

Dostoevsky's Depth Theology

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Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
Psalm 139: 7-8

During their final meeting in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), Smerdiakov notes to Ivan that they are not alone in the room, that between them, “without a doubt, there’s also a third.” When Ivan, frightened, asks who this third person is, Smerdiakov explains, “The third is God, sir, Providence itself, sir; here it is now next to us, sir, only don't look for it, you won't find it.”¹ The exchange, between two apparent atheists, though bizarre by any standard, is also characteristic of Dostoevsky’s intervention into the ostensibly secular genre of the novel. As in the Hebrew Bible or ancient Greek epic where God or the gods appear and act alongside the heroes, Dostoevsky makes God into a narrative presence, a mover of action, indeed almost a character among other characters. In the epilogue to *Crime and Punishment*, there is an active “something” that “lifts” Raskolnikov up and “flings him down” at Sonya’s feet (6:421; Ep., Ch. 2); just as there is “something” that repeatedly attacks Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*, burning his heart, tearing certain truths from his mouth “as though not of his own will” (15:39-40; Bk. 11, Ch. 5). Ivan too, for all his professed atheism, feels this force acting upon him, and even falls seriously ill, according to Alyosha, from the strain of having to fight back against

“God in whom he did not believe” but who was “overpowering his heart” (15:89; Bk. 11, Ch. 10).

Whether perceived as outward or inward, this invisible presence is marked in Dostoevsky’s novels by the inarticulate terror it provokes among his modern intellectuals.² The underground man has spent his life trying to suppress the “elements” that “seethe” within him, and yet in his most desperate moments he continues to feel “something” rising “in the depths” of his “heart and conscience,” “something” oppressive which “did not want to die and expressed itself in a burning anguish” (5:100, 165; Pt. 1, Ch. 1; Pt. 2, Ch. 8). Kirillov in *The Demons* complains that God “has tormented” him his “whole life,” and he describes “unbearable” sensations of “joy” and “eternal harmony” that threaten to destroy him from within (10:450, 94; Pt. 3, Chs. 5, 7). Dostoevsky himself greatly feared the overwhelming mystical ecstasy that presaged his attacks of epilepsy, a “rapturous, prayerful merging,” as Prince Myshkin describes it, “with the very highest synthesis of life” (8:188; Pt. 2, Ch. 5).

These evocations of an active, intimate, menacing, and inwardly encroaching divine force are uncomfortably at odds with our more canonical understanding of Dostoevsky’s religious credo – that is, of Dostoevsky-the-idealist, who wrote from Siberia of having discovered a “symbol of faith” in “moments” of “absolute calm”: the “belief that there is nothing more beautiful, deeper, more sympathetic, reasonable, courageous, and perfect than Christ” (28[1]:176). The critical tradition of reading Dostoevsky as a Christian idealist is robust and time-honored, extending from the preeminent founders of Dostoevsky studies – Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Nikolai Berdyaev – all the way to Robert Louis Jackson and Joseph Frank in the twenty-first century. It rests firmly on a multitude of statements in Dostoevsky’s novels, essays, letters, and diaries, including: his landmark 1861 essay, “Mr. –bov

and the Question of Art,” where he invokes the preservation of “beauty and its highest ideal” as the purpose of art and the best hope for humankind (18:102); and his remarkable 1864 diary entry after the death of his first wife in which he describes Christ as the developmental goal of human history, “the eternal ideal toward which the human being strives and must strive” (20:172).³

This essay seeks to understand the disparity between these two concepts of God in Dostoevsky’s writing, that is, between, first, his notion of God-the-ideal: the revealed image of Christ, the exemplar of beauty and goodness, the ultimate goal of human striving – and, second, his descriptions of God-the-presence, an active foreign agency or source, a “something” that rises up from the “soul’s darkness” to annex and overpower the human being from within. The tension between these two God principles (the God that is longed for and the God that is fled in terror; or the God of the heights and the God of the depths) has prompted many of Dostoevsky’s most influential readers to interpret him – mistakenly, I will argue – as a ditheist, a Manichean, or an ascetic idealist. Scholars, for example, have often taken Dmitry Karamazov’s Manichean invocation of “God and the devil” battling in the “human heart” (the high “ideal of the Madonna” and the low “ideal of Sodom”) as a reflection of Dostoevsky’s own dualistic worldview.⁴ Such an approach, I argue, fails to appreciate the larger arc of Dostoevsky’s novelistic theology – his gradual turning away from idealism through his study of the agonies of theomachy, the act of wrestling and evading a divine insurgent force. This essay proposes to amend our understanding of Dostoevsky’s religious thought by tracing the evolution of his idealism into a more capacious depth theology, which posits the energies of God as the foundation of the unconscious and the active core of a vigorous personality. I will focus on *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* as

the novels which most decisively tell the story of Dostoevsky's attempts to reconcile the longed-for God of the heights with the dreaded God of the depths.

Dostoevsky's depth theology, I will argue, also constitutes a formidable response to the 19th-century atheist tradition, a tradition, which – from Feuerbach to Marx, from Chernyshevsky to Pisarev – sought to refute the existence of God, conceived primarily as a speculative ideal. When Ludwig Feuerbach presented his influential rejection of Christian metaphysics, his more specific target was the German idealist edifice which he perceived as the culmination of that tradition. The transcendental ideal, the Kantian “in itself,” the Hegelian “speculative God” were among those God principles that had been projected, according to Feuerbach, by the human imagination into otherworldly space and subsequently endowed with powers that rightfully belonged to their human creators.⁵ Atheism as anti-idealism was likewise the reigning tradition in Russia where Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Nikolai Dobrolyubov, disciples of Feuerbach, emphasized the importance of reclaiming responsibility for the world – taking it back, that is, from the imaginary absolute onto which it had been deferred – and where Dmitry Pisarev warned against disavowing the world by means of “dreamy aspirations towards a non-existent infinity” (Pisarev, 123).⁶

What has not been sufficiently appreciated about Dostoevsky's novelistic defense of theism, I submit, is his *agreement* with Feuerbach on the flimsiness of the transcendental ideal; on the dangers of projecting one's own highest aspirations onto an imaginary otherworldly being; and on the temptation of endowing such a being with unlimited powers. Modern atheism, however, for Dostoevsky, to quote Prince Myshkin, is a discourse that “is not at all about that”: “no matter how many unbelievers I've met, no matter how many books I've read of this kind, it has always seemed to me that they are talking or writing books that are not at all about that,

though it looks as if it were about that” (8:182; Pt. 2, Ch. 4). The atheist tradition, in other words, for Dostoevsky, rightly dethrones a series of false idealist gods, while failing to assess, encounter, or acknowledge the “living God” whose energies, far from a wishful projection, present an oppressive challenge to the integrity of the psyche. Nor does modern atheism, for Dostoevsky, appreciate the value of the ideal, not as an otherworldly essence nor an avenue of escape, but as a guide, a resource in memory capable of directing the seeker through the otherwise impenetrable darkness within.

The Idiot: “Light vs. Darkness” Revisited

The Idiot (1869) can be read as Dostoevsky’s most decisive critique of idealism, his attempt to put the kindest, best, most benevolent Don Quixote figure that he could possibly imagine to the test. The novel explores the inadequacy of rooting oneself in a transcendental or idealist vision of goodness through its development of dynamic and vitalist theology of the depths. A rich, polemical tradition of commentary has grown up around the novel’s tormented and ambivalent examination of high idealism, with many readers certifying Prince Myshkin as the embodiment of Dostoevsky’s own Christian ideal; others critiquing the hero as a flawed invention; and yet others rejecting him as a corrupted or corruptive would-be redeemer.⁷ It is possible, however, to agree partially with each of these readings if we consider Myshkin as a hypothetical point of departure for Dostoevsky in his experimental critique of Christian idealism.

We can begin by noting at least two major problems with the traditional approach to *The Idiot* which identifies Myshkin as a bright Seraph seeking, tragically, to redeem the worldly darkness and chaos of Petersburg society.⁸ It should be noted, first, that Dostoevsky chooses for his “perfectly beautiful person” not a serene angel, but a deeply troubled individual with a

significant amount of his own inner darkness – a formerly sick and abused child, an amnesiac who is attempting to escape the stranglehold of a vaguely defined madness that has haunted him for most of his life. Nor is the society that Myshkin enters particularly dark or chaotic, at least for Dostoevsky. Unlike the callous squalor of *Crime and Punishment*, or the rabid ideological pestilence of *The Demons*, the backdrop of *The Idiot* is constituted almost exclusively by “ordinary people” (8:383; Pt. 4, Ch. 1), a string of unremarkable, lukewarm, pragmatic characters – the Ptitsyns, the Ivolgins, the Lebedevs, Radomsky, Prince Shch, General Epanchin – friendly well-wishers, who, when they scheme, do so innocuously, and who immediately relinquish their designs when met with resistance, ready to apologize, reimburse, compensate. Even the amoral sexual abuser Totsky spends the novel trying to patch up, if not atone for, his misdeeds, “valuing peace and comfort more than anything else on earth,” avoiding “the slightest infringement, the slightest ripple” in the veneer of normalcy (8:37; Pt. 1, Ch. 4).⁹ Against the backdrop of such “ordinariness,” Dostoevsky valorizes the personality that is “original, or in other words, troubled” (“*original’nyj, drugimi slovami, bespokoinyj*” [8:270; Pt. 3, Ch. 1]), offering us protagonists – Myshkin, Rogozhin, Nastasia Filippovna – whose agonized profundity threatens the superficial veneer of their society. The Epanchin women, mother and daughters, are important here as bearers of the curse of “originality” while still being able to pass as “ordinary” (8:270; Pt. 3, Ch. 1), and therefore occupying the novel’s intermediate ground between the tranquil mediocrity of society and the deranged abnormality of Myshkin and his uncanny counterparts.

If we disentangle the imagery of light and darkness in *The Idiot* from the Manichean dualism of good vs. evil, the plot comes into clearer focus as probing a different kind of duality – that is, between the tranquil superficiality of the “*sver*” (the Russian word for “society” also

means “light”), on the one hand, and the dark, troubled “originality” of the depths, on the other. The novel, in this mode, can be retold as follows. An idealistic, compassionate, benevolent, and humble young man, with a history of mental illness, returns to Russia from his treatment in Europe, wondering whether he will be able to live a productive, happy life in society. He inherits a fortune and falls in love, requitedly, with a beautiful society woman, Aglaya Epanchin. All is well, except that the Prince is not really an acceptable suitor. Unlike the “ordinary” or “untroubled” people of the grand *svet*, Myshkin is aware of a “darkness in his soul” (8:192; Pt. 2, Ch. 4), a subliminal connection to certain irrational and anarchic elements that he is unable to excise or dissolve. These subliminal allegiances express themselves in an uncanny sympathy with the aggressive, violent Rogozhin, and in an even more profound and instinctive bond with the abused Nastasia Filippovna – who “evokes” an overwhelming “pity” and “horror” in Myshkin’s “heart” (8:289), and whose “madness,” according to the Prince, is somehow indistinguishable from his own personal “nightmares” (8:378; Pt. 3, Ch. 10).

The question at the heart of the novel, therefore, is whether Russian society is robust enough to confront and integrate its own subliminal “darkness” – the active reservoirs of pain, dynamism, and rage that hide within its margins and in the troubled memories of its inhabitants. Dostoevsky’s treatment suggests that modern society is in fact too brittle, sanitized, and superficial even to acknowledge the existence of such elements. Though Aglaya loves Myshkin, she accepts only his bright, benevolent qualities, and demands that he disavow his more painful and imponderable allegiances. When faced with the necessity of dissolving his connection to Nastasia Filippovna, however, of rejecting a sympathy that touches on something subliminal of which he himself is only dimly aware – extending, we can surmise, into their similar histories, orphaned at early ages, abused in various ways, raised by dubious “benefactors” – Myshkin finds

himself incapable of complying, seeing “before him only the despairing, insane face from which [...] ‘his heart had been forever pierced’” (8:475; Pt. 4, Ch. 8).

The problem with idealism, as presented in the novel, is that it, too, like the enforced superficiality of a trivial modern society, offers a ready path *away* from the “depths.” Feuerbach’s critique of the transcendental ideal as a wishful projection of the mind and disavowal of the real world is pertinent here. Prince Myshkin fears being “drawn into this world irrevocably,” feels “a terrible urge to [...] go back from where he had come, as far away as possible,” and worries “that if he stayed here even for a few more days, [...] this very world would be his lot from now on” (8: 256; Pt. 2, Ch. 11). Though the Prince is described as a selfless and idealistic knight, “capable of ... blindly devoting his life” to a “bright image” to the point of “asceticism” (8:207; Pt. 2, Ch. 6), the nature of his ideal is left undefined. In his longing to escape, we are only told that he wishes to “think only about one thing – and this would be enough for a thousand years” (8:256; Pt. 2, Ch. 11), about something distant and lofty, associated with both light and height, with the “sensation,” that is, while standing in the Swiss mountains, of being “beckoned” to “walk far, far, to go beyond that line where the earth meets the heavens” (8:51; Pt. 1, Ch. 5). We can also observe that, as a projective and escapist ideal, the Prince’s “one thing” becomes subsequently tangled up with the person of Aglaya who appears to Myshkin in “his darkness” as a “new dawn” (8:363; Pt. 3, Ch. 10), and at whom “he would suddenly start staring for five minutes without tearing his gaze from her face [...] as though at an object that was two versts away from him [...] and not at Aglaya herself” (8:287; Pt. 3, Ch. 2).

Here we have a rough outline of Dostoevsky’s critique of transcendental idealism: the longing for a vague and lofty “one thing” that offers temporary respite from the chaos and darkness of life but which also threatens to become a form of idolatry. All three of Dostoevsky’s

“troubled” protagonists, it turns out, are ascetic idealists in this sense. Rogozhin, too, from within the gloomy darkness of his house and family, discovers a “goddess” onto whom he can project all of his religious fervor, approaching Nastasia Filippovna as “some kind of divinity” (8:97; Pt. 1, Ch. 10). Nastasia Filippovna, in turn, admits that she is also a “dreamer,” that she has dreamed for years, in her misery, of a “good, honest, kind” redeemer who will pull her out of the mire (8:144; Pt. 1, Ch. 16); and it is no surprise, then, that she “loses her mind” (8:140; Pt. 1, Ch. 16) when her ideal seems to take form suddenly in the figure of the Prince, whom she subsequently worships as the very embodiment of God (8:380; Pt. 3, Ch. 10), and in the face of whom she feels consolation but also unbearable shame. The escapist ideal, Dostoevsky warns, grants only a temporary reprieve from the “soul’s darkness,” while threatening to degenerate into a form of idolatry that is potentially more destructive than the darkness itself.

Modernity as Amnesia, Groundlessness

Against the backdrop of these ascetic and quasi-idolatrous practices of transcendental idealism, Dostoevsky stages an attempt in *The Idiot* to imagine a different kind of God principle, a more dynamic form of theism capable of incorporating or transfiguring the “darkness” that modern society expels to the margins and refuses to acknowledge. As the Prince himself puts it, in a manner most challenging to his own lofty temperament, “He who has no ground beneath him has no God” (8:453; Pt. 4, Ch. 7). Before we turn to Myshkin’s attempt to probe the darkness, however, some prefatory context on Dostoevsky’s more general view of modern psychology is necessary.

Dostoevsky’s major works from *Notes from Underground* onward are driven by abiding anxiety over the moral ailments of “our time,” of the “recent past,” (*Notes from Underground*

5:99; Pt. 1, Ch. 1), over what Dostoevsky called, in his 1880 Pushkin speech, the “ailing phenomenon of our educated society torn away historically from the ground [*iavlenie nashego intelligentnogo, istoricheski otorvannogo ot pochvy obshchestva*]” (26:129). To be “torn away” from the “ground,” for Dostoevsky, meant to suffer a kind of personal and cultural amnesia that rendered one both feeble and superficial. In his 1880 speech, Dostoevsky compared Pushkin’s modern hero – the flimsy, shallow Eugene Onegin (“a blade of grass carried by the wind”) – to his female pre-modern counterpart, the “deeper” and “more intelligent” Tatiana Larina, who has preserved within herself “something firm and unshakable, a ground for the soul,” a collection of resources to which the ailing modern has no recourse: “These are the memories of her childhood, memories of her birthplace, [...] and this is no small thing, no, this is already a lot; here we have an entire foundation [...] a link with the homeland, with the people, with what is sacred” (26:140).

Both Freud and Jung, in developing their psychoanalytic schools in the decades after Dostoevsky’s death, noted in different ways that the neuroses, or inner disturbances, that they were attempting to treat were largely symptoms of modern European life. While Freud connected the “spread of modern nervous illness” to the sexual repression that was the great compromise of “modern civilized living” (Freud, 86), Jung, in a manner more reminiscent of Dostoevsky, emphasized neurosis as a form of cultural estrangement. Individuals firmly embedded in traditional communities, he maintained, those with a “recognized system of belief” that “gives true expression to life,” do not require psychoanalysis. Only as one becomes estranged from these traditional rhythms and religious practices, does one, according to Jung, experience “a profound convulsion of spiritual life,” and “only then, in this distress, do we discover the psyche; or, more precisely, we come upon something which thwarts our will, which is strange and even

hostile to us” (Jung, 202). The “modern” individual, therefore, “in order to unearth buried fragments of psychic life” has “first to drain a miasmal swamp”: “if he then turns his gaze inward upon the recesses of his own mind, he will discover a chaos and darkness there which he would gladly ignore” (Jung, 214, 205).

Dostoevsky appears to have held a remarkably similar view. Like Jung, he drew a clear line between the chaotic and dark “miasmal swamp” of the modern psyche and the comparatively solid ground of the pre-modern. For the pre-modern peasantry, or people – with whom Dostoevsky affirms Tatiana Larina’s affiliation in his Pushkin speech – there is no need to journey into the “depths” to find God. On the contrary, the Christian ideal, he argued, had been so firmly etched into the popular psyche over “centuries of countless and endless sufferings” as to acquire the intimacy of a personal memory. In his *Diary of a Writer*, he described the centuries of growing intimacy with the image of Christ experienced by the people “while fleeing from their enemies in the forests,” while “remaining with no one but Christ-the-comforter whom they took into their soul forever and who, in return, saved their soul from despair” (26:150-1). Sonya from *Crime and Punishment* is a vivid embodiment of this kind of pre-modern psychic symbiosis. As Raskolnikov watches her read from the Book of John, he observes that the Gospel itself is the substance of her inner life; it was in fact “all that was *hers*,” as he puts it, “her *secret*, perhaps even from her very youth, while still with her family, next to an unhappy father and a grief-crazed stepmother, among hungry children, ugly screams and reproaches” (6:250; Pt. 4, Ch. 4). Just as the people internalized the image of Christ over centuries of suffering, Sonya’s intimacy with the Gospel image of Lazarus coming back to life acts upon her like a stabilizing memory from her own troubled childhood. The Christian ideal, then, for the pre-modern individual, is neither a projection nor an eschatological or otherworldly principle, but a kind of

memory, and in this direct and largely unconscious sense, “the people,” to quote Zosima, are “carriers of God” (14:285). Here, alongside the problematic idealization of peasant culture, we can discern a coherent psychological theory – the notion that images bequeathed by past generations, when preserved as personal memories, operate as a stabilizing and nourishing unconscious ground for the personality.

What primarily defines the modern mind, by contrast, for Dostoevsky, is the distance it maintains from its own ground, from the memories, that is, that constitute its unconscious reservoirs. Only to the rational Western-styled modern consciousness is the “soul” a foreign entity, a threatening, punitive presence at the end a long, dark corridor, on the other side of a “miasmatic swamp,” to borrow Jung’s phrase. By the time Dostoevsky wrote *The Idiot*, having spent his career to date describing squeamish moderns in flight from “something” rising from “the depths” (*Notes from Underground*, 5:165; Pt. 2, Ch. 8), he had accumulated an extensive symbolic vocabulary for describing the flight from the unconscious, and had even become adept at making it into good novelistic fare. In *Crime and Punishment*, for example, Raskolnikov, in a state of terrible anxiety, dreams that he is lying in his elevated closet-like room (“*kletushka*” [6:25; Pt. 1, Ch. 3]) while oppressed by a violent commotion from the staircase below where his landlady is being savagely beaten, and from where her screams make their way up the staircase, while he, paralyzed by terror, attempts to lock the door to protect himself. The closet at the top of the building is a room in the normal sense, but, in Raskolnikov’s dream, it doubles as an illustrative map of the hero’s cerebral and disjointed psyche – a detached, speculative mind oppressed by mysterious subliminal agencies that howl wildly and terrifyingly from the depths below. A version of this image is repurposed later in the same novel to render Svidrigailov’s pre-suicidal anxiety, where he dreams that he too is lying in a closet-like room (“*kletushka*”; [6:388;

Pt. 6, Ch. 6]), this time in a hotel, and that he ventures out into the uncharted darkness of the hallway, walking “for a long time through the long, narrow corridor” until, “in a dark corner,” he discerns “some strange object, something that seemed alive,” “a child – a little girl” who is “shivering and crying.” The “something” that Svidrigailov finds in the darkness is a living being, and though he tries to send her to sleep, the child refuses to comply, and Svidrigailov watches in horror as she opens both eyes and laughs mockingly at him (6:392-3; Pt. 6, Ch. 6). If there is one thing that terrifies Dostoevsky’s cerebral moderns, that oppresses the *kletushka* or closet of modern consciousness, it is the awakening and impingement of the soul’s subliminal contents. Whether in the form of a landlady screaming from the staircase below, or an abused child awakening from the darkness, there is “something” in the “depths” that is the stuff of nightmare.

Towards the Figure in the Depths

In *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky turns these dream images of a living being emerging from the darkness in the direction of his own developing depth theology. Prince Myshkin – while possessing much of the meekness and kindness of Dostoevsky’s pre-modern “God-carriers” – is a thoroughly modern personality, an amnesiac, educated in the West, bearing a “Swiss understanding of man” (8:257; Pt. 2, Ch. 11), and therefore endowed with a comparatively fragile psychological constitution. Like Dostoevsky’s modern intellectuals, from the underground man to Raskolnikov, to Kirillov, he is engaged in a struggle against divine energies that plague him from “within the sadness, the soul’s darkness” – “rapturous” and “unbearable” “sensation[s] of life” which, in reflective moments, he acknowledges as divine (“that it was truly ‘beauty and prayer’ [...] he was not able to doubt” [8:188; Pt. 2, Ch. 5]), but from which he flees in terror, and which take him over in violent fits. In this context, Myshkin’s hotel in Part II can

be seen as the direct symbolic successor of Svidrigailov's hotel. Here Myshkin is not dreaming; he is awake, but in his waking state, he is oppressed by the "darkness in his soul," by some vague "demon" that "whispers to him" and which he wishes to "renounce" (8:192-3; Pt. 2, Ch. 5). Feeling "some kind of inner invincible disgust," "wanting to forget something, something present, urgent" we are told that he "attaches himself in his memories and mind to every external object" (8: 187-9; Pt. 2, Ch. 5) – that is, he projects the dreaded contents of his psyche onto the outside world, thus turning the world around him into a projective map of what he is trying to escape. Wrestling with feelings of shame and terror, he returns with "especial disgust" to his room at the hotel, feeling a "new, unbearable flood of shame, almost despair" as he approaches the gates (8:194; Pt. 2, Ch. 5).

Here Dostoevsky emphasizes the danger of the inward turn for the fragile idealist. In the literal sense, Myshkin is returning home to his hotel where he will be attacked by Rogozhin, his friend and jealous rival. In the projective sense, however, he is journeying into his own unplumbed inner darkness.¹⁰ As he approaches "the very beginning of the gateway," the day turns "dark, very dark," and he sees "a person in the depths of the gateway, in the semi-darkness, at the very entrance to the stairs." In a burst of resolution, Myshkin rushes up the stairs to where the figure is hiding – like the girl in Svidrigailov's dream – "in a dark niche"; he takes the figure "by the shoulders and turn[s] him back to the stairs, closer to the light: he wanted to see his face more clearly." As Myshkin pulls the mysterious figure into the light, "an extraordinary inner light illuminated his soul. The instant lasted maybe half a second; but still he remembered [...] his dreadful cry, which burst forth from his chest by itself and which no power could stop" (8:194-5; Pt. 2, Ch. 5). Here Dostoevsky's unprepared seeker, an idealist who has spent his life fleeing his "darkness" and who has developed no resources for encountering it, suddenly

attempts a reckoning with the figure that haunts him. As he pulls the “figure in the depths” out into the light, “convulsions overtake the whole body [...], a terrible, inconceivable and incomparable cry bursts out of the chest; in this cry everything human suddenly seems to vanish. [...] It even seems that someone else who is inside this person, is screaming,” evoking in observers “an unbearable horror, which even has something mystical in it” (8:195; Pt. 2, Ch. 5). To journey into the darkness, to be pierced by “an extraordinary inner light,” to be inhabited by a foreign being who acts through one’s own body – as a later character will put it, quoting scripture, “to fall into the hands of the living God” (14:281; Bk. 6, Ch. 2) – is rendered here not as a life-affirming epiphany but as a destructive and excruciating ordeal.

Myshkin’s passage through the gates to encounter the figure in the darkness turns out to be only a trial run for the novel’s much more harrowing mystical climax, that is, Myshkin’s journey into the purest darkness that Dostoevsky, as a novelist, can possibly evoke: the unlit, closed-windowed, curtained inner rooms of Rogozhin’s gloomy, thick-walled, monstrously large and cavernous house. Dostoevsky once declared that this final scene was “the most important thing in the novel,” the “richest and best poetic thought” of his “entire literary life” (28.2:318, 321), and he put a great deal of effort into making Rogozhin’s house not just a house, but a living being – a half-sleeping, half-conscious creature whose windows resemble eyelids and whose “physiognomy” is “concealing and hiding” something (8:170; Pt. 2, Ch. 3). Dostoevsky also took pains to portray the house’s owner, Rogozhin, through Ippolit’s eyes, as the embodiment of “that dark power” in nature – “that boundless power, that dumb, dark, and mute” force that forever “mocks” human beings (8:340-1; Pt. 3, Ch. 5), and then to describe the house as a reflection of Rogozhin himself (8:172; Pt. 2, Ch. 3). By portraying the house as “graveyard” (8:338; Pt. 3, Ch. 5), moreover, full of barely discernible images – portraits of bishops, faces, landscapes – that

hang on the walls, and of terrible secrets, a “dead body” somewhere “under the floorboards” (8:380; Pt. 3, Ch. 10), and by populating its ground floor with religious sectarians, Dostoevsky also makes the house the repository of vast and imponderable cultural memory. To this picture, “in one of the darkest rooms of the house, above the door” (8:338; Pt. 3, Ch. 5), he adds the *pièce de résistance* — a reproduction of Holbein’s *Dead Christ*, the wounded corpse of Christ in the tomb, the image of greatest value, according to Rogozhin (8:181; Pt. 2, Ch. 4), from among all the barely discernible pictures on the walls. All of this preparatory work ensures that when Myshkin enters the house at the end of the novel to discover the corpse of Nastasia Filippovna in its dark reaches, he is, in a projective or symbolic sense, journeying both into the depths of nature and into the collective unconscious of the Russian people as a whole.

Here we have the “richest and best poetic thought” of Dostoevsky’s “entire literary life” leading up to *The Idiot*: the journey of the fragile, unprepared, but courageous modern idealist into the depths of the unconscious. Armed only with good intentions and vague but lofty ideals, the seeker has no hope of navigating the almost impenetrable darkness and is defenseless against the brutal realities of violence and crucifixion that lie in wait to destroy his already precarious sanity. In these winding depths, Myshkin encounters neither a screaming landlady nor an abused child, but the dead body of a beloved being, a slowly rotting corpse laid out to resemble the dead Christ.

If we read *The Idiot* as a spiritual journey, we have to conclude that, for the modern individual, it is infinitely preferable, from the point of view of sanity and tranquility, simply to disavow the darkness within – to become either an atheist (that is, to imagine the human being as a competent rational creature with no subliminal depths); or an idealist (to eschew the darkness altogether in pursuit of an otherworldly thought); or yet again, a combination of the two, a

utopian revolutionary (to cast off the past as irredeemably tainted and to pursue a radically different future). In choosing these paths of escape, however, one also ensures that those unintegrated memories that have been relegated to the unconscious – the murder of Christ, for example at the hands of human beings – will be continually reenacted, in this case in the murder of Nastasia Filippovna (the “lamb,” as her surname Barashkova suggests). The tragedy of the novel, therefore, lies not in the triumph of evil over good, but in the powerlessness of modern people – even their best, most benevolent representatives – to encounter, much less resurrect, the discarded and murdered ideal that lies in the depths of the collective psyche. Atheism and idealism, for Dostoevsky, are rationalized forms of superficiality and hollowness, refusals to rise to the more formidable challenge of the religious life, which Alyosha will later describe to Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* as “the need to resurrect your dead who have perhaps never died” (14:210; Bk. 5, Ch. 3). In other words, the Christian ideal cannot be found at some lofty height, pointing away from the world (in the Swiss mountains for example); but must be salvaged instead from the depths, from within the reservoirs of memory, where it is spread out like a corpse (*à la* Holbein), though possibly still alive.

Twilight of the idols: Mother-Goddess, Wonder-Worker, Architect

To be modern, for Dostoevsky, means to lack the resources to pass through the inner miasmatic swamps that block and “muddy” the path to the “wellsprings of life” (8:310; Pt. 3, Ch. 4). Over the remainder of his career, Dostoevsky would ponder how to revive these resources for his readership, how to help the modern individual make this passage. By the time he wrote *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), having largely outgrown the influence of German idealism, Dostoevsky had reconceived of the ideal at the center of his own religious worldview – no longer

as an eschatological goal pointing humanity to the end of history but now as a resource in memory that guides the individual through the darkness of the psyche towards its own divine sources in the farthest depths, which are simply too overpowering and menacing to approach without a guide. To develop this new notion of the Christian ideal as resource and guide, Dostoevsky organizes *The Brothers Karamazov* around the spiritual journeys of three troubled and fragile idealists, the three eponymous brothers, each at war with his own subliminal “darkness,” each clinging to an ideal, or idol, as a means of escape, and each compelled, agonizingly, to forge a relationship with the “living God” in the depths.

Dostoevsky repeatedly calls attention to Alyosha’s youthful idealism early in the novel as a path of escape from the “soul’s darkness.” Alyosha, we discover, is “not at all a mystic”; rather he had had “hit upon the monastery path only because it alone struck him and presented itself as the ideal exit for his soul which was struggling from the darkness of worldly malice to the light of love” (14:17; Bk. 1, Ch. 4). Dostoevsky considers this statement important enough to make twice in the space of several pages, and, in repeating it, emphasizes that his hero is employing the “ideal” as a means of “exit” from the “darkness” of “his soul”: “I simply repeat that which I said above, that he set out on this path simply because it alone [...] presented itself as the entire *ideal of an exit for his soul which was struggling from the darkness towards the light*” (14:25; Bk. 1, Ch. 5, emphasis added). Alyosha enters the novel in an attempt to parse the “soul’s darkness,” to find his mother’s grave, to reconnect with a troubled childhood the mere discussion of which still has the power to send him into nervous convulsions (14:126-7; Bk. 3, Ch. 8). On this journey, he discovers an ideal in his elder that saves and stabilizes him, and Dostoevsky emphasizes both the nourishing quality of this ideal and its nearness to idolatry. Zosima’s “strength and power,” we are told, “acted strongly on [Alyosha’s] youthful imagination”;

Alyosha “believed unquestioningly in the miraculous power of his elder,” and “understood perfectly” the “strongest need and consolation of finding a shrine or a holy person, to fall down before that person and worship him” (14:29; Bk. 1, Ch. 5).

Dmitry’s idealism at the beginning of the novel is more tormented. For Dmitry, who considers himself a “monster,” “a base sensualist,” whose “soul” is perishing “in hell,” the “soul’s darkness” is an obsession, and he cleaves to his lofty ideal as his only possibility of deliverance. “Let me be damned,” he proclaims, “let me be base and despicable, but let me also kiss the hem of the robe in which my God is clothed” (14:98-99; Bk 3, Ch. 3). This “God” appears to Dmitry’s fastidious imagination in the form of a virtuous “goddess,” “the mother-Ceres” of Schiller’s poem, who descends to earth “from the Olympian heights” only to behold a disgusting and contemptuous creature – Dmitry’s projection of himself – kneeling abjectly at her feet (14:98; Bk. 3, Ch. 3). Dmitry’s self-hating idealism slides unrestrainedly into idolatry. He actively projects the lofty qualities of his “goddess” onto his virtuous benefactress Katerina Ivanovna, describing himself as “weeping, kneeling praying to Katya’s image” (14:143; Bk. 3, Ch. 11) while spending her money on food and drink. Like Myshkin who is offended by his “soul’s darkness,” Dmitry wishes that he could “narrow” the human being, to save him from the agony of being capable of such heights and depths – bearing within himself the highest “ideal of the Madonna,” from which his “heart burns, truly, truly burns, just as in the sinless years of youth,” while also being drawn perversely into what he perceives as the demonic abyss.

Though Ivan’s revulsion for the “disordered, damned” and “demonic chaos of the world” (14:209; Bk. 4, Ch. 3) is similar to Dmitry’s in its Manichean intensity, and though Ivan also feels “disgust at digging around in his own sensations,” oppressed by the “terrible nightmare of thoughts and feelings that boils in his soul” (15:47, 54; Bk. 11, Chs. 6, 7), his escapist idealism is

more complex. Fully schooled in Feuerbachian atheism, Ivan is well aware that the idealist God – whom he describes in Hegelian terms as a future-directed, all-embracing “eternal harmony” that will draw all contradictions into itself and “into which we will somehow blend” (14:214-15; Bk. 4, Ch. 3) – is a projection of the human mind. As he puts it to Alyosha, “it was truly the human being who invented God, and what’s strange, what’s truly marvelous is not that God exists in reality, but that such an idea [...] could enter the mind of such a wild and spiteful animal as the human being, so holy is it, so touching, so wise” (14:214; Bk. 4, Ch. 3). While all this is expressed with lighthearted irony, there is, however, another version of God whom Ivan takes more seriously, and in whom he professes a more anguished faith – that is, his image of a cruel, authoritarian “architect” who “founds his edifice” on human suffering with the utilitarian “goal of making human beings happy, to give them peace and calm in the end” (14:224; Bk. 4, Ch. 3). Though Ivan rages against this imagined deity, he also subscribes to its program, representing it obliquely in figure of the Grand Inquisitor, and aiming to become such a god himself, as a socialist revolutionary who plans on constructing a system for the alleviation of human suffering. Ivan, in other words, though educated in modern philosophy, has not yet fully walked the path of Feuerbachian atheism. He is not yet fully aware, that is, that the cruel authoritarian “God” whom he despises is a projection of his own most cherished hopes.

Dostoevsky prefaces the spiritual journeys of his protagonists, therefore, by *affirming* the principal conclusions of modern atheism. The gods of his idealists are projections, idols, paths of escape. In the case of each brother, the novel is about the painful relinquishing of an imaginary god who is an evident projection of the seeker’s own highest aspirations – whether: the miracle-working deity whom Alyosha perceives lovingly in Zosima; the lofty, nurturing mother-Goddess whom Dmitry projects onto Katerina Ivanovna; or the cruel, utilitarian architect whom Ivan

wishes both to dethrone and to become. For Dostoevsky, however, not all ideals are equal. At the heart of the novel lies the distinction between an *invented* ideal – a modern contrivance that serves as a makeshift means of escape from the “soul’s darkness” – and an *inherited* ideal, a shared resource in memory, that acts as a guide for the journey into the depths. The character of Zosima, though verging on the idolatrous in Alyosha’s imagination, is wholly committed to the task of preserving the historical Christian ideal. The work of religious culture, he explains, is “to preserve for now in seclusion the image of Christ in its magnificence and undistortedness, in the purity of God's truth, from the earliest fathers, apostles, and martyrs” as a resource and guide: “We wander over the earth, and if we did not have the precious image of Christ before us, we would perish and go astray as the human race did before the flood” (14:284, 290; Bk. 6, Ch. 3). As Zosima explains, the revelations of scripture work on the mind from within “like a precious memory”; the “seed of the word of God” enters the “soul” in early childhood, and “lives in the soul throughout [one’s] life, lurking there amidst the darkness [...] as a bright spot, as a great reminder” (14:264-6; Bk. 6, Ch. 3).

Alyosha’s mystical dream-journey, after the death and decomposition of his elder, is a study in contrasts with Myshkin’s disastrous and projective journeys into the darkness from slightly more than a decade earlier. Like Myshkin, Alyosha gathers the courage to confront the rotting corpse of his beloved friend in the tomb, but in Alyosha’s case, when he kneels next to the body, the room “expands,” and he embarks farther, now in his dream, through the “scraps of thoughts” that “flicker in his soul” to encounter the presence of God as a source, “the Sun,” the maker of “new wine,” who is “terrible” and “dreadful” to behold (14:325-7; Bk. 3, Ch. 4). What is most striking about Alyosha’s journey into the unconscious to perceive the “wellsprings of life,” is that – unlike Myshkin’s psyche, which is constituted only by a thick and menacing

darkness – Alyosha’s psyche has a landscape to it, a landscape borrowed directly from scripture, from the imagery of the Gospel of John. In the depths, therefore, Alyosha finds not an impenetrably dark room housing nothing but a corpse and a buzzing fly; rather he dreams that he is being “summoned to a feast,” the feast at Cana, where the body of his elder has been resurrected, and where God, or Christ, whom he fears to behold directly, presides as the source and center of the ceremony. Myshkin enters the darkness of his hotel to be attacked and struck down by the figure in the dark which then screams inhumanly through this body. By contrast, Alyosha, whose psychic landscape has been shaped and informed by the Christian story, is able to endure the ordeal of “something firm and immutable” entering “his soul,” “filling him suddenly to the point of pain” as a joyful event (14:327-8; Bk. 3, Ch. 4), indeed, as the ecstatic turning point of his life.

Most ailing moderns, Dostoevsky warns, will have neither the benefit of Zosima’s mentorship, nor a “sacred memory” preserved from childhood (the strongest of all resources, according to Alyosha [15:195; Ep., Ch. 3]), and therefore will not bear within themselves images capable of guiding them towards the “new wine” at the core of the psyche. Indeed, most moderns will be closer in their inner architecture to Dmitry – will descend, that is, through “the torments of the soul” into the depths only to find a desert landscape, a burnt-down village plagued by drought and starvation, in which an infant starves at the “dried-up” breasts of its mother (14:457; Bk. 9, Ch. 8). Dmitry’s lament is that there is no source of sustenance in his inner village – in other words, no infinite “source” of “new wine” that sustains the landscape of the soul. As Dmitry outgrows his idealism, however, and overcomes his contempt for the “cruel insect growing and spreading in [his] soul” (14:99; Bk. 3, Ch. 3), he discovers the possibility of a God in the depths. “If they cast God away from the earth,” he declares, “we will find him

underground!” – and he describes the act of salvaging, “in the mines, under the earth” a “resurrected person,” a “new person within,” a being who had formerly been “imprisoned” in the darkness in an un-resurrected form. This “person in the depths,” “revived and resurrected” from a “frozen heart” also recalls the “person in the darkness” whom Myshkin had “pulled into the light” and who screamed out from within his body with such convulsive violence. Dmitry, however, comes to understand this act of “bringing” the inner person “out from the cavern into the light” not as something that can be done in a burst of resolution, but as the outcome of long, sustained inner work: “to resuscitate and resurrect the deadened heart in this imprisoned person, one can tend to him for years, and bring him out from the cavern into the light already as an elevated soul” (15:31; Bk. 11, Ch. 4). There is, however, Dostoevsky warns further, a worse predicament than Dmitry’s, namely the absence of any psychic landscape whatsoever: to be locked, as Ivan is in his nightmare, in his own little room, with all the windows closed, and with no one but a thinly disguised projection of himself (“man,” as Ivan points out, also “created the devil in his own image and likeness” [14:217; Bk. 5, Ch. 4]) to keep him company.

Opiates of the Intelligentsia

The atheist project of the 19th century aimed to un-blur the lines between the transcendent and the transcendental. For Feuerbach, responding to the German idealist tradition, God is transcendental – a principle belonging to the sphere of thought – but not transcendent, not existing beyond thought or experience. The problem with Christian idealism, to paraphrase Feuerbach, is that its adherents ignore this distinction, projecting what belongs to the mind onto an imaginary beyond. For Dostoevsky, the Christian ideal is indeed transcendental – the greatest thought of which the human mind is capable – and its purpose is to point and guide the seeker on

the journey towards the image-less mystery of the transcendent which can only be experienced as an infinite source of “active love” annexing or annihilating the self from within. For the fragmented modern mind these two Gods are disjointed; the ideal points away from life into the future, while the energies of the “living God” howl from the depths like an unwanted memory. From *The Idiot* to *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky attempted to align the image of Christ with the energies of the Holy Spirit, to heal the modern mind by salvaging the image of the transcendental God as the very landscape of the unconscious.

Dostoevsky’s depth theology presents an interesting challenge to the valor commonly associated with modern atheism. Chernyshevsky, for example, held to his Christian faith well into his twenties, though he confided to his diary that, to borrow Victoria Frede’s paraphrase, “he believed *only* because he lacked the ‘firmness and decisiveness’ necessary to reject his habitual faith. Had he the ‘courage’ to stand by what he thought ‘in theory,’ he would stop believing and become a follower of Feuerbach” (Frede, 128). To become an atheist, for Chernyshevsky, was to gather the courage to forsake the consolations of an imaginary, all-powerful custodian. Such a notion of faith is an absurdity in Dostoevsky’s world, where the trembling seeker ventures into the darkness to salvage and resurrect the image of Christ only to endure, at best, a painful annihilation from within by the energies of the Holy Spirit. Here Dostoevsky reverses the charge of cowardice. To the “ordinary, untroubled” modern who is not oppressed by the presence of God in the depths, Dostoevsky pays almost no attention. As his narrator states in the conclusion to *The Idiot*: “Lebedev, Keller, Ganya, Ptitsyn and many other characters of our story live as before, have changed little, and we have almost nothing to tell about them” (8:508; Pt. 4, Ch. 12). But for the “original, or in other words, troubled” person – the modern atheist or idealist who feels the encroachment of the indwelling God and attempts to flee in horror – Dostoevsky

advocates the hard, fearful work of “resurrecting one’s dead who have perhaps never died,” the cultivating and preserving of the most sacred images, ideals, and memories of the culture as a landscape for the soul. Without such images, with nothing but superficial ideology for the psyche to claim as its landscape, atheism, he warns, will become an absolute necessity, a requirement for self-preservation.

This re-appraisal of Dostoevsky’s idealism allows us to amend a pervasive misreading of Dostoevsky’s theory of evil that has become endemic to Dostoevsky studies – namely, the notion of the “dual abyss.”¹¹ In conflating Dmitry’s squeamish and idealistic self-disgust from his first major speech in *the Brothers Karamazov* with Dostoevsky’s own view of human nature, critics have repeatedly misinterpreted Dostoevsky as a medieval Gnostic dualist who imagines the human being as poised between a “light” and a “dark” unconscious (Chizhevskii, 59): the high “ideal of the Madonna” and the low “ideal of Sodom” (14: 100; Bk. 3, Ch. 3). As an immature idealist, Dmitry Karamazov, as we have seen, is dangerous not because he has “deep” and “dark” drives flowing through him, but because he fears and despises his depths, demonizes them, and therefore is at war with the life-affirming currents of “active love” that threaten to overtake him. As he himself explains to Alyosha after his wrenching accelerated maturation, his various crimes were in fact hysterical attempts at suppression. “Unknown ideas were raging within me,” he admits, “and I got drunk, fought, raged about [...] in order to assuage them within me [...] in order to calm them, to suppress them” (15:31; Bk. 11, Ch. 4). Nor, one might add, is Dmitry’s father any kind of effervescent Dionysian. A quasi-amnesiac, visited periodically by “a spiritual terror and a moral commotion [...] almost physically calling out within his soul”—or as he describes it, “as if my soul were trembling in my throat” (14:86; Bk. 3, Ch. 1)—the continual

binges and orgies of his household can be readily understood as desperate distractions, attempts to medicate these inwardly insurgent threats through narcotic oblivion.

By disentangling Dostoevsky's psychology from Dmitry's adolescent Manicheanism, we see that evil, for Dostoevsky, is consistently – violently, oppressively – superficial. Ivan's devil is a talkative parasite who tortures his interlocutor with light irony and glib chatter. Dostoevsky's "demons" are, to use Shatov's words, "paper people" (10: 110; Pt. 1, Ch. 4) with *nothing* in them, who are therefore easily controlled by external forces, defenseless against any passing ideological suggestion. Crimes are committed in Dostoevsky's world not from deep subterranean urges but from giddy, frantic attempts to flee "something" inward and menacing. Svidrigailov commits suicide to escape the terrors and apparitions that he is too feeble to confront; it is the sick child in the dark corridor refusing to go back to sleep that propels him out of his hotel with his gun loaded. Raskolnikov's murders allow him to erect a temporary barrier against the "something" that plagues him from within, howling in the depths of his dark "staircase," and which, only in the novel's final pages, claims him violently with its "infinite sources of life" (6:421; Ep., Ch. 2). Dostoevsky did not live in Dante's scholastic universe in which the depths are the storehouse of anguish, horror, and punitive despair. As a theologian of the depths, Dostoevsky sought ways for the modern individual to journey through the miasmal swamps, past the rotting bodies, in search of a nourishing ground.

During the last decade of his life, Dostoevsky addressed the crisis of modern superficiality, and the fear of acquiring depth, of confronting the memories that haunt the modern mind – the abused child in the darkness, the starving infant, the rotting corpse – through his preoccupation with Claude Lorrain's *The Golden Age*. In having his characters (Stavrogin, Versilov, the Ridiculous Man) undergo dream-experiences of a gloriously blissful ancient human

origin patterned after Lorrain's painting, Dostoevsky explored his intuition that human beings, whether willingly or not, carry, as an aspect of the soul's inherent knowledge, the collective memory of the whole tragic progression of human civilization from its inception. As he noted in his *Diary of a Writer*, "it is possible to know a very great deal unconsciously" (21:38). A culture in need of Freudian psychoanalysis is one that has become neurotic from suppressing its drives and impulses. A culture in need of Dostoevskian depth theology is one whose collective memory reaches back only to bitter injustices, hungry serfs, abused children, burnt-down villages, rotting corpses. The goal of the Dostoevskian endeavor is to find an ideal amid the rubble that could guide one farther back, through the miasmal swamp, to the lost "wellsprings" that can feed the starving village of the psyche from within.

Notes

¹ All passages from Dostoevsky are taken from Dostoevskii, *Polnoe Sobranie*. Hereafter citations will appear in parentheses with volume and page number, 15:60. For the novels, I also include book and chapter number as an easier form of reference for non-Russian readers, Bk. 11, Ch. 8. All translations are mine.

² In examining the problem of inwardness in Dostoevsky, this essay draws on conclusions from my book, *Dostoevsky and the Riddle of the Self*, and from more recent essays, "Dostoevsky on Evil as Safe Haven and Anaesthetic" and "Dostoevsky's Guide to the Inner Life."

³ Robert Louis Jackson describes Dostoevsky's worldview as one of human striving toward a "transcendental 'ideal'," a striving that "gives evidence to the divine spark in [man's] nature, to a fundamental freedom of will and to a capacity to effect his own salvation" (Jackson, x). In his treatment of Dostoevsky's theism as idealism ("God is Ideal", 114-48), Steven Cassedy takes Dostoevsky's 1864 journal entry as the "kernel" of Dostoevsky's "religious conception." (Cassedy, 115); as does Liza Knapp in appraising Dostoevsky's view of "earthly existence as a 'balance' between man's failure and his success in living up to the idea of Christlike love that runs counter to the laws of nature" (Knapp, 215). See also Edith Clowes who describes the religious impulse in Dostoevsky's works as the "yearning for some firm, even absolute ideal": "From the psychic squalor of the underground emerges its lofty opposite" (Clowes, 98).

⁴ Dmitrii Chizhevskii's classic essay "Dostoevskii – psikholog," for example, posits, almost exclusively on the basis of Dmitry Karamazov's statement, a "dual unconscious" in Dostoevsky, a "light" unconscious and a "dark" unconscious (Chizhevskii, 59). Among Dostoevsky's early Symbolist readers, some version of this view is ubiquitous; see, for example, Vyacheslav Ivanov's description of Dmitry's dictum about "God and the devil" as that of "the author," and as the statement through which "man pronounces his verdict upon the whole world, in the sense that he decides either for [...] being in God; or [...] for flight from God into Not-being" (Ivanov, 38).

⁵ On Feuerbach's complex relationship with the German idealist tradition, see Ameriks, 359-64.

⁶ Irina Paperno explains Feuerbach's "truly extraordinary influence" on Russian radical thought in terms of his appeal, ironically, to the Russian Orthodox religious sensibility: "Feuerbach's ideas fell on ground that had been prepared by the teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy. In fact, a central tenet of Orthodox theology, formed in Greek Patristic thought, is the deification of man: God was made man that man might be made God" (Paperno, 204).

⁷ The spectrum extends from Joseph Frank's appraisal of Myshkin as Dostoevsky's "extremest incarnation" of the ideal of Christ-like selflessness (Frank, 275) to Elena Mestergazi's analysis of Myshkin as a defective materialist. Explorers of the middle ground include Caryl Emerson, who observes Myshkin's weakness for "monologiz[ing] his fellow characters," imposing ideal narratives onto them (Emerson, 256); and Sasha Spektor who reads Myshkin as corrupted by his need to become an author of others (Spektor, 83-101).

⁸ Though the Prince fails "in *this* world," as Joseph Frank argues, "he brings with him the unearthly illumination of a higher one [...] that for Dostoevsky provided the only ray of hope for the future" (Frank, 341).

⁹ For the more traditional reading of the world of society in *The Idiot* as "baleful," "delirious," "ulcerous," "more terrible and more tragic than the world of *Crime and Punishment*," see Mochulsky, 352.

¹⁰ For a Freudian reading of the scene as a journey into the psyche, see Dalton, 107-16.

¹¹ See note 4, above.

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