



# From Kant to Dostoyevsky: Dmytro Čyževs'kyj's Literary Anthropology

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## SYNOPSIS

This paper reconstructs the core argument of Dmytro Čyževs'kyj's unfinished project on formalism in ethics, developed in the late 1920s during his exile in Prague. Although the planned book never materialized, Čyževs'kyj published three articles and a broader set of related texts which, taken together, articulate a distinctive and coherent theoretical position. At its centre lies a compelling intuition: that literature plays a fundamental role in the constitution of moral subjectivity — what may be termed Čyževs'kyj's *literary anthropology*. Čyževs'kyj begins with a critique of Kantian formalism, identifying its abstraction from the concrete will of the individual subject as the root of a broader crisis in ethical theory. Rather than abandoning formalism, however, he seeks to reconfigure it, proposing that ethical meaning is not logically subsumed but symbolically embodied. This claim is developed both philosophically — in a typology of the forms of generality — and interpretively, through readings of Dostoyevsky's motif of the double. Positioned alongside contemporaries such as Bakhtin, Lukács, and Kojève, Čyževs'kyj offers a unique response: not polyphony, but ontological doubling as the site of ethical individuation.

## KEYWORDS

Dmytro Čyževs'kyj; Mikhail Bakhtin; Fyodor Dostoevsky; philosophical anthropology; literary theory; Kant; formalist ethics; double; reception.

## DOI

<https://doi.org/10.14712/23366680.2025.1.5>

## INTRODUCTION

In the late 1920s, while in exile in Prague, Dmytro Čyževs'kyj set about writing a book on the question of formalism in ethics, the 'fundamental theme', according to him, of a 'contemporary crisis of ethical theory so extraordinarily profound and significant that it calls into question the very *possibility* of ethical theory in its traditional form' (Čyževs'kyj 1928a, p. 15). While the book never materialized as a whole, Čyževs'kyj published three articles providing 'a summary of its individual chapters' (Čyževs'kyj 1931a, p. 50): 'On Formalism in Ethics: Remarks on the Contemporary Crisis of Ethical Theory' (Čyževs'kyj 1928a), 'Logic and Ethics: The Question of Overcoming Ethical



“Formalism” (1928/1931, Čyževs’kyj 1931a)<sup>1</sup> and ‘On the Problem of the Double in Dostoyevsky: A Philosophical Interpretation’ (Čyževs’kyj 1929a).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a broader body of related writings from the 1920s and 30s (e.g. ‘Hegel et Nietzsche’, ‘Schiller und die Brüder Karamazov’, ‘Dostoyevsky-psycholog’) also deals with the main themes broached by Čyževs’kyj in the three explicitly reclaimed chapters ‘from the book on formal ethics’ (cf. Janzen 2008, p. 132; Plotnikov 2024, p. 194).

As the titles of Čyževs’kyj’s various articles suggest, their thematic range is strikingly broad — extending from ethics and logic to philosophical anthropology and literary criticism. Given the unfinished state of his book project, moreover, it is not immediately apparent whether these diverse explorations really constitute a coherent whole, or how exactly they were meant to coalesce into a systematic response to the question of formalism in ethics. Nevertheless, several core concerns recur throughout: the notion of ethical personality and its dual or divided nature, the problem of the (logical or literary) ‘form’ of ethical propositions, and the enduring centrality of figures such as Kant and Dostoyevsky, whose presence remains constant despite disciplinary and thematic shifts. It is also clear that Čyževs’kyj did at least have a broad, overarching project, and that these writings amount to an attempt at ‘systematic philosophy’ (cf. Janzen 2008, pp. 125–127) — a view affirmed by Zenkov’skij (1950, p. 460), and more recently by Nikolaj Plotnikov, who has persuasively proposed reconstructing Čyževs’kyj’s effort as the ‘draft of a phenomenological ethics’ (Plotnikov 2024).

Our aim in this study, in this context, is to contribute to sharpening our understanding of the nature and import of Čyževs’kyj’s project on formalism in ethics by examining more precisely how his seemingly scattered and incomplete investigations can indeed be understood as articulating an original and coherent position. We focus on one central intuition that appears to underlie — or rather to constitute the potential theoretical point of crystallization of — the entire project: *the crucial — perhaps even necessary — role of literature in the concrete process by which moral, human subjectivity is constituted or individuated*. In this light, I wish specifically to argue that Čyževs’kyj’s writings collectively outline a theory that, while fragmentary, may justifiably be described as his ‘literary anthropology’.

A major ground for taking the perspective outlined in Čyževs’kyj’s writings on formalism in ethics seriously as a coherent position is that it did not exist in a vacuum, but clearly demands to be situated in the discursive space constituted by very similar, if much more extensive and systematic explorations conducted by the likes of Mikhail Bakhtin, György Lukács, and Alexandre Kojève (cf. Tihanov 1999, 2000; Jacobs 2023) or, later, by such thinkers as Jakov Golosovker (*Kant i Dostoevskij*, 1963), Mikhail Livšic (*Problema Dostoevskogo*, 2013), and Valerij Podoroga (*Roždenie dvojnika*, 2019). All these authors, indeed, trace a broadly parallel trajectory, from a critique of Kant, through Hegel and German idealism (as well as, more often than not, Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology), towards philosophical anthropology and finally, through Dostoyevsky, towards a literary anthropology. The question of the relevance

1 This article is an extended version of the protocol of a talk given to the Dostoyevsky Society (‘Representant, Sign, Concept, Symbol’, 1928) and thus comes both chronologically and conceptually before the paper on the double.

2 We provide the translation of the more explicit title of the later German version of 1931.



and originality of Čyževs'kyj in this fascinating context has never been properly addressed,<sup>3</sup> and the reconstruction proposed here is meant as a first step towards such a comparative analysis.

For want of space and time, the aim of this paper will strictly consist in reconstructing and fleshing out the basic outlines of Čyževs'kyj's literary anthropology, without either contextualising or assessing its broader significance to his work and thought as a whole. It is quite obvious, however, that this particular facet or episode did play a crucial role in Čyževs'kyj's intellectual transition from his early interest in philosophy to his life-long focus on literature (cf. Mnich 2021, p. 95ff). Much more, the literary anthropology he developed out of his critique of formalism in ethics seems to provide an essential key for understanding the *specific* orientation he gave towards the question of *reception* in his mature approach to literature itself (cf. *ibid.*, esp. pp. 23–50).

## 1. 'ON FORMALISM IN ETHICS': PARADOXES OF KANTIAN ABSTRACTION

The starting point of Čyževs'kyj's theoretical journey towards a literary anthropology, broached in 'On Formalism in Ethics', is the paradoxical nature of Kantian ethics, which has been widely recognised — well before Čyževs'kyj, by Schiller, Fichte, etc. — both as having decisively contributed to defining the general conditions of possibility of a free moral human subject, but, at the exact same time, as precluding any understanding of the practical dimension of that concrete moral subject's individual actions. While Čyževs'kyj thus credits Kant with having formulated 'with maximal sharpness the basic provisions of ethical formalism' (Čyževs'kyj 1928a, p. 197), he also sees his formalism as having created the conditions for the contemporary crisis of ethical theory.

In agreement with thinkers such as Max Scheler, Georg Simmel, and Georges Gurwitsch — whose own critiques of formalism he expressly acknowledges without thoroughly discussing them —, Čyževs'kyj sees in Kant's formalism a foundational moment, which no post-Kantian philosophy has been able to shake off or refute (cf. Scheler 1913, p. 405) and whose essential premise, 'in an unclear and unconscious form, has been a common property of almost all ethical theories up until the end of the 19th century' (Čyževs'kyj 1928a, p. 196). Although Čyževs'kyj never quite states this in explicit terms, his assumption is clearly that Kant successfully redefined the entire possible theoretical space for any future ethics and that his formalism thus effectively constitutes a necessary basis for any reflection on the conditions of ethical subjectivity.

At the same time, Čyževs'kyj also acknowledges a fatal flaw at the very core of Kant's formalist ethics, namely his radical characterization of 'ethical will as independent of all subjective differences or empirical conditions, as abstract from any matter, and thereby abstract from any object of desire or concrete goal' (*ibid.*, p. 197). By separating in this dualistic way the general principles of moral action from the conditions of their concrete, specific applications, in Čyževs'kyj's view, Kantian for-

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3 The only traces of such a critical approach are to be found in Bitsili (cf. Vasil'eva 2008).

malism makes it all but impossible to address the real question of ethics, i.e. the practical dilemmas faced by the individual in the concrete determinations of his will:

*Ethical action is only possible if one chooses a side: to refuse a decision is to withdraw from the ethical sphere in general, or to refuse generally to be an ethical subject. This means that the focus of ethical action as such lies not in the application of general principles to the will, but in the very fact of the determination of the will in all its concreteness and individuality (ibid., p. 201).<sup>4</sup>*

Given the crucial role of Kantian formalism in redefining the foundations of ethical theory in general, its own contradictions thus seem to preclude the very possibility of any ethics whatsoever and therefore to plunge it into the profound crisis diagnosed by Čyževs'kyj. As he points out, 'our own objections against ethical formalism seem, at first glance, to undermine the very possibility of ethical theory in general' (ibid., p. 202).

While he is not alone in attacking the excessive abstraction and dualism of Kant's ethics, Čyževs'kyj proposes a way out of its paradoxes that sets him distinctly apart both from the attempts to 'reground' or 'concretise' Kant made by Schiller, Fichte, or Hegel, and from the later turn by Scheler to such notions as 'material values'. Čyževs'kyj, indeed, sees Kant's weakness not in the self-subsumption of the ethical subject to general, formal laws (through the categorical imperative) — i.e. in the very essence of formalism as a commitment to the universality, rationality, and necessity of moral laws — but much more technically, in his specific conception of the individual subject's relation to these norms. Čyževs'kyj discretely alludes to the specific nature of his criticism of Kant in a telling footnote on Scheler:

*We believe that the critique of Kant, given in broad strokes in Max Scheler's Der Formalismus in der Ethik, is in significant ways unjust and too harsh. The object of our own critique is not the historical Kant, but only distinct elements of his theory (ibid., p. 209).<sup>5</sup>*

In this narrow sense, Čyževs'kyj identifies two main problematic points in Kant's characterization of the individual subject's relation to ethical law.

The first is of a logical nature. For Čyževs'kyj, an essential premise of Kant's formalism consists in the recognition that 'ethical theory must interpret reality *in the same way and along the same path* as any "theory" in general' (ibid., p. 196). If it is to

4 'В этическом действовании возможно только стать на одну или другую сторону; отказ же от решения — есть выпадение из этической сферы вообще, есть вообще отказ быть этическим субъектом. — А это значит, что центр тяжести этического действия как такового — не в приложении к воле общих принципов, а в самом факте определения воли во всей её конкретности и индивидуальности.' Translations by me unless otherwise noted — P. F.

5 'Мы считаем критику этики Канта, данную в широких рамках цитированной книги М. Шелера, в значительной части несправедливой и слишком суровой. Объектом же нашей критики был не исторический Кант, а только отдельные элементы его теории.'



be a theory at all, ethics must follow the same rules as any theoretical knowledge or formal logic. For Kant, according to Čyževs'kyj, this implies that ethical theory cannot focus on contingent material or empirical facts, but only on their most general form, on the 'necessary possibility' of what 'must happen, even if it has *never* happened before' (ibid., p. 198). Further,

*[i]t necessarily follows from this that the structure of ethical 'principles', 'norms', 'laws' is strictly the same as the structure of any other judgment: the relation of an ethical 'particular case' to the general rule, the concrete determination of the will with respect to the ethical law is the logical relation of 'subsumption' (ibid.).<sup>6</sup>*

The categorical imperative represents exhibit number one of this logical understanding of the individual subject's will and actions as being subsumed, as neutral or indifferent instantiations, under a homogenous, universal law. Indeed, Kant posits that the ethical maxims of the will 'must be chosen in such a way that they can be valid as *general laws of nature*' (quoted ibid., p. 199) and thus display no individual specificity whatsoever. According to Čyževs'kyj, it is precisely this dogmatic decision to privilege the strict subsumption of the individual under the general as the only possible relation between the two that ultimately leads Kant to the 'strange conclusion that the ethical character of an action is linked to its *abstractedness from the concrete*, that the founding trait of the moral world is its *uniformity and monotony*' (ibid., p. 200).

Of course, 'the fundamental dogmatic assumption of Kant's logic does not appear to be indisputable' (ibid.), and Čyževs'kyj thus explicitly declares that it needs to be rejected in order to salvage the very possibility of ethical theory (ibid., p. 202). In contrast to Kant, he offers to 'recognize the possibility of knowing an individual-concrete ethical reality, which at the same time does not absolutely have to be empirico-sensible' (ibid.). In other words, Čyževs'kyj postulates the necessity of conceiving another kind of logical relation between individual reality and general norm than the untenable form of logical subsumption, for example in the following way:

*The application of an ideal is not the subsumption of a particular case under a general rule but rather a certain approximation to the maximum possible realization of the ideal ethical form as it appears to us, in all the inexhaustible complexity of its content and structure (ibid., p. 202–203).<sup>7</sup>*

Without elaborating this point any further, Čyževs'kyj then turns to the second fundamental problem he sees in the abstractedness of Kant's formalism, namely its re-

6 'А отсюда следует с необходимостью, что структура *этических* «принципов, норм», «законов» — совершенно та же самая, что и структура всяких иных *суждений*; отношение этического «частного случая» к общему правилу, конкретного этического определения воли к этическому закону — есть отношение логического «подчинения».'

7 «Приложение» идеала — не есть подведение частного случая под общее правило, но известное приближение к максимальной возможной реализации предстоящего этического «облика» во всей неисчерпаемой сложности его содержания и структуры.'



jection 'of the ethical character of any determination of the will that is in any way oriented on the subject itself, on his enjoyment, satisfaction, pleasure' (ibid., p. 203). Kant's own ground for this rejection is, of course, his same initial commitment to deal only with the general conditions of the determinations of the will, in abstraction of its concrete, material situation. Čyževs'kyj's counter-argument, similarly, is thus again directed not against the main postulation of Kant's formalism, but against the 'dogmatic' exclusion of concrete, individual factors in the very process of being oriented or determined by a formal, general law.

As Čyževs'kyj tries to show by contrasting Kant's dismissive attitude towards the 'hedonistic' principles of enjoyment, satisfaction, and pleasure with Plato's, these principles are not necessarily tied to the concrete, material (i.e. basely biological and libidinal) dimension of the subject, but can also be seen as the fluid, unreliable effects of a subject's wavering aims. In other words, enjoyment, satisfaction, pleasure are also goal-oriented actions, 'they grow out of service' (ibid.), and could thus potentially be integrated into another conception of formalism that seeks to grasp not only a subject's pure orientation towards general laws, but his entire intentional involvement towards these same ethical principles. For Čyževs'kyj, probably following a phenomenological argument in this case (cf. Plotnikov 2024, p. 186), that involvement is not simply accidental or contingent, but happens at an 'ontological' level and involves the entire personality of the ethical subject:

*All the more so, the hedonist who has linked the fate of his pleasure with a living individuality, who has fallen in love, even if only carnally, for example Fjodor Pavlovič Karamazov, who has fallen in love egoistically with his child, etc., goes beyond the limits of the hedonistic world-view. Every concrete element of existence brings with it the overcoming and disintegration of hedonism. Thus, in his criticism of hedonism, Kant is completely wrong, directing his attacks precisely against the living and ontologically meaningful elements of pleasure (Čyževs'kyj 1928a, p. 207).<sup>8</sup>*

## 2. ETHICS AND LOGIC

In the second 'chapter' of his planned book, 'Ethics and Logic', Čyževs'kyj turns his sights towards addressing the first of the two main weaknesses he identified in Kantian ethics, namely its commitment to the abstract subsumption of the individual under the general (cf. Čyževs'kyj 1931a, p. 50). In 'Formalism in Ethics' Čyževs'kyj's main focus had been to criticise the dogmatic and unsustainable use of subsumption and the only alternative to the model of logical subsumption he put forward, as

<sup>8</sup> 'Тем более выходит из пределов гедонистического мироотношения гедоник, связавший судьбу своего наслаждения с живой индивидуальностью, влюбившийся, хотя бы и чисто плотски, Фёдор Павлович Карамазов, эгоистический, но полюбивший своего ребёнка отец и т.п. Всякий конкретный элемент бытия несёт с собою преодоление и разложение гедонизма. — Итак, в критике гедонизма сугубо неправ Кант, направляющий удары как раз против живых и онтологически-содержательных элементов наслаждения.'



we saw, was the (itself rather Kantian) idea of ‘a certain approximation to the maximum possible realization’. In ‘Ethics and Logic’, he sets out on a different track, leaving altogether the framework of Kantian philosophy aside to question whether ‘the “application” of general principles to specific cases, considered from a purely logical point of view, is exhausted by the types and forms, which are traditionally accepted in (school!) logic’ (ibid., p. 50). His answer, unsurprisingly, is negative, leading him to develop a completely different conception of the logical relations between the general and the particular.

Čyževs’kyj’s reflection on the topic, it has to be said, is idiosyncratic. Except for a couple of quick references to Gessen, Losskij, Weber, Marburg Neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and his own work on logic (ibid., p. 53), he chooses not to situate his argument explicitly in a certain school or movement. He begins instead with a very succinct review of the importance of the theme of the ‘general’ (*obščee*) in the history of Western philosophy, which ‘in a certain sense is even more fundamental, more original than, for example, the notorious “gnoseological” problem of the knowledge of the “external world”’ (ibid., p. 51). Having established the ‘original’ importance of the problem of the general, Čyževs’kyj moves on to the crux of his article, namely ‘the forms of givenness of the general’ (*formy dannosti obščego*), which he sees not as a strictly abstract or conceptual problem, but rather as pertaining more largely and fundamentally to the meaningful structures of experience itself. As Čyževs’kyj points out:

*the problem of the multiplicity of forms of givenness of the general is not exhausted by the problem of the multiplicity of aspects of concepts. The general encompasses a much wider sphere than that of abstract thinking, and has deeper roots than only in the concept (ibid., p. 53).<sup>9</sup>*

Instead,

*Even the most naive approach to being itself can convince us that being is immediately given to us as permeated, intertwined, and interlinked with elements of the general. We do not even have to look for them, we do not need to ‘question’ being, for it reveals itself as general (ibid.).<sup>10</sup>*

On the basis of this assertion, Čyževs’kyj proceeds to distinguish four different modes of immediate givenness of the general: *repetition, concentration, conjugation, movement* (ibid., p. 56). As he points out:

<sup>9</sup> ‘Но ведь проблема многообразия форм данности общего не исчерпывается проблемой множественности видов понятия. Общее охватывает более широкую сферу, чем только абстрактное мышление, и коренится глубже, чем только в понятии.’

<sup>10</sup> ‘Уже самый непосредственный, непредвзятый, наивный подход к бытию убеждает нас, что бытие непосредственно предстает нам пронизанное, оплетённое и связанное элементами общего. Их даже не приходится искать, не нужно «вопросать» бытие, ибо оно само раскрывается как общее.’

*These categories do not take us beyond the bounds of immediacy. They all provide us in immediate, i.e. in undifferentiated and unformed being, various forms and 'styles' of the general in the individual (ibid.).<sup>11</sup>*



Having defined these four general modes of givenness of the general, Čyževs'kyj can then explain what form they take on concretely, articulating thereby a typology that is not dissimilar to that of Charles Sanders Peirce, both in its general conception of 'logic' as essentially a formal semiotic and in the specific articulation it establishes between the types of semiotic functions or units:

*The general can be given either as a single link of the repeating chain, as a point of concentration or 'collection', as the centre of a group, or as the form embracing that group, or, finally, as a movement, a constituting commonality.*

*As a result, we achieve a system of four fundamental aspects of the givenness of the general, which we shall call, in adequation with their essence: representative, sign, concept, symbol (ibid., p. 58).<sup>12</sup>*

The rest of the article is dedicated to the details of this semiotic typology, which constitutes a sort of progression: while the representative constitutes the most abstract relation between the general and the singular (by simply repeating the general in the singular), the symbol appears as a *concrete being 'expressing' another being (which can be general) in the fullness of its concreteness* (ibid., p. 62). We are not able, unfortunately, to linger further on this model, which, as Čyževs'kyj himself notes, requires further development by adding 4 sub-modes to each main aspect, and with which, at the very time of writing 'Ethics and Logic', he was already 'no longer satisfied' (ibid., p. 58). In any case, what we have seen so far is enough to illustrate what I see as the two main points of Čyževs'kyj's answer to the abstraction of Kant's formalism.

Firstly, on a general level, we see that Čyževs'kyj chooses the somewhat surprising path of attacking Kant on the technical terrain of logic: it is neither Kant's conception of reason (and its limits) nor of man, much less his deontology and the formalism of the categorical imperative that are the target of Čyževs'kyj's critique, but the rather narrow question of the logical subsumption of the individual under the general. Whether one wishes to agree with Čyževs'kyj's specific typology or not, it is clear that this is a valid and interesting avenue of criticism, one that developed at approximately the same time in a number of works by other thinkers (we mentioned

11 'Эти категории не выводят нас за границы непосредственности. Все они — в непосредственности, т.е. в недифференцированном и неоформленном бытии — дают нам в различном виде и «стиле» общее в единичном.'

12 'Общее может быть дано или в одном звене повторяющегося, или как пункт концентрации, «собираения», как средоточие группы, или как охватывающая группу форма, или, наконец, как движение, конституирующее общность. Таким образом, мы получаем систему четырёх основных видов данности общего, которые мы и назовём — соответственно с их существом: представитель, знак, понятие, символ.'



the obvious case of Peirce, but one could add the phenomenologists Husserl and Heidegger, as well as the Neo-Kantians Cohen and Cassirer).

Secondly, Čyževs'kyj makes a decisive move by turning away from a static, homogenous understanding of the subsumption of the individual under the general, privileged in the categories of pure representation, semiotic description or conceptual distillation, towards the dynamic, living form of the symbol. The intimation of Čyževs'kyj's typology, when understood in connection with his criticism of Kant, is indeed that ethical norms are instantiated and can be correctly understood not as the pure application of a general idea or as purely applied concepts, but as concrete, infinitely varying symbols. In other words, the ethical dimension of the individual actions of a subject are not to be abstracted from their concrete determinations, but are to be seen as being realized and expressed symbolically, or in symbolic form, by the entirety of the concrete context of the subject's life and activity. Here again, it is worth noting, Čyževs'kyj is not alone in this turn to the symbolic as the locus of the possibility and realization of the worlds of ethics and culture in a Kantian perspective (the most evident point of reference is of course Cassirer, cf. Mnich 2015).

### 3. DOSTOYEVSKY'S DOUBLES

Having thus 'rescued' the very possibility of ethical theory by tracing the outlines of formalism's escape from the clutches of logical subsumption — by demonstrating how the expression of general ethical laws attains an inexhaustible complexity and variety in concrete, living symbolic forms —, Čyževs'kyj turns, in the third 'chapter' of his book, 'On the Problem of The Double', to face the second of the two conundrums he has identified in Kant's formalism, namely the dualism it introduces between inclination (*Neigung*) and duty (*Pflicht*), or more generally between the concrete determinations of a subject's will and its relation to the general ethical norm.

As was the case in 'Ethics and Logic', Čyževs'kyj's strategy is not to try to work directly within the framework of Kant's philosophy (for example by considering his *Third Critique* or his *Anthropology*), but rather to articulate a theoretical position that answers the paradox it raises while respecting the general premises of ethical formalism. Instead of developing his own theoretical model, Čyževs'kyj offers this time to use the figure of the *double* in the work of Fyodor Dostoyevsky as the basis of his argument.

While this turn to literature and Dostoyevsky might appear quite sudden, it is in fact foreshadowed in several significant ways. In 'Formalism in Ethics', for example, Dostoyevsky's Fedor Karamazov is mentioned as an illustration of the 'ontological' (rather than 'accidental' and purely 'empirical') dimension of the concrete elements determining a person's ethical horizon (Čyževs'kyj 1928a, p. 207). In a short autobiographical text from 1945, Čyževs'kyj even suggests that 'some of my Dostoyevsky-articles should be considered as preliminary studies to my book on formalism in ethics' (quoted in Janzen 2008, p. 125). As for the turn to literature, it must be interpreted as a logical consequence of Čyževs'kyj's argument in 'Ethics and Logic': given that ethical norms manifest themselves in individual human actions in the form not of abstract, conceptual judgements, but of complex, living symbols, it bears to reason



that they should be best embodied and expressed not in pure, theoretical form, but rather in living symbolic ones such as literature.

And indeed, it is precisely in this way that Čyževs'kyj turns to the motif of the double, which he understands neither as a strictly literary motif nor as a psychiatric condition, but rather as a sort of transcendental psychological feature of the consciousness of the characters of Dostoyevsky's novels, and of the meaningful development of their world-view and sense of self. In Čyževs'kyj's own words: 'it is particularly important here that the realistic-psychological representation in Dostoyevsky's poetry is at the same time "transcendental-psychological", "meaningful"' (Čyževs'kyj 1931b, p. 21). While the scope and intent of these interpretative claims are, of course, of a general, philosophical nature, Čyževs'kyj's interpretation of Dostoyevsky himself remains rooted in a philologically respectful and attentive reading of the texts. Čyževs'kyj, indeed, offers to retrace the literary development of the motif of the double throughout the entire length of Dostoyevsky's oeuvre, from the early short story *The Double* right up to the late great novels, in particular *Demons* and *The Karamazov Brothers*.

According to Čyževs'kyj, the short story *The Double* offers the first and most obvious example of both the literary realization and philosophical implications of the motif of the double in Dostoyevsky, which rely on a subtle play between psychological realism and literary fantasy (cf. *ibid.*). On the one hand, Čyževs'kyj suggests that the double has a clearly psychological origin: 'Goljadkin's double — whatever his physical existence may be — is psychologically determined, it rises, grows from the depths of Goljadkin's soul' (*ibid.*, p. 23). More precisely, it is rooted in the *unstable psyche* of Goljadkin, which Dostoyevsky, in the first part of the novella, 'lets [...] develop to the highest degree of nervousness in an escalation that is reminiscent of the best scenes of *The Idiot*' (*ibid.*, p. 22). In the second part of the novella, Goljadkin's psychological instability is then extended to the entire realm of his life:

*Goljadkin's double pushes him out of all spheres of life, he 'exchanges' him, replaces him in his official life as well as in his private life, in Olsufij Ivanovich's family and among his colleagues in the office, or, as the older Goljadkin himself puts it, 'forcibly penetrates the sphere of my being and all my relationships in practical life' (ibid., p. 25).<sup>13</sup>*

This ultimately reveals Goljadkin as a person whose place in the world is highly uncertain. As Čyževs'kyj points out, this transition from Goljadkin's 'realistic' psychic instability to the general replacement of his entire physical person in all spheres of life is effected thanks to Dostoyevsky's use of the 'strange' dream as literary technique. By hinting thus that Goljadkin's double is much more than a mere expression or product of psychic instability, meanwhile blurring the question of the 'real' exist-

13 'Der Doppelgänger des Herrn Goljadkin drängt ihn aus allen Lebenssphären hinaus, er "vertauscht", ersetzt ihn im Dienst wie im Privatleben, in der Familie des Olsufij Ivanovič und bei den Kollegen im Amt, oder wie das Goljadkin der Ältere selber ausdrückt, "dringt mit Gewalt in den Umkreis meines Seines und aller meiner Beziehungen im praktischen Leben".'



tence of Goljadkin's double at the literary level, Dostoyevsky manages to ask the following essential question:

*Here Dostoyevsky raises an 'ethical-ontological' problem, the problem of solidity, reality, — the security of individual existence. This problem is really one of the most essential problems of ethics! The reality of the human personality is not secured by its mere empirical existence, but requires some (non-empirical) prerequisites (ibid., p. 26).<sup>14</sup>*

While *The Double* consists almost only of a 'character study' of Goljadkin's ill-fated attempt to achieve a stable sense of himself (a motif repeated in *A Raw Youth*, cf. Gerigk 1965), Čyževs'kyj argues that one finds the same motif of the double expressed again in the great figures of Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov, this time however in a way that is much more profound and less tied to the frailty of the characters' individual consciousness, and that appears instead as a general condition of the constitution of the consciousness of strong-willed, rational individuals.

In the case of Stavrogin, Čyževs'kyj points out the presence of a devilish double in some passages that were left out by Dostoyevsky in the final version of the novel: 'In one of the omitted passages, Stavrogin, in conversation with Daša, says that sometimes a double, a "devil", appears to him' (Čyževs'kyj 1931b, p. 28). What interests Čyževs'kyj here is that this concrete devil-double does not completely disappear from the rest of the text, but is heard through the voices of other characters: 'Dostoyevsky's artistic intention was that some people from Stavrogin's environment also repeat the same thing that the devil says' (ibid., p. 29). In this sense, the disappearance of the explicit Devil-double, in Čyževs'kyj's interpretation, masks only the fact that the characters surrounding Stavrogin constitute an array of doubles that are mere projections of his own contradictions. Of course, in this reading, the personal integrity of Stavrogin himself is also called into question:

*Thus, Stavrogin lives among the 'emanations' of his mind, in a world of ghosts, of 'devils'. Or, better said, others live for him (let us remember the women in the novel), 'from him' and out of him, but he himself does not actually live, he does not possess a complete reality, he is only a 'usurper' (ibid., p. 31).<sup>15</sup>*

The final and most striking illustration of the motif of the double in Čyževs'kyj's account is Ivan Karamazov. In his case, of course, an explicit devil-double remains in

<sup>14</sup> 'Hier wirft Dostojevskij das "ethisch-ontologische" Problem, das Problem der Festigkeit, der Realität, — der Sicherheit der individuellen Existenz auf. Dies Problem ist wirklich eins der wesentlichsten Probleme der Ethik! Die Realität der menschlichen Persönlichkeit wird nicht durch ihr blosse empirische Existenz gesichert, sondern erfordert noch manche (nicht-empirische) Voraussetzungen.'

<sup>15</sup> 'So lebt Stavrogin zwischen den "Emanationen" seines Geistes, in der Welt der Gespenster, der "Teufel". Oder — besser gesagt: Andere leben für ihn (erinnern wir uns an die Frauen des Romans), "von ihm" und aus ihm heraus, er selbst aber lebt eigentlich nicht, er besitzt keine vollständige Realität, er ist nur "Usurpator" [...].'

the text of the novel, connected here — as it was in Goljadkin's case, both to mental illness and a weakening sense of self:

*Ivan's illness, his 'nightmare', is a double phenomenon. Ivan's 'devil' is only 'an embodiment of my ego, or rather only a part of my ego — my thoughts and feelings, but only the lowest and stupidest' (ibid., p. 36).<sup>16</sup>*

In contrast to Goljadkin, Ivan is not simply a weak individual with no place in the world. Rather, as Stavrogin, he is a strong-willed rationalist and individualist who, if anything, is too sure of his own intellectualized truths and is thus disconnected from the world. The manifestation of his devil-double is but one symptom of his alienation from others and from the moral risk and crisis it entails for him. As Čyževs'kyj argues, Ivan's devil is not his only double in the novel: like with Stavrogin, some of the other characters also act both as his doubles and as the revelators of the instability that underlies the only apparent solidity of his moral disposition:

*Despite the severe psychological crisis he has experienced, Ivan has not yet reached the point of realizing his guilt for everyone, but only for one man, who is his 'double' — because Smerdjakov is Ivan's double (ibid., p. 35).<sup>17</sup>*

Rounding up his analysis of the motif of the double in the figures of Goljadkin, Stavrogin, and Ivan Karamazov, Čyževs'kyj turns in the second part of his text to a philosophical assessment of the evolution of that motif. His first point, already broached in relation to Goljadkin, has to do with the frailty of the human psyche, or rather, its need to go beyond itself in order to achieve the status of a truly ethical subject:

*The appearance of a double poses the question to a person about his or her full reality. Simply 'existing', 'being there', it seems, is not enough to be an ethical subject. A person's merely empirical, material existence is not yet a human existence. A double, by breaking into a person's ego, shows the dependence, inconstancy, uncertainty, and instability of that person's 'ethical being' (ibid., p. 37).<sup>18</sup>*

16 'Die Krankheit Ivans, sein "Alpdruck" ist wie bei Stavrogin — eine Doppelgänger-Erscheinung. Der "Teufel" Ivans ist doch nur "eine Verkörperung meines Ich, übrigens nur eines Teils meines Ich, meiner Gedanken und Gefühle, aber nur der niedrigsten und dümmsten".

17 'Ivan ist trotz der von ihm erlebten schweren seelischen Krise nicht bis zum Bewusstsein seiner Schuld für alle vorgedrungen, sondern nur für einen einzigen Mann, welcher sein "Doppelgänger" ist, — denn Smerdjakov ist der Doppelgänger Ivans.'

18 'Die Doppelgängererscheinung stellt einen Menschen vor die Frage nach seiner vollwertigen Realität. Einfach zu "existieren", "da zu sein" genügt, wie es scheint, nicht, um ein ethisches Subjekt zu sein. Eine bloss empirische, dinghafte Existenz eines Menschen ist noch nicht eine menschliche Existenz. Ein Doppelgänger, indem er in das Ich eines Menschen einbricht, zeigt dadurch die Abhängigkeit, Unbeständigkeit, Unsicherheit, Unfestigkeit des "ethischen Seins" dieses Menschen.'



In the case of almost all Dostoyevsky's characters, at least in Čyževs'kyj's interpretation, the apparition of the double and the moral revelation it brings of a yet incomplete ethical personality derives from their abstraction or removal from the concrete sphere of humanity. While Goljadkin simply never finds his place, Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov are prevented from achieving this by their egoistical commitment to rational, abstract principles:

*The principle of 'abstraction' in the ethical sphere leads to the abolition of the concrete humanity of every ethical subject. If a general principle is the most important thing in an action, the ethical subject, together with its concrete life situation, is merely a tool of the abstract principle and as such has only a very secondary function in the process of realizing the good (ibid., p. 40).<sup>19</sup>*

In this sense, the figure of the double itself, as it appears in the work of Dostoyevsky, does not constitute a 'solution' or a theory of the successful constitution of a subject in the sense of ethical formalism. Indeed, it is fair to say that, in most cases, it is rather the symptom of the tragic failure of such a process. What Dostoyevsky's novels do achieve, however, is to circumscribe the failure of a pure, abstract formalism, oriented towards the neutral, rational implementation of principles; by neither condemning nor deriding the characters that fall prey to its trappings, it indicates the larger, existential conditions which a truly lived formalism would require. As such,

*[I]ike Kant, Dostoevsky wants to believe that no 'zero-point' exists in ethics and that the innate sense of the good never disappears without leaving a trace. In a sense, even the anti-hero exhibits his peculiar kind of ethical awareness (Cherkasova 2009, p. 44).*

Further, in *Dostoyevsky as Psychologist*, Čyževs'kyj seems to broaden his claim, to see the dialectics of the double, of the personal fight of the individual to assert himself beyond intellectual abstraction as a struggle characteristic of the constitution process of any subjectivity, not only the dangerous, titanic ones such as Ivan and Stavrogin.

*The entire complex antithesis of types in Dostoevsky's great novels is an antithesis of related spiritual 'forces' and functions (Čyževs'kyj 1933, p. 63).*

*All Dostoyevsky's 'positive' characters — from Ordynov to the Idiot and Aleša Karamazov — there is this duality of activity and passivity, concreteness and abstractness (ibid., p. 71).<sup>20</sup>*

19 'Das Prinzip der "Abstraktion" in der ethischen Sphäre führt eben zur Aufhebung der konkreten Menschlichkeit eines jeden ethischen Subjekts. Wenn in einer Handlung ein allgemeines Prinzip das Wichtigste ist, so ist das ethische Subjekt samt seiner konkreten Lebenssituation bloss ein Werkzeug des abstrakten Prinzips und als ein solches hat es nur eine ganz nebengeordnete Funktion im Prozesse der Verwirklichung des Guten.'

20 'Вся сложная антитетика типов в больших романах Достоевского — есть антитетика друг другу родственных душевных «сил» и функций. Во всех положительных образах Достоевского — от Ордынова до Идиота и Алёши Карамазова — есть эта двойственность активности и пассивности, конкретности и абстрактности.'

In other words, we have arrived here to Čyževs'kyj's key literary anthropological thesis, elaborated from the contradictions of formalism in ethics. In short, it postulates that in the pursuit of achieving or attaining its own integral, moral personality, a subject cannot simply apply or follow abstract principles and norms, but must go through a process of de-doubling, of crisis of his intellectual, general principles that involves a confrontation with a symbolic alter ego (or several) that reveals the full extent of the contradictions of his moral personality. That process, which is not purely psychological-empirical but situated at a transcendental, ontological level of meaning, seems to require the fundamental involvement, or even concrete expression, of these strata of meaning in literary form.

#### 4. ČYŽEVS'KYJ AND BAKHTIN

Čyževs'kyj, in the final part of 'The Problem of the Double', turns to situating Dostoyevsky's relevance in the wider context of reactions to Kant's formalism and to highlighting the originality of his approach. This is perhaps the aspect of Čyževs'kyj's critique of formalism that occupied him the longest outside of the narrower scope of his unfinished book project, and is tied up with his very extensive research on German idealism and its reception in Russia. In fact, one could probably argue that, rather than being the problem of formalism in ethics itself, it is a question of the specific development of Russian thought, from its reception of Enlightenment ideas and German idealism to its 'mature' expression for example in the literary works of Dostoyevsky that was of central interest to Čyževs'kyj. To put it another way, it is because Russian culture and philosophy proposed an interesting answer to the paradoxes of Kantian ethics that this theme became a notable object for Čyževs'kyj. Be that as it may, it is clear that Čyževs'kyj saw Dostoyevsky's doubles as inscribed in a dual genealogy comprised of Russian philosophy and its reception of German thought on the one hand — this background, in any case, is of vital importance, since as Čyževs'kyj notes, 'Ivan as well as Stavrogin are only possible on the basis of Russian enlightenment' (Čyževs'kyj 1931b, p. 39) — and a European 'anthropo-ontological current' (Feuerbach, Stirner, Bruno Bauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Dostoyevsky; cf. Čyževs'kyj 1933, p. 72) on the other.

While we cannot elaborate here on Čyževs'kyj's account of Dostoyevsky's position in this wider context of German idealism and Russian philosophy, it does remind us that the invocation of the motif of the double and Čyževs'kyj's resulting literary anthropology strongly echo the work of his contemporaries Lukács, Kojève, and Bakhtin. Again, exploring the significance of this motif, both in reference to these other models and in its own right, is a task I reserve for another paper (with great potential, I believe, to help us rethink the complex roles of Kantian ethics and Hegelian phenomenology as source of these Russian anthropologies). In order to at least outline the originality of Čyževs'kyj's perspective, and clarify how and why it played a crucial transitory role towards the development of his mature work and 'receptive aesthetics' (Mnich 2021), I will conclude by briefly contrasting his position with its most obvious point of comparison, Mikhail Bakhtin.

In *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, for one, Bakhtin explicitly points out that the Kantian antinomies can be used as a foundation for the analysis of Dostoyevsky





(Soboleva 2024, p. 83). More generally, starting from the exact same criticism of Kantian formalism as Čyževs'kyj, in *The Philosophy of the Deed* (1919/21) Bakhtin moved towards a theory of aesthetic experience inspired by Cohen and Scheler, and towards a positive conception of the novel as dialogue based on the works of Dostoyevsky. In other words, Bakhtin combines the exact same ingredients as Čyževs'kyj to produce a new picture of an embodied, involved subject. Given the towering influence and fame of Bakhtin's position, therefore, one can rightfully start by wondering whether Čyževs'kyj's perspective in fact adds anything that has not been said already a hundred times over.

The simple answer to this is that there is at least one crucial aspect of Čyževs'kyj's interpretation of Dostoyevsky that seems to warrant more attention than it has received up to now. For all that it shares with Bakhtin's account, Čyževs'kyj diverges from it on one absolutely essential aspect — the key concept that allows Bakhtin to reconcile the apparently incompatible collective and individual aspects of expression in Dostoyevsky: *polyphony*. Crucially, this is not an omission or oversight on Čyževs'kyj's part. He was aware both of Bakhtin's book on Dostoyevsky (cf. Čyževs'kyj 1965), and of the very notion of polyphony and its potential heuristic utility for analyzing Dostoyevsky's works (Čyževs'kyj 1929c, p. 7). Rather than an omission or oversight, what one finds in Čyževs'kyj's interpretation of Dostoyevsky is a radically different, indeed diametrically opposed approach to that of Bakhtin's. Instead of seeing the Dostoevskian ethical subject as emerging out of a plurality of autonomous, distinct voices in a polyphonic or heteroglossic context, Čyževs'kyj understands Dostoyevsky's entire work as a sort of schizophrenic dialogue with himself, a constant de-doubling of his personality in alter egos and Doppelgänger.

Of course, one might object that we are selling Bakhtin short, and that he was well aware of the potential of Dostoyevsky's work to collapse into schizophrenia and solipsism, rather than true polyphonic expression. As Zenkin notes, Bakhtin offered a genetic explanation of polyphony, seeing the development of the 'grand dialogue' with the author only in the mature novels, and a less developed form of consciousness in novellas such as the *Double*:

*According to Bakhtin, a distinctive feature of the heroes of these novels is their 'self-consciousness': it puts them in 'a great dialogue' with the author, hence the total form of the 'polyphonic novel.' But self-consciousness is extremely reduced in the 'poor official' Mr. Goljadkin; it would probably be more accurate to speak of an unconsciousness, a pathological inability to form an idea of oneself. All the more so, this man cannot form more general ideas and thus enter into Bakhtin's category of 'ideological heroes' (Zenkin 2021, p. 529).*

In this reading, the inner monologue is a form of reduced consciousness, the pathology of a subject that has not managed to find recognition and to enter into dialogue with others, and thus either stays in a proto-form of development, or regresses in the pathological misanthropy of the *Man from the Underground*. As Bakhtin himself puts it when describing the *Double*:

*The story tells how a man wanted to do without the awareness of others, without recognition by others, how he tried to bypass the other, to confirm himself, and what*

*happened as a result [...]. At the heart of the plot is therefore Goljadkin's attempt, following the total rejection of his person by others, to replace others with himself* (Bakhtin 1929, p. 32).



Far from providing a counter to Čyževs'kyj's insistence on the importance of the double and tendency on the part of Dostoyevsky's characters to manifest schizophrenic inner dialogue, the obviously Hegelian undertones of this passage, which sees the Double as an aborted attempt at dialogical recognition and constitution of the self, are precisely what distinguishes Bakhtin from Čyževs'kyj.

For Čyževs'kyj, indeed, Goljadkin's schizophrenia and doubling are not interpreted as a failing or symptom of his unsuccessful attempt towards a Hegelian constitution of the self through recognition and dialogue, but as a constitutive moment in the creation of any moral subject. As we have seen, some of the strongest of Dostoyevsky's characters seem to be constructed almost solely through a schizophrenic de-doubling into other characters, and not through an 'internalized dialogue'. This is the case most spectacularly with Stavrogin, who seems to inform the construction of all the other characters in *Demons*, but also with Ivan Karamazov, who engages both in 'real' dialogues, for example with his brothers, but who also has a powerful double in the figure of Smerdjakov. Again, there is no horizon here of overcoming the schizophrenic split of the subject through a radical opening to dialogue and polyphony. Schizophrenic doubling for Čyževs'kyj is an unavoidable moment or rite of passage in the constitution of the ethical subject both in Dostoyevsky, and more generally. A subjectivity that does not go through the confrontation with its semi-exteriorized self remains abstract, and can have no claim to be constituted as a full, integral, moral subject.

This of course raises with extreme acuity one further problem, which Bakhtin's polyphony had seemingly addressed: namely that of the status of the work of art itself, and the author's position vis-à-vis the work.<sup>21</sup> If one rejects the Bakhtinian idea that an author can divest himself of his own position, and let the other speak in his work, then the work itself must be considered as a schizophrenic operation or exercise of de-doubling: in this sense, they are only abstract, intellectual products that do not reveal the full personality either of their author or of the characters he has created. This actualization can intervene only through the 'completion' of the text in the act of its reading: the productive, moral tension of the double that is a work of literature in relation to its authors must be enlivened and realized in a receptive horizon by a reader, who will ultimately decide and resolve (for himself) the tensions between the real and fantastical, abstract and concrete. The main problem of formalism in ethics thus appears to be, and was indeed treated as such by Čyževs'kyj, the question of reader-response and reception.

<sup>21</sup> As believes Zenkin, that problem is in fact already present in Bakhtin himself: "The problem of the fantastic in literature, as shown by Dostoevsky's *The Double*, lies not only in the verbal economy of a text but also, and perhaps primarily, in its receptive structure, where the "architectonic" order imposed by the author is overturned. Bakhtin's metalinguistic analysis proves valid in its essentials, but it must be taken further—beyond the authorial activity—toward the experience of the reader' (Zenkin 2021, p. 534).



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