S. G. BOCHAROV

INTRODUCTION TO THE RUSSIAN EDITION

Among Bakhtin's works published posthumously in the collection of his essays *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* [The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979) the text of central importance is the treatise "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity."¹ Bakhtin worked on this treatise at the beginning of the 1920s but did not finish it; it has been published from a manuscript which was preserved (unfortunately, in an incomplete form) among his papers. Bakhtin's papers also included the manuscript of another philosophical treatise which is quite similar in its problematics, basic ideas, and language to "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity." This manuscript was also preserved in an incomplete form, which we are publishing here under the title *K filosofii postupka* [Toward a Philosophy of the Act].²

The text published here represents only the initial part of a more extensive philosophical project. The text consists of two large frag-

.....

ments. The first fragment is apparently the introduction to a treatise on moral philosophy that was to consist of several parts, according to the plan outlined at the end of the introduction. The first pages of this introduction are missing in the surviving manuscript: the first eight out of fifty-two, according to the author's pagination. The introduction is followed immediately by "part I" (that is how the author entitled it in the manuscript); only the beginning of this part has been preserved (sixteen pages, according to the author's pagination).

Both the content of the text published here and the outlined plan of the whole treatise show that the distinctive philosophical aesthetics presented in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" was only a part of a larger philosophical project which went well beyond the bounds of aesthetics. This project is concerned with more general questions which lie on the boundary of aesthetics and moral philosophy; it is concerned with what Bakhtin calls the world of human action—"the world of event" [*mir sobytiia*], "the world of the performed act" [*mir postupka*]. The leading category in this projected treatise is "answerability" [*otvetstvennost'*], and the distinctive concretization of it is an image-concept that Bakhtin introduces here—a "non-alibi in Being" [*ne-alibi v bytii*]: a human being has no right to an alibi—to an evasion of that unique answerability which is constituted by his actualization of his own unique, never-repeatable "place" in Being; he has no right to an evasion of that once-occurrent "answerable act or deed" which his whole life must constitute (cf. the ancient parable of the buried talent as a parable of moral transgression).³

It is with a discourse on "answerability" that Bakhtin entered the intellectual life of his time in the immediate postrevolutionary years: his earliest known publication (1919) was an article entitled "Art and Answerability."⁴ It spoke in a impassioned tone about surmounting the ancient divorce between art and life through their mutual answerability for each other; and this answerability was to be actualized in the individual person, "who must become answerable through and through": "I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art . . ."⁵ Bakhtin probably began working on the treatise "Toward a Philosophy of the Act" soon after

that programmatic article and it is inspired by the same passion of surmounting “the pernicious non-fusion and non-interpenetration of culture and life” (p. 3 in the present volume). One can feel that passion behind the somewhat difficult technical language of the treatise that reflects, of course, the philosophical trends of the time of its writing. The critical dimension is very pronounced in the text published here: Bakhtin develops a critique of “fatal theoreticism” in the philosophy of that time (in epistemology, in ethics, and in aesthetics) and opposes to it, as a task to be accomplished, the “answerable unity” of thinking and performed action; he also introduces such categories as “action-performing thinking” [*postupaiushchee myshlenie*] and “participative (unindifferent) thinking” [*uchastnoe myshlenie*]. A human being who “thinks participatively” does not “detach [his] performed act from its product” (footnote on p. 19)—that is the main thesis of this distinctive “philosophy of the answerable act or deed” [*filosofia postupka*], as the author himself defines the content of his treatise in the text published here (p. 28). Based on this definition, we have entitled this text “Toward a Philosophy of the Act” [*K filosofii postupka*], since we do not know the author’s own title.

Bakhtin apparently worked on this treatise during his stay in Vitebsk (1920–1924). It is very likely that the Vitebsk periodical *Iskusstvo* [Art] (1 [March 1921]: 23) was referring to this treatise when it reported that “M. M. Bakhtin continues to work on a book devoted to the problems of moral philosophy.” In the text published in the present volume we are dealing with the early Bakhtin, at the beginning of his life’s career; and we find here the philosophical sources of a number of leading ideas which he continued to develop in the course of more than half a century of his activity as a thinker.

It was in the context of working on his treatise on moral philosophy that Bakhtin began to write the treatise on aesthetics that the reader knows—“Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity.” This treatise was apparently an offshoot from the treatise on moral philosophy and was written somewhat later. The text of “Author and Hero” that has been published in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* [The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation] did not include an extant fragment of the first chapter, which deals with certain preliminary propositions

concerning the human being as the condition of aesthetic seeing in actual life and in art. We are publishing this fragment as well in the present volume (under the title of the whole treatise, “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”).⁶ The text of “Author and Hero” published in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorčestva* follows immediately after this fragment. The reader will notice the way the content of Bakhtin’s “Toward a Philosophy of the Act” spills over into his treatise on aesthetics; there are formulations in both texts that are very similar, and in the two texts we find variants of an analysis of the same poem by Pushkin. It was characteristic for Bakhtin to come back to certain constant leading themes in his philosophical work and to formulate new variants of his favorite ideas. In a draft for a preface to a collection of his works from various years Bakhtin noted: “My love for variations and for a diversity of terms for a single phenomenon.”⁷ We can also observe this love for variations on certain themes and ideas in the two early texts that are published in the present volume.

The reader should bear in mind that the author himself did not prepare these manuscripts for publication; that is why the exposition in these texts assumes at times the form of thesis-statements and summaries. The manuscripts have come down to us in very poor condition; some words in them could not be deciphered, while others have been deciphered conjecturally (this is indicated by a question mark in brackets after the doubtful word). The difficult labor of deciphering the manuscripts and preparing them for publication was carried out by L. V. Deriugina, S. M. Aleksandrov, and G. S. Bernshtein.

• • • • •

TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF THE ACT

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK