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THE FIGHT AGAINST THE FRENCH REVOLUTION: DOSTOEVSKY AS A POLITICAL THINKER

The victory of the Allied Forces over fascist European regimes in 1945 did not only bring about the imposition and consolidation of liberal democracies throughout the West, but also set a new course of study in academic fields, thus breaking away from the recent past. This can be seen, for example, in the fracture which takes place in Nietzsche studies, a fracture which also becomes apparent in the research carried out around the figure of the Russian writer and thinker, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky.

With the intention of depoliticizing writers who, in one way or another, had served as political sustenance for fascist ideologies, literary scholarship focused on new perspectives of the works of fiction, ignoring or leaving unsaid the more problematic aspects of a writer's legacy. Thus, for example, Dostoevsky studies relegated to the background the political reactionary facet within Dostoevsky's worldview, and focused on the philological, theological and ethical matters which arise within the body of his work.¹ It is for this reason that there are relatively few contemporary studies which deal with Dostoevsky's political thought in a systematic way, thus openly discussing not only his criticism towards Russian and western

1. This conspiracy of silence can perhaps be explained by the dual perception of Dostoevsky, the great writer and Dostoevsky the publicist. The view of Karla Hielscher sheds light on this duality: "Dostojevskijs politisches Denken stellt, wenn es unkritisch aufgenommen wird, eine solche Gefahr [d.i. eine 'Gefahr für die Demokratie'; J. M.] dar, gerade weil es von einem ehrlichen, tiefempfunden Pathos der christlichen Brüderlichkeit inspiriert ist. In seiner konkreten Publizistik jedoch wird seine politische Philosophie aller schönen Hüllen entkleidet. Verstärkt durch das grelle Licht, das die Rezeption durch die deutsche antiwestliche Rechte darauf wirft, wird ihr eigentliches Wesen offenbar: Es handelt sich um einen antiaufklärerischen, die gesamte Moderne negierenden Fundamentalismus." Karla Hielscher, "Dostojevskijs antiwestliche Zivilisationskritik und die deutsche Konservative Revolution," in *Neue Gesellschaft Frankfurter Hefte*, 43, no. 8 (1996): 730-36, now in R. Neuhäuser, ed., *Polyfunktion und Metaparodie. Aufsätze zum 175. Geburtstag Fedor Michajlovič Dostojevskijs* (Dresden: Dresden Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 238-54, here p. 254. See also K. Hielscher, "Die dunklen Seiten der Weltanschauung Dostojevskijs. Biographische Hintergründe und politische Dimensionen", *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Dostojevskij-Gesellschaft*, 13 (2006): 115-28 and Susan McReynolds, "Aesthetics and Politics: The Case of Dostoevsky," *Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics*, 4, no. 1 (2002): 91-104; here p. 93.

society of his time, but also his positive proposals for social reform inspired by his religious Orthodox conception of life and society.²

This article will focus on one of the less discussed topics within Dostoevsky's political critique which, although evidently present throughout his narrative and journalistic work, has not attracted enough attention from Dostoevsky scholars. This is the case of Dostoevsky's political ideology in connection with the events of 1789.³

The French Revolution constitutes the beginning of a series of changes in European societies which, throughout the nineteenth century, would gradually unfold and ultimately evolve into the social, economic, political and moral structures present in our contemporary society. Like every major historical landmark which shapes a before-and-after reality in people's lives, it was the object of admiration and criticism for all great spirits who lived and outlived it: from Hegel to Goethe, from Fichte to Schopenhauer

2. See, for example, the following works: Josef Bohatec, *Der Imperialismusgedanke und die Lebensphilosophie Dostojewskijs: ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis des russischen Menschen* (Graz: Böhlau, 1951); Jean Drouilly, *La pensée politique et religieuse de F. M. Dostoïevski* (Paris: Libres de Cinq Continents, 1971); Geoffrey C. Kabat, *Ideology and Imagination: the Image of Society in Dostoevsky* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1978); Wayne Dowler, *Dostoevsky, Grigor'ev, and Native Soil Conservatism* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1982); Bruce Kinsey Ward, *Dostoevsky's Critique of the West: The Quest for the Earthly Paradise* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1986); Karla Hielscher, *Von Marx zu Dostoevskij: die Rolle F. M. Dostoevskijs in den aktuellen ideologischen Debatten in der Sowjetunion 1954-1983* (Hagen: Medienverlag, 1987); Liza Knapp, ed. and trans., *Dostoevskii As Reformer: The Petrashevsky Case* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1987); Stephen Kirby Carter, *The Political and Social Thought of F. M. Dostoevsky* (New York: Garland, 1991); Igor' L. Volgin, *Kolebljas' nad bezdnoi: Dostoevskii i imperatorskii dom* (Moscow: Izdat. Tsentr Gumanitarnogo Obrazovaniia, 1998); A. K. Golikov – A. A. Glubev, "Duchovnye osnovy sotsial'no-politicheskikh vozzrenii F. M. Dostoevskogo (K 180-letiu so dnia rozhdeniia pisatel'ia)," *Klio. Zhurnal dla uchenikh*, no. 2.11 (2000): 90-99; Ursula Kansy, *Die staatspolitische Bedeutung der Religion in Dostojewskijs 'Großinquisitor'* (Hamburg: Kovac, 2004); Sarah Hudspith, *Dostoevsky and the Idea of Russianness: a New Perspective on Unity and Brotherhood* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), and Nancy Ruttenburg, *Dostoevsky's Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008).

3. Among the bibliography on Dostoevsky's political thought, we have to mention the following studies, which deal exclusively with the French Revolution: Vl. Kovalenko, "Idées sur la Révolution et pensées socio-philosophiques chez Dostoïevski," in *1889: Centenaire de la Révolution Française: réactions et représentations politiques en Europe*. Actes du colloque tenu à l'Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg, 20-22 avril 1989 (Berne: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 59-64; P. Torop, "Frantsuzskie revoliutsii i F. M. Dostoevskii," in A. E. Mal'ts, ed., *Tezisy dokladov nauchnoi konferentsii "Velikaia frantsuzskaia revoliutsiia i puti russkogo osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniia," 15-17 dekabريا 1989 g.* (Tartu, 1989), pp. 66-73; now in *Dostoevskii: Istoriia i ideologiia* (Tartu: Izd. TGU, 1997), pp. 56-63; and Dmitry Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life (1865-1905)* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1996), pp. 53-59 ("Dostoevsky: The French Revolution as Dangerous Illusion").