N I N E

Masochism and the Collective

In Russia, as in most other large cultures outside of the Western world (Japan, China, India, etc.), emphasis is placed on the collective. What cross-cultural social psychologists call collectivism predominates over individualism. To oversimplify somewhat: the beliefs, needs, and goals of the “in-group” are accepted as being more important than those of the private self, and to some extent are not distinguished from those of the self; mutual cooperation is expected within the collective; the interests of others come before one’s own interests.¹

What It Means to Be a Zero

Masochism, as has been observed more than once in this book, is a phenomenon of the individual. Individuals do exist in collectivist cultures, even if their interests are de-emphasized. Indeed, such de-emphasis serves to encourage masochism.

Much individual masochism in Russia is enacted in relation to the collective, as opposed to another concrete person. The collective does act on the individual, but the individual is an actor as well—in contexts ranging all the way from Slavophilic sobornost' to Stalinist totalitarianism.² The collective cannot itself act without some cooperation from the individual. In Russia such cooperation often takes the form of sacrifice, suffering, or humiliation.

For example, the individual Russian peasant in tsarist Russia would on some occasions be obliged literally to bow down before the collective. Here is the ritualized utterance of a young bride newly arrived in the
village of Podzovalovo, Orlov province, in 1898, as she repeatedly bowed in all four directions to the crowd surrounding her, first from the waist, the second time a little lower, the third time almost to the ground: “I bow low to the beautiful girls, to the young married women, to the bachelor fellows, to the grandfathers, to the uncles, to the grandmothers, to the aunties! To the matchmaker men and the matchmaker women, to all in one swoop! I beg you to accept me into your fold, and if not, to drive me away!” The first and second time around this servile act was met with silence by the collective, the third time around, that is, after a grand total of twelve bows, it was greeted with an enthusiastic chorus of song, followed by more servile utterances by the young woman. Those dissatisfied with the woman’s performance heckled her: “Little mother, submit and bow lower!”

My concern here will not be to judge what constitutes too much or too little exercise of power by the collective, or to estimate to what degree the individual should or should not act in servile fashion toward, or sacrifice himself or herself to the collective. Rather, I will simply attempt to examine the underlying psychodynamics of individuals who characteristically welcome humiliation, suffering, or defeat specifically at the hands of the collective in Russia.

By collective I mean any group of psychological importance to the individual, be it the nuclear family, the extended peasant family, the artel or other work collective, the tsarist rural commune (“obshchina” or “mir”), the Orthodox church congregation, temporary get-togethers (e.g., “posidelka,” “khorovod”), the schoolroom, the Soviet Komsomol, the military unit, the Soviet village or collective farm, the Party, the tsar’s court, the Motherland, and so on. There are (or were) many kinds of collectives in Russia, and any one individual could belong to several collectives simultaneously. Here I will be concerned with various collectives within Russia, as well as with Russia herself.

The family is of course the most basic type of collective, the fundamental “cell” (“iacheika”) of society, as the Soviet sociologists used to say. That this is so can be seen in the directionality certain metaphors take. The Russian tsar was customarily referred to as “little father” (“batiushka”), but the father in the traditional peasant family was not normally called “tsar.” Similarly, Russia itself is called “mother,” but mothers are not called “Russia.” This directionality may seem extremely obvious, yet it is usually neglected.
One reason why the moral masochism of the individual in Russia has not been overly visible is because Russians prefer to emphasize the collective rather than de-emphasize the individual. Sometimes the de-emphasis of the individual is even denied, as in this statement by the Soviet writer A. Ivanov: “The chief feature which the Slavophiles valued in the Russian people was not smirenie at all, but the communal spirit, or as we would put it today, the feeling of collectivism as opposed to the individualism and egoism of the bourgeois West.” In fact, however, the “communal spirit” implies smirenie, collectivism entails masochism of the individual. The two are logically connected, even if conscious attention is directed toward one at the expense of the other. The bride who bowed down twelve times before her collective was expressing “communal spirit” and was behaving masochistically.

Russians like to emphasize their collectivism by making a grandiose metaphor of the ordinary pronoun “we” (Russian “my”). Late in 1991, as the Soviet Union was disintegrating, writer and critic Viktor Erofeev commented: “What was imported in Western Marxism will vanish... But Communism will not disappear, inasmuch as the spirit of collectivism is at the heart of this nation. The nation will always say ‘we’ rather than the Anglo-Saxon ‘I.’”

Erofeev’s metaphor may seem hackneyed to the Westerner, but it is both true and affectively loaded for the ordinary Russian. Russians have always emphasized the “we” at the expense of the “I.” Evgenii Zamiatin satirized this emphasis in his distopian novel We, Vladimir Kirillov glorified it in his revolutionary poem “We,” and Aleksei Peskov attempted to analyze it historically in his 1992 essay “We.” The Russians love a title with this word in it: “Time and We” (an emigré journal); “The World and We” (the international page in Moskovskie novosti); “Hellenism and We” (a chapter title in Viacheslav Ivanov); “Dostoevsky and We” (a chapter of Berdiaev’s book on Dostoevsky); I and We (La i my, the title of a 1969 book by psychiatrist Vladimir Levi); “Bread and We” (a title on the front page of Literaturnaia gazeta, 11 August 1993), and so on. During the “liquidation of illiteracy” (“likbez”) campaign in the early Soviet period a favorite slogan was the pun “Raby—ne my” (either “Slaves are not us” or “Slaves are mute”). As it turned out, of course, education did not eliminate slavishness.

Russian collectivism can take gigantic proportions. For example, for many millions of Soviet individuals the Communist Party was every-
thing. It was an enormous machine, and individuals were mere "cogs" ("vintiki," to use Mikhail Heller's metaphor). People actually believed such slogans as "The Party is our steering wheel" ("Partiia—nash ru-levoi"), or "The Party is the mind, honor, and conscience of our epoch" ("Partiia—um, chest' i sovest' nashei epokhi")—as if individuals did not have their own minds and consciences to guide them.

Indeed it was considered best if they did not. If the party was everything, then the individual was nothing, morally. To quote Vladimir Mayakovsky's long poem deifying the Party with Lenin at its head:

Едiница — вздор,
   едiница — ноль.

The individual is nonsense,
The individual is zero.8

Although Mayakovsk y proclaims that there will be no more slaves and masters in his country ("bez rabov i gospod"), his utter self-abnegation as a "zero," or at best a tiny particle ("chastitsa") within the collective, is a most effective propaganda for slavishness.

Any Westerner who has visited Russia for an appreciable length of time knows how it feels to be treated as a "zero" by the collective. Consider, for example, the abuse accorded to individuals in crowds. On a bus, in a train, or in a crowded subway, one has to expect a certain amount of pushing, elbowing, even punching from others as they struggle to get wherever they are going. The remarkable thing, from a Western viewpoint, is that no one seems to mind. The abuse is just accepted by Russians as normal. Furthermore, it is not individuals who are perceived as pushing and shoving other individuals. Wright Miller has captured this phenomenon:

The secret of it all seems to be that the crowd pushes, but no one person pushes, so that there is no one to get angry with. Unless perhaps it is a foreigner like myself, who was made to feel mortally ashamed once when I lost my temper and lashed out back, sides, and front at my neighbours to get some breathing-space. "To have to travel with such people!" they said with indignant scorn.9

"Such people" means in this case a Britisher who was not so accepting of abuse, not so masochistic as Russians are.

The individual's insignificance also becomes apparent in attempts to obtain the most rudimentary goods and services in Russia. I recall how I
approached a restaurant along Moscow's Arbat on a day in September of 1991. It was dinnertime, and I was hungry. But on the door was posted the following notice: "CLOSED FOR DINNER." A few restaurant workers were eating inside of the mostly empty restaurant.

Even workers in the recently formed cooperative restaurants often behave as if they do not know what is good for them. In one instance I waited forty-five minutes just to order a meal. The waiter was surly, and the food turned out to be mediocre. Naturally I left a one kopeck tip. But I am not a Russian.

There are anecdotes galore on this topic in Hedrick Smith's book *The New Russians* and in other accounts by Westerners.\(^10\) Even Russians have written about the problem, which is to say that certainly not all Russians find that abuse of the individual by the "system" is acceptable. An example is Vladimir Voinovich's *Anti-Soviet Soviet Union* (1985), a compendium of painful, satirical essays the very title of which suggests a collective kind of masochism.

**Sticking One's Neck Out in the Collective**

I am hardly the first to notice the masochistic tinge to Russian collectivism. Jeffry Klugman says, for example, that Soviet Russians grew up in families and went to schools which fostered "the total warmth of *submitive* belonging."\(^11\) Earlier in this century Berdiaev wrote that "the Russian people has a public gift of submissiveness, of *smirenje* of the person to the collective."\(^12\) Writing in 1898, A. Nikol'skii asserted that "in the overall social life of the peasantry, the personal element is sacrificed to the communal element."\(^13\) Nikol'skii makes it clear that such sacrifice is unnecessary and excessive, that is, masochistic in nature. He refers to the "passivity" and "profound quietism" of the communal peasant, and he expresses admiration for the enterprising peasant who acts out of self-interest, or who moves away to the city and thereby casts off the "yoke of communal life."\(^14\)

To take an example from the immediate post-Soviet period, we have Bulat Okudzhava talking about the collective talent of Russians to accomplish great deeds, but only when under threat of the stick ("iz-pod palki"). Emerging from their "recent enslavement," Russians are still plagued by their tendency to submit unnecessarily to the collective: "Our
misfortune resides in the fact that we are all one society [vše my odno obshchestvo] with a poorly developed ability to think independently, an enviable capability for submission [podchiniat’ia], and an inability to take individual risks or responsibility.”¹⁵

When someone does take individual risk or initiative, the collective (or a representative of the collective) is likely to express disapproval and, more important for the theme of this book, the individual is likely to give in. In 1991 Moscow psychoanalyst Vera Loseva related an anecdote to me which graphically captures this situation:

Two beggars are sitting on a street corner. A third beggar arrives, sits down, and starts playing the harmonica. One of the other beggars gets up, comes over to the harmonica player and starts hitting him on the head, saying: “You can’t do that, you have to beg the same way the rest of us beggars do!” The would-be musician puts away his harmonica and apologizes profusely.

The beggar who strikes the harmonica player is enforcing the sadistic will of the collective (however small, in this case a grand total of three beggars). The beggar who complies, on the other hand, is a moral masochist. He willingly accepts the harm done to him, that is, he accedes to both the blows and the reduction of his efficiency as a beggar.

If in America the inventor of a better mousetrap is rewarded, in Russia the more efficient beggar is punished.

Of course the harmonica player could resist, and this might bring even more punishment. So hasn’t he chosen the less masochistic solution by complying? Perhaps yes in the short run, but that does not make his original solution non-masochistic. And besides, without a masochistic mind-set he (and others in his position) might think of ways of resisting the pressures of the collective, such as striking back at the other beggars, avoiding streetcorners where other beggars are present, or hiring beggars as bodyguards with the profits made from begging by harmonica.

But, “don’t stick out!” (“Ne vysovyvaites!”), says the proverb. The tallest blade of grass, after all, is the one to get cut down. Hedrick Smith points to the masochistic essence of this attitude toward the collective: “The Russians are long-suffering people who can bear the pain of their misery, so long as they see that others are sharing it. The collective jealousy can be fierce against those who rise above the crowd.”¹⁶ In other words, masochistic conformity can have a sadistic side-effect. Among Smith’s numerous examples of this mentality are the following:
Valentin Berezhkov, a former Soviet diplomat, told me of a farmer he knew in a town outside of Moscow whose horse and few cows were set free and whose barn was set afire by neighboring farm workers who were jealous of his modest prosperity. The Soviet press is full of stories about attacks on privately owned cooperative restaurants and other small service shops, the perpetrators people who resent seeing others do well. In the debates at the Supreme Soviet, the most potent arguments, the ones with the strongest resonance among the populace, are the passionate accusations that the free market will yield speculators getting rich from profiteering and exploiting the working class.¹⁷

In an article that appeared in a 1992 issue of Literaturnaia gazeta, N. Zenova refuses to name the location of collective farm property taken over by an enterprising group of people for semi-private development. The reason is clear: some envious readers might do physical harm to the developers.¹⁸

If in America misery loves company, in Russia misery often requires company. In effect: “If I am going to live poorly, let them live poorly too.”¹⁹ Any attempt to improve oneself will meet with resistance. To quote a saying that was widely applied in late Soviet Russia: “Sobaka na sene” (“A dog [lying] on the hay”). Even if a dog has no use for hay, it will not let anyone else get at it.²⁰

The members of the collective all have to be equally miserable—otherwise it becomes too obvious that one’s own personal misery is not really necessary, that is, is masochistic in essence. The happy non-masochist is quite correctly perceived as alien (“chuzhoi”), not part of “us” (“svoi”) any more.²¹

Not all members of the collective will necessarily feel hostile toward another’s success, indeed in most cases not even the majority will necessarily feel this way. But the spiteful proportion of the population is nonetheless significant, as recent sociological surveys have shown. For example, when a jewelry cooperative in a town in the Crimea was closed down because the authorities thought the workers there were making too much money, an opinion poll showed that 30 percent of the public agreed with the closure (14 percent thought the closure was not in the spirit of glasnost, and 56 percent thought it was wrong).²²

A century earlier envy was also common. Among the peasantry, for example, there were those enterprising individuals (“predprimchivye liudi”) who managed to acquire large amounts of land and/or other property,²³ but not without provoking resentment among neighbors. The communal envy portrayed in the classic ethnographic descriptions
confirm Smith's assertion that today's attitudes are pre-Soviet in historical origin. Semenova-Tian-Shanskaia, for example, describes the envy which richer peasants had to deal with in the late tsarist period:

Those who are somewhat richer complain bitterly about their fellow-villagers' attitude toward them. "They hate you (envy you) constantly, saying: 'what makes you think you're better than we are, hold on, aren't you getting a little uppity, taking it into your head to plant a little apple tree? Ha! You've decided to plant a garden, think you're a landlord, eh? We sit hungry, and he plants a garden, and even fences it off!'" Then they smash the fence and drag off the apple tree that has been planted. Or if the apple tree grows up and produces apples, they feel obliged to make raids on it.

Such envy must have been very common, to judge from just some of the numerous proverbs gathered on the subject by Dahl:

The neighbor interferes with sleep because he lives well (Sosed spat' ne daet: khorosho zhivet).
It's not offensive that the wine is expensive, but it's offensive that the inn-keeper is getting rich (Ne to obida, chto vino dorogo, a to obida, chto tselovale'nik bogateet).
Beat to death the one who lives better than we do (Ubei togo do smerti, kto luchshe nashego zhivet).
The envious one will not spare his own two eyes (Zavistlivyi svoikh dvukh glaz ne pozhalet).

Not only the one who submits to such envious attitudes is behaving masochistically, but sometimes, as the last item indicates, the envious person himself or herself can be engaged in a masochistic enterprise as well. If the envious peasant set fire to his neighbor's hut, for example, his own was likely to burn down too, since the peasants' wooden huts were built exceedingly close to one another.

A masochistic attitude toward the collective is of course not the only thing that prevents the individual from "sticking out" in Russia. There are likely to be other reasons as well, depending on the situation. A would-be family farmer in the late Soviet and post-Soviet period, for example, is thwarted by a host of daunting problems. Where will the fertilizer, seeds, tractors, and other items necessary for farming be obtained? How much should be invested in livestock? What crops would bring a profit, what crops should be avoided? Will government policies
change in the midst of farming operations?—And so on, to name a few of the issues cogently discussed by Hedrick Smith. But the existence of non-psychological factors does not rule out psychological factors, including masochism. When Smith asked state farm director Dmitrii Starodubtsev in 1989 why the new opportunities for leasing land were not catching on, the reply took a curiously psychological form:

“You see,” he said, “the land was confiscated from the peasants in the thirties, even in the twenties. Sixty years ago. So the new generation never owned the land. They are not used to the land. They are afraid of it. It has become alien to them. The livestock they are willing to take. To breed animals, that’s OK. But the land, they’re afraid of it. Our people have lost the feeling of being masters of the land.”

With the image of “masters of the land” Starodubtsev raises, perhaps unintentionally, a sadomasochistic issue: if the peasants are not “masters of the land,” perhaps they are its slaves instead? And given the maternal significance of “land” (“zemlia,” e.g., “matushka zemlia”) which is so prevalent in Russian tradition, perhaps Starodubtsev is suggesting that would-be farmers fear having to deal with an old maternal image. I will have more to say about such imagery.

A Post-Soviet Antimasochistic Trend?

It is true that efforts are now being made in Russia to reduce the importance of the collective and to emphasize the value of the individual. Psychoanalyst Aron Belkin observes that perestroika encouraged people to emerge from their previous “inhibited, infantile state,” to “think independently, to get to know themselves and their environment, to evaluate for themselves their attitude to the historical past and to their native land.” Belkin believes that psychoanalytic therapy itself can help individuals who have suffered under a totalitarian system gain some sense of their own freedom and autonomy. To get rid of one’s “slave psychology” (part of which is masochism—a term Belkin avoids), one might try some free association.

In the late Soviet and post-Soviet Russian media there are numerous references to something called “sovereignty of the person” (“suverenitet lichnosti”). This represents a major change of approach to human relations among Russians. The very phrase, however, is a metaphor based on the idea of a collective: “sovereignty” is (in Russian as in English) an
attribute of a state. Lidiiia Grafova, in a fascinating article under this rubric, introduces further collective metaphors in her attempt to convey her disgust at the masochism in an individual: “I don’t know about you, reader, but I personally discover with shame something totalitarian in myself.” Or: “Can we be free from our internal slavery and fear?” Again, “something totalitarian” and “slavery” are collective, not individual phenomena. But it is clear that Grafova has personal freedom in mind, as when she deconstructs the metaphor of “sovereignty of the person”: “the secret wish of Soviet people [liudei] (not only republics) is to gain independence.”

Soviet psychologist Boris Kochubei made a particularly explicit and eloquent statement of the importance of the individual in an article that appeared at the end of 1990. According to Kochubei, socialism failed in Russia because it intensified the already native collectivist mentality of Russians: “From an underdeveloped ‘I’ in Russian culture we moved to a complete repression of the ‘I’ in the name of the ‘we.’” After lamenting the “primitive collectivism” and the tendency toward “identification of the self with the group” among his fellow citizens, Kochubei declares: “It’s high time to understand that there is nothing apart from the single, private person (the very one that people call a philistine and a clod), with his small happiness and his big sorrow.” Everything else—the Party, the class, the nationality, the government, the Motherland, all of society itself—exists only for the individual. Only in a society which places the individual above all else is there a chance that “reason and conscience” will prevail.

Some Theoretical Considerations

What is a collective, from the viewpoint of the individual? How do psychoanalysts characterize the individual’s conscious and unconscious attitudes toward the collective?

For one thing, the collective is itself like an individual, and a very special individual at that. It tends to get personified, and the personification is usually maternal in nature. Semiotically speaking, the collective is an icon of the mother.

Russian culture richly exemplifies this analytic view: “Mother Russia,” “Mother Moscow,” and “the mother Party” are obvious examples. Sometimes this maternal metaphor is displaced beyond the collective
itself and on to some abstract entity which in turn governs the collective, for example, the “mother ideology” which guides the Party or the “mother history” from which lessons must be learned. Sometimes the maternal metaphor is extended in the rhetorical sense, as when Dmitrii Likhachev tries to represent both positive and negative feelings toward Russia:

To divide up the territory of Russia the way the newly formed “independent governments” are now dividing her can only be accomplished by eliminating memory, cultural and historical memory, memory indeed of the motherland [pamiat’ rodiny]—regardless of what value one may place on this motherland. Perhaps she was a stepmother [machekhoi] for many, rather than a mother [mater’iu], but still, she did exist.\(^{32}\)

Another example is offered by Nina Katerli and Iuriii Shmidt in their extension of the maternal personification of the Party. Writing in a recent issue of \textit{Literaturnaia gazeta}, they assert that the enemies of democracy have mastered the art of provocation: “They have sucked in this art with the milk of the mother KPSS [Communist Party of the Soviet Union].”\(^{33}\)

Here is how psychiatrist Aron Belkin depicts the child’s acquisition of a submissive attitude toward the collective in Russia:

Having barely learned to distinguish words from one another, we find out that “I” [ia] is the last word of the [Russian] alphabet. \textit{We have taken in with mother’s milk} the conviction that whatever value or meaning each of us might have is only as a particle of the collective, inseparable from the overall mass.\(^{34}\)

In this indirect fashion Belkin recognizes that a masochistic attitude toward the collective derives from early interaction with the mother.

If the collective is maternal, then its members are children. \textit{We Are All Children of Russia (Vse my—deti Rossii)}—proclaims the title of a recent book by conservative literary critic Iuriii Prokushev.\(^{35}\) The phrase “children of Russia” has also come to refer to Russians living in non-Russian, formerly Soviet republics, and who may feel endangered and isolated from their true motherland. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union a column titled “The Children of Russia” has been running in \textit{Literaturnaia gazeta}. A recent instance is introduced with these words: “We are all your children, Russia, both those of us living on the land of our ancestors, and those living beyond her borders. We have the same
Sometimes the maternal personification of the collective is slightly less obvious, as in the terms “rodina” (“motherland,” literally “birthland”) and “narod” (“the people” or “the folk”)—both of which are related to the verb “rodit’” (“to give birth”) and “rod” (“birth,” as in “ot rodu,” “from birth”), and thereby indirectly suggest the mother.

Usually, however, collectives are not personified or characterized in explicitly maternal terms at all, even in Russia. But there is evidence from psychoanalytic theory, and there are passages from some of Russia’s great philosophers and literary artists—which indicate that the collective to which one submits is always maternal at the level of deep fantasy. Below I will examine key passages in Losev, Berdiaev, Blok, and Dostoevsky to support this idea. Here I wish to offer a few psychoanalytic considerations.

Surprisingly little psychoanalytic work has been done on attitudes toward the collective. Perhaps this is because psychoanalysis, for the most part, developed in the West, where individualism rather than collectivism flourishes. Nonetheless, there are some studies which ought to be mentioned.

Didier Anzieu, reporting on his psychoanalytic work with large groups (up to eighty persons), says that significant anxiety is provoked by the impersonal nature of such a collective. It is impossible to know most of the others in the group, and this is threatening. Not knowing who the “other” is actually raises the question of who the self is: “The group situation in which I don’t know who ‘they’ are and they don’t know who ‘I’ am is, as such, a source of anxiety.” There is thus a “danger of losing one’s ego identity.” The question “Who am I?” is, as Anzieu says, “the most difficult question that the group situation forces on its members.”

This question, however, is precisely the question being addressed by the child that is in the process of differentiating itself from the mother and forming itself into a unity that coheres: “The group draws the individual far into his past, to early childhood where he did not yet have consciousness of himself as subject, where he felt incoherent.”

Fragmentation is a persistent concern of both the pre-Oedipal child and the group member. In the case of the group member the concern is
dealt with by means of an "illusion" (Anzieu) whereby the group itself coheres as a person of some kind. Attention is thus defensively displaced from the narcissistic problems of an individual person to the group as person. In other words, the collective is defensively personified.

Another way to view the problem faced by the individual in a collective is in terms of the individual’s ego ideal. This Freudian construct is supposed to have developed in the early interaction of every individual with the parents. It is an internal model to which the ego seeks to conform. But the model can be replaced in intense interaction with the collective by some fictive group ego or group ego ideal. That is, the individual can project certain desired qualities of the ego on to some aspect of the group.\(^{41}\)

The individual in a collective is always confronted with the issue of boundaries: where does the individual self leave off and the collective begin? Again, the issue is an old one, that is, a pre-Oedipal one. The most regressive solution is to avoid a boundary altogether, to fantasize fusion or merging with the collective other. Psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel (influenced by Anzieu) says: "It is as if the group formation represented of itself the hallucinatory realization of the wish to take possession of the mother by the sibship, through a very regressive mode, that of fusion."

If the group is felt to be unquestionable, all-powerful, ideal, then, says Chasseguet-Smirgel, it “is itself an omnipotent mother.”\(^{42}\) If the group palliates the narcissistic wounds of individuals within it, it is serving as an idealized “breast-mother”—to quote Otto Kernberg’s discussion of Anzieu.\(^{43}\)

All of these issues—coherence of the self in relation to the “other,” self-definition or boundary in relation to the “other,” and idealization of the maternal “other”—are also paramount for masochism, as we saw earlier in the clinical chapter. For some reason, however, Anzieu, Chasseguet-Smirgel, and their Kleinian predecessors pay little attention to masochism in their discussions of the psychology of individuals in the collective. Again, this probably testifies to a cultural difference between Western European and Russian attitudes toward the collective. There is no a priori reason to believe that the sophisticated psychotherapeutic trainees in Anzieu’s large groups, for example, should react the same way ordinary Russians would in a similar situation. But the issues dealt with—in particular the identity of the self in contiguity with the collec-
tive—are intrinsically the same in any culture. Anzieu's French subjects appear to be more individualistic and to resist submission in situations where Russian subjects would more likely behave masochistically.

Submission to the "Will" of the Commune in Tsarist Russia

The typical Russian peasant in the imperial period was not only under the thumb of the gentry landlord and the family patriarch ("bol'shak"), but was also beholden to a collective of fellow peasants known as the commune ("obshchina" or, more commonly among the peasants, "mir"), the administrative actions of which were usually carried out by an all-male village assembly ("sel'skiy skhod"). The commune played a very important role in the emotional life of the peasant. It was also an important political and economic structure, of course, but here I am concerned with how the peasant felt about the commune. It is possible to address this psychological issue without getting entangled in complex economic questions, and in particular without pretending to settle the hotly disputed issues of just how ancient or how genuinely Russian the peasant commune was.44

The commune seems to have gained even more control over the lives of individual peasants after the emancipation of 1861 than it held previously. The emancipated peasant in most cases still was not able to own arable land, but depended on the commune to parcel it out periodically. The commune did not assign land, moreover, to the peasant as an individual, but to the extended peasant household on the basis of the number of "tiagla" per household. A "tiaglo" was usually a married couple between the ages of eighteen and sixty (sometimes land was assigned instead on the basis of the number of adult males per household, or the number of mouths to be fed). This economic disregard for the individual peasant could not but have psychological consequences.

Although the peasant worked the land, it was not in most cases his or hers to sell or to pass on to offspring. There was no truly private property, other than the hut and the immediately surrounding farmstead land and buildings, and, for women, the dowry. The typical peasant was at best a temporary landholder, not a landowner. In addition, the post-emancipation peasant was required to work the exclusively collective portions of the commune’s land, that is, the arable land from which
funds were earned to pay assistance to landless widows, herders, teachers, doctors, etc., as well as to pay for road, bridge, and church repair.

The commune did have its advantages. The members, for example, might collectively come to the aid of a family in distress (e.g., rebuilding a hut destroyed by fire, helping a family stricken by disease, etc.; this practice was called "pomoch"). Successful agricultural innovation initiated by one member might end up benefiting all members (if the majority went along with the innovation). The peasant commune also offered the psychological advantage of comfortable group identity and solidarity (this solidarity was maintained even by members who left the commune for varying periods of time in order to earn money elsewhere: "zemliaki," individuals from the same village—literally from the same "zemlia" or "land"—tended to live together in the working-class neighborhoods of large cities). Another psychological advantage to the individual member of the peasant collective was an option in some contexts to shift blame or responsibility for morally questionable actions on to the collective (see below, 237).

The commune retained enormous power over its members in exchange for the advantages it offered, however. Some, indeed, have argued that the commune enslaved the individual peasant to a greater extent than did the serf-owning landlord. Certainly the typical peasant felt a much greater sense of devotion to the commune than to the landowner. Here we may cite a typical response by a serf when asked by a provincial governor whether he would obey his master: "As the mir goes, so will I." After twenty-five blows with a birch switch, the serf still gave the same response.

The commune’s power was manifested in a wide variety of spheres. With good reason Leroy-Beaulieu speaks of “communal despotism.” The commune determined land allotments for each household. It determined how much each household was to pay in taxes (there was much grumbling by individuals who had to pay higher taxes when other individuals in the household slackled off, e.g., out of drunkenness). It determined which young males would be recruited into the military. In many cases the commune could prevent an individual from setting up a separate household. By various means it could pressure individuals to participate in a "pomoch." It could force an individual member to participate in a new agricultural project, such as draining a swamp, or it could prevent an individual member from introducing an agricultural
innovation. It could arrange for the public shaming or other disciplining of any member who stepped out of line. It dictated whether an individual peasant could receive the passport needed to reside elsewhere than on the commune (the internal passport requirement later became a fact of Soviet life as well). The commune could even interfere in family matters. For example, the powerful head ("bol'shak") of a multiple family household could be deposed by the commune if he did not see to it that his household fulfilled its communal obligations (e.g., if he became a drunkard and squandered patrimonial property).

The ability of the traditional peasant collective to formally shame a member is striking evidence of the collective's power over the individual. Among the numerous examples adduced by Christine Worobec is the following:

In 1887, in the hamlet of Iazykova in Petrov district, Saratov province, the gates to two homes in which marriageable girls lived had been tarred [signifying premarital sexual activity on the part of the girls]. The girls' parents informed the village assembly that they suspected three village girls with whom their daughters had quarreled over suitors. Since the quarrel was common knowledge in the community, the assembly held the parents of the accused party responsible for their daughters' actions and ordered them to treat the assembly members to fifteen rubles' worth of vodka. Moreover, each of the guilty girls was shamed publicly by having a tarred piece of string tied round her neck. A crowd then led them to the tarred gates and forced the girls to kiss them. Such public humiliation weakened the offenders' chances for making ideal marriage matches.

Two layers of collective coercion of the individual are evident in this charivari. First, the collective took it upon itself to regulate women's sexuality. It is clear that a woman's sexual behavior was not her own business. She and her entire family might be humiliated in the eyes of the larger collective by a premarital sexual adventure (while the man and his family were not, although there were cases where the collective forced a man to marry a woman he had impregnated). Second, the collective could punish those who falsely accused a woman of not conforming to the collective's demands on her sexuality. In effect, it could humiliate attempted humiliators, and thereby adversely affect their future lives in the collective. Apparently it was quite rare for the individual to resist or openly repudiate humiliation being meted out by the collective.

Charivaris were apparently most frequently directed against suspected petty thieves. Very often the victim was forced to treat those
assembled to vodka or wine, which was supposed to effect a kind of reconciliation with the collective. In cases of more serious crimes, such as horse thievery, the suspected criminal might be tortured and beaten to death by a mob. Individuals accused of witchcraft or sorcery might also be murdered by a communal mob.54

Numerous proverbs attest to the psychological power which the traditional peasant collective wielded over the individual, or more accurately, to the power the individual felt the collective wielded. In effect, these proverbs express smirenje, an acceptance that one must submit, however reluctantly, to an omnipotent collective:

What the mir has ordained is what God has decided (Chto mir poriadil, to Bog rassudil).

As the mir wishes, judges, ordains, establishes, wants, sentences, decides; the will of the mir (Kak mir zakhochet, rassudit, poriadit, postavit, povolit, prigovorit, polozhit; mirskaia volia).

When the mir roars, the forests groan / the forest bows (Mir zarevet, tak lesy stonyt [les klonitsia]).

Wherever the hand of the mir is, my head is [in agreement] (Gde u mira ruka, tam moia golova).

The mir cannot be judged, but its members can be beaten (Mir nesudim, a miriia n biut).

If the mir goes crazy, still you can’t put it in chains (Mir s uma soidet—na tsep’ ne posadish’).

Who would be greater than the mir? You don’t argue with the mir (Kto bol’she mira budet? S mirom ne posporish’).

The neck of the mir is tough: it stretches but does not break (Mirskaia sheia tuga: tianetsia, da ne rvetsia).

No member of the mir can be opposed to the mir (Nikakoi mirianin ot mira ne proch’).

The people’s voice betrayed / crucified Christ (Glas naroda Khrista predal [raspial]).55

Language is used in a personifying fashion in most of these sayings. That is, it is clear that the collective is understood to be a person. It has a “will” of its own. It has body parts, such as a “hand” that directs, or a
"neck" that is strong. It is capable of doing things persons do: it "wishes," "judges," "ordains," "decides," "passes sentence on," "roars," "goes crazy," and so on. In effect, the proverbs give the commune a human face.

The proverbs may state outright that the commune is a person. In a positive vein we have: "The mir is a great person" ("Mir—velik chelovek"). On the negative side, however, there is "The mir is an aggressor/destroyer" ("Mir—nasil'nik-razoritel’"). From these contrasting examples provided by A. A. Rittikh it is clear that the peasant had ambivalent feelings about the personified commune.

What the commune-person does is require submission from real persons, its members. And the members go along, they submit. There is a certain passivity and fatalism to the proverbs. The commune is not to be questioned. The imagery for its members is abject. A forest "bows" to it, a member is powerless to "argue" or be "opposed" to it, one's "head" is in automatic agreement with it. One can be "beaten" by it, one can even be "crucified" by it, as was the case with Christ, the ultimate willing victim for a Russian ("Glas naroda Khrista raspial"). Here it is worth mentioning that the saying about Christ's crucifixion is the one which concludes the section of Dahl's handbook which I have been quoting from, while another one with a very similar wording begins the same section: "The people's voice is God's voice" ("Glas naroda—glas bozhii"). Evidently Dahl intended to convey a message with this symmetrical construction, namely: the voice of the commune is the voice of God the father, who demands the sacrifice of his son Christ. The commune member is thus a child, while the personified commune is a parent.

The commune member sometimes resists the commune, especially if its collective activity does not seem very intelligent:

The mir was in session for days, smoked up the sky [accomplished nothing], and then dispersed (Mir sutki stoial, nebo podkoptil i razoshelsia).

The people is stupid—it gathers itself into a heap (Narod glup: vse v kuchu lezet).

The peasant is smart, but the mir is a fool (Muzhik umen, da mir durak).
These particular sayings suggest a certain degree of "dissidence" from the will of the collective, but it must be admitted that they are few and far between. The great majority of expressions Dahl collected on this topic favor submission over resistance. Psychoanalytically speaking, the masochistic solution is to be preferred.

The submission is particularly evident in the advice to conform. To live in the commune is to accept being lowered to the level of a dog:

If you live with wolves, howl like a wolf (S volkami zhit'—povolch'i vyt').

You've landed in a pack, so whether you bark or not you'd better wag your tail (otherwise you'll be eaten) (Popal v staiu, lai ne lai, a khvostom viliai [a to zaediat]).

Don't run ahead, but don't lag behind your own either (Vpered ne zabegai, a ot svoikh ne ostavai!).

Though you may be in the rear, you're still in the same herd. If you lag behind, you become an orphan (Khot' na zade... , da v tom zhe stade. Otstal—sirotou stal). 58

The implication of the last item is that the individual is a child, the commune a parent. To fail to go along with the commune is to lose a parent, to become an orphan (in Russian one becomes a "sirota" with the loss of either or both parents). The only element missing in this practically psychoanalytic characterization of masochistic conformity to the collective is a specification of which parent—mother or father—the commune represents.

The communal mentality on moral matters might thus be paraphrased as: whenever there is any doubt, the commune is right and the individual is wrong. Or, the commune is innocent and the individual is guilty. Or, to quote the poetic formulation made by one of my Russian informants to explain this whole series of proverbs: "the commune is God and the individual is shit [govno]." The masochistic orientation of anyone who actually accepts this idea of himself or herself should be self-evident.

Even death is not so bad, as long as it occurs in the context of the commune (or among people generally): "Even death is beautiful when you have got people round you" ("Na miru [Na liudiakh, S liud'mi] i smert' krasna"). 59 Perhaps the attitude expressed by this proverb was
not shared by all Russian collectivists, just as the comparable "Misery loves company" does not necessarily reflect the attitude of most English speakers. Yet there is something striking about the way the Russian proverb expresses fondness for company. The English proverb does not suggest that one welcomes misery, while the Russian proverb suggests an actual welcoming of death in the context of a collective (Fedotov speaks of a "zhazhda unichtozhenii a v kollektive"). An individual may be mortal, but that is trivial because the collective with which one merges is immortal. It is even an honor to die in public.

As normally happens in masochism, the individual experiences an unclear psychical boundary with the object, in this case, with the commune. Numerous proverbs attest to the experience of identification with the group or its members:

I am such as those with whom I am (S kem ia, tem ia).
You are known by the company you keep (S kem zhives'h', tem i slyves'h').
Tell me who you are acquainted with, and I will tell you what kind of person you are (Skazhi, s kem ty znakom, i ia skazhu, kto ty takov).
You bear a resemblance to the one with whom you break bread (S kem khleb-sol' vodish', na togo i pokhodish').

The Soviet historian Boris Mironov seems to have these proverbs (and others cited earlier) in mind when he discusses the individual's place in the post-emancipation commune:

Although an individual peasant's role depended on his personal qualities and immediate circumstances, the socialization process and the strong social control exercised by the commune did not allow a distinction between the individual and the group: the peasant's "I" merged with the communal "we." The result, though imperceptible and unnoticed by the peasant himself, was a far-reaching regulation of the peasant's whole life and the observance (more often unconsciously than consciously) of those stereotypes and models existing in the commune.

It is important to note that the peasant did not perceive his fusion with the commune as a violation of his individual rights, that he did not feel enslaved by the commune. Because the feeling of "I" was only inadequately developed, the individual peasant voluntarily sought to immerse himself in the "we" of the commune. The most striking example of this was the fact that decisions in the
assembly were ordinarily expected to be unanimous, and if that unanimity was wanting, the commune made long, stubborn efforts to achieve it through compromise and suasion. Although the fusion of the individual peasant with the commune could have meant the forcible subordination of the minority to the majority, this was rarely the case . . . , and the peasants regarded involuntary subordination as both extraordinary and undesirable. The relationship between peasant and commune may be called organic, voluntary conformism. This conformism was political, intellectual, moral, and social, and it made for standardization of the peasants’ needs and interests.  

The conformism was also psychological, of course, as Mironov’s own metaphors indicate: the peasant’s “I” achieved “fusion” with the communal “we”—“more often unconsciously than consciously,” as Mironov says. Parts of Mironov’s article actually read like a psychoanalytic study of large group processes (cf. psychoanalyst Geoffrey Gorer’s discussion of the “feeling of being merged into a larger group” which occurs in members of both tsarist and post-tsarist collectives, or Margaret Mead’s assertion that the mir stressed “merging of the individual in the group”). But Mironov does not specify (1) who the “we” might be a personification of in early ontogeny, and (2) he does not explicitly grant that the individual’s attitude to the group was masochistic. The masochism is implicit, however, in Mironov’s formulation (just as it was implicit in Slavophile writings about the commune over a century earlier): the individual commune member did not feel enslaved, there was not a forcible subordination of the individual—ergo the subordination was voluntary, was welcomed, even if “unconsciously” so. The subordination was thus masochistic by definition.

It was Petr Arkad’evich Stolypin (1863–1911), Russia’s premier and interior minister under the last tsar, who initiated a series of agrarian reforms aimed at improving productivity and eliminating the peasant’s slavish dependence on the commune. Stolypin and his fellow reformers made it possible for the peasant actually to own land privately. Their proposals were attractive enough to induce many peasants to overcome not only the fear of losing the security of the commune, but related masochistic attitudes toward the commune as well. However, although almost two-thirds of peasant households obtained title to land by the end of the period 1906–17, the reform did not stick. After the events of 1917 massive re-communalization took place. As Michael Confino and others have pointed out, 95 percent of peasant land in Russia during
the 1920s was held on communal tenure. After forced collectivization of agriculture occurred under Stalin in the early 1930s, private ownership of course remained totally out of the question. Not until the late 1980s and early 1990s were there any signs that individuals might get out from under the thumb of statewide collective control of arable land.

In the meantime, however, psychological attitudes toward the land had not changed. In December of 1990, when the Russian Parliament was taking steps for the privatization of farmland, President Boris Yeltsin made the following remarks to foreign correspondents: “You would never understand the spirit of Russians who never have become accustomed to the terminology and even more to the practice of selling and buying land—the motherland, as we call it.” Yeltsin added: “As some legislators used to say, ‘One can not sell his or her mother.’” “It is a psychological issue,” declared the Russian leader. The traditional idea of the Russian “land” as mother was thus alive and well late in the twentieth century. “You pick up the soil and it’s like holding your mother’s hand,” said a collective farm worker to a reporter in 1988. This is an extremely common sentiment in the Russian countryside.

To understand just how restrictive the Russian Parliament was on “selling the mother,” one need only consider some of the details of its legislation: an individual who obtained land from the government was required to keep it for a minimum of ten years, and then could sell it only back to the government—not to other individuals in Russia, and not to foreigners. Such limitations on access to the agricultural “mother” would certainly be unacceptable to farmers in the West.

State ownership of land in the Soviet period fostered the same psychology as did communal ownership in previous times, that is, a masochistic attitude toward collective authority. Only private ownership, free of collective control and individual submissiveness, profoundly motivates farmers to produce. True, self-interest can result in abuses too (e.g., the owner’s greed can be harmful to hired hands). But self-interest is generally better than self-harm, even for the larger collective. For example, on the eve of the First World War, as a result of the Stolypin reforms, Russia became the world’s second-largest exporter of grain. The small private plots that were permitted during the Soviet period made a disproportionately large contribution to overall Soviet agricultural productivity by comparison with collectivized agriculture.
The idea that Stolypin’s agricultural reforms countered a previously masochistic (not merely repressive) arrangement between the peasant and the commune is not entirely new. There is a very interesting passage in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *August 1914* which demonstrates an awareness of the psychological essence of agrarian reform in Russia. Solzhenitsyn begins by succinctly characterizing Stolypin’s project:

Stolypin’s idea was one of shining simplicity—yet too complicated to be grasped or accepted. The repartitional commune reduced the fertility of the land, took from nature what it did not return, and denied the peasant both freedom and prosperity. The peasant’s allotment must become his permanent property.

Solzhenitsyn then pauses to consider the psychological consequences of this momentous change, wondering whether the proposed reforms might deprive the peasant of a traditional outlet for moral masochism. Solzhenitsyn does not express himself in psychoanalytic terms, of course. But his neo-Slavophilic terminology clearly refers to what psychoanalysts mean by moral masochism:

Perhaps, though, in this self-denial, this harmonization of the will of the individual with that of the commune [v etom umeren’i, soglasii svoei voli s mirskoi], this mutual aid and curbing of wild willfulness, there lay something more valuable than harvests and material well-being? Perhaps the people could look forward to something better than the development of private property? Perhaps the commune was not just a system of paternalistic constraints, cramping the freedom of the individual, perhaps it reflected the people’s philosophy of life, its faith? Perhaps there was a paradox here which went beyond the commune, indeed beyond Russia itself: freedom of action and prosperity are necessary if man is to stand up to his full height on this earth, but spiritual greatness dwells in eternal subordination, in awareness of oneself as an insignificant particle [no v izvechnoi sviazannosti, v soznanii sebia lish’ krokhoi obshchego blaga vitat dukhovnaia vysota].

This little masochistic fantasy is then dispelled by Solzhenitsyn, who is trying to capture Stolypin’s thought processes: “Thinking that way makes action impossible. Stolypin was always a realist.”73 In the meantime, however, Solzhenitsyn has given the reader a very effective summary of the broad psychological issues (“beyond Russia itself”) involved in an individual’s willing submission to a collective.
Aleksei Losev: Masochism and Matriotism

The most extreme Russian patriots are matriots at heart. By this I mean that their devotion to “Mother Russia” is so intense that the underlying maternal fantasy basis of patriotism comes to the surface as maternal imagery, while paternal imagery fades away. At the same time there is a willingness to indulge in or act out masochistic fantasies with respect to the maternal image.

For the Russian matriot Russia is nothing if not a suffering collective, a maternal icon in pain. But she does not suffer alone, she calls on her own to suffer as well—or at least she seems to for those who emulate her or find it difficult to distinguish themselves from her.

The philosopher Aleksei Fedorovich Losev (1893–1988), who had served time in a Soviet labor camp during the 1930s and lost loved ones during the German bombing of Moscow in 1941, expressed what it meant to suffer willingly “on the maternal bosom of the Motherland [na materinskom lone svoei Rodiny].” As Nazi troops pressed close to Moscow, he wrote:

The very concept and appellation of “sacrifice [zhertva]” sounds elevated and exciting, ennobling and heroic. This is because we are born not just by “being,” not just by “matter,” not just by “reality” or “life”—all this is non-human and supra-human, impersonal and speculative—but we are born by our Motherland [rozhdaet nas Rodina], by that mother and that family which are already worthy of existence, already something great and bright, something sacred and pure. The dictates of this Motherland [Velenie eto i Materi Rodiny] are indisputable. Sacrifices for the sake of this Motherland are inevitable. A sacrifice to a faceless and unseeing force of a community is meaningless. However, this is not a sacrifice, either. It is simply a meaningless, unnecessary and absurd conglomeration of births and deaths, tedium and bustle of a universal, but at the same time bestial womb. A sacrifice for the sake of the glory of our Motherland is sweet and holy. This sacrifice is the only thing that makes life meaningful. . . either there is something above us that is our own [rodnoe], great, bright, common for us all, intimately and innately ours, essentially and eternally ours, namely, our Motherland, or our life is meaningless, our suffering irredeemable, and human tears interminable.74

Losev’s desire to suffer is explicit, that is, the masochistic attitude is not even unconscious: “suffering, struggle, and death itself are nothing but desirable and full of meaning.”75 But the masochism is not a gratu-
itously individualistic enterprise. It is in the service of union with a collective maternal figure. A true "son of the Motherland" does not distinguish his own interests from those of the Motherland. Indeed he is one with her. This is the meaning of matriotism:

We know the thorny path traversed by our country; we know the long and agonizing years of struggle, shortages, and suffering. But to a son of his Motherland [dla syna svoei Rodiny], this is all his own [svoe], inalienably part of his flesh and blood [rodnoe]. He lives and dies with it; he is it, and it is him.76

The virtual synonymy of mother and child is also clear from the ease with which Losev moves back and forth between child-imagery and mother-imagery. At one point he says that what draws us on, what is worth sacrificing ourselves for is "you, Motherland-Mother," while two paragraphs later he asserts that what is worth dying for is "something dear [rodnoe] and lovely, something child-like, even infant-like." It is as if Losev were looking into his suffering mother's eyes and seeing himself, as child, reflected. The sacrificial death is itself a fusion of mother and child:

He who loves dies peacefully. He who has a Motherland dies in comfort [ui-utno], if not for her, then at least in her, like a baby falling asleep in its warm and soft cradle—whether that be death in combat, or the death of a pilot who has fallen thousands of meters to the rocky earth. Only our Motherland is capable of giving internal comfort [uiut] because everything that is of the Motherland [rodnoe] is comforting, and comfort alone is triumph over fate and death.77

The "comfort" Losev's Motherland offers is, to say the least, severe. To an outside observer it looks more like punishment. A violent death for the Motherland can be characterized as "comforting" only because mothers typically comfort children in distress. But a child may get into trouble precisely in order to be comforted by a mother with whom it is having a problematical relationship. It may, in other words, behave masochistically. Losev is in a position to recommend masochism on behalf of the all-important Motherland because every child has experienced moments of masochism in dealing with the all-important mother. This is not to make a moral judgment of Losev's recommendation, but to point to the ontogenetic origin of its appeal. Indeed, the extreme patriotism, that is, matriotism of Soviet citizens may have saved the world from German Fascism.
Berdiaev’s Prison Ecstasy

Nikolai Berdiaev was a very different kind of philosopher from Losev. He would have rejected Losev’s extreme Russophilia. He was not a particularly masochistic individual by Russian standards. Yet masochistic episodes did occur by his own admission. They were connected with the terms he served in both tsarist and Soviet jails, and they reveal something of his attitude toward the collective: “during arrest and at interrogations, as in all the catastrophic events in my life, I was characteristically disinclined to experience depression. On the contrary, I was always animated and in a bellicose mood.” “With no exaggeration,” Berdiaev declares, “I can say that prison felt very pleasant to me.” The “near ecstasy” that Berdiaev experienced upon being arrested, that is, his masochistic ebullience, was in part determined by his escape from himself or his merger with the collective: “I never experienced so fully such a feeling of oneness with the communauté, I was in a less individualistic mood than ever.”

Here it is curious that Russia’s greatest philosophical advocate of freedom (“svoboda”) should be claiming to achieve happiness precisely at those moments when he was deprived of his freedom, that is, when he was masochistically welcoming imprisonment.

The profound contradiction between the individual and the collective was of lasting concern to Berdiaev. Soviet communism and West-European fascism, for example, constituted unacceptable domination of the individual by the collective, for they treated the individual as a mere object, not a subject, not a person (“lichnost’”). But, as we have just seen, Berdiaev was also very interested in the potential fusion of the individual with the collective. His prime example of this was the phenomenon of sobornost’ (or what he sometimes called “kommunnotarnost’,” i.e., “communitarianism,” not to be confused with “communism” or “collectivism”—both negative, authoritarian phenomena for Berdiaev). Sobornost’, in the original sense of Khomiakov, was for Berdiaev an acceptable, even desirable way for the individual to come under the complete sway of the collective.

According to Berdiaev, no domination, force, or violence is entailed by sobornost’ (he, like Khomiakov, conveniently disregards dominance of, or violence against the self). To experience sobornost’ is to retain the sense of one’s own person while at the same time experiencing union
with other persons in the collective, or with the collective as a whole. *Sobornost* is, moreover, a divine experience, for God mediates in the union of individual and collective: "the sobornost' of the church is not some sort of authority, be it authority of a council of bishops or even of ecumenical councils, but is an immersion in interaction and in love of the church folk and of the Holy Spirit."\(^8^0\) There are no external signs of this process, there are only internal, spiritual vicissitudes: "communitarianism is the unmediated relationship of a person with another person through God, who is the internal foundation of life."\(^8^1\) Thus only God can erase boundaries between individuals. If God is absent, sobornost' or communitarianism degenerates into mere communism, or fascism, that is, authoritarian domination of the collective over the individual.\(^8^2\)

God (the Father, Christ, or the Holy Spirit) is important to Berdiaev as an eraser of boundaries. For example, God and the human being (or to translate more traditionally, God and Man) are "inseparably connected to one another."\(^8^3\) "Humanity is the basic attribute of God. The human being is rooted in God, as God is rooted in the human being."\(^8^4\)

Berdiaev's favorite person of the Holy Trinity is of course Christ, the one who most blends with humankind. Berdiaev's designation "Christ the God-man" ("Khris t Bogochelovek") itself questions boundaries between persons.\(^8^5\) Christ is the one person of the Trinity to become human ("stal chelovekom") as well as to be God. Christ is also precisely the person who suffers, or rather, the one who welcomes suffering. Christ is the masochistic person of God:

One can believe in God only if there exists God the Son, the Redeemer and Liberator, the God of sacrifice and love. The redeeming sufferings of the Son of God do not constitute a reconciliation of God with the human being, but rather a reconciliation of the human being with God. Only a suffering God can reconcile [one] with the sufferings of creation.\(^8^6\)

Note that the word "reconciliation" here is applied both to the relationship of God and the human person ("primirenie cheloveka s Bogom") and to the relationship of the human person with suffering ("primiriat s stradaniiami tvoreniia"). To welcome suffering is really the same thing as to blur the boundary between persons. Berdiaev can believe in God the Son because, in suffering, God the Son erases the boundary between God and humans.
Berdiaev admits that he is an admirer of *The Imitation of Christ*. To imitate Christ is to accept suffering freely. No Christianity worthy of that designation can ever be forced upon anyone. Indeed, to believe in God *is* to be free: “God is my freedom.” But to be free is to be free to suffer. As I already observed in connection with the discussion of Khomiakov earlier in this book, this is a rather masochistic notion of freedom.

Berdiaev welcomes the communitarianism of *sobornost* because it brings one closer to God. That is, immersion in the collective (which was very difficult for Berdiaev, personally) can bring one to the very feet of Christ on the cross. But neither the collective nor the suffering Christ is a particularly maternal icon (whereas Losev’s motherland is starkly, almost parodistically maternal). But this does not mean that Berdiaev’s ideal is not maternal nonetheless. Because Berdiaev is trapped in genderless imagery of the collective, or in the traditionally sexist imagery of God and the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Ghost), there can by definition be little hint of the maternal in his discourse on these matters.

However, it is clear from his personal religious-philosophical development that Berdiaev originally conceived of the collective as a maternal icon. The early Berdiaev, in his characterization of the “inadequate development of the personal factor in Russian life,” says, “The Russian people has always loved to live in the warmth of the collective, in a kind of dissolution in the earthy element, in the bosom of the mother [в какои-то растворенности в стихии земли, в лона матери].” Russian religion is an example of this, according to young Berdiaev:

The universal spirit of Christ, the masculine universal logos is imprisoned by the feminine national element, by the Russian earth in her pagan primevalness. Thus was formed the religion of dissolution in mother-earth, in the collective national element, in animal warmth.

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, the maternal imagery here is striking. Berdiaev attributes not merely feminine, but specifically maternal qualities to the enslaving (“plenen”) Russian collective. Religion in Russia is “... not so much a religion of Christ as a religion of the Mother of God, a religion of mother-earth, of a feminine deity illuminating fleshly being.” Here Berdiaev is being historically accurate as well as self-revealing.
Even Berdiaev's later writings will sometimes characterize union with God in maternal terms. Describing the creative potential of the God-human, Berdiaev says:

God's idea of the human being is infinitely higher than traditional, orthodox notions of the human being born [porozhdennykh] of a depressed and narrowed consciousness. The idea of God is the greatest human idea. The idea of the human being is the greatest divine idea. The human being awaits the birth of God within. God awaits the birth of the human being within [Chelovek zhdet rozhdeniia v nem Boga. Bog zhdet rozhdeniia v Nem cheloveka].

With so much birthing going on, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that God is a mother after all—or that God-man is really God-woman.

One wonders whether Berdiaev thought about his mother in those ecstatic moments when he himself was thrown into prison. Certainly he experienced a sense of merger or fusion with his social-democratic collective (“oneness with the communauté”), as we have seen. But in the context he does not define that collective as maternal. Yet, the only thing he remembers an important official saying to him and his fellow prisoners the time he was arrested in Kiev does bear a strikingly maternal image: “Your error is that you do not see that the social process is organic rather than logical, and that a child cannot be born any earlier than in the ninth month.”

A Blok Poem: Suffering Begins at the Breast

The poet Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921), moved by the sufferings of his fellow Russians during the First World War, produced a poem which very explicitly depicts a mother's inculcation of masochism in her child:

КОРШУН

Чертя за кругом плавный круг,
Над сонным лугом коршун кружит
И смотрит на пустынный луг.—
В избушке мать над сыном тужит:
«Нá хлеба, нá, нá грудь, соси,
Расти, покорствуй, крест неси».

Идут века, шумит война,
Встаётмятеж, горят деревни,
А ты всё та ж, моя страна,
A buzzard flies the drowsy field,
Smooth circle after circle weaving.
He scans bare lands. A shack’s revealed;
A mother for her son is grieving.
‘Here, take this bread and suck this tit.
Mind! Grow! Here’s your cross; carry it!’

Centuries pass, the war’s at hand.
Rebellion came; each village sears.
And you are still the same, my land,
In your old beauty, stained with tears.
O how long must the mother grieve?
How long—the circling buzzard weave? 94

Misfortune in the form of a buzzard 95 circles (“kruzhit”) over a meadow, just as a mother grieves (“tuzhit”) over her child. The striking parallel between the menacing buzzard and the breast-feeding mother is repeated in the final couplet by means of a grammatical parallelism involving the archaic “dokole” (“how long”) plus a dative-infinitive construction. This suggests that the parallel actions are both really unavoidable, in effect: how long is the mother *fated* to grieve, how long is the buzzard *fated* to circle?

But how does a mother resemble a dangerous bird of prey? One historical explanation recently offered by E. Obukhova runs as follows: Blok was acquainted with Dmitrii Merezhkovskii’s novelistic biography of Leonardo da Vinci in which da Vinci, in a dream of himself as an infant, is approached from above by a buzzard (“korshun”) which proceeds to stroke his lips with its wings. Blok was probably also aware of the fact (possibly from Freud’s own biography of Leonardo) that a buzzard was used to represent the mother in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. 96

I would add that the theme of mother addressing child is common in the poetry of Blok’s predecessor, Nikolai Nekrasov. In particular Nekrasov’s mother figures are exemplary sufferers who often teach their children to endure. In one poem a mother, taking a break during the hard work of the harvest time (“strada,” the “suffering time”), stands over her child in an open field:
Sing him [the child] a song of eternal endurance,
Sing, enduring mother!

So often Nekrasov’s message is this: you must suffer as all Russian mothers suffer, as Mother Russia herself suffers.

This historical background, which the typical reader of Blok’s poem may or may not be aware of, can only support an intuition that the hovering buzzard represents something maternal. Yet a buzzard aggressively attacks what it is about to eat, while the mother depicted here encourages her child to eat. She foists food upon the child, force-feeds the child even (accented “na” occurs three times in one line).

A buzzard eats its prey, while a child “eats” its mother. This is a curious symmetry. In psychoanalytic experience, a child’s devouring attitude toward the mother’s breast can result in compensatory paranoid fears about being devoured by the mother (cf. the well-known folktale figure of Baba Iaga, who likes to devour little children, or the charm against a mother who drinks her son’s blood).

By offering the breast so insistently, the mother in Blok’s poem seems to be saying: “it’s alright, you can eat me, I won’t eat you—but the buzzard might.” That is, the mother’s contextual poetic equivalent may do the damage.

What might the damage be? This question is answered in the second stanza. The children grow up, war and revolution come. The children, in other words, start killing each other. Their dead bodies would probably make fine food for the buzzard circling overhead.

Not that the mother is pleased with this outcome. She grieves, after all, just as the buzzard weaves circles in the sky. Yet the terrible things which are happening are her fault at some level. She it was who taught her children to suffer: “Grow, be submissive, carry your cross!”—this would be a literal translation of her words uttered in the sixth line. There could hardly be a more explicit instruction to behave masochistically. What is more, the masochism is encouraged amid overt breast imagery (“suck this tit!”). A common Russian metaphor, “to take in with mother’s milk” (“vpityvat’ s molokom materi”) is realized, as it were: masochism is taken in with mother’s milk.

The scene is strictly pre-Oedipal (or perhaps a-Oedipal would be a
better term here). Not only is the child at the mother’s breast, there is no competing paternal figure to fill out an Oedipal triangle. Blok thus demonstrates an intuitive knowledge of what psychoanalysts regard as the ontogenetic origin of moral masochism. One might even say that Blok’s knowledge is deeper than Freud’s here because he avoids Oedipal imagery, going directly to the child’s primal, pre-Oedipal interaction with the mother. Freud, as we saw earlier, was reluctant to give the mother her due in his account of the origin of moral masochism.

In the poem’s second stanza the scene shifts from mother and child to (Mother) Russia and the poet. The poet addresses his country (“strana”) with the familiar “ty,” much as a boy would address his mother. The country is in tears, much as the mother in the first stanza was.

How long must Mother Russia grieve over her sons?—the poet seems to be asking in the last couplet. A psychoanalytic answer to the question would be: as long as Russian mothers imbue masochism in their sons. If the mothers had not instilled masochism in them, they would not feel obliged to go off and destroy themselves in warfare, or destroy each other in revolution. If villages were not burning, if uprisings were not taking place, mothers would be spared their grief.

Curiously, then, mothers are the cause of their own grief. Or, Mother Russia is the cause of her own grief (by the end of the poem it is no longer possible to distinguish the personal mother from the maternal country, the “Rodina” which serves as title of the cycle which this poem culminates). Both sons and mothers suffer, of course, but the mother/Mother Russia is ultimately to blame for the suffering overall.

This is of course a sexist idea, and the implicit image of the mother as a bird of prey who might gobble up her sons seems to place inordinate blame on women for the male masochism of warfare. Yet behind Blok’s sexism is an insight familiar to psychoanalysts—including women psychoanalysts who place the origin of masochism in the pre-Oedipal mother-infant scene.

Perhaps if the Russian father got more involved in “mothering” his mate’s infant, there would be less reason to think that Russian masochism originated in the mother-infant relationship. This alternative is not present in Blok’s poem, however, nor is it a likely prospect in Russian reality.

Blok’s very graphic allusion to the maternal breast, which effectively
becomes the breast of Mother Russia by the end of the poem, is not altogether original. In 1835 the Slavophile Aleksei Khomiakov wrote a poem about the bounteouslyness of Russia:

В твоей груди, моя Россия,
Есть также тихий, светлый ключ;
Он также воды ядет живые,
Скрыт, безвестен, но могуч.

In your breast, my Russia,
There is also a quiet, bright spring;
It too, hidden, unknown, but powerful,
Pours forth living waters.\(^{101}\)

This breast, however, is rather abstract and idealized by comparison to the one in Blok’s poem. There is a sequence in Blok’s unfinished long poem “Retribution” (“Vozmezdie”) where another bird of prey, this time a hawk, circles over a meadow in search of a victim. Suddenly the hawk plunges down and captures a baby bird in its claws. There is a sad squeaking of little chicks, feathers fly, and again a maternal image appears:

Россия-мать, как птица, тужит
О детях; но — ее судьба,
Чтоб их терзали ястреба.

Mother Russia, like a bird, grieves
Over her children; but her \(sud’ba\)
Is that hawks tear them to pieces.\(^{102}\)

In this case it is Mother Russia herself who has to learn to accept suffering, that is, the repeated victimization of her offspring. This is her fate (\(sud’ba\)) — a notion so often associated with the mother, as we saw earlier. Mother Russia has no choice, her children have no choice but to suffer. Here, however, she is not so much to blame as in the other poem, for she does not admonish her offspring to submissively carry a cross. The \textit{hawk} is the source of any resulting masochism. The passage is not sexist, but it is also less insightful psychoanalytically, than “Korshun.”

\textbf{Dostoevsky’s Maternal Collective}

We saw earlier that Dmitrii Karamazov welcomes the punishment about to be meted out to him by the collective which arrested and
imprisoned him: “I accept the torture of accusation, and my public shame, I want to suffer and by suffering I shall be purified.” The motivation for this, as we saw, had something to do with the dream-image of a babe at the dried-out breast of its mother: “It’s for that babe I am going to Siberia now.” But Dmitrii is not satisfied to limit the psychological problem to himself. He needs to involve the collective as well. At his pretrial hearing he declares: “Gentlemen, we’re all cruel, we’re all monsters, we all make men weep, and mothers, and babes at the breast. . . .” Not only the individual Dmitrii, then, but all of society around him is guilty. How Dmitrii should happen to know so much about the moral character of those individuals around him is unexplained. Indeed he does not “know” whether others are actually guilty monsters, he surmises that they are, he projects his own guilt on to others. The boundary between himself and the collective breaks down even further when he declares:

One may thaw and revive a frozen heart in [the] convict, one may wait upon him for years, and at last bring up from the dark depths a lofty soul, a feeling, suffering creature; one may bring forth an angel, create a hero! There are so many of them, hundreds of them, and we are all to blame for them. Why was it I dreamed of that “babe” at such a moment? “Why is the babe so poor?” That was a sign to me at that moment. It’s for the babe I’m going. Because we are all responsible for all [vse za vsekh vinovat). For all the “babes,” for there are big children as well as little children. All are “babes.” I go for all because someone must go for all.104

We may gather from this somewhat incoherent discourse that Dmitrii is taking on the guilt of others, that is, of the collective which he can hardly distinguish himself from any more. In his masochistic ecstasy he feels that he can withstand the Siberia others deserve for their sins, because the boundary between these others and himself no longer obtains. When “all are responsible for all,” or to translate more accurately, “all are guilty for all,”105 individuals hardly matter anymore. Dmitrii loses himself in something greater than himself, he merges with the collective, fuses with it and this makes his suffering tolerable, even welcome.

The idea of “all guilty for all” occurs again and again in the novel. The monastic elder Zosima goes so far as to ask the birds in the heavens for forgiveness. At one point Zosima bows down before Dmitrii because he feels responsible for another man’s patricidal impulse. His advice
on the obligation to suffer for others is practically psychoanalytic in its explicitness:

If the evil doing of men moves you to indignation and overwhelming distress, even to a desire for vengeance on the evil doers, shun above all things that feeling. Go at once and seek suffering for yourself [idi i ishchi sebe muk], as though you were yourself guilty for that wrong. Accept that suffering and bear it and your heart will find comfort, and you will understand that you too are guilty.\textsuperscript{106}

If normal guilt feelings over one's own transgressions have a slightly masochistic tinge, guilt over the sins of others is certainly masochistic, involving as it does a gratuitous disregard for the boundaries between individuals.

It is curious that Zosima acquired this masochistic philosophy from his brother Markel who, in turn, developed it specifically in the context of trying to please his mother. Markel was originally an atheist, but when he learned that he was dying of consumption he deliberately started going to church for his mother's sake. In his conversations with her shortly before he died he would say such things as: "Mother, little heart of mine . . . my joy, believe me, everyone is really responsible [vinovat] to all men for all men and for everything."\textsuperscript{107} By this time he is sincere about his masochism, and his mother weeps with joy and grief.\textsuperscript{108}

The idea of "all guilty for all" is not original with Dostoevsky. Gary L. Browning has pointed to sources in the Russian Orthodox liturgy, in the philosopher Nikolai Fedorov, in French utopian socialism, and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{109} The idea accords well with the typically Russian attitude—especially among the peasantry—about the displaceability of responsibility between individuals, or between the individual and the collective. For example, Dahl's 1862 collection of proverbs contains the following items:

Dump [everything] on to the mir: the mir will bear anything (Valin a mir: mir vse sneset).

A hateful tiaglo has fallen upon the mir (during apportionment; a tiaglo which no one would take on) (Postyloe tiaglo na mir poleglo [pri raskladke; tiaglo, kotoroe nikto na sebia ne prinimaet]).

In the mir no one is guilty. You can't find the culprit in a mir (V miru vinovatogo net. V miru vinovatogo ne syshchesh").
All for one, and one for all. Mutual responsibility (Vse za odnogo, a odin za vsekh. Krugovaia poruka).\textsuperscript{110}

In most of these examples responsibility is being shifted away from the individual and on to the collective—a decidedly non-masochistic move, but one in which boundaries are questioned nonetheless. In the last item the direction of the shift can be projective (“all for one”) or introjective and masochistic (“one for all”—Dmitrii Karamazov’s position precisely).

As for the curious expression “krugovaia poruka,” it has taken on a derogatory meaning similar to English “passing the buck.” In English, however, “the buck stops” (e.g., President Truman’s famous phrase, “The buck stops here”). In Russia the buck tends not to stop (or the attitude is that it does not stop). Rather, it goes on in endless circles (“krugovaia”), so that no one individual ever has to end up taking the blame for a morally questionable act. The collective answers for the irresponsible action of an individual.\textsuperscript{111}

This is an exaggeration, of course, for in Russia there have been and there are individuals who take personal responsibility. Indeed, there are those Dostoevskian masochists who take more responsibility than is really their due—yet another manifestation of the fuzziness of Russian interpersonal boundaries.

The notoriously Russian question “Who is to blame?” (“Kto vino-vat’?,” as in the title of Herzen’s novel) would not come up so often in Russia if the answer were not so elusive. But the answer would not be so elusive if the individual person were more distinctly delineated from other persons or from the collective.

In the second half of the twentieth century the guilty individual continues to be elusive. When the post-Soviet Russian government tried to identify a culprit for some of the atrocities perpetrated during the Soviet period, the defendant in the courtroom was not an individual, but a collective, that is, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (imagine trying the Republican Party rather than, say, Caspar Weinberger or Oliver North for the Iran-Contra affair!). When on the front page of Moskovskie novosti in late 1990 Aleksandr Kabakov described a religious gathering on the notorious Lubianka Square, he referred to the location as a “symbol of our general inescapable guilt,” and declared that spiritual cleansing entails “the soul of the people [dusha narod-
naia]," and not "just our individual souls." When journalist Oleg Moroz criticized the Russian congress for not permitting a referendum early in 1993, he castigated everyone for having brought such a congress into existence. His rhetoric, moreover, was rather picturesque: "In the last analysis, we are all guilty of the fact that we are sitting up to our ears in shit [my vse sami povinny v tom, chto sidim po ushi v der'me]."

In his 1973 essay "Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations" Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn urged his countrymen to repent for their sins under Soviet rule. But in this work Solzhenitsyn did not so much name names as blame everyone generally, including himself:

No country in the twentieth century has suffered like ours, which within its own borders has destroyed as many as seventy million people over and above those lost in the world wars—no one in modern history has experienced such destruction. And it is true: it is painful to chide where one must pity. But repentance is always painful, otherwise it would have no moral value. These people were not the victims of flood or earthquake. There were innocent victims and guilty victims, but they would never have reached such a terrifying total if they had suffered only at the hands of others: we, all of us, Russia herself, were the necessary accomplices.

Solzhenitsyn’s article is nothing less than a call for “general repentance” among Russians. Anticipating protests that certain individuals or groups of individuals (e.g., members of the secret police) might be more blameworthy than others, Solzhenitsyn holds his ground: “But we must all answer for everything [vse—za vse].” Dostoevsky would certainly have agreed with this conflation of the innocent with the guilty. Better that everyone be slightly guilty than separate the truly guilty from the truly innocent. That way no one has to be very guilty. Better that everyone engage in the mild masochism of breast-beating than engage in sadistic revenge against real, specific criminals. In this essay Solzhenitsyn does not seem to understand that general repentance precludes real justice. One cannot hold a Nuremberg-style trial, one cannot bring genuine, individual criminals to justice by operating in an impractical fantasy world which blurs distinctions between individuals and the collective.

But to return to Dostoevsky. When Dmitrii Karamazov asserted that “all are guilty for all,” he was failing to see boundaries within a Russian context. But such a failure need not happen only in such a context. In The Diary of a Writer, for example (particularly in the so-called “Push-
kin Speech”), the ideal Russian is characterized as some kind of universal human being (“vsechelovek”). The boundary between Russian and non-Russian is itself questioned. In grandiose fashion Dostoevsky asserts that “among all nations the Russian soul [russkaia dusha], the genius of the Russian people is, perhaps, most apt to embrace the idea of the universal fellowship of man, of brotherly love.”

According to Dostoevsky, the Russian national poet Aleksandr Pushkin is so great that he possesses “the faculty of completely reincarnating in himself an alien nationality.” Pushkin’s version of Don Juan seems utterly Spanish, A Feast During the Plague is perfectly in tune with “the genius of England,” and the Imitations of the Koran captures the very spirit of Mohammedanism (whereas Shakespeare’s Italians are “invariably Englishmen”). This alleged quality of Pushkin’s is, however, specifically Russian:

It is exactly in this that his national, Russian strength revealed itself most—the national character [narodnost’] of his poetry, the national spirit [narodnost’] in its future development, and the national spirit [narodnost’] in our future, which is concealed in that which is already present—and this has been prophetically revealed by Pushkin. For what else is the strength of the Russian national spirit [sila dukha russkoi narodnosti] than the aspiration, in its ultimate goal, for universality and all-embracing humanitarianism [ko vsemirnosti i ko vsechelovechnosti]? I have had to doctor up the translation a bit in order to capture the striking repetition of the Russian word “narodnost’” (which derives from “narod,” “people” or “folk,” and is cognate with such words as “rodina,” “motherland” and “rodit’sia,” “to be born”). Dostoevsky’s grandiose idea of Pushkin seems inseparable from the Russian folk idea.

A little later in the same essay grandiosity takes the form of a reaching out to all of humankind by the Russian people:

Yes, the Russian’s destiny is incontestably all-European and universal. To become a genuine and all-round Russian means, perhaps (and this you should remember), to become brother of all men, a universal man [vsechelovekom], if you please. Oh, all this Slavophilism and this Westernism is a great, although historically inevitable, misunderstanding. To a genuine Russian, Europe and the destiny of the great Aryan race are as dear as Russia herself, as the fate of his native land [svoei rodnoi zemli], because our destiny is universality acquired not by the sword but by the force of brotherhood and our brotherly longing for fellowship of men.
I am speaking merely of the brotherhood of men and of the fact that the Russian heart is more adapted to universal, all-humanitarian brotherly fellowship than any other nation [iz vsekh narodov]. I perceive this in our history, in our gifted men, in the creative genius of Pushkin. Let our land be poor, but this destitute land “Christ, in a slave’s garb, has traversed, to and fro, with blessing.” Why shouldn’t we embrace His ultimate word? Wasn’t He Himself born [rodilsia] in a manger? I repeat: at least we are already in a position to point to Pushkin, to the universality and all-humanitarianism of his genius. For wasn’t he capable of embracing in his soul foreign geniuses as his own [kak rodnye]?  

The grandiosity exists despite the humble character of Russia and of Russians. The collective known as Russia is destitute (“nishchaia”), it has been visited and blessed by Christ “in a slave’s garb” (Dostoevsky is quoting the famous line from Tiutchev). Humble Russia has “served” Europe, and so on. All of these ideas have clear masochistic implications.

It was also in the Pushkin Speech that Dostoevsky gave his most famous exhortation to moral masochism. The context is a discussion of Pushkin’s long poem The Gypsies, in which a world-weary, Byronic hero named Aleko falls in love with a Gypsy girl, lives with her among a group of Gypsies for two years, then kills her when he learns that she has taken a lover. Dostoevsky quotes the words with which the girl’s father sends Aleko away from the Gypsy encampment forever:

Оставь нас, гордый человек;
Мы дики, нет у нас законов,
Мы не терзаем, не казним.

Depart from us, thou haughty man:
We’re wild, we have no binding laws,
We neither punish nor torment.  

According to Dostoevsky, this passage suggests a “Russian solution” to the problem of pride—even though it is a Gypsy who is speaking against pride, and a Russian who is being offensively proud. In any case, disregarding Dostoevsky’s poor logic, we may quote his famous formula for smirenie which he believes is in accord with the faith and the truth of the Russian folk: “Humble thyself [smiris’], proud man; above all, break thy haughtiness! Humble thyself, idle man, and, first of all, labor on thy native land!”  

It is important to keep in mind that this is not some wizened, obscure monk perverting a fresh novice in ancient Rus’, but the great
Dostoevsky speaking to the cream of the Russian intelligentsia in 1880. And, to judge from the intensity of the reaction (both positive and negative) by that intelligentsia, Dostoevsky must have hit a very sensitive, Russian nerve.

The humiliation which Dostoevsky calls for is essentially the same as what had been advocated by the Slavophiles, namely, a bowing-down to the collective, here designated as the people ("narod," whereas the Slavophiles had focused on the commune, i.e., the "obshchina" or "mir"). The road to salvation lies in humble communication with the people ("smirennogo obshcheniia s narodom"). Yet, as was also the case with the Slavophiles, the truth lies within oneself: "Truth is within—not without thee. Find thyself within thyself. Subdue thyself; be master of thyself [podchin i sebia sebe, ovladei soboi]." It may well be that one can find oneself in humbling oneself before the collective, but Dostoevsky does not really explain how this is so. Again, as with the Slavophiles, the self to be found is confused with that collective object toward which one takes a masochistic stance.

And again, as with Losev, that object is maternal. Dostoevsky is being matriot in these passages. "Narod," Dostoevsky's key to achieving a high level of moral masochism, is a suggestive word. It and several other words containing the Russian root morpheme -rod-, which connotes birth and generativity, occur repeatedly in the passage. Dostoevsky says Aleko is an "unhappy wanderer in his native land [v rodnoi zemle], that traditional Russian sufferer detached from the people [ot naroda]"—by which he also means such literary characters as Onegin, Pechorin, and Andrei Bolkonsky, as well as real Russians such as those members of the intelligentsia who feel alienated from Russia. This kind of person came into existence ("zarodilsia") roughly a century after the reforms of Peter the Great, in the midst of an intelligentsia detached from the people, from the people's might ("ot naroda, ot narodnoi sily"). These "homeless Russian ramblers," though they may belong to the hereditary nobility ("k rodovomu dvorianstvu"), may seek solace "in the bosom of nature [na lone prirody]." Aleko himself suffered a longing for nature ("toska po prirode"), although he eventually came into conflict with it ("s usloviiami etoi dikoi prirody").

Elsewhere in the essay on Pushkin there are more clumps of these -rod- words: humble Tat'iana's childhood past is a "contact with the
motherland, with the native people [s родной, s родным народом]”; no writer experienced such a heartfelt union with the Russian people (“родственное народу своем”) as did Pushkin.\textsuperscript{126}

The accumulation of words containing the maternally suggestive root -rod- is remarkable, particularly in the admonition itself to masochism, and in the immediately following words: “labor on thy native field [на родной ниве]!”—Such is the solution according to the people’s truth and wisdom [по народному правде и народному разуму].”\textsuperscript{127}

The field (“niva”) too is suggestive, for it is a feminine noun referring specifically to the kind of field one plants and makes fertile.\textsuperscript{128} Moreover, a related word with clear maternal overtones, “земля,” meaning “land” or “earth” also occurs repeatedly in the essay on Pushkin (especially the phrase “родная земля,” “native land”; compare Konstantin Aksakov’s equation of “народ” and “земля”).\textsuperscript{129} Here it is also worth keeping in mind that Dostoevsky was one of the похвеники or “men of the soil” (from “пochва,” “soil”),\textsuperscript{130} who encouraged the educated class to find its roots with the folk masses without necessarily rejecting the West as the Slavophiles did. The похвеники too were real Russian matriots.\textsuperscript{131}

Dostoevsky’s fantasy of masochistic bondage to a maternal figure flows quite naturally out of an awareness of the agriculturally dependent position of the Russian peasant. As Christine Worobe points out in her book on the peasant in post-emancipation Russia, “Peasant societies are, by definition, built on relations firmly tied to the land. Land generally provides the means for peasant existence, and around that foundation institutions develop in turn to perpetuate peasant society.”\textsuperscript{132} Although the analysis provided by Worobe is primarily economic and cultural in nature, she recognizes the important psychological backdrop in the peasant’s relationship to the land: “Despite the natural odds against them, Russian peasants concentrated their attention on the land, maintaining a sacred, devotional attachment to it. Mother Earth was all-powerful, providing peasants with sustenance and definition of purpose.”\textsuperscript{133}

The land quite literally fed the peasant, just as a mother feeds a child. The land had a certain degree of control over its inhabitants, much as a mother has control over her child. There was an unavoidable motivation to submit masochistically to that control. Dostoevsky instinctively understood the emotional needs of the peasant.
The most explicit linkage of moral masochism to troubled interaction with the maternal figure of Russia comes in an earlier passage of Dostoevsky’s *Diary*:

It is we who have to bow before the people [preklonit'sia pered narodom] and await from them everything—both thought and expression; it is we who must bow before the people’s truth [preklonit'sia pered pravdoj narodnoi] and recognize it as such—even in that dreadful event if it has partly emerged out of the *Chet'i Minei* [a Russian martyrology]. In a word: we must bow like prodigal children [sklonit'sia, kak bludnye deti] who, for two hundred years, have been absent from home, but who nevertheless have returned Russians—which, by the way, is our great merit.\(^{134}\)

The uprooted Russian comes crawling back *as a child* to Russia which, although not explicitly characterized as a mother, is nonetheless the Russian folk, the “narod” with its repeated, maternally suggestive root morpheme -rod-. In returning home the intelligent can experience union (“soedinenie”) with the “narod,” can actually *be* a Russian. The underlying fantasy that Dostoevsky caters to is masochistic submission to and merger with the pre-Oedipal mother.

It is right after this passage that the famous “Peasant Marei” episode is recorded. Marei is a member of the “narod,” a kind and gentle peasant that Dostoevsky vividly remembers from his childhood. Once, in late summer when he was nine years old, little Fedor was walking outdoors when, all of a sudden he heard a cry: “A wolf is coming!” Apparently this was just a hallucination, but the child was extremely frightened and ran for protection to a nearby peasant named Marei, who was plowing a field. Marei quite naturally comforted the boy, addressing him as “rodnyi” (“dear one”), caressing him, and urging him to cross himself. Dostoevsky remembers the peasant’s “almost feminine tenderness” and, more important, mentions his “motherly smile” (“materinskaia ulybka,” “materinski ulybaias’”) three times in the course of the narration.\(^{135}\) Two of Dostoevsky’s psychoanalytic critics have (independently) noted the similarity of the name Marei to the name of Dostoevsky’s mother, *Maria*.\(^{136}\) Clearly, as psychoanalyst Louis Breger observes, Marei is a “loving mother.”

The memory of this encounter with a simple Russian peasant in an open field is very special for Dostoevsky. It is pressed into the service of a fantasy about an idealized Russian folk, a “narod” that is explicitly “maternal” even in the person of a male peasant, a peasant who will-
ingly suffers deprivation ("he had no expectation, no notion of his own freedom") and who himself repeatedly admonishes his little master to obey ("Christ be with you, cross yourself"; "Christ be with you, get moving now").

Dostoevsky considers his maternal Marei to be the very highest example of moral perfection, the ideal representative of the collective "narod" before whom one must "bow down." Psychoanalytically, Marei confirms the maternal essence of the object, the "narod," before whom one must behave in masochistic fashion, and from whom one must acquire masochistic habits in order to become a true Russian patriot.137

The individual in traditional Russian culture is strongly inclined to submit to the collective. In effect: *Doleo, ergo sumus.* Such submission is yet another of the many forms of moral masochism which Russians may enact for themselves. Ordinarily, the deep structure of this posture is not available to consciousness. But, when we closely examine some specific imagery of the collective concocted by certain selected, highly creative individual Russians—Losev, Berdiaev, Blok, Dostoevsky—then the collective's maternal face becomes visible.