

Dostoevsky and Arendt on the Crisis of Tradition

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Abstract

In this paper, I shall pursue two goals. Firstly, I will demonstrate that H. Arendt's early analysis of the origins of totalitarianism was anticipated in many ways by F. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, specifically Dostoevsky's description of Raskolnikov, who is placed in a marginal position of social isolation as well as deprived of traditional orientation. Raskolnikov's crime follows from an attempt to compensate for this lack of traditional orientation, with speculative rational constructions that provide alternative values and orientation. Arendt's analysis of the origins of totalitarianism, in similar vein to Dostoevsky, is concerned with individuals' isolation from the common sense of a given political community, a common sense that provides orientation and values for every member. Being isolated from common sense (and, consequently, from others) and thus not able to disclose the common world, people are forced to substitute intersubjective disclosure of truth with what she describes as 'logicality' of thought, a mere logical consistency, which eventually leads to justifying such phenomena as genocide. Secondly, I shall demonstrate how Arendt's early thought goes beyond Dostoevsky's diagnosis. While Dostoevsky had attained a conservative standpoint stressing the role of a pre-given tradition and religion, Arendt investigates the condition of possibility of the common sense demonstrating that communication among individuals who are capable of accepting other's point of view ("thinking from other fellow's point of view") can serve to rebuild common sense.

Keywords: Arendt, Dostoevsky, tradition, rationality, isolation

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Introduction

The study of crisis has become a recurrent feature of European thought starting from the 19th century: a number of thinkers are convinced that European societies are undergoing an extended period of crisis and decadence. The list of possible diagnoses and solutions is manifold and varied ranging from nihilism (Nietzsche), systematic oppression, and capitalistic systems of production (Marxism) to the ‘rebellion’ of the masses (Ortega y Gasset) and crises of sciences (Husserl). One particular area of diagnosis that will be of interest in this paper identifies the progressive isolation of individuals both from each other and commonality of tradition as the core reason for such a crisis. This original line of thinking reveals an unexpected alliance: in this paper, I will argue that both H. Arendt and F. Dostoevsky, while being drastically different in regard to their overall aims and style of thinking, converge nonetheless at a number of points. Both of them are convinced that the crisis is, first and foremost, a crisis of the tradition that integrates individuals into community, and supplies them with values and orientation. Most importantly, both Arendt and Dostoevsky Offer compatible explanations of such a crisis

In the first part of this paper, I will demonstrate how Raskolnikov – the main character of Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* – commits his crime under the condition of severe isolation from others, and how Dostoevsky demonstrates the corruptive effect this isolation has on Raskolnikov’s thinking. In the second part, I will demonstrate that Dostoevsky’s conclusions, in many ways, are paralleled by Arendt’s early analysis of totalitarian regimes and what she calls “logicality” of thought which replaces the need to talk things through with the fellow man. Finally, in the third part, I will argue that Arendt, unlike Dostoevsky, also shows us a way of rebuilding and rehabilitating tradition.

1. Reason vs. Tradition in F. Dostoevsky

Crime and Punishment was ingeniously designed to demonstrate to the reader a yet unseen type of crime, or, rather, a new phenomenon that modernity brings into life. This

crime is not a crime of passion, it is not a result of a meaningless and inhuman cruelty or cynicism; neither does it follow from a mistake or misunderstanding. This crime, as Dostoevsky seeks to demonstrate, is *theoretically induced*: it comes from reason, from meditations on “a certain book” (Dostoevsky 2001, 463, translation modified); Raskolnikov first justifies his right to commit the murder by proving that it is acceptable and even desirable, before carrying out his theoretical conviction. Razumikhin (one of the characters in the novel and who, as we are about to see, often expresses opinions that are close to Dostoevsky’s) claims that what is “really original” about this crime is that it sanctions the “bloodshed *in the name of conscience*,” which is “more terrible than the official, legal sanction of bloodshed...” (Dostoevsky 2001, 472)

The theory itself is relatively simple and, up to a certain point, inessential. Before committing a murder, Raskolnikov writes an article in which he claims that a difference can be drawn between ‘ordinary men’ who are obliged to follow the norms of law and morality, and ‘extraordinary men’ who have an ‘inner right’ to overstep the boundaries established by laws and moral norms when they deem necessary. By virtue of their unique and outstanding nature, extraordinary men are entitled to commit what is generally conceived of as crimes if their ends justify the means. As Raskolnikov himself puts it, “the discoveries of Kepler and Newton could not have been made known except by sacrificing the lives of one, a dozen, a hundred, or more men, Newton would have had the right, would indeed have been in duty bound ... to eliminate the dozen or the hundred men for the sake of making his discoveries known to the whole of humanity.” (Dostoevsky 2001, 466) Later on, Raskolnikov further specifies that it is not simply to say that outstanding goals make extraordinary men, and consequently sanction crimes; it is the ability “to stoop and pick it [power] up” (Dostoevsky 2001, 740) for one’s own goals that does the trick.

This idea is hardly new. In fact, it is hardly modern at all: One can easily think of Greek sophists and the famous Glaukon-Socrates debate in Plato’s *Republic*. But Dostoevsky’s claim, and the focal point of his attention, does not so much concern the *content* or *validity* of this idea, but rather the fact

that somebody actually decides to act on it *if he becomes convinced that it is valid*.

To understand this peculiar point, we should start by realizing that Raskolnikov's theory was never contested with regard to its rationality or validity throughout *Crime and Punishment*. The collapse which it incurs, or 'the punishment', has no distinct rational articulation; it is not framed as an 'argument' against theory. Raskolnikov remains convinced that his theory is valid until the very end of the epilogue (where Dostoevsky claims that abandoning his theory is a topic for a different book). Moral and psychological suffering which Raskolnikov immediately identifies as punishment ("Surely it isn't my punishment coming upon me? It is!") (Dostoevsky 2001, 171) is not seen as something that undermines the theory; Raskolnikov sees it as an argument against *his* extraordinary status, against *his* personal entitlement to murder: "If I worried myself all those days, wondering whether Napoleon would have done it or not, I felt clearly of course that I wasn't Napoleon" (Dostoevsky 2001, 741). Other characters, such as Razumikhin, Sonja and Porfiry, also offer no arguments. The theory isn't criticized argumentatively by Razumikhin, who discusses the article with Raskolnikov, or by Sonja, to whom Raskolnikov has confessed; even Porfiry Petrovitch, after ironically toying with Raskolnikov's theory, has nothing of substance to object to Raskolnikov's coherent explanations.

For other characters, however, the lack of rational weaknesses did not prove the theory acceptable. Instead of their reasons against the theory, Dostoevsky shows us their intuitive, pre-rational and even wordless repulsion: Razumikhin cannot believe his ears when he hears Raskolnikov explaining his theory, Sonja is outright shocked by it, Porfiry dismissively renounces it as 'stupid' – without offering any reason, he views it as something that is not worthy of serious rebuttal. This difference between Raskolnikov and other characters is crucial. If the characters remain *attentive* to this pre-rational intuition even though it has no clear rational content, for Raskolnikov the lack of such content also means this intuition lacks any binding power; consequently, Raskolnikov remains blindly

devoted to the power of his argument and eventually brings it into reality. This is what makes Raskolnikov's crime so unique: it is not a crime that violates this or that particular traditional norm. It is a crime that follows from rebellion, that puts the power of one's own reason over tradition, and does so not only in theory, but in the real life. Consequently, Dostoevsky's way of denouncing Raskolnikov's theory in many ways follows from the demonstration of how attempts to neglect this wordless, pre-rational intuition (an intuition that might lack a clear rational foundation) devastates and impoverishes one's own existence, leading Raskolnikov to moral and existential alienation. As Opuł'skaia notes, Raskolnikov's rational triumph is dramatically contrasted with his 'moral' collapse. (Opuł'skaja 1973, 321)

First of all, we can see Raskolnikov's self-alienation. Raskolnikov was not a sociopath: Dostoevsky paints a picture of an extremely proud but also emphatic individual with "good inclinations:" he cares deeply for mother and sister; he is concerned with the injustice of the world and has a lot of compassion for the innocent and wounded. His friend, Razumikhin, says that "he has a noble nature and a kind heart" and is capable of "generous impulses." This portrait does not incline us to believe that Raskolnikov is a natural-born murderer; on the contrary, one could assume that he should have found the very idea of murder thoroughly repulsive. Dostoevsky illustrates the inner rejection of murder with the help of dream. Raskolnikov dreams about being a child that witnesses a brutal murder of a horse. Being overwhelmed with this experience ("Good God! he cried, 'can it be, can it be, that I shall really take an axe, that I shall strike her on the head, split her skull open ... that I shall tread in the sticky warm blood, break the lock, steal and tremble; hide, all spattered in the blood ... with the axe.... Good God, can it be?"), he decides to abandon the crime, but soon his theory comes back in force. This dream, as Dostoevsky writes in one of his drafts, is "a law of nature that we don't *know* but that screams in us." (Dostoevsky's draft, 7; 137). By committing murder, therefore, he alienates himself from this law and, consequently, from those good inclinations that he once harboured. After the

murder, he loses his sense of reality and self-identity: he cannot understand whether he is hallucinating about something or not; he does not know whether he really commits the murder; ('Well, you all say,' ... 'that I am mad. I thought just now that perhaps I really am mad, and have only seen a phantom') (Dostoevsky 2001, 525). Towards the end of the book, Raskolnikov realizes that by murdering the old moneylender, he has mutilated himself: "Did I murder the old woman? I murdered myself, not her! I crushed myself once for all, for ever..." (Dostoevsky 2001, 743).

Furthermore, this self-alienation is paralleled closely with alienation from others. The theory that treats most people as "material that serves only to reproduce its kind" (Dostoevsky 2001, 467) reduces others to instruments, use values in a context of a goal that is set by an unusual individual, which is a move that by itself balances on the edge solipsism. But before the crime, this was just a theory. The crime that was meant to prove that Raskolnikov belongs to the privileged caste transforms this theory into something more: the murder traumatically seals his philosophy substituting the theoretical isolation from others with a factual one. Now, Raskolnikov's isolation concerns not only his ideas and cognition, but the whole scope of his existence. He suddenly realizes "...that he would never again be able to speak of anything to anyone" (Dostoevsky 2001, 413) he feels that "all who met him were loathsome to him" (Dostoevsky 2001, 467). Even those closest to him – his mother and sister – are now painfully far, even alien to him ("Mother, sister—how I loved them! Why do I hate them now? Yes, I hate them, I feel a physical hatred for them, I can't bear them near me.... ") (Dostoevsky 2001, 245). At the same time, he by no means loses the need for others; Svidrigailov, Maremeladov and Porfiry (in different places) all claim that Raskolnikov needs "air" and "company." In the same way, Sonja recognizing the depth of Raskolnikov's alienation emphatically asks: "How can you live without others?" (Dostoevsky 2001, 467), translation modified). It is this sense of "uncoupling and dividedness" with humanity that makes him confess to Sonja and, in the end, turn himself in.

Raskolnikov's reasonability, in such a way, turns out to be nothing but stupidity. Faced with enormous expenses, his theory bankrupts even without needing any reasons against it – *it just is stupid* no matter how logically non-contradictory it is. The roots of this stupidity stem from Raskolnikov's neglect of this wordless, pre-rational intuition that renders his theory so appalling to others, an intuition that tells them that something is completely off with such a theory, before they start thinking about the argument against it. This intuition is, in a sense, *unmistakable*, but not because it offers some sort of an apodictic proof that cannot be doubted; rather, it delimitates the space of what can be meaningfully said (here Dostoevsky seemed to anticipate Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*).

To understand the nature and the source of this intuition more thoroughly – along with the danger of unconditional trust in reason, we should take a brief look at the wider context of Dostoevsky's work. In many ways, the core of Dostoevsky's thought was formed during the hard days of katorga where he, being for the first time in his life surrounded by common, non-privileged people, was shocked by the magnitude of their separation from 'intelligentsia,' the upper class of educated individuals who participate in mental labour; as Frank notes, years of „isolation and enmity from which he had suffered all through his prison-camp years, powerfully affected the subsequent cast of Dostoevsky's ideas;“ (Raskolnikov, who undergoes the same experience in the epilogue, reiterates Dostoevsky's own intellectual path; the narrative of his redemption amounts to recovering of the ability “to identify himself with the others, morally and emotionally” (Frank 1987, 144).

Dostoevsky saw the origin of this split between intelligentsia and common people in Petr I's reforms that were trying to Europeanize Russian society (Dostoevsky 1861, 5): aimed at the educated part of Russian society these reforms were implemented from the top, in a voluntaristic fashion, instead of relying on the organic development of people. Thus, they have remained alien to the common people who have retained their “originality” despite the transformation of the elite (Dostoevsky 1861, 6). Dostoevsky, unlike the previous

generation of conservative thinkers (Dowler 1982, 90-91), admitted the value and necessity of Petr's Europeanization saying that it has expanded Russian "sight" and "field of action," (Dostoevsky 1993, 29) deepened Russian self-knowledge (Dostoevsky 1993, 149) and gifted it with science, a gift that was accepted "with gratitude" (Dostoevsky 1993, 23) Dostoevsky drew no inspirations in the idea of returning to some idyllic past. But the momentary price for these achievements was the alienation of the educated part of Russian society from its "soil" – the common people (Dostoevsky 1993). Being imbued with *pride* Russian intelligentsia started believing unconditionally in their superior, unique status and learned to despise common people who represented, for them, a lower level of life. *They no longer listened to the ordinary people as if people had nothing to say.* Dostoevsky describes the growing sense of alienation between these two groups in one of his notes within *Diary of a Writer*: "One of the most typical traits of Russian liberalism is horrible contempt towards the people and in addition to that a horrible lording over the people..." (Dostoevsky 1971) Intelligentsia and people are divided by "by an impassable gulf" (Dostoevsky 2004).

Dostoevsky's thinking about the significance of this "gulf" was strongly influenced by Herder (through his colleague and friend Grigoryev) and his criticism of universalistic approaches to societies (Scanlan 2011, 159; Dowler 1982, 44). Herder starts with an assumption that societies occur and develop as a response toward particular settings of the world and make no sense without the context of this response. Individuals, their identity, and their ways of making sense of the world are seen as equally context-dependent: we become who we are only by inheriting the common tradition, its customs, norms, worldviews, mythology, fundamental ideas and 'cosmogonies.' The attempt to treat individuals as universalistic, self-standing creatures is thus grossly misguided. Dostoevsky enthusiastically endorses this thinking, which has served as the foundation of his theory of 'pochvenicestvo:' according to Dostoevsky, the 'soil' ('pochva'), the tradition that has been forged for generations introduces us into values, orientations, a sense of justice (the law of the earth,

as Dostoevsky puts it) and purpose; being generated by the historical life of the community, it gives us a sense of identity and belonging to others. *My* orientation makes it possible for me to orient in *my* environment; as Scanlan puts it “different soils produce different plants bearing different fruits.” (Scanlan 2011, 201)

Unlike the previous generation of Russian conservative thought, Dostoevsky and other *‘pochvenniki’* no longer understand tradition as a fixed system of norms and prescriptions treating it instead as an organic process. As another close to Dostoevsky *‘pochvennik’* – Strakhov – puts it, ‘under the term soil are meant those basic and distinctive powers of a people which are the seeds of all its organic manifestations. Whatever the phenomenon is...be it a song, story, custom, or a private or civil form, all these are recognized as legitimate, as having real meaning, in so far as they are organically linked to the national essence.” (Strakhov 1862, translated by Dowler). So, the tradition does not refer us to some fact or some period in past but to the *essence*, the *principle* according to which periods occur and succeed each other. Thus, *pochvenniki* offer us a much more dynamic notion of tradition, which accounts for the need and possibility of change; *they* prefer “progress and life...” over “stagnation and sleep” (Dowler 1982, 95). The only point is that this change must be *organic*: as a product of the historic life of a community, it must *follow* from the situation instead of being deduced from some abstract theoretical postulate; as Dowler puts it, “[c]hange was inevitable and desirable but was legitimate only when it took place within the constraints of tradition” (Ibid., 110). Otherwise, it will always remain an alien, undigestible element. (In *Crime and Punishment*, Razumikhin who stresses that any kind of social change cannot be based on detached theoretical constructions but must remain in a dialogue with the animated society and its historical life expresses this view.) In this sense, the ideology of the native soil is, in the first place, an ideology of unity that seeks to reconcile different social groups by stressing the indebtedness of any particular project to the context when it has arisen.

So, the tradition – what following Barnard’s interpretation of Herder, we might describe as a “historical and cultural continuum” (Barnard 1989, 31) – is not based upon fixable entities ‘in’ us that we must simply accept or deny; it cannot be summed up as a set of coherent sentences formulatable by a single isolated individual. For Dostoevsky, belonging to the tradition is rather based on intuitive comprehension, intuitive merging with the folk tradition the most crucial element of which is the pre-rational, pre-conceptual openness to the others, genuine caring for their lives and aspirations. He describes this intuition in *Brothers Karamazov*, where Alyosha experiences the feeling of belonging that Dostoevsky describes as follows: “There seemed to be threads from all those innumerable worlds of God, linking his soul to them, and it was trembling all over ‘in contact with other worlds.’ He longed to forgive everyone and for everything, and to beg forgiveness. Oh, not for himself, but for all men, for all and for everything. ‘And others are praying for me too,’ echoed again in his soul” (Dostoevsky 2009, 463) (Alyosha that kisses the earth here echoes Raskolnikov’s similar act of repentance, which symbolized giving himself over the court of the soil.) We can see, therefore, how this pre-reflective, pre-rational sense of unity, which consists of our dialogical attentiveness to others, an ability to hear others and value them “as ourselves,” fills the life with meaning and a sense of belonging, putting us in direct contact with others. Taken in itself this attentiveness is indeed “unreasonable,” (Dostoevsky 1995, 241) i.e., it cannot be rationally grounded by an isolated, monological consciousness; but it is by understanding ourselves as outgrowths of the same soil, as caring for others and being cared by others, we can disclose warmth and intimacy of a shared life.

What Dostoevsky demonstrates (both philosophically and stylistically), in other words, is that our voice obtains its meaning and situatedness only by blending with the polyphony of other voices and remaining connected with others and the common world – the soil – where it happened to grow. Being confronted with the magnitude of the gulf separating the common people and intelligentsia back in the days of his

katorga, he has realized that the richness and depth of a single individual is “unassimilable to any prefabricated sociopolitical vision and unamenable to any totalizing scheme” (Ruttenberg 2008, 27). So the alienation from people cannot be overcome with the help of constructing theories and making observations, something Dostoevsky describes as “looking upon” people, but with the help of living “with people,” i.e., by sharing their lives and caring for them. Dostoevsky’s polyphonic method of narration, which entitles characters to “their own directly signifying discourse” (Bahtin 1984, 6) and frees them from the strict subordination to the goals of the plot, was meant to make exactly this kind of “living with” possible; later on, it has further crystallized into a number of philosophical points described above.

Isolation from tradition and the common people proves to be corruptive. Placed in this detached position, intelligentsia might not recognize this corruptive impact and praise instead its privileged and self-sufficient status. It substitutes the reliance on tradition with the unconditional trust in reason: being deprived of its dialogical interconnectedness to others, intelligentsia relies only on itself and its private power of argument. As Dostoevsky stresses in Pushkin’s speech, this self-sufficiency is an illusion: no matter how useful and correct rational constructions and knowledge are ‘in themselves,’ they can never compensate for isolation. Any kind of genuine thinking must remain in touch with the soil, attaining the depth and significance in the context of its historical situation rather than being free-floating speculation. By substituting the nourishing power of the tradition and dialogue with others with the naïve belief in its own self-sufficiency, intelligentsia dooms itself for disorientation; the knowledge it elaborates will always suffer from idleness, emptiness, and speculative, abstract character. The Russian intellectual, says Dostoevsky “will never understand that the truth is first of all within himself. How could he understand this? For a whole century he has not been able to be himself in his own land. He has forgotten how to work. He has no culture... For the time being he is only a blade of grass torn up by his roots and blown through the air” (Dostoevsky 1880) In other words, thinking

that does not arise from the ‘pochva’ or soil will never be able to clarify its own situation and its own significance because from the very beginning it forgets one’s own “truth;” such thinking would amount a ‘torn up blade of grass’ that occurs and disappears without any impact. Only by reconciling the detached elite with the people “the redemption of the whole” (Murav 1992, 6) can be reached.

Furthermore, this isolation is never complete. One way or another, an individual still remains dependent upon the tradition and others (for Dostoevsky this means that no one is lost completely, and anyone retains a chance of redemption). Bakhtin has explicated this line of thinking perfectly stressing that Dostoevsky intentionally does not demonstrate us Raskolnikov’s article while demonstrating how the idea of the article is perceived and lived by other characters. By doing this Dostoevsky once again contrasts “monological” content of Raskolnikov’s theory and private character of his argumentation and its real-life “dialogical” motivation that sources directly from Raskolnikov’s relations with his sister, mother, and Sonya. Only in the course of interactions with others “Raskolnikov’s idea reveals its various facets, nuances, possibilities, it enters into various relationships with other life-positions. As it loses its monologic, abstractly theoretical finalized quality, a quality sufficient to a single consciousness, it acquires the contradictory complexity and living multi-faceness of an idea-force, being born, living and acting in the great dialogue of the epoch and calling back and forth to kindred ideas of other epochs.” (Bahtin 1984, 31) Dostoevsky also demonstrates that Raskolnikov’s own decision to commit murder retains the implicit dialogical, intersubjective motivation: only after he received the letter from his sister (which, again, increases his alienation), the abstract “arithmetic” of his theory is transformed into a driving force of his life (Kirpotin 1970, 83). So, even though his theory does not contain any sort of dialogical aspects, it itself remains essentially motivated by dialogue and, thus, can never be finalized into complete isolation.

By creating the figure of Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky was trying to create an epitome of Russian intelligentsia

transposing these social, intellectual and, most of all, spiritual problems into a picture of the struggling disoriented student; Raskolnikov is a “hero of the modern age.” Indeed, it is not hard to find in Raskolnikov all the traits and phenomena that troubles Dostoevsky. Raskolnikov is a student, a participant of the intellectual labour, and thus a member of the intelligentsia. As part of this privileged group, he finds himself completely detached from people: he does not understand them and is not understood by them (to stress this alienation, Dostoevsky often describes various misperceptions of Raskolnikov’s sufferings – e.g. “many of them took him to be drunk” (Dostoevsky 2001, 80)). He is also extremely prideful: he despises the people (“their ugly faces”) and puts himself above them. Finally, he lacks a clear sense of identity (“who am I?”). But Raskolnikov is not only an example but also *an experimental model* for Dostoevsky: based on the figure of Raskolnikov, he shows us what *could* happen (and what has already started happening) if this isolation progresses and radicalizes. Raskolnikov is not only isolated from common people and tradition – he is placed in complete isolation from others. His family is far away from him, he has very few friends and barely participates in social occasions. Even before the crime, Raskolnikov consciously kept distance from society – in university, for example, he “kept aloof from everyone.” (Ibid., 100) Furthermore, Dostoevsky also describes Raskolnikov as “crushed by poverty” (Ibid., 7) he wasn’t able to meet even his basic needs, let alone help his mother and sister.

And since he is even more radically isolated than most people, he also has to rely more radically on private, non-dialogical reason. Again, Raskolnikov’s ideas were hardly unique. Dostoevsky explicitly admits that, referring us in one of his letters to Katkov to “strange, *‘incomplete’* ideas which go floating about in the air” (Dostoevsky 1996) Even the theory itself wasn’t unique – J. Karjakin, for example, mentions that “the generation was obsessed with napoleomania” (Karjakin 1996, 98-99) (hence, Porfyri’s ironic question ‘Oh, come, don’t we all think ourselves Napoleons now in Russia?’) (Dostoevsky 2001, 476). This is the logical result of isolation from the tradition that forces intelligentsia to rely on reason and produce

all sorts of hollow intellectual constructions. But what makes Raskolnikov stand out, as I have claimed earlier, is his decision to act upon those ideas. The murder transforms what has been a merely theoretical stupidity into an existential stupidity, which now appears as an organizing topic of Raskolnikov's life. If before these 'modern times', isolation from the tradition has led to the occurrence of abstract ideas detached from life, now these abstract ideas themselves violently imposed themselves as reality and *become* reality. Acting upon his theory means *finalizing* his isolation and *rupturing* the very structure of his being with others; from *merely conceptual inability* to articulate and appreciate the constitutive nature of our being with others, he has arrived at the *existential amputation* of such a being. There is no simple way back from here: he cannot abandon his theory as a failed experiment, but instead has to rebuild his life from scratch through moral resurrection and suffering. Dostoevsky, in such a way, demonstrates that the tendency to rely on reason (a product of isolation) can, at the same time, potentially reinforce this isolation in a radical way.

Crime and Punishment should be seen as a *sinister warning* against what might follow if reconciliation between the intelligentsia and people does not happen, if this corruptive isolation of thinking from the soil and others progresses and radicalizes. If we place too much trust in reason and stop being attentive to tradition and others, we are left unprotected from moral and existential collapse. The first signs of such radicalization have already been noticeable in in Dostoevsky's Russia; but Dostoevsky, of course, was far from realizing how much further this radicalization can progress.

2. Logicality vs. Common sense in H. Arendt

H. Arendt is rarely (if ever) compared to Dostoevsky: these two thinkers come from very different backgrounds, operate with different methods and conceptual tools, and proceed from different assumptions. Arendt herself, as S. Boym stresses (Boym 2005, 106), has come to conclusion that Dostoevsky's dialogical openness is opposed, by the very definition, to the public domain that was interested in. But if

we compare their views on the status and crisis of tradition, a number of crucial similarities immediately show up.

To elaborate on such similarities, I will start with a brief outline of Arendt's notions of common sense and reality. According to Arendt, the sense of reality is guaranteed by the fact that individual senses disclose the same world and the same objects in different ways. The special sense coordinates the activities of the other senses and transforms them into a perception of one specific object; combined together, private senses serve as the foundation of a sixth sense that is common to everybody: "[w]hat since Thomas Aquinas we call common sense, the *sensus communis*, is a kind of sixth sense needed to keep my five senses together and guarantee that it is the same object that I see, touch, taste, smell, and bear." (Arendt 1981, 50) Arendt adds to this Aristotelian understanding of the sixth sense a more significant intersubjective aspect. The real guarantee of the existence of the object is not the unity of my perceptions, but its appearance to other humans, although the "mode of appearance may be different" (Ibid). Others help us to separate illusion from reality and evaluate the latter appropriately. The context of these different "modes of an appearance" will therefore still be the same for everyone who perceives this appearance because they live in the same intersubjectively verified world (Ibid.). Everything that belongs to it attains its natural or common perspectives owing to the very process of communicating with others, which means a constant specification of reality and a readiness of thought to adapt and grasp the changes in it. The process of verification is not simply a transformation from reality to a common reality. Instead, it is the way reality and truth as such are discovered (Ibid.)

This means that disclosure of reality is not an automatically guaranteed fact but an intersubjective achievement: sense of reality is essentially associated with a never-ending process of refinement, verification and coordination among plurality of perspectives. It is the outcome of actual, historical acts of communication with other people: through daily activities and interactions with others, my world acquires heft, tangibility, and a natural hierarchy. For Arendt, in such a way, the common sense is not so much a movement of

cognition as it is a movement of communication, of agreeing with others to attain a shared attitude towards the world; it is not a universal a priori law of my access to the world but rather an intersubjective praxis of securing such an access. Common sense functions as a medium of communication among people: because they exist in the same homogenous space, communication and ordinary interactions among people are basic processes that usually cause no complications. People are able to understand each other's intentions easily because there is a normativity common to everyone, which reveals what should exist and how exactly it should exist. Withdrawal from this means destroying the plurality of perspectives, its richness and the very possibility to be certain of reality. It is for this reason that Arendt says that common sense is a "political sense par excellence" (Arendt 1994, 318).

But since the common sense is not an abstract structure of one's own mind but a result of actual interaction with fellow men, it can not only be changed but also damaged, or even lost. Arendt, just like Dostoevsky, sees the loss of this sense of common reality, our connection to others, as one of the ills of modern times, something Arendt describes as "bankruptcy of common sense." In the modern world where "work" (the process of creating lasting elements, 'hinges' of the world) has been substituted with "labor" (the cyclical activity aimed at the life-maintenance and immediate consumption) (Arendt 1998, 47), where political regimes rely on propaganda and terror (see, for example, Arendt's "Ideology and Terror"), where "our categories of thought and standards of judgment" (Arendt 1994, 318) – something Arendt calls "crutches" (Arendt 1968, 10) of our thinking or "yardsticks by which to measure" (Arendt 1994, 321) – has been bankrupted. We are left deprived from the means of establishing the common world; as a result, common sense, the very feeling of a common world, had vanished. As Arendt puts it, "[w]e live today in a world in which not even common sense makes sense any longer." Under this condition, establishing normal communication between two people – the process that constitutes common sense – stopped being an ordinary procedure; social institutions, common normativity and traditions were no longer able to serve as a regular medium

of communication. Left without this common ground, people find themselves separated from each other; they “either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass.” The intersubjective relations become almost mechanical or “automatic” (Arendt 2006, 89-90): while interacting with each other, they still lack mutual understanding, an ability to establish any kind of significant bond or a sharedness of their world.

This pathology of the common sense is immediately followed by the pathology of thinking: being isolated from others, people tend to substitute a real act of communication with vacuous logical consistency, an ability to form a sequence of several propositions – something Arendt calls “logicality” (Arendt 1973, 472) If thinking loses this touch with others, it also loses its connection to truth because truth, says Arendt, must reveal something whereas logicality by itself is sterile and concerns only interactions of judgments. And since disclosure of truth is inseparably linked to interaction among different perspectives, individuals that find themselves cut off from others are no longer able to introduce anything genuinely new into their system of judgments, which makes any kind of substantial reconsideration or alteration of their perspectives impossible. Reliance on private logical consistency, the growing level of rigidity and inertness mark a self-encapsulation of thinking and robs it of its ability to attain experience and learn anything. To illustrate this phenomenon, Arendt cites Luther’s claim, that the lonely man “always deduces one thing from the other and thinks everything to the worst.” There is nothing that can stop this merely logical deduction from the inside (Canovan 1995, 91): when thinking is replaced by a systematic deduction of rules, the absolute sequence of which cannot be interrupted, the possibility of going beyond the limits of its private logic is destroyed. So, by losing contact with others and the common reality around us, we also lose “the capacity of both experience and thought” (Arendt 1973, 474).

According to Arendt, this tendency to rely on one’s own logical capacities creates a fertile ground for the occurrence and spread of dominant ideologies of the 20th century. A distinctive feature of such ideologies is their ultimate totality. According to

Arendt, they resolve “all the riddles of universe” (Ibid., 457) by reducing them to one fundamental problem, whether it is the struggle of social classes for means of production, or the struggle of races for survival. This fundamental problem essentially works as a general rule, under which other, more specific rules are subsumed: everything in the world, appearances, historical events and the future, in an ideological context, gains its meaning only as a result of its relation to a fundamental problem. Ideology interprets reality as the “unfolding” of some “process which is in constant change” (Ibid., 469) and the “idea” of ideology becomes immanent logic, according to which historical “movement... is set into motion” (Ibid.) Phenomena of the world lose their being “for themselves” and are reinterpreted in light of ideological goals: they are “automatically assumed to signify something else” (Ibid., 471) gaining a certain “epistemological basis” supplied by ideological explanation.

This all-encompassing power of ideological explanation is what finally destroys the very possibility of actual experience: by reducing to the “idea” of ideology past, present and future with the whole range of its perspectives, ideology isolates us from everything new *in advance* or *a priori*; by having an ambition to explain *everything* theoretically, it excludes *anything* that can give us reason to reconsider our positions. By doing that, ideology substitutes reality, with all its concreteness and uniqueness that can teach us something, with a “truer” reality, reality that does not require communication with others and intersubjective revelation of what is really but that can be entirely deduced from the fundamental problem set by it. This process of deduction and subsuming *a priori* covers the whole world: “...after ideologies have taught people to emancipate themselves from real experience and the shock of reality by luring them into a fool's paradise where everything is known *a priori*.” (Arendt 1994, 356) The intersubjective disclosure of truth becomes completely and irrevocably substituted with private deductive operations excluding the basic need to cooperate with others. With regard to logical consistency, any kind of *theoretical* need for others is excluded; we know what

reality and history is all about even without needing others to confirm or disconfirm it.

Others, who are supposed to be listened to and reveal their perspectives, something we have no access to without communication, do not appear in ideological thinking. Instead, humans are understood as the means by which History or Nature reach their goals (Arendt 1973, 356). Mutual understanding among people has already been secured by the ideology, owing to the fact that the area of their interaction and understanding is ultimately narrowed to the limits proposed by meta-thesis. In reality, however, this kind of “understanding” only isolates people from each other. Interaction in this sense is not a contact between two independent people, or individuals in need of finding a common ground, but only the interaction of the “cogs” (Arendt 2003, 29) of history. Others are not given as possessing their own agency, as individuals whose perspectives are equally valid as any other perspectives; instead they are given within the context of the fundamental ideological project and they have their meaning and status defined exclusively in terms of this fundamental project. This means that the destruction of common sense by ideology leaves humans completely alone, without any possibility of making actual contact with their fellow man: Even though others are present in our daily interactions, they are present as such soulless ‘cogs’ and never as others.

Under this condition of complete isolation from others, people have no defense against radical evil. If ideology delimitates something like “dying class” or “races unfit to survival,” then the idea of mass murder is *only logical*: they must be killed if *the cause*, or *the greater good*, is to prevail. Since the premise of ideology lies beyond any possible doubt, there is nothing that can wrench us out of this succession of claims and save us from the evil; “[t]otalitarianism,” claims Boym recognizing the intuitive affinity with *Crime and Punishment*, “pushes further Raskolnikov’s maxim that everything is permitted” (Boyml 2005, 603). The almost connatural resistance to murder (all the more so mass murder) is explained as irrational resistance – as either cowardice or stupidity – that needs to be suppressed and overcome. The

tendency to rely on reasons might fail each of us: not everyone is capable of giving solid arguments against such a murder off the top of one's head. This doesn't mean, however, that everyone who has no ready-made arguments against mass murder would automatically engage in it – normally, we, people, have this 'unmistakable' feeling that something is completely off with the idea; we don't even consider this idea as a *truth-candidate*, neglecting it as meaningless before deliberating about it. Something entirely pre-reflective but nonetheless convincing resists reducing this neighbor family to some abstract and desperate representatives of an unfit race. Normally, it is common sense – something that discloses us reality and that was built, among other things, in interaction with this family – that makes this reduction *seem mad*. But what distinguishes the 20th century and what makes this type of crime possible is that this pre-reflective trust to the common sense (or, in other terms, to the tradition) is revoked, which renders everything that displays logical connections reasonable and, potentially, acceptable.¹

We can see, therefore, that Arendt's diagnosis displays some remarkably similar traits to that of Dostoevsky's.² First of all, Arendt proceeds from similar assumptions. Just like Dostoevsky she sees tradition as an *intersubjective achievement*, not some cognitive set of self-obvious valid statements about reality. Our ability to make sense of the world and ourselves is directly dependent upon attentiveness to the tradition that itself is not reducible to a set of arguments. Just like Dostoevsky (but for different reasons), Arendt believes that this tradition and our connection with others are weakened in modern societies. But most importantly, both Arendt and Dostoevsky agree on the danger that follows from such a weakening: in a situation where thinking stops being communicative, where it stops taking into account actual perspectives of others and common sense, it becomes unbound, vague and speculative. As a result, this kind of vague, unbound thinking can potentially justify a set of theoretical propositions that can never be even remotely meaningful or acceptable in a wider context of human existence. The crimes that follow from such free-floating thinking finally rupture our connection to

others and burn every bridge that can lead us back to them. We can see, therefore, that Arendt also sees ideological thinking as a product *and* a reinforcement of isolation at the same time.

3. From Returning to Rebuilding

It should be stressed, however, that this similarity between Arendt and Dostoevsky is a similarity in diagnosis. They arrive at this conclusion, from very different perspectives, and offer different ways of resolving this crisis. Investigation of this difference will not only further clarify their accounts, but also emphasize the progress that European thought has achieved over the half a century which separates *Crime and Punishment* and Arendt's early thinking.

Let's first return to Dostoevsky in more details. Dostoevsky believes that two factors are responsible for the crisis. The first is sociological, which has already been discussed – Petr I's reforms have violently separated people and intelligentsia. The second factor is more abstract and inconspicuous, but ultimately more significant for Dostoevsky functioning as a sort of a *leitmotiv* in many of his writings. It consists of a Christian assumption that detachment from the tradition constitutes a sort of a *sin*: intellectuals are guilty of being too proud of themselves (Cicovacki 2005). After attaining this privileged and renewed position, they have started to think of themselves as autonomous, independent agents; they assume that they are capable of governing themselves without need of any external law. Such major characters, like underground man Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov, and Raskolnikov, share this peculiar trait of being proud up to the extent that they thought themselves the only authority they required; all of them are self-absorbed, egoistic, and all of them are lost in the world and isolated from others. This second factor is a much more severe problem than the first, since it does not source from the external environment but from human nature as such; consequently, there is no receipt against pride other than individual remorse, which cannot be caused by the environment, but must follow from the inside. As Cicovacki puts it, "The monster that Dostoyevsky recognized in Siberia, which turned him against his own earlier convictions, was

humanity's proud nature. The sinners, the poor, and the innocent are victims of mindlessness, misery, and injustice, but the wicked are victimized by a greater evil: pride. Ignorance can be removed, poverty eliminated, injustice corrected. But pride? How can we fight pride?" (Ibid., 2005).

With this, another important point comes up: for Dostoevsky, the crisis of a tradition is a crisis of an individual that mistakenly breaks away from tradition, but it is never a crisis of the tradition itself. The tradition, while being different from culture to culture, shares nonetheless the essentially Christian core that has taught us to "love our neighbour as ourselves" (Dostoevsky 1994). This core is innate to every human being as it is nothing but a "gift" of God, which Scanlan aptly describes as "initial structural endowment" (Scanlan 2011, 88). While recognizing the possibility and need for changes in the tradition, Dostoevsky stresses that this incorporation must happen in an "organic way" based on dialogue with others. And our attentiveness to others, the sense of unity and belonging is an ineradicable, "innate" aspect of every human existence; we can walk away from this God's gift but we can never eradicate it completely from ourselves. Thus, every major character of Dostoevsky's works – no matter how deep he falls into the abyss of isolation and vice – retain this possibility of confessing and returning to others. So, in this sense, historically contingent and external isolation from others might provoke the belief that others are not needed at all; it might spark pride and the illusion that we can settle with ourselves and the rationality of our own minds. But this crisis, strictly speaking, is never a crisis *of* tradition but rather a crisis that follows from the attempt to deny it. Consequently, the solution to the crisis of tradition always lies through individual remorse, abandonment of pride, and a return to others. Human beings, in other words, are of course free to deny the tradition at self-mutilating cost, but they have no need in rebuilding it. Being given as a sort of theological revelation, as a gift that can be accepted or denied but never corrupted completely, the tradition is always there to return to. This perspective has its natural limits: it might have looked acceptable in the 19th century where the crises of tradition were still limited to a

number of individuals, while the bulk of the nation – the ordinary people – were seen as an unshakeable cornerstone of the tradition. The experience of 20th century totalitarian regimes, of course, tests this assumption, showing us that significant groups of ‘ordinary people’ were, at the least, tacitly complicit with the crimes of the regime. In this case, it is no longer a crisis of individual misfits or rogue elements, but involves a full-blown crisis of the tradition and its power to integrate and settle people in the world. In light of these events, Arendt’s perspective makes much more sense. Coming from transcendental and phenomenological traditions of thought, Arendt does not rely on the innate character of the common sense, but investigates the condition of its possibility. For Arendt, interactions among individuals, communication *actively constitutes* common sense, the feeling of the common world; so, instead of blending in theological implications or revelation and viewing our belonging to the tradition as something that is theologically secured, she interprets it as an intersubjective achievement. For this reason, Arendt is able to deploy a much richer analysis of the pathologies of common sense; but most importantly, she offers us an explanation of how it is possible to actively rebuild (and not just ‘re-accept’) the tradition that has lost its grip over us. This rebuilding project has occupied Arendt throughout her career: early on, she tried to demonstrate how genuine thinking, “thinking from the standpoint of somebody else” can perform such a task, while later she has passed over this function to the capacity of judgement. This latter part of her thought on judgement has already received a lot of attention from various scholars; to name but a few, the works by R. Beiner and M. Canovan serve as a useful guide on how reflective judgement can re-build the common sense. In what follows, however, I will concentrate on Arendt’s early thinking about thinking, first because it is a relatively under-investigated topic, but mainly because it will supply us with further parallels to Dostoevsky’s work and continue to add to the relation between logicity, isolation, and genuine thinking.

In particular, we can look at Arendt’s unpublished lecture entitled “Philosophy and Politics” from 1953. The basic problem described in this lecture is Socrates’ trial. The

problematic character of the trial reflects the larger problem of the relationship between the philosopher and the plurality. Socrates spoke with his judges in the same way he spoke with his friends. He “addressed his judges in the form of dialectic,” (Arendt 1953, 79) asking questions and seeking answers to them in an effort to arrive at the truth. In reality, discussion in a court was not the kind of dialogue to which Socrates was accustomed. He was used to a dialogue among friends. Faced with judges, however, he was addressing a plurality. Dialectic is not suited to this kind of task, because it is preoccupied with the quest for truth. Inside the courtroom, persuasion aimed at shaping opinion is more appropriate. Truth, which is a traditional area of interest to the *sofoi*, or wise man, loses its essential characteristics to a degree when it enters the public space, where it can be seen and judged by the multitude, because “the moment the eternal is brought into the midst of men it becomes temporal” (Ibid.) Interaction with the public excludes the very possibility of dialogue, a succession of questions and answers, united in a desire to find the truth. In public settings, thought loses its own inherent context; the way it was achieved, its inherent *responsibility*, and quest for truth, and instead turns into opinion, at that a merely subjective one. Because of all these losses, the rivalry among opinions takes the form of persuasion, which according to Arendt “does not come from truth” (Ibid.). The rivalry among them takes the form of violence, a collision among different effects (even though it is expressed in speech): “To persuade the multitude means to force upon its multiple opinions one's own opinion; persuasion is not the opposite of rule by violence, it is only another form of it” (Ibid.).

According to Arendt, a key feature of Socrates's approach is his attempt to reveal the truth hidden in the opinions of judges. Unlike Plato, he did not discount the value of *doxai*, opinions. Arendt gives her special attention to the primordial connotations of this Greek word “*doxa*,” which have been lost in translation: “*doxa*” comes from “*dokei moi*,” meaning “it seems to me.” “It seems to me” refers to our position in the world, and seemingness assumes some point of view and, as such, is significantly different from illusions,

although it is not “something absolute and valid for all” (Ibid.). Such subjective seemingness is combined with “commonness” (Ibid.) of the world, i.e., the recognition that despite any differences, “both you and I are human” (Ibid.) living in one, objective world. Objectivity is always present in the subjectivity of opinions, since the latter is a consequence of a common object presented to different people with different perspectives. Socrates’s dialectic was aimed at this concealed objectivity. It was an attempt to reveal the truth hidden in every opinion.

Thinking in itself is a mean of communication that can turn a subjective opinion into a truthful one, provided that the speaker understands and accepts the condition of his opinion: his point of view from which his view “seems.” Admitting his ignorance and the inability to achieve complete knowledge, Socrates believed that truth is revealed to mortals only through an appreciation of the limitations and the conditionality of truth. This discovery led him to an understanding of the necessity of communication. Uncovering the truth of a companion is only possible by learning from what point of view his opinion seems to be right, which is an impossible task without a style of rhetoric and questioning which has no other motive than the desire to understand. The main task of “talking something through” (Ibid., 81) is therefore not to dismiss the opinion of one’s companions, but to “reveal *doxa* in its own truthfulness” (Ibid., 81). In this way, it is possible to achieve a common truth for all who are involved in a discussion and to replace a competition among opinions with dialogue. This is the only way of achieving compromise in the mortal world, where no final truth is possible and, therefore, any form of coercion or tyranny by truth is excluded. The necessary condition for such a conversation is the absence of any clear goal for the discussion and any specific “interests” related to it. Dialogue is a form of communication among friends. For this reason, Arendt calls the *maieutic* method political capacity per se (Ibid.), and says that friendship as such is a form of political organization.

For Arendt, the most distinctive characteristic of politics is its concern with the common world. In “Philosophy and Politics,” she interprets friendship in an Aristotelian way, as a relationship based, for the most part, on talking something

through with someone else. It mainly consists in discussing *doxai*, their points of view which *a priori* assures them that they live in the same world. The common world can become common owing to an equality that makes their views equally relevant and, as well as the need to live together. In discussing their opinions, friends find a way of reaching consensus by uncovering the truth hidden in their opinions. They begin “to constitute a little world of its own which is shared in friendship” (Ibid., 82). Friendship in this sense is truly the highest political relationship, which can build or rebuild a common world, because friendship is connected with equalization of friends in relation to the public realm, i.e., an equalization of their claims to be right. Socrates’s project consisted of trying “to make friends out of Athens’s citizenry” (Ibid.) with the help of thinking and good-natured dialogue, because the citizens of Athens understood the public space to be a place of competition and mutual struggle. Socrates wanted to replace this space of contending opinions by “equalizing” (Ibid., 83) communication and achieving understanding. Arendt clearly states that the capacity to see “the world (as we rather tritely say today) from the other fellow’s point of view—is the political kind of insight par excellence” (Ibid., 84) (the same formulation she used to describe Eichmann’s thoughtlessness). In fact, Arendt claims that “If we wanted to define, traditionally, the one outstanding virtue of the statesman, we could say that it consists in understanding the greatest possible number and variety of realities...as those realities open themselves up to the various opinions of citizens” (Ibid.). Socrates wanted every citizen to take up this activity as his own responsibility. According to him, this was the “political function of the philosopher” (Ibid.). This point is especially important, since common sense can be ruined — and indeed has been ruined — in the 20th century. This type of thinking, however, offers a potential means of rebuilding it.

4. Conclusion

We can see, in such a way, that Dostoevsky can be considered a forerunner to Arendt’s analysis of the collapse of the common sense and tradition. Both Arendt and Dostoevsky

are concerned with isolation of individuals from others, but most importantly, both of them believe that this isolation has a corruptive impact upon our ability to make sense of the world, substituting the traditional orientation in the world with logically coherent but hollow rational constructions. Following from the isolation of individuals, this substitution can also drastically reinforce and radicalize the substitution, thus opening up a way to catastrophe. But even though they both agree about the importance of dialogical thinking and tradition that is opened up through such thinking, Arendt arrives at the problem from a very different angle. She no longer relies on a religious foundation of the tradition, and analyzes instead the concrete historical ways of transferring the tradition, and equally concrete historical dangers to such transferring. Being no longer bound by the religiously and morally laden demand of returning to others, Arendt's "thinking from the standpoint of somebody else" – unlike Dostoevsky's version – is guided by the need to "*constitute*" the common world. It *creates* rather than *preserves*; it moves forward rather than reminds us about something we have left behind. This is because Arendt's "post-metaphysical" thinking is a much more modern phenomenon: it is a product of the time, which (for better or worse) largely proceeds from the fact that there no longer are any "general standards to determine our judgments unfailingly, no general rules under which to subsume the particular cases with any degree of certainty" (Arendt 2018). There is no longer hope of finding some foundation that would *secure* our interactions with others. As Boym puts it, the answer to the task of winning back the commonality of our no longer lives through "the invention of a national tradition, or the resacralization of the disenchanting modern world and a prescriptive enforcement of moral rules" (Boy 2018, 362). In this sense, Arendt's early thinking on thinking from the very beginning is faced with a task of orienting ourselves in this new situation; it is an attempt to offer us a way of "mov[ing] freely without crutches" without "pillars and props" (Arendt 1968, 10) relying on one thing only – our never-ending need to constitute this "little world" that we can share.

NOTES

¹ In one of her letters, Arendt even discusses Dostoevsky in this regard: “why should I not kill my grandmother if I want to? Such and similar questions were answered in the past by religion on one side and common sense on the other. (...) Both answers don't work any longer, and this not only because of these specific replies- nobody believes in hell any longer, nobody is so sure if he does not want to be killed or if death, even violent death is really so bad-but because their sources, faith on one hand and common sense judgements don't make sense any more (...) If this common sense is lost, there is no common world any longer“ (Arendt to McCarty, August 20, 1954 in *Between Friends*, 22); this point was also discussed by Benhabib, Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem (2000).

² S. Boym has also demonstrated that the emphasis upon the dangers of isolation and importance of attaining the ‘other's point of view’ also approximates Arendt with other Slavic thinkers such as Shklovksy (Boym 2005) and Shalamov (Boym 2008) .

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