Me and My Double: Selfhood, Consciousness, and Empathy in *The Double*

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Me and my shadow,
Strolling down the avenue,
Me and my shadow,
Not a soul to tell our troubles to . . .

And when it's twelve o'clock,
We climb the stair,
We never knock,
For nobody's there . . .

"Me and My Shadow," music and lyrics
by Dave Dreyer, Billy Rose, and Al Jolson

Mysteries

How odd that consciousness should be located somewhere! Why should it require a particular place? And why must it be housed in a material body?

Consciousness seems to be private. I feel only my own, but must infer others'. Can that difference be overcome? Is there some way I can experience the experience of others? Does genuine *compassion* (co-suffering, сострадание in Russian) or empathy exist? When we empathize with others, do we sense, rather than just guess at, what they feel?

What happens when we identify with fictional characters? When men weep over the death of heroines, Catholics over the suffering of Protestants, or the rich over the degradation of the poor, are they really feeling the pain of people unlike themselves? And if authors can create believable characters, unlike themselves or other characters, does that mean authors can somehow escape the prison of their own point of view?

We usually think of empathy as an unqualifiedly good thing. From the perspective of the great realist novels, at any rate, it seems to be necessary, if not sufficient, for morality. But can it not be used for immoral purposes? Does every con-man not use it? Intrigues, plots, and deceptions apparently rely on such negative empathy.¹

For that matter, do torture and sadistic cruelty not rely on a form of empathy? After all, people seem to love inflicting pain on each other but no one finds any point in abusing a stone. In *Notes from the House of the Dead* [*Записки из мертвого дома*, 1861], guards enjoy inflicting punishments only on the living.

We speak of torture as “dehumanizing,” but, upon reflection, the very opposite seems true. Deliberately to cause pain to another necessarily acknowledges the victim’s humanity and personhood. It is a way of *relating*, to use the current jargon.

Just as erotic love demands another person, so does torture. As Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov likes to point out, the two are closely connected for just this reason. As we may inflict pain, we may inflict pleasure, if we reach deeply enough into the most private realm. The torturer and the lover use the body to expose another person’s soul, stripping away all defenses and disguises to reveal the naked self.

All these “accursed questions” concerning the mystery of consciousness define the spirit of Russian literature. Dostoevsky wondered about them from his first works to his last. To be sure, his second published work, the novella *The Double* [*Двойник*, 1846; revised 1866], is not as overtly philosophical as his final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* [*Братья Карамазовы*, 1880]— the main protagonist of *The Double*, Iakov Petrovich Goliadkin, can hardly think as abstractly as Ivan Karamazov—but this early work nevertheless sharpens our understanding of the uniqueness of selfhood, the imprisonment of consciousness in space and time, and the use or abuse of empathy.

Self is Here

"The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me," wrote Pascal.² The *I* that is my universe, and that looks out upon the immensity of the physical world, is somehow located at an infinitesimal point. Mentally I comprehend all of space, and physically it comprehends me. How can infinity be so compact?

In *War and Peace* [*Война и мир*, 1869], Pierre finds this mystery comic. Led away into captivity by the French, he finds himself seated by a campfire where he bursts into good-natured laughter. "They took me and shut me up . . . Who is 'me'? . . . Me—is my immortal soul! Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!" He looks around at the fields, forest, "the bright shimmering horizon luring one on to infinity," and "the remote, receding, glimmering stars." He thinks: "And all that is within me, and is *me*! . . . And they caught all that and put it in a shed and barricaded it with planks!"³

It seems absurd that thought can be so confined. How can the infinite be locked in a shed? Pierre here expresses one of the ultimate mysteries of the universe. And for both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the important thing is to recognize that it is a mystery.

For the materialists of the intelligentsia, it was not. For them, as for today's "new atheists," selfhood and consciousness do not constitute anything radically different from all those other things explained by physical science. Physiologist and philosopher Jacob Moleschott is supposed to have said that the brain secretes thought the way the liver secretes bile. For Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, as for Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Ivan Sechenov, *there is no mystery*.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Rakitin condescendingly explains the materialist view of consciousness to the imprisoned Dmitri. Only minor changes would be needed to make this explanation similar to the ones we so often read. Dmitri paraphrases what he has heard:

Imagine: inside, in the nerves, in the head—that is, these nerves are there in the brain . . . (damn them!) there are these sort of tails, the little tails of these nerves, and as soon as they begin quivering . . . that is, you see, I look at something with my eyes and then they begin quivering, those little tails . . . and when they quiver an image appears . . . it doesn't appear at once, but an instant, a second, passes . . . and then something like a moment

appears; that is, not a moment—devil take the moment!—but an image; that is an object, or an action, damn it. That's why I see and then think, because of those tails, not at all because I've got a soul.⁴

"An image appears"—*to whom*? The explanation stops short just at the most important point, which is not how images can be created, but how they can appear *as* images *to me*, to a subjectivity.

Thought Experiments

One way to show that selfhood and subjectivity are real is to imagine accepting their absence. Philosophers have often constructed thought experiments to demonstrate or explore the consequences of ideas of personhood. These experiments often center on the unique subjectivity we presumably all experience. In a universe that in and of itself lacks point of view, each of us has one. There is no "to me" about Newton's laws, but there must be a "to me" to me.

One thing we all share is that we each have something we do not share. My consciousness is precisely mine. Typically, philosophical thought experiments about selfhood work by supposing the opposite and generating absurdity. Reduction to the absurd was one of Dostoevsky's favorite techniques. It contributes to the odd quality of his humor.

Consider: if I am nothing but how I appear to the outside, why could I not be copied? If I could be, would there be two of me? (This is sometimes called "the amoeba problem.") Would these two of me directly sense each other? If so, would they really be one of me in two bodies? As Siamese twins are two selves sharing part of a body, could there be Siamese selves sharing part of me? Or would me and copy-me each be a separate me, albeit absolutely identical to its counterpart, and each sensing only its own subjectivity?

Or imagine a new machine that could transport passengers instantly across thousands of miles. It seems to work as advertised, but someone discovers how the machine actually works: when a passenger steps into it, an exact duplicate is assembled at the destination point after the passenger is destroyed at the starting point. Would you travel that way? To others, the person who emerges would be just like you, but would it be *you*? Would there be any way of finding out, even in principle?

Is your double you? This is a core philosophical problem pertaining to stories about doubles in general and to Dostoevsky's in particular, and not just

the one called *The Double* but also the later works in which doubles play a role. Our deep fascination with identical twins, still more with Siamese twins, comes in part from our sense that subjectivity must be unique. Goliadkin considers twinning as a sort of analogue to what he experiences when his precise double appears, but doubling goes a step further. *Ex hypothesi*, a person and his double are absolutely identical from the external standpoint. Identical twins do not have the same name, but the two Goliadkins do, and that is one reason our hero is especially horrified to learn that the other Goliadkin is also Iakov Petrovich! The story would not be nearly as funny if, for instance, the double were Foma Fomich, or Erast Erastovich, or even Akakii Akakievich.

“Both Together Is Impossible”

Dostoevsky creates humor from metaphysical quandary. Whenever the novella suggests that subjectivity is bifurcated or duplicated, we laugh at the absurdity. Our laughter testifies to our intuitive awareness that subjectivity must be unique.

If there were someone *exactly* like me, would it *be* me? For a materialist, that would have to be the case, since identical causes must produce identical results. Can there be a difference without any difference to produce it?

If someone *exactly* like me were to replace me, and no one could notice any change, would I still be there?

The identity of the Goliadkins' names is, if anything, weirder than mere identity of appearance. It cannot be the result of DNA. It suggests an identity of *persons* even where we see two *men*, and so creates a metaphysical comedy. If the two Goliadkins are objectively absolutely the same, perhaps they are also subjectively the same, but without knowing it? What would that be like?

Dostoevsky constantly plays on the identity of names suggesting an *identity of identity*. He milks the absurdity for all it is worth when Iakov Petrovich addresses a letter to Iakov Petrovich. Actually, in keeping with the theme of doubling, Iakov Petrovich addresses *two* such letters:

Dear Sir, Iakov Petrovich!

... Your obstinate desire to persist in your course of action, sir, and forcibly to enter the circle of my existence [насильственно войти в круг моего бытия], and all my relations in practical life, transgresses every limit imposed by the merest politeness . . . I imagine there is no need, sir, for me to refer

to . . . your taking away my good name. . . . I will not allude here to your strange, one may even say, incomprehensible behavior to me in the coffee house . . .

Your most humble servant,

Ia. Goliadkin⁵

Dear Sir, Iakov Petrovich!

Either you or I, but both together is impossible! [Либо вы, либо я, а вместе нам невозможно!] . . . However, I remain ready to oblige or to meet you with pistols.

Ia. Goliadkin⁶

The endlessly varying metaphysical joke is that the two who somehow *think* they are different people are indeed the same person. But how can one person think he is not himself? He might somehow forget or be brainwashed about his name and even his past, but how could he be wrong about his subjectivity? To cite a famous example from John Locke, if a prince's consciousness should change places with a cobbler's, the prince would still feel his own *me* even if he must repair shoes. Others could be mistaken because they must judge from the outside, but I *am* me, am I not?⁷

In the classic chapter on "Identity and Difference" of personhood in the *Essay on Human Understanding*, Locke supposes that two consciousnesses could alternate in the same body—or even in the same spiritual substance or soul!—but with no memory of having performed the other's actions. In that case, Locke argues, they would genuinely be two distinct persons. By much the same reasoning, if my soul could once have been Nestor or Socrates but did not remember having been so, I would not be Nestor or Socrates. Neither would I be responsible for Nestor's or Socrates' actions. But if I were conscious that I had been Socrates, even in a different soul as well as a different body, I would be the same person and responsible for Socrates' actions. Perhaps I could be charged with suicide. My consciousness—not my body nor my soul—makes me *me*, or so Locke contends.

"I know that in the ordinary way of speaking, the same person, and the same man, stand for one and the same thing," and in daily life, that way of speaking will do. But if we are really to understand "what makes the same spirit, man, or person," we must carefully distinguish these terms.⁸ Personhood

is neither soul, nor physical man, but precisely consciousness. And consciousness can be in only one place at a time. If we imagine a person whose finger is cut off, and further suppose that consciousness went with the finger—so that, in a sense, it was not the finger but the rest of the body that was cut off—we would see that personhood goes with consciousness. Wherever consciousness may be, Locke concludes, it must still be either here or there at any given moment.

Or as Goliadkin says: “Either you or I, but both together is impossible!” Of course, he has not read Locke or any other philosopher and he means something like “This town isn’t big enough for the two of us!” But the reader also detects the literal sense of the words: either you are me or I am me, but not both. More than one me is “impossible”—not just in the sense of “unacceptable” but also in the sense of “logically incoherent.” It is not taboo but senseless to say, except figuratively, that another person can “enter the circle of my existence.” My existence as me cannot be in two persons, and two persons cannot be one me.

And yet: the very fact that Goliadkin has to protest so much, and tries to prove his point by threatening a duel, humorously suggests that he himself believes the opposite. He at least suspects that the supposedly impossible is not only possible but actually the case. He insists, without expecting to be believed: “He’s another person, your Excellency, but I’m another person too; he’s apart and I am also myself by myself [сам по себе]; I am really myself by myself” [or “separate”—I translate rather literally], he explains, as if he does need convincing.⁹

Goliadkin’s insistence that I am I, while he, Your Excellency, is he, and not at all the same as I, suggests the reverse: that I somehow am not at all “apart” [“особо”] or “separate”—whatever such an assertion might mean. Goliadkin constantly tells himself that he does not “intrigue,” or “polish the floor with his boots,” or “wear a mask,” or practice deceit, like that other Goliadkin. But he says so deceitfully and wears a mask while saying it. On numerous occasions—say, when bribing Ostafiev for information—he speaks openly of laying his own plots and intrigues. And so he winds up saying of his double: “He is such a toady! Such a lickspittle! Such a Goliadkin!”¹⁰ He is such a *me*! We laugh whenever Goliadkin verges on asserting that he *is* me.

This is not a case of resemblance or even congruence but of identity. It only resembles resemblance. The story’s deep humor derives, in short, from

Goliadkin's recognition, and simultaneous refusal to recognize, that the double is not just like him but *is* him, and that *he is his own impersonator*. If anything, the double is more truly him (if comparatives have any meaning here) than he is.

One Step Further

And what if the matter is still more horrible? When Goliadkin encounters the double, "his hair stood on end, and he almost fell down with horror. And indeed there was good reason," the narrator explains. "He perfectly recognized his nocturnal visitor. The nocturnal visitor was no other than himself [не кто иной, как он сам]—Mr. Goliadkin himself, another Mr. Goliadkin, but perfectly the very same as he himself [совершенно такой же, как он сам]," a double in every respect.¹¹ An ellipsis consisting of a line and a half of dots concluding the chapter suggests both horror and wonder.

The real horror, which the hero constantly tries to ward off, is that while subjectivity is indeed unique and only one of a *me* can exist—the real me is not mine but his, and I am the one who does not have a *me*! I am the pretender! This possibility is hard even to state precisely because we all believe that a me is *directly* present to itself. I might, for instance, discover that a man people took to be a certain person is his twin, and, in fact, numerous murder mysteries have turned on this possibility of misidentification *from the outside*. But these "mysteries" are not at all mysterious in any fundamental way, as they would be if there were a misidentification of a subjectivity *from the inside*. The absurdity of such an idea suggests that we simply *know*, in the sense that we cannot sensibly doubt, that we have a subjectivity.

If that is the case, we cannot truly believe that a purely objective description of the world could ever be complete.¹² The materialists must be wrong precisely because for them the objective description is complete.

To believe that, you might as well—Descartes notwithstanding—doubt your own existence. Strangely enough, Goliadkin does: he "even began to doubt his own existence."¹³ For that matter, so does the devil in *The Brothers Karamazov*, but there the philosophical comedy can be more explicit, since the devil himself deliberately plays the role of a metaphysical nihilist. Despite his status as a supernatural being, he is not sure whether he believes in the supernatural. He even knows he is Ivan's double, perhaps just a figment of Ivan's fevered imagination, and so might very well not exist at all. Dostoevsky never tired of varying

this joke. He constantly found ways to refute any denial of subjectivity through laughter indicating recognition of an absurdity. Goliadkin is totally unaware of metaphysical quandaries, which he senses not as humorous but as terrifying and, above all, humiliating. But readers, at the same moments that they identify with Goliadkin's horror, also laugh at its incoherence. What he most fears is not just strange but "one may even say, incomprehensible."

Goliadkin uses expressions that can mean either "humiliation" or "nonbeing." He intends one, we hear both. Consider: "He recognized in an instant, that he had perished, was in a sense annihilated."¹⁴ Goliadkin means, of course, that he has disgraced himself, but the reader can also hear the absurd literal meaning, that he knows he does not exist. By the same token, when Goliadkin challenges his double to a duel, he understands it as one man vindicating his honor by putting his life on the line, so that one of them will cease to be and the other will survive. But the reader also hears him as if it were selves, rather than lives, being shot at, and entertains the thought that a self, having been killed by itself, can know that it has made itself cease to be. So Goliadkin also says: "I'm my own murderer!"¹⁵

Siamese Noses

Dostoevsky adapts the comic technique Gogol uses in "The Nose" ["Hoc," 1836], which depicts a nose acting for a time as an autonomous adult and plays endlessly on idioms with the word "nose" ("lead him by the nose," "as plain as your nose"; the devil in *The Brothers Karamazov* also offers such a nasal pun). We are constantly treated to assertions that, as we say today, do not pass the smell test. In *The Double* the puns concern not nose but self. In both Gogol and Dostoevsky, the character uses an expression in its figurative sense, but the reader hears it both ways. The literal meaning works by virtue of sheer nonsense.

The narrator of "The Nose" comes up with ostensibly rational attempts to prove that all the odd incidents depicted, though indeed strange, are perfectly explicable. They were all a "freak of nature," and the story ends by affirming that such things do happen—not often but they do happen. The joke is that the narrator treats an event as rare when it is patently self-contradictory. It is not "strange" but literally "incomprehensible." If it simply violated all human experience, it would still be comprehensible. But the adventures of the nose are impossible not because appropriate causes do not exist but in a quite a different

way. It is as if someone explained that, to be sure, it is rare for triangles to have four sides, but, strange as it may seem, this one did.

The Double also offers such four-sided triangles. To explain his absurdly doubled subjectivity, Goliadkin appeals not only to Siamese twins, counterfeits, imposters, or pretenders to the throne (like Grisha Otrepev in Aleksandr Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* [Борис Годунов, 1825]), all of which do indeed exist. He tells us that somehow nature herself had a hand in all this. It is all quite natural, you see, so there is nothing to be ashamed of. But this sort of explanation is absurd: a me discovering it is not me, or that another person is really my me, makes no sense. Once we recognize the nature of the absurdity, we can no longer doubt the existence of unique selfhood. Subjectivity is mysterious, and perhaps we will never explain it, but its absence spells complete nonsense.

The Thinking Rag

The most famous aphorisms about the mystery of selfhood and of irreducible “me-ness” belong to Pascal, whose influence on Russian thought was immense. Pascal repeatedly evokes the sense of the radical difference between consciousness and the material world. “Out of all bodies together we could not succeed in creating one little thought. It is impossible and of a different order”¹⁶ “All bodies, the firmament, the stars, the earth and its kingdoms are not worth the least of minds, for it knows them all and itself too, while bodies know nothing.”¹⁷

“Are not worth”: Pascal maintains that the difference is not just of kind but also of value. In fact, without thought there would be no value, which is a matter of judgment and preferences, both of which by their nature do not pertain to bodies. Nature does no ranking. The best known passage in Pascal's *Pensées* concerns the *nobility* of thought:

Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water, suffices to kill him. But if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this.¹⁸

The Double seems to rework these lines. Goliadkin tells himself he will not “allow himself to be insulted” since he is a man, not a thing. He stoutly insists he

will not “be treated like a rag [ВЕТОШКА] . . . I am not a rag. I am not a rag, sir!” As if paraphrasing Goliadkin’s own uncertainties from within, the narrator mocks this statement:

Possibly if someone wanted, if someone, for instance, actually insisted on turning Mr. Goliadkin into a rag, he might have done so, might have done so without opposition or punishment (Mr. Goliadkin himself felt this at times)—and there would have emerged a rag and not Goliadkin—yes, a nasty, filthy rag; but this rag would not have been a simple rag, this would have been a rag with self-esteem, this rag would have had animation [одушевление] and feelings, even though it would have been a timid pride and timid feelings, hidden far away and deep within the folds of this rag, but all the same they would have been feelings.¹⁹

I was forced to retranslate this passage to preserve the constant repetition of the word “rag,” which seems to provoke a wince of pain in Goliadkin every time it is uttered, with every wince inspiring the narrator to say it again and again.

Since only a non-thing could say it either is or is not a thing, one would think that there would be no reason to insist on one’s non-thing-ness. And yet, Goliadkin does insist, with every expectation of being successfully contradicted, that he is not a thing, that he is alive, that he has self-esteem and feelings. He has “ensoulment” [in Russian, о-душ-евление, anima-tion in the etymological sense]. For Pascal, man is a reed, but a thinking reed; for this narrator, the hero is a rag, but a feeling rag. Not just thinking, but feeling—because, for Dostoevsky, it is not consciousness, or even self-consciousness, but the particular sort of agonizing self-consciousness we call humiliation that makes us human. We have moved from man as *un roseau pensant* [a thinking reed] to man as *un chiffon tremblant* [a trembling rag].

The transformation is humorous because one hardly thinks of a rag as noble or dignified. And if the point were to show dignity and self-esteem, one would hardly have to add filth, or say that pride and feelings are timid (безответный, answerless), a sort of oxymoron. This is human dignity at its lowest, barely clinging to existence, ready, indeed, even to concede the right to exist if only it be allowed of its own free will to make that concession—or even to concede that right too, just so as to preserve the pretense of dignity, because, after all, only someone alive, only someone who is not a thing, can pretend!

Humiliation

The “rag” passage extends Pascal’s logic. Pascal’s thinking reed is overwhelmed only by the universe’s physical force, but Dostoevsky’s rag is also overwhelmed by society’s moral force. Physical force at least leaves the self with nobility, but social force strips that away, too. Such *stripping* is unspeakably painful—Dostoevsky’s underground man compares it to being flayed alive—and it seems to explain the etymology of the hero’s name, Goliadkin (from *golyi*, naked). The narrator seems to revel in inflicting such pain. No wonder Dostoevsky was called “a cruel talent.”

What is it to be a human, conscious, being? While Descartes pointed to thought, other philosophers have argued that pain proves consciousness still more clearly. When in pain, even a materialist who regards thought as analogous to bile *cannot doubt*, can barely pretend to doubt, that he is in pain. That is why, in his polemic against the materialists, Dostoevsky’s underground man speaks of “an educated man of the nineteenth century who is suffering from toothache.”²⁰ Just try to be a materialist with aching teeth! As there are no atheists in foxholes, there are no materialists in dental chairs.

But pain is not enough to make us human. Animals, after all, also suffer pain. Few of us would agree with Descartes’s view that animals are unsouled automatons, but we also do not regard them as human. What is it they are missing?

In his earliest works Dostoevsky suggests that the answer is precisely *humiliation*. Pain proves we have a subjectivity, but humiliation proves we have a *social* subjectivity, and human subjectivity is essentially social. We are humiliated only in the eyes of others, in the awareness that others are watching us. I am humiliated, therefore I am human.

Goliadkin’s inner discourse constantly reflects his awareness of being watched, spied on, evaluated, judged, regarded as strange. That is why he is constantly assuring himself that he is all right, he is just like everyone else, his position is like everyone else’s, and why should it not be? When he leaves the doctor’s office, he looks up and sees the doctor watching him from the window. It is a sort of early study in Stavrogin’s resentment of Tikhon as a spy into his soul in Dostoevsky’s novel *The Devils* [*Бесы*, 1872]. When Goliadkin sneaks into the party to which he is uninvited he makes a *spectacle* of himself. What most infuriates him about his double is that the double gets others to laugh at

Goliadkin. Everywhere Goliadkin faces “the witnesses of his ignominy.”²¹ They include us.

The “feeling rag” passage captures this sense of humiliation at its most vertiginous. Readers find it intensely painful. We wince when he suffers “agony upon agony, terror upon terror.”²² Terror, because the ultimate terror is threat to one’s selfhood, as makers of horror movies know. Because of the narrator’s taunting tone, readers simultaneously occupy the role of humiliator and humiliated, as they both identify with Goliadkin and laugh at him. In so doing, they are, of course, “laughing at themselves,” like the spectators of Gogol’s play *The Inspector General* [*Ревизор*, 1836].

The Bad Samaritan

So painful is the sense of Goliadkin’s humiliation that readers cannot doubt that people are more than material objects, still less that they are essentially social. We are not monads that happened to be thrown together. In principle, selves cannot be isolated. No self is an island.

Goliadkin says he is “myself by myself too; I am really myself by myself.”²³ But that is not how selves are. One is a self among others, or so Dostoevsky wants us to believe. *The Double* represents the first among many Dostoevskian demonstrations that the self is social. For Dostoevsky, this view of selfhood was essential to Christianity and its command to care for others, to be one’s brother’s keeper, and to love one’s neighbor.

In the “Rebellion” [“Бунт”] chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan Karamazov tells Alyosha that one *cannot* love one’s neighbor. “Suppose I, for instance, suffer intensely. Another can never know how much I suffer, because he is another and not I.”²⁴ Here and elsewhere, Dostoevsky seems to echo La Rochefoucauld’s famous comment that we all have sufficient fortitude to endure the misfortunes of others.²⁵ Ivan allows for human reactions that might look like genuine concern—or as he calls it, Christian love—for others, but these are all counterfeit. When John the Merciful took a frozen beggar in his arms and breathed into his mouth, loathsome with some putrid disease, he may have done it from “the self-laceration of falsity, for the sake of a charity imposed as a duty, as a penance laid upon him.”²⁶ But these are not love; they are all forms of self-aggrandizement. We can affirm our love for “humanity,” or for people in the abstract, or for those at a distance, but not for a specific person nearby, not

for a *neighbor*. People in the abstract are ideas, *abstractions*, but a specific person is another self.

Ivan's point is not that we cannot acknowledge the *existence* of other selves. This is not the metaphysical problem of the existence of "other minds," and Ivan is no solipsist. On the contrary, he above all knows that we acknowledge others and can even empathize with them— but *negatively*. They are there *for us*, and their existence as other people is important for us in relation to our selves. We use other selves to show our nobility as charitable beings, like the "benefactress" who drove Ivan's mother to attempt suicide. And we also acknowledge other people as other selves so that we may enjoy torturing them, like the many torturers Ivan describes with such relish in "Rebellion." What Ivan denies is positive empathy, genuine concern for others as others. Ivan believes that we cannot acknowledge others as having value apart from their value for us.

Father Zosima recognizes the strength of Ivan's argument, but maintains that genuine empathy, though very difficult, is possible. "Father Zosima has talked of that more than once," Alyosha tells Ivan. "But yet there's a great deal of love in mankind, and almost Christ-like love." To overcome our natural limitation of interest to our own self, one has to be "practiced in love."²⁷

Ivan breaks out of the circle of self he describes when he returns to help the drunken peasant freezing in the snow. The incident alludes to Jesus's story of the man who had "fallen among thieves" and been left naked and half-dead. A priest sees him and passes by "on the other side," as does a Levite. But a good Samaritan "had compassion on him."²⁸ This Samaritan stands as a model of kindness to someone who is unlike him and who can never repay his kindness. Jesus tells the story to explain what it means to "love thy neighbor," which, after caring for the peasant who will never know he has done so, Ivan now recognizes is indeed possible. For Ivan, the discovery comes too late, but for Goliadkin it does not come at all. That is why we sense there is hope for Ivan's, but not Goliadkin's, recovery from insanity.

I think the key incident in *The Double* has been overlooked. Let us call it "the bad Samaritan." When the double follows Goliadkin home, Goliadkin takes him in and, apparently, pities him. The new Goliadkin is a picture of humiliation as only Dostoevsky can describe it:

There was a downtrodden, crushed, scared look about all his gestures, so that—if the comparison might be allowed—he was at that moment rather like the man who, having lost his clothes, is dressed up in someone else's: the sleeves work up to the elbows, the waist is almost up to his neck, and he keeps every minute pulling down the short waistcoat; he wriggles sideways and turns away, tries to hide himself, or peeps into every face, and listens whether people are talking of his position, laughing at him or putting him to shame—and he is crimson with shame and overwhelmed with confusion and wounded vanity.²⁹

This poor soul is fallen not among thieves but among Petersburgers, stripped not physically but morally, and left not naked but, still worse, in someone else's clothes that ostentatiously fail to fit. For a moment, Goliadkin is “genuinely touched” [“истинно тронут”].³⁰ If only he could continue being so!

Alas, almost immediately his mood takes on—if the phrase may be allowed—a Dostoevskian quality. “In short, Mr. Goliadkin was quite happy . . . because, so far from being afraid of his enemies, he was quite prepared now to challenge them all to mortal combat . . . [and] because he was now in the role of a patron.”³¹

Goliadkin has the chance to show compassion and care for another person for the sake of the other person. But he treats the other as—well, as an extension of himself. He sees in his pitiful companion someone who will toady up to him as Goliadkin has toadied up to others; and, still worse, he values him as someone who will be his ally in intrigues against those others. “We shall be like brothers; we’ll be cunning, my dear fellow, we’ll work together; we’ll get up an intrigue, too, to pay them out. To pay them out we’ll get up an intrigue too.”³²

For Goliadkin, others exist either to intrigue against him or to be intrigued against. The only empathy he knows comes from recognizing another person as an object of pain or patronage. The next day, when the double treats Goliadkin with negative empathy, as someone to serve as an object of mockery and intrigue, he is only enacting Goliadkin's own intentions. It is, of course, because the double knows Goliadkin so intimately that he can touch his sore spots with such uncanny accuracy.

From this point on, the story unfolds with an inevitable logic of mounting humiliation leading to the madhouse. The story ends: “Our hero shrieked and clutched his head in his hands. Alas! For a long while he had been haunted by a presentiment of this!” [“он это давно уже предчувствовал”—literally, “he

had long ago already fore-felt this”].³³ A presentiment, or fore-feeling, is a sort of temporal double. The sense of inevitability derives from the fact that the fore-felt event is a repetition of what was already long there.

And yet: for one moment, the moment when he felt genuine sympathy, Goliadkin could have escaped the self that extended no further than itself. He could have seen more in another than a reflection of his own needs. And he could have escaped the logic of doubling, leaving his own shadow behind.

Endnotes

- 1 Perhaps the most empathetic character in Russian literature is Porfiry Petrovich, the detective in *Crime and Punishment* [*Преступление и наказание*, 1867], who uses his amazing talent to send the novel's hero to prison.
- 2 Quoted in Shapiro, *Yale Book of Quotations*, 584.
- 3 Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 1217. Quotations of Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* come from the Dunnigan translation and are cited by page number. I have adjusted the translation where necessary.
- 4 Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 716-17. Quotations of Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* come from the Garnett translation. I have adjusted the translation where necessary.
- 5 Dostoevsky, *ПСС*, 1:175; 218-19. Quotations of *The Double* are from Dostoevsky's 1866 revision of the novella as it appears in F. M. Dostoevsky, *Полное собрание сочинений* [*Complete Collected Works*], cited by volume and page number; the translations are from Garnett, cited second by page number, although I have often adjusted the translation, sometimes extensively.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 1:188; 234.
- 7 See the chapter "Of Ideas of Identity and Diversity," Locke, 1:439-470.
- 8 Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I:457.
- 9 Dostoevsky, *ПСС*, 1:213; 264.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 1:172; 215.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 1:143; 179.
- 12 This is the formulation Thomas Nagel repeatedly uses in *The View from Nowhere*, to which I am indebted at several points in this essay.
- 13 Dostoevsky, *ПСС*, 1:147; 183.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 1:167; 208.

- 15 Ibid., 1:180; 225.
- 16 Pascal, *Pensées*, 215.
- 17 Ibid., 125.
- 18 West, *Thinking Reed*. Here I cite the translation that serves as the epigraph to Rebecca West's novel, *The Thinking Reed*, facing title page.
- 19 Dostoevsky, *ИИСС*, 1:168; 210. For a good version of this passage, see Evelyn Harden's interesting edition of the two versions of *The Double*, 100-101.
- 20 Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 274.
- 21 Dostoevsky, *ИИСС*, 1:167; 208.
- 22 Ibid., 1:140; 174.
- 23 Ibid., 1:213; 264.
- 24 Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 281.
- 25 Quoted in Shapiro, *Yale Book of Quotations*, 443.
- 26 Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 281.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Luke 10:33.
- 29 Dostoevsky, *ИИСС*, 1:153; 191.
- 30 Ibid., 1:156; 194.
- 31 Ibid., 1:157; 195.
- 32 Ibid., 1:157; 196.
- 33 Ibid., 1:229; 284.

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