THE NUMINOUS EXPERIENCE OF EGO TRANSCENDENCE IN DOSTOEVSKY

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We do not fully inhabit our selves: some vision of
our self inhabits us. Where self was, ego now
searches for it.

—Art Berman, *Preface to Modernism* (282)

Since Bakhtin's decisive work defined the field, the fact that Dostoevsky's fiction can never be limited to a monologic frame of reference is indisputable. Bakhtin inevitably opened the way to a broad field of interpretation, much to the enrichment and benefit of Dostoevsky studies. Researchers have seen that Dostoevsky's treatment of the human personality is at once modern and biblical, translating psychological complexity into a struggle between good and evil (Pattison and Thompson 2). This view is limiting, nonetheless, if it overdetermines Dostoevsky's work as a function of his religious beliefs, interpreted through the lens of Russian Orthodoxy.¹ On the other hand, several recent studies (Jones, Cassedy, Young, Blank, Van den Bercken) prove that Dostoevsky's themes and ideas move further afield than his native Russia's religious traditions. These suggest to me the possibility of reading Dostoevsky with a mind to religious and philosophical problems broader than mid-nineteenth century Russian thought or the faith traditions of Orthodoxy. The present essay argues that a single compelling vision unites Dostoevsky's major novels, even while it accounts for the multi-voiced complexity of the writer's work. For all their conflicting variety of themes and polyphonic range, Dostoevsky's major novels converge around the ruling idea of personal transformation. Frequently paradoxical, at turns unorthodox and heretical, it is a vision that neither mandates nor guarantees any radical shift of awareness. Yet it intimates a nascent awareness of a higher self that coheres with the integral vision of transcendence which Dostoevsky encountered in German Romanticism and other syncretic philosophies known to have framed his times and milieu.²

1. For an overview of the scholarship on Dostoevsky as a Christian novelist in the Orthodox tradition and discussion of problems inherent to that approach, see "Essay II: Introduction to Current Debate" in Jones 25–33. Works of Dostoevsky cited by volume and pages nos. in this essay refer to *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, 1972–90. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

2. See, for example, Copleston, Frank 1976, Mochulsky, and Walicki.

The problem of self-knowledge and transformation is one that gets at the heart of the collision between religion and modernity. Dostoevsky's impassioned engagement with this particular conflict perennially inspires illuminating scholarship in Russia and the West. Yet the complexity of that engagement continues to confound, causing recent debate to center on the persistent challenges of "reading Dostoevsky religiously."³ I address some of its issues below, in agreement with Jones that the dialectical uncertainty that is seen as a hallmark of the Dostoevskian text ensures that reading Dostoevsky 'religiously' requires most of all a dynamic engagement between religious vision and the ideological challenges of the modern age (30).

My purpose in this essay is to engage with that dynamic by investigating themes of personal transformation and ego transcendence in Dostoevsky's works. Examples are culled from his fiction in episodes where characters undergo visionary experience, epiphany, or personal insight, which posit the reality of a transcendent category of awareness. Prince Myshkin, Elder Zosima, and Alyosha Karamazov are discussed as examples of inwardly illumined characters who come to transformative insights of a numinous quality. This numinous awareness I will refer to as *authentic self*, since Dostoevsky presents it as the basis of soul nature—the inviolable, immortal self connected to a divine whole. It is contrasted by Dostoevsky with the modern secular view—the rationalist perspective on the phenomenological character of consciousness, such as that reported by the Underground Man and discussed in Dostoevsky's personal diary and nonfictional writings on the nature of egoism. This phenomenal or *apparent self* has a historical pedigree, having developed with the advent of modern secularism, rationalism, and the scientific method. It can therefore also be called the *modern self*. It should be clear that my terminology (*authentic*, *apparent*, and *modern self*) is not used by Dostoevsky, but I use it here for convenience to refer to coefficients in the author's vision of personal transformation. The terms are discussed in detail as I develop my arguments further below.

In sum, my task is to identify these presentations of self by Dostoevsky in his fictional characters and nonfiction. Taking a character to be an enactment or dramatization of self, I find it most interesting to examine those who seem to epitomize an apotheosis among dramatized selves in Dostoevsky. These are the characters named above, who embody and illustrate the major theme of self-transformation, which I argue lies at the heart of the author's artistic vision. Ultimately, the clash of divided selves in Dostoevsky's wider work engages Romantic duality in situations where the apparent self dissolves in the authentic self's developing awareness. Its culmination is unity with a moral and aesthetic vision emanating from a transcendent order of being.

3. See Pattison and Thompson, "Introduction: Reading Dostoevsky Religiously" (1–28), and the discussion in Jones (25–33).

To broach my topic, it is instructive to consider what Dostoevsky specifically meant when he wrote in a descriptive way about self—*my self* [*moe ia*]⁴—in terms distinct from the apparent or phenomenal self that he referred to in his critique of rational egoism (of which, more below). A revealing example is found in a letter of February 1878 to an admirer, one Nikolai Ozmidov. Writing of the objects of consciousness, or all the things that an individual may be aware of in his conscious mind, he concludes:

If it has been conscious of all this, [...] then, therefore, *my self* [*moe ia*] is higher than all this; [...] it stands to the side, as it were, above all this, judges and is conscious of it. But, in that case, this *self* not only is not subject to the earthly axiom, to earthly law, but goes beyond them and has a law higher than them. Where is that law? Not on earth, where all come to an end and all die without a trace and without resurrection. Isn't this a hint at the immortality of the soul? If not, would you, Nikolay Lukich, take to worrying about it, writing letters, looking for it? This means that you can't cope with your *self*: it doesn't fit into the earthly order but seeks something else, besides the earth, to which it also belongs.⁴

Here Dostoevsky describes a category of self that must be seen as transcendent and noumenal. The perceiving conscious subject is higher than all the objects of its consciousness, so that the self “goes beyond,” it “stands to the side,” and adheres to a law higher than the earthly. These statements help to define the problem I mean to address. If Dostoevsky understood the self to be a transcendent entity, then why did he fill his novels with such an amorphous range of types and antitypes, so many grotesque distortions of personality, the parade of criminals, suicides, ideologues, petty tyrants and buffoons? Is he primarily a poet of chaos and disorder? On the other hand, alongside them are the long-suffering and compassionate, the meek and gentle creatures, sage elders, visionaries, holy fools, and innocent children. The writer's great and remarkable talent is his facility to dramatize the emotional and psychological lives of this diverse cast along with their weighty psychic load. The dualistic tensions playing out among them and catalyzing change within individuals is emblematic of Dostoevsky's exhilarating prose.

The question that presents itself is this: in the nightmare-filled urban dramas in which they dwell, susceptible to the vicissitudes of modern life, equipped with only a fragile, often destructive and self-immolating psyche, does the storyteller somewhere indicate an aim to discover and define an authentic core of self, inviolable and integrant?

The Problem of Religion

When it comes to religion, the problem is not that religious concerns are indeterminate in Dostoevsky's work, but that they are puzzlingly broad and ambiguous. Jones and other recent studies approach complex themes in Dosto-

4. Letter to Nikolai Ozmidov (*PSS* 30.1: 10–11); Dostoevsky's emphasis; see discussion in Scanlan (32, 45). Scanlan refers to the statements in the passage as Dostoevsky's *argument from the unique character of consciousness* (trans. Scanlan, 32).

evsky's fiction from religious and psychological perspectives of both the modern and pre-modern world, of Russia and other parts of the world—but they find that traditions or ideas indigenous to the writer's native Russia, surprisingly, are not always the dominant ones. While motifs of Eastern Orthodoxy are often present in Dostoevsky's mature novels, for example, its doctrinal elements, rites and rituals are occasional and peripheral, so that “they are not thrust upon the reader's attention, thereby permitting, even encouraging readings that do not require them” (Jones 40). However, while Dostoevsky depicts “minimal religion,” there is no doubt of the writer's belief in the supreme value of religious experiences in human affairs (152–53). The deficiency in doctrinal and iconographic elements in the novels is made up for by the “direct impact of lived, personal testimony” of their characters' lives, even though the stories may “lack the power and authority of interpretive tradition” (Jones xi). In a related view, Cassedy shows that if we look for confirmation of Russia's native faith in Elder Zosima, the revered *starets* of *The Brothers Karamazov* [1880], we find that his creed is remote from Russian Orthodoxy, representing not only a type of nature mysticism, but even possibly a heretical, ethnocentric belief (160).⁵ In the example of Zosima, Dostoevsky proceeds from Christian doctrinal reasoning, yet the “grand synthesis with the all” that he promotes bears no connection to Dostoevsky's native religious traditions (145–46). Van den Bercken's recent study also concludes that the religious elements in Dostoevsky's novels are Christian, but make significant departures from Eastern Orthodoxy.⁶

One bears in mind that in his later works Dostoevsky promoted the view indigenous to Slavophilism that Russia and the Orthodox Church were models for pan-human Christian brotherhood.⁷ Given his associations with Romantic Russian nationalism, Dostoevsky's critique of Western rationalism naturally lends itself to comparison with Slavophilism. However, Dostoevsky's attitudes toward the Slavophile school of thought were complex and often ambiguous.⁸ While he shared some of their values, Dostoevsky also questioned and debated

5. Cassedy suggests that Zosima's views resemble a type of nationalism condemned at an Orthodox Church Council in Constantinople in 1872, which prohibited the establishment of any church along purely ethnic lines.

6. As summarized in Van den Bercken's Conclusion (123–26).

7. Kireevsky and fellow Slavophiles Aleksei Khomyakov and Konstantin Aksakov linked the holistic principles of integral knowledge and wholeness of spirit (*tsel'nost' dukha*) to the social ideal of organic unity (*sobornost'*). According to Slavophile principles, man is free but cannot develop except in and through membership in society—a greater whole which promotes self-realization and integrated harmony of the interests of its members. See Hudspeth (7–10).

8. Never one to align with preexisting ideological camps, Dostoevsky, along with his brother Mikhail and co-contributors to their journal *Vremia* [Time] Nikolai Strakhov and Apollon Grigoriev, proposed a middle way to the debate between Westernizers and Slavophile, called *pochvennichestvo* (commonly translated as ‘native soil conservatism’). See Scanlan (passim), and Frank 1986 (passim).

the Slavophiles as much as he did the Westernizers, particularly in his journalistic writings through the 1860s.⁹ On some points Dostoevsky harmonized with Slavophile thought but he diverged at other junctures: he criticized the Slavophiles' idealization of pre-Petrine Russia but found common ground when it came to their critique of Catholicism and the West. Slavophiles, in particular Ivan Kireevsky, thought the Catholic Church had developed in the spirit of rationalism which it inherited from Rome, while Russian Orthodoxy stayed true to the spiritual traditions of the early Church Fathers.

While it is true that Dostoevsky's religious ideas are often tied to Russian nationalism, insofar as the studies above show that his religion can be seen outside of Russian Orthodoxy, some notable research compares his major themes to a surprisingly broad field of religious ideas. They verify that while Christianity is integral to some of the author's most powerful imagery and ideas, it is not a necessary condition for descriptions of metaphysics or cosmology in his writings. For instance, Irina Kirk observed that there are similarities between Dostoevsky's hero of *The Idiot* [1869] and Siddhartha Gautama the Buddha (77–84). Michael Futrell (1981) also investigated Buddhist elements in *The Brothers Karamazov*, as well as references to Muhammad and Islam (1979) in several of Dostoevsky's novels from *Notes from the House of the Dead* [1862] to *The Devils* [1872]. More recently, Sarah Young discovered further commonalities between Prince Myshkin's experiences and Buddhist concepts of impermanence, ego dissolution and presentness (220–29).¹⁰ Myshkin's qualities have even been likened to shamanism and Sufi mysticism, indicating their common source in intuitive apophatic theology (Kasatkina 457–58).

These compelling intercultural studies appreciate the breadth of religious and spiritual meaning in Dostoevsky's texts. Despite the undecidability of those texts and the author's oscillating positions on important questions of faith vis-à-vis reason, reading Dostoevsky outside the lens of Orthodox traditions sheds light on points in his fiction and non-fiction that are often taken as contradictory and irreconcilable. To my mind the problem of the modern self is the dominant here, where Dostoevsky's recurring and unambiguous critique of modern secular reason and so-called rational egoism catalyzes the psychological imperative of self-transformation. Since the secular modes of thought he contests deny the importance of religious insight in the reflective consciousness, the numinous event of ego transcendence is an essential transformative experience for a number of Dostoevsky's principal characters. In examples below, I will discuss how and to what effect such works as *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* dramatize the transformative experience of in-

9. For example, Dostoevsky parodied Slavophilism in his ironically titled editorial "Confessions of a Slavophile" in *Diary of a Writer* (25: 195–96) and mocked its ideology in the contradictory views of Shatov in *The Devils*. See Hudspeth (86–87; 109–15).

10. For another recent description of Buddhist elements in Dostoevsky, see Fursov.

ward illumination. First, it is helpful to summarize the problematic issues surrounding the development of the modern self, and Dostoevsky's responses to the same.

The Problem of the Modern Self

Broadly speaking, Dostoevsky's work is a counterweight to the modern paradigmatic character of mind after the triumph of Western secularism and scientific rationalism. Through the prism of modern challenges, including his own nation's cultural fragmentation, Dostoevsky dramatizes the search for unity even while questioning its basis (De Jong 22–27). This is a characteristically Romantic quest: a sense of internal division is fundamental to Romantic malaise as much as secure unity in the great chain of being and meaning was characteristic of the eighteenth century (25). The divided self, which gives expression to so much of the dramatic intensity of Dostoevsky's art, and accounts for its frequent disconcerting contradictions, is the primary duality which expresses the Romantic vision of lost unity. The chief project of Romanticism was reconciliation of subject and object, human and nature, heart and mind, spirit and matter. Romantics strive to discover what is unknown, or imperceptible to the rational mind. Dostoevsky's vision in his formative years as a thinker was especially informed by Schellingian idealism, which opposed the rationalist distinction between the cognizing subject and its perceived object (Orwin 52). This was a reaction to the modern stand which accepts the hegemony of instrumental reason, a product of the rational mind's self-scrutinizing behavior. Trust in the rational faculties alone to arrive at certain truth ensured that the *apparent self* was disengaged from autonomous personhood that trusts in its origination in and absolute unity with divine essence.

The Romantics established a new worldview from their critique of disengaged reason: the rational mind has to open to our own deepest feelings and instincts, allowing recovery of the authentic self through transcendent arts, liberty of spirit, spiritual epiphany, and utopian vision—all of which evolve in an eternally unfolding expression of the Absolute. Humans need to heal the division within themselves that disengaged reason created by setting thinking in opposition to feeling or instinct and intuition. But Dostoevsky's characters are beyond Romantic solace in feeling and recovered unity—witness the Underground Man's critique of Rousseau, "l'homme de la nature et de la vérité" (5: 104). Philosophy is no consolation. The cultural dominant of disengaged reason in the modern age was the catalyst for a now inexorable overdetermined secular rationalism devoid of absolute values. Europe's Scientific Revolution had ushered in the triumph of the modern mind in Newtonian-Cartesian cosmology, revealing the 'true nature' of reality. Man's role in the universe could be judged by the fact that, by virtue of his own intelligence, he had penetrated the universe's essential order and could now use that

knowledge for his own benefit and empowerment (Tarnas 271). Following Hume and Kant, metaphysics is demonstrated to go beyond the powers of human reason. Thus, religious faith lost support from either the empirical world or pure reason, and lacked plausibility and appropriateness for secular modern man's psychological character (351).

In Dostoevsky these developments bring about the inert spiritual void and the spectre of nihilistic materialism—symptoms of modernity he treated as directly related to the problem of excessive self-reflection. The Underground Man claims that he has “enhanced consciousness” [*usilennoe soznanie*] (5: 102–4), yet his conscious self-absorption is the motor force behind his perverse logic and contrary acts of self-assertion. Orwin has shown that Dostoevsky implicitly blames the Underground Man's reading of Western literature and philosophy for creating the gulf between natural spontaneity and his self-reflective torments. Beyond the content of what he read, the consequential influence is a change in his very psyche enhanced by the act of reading itself (23). The Underground Man's enhanced conscious mind is thus representative of the crisis of modernity that forced Dostoevsky to recognize the limitations of rational thought and to resist the systematizing utilitarian and materialist philosophies inherited in Russia from the modern West.

The developments of modernity summarized above point to the fact that Dostoevsky's work reckons, above all, not with the schism between faith and reason (as it is often seen), but with the problem of modern identity. As I turn to specific examples in Dostoevsky, the work of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor is useful to bear in mind as an approach to understanding the making of the modern identity. According to Taylor, and as indicated in my epigraph from Berman, the modern experience of personal identity differs from the Ancients' in its radical reflexivity, where, in place of discovering one universal human nature, human agency is defined as the self *in search of itself* (181–84). The modern self has its own unique, independent makeup and expression. It is the sum of one's knowledge, experience and conditioned reason, which has no existence outside of the form that contains it. “So we come to think that we ‘have’ selves as we have heads,” writes Taylor. “But the very idea that we have or are ‘a self’, that human agency is essentially defined as ‘the self’, is a linguistic reflection of our modern understanding and the radical reflexivity it involves” (177). Moreover, “We seek self-knowledge, but this can no longer mean just impersonal lore about human nature, as it could for Plato. Each of us has to discover his or her own form. We are not looking for the universal nature; we each look for our own being” (181). In other words, the Augustinian view of an innate self revealed in contact with the divine, which one works to bring to explicit and conscious formulation, moving from ignorance to true self-knowledge (135), is contrasted to the disengaged subject, with its reflexive stance, exercising procedural reason and instrumental control (174).

The crux of the matter, as Dostoevsky saw it in the mid-1860s, was the problem of so-called 'rational egoism,' associated with some of his ideological rivals, as well as the principle Dostoevsky referred to in his notebooks as the Law of Personality.

In "Winter Notes on Summer Impressions" [1863], following his critique of the venerated morality of self-interest promoted in the West, Dostoevsky advanced his thesis on egoism—"the personal principle, the principle of isolation, of intense self-preservation, of self-solicitousness, of the self-determination of one's own ego, of opposing this ego to all of nature and all other people as a separate, autonomous principle completely equal and equivalent to everything outside itself" (5: 79). These qualities are exemplified by the Underground Man's so-called enhanced consciousness noted above. His fixation on his own reactions, motives and behavior, is, as Scanlan puts it, "a state of obsessive, anguished introspection, quite different from the complacent single-mindedness of Rational Egoists such as Chernyshevsky's heroes, who were men and women of action" (69). A free conscious being, he has an egoism of personal *will* (and glorification of it) rather than personal *interests* (69). Freedom of the personal will is raised to the level of an absolute, so even absurd and self-destructive impulses are celebrated expressions of that unbounded willfulness. In sum, "The normative stance of the Underground Man, far from coinciding with Dostoevsky's, illustrates the evils of a freedom unstructured by higher values; the Underground Man's egoism is the perversion of a distinctive and precious human capacity by exempting it from all spiritual authority. For Dostoevsky, human will transcends natural law but not moral law" (Scanlan 75). Thus the Underground Man's self-absorption is treated as a moral failing and spiritual void.

In other places, Dostoevsky contravenes the ego principle with an argument for the imperative to love. The highest development of personality was "voluntary, fully conscious, and completely unconstrained self-sacrifice of one's entire self for the benefit of all"; "One must love" (5: 79–80). The giving of oneself must not spring from any calculations of self-interest (Scanlan 61). Dostoevsky speculated on this problem in the "Masha entry" of his personal diary on April 16, 1864 (20: 172–75).¹¹ The well-studied passage, composed as the writer stood before the body of his recently deceased wife Maria Dmitrievna, demonstrates the major departure of his belief system from the Slavophile natio-centric point of view. It is remarkable for its poignant insight, as recorded by the grieving husband, into the nature of self, including something he called the Law of Personality [*zakon lichnosti*]. Explicitly, Dostoevsky saw a fundamental paradox involving the integrity of and dissolution of the self, since the self stands in the way of fulfilling the Christian impera-

11. See Cassedy's chapter "Belief Is Ideal" (115–48) and Scanlan (21–24, 49–50, 82–84, and 191–96) for comprehensive analyses of the cited entry.

tive to love: "The law on earth that there must be such a thing as an individual person is binding," he writes. "The I is an obstacle" (20: 172–73). Dostoevsky reasons that the entire human history of struggle and development is a form of striving for the goal of moral perfection, yet the path towards wholeness ends in ego dissolution. The revelation of human unity follows the Law of Love [*zakon liubvi*], which requires "[giving oneself] over completely to each and all, undividedly and selflessly" (20: 172–74; Cassedy 136; Scanlan 82–83). The greatest good, then, is annihilation of 'self' in the sense of harnessing one's will to the Law of Love despite the self-serving inclinations of the Law of Personality (Scanlan 83).

The goal for both the individual and the human collective, then, is ultimate unity—unattainable, however, in earthly life, because it relies on disintegration of our ego selves. This implies that an ontological gulf separates worldly existence, marked by moral imperfection, from otherworldly, perfect, transfigured humanity (Scanlan 189). Since the Law of Personality dominates earthly life, one struggles for an ideal counter to one's nature, done "in accordance with the same law of nature, in the name of the ultimate ideal of his goal." The implication is that human "nature" is a composite: animal and spiritual nature. The Law of Personality and the Law of Love counter each other in a dualist moral dialectic. Life is development, struggle, striving for the goal. Present-day man is transitional to the transfigured, selfless creature of the Christ ideal. Progress is "self-enlightenment in the name of love of one another" (19: 126; Scanlan 191). "Self-will" [*svoevolie*] is the chief inhibitor to that possibility, distinctly outlined in Dostoevsky's fiction. Scanlan concludes, "The use of human freedom to assert one's will independently of the law of love—is to act egotistically [...]; Dostoevsky believed that true freedom consists not in egoistic self-expression but in moral self-mastery" (83).

Toward that end, Dostoevsky's fiction prioritizes the theme of personal transformation in the form of narratives of visionary experience, epiphany, and personal insight. The author comments at length on the reality of a transcendent self "full of reason and ultimate cause." Some of these narratives have been contextualized in myths of resurrection and other religious experience, which make for a suitable stepping-off point for my examples of transformation and inward illumination.

Transformation and Renewal of the Authentic Self

The myth of death and renewal in Dostoevsky's works is a symbolic map of transfiguration, giving force to the moral and aesthetic ideal that necessitates and guides personal transformation. Easter motifs in particular undergird the narrative and thematic structure of some of Dostoevsky's works, but Jones shows that they are for the most part non-institutional. The epigraph to *The Brothers Karamazov* ("Except a grain of wheat..." from John 12:24) is an image ubiquitous to world myth and faith-based traditions (45–46). By

Jones's analysis, the death of Orthodoxy is itself a metaphor in Dostoevsky's world, meaning that its tradition as authoritative discourse had lost its force. Conflict between belief and unbelief in the modern age required that Orthodox tradition be set aside in order that personal faith be allowed to blossom again, that shoots of a new faith be born (Jones 45). Religious experience as inwardly persuasive discourse takes its place (62). "By and large, 'resurrection' seems to be a metaphorical concept in Dostoevsky, referring to a spiritual rebirth" (58). An example of death and resurrection in his novels is the story of raising Lazarus, which played a role in Raskolnikov's change of heart in *Crime and Punishment* [1866]. In another, Dostoevsky's notebooks for *The Idiot* show a plan for Prince Myshkin to rehabilitate Nastasia Filippovna (9: 252), whose name, in its Greek origin, means "resurrection" (Jones 46–47). A third, following Ksana Blank's successful interpretation, is Dmitry Karamazov's enactment of the death and renewal myth in symbolic terms of the Eleusinian mysteries (46–51).

The processes described each involve the death of the apparent self, with its culturally conditioned psyche, to allow for the emergence of the higher, authentic self. To some degree these accord with the Orthodox tradition: the themes of spiritual awakening, moral rebirth, resurrection, and particularly the Easter myth of death and renewal, are given prominence in Eastern Orthodoxy. The spiritual epiphanies of Myshkin, Makar Dolgoruky [*A Raw Youth*, 1875], Zosima's brother Markel, and Alyosha Karamazov also reflect the Orthodox emphasis on transfiguration (Jones 53). Yet while they inhere in the Orthodox heritage, in Dostoevsky these themes are nourished more deeply by personal religious experiences than doctrinal bases or sacramental rites (Jones 62).

Dostoevsky gives the experience of inward illumination its most direct expression in three principal characters: Prince Myshkin, Elder Zosima, and Alyosha Karamazov. To begin with Myshkin, his heightened spiritual sensitivity and his purity and goodness, which have an infectious impact on others around him, are often remarked upon as Christ-like qualities.¹² On the other hand, most researchers have not failed to recognize that Myshkin is a fallible individual, neither a saint, nor certainly a Russian Christ (Jones 14–16). He is ultimately subject, like all others, to the Law of Personality. On the other hand, he is a positive example of one with intuitive awareness of authentic self. His report of the transcendent qualities of his pre-epileptic aura is often quoted because it illustrates the momentary experience of unitive consciousness in its fullest presentation by Dostoevsky:

12. Myshkin's egolessness [*samootvershennost'*], childlike simplicity and moral purity [*pravstvennaia chistota*] are qualities prefigured in such precursors of Dostoevsky's invention as the Dreamer from *White Nights* [1848], Colonel Rostanev of *The Village of Stepanchikovo and Its Inhabitants* [1859], Ivan Petrovich of *The Insulted and Injured* [1861], and the Dagestani Tatar Alei of *Notes from the House of the Dead* [1860–62] (see 9: 337–38).

The sensation of life, of self-consciousness multiplied almost tenfold at these moments, flashing by like lightning. His mind and heart were illumined with extraordinary light; all his worries, all his doubts and anxieties were as if allayed at once, resolved in a kind of higher serenity, full of clear, harmonious joy and hope, full of reason and ultimate cause [*polnoe razuma i okonchatel'noi prichiny*]. (8: 187–88)

Myshkin speaks of gleams and flashes of a higher self-perception [*samooshchushchenie*] and self-consciousness [*samosoznanie*] of “higher existence” [*vysshego bytiia*]. There is a feeling of fullness, of proportion, of reconciliation and ecstatic fusion with the highest synthesis of life in which there could be no doubt.¹³ Although this episode is usually studied in the frame of Christian eschatology (with the exception of those intercultural studies mentioned above), inward illumination and sudden change known as *metanoia* is integral to Orthodox Christianity, where it refers to repentance in a narrow sense, but more broadly, transformation that brings spiritual knowledge (Blank 11). The awakening of self-awareness to unitive consciousness is a sacred truth of apophatic Orthodox theology as well as the Western esoteric tradition.¹⁴ It is central to the apophysis of Plato and Dionysius the Areopagite, wherein illuminative transformation is the visitation of divine Logos, occasioning transcendence of personality (apparent self) and identification with the divinized self of higher cognition (authentic self). One bears in mind that the mystical philosophy of Platonism was available to Dostoevsky through Eastern Orthodoxy (Lossky 153–57), along with the possibility that self-transformation was a native principle to Dostoevsky as a legacy of the effect of Neoplatonism on Russian Orthodoxy.

Myshkin's mention of reason [*razum*] and ultimate cause deserves special notice. His vision suggests a numinous awareness of divine reason emanating from the supreme intelligence underlying all and catalyzing his spiritual transformation. This idea is evocative of divine Logos in the Hellenic tradition, wherein nature is permeated with divine rationality and final causes—a notion which was co-opted into medieval Christianity by Neoplatonic thinkers (Tarnas 98–105). In this sense Myshkin might be likened to an initiate, although remote from the rites and rituals of the mystery religions. Initiatory experience in the esoteric tradition refers to conscious deliberation of the idea of the sacred, an awakening to a previously hidden or suppressed reality that is superordinate to the established secularism of the modern mind. This perennialist

13. Dostoevsky told Strakhov about similar personal experiences he had had: “I experience a happiness that is impossible under ordinary circumstances, and of which most people have no comprehension. I feel a complete harmony within myself and in the whole world, and this feeling is so strong, and affords so much pleasure, that one could give up ten years of one's life for several seconds of that ecstasy, perhaps one's whole life” (Dolinin 1964, 1: 281; quoted in Jones, 8).

14. See Lossky on the foundations of apophatic Orthodox theology in Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

"awakening" to hidden reality is also found in Elder Zosima's so-called "nature mysticism," so it is the example of Zosima to which I now turn.

Zosima's spiritual life is the result of an inner awakening not unlike Myshkin's. A passionate youth who became entangled in a duel, Zosima himself had had a conversion experience and exhorted his companions, "nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, only we are godless and foolish, and we don't understand that life is paradise, for all it takes is our wanting to understand, and it will come at once in all its beauty, and we will embrace each other and weep" (14: 272).

The life and teachings of Elder Zosima recounted in Alyosha's "Biographical Notes" concerning his mentor provide the most detailed illustration among all of Dostoevsky's published works of the authentic self lived in the present life to the extent that it is achievable even if full realization of the ideal is reserved for the world beyond. Many of Zosima's teachings were inspired by his brother Markel, who, on his deathbed at age seventeen, remarked, "life is paradise, and we're all in paradise, but we refuse to see it. If we only wanted it, there would be paradise tomorrow on all the earth" (14: 262). This idea is also expressed in Zosima's narrative of the Mysterious Visitor who confessed murder to him (Book VI, chap. 2). The Visitor speaks of how individuals are isolated, how "all have separated themselves into units," and "everyone alienates himself from others, hides." But the end of "even this frightful individual isolation will come," he assures, "and people will understand how unnaturally they have separated themselves from one another." Moreover, it will happen without fail that all will live harmoniously in brotherhood (14: 275-76; Cassedy 139).

Yet Zosima confirms that the roots of the self are in "the other world": "There is much on earth concealed from us, but to make up for it, we are given a precious, mystic sense of our living bond with the other world [*s mirom inym*], with the higher heavenly world [*s mirom gornym i vysshim*], and the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here, but in other worlds. That is why the philosophers say that the essence of things cannot be conceived here on earth" (14: 290).

Zosima's example and teachings inspired his disciple Alyosha Karamazov, whose vision of the wedding at Cana of Galilee provides the clearest, most succinct example of transformation in a single moment of illumination. He had fallen into a reverie while listening to Father Paissy reading the Gospels over the coffin of the deceased elder. Upon waking he feels

[a]s if threads from all these countless of God's worlds had all coincided within his soul at once, and it trembled all over, in the 'contiguity with other worlds' [*soprikasaias' miram inym*]. He wanted to forgive all creatures for all things and to ask forgiveness, oh! not for himself, but for everyone, all creatures and all things, while 'others ask the same of me' resounded again in his soul. But with each moment that passed he felt something palpable and tactile, as firm and unshakable as the celestial vault, descending into his soul. It was as though some idea had seized

and taken mastery over his mind—and now for the rest of his life and until the end of the ages. He had fallen to the earth a feeble youth, but now he had become a resolute warrior for the rest of his life and knew and felt this suddenly, at that same moment of his ecstasy. And never, never would he forget that moment for the rest of his life. (14: 328)

Alyosha's transformation is instantaneous and complete. The qualities of the numinous moment of his spiritual epiphany include an awareness of wholeness, connection to other worlds, compassion, and selflessness, all of which coalesce in an 'idea' that seizes the sovereignty of his intellect [*votsarialas' v ume ego*]. That idea, I venture, is awareness of the authentic self that replaces the lower category of self, which I have been calling apparent, due to its illusory nature. It is discovered and transformed upon recognition of the higher self. The earthly self ruled by ego and intellect (following the Law of Personality, exemplified by Alyosha's brother Ivan, the Underground Man, and other characters) is transformed in the manner Dostoevsky illustrates in the experience of several characters, three of which have been described in the foregoing examples.

Here then is the critical aspect of Dostoevskian duality and at the same time the key to its resolution: application of the will toward the authentic self's ultimate goal leads to the apparent self's own negation. In the here and now the 'I' (apparent self) contributes to disunity, division and isolation; however, at the end of its striving, as in the Masha entry and the Visitor's dialogue with Zosima, duality is overcome by the (apparent) self's dissolution upon recognition of its own natural unity with all. If this is a problematic situation in earthly existence given that individual selves stand in the way, the possibility of transformation and unity, at least in principle, is suggested in *The Idiot*, and explicitly postulated in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

My aim has been to show that the principles of ego transcendence and unitary consciousness are prominent themes in Dostoevsky's writing, which suggests that personal transformation was an artistic concern of the writer. Without a doubt the plane of analysis which proved to be the most productive for Dostoevsky was the exploration of those things which separate us from oneness with the divine. Certainly personal transformation and moral regeneration are less frequently traversed within the scope of a Dostoevskian text than the many instances of deformed and suffering personalities; or they are alluded to only provisionally, as in Raskolnikov's moral and spiritual rehabilitation in the Epilogue to *Crime and Punishment*. Nevertheless, especially in the later works, self-transformation is met with increasing frequency in narratives of visionary experience—personal insight which takes the form of epiphanic, ecstatic, or revelatory experiences. These instances posit the reality of a plane of transcendent awareness where the authentic self is aligned with primary consciousness beyond the ego self.

Within the cultural setting in which Dostoevsky lived, the flourishing of Western thought ensured that the modern self, with its procedural reason and self-serving bias, had become the only organizational model of personhood

acknowledged by progressive thinkers. However fractured and lacking of intrinsic unity, it had established the basis of modernity, with its insoluble contradictions and permanent state of crisis. Thus for Dostoevsky, the threat to genuine expression of the authentic self is especially raised by utopian socialism, for him a pernicious doctrine because it only accounted for the utilitarian needs of the apparent self. The cult of unity on a political level was a civic ideal that Dostoevsky vigorously contested in the post-exile phase of his writing, in favor of the genuine unity brought about by personal transformation.

In spite of modern cultural imperatives, the evidence points to the author's authentication of a nascent quality in the human psyche, which is predisposed toward illumination of the divine intellect. It catalyzes the birth or awakening of the noumenal self that exists *in potentia* until it is revealed by the insight of numinous vision. Thus, I have argued that a chief artistic concern of Dostoevsky was to revitalize the premodern vision of a transcendent, authentic personal self. The indeterminacy of the typical Dostoevskian text notwithstanding, its major thrust counteracts the modern materialist worldview to confirm the positive potential for true correspondence with divine essence.

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Реферат

Лонни Харрисон

Мистический опыт преодоления эго в произведениях Достоевского

В продолжение дискуссии о «религиозном прочтении Достоевского», данная работа исследует темы трансформации личности и преодоления эго в произведениях Достоевского, как ответ писателя на кризис эпохи модерна. Вопреки общепринятому мнению о русских корнях его религиозных идей, недавние исследования показали, что мотивы православия являются случайными и в основном периферийными в романах Достоевского. Данная статья подтверждает, что религиозные воззрения Достоевского имеют синкретическую основу и утверждает, что религиозные темы в его произведениях базируются на идее подлинной сущности собственного «я», происходящей из синкретической философии немецкого романтизма и неоплатонизма, с которой был знаком Достоевский. Моменты визионерского опыта, прозрения и самопознания в его произведениях постулируют реальность трансцендентного сознания, где собственное «я» соответствует первичному сознанию вне эго или явной личности.

Князь Мышкин, старец Зосима и Алеша Карамазов рассматриваются как примеры просветленных личностей, которые являются вариантами подлинного «я», выявленного проникновением в суть сверхъестественного. Примеры из романов и рассказов, публицистики и частной переписки писателя приведены с целью показать, что критика Достоевским современного понимания разума, в особенности так называемого «разумного эгоизма», сходна с архаичными идеями, объясняющими, как подлинный «я» раскрывается в нравственном и эстетическом свете, происходящем из трансцендентной сферы бытия.