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### The Influence of Russian Fiction on the Idea of Life and Death in Russian Philosophy

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#### Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the influence of Russian fiction on the formation of the idea of life and death in Russian philosophy of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The author names modern Russian scientists who directly or indirectly affect this topic in their scientific works. The article justifies the need to conduct this study to deepen the existing knowledge about the origins of Russian philosophy, as well as to apply the results obtained in the educational process of a modern university. Analysis of the Russian philosophers' works allows the author to establish the criteria for the difference between philosophical works and artworks, to search in the works of S. N. Bulgakov, N. A. Berdyaev, S. L. Frank and A. F. Losev for the names of Russian writers and poets whose literary work contributed to their interest in existential issues. It is emphasized that the formation of the idea of life and death in Russian philosophy took place not only under the influence of the impression received by philosophers from acquaintance with the fate of the heroes of fiction, but also under the influence of information about the biography of the classic authors of Russian literature that created them, as well as the main motives of their artistic creativity.


**Keywords:** Russian fiction, spiritual situation, birth, life, death, meaning of life, Russian philosophy.

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### Влияние русской художественной литературы на представление о жизни и смерти в русской философии

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#### Аннотация

Статья посвящена исследованию влияния русской художественной литературы на формирование представления о жизни и смерти в русской философии XIX–XX веков. Автор называет современных российских учёных, прямо или косвенно затрагивающих данную тему в своих научных работах. В статье обосновывается необходимость проведения данного исследования для углубления имеющихся знаний об истоках русской философии, а также

для применения полученных результатов в воспитательном процессе современного вуза. Анализирование трудов русских философов позволяет автору установить критерии различия между философскими и художественными произведениями, осуществить поиск в трудах С. Н. Булгакова, Н. А. Бердяева, С. Л. Франка и А. Ф. Loseva имён русских писателей и поэтов, чьё литературное творчество способствовало возникновению у них интереса к экзистенциальной проблематике. Подчеркивается, что формирование представления о жизни и смерти в русской философии происходило не только под влиянием впечатления, полученного философами от знакомства с судьбами героев художественных произведений, но и под влиянием сведений о биографии создавших их классиков русской литературы, а также основных мотивов их художественного творчества.

**Ключевые слова:** русская художественная литература, духовная ситуация, рождение, жизнь, смерть, смысл жизни, русская философия.

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**Introduction.** A special role in the formation of the youth values system in Russia has always belonged to Russian fiction which has not only the amazing beauty of the word but also a deep life-affirming meaning. Russian writers were able to embody in their works a special idea of life and death characteristic only of Russian culture. Many famous writers who later became classic authors of Russian literature preferred to express their philosophical ideas through works of fiction, and not scientific articles, as was the case in the West which created certain difficulties for scientists trying to distinguish between Russian philosophy and fiction.

The appeal to Russian fiction today is due to the need of modern Russian youth to obtain knowledge about the value and meaning of life, as the domestic teacher R. V. Bazaliy writes in her article “Development of spiritual values among students in educational activities” [1]. Most of the dissertation research and scientific articles in the field of the influence of Russian literature on the formation of the value system of the younger generation in Russia occurred in the early 2000s. At this time, dissertation studies were conducted by M. A. Bondarenko “Education of moral qualities among university students: on the example of domestic literature” [7], M. S. Bobrova “Spiritual and moral formation of a student in the educational process of a university” [6], and the scientific article by A. V. Pushkina “The influence of fiction on the formation of the ideals of modern Russian youth” was published [14].

The difficult spiritual situation that has now developed in the ranks of student youth in Russia entails the need to re-appeal to the study of the axiological aspect of Russian fiction, the positive impact of which on young people could be described as follows: “Forming a worldview, it is directly involved in the formation of personality. Having different content, fiction brings certain characteristic qualities, changes a man’s personality, forms a system of individual’s values” [11, p. 144].

The acquaintance of young people with story lines of early literary works unknown to them, the search for philosophical ideas about life and death embedded in them, as well as a new look at the already read books of Russian writers should help preserve the system of spiritual values traditional for Russian culture, help young people find the meaning of life, and improve the quality of education. Therefore, one of the most important tasks facing the field of higher education in Russia today is the application of ideas about the value and meaning of life laid down in Russian fiction in the educational process of a modern university.

While another equally important task set before modern science is to conduct a thorough study of Russian fiction in order to find ideas about life and death that served as a source of philosophy in Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries. And if the study of the Russian philosophy influence of this period on subsequent Russian fiction has received a high degree of development in modern science, then the establishment of reverse influence, especially in the context of the axiology of life and death, needs additional research.

**Materials and Methods.** The purpose of this study is to determine the degree of influence that the works of Russian fiction had on the formation of the idea of life and death in Russian philosophy of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The formulation of the purpose of the study entails the need to accomplish the following tasks: establishing criteria for the difference between artworks and philosophical works based on the material of Russian philosophy; searching for the names of Russian writers in the works of philosophers whose artworks had the greatest influence on their philosophy, as well as on the formation of philosophy in Russia as a whole; identification among the literary works of an existential nature noted by Russian thinkers which deal with the value and meaning of life, birth and death of a man.

The following methods of scientific research are used in this article: analysis, synthesis, historical and descriptive methods. Thanks to the use of methods of analysis and synthesis in the works of S. N. Bulgakov, N. A. Berdyaev, S. L. Frank and A. F. Losev, a number of Russian writers and poets whose artistic creativity contributed to the emergence of interest in existential problems among domestic thinkers is pointed out. The use of historical and descriptive methods of scientific research makes it possible to establish the attitude of Russian philosophers to the phenomena of life and death.

**Results.** Thus, Russian fiction had a significant impact on the formation of Russian philosophy as a whole in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The study has found that, despite the similarity of Russian fiction and Russian philosophy, such famous Russian thinkers as S. N. Bulgakov and A. F. Losev clearly distinguished philosophical works from artworks. Among the differences highlighted by thinkers there was the use of philosophical terminology, the presence of a logical construction of the work as well as the need for preliminary preparation for its understanding.

The greatest influence on the formation of ideas about life and death in Russian philosophy was exerted by the works of F. M. Dostoevsky and L. N. Tolstoy in which the problems of life and death come to the fore. The most significant writers whose literary work had a significant impact on the formation of philosophy in Russia in addition to F. M. Dostoevsky and L. N. Tolstoy were A. S. Pushkin, M. Yu. Lermontov, E. A. Baratynsky, F. I. Tyutchev, N. V. Gogol, N. S. Leskov, Vs. M. Garshin, Gl. I. Uspensky and A. P. Chekhov.

Each of the Russian philosophers distinguished one or more domestic writers, acquaintance with the artworks of which had the greatest influence on his own philosophical view. For S. N. Bulgakov it was A. P. Chekhov, for N. A. Berdyaev, A. S. Pushkin, F. M. Dostoevsky and L. N. Tolstoy, for S. L. Frank the poet F. I. Tyutchev, for A. F. Losev, F. M. Dostoevsky. Representatives of Russian philosophy drew attention not only to the life and death of the main characters of artworks, but also to the fate of the Russian writers who created them, among whom the personalities of A. S. Pushkin and L. N. Tolstoy aroused particular interest.

Thanks to the great influence of Russian fiction, existential problems, which for many years determined interest in the study of topics related to birth, the search for meaning and determination of the value of human life, fear of death, and reflections on the afterlife of the soul, came out on the foreground in Russian philosophy of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Discussion and Conclusions.** Such famous philosophers as S. N. Bulgakov, N. A. Berdyaev, S. L. Frank and A. F. Losev named in their works the names of Russian writers who had the greatest influence on the development of philosophical thought in Russia. S. N. Bulgakov considered the writer and playwright A. P. Chekhov to be one of the most outstanding and underestimated Russian philosophers. This statement was laid down by him as the basis of the essay “Chekhov as a thinker”. The uniqueness of A. P. Chekhov as a thinker, according to S. N. Bulgakov, consisted in a very subtle understanding of the psychology of a believer, in which A. P. Chekhov bypassed L. N. Tolstoy and approached F.M. Dostoevsky as much as possible, as well as in the writer’s magnificent presentation of the topic of mental strength lack for a person to transform his own life: “Chekhov artistically fully posed the problem of mediocrity, mental and moral limitations, spiritual philistinism which neutralizes life for you and others, makes it boring and hateful. Therefore, one

cannot use the established word usage about Chekhov and talk about Chekhov's "heroes", for the complete absence of the heroic in his characters is their main and most characteristic feature" [8, p. 12].

This problem was brilliantly indicated by A. P. Chekhov in "The Story of an Unknown Man", the heroes of which are trying to answer the question about the reason for the fading of stuffy forces among humans over the years. Literary characters of A. P. Chekhov are also concerned about the philosophical problem of finding the meaning of life. According to S. N. Bulgakov, many characters of A. P. Chekhov's stories see joy in life and are delighted with it, as the writer shows in the story "Student": "... a sense of youth, health, strength — he was only 22 years old — and the inexpressibly sweet expectation of happiness, unknown, mysterious happiness got control over him little by little, and life seemed to him amazing, wonderful and full of high meaning" [17, p. 160]. Despite the philosophical ideas laid down in the artworks of A. P. Chekhov, S. N. Bulgakov nevertheless distinguished philosophical works from artistic ones by the presence of philosophical terminology in them and the need for preliminary philosophical preparation for correct understanding.

Praising the artistic skills of A. P. Chekhov S. N. Bulgakov named F. M. Dostoevsky, L. N. Tolstoy, Vs. M. Garshin and Gl. I. Uspensky as writers who had the greatest influence on Russian philosophy. The philosopher emphasized the existence of differences between philosophical works and artworks. Like the heroes of Chekhov's works, he called life one of the most important values for a man, a divine gift and had enthusiastic feelings towards it.

Another Russian religious thinker N. A. Berdyaev considered the main topics of Russian fiction to be the search for the meaning of life and the salvation of humanity from evil and suffering. Against the background of many Russian writers, the philosopher especially distinguished the literary style of A. S. Pushkin, since he believed that thanks to his poetry and prose, in fact, the formation of the Russian language and literature took place. N. A. Berdyaev believed that one of the central themes of A. S. Pushkin's works was the topic of human freedom in terms of improving his own life, and the main motive of his literary work was joy and inspiration. N. A. Berdyaev compared the artistic style of A. S. Pushkin with the artistic style of writers of the Renaissance. According to the thinker the literary work of A. S. Pushkin contributed to the emergence of the following classic authors of Russian literature: N. V. Gogol, F. M. Dostoevsky and L. N. Tolstoy.

Unlike the motive of A. S. Pushkin, the motive of F. M. Dostoevsky's works is compassion for people with a difficult fate: "Schism, apostasy, wandering, impossibility of reconciliation with the present, striving for the upcoming, for the better, fairer life are characteristic features of the intelligentsia" [5, p. 29]. One of the central philosophical problems in the artworks of F. M. Dostoevsky was the enthusiasm of the intelligentsia for the ideas of anthropotheism which was reflected in the novels "Demons" and "Crime and Punishment". The study of this phenomenon, the opposition of the man-God to the God-man or Jesus Christ will later become one of the main topics of N. A. Berdyaev's philosophy.

N. A. Berdyaev also showed special interest in the artworks and personality of L. N. Tolstoy. The philosopher believed that L. N. Tolstoy had lived an interesting life at the end of which large-scale changes took place in his way of thinking. If L. N. Tolstoy was a rationalist throughout almost his entire life who rejected everything that could not be explained logically, then "at the end of his life the great old man returned to mysticism, mystical notes sound stronger and drown out his rationalism. He was preparing for the latest coup" [4, p. 144]. The attitude of N. A. Berdyaev to the work of L. N. Tolstoy was ambiguous. N. A. Berdyaev wrote in one of his works: "Dostoevsky was always closer to me. But in my early youth, almost in my adolescence, the first uprising against the evil and untruth of the surrounding life, the first desire to realize the truth in the life of personal and social, is associated with L. Tolstoy. "War and Peace" always gave me an acute sense of my homeland and my origin" [3, p. 76].

According to N. A. Berdyaev, L. N. Tolstoy was interested in the topics of life and death, the meaning of life, the "search for a perfect life", love, fear of death, memory of death. But N. A. Berdyaev could not help but recognize the merits of L. N. Tolstoy which the writer achieved in describing the spiritual experiences of the common people, peasants.

In addition, the writer's thoughts were occupied by the ethical problem of the contradiction between the life goals of a man and the choice of means to achieve them: "A man strives for freedom as a goal and he is so absorbed in violence as a means for this goal that he forgets about freedom. A man strives for love and brotherhood as a goal and he is so absorbed in hatred and strife as a means for this goal that he forgets about love and brotherhood" [2, p. 259].

Thus, thanks to the acquaintance of N. A. Berdyaev with the artworks of A. S. Pushkin, F. M. Dostoevsky and L. N. Tolstoy, as well as the biographies of these writers, the sphere of his scientific interests was formed which included the problems of freedom and creativity, life and death, humanity and God-mankind.

Russian religious philosopher S. L. Frank in his work "Russian Worldview" noted that reading fiction allows him to answer questions regarding the meaning of a man's life, to help determine the vector of his spiritual development. The thinker called Russian literature "... one of the deepest, philosophically comprehending life" [16]. Among the most significant Russian writers and poets, S. L. Frank singled out A.S. Pushkin whom he also called "Russian Goethe", M. Yu. Lermontov, F. I. Tyutchev, N. V. Gogol, N. S. Leskov, Ch. I. Uspensky, at the same time, emphasizing the unprecedented influence of F. M. Dostoevsky on the understanding of human psychology and on the development of all Russian philosophy.

S. L. Frank's special attention was focused on the work of F. I. Tyutchev whom he called the poet-thinker. One of the features of F. I. Tyutchev's poetry was the appeal to the philosophical categories of eternal and temporary which was present in the poem "Bright snow shone in the valley". In another poem, "Dream at Sea", the poet created the image of the mountain world which was opposed by the world of valleys as the earth opposed the sky. S. L. Frank believed that the poetry of F. I. Tyutchev expressed his deep philosophical and religious ideas about life and death through the numerous poetic images which he had created.

The dissertation study "The artistic world of prose of A. F. Losev and its origins" by the domestic philologist E. A. Tahoe-Godi is devoted to the topic of the influence of Russian fiction on philosophy of A. F. Losev. According to the scientist "Losev has been living in the world of books since his youth, his main behaviour in his youth is reading, and he reads not only scientific, philosophical literature, but also the works of Russian classic authors and contemporary writers, and poets of the late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries" [15, p. 37]. A. F. Losev believed that the main difference between philosophical works and artworks lies in their structure: "There can be a lot of philosophical in a novel. But the novel is still not a philosophy, even if it contains philosophical thoughts and intuitions. And the thing is that the system of a novel or a poem is a poetic system, and the system of philosophy is logical" [13, p. 671]. Nevertheless, the philosopher admitted that the literary works of F. M. Dostoevsky and L. N. Tolstoy contain more philosophical ideas than in the doctrine of Plato's ideas.

According to E.A. Tahoe-Godi, A. F. Losev was greatly influenced by the philosophical teachings of V. S. Solovyov as well as the poetry and prose of A. S. Pushkin, F. M. Dostoevsky and L. N. Tolstoy. The attention of A. F. Losev was riveted not only to the works themselves, but also to the personalities of the people who created them as it was with the personality of A. S. Pushkin whose life path the philosopher compared with the autumn forest, which is desperately resisting winter. According to E. A. Tahoe-Godi poems by A. S. Pushkin "A gift in vain, a gift accidental"..., "Life, why are you given to me?" as well as the story "Captain's Daughter" influenced the idea of A. F. Losev about the meaning of life.

The great influence on the idea of A. F. Losev about life and death was also made by the works of F. M. Dostoevsky. Like F. M. Dostoevsky A. F. Losev considered the birth of a child to be a miracle, a unique event. Having received the news of a child's birth, the hero of the novel of F. M. Dostoevsky, Shatov has strong feelings: "Have fun, Arina Prokhorovna... It's a great joy... — Shatov has mumbled with an idiotically blessed look, shining after two words of Marie about the child... — The mystery of the birth of a new creature, the great mystery and inexplicable, Arina Prokhorovna, and what a pity that you do not understand this!" [9, p. 529]. Following F. M. Dostoevsky, the philosopher called a miracle not only the appearance of a man in the world, but also his life as a whole: "Everyone experienced this strange feeling, when it suddenly becomes strange that people go, eat, sleep, are born, die, quarrel, love, etc., when suddenly all this is assessed from the point of view of some other, forgotten and scolded being, when all life suddenly appears as an endless symbol,



as a complex myth, as an amazing miracle” [12, p. 360]. Life is a unique divine gift which a man does not want to put an end to like Rodion Raskolnikov: “Where is it”, Raskolnikov thought, walking on, “where did I read it, as one condemned to death, an hour before death, speaks or thinks, that if he had to live somewhere at an altitude, on a rock, and on such a narrow platform so that only two legs could be put, and all around there will be abyss, an ocean, eternal darkness, eternal solitude and eternal storm, and stay so, standing on the arshin of space, all his life, a thousand years, eternity, it is better to live like this than to die now!” [10, p. 132].

Thus, like F. M. Dostoevsky A. F. Losev believed that the birth and life of a man is a “genuine miracle”, a miracle that is beyond scientific explanation, and therefore attempts to describe the birth and life of a man from the point of view of any of the existing sciences will be doomed to failure, since the phenomena described by them will look one-sided. A. F. Losev also considered it necessary to establish a distinction between philosophical works and artworks based on their internal structure. The life and works of A. S. Pushkin and L. N. Tolstoy had a great influence on the ideas of A. F. Losev about life and death.

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*The author has read and approved the final manuscript.*