CHAPTER THREE

EROS AND CREATIVITY: FROM SOLOVYOV’S “LOVE” TO ROZANOV’S “SEX”

As we saw in *The Justification of the Good*, Solovyov associates creative genius with sexuality. Rozanov claimed, and some (Fateev) believe him, never to have read the seventh section of Book I Part I of Solovyov’s long ethical work, yet we have ample evidence (see below) that Rozanov did read it and it was distasteful to him as a way of writing about sexuality in man. Fateev does attest to Solovyov’s probable distaste for the way Rozanov was to write about sexuality.97 (Rozanov’s comments in

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97 Fateev, *Zhizneopisanie Vasiliia Rozanova*, p. 163. Here Fateev speaks of a letter now lost in which Rozanov informed Solovyov of his views on “sexual shame” and shared some of his ideas on the sexual theme with Solovyov, prior to their appearing in print. He surmises the following about Solovyov’s reaction: “We do not know Solovyov’s reaction to this letter, but one can hypothesize that if Rozanov’s ‘candid admissions’ did not shock Solovyov, neither did they elicit his admiration.” Later at the end of the section entitled “More about Solovyov,” pp. 262–266, Fateev writes: “Further on Rozanov speaks about his main disagreement with Solovyov—their views of sexuality. Solovyov’s view that ‘the veils of Isis should not be torn off’ is certainly opposed by Rozanov who said that ‘religion in general originates in this dearest and most intimate aspect for man.’ The present author, along with such a Solovyov expert as A.F. Losev, emphatically disagrees with this surmise of Fateev. While Solovyov may never have liked the style in which Rozanov sometimes wrote about sexuality, had he lived to read the bulk of what Rozanov wrote on sex as a religious topic, he would have seen more communality than disagreement. There is no doubt that Trubetskoi, who had a distaste for Solovyov’s sexual utopia, and for Solovyov’s views on love and the ethical meaning of sexuality, represents the more traditional “Christian modesty” on this subject. The philosopher B.N. Chicherin scoffed at the idea that sex was a source of shame in man, unless he had some sexual insufficiency. And he disagreed that sexual shame awakened ethical feeling in man.

See also Fateev, p. 164, concerning Rozanov’s insult to Solovyov in failing to write a review of *Opravdanie dobra* and giving the book to Fedor Shperk to review. This does not mean that he gave it away hastily without reading it. He reacted to the book too soon in print to be characterized as “not having read it.” What is true is that Rozanov was never fair about Solovyov’s section on sexual shame as a source of ethical feeling in man in that book, nor was he openly praiseful of “The Meaning of Love,” much of which he could subscribe to and “The Meaning of Love” is clearly an influence upon him. Rozanov had a visceral reaction to seeing the words “sex” and “shame” together. But when Chicherin attacked Solovyov’s idea, Rozanov found Chicherin’s argument superficial (neglubokomyslenyi), “Semia i zhizn’,” p. 168. There is very little written at this time on sexual issues of which Rozanov was unaware. He expresses his coolness towards *Opravdanie dobra’s* seventh part, which is motivated by a distaste for Solovyov’s tone in handling the sexual issue, not so much the substance of what Solovyov says. He does not react significantly to “The Meaning of Love.” The present author is convinced that “The Meaning of Love” was a major influence on Rozanov.
The Family Question in Russia and elsewhere). Nevertheless, Solovyov’s statement about the sexual, physiological basis of human creative genius is exactly in line with Rozanov’s views, to be expressed only a few years later. We quote Solovyov:

We call geniuses people whose vital creative energy is not spent completely on external fleshly procreation, but is expended further on internal acts of spiritual creation in some field (poprishche) or other. A genius is one who in addition to the life of the species immortalizes himself personally and is preserved in posterity, even if he did not have children himself. The meaning of genius in the generally accepted sense is only a hint of what really happens. The true genius inherent in us speaks to us most loudly in sexual shame […] it demands much more than gifts for the arts or sciences. As true genius is related to the whole species (genus) though standing above it, it appeals not only to an elite of the chosen, but to each and every person, warning us all against the vicious circle in which nature eternally, but vainly founds life on dead bones.98

The physiological basis of all creativity could not be clearer, as part of our shame at our animal nature, which impels us to rise above nature, to redirect our sexuality, one of our greatest links to the natural world, (along with eating, breathing) somewhere beyond procreation.

It is further clear from Chapter VII of The Justification of the Good that sexual shame does not inhere in the external aspect of the organs or the means of coupling (Solovyov did not find the human body repulsive) or childbirth as a bad thing. “Childbirth is a good,” he writes with emphasis. The shame about sex comes in the sense that in it nature is using us as a means to its ends,—continuation of the human race. Shame comes from the sense of being depersonalized, dehumanized in sex. And from this sense of sexual shame and the redirection of the sexual instinct in love, religious and other creativity, man affirms his human and divine essences. Sublimation of sex catalyzed by the emotion of shame makes man a critical being, hence is central to the formation of his own individual character, his Godmanhood, his personality.

The tone of Chapter VII with its emphasis on the importance of shame sounds far from Rozanovian, as it might appear to tend to askesis. But Solovyov does not validate askesis above sexual bonding in love. He validates highly selective heterosexual love above all human attachments. Moreover, he depicts the genius as having a greater supply of

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98 Solovyov, Opravdanie dobra (Justification of the Good), Book VII, 167–168.