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## Dostoevsky and Scholastic Theology: Points of Intersection

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## Достоевский и схоластическая теология: точки пересечения

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**Аннотация:** В статье рассматривается отражение средневековой схоластической теологии в творчестве Ф.М. Достоевского от аллюзии подпольного человека на второе доказательство бытия Божия до трансформации концепции творения Фомы Аквинского в высказываниях Степана Трофимовича Верховенского в «Бесах» и до использования формального приема «pro et contra» в «Братьях Карамазовых» на вербальном и структурном уровне. Аллюзии на «Сумму теологии» также парадоксальным образом связывают идеологию подпольного человека с идеологией его предполагаемых противников-рационалистов через параллели между высказываниями св. Фомы и «Позитивистским катехизисом» О. Конта. Отсылки к теологии Фомы Аквинского, считывавшиеся современниками Достоевского, направлены на то, чтобы сориентировать читателя в философско-религиозном мире самого писателя и его героев.

**Ключевые слова:** «Сумма теологии», творение у Фомы Аквинского, Огюст Конт, Иоганн Готлиб Фихте, схоластический аргумент, «Записки из подполья», «Бесы», «Братья Карамазовы», средневековая герменевтика.

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**Abstract:** The article considers the reflections of scholastic theology in Fyodor Dostoevsky's works; their range spans Dostoevsky's works from *Notes from Underground* where the Underground man alludes to the second proof of the existence of God to *The Devils* where Stepan Verkhovensky transforms Thomas Aquinas's concept of creation in his view of the relationship between man and God. Similar verbal and structural references are also present in *The Brothers Karamazov* where Book Five is titled "Pro and contra." The links with *Summa Theologiae* also paradoxically connect the Underground man's ideology with that of these alleged opponents, the rationalists, by drawing parallels between St. Thomas's arguments and Auguste Comte's *The Catechism of the Positive Religion*. References to Thomas Aquinas's theology were picked up by Dostoevsky's contemporaries and they are intended to guide the readers in the philosophical and religious world of the writer and his characters.

**Keywords:** *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas on creation, Auguste Comte, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, scholastic argument, *Notes from Underground*, *The Devils*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, medieval hermeneutics

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In today's scholarship, the relationship between Dostoevsky and medieval scholastic theology<sup>1</sup> and particularly between the Russian writer and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), a 13<sup>th</sup>-century Dominican theologian, is not extensively explored for obvious reasons since Dostoevsky both in his literary works and in his journalism was not overly fond of Catholics as members of a particular Christian Church. Additionally, Thomas Aquinas was a Dominican, and this is particularly relevant: Pope Gregory IX (Pope in 1227–1241) put the Dominican order in charge of the Inquisition

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<sup>1</sup> When this article was presented as a conference paper, Svetlana A. Martyanova raised the question of the relationship between the western, or Catholic, and eastern, or Orthodox, types of theology. In my view, Orthodox theology, particularly in its purely Orthodox capacity, focused more on personal experience of Divinity (similar to Alyosha's mystical experience during his dream of Cana of Galilee) as opposed to the hard logic of discourse in the West. While the former is the ultimate individual proof (as Alyosha's case evidences), the latter is more communicable and more comprehensible to people who were not granted a mystical feeling of participation. These two types are not mutually exclusive, rather, they are complementary. Additionally, medieval theologians had never viewed rational arguments as the only way of knowing and comprehending God. For them, the principal truths are contained in the Revelation. St. Thomas uses a distinction between articles of faith and preambles to faith [Thomas Aquinas], the former being the revealed truths [New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, p. 764-765], the latter being the truths that can be established by human reason.

[Brockhaus and Efron, 1890–1907, v. 10a, p. 959], and hence they were popularly depicted as two dogs, black and white, scaring wolves away from the Lord's flock and nicknamed "*domini canes*," "the dogs of God," in a punning reference to their name "*dominicani*" [Brockhaus and Efron, 1890–1907, v. 13, p. 199]. Aquinas's Catholicism in general and his affiliation with that specific order in particular would seem to indicate that he would not be an attractive figure for Dostoevsky.

However, scholars have already attempted to draw certain parallels. For instance, Inna Kuznetsova in her article on names in *The Village of Stepanchikovo and its Inhabitants* notes that Thomas Aquinas and Foma Fomich Opiskin share the same first name and also some ideas, even if Opiskin presents Aquinas's thoughts in a highly exaggerated manner [Kuznetsova, 2015, p. 209-210]. In this case, however, the parallel is more palatable since Dostoevsky chooses one of his less attractive characters to borrow ideas from the medieval Dominican theologian and appears to parody them accordingly.

Yet Dostoevsky did put a Catholic crucifix with Mater Dolorosa, the Sorrowing Mother, in the elder Zosima's cell, which indicates that some points of contact and some intersections between his artistic and philosophical thought and the Catholic faith could go beyond parodying.

Previously, I have attempted to show that in *Notes from Underground*, Dostoevsky uses Thomas Aquinas's arguments to help his readers discern those undercurrents in the Underground man's arguments his character himself appears to disguise [Kovalevskaya, 2019].

Dostoevsky's debt to Thomas Aquinas was noted early, immediately after the publication of *Notes from Underground*, and by none other than Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, who mocked *Notes* mercilessly in his mini-play "The Swifts" ("Strizhi") adding, "He borrows his arguments primarily from Thomas Aquinas, but since he never mentions the fact, the reader thinks that these thoughts belong to the narrator".<sup>2</sup>

Even while he was mocking *Notes*, Shchedrin shrewdly saw that the focus of *Notes* was not on social criticism, not on the matter of the "superfluous man" whom the social order prevents from finding his place in the world, but on exclusively metaphysical issues which the narrator disguises, yet they underlie the whole logic of his rebellion. In exposing his narrator, Dostoevsky uses the constructs of medieval theology and particularly Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*.

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<sup>2</sup> Here and elsewhere, unless otherwise specified, Russian translations are mine – T. K. (for the Russian original, see [Saltykov-Shchedrin, 1965–1977, v. 6, p. 493])

Presumably, Dostoevsky could have read the *Summa* in the Latin original. In 1838, he wrote to his father, "I will also tell you that I would not wish to abandon Latin. What a charming language. I am now reading Julius Caesar, and after two years away from Latin I understand every single thing".<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the Latin of Thomas Aquinas was definitely not the Latin of Julius Caesar; Dostoevsky, however, could also have read the former in the French translation since the first volume of *Summa Theologiae* was published in French in 1851 and it included Questions 1 through 74.

In [Kovalevskaya, 2019] I have already pointed out the similarity between *Notes from Underground* and *Summa Theologiae*. I will need to do so again since this reference will form the basis for the subsequent discussion of other references to *Summa Theologiae*. I will quote side by side the parallel texts of *Notes from Underground* and *Summa Theologiae* to show the points of intersection that are of crucial importance for tracing further junctions between the two thinkers.

Where are the primary causes on which I can take a stand? Where are my foundations? Where am I to get them from? I exercise myself in reflection, and consequently with me every primary cause at once draws after itself another still more primary, and so on to infinity. ... [H]e [man] has found a primary cause, [a foundation], that is, justice. ... Spite, of course, might overcome everything, all my doubts, and so might serve quite successfully in place of a primary cause, precisely because

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be

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<sup>3</sup> "Скажу Вам еще, что мне жаль бросить латинского языка. Что за предестный язык. Я теперь читаю Юлия Цезаря и после 2-х годичной разлуки с латинским языком понимаю решительно всё." [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, v. 28, p. 60]

it is not a cause.<sup>4</sup> [Dostoevsky, 2005, p. 20]

several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God [Thomas Aquinas, Quest. 2, Art. 3].

The reference to Thomas Aquinas fills in the name the Underground man refuses or cannot say, the name of God. Thus, his rebellion emerges not just as an uprising against the tyranny of the Philistines, the kind of mutiny that permeated the works of German Romantics and particularly the stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann, but a rebellion against God and an attempt to take His place. A host of references enters the mind of the readers with that reference to God and also drastically changes their perception of the Underground man's mutiny.

Whom does the Underground man laugh at, the person who stupidly "found a cause" and the very quest for that cause, or St. Thomas and his rationalist arguments in *Summa Theologiae*? He well may be ridiculing both. However, *Notes from Underground* is a *tour de force* of layered voicing where quotes can be tripled- or even quadrupled-voiced: an example of a four-voiced quote is the epigraph borrowed from Nikolay Nekrasov's poem. The poem itself has two voices, that of the poet and that of the lyrical persona. The interpretation of the quote in *Notes* is, as Robert L.

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<sup>4</sup> Где у меня первоначальные причины, на которые я упрусь, где основания? Откуда я их возьму? Я упражняюсь в мышлении, а следовательно, у меня всякая первоначальная причина тотчас же тащит за собою другую, ещё первоначальнее, и т. д. в бесконечность. <...> Значит, он [человек] первоначальную причину нашёл, основание нашёл, а именно: справедливость. <...> Злость, конечно, могла бы всё пересилить <...> и, стало быть, могла бы совершенно успешно послужить вместо первоначальной причины именно потому, что она не причина." [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, v. 5, p. 108] Square brackets indicate my emendations in the text.

Jackson noted, also doubled-voiced with the voice of the Underground man being distinct from that of Dostoevsky [Jackson, 1998, p. 144-146]. The allusion to Thomas Aquinas is triple-voiced: there is the voice of St. Thomas himself, the voice of the Underground man who sarcastically paraphrases St. Thomas, and then there is the voice of Dostoevsky who is both within and above the fray. In order to understand the interrelation of the voices of the writer, his anti-hero, and their shared source we also need to look at the acknowledged object of the Underground man's polemics, 19<sup>th</sup> century rationalism.

Traditionally, the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857) is identified as one of the principal targets of the Underground man's rant against the purely rational society with Comte's *Course of Positive Philosophy* and *System of Positive Politics* being most frequently mentioned in that relation. Comte's personal history deserves a few words. He was a student of Henri de Saint-Simon, but eventually drifted away from his teacher judging his views to be overly sentimental and religious [Brockhaus and Efron, 1890–1907, v. 16, p. 122]. Ironically, Comte's subsequent life was thoroughly imbued with both sentimentality and religious impulse, even though that impulse took a rather peculiar turn. Comte married one Caroline Massin; their tumultuous marriage ended in divorce; before his divorce, he met a married woman named Clotilde de Vaux who died in 1846; apparently, their love was purely platonic; following her death, Comte raised de Vaux to an almost religious pedestal. Toward the end of his life, Comte also developed his own non-theistic religious system that resulted in the *Catéchisme positiviste* written in 1852. The religion was called *sociolâtrie*, or sociolatriy, the humanity, *la humanité*, was its goddess, and Comte himself was its high priest.

Everything that is objectionable to Dostoevsky (and the Underground man) in the staunch 19<sup>th</sup> century rationalism fully comes into its own in *The Catechism of Positive Religion*. There, Comte describes freedom as

obeying without hindrance the laws applicable to the case under consideration. When a body falls, it shows its liberty by moving, according to its nature, towards the centre of the earth... ..every vegetative or animal function is said to be free, if it is performed according to the laws applicable to it, without any hindrance from within or from without. ... If human liberty consisted in obeying no law, it would be even more immoral than absurd, as making all regulation impossible, for the individual or for the society. ... No mind can refuse its assent to demonstrations which it

understands. ... The will admits of a liberty similar to that of the intellect, when our good instincts acquire such ascendancy as to bring the impulse of affection into harmony with its true purpose, overcoming the antagonist motors [Comte, 1891, p. 160].

This is precisely what the Underground man is arguing against, and this is also the foundation of a new religious system with laws the Underground man so vehemently denies forming its center. What is important, however, is that Comte founds his religion on laws by discarding causes. Causes are mentioned specifically to be rejected. Comte states that “the Positive faith sets forth directly the real laws of the different phenomena observable, whether internal or external; i.e., their unvarying relations of succession and resemblance, which enable us to foresee some as a consequence of others. It puts aside, as absolutely beyond our reach and essentially idle, all inquiry into causes properly so called, first or final, of any events whatever” [Comte, 1891, p. 41].<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, we have something of a paradox here. Once the Underground man implies a mocking reference to Thomas Aquinas and to a successful search for a “primary cause” while simultaneously proclaiming his own inability to find said cause, he finds himself on the same ideological ground as his opponent Auguste Comte who founds his system on laws because he cannot find causes either and, conscious of this inability, does not even attempt the quest. The Underground man may be laughing at the voice of *Summa Theologiae*, but the third voice in that multi-layered statement implies that he is, in fact, tacitly acknowledging his kinship with what he strives to refute. The allusion to Thomas Aquinas also explains why the two seeming opposites find themselves on the same ideological platform: the first cause they deny is God. Without God, Comte can only institute laws as the ultimate binding force in his worldview, while the Underground man attempts to install his individual will in place of the universal one.

The Underground man sees the positivist view of life as a sort of tyranny he strives to subvert. Yet, in addition to hinting at his unexpected kinship with Comte, the allusion to St. Thomas serves to identify the Underground man’s effort as ultimately theomachistic. We read the Underground man’s story backwards. We start with his philosophical manifesto in Part I and then go back to his formative years in Part II where he initially presents himself in a manner that reminds the audience of a quintessential

<sup>5</sup> This parallel has been noted in [Kovalevskaya, 2020, p. 98]; here, it is developed further.



Romantic hero at war with his mundane surroundings that fail to understand him. Eventually, however, he confesses to being a tyrant incapable of any other relationship other than lording it over others, including those he claims to love: “I cannot get on without domineering and tyrannising over someone” [Dostoevsky, 2005, p. 131]<sup>6</sup>; “...by then I was incapable of love, for I repeat, with me loving meant tyrannising and showing my moral superiority. I have never in my life been able to imagine any other sort of love, and have nowadays come to the point of sometimes thinking that love really consists in the right – freely given by the beloved object – to tyrannise over her” [Dostoevsky, 2005, p. 133].<sup>7</sup> The mentioning of tyranny changes the picture from that of an unwelcoming world giving the cold shoulder to a young and sensitive person to that of a tyrannical and egotistical being whom the world shuns out of self-preservation. Robert L. Jackson noted in *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes* [Jackson, 1998, p. 142] that the Underground man’s actions toward Liza represent a parallel to Raskolnikov’s murder of the old pawnbroker and Lizaveta: having heard the Underground man’s cruel tirade, Liza “sank on a chair as though she had been felled by an axe” [Dostoevsky, 2005, p. 129].<sup>8</sup>

Yet this idea of tyranny is present already in Part I, entering the text surreptitiously and just as surreptitiously guiding the readers toward a particular viewpoint; one of the ways for it to enter the text is through the reference to “spite” (*zlost’*) attempting to replace the Primary Cause.

Evil (*zlo*) emerges in the universe when Lucifer attempts to dethrone God and take His place. One of the most famous and probably one of the most debated representations of Lucifer is John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*<sup>9</sup> where Lucifer depicts himself as a fighter against tyranny, while in fact he intends to replace the alleged tyranny of God with his own that, judging by his monologues prior to seducing Eve, will be, indeed, a true arbitrary tyranny that refuses to admit of any responsibility or accountability for his actions. The “borrowing” (to use Shchedrin’s words) from Aquinas alerts the reader to this question of imitating Lucifer and, consequently, to the

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<sup>6</sup> “Без власти и тиранства над кем-нибудь я ведь не могу прожить.” [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, v. 5, p. 175]

<sup>7</sup> “<...> я и полюбить уж не мог, потому что <...> любить у меня – значило тиранствовать и нравственно превосходить. Я всю жизнь не мог даже представить себе иной любви и до того дошел, что иногда теперь думаю, что любовь-то и заключается в добровольно дарованном от любимого предмета праве над ним тиранствовать.” [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, v. 5, p. 176]

<sup>8</sup> “как будто ее топором подсекали, упала на стул.” [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, v. 5, p. 173]

<sup>9</sup> The epic poem was repeatedly translated into Russian from French, English and “a foreign tongue” (1795) starting as early as 1777 (a translation from English by V. Petrov).



question of usurpation and tyranny early on; therefore, equally early on, this “borrowing” demonstrates that the Underground man’s stance is **not** what the readers should identify with. Being against something together does not equal being in favor of something together. That is, the fact that Dostoevsky and the Underground man are both vigorously opposed to the Comtian view of human beings does not mean that they suggest the same path as the proper alternative.

The tricky part of *Notes from Underground* is that the Underground man’s stance of fighting the blind tyranny of the universe resonates with his readers, and, unless they astutely judge **both** what is said and what is left unsaid, they commit the easy fallacy of assigning to the Underground man the side the readers should take.<sup>10</sup> Shchedrin’s “The Swifts” is particularly interesting and valuable not merely as a pointer to the theological allusions in Dostoevsky, but as a confirmation of the fact that Dostoevsky’s contemporaries could “pick up” on these references. How they read them is another matter, but these references were clearly identifiable. The reader is intended to follow the course of the philosophical argument through to the missing word “God” that is being “reconstructed” from Aquinas’s argument and see the Underground man’s rebellion for what it is: an attempt to usurp the place of God and to install himself as the defining power in the universe thus trying to repeat Lucifer’s attempt to install his tyranny in the universe. The Underground man does not fight the positivists solely as his adversaries; he also fights them as his competitors and rivals; both want to replace God with something else; Comte wants to replace God with humanity, the Underground man wants to replace Him with himself. And Dostoevsky is the *via tertia* that suggests God as the answer to the problem of a human being who cannot find their place in the universe.

The rationalist arguments of St. Thomas link the Underground man with the theomachistic drive and also help uncover the overlapping and the competition between him and his alleged enemies changing their relations to those of rivalry. These rational arguments are necessary for exposing the unexpected **connection** between the Underground man and his rational opponents. They both strive for the same goal, overthrowing God; they differ radically, however, on the replacement they wish to see installed in God’s place.

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<sup>10</sup> That was the logic of many a student reading *Notes from Underground* and interpreting it exclusively on the strength of what the Underground man claims and not on the strength of what he deliberately omits.

The references to Aquinas's arguments related to the nature, attributes, and power continue in *The Devils*. Early in the novel, Stepan Verkhovensky addresses the issue of faith in God. "Our teacher believed in God. 'I can't understand why they make me out an infidel here,' he used to say sometimes. 'I believe in God, mais distinguons, I believe in Him as a Being who is conscious of Himself in me only. ... As for Christianity, for all my genuine respect for it, I'm not a Christian. I am more of an antique pagan, like the great Goethe, or like an ancient Greek'" [Dostoevsky, 1936, p. 21].<sup>11</sup>

It is likely that the immediate source of Verkhovensky's wording is Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (*The Vocation of Man*, 1800), where he says the following about nature: "...in man, as her highest masterpiece, she turns inwards that she may perceive and contemplate herself; in him she, as it were, doubles herself, and, from being mere existence, becomes existence and consciousness in one" [Fichte, 1931, p. 19]. In *The Vocation of Man*, Fichte, however, does not present a straightforward exposition of his own philosophical system. Instead, he goes through a whole series of anthropological concepts, carefully developing and then discarding them one by one, and the notion of Nature becoming conscious of herself in man is one of such rejected ideas. It is not my purpose here to focus on Fichte as such though,<sup>12</sup> my primary

<sup>11</sup> "В Бога учитель наш веровал. 'Не понимаю, почему меня все здесь выставляют безбожником? – говаривал он иногда, – я в Бога верую, mais distinguons, я верую, как в существо, себя лишь во мне сознающее. ... Что же касается до христианства, то, при всём моём искреннем к нему уважении, я – не христианин. Я скорее древний язычник, как великий Гёте, или как древний грек.'" [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, v. 10, p. 33].

<sup>12</sup> Igor Evlampiev has consistently written on Dostoevsky and Fichte [for instance, Evlampiev 2016] and presented several papers on Fichtean "Christianity" at Dostoevsky conferences in St. Petersburg depicting the Russian writer as a clear follower of the German thinker. Fichte was not, strictly speaking, a Christian, and his concession to the traditional Christianity was merely a concession to tradition. He denied the concept of creation, denied the reality of sin and, crucially, he denied the divinity of Christ. Denying creation in his *The Way Toward Blessed Life*, he does not offer any explanation at all of how human beings came to be separate from God; presumably, he envisioned some unidentified and unspecified process or even a leap by which a human being becomes distinct from God, but once the human being realizes that gap, they are able, through their own actions, to go back to being one with Divinity. Fichte was claimed to be a Christian of the Gnostic persuasion. This categorization appears dubious if for the simple reason that Fichte is not a dualist; the trademark Gnostic system of two creator gods has no place in the philosophical system that denies creation as such. What he appears closest to is pantheism [Copleston, 1993–1994, v. 7, p. 92-93] or even the Cabbalistic teaching of *adam kadmon*, "a being of light formed ... as the beginning of the process of emanation. *Adam kadmon* is a transcendent manifestation of God Himself, personalized structure made out of the *sefirot*, (the powers in which God became manifest). ... [However] some of lower sefirotic lights forming *adam kadmon* broke the vessels that were meant to contain them ... leaving sparks of light trapped in the broken pieces. Although the creative process was partially rectified by God, it is up to man to complete the rectification ... by

focus is on the idea of the creative power that creates in order to become conscious of itself in the highest of its creations.

Fichte's concept and its rejection both can be traced back to medieval scholastic theology and Thomas Aquinas once again. (Parenthetically, it is curious to note that Dostoevsky consistently finds certain kinship with those philosophers who give a large amount of place in their works to the concepts they refute. The same applies to Thomas Aquinas and his discussion mode that I will address later in the article.) In Question 44 in *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas dwells on the relationship between the Creator and creatures as regards creation and teleology:

...Every agent acts for an end: otherwise one thing would not follow more than another from the action of the agent, unless it were by chance. Now the end of the agent and of the patient considered as such is the same, but in a different way respectively. For the impression which the agent intends to produce, and which the patient intends to receive, are one and the same. Some things, however, are both agent and patient at the same time: these are imperfect agents, and to these it belongs to intend, even while acting, the acquisition of something. **But it does not belong to the First Agent, Who is agent only, to act for the acquisition of some end; He intends only to communicate His perfection, which is His goodness;** while every creature intends to acquire its own perfection, which is the likeness of the divine perfection and goodness. Therefore the divine goodness is the end of all things. Reply to Objection 1. To act from need belongs only to an imperfect agent, which by its nature is both agent and patient. But this does not belong to God, and therefore **He alone is the most perfectly liberal giver, because He does not act for His own profit, but only for His own goodness** [Thomas Aquinas, Quest. 44, Art. 4].

Once again, we are coming back to a human being's relationship with God and a human being's attempts to replace God with himself. Verkhovensky Sr. attempts to do the same thing as the Underground man, but he employs a different tack.

As Frederick Copleston treats Aquinas's concept of creation, he writes about God that "as infinite perfection, He is self-sufficient" [Copleston, raising the remaining sparks back to their divine source" [Unterman, 1991, p. 12]. While Fichtean philosophy seems to be very close to some of Dostoevsky's thoughts, its non-Christian underpinnings, and primarily his denial of the divinity of Christ and the reality of sin, make Dostoevsky the Fichtean highly unlikely (On the possibility of different interpretations of allegedly Fichtean features in Dostoevsky see [Malinov, Kupriianov, 2019]).

1993–1994, v. 2, p. 365]. *Ergo*, God does not need anything and He does not need creatures in order to know Himself. (St. Thomas considered the issue of God’s perfection in Question 2 of Part 1 of *Summa Theologiae*.) “As infinite perfection, God cannot have created in order to acquire anything for Himself: He created not to obtain, but to give, to diffuse His goodness” [Copleston, 1993–1994, v. 2, p. 365].

However, if God creates in order to cognize Himself in His creatures, it means precisely that He **needs** creation and creatures. Verkhovensky Sr.’s claim therefore denies God’s perfection and it also denies His goodness He wishes to give to creation out of His own free will. Once God ceases to be perfect, the rest of Christian theology crumbles as well: first, since God needs His creatures, we may conjecture that they no longer fully depend on Him in their existence;<sup>13</sup> consequently, we are no longer sure that they need God as their Primary Cause (and here we come back once again to the Underground man and his attempt to replace God in the second argument for the existence of God). There are now philosophical grounds to claim that human beings are, in some ways, more perfect than God since it is God, as Verkhovensky Sr. contends, needs man, and not vice versa. The Creator and the creature change places, and the subsequent metaphysical core of the novel is formulated at its very outset in a short sentence whose idea will serve as the soil from which the detailed and verbose theories of Verkhovensky Sr.’s biological and spiritual children will sprout. The understanding of Verkhovensky Sr.’s essentially erroneous religious philosophy largely rests on understanding medieval scholastic theology and its carefully developed ideas about the principles of creation and the relationship between the Creator and His creatures.

*Summa Theologiae* surfaces once again, almost openly this time, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, in the book titled “Pro and contra,” Latin for “in favor” and “against.”

Dostoevsky himself wrote to Konstantin Pobedonostsev: “...this book is the culmination of my novel, it is titled ‘Pro and Contra,’ and its point is blasphemy and refutation of blasphemy. I have finished the blasphemy part and mailed it off, and the refutation will only be mailed in for the June issue”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> René Descartes in *Meditations on First Philosophy* writes that “all things which cannot exist without being created by God are in their nature incorruptible, and that they can never cease to exist unless God, in denying to them his concurrence, reduce them to nought” [Descartes, 1996, p. 56].

<sup>14</sup> “...эта книга в романе у меня кульминационная, называется ‘Про и contra,’ а смысл книги: богохульство и опровержение богохульства. Богохульство-то вот это закончено

“Pro and contra” is a reference to the form Thomas Aquinas in particular used in his treatises. Today’s dictionaries of philosophy define “pro et contra” as a “scholastic method of disputing when two series of contradictory elements are proposed” [Ilichev, Fedoseev, Kovalev, Panov, 1983, p. 824]. This description, however, fails to convey the specific structure of such scholastic arguments. “Two series of contradictory elements” applies to any debate or dispute, otherwise it would not be called a dispute and would qualify as an exposition.

For today’s person, a debate also necessarily involves two series of contradictory arguments, yet they are presented in a manner very different from medieval scholastics. If, for instance, the subject of a debate is “Is God good and His creation good?” the two parties engaged in the dispute propose their arguments trading their pro et contra. If such debates are public, an audience member will likely think that pro/in favor arguments claim “God is good” and “contra/against” arguments prove that He is not good. The audience or a panel of adjudicators or a single arbiter listen to the arguments proposed and render their verdict on the winner. A competitive court hearing would be a perfect example of such a debate.<sup>15</sup>

In *Summa Theologiae*, the audience plays no adjudicating role at all in any way, shape or form. St. Thomas expounds his arguments *ex contrario*. Arguments “pro” uphold the statement he wants to **disprove**. In this case, this contrary statement is “God is not good,” and arguments “pro” support this negative claim. Therefore, in debating the question of whether God is good, St. Thomas will first propose arguments proving that goodness does not belong to God. These arguments are proposed together and “heard” in sequence with no interruptions. Once they are expounded, the definitive answer is given and arguments “contra” are proposed; they refute the statement the arguments “pro” support, and they affirm the conclusion St. Thomas wants to reach and prove.

I will allow myself a lengthy quote from *Summa Theologiae* to show how this works:

Article 1. Whether God is good?

Objection 1. It seems that to be good does not belong to God.

For goodness consists in mode, species and order. But these do not seem to

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и отослано, а опровержение пошлю лишь на июньскую книгу.” [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, v. 30<sup>1</sup>, p. 66]

<sup>15</sup> On other forms of “performative” disputations fitting more closely with the modern idea of debates see [Novikoff, 2013, p. 133-147].

belong to God; since God is immense and is not ordered to anything else. Therefore to be good does not belong to God.

Objection 2. Further, the good is what all things desire. But all things do not desire God, because all things do not know Him; and nothing is desired unless it is known. Therefore to be good does not belong to God.

On the contrary, It is written (Lamentations 3:25): “The Lord is good to them that hope in Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.”

I answer that, To be good belongs pre-eminently to God. For a thing is good according to its desirableness. Now everything seeks after its own perfection; and the perfection and form of an effect consist in a certain likeness to the agent, since every agent makes its like; and hence the agent itself is desirable and has the nature of good. For the very thing which is desirable in it is the participation of its likeness. Therefore, since God is the first effective cause of all things, it is manifest that the aspect of good and of desirableness belong to Him; and hence Dionysius (Div. Nom. iv) attributes good to God as to the first efficient cause, saying that, God is called good “as by Whom all things subsist.”

Reply to Objection 1. To have mode, species and order belongs to the essence of caused good; but good is in God as in its cause, and hence it belongs to Him to impose mode, species and order on others; wherefore these three things are in God as in their cause.

Reply to Objection 2. All things, by desiring their own perfection, desire God Himself, inasmuch as the perfections of all things are so many similitudes of the divine being; as appears from what is said above (I:4:3). And so of those things which desire God, some know Him as He is Himself, and this is proper to the rational creature; others know some participation of His goodness, and this belongs also to sensible knowledge; others have a natural desire without knowledge, as being directed to their ends by a higher intelligence [Thomas Aquinas, Quest. 6, Art. 1].

In this mode of debating, arguments “pro” are not to be expanded and augmented, while arguments “contra” are final and non-debatable. With such a strict arrangement model in place, a certain structure of the expectations and a certain structure of response to the arguments presented are introduced.

As has been stated, arguments “pro” are proposed first and in a single go, i.e. they are expounded all together. Arguments “contra” must follow arguments “pro,” but theoretically, they can be of any length. Their number is restricted by the number of “pro” arguments, but that section additionally features a conclusion followed by the “contra arguments,”

and that conclusion can theoretically run into any lengths. Arguments “contra” are, therefore, in a preferential position. Additionally, arguments “contra” are expected to provide final and irrefutable proof of what the author of the text wants to prove, “God and creation are good.”

Consequently, in selecting the Latin terms “pro et contra,” Dostoevsky uses them to denote those arguments the reader should agree with (and the letter to Pobedonostsev proves it since he describes them as “blasphemy” and “refutation of blasphemy” in just that order). He suggests where the reader should find the guiding voice, because the arguments “contra” are the arguments their author intends to be the decisive ones. Such an arrangement of arguments does not **force** readers to agree, but it suggests the stance the authorial voice takes.<sup>16</sup>

The ubiquitous presence of medieval theology throughout Dostoevsky’s works (confirmed by the testimony of Dostoevsky’s contemporaries who spotted scholastic references in the writer’s works) demonstrates the writer’s consistency and coherence throughout his works, from the start of his literary career to its conclusion. He is focused on resolving the mystery of the human being and their aspirations ranging from social to metaphysical, and medieval scholastic theology is also linked to the core of Dostoevsky’s religious and philosophical thought on the human being.

As a formal device, the scholastic mode of dispute helps structure the writer’s argument in a particular manner putting the tenets he supports in a clearly identifiable position. As regards contents, theological arguments refer to the ambitions of human beings who attempt to establish their will as the universally dominant one at every level, from interpersonal, to societal, to metaphysical. These theological references are interspersed throughout Dostoevsky’s works as pointers to the authorial voice the reader is to identify as suggesting the path believed to be the right one for human beings. Whether Dostoevsky’s readers agree with that path is still up to them, just as it is up to human beings themselves in the writer’s works.

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<sup>16</sup> When this article was presented as a conference paper, Galina M. Rebel raised the logical question of the relationship between the Bakhtinian polyphony and the *pro et contra* argument structure and its intended “monological” conclusion. This structuring does not contradict the polyphonic principle, but helps readers identify the authorial voice leaving it to their choice, however, whether they agree or disagree with it. About the influence scholastic disputation had on the development of polyphony in various forms of medieval music see [Novikoff, 2013, p. 147-155]



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