



## Mir (*мир; миръ*) (Russian)

Historically, ‘*mir*’ was one of the terms used to refer to an organized and self-sufficient peasant community (*obshchina, община*) in Russia. It acquired additional metaphysical connotations in the religious and philosophical writings starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and served as a conceptual precursor to one of the central categories of Russian religious philosophy, *sobornost*.<sup>1</sup>

The most obvious semantic layer of this term connotes the idea of a complex collective identity as opposed to an individual agency. The *mir* includes all members of a (usually) agricultural community but is not identical to a mechanical sum of a certain number of humans. Even at the level of an ordinary language usage, *mir* appears to acquire quasi-personal characteristics when it shows itself as a wise agent which can issue binding decisions, administer rewards and punishments and acquire property rights. For example, it was the *mir*, rather than an individual peasant, who ultimately owned the land, and, consequently, it was the responsibility of the *mir* to settle any financial or legal accounts with the government on behalf of a particular member of the village. A pervasive conviction among the peasants that God alone had the ultimate claim to the land that they were cultivating merely as temporary ‘care-takers’ was manifested in the alienation of the individual rights for the agricultural assets in favor of the abstract collective union, the *mir*. It thus functioned as an earthly representative of the higher authority with the full powers to distribute the land and other goods according to the principles of *truth (pravda, no pravde)* rather than the rules of formal justice. For a similar reason, the *mir* also served as a point of reference for an individual facing a moral uncertainty and thus as a reliable moral standard. The decisions of the *mir* were in an important sense final and could not be appealed (e.g., as in expression ‘*the mir has decreed...*’ ‘*мир присудил...*’).

Psychologically, *mir* allows to transcend the obvious limitations of a person taken as an atomic unit. A common expression “by the efforts of all the *mir*” (*всем миром*) imbues a person with the powers of the multitude, and a popular Russian saying “even death is beautiful in front of the *mir*” (*на миру и смерть красна*) suggests that one’s identity is defined against the background of the *mir*’s judgment. Traditional emphasis on the absolute priority of the collective, the *mir*, over an individual was often identified as one of the underlying causes of the popular appeal of communist ideology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia (e.g., Berdyaev, 1960). But more importantly, an

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<sup>1</sup> The other lexical meanings of this homonym, such as *peace* and the *world*, will not be relevant here, even though Maria Kainova argues that the other ordinary meaning of *mir*, namely, ‘peace’ is not merely accidental – it is derived from the idea of a *peaceful* co-existence within a traditional community. <https://reshenie.vcc.ru/read/mir-i-mir>

idealized understanding of *mir* as a peaceful commonwealth of Christian peasants, unspoiled by the ills of civilization, is also at the root of another influential philosophical and religious concept – *Sobornost'*. On Khomiakov's view, who was one of the first thinkers to employ this notion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *sobornost'* "is an organic, living unity the origin of which lies in the divine grace of mutual love... it is a spiritual unity, not only a social unity" (2019, 205).<sup>2</sup> The historical fact of the pervasiveness of *mir* in Russian history served as both an inspiration and justification of that subsequent philosophical notion of *sobornost'*, and the latter notion cannot be fully grasped without understanding the former.

**Andrei Zavaliy**

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, an understanding of the *mir* as *sobornost'* in Khomiakov's sense was intuitively grasped by Natasha Rostov in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. While being present at a church service, she listens to the words of a traditional prayer, "Let us pray to the Lord by all the *mir* (*Миром Господу помолимся*)" and she immediately interprets the phrase in the following way: "As one community, without distinction of class, without enmity, united by brotherly love—let us pray!" (Book 9, Ch. XVIII).