

FEUERBACH, KANT, DOSTOEVSKII:**The Evolution of “Heroism” and “Asceticism”
in Bulgakov’s Work to 1909***Ruth Coates*

Sergei Bulgakov famously structures his essay for *Vekhi*, “Geroizm i podvizhnichestvo. (Iz razmyshlenii o religioznoi prirode russkoi intelligentsii)” (“Heroism and Asceticism [Reflections on the Religious Nature of the Russian Intelligentsia]”), around the binary opposition expressed in its title. Sections one to four develop a portrait of the Russian *intelligent* as a self-glorifying “hero” bent on saving the Russian people, while sections five to seven describe the type of the Christian ascetic who serves the world in a spirit of humility. Bulgakov argues that Russia requires the second type, for the first will lead her to destruction. The worldview expressed in his essay is the most Christianized of all those of the *Vekhi* contributors, and, more specifically, it is the only one to be colored by Russian Orthodoxy. The symposium captures Bulgakov midway on his intellectual trajectory from orthodox Marxism via Kantian idealism to the Orthodox priesthood.¹ The philosophical premises of his argument are still Kantian, but the tone is religious. Nevertheless, Bulgakov has yet to find his own Orthodox voice; instead he relies almost entirely upon that of Dostoevskii, not least for the heroism/asceticism opposition itself.

Russian Orthodox culture has always been constructed on the fundamental opposition of the sacred and the profane.² Since the time of the seventeenth-century schism, the forces ranged against orthodoxy have been equated with the Antichrist, and the notion of a false religion, pseudo-orthodoxy, has become established. In modern secular Russian culture no one has assimilated this ancient archetype more than Dostoevskii. In his

artistic system of values, the image of Christ, the God-man (*Bogochelovek*),³ the center of the Orthodox faith and the treasure of the Russian people, is set against the image of the man-god (*chelovekobog*), the all-powerful human pseudo-savior that is the fantasy of the deracinated atheistic socialist *intelligent*. In *Brat'ia Karamazovy* (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 1881), the novel with which Bulgakov most closely engages, the opposition is embodied in Ivan/the Grand Inquisitor and the elder Zosima/Christ. The spiritual fate of Russia, for Dostoevskii, depends upon a choice between the God-man and the man-god.

Nevertheless, the manifest parallels between Dostoevskii and Bulgakov that are apparent even from this brief summary are by no means fixed. They have been arrived at by a process of evolution which can be traced through an examination of some of the essays Bulgakov wrote prior to *Vekhi*. The object of this chapter is to analyze the development of the terms “heroism” and “asceticism” in Bulgakov’s early work in order to shed light not only on his dynamic relationship with Dostoevskii, but also on his developing understanding of and sympathy for his native Orthodox tradition.

HEROISM

Dostoevskii made the term *chelovekobog* his own, but it derives indirectly from the thought of two German philosophers, both Young Hegelians and proponents of atheism: Ludwig Feuerbach, best known for his *Die Wesenheit des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*, 1841) and Max Stirner, author of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and its Own*, 1844). It is known that Dostoevskii was familiar with the ideas of Feuerbach and Stirner, both from discussions with his early mentor Belinskii and from meetings of the Petrashevskii circle.⁴ Neither Feuerbach nor Stirner actually themselves use the German equivalent of *chelovekobog* (*Menschgott*) or the abstract nouns *chelovekobožhie* and *chelovekobožhestvo* (*Menschgottum*).⁵ It is likely that these derive instead from the critical reception of Feuerbach’s system as anthropotheism. In fact, to designate his “new philosophy” Feuerbach briefly employs the Greek-derived term anthropotheism (*Anthropotheismus*) in his short monograph *Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie* (*Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy*, 1842).⁶

Walicki, and after him Frank, both cite the *petrashevets* Nikolai Speshnev as a probable mediator between the German philosophers and Dostoevskii.⁷ Their claim is based on a letter, not actually addressed to Dostoevskii, in which Speshnev writes, “Anthropotheism [*Antropoteizm*] is also a religion, only a different one. It divinizes a new and different object, but there is nothing new about the fact of divinization.... Is the difference between a god-man and a man-god really so great?”⁸ Did Dostoevskii take the term *chelovekobog* from Speshnev, and was Speshnev concretizing the abstract noun *chelovekobozhie* to mark the progression from a Feuerbachian to a Stirnerian worldview?

These questions are relevant because much of the interest in Bulgakov's reception of Dostoevskii lies in the tension between Feuerbach and Stirner, between *chelovekobozhie* and the *chelovekobog*. In his 1905 essay “Religiia chelovekobozhiiia u L. Feierbakha” (“Ludwig Feuerbach's Religion of Man-Godhood”), Bulgakov demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the polemics between the two. His exposition of Feuerbach's work is geared around two main points. First, he discusses the fact that Feuerbach's position is not strictly speaking atheism, but anthropotheism (*antropoteizm*) (77–78):⁹ his objective was “not to abolish religion, but to humanize it.”¹⁰ Humanity was to re-appropriate the divine essence it had projected onto an illusory god, to take back what was its own. In Feuerbach's words: “Man is the god of man: *homo homini deus est*” (75). Second, he emphasizes that what is divinized by Feuerbach is not the self but the human species, humanity as a whole: “His *homo homini deus est* should be translated thus: the human race is the god of the human individual, *the species is the god of the specimen* [*vid est' bog dlia individa*]” (79). The individual person is limited and flawed; only the human race as a whole is perfect. Thus the divine predicates—goodness, truth, immortality—have their locus in humanity. Stirner's answer to Feuerbach's “positive, humanistic” atheism is a more radical amoralistic, individualistic, atheism (91–2). In Bulgakov's view, Stirner correctly exposed Feuerbach's anthropotheism as just another manifestation of religion; he debunked the latter's divinization of humanity as another form of enslavement of the individual, and he mocked his sentimental attachment to moral values as having no foundation. “Mir geht nichts über Mich”—“There is nothing higher than Me,” was Stirner's

response to *homo homini deus est* (92). Thus, according to Bulgakov, “Stirner is the truth, the disclosed secret, of Feuerbach” (97). Feuerbach leads to Stirner.

Nevertheless, Bulgakov devotes only one chapter of his essay to the Feuerbach-Stirner polemics. The essay makes it clear that at this time Stirner, and his successor Nietzsche, are not essential to Bulgakov. Rather, his overriding objective is to counter Feuerbachian anthropotheism as an integral and central part of his polemic with Marxism. In Bulgakov’s view, expressed in this essay and elsewhere, supposedly scientific theories of social progress of all complexions are the inheritors of Feuerbach, as they all accord humanity the highest value, even in those cases, such as Marxism, in which their founders disavowed Feuerbach’s sentimentalism (as the late Engels did): all are atheistic humanists. “Their atheism is just as much an anthropotheism [*antropoteizm*] as Feuerbach’s, and in this sense all its representatives, regardless of their shade, are in principle opposed to the more radical atheists Nietzsche and Stirner, who in the name of atheism also deny anthropotheism, and having denied the heavenly God, do not want an earthly divinity either” (99). In what follows I shall argue that Bulgakov’s obsession with Feuerbach and his connection with Marxism strongly affects Bulgakov’s initial reception of Dostoevskii, focusing on his reading of Ivan Karamazov in the 1901 essay “Ivan Karamazov kak filosofskii tip” (“Ivan Karamazov as a Philosophical Type”). Analysis of Bulgakov’s essay for *Vekhi*, however, reveals a discernible shift away from the Feuerbachian *chelovekobozhie* and towards the Stirnerian *chelovekobog* as the prototype for the “hero”-*intelligent*. This shift brings Bulgakov into a position of greater agreement with Dostoevskii’s worldview, as indeed the essay as a whole demonstrates.

“Ivan Karamazov as a Philosophical Type” is one of the essays included in the 1903 collection *Ot marksizma k idealizmu* (*From Marxism to Idealism*). An examination of the references to Dostoevskii in the collection as a whole reveals the overwhelming importance of Ivan Karamazov to Bulgakov during this transitional period: eleven out of twelve references are to Ivan, the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor,” or the philosophical issues that Bulgakov associates with these. (The twelfth reference is to Dostoevskii’s “Pushkin Speech”—delivered on the occasion of the unveiling of the Pushkin

monument in Moscow in 1880—in the context of a discussion of the problem of nationalism: the “Pushkin Speech” will dominate Bulgakov’s thinking later, in the *Vekhi* essay.) One reason for this is that Bulgakov identifies with Ivan, whose condition in the novel, like Bulgakov’s own, “is one of mistrust, of a loss of faith in the old, which has not yet been replaced by the new” (88).¹¹ This transitional status of Ivan is reinforced by the position accorded to the essay in the collection: fourth, immediately after the three essays included to represent Bulgakov’s Marxism (dating from 1896–98), and thus the first properly transitional text.

Another reason for the prominence of Ivan and the “Legend” in the collection concerns the precise nature of Bulgakov’s interest in man-Godhood at this time. After all, there are several other *loci classici* treating this theme in Dostoevskii’s oeuvre—Raskol’nikov’s “Napoleon” theory, Kirillov’s suicide rationale, Shigalev’s theory of despotism, the character of Stavrogin—with all of which Bulgakov was of course familiar. But these are all treatments of the *chelovekobog*, the strong, self-willed, unprincipled individual with charismatic power over the ordinary majority. As such they lend themselves less well as material through which to polemicize with the *chelovekobozhie* of scientific socialism.

It is of course possible to object that Ivan Karamazov has been associated just as much, if not more, with the theme of amoralistic individualism (“If God does not exist, all is permitted”) as with the theme of atheistic humanism. And indeed, it is very interesting to observe how Bulgakov manipulates Dostoevskii’s material to fit his own philosophical and political agenda. This manipulation can be illustrated by examination of Bulgakov’s treatment of Ivan’s protest against the suffering of the innocent, and through his interpretation of the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor.”

After introducing the theme of man-Godhood through a presentation of Ivan’s views on the matter as quoted to him by his hallucinated devil, Bulgakov moves on to a discussion of Ivan’s well-known rejection of a divine order which tolerates the unacceptable suffering of innocent children. Ivan, he argues, cannot accept the premise that present suffering can be justified by future happiness. Bulgakov presents this as a rejection of eudaemonism, the theory whereby the value of an action is determined by the degree of its capacity to produce happiness. In his polemic with Marxism he is at

this time arguing that socialism built on a positivistic foundation replaces religion with belief in progress, which offers as a justification for present suffering under capitalism the happiness of the free humanity of the future order. Bulgakov rejects this as a form of eudaemonism, arguing that a valid ethics must do justice to the principle, derived originally from the Gospel but now established within contemporary consciousness, of the essential equality of persons as moral subjects. It is unjust to require that those living now, or in the past, should sacrifice their happiness for the sake of future beneficiaries.

In using Ivan to demonstrate his own argument, Bulgakov is either blind to, or deliberately overlooks, the obvious fact that Ivan is objecting not to the theory of progress and the socialist paradise, but to the Christian concept of heaven, and not to the notion that the suffering of children benefits others now or in the future and is therefore justified, but that the happiness of those same children in the next life makes up for their suffering on earth. Had he not overlooked this, Bulgakov would have had to acknowledge that his hero Ivan is diametrically opposed to Bulgakov himself on the question of theodicy. While Ivan cannot be reconciled to accepting a justification for suffering that is inaccessible to his “Euclidean” mind, Bulgakov argues at length elsewhere in *From Marxism to Idealism* that the moral meaningfulness of our lives is predicated upon the fact that we have to deal with evil as it presents itself in our experience, namely, as irrational, while accepting in faith that, in the metaphysical sphere, evil has a rationale (227–29).¹² As it is, Bulgakov recruits Ivan as an ally in the fight against scientific socialism. Thus he is here interested in reading Ivan as a character who struggles with the moral implications of his atheism rather than as a character who struggles with the apparent injustice of the Christian world conception.

In his polemics with scientific socialism Bulgakov also argues that the belief in progress and the future new human being depends of necessity on an act of faith—that it is a pseudo-religious belief, which is therefore also subject to doubt. In his presentation of the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” Bulgakov shifts the dominant of his interpretation of Ivan from the character who struggles with the moral implications of his atheism to the character who harbors doubts about the *capacity* of humanity to

achieve man-Godhood (as opposed to the desirability of it doing so) (99). Humans are too weak to take up the challenge of freedom, thinks the Grand Inquisitor/Ivan (100). Against the grain of the usual interpretation, Bulgakov reads this idea not as a riposte to Christianity (though he does not suppress the object of the Grand Inquisitor's polemic in his summary of the story) but as a riposte to scientific socialism's dream of a transformed humanity: "to the question as to whether humanity is capable of leaving its present, debased condition and making room in itself for the onset of a new, free, autonomous moral life, of carrying out the task allotted to it in the future, the Grand Inquisitor answers with a spiteful and passionate 'no'" (102). This ambiguous and curious wording (the reference to a "present, debased, condition" and "future" onset of a free life) reveals again what is Bulgakov's primary motive for using Dostoevskii at this stage in his career, namely to refute the theory of progress. In order to foreground the concept of man-Godhood in the first sense of a transformed collective humanity, he does not exploit the obvious potential for exposing the Inquisitor as a man-God in the second, Stirnerian sense.

When Bulgakov does eventually address the problem of the despotic ruler, it is once again to use Dostoevskii's material as a vehicle to air another of the arguments central to his conflict with Marxism, namely that as a positivistic worldview it cannot philosophically justify its core value of equality, and that its theory of progress is predicated on a disregard for the equal value of all. He argues that the Grand Inquisitor is anti-Christian (anti-Christ) in the sense that he rejects the Christian precept of the moral equality of all humans before God (which Bulgakov sees re-stated in the Kantian dictum that the person must be viewed not as a means but an end in itself) and replaces it with the pagan (pre-Christian) differentiation between the ethics of the master and the ethics of the slave. Not unexpectedly, Bulgakov draws a comparison to Nietzsche's neo-pagan, anti-Christian ethics, also pointing out that the latter regarded the emergence of a master-race as the goal of history (104–05). Bulgakov states that Dostoevskii wanted to show how an atheistic ethics is always in danger of reverting to pagan norms: "People are equal in God, but they are not equal in nature, and this natural inequality defeats the ethical ideal of their equality wherever this ideal is voided of its religious sanction" (104).

The connection with paganism and the point about people being unequal in nature are surely not Dostoevskii's, but Bulgakov's own. Still, what is most striking is that Bulgakov resists making the usual and apparently obvious point that the "Legend" illustrates how, for Dostoevskii, socialism must always end in tyranny. This entrenched view of Dostoevskii's, founded on the premise that socialism is intrinsically atheistic, is precisely the one that Bulgakov is fighting to overcome, so it is not surprising that he does not want to draw attention to it here. Though Bulgakov agrees that *Marxism* is intrinsically atheistic, the new ideological position that he is forming at this time is that social democracy as such is not only compatible with philosophical idealism and with Christianity, but that its values of justice and equality have no foundation without them. Thus Bulgakov's conclusion about Dostoevskii and socialism is a blatant imposition of his own view upon Dostoevskii: the latter "regarded the socialist worldview ... as something of the order of a moral illness, but an illness of growth, as a transitional worldview that preceded a higher synthesis which, I might add, would consist in the merging of the economic demands of socialism with the principles of philosophical idealism, and the justification of the former by means of the latter" (109).

Though "Heroism and Asceticism" is not "about" Dostoevskii, its argument and vision are much closer to him than the essay discussed above that *is* "about" him. We can speculate that the change in emphasis has to do with "events." Between 1900 and 1905, Bulgakov's polemic with Marxism and other forms of positivistic socialism was conducted on the plane of theory. "Heroism and Asceticism," on the other hand, is an analysis of the Russian intelligentsia based on Bulgakov's experience both of the revolution of 1905 (which inspired the *Vekhi* symposium) and of the second State Duma of 1907, of which Bulgakov was a member. In confronting the political reality facing Russia at this time, the apparent inability of the radical left to engage with the political process and effect concrete reforms, Bulgakov willy-nilly psychologizes his objections to *chelovekobozhie* in the form of a critique of the leaders of the revolution seen as so many *chelovekobogi*.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that Bulgakov is the only *Vekhi* contributor to develop the theme of "the heroism of self-worship," the savior mentality, in his critique of the intelligentsia. On the other

hand, both Nikolai Berdiaev and especially Semen Frank highlight the theme of anthropotheism.¹³ Defending absolute values, Berdiaev sees the intelligentsia's "worship of man and worship of the people" as idolatrously replacing love of God and the truth (6), and concurs with the earlier Bulgakov in regarding scientific positivism as a "special religion" (8). For Frank, faith in the future happiness of the people "takes the place of authentic religion in the consciousness of the atheistic intelligentsia" (142), and he actually rehearses Stirner's challenge to Feuerbach that only amorality can derive from the rejection of absolute values (135).¹⁴ However, in his analysis of the contradiction in terms that is the intelligentsia's ideology of "nihilistic moralism" (seen as embodying the tension between Feuerbach and Stirner), Frank nevertheless contends that, in the classic Russian *intelligent*, moralism displaces nihilism (149). Bulgakov's new emphasis on the self-worship of the *intelligent*, rather than the latter's worship of the people, reflects his greater immersion in Dostoevskii relative to the other contributors: he makes ten references to the novelist in his essay, while Berdiaev mentions him only once, and Frank not at all.¹⁵

If Bulgakov has previously focused on scientific socialism as a pseudo-religion, as anthropotheism, in "Heroism and Asceticism" the focus is on the intelligentsia as a pseudo-religious sect. Dostoevskii is explicitly credited by Bulgakov with being the first person to point out the intelligentsia's religious traits (20).¹⁶ In his turn, Bulgakov draws our attention to its spirit of martyrdom, its utopianism, its Puritanism, and its dogmatic fundamentalism on the question of atheism, which he wittily describes as the faith into which all members of the intelligentsia are uncritically baptized (22). And if previously Bulgakov has analyzed as a philosophical consequence of Feuerbach's thesis the tendency to deify the common people, in "Heroism and Asceticism" he notes that the intelligentsia's intense feeling of guilt before the Russian people is the atheist's reassignment of the Christian's sense of her or his guilt before God (21).

Further, as indicated above, if Bulgakov has been previously preoccupied almost exclusively with Feuerbach's and Marxism's "religion of man-Godhood," within a few paragraphs of the third chapter of

“Heroism and Asceticism” this theme transmutes into the theme of *self-worship*. Thus he begins the chapter by stating, “The intelligentsia rejects Christianity and its standards and appears to accept atheism. In fact, instead of atheism, it adopts the dogmas of the religion of man-Godhood, in one or another of the variants produced by the Western European Enlightenment, and then turns this religion into idolatry.” However, he goes on to argue that “the basic tenet” of man-Godhood—the “belief in the natural perfection of man and in infinite progress ... effected by human forces”—leads to “man [putting] himself in place of Providence and [seeing] himself as his own savior” (26). He concludes that the essence of man-Godhood is self-worship. In Russia, the intelligentsia sees itself as the savior of the Russian people, as Russia’s hero: “*Heroism*—for me, this word expresses the fundamental essence of the intelligentsia’s world-view and ideal, and it is the heroism of self-worship” (26–27). Later on in the essay he will state unequivocally that “the hero ... is the man-God” (39).

As we saw, in the Feuerbach essay of 1905 Bulgakov regarded Feuerbach and Stirner as ideological opposites, despite their shared atheism. The former had a substitute religion, that of *chelovekobozhie*; the latter had no religion except the elevation of the self. In “Heroism and Asceticism” Bulgakov admits a synthesis of the two, despite being aware of the ideological tension between them, as is apparent in the following statement:

Our intelligentsia is almost unanimous in striving for collectivism, for the closest possible communality of human life, but its own temperament renders the intelligentsia itself an anti-communal, anti-collective force, since it bears within itself the divisive principle of heroic self-affirmation. The hero is to some extent a superman, confronting his neighbors in the proud and defiant pose of a savior. (29)

This insight had been reached by Dostoevskii long before. Unlike Stirner’s *Einzigiger*, his *chelovekobogi* (Raskol’nikov, the Grand Inquisitor) are interested in the social sphere, and see themselves as the saviors of mankind. They combine egoism, or at least desire to rule, with altruism. In Russia, illogically, “Stirner” did not supersede “Feuerbach.” Rather, egoistic amorality, the logical outcome of materialistic atheism, existed side by side with faith in humanity and devotion to its cause. In “Heroism

and Asceticism” Bulgakov understands this, which brings him into line with Dostoevskii's own treatment of the man-Godhood theme.

ASCETICISM

We should view Bulgakov's engagement with asceticism in the context of the widespread preoccupation with the relationship between the “spirit” and the “flesh” in the culture of late imperial Russia. Since about 1900, in pursuit of a “new religious consciousness” and under the influence of Nietzsche, the literary avant-garde, led by Viacheslav Ivanov, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, and Vasilii Rozanov, had set its face against the institutional Church, among other reasons because of its perceived denigration of the material world and bodily life. This perception was connected with the resurgent dominance of monasticism in Russia and the fact that the Church leadership was appointed from the (celibate) monastic clergy. A second reason asceticism was viewed with great hostility was because it was considered selfish to pursue one's own salvation in isolation from society at a time of unprecedented social and political upheaval. In this respect, Dostoevskii's passionate advocacy in *The Brothers Karamazov* of the Russian monastery and the institution of holy elders as the source of Russia's salvation fell on stony ground, despite the popularity that he otherwise enjoyed in the first quarter of the twentieth century.¹⁷ Thus Bulgakov's Dostoevskian defense of the Christian ascetic in “Heroism and Asceticism” constituted a bold, counter-cultural move. It also marked a significant shift in his own, originally rather negative, appraisal of asceticism.

Bulgakov's most extensive treatment of asceticism prior to “Heroism and Asceticism” is found in a 1903 essay entitled “Ob ekonomicheskom ideale” (“On the Economic Ideal”).¹⁸ The terms used in his article are exclusively *asketizm* and its derivatives, where *asketizm* is opposed to hedonism, so it is true to say that Bulgakov moved between 1903 and 1909 from *gedonizm i asketizm* to *geroizm i podvizhnichestvo*. I will comment on the shift in terminology in due course. In 1903 Bulgakov had abandoned the philosophical materialism of Marxism and was working toward a justification of the Marxian beliefs in social justice and equality

on the basis of Kantian idealism. His essay employs a rigorous Kantian methodology to scrutinize the value of wealth as one of the foundational values of political economics (the other is justice), and specifically to solve the economic problem of luxury. The question Bulgakov poses is: how justified is the relative ideal of wealth when examined in the light of the absolute ideal of the good?

Bulgakov sets up an opposition between two inadequate materialistic attitudes to wealth, which he will go on to resolve idealistically. These inadequate attitudes are at one extreme Epicureanism, the validation of the sensual world as the only existing one through the embrace of hedonistic consumption: this is the attitude of both materialist varieties of socialism, including Marxism, and contemporary capitalism.¹⁹ At the other extreme is asceticism, which is deemed to be a materialism of a negative type, recognizing the world as exclusively sensual and rejecting it out of hand. Asceticism regards the body and its life as an absolute evil, and strives to liberate the spirit from the material sphere (271). Asceticism is intrinsically anti-cultural: it denies economics, whose premise is the validity and desirability of the growth of needs, and it denies history as a record of common human endeavor, admitting only of a moral individualism based on the need to save one's own soul (272–73). Thus the definition of *asketizm* that Bulgakov is working with is: “denial of the world.”

I would contend that Bulgakov's attitude to asceticism as defined above is primarily derived from Vladimir Solov'ev, in terms of both the content of his view and the methodology that he uses to establish the “correct” attitude to the problem of wealth. From an essay, published in the same year, “Chto daet sovremennomu soznaniuu filosofii VI. Solov'eva?” (“What Does the Philosophy of V. Solov'ev Give to Contemporary Consciousness?”), we know that Bulgakov was familiar with Solov'ev's work in 1903, and what his essential evaluation was of it at this stage.²⁰ Like Solov'ev in *Chteniia o bogochelovechestve* (*Lectures on Godmanhood*, 1878), he identifies as the “pessimistic philosophy of asceticism” first neo-Platonism, then Buddhism. (Schopenhauer and Tolstoi are adduced as contemporary examples.) His basic approach to cultural history is also the same as Solov'ev's: hedonism and asceticism are seen as “abstract

principles," one-sided responses to the problem of the body and its needs that ought to be supplanted by a higher, that is, a historically more recent, integral approach (and this methodology perhaps constrains Bulgakov into a very narrow interpretation of asceticism) (280).

What is interesting, though, in the light of the *Vekhi* essay, is that Bulgakov perceives asceticism in Christianity to be the same "denial of the world." The ascetic worldview "was adopted by an ascetic understanding of Christianity that is closer to Buddha than to Christ. Based on a one-sided and therefore untrue interpretation of the Gospels' teaching on wealth, this worldview often transforms God's world into the exclusive kingdom of Satan, into which not a single ray of divine light penetrates." To which aspect of Christian culture is Bulgakov referring? Surely to the extreme ascetic practices of the heroes of the Christian East, judging by a list of these heroes cited in a footnote to illustrate his point that the motto of the ascetic is: "mortify your flesh, curtail your needs, reject wealth as a temptation and the greatest of evils" (272). This suggests that in 1903 Bulgakov was not yet familiar with the hesychastic tradition that had so recently undergone a revival in his own country, that he had not yet read the ascetic writings collected in the *Philokalia*, that he was unaware of its teaching about the spiritual rewards of the ascetic life, and particularly that he had not learned of the teaching about the participation of the body in those rewards. It is certainly clear that he had not yet met his future friend, the defender of asceticism Pavel Florenskii.²¹ On the evidence of the sources that he cites, Bulgakov's knowledge is drawn from scholarly works like M. Korelin's *Vazhneishie momenty v istorii srednevekovogo papstva* (*Important Moments in the History of the Medieval Papacy*, 1901) and those of Protestant theologians like Adolf von Harnack (*Das Wesen des Christentums*, 1900) and Francis Peabody (*Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, 1903).

It is also highly probable that Bulgakov's view of Christian asceticism is colored by his reading of Solov'ev, whose hostility toward monasticism was expressed many times in his career, most memorably in the essays "Ob upadke srednevekovogo mirosozertsaniia" ("On the Collapse of the Medieval World-Conception," 1891) and "Zhiznennaia drama Platona" ("The Life Drama of Plato," 1898). It is well known that Solov'ev perceived monks to have turned their backs on a needy world in order to pursue

their own private salvation, whereas according to him their duty was to Christianize the world. The moral task of Christianity was seen by Solov'ev to be social, not individual. As a Christian socialist, Bulgakov naturally sympathized with Solov'ev's moral vision. Indeed, displaying typical Solov'evian historicism, he states in his essay that the ascetic worldview, with its rejection of history and social morality, is alien to contemporary Europeans, part of an outworn phase in human development that cannot be revisited (272).

Asceticism as “denial of the world,” we can see, is unacceptable to Bulgakov. In “On the Economic Ideal” he is defending the “world,” the material-bodily principle, *as an economist*. The basic premise is Kantian: the ideal of wealth should not be rejected, but rather subordinated to the higher ideal of the good. Bulgakov's defense for this is that material wealth is a prerequisite for spiritual growth.²² The meaning of human existence is to serve the highest principle, the absolute good, by means of spiritual labor (272). This act of service is a free choice, made in the light of conscience and of the consciousness of one's duty (Kant's categorical imperative). The process is also the objective: through the service of a higher ideal a person grows spiritually and becomes more and more free—that is, morally developed. Perfection, however, is an unattainable ideal lying beyond the bounds of history and the individual life. But in order to begin this process of spiritual service and spiritual growth, one must first have attained a certain level of material wealth, or must experience freedom from poverty. Below a certain level of prosperity, humans are the slaves of nature and cannot fully exercise free moral choice. A negative asceticism is of no use to the poor (and is therefore inappropriate in Russia). Culture is the record of the spiritual labor of human beings, but without material well-being, there can be no culture (275–79).

This argument anticipates an important point made against asceticism in the *Vekhi* symposium, where it is taken by the other contributors, as it was in 1903 by Bulgakov, to mean “denial of the world.” This argument is made in connection with the theme of culture-building in the widest possible sense, from the production of wealth through the creation of a legal state to the writing of philosophy, and is a product of the same Kantian framework that Bulgakov is using in 1903. At its greatest extreme, denial of the world

incorporates denial of life itself. The *Vekhi* contributors are unanimous in regarding the Russian intelligentsia as ascetics in this sense, and thus as psychologically unfit for the urgent task of reforming Russia. For example, Berdiaev observes an “ascetic view of philosophy” that militates against the development of independent and original national thought (2). Aleksandr Izgoev is pessimistic about the intelligentsia’s potential for creating culture given its cult of martyrdom: it “has formed a peculiar monastic order of people who have condemned themselves to death, and, moreover, to the most rapid death possible” (85). Frank points out a fundamental contradiction between the exclusively material ideal that the intelligentsia holds out for the people and the psychological fact that “the Russian intelligentsia does not love wealth,” of either the spiritual or the material kind (148). To a greater extent than any of the other contributors, Frank repeats Bulgakov’s earlier argument that Russia is too poor to afford asceticism: her priority must be to produce wealth.

But for Bulgakov in “On the Economic Ideal,” once a certain level of material wealth has been achieved, the ascetic *method*, if not the philosophy of asceticism, acquires a positive value and comes into play as an essential moral practice for maintaining a person’s spiritual growth. It does this by ensuring that our natural hedonism—a love of the good things of life—does not become a negative hedonism—enslavement to materialistic values and material goods. People in wealthy societies are always going to be tempted by negative hedonism, and will only be able to overcome this temptation through conscious moral effort, or *askesis* (*uprazhnenie*). Failure to do so will lead in due course to cultural collapse.²³ Luxury, then, cannot be defined objectively. Luxury is the victory of sensuality over the spirit, whether in an individual or a society. Thus Bulgakov wants to see the philosophy of asceticism as having been surpassed, although its method is presented as a timeless feature of our moral being. His main concern seems to be to Christianize Kantian ethics, to replace its apparently effortless exercise of duty with a vision of moral choice as a difficult and unending struggle for self-mastery. At the same time, Bulgakov wants to bring asceticism out of the monastery and into society: “Our time knows ascetics whose lives are a constant feat of the spirit [*podvig dukha*], constant sacrifice and self-negation, although

nowadays one encounters these ascetics more frequently in the world than in the monastery or the desert” (282).

“Heroism and Asceticism” represents a development of this argument, and of course an application of it to the Russian intelligentsia. Now thinking about asceticism in a different way, as “self-overcoming,” Bulgakov has gone beyond his fellow contributors, who are still applying a notion of asceticism as “rejection” or “denial,” whether of the world, as we have seen, or of the self. For them asceticism is seen negatively from the point of view of a Kantian emphasis on culture-building and individual responsibility. Since 1903 Bulgakov, on the other hand, has moved deeper into the psychology and culture of Orthodoxy, and his understanding of the moral life, though still wholly compatible with Kantian ethics, has become further Christianized.

Both the changes and the original Kantian position are reflected in Bulgakov’s choice of vocabulary. The most significant new terms are of course the Slavonic *podvizhnichestvo* (asceticism) and *podvizhnik* (ascetic) (deriving from the noun *podvig*—“exploit,” “feat,” “heroic deed”), but also *smirenie* (humility), *grekh* (sin), and *poslushanie* (“penance” or “obedience”). The morphology of *podvizhnichestvo* conveys the element of struggle in moral choice more effectively than the Greek *askesis* (exercise), which connotes a sense of discipline that seems to fit better with the Kantian notion of duty. The terms *smirenie* and particularly *grekh* personalize the Kantian imperative to aspire to the Good. One is humbled more in the presence of a superior being than that of a principle, and one sins not against an ideal but against a Person. *Grekh* also reinforces powerfully the notion of struggle in the exercise of our “free” will. The choice between right and wrong is not merely a rational act (as Kant implies), but an effort of the will that must first overcome an innate tendency to do the wrong thing. Thus Bulgakov writes of “the power of sin, its agonizing weight, its ubiquitous and profound influence on all human life” (36). Nevertheless, some truly Kantian/Protestant vocabulary and concepts remain, including: *dolg* (duty)—which is frequently mentioned, *obiazannosti* (obligations), *samokontrol’* (self-control), *samodistsiplina* (self-discipline), and the like.

Nevertheless, asceticism is being used differently in the *Vekhi* essay, as part of a polemic against the Russian intelligentsia. The binary opposition *geroizm/podvizhnichestvo* is not, as was the opposition *gedonizm/asketizm*,

a false opposition of two equally flawed attitudes to be reconciled in a higher synthesis, but an irreconcilable opposition of an attitude presented as essentially false to one presented as essentially correct. This is of course the opposition of man-Godhood and Godmanhood, of divinized humanity (the intelligentsia “hero”) and Christ the God-man, or the ascetic-imitator of Christ: “Is the standard for examining oneself the image of the perfect, Divine personality [*Bozhestvennoi lichnosti*], incarnate in Christ? Or is it self-deified man in one of its earthly, limited guises (humanity, the people, the proletariat, or the superman)—a projection, in the last analysis, of one’s own ego in a heroic pose?” asks Bulgakov (36). In fact, it is misleading to use the abstract noun *bogochelovechestvo*, with its Solov’evian ring, because in the essay Bulgakov actually only uses the proper noun *Bogochelovek*, and that only once, as he prefers to refer directly to *Khristos*—Christ. This is because this essay is written primarily and indeed overwhelmingly under the influence not of Solov’ev but Dostoevskii, who at this point clearly colors Bulgakov’s interpretation of asceticism. Dostoevskii explored the struggle between atheistic socialism and Christianity through the medium of fiction, and thus preferred embodiments of the man-god and the saintly Christian to their philosophical abstractions. This suits Bulgakov’s purpose as he opposes the Russian *intelligent* intent on saving the world to an image of the Christian citizen doing penance within it (39).

It will be said that Dostoevskii was more interested in saintly elders and the “God-bearing” Russian people than in doctors, engineers, and lawyers. One response to this is that Bulgakov’s citizen-ascetics are his vision of the humbled intelligentsia “proud men” that Dostoevskii called for in his “Pushkin Speech,” which Bulgakov mentions with approval in his essay. Dostoevskii wished to reunite a deracinated intelligentsia with the people, and this is the theme with which Bulgakov ends his essay. In his previous work he had condemned Dostoevskii’s religious nationalism for its politically conservative and romantic attitude to the question of the rule of law,²⁴ but in “Heroism and Asceticism” the national idea is defended against the intelligentsia’s cosmopolitanism, which overlooks the importance for the people of the Orthodox faith. The people’s “ideal is Christ and his teaching, and their standard is Christian asceticism,” claims Bulgakov after Dostoevskii (44–45), and he even follows Dostoevskii in identifying the people’s ascetic

ideal with the Orthodox monasteries and elders in their midst: "Like the icon-lamps glimmering in the monastery cloisters, whither the people thronged through the centuries in search of moral support and instruction, these ideals, this light of Christ, illumined Rus" (45). Thus, under the influence of Dostoevskii and the logic of his man-god/God-man opposition, Bulgakov sympathetically reconnects the ideal of the citizen-ascetic with its monastic source.

As Bulgakov emerges from Marxism, he begins to place greater emphasis on the psychology of atheism than on its philosophy. As he emerges from Kantianism he begins to invest more in the concrete human personality than in the theoretical individual. By the time he wrote "Heroism and Asceticism," he saw the human being as a genuine agent whose efficacy rests on a choice between pride and humility, self-elevation and self-effacement. Humility is not seen as inactivity or as the mark of a weak character, but as a constant battle for perfection on the model of Christian asceticism. Meanwhile, perfection is no longer a philosophical ideal but a personal God: "The Christian saint is the person who, by means of continuous and unremitting effort [*podvigom*], has most completely transformed his personal will and his empirical personality until they are permeated to the fullest possible measure with the will of God. The model of total permeation is the God-man, arriving 'not to do his own will, but the will of His Father that sent him'" (39–40). Bulgakov is indebted to Dostoevskii for his vision of Russia as the battleground on which Christianity fights the atheistic forces of modernity for control of the country's future.

NOTES

- 1 For a detailed account of Bulgakov's intellectual development until 1922, see Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). Bulgakov entered the priesthood in January 1918. See also Rowan Williams, ed., *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999).
- 2 See Ju. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskii, "The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture," in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. Ann Shukman (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), 3–35.
- 3 The term *Bogochelovek* is the Slavonic rendering of the Greek *theanthropos*, which was widely used by the Greek Fathers to convey the hypostatic union of the two natures—divine and human—in Christ. Origen was the first to use the term, in *de principiis*. *Theandros* was used as a variant. See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 615–16.
- 4 See Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 538, and Joseph Frank, *Dostoevskii: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821–1849* (London: Robson Books, 1977), 182–98.
- 5 Established by means of an electronic search of the texts via Zeno.org. Accessed on 25 January 2011. It is worth noting that Bulgakov uses *chelovekobozhie* (alongside *antropoteizm*) in his essays before *Vekhi*, but switches to *chelovekobozhestvo* in the *Vekhi* essay itself. I do not think there is an obvious explanation for the switch.
- 6 The passage reads as follows: "Der Theismus beruht auf dem *Zwiespalt* von *Kopf und Herz*; der Pantheismus ist die Aufhebung dieses *Zwiespaltes* im *Zwiespalt*—denn er macht das göttliche Wesen nur *als transzendentes* immanent—; der Anthropotheismus *ohne Zwiespalt*. Der Anthropotheismus ist das zu *Verstand* gebrachte Herz; er spricht im Kopf nur auf *Verstandesweise* aus, was das Herz in seiner Weise sagt. Die Religion ist nur *Affekt, Gefühl, Herz, Liebe*, d.h. die *Negation, Auflösung Gottes* im Menschen. Die neue Philosophie ist daher, als die *Negation der Theologie*, welche die Wahrheit des religiösen Affektes leugnet, die *Position der Religion*. Der Anthropotheismus ist die *selbstbewußte Religion* – die Religion, *die sich selbst versteht*." *Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie*, in Ludwig Feuerbach, *Kleine philosophische Schriften (1842–1845)*, ed. Max Gustav Lange (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1950) (Philosophische Bibliothek, Bd. 227), 55.
- 7 There is evidence that Speshnev became a prototype for the character Stavrogin in *Besy* (*The Devils*, 1871–72). See Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 258. Stavrogin is the ultimate Dostoevskian amoralist of the Stirnerian type.
- 8 V. E. Evgrafova, *Sotsial'no-politicheskie i filosofskie vzgliady petrashevtssev* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1953), 496; Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 262; Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, 538–39. The addressee is K. E. Khoetskii. Speshnev's wording does seem to echo Feuerbach's understanding of anthropotheism

as a form of religion (“self-conscious religion, religion that understands itself”). If, as seems likely, he coined the term “man-god” for the first time, it is reasonable to suppose that he did so against the background of the prevalence of the use of “God-man” to denote Christ in Orthodox religious discourse.

- 9 S. N. Bulgakov, “Religiia chelovekobozhiia u L. Feierbakha,” in *Dva grada. Issledovaniia o prirode obshchestvennykh idealov*, ed. V. V. Sapov (Moscow: Astrel, 2008), 67–119. *Dva grada* was originally published in 1911. Page references to essays in *Dva grada* refer to the Sapov edition and are included in parentheses in the text.
- 10 Translations of text from Bulgakov’s essays prior to *Vekhi* are my own. For text from the *Vekhi* symposium itself, I have used Marshall S. Shatz and Judith E. Zimmerman, eds. and trans., *Vekhi/Landmarks: A Collection of Articles about the Russian Intelligentsia* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994). Page references to essays in *Vekhi* refer to this translation and are included in parentheses in the text.
- 11 Sergei Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu. Sbornik statei (1896–1903)* (Frankfurt am Main: Posev, 1968). Facsimile of the original publication in St. Petersburg, 1903. Page references to essays in *Ot marksizma k idealizmu* are included in parentheses in the text.
- 12 See “Chto daet sovremennomu soznaniuu filosofii Vl. Solov’eva?,” in Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu*, 195–262.
- 13 The opposition true religion/false religion is present at least implicitly in all of the essays, except those of Izgoev and Kistiakovskii, but remains undeveloped by Gershenzon and Struve. It is of course not a coincidence that it is the religious philosophers who are most interested in this theme.
- 14 Stirner is mentioned three times by Frank, Feuerbach once.
- 15 Izgoev and Kistiakovskii make no reference to Dostoevskii. Struve does so in a generic way twice. Interestingly, Gershenzon, the “Tolstoian,” makes five mentions of Dostoevskii.
- 16 Struve gives Solov’ev this honor (119).
- 17 For an overview of religious attitudes in late imperial Russia, see my “Religious Renaissance in the Silver Age,” in *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. William Leatherbarrow and Derek Offord (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 169–94.
- 18 “Ob ekonomicheskom ideale,” in Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu*, 263–87. Translated by Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov*, 27–53.
- 19 Bulgakov illustrates extensively from the German social scientist Werner Sombart’s *Der moderne Kapitalismus* (1902).
- 20 See note 12, above.
- 21 The first published correspondence between Bulgakov and Florenskii is postmarked March 1906. See *Perepiska sviashchennika Pavla Aleksandrovicha Florenskogo so sviashchennikom Sergiem Nikolaevichem Bulgakovym*, ed. Igumen Andronik (Tomsk: Vodolei, 2001), 16.

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- 22 In fact, this is one of two discrete defenses. Bulgakov also argues that matter is the medium through which a higher, non-material end is served. This argument is of great interest for his subsequent work, particularly *Filosofia khoziaistva* (*The Philosophy of Economy*, 1912). However, since it has no bearing on the *Vekhi* essay, I shall not analyze it here. See Sergei Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, trans. and ed. Catherine Evtuhov (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).
- 23 One might well reflect on the recent banking crisis in the light of this perception.
- 24 See the 1906 article “Venets ternovyi. Pamiati F. M. Dostoevskogo,” in Bulgakov, *Dva grada*, 478–93.