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**DOSTOEVSKY'S NON-COINCIDENT SELF:  
THE SUBJECT OF JUDGMENT IN  
THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV**

*The article deals with the fundamental complexity and controversy of the non-coincident self concept in the Dostoevsky's novel "Brothers Karamazov". Theoretical and philosophical investigation of the subject of judgment's category is proposed. One of the guiding conceptual frameworks for the novel then is an articulation of true judgment: the possibility of sitting in judgment on the other, and the nature of the subject who is being judged. It is emphasized that the novel's dominant man under judgment is Dmitri Karamazov. The article points to the contrast between the official and unofficial judgments thus broadly affirms the polar categories of falsity and truth. It is argued that this contrast enacts a familiar Western metaphysical paradigm: truth is aligned with the private, the interior, and the familial; falsity is aligned with the official, the public, and the bureaucratic. In the space of the private, real communication can occur as interiority is exposed to interiority. The problem of non-coincident self and subject of judgment in the "Brothers Karamazov" is considered in the light of basic difference in the Levinasian and Bakhtinian readings of Dostoevsky. Bakhtin believes that the subject escapes this tautology by being more than the perception of him or her by outside eyes. The Levinasian conception of non-coincidence revolves around a disjunction between what might be called levels of subjectivity. The subject is himself and that which has himself – the Levinasian subject is that which takes itself as its own content. The Bakhtinian subject is that which exceeds the others' grasps. At the same time the Bakhtinian and Levinasian understandings of the subject both insist on the point that the subject is non-coincident with himself. The article takes into account the contemporary theoretical approaches of to the Dostoevsky's studies: Gary L. Browning (Zosima's "secrets of renewal"), M. Goldstein (position of a hypothetical man of "advanced ideas"), C. Emerson's reading in "Zosima's "Mysterious Visitor": Again Bakhtin on Dostoevsky, and Dostoevsky on Heaven and Hell".*

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Dostoevsky claimed that he is not a realist but rather an ultra-realist, that what concerns him is man inside man. It is well known that he had no patience for sophisticated psychology, absolute philosophies, or social determinism; neither did he concern himself with biological determinism or a concern for what might

be called genetic memory. The man inside man that is left seems to be a subject that cannot be adequately understood without an inscrutable, and perhaps mystifying, notion of God and transcendence. Yet this notion of man as understood through God can be seen as the transcendent form of a dialectic of development that Dostoevsky opposes in its atheistic form as psychological, social, and historical determinism. What is repugnant about any form of the dialectic of development is that man counts only insofar as he is subsumed in a totality<sup>1</sup>. Whether the name for that totality is God or Progress, what is lost is precisely the man Dostoevsky was so interested in finding. Inserted into totality, man is destined to do what he does, and so only *appears* to have time. As Gary Saul Morson points out, “we are human only insofar as time is open. Scientific determinism... allows for only one outcome at every moment, and so it constitutes a sort of philosophical capital punishment” [12, p. 107]. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the man within man is the stake for which competing machinations, intrigues, scandals, and debates play. The three legitimate brothers each goes through the crucible of suffering, descending away from the objective totality of the world, to come to the moment in which the man inside the man might be revealed<sup>2</sup>. Two brothers, Dmitri and Alyosha, emerge. Ivan sinks into brain fever. Each brother faces a certain kind of judgment that strips him of the extensive social armature that had hitherto supported him. However, this stripping is more than a self-revelation or epiphany; the man inside the man is realized at a certain juncture of self and other, of a subject who is outside of the objective totality of the world and yet more than a subtracted and subtractive interiority. One of the guiding conceptual frameworks for the novel then is an articulation of true judgment: the possibility of sitting in judgment on the other, and the nature of the subject who is being judged.

The novel’s dominant man under judgment is of course Dmitri Karamazov, on trial for the murder of his father; the judgment pronounced on him is unequivocal, and unequivocally wrong; thus Alyosha Karamazov’s subsequent authorization of his Dmitri’s planned escape to America seems to right. The official courts were unable to see that Dmitri Karamazov did not kill his father, and the private judgment which Alyosha sits in on – is it morally permissible for Dmitri to escape – allows for truths to finally be said: Dmitri did not kill; he is too weak to bear the burden he wishes to; as long as no one will be at fault for his escape it is even morally necessary that he escape. The contrast between the official and unofficial judgments thus broadly affirms the polar categories of falsity and truth. This contrast enacts a familiar Western metaphysical paradigm: truth is aligned with the private, the interior, and the familial; falsity is aligned with the official, the public, and the bureaucratic. In the space of the private, real communication can occur as interiority is exposed to interiority. Brother to

brother, Dmitri reveals his fears, his desires, and his fantastic hopes for the future. Accepting this naked speech, Alyosha can make a just evaluation of his brother and offer mercy. In the space of the public, real communication is impossible. The figure Dmitri cuts (precisely a figure, a spectacle) does not “speak”. In any case, the jury which will decide his fate is not able to listen. (The audience of well-dressed ladies and gentlemen asks how it’s possible that such low level clerks, merchants, and artisans could understand the complexities of the case being presented to them, and the answer is that they are not. The irony lost on the audience is, of course, neither is it able to grasp the case’s complexities.) Dmitri’s figure is already determined, assigned its meaning in a larger psychological, social-historical grid; Bakhtin describes this contrast between the unfinalizable essence of Dmitri’s subjectivity and the *pre-comprehension* during the investigation and trial: “The most profound picture of false psychology in practice is provided by the scenes of Dmitry’s (sic) preliminary investigation and trial in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The investigator, judges, prosecutor, defense attorney, and commission of experts are all equally incapable of approaching the unfinalized and undecided core of Dmitry’s personality, for he is a man who stands, in essence throughout his entire life, on the threshold of great internal decisions and crises. In place of the living core, bursting with new life, they substitute a sort of *ready-made definitiveness*, “naturally” and “normally” *predetermined* in all its words and acts by “psychological laws.” All who judge Dmitry are devoid of a genuinely dialogic approach to him, a dialogic penetration into the unfinalized core of his personality. They seek and see in him only the factual, *palpable definitiveness* of experiences and actions, and subordinate them to already defined concepts and schemes. The authentic Dmitry remains outside their judgment (he will pass judgment on himself)” [1, p. 62].

The situation of two judgments repeats throughout the novel. Fyodor Pavlovitch asks Alyosha and Ivan to answer whether there is God and immortality. Ivan answers no; Alyosha answers yes. Grushenka reveals her baseness to Alyosha, brought to her by Rakitin for the express purpose of corrupting Alyosha. Rakitin judges her a bitch; Alyosha finds her a sister. The sections “Rebellion” and “The Grand Inquisitor” and “From the Life of Elder Zosima” and “Talks and Homilies” follow this pattern with a judgment on God and the world. These judgments revolve around the pairings of truth-interiority and falsehood-exteriority. The polarity itself seems generated by a particular understanding of the individual as exceeding judgment (Bakhtin). Thus what is available for public judgment is the exterior of man, the spectacle that he presents. This judgment will always be false insofar as it mistakes its totalization of the exterior (we might say, the surface interaction of the man and his society)

as a thorough comprehension of the man's existence. This is the judgment that Ivan makes when he tells his father that there is neither God nor immortality, that Rakitin makes when he sneers at Grushenka, and that the court makes when it condemns Dmitri on the circumstantial evidence. Where Dmitri meets with the social, he is violent in his passions, egoistic, and murderous. The court's judgment is inevitable since the nature of the court is to see the spectacle and to take the spectacle for the whole of the man. The judgment that Alyosha sits upon Dmitri begins with an understanding that the spectacle does not comprehend the individual. That is, the individual exceeds the situation in which he is. The proper response to the untotalizable interiority of the individual would be to show mercy.

Thus judgment divides itself into the true and the false, into the interior that enjoins mercy and the exterior that must ignore precisely the essence of man in order to fulfill itself. This binary system has at its foundation the heavenly (God and immortality) and the earthly (the denial of God and immortality). Ivan acknowledges this point: if there is no God, there is no immortality; but if there is no immortality, there is no immorality that is not simply conventional, relative, completely contingent, and therefore ultimately meaningless. We can continue this reasoning: if there is no real morality, there is no mercy. The court brackets off whatever is not visible and pronounces judgment in a void. Small wonder if it does not waver in its certainty that Dmitri had murdered Fyodor Pavlovitch. The private judgment Alyosha is forced to make on the question of Dmitri's escape offers an almost perfect inversion of the trial: courtroom-prison; public-private; spectacle-dialogue. The spectacle quality of the trial is totally absent from the meetings in the prison. Alyosha pronounces the judgment which is both a criticism and a clemency. Dmitri, even though he wishes to bear a great burden to expiate for the sufferings of others, is not strong enough and so must escape to keep alive the possibility that he will regenerate into a better man. This meeting seems to confirm the notion that truth is only possible in the realm of the private. Truth becomes a subtraction from the world, a withdrawal from the public, a notion already evident in the movement from the history of the Karamazov family recounted by the narrator to the thoughts and experiences of the brothers; that is, in the oscillation between the "objective" story and the "subjective" stories. The public-false/private-true dichotomy might seem to present a warm and fuzzy view of the possibility of justice, the preferability of mercy, and the virtues of dialogue. This notion of the truth and efficacy of private judgment is introduced earlier on in the novel in the section of the history of father Zosima. A visitor, a distinguished and philanthropic man, is intrigued by the young Zosima's asking for forgiveness in the middle of a duel, and would like to know what emotions Zosima had felt at that moment. After

many visits, the visitor, Mikhail, admits to murdering a woman fourteen years ago and of yearning to publicly confess his crime. Mikhail asks Zosima to judge what he should do; Zosima tells him to confess.

The broad outlines of this encounter conform to the notions of privacy and truth structuring the later episode in which Alyosha tells his brother to escape. A certain aura of being outside normal sociality permeates these two moments of judgment, which are preeminently moments of total communication "communion assumes a special character and becomes independent of all real-life, concrete social forms (the forms of family, social or economic class, life's stories)" [1, p. 264]. In moments outside normal day-to-day relations, Mikhail and Dmitri each speaks the truth, a truth so implicated in this extra-social situation that to utter it elsewhere would immediately change its tenor. Mikhail, on the threshold of a crisis, comes to Zosima, himself on a threshold, and struggles to decide to confess his crime to the world. It seems forgiveness and love awaits him if he does, and torment and isolation awaits him if he does not. Gary L. Browning enumerates the steps of Zosima's "secrets of renewal", among the examples of which Browning includes the episode of the mysterious visitor:

1. In all behavior, choose humble love; eschew condemnation and vengeance;
2. Recognize your own guilt from
  - a. your bad example (the source of much of Dmitrij's (sic) guilt),
  - b. your tendency to judge rather than forgive (the source of much of Ivan's guilt),
  - c. your inadequate good example (the source of much of Alesa's (sic) guilt);
3. Confess your guilt, ask for and freely give forgiveness and love;
4. Enter the earthly paradise of love and brotherhood, praising God's glory in all creation [2, p. 522].

The application of the "secret of renewal" to the story of the mysterious visitor fails to do justice to the disturbing quality of the episode. As Zosima knows, active love such as would enable entrance into an earthly paradise is hard work. The fraught moment of Mikhail's hesitation between confession and silence, and then confession and a second murder, requires more than the choosing of humble love over vengeance or the recognition of guilt. If Mikhail does manage to attain to earthly paradise, it seems as if it is because his paradise will be a short-lived one before the practical consequences of his confession become apparent. That is, his entrance into a brotherhood of praise for "God's glory in all creation" must be curtailed if Mikhail is to remain in paradise. Martin Goldstein, reading this episode from the position of a hypothetical man of "advanced ideas," points out the oddly complacent tone that could be inferred

from the episode: “The upshot of his [Mikhail’s] confession is what is to be expected of pietistic literature, though not of life: goodness receives its reward here on earth. The confession is not believed by the community to which this well-respected individual belongs, and his action is attributed to a mental aberration. His family, although grieved by his presumed illness, does not suffer any great sacrifice or misery, and he dies shortly afterward, happy that he made his confession without great loss to those he loved, thanks to God’s mercy. In a sense, he has eaten his cake and had it, too” [7, p. 329]<sup>3</sup> .)

The quaintly fairy-tale quality of entering an earthly paradise of love and brotherhood through love and confession comes off flat and unbelievable, or inappropriately smug.

This pietistic smugness is, to be sure, just one reading. The episode is yet more disturbing in Caryl Emerson’s reading. In her judgment: “[There] is no moral dilemma anywhere in Dostoevsky’s final novel that can match this little story in efficiency and hopelessness. It is a portrayal of the “right thing” accomplished, but where all parties are guaranteed to lose...” that causes “universal confusion, pain, disbelief, the predicted diagnosis of madness, the ruin of his family, his own death, and a lingering aftermath of resentment on the part of the aggrieved wife and stunned townsfolk against Zosima... What indeed *had* been gained by this act, in the real world of loving human being? Absolutely the only thing in its favor is that it was the truth” [5, p. 162].

Although Alyosha’s counsel to Dmitri is itself not terribly clear in its implications (will Dmitri actually escape or is this another fantasy like his future return to Russia with Grushenka as Americans, is it moral cowardice to escape given Dmitri’s epiphany of the “poor babe”?), the implications of Zosima’s counsel to Mikhail is even more fraught. The effects of following the two “true” judgments are incomparable. Dmitri’s escape (if he escapes) will not hurt anyone. The money to finance the escape comes from Ivan, who is in a certain sense trying to appease his conscience by refusing to financially benefit from Dmitri’s predicament. Grushenka will arrange to follow Dmitri. Even the guards who have been bribed will not suffer punishment (a condition that Alyosha takes into explicit consideration when advising Dmitri to escape). Mikhail has a family – a young wife and children – who will be not only horrified by the confession, but will face immediate practical consequences if the visitor takes on the legal status of a criminal. While no amount of private suffering might expiate the Mikhail’s crime, the confession will create new suffering, will in effect be a new crime against his wife and children. It is difficult not to read the visitor’s desire for confession as egotistical. As Emerson succinctly puts it, “[morally] right decisions... can be astonishingly selfish” [5, p. 160]. This forces the question of whether the strict honesty of the encounter between

Zosima and Mikhail does not in fact violate the ethical in its desire for ethics, whether the judgment that Zosima makes is based on a transcendence that in its rigor is inhuman. Does not the weight placed on the relational nature of ethicality, of the impossibility of judgment in face of the guilt and responsibility of one for all (and I more than the others), reveal Zosima’s counsel to be a terrible aberration, a forgetting of others? As Val Vinukorov argues in an analysis of the ethicality of Alyosha’s “giving permission” for Dmitri to escape: “[The] pursuit or acceptance of unwarranted self-punishment may *seem* like a valid reaction to the ontological relation of nonreciprocal responsibility for the other. But in the real world – where I am involved in a complex web of associations and circumstances beyond my control, where “I am not alone with the other” – such self-punishment is a psychological manifestation, a passion play, and not an actualization of ethics. In the real world, there is generally someone who needs my help and not my show of self-punishment; and it is exactly this that Alyosha realizes over the course of the novel” [15, p. 335].

The crucial notion is that there are others who need my help. Mikhail’s self-punishment is warranted, but there is a histrionic quality in it (the theatrical confession at the birthday dinner, the proofs offered to the unbelieving guests) that seems at odds with concern for others. Mikhail recognizes that to continue suffering in private may be best for his family. If private judgment offers the possibility of truth and mercy in ethical relations with others, what is the value of Zosima’s exhortation to Mikhail to confess? Even the obvious difference that Dmitri is innocent while the Mikhail is guilty, while perhaps determining the difference in the consideration of human frailty, cannot obviate the monstrosity of Zosima’s counsel.

There is a strange moment within the novel, a moment which seems to problematize in advance the piety of the young Zosima’s counsel to confess. Early on, before the conversation concerning the Church, the State, and the criminal, father Zosima goes out to speak with the women who have gathered on the portico to see him. A young peasant woman, diffident but desperate to speak with father Zosima, follows him with her eyes. He senses her, and begins to listen to her confession. She, now a widow, had been married to an old man who beat her and made her life wretched. He had fallen ill and she thought how on his recovery he would continue to beat her, how much better it would be if he never got up again. Before she comes to her sin, Zosima anticipates what she will say and commands her to whisper it in his ear. That the woman murdered her abusive husband is clear. From her truncated narrative it seems fairly clear that her husband’s death was not considered a homicide – she does not feel guilty for someone else being accused of her husband’s death. The parallels between the situation of the young peasant woman and Mikhail are numerous:

a murder for which no one is wrongly found guilty by a court of law; a burning desire experienced by the murderer for forgiveness; a confession that is also an appeal; the desirability of a public confession. In the case of Mikhail, the young Zosima is rigorous. In the case of the woman, father Zosima stops her public confession (the woman's willingness to speak her crime before a public gathering is curtailed by his injunction that she whisper it in his ear).

The simplest method of reading the disparity of the two judgments is to see them as gendered, to read one model of ethics for man (rigorous and transcendent) and one for woman (flexible and material). This reading would take into account the passage on the terrible sufferings of Russian women, especially peasant women, and the necessity of conceding them a corresponding kindness and allowance for their sins and sicknesses. Or, leaving the gender question aside, the disparity could be read in terms of the viciousness of the murder. Out of jealousy, Mikhail stabs a sleeping woman whose crime is to not love him, whereas the young woman was regularly and badly beaten by her older husband. Both readings, the one taking up gender or the one taking up justification, ultimately rest on a notion of justification. Mikhail's murder of the young woman was completely unjustified as he himself will come to see, and his philanthropy, which he sometimes puts forward as expiating his sin, is in some measure an attempt to buy forgiveness. His unwillingness to confess is unworthy of man; only confession (which is also and very importantly a scorning of public opinion) will redeem him. The young woman has almost something like a right to kill her brutal husband, and she finds her sin unforgivable. In consideration of her circumstances and her womanly frailty, as well as her total self-abnegation, her crime can largely be considered justified. This is why public confession is not demanded of her, whereas it is demanded of the visitor in spite of the harm that will come to his family.

This possible reading of Zosima's two judgments contradicts the vehemence with which the notion of motivation and justification for crime is derided in the novel. In the end, these notions present a static and psychological picture of the criminal, and as Bakhtin writes: "Toward the psychology of his day – as it was expressed in scientific and artistic literature, and as it was practiced in the law courts – Dostoevsky had no sympathy at all. He saw in it a degrading *reification* of a person's soul, a discounting of its freedom and its unfinalizability, and of that peculiar indeterminacy and indefiniteness which in Dostoevsky constitute the main object of representation: for in fact Dostoevsky always represents a person *on the threshold* of a final decision, at a moment of *crisis*, at an unfinalizable – and *unpredeterminable* – turning point for his soul" [1, p. 61].

That is, the question of justification undermines the very essence of the human insofar as it presumes a situation in which to act otherwise is impossible. The most distilled image of this notion of justification, which is first and foremost a question of the socio-psychological, is Rakitin's testimony at Dmitri's trial. Here is laid out a malicious and fairly accurate (from his *objective* standpoint) interpretation of the Karamazov family. His understanding of the Karamazov family and the crime it has bred uses the concepts of social determinism to explain why things happened, and why things could not have happened in any other way. It is in fact difficult to say that Dmitri is guilty of a crime according to Rakitin's reasoning; but precisely because there is in a fundamental sense (in the sense of freedom) no crime, there can also be no forgiveness or mercy. The individuals of the Karamazov family are functions within a dysfunctional family that is itself a function within a dysfunctional society. As functions, the individual does not matter (this above and beyond the certainty that the individual cannot be reformed unless his function has been determined by his environment as the function of undergoing reformation) since what is at stake is a historical totality. Dmitri, the aberrant product of an aberrant environment, must be condemned, regardless of the ultimate falseness of the reactionary categories of crime and guilt that judge him. He must be cleared away for the sake of progress and a better historical totality. "[In the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy, individuals] are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals (invisible outside of this totality) is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to bring forth its objective meaning. For the ultimate meaning alone counts; the last act alone changes beings into themselves" [11, p. 21–22].

Human beings, as finite functions within a strictly empirical totality, are never guilty insofar as they lack the basic freedom to commit a crime, but they are also infinitely disposable as finite functions. Thus the saying attributed to Ivan that without immortality everything is permitted, finds its completion in the notion that forgiveness and mercy are ultimately meaningless and mystifying concepts. If everything is permitted (because there is no God guaranteeing universal values), what will happen can only be the product of determinism (as there is no freedom). This doctrine of an atheistic predestination precludes the notion of responsibility on which the possibilities of forgiveness and mercy rest. If one cannot be responsible for one's actions one can only be explained, not forgiven.

The stories of the woman who murdered her husband and Mikhail hinge on the possibility of forgiveness. The question is how forgiveness is possible<sup>4</sup> if

the individual is only an instantiation of a moment of totality. Any action becomes justified through its place in the totality. Justification always rewrites the past, makes it recoverable. In placing the event into a totality that gives the event meaning, the event is both emptied of its actual content (judged from outside) and recuperated through its effects. Thus Mikhail attempts to justify his murder of the woman by the good deeds he practices, arguing that those deeds arise from his desire to balance out his one crime. The woman's murder, certainly bad in itself, is revealed as good insofar as it motivates his philanthropy. This kind of justification is short lived in the story of Mikhail. Although for a long time he succeeds in placating his conscience, and even not thinking about the murder or managing to evade thinking about it, "[nevertheless], he fell to brooding at last, and the torment was more than he was able to bear... Finally the blood of the murdered victim began to appear to him, menacingly and bitterly, her destroyed young life, her blood crying out for revenge" [4, p. 307]. Recuperation compounds suffering by leading to the recognition that it is an attempt to smooth over, to erase, the irrevocable event. It further embroils one in the unforgivable act. Mikhail's acknowledgement of just that aspect of recuperation is tortured insofar as he knows that, on one hand, his philanthropic concerns are sincere and, on the other, that there can be no justification for his act, because justification would render the crime *good*. This road must lead in the end to the saying attributed to Ivan that all is permitted.

Yet precisely the event's place outside of totality, its standing over and above Mikhail rather than being submerged within the totality of a life, would seem to make the event unforgivable. The only path to forgiveness seems to be through a transcendent God capable of guaranteeing everything, but if so, if ultimately the essence of man is in his relation to a transcendent God, what becomes of the relation to the other human being, the neighbor or the stranger?<sup>5</sup> Mikhail must answer for murder, but is he answerable for his wife, his children? The answer might be that the relation with the human other is predicated on one's relation to God, that Mikhail cannot be free to embrace his children without having first reconciled with God, but this contradicts the vehemence with which the notion of a subject mediated through a larger totality is rejected. The novel does not critique social determinism as a distortion, and distorting influence, of the relations between individuals in order to substitute for it a transcendent, rather than social, totality<sup>6</sup>. Ivan's story of the sentimental aristocrats teaching Richard his culpability is the religious version of social determinism. Here too, as in Rakitin's analysis of the Karamazov family, Richard is not guilty since he was no better than a beast, but as he has shed blood his blood must be shed. Fortunately, he can die "happy" knowing that he has found grace. The picture of the murderous, prodigal son swooning and melting into God's embrace as he

is executed for a crime he cannot truly be accountable for is the sentimental-transcendent version of Rakitin's notion of the degenerated and sickly parts of society unknowingly carrying on the great forward march of social progress. The question is also not of whether God can forgive (it is accepted in advance that he can), but whether the human subject can forgive, and if so, how. (Isn't this the ending of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which Alyosha tells the band of boys that Ilyusha and they will be resurrected in gladness? What is his recommendation to remember eternally Ilyusha, in whose death they had a part, but a forgiving of the boys of their culpability? The novel ends in Alyosha's joyous affirmation that forgives Ilyusha's pained life and pained death, but the question of whether it is right to forgive remains. Is it possible to forgive the cause of Snegiryov's frenzied grief: "I don't want another boy!.. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my tongue cleave..."? [4, p. 562].)

The question of judgment in the novel will perhaps become clearer through an examination of the nature of dialogue, especially the interaction between Mikhail and Zosima. It is interesting that in *The Brothers Karamazov* the actions that must be forgiven are introduced from the perspective of the one being called on to grant forgiveness, *but the forgiver is not one who has been wronged*. Mikhail and the woman ask Zosima for forgiveness. Dmitri and Ivan (to some extent) ask Alyosha. This entails very specific consequences: the act of forgiveness is not won through restitution to an injured party (since restitution would imply that the offense has an equivalent, a value, thereby reinstating it in a totality); the possibility of forgiveness is founded in conversation or confession (since the seeking of forgiveness must begin with telling a third party about the offense); conversation takes on an extra-social dimension insofar as it offers the possibility of breaking with totality. The fundamental importance of speaking is that one articulates himself, and that this articulation is always open to revision. In speaking the subject lays himself bare, that is, concretely fashions himself as more than the sum of materiality and circumstance, and in this fashioning invites his listener. Speaking is always a speaking to an interlocutor, who can in turn make his interiority available through speech.

Is it then the realization of the possibility of speaking one's interiority that enables forgiveness? Is the genuine life of the personality, its extraneousness to the material being that can be spied upon in its objectivity, the breaking open of the totality in which a man and his actions seem irrevocably held? The possibility to speak oneself conditions the possibility to be forgiven. Zosima's visitor and the young woman are certainly at points of crisis, threshold moments for their souls. What is missing from Bakhtin's analysis is the *gravity* of the actions that create the circumstances of and urgency for dialogue. The speaking subject's *transcendence* of the conditions, his or her murders in these cases,

fails a fidelity to that which demands forgiveness. The emphasis of the Bakhtinian reading is placed on the speaking subject and the reader's recognition of the impossibility of totalizing him or her. What is overcome through dialogue is the event that motivates dialogue and that remains incommensurate to the subject. The problem with this reading of Zosima's two judgments is that in large part it equalizes the voices of the characters, Mikhail and Zosima, or the young peasant woman and Zosima, in a kind of bird's eye perspective of dialogue. Thus its ideal is reciprocity in dialogue, a reciprocity witnessed by a reader. It verges on complicity with the very notion of totality that it argues against. In Bakhtin's reading, the ethical moment is the openness to the other in dialogue, the interpenetration of voices: the urgency of the visitor's and the young woman's situations crests at the moment in which they reveals themselves to Zosima and are open to his word. Thus the actual judgments Zosima sits upon them, the exhortation to confess or to believe in the possibility of forgiveness and mercy, closes the moment of interpenetration; what comes after is a kind of remainder, a reinscription into the objective totality of the world. Yet it is precisely this remainder that is at issue in these two scenes in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The revelation of the subject in his or her speech is not the stake, it is the opening of the possibility of what comes after that brings about the demands for judgment.

If there is an ethical moment in speaking to an interlocutor, it is not the interpenetration of voices in dialogue. Bakhtin's reading holds an equivalence of subject positions within dialogue; what matters is the openness in the subject to the other. This openness does not fundamentally change the subject's position, which is always that of equal partner in a dialogue. This is perhaps why Bakhtin's dialogue is open to the possibility of recuperation in a third party perspective – polyphony. The break with totality and with a monological perspective is sublated into the "ethical" movement of the layering of many voices. It becomes a new History. If there is an ethical position in Zosima's judgment on Mikhail and the young woman, it is not along the lines of the Bakhtinian reading, that is, not because Zosima is open to his interlocutors in a reciprocal dialogue; rather, it is along the lines of the Levinasian reading, that Zosima's and his interlocutor's positions are totally unequal, non-reciprocal. This inequality is not predicated from guilt or moral culpability but from an inability for the subject of dialogue, Zosima, to reach his interlocutor, whether Mikhail or the woman. Levinas' analysis of the subject and Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's characters argue against the totalization of the subject in the dialectic of identity, but the crucial difference is that Bakhtin's reading does not have a place for the radical inequality of the subject of his interlocutor. What is revealed in dialogue is not the untotalizable and indeterminable essence of man, but rather the subject's inability to capture and totalize his other. What is enacted

is a disparity of positions within dialogue, an absolute disparity that precludes the possibility of the bird's eye view enacted in the Bakhtinian reading, a view that comes to act as the movement of History itself, even if that History is the movement of polyphony rather than the sum of atomized individuals: "If [History] claims to integrate myself and the other within an impersonal spirit this alleged integration is cruelty and injustice, that is, ignores the Other. History as a relationship between men ignores a position of that I before the other in which the other remains transcendent with respect to me. Though of myself I am not exterior to history, I do find in the Other a point that is absolute with regard to history – not by amalgamation with the Other, but in speaking with him. History is worked over by the ruptures of history, in which a judgment is borne upon it. When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history" [11, p. 52].

Levinas' analysis of the intersubjective relations posits the encounter before the conversation. The relation with the Other is conversation, but conversation is initiated by the unequal encounter: the presence before a face. Before speech in which a man may articulate himself, the face of the other comes upon the subject. The face of the woman in the crowd makes its demands on Zosima before a word is spoken. Thus speech is not the spontaneous or coerced revelation of a subject who exceeds himself in Bakhtinian fashion, but always a reply that is demanded by the other. "Speech is not instituted in a homogenous or abstract medium, but in a world where it is necessary to aid and to give" [11, p. 216]. The primacy of the notion of demand and of the urgency to respond, rather than the primacy of openness, to the other articulates the ethical moment within the relation between the other and the subject in Levinas' conception as opposed to the ethical moment as the polyphonic layering of Bakhtin's conception. Bakhtin's reading locates ethics as Zosima's openness to the other, embodied in the extra-social situation of the confession, *recuperated in the openness of the novel to the sacrality of the individual*; Levinas' conception locates ethics in the impossibility of Zosima's not responding to the other, revealed in his inability to take the suffering of the other onto himself *or to equalize moments of being* (the position of the subject and the position of his interlocutor).

The Bakhtinian and Levinasian understandings of the subject both insist on the point that the subject is non-coincident with himself. "To be I is, over and beyond any individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as one's content. The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it" [11, p. 36]. "The identification of the same in the I is not produced as a monotonous tautology: "I am I" [11, p. 37]. For Bakhtin, the Dostoevskian subject – the man in man who might be

forgiven – is embodied in his speaking: “A man never coincides with himself. One cannot apply to him the formula of identity  $A = A$ . In Dostoevsky’s artistic thinking, the genuine life of the personality takes place at the point of non-coincidence between a man and himself, at his point of departure beyond the limits of all that he is as a material being, a being that can be spied on, defined, predicted apart from its own will, “at second hand.” The genuine life of the personality is made available only through a *dialogic* penetration of that personality, during which it freely and reciprocally reveals itself” [1, p. 59].

Thus in either reading, the mysterious visitor and the young peasant woman are not simply murderers. If  $A$  does not equal  $A$  when it comes to the subject, if  $I$  is not  $I$ , the visitor and the woman are more than the sum of their bodies or their past actions. The difference in the Levinasian and Bakhtinian readings is that in the Bakhtinian reading the subject escapes this tautology by being more than the perception of him or her by outside eyes. The reaction of the town to the visitor’s confession delineates this outsider’s perception: at first there is shocked disbelief as no one wants to accept the confession; then malicious tongues start to wag and the mysterious visitor is another example of “the fall of the righteous man”. What is left out is the truth of the dialogues with Zosima. The Levinasian conception of non-coincidence revolves around a disjunction between what might be called levels of subjectivity. The subject *is* himself and that which *has* himself – the Levinasian subject is that which takes itself as its own content. The Bakhtinian subject is that which exceeds the others’ grasps.

The difference in the structure of subjectivity entails specific consequences for communication. As the Bakhtinian subject is that which exceeds the other’s conceptualization of him, communication breaks with conceptualization by revealing the inadequacy of this “objective” understanding. In speaking himself, the subject reveals himself as excess. Thus communication, true communication in which subjects reveal themselves, are the culminating points of an awareness of others and of the depth of intersubjectivity. The Levinasian subject, as he who must take himself as his own content, is not constrained by the same desire to reveal himself to others as exceeding the others’ perceptions of him. Rather, the other comes to disturb the subject by revealing the subject’s self-possession as culpable and deficient. The Levinasian subject realizes his guilt before the other who demands an answer. Zosima, before the peasant woman and the visitor, realizes his own immense culpability through the structure of both being himself and having himself. The subject finds himself guilty because of his comparative wealth of subjectivity. He cannot give this wealth to the other before him. This double structure finds him open to judging himself. The crucial moment of judgment is then not the mercy or the rigor by which the

subject absolves or redeems his interlocutor, but the movement by which the subject finds himself to be the subject of judgment. The refrain throughout *The Brothers Karamazov*, “I am guilty before all”, is the acknowledgement of a continual self-judgment. The possibility of judging the other, of Zosima advising Mikhail to confess and the young woman to forgive herself, results from the impossibility of not responding. Even as Zosima judges himself, the movement inwards, deeper into the subject, he cannot evade the demand for judgment. Judgment becomes, above all, what is desired even as it becomes highly troubled by the guilt of the judge. The guilt of the judge is the condition for what, from an outside perspective, looks like mercy *but that it is not mercy given the culpability of the judge*. Thus the young woman who murdered her husband is “forgiven”, but what Zosima offers her most of all is the counsel to no longer live in fear. Mikhail’s decision to confess, an action he would like to carry out before he hears of Zosima’s behavior during the duel, is affirmed, thereby saving him from the suicide that he had contemplated. In the face of the young woman and Mikhail, Zosima attempts to give counsel that will release them from an unbearable tension, to free them from an irrecoverable guilt. This is only possible because he is himself guilty before them.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Hegel is the proper name that could be inserted here, but the question is not of Dostoevsky’s disagreements with Hegel’s philosophy of absolute Spirit but with *The Brothers Karamazov*’s response to a Hegel-influenced way of thinking the world and man. For a brief overview of Dostoevsky’s possible engagements with Hegel’s writings, see Malcolm V. Jones’ “Some Echoes of Hegel in Dostoevsky” [10]. For a brief overview of the Hegelian ideas that influenced Russian thinking and that in large part composed the terms of disagreement between Westerners and Slavophiles, see Ana Siljack’s “Between East and West: Hegel and the Origins of the Russian Dilemma” [13]. The introduction to Michael Holquist’s *Dostoevsky and the Novel* provides a brief overview of how a Hegelian notion of national development laid the groundwork for an existential crisis for Russian writers [9].

<sup>2</sup>It could be argued that Smerdyakov equally suffers a radical disruption that reveals some essential truth, but his suffering is not narrated from within his own consciousness, as the sufferings of the three legitimate brothers are. Smerdyakov’s marginalization within the novel points to a troubling dilemma in judging: how do I adjudicate my responsibilities in a social situation? Even Alyosha dismisses Smerdyakov, but this negligence might be the result of his prior responsibility for Dmitri and Ivan, that is, of the necessity to judge



between responsibilities.

<sup>3</sup>Mikhail's death shortly after his confession, and in the certainty that his confession has not been believed (a certainty that Zosima reveals as short-sighted insofar as "malicious" people *do* come to believe the downfall of the righteous man), is perhaps the only way the confession could have been borne.

<sup>4</sup>This is the question Ivan raises in the chapters "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor". There can only be forgiveness if there is God (the possibility of freedom), but if there is a God who can forgive, this in no way enables a torturer or murderer forgiveness from his victim. The impossibility of forgiveness here finds its ultimate expression in the impossibility to forgive a God who has created a world of torturers, murderers, and their victims.

<sup>5</sup>Thus the question Ivan first raises in his discussion with Alyosha in the chapter "Rebellion" is of my relation to my neighbor and to the stranger, to the human other, rather than of my relation to God.

<sup>6</sup>There are two crucial dreams in the novel that might undermine this argument: Alyosha's dream of the wedding at Galilee, and Dmitri's dream of the starving babe. These dreams seem to have the appearance of religious epiphany, but what should be emphasized is that the radical re-visioning is less concerned with the revelation of God than with the profound interrelation of human beings. Alyosha's dream concerns the celebration of a human happiness, and Dmitri's dream concerns the ethical obligation to the human neighbor. It is not God who enables the celebration or the recognition of the neighbor's claim, but the festivity and the claim of the suffering neighbor that opens up the possibility of a relation with God. For an analysis of the prosaic quality of Alyosha's dream see Gary Saul Morson [12].

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*Джун Чанг***НЕСОВПАДАЮЩАЯ САМОСТЬ У ДОСТОЕВСКОГО.  
ПРЕДМЕТ СУЖДЕНИЯ В “БРАТЬЯХ КАРАМАЗОВЫХ”**

*В статье исследуется предмет суждения как один из фундаментальных концептов для понимания феномена несостоятельной самооценки в романе Достоевского «Братья Карамазовы». В статье указывается на противопоставление между официальными и неофициальными суждениями, что выстроено на противопоставлении лжи и правды. Утверждается, что правда соотносится с частным, внутренним и семейным, ложь согласовывается с официальным, общественным и бюрократическим. Сравняются концепции субъективности Бахтина и Левинаса, предложенные ими в результате прочтения романа Достоевского.*

**Ключевые слова:** роман Достоевского «Братья Карамазовы», несовпадающая самость, полифония, диалог, правда, уровни субъективности.

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ПРЕДМЕТ СУДЖЕННЯ В “БРАТАХ КАРАМАЗОВИХ”**

*У статті досліджується предмет судження як один з фундаментальних концептів для розуміння феномену неспроможній самооцінки в романі Достоевського «Брати Карамазови». У статті вказується на протиставлення між офіційними і неофіційними судженнями, що збудовано на протиставленні брехні і правди. Стверджується, що правда співвідноситься з приватним, внутрішнім і сімейним, брехня узгоджується з офіційним, громадським і бюрократичним. Порівнюються концепції суб'єктивності Бахтіна і Левінаса, що були запропоновані ними як результат прочитання роману Достоевського.*

**Ключові слова:** роман Достоевського «Брати Карамазови», незбігаєма самість, поліфонія, діалог, правда, рівні суб'єктивності.

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