Bakhtin

and Religion
Bakhtin and Religion
A Feeling for Faith

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Not faith (in the sense of a specific faith in orthodoxy, in progress, in man, in revolution, etc.) but a feeling for faith, that is, an integral attitude (by means of the whole person) toward a higher and ultimate value. Atheism is often understood by Dostoevsky as a lack of faith in this sense, as indifference toward an ultimate value which makes demands on the whole human being, as a rejection of an ultimate position in the ultimate whole of the world.

—M. M. Bakhtin "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book"
Contents

List of Illustrations ix

Acknowledgments xi

List of Abbreviations xiii

Paul J. Contino and Susan M. Felch
Introduction: A Feeling for Faith 1

Alan Jacobs
Bakhtin and the Hermeneutics of Love 25

Graham Pecky
Philosophy and Theology in "Aesthetic Activity" 47

Ruth Coates
The First and the Second Adam in Bakhtin's Early Thought 63

Sergei Averintsev
Bakhtin, Laughter, and Christian Culture 79

Charles Lock
Bakhtin and the Tropes of Orthodoxy 97

Alexander Mikhailovic
Bakhtin's Dialogue with Russian Orthodoxy and Critique of Linguistic Universalism 121

Randall A. Poole
The Apophatic Bakhtin 151

Caryl Emerson
Afterword: Plenitude as a Form of Hope 177
The Apophatic Bakhtin

Randall A. Poole

Apophatic, or negative, theology emphasizes the unknowability of God, the inadequacy of human conceptual categories to the divine. The transcendence of God means that theology must proceed by way of negation (the via negativa); God can be approached only by knowing what he is not. Conceptualization and theorization impoverish divine reality. Apophaticism is, "above all, an attitude of mind which refuses to form concepts about God. Such an attitude utterly excludes all abstract and purely intellectual theology which would adapt the mysteries of the wisdom of God to human ways of thoughts,"[sic] writes Vladimir Lossky in his classic treatise, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church (cited hereafter in this essay as MTEC). The apophatic approach is an aspiration toward an ever-greater plenitude, "straining always to conceive a greater fullness and to pass beyond the conceptual limitations which determine the divine being in terms proper to human reason."

Man, created in the "image and likeness" of God, is called to participate in divine reality. In theistic anthropology, it is man's divine vocation that makes a human being a person, the image and likeness of God are what constitute personhood.6 "Our ideas of human personality, of that personal quality which makes every human being unique, to be expressed only in terms of itself: this idea of person comes to us from Christian theology," Lossky affirms. Because the image of God in man is unknowable, personhood is a mystery. "The human person cannot be expressed in concepts," Lossky continues. "It eludes all rational definitions, indeed all description" (MTEC 53). Apophaticism thus encompasses human as well as divine nature. The mystical culmination of personhood is theosis, transcendent salvation in immortality and deification, "becoming" or union with God. This theistic doctrine of man, which closely links apophasis and theosis, is especially distinctive of Orthodox theology.7

Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of consciousness is both a powerful immanent analysis of the self and a defense of the intrinsic value of personhood (ichnwest). His concept of the person, although it is not grounded in a theistic ontology, bears striking similarity to the apophatic tradition in Orthodox theology, a tradition on which Bakhtin very likely drew in developing his ideas.8
Theism, Kant, and Bakhtin

Theism is metaphysical. It maintains that being is not exhausted by or reducible to nature, that being transcends the natural universe in space and time, and that this transcendent ontological reality is God. The spiritual is at some level ontologically real, not merely epiphenomenal. Naturalism, or atheism, is the opposite view: nature is all of being, and the "spiritual" is a metaphor for higher mental activity that is ultimately reducible to naturalistic processes. Relying on this dichotomy—is there, in the end, a third alternative?—philosophical theists often point to the nature of consciousness in support of their beliefs. The issue, for them, is whether consciousness can be shown to be irreducible to nature, and, if so, whether that entails theism. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is a classic example of a philosophical argument (transcendental idealism) for the irreducibility of consciousness to nature. Bakhtin, who has become perhaps best known as a philosopher of consciousness, drew heavily on Kant. This, when coupled with the claim that Bakhtin was a religious man, might easily lead one to associate him with philosophical theism. Is this association as straightforward as it seems? Bakhtin's use of Kantian categories (see below) ought not to obscure the differences between the two thinkers. Let us first consider Kant. Consciousness cannot be wholly explained by the facts of the natural, empirical world, Kant argues, because empirical experience itself depends on the transcendental functions of consciousness. Without these transcendental conditions, neither experience nor the self would be possible. They enable the self to be a self, that is, to have a world—a reality different from self, an outside capable of being experienced, otherness or alterity, objects. This startling capacity for objectivity, for differentiation between self and other, for the possibility of experience, is what Kant means by the term "transcendental." His transformation in the concept of the nature of experience is transcendental idealism, his Copernican revolution. Among its main contentions is that the self cannot be reduced to the empirical, natural world because it is its very condition.

Kant's refutation of naturalistic reductions of consciousness turns on his striking insight that experience is necessarily objective since it is experience of something "other" than the self doing the experiencing. The subject of experience is the background against which there can be objects; it is a focus radically set apart from literally everything, for everything (even an object of thought) is an object for "it." This "it" is the self for which there can be a world or universe, the totality of things not-self. Experience thus presupposes pure self-consciousness as the capacity to confer objectivity. The capacity for objectivity is so central to experience, including thought (inner experience), that it cannot be done away with. The scare quotes around "it" are necessary because even in thinking about this capacity for objectification, for experience, we must objectify the self that has or is this capacity. But this original self, the very capacity for objectification, cannot be identical to
the self (or aspect of the self) that is objectified or experienced in introspection, since it (the introspected self) thereby becomes an object of thought, and this presupposes a thought-background or original self that experiences or thinks the psychological self of introspection. Kant thus deduces a transcendental or pure self (the transcendental unity of pure apperception), or simply the I think, which can never be an object for "itself" because "it" is the very capacity for experience, including thought and introspection.⁷

Transcendental idealism refutes naturalism by seeking to show that nature does not stand on its own but is transcendentally conditioned. But does it entail theism? Although it cannot be proven that the transcendental conditions of experience strictly entail a transcendent level of being, it is difficult to think that the only alternative to naturalism is solipsism, a free-floating self anchored neither in this world nor another. Certainly Kant did not think so.⁸ He believed that the irreducibility of the self leads to the "postulate" of a "noumenal" realm of being transcendent to space and time and inaccessible to theoretical knowledge.⁹ The American philosopher Errol E. Harris goes a little further: transcendental idealism "leads unfailingly to theism."¹⁰

Where does Bakhtin stand? In his essay from the early 1920s, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin brings Kant down to earth, as it were, by focusing on actual lived experience, not the transcendental conditions of experience. Bakhtin is interested in subject and object not as abstract epistemological categories, but as embodied, concrete human beings, each occupying its own unique place in the world. True, Bakhtin's idea of subjectivity clearly owes very much to Kant.¹¹ In self-experience, I cannot perceive or know all of myself, Bakhtin argues, because I am unable to make all of myself an object for myself. In the act of self-objectification, an essential part of me always remains behind. I can never coincide with myself: "I-for-myself shall continue to be in the act of this self-objectification, and not in its product, that is, in the act of seeing, feeling, thinking, and not in the object seen or felt. I am incapable of fitting all of myself into an object, for I exceed any object as the active subiectum of it" ("A&H" 38). Self-knowledge will always be far from complete, it is the nature of subjectivity. (This is, to anticipate, the core of the apophatic Bakhtin.) The other, by contrast, is entirely an object for me, as I cannot be for myself. "The other, all of him, is laid out before me in the exhaustive completeness as a thing among other things in the world external to me" ("A&H" 36).¹² My position outside another person enables me to see him in a way he cannot see himself, it gives me an excess or surplus of seeing and knowing, which can help balance his own inevitable deficit of self-knowledge. And vice versa. In all this, Bakhtin repeatedly stresses that his concern is "concrete lived experience," and not, for example, the transcendental capacity for differentiation of subject and object.¹³

My condition of subjectivity produces the impression of idealism. "[W]hat makes idealism intuitively convincing is the experience I have of myself," Bakhtin
writes. Solipsism, for the same reason, is likewise intuitively convincing, "or at any rate understandable" ("A&H" 39). However, what is intuitively convincing does not necessarily have extra-intuitive validity. Realism and materialism are also intuitively convincing, if I proceed not from self-experience but from experience of others, not from the inner world but from the external world ("A&H" 39-40). Bakhtin maintains that we cannot decide between idealism and materialism on the basis of experience alone; cognition may help but that, he insists, is not his concern. What matters to him is immanent, phenomenological description of "concrete lived experience"; theoretical abstraction from that experience is misleading. Bakhtin's approach is, in short, phenomenological, not transcendent. His earliest sustained work, Toward a Philosophy of the Act, indeed recommends phenomenology as a first philosophy (TPA 31-32). Thus, while Bakhtin clearly valued Kant's account of subjectivity and objectivity as basic categories of experience, he does not endorse Kant at the level of theory. Idealism and naturalism are phenomenological descriptions of experience of self and other, not metaphysical conclusions.

In one place in "Author and Hero," Bakhtin certainly seems to echo Kant on the irreducibility of consciousness to nature:

I am not—for myself—entirely connatural with the outside world, for there is always something essential in me that I can set over against that world, namely, my inner self-activity, my subjectivity, which confronts the outside world as object, and which is incapable of being contained in it. This inner self-activity of mine exceeds both nature and the world: I always have an outlet along the line of my experience of myself... I always have a loophole, as it were, through which I can save myself from being no more than a natural given. ("A&H" 40)

The key phrase here is "for myself," at the beginning of the passage. Because my inescapable condition is subjectivity, it is not within my ability to conceive of being a natural object: only in this sense am I irreducible to nature (a subject just cannot do it). This brings out the essential difference between Kant and Bakhtin. Kantian transcendental idealism claims that the very possibility of nature depends on the transcendental capacity for objectivity, for differentiation between self and other. Reducing consciousness to nature is therefore something like reducing consciousness to itself. Bakhtinian phenomenology, by contrast, describes the situation of being a subject in the world. Bakhtin proceeds from ordinary assumptions that the subject is a human being already in the world, there is no metaphysical mystery.

Another way of putting the difference is that for Bakhtin being a subject means having major real-life inadequacies (which is why I need the help of others), whereas for Kant it means the metaphysics of experience. The "loophole" by which
I can save myself from being no more than a natural given arises from one such inadequacy, that as a subject I can never coincide with myself. If I could, then I might know that I really am no more than a natural given (science can tell me that but I cannot really believe it as a subject). Bakhtin makes the most of this inadequacy: my intuitive idealism gives me a loophole that permits me to act on the assumption of freedom (unfinalizability). This says much, I believe, about Bakhtin’s approach. He accepts the situation we are in as human beings in the world and tries to make the most of it through phenomenological disclosure of the ways we are persons (I-for-myself, I-for-another, another-for-me) and of how we can exploit these ways to help each other and enrich human interaction. What phenomenology reveals has its own value for Bakhtin: since, for myself, I am free and act according to my sense of “ought” (“A&H” 120), freedom and ethical responsibility are intrinsic values in no need of metaphysical sanction. It is enough that they are present in my lived experience of myself.

From all this, it is clear that Bakhtin was interested in religion in its immanent meaning for human consciousness, as one of the categories through which the self is constructed. His concern was man in the world, not God in metaphysics. Theism offered Bakhtin a powerful image of self-other relations, where the other is the idea of God. Susan Felch is certainly right in claiming that “Bakhtin rejects methodological naturalism in favor of methodological theism,” since the first approach naturalizes or objectifies the human being while the second treats him as a person who has the potential for deification. Alexandar Mihailovic’s idea of a Bakhtinian “human theology” is similarly apt. But Bakhtin did not think the “internal uniqueness of consciousness” entailed the irreducibility of the self to nature, let alone metaphysical theism. If he was a believer, it was, apparently, on other grounds.

Bakhtin wanted to stress that his philosophy of consciousness did not hold metaphysical implications one way or the other (theism or naturalism). He thought metaphysics implied a type of guarantee, while what consciousness needed was faith (see the final section of this essay, "Toward God as Other in Bakhtin’s Dialogic Philosophy of Consciousness"). This helps explain Bakhtin’s efforts to demystify, from a philosophical point of view, the “internal uniqueness of consciousness.” His approach, depending on the actual extent of his theistic belief, may not be without contradiction. In any event, the apophatic framework fits Bakhtin very well because it rests on the conviction that the human person cannot be, and ought not to be, theoretically determined or finalized. This conviction, no matter what else it may have been, was at least an ethical one for Bakhtin. Meanwhile, those who think that the authentic freedom, unfinalizability, and ethics of personhood are good philosophical arguments against naturalism and for theism are not only still able to think that, but can point to Bakhtin’s powerful immanent analysis of what it means to be a self as evidence in support of their beliefs.
Apophasis and Theosis in Orthodox Theology

In 1917, Sergei N. Bulgakov (1871–1944), one of Russia's most important religious philosophers, published a major work, Свет неречемный (The Unfading Light), which includes a chapter entitled “Negative (Apophatic) Theology.” Bakhtin would surely have known this work (which is cited hereafter in this essay as SN). The ideas that Bulgakov highlights in the apophatic tradition of Orthodox theology bear striking relevance to Bakhtin's thought. The central conviction of negative theology is the transcendence of divine reality. Theology must be apophatic, Bulgakov argues, because "the basic content of religious experience—contact with the transcendental, divine world—clearly contains a contradiction for rational thought." This contradiction, immanent contact with or experience of the transcendent, amounts in fact to a fundamental antimony: "that which is immanent cannot at the same time be transcendent and to that extent is not transcendent; that which is transcendent cannot be immanent to consciousness and remains beyond its limits" (SN 88).

Divine reality, in its simultaneous transcendence and immanence, is the basic fact of religious consciousness and experience, but it cannot be understood in rational terms.

The antimony of transcendence and immanence is most obvious in theology where the "object" of thought is the transcendent God. All thought, however, must face the inevitability of the transcendence of its object (any object) and the inexplicability of how a transcendent "object" can be an object of thought at all, that is, how it can be immanent to consciousness. In this connection Bulgakov turns to Kant, directly following another major Russian religious philosopher and contemporary of Bakhtin, Pavel A. Florensky (1882–1937), whose work likewise displays impressive similarities to that of Bakhtin. Kant's great service in theoretical philosophy, Bulgakov writes, was to have demonstrated that reason becomes entangled in antinomies because it is inadequate to its object. Reason (German Verstand, Russian rasudok) cannot make being fully immanent to itself; the inevitable result is a discrepancy between being and the laws of thought, a discrepancy expressed in antinomies. This clearly testifies to a certain transcendence of the object of thought and thus to the untenability of rationalistic, epistemological immanenism. "Antinomic thought seizes its object, makes it immanent to itself only in part, only to a certain extent, which comes out in an antinomy," Bulgakov explains. "The full transcendence of an object to thought would make it completely impossible as an object of thought, or ultimately inconceivable, its total adequacy to thought, on the other hand, would testify to its full immanence: in divine reason (German Vernunft, Russian razum), in which thought and being coincide in one act, there are and can be no antinomies . . . which make up a natural property of human reason" (SN 89).

Bulgakov emphasizes (as does Florensky) that antinomies reveal the impossibility of the full coincidence of subject and object, the inadequacy of the subject
of thought to its object. These ideas soon took on great importance for Bakhtin. They form the basis of his critique of "theoreticism," first advanced in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. The theoretical world is the immanent world of abstract cognition, self-regulating and logical. Within its own bounds, its autonomy is fully justified. "But the world as object of theoretical cognition seeks to pass itself off as the whole world" (TPA 8). This is theoreticism: the attempt to immanentize the whole world, to reduce all being to theoretical consciousness. It is, among other things, to counter theoreticist tendencies in philosophy (in epistemology, first of all) that Bakhtin defines being as an "event."\[23\] Being, the world, remains irreducible and is always more than an immanent object of thought. Subject and object can never fully coincide. Self-sufficiency, a subject that is its own object, is a divine reality, not a human one. "Immanentism," or what Bakhtin calls "theoreticism" and also (in the Dostoevsky book) "monologism," is a pretension to a self-reliance that is God's, not ours.

Bulgakov thought Kant important enough for understanding negative theology that he devoted a separate section to him.\[26\] The main apophatic idea in Kant is the unknowable thing-in-itself, or noumenon. This affirmation of transcendence helps distinguish Kant from what Bulgakov calls the "whole pathos of immanentism" characteristic of post-Kantian German philosophy. Bulgakov's specific target is neo-Kantianism: "The pretension of the neo-Kantians to the total generation by thought of the object of thought (reiner Ursprung) is self-deception" (SN 90). Bakhtin, too, thought the neo-Kantians were especially to blame. Referring to the history of idealism, he wrote, "It becomes purely monologic only in a neo-Kantian interpretation" (PDP 100, note). In this, Bakhtin likely drew not only on Bulgakov but also on another Russian religious philosopher, Sergei A. Askoldov (1870–1945), whose work (at least on Dostoevsky) Bakhtin definitely knew and valued (PDP 11–14).\[27\] In 1914, Askoldov wrote that the first thesis of German neo-Kantianism, which can be called the "position of immanence," consists in the assertion that any knowable object is always something given to consciousness or thought in one way or another, or even generated by thought, and that generally there is nothing in the sphere of being beyond the limits of consciousness and thought, that is, nothing transcendent to them. This thesis is newest in relation to Kant, who affirmed only the unknowability of the transcendent, but did not clearly and categorically reject its existence.\[24\]

Like Bulgakov and Askoldov, Bakhtin appreciated the main difference between Kant and the neo-Kantians: that Kant pursued the apophatic aim of hemming in the theoretical world, while the neo-Kantians wanted to extend it endlessly. The point of access to being (to the noumenal thing-in-itself) is not theoretical reason
but practical reason, in moral consciousness of "ought." This conviction (which is, in fact, distinctively Kantian) was Bakhtin's point of departure in his essay on ethics, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act.*

The preservation of the transcendence of the divine, against all-encompassing inmanentism or theoreticism, is the main tenet of negative theology. In Bulgakov's formulation, "the transcendent God is forever an unknown, inaccessible, unfathomable, inexpressible Mystery, for which there is no approximation" (SN 90–91). The Mystery is that God transcends any distinction between subject and object, categories within which all thought, as such, takes place. For this reason, it cannot even be said that God is the "object" of theology. Here it begins to become clear that apophatic theology is mystical theology, that "knowledge" of God would actually be union with him, that *apophasis* is the way toward transcendent salvation in *thesis*. In *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Vladimir Lossky writes that the apophatic way must culminate in freedom "from the subject as well as from the object of perception. God no longer presents Himself as object, for it is no more a question of knowledge but of union. Negative theology is thus a way towards mystical union with God, whose nature remains incomprehensible to us" (MTEC 28).

The Eastern tradition of apophatic or mystical theology, in conscious service of *thesis*, has its origins with Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) and Origen (d. 254). It achieved prominence with Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395) and became a major doctrinal force with the appearance (around the year 500) of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. It was then further developed in the important distinction Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) drew between God's essence (utterly inaccessible) and his energies (that enable human participation in divine reality), a distinction Palamas used to defend the hesychast method of prayer. For the great Byzantine theologian Maximus the Confessor (d. 662), the intricate connection between the apophatic way and the goal of deification was the essence of "theological anthropology." Bulgakov highlights the importance St. Maximus attached to the categories of subject and object. All thought presupposes multiplicity or, more precisely, duality: the thinker and the object of thought. "In God, however, there is no place for this dichotomy." God is absolute unity, "in Him the subject and object of thought coincide" (SN 110). The inevitability of subject and object in human thought therefore makes knowledge of God impossible and requires that theology be apophatic. It also entails the interesting conclusion that to "know" God is to already be him (or at least to have transcended subjectivity and objectivity in a unity that is to us utterly inconceivable). Precisely this is the nexus between *apophasis* and *thesis*. In Lossky's words, "the way of the knowledge of God is necessarily the way of deification" (MTEC 39). Overcoming the distinction between subject and object—true self-sufficiency, self-identification, or self-reliance—would be an utter transformation in the human condition.
A corollary of the unknowability of God is the unknowability of man. If man cannot know God, neither can he know himself, created as he is in the image and likeness of God. The impossibility of identity of subject and object that precludes knowledge of God also rules out complete self-knowledge. And in the same way, knowledge of God and perfect self-knowledge would equally be \textit{thesis} (deification or union with God), since both entail an otherworldly unity of subject and object. But in this world, consciousness is not self-sufficient, subject and object do not coincide. This is one of Bakhtin's main ideas, and it must have been informed by his broad cultural knowledge of religious history and theology. For example, in discussing the Christian contribution to the history of the "idea of man," Bakhtin refers to "the idea of the deity becoming human (Zielinski) and man becoming divine (Harnack)." The apophatic moment in Bakhtin certainly consists, however, not in the mystical negation of subject and object that culminates in \textit{thesis}, which is prototypical in the deification of the humanity of Christ, "man becoming divine"—but in the unknowability of the self to itself (I-for-myself), and thus in the need for the seeing and knowing other—for "deity becoming human," becoming, that is, an embodied, grace-bestowing other, Christ, which is Bakhtin's ideal image of the other.

The mystical union of self and other in God is not an idea congenial to Bakhtin's thought. The Orthodox doctrine of \textit{thesis} does, however, include ideas that are, and that, in fact, form a large part of the religious imagery Bakhtin employs in depicting self-other relations (see "Toward God as Other in Bakhtin's Dialogic Philosophy of Consciousness"). The main compatibility is that \textit{thesis} preserves the personal identity of the participants. "The mystical union between God and humans is a true union, yet in this union Creator and creature do not become fused into a single being," in Timothy Ware's formulation. "Orthodox mystical theology has always insisted that we humans, however closely linked to God, retain our full personal integrity. The human person, when deified, remains distinct (though not separate) from God." Deification is \textit{participation} in divine being, a "dwelling in" but not identity with the divine nature. The biblical basis is 2 Peter 1:4, which calls human beings to "become partakers of the divine nature" (RSV). It may not be going too far to see a reflection of this idea in Bakhtin when he refers to "the image of many unmerged personalities joined together in the unity of some spiritual event" (PDP 13). Bakhtin, in fact, left no doubt about what he most valued in religion: "a personal relationship to a personal God," as he remarked in 1925. "The personal nature [\textit{person'nost'}] of God and the personal nature of all believers are the constituent traits of religion."36

Concrete personhood, unity in diversity, gives the mystery of the Trinity a special place in the Orthodox tradition. To preserve the distinctiveness of the three persons (hypostases) of the Trinity, Byzantine theology, especially as expounded by the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nazianzus,
Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nyssa), locates the principle of the unity of the godhead in the person of the Father, not in the divine essence that the three persons share (*homousios*). Vladimir Lossky's prominence in twentieth-century Orthodox theology rests in part on his defense of Trinitarianism, specifically of the view that only the "monarchy" of the Father guarantees the concrete personhood of the three hypostases in the Trinity. "If one speaks of God it is always, for the Eastern Church, in the concrete," Lossky writes. "When, on the contrary, the common nature assumes the first place in our conception of trinitarian dogma, the religious reality of God in Trinity is inevitably obscured in some measure and gives place to a certain philosophy of essence" (MTEC 64). For Bakhtin as well, no philosophy of essence could usurp concrete personhood.

Fear of depersonalization helps explain the Orthodox rejection of the *Filioque*, the Roman Catholic doctrine—the unilateral adoption of which (and insertion into the Nicene Creed) contributed to the great schism between the Latin West and Greek East, customarily dated at 1054—that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son ("double procession"), not from the Father alone. For the Orthodox, the *Filioque* is a subordination of the Holy Spirit to the other two hypostases and a diminishment of its own role in salvation. The work of the Holy Spirit is sanctification of human persons. This is integral to and inseparable from the work of Christ, redemption of the common nature of humanity. "Within the Church the Holy Spirit imparts to human hypostases the fullness of deity after a manner which is unique, 'personal,' appropriate to every man as a person created in the image of God," according to Lossky. "The work of Christ unifies; the work of the Holy Spirit diversifies" (MTEC 166–67).

Bakhtin might well have seen a literary expression of Trinitarian personalism in Dostoevsky. In one of his better known observations, Bakhtin wrote, "Dostoevsky's world is profoundly pluralistic. If we were to seek an image toward which this whole world gravitates, an image in the spirit of Dostoevsky's own worldview, then it would be the church as a communion of unmerged souls, where sinners and righteous men come together" (PDP 26–27). And Bakhtin's own profoundly pluralistic world of unmerged souls surely owes something to P. A. Florensky's explicitly Trinitarian concept of personhood, advanced in *The Pillar and Foundation of Truth* (1914). At any rate, the striking formal similarity between Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy of consciousness and Orthodox Trinitarianism could not be better captured than in Ware's characterization: "Deification is not a solitary but a 'social' process... Humans, made in the image of the Trinity, can only realize the divine likeness if they live a common life such as the Blessed Trinity lives: as the three persons of the Godhead 'dwell' in one another, so we must 'dwell' in our fellow humans, living not for ourselves alone, but in and for others... Such is the true nature of theosis."
The Possibility of Creation

The broad significance of apophatic theology is that theory impoverishes divine reality, a reality that is God but includes man (by vocation). One of Bakhtin's fundamental ideas, and one that spans his entire career, is that theory is impoverishing. In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin writes that theories are typically impoverishing, "because they seek to explain the creatively productive event by reducing its full amplitude. . . . [T]he event is transposed in all its constituents to the unitary plane of a single consciousness, and it is within the unity of this single consciousness that the event is to be understood and deduced in all its constituents" ("A&H" 87). Theory, then, is impoverishing when it is a reduction to one consciousness. But what, specifically, is impoverishing about a single consciousness? Here as well, Bakhtin is clear. One consciousness cannot create.

There are events which are in principle incapable of unfolding on the plane of one and the same consciousness and which presuppose two consciousnesses that never merge. Or, in other words, what is constitutive for such events is the relationship of one consciousness to another consciousness precisely as an other. Events of this kind include all of the creatively productive events—the once-occurrent and inconvertible events that bring forth something new. ("A&H" 86–87)

One consciousness cannot be creative because within it there is no outside from which another can give me something I lack. It does not provide the possibility of "formal enrichment," which Bakhtin describes as basic to cultural creation but which involves the idea of creativity as such. Let the other remain outside of me, "for in that position he can see and know what I myself do not see and do not know from my own place, and he can essentially enrich the event of my own life" ("A&H" 87). In my deficit of knowing and seeing, I am in an "apophatic" situation, and it is precisely this that gives the other a creative opportunity (and vice versa). If everything is reduced, or made immanent, to a single consciousness, then I already know and have everything. Nothing can be introduced from outside. I cannot, in principle, be enriched and therefore remain eternally impoverished.

Creation, in other words, needs transcendence, an outside from which something new can descend as a gift. Creation is not an "emanation" of one consciousness but something altogether new. In the value he placed on a multiplicity of consciousnesses that can therefore be outside each other, Bakhtin surely drew on the Christian mystery of creation ex nihilo. True, it is difficult to know what "outside" God means. "Yet creation ex nihilo does mean just such an act producing something which is 'outside of God'—the production of an entirely new subject," as Lossky tries to
express the idea. "We might say that by creation \textit{ex nihilo} God 'makes room' for something which is wholly outside of Himself; that, indeed, He sets up the 'outside' or nothingness alongside of His plenitude. The result is a subject which is entirely 'other'" (\textit{MTEC} 92). The Christian dogma of creation \textit{ex nihilo} took shape in part against Neoplatonic cosmogony, in which the world is "emanated," not genuinely created. In \textit{The Unfading Light}, S. N. Bulgakov sharply contrasts Neoplatonism and Christianity on this point. In Neoplatonism, Bulgakov writes, "nothing happens or occurs in the world, for it does not lie \textit{outside} the absolute, but is the absolute itself, only in a certain state of deprivation" (\textit{SN} 139). Here there is a striking parallel with Bakhtin, probably a case of direct influence, for Bakhtin himself points to the example of Neoplatonism: in it, "the distinctiveness of the category of the \textit{other} fails to gain a foothold. The emanationist theory prevails. . . . All events are concentrated in the unitary \textit{I-for-myself}, without introducing the new value of the \textit{other}." Everything—"the universe, God, other people"—is reduced to pure self-experience (\textit{A\&H} 55). In another context Bakhtin refers to the deep distrust of outsidership, writing that, "in religion this is associated with the 'immanentization' of God" (\textit{A\&H} 203).

From Neoplatonic roots, theoretical reductionism within a single, all-encompassing consciousness has grown to become a "profound structural characteristic" of modern times (\textit{PDP} 82).\textsuperscript{40} Bakhtin sees this development in, for example, the "epistemology" pervading nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy. "Epistemological consciousness, the consciousness of science, is a unitary and unique consciousness, or, to be exact—a single consciousness" (\textit{A\&H} 88). We have seen that Bakhtin first advances his critique of "theoreticism" in \textit{Toward a Philosophy of the Act}, where he also uses the term "rationalism" to describe the phenomenon (29–30). He returns to and develops this theme in \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics}, now also under the general rubric of "monologism," the culmination of European rationalism, "with its cult of a unified and exclusive reason." The highest form of ideological monologism is, in turn, monistic absolute idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel). Bakhtin also singles out another expression of monologism: European utopianism, including socialism (\textit{PDP} 80–82).\textsuperscript{41}

For Bakhtin the most important consequence of monologism is that, within the single consciousness of absolute idealism, human consciousnesses can only be "empirical" or "accidental." Monologism is fundamentally debilitating. "In an environment of philosophical monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible" (\textit{PDP} 81). And it is the genuine, dialogic interaction of consciousnesses that enables personhood. "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a thou)." For these reasons, "consciousness is in essence multiple" (\textit{TRDB} 287, 288). The multiplicity of
consciousnesses is what is creative about each of them, for the "I-for-myself" needs the surplus of vision and knowing of the "other-for-me." This move, diametrically opposed to the omniscience of the monologic absolute consciousness, is the creative force behind the apophatic Bakhtin.

**Toward God as Other in Bakhtin's Dialogic Philosophy of Consciousness**

Dialogic interaction of self and other is the highest level in Bakhtin's conception of personhood, a level that presupposes prior enabling stages. The most basic of these, as specified in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, are ethical and, to an extent, ontological. Bakhtin advances three core ideas: being-as-event, non-alibi in being, and "ought." Bakhtin is not altogether clear on what he means by "being-as-event"; it is a basic and irreducible category. Bakhtin exploits the etymology of the Russian word for event (*sobytie*) to emphasize that being happens, or is an event, between or among interacting consciousnesses. Being, at the moment it is an event, is also a constituent moment of consciousness. It enables consciousnesses to continue their interaction at higher levels, where they become fully creative of each other in personhood-bestowing dialogue. Being-as-event requires participation, once participation ends, it is no longer an event. Or, as Bakhtin also says, it requires actual communion. Being is an event only in an act or deed. As an event, it cannot be transcribed in theoretical terms. Concrete uniqueness and singularity characterize an event. Theory, by contrast, deals with the general and recurrent. In this connection, Bakhtin relates being-as-event to an important distinction between truth as *pravda* and truth as *istina*. "It is an unfortunate misunderstanding (a legacy of rationalism) to think that truth [*pravda*] can only be the truth [*istina*] that is composed of universal moments, that the truth of a situation is precisely that which is repeatable and constant in it" (*TPA* 37). Throughout, Bakhtin's stress is the link among being-as-event, personal participation, and personhood-in-process. Thus, referring to his formulation of *pravda* as unitary and unique truth, Bakhtin writes, "It is precisely this truth that requires me to realize in full my unique participation in Being from my own unique place. The unity of the whole conditions the unique and utterly unrepeatable roles of all the participants. Being, as something determinate, finished, and petrified in respect to its content, would destroy countless uniquely valuable personal worlds" (*TPA* 45–46).

Bakhtin draws important implications from the unique and irreplaceable position each participant occupies in being-as-event. First he stresses the utter uniqueness of that position. "I occupy a place in once-occurrence Being that is unique and never-repeatable, a place that cannot be taken by anyone else and is impenetrable for anyone else... That which can be done by me can never be
done by anyone else. The uniqueness or singularity of present-on-hand Being is
compellently obligatory" (TPA 40). By "compellently obligatory," Bakhtin means
that I am obligated to acknowledge my unique place in being-as-event, to ac-
knowledge, that is, my "non-alibi in being." Theoreticism seeks to diminish this
responsibility by universalizing it, by displacing it to everyone and so to no one in
particular. Theoreticism proposes an alibi in being when in fact I don't have one. It
is only through affirming and living up to my non-alibi "that I do not sever myself
from the ontological roots of actual Being" (TPA 44). Bakhtin is, however, far more
concerned with ethics than with ontology. Acknowledging my "non-alibi in being"
is a moral obligation; it is what I ought to do. My unique position in being produces
a "concrete ought" to live up to it. "Ought" is a category of consciousness (TPA 6,
25); it, too, is basic and irreducible, the nexus between person and being. I perform
an "answerable" deed when I act from or according to my non-alibi in being, that
is, as I ought to. "This fact of my non-alibi in Being, which underlies the concrete
and once-occurrence ought of the answerably performed act, is not something I come
to know of and to cognize but is something I acknowledge and affirm in a unique or
once-occurrence manner" (TPA 40, my italics). Bakhtin's approach to it is, in other
words, apophatic.

Of all the deeds I ought to accomplish from my own unique place in being,
the most valuable is what I can do for another. "That I, from my unique place in
Being, simply see and know another, that I do not forget him . . . is something
only I can do for him at the given moment in all of Being: that is the deed which
makes his being more complete, the deed . . . which is possible only for me" (TPA
42). This type of deed, in which I help another to be more complete, comprises
the highest level of Bakhtin's moral philosophy, where ethics becomes dialogic
philosophy of consciousness. What I can and ought to do for another is help fill
in the apophatic gap of non-self-sufficiency that every self faces. This realization
that I am in the position to help complete another comes about through facing my
own lack of self-sufficiency, through recognizing that, as Bakhtin strikingly puts it,
"what God is for me, I must be for another" (A&H 56). And it is remarkable that
Bakhtin invests his description of this process of self-discovery so heavily with the
religious imagery of apophasis and thesis: grace, confession, penitence and prayer,
and faith.

In "Author and Hero," Bakhtin considers some of Christianity's contributions
to the history of the "idea of man." Among them is grace, the idea of bestowal,
from outside, of loving mercy, justification, and restoration (A&H 57). Grace is a
quintessentially apophatic image. It is not surprising that Bakhtin would use it to
convey the idea of self-insufficiency. With Christ, Bakhtin writes, "God is no longer
defined essentially as the voice of my conscience, as purity of my relationship to
myself . . . God is now the heavenly father who is over me and can be merciful
to me and justify me where I, from within myself, cannot be merciful to myself
and cannot justify myself in principle” (“A&H” 56). The grace of justification and fulfillment can descend only from outside; its source is transcendent. This idea of grace relates to the important distinction Bakhtin draws between spirit and soul. On my own (I-for-myself), I am unfinalized, incomplete spirit, not a soul (as I am for another). “My self-reflection, insofar as it is mine, is incapable of engendering a soul... The soul descends upon me—like grace upon the sinner, like a gift that is unmerited and unexpected” (“A&H” 101). The implications go beyond Bakhtin’s main context of aesthetics, since another’s image of me can help my spirit ascend to ever higher levels. The soul may be a gift bestowed upon me, but it is always transcended by my open, unfinalizable spirit. And, likewise, “[t]he soul is a gift that my spirit bestows upon the ether” (“A&H” 132), whose spirit then transcends it.46

Confession is the act in which I realize that I am not adequate to myself, that I cannot complete myself.47 Confessional self-accounting strives for complete purity of self-relationship, for immanence and the exclusion of all moments “transcendent to self-consciousness. As a result, it cannot in itself be consummating. It is a transitional moment in which I pass beyond myself and turn to God. “The negation of any justification in this world is transformed into a need for religious justification... for a mercy and grace that are totally otherworldly in respect to their value. Such justification is not immanent to self-accounting, but lies beyond its bounds” (“A&H” 145). A confession is made, Bakhtin repeatedly says, in penitent tones (“A&H” 57, 128, 141ff.). With this, he introduces the key apophatic image of repentance. In Vladimir Lossky’s words, “the apophatic way of Eastern theology is the repentance of the human person before the face of the living God” (MTEC 238). On this point there is indeed a striking similarity between Lossky and Bakhtin. Of repentance, Lossky writes, “it is the opposite state of the soul to self-sufficiency.” Like the way of ascent toward God, it can have no end (MTEC 204). In this context, Lossky refers to the prayer of the publican (MTEC 206), and writes that “the beginning of prayer is petition—the prayer of supplication” (MTEC 207). Bakhtin, too, singles out the prayer of the publican (a ‘pure and profound’ example of confessional self-accounting), stresses that such penitential prayers do not end and, from within themselves, are incapable of being consummated (“repetition of prayers” represents movement as such, he says),48 and makes the comparison to petition and supplication (“A&H” 145, 143).

Bakhtin’s next link is perhaps his most profound: self-consciousness in faith. Within the inner world of I-for-myself, I always live for the future as someone who is yet to be achieved, someone who in the most essential respects does not exist yet. I never live up to my potential, but rather by the hope and faith that more of me always lies ahead, even that the essential me lies ahead. “The real center of gravity of my own self-determination is located solely in the future.” No matter how much I achieve, “the center of gravity of my self-determination will continue
to shift forward, into the future, and I shall rely for support on myself as someone yet-to-be" (A&F 127). More than that, self-consciousness depends on the self not coinciding, not coinciding in principle with its factually given, present-on-hand existence. Living (as I inevitably do) by the hope and faith of such noncoincidence is, as Bakhtin puts it, a rightful folly or insanity, because "there are no guarantees of the ought-to-be" (A&F 128). It is the nature of the self to not coincide with itself, we know that this is one of Bakhtin's foundational ideas (and that it is essentially Kantian). One of the several basic implications Bakhtin draws from this idea is that consciousness is always forward-looking (or inherently progressive).

In striving forward toward "what ought-to-be," I try to exclude all external axiological forces of justification that could tempt me to be quiescent, to stop short in my passing-beyond-myself, and think that I do coincide with myself. This solitary "restlessness" is the first constituent moment of confessional self-accounting, which Bakhtin defines succinctly as an attempt to determine oneself in light of the ought-to-be (A&F 141). The goal is to overcome the "axiological self-contentment of present-on-hand being" and to appreciate that I "absolutely" do not coincide with myself. At this point, if I am successful, "a place for God is opened up," because consciousness itself is not possible "in an absolute axiological void" (A&F 144). This is the second constituent moment of confessional self-accounting (the specifically confessional moment). Pure self-consciousness, as such, is impossible, the self does not coincide with and is inaccessible to itself. Therefore, consciousness requires a bearing in something "other" than self, first in "what ought to be," then, with the increasing clarity of self-accounting, in God. Self-consciousness, Bakhtin writes, is impossible "outside God, outside the bounds of trust in absolute otherness." Confessional self-accounting, striving to be absolutely solitary, ends up revealing the need for absolute otherness. The deeper the solitude and the deeper the repentance, "the clearer and more essential is one's referredness to God." Bakhtin's (analytic and compact) argument is that "what ought to be," toward which I strive and with which I never coincide, must be transcendent to consciousness, since were it only an immanent moment of my consciousness, that is, were it only a moment of present-on-hand being, it could not be that by virtue of which I am self-conscious. In other words, "the very fact of becoming conscious of myself in being, testifies in itself that I am not alone in my self-accounting, that someone . . . wants me to be good" (A&F 144).

The transcendent "moment of otherness" (what ought to be, ultimately God) is, Bakhtin stresses, not guaranteed.

[For a guarantee would reduce it to the level of present-on-hand being (at best, aestheticized being, as in metaphysics). One can live and gain consciousness of oneself . . . only in faith. Life (and consciousness), from within itself, is nothing else but the actualization of faith, the process of life's gaining
self-consciousness is a process of gaining consciousness of faith (that is, of need and hope, of non-self-contentment and of possibility). ("A&H" 144)\textsuperscript{11}

Bakhtin's point is not only the quite apophatic one that God cannot be known, but that were he known, human beings could not grow in self-consciousness and personhood. As present-on-hand being, he would no longer be the ideal toward which we aspire and by virtue of which we are self-conscious. Or, in the language of \textit{theosis}, were God known, we could only serve him, not become him.

\section*{Notes}


Weltanschauung of F. M. Dostoevsky and Vl. Solov'ev]. Sovremennye zapiski (Paris), vol. 45 (1931), 283, makes the apathetic connection. He writes that in The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky comes very close to negative theology (in another context Hessen refers to Bakhtin’s polyphonic image of Dostoevsky, 281, note).

5. See, for example, Richard Swinburne, The Existence of God, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), chapter 9, "Arguments from Consciousness and Morality," 152–79. Both the cosmological and ontological proofs can also be considered types of argument from consciousness: they turn on the insight that infinitude, perfection, and necessity are a priori ideas, i.e., ideas that are not extrapolations from the empirical world but are already present as a condition of awareness of finitude and contingency. As Leszek Kolakowski, in Religion (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), 72, writes, “To assert the priority of infinitude is the same as to assert the contingency or non-self-sufficiency of the finite world, and the real question is: where does this idea come from?” Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), 140–41, makes the same point in his interpretation of the ontological proof. Alvin Plantinga’s classic defense of the rationality of theistic belief, God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), likewise proceeds from philosophy of mind: belief in God is no less rational than belief in other minds.

6. “I entitle transcendental all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible a priori.” Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, unabridged ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), 59. In his well-known “Preface to the Second Edition” of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant explains that objects must conform to a priori concepts of the faculty of understanding. “For experience is itself a species of knowledge which involves understanding; and understanding has rules which I must presuppose as being in me prior to objects being given to me, and therefore as being a priori. They find expression in a priori concepts to which all objects of experience necessarily conform.” Critique of Pure Reason, 22–23. In short, “it is possible to show that pure a priori principles are indispensable for the possibility of experience” (ibid., 45).


8. He was specifically concerned to refute “idealism,” in the solipsistic sense it often had in his time, that nothing exists apart from the self. Critique of Pure Reason, 244–47.

9. Kant arrives at his three postulates of practical reason—freedom of the will, immortality of the soul, and the existence of God—from the nature of moral experience. Moral consciousness of “what ought to be” (das Sollen) is neither derivative from nor reducible to the empirical world of “what is” (das Sein). “Ought,” the force of which is felt in duty, can determine the will in opposition to natural causes. “There is in man a power of self-determination, independently of any
coercion through sensuous impulses," writes Kant (Critique of Pure Reason, 465). Kant's system is a tightly integrated whole: the epistemology (transcendental idealism) and the ethics mutually corroborate the autonomy or irreducibility of the self. Transcendental idealism, by reconceptualizing nature as the capacity for empirical experience, makes possible or validates duty and free will as authentic (otherwise, they are reduced to psychological illusions), with all the implications this holds for metaphysics. "Ought" is one of Bakhtin's fundamental philosophical categories.


11. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 43, 103, state that in 1919, Bakhtin ran a study group in Nevel on the Critique of Pure Reason, and that in 1925, in Leningrad, he gave a private course of eight lectures on the Critique of Judgment. L. V. Pumpliansky's notes from Bakhtin's lectures of 1924–25 contain schematic accounts of six (out of apparently nine) lectures on Kant, which Bakhtin probably delivered in October–November 1924. These lectures are on the Critique of Pure Reason, not the Critique of Judgment. However, it is possible, as N. I. Nikolaev suggests, that Pumpliansky's notes date from an earlier series of lectures on Kant. The 1924–25 notes were published in Russian as "Lektsii i vystupleniia M. M. Bakhtina 1924–25 gg. v zapisakh L. V. Pumplianskogo" ["M. M. Bakhtin's Lectures and Speeches of 1924–25, as transcribed by L. V. Pumpliansky"], introduced, edited, and annotated by N. I. Nikolaev, in M. M. Bakhtin kak filosof, ed. L. A. Gogotishvili and P. S. Gurevich (Moscow, 1992), 236–44. An English translation of them is included as an appendix to this volume.

12. Bakhtin later gives a succinct statement of the difference between subject and object: "The other always stands over against me as an object; the exterior image of him stands over against me in space and his inner life stands over against me in time. I myself as subject never coincide with me myself: I—the subject of the act of self-consciousness—exceed the bounds of this act's content" ("AaH" 109).

13. Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, 59, write that Bakhtin wanted to claim Kant for a fuller understanding of lived experience, and that he used Kantian ideas about space and time but took them not as transcendental forms but as forms of the most immediate reality (here they quote Bakhtin's essay, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel"). On subjectivity, they also draw the comparison with Kant's "I think" (71). On these points my own reading of Kant and Bakhtin fully concurs with theirs.


15. In Bakhtin's own words, "Idealism is a phenomenology of my experience of myself, but not of my experience of the other, the naturalistic conception of
consciousness and of man in the world is a phenomenology of the other. We are not concerned, of course, with the philosophical validity of these conceptions. Our only concern here is the stock of phenomenological experience that underlies them; in themselves, these conceptions are the result of a theoretical processing of that stock of experience" ("A&H" 110).

16. Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, 90, on Bakhtin's approach to the apparent paradox of the self's inability to see itself: "That invisibility is neither mysterious nor even metaphoric but rather structural."


19. Quite the contrary. In 1961, Bakhtin returned to a theme he first took up forty years earlier in "Author and Hero," that death cannot be a fact of self-consciousness (for the simple reason that I am incapable of experiencing the moment of my own death). "In Dostoevsky's world death finalizes nothing, because death does not affect the most important thing in this world—consciousness for its own sake." Commenting on this, Bakhtin writes: "Dostoevsky gives all this an idealistic cast, draws ontological and metaphysical conclusions (the immortality of the soul, and so forth). But the discovery of the internal uniqueness of consciousness does not contradict materialism. Consciousness comes second, it is born at a specific stage in the development of the material organism, it is born objectively, and it dies (also objectively) together with the material organism (sometimes even before it); it dies objectively" ("TRDB" 290). The irreducibility of the self to nature is—let there be no doubt—an important idea in Orthodox thought and is thus directly relevant to the issue of Bakhtin and theism. John Meyendorff writes that Byzantine theologians often describe man in terms of the trichotomist conception: spirit or mind (nous), soul, and body. Bakhtin himself makes extensive use of this trichotomy in his essay, "Author and Hero." In the Byzantine tradition, the spirit (nous) most represents the person in the human being (for Bakhtin, the unfinalizable, internal uniqueness of consciousness). "This concept of the person or hypostasis, irreducible to nature or to any part of it," Meyendorff writes, "is a central notion in both [Byzantine] theology and anthropology" (Byzantine Theology, 142, my italics).


22. There are other parallels as well between Bulgakov and Bakhtin. Mihailovic, Corporeal Words, 37–38, compares Bakhtin's essay from the mid-1930s, "Discourse in the Novel," to Bulgakov's essay, "Was ist das Wort?" published abroad in 1930 (it is the first chapter of Bulgakov's book, Philosophy of the Name, written in 1919 but not published as a whole until 1953). Steven Cassedy, Flight from Eden: The


24. The problem of antinomies is central to Florensky's major work, The Pillar and Foundation of Truth (1914), on which Bulgakov relies and which Bakhtin would have known. Apart from the apophatic conclusions that follow from the antinomies of reason, the similarities between Florensky and Bakhtin include the idea that personhood (lichnost') emerges within a multiplicity of consciousnesses (an explicitly Trinitarian context for Florensky) and the idea of kenotic embodiment. For the lichnost' comparison, see Meerson, "Sergei Bulgakov's Philosophy of Personality," 143–44, and Milhailovic, Corporal Words, 99–102. For the kenosis comparison, see Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, 84–87, 135–37, and Cassedy, Flight from Eden, 114–20. The apophatic connection between Kant and Florensky has recently been drawn by T. B. Dlugach, "Problema vremeni v filosofii I. Kant i P. Florenskogo" ['The Problem of Time in the Philosophy of I. Kant and P. Florensky'], in Kant i filosofii v Rossii, ed. Z. A. Kamensky and V. A. Zhuchkov (Moscow, 1994), 186–211. Dlugach writes that for all the differences between Kant and Florensky, "nonetheless the philosophical reflections of both aspire beyond the limits of scientific reality—to being in itself, and in this sense they move from logic to ontology, to metaphysics. Kant takes being in its negative, apophatic significance, while for Florensky it becomes a symbol of true, Divine existence."

25. Being-as-event, or the event of being, is Bakhtin's most basic category in Toward a Philosophy of the Act. One of his clearest uses of it occurs in the critique of his critique of theorecticism. Theory (philosophy and science) is only one particular moment that participates in being-as-event. Theory is not a detached, separate world, let alone the whole world, "but rather a world that is incorporated into the unitary and once-occurent event of Being through the mediation of an answerable consciousness in an actual deed. But that once-occurent event of Being is no longer something that is thought of, but something that is, something that is being actually and inescapably accomplished through me and others (accomplished, inter alia, also in my deed of cognizing) . . . This Being cannot be determined in the categories of non-participant theoretical consciousness—it can be determined only in the categories of actual communion, i.e., of an actually performed act" (TPA 12–13). Being-as-event is the world that phenomenology, Bakhtin's first philosophy, is to disclose (TPA 31–32). "Author and Hero," as well, specifies that "[t]he event of being is a phenomenological concept, for being presents itself to a living consciousness as an event, and a living consciousness actively orients itself and lives in it as in an event" ("AAH" 188, note).
26. Bulgakov, Sob nevsekhvasti, 128–30. More recently, the apophatic moment in Kant has been singled out by Henry E. Allison, Kant's Transcendental Idealism. An Interpretation and Defense (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 242, and Don Cupitt, "Kant and the Negative Theology," in The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology, ed. Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart Sutherland (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), 55–67. Two Russian scholars have compared Kant to the apohatic currents in Russian religious philosophy: Dlugach (see note 25 above), and A. V. Akhutin, "Seeia i chert (Kant pered litsom russkoi religioznoi metafiziki)" ["Sophia and the Devil (Kant before Russian Religious Metaphysics)"], in Rossiia i Germaniia: Opyt filosofskogo dialoga, ed. V. A. Lektorsky (Moscow, 1993), 207–47. Akhutin, like Dlugach, draws attention to the apohatic or negative quality of Kant's philosophy, comparing it to the "critical antinomism" of S. N. Bulgakov and P. A. Florensky and the "apohatic ontology" of S. L. Frank.

27. On Askoldov, his critique of neo-Kantianism and Bakhtin, see Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, 132–33.


29. Bakhtin writes, "Formal ethics starts out from the perfectly correct insight that the ought is a category of consciousness... But formal ethics (which developed exclusively within the bounds of Kantianism) further conceives the category of the ought as a category of theoretical consciousness, i.e., it theorectizes the ought" (TPA 25). Bakhtin levels this criticism against both Kant and the neo-Kantians, but it applies far more to the latter, in their abandonment of Kant's noumenon, transcendent to theoretical reason.

30. For historical development, see Jaroslav Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (300–600), 344–49; Pelikan, The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700), 30–36, 254–70; Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church, 62–70; John Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 11–14, 27–29, 76–78; and Deirdre Carabine, The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eratoca (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1995), especially on Gregory of Nyssa.

31. Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator.

32. Deirdre Carabine, The Unknown God, 325, concludes as follows: "From an apohatic viewpoint, the only way to cross the distance that is seen to exist between the soul and the One, between the soul and God, is the breakdown and negation of all the normal epistemological categories of subject and object, which are, of course, the basis for all cognition." Raoul Mortley, "What is Negative Theology? The Western Origins," Prudetia, Supplementary Number on The Via Negativa, (1981), writes: "Predication itself involves a threefold structure, that of subject, verb and object, and so it is impossible that it should ever be able to grasp unitary truth without perverting it in some way. The way in which it pervers will be clear: it will multiply the One" (11).
33. "Our negative theology demands as counterpart a 'negative anthropology.'" Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia [Timothy Ware], foreword to Panayiotis Nellas's Defication in Christ, 9.

34. "A&I" 56. According to Vadim Liapunov's note, Tadeusz Zielinski (1859–1944) was a Russian-Polish classical philologist, historian of religion, and philosopher of culture. He was one of Bakhtin's professors at St. Petersburg University. Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) was, of course, the great German historian of Christian dogma.

35. Ware, The Orthodox Church, 232.

36. "Lektsii i vystuplenija M. M. Bakhtina 1924–1925 gg. v zapisakh L. V. Pumplinskogo," 246. See the appendix to this volume.

37. Ware, The Orthodox Church, 208–18, provides a lucid exposition of the theological issues here and in the paragraph above. Also see Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 91–94, 168–73, 180–86.

38. See note 24 above.

39. Ware, The Orthodox Church, 237.


41. The critique of utopianism is an obvious implication of the "apophatic Bakhtin" thesis, as of the "prosaics" interpretation advanced by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson in their Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990).

42. See Caryl Emerson's note, PDP 6.

43. Cf. John D. Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985). "Being as communion" is one of Bakhtin's central concepts (although his context is not necessarily theological).

44. All this clearly relates to one of Bakhtin's most famous passages: "It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature full of event potential and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses" (PDP 81). This aspiration toward pravda, the unitary and unique truth of unity in diversity—the diversity of uniquely valuable persons—is by its nature apophatic.

45. Forty years after Toward a Philosophy of the Act, Bakhtin could still write, "And this sole and irreplaceable position in the world cannot be abolished through any conceptual, generalizing (and abstracting) interpretive activity" ("TRDB" 296).
46. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 179–96, in their analysis of "authoring a self" (in both art and life) in "Author and Hero," stress the spirit's creative transcendence of the forms that others bestow upon it (a more nuanced understanding than Bakhtin himself offers).

47. Confession is another enduring theme for Bakhtin, which is not surprising in view of his work on Dostoevsky. Of the great Russian novelist, Bakhtin wrote, "He depicts confession . . . to show the interdependence of consciousnesses that is revealed during confession. I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another" ("TRDB" 287). See Paul J. Contino's essay, "Zosima, Mikhail, and Prosatic Confessional Dialogue in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*," *Studies in the Novel* 27, no. 1 (1995): 63–86.

48. The best example of the Orthodox practice of the "repetition of prayers" is the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner"). Ann Shukman, "Bakhtin's Tolstoy Prefaces," in *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*, ed. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1989), 137–48, notes that the prayer of the publican is a source of the Jesus Prayer. Shukman writes that the three Gospel episodes that Bakhtin refers to here all relate to the theme of the lack of human self-sufficiency.

49. "Someone" is capitalized in the corresponding passage from "Lektsii i vystuplenia M. M. Bakhtina 1924–25 gg. v zapisakh L. V. Pumpianskogo," 236: "I am infinitely bad, but Someone needs me to be good" (appendix).

50. The first part of this essay demonstrated that Bakhtin saw nothing mysterious in the "internal uniqueness of consciousness." Now, he maintains that the very fact of self-consciousness testifies to the existence of God. The paradox results from Bakhtin's fear that miracle, mystery, and philosophical argument (such as the transcendental irreducibility of consciousness to nature) all diminish faith. Thus, Bakhtin feels it necessary to stress that the purpose in reading another's confessional self-accounting is not theoretical cognition but reproducing within oneself the inner event of faith ("A&H" 149–50).

51. M. I. Tubiansky, a member of Bakhtin's Leningrad circle (Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 102), provides a good formulation of this set of ideas. Miracle and revelation would lead to the atrophy of moral consciousness and thus of human personhood. They would in fact degrade the human relationship to God, "because if there were the slightest assurance, then merit and the possibility of faith would disappear." Tubiansky refers to Kant's postulates of practical reason as one of the links between the human and divine worlds. See Tubiansky's remarks in "Lektsii i vystuplenia M. M. Bakhtina 1924–25 gg. v zapisakh L. V. Pumpianskogo," 244–45, appendix. In his response to Tubiansky, Bakhtin does not acknowledge the large area of agreement between them. It was Bakhtin, after all, who condemned the "forces that lie outside consciousness, externally (mechanically) defining it: from environment and violence to miracle, mystery, and authority. Consciousness
under the influence of these forces loses its authentic freedom, and personality is destroyed" ("TRDB" 297). It is interesting, however, that Bakhtin objects to Tubiansky for taking a rationalistic approach to religion and for neglecting its personal essence: "thus, argumentum ad hominem in religion is fully admissible, as religious logic is not at all philosophical logic." "Lektsii i vystupeniia M. M. Bakhtina 1924–25 gg. v zapisiakh L. V. Pumianskogo," 246, appendix.