

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
59 (2), pp. 38-57, 2014

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

Ciprian Iulian Toroczkai, Daniela Preda

Ciprian Iulian Toroczkai, Daniela Preda

“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu

E-mail: torocipri@hotmail.com

Abstract

Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky sees the fate of the human being in such a fateful perspective, knowing that what characterizes human nature and the destiny of the contemporary man is nihilism. Nihilism is the sine qua non way of an outraged human being who reverses all the values so that the transition from death to life involves overcoming some infernal obstacles. Thus Dostoevsky - “a prophet from hell” considered the neurosis that tortured him all his life as part of the Hell that man must go through in order to reach the light.

Modern man is guilty of the crime stated by Fr. Nietzsche – “killing God”. But the philosopher of nihilism did not completely draw the bad consequences of this spiritual crime: that killing the Creator can only lead to killing His creation. Therefore Dostoevsky’s universe comprises acts of murder and suicide.

Keyword

Crime and Suicide, nihilism, Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky

Introduction

“The 19th and the 20th century weakened several values which had previously seemed to be certain, discredited determination and freedom and terrifyingly and caricaturally revealed their

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

chimerical nature. Man felt like a helpless object, a guinea pig having fantastic experiences, a tool of impenetrable laws and as a riposte he posed himself as an almighty subject, a creator free from rules, a capricious demiurge. To his blind obedience he opposed the anarchic revolt. Being silenced, he began to scream, having his hands and feet bound, he was at his wits' end. «You are nothing» - a sarcastic voice whispered to him - «I am everything», he shuddered. «You are not allowed anything», he seemed to hear everywhere - «I am allowed everything» - he shouted desperately. «I am allowed to make my existence as I like it, to dispose of my neighbor's fate, to play *va banque* with my own fate; I am allowed to mistreat and kill, to destroy myself and to kill myself»¹.

Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky sees the fate of the human being in such a fateful perspective, knowing that what characterizes human nature and the destiny of the contemporary man is nihilism. Nihilism is the *sine qua non* way of an outraged human being who reverses all the values so that the transition from death to life involves overcoming some infernal obstacles. Thus Dostoevsky - “a prophet from hell” considered the neurosis that tortured him all his life as part of the Hell that man must go through in order to reach the light. “The Dostoevskian hell” is composed of four related hells:

‘the first hell is the underground, the salt mine as an exterior and especially interior prison; the second hell is his terrible neurosis which tortured him all his life; the third hell is the roulette gambling addiction which he considered as a «sentence to the salt mine»; the fourth hell, perhaps the most frightening of all, is his perpetual sense of guilt»².

Modern man is guilty of the crime stated by Fr. Nietzsche – “killing God”. But the philosopher of nihilism did not completely draw the bad consequences of this spiritual crime: that killing the Creator can only lead to killing His creation. Therefore Dostoevsky's universe comprises acts of murder and suicide; the characters seem to be trapped in a “roulette of

¹ Ion Ianosî, *Dostoevsky*, Teora Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 38.

² Ioan Mânzat, *Christian Psychology of Depths, (F.M.Dostoevsky versus S.Freud)*, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 41.

death” as it will be seen from the brief review of some of the most famous works of Dostoevsky.

Killing: “... *Given My Extraordinary Ability for Crime*”

The title of this chapter comes from Raskolnikov’s statement in “Crime and Punishment” when talking about his “extraordinary ability for crime”³.

V. Rozanov believes that the central theme of the novel “Crime and Punishment” is the “theory of relativity of the crime”: can this “everything is permitted” lead to murder? Yes, says the “bronze man”! This modern Napoleon says “wouldn’t one petty little crime like that be atoned for by [...] thousands of good deeds” (but there is only one step from here to killing millions of people, because the number does not matter) and Raskolnikov will rationally agree with this statement: “My killing a loathsome, harmful louse, a filthy old moneylender woman who brought no good to anyone [...] who sucked the lifeblood of the poor, and you call that a crime?”⁴. These beliefs are stated again in a discussion with Sonia when he says that “The old woman was only an illness. I was in a hurry to overstep. I didn’t kill a human being, but a principle!”⁵ This expressed the principle that will be resumed and developed by Nietzsche: the “will for power”, the absolute power, unlimited by any moral principle. Crime is nothing but the result of limitless power (“he who is firm and strong in mind and spirit will rule over them” says Raskolnikov). Elsewhere, a Dostoevskian character says that murder and suicide are almost inevitable:

“So, I think that many suicides and murders took place just because the gun had already been taken in hand. It is here, as if the abyss opened in front of you, it is as if you were in front of a forty-five degrees slope that you surely slip on: an unrestrained power pushes you to pull the trigger”⁶.

The boundless, chaotic freedom desired by the nihilist must be fuelled and supported in theory. In Raskolnikov’s case (as well as in the cases of Ivan Karamazov and “his lackey”- Smerdeakov) this

³ F. M. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, vol. I, translated by Ștefana Teodoreanu and Isabella Dumbravă, Biblioteca pentru toți Publishing House, Bucharest, 1962, p. 82.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 179.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *White Nights*, translated by Nicolae D. Gane, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 146.

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

“rational gymnastics makes him conclude that he is a rare specimen of humanity, an exceptional specimen, an individual of an extraordinary race and therefore, given this natural superiority proven by his personal reason he is above laws. For Rodion Raskolnikov, laws are made to be obeyed only by simple, ordinary people. Being a quite exceptional specimen as he is endowed with reason, he is above any law”⁷. But

“Rodion Raskolnikov’s rationalism appears as an instrument through which the devil works on this individual, on this student, giving him the misleading mask of the appearance that he is working for the salvation of mankind. He is a murderer, who committed murder through the logical development of his personal reason for his race, his nature in terms of his personal life and the lives of others is different”⁸.

In fact, most criminals and suicides in Dostoevsky’s works are scholars who develop an interest not in the act as such, but in the idea of it, who are actually engaged in an “intellectual adventure” which haunts them above any practical implications.⁹ Still, this is not as simple as it seems. Beyond the desire to help his mother and sister (“I wasn’t as hungry as that... I certainly did want to help my mother, but... that’s not the real thing either...”) - beyond the need for money that poverty pushed him towards murder, beyond believing he was a benefactor of mankind (“I did not kill so that, having obtained means and power, I could become a benefactor of mankind”) hides the principle of absolute evil, which embittered him, enslaved him and dragged him into the den of sin:

“But I turned sulky and wouldn’t. (Yes, sulkiness, that’s the right word for it!) I sat in my room like a spider. You’ve been in my den, you’ve seen it... And do you know, Sonia, that low ceilings and tiny rooms cramp the soul and the mind? Ah, how I hated that garret! And yet I wouldn’t go out of it! I wouldn’t on purpose! I didn’t go out for days together, and I wouldn’t work, I wouldn’t even eat, I just lay there doing nothing. If Nastasya brought me anything, I ate it, if she didn’t, I went all day with-

⁷ Nichifor Crainic, *Dostoevsky and Russian Christianity*, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 112.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁹ Ion Ianoși, cited work, p. 64.

out; I wouldn't ask, on purpose, from sulkiness! At night I had no light, I lay in the dark..."¹⁰.

After committing the crime, Raskolnikov even admits which was the real reason - "When *reason* fails, the *devil* helps!"¹¹

The main weapon of the few and powerful "great men" which entitles them to be chosen is no other than murder. Dividing people into "ordinary" and "unusual", when referring to the last category, Raskolnikov wrote in an article that

"we must take into account the fact that these great leaders of the mankind have made the blood flow plentifully. Where to conclude that not only the great men, but all the men who rise even slightly above the normal, those who can say something new, have to be, by their very nature, criminals - more or less, of course! Otherwise, they wouldn't be able to rise above the others; and to remain at their level, they cannot admit this and, in my opinion, it's their duty not to admit this"¹².

In this case, Dostoevsky proves to be a prophet. In 1933, Andre Breton will say that "The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd" and Jarry says that "after I have laid hands on everything, I will kill everyone and leave". Andre Breton also remarked, referring to the Marquis de Sade: "Of course, man accepts here to be united with nature only by crime; it is to be known whether this is still one of the craziest, the most incurable, the most indisputable ways to love"¹³. This is nothing but false love, an empty hungry masochistic passionate love, which makes it possible to claim that violence is the only adequate means to express.

What is the result of Raskolnikov's crime? What is basically a crime? The adequate answer is expressed by Christian faith, which sends us to the value of each man created "in the image" of God (Genesis 3, 28):

"It's the destruction of man. But what is destroyed from the religious point of view in this man? The image and likeness of God. We might say that a crime is an attack against God. Thus ap-

¹⁰ F. M. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, vol. II, p. 178.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 91.

¹² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 329-330.

¹³ See Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, translated by Ligia Noluță, Sophia Publishing House, Oradea, 1994, p. 105-106.

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

pear the consequences which are so disastrous for the soul of the criminal. Through this evil supreme act of negation, one actually denies oneself because by destroying the image and likeness of God in their neighbor, one destroys in oneself the image and likeness of God.”¹⁴

To kill is equal to kill oneself spiritually, hence the desperate cry of Raskolnikov: “I killed myself!”

Here is the result of “rational egoism” vulgarized to the extreme: one must not love one’s neighbor, but love oneself, for everything in this world is based on interest. “Try to do what you stated and you will think that you have every right to kill...”¹⁵.

But Dostoevsky will distinguish two kinds of criminals: those who are forced by circumstances to kill and those who kill for pleasure (a terrifying example is the legend of the salt mine about how to obtain a ruble killing a man who only has one onion. But an onion costs a kopeck and when one kills a hundred people, does he have a ruble???). “Often, indeed, one crime cannot be compared even approximately to another. Two murderers kill a man under circumstances which in each case are minutely examined and weighed. They each receive the same punishment; and yet by what an abyss are their two actions separated! One has committed a murder for a trifle - for an onion. He has killed on the high-road a peasant who was passing, and found on him an onion, and nothing else. “Well, I was sent to hard labour for a peasant who had nothing but an onion!”

“Fool that you are! an onion is worth a kopeck. If you had killed a hundred peasants you would have had a hundred kopecks, or one rouble.” The above is a prison joke. Another criminal has killed a debauchee who was oppressing or dishonouring his wife, his sister, or his daughter. A third, a vagabond, half dead with hunger, pursued by a whole band of police, was defending his liberty, his life. He is to be regarded as on an equality with the brigand who assassinates children for his amusement, for the pleasure of feeling their warm blood flow over his hands, of seeing them shudder in a last bird-like palpitation beneath the knife which tears their flesh!”¹⁶.

¹⁴ Nichifor Crainic, cited work, p. 141.

¹⁵ Ion Ianoși, cited work, p. 71.

¹⁶ F. M. Dostoevsky, *The House of the Dead*, translated by Nicolae D. Gane, Moldova

Would Orlov, Petrov, Gazin or Noble A. have done anything, even committed the most terrible murder to satisfy their desires?

In the novel "The Idiot" Dostoevsky captures the essentials in what the modern murderer is concerned: even though there have been murders so far (maybe a higher number than today) the murderer knew his condition then, whereas now he considers himself innocent and even legitimate to commit murder.

"I know that there were just as many, and just as terrible, crimes before our times. But what I especially noticed was this, that the very most hopeless and remorseless murderer - however hardened a criminal he may be - still *knows that he is a criminal*; that is, he is conscious that he has acted wickedly, though he may feel no remorse whatever. And they were all like this. Those of whom Evgenie Pavlovitch has spoken, do not admit that they are criminals at all; they think they had a right to do what they did, and that they were even doing a good deed, perhaps."¹⁷

The same novel cites the case of a lawyer who claimed during a trial, in his client's defense, that there was nothing more natural for someone pushed by poverty than kill six people... This proves the lack of discernment of the "new man" who is no longer able to discern between good and evil because he no longer has an objective evaluation criterion, but only his own selfish ego.

Modern society thus revealed the "murder theorists" like Piotr Verhovenski, those who plan to lead humanity in an "existential chaos" based precisely on murder.

"Look - he says in an interview with Stavrogin - I reckoned them all up: a teacher who laughs with children at their God and at their cradle; is on our side. The lawyer who defends an educated murderer because he is more cultured than his victims and could not, help murdering them to get money is one of us. The schoolboys who murder a peasant for the sake of sensation are ours. The juries who acquit every criminal are ours. When I left Russia, Littré's dictum that crime is insanity was all the rage; I come back and I find that crime is no longer insanity, but simply

Publishing House, p. 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *The Idiot*, translated by Nicolae Gane, RAO Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 147.

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

common sense, almost a duty; anyway, a gallant protest!”¹⁸

Shigaliovism is precisely the doctrine that states that murder is the thing that connects people, that leads to the feeling of collective guilt, which will be put into practice by the “group of five” by killing a former comrade, Satov (“persuade four members of the circle to do for a fifth on the pretence that he is a traitor, and you’ll tie them all together with the blood they’ve shed as though it were a knot. They’ll be your slaves, they won’t dare to rebel or call you to account”¹⁹).

From the individual murder one can reach collective murder, as “there will still be thousands of cases like Satov”²⁰, for the

“it was with the idea of systematically undermining the foundations, systematically destroying society and all principles; with the idea of nonplussing every one and making hay of everything, and then, when society was tottering, sick and out of joint, cynical and sceptical though filled with an intense eagerness for self-preservation and for some guiding idea, suddenly to seize it in their hands, raising the standard of revolt...”²¹.

This type of murder is also a major act of rebellion against God’s order in the world:

“If through individual murder one destroys the image and likeness of God in man, through revolution, through the revolutionary act, which is a social crime, one destroys the image and likeness of God in society. There is a very close connection between individual murder and the social one. Revolution, in fact, is nothing but a social murder, an individual murder amplified on the whole society”²².

The transformation that these revolutionaries (followers of the socialist doctrine, preached by Bielinski, Herzen, Cernâșevski - that Dostoevsky himself embraced in the beginning-) want to bring is an exterior one- in form- and not an inner one- in substance- as it was the case of Christianity. The purpose of the “new man” is not to transform man and all creation,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, The Possessed, translated by Marin Preda and Nicolae Gane, Cartea Românească Publishing House, Bucharest, 1970, p. 440.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 630.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 692-693.

²² Nichifor Crainic, cited work, p. 142.

but universal destruction. “By this means - the universal destruction, the universal revolution - they hope to achieve an earthly paradise on earth, as they call it. Accordingly, the revolutionary action or, more precisely, the character of the revolutionary action in “The Possessed” is the attempt to secularize the kingdom of God, which is in eternity”²³. At what cost? “The principle of universal destruction in order to reach the final good (a utopian imaginary good that subordinates all the realities) claims more than one hundred million heads for the establishment of reason in Europe”²⁴, which will unfortunately come true through the mass murder that Stalin ordered. „They shout ‚a hundred million heads’; that may be only a metaphor; but why be afraid of it if, with the slow day-dream on paper, despotism in the course of some hundred years will devour not a hundred but five hundred million heads?”²⁵

Does the number of victims matter for these “babuvists”? “We will proclaim destruction” they cry, saying: “But one or two generations of vice are essential now; monstrous, abject vice by which a man is transformed into a loathsome, cruel, egoistic reptile. That’s what we need! And what’s more, a little ‘fresh blood’ that we may get accustomed to it...’ These revolutionaries do not admit a humanity that develops historically following a vivid way, but proclaim a sudden violent transformation saying that “history is only brazen and nonsense”. That is why they hate so much the living process of life: they need living souls!

“The living soul demands life, does not want to automatically subdue, the living soul is suspect, the living soul is retrograde! While for them, man can smell like carrion, only to be flexible as rubber - has no living soul, has no will, is the soul of a servant and will not rebel!”²⁶.

So for Dostoevsky revolution is demonic; in revolution he saw “its demonic atheist principle”²⁷, because revolution “not only denies the individual, but also the connection with the past, with parents, it proclaims the religion of killing, not of resurrection”²⁸. “Liberty, equality, fraternity... or

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 144-145.

²⁴ F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, *Crime and Punishment*, vol. I, p. 324-325.

²⁸ Nichifor Crainic, cited work, p. 148.

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

death” - this is how the highest principles, using evil means can lead not to better life, but to the opposite of life, death. But human consciousness requires explanations and is not altered by slogans:

“Proclamations. Everybody dreams only of constitution, socialism... They want Russia to shed blood like water... and what do you want, Russian gentlemen? ... Who gave you the right to think that human blood is water? ... You want to write on your flags with letters of blood: freedom and anarchy”²⁹.

Murder is not a solution for murder. “Committing murder is a punishment incomparably worse than the crime itself”³⁰, says Dostoevsky. The harshest agonies which transform the murderer are not the physical but the moral agonies. Consciousness, not the guillotine! “A simple murder, said D. Merezhkovsky, destroys the religious life of the murderer; the death penalty kills the religious life of an entire people. Executing one, we execute them all; killing one person, we kill the soul of all the people... Let’s not plead: “destroy them”- but abolish the death penalty with Christ, Who conquered death by death, Who suppressed the agony by agony”³¹. This Christian solution is the only one that brings the real solution to the problem as it regards not the body but the soul, the inner voice of man.

“The one who breaks the outside law receives legal exterior punishment, far away in a salt mine, but the interior sin of pride which separates the superior man from the rest of the world and determines him to kill, this inner sin of self - deification can be redeemed only through the inner moral act of self-sacrifice”³².

Nichifor Crainic said “there is no writer who has analyzed the soul of the criminal so well”³³, as proven by the way in which Dostoevsky treats parricide. After trying to exemplify the theory of the “Oedipus complex” in literature (in “Hamlet” by William Shakespeare and “Oedipus the King” by Sophocles) S. Freud stops at “The Brothers Karamazov” by F.M. Dos-

²⁹ See Nikolai Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, translated by Radu Părpăușă, European Institute Publishing House, Iași, 1992, p. 99.

³⁰ F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, p. 32.

³¹ Dmitri Merejkovski, *Sick Russia*, translated by Emil Iordache, Ades Publishing House, Iași, 1996, p. 156.

³² Vladimir Soloviov, „Speech about Dostoevsky”, in *The Grand Inquisitor. Dostoevsky – Theological Lectures*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 1997, p. 46.

³³ Nichifor Crainic, cited work, p. 115.

toevsky. The psychoanalyst believes that here “the patricide is associated with the sexual rivalry for a woman”, that there is a connection between the parricide in Dostoevsky’s work and the killing of Dostoevsky’s father (that the Russian author always felt guilty for and which caused the first manifestations of his crisis of epilepsy). However, we cannot agree with Freud’s interpretation who stated that the parricide (Dostoevsky unconsciously wanted to get rid of a very harsh father) was based on a “latent homosexuality”.

Dostoevsky was described as: “An individual with particularly strong bisexual predispositions who fiercely protected against the addiction to a very harsh father”. Also, we cannot support the “theory of the savior criminal” who assumes the guilt that others should bear³⁴. We believe that Dostoevsky related parricide to the “killing of God”, the Heavenly Father. To support our statement, we mention Ivan Karamazov who said “Evil-doing should not only be permitted but even should be acknowledged as the most necessary and most intelligent solution for the situation of every godless person!”³⁵.

For, after having killed God, can the nihilist stop before killing his fellows? The answer is no, but what Dostoevsky pointed out is the fact that killing is sometimes only the peak of an intellectual and spiritual process of gradually “killing” one’s neighbor through hatred. And this suppression is equally important as it represents the beginning of a process. Thus, based on Dostoevsky’s work, Nikolai Berdyaev wrote:

“One kills one’s neighbor not only when one takes their physical life. The secret thought, which often does not pervade the consciousness and is directed towards denial of one’s neighbor means a murder in the spirit and one is responsible for it. Any enmity means murder”³⁶.

Suicide: “... My Life Was Unbearable”

The nihilist’s way leads to death. Denial involves nothingness. In the short story “White Nights” Liza tells the main character that “you are

³⁴ See Ioan Mânzat, cited work, p. 100-103.

³⁵ F. M. Dostoievski, *The Brothers Karamazov* vol. I, translated by Ovidiu Constantinescu and Isabella Dumbravă, RAO Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 111.

³⁶ Nikolai Berdyaev, cited work, p. 66.

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

your own enemy”³⁷, while in another novel- “A Faint Heart”- a character says that “we are doomed, human life is generally a curse (and mine especially)”³⁸. Which could be the aim of a man who stays away from God, who is solitary in his rational world, immersed in dreams, lonely and sad? In many cases suicide is simply the last desperate attempt of a refuge in anything when facing the inner emptiness³⁹, and in Dostoevsky’s work we are dealing with an “epidemic of suicides” as expressed in “The Raw Youth”. This inner emptiness comes from pride which, paradoxically, leads to self-hatred, “a cultivated nice man cannot be vain without demanding the infinite himself and without contempt in some moments, reaching up to hating himself”⁴⁰.

Ioan Mânzat makes a list of the villains present in Dostoevsky’s work, in which, besides those who go crazy (Ivan Karamazov, Goliotkin, A.P. Versilov) and the criminals (Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, Stavrogin), he places the ones who commit suicide (Stavrogin, Ippolit Terentiev, Svidrigailov, Smerdeakov). Which are the causes of suicide? Firstly, some characters kill themselves in the desire to escape suffering, such as in “A Faint Heart”. The character in this short-story is oppressed by her parents and after marriage she is under the tyranny of her husband (who admits: “I made her suffer too much- I am to be blamed”⁴¹) so that she finally jumps out the window with an icon in her hands (symbol of her desire for redemption, of liberation from suffering). In the novel “The Raw Youth” Makar Dolgoruki makes a comparison between Kraft’s suicide and Hecuba’s despair, seeing in his suicide an attempt to go beyond this imperfect world

”I’m sick of living among people like you!? Kraft, a chosen soul, committed suicide, shot himself for the sake of an idea, for the sake of Hecuba... But what do you know of Hecuba? ... How to live among your plots, in your world where there are only lies, deception, plots ... I’m sick of it!”⁴²

³⁷ F. M. Dostoevsky, *White Nights*, p. 19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

³⁹ Gabriel Bunge, *Akedia. Boredom and its Therapy in Avva Evagrie Pontus’ Opinion or the Soul Fighting the Noon Demon*, translated by Ioan I. Ică jr., Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1999, p. 103.

⁴⁰ F. M. Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, translated by Emil Iordache, Timpul Publishing House, Iași, 1996, p. 76.

⁴¹ *Idem*, *White Nights*, p. 179.

⁴² *Idem*, *The Raw Youth*, translated by Emma Beniuc, RAO Publishing House, Bucha-

Because of his “eternal grumpy sadness” Svirigailov wants to go to “foreign countries”, to America (a country of the unfulfilled dreams- a theme also found in “The Raw Youth”) but actually to death; despite Achilles’ protests that “This isn’t the place”. Svidrigailov took out the revolver and cocked it. Achilles raised his eyebrows:

“I say, this is not the place for such jokes!”

“Why shouldn’t it be the place?”

“Because it isn’t.”

“Well, brother, I don’t mind that. It’s a good place. When you are asked, you just say he was going, he said, to America.”

He put the revolver to his right temple.

“You can’t do it here, it’s not the place,” cried Achilles, rousing himself, his eyes growing bigger and bigger.

Svidrigailov pulled the trigger.⁴³

Even a character like Aglaia - apparently uncontaminated by nihilism - admits in the novel “The Idiot” that she has thought, at the age of thirteen, to commit suicide to make everyone else cry around her coffin “Thinking they were so cruel to me...”⁴⁴.

Another character in the same novel, Ippolit Terentiev wants to kill himself because of “my bad dreams”, so as not to show that he was a socialist - “a man who denies everything and who does not care about anything, not even about his own death”⁴⁵, but because of the “frightening beast” that haunted him, a kind of monster, a scorpion, which had “something unusual, of a mystical essence...”⁴⁶. This negative transcendent being makes him believe that his rebellion must end in his own death as the only evidence of an unlimited willpower:

“But if it was up to me I wouldn’t have been born, certainly I wouldn’t have accepted the existence in such humiliating conditions. But at least, it is in my power to take my life, although my days are really numbered. It is not much of a great power, nor is my rebellion great”.

rest, 1998, p. 193.

⁴³ *Idem, Crime and Punishment*, vol. II, p. 300.

⁴⁴ *Ibid., The Idiot*, p. 561.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 513.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

However, he says that: "suicide would be the only act that I could take having good chances to finish it of my own volition. Perhaps this is exactly what tempts me: to take advantage of this final opportunity to act. Protest can sometimes mean a lot..."⁴⁷.

In Ippolit's case one can take into account his incurable lung disease as motivation of his suicide; however, through Kirillov (who, in Crainic's opinion, "embodies the suicide theory") one gets acquainted with the "rational suicide". Thus, "Kirillov is pure suicide"⁴⁸. Being an atheist, he places his unbelief at the foundation of his own existence; but "running from God is running from oneself, one's origin, one's being and essence"⁴⁹. In his opinion, "there are too few suicides"; pain and the life after death is the thing that determines people not to commit this act. One will finally be free when "one does not care if they live or not"⁵⁰. Kirillov says that "He who conquers pain and fear will be a god himself"⁵¹. (Thus he states suicide as an act of self-deification!)

Jean-Paul Sartre will say that "if God exists, I am not free" and Kirillov's idea is similar as he said "*I want to state my opinions fervently*". He saw in God an obstacle to the absolute exercise of the free will: "If God exists, then the whole will is His and I can do nothing. If He doesn't exist, then all will is mine and I must exercise my will, my free will"⁵². „The men who revolt against death, wanted to provide the species with an untamed immortality and are horrified seeing themselves forced to kill. However, if they back down, then they must accept to die themselves; if they go ahead, they have to kill"⁵³, said Albert Camus, while Kirillov makes the difference between murder and suicide. In a discussion with another "demon", Piotr Verhovensky, he says: "To kill some one would be the lowest point of self-will, and you show your whole soul in that. I am not you: I want the highest point and I'll kill myself"⁵⁴. Suicide would thus be superior to crime because it would open the way to absolute freedom, to the supreme self-assertion of the human self.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 546.

⁴⁸ Nichifor Crainic, cited work, p. 126.

⁴⁹ Max Picard, *The Flight from God*, translated by Patricia Merfu and Fr. George Remete, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 156.

⁵⁰ F.M.Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 127.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 640.

⁵³ Albert Camus, cited work, p. 298.

⁵⁴ F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 640.

Surprisingly, in a discussion with Satov, Kirillov argues, however, that he loves children and life and yet he chooses death because „there is life and no death”. But the life he accepts and says he loves it the terrestrial life: not believing in God he does not believe in immortality (not coincidentally Satov says: “Kirillov! If...if you could renounce your terrible fantasies and drop your atheistic ravings...oh, what a man you’d be, Kirillov”). He demonically retells the inverted Gospel pericope on Crucifixion, to prove his own thesis that everything is a lie, that everything “is based on lies and stupid irony”.

“Listen to a great idea: there was a day on earth, and in the midst of the earth there stood three crosses. One on the Cross had such faith that he said to another, ‘To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.’ The day ended; both died and passed away and found neither Paradise nor resurrection. His words did not come true”⁵⁵.

Smerdiakov thinks the same way, he is proud that he is a “smart” rational man who does not accept the existence of God; consequently he commits parricide and ends up killing himself (only a “villan” and an “infidel” like him, as his adoptive father, Grigori Vasilievich, calls him may think that “It would have been better for me to be killed in my mother’s womb than see the daylight!”⁵⁶).

Stavrogin is another character who comes to commit suicide because of atheism, because solving the dilemma whether or not God exists is really a matter of life and death. In this respect, Nikolai Berdyaev says that “one cannot live not solving the problem of God and devil, of immortality, freedom, evil, the human and humanity destiny. Their solution is not a luxury, but it’s vital. If there is no immortality, it is not worth living”⁵⁷. When visiting Tikhon, Stavroghin admits that “my life was unbearable”⁵⁸ (“for him life has no meaning, or has only one meaning, that it is worth making fun of it”⁵⁹ - Nikolai Berdyaev) that he does not distinguish between good and evil (seen as mere prejudice, although- he says- if he sets free from them, he would be lost). He even admits having raped a twelve-year-old girl who then killed himself. However, like Judas, he does not repent of

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 641.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, *The Brothers Karamazov* vol. I, p. 348.

⁵⁷ Nikolai Berdiaev, cited work, p. 145.

⁵⁸ F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 723.

⁵⁹ Nikolai Berdyaev, cited work, p. 131.

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

his actions, he is still dominated by pride and he refuses Tikhon's advice who cries that: "you've never been so close to a new crime, fiercer than the other": suicide. Stavrogin thus confesses: "I do not love, at least I do not love those who are trying to get into my soul" and "his biggest rebellion is when Tikhon puts his finger on the wounds of his soul. He does not allow under any circumstances to be told what he is; to be, in other words, unmasked"⁶⁰.

Stavrogin is part of the "demons" that came out of the pigs and entered the people:

"those devils that come out of the sick man and enter into the swine. They are all the sores, all the foul contagions, all the impurities, all the devils great and small that have multiplied in that great invalid, our beloved Russia, in the course of ages and ages. *Oui, cette Russie que j'aimais toujours*. But a great idea and a great Will will encompass it from on high, as with that lunatic possessed of devils... and all those devils will come forth, all the impurity, all the rottenness that was putrefying on the surface ... and they will beg of themselves to enter into swine; and indeed maybe they have entered into them already! They are we, we and those... and Petrusha and *les autres avec lui*... and I perhaps at the head of them, and we shall cast ourselves down, possessed and raving, from the rocks into the sea, and we shall all be drowned—and a good thing too, for that is all we are fit for. But the sick man will be healed and ,will sit at the feet of Jesus,' and all will look upon him with astonishment..."⁶¹.

"The paradoxist - says Ioan Mânzat - is in a permanent axiological conflict with himself and others. He does not clearly distinguish between good from evil, he confuses them or treats them reversibly, he cannot draw a clear line between truth and lie, between virtues and vice"⁶²,

between life and death, we would add. However, Kirillov realizes that the harmony he wants to achieve and that he would like to give his life for, even if it lasted only for a few seconds, is too great for "this earthly man", the solution is either his transformation (the correct solution) or death (the

⁶⁰ Nichifor Crainic, cited work p. 138.

⁶¹ F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 678.

⁶² Ioan Mânzat, cited work, p. 367.

wrong solution, which he unfortunately chose). Here is the testimony of this character:

“There are only a few seconds- not more than five or six at once- when I feel in an absolute way the presence of the eternal harmony. It is not something earthy; I do not say it is something heavenly, but I say that men in their earthly form cannot bear this harmony. You have to transform physically or die so as to feel”⁶³.

The last considerations about suicide belong to Father Zosima in the novel “The Brothers Karamazov”. Although- in his blind rage to deny and destroy- the nihilist refuses to accept life and even his own self, he can still not cancel something that does not belong to him, something that he got from creation: God’s image. Even in hell “forever death shall depart from them”, from those who “knowingly chose the dungeons of hell and their torment will never end, for they are willfully suffering”. The spiritual father describes them:

“For they have cursed themselves, cursing God and life. They live upon their vindictive pride like a starving man in the desert sucking blood out of his own body. But they are never satisfied, and they refuse forgiveness, they curse God Who calls them. They cannot behold the living God without hatred, and they cry out that the God of life should be annihilated, that God should destroy Himself and His own creation. And they will burn in the fire of their own wrath for ever and yearn for death and annihilation. But they will not attain to death...”⁶⁴.

With his cry: “But woe to those who have killed themselves on earth, woe to the suicides!”, Zosima confesses that “but in my secret heart I believe that we may pray even for them. Love can never be an offence to Christ”⁶⁵. Moreover, Dmitri Karamazov confesses to Alyosha that only his love for him stopped him from committing suicide.

“Here I have a willow, a handkerchief, a shirt, I can twist them into a rope in a minute, and braces besides, and why go on burdening the earth, dishonouring it with my vile presence? And then I heard you coming - Heavens, it was as though something

⁶³ Nichifor Crainic, cited work, p. 123.

⁶⁴ F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. I, p. 505.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 505.

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

flew down to me suddenly. So there is a man, then, whom I love. Here he is, that man, my dear little brother, whom I love more than anyone in the world, the only one I love in the world. And I loved you so much, so much at that moment that I thought, 'I'll fall on his neck at once!'"⁶⁶

Love can thus make people hug, not commit suicide...

Conclusions

Dostoevsky died too soon. Of course, all the great people die too soon, but the Russian writer also had something to say: that one can be bad and become good, that one can be an atheist and ultimately convert like the thief on the cross did; that nihilism can be defeated and thus murder or suicide can be avoided. Berdyaev said that "Dostoevsky knew everything Nietzsche knew... and more"⁶⁷ and *that something* is most likely referring to the resurrection of the fallen man through repentance. The human goal is to achieve deification (theosis) so "the mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for"⁶⁸ as "it is not the same to die as an honest man or as a villain"⁶⁹. After reading the works of Dostoevsky a nihilist might suffer that extraordinary blow in his conscience and exclaim like Mitea that "it is impossible not only to live like a villain, but you cannot even die when you know what a villain you are."⁷⁰

Christos Yannaras said that "we are all grandsons of Dostoevsky"⁷¹ and it would be really good if the prophecy of Albert Camus fulfilled: "If the 20th century was that of Marx, the 21st century will be that of Dostoevsky". He was the one who dreamed that not only Russia but also the whole of Europe will be "regenerated by the power of Christian love"⁷². For this, one still needs to understand and value Dostoevsky's work:

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁶⁷ Nikolai Berdyaev, cited work, p. 70.

⁶⁸ F. M. Dostoevskiy, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. I, p. 395.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 260.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 261.

⁷¹ Olivier Clement, *Truth and freedom. Orthodoxy In Contemporaneity. Conversations with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I*, translated by Mihai Maci, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1997, p. 12.

⁷² Nichifor Crainic, cited work, p. 284.

“He who wants to be closer to Dostoevsky must fulfill a number of exercitio spiritualia: must live hours, days or years within the conflicting evidence. There is no other solution. Only then can one foresee that time has not one, but two dimensions or even more, that laws don’t exist since forever, but are given to us so that we can redeem ourselves, that not our deeds, but our faith saves us, that the death of Socrates can ruin the terrible “two multiplied by two makes four”, that God does not demand the impossible, than that ugly duckling can change into a beautiful white swan, that it all begins but does not end here, that even caprice is entitled to guarantees, that the fantastic is more real than the normal, that life is death and death is life and other facts of this kind, which are measured by their strange and terrible eyes in all the pages of Dostoevsky’s works”⁷³.

Dostoevsky was paradoxical, the nihilist is also paradoxical; but just as the former was able to return to life, the latter could also see the magic moment of reconciliation with people, with the world, with God. After facing great doubt, Alyosha has the vision of “Cana of Galilee” when he is in front of his spiritual father Zosima. We believe that the scene that followed is one of the most impressive scenes in the universal literature and entirely suggests what a man who came back to God feels: “He did not stop on the steps either, but went quickly down; his soul, overflowing with rapture, yearned for freedom, space, openness. The vault of heaven, full of soft, shining stars, stretched vast and fathomless above him. The Milky Way ran in two pale streams from the zenith to the horizon. The fresh, motionless, still night enfolded the earth. The white towers and golden domes of the cathedral gleamed out against the sapphire sky. The gorgeous autumn flowers, in the beds round the house, were slumbering till morning. The silence of earth seemed to melt into the silence of the heavens. The mystery of earth was one with the mystery of the stars.... Alyosha stood, gazed, and suddenly threw himself down on the earth.” He did not know why he embraced it. He could not have told why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss it all. But he kissed it weeping, sobbing, and watering it with his tears, and vowed passionately to love it, to love it for ever and ever. “Water the earth with the tears of your joy and love those tears,” echoed in his

⁷³ Lev Shestov, *Revelations of Death, (Dostoevsky-Tolstoy)*, translated by de Smaranda Cosmin, European Institute Publishing House, Iasi, 1993, p. 284.

Crime and Suicide - Heights of Nihilism in the Thinking of F.M. Dostoevsky

soul. What was he weeping over? Oh! in his rapture he was weeping even over those stars, which were shining to him from the abyss of space, and "he was not ashamed of that ecstasy." 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. But with every instant he felt clearly and, as it were, tangibly, that something firm and unshakable as that vault of heaven had entered into his soul. It was as though some idea had seized the sovereignty of his mind - and it was for all his life and for ever and ever."⁷⁴

We can only hope that man, through the aid received from the divine grace, can get over this temptation of absolute negation. We are sure that others, including Dostoevsky, could do this.

⁷⁴ F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. II, p. 65-66.