

Dmytro Chyzhevsky and Petr Bitsilli on the “Problem of the Double”

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The history of relations between Petr Bitsilli¹ and Dmytro Chyzhevsky is not substantiated by any record of correspondence or active cooperation. At any rate, the archives accessible to us provide no documentary evidence of it. This “history of relations” developed without personal contact. However, even in this “intermittent” form, it was highly significant in Bitsilli’s scholarly activity. If one considers the statistics of mutual “citations,” reviews, and references, they do not add up to very much. Nevertheless, this meeting “without personal contact” was of unquestionable significance and led the two scholars to an expression of unqualified mutual respect.

Here are a few of the most important stages in the “intersection” of their scholarly interests: Chyzhevsky’s review of Bitsilli’s *Outlines of a*

1. Petr Mikhailovich Bitsilli (b. Odesa, 1 [13] October 1879–d. Sofia, 24/25 August 1953), historian, philologist, and literary critic. The works that he published before the Russian Revolution were contributions to medieval studies. He emigrated to Serbia in 1920. In 1924 he moved to Bulgaria, where he held the chair of world history at Sofia University on a contract basis until 1948. The émigré period of Bitsilli’s life was marked by a change of disciplinary preference: he became ever more involved in philological studies. In 1948 he was dismissed without pension, largely because of the change in Bulgaria’s political orientation. Bitsilli’s bibliography is extensive: he was eagerly sought by Russian diaspora publications as a reviewer and contributor. His articles were invariably distinguished by refined scholarly culture and academic “bearing,” as well as extraordinary liveliness of thought and a brilliant style. His most important literary studies are *Etiudy o russkoi poezii* (Prague: Plamia, 1926), “Tvorchestvo Chekhova: opyt stilisticheskogo analiza,” *Godishnik na Sofiiskii Universitet. Istoriko-filologicheski fakultet* (henceforth *GSU*) 38, no. 6 (1941–42): 1–138; “Pushkin i problema chistoi poezii,” *GSU* 41, no. 11 (1944–45): 1–61; “K voprosu o vnutrennei forme romana Dostoevskogo,” *GSU* 42 (1945–46): 1–75; “Zametki o chekhovskom ‘Rasskaze neizvestnogo cheloveka,’” *GSU* 44, no. 4 (1947–48): 1–13; and “Problema cheloveka u Gogolia,” *GSU* 44, no. 4 (1947–48): 1–32 (third pagination).

Theory of Historical Science;² Bitsilli's close attention to Chyzhevsky's programmatic article "On the Problem of the Double (From a Book on Formalism in Ethics)"³ and his article "On Gogol's 'Overcoat'"⁴; Bitsilli's review of Chyzhevsky's fundamental study of *Hegel in Russia*;⁵ and the posthumous publication of Bitsilli's *On Chekhov* in German translation in the *Forum Slavicum* series established by Chyzhevsky.⁶ Despite the paucity of these "intersections," some of which were brief indeed (amounting only to mentions, stipulations, or references), they became decisive in the history of the dialogue "without personal contact" between Chyzhevsky and Bitsilli. It is also significant that the works inspiring a response from the two scholars were of definitive importance not only to their own careers but also to the research space of the Russian diaspora. It was this joint sense of what was important, critical, and innovative that turned the impersonal association of Chyzhevsky and Bitsilli into something of a joint creative enterprise.

The most important subject of their intellectual relations—one that determined the structure of their association, so to speak—was the "problem of the double" raised in Chyzhevsky's article. Originally published in the first collection *On Dostoevsky* edited by A. L. Bem,⁷ the

2. Review of *Ocherki teorii istoricheskoi nauki* in *Sovremennye zapiski*, 1929, no. 39: 542–47.

3. D. Chizhevsky, "K probleme dvoynika (Iz knigi o formalizme v etike)," in *O Dostoevskom*, no. 1 (Prague, 1929), 9–38. Bitsilli's review of this article appeared in *Chisla*, 1930, nos. 2–3: 240–42.

4. D. Chizhevsky, "O 'Shineli' Gogolia," *Sovremennye zapiski* 67 (1938): 172–95. Bitsilli constantly refers to this article in his "Pushkin i Viazemskii," in *GSU* 35, no. 15 (1939) and "Tvorchestvo Chekhova" (1941–42), where, examining the motif of Bashmachkin's infatuation with an inanimate object—an overcoat—he notes: "On this, see Professor Chyzhevsky's excellent article on 'Shinel' in *Sovremennye zapiski* 67" (Bitsilli, *Tragediia russkoi kultury: Issledovaniia, stati, retsenzii* [Paris: *Sovremennye zapiski*, 1933], 351). Constant reminiscences of this article of Chyzhevsky's are to be encountered in a number of Bitsilli's works, including "K voprosu o vnutrennei forme romana Dostoevskogo" (1945–46).

5. D. Chizhevsky, *Gegel v Rossii* (Paris, 1939). Bitsilli's review appeared in *Sovremennye zapiski* 70 (1940): 289–91.

6. P. M. Bicilli, *Anton P. Cechov. Das Werk und sein Stil*, ed. V. Sieveking, *Forum Slavicum*, ed. D. Tschizewskij (Munich: Fink, 1966). I am grateful to the translator of the German edition, Vincent Sieveking, for relating its history in a letter to me. The translation was initiated by a student of Chyzhevsky's, D. Gerhardt. At first Chyzhevsky contemplated a Russian-language version, which would be simpler to publish, but, thanks to German Slavists, Bitsilli's work appeared in German translation.

7. Three collections entitled *O Dostoevskom* appeared in the years 1929–36, reflecting the work of the Dostoevsky Studies Seminar at the Russian People's University

article appeared with a subtitle in “From a Book on Formalism in Ethics.” In the same period, Chyzhevsky published two more articles: “On Formalism in Ethics (Notes on the Current Crisis in Ethical Theory)” (1928)⁸ and “Ethics and Logic: On the Question of Overcoming Ethical Formalism” (1931).⁹ Both were published by the Russian People’s University (Prague) and stand apart from Chyzhevsky’s work on Dostoevsky’s “Double.” However, in a footnote to his article on “Ethics and Logic,” Chyzhevsky observed that “Because I am unable to publish my book on formalism in ethics in toto in the near future, I am taking the liberty of offering abstracts of particular chapters. This work is related to two other publications, ‘On Formalism in Ethics’...and ‘On the Problem of the Double.’”¹⁰ Although Chyzhevsky’s article about Dostoevsky’s work is formally and thematically distinct from those chapters, it must be borne in mind that he regarded the “problem of the double” as an inalienable part of a large-scale research project devoted to a critique of ethical formalism. Thus, his article “On the Problem of the Double,” a successful instance of applying the method of “close reading” (*melkie nabliudeniia*) to literary studies, as practiced in the seminar directed by Bem, was assigned by Chyzhevsky himself first and foremost to the sphere of philosophy, ethics, and ontology, and not to that of literary studies.

In his article Chyzhevsky argues that the theme of the double, raised in Dostoevsky’s early story, not only was not abandoned by the writer but also manifested itself “again and again in his work in a variety of metamorphoses.”¹¹ By means of close reading, Chyzhevsky draws attention to a variety of leitmotifs in “The Double”—those of imposture,

in Prague. A. L. Bem, the guiding spirit of the seminar, wrote: “In character it was more a scholarly society than a standard university seminar. Those who joined it were mainly mature scholars interested in Dostoevsky’s work.... The seminar’s work repeatedly attracted the attention of the Russian and foreign press, especially in connection with the first issue of the collection *O Dostoevskom* (1929), which consisted of papers read at the seminar” (see *O Dostoevskom*, no. 2 [Prague, 1933]: 123–24).

8. D. Chizhevsky, “O formalizme v etike. (Zametki o sovremennom krizise eticheskoi teorii,” in *Nauchnye trudy Russkogo narodnogo universiteta v Prage*, no. 1 (Prague, 1928), 15–29.

9. D. Chizhevsky, “Etika i logika. K voprosu o preodolenii eticheskogo formalizma,” in *Nauchnye trudy Russkogo narodnogo universiteta v Prage*, no. 4 (Prague, 1931), 50–68.

10. *Ibid.*, 50.

11. Chizhevsky, “K probleme dvoynika,” 11.

perfect likeness, and loss of place. Tracing the problem of place back to the baroque tradition and actualizing it, Chyzhevsky relates it to ideas of Hryhorii Skovoroda with which he was completely familiar.¹² He emphasizes that “the appearance of the double and his forcing Goliadkin out of his ‘place’ merely reveals the illusoriness of that ‘place,’” and, by the same token, is closely related to the “problem of security, reality, and stability of actual human existence.” He stresses the ontological (not psychological or social) insecurity of the protagonist of Dostoevsky’s story and, tracking the ontological “idea of the double” in Dostoevsky’s work, convincingly shows that it was one of his central ideas, as manifested in Versilov’s “split personality” in “A Raw Youth”; Ivan Karamazov’s “doubles” (the devil; Smerdiakov); and Stavrogin’s “doubles” in *The Possessed*. According to Chyzhevsky, the “problem of the double” reaches its apogee in the novel *The Possessed*, since all of Stavrogin’s disciples are his “doubles” or “emanations of his spirit.” For Chyzhevsky, a split personality or duality are the results of a tragic disintegration of the soul; of the lack of a “spiritual anchor,”¹³ ontological security and integrity: “in Stavrogin’s soul there is *no ‘direction’*; he possesses no spiritual ‘magnetic meridian,’ and for him there is no ‘magnetic pole’ toward which, in Dostoevsky’s opinion, every *living* soul is drawn—*there is no God*. Man’s living, concrete existence; any ‘place’ for him in the world is made possible only through a living link with divine existence.”¹⁴

“The problem of ‘security’ and the ontological stability of the individual’s ‘ethical existence’ is indeed...the essential problem of the nineteenth century,” notes Chyzhevsky. However, having uncovered many aspects of the problem of the double and its relevance in the

12. Chyzhevsky’s article “On Gogol’s ‘Overcoat’” is imbued with the same idea. “The ‘Center’...of Christian mysticism is God. Certainty and stability are to be found in Him. He also shows man ‘his place’ (which everyone possesses)... Loss of connection with that Center means the loss of one’s place in the world” (192). Chyzhevsky closely associates the subject of “loss of one’s place” with the traditions of Christian mysticism, the verses of Hryhorii Skovoroda, Paisii Velychkovsky’s “Love of Goodness,” and the prose of Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko. He develops this theme in detail in articles devoted to the work of Nikolai Gogol/Mykola Hohol. In his article “Neizvestnyi Gogol” (*Novyi zhurnal*, 1951, no. 27: 126–58), he notes: “In Gogol’s opinion, God gives everyone ‘his place’ in the world (this is later repeated by Dostoevsky)” (145). As we see, Chyzhevsky actively developed ideas raised in the Dostoevsky Studies Seminar for many years afterwards.

13. See Chizhevsky, “O ‘Shineli’ Gogolia,” 192.

14. Chizhevsky, “K probleme dvoynika,” 22.

intellectual constructions of nineteenth-century philosophy, Chyzhevsky fundamentally revises the understanding of that problem and makes it one of the most important points of his single-minded critique of ethical rationalism. In Chyzhevsky, the critique of ethical formalism is directed above all against the rationalist ethics of Fichte and Nietzsche, as well as against Kant's "categorical imperative," which reduces the understanding of an ethical system to the general laws of nature. In Chyzhevsky's opinion, such a breach with concreteness forces one to contemplate the world "through the eyes of an impassive and faceless universal double."¹⁵ Thus Chyzhevsky raises the idea of the individual's *concrete existence* in its most acute form, stressing that abstract thinking basically presupposes the idea of "similar beings" as passive embodiments of rational principles and abstract ideas. It is this very point—the postulation of the concreteness and individuality of man's ethical activity—that reveals an obvious "point of contact" in the thinking of Chyzhevsky and Bitsilli. When Chyzhevsky traces the problem of ethics and ontology back to the idea of the irreplaceability, unrepeatability, and uniqueness of a concrete individual, his arguments coincide with the systematic argumentation deployed by Bitsilli as a consistent critic of the philosophy of history. In order to track these "points of contact," we must turn to Bitsilli's programmatic *Outlines of a Theory of Historical Science*. That fundamental work was issued in 1925 by the Plamia publishing house in Prague.

We must begin with the reservation that the *Outlines* are not devoted to the problems of history as a subject but to those of the historical discipline (method) and to the author's convincing demonstration of a crisis of theory in that discipline. What are the basic postulates of that book, and wherein does its author discern the groundlessness of a variety of rationalist theories in historical science, first and foremost in historiographic theories? According to Bitsilli, history as it really is cannot be subsumed entirely under any metaphysical scheme, as this inevitably excludes the accidental and irrational aspect of the historical process and leads involuntarily to the rationalization of history. Treating history through the prism of supreme ideas leads logically to the question: What principle is to be used for the selection of historical material? What is to be taken as a model? And can everything that happened in history be taken to conform to such a model, coincide with it, and explain it? As a result, whole aspects of history have to be sacrificed to an ideal history—an abstraction of some kind. But consciousness, reflecting what has al-

15. *Ibid.*, 30.

ready taken place and claiming mastery of reality, strives to control, shape and construct it according to its own discretion. Thus the philosophy of history does not describe a subject (historical reality) but creates it. The merging of strictly philosophical and strictly historical viewpoints, the effort to find one absolute meaning in historical reality, and approaching history in a “spirit of optimism” leads to the destruction of its living substance and to rejection of the idea of the creative individuality of every actual agent of the historical process, that is, the individual.

From Bitsilli’s viewpoint, the conception of historical existence as movement toward a higher goal established from above—a process of the gradual realization of higher absolute values—is fundamentally ahistorical: the subjects of historical life are here presented as passive counters; as objects, not subjects, since the “meaning of history” does not *unfold* creatively in their concrete actions and intentions but is merely *disclosed* in their fate. In excluding the individual as the subject of history and the autonomous sources of the spirit, the philosophy of history undermines itself from within, casting doubt on the absolute impossibility of repeating or recreating a particular historical reality, moment, or subject.

The context of the *Outlines* takes simultaneous account of several historical epochs, currents, and schools in the theory of historical science. The immediate polemical target of the work is the new branch of Russian historiosophy as part of the West European philosophical tradition, first and foremost Lev Karsavin’s philosophy of history.

On broader inspection, the *Outlines* are opposed to any “modeling” of history in the spirit of infinite progress, whether defined by the developing Absolute, as in Karsavin’s *Philosophy of History*, or by an ideal society in the spirit of Marxist theory. Bitsilli shows convincingly that each of these theories treats the history of mankind as the realm of necessity, not of liberty, and insistently stresses the new task of historical understanding: “It differs in principle from the problem of the relation between free will and necessity as that question was posed in antiquity by theologians and philosophers of history. At that time freedom was understood as the right to choose one of several predetermined paths; as the possibility of carrying out or not carrying out any one of a number of preformulated tasks. Having exposed the roots of the old historical understanding, we gain the opportunity to formulate it more or less as follows: if Tolstoy had not written *War and Peace*, then that novel could have been, or perhaps even should have been written by someone else. A

similar idea is concealed beneath most Marxist constructions.”¹⁶ According to Bitsilli, “programmed” history, which does not admit the possibility of accident, rejects creativity—for the philosopher of history, the “individual” and the “accidental” turns out to be a residue not subject to rationalization and is therefore expendable. In his review of the *Outlines*, Chyzhevsky notes that very argument as one of the most convincing in the polemic with the philosophy of history.¹⁷

Bitsilli insistently directs the attention of the historical scholarship of his day to the problem of the *absolute* value of the individual. “The thousands and thousands of combinations; the thousands and thousands of individual wills striving to objectify themselves, coinciding and competing, agreeing and conflicting, make up the living, constantly changing substance of history, which is constantly renewing itself. Each atom of the historical whole; each bearer of a charge of volition is limited in two aspects: first, from within, as an individual; secondly, from outside. His external limitations consist of psychic atoms like himself, as well as the products of their activity and, finally, of the period. Any attempt to determine the specific gravity of any of those categories of limitations and within any of them is doomed to failure, for experimentation in the strict sense is impossible here.”¹⁸ Written during a tremendous onslaught of reason, which had taken on the mission of experimenting with historical reality, the *Outlines* were unquestionably a response to the destructive experiment of the Russian Revolution. At the same time, the *Outlines* seemingly foretold the crisis that would engulf Europe and Russia in subsequent decades, involving the large-scale application of various abstractions, theories, and schemes, leading ultimately to a global “crisis of humanism.”

As an alternative to the philosophy of history, Bitsilli insists first and foremost that no external formula be imposed on history but that an effort be made to comprehend its inner law of development. Expressing doubt about theoretical “experimentation,” he appeals to his readers not to “formulate” or “invent” but to “discover,” that is, to engage directly in profound study of the historical process itself and individualize each moment of history, comprehending it on its own terms. “Life is infinitely more complex than our constructions and schemes. It is an impossible

16. P. M. Bitsilli, *Ocherki teorii istoricheskoi nauki* (Prague, 1925), 32.

17. Chizhevsky, review of *Ocherki teorii istoricheskoi nauki* in *Sovremennye zapiski*, 1929, no. 39: 544.

18. Bitsilli, *Ocherki teorii istoricheskoi nauki*, 231–32.

task to comprehend it at once philosophically and historically, both in the multiplicity of its manifestations and in its basic tendencies.”¹⁹ Bitsilli’s thinking is sharply at odds with the historiosophy of Lev Karsavin, whose emphasis on the *common* elements in history runs counter to Bitsilli’s *individualizing* method and idiographic principles of understanding historical reality. However, in his insistent stress on history as an “idiographic science” concerned with “individual” phenomena,²⁰ Bitsilli comes up against the distinctive characteristics of idiography: because it describes historical and cultural phenomena as unique, it cannot offer any means of reconstructing the whole. “It may appear,” writes Bitsilli, “that an individualizing treatment of historical material makes history disintegrate completely and that the formulated...*principium individuationis*, if consistently applied, would make any periodization impossible.... In that case, where is the limit to the division of history?”²¹ Consequently, the questions of how to formulate historical reality and how to synthesize or periodize history become central to the *Outlines of a Theory of Historical Science*. “Precisely because historical truth is a process of ceaseless becoming, in every moment of which Absolute Being manifests itself, that truth as a whole and its every moment take on their own particular value.”²² How, then, is one to resolve the antinomy between the diversity of empirical reality, which yields to no comparison, and its absolute flux; how can the evolutionizing (genetic) and aesthetic/individualizing approaches to history be reconciled?²³

In an article on “The Antinomy of Historicism and the Crisis of Historical Science,” Bitsilli demonstrates the ineluctable antinomy between these two approaches and the groundlessness of all the diverse theories that attempt to resolve it. According to him, this insuperable antinomy cannot be eliminated because it is rooted in human history itself, inherent in the antinomy between evolution and creation. It is that insoluble antinomy, noted in Bitsilli’s *Outlines*, that transforms his

19. *Ibid.*, 27.

20. *Ibid.*, 263.

21. *Ibid.*, 264.

22. *Ibid.*, 148.

23. Bitsilli devoted another monograph to the problem of historical synthesis: *Uvod" v" izuchavaneto na novata i nai-novata istoriia (Opit" za periodizatsiia)* (An Introduction to the Study of Modern and Recent History [A Trial Periodization]) (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bŭlgarskata akademiia na naukite, 1927).

understanding of the historian's work as an unceasing approach to truth; an eternal movement toward primal experience, free of "ideational" deformation. Bitsilli's departure from rigid constructions, final verdicts, and the desire to present experimental results as final and definitive make his method creatively mobile, attuned to the infinity of cognition. Theoretical caution would always be a defining feature of Bitsilli's work. Even the most clever and brilliant hypotheses and approaches that characterized him as an original thinker usually seemed to "hang" in their trajectories, avoiding final incarnation and conceptual "completeness." To be sure, these features are not evidence of "conceptual weakness" but of a deliberate choice in favor of painstaking analysis, to the detriment of "stylish" theory.

Such theoretical "incompleteness" is a distinguishing feature of the *Outlines of a Theory of Historical Science* and should be taken as an inalienable aspect of his historical outlook. Having posed the question of historical synthesis (the theoretical formulation of historical reality), Bitsilli does not solve it or propose an answer. The fact that the question of synthesis is posed in the *Outlines* does not oblige the author to present his own solution. Synthesis in historical science as an effort (quite artificial, in Bitsilli's view) to join together or merge individual historical phenomena runs counter to the idiographic method on which the author of the *Outlines* relies. Here idiography turns out to be not only Bitsilli's subject but his method as well. For him, the question of what criterion the historian should use to make sense of the chaos of reality remains open. Let us simply note that if he attempted to give an answer, he would inevitably eliminate the insoluble antinomy of historicism that he himself discovered and thereby negate the fundamental purpose of his work.

Criticisms pertaining to the "disorganization" and "incompleteness" of the *Outlines* were already raised by Bitsilli's contemporaries. Thus, Chyzhevsky referred to the "volcanism" of the book as its principal defect, noting that "The author himself seems unaware of that 'volcanism': he has placed his desk in the middle of a lava flow and written a 'book' with footnotes, 'excurses,' and citations."²⁴ It is hard to say whether the reviewer noted the organic connection of that 'volcanism' with the scholarly method employed in the *Outlines*, but his recognition of the "fruitfulness of the book, not only methodologically but also philosophically," can hardly be considered accidental.²⁵ In this regard Chy-

24. Chizhevsky, review of *Ocherki teorii istoricheskoi nauki*, 542–43.

25. *Ibid.*

zhevsky resembles another reviewer, the philosopher and philologist Nikolai Bakhtin, who wrote: “The broad and precise presentation of the problem; the erudition and penetration of the analysis and, finally, the exposition, not lacking in brilliance and acuity—all this makes Bitsilli’s book hardly less than the most significant phenomenon of our philosophical literature of the most recent years.”²⁶

Generally speaking, the ambivalence of Chyzhevsky’s review is telling. His critical observations concerning the organization of the material do not reduce his interest in the author’s innovations: “P. M. Bitsilli rejects the possibility of a ‘philosophy of history’ because...for the philosopher of history, all that is specifically historical is ‘a residue not subject to rationalization.’ For all its simplicity, this argumentation, in our view, is a very painful blow to any *rationalization* of the philosophy of history.”²⁷

In his article “On the Problem of the Double,” Chyzhevsky takes up this idea of Bitsilli’s: in an abstract understanding of ethics, “the living subject of ethical action becomes...a soulless executor of the commands of abstract law; a superfluous pendant in the system of universal morality—superfluous because he can be replaced by any other ethical subject.”²⁸ Bitsilli’s criticism of a philosophy of history operating with an “average ‘soul in general’”²⁹ is akin to Chyzhevsky’s critique of the “faceless universal double” in the abstract constructions of ethical rationalism.

Chyzhevsky himself notes the correlation between the basic ideas of the *Outlines* and the critique of ethical rationalism in his review of the book. Commenting on Bitsilli’s idea of the impossibility of history “in general,” Chyzhevsky notes: “The statement of the problem is reminiscent of the statement of the problem of ‘formal ethics’ in contemporary philosophy. See my article in the collection of the Russ[ian] People’s Univ[ersity] in Prague”—a reference to his article “On Formalism in Ethics (Notes on the Current Crisis of Ethical Theory)” (1928). In this connection, however, one should note the chronology. Chyzhevsky’s article “On Formalism in Ethics” appeared three years after the publication of the *Outlines*, and his review of the book only saw print a year

26. N. Bakhtin, review of *Ocherki teorii istoricheskoi nauki*, *Zveno* (Paris), no. 12 (16 March 1925): 4.

27. Chizhevsky, review of *Ocherki teorii istoricheskoi nauki*, 544.

28. Chizhevsky, “K probleme dvoynika,” 30.

29. Bitsilli, *Ocherki teorii istoricheskoi nauki*, 235.

after that. Priority in this dialogue therefore more probably belongs to the *Outlines*, which opened this “impersonal” exchange between the two scholars.

For Chyzhevsky, the theoretical self-limitation of the *Outlines* does not conceal the undoubted relevance of the problem revealed by Bitsilli: “the book gives no positive description of the peculiarity of the historical element. That positive description is only hinted at in such epithets as ‘individuality,’ ‘irrationality,’ ‘singularity,’ ‘transitoriness,’ ‘uniqueness,’ and so on. But the author himself evidently feels that such epithets are far from sufficient, as he does not settle on any one of them. It seems to us that the author’s basic attitude here is perfectly correct. A description of historical being certainly cannot be reduced to any abstract formula.”³⁰ Let us note that Chyzhevsky’s own critique of “abstract thinking”³¹ in ethical rationalism, as well as his subsequent revision of the understanding of ethics, would be based on those same “alternating” concepts: the idea of “singularity,” “transitoriness,” and “uniqueness” would become central to his study of the “problem of the double” in Dostoevsky’s work.

Nikolai Lossky, operating with the same “epithets” that Chyzhevsky and Bitsilli used concordantly, noted in his review of the Dostoevsky studies collection: “Chyzhevsky uncovers the profound philosophical significance of duality as a consequence of the moral collapse of the human subject, to wit, his failure to carry out his concrete *individual* purpose, which makes it possible to replace one subject with another, leading to his loss of *uniqueness*” (emphasis added).³² Positive reviews of “On the Problem of the Double” were written by S. I. Gessen,³³ S. L. Frank,³⁴ and L. A. Zander.³⁵ The problem of the double, raised in the Prague Dostoevsky seminar, also met with a response from Bitsilli. Judging by his letter of 19 March 1930 to A. L. Bem, he made a point of sending Chyzhevsky his review of the collection: “I trust that you received my two reviews of your collection.... Along with your offprint, I have included one for colleague Chyzhevsky, whose address I have

30. Chizhevsky, review of *Ocherki teorii istoricheskoi nauki*, 543.

31. Chizhevsky, “K probleme dvoynika,” 29.

32. Review of *Dostojewskij-Studien* (Reichenberg: Veröffentlichungen der Slavistischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft an der Deutschen Universität in Prag, 1931), in *Sovremennye zapiski*, 1932, no. 49: 463.

33. *Sovremennye zapiski*, 1930, no. 43: 503.

34. *Rul* (Berlin), 1930, no. 2709.

35. *Put* (Paris), 1930, no. 25: 128.

lost.”³⁶ It is apparent from the letter how important it was for Bitsilli to establish a dialogue with Chyzhevsky. In his next letter to A. L. Bem, written on 15 April 1930, Bitsilli agreed to Bem’s request for a review of the first collection *On Dostoevsky* and noted how important it had been in renewing his own vision of Dostoevsky’s work: “I must say that recently I have somehow begun to perceive Dostoevsky quite differently than before, and a large role in this has been played both by the collection (I have in mind Chyzhevsky’s article and your thoughts on the significance of sleep in D[ostoevsky]’s work)³⁷ and Bakhtin’s excellent work.”³⁸ Bitsilli’s review of the collection, which appeared in the Paris journal *Chisla*, was constructed mainly around the problem of the double, not around the significance of sleep in Dostoevsky (cf. Bem’s article “The Dramatization of Delirium”).

The review made Bitsilli a participant in a complex discussion among prominent thinkers of the Russian diaspora—N. O. Lossky, S. N. Bulgakov, A. L. Bem, and S. L. Frank. In Russian émigré philosophy and philosophical literary criticism, the “problem of the double” developed in a new direction as a concept of the “other” or the “counterpart,” becoming ever more distant from both the Russian philosophical tradition (Vladimir Soloviev, Pavel Florensky) and the phenomenology of the “other” in Mikhail Bakhtin’s book. One of the most active initiators of that discussion was the seminar led by A. L. Bem, which pursued its declared intention of making Prague a center of Dostoevsky studies.³⁹ The same intention may be discerned in Bem’s editorial policy with regard to the seminar materials: he placed Chyzhevsky’s “On the Problem of the Double” and Nikolai Osipov’s “The Double: A St. Petersburg Poem” at the beginning of the first collection as most representative of the Dostoevsky Studies Seminar at the Russian People’s University in Prague.

Against the background of this extensive study and rethinking of the problem of the double, Bitsilli’s brief review of the collection *On Dostoevsky* might be considered a mere *apropos* remark. However, as the

36. “Pisma P. M. Bitsilli k A. L. Bemu,” edited and annotated by M. Bubenikovaia (Prague) and G. Petkova (Sofia), *Novyi zhurnal/The New Review* 2002, no. 228: 129.

37. A. L. Bem, “Dramatizatsiia breida (“Khoziaika” Dostoevskogo),” *O Dostoevskom*, no. 1, 77–124.

38. M. M. Bakhtin, *Problemy tvorчества Dostoevskogo* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1929). For this quotation, see “Pisma P. M. Bitsilli k A. L. Bemu,” 129–30.

39. A. L. Bem, “Ot redaktora” in *O Dostoevskom*, no. 1, 8.

literary critic G. V. Adamovich justly observed of Bitsilli's reviewing style, "in a hundred or a hundred fifty lines...[he] sometimes manages to touch upon so many subjects and questions that it would take a major piece of research to work them all out."⁴⁰

Strictly speaking, the publication in *Chisla* can hardly be called a review: the author gives no extended analysis of the Prague collection; instead, he undertakes a miniature research essay and develops the theme of the double, which has excited his interest. The reviewer's "disproportion" is no accident: in many respects, it is predetermined by the *Outlines of a Theory of Historical Science*. Like Chyzhevsky, who addressed the problem of the double in the context of an extensive polemic with ethical rationalism, Bitsilli viewed "duality" through the prism of a polemic with rationalizing historiosophy. In response to Chyzhevsky's article, Bitsilli presents his treatment of the problem of the double. "All of Dostoevsky's work," he writes, "is devoted to the tragedy of the individual, The elements of that tragedy are the conflict of the individual and his milieu (*pochva*), the individual and the cosmos (*zemlia*), and the individual and God. These conflicts are associated with the basic conflict—that of the individual with himself. The individual's alienation from universal unity is equivalent to his *disintegration*: the 'pure' I ceases to be an *individuum* (indivisible) and loses itself; its *identity*. This is the disease of the 'Enlightenment' with its nominalist rationalism.⁴¹ To find oneself; to overcome internal chaos and, ultimately, the disintegration of individual consciousness (insanity is a *moral* disease) is to assert *one's own* concreteness, which means realizing the concreteness of the Whole, the World and God.... The passive mysticism of the East and 'enlightened' theomachy ultimately lead to one and the same thing: for Kirillov, becoming God means *destroying oneself*. Opposed to those two paths is a third—the path of active mysticism of European humanity: to become conscious of oneself as a *microcosm*; as a monad associated with the whole, *representing* it but not swallowed up by it."⁴² As we see, Bitsilli considers the problem of the double through the prism of the problem of individuality, which is central to his scholarly legacy. Bitsilli himself was well aware of the complexity and novelty of the problem posed in his review; hence his summary

40. G. Adamovich, "Literaturnye zametki," *Poslednie novosti* (Paris), 29 August 1934, no. 4900, 3.

41. On this, see the valuable observations in Chyzhevsky's article (Bitsilli's note).

42. Bitsilli, *review of O Dostoevskom* in *Chisla*, 1930, nos. 2–3: 241–42.

comment: “Further work along those lines would illuminate yet another aspect of the selfsame problem of duality.”⁴³

But the reviewer himself was not to return to the problem noted in the review either in the immediate future or in the long term. This does not mean that Bitsilli gave up working on the “problem of the double”; on the contrary, it occupied a substantial place in his fundamental philological work “On the Question of the Inner Form of Dostoevsky’s Novels.”⁴⁴ Bitsilli’s path to that work was a complicated one. As early as 1930, he presented philology with the task of substantiating, from the viewpoint of esthetics and style, the organic necessity of the inner form of Dostoevsky’s novels that Bakhtin called the “polyphonic novel.” In a letter to A. L. Bem, Bitsilli would note: “Bakhtin has not shown how polyphony nevertheless leads to harmony; a fugue, after all, is not the same thing as the simultaneous sounding of various melodies: therein lies the problem, and I am racking my brains over it.”⁴⁵ The fundamental study undertaken in 1945, completely dedicated to the investigation of the problem over which Bitsilli had “racked his brains” back in 1930, presented literary studies with one more version of the inner form of Dostoevsky’s novels. That version was constructed not so much on the basis of the idea of polyphony as on that of duality. The conceptual apparatus of Dostoevsky studies was enriched by yet another term—the “novel-drama”—and the “problem of the double” found its further development in the sphere of poetics, thereby adding yet another page to the dialogue “without personal contact” between the two scholars, Petr Bitsilli and Dmytro Chyzhevsky.

43. *Ibid.*, 242.

44. Bitsilli, “K voprosu o vnutrennei forme romana Dostoevskogo,” *GSU* 42 (1945–46): 1–75.

45. “Pisma P. M. Bitsilli k A. L. Bemu,” 130.