



Review of: Svetlana Klimova: *Russian Intelligentsia in Search of an Identity (Between Dostoevsky's Oppositions and Tolstoy's Holism)*, Leiden, Brill, 2020, Hardcover, ISBN 978-90-04-44060-9, \$ 82,80

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Accepted: 6 August 2022 / Published online: 13 September 2022
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In 2021, Brill published a book written by Svetlana Klimova and titled *Russian Intelligentsia in Search of an Identity (Between Dostoevsky's Oppositions and Tolstoy's Holism)*. The publication of this monograph has developed into quite an argument on her intriguing perspective on the archetypes of Russian intelligentsia. Klimova is well known in modern Russian studies, thanks to her fundamental works and research on the heritage of Russian philosophers and theologians. She is especially recognized for her writings on Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy's ideas and works. In addition, she brought the heritage of Nikolai Strakhov to the academic community, which, in the past, was undeservedly given little attention in European and Russian academic philosophy studies. In the monograph, Klimova appoints Nikolai Strakhov as a kind of mediator between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy's views.

The author devotes her new book to one of the key problems in Russian philosophical thought of the nineteenth century, namely the problem of national self-consciousness. The nineteenth century was a period when the main ideas were focused on the future of Russia's statehood and culture. It was important to articulate the main ideas of what Russianness meant against the background of nascent European nationalism. As Klimova points out, the Russian intelligentsia became the most active participant in social and cultural processes during this period.

In the monograph under review, the problem of Russian intelligentsia's self-identification is a key issue, reconstructed in the historical-philosophical and historical-cultural sections. The text consists of two parts. The first part deals with the origins of the intelligentsia. The second part reveals a kind of intellectual and spiritual opposition between Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy, focused on the Russian intelligentsia's destiny. Klimova notes that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are acting as guides for generations of the Russian intelligentsia. In their works, both writers attempted to discern the main components of its self-consciousness.

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Actually, the author provides not just a brilliant historical and philosophical analysis of the foundations of Russian intelligentsia's self-identification, but also clarifies the archetypes of the post-Soviet intelligentsia in Russia by employing ideas formulated by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and their approaches to assessing the Russian intelligentsia's moral stance, as well as its sociocultural and political actions. Klimova clearly outlines the purpose of her research. She writes:

This monograph addresses a perennial theme of a distinctly Russian character: that of determining the role and significance of a specific segment of society, namely, the intelligentsia. The text traces the rise of the intelligentsia, from the 18th century to the present day, at the same time problematizing its central ideas. (p. 1)

In this case, it is rational to attempt to explain the complex question of "Who is a Russian intelligent?" At the beginning of the twentieth century, the authors of *Vekhi* [Signposts] (1909) searched for an answer to this question. *Vekhi* provided an introspective analysis of the subculture of the Russian intelligentsia as a holistic phenomenon, with each of the authors magnifying this approach through the prism of studying the particular aspects of the intelligentsia's spiritual life. Klimova also considers the Russian intelligentsia as a holistic phenomenon and conducts a study its key features. She gives the following definition of a Russian intelligent: "The inner form of the word intelligentsia—from the Latin *intelligentia*—signifies the highest stage of consciousness or self-consciousness; the Russian intelligentsia is a singular case of a social class isolated and designated according to this characteristic" (p. 7).

Klimova notes that the Russian intelligentsia, as an integral historical phenomenon, started in the eighteenth century. The reforms of Peter I determined the fundamental breakdown of Russian society. In this case, the author talks about the formation of the binary consciousness, which the Russian intelligentsia perceived at a deep level. She remarks: "The dualistic world of Russian culture, philosophy and literature began its development in the grip of ideological forces and mental clichés" (p. 25).

In contemporary research literature (in particular, in the works of the Russian scholar Vladimir Kantor), the term duality (*dvoynichestvo*) was also introduced, illustrating that each thesis always includes its own antithesis, which act in parallel both in the world and history. In Russian literature, this principle was brilliantly used by Dostoevsky, particularly in his novel *The Double: A Petersburg Poem*, then later by Dmitry Merezhkovsky in his trilogy *Christ and Antichrist* and by Mihail Bulgakov in his novel *Master and Margarita*. In Russian history, paradoxically, this principle is also at work, exemplified by such dualities as the Old Believers and supporters of church reform, Slavophiles and Westernizers, the February and October revolutions. Klimova also addresses this issue in her monograph, but she focuses on the world-view, trying to identify the psychological framework of the Russian intelligentsia's self-consciousness. She brilliantly shows how the dual approach affects not only the sociocultural phenomena, but also the ethical ones. In contrast, Kantor, appealing to the principle of duality in his texts, works from the perspective of "historiosophical" problems and shows how certain cultural attitudes manifest themselves in history.

In the second part of the book, Klimova moves on to the two pillars of Russian literature, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Recognizing some similarities in the works of the

two writers, such as religious orientation and the common theme of God-seeking, she, nevertheless, notes that there might be hardly found two thinkers more different in their pathos in Russian culture. Klimova writes: “Dostoevsky and Tolstoy became, during those years, the chief originators of the new movement of God-seeking (*bo-goiskatelstvo*), making religious problems central to the life of the society and to the intelligentsia’s thought” (p. 61). Indeed, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy represent two types of religiosity. Dostoevsky emphasized the religious and metaphysical idea of Christianity, while Tolstoy emphasized Christian ethics.

In the chapter on Dostoevsky, primarily through an analysis of the *Diary of a Writer*, the author shows that Dostoevsky was far away from the Orthodox church, despite the fact that he intentionally emphasized that he was “Russian, because he was Orthodox”. Dostoevsky forms the Russian idea around the idea of universal Christian love and the universal humanity (*vsechelovechnost’*) of the Russian people. Klimova notes that this idea is utopian. Dostoevsky always remained in binary opposition. We can agree with the author on one thing: Dostoevsky’s project really cannot have practical success, and even in the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there are many examples of religious and national intolerance in Russian society. However, Dostoevsky’s idea could only be understood in the context of his deeply religious and inwardly directed view. It focuses on the inner world of the person. Pointing to the multidimensionality of this inner world, the writer gave the answer how to save and preserve its integrity. Dostoevsky’s answer is simple—faith saves faith in the God-man, and, at the same time, faith in the person as God’s creation.

In the book under review, Dostoevsky’s approach is contrasted with Tolstoy’s. Klimova sees integrity in the ethical approach. Tolstoy succeeded in this. He proposed to turn to the origins of Christian teaching, to turn directly to the Sermon on the Mount. Tolstoy clearly saw the discrepancy between the teachings of Christ and the teachings of the historical church, including their respective principles of organizing social life. He insists on the need to correct this contradiction, essentially criticizing humanity for being unreasonable and departing from the teachings of Christ. He took on the role of preacher, trying to clarify the simplicity of Christian ethics to everyone. His ideas are clear and simple, and with no rational contradictions in them; they are integral. Tolstoy required from everyone else the exact same amount of faith as he himself had. However, paradoxically, here is the main contradiction of Tolstoy: through calling himself a Christian, he was too radical, and he did not display tolerance for human unreason and weakness. He seemed to insist that a person needs to submit to goodness. In addition, as Leo Shestov quite accurately noted, for him, God becomes Good.

In my opinion, Klimova mistakenly calls Tolstoy a Christian. He focused exclusively on the teachings of Christ and not on the figure of Christ, as the God-Man. Tolstoy is too rational. He removed from his teaching the most important belief in the miracle of the Resurrection, without which Christian ethics, in itself, is powerless. The Russian philosopher, Vladimir Solovyov, was one of the first thinkers who pointed this out. In his works, *Three conversations*, he critically referred to Tolstoy’s ethics as abstract moralism.

In many ways, this is why the reception of Tolstoy’s ideas in the Russian intellectual space of the twentieth century was so diverse. Russian religious thinkers

criticized Tolstoy for his rationality and religious shallowness, and the Russian radical intelligentsia, on the contrary, highly appreciated Tolstoy's sociopolitical views, but criticized him for his religious approach to assessing the Russian people. Klimova masterfully revealed these alternative approaches to the interpretation of Tolstoy by using the example of the analysis of the reception of Tolstoy's ideas by Merezhkovsky, and by referring to the articles by Lenin and by Korolenko. Actually the myth of Tolstoy as the forerunner of Bolshevism appeared after Lenin's publications. At the same time, Maxim Gorky criticized Dostoevsky for the phenomenon of "*Karamazovschina*", whereas Tolstoy's views received praise. Klimova comments on this: "Dostoevsky's prophetic denunciation of the 'demons' was contrasted with Tolstoy's supposed revolutionary demonism. It would be logical to suppose that Tolstoy was also responsible for engendering the 'demons' by his calls to nonviolence and to following Christ's commandments" (p. 216). Berdyaev also pointed to Tolstoy's revolutionary spirit, but it would be a mistake to equate the writer's position with the radical program of the Bolsheviks, built on the use of force, for it fundamentally contradicts Tolstoy's key ethical principle of "non-resistance to evil by force".

Such discussions only confirm that it was no coincidence that Klimova chose Dostoevsky and Tolstoy as the main characters of her study of the foundations of the self-consciousness of the Russian intelligentsia. They did not only identify the key archetypes of the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century, but throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries their views and their writings have become the subject of discussion and a source for the formation of new ideas of the Russian intelligentsia. In this sense, Svetlana Klimova's book is extremely important. It not only brings to attention the grandeur of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky's thought, but also encourages discussion on issues important to the Russian intelligentsia.

Funding This review was supported by the Russian Science Foundation under grant No. 19-18-00100.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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