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Thérèse philosophe and Dostoevsky's Critique of Rational Egotism*

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This article examines a curious yet significant episode in the culminating phase of F. M. Dostoevsky's creativity. In his extended sketch for a project known as "The Life of a Great Sinner" ("Zhitie velikogo greshnika") he refers a number of times to a certain Thérèse philosophe, a character drawn from a 18th-century French conte philosophique entitled "Thérèse philosophe, ou Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Père Dirrag et de Mademoiselle Éradice". Although "Thérèse philosophe" was first published anonymously in 1749, the article demonstrates that the author was Jean Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens (1703–1771), a prolific author who took an active part in the philosophical debates of his day, corresponded with Voltaire, and in 1742 entered the service of Frederick II, where he remained for the next twenty-six years as a director of the Prussian Academy.

The first part of the article is devoted to a detailed exposition and analysis of "Thérèse philosophe", which although widely known at the time in the century following its original publication, was subsequently overlooked and difficult to access. Through the exposition it becomes evident that "Thérèse philosophe" propounds ideas of rational egotism (particularly in relations between men and women) that were current during the French Enlightenment.

The second part of article examines Dostoevsky's determined response to that moralit? in his late novels. The article suggests that an apparently frivolous work of French literature that would have been read by Dostoevsky in his youth retained enduring meaning for the writer as a paradigm for views on life that he profoundly contested.

Keywords: Fedor Dostoevsky; "Life of a Great Sinner"; "The Brothers Karamazov"; "The Idiot"; Marquis d'Argens; "Thérèse philosophe"; French Enlightenment; rational egotism; libertinism; Marquis de Sade; Nikolay Chernyshevsky; "What Is to Be Done?"; Roman Catholicism; Lucien Goldman; socialism; French Revolution

In one of his notebook entries for 1864 Dostoevsky writes:

Catholicism (the force of hell). Celibacy, the relation to a woman in confession. Erotic diseases. There is a certain subtlety here which could only be grasped by the most underground, bedroom debauchery [самым подпольным постельным развратом] (Marquis de Sade). It's remarkable that they are all debauched; trashy books are attributed to debauched clerics, sitting in the Bastille, then it's into the revolution for tobacco and a bottle of wine. Influence through women (Dostoevsky, 1971: 244, 246)¹.

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The virulence with which Dostoevsky attacked the Catholic church and the institution of the Papacy is clearly evident in his later work, fiction as well as nonfiction (e. g., *The Diary of a Writer*); yet the passage just quoted — part of a longer, anti-Catholic tirade contrasting the Russian and Roman clergy — is particularly explicit in its statement of the connection between Catholicism, corruption, and revolution.

Anti-Catholicism forms one of the oldest traditions in Russian polemical thought, and it assumed renewed importance in the Slavophile controversy of the nineteenth century; but Dostoevsky's peculiar interpretation of the polemic and its importance within his work cannot be explained solely in terms of Slavophile opposition to Western institutions². Although the motivations for his reasoning are many and complex, the above quotation suggests a source heretofore inadequately examined: the reference to *knizhonki* (those “trashy little books”) and the enigmatic mention of the Marquis de Sade. While it seems unlikely that we shall ever have definitive knowledge about Dostoevsky's acquaintance with the writings of Sade³, it can be assumed beyond reasonable doubt that he read the “trashy little books”; for one of them, *Thérèse philosophe, ou Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Père Dirrag et de Mademoiselle Éradice*, is mentioned several times by Dostoevsky and, it will be argued, provides a paradigm for principles associated with the French Enlightenment and tolerated — according to Dostoevsky — by the Roman Church.

The first mention of Thérèse occurs in Chapter XVI of *The Gambler* (1866), where we are told that Mlle Blanche, the narrator's mistress, has introduced him to a certain Hortense, “who was really a remarkable woman in her own way; and in our circle was called *Thérèse philosophe*... However, there is no need to enlarge upon that; all that might make a separate story, in a different tone, which I do not want to introduce into this story” (Dostoevsky, 1973a: 306). Hortense is a shadow character (or “homunculus”, to borrow a term from Nabokov), and the account of her affairs with the gambler (“in a different tone”) remained unwritten; but Dostoevsky will again refer to *Thérèse philosophe* in one of the most significant documents of his literary career: his notes toward *The Life of a Great Sinner* (“Zhitie velikogo greshnika”, 1869).

The first reference appears among a list of names; the following three are more explicit:

Instruction in f<...>ing from another boy (*Thérèse Philosophe* — beats him up for that, but keeps the book).

Friendship with a boy who is bold enough to annoy Tikhon with his pranks. (He is possessed by a demon.)

Tikhon learns about *Thérèse Philosophe*.

He gives him his blessings, both for his fall and for his redemption.

<...>

Tikhon's story about his first love, about children. To live the life of a monk is lower, for one ought to have children, yet also higher, if one has a calling for it.

Thérèse Philosophe embarrasses Tikhon. “Why, I had thought that my will was already well tempered” (Dostoevsky, 1968: 63, 156–157. Corresponding pages in Russian version: Dostoevsky, 1974: 134, 138).

Ever since its first, fragmentary publication in 1921, Dostoevsky's plan for the epic novel *The Life of a Great Sinner* has been recognized as a source of themes and character prototypes for his last three novels (*The Devils*, *A Raw Youth*, *The Brothers Karamazov*), as well as a preliminary sketch of a vast, unrealized scheme which preoccupied him in the last years of his life, and was to be, as he put it, “the final word in my literary career” (from a letter to

N. N. Strakhov dated December 2, 1870; see: Dostoevsky, 1930: 298–299). Focusing on the relation between a saintly monk (Tikhon) and a young boy who, as the novel's protagonist, would go into the world, become a “great sinner”, and be redeemed, the fragment attests to Dostoevsky's concern not only with the basis of moral values, but also with the transmission, the inculcation of these values. That *Thérèse philosophe*, a didactic work in its own right, should be mentioned so frequently at so crucial a point, underscores Dostoevsky's persistent interest in this “trashy book”.

However, the elliptical nature of Dostoevsky's references to *Thérèse* has posed difficulties for annotators. The first edition of *The Life* gave no indication that “Thérèse philosophe” was the title of a book; once this issue had been settled, the identity of the author remained in question, since the novel had appeared anonymously in 1749⁴. Scholarly evidence now seems overwhelmingly in favor of Jean Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens (1703–1771), a prolific author who took an active part in the philosophical debates of his day, corresponded with Voltaire, and in 1742 entered the service of Frederick II, where he remained for the next twenty-six years as a director of the Prussian Academy and amanuensis to the King. His copious writings played a role in the propagation of Enlightenment ideas, particularly in Central Europe; and in Russia seven of his works, fiction as well as non-fiction, were published in translation between 1763 and 1787 at the presses of such institutions as Moscow University and the Academy of Sciences (Svodnyi katalog ... , 1962: 53).

The case for d'Argens as author of *Thérèse philosophe* has been made on the basis of biographical information and stylistic similarities with his acknowledged works⁵, but one can find a more direct reference from a source with considerable claim to expertise in these matters. In *Juliette* the Marquis de Sade writes:

Thérèse philosophe was there, a charming performance from the pen of the Marquis d'Argens, alone to have discerned the possibilities of the genre [the libertine novel. — W. B.], though only partially realizing them; alone to have achieved happy results from the combining of lust and impiety. These speedily placed before the public, and in the shape the author had initially conceived them finally gave us an idea of what an immoral book could be (Sade, 1968: 462)⁶.

There is no evidence to suggest that Dostoevsky considered d'Argens the creator of *Thérèse*; but d'Argens's reputation as a *philosophe* provides a link with Enlightenment thought and its vulgarization in the libertine novel — a vulgarization Dostoevsky seems to have considered inevitable. Geoffrey Brereton has remarked that it is often difficult to decide whether the erotic *conte philosophique* was conceived as light entertainment for libertine society or whether the philosophy, the *moralité*, was seriously intended (Brereton, 1961: 126–127)⁷. In *Thérèse philosophe*, however, the simplified “philosophy” not only suits its libertine context quite comfortably but also provides a recognizable paraphrase of the thought contained in d'Argens's more serious work.

Indeed, it is characteristic of the Enlightenment that “libertinage” should refer both to a manner of sexual conduct and to a concept of free, rationalist thought — an alliance illustrated in *Thérèse philosophe*, where the practice of sexual license is rationalized by the appeal to an enlightened egotism. In his survey of the eighteenth-century libertine novel, Barry Ivker writes: “*Thérèse philosophe* is the first libertine novel in which the erotic and philosophic elements are totally integrated. The heroine's philosophic inquiries exactly parallel her discoveries in the sexual realm. They represent an effort to present a completely rational approach to certain areas of human experience” (Ivker, 1970: 231). Dostoevsky will adapt the rational approach to human experience to his own purposes, exploiting its incon-

sistencies and pursuing them to an extreme which negates the concept of rational ethics derived from self-interest.

He was not, however, the first to pursue this course. In the above passage from *Juliette*, the Marquis de Sade praised d'Argens for having discerned the possibilities of the libertine novel in *Thérèse philosophe*, but added that the possibilities were “only partially realized”. Behind this polite qualification lies a radical difference in the interpretation of libertinage and the concept of rational egotism as a basis for social and ethical principles, for Sade's individualism subverts the belief that a capacity for reason naturally leads to a system of ethical behavior. Despite the diametrical opposition of Dostoevsky's and Sade's views on the existence of God, a study of the relation between Dostoevsky's work and the literature of libertinage will not only reveal a confrontation with Enlightenment rationalist ethics (with its element of moral relativism) but will also demonstrate points of affinity with the writer who, in his extremism, finally realized the “possibilities” of libertine thought.

In order to examine both the confrontation and the affinity, it is first necessary to understand the principles set forth in d'Argens's “charming performance”. He shows no hesitation in stating them, for at the very outset Thérèse addresses the reader with the confidence of one who has assimilated the *moralité* of enlightened egotism and finds it unassailable:

Imbéciles mortels! vous croyez être maitres d'éteindre les passions que la nature a mises dans vous! Elles sont l'ouvrage de Dieu. Vous voulez les détruire, ces passions, et les restreindre à certaines bornes. Hommes insensés! vous prétendez donc être les seconds créateurs plus puissants que le premier? Ne verrez-vous jamais que tout est ce qu'il doit être, et que tout est Bien; que tout est de Dieu (Thérèse philosophe ... : 3)⁸.

From this premise the rest of the novel derives: man is the subject of passions which are, by definition, acceptable and must not be repressed. Having admitted their subservience to “la nature”, d'Argens's libertines embrace a concept of sexual license based on rational principles — the “philosophy” illustrated in Thérèse's account of her life.

It is significant that both d'Argens and Dostoevsky (in *The Life of a Great Sinner* and to a certain extent in *The Brothers Karamazov*) base the struggle between passion and restraint in the formative years of childhood, a period during which social and cultural influences determine patterns of behavior. In d'Argens's view the child is innocent in an amoral sense, devoid of a notion of sexual shame imposed by society, and the description of Thérèse's childhood reveals the harmful effects of an upbringing based on taboo and guilt. Unable to understand her mother's admonitory, indignant comments on certain subjects, the young Thérèse continues her sexual explorations with playmates until the age of eleven, when she is sent to a convent. There she is lectured on the dangers of sex — described as an insidious serpent, but the lecture serves only to excite her imagination (“l'idée de l'aimable serpent”). In her comment on the attempt to instill a sense of shame, Thérèse rejects the possibility of determining good and evil on the basis of free choice: “Cette volonté et cette prétendue liberté n'ont de degrés de force, n'agissent que conséquemment aux degrés de force des passions et des appétits qui nous sollicitent” (Thérèse philosophe ... : 24).

Proceeding in a strictly deterministic fashion, Thérèse denies the existence of actions beyond or counter to the natural forces of the passions: “Pour admettre que l'homme fût fibre, il faudrait supposer qu'il se déterminât par lui-même; mais s'il est déterminé par les degrés de passions dont la nature et les sensations l'affectent, il n'est pas libre; un degré de désir plus ou moins vif le décide aussi invinciblement qu'un poids de quatre livres en entraîne un de trois” (Thérèse philosophe ... : 26). In this mechanistic explanation of human behav-

ior, acts of reason and will are determined by passions whose force derives from an arrangement of organs, fibers, and liqueurs — a view developed by La Mettrie in his work *L'Homme machine* (1748), and emphasized by frequent references to the body as machine in *Thérèse philosophe*.

In a pattern which continues throughout the novel, adventure follows discourse — surely with didactic intent. Languishing in the convent, Thérèse is one day privileged to observe (discreetly) the religious instruction bestowed by Père Dirrag on his young pupil Eradice. (Voyeurism is not only an important means for the young Thérèse' education, but is also frequently used as a narrative device — point of view in the most literal sense, with reader and character united in observing the sexual play in a detached, uninvolved [“rational”] manner.) Dirrag's instruction is of a highly erotic sort, a satirical combination of religious and sexual ecstasy — word and deed — in which the expression of spiritual devotion is conveyed in the language of physical love. (“Elle aime Dieu comme on aime son amant”.) Thérèse is soon given similar instruction under the tutelage of the abbé T., who provides her with a rational explanation for the basis of sexual desire in its many forms.

The portrayal of the cleric as debauchee is a common feature in the libertine novel, where it fulfills the function of a satirical attack on the religious establishment (Ivker, 1970: 233)⁹. But quite apart from the satirical element, the sexually active priest becomes the ideal spokesman for libertine principles. Not only does he expose — and further — the corruption and cynicism of the Church, he also serves as an instrument of secular, enlightenment thought, by virtue of his learning and his role as preceptor. It should be noted that Dostoevsky adapts the motif of the erotically inclined French priest to his own purposes in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the chapter “Ivan Fyodorovich's Nightmare” the devil recounts two anecdotes of the Jesuit-in-confessional variety, the latter of which concerns an old priest who becomes sexually aroused as a young woman confesses her lapse from virtue. “‘Ah, mon père,’ answers the sinner with tears of penitence, ‘ça lui fait tant de plaisir et ? moi si peu de peine!’ ” (Dostoevsky, 1976b: 81). With this phrase Dostoevsky parodies the notion of sexual permissiveness based on the pleasure principle — a principle advanced by the libertine priest in *Thérèse philosophe*.

The instruction which d'Argens's libertine clerical *raisonneur* offers Thérèse contains an extended discourse on the rational arrangement of human (above all, sexual) conduct. He condemns jealousy and defends masturbation, prostitution, and sexual freedom for women as well as for men. But there is one important qualification: the libertine must indulge only in those pleasures which do not disturb the tranquility and decorum of society. Those who violate this tranquility, determined according to standards established in each society, are to be considered criminals and punished accordingly.

Yet the existence of evil in any absolute sense is denied by the novel's *raisonneurs*, who consider traditional judgments of good and evil relative — a viewpoint d'Argens shares with other eighteenth-century *philosophes* (such as Diderot and Sade), whose conclusions were supposedly demonstrated by anthropological evidence gathered during voyages of exploration. As for moral responsibility, it can hardly be said to exist for the abbé, who reasons: “Si nous ne sommes point libres, comment pouvons-nous pécher?” (*Thérèse philosophe* ... : 88)¹⁰. God is seen as a benevolent, remote figure who could not, in the very order of things, allow absolute evil to enter his creation. The devil? — An absurd belief. (One may compare Lebedev's statement in *The Idiot*: “Disbelief in the devil is a French idea” (Dostoevsky, 1973b: 311).) In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan's devil addresses this disbelief with mock indignation¹¹. God would not permit such an affront to his benevolence and power: “Dieu

n'avait qu'à anéantir le diable, nous serions tous sauvés; il y a bien de l'injustice ou de l'impuissance de sa part" (Thérèse philosophe ... : 92).

The abbé places the responsibility for evil — were one to assume its existence — on God, not man; but since evil does not exist, man is capable of rational accommodations with the conditions of his being. The demands of Catholic morality are viewed as a form of irrational fanaticism supported by dogma, and the abbé concludes with yet another appeal to reason and sentiment — both bestowed by God — as the proper basis for human conduct. In fact the guiding “moral” principle of the book is discretion based on a code shared by an elite (rational libertines), whose sexual practices are harmless so long as they are contained within the society of those initiated into the pleasures of libertinism and the principles of rationalist morality. The abbé professes no desire to proselytize among simpler souls destined for monogamy and family.

Dostoevsky's response to elitist moral systems will be discussed later, but it should be noted that he portrays an attempt to “rationalize” libertine sexual conduct in the relation between Totsky and Nastasya Filippovna (in *The Idiot*). Having decided to enter into a respectable society marriage, Totsky explains (rationalizes) his behavior to Nastasya in the following terms: “Totsky straight out told her of the unbearable horror of his position; he blamed himself for everything and frankly said that he could not repent of his original action toward her because he was an incorrigible sinner and had no power over his actions, but that now he wished to get married” (Dostoevsky, 1973b: 40). If one interprets libertinism solely in sexual terms, Totsky is Dostoevsky's *vrai libertin*: the inveterate sensualist not responsible for his conduct, and the rational egotist concerned with the preservation of *bien-séance* and his own interests. Indeed, much of *The Idiot*'s complex psychological maneuvering can be explained by Nastasya Filippovna's desire to discredit Totsky's libertine myth, by her refusal to accept the rational sexual code of the initiated, to be “reasonable”.

No such complications enter the well-ordered fantasy of *Thérèse philosophe* with its mechanical explanation of passion and its objectivization of the sexual partner. Having assimilated the principles of rational behavior, Thérèse will pursue her libertine education to a highly rewarding conclusion, but not without further perils which serve to introduce the novel's most lascivious episodes. Deprived of her one remaining parent (her mother, who succumbs to a financial disaster), alone in Paris with no resources, Thérèse finds her situation so desperate that she considers becoming a nun. She chooses, however, a very different occupation as a consequence of a meeting with Bois-Laurier — a woman of respectable demeanor but one “que la nécessité avait contrainte, pendant sa jeunesse, de servir au soulagement de l'incontinence du public libertin” (Thérèse philosophe ... : 103).

In the course of their conversations Thérèse explains that her companion's sexual activity as a prostitute is the result of involuntary urges; but when Bois-Laurier attempts to procure Thérèse for the same activity, the latter is scandalized — a reaction emblematic of the fact, conveniently ignored by d'Argens, that libertinism is a rationalization of sexual exploitation based on economic dependency. Although d'Argens is clearly aware of economic necessity (the book abounds in various economic and mercantilist references), the examination of the role of money in sexual domination would be a task for the nineteenth-century novelist — Dostoevsky, Dickens, Balzac.

For her part, Bois-Laurier merely explains to Thérèse that she must accept certain social and economic realities, and in an inserted novella she proceeds to recount her own life story as an illustration. Orphaned at the age of six, Bois-Laurier is eventually-introduced to a life of prostitution which she pursues with indefatigable resolution (aided by an anatomical

peculiarity — “la solidité du pucelage” — which gives her a certain impunity). As she relates her prolific sexual accomplishments, Bois-Laurier reveals the praxis which complements Thérèse’s “theoretical” statements on moral relativity. Convinced at last that she must discard her prejudices in fact as well as in theory, Thérèse agrees to accommodate a certain count of refined tastes who, conveniently, declares his love, takes her under his protection, and encourages her to write an edifying account of her experience. They settle into a life “sans trouble, sans enfants, sans inquietude” (Thérèse philosophe ... : 161).

The novel’s closing pages, devoted to a dialogue between Thérèse and the count, in which d’Argens’s views on self-interest and the nature of social relations are recapitulated, contain one passage that deserves quoting at length as a profession de foi of eighteenth-century libertinage. The count remarks:

Il est démontré qu’on ne pense pas comme on vent. Pour faire son bonheur, chacun doit saisir le genre de plaisir qui lui est propre, qui convient aux passions dont il est affecté en combinant ce qui résultera de bien et de mal de la jouissance de ce plaisir, et en observant que ce bien et ce mal soient considérés non seulement en égard à soi-même mais encore en égard à l’intérêt public. Il est constant que, comme l’homme, par la multiplicité de ses besoins ne peut être heureux sans le concours d’une infinité d’autres personnes, chacun doit être attentif à ne rien faire qui blesse la félicité de son voisin. Celui qui s’écarte de ce système, fuit le bonheur qu’il cherche. D’où l’on peut conclure avec certitude que le premier principe que chacun doit suivre pour vivre heureux dans ce monde, est d’être honnête homme, et d’observer les lois humaines, qui sont comme les liens des besoins mutuels de la société (Thérèse philosophe ... : 149).

In an appropriate conclusion to this philosophy of enlightened egotism, the count proposes a definitive explanation of the basis of human behavior: “Toutes les actions de notre vie sont dirigées par ces deux principes: se procurer plus ou moins de plaisir, éviter plus ou moins de peine” (Thérèse philosophe ... : 154).

Such is the book Dostoevsky mentions four times in *The Life of a Great Sinner*. To assign ponderous significance to statements contained in d’Argens’s entertaining *jeu d’esprit* would be alien to the very spirit of the *conte philosophique*, with its reliance on wit and a measure of ironic detachment appropriate to enlightened skepticism. Yet *Thérèse philosophe*, whatever its other uses, serves admirably as a compendium of ideas and attitudes questioned in Dostoevsky’s later work — ideas which appear, *mutatis mutandis*, among his ideological opponents during the 1860s. When Lopukhov (in Nikolay Chernyshevsky’s radical novel *What Is to Be Done*) tells Vera Pavlovna that elevated sentiments and aspirations are in fact derived from self-interest, he is stating much the same principle that the count offers Thérèse: “C’est l’amour-propre <...> qui décide de toutes les actions de notre vie <...> je vous aime parce que j’ai du plaisir à vous aimer” (Thérèse philosophe ... : 153). Although Chernyshevsky’s prim moralizing is very different from d’Argens’s erotic fancy, the *razumnyi egoizm* (rational egotism) of *What Is to Be Done* is based on the same optimistic, empirical assumption that individuals, pursuing their own interest in a rational social environment, will naturally coalesce into a desirable pattern of human relationships.

The persistence with which this belief is stated in *Thérèse philosophe* provides an excellent example of the popularization of certain principles fundamental to the Enlightenment quest for a rational, objective base of moral values. In his book *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* Lucien Goldmann defines this quest in terms of the “individualist perspective”: “Once the adult and completely independent status of individual reason has been proclaimed and all trans-individual authority rejected, the problem is to establish a set of binding rules of conduct based only on the recognition of their validity by the individual con-

science” (Goldmann, 1973: 25). From the various formulations of this set of rules, one basic principle emerges: that individual reason, directed by enlightened self-interest, is sufficient for the promotion of the general good.

Goldmann asserts, however, that no system of moral values based on individualism, on the individual conscience, can be established as necessarily valid, and it is at this point that Dostoevsky and Sade (for very different reasons) attack the concept of rationalist ethics (ibid: 26–29)¹². Neither considered moral values to be inherently a product of reason, both were attuned to the destructive potential of an egomania indifferent to rational concepts of happiness, and both were fully aware of the deliberate and calculated nature of evil.

Under the rationalist concept of morality, the presence of evil must be considered the result of a corrupt social environment, subject to elimination by reform; in the meantime misconduct that disturbs the tranquility of society will be dealt with, according to d’Argens’s writings (including *Thérèse philosophe*), by institutional means. In effect the issue of moral response to criminality is dismissed — an attitude Dostoevsky vigorously protested in *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Diary of a Writer*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* (especially Book II, Chapter V). His frequent attribution of this attitude to socialist thought must not obscure the fact that, in his view, the socialists are descendants of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, with its rationalist, empirical system of social morality.

Not only is moral responsibility for crime (itself seen as a product of environment) replaced by a legal code, but in addition the means society uses to effect this control are as reprehensible as the crime itself — particularly in cases leading to capital punishment. (Cf. Myshkin’s account of the execution in Lyons: “To kill for a murder is an immeasurably greater punishment than the crime itself. Murder by sentencing is immeasurably more horrible than murder by a robber” (Dostoevsky, 1973b: 20). On this point, as on others, one is struck by the degree to which Dostoevsky is anticipated by Sade. In his political pamphlet *Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains* Sade writes: “Briefly, murder is a horror, <...> but ought it be considered a deed punished by death? <...> Is it or is it not a crime? If it is not, why make laws for its punishment? And if it is, by what barbarous logic do you, to punish it, duplicate it by another crime?” (de Sade, 1966: 337).

In sum, rationalist morality is intended only for an elite capable of formulating and applying its principles in a manner convenient to its own enlightened self-interest. For those (particularly the lower classes) unable to comprehend these “innate” principles, there are two alternatives: the penal system and religion. God is, so to speak, let in the service entrance in order to ensure the tranquility of the masses¹³. Dostoevsky’s response to moral elitism (rationalist, privileged ethics for the enlightened, religion for the rest) is developed most fully in the relationship between Ivan Karamazov and Smerdyakov, who parodies and finally subverts Ivan’s enlightened, godless righteousness; but the response is a persistent element in much of his post-exile work. Without religious belief — transcendent moral values — no system of morality is valid.

In *The Brothers Karamazov* Miusov paraphrases Ivan’s views on the relation between morality and a belief in immortality: “Ivan solemnly announced in an argument, that in all the world, there is absolutely nothing that would compel people to love others as themselves, that there is no law of nature that says man must love mankind, and that if there has been love on earth heretofore, then it is not from natural law but solely because people believed in immortality”. Without a belief in immortality, there is no immoral action, “everything is permitted, even anthropophagy”. Ivan concludes (we are told) with the assertion that “for every individual <...> who does not believe in God or immortality the moral

law of nature should immediately be changed to the complete opposite of the former, religious law and that egotism, even unto villainy, not only should be permitted, but even recognized as essential, as the most rational and even most noble outcome of his position” (Dostoevsky, 1976a: 64–65) Dostoevsky, like Sade, is an absolutist in his argumentation, and the above passage demonstrates an affinity for the type of reasoning on which Sade based his concept of criminal libertinage — perhaps a conscious affinity, for the notebooks to *The Brothers Karamazov* refer to Sade in this context, as an example of criminal egocentricity, unrestrained by transcendental, religious values. It is this connection between criminality and unbelief that Dostoevsky wished to develop in his cycle *The Life of a Great Sinner*, with its protagonist’s “dethroning” of God and pursuit of infamy.

The preceding discussion has dealt with *Thérèse philosophe* and its philosophy as a paradigm for an intellectual and ethical system consistently opposed by Dostoevsky during the last two decades of his life. At the same time I have referred to the Marquis de Sade as a writer and thinker who, anticipating Dostoevsky, pursued the “individualist perspective” to its destructive, egocentric extreme.

There are, however, references to *Thérèse philosophe* in *The Life of a Great Sinner* which suggest a more specific area of concern — one which reappears in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In *The Life of a Great Sinner* Dostoevsky states that Tikhon is embarrassed by *Thérèse philosophe*, that his will is tested, and that the book plays a part in the “boy’s” debauchery. It is clear that the boy is intended to be the cycle’s protagonist, and as such he has been seen as a rough prototype for Alyosha Karamazov, whom Dostoevsky planned to lead through a similar pattern of fall and redemption. Within such an interpretation Tikhon would serve as a predecessor of Father Zosima — as indeed he does in certain details.

But a transference of details between the plan and Dostoevsky’s last novel is complicated by a substantial shift, over a period of almost ten years, in his intentions for the main characters in the projected series of novels. Tikhon, for example, is endowed with characteristics which will be attributed to Alyosha: both are subjected to the temptations of lust (although Alyosha finds his in less bookish form — *Thérèse* replaced by Grushenka). Tikhon’s concern with the spiritual and moral education of a young boy offers a parallel to Alyosha’s relation with Kolya Krasotkin.

From this point further correspondences develop between the two boys, both of whom have read books unsuitable for their age (cf. *ibid*: 463). Dostoevsky, however, does not refer to *Thérèse philosophe* in *The Brothers Karamazov*, nor does he lead Kolya through a phase of debauchery. Indeed, Kolya affects a certain contempt for the idea of sexual relations. There is mention of an eighteenth-century Russian erotic novel (on the French model), *A Kinsman of Mahomet or Salutary Folly* (*ibid*: 493), which Kolya takes from his father’s shelf and trades for a toy cannon he will give to the dying Ilyusha; but in this act of charity Dostoevsky has expunged, as it were, the erotic element so prevalent in his description of the “boy”. Yet the similarity between the two boys remains — in their bravado, their ambition, and their sense of superiority. If Dostoevsky had retained the plan set forth in *The Life of a Great Sinner*, Kolya Krasotkin, not Alyosha, would have been the cycle’s ultimate protagonist. In the novel as we have it, we sense that Kolya is the stronger character, endowed with a potential better suited to Dostoevsky’s concept of the “great sinner”.

Whatever the logic behind the evolution from Tikhon and the boy to Zosima, Alyosha, and Kolya, the ultimate goal in Dostoevsky’s design was the return of his protagonist to a form of spirituality based on the principles of Russian Orthodoxy¹⁴. While Dostoevsky attempts to define and interpret these principles in a positive manner throughout his no-

vels, he also characterizes them by what they are not, by contrast with the idea of a Catholic, socialist, godless Europe. In a passage quoted earlier Dostoevsky referred to Catholicism (the force of hell), debauchery (Marquis de Sade), and corrupt abbés, writing their obscene books while waiting to plunge into revolution.

But in the paragraph which precedes this passage Dostoevsky states his belief in the relation between Catholicism and the secular revolution still more clearly: “*To prove* that the Papacy has much more deeply and fully entered into *the entire West* than is commonly thought; that even the former reformations are a product of Popery, as are Rousseau and the French Revolution — a product of Western Christianity; and finally, socialism with all its formalistics and fragmentation — a product of Catholic Christianity”. After characterizing the Papacy as an institution in search of earthly power, Dostoevsky concludes: “Transition to the Russian clergy. Brotherhood” (Dostoevsky, 1971: 244).

This linking of obscenity, a corrupt clergy, Catholicism, free thought, socialism, and revolution, and its contrast to the spiritual principles that would be embodied in Tikhon and Zosima are among the more idiosyncratic manifestations of Dostoevsky’s thought. Nonetheless, a reading of *Thérèse philosophe*, a libertine classic known to Dostoevsky, with debauched clerics, a hedonistic ambiance, and moral relativism in the guise of enlightened self-interest, can offer a nexus, or “paradigm”, of associations at the base of his polemic with the Enlightenment and with Roman Catholicism. One might object that *Thérèse philosophe* is itself an anticlerical satire, but for Dostoevsky the corruption of the Church and Enlightenment satire of that corruption are part of the same pattern of decadence. However questionable or inappropriate Dostoevsky’s reasoning (and Thomas Mann would revive aspects of it in Naphta’s tortured dialectic), it is evident that this complex of ideas forms an essential component not only of the development of his concept of freedom and moral responsibility but also of his interpretation of character beyond the consolation of reason.

NOTES

¹ Unless noted otherwise, all translations from Russian are by the author.

² See, for example, Joseph Frank’s discussion of the opposition between Russian Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism in the statements of Dostoevsky’s intellectual predecessors in Dostoevsky (Frank, 1976: 215–216).

³ Robert Jackson’s article (Jackson, 1976) is a helpful summary of Dostoevsky’s references to Sade, but offers no further evidence concerning his familiarity with specific works by Sade. In any event Dostoevsky’s concept of Sadism is clearly evident from his work — as are certain affinities in their thought.

⁴ Mario Praz (Praz, 1970) and E. N. Konshina, author of notes for Zapisnye tetradi F. M. Dostoevskogo (Dostoevsky, 1935), attributed the work to a certain Darles de Montigny, as did Edward Wasiolek in The Notebooks for “The Possessed” (Dostoevsky, 1968). The original attribution to Montigny, a “commissaire des guerres”, was made by one abbé Sepher, who claimed that the “author” was sentenced to eight months in the Bastille for publication of the work. (For more on the Praz attribution, see note 6.)

⁵ See: Bibliotheca Germanorum ... , 1914: 629–632; note by T. A. Lapitskaia (Dostoevsky, 1974: 519); “Bibliographie chronologique” (Johnston, 1928: 205, 208) and Barry Ivker’s article (Ivker, 1970).

⁶ M. Praz’s attribution of *Thérèse philosophe* to Montigny is particularly baffling since, in discussing Therese, he quotes a phrase from this passage in which Sade identifies the author as the Marquis d’Argens (Praz, 1970: 100–101).

⁷ Robert Darnton demonstrated, with an impressive array of data, the extent to which obscene literature was used to propagate radical political ideas as well as various philosophical positions current in eighteenth-century France (Darnton, 1977; see esp. pp. 52–55).

⁸ Publisher and date are unidentified, but according to *Bibliotheca Germanorum* this edition was released by “Au palais sous les robes” in 1882; hereafter cited in the text. This edition contains an introduction supporting d’Argens’s authorship.

⁹ In *Thérèse philosophe* the device is ostensibly motivated by reference to the actual event, the widely publicized Girard-Cadiere scandal (1728–1731), in which Girard, a Catholic priest, was accused of debauching one of his spiritual charges, a certain Cadière. Although Girard was acquitted by a Jesuit court, Cadière’s pregnancy provided further ammunition for anticlerical propagandists, among them d’Argens, who refers to the case in his precocious memoirs (1735). Despite d’Argens’s ostensible use of the scandal in one of the novel’s episodes and his anagrammatic reference to it in the subtitle (*Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du Père Dirrag et de Mlle Eradice*), he had little need to resort to a specific case for his portrait of Père Dirrag.

¹⁰ This simple statement contains the crux of an attitude Dostoevsky vigorously opposed in both the moral and legal arguments of *The Brothers Karamazov*. The issue of social determinism as rationalization for human behavior was pervasive among Dostoevsky’s radical contemporaries, such as Nikolay Chernyshevsky. In the latter’s influential novel *What Is to Be Done*, Lopukhov — one of the “new people” — asks Vera Pavlovna, the heroine: “Who has the right to condemn the results of a fact, when the fact exists? Your personality in a given setting is a fact; your actions are the inevitable result of that fact, they are done by the very nature of things. You cannot answer for them, and to condemn them is stupid” (Chernyshevsky, 1974: 89).

¹¹ A. Rammelmeyer cites Lebedev’s remark in conjunction with a passage from Voltaire’s A, B, C ou dialogues entre A, B, C (1877); however, ridiculing the idea of the Devil was not uncommon in literature of the French Enlightenment, and Dostoevsky could have based his statement on any number of sources — *Thérèse philosophe* included (Rammelmeyer, 1958: 259).

¹² Goldmann’s mention of Sade in this connection is particularly relevant: “It is not surprising that the great thinkers of the period totally failed to perceive the difficulty of basing these generally accepted values on the individual conscience. The only exception — and he stands on the fringe of the Enlightenment — is the Marquis de Sade, who developed a fully rational and systematic attitude to the world based on scorn and hatred” (Goldmann, 1973: 29).

¹³ Newell Bush summarized d’Argens’s views on the function of religion in an ethical system as follows: “Following Bayle in the separation of morality from religion, the Marquis d’Argens argued that many men had been virtuous without the incentive of a belief in immortality. For the majority, however, the idea of a future life and of Divine retribution was necessary for the maintenance of good order. Therefore, the true value of religion was primarily ethical. Yet the distinction between good and evil was to be based on common sense, or on the natural light of reason possessed by all men as a gift from the Deity” (Bush, 1953: 224–226). Goldmann’s remarks on this “double standard of truth” are, again, quite appropriate: “But though the god of Voltaire and Rousseau may have little in common with the transcendent god of Christianity, and though the philosophes often admitted the need for a double standard of truth, depending on whether they were addressing the cultivated classes or the uneducated masses, it remains clear nonetheless that their religious thought has its origin in the structure of their philosophical conception of the world” (Goldmann, 1973: 32).

¹⁴ See Dostoevsky’s notes for *The Life of a Great Sinner*, from January 1, 1870, and May 3/15, 1870 (Dostoevsky, 1974: 128, 138–139).

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«ФИЛОСОФИЯ ТЕРЕЗЫ» И КРИТИКА РАЦИОНАЛЬНОГО ЭГОИЗМА
 В ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ ДОСТОЕВСКОГО

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В статье рассматривается любопытный эпизод, характерный для периода наибольшего творческого расцвета Ф. М. Достоевского. В набросках к неосуществленному проекту, известному под названием «Житие великого грешника», писатель несколько раз упоминает «Терезу-философа» — персонажа французской философской повести (conte philosophique) XVIII в. «Философия Терезы, или Мемуары к истории отца Диррага и мадемуазель Эрадис» ("Thérèse philosophe, ou Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Père Dirrag et de Mademoiselle Éradice").

«Философия Терезы» вышла в свет анонимно в 1749 г. В статье доказывается, что ее автором был Жан-Батист де Буайе, маркиз д'Аржан (1703–1771), плодовитый автор, участник философских дискуссий своего времени, состоявший в переписке с Вольтером. В 1742 г. д'Аржан поступил на службу к Фридриху II и последующие 26 лет возглавлял Академию наук Пруссии.

Первая часть статьи посвящена детальному анализу «Философии Терезы». Хотя эта книга была широко известна в первые сто лет после ее публикации, затем она была забыта и стала библиографической редкостью. Анализ показывает, что в «Философии Терезы» высказываются идеи «разумного эгоизма» (особенно в отношении между мужчиной и женщиной), популярные в период Просвещения во Франции.

Вторая часть статьи посвящена решительному ответу такой морали, который Достоевский дает в своих поздних романах. Автор статьи предполагает, что фривольный французский роман, вероятно, известный Достоевскому с юности, сохранял для него значение как образец такого взгляда на жизнь, с которым русский писатель был глубоко не согласен.

Ключевые слова: Ф. М. Достоевский; «Житие великого грешника»; «Братья Карамазовы»; «Идиот»; маркиз д'Аржан; «Философия Терезы»; Просвещение во Франции; разумный эгоизм; либертинаж; маркиз де Сад; Н. Г. Чернышевский; «Что делать?»; католичество; Л. Голдманн; социализм; Великая Французская революция

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