



Berdyaev on Dostoevsky: Theodicy and Freedom

Vladimir K. Kantor

To cite this article: Vladimir K. Kantor (2015) Berdyaev on Dostoevsky: Theodicy and Freedom, *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 53:4, 324-337, DOI: [10.1080/10611967.2015.1123060](https://doi.org/10.1080/10611967.2015.1123060)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10611967.2015.1123060>



Published online: 21 Apr 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

VLADIMIR K. KANTOR

Berdyaeu on Dostoevsky: Theodicy and Freedom

The author examines the key philosophical problem of theodicy and freedom as it was first formulated by Fyodor Dostoevsky and later developed by Nikolai Berdyaeu.

In a letter (1839) to his brother, Dostoevsky famously wrote: “Man is a mystery that must be solved, and if you spend your entire life trying to solve it, then do not say the time was lost. I am working on this mystery, because I want to be a man.” Likewise for Berdyaeu, according to Piama Gaidenko, the human was always at the center of his philosophy: human freedom, human fate, and the meaning and purpose of human existence. The affinity between Berdyaeu’s and Dostoevsky’s worldviews is obvious. They shared a similar passion, opposed totalitarian and mob psychosis, and strove to see transcendental reality within earthly existence. This affinity is itself mysterious, for it was not based on imitation or repetition, but on an intuitive insight into the same problems of human existence.

English translation © 2015 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, from the Russian text © 2014 “Filosofskie nauki.” “Berdyaeu o Dostoevskom: teoditseia i svoboda,” *Filosofskie nauki*, 2014, no. 4, pp. 52–64.

Vladimir Karlovich Kantor, doctor of philosophical sciences, is a professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE, Moscow).
Email: vlkantor@mail.ru

Translated by Peter Golub.

Berdyaev wrote:

Dostoevsky's novels are composed entirely of people and human relationships. This is clear to anyone who carefully reads his astounding anthropological treatises. Dostoevsky's characters are constantly visiting, talking, and delving into the tragic abyss of human destinies. The only serious actions of Dostoevsky's heroes are their interactions, their passionate attraction and repulsion. No other "action," no other social endeavor can be found in this infinitely varied human world. There is always some human center, some central human passion, around which everything revolves, turning on this axis. Thus a passionate whirlwind of human relations rises and engulfs everything in its frenzied vortex. This whirlwind of passionate, fiery human nature pulls us into the mysterious, enigmatic, and unfathomable depths of this nature. Here Dostoevsky reveals the infinite and bottomless quality of human nature. But even in the deepest depths, at the nadir of the abyss, the face and image of man remains.¹

Berdyaev repeatedly pointed out that he is the heir of both the Slavophiles and Westernizers, Pyotr Chaadaev and Alexei Khomiakov, Alexander Herzen and Vissarion Belinsky, even Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Mikhail Bakunin, despite their differences in views, and above all he was the heir of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy, Vladimir Solovyev and Nikolai Fyodorov. At the same time, he emphasized that despite the presence of Western elements in the foundation of his personality, he felt he belonged to the Russian intelligentsia, and its search for truth: "I am a Russian thinker and writer. And my universalism, my aversion to nationalism is a Russian trait."²

It is amazing thus that during this era of nationalist orientation, Europe accepted Berdyaev as a Russian and Russian Orthodox voice. After Berdyaev's death, the philosopher Lev Shestov stated that Berdyaev is undoubtedly one of the first Russian thinkers who was listened to not only at home, but also in Europe. His writings have been translated into many languages and have been greeted with appreciation and even enthusiasm. Yes, many of his compatriots, recognizing the importance of Berdyaev's work, constantly emphasized that he was not the voice of Russia, let alone Russian Orthodoxy. Only in death was the philosopher—who rebelled against all collective and socially rigid structures (including the Russian Orthodox Church in exile)—finally reconciled with many of his detractors, who were forced to recognize his significance. Georgy Fedotov—who Berdyaev nearly single-handedly defended from Orthodox ideologues throughout the 1930s—wrote: "The West, of course, is

mistaken in considering Berdyaev a typical exponent of Russian Orthodoxy. Berdyaev himself was very worried about this persistent misunderstanding. But we are criminally unjust to ignore this seminal Russian thinker, who did not just write books for students or the academy, but pages full of living (as is popular today, existential) meaning, addressed to everyone.”³

Dostoevsky was once similarly disparaged; his novels and articles were accused of being fantastic and not reflecting the true nature of Russian reality, as opposed to writers like Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, and Ivan Goncharov. In fact, Dostoevsky did not reflect reality, he expressed the meaning of the Russian worldview, which was not narrowly nationalistic (as, for instance, that of Leo Tolstoy), but was “humanist” [*vsechelovecheskim*] (like that of Alexander Pushkin). Berdyaev relied on European thought (at times polemicizing with it), on figures like Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, William Shakespeare, E.T.A Hoffmann, and Honoré de Balzac. Throughout Berdyaev’s volatile life, Dostoevsky served as a kind of tuning fork for his work. He believed that Dostoevsky was the point of origin of a new Russian philosophy: “Our spiritual and intellectual history of the nineteenth century is divided by the phenomenon of Dostoevsky, who heralded in Russia the birth of the new souls. Between the Slavophiles and Idealists of the 1840s, and the spiritual currents of the beginning of the twentieth century, lies a spiritual revolution—the work of Dostoevsky.”⁴ It has often been noted in Russia and the West that “the actions of Dostoevsky’s characters are defined by religious forces and motivations, which are the basis of their decisions. Moreover, Dostoevsky’s whole ‘world’ (i.e., its specific set of facts and values), its whole atmosphere, has an essentially religious source.”⁵ It should also be noted that Berdyaev’s analysis of Dostoevsky provides a helpful glimpse into Berdyaev’s own philosophy. He began his book on Dostoevsky with the words: “I have written a book where I have tried to reveal not only Dostoevsky’s worldview, but also much of my own worldview.”⁶ This is an important recognition. We can once again refer to Fedotov who writes: “The main intuition of Berdyaev’s life was a keen sense of the prevalence of evil in the world. With this intuition he continues the tradition of Dostoevsky (Ivan Karamazov), and also the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, with which he broke many a lance in the first years of his idealistic phase (during the “*Vekhi*” period). The fight against evil is a revolutionary and chivalrous position toward the world, which distinguishes Berdyaev from many thinkers of the Russian Orthodox revival.”⁷

Indeed, Berdyaev always said that Russia never had a chivalrous beginning, a beginning of personality.* Speaking of his ancestry, he would recall that he was the descendant of heroic Russian officers (on his father's side) and French aristocracy (on his mother's). This was the chivalrous-personal beginning he realized in his behavior. It is necessary to understand what "personality" meant for Berdyaev—the concept is crucial for understanding his worldview. In Russian émigré thought, this concept of personality was articulated by Berdyaev many times. Personality, for Berdyaev, is radically different from individuality; it is the unique, unrepeatably combination of personal features. Individuality or the individual belongs to the natural world and shares its slavery and death. In her work on Berdyaev, Piama Gaidenko picked up this thought and placed it within the cultural-philosophical context associated with the concept of freedom:

The concept of personality, for Berdyaev, is different from an empirical concept of human existence, which is, on the one hand, a part of nature, and on the other, a part of the social whole. The empirical existence of a human being, taken with the part belonging to nature and endowed with certain bodily-mental organization is, according to Berdyaev, *not personality, but individuality*. To the latter he attributes his own sociocultural qualities that distinguish him from other individuals belonging to different social entities. Individuality is thus determined by society and nature, and, according to Berdyaev, constitutes a part of the universal. Since individuality is subordinate to natural and social laws, it is the subject of particular sciences—such as, biology, psychology, and sociology. Personality, however, is part of spiritual reality and "no law is applicable to it." Therefore, it cannot be the object of scientific inquiry—this is the existential thesis of Berdyaev's philosophy, which runs parallel to the thinking of Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The defining quality of personality is its *freedom*: personality does not merely *have* freedom, it *is* freedom itself.⁸

In *Self-Knowledge*, Berdyaev ironically commented that he was referred to as the philosopher of freedom, that some even used—the oxymoron—"prisoner of freedom." But the theme of freedom was in fact not merely an academic topic. It was the fundamental expression of his existence, which he clearly formulated: "I have always been my own person, my own man, of my

*The word *lichnost'* is used throughout Berdyaev's work and Berdyaev scholarship. Its closest translation is "person." *Lichnost'* means a living human, with a unique composite of characteristics that make up an individual personality. In this article, *lichnost'* is translated as "personality."—Trans. & Ed.

own ideas, my own profession, my own search for truth. . . . I do not succumb to collective contagion, not even the beneficial. Coalescing with the collective is alien to me. I am brought to ecstasy not by existence, but freedom."⁹

It is this thirst for freedom that he recognized in Dostoevsky. Strictly speaking, there are few thinkers of the last two or three centuries who have not spoken of the necessity of freedom. Hegel went so far as to say: "The History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom; a progress whose development according to the necessity of its nature, it is our business to investigate."¹⁰ But it was perhaps only Dostoevsky who understood the tragedy of freedom in the formation of personality and its existence in history. According to Berdyaev, the paradox presented by Dostoevsky is that people are free according to the divine plan, but that this freedom is tragic, necessitating encumbrance and suffering. The human soul appeared before the writer at the moment of its abandonment by God, and this experience turned out to be incredibly religious, where immersion in darkness is followed by the illumination of a new light. That is why, after reading Dostoevsky's book, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Elders of the Optina Hermitage renounced him. According to Berdyaev, Dostoevsky tried to open the way to Christ through absolute freedom. And freedom can lead to evil. What can oppose the evil of freedom? This was Berdyaev's main question, and the problem at the core of his theodicy. He recognized that "history does not spare the human personality—it doesn't even notice it."¹¹ Here he was at odds with Hegel, as he did not believe that freedom was the end result of the historical process.

It is relevant to mention his own personal position, which some referred to as "the Knight of Freedom." In spite of calling himself "nobody's man" and claiming to belong to no group or collective (which was in fact the case), he was an amazingly social man. Moreover, he functioned as a reference point for many the representatives of different ideological currents, and even those who disagreed with him. Such was his predilection—to be in the public eye. In *History of Russian Philosophy*, Nikolai Lossky stated the generally agreed-upon view that Berdyaev is "the most famous modern Russian philosopher."¹²

I believe that his popularity is due in part to his independence, his unflinching movement toward his personal conception of truth. Beginning his ideological and social life as a Marxist and polemicizing with Nicholas Mikhailovsky* (with whom he had an early affinity), he was one of the

*Nicholas Mikhailovsky (1842-1904) was the most influential populist journalist inside Russia throughout the final third of the nineteenth century.—Ed.

first of his generation to turn toward religious and idealistic philosophy. It turned out that in the history of Russian thought, he would be joined by other independent philosophers—Sergei Bulgakov, Peter Struve, and Semyon Frank. He was expelled from the university as a young man, exiled for three years to Vologda, and mocked by both friends and enemies, who called his books “*beliberdyaevschina*.”* It is amazing that for nearly all his life he had no illusions. Remembering his revolutionary experience he wrote:

Desiring to participate in the liberation movement, I joined the Union of Liberation. I had my own ideological and personal ties with the initiators of the Union of Liberation. Abroad, I participated in two congresses (1903 and 1904), where the parameters of the Union of Liberation were outlined. The congresses took place in the Black Forest and Schaffhausen, near the Rhine Falls. The natural beauty attracted me more than the content of the Congresses. There I first became acquainted with the zemstvo liberal circles. Many of these people later played an oppositional role in the State Duma and were part of the provisional government in 1917. Among them were very commendable individuals, but that environment was foreign to me.¹³

However, Berdyaev was one of the first to accept Mikhail Gershenzon’s offer of writing for *Vekhi*, and produced the remarkable article, “Philosophical Verity and Intelligentsia Truth,” [Filosofskaia istina i intelligentskaia pravda] published as the first piece in the collection. In it, he spoke of the need to overcome “external forces.” That was his main position—that the objective world is contrary to human and philosophical freedom.

Even the February Revolution—enthusiastically embraced by many writers and philosophers close to him (and many disciples of Dostoevsky)—he related to not only ironically, but with great anxiety. His sister-in-law, Evgeniia Rapp, recalled that he was convinced that the Bloodless Revolution (as people referred to the February Revolution) would end in great bloodshed. He spoke of the elemental evil of the revolution, for which he was considered a reactionary. And when the enthusiastic and servile poet-philosopher, Andrei Bely, loudly praised Alexander Kerensky, describing him in the words used to describe Christ—“He is a *che-lo-vek*” [human]—Berdyaev laughed out loud, and forever offended Bely, who devoted his later work to denouncing Russian idealism and praising Leninist dialectics. Berdyaev categorically rejected Bolshe-

*A neologism made by combining the words “Berdyaev” and “nonsense.”—Trans.

vism, which he considered a debasing of Russia and Europe at the anthropological level. He wrote that as a result of the Bolshevik revolution,

... there has appeared a new anthropological type, devoid of the kindness, ambiguity, and uncertainty of former Russian people. These are clean-shaven faces, rigid in their expression, aggressive, and active, bearing not the slightest resemblance to the old Russian intelligentsia, which had prepared the revolution. This new anthropological type emerged from the war, which created the Bolshevik cadres. This type is as militarized as the fascist type. I have written about this repeatedly. The people and nations underwent a surprising metamorphosis. For me this was a new and painful experience. Subsequently, the same metamorphosis took place in Germany, and is likely to occur in France.¹⁴

Moreover, realizing that the Russian Revolution derided the Russian intelligentsia and had set out to destroy it, Berdyaev, who greatly disliked collectivity, came to the defense of those individuals who still adhered to the spirit of personal freedom by organizing the Free Academy of Spiritual Culture (1919–1922). He admitted breaking off with old friends—Vyacheslav Ivanov and Mikhail Gershenzon—considering their behavior to be too adaptable and conciliatory. It is interesting that in spite of this he was valued by the Bolsheviks, who included him in a group of twelve men to whom they allotted the “academic rations” during times of food shortages. He was one of the “twelve immortals.” However, he did not change his anti-Bolshevik position, and in 1920, he was arrested for the first time and interrogated personally by Felix Dzerzhinsky. Berdyaev recalled:

On the left side, near the desk, stood a person I did not know in a military uniform with a red star. This was a blond man with a straggly pointed beard, with gray, cloudy, melancholy eyes; there was something soft in his appearance and manner—a certain refinement and courtesy. He asked me to sit down and said: “My name is Dzerzhinsky.” This was the name of the person who had created the Cheka, a word associated with blood and before which the whole of Russia trembled. Among the many prisoners, I was the only one Dzerzhinsky questioned personally. My interrogation had a ceremonial aspect—Kamenev attended, as did the deputy chairman of the Cheka, Vyacheslav Menzhinsky, with whom I was vaguely familiar, having met him in St. Petersburg when he was a writer, a failed novelist. A prominent feature of my character is that during calamitous and perilous moments of my life I never feel overwhelmed or have the slightest fear; on the contrary, I feel inclined to rise and go on the offensive. This is likely the effect of my military heritage. I decided not to defend myself during the interrogation, but to

attack, shifting the entire conversation to the ideological sphere. I told Dzerzhinsky: “Keep in mind that my dignity as a thinker and writer demands that I should speak frankly and plainly.” To this Dzerzhinsky replied: “That is what we expect of you.” I then proceeded with my attack and spoke for some forty-five minutes and gave a whole lecture in defense of my religious, philosophical and moral opposition to communism....¹⁵

This is why, he thought, he was expelled from the Soviet Union not for political but ideological reasons. In the West, he also held an absolutely independent position. As mentioned above, Berdyaev’s favorite word was “chivalry.”

Consider another story related to Nikolai Fedotov, who in 1939, in Paris, was to be expelled from the St. Sergius Theological Institute by several well-known Russian theologians for his disagreement with the bishop or more precisely, for his disobedience.¹⁶ At that time, Sergei Bulgakov, Vladimir Zenkovsky, and Georges Florovsky were all present, and all of them, like subservient Soviet citizens (whom they supposedly derided) voiced no opposition. Of the Russian religious figures living in Paris at the time, only two came to Fedotov’s defense—Mother Maria and Berdyaev. Mother Mary in the midst of the “Fedotov Case” (as she called it) proposed to create a “Society for the Protection of Christian liberty,” and Berdyaev published a sharp article that caused him to quarrel with the right wing of the Orthodox émigrés, which even included authors writing for *Put’*. He described the episode in his memoirs:

I thought that the version of Christianity that had triumphed was distorted and ill-adapted to human interests. I was in a constant agonizing conflict. For me, this conflict culminated in the incident of G.P. Fedotov, who was nearly removed from the Theological Institute for his articles in *Novaia Rossiia* [*The New Russia*], which apparently contained “leftist” deviation. Official Orthodoxy had positioned itself as the “right.” I had for some time been distressed by the banality, repugnancy, and servile guise of the official church. In relation to the G.P. Fedotov incident, I wrote a strident article for *Put’*, “Sushchestvuet li v pravoslavii svoboda sovesti?” [Does Freedom of Thought and Conscience Exist in Orthodoxy?] which caused a row with the professors of the Theological Institute.¹⁷

He recognized nothing to be more important than freedom of spirit.

The article caused the Orthodox hierarchs to stop considering Berdyaev as Orthodox. Berdyaev had written a fierce philippic against nationalism in life, thought, and religion:

There is nothing more repulsive than the expression of “nationalist thinking.” . . . Today, the world is dying as a result of nationalism; it is drowning in the blood due to “nationalist thinking.” The church should condemn nationalism as a heresy . . . Nationalism is a form of paganism within Christianity, encouraging the instincts of blood and race. Christians who are faithful to Christ and the Gospel (many are not) have no right to “nationalist thinking.” To be in accordance with the morality of the Gospel, or simply human morality, they must be “universally minded.”¹⁸

Nationalism at that time had possessed the consciousness of Europeans and even educated Russians. Not to mention the fanaticism of the Black Hundred who Berdyaev could not stand. In the words of Evgeniia Rapp:

In Paris, N.A. (I cannot remember the year) again came to the defense of the Jews. The hall was overcrowded. At the end of his speech, a young man started to vehemently and disrespectfully object to N.A., attacking the Jews and essentially paraphrasing the tenets of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. His speech was punctuated by the enthusiastic applause of his entourage. When N.A. tried to answer him, they interrupted him with jeers, whistles, and shouts. I sat in the front row and watched as N.A. suddenly turned pale. I felt that he was seized by a terrible fit of anger and outrage, which I had witnessed on several occasions, and in which there was such force that it was impossible to resist. “Get out!” resounded his stentorian voice. “This is not a Russian tearoom!”¹⁹

The force of his voice was indeed powerful, causing the Black Hundred to leave. And long before that incident he had written: “The nobleman Pushkin or the intellectual Dostoevsky were a thousand times more representative of the people. The nation attains its most perfect and highest expression in genius. Genius is always populist and nationalist; in it can always be heard the voice from the depths of national life. The spirit of a nation is always expressed by its distinguished, elect individuals.”²⁰

The era of mass uprisings had arrived. Berdyaev had written about this many times. *The End of Our Time* and *Toward a New Epoch* are two particularly famous books on this subject. He wrote: “The primary realities, that had previously been covered by the cloak of civilization, are now revealed. Faith in man, who had still existed in the nineteenth century, has been permanently shaken. Faith in God had been shaken earlier. The one followed the other. The humanist myth of man fell. And the abyss opened beneath him.”²¹ But who foresaw this abyss? Berdyaev remembered Fyodor Tyutchev and Dostoyevsky. But Tyutchev foresaw chaos in nature, and here it stirred in history: “History has a process of rationalization, but it

also has a strong, irrational beginning. Overwhelmed by the chaos of history, surrounded by its raging irrational forces, and struck down by its fatum—man agrees to enter the sphere of nonhuman existence and is expelled from human existence.”²²

This is the situation in Albert Camus’s novel *The Plague*, where people are killed by an invisible force that cannot be stopped, and is resisted by a select few. The masses are antipersonal, as Dostoevsky showed in “The Grand Inquisitor,” they negate freedom, because in a state of freedom they are cannibalistic. The harbinger of this idea is present in Raskolnikov’s nightmare.

The following passage is central to the present text. In the strange and terrible environment of prison, Raskolnikov succumbs to sadness and loneliness, and falls ill: “He was in the hospital from the middle of Lent till after Easter. When he was better, he remembered the dreams he had had while he was feverish and delirious.” In his delirium, he sees dreams that are a continuation and a generalization of the nightmare of the senseless killing of the old horse by the commoners. He sees the uprising of the masses. This is an apocalyptic picture, and the Apocalypse, as we know, was one of Dostoevsky’s favorite texts. These are not ideological murders, but a plague of madness: “In his delirium, he envisaged that the whole world had been condemned to a terrible, unknown, and invisible plague that descended on Europe from the depths of Asia. All, but a select few, would perish. A new species of trichina emerged, microscopic entities that inhabited human bodies. These were spirits, endowed with mind and will.”* These trichina are very similar to those of the future Führers—endowed with mind and will—which pitted people against one another in a satanic dance of death, which Camus would describe in his work. But in the passage, Raskolnikov still holds onto the hope granted by the Gospel, that a select few will be able to resist the mass psychosis.

People infected by them immediately became demonic and insane. And yet never before had they been so convinced of their intelligence or been so steadfast in their beliefs, as were the infected. Never did they doubt their convictions, their scientific conclusions, their moral beliefs and faith. Whole towns, cities and nations were infected and succumbed to madness. All were in crisis and could not understand one another, each thinking that they alone knew the truth, and they suffered looking upon one another, and beat their breasts, and wept, wringing their hands. They knew not how nor whom to judge, and could not agree on what was evil and what was good. They knew not whom to condemn nor whom to

*Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1866), “Epilogue,” ch. 2.—Trans.

absolve. And so people killed one another in senseless rage. They gathered in vast armies, but before the campaigns could begin, they would turn on themselves—the ranks dissolved and the soldiers fought one another, hacking and slashing, tearing the flesh and feasting upon it. In the cities, the bells rang all day. All were summoned, but none knew who called them and for what purpose—and yet bells continued to ring and ring without end. The most ordinary work was abandoned, as everyone had their own methods, their own inventions, and could not decide upon the best way; and so farming stopped. Some tried to form alliances, to agree upon something and work together, to keep their oaths, but soon after an agreement, they would start on something else completely; and so, blaming one another, they resumed fighting. Eventually fire and famine spread. Death took all things, while the pestilence progressed and spread further and further.*

The movement described in this passage is suggestive of a bustling crowd. The pestilence is not an idea, but something else. Plague, cholera, a feast amid the plague—this is not the act of ideologues: “Whole towns, cities and nations were infected and succumbed to madness.” What is the solution? As in Berdyaev’s article, many times denounced by Soviet and Russian scholars, Dostoevsky sees the opposition to mass insanity in independent personalities, in the select few: “Of the whole world, few were saved. These were the pure and chosen people, destined to found a new race and a new existence, to renew and purify the Earth, but no one saw them, no one heard their words and voices.”* This is an absolutely Christian position. The Gospel too states that “few are chosen.” In his *Novella of the Antichrist*, Vladimir Solovyev also proposes that any opposition to the antichrist will come in the form of a small, select few.

Of the “Epilogue” that concludes *Crime and Punishment* Yuri Kariakin writes: “And can we not hear, in this hellish music, in this chiming of the tocsins, the ‘strings’ in the soul of the young man who plotted his own ‘sentence’ with intimidated and dangerous enthusiasm. Can we not see among the swarming myriads the Raskolnikovs with their ‘sentences’ in one hand and an ax in the other? And having killed his pawnbroker, his Lizaveta, his mother. Each ascending to ever ‘higher’ spheres, driving others ‘lower’ still . . .”²³ An idea instilled in the masses ceases to be an idea (i.e. a mental product of the personality). Therefore, the masses cannot know love, just as they cannot know ideas, especially masses organized by totalitarian Führers—trichina. Raskolnikov dreams not of the struggle of

*See Ibid.—Trans.

personalities, but the madness of locusts, which Merezhkovsky identified with the Nazis, arguing that we cannot talk about the ideas of the Nazi mobs, but only the temperature of the swarm.

Here Berdyaev is on the side of Raskolnikov: “The experience of the Russian Revolution has confirmed my long standing belief that freedom is not democratic, but aristocratic. Freedom is neither interesting nor necessary for the insurgent masses; they cannot bear the burden of freedom. Dostoyevsky had a deep understanding of this. The fascist movement in the West corroborates this idea. They stand under the sign of the Grand Inquisitor—the rejection of freedom of the spirit for the sake of bread. In Russian Communism, the will to power turned out to be stronger than the will to freedom.”²⁴ Berdyaev always maintained that the idea of freedom preceded the idea of perfection. But can God be justified against the backdrop of mass atrocities? This is the problem that was put forward by postwar Western theology. The thesis of the present text is the following: *For Berdyaev, theodicy is only for personalities. The masses operate outside divine law and divine grace. This is how Berdyaev felt the world (perhaps through Dostoevsky). The masses are afraid of freedom. And freedom is a gift from God. The revolt of the masses is ersatz-freedom.*

Berdyaev wrote: “The masses are generally very easily manipulated and give way to a state of collective obsession. They can obsess only over those ideas that represent a simple and elementary symbolism. The style that is typical of our time. The pursuit of leaders who will lead the masses, grant deliverance, and resolve any issues, suggests that the classic authorities, the previous monarchies and democracies have fallen only to be replaced by new authorities, produced by the collective obsession of the masses.”²⁵ This collective obsession has prevented humanity from seeking God, and evil could not be overcome by freedom, because evil superseded personality. Berdyaev outlined the problem thus: Dostoevsky showed that boundless freedom of the personality leads to boundless despotism (i.e., absolute social evil). However, here a verbal-ideological substitution occurs, since the concept of infinite freedom turns out to mean extremism and arbitrariness, which is antithetical to freedom. This is the state of despotism and mass movements where there is no personal temptation or personal atonement. In the mass hecatombs, the concept of sin is, of course, absent—there are only the directives of the leader.

As noted above, the theodicy and anthropodicy that Berdyaev finds in Dostoevsky relates only to personality:

Rebellion that begins with boundless freedom inevitably leads to boundless power of thought and boundless despotism in life. This is how

Dostoevsky writes his amazing theodicy, which is also an anthropodicy. There is only one interminable objection to God—the existence of evil in the world. This is Dostoevsky’s central theme. His work is an answer to this objection. And I would paradoxically formulate the answer as follows: *God exists precisely because there is evil and suffering in the world; the existence of evil is proof of the existence of God. If the world were exclusively kind and good, then there would be no need for God, then the world would already be God. God exists because evil exists. This means that God exists, because freedom exists.* Thus, Dostoevsky proves the existence of God through freedom, freedom of the human spirit. Those who deny the spirit its freedom deny God, and vice versa. A world that is forcibly kind and good, that is harmonious due to unavoidable necessity, is a godless world—a rational mechanism. And those who reject God and the freedom of the human spirit, seek to transform the world into such a rational mechanism, and move it toward such a coercive harmony.²⁶

Later he understood the significance of chaos and arbitrariness, as opposed to rationality, when iniquitous chaos metamorphosed into fixed horror. It was not by accident that he discussed at length the concepts of “fear” and “horror” in the works of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. “I am fighting for freedom,” he wrote, “but I do not want freedom for myself; I don’t want people to think that I’m fighting for selfish reasons. . . . A shadow has fallen over the world. A historical and cosmic cycle of catastrophe and collapse has begun.”²⁷ This world has already forgotten theodicy and freedom. In his book, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World* [Sud’ba cheloveka v sovremennom mire (k ponimaniuu nashei epokhi)], he described how irrationality and chaos lead to totalitarianism, and, moreover, under the guise of rationality: “Externally, chaos can appear to be perfectly organized.”²⁸ But chaos is the original evil, and therefore, provides no freedom. In fact, it is not even evil, but the primeval horror feared by Franz Kafka and Martin Heidegger. It is the Nothingness a person sees in place of Being. Here, the words of Heidegger are apropos: “The night of the world is spreading its darkness. The world age is determined by the God’s staying away, by ‘God’s absconsion.’ . . . God’s absconsion means that there is no more visible God, who would indisputably gather all the people and things of the world, and from within this gathering would build world history, and humanity’s place in it.”²⁹

This state of the world exists outside human history. This is what Dostoevsky guessed. And what Berdyaev saw.

Notes

1. Nikolai Berdyaev, "Otkrovenie o cheloveke v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo," in *N.A. Berdyaev. O russkikh klassikakh* (Moscow: Visshaia shkola, 1993), p. 57.
2. Nikolai Berdyaev, *Samopoznanie* (Moscow: Kniga, 1991), p. 11.
3. Georgy Fedotov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii. N.A. Berdyaev—mislitel'* (Moscow: Martis; Sam & Sam, 2004), vol. 9, p. 278.
4. Nikolai Berdyaev, "Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo," in *N.A. Berdiaev. O russkikh klassikakh* (Moscow: Visshaia shkola, 1993), p. 215.
5. Romano Gvardin, "Religioznie obrazi v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo," *Kul'turologiia Daidzhest* (Moscow: INION PAN, 2007), no. 1(40), p. 129.
6. Berdyaev, "Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo," p. 107.
7. Georgy Fedotov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii. N.A. Berdyaev—mislitel'*, p. 279.
8. Piama Gaidenko, *Vladimir Solovyev i filosofia Serebrianogo veka* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsia, 2001), pp. 302–03.
9. Berdiaev, *Samopoznanie*, p. 47
10. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lektsii po filosofii istorii* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2005), p. 72.
11. Berdyaev, *Samopoznanie*, p. 9.
12. Nikolai Lossky, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1991), p. 268.
13. Berdyaev, *Samopoznanie*, p.133.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
16. Vladimir Kantor, "Filosofia natsional'noi samokritiki pis'mo S.L. Franka G.P. Fedotovu," *Voprosy filosofii* (2006), no. 3, pp. 132–43.
17. Berdyaev, *Samopoznanie*, p. 287.
18. Nikolai Berdyaev, "Sushchestvuet li v pravoslavii svoboda mysli i sovesti," *Put'* (1939) no. 59, p. 48.
19. Evgeniia Rapp, *Moi vospominaniia. Berdyaev N.A. Samopoznanie*, (Moscow, 1991), p. 380.
20. Nikolai Berdyaev, *Filosofia neravenstva* (Moscow: IMA-PRESS, 1990), p. 101.
21. Nikolai Berdyaev, *Sud'ba cheloveka v sovremennom mire. Berdiaev N.A. Dukh i real'nost'* (Moscow: AST; Folio, 2006), pp. 147–48.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 164–65.
23. Yuri Karyakin, *Samoobman Raskolnikova. Dostoevskii i kanun veka* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1989), p. 35.
24. Berdyaev, *Samopoznanie*, p. 231.
25. Berdyaev, *Sud'ba cheloveka v sovremennom mire*, pp. 165–66.
26. Berdyaev, "Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo," p. 147–48.
27. Berdyaev, *Sud'ba cheloveka v sovremennom mire*, p. 167.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
29. Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Kostermann, 1950). p. 270. Russian translation from the German by A. V. Mikhailov.