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Berdyaev and Dostoevsky

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ABSTRACT: The article is devoted to the analysis of N.A. Berdyaev's book "The Worldview of Dostoevsky". The author indicates the key points on which he agrees with Berdyaev and criticises the philosopher's thoughts which seem not indisputable. The comparative-analytical method was used as the main research method. The paper analyses the characteristics of Dostoevsky's novels identified by Bakhtin: polyphonicity, dialogicality and incompleteness. Berdyaev's interpretations, while providing food for disagreement and debate, are not generally at odds with Bakhtin's ideas, which many Western scholars rely on. The author argues that Berdyaev without denying a certain integrity of Dostoevsky's worldview, emphasises the dynamism of his thought and, consequently, the need for a dynamic perception of his thought by the reader. Dostoevsky's theological anthropology reveals the tragic contradictions and duality of the human heart. Berdyaev stresses that in Dostoevsky's artistic world the human path to God is possible as a personal and internal one, and at the same time it implies a relationship with other people. Three main issues are highlighted in which the author agrees with Berdyaev: Dostoevsky is a predominantly Christian writer; Dostoevsky's Christianity is largely original; even a religious worldview centred on the individual requires the social aspect, including the relationship between church, society and nation. In the second part of the article, the author criticises a number of statements in Berdyaev's book. Firstly, Berdyaev's idea of centralising the action of Dostoevsky's novels around the main character appears to be controversial. The analysis of the case studies shows that the structure of the novels is polycentric and suggests that it is possible to consider different characters in the novels as central. Secondly, the boundaries between individuality and personality in Berdyaev's work do not seem to have been fully clarified. Thus, personality

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presupposes openness to communication with others, and this characteristic is precisely a characteristic of personality, not of individuality. It is hard to agree with Berdyaev in his assessment of the role of women in Dostoevsky's novels. The post-penitentiary novels contain many vivid heroines who have significance in their own right, whereas Berdyaev believes that Dostoevsky presents women "solely as a moment in a man's destiny". Finally, the author does not agree with Berdyaev's thesis about the peculiar structure of the Russian soul, which differs from the soul of a Western person. On the contrary, the deep interest in Dostoevsky's work among Western audiences shows the relevance of his legacy for people of different nationalities and cultures.

KEYWORDS: theology, anthropology, Bakhtin, personality, individuality, Russian soul, Dostoevsky's worldview

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Introduction

Berdyaev's short book on Dostoevsky has served readers in many languages as a first introduction to the writer's thought. First published in Russian by the YMCA-Press in Prague in 1923, it appeared in German in 1925 and French in 1929, with an English edition following in 1934. Although it has an honoured place in the annals of secondary literature, more recent criticism has tended to see it as imposing on overly "monological" interpretation on Dostoevsky's inherently polyphonic and unfinalizable world¹. A first aim of this paper will be to argue that such objections are overstated. I shall then note what I find to be key points of agreement with Berdyaev's study. However, his reading is not beyond criticism and in the second part of the paper I shall consider those points on which I find myself in significant disagreement with Berdyaev's readings. Both parts of the paper will, I hope, bring to the fore key aspects of Dostoevsky's writings and Berdyaev's own thought and therefore help direct our discussion to key issues in both authors.

1. Rowan Williams, for example, suggests that it is "sermonistic". See: [Williams, 3]. Reinhard Lauth sees it as imposing a "gnostic" theosophy onto Dostoevsky's thought. See: [Lauth, 7–8].

Berdyaev and Bakhtin

Contemporary Western approaches to Dostoevsky are for the most part set within a paradigm defined by Mikhail Bakhtin. Key terms include polyphony, dialogue, and unfinalizability. In other words, it is assumed that Dostoevsky's novels achieve significant independence from their author and that they cannot be construed as arguments for any single ideological position. Ideas are at issue in the novels, to be sure, but they are debated, contradicted, and rendered problematic. When Bakhtin was first read in the West, very little was known about him and he was largely read as a secular structuralist critic. On this basis, his ideas about polyphony, etc. were seen as incompatible with a religious or theological reading of Dostoevsky. This has now changed². As a result, many theological writers now use Bakhtin to develop a theological interpretation of Dostoevsky, former archbp. Rowan Williams being only one of many³. For some, this means focusing less on the content of Dostoevsky's writings and more on the form, so that the "Christian" or "Trinitarian" dimension is found in the dynamic and polyphonic flow of multiple voices in his novels rather than in any "message" that could be abstracted from them. Nevertheless, even some of the theological Bakhtinians typically reject what they see as the monological Christian interpretations of earlier generations⁴.

Now there are elements in Berdyaev's book that could invite this criticism, as when he writes that "Dostoevsky was a gnostic; his work is a system of knowing, a science of the spirit" [*Berdyaev 1957, 13*]. However, if we read more carefully, I think it is clear that what Berdyaev means by that is not — cannot be — the kind of monological ideological position that Bakhtinians reject. The very first thing that Berdyaev says about Dostoevsky as a thinker is that he was "a dialectician of genius... This dialectic is of the very essence of his art" [*Berdyaev 1957, 11*]. In other words, what Dostoevsky presents us with is not a fixed position, a monological formula, but a dialectical struggle.

This is further brought out when Berdyaev continues by explaining what, in this context, he means by "ideas"; for Dostoevsky, he writes:

2. See, e. g.: [*Felch, Contino*].

3. See not only [*Williams*] but, e. g., [*Thompson*].

4. There is a Russian tradition of critical evaluation of Bakhtin's concept of the author's position in Dostoevsky (since the publication of "Problems

of Dostoevsky's Creativity" in 1929). At the present stage, K. A. Stepanyan published a book about Bakhtin and Dostoevsky [*Stepanyan*]. See also: [*Foldenyi; Vetlovskaya*].

ideas live with an organic life... their existence is highly dynamic: there is nothing static about them, no standing still, no hardening [*Berdyaev 1957, 11–12*].

And, he goes on to say, “they have life-giving energy” — perhaps alluding to Stoic-Aristotelian ideas of the divine energies Christianized in hesychastic traditions [*Berdyaev 1957, 12*]. What Dostoevsky shows is not a Platonic order of unchanging ideas but “worlds in motion” [*Berdyaev 1957, 13*]. What Dostoevsky offers cannot therefore be confused with a fixed or abstract system. Indeed, immediately following the statement that he presents a “science of the spirit” Berdyaev adds that “His conception of the world was in the highest degree dynamic” and it is as such a dynamic gathering of life-giving energies that Berdyaev intends to examine it [*Berdyaev 1957, 13*].

None of this means that Berdyaev doesn’t think there is a unity in Dostoevsky, but “This unity can be apprehended only intuitively, by identifying oneself with it and ‘living’ it oneself” [*Berdyaev 1957, 15*]. What this means is that we can only understand Dostoevsky if we are prepared to allow our own thinking to become as open and dynamic as his. In this regard, we may say that it is unfortunate that Berdyaev uses the expression “world-view”, corresponding also to the German “Weltanschauung”, since in Russian, English, or German, this has connotations of contemplation, of a kind of spectatorship, in which we stand back from the world and survey it calmly as a whole, as if from a distance. However, if Dostoevsky’s thought has the characteristics of dynamism and life that Berdyaev ascribes to it and if we can only understand it by living it for ourselves then it is clear that neither our relation to Dostoevsky nor to his “world-view” can be any kind of detached spectatorship. It too must be dynamic and involved; we ourselves must struggle with Dostoevsky and with Dostoevsky’s doubts if we are to understand him, or, as Berdyaev puts it, “intuit” what it is he is saying.

Implicit in all of this is the centrality of freedom, Berdyaev’s most characteristic theme. Dostoevsky’s treatment of freedom, Berdyaev argues, is precisely what makes his approach to human existence essentially different from that of the Fathers⁵. It also makes it different from Renaissance humanism. Of course, Berdyaev is not saying that people of the ancient, medieval, or Renaissance worlds were not free, but they had not thematized freedom in the way that it is thematized

5. For a recent defence of Berdyaev’s position see: [*Knezevic*].

in the modern world and they had not made freedom into the highest of all values. But this is what we see in Dostoevsky. At the same time, however, Dostoevsky also saw that freedom, properly understood, is something awe-inspiring, terrifying even. In this regard Dostoevsky may be compared with Nietzsche. As Berdyaev writes, “The thing which Dostoevsky and Nietzsche knew is that man is terribly free, that liberty is tragic and a grievous burden to him” [*Berdyaev 1957, 62*]. This centrality is further underlined in the chapter on the Grand Inquisitor, that Berdyaev sees as “the high point of Dostoevsky’s art” and, in particular, the high-point of his treatment of freedom [*Berdyaev 1957, 188*]. Again, this is not simply something Dostoevsky writes *about*, it is something he presents as a challenge to the reader:

It is indeed a puzzle, and it is not clear on the face of it which side the speaker is on and which side the writer; we are left free to understand and interpret for ourselves: that which deals with liberty is addressed to the free [*Berdyaev 1957, 188*].

What this involves becomes clearer as Berdyaev explores how, according to Dostoevsky, human beings are essentially dualistic, and make this essential dualism — the English translation uses the French *dédoublement* — the central theme of his novels [*Berdyaev 1957, 26*]. This manifests itself in the way in which Dostoevsky’s characters are often joined in mysterious doublings, like Ivan Karamazov and Smerdyakov, like Myshkin and Nastasia Phillipovna.

Their collisions and reciprocal reactions do not express any deceiving objective reality but that hidden reality, the inner destiny of humankind [*Berdyaev 1957, 27*].

It is for this reason that Dostoevsky cannot be regarded as a straightforwardly “realist” novelist, since these kinds of relationships cannot be reduced to a sequence of facts that could be grasped empirically. Again, we are confronted with phenomena that are essentially dynamic and “unfinalizable”, to use Bakhtin’s expression.

This *dédoublement* is also reflected in the internal doubling of many of Dostoevsky’s key characters and Berdyaev doesn’t make the mistake of commentators in the existentialist tradition of identifying characters such as Ivan Karamazov or the Underground Man with Dostoevsky himself. Berdyaev asks “Was Dostoevsky himself among the underground men? Did he make their dialectic his own?” [*Berdyaev 1957, 55*]. His answer is nuanced. He is clear that

The underground man's conception of the world is not the positive religious conception that Dostoevsky had, the conception in which he made plain the dangerousness of the arbitrary ways and rebellion in which underworld men were engaged because they were headed for the destruction of human freedom and the decomposition of personality [*Berdyaev 1957, 55*].

At the same time, Berdyaev recognizes that, as he puts it, "Dostoevsky in his conception of the world rejected what the underworld man rejected in his dialectic" [*Berdyaev 1957, 56*].

Once more, it is a matter of approaching the texts and characters dynamically. Human existence is antinomic and cannot be immobilized in formulae. This dynamism, Berdyaev argues, has become a prominent theme in the modern world and has rendered the older humanism of the Renaissance incapable of addressing the questions of modernity. In the case of Russia, he says, there never was a humanistic Renaissance, which is perhaps why it was a Russian novelist, Dostoevsky, who was best-placed to explore such agonizing dualities. In the modern world, the free will is not simply a capacity that we merely have to activate, like pulling a lever or pushing a button. Our freedom is and can only be revealed through the ongoing struggle with alternative possibilities.

Everything I have been saying indicates that to oppose Berdyaev's and Bakhtin's readings of Dostoevsky is to pose a false alternative. Berdyaev's vocabulary is very different, but Bakhtin's category of "unfinalizability" is very much in the spirit of Berdyaev's interpretation. It seems very unlikely that Bakhtin would have been able to read Berdyaev's study of Dostoevsky, but they did know each other, however slightly⁶. The protocol of Berdyaev's interrogation on 18th August 1922 includes a letter from Matvei Kagan, dated 29th March 1922, in which he appeals to Berdyaev to help his friend Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin

"whom you know", he says, adding that "he was at yours once, two years ago, together with me and apart from that I've talked to you about him several times" [*Pis'mo, 218*].

He also mentions that Bakhtin is working on a big book on Dostoevsky. But there, as far as I know, the historical trail goes cold. Whether

6. The Russian version of Berdyaev's study was published prior to Bakhtin's work, but since it was printed in Prague, not Russia, it is unlikely that he would have had access to it.

Bakhtin and Berdyaev did meet after that and, if so, how much opportunity they would have had to discuss Dostoevsky, I do not know. In the light of what I have been arguing, however, this would have been a constructive conversation and not simply the opposing of two very different views of the writer.

Theological anthropology of Dostoevsky in Berdyaev's interpretation

Having defended Berdyaev against the charge of monologism, I turn to other points where I am in essential agreement with him.

The first and perhaps most important is that, in line with Berdyaev's own thought, he sees in Dostoevsky an attempt at what we would call theological anthropology. In exile, Berdyaev himself was exposed to and rejected Karl Barth's influential view that Christian theology had no essential interest in anthropology apart from biblical revelation [*Berdyaev 1939, 155*]. For much of the 20th century, Berdyaev's own theological anthropology or anthropological theology was a minority voice in the West, though this has changed in the last generation. In any case, Berdyaev sees Dostoevsky as presenting the way to God as an essentially human way. As he writes, "Dostoevsky put no limits or boundaries to experience of the spirit" and therefore "God can be reached in man and by man" [*Berdyaev 1957, 37*]. When Berdyaev then says that "Dostoevsky devoted the whole of his creative energy to one single theme, man and man's destiny" [*Berdyaev 1957, 39*] this does not mean that Dostoevsky's writings are not theological, simply that they approach the question of God through the question of man. As we have seen, this will mean exposing ourselves to the dynamic, antinomic, and, yes, tragic processes of human existence — not only as these are represented in Dostoevsky's writings, but as they manifest themselves in our own lives. In this way, reading Dostoevsky becomes a journey of self-discovery and not only self-discovery since it is in the depths of the self that we are brought into a decisive relation to God.

Theological anthropology has in recent years become once more a more mainstream form of theological reflection, partly relating to the success of phenomenological approaches to the religious self, but this should not obscure the originality of Berdyaev's position. This is not only by way of its providing an alternative to Karl Barth's insistence on biblical revelation as the sole medium in which knowledge of God can be communicated — "through God alone can God be known",

as my own Barthian theology professors put it. It also offers a significant alternative to the kind of theological anthropology that had been long established in the West, from Augustine onwards. Classically, it had been reason, divinely illuminated, that provided the surest anthropological pointer to God, since it was reason (*logos* as *ratio* or *Vernunft*) that was the residual presence of the divine image, the *imago dei*, by which humanity was defined. This was differently handled in, e. g., the ontological, cosmological, and moral arguments for God's existence as the conception of reason itself developed from that of Platonic contemplation to Kantian practical reason. It was different in the mysticism of Eckhart and the humanism of the Renaissance. Nevertheless, through all these changes, reason remained the defining feature of human beings and their God-likeness. But neither Berdyaev's theological anthropology nor that of Dostoevsky (as interpreted by Berdyaev) is focussed on human beings' rational capacities. On the contrary, it is, as we have seen, their inner contradictions that are most decisive here. The way to God is through the recognition of the tragic duality at the heart of human existence.

Now we could say that there are some anticipations of this in the West; in Luther's anguished search for a gracious God, in Pascal's account of human beings' cosmic homelessness, and in Kierkegaard's phenomenology of despair. Each of these explored the way to God as a way that passed "in and through man". In the 20th century, Berdyaev's friend Shestov would bring each of these into dialogue with Dostoevsky⁷. At the same time, each of Luther, Pascal, and Kierkegaard sees the way to God as essentially a solitary one, an inner journey, whereas Dostoevsky explores it precisely as something that occurs in the inter-personal, in the dynamic actions and reactions to each other of the characters in his novels.

Here, I should say, I find Berdyaev ambiguous, a point I shall come back to when discussing my disagreements with his approach. First, however, I want to mention three more interconnected points of substantial agreement.

The first is, quite simply, that Dostoevsky is an essentially Christian writer. This may seem so obvious as not to need saying, but I think we should never overlook the obvious — and there are scholars such as Igor Evlampiev of St. Petersburg who argue that Dostoevsky's religion

7. On Luther see: [Shestov 1957]; on Pascal: [Shestov 1923; Shestov 1937a]; on Kierkegaard see: [Shestov 1937b].

is essentially a kind of Gnosticism⁸. Against this, Berdyaev states that the anthropological orientation of Dostoevsky's thought became possible only in the Christian era. Its essential presupposition is the manifestation of God in the God-man, Jesus Christ. The confrontation between the Grand Inquisitor and Christ is important precisely because it highlights what Berdyaev takes to be axiomatic in Dostoevsky's religion, that

Christ knew no power except that of love, which alone is compatible with freedom. His is the religion of unconstrained love between God and man [*Berdyaev 1957, 204*].

The second is that if Dostoevsky's Christianity is undoubtedly Christianity, it is not identical with any pre-existing forms of Christianity. We have already noticed the difference that Berdyaev sees between the Patristic view of man and Dostoevsky's view of man. Clearly, it is impossible to deny that Dostoevsky's view of Christianity as primarily shaped by Orthodoxy and Orthodoxy provided the form in which Dostoevsky practiced Christianity. At the same time, precisely his emphasis on freedom strikes a new tone in Orthodoxy that, as Berdyaev notes, many of his Orthodox contemporaries were unable to see. His is a new revelation, a new holiness, a resurrected Orthodoxy, as Berdyaev at one point suggests [*Berdyaev 1957, 208–209*]. Avril Pyman has spoken of Orthodoxy as the semiosphere, the matrix of images and symbols on which Dostoevsky drew in shaping his vision of Christianity, Dostoevsky uses this in ways that are radically innovative and modern⁹. Whether this is a development within or beyond the constantly developing life of tradition is an open question, but in either case we may say it is pushing at the outer boundaries of what is possible from within ecclesiastical tradition.

The third is that even a religious world-view focussed on personality also requires an account of the social dimension, including the relationship between church, society, and nation. Here, Berdyaev is critical of a tendency to religious nationalism in Dostoevsky, which, he says, conflicts with the writer's own personalism and he similarly takes issue with Soloviev's idea of a free theocracy. At the same time, Dostoevsky's own idea of theocracy "contains ill-assorted elements",

8. See: [*Evlampiev 2012; Evlampiev 2019*].

9. See: [*Pyman*].

and “he had an inadequate idea of the independent temporal value of the State as a natural society directly ordained by God” [*Berdyaev 1957, 211*]. In relation to these questions, Dostoevsky saw much that was true, but he didn’t always see it clearly or accurately, or so Berdyaev thinks.

Criticism of Berdyaev’s ideas

I turn now to my points of disagreement with Berdyaev. These are in many ways interconnected. They have to do with the nature of Dostoevsky’s novels, where I have two main points, and his depiction of women. If there is time, I have further questions relating to what Berdyaev says about the Russian soul that might provide an interesting point of discussion.

Regarding the nature of Dostoevsky’s novels, Berdyaev states that these

are all built up around a central figure, whether the secondary figures converge towards it or the reverse. This chief figure always represents a puzzle, which everybody tries to solve [*Berdyaev, 41*].

Thus, in *A Raw Youth* it is Versilov, in *The Possessed* it is Stavrogin, in *The Idiot* it is Prince Myshkin¹⁰. In the first two examples, Berdyaev says, it is the other characters who are obsessed with and puzzled by the central figure, whereas in *The Idiot*, the action “goes out from him towards the others. It is he who explains all the riddles” [*Berdyaev 1957, 43*]. In *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from Underground* the central figures are not themselves riddles or riddle-solvers but pose intellectual problems and riddles of a more general or theoretical nature, such as whether crime is ever justified.

I think this is misleading, both in general and in relation to the particular examples Berdyaev uses. Of course, the general principle might be correct but the applications wrong. Why, for example, should we take Versilov as the chief figure of *A Raw Youth* rather than Arkady Dolgoruky, the narrator? Or why Stavrogin rather than Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky with whom the novel begins and ends and who, as father of Peter and tutor of Stavrogin is, in a sense, the source of the

10. It is interesting, by the way that Berdyaev shows a special interest in Versilov, the rootless aristocrat, searching for God but entangled in his own vanity and ambitions.

demonry unleashed on Russia? It is he who also declares the truth that Raphael and Shakespeare are more important than petroleum and who applies the parable of the Gadarene swine to Russia. In *The Idiot*, of course, it is hard to deny the centrality of Prince Myshkin and we must acknowledge the potentially Christlike character that makes him stand out from all the other characters¹¹. Even here, though, apart from the stream-of-consciousness chapter leading up to Rogozhin's attempt on his life, the most memorable parts of the novel are brilliantly executed ensemble scenes — breakfast at the Epanchin's, Nastasia Phillipovna's birthday party, the confrontation with Burdovsky, Ippolit's confession, and so on. In fact, one can read all three novels — I certainly read them — as group studies, that is, studies of a group of figures who are interrelated in complex and dynamic ways. Of course, some group members, some individuals, are more prominent than others, but these are never just the story of one personality: they are about families, about society, about Russia, ultimately about the human condition. The narrator of *The Brothers Karamazov* tells us that his hero is Alyosha and many commentators simply repeat this view, but I think it significant that Dostoevsky called the novel *he* wrote *The Brothers Karamazov*: it is a story of three (possibly four) brothers and not just one.

This misperception on Berdyaev's part points to another issue that haunts a number of his works. Following a strong tradition in Russian philosophy, Berdyaev many times distinguishes between individuality and personality. This is a very difficult distinction to grasp and there are times when what he says about personality sounds like individuality, something that perhaps relates to what he called the "aristocratic" element in his thought. However, he is clear that this would be to confuse what is essentially dissimilar. Personality presupposes that the ego is in its very basis open to the other and that communion is therefore an intrinsic possibility for human life at the level of personality — though not at the level of individuality¹². If Berdyaev had applied this aspect of the idea of personality to Dostoevsky's novels then the importance of the interrelatedness of the individual personalities of the novels becomes clearer, rather than these individual personalities themselves. Alyosha is who he is through his relations to his father, to each of his brothers, to the Elder Zosima — and the same

11. Though I'm not now going to enter the debate about whether or to what extent he is a Christ-figure.

12. Although Berdyaev touches on these issues many times, perhaps the most sustained discussion is in his

Self and Society (Ja i mir objektov) [Berdyaev 1938]. It is this distinction, between personality and individuality, that Berdyaev, like others, connects to the Russian idea of *sobornost'*.

goes for each of them. He is not identical with any of them, but it is only through his relations to them that we can see who he is; indeed it is only through these relations that he himself can discover who he is. *A Raw Youth* is perhaps especially telling. If we read it from the perspective of Arkady Dolgoruky, the eponymous “raw youth”, then its story is the story of how a young man finds a way to adulthood that involves renouncing the egocentric idea of becoming a Rothschild and accepting the network of family relationships into which he has been born. Versilov certainly plays a crucial role in this, but so does Sonia, his mother, his sister, the holy man Makar and so on. It is not a story of individualization but socialization and it is only in and through this socialization that he becomes a full human personality.

All of this relates also to what I regard as another major misreading on Berdyaev’s part, namely, the role of women in Dostoevsky’s novels. He writes:

Woman never appears as an independent being for, as we shall see, Dostoevsky was interested in her solely as a milestone on the road of man’s destiny. His anthropology is masculine: the soul is primarily the masculine principle in mankind and the feminine principle is the theme of man’s tragedy, his temptation [*Berdyaev 1957, 112*].

This seems to me to be plainly wrong and in a number of ways. Unfortunately, Dostoevsky never completed *Netochka Nezvanova*, but it is an unusual attempt by a male novelist to narrate a novel from a woman’s point of view¹³. Nevertheless, his post-Siberian authorship is marked by many strong and independently significant female characters. Sonia Marmeladova is not simply “a milestone” on Raskolnikov’s journey but a genuine representative of Christ-like love; Dounia Raskolnikova is not just an adjunct to her brother but a woman with a life of her own ahead of her; Mme Stavrogina may not be a sympathetic character but she is strongly drawn and not reducible to any of the men around her; Nastasia Phillipovna may in the end become a sacrificial victim but she is a powerful, intelligent, and passionate figure in her own right; remaining with *The Idiot*, many commentators regard Mme General Epanchina as one of Dostoevsky’s most brilliant female characters, a fully three-dimensional figure who has neither beauty, nor genius, nor even wisdom, but despite her erratic moods is a fig-

13. Though many women novelists have written from a male point of view.

ure of great sympathy and it is to her that Dostoevsky gives the last words of the novel; her daughters too are lively and idiosyncratic, each with their own interests and views — so too Vera Lebedeva, a quiet but essential personage in the novel; nor are Grushenka and Katerina Nikolaevna simply there to illuminate Dmitri and Ivan Karamazov. In a completely different modality, the general's mother in *The Gambler* is a superb comic figure who dominates every scene in which she appears. And, of course, there are many other examples.

This is closely connected to a further point Berdyaev makes on the same page, namely, that although love has a big place in Dostoevsky's novels, "it is not an independent one: love has no value in itself or symbolism of its own but serves only to show man his tragic road and to be a reagent of his freedom" [*Berdyaev 1957, 112*].

I have already discussed the question of freedom and I certainly accept Berdyaev's claim that this is a central feature of Dostoevsky's worldview. But I would not say that it is more important or more basic than love. In Dostoevsky, as in life, love and freedom are hard to separate — as indeed Christ's opposition to the Grand Inquisitor shows. Love is only love when it is freely given or freely affirmed: but freedom that is not rooted and grounded in love and that does not lead to love is destructive and not creative. Isn't this the lesson Raskolnikov learns in the Epilogue to *Crime and Punishment*? Isn't it what even Stavrogin learns, but lacks the courage to grasp, in the scene with Liza? It is what the husband in *Krotkaia* learns when he is confronted with the absence of love in his life. It is not Myshkin alone who interests us, but Myshkin and Nastasia, Myshkin and Aglaia. Likewise with Dmitri Karamazov and Grushenka: the story of their relationship is not just Dmitri's story but a love story, their love story. And, finally, love is the principle of the community to which Zosima invites his brothers and us, his readers, love to each other, to all other creatures, and to God. Not to mention the kinds of love we find between parents and children, brothers and sisters, and friendships of many kinds.

It is perhaps true, as Berdyaev goes on to say, that "the beauty proper to family life" [*Berdyaev 1957, 113*], is not a dominant theme in Dostoevsky: nowhere do we encounter a family like Tolstoy's Rostovs. Yet love is not "a tornado that bear man on to shipwreck" [*Berdyaev 1957, 113*] — or not only. It is love that saves Raskolnikov, and it is love that, we hope, will save both Dmitri and Grushenka. Secondary characters such as the Ikhmenevs in *The Insulted and Injured* are flawed, but they are, for all their troubles, a solid family who find reconciliation and perhaps the Versilov/Dolgoruky "accidental family" will also find

peace and acceptance through mutual love. We envisage Razumikhin and Dounia Raskolnikova living well together and, perhaps, as the final chapter of *The Idiot* hints, Radomsky and Vera Lebedeva. We note also that Dostoevsky said of himself that three-quarters of the happiness to be found in life was found in marriage. Tragedy is not the last word, but — and Berdyaev does well to remind us — it is a possibility that lurks at every turn of the road.

Conclusion

Finally, I shall say only that I disagree with Berdyaev's claim, a claim that he makes on his own behalf as well as on Dostoevsky's, 'that the structure of the Russian soul is all its own and completely different from that of Westerners' [*Berdyaev 1957, 161*]. Certainly, the opposition — religious, moral, and cultural — between Russia and the West is a major theme of both Dostoevsky's fiction and non-fiction writing. However, at this point Berdyaev seems almost to make this an ontological distinction — but if we were to go that far, then it would be hard indeed to conceive how it is that Dostoevsky spoke and speaks so profoundly to his Western readers.

This remains a deeply controversial area and debates between Slavophiles and Westernizers that have shaped Russian religious thought since at least the 19th century. It is undeniable that Russian history has been marked by a series of distinctive and sometimes catastrophic events — the Mongol Invasion, Napoleon's invasion, the 1917 Revolution, the Great Patriotic War. Coming from an island nation where one is never more than 100 km from the sea, I also understand Berdyaev's point that the vastness of the Russian interior is bound to have a certain effect on people's attitudes and sensibilities. Nevertheless, we must beware of absolutizing such differences.

In Russia, one talks, as both Dostoevsky and Berdyaev talked, of "the West"; but the West has multiple internal differentiations. In Schleiermacher's speeches on religion, for example, he asserts that only Germans will be able to understand his message since they alone have the poetic depth of soul needed — the English, he says, are too mercantile and the French too frivolous and contemptuous of spiritual life [*Schleiermacher, 63–64*]. As an Englishman, I admit to growing up believing that the French almost belonged to another species — and as for the Italians! Living in Scotland, I have become aware of deep characterological differences between English and Scots and, of course, there is a still deeper and more bitter history of conflict between English and Irish.

One might also add that in a class society such as Britain there remain deep divisions between classes and there have been moments in literature when writers have seen the same or similar virtues in the British working classes not unlike those that Dostoevsky saw in the Russian peasants¹⁴. It is therefore an open question as to whether Russians are more different from the English than are Scots or Irish. Given the great scope of Russian history and the vastness of the Russian land, its eastward as well as its westward orientation, differences will be more complex than these relatively “local” differences. Nevertheless, they must still be susceptible of understanding through the analysis of the relevant historical and cultural background rather than hypostasized as essential attributes. And here, I think, we do well to follow what, in his Pushkin speech, Dostoevsky explained as a distinctive feature of Russianness, namely, the ability to enter into other cultures and live them from within. But this is something we must *all* try to do. No culture is hermetically sealed from any other, though understanding may often require great effort. At the beginning of this paper I alluded to Dostoevsky’s ambition to portray “the man in man”. Our differences can become sources of enmity, but if we keep focussed on “the man in man”, then, I think, these same differences can become a source of mutual encouragement and delight. And, of course, Dostoevsky’s own authorship is itself the most powerful testimony to this possibility, since his distinctively Russian point of view was received and welcomed around the world and has provided readers in virtually all countries with immeasurable encouragement in the midst of life’s sufferings and in face of the unresolved questions at the heart of our existence.

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