



IWONA MAGDALENA PERKOWSKA
UNIwersytet Łódzki

A MAN IS FREE AS HE IS THE IMAGE OF GODLY FREEDOM.
FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS
ABOUT FREEDOM ¹

The influence on the development of Western thought Fyodor Dostoevsky had is so great and obvious that the trouble of justifying the fact that he belongs to the broadly defined circle of philosophers must wonder. Certainly, he was not a philosopher in the strict sense. But if we assume that the philosopher is first of all the one who thinks about and asks - from the human point of view - the most important questions and tries to identify a solution for these issues, then the problem may disappear. I suggest avoiding citing once again the well-known arguments², proved his rights to be named like this, and instead trying such a heuristic procedure that consists in answering two following questions: what would the culture lose if Dostoevsky were not to exist at all? And how much poorer would our knowledge about the man and human nature be? Replies settle clear about the importance of the achievements of the great Russian writer-thinker.

Of the many names Dostoevsky was called, two remain incredibly important, and that what he discovered as a pneumatologist and anthropologist³, remains invaluable. The reading of arts of the Russian author is still more than a tribute to a deeper understanding or

¹ This article is a revised and expanded version of the paper originally published as *Human being and the Image of God In Dostoevsky's Works*, [in:] *Bezsens ludzkiej egzystencji. Friedrich Durrenmatt, Samuel Barclay Beckett, Fiodor Michajłowicz Dostojewski*, Rozprawy i studia Katedry Filozofii Wyższej Szkoły Finansów i Zarządzania w Warszawie, Warszawa 2009.

² See for example: Lecture by Jay Gallagher: *Dostoevsky as Philosopher* <http://www-philosophy.ucdavis.edu/phi151/NOV28LEC.HTM>

³ Terminology used by M. Bierdiaev.

extending knowledge on human nature such as it is. It is easy to discover that nature of human beings showing in his novels has deeply tragic character. However, the dynamics of human nature shown by him, the essence of which is transcending oneself and striving for self-fulfillment, more often than to self-fulfillment leads to perdition. And this is because a man, in an arbitrary way, uses his freedom.

“A man – writes Paul Evdokimov - is free as he is the image of Godly freedom and this is why he can make his choices”.⁴

Dostoevsky's characters possess unlimited freedom, which if not set in values and directed at transcendence, may become their greatest existential problems. The writer shows, that dealing with own freedom is one of the greatest tasks in human life and man's future fate depends wholly on how he copes with this task. Freedom is a fundamental concept in a philosophical anthropology of the Russian writer.

As an anthropologist, Dostoevsky is invariably close to the Orthodox vision of a man, in which human existence, as long as only human, remains incomplete. A man, who as a result of original sin, had lost direct contact with God, has become being crippled, incomplete. His ontic structure was broken. These cracks can not be left empty, they tend to be filled. There are only two directions: good or evil. Divine or demonic.

“Each created existence presents itself as one participating in the Godly Existence, as a similarity, which is to give answer to the God's concept of a man. Human perfection is in the shaping of the whole existence according to the Godly image and similarity”.⁵

A man, wishing to gain the obvious foundation of own existence, from the bottom of his being pursues God, as only God is - as Evdokimov writes - a person in an absolute sense.⁶

The secret of a person as a hypostasis is based on the act of transformation of oneself towards God (...) A man plays himself and shapes his being through other men, but complete truth about oneself is achieved only when he rises to this awareness that God has about him, when he is inside the relations determining the Godly Person. On this summit the pure human element is mastered and the most inner,

⁴ P. Evdokimov, *Prawosławie*, transl. J. Klinger, PAX, Warsaw 2003, p. 77.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

hypostatic me ceases - as a property - to be mine. I then receive it as a grace, which supplements it.⁷

As long as we intentionally do not pursue God we will not discover the purpose of our existence, we will remain internally shattered and incomplete. After the Fall, the result of which was disconnection from God, the only true and complete being, a man has tendencies to search for himself outside, what is always a wrong direction leading astray. Thinking this, Dostoevsky very often condemns his characters to stumbling, futile searches and false revelations, thus indicating that there is only one exit from the labyrinth, that to exist authentically means co-existing with God, harmonizing with Godly order. Human autonomic order does not exist at all, its existence could be only an illusion, lie or emptiness.

The Latin term *persona*, similarly to the Greek *prosopon*, originally means a mask. This term itself contains a deep philosophy of a human person. It means the non-existence of an autonomous human order, as existing means participating in existence or in nothingness. By participating, a man realizes the image of God or assumes a demonic grimace of aping God.⁸

Similarity to God is expressed in the act of opting for Him, acknowledging the values He established and adopting commandments. A man, by following the example of the Christ, materializes the possibility of becoming similar to God, realizes the fullness of own humanity. After finding the image of God hidden within, thanks to grace, which is ever-present,⁹ combining the separate parts becomes possible - complete integration of a human being. By finding God, a man finds his true self. This means that one needs to become a god in order to fully be

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 81-82.

⁹ „According to the Orthodox theorem, the created nature receives its grace from its source, in the sole act of creation. Lack of grace is something unthinkable. It would be a distortion annihilating nature itself, equal to the second death described in the Apocalypse. The truth of the nature lies with its supernatural character, and this "super" means its theoforous character from the sole beginning.” *Ibidem*, p. 93.

a man. "A man - as Saint Basil says - is a being that was commanded to become a god, meaning to become an over-divine hypostasis".¹⁰

Orthodox over-divinity - a category identical to sanctity - is the purpose of human existence and a crowning of his efforts. The path of over-divinity has been becoming the only rescue for a man torn apart between good and evil, imprisoned in his own mind. In Dostoevsky's works we will not however find characters, who would travel this path all the way. We are condemned to numerous objections: post-mortal decomposition of Zosima is one of the more difficult tests for weakly founded, miracle-expecting faith. The writer himself had doubts. His own religion was far from orthodoxy. He deeply believed that world without God would be much worse than the one in which people have faith. The world without Jesus Christ would lose any immanent sense and the strongest fundament of its morality. Even his last and most mature child does not give certainty that he has found immovable bedrock, and that his faith is not merely an act of despair, hope rather than love. The reality described and best known by Dostoevsky is the world without God. It is filled by either terrifying emptiness and void and the lack of God (*The Possessed*), or various conceptualizations of God, used for particular man interests (*The Brothers Karamazov*). With great difficulty will we find the presence of a living God (dying brother of Zosima).

Long time has passed since the discovery that Dostoevsky was not a theologian and that he used to write only about men.¹¹ "Actually, you will not find anything aside the man in Dostoevsky's works, everything appears only in a human being, everything happens because of him (...) Dostoevsky is poor as theologian, but infinitely rich as an anthropologist".¹²

A man, pictured by the Russian writer, is a weak and lost being, which, if condemned only to itself, will surely die, because he does not overcome the destructive forces entered in its own nature. The terror of absence of God in the world and the feeling of His existence forced

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

¹¹ J.P. Scanlan, *Dostoevsky on the Existence of God*, Archiwum Historii Filozofii I Myśli Społecznej, vol. 44, 1999, PL ISSN 0066-6874.

¹² M. Bierdiajew, *Obraz człowieka w twórczości Dostojewskiego*, transl. S. Chabiera, [in:] *Wokół Leontjewa i Bierdiajewa.*, series *Almanach Myśli Rosyjskiej*, (edited.) J. Dobieszewski, Warsaw 2001, p. 249 and 256.

Dostoevsky to scream against all which could take away the rest of hope for finding transcendence or which would eliminate the necessity of searching itself. A man is the source of all misery, which he brings upon himself. Not atheism but false understanding of God is the greatest of them. Winning would allow the man to take a seat at the summit of creation and replace the cruel godly order with one of his own. The false image of a cruel god is the result of adopting a perspective showing the Godly Being outside of the human being, as well as of treating God and man relationship in a master and slave category only. Such an image will not subside as long as we look at God as a stranger. Paul Evdokimov writes about it that way:

God was tried as an indiscrete foreigner, whose sight attempts to penetrate the most intimate corners of the soul and thus eliminates dignity and autonomy of a human being. Terrible simplification is familiar with God only as someone "different", who is located on the same plane as antique gods, and as such as an everlasting threat, whom men do not believe.¹³

Mistrust towards God stems from unfamiliarity with His true face. Most often God is simply alien to man. And from here there could be only one step to hostility. A man, while not making an effort to get to know, accepts only such an image he is capable of understanding; this is how the God's image is created on the basis of oneself. The main character of *The Possessed* - Aleksy Kiryłow becomes an Ontic-axiological revolutionary because he has only a simplified image of God menacing human dignity.

Freedom will be only it makes no difference: to live or die. (...) This is how it works. Life is given to man for the price of pain and fear, and this is where the whole deception is. Contemporary man is not this particular man. This new man, happy and proud. The one, who can do anything: live or die - this person is the new man. Who overcomes pain and fear, becomes god himself. And this God will be no more. (...) God is the pain of fear of death. (...) Everyone, who wants cardinal

¹³ P. Evdokimov, *Gogol i Dostojewski czyli zstąpienie do otchłani.*, transl. A. Kunka, Homini, Bydgoszcz 2002, p. 261.

freedom, should have the courage to kill themselves. (...) Who kills oneself only to kill the fear, becomes a god¹⁴

According to Kirryłow, God is the most dangerous enemy of human freedom. Fear from death and uncertainty in eschatological matters limit the potential of men. Kirryłow decides to commit suicide in order to show humanity the new path and to free it from fear of death. He will kill himself willingly, repeating Christ's sacrifice. Kirryłow is going to sacrifice his freedom for human well-being, he wants to take away the fear of death completely. His gesture will turn out to be only an unsuccessful and terrible parody of Redemption, however Kirryłow's demeanor will become a warning about the greatest of the crimes, which can be committed by a human: a claim to take the place assigned exclusively to God. By killing myself, as the one, who was created in the image and similarity of God, I am killing the world of values and God within me. Kirryłow is not the only god-killer among the characters of Dostoevsky's works, his uniqueness is based only on the motives, which propel him, on the fact that they are completely altruistic and honest. In this literary figure the writer combined many opposite features, both those appreciated by him, and considered to be a real threat. "Understand me: a voluntary, totally conscious sacrifice of oneself in the interest of all, made under no sort of compulsion, is in my opinion a sign of the highest development of the personality".¹⁵

If Kirryłow had a different image of God, his intention would have never been created, as there would be no purpose for it to exist. God perceived as the Good Father, God felt as Love or, finally, God a therapist, who eliminates the innate disconnection from the Being, ceases to be a threat for the man. If we do not build our relations with God based on the principle of master-slave, we will make sure that the necessity for an uprising will never occur.

Kirryłow is one of the most interesting characters ever created by Dostoevsky, as he combines the characteristics of a mystic, incredible altruist and a man possessed by the demon of grandeur and a

¹⁴ F. Dostojewski, *Biesy*, transl. T. Zagórski, Z. Podgórzec, Puls, London 1992, p. 108-109.

¹⁵ Cited by J. Frank, *Dostoevsky. The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*, Princeton University Press 1995, p. 258.

blasphemer. The writer shows how many contradictions may be hidden inside and how easy it is, only following the mind, to become self-destructive. Demolishing the present order is the domain of Dostoevsky's characters, thus one may conclude that, based only on himself, a man will not build anything valuable. Kirryłow has a character, which predestined him to being someone uniquely good, however the concept "he lazed in America", took his freedom away. Mind captivated Kirryłow to such an extent that he took his own life. Not wanting to be hostage of the world created by God, he becomes prisoner of his own mind. The need to make himself a false God, is - according to Dostoevsky - the greatest perversion of human soul.

However, sometimes equally dangerous could be another idea of God, which we find out in the works of the Russian writer. It is a disaster for human beings, when God is something or someone distant and foreign, because then it is like he did not exist at all. And what lasts, these are only empty words about him. Distance in itself becomes the measure of the validity of God, because this is really important what is close and what we allowed to be close. Otherwise, God becomes something like a theoretical postulate, perhaps even well-rooted in tradition and culture, but the living presence of whom no one feels and no one is looking for closeness with him. Sudden and unexpected meeting so conceived God can bring only trouble and confusion in well or less structured reality. That is what *The Legend of Grand Inquisitor* is about. A similar motive we can find in a novel *The Idiot*. The main character of this novel is Prince Myshkin, who was created as an exemplification of the best man all over the world. Dostoevsky had such an idea and tended to its realization, it was called by him *a perfectly beautiful man*. Unfortunately, it cannot be said, that it was very successful experiment. Myshkin was thought as an imitation of living Christ. Despite all the anti-Catholic and nationalist themes, understood as the obvious aberrations of the writer, we can see Prince endowed with many positive features as: simplicity, directness, gentleness, avoiding judging others and boundless sincerity. Dostoevsky for a long time considered what such a character should be like.

Domination of himself out of pride (not morality) and rabid self-
license in everything. Consequently he could turn into a monster, but
love saves him. He becomes imbued with the most profound

compassion and forgives faults in others... In compassion he progressively develops a high moral sense and performs a heroic action.¹⁶

The first meeting of Myshkin is a huge challenge for people, because of the fact that social conventions are totally alien to him. Prince is mostly treated like a kind of freak, occasionally with closer examination gaining better opinion, however it often happens that his kindness is misused or used for different though not correct purposes. Not being able to stand up to abuse Prince seems to be completely helpless. His boundless confidence of virtue turns into an annoying flaw. And though he is devoid of pettiness, jealousy, he no one settles and does not condemn - his actions do not bring positive results. He is not the sower of the order. He becomes a tool in the hands of other people. His lack of assertiveness leads to chaos. His goodness is united with weakness. Prince can not be bad. Therefore, his actions are devoid of driving force. Myshkin is good, because he can not be otherwise. Goodness of Prince Myshkin is transformed into a caricature of good as itself and it is very far from the pattern left by Jesus Christ, as well. That second –before mentioned - dangerous idea of God deals with the image of someone who is so extremely good that he is not able to be different, and on the other side, someone who can be cheated and underestimated by others, which are counting on his endless mercy. Dostoevsky oscillates around the two images of God: fierce enemy of human freedom and naive, a little helpless one, who will forgive everything for everyone. What is most important about God Dostoevsky entered in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The Legend of Grand Inquisitor, the most famous part of *The Brothers Karamazov* refers to the image of a familiarized, absent God; a God, who gave all knowledge to an institution and forever has withdrawn from the world. The Inquisitor accuses Christ that he valued man too much, as the result of which he demanded too much of him. A man is not ready to live in a way recommended by the Savior, i.e. completely free and fully responsible, this is why he willingly agrees to give away his freedom to an organization, which in return for safety will direct his life. However, he does not notice the fact that by giving his life

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

to be ruled by the Inquisitor, he allows the existence of a world, in which there is no place for God himself. This is why, when Christ appears in Seville, the crowd allows him to be arrested. Nobody opposes the Inquisitor, despite the fact that everybody witnessed a miracle. Human frailty is incurable, in its presence Christ's love becomes incomprehensible and is perceived as an expression of weakness. Who would understand why perfect God loves a man, seeing the irreparable shortcomings of his nature, his incredible ingratitude?

Freedom refers to all that which is in no way contingent on the surface. That is why Christ – being tempted in the wilderness - rejects all proposals of Satan while not turning stones into bread. He avoids doing any wonders. He does not enslave a man by caring for all his needs, risking being accused of callousness. This motive was very important for the writer in his polemic with socialists and atheists, because it contains the most fundamental issues.

Such a temptation [fulfilling of all material needs – I.M.P], he argues, would be irresistible only to a «man-brute». But „if... there were no spiritual life, no ideal of beauty, then man would fall into anguish, would die, would go out of his mind, would kill himself, or would indulge in pagan fantasies.” Hence Christ decided that «it is better to inspire man’s soul with the ideal of beauty; possessing it in their souls, all will become brothers to one another, they will also be rich.» The question still remains, however, of why God should not have given man «Beauty and Bread together?» The answer is: «then man would be deprived of *labor, individuality, self-sacrifice of one’s own good for one’s neighbor* – in a word, deprived of all life, the ideal of life.»¹⁷

God remains someone incredibly distant and paradox-like, allowing the man to use one another in realizing his particular interests. *The Legend* makes us realize that if Christ appear once again, he would be once again crucified, as the man is still not ready for His arrival. The vision shown by Dostoevsky does not leave any illusions; nothing indicates that this state will undergo any radical changes ever. Christ remains silent, as he has already said everything and he knows that human beings are unable to hear His voice.

¹⁷ J. Frank, *Dostoevsky. The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2003, s. 286.

ABSTRACT

***A MAN IS FREE AS HE IS THE IMAGE OF GODLY FREEDOM.* FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT FREEDOM.**

The article presents Fyodor Dostoevsky's considerations of freedom based on both *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Idiot*. The writer shows, that dealing with own freedom is one of the greatest tasks in human life and man's future fate depends wholly on how he copes with this task. Freedom is a fundamental concept in a philosophical anthropology of the Russian novelist. According to his grasp of the problem of evil this is a man, who appears the source of all misery, which he brings upon himself, among which not atheism but false understanding of God is the greatest one.