



Dostoevsky as a Thinker: to the 200th Anniversary of the Birth

Достоевский как мыслитель: к 200-летию со дня рождения

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Dostoevsky. A View from the West

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Достоевский. Взгляд с Запада

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Numerous readings and interpretations of Dostoevsky's work, both in Russia and abroad, can rightfully be considered a useful litmus test for reflecting on the historical period that produced them. Reading and studying Dostoevsky brings to the surface the unresolved problems of our time, the concerns and anxieties of society and culture, and, at the same time, even our personal and individual experiences and hopes.

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Therefore, it is no wonder that most of the articles presented in this issue cover, in one way or another, the vital problem of the relationship between Russian culture and Europe. As one of the articles explains, a profound awareness of one's own identity is an urgent task for contemporary Russian philosophical culture.

The endless search for answers leads to a preference for philosophical and religious discourse over literary studies when perhaps the time has come to bring together these two main strands of Dostoevsky studies and thereby enrich them mutually.

A similar thing happens in the West, where many scholars, fascinated by the demanded heterogeneity, are inspired by Russian idea and insist on its specificity, which is seen as a privileged horizon for making sense of our tired Western culture. Especially in Russia, the problem of the specificity of Russian thought is taken for granted. However, originality and origins of Russian philosophy are not always resolved within their underlying reasons. Hence the quite legitimate appeal to the late Dostoyevsky and his call for the Russian idea's universal significance. It is no coincidence that his famous *Pushkin Speech* is quoted so often in this issue.

"Nationality is a fact which no one ignores. But in Slavophile theories, we are dealing not with nationality, but with nationalism," — Vladimir Solovyov wrote somewhat harshly to Nikolay Strakhov in 1887 [1. P. 103]. Another author, Benedict Anderson, also long ago described such a phenomenon as "imagined communities" and drew attention to the role of literature in the process of constituting these [2].

Thus, this is not said out of a kind of fierce historicism or denial of each national culture's undoubted peculiarities. On the contrary, to better understand and cherish them, we should take a sober look at the interpretations that Russian philosophy has given itself. In a word, I would like not to confuse meta-philosophical discourse, that is, the self-consciousness of Russian thought, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the means it has developed for expressing this consciousness, the Russian idea, for instance. Otherwise, there will be a risk once again of distancing Russia from Europe and attributing it to the exotic, while it is undoubtedly European in culture. There will be a risk of defining Russian philosophy as "strange philosophy," whose point of view is valuable because of its "alienated" and paradoxical position.

The great Russian thinker and poet, inspired by Dostoevsky and, like Solovyov, with his idea of a free theocracy, Vyacheslav Ivanov, wrote to his young friend, Evsei Schor, in 1927: "For you, Russia is an 'extra-European country,' Europe is also a culture, a creation of the German tribes in the first place. Russia is a "province" of this European culture, as is Asia <...>. For me, culture is a Greco-Roman plant. It gives rise to two sprouts: the European East and the European West." [3. P. 337].

Unfortunately, the history of the 19th and 20th centuries was often built on a lopsided understanding of these two sprouts' essence. Western and Eastern, the two great traditions made differentiation the strong point of their identities, acquired and

consolidated in opposition to one another. Differences, often revealed and exaggerated *a posteriori*, were thus fixed. The paths were chosen with radical determination, forgetting that *in potentia* their tradition also contained the unchosen path.

It is inevitable that the present moment, which predetermines our point of view, conditions our interpretation of Dostoevsky's worldview. Nevertheless, it is just as important in our time to distinguish between two very different planes, especially concerning intercultural exchanges — the historical-political and the cultural. What happens on the political niveau, conditioned by extra-cultural factors, is anchored in culture. Nevertheless, politics uses culture for its purposes, trying to condition it to bend to its interests. While on the purely cultural level, the osmotic process, the exchange of all kinds of factors that shape mentalities², is complex, articulate, often clandestine. Fortunately, by its peculiarly unpredictable chronology, it extends far beyond the narrow confines of the historical-political level. When addressing Dostoevsky, it would be lush not to describe society's state of his time but to capture its movement. "The subject of the novel is not the way of life of a society, but the social {movement}," — wrote Vladimir Solovyov of the great writer. According to the philosopher, "the most important and essential in Dostoevsky's work is his notion of "universal Christianity." [5. P. 371, 389].

Thematic section of the journal develops along three closely related thematic lines: the issue of the Russian Idea and Russian identity, the Christian anthropology of Dostoevsky, and reflections on the biography and reception of writer's legacy.

S.A. Nizhnikov, in his article *Russian Idea of F.M. Dostoevsky: from Soilness to Universality*, following in Berdyaev's footsteps, describes the pneumatic trait of Dostoevsky's thought. Nizhnikov points to the writer's reflections on Soilness as a prerequisite for his understanding of Russian culture's universal purpose.

The article by A.A. Lagunov and A.Yu. Smirnov, *F.M. Dostoevsky on the Reasons for Europe's 'Remarkable Dislike' for Russia*, reveals the specifics of the relationship between Europe and Russia. The researchers stem from the perspective of the distrust that Dostoevsky believes Europe has historically nurtured toward Russia. The writer traces its deeper causes in the Orthodox heritage that nurtures Russian culture and spirituality, whereas, paradoxically enough, this heritage could become the occasion for forming a united new culture and a new pan-European community. Indeed, in attempting to actualize Dostoevsky's discourse, the authors

² By mentality, we mean a set of evaluative and ethical criteria that does not belong exclusively to the individual but forms a kind of cultural and social community, a paradigm of perception and evaluation of reality, developed by the social consciousness within a particular society and giving it that unique tone, that nuance that distinguishes it. Such a set of rules, feelings, and behavioral codes is never explicitly formulated, but it is perfectly understandable and functional within the community of which it is an expression. It is implicit because it is clear and evident to the bearer. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the historian's retrospective view. Ref. in this regard B.N. Mironov, *Social History of Russia in the Period of Empire (18th — early 20th century)*. The genesis of the Individual, the Democratic Family, Civil Society and the Rule of Law [4. P. 327].

proceed from the writer's attempt to seek a kind of *third path* that would bridge the gap between Western humanism and the Russian ascetic worldview.

E.V. Besschetnova, in *The Idea of the Church as the Best Social Structure: F.M. Dostoevsky and V.S. Solovyov*), analyzes the historiosophic concept of Dostoevsky, beginning primarily with *Demons*, *A Writer's Diary*, and, naturally, *The Brothers Karamazov*. There, the writer clearly expresses his ideal of the politics' complete transformation into spirituality, i.e., the resolution of the state in the Church. In striving for non-state *sobornost*, for a new type of community, based on brotherly love and not merely on the common good regulated by law, Christian society's ideal is contrasted with the socialist one. This is particularly evident in Dostoevsky's and Vladimir Solovyov's understanding of the Russian idea, which emphasizes the mutual influence of the two great thinkers, regardless of the role and significance that the Catholic problematic later acquired in Solovyov's works.

In Dostoevsky's works, God and man are involved in a story of evil and pain, sin and redemption, perdition and salvation. In creating his paradigmatic heroes, the writer descends a spiral of evil. It is quite natural that the dispute on evil is highlighted in the articles presented, both from the perspective of Christianity and ethics.

Currently, virtue ethics, or the ethics of goodness, is of interest to many thinkers. Contemporary studies suggest a moral position that does not point to the excellent outside of us as a guide for our actions, instead perceives the virtues as constitutive traits of the individual, a kind of ontological *modus* realizing humanity's fullness, "human flourishing" (Elizabeth Anscombe). In particular, philosophers such as Paul Ricœur attribute a profound ethical value to narrative because it can position itself indicatively and existentially on the threshold between anthropology and ethics. Hence also the investment in Dostoevsky, the great narrator and "philosopher of human souls," as defined in Kosorukova and Zubkova's article – he, with his meditation on evil and particular attention to such virtues, his insistence on virtues such as humility, self-sacrifice, and kenosis, offers not so much a moral path for people as a much deeper decentralization of the subject, his ability to accept otherness both in terms of compassion and understanding of his neighbor and in terms of openness to a divine beginning.

I.I. Evlampiev and V.N. Smirnov's article *Dostoevsky's Christianity* hypothesizes that the Christianity of the Russian writer cannot be exhausted entirely within the framework of Orthodox doctrine. Nevertheless, fueled by the influence of German idealist philosophy, primarily by Fichte, includes numerous Gnostic elements. From this position, Dostoevsky's work is seen in the broad context of his time's tendency (also shared by Tolstoy and Solovyov, albeit from very different premises) to restore the original purity of Christianity, overcoming the historical division of the Church.

A.A. Kosorukova and U.V. Zubkova, in *Archetypes of F.M. Dostoyevsky's "Meek" and "Proud" Female Characters as Studies of the Question of Virtue*,

proceed from their analysis of various attempts to systematize Dostoyevsky's character typology. Interest in such a typology is continuously evident in Dostoevsky studies, from Innokenty Annensky, who analyzes *Crime and Punishment* as a complex network of symbols whose nodes are characters, to Tatyana Kasatkina's recent studies of Dostoevsky's characterology. The article presented especially emphasizes the virtues of humility and meekness, which are necessary for understanding the multidimensional female characters in Dostoevsky's world.

Finally, let us turn to the line of study on the biography and reception of Russian writer. Painstaking work to reconstruct materials from archives and other sources in order to shed light on periods of the writer's biography that remain in the shadows is perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of modern Dostoevsky studies, mainly when this work aims to interpret specific biographical data, to highlight the inner structure of the writer's existential journey, and to observe the forms of his artistic images. As Gaston Bachelard notes in this regard: "Hermeneutics, which is more profound than biography, must determine the centers of fate by ridding history of its conjunctive temporal tissue, which has no action on our fates" [6. P. 20].

S.M. Klimova's article, *Dostoevsky — Strakhov — Tolstoy: Toward a History of One Conflict*, examines the famous conflict between Strakhov and Dostoevsky in light of the relationship of both to a third person, namely Tolstoy.

Following Lydia Ginzburg's lesson and her analysis of "borderline types of literature," dealing with the famous "labyrinth of linkages" (to quote Tolstoy's famous expression in Tunimanov's seminal essay), the article overcomes a purely psychological perspective. It reveals the authors' concept in question and the question of the relationship between life and literature, author and hero. In this perspective, it is as if the usual opposition between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is broken, precisely based on the analysis of their Christianity, on their overcoming moralism and a broader conception of morality.

Finally, Giorgia Rimondi's article, *A.F. Losev on F.M. Dostoevsky. On Losev's Activities in the Literary Section of the State Academy of Art Sciences*, reconstructs in detail Aleksei Losev's participation in the literary section of the State Academy of Art Sciences and, in particular, in the study of Dostoevsky's work. Archival documents mention Losev's speeches and reports on Dostoevsky, particularly on the nature of the great writer's symbol and myth. Rimondi attempts to link ideas from those speeches of Losev, from which only fragments remain, with the ideas he put forward in his later works written after his arrest, in particular *The Problem of the Symbol and Realist Art*, thus emphasizing the laboratory, incubation character that the Academy of the 1920s had for the history of Russian and Soviet thought, being a fundamental link in the chain linking Soviet philosophy with the great legacy of the Silver Age.

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