
Despite the fact that Dostoevsky was a writer by profession, questions of a distinctively theological nature – good and evil, faith, justice and God – pervade his works. This book is a collaborative work which examines the dialogues of Dostoevsky’s personas from aesthetic, philosophical and religious viewpoints.

The book is comprised of five parts, and each part includes a collection of articles contributed by scholars of science, religion and philosophy.

Part 1, Encounters with Science, Chapter I, “Darwin, Dostoevsky, and Russia’s Radical Youth” written by David Bethea and Victoria Thorstensson, discusses the issues of the uses and abuses of Darwin’s theories and Darwin’s reception in the writings of the Russian radical intelligentsia, such as Chernyshevsky, Pisarev and Zaitsev. In Chapter 2, “Darwin’s Plots, Malthus’s Mighty Feast, Lamennais’s Motherless Fledglings, and Dostoevsky’s Lost Sheep”, Liza Knapp discusses Dostoevsky’s response to Darwin and his penetration deep into Dostoevsky’s aesthetic views, and explains his resistance to Social Darwinism which was introduced by English novelists. Chapter 3, “Viper will eat viper: Dostoevsky, Darwin, and the Possibility of Brotherhood” written by Anna Berman, explains Dostoevsky’s hesitation and the ambiguity in Dostoevsky’s approach to Darwinian thought in his novels The Brothers Karamazov and Crime and Punishment. In Chapter 4, “Encounters with the Prophet: Ivan Pavlov, Serafima Karchevskaya, and ‘Our Dostoevsky’”, Daniel Todes explores the interaction between Dostoevsky and two of his younger readers and admirers, physiologist and atheist Ivan Pavlov and his wife Christian Orthodox Serafima Karchevskaya.

In Part 2, Engagements with Philosophy, Chapter 5, “Dostoevsky and the Meaning of ‘the Meaning of Life’”, Steven Cassedy discusses the question of ‘meaning’ by outlining the history of the concept
and considering the historical and intellectual circumstances that led to its emergence. Chapter 6, “Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Hazards of Writing Oneself into (or out of) Belief”, David Cunningham explores the thinkers Dostoevsky and Nietzsche and their writings about God, demons and angels, and about the characters who are obsessed with theological or atheological claims. The author discusses why Nietzsche was trying to write himself out of the faith and why Dostoevsky was trying to write himself back into the faith. In Chapter 7, “Dostoevsky as Moral Philosopher”, Charles Larmore focuses on the chapter “The Grand Inquisitor” in The Brothers Karamazov, and discusses the confrontation between the Grand Inquisitor and Christ in their two opposing ideas of human freedom: radical freedom and instrumental freedom. In Chapter 8, “If there’s no immortality of the soul,…. Everything is lawful”: On the Philosophical Basis of Ivan Karamazov’s Idea”, Sergei Kibalnik uses the popular formula “If there is no God, …. Everything is lawful”, that is presented in Dostoevsky’s novel The Brother Karamazov and places Dostoevsky’s and his characters’ thoughts on atheism and morality in the context of European philosophical thought, in particular that of Ludwig Feuerbach and Max Stirner.

In Part 3, Questions of Aesthetics, in Chapter 9, “Once Again about Dostoevsky’s Response to Hans Holbein the Younger’s Dead Body of Christ in the Tomb”, Robert Jackson discusses aesthetic – spiritual truth in Dostoevsky’s thought and his view, his belief in art’s ability to convey not only natural or actual truth but also artistic truth. In Chapter 10, “Prelude to a Collaboration: Dostoevsky’s Aesthetic Polemic with Mikhail Katkov”, Susanne Fusso explores Dostoevsky’s relationship with his rival publisher and journalist Mikhail Katkov, and sees them as two conservatives who share many aesthetic views and agree on fundamental issues, but engage in a passionate polemic over Russian cultural and political roles. In Chapter 11, “Dostoevsky’s Postmodernists and the Poetics of Incarnation”, Svetlana Evdokimova discusses Dostoevsky’s religious aesthetics based on Platonic representation and the concept of the “aesthetics of incarnation”.

In Part 4, The Self and the Other, in Chapter 12, “What is It Like to be Bats?” Paradoxes of the Double”, Gary Morson discusses what separates Dostoevsky from the writers who approach human consciousness from the perspective of scientific materialism. In Chapter 13, “Interiority and Intersubjectivity in Dostoevsky: The Vasya Shumkov Paradigm”, Yuri Corrigan focuses on Dostoevsky’s conception of personality, solipsism, and doubles as issues located at the cross-section of psychology, sociology, philosophy and religion. Chapter 14, “Dostoevsky’s Angel - Still an Idiot, Still beyond the Story: The Case of Kalganov”, Michal Oklot discusses the question of subjectivity and the crisis of personhood, the problem of the personality’s latent openness in Dostoevsky, and the marginal angelic characters of Dostoevsky. In Chapter 15, “The Detective as Midwife in Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment”, Vladimir Golstein approaches the problem of the personality’s latent openness through the prism of characters-catalysts who serve as facilitators in the process of recovering one’s identity, and explores one of the fictional characters of Crime and Punishment, “the liminal creature”, the detective Porfiry serving as a midwife who brings forth Raskolnikov’s conscience. Chapter 16, “Metaphors for Solidarity: Confinement in Notes from Underground and Notes from the House of the Dead” Carol Apollonio focuses on Dostoevsky’s use of the special metaphor of solitary confinement, the immediate effects of imprisonment on Dostoevsky’s characters, and the impact of isolation on human consciousness. In Chapter 17, “Moral Emotions in Dostoevsky’s The Dream of a Ridiculous Man”, Deborah Martinsen focuses on the spiritual awakening of the story’s protagonist, caused by his need for “the other”. The Chapter 18, “Like a
Shepherd to His Flock: The Messianic Pedagogy of Fyodor Dostoevsky – Its Sources and Conceptual Echoes” written by Inessa Medzhibovskaya concentrates on Dostoevsky’s concept of nation, the true Russian who is to become universal, and messianic pedagogy, education as a form of human relationship which is seen an integral process involving the interaction between an individual and a nation and the world.


In Chapter 20, “Raskolnikov and the Aqedah (Isaac’s Binding)”, Olga Meerson discusses Dostoevky’s uneasy attitude toward Jews and reflections of a paradoxical identification with Judaism in Crime and Punishment.

The Chapter 21, “Prince Myshkin’s Night Journey: Chronotope as a Symptom”, Marina Kostalevky explains why Dostoevsky used Koranic motifs in his work and explains the “epileptic time” which is the moment before an epileptic fit, experienced both by Dostoevsky and by his character Prince Myshkin.

This valuable book includes very well-researched articles written by the scholars of the field which examine the dialogues of Dostoevky’s personas from aesthetic, philosophical and religious viewpoints. It is a major contribution to the Russian literature associated with Dostoevky’s name and works.

*Ayse Dietrich - Professor, Part-time, at Middle East Technical University, Department of History, and Eurasian Studies. Editor and the founder of the International Journal of Russian Studies e-mail: editor@ijors.net, dayse@metu.edu.tr, dietrichayse@yahoo.com

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