FIVE MUSCOVITES: NARRATIVES OF MORAL EXPERIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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Abstract

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Recently social scientists in general and anthropologists in particular have invoked the concept of morality in their studies. The use of this concept is seen by many as a way to bypass the complexities and contradictions of such traditional social scientific concepts as culture, society and power. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly evident that in many of these studies morality itself is used in a way that may be more reminiscent of the moral understanding of the social scientist than that of their subjects.

This work goes beyond these studies by showing the ways in which my ethnographic interlocutors articulate and perform their own moral conceptions. Based on extensive ethnographic research in Moscow, Russia between 2002 and 2005, this work focuses on five Muscovites and the ways in which their own personal experiences during the late-Soviet and post-Soviet periods have helped shape the ways in which they themselves conceive of morality. Utilizing life-historical methods and hermeneutic narrative analysis, "Five Muscovites" consists of chapters that focus on each of these individuals and how their disparate narratives articulate substantially different moral conceptions. Each of these chapters, then, can be read as a moral portrait of each individual. The conclusion of this works asks the question, if morality is best understood

as having been constructed through the varied and differing life experiences of individuals, how then is it possible to speak of a shared morality at all. In seeking to address this question, “Five Muscovites” provides five moral portraits of individuals not only struggling to articulate their own moral conceptions, but perhaps more importantly struggling to give expression to their experiences of living through the post-Soviet transition.

Dedicated to my parents, Sandy, David and Janelle,
without whom this would not be possible.

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations of texts from Russian to English have been done by the author. All transliteration of Cyrillic follows the US Library of Congress transliteration system.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In early February, 2003 I got on a Moscow city bus in the northeastern section of town and hoped I would notice my stop. There is nothing easy about finding your bus stop in the middle of the Moscow winter - only those who have ridden the same line for months if not years will know where to get off. It is more a matter of feeling than knowledge or even vision. For once sitting - or more likely standing - on the crowded bus, you are encapsulated within a shell of ice and frost on wheels. The windows are as transparent as a frozen lake. If you are lucky your stop will either be one or two away from where you started, or at the other extreme, a good twenty minute ride. The benefits of a short ride are obvious, but why would you want to ride the ice-box on wheels for twenty minutes? Simply because if you find yourself near an ice and frost covered window, out of which you have no immediate hope of seeing, you can begin to work on the window with your warm breath and thumb. Look around and everywhere you will see people working on the windows in this manner. Old *babushki* with their handbags full of groceries, teenagers with their walkmans, factory workers in blue overhauls and business men in suits all nonchalantly breathing onto the closest window space near them and rubbing it with their mitten covered thumb.

On this day I was having very little luck creating my window within the window (it is not always as easy as it may sound!), but luckily my friend Olya had told me exactly how many stops there were between the metro station where I got on the bus and where I should get off. When I finally stepped out of the bus I entered a world of gray. Certainly this is nearly always the case in most of wintery Moscow, but the industrial northeast

section of Moscow - the metro station where I caught my bus is called *Elektrozavodskaia* or Electrical Plant - lacks any of the color, found for example in extravagant churches, old aristocratic estates, or even parks, that on occasion breaks the gray monotony. The world into which I stepped from that bus more closely resembled a toned down version of Malevich's *Black Square* than any of the bright and vivid socialist realist paintings I had seen - all the more so since I was the only person on the street for as far as I could see.

Finally out of the grayness I made out the image of Olya at the other end of the block, walking from the opposite direction that I was heading. I was lost and late, and Olya was a little distressed. "So, you finally made it," she said in a kind but agitated tone of voice. As we entered *Shkola Budushchego - Raduga* (The School of the Future - Rainbow), she told me that the other teachers were waiting for me in an office. We rushed into the newly constructed building and temporarily left behind the world of gray, snowy coldness outside. Quickly we took off our several layers of jackets, extra sweaters, scarves, hats and mittens and hung them in the coat room just around the corner from the front door. Children of all ages scurried about as they jostled to be the first out the door after a long day of school. As I tried to scrape off as much snow, ice and dirt from my stiff leather boots as possible, Olya slipped into a cozy looking pair of indoor shoes. We then hurried off to meet some of her teaching colleagues for a group interview.

I had come to Moscow to talk to people about their moral conceptions. When I first arrived I thought it would be a good idea to meet with groups of Muscovites and in this way be able to observe how individuals work together to dialogically articulate their respective moral positions. But as this group interview with Olya and her five teaching

colleagues finally convinced me, discussing morality in groups tends to lead to a group agreement on moral beliefs and concepts. One might think this agreement is the result of the articulation of an already held commonly shared notion of morality, and as such provides an excellent opportunity to record if not a Russian notion of morality, then certainly a Muscovite one. The process, however, could be viewed differently. It seemed that over the course of the interview the individuals shifted their moral positions not necessarily toward some pre-given Russian morality, but rather toward the subjective moral position of the head of the department Tatyana Pavlovna, a 37 year-old articulate and domineering figure who sat at the end of the room upon a stool that raised her a half meter above the rest of us. In this way I left the interview feeling as if I knew more about the power relations within the department than I did about any of their individual moral positions or how morality is negotiated among them. While this in itself is certainly interesting, it presented a problem for my research - how best to allow individual Muscovites the opportunity to articulate their own moral positions. Having finally appreciated this obstacle, I decided no longer to hold group interviews and instead focus on interviews with just one or two individuals. Ultimately, this methodological shift provided the most interesting conversations between my interlocutors and myself, and served as an example of the situationally located dialogical negotiation I found to be vital to subjective moral positions.

This dissertation, then, is the study and analysis of how a few Muscovites articulate their subjective moral positions. By interpreting the "logic" of their narrative articulations I hope to provide examples of how some individuals "theorize" morality through their narratives. By "logic" I mean, for example, the patterns, regularities and

recurrent themes of my interlocutors' narratives. Understanding the "logic" or process of this everyday theorizing is important because, like creating the window within the window on the bus, it provides a glimpse into the personal experiences of individuals making a moral world for themselves and others. By analyzing these narratives and explicating the "logic" of their conceptual articulations, this dissertation will show the process by which some Muscovites go about creating their moral worlds.

Because this dissertation is limited to the explication of the moral conceptions of a few Muscovites, it makes no claim to describe Russian morality in general. Therefore, while an occasional reference might be made to certain practices or ideological positions, for example, Russian Orthodox or Soviet practices and positions, that may make the narratives of my interlocutors more clear, these will be few and far between. There are certainly potential shortcomings and dangers to such an approach. However, by only stressing the socio-historic-cultural over individual experience the result is often a "distorting simplification of the human condition," and runs the risk of not fully appreciating human ambiguity, creativity and transgression.[1] Because of this, it is claimed, we often engage in the very "distancing and othering" practices many anthropologists seek to overcome.[2] The result of such practices, so argues James Faubion, is the risk of conceit that comes from anthropologists not always recognizing

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[1] Vincent Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 6.

[2] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999[1986], pp. xvii-iii.

the same individuality in their ethnographic subjects as they recognize in themselves.[3] One way of overcoming this divide is by acknowledging the personal and individual experience of our ethnographic participants as the starting point for anthropological investigations.[4] For as this dissertation intends to show, it is personal experience that provides one with the feeling that one's moral conceptions are correct, and with the motivation to act according to them.[5]

It has been argued that "people express their individuality with everything they do, whether or not self-expression is at the moment or in the context particularly valued or even considered to be relevant."[6] This is so because each person has their own unique experiences and memories of these experiences.[7] I found often that a person's conception of morality is different from another's because each individual has had different experiences from which generalizations are made. This is so because individuals have access to an array of different sources from which their moral conceptions can be crafted. While there is no doubt that such unique Russian experiences as the Soviet Union and the Russian Orthodox Church and all of their

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[3] James D. Faubion, *The Shadows and Lights of Waco: Millennialism Today*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, pp. 32-3.

[4] Edward M. Bruner, "Experience and Its Expressions," *The Anthropology of Experience*. V. Turner and E. Bruner, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986, pp. 8-9.

[5] Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn, "A Cognitive/Cultural Anthropology," *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*. R. Borofsky, ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994, p. 288.

[6] Barbara Johnstone, "The Individual Voice in Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 29, 2000, p. 407.

[7] Ibid. p. 411.

respective ideologies and practices are a unique source for many of my informants, they have also had significant contact and influence from such non-Russian sources as Western literature and mass media, the internet, the Hari Krishna, Protestantism and other so-called spirituality cults, and extensive travel abroad, to name just a few. In my case studies, I show how unique experiences have provided a foundation for the moral conceptualizations of my informants. And yet, because the individual is always in the midst of intersubjective relations, her experiences are always connected to the socio-historic-cultural world in which she lives.[8] In other words, personal experience is always limited by a range of possibilities found within a particular socio-historic-cultural world.

Recently the very notion of experience has been questioned by some social scientists and anthropologists.[9] For example, Joan Scott argues that because experience can never be separated from the very socio-historic-cultural processes and structures that give rise to it, experience as a starting point for social scientific analysis should be rejected.[10] Similarly, Desjarlais has argued that social scientists have tended to accept a Western notion of experience, which is characterized by depth, interiority, coherence, and authenticity.[11] In contrast to this, Desjarlais contends that the homeless individuals he studied in a Boston shelter do not have such experiences, but rather live a form of life

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[8] James F. Weiner, *Tree Leaf Talk: A Heideggerian Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg, 2001, pp. 80-1.

[9] C. Jason Throop, "Articulating experience," *Anthropological Theory*, Vol. 3(2): 2003, pp. 219-241.

[10] Joan W. Scott, "Experience," In *Feminists Theorize The Political*. Judith Butler and J. W. Scott, eds. New York: Routledge, 1992.

[11] Robert Desjarlais, *Shelter Blues: Sanity and Selfhood Among the Homeless*.

he calls struggling along, which is characterized as non-reflectivity, episodic, and publicness.[12] Because these critiques themselves take for granted what Desjarlais calls the Western notion of experience, they are left with no other option than rejecting it out of hand.

The concept of experience, however, has not always been characterized in the way it has been described by Desjarlais. Indeed experience as a concept has a genealogy of its own, and only since the eighteenth-century has taken the form critiqued by these writers. It seems that the concept of experience underwent a significant shift in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries in the midst of debates over competing methods of natural philosophy, soon to become science, across Europe. As some natural philosophers increasingly desired to draw conclusions about the natural world with more and more certainty, they turned to mathematics as the only available resource that could provide such certainty. The adoption of this new language of certainty necessitated a shift in method away from the predominate use of the Aristotelian notion of experience to the more narrowly focused practice of experiment. Peter Dear explains the difference between experience and experiment in the following way:

> One common way of distinguishing an "experiment" from simple "experience" is to define the former as involving a specific question about nature which the experimental outcome is designed to answer; by contrast, the latter merely supplies raw information about phenomena that has not been deliberately solicited to interrogate a theory or interpretation. One premodern, scholastic use of "experience" in natural philosophy, for example, tended to take the form of selective presentation of instances. These illustrated the conclusions of philosophizing that had itself been

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Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, p. 17.

[12] Ibid. pp. 17-24.

> conducted on the experiential basis of common knowledge. It was not a matter, therefore, of employing deliberately acquired experience to test philosophical propositions. From this perspective, it is true to say that "experiment" became a characteristic feature of the study of nature only in the seventeenth century.[13]

Thus it seems that experience prior to this period could be characterized in a very similar way to how Desjarlais describes struggling along, that is, as episodic and public. For as Dear puts it, Aristotelian experience consisted of "selective presentation of instances" of "common knowledge." In fact, for Aristotle "the nature of experience depended on its embeddedness in the community; the world was construed through communal eyes."[14] Prior to the seventeenth-century revolution in scientific method, then, experience conceived of as selective and communal was the foundation for natural scientific knowledge.

It was only after this shift in scientific method, then, that experience began to take the conceptual form of depth, interiority, coherence, and authenticity. Raymond Williams shows that since the eighteenth-century experience has taken on two main senses in everyday and intellectual usage. "These can be summarized as (i) knowledge gathered from past events, whether by conscious observation or by consideration and reflection; and (ii) a particular kind of consciousness, which can in some contexts be distinguished from 'reason' or 'knowledge.'"[15] In this description there is an obvious

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[13] Peter Dear, *Discipline and Experience: The Mathematical Way in the Scientific Revolution*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 21.

[14] Ibid. p. 23.

[15] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983[1976], pg. 126.

shift of emphasis from experience as located in the community to being centered in the individual. This shift, so Williams argues, is partly due to the influence of Protestantism, and particularly the more radical Protestant movements of the mid-nineteenth-century such as Methodism. This notion of subjective experience is "offered not only as truths, but as the most authentic kind of truths."[16] Thus, the new religious experience of the post-Reformation years helps shift the burden of truth from the community to the individual. So too does the rise of modern psychology in the late-nineteenth-century. For in this new science of the mind, not only is trauma conceived of as having been experienced solely by the individual.[17] But so too, with the development of psychoanalysis, is a method available for the individual to work through this trauma by means of reflecting upon experience in both ways described by Williams.

The twentieth-century, and especially the latter part, has seen an increased critique of this subjective notion of experience and has argued for a closer look at how experience is a "product of social conditions or of systems of belief or of fundamental systems of perception."[18] I too share many of the concerns of those who critique the concept of experience. But as Geertz has argued, without this concept our "analyses seem to float several feet above the ground."[19] Because of this, the concept of experience

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[16] Ibid. p. 128.

[17] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 61.

[18] Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, p. 128.

[19] Clifford Geertz, "Making Experience, Authoring Selves," *The Anthropology of Experience*. V. Turner and E. Bruner, eds., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986, p. 374.

remains central to my work, although what I consider experience is more similar to what Desjarlais calls struggling along than to what he characterizes as the Western notion of experience. Rather, and similar to Geertz, by experience I intend that which is *derived* through processes of memory and recollection, but also of hope, desire and anticipation, and which is in turn *attempted* to be integrated into one's dispositional way of being in the world. Thus, experience as I use it in this dissertation is characterized by *interpretive derivation* rather than accumulation, *attempts to integrate* rather than simple aggregation, and *publicness* rather than interiority.[20] Indeed, as will become clear throughout this dissertation, those "experiences" that my interlocutors speak of as central to their moral way of being were rarely recognized as such at the moment of their happening, were often only spoken of, or perhaps even only considered, in the unusual situation of the ethnographic interview, and when spoken of were often done so as if cut off from other aspects of their lives. Thus, while the experiences articulated by my interlocutors take a narrative form,[21] those very experiences are not necessarily thought of as part of a greater life narrative.[22] Nevertheless, they can only be understood as meaningful experiences in the context of the particular socio-historic-cultural world in which they were lived-out.

Because I agree with Gadamer[23] that moral conceptualization cannot be separated

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[20] Ibid. p. 380.

[21] Cheryl Mattingly, *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots: The Narrative Structure of Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 45.

[22] Eduardo P. Archetti, "The moralities of Argentinian football," *The Ethnography of Moralities*. S. Howell, ed., London: Routledge, 1997, p. 102.

[23] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. New York: Continuum, 1997[1960], p.322.

from personal experience as I have just laid it out, this dissertation will focus on the relationship between the experiences and conceptualizations of five Muscovites. Each of these individuals will be the focus of their own chapter, with one chapter dedicated to two of these individuals and the way in which their friendship influences their quite different moral conceptualizations. As such, in some ways each of these chapters resembles the anthropological genre of life history,[24] but are perhaps better thought of as moral portraits. While each share the desire to present "the subject from his own perspective,"[25] the moral portraits provided here do not have the descriptive breadth of life histories. Rather, and similar to the "life-historical profile" done by Faubion[26] or the "person-centered" sensory biographies done by Desjarlais,[27] the chapters of this dissertation particularly focus on the experiences my informants claim to have been central to their moral conceptions.

These moral portraits, then, are an example of what Nordenstam has called a descriptive ethics. While what my five interlocutors have expressed in their narratives is best considered their own personal normative ethics, that is, "those ideals, norms, conceptions of right and wrong, good and bad, and so on, which together make up [their]

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[24] Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991; Ruth Behar, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993; Michael Herzfeld, *Portrait of a Greek Imagination: An Ethnographic Biography of Andreas Nenedakis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

[25] Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 8.

[26] James D. Faubion, *The Shadows and Lights of Waco*, p. xiv.

[27] Robert Desjarlais, *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths Among Nepal's*

ideal of the good life," the portraits provide a "description and analysis of [these] systems of normative ethics."[28] These portraits are also examples of a phenomenological ethics and anthropology. For as Heidegger claims, phenomenology is nothing more than a method of analytic description.[29] This phenomenological method of analysis, so argues Desjarlais, provides a description of the ways in which our interlocutors *conceive of their own* lives.[30] In this way, the description comes out through the interpretative analysis of my interlocutors' disparate narratives. This method of analysis can also be seen as a blurring of the line between anthropology and moral psychology. For while the focus upon the narratives of individual persons might evoke the methods of psychology, my analysis attempts to give these narratives a socio-historic-cultural context in which they can be better understood.

Each of the chapters will contain two aspects of individuals' narratives. The central focus of each chapter is the way in which these five individuals conceptualize morality. This often takes the form of everyday "theorizing" of what each of them believe morality to be as well as how this "theory" is implemented in their own lives. Often times in discussing how this implementation occurs, my interlocutors provided examples that they believe illustrate this process. These examples make up the second aspect upon which this dissertation will focus. By analyzing these examples it becomes

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Yolmo Buddhists. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p. 4-5.

[28] Tore Nordenstam, *Sudanese Ethics*. Uppsala, The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968, p. 18.

[29] Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, p. 79.

possible not only to see whether or not these examples are actually consistent with the conceptions they are meant to represent, but perhaps more importantly it allows for the realization that often people do not act according to their own ideal moral conceptions. Therefore, the comparative analysis of these two narrative aspects reveal the ambiguity and situationally varying nature of these individuals' moral experience.

It should also be noted that many of the examples my interlocutors provided may at first glance appear banal if not superficial. Such things as lying to one's boss, cutting off a best friend from speaking, and deciding whether or not to pay for a ticket on a train if one can get away without doing so, may not seem like the kind of major moral dilemmas often discussed in the press[31] or academic writing.[32] What becomes clear is that at least for the five individuals of this dissertation, moral experience consists of that minutia of everyday life that makes it at one and the same time both mundane and deeply interesting. They are the things of novels, not news reports. This realization should not force us to turn our back on the quotidian in search of the spectacular, for it is in these

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[30] Robert Desjarlais, *Sensory Biographies*, pp. 5-6.

[31] See for example: Jeffrey Tayler, "Russia is Finished," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 287(5), May 2001, pp. 35-52; Michael Specter, "The Devastation," *The New Yorker*, October 11th, 2004, pp. 58-69; Marshall I. Goldman, "Putin and the Oligarchs," *Foreign Affairs*, 83(6), November/December 2004, pp. 33-44.

[32] See for example: Tat'iana Zabelina, "Sexual Violence Towards Women," *Gender, Generation and Identity in Contemporary Russia*. H. Pilkington, ed., London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 169-186; Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours:* Blat*, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 190-2; Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies After Socialism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

little problems of everyday life that entire personal "theories" of morality are crafted.[33]

To say that for my five interlocutors moral experience tends to consist of the quotidian dilemmas and problems of everyday life, however, does not mean that such experiences and conceptions of morality are cut off from their socio-historic-cultural world and the other persons living in that world. Rather, as I will show throughout this dissertation, it is often the results and consequences of ethically working-through these everyday dilemmas and problems that dialogically informs the ways in which these individuals act in the moment of future moral dilemmas and problems. Indeed, it is sometimes even the case that the consequences of these everyday moral decisions and practices help shape the very circumstances and context of future moral dilemmas and problems. In this way, then, it is in working-through these quotidian moments of moral experience that these five individuals not only exercise their already acquired moral way of being, but as a result, are able to, consciously or nonconsciously, reenforce or modify this morality for the next time. Because of this cumulative effect, the consequences of acting in these everyday moments of moral dilemma reach much further beyond the circumstances in which they took place. It is the far reaching nature of these consequences, I suggest, that allows my interlocutors, upon reflection, to craft their personal "theories" of morality.

This dissertation will focus its analysis on my interlocutors' narratives of these experiences. These narratives will be interpreted not so much for what they literally tell,

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[33] Ernestine McHugh, "Moral Choices and Global Desires: Feminine Identity in a Transnational Realm," *Ethos*, 32(4), 2004, p. 591; Joel Robbins, "Morality, Value, and Radical Cultural Change," presented at workshop on "Rethinking Morality" at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, December 2005, p. 17.

but rather for the "logic" revealed not only in their patterns, regularities and recurrent themes, but also in their assumptions, contradictions and veiled references. The "logic," then, is not just the structure or form of the narratives, but also their content. The interpretation of this "logic" reveals the moral worlds of my interlocutors. As Kathleen Stewart has put it in her ethnography of West Virginia coal miners, narratives not only express "local epistemology," but also help create a "positioned subject."[34] As such, narratives "function as technologies of deliberation and decision, of practical reasoning."[35]

One of the most important aspects of this "logic" is the framing of narratives and the utterances within them. Framing is particularly important because it works to structure the narrative, link its diverse content, and order the experiences it articulates.[36] Such framing not only sets off particular realms of content within the narrative, but also serves to link these realms and to provide for transition between them.[37] By paying attention to how interlocutors frame their narratives, the "logic" of patterns, dichotomies and recurrent themes is more easily revealed. The analysis of framing, then, allows one to interpret how speakers work through the process of articulating their moral experiences, as well as how these experiences are related to other aspects of their life.

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[34] Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 30-1.

[35] James D. Faubion, *The Shadows and Lights of Waco*, p. 49.

[36] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974.

[37] Katharine Galloway Young, *Taleworlds and Storyrealms: The Phenomenology of Narrative*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987, p. 23.

This, in turn, provides the opportunity to see how various aspects of one's life are related to the process of conceptualizing one's sense of morality.

Arriving at the question and locating my interlocutors

For as long as I can remember I have always had an interest in a place and an idea called Russia. As a child in the late 1970s and early 80s I had a very unchildlike occupation with what the Soviet Union was doing and why. I missed the first few days of classes my freshman year in college because I couldn't step away from the television as tanks rolled through Moscow in August of 1991. A few months later I read Dostoyevsky for the first time and was hooked. Despite this interest and studying the language, the thought of focusing my career on Russia rarely crossed my mind. Eventually I turned to the study of philosophy, particularly moral philosophy. I loved the arguments and the precision of thinking and writing that philosophy offered, but soon realized that moral philosophy had very little to do with real people's lives. It was because of this that I turned to cultural anthropology. But I quickly came to realize that very few anthropologists, in the words of James Faubion, "have yet systematically to put the ethical itself into anthropological question, systematically to inquire into the social and cultural themes and variations of ethical discourse and ethical practice."[38] I began to wonder why so few philosophers and anthropologists spoke to real people about what they think morality is.

One thing that makes the study of everyday moralities so difficult is that often when first asked about their moral beliefs people will recite some version of a culturally

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[38] James D. Faubion, "Toward an Anthropology of Ethics: Foucault and the Pedagogies of Autopoiesis," *Representations*, 74, Spring 2001, p. 83.

scripted morality, for example, the ten commandments. This seems to be even more the case when one lives in a relatively stable socio-political environment.[39] This is precisely why I decided to go to Moscow. For nearly the last twenty years the Russian people have been living through an historically unprecedented period of social and political upheaval and cultural and epistemological questioning - or what is often referred to as a period of transition. It has been argued that rather than bringing about a condition of increased homogeneity, globalization has brought about an "increasing intensity of problematization."[40] The Foucaldean notion of problematization, like Heidegger's breakdown,[41] describes a reflective state in which such everyday, unreflected states as behavior are presented "to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals."[42] It is my contention that like globalization, the so-called transition of post-Soviet Russia is characterized by problematization. One characteristic of this questioning is the struggle by individuals and institutions to articulate a coherent and widely acceptable notion of morality.[43] Unlike, for example, during much of the Soviet period when morality was ideologically endorsed and any serious dissent was systematically silenced, the post-Soviet period has experienced a

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[39] Alexander Zinoviev, *Homo Sovieticus*. London: Gollancz, 1985, p. 48.

[40] James D. Faubion, "Toward an Anthropology of Ethics," p. 101.

[41] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Albany: State University of New York, 1996[1927], pp. 68-9.

[42] Michel Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault," *The Foucault Reader*. P. Rabinow, ed., New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 388.

[43] Eduardo P. Archetti, "The moralities of Argentinian football," p. 112.

cacophony of moral debate, argumentation and questioning. This seemed to be a unique opportunity to talk with people about and observe how they attempt to articulate their conceptions of morality. So I came to Moscow in August 2002 and stayed until July of the next year, and returned again in the winter of 2005 in order to listen to and record as much of this cacophony as I could.

In total I interviewed thirty people who identified themselves as either an active Russian Orthodox Christian believer, a practicing artist or a teacher. While most only identified themselves as belonging to one of these "social groups," a few considered themselves as belonging to more than one. Thus, ten of these individuals are Russian Orthodox believers, fourteen are practicing artists, and ten are secondary and post-secondary teachers. No one identified themselves with all three.

I chose to focus this study on individuals who identify themselves with these three groups because historically their members have in various ways participated in the public moral discourse in Russia. Throughout its long history the Russian Orthodox Church and its faith have been integral parts of Russian life.[44] In the post-Soviet era the Russian Orthodox Church has reestablished itself as one of the most stable and influential cultural institutions in the Russian Federation.[45] In particular, the Church has become increasingly involved in public debates concerning such specific moral issues and

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[44] See for example: Svetlana Boym, *Common Places*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994; Jane Ellis, "Religion and Orthodoxy," *Russian Cultural Studies*. C. Kelly and D. Shepherd, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic: 1890 - 1934*. Northwestern University Press, 1999.

[45] Jerry G. Pankhurst, "Religious Culture" *Russian Culture at the Crossroads*. Dmitri N. Shalin, ed. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.

concerns as bioethics and reproductive rights, the family and law.[46] Similarly, over the last century and a half the artistic community in Russia has had an active voice in the formulation and communication of morality.[47] While many of the religiously inspired depictions of morality that characterized a good deal of nineteenth-century art were left behind after the revolution, Russian artists of the twentieth century continued to use their medium to express moral ideals and conceptions. The major Russian artistic movements of the twentieth-century, namely, Futurism, Constructivism, and especially Socialist Realism, often expressed significant moral and social agendas.[48] While several of the artists with whom I spoke contend that much of the art work and performance being done in Russia today lacks the obvious moral dimension of the past, they continue to see one of their roles as artists to be moral educators, critics and exemplars. Lastly, Kharkhordin has shown that schools and other similar youth organizations were of central importance in the Soviet Union for the teaching of so-called Soviet morality.[49] While the teachers with whom I spoke bemoan the lack of official moral education in post-Soviet Russian schools, they continue to see themselves as important moral educators for their students.[50] Although some schools continue to hold specific classes concerned with

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[46] Ibid.; Jane Ellis, "Religion and Orthodoxy," 1998; *Osnovy Sotsial'noi Kontseptsii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*. Moskva, 2000.

[47] Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic*, 1999.

[48] Ibid.; See also several essays in: *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism*. I. Paperno and J. D. Grossman, eds., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

[49] Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

moral and proper behavior, many of these teachers said that for the most part they simply try to work their own version of moral education into other classes and lessons. It is for these reasons, then, that this research focuses on individuals who identify themselves with these three groups.

In addition to focusing on Russian Orthodox believers, practicing artists and teachers, I also tried to interview an equal number of men and women. However, it seemed to me that women were much more interested in talking about morality than men. I cannot be sure why this is the case. While several men I approached declined to participate in an interview, no women declined. The result is that eleven interlocutors were male and nineteen were female. Similarly, I had hoped to interview individuals across a broad spectrum of age groups. However, because my initial contacts were all under thirty-five years of age, they tended to introduce me to people of their own age group. Thus, eleven were between the ages of twenty and thirty, ten between the ages of thirty-one and forty, five between the ages of forty-one and fifty, and four over the age of fifty.

It is difficult to locate a precise economic position for any of the individuals with whom I spoke. While certainly none of them are wealthy, it is more difficult to say if any of them are poor. For instance, all ten of the teachers take on tutoring jobs when they are able in order to earn extra income and a few of the artists have friends and/or patrons who help them on occasion by bringing by food, extra clothes and the like. Similarly, several persons under the age of thirty either still live with their parents or receive some

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[50] Perry L. Glanzer, "Postsoviet Moral Education in Russia's State Schools: God, Country and Controversy." *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 33, No. 3, September 2005.

support from them in the form of money and food. I suspect like many Russians today, several of my interlocutors would find it very difficult to survive without this extra help. It should also be noted that each of them are currently employed except for one, a painter who is able to scrape together a living from a pension, the occasional sale of his art, and the help and patronage of friends and family. Finally, all of these individuals have received an education beyond secondary school, whether it be in the university, technical college, an art institute or a seminary.

Although I interviewed thirty people for this research at least once, I interviewed ten of them more than once. Of these ten, I became quite close with the five individuals whose moral portraits are presented here. Thus, while none of the narratives collected from the other twenty-five informants are presented in this dissertation, they do provide a context in which these five moral portraits were collected. In that sense, while explicit reference is not made to these twenty-five informants, their influence remains in the part they played in shaping some of the questions I eventually asked my five central interlocutors. Although I continued to do interviews with all of my informants throughout the initial time period of my research, I had extensive and close contact over the course of the final six months of the initial period with the five individuals portrayed here, and the follow-up trip of the winter of 2005 was spent exclusively with these five.

All interviews were semi-structured, which at their best became conversations, and were one and half to two hours long. During these formal interviews I had the assistance of an interpreter. I felt that an interpreter was necessary because when I first began the research I was not comfortable enough with my knowledge of Russian to be without one. Eventually, I realized that I probably did not need an interpreter present

during the interviews, yet I chose to continue to use one in order to confirm any questions I might have had. These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by myself with the assistance of my interpreter.

While the formal interviews were conducted in Russian with the help of an interpreter, some of the informal conversations with the five portrayed here were in English. However, whenever I felt as if what they were saying was significant for the research, I asked them to try to express the same notion in Russian so that I could see if any particular idiom or idiosyncracy of the Russian language was central to what they were trying to communicate. Any shifts between languages will be indicated throughout the dissertation. These casual conversations were critical to the success of this project. For even when they were not focused on the research, I was able to note the ways in which these individuals spoke on certain topics and issues corroborated or contradicted what they said in the more formal interviews. Not only were these casual conversations significant, but so too were the kinds of observations I was able to make of their practices, behavior and attitude in everyday life. I would eventually find ways to introduce as many of these observations as possible into subsequent interviews.

I should also note that the five persons portrayed in this dissertation, and especially the four closest to my own age, have in every sense become my friends. To this day we email each other regularly and speak on the phone every few months. They have been personally involved in this project for some time and the ones who are able to read English have read drafts and made comments and critiques, all of which has been worked into what is presented here. With the five persons portrayed, I believe I have been lucky enough to find both friends and collaborators.

The names of my five interlocutors have been changed to protect their identities. I have preserved the formality of names that is standard in colloquial Russian in the choice of pseudonyms. Thus, individuals of my own age group are given only a first name (*imia*), while those of an older generation are given an *imia* and a patronymic (*otchestvo*). Lastly, I should say something about how the five persons presented here became central to this dissertation. In a very real way it is most truthful to say that they chose their role in this project and not the other way around. While it is certainly true that as with all of my other interlocutors I first approached each of these five, after that initial contact each of them expressed a deep and personal interest in the project unlike any of the others. Among other things they each freely offered their time, gave me literature on the topic to read, introduced me to other potential participants, and most importantly invited me to become part of their already busy lives. For all of this I will remain forever grateful. This is not to say, of course, that the other persons involved in this project were not interested in pursuing it further, and indeed several of them contributed greatly, but as I am sure many anthropologists discover in the field, some individuals tend to become more central to our projects than others. The reasons for this are varied, and just as often have to do with the choices we make as anthropologists as it has to do with the choices and interests of our interlocutors.

Locating the Question

Articulating Morality in Contemporary Russia

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Russian Federation and its people have faced overwhelming and unprecedented political, economic and cultural upheaval. As a result of these upheavals and with almost certain influence from the

Soviet era, Igor Kon argues there now exists in Russia a dialectic between competing moral understandings and an all out moral malaise.[51] Kon claims this is a result of the fact that people in Russia were left after the collapse with contradictory moral principles. As he puts it, the "moral system generated by communist ideologies . . . [did] not recognize any absolute, extrasocial, transhistorical moral values. At the same time, communism is decidedly anti-individualistic and antilibertarian."[52] In addition to this morally precarious social foundation, the influx of consumerism in the perestroika years and throughout the 1990's further shifted the private as well as public discourses and practices of morality toward extreme self-interest. Kon, therefore, compares the realities of mid-1990's Russian moral culture to a Hobbesian state of war, that is, as a society of *bespredel* or a society without moral limits.[53]

Although I would not go as far as Kon to say that Russia today has no moral limits, it is clear that Russia is characterized by the struggle over competing moral conceptualizations. But this is not unique to the post-Soviet period and seems to have been the case in the post-Stalinist years of Soviet Russia as well. Writing about life in late-Brezhnev era Russia, Michael Binyon shows that Russian authorities, social scientists, media and laypersons have been speaking of the decline of moral values since at least the mid-1970's.[54] Using a discourse very similar to that heard in the post-Soviet

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[51] Igor S. Kon, "Moral Culture," *Russian Culture at the Crossroads: Paradoxes of Postcommunist Consciousness*. Dmitri N. Shalin, ed., Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.

[52] Ibid. p. 187.

[53] Ibid. p. 205.

[54] Michael Binyon, *Life in Russia*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983.

period, Russians of a generation ago showed constant concern for the immorality of Soviet youth, the increasing negative effects of materialism and Western entertainment on Soviet morality, and a shocking rise of publicly expressed sexuality, all of which led many to call for a return to good old fashioned Russian and Soviet family values. In the early-1960's concern for the possible breakdown of morality in the Soviet Union was expressed in the Communist Party's promulgation of "The Moral Code of the Builder of Communism," a kind of communist ten commandments that was eventually taught in schools and door to door by members of the Komsomol.[55] Even as far back as the late-1940's there was a redoubled effort of securing "a Victorian socio-sexual puritanism" to counter the increased sexual freedom and high divorce and abortion rates of the pre-war years.[56] This effort, no doubt, was made necessary in part by the tremendous loss of life during the war. As can be seen, then, Kon's concern for the erosion of morality in post-Soviet Russia is in large part a continuation of a public discourse that has been voiced for generations.

Kon's concern also seems to rely on an assumption that during the Soviet period people did in fact share something called Soviet morality, the contents of which were agreed upon. But as I have just suggested, and as Field shows in her historical study of "private life" in post-Stalinist Russia,[57] the evidence for such an assumption is slim. It is

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[55] Richard T. De George, *Soviet Ethics and Morality*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969, ch. 5.

[56] Jerry Tallmer, "Russia's 'New' Morality," *The Nation*, November 26, 1949, pp. 515-17.

[57] Deborah Field, *Communist Morality and Meanings of Private Life in Post-Stalinist Russia, 1953-64*. Doctoral Dissertation, Department of History, University of

more likely that any expression of a unified moral agreement was a result of what Yurchak calls the hegemony of representation rather than any truly agreed upon Soviet morality. As Yurchak argues, by means of Party promulgations, slogans that appeared everywhere from the media to the sides of buildings to the windows of fruit and vegetable stores, and the formulaic structure of official discourse, this "hegemony of representation produced the feeling that one's experience was shared by all, and most people behaved accordingly."[58] They did so not necessarily because they believed or agreed with such representations, but because they had little other choice than to *pretend*[59] that they did. The result of such pretending led to the publicly expressed impression that not only did the people of the Soviet Union support its ideology but also its governing system.[60] When Kon bemoans the competing moral positions of post-Soviet Russia, then, he seems to long for a unified morality that may never have actually existed in the first place.

Nevertheless, there have been several studies that have tried to analyze the so-called communist and Soviet morality. These studies suggest that Soviet conceptions of morality, as spelled out in party documents, taught in schools and youth organizations, and portrayed in party-run newspapers and party-endorsed myths, expressed a socio-

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Michigan, 1996.

[58] Alexei Yurchak, "The Cynical Reason of Late Socialism: Power, Pretense, and the *Anekdot*," *Public Culture*, vol. 9, 1997, p. 167.

[59] Ibid. p. 169.

[60] Alexei Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45(3), 2003, p. 480 and 504.

centric, non-individualistic expectation, even if such a morality ultimately rested on methods of individuation and self-discipline.[61] Thus, Michele Rivkin-Fish argues that while Soviet ideology may have represented morality as socio-centric, the personal sphere was often the site of moral discipline and authenticity.[62] In particular, she argues that the concepts of *kul'turnost'* (culturedness) and *lichnost'* (individuality/person) were utilized as disciplinary tropes in the Soviet era and suggests that their use has continued in the post-Soviet sphere of public health. Thus, for example, medical personnel use these tropes for the purpose of disciplining their patients to live healthier lifestyles or practice safe sex. In doing so they make it clear to their patients that cultured individuals ought to exhibit traits of "civility, modernity, and self-dignity," and only in so doing will they effectively live healthy lives.[63] In this way, Rivkin-Fish claims that while such person-centered moral discourse takes on the appearance of being separate from state power and interest, it actually establishes medical personnel as a source of authority for moral discipline and practice.

In her work on Russian talk during perestroika, Ries shows that what Russians talked about and the speech genres they used played an important role in the fall of the

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[61] See for example: Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1961; Richard T. De George, *Soviet Ethics and Morality*; Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*.

[62] Michele Rivkin-Fish, "Personal Transitions and Moral Change After Socialism: The Politics of Remedies in Russian Public Health" *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Vol. 19(1), 2001, p. 38.

[63] Ibid. p. 38.

Soviet Union.[64] What is perhaps most important in Ries's work is her portrayal of how litanies and lamenting, speech genres traditionally associated with the Russian Orthodox Church, were appropriated and utilized by individuals in their everyday speech for political ends. According to Ries, litanies and laments are often interconnected in everyday Russian talk and are often expressed as a speaker enunciates "a series of complaints, grievances, or worries about problems, troubles, afflictions, tribulations, or losses, and then often comment on these enumerations with a poignant rhetorical question ("Why is everything so bad with us?"), a sweeping, fatalistic lament about the hopelessness of the situation."[65] Ries argues that such everyday forms and genres of speech are integral to negotiating and creating the social world of values for Russians. As she puts it, "in Russia talk in all its manifestations is a markedly significant domain of value creation - perhaps, in part, because other domains of action have been so restricted. This is to say that Russian talk is not just an activity during which value creation is described, but one in which, during which and through which value is actually produced."[66] Cynicism is just one form of such talk. Ries writes that people "talk about cynicism to describe a general context of moral corruption and dishonesty, where it seems that everyone is engaged, to some degree, in cheating, lying, swindling, and stealing."[67] But Ries claims that such cynical talk does more than simply describe a

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[64] Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

[65] Ibid. p. 84.

[66] Ibid. p. 21.

[67] Nancy Ries, "'Honest Bandits' and 'Warped People': Russian Narratives about

certain view of contemporary Russia, but more importantly works to deconstruct naive discourses of state and market ideology and serves to justify one's own occasional transgression.[68]

My research takes Ries' work as a starting point for studying the ways in which moral conceptions are expressed through narratives of personal experience and belief. While Ries focuses on the various speech genres utilized by her Russian informants, as I have already laid out, I take a slightly different approach and analyze the particular narrative "logic" of each of my interlocutors. In so doing, I seek to explicate the very process of moral conceptualizing my interlocutors go through in speaking about their moral beliefs. Both approaches, however, share a similar interest in having the words of our interlocutors as the starting point and foundation for our anthropological analysis.

Recently, Douglas Rogers has done research on the moral practices of persons living in a predominantly Old Believer village in the Urals. Rogers argues that the context of socio-political transition in the post-Soviet years has allowed for the renewal of "conversations and conflicts about how to constitute moral relations."[69] These conversations and conflicts, so Rogers argues, are in a dialogical negotiation with historically informed dispositions and sensibilities, which, in turn, leads to the kinds of

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Money, Corruption, and Moral Decay," *Ethnography in Unstable Places*. C. Greenhouse, E. Mertz, and K. Warren, eds., Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, p. 276.

[68] Ibid. p. 277.

[69] Douglas J. Rogers, *An Ethics of Transformation: Work, Prayer, and Moral Practice in the Russian Urals, 1861-2001*. Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, The University of Michigan, 2004, p. 207.

ethical transformations he writes about.[70] What makes this dialog and transformation possible is that "what one thinks of as 'right' or virtuous usually exists in many shades of similarity and difference to what one's neighbors think."[71] It is these very shades of similarity and difference between individuals that leads to the dialogical negotiation of moral practice and conceptualization that I will describe throughout this dissertation. My approach, however, differs significantly from that of Rogers. While I focus my analysis on the very narratives of my interlocutors' moral experience in order to show the ways in which they themselves conceive of morality, there is little indication throughout Rogers' work that any of his informants might ever actually refer to the kinds of practices he focuses upon - such as work, prayer and exchange - as moral practices. Indeed, in his attempt to study moral practices as an alternative to the more traditional anthropological concepts of culture and tradition, it seems that Rogers has simply replaced these concepts with another such concept imposed by the anthropologist himself. For what appears most clear in Rogers' analysis is not what his informants consider morality, but what he himself counts as moral practice. It is just this error of methodology and analysis that I attempt to overcome in this dissertation.

A Short Genealogy of Moralities and the Anthropology of Moralities

Because an anthropology of moralities must attempt to locate itself within a broader tradition of analyzing the concepts of morality, a brief genealogy of the concept of morality itself is in order. For only by understanding how we contemporaries have

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[70] Ibid. p. 37.

[71] Ibid. p. 36.

arrived at the concept we now know as morality, can we begin to consider how this concept is utilized and articulated in the everyday lives and discourse of individuals.

Alasdair MacIntyre claims "we live with the inheritance of not only one, but of a number of well-integrated moralities. Aristotelianism, primitive Christian simplicity, the puritan ethic, the aristocratic ethic of consumption, and the traditions of democracy and socialism have all left their mark upon our moral vocabulary. Within each of these moralities there is a proposed end or ends, a set of rules, a list of virtues. But the ends, the rules, the virtues, differ."[72] Thus MacIntyre goes on to argue that only with a history of moral philosophy can a sufficient understanding of the crisis of the Western moral vocabulary be understood. By why the need for a history? Precisely because of the different ends, rules and virtues of the various moralities. These differences alone, nevertheless, do not pose the real problem of what MacIntyre sees as the moral crisis of the modern world. The crisis lies, in fact, in the shared vocabulary of the various moralities. To the casual observer of moral action and vocabulary there is no difference of intended meaning within this vocabulary. For after all, don't we all speak of good, justice and freedom if not in the same manner then certainly in a sufficiently similar fashion? MacIntyre convincingly argues - No. It is only with a proper history of moral philosophy, then, that MacIntyre thinks we are able to understand the various ways in which the central concepts, notions and ends of diverse moral philosophies have informed these concepts and their use today. That is to say, only a history of moralities

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[72] Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998(1966), p. 266.

can reveal the multivocality of the very concepts of which many assume a basic shared understanding.

Thus, MacIntyre begins by returning to Homeric Greece to show the origins of Western moral philosophy's most valued and misunderstood concept - the good. The pre-Socratic history of good provided by MacIntyre is not very different than that given by Nietzsche in his first essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.[73] Both show how the concept of the good originally applied to the proper actions of a specific member of Homeric Greek society, namely that of the noblemen. By the time Socrates arrived on the scene this form of social life in which the good as pertaining to the *aret* of the nobleman was already beginning to crumble. Nevertheless, the concept of the good as the *aret* of some specific function of the individual has remained with us to this day. The problem arises with the difficulty of understanding or discerning the so-called function of the individual within a specific form of social life. For if this is done, so it is argued, then we can better understand the moral concept of the good. "To understand a concept, to grasp the meaning of the words which express it, is always at least to learn what the rules are which govern the use of such words and so to grasp the role of the concept in language and social life. This in itself would suggest strongly that different forms of social life will provide different roles for concepts to play."[74]

A significant part of the current moral crisis, according to MacIntyre, is due to the rise of individualism. This can also be viewed, as Schneewind sees it, as a shift from

[73] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

[74] Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 2.

conceptions of morality as obedience to conceptions of morality as self-governance.[75] This shift occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries as reliance upon God and institutions of authority for moral guidance increasingly gave way to the notion of the autonomous individual as the source of moral reasoning. With this shift came perhaps the most significant development of modern moral philosophy, that is, the assumption that every individual is equal in his or her ability to reason and act morally. It is this assumption that has been the foundation for nearly all of moral philosophy since Kant.[76] These notions of individualism and the autonomous moral person arose in part due to the influences of Protestantism and capitalism. The former can be seen in the philosophy of Luther who separates the individual from both the state and God. But most importantly it is in Luther's separation of the individual, who dies alone before God, from the form of social life that had the most impact on future moral philosophy. His influence on Kant, both of whom share a notion of the insignificance of consequences for morality, is particularly obvious. The influence of capitalism on moral philosophy is also significant. Its emphasis on the individual is particularly obvious in the philosophies of Machiavelli, who was writing in the Italian city-states during the incipient years of modern capitalism, and in the natural rights-based theory of John Locke.

The rise of individualism resulted in a clean break from the moral vocabulary of ancient Greece and early Christianity. The most obvious example of this is in the disconnection between duty and happiness. In this new era of individualism there is no

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[75] J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 4.

[76] Ibid. p. 4.

guarantee of happiness through the fulfillment of duty. Rather, happiness has now become a matter of individual psychology rather than socially conceived.[77] It was this chasm between the new form of social life and the old moral vocabulary that led to modern moral philosophical thinking. This modern way of thinking is characterized by the use of an *ought* that cannot, so it is claimed, be deduced from any *is*. That is to say, the *ought* of modern moral imperatives are divorced from any social reference or end.[78] Modern moral philosophies and their concepts, such as the good, justice, and freedom, emphasize the centrality of the individual *qua* individual human being. In other words, the reference-less *ought* is only socially so. For the modern *ought* does reference the individual with an essential human nature abstracted from a social setting. The modern individual no longer invokes social expectations in his actions but his very humanity. Kant's categorical imperative is the most significant example of this form of modern moral thinking. It is this modern disconnect that MacIntyre claims is responsible for the contemporary moral crisis brought on by conceptual multivocality. For as he suggests, any "attempt to find a moral standpoint completely independent of the social order may be a quest for an illusion, a quest that renders one a mere conformist servant of the social order much more than does the morality of those who recognize the impossibility of a code which does not to some extent at least express the wants and needs of men in particular social circumstances."[79] This statement is leveled against the moral theory of

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[77] Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, p. 167.

[78] Ibid. p. 173.

[79] Ibid. p. 198.

Kant. MacIntyre continues, then, to quote Eichmann as claiming his moral education to be in Kantian ethics to illustrate the potential danger of the disconnect between moral concepts and their social context.

Twentieth-century moral philosophy has continued further this chasm between moral concepts and the social world. For many of these philosophers "write as if morality, and with it, moral philosophy existed apart from all specific social forms."[80] Thus, whether it is Sartre locating the absolute freedom of choice of the individual in human nature, or the prescriptivist and emotivist philosophers appeal to choice and attitude as ascribed "to the nature of moral concepts as such," none of them recognize the embeddedness of moral concepts in a social form of life.[81]

Indeed, one consequence of this modern separation of moral concepts and reasoning from the social world has been the rejection of casuistry. Jonsen and Toulmin define the art of casuistry as "the practical resolution of particular moral perplexities."[82] This art takes serious the social nature of moral dilemmas and in so doing looks to the "concrete circumstances of actual cases, and the specific maxims that people invoke in facing actual moral dilemmas."[83] This kind of moral reasoning, however, was increasingly rejected in the post-Reformation years as the individual increasingly became the center of a moral reasoning that was considered distinct from concrete circumstances

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[80] Ibid. p. 248.

[81] Ibid. p. 269.

[82] Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 13.

[83] Ibid. p. 13.

and consequences, as well as the social forms of life in which these were found. While casuistry may have come into philosophical disrepute since its high point in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, it seems likely that for many people faced with moral dilemmas in their everyday lives, the resolution of these dilemmas takes the form of something very similar to a casuistic method. This will become clear in the moral portraits that follow.

While Western philosophy from its outset has been concerned with the various concepts we now name as morality, anthropologists have in general avoided an explicit study of moralities. One explanation for this lack of attention is that because anthropologists study culture, and because what counts as the moral is best understood as culture itself, anthropologists have been studying morality all along.[84] Despite this Durkheimian assumption of the congruence of culture or society with morality, there have been some important contributions to an anthropology of moralities. While Read's essay on the Gahuku-Gama and Evans-Pritchard's work on the Azande are probably the most notable contributions, perhaps the lesser known work by Edel and Edel has been more influential for those anthropologists who have recently turned to the study of local moralities.[85] In their pioneering work on the subject, Edel and Edel raise the question: "By what mark shall we know 'the moral'?"[86] In the attempt to answer this question,

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[84] David Parkin, "Introduction" *The Anthropology of Evil*. D. Parkin (ed), Oxford: Blackwell, 1985, p. 4

[85] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965[1937]; K. E. Read, "Morality and the concept of the person among the Gahuku-Gama," *Oceania*, 25(4), 1955, pp. 233-82.

[86] May Edel and Abraham Edel, *Anthropology & Ethics: The Quest for Moral*

they make a distinction between what they see as the two predominant approaches to this question. They call these two approaches Ethics Wide and Ethics Narrow. Ethics Wide, so they argue, "assumes that moralities are part and parcel of the whole field of human endeavor and striving,"[87] and as such, inquires into human values and notions of the Good. With such a broad definition, however, it is difficult to make a distinction between Ethics Wide and the anthropological concept of culture, and Edel and Edel make no argument for why the former is preferable to the latter.

Ethics Narrow, on the other hand, limits moral inquiry to particular phenomena. Edel and Edel conceive of this as a cross-cultural investigation of obligation and duty, that is, of questions of *ought*. Recent anthropological studies of moralities, however, suggest that focusing on the *ought* may confine morality to its Western conception. For instance, Howell suggests that a cross-cultural study of moralities is better served by focusing on the acting individual's process of moral reasoning during which choices are made between alternative possible actions.[88] Ultimately, however, Edel and Edel suggest that an Ethics Wide, much like the study of culture in general, is too broad, and Ethics Narrow is too limiting for considering the often complex configuration and possibilities of moralities. In the end they conclude that only a cross-cultural empirical study of the family resemblances of personal, cultural and human practices that constitute a moral

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Understanding. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000[1959], p. 7.

[87] Ibid. p. 8.

[88] Signe Howell, "Introduction" *The Ethnography of Moralities*. S. Howell (ed), London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 14-6.

configuration lead to an adequate study of moralities.[89]

Recently, Howell has edited a collection of ethnographic essays that takes up the study of local moralities.[90] The essays in this collection apply ethnographic methods to examine morality in particular locations, events or texts. Archetti, one of the contributors to this collection, argues that because morality covers such a vast arena of practices and events, it is only possible to study morality in the context of a particular event or location (he chose soccer in Argentina).[91] Howell argues that these locations or "pegs" must be extended to as many arenas as possible. One such arena is the speech-event. Speech-events are particular utterances that are framed in such a way as to communicate recognizable meanings, values and assumptions.

Thus, for example, in his study on moral reactions to land usage in a rural north England community, Rapport argues that local definitions of "local" and "outsider" are significant symbolic markers for moral interactions.[92] Rapport found that although these moral discourses were conveyed in absolutist terms, often times what counts as "local" and "outsider" depends upon who is speaking to whom, about whom, when and where. In this way, while the symbolic distinction between "local" and "outsider" serve the speech community as a means for locating moral boundaries, these boundaries are

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[89] May Edel and Abraham Edel, *Anthropology and Ethics*, p. 11.

[90] Signe Howell, *The Ethnography of Moralities*. S. Howell (ed), London: Routledge, 1997.

[91] Eduardo P. Archetti, "The moralities of Argentinian football," p. 100.

[92] Nigel Rapport, "The morality of locality: on the absolutism of landownership in an English village," *The Ethnography of Moralities*. S. Howell (ed), London: Routledge, 1997, p. 75.

continuously shifting in each particular and subjective speech-event. Similarly, Humphrey argues that speech-events are subjectively utilized for the purpose of creating an individual's moral world.[93] Humphrey shows how the sayings of famous Mongolians are taught by mentors to students, who in turn can choose and interpret these sayings in specific contexts to use as moral exemplars. In this way, individuals use exemplars as a means of moral deliberation and disciplining, which "enables people to transform themselves and gradually to commit themselves to certain [ethical] modes of being."[94]

Both of these studies suggest that language is not only important to morality because it is how morality is framed, communicated and acquired. It is also important because often times morality is created and acted out in everyday speech without any explicit attention drawn to this fact. In this way everyday speech does not "simply reflect a taken-for-granted world 'out there,' [but also helps] constitute such a world" by establishing relationships between speaker and listener, expectation and behavior, and referent and meaning/understanding.[95] For example, in his study of Samoan respect vocabulary, Duranti shows that the use of these respect words do not serve to simply save face in intersubjective relations, but more importantly have a pragmatic force that creates

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[93] Caroline Humphrey, "Exemplars and rules: Aspects of the discourse of moralities in Mongolia," *The Ethnography of Moralities*. S. Howell (ed), London: Routledge, 1997.

[94] Ibid. p. 43.

[95] Alessandro Duranti, "Language in context and language as context: the Samoan respect vocabulary," *Rethinking Context: Language as an interactive phenomenon*. A. Duranti and C. Goodwin, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 80.

the possibility for specific kinds of actions by the speaker and addressee.[96] In this way, then, the use of certain words helps to create the context in which a particular moral way of being can be performed.

The analysis of this dissertation pays particular attention to how narratives spoken by my interlocutors perform morality. I use the word perform in a double sense. First, to indicate the calling of context or the establishment of an interpretive frame for morality.[97] In this sense, the performance of morality sets off moral narratives and speech from other, non-moral interactions, and allows all the participants in the interaction to understand the context. Secondly, performance indicates the actual production of morality within the context. This notion of performance has its roots in Austin's speech-act theory,[98] found its methodological grounds in the work of ethnomethodologists,[99] and has been taken up by many contemporary linguists and ethnographers. As with the Samoan respect vocabulary discussed by Duranti, this second notion of moral performance focuses on how particular utterances help constitute moral relations between individuals. In considering how my interlocutors' narratives can be interpreted in light of these two aspects of performance, this dissertation will pay particular attention to the ways in which individuals personally craft their conceptions of morality from their own

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[96] Ibid. p. 95.

[97] Richard Bauman, "Verbal Art as Performance," *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*. A. Duranti, ed., Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001, pp. 165-88.

[98] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

[99] Charles Goodwin and Alessandro Duranti, "Rethinking context: an introduction," *Rethinking context: Language as an interactive phenomenon*. A. Duranti

everyday experiences.[100]

As already mentioned, this dissertation is in part a response to the general lack of attention anthropology has given to a systematic study of local notions of morality.[101] Because there remains a strong Durkheimian assumption in anthropology that the social is the moral, anthropologists have in general avoided an anthropology of moralities.[102] Unfortunately, this Durkheimian congruence is not how many of the people we actually study would understand the moral, and thus, anthropologists who make this assumption tend to impose their own conception of morality onto the people they study. Related to this is the increasing tendency of anthropologists to describe certain practices of their subjects as moral practices without any indication that their subjects would think of them in the same way. Thus, for example, anthropologists have written about the "strong moral code[s]" that regulate Russian understandings of social networks and public assistance,[103] or the "moral worth" acquired by Nepalese women who live within the gendered restrictions of their villages.[104] While these practices may be central to both Russian and Nepalese ways of being in the world, intimately felt by their actors and even impose certain limits on social behavior, there is no indication that local persons would

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and C. Goodwin, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 27.

[100] Ernestine McHugh, "Moral Choices and Global Desires," p. 591.

[101] James D. Faubion, "Toward an Anthropology of Ethics," p. 83.

[102] Joel Robbins, "Morality, Value, and Radical Cultural Change," p. 1.

[103] Melissa L. Caldwell, *Not By Bread Alone: Social Support in the New Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p.86.

[104] Ernestine McHugh, "Moral Choices and Global Desires," p. 590.

describe such practices as moral. In describing them as such, then, we have a better understanding of the anthropologists' conception of morality than of that of their subjects.

This dissertation, then, can be read on two levels. First, as a critique of the ways in which anthropologists have generally conceived of and utilized morality in their research and writing. The conclusion of this dissertation suggests that morality cannot simply replace the old keywords of culture, tradition or agency without a systematic and in-depth analysis of how actual persons articulate and utilize moral conceptions in their own lives. Second, this dissertation is an attempt to show how five Muscovites craft, articulate and utilize their own moral conceptions as expressions of their personal experiences of everyday life. By means of this it becomes possible to see not only how the moral conceptions of these five individuals are not only different from that of the anthropologist's, but from each others as well. This dissertation, then, sheds light on the multivocality of everyday moral conceptions and calls into question the very usefulness of the concept of morality. It is this question that is addressed in the conclusion.

Organization of the Dissertation

What follows will consist of seven chapters. Five of these chapters will be the moral portraits of the five individuals about whom I spoke above. Each chapter will focus on one of these persons. Another of these chapters will describe the friendship of two of these persons and the ways in which they are able to maintain their friendship despite holding quite different moral conceptions. This chapter will also show how these two individuals (three if I count myself) negotiate, influence and come to some agreement on how they both conceptualize and act out their moral beliefs. The final

chapter will provide a brief conclusion of the significance of these disparate moral portraits.

Chapter 2

Olya

After the interview with Olya and the group of her teaching colleagues, Olya asked if I would walk with her since she was headed in the direction of the metro station I needed. She was going to an elderly woman's apartment in the neighborhood, where she went a couple times a week to prepare the woman's dinner, feed her and generally maintain the home and keep the woman company. "She can't do it on her own and someone from my church told me about her. My heart was just aching, I had to do it. I had to help her." Olya considered it so important, so necessary to help this *babushka*, that she gave up a tutoring job after school to do it. Like many other Russians, as a teacher Olya could not live off of her salary alone. So she supplements her income by tutoring students from school and other kids in the neighborhood in French. It is the extra income from these tutoring jobs that allows Olya to live a relatively comfortable life, including the occasional trip to the theater. It helps that she lives rent-free in her parent's apartment.

At this time in the winter of 2003 Olya taught French to middle school children at a newly built private school in the neighborhood where she grew up and still lives today. As we walked through this neighborhood Olya pointed out the places that were important to her. Here was where she had gone to kindergarten. This is where she went to high school. That is her church, it is "small but beautiful," where she attends service at least twice a week and sings in the choir. Right here is where her brother goes to college. He studies business and marketing. They are quite different and often fight, but Olya loves him and says that she always tries to help him be a better person, which for her primarily

means living a good Christian life.

Olya has always lived in this neighborhood, and now at the age of twenty-eight she works here too. It is her home and she likes it. As a child she played in the courtyards of the apartment buildings with her many cousins who also lived and grew-up here. She once described her extended family, including her cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents, all of whom lived in this neighborhood when Olya was a child, as a "clan." As a child Olya did nearly everything with this clan. They played together, went to school together, argued, ate, and even slept together. This experience of a close family has been central to who Olya is today. Although she is very close with her parents and claims that they had the most influence on who she is today, they worked abroad in the Middle East and therefore were often not at home. For this reason Olya and her brother spent a good deal of their childhood with relatives, mostly with their grandparents. This, however, is not uncommon in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia as grandparents, and especially grandmothers, often have a significant role in raising children either because there is only one parent or both parents work.[105] As Melissa Caldwell has observed, it is expected that parents "who have the opportunity to earn more money by working in a different city or abroad leave children in the care of their grandparents for extended periods of time."[106] For Olya this experience with the clan and her grandparents has led her to believe in the importance of family and the need for them to get along and love

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[105] Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*. New York: Viking, 2001, pg. 246.

[106] Melissa Caldwell, *Not by Bread Alone: Social Support in the New Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p. 67.

each other. This is one of the reasons why sometimes Olya is quite upset by the fact that she is still an unmarried woman. It is also this belief in the importance of family, so she tells me, that helps her try to maintain good relations with her brother Sergei, even in the most difficult of times. Because Olya and her brother are so different, Olya, for instance, is a strict Orthodox Christian believer who often volunteers her time to help those in need, her brother, on the other hand, is religiously indifferent and has been known to steal money from Olya, these difficult times occur more often than she would like. On several occasions Olya told me that maintaining good relations with her brother, despite the differences and difficulties, is both the most difficult and the most important social task that she has. It is no wonder, then, that the majority of the examples of moral dilemmas, judgements and negotiations Olya gave in our interviews and conversations concerned relations between herself and her brother.

If maintaining amicable and familial relations with her brother is the most important social task in Olya's life, then cultivating her faith is her most important personal undertaking. Olya realized her faith in 1990, when she was sixteen years old, at a time when conversion to Orthodoxy and religious self-discovery was a mass phenomenon in Russia.[107] Today she is unable to explain how it happened. No one else in her family is religious, although she did know that her grandmother occasionally said prayers. But for the most part, Olya received no religious education, inspiration, or support from her family. As Olya tells it, it just so happens that one day when she was sixteen she was walking alone past the church in her neighborhood, the one which she

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[107] Nancy Ries, personal communication.

still attends today, when she felt an overwhelming and irresistible need to go inside. When she entered the church, the first time in her life she had ever done so, she immediately knew that this was what was missing from her life. Her eyes fixed upon an icon of Mary holding the baby Jesus, the silent flickering of candle light dancing over its surface, and tears began to swell in her eyes. Had Olya found the family that had always been missing from her life despite the closeness of the clan? Or was it the promise of salvation depicted in the innocence of baby Jesus that attracted the young Olya, who, so she now claims, always had a very strong sense of justice? Whatever it was that attracted Olya on that day it has grown stronger over the years. Today Olya says that she is unable to go a few days without going to the church to attend a service, sing in the choir or just pray in silence before her icon at home. As she puts it, this place and these practices give her the energy to live. Without them, she is unsure of how she could have lived these last twelve years.

This very well could be the conversion story of one who went on to join the Church as a nun. Olya, however, decided to remain outside of the official structures of the Church and instead become a teacher. As a teacher, so Olya figured, she could have more daily contact, and thus more influence for the good, with the young persons who are the future of Russia and this world. Although since the mid-1990's the Russian Orthodox Church has increasingly become involved in various charitable and social service projects, it has not yet advocated that its members take its ministry into their own private workplace.[108] This is a fact that has not eluded Olya and she has expressed the hope that

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[108] Jerry G. Pankhurst, "Religious Culture," p. 152; Melissa L. Caldwell, *Not By Bread Alone*, p. 58.

more Orthodox believers will eventually use their faith in the workplace to better Russia and its future.

After finishing high school Olya entered one of the humanities universities in Moscow and studied Philology, focusing on French and English, and Education. She describes her years at the university as relatively uneventful. She was a good student, but participated little in the life of the university. Olya still lived at home in her parent's apartment and spent what little free time she had in church activities. It was during these university years that Olya was baptized and became a member of the Church, joined the choir and in general felt as if she had finally become part of her church community. While many Muscovites in their late-teens and early-twenties were enjoying the new sense of freedom, sexuality and materialism that hit the city in the mid-1990's,[109] Olya rejected all of this and instead slowly cultivated her faith. In many ways, she had more in common with women forty years her elder than with those her own age. Thus, unlike many others of her age who have come to be discursively represented in the media and elsewhere as symbolizing "the material vulnerability, moral confusion, cultural imperialism of the West and degradation of the Russian nation," Olya is in the minority of those her age who chose the way of the Church instead of the way of the nightlife.

But it was also during these years that Olya met Larisa at the university. The two have been best friends ever since, and much like Olya's relationship with her brother, this relationship is marked by real differences between the two. These differences and their

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[109] Alexei Yurchak, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids: Transforming Power, Identity, and Aesthetics in Post-Soviet Nightlife," *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev*. Adele Marie Barker, ed., Durham: Duke University Press, 1999, pp.76-109.

relationship will be made more clear in the next few chapters, but for now it is important to note that it was at this time that Olya met one of the few people she maintains a strong friendship with who is outside of her church. Larisa is also the person who was able to lure Olya away from her teaching job in the summer of 2004 to come work for the same European developmental project based in Moscow for whom Larisa works. Although Olya had real hesitations about changing her profession, especially her concerns about losing contact with children, she eventually took the position because she just could not resist the large increase of income it offered. Still, even though Olya no longer needs the extra income since her new job pays her over $15,000/year, a very good income by Russian standards, she still tutors some students on Saturdays for no other reason than she loves spending time with them and the potential positive influence she can have on their lives.

Even though Larisa is one of Olya's few friends, she does not seem to mind, for she seems to be most comfortable in small groups of people. She talks quietly and sparely, with only moments of excitement and expressions of passion. She does, however, often have a smile. She is, in a word, a calm person. To spend time with Olya always brought a feeling of soothing relief to my own sense of being as I listened to the measured cadence and even tone of her quiet voice. And so it was as we walked through her neighborhood together on that relatively pleasant February afternoon just after the group interview with her colleagues.

Just then out of nowhere, a *lada* drove onto the sidewalk and headed toward us as if we were walking in the middle of the street! Because this is commonplace in Moscow - one can hardly walk without having to avoid driving or parked cars on the sidewalks in

this city - we casually stepped out of the way as the small Soviet-era car passed, leaving a cloud of benzine exhaust behind. "See this is what I mean," Olya starts in a voice indicating her anger despite the hackneyed character of this event, "this is a perfect example. All these drivers know the rules, but they just refuse to follow them." I asked her why they didn't follow the rules. "Because they do not respect other people. In Russia today there is a general lack of respect for other people. I think this is because most people have lost their way. They have lost their values." In what way have people lost their values? "Just like you saw right now. He probably would have run us down if we didn't move. Russians today, not all, but many of them have nothing human left in their souls. What I mean is that they have forgotten how to treat other people with respect; to value the other person as they would want to be valued."

When Olya put into question the humanness of an individual whose moral foundation has come into doubt, her critical stance toward the transgressor was not unique. For this was not only a common view of many with whom I spoke, but Nafus has also shown that many of her ethnographic participants in St. Petersburg called into question the "very humanity"[110] of an individual who transgressed moral expectations. But more than anyone else with whom I spoke Olya made use of the distinction between humans and nonhumans in order to describe her moral beliefs, expectations and judgements. In fact, it was not surprising that Olya called into question the humanness of the driver, whose act she interpreted as immoral, since in our various conversations she had several times spoken of morality and immorality using metaphors of humanness,

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[110] Dawn Nafus, *Time, Sociability and Postsocialism*. Doctoral Dissertation, Sidney Sussex College, n/d, p. 52.

animals, nature and biology. An example of this is from a conversation Olya and I had prior to the incident with the *lada* in the kitchen of her apartment.

Once in December of 2002 we met for an afternoon dinner and tea at her parents apartment, where she and her brother, who is 22 years old, still live. Her parents are diplomats working in Saudi Arabia, where they live most of the year. This December afternoon Olya and I were alone for most of the day enjoying the meal she prepared and drinking tea with the chocolates I had brought. When the interpreter arrived, we began the formalities of an interview. Eventually her brother also came home, stuck his head in the kitchen to say hello, and went into the living room to watch the bootleg video cassette of an American action movie he had recently purchased on the street. Olya, the interpreter and I smiled at each other like adults who are "in the know" and continued our interview. It was a bit ironic that her brother came in at this time since Olya was just speaking about how sometimes she struggles to maintain good relations with him. As she put it, and perhaps borrowing terminology from her parents profession, sometimes relations must be maintained diplomatically, utilizing skills of negotiation. Olya knows, especially with her brother, that others will not always be and act the way she wants them to. Therefore, she must learn to accept the differences that she cannot change and try to work with or negotiate those she can. In this way, Olya is best able to maintain good relations with her brother. It is also one of the aspects of what she calls the morality of society. After telling me of the importance of diplomacy in her relations with others like her brother, Olya continued on to speak of what she calls the difference between this morality of society and God's morality.

Olya - Without morality there is no whole life. But there are different

kinds of morality. There is a morality connected to God and a morality connected to laws, the rules that people prescribe to follow. This is the morality of society. And the morality of a Christian in society is another thing.

Jarrett - And where do you think this morality comes from?

Olya - One comes from God and the other comes from people's way of thinking. From the way people perceive others. It is just like the rules of a game.

Jarrett - But you also said there is morality from God. Is this something you are born with or something you have to acquire?

Olya - I think it is the highest morality. It is sacred. But it is both. Some I acquire from society and some I am born with - maybe God inspired it in me when I was born.

Jarrett - So if you are born with it, do you still need to learn how to use it?

Olya - I feel that I should do this and shouldn't do that. These are the rules that are inside of us that our parents first taught us. But the feeling that we should do this or that is inside us from the moment we are born. Many of us when we are very young cannot understand this very clearly, but we follow our inside laws.

Jarrett - What happens when this social morality is different from the morality you are born with?

Olya - I think these two moralities coexist. People can know about God but follow only their own rules. And some people can know the rules of God and the rules of society and follow both of them, because people live in this world and should follow the rules of society. But as people who also belong to another kingdom they should follow the rules from there.

Jarrett - Do you think it is ever possible that the rules of the other kingdom will become the rules of this world?

Olya - They are both very important. When we are living here we follow these rules. But I can only hope that these rules will become the rules here. But I think this society is very far from God and there is a big gap. And to bridge this gap we need to work very hard. And many people will not agree to build this bridge. And while part of the population will work to bridge this gap, the rest of the population will just rest. And it will be

useless.

Jarrett - Would you say the bridging of this gap is something you hope and work for? What sorts of things do you do to achieve it?

Olya - I don't try to be unique. The main thing we can do is try to become people. Sometimes we are not people - we are very brutal and rude. We can compare our life to the life of animals. Their life is more correct. They are more kind to each other. They have their own rules for life, but still we need a lot of time first to find the road to the gap and when we get there we will realize our mistakes and we will begin constructing this bridge. But first we need to find the road to it. That is the problem of our work, our society, our century.

Jarrett - You said we need to become people. What is a person for you?

Olya - People help each other. They need each other. But the life I see around me I see that people don't help each other and only use each other for selfish reasons, to obtain their own goals. People are not ready to sacrifice, to sacrifice their lives to help others. They don't pay attention to the needs of each other. Again, to make a comparison with animals, they always live together and are always helping and keeping the rules. And for us, this is not the case.

Olya open frames this narrative by making the claim that there is no whole (*tselyi*) life without morality. I translate *tselyi* as 'whole' rather than 'complete' because it seems that throughout this narrative Olya is emphasizing her belief that morality is a necessary part of a fully realized human person. Because Olya makes this claim directly after speaking of the necessity of diplomatically negotiating relations with specific others in specific situations, morality as a necessary part of a whole, that is, fully realized human person seems to fit better with the previous part of the interview as well as the rest of this narrative utterance.

Immediately, however, Olya goes on to explicate just what she means by morality. For Olya there are two different kinds of morality - the morality of society and God's morality. Social morality is the rules of the game. It is that which allows

members of society to interact in an understandable and acceptable manner. It is based not only on rules and laws, but also on the way that people think and perceive. In describing social morality in this way, Olya seems to be expressing a position of extreme moral-cultural relativism. For if social morality is based on the rules, laws, and ways of thinking and perceiving of people, then it must differ between different societies. As such, Olya is claiming that there are many more moralities than the two general kinds of morality she has mentioned. For social morality, as it is described by Olya, must be a general category under which many different kinds of socio-historic-cultural moralities are subsumed.

If social moralities are many, then God's morality is one. Not only is it the highest morality, but so too is it sacred. This sacredness, however, does not preclude it from human capabilities. In fact, it seems that this sacredness is that which makes it available to all humans despite their varying socio-historic-cultural context. For although all persons are necessarily thrown into a specific socio-historic-cultural context, they have the capacity to live by a morality that differs from the social morality of that context. This is, so Olya claims, what Christians do. As she put it, "the morality of a Christian in society is another thing." This other thing is the sacred morality of God. This is the morality that Olya herself has tried to cultivate since that moment of conversion when she was sixteen years old. It is the morality, so she told me several times, that is based primarily on the exemplary life of Christ.

At this point our interview begins to get a bit confusing. I had asked Olya if the morality of God is something with which one is born or something that must be acquired. She responds by saying that it is both, partly from "society" and partly something with

which one is born. Because I was confused about how she thought the morality of God was partly acquired from society, I reiterated the question. Here again is how she responded.

> **Olya** - I feel that I should do this and shouldn't do that. These are the rules that are inside of us that our parents first taught us. But the feeling that we should do this or that is inside us from the moment we are born. Many of us when we are very young cannot understand this very clearly, but we follow our inside laws.
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> **Jarrett** - What happens when this social morality is different from the morality you are born with?
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> **Olya** - I think these two moralities coexist. People can know about God but follow only their own rules. And some people can know the rules of God and the rules of society and follow both of them, because people live in this world and should follow the rules of society. But as people who also belong to another kingdom they should follow the rules from there.

Olya explains that she feels she should and shouldn't do certain things, and this feeling comes from what she learned as a child from her parents. I read this reference to childhood learning from parents as acquiring social morality, since many of my interlocutors, including Olya, spoke of parents and childhood as the primary location of social and moral acquisition. Olya continues, however, in claiming that the ability to feel what one should or shouldn't do is "inside us" from birth. By characterizing this ability as "inside us" Olya seems to be making a claim that all humans *qua* human are endowed with this capacity for morality. This capacity, then, must be the morality of God, which in its sacredness is available to all humans. It seems then that at least in part the morality of God is conceived by Olya as the capacity with which all humans are born that must be cultivated in one's lifetime in order to be fully realized. This is suggested in Olya's response to my next question, which was asked because I was still misreading what she

had just said as being only about social morality.

Olya again tries to make herself clear. The moralities of society and God can coexist within one person. And indeed this is the case for Christians, for they belong to two kingdoms. The unsaid of her response, however, is that ultimately the Christian person must follow the morality of God. For because God's morality is the highest, it overrides social morality. Thus, Olya is suggesting that the two moralities can only coexist for one person in certain situations. That is, when the social morality does not contradict the morality of God. Because they can coexist, however, Olya is suggesting that there need not be a discrepancy between the two moralities either within a person or within society itself. It is the former possibility that makes self-cultivation necessary. And it is the latter possibility that finishes out the remainder of this particular narrative utterance.

I ask Olya if she thinks the rules of God's kingdom will ever become the rules of this kingdom and she responds:

> **Olya** - They are both very important. When we are living here we follow these rules. But I can only hope that these rules will become the rules here. But I think this society is very far from God and there is a big gap. And to bridge this gap we need to work very hard. And many people will not agree to build this bridge. And while part of the population will work to bridge this gap, the rest of the population will just rest. And it will be useless.
>
> **Jarrett** - Would you say the bridging of this gap is something you hope and work for? What sorts of things do you do to achieve it?
>
> **Olya** - I don't try to be unique. The main thing we can do is try to become people. Sometimes we are not people - we are very brutal and rude. We can compare our life to the life of animals. Their life is more correct. They are more kind to each other. They have their own rules for life, but still we need a lot of time first to find the road to the gap and when we get there we will realize our mistakes and we will begin constructing this

> bridge. But first we need to find the road to it. That is the problem of our work, our society, our century.
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> **Jarrett** - You said we need to become people. What is a person for you?
>
> **Olya** - People help each other. They need each other. But the life I see around me I see that people don't help each other and only use each other for selfish reasons, to obtain their own goals. People are not ready to sacrifice, to sacrifice their lives to help others. They don't pay attention to the needs of each other. Again, to make a comparison with animals, they always live together and are always helping and keeping the rules. And for us, this is not the case.

Olya responds by insinuating that this gap between the two moralities exists because most individuals have not yet fully realized their potential as human beings. As she put it, the most important thing individuals can do is "try to *become people*." This suggests that some have not yet achieved or acquired people-ness, or humanness (*chelovechnost'*). This also references back to the claim she made in opening this narrative about the necessity of morality for a "whole life." Indeed, by this point in the interview Olya has made it fairly clear that the morality that is truly necessary for this whole life, for this achievement of people-ness, is the morality of God.

Olya, however, goes a step further in her characterization of those who have and have not realized God's morality. For while those who have not yet achieved God's morality are not fully people yet, they are also not animals. For Olya describes animals as living a life "more correct" than those individuals who have not yet "become people." Olya, then, begins by establishing a distinction between individuals who transgress morality and as such cannot be counted as either human or animals, and animals, who seem to stand in for Olya as an ideal image of a moral life and, perhaps, for what a moral person should be. Ironically, Olya seems to suggest that an individual who has become a

moral person would live a life as if an animal. Could this be what Olya meant? It is not clear exactly what Olya meant by this comparison. But what seems likely is that one aspect of what Olya means by animals having a more correct life is that they either lack or do not emphasize a sense of self. This is suggested in a few different moments in Olya's narrative. First, when I ask her what she does to help achieve the bridging of the gap, she first tells me that she doesn't try to be unique, and just tries to be a person/human. This suggests that it is important to emphasize the shared qualities, goals and needs in her actions rather than selfish purposes. This is further suggested when she later speaks of contemporary society as selfish, with everyone focusing on their own goals. This is a society not governed by the morality of God. This is a society of those who have not yet become people because they are too selfish. This is a society of those who can learn much from animals.

I asked her, however, what it means to become people. What does it mean to be a person? Again, in asking her what she conceived a moral person to be like, she quickly shifted the response to a contrast with animals. In the closing of this narrative, then, Olya sets up a distinction between those individuals who have not yet become moral human persons and animals who are moral, and as such serve as a moral ideal. In portraying the immorality of those who have not yet "become people," she represents them as selfish, indifferent to others, brutal and rude. Those who are immoral, then, live in a kind of Hobbesian state of nature where every one is at war with every one else. In this life of immorality "people don't help each other and only use each other for selfish reasons." Olya contrasts this life with that of morality, a way of being in which everything is in harmony with everything else and with its own purpose. A way of being, in other words,

that is a whole or total life. It should be noticed that this moral way of being closely resembles that state of nature in which Genesis tells us humans lived before the Fall, where animals “live together and are always helping and keeping the rules,” and “people help each other.” This image is particularly apt considering that several times throughout our interviews and conversations Olya spoke of the only true morality as God’s morality. It is also apt considering the centrality of Orthodox Christianity and the life of the Church in Olya’s everyday life. It is this gap, then, between the Hobbesian nature of contemporary human society and its brutish, selfish immorality and the ideal image of Eden and its Godly morality of harmony and purpose, that Olya seeks to bridge. For it is with this bridge that each of us can finally “become people.”

It could be questioned, however, whether or not Olya is being a bit extreme in the contrasts and distinctions she draws. For although she appears to be claiming that those who do not live by the morality of God are not yet fully human, she does seem to believe that social morality in itself can be a relatively good, in the sense of adequate, morality. I do not believe that Olya would consider a person who, for example, was an atheist but lived a very moral life by social standards to be a non-person. Surely she would try to explain to or convince this person that a Christian life following God’s morality is a better, more fulfilling human life, but she would not dismiss his very humanity as she did that of the driver of the *lada*. If this is true, then the question has to be raised about the adequacy of Olya’s narrative. Does this narrative adequately describe what Olya believes to be the case? As the narratives throughout the rest of this chapter suggest, this is indeed an adequate narrative description and interpretation of this narrative of Olya’s personally held moral conception. This does not, however, mean that this conception is

utilized or appropriate in all aspects of Olya's everyday life, which will become clear in chapter four. It is instead better thought of as a model, guideline or foundation from which Olya can begin to make sense of, fall back onto, or perhaps even use as a canned answer when asked to explain her moral beliefs. It could be all of these and none of these. While Olya's moral conception is certainly an example of a cultural model given authority by the Russian Orthodox Church, it is more importantly a personal model in that it only makes sense and is applicable for Olya because it coincides, to some degree, with her own personal experiences.[111] Whatever this narrative tells us about Olya's moral conception, it is clear that several of the themes and patterns that make up its logic are repeated throughout several of the narrative conversations we had. The rest of this chapter will attempt to explicate more fully these themes and patterns.

Olya not only claims to believe in a hierarchical differentiation of possible moralities, she is also a developmentalist. Olya believes that morality, whether social or God's, is to some extent necessarily acquired, cultivated and developed in one's lifetime. This became even more clear in another interview I had with Olya in May of 2003. I met Olya and Larisa, her best friend who she met at university and who we will meet in the next chapter, for coffee in a central Moscow coffee shop. The purpose of this meeting was to have each of them comment on some of the main themes I was able to pull out of the interviews I had done with all of my interlocutors to that point. The first question I asked concerned the fact that many people had been saying that they thought morality

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[111] Bradd Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 46.

was something with which they were born, that either it was given by God or received through genes. I asked what they thought about this and if they agreed. Olya was quick to respond:

> **Olya** - We can compare [morality] to a part of our body - like our heart. It is inside but we cannot touch it - it is like the air that we breath in and breath out. It is like a seed inside us when we are born and then it develops inside us. But this depends on our parents and also on society and everything that surrounds you. If the conditions are favorable this seed will grow and develop and live inside you and teach you and show you the right way to live in this world. But if society ignores morality and its rules and you live on your own you will ignore this seed also and it will die inside you and your life will be different. So I think there are two ways. To develop this moral seed that is inside you or to ignore it.
>
> **Jarrett** - Do you think all people everywhere are born with the same kind of seed or with different kinds of seeds?
>
> **Olya** - Yes, I think that everyone is born with different kinds of seeds but in these different kinds of seeds there is a small part that is the same for everyone. It is like a gene. And there are different combinations.
>
> **Jarrett** - You just said that everyone has different seeds but there is a small part that is the same which you said is like a gene. Do you think we receive this different kind of seed from our parents, which would be very much like genes?
>
> **Olya** - I think that we are likely to get them from our parents like genes but after we get them they can change according to our environment and experience. For example, if you live among intelligent people and they are moral then your own seed will become like them. You will imitate them and learn from them. But if you live among beggars or drunkards or some other kind of people, well, these groups will also influence your life.
>
> **Jarrett** - Which do you think is more important then the environment or the seed?
>
> **Olya** - I think both are important, but the environment is a little more important.

Unlike her earlier developmental story that takes place at the more abstract and dichotomous level of human/nonhuman, God's morality/social morality and Hobbesian

nature/nature of Eden, in this conversation Olya is trying to locate morality within the individual body. In doing so, however, she struggles to find the appropriate association or metaphor to link morality with the body. In following her progression of metaphorization, it is possible to see Olya working out for herself her conception of morality. Olya begins by associating it with the heart, which like the soul or *dusha* is often considered the center of moral values in both everyday Russian discourse as well as official Russian Orthodox discourse.[112] Despite this culturally endorsed initial comparison, Olya must have been unsatisfied. For she quickly shifted to a less substantial and referential association, that of the air one breathes. With this shift morality remains an essential part of the body, but is no longer specifically locatable. Because morality represented as air is not located in any one specific location of the body, it is depicted as that which flows through or permeates the body. Just as in our earlier interview when Olya spoke of morality as necessary for a whole life, here morality is expressed not just as that which makes life possible, that is air, but also as that which flows throughout the body. Not only does morality as air flow throughout the body, it also flows out of the body. As Olya put it, we breath it in and out. This suggests that morality is not restricted to any one body as an individual, but instead is public. Like air, it is shared in a never ending circulation that sustains life.

Then, just as quickly, Olya shifts her metaphor again. Apparently the image of

[112] Bishop Kallistos Ware, "'My helper and my enemy': the body in Greek Christianity" *Religion and the Body*. Sarah Coakley, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 100-1; Dale Pesmen, "Tropes of Depth and the Russian Soul: Openings and Closings in Post-Soviet Siberia," *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. D. Berdahl, M. Bunzl, and M. Lampland, eds., Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000, p. 189.

morality as the shared, circulatory flow of life remained insufficient for Olya. This is an interesting shift, however, because she goes from associating morality with essential and inextricable parts and processes of the body to a metaphor that is absolutely foreign to the human body. Now depicted as a seed, morality is expressed as something once again located within the body, but not located in any 'real' organ. This image works well for Olya, I suggest, because it combines the two previous metaphors. Morality as seed is there from birth, but unlike the heart and like air it cannot be touched. And even though it is located, the seed of morality develops over a lifetime. This inherent potentiality and necessity of development gives the seed the same characteristic of movement of air. Unlike the heart which is merely a catalyst for movement, air and the development of the seed are each representations of movement itself. And as Olya suggested in our earlier interview, the notion of movement or development is vital to her idea of morality as dependent upon the cultivation of the individual.

Just as the seed of morality shares the essential character of movement with the air of morality, so too does it share the public, shared character of air. For despite the seed being located within the individual body, Olya locates the conditions of the seed's proper development in "parents and also on society and everything that surrounds you." In this way, Olya seems to make an explicit connection between not only morality and particular ways of being, but also the body as always and already thrown into a particular social world. Understood in this way, the seed is no longer the metaphor of nature that it first appears, but is perhaps better understood as similar to the bridge she spoke about in our earlier conversation. Like the bridge that spans the gap between God's morality and social morality, the seed connects the individual and its social world. But not only do the

bridge and the seed allow for a connection or relationship, they ideally allow for a proper relationship. While the bridge will be built in order to usher in the highest morality of God, the seed exists for the purpose of being properly developed . And if the seed is properly developed, it will "show you the right way to live in *this world*." The seed, then, like the bridge, is a means through which Olya is able to conceive of the appropriate development of morality.

The movement in Olya's description does not end in the social but returns to the body with another shift of metaphor. The seed has become a gene, and morality is for the first time in Olya's telling firmly rooted in the body's biological makeup. Olya's description, then, takes us on the journey of the dialogical construction of morality. The description runs like this: All individuals as human beings are capable of morality. Its proper development, however, depends upon favorable conditions in the personal and social world of the individual. But no matter the conditions, one's "environment and experience" eventually go a long way in determining the kind of morality one has. Whether one eventually becomes a "person" or a "brute," the outcome of this dialogical process is not written in one's genes. Olya's conception of morality as genes, then, does not condemn anyone to a determined moral way of being. Rather, morality as genes indicates a potentiality for morality, that is, a potentiality for moral growth. In this way, morality as genetic indicates Olya's belief that all individuals are potentially moral beings, or to use her language of our previous interview, all individuals can potentially become people.

One's social environment is what is more deterministic in this conception. If one is thrown into a world of "intelligent" and "moral" people, one will most likely develop

into one herself. On the other hand, if one is thrown into a world of "beggars or drunkards," then one will have a good chance of turning out that way as well. By putting the influential primacy on an individual's social world, Olya is able to emphasize her belief that certain ways of living have more moral value than others. Although she does not mention it here, Olya told me in other conversations that living in a Christian family and community is the best life one could live. Because of this, as well as the way Olya lives her own life, it could be surmised that Olya believes the gene of morality is most properly developed in a social setting dominated by Christian beliefs, practices and institutions.

Not only are Olya's narratives ripe with a developmentalist discourse, I have also been arguing that they are often characterized by a dichotomous split between the contemporary world of Russia as she perceives it and the ideal moral world governed by God's morality. This dichotomous split, however, is not a binary dichotomy. Rather, it often takes the form of an hierarchical dichotomy, where the disconnective split between the two moral worlds is conceived of as the space that ultimately *should* give way to the emerging new moral world of God. In this way, then, Olya's dichotomous conceptualization does not take binary form as some have argued is characteristic of Russian ways of thinking, but instead is an aspect of her developmentalist reasoning.[113]

Olya's developmentalist thinking, however, is not progressive in any

[113] Melissa Caldwell, *Not by Bread Alone*, p. 15-6; Anna Wierzbicka, "Russian Cultural Scripts: The Theory of Cultural Scripts and Its Application," *Ethos*, 30(4), 2003, pp. 416-7; Bruce Grant, "new Moscow monuments, or, states of innocence," *American Ethnologist*, 28(2), 2001, p. 350.

straightforward linear sense. Rather, as the following narrative suggests, Olya has a more subtle view of history and its long ebb and flow of moral development. Russian history is marked by a kind of pulsing wave that oscillates between various positions which are closer and further from the ideal of God's morality. This view came out in an interview we had soon after the Nord-Ost hostage crisis in October 2002. The recent events had led me to ask her if she thought there had been an increase in violence in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Her reply is interesting because it not only shows her conception of the ebb and flow of moral development, but it also shows that what many consider to be a moral breakdown in contemporary Russia in the form of violence and crime is rhetorically abstracted from her own, everyday life. This is seen in how quickly Olya turns her answer about violence into a more general characterization of the "indifference" and "disconnect" between people in Russia today.

> **Olya** - I think all of life as a whole has taken a turn for the worse. I think that people, in general, have become more indifferent to each other, they don't notice the troubles of each other, sometimes they don't pay attention to a person who is suffering, to a person who is asking for their help. I know there has been some occurrences of violence against people of other nationalities. This is the most difficult thing to understand.
>
> **Jarrett** - Why do you think there is this growing indifference? What has changed that doesn't allow for people to care about each other as much?
>
> **Olya** - I think on a whole people have become disconnected from the Creator. I think people used to be more kind and helpful. Their values changed. People have become the slave of money, of their success, and they exert a lot of energy to become the most respected and successful and they forget about their inside life, the main life. And I think that is the reason why they have changed and become disconnected from each other. In the past we were one house, but now we are many houses and the families don't pay attention to how the others are. Sometimes they may watch the news and become curious but they are not compassionate. And they have lost love for one another.

When asked about violence in post-Soviet Russia, Olya responds by telling about

what she perceives as an increased indifference and disconnect between people. To the best of my knowledge Olya has not personally experienced any violence of the kind my question probably implied, for example, murder, rape or assault. Not only the question, but the topic itself is too abstract, disconnected if you will, from her own experience. This is reflected in her answer. The only time she explicitly mentions violence is in reference to violence against foreigners and ethnic minorities. This reference seems to serve two purposes in Olya's response. First, by only addressing violence against "other nationalities" she reiterates the distance between her own experience and violence that up to this point she has set forth. By highlighting violence against non-Russian others, Olya is able to remain at a rhetorical distance from what she has personally not experienced. Second, while she has not explicitly answered my question on violence, Olya has "theorized" on its cause. All of life has become worse due to an increased indifference and disconnect between people. Read in this way, Olya focuses on the violence against "other nationalities" in order to emphasize this disconnect through the representation of the disconnect between Russians and non-Russians. This illustration serves Olya's purpose well, as tensions between ethnic Russians and non-Russians has been the source of much violence in the post-Soviet era and certainly the catalyst for the Nord-Ost hostage crisis, the topic of which started this conversation.[114]

It is interesting to note that although Olya clearly has trouble with violence against non-Russians, her response to my follow up question seems to follow a fairly straightforward nationalist rhetorical line with Orthodox undertones. While Olya is

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[114] Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, pp. 210-11.

certainly not a nationalist in any political sense, she does adopt the common nationalist critique of the so-called moral decay of contemporary Russia. She begins by invoking God and contemporary society's disconnect from Him, suggesting that some time in the past Russian people and God were connected. This is supported by her immediate claim that people were "more kind and helpful," common signs of morality throughout many of my interviews, in the past. There has been a change however. Russians have forgotten about their inner, spiritual lives and have been enslaved by money, materialism and success, all of which point to stereotypical immoral qualities imported from the West. She concludes with the statement, " I think that is the reason why they have changed and become disconnected from each other." "They," of course, being those who have strayed from this nationalist/Orthodox vision of moral Russia. Olya's use of "they" also indicates her sense of not being one of the "they." By marking those who have become immorally disconnected from each other, she identifies herself as one who has not changed, and thus has been able to go against the current of history and maintain the kind of unity with God that is necessary for God's morality as well as the nationalist/Orthodox vision of a moral Russia.

"In the past we were one house." Olya conceives of the past as a time of familial unity, a time when all Russians in a sense lived together as one. But now Russia is a realm of Western and capitalist alienation where families and individuals are not only disconnected from one another but don't even "pay attention" to each other. This new Russia of indifferent individuals was mentioned by Olya in another narrative as the selfishness that stands in the way of individuals today becoming moral persons. Because there is no unity, whether that unity come through God, the nation or even perhaps the

family itself, Olya conceives of Russia today as a place of moral decay. As a place of moral decay, it is also a time of moral breakdown along the road that will eventually lead to the bridge that can finally overcome the gap between the morality of society and the morality of God.

After Olya told me that "they [those Russians who have become immorally indifferent toward one another] have lost love for one another," I asked what she thinks people can do to become more connected with one another. She responded:

> **Olya** - The first thing they must do is turn to God. That is my opinion. And only with His help can we be more united, be more good.
>
> **Jarrett** - And how does this belief in God help people become more united?
>
> **Olya** - When people believe in God they try to do as He asked us; they try to live in our way and the main aims the main purposes the main ideas are to connect people and these ideas are better than the ideas that exist now, the ideas of violence, people feel like they can do anything, they don't often respect each other they just do what they want, they don't care about other's feelings and other's views and that is why they break all the laws, the laws of this world and that one.
>
> **Jarrett** - Which teachings of Orthodoxy do you find most important in your moral life?
>
> **Olya** - I think the most important teaching for me is the life of God - Jesus Christ, and I try to follow it and I try to follow his law. And it has helped me to be at one.
>
> **Jarrett** - And what characteristics of Christ's life do you try to emulate in your own?
>
> **Olya** - There are some that are very important for a good way of life. They are patience, love, not the love that is existing now, but the love inside the soul it is cleaner it's deeper and it's stronger. And I think that this is the main thing in his teachings and the others come from this very important point - kindness, respect, mercy, helpfulness, supporting of others, etc.

Not unexpectedly Olya believes that only through God can individuals become connected with one another in the sense of no longer being indifferent toward one another. It is interesting, however, that Olya maintains not only her distinction between the morality of God and practices that she sees as predominant in contemporary Russia, but she also maintains the distinction she has already made between the immoral "they" and herself. Here Olya more explicitly categorizes herself as one who lives, or at least consciously attempts to live, according to God's morality. As she put it in response to my question of how the belief in God reconnects people: "*they* [will] try to live in *our* way." In speaking of the end result of believing in God as the ability to live in *our* way, Olya puts herself in a community of those who not only believe, but more importantly live properly. Only when *they* have found God, will *they* be able to live as Olya already does. In this way, Olya and other Christians who constitute the *our,* already live in a moral world that stands only as the future ideal for the *they* who have not yet found the bridge to God. Ironically, in making this distinction Olya is creating a disconnect between herself and others who do not believe in God. In doing so, she is maintaining the very disconnect that she claims helps support the environment of disinterest and selfishness that is predominant in contemporary Russia. That Olya believes she stands on the proper side of the gap and that eventually all others should want to bridge this gap for the betterment of themselves and their world does not belie the fact that she is helping to create and maintain this disconnect.

Still Olya would never characterize the distinction she has made between herself as a moral Christian and the immoral *they* as leading to the kind of indifference she claims has led to a condition of moral breakdown in contemporary Russia. For as she

might put it, the distinction that she has made, the distinction that puts her in the realm of God's morality, is what allows her to be connected with others, to love them, and to help them. She would probably say that it is her position in the realm of God's morality that motivates her to do such things as volunteer to help the elderly woman instead of tutoring a student for extra money, a practice which she continues to do once a week as of February, 2005 despite her increasingly hectic schedule.

Although Olya places herself in the category of those who believe and therefore attempt to live by God's morality, she does not always achieve this high standard. This came out as our interview continued and I asked her to expand on what she meant by love as the basis for this morality. She replied:

> I just remember that He said - first love the ones who are nearest you, and than they will love you. For example, when I don't love my brother he doesn't love me and it is awful because we argue. But when I understand him or try to understand him, because people are very different and each of them has their special faults and particularities . . . And another thing, to live with someone without arguing without fighting, I don't know what else, you should be patient and accepting and try to find points of common relations. I think love is to be more demanding of myself than of others.

Olya tries to explain love by referencing a teaching of Christ. But the example she gives is actually an example of her failure to follow this teaching, and therefore, her failure to live according to God's morality. In this example, then, Olya reveals that although she might catagorize herself as one who attempts to live by the standards of this highest morality, she does not always succeed. And in fact, based on our many conversations and interviews it seems that her failures often come in relations with her brother. In talking of her brother here, Olya slips between love and understanding and then returns to a more general characterization of love as patience, acceptance and self-

demand. Based on other interviews and conversations I suspect that the slippage to the problem of understanding is more telling of Olya and her brother's relationship than the problem of love, and indeed it is a topic we will revisit in chapter four. They live very different lives and hold very different opinions about life. This difference is extremely troubling for Olya because she in fact loves her brother deeply. The lack of understanding does not strain her love for him, but instead her strong love compels her passionate response to the lack of understanding. As Olya often did in our conversations she stopped talking before she went into any detail about her arguments with her brother. Olya is a very private person. In shifting back to a more general characterization of love she is able to narratively avoid the kinds of discomforts and troubles she may have in her relationship with her brother. Her characterization of love, therefore, is not significant in what it says about love, indeed, it says very little. Instead it is significant for how she uses it to move the narrative away from what I know to be a deeply troubling relationship in her life.

During the main period of my fieldwork from the late summer of 2002 through the early summer of 2003, Olya's days were filled with her teaching job, tutoring and her devotion to her faith. At the time even her teaching was not distinct from her faith. For Olya in fact chose to become a teacher because she thought it the best profession for helping the future of Russia. When in the summer of 2004 Olya decided to quit her teaching job and work for the European developmental project Larisa works for, Olya was faced with a minor personal crisis. While this new job would surely provide Olya with the kind of income she had been struggling to make as a teacher and through

tutoring, she would have to leave behind her direct contact with children and take on an office job. How could this fit into her way of conceiving her place in the world? Ultimately, she told me, she realized that she could help Russia's future in other ways besides teaching and that surely the job with the developmental project was one of those ways. It should be noted, however, that Olya continues to tutor on Saturdays even though she no longer needs the extra income. In this way, then, we can see a continued relationship between Olya's choice of career and her conception of morality, which as can be seen in the narratives above, is best described as an emergent developmentalist position.

We have seen a glimpse, however, of the fact that in her everyday life Olya does not, and the question should be raised of whether or not it is even possible, always live by the very standards she claims to hold. This was evident in what she said about her relations with her brother. Although most of what Olya spoke about tended to be at the more abstract level of how the moral condition of the world stands today and how it should be, she did on occasion reference specific moral dilemmas. But as in the example of her and her brother in this chapter, they were often mere glimpses with little detail and she often quickly moved back to a meta-level description. Whenever I pushed her to provide more specific details, she declined. As already mentioned, Olya is a very private person. But in these glimpses she does provide, it is possible to glean some of the subtleties of the specific relationships and dilemmas that concern her most, and the moral conceptions that guide her through these subtleties. This is what I tried to do in the example of her brother in this chapter. It is also what I will do in chapter four where Olya and Larisa engage in conversation together and attempt to work through their

conceptual differences. At that point it will be possible to see how Olya opens herself more in the presence of Larisa, whose more open and freewheeling personality perhaps allows Olya to express a part of herself that she finds very little opportunity for in the other parts of her life. It is in that chapter, then, where Olya will speak more freely about herself, the moral dilemmas she faces at her new job and how they are related to her ethical tactics for dealing with her brother, that the occasional disconnect between Olya's moral conception and her practices will be revealed. Before we turn to this conversation, however, let's first meet Larisa.

Chapter 3

Larisa

Olya and Larisa are best friends. They met at university in 1995 and have been friends ever since. Interestingly they maintain their friendship despite some very real differences. While Olya is a dedicated member of her church, attending at least two services a week and singing in the choir, Larisa, after trying for about a year to find her faith, no longer considers herself an Orthodox Christian. When I first met Larisa in the fall of 2002 she was in the midst of this struggle to become Orthodox and attended church services about twice a month and then often only out of a sense of obligation. Although Larisa considered herself an Orthodox believer, it was a struggle for her to live the kind of life she thinks a believer ought to live. For this reason she often deferred to Olya as the true believer of the two and the one who lives a truly Christian life, and thus as she puts it, is a better person. By the winter of 2003 Larisa had given up on her struggle to become a practicing Orthodox believer, and was instead satisfied with her personal belief in God without the mediation of the Church. As of the winter of 2005 Larisa continues to speak of Olya as the more moral of the two and has strayed even further from the Church. In a conversation we had that winter she went as far as to say that anyone who lives according to Christian values lives in a hell on earth.

As a 27 year-old, single woman living in Moscow, Larisa is perhaps the perfect image of the so-called post-Soviet, modern Russian woman. Being unmarried, economically self-sufficient, highly motivated, and an avid shopper for clothes and perfume in many of the foreign boutiques in Moscow, Larisa epitomizes many of the post-Soviet youth who live a life that was not available ten years ago. And like many

other post-Soviet women Larisa has come to consider her career a priority in her life, as well as considering the ideal woman a career-oriented woman.[115] This way of thinking is radically different from just a few decades ago, but as she put it to me on several occasions, "Jarrett, I grew up in Russia not the Soviet Union." It is a life she knows to be different not only from that of the past but also from many of her contemporaries such as Olya. And yet, they remain the best of friends. The differences do not seem to negatively affect the friendship.

Although Larisa is economically self-sufficient she is helped by the fact that she lives for free in her mother's apartment in one of the southernmost regions of Moscow. Because her mother is remarried and lives abroad, Larisa lives in the apartment alone. She hopes one day to remodel the apartment and do away with its 1970's Soviet decor. But for now she must wait to save money. This, however, is no easy task for Larisa. As she put it while showing me a wallet full of discount cards for various Moscow stores, Larisa is addicted to shopping. Her closets are filled with clothes of the latest fashion, she loves to buy all kinds of perfume and other beauty products, and she eats out in restaurants or orders food delivered nearly everyday. Indeed, the day I arrived in Moscow in January of 2005 Larisa picked me up at the airport, refused to let me pay for the taxi to her apartment and once there immediately ordered a pizza and chicken wings for delivery! She later laughed and begged me not to tell her mother, who came to visit a few weeks later, about the pizza and wings. "She would be very disappointed in me for

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[115] Mariia Kotovskaia and Natal'ia Shalygina, "Love, sex and marriage: the female mirror - Value orientations of young women in Russia," *Gender, Generation and Identity in Contemporary Russia*. H. Pilkington, ed., London: Routledge, 1996, p. 123.

not giving you a proper Russian welcome," Larisa said. Thus, while she makes an above average salary of around $19,000 per year, Larisa once confessed that she has no savings. Her goal, however, is to save enough by the end of the year to remodel the apartment. In order to achieve this goal, Larisa has begun to go to the Moscow shopping malls without money. She has little taste, however, for window shopping and often falters and buys herself something anyway. Her lack of savings, however, is due not only to her avid spending, but also to her lack of trust of the Russian banking system. As Caldwell notes, after the financial crisis of 1998 distrust of the banking system has become widespread in Russia.[116] Larisa also admitted that by not putting money in the bank she can more easily cheat on her taxes. There are, then, a number of personal as well as institutional factors that go into Larisa's future financial uncertainty.

Larisa currently works for a Moscow-based, European sponsored development program, where despite her relatively low rank, she has gradually acquired more and more responsibility due to her hard work and desire to succeed. By all accounts she has the kind of work ethic necessary for the difficult path of economic ladder climbing in post-Soviet Russia. On two separate occasions, two of Larisa's work superiors assured me that the program would not be successful without Larisa. One of the consultants on the project has already offered her a job with his company for a much higher salary once this program ends in the fall of 2005. She told me about a lunch she once had with this man and her boss. The consultant mentioned to the boss how much he liked Larisa and that he would hire her once the program ended. The boss, holding out hope that the

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[116] Melissa L. Caldwell, *Not By Bread Alone*, p. 65.

program would receive an extension for a few more years, replied that Larisa would certainly stay on if the program was extended. After the two men went back and forth for a few minutes, Larisa, only partly in jest, interjected that they need not argue over her, they simply should enter their respective bids. After only two years of doing everything from making the coffee to welcoming foreign dignitaries, from preparing the budget to holding meetings with members of the Russian Duma, Larisa is becoming confident in her ability to maneuver through the contemporary world of international politics and business.

Her mother says that Larisa inherited this ability from her father, who is one of the top managers at the MIG aeronautics and defense company, where he got Larisa her first job after university and where her brother has worked for nearly fifteen years. But Larisa maintains that she learned her independence from her mother. Larisa remembers that as a child her mother would make Larisa do tasks for herself, for example, to go buy school supplies, that most mothers would do for their children. At the time, she admits, she thought it was because her mother did not love her. But now she realizes that her mother was trying to teach her to take care of herself. Larisa learned her lesson well, for when her mother remarried and relocated to her husband's country she left Larisa to live alone with her older brother at the age of fifteen. Her brother, who is ten years older than Larisa, worked and had very little time to spend with her. Thus, for all practical purposes, Larisa raised herself from this point on. Although her father would call on occasion to make sure she was alright, he worked too much to take care of her and was satisfied that Larisa was taking care of herself. It was from such experiences as these that Larisa believes today she is self-sufficient, independent and a hard worker.

If it is true, however, that Larisa takes after her father, she, nevertheless, maintains a rocky relationship with him. He and her mother divorced when Larisa was twelve years old and she admits this has left a deep mark upon her. Not only has it scarred her relationship with her father, but, so she claims, it has also affected her ability to have a relationship with other men. Already twenty-seven, Larisa has yet to have any committed relationship. She says there are two reasons for this. First, she has no time because she often works six days a week, ten hours a day. And second, because she does not believe in marriage. Larisa does not understand how one can give oneself over to another, and as she put it, become dependent upon him. Slowly Larisa is beginning to accept that this is the kind of person she is, and because of it she will possibly be alone for the rest of her life. She all but admitted this once when she told me that while it is true she does not want to become dependent upon someone else, she also doesn't have the courage to fall in love. "It takes real courage to love someone else and I think I'm just a coward," Larisa told me. The risk of being hurt was just too much for her, she added. Nevertheless, Larisa says that she is quite comfortable with this possibility and only worries about being alone and helpless in her old age. When she told me this with a dispassionate voice as we sat together in her kitchen drinking tea and eating fried sweet cheese at two in the morning, I did not believe her. She added, however, that she was lucky to have grown up in the modern age, since when she is old she does not have to worry about who will go buy bread for her. Instead, she can just pick up the phone and have some food delivered to her. She laughed and said this is something her grandmother would never think about.

It is this kind of talk and attitude, however, that is interpreted by others as "cold and cruel." Larisa told me of two separate instances

when people referred to her in these terms. The first, and relevant to my disbelief of her claim of wanting to be alone, had to do with a man. In the spring of 2004 Larisa made the acquaintance of a man in his mid-thirties who works at the Spanish embassy in Moscow. Despite him being married, there was a mutual attraction and they have been emailing and talking on the phone regularly ever since. Occasionally they go for walks together. According to Larisa, however, this is the extent of their relationship. They have gone no further and for her it hovers in some in-between space where the relationship cannot be categorized as romantic, friendly or even professional. This is in part because they do not speak about anything personal with each other and thus an inevitable distance remains between them. When I asked her why this was, she said she did not know, maybe it was her fault, for one day he became quite upset with her and called her cold. In telling me this, Larisa became visibly upset and tears began to well in her eyes. There is no doubt that Larisa's feelings for this man go well beyond either friendship or professional relations. She, however, cannot admit it.

The second instance she spoke of had to do with a family disagreement. Her father, who because of his high ranking job at MIG, is well off. Recently he was making out his will and decided to leave everything to Larisa. He did so not because he wanted to shut out Larisa's older brother from his inheritance, but because he wanted to protect his son from "women who would only be interested in his inheritance." Her father's plan, then, was to legally leave everything to Larisa, but to have her give half of it to her brother. This outraged Larisa's brother and many other members of the family. Not only was her brother angry with the father, but he did not trust that Larisa would give him his half. Their aunt agreed with him and said that because Larisa is so "cold and cruel" she

cannot be trusted. Her brother told Larisa this, he said, because he agreed with the aunt. This hurt Larisa very much, even more so since she had nothing to do with her father's decision. Their anger toward her, so Larisa thought, was unjustified. Nevertheless, when I asked her if she would give him the money, if this was something he should worry about, she replied that most likely she would, but she doesn't know if this is because she is obliged or because she wants to. At this point she said to me, "you see, maybe I am cold and cruel."

Cold and cruel is certainly an extreme interpretation of Larisa and her general attitude and behavior. It is not so extreme, however, to say that at times she can be extremely shy and reserved. It is for this reason that Larisa often preferred not to speak to me in a formal interview which was taped. Instead, she preferred to have casual conversation that both of us would occasionally turn toward a topic related to my research. Therefore, not all of what follows takes the form of prolonged interviews and its analysis. Like Olya, however, Larisa did feel more comfortable in the formal format when the two were together. For this reason the next chapter will focus upon interviews with Olya and Larisa together. The rest of this chapter will focus on one particular topic that Larisa raised in our conversations and interviews many times, that of lying.

In April of 2003 Larisa and I were walking on a cobble stoned street heading toward the Moscow Conservatory, when for no apparent reason she said, "you know, I'm not a very good person. I'm really a bad person playing the role of a good person." After recovering from the suddenness of her confession, I asked her why she would say such a thing. "I'm beginning to tell a lot of lies, especially at work," she said and went on to tell

me one that she had recently told her boss at MIG. Larisa had just completed a big project at work that took several weeks and many hours of unpaid overtime. She was just sick of it, and this feeling was only compounded by the fact that she was beginning to search for another, higher paying job, a search that eventually led to her current position. She did not intend to stay at MIG to be overworked and underpaid much longer. Soon after the project was completed her boss approached her about starting another project of equal size and difficulty. Larisa could not believe that he would do such a thing and in order to get out of it began to complain of stomach pains and said she thought she had to go to the hospital. This of course was all a ruse, a lie, to avoid the work. Yet, Larisa still went to the hospital, had a day's worth of medical tests done on her, and then took a week off of work so as to make the lie more believable. She even went as far as to lie to me a few days earlier, suggesting that we might have to cancel our plans together because of her sickness. It was not until that very morning that she confirmed with me that she was "healthy" enough to meet. It turns out, however, that the lengths she went through to avoid such work were not for the purpose of making the lie seem more believable, but because in order to miss work for so long Larisa needed a signed form from a doctor. In going to the hospital and subjecting herself to a day's worth of medical tests, Larisa was simply doing what was necessary to avoid the work asked of her. In this light, the lie itself was not very extreme. What makes it appear so, however, is the institutional requirements Larisa needed to meet in order to miss work.

If this is so, then why does Larisa say that she is "really a very bad person playing the role of a good person?" I know that she did not feel too badly about working the system to avoid her work. This is especially so since soon after this event she quit the

job at MIG and started her current position. And the fact remains, she enjoyed her week off. So then, why the confession? I suspect that in part it had something to do with the fact that she had also lied to me. As she told me several times after this day, she can lie at work easily, but never to friends. But indeed she had lied to me. Because she had done so, and perhaps had also done so to other friends, the line is blurred between Larisa's attempt to work the system for some desired time away from work and transgressing her own sense of moral boundaries by lying to a friend.

Still Larisa's claim that she is a "really bad person playing the role of a good person" still seems a bit extreme. But the idea of playing a role suggests that Larisa feels a disconnect between how she sees herself and how she believes others see her. With Larisa this goes beyond the distinction between her private sense of self and her public presentation of self. At the time of this conversation it also had to do with her attempt to become an Orthodox believer, an attempt that was supported by Olya. Larisa's attempt to turn to Orthodoxy was difficult and ultimately she decided it was not for her. But during this period of her life until the winter of 2003 Larisa struggled to become the kind of good Christian she considered Olya to be. This struggle came out in an interview we had previous to this confession.

One day in December of 2002 I was speaking with Larisa about the difficulties she has maintaining her faith and attending church regularly. At the time of our interview Larisa told me that this is something with which she struggles constantly and claims that her skepticism, doubt and desires often lead her away from what she considers proper faith. One of the aspects of faith with which she struggles very much is her perceived distinction between what the Church requires of her as a good Christian

and her own actions. In her interpretation, Larisa is unable to live up to the moral expectations of the Church. It is this perceived inability of herself to live as she thinks she should, and as she thinks Olya does, that often leads Larisa to question not only her faith but her own moral worth. Because of this, it is possible to understand her claim that she is a bad person playing the role of a good person as a description of her feelings of moral inadequacy. I asked her how this feeling came about. She replied:

> **Larisa** - Well you know some strange things are happening to me, because when I started to pay more attention to faith and to go to church, I began to think that 99% of what I do is bad. Even the minor lies. And I sometimes say 'God, I cannot help lying tomorrow, please do something to help me not lie,' like have the other person not ask me something to which I have to tell a lie. I can't tell the truth and my lie will be so bad. Everything is bad. Everything is evil, I think.
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> **Jarrett** - Everything? Why do you think that?
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> **Larisa** - Well I think this because of religion. When you have to make a confession in the Russian Church I would normally go through a special book which reminds me which things are sins. And when I start going through this list I realize that I'm such a sinful person. That I make such awful mistakes everyday. Not only what I do is wrong, but even when I think something it is usually wrong. Maybe if I don't like something, it is a sin. You see, so all these things are evil.
>
> **Jarrett** - So is it possible for a human being not to do any of those things?
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> **Larisa** - No, no, no.
>
> **Jarrett** - Even monks or saints?
>
> **Larisa** - No.
>
> **Jarrett** - They are also bad?
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> **Larisa** - Yes, all people commit sins. Everyday, every minute. It is supposed to be evil. A sin is something evil, isn't it?
>
> **Jarrett** - So in your view there is nothing good?

Larisa - No there are a lot of good things. When you don't sin, then you are doing something good. When you refuse to eat meat on Friday.

Jarrett - That's good?

Larisa - That's good. [she laughs]. When you don't envy people, but this is hard because it is inherent, this is in people's nature. But we shouldn't envy.

Jarrett - So do you think every situation in which you act or speak is governed by moral obligations or only certain situations? For instance, if you need to decide if you are going to tell a lie or not.

Larisa - Well I think for a believer absolutely every situation should be governed by some moral obligation. Ideally yes.

Jarrett - How about for non-believers?

Larisa - For non-believers, no.

Jarrett - So you would say that for a believer the moral obligations are stricter?

Larisa - I think so. Yes, because it is God who is watching us so it is not people who can punish us. Of course they can immediately, by not paying us a salary or not hiring us for work, but moral obligation is much stronger.

Jarrett - But doesn't God watch all of us? So it would seem that the non-believer is held to the same standards as the believer, for example the list of sins you were talking about, but he just may not be aware of it.

Larisa - Yes. We would be looking at the same list, but this is just a list made up by believers. And they would look at it and say that 'believers and monks and priests made up this list. So I don't agree that all of these are sins. I look at this as impossible. How can you avoid these? So I don't believe it.'

Jarrett - Do you ever say that about the list? Do you ever go down the list and say well I agree that this is a sin but I don't agree with this?

Larisa - No. I accept all of it. I accept. But another thing is that I can't always meet the expectations. Yes this is a sin but I committed it.

Larisa points to her turn toward the Church as the beginning of her feelings of

moral inadequacy. She claims that once she began going to church, she began to think that ninety-nine percent of what she does is bad. But what does she do that is so bad? The only thing she mentions is minor lies, or what might be called white lies. In naming these, Larisa seems to be pointing to the strictness of the Church's moral expectations. But even if this is the case, Larisa does not specifically name anything she does. Instead, she jumps from naming minor lies, which suggest the extent of the moral expectations, to describing how she prays to God to help her not to lie, to a general characterization that everything is bad and evil. Why is Larisa so extreme in her view? She is far from a strict Orthodox believer and at the time of this interview was only beginning to take an interest in her faith. It was suggested to me, however, by another, more serious Orthodox believer that Larisa has taken such an extreme position because she is new to the faith. Perhaps she is overzealous in her interpretation of the Church's moral expectations because of this, but this explanation in itself is not completely satisfying. For when I returned to Moscow in 2005 Larisa had all but given up her attempt to join the Church and yet still spoke of herself as being a generally bad person and only seeming to be good and not actually being good. There is, it seems, something deeper in Larisa that leads her to have these feelings.

At the time of this conversation, however, Larisa was sure that it was her involvement in the Church. When I asked her why she thought everything was bad and evil, she told me about a Church published book she reads before confession to "remind" her of what things are sins. When Larisa speaks here of being reminded of her sins, she is speaking in a kind of Platonic sense of remembering what she already knows. But it is not clear that Larisa would have ever thought of some or any of her actions as sins

without this reminder. While I do suspect that Larisa has a predilection for self-doubt and self-flagellation, it seems to have found institutional confirmation in this list of sins included in this book. She gave me the book to look over and it did in fact have a very broad notion of sin, including chapters on such topics as vanity (*Sueta*), egoism (*Egoizm*), envy (*Zavist'*) as well as a chapter on the sin of excess materialism and consumption (*Bednost' I Bogatstvo*).[117] It is in this list, then, that Larisa finds confirmation "that [she is] such a sinful person," and that she makes "such awful mistakes everyday." This feeling of moral inadequacy is only compounded by the fact that it is not only her actions for which Larisa is held accountable, but also her thoughts. For "even when [she thinks] something it is *usually* wrong."

It seems that the only comfort Larisa can find in this view confirmed by the Church is that all people, including saints and monks are sinful. She is not alone in her sin. Indeed, she was hard pressed to name something that she thought was not evil. The only things she could name was not sinning, which is really only restating the question, and not eating meat on Fridays, which is a Church endorsed dietary ritual. When I expressed surprise at this response, Larisa added that the lack of envy was also good but that this was difficult because it is inherent and part of people's nature. This, however, suggests her own struggles. For Larisa can be if not envious of others, then certainly desirous of achieving the kind of success and status that others have. It is this desire that drives her at her work place, and as will be seen shortly, leads her to try to create an image of success even through means of lying. It is also this desire that feeds Larisa's

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[117] V. Nevyarovich, *Terapiya Dushi*. Moskva: Russkii Khronograf', 2001.

focus upon the status of others. It is not uncommon that when Larisa speaks of another person she also mentions his particular status. Thus, for example, she told me about a man with whom she works and admires very much, he is so and so and is “a top diplomat from Italy;” or when telling me about her friend’s husband, he works at such and such firm, “he does not have a very high position but will some day.” Therefore, when Larisa speaks about the naturalness of envy, one must wonder if she is speaking about her own sense of envy and the difficulties of overcoming it.

Having told me about the list of sins that has led Larisa to believe that most of what she does is in fact sinful, I asked if she believes every situation is governed by moral obligations. She responds by making a distinction between the moral obligations of believers and nonbelievers. She defends this distinction by claiming that it is God and not people who ultimately punish those who sin. But this does not explain why believers are held to stricter moral obligations than nonbelievers. This simply suggests that it is God who ultimately decides who sins and doesn’t. Nevertheless, it is interesting that Larisa chooses this as her reasoning since it suggests a deeper distinction between the judgement of public and private acts. It is the latter with which Larisa throughout our many conversations seems to be most concerned. For she often speaks about such things as the role she plays, or that she only seems good, or that she hides herself from people, all of which suggests that Larisa makes an important distinction between her public presentation of self and her private and personal view of herself. Such a distinction became a prominent practice during the late-Soviet period,[118] and Kharkhordin has gone

[118] Alexei Yurchak, “The Cynical Reason of Late Socialism,” p. 171.

as far as to argue that this dissimulation became "the central unofficial means of individual self-fashioning" during that period. In other words, the Soviet individual became an individual, not only of deception, but one who was closed-off from all others around him, even, at times, his most intimate peer group.[119] While these late-Soviet practices no doubt still influence how people behave in contemporary Russia, this distinction between the public and private presentation of self is probably best understood as a result of Larisa's own experiences.

So far this narrative suggests Larisa's intense struggle not only with her faith but also with the image she holds of herself. This struggle is revealed in the last part of the narrative right before the interview makes a shift toward a specific transgression that she had recently made at her work. When I challenge Larisa on the distinction she makes between believers and nonbelievers and ask her whether God is watching all people, she offers a very ambiguous reply concerning the list of sins and how it can be interpreted. She says that both believers and nonbelievers would be held to the same list of sins, but then says that "this is just a list made up by believers." Who is speaking here? It is unclear whether it is Larisa the believer saying this or if it is Larisa speaking as a skeptical nonbeliever. And if it is the latter, is it Larisa herself as a skeptic or is Larisa speaking *as if* a nonbeliever. While this last interpretation seems to make the most sense based on the quasi-direct speech that follows this clause, each of these interpretations are plausible. And indeed I believe it is this very ambiguity that best portrays Larisa's relationship at the time with her faith and the Church. At the time of this interview the

[119] Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, pp. 270-1.

relationship was quite precarious and, as already mentioned, by the time of my return two years later she had already given up on both her faith and the Church.

Our interview in December of 2002 continued. Larisa had just told me that she cannot always meet the expectations of what is expected of her even though she claims to accept that she should. This led me to ask her how she goes about deciding what she should do in such a situation.

> **Jarrett** - When you are in a situation, for instance, if you are deciding to tell a lie or not, how do you decide what you should do? What do you consider, what do you think about, how do you know what is the proper thing to do?
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> **Larisa** - To tell or not to tell? Well, you know what I did? I used . . . one of my colleagues gave me a lap top to use at home. But it was terribly outdated, it didn't even have word or windows, it had something like works for windows, something nobody knows about. And when I launched it I saw 1983 or something. But I used it and it seemed to work alright for me. But of course I couldn't print it from the lap top so I took this disk and brought it to work [MIG] and I tried to print it from our computer. But then something terrible happened because the secretaries were unable to use the computer afterwards because it started doing strange things like copying text ten times and strange words kept showing up. And they said, Larisa what have you done to our computer? Is it a virus? Don't use this disk again. And I said ok. But I really had to do something with this work and get it printed out. So I thought that I probably just pushed a wrong key on the computer or something so I will try it again because it said that it had no virus and maybe it was just a mistake of the computer. So I tried it again. And the same thing happened. And I'm sure tomorrow the secretary will realize that something happened again, and she is going to ask me again for sure, Larisa have you used this disk again. And so when I was going home I was asking God, please do something so she does not ask me so I don't have to answer. Because I cannot tell her that I broke my promise and that I used the disk again.
>
> **Jarrett** - Did she fix it after the first time?
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> **Larisa** - I think so. I think she did something.
>
> **Jarrett** - Maybe you can just . . .

Larisa - But after our conversation I probably have to tell her the truth.

Jarrett - Well maybe if you just explain to her what you told me and that you thought you just pushed the wrong button and that you will never do it again and you realize you . . .

Larisa - Well I just hope she doesn't ask me.

Jarrett - That would be the best. Or maybe you could just avoid her for a few days.

Larisa - Yes, I was thinking about that. Just going into the office without entering her room.

Jarrett - So in this situation you know that you should tell the truth to her. And how do you know that you should tell the truth? Where does this come from?

Larisa - Well it comes from the idea that any lie is bad. This lie won't do anyone harm though. [She laughs]
Jarrett - So why is it bad then?

Larisa - Maybe two years ago I wouldn't even be thinking about it.

Jarrett - So again this is a question of your faith. So even in this world if the secretary will not be harmed, it is still wrong in God's eye?

Larisa - Yes. So I just have to accept this formula that any lie is bad. I can't question it. Who am I to question it?

This is the narrative of a person torn between what she wants to do and what she believes she ought to do. Perhaps it is this discrepancy that has led Larisa to say that ninety-nine percent of what she does is bad. She finds institutional support for this claim by pointing to a Church sponsored list of sins that provides her with evidence of her moral inadequacy. I should mention, however, that no other Orthodox believer with whom I spoke said anything like this. It is likely, then, that Larisa's interpretation of her moral worth is more characteristic of her own doubts, desires and personal proclivities

than of some general Orthodox position. Indeed, this self-doubt is common of Larisa concerning many aspects of her life and makes for an unusual mix with her more self-confident side. In any case, this narrative provides an opportunity to witness Larisa's reasoning process as she tries to decide what she will do the next time she sees the secretary. It is a process by which Larisa weighs the various possibilities of acting as well as the distinction between what she knows she ought to do, an ought which is given authority by the Church, and what she wants to do.

It is also a process in which I become a part, not just as one who makes suggestions to Larisa, but also by allowing her to speak to another about this dilemma. In fact, Larisa claims that because of our interview, a process that may have conjured feelings of guilt and shame, she will now have to tell the secretary the truth. When I respond to this by suggesting she tell the secretary what she had just told me, Larisa quickly shifts away from the position of truth to the hope of non-confrontation. If the secretary does not ask Larisa about the computer problem, then Larisa ultimately is not confronted with the dilemma of speaking truth or lie. If this were the case, it would be as if the situation never really happened. When I make the further suggestion of avoidance, Larisa admits that she had already been considering such a move and as such would intentionally initiate her hope of non-confrontation.

What becomes clear in this narrative is that at least part of Larisa's reasoning process is about how to avoid the dilemma altogether. She has already made one kind of transgression by going against her promise to the secretary. Larisa understands this and is intent on not breaking this particular promise again. What concerns her now is what comes next. What will be the consequences of this transgression and how might it be

possible to avoid them altogether? This is what Larisa is trying to figure out. She is uncertain of whether she will lie or not if confronted by the secretary, so the best way to avoid this possible transgression is to avoid the secretary. The result of this reasoning process, then, is not that Larisa maintains some abstract notion of good given authority by the Church by not lying, but rather that she tries to avoid altogether the possibility of lying. For if the possibility arose, Larisa is quite unsure of her ability to speak the truth. By avoiding a moral dilemma, then, Larisa is able to maintain some standard of morality, or at the very least, avoid a slippage into further transgression. Therefore, Larisa's moral reasoning is not necessarily motivated by the desire to be moral, but rather the desire to avoid the possibility of immorality.

This, however, is a recent concern of Larisa's. Before she turned to Orthodoxy this situation may not have posed a problem for her. As she said, "maybe two years ago I wouldn't even be thinking about it." But now she is. As one who is trying to be a good Orthodox Christian, Larisa must learn to simply accept that any lie is bad. She is unable to question this. Indeed, as she put it, "who [is she] to question it." In the presence of the Church and its list of sins, and God Himself, Larisa is in no position to question their authority. If she wants to be a good person free of sin, her only choice is to accept lying and everything else on the list as a sin and try to cultivate herself in such a way to become one who does not sin. Unfortunately, when I returned in January of 2005 Larisa was quick to tell me that she was unable to live up to these standards. She had given up on her attempt to become an Orthodox believer. This, however, did not stop her from speaking of herself as a divided self, as one who is really bad but presents herself as good. As became clear in our conversations and interviews in January and February of

2005, Larisa now views this divided self as necessary for her success in her workplace.

This view, so Larisa says, stems from her strong desire to be successful. Larisa prides herself on her ability to quickly learn what is necessary to be successful at her job. This comes not only from learning to expediently do her own duties, but also the careful observation and questioning of others in her workplace. This has given her the knowledge of what most others do around the office and the ability to help and fill in when needed. This is especially so for those who work in higher positions than herself. It is for this reason, so she claims, that Larisa has gradually been assigned more and more responsibilities around the office and, as she puts it, practically runs the place.

One of the most important skills she claims to have learned in the workplace is lying. But unlike the lie she told at MIG to get out of work, the lies she tells at her new job are for the purpose of appearing as a better worker than she is. She confessed this to me on the very day I arrived in Moscow in January of 2005. We were standing on a metro platform waiting for a train when, very similar to the confession she made a year and half earlier, for no apparent reason Larisa began telling me about her tendency to lie at work. She began: “Jarrett, do you remember when I told you that I tell a lot of lies at work? Well I do it even more now.” She went on to tell me that she observed from the men with whom she works that in order to be successful in any kind of business one must learn how to lie to make oneself appear to be a better worker than one is.

Once we returned to her apartment I asked her more about this notion of lying for the sake of appearance. Larisa said, “yes, I learned this from my first boss at [her current place of work]. He showed me that appearance and image is everything. Without a good image you can never be successful.” A primary part of this image of success, so Larisa

has observed and taken on for herself, is the necessity of lying or what she also calls, referencing the poker strategy, bluffing. This strategy is particularly important when she makes a mistake. Larisa says that if she doesn't lie to cover over her mistakes then everyone will know that she is not a very good worker and she will be fired. This is a chance she cannot risk. But such bluffing does more than merely protect her job, so Larisa thinks, it also expresses an image of herself as one who is a hard and efficient worker that can handle her duties on her own. The bluff, then, is that the other "players" in her office, and especially her superiors, will think of her as a proficient and reliable worker and, thus, a successful person. From all accounts of her fellow workers and superiors who I have met, the bluff is working.

But I do not want to portray Larisa as a person who only cares about what others think of her. For she also conceives of this kind of lying as a means of assuming responsibility for her own work and mistakes. As she told me, "if I lie about a mistake I have made, then it gives me the opportunity to fix it myself. I do not want to pass on the responsibility to someone else, so I lie and keep it for myself." In this way, then, Larisa conceives of this kind of lie, or bluff, as a responsible act. She is answering for her own mistake by creating the opportunity through the lie to rectify the mistake. An example she gave of this kind of bluff was when she had forgotten to make an appointment with a deputy minister in the government who had to meet with her boss and sign some documents. On the day of the deadline for the document to be sent to the main office in Europe, Larisa realized she did not get the signature and in the meantime the deputy minister had been fired from his post. Armed with this knowledge, Larisa decided that her only course of action was to forge the deputy minister's signature along with that of

her boss's, which she often does with his approval. When her boss looked through all the documents to be sent to Europe he asked about this one in particular, saying that he did not remember having the meeting with this particular deputy minister so how could the minister as well as himself have signed the document. Larisa acted quickly on her feet and bluffed. "Of course you met with him, how could you forget?" Larisa replied. After a short give and take, her boss finally believed her and the entire thing was forgotten. Regardless of the obvious incompetence of her boss, this bluff allowed Larisa to make up for her very big mistake of not organizing the meeting and project the image that not only did she do her work, but she has the situation under more control than her boss. By forging the two signatures and lying to her boss, Larisa conceives of herself as taking responsibility for her previous mistake and rectifying the potentially difficult situation. Unlike the Larisa of two years ago who worried about her tendency to lie at work and the distinction between her private self and her public presentation of self, Larisa now prides herself on the ability to maintain such a distinction as she has learned that it is the key to her success in the, as she puts it, modern world. It is interesting, then, that Larisa has come to the conclusion that the same tactic of dissimulation that made for success in the late-Soviet period is also necessary for success in the contemporary world of international development, politics and business.[120]

In this world of the modern work place, so Larisa says, bluffing is necessary for one to present the image of competence, assume responsibility and ultimately become successful. Honesty, so Larisa told me, in these kinds of situations makes one look

[120] Ibid. p. 270.

"stupid." By stupid Larisa does not only mean incompetent, but also suggests a revelation of gender. For Larisa also said that she lies rather than being honest about her mistakes because she does not want to look like "a crying teenage girl." To be honest in the work place, then, is to be like a young, and as the crying suggests, vulnerable woman, while to play the game properly and bluff when necessary is to be manly. As she put it on another occasion, "men have made all these rules in the workplace, so we have to adopt them for ourselves or we can never be successful there." It is possible to say, then, that Larisa has adopted what are typically thought of as masculine values, such as bluffing in the workplace, pride of economic self-sufficiency and the desire to remain unmarried and childless, because she sees these as the key to her success in the difficult incipient capitalist world of contemporary Moscow. As Rethmann points out, Larisa is certainly not the only Russian woman to recognize the dominance of so-called masculine values in the new economy.[121] It is also possible that Larisa has adopted this view because it helps make acceptable to herself some personal characteristics that just a few years ago she found troubling. And of course it could be a bit of both. Whatever the case may be, Larisa has wholeheartedly adopted this moral position for herself and shows no signs of the hesitancy and skepticism she showed toward adopting the moral position of Orthodoxy.

If Larisa finds it acceptable to lie when necessary at work, she claims that she does not lie to her friends. She is easily able, so she says, to make a distinction between bluffing in the workplace and lying to friends. She is not as strict about this policy

[121] Petra Rethmann, "Chto Delat'?: Ethnography in the Post-Soviet Cultural Context," *American Anthropologist*, 99(4), 1997, p. 772.

toward her family, but still tries to be honest with them as much as she can. Larisa says she believes honesty is important in friendship and without it there is no friendship. This is a good time to recall her lie to me about being sick and her subsequent confession. Does this example show that she does indeed lie to her friends, or does the fact that she confessed so abruptly on the street that day suggest that she had transgressed one of her most cherished moral principles? I can never know. But I do know that I have never suspected Larisa of lying to me any other time in our relationship, and Olya tells me that as far as she knows Larisa has never lied to her. I take Larisa at her word then, but in doing so it suggests another divide in her presentation of self. There is now the private Larisa, the public Larisa who lies unhesitatingly when necessary at work, and the Larisa who does not lie to her friends. Such distinctions, of course, are not surprising, but Larisa is the only one with whom I spoke that was able to so categorically make these distinctions as though speaking of different persons entirely.

Although Larisa claims to never lie to friends, there is one exception to this rule. This exception has to do with lying so as not to hurt someone else. This is something she told me in an interview we had in April of 2003 and reiterated in several conversations in the winter of 2005. During the April interview I asked Larisa if there was ever a situation that would cause her to act against her moral principles. She replied with an example.

> **Larisa** - A not very extreme example is when you have to lie to avoid hurting the other person. I used to have a friend who was dating a young man and she was having an affair with another young man. And when the first young man came to me to ask if she was having an affair with anyone else I said no. Because I couldn't just hurt him.
>
> **Jarrett** - So in this case is it morally acceptable to do such a thing?
>
> **Larisa** - Yes, if you don't want to hurt a person then you are obligated.

You must do it.

Jarrett - How do you decide whether or not this is possible. Because clearly by lying you are going against . . .

Larisa - Yes, I am going against myself. But I decided very simply that if I know my words will destroy anyone's relationship and life, I would lie, because I am not entitled to interfere with anyone's life. And if I say for example that she did not cheat . . . he must himself go and ask her.

Jarrett - So it sounds as though relationships with people are more important than some abstract notion of right and wrong. Because some people would say, well yes you might hurt the young man but you are lying and this goes against some kind of abstract obligation. But to you it sounds like the face to face is more important.

Larisa - Yes, I'm thinking about people above all and then about some principles. I think all the Christian principles and commandments are based on love for your neighbor and they are not abstract. They can be applied in such and such situations in life.

Here, then, is an example of when Larisa will lie outside of her workplace. Very similar to how she describes lying at the workplace as a kind of moral act through which she assumes responsibility for her own work and mistakes, so too in this situation she speaks of lying as if a moral obligation. As Larisa put it, "if you don't want to hurt a person then you are obligated [to lie]. You must do it." In such situations a lie and not truth is the appropriate response. The question arises, however, of how Larisa is in a position to know what will and will not hurt the other person. To put the question in an another way, does Larisa have the right to decide for the other what is best for him.

In fact, it seems that Larisa is not making this decision at all. Instead, by lying to the young man Larisa is deferring this decision back to the young man. As she put it: "I am not entitled to interfere with anyone's life. And if I say, for example, that she did not cheat . . . he must himself go and ask her." Again, similar to how Larisa uses lying at the

workplace as a strategy for assuming responsibility, in this situation she uses lying to, on the one hand, empower the young man to confront his girlfriend about the problem, and on the other hand, to shift responsibility to the girlfriend to answer for her deeds.

By conceiving of lying in this way, Larisa does not apply an abstract moral rule to all situations, but instead decides in each face to face encounter what is the best way to act. She may make an incorrect judgement. Indeed, the young man may not ask the girlfriend and may be satisfied with what Larisa told him. Or if he does ask, the girlfriend may also lie. In such cases Larisa's strategy of lying in order to shift power and responsibility to the two individuals most intimately involved in the dilemma will have failed to produce truth. But such failure does not render the lie an immoral act in Larisa's eyes. According to her, she has no right to interfere. With the lie she has done all she could to bring about the most felicitous outcome possible. After that, the consequences are out of her hands.

It is interesting, however, that Larisa, who at this time was still struggling to accept Orthodoxy, references "Christian principles and commandments" to support her ethics of lying. These principles and commandments, so says Larisa, are based on love for your neighbor, and it is on this basis that she finds confirmation for her lie. As Larisa understands it, this Christian notion of loving thy neighbor does away with abstract moral principles and obliges one to act appropriately according to each situation. In following this interpretation, Larisa thought the best way she could love her neighbor (the young man), was to lie to him in the hope that he would confront his girlfriend. For Larisa, then, her lie was not only a moral act, but a Christian act as well.

That such a claim contradicts what she had earlier told me about having to accept

that all lies are sin is not all that surprising considering the intense struggle Larisa was going through during this period of her life. It may also indicate the beginning of Larisa's move away from the Church. The contradiction, however, is only sharp in Larisa's discourse, but not in her actual or hoped for actions, for the two situations are in fact different. In the situation with the young man she lied in order to transfer power and responsibility to the couple, and in the situation with the secretary's computer, she hoped to avoid a confrontation with the secretary so she would not be tempted to lie at all. It turned out that she was able to avoid a confrontation and the secretary never asked about the problem. Such that, in this case she never had to tell a lie. One cannot say what she would have done if confronted. The question is moot. Additionally, the two situations differ in that a possible lie to the secretary would have been a lie about something that Larisa herself did, while lying to the young man concerned someone else's actions. If Larisa is concerned about responsibility, which it seems that she is, then this difference is important. For again, the lie to the young man shifts responsibility to the girlfriend, the person whom Larisa believes should have it, while a possible lie to the secretary would have meant that Larisa did not accept responsibility for her own action. Thus, by lying to the young man she is able to rhetorically place responsibility where she judges it ought to be, while if she would have lied to the secretary, she would have avoided the responsibility she felt for her mistake. Lying to the young man, then, is judged a moral act, while a possible lie to the secretary would have been immoral.

The contradiction, then, only arises in her discourse. It seems, however, that Larisa's position taken over the question of whether or not to lie to the young man is more representative of Larisa's beliefs and behavior throughout the several years that I

have known her. While, on the other hand, her claim of the necessity of accepting the list of sins of the Orthodox Church seems more like an attempt on her part to convince not only me, but more importantly herself, that she must do so in order to become a good moral and Christian person. Two years after she uttered these words, and all that has happened in that time, her concern with the list of sins are more revealing of her short lived attempt at faith than any significant acceptance of this institutionalized list of sins. In the end, Larisa is much more comfortable with a conception of morality that is situationally sensitive.

I always found Larisa quite interesting to talk with because she often found interesting ways to present the typically considered immoral act of lying as a moral act. If at the same time, the lie served her personal interests of achieving success in the workplace, then so much the better. For Larisa, there is not a contradiction between morality and self-interest. Even when she speaks of herself as only seeming good but not actually being good, she does not necessarily regret this distinction. Only the one time when Larisa confessed to me the lie she made to her boss at MIG, did she speak of herself as a bad person. Otherwise, the seeming/being distinction she makes is focused more upon what she believes others expect from and see of her. If others believe Larisa is good based on whatever standards they may be judging, then she can benefit from this image. If this image does not quite match what she believes of herself, then she can live with that. For whatever the difference may be between the public and private Larisa, she does not believe the private Larisa is all that bad. In her eyes, she is simply trying to play the game of modernity by the rules that were set long before she arrived at the table. If

on occasion she bluffs in order to win a hand, then this only shows to herself and others that she has learned the game well.

Chapter 4

Olya and Larisa

As can be seen from the previous two chapters Olya and Larisa are very different people. So much so, in fact, they have told me that many people have wondered how they could be friends at all. But while they both recognize there are real differences between them, Olya and Larisa have agreed, whether explicitly or tacitly, to disregard them. They claim this is not only because they essentially share much in common despite the obvious differences, for after all, they are both very similar in that they are young, unmarried and childless women, have similar family backgrounds, and now work in the same office, but also because they have come to understand one another. They claim to understand the other in all her difference. This raises the question of what they mean by understanding, how it is achieved and what it allows not only in terms of evaluating difference, which certainly does occur, but more importantly in terms of acknowledging difference. In order to consider this question let's look at how Olya and Larisa talk about the importance of understanding in their friendship and how it allows them to easily move past potentially difficult moments.

One afternoon in May of 2003 I met with Olya and Larisa in a coffee shop in central Moscow. The purpose of the interview was to have them comment about some of the general themes I had picking out of all of the interviews I had done the past year. Eventually, however, the interview focused on their own friendship, what they expect from each other and how they negotiate transgression against those expectations. This came about in the midst of a discussion concerning the theme of friendship and its significance in my interlocutors' lives. I will quote at length our interview in order to

show the progression of ideas and how the negotiation of transgression and expectation gradually comes about in the midst of the interview. Afterwards, I will requote some of the more important parts of the interview in order to analyze them with closer scrutiny.

> **Jarrett** - Do you think you have different expectations with friends than you do with strangers?
>
> **Larisa** - The first thing that comes to my mind is that I am less demanding with strangers. I do not demand so much attention from them.
>
> **Jarrett** - When you say less demanding, how about how they treat you, are you less demanding with that too?
>
> **Larisa** - Can I think it over?
>
> **Olya** - I think that with my close friends I expect from them what they should do and I know them very well. I know their character traits very well, their positives and their negatives. In this case I can demand something from them that I expect. It is just the opposite with strangers. I don't know who they are. I try to behave natural and I don't expect a lot and I allow this person to show himself and to behave as he does.
>
> **Jarrett** - What is the most important thing you expect from a close friend?
>
> **Olya** - I expect, well it is the one rule that is very important in our lives, and that is to treat others as you want them to treat you. I think that is the main rule and everything is based on it even though sometimes people ignore it. For example, in relations with my brother sometimes I expect more from him than he can give. And sometimes this irritates me and I go a little crazy and I demand from him a lot and then I understand that I have no right to demand from him because he is a person with his own opinion and his own life and sometimes I behave as if he was not my brother but my doll - I just demand from him as if he was my slave. This law is very important. When I behave properly I don't demand a lot from him but demand a lot from myself. In this case I hope for a good response from him.
>
> **Larisa** - I think that my expectations are equal. But the difference is that when strangers, for example, hurt you, not deliberately but because they don't know you, I think that that person does not know you and probably he or she didn't want to hurt you but it just came out like that. But when a friend hurts you it is more painful of course but then you still forgive them.

Jarrett - Why do you forgive them?

Larisa - Well because they are my friends. I must accept people as they are.

Jarrett - Do you expect that they should do anything to earn your forgiveness or do you just forgive them automatically?

Larisa - Automatically, but still I can be offended for a couple of days just to, just to take airs, you know.

Olya - Yes! (Agreeing that Larisa does this)

Larisa - It is very pleasant to act offended.

Jarrett - Do you feel that you can get away with more with your friends than with strangers?

Larisa - Yes, certainly.

Jarrett - Why? Can you give an example?

Olya - For example I can be late to meet a friend and . . .

Larisa - Yes, do you know that Olya was 30 minutes late today because she was doing her hair.

Olya - Yes, and she is very good, her heart is very good she will never kill me for this! But with a stranger of course I will do my best not to be late.

Larisa - That is what I'm always irritated about, people always think this is my friend and he will put up with this, but this is a stranger, I must not treat him badly. I think friends require more attention than strangers, of course. But as for moral boundaries I'm more open with friends.

Olya - I think with strangers we don't show our nature, we don't show everything we have inside.

Larisa - I don't agree. We do show it because it is against our nature not to show our nature. We reveal who we are in every move, in every word, in every step. But when we deal with strangers we do not want to show this nature.

Olya - We pretend to be better than we are.

Larisa - With friends we can be more nasty, and so on.

Jarrett - And why can you be more nasty with your friends?

Larisa - Because I know for sure that my friends accept me for who I am with all my faults, deficiencies and bad qualities.

Jarrett - Could you give an example of nasty and bad?

Olya - If I'm interested in something I could ask Larisa about it. And if she doesn't reply I can ask her about it again the next time we speak. But for example, if I ask another person and she doesn't answer, I will not ask it again. Because I understand that she doesn't want to reply. Things are different though if it is with a close friend, I will ask her every time until she answers me. I will get what I want no matter the cost!

Larisa - About my bad behavior with friends, I don't know, some minor offenses such as forgetting birthdays or sometimes I can be very blunt.

Jarrett - What do you say when you are blunt?

Larisa - Oh for example, today I told Olya when she wanted to tell me a story that I wasn't interested in it. I got ashamed about me saying this at the very moment I said it.

Jarrett - And what is your response to her saying this?

Olya - I just understood her because of course she wouldn't be very interested in what I had to tell her. I understand her and I just said never mind.

Jarrett - How did you understand her?

Olya - I know that I had already talked a lot about this subject and she doesn't need to know more. She spent a lot of time with me and V., (an exchange student from France) going to the park and to different places and maybe she is bored . . .

Larisa (interjection) - No I'm not!

Olya - . . . of this person and doesn't want to get more information about it.

How does the interview lead up to the climax of Olya and Larisa "understanding" one another? The interview begins with a general agreement that both Olya and Larisa

have higher expectations of their friends or other people with whom they are close, for example family members such as Olya's brother, than of strangers. These expectations tend to center around on the one hand, the predictability of behavior, and on the other hand, a small probability for transgression, especially transgression toward "me as friend." Both of these expectations seem to be founded on the belief that friends know one another or understand each other in the most intimate and deepest way. As Olya put it, "I know their [friends] character traits very well." Such intimate knowledge comes about not only from spending prolonged periods of time with one another, but as Larisa put it during another conversation, the intimate process of *obshchenie* through which friends come to understand each other. Anna Wierzbicka has argued that this process of *obshchenie*, or what she translates as communing talk, allows individuals to mutually develop each other and themselves, in effect creating each other anew in the process.[122] Because friends have already laid a foundation of understanding through perhaps years of *obshchenie*, the expectations mentioned above are probably well-founded. This does not mean, however, that transgressions between friends do not occur. Indeed, as Nafus has argued concerning friendship in Russia, friends do in fact make transgressions against each others' moral expectations but these are rather easily overlooked because of the intimate knowledge each have acquired of the others' "essence of self." Such knowledge and the "unconditional acceptance" of the other, Nafus continues, is the mark of true friendship (*druzhba*) among many Russians.[123] As will become clear throughout the rest

[122] Anna Wierzbicka, "Russian Cultural Scripts," pp. 425-8.

[123] Dawn Nafus, *Time, Sociability and Postsocialism*, p. 70.

of this chapter, this “unconditional acceptance” of the other has become the foundation for Olya and Larisa’s friendship.

To see how this works within their relationship let’s take another look at part of the interview with Olya and Larisa to see how it turns to the ways that friends actually can and do transgress against one another. When I asked if they felt as if they could “get away with more with friends than with strangers,” this is how they responded:

Larisa - Yes, certainly.

Jarrett - Why? Can you give an example?

Olya - For example I can be late to meet a friend and . . .

Larisa - Yes, do you know that Olya was 30 minutes late today because she was doing her hair.

Olya - Yes, and she is very good, her heart is very good she will never kill me for this! But with a stranger of course I will do my best not to be late.

Larisa - That is what I’m always irritated about, people always think this is my friend and he will put up with this, but this is a stranger, I must not treat him badly. I think friends require more attention than strangers, of course. But as for moral boundaries I’m more open with friends . . . With friends we can be more nasty, and so on.

Jarrett - And why can you be more nasty with your friends?

Larisa - Because I know for sure that my friends accept me for who I am with all my faults, deficiencies and bad qualities.

Jarrett - Could you give an example of nasty and bad?

Olya - If I’m interested in something I could ask Larisa about it. And if she doesn’t reply I can ask her about it again the next time we speak. But for example, if I ask another person and she doesn’t answer, I will not ask it again. Because I understand that she doesn’t want to reply. Things are different though if it is with a close friend, I will ask her every time until she answers me. I will get what I want no matter the cost!

Larisa - About my bad behavior with friends, I don’t know, some minor

offenses such as forgetting birthdays or sometimes I can be very blunt.

> **Jarrett** - What do you say when you are blunt?
>
> **Larisa** - Oh for example, today I told Olya when she wanted to tell me a story that I wasn't interested in it. I was ashamed about me saying this at the very moment I said it.

Despite the initial claim of a low expectation of friends transgressing against one another, both admit that they feel they have looser boundaries in terms of what they can and cannot do with friends. Is this a matter of transgression or simply that the friendship between Olya and Larisa allows for a broader conception of moral boundaries? Are their different moral bounds between friends than there are between strangers? The answer seems to be yes, there are different bounds or expectations between friends than there are with strangers and with friends they are broader and less strict. This seems to suggest, then, that Olya and Larisa, and perhaps others as well, have different conceptions of morality for different people. Thus, it becomes very difficult to speak of an individual's singular moral conception, but instead it is likely that a single individual holds several different conceptions of morality depending on the persons, situations and perhaps even the times and places involved. If this is true, then at least for Olya and Larisa it is clear that with a friend more is allowed. Yet there are limits, and it seems that Larisa knew that she had transgressed them when she told Olya she was not interested in the latter's story. Nevertheless, Olya's response is quite muted, almost as if no transgression had taken place at all. Why is this so?

> **Olya** - I just understood her because of course she wouldn't be very interested in what I had to tell her. I understand her and I just said never mind.
>
> **Jarrett** - How did you understand her?

> **Olya** - I know that I had already talked a lot about this subject and she doesn't need to know more. She spent a lot of time with me and S., (an exchange student from France) going to the park and to different places and maybe she is bored . . .
>
> **Larisa (interjection)** - No I'm not!
>
> **Olya** - . . . of this person and doesn't want to get more information about it.

For Olya it is through understanding that acceptance of moral boundaries between friends are established. Olya is not offended by Larisa, she does not feel as if Larisa has transgressed against her and their friendship, because she *understands* why Larisa would act the way she did. But look! Larisa disagrees. Larisa adamantly claims "No!," this is not the reason. At that point with no explicit response to Larisa's "No!," Olya shifts the conversation to another topic.

Larisa's "No!" is not only a denial of Olya's claim to understand why Larisa acted the way she did, but it also sufficiently puts an end to any attempt by the two to come to a mutual understanding of the slight, if not mundane, transgression. So then how is one left to consider Olya's claim to understand Larisa's act? After a closer look at these last utterances it becomes clear that Olya in fact is using the notion of understanding (*ponimanie*) in two different ways. In the first utterance, which is a response to my question of how she responded to Larisa, Olya seems to be making a more general claim of understanding Larisa as a person and how she might generally act in such situations. This is suggested in her use of "of course," which appears to reference a more general characteristic of Larisa rather than the particular situation under discussion. This interpretation is supported by Olya's earlier claim that she knows the

"character traits" of her friends very well and that because of this she knows what to expect from them. In this case, because she knows Larisa very well, because through years of friendship and the understanding established between the two of them, Olya understands that "of course" Larisa would not be interested in this particular topic. Olya, then, would agree with Nafus "that friendship means accepting the faults of others," an acceptance only made possible because of an intimate knowledge of the other's "character."[124]

But in the course of the interview I misread Olya's claim to understand Larisa at this more general level and instead asked her how she understood Larisa's particular action in the situation. It is only after my situational misinterpretation of Olya's words that she attempts to hypothesize why Larisa acted as she did. It is this attempt that Larisa disagrees with in her "No!". And Larisa may be right in her response that Olya has misunderstood her reason for acting as she did. But that is not the point Olya was originally trying to make when she spoke of understanding Larisa, and it is perhaps for this reason that Olya changes the topic of conversation. For she does not consider it important enough to continue on to discover the exact reason why Larisa acted as she did in the moment, since at the more general level Olya already understands Larisa well enough as a person to not even count her actions as a transgression despite Larisa having felt bad about it.

This distinction between understanding the other as a person, or what Olya and Larisa call the other's "nature," and understanding the reasons for acting in a certain way

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[124] Ibid. p. 70.

in a specific situation, and the importance of the former over the latter, was made explicit in an interview we did together in February of 2005. I gave each of them a copy of the transcript from the above interview to jog their memory about the specific conversation and then asked:

> **Jarrett** - So I found this interesting because even though Olya claimed to understand why Larisa acted the way she did, Larisa denied this was the reason. I was wondering why you (Olya) did not get upset with Larisa and how misunderstandings like these do not hurt the friendship?
>
> **Olya** - There was no reason to become upset, because it doesn't help to make peace if you are upset. It is very easy to become angry and to push a person away and it is more difficult to understand and to forgive and then to discuss it together and to remain good friends.
>
> **Jarrett** - Does this happen often with the two of you? Or does it happen that one of you gets upset and then you talk about it?
>
> **Olya** - Yes, of course, from time to time.
>
> **Larisa** - I think it always happens, even if she doesn't notice, especially at work. You know I'm very pushy by nature. Not only Olya but everyone in the office suffers because of me, I even push myself onto the bosses all of the time. I am like a dictator. And when Olya is doing something, you know, I know that I'm supposed to let everyone do things the way they want to do it, but when I see Olya doing something and, for example, she has chosen the slowest possible way to do it, I try to teach her and sometimes she just listens and says, yes you are right. But because I am very pushy I will yell, Olya why don't you do it like this. And when she says, yes, you are right, I feel bad immediately. And sometimes she becomes angry with me and sometimes she responds with the same anger in her voice. And then I have two reactions, the first is to attack her back right away. Or the second, which is more common, is to try to make things better with a joke and then we both start laughing. It happened today by the way. We were arguing over the stapler, because I bought two staplers, one for me and one for Olya, and mine disappeared so I was using her's and she said, would you please stop using my stapler. And I said, or what, and she said, or nothing. And we both started laughing like crazy. It constantly happens.
>
> **Jarrett** - When she acts this way, how do you (Olya) react?

Olya - You know it is her nature and I understand this. She is very pushy and she doesn't want to wait, and if she doesn't see the result that she wants immediately, she gets very upset. And usually I just try to calm her down, and sometimes I'm not successful. Sometimes she does not want to give in, and this is the kind of person she is. And I understand her, and I do not want to quarrel with her and be like two angry cocks who battle all the time, so I try to find some kind of compromise.

Jarrett - So is it more important that you understand her as a person than why she acts in a certain way in a certain situation?

Olya - Yes, absolutely.

Larisa - Olya is right. The first thing you should try to do with someone is understand their nature not their logic. Because logic can be, um, well, I'll give an example. There is destination A and destination B and how you travel to these destinations is up to you, and I can disapprove how a person travels or approve, but this is only logic. But to understand why he or she does it you should know the nature.

Jarrett - So it is more important to understand the nature than what you call the logic?

Larisa - Yes the logic is only the behavior, but the nature is the person.

Jarrett - So when she gets very pushy at work you (Olya) don't really care about the specifics of the situation you just know that in general it is her nature to be that way sometimes?

Olya - Yes because I see no reason to go against her, she will not change. Besides, I know sometimes she is right I can be very slow, I just want to do everything very carefully and it takes time. But sometimes we have no time and I should be very quick.

Here it becomes clear that for both of them the understanding that is central in their friendship is the understanding of what they call the "nature" of the other. This "nature" can be characterized as, among others, the pushiness of Larisa or the slowness/tardiness of Olya. Gadamer writes that moral understanding necessitates the

transposing of oneself "fully into the concrete situation of the person who has to act."[125] This suggests that moral understanding is based on an empathetic understanding of specific reasons in specific situations. But because Olya and Larisa understand each other's "nature" so well, more often than not the specific acts of the other need not be questioned for reasons. Using Larisa's terminology, the logic of specific acts rarely come into question because most acts, such as Larisa's demand for the stapler or general pushiness around the office, are better understood in terms of the "nature" of the person. Thus, Gadamer may be right that one who understands does not do so as one "who stands apart and unaffected but rather . . . thinks along with the other from the perspective of a specific bond of belonging."[126] But for Olya and Larisa this perspective of belonging together is made possible through the general acceptance and understanding of one another as individual persons who have their own unique personalities, characteristics, tendencies and faults.

It is this understanding of the other's "nature" that allows them to generally avoid confrontation. Larisa's interpretation of the relationship suggests there are many opportunities for such confrontation and Olya's interpretation suggests there is much less. Which ever the case may be, it seems clear that Olya takes it on herself to avoid as much confrontation as possible. By not reacting to Larisa's pushiness, or in the interview above, Larisa's indifference to Olya's words, Olya is able to avoid escalating the situation to a full blown argument. Olya is able to do this because she has chosen to

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[125] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 323.

[126] Ibid. p. 323.

focus on Larisa's "nature" and not her reasons for acting in particular ways at particular times. In doing so, she is choosing to accept Larisa as a friend with all of her faults. We can only assume that Larisa does the same for Olya. Just as Caldwell writes about the necessity of social negotiation for the purposes of mutual understanding and agency within the constraints of contemporary Russia's social structure,[127] so too are intersubjective negotiations necessary for the mutual acceptance between Olya and Larisa. Their friendship, then, is based on a mutual acceptance spoken of as understanding. And perhaps acceptance is a more precise way to speak of what Olya and Larisa are doing. For as Jackson has pointed out in his comparative study of peoples from Sierra Leone and Australia, intersubjectivity does not necessarily lead to mutual understanding, but is perhaps better understood as the process of being able to be together.[128] It is in this way, then, that Olya and Larisa can remain such good friends despite their obvious differences. For in coming to understand one another, Olya and Larisa have come to accept each other along with their respective faults and in so doing are able to be together as friends.

In Olya and Larisa's friendship, then, understanding of each others' "nature," which is built up over years of friendship and *obshchenie* provides the background against which each others' acts can be judged. Because such a firm ground of understanding has been built in their friendship, everyday transgressions, such as dismissing what one has to say to the other, being pushy and aggressive in the office, or

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[127] Melissa L. Caldwell, *Not By Bread Alone*, p. 37.

[128] Michael Jackson, *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 4.

being thirty minutes late, can be easily forgiven or even go unnoticed. The understanding established through the *obshchenie* of friendship provides the moral basis for the two expectations Olya and Larisa have of each other and their other friends and family members, that is, the prediction of their behavior and a low expectation of transgression. Because they already understand one another, behavior is often predictable and very little of it is interpreted as transgression. For it is through this kind of understanding as acceptance that friends come to really know each other and, therefore, moral boundaries between them are established and loosened.

Olya and Larisa have not only established moral expectations between one another over the course of their friendship, but they have also influenced one another in the ways in which each of them conceive of morality for themselves. This is clear from the influence and support Olya offered Larisa in her short lived attempt at becoming an Orthodox Christian believer, and it is also evident in the following conversational narrative taken from the interview we did together in February of 2005. In what follows I will give the complete conversational narrative so the reader can get a feel for the interaction - the dialogical give and take - between Olya and Larisa, which I think is important for understanding their relationship, after which I will break down the narrative for interpretation.

This interview took place one evening in their office after their co-workers had left for the day. Because each of them work such long hours, meeting here at nine at night was the most convenient time and place for all of us to come together. It also provided me with an opportunity to see their workplace and how they interact in this

space. After making tea we sat in the room they share, their two desks facing one another, and began our interview. Eventually I turned to the topic that Larisa had focused on in many of our interviews and conversations, that of lying. In particular I wanted to see how Olya reacted to Larisa's claim that it is necessary to lie in the workplace. Surely, I thought, Olya would disagree with Larisa, for it runs counter to Olya's strict conception of the morality of God. As becomes clear in the following, however, I was quite mistaken.

> **Jarrett** - Larisa has told me about her discovery of the importance of what she calls bluffing in the work place, which is maybe a nice way of saying that you have to lie at work to be successful or to make others think that you are perfect, I was wondering what you (Olya) think of this?
>
> **Olya** - Yes, Larisa has succeeded in this . . .
>
> **Larisa (interjection)** - I told you!
>
> **Olya** - . . . and she tries to teach me to do it. And of course I appreciate that she tries, and I see that it is important to be successful here.
>
> **Jarrett** - But this does not seem to match very well with your religious beliefs.
>
> **Olya** - And that is why I'm not very good at this. Sometimes I will admit right away that I made a mistake . . .
>
> **Larisa (interjection)** - Yes, and she looks so stupid when she does this.
>
> **Olya** - . . . and sometimes I remember what Larisa has told me and I try to do it. I don't know which I should do. Work is a different world with its own rules. So I should probably learn to do these kinds of things so I can survive. I don't know if it is really a lie or not.
>
> **Jarrett** - What do you mean?
>
> **Larisa** - Let me try to explain because I think Olya will agree. Work is just a game, we cannot treat it seriously. We are not ourselves when we work, we are just machines that need to fulfill something. And this lie, it doesn't really cause any harm. What kind of harm could it cause? The

worst harm you could do is destroy someone's career, but what is a career? It is like something so unreal, which a person should treat as minor, but somehow this world has gone crazy and treats it as the most important thing.

Jarrett - Ok, but it's not that simple. Destroying someone's career is not just destroying the job but their life. It is the way they pay their rent, it is how they buy their food, it is how they buy clothes for their children . . .

Larisa - Yes, but real life is, um . . .

Jarrett - That is real life.

Larisa - No!

Jarrett - I mean it's not as separate as you want to make it.

Larisa - It helps you to live, but it is not life itself. Think about the worst case, you are jobless. There are many jobless people on the planet and they survive, they find a way. I have always, you know, when I found this job I was so desperate I was so eager to work and I did even more than I was physically able to do, but now I think, what if I am fired what will I do, well I will just sell sausages at the market.

Jarrett - Do you really think you will be happy with that?

Larisa - Yes.

Jarrett - You wouldn't be able to buy your perfumes and all your things.

Larisa - So what! I am already fed up with all those things. Of course I would be a little upset but I wouldn't be dead or disabled. So it is just a game that is not serious at all like chess or something like that.

Jarrett - Do you (Olya) believe that?

Olya - Well I partly believe it. Of course it is part of our life and we have certain relations here with people, but it is only here at work, when you go home you become different and you forget about everything here. For example, after work I go to study and then I become totally different, there are other obligations, other people, it is a different game.

Larisa - Yes!

Olya - So, in psychological terms you play games, you play different roles

in your life. This is just the way we are.

Larisa - You cannot fully understand it because you are a man. Yes, yes, it is proven that for a woman the job takes second place, the first place is personal relations and what happens outside of work.

Jarrett - I disagree because I don't, I'm not saying that the job takes first place, but I'm saying that the roles are not as distinct as you are trying to make them, that something comes across . . .

Larisa (interjection) - No.

Jarrett - . . . and that, for example, if you tell a lot of lies here in this room, then, maybe not today, but if you tell a lot of lies in this room for ten or twenty years, then eventually it becomes easier to be the kind of person who tells lies outside of this room.

Larisa and Olya in unison - No!

Olya - Well yes, maybe for some people who are not very good. If you are like this, then you will be like this everywhere. If you are egoistic then you will be egoistic at work, at home, in your relations, everywhere. And people who remain people, human beings, they can be different, they can feel differently in different situations, you put on a new dress here, and another one there. You just change with the situation.

Larisa - Yes, I agree with Olya. It is like a masquerade, you come and play a role and there is a different theme for work and elsewhere. At work lies do not lead to anything important, but in life you can really destroy a person and hurt them very deeply in the heart. And work is not connected to the heart. You understand?

Jarrett - So for you, for example, it is ok to lie to your boss because you don't consider it lying to him as a person but to him as a boss?

Larisa - Yes, to lie to him is like lying to a doll, a working doll. But the same boss, if I go out with him, for instance, and he asks about something in his personal life, I would never lie to him because he is another person in this instance, he is not a boss but a person.

Olya - But I wouldn't say that when I go home after work that I stop thinking about work or these relations, even sometimes I will dream about it. So work is not completely separate but you do change your attitude.

Larisa - No, work is not separate, it is a part of life, but it is an unnatural

part of your life, it is just something that people created. There was as time when people did not work in offices or there were no factories and women did not work, so I mean this is completely unnatural. Nothing has changed in the moral aspect, only now there is this different realm.

Jarrett - So because you consider work an unnatural part of life, somehow the morality that you live according to in life doesn't count here?

Olya -Yes, that is right.

Larisa - Yes, it is an imaginary world, and of course it helps us to survive.

Jarrett - But the morality of the real world doesn't count here? I mean of course you won't kill your boss but lying and things like this.

Larisa - Well maybe not major lies. For instance I have the opportunity to, everyday I have large amounts of money in my hands and I never steal this because I think it is dishonest. For me this is a major lie. But lies, for instance, when they ask you if you did something and you didn't but you say you did, but this is not lying this is protecting.

Olya - Preventing them from being worried about nothing.

Larisa (speaking to Olya) - I told Jarrett that when you are honest at work, for instance if D. (the boss) comes up and asks if you have done this, and you say no, then he begins to worry.

Jarrett - So you (Olya) agree with that?

Olya - Yes, absolutely.

Jarrett - So when you tell this lie to D. it is to protect him or to keep the responsibility for yourself.

Larisa - Yes, and you know, maybe lying is an exaggeration. At first you should try to generalize as much as possible so that your answer will be in line with reality but still will not cause him any worries. But if you cannot do this, then you should lie?

Jarrett - Is this difficult for you (Olya) since you seem to be stricter about this?

Olya - I'm not as good at this as Larisa, but of course sometimes I will say that I have done something even when I haven't just so they won't worry.

But my nature is that I can't invent these lies very quickly and I even get confused sometimes, so when this happens I can't go against myself.

Jarrett - Then it is just easier to tell the truth?

Olya - Yes.

Jarrett - But I noticed that when I arrived here today and you had to come get me, you had to tell a little lie to the security guard.

Olya - Ah yes . . .

Larisa (interjection) - What did you tell him?

Olya - The security guard asked who you were and why I should let him in, and I told him that you are our colleague and that we have to do some work.

Larisa - You see, this is a perfect example of what I'm talking about. It is totally innocent. It leads to nothing, well it leads only to good things - that you were let in. And who cares who you are, you will not destroy this building.

Olya - You are not a terrorist.

Larisa - So you broke their security rules. So what!

Jarrett - I understand that this is ok for you (Larisa), but I'm a bit more surprised with Olya. For example, the bible says do not lie, this covers all situations doesn't it?

Olya - Well yes, but sometimes it happens. Life demands it.

Jarrett - So you are willing to go against some of your principles when you need to?

Olya - Yes, for example, if I didn't say this then you would still be sitting down there.

Jarrett - Thank you.

Larisa - For instance, I can say that I learned this from men. And even tonight we were sitting here working together (Larisa and her boss were working together on the budget when I first arrived) and when there was a mistake he said automatically, look you put the wrong number here. And

> I said, why me, we both did it. And he said, oh yes, yes, we did it. Again, they don't even think about this. You know, because men are very image oriented and they try to avoid looking bad, they will never say that they have made a mistake. I see D. sometimes works so hard, not because he cares very much, but because he wants to prove he is right. Olya have you seen this?
>
> **Olya** - Yes, absolutely.
>
> **Larisa** - For him the importance of work is to show to everyone that he didn't make a mistake. And when someone else makes a mistake he is eager to point this out.
>
> **Jarrett** - Do you (Olya) see this as well?
>
> **Olya** - Yes, I see it and it has helped me understand men better. And I have tried to learn to say things that are not true when I need to, but I would not call this a lie, but protection. Just some phrases that protect you like some safe clothes.

Here it is possible to see Larisa influence Olya's way of conceiving of the morality of lying in the workplace. Indeed, not only is her influence seen in how Olya articulates her position on this question, but it is also seen in how Larisa participates in the conversational narrative. On several different occasions Larisa interjects into the conversation so as to support, expand and clear up what Olya is saying. She even answers for Olya on more than one occasion. Such behavior is not entirely uncommon for Larisa as she often likes to be the center of attention, which she has admitted on more than one occasion, and can be, as already seen above, quite pushy and aggressive at times. Here, however, Larisa's participation works in at least two ways. First, she is eager to show that even Olya, a person who Larisa continually claims is a more moral person than herself, can understand the necessity of telling certain kinds of lies in the office place. Therefore, I should not be very surprised at this ethics of lying for in some sense it is self-evident. Secondly, Larisa is trying to smooth over some of the slight

differences that do in fact exist between her and Olya, and in so doing create the appearance that there really is no difference between their two positions. But what are these two positions that are so very close but yet still hold some difference?

Both agree that sometimes lying at work is, if not necessary, then convenient because it helps alleviate possible tension, worries and concern. But whereas Larisa recognizes this aspect of it, she tends to focus more on how lying is a way of maintaining responsibility for herself and her own work, as well as presenting an image of capability and success. As she put it, she does not want to look stupid by being too honest, as she accuses Olya of being, around the office. Olya, on the other hand, recognizes Larisa's concerns about responsibility and image, but tends to focus more on lies as a means of protection. As Olya said, "I have tried to learn to say things that are not true when I need to, but I would not call this a lie, but protection. Just some phrases that protect you like some safe clothes." The protective clothes of the lie not only protect herself, as she emphasizes here, but also protects her co-workers. First, by learning to tell lies Olya protects her bosses and others in the office from being overly concerned with whether or not the work will be done on time, properly, and if she can handle the task. Secondly, and related to the first, Olya realizes that she can protect herself by lying, in that by not causing her co-workers to question her ability to do the work, Olya is able to protect herself from being considered a poor worker. This, however, is something that she is still learning and has not mastered as Larisa has.

> **Jarrett** - Larisa has told me about her discovery of the importance of what she calls bluffing in the work place, which is maybe a nice way of saying that you have to lie at work to be successful or to make others think that you are perfect, I was wondering what you (Olya) think of this?

Olya - Yes, Larisa has succeeded in this . . .

Larisa (interjection) - I told you!

Olya - . . . and she tries to teach me to do it. And of course I appreciate that she tries, and I see that it is important to be successful here.

Jarrett - But this does not seem to match very well with your religious beliefs.

Olya - And that is why I'm not very good at this. Sometimes I will admit right away that I made a mistake . . .

Larisa (interjection) - Yes, and she looks so stupid when she does this.
Olya - . . . and sometimes I remember what Larisa has told me and I try to do it. I don't know which I should do. Work is a different world with its own rules. So I should probably learn to do these kinds of things so I can survive. I don't know if it is really a lie or not.

Not only has Larisa mastered the art of lying at the workplace, but so too has she tried to teach this art to Olya. But Olya is torn. On the one hand, she recognizes that perhaps such a skill would be useful in the workplace, but it also goes against her own conception of morality. As she admits, it is because of her religious beliefs and its accompanying moral principles that she sometimes has a difficult time lying. Larisa does not hesitate to remind her that she looks "stupid" in such moments. Such a comment at one and the same time tests the limits of the moral boundaries of their own relationship and serves to influence the way Olya considers how she speaks around the office. Just as Larisa considers Olya to be the more moral person of the two, Olya considers Larisa to be more savvy and knowledgeable of the business and working world, and thus takes to heart such commentaries on her own behavior. At the moment, then, Olya is struggling with this question of truth or lie in the workplace. She doesn't "know which [she] should do," and neither does she "know if it is really a lie or not." These are real questions over

which Olya is currently struggling, for in the six months she has been working in the office she has come to realize that it is a different world from the school where she used to teach, and this new world has its own rules that she must learn in order to survive.

> **Olya** - I'm not as good at this as Larisa, but of course sometimes I will say that I have done something even when I haven't just so they won't worry. But my nature is that I can't invent these lies very quickly and I even get confused sometimes, so when this happens I can't go against myself.
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> **Jarrett** - Then it is just easier to tell the truth?
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> **Olya** - Yes.
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> **Jarrett** - But I noticed that when I arrived here today and you had to come get me, you had to tell a little lie to the security guard.
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> **Olya** - Ah yes . . .
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> **Larisa (interjection)** - What did you tell him?
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> **Olya** - The security guy asked who you were and why I should let him in, and I told him that you are our colleague and that we have to do some work.
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> **Larisa** - You see, this is a perfect example of what I'm talking about. It is totally innocent. It leads to nothing, well it leads only to good things - that you were let in. And who cares who you are, you will not destroy this building.
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> **Olya** - You are not a terrorist.
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> **Larisa** - So you broke their security rules. So what!
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> **Jarrett** - I understand that this is ok for you (Larisa), but I'm a bit more surprised with Olya. For example, the bible says do not lie, this covers all situations doesn't it?
>
> **Olya** - Well yes, but sometimes it happens. Life demands it.
>
> **Jarrett** - So you are willing to go against some of your principles when you need to?
>
> **Olya** - Yes, for example, if I didn't say this then you would still be sitting

down there.

Again Olya admits that Larisa is better at this lying than she is. But she is not better because she has worked in such an environment longer and, therefore, has more practice at it, but because it is part of her "nature." Although Olya doesn't explicitly say that the capacity to lie with ease is part of Larisa's "nature," she suggest this by saying that her own difficulty with lying is due to her own "nature." In referencing her own "nature" and its significance in her ability to lie with ease or not, Olya is indicating an essential aspect of her self that is the basis of how she can act in the world. Just as she had spoken of understanding the "nature" of Larisa as the way in which she could so easily overlook Larisa's transgressions, so too Olya here speaks of a quasi-deterministic "nature" that significantly influences her own moral disposition. Because of her "nature," Olya sometimes gets confused and cannot lie very quickly. It is as if she is going against her very self. In these moments it is much easier for Olya to simply speak the truth and risk worrying her co-worker, looking "stupid," and potentially putting her job in jeopardy. When I pointed out, however, how easily, how smoothly she was able to lie to the security guard when I arrived, Olya relied on the contingencies of life to explain her act. Sometimes "life demands it." In such moments, as I observed, Olya is able to easily tell what Larisa calls an innocent lie in order to make things go smoothly. As she put, I am not a terrorist so there is no good reason that I cannot enter the building. Such a lie will not harm anyone, I am told. These are the kinds of lies Larisa believes are just fine to tell, if not necessary. Unlike these innocent lies, Larisa claims she would never tell a major lie such as stealing money from the project's budget. In fact, since Larisa began controlling the budget at work her older brother has been urging her to steal

money from the project. Larisa, however, will not do this. Not only is it dishonest, but it would also put at risk her future in the work world. As Larisa put it during a casual conversation on the topic, "my brother has this Soviet mentality that believes he should get as much as he can from his work place right now, while I (Larisa) have the more modern mentality that by being a good worker I can eventually get more from my hard work than from stealing." This same distinction is made by Leonid Ivanov, a Russian small business owner who has written about his experiences setting up offices in Moscow, California and Germany. Writing about business ethics in Russia, Ivanov claims to have observed that many Russians do not consider future growth in their business dealings and instead tend to focus on what they can get now, making "it hard to conduct any business that is time-dependent."[129] Whether this distinction is overly stereotypical or not, the fact remains that Larisa draws an important line between what she considers an appropriate lie or not.

Returning to Olya's ability to lie easily to the security guard, the question is begged, if Olya can so easily tell such a lie in the situation with the security guard, then why not with her boss? Perhaps because, despite her desire to be considered a good worker, she does not consider the workplace to be on par with the demands of real life. This is, after all, how Larisa would put it.

> **Larisa** - Let me try to explain because I think Olya will agree. Work is just a game, we cannot treat it seriously. We are not ourselves when we work, we are just machines that need to fulfill something. And this lie, it doesn't really cause any harm. What kind of harm could it cause? The

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[129] Leonid V. Ivanov, "Small Business in Russia: A View From Under The Table," *The Future of Freedom in Russia*. W. J. vanden Heuvel, ed., Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000, p. 95.

worst harm you could do is destroy someone's career, but what is a career? It is like something so unreal, which a person should treat as minor, but somehow this world has gone crazy and treats it as the most important thing.

Jarrett - Ok, but it's not that simple. Destroying someone's career is not just destroying the job but their life. It is the way they pay their rent, it is how they buy their food, it is how they buy clothes for their children . . .

Larisa - Yes, but real life is, um . . .

Jarrett - That is real life.

Larisa - No!

Jarrett - I mean it's not as separate as you want to make it.

Larisa - It helps you to live, but it is not life itself. Think about the worst case, you are jobless. There are many jobless people on the planet and they survive, they find a way. I have always, you know, when I found this job I was so desperate I was so eager to work and I did even more than I was physically able to do, but now I think, what if I am fired what will I do, well I will just sell sausages at the market.

Jarrett - Do you really think you will be happy with that?

Larisa - Yes.

Jarrett - You wouldn't be able to buy your perfumes and all your things.

Larisa - So what! I am already fed up with all those things. Of course I would be a little upset but I wouldn't be dead or disabled. So it is just a game that is not serious at all like chess or something like that.

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Larisa - Yes!

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in your life. This is just the way we are.

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Jarrett - I disagree because I don't, I'm not saying that the job takes first place, but I'm saying that the roles are not as distinct as you are trying to make them, that something comes across . . .

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Jarrett - . . . and that, for example, if you tell a lot of lies here in this room, then, maybe not today, but if you tell a lot of lies in this room for ten or twenty years, then eventually it becomes easier to be the kind of person who tells lies outside of this room.

Larisa and Olya in unison - No!

Olya - Well yes, maybe for some people who are not very good. If you are like this, then you will be like this everywhere. If you are egoistic then you will be egoistic at work, at home, in your relations, everywhere. And people who remain people, human beings, they can be different, they can feel differently in different situations, you put on a new dress here, and another one there. You just change with the situation.

Larisa - Yes, I agree with Olya. It is like a masquerade, you come and play a role and there is a different theme for work and elsewhere. At work lies do not lead to anything important, but in life you can really destroy a person and hurt them very deeply in the heart. And work is not connected to the heart. You understand?

Jarrett - So for you, for example, it is ok to lie to your boss because you don't consider it lying to him as a person but to him as a boss?

Larisa - Yes, to lie to him is like lying to a doll, a working doll. But the same boss, if I go out with him, for instance, and he asks about something in his personal life, I would never lie to him because he is another person in this instance, he is not a boss but a person.

Olya - But I wouldn't say that when I go home after work that I stop thinking about work or these relations, even sometimes I will dream about it. So work is not completely separate but you do change your attitude.

Larisa - No, work is not separate, it is a part of life, but it is an unnatural

part of your life, it is just something that people created. There was as time when people did not work in offices or there were no factories and women did not work, so I mean this is completely unnatural. Nothing has changed in the moral aspect, only now there is this different realm.

Jarrett - So because you consider work an unnatural part of life, somehow the morality that you live according to in life doesn't count here?

Olya -Yes, that is right.

Both Olya and Larisa agree that work is a different world, a different game than real life. As Larisa put it, it is "completely unnatural." But while this difference between real life and the unnatural game of work allow Larisa to so easily lie in the office, it is perhaps what makes it more difficult for Olya. For while Olya recognizes that by occasionally lying she might be more successful, success does not matter to her nearly as much as it does to Larisa. Notice that while Larisa tends to focus on lying in order to preserve her image and sense of responsibility, Olya tends to talk about it as a way of protecting others from worrying. Thus, when Olya lies at work, it is for the sake of protecting her co-workers from unnecessary concern. But this may not always be enough for her to go against her "nature." Thus, at times she becomes confused and cannot easily or quickly lie. On the other hand, when confronted with the possibility that I might not be allowed into the building, Olya was able to quickly and easily lie to the security guard. But why so easily? I had come to their workplace to do the interview because Olya had been so busy recently that she was unable to meet with me anywhere else. She had been so busy with work, often staying until ten or eleven at night, tutoring on Saturdays and church on Sundays, that the only time she could find to sit with me for an interview was at the office after a day of work. Thus, I was there because she had asked

me to come. She had also been putting off the interview for nearly a month. Olya, then, probably felt a sense of obligation toward me and was unwilling to let a young, overly zealous security guard get in the way of us doing what I had come to do. Olya, therefore, lied. Life demanded it.

But if work does not count as real life, if it is an unnatural part of life, then its demands for lying are less palpable for Olya. She may do so to protect herself from the scorn of her co-workers or to protect them from unnecessary worrying, but for Olya these concerns have more to do with the real life-like human relations between her and her co-workers, then with the space of work. Unlike Larisa, Olya recognizes that even in the space of work she is engaged in real relations with other persons. For Larisa, on the other hand, she is not engaged in human relations, but rather in relations with "working dolls" or 'machines." Dolls and machines do not merit moral obligations, rather they are simply pawns in a game, the goal of which is to successfully accomplish your tasks and to look good doing so.

Larisa is able to support this position in a number of ways. First, like Olya, she also claims to be lying partly to protect her co-workers from unnecessary worry. But she also claims that she does it because these are the rules of the game. Everyone does it. She has learned it from the men, the ones who have established these rules and control this unnatural world. Indeed, her boss D., so Larisa claims and Olya agrees, only works as hard as he does in order to prove that he is right about certain things he says and does. In other words, he only works hard in order to maintain an image. Thus, Larisa also lies because this is part of the game. She further rationalizes her lying by emphasizing that this is something she only does in the workplace. While she might lie to her boss at work

because there he is a "working doll," when they see each other outside of work, and this does happen on occasion as people from the office will go out for dinner and drinks from time to time, Olya will never lie to him. As she put it: "But the same boss, if I go out with him, for instance, and he asks about something in his personal life, I would never lie to him because he is another person in this instance, he is not a boss but a person." Outside of work, outside of that particular game, D. is intersubjectively transformed from a boss to a person. As a person, Larisa is unable, so she claims, to lie to him. In such ways, then, Larisa defends her ethics of lying at the workplace and her desire to teach this ethics to Olya.

As our interview progressed, however, I came to learn that Olya is not as averse to lying as she might try to appear. Eventually I turned the interview toward a topic that has continually appeared in past interviews and conversations with Olya, her troubled relations with her brother. I wanted to find out more about this relationship and how Olya handles its turbulence. I came to learn that money often comes between the two of them. Olya's brother, Sergei, much like Larisa describes the men at their workplace, is very concerned with his image. He spends all of the little bit of money he has, for he is still a student in the university, on expensive designer clothes, going to clubs and cafes and generally trying to impress his friends. A story Olya told me about Sergei amusingly illustrates his concern for how others view him.

> Last year when I was teaching and it was Teacher's Day the students brought me a lot of flowers, and because I taught at a private school the students brought me a lot of very nice, expensive flowers. And I brought these home and my brother looked through them and he chose the best one, a big basket of flowers and he asked if he could take them. And I said well they are mine. And he said that he will bring them back. I asked him why and he said he will tell me later. So in the evening he came back

> home and he gave me the flowers and I asked him why he took them, and he told me that he took them with him to his University so his friends would see him and ask why he has these flowers and then he told them that 'these flowers I bought for my sister because she is a teacher and it is her day.'

This story, of course, left us laughing, but it also illustrates the way in which Sergei is concerned with his image and will go to great lengths to present himself to others, especially women, as best he can. This includes stealing large sums of money from Olya and her parents. When I first turned the interview toward the topic of Olya's relations with her brother, I asked how she tries to manage these relations. She replied:

> **Olya** - My relations with my brother are very difficult and sometimes he is very egoistic and I get very angry and I even decide not to talk with him sometimes. And it often has to do with money and we often quarrel about this. And sometimes I decide not to give him anything at all, but he is like Larisa and he can change his personality very quickly. Sometimes he can come to me and be very nice and polite and helpful and I forget about all our troubles and he can be very kind and loving. But when he gets very angry I usually just try to be silent because if I say anything it doesn't matter, he doesn't care, he just gets more and more angry. And he can even run out of the house and slam the door behind him very loudly and everyone in the building will hear it. He is very concerned about himself and sometimes he doesn't even realize that he is doing what he does. Of course sometimes I am not right either and act like a little girl and act very self-assured. And I realize that he often just wants me to be how he wants me to be and he does not like it when I will not be as he wants. And so sometimes we do not understand each other. We are very different from one another.
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> **Jarrett** - So can you think of a specific example of when there is some tension between the two of you?
>
> **Olya** - This is usually about money. Sometimes he wants to borrow money from me and I can't give it to him all the time especially for just going to clubs and cafes. Sometimes I even lie to him because I don't want to give him my money for such things. For example, he asks me for money for his car, but it isn't even his car, it is the one our parents let him use. And when I don't give him money he gets very angry and starts cursing at me and yelling.

> **Jarrett** - And why do you lie?
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> **Olya** - You know I asked my priest about this and he told me that you do not need to tell him that you have money because it is not good, he could use this money for bad things, like buying cigarettes or going to clubs or something. So in this case I need to tell him the lie.
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> **Jarrett** - So you are lying to protect him?
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> **Olya** - Yes.
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> **Larisa** - I think Olya will agree that sometimes you can lie so not to lead another person into temptation.
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> **Olya** - Yes. Or not to make him angry. And it used to be that when he would say some bad words to me then I would react and he would get worse and then it would be like a snowball getting worse and worse. So now I prefer to stop it at once even if I have to lie. I think this takes some moral strength to do this.

In some ways Olya's relations with her brother mirror those with Larisa. Like Larisa, Sergei can take on different personalities. One moment he is angry, abusive and seems only to want to use Olya for her money. The next moment he can be very kind and loving. As with Larisa, Olya can warm up to Sergei when he is loving and easily forget about his bad side. But she knows how he is. To use the terms she used when speaking about Larisa, Olya understands her brother's "nature." He is essentially egoistic and overly concerned with his image. Olya only claims that they don't understand one another when she is referencing their inability to act in expected and desired ways. "I realize that he often just wants me to be how he wants me to be and he does not like it when I will not be as he wants. And so sometimes we do not understand each other." Thus, when Olya speaks of not understanding her brother she is speaking of not understanding him in terms of reasons for a specific act. Otherwise, she is well informed about, or understands well, how Sergei is as a person, that is, his "nature."

Because Olya understands Sergei's "nature" so well, she has come to realize that sometimes it is best to lie to him. While this may not be what she wants to do, she realizes that it takes "moral strength" to do so. Why? By lying to Sergei, Olya has taken on the responsibility of protecting him. This is a responsibility given institutional support through the advice of her priest. In a sense, by lying to Sergei about not having money to give him, Olya is acting as a martyr in order to save her brother. Obviously Olya does not speak in these terms, but by having the moral strength to go against one of the bible's most coveted moral precepts, Olya potentially sacrifices her own moral purity for the sake of trying to protect Sergei from the potential harm of modern, hedonistic society. Not only does Olya lie to protect her brother, but also to protect their relationship. By lying she tries to forestall any potential argument about money. If this does not work, Olya further tries to stifle her own feelings in the situation so as not to respond in anger. Thus, much like she holds herself back from responding to Larisa's aggressive "nature," so too she does this with Sergei in order to avoid a snowball effect of anger. Lying for Olya, then, is not only a way of protecting her brother, but it is also a tactic for avoiding further moral transgression within her relationships with Sergei.

This notion of protecting Sergei is very similar to how Olya spoke about protecting her co-workers from unnecessary worry. But the fact that she cannot lie as easily to co-workers as she can to Sergei only further suggests that Olya interprets the unnaturalness of the workplace differently than Larisa. While this unnaturalness allows Larisa to lie with ease, it presents a problem for Olya. Olya recognizes that sometimes life demands lying. For instance, to get me into her office building or to protect her brother from potential harm to himself. It is in these moments that she can lie more or

less easily, and which is supported by her priest's advice. On the other hand, if work does not count as real life, then lying at work becomes much more of a moral dilemma than lying outside of work. Indeed, it seems that only when Olya is able to think of her relations with her co-workers as normal human relations can she lie to them with ease. Thus, while Larisa can lie to co-workers because she conceives of them as "working dolls" or machines, Olya can do so only when she thinks of them as other human persons.

Olya and Larisa are best friends. This is true despite some of the deep personal differences that exist between the two of them. And yet they overcome these differences because they have come to understand each other as persons. Such understanding allows them to forgive or overlook the other's potential transgressions. The differences are also overcome by the influences each have on the other. Olya tried to help Larisa become a believer of the Russian Orthodox faith, and even though Larisa eventually gave up on this path, she still speaks of that time period as important and influential on how she sees the world today. Likewise, Larisa has influenced Olya. By finding Olya a new, higher paying job Larisa has made Olya's financial life more comfortable. She has also been trying to "teach" Olya what Larisa believes is essential to a successful career. Although Olya recognizes the practical wisdom of much of what Larisa tells her, she still finds it difficult at times to take it on completely. Larisa's influence, then, is only partial. Olya can take on only so much and then will draw the line where she believes it should be. But as in her relationship with her brother, this ability to lie when life demands it reveals that Olya is not as separated from the realities of the world as she may have portrayed in her idealized notion of God's morality. While she may try to live according to what she

considers the highest of all moralities, the contingencies and demands of everyday life make it quite difficult. That Olya's closest friend often tries to convince her of the practicality of going against her own ideal does not make it any easier. And yet this difference does not get in the way of the friendship. Love, respect and mutual influence combine with real differences, the coming together of which create a unique and deeply felt friendship that both Olya and Larisa describe as sisterhood. It is in the maintenance of this friendship that moral expectations, bounds and transgressions must be negotiated, performed and lived out. It is this process that they call understanding.

Chapter 5

Dima

Dima is a thirty-four year old married, but childless, musician and Program Officer with an international AIDS prevention program who has personally benefitted from the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the late-1980s during some of the worst years of perestroika, when store shelves were empty and the hapless economy could no longer be hidden, Dima finished high school and made a decision that would forever change his life. He would forgo the opportunity of attending a university and instead play guitar in a rock band. This decision was more about choosing to stand outside of a social system that he viewed as impeding any opportunity for personal choice in lifestyle and career than it was about choosing to play in a rock group. For Dima, like many others of his and earlier generations had,[130] could have played music and been a student at the same time. In passing on this more conventional path, Dima exercised what he saw as his right to chose the lifestyle he preferred even if this meant finding himself on the margins of a social order that even in the years of official glasnost had very little tolerance for those who lived in these margins.

For the next five years Dima lived a life on the edge. His band had very little success and brought him no money to speak of. He didn't work any other job. Although Dima supposedly lived at home with his parents, he spent most of his nights out with friends or girlfriends sleeping wherever he found himself at the time. He had not yet

[130] Michael Binyon, *Life in Russia*, pp. 184-7; Julia P. Friedman and Adam Weiner, "Between a Rock and Hard Place: Holy Rus' and Its Alternatives in Russian Rock Music," *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev*. Adele Marie Barker, ed., Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.

begun to use heroin but was smoking a lot of marijuana and drinking heavily. Because he had no job and his parents were often reluctant to help him financially, Dima began to steal. This soon became a habit, not so much because he needed to steal, he once told me, but because he enjoyed it. Stealing became more of an addiction than the alcohol and marijuana. So too did his penchant for lying. Both of these gave Dima a rush of knowing that even if just a little, he was standing outside the expected ways of the world. When I met Dima in the fall of 2002 he told me that he had given up his habit of stealing by the mid -1990's but that he still lied pretty often. He assured me, however, that he never lied to me. One wonders what to make of such an assurance, but as of yet I have never caught him in a lie so I personally have never had any reason to distrust him.

In 1994 Dima was walking through central Moscow when he came across a group of Hari Krishnas singing and dancing on the street. Such encounters were not uncommon in the mid-1990s, as the immediate post-Soviet years saw a wave of religious activity hit Russia. Not only did the Russian Orthodox Church experience a major revival in these years, but Russians were also introduced to a wide variety of Protestantisms, non-Western religions, such as the Hari Krishna, and other so-called spirituality cults.[131] Dima stopped and listened, and was immediately captured by the sounds of the Hari Krishna's music. Just as he had once told me that it was the sound of music and not the words that have taught him the most about how to live his life, so too it was in the presence of the sounds of the Hari Krishna that Dima once again chose to radically alter

[131] Eliot Borenstein, "Suspending Disbelief: 'Cults' and Postmodernism in Post-Soviet Russia," *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev*. Adele Marie Barker, ed., Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.

his life by joining this religious group. It was not just the music, however, that attracted Dima to the Hari Krishna. As he put it to me once, when he first visited their center housed in a central Moscow apartment, he felt as if he was walking into a fairy tale. The colorful paintings that covered the walls, incense and candles burning and the sounds of the music all reminded him of the many fairy tales, mythologies and epic tales that Dima had been reading voraciously since his childhood and still reads today. It also reminded him of his childhood. For Dima's mother used to often buy incense and soy sauce at one of the very few Asian stores in the Soviet Union. As he told me, he might have lived in the only family in the entire Soviet Union that knew what soy sauce was. In any case, when Dima walked into the Hari Krishna apartment he felt as if he had walked into a very familiar place.

In many ways the nearly two years between 1994 and 1996 that Dima belonged to the Hari Krishna have helped him become the person he is today. It was with the Hari Krishna that Dima became a vegetarian, gave up his habit of stealing because he learned to de-emphasize material possessions, and perhaps most importantly today and as will be seen later in this chapter, Dima learned the importance of self-discipline for becoming the kind of person he wants to be. Dima learned much in this period of his life and still points to it as one of the most significant. Although he eventually left the Hari Krishna he claims to remain today an "essentially religious person," which means for him someone who respects all life, believes that Good will conquer Evil, and works to better himself and those around him.

One of the reasons Dima left the Hari Krishnas is because it required being very social. Dima is essentially a loner and still to this day prefers to spend most of his time

alone. Another reason is that Dima began to use heroin. As he put it to me, "I did it backwards, most people do the heavy drugs and then join the Hari Krishnas. I left them to start heroin." This change, however, did not get in the way of some of the most important things he learned with the Hari Krishnas. Rather, he thinks it only added to what he had learned. In fact, Dima attributes many of his most personally cherished characteristics to this period of heavy drug use. But it was not the drugs, per se, that helped Dima see the world in a different way, but the drug culture in which he was getting more and more involved. It was in this drug culture of Moscow in the late-1990's that Dima learned the importance of supporting those he loves and have the courage to be himself. It was this experience of being a member of one of the most marginalized groups in Russia,[132] so he told me, that taught him how to be secure in who he is as a person and how to use the strength and courage this brought him to support those around him. It was at this point in his life while still a junky that Dima first learned about Doctors Without Borders and their work with drug users in Russia. Dima claims that using heroin may have been the best thing he ever did for himself. For if he didn't use heroin he never would have come into contact with Doctors Without Borders, nor would he have had the courage and self-confidence, so he claims, to join their organization as a volunteer.

It was this decision to volunteer for Doctors Without Borders that really led to a

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[132] Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch, Jeff Hoover, and Anna Alexandrova, "Unintended Consequences: Drug Policies Fuel the HIV Epidemic in Russia and Ukraine," *War on Drugs, HIV/AIDS and Human Rights*. Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch and Sarah Gallagher, eds., New York: International Debate Education Association, 2004, pp. 194-211.

change in Dima's life. As a friend of his who he first met at Doctors Without Borders recently told me, "when Dima started at Doctors Without Borders he was this skinny little boy riding a bike wearing a green t-shirt that was so big you could fit five Dimas in it, and now he wears a suit and leads these meetings with politicians and business men about the HIV crisis in Russia. This is not the little Dima that I remember!" Soon after joining this organization Dima quit heroin and started working full-time for them. He realized that he could help those junkies who were not as fortunate as himself to have the strength to fight the addiction. Eventually this job led Dima to UNAIDS where he worked himself through the ranks to become a Project Manager, the position he held when I first met him. Ever since realizing that he was happiest working to help others who have had similar experiences as himself but weren't as lucky as he had been, Dima has worked hard to help fight the spread of HIV/AIDS in Russia by helping to organize needle exchange programs throughout the country, negotiating with the government, NGOs and private business for the legalization and funding of such programs, and recently saw the passing of legal reform that he helped to initiate, which legalized the possession of small amounts of marijuana. This reform led to the release of over 40,000 persons from Russian prisons who had been jailed for the possession of very small amounts of marijuana.

The so-called transition years of late-Soviet/post-Soviet Russia have also been a personal transition for Dima. These years have been difficult for most Russians and Dima is no different. But he would never trade them in for a return to the Soviet days. For Dima these personal and social struggles and hardships have ultimately been worthwhile because they resulted in the end of the Soviet era, which Dima characterizes

as boring and grey. In fact, Dima now tends to talk as if the last decade was not all that bad and in fact even better than Soviet times. This is seen in the following excerpt from an interview we had in February of 2003. I began the interview by asking Dima if he thought there was more violence in Russia today than, for example, twenty years ago. He responded:

> **Dima** - Of course a lot depends on what you define as violence, but in general, I guess the same level and maybe now it is even better than it used to be.
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> **Jarrett** - How would you say it is better than it used to be?
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> **Dima** - The violence that we had in the Soviet Union was more related to the desperate conditions of life, like the low salaries and cheap alcohol and the way of life that was connected to it. Meaning that a lot of people didn't see any perspectives in life other than drinking and fighting. That was the kind of violence we used to have. And a lot of it still occurs today. And if you read the news you can read everyday that something like this happens and someone gets stabbed and even members of one family can kill another member, but it is more marginalized than it used to be. But of course this is just my personal opinion. I'm not trying to be objective or anything. On the other hand we have developed organized violence, which is more like youth extremism or something like that. A lot of right wing and left wing stuff going on, which, I would say, is pretty new, a new phenomenon.
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> **Jarrett** - Yet you say in general things are better than they were in the past. What has happened say in the last ten years that makes the situation better today?
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> **Dima** - Generally speaking people have more choices than they used to have. Right now for a lot of people there is a way for them to live their life the way they want to and it is no longer determined by the state and the state no longer dictates what to do. You can . . . you can get a decent education, a good job. There is no limit actually, you can do what you want, you can go live abroad if you want, you don't have to be confined to the one life style that is prevalent in Russia still. And I think that ispositive. For a lot of people that is a real stimulating factor for them to change their way of life for the positive.

Unlike many who characterize the decade after 1991 as more violent, Dima does

just the opposite. For him, the Soviet period was at least just as violent if not worse. But Dima's narrative may be better read as a telling of his own story through the rubric of Russian society in general. Before Dima even begins to tell his narrative he had already made it clear to me that he thinks the Soviet period was much worse than Russia is today. This preunderstanding of Dima's position informs how I hear his words. Knowing this, Dima's claim makes sense. So too does his choice of focusing on the Soviet problems of alcohol and low wages as the cause of violence during that period. For these were two of the very issues that Dima himself struggled with in the late-1980's. Not only did he drink heavily at the time, but his choice to play music in a rock band was in part motivated by his desire to remain outside of a labor market that promised low wages no matter one's education level.[133] Dima's experience as a young adult in the late-Soviet period, then, was in fact characterized by the kinds of personal and structural violence he mentions here.

Dima does, however, return to a more general claim about Russian society when he shifts in mid-narrative by saying "And a lot of it still occurs today." This is not only a shift back to society in general but also to the post-Soviet period. But in making this shift to the continued violence of this period, Dima also shifts his narrative away from personal experience and in so doing continues to talk about his own experience through this distancing discourse. The same problems of alcohol and low wages still today lead to violence, but it is more marginalized and is only known through the newspapers. There are also the problems of organized crime, violence, and extreme politics. But

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[133] Melissa L. Caldwell, *Not By Bread Alone*, pp. 35, 48.

again, these examples of violence in the post-Soviet years are sufficiently distanced from Dima's own life so as to render them, at least rhetorically, negligible in his own experiences.

It is in the next narrative utterance, however, that Dima really begins to talk about society as himself. For what has made post-Soviet society better than the Soviet period is the increase of options and choices for individuals. This is perhaps Dima's biggest complaint about the Soviet period - no personal choice. It should be noted, however, that Dima did in fact make a personal choice to play music rather than follow the socially sanctioned paths of life. In this way, Dima showed that choice was possible if one had the courage to make it. And it should be noted that many more people did have that courage than Dima might be willing to acknowledge. Nevertheless, it is true that personal options have significantly increased for individuals in the post-Soviet period, although Dima is speaking a bit hyperbolically when he says that there are "no limits" of what one can do, for not all people in Russia today are in a position to take advantage of these new found options. Dima is right, however, that the freedom to make choices and have options has done much to stimulate individuals to make changes in their lives not only in terms of career but also in terms of personal practices, habits and beliefs. Dima is just one such example of a person who has made these kinds of changes in post-Soviet Russia.[134]

Our interview continued and I began to push Dima on his perhaps overly positive description of the last decade.

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[134] This is clearly seen in the group of university students Nafus studied in St. Petersburg: Dawn Nafus, *Time, Sociability and Postsocialism*, n/d.

Jarrett - But it seems like there is still a lot of people who are pretty restricted by lack of money and low paying jobs and really don't have those kinds of options.

Dima - Right and I guess that these are still the majority of the population. But it is hard for me to speak of these people because I don't really communicate with them a lot and I think in the circle of people that I meet or the people that I communicate with, on a whole, are definitely a minority. My circle is somewhat younger people with more energy and motivation in life and they are quite different from some other, some marginalized people.

Jarrett - When I visited Ira's family near Nizhni Novgorod it was like two different worlds comparing here to there.

Dima - But actually I think that life is also changing in those places as well, but very slowly. There is a lot of money flowing into Moscow and maybe not so much into Nizhni Novgorod, but this is starting to happen. New work places are being created and all that. And I can still see a positive development.

Jarrett - It actually wasn't Nizhni Novgorod, it was a small industrial city about an hour away, but even there they had an internet café and it was packed with young kids.

Dima - This is what I am saying, you are no longer confined to one life style. It used to be like that. The Communist Party or the state would tell you what to do and you basically had no choice. What choices did you have? I had a choice to either become a worker and work in construction or a factory and develop in that direction or I had a choice to enter a university and then study and then get a job. But then there were no prospects. There was a ceiling for both of these and the ceiling was kind of close, so if you got a good education there was no guarantee that you would go beyond this level - you know, small salaries, a lousy life. Maybe you had better, not better but more educated people to communicate with, that was something maybe, but apart from that . . . I think also if people were allowed to make more money or making some money underground, they couldn't spend that money because the police were always out there watching you. Sometimes I think a lot of people who are complaining about how life is now have quickly forgotten what life was about 20 years ago. I wouldn't say it was all terrible and a horrible nightmare, but it was bad, it was boring, I would say, I would put it like that.

Jarrett - It seems that it is a lot of the older generation who complain

about today and think about the old times.

> **Dima** - I think that they just want to stick to something. You have to have something that you own in this life, something that you can keep to yourself. Because if you have nothing . . . of course whatever I'm saying now I wouldn't like to be in their shoes, you know, because I think what the state did to them is a totally wrong thing. What they are doing in China is much better in a sense. It may be worse in terms of freedom of speech and everything, but it has more guarantees for long term development than what is going on in Russia. We just let it go without any kind of control and everything fell apart. I think this was wrong. And I strongly believe that China learned a lot from the collapse of the Soviet Union and didn't wish to repeat this. But we had ten years and we could have looked at the Chinese model, either way, I'm not saying that what is going on in China is good but some things are definitely better than what we have here. At least, I mean nothing brings down the morale of people as much as lack of care for older people or for children or the army and stuff like that. And this is what we see. We see all these begging soldiers on the street, old people who are picking garbage. I think this is very demoralizing for people and this is absolutely wrong. So I understand them.

When I challenge Dima on the conditions of contemporary Russia he acknowledges that the picture he had so far painted was a bit over optimistic. For the majority of Russians still cannot exercise the options that he referenced that make life better today. But this majority is a minority in his own life. He has very little contact with these people, so he says. Most of his friends are motivated and energetic and it is these people and himself, so it seems, that he was talking about when he characterized post-Soviet Russia as better and less violent than the Soviet years. Indeed, not only in his narrative but also in his own life the majority of the Russian population are "marginalized people." However, even though he acknowledges that most cannot live the kind of life that he has been able to, he jumps on the first opportunity to return to the kind of narrative he had been telling. For when I tell him of the internet café filled with kids, who were in fact all playing video games and not using the internet for communication,

information gathering and entertainment the way Dima uses it, in a small industrial city near Nizhni Novgorod, he quickly grasps onto this in order to reassert his position that life is better today.

This assertion is again made through contrasting the present with the past. But as earlier, Dima talks about the Soviet past through his own perspective. In response to his own rhetorical question of what choices people had for a career in the late-Soviet period, Dima replies by telling me about his own choices. He could have either worked construction or in a factory or attended university. These were his only choices, so he claims. But this strict dichotomy between the world of physical labor and the intelligentsia, while having some legitimacy, is too easily exploited for the purposes of his own story. For if Dima constructs this scenario as his only options in late-Soviet life, then it becomes so much easier not only to justify his own past, which it should be remembered did not follow either of these two paths and thus suggests the presence of options, but more importantly to justify his characterization of contemporary Russia as a place unquestionably better than the past. Just as Dima suggests that some people in Russia today have "forgotten" the past so as to justify their complaints of the present, so too does Dima construct a certain narrative of the past that best explains his present day satisfaction with his own state of affairs.

But just as Dima was able to slip back into this narrative of progress, so too he easily returns to a critique of contemporary Russia when I mention the concerns of the older generation. This seems to touch off something. And it is understandable. For perhaps the older generation more than anyone else in Russia has suffered the most in the post-Soviet years. They have seen a lifetime of work and savings lost to the devaluation

of currency. Their pensions are barely enough on which to survive, and as of January 2005 have become even lower through monetization reforms, and many depend on their extended families for support.[135] Because of this, it is not uncommon to see pensioners prostrated in the middle of the sidewalk, head to the ground with their arms stretched forward, palms up, begging for money and mumbling barely audible prayers. Dima is right, this is demoralizing not only for the pensioner but for anyone who sees it. Most Russians, I suspect, understand that with a slightly different turn of luck, that could have been their own grandmother kneeling prostrate on the cold, damp Moscow ground. And it is such visions, perhaps, that allow Dima to so quickly turn to a critique of the post-Soviet transition. So much so, in fact, that he suggests that the policies of China may have been a better strategy for change than the shock therapy of Russia. It is interesting that Dima would make such a claim even though China's policies lack many of the personal freedoms that Dima so cherishes.

It is in a narrative moment like this, when images of impoverished grandparents or crippled veterans flash through the conversation, that Dima is able to be more realistic about the post-Soviet transition. It should also be noted, however, that Dima is not quite as naive as this narrative might suggest. For certainly he lived through some personal struggles and hardships of poverty, marginalization and instability throughout the nineties. Additionally, his eventual choice of work to help drug users, prostitutes and others who are high risk for the contraction of HIV/AIDS suggests that Dima is extremely sensitive to the hardships experienced by many in contemporary Russia. But

[135] Melissa L. Caldwell, *Not By Bread Alone*, pp. 83-4.

what this narrative makes clear is that Dima is able to narratively construct a Soviet past and a post-Soviet transition that best fits his own experience of these times. There is of course nothing unique about this. Still, Dima, the person who constantly trumpets a very individualistic ideal of social progress and moral expectations, more than anyone else with whom I spoke constructed an account of the past that most closely fit his own experiences. In this sense, then, Dima has provided an account of the so-called transition that is also an account of himself. That is, a story of decreasing violence and increasing stability.

Like many other Russians in their thirties Dima came of age in a time of chaos. This was a time ranging from perestroika through the economic crisis of 1998 when the absurdities, illusions and contradictions of late-Soviet/transitional Russia were open for all to see and shaped the lives of an entire generation.[136] The first time I met Dima he revealed how he enjoys what he calls "the present chaotic state" of Russia. I asked him what he meant by this. "It was not a comfort feeling [the Soviet illusion of future perfection and the present's necessary path to it], it was not a good feeling. It was boring and grey and – life is still grey in many ways but it is not as grey as it used to be. I don't think chaos is that good. If it goes on for too long it will be counter-productive in the end. We will be totally disoriented and we will lose each and every positive thing we have gained, so that is dangerous. Chaotic times may be good for a while, but not . . ." And for some reason Dima just stopped talking. I pressed Dima a bit more but he had

[136] Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

little more to say on the subject. This is what Dima does. He can talk and talk for what seems like hours straight, but when he decides there is nothing left to say on a subject, he just stops. But as I came to know Dima more, I have come to think that perhaps he stopped speaking here because he realized that what he was saying was self-evident, that the story of his own life made this point clear. For in a way, Dima's own life is a story of the gradual movement from chaos to order.

The way Dima spoke in our many conversations and interviews reflects this movement in his life. For although he continually repeats that we should all be free to do anything we want as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else, at the same time he maintains that there are certain definite ways that we should treat others and work on ourselves to be better. This latter position can be seen in the way Dima spoke about his experience of watching the movie *Lord of the Rings*.

> **Dima** - Just two days ago I went to see *Lord of the Rings*, because I had two or three hours and I just wanted to see that movie. And I had tears in my eyes, you know. And I was just sitting there crying like a baby. I look at it this way, if I was really a grown up man I would be cynical about all this . . . it is a great movie, but not great like a David Lynch movie is great. It is great but in a different sense. It's like Good versus Evil. It is difficult to explain, but the way I see it there is a line that goes through the film and, I don't know what happened, but to me it was magic. There were people sitting around me, actually a lot of people were impressed, I could see that. I mean they stopped their usual blabbering and were sitting there looking at the screen. Of course some of the views were breathtaking, some of the landscapes and all that. But I didn't see a lot of the usual, the way people usually behave when they go to the movies. I don't know, maybe it was my impression.
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> **Jarrett** - Do you remember what in particular brought tears to your eyes?
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> **Dima** - There was a scene with the old king and he was possessed. That was the strongest part of the whole film to me, the way Gandalf appeared and he was wearing all white and all that, and he just freed this king. To me that symbolized the power of God, the way that God can liberate

> people, just very easily, the way that Good defeats Evil. So to me it was a very Christian film, or maybe even bigger than that a totally religious film. Without all the unnecesarries . . . I used to be a huge fan of Tolkien when I was a kid, so maybe that is it. But it clearly showed the line between Good and Evil in a beautiful way, and it showed courage and devotion in a very pure way.

Dima, then, is moved by the notion that in the end good conquers evil. So much so in fact that he was moved to tears. Dima, the man who describes himself as very cynical - and I can attest that he is - cried “like a baby” at the sight of good conquering evil. Is it Dima’s hope that good will conquer evil that brought him to work for HIV/AIDS preventions institutions and to help intravenous drug users organize into unions to protect and educate themselves and to receive clean needles? At some level whatever drew the tears out of Dima’s eyes that evening in the movie theater must also play a role in what he has chosen to do with his life and future. But it must also say something about his past. Dima would never describe what he did in the past as evil, but he would describe his present life in better terms than his past. In this sense, then, Dima recognizes a progression in his own life toward the better. Thus, while Dima was not the only one of his generation who spoke to me about the freedom of chaos, he is the only one who spoke of it who believes that he can help make his future and the future of Russia a better time.

Several months later in an interview Dima was telling me about how the drug culture in which he took part during the mid-1990's had a strong influence on him in terms of critiquing mainstream society and coming to understand who he is as a person. It was his experience with this culture, so Dima claims, that solidified his current moral beliefs and ethical practices. Most importantly Dima learned that it is important to have a

goal or idea of who one wants to become. For only with this idea can one begin to work on oneself.

> **Dima** - I left the Hari Krishnas when I started using drugs. The other way around is what happens to most people. And this was very strong in terms of physical emotions and feelings and the reassessment of the world and my place in it. I don't mean just the drugs but the drug culture itself, being different and alternative from the main stream culture and the main stream relationships and ways of dealing with people. Of course I very soon grew disappointed but in the beginning it was very strong.
>
> **Jarrett** - It does get old after a while but at first it is very refreshing because it gives you a chance to step outside.
>
> **Dima** - Right, and to be yourself also. What I remember clearly was that it was probably not the first time in my life, but I felt very strongly that I had an opportunity to be myself and to express myself. Which is not the same as, I don't know, maybe because drugs are so marginalized in our society, I don't know, but it seems like people who are doing drugs have the courage that other people do not have. The courage and openness and everything that comes with it. And I think that is really true for a lot of people when they first start but when you start on that path it will lead you to who knows where, it all depends on the person. You can use it and then throw it out or else it can throw you out. Drugs are probably one of the most dangerous things, similar to sex, in that it can make you forget about yourself. It can really turn you into a totally, into, I don't know what the word would be. Not that drugs in themselves are bad, but drugs and sex are two very powerful drives that can really drive you and if you let them drive you, you can really end up in trouble.
>
> **Jarrett** - I understand how drugs can do this, but how does sex do it?
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> **Dima** - There a lot of people who are crazy about sex and when they loose track of it it just kind of ruins their life, they become slaves to it. I don't think, yeah I understand that there are a lot of things connected to our instincts, and if you are unable to control yourself, it doesn't happen to everyone, not everyone has very strong sexual desires, but many people do and when they do it can take them over, but sex as it is is not dangerous at all. But it can be connected to other things that you might not want to do otherwise but you do because of that. A lot of things people do because of sex, and that is what is dangerous about sex. Not sex as it is, of course, because it is beautiful the way it is.
>
> **Jarrett** - Because it can cause you to forget about other things that are

> more important to you?
>
> **Dima** - Right, and instead of being a serious person you would just end up being a junky, sort of a sex junky. In the way that a lot of people, I mean, to think of it this is an exaggeration because it is not sex as it is, not in itself, but also connected to many other things. It can happen to you if you, I mean there are other sorts of things, not just drugs and sex. Anything.

Dima seems to be weaving two stories throughout the first part of this narrative. First, he is expressing an admiration for the people he met in the drug culture and the kinds of personal characteristics he thinks distinguishes them from mainstream society. Dima found such characteristics as courage and openness among those who participated in the drug culture of the mid-1990s, and attributes them to the marginalization of this culture in the greater Russian society. This courage and openness is not only related to the potential dangers of being marginal, but also about expressing oneself. This is the second story Dima is telling. It was during these years participating in the drug culture that Dima finally had the opportunity to be himself and to express himself. Still today, even though he has not done any drugs in over six years, Dima remains a member of this drug culture. Many of his friends are still junkies, counting some of them among his most trusted, and he continues to work with them in trying to establish needle exchange groups throughout the country.

Just as the drug culture allows for individuals to have the courage and openness to be themselves, so too the actual drugs can potentially lead to the forgetting of oneself. This risk, however, is not unique to drugs, but is true of nearly anything that causes one to forget about oneself. Dima mentions sex. Like drugs, sex can activate a powerful "drive" and cause one to do things that one might not do otherwise. Dima, at this point,

seems to backtrack a bit. He does not want to overemphasize the dangers of drugs and sex. As he says, this is an exaggeration and these dangers can ultimately be associated with anything. For Dima, then, the danger he expresses through drugs and sex is not about the substance and act itself, but about how individuals are able to handle it. The point that Dima seems to be making is that no matter what one does, it is important to remember oneself, remember what is important to oneself, and not to let other things get in the way of this. Our interview continued, and I asked if what he was saying is that it is important to maintain some kind of control over himself.

> **Dima** - It is not that I think about it all the time or I devote a large part of my life to it, but I try not to forget myself in a way, you know. It is sometimes, it doesn't happen, sometimes I just make desperate attempts, and sometimes it does happen and then I am happy because it proves in principle you can do it. But controlling yourself for the sake of controlling yourself is also a stupid thing. You have to have an idea. I believe that you have to have an idea about the things you do, not all the things, but at least the major things, like why you do one thing or the other.
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> **Jarrett** - Do you mean some kind of plan for your life?
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> **Dima** - Kind of like a purpose, however stupid that sounds. I don't want to judge anyone or anything, but some people just live like animals. They get carried away by instincts and then they forget about everything. And this is what I learned from the Hari Krishna people, and I think this is a valuable observation that they make. Because, a lot of things we are doing are not worth it. You can either develop yourself or you can stay in the same situation and you can, you know, just float. This is what I don't want for myself. I don't mind other people doing it, it is fine, as long as they like it. I don't care, if someone says to me, oh there is no god, or I am the only person in this universe for myself. Fine, everyone believes in their own god and if you want to believe in yourself, then believe in yourself. I believe in myself too, up to a certain point. I am not so fatalistic to say that I cannot change anything. Just some things that you don't need to try, they are useless. For instance, life as it is is kind of boring if you happen to work then it is work and no fun, absolutely, then you have to start making things up for yourself. Like joining a movement, say you want to legalize drugs, something interesting something good, for

> instance. But then if you think about it, it doesn't do anything, because if you change that there will be other problems and it will go on and on and on. This isn't to say that we shouldn't do anything. It is just to say that none of these things are that important that you should devote your life totally to it. I don't think it is worth it. I used to be like that. I used to, and even now I really fall for many things, but I am starting to have more control over it. So at one point I can just think to myself. Like I told you about my job [he was recently offered a raise to stay at his current work place at the time]. At first I was opposed to it. But then I was driving along the coast [in California] and I was thinking to myself, and I just thought, ok, I can leave this job, I'm always complaining, I don't like the UN, I don't want to be part of its structure. But if I quit this job, what am I going to do. I won't be able to spend my holidays the way I want to. I mean there is nothing new about these thoughts, I'm sure millions of people have had similar thoughts, that is why people get bought so easily. Maybe in that sense I have grown up, I don't know. A few years ago I would have just quit without giving it a second thought.

For Dima this notion of an idea of who one wants to become has a dual aspect. On the one hand, it is an idea of self. Dima begins this utterance by denying that he spends too much time working on himself, but it is important not to forget himself. The project of working on oneself need not be all consuming, but it is a matter of being oneself. That is, being the self one hopes to be. This, however, is not always possible. Dima makes mistakes. He fails. He does not always remember himself. But this is expected and Dima seems to recognize this when he slips into a meta-critique of his own words by telling me that controlling oneself simply for the sake of control is stupid. For the important thing is that one has "to have an idea."

This reveals the second aspect of the notion of having an idea about oneself. One can only be the person he hopes to be, he can only remember who he is, through the things he does. As Dima has already said, this cannot be done all the time, and so a central part of working on oneself is deciding in which particular moments and contexts this idea can be successfully accomplished. Similar, then, to how many Mongolians pick

and choose between various exemplars depending on the situation at hand in order to work on themselves, so too Dima singles out particular instances that seem most appropriate for working on himself.[137] Part of making such decisions is having a purpose.

Like having an idea, having a purpose gives Dima a reason to do certain things and not to do others. He contrasts this notion of having a purpose with living like animals according to instinct. When one lives according to instinct, and in another conversation Dima told me at times everyone does this, even himself, one forgets about the purpose, about oneself, about everything. Unlike Olya who associates animals with a moral ideal, Dima says that those who live like animals "just float." They are unable to develop themselves into the kind of person they want to be, into a person who has a purpose. This is not what Dima wants for himself.

An attribute of having a purpose is considering the consequences of one's actions. Here Dima's cynicism begins to show. While it is important to break up the monotony of life by participating in some kind of movement or activity - he gives as an example his own participation in the movement to legalize marijuana in Russia - and in so doing give your life and actions a purpose, ultimately such activities don't do much social good. Another problem will arise. But here Dima seems to be confusing his desire to give a purpose to his own life by joining such a movement, with the social results of the movement. While indeed the ultimate goal of the movement is to legalize marijuana, at least one of the reasons Dima joined the group was to give himself a purpose, something

[137] Caroline Humphrey, "Exemplars and rules," p. 35.

to believe in and activities with which to develop himself. Thus, even if the goal of the movement is not realized, at least part of the reason Dima joined the movement is indeed fulfilled even if he does not recognize this as so.

His concern for consequences also shows itself in relation to his job. He had recently told me that he wanted to quit his job at the UN. Then he and his wife went on vacation to California. It was while driving up the coast line that he realized that in quitting his job he could not take such vacations. As he said, "a few years ago [he] would have just quit without giving it a second thought," but now Dima has developed into another person. He considers the consequences of his actions and how they are related to the purposes he has set for himself. It is, then, in such mundane moments that major decisions are made over everyday concerns that help Dima maintain and develop himself into the kind of person he has an idea of being.

Our interview continued and having picked up on Dima's shift in his narrative to a concern for consequences, I asked him if he considers consequences more than he used to.

> **Dima** - I think sometimes people can make up an excuse, because in the back of their minds they want to be secure about things. For example, if someone really wants to cheat on their wife, they will do it. These people usually do it. Really that surprises me. Very often people don't think at all and they just do, and then afterwards they start regretting what they did. I'm very happy, I wouldn't like to live without the ability to look at myself from a distance, to be able to look at what I am doing. Sometimes it is the only thing that helps. People get these kinds of ideas pretty often. Like I have decided for myself, ok, what if I do that and then I catch something. What am I going to do? I don't want that. And however stupid that sounds, it really works for me. I mean every time I think of something like that, I just, somehow it just pops into my mind, and I'm like, oh, that is really serious. I'm working in the AIDS field, you know . . . no I'm not really scared of AIDS, I'm more scared of the smaller sexually transmitted diseases that are quite common here in Russia. If you

catch something like that and then you pass it on to your wife, then you can imagine what will happen. On the other hand, I also don't want to cheat on her because I want her to trust me and I wouldn't be able to trust myself if I do that.

Jarrett - So it's not just about consequences but also about being the kind of person you want to be like being trusted by your wife?

Dima - I think we should always try to look from a longer perspective, this really makes a difference. You have to at least either like what you are doing or train yourself to like it, you know. I don't know, but I think it makes sense to have a habit of analyzing the things you do. Of course you can really become paranoid if you always analyze what you do, but sometimes it doesn't hurt if you do a little of it.

Above Dima suggested that he has to choose particular situations and contexts in which he will work on himself. Here Dima gives an example of the kind of situation in which he chooses to work on himself, that of cheating on his wife. In this example it is possible to see how Dima combines the notion of working on himself or developing himself with that of looking toward consequences. Not only is he concerned about what diseases he may catch and pass on to his wife by cheating, but so too is he concerned about her not trusting him. Therefore, it is more than the knowledge of the possible diseases he can contract, a knowledge that comes predominantly through his job, but also his desire to cultivate a trusting and lasting relationship with his wife. Thus, in Dima's consideration of the consequences of adultery, there are multiple factors that go into his decision.

This way of developing himself by means of considering various consequences is what Dima calls looking "from a longer perspective" or "at myself from a distance." These two expressions of distancing himself from himself reveal Dima's conception of self-analysis and self-development. Thus, just as Pesmen has claimed it is central for

many Russians to engage in these practices of analysis and development to maintain a healthy *dusha* (soul),[138] for Dima the rhetorical distancing of self-analysis allows him to work on himself to become the kind of person he wants to be. By performing this distance, Dima is able to consider not only the situation and the dilemma it may entail, but more importantly for him, it allows Dima to consider himself, it allows him not to forget himself, and the things that are truly important to him. Because he is able to perform this distance, Dima can realize that for himself it is more important to maintain a trusting relationship with his wife and remain disease free than it is to be driven by his sexual instinct. As he put it, he may not like this decision, but in order to be the kind of person Dima wants to be, he must "train [himself] to like it."

This notion of working on himself, or developing himself, to be the kind of person he wants to be was common to many of the conversations and interviews that Dima and I had. Ironically, despite his open disdain for all things Soviet, Dima's emphasis on working on himself (*rabota nad soboi*) is reminiscent of the Soviet discourse of creating the New Soviet Man by means of individual self-disciplining.[139] As Oushakine has pointed out, because many of the disruptions and changes of the post-Soviet years so closely resemble those of the 1920s and 1930s, so too do many of the current rhetorical and disciplinary practices of contemporary Russia resemble those of

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[138] Dale Pesmen, *Russia and Soul*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 54fn.

[139] Alexander M. Etkind, "Psychological Culture," *Russian Culture at the Crossroads: Paradoxes of Postcommunist Consciousness*. D. N. Shalin, ed., Boulder: Westview Press, 1996, pp. 107-9; Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*.

nearly a century ago.[140] As Kharkhordin has convincingly shown, this early Soviet emphasis on working on the self had its roots in the pre-revolution Russian Orthodox Church and continued well into the late-Soviet years.[141] Indeed, these practices continue in the post-Soviet years. Pesmen argues that the tropes of self-analysis and suffering are central to the ways in which her informants spoke of working on themselves, and that they believe such practices are the necessary "work of *dusha*."[142] Similarly, Rivkin-Fish shows that among reproductive health activists in Russia, there is a "common tendency to construe their work for reproductive health as a mission to promote moral changes in interpersonal relationships and the development of personality (or what might be called 'work on the self')."[143] As can be seen, then, regardless of Dima's rhetorical attempts to distance himself not only from the Soviet past, but also from many of what he calls his "mainstream" contemporaries, his emphasis on working on and developing himself has much in common with past and present moral discourse in Russia.

This emphasis came out, for example, in the interview when Dima was telling me that he thinks the Chinese model of transition is a less demoralizing model than the shock therapy model used by Russia. He had just told me that he thinks it is "absolutely wrong" that there are begging soldiers and elderly people in the streets, and I asked him

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[140] Serguei A. Oushakine, "The Flexible and the Pliant: Disturbed Organisms of Soviet Modernity," *Cultural Anthropology*, 19(3), 2004, p. 396.

[141] Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*.

[142] Dale Pesmen, *Russia and Soul*, p. 54fn.

[143] Michele Rivkin-Fish, "'Change Yourself and the Whole World Will Become Kinder': Russian Activists for Reproductive Health and the Limits of Claims Making for Women," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 18(3), 2004, p. 284.

how it was that he recognizes such things as wrong.

> **Dima** - It is difficult to say, because in principle I have strong beliefs about some things, but these don't correspond with life. Because I also believe that life can be different and some people don't realize that. An example is that, you know the Orthodox Church is very strong here, and for example they don't like gay people. And they have a lot of things against gay people and what they are trying to do is persecute them using the Russian government. I mean these attempts are still few and small but I can see a clear tendency that they are very intolerant. And I understand the reason for that, for instance, they think that what gay people are doing is immoral and wrong. But I also believe that they have failed to take into consideration that this is a different state of mind that people have today and that we are living in a different place and a different time. I mean this is no longer Tsarist Russia in the 19th century. So this is just an example of where things can go wrong when people start thinking in terms of moral versus immoral. I think that as long as something does not physically hurt someone, it should be ok, whatever it is, being sexual life or political views or anything of that sort. I don't know. This is probably naive but this is my criterion for me and the way I see things.
> For me there are many things in the outside world that I do not like because I'm essentially a religious person, right. And I don't know how it happens . . . but I don't like modern pop culture, I don't like television, I don't like what they show in the movies. I mean, in no way am I going to attack those people or say anything, I just prefer not to watch it whenever it is possible. That is the end of the story for me. I don't actually want to impose my beliefs on other people, right. But I still have some strong views on these things and I consider them religious in a way. Because they somehow conform to some religious standards in a way.

> **Jarrett** - But you don't necessarily go around judging someone or . . .

> **Dima** - No, no, I definitely judge them for myself, of course. And I prefer to touch some things and not other things. But I would definitely not take part in a protest against a gay club or Russian television or something like that. In fact, I just mentioned the gay club not because I'm against it, actually this particular thing of different sexual preferences I don't have any opinion about. I have a lot of friends who are straight and I have some great friends who are gay and I don't actually see any difference contrary to what many people believe, like gay people have different mentalities, it's all bullshit. It just depends on what kind of person you are. So about this I don't have any kind of opinion. I might have some opinions about other things, like when people start exploiting this in a commercial way, and I don't like it, but this is something different. And I would still not try to protest against it. That is not for me. I would just try

to close my ears and eyes to it. It would be safer (little laugh).

What begins to become clear here and what I came to realize after several other interviews and discussions with Dima, is that he prefers not to think in terms of morality. For Dima the notion of morality is connected to institutions of power such as the Church, and in another casual conversation he spoke to me about the imposition of morality by the government. These institutions use the notion of morality as a way to impose their own view onto society and, so it would seem, not take into account changes that have occurred within society. Thus, the Church, according to Dima, is still thinking in terms of the nineteenth-century. For Dima, then, "things can go wrong when people start thinking in terms of moral versus immoral." Such thinking can potentially lead to persecution due to the intolerance seemingly inherent to the very idea of morality.

Instead of thinking in terms of moral and immoral, Dima prefers to think in terms of the kind of person he himself would like to be and the kinds of activities and practices in which he wants to participate. Others can do what they like as long as it doesn't physically hurt others. Dima acknowledges that perhaps in what he calls mainstream society or in the eyes of certain institutions such a conception may appear naive, "but this is [his] criterion for [himself] and the way [he] sees things." It is, then, Dima's moral conception. Or perhaps more appropriately put, his personal ethic.

Such an ethics entails understanding the kinds of activities and practices he prefers to avoid. This includes a good deal of what Dima calls modern culture. His ethics of self-interest are informed by what he calls religious standards. Although he claims he is influenced by religion, he does not associate with any Church institution. This further maintains Dima's distinction between the moralization of institutions and his

own personal ethics. Even though Dima does not subscribe to a notion of morality in the institutional sense, this does not stop him from judging others with whom he does not agree. The difference is that while Dima may judge others, he does not attempt to change their minds or stop them from doing something with which he does not agree. As he put it, "I would just try to close my ears and eyes to it." This, however, is not entirely true. For Dima did play a significant role in the recent changing of a Russian law concerning the minimum amount of marijuana a person is legally allowed to possess, the result of which led to the release of about 40,000 people from prison. Thus, Dima does not always close his ears and eyes to things with which he does not agree. But while this example is connected to his work and other drug-related movements, Dima here seems to be speaking more about his personal relation to what he calls modern culture and others' relations to it, whether these relations be protests or the commercial exploitation of it. Others can do what they want, and Dima too will do his own thing.

Dima, however, is not always able to live up to his own standards. This was revealed as our interview continued.

> **Jarrett** - So if you judge others, do you also judge yourself? For example, if you realize that you have done something that goes against your own standards what do you do?
>
> **Dima** - First of all I try to, its really hard, because people are driven by instincts a lot and I don't like it. I understand that this is how we are built, but still I'm sure there are ways to deal with it. You can teach yourself to do some things and not to do other things, in principle, what ever you choose to be right or wrong for yourself. This is what I mean. So if I do something wrong from my own point of view or from my inner self point of view, first of all, I don't know, its really painful. Its really painful. And sometimes it gets me really depressed. But I'm kind of helpless about many things. I just do something and then I regret it and then maybe I do it again and then I regret it again and it continues like this until the moment when I can stop doing it. But then maybe something else will

come up.

Jarrett - Do you think there is something that you can do to train yourself not to do these things?

Dima - I believe that some people can do that, but not me, not me. I guess that I always wait until the moment that I am conscious about it and then it is usually very easy for me to stop doing something. Like taking drugs or drinking alcohol or a lot of things I used to do in my life that I don't do anymore.

Jarrett - You said that a lot of people act on instinct, what do you mean by that?

Dima - I guess that we all tend to act on instinct, I don't know. It is hard to say, but I can give you an example. You know that I have a wife, but I also work in an environment where there are a lot of different girls working in my office. And usually it is ok. But just a few days ago one of them put on a different kind of dress. Usually everyone at this office dresses in a proper way because they have to uphold certain standards. But this time her dress was sort of revealing, a lot, and I caught myself thinking about that for several hours. Really, you know. There is nothing that I could do about it. And I wouldn't go and say that it was wrong and that it is horrible but it is just that I remember that I couldn't help but think about it. So somehow I got aroused by it and that is one of the inexplicable things to me, how things like that happen. And that I believe is proof that we very often get caught by instincts. Although if you start thinking rationally you could of course pretend that everything is alright and that it doesn't exist and that I have a wife and I'm not going to do anything about this anyway. I'm not going to go flirting with girls in my office. But it just sticks somewhere in the back of my mind.

In response to my question Dima wants to begin by telling about the pain he feels when he transgresses. This desire, which is indicated by his parallel use of the phrase "first of all" to frame both the beginning of his narrative, as well as the beginning of his particular utterance on pain, is interrupted by his setting of the background against which suffering should be understood. As in another interview discussed above, Dima again uses the rhetoric of instincts to characterize individuals who are unable to "choose" to act in the way that is "right" for themselves. As he puts it, he understands that "we are built"

with instincts and that if we don't try to overcome them they will control us, but he is "sure there are ways to deal with it." He suggests that one is able to "teach" oneself to do certain things and not others. Once again, then, Dima is emphasizing the necessity for people to work on themselves to become the kind of person they want to be, even, as he put it in another interview, if they don't like it.

Dima's attempt to do just that is seen in the example he gives of how instincts can sometimes take over. Dima cannot take his eye or thoughts off of the scantily dressed woman in his office. He doesn't understand why he would do such a thing, it is not what he wants. And yet, he looks, he thinks, he desires. These are not wrong, he reassures me. He is not judging himself against some moral standard of what is right and what is wrong. Rather, this is troubling because he "couldn't help but think about it." Dima, then, is troubled by this situation because he is unable to control his thoughts about this woman and *that* is what goes against his own ethical standards. He is unable to be the kind of person he wants to be. He has lost control of himself. The danger, then, is that these uncontrollable thoughts could potentially lead to an act that he definitely does not want to do. Most likely, though, this will not happen. Dima is quite disciplined about this. But he just cannot control his thoughts. He suggests the way, however, that he tries to control them. If "you start thinking rationally you could of course pretend that everything is alright and that it doesn't exist and that I have a wife and I'm not going to do anything about this anyway." By thinking "rationally" Dima suggests he can try to control his unwanted thoughts, his instincts. This rationality, however, leads to delusion. For in thinking rationally he is only pretending that he doesn't have such thoughts. It is through what we might call rational imagination, then, that Dima is able to control his

thoughts and not actually physically act out his transgression. Still, this unwanted thought “sticks somewhere in the back of [his] mind.” In some cases, then, try as he may, Dima cannot entirely be the kind of person he wants.

What I have called rational imagination is not the only way Dima works on himself. For before he gives the example of his reaction to the woman in his office, he talks about the moral suffering he feels when he makes a transgression. Thus, after having established a background understanding for why moral suffering is an appropriate response to transgression, Dima returns to his first words to frame his utterance on suffering. “First of all, I don’t know, it’s really painful. It’s really painful.” By laying down this background understanding, Dima suggests that his moral suffering is, at least in part, a result of having acted by “instinct” rather than according to what he chooses to be right for himself. This echoes what he said in an earlier interview about the importance of not forgetting oneself and is shown in the example of his reaction to the woman in his office. When Dima transgresses his own moral expectations, he would say that he has forgotten himself and acted instead according to instinct. The realization of having done so makes Dima “really depressed.”

This depression leads Dima to a kind of repetitive state of suffering and a feeling of helplessness that in Dima’s case makes it difficult for him to change. “I’m kind of helpless about many things. I just do something and then I regret it and then maybe I do it again and then I regret it again and it continues like this until the moment when I can stop doing it.” Dima claims to continue to transgress and in this way repeats and prolongs his own suffering. His inability to change and his claim to be “helpless” seem to articulate his inability to break out of his “instinctual” being and to remember himself

and the way he wants to be. Thus, Dima is unable to stop thinking about the woman in his office and even after he attempts to rid himself of such thoughts, they linger in the back of his mind. Dima is helpless in the presence of these instinctual thoughts. His suffering and instinctual behavior continues until he is finally "conscious" of it. At this point, Dima realizes that this is not what he would choose to do and can stop acting that way fairly "easy."

Dima emphasizes the repetitive nature of his moral suffering in his narrative description of it. This is seen in the last sentence of his initial utterance on suffering. "But then maybe something else will come up." In this way Dima further emphasizes the repetitive nature of suffering not only in particular cases of transgression, but also in terms of the never-ending repetition of transgression itself. Because according to Dima humans are a combination of instinct and self-discipline, slippage into instinct as transgression is always possible, and thus so too is moral suffering. Indeed, it may even be necessary if moral suffering, as Pesmen has claimed, is considered an integral aspect to working on oneself.[144]

How does this repetitive moral suffering help Dima work on himself? When I asked him if he thought there was something he could do to train himself not to transgress, he rejected this notion with some force. This is just the way he rejected my question about having a plan for life in another interview. Dima considered a plan to be too structured for the contingencies of human life, so too is the notion of training oneself. Instead, Dima waits "until the moment that [he] is conscious" about his suffering and

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[144] Dale Pesmen, *Russia and Soul*, pp. 54-9; see also: Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk*, pp. 159-60.

behavior and it is at that point, so he claims, that he can pretty easily change. This suggests that for Dima moral suffering plays a significant role in his ability to become conscious of his transgressive behavior. If it was not for his suffering and depression, then of what could he become conscious? Dima, then, articulates suffering as the subjectively felt experience of his transgressions. As such, it is his becoming conscious of this suffering experience that leads him to remember himself and how it is that he wants to be, and thus, to be able to stop transgressing against himself and, as he put it, not to do it “anymore.” In this way, moral suffering helps Dima to work on himself to become the kind of person he hopes to be.

For Dima, then, working on himself is a tactic to maintain his own, personal ethics, rather than a strategy for living according to an institutionally endorsed morality. Not only does Dima reject the very idea of this kind of morality, he also rejects the idea that his own ethics are in some way, as he put it, virtuous. As the following excerpt from an interview indicates, Dima is not concerned with being virtuous, good or perfect. Instead, his conception of his personal ethics has to do more with participating in the kinds of practices that he enjoys. It is, then, a very self-interested conception of ethics that focuses more on a kind of lifestyle, rather than the rightness or wrongness of particular acts.

In February of 2005 Dima invited me to his apartment for dinner and afterwards we sat over tea for an interview. One of the things I wanted to ask him was to say more about his notion of having a purpose in life, or what he had called a challenge in a conversation we had the week before in a coffee shop.

Jarrett - You have talked about the importance of having a purpose or a challenge in life. What do you mean by this? Do you consider this a way to better yourself?

Dima - Yes, it is important. It's definitely very important.

Jarrett - Can you give an example?

Dima - We were talking about being a vegetarian for instance. For me it is also about making things comfortable, not easy, but comfortable. I wouldn't be a vegetarian if I wasn't comfortable. It isn't really mainstream here, and probably not in any other country except for India. But for me it was a challenge. I like pleasant challenges, I don't like unpleasant challenges like challenging a group of racists or something. I wouldn't like this kind of challenge. [laughing]

Jarrett - When you choose a challenge, do you think of this as trying to better your self in some way?

Dima - Yes, definitely.

Jarrett - How?

Dima - Well in a way that makes me more flexible and able to discover new things for myself and making myself better and learning more things about myself and the outside world?

Jarrett - What have you learned about yourself in trying to be a vegetarian?

Dima - Not about myself maybe, but about animals for instance. I've become more interested in animals. It is interesting not to do something that most people do. This itself is a challenge. Of course we have a circle of friends who are also vegetarians or who don't ask us about it. But as soon as we get around people who don't know us then they start asking . . . So you know, I've done lots of little challenges for myself, like stop smoking, becoming a vegetarian, exercising more, this is also a challenge. I think this is all pretty common.

Jarrett - What do you mean?

Dima - Well there are all kinds of challenges. You could be a Muslim and go fight in Iraq for instance, this is a challenge. This is not a common challenge, but leading a healthier way of life is pretty stereotypical, this is what they always tell you to do.

Jarrett - Does that take away from it?

Dima - No, not at all.

Jarrett - Have you always been this way, wanting to challenge yourself?

Dima - No.

Jarrett - Why did you start?

Dima - I can't remember, it was a long time ago. But I think becoming a vegetarian has helped me in a lot of ways.

Jarrett - When did you become one?

Dima - I think 1987. But I had a lot of breaks in the meantime, unfortunately. I really value this, but I don't think it is that important in the overall scheme of things. I don't think it's virtuous or anything.

Jarrett - What do you mean not virtuous?

Dima - Well I don't know. Sometimes people think that, well we all have this illusion that if we do this or that then we will be better or that we will deserve a better fate, but this isn't so. You know sometimes people say, oh Christ why did this happen to me I don't deserve this. But this is the way life is, no one deserves anything. It either comes your way or it doesn't. Who knows why this happens. What I'm trying to say is that if you try to be a better person by being a vegetarian or a philanthropist or something it really doesn't bring you anywhere. You really don't get anything from this. It doesn't save you.

Jarrett - So why do you do it?

Dima - Well I guess the sane thing is to do things for yourself. To learn more and improving your understanding of the world. But it isn't very easy because we, people in general tend to have this delusion that if I do this now then things will be better tomorrow, but it doesn't work this way. Who knows, maybe there is this connection, but maybe there is not. Maybe by becoming a more honest person you improve your karma and it gives you a better fate, but maybe it doesn't.

When Dima speaks about working on himself it does not always have to do with overcoming certain transgressions, such as thinking about his female co-worker. It is

also about living the kind of life, or lifestyle, that he wants for himself. Thus, when I asked him about having a purpose in his life he shifted the emphasis to taking on challenges. This shift, while minor, indicates that Dima prefers to think about his development in terms of working on specific practices, rather than his life as a whole. By focusing on the challenges of vegetarianism or not smoking Dima can gradually and with a compartmentalized focus develop into the kind of person he wants to become. In articulating these particular challenges, then, Dima reveals the minute, practical and lifestyle oriented nature of his development.

Not only are these challenges practice and lifestyle oriented, they are also, for the most part, what Dima calls stereotypical. They are "what they always tell you to do." In this sense, then, although Dima tends to reject institutional and "mainstream" morality, he takes on the kinds of personal and ethical developmental projects that are socially sanctioned.[145] Even vegetarianism, which is very unusual in Russia, fits into the greater social focus on living a healthy lifestyle. Therefore, while Dima often prides himself on living on the margins of society, increasingly Dima is becoming more attuned with social expectations and behavior. If anything, Dima has gone from living on the margin of society as a nearly homeless musician who shot up on heroin, to a person that many would recognize as the picture of a socially successful person: a person who earns a very good, western salary, who has worked himself up the ladder of various international developmental and relief organizations and now lives a comfortable life with his wife in a good neighborhood in Moscow. In some ways, then, Dima's own image of himself no

[145] Michele Rivkin-Fish, "Personal Transitions and Moral Change After Socialism: The Politics of Remedies in Russian Public Health."

longer matches with the person he has become.

Still, despite his successes and the ability to work on himself in a way that allows him to live the kind of life he wants, Dima does not think of himself as a "virtuous" person. He does not live under the illusion that by doing certain things or living a certain lifestyle he will become a better person or deserve, as he put it, a better fate. Rather, he performs certain challenges and works on himself in certain ways so as to be "sane." Similar to how Susan Wolf speaks of moral agency as the attempt to live a sane or acceptable life, so too Dima only hopes to live a life that he can find acceptable for himself.[146] He only hopes to live a life, as he put it with vegetarianism, with which he is comfortable. Dima, then, has no hopes of living a virtuous life that is recognized by others as morally expected or even exemplary. Rather, for Dima the purpose of his life seems to be to live as much as he can according to certain lifestyle and behavioral standards that he has thoughtfully and informatively set up for himself. As he put it to me the following week in a conversation we had in a coffee shop, working on himself "makes my life interesting and actually worth living because I can see a goal. I improve myself, think about it, improve myself, think about it, improve myself, think about it. Otherwise, life has absolutely no meaning. And Russians are especially interested in this question of the meaning of life. It is in their literature and so on. I think it is because deep inside they are very religious and moralistic. And since I was brought up in this culture obviously it is quite an important goal for me." Here it becomes clear that the

[146] Susan Wolf, "Sanity and the metaphysics of responsibility," *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*. F. Schoeman, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 46-62.

quest Dima has undertaken to work on himself and live in certain ways is for the purpose of giving meaning to his life. To live sanely, then, is to have meaning. Thus, while Dima may attribute this quest for meaning to his cultural upbringing, the meanings themselves accomplished through the various challenges he undertakes are established by Dima himself. For in choosing which challenges, purposes and ways of living best suit him, Dima is at one and the same time living the life he desires and imputing meaning to that life.

Although Dima claims that his quest for meaning in his life comes from being brought up in Russian culture, Dima is actually ethnically Armenian. Nevertheless, Dima was born and raised in Moscow and his family has lived there for three generations as members of the Communist Party. Still his status as a non-ethnic Russian has led him to have a great sensitivity to racist attitudes and behavior in Russia. He is often quick to accuse someone, usually a politician or some other public figure, of being a racist, and as far as I can tell it is the mark by which he judges the quickest and most harshly. Several times in our conversations and interviews Dima spoke about the moral dilemma he has felt about interacting with racists in his own life or how racism is one of Russia's most wide spread and dangerous moral concerns. One such example happened when we were casually hanging out in his apartment in January of 2005. Dima was telling me about all the traveling he had been doing recently for his job and how he was looking forward to it ending soon so he could relax at home for awhile. He then told me that two weeks earlier he had been in St. Petersburg and that he liked the city very much, but whenever he goes there he always gets lost walking around. I half joked that this is probably because

everything looks the same in Petersburg, referring to the planned European-style architecture of the city. He smiled and said, "yes that could be, and everyone is racist there too." This is what it is like to have a conversation with Dima; topics shift and conversations change in mid-sentence all of the time. I never know if I should take Dima literally when he speaks or to read into these shifts more so than in most conversations. It is possible that Dima meant that he always gets "lost" in a metaphoric sense of not feeling at home among the palpable racism of Petersburg. If this is what he meant, it was not exactly clear at the moment.

Because I was unsure how to read his comment, I simply asked if he thought that there was more racism in Petersburg than in Moscow. He replied, "I don't know, but it is the only place in Russia that an anti-racist activist and scholar has been killed." This is in reference to the recent murder of Nikolai Mikhailovich Girenko by a local racist group in St. Petersburg. "They even posted it on their website beforehand. Now they have posted another death sentence for the Governor." The first time I met Dima two years earlier he had told me that he thought there was a real possibility that the far right nationalists, with the support of local racist groups, could take control of the government. I asked him if he still thought this was true. "If things get bad, if something happens to upset this small amount of stability we have now, it could definitely happen," he replied. I asked him what he thought about Putin's move to the right and his alliance with the United Russia party, a newly formed nationalist-leaning party that is for all intents and purposes Putin's party. He responded with a whimsical smile, "I hate Putin. Now I can understand how some Americans feel about Bush. There is something really scary about this guy [Putin], you don't know what he can do." He paused for a few seconds and continued, "But there

are good things about him, for example, he speaks very good Russian. This is a big step for our leaders."

This last comment can be read in different ways. On the one hand it could be meant as an actual compliment to Putin, who is considered by most to be an intelligent and capable leader despite possible differences of political opinion. Or it could be read as an ironic statement, since compliments on the ability of one to speak proper Russian is often a mark of nationalist discourse. Or it simply could have been an amusing reference to the provincial speech for which Gorbachev was so often mocked or the drunken slurs of Yeltsin.

However one reads Dima's words, though, this exchange, which was at this moment interrupted by someone else in the room and so the topic changed entirely, says something about Dima's personal way of being in post-Soviet Russia, as well as the way he so often depicts the world around him through his own experiences and interpretations. For despite being an acculturated Armenian living in Moscow, Dima remains very sensitive to the abundance of nationalist and racist discourse and practice in Russia today. This sensitivity is undoubtedly one of the central prisms through which Dima interprets and understands the world in which he lives. And as this killing in Petersburg suggests, there is certainly much for Dima to be sensitive about in contemporary Russia.

When we met again in February of 2005 I had in mind this conversation about racism in Petersburg and Russia when I asked Dima if he had ever had any experiences with skinheads. He replied:

Dima - Well probably every ethnic minority in Russia has experienced

this at some point in their life. But at a more general level, I think it is a very negative thing for a country to have, it is an obstacle to growth. But also I think it is inevitable to a point when there is a change in countries from a more rural and traditional life to a more urban and modern and diverse future. You cannot enter this future all at once. There will be clashes. Still it is a very ugly phenomenon. I understand the rationale behind it, though. It is the same as if I live in a small town or village and I see one day that a bus comes in carrying 100 people from out of town who do things differently from myself. They talk loud and do things differently then I do. And Russia is such a big country and there is always this perception that Russia has such a rich culture that a lot of the neighboring cultures do not have, so it always seems like they are inferior. Which is not true of course. Some of these countries, like Tajikistan and Armenia, existed 1000 and 2000 years ago.

Jarrett - So there is nothing in particular that has happened to you that really sticks out?

Dima - No it has already, of course, of course. Since I was a kid it has happened on a number of occasions. But I think a number of non-ethnic Russians would tell you they had to live with this. No matter how hard you try to fit in to this society it is impossible because they will always remind you about how you are different. It is the same as seeing a black person everyday, but still people are curious. How is it that we are white and he is black? In this country it doesn't change for whatever reason. Or people will keep blaming Jews for whatever happens, you know, as they did 100 years ago, 200 years ago, 300 years ago, this is a very traditional psychology. But I wouldn't say that it is very bad, I haven't encountered it very many times, but on a number of occasions of course I have. Not as bad as Chechens. For them it is much more difficult. I have been called names and attacked a few times by skin heads.

Jarrett - Recently?

Dima - No not recently, the last time was probably 3 years ago. Two years ago, in 2002. I was standing at a bus stop and I got attacked by 6 or 7 teenagers. I didn't want to . . . also the more you experience it the more you don't even want to fight with them because then you will have to deal with the cops, so you just do what you can to prevent it from happening.

Jarrett - What did you do?

Dima - There was a music shop right there, so I just ran in and I closed the door just in time because they were running after me. And they immediately found someone else, immediately. I looked outside in two

minutes and they were beating someone else just outside. And I wanted to call the cops, but somehow I didn't do it.

Jarrett - Why?

Dima - I had a cell phone and I thought I should call the cops and tell them what was happening and then I thought, no.

Jarrett - Why?

Dima - Just being lazy probably. It wasn't because I was afraid to deal with the police or anything, it's that they wouldn't be able to do anything anyway. They would be looking and finding nothing. Because they just looked like regular teenagers. I didn't think they were skinheads at first from the way they looked. But I could see that as a group they had this group dynamic that regular people don't have, like they were looking around for a target and then they saw me. Because this was at the time when they started being smarter and not dressing like skinheads with the boots and everything. They just looked like football fans.

Jarrett - So you just went home?

Dima - Yeah, and it hasn't happened since.

Jarrett - What happened to the person that got beat up?

Dima - I don't know, I looked outside and saw it happen, and I walked back into the store and talked to the guy who worked there and he said maybe we should call the cops and then I walked outside and no one was there anymore, not even this guy, so I thought, probably I should just go, so I left.

Jarrett - You know, when I was here before [during the main part of my fieldwork in 2002-3] I met some Chinese students at MGU and they were always very scared about these skinheads and racists and never went anywhere alone.

Dima- That was definitely not an exaggeration. I was talking with this one skinhead once and he was telling me that we had a lot of fun with these students, we really got a lot of physical exercise. We would go there every night and just wait in this underpass in the corner and they would enter and not notice us and we would just jump them.

Jarrett - When were you talking with skinheads?

> **Dima** - With my older job, and I had some friends among them before that, but I kind of know how these people are. And there are some nice people among them. Well educated, intelligent. It is not like they are all drunk with a low IQ. Absolutely not.

Dima, like most other non-ethnic Russians, has experienced the palpable racism of Russia. He has learned to accept it and even understand it. And it is for this reason, not only his possible laziness, that led Dima not to call the police during this incident. As he put it, the police could not, and very possibly would not, do anything. Indeed, it is not uncommon that some police support the activities of racists and skinheads. In early February 2005 the chief of the Moscow police stated during a news conference that there are no skinheads in Moscow. This is, of course, an absurd statement and has been interpreted as indicating an official proclamation of turning the focus of the police away from right-wing groups in Russia to the increasingly active left-wing groups.[147] Thus, Dima's apparent indifference to this situation can be understood as a combination of an acceptance of a racist culture, understanding of institutional apathy for the problem, and a personal desire to find safety as quickly as possible.

What is surprising about Dima, however, is that despite his experiences with racism and his disdain for this attitude, he does have some friends who are open racists. This is made clear at the end of his narrative when he says that he has been friends with some skinheads and that some of them are quite intelligent, educated and even nice. It is this seeming contradiction that I would like to explore further. For while on the one hand, Dima is an avid anti-racist, he is still able to have some friends who are in fact

[147] Carl Schreck, "Police: No Skinheads in Moscow," *The Moscow Times*, February 3, 2005.

racists. When Dima first told me this in 2002, the very year in which he was last attacked, I found this a bit surprising. How could a person who was so adamant about his anti-racist position and his concern for a right-wing, nationalist coup also have friends who were openly racist? In answering this question it is possible to better understand the ethical life of Dima. For the answer shows how Dima's ethical life is not centered around solidified positions of right and wrong or good and bad. Rather, Dima chooses to act in ways and live a life that best suits his desires, even if some of these choices contradict one of his strongest held beliefs. One of his desires is to have friends who are very creative, intelligent and interesting. It is this desire that in one particular case came to override his anti-racism. Part of this desire is Dima's love for *obshchenie*, which for Dima consists of the kinds of one-on-one, intimate relations he can have in the context of good conversation, rather than the kind of large group sociability that led him to leave the Hari Krishna. In fact, Dima once admitted to me that he enjoys doing interviews with me because he considers them a kind of *obshchenie*, an open conversation in which he can learn about himself and others and in so doing face the world in a different way.[148] As will become clear in the following narrative, this desire for having *obshchenie* with a creative and interesting person trumped his anti-racism.

One brisk October evening in 2002 I met Dima in the square in front of the Bol'shoi Theater. After sitting and talking for a bit at one of the benches, we bought a couple of beers from a kiosk and strolled the old streets behind the theater. Similar to many ancient European cities, these streets are a hodgepodge of 18th and 19th century

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[148] Anna Wierzbicka, "Russian Cultural Scripts," pp. 425-6.

buildings, Soviet and modern architecture and memorial, and post-Soviet constructs of excessive post-modern design. These streets and their buildings' architecture tell the history of Russia as well as any book written on the subject. Eventually we went into one of the many cafés now found throughout central Moscow to sit and talk.

There had been a recent newspaper report of the increase of racial and ethnic violence in Moscow and I asked Dima if he had heard about this. He had but was not surprised. "This is a big problem in Russia and has been for a long time," Dima said. I asked him if he knows anyone who is prejudice against non-Russians and how he reacts to them.

> **Dima** - I always . . . one thing I haven't decided yet is how to treat people with different views. Like, for instance, several months ago I met a really brilliant guy - he is a writer and a poet and a really good one. And he is an interesting person to talk to and we were sitting there smoking pot and talking and he told me - you know he is a Russian guy who has been through a lot and has seen a lot, he has been in jail, drugs, etc, etc. - and he said to me I'm a racist. The way he put it was that he used to really hate niggers to the point where I would jump them on the metro, but now if I was in the same car with a nigger I would just leave. So do you think that is wrong?, he said to me. He said to me, you are telling me that in other countries people treat them like they are normal? Maybe there is something wrong with me, I don't know. But the way he put it to me was that it was like a natural feeling, I can't help it. And I started thinking, what should I do about this, maybe I should tell this guy that I wouldn't want to listen to that. On the other hand, everyone is like that. The idea of being politically correct about something, even if deep inside you are a racist about some things, you should at least be able to conceal it if you are a civilized person. I believe, I don't know. Especially when you are talking with someone that you don't know really that well. I just thought that most everyone is like that, so what can I do.
>
> **Jarrett**- So what did you tell him?
>
> **Dima** - I didn't tell him anything. What I said to him was, something like, you know this is true in many other countries people don't really see it the way you see it. And he said, yeah that is what I am saying. But I don't know, maybe I will grow to like them.

In this example Dima is confronted by an individual who on the one hand he respects because of his intelligence and writing abilities, but on the other hand finds extremely troubling because of his racist views. This creates a dilemma for Dima since he clearly would like to cultivate a relationship with the poet, but feels troubled by their differences on this crucial topic. This dilemma is played out in Dima's ambivalence about how to react to the man's confession that he is a racist. While Dima's initial reaction is that he should tell the man that he does not want to hear about such things, Dima immediately begins to create excuses for why he should engage with the poet about the topic. Dima reports to have gone through an internal debate about how to handle the dilemma. While "everyone is like that" Dima tells himself, still the poet should be able to control what he says around someone he doesn't know that well. Dima, then, is unsure if he should engage this man at the level of the "everyone," which would seem to be an acknowledgment that all people make mistakes or have faults and therefore should be given an opportunity to rectify these faults, which, in fact, the poet seems to be trying to do. Or, engage him at the level of one who is unable to control his words in front of others, which as an "uncivilized" trait marks the poet as someone with which Dima is unwilling to associate. Ultimately, Dima chooses the former position and attempts to engage with the man as someone who could be potentially rectified. In doing so, Dima continues to talk with the poet about the topic and reinforces the latter's suspicions that his racist attitude and acts are not acceptable by most people around the world. This example of *obshchenie*, or opening up to the other in conversation, shows how everyday encounters in mundane situations can suddenly present an opportunity for the attempt to

engage others in ways of speaking that can have real moral results for both interlocutors.

Our interview continued:

> **Jarrett** - Is this how you usually handle these kinds of difficult situations?
>
> **Dima** - It depends on who that person is. If it is a close friend or someone I care for, then I will probably say something about it. But if it is someone I don't really care for or just a casual acquaintance, I wouldn't say anything.
>
> **Jarrett** - What would you say to a friend?
>
> **Dima** - Well, consider saying something else or doing something else. Or just give them an example of what I would do . . . I don't know, usually people don't like this kind of thing. Especially with me. I'm not a natural leader so it is not easy for me to interact (*obshchenie*) with people who aren't 100% like me. Not that people have to think like me or something but at least some basic things should be . . . really I wouldn't communicate with an open racist. I might consider an intelligent or an interesting guy, but I wouldn't communicate with him because it is offending to me. This is what happens to me and basically I don't communicate with people. If something like this happens with a person I am dealing with I probably wouldn't continue dealing with that person.

Notice that after just telling me about the way he engaged the racist poet in a form of *obshchenie* to try to get the poet to understand that his racist views were not acceptable to Dima, he now says that he wouldn't do so with a racist. Dima does seem to acknowledge this exception, however, when he says "I might consider an intelligent or an interesting guy." But for the most part Dima is saying that for him *obshchenie* can only be done with someone with whom he is already close or with whom he shares common beliefs. Dima, then, seems to place this restriction on himself. "I'm not a natural leader so it is not easy for me to interact with people who aren't 100% like me." As has been seen throughout this chapter, Dima firmly believes that individuals must make themselves into the kinds of moral persons they want to be. For this reason, perhaps,

Dima takes the restrictive burden of *obshchenie* onto himself. As our interview continued it became more clear that Dima not only restricts his interactions to those with whom he shares certain beliefs but also that this, in fact, is a way for him to work on himself to become the kind of person he wants to become.

> **Jarrett** - But if it was someone close to you, you would in someway try to explain to them and get them to understand . . .
>
> **Dima** - At one point I had a girlfriend who was very good to me. But she was always complaining about the Caucasians buying apartments in Moscow and living and coming here with their families. And after several remarks of this kind I really got very angry about it and that is actually why we began to split. At first I thought it was a result of her upbringing and that her mother thinks that way, that her father thinks that way - they are quiet people sitting there on the sofa talking about that kind of thing. It is not my type of person, I wouldn't want to deal with that kind of person. It is very small but if people like talking about this all the time, bringing up these kinds of issues, it means that this is not my kind of person. Not my kind of person.
>
> **Jarrett** - What is your kind of person? What do you expect of them and what do they expect of you?
>
> **Dima** - It will probably sound egotistical, but people with whom I communicate must have some interest in communicating with me. That is basically the first thing. Interests meaning not material interests but what I can offer them. Otherwise we wouldn't deal with each other. I don't know.
>
> **Jarrett** - You mentioned communicating (*obshchenie*) with people a couple of times. What do you mean by this?
>
> **Dima** - This is an interesting question because recently I have been thinking more and more about my role in the outside world. And what I have been figuring more and more is that I don't want to be part of anything. I just want to be myself. And if that means being alone at times or not having a lot of friends that is absolutely fine with me. Because I have lots of things to do and . . . and that makes it difficult to estimate what others might be looking for in a relationship.
>
> **Jarrett** - How did this come about?

> **Dima** - I guess the biggest reason is that when you develop certain views or beliefs it means you are physically cutting off some parts of the outside world. Like when you become a vegetarian, when you stop doing drugs, when you stop smoking, when you stop having casual sex, you know. Or when you become religious, seriously religious. I'm not seriously religious the way I should be, I don't know. That leads you to sort of alter yourself. And I think many people are afraid of that. I don't want to say that that is wrong, but everyone should be able to experience it in their lifetime, what it means being alone, to yourself. Because in fact it is a very positive thing because it is the only time you can actually improve or change yourself. If that is necessary. If you want to improve yourself. I mean you can spend your entire life doing regular things. But I'm not interested in doing that anymore. I mean I still do a lot of stupid things that I would like to stop doing, but there is more and more direction in my life.

In a way this last part of the interview is a repeat of the first part. Interestingly though, this time his experience with a racist, his girlfriend, leads to a break-up of their relationship. It is likely that there were other factors involved in this break-up, but since Dima attributes this difference to "why we began to split" it stands as an example of Dima's increasingly narrowing circle of those with whom he will interact. For Dima though, this narrowing is a process of making himself the kind of person he hopes to be. By increasingly focusing on the beliefs and practices he personally finds important and for the most part only engaging in *obshchenie* with other persons who also share these beliefs and practices, Dima is working on himself and creating a personal, moral world in which he can live the life he wants. There are of course exceptions, like the one he made for the racist poet. But this only indicates that Dima realizes that the world is not as simply and narrowly divided into people one hundred percent like him and those who are not. In these situations Dima is faced with a dilemma whether or not to engage the other in a way that can potentially lead to friendship. These are the moments of ethical dilemma, then, that make *obshchenie* a powerful and necessary process of moral

engagement between Dima and others.

When I returned to Moscow in the winter of 2005 I was interested to know whether or not Dima was still friends with the racist poet. I asked him about it when we met one evening in his apartment.

> **Jarrett** - When we spoke before you were telling me about this poet who was a real racist, do you remember telling me about him?
>
> **Dima** - Yes, he is our (Dima and his wife's) friend actually. He is not a violent racist, but he has some real racist views. I thought about this hard, but I came to realize that you cannot change people. And by not communicating with these people because they are racist doesn't really change anything. You might feel better about yourself, but it doesn't change anything. He is a nice guy, he was probably just brought up this way or something. He is a good poet. Actually he just read his poems last week. He is a very good poet.
>
> **Jarrett** - So it doesn't really stop him from being friends . . .
>
> **Dima** - He hates a lot of different behaviors of different people. He hates gay people, blacks, jews.
>
> **Jarrett** - But that fact doesn't stop you from being his friend?
>
> **Dima** - Well when I say friend he is not really a friend (*drug*), he is not someone I see everyday. But I recognize his talent. And as I told you, it doesn't really make a difference if you don't communicate with these people. It doesn't make you feel any better. It doesn't make you any better. It is the same thing as being a vegetarian. You don't just talk with vegetarians. It doesn't make any sense to me. You can find a lot of interesting people out there and he is a very interesting person. Sometimes I see him once in a while. We have a lot of things to talk about besides these sensitive topics, like modern culture or modern Russian poets or politics. He has a lot to say about this stuff. There is a wide spread perception in Russia that you have to be like everyone else. So if you are gay, and you are a closet gay, then that is ok. But if you show it to everyone, that makes you an indecent person. Or if you come from another country and you are a loyal citizen that kind of makes you an alright person. But if you steal or do drugs or something like this then that automatically puts you, well that is natural, but even if you are a business person people will automatically presume that you are a criminal because you are not Russian. Some people go as far as saying that Russians should

not be punished for anything because Russians own this country so they can do anything they want. But that is what we call zoological racism. I think many countries are moving in this direction. It is difficult with so many immigrants and the world is becoming a more global place and this is difficult for a lot of people. Especially because the opinion of these people is never taken into account, and this probably won't help. So if you call someone a Nazi and say, oh, I don't want to talk with you, this person will not disappear. They will still be there, but will just be with each other and maybe become violent because of it. There are certain groups that don't have access to the media, and for all the right reasons, for example, when people deny the holocaust, of course they have no real evidence, but they are convinced that these camps never existed. If you say to them, oh you are just a bunch of crazy Nazis, this doesn't help. You know? Society needs to find a way to deal with it.

Jarrett - I think some people might say to you that you are right about what you just said, but by being acquainted with them somehow you are doing something wrong.

Dima - Well this really depends, if you support them, that is one thing. But if you don't. You can always tell them, well I disagree with you on this one point, I don't support you, but overall you are a nice guy. Plus, if they can't talk with people who don't hold your view, then they can never change, they will never have access to these different views. If you do, then they will have some potential to change. It also has to do with the individual. Some people are intelligent and talented, and others are just totally stupid. So I communicate with the poet when I see him at a party or concert, not because I want to change him, but because I like him as a person and we can talk about different things and I recognize a lot of talent there. I consider that if he was a real racist he probably wouldn't go to these places, or write the kind of poetry that he does, or even talk to me. He would talk about Hitler all the time and things like that. I know some people who are like that.

Jarrett - So you are going to judge him and people on who they are as individuals?

Dima - Yeah, if I see that a person hasn't really produced anything interesting and just breeds this hate, like some of these Nazi leaders who are clearly out of their minds, to me these people aren't worth anything. But if you see someone who is talented or has a great sense of humor, then you recognize that he probably hasn't lost it. I think the important thing is the percentage of what makes up a person. If he is 100% racist, then there is no way to communicate with this person. If he is 99% something and 1% racist, then there is an opportunity to talk with this person. Because

> people are brought up this way and live in this society. Most people are like this, they have some prejudice. I remember I was watching this television show for children and they would take some important topic and discuss it for an hour. And they invited guests and all that. And one of the guests was this African girl who was a student here in Moscow and there was this Russian woman who was an actress who said I'm definitely not a racist but I wouldn't want my son to marry this girl or to bring home a black girl. And she said this to the audience and said I'm not a racist! This reflects how a lot of people are [laughing].

A little over two years later Dima had in fact cultivated a relationship with the poet. As he says, they are not friends, but would instead best be described as a *znakomyi* (acquaintance). Still Dima enjoys his company and does not shy away from him when they do meet. Ultimately, Dima has come to realize that he is able to have good conversation, enjoy *obshchenie* with him and listen to good poetry with this poet. Thus, for Dima the personal benefits of spending time with the poet are more important than Dima avoiding him because of a preconceived and general standard of not associating with open racists. In this way, then, Dima is able to hold an ethical principle that is strongly anti-racist and at the same time enjoy the company of an open racist.

But this decision did not come easy for Dima. As he put it, "I thought about this hard." This may in fact reference back to the interview reported above that I had with Dima a couple of years earlier where Dima described this internal conflict. In the end, Dima decided that he "cannot change people." At first Dima says that "you might feel better about yourself" if you don't talk with racists anymore, but then two utterances later he says "it doesn't make you feel any better. It doesn't make you any better." Whether one feels better or not, Dima recognizes that he is not a better person just because he doesn't associate with a racist. For Dima there is no standard against which to make this judgement other than his own interests. And Dima would much rather enjoy good artistic

and political conversation with the poet than avoid him for "moral" reasons. What good would come of this? That is, what good would come of this for Dima? None. Additionally, Dima recognizes that no good would come of this for the poet either. Avoiding him will not change him. And while Dima has no intentions of trying to change the poet, the fact that Dima does spend time with him might result in the racist poet actually changing his attitude.

This example of Dima's relation with the racist poet exemplifies Dima's conception of ethics. Dima does not maintain an unshakable moral position on any subject, even those that are most dearest to him such as his anti-racism. Nor does Dima follow what he might call a mainstream or institutionally endorsed morality. Dima does not talk about right and wrong, rather he talks about what is right and wrong for himself. Dima's goal is not to be a virtuous person, but to develop himself as he himself deems appropriate. Whether this comes in the form of being a vegetarian, fantasizing about his female co-worker or maintaining a friendship with an open racist, Dima in each instance takes it upon himself to choose what is right for him. This does not mean, however, that Dima just does whatever he wants. Far from it. As he once put it to me, sometimes he has to work on himself even if he doesn't like it. Dima, then, recognizes a distinction between what he desires in the moment and the kind of person he wants to be in the end. The calculus of deciding how to make these two match or in what instances desire can override the purpose, however, is not always as straightforward as one might hope. Negotiating this ethical calculus, though, is just one more challenge that Dima takes on for himself in his never ending journey toward finding meaning in his life.

Chapter 6

Anna

Anna is a single, 28 year-old poet who when I first met in the fall of 2002 lived alone in the southeast part of Moscow, which is generally considered a rougher part of town if for no other reason than it is predominantly inhabited by working class people. As is often true in Moscow, Anna's apartment at the time contrasted sharply with the dingy, rundown exterior of the apartment building and the overgrown grass of the yard that surrounds it. The two room apartment, which she rents from a lawyer, came fully furnished with new furniture, a renovated kitchen and bathroom and a very large television and VCR. The apartment also contrasts with what one would expect Anna to be able to afford on her, so she complains, very low secretary salary at a Moscow-based European firm. But, as is common throughout Russia, she still received much financial support from her parents despite their own financial difficulties, which helped her afford the apartment and the many recreational activities, such as skiing, traveling and movie-going, in which she participates. What is not common, however, is that she lived alone and not with her parents, which is the more typical way for parents to help their children with living expenses.[149] This, perhaps, has something to do with the often contentious relationship between Anna and her parents, a relationship she told me at the time she was trying to rectify.

For the longest time Anna could not imagine living with her parents. She had come to believe that although she loves them very much, they are just unable to get along

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[149] Melissa L. Caldwell, *Not By Bread Alone*, p.66.

well enough to live together. This is especially so since Anna feels as if they are constantly trying to teach her how to live - to do this instead of that, to say something a bit differently, or, and this especially comes from her mother, that she should be married. As Anna put it, "my mother treats me like some Muslim girl who must be married off as soon as possible." Despite Anna's attempt to rhetorically link being married off with another culture, and thus foreign if not backwards, it will become clear throughout this chapter that marriage and family is central to Anna's conception of morality.

When in the spring of 2004 the owner of Anna's apartment decided to sell it, Anna was forced to leave. Because she could little afford another place of her own, Anna had a choice to make - either move back with her parents or move in with a friend and sleep on the couch. Anna chose the friend's couch. Despite her desire to avoid living with her parents, Anna feels a very strong attachment to them and her older brother. She says that family is the most important thing to her, but for some reason she finds it very difficult to spend time with them. She is not sure why, although once she mentioned that it is hard for her to accept that she is so much like her parents, and this realization often makes her want to avoid them. She assured me, however, that she was making attempts to visit them more often and that their relationship was growing stronger.

In the early fall of 2004 Anna was asked by her friend to leave. It seems that Anna's young cat had been scratching the walls with such passion that she began to scratch off the wallpaper. All around the apartment wallpaper hung torn from the wall and Anna's friend had had enough. Anna was left with no other choice but to return to her parents. Ultimately, Anna told me in January of 2005 this was the best thing she could have done. It has helped her learn to get along better with both of them and has

generally taught her patience with people in general. "It is just the kind of training I needed," she told me. Now relations between her parents and herself are better than ever. Anna also feels as if she is finally participating in the family as an equal, since her parents, who are both in their late-60's, are beginning to have health problems and require more and more assistance around the apartment. Anna says she is happy to be there to help, to do the little things they now have trouble doing, such as cleaning and grocery shopping. Also, because Anna is finally beginning to earn some more money, she is happy to be able to repay them for their years of assistance by buying groceries and helping to pay utilities and such. For the first time in a long time Anna feels at home with her family and is quite happy to have finally reached this point.

Anna's financial assistance is welcome as the post-Soviet years have been difficult for her parents. On two different occasions in the mid-1990's they lost all of their savings when the banks in which they trusted their money suddenly closed and took the money of all their patrons. Such closings were not uncommon throughout the 1990's and has led to a society of mattress savings, where most Russians are unable to take advantage of any institutional means of saving and investing for their retirement.[150] In addition to the loss of their savings, Anna's parents, who are now retired, are, as I write, along with all other pensioners in Russia losing many of their long held benefits. As of January, 2005 many of the government subsidized benefits provided to the elderly, such as free public transportation and prescription drugs, and discounts on utilities, are being replaced by a voucher-like system where each month pensioners receive approximately

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[150] Ibid. p. 65.

150 rubles ($5) from the government to be spent on that which was previously free or nearly so.[151] This change has brought about much protest by the elderly, including about 10,000 who took to the streets of St. Petersburg during the week of January 17th, 2005. This so-called reform, however, comes as no surprise to Anna, who at an early age became quite skeptical of the Russian government. One day we were speaking about this skepticism and why she has it, she told me:

> **Anna** - It just comes from my own experience. It is very clear that the lives of our people are worth nothing to these politicians. It was a shock for me, when for example, I went to the shop to buy some milk and bread. And some people shot some other people on the street and it was considered totally normal.
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> **Jarrett** - And you saw this?
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> **Anna** - Yes, because I lived in the center [of the city] and it was so strange and I was so shocked that no one cared about others' lives because it is the only thing of value. No matter if the government is up or down, they should care, someone should care about the people, old men and women, and children. But it was like entertainment on the street with many onlookers and tanks and snipers on the buildings who could shoot just anyone for fun. I was really upset, it was a real shock for me.
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> **Jarrett** - When was this?
>
> **Anna** - It seems to me it was in October. Three days in October when a few people were killed.
>
> **Jarrett** - What year?
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> **Anna** - 1991 it seems to me, 1991. Because it was one of the strongest impressions that changed how I see the world.
>
> **Jarrett** - And it was before the end of the Soviet Union?
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> **Anna** - Yes, it seems to me, yes.

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[151] Oksana Yablokova, "Mothers' Protest Is in The Mail," *The Moscow Times*, No. 3089, January 21-3, 2005.

Jarrett- Who shot who? The government shot people?

Anna - No, just, I still don't know today who it was. Just on one side there was people who were shooting people who were on the other side.

Jarrett - So how did this change you?

Anna- I just understood that it is a big game. No one cares about your life, about your future, about children, old people, or the prosperity of our country. They just want to make a lot of money and power and they will kill you, put you in prison, they will do anything if you try to stop them.

Jarrett - How did this affect the way you act? If you realized all of this, has it affected the way you act or feel?

Anna - Yes, it scares me. I was scared and then I became not interested anymore in the political life of our country. I understood that we will always have this situation. Maybe little things will change, but most of the money will always be in their hands. Our future will be more or less the same.

Jarrett - So you think today is more or less the same as then?

Anna - Yes, the country changed, yes, it has changed much. But you know this money continues to flow and the only thing that happens is that the disparity grows between the rich and the poor. This is not good, because the middle class decreases and there is not that many rich people and the number of poor is huge.

Jarrett - Tell me about your own experience in the 1990's. They were difficult times, were they difficult for you and your family?

Anna - Yes, surely. It was difficult because my parents, for example, lost their money several times, because they believed, like other people, and gave their money to banks and their money and the banks just disappeared. It was a time of losing beliefs and trust.

Jarrett - This must have also added to the way you understood Russia and your life here, how did it affect the way you saw other people? Did it make it harder for you to trust other people?

Anna - No, just the institutions. Just the government and its key figures.

According to Anna, this experience of witnessing the shooting on the street near

her home changed forever the way she thought of the government and its leaders. The experience, however, is not clear. For one, she says it happened in October of 1991, but it is more likely that it occurred during what is often called the second October revolution in 1993 when Yeltsin finally won control over the incipient Russian government by shelling the parliament building (White House) and eventually forcing parliament to give into his demands for a referendum on a new constitution.[152] Whenever it may have occurred, Anna is unsure of the reasons for its occurrence. In her telling of it, what is important is not the circumstances of the event, but rather how people responded to the event and what it signified. Onlookers stared as if it was all entertainment, tanks stood around probably not doing much, and snipers sat on roofs prepared to shoot anyone, as Anna saw it, for fun. Anna could not believe that she lived in a country where no one seemed to care that dead people lay on the street, their blood still forming scattered pools around their bodies. David Remnick has described the same events in a very similar way.[153] As he reports it, these days in October were, for the most part, characterized by the disorganization of both the government and the parliamentarian forces. Indeed, it seems that the parliamentarians were the first to organize sufficiently enough to mobilize large demonstrations in the neighboring areas of the White House, in the very part of town where Anna lived at this time, and eventually send "troops" to attempt a takeover of the Ostankino television tower. It was in response to these actions that Yeltsin and the military finally moved against the parliamentarians barricaded in the White House.

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[152] Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, p. 150.

[153] David Remnick, *Resurrection: The Struggle for a New Russia*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997, pp. 37-83.

During this assault, Remnick tells us, the "strangest part of the spectacle was the sight of hundreds of people watching the action along the streets and bridges as if they were at a sporting event."[154] Just as Anna described the way people responded to this event as "entertainment," so too Remnick noticed the strange spectacle of onlookers, many of whom were killed and wounded in the action.

Notice, though, that Anna does not blame her fellow citizens for their indifference. Although she acknowledges that onlookers stared, she saves her judgement for the government itself. This event made her realize that the government, that is to say, its leaders, do not care about the Russian people, especially the elderly and children, and cannot, therefore, be expected to do anything to help or make the country better. This is a view only solidified by her parents' experience with the banks. In Anna's view, because government and monetary institutions do not care about the people, they cannot be trusted to guide the country into the future. As Anna puts it, things will always be the same in Russia. Some things may change, by this I suspect she means the greater availability of consumer goods, the ability to travel and other such freedoms made available after the fall of the Soviet Union, but as for the general character of the government, Anna does not see how this can ever change. Why is this so? I asked her this and she replied:

> **Anna** - Because I do not accept these people who are in the leadership of the government. It doesn't depend on the people, but on the mentality. I told you this idea and I still believe it, that if you are an honest person than you will never make it to this high level of government and if you do, it can be explained only by your moral qualities. It is a kind of moral choice. If you choose money, then you will surely lose something. If you

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[154] Ibid. p. 78.

> want to be powerful, then the same thing will happen.
>
> **Jarrett** - Why does someone lose their moral quality if they try to get money or power?
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> **Anna** - Because I believe it is a kind of deal with your conscience. If you want to stay at this high level of politics, you must betray, sell your friends, and other such dirty things.

The Russian government is incapable of ever truly caring for its people, so Anna thinks, because the only people who enter politics have done so at the cost of their morality. For her, to choose a career in politics is to make a moral choice, and the choice is ultimately immoral. Not only are politicians selfish in their acts of power and accumulation, but so too must they betray those who are closest to them, as well as their moral conscience. It should be noted that Anna, like many other contemporary Russians,[155] does not seem only to be speaking of politicians here, but perhaps of all people who seek wealth and power. For Anna, then, her deep distrust and skepticism of the Russian government and its leaders is not simply a matter of political indifference or cynicism, but rather is an outgrowth of her own experiences with what she interprets to be the government and its doings. These experiences have led her not to simple political indifference, but to deep moral distrust.

Similarly, it is her personal experience that once led Anna to tell me about the hopelessness of living in Russia today. One evening in June of 2003 I went to Anna's for dinner. When we sat at the table, I found myself face to face with a bowl of about fifty shrimp - one hundred beady, black eyes staring at me as if they were still begging for

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[155] Jennifer Patico, "'New Russian' Sightings and the Question of Social Difference in St. Petersburg," *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 18(2), 2000, p. 76.

sympathy. At first I was a bit taken back. After all, my past experiences with shrimp, like with most meat and fish in the United States, was of the peeled and packaged kind. I was not used to eating anything with the head and eyes still there, still staring. I tried to make light of it by telling Anna, she gave me a polite chuckle in response and immediately went into the importance of shrimp in Russian life, a fact I had never known and would never have guessed. Soon she began to talk about hope, or more specifically, the lack there of. As Anna put it, "Russia is like Dante's inferno - Leave all your hope outside." This lack of hope is evident, at least as Anna sees it, because of the price of shrimp. It used to be, Anna said, five or so years ago, you could buy about a half a kilo of shrimp for about one dollar. But now, the price is closer to two or three dollars! "This is all because the business in the East is run by mafia and they sell their shrimp to Japan, China, and Korea - they really like shrimp and things like it there. But this is criminal! We call it Soviet capitalism. A few years ago maybe there was some hope, some reason to think all would turn out alright, but now we get shrimp here in Moscow from Norway. Can you believe it?"

Anna characterizes Russia today as Dante's Inferno, as having no hope. She does this despite the fact that in an earlier conversation that spring she had told me about the importance of hope for Russians and that it is only this hope that allows them to live through the hardships of Russian society and history. On one of the first warm and sunny Saturday afternoons of the spring of 2003 I was walking with Anna, each of us enjoying a bottle of beer on the crowded streets of central Moscow. The streets were crowded with people looking for some much anticipated sun and warmth after the long, cold winter. Young and old sat on benches and strolled lazily through the crowded streets as they

talked, laughed, sang and drank, as if a city-wide party was being thrown to celebrate the first warm day of spring. Anna and I walked along one of the cobblestone streets behind the Bolshoi Theater when eventually our conversation turned to what our plans were for the summer. She told me that she hoped to return to Poland to work at a children's camp again as she did last summer. When she told me of this hope I told her about how so many people were speaking to me about hope and that they often spoke of it as necessary to get through difficult times. She responded, "yes I agree and I absolutely agree with the famous expression: 'you live as long as there is hope' (*zhivesh' poka est' nadezhda*), which means that you live even if everything is very, very bad around you because if you have hope you can live, you can survive, you cannot live without hope, if you have hope you can fight." Anna's expression, which seems a bit awkward, is very similar to the much more common proverb "hope dies last" (*nadezhda umiraet poslednei*). Similarly, in her ethnography of the Russian soul Pesmen reports having heard people make a connection between hope and *dusha* (soul). "'If there's soul, there's hope.' 'Filled with dusha' means full of hope."[156]

I mentioned to Anna that a couple of people had told me that to be Russian is to hope. I asked her if she thought hope was particularly important for Russians or is it equally important for all people. She replied, "I think that is right in some way. Because you know our level of life isn't as high as Europeans or Americans. So many people are now living for tomorrow and hoping that tomorrow will be better. They did the same fifty years ago when people were fighting for communist goals, when people hoped that

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[156] Dale Pesmen, *Russia and Soul*, pg. 63.

the future would be better for their children. It is the same today." For Anna hope is not just an attitude of strength that can get one through a personally difficult situation, although it is that too, but perhaps more importantly hope is a cultural attitude shared by Russians because of their particular history of hardship and struggle. Despite some structural changes in post-Soviet Russia, these struggles and hardships remain for most Russians and therefore so too, claims Anna, the necessity of hope.

But why the disconnect between Anna's two claims? It should be noted that in this latter conversation when Anna talked about the importance of hope for Russians she was talking at an abstract level of general Russian historical and contemporary hardship, referencing a proverb and not any particular situation. But in the instance with the shrimp, Anna is speaking of a particular context that transcends several experiential levels. Shrimp is one of Anna's favorite foods, but she is unable to eat it very often because of the rising prices. This personal sacrifice is understood by her as having been imposed not only by some abstract force called Soviet capitalism, but more specifically by mafioso running the shrimp industry on the opposite end of the country. Because these few individual mafioso choose to sell their shrimp to the Japanese and Koreans, Anna must purchase her much beloved shrimp here in Moscow at a higher price because of its Norwegian origins. Thus, the hopelessness Anna expresses through the example of shrimp is understood through a combination of national economics and politics, which is personified by a few mafioso in Vladivostok, with the global exchange of shrimp, all of which leads back to Anna's experience of high shrimp prices, and thus eating less shrimp. It may not have helped that her American friend commented on the beady black eyes of the shrimp.

But there seems to be something ironic about the contradiction of Anna's two claims about hope, that is, it's necessity for living through hardships and the lack of hope in Russia today. For even though she expresses hope when speaking at an abstract, and depersonalized level, and expresses hopelessness when talking about her own experience with shrimp, it seems in fact that the abstract level can be read as a very personal statement, while the experience with shrimp can be read as an observation of something out of her control. In other words, when Anna speaks about the necessity of hope for living through the hardships and struggles of Russian history and society she is commenting on the necessity of all Russian individuals, including herself, to maintain an attitude of hope to make it through these hard times. The use of a proverb and the abstract level of speech is utilized, then, to express the *necessity* of this personal, dispositional attitude of hope. On the other hand, the account of her personal experience with the high prices of shrimp can be read as an articulation of those very hardships that she as an individual cannot control. It is the fact that the price of shrimp and all that goes into these high prices is out of Anna's control is what she means by hopeless. But it is this very fact of the hopelessness of Anna ever having a say in the price of shrimp or any other structural hardships she may encounter that necessitates her having hope in general. For if she has hope, she "can survive." Thus, Anna's expression of hopelessness about the national and global political-economic forces that go into the high price of shrimp in Moscow can be read as similar to her general skepticism about the Russian government and its leaders. Just as she believes that Russian political leaders and the wealthy cannot be trusted because of their moral deficiencies, so too Anna suggests that the forces that go into the high prices of Moscow's shrimp are the result of the actions of a few morally

questionable mafioso. Ultimately, then, Anna's feelings for her government, those who seek wealth and power at the expense of others, and those who are responsible for the high price of shrimp in Moscow, are fueled by her own moral conceptualization.

What is this conception? Anna spoke about it one brisk afternoon in early November, 2002. We had taken a bus out of the city to the palace turned leisure park *Arkhangelskoe*. For several hours we walked the tree lined paths of the estate, visited the small 17th century church and sat by the river as lovers strolled past and children played in the fields behind us. We spoke about many topics, from films, literature and music, to the recent hostage crisis in the Moscow theater. Often we just walked in silence enjoying the sounds and smells that were so different than those of Moscow. Anna told me about her love for travel, a love she received from her parents who had taken her on many journeys throughout the Soviet Union in her youth. As an adult, Anna continues this adventure throughout Europe and Africa. Although she doesn't have very much money, what little she is able to save she uses for traveling. Once she told me that her biggest hope is to travel around the world someday. I asked her why she loved traveling so much. She replied that she loves to see how other people live and that she thinks it's important to see that even though there are great differences between people all around the world, essentially they are all the same. "I think somehow it should be required that everyone has to travel abroad sometime in their life," she said. "If they did," Anna went on, "then maybe there wouldn't be as much hatred and war in the world." Her love for travel and the interests in the differences and things shared between human beings is key, I suggest, to understanding Anna's conception of morality. For as she revealed that

evening in the park café, morality for Anna is something that connects all peoples despite their socio-historic-cultural differences.

Eventually as the sun began to set lower in the sky and the temperature dropped, we went for a cup of tea in the café located not too far from the church. We found a corner table on the upper level, near a window overlooking the river and opposite the crowded side of the café and began our interview. Eventually the interviewed turned again to the recent theater hostage crisis, which led us to the topic of violence in post-Soviet Russia. I told Anna that one of the reasons I was doing my research on this topic in Russia was because it is often written that there is more violence, crime and moral transgression today than during the Soviet period. Anna responded:

> **Anna** - No I do not think so. I think that compared to our past we have the same number of violations and crimes, but we had other conditions, . . ., we had very strict policies and a very strict order in our state. Now we have more freedom, so therefore we also have more crimes. My mother worked as a guide for foreign tourists for many years and I remember many of her stories from those days. For example American tourists visited Moscow at that time and they were absolutely astonished that Muscovites could walk on the street at night and they weren't afraid at all that someone could steal from them or kill them. They didn't realize that it wasn't a benefit . . . it was nice of course to walk in the night and not be afraid of something, but as for other things, of course we could not go abroad for example, we could not invite someone from abroad, we couldn't even talk with a foreigner, because then we would have problems. Of course I choose the present and not the past. I do not miss at all that time when there seemed to be less crime and violence. It only seemed of course, because we did not know what happened behind our backs. We didn't have any information, about dissidents for example, who were killed. So it was only on the surface that everything was quite peaceful. But deeper down it was terrible for me. I remember even now that as a child I was afraid to be seen by a policeman, to be suspicious, because I was afraid that some policeman would think that I was not behaving in the right way and they could take me to the prison. I had such strange thoughts in my childhood during my walks.
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> **Jarrett** - Do you have those concerns now?

Anna - No of course not.

Jarrett - You aren't concerned that people are watching your behavior?

Anna - No. No. Absolutely not. I remember that time well. Although maybe statistically there were less crimes, there were not less in reality.

Jarrett - It also seems from what I read and from what I see on television or just on the street that there has been a kind of sexual revolution here in Russia. Do you think this is true.

Anna - I do not think so. Because before we did not talk about it, but of course we had it. Maybe now people started to talk more about it. [here she begins to talk in a lower voice, as if to hide the topic of conversation from those around us.] But it is only talk. Because it is the same situation as with crime. Many things happened [before] but ordinary people did not know about it. Ordinary Russians they had sex but they did not talk about it. This word only appeared a few years ago. I think that it was beneficial for someone to represent Russia as a place of abounding sexuality. It is a kind of business, actually. Like in other things money is the main thing.

Jarrett - What do you mean that money is the main thing?

Anna - That money and the desire to earn money promotes such things. Like sexual themes, or shows, or even things from sex shops. Because they were not popular, they were not well known. Now someone tries to represent it as a discovery. Because we did not have it in our markets and shops. And now newspapers and magazines can write that there was a sexual explosion and innovation in our lives but it wasn't. I think we could avoid it, it wasn't very important for me. All of this is about money, that is it. If people think they can make money from saying there is more sex and crime, then they will. But I don't think these things have changed very much. I don't think our morality has changed very much.

Jarrett - What do you mean?

Anna - I know people say that because there is so much crime today we have lost our moral values. But I don't think this is true. As I said, it only seems like there is more. For the most part Russian people are good people. We have lived through much worse than this, this cannot change our morality.

Similar to how Anna exhibits a deep skepticism for politicians and the wealthy, so

too does she hold a good bit of doubt concerning the way contemporary Russia is often characterized. Yes, Anna will admit, there is crime, prostitution and so on in Russia today, but these things existed during Soviet times as well. The difference, she argues, is not that these things have increased, but that they are now more in the open. Because of the increased freedom of knowledge and information, it is now possible to hear about such legal and moral transgressions.

But it is not just this kind of freedom that makes it possible to know about such transgressions, Anna suggests that although there is not necessarily more crime and sexuality in Russia today, it is of a different kind. Notice that just after she finishes telling me there were the same number of crimes during the Soviet period, she immediately seems to contradict herself by saying that now "we have more freedom, so therefore we also have more crimes." This one sentence seems completely out of place in comparison with the rest of what she says here. But it is possible to understand this sentence as indicating a difference in the types of crimes committed today, not necessarily a difference in quantity of crimes. This sentence indicates a contrast of social and institutional conditions between the present and past. Whereas the past had "strict policies and a very strict order," the present is a condition of "freedom." This latter condition allows for the open and public violation of law and morality and thus the appearance of more crime and sexuality. Thus, for Anna the freedoms of the so-called post-Soviet transition did not bring more transgression, it simply brought it into the open.

For Anna this is actually a welcome turn of events. For even though by Anna's telling everything seemed calm during the Soviet period, she says that "deeper down it was terrible for me. I remember even now that as a child I was afraid to be seen by a

policeman, to be suspicious, because I was afraid that some policeman would think that I was not behaving in the right way and they could take me to prison. I had such strange thoughts in my childhood during my walks." The appearance of structural calm, then, led Anna to feelings of fear, for even as a child she understood what was behind such calm. Today, in a Russia overwhelmed with media reports of crime and violence, Anna no longer has such fears. It is the kind of violence that is hidden, unspeakable, and supported at all levels by institutional authorities that Anna fears, not the kind she can watch on her TV. This is the kind of childhood fear that may have informed her current deep skepticism of the governing and business elite, a fear and skepticism filtered through that one particular event of the shootings on the street on that October day of her youth.

In Anna's view, then, not much has changed since the fall of the Soviet Union. Perhaps sex and crime are more visible now and being used in different ways, but they are not any more prevalent, so she thinks, then before. If it seems like there is more of this, it is only because someone is trying to make money from its public display. For the most part, though, Anna maintains that such things have not really changed all that much and this is especially so about morality. This is something that several people with whom I spoke mentioned. Russians, so they say, have had a very long and difficult history. As Anna put it, "we have lived through much worse than [the post-Soviet period]." Taken from this larger historical perspective, Anna does not believe that the last fifteen years have had that much of an effect on Russians' morality. I asked her if she could tell me what she meant by morality. She replied

Anna - Morality is like a belief, maybe a kind of belief that each person

> has in his soul. And morality for all of us is something common and something not common, because every person has common values and has particular differences that make them different from others. Because we all behave according to one set of values, the values that are similar to those written in the Bible, and the Ten Commandments, even though we didn't know that these Ten Commandments were commandments. But of course all of us know such things and try to believe in it, like do not kill, do not steal. So all these things combined together represent morality. So something common and something that rules your life and helps you to make decisions.

Anna makes an interesting observation here: morality is "*like*" a belief. What does this *like* (*kak*) indicate? For one, like a belief, morality to a degree can be articulated. In this sense moral "beliefs" can be listed, for example, do not kill and do not steal. In doing so, Anna, despite her claim to atheism, can gloss the particulars of morality as those associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition. Such a gloss on morality allows Anna to represent the common aspects of morality, the ones that "each person has in his soul." What is not clear, however, at this point, is whether Anna is speaking only about Russians or all humans. For while our interview up this point had focused on crime, sexuality and morality in post-Soviet Russia, it seems as if Anna has shifted her narrative to a more universalizable, species-specific conception of morality.

Even though Anna has apparently shifted to a more universalized conception of morality, by characterizing it as *like* a belief she allows herself to maintain moral differences between persons. This difference, however, seems to be only by degree rather than kind since if "we all behave according to one set of values" it is difficult to imagine how the differences could be that great. Nevertheless, for Anna there are differences between people's conception of morality and this has to do with their own personal, as well as, socio-historic-cultural differences. It seems, then, by naming

morality like a belief, Anna makes room within the concept for its sharedness and its uniqueness. Morality is at one and the same time something that unites all people and represents the radical differences between all people.

I pressed Anna on this dialectical conception of morality as at once common and unique.

> **Jarrett** - You said that morality is something that we hold in common. Where do you think this commonality comes from? Is it something that we are born with or something that we acquire or . . .
>
> **Anna** - No, of course it is not something that we are born with. It is from our parents and they get it from there parents. So from generation to generation we pass it on.

Notice how quick Anna is to cut me off when I ask whether morality is something with which one is born or if it is acquired. "Of course" we are not born with morality. In this exchange there is no question about this for Anna, morality is acquired from parents and passed on through generations. But we continued.

> **Jarrett** - So in that sense it is possible that it changes over time.
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> **Anna** - No, I do not think so. Ideas and ideals do not change very much. Because all of our (humans) values are practically the same although there are different names for them and different thoughts and expressions for them. You can name it however you like, but our moral ideas and basis are the same. We want the same things and respect the same things as people of other nationalities. Even if they believe in another religion and in different gods, I think they are the same things that any person would acknowledge and respect.

Although Anna claims that morality is acquired from parents and passed on through generations, she denies the possibility of any kind of real change in morality over time. She maintains this stability, or perhaps it is better to say, the endurance of morality despite her own familial experience often being chaotic and unstable. But as will become

clear soon, the family is central to Anna's conception of morality, not only as the realm of morality's acquisition, but also as the ideal image of morality, as well as the focus of several of her moral dilemmas. It is possible, then, to consider Anna's articulation of morality as a stable, unchanging "ideal" (it should be noticed that she shifted her characterization of morality from a belief to an idea or ideal), as an expression of her desire for a stable, unchanging family. I will return to this shortly.

Notice, however, that Anna may not have answered the question that I actually asked. My question was about the possibility of moral change over time. While Anna's response could be interpreted as responding to the question of change over time, it is more likely that she is speaking of difference across space. By this point in the narrative she has certainly shifted away from morality in Russia to a more universal human morality, as she speaks of "our," "other nationalities," and "another religion and different gods." For Anna, no matter the socio-historic-culture, the moral ideas and foundations are the same for all humans. Because of this, there cannot be too much change or difference between individuals or communities of people. Thus, individuals and socio-historic-cultures can "name it however [they] like," nevertheless, morality, for the most part, will remain the same between them.

As Anna has shifted her narrative to a more universal and shared conception of morality, so too has she shifted her use of metaphor. Whereas earlier morality was *like* a belief, now she speaks of it as "ideas" and "ideals." Ideas and ideals are more stable, more tangible, more real than beliefs. Ideas and ideals "do not change very much," beliefs apparently can. Ideas are associated with "the same," beliefs with the possibility of difference. When Anna spoke of morality as belief, it was possible that this belief

could be different between individuals. When she speaks here of morality as an idea or ideal, however, she neglects to mention the possibility of difference. Morality as idea is that which is the same for all humans no matter individual or socio-historic-cultural difference. Thus, "our moral **ideas** and basis are the **same** . . . Even if they *believe* in *another* religion and in *different* gods, I think **they** are the **same** things that any person would acknowledge and respect."

We continued on this question of sharedness and difference.

> **Jarrett** - How do you think that we all share them if we are not born with these moral ideas? Especially if we come from different religions and different societies?
>
> **Anna** - I think because it is connected with human nature (*chelovecheskaia priroda*). Because no man wants to be killed or stolen from or betrayed. So we all have similar desires and similar hopes, although we name them in different ways. We all desire to go in the direction of one goal.

When pushed on this uncertainty between the universal and the relative, Anna collapses the distinction and equates that which is different with that which is universal. The two are conceived as uniting in "human nature," which is a strange way for Anna to characterize what she is trying to say considering she adamantly denied that morality is something with which one is born. The particulars of not killing, not stealing and betrayal, which she earlier glossed as the Ten Commandments, are here equated with, or conceptually elevated to the level of the human.

At this point, Anna makes an interesting shift in her narrative. Having claimed a universally shared morality, morality, so it seems, becomes desire and hope. As a desire/hope that is shared by all humans, morality takes on a purpose, that is, "to go in the direction of one goal." I asked her what she thought is the goal of this hoped for

morality.

> **Anna** - I think happiness. I think so.
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> **Jarrett** - What does happiness mean to you?
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> **Anna** - It's an abstract notion but it includes a family. Happiness for a woman is a family, a husband and many children. I know of course that it isn't very popular now. Maybe some people will say they do not want it and they do not acknowledge it or they are too busy or they could name many other reasons, but I think it isn't true. Because all of us want to have friends. None of us want to be alone. All of us want to be understood by someone - to have a family.
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> **Jarrett** - Why do you think this is so? Why do we all want to have a family?
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> **Anna -** Because family is the most important thing in our life and everything revolves around it. It is misleading to say to yourself that family is not important, for example, that business or a career is more important. This is not true of course. It is only a sublimation of your inability to have a family. Family is your core. The family supports you and gives good feelings and the desire to keep living, especially when you are in trouble. I think we are born to have a family and not to be alone. It is our genetic destiny.

After beginning by acknowledging the abstractness of happiness, and perhaps by extension of morality, Anna immediately tries to turn her narrative back toward the specific, even if in the form of a characterization of traditional gender roles. According to Anna, the goal of morality, which is connected to human nature, is happiness as family. But this may not be as unusual as she thinks. In the late-Soviet period, the Party reemphasized the importance of family and traditional gender roles for the upkeep of morality.[157] This, perhaps, was epitomized by the course introduced to all high schools in 1984 on "The Ethics and Psychology of Family Life," which taught the moral value of

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[157] Michael Binyon, *Life in Russia*, p. 44; Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, p. 87.

the family and the proper gender roles within it.[158] Indeed, even before American conservatives made a call for a return to "family values" in the 1990s, Soviet elites and laypersons made the same call in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[159] Thus, while it is true that some young people in the post-Soviet years have rejected what they see as traditional ways of living,[160] the family still remains for most Russians today a "moral refuge" from the perceived disorder of Russian society.[161]

But perhaps Anna is not simply reciting traditional family values and gender roles, for the remainder of this utterance can also be interpreted as making a double critique of both Russian society in general and her own life in particular. By admitting that both her characterization of women and her association between nature/morality and happiness/family are not "very popular now," Anna calls into question the very moral foundation of Russian society. Some people in contemporary Russia no longer acknowledge or want their most natural of hopes. The demands and distractions of life have gotten in the way of morality as family, people have become too busy.

When Anna says that "some people will say that they do not want it and they do

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[158] Lynne Attwood, "Young people, sex and sexual identity," *Gender, Generation and Identity in Contemporary Russia*. H. Pilkington, ed., London: Routledge, 1996, p. 96; Rebecca Kay, "Images of an ideal woman: perceptions of Russian womanhood through media, education and women's own eyes," *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia*. M. Buckley, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 79-80.

[159] Michael Binyon, *Life in Russia*, p.51.

[160] Mariia Kotovskaia and Natal'ia Shalygina, "Love, sex and marriage," pp. 121-131.

[161] Michele Rivkin-Fish, "'Change Yourself and the Whole World Will Become Kinder,'" p. 283.

not acknowledge it or they are too busy or they could name many other reasons," this sentence works as a transition between Russian society in general and her own life. For while Anna certainly acknowledges the importance of and wants a family, several times during 2002-3 she told me she has no time to visit her parents or to meet a man, both of which upset her very much, because she is so busy. Because she works nearly ten hours a day, and several days a week after work she attends different activities, such as ballet and swim classes, she has little time for thinking about family. In this way, Anna's claim that the goal of morality is the happiness of family can be understood as an expression of her own desire not only to get along better with her parents, but also to begin her own family.

When I returned to Moscow in January of 2005 Anna had finally found herself with someone with whom she might marry. Ironically, it was because of her busy lifestyle that she met the man she hopes will be her future husband. She had recently joined an international choir based in Moscow, which she attends for practices twice a week after work. It was here that she met Dietrich, a thirty-year old German who had been living in Russia for over ten years. Also as of this time, Anna is again living with her parents and helping them around the home and financially, as well as getting to know them better. Thus, by 2005 Anna had come a long way toward achieving what she proclaims is the goal of morality, the happiness of family.

Interestingly, Anna concludes by claiming that "we are born to have a family . . . It is our genetic destiny." This claim not only contradicts her earlier position that morality is taught by parents, and not something with which one is born, but also what she told me one day in a casual conversation as we walked together - that her mother had

taught her from a very young age that it is important to get married. Similarly, she attributed to her mother her desire to be married in an interview during which we spoke about the significance of marriage in Russia. I was telling Anna about an American friend of mine who had lived in Moscow a few years earlier. Still single in her mid-thirties my American friend had found that many people she met in Moscow found it strange that she was not married and some even expressed pity for her. Anna laughed and said that this sounds very typical. I asked her why this was typical? Why is there such a concern for marriage in Russia? She answered:

> **Anna** - It is from our parents also. Like our values and our tastes. So our desire to have a family, I mean our women's desire comes from our mothers. They treat us like some Muslim women [laughing]. We must have a family before it is too late.
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> **Jarrett** - And when is too late?
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> **Anna** - Usually around 30.
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> **Jarrett** - And then it is too late?
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> **Anna** - No, not too late but people will not understand and will be surprised and wonder why you are not married yet.
>
> **Jarrett** - It seems like I know several women who are nearly 30 and are not married yet. Do you think it is becoming more common to marry later?
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> **Anna** - Although many people say it is becoming more common, I don't think so. I think that everything has stayed the same. Not much has changed in our lives. Although maybe the inhabitants of big cities like Moscow can understand if you are not married when you are 34 or 35, but if you live in a village, you will not be able to live there without a husband. [she begins to laugh]
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> **Jarrett** - Will they kick you out? [jokingly]
>
> **Anna** - Yes! [laughing]

Jarrett - Really! [laughing with doubt]

Anna - Yes. Of course this is very strange and they will not understand it and they will not like it and they can hurt you.

Jarrett - Why do you think this is? Why is it so important?

Anna - Maybe because, I think, it is a mark of one's personal character. It shows your value. If you are not married it shows that no one needs you. And if no one needs you it is very bad. So you are different from other people. And different in a worse way.

Jarrett - Because you would be difficult to spend time with or you cause too much trouble or difficult to get along with? These kinds of things?

Anna - Yes, maybe. If you are not married it shows your value. No one wants you.

Jarrett - Because you have no value? Do you believe that?

Anna - Maybe.

Jarrett - Yes?!?

Anna - Maybe [chuckling in embarrassment]. There are too many things involved.

Jarrett - But sometimes it's just bad luck that you don't meet somebody.

Anna - Yes, sometimes bad luck. And also your inability to adapt to the situation.

Jarrett - But that puts . . . that means that the woman does all the work. In other words you are saying that it is up to the woman to adapt, it's a judgement of the woman's character. Perhaps the reason the woman isn't married is because she herself hasn't found a man with any value.

Anna - Maybe she, as often happens, she had too high expectations or is too complicated. Perhaps she demanded too much from a person.

Despite my attempts to provide alternative reasons for why a woman may not be married, Anna maintains judgmental focus and responsibility on the character value of the woman. I was quite surprised by Anna's position on this issue, and she herself

expressed slight embarrassment while speaking of it. For regardless of her otherwise very contemporary way of life - writing stream of conscious poetry, traveling widely throughout Europe and Africa, love of modern literature - Anna expresses a very traditional view of gender and marriage.

The question should be asked, however, how much is this telling actually about marriage practices in Russia and Anna's beliefs about marriage. Perhaps it is better read as a narrative about herself. She attempts to distance herself, though, from the telling by focusing on marriage expectations in some far off Russian village where women are judged and ostracized for being unmarried. The village in the narrative not only stands in as the epitome of true Russian beliefs and practices, but it is also that which Anna is not - rural, judgmental and, as she tells it, traditional. But her telling of the village expectations and judgements do say something about her own experience. In fact, not too long before this interview in the winter of 2003 Anna had rejected a marriage proposal from a man who was studying to be an Orthodox priest. Although she loved this man very much, she did not think she could live the life of a priest's wife. It was for this reason only, so she says, that she turned him down. Perhaps, then, when Anna refuses to move from her position that it is the woman who is unable to "adapt to the situation," or who has "too high expectations," or demands too much from the man, perhaps, it is herself of whom she speaks and the regrets she still held at the time for this decision. These regrets were no doubt amplified by the pressure put on by her mother to marry this man, as well as the life long lesson from her mother about the importance of marriage for a woman. Indeed, by referencing Muslim women in connection to the importance of getting married, I believe Anna was trying to say that mothers (her mother)

teach their daughters that they have no choice, that a good woman is a woman who is married. As she put it, if a woman is not married it "shows your value. If you are not married it shows that no one needs you. And if no one needs you it is very bad."

When Anna concluded that "we are born to have a family . . . It is our genetic destiny," she may have contradicted her other claims that morality and the importance of marriage are acquired from parents, but this is consistent with her reasoning for how morality can have the same basis for all human beings regardless of socio-historic-cultural and personal differences. In using the rhetoric of "human nature" or "genetic destiny," Anna struggles to find ways to articulate specific moral beliefs and expectations, whether they are culturally specific, as in the Judeo-Christian based Ten Commandments, or personally specific, as in her deep concern for family, in terms of a universally accepted moral foundation. For although Anna claims that morality can be different for different people, and to some extent she is willing to make room for slight differences based on personal experience and situation, it seems that ultimately Anna is most comfortable speaking of morality as something that has a humanly shared foundation. In coming full circle from the family as the location in which one acquires morality, to the family as the goal of morality, to the family as the genetic destiny of being human, which in fulfilling this destiny we can assume the circle begins again, Anna articulates her conception of morality as happiness and family. This is a morality that is not only humanly shared, but also shared with those who are closest to you. It is a conception of morality that has family as its core.

While family and kin relations are often associated with morality in

anthropological literature, this association commonly takes the form of individual subjugation to the family unit or to the leader of the family or kin group.[162] This, however, is not how Anna speaks of the family. For her the family is associated with happiness and morality because it is in the intimate relations of family that one learns not only how to be oneself, but how to be oneself with others in the social world. Thus, while Faubion is partly right in his judgment that the family is a location for the kinds of techniques of the self Foucault convincingly argued are central to ethics,[163] for Anna the family is perhaps better conceived of as that Levinasian place of isolation where the social world can at once be left behind *and* worked through with other family members.[164] The result of such work is strengthened or even new moral ways of facing the world. This can be seen in the way Anna speaks of the importance of *obshchenie* in her family relations and her own moral acquisition within these relations. This came out in an interview in the spring of 2003. I asked Anna from where she thinks she received her sense of morality. She replied:

> **Anna** - From my parents as I have said. From my mother.
>
> **Jarrett** - Do you think from your mother more than your father?

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[162] See for example: Caroline Humphrey, "Exemplars and rules: Aspects of the discourse of moralities in Mongolia," p. 32; Anita Jacobson-Widding, "'I lied, I farted, I stole . . .': Dignity and morality in African discourses on personhood," p. 70; Marilyn Strathern, "Double standards," pp. 137-8 - all found in: *The Ethnography of Moralities*. S. Howell, ed., London: Routledge, 1997.

[163] James D. Faubion, *The Ethics of Kinship*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001, pp. 17-8.

[164] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2000[1961].

Anna - Yes, not because he is less moral or not because he spent less time with me than my mother, but because he is a more silent person. He keeps everything in his soul, inside and not outside, not in his words but in his actions.

Jarrett - So because your mother spoke more you think you learned more from her?

Anna - Yes, she is very open and she tries hard to understand me.

Jarrett - How did this teach you morality?

Anna - Through communication (*obshchenie*) of course. When you are alone you will not have anyone to talk with. It is very important that someone understands you and realizes your unique qualities, so it is very important to have someone who understands you and supports you and is always there for you and appreciates your interests, your mind, your intellect. It is very important because family is your blood, your flesh.

Jarrett - You have mentioned understanding a few times, what do you mean by that?

Anna - I mean understanding from people who are closest to you, from your parents, your family and friends, from the people who share your opinions and way of thinking.

Jarrett - Is that what understanding means to you, sharing of opinions?

Anna - Yes. Even if they disagree with you they can accept you the way you are.

Jarrett - And why is that important for you?

Anna - Because it supports you and helps you, it gives you the power to live and keep going. You know that there is always someone who will accept you no matter what.

Jarrett - And you said this comes about through communication (*obshchenie).* Can you tell me how this happens?

Anna - *Obshchenie* is an exchange of opinions. It is not only an exchange, but moral growth.

Jarrett - How does it make you grow?

> **Anna** - Because you can teach other people your experience and you can learn from their experience.
>
> **Jarrett** - And this is what your mother taught you . . .
>
> **Anna** - Yes, she taught me what she learned in her own experiences. Maybe I didn't always listen to her or accept it right away, but usually I realized she was right and I tried to learn from her.

For Anna the key to this process of moral acquisition, or what she calls moral growth, is *obshchenie*. Because her father "is a more silent person," she attributes her own acquisition of morality for the most part to her mother. According to Anna she acquired her moral way of being-in-the-world predominately through the speech-acts of her mother. It should be emphasized that the speech-acts of Anna's mother were not always or for the most part explicit teachings of moral values. For Anna the teaching comes through the process of *obshchenie*. It is through this communing talk of *obshchenie* that Anna finds "understanding," "support," and "appreciation" among her family members, and especially her mother, and which she considers the grounds for her moral way of being. That *obshchenie* with her mother seemed to Anna as more significant in her moral acquisition, again, is not because her father is less moral, but because "he is a more silent person. He keeps everything in his soul, inside and not outside, not in his words but in his actions." Because Anna's father is less likely to open himself to the process of *obshchenie*, Anna believes he had less of an impact on her moral way of life.

On the other hand, Anna's mother is "open" (*otkrytaia*) and always tries to understand her. For Anna it seems that *obshchenie* and understanding go together. It is through *obshchenie* that understanding becomes possible. Through the communing talk

of *obshchenie* opinions, ways of thinking, and experiences are exchanged and it is in this process that not only understanding is reached, but so too is moral growth made possible. Notice, however, that understanding need not be the mutual sharing of opinions or ways of thinking, rather it is simply the appreciation and acceptance of the other's opinions, thoughts and experiences. But such appreciation and acceptance goes a long way for Anna. For it is this kind of understanding that gives her the confidence that she is not alone in this world. That no matter what she does there is someone upon whom she can rely, there is someone who will always be there for her even in the moments of non-mutual understanding.

Remember that in the earlier interview reported above about why Anna thinks family is so important to morality, she said that "none of us want to be alone. All of us want to be understood by someone - to have a family." Here again Anna picks up on the theme of contrasting morality with being alone. And as before, this aloneness is contrasted with understanding. For Anna, then, to be alone is to be unable to participate in the dialog of *obshchenie*, and thus not to be understood by anyone. Anna's conception of morality as family, then, seems to be ultimately tied to these related practices of *obshchenie* and understanding. Again, the understanding need not be mutual, but instead is a kind of understanding that lets Anna know that she is not alone. It is the kind of understanding that lets Anna know that someone is with her, supports her and appreciates her even if they do not share all of the same opinions, ways of thinking and experience. It is this kind of understanding that Anna has gotten through *obshchenie* with her mother, and it is because of this that she feels that she has acquired more of her moral way of being from her than from her father or anyone else.

It is interesting that while telling me about the significance of *obshchenie* for moral acquisition, Anna ends one of her utterances with the claim that "it is very important because family is your blood, your flesh." While it may be that Anna was simply trying to emphasize the importance of family for *obshchenie* and moral acquisition, perhaps another interpretation is possible. For in none of our other conversations or interviews did Anna ever describe the family in terms of blood and flesh. Here, however, she does. Why? Perhaps because the family characterized in the most explicit of biological and natural features - blood and flesh - stands in here for what Anna considers as the naturalness, that is the humanness, of dialogical *obshchenie*. By associating the most social of activities - intimate conversation - with such terms, Anna suggests that to be a moral human being is to participate in the dialog of understanding, appreciating and supporting an other. To be moral for Anna is to share in a world of difference by attempting to understand the other through *obshchenie*. But not only is the dialog natural, in the sense of this is what humans do, but so too does the dialog create morality as nature. Morality is shared and potentially universalizable because it can be communicated in the process of *obshchenie*. While this communication may begin and have its strongest hold in the family, it is continued throughout one's lifetime in the never ending play between sharedness and difference that is the social and human world. For Anna, then, the dialog of morality is just as natural as the blood and flesh of the family.

Even though Anna attributes her own moral way of being to the openness of her mother, such openness has not always been beneficial for both Anna and her mother. She told me this when in another interview I asked her what kind of moral qualities she received from her mother. She told me:

Anna - I think my openness. She is such a strong and open person, and I really admire this in her. I was always surprised at how kind she could be to people. Still now that she is sick she still helps other people, old people who are neighbors in our building. Even though she is sick this doesn't get in the way of her helping other people. This is very impressive to me.

Jarrett - You have told me that your father is a good person, but do you think your mother is more kind?

Anna - No, no. They are both very kind. Maybe he expresses it in a different way. They are really very kind. Maybe sometimes they are too kind. Sometimes it causes some problems because they believe people, they have suffered a lot because of their openness to other people or their trust of other people.

Jarrett - Can you give me an example of this suffering?

Anna - I know they had many problems with their jobs. My mother, for example, she is a very open person, she likes to share her opinion with other people, and these people betrayed her and they changed her words around, and then she had problems.

Jarrett - With who? Her boss?

Anna - Yes, with her boss. And with her colleagues.

Jarrett - Was she talking badly about people, or they just changed her words around?

Anna - Yes, they changed her words.

Jarrett - Because she is too trusting of people?

Anna - Yes.

Jarrett - And do you think you have this problem?

Anna - Yes.

Jarrett - Has it caused you suffering?

Anna - Yes. Because I also can be very open and this is not always good, a person should be more closed sometimes.

Jarrett - Could you give an example of when you were too open?

> **Anna** - Also at my job I openly expressed my opinion about my boss and my colleagues. I didn't say bad things, but when I didn't like something I said it in the presence of our driver and an other person. And now I know these people are like a sheep in wolves clothes, and he told me that my boss was not always satisfied with my work, that I was late sometimes and I said that yes, sometimes I am late but do you know how many times I spent my free time there, how many evenings I worked and sat there until nine o'clock, and I think it equals out in the end. And now I know for sure that he told my boss and maybe even added something, and now I have bad relations with my boss.
>
> **Jarrett** - How has this changed the way you interact with your boss and the driver?
>
> **Anna** - Well I don't act differently, but I keep in mind that I cannot believe them anymore.
>
> **Jarrett** - Your boss too?
>
> **Anna** - Yes. I liked him very much. I almost loved him, I respected him a lot. But now, I know that it wasn't his fault, he was told something from the other people, but he treated me badly, he yelled at me in a terrible way, so now I cannot act with him as before.
>
> **Jarrett** - So it spoiled something in the relationship?
>
> **Anna** - Yes.
>
> **Jarrett** - And this is because you were too open with your opinion?
>
> **Anna** - No, it was because the driver told him what I said and maybe added something. But I should try to be less open and realize that I cannot trust people as I do. But it is difficult, this is who I am.

Like her mother, Anna is open and trusting of people. She does not keep her thoughts to herself too often. Also like her mother, these qualities have gotten her into some trouble at work. It does not help that perhaps their words were changed around a bit by those who heard them and passed them on to others. The kind of openness that allows Anna and her mother to engage in *obshchenie* with one another in such a way that

provides for the moral growth of Anna, and we can assume also the growth of her mother since *obshchenie* is a dialogical relationship, can also lead to troubled social relations. The trouble, however, does not arise in Anna's view because of their openness. Rather, as she put it for her situation, "it was because the driver told [the boss] what [Anna] said and maybe added something." The troubled social relations arise, then, because of the untrustworthiness of others, not because openness is a flawed moral quality. Indeed it is this moral quality of openness, along with her kindness, that Anna really admires in her mother. And while it may be necessary for both Anna and her mother to realize that such openness should be monitored around those who may not be completely trustworthy, Anna believes that in itself it is a "very impressive" moral quality. And indeed, to give up such a moral quality all together would in essence entail not only giving up on that which is the foundation for the kind of *obshchenie* that Anna conceives of as the means of her moral growth, but also giving up on her self. As she put it, "I should try to be less open and realize that I cannot trust people as I do. But it is difficult, this is who I am."

If Anna conceives of morality as intimately connected to family not only in terms of how she acquires her moral way of being, but also as the very goal of morality, then how does this conception fit into her moral decision making process? Or perhaps better put, how does such a conception contribute to Anna's perception of certain decisions as moral decisions? For in answering this question it becomes possible to see how such a concept of morality can be utilized in Anna's everyday life.

Once in the winter of 2005 I asked Anna if she could recall a particularly difficult moral decision she had to make. Upon hearing the story, it did not immediately strike me

as a moral narrative. Certainly it was a story of a difficult decision, but I did not see how it could be a moral decision. But then I realized that I was interpreting the story in terms of my own moral conceptions and that when I considered it through the lens of Anna's conception of morality as family, the story clearly became a moral narrative. This is what she told me:

> **Anna** - I studied in Poland, I was there for several months in 1996, with a study abroad program at a university near the Ukrainian border. I went there with three other female students. I was nineteen years old and I liked this country very much. It made such an incredible impression on me. I loved their way of living, I loved this little town where the university was located. And I found a boyfriend there. He was Polish. And the other girls I went with didn't like it there at all. They didn't like the university. They didn't like the teachers. They were very bored and the only thing they wanted was to return to Moscow. And I was so impressed by Poland and my boyfriend and everything around me. It was the first time I traveled alone and I felt absolutely free without my parents. It was like a dream for me. Of course we didn't have a very good room, and we didn't have any money, we just ate beer and sausages, that was all, but I didn't need any more. I just loved it. I don't know if I loved the boy very much, but he was a very nice boy and it was a difficult decision to go back to Moscow early or not. But the girls gave me an ultimatum. They wanted to go back and I could stay if I wanted, but if I did then I would have problems back in Moscow for sure because we had very strict teachers back in Moscow.
>
> **Jarrett** - And who told you this, the girls?
>
> **Anna** - Yes, the girls. They saw that I liked it there and they knew about this boy, and we had been there only three months and we were supposed to stay for six months. They said I could stay alone, but that would have been crazy, because the teachers back in Moscow would not have waited for me and would have gone ahead with the lessons and I would have fallen too far behind to continue. I would have missed many assignments, exams and preparation for the diploma, and I knew that if I would stay then maybe I would be happy, that maybe I would marry him and live there for the rest of my life, maybe this was my chance or my destiny. But if I did this I knew that my parents would miss me and it would have been absolutely crazy to stay there. So I didn't know what to do. I thought for a long time and finally I decided to return with them. It was very difficult to do this though, because I really enjoyed life in Poland and I wanted to

at least stay until the end of the six months, but they didn't want to even hear about it. They were like terrorists. They pushed me, they yelled at me - do what you want, but we will go and you will have problems and we will tell our teachers and so on. So there was a lot of pressure and I didn't know what to do.

Jarrett - What kinds of things did you think about when you were making this decision?

Anna - I was not sure about his feelings. If I was absolutely sure about what he wanted then I would have given it all up. I would have left my school. I would have left my parents; my country. I would have left it all. But I was not sure what he wanted.

Jarrett - Did you talk with him about it?

Anna - No, I thought about it on my own and I decided without him. I just told him that we will leave and he wasn't very upset, even though we practically lived together, I slept at his place almost every night and we spent all our days together. And when I returned to Moscow it was very difficult for me, because everything that I was doing was very difficult for me. The classes were difficult and boring and I couldn't focus on the work. We stayed in contact, of course. He wrote me letters and we spoke on the phone and by email. But then I met other people and I began to forget about all of this. It was interesting to me that I could lose my feelings for him and that my love could disappear. But we still stayed in touch by letters and phone and I knew that he eventually met another woman and they got married. He wrote me about this and sent me pictures of the wedding.

Jarrett - Was that difficult to see?

Anna - No, I was just a little surprised that he wrote me about it. And continued to write and call afterwards. I don't understand why he would do this if he couldn't ask me to stay when I was there. If he didn't love me enough to ask me to stay, why did he stay in contact now? I didn't understand. And then I returned to Poland three years ago in the summer to work at a children's camp. I called him when I was there just to say hello and to tell him I was there. And at this time I was falling in love with a Russian boy who worked there and this guy, his name is M., came to see me at the camp with his wife, and his sister, and the husband of his sister and with the friend of his sister. And my eyes were huge. I was so shocked and surprised that he came with all these people. I couldn't understand what he wanted and what he was doing. Of course I tried to be very hospitable and show them around the camp and the children. And

then he wanted to see me again and he told me that he still thinks about me and still regrets that he didn't say anything to me. But it was too late. He didn't say it before and now he is married and should be happy, and I don't know why he would do this. Maybe this is just the nature of men. Maybe he had to get rid of something that he was carrying around so he could feel better or something.

Jarrett - And did you have any regrets that you never spoke to him about it?

Anna - I was waiting for him to say something.

Jarrett - Why didn't you ask?

Anna - Because of my pride, certainly. Because he knew my situation that I couldn't stay.

Jarrett - So he knew everything and you were waiting for him to say something.

Anna - Yes. Maybe he wasn't sure what he wanted, maybe he wanted to find someone else, someone who is better than me. But this time he came and told me that he still thinks about me and regrets that he let me go. But now it means nothing.

Jarrett - What did you say to him?

Anna - Nothing. What could I say?

Jarrett - Did you still have feelings for him?

Anna - No, no. Just a sad memory.

Jarrett - So why do you consider this one of the most important moral dilemmas in your life?

Anna - Because I was prepared to forget about my parents, my friends, my life in Moscow, everything. I could give him my life, I could give him everything I had if he only said one word.

Jarrett - So if he would have asked, you would have stayed?

Anna - Yes, that's right.

Jarrett - What kinds of things did you think about that made you able to

> give up all those things? What was the process that led you to this decision?
>
> **Anna** - I thought that I would have been happy with him. I think it would have helped me and my parents and maybe I could build my life there and I could help my parents. I think it would have been positive for everyone.

For Anna this is a particularly significant moral narrative in her life because of the various ways in which family, her obligations to her parents and her desire to have her own family, weave in and out of it. Anna makes it fairly clear from the beginning that she may not have "loved the [Polish] boy very much," but he was nice enough and potentially good enough to marry. The fact that she enjoyed the freedom of her first trip abroad and her first trip without her parents probably added to her feelings of excitement. When the ultimatum was given by her classmates, however, the Polish boy failed to ask Anna to stay.

But why didn't Anna talk to him about it? Why did she wait on him? She says it is because of her pride. He knew the situation, and in Anna's view it was up to him to ask her to stay. But perhaps there was more. It seems likely that Anna was motivated to stay in Poland for more than her love of the country and the Polish boy. In the mid-1990's the Polish economy was benefitting from the very same kind of "shock therapy" economic plan that Russia was suffering through. Back in Moscow her parents had just lost all of their savings from another bank closing, and Anna's future job prospects were not very bright. As Anna put it, staying in Poland offered her the opportunity to "build my life there and I could help my parents. I think it would have been positive for everyone." For Anna, then, the decision was not necessarily whether to leave her country, her parents and her education for her love of a Polish boy she had only known

for three months. Rather, it was a decision of whether or not to leave all this behind in order to try to help her parents financially back in Moscow. Anna may indeed have felt strong feelings for the boy. But she herself admitted that she did not love him. Thus, not only was the decision about leaving behind her parents and life in Moscow, but it was also about whether she could spend the rest of her life with someone she did not truly love. Nevertheless, she describes this possibility as one that would bring happiness not only to her parents but also to herself. It seems, then, that even if Anna did not feel true love for the Polish boy, she believes she would have been able to find happiness in the process of helping her family and trying to build one for herself. That Anna describes the way in which her classmates tried to force her to leave behind this opportunity as acting like terrorists suggests the significance Anna placed on this opportunity for happiness for herself and her family.

Thus, for Anna this decision took on the significance of a deep moral decision. While on the one hand, she must give up everything that she had ever known - her country, friends, and family - on the other hand, in doing so she might be able to help her parents live a more comfortable life and gain for herself what she called a happier life in the process. The catch is that she must leave behind that which she cared for, and had obligations to the most - her family - in order to help them. Ultimately, however, although Anna had finally decided that she would stay, the Polish boy never asked her. Thus, while Anna was willing to make such a significant and heart-wrenching decision, its realization was in the end dependent upon an other who did not say what he needed to say. Anna returned to Moscow.

Several years later Anna returned to Poland. By then she had gotten over any

feelings she had for the Polish boy, but called him just to make contact and say hello. She had found a job back in Moscow, it may not have been the highest paying, but it was enough. Her parents had gotten back on their feet economically and could now help Anna pay some of her bills. She had also met a Russian man who came to Poland with her who would enter an Orthodox Seminary upon their return to Moscow at the end of the summer. Although things eventually did not work out between Anna and this man, she was at the time in love with him. When the Polish man learned of Anna being at the children's camp, he came to see her, bringing his extended family in tow. This struck Anna as surprising, and its significance was only revealed when the next time the Polish man came to visit her alone. He told her of his regrets that he never asked her to stay, that he still had feelings for her and such. And this too has moral significance for Anna's story. For she could not understand how this man could say such things after all these years and with him being married. In saying such things, this man was transgressing one of Anna's most closely felt moral principles - do not betray. She understood that perhaps he regretted his non-action of several years ago and that it was because he was a man that he felt the need to say such things. But she could not understand why he would. In doing so he was not honoring his marriage and the happiness that it should bring him. While this may not be the central moral theme of this narrative, it is significant that Anna expressed such surprise at the man's confession of regret. Her surprise, then, reveals another level at which this narrative can be viewed as an expression of Anna's conception of morality as centered around the family.

For Anna the Polish man's expression of his regret for letting Anna out of his life

reveals his unhappiness with his marriage. This is troubling for Anna not because it provided her with an example of the fact that marriages do not necessarily lead to happiness. For surely this is something about which Anna was already fully aware. Rather, this is troubling because in the Polish man's confession to her, Anna experienced how the lack of happiness in the family can lead one to potentially transgress moral boundaries. For in making this confession to Anna, the Polish man was coming dangerously close, if not actually transgressing, Anna's most heart felt moral rule - do not betray. Thus, in Anna's conception of morality, transgression becomes this much easier when one is not happy in the family. This is so because the family is not only that which acts as an ideal guide in moral decision making and reasoning, but it is also the social location in which morality is acquired and transferred.

In speaking of the goal of morality as happiness as family, though, Anna is not simply speaking about "feeling happy," but more importantly about "being happy."[165] This distinction, which is made by Archetti in relation to the moral affects of football on Argentinians, is important for understanding Anna's moral conception and her reaction to the Polish man's confession. For Anna, in order for the family to lead to the goal of morality as happiness, it must bring to the individual more than just "feeling happy." That is, it cannot be a relation unto itself that only brings about certain, situational and isolated feelings of happiness toward family members and the familial relations. Rather, family only leads to morality as happiness when it provides for the individual a way of "being happy" in the world. In other words, in Anna's conception of it, the family must

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[165] Eduardo P. Archetti, "The moralities of Argentinian football," p. 118.

be the foundation for a way of life. It must provide the foundation for one to be able to go out into the world and act and be in a moral way. It is the place from which *obshchenie* and understanding lead out into the world and return again. For Anna, then, morality as the family is not a simple notion of a happy family, but instead has the family as the foundation, the center from which, a happy life, a life of "being happy" can be lived.

Chapter 7

Aleksandra Vladimirovna

Aleksandra Vladimirovna is a fifty-one year-old woman, who although still officially married has not lived with her husband in nearly ten years. She does, however, still live with her only child, her son Oleg who is in his mid-twenties and currently unemployed. She holds a doctorate in Philology from Moscow State University and teaches English at a language institute near the *Park Kul'tury* metro station. Since she usually teaches classes at the institute on weekday evenings, Aleksandra Vladimirovna supplements her low teacher's salary by tutoring university students, children and professionals in her free time during the afternoon and weekends and in the spring of 2004 began teaching part-time at a private elementary school, in which is enrolled children of some of the richest individuals in all of Russia. Despite her very busy schedule, she felt it was her duty to meet with me and help with my research. For Aleksandra Vladimirovna believes that it is her fate to pass the word of God on to as many people as possible. In fact, as with the Branch Davidian James Faubion interviewed, Aleksandra Vladimirovna once told me that even though it is often difficult to find time to speak with me or to speak of such personal issues, she believes God had sent me to act as a messenger to spread her experiences to others in order to help them.[166] Thus, what follows serves two purposes, that of my own intention of a moral portrait and that of Aleksandra Vladimirovna.

Aleksandra Vladimirovna is a dedicated teacher and has loved to study foreign

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[166] James Faubion, *The Shadows and Lights of Waco*, p. 158.

languages since childhood. This love, so she once told me, comes from her mother, who worked as an interpreter in the Soviet military. As a child her mother would often speak to Aleksandra Vladimirovna in German and English, as well as read her fairy tales in both languages and Russian. These moments made a lasting impression on her as she spoke of them as some of her most cherished childhood memories. She also mentioned that these fairy tales taught her a lot about how to behave and act properly, what she calls morality. Most importantly, Aleksandra Vladimirovna said that it struck her as a child that many of these fairy tales from different countries had similar themes and lessons, and because of this she thought from an early age that all peoples must have some shared ideal of how individuals should act and treat one another. This is a notion that she still holds today.

This notion was supported by her grandmother, her mother's mother, who was "a very religious woman." Like many others of her generation,[167] it was from her grandmother that Aleksandra Vladimirovna learned as a child some of the basics of Christianity, which laid a foundation, so she claims, for her attraction to the high moral standards of Communism and eventually to Orthodox Christianity in the 1990's. It was also because of her grandmother's religious convictions that her father, a Soviet military officer of some importance, and her mother were illegally married by a priest in a church and Aleksandra Vladimirovna was illegally baptized as a child. Today, Aleksandra Vladimirovna attributes her own heightened sense of morality and positive moral dispositions to these familial circumstances. As a practicing Orthodox, Aleksandra

[167] Jerry G. Pankhurst, "Religious Culture," pp. 142-3.

Vladimirovna follows the Church's stance that a church wedding and baptism are integral to a good family.[168] Because her parents took the risk of a church wedding and baptism during the time of Stalin, she was born into a blessed family and has benefitted from God's grace.

It also helped that Aleksandra Vladimirovna was born into a high-ranking military family that was stationed for most of her childhood in East Germany. Because of this Aleksandra Vladimirovna enjoyed many of the perks due to a family of such status. Thus, for example, Aleksandra Vladimirovna and her family lived in their own, noncommunal apartment, had access to some of the highest quality vacation resorts in the Soviet Empire, and was able to send Aleksandra Vladimirovna to the best Soviet schools that eventually led her to Moscow State University. One aspect of this high road of education was the many pioneer and youth camps that Aleksandra Vladimirovna attended throughout her childhood and youth. In these camps, which she remembers with fondness and believes should still be available today to all children, Aleksandra Vladimirovna was taught at an early age the values of Communist society. These pioneer camps, and this is especially true of the ones for the children of elites, represented to many, in the words of Paul Thorez, the son of the French Communist Party leader Maurice Thorez, "paradise on earth . . . the end-point of history. It was the achievement yet to come, the world to struggle for."[169] It was here that Aleksandra Vladimirovna

[168] "*Voprosi Lichnoi, Semeinoi I Obshchestvennoi Nravstvennosti*" In *Osnovy Sotsial'noi Kontseptsii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*, pp. 47-56.

[169] Paul Thorez, *Model Children: Inside the Republic of Red Scarves*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991[1982], p. 145.

learned the importance of teamwork and fellowship, the primacy of social goals over personal goals, and the organizational skills necessary to accomplish them. But she also learned that none of this was possible without self-discipline. An individual became a good Soviet person not only through the external discipline imposed by teachers and leaders as Makarenko taught, but also through the self-training that was embodied by means of this external disciplining.[170] It was taught to all of these children that the glory of the Soviet Union would only come about through the disciplined hard work of the new Soviet man. Aleksandra Vladimirovna from a very early age was trained to be one of these self-disciplined agitators. This personal characteristic was easily transferred to her life as an Orthodox Christian in the 1990s, and today she sees it as her mission to spread the word of God to as many people who will listen.

With this childhood it was only a matter of time before Aleksandra Vladimirovna was asked to join the Party. In 1970 one of her professors at Moscow State University recommended Aleksandra Vladimirovna for membership in the Communist Party. This honor was bestowed upon her at an unusually young age, and as she put it, “even some of my professors weren’t yet asked into the Party.” As a young member of the Party and the Komsomol, she helped organize youth events such as dances, social-economic events such as helping with the crops, and educational events such as going door to door explaining the recently mandated Moral Code of the Builders of Communism. Aleksandra Vladimirovna remembers this Code as an exemplary instance of the deep moral values of Communism and the kind of world she was working for. Even now, over

[170] Serguei A. Oushakine, “The Flexible and the Pliant,” pp. 414-5.

thirty years later, she still claims to think of this Code, so similar to the Ten Commandments, as outlining the foundations of any morally good society.

The code was originally promulgated in 1961 by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and was held up by both the Soviet leaders and Soviet moral philosophers as an outline of the "all-human" morality of communism. According to De George the code was a general set of principals that does not explicitly offer a guide to practical, real life conduct and thus requires interpretation.[171] Because of this, like with the Ten Commandments, the Code was perhaps better thought of as "educative [and promoting] those qualities which are in some way important or distinctive to socialist morality and so need special emphasis, repetition, and inculcation."[172] The "Moral Code of the Builders of Communism" was highly publicized throughout the sixties and early seventies and was used as the foundation for moral and ethical teaching at the time. When considered as an educative tool, the Code can be thought of, as Kharkhordin argues, as just one of many attempts throughout the twentieth century by the Soviet regime to compel Soviet citizens to train themselves into new Soviet men and women.[173]

As a child Aleksandra Vladimirovna was taught the Code. As a Pioneer she received special instructions on it. When she eventually became a member of the Komsomol she went out with other members going from apartment to apartment explaining the teaching and uses of the Code. As a leader in the Komsomol she often had

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[171] Richard T. De George, *Soviet Ethics and Morality*, p. 87.

[172] Ibid., p. 87.

[173] Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 1999

to settle disputes between other members, a process she told me she tried to govern with mutual respect for the participants and use the principles of the Code as a guide for her decisions. Once when telling me of her childhood and young adult years, Aleksandra Vladimirovna said: "we were brought up to be moral. And by the way, there was a code of morality of the Communist Party - it was very, very moral." Indeed, she went on to tell me that this Code should be interpreted to express moral values shared by all humans. "Yes," she said, "Communism is a very moral ideal. We all believed in the brotherhood of humanity." Even though she is no longer a communist, she still believes this today and continues to try to teach it to her students.

For twenty years Aleksandra Vladimirovna lived the life of a good member of the Soviet intelligentsia. She supported the goals of the system, despite the recognizable flaws of the regime. She took her job as a university professor of foreign languages serious and continued to participate in various Party organizations and events. Things slowly began to change, however, in the late-1980s when she spent time in England as a visiting scholar. She had already begun to take an interest in what she now calls the occult, so when she had the opportunity in England to join a small group of teachers practicing Raja yoga, Aleksandra Vladimirovna took advantage of the chance to learn more about "the spiritual world." This moment in her life signaled the beginning of a radical change in lifestyle and belief for Aleksandra Vladimirovna. Upon her return to Russia she spent the summer at her dacha more or less alone reading about and practicing yoga, meditation and fasting. By the time the summer was over Aleksandra Vladimirovna knew that she had discovered something that was always missing from her life - God. When she returned to Moscow at the end of the summer she began to seek out

some of the various so-called spirituality cults that were becoming so popular all over Russia in the late years of the Soviet Union.[174] Aleksandra Vladimirovna joined several of these groups which combined aspects of all the world's major religions, as well as aspects of astrology, numerology and animism. By 1990 Aleksandra Vladimirovna could no longer accept the Party's stance on religion and resigned from the Party despite her still strong feelings for the positive characteristics of their values and accomplishments. But by this time Aleksandra Vladimirovna had found new values and new ways of living them.

Soon afterwards, however, she began to feel as if the values and practices of these various spirituality groups were leading her astray. It was no longer clear to her that these disparate practices and beliefs were delivering what they promised. More and more Aleksandra Vladimirovna began to realize that the only true path to God was through the Russian Orthodox Church. By 1994 she had all but given up on the various spirituality groups and dedicated herself, along with so many other Russians at this time, to the Church. But unlike many of the others who came to the Church at this time in the mid-1990s, Aleksandra Vladimirovna remains today a dedicated and active member. In many ways she has transferred the skills and discipline she learned through all of those years in the Communist system to her personal and proselytizing practices with the Church. For today she not only strictly monitors her own behavior and thoughts so as to keep them in line with what she calls Godly morality, but she also spends a significant amount of time and money passing out Orthodox literature and cassette tapes with lectures and sermons

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[174] Eliot Borenstein, "Suspending Disbelief: 'Cults" and Postmodernism in Post-Soviet Russia."

to those she deems in need of their message. I was but one of the many to whom she gave such materials.

Throughout all of our conversations each of these experiences of Aleksandra Vladimirovna are often visible, contributing to the depth of her narratives. One such example is from an interview we had in November of 2002. I had asked her about the perceived increase of violence in the post-Soviet years and she went on to tell me that this was caused by the social instability felt by many Russians and the hopelessness and immorality this feeling brings about. I asked her about this feeling of hopelessness and its relation to how Russians act.

> **Jarrett** - You mentioned that people have lost hope and that they don't have examples of how to live a life, how to act, who do you think should provide that?
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> **Aleksandra Vladimirovna** (**A.V.**) - I think it is being restored now. We had ten years of confusion, of mess, and now there is going to be some restoration. People in the government are beginning to talk about it and now they try to encourage such things. They encourage all sorts of initiatives in the schools and the provinces and various places, to set up any organizations that are useful to children. So it is both from above and from the local places themselves.

After having just told me about the social instability and lack of morality in contemporary Russia, Aleksandra Vladimirovna begins to vacillate in her characterization of it. While on the one hand people are losing confidence, hope, and have no examples to follow, there are also signs that the government at the local and federal level are initiating what she calls a restoration (*restavratsiia*). This is an interesting choice of words. For to restore is to bring back or to set in place again. Unlike others who have talked about a restoration in the post-Soviet period, Aleksandra

Vladimirovna is not talking about a restoration of the monarchy. Nor is she talking about a restoration of Soviet power. Rather, it seems that she simply means that initiatives are being made, mainly by the government, to provide for a more stable life for Russians. Again, for Aleksandra Vladimirovna it seems that structural stability, which will eventually lead to moral stability, is brought about through top-down efforts. It is up to the government to establish the conditions for a moral society.

I continued our conversation on the gradual restoration of stability and morality in Russia by offering a possible example of the current attempts by the government to restore moral values.

> **Jarrett** - I actually just read yesterday that Putin and the government are thinking about banning some toys from the United States and Western Europe. For example, the Barbie doll.
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> **A.V.** - I think this has little to do with the restoration.
>
> **Jarrett** - You don't think that will be very helpful?
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> **A.V.** - We used to have Russian dolls and they were very nice ones. I used to live in Germany, my father was a military man, and I had very nice toys and a doll house, which was nice, and furniture and it didn't spoil me.
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> **Jarrett** - The thing with the Barbie doll, and this is a concern back in the US as well, is that she is not a very natural woman, she has a very large chest, and very thin body, people think she is overly sexual.
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> **A.V.** - I don't think children think this. This is what adults think. If you ask children I don't think they will say this. I think today there is the cult of top models. That is the ideal beauty in their eyes. They see girls in magazines, on the screen and then they see this toy. There is nothing really sexual about it for kids of ten years or something.
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> **Jarrett** - How about with women in their twenties or even teenagers? It seems that in the last ten years there has been quite an increase of sexuality in Russia. What do you think of this?

A.V. - Yes, that is true. As a Christian I see it as just another step toward the end as it is described in the Bible.

Jarrett - Toward the what?

A.V. - Toward the end. Immorality as it will proceed the end of the world. But I think it will be reduced, it was just those ten years of mess. I think the pornography on the screen will be reduced, and in books, those ten years were very special and without control. Now there is some control. More and more people are expressing their indignation for all this. There will be less. But still if it is not considered a sin, there is nothing bad about it unless you get pregnant or get some kind of disease. So it doesn't . . . for many people it is not considered immoral because it is not a sin, it is just normal.

Here Aleksandra Vladimirovna seamlessly turns to the Christian perspective on contemporary Russia to help account for the rise of sexual behavior and the inability of individuals to resist the societal pressures to engage in this behavior. But the turn to this perspective did not stop her from vacillating once again on how she interprets contemporary Russia. Here it is not just instability that has led to immorality and various forms of violence, it is the sin that foretells the end of the world. She immediately, however, backs off from this Apocalyptic characterization. One wonders why she would do so? One possibility is that Aleksandra Vladimirovna is not the kind of person, despite her strong Christian faith, who lives by end of the world scenarios. Her entire life has been working for the betterment of the world in which she lives. Whether this work takes the form of going door to door in the late 1960's in order to teach the basic tenets of the Moral Code of the Builders of Communism, or her work as a Komsomol leader in settling disputes between members, or her current "mission" to bring the word of God to as many people as she can, Aleksandra Vladimirovna has invested too much of herself in her world to so easily give it up to Apocalyptic visions. For this reason it is of little

surprise that she so quickly backtracks on her claim of the end of the world. There may be sin in this world, and many people may not recognize it as such, especially if they do not immediately suffer negative consequences for it, but the mess is slowly being recognized as such. And in telling herself this, Aleksandra Vladimirovna has reason to believe that life is slowly beginning to change for the better in contemporary Russia. As she told me in an interview we later had about overcoming personal failings, recognition is the first step to changing for the better. Because what she calls the post-Soviet mess is now slowly being recognized, Aleksandra Vladimirovna claims to believe that Russia can finally begin to restore itself in terms of societal and personal stability, hope and morality. As she put it in another interview, “The worst has passed, I believe, so there is dawn already. It is dawn.”

Although Aleksandra Vladimirovna is able to pull herself back from an Apocalyptic prognosis for Russia, she still maintains that for most Russians the increased sexuality of the post-Soviet years is not considered immoral or a sin. Most Russians, so Aleksandra Vladimirovna claims, do not think of their acts in terms of immorality or sin, but rather judge them based on the consequences. If one suffers from one’s act, such as getting pregnant or a disease, then one might reevaluate this act as having been immoral or sinful. But if no such consequences occur, so Aleksandra Vladimirovna portrays it, then such acts are considered perfectly acceptable, or as she put it, “just normal.” Aleksandra Vladimirovna continued making this distinction between those who consider such acts immoral and those who do not.

> **A.V.** - But since about ninety percent of our society is not Christian, for most of them there is nothing bad about [the increased sexuality]. But for most people there is some idea inside them, the conscience or something, I

> remember I used to have it before I was a Christian, but it is not that good. As people say, the conscience is such a fragile thing, and if you don't listen to it all the time and develop it you stop it, you won't hear its voice. And you forget about it.

Similar to Olya who made a distinction between the immoral *they* and the moral *our*, Aleksandra Vladimirovna immediately distinguishes herself from the majority of Russians. While she sees this increased sexuality as a sin that could potentially be a sign of the coming end of the world, most Russians do not. The difference rests on whether or not one is Christian. For although the non-Christian has a moral conscience, it is a conscience that is fragile and unreliable in that if one does not listen to it it goes away. It is a voice that calls but does not demand. There is no obligation for an individual to listen to the conscience. It is, so it would seem, nothing more than one of a multitude of opinions available to the non-Christian. In calling the conscience "not that good," Aleksandra Vladimirovna has in effect called into question what she imagines "ninety percent" of Russians believe is the foundation of their morality.

She ends the utterance with the phrase, "And you forget about it," which provides a double significance. First, the conscience can be forgotten because it is not that good, fragile and ephemeral. The conscience, Aleksandra Vladimirovna might say, cannot be counted on in the moment of need. Secondly, in exposing the limits of the conscience Aleksandra Vladimirovna articulates another realm of morality that transcends and improves upon this moral opinion that can so easily be forgotten. She herself now only remembers that she used to have one. The very suggestion by Aleksandra Vladimirovna that she no longer has a moral conscience may raise eyebrows, but for her it is an expression of having finally understood the true morality. As she put it to me several

months later, "I finally understood what it was inside me that guided my life through all those years. It is God." In claiming that she now only *remembers* having a conscience, Aleksandra Vladimirovna places her possession of it in the past, a past which she views as being somewhat morally deficient in comparison to her present way of being. In doing so, Aleksandra Vladimirovna articulates a position that is similar to Olya in that the conscience, just like Olya's social morality, stands in for a position or stage along the path of moral development that inevitably leads to the Christian morality of God.

Ironically, the conscience that Aleksandra Vladimirovna portrayed as not that good, fragile and ephemeral is in fact God. When I responded to her characterization of the moral conscience by asking her what she thought was the origin of this conscience, she said.

> **A.V.** - It comes from God. You know, no atheist can explain what it is. We used to have lectures on this sort of thing, and no one could explain why and what it is. But it's a spark of God.
>
> **Jarrett** - Are you saying it is a part of God inside you?
>
> **A.V.** - Yes, yes. We are born with it and it is His presence in us.

This helps explain the distinction Aleksandra Vladimirovna made earlier between those who rely on a conscious that is not that good and those who have moved beyond reliance on it. It now appears that it is not the conscience itself that is not that good, but the lack of knowledge of the truth of this conscience that leads one to disregard it. For non-Christians have the same spark of God (*iskra bozh'ia*) in them as do Christians, the difference is simply a matter of knowing that it is God and developing the capability to always listen and follow God as conscience. It seems that when one knows that conscience is God, what was once considered unreliable becomes absolutely obligatory.

Aleksandra Vladimirovna throughout her narratives portrays herself as one who has developed this capability and as such has reached a different, higher level of morality than those who have not yet had this realization.

The centrality of development within one's lifetime is revealed in Aleksandra Vladimirovna's use of the phrase *iskra bozh'ia* (spark of God) to describe conscience. *Iskra bozh'ia* is more commonly used in colloquial language to indicate that an individual has a talent or a gift for something, for example, an artistic talent. Much like the seed and gene of which Olya spoke, the spark of God is something with which one is born and must be developed by an individual so that this spark of God can become a fully realized talent. It is not surprising that Aleksandra Vladimirovna speaks of conscience and morality in this way. For not only does she think of herself as blessed because of the illegal church marriage and baptism that provided her with God's grace, but as will become clear soon, she also emphasizes the need to continuously work on herself so as to become a better, more Christian person. The *iskra bozh'ia*, then, becomes a self referential concept that indexes her own experiences that she interprets as leading to her present moral way of being. I am not trying to suggest that Aleksandra Vladimirovna does not believe that the spark of God is that which one must develop in order to live a moral life, I am simply pointing out that moral concepts are much more acceptable to one when it fits with one's own experiences. Because the concept of *iskra bozh'ia* fits so well with Aleksandra Vladimirovna's life experiences, it becomes available to her not only as a truth that can be convincingly uttered, but more importantly a truth that can be convincingly lived.

Our interview continued:

Jarrett - So you would say that God is necessary for the existence of morality.

A.V. - God is necessary. But you know, morality is one thing and being Godly is another. Being moral means to act morally, not to hurt people. But you never know what is going on inside you. But being Godly means that you feel your heart full of God. You understand? As an example, you see a beggar but you are poor yourself and you do not have a ruble to give to him. But you wish him the best and you pray for him. For some outsider it will seem that you have not done anything good. But inside you have compassion and love for him. But if you give someone a hundred rubles but you are thinking 'oh you beggar, I wish you were . . .' So people will think he is very moral, very moral, but in fact he is not, because his heart is full of envy and looks down on people. So morality is what we see. Sometimes it coincides with the Godly behavior but not always.

Jarrett - You just said that morality is what we see?

A.V. - Yes it is the visible parts . . . but it doesn't always mean that you are like that inside. Some bad people may pretend to be very nice, and in the eyes of others they will be perfect people.

Jarrett - I'm trying to understand this difference you are making between the inside and the outside, and I understand the difference when you give the example of giving the 100Rubles while having hatred on the inside, but is it possible to be moral, or God-like, on the inside and be immoral on the outside? Is this possible?

A.V. - In extreme situations, maybe, in extreme situations. But they are so rare that you cannot call them a rule. Because if you are moral on the inside, with God, you are going to please the Lord. You know there are some quotations like - he who pleases the Lord fulfills His commandments. If you have it inside, it is practically impossible to do something that is immoral. But there may be some extreme situation, for the sake of something, like saving someone or something.

Jarrett - I'm thinking of an example, let me know if you think this is appropriate. For example, if you don't want to hurt someone and don't want them to be upset, so you tell them a little lie.

A.V. - Yes, that is a difficult situation to explain.

Jarrett - So on the outside you are clearly telling a lie, and most people would consider this immoral, but on the inside you are doing it because

you know this person will be very upset and you don't want to hurt them or make them do something inappropriate.

A.V. - This is a situation which people face and the more experienced I am in Christianity the more I understand that you shouldn't lie. But you should tell the truth in a different way. More comforting. It's the way that you tell the truth, somehow you can find different words. But on the other hand, there are examples from the Old Testament. For example, there was a prostitute and she told a lie, she told the soldiers that she hadn't seen the people they were looking for and she saved those people. She lied, she lied to them, but she saved the people. Or for example, partisans were kept in houses during the war, and the Germans would come and ask - well, do you have partisans here? - and the people would say - no, no, no - but it is a lie, isn't it. It is a question that actually embarrasses me, and occasionally I think about it.

Aleksandra Vladimirovna makes a distinction between the visible or public acts which are judged by others as morality and the internal, nonvisible or private states that are only known by God. They are not the same, although sometimes they can coincide. What counts as morality is visible, it is seen by others and it is they who judge whether or not one's act is moral. In this visible and public world, being is equated with acting ("Being moral means to act morally") and it is this surface world of appearances that counts in the world of sociality. Being Godly, on the other hand, is equated with feeling. To be Godly is to have one's heart full of God, a notion reminiscent of the Orthodox concept of *theosis*,[175] at which point the world of appearances, the world of acts, is no longer central. Godly morality, then, cannot be judged by others because it is not visible, it does not depend upon the public. Only God, and perhaps the one who is Godly, can know what is in the heart.

This difference between the visible and the nonvisible, and the act and feeling,

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[175] Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001, p. 23 and pp. 74-5.

could suggest a distance from the social world inherent to Godly morality. This is perhaps intimated in Aleksandra Vladimirovna's example of giving money to the beggar. But notice, she does not say the Godly person does not give money to the beggar because she is Godly, rather it is because she herself does not have the money to give. The example is not provided to suggest that the Godly person does not act in this world, but to show that the essence of Godly morality is not the visible act; that it cannot be judged by other people. Thus, Aleksandra Vladimirovna is not claiming that Godly morality is disengaged from the social world. One who is Godly can be just as engaged, and perhaps even more so, than one who is not. Indeed, Aleksandra Vladimirovna herself finds it very important to remain engaged in her social world, helping the poor and needy when she can and educating others about the life of Christ. In fact, she always carries extra money with her for what she calls "spiritual needs," so she can give to the needy or even buy Church literature for someone she thinks needs it at one of the many kiosks all over the city selling such material. As Aleksandra Vladimirovna puts it, then, sometimes visible morality "coincides with the Godly behavior." When the two coincide a kind of harmony has been reached between the feeling heart and the act; between the nonvisible and the visible.

But the world is complex and individuals are not always able to live this kind of harmony. For when I pressed Aleksandra Vladimirovna on this distinction she has made between visible morality and nonvisible Godliness, a difficulty arises for her. If one can be Godly on the inside and visibly act amorally, which is how I read her example of not giving the 100 rubles while having compassion and love in the heart, is it possible to be internally Godly and visibly immoral? This is the question I posed to Aleksandra

Vladimirovna through the example of lying to someone for the purpose of not hurting or upsetting them. This proposal raised a dilemma for Aleksandra Vladimirovna that she could not easily overcome.

Rhetorically she attempts to deal with this dilemma in three different ways. First, by the use of reported speech.[176] Aleksandra Vladimirovna begins by trying to reason away the dilemma by referencing an authoritative quote that suggests that any act motivated by a Godly heart will result in a moral act ("he who pleases the Lord fulfills His commandments"). After giving this piece of reported speech she follows with its interpretation, "If you have it inside, it is practically impossible to do something that is immoral." Thus, by first utilizing authoritative reported speech Aleksandra Vladimirovna attempts to render my question a non-dilemma. In effect, she is saying that my question is not legitimate. When I provide a specific example, however, she must change her tactic. Her second rhetorical tactic, then, is to moralize the problem away. She tells me that as she becomes a more experienced Christian she has learned how to most appropriately deal with such a dilemma - "tell the truth in a different way." And indeed this may be a way to resolve the problem if the specific situation allowed for a way to both prevent the pain of the other while telling the truth. But Aleksandra Vladimirovna herself realizes that this is not always possible in very difficult situations. These situations, however, are represented by her as extraordinary and as such render the lying person heroic. This is Aleksandra Vladimirovna's third tactic for resolving the dilemma posed to her conception of morality. In providing me with examples of the Old

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[176] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000[1929], pp. 115-24.

Testament prostitute who lies to soldiers to save people or those who lie to Nazis to save partisans, Aleksandra Vladimirovna turns to religious and socio-historic-cultural heroic examples in order to preserve the basic foundation of the conceptual distinction she has made between the visible and the nonvisible, the moral and the Godly. Only in extraordinary, if not heroic acts can the Godly inner world of feeling lead to an immoral public act, which in its very heroicness is rendered a moral act. Otherwise, the conceptual framework remains intact; Godly inner feelings can, in most normal cases, only lead to either moral public acts or, due to certain structural obstacles such as poverty, amoral public acts. Despite her attempt to rhetorically preserve her conceptual framework, however, Aleksandra Vladimirovna admits that this is a dilemma that "embarrasses" her and that she occasionally thinks about it.

One can never know just how much Aleksandra Vladimirovna actually thinks about this dilemma and how it may call into question her moral conception, it did, however, raise the question within our interview about the distinction between one's moral ideals and the practical difficulties of utilizing them in real life moral dilemmas. After Aleksandra Vladimirovna admitted her embarrassment to me, I suggested that this perhaps reveals a practical disconnect between one's ideal moral conception and real life dilemmas. I asked her how she deals with this disconnect in her own life. She responded:

> **A.V.** - I pray and ask the Lord to help me. This is the best solution. I can give an example. Either every week or twice a month I go to the country to visit my aunt and I go by train. And I came and there was a large line for tickets and if I would have bought a ticket I would have missed the train, and so I just got onto the train. But if you have to pay a fine for this on the train, then often you can just pay something like 20Rubles to the person and they are satisfied and they go on their way. But if you say -

well I want a receipt or something - then you have to pay much more. And many people just give 20Rubles and they are quite happy. And I thought of the situation and I thought I was ready to pay to go to see my aunt. And I prayed to the Lord to help me. And then I also thought that if no inspector comes by then I will give the money that I saved to some charity or something. But I didn't want to feel embarrassed. And then no one came, so I took the money and gave it to someone, some beggar or church or something. Because I thought that this was not my money any more, this is how I solved it for myself.

Jarrett - And by praying this helped you come to this solution?

A.V. - I don't know how, but I didn't have to be embarrassed by inspectors, I didn't have to decide whether to pay the bribe of 20Rubles or to pay the fine, which is much more. So I decided, ok I will pay the fine, this is the best. But fortunately I didn't have to face this situation. But I knew, because as God disciplines me, I knew that if I didn't give the money to someone and just saved it, I would be punished. Because things like that have happened before and I don't want to make the same mistakes and be disciplined again. You see?

When I asked Aleksandra Vladimirovna to explain how she overcomes the disconnect between her moral ideals and the complexities of real life, Aleksandra Vladimirovna does not provide an example of such an instance. Rather, she tells me how she goes about the process of making a moral decision in the moment of moral dilemma. While it is possible that she misunderstood my question, I think it is more likely that Aleksandra Vladimirovna's telling of this story in response to this particular question reveals the difficulties and the tension involved in all everyday, real life moral decision making. It is tempting to act in ways that might be considered immoral by others or by oneself. It is tempting to pay twenty roubles instead of the full price of the ticket. Who would even notice? This is a very common occurrence in Russia today. So much so, that most probably wouldn't even think of this as immoral. But the situation posed a problem for Aleksandra Vladimirovna, not necessarily the problem I asked about, but the very

important problem of how Aleksandra Vladimirovna performs the moral reasoning process.

It is of little surprise that the technique for moral reasoning Aleksandra Vladimirovna spoke about was that of prayer. As she tells it, she addresses God directly for help in a particular moment of a moral dilemma. This kind of petitionary prayer, then, is an informal, situational and personal prayer that seeks to establish a communicative relationship with God. As a communicative relationship, this example of prayer is a form of *obshchenie*, or communing talk. Indeed, once Aleksandra Vladimirovna described prayer to me as a conversation, a description supported by the Orthodox notion that prayer is a conversation between two persons, God and she who prays.[177]

This dialogical opening is seen in Aleksandra Vladimirovna's narrative. After praying for help she is able to think what she will do in the situation. "I prayed to the Lord to help me. And then *I thought of the situation* and *I decided* I was ready to pay to go to see my aunt. And then *I also thought* that if no inspector comes by then I will give the money that I saved to some charity or something." Prayer opened Aleksandra Vladimirovna to God's advice. By engaging God in prayerful *obshchenie*, Aleksandra Vladimirovna was able to create the possibility that God could help her decide whether to pay the fine or the bribe. But prayer as *obshchenie* is not just God telling her what to do, it is creating the possibility that Aleksandra Vladimirovna can resolve the dilemma herself. As she describes it, the resolution to this dilemma appears to her as her own

[177] Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, pp. 105-28.

thought (*Ia dumala*). To say that *obshchenie* is dialogical, then, is not to say that advice, ideas or meaning is simply transferred between two persons. Rather, prayer as a form of dialogical *obshchenie* opened Aleksandra Vladimirovna to herself and allowed her to resolve the dilemma and in so doing, perhaps, further strengthened her moral character and her dedication to prayer.

This situation, however, involved two moral dilemmas. Not only did Aleksandra Vladimirovna need to decide whether to pay the fine or the bribe, she also had to decide what to do with the money once she did not have to pay anything. It was this second dilemma, so it seems, that provides the real concern for her. It is the possibility of keeping money that was no longer hers that raised concerns about God disciplining or punishing her. Why the strong concern over this issue? Is it the influence of Christian notions of charity that inspired her? Or perhaps the residue of Soviet anti-profit and anti-money ideology that led her to believe that she should not keep this money?[178] Whatever the reason, it is around this particular dilemma that she speaks of God imposing discipline upon her and forces her to recall past instances of God doing so, perhaps even because of similar cases.

What is truly interesting about Aleksandra Vladimirovna's concern with what to do with the money is that she doesn't actually remember what she did with it. As she put it, "And then no one came, so I took the money and gave it to someone, some beggar or church or something." Although it didn't strike me at the moment of the interview, the

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[178] Alaina Lemon, "'Your Eyes Are Green like Dolars': Counterfeit Cash, National Substance, and Currency Apartheid in 1990s Russia," *Cultural Anthropology*, 13(1), 1998, pp. 22-55; Dale Pesmen, *Russia and Soul*, pp. 126-7; Melissa L. Caldwell, *Not By Bread Alone*, pp. 69-70.

question certainly arises: well to whom did she give this money? If this example is one that made enough impact on her to remember and retell, then how could she not remember, or if she did remember, why was she not specific in telling exactly to whom she gave the money? I had the opportunity in later interviews to ask her about this, but chose not to. I decided it was not important to find the truth of what really happened to the money. And it certainly was not important enough to risk offending Aleksandra Vladimirovna. What is truly significant about this lacunae in her narrative, however, is that it once again raises the question of the distinction between the ideal moral conception of an individual and their everyday moral performance in the moments of moral dilemma. For in leaving out the details of to whom she gave the money, Aleksandra Vladimirovna gives the impression that she may have slipped back into an ideal telling of her moral conceptions in the midst of an apparently otherwise real example of an everyday moral dilemma.

Prayer is not just a tactic for moral reasoning and decision making, it is also a means for Aleksandra Vladimirovna to work on herself to become the kind of person she hopes to be. This was revealed a few moments later in our interview as I was still trying to get clear about this distinction Aleksandra Vladimirovna had made between the visible act and the nonvisible Godly feeling. I asked her if it was possible to achieve a unity between the inner feeling and the outer act, and if so, how was this done. She replied:

> **A.V.** - By working on yourself, by changing yourself. And this is always the most difficult thing, changing yourself.
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> **Jarrett** - How do you do that, how do you change yourself?

A.V. - Our practice in Christianity is confession. That is what I do. Every 4 to 6 weeks. I analyze the day, and as apostle Paul said, be aware, be awake. So I am aware of what I say and what I do, my motives and my thoughts. And if something I don't like appears in my head, I try to brush it away with prayer so as to make myself pure. But if it stays for some time or if I do something all of a sudden or think and don't get rid of it immediately, then in the evening I take it out. Because you know, sins are in our hearts and in our minds and in our words, not just necessarily actions, but also thoughts. Well then I confess it and try to be more critical and try not to give way to those temptations again. So I try to keep my thoughts under control and then I catch them. And as one of the Church elders (*starosty*) said, if you have a bad thought it is not a sin, it is like a fly, if you brush it away it flies away immediately. But if you don't it begins to penetrate you and you begin to concentrate on it more and more and little by little it becomes a sin. So the idea is to brush it away as soon as possible. And then you have peace of mind and a peaceful heart. And then you try to pray - in the Church there is a prayer that you can say all the time and this way you will not have ideal or bad thoughts or criticisms and looking at other people and thinking - ah, look at her, there is something . . . - but if you are busy then you don't even think about these things.

Jarrett - One of the things I think of immediately is the Jesus Prayer.

A.V. - Yes, that is right. And others too. You know what I noticed, when I read in the metro, I usually try to read, if it's the newspaper it's a catastrophe, because after reading for five minutes I'm absolutely broken, like a corpse, but if I read some spiritual literature, if you read prayers, I have a book of Psalms here with me, then I'm fine, I'm absolutely perfect, I'm so fresh and energetic. You know it's just so much easier to do what ever I have to. This is what I've been doing.

Jarrett - A lot of people have told me that they find dealing with anger the hardest thing about themselves to control. Do you agree with that?

A.V. - Fortunately this is not a problem for me, I can usually control my anger. And if you immediately pray then you will not give way to it. So for me it is not a problem.

Jarrett - You are lucky.

A.V. - That's because I had a happy childhood, maybe. My parents were wedded [in the Church], I don't know, they say it is important. I had a very religious grandmother, but I saw very little of her because I was away. But everything taken together, and prayers, and especially now that

I am a Christian I can't even imagine some bursts of anger or loss of control.

Jarrett - How about on the inside? Do you feel anger inside you?

A.V. - No, not now. I could some years ago but not without losing control. I remember getting angry, of course. But you know what, I remember twice I struck my son when he said some bad words or something. Yes, bad words, I remember, twice, I was practically out of control. But actually the reaction was very positive on his part. (We both laugh)

Jarrett - How would you characterize appropriate relations between people? What do you expect of people around you and what do you expect of yourself?

A.V. - I should love my enemies and pray for them. Be quite easy going. I don't think I have many enemies in my life, at least not many that I know of. But I remember that if someone pushes me too much I concentrate not on my anger towards him but on not being hurt myself and I even give myself points. So I try not to be offended myself. And I got this from a book in six volumes written by some occultist - half Christian, half something - but he proved, and this has become very popular, that our negative emotions hurt us, and cause a lot of illnesses and cause a lot of problems for us. So the idea is not to answer back but not to be hurt and to accept it and to thank him. And that is what I have been practicing doing, so whenever someone does something that I don't like, the concentration is on myself - not to be angry, or praying for the person, and even asking forgiveness for him. A priest even told me one time, if someone does something negative toward you, well ok, pray for him. That is what I do.

In order to try to achieve unity between her inner feelings and her outer actions Aleksandra Vladimirovna utilizes institutionally endorsed techniques of self-discipline. In referencing such Church figures as Paul, *starosty* (Church elders), and a priest, Aleksandra Vladimirovna provides her narrative explanation of her practices with the backing of the entire history of Christianity. In doing so, she is making claims not only of tradition, but of utility. Similar to how Caroline Humphrey writes of Mongolians

using exemplars from history as their moral guide,[179] Aleksandra Vladimirovna uses these authoritative references as a way to express that these self-disciplinary practices are proven.

By participating in regular confession and daily prayer Aleksandra Vladimirovna is able to work on herself in order to "control" her thoughts. And it is her thoughts that she seems most concerned with. By now she has, for the most part, learned to control her outer acts. Perhaps this is why her narrative focuses on thoughts and words. Such things demand strict self-awareness so that any transgressions can be caught before they fester into fully realized sin. It is, so it seems, a developmental race. If Aleksandra Vladimirovna can utilize these tactics of confession, prayer and self-awareness to "brush away" these transgressions quickly enough, she will be able to change herself before the transgression can change itself into a sin. Similar, then, to how Reichard writes of Navaho prayer as warding off evil and allowing for the influx of good or for preserving and maintaining health,[180] so too Alexandra Vladimirovna, at least in part, conceives of prayer as essential to maintaining and developing her own moral nature. Thus, when she reads a prayer book or Psalms on the busy metro she feels "fresh and energetic."

But when Aleksandra Vladimirovna spoke of reading on the metro in order to keep herself "fresh and energetic," I thought of how frustrating the Moscow metro can be. I always thought that the Moscow metro can get more crowded and pushy than any train I ever took in my home of New York City. This thought is what motivated me to

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[179] Caroline Humphrey, "Exemplars and rules," pp. 34-8.

[180] Gladys A. Reichard, *Prayer: The Compulsive Word.* New York: J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1944.

ask her about anger. Indeed, several other people with whom I spoke talked about how angry they often get on the metro. Anger, however, is not a problem with which Aleksandra Vladimirovna must wrestle. At first she attributes her lack of anger to her happy childhood and the Church wedding of her parents, but eventually tells about the self-disciplining she goes through in order to control potential anger. Similar to how Talal Asad writes about someone he knows using numbers to structure and engage with her pain, so too Aleksandra Vladimirovna uses numbers in the form of points to control and overcome her anger.[181] This use of numbers helps her to concentrate on herself and her ability to overcome the anger rather than the anger itself or the person at which the anger is directed. This tactic, unlike the Orthodox practices of confession and prayer, is taken from a volume of books that she characterizes as occult. Here it is possible to see Aleksandra Vladimirovna utilizing a tactic that she learned in her experience with the various spirituality groups to which she belonged before she dedicated herself solely to the Orthodox faith. Interestingly, Aleksandra Vladimirovna is able to slip from a reference to this occult book straight into the claim that a priest once told her that she should pray for those who transgress against her. By seamlessly slipping across these institutionally diverse experiences within her narrative, Aleksandra Vladimirovna reveals how her own personal experience has been more significant for the way she describes her own moral experiences and self-disciplining than anyone institutionally or culturally endorsed moral ideology.

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[181] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, p.80.

In the above narrative Aleksandra Vladimirovna attributes her lack of anger, despite also telling about the self-disciplining tactic she uses to control her anger, to her happy childhood, parents and grandmother. It was not uncommon in our interviews for her to attribute much of her current moral and personal way of being to her family. Both of her parents were in the military, her father as an officer and her mother as an interpreter, and as such Aleksandra Vladimirovna had, in her words, a very pleasant, comfortable and interesting childhood always surrounded by "very good people." But this good childhood atmosphere was not enough. Her successes have also depended on what she received from her parents at birth. Unlike many others with whom I spoke, however, Aleksandra Vladimirovna did not simply conceive of this inheritance as a genetic moral foundation from which she developed her own personal moral way of being. Rather, Aleksandra Vladimirovna, similar to some Greeks with whom Herzfeld has done research,[182] conceives of this inheritance as the passing on of the consequences of the actions of earlier generations in her family. Because of this, Aleksandra Vladimirovna thinks of herself as being a morally good Christian person not only because she was raised in a favorable family environment, or because her parents had a Church wedding and she was baptized, but also because her parents and grandparents and earlier generations were morally good people, and thus, did not pass on to her any negative consequences of immoral acts. All of this became clear during an interview we had in May of 2003. I told her that several people with whom I had spoken told me that morality was something with which they were born. Some had said that it was a divine

[182] Michael Herzfeld, "Meaning and Morality: A Semiotic Approach to Evil Eye Accusations in a Greek Village," *American Ethnologist*, 8(3), August, 1981, p. 564.

seed, and others had said that it was something which was passed onto them genetically by their parents. Aleksandra Vladimirovna agreed that one is born with something, but her explanation combined these two positions. While on the one hand every person is born with a divine seed, or what she had in an earlier interview called a spark of God, each of us are also born with the consequences of the actions of earlier familial generations. I asked her to explain this further, and she went on:

> **A.V.** - Sinful people are punished very often through their children too. The punishment passes on. It is quite natural though, if you drink a lot or do other unhealthy things the consequences will pass on to your children. Or now they say if you have some sexual relations with someone who is not your spouse, even the doctors say, one of my students was a doctor and she was telling me that they discovered that your children suffer. That is interesting, she gave me some proofs and facts about this. It is not just an invention, a pure invention, but some very important principles that help people to be moral, it helps people to be healthy and their children to be healthy. It is interesting. So suppose that you are born in a family where your parents and grandparents were awful sinners and still are, then of course you might have some traces of character that are, I would say traces of character, it doesn't mean that you are a criminal or something like that, but maybe that you are bad tempered or something like this. But if you learn something about Jesus Christ and if you learn that he wants you to be perfect, then you will begin to take some steps. And I think that is what Jesus Christ meant when he said that each person has his own talents. But if you are born in a not so good family then it means you will probably have fewer talents, it doesn't mean that you don't have any. And those who are born in favorable circumstances have more. But the idea is that you shouldn't bury your talents in the ground, you need to make the best of it. If you have two, you should make four. If you have ten, you should make twenty. And I think that you have more responsibility when you have more. The more you have the more responsible you are. Priests are more responsible than others. But what God judges is your intention. Suppose that you don't want to be a hooligan and use bad language and you make some efforts, maybe some people don't even see them, but you know that you are trying and God sees this, you know. And that is what you are doing, you are applying your talents.
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> **Jarrett** - And what about this idea of morality as some kind of natural seed that we are born with?

A.V. - What is inside of us according to the bible is a seed, a godly, divine seed. We are born with it. All of us have it, even the worst criminals are born with it. As for the sinful nature, that comes from the first sin committed by the first man and these are the consequences of it. We have good and bad, we have both. It is up to you to decide. In any situation you can choose which side you are going to take. So you are born with a seed, a divine seed - that is the conscience by the way and not a single materialist can explain what it is but it exists, that something, no one denies that it exists. So this is the seed.

Jarrett - And does one's family and upbringing make a difference?

A.V. - There are several theories about the nature of people. Some people thought man is a Tabula Rosa, born without any inherited traits, just whatever he hears and sees is imprinted on him. But most scientists came to the conclusion that this is not true and that it is a combination of many factors. So you have the things that you are born with, and if you don't live according to it then how can you live. If you have good parents then you see the results, it is encouraged. If you don't see it around you then it will become spoiled and this very often happens. Therefore parents are responsible for upbringing the bible says, it is the greatest responsibility. In some bad families the children remain very good, they are very pure. Probably they are strong willed. In some good families some children are not so good. A lot depends on the surroundings, the parents the friends the atmosphere, so again it's a combination but if you are lucky enough to be brought up in a religious family then you will be alright.

Although Aleksandra Vladimirovna claims that the consequences of both good and bad families are passed on from generation to generation, she begins by focusing on the inheritance as punishment. To speak of the heritability of morality and its consequences as either punishment or reward, is to shift it from a mechanism of disinterested biology to an interested and involved judgment of individuals and their families. Aleksandra Vladimirovna would not hesitate to name God as the judge. This is a God that is intimately interested and involved in his creation, and Aleksandra Vladimirovna expresses this in her shift from the divine punishment of sin to the naturalization and medicalization of this very same process. In this way, God is tied to

both nature and society in Aleksandra Vladimirovna's narrative of morality. Morality, then, pervades all of being - the divine, the natural and the social - by means of the inheritance of familial behavior. By alluding to medical science, Aleksandra Vladimirovna provides "proofs" and "facts" for the pervasiveness of God's morality. For "even the doctors say" that when one transgresses morality, the children of the transgressors suffer. It should be noted that the example of transgression that Aleksandra Vladimirovna gives, that of adultery (or premarital sex depending on how having "sexual relations with someone who is not your spouse" is read), is a transgression of both God and society's morality, which further tightens the link between the divine, natural and the social.

This notion of the heritability of morality as a link between the divine, natural and social is clearly described in a passage from *The Foundations of Social Concepts of the Russian Orthodox Church*, a Church publication given to me by Aleksandra Vladimirovna and which delineates the Church's position on various social questions.

> it is important to remember that a genetic disturbance is quite often a consequence of the neglect of moral foundations, the result of a depraved way of life, as a result of which their descendants suffer. The sinful damage of man's nature overcomes spiritual efforts; if from generation to generation vice rules in the life of the progeny with increasing strength, then the words of the Saints Writings will be realized: "a terrible end awaits the unjust family." And conversely: "The blessed man is he who fears the Lord and deeply loves His commandments. There will be great strength on the land of his family; the family will be rightly blessed" (Psalms 111, 1-2). In this way, research in the field of genetics only confirms the spiritual law which was revealed to humanity many centuries ago by the word of God.[183]

[183] "Problemy Bioetiki" *Osnovy Sotsial'noi Kontseptsii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*. Moskva, 2000, pg. 66.

This passage sheds light on Aleksandra Vladimirovna's claim that the inheritance of morality and its consequences is not "pure invention." In this utterance she attempts to return her narrative to the divine nature of this mechanism of morality. Her claim that this mechanism is not "pure invention" carries with it a double meaning. On the one hand, she is denying its social construction. It has not been created by the Church or any other social organization or even by herself for that matter. The heritability of morality has been proven scientifically. But this does not mean that it should be considered as simply a natural phenomenon. And this is the second meaning of her denial of invention. The heritability of morality is not a result of the chaotic chance of nature. Rather, it is an "important principle" given by God, a guide if you will, to "help people to be moral." In this sense it is inextricably linked to the divine seed of morality, or what she called in an earlier conversation, the spark of God. This combination of the divine seed and one's inherited moral disposition, or what she calls character, is what allows one to work on oneself so as to develop into a better person.

After fixing the origin of morality in God, Aleksandra Vladimirovna shifts her narrative back to the family and its relationship with and influence on one's moral foundation. Although in this narrative she does not explicitly refer to the spark of God, Aleksandra Vladimirovna does reference the parable of talents from Matthew 25:14-30 in order to talk about talents as a reflection of the state of one's moral foundation. Although in Matthew talents refer to monetary coins, Aleksandra Vladimirovna uses talents in the more common way of skill or ability. As I have already noted, spark of God or *iskra bozh'ia* is more commonly used in colloquial Russian to refer to talent or skill. In this sense, we can understand Aleksandra Vladimirovna in this narrative as equating talents

with moral foundations.

If this is so, then it is clear from her narrative that not every person is born with the same moral foundation. It is true, according to Aleksandra Vladimirovna, that every one is born with a divine seed that provides each of us with the capability of living morally. Or as she puts it in this narrative, to begin to take the steps to be perfect as Jesus wants. It is a capability, however, that differs between each person according to their familial history, and thus each person's inherited moral way of being in the world. As a differentially available capacity for being morally in the world, these two combined moral foundations not only provide a possibility for each person, but also a limitation on each person. Each person can only be as moral as her "talents" allow, but it is in their hands to do their best with what they are given. The suggestion that Aleksandra Vladimirovna seems to be making, then, is that because each talent is in fact a moral foundation given by God, even those who have been predisposed with fewer talents for morality can still do their best to be moral individuals. In this way, then, even those who are being punished by their infelicitous inheritance can ultimately be saved through God's morality.

This is possible in two ways. First, and as already suggested, by means of the individual working on herself to become a more moral person. For Aleksandra Vladimirovna this is best done with the help of God. When one discovers Jesus Christ, then it becomes easier to "begin to take some steps" toward becoming a more moral person. And just as she had earlier spoken of God's morality centered on the internal feelings and heart of the person, here she claims that these steps can be taken, at least at first, through intention alone. As Aleksandra Vladimirovna put it: "But what God judges

is your intention. Suppose that you don't want to be a hooligan and use bad language and you make some efforts, maybe some people don't even see them, but you know that you are trying and God sees this, you know. And that is what you are doing, you are applying your talents." Just as others are not in a position to judge the Godly morality of the person who is unable to give to the beggar but prays for him instead, so too others are not in a position to judge whether or not one is attempting to use his talents, or moral foundations, to try to work on himself. Only God can ultimately judge whether or not one is working to become a more moral person.

Secondly, the cultivation of morality can be helped or hindered depending upon one's surroundings. As Aleksandra Vladimirovna put it: "A lot depends on the surroundings, the parents, the friends, the atmosphere." But this is where her conception becomes a bit confused. For if one's inherited moral foundation is already tainted by the negative consequences of the immorality of past familial generations, then how is it possible for the parents to provide a felicitous atmosphere for one's moral development? It would seem that the parents themselves would also be marked by this same negative inheritance, if not the root cause of the it, and therefore there ability to provide for one's proper development must be called into question. As Aleksandra Vladimirovna expressed it: "If you have good parents then you see the results, it is encouraged. If you don't see it around you, then it will become spoiled and this very often happens." What becomes spoiled? It can be read in two ways. First, simply one's moral development can become spoiled by this situation. Second, and more interestingly, one's very moral foundation can become spoiled. Thus, even if one is born with a felicitous inheritance, if the parents do not provide good examples, then the foundations can be spoiled. In either

case, one's parents are said to have a significant role in the outcome.

This confusion, however, continues one sentence later. "In some bad families the children remain very good, they are very pure. Probably they are strong willed. In some good families some children are not so good." Thus, despite the behavior of parents, an individual may turn out the opposite of the family atmosphere they provide. To explain this discrepancy in her own conception, Aleksandra Vladimirovna makes a quick reference to what she apparently considers as an independent essence of each individual, the will. "Probably they are strong willed," she says. The will, then, stands in as a force that can be strong, and by extension weak, and allows an individual some leeway outside of the more deterministic mechanisms of inherited moral foundation and parentally supplied familial atmosphere. Perhaps at this point in her narrative Aleksandra Vladimirovna begins to see the confusion of her conception and attempts to render it steadfast in her closing claim: "but if you are lucky enough to be brought up in a religious family then you will be alright." By returning to religion, and by this she means Orthodox Christianity, Aleksandra Vladimirovna attempts to solidify her description and clear away any incoherence. For her it is quite simple, if one is raised in an Orthodox family or eventually turns to God, then one will with out doubt, and regardless of one's inherited moral foundation, become a moral person. God, and by extension Orthodox Christianity, is the only true source for morality and its development.

If this is so, how has Aleksandra Vladimirovna utilized this moral conception in her own life? When we met for an interview in the winter of 2005 Aleksandra Vladimirovna revealed to me something that not only shows how for her Orthodox

Christianity is the only true source of morality, but perhaps more importantly how difficult an act motivated by such a conception can be for her. As will be seen, just because Aleksandra Vladimirovna makes lofty claims about her source of morality, she is not always able to live up to these claims.

Earlier in the interview I had asked her if she could recall any moral decisions that she had to make that were particularly difficult for her. She responded by telling me of something in very general terms:

> **A.V.** - Oh, yes, there was some thing. A person who actually hurt me quite a lot and I was hurt in the heart of hearts and then the person asked for help, material help. And of course as a human being I did not feel like helping him because I knew I wasn't the only one who could help him. But then I thought about the gospels, and I thought, if you are a Christian then you should do this. So there are some standards so you know what to do, ok, what does it say, it says to help, so I did. This happened several times. And I thought, what does this mean . . . but I try to remember what the bible says about this. And there was a situation when I don't feel like doing this, and I think what does the bible say, then well ok. You know if I begin to think logically I would never have agreed to do that, I would think oh how terrible it will be and just imagine what will happen, but I try to do what the bible says and I do it.
>
> **Jarrett** - Could you tell me what was specifically asked of you?
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> **A.V.** - No I cannot tell you, it is personal, I cannot say. It was about money, with a person who is quite unpleasant to me, but the bible says I should, so I did. And the thing is, when you don't want to do something even when the bible says, there is this voice behind you that says why, what for, he is a such and such, don't do this. And then I realize that there is someone who doesn't want me to do this, and I feel this, and then this is another reason that you should do it. The moment I do it, I am rewarded and I am glad.

Aleksandra Vladimirovna begins by telling this story in very general terms without mentioning who the person was who asked her for money and why, and why it was so difficult for her to give it. Yet she does disclose that she only gave the money

because she believed she was obliged to do so according to what her religion, its sacred book and ultimately her God would want her to do. Yes this obligation went against what she calls "thinking logically," which in fact seems to be her way of saying that it went against her negative feelings for the person and her desire not to help him. Nevertheless, as a Christian she was obliged, so she gave the money. The fact that she recognized the voice "behind" her telling her to go against what the bible said was just further proof that she should give the money. At this point, so she claims, she felt "rewarded" and "glad."

As our interview continued and the topic changed we eventually began to talk about her husband and the circumstances of him leaving her. Without going into too much detail, it is sufficient to say that Aleksandra Vladimirovna was very shocked and upset by him leaving. These feelings remain today, several years later, and came out as she told me about him. After speaking of him and the separation for a few minutes Aleksandra Vladimirovna returned to the same story, this time with more specific detail.

> **A.V.** - Yes, well ok. Since I have mentioned my husband, I must say that after he left me, well, I will not go into it and say bad things about him, but actually it was very hurtful, but as it is written, without getting over obstacles you cannot overcome your ego, the battle with your ego, and it was actually he who asked for money, and it was a large amount of money, and I was the one who suffered, and he wanted money and of course I didn't feel like giving him anything, especially since he didn't give me any money or nothing for my son, but I said well, yes, ok. And that was a very difficult decision. I didn't do it for me, it was only because the Lord wants it. I don't want this, but He does, and I will do it only because the bible says so. And so three times I did this.
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> **Jarrett** - Three times?
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> **A.V.** - Yes, three times. And he didn't give it back for a long time, but eventually he gave it back.

Jarrett - So this is an example where there is a real divide between what God wants you to do and what you want to do.

A.V. - Absolutely.

Jarrett - So was this a real struggle for you to do what God wanted you to do?

A.V. - Yes it was. Because I was in pain, you know this is so strange for me, I couldn't believe the situation. The person that says bad things about you and hurts you and doesn't want you, and then out of all the people he could have asked, he asked me for help. He doesn't help me or my son with anything.

Jarrett - So that must have done a lot to strengthen you through this process.

A.V. - Yes, and another thing he used to say that he loved me and he wanted me back. And he began to drink a lot. It was difficult for him. And he told one of his students that he wanted me back and that I was so good, and he said this when he was a little drunk. And this student, such a noble man, he called me and told me, you know, your husband wants you back and he says all these wonderful things about you, how about seeing him. I didn't feel like it all. And I said again, what does the Lord want. And I couldn't imagine how I could meet with him and that we could be back together, so I didn't feel like it at all. But then I said what does the bible say, and it says that a wife should make every effort she can to stay together with her husband, so I decided to do it because of this. I couldn't even imagine, but the bible said that I should, so I said ok, and I went. And this poor student thought that my husband would start trying to convince me to come back or something like this, but he was sober this time, and he didn't do it. We just sat and talked, and my son was there too, and then we left. But I was glad actually because I didn't feel like starting it all over, I couldn't even imagine how it could be.

Jarrett - So you did what you were supposed to do and it showed you what was supposed to be.

A.V. - Yes.

Jarrett - And maybe if you didn't go, you wouldn't be certain.

A.V. - If you are Christian you do what He says. He who loves me follows my rules, that is what Jesus said. So I do it.

Jarrett - Do you think of Christianity as rules to follow or an example to follow or how?

A.V. - I know the rules, but loving God and knowing that He wants to do you good, and whatever He wants you to do is for the good. If you follow His ways, then you will be happy in the end.

When Aleksandra Vladimirovna tells the same story with details, the real difficulties and stresses for her show. Not only did she not want to give money to someone who hurt her, but this person was the very one who hurt her more than anyone ever has. When her husband left her, he hurt her in her "heart of hearts." So much the harder then to give him money, not once, but three times. This already understandable difficulty was further compounded by the fact that he could have asked any number of other people for the money. Additionally, as has been already pointed out, Aleksandra Vladimirovna must work several jobs just to survive. So the insult was even further imposed by a successful lawyer asking his poor wife whom he left for money. I think it is fairly clear why Aleksandra Vladimirovna did not want to give him the money.

Nevertheless, she knew she had to give it. This is what a good Christian would do, thus, she must do it. Aleksandra Vladimirovna, unlike the Branch Davidian Ms. Roden that Faubion has done similar research with, conceives of God's morality not only as a morality of Law, but of one of obedience. Because the bible, and thus God, says that she must give the money (or try to reconcile with her husband), then she must, despite her own feelings. But similar to Ms. Roden, Aleksandra Vladimirovna does not conceive of this morality of Law in terms of simple rule following, but in terms of finding examples from the bible that can serve as a guide in situational dilemmas.[184] It is only by

[184] James Faubion, *The Shadows and Lights of Waco*, pp. 144-5.

following God's rules as examples that Aleksandra Vladimirovna can conceive of herself as being happy in the end despite her situational resistance to doing so.

We met again later that week and I brought up this situation again:

Jarrett - On Monday you were telling me about the situation with your husband and money and it was very difficult and you only did it because this is what God wanted you to do.

A.V. - Yes, absolutely, I felt hurt, wounded and I didn't want to do it.

Jarrett - It's understandable.

A.V. - He never gave any money for the son. So why should I? And he works. So why should I give him money? It was only because the bible said so, this is the only reason, that is for sure.

Jarrett - Was it a long process of coming to this decision or did you just . . .

A.V. - It was not instant, but it was a short one.

Jarrett - And you said this is what the bible said you should do, did you actually look through the bible?

A.V. - No, no I felt it. No, no, no, I know that this is what it says, ok. It says, give to the one who asks for it. And he was my husband officially for quite a long time and he needed money.

Jarrett - And because you know a good Christian gives to charity or a person in need . . .

A.V. - I just know that is what God wants from me. To overcome myself, despite all my likes and dislikes I need to do it. It is emotion, you know, and you shouldn't base your life on emotions. They betray you all the time. Even mothers, one day they will say oh I adore you, and the next they will say oh I could kill you. Some Russian mothers say this. So what should you trust then?

Jarrett - After you gave him the money did that change the way you felt at all?

A.V. - No I did my duty and that is all. I'm still grumbling inside me.

> **Jarrett** - I can see it on your face.
>
> **A.V.** - Yes, because I didn't want to do it at all. But I did it. Because I knew that the holy fathers say you should overcome yourself, and this was overcoming myself, my emotions.
>
> **Jarrett** - So it seems to me if you could overcome that, you could probably overcome a lot.
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> **A.V.** - You shouldn't ask for temptations, it is a sin, if you ask for it you could be punished for it. You know Seraphim Sarovskii, he had a pupil who wanted to spend a lot of time with him and one day he thought to himself that some people say that people become demon possessed but I don't think that could happen to me, and that was a challenge and then he physically felt that something was entering him through his mouth and he became possessed and this lasted for years and nothing could help him. He challenged God and he was punished and suffered and eventually he was freed from this and that is when he wrote about it. You should avoid temptation, and deliver us from evil.

When I asked her about this situation again, it is even more clear that by doing what the bible and God had told her to do, she was acting against what she herself would have chosen to do. Despite all her efforts over the years to embody God's morality, Aleksandra Vladimirovna still has difficulty doing so in some particularly difficult, or perhaps it is more accurate to say particularly personal situations. In such a situation she cannot rely on her own cultivated moral strength, but must instead turn to an exemplified rule from the bible. By following the rule despite her own inclinations she is, as she or Kant would put it, fulfilling her duty.

But yet in fulfilling such a duty despite her inclinations, Aleksandra Vladimirovna conceives of this as helping her to continue to develop and work on herself to become a good Christian. She recognized that she did not want to give the money because of the deep pain she felt at the hands of her husband. She recognized that her desire to not help him was motivated by her emotions. But as she put it, one cannot act according to

emotions. They are, similar to the materialist conscience she spoke of in earlier interviews, untrustworthy. Only God's will as understood through the bible or as perceived through prayer is a reliable source for moral action. For He will always lead Aleksandra Vladimirovna to act rightly no matter her own desires.

Ironically, when I asked her if she had actually read a passage in the bible that told her she should give the money, she responded adamantly, "No, no I felt it. No, no, no, I know that this is what it says, ok. It says, give to the one who asks for it . . . I just know that is what God wants from me." Not only does God want her to give the money, but God wants her to "overcome" herself, that is, overcome her emotions. Thus, Aleksandra Vladimirovna never actually read a passage that told her to give the money, instead she "felt" that God wanted her to do it and in so doing overcome her emotions. The very idea, then, of her duty to overcome emotions to act as God wants is itself an embodied and felt knowledge.

As this final example of giving money to her husband suggests, despite Aleksandra Vladimirovna having a very complex and well integrated conception of morality that combines notions of natural law, development and self-discipline, she is not always able to enact this conception straightforwardly. Morality, then, even for someone who apparently has it as fully conceptualized as Aleksandra Vladimirovna does, is not necessarily always applicable to real life situations. In these moments Aleksandra Vladimirovna relies on her felt sense of an embodied tradition. The very idea that she was reacting so negatively to her husband's request suggested to her that she must give the money. In this way, then, although she did not immediately react the way she knew she should, the fact that she felt she must give the money anyway is evidence to her of

her embodied sense of morality. She felt that she must do her duty and in so doing continue to overcome herself on the path toward God's morality, on the path toward harmony with God's will. This, however, she knows is a long journey and she must not take time to praise herself for doing what she must do as a good Christian. For as the story of Seraphim Sarovskii's pupil indicates, pride itself is one of those emotions that must be overcome. Perhaps the final piece, then, of Aleksandra Vladimirovna's complex conception of morality is the realization that enacting God's morality is a life long process, a life long struggle to overcome not only herself, but to overcome this world of temptation.

Chapter 8

Final Words

The very nature of the presentation of the material in this dissertation may in fact resist any conclusions understood in the traditional sense of summarizing generalizations. If the starting point of this dissertation is that personal experience leads to unique and personal conceptions of morality, the idea of drawing conclusions across these individual conceptions seems to contradict the premise of the work. For as I have tried to show throughout this dissertation, the way in which people speak about their moral conceptions and provide examples of moral acts and dilemmas are intimately tied to the unique experiences they have had throughout their life. In this sense, one conclusion that can be drawn from the five moral portraits presented here is that moral conceptions differ between individuals to a greater or lesser extent.

This greater or lesser is, in turn, dependent on just how different personal experiences are between individuals. Thus, for example, because Olya and Aleksandra Vladimirovna, despite their many differences, have shared similar kinds of experiences in terms of their relationship to the Church, referencing the same foundational literature, most specifically the Bible, reading similar secondary literature, and participating in the same Church sanctioned rituals and practices, they also share similar conceptions of morality. On the other hand, there is a much greater difference of moral conceptions between, for example, Aleksandra Vladimirovna and Dima. Although Dima does on occasion reference God and does consider himself a “religious person,” he is not speaking of God and religion in Russian Orthodox terms as Aleksandra Vladimirovna does. More importantly, however, is the real difference that exists between the two of

them in terms of motivation for acting "morally." I mark morally here in quotes because one similarity that does exist between the two of them is that both seem to reject a social notion of morality. For Aleksandra Vladimirovna, true morality is Godly morality, which is acquired when one's heart and will is in harmony with God's will. For Dima, on the other hand, morality as social expectation is for the most part rhetorically rejected, and instead he focuses on a personal ethics of self-interest. That is, an ethics of doing what he wants for himself as long as it doesn't hurt others. As can be seen, then, the greater or lesser differences between individuals can ebb and flow not only across individuals, but throughout their various narratives so that at different times people can be more or less similar in their way of speaking about their moral conceptions.

Even though I have tried to show how individuals' moral conceptions are most closely associated with their personal experiences, it should be noted that personal experience is in some sense limited by the socio-historic-cultural world in which one finds herself. This socio-historic-cultural world, then, limits the range of possibility for the kinds of experience one can have. Increasingly, however, the question must be raised if whether or not the so-called global and interconnected nature of the world is effecting this limiting imposition of the socio-historic-cultural. Whatever these effects may be, there is no doubt that as inhabitants of Moscow, the experiences of these five Muscovites have been significantly influenced by such things as the existence and eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union, the social, politico-economic and epistemological breakdowns of the so-called transition years, the institutionally authoritative voice of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the unique position in Russia of Moscow as one of the preeminent global cities in the contemporary world.

While it is true that personal experience can never be completely separated from one's socio-historic-cultural world, this does not lead to the assumption that we can speak of a unique and shared Russian morality that can be analytically discovered if we could only sift through all of the inconsequential differences between individuals and find a core foundation to what all Russians experience and say about these experiences. Just because experience is intersubjective, this does not mean that it necessarily leads to anything shared, socio-historic-cultural or even universal.[185] Instead, the intersubjectivity of experience belies the Cartesian distinction between the subjective and the objective upon which the traditional anthropological notions of culture, agency and sharedness rely. When experience is no longer conceived of as the relationship of a subject with other subjects or with a so-called Third,[186] then such a distinction collapses. What is left, then, is a world of intersubjective relations where no subjects and no objects exist, except for in those rare moments of what Heidegger calls the breakdown[187] or what Foucault calls problematization,[188] when subjects step out of the world of intersubjectivity in order to reflect upon the objects this very stepping out creates. It is only in this derivative position of being stepped out that anything like a shared Russian morality or culture or even a notion of universality can begin to make sense.

And yet, the narratives that have been analyzed in this dissertation are the very

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[185] Michael Jackson, *Minima Ethnographica*, p. 4.

[186] Vincent Crapanzano, "The Self, the Third, and Desire," *Hermes' Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire: On the Epistemology of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

[187] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 68-9.

result of having asked my interlocutors to step out of their everyday world of intersubjectivity in order to speak about their moral conceptions, acts and dilemmas. Thus, one's own moral conceptions are the result of having stepped into this derivative way of being. That is to say, for the most part, and several of my interlocutors said as much, the individuals with whom I spoke do not even think about or consider questions of morality, but instead usually and for the most part just act in ways that upon reflection they consider to have been moral. Thus, in asking my interlocutors to speak about their moral conceptions, acts and dilemmas, I have in fact alienated them from the very intersubjective world in which these are performed.

Because these narratives reflect upon the intersubjectivity of morality, any similarities that can be disclosed across them may say just as much about intersubjectivity itself as it does about morality. For the rest of this final chapter, then, I will consider a few similarities revealed in these narratives and consider what they disclose about the intersubjectivity of morality.

Perhaps the most obvious similarity across these five moral portraits is the appearance of *obshchenie*. As I have noted several times, *obshchenie* can be translated as communication or interaction, but is perhaps best translated as communing talk.[189] Each of the five portrayed here used this word explicitly in their narrative descriptions. And yet, they did not all use *obshchenie* in the same way or to describe similar interactions. Thus, for example, while Olya and Larisa spoke of *obshchenie* as the way in which they

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[188] Michel Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations," p. 388.

[189] Anna Wierzbicka, "Russian Cultural Scripts," p. 427.

have come to understand one another and remain friends despite their differences, Anna used *obshchenie* to describe the process she continues to go through in acquiring her moral way of being in interactions with her mother. And while Dima speaks of needing to share common interests with someone in order to engage in *obshchenie* with them in the first place, this does not stop him from engaging in it with an open racist whom he finds interesting despite their radical difference of opinion on this particular topic. And while each of these speak of *obshchenie* as something they do with other human individuals, Aleksandra Vladimirovna only mentioned it in terms of the conversations she has with God as a person through prayer. Thus, as can be seen, although *obshchenie* seems to be a keyword across each of these five moral portraits, it can be utilized in different ways in order to accommodate the particular moral experiences, conceptions, and dilemmas each have had.

What appears to be significant about *obshchenie* in each of these variants, however, is that it is a way of articulating the intersubjectivity, the being together with, of moral experience. In each case, whether it be for the sake of moral acquisition as with Anna, or the resolution of a moral dilemma as with Aleksandra Vladimirovna, or the fulfillment of a personal desire as with Dima, it is a way of describing a relationship that can be after the fact articulated as having been moral. As such, when these individuals describe certain relationships as examples of *obshchenie*, they are indeed utilizing a certain cultural script[190] for the purpose of marking these relationships as exemplary instances of moral experience. The fact that this cultural script can be applied to such a

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[190] Anita Jacobson-Widding, “I lied, I farted, I stole,” p. 50; Anna Wierzbicka, “Russian Cultural Scripts,” p. 401.

wide variety of experiences, only reveals the way in which personal experience can fracture a seemingly unifying concept.

And yet because the concept can be applied to a variety of personal experiences, it too must carry something across to each of these disparate uses. This, then, further suggests the dialogical nature or the hermeneutic circle of not only experience but intersubjectivity itself.[191] That is, each of these disparate uses of *obshchenie* in my interlocutors' moral narratives cannot be understood without an understanding of what the word implies, but at the same time the word can have no implication without these disparate uses. Thus, *obshchenie* is one of those words that truly can have no meaning, that is no use, outside of a particular context of utterance. And as such, when my interlocutors speak of *obshchenie* in their moral narratives, they are speaking of a particular way of being together with others in very particular circumstances that give rise to certain moral ways of being. Thus, Larisa and Olya only spoke of it as the way they interact with one another and how they have come to understand the kind of person the other is, and Anna only spoke of it to describe those certain interactions with her mother that she saw as providing her with moral acquisition.

Another similarity across the five moral portraits is the notion of development. While each of my interlocutors presented in this dissertation spoke of the importance of developing what they see as the proper moral disposition, none of them spoke of this as a natural, inherent or necessary movement. Instead, each of them spoke of this development as a more or less self-driven development. That is, a development that can

[191] Edward M. Bruner, "Experience and Its Expressions," p. 6.

occur if one puts in the effort, if one works on oneself in certain ways that will lead to the goal of the kind of moral development one hopes for.

Thus, for example, Olya and Aleksandra Vladimirovna share the desire to develop their moral dispositions to increasingly coincide with a Godly morality, and do such things as pray, confess, maintain vigilance over their acts and thoughts so as to work toward this goal. Larisa hopes to maintain a strong sense of independence while working toward a successful career in Russia's new international market economy, and in so doing continually cultivates a work ethic that she finds necessary for such goals. Over the years Dima has increasingly worked to limit his life to the people, activities and interactions that he thinks will support his desire to become the kind of person he hopes to be. And Anna has struggled along the circuitous road to happiness conceived as family, having finally found herself in the kinds of relations she had always hoped to have with her parents and perhaps having finally met the man who she will be able to marry. Each of these examples, then, are ways of conceiving of the development of morality in the narratives of my interlocutors. If they do not all resemble the kind of moral development many have come to think of as proper moral development, this reveals not a lack of conceptual thinking on the part of these five Muscovites, but instead reveals the prejudices of certain kinds of academic thinking on the subject. For as Faubion has suggested, too often Western social scientists and philosophers view the world through their own moral lens, and in so doing impose this sense of morality onto others where those very others may not recognize it.[192] In the process of doing so, they

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[192] James D. Faubion, "Toward an Anthropology of Ethics," p. 84.

too often overlook the moral conceptions of the very people they claim to be studying.

This tendency is even more prevalent in disciplines that tend to focus their analytical gaze at the level of the group rather than the individual. For at the individual level, things get even murkier. Thus, while I believe it is possible to claim that each of my five interlocutors have some notion of morality as development, clearly each of them hold their own perspective on how this development works and toward what end it moves. Therefore, by simply saying that each of them share a notion of morality as development, I have said little that increases our understanding of each of their particular moral conceptions. For in the end, more than anything else this dissertation has tried to show that each of the five presented here hold unique moral conceptions based on their own, unique personal experiences.

And yet there is one last similarity that I feel is necessary to mention. Each of my interlocutors at times seemed to speak of morality as a way of speaking about the kind of self they hoped they could be. While this was obvious in the narratives of Dima, I believe it also holds true for the others. Thus, although Aleksandra Vladimirovna speaks often about the goal of harmonizing her own will with that of God's, she admits that this is something she cannot always do. This, in fact, is revealed in the examples she gave of paying for the train ticket and giving her husband the money he asked for. Similarly, Olya says she strives for God's morality, but finds it difficult to actually realize this in the midst of the everyday situations she faces in her workplace and at home. While from the first time I met Anna she spoke to me about the ideal of morality as family and happiness, it was only after knowing her for over two years that she was finally able to take steps toward possibly achieving such a goal. These steps, it should be further noted,

only occurred when they did because Anna had no other options but to move back in with her parents. Thus, at least in terms of trying to find happiness with her parents, this seemed to only come about out of necessity rather than choice. And finally Larisa. While I have no doubts that Larisa wants to achieve success in her career, I also have no doubts that she often uses her career and the rhetoric of an ethics of independence in order to cover over her desire to find someone to love and love her in return. She has all but admitted this to me in several late night conversations.

All of this suggests that what has been described in this dissertation is not simply the moral conceptions of these five individuals, but also an ideal portrait of the kind of persons as which they would like to present themselves. Some times this presentation works to project the ideal of who they someday hope to become. Other times it works to cover over the kind of person they actually are. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that these narratives cannot be read as simple, straight forward declarations of moral belief. Instead they should be read as part of a larger project that includes the desire to be viewed by others in a certain light and the hope to be a kind of person that one may not actually be. It also entails the recognition that both of these can only happen in real, actual, everyday interactions with others, only one of which is a very odd, but yet still actual interaction with a nosey anthropologist, and finally the realization that everyday lived life is a process continually underway once again.

Because of this, these narratives force us to reconsider the very idea of morality. Indeed, they force us to ask why it is that we even believe there is something called morality. For if these narratives force us to read them as more than moral narratives, shouldn’t they also force us to question our own conceptual view of the world? In the

end, perhaps, these narratives force us to recognize that the One Big Idea concepts such as morality, culture and history do little to help us understand the ways in which actual lived life, the kind of life that every human being must wake up to every morning, can never be boxed into such concepts. For to paraphrase Dostoevsky's underground man, just when we think we have properly described human life with our analytic concepts, real, actual lived life throws us another curveball seemingly for the sake of proving it will always defy such conceptualization. This seems to be true whether it be the anthropologist looking for how people conceive of morality, or Aleksandra Vladimirovna unexpectedly being asked to lend her husband money.

And yet morality is a concept that carries with it much weight in both its everyday and theoretical uses. For this reason we should not eschew the anthropological study of moralities. It should be recognized, however, that the study of moralities must go beyond questions of right and wrong, good and evil, and the assumption of shared rules, obligations and expectations. For such a notion of morality may indeed be more representative of philosophical theorizing than of everyday lived life. Nevertheless, in recognizing that there may be no local (in this case Russian or Muscovite) morality as such to speak of, we need not give up looking at how various local and personal uses of moral discourse are articulated and utilized in various social contexts. For if it is true that there is no universally or culturally shared morality, then it is certainly just as true that morality is often invoked in various contexts by individuals and institutions. It is how morality as a discursive, rhetorical and pragmatic concept is utilized and to what ends, then, that an anthropology of morality should address itself. If any conclusion is possible for this dissertation, then, it is that in each of these moral portraits morality as a concept

is a way in which each of these individuals articulate their hopes and struggles in being and becoming a certain kind of person. In the end, perhaps, it is not surprising that morality was invoked by these individuals to describe this process of struggle and hope. For this is life after all, and if these narratives have said nothing else, I believe they have each in their own way made it clear that in life all there really is to do is to keep going. And as I write these final words I am happy to report that each of my interlocutors, Olya, Larisa, Dima, Anna and Aleksandra Vladimirovna, are doing just that.

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