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***Logos Sent into a Headspin:
Notes on the Conversation with the Devil
in Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov***¹

Dedicated to the memory of Horst-Jürgen Gerigk

Ivan Karamazov avowedly believes neither in immortality nor in God and the devil (*IICC* 14; 123).² Nevertheless, he has a long and wide-ranging conversation with a devil in a felt hat and plaid trousers (*IICC* 15; 69-85). This need not worry us at this point. What would be an imposition on the mind in our everyday experience, in a work of art we either accept as typical of the genre, or we expect the author to rationally resolve what irritates us. In the case of Ivan Karamazov, the most obvious explanation for the presence of the plaid gentleman is that Ivan is hallucinating him. And indeed, Dostoevsky's narrator seems to make precisely this diagnosis, albeit with the caveat "I am not a doctor" (*IICC* 15; 69). He quotes a doctor's verdict that hallucinations are "very possible" in Ivan's condition (*ibid.*; 70). The reader is thus given a medical prescription, as it were, for further reading. His trust in the narrator's authority is soon shaken, however, when he realizes that the narrator does not really distance himself from the delusional perception of his protagonist.³ This narrator is obviously

- 1 This paper is an extended und updated version of the author's essay: Urs HEFTRICH, "Vom Kreisen des Logos. Anmerkungen zum Teufelsgespräch in Dostoevskijs *Brüdern Karamazov*", in Thomas BRUNS und Henrieke STAHL (Hrsg.), *Sprache – Literatur – Kultur. Studien zur slavischen Philologie und Geistesgeschichte. Festschrift für Gerhard Ressel zum 60. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt/M. et al.: Peter Lang, 2005), S. 301-310.
- 2 *The Brothers Karamazov* is cited below according to the *IICC* edition in my own English translation. A bibliography of literature on the novel is provided in Horst-Jürgen GERIGK (Hrsg.), "*Die Brüder Karamasow*". *Dostojevskijs letzter Roman in heutiger Sicht* (Dresden: Dresden University Press, 1997), S. 245-268.
- 3 It is not the narrator who proves that the damp towel with which Ivan cools his forehead during the devil's conversation is a delusion, but Alyosha (cf. *IICC* 15; 72 with 86). Anyone who, like Kevin Corrigan, considers Ivan's devil to be an internal fictional "reality" will find this passage difficult to explain (Kevin CORRIGAN, "Ivan's Devil in *The Brothers Karamazov* in the Light of a Traditional Platonic View of Evil", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 22, № 1, 1986, pp. 1-9; p. 5). The procedure of leaving the reader in the dark about

not to be relied upon when it comes to deciding what is inner-fictional imagination and what is “reality”. Dostoevsky thus perfidiously puts his audience in the same position as his protagonist: rational thinking suffers massive uncertainty through the confrontation with a figment of the imagination.

What is the purpose of this construction? An answer is attempted here in three steps. First, the chances of the logically reasoning mind to unmask a hallucination as such are examined. The results of this general reflection are then applied to the specifics of the devil’s conversation with Ivan Karamazov and their significance for the novel. Finally, there is a brief discussion on the ideological intention behind Dostoevsky’s design, with reference to Horst-Jürgen Gerigk’s groundbreaking insights into the interaction between structure and ideology in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

I

In his *General Psychopathology*, Karl Jaspers defines “hallucinations proper” as

...actual false perceptions which are not in any way distortions of real perceptions but spring up on their own as something quite new and occur simultaneously with and alongside real perceptions. [...] In actual sense-perception we deal ultimately not with one single sense, but with an object. This object seems to us as one and the same through the operation of several senses. So with hallucination, one sense supplements the other.⁴

Hallucinations obviously unfold their illusion to the same phenomenal fullness as real perception. What makes the illusion an illusion is precisely that it is not inferior to our normal sensory perception. Abnormal and normal perception provide the mind with one and the same material; the mind has to deal with sensuality, here and there. All “thought must”, according to Kant, “directly, or indirectly, by means of certain signs, relate ultimately to intuitions; consequently, with us, to sensibility”. In other words: “Understanding cannot intuit, and the sensuous faculty cannot think. In no other way than from the united

the reality status of the events is not new in Dostoevsky; it has already been tried out in *The Double*.

4 Karl JASPERS, *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (Berlin, Heidelberg, New York: Springer, 8th ed., 1965), S. 57, 63. Engl. transl.: Karl JASPERS, *General Psychopathology*, transl. by J. Hoenig and Marian W. Hamilton, with a New Foreword by Paul R. McHugh (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 66 and 74.

operation of both, can knowledge arise”.⁵ According to Kant’s definition, questioning sensuality through the intellect – and what else would an attempt to get to grips with a hallucination with the help of logic be? – would be an absurd undertaking. For logic “contains only forms and rules for thinking operations [...]. In reflecting, Reason is absolutely forced to take its material contents from outside, *i.e.*, from the intuitive representations” (Schopenhauer).⁶ Whether one calls the ability to draw conclusions “understanding” or “reason” is irrelevant at this point; Kant and Schopenhauer agree on the essentials. And it lies in the consequence of their thought that logic not only cannot refute a deceptive perception of the senses by its own power, but that it must even *confirm* it. This is precisely what Jaspers has in mind when he says that “logical reasoning [...] serves the delusion and can never turn and refute it”, and emphasizes that “thinking is in order in delusion and even used ingeniously to serve it”.⁷ For the psychiatrist Silvano Arieti, the delusion work, which ultimately leads to the “*delusional system*”,⁸ is a fixed feature of schizophrenia: “the patient will try to demonstrate logically what seems evident to him”.⁹ And not only for the patient himself, but also for his environment: “There is no point in trying to convince him that he is wrong”.¹⁰

The literary realization of this insight can already be found in E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose Serapion Brother Cyprian wants to cure the insane Serapion with rational arguments. Serapion replies: “You are obviously the most impotent of all the adversaries who have appeared to me, and I will beat you with your own weapons, that is, with the weapons of reason”. He succeeds in doing so – “with gruesome acumen”, as Hoffmann remarks.¹¹

5 Immanuel KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), S. 69, 98 (= *Critique of Pure Reason*, §4.1.1 § I. and §4.2.1.1 I., transl. by J. M. D. Meiklejohn).

6 Arthur SCHOPENHAUER, *Zürcher Ausgabe. Werke in zehn Bänden* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1977), B. 5, S. 132 (= *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, § 34, transl. by Karl Hillebrand).

7 JASPERS 1965, S. 342 and 164 (Engl. transl. JASPERS 1997, pp. 411 and 195, see also p. 97: “The critical faculty is not obliterated but *put into the service of the delusion*”).

8 JASPERS 1965, S. 89 (Engl. transl. JASPERS 1997, p. 106).

9 Silvano ARIETI, *Understanding and Helping the Schizophrenic. A Guide for Family and Friends* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 44.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

11 E.T.A. HOFFMANN, *Die Serapions-Brüder* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), S. 23, 54. Here and wherever not otherwise indicated, translations from German are by the author of this article.

II

But it is Dostoevsky, well familiar with Hoffmann's work, who pulls out all the stops of rhetorical virtuosity that the subject has to offer: on the one hand by transferring the dialogue to a single person, and on the other by consistently unfolding all conceivable arguments. A note on the *Demons* – later partly blended into Ivan Karamazov's nightmare – reflects the insight that the hallucination has already won the very moment its victim enters into conversation with it: "I was upset that my own devil could appear in such a vile mask... By the way, I kept silent – on purpose; but I was not only silent, I was motionless. He was terribly upset by this..."¹² All intellectual resistance notwithstanding, it is only the readiness to see hallucinations that creates them in the first place. Dostoevsky is just as aware of this as he is of the uselessness of logic in the face of a deceptive perception; indeed, he compares it to the futility of proofs of God:

"Don't believe it", the gentleman laughed amiably, "what kind of faith would that be to force? Besides, proofs never help in matters of faith, especially not material evidence. Thomas did not believe because he saw the risen Christ, but because he wanted to believe beforehand [...]. The hereafter and material evidence – hushabye baby!" (*ITCC* 15; 71).

The devil is right: the hope of attaining ultimate certainty about the validity of perception by means of pure reason is just as futile as trusting in a proof of God. In both cases, thinking attempts to transcend the world of the senses. Dostoevsky shows how the hallucination gains an unassailable superiority over thinking through its sheer presence. Every argument turns, for the very reason that it is only an argument, in favor of the hallucination. The *aporia* comes to a head when the hallucination begins to refute itself. Dostoevsky makes use of this extreme possibility twice:

The devil: "I deliberately told you your own anecdote, which you had already forgotten, so that you would lose all faith in me". Ivan: "You're lying!" (*ITCC* 15; 80).

The devil: "I'm just your nightmare and nothing more". Ivan: "You're lying!" (*ITCC* 15; 74).

Ultimately, if the hallucination does not disappear of its own accord, there

12 Quoted from Natalie REBER, *Studien zum Motiv des Doppelgängers bei Dostojewskij und E.T.A. Hoffmann* (Gießen: Schmitz, 1964), S. 83.

is only one way to dispel it: the startling intrusion of the outside world. As if he had been aware of the psychiatric recommendation that one who hears voices should above all be torn from his “listening attitude”,¹³ Dostoevsky ends Ivan’s nightmare by Alyosha’s insistent knocking on the window (*IICC* 15; 84). The illusion is not dispelled by argument, it gives way to a stronger sensory impression. Our theoretical assumption thus seems to be confirmed by the literary example: the mind does not know how to help itself in the face of a hallucination.

But is it not possible to deal with a hallucination in the same way as with an optical illusion? Is it not possible to test it against other data provided by the senses and make a judgment based on this comparison, all the more so because hallucinations, by definition, “occur simultaneously with and alongside real perceptions”?¹⁴ The argument is, to use Thomas Mann’s words, “resounding, but too facile”.¹⁵ On the one hand, the mind is no longer left to its own devices as soon as it assesses the illusory perception with the help of a real one. On the other hand, such an operation of the mind will not eliminate what is undeniably present. A hallucination does not disappear through its intellectual unmasking. Dostoevsky knows this and uses it for his own purposes. Ivan believes he has found an objective touchstone for the unreality of his visitor. A hallucination, he believes, cannot express anything that is not already known to the mind from which it springs. Only if the devil proved to have a lead in knowledge over his counterpart would he have an independent existence. Ivan tries out this supposedly reliable means twice. Once he thinks he has uncovered the devil’s deception: the anecdote about the quadrillion years, which Ivan initially follows with “unexpected interest” (*IICC* 15; 78), turns out to be his own brainchild. Just how little Ivan gains from this victory over his adversary has already been quoted (*IICC* 15; 80). The other time, the devil manages to baffle Ivan with an ingenious variation on Terence’s phrase “Nothing human is alien to me”:

[Ivan:] “How, how? *Satanas sum et nihil humanum...* that’s not stupid for a devil! [...] But you didn’t get that from me!” – Ivan stopped in his tracks. [...] “*C’est du nouveau, n’est-ce pas?* This time I’ll be honest and explain it to you. Pay attention: in dreams [...] a person sometimes sees such a [...] real reality, [...] with such [...] unexpected details [...] that, I swear to you, even Lev Tolstoy couldn’t make something like that up” (*IICC* 15; 74).

13 ARIETI, p. 110f.

14 JASPERS 1965, S. 57 (Engl. transl.: JASPERS 1997, p. 66).

15 THOMAS MANN, *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990), B. VII, S. 190 (= *Der Erwählte*, Chap. “Die Buße”).

The devil, seemingly confirmed in his incarnate existence in the most convincing fashion, destroys this confirmation himself. There is no method of proof that could provide the victim of a hallucination with the certainty he seeks. Logical thinking, otherwise the guardian of common sense, turns into the accelerator of madness by engaging in the delusions of the senses. Once the mind has torn itself away from its anchoring in the outside world, it can no longer find its way back there on its own. On the contrary, it is its very strength that keeps it spinning in circles. “From what does the most penetrating folly spring”, asks Montaigne,¹⁶ “but from the most penetrating spirit”? The failure of the Logos is therefore no accident, but an immanent necessity.¹⁷ Conversations with the vile one are vicious circles.

But why does Dostoevsky expose the most enlightened of the Karamazov brothers to a conversation with the messenger from hell? In order to understand this paradox, we must take a look at the person in whom it is rooted. There are many more contradictions there. Let us single out the most important one. If there is no immortality, Ivan concludes, then the basis of all morality and thus the question of good and evil no longer exists; ergo “everything is permitted” (*IICC* 14; 65). For Ivan, the moral sense of human beings arises solely from the idea of the hereafter. But it is precisely this moral sense that forbids him to believe in paradise. Ivan rejects the kingdom of heaven because it promises retribution for all the deeds and misdeeds of this world. He revolts against this by pointing to worldly atrocities that make a mockery of any heavenly compensation (*IICC* 14; 223).

16 Michel de MONTAIGNE, *Essais*. Auswahl und Übersetzung v. Herbert Lüthy (Zürich: Manesse, 6th ed. 1985), S. 442 (= Book 2, Chapter XII).

17 See also Deborah Martinsen’s poignant observation, that “the Devil reminds Ivan of the divine Logos” (Deborah A. MARTINSEN, “The Devil Incarnate”, in Predrag CICOVACKI and Maria GRANIK (eds.), *Dostoevsky’s “Brothers Karamazov”. Art, Creativity, and Spirituality* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010), pp. 45-71: p. 70). Jens Herlth also deals with the problem of logos in Ivan Karamazov’s conversation with the Devil, but from a different angle. Herlth emphasizes the parallels to Goethe’s *Faust*, and in particular to Faust’s high-handed translation of the concept of logos. Herlth’s interpretation is based on Ivan’s report of atrocities against children, which are explicitly presented as mere “facts”, which Ivan ostentatiously refrains from commenting on: “I don’t understand anything [...] and I don’t want to understand anything now. I want to stick to the facts” (*IICC* 14; 222). Alluding to a famous dictum by Goya, Herlth explains: “The renunciation of interpretation produces monsters” (Jens HERLTH, “Böse Lektüre: Anmerkungen zum Kapitel ‘Čert. Košmar Ivana Fedoroviča’ aus Dostoevskijs *Brat’ja Karamazovy*”, in Bodo ZELINSKY [Hrsg.], *Das Böse in der russischen Kultur* [Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2008], S. 146-169: S. 149). However, one must ask oneself whether he himself is not here dispensing with the most obvious interpretation of Ivan’s gesture: Ivan does judge the atrocities mentioned – by phrasing his verdict as a variant of the so-called unspeakability topos.

Both the one and the other are proclaimed by “our dear eccentric and paradoxical Ivan Fedorovich” (*IICC* 15; 65), who can truly “grasp abysses of belief and unbelief in one and the same moment” (*IICC* 15; 80). Who is this Ivan: an overly squeamish man who is broken by general injustice – or a hardened cynic? He is probably both at the same time. Alyosha sees “a deep conscience” at work in him (*IICC* 15; 89). Ivan, a man of reason, has only one way out of his heart’s inability to come to terms with the evil in the world: he places himself beyond good and evil. According to Dostoevsky, this is an aberration. None other than Starets Zosima is chosen to reveal what lies behind the mask of intellectual immoralism: “For the time being, you are playing out of despair [...] without believing in your own dialectic, which you laugh at with a soft heart...” (*IICC* 14; 65). Dostoevsky has arranged everything in such a way that this “dialectic”, for Ivan a makeshift means of coming to terms with the evil of the world, turns into an instrument of murder in the hands of a third party. “Everything is permitted” (*IICC* 15; 67), Smerdyakov tells Ivan after he has killed their father, “And you are the true legal murderer” (*IICC* 15; 63).

Through the exercise of abstract reason, devised to eradicate guilt from the world, Ivan only becomes entangled in guilt; pure reason makes him a murderer. To further emphasize Ivan’s responsibility, Dostoevsky, as we know, portrayed the eager disciple Smerdyakov as a negative double of his master:¹⁸

There was the lackey Smerdyakov sitting on the bench at the gate [...], and Ivan Fedorovich [...] realized that the lackey Smerdyakov was sitting in his soul, too, and that his soul could not bear this particular person. Everything suddenly became bright and clear¹⁹ (*IICC* 14; 242).

If we add to this the fact that Ivan persistently insults the lackey in Chapter VI of Book 5 as a “devil” (черт), but the devil in turn as a “lackey” (*IICC* 15; 83), that Smerdyakov is Ivan’s half-brother, and that the appearance of the devil occurs at the very time when Smerdyakov hangs himself, the intentionality of the interlinking of all these elements becomes unquestionable. The picture of a highly unholy trinity emerges, with Ivan taking the place of the father. What

18 Olga Meerson points to the biblical subtexts of the teacher-disciple relationship between Ivan and Smerdyakov. See: Olga MEERSON, *Dostoevsky’s Taboos*, with an Introductory Note by Horst-Jürgen Gerigk and a Preface by Robert L. Belknap (Dresden, München: Dresden University Press and Studies of the Harriman Institute, 1998), pp. 186-207.

19 Cf. also Dmitrij TSCHIŽEWSKIJ, “Zum Doppelgängerproblem bei Dostojevskij. Versuch einer philosophischen Interpretation”, in Dmitrij TSCHIŽEWSKIJ (Hrsg.), *Dostojevskij-Studien* (Reichenberg: Stiepel, 1931), S. 19-51.

holds them together is the evil born of cold logical thinking.²⁰ This way of thinking has already been devastatingly defeated in the field of morality. Now it is being challenged in its own field: that of proving and disproving.

Ivan's encounter with the devil is characterized by fierce resistance from the very beginning. There is no room for metaphysical guests in his realm of thought. In the first phase of the conversation (*ИСС* 15; 71-79), he attempts to defeat the devil with the weapons of dialectics. The means he uses to do so have already been shown by way of example. Any further evidence could only confirm what is *a priori* certain: the devil has sensuality on his side and is therefore unbeatable. He can allow himself any kind of weakness, right up to the verbal obliteration of his own existence; as long as he is sitting on the sofa, he retains the upper hand. This relationship also characterizes the atmosphere of the conversation: impotent rage on Ivan's side; mockery, irony and maliciously emphasized comfort on the devil's side.

His attacks are decidedly aimed at *reason*. The devil's first reply deals with the limitations of logical thinking. The passage has already been quoted (*ИСС* 15; 71): "Besides, proofs never help in matters of faith..." This statement is programmatic, it names the premise under which the entire discussion will stand and which it is precisely trying to deny. Reason has thus been shown its limits once and for all: limits that Kant had already set for it in order to allow it to develop all the more generously in a narrower space. Such generosity is alien to Dostoevsky.

The devil's next blow is not directed against reason in general, it takes direct aim at Ivan – a tactic that will characterize the second phase of the fight in particular. "Зато ты-то как умен" says the devil, meaning: "That's why you're so clever" (*ИСС* 15; 74). The Russian adjective contains the concept that matters: 'um' (ум), the mind, is directly targeted for the first time at this point. The 'um' is now being systematically demolished. "Unfortunately, the truth almost always tends to be less witty" (*ИСС* 15; 75). This sentence must also be read in the original: "к сожалению, правда почти всегда бывает неостро-ум-на" (my segmentation and italics – *U. H.*). Can such wisdom be believed, or is it, again in the words of Thomas Mann, a "mere devil's fart"?²¹ Absolutely not: it can already be found in the 5th book of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and it is bitterly serious when Ivan confesses to his brother there: "The more stupid, the clearer. Stupidity is short and not smart, but the mind [ум] keeps making excuses and

20 Cf. on this: Яков Е. ГОЛОСОВКЕР, *Достоевский и Кант. Размышления читателя над романом «Братья Карамазовы» и трактатом Канта «Критика чистого разума»* (Москва: Изд. АН СССР, 1963), с. 5-24 and с. 85-101.

21 MANN, Bd. 6, S. 321 (= *Doktor Faustus*, Chap. XXV).

hiding. The mind [ум] is a scoundrel, but stupidity is honest and straightforward” (ITCC 15; 215).

Against this background, it is easier to decide which of the devil’s words can be taken at face value and which cannot. Where the devil criticizes reason, Ivan’s later admission obviously applies: “By the way, he told me a lot of true things about myself” (ITCC 15; 87).²² On the other hand, caution is required when the devil turns to the problem of theodicy:

If everything in the world were reasonable [благоразумно!], nothing would happen [...]. And so I bite off my anger and serve, so that there are events, and create unreasonable things on command [неразумное!]. People take all this comedy for something serious, even with all their indisputable sense [ум] (ITCC 15; 77; segmentations and italics in the Russian quotes – U. H.).

It would be foolhardy to assume that Dostoevsky entrusts Satan, of all creatures, with the proclamation of his religious convictions. On the contrary, by choosing this speaker he wants to discredit a common theodicy. He is neither defending unreason (like the devil) nor justifying divine wisdom in the face of evil (like Leibniz’s “sagesse divine”); rather, Dostoevsky wants to show that the yardstick of human reason does not measure up to creation *per se*. The theological digression is followed by a philosophical one. By mocking Descartes, the devil takes an axe to the roots of rationalism: “*Je pense, donc je suis*, that I know for sure, but as for the rest around me, all these worlds, God, and even Satan himself, – all this is not proven to me...” (ITCC 15; 77). The Descartes quote in the devil’s mouth harbors a deeper meaning beneath its comical surface. Firstly, if a hallucination is able to claim the only certain proof of existence for itself, then this proof cannot be of much use. Secondly, thinking that is based on such evidence, i.e. that regards man first and foremost as a *res cogitans*, is also not at its best. Reason can be considered dead after this prank; with a sense of resignation, Ivan asks for an anecdote (ITCC 15; 78).

This leads to the second phase of the discussion. There is a shift in focus: Ivan hardly tries to deny the *existence* of his counterpart anymore; it is his *views* that he does not want to acknowledge. The hallucination is no longer of interest as such; its *diabolical* nature comes into focus. Correspondingly, the devil changes his target: after shattering rational thought, he sets about shattering Ivan. Where does this turn come about? The point can be determined exactly. Ivan, who until now has stubbornly refused to believe in his hallucination, says

22 Cf. also the devil’s words: “Друг мой, не в одном уме дело!” (ITCC 15; 76).

“suddenly strangely”: “By the way, I wish I could believe in you!” (*IICC* 15; 79). From now on, this wish becomes more and more urgent, until Ivan cries out: “That wasn’t a dream!” (*IICC* 15; 85) and his confession to Alyosha: “I wish very much that he was really *him* and not me!” (*IICC* 15; 87). Words spoken long after the hallucination has disappeared and is recognized as such!

Ivan’s change of heart is all the more surprising as he has the upper hand for the first time at that moment. The devil seems to have been caught: “That anecdote about the quadrillion years – I invented it myself!” (*IICC* 15; 79). On closer inspection, the astonishment evaporates. Ivan’s statement is highly ambiguous. It “proves” that the devil thinks nothing of his own, and therefore is not; but at the same time it also shows that the devil begins to confront Ivan with his *past*. The *old* Ivan, “our dear eccentric and paradoxalist Ivan Fedorovich”, the mastermind and doppelganger of the murderer Smerdyakov, actually long since overcome by the *new* Ivan’s decision to face the judge – that Ivan rises from the dead once again. Ivan cannot withstand this sight. Even the reality of the irrational seems more bearable, he throws his tea glass at the ghost (*IICC* 15; 84). This is the final capitulation of a way of thinking that only recognizes what it has logically proven and for which morality exists only as a deduction from an idea of God.

III

It is now time to turn to the initially mentioned interpretation of Dostoevsky’s last novel by Horst-Jürgen Gerigk – all the more so as in recent works on evil in *The Brothers Karamazov* this interpretation has not received the attention it deserves.²³ Gerigk reads the construction of the novel as a finely tuned, systematically structured philosophical answer to the question: “How does evil come into the world?”²⁴ This answer is based on the theory of the human conscience as an inner court from Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*. According to Gerigk, the altogether four sons of the murdered father Karamazov, i.e. “the three Karamazov brothers and Smerdyakov form a single person”.²⁵ It is before the inner court of this one person that the trial is held over who is actually to blame for patricide:

23 Surprisingly, neither Harreß (Birgit HARREß, “Macht und Ohnmacht des Bösen in Dostoevskijs Roman *Brat’ja Karamazovy*”, in Bodo ZELINSKY [Hrsg.], *Das Böse in der russischen Kultur* [Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2008], S. 133-145) nor HERLTH (2008) address Gerigk’s theory of evil in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

24 GERIGK, “Die Architektonik...”, S. 49.

25 *Ibid.*, S. 52.

In search of the perpetrator, the three brothers find – themselves! Each of them contributed to Smerdyakov’s murder. Each of them could have prevented Smerdyakov from taking action. In this way, the collective of the Karamazov brothers emulates the symbolic movement of King Oedipus, who searched for his father’s murderer and found himself.²⁶

Gerigk explicitly opposes all attempts to “see Ivan as the main culprit” or Dmitry as the innocent victim of a miscarriage of justice.²⁷ “It is not the actual killer [Smerdyakov] who is the true murderer, but the collective of the three title characters who have provided the actual killer with the opportunity to take action – with Dmitry in the lead.”²⁸ Only *de jure* is Dmitry wrongly convicted, but from a moral point of view, he is rightly found guilty: “Only Dmitry’s decision to act releases the reality of evil.”²⁹ The path from homicidal thought to actual murder thus passes through four stages: Alyosha rejects the desire to kill as it briefly arises in him. Ivan affirms it in theory. Dmitry affirms it in practice by being hell-bent on the deed. Smerdyakov carries out this very decision. This is the overall ethical architecture of the novel as mapped by Gerigk:

Note the essence of Dostoevsky’s construction. In the monastery, Alexey misses the opportunity to become involved in the world, i.e. to dissuade his brother Dmitry from reckless behavior. Dostoevsky’s reproach is directed at the *monk*, who claims to have nothing to do with the world. Ivan preemptively removes himself from the scene of the crime so as not to stand in the way of the hoped-for murder. Dostoevsky’s accusation is directed at the *intellectual* who unscrupulously instigates the crime, but then disappears and pretends afterwards that he knew nothing about it. Dmitry unhesitatingly assumes the role of the perpetrator because he passionately indulges his righteous indignation. Dostoevsky’s reproach is directed at the *soldier* who openly admits to killing in the name of a good cause. Thus, *monk*, *intellectual* and *soldier*, as defined by Dostoevsky, bring forth the reality of evil. In this construction, Smerdyakov is the *lackey*, a mere tool provided by the *intellectual*, set in motion by the *soldier*.³⁰

26 *Ibid.*, S. 49.

27 *Ibid.*, S. 52.

28 *Ibid.*, S. 54.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Horst-Jürgen GERIGK, *Dostojewskijs Entwicklung als Schriftsteller. Vom “Toten Haus” zu den “Brüdern Karamasow”* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 2013), S. 245-246.

The extent to which Gerigk's structural analyses of Dostoevsky's great novels, from *The Adolescent*³¹ to *The Brothers Karamazov*, have revolutionized Dostoevsky research can hardly be overestimated. If anything can be added to his allegorical reading of Dostoevsky's final masterpiece, then at most this: it could actually be thought through even more consistently than Gerigk himself has done. The following considerations should be understood as an attempt in this direction.

Gerigk's approach to *The Brothers Karamazov* reveals the tectonics that holds the entire novel together: it rests on four pillars, each pillar carrying the face of one of the four brothers. A structure that rests on four supporting elements is most stable if all four elements are equally strong. It is therefore surprising that Gerigk himself, after uncovering the construction plan of Dostoevsky's most spacious edifice, sets about questioning the importance of one particular pillar: Smerdyakov.

If he sees "Dmitry in the lead" of the foursome of brothers, he naturally has good reason to do so. Gerigk rightly observes: "As long as Ivan's rebellion against God receives more attention than the events at the crime scene, an appropriate interpretation of *The Brothers Karamazov* is clearly a long way off".³² The entire plot of the novel revolves around the miscarriage of justice that the court commits against Dmitry and the question as to whether this verdict might represent a higher justice after all. Those who focus their attention primarily on Ivan as the guilty party ultimately agree with Smerdyakov, who calls his teacher the "true legal murderer" – which Ivan is clearly not.³³

Significantly, however, Gerigk seems to struggle with categorizing the one who is actually the only real murderer in *The Brothers Karamazov*: Smerdyakov.³⁴ On the one hand, he downgrades Smerdyakov to a "mere tool", even denies him the precarious privilege of being considered a "true murderer"³⁵ and points out that, as the "executor of evil desire, he is not there on his own, but only when he is called".³⁶ Gerigk states that "Smerdyakov, unlike his brothers,

31 Cf. Horst-Jürgen GERIGK, *Versuch über Dostoevskijs "Jüngling". Ein Beitrag zur Theorie des Romans* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1965).

32 GERIGK, "Die Architektonik...", S. 73.

33 Gerigk rightly refutes a common interpretation, represented by Golosovker: "It is therefore completely wrong when Jakov Golosovker in his essay *Dostoevsky i Kant* affirmatively repeats a common assumption of earlier Dostoevsky research, according to which the earthly court wrongly condemns Dmitry, but the court of God sees the guilty party in Ivan" (GERIGK, *Dostojewskijs Entwicklung*, S. 213).

34 GERIGK, "Die Architektonik...", S. 61.

35 *Ibid.*, S. 54.

36 *Ibid.*, S. 64.

is only ever presented to us from someone else's point of view. [...] Smerdyakov is not portrayed from the inside!"³⁷ On the other hand, he emphasizes "the autonomy of the individual Pavel Fyodorovich Smerdyakov", who certainly has the freedom of will to decide for or against killing his father.³⁸ As if that were not enough, he claims that even Smerdyakov's outward appearance is only composed of features "that can be freely chosen": "In a word, Smerdyakov's appearance is the objective correlative of an inner dynamic determined by the idea of morality".³⁹

As we can see, Gerigk's considerations lend Smerdyakov a somewhat shaky ontological and ethical status: something between a mere projection and a person with his own history, between a tool and a free-willed human being – as if he were among the Karamazov siblings Brother No. 3,5.⁴⁰ The murky circumstances of his origins further accentuate this impression; Gerigk concludes "that the executive of evil in man has no recognized relationship to the true nature of man".⁴¹ Indeed, the servant Grigory suspects that his de-facto stepson Smerdyakov is not human at all, but has sprouted from the wetness of a bathhouse – a kind of fungus, so to speak. Such semi-existence, of course, seems to correspond exactly to the role Smerdyakov plays in the plot of the novel, according to Gerigk:

To call Smerdyakov the devil's tool means that his own design of action is adjusted to the design of others. The design of others results in his desperate identity as invisible man. If it comes to looking for responsibility the devil's tool loses its substance and vanishes. [...] This means that the 'lackey' in one has no legitimate affinity to human nature.⁴²

But would we really say so of a character who grows up as the son of a homeless woman, of someone who as a child vents his anger by hanging cats and as

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*, S. 74.

39 Both quotes: Horst-Jürgen GERIGK, "Mikroanalyse eines Epilepsiekranken: Der Mörder Smerdjakow in den *Brüdern Karamasow*", in Horst-Jürgen GERIGK, *Ein Meister aus Russland. Beziehungsfelder der Wirkung Dostojewskijs. Vierzehn Essays* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010), S. 145-159: 159.

40 Cf. also the chapters "Three or Four Sons?" and "Three or four Brothers", in MEERSON, pp. 185-207.

41 GERIGK, *Dostojewskijs Entwicklung*, S. 216.

42 Horst-Jürgen GERIGK, "Dialogue and Pseudo-Dialogue", in Predrag CICOVACKI and Maria GRANIK (eds.), *Dostoevsky's "Brothers Karamazov". Art, Creativity, and Spirituality* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010), pp. 29-44: p. 40.

an adult teaches children how to torture dogs, and who experiences his first epileptic seizure at the age of twelve after being slapped by his stepfather? Would we say so about someone who develops an obsession with cleanliness and a fetishism for boots, but also plays the guitar, admires France, is proud of his cooking, dreams of opening his own restaurant with a small start-up capital – and finally seizes the opportunity to snatch this capital from his loathsome biological father with a perfectly disguised murder? Would we really deny such a person any affinity with human nature? This is a rhetorical question.

Smerdyakov is neither the devil nor a tool, but human, all too human – and in this capacity, the perfect embodiment of the banality of evil:⁴³ emotionally damaged, resentful, petty in his pipe dreams but not entirely without talents, sadistic towards the weak, greedy, cunning and extremely opportunistic when an occasion presents itself, eager to blame someone else when confronted with the consequences of his actions. And his face, already wrinkled at the age of 24, proclaims: all these characteristics are as old as mankind itself. Smerdyakov's version of evil thus marks a fundamental and at the same time highly realistic counter-position to three other, much more grandiose, ways of behaving towards evil. He neither entrenches himself saintly behind monastery walls against temptation, nor does he work himself up into an intellectual furor of moral indignation against the wickedness of the world, nor does he allow himself to be carried away in a frenzy of passion. In other words, he is neither Alyosha, nor Ivan, nor Dmitry Karamazov. He lives up to his name: he is the very stinker that none of us wants to be when tempted to do something ugly, but whom we encounter all the time (sometimes in front of a mirror). And Dostoevsky makes it clear that this ignoble variant of evil inevitably enters the scene as soon as the actual deed is committed – no matter what noble theory or emotion may have prompted it. Brother Smerdyakov is always part of the party; Gerigk's astute observation that "without Dmitry there is no murder"⁴⁴ has to be supplemented by the trivial observation that without Smerdyakov there is no murder either.

The Karamazovs' allegorical family has four indispensable members. And each of these family members is given a specific punishment that is tailored to them. Dostoevsky's novel provides, and this is important to recognize, not on-

43 Cf. the subchapter on "Die Banalität des Bösen" in HARRESS, S. 141-143. See also Urs HEFTRICH, "Der Dämon im Alltagskleid: Zum Begriff der 'pošlost' bei Nikolaj Gogol", in Peter THIERGEN (Hrsg.), *Russische Begriffsgeschichte der Neuzeit. Beiträge zu einem Forschungsdesiderat* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2006), S. 127-137.

44 GERIGK, *Dostojewskijs Entwicklung*, S. 214.

ly a “theory of stages in the development of evil”.⁴⁵ It houses an entire *penal colony* with finely graduated sanctions for each evil. All *four* of Karamazov’s sons are dealt retributive justice, which proceeds according to a strict *jus talionis*. Each of the four is punished specifically for *his* part in their father’s murder. Alyosha is expelled from the monastery walls for his attempt to hide behind them against the lure of evil. Dmitry must atone for his unfinished patricide, in which he meets and almost kills the wrong father figure (the old servant Grigory), by the fact that the court now strikes *him* as the wrong person – *instead of a servant* (Smerdyakov) and *because of a servant* (Grigory’s incorrect memory). Note the precision with which Dostoevsky relates the circumstances here! Smerdyakov, the actual murderer, is the only one of the four brothers to be sentenced to death – by his own hand. This suicide is not only motivated by the plot (in order to eliminate the decisive exonerating witness for Dmitry and at the same time make his innocence clear), but also to a large extent by the ethical system of *The Brothers Karamazov*: a murderer can perhaps still attain the kingdom of heaven, a suicide hardly. From the point of view of divine justice, Smerdyakov therefore suffers the harshest punishment; he alone is guaranteed hell (he appears to Ivan at the exact moment of his death in the form of an inhabitant of hell). This places the most banal representative of evil at the center of the action.

The Brothers Karamazov is a story of the decay of the Luciferian act, which begins with the spirit’s attempt to rise morally above the Creator and ends with a banal act of bloodshed. Ivan is punished at the seat of the intellect for providing the intellectual instrument of killing: he becomes temporarily insane. It is worth noting that Smerdyakov, for his part, describes Ivan as the “true legal murderer” and that Ivan also accuses himself of murder in court. There is an unmistakably close relationship between the theorist of amorality and the practitioner of robbery-murder. It culminates in Ivan’s conversation with Smerdyakov and his nightly conversation with the devil, which is synchronized with Smerdyakov’s suicide. The placement of this conversation in the plot of the novel thus follows a well-calculated direction. Dostoevsky takes rational thought down two paths, each of which leads to a point where it encounters something that cannot be proven but is nonetheless undeniable: the voice of conscience and the sensory presence of a hallucination. He constructs his novel in such a way that the logic first fails morally and then, at the peak of the action, fails in itself. It is now possible to determine the meaning of the

45 GERIGK, “Die Architektonik...”, S. 72. Cf. already Horst-Jürgen GERIGK, “Die zweifache Pointe der *Brüder Karamasow*. Eine Deutung mit Rücksicht auf Kants *Metaphysik der Sitten*”, *Euphorion*, vol. 69, 1975, S. 333-349.

Logos sent into a headspin: pure reason is to be reduced to absurdity, for it is “a scoundrel”. To achieve this impression, Dostoevsky, after having damaged it through skillful plotting, drives the Logos into a battle that is hopeless from the outset. He cunningly conceals to whom he owes his knowledge of the outcome of the battle: the Logos.