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# The two-fold image and philosophy of personality in the works of F. M. Dostoevsky

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## Abstract

The two-fold image as Dostoevsky's creative principle has been repeatedly observed and described from different perspectives in accordance with different research tasks. In this article, attention will be focused on the description of the two-fold image, its structure and functions, *by Dostoevsky himself* within the framework of his reflection on his creative method, as part of what can be called his own theory of creativity. In 1876, Dostoevsky describes the structure of a two-fold image from three different angles on three occasions over a short period of time: from the point of view of the structure as such; from the point of view of its manifestation and revelation in a work of fiction; from the point of view of its application as a working construct in a particular case for a particular person. Dostoevsky understands the two-fold image as a profound insight about the world and man, a fundamental philosophy of personality that provides the reader with clues to a personal transformation. At the same time, he always speaks about the second component of the image absolutely transparently to himself—but covertly to the reader, assuming that it is the enigmatic nature of its deep core that compels the reader to look at and listen to the implicit concept, making the image a working, transforming tool.

**Keywords** Dostoevsky · Philosophy of personality · Image theory · Creativity theory · The two-fold image

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The two-fold image is Dostoevsky's main creative principle,[1] which since *Crime and Punishment* has been present in his texts in the fullness of its manifestation and as the unquestionable keynote of his creative method. This principle was characteristic of Dostoevsky's work before but either in combination with other ways of constructing a text and expressing the author's position, or in a reduced, implicit way. This principle has been repeatedly noted and described by various researchers in different aspects in accordance with their research tasks.[2]

A detailed and comprehensive analysis of the two-fold image as Dostoevsky's fundamental creative principle was carried out in my book (Kasatkina 2015). In this article, I will be interested in the description of the two-fold image, its structure and functions provided *by Dostoevsky himself* within the framework of *his* reflection upon his creative method, as part of what can be called his original theory of creativity.

Dostoevsky describes the structure of the two-fold image at least three times during a fairly short time in 1876, and twice these descriptions are intended for publication, but the third time the description appears in a personal letter intended for reading by one person only in a very specific situation.

Presumably Dostoevsky feels the need to delineate his basic artistic principle in connection with starting to issue in 1876 *A Writer's Diary* as *a self-contained independent publication*. However, one can assume that this need also arises in view of his embarking on *The Brothers Karamazov*, the novel in which Dostoevsky wanted to 'speak out' and be understood. Thus, he attempts to clarify in advance for the reader, as far as possible, how to read him.

Interestingly, the description itself appears only in the second issue of *A Writer's Diary*, while the entire first issue—which is a declaration of the goals and objectives of *A Writer's Diary* expressed indirectly (and this indirect speaking is carried out precisely through the use of a two-fold image)—does not contain a direct explanation of the technical ways of attaining these objectives. That is to say, first, Dostoevsky uses the stated principle, and only then finds it necessary to explain it—in order to facilitate the reader's perception of his texts.

As a result, the first issue of *A Writer's Diary* of 1876 turns out to be essentially enigmatic. This mysteriousness is stated most directly and openly in the small chapter *The Golden Age in Your Pocket*.

[1] According to Dostoevsky, a true writer is a person with a special eye. Such an eye is capable of opening the depth in the proximate and visible. Dostoevsky emphasizes that the purpose of a writer is to be the eye of humanity in order to plumb its depth, or to offer humanity his eyes, so that it can look into the depth and familiarize itself. Dostoevsky understands the two-fold image in that manner: at the heart of the most immediate contemporary event there is a story from the Gospels; in the heart of the most ordinary or least virtuous man there is Christ.

[2] R. L. Jackson wrote about this type of image as an important structural element of Dostoevsky's text (Jackson 1993), see also the analysis of Jackson's approach and scientific method in the article (Emerson 1995). Olga Meerson (2019) considers a biblical text **showing** through the author's text (**and, accordingly,** a biblical character **showing** through the personage) as a way that Dostoevsky uses in order to give an absolute **judgment** of what is happening, without objectifying and completing the hero, and without appropriating the "excess of vision" (Bakhtin 2000).

> And one quite fantastic and utterly improbable thought occurred to me: What if all these dear and respectable guests wanted, even for one brief moment, to become sincere and honest? How would this stuffy hall be transformed then? What if each of them suddenly learned the whole secret? What if each one of them suddenly learned how candid, honest, and sincere *he really was*?[3] What if he knew how much heartfelt joy, purity, noble feeling, goodwill, and intellect—never mind intellect, but wit, most subtle and sociable—he had, and that each and everyone of them shared these qualities? Yes, ladies and gentlemen, all that exists within every one of you, and no one, not a single one of you knows anything about it! Oh, dear guests, I swear that each lady and gentleman among you is cleverer than Voltaire, more sensitive than Rousseau, incomparably more alluring than Alcibiades or Don Juan, or any Lucretia, Juliet, or Beatrice! You don't believe that you are that beautiful? But I give you my solemn word that neither in Shakespeare nor in Schiller nor in Homer, nor in all of them put together, can you find anything so charming as now, this very minute, you can find here in this very ballroom. What is Shakespeare! Here you would see something of which our wise men have not dreamed. But your trouble is that you yourselves don't know how beautiful you are! Do you know that each of you, if you only wanted, could at once make everyone in this room happy and fascinate them all? And this power exists in every one of you, but it is so deeply hidden that you have long ceased to believe in it. < … > and yet my whole outburst just now is not a paradox, but the complete truth… And your whole trouble is that you don't believe it. (Dostoevsky 1993, pp. 307–308)

Dostoevsky here points out to the reader the secret not of an abstract man or 'man in general'—but a secret hidden within the reader himself who is right now reading these lines of his *Diary*: a huge space of beauty always carried inside oneself—but which has become virtually inaccessible due to the owner's disbelief in its existence. He points it out and leaves it a secret, insistently declaring that there is not a single human ideal next to which the reader could, without erring against the truth, say, "This one is greater than me and, therefore, I have no responsibility." In this description of each person at the ball, Dostoevsky, in fact, repeats the structure of his creed from the famous letter to Fonvizina in 1854, but looking, as it were, from the other side, "there is nothing lovelier, more rational, more manly…"[4]—"Each and every

[3] In quotes, italics denote 'highlighted by me', bold type—'highlighted (in italics) by the quoted author.'—T. K.

[4] "I want to say to you, about myself, that I am a child of this age, a child of unfaith and skepticism, and probably (indeed I know it) shall remain so to the end of my life. How dreadfully has it tormented me (and torments me even now)—this longing for faith, which is all the stronger for the proofs I have against it. And yet God gives me sometimes moments of perfect peace; in such moments I love and believe that I am loved; in such moments I have formulated my creed, wherein all is clear and holy to me. This creed is extremely simple; here it is: I believe that there is nothing lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic, more rational, more manly, and more perfect than the Saviour; I say to myself with jealous love that not only is there no one else like Him, but that there could be no one. I would even say more: If anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth **really** did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth" (Dostoevsky 1917, pp. 67–68).

one of you is cleverer, more sensitive, more alluring." Thus, he absolutely clearly, from the point of view of the person who once wrote this creed, indicates the source of unsurpassed beauty of *each person*—the image of Christ, without naming Him directly (and even somewhat cloaking this indication with improper definitions—"more alluring") and therefore leaving as yet a kind of dash in place of the second component of a two-fold image. Yet the dash, from the point of view of the author, is extremely easy to complete by any reader who is not averse to intellectual effort.[5]

In the next issue, published in February, in the chapter preceding *The Peasant Marei*, Dostoevsky will openly explicate the concept of a two-fold image (and even a three-fold one, but the third component turns out to be essentially non-ontological, although it is often the only one that is visible). So, he creates *A Writer's Diary* as a kind of manual for the reader making it easier for him to enter into the depths he is not used to. Methodologically, it is a very competent guidance manual. In the first issue, in *The Golden Age in Your Pocket* the author gives the reader a riddle about himself to solve (it is worth recalling that the main thrust of the text: 'Understand what you are'—practically a reproduction of the inscription over the Delphic sanctuary Γνῶθι σεαυτόν: 'See what the most important thing about yourself is which you do not know'—is the semantic core of many fairy tales with the initiation plot). In the second issue, Dostoevsky gives an almost direct answer by outlining man's image structure.

> I wrote, for instance, in the January issue of the *Diary* that our People are coarse and ignorant, devoted to darkness and depravity, "barbarians awaiting the light." Meanwhile, I've only just read < … > in an article by the late and unforgettable Konstantin Aksakov, a man dear to every Russian—that the Russian people have long been enlightened and "educated." What can I say? Was I troubled by my apparent disagreement with the opinion of Konstantin Aksakov? Not in the least; I completely share that view, and have had warm sympathy for it for a long time. So how can I reconcile such a contradiction? But the point is just that it can be very easily reconciled, I think; but to my astonishment others think that these two notions are irreconcilable. One must know how to segregate the beauty in the Russian peasant from the layers of barbarity that have accumulated over it. Through the circumstances of nearly the whole of Russian history, our People have been so dedicated to depravity, and so corrupt, led astray, and continually tormented, that it is a wonder they have survived preserving their human image at all, never mind preserving its beauty. But, indeed, they have also preserved the beauty of their image. (Dostoevsky 1993, p. 347)

We can see here a three-fold image. If one moves from the surface to the depth, the structure appears as follows: alien layers of barbarity/layers of filth—the human

[5] With Dostoevsky, one of the main principles of text creation is—to "retreat" from the reader, leaving the reader enough space to choose: whether to come to the conclusion that is obvious to the author, or not going in the proposed direction if the reader is not ready for this yet: "Let the readers take the trouble to figure it out themselves" (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, vol. 11, p. 303).

image—the beauty of this image. The level that depends, according to Dostoevsky, on our own make-up is filth: "He who is a true friend of humanity, whose heart has even once throbbed for the sufferings of the People—he will understand and overlook all the impenetrable deposits of filth that weigh down our People and will be able to find diamonds in this filth" (Dostoevsky 1993, p. 347).

And, yet, Dostoevsky here, analytically outlining the structure of the image, does not give a direct answer about what its *internal component* is, and this is while for himself (if we recall the preliminary notes to *The Possessed*/*Demons*, we will see this quite clearly) he indicates what an internal image of a two-fold image is, that is, what is hidden behind the 'human image.' In his notes to *The Possessed* he writes, "The world is being saved by the Beauty of Christ"[6]—which, we might add recalling ideas put forward in *The Golden Age in Your Pocket*, is almost irremediably encased within each person. From which it follows (and will be shown in *The Peasant Marei*): common people have not just *preserved* the beauty of their image (it is, as it was said in *The Golden Age in Your Pocket*, maintained even in those who forgot about it and do not remember about it; even in those who do not believe in it)—but they know how *to reveal* it to those, for whom it has long since been 'incredible'—and it is this that makes common people saviors for the educated part of the nation. The peasant Marei performs for the young nobleman Dostoevsky (the People perform for the upper class) the role of Mary for Christ[7]—The One who connects Him to Earth, The One who gives Him (an ideal being) a body. Having made such a complex pattern of internal references, only half revealed to the reader, Dostoevsky clearly says that the image of Christ is awakened in another person only by the one who is able to reveal the image of Christ in oneself—to expose to the eyes of another the deep *beauty* of one's own human image (in other words, that person becomes the Mother of God for another).

The next time when Dostoevsky returns to the delineation of the two-fold image is in the October issue of 1876. He speaks now about the depth of the world, about what is hidden beyond the veil of everyday life. It is interesting that this direct conversation about the two-fold image of reality, just as the first conversation about the two-fold image of a person, begins in the context of the conversation about suicides (a talk about suicides opens the first issue of 1876, and the quotation given below is in the chapter called *The Two Suicides*). Dostoevsky, again, not directly, but nevertheless very insistently leads the reader to a very specific idea: a person cannot live and commit suicide if he does not see or at least does not feel the world and himself in the fullness and *magnitude* of a two-fold image, even though usually his mind tries to "draw everything in a straight line." According to Dostoevsky, a correct and adequate vision of oneself and the world is not a condition of a *righteous* life—but a condition of life as such.

[6] Cited by (Tarasova 2019) since this phrase was incorrectly decoded in Dostoevsky's *Complete Collected Works*.

[7] See a detailed analysis of this masterpiece by Dostoevsky in (Kasatkina 2018).

> ‘But do you know,’ the writer said to me suddenly, apparently deeply struck by his long-held idea, ‘do you know’, whatever you write or portray, whatever you set down in a work of art, you can never match real life. It doesn’t matter what you depict—it will always come out weaker than real life. You might think you’ve found the most comical aspect of some certain thing in life and captured its most grotesque aspect—but not at all! Real life will at once present you with something of this same sort that you never even suspected and that goes far beyond anything your own observation and ‘imagination were able to create…!’
>
> I had known this ever since 1846, when I began writing, and perhaps even earlier, and this fact has struck me more than once and has caused me no small bewilderment: what is the use of art when we can see it so lacking in power? In truth, if you investigate some fact of real life—even one that at first glance is not so vivid—you’ll find in it, if you have the capacity and the vision, a depth that you won’t find even in Shakespeare. But here, you see, is the whole point: **whose vision and whose capacity**? Not only to create and to write a work of literature, but merely even to pick out the fact requires something of the artist. For some observers, all the facts of life pass by in the most touchingly simple manner and are so plain that it’s not worthwhile to think about them or even to look at them. Those same facts of life will sometimes perplex another observer to the extent that he (and this happens not infrequently) is at last incapable of simplifying and making a general conclusion about them, of drawing them out into a straight line and so setting his mind at rest. He resorts to simplification of another sort and **very simply** plants a bullet in his head so as to quench at one stroke his tormented mind and all its questions. These are only the two extremes, but between them lies the entire range of the human intellect. But of course we can never exhaust a whole phenomenon and never reach *its end, or its beginning*. We know only the daily flow of the things we see, and this only on the surface; but *the ends and the beginnings* are things that, for human beings, still lie in the realm of fantastic. (Dostoevsky 1993, p. 651)

This argument, especially the part concerning the utility and objectives of art, is closely related to those descriptions of creative practices which Dostoevsky presents to the reader in *The Peasant Marei*. However, in this article I want to focus exclusively on the author’s allusions to the second component of a two-fold image. Dostoevsky again repeats almost the same technique as in the previous cases, but this time he gives a reference not to those obvious quotations which, however, can be found mostly in his own preliminary notes and letters (and which may appear to him a very natural continuation of what is stated in the text directly, a continuation easily reconstructed by the reader—but which in practice turns out to be different), but to a really obvious quotation which can be found in the book available to all. “The ends and the beginnings” that are beyond “the daily flow of the things we see” are a clear, albeit inverted quote. Christ calls himself four times in the Revelation of St. John the Divine, the book that tells us exactly what is happening outside the temporal being of the visible world, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Rev.

1, 8); "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" (Rev. 1, 10); "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 21, 6); "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22, 13). This is what is the deep center, the inner image discerned by the writer, who "has a vision", in every phenomenon of everyday life—and here it is said in such a way that the reader can at last easily see what the writer means if he "takes the trouble" to place the quote. And the quote is turned over most likely because, again, as in the first case analyzed, the glance seems to be directed from different angles. Christ sees Himself as the beginning and the end of every thing in the world, as the beginning and the end of the whole world—a thing looks from the other side, goes from the end to the beginning, coming to know itself as the result—and only then discovering that the result had a beginning and a starting point.

The last text written in 1876 where Dostoevsky speaks of a two-fold image is a private letter sent to Maslyannikov.[8] The letter focuses on the case of Kornilova, a 20-year-old stepmother who threw her 6-year-old stepdaughter out of the window and immediately went to the police to plead guilty to murder, while the girl had got back on her feet and walked away practically without an injury. Kornilova was convicted—and Dostoevsky publicly insists that the case should be reviewed pointing out in *A Writer's Diary* a possible "pregnancy-induced temporary insanity." Maslennikov, a young admirer of Dostoevsky, as he himself writes in his memoirs,

> served in the Department on which it depended either to leave requests for clemency 'without consequences' or to present them in the proper light, with all the circumstances for and against. Sharing completely the view of the late Fyodor Mikhailovich [the memoirs were written soon after Dostoevsky's death] on the nature of Kornilova's crime, I sincerely wanted to help her, putting my hopes in my immediate superior known for his liberal (for those times) views and who had it in his power to advance my report. (Maslennikov 1883, p. 104)

Maslennikov wrote Dostoevsky a letter suggesting a plan of joint action. Dostoevsky replied with a very pragmatic message setting forth all that he had already done according to this plan and quite unexpectedly ended his letter as follows:

> There was a pool in Jerusalem, Bethesda, but the water in it only became healing when an angel descended from heaven and troubled the water. The impotent man complained to Christ that he had been waiting for a long time and was living at the pool but had no **man** to put him into the pool when the water was troubled. According to the meaning of your letter, I think that such a **man** for our patient want to be you. Do not miss the moment when the water is troubled. For this God will reward you, and I will also act until the end. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, vol. $29_2$, p. 131)

[8] Dostoevsky addresses his letters to *Maslyannikov* while the man himself writes his name as *Maslennikov*.

I already analyzed this text in my book (Kasatkina 2015). For the first time this text clearly demonstrates the structure of a two-fold image, emphasizing the two-fold image of space, where the Gospel story, deeply embedded in a today's situation comes out (Jn. 5, 2–15). Therefore, it has remained for us not a given, but a task (one of the many tasks of the Gospel) that each of us can perform right now ("such a man for our patient want to be you") *continuing* the Gospel story.

Now I would like to draw attention to another important moment, which, again, even in a private letter, was expressed obliquely. As a matter of fact, such a *man* came along at the Sheep pool, too—and this man was Christ, although He did not need to use the water of the spring to heal the impotent man. Water, in this case, is only a place where the divine and the human natures join in their cooperation, a place necessary until the moment the Man comes along and shows *where* these natures actually join, thus creating the possibility of an instant *correct action* that restores everything what became damaged. The phrase "do not miss the moment when the water is troubled" means here "do not miss the moment when the Lord descends into your soul and directs your actions in the right direction." In other words, what Dostoevsky literally wants to say to Maslennikov is the following: "Become her Christ and everything will work out." With this unexpected passage at the end of his letter, the writer literally connects the addressee with the image implied but not named directly, and brings him into resonance with the powerful prototype. This is not an exhortation at all—one can hear in these words a revelation to a man about his own self, it conveys that inner feeling of self that allows one to move without blunder and falsehood. This is something that Dostoevsky directly and repeatedly states in his preliminary notes to *The Possessed*: "sacrifice oneself and sacrifice again, only then will all be mutually happy, for to assume that all are Christs" (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, vol. 11, p. 106); "If we could imagine that all are Christs, could there be pauperism? In Christianity, even lack of food and fuel would be a salvation (instead of slaying babies one could die oneself for one's brother)" (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, vol. 11, p. 182); "Christianity is able even to save the whole world and all the questions in it (if all are Christs)" (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, vol. 11, p. 188); "Imagine that all are Christs—well, would present vacillations, perplexity, pauperism be possible? He who does not understand this does not understand anything about Christ and is not a Christian. If people did not have the slightest idea about the state and any sciences but each was like Christ, is it possible that there was no Paradise on Earth immediately?" (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, vol. 11, p. 193); "Here common work (if all were Christs) would be carried out with joyful singing, but not that of Athenian parties" (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, vol. 11, p. 193).

In all these descriptions of a two-fold image, Dostoevsky follows his own recommendation expressed in the same July of 1876 letter to Vsevolod Solovyov,

> That's what happens when you dot all the i's! State any paradox you like, but don't elaborate on it and everything will come out witty, and subtle, and comme il faut; on the contrary, say some word outright, say for example all of a sudden, 'This is the Messiah!'—directly and not as a hint, and no one will believe you just for your naivety, just because you stated it openly, blurted it out. And, conversely, if many of the most famous wits, such as Voltaire, for

example, instead of ridicule, hints, half-words and allusions, suddenly decided to express all they believe in, showed their true nature at once, their real self—then, believe me, not a tithe of the former success would they've gained. Moreover, they would've just been laughed at. Yes, man somehow doesn't like the last word in anything, doesn't like an 'uttered' thought; he says that 'A thought once uttered is a lie.'[9] (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, vol. $29_2$, p. 102)

However, the Messiah in all these statements is not someone who came from the outside, as an external observer, but someone who opened up in the depths of our inner selves.

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### Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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