THE CONCEPTS OF METAPHYSICAL REBELLION
AND FREEDOM IN THE WORKS OF DOSTOEVSKY AND CAMUS

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Introduction

The nineteenth century was a time of great social and political unrest in Europe and in Russia. There emerged a strong revolutionary spirit which resulted in a challenge to the status quo in every aspect of man's life—social, political and metaphysical. This was a century of forceful ideas. In striving for a new approach to reality, these new concepts caused many ideological conflicts, which were revealed in the philosophy and literature of the time. Of these writers of the previous century, I would like to focus my attention on Dostoevsky and his works. Dostoevsky's art is more than a contemporary commentary on the problems of his era; it is part of that body of great literature which is ageless and has relevance to all ages. The themes that continually occur in his works are universal in scope, concerning man's most profound problems—his relationship to God and to the world and his responsibility toward his fellow man. These questions have been tackled by all great writers, each in the perspective of his time. Dostoevsky treats these
themes in a new way, in the context of the intellectual ferment mentioned above. In this way he is not only relevant to his time, but to ours, for the conflicts which developed in the 1800's are not yet resolved and very much with us today. Dostoevsky was a precursor to many writers of the twentieth century, especially in his psychological analysis of characters and the metaphysical paradoxes by which they are confronted. It is this latter aspect of Dostoevsky's art that I would like to discuss in the context of modern literature.

That group of writers and philosophers who have most directly continued to develop the same themes regarding existence and rebellion can be loosely grouped together and called existentialists. This label is rejected by most of those men commonly considered existential writers, mainly because existentialism is more a feeling than a concrete, cohesive ideology. Each writer, from Sartre and De Beauvoir to Heidegger and Camus, defines existentialism in his own terms and these terms are very abstract; differentiations in meaning are subtle. Being and nothingness, faith, consciousness, freedom and rebellion in existential thought must be
studied in accordance with each individual author.

Nevertheless, that which allows one to group these men together is a common concern for particular concepts.

According to Hazel Barnes,

"All existentialist writers offer—each in his own way—a challenge to conventional moral codes, a sense of urgency in matters of conscience, an interest in the private introspections of the individual. In addition there are certain emotionally charged philosophies—anguish, dread, nausea, despair, the compulsive demand for passionate choice and total commitment."

Essentially, existential thought approaches a world in which God is dead and reason is rejected as a moving force in life. Reason is inadequate for explaining the cruelties which exist, and faith in God can no longer offer solace. There is only man. All responsibility for his own actions and those of others lie in man himself. If there is only man, how should he live? Why should he live? Existentialism is a search for meaning in life, and the possibility of some external force which demands of each person a certain way of living. Some men will not face the implications of man's total self-reliance and they live in "bad faith", as Sartre puts it, deceiving themselves. There are
others who recognize the problem of existence and try to solve it. Their struggle is of monumental proportions. The existential philosophers and artists are among these men who take up the challenge and their literature is a revelation of man's psychological and metaphysical possibilities as he confronts his very being.

One can place the work of the French writer Albert Camus in such a context. He began his career in the years just prior to the beginning of World War II and continued to write until his death in 1960. He wrote many articles for periodicals and newspapers and several collections of lyrical and philosophical essays. His fiction includes both novels and plays. In all of these genres, Camus's greatest concern was man's search for something positive in life. Camus felt a firm and active commitment to life and felt that he could best contribute to society through his literature. This commitment is revealed as he attempts to define man's position as it is now and how it has developed as such in the course of history. Camus is extremely aware of the past and its influences on the present. He interprets certain trends in thoughts which he finds
important, often going as far back as the ancient Greeks. Of those men of the nineteenth century whose works he was acquainted with and often refers to, Dostoevsky stands to the fore. In a foreword to the first American edition of his play _The Possessed_, Camus says,

"The Possessed of Dostoevsky is one of the four or five works that I rank above all others. In many ways I can claim that I grew up on it and took sustenance from it... Dostoevsky's characters, as we know well by now, are neither odd nor absurd. They are like us; we have the same heart... The Possessed is a prophetic book... it prefigures our nihilism..."^2

Camus's thought is a continuation of Dostoevskian thought in many respects. In this thesis I am not attempting to provide an exhaustive comparison of the works and ideas of the two authors. I have chosen to discuss the concept of metaphysical rebellion and freedom as found in several of the major works of Dostoevsky and Camus, and to show the continuity of thought which exists between them, beginning with their rejection of the rational world and ending with the exploration of the outer limits of freedom.

There is a degree of irony involved in the comparison of Dostoevsky and Camus. In studying
Dostoevsky's books, notebooks, correspondence and literary criticism, it becomes evident that there is a duality and conflict within Dostoevsky himself and this is revealed in his literature through the diametrically opposed characters he is able to create. There is often much more in his work than he consciously intended to portray. This is, of course, one aspect of his genius. Dostoevsky was most sympathetic to the slavophile ideals of Russian nationalism and Russian Orthodoxy. His belief in God and of eternal life after death provided the basis for his most positive characters, men like Aljosha Karamazov and Father Zossima. It is these characters in particular who are the culmination of Dostoevsky's thoughts on the question of God in man's life.

Nevertheless, there was a great deal that was nihilistic and rebellious in Dostoevsky, but which he consciously chose to suppress or condemn in favor of religious faith. These rebellious tendencies found expression in characters like Kirilov, Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov, men without God and faith, who have deviated from the moral standards which religion sets up. It is these men who have the great confrontation
between old and new ideas; it is they who think and act in a way comparable to men to today. It is invariably these men whom modern existential writers find relevant and choose to refer to. Hence the irony and complexity of Dostoevsky. As Edward Wasiólek says,

"The revolt of so many distinguished readers against Dostoevsky's conscious intention is, whatever else, a testimony to the force and persuasiveness with which Dostoevsky was able to state the other case."

Camus is interested in this "other case", in those characters who are actively involved in a condition of metaphysical rebellion. It is metaphysical in the sense that it is concerned with universal and timeless questions, not merely a revolt against conditions of a certain time, in a certain country. Metaphysical rebellion is a revolt against the suffering and evil found in our life, and an attempt to understand the nature of our being. This is what Dostoevsky and Camus have chosen to do.
Notes

1 Hazel E. Barnes, Humanistic Existentialism

2 Albert Camus, The Possessed trans. Justin O'Brien

3 Edward Wajcman, Dostoevsky The Major Fiction
CHAPTER I

DOSTOEVSKY'S CONCEPT OF METAPHYSICAL
REBELLION AND FREEDOM

Notes From the Underground is considered to be a pivotal work by almost every scholar of Dostoevsky. In it are presented the basic concepts of Dostoevskian thought, which would be more fully developed in later works, especially in Crime and Punishment, The Devils and The Brothers Karamazov. Those concepts found in Notes From the Underground which are most pertinent to my thesis are the irrationality of human behavior, rebellion and freedom. These three concepts are closely interwoven and a discussion of one leads immediately to a discussion of the other two. Notes From the Underground is a confession and an explanation of the Underground Man's confrontation with life. The book has two parts. Part Two comes first chronologically; it relates the Underground Man's experiences with people in the real world before he went underground. Part One shows us
the Underground Man after many years away from society. It is an analysis of the Underground Man's actions and an explanation of them. This is a self-analysis and from the personal level the Underground Man proceeds to generalize his thoughts and apply them to society as a whole.

The Underground Man is the first in a series of Dostoevskian characters who are supremely conscious of the contradictory nature of life and the irrationality of human behavior. Man has tried to make the world seem rational by relying on laws and formulas which can predict any outcome. These laws and formulas allow no doubt; they form a "stone wall." Many men accept these laws and will not go beyond the wall. The ultimate results of such a total reliance on laws are two structures which mold and restrict man. The first of these is the Crystal Palace. It is a utopia built by the rules of science and mathematics. Science will teach man that

"...he does not really have either caprice or will of his own and that he has never had it...and that, moreover, laws of nature exist in this world, so that everything he does is not done by his will at all, but is done by itself...Consequently we have only to discover
these laws of nature, and man will no longer be responsible for his actions and life will become exceedingly easy for him."  

The anthill is another edifice which can result from total adherence to the rational. In the anthill there is total conformity; each knows what to do and does it without question. The anthill is like a well-run machine. Within each of these structures man is robbed of his humanity and his consciousness of self.

The Underground Man fears and detests all that the Crystal Palace and the anthill represent. He prefers his freedom even if that freedom brings with it suffering and pain. He is sure man will never renounce suffering because it is through suffering that man can obtain consciousness. Consciousness is individuality and allows the possibility of reaching great and sublime heights, as well as the possibility of falling to the depths of degradation. To preserve his freedom the Underground Man rebels. He will not resign himself to obeying the laws of nature. His revolt consists in the manifestation of his free will. Everything he does is calculated (consciously or unconsciously) to maintain his freedom. He goes to extraordinary lengths
and creates elaborate ruses in order to prove his freedom. Perversity and spite are the results, insult and humiliation are the tools of that spite. He tries to ingratiate himself with those he knows despise him, therefore seeking his own humiliation. In turn he humiliates those who offer him kindness, like Liza the prostitute. Even the pain of toothache is preferable to going to the dentist! He purposely seeks pain.

Above all, the Underground Man is never static, never defined. His actions must not be predictable by any rules. If he is to be free,

"...he must make his nature, and he must make it with every choice...he must be in revolt not only against society, but against himself, not once but in eternal revolt."\(^2\)

If he succeeds in his revolt, that freedom which he maintains acquires grave implications. The Underground Man's demand for independence is without qualification. He does not feel bound by social or moral laws. He says, "What man needs is simply independent choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead."\(^3\) Man then becomes his own law and will force
his will upon others. The problem of unlimited freedom is not greatly developed in Notes From the Underground, nor is it resolved, but it is certainly shown to be a consequence of freedom.

In Notes From the Underground we see the first statement of those ideas which become the basis of Dostoevsky's major novels, as well as influencing modern existential thought. The Underground Man refuses to accept a hated reality and wishes for a restoration of the feeling of existence. He must constantly be in revolt to protect that feeling of existence. This results in a lack of moral sense and everything is theoretically possible. In his rebellion he is isolated, alone in the underground.

The Brothers Karamazov is considered to be the most mature statement of Dostoevsky's art. In this book he was able to join together all the various concepts on God and man and life which had first appeared in Notes From the Underground. In the characters of the father and his sons, strikingly contrasted attitudes toward life are shown. Each of the men has one aspect of his personality which dominates all others. The father and his son Dimitri are ruled by passion and lust, and show only
the physical side of man. In Aljoša the spiritual-religious side of man is most fully developed. And it is Ivan who is most characterized by his intellectual capacities, and in him the concepts of metaphysical rebellion and freedom reach the highest point of development.

Ivan had shown an intellectual superiority over his peers very early in life, and when he is first introduced to us, we find him on the verge of a brilliant career as a literary critic. He has the reputation of a thinker, a man who has insights into the problems of human existence. He is respected by both Dimitri and Aljoša and even the degenerate father Fyodor would sometimes engage in "furious intellectual arguments" with Ivan. It is only natural that Ivan should be the man to struggle with life's problems on the metaphysical level.

Ivan is acutely aware of the unhappy state of man and he will not accept the human condition as it is. The paradoxes and terrible incongruities of life torment him. By his own admission he is a rationalist, a mind with a Euclidean mind, a mind that can recognize only facts. This mind wants the unanswerable to be explainable.
This constitutes the basic paradox of Ivan’s situation. If it cannot be explained, an idea must be rejected. He synthesizes all aspects of his questions and demands into one awesome challenge. “Why must innocent children suffer?” The suffering of mankind in general is horrible and often without just cause, but the suffering of children points out most acutely a world without reason, an absurd world. The only answer which can be given to Ivan for this question is that no one is to blame. Ivan will not accept this and he rebels against God who has created such a world. He does not reject God, but dismisses him.

“God is a metaphysical concept; the world is a three-dimensional fact. And Ivan refuses to deal with anything but fact... But the idea of God is something beyond fact. To reject God would be to go beyond fact. Ivan accepts God only in the sense that one accepts a hypothesis that cannot be proved.”

As in Notes From the Underground, a hypothetical choice is given to man. For the Underground Man the choice lay between the static dullness of the utopian Crystal Palace and a life of freedom and painful consciousness. For Ivan the choice was the same.
Man had been given paradise, but instead he had wanted freedom, even knowing that he would be unhappy. This is explained most fully and beautifully in Ivan's poem about the Grand Inquisitor. The Grand Inquisitor had decided to take the suffering of the world on his shoulders and make man happy once again. But in the process man would lose his freedom and be guided by the miracle, mystery and authority of the Grand Inquisitor. He will establish once again a paradise on earth. In the legend, Christ is the symbol of man's freedom and his suffering, because it is he who has resisted temptation in favor of freedom. Freedom is based on the choice between good and evil, man's conscious use of his free will.

Ivan rejects the Grand Inquisitor's solution of blind obedience and happiness, but he also demands retribution for suffering and a reconciliation of man and happiness on this earth, in this life. Suffering must not be the basis of truth and harmony, and if it is, he will not accept it. He says,
"I don't want harmony. I don't want it, out of the love I bear to mankind. I want to remain with my suffering unavenged and my indignation unappeased, even if I were wrong. Besides, too high a price has been placed on harmony. We cannot afford to pay so much for admission."5

With his rejection of a world of good and evil there arises the same possibility of an unlimited freedom. If there is no morality, then all is permitted. This is the logical conclusion of Ivan's reasoning. But he cannot wholly accept that which he has postulated. Throughout the entire book Ivan struggles between acceptance of this statement and a rejection of it as being morally wrong. He is fully aware of this struggle, as is Father Zossima who says to him,

"You still can't find the right answer to this question and you're very worried about it... You, too, in despair, are for the time being amusing yourself with magazine articles and discussions in society without believing in your arguments and smiling bitterly at them with an ache in your heart... You have not made up your mind what answer to give to that question and therein lies your great grief, for the question urgently demands an answer."6

Ivan is not forced to give an answer until the murder of his father takes place. If all is permitted then his father's death is negligible. But Ivan feels
a deep and perpetual guilt about that murder. It is he who had talked to Smerdjakov, the murderer, and to whom he had expressed his ideas on total permissiveness, and thus, consciously or unconsciously, giving Smerdjakov permission to murder. The moment that Ivan left the town was the moment he acquiesced to the murder. From that moment on, Ivan is tormented to a state of madness, which reaches a climax in his hallucination, the appearance of his own petty devil. This demon taunts Ivan with all of his nihilistic and rebellious thoughts, because the demon is really a part of Ivan, the most horrible and base side of his nature. The devil's speech is a reiterating and a solidification of the ideas behind Ivan's metaphysical rebellion. If man rejects God's world of good and evil, he will himself become a man-god who may then "jump over every barrier of the old moral code of the former man-slave if he deems it necessary."7

Ivan cannot resolve the discrepancy between his rational thoughts and feelings. He falls ill of brain fever and lies in bed in a state of madness. Only his brother Aljoša fully understands the dilemma which Ivan must face. Ivan wants to confess to the murder
of his father and save Dimitri because he feels that he is morally responsible for the crime. But if he does not believe in the morality of good and evil, how can he confess? Ivan's illness was,

"The agony of a proud decision – a deep-seated conscience. God, in whom he did not believe, and truth had gained a hold over his heart, which still refused to give in...Ivan will either rise up in the light of truth or – perish in hate, revenging on himself and on everyone else the fact that he has served something he does not believe in." 

This is the fate of the rebel, either the underground or madness, but never happiness or peace.

**Camus’s Concept of Metaphysical Rebellion and Freedom**

In the works of Albert Camus we can see a continuation of Dostoevskian thought, regarding the concept of metaphysical rebellion and freedom. In his book *The Rebel* Camus very often refers to the characters of Dostoevsky as examples of men in revolt. But he does not merely analyse these characters in terms of Dostoevsky's attitudes. Camus uses them in order to
give a reinterpretation of metaphysical rebellion in view of modern society and the nihilism which is prevalent in its every strata. The twentieth century has seen two world wars as well as innumerable smaller conflicts equally horrible, and has produced several dictators who have perpetrated gross atrocities against mankind. Camus calls this century "an era of legalized murder." In his essay he attempts to define not only the concept of metaphysical rebellion, but also the limits that should be imposed upon it.

What is metaphysical rebellion for Camus? Rebellion is the movement from a state of acceptance to the refusal of oppression. Metaphysical rebellion is man's protest against the human condition. Man does not ask for life, but reasons for living. There is still a world of suffering and terrible incongruities against which man seems to be helpless, merely a plaything in the hands of some great force of evil. His life is wasted at the expense of evil and incomplete because of inevitable death. Metaphysical rebellion begins at that point when man refuses to comply and serve this oppressive force which rules his life. The metaphysical rebel demands unity and justice and a resolution of
the contradictions. Rebellion is much more complex than a mere refusal to comply with injustice. There is in it the implication of man's intrinsic worth. An awareness is born in man that there is something good in him, something worthy of having freedom, that the rebel is somehow right in his rebellion.

"The rebel himself wants to be 'all' - to identify himself completely with this good of which he has suddenly become aware and by which he wants to be personally recognized and acknowledged - or 'nothing'; in other words, to be completely destroyed by the force that dominates him."  

There is such valor in his revolt that it is worth even death. Upon examination we find this positive aspect of rebellion is reinforced by several factors. Rebellion is not seen as an individual protest; it is an act in defense of all men's rights. Rebellion is not an act of egoism but a collective experience. In his demand for acknowledgement as an equal, the rebel identifies himself with other men. There must be a respect common to all men. In this way rebellion gives birth to a human solidarity of feeling. Camus discusses this solidarity in terms of human suffering. When rebellion begins, suffering is no longer an individual burden; it
is a collective activity. Man begins to realize that his feelings are shared by others. This whole concept is best expressed in Camus's adaptation: "I rebel therefore we exist." This conception of rebellion is very similar to that which Ivan Karamazov expresses. He loves mankind and it is the common and indiscriminate suffering of man that he is protesting. So it is for all men that he says, "I don't want harmony. I don't want it out of the love I bear to mankind."10

Rebellion takes place on the name of love and in the name of freedom. It is initiated to protect and confirm man's right to express his will. From this arises the question of God and the concept of good and evil which God represents. It is not God's existence or nonexistence which is in question. Using Ivan's very reasoning, Camus's rebel does not deny God and is therefore not necessarily an atheist, because if he

"...ranges himself against a power whose existence he simultaneously affirms; he only admits the existence of this power at the very instant he calls it into question...the rebel defies more than he denies. Originally, at least, he does not supress God; he merely talks to him as an equal."11
It is only later that God is killed. This is a consequence of nihilism, not of rebellion. Camus says that it is the "even if" statement of Ivan Karamazov which has marked the turning point from which rebellion becomes nihilism, a system of absolute destruction. "Even if" God existed, Ivan would never surrender to him and accept the injustice of suffering as just and acceptable. The even if was then changed to "you do not deserve to exist" and finally, "you do not exist."

It is at this point that God is dead and man becomes the man-god and his own master. This is also the moment when Ivan’s statement "if there is no God, all is permitted" comes into reality. There is now the possibility of unlimited freedom and all its consequences. Unchecked freedom does lead to the dominance of others, to absolute tyranny both on a metaphysical level and in historical reality. This is the horrible paradox of unlimited freedom; it can maintain its absolute quality only by infringing on the freedom of others. The slave becomes the master and someone else becomes his slave, and there is no concept of sin to stop the exercise of his will. This is the condition of our time.

Camus cannot accept the mass murders of the
twentieth century, which are a result of this prevailing sense of nihilism. He attempts to define those limits which must be placed on a freedom unhindered by a moral sense. Camus's solution is based on that feeling of human solidarity which I have discussed above. The rebel must seek only "a measure of justice, a measure of freedom." Freedom should not be taken beyond the limits of a common human dignity; there should be not individual liberty but a common liberty, otherwise new forms of tyranny will arise:

"La nature sociale de l'homme crée un lien étroit entre la liberté individuelle et les différentes théories destinées à établir le climat ou la structure favorables à la vraie liberté. C'est le thème du plus important livre de Camus: L'Homme Revolté. La révolte est toujours réclamation de liberté. Mais seule la vraie liberté confère à l'homme la possibilité de dicter son bonheur."

True liberty is liberty in moderation through which happiness for all is possible.

But man has not yet succeeded in tempering and restraining the freedom he attains. In the second half of The Rebel Camus's rebel makes the transition from contemplation to action, and from metaphysical revolt to historical revolution, its logical outcome. In doing
so he traces the history of revolution in Western society from the French Revolution to the present. In each case he finds that the original positive goals of rebellion become perverted in the actual act of revolution, and end in regicide, deicide and mass murder. Camus is attacking that myth of Western society in which revolution is viewed as a positive force. Revolution in the name of absolute freedom and justice can only become a distortion of ideals. Thus, Camus ultimately rejects a rebellion on either the metaphysical or historical level if it does not renounce absolute ends. Reading through The Rebel we find that Camus

"...distinguished two main forms of revolt culminating in the intellectual justification of two forms of contemporary police states: the nihilistic, individualistic revolt, inherited from a perversed Kies sensism...and the ideological revolt whereby man replaces God by some other absolute like Reformation."\(^13\)

We find the same realization of events expressed in the works of Dostoevsky. Notes From the Underground was, in part, an attack on the rationalists of the time. The Devils, which I will discuss below, was an attack against the revolutionary radicals of the nineteenth
century. The idealization of the goal and complete
disregard of the means was found to be abhorrent to both
Dostoevsky and Camus. Even with the high value they
placed on freedom in man's life, they knew that freedom
must be tempered by respect of others if not by a belief
in good and evil.
Notes


2Wasilek, op. cit. (Chapter I, note 3), p. 43.

3Dostoevsky, Notes From the Underground, p. 23.

4Wasilek, p. 162.


6Ibid., p. 78.

7Ibid., p. 764.

8Ibid., p. 771.


10Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 287.


12Germain-Paul Celinas, La Liberté dans la Pensée d'Albert Camus (St-Paul Fribourg, Switzerland, 1965), p. 112.

CHAPTER II

SUICIDE AS A SOLUTION TO THE ABSURD

Related to the question of rebellion and freedom is the idea of suicide as the resolution to the problems of life. If one is free from moral restraints and cannot find a meaning in life, is suicide an acceptable action? Both Camus and Dostoevsky must answer this question, because the rebels they have created are faced with a world which is without meaning for them.

Camus stated that *The Myth of Sisyphus* was an attempt to resolve the problem of suicide just as *The Rebel* was an attempt to resolve the problem of murder, whether it be of an individual or of an entire people. The subject of his essay is a discussion of the relationship between an absurd world and suicide — the logical conclusion to a life without meaning. The myth itself sets up the situation. Sisyphus had been condemned by the gods to eternally roll a rock to the top of a mountain; once he has reached the top, the
rock immediately falls to the bottom by the force of its own weight. Sisyphus' work was all in vain. He was condemned to a life of futile and hopeless labor.. This is the essence of the absurd situation. Here is a man who is forever working in order to accomplish nothing. What is the absurd? It is, basically, the feeling that life is incomprehensible, that reason is inadequate in explaining life, not only its horrors and its sufferings, but also its monotony and lack of hope or any implications of future improvement. Camus describes this life well.

"It happens that the stage set collapses. Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm— this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. 'Begins'—this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulses of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows...At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery."

The word consciousness is, I think, the key. This is the same awareness which leads the slave to say no, to become the rebel. It is the acute sensibility of life,
which allows him to fully experience everything he encounters. The conscious man has lost all agency. For some, there is no special importance in how a man lives his life — his answer to everything is "I don't care," "it's all the same to me." These men do not go beyond the mere realization of the absurdity in life. And others among men seek different resolutions to the senseless quality of life.

"L'équation absurde qui confronte les exigences de l'homme et les réalités du monde (se pouvait) rassoude de différentes façons: le suicide, qui supprime l'homme; la soumission mystique qui étouffe ces exigences ou les transpose sur un autre plan; le postulat d'un monde rationnel, autre solution de foi, camouflée sous le masque de l'intellectualité. Il revenait au croche de dieu de dénoncer ces formes d'accroissement à l'absurde qui sautent du tout au rien."²

Using this quotation as a basis, we can discuss the various alternatives man has allowed himself in facing life, and how Camus feels about each. The traditional resolution of the absurd lies in religion. It is some force outside of man which offers an explanation of life's paradoxes and which gives some recourse to the suffering in life by transcending earthly life with the promise of a happier future existence. Western
religion has at its base the acceptance of God as the all-powerful force of the universe. Camus cannot accept God and traditional religious precepts as a solution to the human condition. As I have mentioned before, he does not exclude or deny the existence of God, which would only be a kind of affirmation, but he rejects the concept of unavoidable evil inherent in a belief in God. For Camus the alternative is clear. Either we are not free and God who is omnipotent is responsible for evil or, we are free and responsible, but God is not omnipotent and the ruling force of existence. This is the paradox of religious faith. For Camus the absurd does not lead to God, but the most striking illustration of the absurd is the idea of "sin without God." The absurdity lies in the fact that man

"...makes demands upon himself and on the world which would make sense only if there were a certain God and a perceptible meaning in existence; and yet he knows there is no God and he can perceive no meaning. Without God man has a concept of sin; in a meaningless universe he demands a meaning; his finite mind insists on pursuing projects whose scope is infinite.""  

Another of the options mentioned in the quotation
above is a belief in some absolute other than God, in which case an intellectual concept such as reason becomes the focal point of life. Once man has recognized the absurdity in the world, this option also must be rejected, and it is rejected by Camus. Curiously is not a reasonable world.

If there is no God and there is not an ultimate force of Reason, a logical answer to the problem of the absurd is suicide. It is not every suicide which is under discussion here, but only those unusual cases which directly follow that consciousness of the absurd life. These are the logical suicides performed by absurd men. For Camus, a nearly perfect example of the absurd man and the suicide of ideas is found in Kirilov, a character in Dostoevsky's novel The Devils. Kirilov was obsessed by the idea of freeing man. He felt that he himself was free of the moral restrictions and fears whichbind men's lives, but wanted to remove the fear of death for all of mankind. His suicide is referred to by Camus as a "pedagogical suicide."
Through this self-imposed death he would attain the status of man-godhood and would conquer fear of death in the name of all mankind. His act upon himself is
on one level gratuitous, carried out not by motivations of self-interest, but in the hope of finding the outer limits of man's capabilities. But there is a paradox involved. Kirilov's suicide is also an act of rebellion against God by whom he was tormented. "God is necessary, and so must exist...But I know that he doesn't exist and can't exist...Don't you know that a man with two such ideas cannot go on living?" In this metaphysical rebellion against God and in his love for mankind, Kirilov is the ideal absurd hero. But he goes beyond metaphysical crime and does actually kill himself. It is at this point that he ceases to be the perfect absurd man, for Camus rejects the idea of suicide as the logical solution to the absurd existence, just as he had rejected religion and Reason.

Once man has gained consciousness (of the absurd) there should not be a withdrawal from life, but the opposite — a strong commitment to life. I noted Camus's positive attitude toward rebellion in The Rebel, which was expressed in the feeling of the basic dignity of man and his solidarity with all men. Rebellion is not a refusal of the absurd but its acceptance. Rebellion is part of the absurd, but suicide is not.
One must live with the consciousness of the absurd always before him and with this in mind, try to experience as much as possible the diversity which life has to offer. It is through awareness and experience that the absurd man can counter the question "Why live?"

Once more in referring to the list of several options man has formulated in order to accommodate life, we can easily see which of them Dostoevsky had chosen. It is in religion and God that man's hope of happiness and salvation lies. The characters of Father Zossima and Aljosha are the most mature reflections of Dostoevsky's positive thoughts concerning God and religion. Their belief in God is strong and deep and pure; the expression of their faith is love. Repentance and not suicide is the path one must take. Nevertheless, in Dostoevsky's major novels the question of suicide is of great importance, if for no other reason than the number of incidences found in his books! I have already mentioned Kirilov and his logical suicide as it was interpreted by Camus. There are several other major Dostoevskian characters who commit suicide, but none for such straightforward, logical reasons. All these suicides seem to be an echo of a general feeling in society, a feeling quite like that which we have defined in Camus's work and called
the absurd. In its use by Camus the word absurd is quite modern, but the realization of the meaningless and empty quality of life is no where more strongly felt than in Dostoevsky's literature. At one point in The Devils the question was asked,

"...why people had started hanging and shooting themselves so frequently among us, as though they had become uprooted or as though the floor had suddenly given way under their feet."

There is a general atmosphere of despair alive in people. In Crime and Punishment Svidrigailov commits suicide. The despair that eventually causes his death was much more complex in nature than a mere realization of the emptiness of his life. It was compounded by strong feelings of guilt which he could only assuage by death, because he had no God. Nor did he have faith in mankind. Throughout the book Svidrigailov is regarded as an evil figure. He is a devil-like person who had a destructive influence on everyone he came into contact with. His own wife, the student Raskolnikov and his sister Dunjasta were all tormented by Svidrigailov. There were many rumors about that he caused the ruin and suicide of a young girl. This intimation is given more probability in the dream sequence just before his death. Young girls
are at the center of his horrible and frenzied dreams. Guilt and total rejection by others resulted in a void. There was nothing of value left in the life of Svidrigailov.

Stavrogin, the protagonist of *The Devils*, is quite a different kind of character, but his life ends in just the same way. The metaphysical plot of the novel revolves around Stavrogin. He is a rebel and his rebellion closely resembles that of the Underground Man; the manifestation of his revolt is most often revealed in malice which is directed towards others and towards himself. He can bite an ear or pull a nose in the most humiliating way. Just as easily he can marry a pathetic cripple, utterly disregarding his own standards and those of his social class. There was a great deal of malice in Stavrogin, and "...his malice was cold, calm, and, if one may put it that way, rational, which means that it was the most abominable and most terrible kind of malice." Yet people are drawn to Stavrogin in a most passionate way. The young girls in the story both love him and offer him a chance of happiness, but he is incapable of returning their love or even of feeling remorse. He says,
"...from me nothing has come but negation, with no magnanimity and no force...I can never lose my reason and I can never believe in an idea to the same extent that Shatov did...Indignation and shame I can never feel, therefore not despair either."

Stavrogin commits suicide — premeditated and conscious suicide in the face of a meaningless life.

Still another suicide victim is Smerdjakov, the illegitimate Karamazov brother. He had not the stature of a Stovrogin either in his mental capacities or physical appeal. He was nothing, but filled himself with the rebellious ideas of Ivan Karamazov, and ultimately carried out what Ivan only expressed in words. He killed his father for money, but

"...mostly because 'everything is permitted.' This you Shatov did teach me sir, for you talked to me a lot about such things: for if there's no everlasting God, there's no such thing as virtue, and there's no need of it at all... That's the way I reasoned." Betrayed and rejected by Ivan, Smerdjakov too commits suicide, "of his own free will."

For Dostoevsky, the fate of those who put themselves beyond God or in his place is either suicide or madness (like Ivan). There is no redeeming aspect in these suicides, but are the natural conclusion to an empty life.
Notes


3 Barnes, op. cit (Introduction, note 1), p. 156.


5 Ibid., p. 332.

6 Ibid., p. 213.

7 Ibid., p. 667.

8 Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, op. cit. (Chapter I, note 5), p. 743.
CHAPTER III

PASSION IN THE ABSURD WORLD

A third theme which is expressed in several of the works of Dostoevsky and Camus is a direct response to the rejection of suicide as an answer to life's problems. Passion holds a significant place in the life of the absurd and rebellious man. For Camus, one consequence of the logic of the absurd is passion. The recognition of the absurd excludes hope for the future, whether in life or in some transcendental existence after death. It is the present that matters. "The present and the succession of presents before a soul which is at every moment conscious — this is the ideal of the absurd man."\(^1\)

It is, as I have stated before, the awareness that is important. And this awareness gives value to any experience which the absurd man has and which he finds significant or worthwhile.

"As a corollary to this position there follows the view that for the absurd man, what counts is quantity of experience...Camus hastens to assure us that the fact of death means that no man is in control of the quantity of experience
Passion involves an intensity of experience which manifests itself on two levels, the physical sensations and the more abstract thirst for life and all it has to offer. Physical sensuality is not only sexual, but sensuality in its broadest reaches. It is the wind in your hair, the rain beating down, the taste of food, cold, all that the five senses come in contact with. Camus exults in nature; the presence of sea and sun are intensely felt. When Meursault (The Stranger) tries to explain why he killed the Arab, he says, that it was because of the sun. Meursault is extremely aware of everything — the sun beating down, birds singing, fans buzzing, cars screeching.

"In the solar world of Camus, the muscular insolence and eurythmy of bodies reigns without contest. Animality is fully accepted. Camus is far from thinking in terms of self-enjoyment or of a hedonistic retreat within. The body is the privileged place of joy, because it is the locus of harmony... Physical love places human beings against the background of Being and participation in the act of love is the symbol of a deeper participation."
Noussault is perhaps the best example of this joy of sensuality in its positive sense. As I have said, he is extremely conscious of and affected by the sun and the sea. He is also extremely aware of women and the curve of the breast, the shape of the neck, even the clothes that are worn by them. In the beach scene of Part One, physical passion and sensual awareness of the world are beautifully joined. The attraction of Marie's body is compounded by the salty warm water, the torrid rays of the sun and the satisfying physical exertion of swimming and running. Noussault fully enjoys life.

In Dostoevsky's characters this degree of positive physical sensuality is not portrayed. His most famous sensualists - the Karamazov family - have difficulty in controlling their passion, whether it involves sex or jealousy or hatred. The father Fyodor and the eldest son Dimitri rage at each other, their jealousy and anger barely kept in check. The father's wild orgies were known of by all in the neighborhood. Dimitri's last party with Grushenka on the night of his father's murder is still another example of unrestrained passion. Smerdjakov's passion and especially his anger were, by
necessity, repressed for a long time, but when that hatred was released, the result was murder. Aijosha, I think, had not yet come to a consciousness of his physical self. It was for this reason in part, that Father Zossima had sent him out into the world. It is Ivan Karamazov who most closely resembles the Camusian concept of the absurd man, both in his acceptance of the meaningless quality of life, and in his love of that life and in his sense of the physical world.

"However much I may disbelieve in the order or things, I still love the sticky little leaves that open up in the spring, I love the blue sky, I love some people, whom, you know, one loves sometimes without knowing why, I love some great achievement, in which I've perhaps lost faith long ago, but which from old habit my heart still receives."

Passion on a more abstract, metaphysical level is nothing less than a love of life, and therefore, its acceptance in spite of everything. It is the affirmation that denies suicide. Again, it is Ivan who says,

"...if I didn't believe in life, if I lost faith in the woman I love, if I lost faith in the order of things, if I were convinced that everything was, on the contrary, a disorderly, damnable, and perhaps devil-ridden chaos, if I were completely overcome by all the horrors of man's disillusionment - I'd still want to live and, having once raised the cup to my
lips, I wouldn't tear myself away from it
till I had drained it to the dregs!"
Notes


4 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, op. cit. (Chapter I, note 9), p. 265.

5 Ibid., p. 268.
CHAPTER IV

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ABSOLUTE FREEDOM

I have discussed the concepts of metaphysical rebellion and freedom in the works of Dostoevsky and Camus. If the rebellion is successful and freedom is attained, there arises the serious question of how man must use and control that freedom. Both authors realized the many consequences of the exercise of unlimited freedom and portrayed them in their works. I have chosen Crime and Punishment by Dostoevsky and Caligula by Camus to be the basis of my discussion of the implications and results of absolute freedom.

Raskolnikov, the protagonist of Crime and Punishment, was the first in the succession of rebels who follow in the footsteps of the Underground Man. He does not encompass every aspect of rebellion as Ivan Karamazov does, but much more than Ivan, he is obsessed with the power of freedom. Raskolnikov wants to prove his individuality, and in the name of freedom and power, show himself to be a superior man, a man beyond the barriers
imposed by society. His hypothesis is rather straightforward. Mankind is divided into two categories by natural selection. Those failing in the first category are ordinary and therefore inferior; they are only useful in a reproductive capacity. The second group of men are far superior to the first. They have the talent to utter a "new word" and are free to break the law. For the most part these new men wish to destroy the present for the sake of a better future. Raskolnikov wants to know, above all, to which category he belongs, and so he dares to test his potential. His test is murder and he kills an old pawnbroker and her friend. By his own admission Raskolnikov fails. He did not go beyond the laws of nature, but remained "on this side." He had the daring but his defeat lay in himself and in fate. In his own failure Raskolnikov does not see a rejection of his hypothesis. He still believes in the superior man who has absolute freedom. It is merely that he is not one of them. To condone and actually idolize a man-god like Napoleon, Raskolnikov must reject any concept of good and evil and faith in God. And yet, when asked, he says that he does believe in God and in the Resurrection. This is the partial cause of his
failure; he is an earlier version of Ivan and like Ivan still has vestiges of morality in him which he struggles against. Speaking of men like Napoleon he says,

"...those men succeeded and so they were right, and I didn't, and so I had no right to have taken that step...It was only in that that he recognized his criminality, only in the fact that he had been unsuccessful and had confessed it."1

Raskolnikov's final fate is not given at the end of Crime and Punishment. We know that he does not repent of his crime on a moral basis, but there is still some hope of his repentance and he is one of the few rebels of Dostoevsky who neither dies nor goes completely insane.

Camus's play Caligula presents a man in just such a position of absolute freedom as has been discussed. The character of Caligula is an excellent one for dramatizing the consequences of absolute power. Historically speaking Caligula had position and power far beyond the scope of most men. He had the superiority Raskolnikov only dreamed about. He was emperor of Rome with the status of a god. The dramatic figure of Camus's Caligula has this same scope and potential, but he is in every way a modern man, facing the problems of existence in the context of an absurd world.
The first step toward attaining freedom is consciousness of one's situation. For Caligula this occurs at the beginning of Act One. It comes with the death of his sister-mistress Drusilla. Until this time, the power at his disposal had been left unused. With Drusilla's death Caligula realizes that men die and are unhappy, that happiness is an illusion and there is no meaning in life. In order to live at all Caligula must have

"...something beyond life — the moon, the impossible — and to Helio the mission of getting the moon... And Caligula is 'the only artist who has brought his thought and his action into harmony.' Therein lies his power... He is the mad Emperor who, in Cassius's eyes, holds sway over a time — our time — which tends to consider the individual life as nothing compared to the moon, that symbol of any ideal state lying beyond the limits of our present lives."?

In this play it is the absurd which determines events and not vice versa. Caligula is now conscious that "all is possible." His freedom is used to its fullest extent. His actions and desires are a mixture of playful malice and unrestrained cruelty. In order to bring the entire court to the same level of awareness as himself, Caligula humiliates his subjects. That humiliation is so much
stronger because the men who surround him are, for the
most part, patricians, members of the senate. They
never know what to expect from him and comply with his
most stupid wishes, from repeating nonsensical phrases
to masquerading in front of him. It is not until humiliation
turns to arbitrary death that his subjects begin to rebel.

Caligula himself escapes none of torment he heaps
on others. He is not a happy man. Love is beyond his
grasp, for living is the opposite of love. His goal is
to make others as supremely aware of the absurdity of
existence as he himself is, and in the process perhaps
attain happiness. Throughout the play we observe an
attempt to equalize the world, place everything on the
same level. Caligula is god and does not recognize the
absolute quality of good and evil. He is beyond the
barrier which Raskolnikov hypothesized. He wishes to
equalize good and evil for all men. Caligula says,

"Ma volonté est de le changer. Je ferai
à ce siècle le don de l'égalité. Et lorsque
tout sera spléni, l'impossible enfin sur
la terre, la lune dans mes mains, alors,
pourtôtre, moi-même je serai transformé et
le monde avec moi, alors enfin les hommes ne
mourront pas et ils seront heureux."
His will is everything. If he wishes a famine to begin, a famine must begin. If a whim demands that a man be killed, then that man is killed, because "one is always free at the expense of others." If this is to bring happiness, it is a terrible kind of happiness, not to be born for long. Caligula's realization of his total freedom is finally limited and he is killed. But before he dies he comes to the conclusion that his freedom is not a good one, his happiness is not a good happiness. He has searched for the impossible and ended with nothing. The danger of absolute freedom had been restrained, and Caligula was murdered.

The concept of absolute freedom has in it two closely linked consequences - crime and isolation. In the characters we have discussed thus far, we can clearly see the correlation between rebellion and crime. For Raskolnikov, for all of the radicals in The Devils and for the Karamazov brothers murder is a result of rebellion. As a literary device murder beautifully expresses the dilemma of freedom. The criminal is someone who has broken a law of society. Crime is "...the might be which the forces of law, convention and tradition held at bay...It is only when one is free of the domination of society's will that one is free to exercise
Thus, crime leads to isolation in both the physical and metaphysical sense. Raskolnikov's situation typifies this feeling of isolation. Even before his crime Raskolnikov had withdrawn from everyone. After his murder of the pawnbroker this withdrawal is even more complete. There is for him the feeling that he is separated and cut off from mankind which he experienced after he killed the old pawnbroker and her friend. This alienation tortured him. Even in prison while "paying" for his crime his isolation did not abate, for he was not really repentant. What surprised Raskolnikov most of all was "...the terrible impossible gulf that lay between him and all the rest. They seem to be a different species and he looked at them and they looked at him with distrust and hostility."6

Crime and its resultant alienation are likewise found in the works of Camus, often providing very striking parallels to situations found in Dostoevsky. For example, in both The Stranger and The Brothers
Karamazov, a murder has been committed. An Algerian man Meursault had killed an Arab. In The Brothers Karamazov it was not Dimitri who killed his father, but it was he who was standing trial for this crime. The trials of these two men are similar in one very important respect. The outcome of each, based on the reconstruction of the crime by the persecutor, depended more on the interpretation of the accused man's moral character than the actual incident of the murder itself. It is neither actual guilt nor innocence which condemns them, but their refusal to conform to the set of feelings which society demands. One must love one's parents or at least say so; nothing must undermine social traditions. Meursault realizes finally, that he is being tried mainly because he didn't cry at his mother's funeral. Likewise, everyone knew how much Dimitri hated his father, so of course he was guilty. In this context, the crime of Meursault and Dimitri is that of being honest.

Caligula too is an alienated character. His absolute power sets him above everyone else; he is the man-god and his alienation was not only from other men, but from the universe itself. Along with his cruel abuse of power it is Caligula's complete denial of man
and life which frightened the Romans. He was a "monster" and had to be killed by society.

Mérusault is probably the most famous of all alienated characters in modern literature. I have mentioned one aspect of his alienation above, his complete honesty and lack of hypocrisy which could not be tolerated in by society. Sartre discusses Mérusault as the prototype of the alienated hero, the outsider.

"In a universe suddenly deprived of light and illusions, man feels himself an outsider. This exile is irrevocable...The reason is that man is not the world...the outsider is man confronting the world...The outsider is also man among men. 'There are days when you find that the person you've loved has become a stranger.' The stranger is, finally, myself in relation to myself, that is, natural man in relation to mind: 'The stranger who, at certain moments, confronts us in a mirror.'"

This passage certainly does refer to Mérusault, to Caligula and other characters of Camus. It can certainly apply to all the rebel-criminals of Dostoevsky's novels. From the one author to the other we see a continuing line of thought which has given us the modern anti-hero.
Notes


2. Sørs, Camus, op. cit. (Chapter I, note 13), p. 171.


CONCLUSION

Dostoevsky and Camus are among the most popular writers of our decade, not in the vulgar sense of the word, but because they both have a great deal to offer to contemporary man. As well as being contemporary, their works are universal in relevance, touching upon those aspects of life which are most complex and yet most fundamental.

It would probably be impossible to achieve a cohesive and straightforward comparison of the two men and their art. Even discussing each man only in terms of his own work is a complex undertaking, for each deals in paradox, duality and contradiction and his works take on several levels of meaning. Added to this, it has never been shown that either writer had a systematic set of precepts which he followed without deviation. Their art, like all art, is the result of a complex and subtle interplay of ideas, situations and attitudes.

I view much in Camus's work as a continuation of Dostoevskian literature and in my thesis have discussed
those points where the authors' ideas most conspicuously ran parallel and often touched. The concepts of metaphysical rebellion, absolute freedom, suicide and alienation hold positions of importance for both Dostoevsky and Camus, and were interwoven in both plot and theme. Very often it is only the final choice of alternatives regarding these concepts which distinguishes the philosophical differences of the two men.

Dostoevsky's answer to the man who embraces the ideas of metaphysical rebellion and all it implies is either madness or suicide. He can offer no other alternative in view of his own beliefs. The most positive resolution can be only in some mystical combination of brotherhood, faith in God and the promise of resurrection.

Camus allowed the godless man another alternative, one found in man himself and in his present life. There is only man, but all men are equal in dignity and their right to happiness. Happiness or value can be found in any experience fully entered into in good faith.

In conclusion, Dostoevsky and Camus understood as others seldom have, how an ideal can be corrupted; they understood the forces of the powerful nihilism affecting
the life of modern man and neither would submit to it, instead have allowed man an escape from total despair.
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