

Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky – Athens or Jerusalem?

1. Preliminary considerations regarding the philosophical and historical significance of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky

„Russia, are you not speeding along like a fiery and matchless troika?“¹

Thus concludes Gogol's *Dead Souls*, the novel, which was to shape much, if not most of Russian literature to come after it. Indeed, where was this troika headed for? And isn't this question, if we extend the consequences of the historical progression of an entire nation to the fate of the individual within it, already an existential one? In the case of Gogol, we know that his individual fate entailed a turn towards madness and mysticism alike in his later years, up until his death in 1852. This year then does not only mark the start of the second half of the long 19th century, but also a shift in Russian literature. It is the beginning of a literary period which cannot be talked about without the mention of two central names: Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky;² And looking at the two of them, considering the particularities of their works, we are once again confronted with the paradigm of historical progression affecting the individual, thus shaping the existential conditions and questions which said individual may be faced with.

Seldom in 19th century literature do we find the social and the spiritual, the historical and the metaphysical to be so deeply interwoven as in Tolstoy's and Dostoyevsky's writings and thoughts; Not with the French or German naturalists such as Zola or Fontane, nor with the Decadents, the likes of Baudelaire or later Wilde.³ We need only look at two of Tolstoy's and Dostoyevsky's arguably most famous novels to find confirmation for this: Doesn't Raskolnikov's "passion", him being fated to committing a crime and receiving his punishment, indicate a social struggle, that of a poor, desperate man, as well as a spiritual struggle, the conversion from his utilitarian ethics and great-man-theory towards Christian charity and humility? Similarly, Levin's attempts to answer the "question of the peasant" are likewise relevant and even central to his existential despair and his religious beliefs, which have formed by the end of *Anna Karenina*. And if we further consider that the fates of these two characters closely mirror those of their creators (Dostoyevsky's exile to Siberia, likewise the topic of *Notes from the House of the Dead*, is shared by Raskolnikov; And Tolstoy's existential crisis, which

¹ Gogol, Nikolai: Die toten Seelen. p. 357

² Indeed, both of their first major publications fall into the timeframe of 1846 to 1852.

³ If we are to find an apt comparison to this particular thematic juxtaposition within the 19th century, perhaps we should look to the French "Renouveau catholique" movement, the prose of Leon Bloy or Charles Péguy.

he also relates in his *Confession*, was deeply relevant to the creation of Levin), and may therefore be interpreted as direct consequences of their personal experiences – The experiences of two men who wondered extensively about their lives as well as their times.

One might thus assume that these writings were also, to a certain degree, their attempts at making sense of their own predicaments, not only from a personal but additionally from a socio-historical and religious-existential, perhaps even from a philosophical point of view. Such an approach is shared by the Russian philosopher Lev Shestov, who wrote extensively on Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky alike. And this approach likewise opens up an important question for literary as well as historical analysis: Is the individual (in this case the author) to be understood by way of his time, or is a time period, a “Geistesepoche”, to be understood through an individual or a series of individuals? The particular *Zeitgeist* which made a thinker such as Shestov possible, perhaps even necessary, is surely impossible to be understood without first considering such formative figures as Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky; And maybe the whole of the so called “Russian Religious Renaissance”, the works of Solovyov, Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov or Shestov himself, would have been completely “unthinkable”, had it not been for the two of these monumental writers shaping an entire current of thought, a generation of artists, novelists, poets and philosophers.

Looking at Shestov’s reception of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, as well as Shestov’s own influence on 20th century thought, it becomes necessary to make a distinction between the three of them and their intellectual “successors” in some form. We may differentiate between “Existentialism” (i.e., Sartre or Camus) and “Existential philosophy” (which may be seen in the “spiritual” tradition of Pascal or Kierkegaard)⁴, the latter of which Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky as well as Shestov belong to. The most noteworthy difference between “existentialist” and “existential” thought is certainly related to their sentiments regarding the value of religious systems of belief. Writers who seek to address such existential-spiritual issues are concerned with the very first as well as the final questions pertaining to life, God, the human experience, and the soul; Even more importantly, they do not solely rely on reason or scientific knowledge to find answers for themselves and for the times they live in, but instead attempt to do this from a religious, mostly Christian perspective. In addition to the religious and spiritual positions these writers take, their works are consequently also critical of what may be regarded as values of the enlightenment, of notions approving scientific and technological progress at any cost, and of the universality and unlimited applicability of reason – In the context of 19th century

⁴ “Existenzialismus” and “Existenzphilosophie”

Russia, they were thus staunchly opposed to intellectuals who would have been considered “Westernizers”.

And ultimately, the works and thoughts of writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky are also marked by the interlocation of literature and philosophy; That is to say, their literary writings are oftentimes characterised by philosophical undercurrents, making them, as Lev Shestov for example suggested of *War and Peace*, works of philosophy in their own right and on a different level than “regular” philosophy: “*Ist Krieg und Frieden nicht ein echt philosophisches Werk, von einem Dichter geschaffen?*”⁵ Attempting to understand these texts not only for “what they are” as fictions, but also for what they indicate, what their points of origin and points of view are within the history of thought, thus perceiving them as connected to (Christian)-Existential philosophy, allows us to likewise ponder their significance and their capacity to reflect Russia’s socio-historical developments in the 19th century as a whole.

2. Christian-Existential thought in the works of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky

Within their great novels and short stories, both Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky oftentimes tackle questions of morality in the face of ambivalence and conflict. Through Raskolnikov and Anna Karenina, to once again name two of the most noteworthy examples, the struggle of an individual who does not conform to societal norms is exemplified; Raskolnikov’s story poses the question of whether murder can be justified through a utilitarian worldview, while Anna Karenina’s tale mirrors the popular 19th century topic of infidelity and its consequences for society. In other words, if we simplify both of these stories even further, they possess a very basic structure, that of, to quote the title of Dostoyevsky’s novel, a *crime* being committed and thus being due its *punishment*. This story structure, one of sin which necessitates atonement in the most basic sense, expresses the emergence of an issue within the writer’s mind. What is the nature of this issue, however? Insofar as we consider Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky to be “men of faith”, these questions of morality also consequently become spiritual questions, pertaining to the justness of an individual’s actions, and playing a vital role in the salvation (or lack thereof) of their immortal souls, *as well as in their earthly lives*. The initially spiritual question hereby also takes on a social character; And it is through this aspect that the stories in *Anna Karenina* or *Crime and Punishment* start to take shape. The literary formation of and approach to these problems is, on a surface level, predominantly achieved through social interactions rather than purely abstract theological musings. The solutions which these problems receive (given to them

⁵ Schestow, Leo: Tolstoi und Nietzsche. Die Idee des Guten in ihren Lehren. p. 94

by the author) are finally social as well as spiritual in nature once again, thus closing the circle and answering the question which had been posed at the outset of the story's genesis.

So much for the structural concerns regarding these two exemplary novels. But this pattern on its own does not answer one of the obvious and central questions in trying to understand a work of art such as these two are: How did these moral and spiritual problems, which mark the novels' "starting points", first form within the authors' minds? Attempting to answer such a question may seem naively optimistic or utopian; Yet it must nevertheless be attempted. As mentioned above, we know that the stories of Raskolnikov and Levin, in a relative sense, mirror the experiences of their creators. Such a plainly biographical, sainte-beuvean explanation might seem somewhat satisfactory on a surface level. In the case of Tolstoy's novel however, the same cannot strictly be said for the figure of Anna, and one must thus assume that her conception arises from a different spot. Levin's story is certainly not devoid of drama and hardship of its own, but ultimately ends happily, while Anna's fate on the other hand is tragic from the outset and Tolstoy does not devise an ending for her which could in any way be seen as salvific. The crime for which Anna is damned, to put it briefly, is infidelity; But even more so it is "breaking up" the family which she lives in with her husband and son. This is contrasted by the figure of her brother "Stiwa" Oblonsky who, while also being unfaithful and consequently causing a lot of torment to his wife, does not consider leaving his family behind. In Tolstoy's view, the holy union of family, bound together by the "institutions" of marriage and children, is sacred and must not be destroyed – This is one of the central aspects in which matters of the societal and the spiritual are interconnected within *Anna Karenina*.

All throughout Europe, and Russia was certainly not exempt from this, the 19th century marked the onset of secularization and thereby a loss of religious values in favour of those sentiments harboured by the age of enlightenment and its followers, or rather beneficiaries. This paradigm shift naturally not only extends to existential questions, to questions of belief, but also to concerns of political and societal importance. Both Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, even if we consider their individual differences, such as their relationships to the clerical aspects of the Orthodox church, may be understood as having staunchly opposed these, in the minds of the 19th century Russian intelligentsia, "western" notions and nowhere does this become more apparent than in their novels, in the stories they tell to illustrate their innermost feelings and views on life and the world they lived in. But this does not mean that Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky should be seen as mere reactionaries in a political sense; One should rather examine them as artists attempting to come to terms with their experiences, the challenges they faced due to their views or professions, and more generally in their daily lives. Similarly, as they were not simply

reactionaries, they were also no saints and not infallible. We may even perceive a certain fascination with sin, with crime and evil in many of both of their works.

Tolstoy likely sought to exorcise some part of himself which he then fashioned into one of his literary characters and called “Anna Karenina”, posing, especially to himself, not only the question of infidelity but also that of suicide. Disillusioned with the world he lived in and haunted by the spectre of cosmic absurdity, of a loss of meaning, we can assume that, as he relates in his *Confession*, he often contemplated or at least thought extensively about suicide and its implications. Yet as we know, and as is presented to us through the character of Levin within *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy did not give in to this despair he felt – By way of a return to faith and belief in God. Even so, this does not change the fact that the central thematic structure of *Anna Karenina* revolves around the topic of infidelity, or more precisely the abandonment of belief in marital union, which Tolstoy perceived as a grave sin. This illustrates that the issue at the heart of the novel (and this is likewise true for many of Dostoyevsky’s works) is at first a spiritual one and consequently takes on a social dimension. By painting sin in its truest colours, in its most fervent reality, a way of understanding and therefore subverting, ultimately even renouncing it, is created, giving answers to both the social and spiritual dimensions of the problem. Yet in order for this liberation through art to be achieved, the writer first has to “submerge himself” within the sin he seeks to understand or has to have experienced some part of the evil he aims to describe within himself.

This complex and oftentimes ambivalent interlinking of sin and literature brings us to Dostoyevsky and two of his major, arguably most famous novels: *Crime and Punishment* as well as *The Brothers Karamazov*. As previously mentioned, the fate of Raskolnikov (his exile to Siberia and conversion to Christianity there) closely mirrors the experience of his creator; Yet it should be obvious that this is not all the protagonist of *Crime and Punishment* represents. If Anna Karenina’s sin was that of breaking up her family, what then is Raskolnikov’s sin, apart from the obvious one of murder? One might argue that this sin is, within the greater picture of the novel’s socio-historical implications, not just Raskolnikov’s individual sin but the sin of an entire age, of the century which Dostoyevsky lived in – and for this very sin the author prescribes the same treatment which he himself had to suffer through. Raskolnikov kills, but *not only* out of despair over his own poverty. He likewise does so out of a conviction, out of his own hubris, putting himself above “conventional” morality and societal rules.

In his book *Dostoyevsky reads Hegel in Siberia and bursts into Tears* Hungarian scholar László F. Földényi approaches this topic from a more philosophical angle, specifically pertaining to the 19th century’s philosophy of history. He relates that Dostoyevsky, after his Siberian exile,

acquainted himself with some of the works of Hegel's philosophy, particularly those relating to the progression of "historical necessity". Hegel argues that the general and major progressions of history do not extend to places which remain largely untouched by political events shaping the currents of thought and "spirit" within civilization and further mentions Africa as an example of this, of being a region "without history". For Dostoyevsky, Földényi purports, this mirrored his own situation in Siberia, cut off from life within the more densely populated parts of Russia and the rest of Europe.

Die folgenden Zeilen schrieb Dostojewski vielleicht, als er Hegels strenges Urteil las: "Wer kann behaupten, er habe diese verlorenen Seelen bis auf den Grund ausgelotet und das vor der ganzen Welt darin Verborgene gelesen!... Ein Verbrechen lässt sich, scheint's, nicht von einem gegebenen, fertigen Standpunkt aus beurteilen, und seine Philosophie ist etwas komplizierter, als man gemeinhin annimmt." [...] Das Buch [The book in question is Notes from the House of the Dead] ist kein Manifest des politischen Rebellierens oder der moralischen Entrüstung, es ist ein Buch der Auflehnung gegen das gesamte Dasein, besonders aber gegen das säkularisierte Geschichtsbild, zu dessen hauptsächlichsten Fürsprechern Hegel gehörte und das suggerierte, alles Leiden werde dereinst, noch hier, im irdischen Dasein, endgültig ausschaltbar sein.⁶

Thus, one might say that the titular "bursting into tears" over his predicament was followed by a realisation of a different kind, one which had largely arisen from Dostoyevsky's reading of the New Testament and consequently his turn to faith: That not one soul can be exempt from the "Heilsgeschichte", the progression of history towards salvation, as it is related in the Bible. Naturally, for Dostoyevsky, this understanding of history was wholly opposed to the views Hegel expressed.

In his book on Tolstoy and Nietzsche (which also features several lengthy passages on Dostoyevsky) Lev Shestov repeatedly quotes a passage from one of the private letters of Vissarion Belinsky, illustrating a similar point:

Wäre ich auch imstande, die höchste Stufe der Entwicklung zu erreichen, ich würde Sie auch dort bitten, mir Rechenschaft über alle Opfer der Lebensbedingungen und der Geschichte zu geben, [...]; sonst würde ich mich von der höchsten Stufe der Entwicklungsleiter Kopf voran hinunterstürzen. Ich will das Glück auch umsonst nicht haben, solange ich nicht beruhigt bin über jeden meiner Brüder im Blute.⁷

It is precisely this idea of unwillingness to accept progress at any cost necessary, to forsake morality and humanity once one is faced with the lure of greatness. Herein we find a central problem of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and a pivotal point in attempting to understand the character of Raskolnikov. His intellectual hubris, the feeling of superiority over his fellow man, allows Raskolnikov, in his mind, to elevate himself both over the laws of society and "conventional" ethics, thus providing him an apology to commit the murder he is planning.

⁶ Földényi, László: Dostojewski liest Hegel in Sibirien und bricht in Tränen aus. p. 20

⁷ Schestow, Leo: Tolstoi und Nietzsche. Die Idee des Guten in ihren Lehren. p. 33

As implied earlier then, for Dostoyevsky, one might argue with Földényi as well, the notion at the heart of Raskolnikov's crime is pride, which is likewise the great sin of his time, the hubris of a purportedly enlightened age. Ultimately this problem which is posed through the novel is also a problem of “reason” – Because the murder Raskolnikov commits is not, strictly speaking, unreasonable, but well planned and meant to serve a “greater good”, becoming, in the mind of the murderer, a necessity. Considering this, we once again find a spiritual and a social question to be deeply interwoven within Dostoyevsky’s book. *Crime and Punishment* represents the author’s accusations against a world which readily abandons either religious or simply ethical values for the sake of personal gain and power. Is it any wonder then that Dostoyevsky has Raskolnikov equate himself with the figure of Napoleon, the “greatest man of his century”, the personification of historical progression for Hegel?

If, as stated above, the problem at the heart of *Crime and Punishment*’s thematic structure is likewise one of “reason”, it perhaps pays off to closer examine the exact circumstances and implications this conception entails. Should we perceive the 18th century to be the height of the age of enlightenment, then the 19th century is among the best indicators for the budding consequences of this “height”, and it is for this precise reason that one can learn so much from the works of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, which always paint a picture of society as a whole, not only in a political or economic but also in an individual or spiritual sense. With the both of them being more than mere “realist” authors, it becomes possible to submerge oneself in the “totality” of the age they lived in. Even so, if we want to fully understand the meaning of reason for their century, one may once again turn to the works of Lev Shestov who was heavily influenced by and wrote extensively on both Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. For Shestov then, as his repeated quotation of Belinsky⁸ implies, there is a kind of suspicion towards or at least a disbelief in the universal applicability of reason, which is not to say that he was opposed to reasonable thinking as a whole, even if his sometimes disjointed, paradoxical, wildly essayistic, and freely associative writings might make it seem that way. Taking this into account, the aforementioned problem of reason thus more so becomes a problem of knowledge, which is to mean that the doubt Shestov harbours towards reason mostly pertains to its claim of being able to explain and interpret every mystery of life and the universe.

One may argue that he consequently divides philosophy, that is to say, human striving for knowledge, into two categories: A philosophy of reason and a philosophy of revelation; This dichotomy is further emphasized by the title of his magnum opus *Athens and Jerusalem*, in which he extensively conceptualizes these two currents of thought, Athens being the “origin of

⁸ See Footnote Nr. 7

reason”, Jerusalem being the “birthplace of religion”. But Shestov, always being conscious of his time and the circumstances which shaped life around him, was, not unlike Tolstoy, keenly aware of the fact that much of the church itself, of organized, overly clerical religion had contributed to the loss of belief in what he called “revelation”, and that precisely this had also caused the apotheosis of reason and science since the Enlightenment. The shestovian struggle for both knowledge and faith is not always a hopeful one; Rather, it presents itself as a task striving for the impossible, against the odds which have been dictated upon it by reason, by scientific exactitude, by historical progress. Faith, for Lev Shestov, in its truest sense, faith which has been achieved through this aforementioned struggle, is always preceded by despair, is attained through an incessant need for questioning one’s own existence, asking the final questions of life. This underlines the fact that to him the categories of “reason” and “faith” are not mutually exclusive, but rather complete one another. Athens and Jerusalem, more specifically the two aspects which they signify, are not to be understood in stark opposition to each other, which is to mean that even reasonable thinking is given by God, is ultimately “revealed” to humanity through grace and likewise necessary to reach salvation in the same way as faith is.

However, this same facet of reason so paramount to salvation may always be subject to corruptive influences once the teachings of faith are forsaken, which Shestov perceived in the excessive rationality of his “enlightened” time, but also within many parts of the Christian church itself, due to its authorities and followers becoming too concerned with “secular affairs”, or to be more exact, one may say politics. We know that this scepticism of Shestov had previously already been shared by Tolstoy; Yet what of Dostoyevsky? To answer this, one merely needs to consider the possibly most famous part of his *Brothers Karamazov*: The story of the *Grand Inquisitor*. The two central characters of this tale, Jesus Christ and the Grand Inquisitor, quite clearly serve to illustrate the divine on the one hand and the earthly side of Christianity on the other. In rejecting Christ himself and proclaiming his own authority to be greater, as well as his knowledge to be more beneficial to the good of humanity than even the will of God, the Grand Inquisitor’s actions mirror those of corrupt church officials who had given up their beliefs in humility and charity to advance their personal gain and power. If the church, that is to mean the “worldly” institution of it, with its doctrines and dogmatism, claims to represent the progression of salvific history more accurately than Christ himself, this could be seen as, from the stance taken by Dostoyevsky, the ultimate, cardinal sin of pride, not unlike the crime of hubris committed by Raskolnikov as a stand-in for the hubris of his entire age. The loss of faith within modernity and ever since the Enlightenment was likewise caused by the

church itself, which, having been unable to reform itself, had become reduced to a political establishment, devoid of spiritual purity. However, the tale is concluded with a brotherly kiss given to the Grand Inquisitor by Christ, possibly signifying an act of forgiveness, as well as mirroring the kiss of Judas and thus reminding the Grand Inquisitor of his own betrayal.

“Worldly” corruption and social depravity once again mark a spiritual lack as well, showing these two characteristics to be deeply interwoven. If reason or progress become tools for elevating oneself above the rest of mankind and simply furthering one’s gain, despite it being done in the name of lofty ideals, then they do not recognize the possibilities which are revealed through them, the opportunities of doing good and giving up one’s pride in favour of self-sacrifice. The despair which precedes faith and renders it possible isolates the individual; But faith suspends this isolation, revealing that despair is shared by all of humanity and binds people together. Such is the revelation of Siberia, which so moved Dostoyevsky, as Földényi states, or of Yasnaya Polyana and the peasants, described by Tolstoy in his *Confession* as well as in *Anna Karenina*. History, especially if we consider it to be a history of salvation, cannot simply be understood as a “project” within the hands of a few great individuals, but must be seen as a totality, as the amalgamation of every person’s struggle with their living conditions, both on a social and spiritual level. For Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Shestov, the fact that religious beliefs had begun to lose their prestige did not impact the validity or the “truth” they contained. By tackling the issues of society as well as of spirituality in their works, and by further understanding them as one, conjoined assemblage of issues which are mutually dependent on- and reciprocally influence each other, these authors provide their readers with an opportunity to recognize that their struggles with the world or with God may not merely serve as a source of isolation and despair, thus expressing their own, particular view of what the meaning of “history” can be for each individual within it.

3. The synergy of Literature and Philosophy within Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky

As previously mentioned, Lev Shestov considered Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (albeit merely to serve as an example) to be a work of philosophy in its own way; If the same should be considered true for other works of Tolstoy or even of Dostoyevsky, it is important to examine this “interdisciplinary” relation. For example, their works do not exactly incorporate explicitly "essayistic" passages, such as Thomas Mann’s or Hermann Broch’s novels, with this aspect largely being a feature of 20th century, modernist prose. Rather, to give a simple example, aren't the conversations of Alyosha and Ivan, which precede and follow the tale of the Grand

Inquisitor, already of a philosophical nature in their own right? The way in which such “deeper”, theoretical issues are most often tackled in Tolstoy’s or Dostoyevsky’s books is through the principle of dialogue. And while their characters may most often be considered “true-to-life” in a sense of realist poetics, they also retain a certain aura of being “archetypal”; That is to say, by being representations of different societal groups or classes, they consequently also harbour and thus “*speak for*” certain sets of views or beliefs (i.e., “Stiwa” Oblonsky as a complacent and relatively conservative member of the old aristocracy; Ivan Karamazov as a young and rational intellectual; Sonya Marmeladova as a poor but religious and good-hearted prostitute).

As these views and beliefs all too often clash with each other, resulting in drawn out and oftentimes in-depth discussions on political, moral, or religious questions, the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky already share a similarity with the philosophical dialogues of antiquity, but also mirror a certain paradigm of language use which was integral to counter-enlightenment thinkers such as Johann Georg Hamann:

Hamann lehnt den kantischen Dualismus von Sinnlichkeit und Verstand ab [...] Es gibt aus seiner Sicht nicht zwei Stämme der Erkenntnis, sondern nur einen einzigen. [...] Mit Hamann etabliert sich eine sprachreflexive und rhetorikaffine, von ihm selbst so bezeichnete „Schreibart der Leidenschaft“, die insbesondere im Stil des Textes den Ausdruck einer individuellen Sicht auf die Welt sieht.⁹

Isn’t this likewise reflective of the way in which Tolstoy’s and Dostoyevsky’s dialogues are written and imbedded into their novels? They are not solely theoretical treatises, but possess an organic quality, a “sensual” nature, if only by attachment to the literary characters who interact within them. Additionally, Lev Shestov shares a similar way of thinking, when he elaborates on the philosophical nature of *War and Peace*:

Im Augenblick da Tolstoi sich selbst des Rechtes begeben hat, Farben zu gebrauchen, lieferte er sich der unproduktiven Arbeit aus, denn die ganze Philosophie von “Krieg und Frieden lässt sich in die Worte fassen: Die Summe der in unserer Sprache vorhandenen abstrakten Begriffe reicht nicht hin, um das menschliche Leben wiederzugeben.”¹⁰

And further: “*Tolstoi ist in “Krieg und Frieden” ein Philosoph im besten und vornehmsten Sinne des Wortes, denn er spricht darin vom Leben und schildert das Leben in seinen rätselhaften und geheimnisvollen Seiten.*”¹¹ And the same may certainly be said for Dostoyevsky and his novels. Through their speculations on morality, free will, the merit of religious beliefs, on society and the meaning or progression of history, embedded in a literary

⁹ Trabant, Jürgen: Die Rückkehr der Philosophie zu Rede und Dialog: Vico, Hamann, Herder, Humboldt. p 225-226

¹⁰ Schestow, Leo: Tolstoi und Nietzsche. Die Idee des Guten in ihren Lehren. p. 95

¹¹ Ibid. p. 97

framework, attached to life in a poetical sense and not just through abstraction, the works of both authors thus attain a philosophical character.

Once again, we recognize that “wisdom” is not solely to be attained, that life isn’t simply to be understood through intellect or reason on its own. Being human entails weakness and fallibility, as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky expressed in their books, and no amount of progress, scientific exactitude or enlightenment possesses the ability to inherently change this; Rather, these failings, even if they should cause a person to experience despair when faced with them, are necessary in understanding oneself and realizing that one is not cut off from the rest of the world, thus leading to a greater ability for humility and forgiveness. Shestov saw that even Belinsky, an influential “Westernizer” for his own time, as well as a staunch proponent of enlightenment values, understood this *at heart*. In his (in)famous letter to Gogol, and related to the question of serfdom, he writes: “... *one cannot endure an outraged sense of truth and human dignity; one cannot keep silent when lies and immorality are preached as truth and virtue under the guise of religion and the protection of the knout.*”¹² Isn’t this same problem, one of feigned piety being used to justify personal interests, expressed in a similar fashion by Dostoyevsky in his tale of the *Grand Inquisitor*? Belinsky, always critical of the Russian orthodox church, nevertheless possessed an insight into the value of ideals such as compassion and fraternity between all of humanity, holding onto them even in the face of aspirations for limitless progression at any cost whatsoever. Athens and Jerusalem are not forced to be two antagonistic currents of thought and belief, it is not through their separation, which in turn results in both of them developing corrupted and malign influences, but rather through their unity that they come to fruition.

¹² Belinsky, Vissarion: Letter to Gogol. Accessed online at:

http://academic.shu.edu/russianhistory/index.php/Vissarion_Belinsky%2C_Letter_to_Gogol

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