

**A Reflection on Russia's Existential Nihilism from Dostoevsky's
Crime and Punishment and *Notes from the Underground***

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and Punishment* and *Notes from the Underground*

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

Crime and Punishment and *Notes from the Underground* are two remarkable novels written by Dostoevsky during the late nineteenth century. The novels centrally focus on the tale of poverty and suffering of Russia and how it triggered the philosophical theory of Existential Nihilism amongst the people during the nineteenth century. The author uses Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov and the anonymous narrator from the underground as the representation of the nineteenth-century existential nihilist from Russia, St. Petersburg. Both of the characters radiate an extreme egocentric and arrogant attitude who prefers alienating themselves from society as they denied abiding by society's requirement due to their disdain attitude towards it. Not only the characters but the city of St. Petersburg as well as supreme element that significantly features the emerging pessimism in Russia. The city is not merely a backdrop to these novels but an embodiment of misleading radical and moral ideas being introduced in Russia. It embodies the intense pessimism that condemned human existence during that time. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to explore and scrutinize the reasons and triggering factors of Existential Nihilism in Russia in the novels *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from the underground* by scrutinizing Dostoevsky's stand concerning social, political and moral state of affairs in Nineteenth-century Russia, his approach of sketching the characters of Raskolnikov and the underground man through their perceptions, actions and in addition the diction used in these novels.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of existence has always been questioned by human minds. It is not once in a blue moon that a person finds himself wondering about the exact purpose of his existence? Often this question frustrates the human mind claiming that they did not choose to be a part of this world, of this society and its miseries, then why were they forced to be a part of it? Sometimes this frustration of not understanding his purpose of existence makes his whole sense of existence collapse. This un-understandable complex urge of the human mind struggles to figure out their existential purpose. These people strongly believe that the world itself serves no meaning of existence and is a place where misery resides for the less substantial minds and only the most intelligent minds have the ability to survive through their ideals. The notion behind such a revolting orientation is presumed to be Existential Nihilism. While Nihilism is associated with terms like skepticism and pessimism Existential Nihilism denotes the purpose of world itself. Strongly believing that human's joy, sufferings, agony feelings are empty. The only sense that they believe in is their intelligence. Existential Nihilism comes from the distorted perception that leads oneself towards their ethical decay and self-destruction. These individuals try to justify themselves with their distorted and dogmatic wit, believing that in a delusional world that serves no meaning they are the only ones born with the privilege to act upon their will without having to explain themselves to the society. Perceiving themselves as the ultimate minds who do not need society's guidance, they claim to be superior to the people who enslave themselves by abiding by the rules of society.

Although Existential Nihilism entices low-spirited personas who appear as intensely skeptic with dogmatic attitude towards their existence, As observed, existential nihilists strongly denote the possibility of a meaningful existence because according to them society restricts one's free will, however they are the same people who imposes their will on the society. To elaborate, existential nihilists creates their own rules and adamantly abides by them to survive in the world they find meaningless. These individuals believe as they do not consider themselves to be a part of the society that they are above any law. As a result they involve themselves to perceive actions without worrying about the outcome and get themselves in unlawful

consequences. What makes it more interesting is that the actions they undertake are mostly negative and desire ill for the commoners of the society. They hold the society accountable for their sufferings and nefarious attitude towards the innocent. It can be observed that these self-proclaimed sufferers are the main reason for their downfall. To continue, the contradiction to the nihilist's belief takes place when they claim that feelings are meaningless yet they perceive hatred towards the society they belong to and hatred is a form of feeling. They consciously or subconsciously mention about the sufferings they have faced because of the society which brings out their wrath and anger which at the same time represents their sufferings and feelings. Apparently, as Shakespeare says "'Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot..." (Shakespeare 72)

Many famous names have been associated with this theory over the years, for instance, Albert Camus, Max Stirner, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Seraphim Rose and Soren Kierkegaard are profoundly admired. However, the core contributor for this thesis is Fyodor Dostoevsky. The particular notion was first introduced by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and his contributions to assembling the notion explicitly interpretable. While he is regarded as the fundamental representation of nihilism Dostoevsky is admired for adding new expositions to nihilism. A sense of curiosity and amusement is aroused by Dostoevsky's works through his formation of delusional, uncompromising and peculiar characters who appear as common as the people of the society yet they are filled with disproportional complexity. These characters are overshadowed by their own intellectualism as if cursed and pulled down to the end of their logical reasoning with their nihilistic revolt. He uses the idea of revolt in his works as a socio-political device in the guise of existential nihilism, pointing out the appalling condition of nineteenth-century Russia. He described the barbaric impact on the people who were pushed to the edge of depression, being at a loss of hope and rejecting every aspect of positivity of their existence.

It is praiseworthy, how the author gives equal attention to the role of Russia behind its people and their complex nature. Dostoevsky specifies the increasing tension and dramatic political, economic, and social changes have affected the notion of denial of existence. Their attempt of alienation detaching

themselves from the normality of the society rather than suffocating in the decimated lifestyle effectuated by industrialization as well as the Tsarist reform and repression during the 1860s . Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels foreground characters to explore the satisfactory answers to their nihilistic tendencies triggered by the nineteenth century Russia questioning the existence of morals and values of the institutions as the overpowering animosity swelled during the despotic authority of the Czar. To him, "A nihilist is a person who does not bow down to any authority and who does not accept any principle on faith" because "conditions in the social organization are so bad as to make destruction desirable for its own sake, independent of any constructive program or possibility is the only escape." (Dostoevsky 75)

Moreover, the fact that Dostoevsky himself was a casualty of nineteenth-century Russia. His life consisted of phases where he encountered the crisis of Russia. From his early life to his experience in Siberia he had artistically expressed his views of the panorama of the existential nihilists. Hence, the aim of this thesis will be to focus on the interpretation of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from the Underground* followed by how Dostoevsky interprets existential nihilism by examining the Russian society through the eyes of these nihilist archetype breaking heroes who are deeply involved in Russia's socio-political ideologies, emphasizing not only on how they view the society but why they are viewing it in that manner, focusing on the degradation of the social, economic and political abhorrence of nineteenth century Russia.

Chapter 2

Unveiling the Author: Fyodor Dostoevsky

Dostoevsky is one of the very few writers who used fiction to argue against his claims, if one wishes to discern the full contours of his views on existential nihilism one must turn to his stories and novels. He words his opinion and it is upon the readers to determine to what extent, if any, the statements of his narrators and characters express his own views. Regarded as one of the most celebrated novelists of Russia Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was born in Moscow, Russia on October 30, 1821 to a nobility. He was born as the second child of eight children to Dr. Mikhail Dostoevsky and Maria Dostoevskaya. He was exposed to the world of education and religion by his family as his paternal roots were of priests. A religious primer taught him to read and write. His father Mikhail Andreevich was a prominent part of his life. The father is described as a man of moral defects. Over the years of his life this revolutionary Russian novelist has undergone through several sufferings. He experienced a tough childhood as his family life was distressful due to his father's tormenting nature towards him, his mother -a fragile and sickly woman and his siblings,

“Being a man of extremely difficult temperature, sullen, contentious and suspicious the members of the Dostoevsky family used to be the victim of his wrath which subjected young Fyodor to attacks of depression... the children used to tremble in front of their father fearing his angry outbursts” (Mochulsky 8).

Dostoevsky's childhood became more desolate with his mother's early demise in 1873 due to Tuberculosis. She belonged to the merchant class considered belonging to a lower social ladder. Young Dostoevsky was the closest to his mother and would speak of her with delightful fervor. Young Dostoevsky encountered another emotional trauma during his father's death. Long believed, Dr. Mikhail was brutally murdered in his country estate by his serfs in 1839 according to the local rumor the reason behind the assassination was Mikhail's brutish and despotic behavior towards his serfs. Dostoevsky has taken

experiences from his life and canvased it into his literary works. The character of Fyodor Karamazov, the father in *The Brothers Karamazov* who was murdered by one of his sons due to his brutish nature is based on the murder of Dostoevsky's father.

Young Dostoevsky started his early life by enrolling into a military engineering school in St. Petersburg in 1838 and lived times of poverty and hardship. From the very beginning of his childhood, he learned to cope with the haphazard and underprivileged economic status of his family. As mentioned his mother belonged to a lower social class than his father and his father was ranked nobility a rank established by Peter the Great as a formal list of positions for the military and the court of imperial of Russia. The system was introduced in 1722 to reorganize the foundation of feudal Russian nobility by honoring their service in the military. Unfortunately, the social ranking failed to provide him with equal status as his literary contemporaries rather his social status was far from elevated. The book *Dostoevsky: His Life & Work* contains letters collected by the author about Dostoevsky which he had sent to his father exhibiting his sufferings and failure to fulfill his basic needs. The letter as well brings out the adroitness of his artistry through writing.

Cost at very minimum of forty rubbles. (I am writing you all this because I am writing to my own father). In this sum I do not include such wants as, for example, to have tea, sugar and so on. This some even without that is indispensable, and is not only indispensable merely for propriety's sake but out of sheer need. When in foul weather the rain soaks you in your linen tent, or in such weather coming back from exercise, tired frozen through one can fall sick without proper precautions. This happened to me last year during maneuvers. But all the same I respect your need, and so will not drink tea. I only want that which is indispensable for two pairs of ordinary rubles – Sixteen rubles.

(5)

For Dostoevsky, entering the military was a choice of survival nonetheless literature had always been his passion, ever since he learned to read. He found the means of expressing his views through the art of writing, his writings are his views that he could never express verbally. However “the impressions young

Dostoevsky acquired through literature helped his introspective withdrawn persona to open up in front of others.” (12) His early fictions focused on the piteous and miserable condition of the misfortunate people of Russia. He was embraced with success in 1846 through his first novel *Poor Folk*, which gained him appreciation and position amongst the leading writers of his time who grouped themselves in Belinsky’s natural school program as young emerging writers as Turgenev and Goncharov as well as Dostoevsky himself, including the "civic" poet Nekrasov.

His literary works have always been a projection of the downcast woeful experiences of his life as well as the rigorous condition of Russia he grew up in. Dostoevsky formed a secret society called "Mephistopheles" with the purpose of circulating propaganda among the peasantry aimed at stirring up a revolution against serfdom. This formation not only revolutionized Russia but his writings as well“...no other novelist managed to come to grip so thoroughly with all the essential questions of life: good and evil, love and hate, doubt and faith, self-assertion and divine law, determinism and free will, crime and punishment, and the conflict between society and the unbridled individual (Fuyeloep -Miller 259) His literary works gave its characters the liberty to express their inner most thoughts and feelings. His preference for dramatic monologues and dialogues in his works is to blend the character's consciousness in a manner anticipating later developments of the stream-of-consciousness technique. *Notes from the Underground* exemplify his poetic preference to beautify the expression of his character. The novel’s introductory part is written in a form of monologue also known as the underground man’s diary and the latter part of the novel is written in “Apropos of the Wet Snow” it described events which happened to appear to Dostoevsky as oscillation of his stream of consciousness by dwindling between new ideas and sometimes either embracing the ideas and sometimes rejecting them.

The transition from religious Dostoevsky to the Dostoevsky who started experimenting with existential nihilist started taking shape in 1849. Dostoevsky along with seven others known as Petrashevsky group was arrested with the allegation of having a link with radical and anti-government activities at that time. Besides Dostoyevsky acclaimed Russian critic Belinsky, writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, Russian

poet Aleksey Pleshcheyev, and the famous painter Taras Shevchenko were involved in the Petrashevsky group. The group's activities included revolting against serfdom, discussing socialist politics as well as boldly criticizing Tsar Nicholas I and reading banned literature eventually leading these rejectionists towards a daunting experience. The intellectual literary group aimed to circulate propaganda for revolution against the harrowing serfdom. Sosnak comments "Though, Dostoevsky rarely participated in the theoretical public discussions; on the few occasions when he did speak, it was to castigate, with passionate indignation, the intolerable injustice of this keystone of the Russian social order."

Consequently, The Petrashevsky were arrested by the secret police of Nicholas I was determined to penalize the revolutionary groundswell sweeping over Europe, not to tolerate these treasonists of Russia. The defining moment of Dostoevsky's life occurred after he was submitted with the other convicts to the mock ordeal of his execution in Semyonov Square. The ordeal was a vivacious form of mental stress from Tsar to the convicts. As the convicts were forced to believe that their life will be soon curtailed by the firing squad standing right in front of them with their hands on the trigger a messenger from the Tsar of Russia came with "a show of mercy". It is rather understandable that this was not a show of mercy by Tsar, but a barbarous way to trigger fear, terror, and gratitude towards the serfdom.

This literary intelligentsia's curiosity for religious-metaphysical realm started shifting towards the belief that moral values has lost their significance therefore their existence has lost significance. "His belief in the importance for the human personality of a sense of its own freedom in its existence, already present in his rejection of Socialist blueprints, was immensely broadened and deepened after the sadistic charade set by Tsar." (17) The next four years of Dostoevsky's life after the mock ordeal is considered equally important in his conceptual transition. In 1850 he was sent to Siberia by Nicholas I and was convicted to spend four years of his life with misbehaving, brutish and black hearted lawbreakers amongst whom several were charged with murders. Raskolnikov's experience after his conviction in Siberia in the novel *Crime and Punishment* is inspired by the insufferable overpowering four years of Dostoevsky's life. The exile is considered as an evolving period of Dostoevsky as a writer and thinker, whose thoughts expanded beyond

poverty and the gap between poor and rich; he started exploring the purpose of existence and actions of human minds. “What Dostoyevsky gained in prison - a remarkable breadth of tragic vision and a painful new understanding of the violent, irrepressible human impulse toward self-expression- he later injected into the novels he started writing soon after returning to civilization: *Crime and Punishment*,’ (*New York Times*. 1986) Therefore, it can be said that his experience in Siberia provided him with both inspiration for his exploration of the concept of existential nihilistic writings as well as haunting memories which terrified him till his demise.

Chapter 3

The Metamorphosis of Russia during the Nineteenth Century

Prior to understanding the concept behind Dostoevsky’s Existential Nihilistic novels *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from the Underground* the rising tension during the nineteenth century in Russia and the reasons behind it requires to be explored because Dostoevsky’s novels were by-products of his encounter of that time. The anarchism of nineteenth-century Russia is considered as the rationalization behind nihilism. The early and the mid-nineteenth century was a period of rising lawlessness and political anarchism which created a massive economic and social disparities between the Russians. The changes during industrialization are held responsible for creating wealth disparity in Russia, new social classes were formed known as the bourgeoisie and the ancient aristocratic power edged towards its end. Moreover, Industrialization triggered an aspiration for a constitution consisting of values like human rights, a representative government, whereas Russia had always been under the strict control of the monarchs during the nineteenth century it realized the necessity to modernize similar to its fellow neighbors.

The early period of nineteenth century was ruled by the Tsars, the epitome of sovereignty, their opinionated philosophies largely affected the history and culture of the vast empire were. Alexander I emerged as the first czar of the nineteenth century during the Napoleonic wars, he was estimated as a

moderate ruler who relaxed political repression. “Alexander I happens to be comparatively pious and inclined than his ancestors for which he was respected by his people after his death revolts stirred as people argued over his successor Nicholas I. Nicholas was detested by the serfs for his harsh treatment towards them.” (Gerome 429) As Nicholas I ascended the throne after his brother’s demise he handled the serfs with much uncompromising and authoritarian manner. The ruling Tsar had a strong opinionated conservative belief towards serfdom; the serfs are born to be the servers of the aristocrats he believed. He was left infuriated and somewhat intimidated during the revolts of the serfs during his accession, presumably he could picture the indestructible aspiration for a democratic change. To immobilize the intense revolt and preserve his dominance he started restricting education so that revolutionary ideas would not spread across Russia.

Regrettably for Nicholas I, in the Beginning of 1860, Russian culture was dominated by a new educated group named “intelligentsia”. A term coined by Polish intellectual Bronisław Trentoski, a revolt for democracy against the Tsar by maneuvering their critique and guidance to reshape the cultural and political situation of Russia. Bowman describes “ the ‘Intelligentsia , as a hailed educated status class intellectuals including of artists, teachers, and academics, writers, journalists, and the literary hommes de lettres. “Considered as the influencer of the society with complex mental labor... they were at the functional periphery of their societies as their political role varied between either the progressive or regressive transition of the societies.” They were supported by a regiment of soldiers who refused to pay allegiance to the new crown, demanding the establishment of a Russian constitution influenced by the words of the intelligentsias. The aspirants welcomed westernized ideas in hope of subduing Napoleon Bonaparte. The Westernized Russians primarily known as the Decembrists were distressed on both of the aristocrats for awarding Poland with a constitution while they were suppressed under the dictatorial Tsars, proclaiming independence, and aspiration toward freedom of self-expression.

Opportunely, the expansion of knowledge subsided social backwardness and political repression of Russia developing the literary dimensions of the country. Earlier in nineteenth century education was

availed depending on one's social position, the serfs were restricted from attending any form of schools. The intelligentsia and Decembrists played a major role in educating the peasants. Reading, writing, arithmetic, history and geography were the subjects; though politics was subtly avoided. During the reign of Alexander the second, women were empowered to education. "Despite the fact that education was yet to reach approximately 70% of the male and 90% of the female serfs during 1897 however it is undeniable that education started being introduced amongst them. The education system was strictly monitored under the surveillance of Tsar, the state appointed inspectors to observe the students behavior, the students weren't allowed to gather in groups greater than five people." (Mark 257)

Conversely, in terms of Russian Literature the Intelligentsia was greatly disputed. The group availed literature as a form of socialist propaganda through the rejection of aesthetic criteria or apolitical works. The group welcomed Lenin, Stalin, and other Bolsheviks who seized power in 1917. The critic Mikhail Gershenzon observed that "an almost infallible gauge of the strengths of an artist's genius is the extent of his hatred for the intelligentsia." Typically, the writers objected to the intelligentsia's intellectual intolerance, addiction to theory, and belief that morality was defined by utility to the revolution. Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Anton Chekhov were all sharply contemptuous of the intelligentsia." (Blum 257) However it is undeniable that both the groups shared a common set of beliefs, including a fanatic faith in revolution, atheism, and materialism.

In the nineteenth century knowledge and art became the reflection of the flourishing Russian culture. Many prominent writers, novelists and poets sculptured Russia into a Golden Age of literature with some of the indisputable masterworks of world literature. Russian literature glorifies the transition from less advanced empire to the well-developed Western Europe. Leo Tolstoy. Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, and the prime novelist of this thesis Fyodor Dostoevsky. These are some of the most distinguished realist writers that worded precise descriptions of Russia's surrounding. Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* unforgettably Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from the*

Underground are a number of novels that glorify the heroic rebels with their individuality and eccentricity during nineteenth century Russia.

In short, the nineteenth Century is hailed as the unsurpassable period of Russia for sheer concentrated literary brilliance. It is presumed that in a remarkably short period the indisputable masterworks of world literature brought greater prestige in Russia than in the West. The period associates with the Imperial and post-Revolutionary periods, identifying with unique characteristics, intensely concerned with philosophical problems, a constant self-consciousness and its relation to the society. A strong tendency toward formal innovation could be traced in formal radicalism. The writer's preoccupation with abstract philosophical issues distinguishes the recognizable aura of Russian classics. Dostoevsky believed, the achievements during his period upholds the very existence of Russian intellectual life and developing political perception. Therefore, the analysis of Dostoyevsky's works are central to the thesis as an exploration of all philosophical, moral, existential and religious analysis through literature and criticism as these were deeply intertwined in describing Existential Nihilism of Russian literature for formal as well as thematic reasons.

Chapter 4

A Preface to Existential Nihilism

Existential Nihilism grasps the thought that the world needs importance or reason. All presence itself - activities, enduring, emotions - is silly, nothingness. The existential agnostic views all contemplations and sentiments as just the impacts of earlier causes. At the end of the day, unrestrained choice is denied. Neither heredity nor condition is ascribed to the skeptic's purposeless presence. The logician and artist from Sicily, c. 492-432 BC known as Empedocles of Acagras describes this distrust as "the life of humans is so ungracious they chose to un-life themselves." This statement can be assumed as an indication towards suicide however it indicates towards the harsh transition of a person where they

deviate themselves from society and morality. This typifies a similar sort of outrageous negativity related with existential skepticism. The concept forsakes any establishment for a basic self or human instinct. The agnostic is then left with anguish as their "nothingness," ushers them into a detached, lethargic universe. Hundreds of years after the fact, Jean-Paul Sartre promoted the agnostic existentialist skeptic development in France as "presence goes before embodiment."

To elaborate, the existentialists observed that despite the fact that several individuals intuitively acknowledge the insignificance of their existence yet they continue to search for their purpose of existence. This is what Camus describes as "the absurd" According to him there are three influential options to deal with this existential angst, the first suggests to embrace and abide by the religion whole heartedly the second requires one to give upon life or in simple words commit suicide as he believed that if there were no life the angst would not be there as well. The last one associates with existential nihilism, which he called "radical freedom," suggesting "the only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion." Therefore it can be remarked for the existentialists, nothingness is the wellspring of outright opportunity as well as existential repulsiveness and passionate anguish. Nothingness uncovers every person as a disengaged being "tossed" into an outsider and lethargic universe.

The ongoing idea in the writing of the existentialists is adapting to the passionate anguish emerging from our encounter with nothingness, and they used extraordinary vitality reacting to the point of where enduring it was conceivable. Their answer was a qualified "Yes," supporting a recipe of energetic duty of the emotionless and the un-emotionless. By and large, it was a tale entangled with urgency in light of the fact that in a lunatic world there are definitely no rules, and any game-plan is hazardous. Energetic responsibility, be it to triumph, creation, or whatever, is itself aimless. Dostoevsky demonstrates the way everybody handles their dilemma in such peculiar manner since we are generally in charge of aggravating a grieved state by our dull-witted activity and inaction alike. In these works and different works by the existentialists, one is frequently left with the feeling that living really with the triviality of life is extravagant.

Fredrick Nietzsche, the pioneer of modern pessimism, undermines the comforting lies of the existentialist nihilists to find meaning in order to survive in life that otherwise appears to be purposeless. He despises the values that make human beings weaker, such as believing in an external force such as God, religion, morality and other mediocre thoughts that don't let people reach their potential. He proposed to destroy all these illusions of meaning, and doing so he can appear to be a nihilist. However he suggests other values that he presumes to attribute purpose in life and that are not based on delusions and self-deception that is the creative capacity, the will to power and potential achievements of humanity. Nietzsche extolled philosophy as the *Death of God*. Nietzsche wasn't trying to literally define the mortality of a supreme being, he rather questioned the ability of religious institutions to provide an adequate moral compass for humanity. In doing so, however, he helped set the foundation for modern philosophical ideologies that deny the existence of any sort of deity. Of course, even without belief in a deity, people still argue over their worldviews.

Apparently, skepticism was inevitably imbued with the existentialist center on how a person encounters existential skepticism, a doubtful and cynical philosophy that sees all presence as aimless. Bliss, distress, enduring, triumph and all other human encounters have no inner meaning or esteem, nor does life itself. This belief system was advanced by French rationalist Jean-Paul Sartre, who broadly lauded that "existence goes before essence". In brief, presence is genuine but we make meaning for it. Stripping absent the dream of meaning uncovers the genuine baselessness of all ethical quality and meaning.

To continue, in his study of meaninglessness, Donald Crosby writes that the source of existential nihilism paradoxically stems from a commitment to honest intellectual openness. "Once set in motion, the process of questioning could come to but one end, the erosion of conviction and certitude and collapse into despair" (*The Specter of the Absurd* 1988). When a sincere inquiry is extended to moral convictions and social consensus, it can bring in lethal consequences. Crosby describes these forces as the promoting elements of ultimate destruction of the civilizations. Similarly, Michael Novak's recently revised *The Experience of Nothingness* (1968, 1998) describes of a similar perception supporting the fact "existential

nihilism paralyzes realism” pointing towards the depressing findings from the earlier century. However, Both of the authors stresses on ways out of the abyss by focusing on the positive aspects nothingness reveals, such as the concept of liberty, freedom, and creative possibilities. Novak, for example, describes how since WWII we have been working to "climb out of nihilism" on the way to building a new civilization.

Though Carr concludes by criticizing the implications as ‘alarming’, he explains, if the aspects of existential nihilism are accepted as a form of liberty, then intellectual or moral arrogance due to lack of proper knowledge regarding freedom will determine nothing but the disfigurement of human moralities. Even worse, the banalization of the meaning of existence creates an environment where ideas can be imposed forcibly to create a metaphysical collapse. It's a conclusion that dovetails nicely with Nietzsche's, who pointed out that all interpretations of the world are simply manifestations of will-to-power.

Chapter 5

The Projection of Existential Nihilism in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from the Underground*

The common thread in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from the Underground* is of the lost existentialists struggling to cope with their emotional anguish arising from their confrontation with nothingness. Dostoevsky portrays the protagonists' journey in expending great energy responding to the question of whether surviving it was possible. The analysis concludes their answer to be a devastating "No," advocating a bigot's passionate commitment and impassive stoicism against a developing capitalist Russia resulted in their ultimate doom in their self-created absurdity with absolutely no guidelines. However such passionate commitment to conquest an absurd change in the societal norms is itself meaningless. The novels illustrates the transition of Russia along with two fictional yet realistic demonstration of failed

products of capitalism. The city represents the characters and the characters represent the city and altogether the novels describe Dostoevsky's interpretation.

The novels are set against the unforgiving sociological decay prevailing in nineteenth century Russia, as the underground man describes "horribly bloodthirsty". Dostoevsky carefully grounds both the novels in St. Petersburg describing the decay of Russia. It is assumed, when the anonymous underground man introduces himself ... "I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man" he is not introducing himself but a spiteful unattractive Russia. This novel was published prior to the publication of *Crime and Punishment*, the novel's central character Raskolnikov describes his victim Alyona the pawnbroker as a "louse", a bloodsucking parasite living on another's blood alike the condition of the bourgeoisie and proletariats of nineteenth century Russia. Alyona symbolizes exploitation, she is amongst those of the many upper class who have been contributing to class disparity. The novels trace the cramped poverty, disease, and crime behind the artificial beauty of the city. The setting of both the novels creates such a believable atmosphere with such specific detailed descriptions because he knew the city so well the readers could experience similar sights and smells his fictional characters experienced. The novels describes the mind of an individual on the margins of modern society, and examines the effects modern life has on that man's personality.

Particularly picking summer as a setting of *Crime and punishment* as well as emphasizing on the overcrowded streets of Russia with reeked air Dostoevsky aims at describing a physical repulsion triggered by an oppressive environment, the summer is the representation of the heated declining social condition of Russia, it is notable how not for once he mentions the over-populated, contaminating environment of the city but he describes casually letting the readers figure out the seriousness of the situation. By mentioning that it is exactly seven hundred thirty steps from Raskolnikov's house from the pawnbroker's one can forever walk the ways with the protagonist through such concrete physical details emphasizing on the novel's realism. Correspondingly, Dostoevsky's goals with *Notes from Underground* presumes to criticize the intelligentsia by exploring the rising conflict between ideology and experience. For instance, the

Underground Man's outright criticism of rationalist and utopian ideas which he describes "the only gain of civilization for mankind is the greater capacity for variety of sensations--and absolutely nothing more. And through the development of this many-sidedness man may come to finding enjoyment in bloodshed." (44) It seems to be, he resents the nineteenth century's unrealistic, over-analytical assessments of human nature. *Notes from Underground* depicts the fact that society's ideologies often end in contradicting its experiences.

Similarly, the clutter and chaotic St. Petersburg represents a two-fold symbol. Upholding the prejudices, inequalities and deficits of artificial Russia it also stresses on the victimizing nature of man-made violent civilization. Both the characters are not only jailed to the dystopian Russia but to their distorted minds as well. As the 'heat' and the 'odor' distresses Raskolnikov. Dostoevsky specifies the heat and the odor coming from places the protagonist encounters crimes. Let it be the dirty streets of Russian where a teenage drunk girl is followed by a middle aged man or be the house of Sonia, Raskolnikov's love interest and a daughter who has been forced into prostitution by her own drunkard father to support the family. The incidents specify, crime was a cardinal issue during the time both these novels were written. Denby describes it as the "city of extremis." (The New Yorker) Likewise, throughout the entire novel the anonymous underground man addresses his imaginary audience, whom he refers to as "you" and "ladies and gentleman" presumably a representative group of educated, Westernized Russians whom he despises. However his tone is constantly cynical. He purports the flawed western ideologies. The underground man words Dostoevsky's ideas and antipathies of his Slavophil reactionaries towards then capitalizing Russia.

The period covered by these novels, nineteenth century Russia transitioned through the changes of Industrial revolution. According to Dostoevsky the changes intrigued a person's moral break down, the intensity of the developing technology and the widening gap between the rich and poor creates a mental anguish ending in paranoia, which he describes as existential crisis. He makes frequent references to how his existence in St. Petersburg, in most ways is not advantageous to the characters, he further describes how the victims of the industrial revolution thrive to discover their identity. The underground man describes the city as expensive and his ill health due to lack of resources, however his revolt comes out as strong as ever

and speaks of the narrators existential nihilistic nature “I shall not leave St. Petersburg! I shan’t leave it because ... Ah well! – it doesn’t make a damned bit of difference whether I leave it or not” (6). He describes his life in a city which is “abstract and premeditated in the whole wide world”, St. Petersburg as “misfortune”. Such statements from the underground man stand correct as nineteenth century St. Petersburg was labelled as the “city of bones” due to so many tragic deaths in the process of its urbanization and industrialization, these people were buried underneath the foundations of this luxurious city. Dostoevsky brings out the similar sights in *Crime and Punishment* the Haymarket in mentioned in the novels reflects how imperial capital gives way to poverty, squalor, and moral frailty. The city is not merely used as a backdrop but a reality of nineteenth century, the disappointment of the founder Peter the great.

It is loud and clear that Dostoevsky directly accuses capitalism to be the significant reason behind existential nihilism. He suggests the effects of civilization has directly impacted on human nature. Raskolnikov believed Alyona’s wealth could be of best use through him, according to the measurers of class is knowledge, as he describes Raskolnikov “Existence alone had never been enough for him; he had always wanted more. Perhaps it was only from the force of his desires that he had regarded himself as a man to whom more was permitted than to others.” (135) He lost his purpose of existence in the greed of attaining more than his capabilities. On the other hand, the underground man describes about a palace built out of crystal in London back in 1851. He disputes each and everything the building represents. From the industrial capitalism to its scientific rationality that robotize human morality, similarly as Sartre describes capitalism “All materialist philosophies create man as an object, a stone.” The underground man claims human nature to be unfathomable. He exemplifies by claiming if given the chance they would deny the obvious two and to makes four. As he claims the mere right to dominate their perception is way more important to them than agreeing with the normality, because they want to be superior, be it through denial and resistance. In the words of Raskolnikov “That's just the point: an honest and sensitive man opens his heart, and the man of business goes on eating - and then he eats you up.” (79) Greenberg in his book *Crime and Capitalism* emphasize on similar prospect of the possible involvement between praxis and Marxist

criminology. The city of St. Petersburg demonstrates such extremist Marxist urban crimes attempted by Raskolnikov and other fellow Russian and described by the underground man. Engels describes such corrupted Political and economic lust came into being as a natural activities of daily life due to the expansion of trade; developed a system of licensed fraud, an entire science of enrichment. As the underground man comments as a result of the quest for civilization, man “has certainly become viler in his quest for blood than before” (22)

St. Petersburg serves an imperative role to describe existential nihilism because Dostoevsky’s wanted to express the man’s suffocation lacking the sense of freedom. The acute narration of the poor and unsanitariness slum areas of St. Petersburg was due to his own personal experiences. The analytical outcome of the city foreground the precise methodical and modern analysis of existential nihilism of Fredrick Nietzsche. Raskolnikov and the underground man appears to be representatives of his claims “all people should strive to be a superman with the guidance of their personal power, let it be knowledge or resistance” and the inspiration to his profound analysis happens to be Dostoevsky. After reading *Notes from the Underground* Nietzsche remarked Dostoevsky as the only person who has been able to enlightened him elaborately about psychology and clarify his doubts regarding existential nihilism. The underground man and Raskolnikov determines the mental state that pressurizes man to think ill and commit crime in search of freedom. The author carefully brings in how these characters are unaffectionate, they are rarely seen to care about what their surroundings will feel or how it will affect them rather just taking their belief to be the utmost reality.

Raskolnikov and the underground man is used as an existential nihilist’s transition from a primitive to a full grown adult. Raskolnikov exhibits the early traits of a person who seems to have lost all hopes in life, his actions appears to be arrogant and nonsensical. The character of Raskolnikov appears to dogmatically claim that his actions are for improving his and his family’s fortune however these actions are mostly unappreciative. While his act of kindness towards Sonia and the anonymous teen girl makes him look like a kindhearted man however it can be assumed that his empathy towards them was because they

were related to his emotions. He fell in love with Sonia and therefore wanted to impress her and that's why he invested his last kopecks to help her family perhaps later he developed empathy for them. Again, he anonymously helped the teenage girl because she was almost the age of his sister Dounia, he saw her reflection in the young girl. Being aware of the fact that his sister was trapped in a relationship with a man who disrespected her and wanted her merely as a trophy to show, also to mention Dounia had been a victim of molestation by her master where Raskolnikov could not do anything to help her. Perhaps that's the reason he wanted to make sure the young girl does not fall to be the next victim. The assumptions can be justified because there were hundreds of people around this man suffering from similar issues however he chose to help these two particular person because they appeared to be important to them and that's why he particularly helped them and not others.

The underground man is a more detached and cold hearted persona than Raskolnikov. The anonymous man's character expressed his inner emotions that he experienced during the end stage of his life. Interestingly, Sigmund Freud's investigations of person's psychological states of mind that instigate man to commit certain crimes. These researches were published followed by Dostoevsky's works of *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from the Underground*. At least Raskolnikov attempted to sustain something from his life but the unnamed narrator shows no interest in survival, he has completely given up on his life. He declares "I am a sick man ... I am an angry man. I am an unattractive man." (1) He refuses treatment for his ailing liver, he also acknowledges the fact that by doing so he is harming no one else but himself. This acknowledgement refers to his loss of purpose. He claims that he is a "wicked man" and he does not want to be treated out of his wickedness, he has reached a point of ennui where he finds pleasure in solitary. He speaks out of extreme spite, he mentions his gains of only nastiness, anger and depression. Through this character, Dostoevsky rejects the central claim of existentialism "existence precedes essence", according to his judgement "the best definition of man is the ungrateful biped. But that is not all that is not his worst defect; his worst defect is his perpetual moral obliquity..." (33)

Significantly, the description of Raskolnikov and the underground man's appearance can be considered as Dostoevsky's witty approach towards his presumptions of an existential nihilist's transition. Raskolnikov is a charismatic man, his appearance makes him look socially desired. Dostoevsky describes him as "exceptionally handsome" nevertheless, the author also describes his ramshackle attire as "he was so badly dressed that even a man accustomed to shabbiness would have been ashamed to be seen in the street in such rags." (5) His attire symbolizes his necrotizing morals caused by the economic inequality. Morals are perceived to be proper and honorable alike his handsome appearance vice versa his shabby cloths are the decaying morality that makes him appear less acceptable, alienating him from the society. Dostoevsky sketches him as a primitive existential nihilist. . Frank writes, Falling under the Influence of the strange, unfinished ideas that float in the atmosphere, he decides to break out of his disgusting position at one stroke by killing an old pawnbroker. (346) In contrast, the underground man is severely misanthropic. Unlike Raskolnikov he describes his own appearance. He describes him as an "unattractive man", supposedly socially unattractive, he mentions his alienation from the society for twenty years. He has a disrupted rationale, his ability to rationalize logically reversed into absolute denial of reality. In the words of ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes he has experienced split of consciousness therefore he rejected the society.

The plot of *Notes from Underground* developed upon two essential dramatic scenes from the experience of the underground man. Firstly, the experience that highlights his engulfment with the rising nihilism of the sixties and secondly, he appears to demonstrate the social romanticism of the forties. So, a reverse chronological time lapse in the novel can be noticed. The contradictions of new ideals with then social structure of Russia is prominent. It images particular psychological aberrant condition due to the contradictions. Dostoevsky's aim in *Crime and Punishment* was to stablish sufferings as a price of redemption. He explored the neutralizing results of self-loath and guilt. Raskolnikov re. He resembles the great Napoleon, for whom any act is justified if he deems it right. . He believes himself to be superior and further thinks that a superior man cannot be held tied for the morality given by common man. "The novel

reflects Dostoevsky's concerns about the generation of new men and the rise of nihilism.” (Sosnak 156) Dostoevsky uses him as an *Übermensch*. During the French Revolution, a rise of the *Übermensch*, a philosophy by Friedrich Nietzsche, an attitude in Europe emerged amongst the people. They perceived themselves to be Supermen and made justifications to their sinful actions, then claiming the offences to be a goal for humanity to set for itself.

Though Dostoevsky, thoroughly sketches Raskolnikov as an *Übermensch*. His intention was not to hail the philosophy but to assess whether the rising nihilism amongst these self-acclaimed supermen is a solution or not. Dostoevsky created the character of Raskolnikov to demonstrate the varieties of layers of man’s psychology. A man’s elemental struggles of what is good for him and what is bad, he shows how death as a capital punishment and murder is almost the same. Both cannot be justified. He shows man’s struggle of belief and reason which makes them take foolish decisions.” He exposes the split personalities that can be found in men, Raskolnikov is a modern representative of young modern Russia whose fate is reshaped by his superior ego and nihilism as the skeptical young youths of nineteenth century” (Sosnak 159) He describes the character as handsome young and intelligent man with a very ill health. He despises human company yet craves someone to talk to at times. As it can be seen in part one chapter two where he is seen to develop an interest to talk to Mr. Marmalov. He is severely victimized by poverty yet suffers more from his ego which is a result of his higher education which makes him to take himself as an extraordinary man superior to others. His preposterous theory behind the murder comes from his absurd belief that every extraordinary men existing in the world is born with the right to commit any sort of crime against the common man as being an extraordinary person they have more to offer than the regular people.

Similarly, Dostoevsky shows Egoism to clarify the underground man’s self-created suffering. His enhanced sense of self is at once his greatest strength and most powerful weakness, his sufferings is caused by his paradox of need to belong. He oscillates between the struggles to attain a sense of connection with the outside world, simultaneously demanding complete autonomy to execute his free-will. The underground man illustrates an existential nihilist’s arrogance in the midst of his infinite unsuccessful struggles to exist,

to define his existence, to define the universe around him, and to belong. According to Dostoevsky a social misfit, the diary of a social misfit is the window of the ultimate stage of the true nature of existential nihilism. Ubermenshe and egoism are the opposite ends of the same coin. Suchlike Raskolnikov, despite the fact that the underground man's ego prevents him from functioning in a proper societal manner he expresses in his enhanced sense of consciousness, stating, "But gentleman, whoever can pride himself on his diseases and even swagger over them? ... ? ... Though after all, everyone does do that; people do pride themselves on their diseases, and I do, may be, more than anyone. (6) He compares his ego to illness perhaps a parallel between him and the social beings who suffer from the same disease of egoism. It can be said that, he is a fully conscious man, therefore inherently superior to those that blunder foolishly throughout life.

Raskolnikov and the Underground Man place themselves upon a pedestal, therefore giving themselves the power to dominate physically, emotionally and to manipulate. As Raskolnikov physically dominated old pawnbroker Alyona, he derived her from her right to be alive while the underground man emotionally abuses Liza, whom he mocks- stating that her dream to escape prostitution is ridiculous and naive. According to Scanlan, the spreading idea of egoism in West into Russian society disturbed Dostoevsky thus he frequently attacked the philosophy of nihilism as a whole and particularly existential nihilism. He states -

In the 1860s Dostoevsky's interest in the phenomenon of egoism was powerfully fed by his conviction that a narrow focus on the ego or self-something he considered endemic in Western civilization- -was a plague that increasingly threatened Russia. We know from many sources that he regarded the spread of egoism in his homeland as a direct consequence of the Westernization of Russia and a prime moral, even mortal, danger

Therefore, it can be claimed that Dostoevsky sketched the characters of Raskolnikov and the underground man as a parody of Russian ideal of egoism accompanied by the nihilistic traits of the characters in the novels seems accurate. As the protagonists serves as a critical demonstration of a system

of beliefs that Dostoyevsky found appalling and lackluster. Dostoevsky found egoism to be solely based on his irrational, and dogmatic viewpoint, dictated by his enhanced sense of consciousness. Raskolnikov and the Underground Man's actions are due to their enhanced sense of ego.

In addition, a sense of subconscious inferiority complex can be traced in these characters. They happen to find people staring at them mockingly or purposefully trying to humiliate them. However, in reality it does not include the other party trying to scathingly critique their character nor any attempts to outright wrong them. This is exemplified in the Underground Man's encounter with the nameless Officer in Part I of the novel where he is convinced that the Officer purposefully pushed him in a crowded street. While it appears to be funny but rather indicates towards the Underground man's inferiority complex and egoism that The Underground Man goes out of his way spending several years plotting to right the wrong that the officer committed, an officer that did not even know him personally though he wanted his revenge.

Meanwhile, Raskolnikov is a victim of poverty and a higher education degree that did not bring him any fortune. He is a very proud man who believes his knowledge should bring him wealth and prestige and he is the only one worthy of respect. He stands out from the crowd because he is a person who breaks the law for a very foolish belief being a student of Law. "The novel reflects Dostoevsky's concerns about the generation of aspiring new men and the rise of nihilism." (Sosnak 156) They completely failed to comprehend the true nature of being. . Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the pioneer of existentialism, defines the aura of existence , 'man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards' (345) however they failed to encounter themselves. Both the novels illustrate their depression, disparity, and loss.

Dostoevsky also foregrounds Free will and the rising rational egoism in the nineteenth century Russia through Raskolnikov and the Underground Man. Rational egoism claims free will to be fictitious. Which refers to every action taken by an individual to be predetermined by the complexities of society or one's own self, similar to Raskolnikov's actions. From the very beginning of the novel *Crime and Punishment* it can be witnessed that Raskolnikov is not like one of the common lead characters of

literature who either sticks to good deeds and pitiful incidents takes place in their life or is a complete vindictive lead character whose aim is to harm others for their own gain. It seems like, he is a fusion of these two traits. His dual personalities contradict with each other. As if he is the Russian version of Jekyll and Hyde.

Vice versa, the Underground Man is seen rejecting the idea of rational egoism, the entirety of the novel consists of the protagonist's struggle to exert control over his ego and self. In fact Dostoevsky used him as a satire against rational egoists of westernized Russia. Sosnak describes his behavior to be 'involuntary'. He suggests that the Underground Man is well aware of his inevitable hateful reactions of the society is an outcome of his failure, the hatred is of his own compulsions, which he longs to escape. According to the literary critics his character is crafted of parodies and satires against the westernized flawed ideals. His behavior exhibits traits of delusion and free will. His actions are inappropriate and irrational because that's how he chooses to behave. He acts upon his free will. Through both of these characters Dostoevsky expresses his view on how misuse and misunderstanding of free will can never yield positive results. They are the ones who is making their own life spiteful through complicating it.

Interestingly, both of these characters are crafted as an archetype breaking characters. According to the Cambridge dictionary an archetype is a typical example of someone or something or the original model of from which others are copied. Archetype is a term which is formed from Greek words that means imprint or type. This particular word archetype means "model" or "prototype," as in the following statements: "Levittown, Long Island, is the archetype of the modern American suburb"; and "In the motion picture *Shane*, Alan Ladd creates the archetype of the cowboy-gunfighter." In both statements, archetype denotes a first model or prototype of that which has often been made or imitate" (Davis 28) Therefore in literature an archetype hero is someone who is always good man whose goodness is always challenged by the cruel society. The hero's ability to endure the cruelty and stay true to his morality is what certify them as a hero. These characters are generally the mentor type who is an idol for others with a pure and innocent nature, though often surrounded by complex, troublesome situations these characters take

wrong decisions which results in their downfall. These archetype heroes are often seen in a contradiction with villains or in the terms of literature the antagonist.

Diversely, Dostoevsky has designed the character of Raskolnikov and the Underground Man to break the norm of archetypes in the world of literature through their appearance and mental description, their crude personality and mostly from their actions and perception towards the society. They are heroes with severe flawed ideals. What makes these character stand out in front of any other protagonist is the way Dostoevsky has sketched both their appearance and dual persona in front of the readers. He describes Rskolnikov as “He is morose, gloomy, proud and haughty, and of late - and perhaps for a long time before - he has been suspicious and fanciful. He has a noble nature and a kind heart; he does not like showing his feelings and rather do a cruel thing than to open his heart freely”. (Scanlan 127) *Notes from the Underground* can be labelled as an archetype breaking novel because of its protagonist. The Underground Man’s consciousness is the sole substance of his character. The Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin describes it with the term “artistic dominant”.

Bakhtin describes artistic dominants to be a governing construction of a character that denies any other features of their image, it absorbs the societal features of the character depriving them of any power to define and finalize the hero. Through utilizing the trait of artistic dominant in the Underground Man Dostoevsky creates a new philosophical aspect to describe existential nihilism. Where the idea of truth is a foreign aspect while the protagonist’s consciousness is the only reality. But of course both of these characters cannot be described as melodramatic villains because their actions and crude behavior are fed by their egoism and of course the westernizing Russian. The novels rather discloses Dostoevsky’s firm belief that no human depravity is so profound that it extinguishes all conscience and all recognition of morality. The readers come across quite a few confessions by the Underground man and actions by Raskolnikov to further reinforce his claims.

Dostoevsky’s works reflects his life experiences. *Crime and Punishment and Notes from the Underground* are amongst those novels that projects his understanding of an existential

nihilist's life and nature. His focus on the social and psychological aspects of these people are experiences he gained in Siberia. The voice of Raskolnikov and the Underground Man is the voice of his inner conflict. Dostoevsky started working on *Crime and Punishment* after his return from exile, he had a deplorable state of mind at that time. Frank mentions, Dostoevsky's desperate need for money due to his brother's early demise and the debt brought within. The novel was a hasty work in addition, in the works of Sosnak it can be found that the newspapers published similar crime records of educate young man who engaged themselves into absurd crimes in search of fortune. From the analysis of the book and the author's life it can be claimed that As Dostoevsky experienced the prison environment and observed the prisoners behavior formed a ground for exploring the psyche of the criminal before and after the crime.

Dostoevsky's prison life consisted of extensive terrifying human experience as well as an awful world that categorizes good and evil simply ceased by their perception. Dostoevsky claims that the nihilistic attitude is strongly related with their struggling past and their inability to sustain the challenges of life, in short they were mentally weak to handle the stress. Dostoevsky in his prison memoir narrates,

Almost all of the convicts raved and talked in their sleep," and that what they raved about usually had some connection with their violent past. Nor did any of the peasants reject the moral law by which they had been judged; during the Easter services, they all fell to their knees and asked forgiveness from Christ (Dostoevsky qtd in Frank)

It can be assumed that he decided to pen nihilism in his writing to explain its psychic origin that ends in crudity and crime and his experience in Siberia was a step closer to understanding existential nihilism. It can be definitely claimed that the author used Raskolnikov and the

underground man as the projection of his observation, his depiction of contradicting psychology and morality.

The underground man's view words Dostoevsky's end result of his experimentation of the condition of the nihilist anarchism. The attention in the crude bluntness of the Underground man is more of the hatred towards the corrupted nineteenth century Russia and its favoritism towards the westernizers. Dostoevsky Particularly indicates that existential nihilism is a flawed concept for the core claim of this philosophical theory becomes vague through the variety of emotions and perceptions the protagonist erupts in the form of hatred, sarcasm, self-detest. If the existence is meaningless then why associate with emotions? Even after being after from the society the underground man connects with it, be it in the form of abhor.

The motives and morals in both the characters which connects them with the essence of existence. Both the characters associate with introspections and guilt conscience. However, one ends in redemption and the other does not. Both the novels describe how morals, emotions, any form of association with society cannot coexist with existential nihilism, it is a misinterpreted psychological disorder. Dostoevsky demonstrates the drawbacks of a popular Russian philosophy which contradicts with its own claims.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

From the experience of *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from the Underground* it is apparent that existential nihilism contradicts human emotions which makes the philosophy fragile. The claim is supported by Dostoevsky through the character of Raskolnikov's sister Dounia, his

love interest Sonia as well as Liza who happens to be the only person the underground man is slightly close to. These characters have undergone way more sufferings, humiliation and trauma than the protagonists of the novels however their strong moral standings, the virtue of their loyalty and being able to take the right decision is what Dostoevsky wanted to describe the true meaning of existence.

Dounia is engaged to an extremely narrow minded man, whose ultimate goal was to marry a beautiful girl from an underprivileged background. Being treated with utter disrespect she was logical enough to leave this man and move forward with her life looking for a new job unlike her own blood brother who did not put any effort to find a job, he mortgaged his family's belongings and ended up murdering a person due to his delusion of being the best. Sonia on the other hand was a prostitute. A disrespectful and unacceptable figure of the society. Interestingly, Dostoevsky associates her with Mother Marry, and a mother figure to all the held criminals Raskolnikov came across in Siberia. The intention was to portray that if one has the will to work hard and remain in the path of righteousness, life will treat them with the respect they deserve. Liza, a young prostitute from the novel *Notes from the Underground Man*, who had been forced into prostitution by her own family appears to be a character who as well demonstrates Dostoevsky's idea of overcoming the obstacles of life through the path of dignity. Liza dreams of escaping the hell and the Underground man fantasizes to be her savior. It seems like Dostoevsky is mocking crime through his deluded fantasy. A person who himself is associated with prudence and abhor, who mocks her desire to escape fantasizes to free her.

Thus the final finding of this thesis claims that, Dostoevsky's aim in both the novel was to describe that existential nihilists are born with the predestined hatred and mindset to harm people who are a threat to their deluded ego. Furthermore, Dostoevsky attempts to stop existential nihilism

from spreading into Russian culture by describing the criminal mindset which is being labelled as a philosophical theory. Dostoevsky shows that human emotions cannot be ignored thus it contradicts the claim that life is meaningless and emotions do not exist. The character of Dounia, Sonia and Liza exemplifies that the balance of rationalism and logical reasoning is the key to remove corruption from if not society but from one's life.

Thus the final claims of this thesis appears definite that the perceptions of Raskolnikov and the Underground man were shaped by the radical ideas and perception of a delusional existential nihilist's egocentric mind. The only reason these to individuals are questioning their existential realities is due to their crippled personalities which fail to cope with poverty, illness and most importantly their superiority complex. These individuals can be ascribed as the weak personas of westernizing Russia and with the help of these character Dostoevsky brutally demonstrates the consequences of being associated with the radical ideas of nineteenth-century Russia.

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