МЫСЛИ ДЛЯ БЕСПОКОЙНОГО КОНТИНЕНТА: НЕКОТОРЫЕ РОССИЙСКИЕ ВЗГЛЯДЫ НА ОБЩЕЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСКИЕ ВОПРОСЫ

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Современный кризис европейских ценностей и фундаментальный вопрос «Что значит быть человеком?» — проблемные сюжеты, которые автор предлагает осмыслить путем обращения к российскому интеллектуальному наследию. Что могут сказать российские мыслители, отвечая на общечеловеческие вопросы? В исследовании автор обращается к творчеству А. И. Солженицына, акцентируя внимание на его идеях личной моральной ответственности каждого индивида перед обществом и необходимости говорить правду, несмотря на советский официоз. «Моральная ответственность» стала настоящим диссидентским нарративом, который автор противопоставляет этике режима и безразличию советского населения. В статье обсуждаются и идеи таких мыслителей, как С. Л. Франк и Ф. М. Достоевский, в контексте поиска новых подходов в осмыслении «человеческого» вообще. В данном контексте рассматривается и русское монашество. По мнению автора, именно русская философия способна помочь Западу в переосмыслении его религиозного наследия и понимании природы человека (так же как и самой России). В заключение он отмечает острую необходимость в религиозном, христианском гуманизме, способном стать соединяющим основанием для общечеловеческого взаимодействия.

Ключевые слова: современные русские мыслители, русские диссиденты, имидж России, либеральный консерватизм, русское монашество, неспокойный дух, христианский гуманизм, моральная ответственность, сознание.

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Europe's current challenges are as much about ideology and culture as politics and economics. The founders of the European project, and its current representatives, in different ways have promoted the idea that the European vision should be about values. But increasingly people are divided about what those values should be. One of the underlying questions is: What does it mean to be human? Opinion in the West today is a strange mix of contradictory tendencies. It combines, on the one hand, the idea that human behaviour is best explained in terms of people's economic or biological drives, with, on the other, the view that everything is invented or in flux, and thus that there is no real core to our humanity at all. There is a restless spirit in Europe, arising from an uncertainty about what the continent stands for. In this context, the export of Europe's values to the rest of the world can in practice simply mean the passing on of its divisions.

In discussing some of these issues, this article draws on inspiration from Russia. This is, perhaps, a surprise. After all, Russia's current image in the world is poor when it comes to human rights, law and ethics—and not without reason. It is also associated, in the Western mind at least, with the promotion of 'fake news' and the manipulation of information. But there is much more to Russia than violence and lies. Indeed, there is a rich current of thinking about human character and personality which is worthy of attention and appreciation. So, in these difficult times, when the world is throwing up so much for us to worry about, let us turn for a moment to what certain Russian thinkers have had to say about the nature of our common humanity.

Russia's tradition of fake news flourished in the communist era. But a robust culture of opposition to it also emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Arguably the most eloquent defender of truth-telling was the novelist, Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008). Solzhenitsyn had been confined in the labour camps at the end of the Stalin period. But in the decades following his release he made a number of telling statements on the subject of 'truth'. One of these was the speech he wrote on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970, 'One Word of Truth'. At the conclusion of this, he declared: 'The simple step of a simple ordinary man is not to support the lie. Let the lie come into the world, but not through me.' (Solzhenitsyn, 1970: 27). A few years later, he put out a programmatic statement entitled, 'Live Not by Lies' (1974), echoing the same theme — which was released into samizdat just prior to his being exiled to the West. Here he challenged people to stop being deceitful; in his mind, non-participation in often subtle practices of lying and dishonest compromise was crucial for personal and social liberation (Solzhenitsyn, 2009: 556–560). One of the reasons for the success of his writings — for they were influential both in the USSR and Eastern Europe — was that they gave people a picture of how they could begin to speak out against oppression; anyone could start somewhere. The underlying message was straightforward: each individual had a responsibility for society, which could not be passed on to others; there was a moral core to human nature.

Solzhenitsyn's ethics grew out of some spiritual experiences he had in the camps, which later found expression in his book, *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973–1974). Here, in a well-known passage, he criticized the idea that morality could be reduced to class or nation, arguing that it was rooted in personal moral choice: 'It was granted me to carry away from my prison years on my bent back, this essential experience: *how* a human being becomes evil and *how* good. <...> Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either — but right through every human heart — and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains <...> an un-uprooted small corner of evil.' Once again, we see here an emphasis on the human being as having a moral nature. It should also be noted that Solzhenitsyn believed that it was only through suffering that he had arrived at this kind of self-knowledge. '*Bless you, prison*, for having been my life,' he declared (Solzhenitsyn, 1975: 615–616). Not all of his contemporaries agreed!

Another example of this moral discourse came in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, when seven activists went out onto Moscow's Red Square to protest. At the subsequent trial, one of the demonstrators, Larisa Bogoraz, stated: 'Staying silent would have meant lying. <...> Had I not done this, I would have considered myself responsible for these actions of the government.' (Gorbanevskaya, 1972: 220). Another Russian dissident, Vladimir Bukovsky — who spent twelve years in prisons before his exile to the West in 1976 — made a similar point in his memoirs. In his mind, refusing to submit to the lies promoted by the regime enabled people to overcome divisions in their own personalities; it presupposed a 'small corner of freedom' in each individual, a 'consciousness of personal responsibility'. (Bukovsky, 1978: 191). Another symptom of this belief in moral responsibility was the widespread use of the term 'conscience' in late Soviet Russia. For some, conscience was regarded as a key component of human personality. For example, Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva — a somewhat troubled person who lived much of her adult life abroad — once wrote: 'All I have is my conscience. And my conscience tells me that before pointing out the mote in my neighbour's eye I must first see the beam in my own. <...> We are all responsible for everything that happened.' (Alliluyeva, 1967: 245).

The Soviet regime was always ambivalent about the nature of morality. After setting its face against traditional Christian values, it found itself promoting an ethic combining moralism and relativism. The moral system it created was ungrounded and unstable. The Bolsheviks preached a 'proletarian morality', which was very strict when the reputation of the state was involved: under Stalin, public confession for political misdemeanours was a regular tool of social control; and people had to be constantly alert to changes in the political discourse to ensure they did not step out of line. Yet the morality was also relativistic; the regime created a narrative that allowed people to

distance themselves from their actions and blame circumstances for any wrongdoing they committed. The memoirist, Nadezhda Mandelstam, traced this back to the 1920s; at that time, she said, people came to consider the idea of moral resistance 'old-fashioned': 'One could not, it was argued, hold out against the inevitable.' (Mandelstam, 1976: 191). Another approach was to explain wrong-doing as a kind of mistake. One reform-minded literary critic, Yuri Karyakin, who became prominent during the 1980s, made this point when he said: 'One of the spiritual crimes of communism was that it wholly replaced the concepts of "sin" and "vice" with the concepts of "mistakes" and "deficiencies"' (Boobbyer, 1993: 357). It was in this context that the dissident narrative about personal moral responsibility was so powerful; it challenged the ethics of the regime and the moral passivity of the population.

The thought of the Russian dissidents did not come from nowhere. One book informing the ideas of Solzhenitsyn and some of his peers was the famous volume *Landmarks* (1909). This was a collection of essays fiercely critical of the revolutionary intelligentsia. In a general sense, it accused the revolutionary movement of being dangerously impatient, of failing to realise that political change could only be successful if it was rooted in a broader cultural or ethical change of mind. Contributors included the religious philosophers Nikolai Berdyaev and Sergei Bulgakov. Another — who features in this article — was the philosopher Semyon Frank (1877–1950). Jewish by background, Frank converted to Orthodoxy in 1912. He was deported from Soviet Russia in late 1922 (as was Berdyaev), after which he lived successively in Germany, France and Britain. In emigration he produced a series of philosophical texts combining neo-Platonic, Christian and existential themes. His essay in *Landmarks,* 'The Ethic of Nihilism,' was a warning against the sectarian character of the revolutionary tradition (Frank, 1977: 155–184).

Throughout his writings, Frank stressed the importance of balance. This was reflected in his political outlook, which he defined as 'liberal conservatism'. He was wary of certain forms of Anglo-Saxon liberalism, believing they lacked a coherent view of human nature. In his social philosophy, he stressed the interconnectedness of persons in a way that echoed the writings of the Jewish theologian Martin Buber. He opposed the idea that human beings should be considered autonomous entities isolated from one another; he thought it was only through awareness of others that self-awareness could emerge. Relationships were grounded in what he described as 'dual-unities': 'The essential feature of the 'I-Thou' relation consists precisely in the fact that, in spite of a strictly maintained, never disappearing separateness, the relation is dominated by a certain genuinely inner unity. This is essentially a dual-unity. <...> The 'I-Thou' relation as 'I-Thou' being is revealed as a primordial form of being.' He also stressed the connection between individuals and collectives: no 'I' could exist alone, without emerging from and at the same time forming a 'We' (Frank, 1983: 143, 148). The soul, he once said elsewhere, was a 'peculiar kind of infinity'; he thought that in some spiritual way all human beings were connected with each other

and part of a larger unity (Frank, 1965: 24). Frank thus sought to avoid the traps of either individualism or collectivism, by stressing the interconnection of people.

Frank also believed that human beings had a vocation in the world. In emigration, addressing a generation of young Russians who had lost touch with their homeland, he encouraged people to think of their lives as having purpose and meaning: 'From our early years our souls are troubled by dreams of goodness and truth, of the spiritual significance and meaning of our lives, and these dreams compel us to think we have been born not 'for nothing', that we are called to realize something great and decisive in the world and thus to actualize ourselves as well.' (Frank, 2010: 1). To this audience, he emphasized that although the world appeared chaotic and meaninglessness, the very ability to see this was indicative of the reality of some higher system of meaning. He stated that to declare life meaningless contained an internal logical contradiction: 'It contradicts a simple self-evident fact: the fact that *we understand and rationally affirm this meaninglessness*. The fact that we understand and rationally affirm it means that not everything in the world is meaningless: there at least exists meaningful knowledge. <...> If the world and life were a total chaos of blind, meaningless forces, there could not exist in them a being who would be conscious of this and could express it.' (Ibid.: 51). Frank thus declared that human life had a larger meaning and purpose; each person had a vocation to fulfil in the world.

There are plenty of other insights in Frank's thought that have a resonance today. During the dark days of the Second World War — when he himself was forced into hiding in the Isère region of France (because of his Jewish ancestry) — he wrote that the true victor in the war would be the person who first started to forgive. It was a telling example of how, in his mind, elements of Christian teaching could be relevant to public life. In this he pointed to the link between politics and spirituality. He also tried to combine idealism and realism; he was always hostile to parties with abstract, utopian agendas. In the 1940s, he called for an inspired, Christian form of realism, which had something in common with the emerging school of Christian realism associated with the US theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. He also encouraged Christian believers to seek alliances with secular parties or tendencies, especially where there was a common moral commitment. In this sense, he stressed the importance of unity and warned against excessive sectarianism (Boobbyer, 2016: 45, 51–52, 55, 57). In our polarized world, this certainly seems relevant. Interestingly, one of the strengths of the Soviet dissident movement was that it was able to bring people together around certain common moral commitments, even when they had significant political differences; for example, it brought together activists of both religious and secular persuasions in defense of human rights.

As his life advanced, Frank became increasingly drawn to mystical spirituality. This is another area where Russia has a heritage relevant to our times. For the purposes of this article, a figure who represents this well is the monk Theophan the Recluse (1815–1894). Theophan played an important role in the revival of Russian monasticism in the

19th century. This was partly through his involvement in the translation into Russian of an anthology of the writings of the Church Fathers known as the *Philokalia*. He was also associated with the so-called 'Jesus Prayer', a short devotional prayer popularized in the late 19th century by a book called *The Way of a Pilgrim*. This text tells the story of a man inspired by St Paul's injunction that people should pray continuously. In response to this, he repeatedly addresses Christ with the words: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' (French, trans.: 1986: 10). The intention of the prayer was to enable people to ground their mental activity in 'the heart'; the aim was to facilitate a movement of the heart towards God arising not just from the mind but from the whole person. Theophan's own statements on prayer reflected this aspiration. Prayer, he said, was to be an activity of 'the mind in the heart': 'The principal thing is to stand before the Lord with the mind in the heart' (Kadloubovsky, Palmer, trans., 1966: 80, 100). This emphasis on the 'heart', which was shared by other Russian churchmen and thinkers, echoed the writings of some of the Desert Fathers whose thinking had helped to shape the Eastern Orthodox mind (Mickelson, 2017: 108). It is a reminder that the Orthodox tradition is very much part of Europe, and leaves an imprint in many areas of modern thought.

Here it is worth noting an area of common interest between Russian monasticism and Russian dissent. Soviet dissidents and Russian monks were alike in seeking for ways of facilitating deeper levels of personal integration. Yet there were differences of emphasis. People like Solzhenitsyn, Bogoraz and Bukovsky thought moral action and truth-telling were means through which people could overcome splits in their personalities; personal wholeness was the result of people taking responsibility for society and making the right moral choices. Theophan's approach was more focussed on the interior life; he thought wholeness and integration required some kind of inner, spiritual endeavor.

Why are silence, contemplation and prayer important? It is because they act as a corrective to a Western rationalism that tends to over-stress the capacity of the mind to unlock all of the world's secrets — a mindset that has been central to the Western outlook since Descartes, and which leads to a kind of gnostic tendency. This is surely one of the causes of our restlessness: on its own, the mind is not grounded anywhere; it never finishes its work. The current cult of mindfulness is a reaction to a one-sided rationalism. This is not to downplay reason, but to stress that for it to achieve its purposes it needs to act in harmony with the whole person. It seems obvious that a person's capacity to think clearly is often undermined by an ill-intentioned will. The message coming from Russian religious thought is that there is a spiritual dimension to human nature, which we need to take account of. The Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyev (1853–1900) was particularly influential in spreading this notion; he used the term 'Godmanhood' or 'Divine humanity' to express the idea that there was a divine spark or potential in every person (Solovyov, 1995).

Unfortunately, the modern Western mind has lost confidence in its religious heritage, even while it is tolerant of spirituality in various forms. In this suspicion of religion there

is a fear that faith must inevitably stifle or restrict personality. But, if the human person has a spiritual nature, then our loss of faith may be one of the causes of our unquiet spirit. It seems that people are hungry for deeper forms of meaning, but lack signposts about where to find them. We need to rediscover that far from restricting personality, our religious heritage offers vital insights into the nature of personhood. Frank thought that Christianity was a religion of personality; indeed, he thought that the very idea of personality was a discovery of Christianity, tracing it back to St Augustine (Frank, 1946: 140). He was also familiar with Augustine's famous statement in *Confessions* that the human heart is restless until it rests in God (Frank, 2010: 58). His contemporary, the Orthodox priest Father Serafim Batyukov (1880–1942), tried to express the uniqueness of each person's identity and vocation in a metaphor about birds: 'Every bird has its own flight. An eagle flies in the clouds, while the nightingale sits on the branch, but each of them glorifies God.' (Василевская, 2001: 101).

An emphasis on the individual can surely be combined with a sense that humanity is a unity. It may indeed be that our current anxieties arise simply because our lives are too self-centered; taking responsibility for the world's needs could offer us a pathway to sanity. The importance of mutual responsibility, so much a feature of the dissident movement, was well-expressed by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881). Dostoevsky was a regular visitor to the influential monastery, Optina Pustyn, and some of the ideas of the Optina monks found expression in his work. Father Zosima, the spiritual hero of his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, who was modelled on one of the Optina monks, declares: 'Each one of us is beyond all question responsible for all men and all things on earth, not only because of the general transgressions of the world, but each one individually for all men and every single man on this earth.' (Dostoevsky, 1958: 190). It is a powerful statement about the interconnectedness of the human family. Dostoevsky's ideas were sometimes contradictory; at times, he promoted an exaggerated form of nationalism, but here we see the more universal side of his thought. A similar breadth of perspective was also evident in a famous speech Dostoevsky gave about Alexander Pushkin in 1880 (Dostoevsky, 1960: 31-94). Clearly, Frank's thought also contained a universal element. Intriguingly, he once suggested that the essence of Christianity was only accessible to the 'collective experience of mankind' (Frank, 1946: 124) — a statement suggesting that humanity as a whole (past and present) has a kind of personality.

So Russia has something to offer the world, which is a challenge to fake news, violence, restless hurry and exaggerated rationalism. It has resources that could help its neighbours rather than frighten them — and which could provide the basis for a sounder politics of its own. These include ideas about how to tell the truth in difficult situations, and the importance of moral responsibility; insights into how individuals and communities are dependent on each other; reflections on human diversity and vocation; thoughts on the connection between spirituality and politics; encouragement to

forgive; and perspectives on prayer and personal integration. One of the reasons why the West survived the Cold War was that it was able to maintain some level of ideological unity. But its cohesiveness is being increasingly undermined by cultural divisions. What is needed is a kind of Christian humanism to bridge and integrate our sometimes contradictory aspirations. Frank himself, in *Landmarks*, called for a turn to religious humanism (Frank, 1977: 184). That challenge is still relevant.

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THOUGHTS FOR A RESTLESS CONTINENT: SOME RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVES ON OUR COMMON HUMANITY

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What does it mean to be human? This is a question about which Europeans today are divided. In this article the author seeks to conceptualize this issue with reference to Russia's intellectual heritage. What do Russian thinkers say about the nature of our common humanity? The paper turns initially to the work of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, focusing on his ideas about moral responsibility and truth-telling. The author then discusses the moral thinking of some of the Russian dissidents, contrasting it with the ethics of the Soviet regime and the moral passivity of the population in the Soviet era. The paper goes on to explore the ideas of such thinkers as S. L. Frank and Fyodor Dostoevsky in the context of searching for new approaches to understanding our common humanity. Russian monasticism is also considered. According to the author, there are resources in Russian philosophy and spirituality which could enable the West to rediscover its religious heritage and understand human nature more deeply—as well as helping Russia itself. In conclusion, he calls for a religious, Christian humanism to help bring unity to our troubled world.

Keywords: Modern Russian thinkers, Russian dissidents, Russia's image, liberal conservatism, Russian monasticism, unquiet spirit, Christian humanism, moral responsibility, conscience.

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