examen critique du nouveau socialisme** (1884), Leroy-Beaulieu dedicated a whole chapter to a discussion of the Russian peasant commune as a particular form of collectivism. In that chapter, the author argues that the *mir* is a “primitive” and economically inefficient social form that the “progress of individualisation” is destined to leave behind. Like all collectivist forms, the *mir* is an “authoritarian and despotic organisation” that leaves no space for “individual freedom” and for “material progress” (Leroy-Beaulieu 1884: 92-100, 432).⁵ Again in this case, the relationship between a certain perception of Russia and her problems on one hand, and the political debates at home on the other, becomes apparent.

II.5 The Debates at the *Société d'économie politique* and in Journals; Other Minor Economic Works on Russia

Things Russian were conspicuously present in the debates of the *Société d'économie politique* (SEP), the French economists' most important academic association. Thus, for example, in a meeting of July 1857 a Russian colleague was invited to lecture about the development of economics in Russia. After the paper, Wolowski asked if the Russian commune and the *artel*' were positive forms of “association”, which led to wide discussion. Later on, in March and April 1858 other Russian colleagues were invited, and the theme of the coming emancipation of the serfs was equally thoroughly discussed. In March 1862 the members of the SEP debated whether the emancipation of the Russian peasantry was a “socialist” measure (some of them argued that it was). In September 1878 the SEP debated the issue of Russia's monetary strength. Later, at a meeting in 1879 Edmond de Molinari, who had lived in Russia for the previous twelve years, likewise lectured on Russia, and answered questions. The issue of the peasant commune and the emancipation was debated once again in May 1881.⁶

⁵ In his book, Leroy-Beaulieu argues against another economist, Émile de Laveleye, whose condemnation of the Russian peasant commune Leroy-Beaulieu did not find strong enough. In the preface of the fourth edition of his **De la propriété et de ses formes primitives** (1891) Laveleye responds to Leroy-Beaulieu by arguing that the *mir* cannot be blamed for Russia's backwardness (LAVELEYE 1891: 29-40). As part of that debate, Bérard-Varagnac sided with Leroy-Beaulieu (BÉRARD-VARAGNAC 1885-86).

⁶ See the review of the meetings in the *Journal des économistes*, vol. XV, August 1857, pp. 304-06; vol. XVII, Jan.-March 1858, pp. 480-89 and vol. XVIII, Apr.-June 1858, pp. 139-46; vol. XXXIV, Apr.-June 1862, pp.

Things Russian were also conspicuously present in the two most important French journals of economics. In *L'économiste français* the theme of Russia's "communism" and/or her lack of a middle class was analysed in several articles by, for example, Félix Belly, J. Witold, A. Fontpertuis, Bérard-Varagnac, Arthur Mangin, Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu and, of course, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu. Other issues related to Russia's economy (including reports for prospective investors) were considered in articles by Arthur Raffalovich, E. Fournier de Flaix, N. de Nasakine, Achille Mercier and in many other anonymous texts. In the same journal, there was also a permanent section called "Lettres de Russie", written by a correspondent in Russia.⁷ Similarly, in the *Journal des économistes* the theme of Russia's "communism" and/or her lack of a middle class was analysed in articles by Eugène Petit, Joseph Garnier, V. de Porochine, Jules Pautet and, of course, Gustave de Molinari, whilst other issues related to Russia were considered in articles by Edmond de Molinari, Charles Letort, Charles de Saint-Jullien, Auguste Jourdiier, Émile Jay, Charles Vogel, Saint-Germain Leduc, and some Russian writers.⁸

II.6 Penetrating Russia

Overall, the economic analyst's average perception of Russia oscillated between two attitudes: on one hand, condemnation of her socio-economic backwardness (mainly embodied in her lack of middle class and private property, and the presence of "communist" institutions, a large bureaucracy and excessive state intervention); on the other, confidence that the correct programme of liberal reforms could easily transform Russia into a developed and modern (Western capitalist) society. This oscillation, however, involved no contradiction. To put it in simple terms, Russia was perceived and criticised not for what she was, but for what she was not. Russia's main problem was her 'emptiness', that is, her lack of the quintessential elements of Western liberal 'civilisation' (private property, a middle class, free associations, and all the benefits that supposedly come with them: freedom, development, and so on). That is why an optimistic view of that country's future was also tenable; Russia's 'emptiness' could easily be 'filled in', if she only followed the right (liberal) programme.

This unconscious will to penetrate Russia with Western-capitalist elements becomes particularly clear in the following two French commentaries about the prospects for investments in Russian railways. After 1855 Russia's railway network underwent an explosive expansion, initially fuelled by private foreign investments. In 1857 Émile Barrault –who had been one of the main editors of the liberal journal *Le globe* and a moderate republican representative at the Legislative Assembly in

151-56; vol. VII, July-Sept. 1879, pp. 135-40; and in *L'économiste français*, no. 37, 14/9/1878, pp. 325-27; no. 28, 12/7/1879, pp. 35-36 and no. 20, 14/5/1881, pp. 606-7.

⁷ See BELLY 1873; WITOLD 1874; MERCIER 1875-1876 and 1877; FONTPERTUIS 1875 and 1876; NASAKINE 1878a, b, c and d; BÉRARD-VARAGNAC 1878; LEROY-BEAULIEU (A.) 1879; FOURNIER DE FLAIX 1880; MANGIN 1881 and 1882; RAFFALOVICH 1884a, b and c.

⁸ See PETIT 1881; MOLINARI (E.) 1880; GARNIER 1879; LETORT 1873; POROCHINE 1865; SAINT-JULLIEN 1861, 1862 and 1863; JOURDIER 1860b and 1861c; PAUTET 1859a and b; JAY 1856 and 1857b; VOGEL 1852 and 1855; SAINT-GERMAIN LEDUC 1854. Apart from the journals and the authors discussed above, the theme of Russia's "communism" appears in other minor accounts of Russia's economy, such as LAVERGNE 1859: 247 and FONTENAY n./d.: 246-47. Other interesting accounts of the Russian economy, but not relevant for our purposes: JOURDIER 1860, 1861a and b, and 1863; SAGNIER 1874-75 and DRÉOLLE 1848.

1849, before becoming interested in economic matters— published his **La Russie et ses chemins de fer**. In that work, Barrault studies the prospects for future investments in the Russian railways, presents tables of profitability and a whole series of other economic figures. And he concludes that, with the coming emancipation of the peasantry and the expansion of the railways, the “Russian bourgeoisie” or “middle class” will finally become “the head of society”, just like “her sister in the West”. In turn, “progress” and “civilisation” will spread throughout Russia. Thus, after the “material incorporation” of Russia and “Eastern Europe” into “Europe” (sic), Russia’s military power will be nothing to be afraid of (Barrault 1857: 3, 28-32, 38).

Similar ideas can be found in Eugène Pégot-Ogier’s **La Russie et les chemins de fer russes**, which, like Barrault’s work, also studies in detail the feasibility and profitability of investments in Russia. It is true —Pégot-Ogier concedes— that Russia is still more “Asian” than “Western”, and that the Russian “third estate” is only beginning to be formed. However, economic progress is leading all nations, regardless of their “differential degree of civilisation”, to the same goal; “civilisation” is defeating “barbarism” everywhere. In fact, Pégot-Ogier adds, the Crimean War was not a war of conquest, but a “humanitarian” intervention, in which Russia (that is, “the past, immobility, brute force”) was defeated by “Western Europe” (that is, “progress, the future, science, civilisation”). And now Russia “acknowledges the superiority of her rival” and tries to reach its level: “Today she [Russia] calls us, she opens her doors; she has understood very well that it is not on the battlefields that she can regain the influence that she deserves in the European concert, but in the new arena that progress, the envoy of God, offers to the nations: the arts, the sciences, commerce, industry”. Hence the importance of investing in the Russian railways, the symbols of progress. Moreover, the necessity of railways has been understood by all Russians, the higher classes because they are “imbued with our French spirit”, the lower classes because they have been in touch with “Western man” and, therefore, they desire emancipation (Pégot-Ogier 1857: XIII-XVI, 10-11, 132).

The Western and liberal fantasy to possess the other until he becomes ‘like us’ could not be more clear. In the French liberal economists’ projects of reform, ‘passive’ Russia, her ‘emptiness’ and ‘barrenness’, were waiting to be made fecund by the ‘active’ principle of (liberal and Western) civilisation, that is, the bourgeoisie, private property, investments, free associations, and so on. Naturally, the Russian collectivist institutions and plebeian forms of association were to be destroyed under the wheels of progress.

III The Great Synthesis: Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu

The analysis of Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu’s three-volume **L’empire des tsars et les russes** (1881-1889) will be the last stop on our journey. For various reasons, Leroy-Beaulieu’s book can be considered the ‘Great Synthesis’ of the liberal representations of Russia that we have discussed in this work. Firstly, because as a general study of Russia **L’empire des tsars et les russes** was the most profound and best-informed of its time in any Western European language, and remained so for a long time. Secondly, because it set the academic standard in interpretation of Russia for subsequent specialists;

moreover, as Marc Raeff has noted, Leroy-Beaulieu's general account of Russia's history, politics and society dominated Western historiography of Russia and Russian area studies until after the Second World War (Raeff 1990: LXVI).⁹ Thirdly, because Leroy-Beaulieu discusses or quotes in his book many of the liberal authors that we have mentioned in this work, including Tocqueville, Rambaud, Leger, Schnitzler, and Molinari. Finally, because all the liberal perceptions of Russia that we have analysed so far, as we will attempt to show in the rest of this article, reappear in Leroy-Beaulieu's work in a more coherent and systematic way, now legitimated by means of an erudite apparatus and a seemingly 'scientific' method. But let us begin with a short account of Leroy-Beaulieu's occupations and political opinions.

Although he did not take part in parliamentary life or in any political party, Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu played an important political role as a Catholic liberal intellectual. In 1870 he became a member of the circle of contributors to the leading liberal journal *Revue des deux mondes*. Worried about the growth of social unrest and socialism in France, he dedicated a good deal of his intellectual energy to finding an answer to the social question without abandoning the principal tenets of liberalism. A member of the *Société d'économie sociale* (SES) –a 'think-tank' of reformist liberalism– in the 1890s Leroy-Beaulieu became president of the *Comité de défense et de progrès social* (CDPS), which had been organised by the SES. The central aim of the CDPS, in which many important liberal intellectuals collaborated, was to ameliorate the workers' living conditions by means of some minor concessions, so as to weaken the socialist impulse. As part of his anti-socialist campaign, Leroy-Beaulieu wrote a series of political essays and delivered a series of speeches. Like Tocqueville, Leroy-Beaulieu was worried that the rule of the majorities and state intervention (not to mention socialism) might interfere with freedom (in the liberal sense of the word). Although unavoidable, democracy was in his opinion "instinctively authoritarian"; that is why liberalism should "conquer" it through education and certain institutional mechanisms. Thus, the "capacity" to exercise political rights should be assured by means of education before those rights are granted. "Collective despotism" and "uniformity" must be counterweighted with decentralisation of power and a strong "local life", the maintenance of "traditional institutions", religion, and the defence of the rights of the "individual" (Leroy-Beaulieu 1890: 155, 215, 177, 182). Against socialism, Leroy-Beaulieu argued that "property" and "private initiative" were "the great sources of progress" and "the engines of civilisation". Likewise, he defended the idea of "fatherland" against the socialists' internationalism (Leroy-Beaulieu 1895: 5-23; n./d.: passim). In order to be able to face the challenge of socialism and radical democracy, Leroy-Beaulieu vehemently called upon conservative Catholics to accept the republic, democracy and the legacy of 1789 as a fact (Leroy-Beaulieu 1885; 1890; 1905a). Moreover, like Tocqueville many years before, after a trip through the USA in 1904 Leroy-Beaulieu emphatically

⁹ In 1998 Georges Nivat, a prominent French *slavisant*, still considered that Leroy-Beaulieu's work "remains an unsurpassed model" and is still "perfectly suitable" for reference (NIVAT 1998: 14).

invited European liberals and conservatives to consider the model of American liberal democracy as the only way out of Europe's political crisis (Leroy-Beaulieu 1904 and 1908).

Apart from his political commitments, Leroy-Beaulieu had a distinguished teaching and academic career. He taught at the famous *École libre des sciences politiques*. In 1887 he was accepted as a member of the General Section of Moral and Political Sciences of the *Institut de France* and, in 1906, he was appointed a member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, of which he later became director.

Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu visited Russia for the first time in 1872, commissioned by the *Revue des deux mondes* –which had a mainly geopolitical interest in Russia as France's potential ally against Prussia– to carry out intensive research on that country; he travelled in Russia regularly thereafter. Leroy-Beaulieu started to publish texts on Russia in 1876, after he had learned the language and thoroughly studied Russian and non-Russian sources. His masterpiece **L'empire des tsars et les russes** initially appeared as a series of articles in the *Revue des deux mondes*, starting in 1878. As a book, the first volume appeared in 1881 and the second the next year, whilst the third was only published in 1889. In France, **L'empire des tsars et les russes** had four editions (1883, 1890 and 1897-1898) and it was still being reprinted in Lausanne in 1988 and Paris in 1990. Outside the French-speaking world, Leroy-Beaulieu's book had an immediate and lasting international success; it was translated into German (1884-1890) and English (Anglo-American first edition 1893-1896; second edition 1902-1903; reprinted New York 1969). Due to the censorship, it was not translated into Russian, although a specially censored version in French was allowed to enter the country (Raëff 1990; Cooley 1971; Butenschön 1978: 91-99; Desmarais 1973; Guyon 1976; Mayeur 1998).

Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu was a friend of Russia and the Russians. And yet, his account of that country displays the entire set of liberal representations and commonplaces. Firstly, despite Leroy-Beaulieu's general respect for things Russian, the traditional charges of "Oriental despotism", "inferiority", "immobility", "ignorance", "primitivism" and "fanaticism" are not absent.¹⁰ Secondly, the theme of Russia's "imitative" civilisation and lack of originality appears recurrently, together with the idea that "civilisation" is a slow and organic historical process that cannot be decreed from above.¹¹ Thirdly, Russia is not accepted as a part of "Western Europe", that is, "the historical Europe" shaped by the synthesis of the Classical heritage, Germanic institutions and Western Christianity; on the contrary, Leroy-Beaulieu argues that Russia belongs to an "Eastern Europe" that resembles Asia in many important ways.¹² However (fourthly) Russia and "the West" do not simply stand before each other as two different civilisations: Leroy-Beaulieu presents the West as the *historical norm*, whilst Russia appears as a *defective* nation. Thus, Russia is presented as lacking "equilibrium" and "measure", marked by a "contradictory", "anomalous", "ill" and "dual" nature, and an "incomplete

¹⁰ See LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 227, 430, 532, 942, 957, 964, 1121.

¹¹ See LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 81, 135, 192, 193, 196, 203, 204, 229, 278, 289, 292, 400, 459, 508, 861, 873.

development”.¹³ However (fifthly), it is not just a matter of defectiveness, but of complete barrenness: Leroy-Beaulieu presents Russia as a ‘land of absence’ in the most clear and unmistakable way:

L’histoire de la Russie se distingue de l’histoire des autres nations européennes plutôt par ce qui lui fait défaut que par ce qu’elle possède en propre, et, à chaque lacune de son passé, correspond dans le présent un vide que le temps n’a pu combler, une lacune dans la culture, dans la société, parfois dans l’esprit russe lui-même. Cette vacuité de l’histoire, cette absence de traditions et d’institutions nationales, chez un peuple qui n’a encore pu s’approprier celles d’autrui, me semble une des secrètes raisons des penchants négatifs de l’intelligence russe, une des causes lointaines du nihilisme ou ‘rienisme’ moral et politique. [...] Comparée à celle des peuples d’Occident, l’histoire russe paraît toute négative.

What the Russian history lacked was “feudalism” (which had brought to Europe “the sense of right”); “chivalry” (the sense of “honour”); “communes, cities, charters, a bourgeoisie and a third estate” (the sources of the “arts”, “sciences”, “political life” and “civilisation”); independent institutions such as the universities, parliaments and the Church (to moderate the power of the state); the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Revolution (the three processes that shaped modern history). In summary, Russia’s history was “poor”, “blurred” and “deserted” because it was “deprived of all that fills up [the history of] Western nations” (Leroy-Beaulieu 1990: 190-192). The representation of Russia’s otherness as ‘emptiness’ was accompanied by remarks about the negative impact of her historical “isolation” during and after the Tatar yoke (implying that the West was the ‘continent’ to which Russia should have been attached), and descriptions of the local population as “passive” and “inertial”. This, in turn, combines in Leroy-Beaulieu’s book with recurrent metaphors of Russia’s alleged need to be “penetrated” or “colonised” by the “active” principles of Western civilisation (the author even argues that one of the reasons for Russia’s “inferiority” lies in that, unlike the USA or Australia, she had a numerous “indigenous population” that obstructed the settlement of Western immigrants).¹⁴

Let us analyse more carefully the main ‘lacks’ by means of which Leroy-Beaulieu explains Russia’s otherness. Firstly, unlike Europe, Russia lacked an independent “nobility” or “aristocracy”; the individual rights of the nobles depended upon the Tsar’s will, and “corporate rights” of the nobility as such were unknown or ill-defined. Moreover, the very “aristocratic spirit”, “caste spirit” or “class spirit” are absent in that country, and the Russians find those notions “repulsive”. Thus, the lack of an aristocracy, which elsewhere is the guarantee of stability and poses a limit to the sovereign power, seriously handicapped Russia.¹⁵

Secondly, Russia also lacked the other class that could have fulfilled the alleged role of an aristocracy, that is, the “middle class”, “third estate” or “bourgeoisie”. Moreover, unlike European cities, Russian urban and industrial development in general was weak and disjointed. The importance of having a “middle class” is twofold. On one hand, because of the lack of an “intermediate class”,

¹² See LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 7, 13-14, 16, 18, 20, 50, 161-62, 166, 168, 170-71, 173-74, 198, 201, 205, 217, 227, 229, 298, 351, 353-54, 440, 503-04, 508, 890, 909.

¹³ See LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 135, 189, 206, 243, 278, 508, 581, 833, 906, 913, 920, 926.

¹⁴ See LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 117, 159, 161, 193, 203, 354, 430, 506, 201, 618, 620, 874, 49.

¹⁵ See LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 246, 258, 267, 280, 285-88, 505, 510, 570.

Russian society was severed in two halves, two “antagonistic” and “extreme” classes without any “moral unity” (Leroy-Beaulieu calls this a “social dualism”). For the “middle class” provides the indispensable “moral link” that makes society a “continuous chain” through which “ideas move downward subtly, from top to bottom of society” (Leroy-Beaulieu also uses the metaphor of “penetration” to illustrate this flow of ideas from the upper classes to the lower classes). On the other hand, the middle class is the most important agent of political “freedom” and economic “progress”, in other words, “civilisation”. Leroy-Beaulieu makes these points repeatedly throughout his work.¹⁶

Thirdly, the Russians lack “personality”, “individuality” or “individual initiative”, which Leroy-Beaulieu considers the “great source of our civilisation”. Indeed, civilisation as a general historical process is related to the “progress of individualisation”, and this, in turn, to the passage from the ancient collective forms of property to modern “individual” or “private” ownership. This issue is connected with the theme of the lack of a “middle class”, for it is private property that allows the appearance of such a class (in fact, the “middle class” seems to embody the very notion of “individuality”). In turn, Leroy-Beaulieu relates the lack of “individuality” to the presence of the economically inefficient and politically threatening “communist” elements in the peasant commune and in the *artel*. These elements negate “freedom” and block “economic progress”; moreover, by ruling out private property, the collectivist peasant commune impedes the formation of the “continuous chain” of property-owners (from small farmers to great landowners) that assures the moral unity of a nation. Consequently, curious as it may sound, in Leroy-Beaulieu’s liberal interpretation of history the Russian peasant commune’s egalitarianism is responsible for Russia’s “social dualism”. Thus, as in many texts analysed earlier in this work, in **L’empire des tsars et les russes** Russia is essentially depicted as the land of communism and state intervention in the economy. Moreover, due to the lack of an aristocracy and a middle class, the absence of a “moral link” between rich and poor, and the communist elements in Russia’s plebeian institutions, Leroy-Beaulieu anticipates a coming “Russian revolution”, which will surely “surpass in barbarism all our Terrors and our Communes”: the Russian “collectivist” popular customs have already “infected” Russia with the “virus” of “communism”. Indeed, the abnormal extension of the Russian “bureaucracy” or “bureaucratic state” –to which Leroy-Beaulieu pays special attention– seem to prefigure the then much-dreaded ideas of a “welfare state” [*état providence*] or even “state socialism”. For the social type of the “civil servant” holds “egalitarian tendencies” and “levelling instincts”, unlike the conservative and liberal inclinations of the property-owner. Interestingly enough, many times in his book Leroy-Beaulieu uses his negative depiction of Russia’s “communist” features to argue openly against socialist ideas at home. Thus, the study of Russia’s “agrarian communism” may offer a valuable “lesson” for Europeans in general, who are currently “tormented” by all sorts of “systems and

¹⁶ See LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 191, 213-14, 218-19, 223, 225-28, 230-32, 238, 242-43, 245, 279-80, 338, 341, 396, 414, 421, 434-35, 451, 467, 505, 618, 833, 869, etc.

theories". The "lesson" that the Russian example as interpreted by Leroy-Beaulieu offered the "Western utopians" was that their ideas were nothing but "illusions" (Leroy-Beaulieu 1990: 348-50).¹⁷

Fourthly, Russia lacked the proper type of "associations" and institutions of local "self-government". Interestingly enough, Leroy-Beaulieu's reasoning in this respect is explicitly taken from Tocqueville's ideas, and it strongly resembles the contemporary discussions about the alleged weakness of 'civil society' in Russia and in Eastern Europe. Thus, Leroy-Beaulieu argues that the "excessive" development of the state in Russia is the "natural consequence" of the "weakness" and "incomplete development" of the "body social". In Russia, the extreme and "external" centralisation of the state has somehow "compensated" for the "feebleness" of the "internal and spontaneous [social] bonds".¹⁸ This weakness is related to the aforementioned lack of independent intermediate bodies [*corps*] between the state and the individual, and the lack of a spontaneous class "solidarity" among the middle and upper classes. Indeed, Leroy-Beaulieu uses the notion of *esprit de corps* and "spirit of unity" as interchangeable with the idea of "aristocratic spirit"; all three are missing among the Russian nobles and bourgeois. This recalls the 'aristocratic' genealogy of Tocqueville's idea of "associations", an origin that can be confirmed in Leroy-Beaulieu's text.

In this issue of the lack of proper associations and local institutions, however, Leroy-Beaulieu was forced to affirm his point by means of an extensive discussion of Russia's existing plebeian, voluntary and autonomous institutions, such as the *mir* and the *artel*, which seemed to prove him wrong. Thus, the author argues that, although the peasants' forms of self-government contained some positive features, other aspects of the *mir* (namely, the collective ownership of the land and the subordination of the "individual" to the community) prevented them from playing a beneficial role in Russia's political life. Moreover, the Russian peasants had a strong "aversion" for the "regular forms of Western liberty", such as "individual" and secret suffrage; on the contrary, they preferred to arrive at decisions by general consensus and unanimity. He concludes that the *mir* is not a "free association" but a "compulsory mutuality", in which all the rights belong to the "community" and none to "the individual". Unlike the "modern" concept of "*self-government*", the peasant's freedom within the *mir* remains, like the ownership of land, "collective and undivided". That is why the elements of self-government of the Russian *mir* had coexisted for long ages with autocracy, without leading the nation

¹⁷ On Russia's "communism" and lack of "individuality" see LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 112, 124, 192, 214-15, 218-19, 257, 260, 271, 273, 282, 285, 289, 326, 348-51, 354, 358-59, 362, 372-79, 385, 387, 394, 399, 404, 415, 419, 427-30, 434-36, 445-46, 454, 468, 503-04, 838-39, 891, 897, 1246-47. On the coming "Russian revolution" see LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 239, 839, 841, 890, 897 and also LEROY-BEAULIEU 1907. On Russian "bureaucracy" see LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 45, 93, 271, 273, 286, 375, 447, 451, 466, 473, 500-02, 606, 616, 1132 and also LEROY-BEAULIEU 1877: 716.

¹⁸ Leroy-Beaulieu makes use of the concept of "civil society" [*société civile*] several times in his book. The sense of that concept, however, is not very clear. Whilst Leroy-Beaulieu largely seems to refer to "civil society" as opposed to "religious society" (that is, lay society as a whole as opposed to the Church and the religious sects), at least in one case the term seems to be used in more of a Tocquevillean sense. Thus, Leroy-Beaulieu argues that the presence of patriarchal and family-modelled institutions in Russia is an indication of the predominance of "private life" over "public life". The reason for this predominance, which contrasts with the West, lies in the

to “political freedom” (as in Europe). Moreover, by “absorbing the individual into the community”, those elements of “extreme democracy” had educated the Russians for despotism in the past, and might prepare them for communism in the future. Naturally, the same applied to the *artel*’ (Leroy-Beaulieu 1990: 485-86, in English in the original).¹⁹

After his analysis of Russia in terms of her lacks, and his comparison of her with the historical norm of Western “civilisation”, Leroy-Beaulieu’s recommendations for (and predictions about) the development of that nation become predictable. Russia’s ‘emptiness’ should be ‘filled in’ by the quintessential components of Western civilisation, that is, a ‘middle class’ and the elements of a civil society. True, civilisation is a slow process, but one that can easily be initiated by adopting the right programme of reforms, by means of which Russia will follow “the same stages” as the West. Indeed, the empire of the Tsars is already “in transition”: the industrialist programme that has already been introduced announces the “modernisation” or “europeanisation” (sic) of Russia. As a part of this process, the “traditional” peasant institutions, collective ownership of the land, and small local manufactures will surely disappear, for they constitute an “obstacle” to economic “progress”. Likewise, the “bureaucracy” should be eliminated or reduced, for it poses another obstacle to progress. Thus, the urban and industrial “new classes” of the entrepreneurs and the “proletarians”, indispensable for a modern country, will be formed. This is an inevitable part of the “natural laws” of historical “evolution”, which the “will of governments”, the “dreams of theoreticians” or the “device of the law” should never contradict. This is the right way to modify the Empire: “without revolutions or sudden changes, by the slow and continuous action of economic agents”, Russia’s “social stratification” will become “more complex and complete”, and the “development of civilisation” and “economic progress” will be achieved. Once Russia is “completed” by means of the “social transformation” that industrial development brings about, “political evolution” (that is, the liberalisation of Russia’s political life) will follow (Leroy-Beaulieu 1990: 451-52, 889). For, besides the emergence of a middle class, industry and economic “competition” foster the “sentiment of personality”, the “spirit of initiative” and the “individual” in general, even in the lower classes. Thus, delivered from the authority of the community, the peasants will become workers and move to the city. The “communist” habits that they bring from the countryside will probably last for a while in their dreams of an “industrial communism”; but the “factory” and “popular education” will finally change their “peasant souls”. This does not mean that Russia will have no social and political conflicts. Like Europe, and despite the illusions of the Slavophiles, Russia will experience “class struggle”, for it is a fact of modern life. When that happens, the Russian state will have to act as an “arbiter” and “moderator” of

weakness in Russia of urban development, which is the origin of “public life” and “civil society” (LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 228n.; see also pp. 1044, 1047, 1074, 1096, 1111 and 1244).

¹⁹ On the issues of associations and self-government, see LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 189, 218-19, 258, 267, 278, 285, 459, 463, 475, 478-79, 481, 485-88, 493, 497-498, 615, 618, 624, 661-62.

the different interests, just as the European states do.²⁰ In summary, Leroy-Beaulieu’s analysis of Russia’s backwardness (and his prescription against it) illustrates the general attitude of liberalism regarding underdevelopment, and anticipates most of the general themes of what in the twentieth century came to be known as ‘modernisation theory’.

One last point must be made about Leroy-Beaulieu’s ‘great synthesis’. The parallel Russia/USA –the “two opposing poles of modern civilisation”– and comparisons between the two countries are a permanent feature of **L’empire des tsars et les russes**.²¹ In this respect, Tocqueville’s influence is evident. Indeed, the whole of **L’empire des tsars et les russes** can be regarded, as Marc Raeff has argued, as the “counterpart” of **De la démocratie en Amérique** (Raeff 1990: VIII-IX, XLIV).²² However, the issue of Tocqueville’s influence on Leroy-Beaulieu can be taken even farther. As the following table illustrates, the very structure of **L’empire des tsars et les russes** follows in an almost exact way the order of themes dealt with in the first volume of **De la démocratie en Amérique**. For each positive characteristic that Tocqueville finds in the USA, Leroy-Beaulieu offers either a negative feature or a picture of emptiness:

Table 1: Correspondences between the first volume of Tocqueville’s **De la démocratie en Amérique** and A. Leroy-Beaulieu’s **L’empire des tsars et les russes**.

Where the titles of chapters provide no clear indication of the content, the text in *Italics* summarises the general spirit of them. Note that the sequence of themes is almost exactly the same, the second column being the negative reflection of the first.

De la démocratie en Amérique (first volume)	L’empire des tsars et les russes
Introduction	Preface
Part I, Chapter 1: “Physical Configuration of North America” <i>[Variety of lands and climates. European colonisation. Geography suitable for trade and industry, predestined to hold a “great nation”]</i>	Vol. I, Book 1: “The Nature, the Climate and the Soil” <i>[Compact and homogeneous land, totally different from Europe. Unsuitable native races and lack of European immigration. The climate produces passive individuals]</i>
Part I, Chapter 2: “Concerning their Point of Departure and its Importance for the Future of the Anglo-Americans” <i>[The social condition of the USA was essentially democratic from the beginning. It</i>	Vol. I, Books 2-4: “Races and Nationality”; “The National Temper and Character”; “History and Elements of Civilisation” <i>[Russia is a ‘land of absence’]</i>

²⁰ On the issue of Russia’s modernisation see LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 440, 442, 448, 451-54, 507, 620, 861, 889, 1338. The idea that Russia would follow the “same economic phases” that Europe had already experienced still appeared in a text of 1905 (see LEROY-BEAULIEU 1905c: 260). The issue of political transformations as the outcome of economic reforms also appears in LEROY-BEAULIEU 1905b: 166.

²¹ See LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 40-45, 227, 327, 359, 420, 433-34, 531, 1338. See also LEROY-BEAULIEU 1897b: 56.

²² Leroy-Beaulieu quotes Tocqueville on some of the crucial theoretical themes of his book, such as the importance of self-government and independent associations, or on the idea of the “social state” of a nation (see LEROY-BEAULIEU 1990: 260, 288, 348, 459, 475, 567, 883, etc).

<p><i>was populated by the European middle class]</i></p>	
<p>Part I, Chapter 3: “Social State of the Anglo-Americans”</p> <p><i>[Equality of propertied, independent and educated individuals]</i></p>	<p>Vol. I, Books 5-8: “The Social Hierarchy: Cities and Urban Classes”; “The Nobility and the <i>Chin</i>”; “The Peasants and the Emancipation of the Serfs”; “The <i>Mir</i>, the Peasant’s Family and the Village Communities”</p> <p><i>[Gap between social classes. Equality of all under the rule of despotism. Bureaucracy. Collective property and lack of individual initiative]</i></p>
<p>Part I, Chapter 4: “The Sovereignty of the People in America”</p> <p><i>[The principle of the sovereignty of the people –which “is always to be found, more or less, at the bottom of all human institutions” but that “usually remains buried there”– dominates the whole of American society. It came out of the township and took possession of the government]</i></p>	<p>Vol. II, Book 1: “The Rural Commune and Peasant self-government”</p> <p><i>[The autonomy of the communes –a sort of “patriarchal democracy” as opposed to “our individualist democracies”– coexists with the autocracy, without stimulating political freedom]</i></p>
<p>Part I, Chapter 5: “The Need to Study What Happens in the States Before Discussing the Government of the Union”</p> <p><i>[The “municipal spirit” passes from the township to the county, and from this to the state and then to the federal government, in a non-hierarchical decentralised structure]</i></p>	<p>Vol. II, Book 3: “Local self-government. Provincial States and Urban Municipalities”</p> <p><i>[Local representation divided according to classes (‘dualism’). Overlapping between the jurisdiction of the bureaucracy and that of the elected corps. Autocracy]</i></p>
<p>Part I, Chapter 6: “Judicial Power in the United States and its Effect on Political Society”</p> <p><i>[The judicial power is a powerful and independent political force]</i></p>	<p>Vol. II, Book 4: “Justice and Judicial Reform”</p> <p><i>[Lack of strong and independent judicial institutions protecting the individuals from despotism]</i></p>
<p>Part I, Chapters 7-8: “Political Jurisdiction in the United States”; “The Federal Constitution”</p> <p><i>[Institutions enabling the people to limit the power of the rulers. Federal system with great autonomy of the States. President elective and responsible. Division of powers]</i></p>	<p>Vol. II, Book 2: “The Administration, the Bureaucracy and the Police”</p> <p><i>[Autocracy. Extreme and limitless bureaucratic centralisation. Corruption. Arbitrary and powerful Police]</i></p>
<p>Part II, Chapters 1-2: “Why it can Strictly be</p>	<p>Vol. II, Book 6, Chapters 1-2:</p>

<p>Said that the People Govern in the United States”; “Parties in the United States”</p> <p><i>[Sovereignty of the people. Democracy. Non-violent competition between parties]</i></p>	<p><i>[Development of the Revolutionary Spirit. Nihilism, Terrorism, etc. Danger of a coming revolution]</i></p>
<p>Part II, Chapter 3: “Freedom of the Press in the United States”</p> <p><i>[Free press as a part of the sovereignty of the people]</i></p>	<p>Vol. II, Book 5: “The Press and the Censorship”</p> <p><i>[Censorship]</i></p>
<p>Part II, Chapters 4-5: “Political Associations in the United States”; “Government by Democracy in America”</p> <p><i>[Utility of free associations in democracies: “extreme freedom corrects the abuse of freedom”. Universal suffrage. Peace]</i></p>	<p>Vol. II, Book 6, Chapter 3:</p> <p><i>[On the need of political reforms. Russia is not a modern state. Participation in power must be granted]</i></p>
<p>Part II, Chapters 6-10: “The Real Advantages Derived by American Society from Democratic Government”; “The Omnipotence of the Majority in the United States and its Effects”; “What Tempers the Tyranny of the Majority in the United States”; “The Main Causes Tending to Maintain a Democratic Republic in the United States” [including a long discussion of the positive role of religion]; “Some Considerations Concerning the Present State and Probable Future of the Three Races that Inhabit the Territory of the United States”; “Conclusion”</p> <p><i>[Suitable institutions and laws, religion, education, practical thinking and customs favour liberal democracy. Possible dangers for democracy. Lessons that Europe should learn: the model of USA as a possible way out of Europe’s crisis. Parallel between USA and Russia]</i></p>	<p>Vol. II, Book 6, Chapter 4:</p> <p><i>[Will Russia be able to achieve freedom? The alternative is “evolution or revolution”. The government must ensure political rights. New classes emerging from industrialisation will provide the basis for freedom. Russia’s future is “obscure”. Ends by referring to Europe’s crisis and argues that the “Russian Revolution” is not a desirable future for Europe]</i></p> <p>Vol. III (entirely dedicated to Religion in Russia and its political role):</p> <p><i>[Religion in Russia plays a positive role. However, the church lacks independence and all sorts of superstitions prevail among the people. Some of the sects are ignorant, immoral and fanatical, and have communist tendencies. They constitute an obstacle to progress]</i></p>

IV Conclusions

This article has shown that the entire set of liberal representations of Russia became part of the academic knowledge of that country as it emerged in France in the period from the 1850s to the early 1880s. The link between liberalism and academia was demonstrated through both the substantial correspondence of ideas and the political background of most of the scholars. Thus, the liberal image of Russia as a ‘land of absence’ –including the themes of the lack of an aristocracy and/or a “middle class”, the lack of proper “associations” and intermediate bodies, “individuality”, and so on– and as the land of “communism” –including the issue of the negative effects of collective ownership, and the theme of bureaucratic rule and the excessive intervention of the state– informed the academic explanation of Russia’s alleged backwardness, absence of economic progress, and defective civilisation. Likewise, the ideological distinction of an “Eastern Europe” opposed to “the West” and the Tocquevillean parallel USA/Russia as a crossroads for Europe also became part of the academic account. The direct influence of Tocqueville’s liberalism on the making of this liberal image of Russia has been sufficiently demonstrated, particularly in the cases of Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu and Louis Wolowski.

In this way, the polyphony of the debate between liberals and Romantic-socialists and their like in the 1840s-1860s, on the historical meaning of Russia’s egalitarian institutions, gave way to a univocal liberal interpretation within the academic field towards the late 1870s. In turn, the proponents of this interpretation were ready, even eager, to determine political and economic decisions in both Russia and France. Embodied in its control of the academic field, the hegemony of this interpretation, as is often the case, erased the indications of its political lineage, thus presenting itself as a ‘scientific’ and ‘neutral’ knowledge. This does not mean, however, that other opinions became impossible. But from then on, any other account of Russia’s otherness would have to confront the authoritative voice of the ‘scientific’ truth on an unequal ground.

In addition, this article has shown how the *implicit* will to possess Russia in the depiction of that country as an ‘empty’, ‘barren’ and ‘passive’ space, gave way to an *explicit* programme of reforms that emphasised the need to ‘penetrate’ Russia with Western investments, technology, social classes, legal codes, and so on, and to destroy the Russian autochthonous institutions for the sake of ‘progress’. It is not excessive to say that the case of the French liberal account of Russia is a good example of Western ideology’s (that is, liberalism’s) general attitude towards the other, that is, a rejection of its alien features and a simultaneous drive to force it to become ‘one of Us’. The ideological nature of this attitude needs no justification.

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Abbreviations:

EF: *L'économiste français*

FE: *Frantsuzskii Ezhegodnik*

JdE: *Journal des économistes*

RdDM: *Revue des deux mondes*

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