The subject of this discussion is "ordinary" altruism, that is, acts of disinterested help rendered to others. I interpret "altruism" as voluntary help rendered by an individual to another individual or group who does not arouse in that individual the biological instinct of help and care. Culture may encourage or discourage it, but the final choice whether to help or not rests with the individual. The actual motivation of that help is less important here. I leave it for the reader to appraise to what extent the opinions represented here may apply to the saving of people in extreme situations.

In the years 1987–1990, as a participant in the Altruistic Spirit Project of the Institute of Noetic Sciences in Sausalito, California, I had talks with many scholars of altruism and persons involved in practical altruistic activities in Poland, the USSR, and other Eastern European countries. I was particularly interested in the impact of the current political reforms in the USSR and Eastern Europe on altruism and other acts aimed at helping others. An important element of those reforms is to create mechanisms to reinforce individualism. Thus the question arises whether an increase in individualism will reduce the traditional altruism and prosocial orientation in those countries.

This study argues that this will not happen, because individualism and altruism do not clash with each other. On the contrary, altruism is based on individualism and together they are complementary to each other in a free society. There can be no altruism without individual freedom of choice; at the same time, altruism provides a moral balance for individualism and the related rise in egoism. Moreover, individualism and altruism oppose collectiv-
ism: thus a lessening of collectivism and reinforcement of individualism may pave the way for a rise in altruism in post-Communist societies.

This study will concern only the model of collectivism created in Russia under the tsars and developed in the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, Communist collectivism developed in favorable conditions because of the collectivist tradition particularly noticeable in the Orthodox religion, the village community, and even in the progressive social thought of the Russian intelligentsia.

1. INDIVIDUALISM, COLLECTIVISM, AND HELP TO THOSE IN NEED IN RUSSIAN CULTURE

Prerevolutionary Russian traditions largely shaped the thinking and aims of today’s reformatory elites in the Soviet Union. It is therefore worthwhile to consider the role of individualism and collectivism and the model of help that prevails in Russian culture. I have assumed individualism to include 1) the separation of the individual from community; 2) the grant to that individual of certain elementary rights that may not be infringed by the state authority or by the community; 3) the conviction that the individual has the right independently to decide about his/her life, provided such decisions do not encroach on other persons’ rights; 4) the conviction that the individual is responsible for his/her acts and fate; 5) the conviction that the individual voluntarily establishes or at least confirms social bonds with definite persons, and that the community is woven from such bonds; 6) the conviction that the individual may have duties in relation to the state and society, but those duties cannot be imposed arbitrarily and cannot encroach on that individual’s rights. However, what is not an indispensable element of individualism is the conception of social contract—that is, the notion that the state arises from a contract between individuals who preserve a part of their inalienable rights, transferring some powers only to that state.

Here collectivism means a negation of the above elements of individualism, in particular 1) a poor separation of the individual from the community; 2) the primacy of the community over the individual and of the individual’s duties over rights—lack of the right independently to decide about one’s own life; 3) a minimal economic and social security provided by the community; 4) the conviction, related to the claim for the sense of security, that the
individual is not responsible for his/her own fate; 5) weakness of the civil society composed of an economic sector independent of the state or community, and of voluntary associations and self-government; and 6) weakness of voluntary social bonds between the separate individuals acting as individuals and not members of the community.

1.1. The Orthodox Religion

One of the main traits of the Orthodox religion that differentiates it from Catholicism and the Protestant religions is a lack of affirmation of the individual. No conception of individual rights exists; rather, an explicit anti-individualism is expressed in the individual’s subordination to community.

This subordination appears already on the cognitive plane. Eastern Christianity and its institutions claim to possess the one and only truth, which is collective in its substance. A logical consequence of such a conception and practice is the rule that the individual should submit to that truth and to the institutions that proclaim it, hence the duty of obedience to and imitation of the path shown by the church. With the church’s complete subordination to the state, that duty was extended to include unconditional obedience to the state.

The unity of church and state additionally impaired the position of the individual: namely, extinguishing the conflict between church and state, it removed the force that had limited the absolutism of both of those authorities, secular and spiritual. As a result, there was in the entire Orthodox state system nowhere that the individual could find shelter from constraint and oppression; nor were there forces to demand respect for individual rights.

The only counterbalance to the unrestricted absolutism of the state was the principle of inner freedom that functioned in the Orthodox consciousness. In his/her inner substance, the individual was free and had an absolute value. That freedom, however, was not achieved in society but in religious feelings directed toward the other world. Rather than get involved in life on earth, it was thought better to concentrate on the improvement of inner freedom expressed in one’s communion with God.

Even those individual actions that concerned others served the purpose of self-improvement. According to the Orthodox religion, the faithful are obliged to give alms and render help to orphans
and the destitute and to protect widows. Yet those "charitable acts are to serve the giver's moral health, and do not have in view the possible beneficial effects for the recipient" (Wieczynsky, in press, 560). This tradition was expressed in the duty to give a penny to each of the beggars in the churchyard, irrespective of one's appraisal of the actual needs or conduct of the person asking for help.

Related to this is an equally old tradition of seeing Christ in every person in pain, in poverty, or in need, and even in those imprisoned. Hence the phenomenon we know from Russian literature: the kindness of ordinary people toward prisoners and convicts. Hence also the custom of following those sent into exile to Siberia: the exiles were nearly as sacred as Christ because they suffered like Christ.

1.2. The Village Commune

The religious dictate of rendering unconditional help to those in need was universally accepted in Russian rural life. However, such help was quite selective, involving persons—yurodivi, cripples, beggars—whom the commune considered "morally" authorized to receive help. In relations with other persons, however, who were equal to one in position, rights, and duties, the dictate to help lacked any particular impact.

The duty to render help was imposed first of all on the family and was only transferred to the community if the family was unable to perform it. In practice, mutual help was rendered in cases concerning the mutual interests of all inhabitants, such as fire, flood, or epidemic. According to custom, individual families received help in situations such as childbirth, weddings, funerals, and particular hardships. The village community usually recognized and duly performed its duties toward deserted and abandoned children and orphans; the dictates to help the elderly, the ailing, and the lonely were less strictly observed (Atkinson 1988).

At the same time, the commune consolidated all the anti-individualistic traits of Russian culture. The supreme value was equality, which was interpreted as equal living conditions—that is, within a single peasant class; the gulf separating peasants from landowners was universally accepted. From the seventeenth century on, that equality was served by the periodic redistribution of land within the commune, to give an equal portion to every man
and boy. Those who had previously had more land lost, while those
who had a greater number of children profited.

Another trait of the peasant commune was strong resentment
both toward those who happened to be better off and more re-
sourceful and toward those who simply chose to stay poor without
the commune's approval—there was danger that such persons
might abuse the commune's duty to help. It may be presumed that
those very resentments were the source of measures, introduced
later on, to fight the so-called social parasites. The predominating
value of equality in the Russian village made the emergence of any
trend towards individualism impossible.

1.3. The Individual and Help to Those in Need in Russian
Social Thought

The village commune became the ideal model of the future for the
strongest philosophical trend among the Russian intelligentsia in
the latter half of the nineteenth century—populism. The anticap-
titalist populists gave priority to social over political change, con-
sidering the basic social value to be not freedom but equality. They
considered political freedom and its protective constitutional
mechanisms to be tools of capitalist oppression.

Two other trends in Russian thought were also anti-
individualistic: Slavophilism and pan-Slavism, which combined
messianic imperialism with glorification of the tsar's autocracy.
Of all the trends in nineteenth-century Russian thought, those clos-
est to individualism were the so-called occidentalists and Consti-
tutional Democrats, such as Vissarion Belinsky and Alexander
Hertzen, who understood the Western principle of individual free-
dom. But even these occidentalists despised the middle class and
all its mechanisms of protecting individual freedom.

All these main trends of Russian social thought had one feature
in common: a program of more or less radical social change in-
troduced by the elite, in most cases the intelligentsia. None of the
philosophical trends, however—not even Russian liberalism—rec-
ognized individual freedom as an essential value. This does not
mean that the Russian intellectuals were indifferent to the indi-
vidual and individual fate. On the contrary, all the criticism of the
middle class and capitalism, particularly in the case of the pop-
ulists, referred to the good of the individual. The populists (narod-
*niks*) intended to improve the village commune to create the best possible conditions for the development of the human being.

Freedom, interpreted positively as the full development of human abilities, naturally went along better with equality than with human liberties and rights. Here the *narodnik* philosophical conceptions approached Marxism, which also rejected political freedom, stressing the vision of the full realization of human potential. With the trend towards Marxism, the role of individualism in Russian thought was even further reduced. The intellectual conception of helping those in need also changed.

While in the village community help was rendered outside the family only in exceptional cases, in the higher classes the duty to help was interpreted more broadly. The entire upper-class Russian culture was permeated with a sense of guilt and duty towards those in need and a profound sympathy toward the suffering. This can be seen in particular in nineteenth-century Russian literature, which went beyond the appeal to be charitable and made heroes of the wronged and humiliated, the poor and lonely, the unfortunate and the fallen. For the Russian intelligentsia, those "wronged and humiliated" meant the entire Russian people, only just liberated from serfdom. The sense of being indebted to the poorer always characterized the Russian intelligentsia, regardless of ideological affiliation.

Concern about the fate of the people was accompanied by a sense of mission and a certain paternalism, expressed above all in the belief that the greatest possible gift for the people would be their mental and moral instruction and elevation to the level of the intelligentsia itself.

1.4. Altruism in Russian Thought: *Landmarks* and the Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyev

The authors of the 1909 volume *Landmarks* accused the socialist-minded populists of mental aristocratism toward the people, treated as the object and not the subject of change, as immature children in need of help from better-educated protectors. They argued that social radicalism was bound to lead to the rejection of absolute values and the explanation of all evil by external conditions, and to the blurring of individual responsibility for human acts and life, thus consolidating the people's immaturity.
Rejecting the intellectuals' concern for the abstract "cause" of the people, the authors of *Landmarks* opposed the conception of an altruism that increases the responsibility of both the helper and the recipient of help. For altruism to become possible, the belief had to be renounced that man's only worthy aim was to serve the common good, and some egoism had to be permitted (Gershenzon 1977 [1909], 86–87). Only if the individual's right to satisfy one's own needs and to choose one's own happiness were accepted could truly altruistic and responsible bonds be formed between the individual and the community.

The conception of altruism postulated by the authors of *Landmarks* drew on the works of the greatest Russian idealist of the late nineteenth century, Vladimir Solovyev, who believed all morals to be based on three emotions: shame, pity, and pious adoration. Shame expresses the individual's attitude toward all that is inferior; its development is conscience, aimed at restoring integrity in the individual's inner life. Pious adoration expresses the attitude toward all that is superior, while pity is a social emotion that, according to Solovyev, expresses humanity's attitude towards all that is equal and similar to it—that is, toward its fellow human beings (Walicki 1979, 388).

Pity originates from maternal love, which is then extended to others, then to humanity at large, and eventually to all the universe. Pity (compassion) is best expressed in the principle of altruism, which should reign in human relations. Altruism based on pity prevents the individual from doing to others what he/she would not like to suffer from them, and makes the individual do what he/she would like them to do. Pity and altruism are aimed at "transforming the society into an integral organism, to bring to pass the 'truth of coessentiality,' the real solidarity of all beings" (Walicki 1979, 388).

Solovyev combined the love of God and the love of one's fellow human being in the principle of charity—that is, of alms—which he formulated and developed in his treatise *The Spiritual Foundations of Life*, written in the years 1882–1884. He believed that a "kingdom of alms" where "the strong and rich would offer themselves up as a sacrifice to the weak and poor" would be the supreme stage of social development. The duty of charity imposed on the "strong and rich" was to be the essence of a nonrevolutionary and basically religious social transformation. In turn, the implemen-
tation of the dictate of charity should be the chief aim of the state. The state should renounce the traditional order and serve the moral one.

It is worth stressing here that despite his different grounds, for Solovyev the duty to give alms was, as in Orthodox tradition, a duty of unconditional help where the helper had no right whatever to appraise the requests and needs of the recipient of help. "True alms consist in giving what is necessary and requested," Solovyev stressed (1988, 48–64).

In formulating this perspective Solovyev attempted to square the Russian tradition with the Western conception of individualism and human rights. Recognizing the primacy of morality and moral rigorism over statutory law, Solovyev nevertheless considered subjective rights to be the necessary guarantee of a minimum of morality in society. Admittedly, morality is much closer to perfection than law, yet there is no mechanism to enforce respect for moral principles. Law, however, has such coercive measures at its disposal. "Thus law is not to change the world into the Kingdom of Heaven but rather to prevent it from changing into hell." While morality tends to be maximalistic, law "lets one be immoral" within specific limits, "defining the conditions of balance between individual freedom and common good" (Stremoukhoff 1980, 280).

Human rights and dignity, freedom of conscience, and the principle of individualism itself were for Solovyev the Western values Russia had to adopt if the restoration of human integrity was ever to be possible. The Kingdom of Heaven in this world could be composed of free human beings only, and a separate individual living in society was the chief aim of moral progress, Solovyev argued. He was probably the only Russian philosopher who tried to combine the common good with individual interests not through subordination of the individual to the community but through recognition of human dignity and individualism as the basis of free altruistic activities aimed at implementation of the principle, traditional in the East, of the universal unity of all people and beings.

1.5. The Tradition of Philanthropy

The principle of help was realized in practice in Russia through philanthropic activities that developed rapidly late in the nineteenth century. Philanthropy originated in charity, but unlike alms and charity, which rendered help directly to those in need, phi-
Altruism involved the establishment of permanent institutions of social welfare: schools, almshouses, hospitals, publishing houses, etc. But ever since Nikolai Novikov’s charity schools in Petersburg were found to be a threat to the empress’s autocratic power, philanthropy, as well as all other civic initiatives, was regularly persecuted.

It is therefore not surprising that in the days of great reforms after 1861, philanthropy was prominent among the rights for which progressive reformers struggled. The liberalization of the period resulted in an exceptionally rapid development of philanthropic activities, led by Russian factory owners trying to win public approval and a position equal to that of the nobility. Philanthropic activity was also among the most frequently used methods of establishing social institutions other than the state-controlled ones in Russia.

In tsarist Russia, charity and philanthropy had provided a counterbalance for autocracy, a complete lack of freedom, and the system’s everyday cruelty. After the 1917 revolution, even that counterbalance ceased to exist.

2. COLLECTIVISM AND ALTRUISM IN THE SOVIET UNION

2.1. Altruism in Marxism and Leninism

For Marx, altruism is merely a mask for class egoism and the selfishness of the capitalists. It has nothing to do with love of one’s neighbor; at best, philanthropy serves the “fulfillment of the money aristocracy’s self-love, it serves well their pride and their desire for amusement” (Fritzhand 1961, 145; translation mine).

Marx’s critique of altruism went hand in hand with his rejection of individualism. Three important tenets describe his attitude toward both concepts:

1. Individual freedoms are barriers that separate people from one another. To overcome those barriers it is necessary to a) reject the notion of individual rights and b) subordiate the selfishness of the individual to the interests of the public sphere.

2. Marx’s public sphere is not the same as the social sphere. The public sphere is identical with the state, which is to take over the private sphere and civil society alike. Since all bonds between individuals, including altruism, belong to civil society, there is no room for such bonds or for interpersonal relations in the public
sphere—that is, in the state-controlled society. In Marx’s ideal society, all activities are to be planned rationally by the state and the needs served by altruism will be taken care of by the state. Individual interests should be subordinated to the interests of the state and, at the same time, all bonds between individuals within civil society (not organized and controlled by that state) should disappear.

3. In the ideal Communist society, the natural kindness of people will triumph over their selfishness, which is induced merely by defective social relations. With those relations mended by revolutionary means, there will be no room for selfishness or for altruism, as the purpose of the latter is to countervail individual selfishness.

Similarly, there was no room for altruism, compassion, or help in Marx’s theory of social development, in which capitalism, with its harsh primitive accumulation, was accepted as a necessary sacrifice on the road to communism.

For Marx, private capitalist exploitation was a tool efficient enough to drive energy out of individuals and to increase the nation’s wealth on the road to communism. Thus, when communism was reached in a relatively affluent society, everybody could afford, so to say, to be “naturally good” and the contradiction between the individual and society could be transcended: everyone would do what he or she liked, with no need for sacrifice, and all the others would benefit.

But after communism took over in Russia, where primitive accumulation had not yet taken place, the Communists, who had taken power on behalf of the people, now faced the necessity to exploit that same people as a precondition of the future material progress they promised. The need for a drastic change in ideology emerged. Thus, Lenin introduced the concept of a “prosocial man,” and the notion of “social interest” became the most venerated idea of Soviet communism. While Marx’s “new man” was a superman who—by virtue of the revolutionary change in social relations—was able to develop all his individual potential, Lenin’s “new man” was a being who gave up his willingness to develop his potential and sacrificed his personal interests and needs for the good of a society represented by the state. Thus, Lenin introduced the original blend of Marxism with traditional tenets of Russian Orthodoxy, populism, and collectivism.
2.2. Rejection of Altruism and Charity in Communist Russia

In the early years of communism, a number of additional factors repressing the altruistic or simply charitable behavior of Soviet citizens emerged.

During the campaign against kulaks in the twenties as well as the ruthless crushing of all political opposition in the thirties, feelings of charity, pity, and mercy were the only remaining obstacles to the imprisonment and execution of innocent people and to the cruelty and lawlessness of the entire system. Therefore, they were ridiculed in the official propaganda as proof of weakness and of lack of revolutionary principles. Mercy was synonymous with betrayal, according to the revolutionary "ethics of struggle," which required merciless annihilation of all "enemies of the people."

Although charity and mercy reemerged in extreme situations during World War II, with the return of Stalinism in relatively safer and more normal times, other factors began to undermine, with more durable effects, the traditional ethics of mercy and pity. Many of them had to do with Communist ideology.

The most visible ideological influence was the atheism imposed on Soviet society, particularly during the party-controlled education of the young generations. With mass rejection of religion, all absolute values became weaker and were challenged ever more effectively. A related development was the outright rejection of the entire Russian philosophical tradition after the revolution.

At the same time the monopoly of an omnipotent Communist state weakened the individual's sense of social responsibility; the state was there to take care of the needy. A new ethics emerged based on the principle of the "pride of the Soviet citizen," which forbade citizens to accept help from private persons, including the family.

With these developments there was less and less room for charity in the Soviet state. Charity Street in Leningrad was renamed Textile Street, and in the dictionary the very word miloserdie (charity) was annotated as "obsolete." The notion of "altruism," never really accepted by the Russian intelligentsia before the revolution, was repudiated outright after the revolution. The educational system neglected the development of charity or help to others and of such feelings as compassion or pity. As Danil Granin puts it, the natural
sensitivity to others' pain ceases to exist when it is not upheld by education or exercised daily. Thus, the word "charity," purged from Soviet art, literature, and education, actually went out of use.

These developments were not accidental by-products of the Communist system. They were the logical consequences of the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the relationship between individuals and society.

2.3. The Individual and Society in Soviet Collectivism

The most important idea of Soviet social thought and ethics is the concept that an individual has to give priority to social interests, as defined by the state, over personal needs and desires. The worst moral offense for a Soviet citizen is to be selfish or "nonsocial." While this may sound like it paves the way for philanthropy and altruism, actually it does not. Social interests are never defined in Soviet science as the needs of a definite individual or a group of individuals within the civil society. Nor is another individual supposed to be a recipient of a good Soviet citizen's unselfish deeds. In the entire body of Soviet Marxist-Leninist social and philosophical writings, one can hardly find a single mention of this particular type of prosocial behavior. Moreover, one cannot find any attention given to the direct relationship among individuals and/or between an individual and a group of individuals within the civil society.

On the contrary, rejection of such relations is the main target of the Leninist critique of altruism and bourgeois ethics in general. "Scientific ethics of Marxism-Leninism has proven that what lies at the very foundation of morals are not the relationships between separate individuals in general but relations between social classes," claimed the authors of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (1960, 2: 187; translation mine).

In general, Leninist social thought is limited to collectivism—that is, to relations between people as members of groups organized and controlled by the state. In fact, the essence of Marxism-Leninism can be interpreted as the identification of society with the state and the elimination of the non-state usage of the term "society."

In Leninism, the very definition of the individual is put in collective terms—that is, the boundaries between an individual and various collectives he/she is part of are blurred and imprecise. One
has a feeling that a greater part of the individual’s identity rests in the collective. Such nonindividualized individuals are not fully grown up: they have obligations to the collective but no rights to protect their autonomy from that collective.

A good example of this collectivist philosophy is a work by a noted Soviet scholar, director of the Institute of Marxism and Leninism in Moscow, Georgi Smirnov (1977), on the formation of the so-called Socialist personality. Writing about “the combination of the common and personal interests in the individual of a new type,” Smirnov quotes a standing authority of Soviet pedagogy, Antoni Makarenko, who wrote, “A man inside whom the interests of the collective prevail over personal interests is already a Soviet type of man” (292; translation mine).

Describing the highest social ideals of the Soviet man, Smirnov writes, “One does not need much to live for oneself; to live for others one needs many good characteristics, powers, and talents. There is truth in saying that an individual is rich not in what he owns but in what he gives to others” (294; translation mine). However, in his entire book Smirnov does not point to a single mechanism by means of which an individual could give anything to other definite individuals. Society and social interest are defined in abstract terms and are represented solely by the state.

This seems to be the essential difference between Leninism and traditional Russian collectivism. While in prerevolutionary Russia the cruelty of the system was balanced by pity, charity, and mercy, which linked individuals, under communism all efforts were made to break the bonds between individuals, including those within the family. Altruism, help, charity, and pity were remnants of the old social network and had to be wiped out to pave the way for one monolithic and hierarchial system of oppression and exploitation. An ever more isolated and atomized individual was totally controlled by the state, which represented society. “Prosocial” ideology was to persuade victims to accept willingly their exploitation and dependence.

2.4 Return to Charity in Recent Years

Despite all efforts to banish it, the old Russian tradition of pity, charity, and mercy remained alive in people’s hearts and in some forms of art, particularly war literature and movies, where expressions of humane feelings and charitable acts were permitted.
Another literary arena in which moral issues were present was the wave of rustic literature in the 1960s, by folk writers called derevenshchiki, (village-dwellers), among whom the most influential were Vladimir Soloukhin and Victor Likhonosov (Jarco 1988; Drawicz 1988). A great majority of them tried to revive the Russian tradition of human interconnectedness, combining a warm attitude toward the church with the affirmation of faith, perceived as the foundation of all other values.

The issues raised by the derevenshchiki began to reemerge in the mainstream of Soviet cultural life with the beginning of the current changes in the USSR. Today, a great number of writers claim that "conscience, compassion, and pity are the foundations of ethics," and join forces with the moral and religious revival in Soviet society (Bykau, in Drawicz 1988, 7).

This revival was particularly visible in 1988, during the celebrations of the millennium of the Orthodox church in Russia. But since early in 1986, a growing number of churches have been reopened after many decades as museums, civic centers, or grain stores. There has been an upsurge in the number of baptisms of both children and adults. The most important part of the teachings given to the newly baptized adults concerns morals in general and the development of virtues of charity, compassion, and pity in particular.

The Orthodox church has also asked the Soviet government to restore the traditional social services of the church, especially the training for nuns to serve as nurses in hospitals, and the provision of help to the needy. While awaiting the decisions, Orthodox priests exercise charity by giving alms to people who ask them for help. An important aspect of this help is a clearly expressed sense of the obligation to help unconditionally.

An increase in charitable and helping activities outside the church became especially visible after the 1986 nuclear plant explosion in Chernobyl. Ordinary men and women volunteered to help the victims, took strangers to their houses, and helped them resettle in new places. Throughout the USSR people collected over five hundred million dollars to help the victims. Similar reactions were also becoming common in less dramatic situations.

In February 1987, Danil Granin published a long essay, "On Charity," in the leading Soviet cultural magazine Literaturnaya Gazeta. Granin, who defended his city during the siege of Lenin-
grad, was a coauthor of the *Book of the Siege*. Based on his personal experience during the war and the research done for the book, Granin came to believe that every individual is endowed by nature with an innate feeling of compassion and an instinct to help. In recent years, however, Granin had noticed that people stopped acting on those positive feelings in their relationships with others. He realized that if those feelings are not exercised in daily life, they tend to abate slowly and eventually vanish completely.

In his article, Granin described in detail the disappearance of charity and compassion in Soviet society and analyzed the reasons why charity was going "out of usage" in the USSR. He recalled the old Russian traditions of pity and "love of the fallen" praised by great Russian writers from Pushkin to Sholokhov. Finally, Granin not only called the readers to charity and philanthropy but asked for the creation of various institutional mechanisms that would help people to exercise those virtues in everyday life.

Granin's article resulted in thousands of letters to the editor of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*: a great number of readers supported Granin and gave practical advice as to how charity could be introduced into Soviet life; some claimed charity "is against the very principles of Marxism, for it hampers attempts to give to everyone according to his work and breeds social parasites," while the last group supported Granin in principle but claimed that taking care of the needy should remain the obligation of the Communist state.

Granin himself kept out of the debate. From a number of letters he learned that many people, including a great portion of the youth, had already been doing what he called for. They helped the needy and elderly. They cooked dinners for sick people and kept them company. All those activities were illegal or at least extralegal. In order to help, the helpers had to overcome bureaucratic obstacles and risked persecution or penalties. Granin decided to use his position and influence to give protection and help to the helpers. In the fall of 1988 he created the Charitable Association "Leningrad."

The primary purpose of the association is not to render direct help to the needy but to help volunteers fulfill their commitments. The majority of helpers are young people. According to Granin, some of them are motivated by their religious beliefs. Some have themselves experienced difficulties and were helped out by others. A majority, however, are people who more or less accidentally helped others and liked it. This is the source of Granin's ultimate
optimism, and proof that the only requirement for the spread of charitable acts is simply to create for young people an opportunity to exercise charity.

The example of the “Leningrad” association was followed by a number of similar charitable organizations throughout the Soviet Union. At the same time, other helping organizations were created. In Moscow, the “Children’s Fund” and the “Cultural Fund” were established. Press articles and radio and television features repeatedly call for charitable activities, and the most popular TV program, “Vzgliad” (Outlook), includes a lengthy section on needy or neglected Soviet citizens and asks for help for them. Subsequent programs reported about thousands of people who responded to the previous week’s call for help.

All these activities have a similar purpose: to propagate help to the needy. They share a similar set of underlying assumptions, two of which are especially important: first, the admission that the Soviet system has failed to solve social problems and alleviate individual misery, and second, a call for the restoration of the best prerevolutionary traditions of pity, charity, and philanthropy that were banned from Soviet culture and life for over seventy years. Therefore, the analysis of those traditions seems crucial for an understanding of the meaning of charity today and for the future of altruism in the Soviet Union, especially in view of the marked continuity of many Russian and Soviet ideas, practices, and values.

3. CONCLUSIONS: INDIVIDUALISM, ALTRUISM, AND COLLECTIVISM IN RUSSIA AND THE USSR

As a trait of Russian and Soviet culture, the duty to help those in need, usually rendered in the form of alms, philanthropy, or radical social activity for the people, has a number of characteristics the consequences of which can be seen in the culture and social life of the Soviet Union.

First, that help is unconditional, independent of the helper’s appraisal of the actual needs and attitude of the recipient. This is a natural consequence of the attitude towards helping in which salvation, alleviation of the sense of guilt, or the helper’s frame of mind mattered more than the interest of the person receiving help. This motive seems to have been particularly strong in the case of radical revolutionary activities pursued “in the name of the people.” Definite individuals disappeared entirely from view in
Marxist-Leninist philosophy and in Communist social practice, where the state was the only recipient of "prosocial" activities.

Related to this is a highly controversial problem of interdependence between helping activities and interhuman bonds. The faithful would give alms never looking the beggar straight in the eye. The populists acted for the benefit of the masses, not definite individuals. In the collectivist model of help formulated by Lenin, an attempt was made to remove all interpersonal relations, including those within the family, replacing them with an anonymous system of help distributed by the state. In time, all helping activities were depersonalized, and the notion of "prosocial attitudes" served as a mask of exploitation carried out by the state, and as a tool to obtain consent to oppression from those exploited.

Thus both philosophical and religious Russian tradition and Soviet practice seem to leave little room for direct bonds between the helpers and the helped. Observations and memories of those who received help from Russians (or other nations of the USSR), however, clash with that conclusion. Those once transported to Siberia and to labor camps, as well as refugees from Siberia and escaped prisoners, are practically of one mind in contrasting the cruelty and soullessness of official representatives of the system with the self-sacrificial help they received from "ordinary" people, sometimes perfect strangers. Moreover, they all stress the spontaneous and profound bond established nearly at once in contacts with Russians, particularly with those rendering help. This was pointed out by Krzyzstof Pomian.

I was similarly impressed during many journeys in the Soviet Union. I believe we deal here with an element of the former Russian system of natural bond, which has resisted time and Communist propaganda. That bond consists of participation in the unity of the universe, in a basic union in which people participate through a "metaphysical submersion" rather than the establishment of direct bonds between one another. This community spirit, derived possibly from the poor personal individualization of self characteristic of the Orthodox religion, is evident throughout Russian culture, both in the intellectual populists and their critics, in the authors of Landmarks, in Solovyev, and in the derevenschik writers of the 1960s.

A basic difference between traditional Russian collectivism and its Communist counterpart is precisely that attempt to remove such primitive bonds or at least to subordinate them to the state
and party control. The fact that this attempt proved not fully effective might indicate that the only way to loosen such bonds is by replacing them with cultural and economic individualism, as occurred in the developed countries. Only following such loosening of natural unity can the establishment of new, this time more voluntary, bonds between the individualized individuals take place.

Another important trait of the Russian model of helping is its rigorism. Help, particularly that which was to secure salvation for the helper, not only had to be disinterested but also had to involve a sacrifice of the helper’s interest. Any grain of profit, or even satisfaction, deprived help of its moral value. This attitude seems to persist to the present day: Danil Granin considers a religious motivation of helping to be “inferior,” as it follows from a wish for reward in the shape of future salvation. One leading Soviet psychologist discontinued his research on altruism, saying, “If I were to carry on then, and to remain honest and faithful to my research, I would have to give all I had away to the needy. I was not prepared for such a gesture, so I changed the topic of my research.”

Such rigorism deprived help of its everyday nature, making it assume heroic dimensions and discouraging those incapable of great achievements and sacrifices from any helping activities whatever. At the same time, with a strong cultural stress on helping, it was difficult to say to what extent help was actually rendered spontaneously.

Still another trait of the Russian cultural model of help is its paternalism. Recipients of help were treated as children unable to choose a life path unaided and who therefore must be guided by the educated helpers. Exclusivity and paternalism were also characteristic of the Russian model of philanthropy in which factory owners and merchants took the lead. Among the weak Russian middle class, philanthropy was an attempt to gain at least a minimum of control over social life through philanthropic institutions, financed and controlled by capitalists. In any case, philanthropy consolidated the helper’s exclusive and paternalistic attitude towards those helped and did not contribute to establishing bonds between individuals in civil society.

The paternalistic model of helping left the greatest impression on the consciousness of those helped, encouraging helplessness and a lack of responsibility for one’s own fate. Unconditional helping
did not allow for the "tough love" where, as a result of refusal to help, the fallen person must make an effort to rise.

The "cult of the fallen," exceptionally strong in Russian literature, often added heroic value to failure, thus providing the grounds for the negative leveling characteristic of Russian social consciousness. Combined with the duty to help, intraclass egalitarianism favored a sense of entitlement and expectation of sacrifice by others. This in turn often gave rise to selfish requests for help, for things and services that were not necessary or that the supplicant could have obtained unaided.

Also worthy of note are the interpretation of land and other property as a burden rather than a chance for individual development; the notion of economic activity as a no-score game where all profit must involve another person's loss; intolerance of those who willfully situate themselves outside the social division of labor ("social parasites"); prejudice against competition; lack of a sense of relationship between effort expended and reward received; and the expectation of socioeconomic security and equality.

It is not by chance that all the abovementioned traits are connected with the Russian anti-individualism that they consolidate: they are elements of a broader and consistent system of collectivism where the valid model of charitable help at the same time fanned and balanced anti-individualism.

Subordinating the individual to the community, collectivism negated individualism. At the same time, forcing out charity, collectivism also negated altruism with its essentially voluntary character. Altruism, however, seems not to negate individualism: they counterbalance each other. It is not by chance, for that matter, that the notion of altruism was used for the first time by Auguste Comte already after the emergence and establishment of the notion of individualism. Nor was it by chance that in the rare cases where Russian thought approached individualism, it departed from the simple duty of charity toward a kind of help that establishes bonds between people.

The problem acquires a special importance in the face of the reforms now being undertaken in the Soviet Union, reforms aimed not only at de-Stalinization and transformation of the petrified political and economic structures but also at stimulating the Soviet people to activity, to take risks, and to assume responsibility for their own fate. This change of attitude cannot be accomplished if the traditional anti-individualism is preserved. Such change will
also be impossible if the traditional conception of charity is revived, as a large part of the modern Russian intelligentsia would do, for like Russian and Soviet collectivism, that conception of charity includes many factors that reduce the individual motivation to assume responsibility for one's own life.

It seems, therefore, that the success of reforms in the Soviet Union depends largely on a renunciation of collectivism and a trend toward both individualism and altruism. The instruments of change towards individualism may be primarily economic and political. However, only moral consciousness can transform collectivistic into altruistic attitudes. While the changes towards individualism may indeed be forced with growing effectiveness by the current economic and political situation, there are reasons to fear that Soviet culture is still poorly prepared for the task it now faces—transforming traditional collectivistic charity into individualistic altruism—a foundation on which a noncollectivist community composed of autonomous human beings might be based in the future.

REFERENCES

