

## TWO VISIONS OF IDENTITY: FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY AND VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV

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### Abstract

In Russian thought of the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) and Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) are two prevailing figures. However, they had different approaches to interpreting the correlations between the universal and the individual, the global (panhuman) and the universal (all-human). These approaches stem from their different visions of identity.

**Keywords:** human, Dostoevsky, identity, conciliarity, universality, Solovyov

### Résumé

Dans la pensée russe de la seconde partie du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, Fiodor Dostoïevski (1821-1881) et Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) sont deux figures dominantes. Cependant, ils avaient des approches différentes pour interpréter les corrélations entre l'universel et l'individuel, le global (panhumain) et l'universel (tout humain). Ces approches découlent de leurs visions différentes de l'identité.

**Mots-clés:** humain, Dostoevsky, identité, conciliarité, universalité, Solovyov

### Rezumat

În gândirea rusă a celei de-a doua părți a secolului al XIX-lea, Fiodor Dostoievski (1821–1881) și Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) sunt două figuri predominante. Cu toate acestea, ei au avut abordări diferite pentru a interpreta corelațiile dintre universal și individual, global (panuman) și universal (tot-uman). Aceste abordări provin din diferitele lor viziuni asupra identității.

**Cuvinte cheie:** uman, Dostoevsky, identitate, conciliaritate, universalitate, Solovyov

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In Russian culture of the second half of the 19th century, there are two most prominent figures who largely determined the subsequent development of philosophical and socio-political thought in Russia. Vl. Solovyev is traditionally regarded as the follower of F. Dostoevsky: both of them traveled to the monastery of Optina Pustyn (1878), communicated with each other, and little is known about any disagreements in their views. In his famous work *Three Speeches in Memory of Dostoevsky* (1881–1883), Vl. Solovyev sees himself as the spokesman for the outstanding writer's ideas. But is it actually true? Answering this question is particularly relevant today, in the age of both globalization and polarization, when the issue of national and personal identity is topical. As we intently grasp the meaning of the famous thinkers' texts, we discover not only differences, but even starkly differing views. For this sake, it is best to consider *Pushkin Speech* by F. Dostoevsky (1880) and *The Russian Idea* by Vl. Solovyov (1888).

Vl. Solovyev was born in Moscow into the family of the famous Russian historian Sergey Mikhaylovich Solovyov (1820–1879). His maternal great grandfather was the famous wandering philosopher G.S. Skovoroda. It is known that in the early years of his university studies, Vl. Soloviev was absorbed in vulgar materialism and positivism; subsequently, after his enthusiasm for Schopenhauer and Hartmann, he returned to Christianity at the age of 18. He perceived himself as a prophet to whom the truth was revealed. Since that moment, the entire problem was to get the message across to people. To cope with that task, he was supposed "... to put the eternal content of Christianity into a new and suitable – i.e. rational and absolute – form," and then, it would change the world for the better (letter to Ye. V. Romanova dated August 2, 1873). Solovyev saw Christianity not only as a *fait accompli*, but also as a mission. However, the path in the direction chosen by Solovyev was not quite straightforward and definitive, as his theocratic utopia demonstrates.

A.F. Losev provides the following general characteristic of the works by Vl. Solovyov, "In Vladimir Solovyov's philosophy, there is an organic fusion of various elements of Platonism and Neo-Platonism, patristic philosophy and Gnosticism, Schelling's and Hegel's philosophy, the authentic Russian worldview and Russian philosophy, and mysticism and rationalism by the greatest thinkers of the old and modern times" (Losev, 1991, p. 233). Solovyev provides a unique combination of the religious tradition of the Orthodox East with the philosophical and mystical tradition of the West, especially that of the German mystics and Schelling's theosophy.

If we divide Solovyev's creative path into stages, initially (at the "preparatory" stage, as E.N. Troubetzkoy describes it), he adhered to the Slavophile point of view; the "utopian," or the theocratic period of his work lasts from 1882 to 1894, when he unsparingly opposes the Slavophiles, turning to Catholicism, divine-humanity, and unitotality. Finally, at the third stage marked by the collapse of his theocratic utopia, he regards unification of churches as an issue beyond history, seeing it in an eschatological light. In the end of his life, Solovyev writes a remarkable work titled *War, Progress, and the End of History*:

*Three Conversations* (1900), where he profoundly and intensely discusses the issue of eschatology rather than that of divine-humanity achieved through external means; it implies not an external unification of Churches, states, and nations, but an internal spiritual unity gained beyond history. At the end of the work, in a *Short Tale of the Antichrist*, Solovyev sees the integrity and truth of Christianity in Christ himself instead of external unification. In this work written before his death, he approaches Dostoevsky's point of view.

Let us turn to the theocratic stage of Solovyev's work, which coincides with the largest period of his life and is the most popular and well-known. VI. Solovyev starts his "Russian idea" with a pretentious statement, "...the idea of a nation is not what it thinks of itself in time, but instead what God thinks of it in eternity." However, according to Solovyov, the meaning of existence of the nations is concluded in humanity instead of the nations themselves. He finds nothing special about the "truly Russian idea" and sees it as merely one of the aspects of the "Christian idea" which he interprets in a universal manner (Solovyev, 1991, pp. 165-206).

From the second half of the 1880s to the first half of the 1890s, VI. Solovyev enters into active polemics with the representatives of late Slavophilism, such as I.S. Aksakov, N.N. Strakhov, P.E. Astafiev, and L.A. Tikhomirov, who do not share his theocratic views (Atyakshev, 2013). The "younger" Slavophiles reject VI. Solovyov's idea of a "Christian community" because of excessive prominence of the concept of "united humanity" to the detriment of individual nations. At the same time, Solovyev views all the national issues as egoistic, pagan, separating people, and conflicting with true Christianity. Yet, as Ivan Sergeyeovich Aksakov (1823–1886), a Slavophile, formulates, one could not serve the highest truth (as Solovyev encourages) without fulfilling the duty to one's compatriots. To be able to serve humanity, one must first serve one's nation, helping bring its powers and talents to light.

An opinion similar to that expressed by Dostoevsky is presented in the concept of cultural and historical types. In the second half of the 19th century in Russia, it was developed by Nikolay Yakovlevich Danilevsky (1822–1885, the main book – *Russia and Europe* – 1871) and Konstantin Nikolayevich Leontiev (1831–1891, *Byzantism and Slavism* – 1891). In the West, it is mostly presented by Oswald Spengler (1880–1936, *The Decline of the West* – 1918) and the British author Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889–1975, *A Study of History* – 1934–1961). Creating their theory, they try to overcome the mechanism of one-dimensional evolutionary schemes of development, which makes it possible to see the individuality and exclusivity of each of the cultures. According to Danilevsky, "Progress does not imply that everyone follows the same direction, but that the entire field which represents the domain of historical activity of mankind is travelled in different directions..." (Danilevsky, 2003, p. 134). There are no privileged cultural and historical types in the world, and they are not supposed to exist. He regards the panhuman as something amorphous, colorless, and unoriginal, that is, as a thing typically called commonplace. Real life is only in the

all-human. Danilevsky considers that it is “above any separately human or national issue,” but it simultaneously consists of the “aggregate of everything national, existing and having to exist in all places and at all times.”

Konstantin Leontiev, in his turn, names his doctrine “the method of actual life” and accepts beauty as a criterion for assessing the phenomena of the surrounding world. The closer a specific phenomenon is to beauty, the closer it is to the truth of existence, vitality, and power. The basic characteristic of beauty is the diversity of forms; therefore, the socio-cultural sphere accepts the need for diversity of national cultures and the unity of their dissimilarity, due to which the uppermost prosperity is achieved. Mankind is alive as long as original national cultures stay alive. As to unification of human existence, it inevitably results in degradation and death of culture.

This is another point where we see a fundamental discrepancy between V.I. Solovyev and F. Dostoevsky, i.e. his “Russian idea” expressed in his *Pushkin Speech* (Dostoevsky, 1984, pp. 129-174). For Dostoevsky, as well as the Slavophiles, there is no universal without national, whereas Solovyev levels down the special for the triumph of the universal, or the panhuman. This “common place,” however, is empty and abstract. It is probably a manifestation of his Hegelianism constructing its dialectics on the principle of denial, total submission, and destruction, surmounting the precedent level – the infamous “withdrawal.” In fact, development of moral consciousness can be schematically drawn as circles which include each other like a Matryoshka doll:

- individual consciousness overcoming selfishness;
- the family;
- the ancestral; the tribal;
- the national (not the nationalistic);
- all-human; the conciliar (sobornost') – filled with all the previous content, including it, elevating it to its own level (not the panhuman as abstract, groundless cosmopolitanism);
- the oecumenical.

At the same time, it is impossible to reach a higher, universal level without including the developed previous ones (overcoming selfishness at every level, such as individual egoism or nationalism). Such all-human issues are meaningful and replete – personally, ethnically, and nationally. This inclusive dialectic developing and incorporating the previous level was unknown to Hegel or Solovyev; it is Dostoevsky who intuitively reproduces it not as a professional philosopher, but as a humanist in the true sense of the word: he does not find it possible to sacrifice a personality or a nation for the sake of higher-ranking notions. In fact, this is existential dialectic opposed to the dialectic of the global or impersonalism.

V.V. Zenkovsky, a famous historian of Russian philosophy, mentions that L. Tolstoy and F. Dostoevsky “paved the way for Russian universalism.” In the 1860s–1870s, there was a tendency to smooth the opposites between Westernism and Slavophilism, searching for a synthesis of both trends. “We Russians have

two homelands: our own Russia and Europe,” Dostoevsky will say (Dostoevsky, 1984, vol. XXIII, p. 30).

F. Dostoevsky, a member of the Petrashevsky revolutionary circle, was arrested, sentenced to the firing squad, and pardoned at the last moment; he spent four years in hard labor in exile and returned to the capital not subdued, but transformed into a master of prose and metaphysical thought. Florovsky notes that Dostoevsky “was a brilliant thinker philosopher and theologian” (Florovsky 1998, p. 68) He developed an extraordinary powerful and profound ideal of Orthodox consciousness (the elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, 1881), provided unsurpassed criticism of various social utopias and violence (*Demons*, 1872), and analyzed collisions of moral consciousness and moral transformation of man (*Crime and Punishment*, 1866), cultivating kindness and love for people in his works. According to Dostoevsky, “all the faith of the saints” consists in love to fellow beings (Dostoevsky 1976, vol. XIV, p. 290). He regards compassion as the most important law of human life. Dostoevsky writes, “Man is a mystery. It needs to be unravelled, and if you spend your whole life unravelling it, don’t say that you’ve wasted time. I am studying that mystery because I want to be a human being” (Dostoevsky 1985, vol. XXVIII, I, p. 63). Already in his first novel, *Poor Folk* (1845), he reveals his main feature as a humanist, “compassion for man.” He believes in the power of spiritual origins in society and a personality, considering that it is not existence (“environment”) that predestines consciousness, but, on the contrary, it is spiritual consciousness or faith that determines everything. Therefore, “Until you have become really, in actual fact, a brother to everyone, brotherhood will not come to pass” (Dostoevsky, 1980, vol. XXI, p. 18, 25, 275).

Dostoevsky’s creative method is described as “Christian realism” (Zakharov 2001, 5–20) due to its conflux with “Orthodox cultural archetypes which took shape as early as in Ancient Rus.” O.A. Bogdanova concludes that the uniqueness of Dostoevsky’s work consists in the fact that he was “the *only* great Russian writer who saw and gratefully brought to life in his major works of art (primarily in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*) the cultural potential and the anthropological ideal of *hesychasm*, an ancient spiritual tradition of Byzantine and Russian Orthodox faith...” (Bogdanova, 2008, pp. 13–14; Salvestroni 2015).

In his *Pushkin Speech* delivered on June 8, 1880, at the ceremonial meeting of the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature, F. Dostoevsky laid the foundation for unfolding of the all-human content of Russian culture. Any national culture crosses the boundaries of nationality and gains features common to all mankind as it reaches a certain level of development. In Russia, this shift took place in the second half of the 19th century, yet Dostoevsky considers that this process was initiated by A.S. Pushkin who discovered such a trait of Russian culture as “universal sensitivity.” Having found this tendency discovered by Pushkin, Dostoevsky joins it, develops it, and makes it more profound: “To become a real Russian, to become quite a Russian, maybe, means only (in the end, it should be emphasized) to become a brother of all people, an *all-man*, if you want... our destiny is universality, acquired not by the sword but by the power of

brotherhood and our fraternal desire to reunite people” (Dostoevsky, 1984, vol. XXVI, p. 147). For Dostoevsky, the people in their historical development and present-day state, in the fullness of their real strengths and spiritual needs, are the “soil” outside of which productive creativity is inconceivable. The Pochvennichestvo (“return to the native soil”) implies not only immersion in the world of tradition, but also the completeness of modernity. Dostoevsky’s “soil-based” concepts included the idea of a universal synthesis as a task facing Russia.

Let us quote a relevant statement from *The Announcement about a Subscription to the Magazine Vremya for 1863*: “We anticipate that our activity’s nature should be universal to the extreme, that the Russian Idea can be a synthesis of all those ideas that Europe develops with such courage...” (Dostoevsky 1974, vol. XVIII, p. 36–37). In the first issue of *Vremya*, Westernizers and Slavophiles are mentioned as outdated tendencies: “they have lost a sense of Russian spirit.” At the same time, those who share the “soil-based” ideas do not confuse the concept of the “nation” with the plain countryfolk. Dostoevsky’s concept of the nation is broader and more profound, it is almost metaphysical, “Judge [people] not by what they are, but by what they strive to become” (Dostoevsky, 1984, vol. XXII, p. 43).

According to A.V. Gulyga (1921–1996), Dostoevsky as a “global supporter” stems from the “soil-based” ideology, yet he overcomes all of its limitations while originating from it (Gulyga, 1995, p. 83). One could ask, however: can the all-human be regarded as a sort of superstructure over the national interests, for instance? Dostoevsky answers this question unambiguously (as Chingiz Aitmatov does later), stating that all-human actually descend from the spiritual prosperity of the national. There is no better or worse, rich or poor culture or world religion as a profound spiritual tradition: this is the sphere where everything is original and unique. At the same time, the all-human is not a mechanical set of specific ideas or works: it serves as a core of each of them. Diversity adorns the truth, and national diversity adorns mankind (K. Leontiev).

This understanding complies with the concept of conciliarity (sobornost’) as a “unity in a multitude,” a “choir where every voice is heard,” developed by the Slavophile Aleksey Stepanovich Khomyakov (1804–1860). He regards conciliarity as a “unity in a multitude” (Khomyakov 1994, p. 242); therefore, it opposes individualism which destroys human unity and collectivism which invalidates a personality. Thus, an individual cannot comprehend the divine truth; it can be understood only in a conciliar way – in the Church. Khomyakov regards peasant community as another manifestation of conciliarity. He believes that elements of true Orthodoxy and conciliarity were preserved among common people. As a result of activity of Peter I, the Russian Orthodox Church completely succumbed to the secular authorities, acknowledging the divine origin of autocracy, while it was the nation that handed the autocratic power to the monarch. The initial meaning of the notion of “*conciliarity*” can be defined as the spiritual unity of believers; the Slavophiles demonstrated its general, social meaning not limited to the boundaries of narrow interpretations. According to Khomyakov, conciliarity

includes not only unity, but also freedom (collectivism is regarded as unity without freedom, and individualism is seen as freedom without unity). K.S. Aksakov, who continues “sociologization” of this notion, believes that, in conciliarity, “a personality is as free as in a choir.”

VI. Solovyov transforms the idea of conciliarity into the concept of unitotality. He emphasizes the following in this regard: “I call all-unity true, or positive, if the unified exists not at the expense of everyone or to everyone’s detriment, but to everyone’s benefit. False, or negative unitotality suppresses or absorbs the elements included in it, and therefore, turns into an *emptiness*; true unitotality preserves and empowers its elements, and is achieved in them as the *fullness of existence*” (Solovyev, 1990, p. 552). Nonetheless, as we have demonstrated above, Solovyev develops the dialectic of the universal and the particular to the detriment of the particular. Subsequently, the issue of conciliarity as one of the basic cultural universals of Russia was widely discussed, especially in modern historical and philosophical studies. However, this concept still requires a more profound theoretical development in the context of the present-day conditions.

Conciliarity as a concept, which originated from the religious tradition can be correlated with the concept of solidarity which stems from the 19th-century Narodnik movement (of course, if we free it from revolutionism and violence). Spiritual ideals have to be combined with the social ones based on the idea of social justice to obtain a sufficiently holistic concept which is capable of “functioning” today. These two traditions were set in opposition to each other and denied each other, but the time has come to “to gather stones together,” synthesize values, and create an integrated theory.

Meanwhile, conciliarity, or solidarity as a broader concept is relevant for the entire mankind. As Aleksandr Sergeevich Panarin (1940–2003) emphasizes, “in our civilizational context, conciliarity is not communality in its local parochial and patriarchal backward sense, but spiritual unity embracing the whole human race to its limit” (Panarin, 2014). A.V. Semushkin, considering conciliarity from the point of view of its universal characteristics and existential faith, points out the necessity to “gather mankind in a brotherly unity (Semushkin, 2009, p. 304).” Therefore, conciliarity, solidarity, is not a given, but a predetermined outcome which requires discovering all its profoundness and implementation in social development.

Summarizing the above, we can see that, in the 19th-century Russian culture, two opposite trends of understanding the ratio of the individual and the universal, the national and the panhuman/all-human emerged. Some supposed that national identity did not matter, its cultivation could result in national egoism, and it was necessary to immediately assume the panhuman attitude (VI. Solovyev). Others believed that the loss of identity resulting in denationalization was destructive for the nation and could not yield anything positive for the universal, - for the all-human (F. Dostoevsky). The latter was supposed to organically generate from the national diversity of mankind. Those who adhered

to the first viewpoint could be defined as the “Westernizers” in Russia, and those who shared the second opinion could be considered the Slavophiles. They still keep arguing in Russian culture to this day, and this struggle involves the fate of the world: the process of globalization could be implemented through denationalization and depersonalization, leveling national cultures, loss of identity, or globalization could emerge from prosperity of national cultures, personal fundamentals, and take shape naturally, on the basis of the common spiritual and anthropological essence of man for the benefit of all peoples and states.

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