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Spiritual freedom in Blake and Dostoevsky

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Abstract

This paper explores the idea of freedom found in the works of William Blake and Fyodor Dostoevsky. While the main focus is on Blake, the paper hopes to illumine how a comparison with Dostoevsky may enhance the understanding of both artists' work and ideas. It is also hoped that this approach, drawing together the original insights and approaches of these two great figures, will provide a strong account of spiritual freedom. The paper identifies vital points of contact between the two artists' conception of and commitment to human freedom as an essentially spiritual quality of man. The paper maintains that both artists defended a Christian idea of freedom against conflicting accounts of liberty and human nature current in their times. The paper seeks to articulate their conception against three main trends of thought that threaten it; Utopianism, Humanism, and Social Eudemonism. Ultimately, the paper argues, Blake and Dostoevsky provide us with a profound defence of the liberty of every unique and particular person, gifted with divine potentials, against the reductive and abstracting systems of materialist thought. The paper consults recent as well as classical studies of both Blake and Dostoevsky and engages critically with certain readings of Blake's work in particular.

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Introduction

William Blake is a champion of spiritual liberty. The revelation and realisation of a freedom from the world of necessity is one of his central themes. Here he shares a purpose with Fyodor Dostoevsky, as vociferous an opponent as Blake of any account of human nature which either negates our freedom altogether or makes it secondary to our happiness and material well-being.

It is a fault of materialist thought to interpret as a problem of social injustice what should in fact be approached as a problem of evil; that is, as a problem of the uses of human freedom. Dostoevsky explores this problem like perhaps no other artist; and his fiction offers a sustained critique of those who insist on a materialist response to an essentially spiritual phenomenon. The positions against which Dostoevsky labours find their epitome in the figure of the Grand Inquisitor and the kind of social eudemonism he represents.

Also Blake's work vehemently resists materialist interpretations of and solutions to humanity's problems, and offers instead a positive call to spiritual regenerative efforts against any and all powers allied with Urizen and the Spectre, two figures that occupy a position in Blake's drama and dialectic analogous to that of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's.

Both Blake and Dostoevsky have an understanding of freedom that is profoundly Christian. For both of them, freedom can be used for ill or for good, and it is only in the right exercise of freedom that we are really free, when our will and our perceptions are freely oriented towards Christ. As Nicolai Berdyaev so categorically puts it, "Every man is offered the alternatives of the Grand Inquisitor or of Jesus Christ" [Berdyaev, 2009, 188]. This is the theme, not only of Dostoevsky's work, but of Blake's too: the story of this choice is the story of Albion as much as of Raskolnikov or the Karamazov brothers. We can put this in slightly different terms for Blake, for

whom we are free to 'expand' or 'contract'. Our destiny is conditional upon our use of our perceptive powers as well as our free will. We are only truly free in imaginative expansion; which is also our ek-static movement away from Selfhood towards Jesus, the 'Great Humanity Divine'.

Their understanding of human freedom as the mark of our divine potentials leads both artists to resist any description of our condition that makes man out to be a product of either his biological nature or his social environment; and they resist any ambition, however well-meaning, to cure mankind's supposed problems on such terms. In this paper I will discuss both artists' defences of spiritual liberty against three such reductionist positions; Utopianism, Humanism, and Social Eudemonism. I will conclude by articulating Blake's and Dostoevsky's mutual dedication to the freedom of 'the little ones', the 'minute particulars', every unique member of the human and divine body.

Against Utopianism

Blake's and Dostoevsky's similar understanding of freedom is rooted primarily in their shared dedication to Christ, but it may also be seen to have a source in their similar attitudes to their respective socio-historical situations, more particularly in their experiences of positivistic and utopian revolutionary movements.

There are interesting parallels between the personal biography and historical experience of the two writers; where both move from initial and active enthusiasm, to renunciation and a profound critique of the utopian ideals of their time. Blake's involvement with the radical circles around the printer Joseph Johnson was perhaps of a less active nature than Dostoevsky's with the Petrashevsky Circle; and his renunciation certainly entailed less personal trauma than Dostoevsky's suffering in the prison camp; but Blake's indictment of the mechanisms and the underlying errors of the utopian ambitions of his time is every bit as emphatic as Dostoevsky's.

While Blake seemed to share some of the hopes of his contemporaries, we mustn't for a second forget that he dedicates his whole artistic life to challenging the philosophical assumptions behind these movements; for, though Blake too desired a kind of transformation of the old order, the revolutionary attempts were premised upon all the same old falsehoods. It is telling that many of the figures that inspired the fight for lib-

eration – such as Rousseau, Locke, and Voltaire – in Blake's art find themselves associated with the repressive and constricting figure of Urizen. "In many important respects, therefore," writes Peter Ackroyd, "he fundamentally differed from [the] principles and [the] belief" of the likes of William Godwin, Thomas Paine and Joseph Priestly [Ackroyd, 1995, 159]. For Blake, then, the Terror in France did not simply signify a political failure, but confirmed the errors of the underlying philosophy of the Revolution; and it helped to affirm his commitment to a different kind and order of liberty.

What Blake initially admires in the revolutionary movements of the late 1700s is their *energy*; personified in the figure of Orc, 'the son of fire' in the early Prophetic Books, who is potentially the herald of an imaginative triumph against the tyranny of necessity and rationalisation. Blake's Orc is a figure that has much in common, I believe, with the zealous young revolutionaries that people the pages of Dostoevsky; and the dialectic of freedom and tyranny as explored by Dostoevsky echoes the tragic destiny of Orc.

Orc is an embodiment of youthful energy, but he is also an embodiment of repressed love, as many have noted; perhaps he should also be considered a parricide, like Smerdyakov. He is certainly both an oedipal and a promethean figure, who embodies the idea of freedom as revolt (not least against paternal bonds), but who ends up like Urizen, re-enacting the same repressions he rose against. As Carl-Johan Malmberg notes, on plate 12 of *America* "the fiery revolutionary becomes more of a tyrant than the tyrant he has fought against" [Malmberg, 2013, 124].[1]

The real problem is that his movement is circular. "Orc," writes Northrop Frye, "is completely bound to the cyclic wheel of life" [Frye, 1969, 218]. His reactive energies soon becomes reactionary, and revolution becomes repression. It is thus a self-devouring freedom he represents, which is not freedom at all. This is true both in social and in personal terms; and Orc may be seen to mirror those of Dostoevsky's characters – like Stavrogin – who may begin as visionaries but end up, not simply as tyrants, but even as suicides.[2]

1 Malmberg's excellent and beautifully produced book is the first major study of Blake in Swedish; the approximate translations are my own.

2 Suicide – which features much more as a real problem in Dostoevsky's work, but the possibility of which also haunts Blake's work – represents the wrong kind of self-annihilation, the very negation of that giving of oneself for others which is at the heart of true freedom.

Rowan Williams astutely analysed the "terrifying profiles of 'revolutionary' freedom" in Dostoevsky's work, not least in *Demons*, and he argues that "the hunger for such a freedom can only manifest itself in destruction [and] culminates in self-destruction" [Williams, 2008, 11]. One of Dostoevsky's achievements, as also Berdyaev interprets it, was to see the negation of human dignity and genuine spiritual freedom as an inevitable consequence of a commitment to the false freedom of arbitrary self-will. As Berdyaev observes, "'Boundless freedom leads me on to boundless tyranny,' says Shigalev, and that has been the evolution of all revolutionary freedom, as may be seen in the French Revolution [Berdyaev, 2009, 82]. This tragedy is that enacted in Blake's so-called Orc-cycle. For all his enthusiasm, Orc's role is not regenerative so much as destructive, clearing the world of past systems of repression but without offering anything fruitful in their place.

"We must look elsewhere," therefore, as Frye knows, "for the divine in man, for the pure imagination or creative power which does not depend on nature for the source of its energy" [Frye, 1969, 218]. For this reason, Orc then gives way, in Blake's exploration of human freedom and redemption, to the figures of Los, Milton and Jesus, as liberators who also express a more self-denying and other-regarding freedom, and crucially a more imaginative and creative one. It is in these figures that we see developed Blake's vision of freedom as redemption, reconciliation and regeneration.

Neither Blake nor Dostoevsky would allow political freedom to be purchased at the cost of the freedom of the spirit, as Berdyaev would call it, which for Blake is the freedom of the Imagination. Blake celebrates the revolutionary efforts only for as long as and in so far as they can be seen as offering a spiritual awakening. He firmly opposes any ambition to establish an earthly utopia by the means of social, physical or mental compulsion. The ambition to 'make the world a better place' by forcefully reorganising its constituent parts is premised upon a false account of personhood and human nature. Much like Blake's critique of the positivistic revolutionaries, Berdyaev notes that Dostoevsky's "profound antagonism to socialism" and his "masterly critique of social eudemonism is directed towards demonstrating its incompatibility with the independence and dignity of personality" [Berdyaev, 2009, 55].

Dostoevsky's attitude to political liberty lets us know that his conception of freedom is first and foremost a spiritual one. As Berdyaev notes, Dostoevsky's sometimes apparent 'cruelty' in social and moral questions is due to the fact that he "would not relieve man of his burden of freedom", not even "deliver him from suffering at the price of such a loss"; rather, he "insisted that man must accept an enormous responsibility corresponding to his dignity as a free being" [Berdyaev, 2009, 67]. Blake may not share Dostoevsky's so-called cruelty, but he shares his conception of human dignity, and thus ought to be read as sharing also the absolute commitment to freedom.

Berdyaev well illustrates how to understand Dostoevsky's conservatism is apocalyptic terms: as taking sides, not for the past against the future, but for Christ against the Antichrist – that is, I would say, for the ever-new revelation of divine love against the age-old lie of self-will. We should be able to see Blake's vision in similar terms; for he is always on the side of that which truly transfigures against that which merely changes. Yes, says Blake, we must refashion the world we inhabit; but this is because the human world – like a work of art – should be an expression of human freedom, dignity and divinity, and not because a reorganisation of material realities will result in happier men.

Insofar as the revolutionary ambition is utopian, it is fundamentally flawed from the outset; for it seeks to finalise human flourishing here and now, on earth and in time, and so in effect looks for freedom in the order of nature and sets a material limit to our essentially spiritual potentials. True liberty may not be contained in a social programme, nor in a historical achievement. As Northrop Frye suggests, "as Orc stiffens into Urizen, it becomes manifest that the world is so constituted that no cause can triumph within it and still preserve its imaginative integrity" (Frye, 1969, 217). No worldly revolution, then, can bring about the kind of spiritual and imaginative transformation that we truly seek; it can only achieve a debased kind of material change which sooner or later changes back again.

While some of Orc's aspects can be seen in the famous image of "Albion Rose", Orc ultimately fails to embody the kind of resurgent joy that we see manifested here. The joy of Albion arises from the depths of his spiritual being, from his divine relation and divine potential. It is not a kind of happiness granted by material circum-

stances. If man is not essentially free and gifted with divine potential, no amount of social equality, liberty and fraternity can call forth in him the positive creative energies that we see in this image and in Blake's art as a whole. The Albion of "Albion Rose", then, is *not* a poster-boy for political revolution, but rather a herald of the liberty achieved in the encounter and communion with Jesus; as indeed this image may be seen to prefigure the image of 'Albion before Christ' on plate 76 of *Jerusalem*.

Nor is "A Song of Liberty" from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* a programme for social reform, but rather a vindication of our potentials for regeneration. The theme and aim of this song of liberty, as of several of the aphorisms and 'Proverbs of Hell' in the same book, is the plea for personal uniqueness against the machinations of social levelling; for

The eagle never lost so much time, as when he submitted to learn of the crow [Blake, 2000, 114];

an affirmation of the freedom and the potential of each creature to grow according to its particular nature; for

No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings [ibid.,113].

It is not a forceful alteration of material factors that achieve this flourishing, Blake's proverbs suggest, but a divine inner quality; and

One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression [ibid., 130].

Thus, when the song of liberty proclaims that "Empire is no more! and now the lion & wolf shall cease!" [ibid., 133], this does not signal political triumph, or a gain of worldly power, but rather a dedication to the inviolate spiritual freedom of each person and creature:

For every thing that lives is Holy [ibid.].

This is a promise that can neither be fulfilled nor broken by the means of social reorganisation.

The sons of anarchy in Dostoevsky's novels are not the heralds and bringers of freedom, but only of self-will, compulsion and death. Freedom is only sustained by forgiveness and repentance, and in the response to divine grace. Similarly, it is the sons and daughters of Jerusalem that are 'named liberty' in Blake's vision – not the children of the revolution; not, that is, the sons and daughters of France or England or any other worldly state or power. Freedom exists only in the promise of a more than

earthly kingdom. Albion can only be truly free in his communion with Jerusalem. For these reasons, the rousing lyric "And did those feet…" is *not* a call for a future utopia, but rather for the full development of our divine qualities and potentials in timeless regenerative labour. Jerusalem is not to be implemented as a heavenly kingdom on earth; for, as Berdyaev learns from Dostoevsky's treatment of the Grand Inquisitor, "the freedom of Christ can be had only at the price of a renunciation of all claims to earthly power" [Berdyaev, 2009, 211]; and "the liberty of the man from the underworld [must] be transformed into 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God'" [ibid., 80].

Against Humanism

The target of both Blake's and Dostoevsky's critique is really any variety of Humanism, any attempt to explain man in purely natural, material and rational terms, without reference to his spiritual needs or divine qualities. Blake is a thorough critic of all theories of 'natural man' and 'natural morality', whether in the pessimistic versions of Hobbes and Pope or in the optimistic versions of Paine and Rousseau. Blake's work constitutes a sustained attack on such reductionist presumptions; while Dostoevsky's work, argues Berdyaev, "marked not merely a crisis in but the defeat of Humanism [and] made it impossible to go back to the old rationalistic Humanism with its self-affirmation and sufficiency" [Berdyaev, 2009, 63]. Utopian socialism is one variety of such thinking; scientism is another.

Both artists, therefore, engage in something that can be captured, to an extent, in the kind of anti-reductionism of the contemporary English philosopher Roger Scruton, most recently developed in *The Soul of the World* (2014). Scruton, among other things arguing against the conclusions of neuroscience, shows how freedom must be sought elsewhere than in the functional and causal order of the world. Blake, who speaks critically of the entrapments of the 'Human Brain' in his poem the "The Human Abstract", would probably both laugh and weep at the neuro-scientific attempts to reduce the riches of our personhood to the mechanical functions of a single material organ.

Key in this regard is the famous analogy of the sun and the guinea from his notes on *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, which Blake concludes thus: "I question not my

Corporeal of Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight," writes Blake: "I look thro' it & not with it" [Blake 1974, 671]. In the same way, the brain may exhibit some of the effects, but hardly the causes, of our mental activity.

Importantly, those who miss out or explain away the depths of human personality are also blind to the meaning and inexhaustibility of the world:

"What," it will be Question'd, "When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?" O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying , "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty" [ibid., 670-671].

A central idea of Blake's is that the world alters according to how we see it, while at the same time we are, and become, what we see and how we see things. We may say that Blake sees more of the sun than the sensible man of the sensible world, because his vision is more imaginative; and that the sun that Blake sees is more real than that described scientifically, because more of Blake goes into seeing it. Blake is free to see the sun as he sees it; and he sees it as a free gift addressed to the free imaginative being that he is.

Northrop Frye comments on the difference between Blake's idea of perception and that of Locke and the empiricists that "We see the guinea-sun automatically: seeing the Hallelujah-Chorus sun demands a voluntary and conscious imaginative effort; or rather, it demands an exuberantly active mind which will not be a quiescent blank slate. The imaginative mind, therefore, is the one which has realized its own freedom and understood that perception is self-development" [Frye, 1969, 23]. This has vital implications for Blake's understanding of personality and human nature too; for in all his critiques of Locke, "Blake is protesting against the implication that man is material to be formed by an external world and not the former or imaginer of the material world" [ibid., 23]. We also see how this must feed into Blake's response to utopian and social eudemonist movements, where the call to imaginatively shape the world is perverted into making us the passive object of material reorganisation.

Much like Blake wages mental war on the 'Newtonian' mind, so Dostoevsky rebels against the 'Euclidian' mind, as he called it: against the principle of utility, against social eudemonism and ontological reductionism. Thus Berdyaev, following Dostoevsky, claims that "Human nature cannot be brought within the operations of

reason: there is always 'something over', an irrational something which is the very well-spring of life" [Berdyaev, 2009, 54]. This irrationality is absolutely vital to Dostoevsky's vindication of a freedom that is capable of turning both to evil and to God, while rationalist models often explain away both evil and the divine. We can hear something of an echo of Blake, I believe, in Dostoevsky's famous claim – as powerful as it is enigmatic – to stand with Christ even against the 'truth'. Thus we read in Dostoevsky's 1854 letter to Natalya Fonvizina: "if someone were to prove to me that Christ was outside the truth, and it was really the case that the truth lay outside Christ, then I should choose to stay with Christ rather than with the truth" [Quoted in: Williams, 2008, 15].

The 'irrationality' here, as in Blake's remarks on the sun, is to be seen as a defence of revelation and belief against any idea of the 'truth' as that which is objectively verifiable. Faith here is not to be dismissed as arbitrary self-assertion, as a species of subjectivist or voluntarist faith in the face of an absurd and meaningless world. Rowan Williams rather suggests that we "must understand 'the truth' as 'what is the case' in the world, as the sum of rationally and evidentially demonstrable propositions independent of human desire and indeed human self-description" [Williams, 2008, 20]. Such a world of scientific reductionism and rational explanations leaves little room for what is most truly and vitally human, let alone for God. But to illuminate these realities, invisible to scientific method and uncontainable within the Humanist description of man, is precisely what both Dostoevsky and Blake want to do.

Carl-Johan Malmberg illustrates well, in a discussion of some key achievements of Blake's visual art, how he sought to reveal man's true nature outside of the frames and proportions of classical art and philosophy. By placing "Albion Rose" next to images of the so-called Vitruvian man, the most famous being by Leonardo Da Vinci, Malmberg shows how Blake makes the statement that, contrary to Humanist assumptions, "man *cannot* be captured within the confines of geometry" [Malmberg, 2013, 46]; nor, indeed, can man's true nature be tied down by the laws of gravity, as Albion's joyful dance proclaims.

To my mind, the perfect counter-image to the Vitruvian Man is Blake's rendition of "Ezekiel's Wheels" (c.1805): an image which lifts man from the mathematical world and places him, where he belongs, in the realm of spiritual revelation.

This watercolour painting manifests such dynamism and energy, such lightness of movement combined with unflinching spiritual strength. It is an image that shows man, the great humanity divine, as the measure of the universe; not man defined by the laws of nature and mathematics. One of Blake's masterpieces, it is a powerful proclamation of human freedom in synergy with divine grace. By contrast, the painting of Newton is a kind of icon of necessity, of self-circumspection and single vision. Newton embodies the erroneous application of our mental powers, delimiting the world of perception and so delimiting ourselves. Newton also personifies the vegetative state of existence, not the spiritual and imaginative state we are called to embody.

Importantly, the critique of "Newton" with his compasses does not mean that freedom for Blake is anarchic or formless; quite the contrary, Blake is an avid champion of 'outline' and clear forms in his art, and of clarity and distillations in his poetry, as long as these are the forms of our spiritual life and not impositions from outside. As Malmberg discusses, the Imagination is essentially opposed to "Conformity, Reason and Law" [Malmberg, 2013, 21], yet still needs to be realised in definite forms. Our challenge is to imaginatively create the kind of order and harmony that is not restrictive but responsive to the dynamics of our free nature. The challenge is to set limits and to forge bonds, which help our mutual flourishing, but which do not choke or oppress us.

Blake's enemy of regenerative freedom is always, in its many varying forms, the 'dark satanic mills' of rationalism and materialism. Plate 15 of *Jerusalem* provides a powerfully evocative critique of the compulsion of mechanical thinking and practice:

> I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe
> And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire
> Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton. Black the cloth
> In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation: cruel Works
> Of many Wheels I view. wheel without wheel. with cogs tyrannic
> Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden: which
> Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace
>
> [Blake, 2000, 312].

Blake was at least as aware of the moral and spiritual cost of the materialist description of the world as Dostoevsky was. Dostoevsky explored with a great sense of urgency and foreboding the idea that 'if there is no God, then all is permitted'; a mental and spiritual aberration with terrifying consequences. For Blake, as Frye shows us, the idea of the mechanical universe "is a mental cancer [and] its moral and emotional implications must accompany it into the mind, and breed there into [all] diseases of the Selfhood, ending in horror and despair" [Frye, 1969, 384]. The only antidote to this are the free 'wheels within wheels' of divine revelation and human imaginative power. We see here again how freedom is not something that can be contained within the cogs or kingdoms of this world, but which belongs to 'Eden', that is, to our mutual life in the imagination, to our relations as members of the divine body.

In a mechanical system such as the one evoked on plate 15, all knowledge serves to delimit, circumscribe and divide; hence the enlightenment virtues of systematic inquiry and classification, of self-assertion and specialisation, of production and progress, for Blake means the perpetuation of a state of mental and spiritual error. The remedy to such false or pernicious knowledge, therefore, is not more of the same old kinds of learning; rather, the unlearning of falsehood becomes the prophetic and redemptive task. Hence Blake's paradoxical revaluation of values in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Hence, too, the importance of so-called 'holy fools' in the work of Dostoevsky. For in an overly rationalistic world, the irrational may serve to point our perceptions beyond the world. A great representative of these holy fools is Marya Timofeena, called the Cripple, in *Demons*. L. A. Zander puts his finger on the non-functional, non-utilitarian life she illustrates: "It is impossible to apply ordinary two-dimensional standards of usefulness and purpose to the Cripple's life" [Zander, 1948, 91]. Instead, her odd existence bespeaks the intrinsic value of human life, and at the same time points us to a meaning and a freedom beyond the happenings of this world.

Similarly, the caprice and wilfulness of Dostoevsky's so-called Underground Man plays a vital role as a testimony to a freedom that isn't bound by rational laws or social norms, a thorn in the side of all natively progressive accounts of freedom. Rowan Williams notes that "the tormented, savage, ironical and absurd person of [*Notes from the Underground*] directs some of his most concentrated venom at a

philosophy of rational self-interest" [Williams, 2008, 17]. The Underground-man perfects this critique, as it were, in the capricious and contradictory way he acts and thinks; as do many of Dostoevsky's characters. Thus Berdyaev makes clear that "a certain 'fantasticalness' or eccentricity is an essential part of human nature, and Stavrogin, Versilov, Ivan Karamazov are 'enigmatical' because that nature is itself puzzling – in its antinomies, its irrationality, its taste for suffering" [Berdyaev, 2009, 57]. Williams, in the same vein, develops the thought that "part of the distinctively human is the capacity for perversity, addiction, self-sacrifice, self-destruction and a whole range of 'rationally' indefensible behaviours. Remove this capacity and two things result: the distinctively human disappears and is replaced by a pattern of ordered but mechanical interaction; and violence is canonized as the means of social rationalization – because the amputation of irrational human needs or wants can only be effected by force" [Williams, 2008, 17-18].

This returns us, then, also to the crucial rejection of Utopianism and Social Eudemonism; for, as "Dostoevsky insists, the freedom to refuse what is claimed to be rational is part of an integral or complete account of human existence; its denial is thus an act of violence, even if it is done in the name of peace or welfare" [ibid., 18].

Against Social Eudemonism

While there is no mistaking the philosophical and even political implications of Dostoevsky's dedication to human freedom, there is a tendency among readers of Blake to ascribe to him an attitude towards social ills that would, if properly attended to, place him rather on the side of the Grand Inquisitor. To my mind, however, any ascription of social eudemonism and utopianism to Blake would utterly negate the spiritual freedom that his entire creative output seeks to inspire in us.

The crux of the matter is that both the cause and the cure for our suffering is found in freedom. If we ascribe the cause to compulsion, to social conditioning, we also risk making compulsion the cure; as does the political and philosophical likes of Thomas Paine. This means that we remove freedom from our account of human personality; and this is a cost for our material well-being that neither Blake nor Dostoevsky is willing to pay. The fact that we are unable, as it were, to handle our

freedom for the best, leads to a choice between the solution presented by the Grand Inquisitor, who kindly wants to take our freedom away from us to keep us from harm; and that of Christ, where any guarantee of worldly security is sacrificed for the sake of a freedom that is fulfilled in the giving of self for other. Both Blake and Dostoevsky are clear in the choice they make and recommend to us.

Blake is certainly a perceptive and vehement critic of social ills, but he is so in ways that far transcend the methods and diagnoses of socialist and materialist thought. In a discussion of "London", Malmberg argues that the chief task of Blake's artistic labours is to free humanity from its own self-imposed fetters [Malmberg, 2013, 199]. There is much truth in this; but I am critical to some of the aspects of Malmberg's reading of the poem. In particular, I think he errs in ascribing too much of the speaker's intentions and attitudes to Blake himself.

The accusatory tone of London-man is not quite the 'righteous indignation' of Blake himself or of his prophetic characters. It lacks imaginative scope and sympathy, is marked by too much bitterness, and bespeaks too solipsistic and jaded a self to belong to the poet. It is very much a voice of Experience, as D.G. Gillham argues, though it certainly provides some piercing insights into the social condition.

What is shown in "London" is the reduction and contraction of the human, of which the speaker is far from exempt. I think of London-man as related in important ways to Dostoevsky's Underground-man. He shows that we are free not to comply with prevailing conditions, that we are free to dissent and be contrary; but to declare falsehood is not the same as embodying truth. London-man appears closed within himself while presuming to declare the errors and illusions of others in the most general terms; he shows himself free to curse and criticise, but there is little or no compassion in his tone, not even towards the infant child.

Crucially, the forgiving and hopeful attitude is instead provided by the illustration to the poem. The care and assistance shown by the child, leading the aged man, complements what is lacking in the words, and thus also serves to alert us to the speaker's deficiencies. Thus the poem as a whole, image included, may be taken as much more representative of Blake's own attitudes than the speaker's voice alone.

The error of London-man lies precisely in seeing others and himself too as passive victims of social circumstance; he suggests no solution beyond implicitly call-

ing for the overthrow of the social structures he identifies as the source of the misery. But even institutional repression is man-made and constitutes a misuse and abuse of our freedom; human ills are not simply cured by a rearrangement of social and material factors, which suppose a strictly causal relation between man and his environment. Instead, it is the right use and orientation of freedom that is the cure for our ills. What is needed is imaginative expansion, first of all realised in the recognition of the divine image in others. This kind of perception, and this kind of mutuality, is what Blake seeks to inspire in the *Songs*, and it is what the speaker is lacking.

The change needed is a kind of conversion; the freely undertaken change of heart, will and perception. This is the mission that Blake always sets before us, and it is the message of Dostoevsky too, against the false outward solutions of the Grand Inquisitor. "London" itself invites this alteration of perspective, in order both to alert us to the social ills perceived by speaker, and – more importantly – to awaken us to the imaginative and active sympathy that the speaker is lacking. Blake wants us to realise the human responsibility for the abuses of trust and power that he points to, thereby kindling our sense of responsibility for the change needed.

Another song of Experience, "The Human Abstract", is a similar case; its first stanza in particular invites a discussion of social eudemonism. Malmberg, I maintain, too uncritically embraces the poem as giving us Blake's voice more directly than any other of the *Songs*; and he is wrong, I believe, to read this first stanza as Blake's unambiguous advocacy for social reform.

Pity would be no more,
If we did not make somebody Poor:
And Mercy no more could be,
If all were as happy as we [Blake, 2000, 89].

Is this simply an indictment of social conditions sustaining a false morality, and so an invitation to overcome this false morality by the alteration of the social conditions? I suggest that we read this – in line with the songs' ambiguous nature, their latent critique of the speakers' perspective – instead an indictment of those who pretend to fix morality by altering the material conditions; thereby offering an implicit vindication both of human freedom and of genuine mercy and pity.

D.G. Gillham, contrary to Malmberg, assumes in his own reading of "The Human Abstract" that Blake is here "expounding a view that he holds in contempt" [Gillham, 1966, 62]. He reads the poem as containing Blake's satire of a defence of a 'selfist' political and moral theory, derived from the ideas of Hobbes and Pope. This defence, then, is uttered by one of the powerful or fortunate in society, who seeks to justify his positon of privilege by the fact that it allows for the cultivation of the benevolent virtues he lists. That is, the speaker is suggesting that we are justified in 'making somebody poor', and in ensuring that not everyone is as happy as he. Blake's intention, then, is to reveal the errors of this kind of position by showing its logical consequences; showing that the pretence to mercy, pity, peace and love in fact result in cruelty, deceit and false humility.

We are not, however, invited to simply invert this idea and to read Blake as arguing for social levelling. This, though, is what Malmberg reads into the poem; and it is much too simplistic; for while it offers a solution, it would end up not only solving the problem of poverty and unhappiness, but also 'solving' or dissolving the virtues of mercy and pity themselves. It is warranted to critique the use of false pity for the sake of maintaining social divisions, but should not result in a denial of the possibility of genuine mercy.

Of course it may be true, even something of a platitude, to suggest that pity can only thrive in conditions of inequality. It is also true that pity may be a tragic quality, that it often accompanies – and sometimes even engenders – division between people and within persons; "For pity divides the soul", Blake writes in the *Book of Urizen*, and this is noted by Malmberg [Malmberg, 2013, 325]. But this does not, I believe, give us license to see pity and mercy as purely negative qualities in Blake's work. There is also the false pity of the Grand Inquisitor; the institutionalised compassion of the socialist state, which is yet another version of a self-serving and sanctimonious care for the unfortunate which in fact hides a disbelief in or disregard for the spiritual dignity of those in need. The Grand Inquisitor, in fact takes pity on us for our freedom as much as for our suffering; and so offers to cure us by compulsion. We can imagine the Grand Inquisitor proclaiming, in the style of "The Human Abstract", that 'suffering no more would be, if we did not make somebody free'. This attitude is precisely what Blake and Dostoevsky so wholeheartedly fight against.

Both Dostoevsky and Blake are fiery critics of any such false morality. But neither of them, crucially, propose social engineering in order to make our love of neighbour redundant. They realise that the possibility of freely given love also is accompanied with the possibility of evil, and they maintain that the loss of freedom is too great a price to pay for the end of suffering. If the tragic aspects of our condition are to be overcome, this is not to be done simply by a change of material circumstances that render the compassionate virtues unnecessary. What we need is precisely the kinds of positive exercise of genuine mercy that enable our mutual betterment. We need the compassion of Sonya for Raskolnikov, and we need the compassionate pleas of Albion's friends and family urging him to forgiveness instead of retribution.

The presence of a Urizen-like figure in the illustration of "The Human Abstract" may not simply, as Malmberg claims, entail a critique of the false God of law and power, but also alert us to the Urizen-like aspects of the speaker. Gillham suggests that the illustration depicts the trap of self-deception; that we see the figure of Experience ensnared "in the net described by Berkely as the 'fine and subtile net of *abstract ideas*, which has so miserably perplexed and entangled the minds of men'" [Gllham, 1966, 65]. This makes the illustration – as in the case of "London" – a critique of the ideas professed in the poem and of the manner in which they are uttered. For the Abstract voice is not that of the creative and expansive energies, of mutual delight and forgiveness, nor is the poem open to seeing the human form as divine – and this is the test, above all, in Blake's world, of the truth or error of our ways. On this count, I suggest, the speaking voice in the poem fails to qualify as an expression of Blake's own vision, whether this voice is read in Malmberg's or Gillham's way.

Both the 'selfist' and the eudemonist positions, in effect, seek to absolve man of responsibility for the ills of this world. "Once men have accepted the implications of the selfist theory," writes Gillham, "one has rejected the notion of personal responsibility" [ibid., 65]. This is true also if one has accepted the implications of social eudemonism; for both the biological and the social determinist reject the personal freedom where responsibility, as well as the possibility for conversion, resides. This is entirely contrary to the teaching of the elder Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who tells us that we are all responsible for and before each other; and it is entirely contrary to the truth revealed in the conversion-experiences of Raskolnikov, Dmitry

and so many others of Dostoevsky's characters, as indeed in the journey of *Milton* and in Albion's encounter with Christ in *Jerusalem*.

If, as Gillham does, we read "The Human Abstract" as a satire of a 'selfist' manifesto, we see how the virtues of mercy, pity, peace and love are explained and accounted for "in terms of their social origin and utility" [ibid., 70]. The social eudemonist position would make the same assumption, but instead campaign for the disappearance of these virtues of inequality, as they may be called, by a change in the social conditions that sustain them. In both cases, therefore, there is nothing real and eternal about these virtues. If this was true, it would entail a great loss of human qualities and dignity. This functionalism is quite unlike what is suggested in "The Divine Image"; an innocent poem which does not try to analyse or explain these virtues, but simply rejoices in their existence, and thus reveals them to be absolutely central to what it means to be human:

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress [Blake, 2000, 60].

This poem suggests that there must be real mercy and pity which is other than that practiced by the prosperous and powerful as a way to appease their conscience while maintaining their material advantages. For if we take that supposed mercy and pity to be the only kind – a tool invented and wielded by the powers that be – then we do not only deny some essential qualities of humanity, but also risk ascribing to man a simply material existence and denying that freedom which is the real mark of our spiritual nature. Indeed, this song of innocence does not allow us to envisage man without these qualities; and it thereby raises the crucial question of what we would be like if the social eudemonists had their way: what would our happiness be like – and what would it be worth – if we did not possess these virtues of unconditional mutuality? This is another version of the implicit question raised against the ideology of the Grand Inquisitor: what would our happiness – our very humanity – be worth if we did not have freedom? Underneath all this we hear the question of the Gospel: what would it benefit a man if he gained the whole world but lost his soul?

The poem goes further still, suggesting that these virtues not only testify to the true nature of man, but also to the reality of God among us; for

Where Mercy, Love, & Pity dwell

There God is dwelling too

If, then, we try to explain away these qualities as being simply functional attitudes arising from social necessity, we begin to dismantle not only the image of man, but the divine image too.

Now, crucially, in order to defend human dignity against reductionism and eudemonism, we also have to accept that evil actions have their root in the same freedom as our acts of charity or repentance. For this reason, the poem "A Divine Image" – which falls somehow outside the collection of the *Songs* – is of great significance; for it serves not only as a counterpoint to the innocent "The Divine Image" but also to the materialist or eudemonist aspects of "London" and "The Human Abstract". For this is a poem which shows us evil in human form, not in the impersonal forces of nature or society:

Cruelty has a Human Heart,

And Jealousy a Human Face;

Terror the Human Form Divine,

And Secrecy the Human Dress [Blake, 1974, 120].

This poem may even be read as an accusation against those speakers of experience who pretend that the source of our maladies, and of our betterment, lies elsewhere than in human freedom. It also wishes to tell us, importantly, that this state of the human is an aberration and a negation of our true image and potential; that in doing evil, in becoming like this, we do violence to our real dignity and integrity. We see this in Albion's suffering too, in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*; for Albion is not a victim of circumstance, but has turned against the 'Divine Vision' or divine image within himself, and he becomes a false and twisted version of himself as a result.

Dostoevsky too is a master of depicting how characters that end up choosing evil become warped and miserable, riddled with fear as well as hatred of others. Only the free acceptance of freely given grace, both artists try to show us, can lead to our regeneration and redemption. Berdyaev, commenting on Dostoevsky's fascination for criminal behaviour and his dislike of "humanitarian-positivist" theories that deny the

validity of punishment for such behaviour, notes an important truth: "If man is nothing but a passive reflection of his social surroundings, an irresponsible creature, then there is no such thing as 'man' – nor is there God, freedom, evil, or good" [Berdyaev, 2009, 90]. This means, then, that we actually end up denying the divine image in man by absolving us of responsibility for our evil actions. A defence of our divine potentials requires a defence of our ability to do evil.

Conclusion: The Liberty of the Little Ones

"The Human Abstract" is perhaps above all a critique of abstraction. Blake's whole body of work, in fact, is an imaginative attack on abstraction and generalisation on behalf of the 'minute particulars' of this world. We read in Jerusalem (plate 5) of "Abstract Philosophy warring in enmity against Imagination" [Blake, 2000, 302]; and Blake is relentless in his labours against the "Abstract objecting power" of the Spectre "that Negatives every thing" and is a "murderer Of every Divine Member" [ibid., 307].

We should expect Blake, therefore, to be opposed to any general and collective solutions to humanity's problems – whether in the guise of a social utopia or a theodicy that seeks to justify the ways of God to men in such a way as to justify the tears of even one human child. The same attitude is integral to Dostoevsky's work. "Under the influence of the euclidian mind," Berdyaev comments, "man thinks he can make a better world, wherein evil and misery and the tears of the innocent shall have no part" [Berdyaev, 2009, 85]. This ambition, however, often negates precisely those 'little ones' that Blake and Dostoevsky sought to dignify. Williams, reflecting on the fate of Shatov in *Demons*, suggests that our vocation as free beings responsive to and responsible for others is "the labour of conserving life in small particulars, a commitment to human history not as a grand project but as the continuance of a vulnerable localized care" [Williams, 2008, 24]. It is significant that as soon as a realisation much like this dawns on Shatov, he is murdered; because this care of the little ones, even the impulse in the human heart towards such care, is the greatest threat to the revolutionary project, which is at the same time the apotheosis of self-will and a commitment to the most abstract generalisations.

Freedom for both Blake and Dostoevsky must mean the freedom, not only from actual repression, but also from those false ideas and accounts of the human condition that make us subject to material or moral compulsion. Hence we see the resemblance between Spectre and Grand Inquisitor, "the Holy Reasoning Power" [Blake, 2000, 307] which provides humanity with false moral laws and solutions that negates the dignity of 'every one of these little ones' that are the concern also of Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov. Ivan's impassioned plea for any suffering child – and indeed his brother's practical and personal care for the schoolboys – answer to Blake's repeated call to focus on the "Minute Particulars, attend to the Little Ones" [ibid., 352]. Dostoevsky tells us that "one may not do away with a single human creature and escape punishment; we must consider the divine image and likeness in every one, from the most noble to the most despicable" [Berdyaev, 2009, 106]. This is also the moral and imaginative call that Blake's work issues to us; to keep and to kindle the divine potentials of each living member of the great human body.

Crucially, Ivan's indignation at a god who supposedly tolerates human suffering for the sake of a future harmony, is not a threat to, but a vital part of, Dostoevsky's positive case for faith and the religious life; for, like the dethronement of Urizen in Blake's work, Ivan's attack on a false theodicy clears the way for a an understanding of the real relations between God and man. The parable of the Grand Inquisitor, therefore, attempts to give us a concrete expression of religious error, through the voice of one himself in error, in a manner that would have pleased the Blake of *Songs of Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. As in Blake's own dialectic, Dostoevsky's parable also posits the freedom of Jesus against the constraints of any human institution, even if it calls itself a church, based on false precepts of rationalism and social eudemonism.

Berdyaev offers a kind of summary of Dostoevsky's views on freedom, which I believe holds as truly for Blake: "Liberty is a burden, its path a way of the cross, and man in revolt seeks to throw it off. Thus freedom dies away into compulsion and slavery. Dostoevsky knew only one way out of this contradiction: Jesus Christ. In Christ freedom is given grace, wedded to infinite love, and no longer need to become its own opposite, while the utopia of social happiness and perfection requires that it be reduced and limited" [Berdyaev, 2009, 144].

Importantly, the vindication of personal uniqueness and spiritual freedom is embedded in the style and form of both artists' work. Berdyaev claims that "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor is the high point of Dostoevsky's work and the crown of his dialectic." He also notes, crucially, how important it is that "the extremely powerful vindication of Christ [and a Christian conception of freedom, is] put into the mouth of the atheist Ivan Karamazov"; that is, that no truth is given us directly from the mouth of the writer in a way that would give us certainty and preclude the need for our active interpretation and reflection; for, says Berdyaev, "that which deals with liberty is addressed to the free" [ibid., 188]. That the freedom of us readers is fundamentally respected in the way Dostoevsky seeks to get his truths across is a core point also in Williams' account of Dostoevsky. Williams shows how Dostoevsky's anti-utopianism is reflected in the very fabric and style of his fiction. The fiction is ambiguous and open-ended, because we are not to expect to hear or say the final word that render more dialogue and expression redundant, any more than we can achieve any social or material conditions that preclude the need and possibility for further spiritual growth.

Blake's art, too, possesses this open-endedness; not least his method in the *Songs*, with their ambiguous and contradictory perspectives, resemble Dostoevsky's dialogic method. But also the paradoxical polemics of the *Marriage*, and Blake's use of a repentant Milton as a spokesperson for his own ideas, employ a similar dialectic. Blake's is an art, like Dostoevsky's, that places great demands on its readers, which subjects them to uncertain experiences beyond the safeguards of reason, and which rewards them with a realisation of imaginative liberty. Thus Los, in the frontispiece of *Jerusalem*, invites the reader the follow him into the work. This is to engage the freedom of the reader, first in the very act of reading, but also in the call to a way of life responsive to the artwork's revelations.

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Духовная свобода у Блейка и Достоевского

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Аннотация

В статье исследуется идея свободы в произведениях Уильяма Блейка и Федора Михайловича Достоевского. Хотя основной упор сделан на Блейка, автор надеется, что сравнение с Достоевским может помочь лучше понять тексты и идеи обоих писателей. Сопоставление их взглядов и подходов, хотя и выглядит неожиданным, является прочным основанием для исследования вопроса о духовной свободе. В статье определены ключевые точки соприкосновения между концепциями писателей, в частности, признание свободы человека как его неотъемлемого духовного качества. Оба писателя защищали христианскую идею свободы в дискуссиях своего времени. Сформулированы основания противостояния обоих деятелей трем важнейшим философским течениям того времени: утопизму, гуманизму и социальному эвдемонизму. Блейк и Достоевский представляют глубоко обоснованные концепции свободы каждой личности, как одаренной божественным потенциалом, в борьбе против ограничительных и абстрактных систем материалистического мышления.

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Блейк, Достоевский, свобода, личность, утопизм, гуманизм, социальный эвдемонизм, христианство.