TRANSITION. ROZANOV AND SOLOVYOV

As we stated in the final pages of Chapter II, we see Solovyov as the founder of the important treatment of the issues of Eros and Creativity in Russian religious thought and in Russian late 19th century thought generally.

Thus, we take the “Solovyovian” views on the special connectedness of Eros sexuality and creativity as the Russian religious “thesis” on sublimation. In the second stage of this 60-year dialogue, which coincides with the Russian Silver Age (1890–1925 circa) and its aftermath, the three most important inheritors of the Solovyovian legacy on these two most closely related issues are, in our estimation, Vasily Vasil'evich Rozanov (1856–1919), Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev (1874–1948) and Boris Pavlovich Vysheslavtsev (1877–1954). While some of the great Symbolist poets can be viewed as followers of Solovyov in one aspect or another, the most important and consistent contributors to the dialogue about Eros and creativity are undoubtedly Rozanov, Berdyaev and Vysheslavtsev. Aleksandr Blok, Dmitry Merezhkovsky Andrei Bely and Viacheslav Ivanov were also under Solovyov’s influence and were active creative artists. All three were influenced to a greater or lesser degree by Solovyov’s and Rozanov’s views on these issues.

Having established Rozanov, Berdyaev and Vysheslavtsev as the major philosophical continuers of Solovyov’s legacy on our subject of sublimation, it must be emphasized that despite overwhelming influence, none of them is a slavish follower of the Solovyovian doctrines set out here in Chapter II. They very creatively read, misread, or even misconstrued (willfully misunderstood) Solovyov, at times while still evoking his name and grounding their thoughts on his posthumous authority. This misreading is directly in the spirit of what Harold Bloom calls “misprision” and describes as a common creative reaction to an inspirational “father figure.”

91 The exclusion of several thinkers very close in their following of Solovyov was necessary in this book due to our goal of treating one subject, Eros and Creativity, in Russian religious philosophy in its connections with Freudian sublimation. The great Symbolist poet Alexander Blok, especially in his first period, was inspired by Solovyov’s concept of the Divine-Sophia and wrote greater poetry than his inspirer, but said little of theoretical value on the issues treated here. Viacheslav Ivanov, another poet much influenced by Solovyov, did write on creativity, but his work on this subject, treated in detail in Robert Bird, Prospero (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), is less of a departure from Solovyov than Berdyaev’s and he was rather predictably hostile to Freud and psychoanalysis. D.S. Merezhkovsky, the strongest candidate for inclusion in this volume, was excluded in that many of his ideas on sexuality and creativity were penned at a time when he was generally considered to be under the powerful influence of V. Rozanov, during the period of the First Religious-Philosophical Meetings. The choice in favor of including Rozanov was a fairly easy one, though we treat Merezhkovsky in some detail below in Chapter IV.

Thus, while it might generally be thought that Rozanov contributed more to the theory of sexuality and Berdyaev more to that of creativity, a close consideration of their massive oeuvres show them to be major Russian contributors to both. Thus, Rozanov, if he thought a great deal about Solovyov in life when they were physically apart, thought about him much more and with much more unmixed admiration after his death, especially between 1900 and 1910. He comments in his funeral speech to this effect: “It is noticeable that his obraz, image (Solovyov’s) grows better, is purified after death; just as if he had been preparing for it.” All this adds up to Rozanov’s feeling that closer intellectual and intimate relations with Solovyov were one of the major missed opportunities of his intellectual and religious life, for which Rozanov largely blamed himself and upon which he dwelt emotionally for some ten years.

Posthumously, Rozanov understood Solovyov’s loneliness and inner sadness. He saw the elder thinker as a lone wanderer: “Here was a real wanderer, in the intellectual, ideological and in the quotidian, even residential sense!” (Solovyov’s not having a fixed domicile and often living at the home of friends). Rozanov continues: “The son of a professor with every reason to expect a University Chair, he did not receive one due to his personal circumstances [perhaps an allusion to his public statement calling for the forgiveness of the assassins of Tsar Aleksandr II, after which Solovyov was deprived of a professorship in Russian universities for the remainder of his life—ALC], grandson of a priest […] , he was very constrained in his desire to be published in academic clerical journals; as a journalist, he bore religious-ecclesiastical ideas, finding a cool welcome for them in editorial offices. He entered through a crack in the door, waited like an intimidated guest, ready to take wing and flit away at any moment with his ambiguous laughter.” (p. 540) Given Rozanov’s admiring view of Solovyov after the latter’s death, one cannot help but feel that when Rozanov in his response to Solovyov’s “Beauty in Nature” (“Krasota v prirode”) wrote so movingly on human genius he had the man he was addressing in this mild polemic in mind, V.S. Solovyov: Rozanov defines a genius as someone surpassing most of mankind in his spiritual evolution. He is, as it were, a leap to the end of the “long process of development in each chain link of which numerous minds of different capacity have labored; [the chain] suddenly closes with a creature [or geniuslike creation], a genius before whom we are forced to stop, amazed at the fullness of the internal harmony of [his] parts. The absence of any insufficiency is the main thing that strikes us in genius […] . The