

Fyodor Dostoevsky’s “I am more than all” and Its Implications for the Political*

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Abstract. The paper examines Fyodor Dostoevsky’s ethical views – especially as exemplified in the dictum “each of us is guilty of everything against all, and I am more than all” – in light of their political implications. It focuses on two related issues. First, Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophical interpretation of Dostoevsky’s “I am more than the others” is contrasted with its interpretation by Sigmund Freud, who famously argued that Dostoevsky’s fixation on guilt was the consequence of his neurotic intention to murder his father. Freud’s claim has been refuted by Dostoevsky’s bibliographers. To understand the meaning of “I am more than all,” its semantic-narrative context in *The Brothers Karamazov* is therefore discussed. Second, the paper then examines the political implications of Dostoevsky’s ethics of redemption. Given that there are at least three traditions of theorizing the political – classical-Aristotelian, Schmittian, and liberal – the paper examines how Dostoevsky’s ethics of redemption can be positioned vis-à-vis these conceptualizations and which of them it can enrich the most.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, ethics of redemption, the political, Levinas, Freud, Schmitt, Aristotle, liberalism, war (in Ukraine).

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Fiodoro Dostojevskio „aš labiau nei visi“ ir jo reikšmė teorinei diskusijai apie politiškumą

Santrauka. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos Fiodoro Dostojevskio etinės pažiūros – pirmiausia jo teiginio „kiekvienas iš mūsų dėl visko kaltas prieš visus, o aš labiau už visus“ – klausiant, ką jos reiškia mūsų svarstymams apie politiškumą. Jame dėmesys sutelkiamas į du susijusius klausimus. Pirma, Emmanuelio Levino filosofinė Dostojevskio „aš labiau už visus“ interpretacija yra priešinama Sigmundo Freudo interpretacijai, anot kurios, Dostojevskio dėmesys kaltės temai buvo jo neurotiško ketinimo nužudyti savo tėvą pasekmė. Šį Freudo teiginį paneigė Dostojevskio bibliografai. Norint suprasti teiginio „aš labiau už visus“ reikšmę, aptariamas jo semantinis-naratyvinis kontekstas romane *Broliai Karamazovai*. Antra, straipsnyje nagrinėjama Dostojevskio atpirkimo etikos reikšmė politinės teorijos diskusijoms apie politiškumą. Atsižvelgiant į tai, kad egzistuoja mažiausiai trys politiškumo teorizavimo tradicijos – klasikinė-aristoteliška, šmitiška ir liberali, – straipsnyje klausiama, kaip Dostojevskio atpirkimo etika gali būti pozicionuojama šių konceptualizavimų atžvilgiu ir kurį iš jų ji gali labiausiai praturtinti.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Dostojevskis, atpirkimo etika, politiškumas, Levinas, Freudas, Schmittas, Aristotelis, liberalizmas.

Introduction

Fyodor Dostoevsky's influence on European philosophy, including social philosophy, cannot be overestimated. Friedrich Nietzsche once claimed that Dostoevsky was the only person who taught him

of Europe, its culture, and the political norms of its peaceful co-existence would be threatened by the war in Europe perpetrated by the illegitimate aggression of Vladimir Putin's chauvinistic regime and its full-fledged military invasion of the sovereign state of Ukraine. It is against the background of the horrors of war that reading and rereading Fyodor Dostoevsky, one of the greatest literary geniuses of Russia, is so important. And this is not so because everything Dostoevsky wrote is valuable and praiseworthy. Indeed, many things he wrote – especially in the form of his journalism in the 1870s – deserves criticism. His antisemitism, anti-Polish sentiments, the patriarchal support of tsarism, best exemplified in his congratulatory address to Alexander II in February 1880, his nationalism and, especially, Russian messianism deserve criticism. I will, however, not engage in the critique of these and other questionable aspects of his work in this paper not least because it was already done before (one of the best attempts to distinguish between the ideological aspects of Dostoevsky's writings in his journalism and the imaginative part of his thought in literature and the critique of the former from the point of view of historical materialism is Geoffrey C. Kabat's *Ideology and Imagination: The Image of Society in Dostoevsky* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978)). Dostoevsky's great literary works are important because they bring the message of humility, forgiveness, infinite ethical responsibility, and deeply rooted Christian pacifism which he, being a Slavophil, saw in the spirit of the Orthodox Russian people. How different it is from the perverted neo-fascism of the political regime of Putin's Russia!

anything about psychology.¹ In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus framed his arguments on suicide and the meaning of life around the protagonist of *The Devils* and envisaged Kirillov as the man of the absurd. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his lecture *Existentialism is Humanism*, took Ivan Karamazov's "if God did not exist, everything would be permitted" to be the starting point of his existentialism. These are just the most obvious examples of his influence on European philosophy, while Dostoevsky's influence on literature and European cultural imagination is enormous. Last year was the 200-year anniversary of Dostoevsky's birth. This fact, together with the enormous threat to peace in Europe posed by the current tyrannical political regime of Russia, give an opportunity to engage in a careful rereading of Dostoevsky's literary texts. Reading Dostoevsky is important to see the greatness of Russian culture and not be trapped in the moral error of putting the sign of equality between the tyranny of the current regime and the culture of the people.

There is ongoing scholarly research in Dostoevsky's literary work and his ethical and religious views. Walter Kaufmann, in his anthology of key existentialist philosophers, was one of the first to present Dostoevsky and his *Notes from Underground* as an existentialist philosopher.² In a somewhat similar manner (yet much earlier than Kaufmann), Andre Gide, a writer himself, emphasised the ethical aspects of Dostoevsky's literary work and claimed that *The Brothers Karamazov* was the greatest novel ever written.³ Denis Dirscherl provided an analysis of Dostoevsky's critique of Catholicism, showing how his Russian-Orthodox messianism was informed by the culturally inherited prejudice about Catholicism and the West.⁴ Dostoevsky's literary works were also extensively analysed from the

¹ Jeff Love and Jeffrey Metzger, eds., *Nietzsche and Dostoevsky: Philosophy, Morality, Tragedy* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 7.

² Walter Kaufmann, ed., *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956).

³ Andre Gide, *Dostoevsky* (New York: New Directions, 1961).

⁴ Denis Dirscherl, *Dostoevsky and the Catholic Church* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986).

theological point of view.⁵ James P. Scanlan wrote an influential account of Dostoevsky not as a writer, but as a philosopher, arguing that despite his shift from being a pro-European liberal in the 1840s to an apologist of Russian imperialism in the 1860s, Dostoyevsky's ethical-political dream remained constant and clear throughout his life – “the dream of a community of perfect Christian brotherhood and love.”⁶ Ksana Blank's study of Dostoevsky's account of ethical views through the dialectical tension between righteousness and sin, between death and salvation has been eye-opening in understanding what role crime, sin and forgiveness play in Dostoevsky's thought.⁷ Yet the most influential for this study have been Joseph Frank's (who is arguably the most authoritative biographer of Dostoevsky in the world) outstanding scholarship and Nancy Ruttenburg's original account of Dostoevsky's Christian socialism and his deeply democratic orientation that we find in *The House of the Dead*, a novel based on his notes from imprisonment in Siberia.⁸

In this paper I will examine Dostoevsky's ethical views – first and foremost in his masterpiece *The Brothers Karamazov* – and pose the question of their implications for a possible understanding of the political. For the sake of brevity, I will concentrate only on two interpretive aspects of his ethical views. First, to understand the meaning of “each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all” (which, as I will argue, is the central ethical theme of the novel and his ethics of redemption in general), I will look at its main pro-

⁵ The noteworthy examples are an outstanding book by Rowan Williams (see his *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2008)), the edited volume by George Pattison & Diane O. Thompson, eds., *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁶ James P. Scanlan, *Dostoevsky: The Thinker* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 160.

⁷ Ksana Blank, *Dostoevsky's Dialectics and the Problem of Sin* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2010).

⁸ See Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), and Nancy Ruttenburg, *Dostoevsky's Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

nouncements in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Second, I will examine its interpretation by Emmanuel Levinas and juxtapose his reading to Freud's misreading of Dostoevsky. The second part of the paper will consider what Dostoevsky's ethics of redemption may mean for political theory's debates on the nature of the political. Thus, the question of how Dostoevsky himself thought about the politics of his day or what political views he had will not be the focus of the second part of the paper. The latter would be the task of a literary critic or a historian, while this paper is an attempt to appropriate Dostoevsky's ethics of redemption, in as much as it is possible to do so, for our theoretical debates about the nature of the political.

1. Two Readings: Sigmund Freud versus Emmanuel Levinas

There are at least two ways of interpreting Dostoevsky's ethical views in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The central ethical theme of the novel is the nature and the limit of ethical responsibility which Dostoevsky himself chose to express in terms of "guilty before all and I am more than others." Sigmund Freud's reading of Dostoevsky's emphasis on guilt has been influential yet mistaken. In his famous essay "Dostojewski und die Vätertötung" ("Dostoevsky and Parricide," originally published in 1928) Freud argued that Dostoevsky's fixation on guilt was linked to his neurosis. Claiming that Dostoevsky was "a sinner or a criminal," Freud argued that "to reckon Dostoevsky among the criminals" comes "from his choice of material, which singles out from all others violent, murderous and egoistic characters, thus pointing to the existence of similar tendencies within himself."⁹ More importantly, Freud argued that his notion of guilt (or infinite responsibility), which Dostoevsky himself took to be the central aspect of his ethical views, was psychologically aroused by his neurotic intention to murder his own father:

⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide," *Completed Works*, ed. Ivan Smith (Free Edition, 2010), 4554.

We can safely say that Dostoevsky never got free from the feeling of guilt arising from his intention of murdering his father. They [neurotic/epileptic attacks] also determined his attitude in the two other spheres in which the father-relation is the decisive factor, his attitude towards the authority of the State and towards belief in God. In the first of these he ended up with complete submission to this Little Father, the Tsar, who had once performed with him in reality the comedy of killing which his attacks had so often represented in play. Here penitence gained the upper hand. In the religious sphere he retained more freedom: according to apparently trustworthy reports he wavered, up to the last moment of his life, between faith and atheism. His great intellect made it impossible for him to overlook any of the intellectual difficulties to which faith leads. By an individual recapitulation of a development in world-history he hoped to find a way out and a liberation from guilt in the Christ ideal, and even to make use of his sufferings as a claim to be playing a Christ-like role. If on the whole he did not achieve freedom and became a reactionary, that was because the filial guilt, which is present in human beings generally and on which religious feeling is built, had in him attained a super-individual intensity and remained insurmountable even to his great intelligence¹⁰.

This reading – especially its claim about Dostoevsky’s intention to murder his father – is not only vulgar but also inaccurate. In a letter to Theodor Reik, Freud’s former doctoral student, Freud confesses that “in spite of all my admiration for Dostoevsky’s intensity and pre-eminence, I do not really like him,” because “my patience with pathological natures is exhausted in analysis.”¹¹ Treating a writer as one’s patient – and the essay demonstrates that Freud was reading Dostoevsky in this manner – is not a gracious way of reading his or her texts. This, of course, is not to say that the Freudian hermeneutics of suspicion has no place in literary criticism and political theory, yet it should be able to illuminate the character of the author *and*, in as much as it is possible, the hidden psychological presuppositions of a text accurately. Yet Freud’s interpretation lacks such accuracy.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4563.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4570.

Joseph Frank has convincingly shown that Freud's claims about Dostoevsky's early epilepsies and his feelings about his father are wrong.¹² Fyodor Dostoevsky grew up in the family of two loving parents and, although Dr. Dostoevsky was a strict father, he always put the well-being and education of his children first. Furthermore, in their family estate in Darovoe both his father and mother treated their peasants with respect and, as far as it can be established, never had beaten them (which then, as Frank notes, was a customary practice in Russia). More importantly, to quote Frank, "Dr Dostoevsky [...] never struck any of his children, despite his irritability and his temper; the only punishment they had to fear was a verbal rebuke."¹³ Also, when at the Military Academy in St. Petersburg, Fyodor constantly relied on his father's financial support. Thus, towards the end of his life Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote to his brother Andrey that both their parents had been "outstanding people," adding that "such family men, such fathers [...] we ourselves are quite incapable of being, brother!"¹⁴

However, there is some truth in Freud's claim that Dostoevsky's notion of guilt is psychologically linked to his acute sense of guilt about the death of his father. Yet the motives, as Frank argues, are rather different from the ones stated by Freud. To put it very briefly, the news about the death, which in itself was and remains to be controversial, reached Dostoevsky with the terrifying assumption that his father was murdered by peasants. After his beloved wife's death, Dr. Dostoevsky lived in Darovoe, where, while grieving and in devastation, he aimed to manage the business of his feudal estate under strenuous circumstances in order to support his sons' education. It was then that Dr. Dostoevsky's harsh treatment of his peasants might have started. Thus, the news that his father was possibly murdered by his peasants caused Fyodor enormous remorse, as he felt compli-

¹² Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

cit in pressurizing the poor father to keep supporting his aspirations to the status and life of St. Petersburg's ruling class. Depicting his father "not as a brutal and heartless despot but as a harassed and finally pitiable figure,"¹⁵ Dostoevsky took responsibility for his death. "If his father had been mistreating the peasants abominably, was he [i.e. Fyodor Dostoevsky] not to blame?"¹⁶ It is worth remembering here that the story of the elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* is in many respects similar to Dostoevsky's own experience. Zosima's spiritual transformation (whose content is his claim about infinite responsibility) is too prefigured by Zosima's enjoyment of the status and liberty of his life as an officer, the life of pleasure, the life that led him, purely out of superficial pride, to challenge an honourable man to a duel and to strike his servant Afanasy.

Yet the hermeneutics of suspicion here is too limited for us to understand "each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all," because it reduces the semantic context and the meaning of the claim to the psychological particularities of its author. We need therefore a philosophical reading. Emmanuel Levinas's philosophical project is, to a large extent, an attempt to account this thesis philosophically. As Alain Toumayan puts it, "Levinas's extensive reliance on Dostoevsky to characterize both positively and negatively his principles of ethics suggests that the influence of *The Brothers Karamazov* and the influence of its principal ethical debate extend beyond the single quotation from Book VI of the novel."¹⁷

Indeed, Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* argues that the ethical in its ultimate meaning is a disinterested responsibility for another human being, for one's neighbour. The ethical disinterestedness implies the asymmetrical relationship between the *I* (which Levinas conceptualizes in terms of the same) and the other, between *ego* and another

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁷ Alain Toumayan, "I more than the others: Dostoevsky and Levinas," in Thomas Trezise, ed., *Yale French Studies: Encounters with Levinas* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2004), 61.

human being, the face which can never be fully thematized. The impossibility of exhausting the alterity of the other through theorizing allows Levinas to conceptualize the other in terms of a transcendent being and infinity. Claiming that infinity "is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolute other,"¹⁸ Levinas thus argues that the other is the Most-High, the invisible, God, *the face*. Drawing on the distinction between ontology (which is based on the adequacy between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge; on the comprehension of being which vanishes alterity) and metaphysics (based on the asymmetry between the same and the other sustained through ethical desire and discourse), Levinas argues that the nature of ethical relationship between the *I* and the other is not that of ontological knowledge, but that of metaphysical desire. To describe the face of the other is to describe it as an object, thus it has little to do with ethics; ethical relationship, on the other hand, is possible through responsibility, when the nakedness of the face of the other commands "Do not kill!"

It is here that the influence of Dostoevsky on Levinas's thought becomes evident. Ethical asymmetry means that the other is higher than the same, than the *I*. The more responsible the *I* is, the greater asymmetry between the *I* and the other grows, the less the *I* requires from the other to be responsible for him/her. Furthermore, the *I* has no right to ask responsibility from the other but from him/herself, for the *I* is responsible even for the other's responsibility: "I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair. It is precisely insofar as the relationship between the Other and me is not reciprocal that I am subjected to the Other; I am 'subject' essentially in this sense. It is I who support all."¹⁹ Levinas then quotes Dostoevsky: "We are all guilty of all and

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 49.

¹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press), 98.

for all men before all, and I more than others.”²⁰ His argument is that only ethical responsibility understood in this sense allows us to transcend ontology – the theory of being – and question our freedom. As Levinas puts it, “freedom denotes the mode of remaining the same in the midst of the other, it is to maintain oneself against the other; it is to ensure the autarchy of an *I*.”²¹

Despite Levinas’s complicated phenomenological argument, the point he is making about Dostoevsky’s thesis is clear: ethical responsibility is total responsibility for another person to the extent that the *I* is responsible even for another person’s responsibility (indeed, even for a lack of responsibility). Furthermore, Levinas suggests that this kind of total responsibility means that the *I* is responsible for being persecuted by the other. Responsibility for Levinas is the true source of subjectivity, because only ethical responsibility makes the subject interchangeable: I can change another person, but nobody can change the *I* in his/her responsibility for the other. Still unclear, however, are the practical implications of such a philosophical reading of Dostoevsky’s thesis. That is, what is the practical (ethical and political) consequence of, say, myself being responsible even for your persecution of me? Is it not, in exceptional cases, the annihilation of my freedom and, ultimately, my being? Of course, Levinas’s argument is that the conception of total responsibility as passivity is the source of the very depth of subjectivity – subjectivity as non-interchangeable, as pre-rational, not in the sense of its irrationality, but as the foundation of rationality, justice, and peace – does not constitute a concrete code of ethics. Still, a possible answer to this question is that Levinas’s philosophical interpretation of Dostoevsky’s thesis is an inversion of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic: I am your slave, do to me and to my freedom

²⁰ *Ibid.* The formulation of the quote is rendered differently in *Otherwise than Being*: “Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I am more than the others” see Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 146. This formulation, as we will see (in footnote 24), is much closer to the original, where the personal pronoun used by Dostoevsky is “I,” not “we.”

²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 45.

as you please. An excellent illustration of this (mis)reading of Levinas is Lars von Trier's film "Dogville" (2003). Beautiful Grace descends to provincial Dogville; she selflessly serves the needs of its residents until they enslave her; her gangster father arrives in search for his lost daughter who, assuming her power in the gang, orders Dogville's residents killed; only the dog Moses – the guardian of the law – is spared.

2. The Meaning and Semantic Context of the Dictum

But is this indeed what we find in Dostoevsky's novel? To answer this question, we need to look at the semantic context of the dictum. As several commentators have argued,²² it is significant that the thesis takes the form of a testimony. First of all, we encounter it in the elder Zosima's story about his older brother Markel who, at the age of seventeen, is terminally ill. He becomes vocally conscious of the thought after he agrees to fast, makes a confession, and takes the Holy Communion out of respect for his mother while understanding that he is ill. Dostoevsky thus presents the thesis as the revelation of Markel addressed to his mother in the presence of his younger brother, the narrator Zosima, in the following way:

"Mama, my joy," he said, "it is not possible for there to be no masters and servants, but let me also be the servant of my servants, the same as they are to me. And I shall also tell you, dear mother, that each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all"²³ At that mother

²² See, for example, Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2008).

²³ The sentence in the original is "всякий из нас пред всеми во всем виноват, а я более всех" (Федор Михайлович Достоевский, *Братья Карамазовы* (Москва: Мир книги, 2008), 288). The English rendering and interpretation of "виноват" as "responsible" (especially by, for example, Rowan Williams (2008), but also by others, including Levinas), even if philosophically and theologically plausible, is nonetheless misleading because its meaning is indeed "guilty." The Russian word/s for "responsible" and "responsibility" are "ответственный" and "ответственность." Thus, the most literal translation of the sentence is "any of us is guilty before all in everything, but I am more than others (/all)." Rendering "всех" as "others" is also misleading, because "все" means "all."

even smiled [...]: “How can it be,” she said, “that you are the most guilty before everyone? There are murderers and robbers, and how have you managed to sin so that you should accuse yourself most of all?” “Dear mother, [...] you must know that verily each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone and everything. I do not know how to explain it to you, but I feel it so strongly that it pains me. And how could we have lived before, getting angry, and not knowing anything?” Thus he awoke every day with more and more tenderness, rejoicing and all atremble with love. [...] “My dears, why do we quarrel, boast before each other, remember each other’s offenses? [...]” [...]. None of us could understand it then, but he was weeping with joy: “Yes,” he said, “there was so much of God’s glory around me: birds, trees, meadows, sky, and I alone lived in shame, I alone dishonoured everything, and did not notice the beauty and glory of it at all.” “You take too many sins upon yourself,” mother used to weep. “Dear mother, my joy, I am weeping from gladness, not from grief; I want to be guilty before them, only I cannot explain it to you, for I do not even know how to love them. Let me be sinful before everyone, but so that everyone will forgive me, and that is paradise. Am I not in paradise now?”²⁴

The above conversation causes his mother and doctor to wonder whether Markel is of sound mind. This is also manifested along with Markel’s claim that “life is paradise” and that “we all live in paradise although we do not know it.” Zosima then continues his story – the narrative is also told at the end of his life to his close followers, including the main protagonist of the novel Alyosha – of his life as an officer, of the duel, of the spiritual transformation, of his decision to become a monk, and finally of the mysterious visitor, the only person who takes his brother’s and at the time his own testimony about guilt seriously, the stranger who had committed a murder out of jealousy many years ago and who finally confesses his crime publicly, acknowledges to Zosima in private that he also feels paradise, and then dies soon after his public confession. The theme of guilt and responsibility then is continued in the rest of the novel. Dimitri

²⁴ Feodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (London & New York: Vintage Classics, 1992), 245–246.

Karamazov accepts his guilt and responsibility for the crime of parricide he did not commit (yet he is convicted for the crime), accepts it not only because he, in his own way, believes in the substance of Zosima's and Alyosha's message, but because he also feels guilty for intending to kill his father. Ivan Karamazov revolts against the edifice of God's world, where the suffering of innocent children is allowed, and rejects metaphysical responsibility; yet feeling guilty for his partly imagined collaboration with Smerdyakov in parricide, he becomes mentally ill. It is therefore possible to say that the issue of ethical responsibility, its nature, and its scope is the focal point of the entire novel.

Rowan Williams argues that the thesis and its meaning cannot be understood without considering the wider context of Dostoevsky's writings.²⁵ It is indeed not clear what the thesis means if we take it at face value. Markel's mother points out a common-sense objection to "guilty before all in everything" by comparing her son to murderers and robbers. Indeed, the legal-moral approach to "responsibility" and "guilt" is based on a concrete individual action or wrong done to another person/s. So, if, for example, I curse you (undeservedly), I am guilty and therefore responsible for doing so. Clearly then Dostoevsky's "guilty for everything" cannot be understood in terms of *lex talionis*, which takes guilt and responsibility to be the consequence of a concrete individual wrong done to a person, institution or collective. Thus, Williams rightly argues that the reader ought to be critically suspicious about "any of us is guilty before all in everything/for all, but I am more than others." That is, even if Dostoevsky believes in it, it should be read with a dose of irony. However, the key point Williams makes is that "responsibility for all" means "the recognition of involvement with every human being's fate," something which is extremely risky; it appears in the story for the first time as a miracle (the miracle experienced by Markel), yet concretely (that is to say, as it is lived through and embodied in the lives of the main protagonists

²⁵ Williams, *op. cit.*

of the narrative) it means the love of other people's – one's neighbours' – freedom.²⁶

Although Williams's interpretation is illuminating and thought-provoking, it is partly misleading, because “виноват” in Russian does not mean “responsible,” it means “guilty.”²⁷ This, however, is not merely a philological issue. Although both theologically and philosophically it makes sense to interpret the thesis in terms of responsibility – total responsibility, as Levinas does – Dostoevsky's use of “guilty” should be understood *against the narrative background of crimes and sins committed by the protagonists*. Even Markel, the most innocent of them, voices it – the voicing of it is indeed the consequence of an existential event – *after* he refuses to fast, swears, and claims that there is no God. This is the case, although in different circumstances, with Zosima too. As mentioned above, Zosima remembers the revelation of his brother Markel and understands its full meaning only after he arrogantly insults and challenges an honourable man to a duel and, before going to the duel, strikes his servant. *Thus, the dictum ultimately means the radical rejection of sin, its personal and existential denunciation, which is the basis of repentance and spiritual rebirth.*²⁸ A deeply redemptive experience brings about the realization that the only way to overcome sin – *amartia* (ἁμαρτία)²⁹ – as alienation is the *full* understanding of the far-reaching consequences of sin, which go *beyond* one's individual guilt over a concrete action. Thus, although it does not necessarily require a Christological interpretation, it is the exemplification of universal atonement *without* a direct reference to Christ. Its content is the message of Christ's death on the cross, which, for Saint Paul, meant the death of the old sinful self (“no longer slaves to sin”) and the birth of the new self as a *free gift* that now “enslaves us to

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 162 and p. 174.

²⁷ See footnote 23.

²⁸ Ksana Blank rightly points to the Greek Orthodox Christian notion of *metanoia* which means a radical change of one's mind (see her *Dostoevsky's Dialectics and the Problem of Sin, op. cit.*, p. 11).

²⁹ As the scholars of Ancient Greek (e.g., Jonas Dumčius) point out, *amartia* also means mistake. I am grateful for reminding me this point to Markas Aurelijus Piesinas.

righteousness.”³⁰ Yet it is clear from Dostoevsky's writings in general (and *The Brothers Karamazov* in particular) that this thesis of universal atonement cannot be realized without both the acknowledgement of God's existence and a *personal* relationship with God. Without it, the thesis is nothing else but the expression of mental instability and self-destructive masochism. In this, of course, Levinas's phenomenology of ethical responsibility as metaphysical – his philosophy which cannot be separated from his own tradition of Judaism, from his theism – comes very close to Dostoevsky's ethical views. Thus, any interpretation of Levinas without reference to his theism, reading him as a mere proponent of multiculturalism and postmodern difference, is bound to be a misinterpretation.³¹

The question, of course, is how Dostoevsky understands sin. A short and preliminary answer is that it is a person's inability to understand and accept “guilty before all in everything but I am more than others” and, consequently, the rejection of the ethical yet paradoxical order of God's created universe. Thus, “sin” for Dostoevsky has a theological meaning, which cannot be understood without its dialectical relationship with mercy and forgiveness as the gifts of God. It also has to do with Dostoevsky's realization about the sacredness of life as a divine gift, the truth of which he experienced in prison after his life was spared during a cruel mock execution. He wrote to his brother Mikhail that life “is a gift, life is happiness, every minute can be the eternity of happiness,” the truth that life is “the greatest of all goods and blessings” has penetrated “into my flesh and blood.”³² Thus, not realizing that life is the divine gift leads to sin, which, for Dostoevsky, is a much more demanding and wider concept than “crime” and “wrongdoing,” both of which, of course, are parts of sin. That is, it is the lack of humil-

³⁰ Romans 6:18.

³¹ A good example of such a misinterpretation is Alain Badiou's reading of Levinas's philosophy as the ethics of difference, multiculturalism, and “good old-fashioned” liberal tolerance (see Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001), 18–24).

³² Frank, *op. cit.*, p. 181–182.

ity and reverence, which then leads to the egocentrism of demanding more for oneself than one possibly deserves.

3. Implications for the Political

Simplifying greatly and making it far too schematic, we can nonetheless claim that there are at least three competing paradigms or traditions³³ of theorizing the political. Let us provisionally call the first one the classical-Aristotelian tradition. It understands the political (and politics) in terms of the notions of *politikon zōon* (the claim that humans are *ontologically* political), the common good, and *aretē* (conventionally translated as “virtue,” while a more accurate translation is (moral) “excellence”). It has been argued, certainly not incorrectly, that a version of an Aristotelian conception of the political is incompatible with the institutional realities of the modern liberal nation states.³⁴ That is, to moralize the whole of pluralistic liberal society on the basis of the common good can only suit the character of a conservative moralist, to use Alasdair MacIntyre’s brilliant expression; conservative moralists who dare to preach *their* values of “Nation, Church and Family” as if their “inflated and self-righteous unironic rhetoric”³⁵ actually embodies *the* common good. For the moment, let us leave the narrative of this paradigm unfinished to

³³ I use “paradigm” here loosely or, to be more precise, more loosely than Thomas Kuhn used it in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) when he wrote about paradigms in natural sciences only, “paradigms” linked to and followed by “normal science.” There cannot be “paradigms” thus understood in social sciences and humanities. The way I use paradigm is much closer to what Alasdair MacIntyre meant by “tradition,” including the traditions of rational enquiry, in his *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988). It is in this sense that there are *competing* paradigms/traditions of theorizing the political.

³⁴ See, for example, Andrius Bielskis, *Towards a Postmodern Understanding of the Political* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005).

³⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, in the foreword to the third edition of his *After Virtue*, adds to the three characters of bourgeois modernity – the manager, rich aesthete, and therapist – a fourth: the conservative moralist (*After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), XV).

introduce the second paradigm of the political so that we can return to it later.

The second is Carl Schmitt's famous conception of the political in terms of the distinction between friend and enemy.³⁶ *The Concept of the Political* has become very influential among different political theories in different countries, including Lithuania.³⁷ And although its main theoretical appropriations have been by the Right – that is, anti-liberal conservative political theorists such as Leo Strauss³⁸ and many others – there is a number of Schmitt's appropriations on the Left as well.³⁹ According to Schmittians, the concept of the political is more fundamental than politics (or to put it in Heideggerian jargon, it is ontologically more primordial than politics as ontic), and that without it – that is, without a clear understanding of what “a we” vis-à-vis “our enemy” is – the politics of a community, as

³⁶ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).

³⁷ Alvydas Jokubaitis is the main political theorist interested in and working on Carl Schmitt's conception of the political in Lithuania (see, for example, his “Moralumo iššūkis Carlo Schmitto politiškuo sampratai” [The Challenge of the Moral to Carl Schmitt's Concept of the Political], *Politologija* 98 (2020): 113–124).

³⁸ Leo Strauss, of course, was critical of Schmitt's understanding of the political, especially of its link to political theology. His influence on Schmitt was also notable given the conversations and correspondence between Strauss and Schmitt, and Strauss's critical remarks expressed in his letters to Schmitt (see Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: Hidden Dialogue* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995)). Leo Strauss's appropriation of Schmitt was to decouple his political theory from the hard-core Schmittian notion of sovereignty and political theology, yet Strauss, in his letter to Schmitt, still argued that the “ultimate foundation of the Right is the principle of the natural evil of man; because man is by nature evil, he therefore needs dominion,” while “dominion can be established” through the unification of men “against other men,” and that the tendency “to separate (and therewith the grouping of humanity into friends and enemies) is given with human nature” (*ibid.*, p. 125).

³⁹ The most obvious example of the influence of Carl Schmitt's concept of the political to the political theorists of the Left is Chantal Mouffe, who argued for an agonal or “adversarial form of politics” and that “the overcoming left right divide, instead of facilitating the establishment of a pacified society, has created the terrain for the rise of right-wing populist movements” (Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 119).

Trace Strong acutely put it, “will likely be overtaken by events.”⁴⁰ Indeed, a Schmittian account of, for example, the war in Ukraine can provide its convincing explanation. Compared to Lithuania, which knew what “its political *we*” vis-à-vis “its enemy” was *prior* to the collapse of the Soviet Union (and, therefore, contributed to its collapse), Ukraine realized what its “*we*” was more than twenty years later and only after a part of its territory was occupied by the increasingly authoritarian and neo-imperialist regime of the Russian Federation. Its indecisiveness between the East and the West costed Ukrainians dearly, while the final unification of the *political* nation of Ukraine – the “*we*” of *Russian* and *Ukrainian* speaking Ukrainians – was realized only through the barbarity of the full-scale invasion and war waged on them by Russia’s tyrannical regime. The irrationality (pre-rationality) of the ontological choice between “*we*” as friends and “*them*” as enemies is illustrated, among other things, by the total collapse of communication and the loss of understanding when even the relatives of Ukrainians who live in Russia accuse their bombarded Ukrainian family members of lying about the war. Once the choice between friend and enemy is made, rationality as the source of understanding one another is possible only among friends. Hence, war *and* death are the fundamental ontological features of this conception of the political.

Finally, the third conceptualization of the political is that of classical and modern liberals. Its rich theoretical tradition spans from John Locke to John Rawls and is based on the appeal to individual freedom, the so-called universal human rights, which in practice are embodied, first and foremost, in the institutional reality of property rights within the capitalist system of production and consumption. Its key premise is that individuals are ontologically primary vis-à-vis the political community. This thesis is best exemplified in the

⁴⁰ Trace B. Strong, “Foreword: Dimensions of the New Debate around Carl Schmitt,” in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), xxi.

classical liberalism of John Locke and his theoretical (fictional⁴¹) hypothesis on the state of nature, in which individuals, prior to the creation of any political institutions, are free and equal. Everyone in the state of nature – ontologically – is sovereign, while the political society is created through a social contract by sovereign individuals who surrender (a part of) their individual sovereignty to the civil magistrate of the newly created state. An extreme version of the artificiality, the unnaturalness of the *political* and (political) society is Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum that there is no such thing as a society, only individuals and their families. The conceptualizations of the ontological primacy of individuals, of course, vary from one political theorist to another (Rawls, for example, has a much stronger conception of a society rooted in solidarity than Locke or Robert Nozick do), yet there is an appeal to the universality of moral norms in the form of fundamental (natural or human) rights of individuals, which are primary to and serve as the standard for judging a concrete political and institutional order of a given state. Thus, morality as universal is ontologically primary vis-à-vis the political in liberalism.

Where and how can Dostoevsky's ethics of redemption be positioned vis-à-vis these conceptualizations? Can it enrich them (or at least one of them), and if so, which one the most? An immediate answer is that the Schmittian conception of the political is radically incompatible with "I am more than others." The friend-enemy distinction is not new in political philosophy, and it was certainly not invented by Schmitt. We find it in Plato's *Republic*, where Polemarchus attributes "helping your friends and harming your enemies" to Simonides's conception of justice.⁴² The discussion between Socrates and Polemarchus, of course, is construed in ethical rather than

⁴¹ On the fictionality of John Locke's "state of nature," it is worthy to quote Searle: if "by 'state of nature' is meant a state in which there are no human institutions, *then for language-speaking animals, there is no such thing as a state of nature*" (see John Searle, *Making of the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilisation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 62, emphasis in the original).

⁴² Plato, *The Republic*, trans. R. Larson (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1979), 332d.

political terms, yet the logic is the same: “we” as friends are “good,” “they” as enemies are “bad,” the thesis which Socrates rightly rejects. Polemarchus’s interpretation of Simonides’s conception of justice reflects a mafia-type tribalism of archaic societies, whereas Schmitt elevates the distinction to the level of the modern state. Dostoevsky’s “I am more than others” implies the Christian command to love our enemies.⁴³ Yet, Leo Strauss’s interpretation of Schmitt’s conception of the political in terms of the sinfulness of human nature – the friend-enemy distinction is the consequence of human sinfulness out of which a (political) dominion is born, the dominion based on (the legal monopoly of physical) *violence*, to use Max Weber’s language, and on the exclusion of “others” – dialectically links it to Dostoevsky’s ethics of redemption. That is, “I am more than all,” as the radical rejection of sin (in the form of its atonement and far-reaching responsibility for it) as well as Dostoevsky’s reflections on crime and punishment,⁴⁴ are diametrically opposite to the realist conception of

⁴³ This is how the command to love one’s enemies and the practice of “I am more than all” in one’s daily life is expressed by Zosima to his followers: “If the wickedness of people arouses indignation and insurmountable grief in you, to the point that you desire to revenge yourself upon the wicked, fear that feeling most of all; go at once and seek torments for yourself, as if you yourself were guilty of their wickedness. Take these torments upon yourself and suffer them, and your heart will be eased, and you will understand that you, too, are guilty, for you might have shone to the wicked, even like the only sinless One, but you did not. If you had shone, your light would have lighted the way for others, and the one who did wickedness would perhaps not have done so in your light.” (Dostoevsky, *op. cit.*, p. 273).

⁴⁴ We find the theme of crime and punishment not only in *Crime and Punishment* but throughout Dostoevsky’s literary works. In his early semi-autobiographical novel *The House of the Dead*, Dostoevsky writes about the people he met in *katorga*, people who had committed terrible crimes but never felt any guilt for them, and whose punishment never changed them and, often, made them worse. The theme of an external, state-imposed punishment is further reiterated in *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is first expressed in Ivan Karamazov’s discussion of his article on the relationship between the Church and the State at Zosima’s. The argument, whose conclusion is expressed in the form of “So be it! So be it!” (which is also the title of the chapter), that the final end of history is not, as Europeans think, that “the Church [...] needs to be transformed into the state” (as Hegel argued, we may add), but “that the state should end by being [...] the Church alone,” is supplemented by Zosima’s claim, explored and illustrated in *Crime and Punishment*, that the “mechanical” punishment of the state (in the form

the political expressed in Schmittean terms. His ethics of redemption is indeed an attempt to imagine the (eschatological) future of humanity beyond the dominions of friends and enemies. This is the vision of humanity in terms of universal Christian brotherhood (and sisterhood), at the centre of which is love: "love is such a priceless treasure that you can buy the whole world with it, and redeem not only your own but other people's sins."⁴⁵

At the beginning of his career as a writer, Dostoevsky was a Belinsky-type pro-European liberal who later became a follower of French Utopian Socialism. Belinsky's influence on young Dostoevsky was indeed significant.⁴⁶ From being a naïve believer in Christ, Dostoevsky became a sceptic and an atheist who later rediscovered faith in God after a mock execution and imprisonment in Siberia (this is the story Dostoevsky tells about himself in the early 1870s). Thus, he saw Belinsky as the symbolic figure of socialism and its new morality *without* God.⁴⁷ Indeed, "socialist" and "liberal" Dostoevsky often used interchangeably. He saw their ideas as coming from Europe, while their amalgamation was the mixture of the Left Hegelianism, French Utopian Socialism, and utilitarian economism.

This biographical fact is important for us to understand Dostoevsky's stance towards both liberalism and socialism. He rejected both in as much as both, in his view, were rooted in atheism. His main

of imprisonment) cannot reform the criminal and that the true reformatory punishment is guilt and conscience as the true manifestation of Christ's law (Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *op. cit.*, p. 51–53).

⁴⁵ Dostoevsky, *Karamazov*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁴⁶ Vissarion Belinsky, as an influential literary critic, intellectual and Westernizer, saluted Dostoevsky's first novel *Poor Folk* and brought Dostoevsky to public attention. Dostoevsky and Belinsky fell apart later, but his influence on Dostoevsky was lasting, as he considered Belinsky as his early ideological mentor. In the early 1870s, Dostoevsky wrote an exaggerated account of Belinsky as an idol of the Russian radical youth, a person who, as Frank puts it, "had succeeded in converting him to Socialism and atheism," which resulted in Dostoevsky's "participation in subversive activity, and then his arrest, conviction, and exile to Siberia" (Frank, *op. cit.*, p. 119).

⁴⁷ Once again, Joseph Frank is very clear about it in his outstanding account of Dostoevsky's biography (see Frank, *op. cit.*, p. 119–126).

novels – *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *Demons*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* – have characters who represent the ideas of atheistic socialism and liberalism which Dostoevsky, often by caricaturing them, associated with nihilism (Raskolnikov as a kind of Thrasymachian utilitarian, Kirillov as the embodiment of Max Stirner’s rational egoism, Ivan Karamazov as a man of European Enlightenment and revolt, Stavrogin as a revolutionary nihilist, Miusov as a progressive liberal, socialist and Westernizer, Lebezyatnikov as a foolish utopian socialist, to name but a few most obvious examples). Dostoevsky was critical of liberalism first and foremost for its overt reliance on rationalism, utilitarianism, and its politics of rights as entitlements. Thus, his “I am more than all” does not sit easy with the liberal ethics of universal rights: it goes beyond the logic of “my legitimate rights ought to be respected by others” by precisely asking to question “my rights” vis-à-vis the rights of others.

Dostoevsky’s understanding of socialism is best exemplified in *The Brothers Karamazov*: “socialism is not only the labor question or the question of the so-called fourth estate, but first of all the question of atheism, the question of the modern embodiment of atheism, the question of the Tower of Babel built precisely without God, not to go from earth to heaven but to bring heaven down to earth.”⁴⁸ This claim, of course, is true only to a very limited sense. This is so not only because there is *no* and *cannot be* a necessary conceptual and ideological link between socialism and atheism. The incompatibility between socialism and Christianity was an ideological stance taken by Dostoevsky ever since the moment he started to move away from being a proponent of the European Enlightenment. The significant existential reasons for his reflections were the mock execution and his life in Siberia where he met ordinary Russians. It was the experience of the life among the peasants, among the people (*народ*) that allowed him to distance himself from the dominant Russian intellectual circle which consisted predominantly of Západniks (Western-

⁴⁸ Dostoevsky, *Karamazov*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

izers).⁴⁹ He became vocal about this ideological stance – the stance of an authentic Slavophile who rejected his *own* earlier belief that Christianity and socialism were compatible – in the 1870s and did so by distorting the facts of his own life and by blaming Belinsky.⁵⁰

Dostoevsky's critique of socialism, therefore, was rooted in his belief, at the time not entirely inaccurate, that socialism and belief in Christ were incompatible; thus, his critique of socialism was first and foremost the critique of atheism prevalent among the Russian pro-Western intellectual elite. He saw and portrayed them as the nihilists of utilitarian persuasion ready to sacrifice life for the greater good (Raskolnikov is the most obvious example). He was critical towards lofty intellectuals who parasitically depended on the work of peasants and workers but at the same time idealized them without truly understanding them. He rightly criticized the naivety of socialists' determinism, when only the corrupted social environment was to be blamed while the complexities of human psychology were not considered.⁵¹ His critique of socialism, therefore, is very similar to his critique of liberalism: any attempt to construct a fully calculated social order of the abundance of material wealth either through the system of free mar-

⁴⁹ Nancy Ruttenburg stresses the importance of Dostoevsky's life in Siberia and its account in his *The House of the Dead* for us to understand a deep-seated democratic orientation of Dostoevsky's ethico-political views (see Nancy Ruttenburg, *Dostoevsky's Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)).

⁵⁰ Joseph Frank argues that Dostoevsky, contrary to what he claimed about himself in his *Diary of a Writer* in 1873, believed in Utopian Socialism earlier than he met Belinsky. The dramatization of Belinsky's influence – *a la* "he transformed me from a believer in Christ to a socialist" (hence Dostoevsky's "either socialism or Christ" rather than "and") – was the neat retrospective ideological positioning of himself as a Slavophile who saw the danger of radicalization of the youth by Belinsky as the key figure of the Russian atheistic Left (see Frank, *op. cit.*, p. 119–126).

⁵¹ Here is how Dostoevsky describes socialism in *Crime and Punishment*: "the socialist position, which we all know: crime is a protest against the abnormality of the social structure, that's all, nothing more, and no other explanation is admissible – none whatever! [...] it's all because people have been 'corrupted by their environment', nothing else! That's their favourite phrase! From which it follows that if society was properly organized, all crime would immediately disappear, since there would be nothing to protest about, and in an instant everyone would become law-abiding" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 305).

ket exchange (liberal capitalism) or through a radical intervention and/ or revolutionary redistribution of already created wealth (socialism) will fail without true solidarity, compassion and ethical responsibility whose ethical (individual) basis is the redemptive "I am more than all."

It is here that we need to return to the first – classical – conceptualization of the political. It is relatively easy to interpret the Aristotelian tradition of theorizing the political the way Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt and other conservative and/or republican thinkers have done.⁵² This is so not only because we find arguments for so-called "natural" inequalities in Aristotle's texts (i.e., arguments for the existence of "natural" slaves, inequality between men and women, the exclusion of workers from the *polis*, etc.), but also because the emphasis on excellence (*aretē*), which is the *principle* of ruling for Aristotle and his followers, *as such* presupposes inequality. It is in this sense that Dostoevsky's ethics of humility inscribed in his "I am more than all" is essential and can greatly enrich the classical-Aristotelian conceptualization of the political. If we agree with Dostoevsky's Christian ethics that arrogance, at least by implication, is the primary source of sin and, in the long run, of evil, then the dictum "each of us is guilty of everything against all, and I am more than all" becomes essential for the conception of the political rooted in excellence. It is indeed true that (moral and political) excellence – the wise and the just – should rule, since the rule based in excellence creates the genuine structures of the common good. Yet the temptation to overemphasize one's excellence, to see oneself as excellent, may give rise to the institutionalization of privilege, which, in the long run, tends to create structural inequalities that threaten the very foundations of the common good. In this respect, although very different from Socrates's "I know that I don't know" and Socratic irony, "I am more than all" still serves the same function – the modesty

⁵² For an argument against the conservative interpretation of Aristotle, see Andrius Bielskis, "'Managers would not need subordinates and masters would not need slaves': Aristotle's *Oikos* and *Oikonomia* Reconsidered," in *Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Aristotelianism: Modernity, Conflict and Politics*, eds. Andrius Bielskis, Eleni Leontini, Kelvin Knight (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 40–57.

of *kenosis*. Thus, this dictum can be seen as the *ethical* (individual) foundation of the politics of the common good. It may serve as an important reminder that, in as much as there is suffering and injustice in our societies, the excellence of a political rule will never be enough; thus, we will always be called to take responsibility for the sins and crimes of others.

Conclusion

Dostoevsky's 19th century Russian cultural background was that of a rapid cultural modernisation, of scientific and intellectual development, of debates between Západniks and Slavophiles. The protagonists of his novels, whose genuine polyphony of valid voices, as Mikhail Bakhtin put it,⁵³ represented the ideas of this cultural milieu. Central to it was Dostoevsky's belief that a fully secularized morality and scientific rationality without Christian compassion and its redemptive ethics would be self-destructive in the way the embodied ideas of the main protagonists in *The Devils* were self-destructive. Yet, his belief that Christianity and socialism were incompatible was his ideologically driven response to the radicalized youth of the Westernizers, to the atheistic Russian Left whose influence was only to grow after Dostoevsky's death. His earlier belief in the compatibility of socialism with faith in Christ, together with his "I am more than all," allow us to interpret his political state as that of Christian socialism. Dostoevsky's critique of the overt economism of the Left teaches us an important lesson that socialism, if based only on either the principles of individual rights as entitlements or on general utility for all, will never work without solidarity, grace, and brotherly love. Also, it can never work without freedom, which, as the story of the Grand Inquisitor tells us, cannot be traded for the abundance of utilitarian bread magically created out of stones.

⁵³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dostojevskio poetikos problemos* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 1996), 11.

One of the greatest lessons of Dostoevsky's "I am more than all" lies in the need to transcend the conception of justice based on the symmetry of "tit for tat" in order to articulate a more inclusive notion of social justice. Dostoevsky's ethics of redemption, even if they cannot be the founding principles of social justice and politics, can serve in our recognition of the far-reaching consequences of our actions and attitudes, consequences which go beyond concrete wrongs we commit to each other. Emmanuel Levinas was, of course, right to suggest that infinite ethical responsibility of "*I am more than others*" is possible only between *I* and *Thou* and thus cannot be applied when the third – society – intervenes between me and you. My responsibility for your violence against me ends when your violence turns against *my* brother, *my* daughter, *my* mother. Then we enter the Schmittian realism of war against our enemies, when Alasdair MacIntyre's claim – that a pacifist is a free rider in the situation of war⁵⁴ – is a sad yet undeniable truth. However, the Schmittian account of the political is deeply problematic precisely because of its *bloody* realism. The classical-Aristotelian conception of the political is based on a very different premise than that of Schmitt's: the political is born not out of the possibility of war with *our* enemy, but out of the *excellence* of our collective life building. War stems from the necessities and shortages of life, but most of all from arrogance and tyranny, whereas the life of (moral) excellence is, first and foremost, about the political community of individuals who aim at the best collective life possible. If war, bloodshed, and death are the conditions of the political, then liberals are right to claim that the less politics of friends against enemies there is the better. Dostoevsky's "всякий из нас пред всеми во всем виноват, а я более всех" is an eschatological promise of the truly joyous life on earth without war.

⁵⁴ This thesis was articulated by Alasdair MacIntyre during a seminar organized by Dr. Kelvin Knight at the Centre for Contemporary Aristotelian Studies in Ethics and Politics at London Metropolitan University in 2012.

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