

EDITED BY  
VLADISLAV A. LEKTORSKY  
& MARINA F. BYKOVA

**PHILOSOPHICAL  
THOUGHT IN RUSSIA  
IN THE SECOND HALF  
OF THE 20TH CENTURY**

A CONTEMPORARY VIEW  
FROM RUSSIA AND ABROAD

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PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT  
IN RUSSIA IN THE SECOND HALF  
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# The Individual and the Problem of Responsibility: Merab Mamardashvili and Alexander Zinoviev

DANIELA STEILA

During the last few years, the study of Soviet philosophy (or Russian philosophy during the Soviet time, as it is sometimes called) has turned out to be particularly interesting. The opinion that philosophy was completely repressed in Russia during the Soviet era had prevailed in the Western world for decades, but for a few sporadic specialists. Today, however, the consideration of Russian philosophy during the second half of the twentieth century, in its richness and variety, imposes itself on the international scientific community<sup>1</sup>. For a scholar that observes the question from the outside, as a foreign researcher, it is not easy to work on recent authors, since they took part in the life, both public and private, of many contributors to the ongoing discussion. Moreover, it is particularly difficult to deal with authors like Merab Mamardashvili and Alexander Zinoviev, whose works are constantly republished in different editions, and to whom “theory” was always closely related to their lives.

As for the subject of my paper, one might add that probably the moral issue of responsibility is not a crucial theme of Soviet philosophy. Nonetheless, it seems to me that it can provide us with an interesting point of view from which to consider the ethical content that, more or less openly, has been discussed in the Soviet ideological milieu. In November 2011, during an international conference about “Philosophy during the Soviet period,” held in Kues, Professor Holger Kuße of the University of Dresden presented a paper on the concepts of “responsibility,” “duty” and “righteousness” and their role in the conceptual elaboration of the Soviet time. This paper offered an enlightened account of the subject matter from the linguistic point of view, but, unfortunately, the conference proceedings have yet to be published. By limiting myself to some general observations, I would like to make only a few remarks. It is worth noticing that, in the “official” Soviet language, the word “responsibility” acquired a different meaning from the one common in the

European philosophic tradition, from the theological debate on free will during classical antiquity up to Scholasticism and the Reformation, to the contemporary discussion about the freedom of will in the analytic philosophy of mind. Responsibility is a constitutive dimension of the human personality in the traditional philosophic language, because only she, who is responsible of her deeds, who deliberately takes on herself the weight of her choices<sup>2</sup>, can truly be called a “person.” On the other hand, in the “Soviet” language, the word becomes a *socio-philosophic concept*, as says the classic *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy* published in 1983, “that reflects the objective, historically tangible character of mutual relationships between person, collective, and society *under the point of view* of the aware realization of mutual needs.” And again:

In the individual, Responsibility forms as a result of *external* needs, which are presented to him by society, class, a certain collective. . . . In the socialist society, where the principle of “all for one and one for all” is asserted, where the free development of each becomes a condition for the free development of all, the relations of responsible dependence become relations that are indeed mutual. The completeness of the responsible individual is realized on the base of his practical participation in the communist construction, and the responsible behavior of the individual toward the society corresponds more and more to his personal efforts. (Ilyichev et al. 1983)<sup>3</sup>

The fourth edition of the *Philosophical Dictionary* published in 1981 openly declares:

In the communist morality, personal Responsibility includes questions that relate not only to the deeds, but also to the becoming conscious by the individual of the interests of the society as a whole, which is to say, ultimately, the understanding of the laws that regulate the development of history toward the future. (Frolov 1981)

In the “official” vocabulary of the Soviet time, “responsibility” articulates the relationship to the collective: one is responsible before the collective, not before oneself.

But this repositioning of the meaning of the concept of “responsibility” can actually drift into the progressive weakening of that meaning, ending in its systematic denial. With Michael Kirkwood’s words: “‘Collective’ responsibility encourages personal irresponsibility” (Kirkwood 1988, 52). If responsibility is a personal matter, the individual will be committed without needing external judges or sanctions; if it depends ultimately on the collective, *seeming* responsible will be more important than *being* responsible. Discharging responsibility on others will be more important than accepting it for oneself<sup>4</sup>. The word “responsible” ceases to designate a moral quality, and begins to indicate the social acknowledgment of hierarchical relevance. The expressions “responsible official” of the party, “responsible agency,” or “responsible post” come into use. But, as Zinoviev writes in *The Yawning Heights*: “The expression ‘responsible post’ is stupid since all posts are irresponsible”

(Zinoviev 1978, 41). As Mamardashvili has pointed out in more than one occasion: “Systematically declining any responsibility was a typical trait of the *homo sovieticus*” (Mamardashvili 1991, 62). According to Mamardashvili, two elements could be recognized in the conscience of the *homo sovieticus*: “First of all, never *on one’s own* (which is to say, at one’s own risk—and responsibility), but always *together*. And secondly, never today, but always *tomorrow*” (Mamardashvili 1992b, 137).

Both our philosophers bestowed, however, a great value upon the possibility of the individual to establish herself as the master of her own deeds and choices, which is why my personal dignity and my integrity depends completely and exclusively on me, regardless of the context.

This theme is certainly present in Mamardashvili, although it probably isn’t his most typical and original trait from the theoretical point of view (as the theme of conscience is, for instance). Many of those who have written about him in the last few decades have underlined that the themes of “freedom, responsibility, honor and dishonor” had a particular role in Mamardashvili’s philosophical constructions (Ryklin 2009, 153; Motroshilova 2007, 6; Guseynov 2011, 15). These are exactly the themes that exert a relevant influence on the Soviet and Russian public. A witness to the first class that Mamardashvili held in Tbilisi remembers: “he talked exactly of what tormented me: of the human person, of its responsibility and freedom” (Kruglikov 1994, 235).

At first sight, attributing to Zinoviev a reflection upon this theme could seem problematic. In his writings, the word “responsible” mostly applies to “power”: “responsible comrades of the Agencies” and “responsible officials of the apparatus” (Zinoviev 1991a, 15, 125). But, beyond this fundamental meaning of the word, the structure itself of personal responsibility, as an undertaking upon oneself of one’s deeds and therefore a claim of autonomy, finds an almost paradigmatic expression in Zinoviev’s “theory of life.”

Furthermore, both Zinoviev and Mamardashvili, although in different ways and measures, confronted the question of responsibility not only in their philosophical meditations, but also in the orientation of their lives. What Mamardashvili wrote of philosophers in general can actually be applied to both these philosophers. We are interested in philosophers’ living and concrete thought, in their *personal experiments*, and not only in their abstract formulas. We are interested in the real experience of the philosophers, “where a real personal experiment, which remains as the invention of a life form, has been realized in one’s own flesh and blood, in one’s own body, putting one’s life at stake” (Mamardashvili 1994). Also Zinoviev often emphasized that his *theory of life* is valid for everyone, singularly, beginning with one’s personal experience, with the *experiment*—this is the formula that he often uses—that one had a mind to carry out on one’s own life. In the preface to his novel *Go to Golgotha*, the author explains that, once the inescapability of life’s conditions is accepted, “I decided that how the given society is not so important as it is how I must become in this society’s conditions, according to my representations of the ideal man” (Zinoviev 2006a). On the subject of himself, Zinoviev often declared that, starting from 1939 (the year of his first substantial anti-Stalin gesture that cost him the expulsion from the institute, the psychiatric clinic and Lubjanka), he had understood that “an ideal society as the one I dreamed of does not exist and is never going to.” And he made

the decision: “I accept the Soviet society as it is, and I bestow upon myself as a task to make an ideal society of myself only. I decided to become that person who corresponds to my ideal. I began my experiment. And my whole life has been that experiment” (Zinoviev 2007, 25). The experiment, as Guseynov has synthesized in many occasions, consists of “being a person, in spite of everything; being a person in the middle of the abomination of reality.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it cannot but be an individual experiment: “The moral programs have to become unique, as every human person is unique” (Guseynov 2008b, 69).

I have no intention of urging any possible similarity between the positions of these two philosophers (although almost anything could be demonstrated by matching some quotes of theirs). Much more modestly and, I hope, with better reason, I would like to outline briefly Mamardashvili’s and Zinoviev’s positions, in order to show that for both that, although in a different manner, within the Soviet context (and not only) personal salvation is possible only if the individual consciously accepts his constitutive role in the world, if he becomes the legislator of his own sovereign state.

I will not insist here on the entwining of biographies, on the fact that Zinoviev has been considered to be Mamardashvili’s “master”<sup>6</sup> to some extent, or that this latter has been the model for “The Thinker” in *The Yawning Heights*.<sup>7</sup> I will consider what results from their works, as they have expressed their ideas and talked about themselves. But, starting from here, two moments can be extracted from their lives and activities that clearly show an essential difference between the two. Firstly, although there is a difference of only eight years between them (Zinoviev was born in 1922, Mamardashvili in 1930), they belonged to two different generations. It was the different experience of the war that divided them: Zinoviev fought in the war serving in the Soviet Army, while Mamardashvili attended school in Tbilisi. Speaking of that time, Erikh Solovyov said that in the universities during the 1950s “‘fathers’ and ‘sons’ winded up at the same desk; as for their age, they differed from each other only as elder and younger brothers. The father-brothers were those who had gone through the experience of the war” (Solovyov 2010, 308).

Secondly, just during those years, Mamardashvili, who had been brought up in a family of no humble origin (his father was in the military, his mother was a noblewoman), found himself in a “peripheral” environment, not only geographically. In Tbilisi, in the local library, he could read the French classics (Montaigne, La Boetie, Montesquieu, and Rousseau) that had accidentally escaped the censorship, and he began his education of “citizen of the world.” He had rather somber memories of the school. There he had not learned anything, it was only necessary to learn by heart a textbook of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and “repeat [it] word by word during the test” (Mamardashvili 1992a, 72–73).

On the contrary, Zinoviev, who had been born in a rather poor family in the Muscovite region, was built as a person in the Soviet school of the Stalin time, and he judged this experience positively through his whole life. He never renounced to the ideals that were explained during the lessons, even though they sound grandiloquent now. According to Zinoviev, the education received in the Soviet school of the 1930s was excellent. There, knowledge and love for the great literature were relayed and “the best that had been produced by the pre-revolutionary Russian



pedagogy” (Zinoviev 2007, 140) was preserved. About his experience and his family, Zinoviev wrote: “I received an excellent education thanks to the Soviet power. We left a boring life in the country and we moved to the city. I became a professor, my brother a colonel, another brother a bank executive. This is not so easy” (Zinoviev 2007, 49). Zinoviev stated with pride: “I think of myself as a product of the Soviet system. I am a Soviet man!” (Zinoviev 2007, 142). And in another place:

I was born after the revolution and I grew up in Soviet Russia. We have been brought up to the best communist and revolutionary ideals. . . . I grew up as an ideal communist. Or, as we used to say, “a real communist,” which is not just a “member of the party who makes a career,” but a Communist with a capital C. (Zinoviev 2007, 20; 24)

But, because of this, he soon understood that reality did not correspond to the ideals in the least:

When I was still a boy of fifteen or sixteen . . . I came to the conclusion that, if everyone would have been a real communist, life would have been right, pure, honest. But in reality there was nothing of the sort. In reality people stole, mugged, reported each other. In other words, the absolute opposite was happening. This is where the problem lay. (Zinoviev 2007, 25)

In the name of these same ideals, Zinoviev became an anti-Stalinist as a boy, and then a merciless analyst of communist reality, but also, later, a fierce critic of the *perestroika*, of post-Soviet Russia and of the Occidental world as well<sup>8</sup>.

Although they were deeply different from one another, both Zinoviev and Mamardashvili were much more than eminent philosophers. They represented two complex cultural “phenomena.” Without a doubt Mamardashvili represented an interesting “phenomenon” of Soviet culture during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Although, during the 1970s, he was denied the possibility of holding any regular classes, and he began to wander from one non-philosophic institution to another (Motroshilova 2011a, 28), Mamardashvili had an audience of his own and the public that was loyal to him began to move with him from place to place. The director Alexander Sokurov witnesses that Mamardashvili’s lectures were an event not only for the institution that hosted them, but for the whole city (Sokurov 1991). His thought was never easy to take in, his statements seemed often obscure. Nonetheless, his lectures turned into social events that were attended by “the whole of Moscow” (Volkova 2011, 282); this occurred in every city where he happened to hold a seminar. Zinoviev too intervened successfully by holding lectures “that turned into *sui generis* concerts” (Zinoviev 2007, 208), and he achieved a huge international accomplishment as a writer (his novel *The Yawning Heights* is translated into thousands of languages). In Russia, during the “*katastrojka*” years (as Zinoviev called the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s), he became, mostly because of his copious interviews<sup>9</sup>, “the only commendable author for many people, for he provided an analysis of the situation in Russia in a mercilessly harsh and extremely ferocious and brave manner” (Barashev 2008, 132). Probably, it was his uncompromising critical

severity and his reputation of “natural contrarian” (*principlial’nyj voprekist*), according to A. A. Guseynov’s words (Guseynov 2008b, 68), that prevented him from really turning into a mass leader.

Both Zinoviev and Mamardashvili were strikingly original thinkers. Since the university years, his colleagues jokingly called Mamardashvili’s *Weltanschauung* (in Russian *mirovozrenie*) “*merabozrenie*,” Merab’s own *Weltanschauung*. In his turn, Zinoviev’s theory was often defined “*zinovyoga*”: such an original thought to deserve an eponym (Geller 2008, 213; Guseynov 2008c, 338, 347). Both these philosophers expressed their theories with originality of forms, of language, and of style too. Zinoviev’s literary forms and linguistic mixture have been the subject of many a writing.<sup>10</sup> It will be sufficient here to underline the “unveiling” to which Zinoviev systematically subdues the “official” language in his novels, his short stories, his sociological writings, his poetry, his interviews, thus always showing the swerve between the literal meaning of the words and their actual meaning. So, for example, in the novel *Go to Golgotha*, regarding the party and the government, which “teach men to live for society, for the people’s good,” he adds caustically: “How can the people live for the people’s good?!” (Zinoviev 2011, 18). Or, in *Notes of the Nightwatchman* he analyzes the expression “superior considerations”: “‘Superior considerations’ is the formula of the agencies’ arbitrary will and of superior individuals upon the inferior.”<sup>11</sup>

Mamardashvili’s language, which evokes associations and emotions, is apparently the opposite of the rigor and dryness that characterize Zinoviev’s language. Nonetheless, also Mamardashvili emphasized systematically his distance from the dead language of the authority. Ju. A. Shrejder has pointed out in regard of this matter that “he once said that it is very important, in the act of philosophizing, to free oneself from the current linguistic meaning, in order to generate philosophic meaning” (Shrejder 2010, 560). Mamardashvili believed that, in the time of a few decades, language as a creative storage of forms and structures of knowledge and experience (as he conceived language itself) had been systematically destroyed in the Soviet Union, and a dead, deformed, and dry pseudo-language had taken its place. A “dead” language generates “dead” individuals, unreal ghosts, “zombies,” who live in the space of an overturned world, the world “beyond the mirror.”<sup>12</sup> According to Mamardashvili, in order for the mortal strength of ideology to work, it was not necessary that people believe in it. The destruction of the linguistic space was enough: “People now may disbelieve in every word of any ideology, but if they are made to exist only in a space that is given by certain material symbols, then they cannot think on the basis of these symbols, not because it is forbidden, but because the fundamentals of the language have been destroyed.”<sup>13</sup>

When Mamardashvili suggested to his audience a live example of authentic language, independent of official rhetoric, this was for him not only a theoretical gesture, but also an ethical one. He wanted to guarantee the action of language as a “form of life”; he wanted language to produce authentic human experiences, problems and discussions.

Such have been two eminent thinkers, two very interesting cultural “phenomena” in the difficult context of Soviet experience. What then are their considerations on the theme of personal responsibility as a constitutive element of human personality?

In Mamardashvili, as has been said above, the theme is treated openly. Erikh Solovyov has even defined his late thought “soteriology,” which is to say doctrine of salvation: “The traditional existential problem of how a human being can stay himself, or find himself, reaches in Merab an extreme tension; it turns into the question of how not to die here, during life” (Solovyov 2010, 311).

In Mamardashvili’s philosophy this is a really important problem. We become persons (which is not at all natural, because a person is a cultural phenomenon, not a natural one) when we are capable of referring to cultural forms, which are the foundation and the horizon of our existence as persons in the world (Mamardashvili 1992b, 193–194). But the forms of culture are a human realization, and thus need, in order to continue to exist, an uninterrupted effort from the human being: they are alive only when the human being who produces them is present (Mamardashvili 2012, 21–22). Therefore, every person, by consciously entering a cultural tradition, takes upon herself the responsibility both of herself and of that tradition. Mamardashvili clarifies that he means here “responsibility in the metaphysical sense of the word” (Mamardashvili 2010, 52).

Thinking is possible only in the context of a traditional culture. Without it, a human being is “naked.” “But being naked—adds Mamardashvili—is useful to the utopists-experimenters” (Mamardashvili 1992b, 194). According to Merab Kostantinovich, Soviet power has been maintained for decades thanks to the destruction of culture, and therefore to the destruction of persons. As I have said before, this was already noticeable in language. Its impoverishment, according to Mamardashvili, acted contagiously in the whole country:

In human beings who find themselves face to face with reality, this is cause for a dulling of the senses and of perceptions. Human beings are formed who can look at an object without seeing it, who can look at human sorrow without feeling it. (Mamardashvili 1992b, 203)

Kafka has described very well the conditions of the overturned world: they “are in every way similar to the human conditions, but they are actually beyond the human being; they only imitate that, which is, in fact, dead” (Mamardashvili 2011, 14). People have found themselves in such a situation during the Soviet time, when everything was dead, twisted, and false. In this “world of dead ghosts” everything was inexistent and unreal (Mamardashvili 1991, 50). Dead is that which “cannot be different” But, if human beings are made to live their whole life in a dead world, a real “anthropological catastrophe” is bound to happen, because, for men, full of “passion for their consciences,” “the most terrible punishment is to suddenly feel and gain a conscience of themselves as an imitation of life, or as puppets that someone else is steering by their wires, leaving them to feel like zombies” (Mamardashvili 2012, 546). The whole of Soviet culture was established on this.

During the last few years of his life, Mamardshvili observed with suspicion and severely criticized the nationalistic exaltation that was developing in Georgia and that seemed to him a new victory of the “dead” language over the alive one. As Mikhail Ryklin has pointed out, in present Russia, “the place of Soviet culture has

been intentionally taken . . . by nationalism and religious fundamentalism. As a result, the enlightened project, on which the philosopher was insisting so passionately, was once again threatened” (Ryklin 2009, 158). Or, as a supporter of the first Georgian president Z. Gamsakhurdija said, “we do not need any enlightenment, we need patriotism” (Mamardashvili 2012, 552). In Tbilisi, where Mamardashvili had moved, he was accused many times of betraying the Georgian cause, but he still continued to go against the tide. Although he was under the strong pressure of the nationalists, he persisted in saying two weeks before he died, “I do not fight against the Georgian language, but against what is now being said in this language. I do not want a faith; I want liberty of conscience” (Mamardashvili 1991, 8).

In the Soviet Union, the transition to the post-totalitarian era would lead only to the “free manifestation of interior impediments and malformations” (Mamardashvili 2011, 252). Instead, “moral, ethics, philosophy, culture are physics, muscles, ability” (Mamardashvili 2012, 273), that must be practiced daily for the civil society to appear and to be preserved. In order to become a real citizen, a human being must take upon herself the responsibility of her deeds. She must become a person.

Although Mamardashvili realized the heavy consequences of the dominion of Soviet ideology that influenced the citizens’ capacity to think in an autonomous and critical manner, he believed that this could not be invoked in any way as a defense. The moment of personal responsibility is necessary in order to become an authentic human being, a person. Mamardashvili talks about it with extreme clarity:

This elusive moment of the human being, which I have called the final point of responsibility, that nobody can get involved with (no education, no influence, no training), also is, on one side, the most repressed moment of twentieth century society, and, on the other side, it is the one we most feel deprived of, but it is necessary to us; we cannot live without it. (Mamardashvili 2012, 144)

Existentialism has rightly maintained that human beings are responsible for everything they are and do *here and now*, without leaning on their nation, their society, their class or education as an excuse (Mamardashvili 2012, 236–238). According to Mamardashvili, everyone must act immediately *here and now*, bearing responsibility for every deed, without hiding behind a divine will or behind history’s inexorable laws. In 1988 he declared: “First of all, we must turn our irresponsible world into the world of responsibility, where good and bad can be *given a name*, and where the concepts of ‘punishment’ and ‘atonement’, ‘sin’ and ‘repentance’, ‘honor’ and ‘dishonor’ make sense and exist” (Mamardashvili 1992b, 196).

In Zinoviev’s works, the theme of personal moral responsibility is less explicit, but equally relevant. As it is already known, according to Zinoviev, the starting point of any disenchanting consideration of reality is the analysis of what is there, carried out with the attitude of a zoologist who studies an anthill. The laws for living together, which Zinoviev sometimes calls “social,” sometimes “communalist” (Zinoviev 1978, 52–56; Zinoviev 1981), have the same naturalness and unavoidability of natural laws; they represent the foundation of communal life, without any indication of value. Here are some examples from Zinoviev himself: “less give and

more take; less risk, more profit; less responsibility, more kudos; less dependence on others, greater dependence of others on myself” (Zinoviev 1978, 53). It would be wrong to value these rules according to the criteria of morality and immorality. They are neither moral nor immoral, because they belong to the “natural” sphere, so to speak, of communal life. Humans cannot but accept them as a fact of their existence in society “as a natural social environment” (Zinoviev 2011, 28).

Civilization, according to Zinoviev, is built to escape these fundamental laws. Human beings develop “institutions that counter these laws and limit them” (Zinoviev 1981). “In the end, the whole history of civilization has been the history of the limitation of the spontaneity of the communitarian principle” (Zinoviev 2007, 18). And again: “Human progress has mostly happened as a process of invention of the means that limit and rule the action of these laws: morality, right, religion, the press, the public opinion, the ideas of humanism etc.” (Zinoviev 1981).

Zinoviev believes that human beings are not just a “natural” phenomenon, that they are not just animals among other animals. They become actually human by turning the world of given things and relations into a world of their own, specifically “human” (Skvorcov 2008, 268; Guseynov 2004, 10). Human freedom, ethics, responsibility are not at all “natural” neither in nature nor in society. On the contrary, they are born, in Guseynov’s words, “firstly, as a manner of personal-individual existence and, secondly, beyond the limits of sociality, as a deviation from its laws” (Guseynov 2008a, 17). In Zinoviev’s last monumental work, *The Factor of Cognizance*, which was published after his death, he insists heavily on the transition of human beings from nature to culture and their specific existence only at this second level, starting from the elaboration of an apparatus of signs, which is not “biologically innate in humans” and “does not pass from one generation to the next one as biological heritage,” although it is rooted in the biological structure of humans, in the brain and in the sensory apparatus. The element that represents the transition to the truly human level of evolution can be summarized, according to Zinoviev, with the word “consciousness”: “Human beings detached themselves from the animal world and they formed a qualitatively new level of the evolution of living matter thanks to consciousness and conscious behavior” (Zinoviev 2006b, 187). As Guseynov has summarized:

Human beings do not only live by doing this or that deed; they are also capable of answering for why they do them. They are capable of comprehending. Comprehension is the factor that allows human beings to have an influence on their life, to bestow upon it the dignity of a responsible existence.

— Guseynov 2008b, 66

As humanity has learned to escape gravity by building airplanes, without canceling gravity itself, but acting within its limits, so human beings “create the ideal society within themselves to escape the yoke of society, and they can do it by staying in the society and by using it” (Guseynov 2008c, 355–356). Though for Zinoviev, this is never a stable acquisition of humanity. This seems to me to be very important: the overcoming of the laws of “communitarianism” can only be accomplished by the single individual, *here and now*.

This has two important implications. On the one hand, it means that aiming for supreme social ideals does not imply at all that it is possible to achieve them on a large scale. A clear example of this, according to Zinoviev, is Soviet society:

Soviet ideology has tried to build an ideal, highly moral man on a large scale. . . . The experiment has failed. The natural qualities of human beings and the qualities that developed in them in the experience of practical life and by any kind of negative influence resulted stronger than those that were inserted artificially. (Zinoviev 2003, 174)

The meticulous analysis of the *homo sovieticus* shows how a system where a person is “only a partial function of the collective” (Zinoviev 1991a, 198) “ends up relentlessly and unavoidably crushing people” (Geller 2008, 213) instead of achieving its high ideals.

On the other hand, though, the fact that the overcoming of the laws of “communitarianism” can only happen in the single individual means that the system can bend the individual as much as it wants, but the individual will always have the possibility of acting according to one’s own ideals, of being autonomous, of becoming legislator of one’s own sovereign state. There always is, in any circumstance, the possibility of living in a worthy manner. In the novel *The Yawning Heights*, one of the characters, the Visitor, declares:

It is by his own desire . . . that man becomes what he is in the moral sense. . . . One cannot become an evildoer by force of circumstance or by ignorance. One cannot be paid to become a decent man. If a man is a rogue it is because he wanted to become one and has striven toward that end. Man himself bears the full responsibility for his morality. Anyone who takes this responsibility away from man is immoral. (Zinoviev 1978, 407)

It is evident that, through this character, Zinoviev ascribes to everyone the full and total responsibility for what one is, for what one chooses to be. In the short story *Temptation*, he writes:

Everything was clear to us since school. Maturation is only the choice of the path. And we choose it in full awareness. The responsibility of their deeds cannot be taken away from human beings by unburdening the guilt on the environment, on the education, on the situations. Education is not only constriction but voluntary choice too. The most part chooses the path of the adaptation to circumstances. Only exceptional individuals suffer the torment of comprehending the way things are and the sense of the injustice of what happens. They too choose this trail voluntarily. (Zinoviev 1991b)

Everyone is presented with the choice between living by adapting to the requests of the environment, thus getting some practical advantages and some recognitions, and living according to the laws of one’s own sovereign state, coherently with one’s own principles. Zinoviev believes that the choice is always each one’s responsibility.

Zinoviev has written of himself:

Generally, I have followed my principle during my whole life: do not pursue a career, do not renounce your principles for material advantages. I have kept to this road. But when I am asked whether this road is good for others, I answer: no, it is not good for many. (Kozhemjako 2009, 79)

Zinoviev's "theory of life" is not for everyone. The choice of life is necessarily personal, and this not only in the commonplace sense that each person chooses singularly, but also because, in a deeper sense, it is this choice that constitutes one as a person. I once again take the liberty of referring to Guseynov's words in this respect:

The theory of life is the theory of how to become a person. How to be a person not when you hold a privileged position in the society, you have a servant, you live in your own house, you are guarded by the police etc., but when you have nothing of all this. (Guseynov 2008c, 358)

The problem of "how to live" is first of all psychological and ethical, not political:

It is a personal problem. To a human being, the world is first of all constituted by himself. Here, in your head, is your world. How you evaluate your behavior: this is what matters. When I say that I am a state, I see a state in every human being. Each man is a universe; he is an entire cosmos. . . . To take responsibility before your own world! This is the main thing. (Kozhemjako 2009, 78–79)

The individual is a sovereign state because she is the autonomous legislator of herself, and consequently she is responsible for what she is and what she does. It is not surprising that Zinoviev's ethics has been compared to Kant's (Skvorcov 2008, 269–270). Unlike Mamardashvili, Zinoviev does not discuss Kant directly, and he generally does not often explicitly mention his relation with the philosophical tradition. But, during one of his last interviews, he acknowledged that his ideal of human being, "the civil man, the idealist man, the utopian man, the naive man, the unpractical man, the not selfish man, the disinterested man," is the same of which "dreamt and wrote Rousseau and Locke, Hobbes and Descartes" (Zinoviev 2007, 229–230). Kant's name does not appear, but it is really difficult not to think of Kant when Zinoviev insists on the absoluteness of ethics and on the autonomous "sovereignty" of the I that legislates herself. In the novel *The Yawning Heights*, for example, is written:

The assessment of acts as good or bad is absolute. . . . Anyone who insists on the relativity of good and evil, i.e. on some relationship between the morality of actions and the circumstances in which they are performed, is *a priori* negating morality. (Zinoviev 1979, 407)

So, for Zinoviev, responsibility is essentially responsibility before oneself, but also before what is human in us (which sometimes Zinoviev defines divine, in the sense in

which Ivan Laptev, the protagonist of the novel *Go to Golgotha*, believes to be God). Therefore, I think that some rather emphatic expressions of Zinoviev's regarding the responsibility that one can and must take on "for the destiny of the country and of the people" (and, conversely, the critics to the "irresponsible chitchat" of the politicians during the *perestroika*, for example) take on a much more radical and anti-rhetoric meaning. Lastly, the Supreme Court is always that of one's own conscience. In the short story *Temptation*, the protagonist is engaged in this conversation:

We are responsible before the future generations.

- Posterity will never appreciate the sacrifices of their ancestors.
- How they will consider us is their business. We have a duty before our conscience. (Zinoviev 1991b)

The problem of many of his characters and of Zinoviev himself, according to the memories of Ol'ga Mironovna Zinoviev, was "how to live . . . if you want to remain a moral individual" (Zinoviev 2008, 206). This was a problem for Mamardashvili too. Zinoviev chose an extreme coherence of ideas even at the cost of being expelled and of living for a long time as an émigré. Mamardashvili claimed for himself a role not of "martyr," but of critic. In a conversation with Bernard Murchland, he admitted:

Some of us ended up in a laager, . . . some teaching in the countryside, some have gone into internal exile, and some have taken my path: they have hidden in the shadows, trying to avoid trouble. (Murchland 1994, 194)

He acted as a "spy"—philosopher, and not as a captain on the barricades (Mamardashvili 2011, 210–211). Nonetheless, although they were very different from each other as persons, and therefore as philosophers, they both chose their ways honestly: to act, in spite of everything, in an autonomous, worthy, and free manner in unfree conditions. They reflected on Soviet Russia, but the problem of how to "remain a moral individual" has been important not only during that period and not only in Soviet Russia. The problem of the role of intellectuals and of their relation to authority, be it of any kind, is crucial nowadays as well.

## NOTES

1. See Malakhov 2011, 64.
2. Eshleman 2016, accessed December 28, 2016. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/moral-responsibility/>.
3. See [http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc\\_philosophy/886/OTBETCTBEHHOCTb](http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc_philosophy/886/OTBETCTBEHHOCTb) (Accessed July 10, 2018.) On the same web page, the entry of the more recent Ivin 2004 presents a definition that is compliant with the European philosophic tradition: "responsibility is the dependence of a human being from something that is perceived by him as a decisive foundation to make decisions and carry out deeds."
4. According to Zinoviev, one of the principles that regulate cooperative relations is: "Every individual seeks to shuffle off his responsibility on to other people's shoulders" (Zinoviev 1978, 148).



5. Guseynov 2004, 24. See also Mironov 2008, 20; Fursov 2008, 317.
6. In the essay *The Russian Fate*, Zinoviev defines Mamardashvili with these words: “a dear friend . . ., who has been once considered my pupil and follower. Then our paths went two different ways” (Zinoviev 1999, 417).
7. See Zinoviev 1999, 418; Kantor 2008, 230; Mitrokhin 2008, 41–42.
8. See Zinovieva 2008, 172; Kirkwood 1988, 44–46.
9. Zinoviev said of his interviews: “In the West there have been so many that once I answered to a reporter’s question on my profession by saying: ‘interviewable’” (Zinoviev 2007, 208).
10. For an overlook, see Kirkwood 1993, especially the chapter 2: *Zinoviev’s Style and Language*.
11. “This formula means: 1. upstairs they have pondered everything and they made the absolutely rational decision to act exactly this way; 2. this decision is not liable to undergo discussion, and your task is to do, not to think; 3. those who made the decision are responsible for it, but you will suffer punishment if you do not fulfill it” (Zinoviev 1979, 112).
12. See Mamardashvili 2011, 13–15, 23–26, 110–111; Andronikashvili 2011, 186–187; Motroshilova 2011b, 209–210; Motroshilova 1994, 28–29.
13. Mamardashvili 2010, 236–237. According to Zinoviev too, “belief is not a requirement of ideology. As long as people apparently accept it, that is sufficient” (Kirkwood 1988, 55).

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