

Each national tradition has its own system of humanistic disciplines and its own criteria for determining what it considers philosophy. Spanish, Italian and Russian word for philosophy is "filosofia." Perhaps this word can become part of English terminology to emphasize the variety of traditions constituting the intellectual heritage of the West: in this case, the distinction between the analytical-critical approach spread in the English speaking world, and the synthetic-constructive approach more characteristic of Continental thought. The Russian filosofer Pavel Florensky (1882 – 1937) observed: "Philosophy, as an academic discipline, never took root in Russia, just as it did not exist in the ancient world. Our filosofers have strived not so much to be intelligent as wise, not so much to be thinkers as sages.... An ethical striving, a religious consciousness, an activity not only of the brain but of all the organs of the spirit; in a word, it is only life outside the study that seems to us of ultimate seriousness and completely worthy." Filosofia does not detach itself from holistic thinking, does not become a narrow specialty studying the conditions and possibilities of knowledge. Instead, it tries to preserve the scale and shape of wisdom, combining in various ways elements of criticism and fantasy, science and poetry, analysis and synthesis, historicism and utopia. Filosofia can and should learn from philosophy how to become more exact at distinguishing these elements--but not in order to sacrifice one of them; rather in order to promote better their unity in a non-totalitarian totality.

The distinction between philosophy and filosofia applies not only along but across national traditions. In England, where the tradition of philosophy has held almost complete sway, some filosofers - such as G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis - have nevertheless appeared. As one goes deeper into the continent, filosofia begins to occupy a larger and larger place; in Spain, there are Miguel de Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset; in France, Bachelard, Bataille, and Baudrillard; in Germany, Nietzsche and Heidegger. By the time we reach Russia the filosofers, such as Vladimir Soloviev, Vassily Rozanov, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Pavel Florensky, thoroughly dominate, although Russia does have its philosophers as well - neo-Kantians, positivists, phenomenologists, and structuralists. (Mikhail Epstein)