

## ***I Am Suffocating and Starving Without Interior Life:* Stepan Veselovskiy's Ethical Principles While in Inner Emigration\***

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Drawing on ego-documents and scholarly works of the outstanding historian Stepan Borisovich Veselovskiy, this article analyzes the ethical principles he adhered to between the 1920s and 1950s, when he, though staying in the USSR, lived in inner emigration. Particular attention is paid to the concepts of “academic ethics” and “professional ethics”. The author studies both universal and specific value orientations of scholars within the framework of professional ethics. As applied to Veselovskiy’s scholarly work while in inner emigration, the relationship between professional ethics and the scholar’s epistemology is traced. Academic ethics is analyzed using Robert K. Merton’s theory of the ethos of science, which makes it possible to single out such imperatives as communism, disinterestedness, and organized skepticism in Veselovskiy’s scholarly work. In addition, the author considers the correlation between Veselovskiy’s ethical views as a person and as a scholar. The article concludes that it was the ethical principles Veselovskiy developed before the 1917 revolution that conditioned his choice of methods to study the past and his ways of constructing a scholarly text, and allowed him to become an inner emigrant in the face of rejection.

*Keywords:* S. B. Veselovskiy, academic ethics, professional ethics, ethos of science, inner emigration

На основе источников личного происхождения и научных трудов выдающегося историка С. Б. Веселовского (1876–1952) в статье проанализированы его этические принципы 1920–1950-х гг., когда он находился в СССР в условиях внутренней эмиграции. Отдельное внимание уделено анализу понятий «академическая этика» и «профессиональная этика». Охарактеризованы как универсальные, так и специфические ценностные ориентации ученых в рамках профессиональной этики. Применительно к научной деятельности Веселовского во внутренней эмиграции прослежена связь

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профессиональной этики и эпистемологии ученого. Академическая этика проанализирована в рамках теории научного этоса Р. К. Мертона, что позволило выделить в научном творчестве Веселовского такие императивы, как коллективизм, бескорыстность и организованный скептицизм. Освещен вопрос о соотношении этических взглядов Веселовского как личности и ученого. Сделан вывод о том, что именно этические принципы, сформировавшиеся у Веселовского до революции, обусловили выбор определенных способов познания прошлого и принципов выстраивания научного текста, а также позволили ему стать внутренним эмигрантом в условиях неприятия.

*Ключевые слова:* С. Б. Веселовский, академическая этика, профессиональная этика, этос науки, внутренняя эмиграция

Under conditions of ideological control, the most educated and talented ones preferred to go, so to speak, into inner emigration. Such scholars' work was characterized by narrow specialization, concentrating on a single, if possibly very important, topic, engaging in source study, and doing empirical research on isolated subjects without any broad generalizations, because once you embark on generalizations, you enter the realm dominated by ideology.

*Aaron Gurevich. The History of a Historian [Гуревич, 2012, с. 96]*

The life and work of the historian Stepan Borisovich Veselovskiy have been attracting intense interest of researchers since the late Soviet time. To date, a wide range of sources including Veselovskiy's scholarly writing as well as ego-documents have been introduced into scholarly use, allowing, among other things, to study the principles he adhered to as a scholar, the circumstances of his work, including in the Soviet time when he led a sort of life that came to be called inner emigration.

Living in inner emigration from the 1920s till the beginning of the 1950s allowed Veselovskiy to complete several studies which later became classical. His inner emigration has already been analyzed, for example, in Liubov Sidorova's article on the intellectual world of 'old school' historians of the 1920s [Сидорова] and Aleksandr Dubrovskiy's book on historians of the 1930s [Дубровский, 2018а, с. 199–232]. The former covers biographies of both émigré historians and inner emigrants to present behavior patterns and characteristic traits of both groups together, while the latter describes Veselovskiy's life in inner emigration in the 1930s only. None of these two studies addresses questions such as how Veselovskiy adapted to Soviet life and Soviet scholarly environment, and what his social behavior strategy was. Veselovskiy's ethical principles as a scholar, the norms, and values which he

adhered to *sine ira et studio* have been studied only in a very general way. In order to address these questions concerning specifically Veselovskiy as an inner emigrant, a more detailed examination of his personal model of behavior is needed.

**Veselovskiy's inner emigration:  
its main features and sources to study it**

What I mean by inner emigration is a kind of unarmed resistance on the part of an individual who rejects the ideology and/or the authority of the state they live in but does not challenge them overtly. For the most part, this sort of resistance is performed in everyday practices. Denying a political agreement with the ruling Bolshevik party and refusing to participate in governance or administration were inseparable parts of inner emigration as practiced in the Soviet Union until the end of Stalin's rule. Drawing on Sergey Melgunov's diaries, Liubov Sidorova has shown that this applies to historians, in particular [Сидорова, с. 168].

Ego-documents, especially diaries, are undoubtedly the key sources for studying inner emigration since they contain the author's reflections on their current state of mind and feelings, recording their public and personal life experience, including their own scholarly work. Analyzing such regular records makes it possible to trace the evolution of one's value vectors and self-reflection. Speaking of Veselovskiy's diaries, it is difficult to say how complete they are. The published version covers partially the Soviet time as well as the years preceding the 1917 revolution. Fragments of the diary published in 2000 and 2001 [Веселовский С. Б., 2000–2001] cover not only the early 1920s, but also the year of 1944, while the publication edited by Dubrovskiy includes several entries from the time between the 1920s and 1950s [С. Б. Веселовский в письмах, мемуарах, дневниках]. These published fragments suggest that Veselovskiy may have kept a diary on a regular basis.

Despite his aversion to the way the Soviets were transforming Russia, Veselovskiy gradually incorporated into Soviet scholarly and educational institutions. However, he seems to have regarded working for them merely as a way of adapting to new life and work conditions, which was necessary for him to be able to do his own research work. For it was research activity that was the highest value for Veselovskiy, as noted in his diary entries in the early 1940s, when eyesight issues forced him to suspend his work with historical sources: "I am suffocating and starving without interior life as I used to feed myself, constantly taking in and digesting sources and new facts for scholarly work. For me it has been a refuge from the emptiness and vileness of the modern life surrounding me, and a source of nourishment for interior creative work" [С. Б. Веселовский в письмах, мемуарах, дневниках, с. 235]. Furthermore, in his inner emigration, research work was not only a goal but also a way of life for him.

From the 1920s onward, Veselovskiy's communication with his colleagues gradually declined, as can be seen from his correspondence

and other sources reflecting his informal contacts with other historians<sup>1</sup>. In 1940, he wrote in his diary: “Many people who were dear and close to me have died or taken exit, some of them too early. Remembering them, I feel grateful to destiny that they were there, that I met such people during my life’s journey and enjoyed their sympathy and friendship. Which cannot be said of those who are still alive. With very rare exceptions, they have long since abandoned all scholarly work. Some have been crushed by dire straits, forced inactivity, or disasters such as exile; others had always been like the Moon that shines with the reflected light of others. Now they have nothing more to reflect, they have faded and become perhaps the most insignificant of all the insignificant children of this world” [Там же, с. 235]. Veselovskiy’s negative attitude toward his fellow historians was caused by a difference in ethical norms and values. Theirs had been distorted in the post-revolutionary period, as the scholar noted in the same entry: “Bitter experience shows – but doesn’t seem to teach anyone – that lying on Abraham’s bosom is not so difficult but living for however long a time on such terms is absolutely impossible. Such [people] don’t deserve being talked about much, even though during the [last] 20 years quite a few have retired from the scene who cannot but be recognized as real researchers, even if not of a very large caliber” [Там же, с. 236]. Thus, as his communication with colleagues decreased, the importance of scholarly work as a space where a sense of inner freedom could be maintained and ethical principles could be upheld, kept increasing.

Veselovskiy’s turning into an inner emigrant was caused by his ethical convictions which were opposite to the ideology that came to dominate Russia. In other words, as long as there was opposition between him and the state, Veselovskiy sought to maintain a sense of inner freedom. As can be seen from his diaries, this tension lasted from the 1920s till the end of his life. Some of his diary entries from the time between the late 1910s and the early 1920s show his aversion to the transformation of the country and society he was witnessing: “Still, I continue [to insist] on my definition which I put forward more than two years ago: not only Bolshevism and the Bolshevik regime but the whole of the revolution is a most profound moral decay process” [Веселовский С. Б., 2000, № 9, с. 115].

In his inner emigration, the resistance practiced daily rested on the sphere in which he was active as a personality. My hypothesis, therefore, is that if we draw not only on Veselovskiy’s ego-documents, but also on his scholarly writings, we will be able to study specific acts of resistance/dissent through his epistemology and his way of constructing scholarly texts.

In opting for a particular way of learning about the past, a researcher places himself before an ethical choice. Epistemology means not only research principles and ideals, but also the researcher’s social responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, the late 1920s saw the termination of a circle of Moscow university professors that included, apart from Veselovskiy himself, Yuriy Gauthier, Matvey Liubavskiy, Mikhail Bogoiavlenskii, among others. For details, see: [Дубровский, 2018b].

For historians, this responsibility may be even greater than for others. Due to the special nature of the historian's trade, Aaron Gurevich pointed out, it is difficult for a historian to separate the responsibility he bears «to the society he belongs to from his responsibility to *the people of the past, whose history he studies* (hereinafter italics supplied. – Т. Кх.)» [Гуревич, 2007, с. 83].

### **Ethics, professional and academic**

There are two main approaches to the study of ethics as a set of values and normative foundations adopted by scholarly communities. The first one is about analyzing the explicit and codified ethical requirements that exist in academia. This approach allows us to analyze the *causes* and *mechanisms* of ethical regulation, but it overlooks the *practices* of living up to ethical principles. Like in society in general, there are norms and values in academia that are not formally codified. This poses a problem for the study of ethics. One solution seems to be studying them via analysis of sources that are directly related to the work of academics, i.e. *scholarly texts* as products of intellectual activity.

In my opinion, it is a peculiarity of academics' professional ethics that it encompasses both *universal* and *specific* value orientations. The universal ones include basic norms and values that are shared by members of the scholarly community regardless of their disciplinary and institutional affiliation. A classic example of this is the ethos of science as described by the sociologist Robert K. Merton [Merton, p. 267–278] which involves *communism*, *universalism*, *disinterestedness*, and *organized skepticism*, or the ethical model built upon it by Bernard Barber [Barber, p. 126–129], which adds *rationalism* and *emotional neutrality* to the above principles.

Depending on the disciplinary affiliation, specific value orientations exist. For historians, for example, they concern the relationship with what is regarded as a primary source. A historian who studies past social reality has an *ethical responsibility* to the author of the source if the latter is manmade.

The study of academic ethics provides an opportunity to understand its role in the inner emigration of scholars and to raise new questions about the ways in which scholars whose academic career had begun before the 1917 revolution incorporated into the Soviet science and education system. Furthermore, studying their professional ethics will make it possible to identify the principles of research construction in the Soviet historiographic setting.

### **Professional ethics and epistemology**

One of the key conditions for Veselovskiy to remain in inner emigration was the choice not only of research topics, but also of research tools. On the one hand, these tools had to fit within the scope of the acceptable in Soviet historiography; on the other hand, they had to be in keeping with his own professional ethical principles, given his desire to obtain reliable knowledge of past social reality.

In terms of epistemology, Soviet historiography – at least between the 1920s and 1950s – generally gravitated toward presentism because history,

which was based on the Marxist paradigm, came to be seen as one of the means of influencing the consciousness of the masses. Furthermore, Soviet historiography of that time was characterized by historicism. As a methodological principle of Marxist historiography, historicism meant analyzing any phenomenon, both past and present, “first, in its emergence, development and change; second, in its relationship with other phenomena and conditions of its time; third, in connection with the specific historical experience which allows to establish immediate and remote consequences of the event or process under study” [Савельева, Полетаев, с. 625].

In Veselovskiy's work, positivism and historicism are prominent. Positivism was characteristic of Veselovskiy throughout his scholarly career. Both before and after the 1917 revolution, he kept striving to draw on as many reliable sources as possible, to support his every claim by references, and to build up a rigorous, factual study. That explains his predilection for archaeography (speaking of his work prior to 1917, the publication of documents can be seen as an appendix to a two-volume study of the cadastral description of land holdings in rural and urban areas of the Russian state). These features were characteristic of Soviet Marxist historiography in general, especially during the Stalin era, although positivism acquired new features within this scholarly tradition as it overcame the bans on philosophizing, politicization, and rejection of macro-theorizing [Там же]. By contrast, in Veselovskiy's Soviet-time works these taboos were preserved. Before as well as after 1917, he showed a tendency to explore the heuristic potential of the primary sources he studied (this was manifested in his resorting to auxiliary sciences of history, especially genealogy and onomastics, for research tools). According to Veselovskiy, historical research should proceed from the primary source and begin with developing research tools for working with it, thanks to which it is possible to verify the empirical data obtained.

Historicism was most clearly manifested in Veselovskiy's studies about the evolution of servant landowners as a class that played a decisive role in the formation of the state of Muscovy. He sought to take into account the peculiarities of the epoch he was studying and to avoid one-sidedness: “Due to our proneness to see everything through rose-colored glasses and focus on people's good qualities and deeds or, on the contrary, to look at things pessimistically, we can easily lose the right criterion in assessing historical personalities unless we take into account the environment in which they lived and acted” [Веселовский С. Б., 1969, с. 96].

Sticking to the principles of historicism also manifested itself in Veselovskiy's use of terms borrowed from the source texts. This peculiarity of his writing style was noted by the editors of his *Studies on the History of the Servant Landowner Class*: “For example, the author writes ‘synclite ranks’ instead of ‘duma ranks,’ ‘stratelates’ instead of ‘the military,’ ‘shakiness’ instead of ‘hesitation,’ ‘departed’ instead of ‘quitted his service,’ etc.” [Там же, с. 5].

Veselovskiy's diary, too, shows that his ethics and his epistemology were geared to each other. In a 1928 entry, he describes the consequences of a

logically flawed approach to research: “The propensity to judge actions by their consequences, which is characteristic of people in general and historians [in particular], has found vivid expression and articulation in the Roman saying ‘Woe to the vanquished’ and in the wicked proverb ‘The victors are never judged.’ Not only can it lead the historian to false explanations of things, but it also makes him lose the ability to establish the very *facts of the past*” [С. Б. Веселовский в письмах, мемуарах, дневниках, с. 227]. Veselovskiy adhered to the principle according to which one should address, first and foremost, causes rather than consequences. This manifested itself in his genealogical studies, which he engaged in since the late 1920s, even though genealogy came to be regarded by the Soviet scholarly establishment as a discipline not recommended for researchers to work in. The fragment quoted above demonstrates Veselovskiy's value orientations as a scholar: in his hierarchy, the facts ranked higher than the narrative. He seems to have placed historical primary sources on the top of his epistemological hierarchy, which is evident in his pre-revolutionary works, above all his archaeographic studies. He valued a diligently performed publication of sources much higher than a study written on their basis, for the latter could become obsolete [Акты писцового дела, с. VI]. This suggests that for Veselovskiy as a scholar, there were no ultimate truths in science, including history. On the contrary, he believed that new sources would surface over time which, when compared with the already known ones, might shed a new light on our previous ideas about the people of the past and their deeds. He maintained the same views throughout his inner emigration time as he continued his efforts to explore the heuristic potential of sources, as manifested, for example, in his studies in auxiliary sciences of history such as genealogy, onomastics, and historical geography, in which he often drew on the same sources.

Veselovskiy's views on history as a science were different from those of Soviet presentist historiography. Whereas from the perspective of Soviet presentism history was to serve the present and future political and ideological needs of the country, Veselovskiy believed that history as a science was valuable in that it allowed to find ways for historians to approach the true knowledge of the past.

### Scholarly ethos

When it comes to academic ethics, the imperatives proposed by Robert K. Merton [Merton, p. 267–278] for the ethos of science cannot be ignored. These imperatives, which were listed above, were upheld by many of Veselovskiy's contemporaries, but for the present study it is necessary to understand in what forms they manifested themselves.

*Disinterestedness* was typical of Veselovskiy. If one views the Stalin-time Soviet academia member's life as a struggle for symbolic capital (e. g. in the form of a cherished position, or authority, or salary, etc.), then Veselovskiy was a passive participant, if any. His main motive was the pursuit of truth not of benefits. This is testified to by his wife who wrote in her diary in 1943

that Veselovskiy was impelled to study Ivan the Terrible's time by reading the first part of Valentin Kostylev's novel about this tsar, which the editors of the *Literaturnaya gazeta* asked him to review: «At first St[epan] Bor[isovich] gave it the air, then he became so angry at the 'lies' in the novel and in the reviews that he began to write even more conscientiously than this novel deserved... St[epan] Bor[isovich] has been carried away by the subject. He is writing not so much about Kostylev's novel as about Ivan the Terrible himself» [С. Б. Веселовский в письмах, мемуарах, дневниках, с. 239].

Notes left by members of Stepan Veselovskiy's family are of value when it comes to the understanding of his daily scholarly work and the circumstances in which he worked. In the memoirs and diaries of his son Vsevolod<sup>2</sup>, he is portrayed as a person for whom scholarly work represented a supreme value. What Vsevolod mentioned most often in entries devoted to his father's life in the Soviet time were the circumstances that hampered scholarly work. The second most often mentioned subject was the collection of books that his home library boasted, and again scholarly work, its course, and results [Веселовский В. С., с. 289, 310, 322–323, 394, 609–610]. Veselovskiy Jr. stressed that his father avoided teaching and sought to concentrate on research, at least in the 1920s and early 1930s: “My father filled most incredible positions working for the library of the Supreme National Economy Council, for the Currency Administration of the People's Commissariat of Finance, etc. He did not want to work at educational institutions, although many of his colleagues were well settled professors. Once, however, he yielded to the temptation and began to lecture at the Communist University of the Workers of the East (KUTV)... He complained that he was unable to engage in research. The Academy of Sciences leads a miserable existence and is eyed askance by the authorities. Science in general is not in favor” [Там же, с. 323].

The question of why a scholar engages in research should also be categorized as ethical. Many of the works Veselovskiy prepared for publication, mainly in the 1930s and 1940s, were never published during his lifetime. He hoped that his work would be recognized by the posterity, as he noted in his diary in 1940: “This urge to keep replenishing the stock of facts for the history of thought is largely to do with habit and inertia, and it is only occasionally that the thought flashes up and comes to my mind that my work might be useful to somebody someday: *future generations, future Russia*” [С. Б. Веселовский в письмах, мемуарах, дневниках, с. 235]. Despair over the delay of publication and, at the same time, hope that in the future his studies would find their readership lasted until the last years of the scholar's life. In a letter to Nikolay Ustyugov of October 9, 1950, Veselovskiy expressed his indignation about his article for the *Istoricheskie zapiski* being detained by the editor for about four years and concluded:

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<sup>2</sup> The memoir volume includes diary entries and letters by Vsevolod Veselovskiy as well as other persons. For archaeological and source criticism, see issues with this publication: [Холматов, с. 294–295].

“All this is very sad. At that, I have written and prepared for publication another five or six similar articles on source criticism! It looks as though they might be printed after my death by friends and admirers of my talents” [Переписка С. Б. Веселовского, с. 488].

As the above excerpts show, the difficulties in publishing Veselovskiy experienced between the 1930s and 1950s, especially during the ideological campaigns of late Stalinism, did not overturn his adherence to *communism* as an imperative of the ethos of science. Veselovskiy did seek to share the results of his research, but this was hindered by delays in the publication and by some of his manuscripts being lost in editor's offices, probably for ideological reasons [С. Б. Веселовский в письмах, мемуарах, дневниках, с. 233–234; Переписка С. Б. Веселовского, с. 492–493].

Most pronounced among the imperatives of ethos in Veselovskiy's scholarly work was *organized skepticism*, which implied criticism as a *conditio sine qua non* for the development of scholarly knowledge. Veselovskiy maintained a critical attitude toward dogmatic Soviet methodology and strove to go beyond it, enriching science with new approaches and new views on established matters. In his book *Feudal Landownership in North-Eastern Rus'* [Веселовский С. Б., 1947], published at the height of the ideological campaigns of late Stalinism, Veselovskiy, drawing on Western historiography, highlighted the value of retrospective approaches to studying legal issues concerning landownership in North-Eastern Rus' between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. He was inspired to turn to retrospective approaches by Frederic Arthur Seebohm's and Frederic William Maitland's works on the history of England. By analogy, Veselovskiy sought to use the English historians' retrospective approach to analyze source texts related to legal relations in North-Eastern Rus'. Furthermore, Veselovskiy emphasized the possibilities offered by the comparativist approach to the study of legal relations, pointing to its use in the works by the English historian and forefather of the sociology of law Sir Henry James Sumner Maine and the French historian Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges [Там же, с. 9–13].

*Organized skepticism* can also be traced in Veselovskiy's use of genealogy, onomastics, and historical geography as research methods which he applied even though the development of auxiliary sciences of history was suspended in the USSR between the 1920s and the 1950s, apparently because of possible continuity with the legacy of pre-revolutionary historians. Taken together, all this suggests that for Veselovskiy, there were no limits to the choice of research objects or approaches, and the task of the researcher as he saw it was to develop the most effective way to study a particular aspect of past social reality.

### **The ethical principles of a scholar and those of a person**

Veselovskiy's diaries provide an opportunity to access the ethical aspects of his personality as well. For example, the entry from March 28, 1918, contains an observation concerning the effects of World War I: “By now, my predictions have come more than true, but my opinion of the people

has not changed, that is, it has not become worse. The rabble remained the rabble. If not for the world war, the misunderstanding might hold on for another dozen or so years, but the ending could have been foreseen. The last branches of the Slavic race proved to be just as incapable of assimilating and further developing European culture and of building a stable state, as other branches that had fallen into slavery before” [Веселовский С. Б., 2000, № 6, с. 99]. Similar thoughts are to be found in the memoirs of his son, too [Веселовский В. С., с. 73].

The diaries also reflect contradictory views concerning the causes of the growing anti-Semitic sentiments in the early 1920s. In an entry from April 3, 1923, Veselovskiy Sr., on the one hand, views the surge of anti-Semitism in Russia as a pressing social issue. On the other hand, he partly explains this surge with certain “national traits” of the Jews themselves: “The surge of anti-Semitism is just striking. It is rising not only in the lower strata, with whom I have little and rarely come into contact, but also in the upper ones, which is much more significant. Everyone is talking about the Jews and their role in the revolution and recently in making use of its achievements, sometimes exaggerating, as usual, their malignancy. <...> The impudence and tactlessness of the Jews, two of their national traits, further the surge of anti-Semitism greatly” [Веселовский С. Б., 2001, № 2, с. 71].

The sources available to us do not make it possible to assess the stability of these thoughts (i. e. to regard them as a person’s deeply rooted convictions rather than an emotional response to certain current events), including during the period of inner emigration. They only allow us to raise new questions for the further study of Veselovskiy’s personality. In view of the research tasks set in this article, the question arises: to what extent were his personal ethical attitudes reflected in his scholarly writings? The excerpts from his diaries quoted above referred to events of Veselovskiy’s time and not to events of the past he studied. An assumption can be made that scholarly work that apparently was the cornerstone of Veselovskiy’s value system was also a basic element of his self-justification. This is especially evident in the memoirs of his son, who stressed that for his father, “the meaning of life lies in scholarly work alone” [Веселовский В. С., с. 322]. For Veselovskiy in his inner emigration, scholarly work was not only “the meaning of life”, but also a way of existence, an escape from reality.

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In the community of historians, Stepan Veselovskiy is remembered as an outstanding scholar who in the Stalinist period remained faithful to the ideals of history as a science. He could, perhaps, be seen as an example for later generations of scholars to follow, especially when his scholarly legacy was published in the late Soviet time. If Veselovskiy became a classic of Soviet and post-Soviet historical scholarship, it was probably due not only to the impact of his works but also to his ethical principles as an academic person. This, however, is a question that deserves a separate study.

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