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Jarrett Zigon

"You Should Reform Yourself and not Other People": the ethics of hope in contemporary Moscow

"You should reform yourself not other people": the ethics of hope in contemporary Moscow[1]

Jarrett Zigon[2]

Abstract

Increasingly the anthropology of moralities is becoming an important topic of study. This article contributes to these studies by considering two ethical tactics used by some contemporary Muscovites for working on themselves. These two tactics are prayer/talking with oneself and suffering. Foucault's two technologies of the self, melete and gymnasia, are utilized to analyze these two tactics. For based on fieldwork done in Moscow over the course of three years, it has become clear that the best way to understand one aspect of the moral conceptualizations of some contemporary Muscovites is to consider these ethical tactics as performances of moral self-analysis and improvement. As such, these ethical tactics constitute a primary component of what I call in this article an ethics of hope.

[2] Jarrett Zigon, postdoctoral research fellow, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, email: zigon@eth.mpg.de

Introduction

In this article I would like to address the increasing tendency in anthropological studies of local moralities to explain local morality either in terms of choice or dispositional training. In utilizing life-historical data from Moscow, Russia I will show that my interlocutors described their responses to what I call moral breakdowns as a combination of both choice and dispositional training. As will become clear, my Muscovite interlocutors oftentimes chose which particular ethical projects were important to the kind of person they hoped to be, and in doing so utilized certain culturally-endorsed ethical tactics for working on themselves.

Post-Soviet Russia offers a unique social context for studying local notions of morality. For nearly twenty years the Russian people have been living through a period of social and political upheaval and cultural and epistemological questioning – or what is often referred to as a period of transition. Just as it has been claimed that rather than bringing about a condition of increased homogeneity, globalization has brought about an "increasing intensity of problematization" (Faubion 2001: 101), so too has the so-called post-Soviet Russian transition been characterized by problematization. The Foucauldean notion of problematization describes a reflective state in which normally unreflected states of consciousness and behavior are presented "to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals" (Foucault 1984: 388). One characteristic of this questioning is the struggle by individuals and institutions to articulate a coherent notion of morality. I have described this struggle elsewhere as a moral breakdown (Zigon 2006b, Zigon 2007).

To speak of moral breakdown is not to speak of a lack of morality, but is to recognize that morality is at times questioned. Thus, I see contemporary Russia as a place and time of competing moral conceptualizations. It is for this reason that I began life-historical research in Moscow (2002-2005) in order to talk with people about and observe how they attempt to articulate their conceptions of morality (Zigon 2006a). These life-histories, or what I have come to call moral portraits, were of practicing artists and active Russian Orthodox Christians living in Moscow. I chose these two "social groups" because of their long held association and participation with public moral discourse in Russia. This does not mean, of course, that their articulated moral conceptions are representative of other "members" of these two "social groups," let alone of Russians in general. They are, rather, portraits of how some persons who take the question of morality in their everyday lives quite seriously articulate their concerns, experiences and conceptions of morality. Thus, neither my research nor this article are concerned with describing "a Russian morality," but instead the concern is with discerning the subtle similarities and differences of moral conceptions that arise from individually similar and different social experiences.

In this article, then, I would like to discuss two ethical tactics used by some of my interlocutors for working on themselves in these moments of moral breakdown. These two tactics are prayer/talking with oneself and suffering. These two tactics were often brought up in the course of interviews and conversations about how individuals deal with and work-through ethical dilemmas in their lives. It became clear that the best way to understand one aspect of the moral conceptualizations of these contemporary Muscovites is to consider these ethical tactics of prayer/talking with oneself and suffering as performances of moral self-analysis and improvement. As such, these ethical tactics constitute a primary component of what I call an ethics of hope.

Anthropology and Morality

While recently there have been several attempts at anthropological studies of local moralities (e.g. Howell 1997; Robbins 2004; Rydstrøm 2003), 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 (Parkin 1985: 4). It is because of this lacuna in anthropological discussions of morality that I am particularly interested in the way in which local persons articulate their own conceptions of morality. In doing life-historical research in Moscow I sought to understand how individuals' personal experiences led them to articulate certain moral conceptions. This is not to say, of course, that these experiences were isolated or monadic. Rather, because experiences are always social and intimately entwined in the matrix of social life, narrative accounts of experience provide an intimate account of how individual persons live-through, understand, and give meaning to their social world (e.g. Mattingly 1998).

   As I hope to make clear, one of the most significant similarities in these narrative accounts is an emphasis on working on oneself in certain ways so as to become the kind of person one hopes to be. This is what one does in moments of ethical dilemma or moral breakdown. As I have suggested elsewhere (2006b; 2007), an anthropology of moralities would be better able to focus its study on local notions of moralities if it made a distinction between morality and ethics. Morality, I suggest, is a kind of habitus or an unreflective and unreflexive disposition of everyday social life. Morality, then, is not thought out beforehand, nor is it noticed when it is performed. It is simply done. It is one's everyday way of being in the world. Ethics, on the other hand, is a kind of stepping-away from this moral habitus. It is brought about by a moral breakdown or problematization. This occurs when some event or person intrudes into the everyday life of a person and forces them to consciously reflect upon the appropriate ethical response (be it words, silence, action or non-action). In my own work I have focused my analysis on narrative reports of these moral breakdowns and the various ethical tactics utilized by my interlocutors to not only return to the unreflective and unreflexive disposition of morality, but in so doing, to create a new moral dispositional self. On working on themselves in this way, then, my interlocutors are performing what I call an ethics of hope.

   An ethics of hope attempts to bridge the gap between what I see as the two predominant approaches taken to anthropological studies of moralities: a focus on moral choice and a focus on dispositional or virtue ethics. For instance, Howell and several contributors to her edited volume on the ethnography of moralities suggests that a cross-cultural study of moralities may be best served by focusing on the acting individual's process of moral reasoning during which choices are made between alternative possible actions (1997: 14-6). Robbins agrees and claims that the moral domain is a conscious domain of choice (2004: 315-16). While to some extent I agree, I am concerned that this position limits what Robbins calls the moral domain. For a person is not only moral when she must make a conscious decision to be so. In fact, my research suggests that most people consider others and themselves moral most of the time and for this reason it is rarely considered or consciously thought over. The need to consciously consider or reason about what one must do only arises in moments that shake one out of the everydayness of being moral. This is what I called above the moral breakdown.

Other anthropologists have focused their attention on what might be called a dispositional or virtue ethics (e.g. Hirschkind 2001; Laidlaw 2002; Widlock 2004; Mahmood 2005). These studies take Neo-Aristotelian and Foucauldian approaches in considering how persons make themselves into properly attuned moral persons. While there certainly are differences between these two approaches, both share in common the position that one becomes a moral person by means of doing rather than thinking or reasoning. As Widlock argues, the dispositional and virtue ethics approach focuses on how persons become and are moral, not by inductively or deductively following rules, but through the experience of doing the good. It is only in this way of becoming virtuous, then, that one can train herself to be moral (Widlock 2004: 59).

Just as with the moral choice position, I am very sympathetic to the dispositional/virtue approach. What is often missing from this approach, however, is attention to how persons can choose between different techniques of training oneself. Persons are not limited to one societal-wide conception of morality (Howell 1997: 11), and for this reason they have, within limits, a range of possibilities from which to choose. On the other hand, this choice, in order to be effective, must be made repeatedly and in time embodied in such a way that it no longer is a choice. It is this bridge, then, between the choice and dispositional/virtue approaches that I will describe in this article.

Because the ethics of hope is a process of working on the self in order to create a certain kind of hoped-for self, I will briefly note what I mean by self. The self is neither monadic nor static, nor is it quite right to say, as does Kondo (1990: 48), that it is plural. I agree with Kondo, however, that the self is an ongoing process. To say that it makes more sense to speak of the self as a process rather than as plural is simply to emphasize the continually ongoing nature of its production and not those moments of reference when an aspect of this process is framed and called "the self." For the self about which I speak in this article is continually being produced and reproduced through the course of everyday embodied behavior, narrative and speech-acts, or what might be called habitus, and is consciously worked on in moments of moral breakdown. The self, then, as I use it here has a particular relationship to morality in that it is the latter, and its various discourses and techniques that set the frames within which selves can be produced (Butler 2005).

Russia and Morality

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Russian Federation and its people have faced significant political, economic and cultural upheaval. As a result of these upheavals and with almost certain influence from the Soviet era, Igor Kon has argued that post-Soviet Russia is characterized by a dialectic between competing moral understandings and an all out moral malaise (Kon 1996). 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" (ibid. 187). In addition, Kon continues, 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 (ibid. 205).

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 (1983). Using a discourse very similar to that heard in the post-Soviet 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[3] (De George 1969). 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 (Tallmer 1949: 515-17). 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 (1996) shows in her historical study of "private life" in post-Stalinist Russia, the evidence for such an assumption is slim. It is 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" (Yurchak 1997: 167). They did so not necessarily because they believed or agreed with such representations, but because they had little other choice than to *pretend* that they did (ibid. 169). 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 (Yurchak 2003). 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-centric, non-individualistic expectation, even if such a morality ultimately rested on methods of individuation and self-discipline (e.g. Marcuse 1961; De George 1969; Kharkhordin 1999). Thus, Michele Rivkin-Fish (2001) argues that while Soviet ideology may have represented morality as socio-centric, the personal sphere was often the site of moral discipline and authenticity. In particular, she argues that the concepts of *kul'turnost'* (culturedness) and *lichnost'* (individuality/person) were utilized as disciplinary tropes in the Soviet

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[3] The youth organization of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

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 (ibid. 38).

In her work on Russian talk during perestroika, Ries (1997) shows that what Russians talked about and the speech genres they used played an important role in the fall of the Soviet Union. 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. 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" (ibid. 21).

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" (2004: 207). 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 ethical transformations he writes about (ibid. 37). 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" (ibid. 36).

These historical and ethnographic studies of morality in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia all suggest a dialogic negotiation between, on the one hand, institutional and cultural forms of moral discourse and practice, and on the other, the personal experiences and conceptualizations of individuals' moralities. Thus, post-Soviet Russia is not so much unique because of this kind of moral negotiation and questioning, but because of the openness and publicness of this negotiation and questioning compared with the past. In the rest of this article, then, I will consider some of the ways in which my Muscovite interlocutors have narratively articulated this moral process.

An Ethics of Hope

An ethics of hope is perhaps best described as a working on oneself. Aleksandra Vladimirovna[4], a 51 year-old practicing Orthodox Christian and university professor who tutors and works a part-time teaching job in order to compensate her low professor's salary, put it to me in the simplest terms one day as we spoke about the perceived rise of ethical dilemmas and moral breakdowns in post-Soviet Russia: "If you want to overcome, you will overcome. You should fight yourself, not other people. You should reform (*ispravlyat'sya*) yourself not other people." Indeed, such an opinion may seem strange coming from a woman who was once the leader of her university Komsomol and still has fond memories of her activities with this organization, including going door to door explaining "The Moral Code of the Builder of Communism." In fact, however, Aleksandra Vladimirovna's response echoes the kind of emphasis on individual self-training and

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[4] All names have been changed.

personal moral analysis that was very much at the basis of Soviet conceptions of morality. As Kharkhordin (1999) has very interestingly argued, Soviet conceptions of the collective and the individual were intimately connected and mutually constitutive. So too were they a continuation of pre-Soviet practices, particularly those of Russian Orthodoxy. Thus, when Aleksandra Vladimirovna spoke to me about the primary importance of reforming herself, she was expressing an ethical tactic that she first learned as a young pioneer (Thorez 1991[1982]) and later lived and taught to others as a Komsomol leader. Little wonder, then, that Aleksandra Vladimirovna, the ex-Komsomol leader turned active Orthodox believer, so strongly focuses upon the importance of reforming herself.

What Aleksandra Vladimirovna told me about the importance of working on herself was echoed by several others of my interlocutors. So too was the importance of working on little projects. In other words, the ethical goal of many of my interlocutors was not to change themselves entirely at once, but instead to work on themselves one project at a time. That is to say, by working on themselves my interlocutors attempt to be the kind of person who does one thing and not another.

What are some examples of these small projects? For Aleksandra Vladimirovna the project is not to be so quickly offended by other's words: "if someone says something bad about me and I get hurt, then I think it is my fault because I was hurt, it was my sin. And then I somehow fix a time. For how long should I feel hurt? Half an hour, maybe? That is good, last time it was a whole hour. Congratulations! I focus on myself, so I am doing better all the time. So the fight is against yourself. Against yourself!" Or for Grigorii, an Orthodox seminary student in his late-twenties who chose to join the seminary after working in a nightclub as a bartender and using, in his words, drugs and alcohol excessively for a number of years, the project is to control his anger: "I try to heal myself from anger. I struggle with it. If you want to take your own experience of spiritual life you can choose any passion and try to struggle with it. Choose only one thing, because it is impossible to struggle with all the passions together. The easiest thing to struggle with is anger because it is the most common passion – it is the result of man's sin. It is also the worst passion because when a person is angry he cannot behave properly." For Dima, an agnostic musician, former heroin user and HIV/AIDS activist in his mid-thirties who is married and makes a Western salary working for an international HIV policy oriented NGO, the project is to stop being tempted to cheat on his wife. So far, so he told me, he has not done so. But he looks, and he is tempted. And he knows if he does not learn to control this, someday he will cheat on her.

These are not world altering personal projects. Rather, the Muscovites with whom I spoke tend to work on themselves little by little, project by project, self-perceived weakness by self-perceived weakness. It is not quite right to say that this is an ethics that aims at an accomplished life. Instead, I think it makes more sense to say that this is an ethics that aims at a better life, that is, a life more livable, both for oneself and for others. It is the attempt to live a life that both Susan Wolf and Talal Asad call sane (Wolf 1987; Asad 2003: 73). To live sanely in the world is to practically know and to be known practically in the world. To live sanely in the world is not to have agency in the sense of resisting the social order, rather it is to be an active agent in the attempt to live acceptably both for oneself and others, and to do so within the world in which one finds herself (see Mahmood 2001). This ethics of living sanely is similar to the kind of agency about which Yurchak writes was common during late socialism, when persons performed authoritative speech acts and rituals, and in so doing, both perpetuated these forms of authoritative discourse and at the same time created

new meanings for themselves (2006: 27-9). As will be seen below, then, several of my interlocutors may share similar ethical tactics, but each perform these for their own personal projects.

We still must consider how the Muscovites with whom I spoke go about working on themselves with these little projects. A good model for thinking about this is Foucault's technologies of the self. Foucault defines technologies of the self as that "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (1988: 18). As such, Foucault sees technologies of the self as one of the main components *of* and *for* a morally constituted individual. As Kharkhordin (1999) shows in his indispensable study of practices of individualization in Soviet Russia, Foucault's notion of technologies of the self is particularly apt for considering such practices in Russia. In the rest of this article, then, I will consider two technologies of the self, or what I call ethical tactics, that were repeated to me in various ways throughout my research: prayer/talking with oneself and suffering. In doing so, I hope to show how my Muscovite interlocutors bridge the gap between the two poles of moral choice and dispositional/virtue training about which I spoke above.

Prayer and Talking with Oneself

When some of my interlocutors first started telling me that they pray in order to resolve an ethical dilemma, I naively assumed they meant a more formalized prayer like the Lord's Prayer or those found in Church prayer books. But as they began to speak more and more about prayer as an important aspect of resolving questions of acting-in-the-moment, I began to ask how they pray. The answer was at once interesting and quite simple: what I will call throughout this article prayer in the moment is a plea for help or advice. Grigorii put it to me like this: "The first thing when something happens to you is to pray and to ask for God's advice. If you don't know how to behave then you pray and then suddenly you will get an answer […] I pray, I don't consult any people at all. I don't share my problems. And you can pray for some time and then all of a sudden you get this idea – yes, that is it, that is the way to do it. Sometimes you don't quite understand but you keep praying. There are circumstances that lead you and you say, I rely on You and I don't consult any people and if you are in prayer He will show you."

Another example was told to me by Aleksandra Vladimirovna:

> I pray and ask the Lord to help me. This is the best solution. I can give you an example. Either every week or twice a month I go to the country to visit my aunt and I go by train. Once I came to the station 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. If you have to pay a fine for this on the train, then often you can just pay something like twenty rubles to the official 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. Many people just give twenty rubles and they are quite happy. I didn't know what to do, so 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. But I also didn't want to feel embarrassed if the inspector came by. 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 twenty rubles or to pay the fine, which is much more. I decided, ok I will pay the fine, this is the best, but fortunately I didn't have to face this situation. 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. So God helped me in two ways, you see. He helped me decide what to do with the money and He also saved me from the embarrassment.

Prayer in the moment, then, can be seen as a form of communication; a communicative relationship between oneself and God so as to resolve an issue. The issue at hand is often very particular and localized – for example, whether or not to pay the bribe to the train conductor, or in Grigorii's case, to help him control his anger, on the metro for instance. In short, prayer in the moment is a form of communicative sociality through which the person who prays seeks advice from God so as to resolve a very particularized issue or dilemma.

Bishop Kallistos Ware describes prayer in the Orthodox Christian tradition as "a living relationship between persons" (2001: 106-7). Similarly, in the Catholic tradition Saint Teresa of Avila describes mental prayer, a form of prayer very similar to what I call prayer in the moment, as "simply a friendly intercourse and frequent solitary conversation with" God (1957[1565]: 63). As such, prayer in the moment can be conceived of as a communicative relationship between the person who prays and God. This is particularly true for these kinds of personalized, private prayers. For in the Orthodox tradition believers are encouraged to go beyond the reading of prayers from Church prayer books and to actively engage in internal and constant prayer with God. The most common form of such prayer is the Jesus Prayer. While the Jesus Prayer is the most common of these internal prayers, more personalized forms are also encouraged. As one Orthodox priest has told me: "it is not so important how you pray, but simply that you pray."

Because prayer in the moment is a communication with God in moments of ethical dilemma, or what I have called a moral breakdown, it is also an ethical performance. To speak of prayer as ethical performance is to say that by praying these persons are doing more than simply declaring a state of affairs or even asking a question to God. Rather, they are actively attempting to resolve a particular ethical dilemma. These prayerful words, then, are a significant part of the ethical act. The prayer, then, is an illocutionary act (Austin 1976: 100). Prayer is also performative because it has an emergent quality to it (Bauman 1984). That is, prayer in the moment helps create or recreate ethical responses, which in turn, helps to re-establish the praying person's moral world. There is, of course, no guarantee that prayer in the moment will be a successful ethical performance, or what Austin might call felicitous, for such felicity also depends upon the social context of the prayerful-act. But for some of my interlocutors prayer in the moment is considered just as important to the felicitous resolution of a moral breakdown as is the social context.

As a performative, prayer in the moment is a calling within of God. That is, it enacts a communion with God Himself. Or as Bishop Kallistos Ware would put it, prayer in the moment allows for the ingoddedness or the deification of the praying individual (2001: 109). Olya, an unmarried practicing Orthodox Christian and school teacher in her late-twenties who, like Aleksandra Vladimirovna, also tutors to make extra money, once told me, "when I pray I can feel that I am not alone. I can feel Him inside me (*vnutri*) telling me what to do." When I asked how she knew it was God telling her what to do and not her own or some other voice, she responded that it is clear when God talks, "there is never any question." Aleksandra Vladimirovna agrees. "God is good, very good. His advice, well let's just say it is more clear (*bolee yasnye*), more obvious than human advice. It's always very simple. It is pure (*chisty*)."

Prayer in the moment, then, is both a relationship to oneself and to God. The distinction is brought about by the obvious gap between the "purity" of God and the fallibility of oneself. It is this gap that allows the space for prayer in the moment to be a technology for working on oneself. For it is in this gap located within oneself that the person finds a space in which moral self-improvement becomes possible. The present-not-quite-moral and the hoped-for-moral are intimately connected in the imminence of oneself. This proximity allows for an ethics of hope.

Prayer in the moment, then, is a particular style of prayer that differs from other, more formal styles of prayer that may be linked with Liturgy or other forms of sacred space or time. Typically what I call prayer in the moment is referred to as petitionary prayer, that is, prayer that expresses a request to God. I would make a finer distinction, however, and suggest that prayer in the moment, while certainly an instance of petitionary prayer, is more definitely linked to specific moments of ethical dilemma.

Prayer in the moment, then, is that which is done in moments of ethical hesitation, confusion or pause, that is, in moments of moral breakdown. As Olya told me, "whenever I don't know what to do I pray." There is nothing surprising about this pragmatic use of prayer, for it seems quite common both cross-culturally and within the Orthodox tradition. For example, Gladys Reichard (1944) in her detailed monograph on Navaho prayer shows how it is often used for such things as warding off evil and allowing for the influx of good or for preserving and maintaining health; Joel Robbins shows how the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea use prayer as an apology or a peace offering between agonistic individuals or parties (2001: 907); Saba Mahmood (2005) shows how prayer is used by Muslim women in Egypt as an ethical practice; and the anonymous peasant who wrote the Russian Orthodox classical text the *Way of a Pilgrim* tells us that only with prayer is it "possible to do good" (Anonymous 1978: 17).

I was told about a similar ethical tactic by some of my non-Orthodox interlocutors. When I asked them how they go about deciding how to act in moments of ethical dilemma several of my interlocutors told me about a process that centers on talking with themselves. Thus, for example, Anna, an unmarried poet in her late-twenties who relies on the help of her parents for financial support, told me the following: "sometimes I just don't know what to do and I have to ask myself, what should I do?" Or, "it's funny, you know, sometimes I even find myself having a conversation with myself (*razgovarivayu sama s soboi)*." These kinds of remarks were not uncommon. Consider how Larisa, a doll maker in her late-fifties and the wife of Igor Sergeevich, a well known musical conductor in his early-seventies, described him when he is deciding how he should resolve a difficult issue in their lives.

> when a [moral] problem arises, and it does from time to time, he is a very cautious person. Sometimes he does not sleep the whole night. I look at him and he just thinks if I act this way how will it affect this person or that person. Sometimes I even hear him talking aloud to himself […] I've never seen such a person before who will think about everyone.

Both Anna and Igor Sergeevich, then, talk with themselves as a tactic for ethical decision-making. Although prayer and talking with oneself are clearly not the same act, they are however both speech-acts that are performed by one person and which are not directed to any other human person. And yet talking with oneself, like prayer, is a speech-act that is doing something. What talking with oneself is doing is providing these persons with a tactic to work through a particular ethical dilemma at hand, come up with a response, and enact it. In this sense it is similar to what

Vygotsky (1986) called inner speech. As Berk claims, this inner speech is the "conscious" dialogue persons have with themselves when thinking and acting (1994: 80). It should be noted, however, that the talking with oneself that my interlocutors reported was not always inner speech, but also what Vygotsky might have called egocentric speech, that is speech spoken aloud directed at oneself. Because talking with oneself takes the form of both inner and egocentric speech, I suggest it remains, unlike Vygotsky's notion of inner speech, essentially social speech. This is so because talking with oneself is an ethical tactic that ultimately aims to return one to the everyday socially moral world. And, indeed, as Larisa made clear about her husband's ethical concerns, it is social speech because in returning to this socially moral world it helps one decide how one's actions will "affect this person or that person."

Both of these tactics, prayer in the moment and talking with oneself, are ways in which these persons can creatively engage with the ethical moment so as not only to resolve the ethical dilemma but also to train themselves so that such a dilemma may not be so problematic in the future. Prayer in the moment and talking with oneself are ways, then, for these persons not only to engage the ethical moment, but also to engage themselves. They allow them, in the words of Aleksandra Vladimirovna, to reform themselves.

While Aleksandra Vladimirovna may be right to say that the focus of such an ethical tactic is to work on oneself, the consequences of such work go well beyond these individual persons. As is clear in all of the examples given in this section, each person engaged in the ethical tactic of prayer or talking with oneself in order to bring about a social situation in which they could have appropriate moral relations with others. As Larisa said about her husband, his main concern in these moments of ethical dilemma is how his decision will best affect other persons. It is this concern that makes him so cautious, not simply a concern of working on himself. So too with Aleksandra Vladimirovna and her ethical dilemma with the train ticket. This was not an isolated instance of questioning good or bad (such situations do not exist). Rather, she found herself in a social context that made this into an ethical dilemma. This context was composed of, among other things, rules (one must pay for a ticket or a fine), those who are supposed to uphold the rules (conductors), those who provide examples of breaking the rules (other passengers and conductors), as well as her own fear of embarrassment brought on by the dilemma. Indeed, when she was eventually not faced with having to confront a conductor, she decided to give her money away as charity, further showing the social nature of the ethical dilemma and its resolution. Thus, the ethical tactics of prayer in the moment and talking with oneself are at one and the same time tactics for working on the self and for creating the conditions for enacting morality with other persons.

Suffering as Moral Training

I have suggested that prayer in the moment and talking with oneself are ethical tactics that can also be considered as aspects of what Foucault called technologies of the self. In this section I would like to move on to another example of such a technology, one that Foucault (1988) calls *gymnasia*. Foucault analyzes in detail two instances of *gymnasia* in the forms of the disclosure of the self that were utilized by the early Christians – namely, *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis*. While Foucault shows that in Western Christianity the form of *exagoreusis*, which most famously manifested itself in the form of confession, became dominant, Kharkhordin convincingly argues that *exomologesis*, which is the "dramatic expression of the situation of the penitent as sinner which makes manifest

his status as sinner" (Foucault 1988: 48), remained "as the doctrinally central church practice for erasing sins in Orthodox Russia" (Kharkhordin 1999: 227). The Orthodox Church seems to support this claim in a recent publication on Christian ethics where it says that "suffering cures the damaged soul of the sinner" (Russian Orthodox Church 2000: 19). In fact, Kharkhordin goes on to show that not only did this practice remain dominant in the Russian Orthodox Church, but it was wholeheartedly adopted by the Bolsheviks "to such an unprecedented degree" that it transcended the religious realm and "was displaced to new locales" that included networks of friends and individuals' perceptions of themselves and their behavior (Kharkhordin 1999: 359). That influence remains today in the self perceptions and behavior of several of my Muscovite interlocutors.

The first time I met Irina, an unmarried and unemployed 26 year-old theater actress who had just recently moved to Moscow from a provincial city in Central Russia, I asked her how she reacts when she realizes she has done something she considers inappropriate or has hurt someone else in someway. As she responded by telling me that "my first reaction is that I feel very bad on the inside and even physically. And I don't know what to do at this time, I have absolutely no idea," I noticed Irina's physical reaction to my question more than her verbal answer. As she was telling me that she feels very bad (*chuvstvuyu sebya ochen' plokho*) and that she even feels physical pain she was actually hitting herself in the head with a knocking motion and beating herself on the chest. At one point she even leaned forward and slapped the table. I wondered, why the physicality? Why the allusion to punishment? As I gradually came to know Irina more I told myself that this, no doubt related to her profession as an actress, was simply an idiosyncrasy of hers.

About a month later I was meeting with Grigorii, the young seminary student about whom I wrote in the last section, whose temperament and personality are quite different from Irina's. While Irina is excitable and apt to go off on long monologues concerning any range of subjects, from art to mysticism, from her grandmother to her sex life, Grigorii is sober and tended to answer as concisely as possible only the specific questions I posed. Once, while answering one of my questions in his usual manner he, as if his body was suddenly infiltrated by Irina, began hitting himself in both his head and chest. I was surprised not only because this was so unlike the Grigorii I had come to know but I immediately realized that perhaps there was something more to this physicality than I had earlier suspected.

Eventually I came to realize that these expressions of physicality were more than articulations of determination or even punishment, but rather were "dramatic expression[s] of the situation of the penitent as sinner which makes manifest his status as sinner" (Foucault 1988: 48). That is to say, these expressions of physicality were public, bodily gestures of suffering. For it became quite clear that suffering in some form or another is a common way for those with whom I spoke to react when they realize they have acted, and for some even thought, in an inappropriate manner according to their own or others' moral expectations. In other words, just as it has been argued that suffering helps constitute the social world (Kleinman, Das, Lock 1997: xxiv), I would like to suggest that for those with whom I spoke suffering helps constitute their particular personal moral world, which is the foundation for each of their particular ways of being-in-the-social-world.

There is, of course, a long tradition of invoking suffering as a definitive trope of Russianness. If this did not begin with Dostoevsky, then he is certainly responsible for its development as a moral category. As he put it in his *Diary of a Writer*, "I think that the most basic, most rudimentary spiritual need of the Russian people is the need for suffering, ever-present and unquenchable, everywhere and in everything" (quoted in Ries 1997: 83). This romantic vision of the suffering

Russian has persisted ever since. Even in contemporary ethnographies we find this vision perpetuated – suggesting if not the moral superiority of the sufferer then certainly the status of a social victim. Indeed, echoing Dostoevsky's romantic vision, these ethnographies tell us that the one who suffers is identified with, because we are told she herself identifies herself with, the Russian soul or the powerlessness rendered eternal through the "distinctive Russian speech genre" of litany (e.g. Ries 1997; Pesmen 2000). I too in my conversations with Muscovites heard much that suggested the personal suffering of those with whom I spoke. But not once did anyone make reference to the eternal suffering of the Russian soul or the unquenchable need to suffer everywhere and always. Rather, what I found is that most people's moral suffering comes as the result of particular and well-defined instances of, in most cases, their own moral transgressions. I agree, then, with Pesmen when she says that for Russians "conscience (*sovest'*) [is] the epitome of suffering" (2000: 54). But while she focuses on the suffering conscience as empathy, which I certainly agree does occur, here I want to consider this suffering as self-generated. As such, the suffering conscience is indeed a "kind of centered moral evaluation aimed at self-improvement" (ibid. 54), but one that begins not in the other, but in oneself.

Let us return to Irina and the answer she gave to my question: "my first reaction is that I feel very bad on the inside and even physically. And I don't know what to do at this time, I have absolutely no idea." Let us slow down and consider her answer and the two implications found within it. First, and related to what we have thus far been discussing, is the physicality of the suffering. Irina says she feels "very bad on the inside." This expression of internal pain was echoed by several others. For example, Dima told me if he does "something wrong from my own point of view or from my inner self point of view, first of all, I don't know, it's really painful. It's really painful (*boleznenno*)." And Larisa, an unmarried woman in her late-twenties who recently attempted to become a practicing member of the Orthodox Church but eventually gave up this path, said that when "I realize I did something wrong I usually undergo some internal torture (*pytka*). I cannot even sleep sometimes because I think, oh I hurt that person." Indeed, once while in Moscow I tried several times to arrange a meeting with Larisa only to have my attempts met with a range of excuses for why she could not meet me. Several weeks later we finally did get together for a walk through central Moscow. In the middle of our walk she stopped, turned to me, and said: "Jarrett I have to admit, I have been avoiding you because I lied to you a few weeks ago about not being able to meet you. I felt so bad about this that I just couldn't face you." Here again is an instance of Larisa suffering moral pain due to her transgression, and thus being unable to do something she would like to have done otherwise. In each of these examples, then, it was reported to me that a recognition of one's own moral transgression leads to a feeling of inner pain.

But as has been pointed out several times since Wittgenstein, pain "in this rendering, is not that inexpressible something that destroys communication or marks an exit from one's existence in language. Instead, it makes a claim asking for acknowledgment, which may be given or denied. In either case, it is not a referential statement that is simply pointing to an inner object" (Das 1997: 70). Similarly, I would like to argue that in this case the suffering pain is a self-imposed tactic for working through a moral transgression. In fact, I would suggest it is not the acknowledgment by others of the suffering pain of those who make this claim that is at stake. Rather, I suggest that expressions like "feeling very bad," "painful," and "torture" are utilized to indicate a process of self-analysis that is hoped to lead to self-improvement. In other words, Irina, Dima and Larisa may

or may not actually feel bad with torturous pain. The actual existence of internal pain is not at question.

What is at question is the ability to use culturally meaningful language – words that suggest internal suffering/pain – to communicate to others that they recognize their inappropriate behavior (and sometimes thought) in some particular past act-moment. In doing so, they accomplish two things. First, they hope to create a social space in which they can find a haven from others who may be interested in applying repercussions and/or retribution on to them for their (mis)behavior. This social space is of course temporally limited in that others generally expect to see results from the internal pain/suffering of the transgressor in the form of an apology or something of the like. It is with this that we see the pragmatic use of language in social situations in which one needs to "buy time" so to work-through particular details of the questioned act-moment. Second, this pragmatic use of language also helps create a personal space in which the transgressor – in this case Irina, Dima or Larisa – can work through the details of the act-moment in question. In this personal space such questions as: what happened? how did I act? could I have done this differently? and so on, can be addressed so as not only to figure out how to make amends for the particular transgression – if this is indeed the goal – but more importantly how to prevent it from happening again in the future. In this way, I suggest, we should think of claims of suffering not as indexing an actually existing pain such as a suffering soul. Rather, claims of suffering are better thought of, similar to prayer in the moment and talking with oneself, as an illocutionary performance that calls forth the context of moral self-improvement.

The second part of Irina's response to my question about how she responds to her own transgressions was that while suffering the internal pain she does not "know what to do at this time, I have absolutely no idea." This notion was also echoed by others. For example, Olya told me that she feels "like I'm overwhelmed with tiredness and I can't deal with the world around me." Similarly, it should be recalled that Larisa was unable to bring herself to meet with me because she felt so badly about her lie. These responses bring to mind Ricoeur's definition of suffering as "the reduction, even the destruction, of the capacity for acting, of being-able-to-act" (1992: 190). But what seems clear from the words of my interlocutors is that this suffering, and the inability to act that it brings about, is itself an ethical act, or to be more precise, an ethical tactic utilized in the moment of moral breakdown.

Related to this moral suffering is the process of repetition. For many with whom I spoke, repetition of the unacceptable behavior or thought is expected and the suffering of internal pain is considered one of the primary ways to prevent or limit it. Let me go back to what Dima was telling me earlier and allow him to finish his thought. "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, it's really painful. It's really painful. And sometimes it gets me really depressed. 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." When I asked him what makes possible this moment of stopping, Dima told me that it comes about when he becomes aware of the repetition. "When I realize that I keep feeling this way (in pain) every time I do it again, then it is easy to stop. I can just stop doing it."

Similarly, when Larisa refused to meet with me because of the moral suffering she was undergoing due to the lie she told me, she repeatedly lied again in order to make excuses not to meet. Thus, the same cycle of transgression and pain was repeated several times over the course of

a few weeks until she was able to breakthrough the cycle and no longer lie to me. It was only at this point that she was able to act in a way that she wanted, that is to meet with me, and finally "confess" her initial transgression. It should be further noted that it was only the initial lie that seems to have morally troubled Larisa. The subsequent lies seem to have not counted as moral transgressions, but instead seem to have been part of the ethical tactic of the repetition of suffering.

These examples suggest that by means of the repetition of the transgressive act so too is the internal pain of suffering repeated. This repetition indicates a process of coming to know oneself in the sense of coming-to-realize-yourself-as-one-who-does-this. As Caruth argues for traumatic repetition, "in its delayed appearance and its belated address, [repetition] cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (1996: 4). However, for several of my interlocutors repetition eventually does bring forth the unknown into the known, and in doing so allows the transgressor to realize that "I did do this" but "I don't want to be the kind of person who does it again." It is in this way that repetition of both the act and the consequent suffering can be considered as a primary technology of ethical self-improvement for those with whom I spoke.

Freud found it interesting that repetition seemed to be a kind of fate. But for some of my Muscovite interlocutors there is little hesitation in speaking of this repetition as a kind of fate that teaches a lesson in life. For some consider the repetition of transgressions as a lesson given to oneself; a lesson on how to become a particular kind of person who does not do this or that. Consider the following from Olya, who it should be remembered is both a practicing Orthodox Christian and a school teacher:

> **Olya –** And of course I think about my future, because if I behave badly this time, I will have the same situation in the future until I find the right solution. Until I discover the proper way to act I will experience the same situation throughout my life […]
> **Jarrett –** And why do you think this happens?
> **Olya –** In order to teach us how to live life properly [… God] is like a teacher in school. For example, if I see a student has made many mistakes, then I show him the correct way to do it and give it to him again to see if he can do it himself […] If we do something wrong and we are not taught how to do it correctly, then we will repeat and repeat and there will be no sense in our life, just repeating our mistakes.

Anna, a poet in her late-twenties who claims to be an atheist, makes a very similar claim concerning the role of God or some other hand of fate in repetition. "I don't know who, maybe God, maybe not, but someone or something helps you and shows you how you should act. That bad event was a lesson. And some of these events are quite mysterious because they repeat themselves and then you realize that someone is trying to teach you a lesson, and then you cannot forget this and repeat your mistakes with other people later."

Repetition, then, despite the mysteriousness of its source – fate, God or nonconsciously self-enacted – is a lesson or an exercise for self-improvement. Because so many people invoked the experience of repetition in terms of a repeating of not only the act but also the consequent suffering, it seems clear that while suffering calls forth or allows for the stepping away from the social world that one needs to create the space and the time for self-improvement, we can think of repetition as a tactic for prolonging this suffering, and thus the stepping away of self development. Repetition, then, goes hand in hand with suffering. For the two are inseparable in that suffering without repetition may be too easily forgotten or dismissed, and thus ineffective in its moral

function, while repetition might simply go unnoticed, or perhaps be unnecessary, without the moral need to suffer.

Just as prayer in the moment and talking with oneself are not only tactics for working on the self, but are also acts of social ethics, so too are suffering and repetition. Whereas the former are primarily tactics for deciding how to act morally in a particular situation, suffering and repetition are responses to recognized moral transgressions against other persons. The suffering and its repetition, then, does not only allow one to step-out of their everyday way of being and work on themselves, but it also serves to draw them morally closer to others. This is done in two ways. First, by publicly expressing their suffering, they are admitting their transgression to others. Second, the work they do on themselves serves to create closer moral and social relations with others once they are able to break the cycle of suffering and repetition. It is in this way, then, that my interlocutors use the culturally-endorsed rhetoric of suffering as an ethical tactic for working on the self.

Conclusion

In this article I have used life-historical data from research in Moscow to show that an anthropology of moralities more accurately describes the moral lives of its subjects when it acknowledges the mutually constituting significance of both choice and dispositional training. To do so is to acknowledge that no society is characterized by "a morality," but instead has a range of moral possibilities that are made up of, as Rogers (2004) put it, shades of similarity and difference. Thus, every society has a range of possible moral discourses, practices, ethical tactics and technologies of working on the self. Because of this, individual persons can to some degree choose (recognizing, of course, the significance of such factors as power or class, among others, in the shaping of such decisions) which of these are appropriate and when.

So too can they choose what they will work on. Here I want to reinforce the minute scale of these ethical projects. That is to say, the particular and personal nature of the one-project-at-a-time. As I said at the beginning of this article, to become the kind of person who does this and not that is to live a life of little projects. This kind of ethics differs from the ethics of an accomplished life commonly expressed by virtue theorists – for there is no resting point; there is no endpoint. There is no endpoint for two reasons. First, because projects continually arise. Second, and intimately related to this, is that the self is always a process, it is always a process of becoming. For this reason, then, there can be no accomplished life because there can be no accomplished self.

The ethics of hope that I have described here recognizes that to be a social being is to be endowed with both the ability to make reasoning choices and decisions, as well as to work on oneself so as to embody a certain dispositional way of being that allows one to have, as Wolf and Asad put it, a sane relationship to one's social world. It attempts to go beyond views of the moral person as either/or and instead sees her as both/and. For ultimately what an ethics of hope recognizes is that for any person to be considered by herself and others as moral, she must not only be able to choose in those moments of the ethical dilemma the morally appropriate response, she must eventually also become the kind of person who does not find herself in these moments very often. Becoming a socially recognized moral person, then, entails both choice and dispositional training.

This article has also shown how some of my Muscovite interlocutors narratively articulated this ethics of hope and how they utilize similar ethical tactics – prayer/talking with oneself and

repetitive suffering. As was made clear, these tactics have roots in Orthodox, pre-Soviet and Soviet discourses of the moral person, as does the notion of the centrality of working on oneself as the foundation for both a good personal moral character as well as for proper social morality. Similarly, it was shown that post-Soviet articulations of moral questioning appear to be a continuation of a decades-long concern over the foundations of morality. What is new, then, about post-Soviet moral questioning is the openness and publicness with which it occurs. In other words, while the specific questions may have changed with the times, the very fact of moral questioning and the tactics utilized in response to this questioning have changed very little. Perhaps, then, the concern of anthropologists of post-Soviet Russia should not be whether or not there is a lack of morality in contemporary Russia, but instead how this *perceived* lack leads persons to articulate a moral discourse and practice ethical tactics that are familiar and make sense to both themselves and others.

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