

Justice and the Western Perception of Dostoevsky: Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* and *Match Point*.

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Abstract

The issue of justice is crucial to Dostoevsky's oeuvre. The Russian writer depicts the gruesomeness of being a law unto oneself and at the same time the inherent futility of holding any individual totally responsible for his deeds. This aspect, makes Dostoevsky one of the favorite authors of Western intellectuals. Dostoevsky is thus read by Nietzsche, Freud, Gide, many American writers as well as by a filmmaker – Woody Allen. Allen in his *Crimes and Misdemeanors* and *Match Point* presents a very nihilistic reading of Dostoevsky, which again is typical of the Western perception of this writer. In the New Yorker's films we see individuals who faced with difficult moral choices discover that social justice is just a facade that imperfectly covers the cruelty and indifference of the world. Eventually Allen's protagonists lose their moral illusions but gain a kind of Nietzscheanistic perspective that enables them to "succeed." The question remains open whether, it is a perspective of the "last man" or of the "superhuman"? One can even suspect a certain cycle of corruption occurs in passing from the second position to the first.

In short, Allen is fascinated with Dostoevsky's radical destruction of the notion of individual justice. Superficially, this destruction is tantamount to total nihilism and that is what many Western intellectuals and Allen seem to suggest. But there is a certain political theology in Dostoevsky's works. This theology is not clearly visible to Westerners because it is collectivistic, imperial and Gnostic. Those motives are an inherent part of the political experience of the East (although they can be also found in some Western ideological movements), which was observed by Eric Voegelin. Nevertheless, what Allen and many other Western readers of Dostoevsky seem to ignore is that the objective of both religious and secular law is not to prevent all crime on a cosmic scale but to recognize certain standards of inter-human and human-God relations.

Simply making the notion of justice a matter of convention does not free the human but enslaves her/him, because it makes the law a matter of a purely arbitrary decision of the political authority. This dilemma is clearly visible in Dostoevsky's work, and I call it the Grand Inquisitor's trap. Not seeing this problem is a serious misreading of Dostoevsky.

Allen's characters endure only slight metaphysical pangs on occasion of their misdeeds and live in a secure world of modern consumerism, which seems to develop without any moral code. An important argument raised in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is that believing in individual justice is hardly possible after Hitler's death camps. A historically conscious reader of Dostoevsky, however, could argue that on the contrary; XXth century has shown us how dangerous the collectivistic morality is (this is also the morality of Dostoevsky, himself). In conclusion, the notions of individual crime and punishment, although imperfect, are the only notions that can offer some protection from the Voegelinian, dark Gnosticism and preserve the liberties of the individual.

Introduction

Every reading necessarily involves a misreading (Bloom 1987), this is true especially in the case of Dostoevsky and has even been codified in the form of the theory of a polyphonism of his novels (Bakhtin 1999). This theory assumes that Dostoevsky is a withdrawn author, a *deus absconditus* of his own universe. Nevertheless, a Central European, a person, who like me comes from the borderland between the West and the East is often surprised by the typically Western reading of Dostoevsky. Czeslaw Milosz (2010), a Polish Nobel Prize winner in literature and a former lecturer at Berkeley sees three main types of the Western reception of Dostoevsky: the psychological, the existential and most recently the socio-political. The last one according to him creates the greatest obstacle to the Western readers. Milosz writes on his American pupils' reception of Dostoevsky:

"My students showed great skill when, I introduced them to the psychology of the characters or when I showed how the authors intentions can be revealed with the use of the structural method. Young people were also typically quick to jocularly notice the discrepancies between the oeuvre and the untidy workshop – that is the mind of the author. Nevertheless, they had trouble when we encountered certain facts. For instance, they could not understand why Dostoevsky loved the autocratic leadership and why he had done so already before his return from Siberia, where from a revolutionary he turned into a conservative. [translation mine - Michal Kuz]" (Milosz 2010, 138).

Notoriously Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the first Western intellectuals to recognize the genius of the Russian writer. "Dostoevsky is the only psychologist from whom I have anything to learn." – says Nietzsche (2005, 45). In this reflection the German philosopher seems to foreshadow both the existential and the psychological reading of the great Russian. One stems from a clear affinity between the Nietzschean theory of the superhuman and the views expressed by many of Dostoevsky's characters. The other, from the psychological perceptiveness Nietzsche attributed to Dostoevsky. As for the political reading there is little evidence that Nietzsche was familiar with *A Writer's Diary*

(Dostoevsky 1994) and other works where Dostoevsky openly reveals his political musings. Neither did he know about the Russian writer's political poems in which he glorified the tzar as a semi - deity (Milosz 2010, 141). Nevertheless, based on the problematic, anti-democratic reception of Nietzsche's own oeuvre one can suspect that the famous German would be far less surprised at the political implications of Dostoevsky's works than many typical readers. The affinity between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche is further explored by Lev Shestov (1969). In the introductory part let us just remark that the closely affiliated existential and the psychological receptions of Dostoevsky became, in accordance with Milosz's observations, typical of many Western intellectuals. This essay will focus especially on the way Dostoevsky is read by an American film maker – Woody Allen and in what aspects this reading can be said to be representative of the Western reception in general. The first part of this examination will be devoted to the psycho-existential reading of Dostoevsky – a reading typical of Allen's movies. The difficulties in grasping the social and political elements of Dostoevsky's thought will be referred to in the second part; followed by the final conclusions.

Part I

Dostoevsky did not become popular in the West instantly, not even after the tribute paid to him by Nietzsche. According to André Gide's (1981) and Milosz's (2010) records he was initially viewed as an interesting writer, albeit too austere, surreal and incomprehensible. This had begun to change with the rise of the French existentialism and endorsements by Gide, Camus and Sartre (Milosz 2010). From the American and English perspective, however, an element that made a breakthrough in the understanding of Dostoevsky was the growing popularity of psychoanalysis and the search for the unconscious in literature. Freud himself deemed *Brothers Karamazov* one of the keys to understanding his theories. In a 1928 essay - "Dostoevsky and Parricide" (Freud 1945) the Austrian psychoanalyst

describes Dostoevsky as one of the great literary geniuses that sensed the paramount cultural and civilization role of the Oedipus complex.

This foreshadowing of the unconscious with all probability made Virginia Woolf state that Dostoevsky's novels are: "seething whirlpools, gyrating sandstorms, waterspouts which hiss and boil and suck us in." (1994, 181). Similar elements can be also sensed in the reflections of Henry Miller who admits that: "Dostoevsky is chaos and fecundity. Humanity, with him, is but a vortex in the bubbling maelstrom."(Bloshteyn, 2007, 101). The psychological reading of Fyodor Dostoevsky is also said to have influenced such contemporary American writers as J.D. Salinger, Joseph Heller and Jack Kerouack (Ibid.). Undoubtedly it has also had a huge impact Woody Allen who names both Freud and Dostoevsky as his major inspirations (Nichols 2000). And indeed, it seems clear that both authors influenced his pictures. The fact that Allen belongs to the psychological school of reading Dostoevsky means that he is partly blind to the political and social aspects of Dostoevsky's oeuvre and among them to his concept of social justice. On the other hand, this blindness is precisely what enables us to see that with the words Yeats a "terrible beauty is born" (2011) and that a certain vacuum is present in Western mass and high culture.

One may even suspect that Allen is conscious of this social and moral blindness as it becomes one of the leitmotifs of his first, and according to critics one of the best, "Dostoevsky movies." *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (Allen 1989) is a film that tells us a story of a ophthalmologist who commits a crime that is uncannily similar to the murder performed by Raskolnikov (Dostoevsky 2006). The film commences with a scene in which the main protagonist – Judah Rosenthal opens a new ophthalmology clinic and in his speech ponders on the words of his father (a devout follower of Judaism): "The eyes of God are on us always." "I wonder whether it was just a coincidence that I made my specialty ophthalmology." – Judah concludes. The metaphor of moral blindness is visible throughout the movie.

Another important character – rabbi Ben is Judah's patient. The rabbi bears a striking similarity to the morally upright Alosha from *Brothers Karamazov* (2009). In the movie he offers spiritual advice to Judah but physically, unfortunately he goes completely blind. Allen in general seems to suggest that because there is no cosmic justice, there is little hope for any justice. Another character – Prof. Levy a Jewish philosopher, who resembles father Zosima from *Bothers Karamazov*, commits a suicide in spite of his declared faith in love and laughter. Zosima of course does not kill himself but the stench of his body is also a device used to undermine the popular image of saintliness. This is Dostoevsky's way of undercutting the most simple and gullible metaphysical hopes. Still, Dostoevsky searches for the metaphysical, he may not reach his goal but he makes an honest attempt. Allen leaves no hope, with the words of the already mentioned Allan Bloom in his films "the outer is dissolved and becomes formless in the light of the inner and the inner is will-o-the wisp or pure emptiness" (Bloom 1987, 155). The cruelty and basic unfairness of life annihilates for Allen almost all higher hopes. In the Marxian and Volterian vein Woody Allen examines two alternative concepts of justice: justice as an objective, materialistic phenomenon or as a loose social convention. And since the material cosmos is not just according to the available human notions, the film maker concludes that the moral foundations of inter-human relations are devised arbitrarily. In one of the scenes Judah has a dream in which he is reunited with his family. During this reunion the Judaical faith of Judah's father is openly ridiculed. A very existential question: "How can one believe in punishing for the wicked after Hitler?" is explicitly asked.

Later Judah tells the story of his crime to a unaccomplished script writer Cliff – played by Woody Allen himself. The ophthalmologist describes in third person how he arranged the murder of a former lover, who blackmailed him; he, however, disguises the recollections as a idea for a potential film script. Nevertheless, Judah explicitly tells us about his pangs of conscience, the "black void" he

saw behind the dead eyes of Dolores – the woman whom he had killed. Here the metaphor of sight is present again. Judah also openly describes his remorse as "little sparks from his religious background." The ending of the story is, however, a shock both for the viewer and Cliff. Judah claims that on a certain day he opened his eyes and found himself as if "awakened from a dream." The pangs of conscience went away, the sun was shining, he decided to take his wife for vacation in Europe, which renewed their relationship. Later he learned that the crime was attributed to someone else and was happy ever after. Nichols (2000 155) calls Judah's experience the "awakening from guilt." On hearing about this Cliff protests, he expects the story to end with an "awakening to guilt" and the protagonist to turn himself in after being tortured by his conscience. Judah's only response is that Cliff has "seen too many movies" and as result prefers a didactic ending over raw life. This is an example the modernistic criticism of a noble lie about the existence of God and cosmic justice that was present in older forms of art. Allen exploits this theme in his play *God* (1972) where an ancient Greek playwright and director boast of an ingenious way to restore order after a number of crimes and atrocities had occurred in the play. To do this he introduces the *deus ex machina* – a device that can simulate a divine intervention and effortlessly bring even the most convoluted plots to a happy ending.

Judah's lack of "awakening from conscience" is also portrayed as a very Freudian process. Firstly, his crime is committed to protect Judah's social *superego* from the consequences of the carnal desires and other misdemeanors of the *id*. Judah's decides to kill only after his former lover threatens to inform his wife of the affair unless he succumbs to her wishes. Secondly, the consciousness as well as its pangs are portrayed as a product of the upbringing, a continuation of the "obsessions" and "complexes" Judah inherited from his parents. This coupled with the subplots – the blindness of the good Rabbi and the suicide of the Jewish philosopher who seeks God, paints a truly gloomy moral picture in accordance with Allan Bloom's assessment.

Even Mary Nichols (2000, 162-163), who overall tries to defend Allen against the accusation of nihilism, admits that perhaps the only consolation, he offers to the viewers of *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is the vision of "singing in the rain," which is tantamount to reacting with laughter to the absurdities and cruelties of reality. With the words of professor Levy – the Jewish philosopher, who kills himself: "Without the laugh it's all darkness." Nevertheless, Nichols' theory of metaphysical laughter, becomes less plausible when applied to Allen's latter movie (*Match Point*) which explores the same crime-and-punishment theme borrowed from Dostoevsky. And this picture is not to be overlooked as Woody Allen himself deemed it the "best film he has ever made" (Schembri 2009).

Match Point (Allen, 2005) is a story of a young tennis instructor (formerly a professional player) – Chris who becomes engaged to a cultured, young woman from a wealthy English family – Chloe. However, already during the engagement Chris starts a clandestine relationship with an aspiring, American actress - Nola. The relationship continues even after Chris' marriage. The protagonist wants both the prestige and material security of marrying into an influential family and the sexual satisfaction offered by a very attractive lover. Ironically, while he and Chloe have problems conceiving a child, Nola soon becomes pregnant. She also refuses to have an abortion; wants to raise the infant with Chris after his divorce and threatens to reveal the whole affair to his young wife unless he does so first. Chris has to make a decision and he does so. He obtains a shotgun and kills both Nola and her elderly landlady. Thus he commits a cold-blooded, double murder that through many references is clearly modeled on the crime of Raskolnikov from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (2006). Chris, for instance, fakes a burglary by stealing certain valuables including the landlady's golden ring and some medicaments. He later throws the loot into the river and most of it, naturally, gets into the water. The camera, however, shows us that one, small golden ring hits the fringe of the railing separating the strand from the river bank; sways for a moment and finally falls towards the pavement – this turns out

to be the match-point mentioned in the title. The ring in this memorable scene is like a ball in a situation that in tennis is called, *nomen omen*, "catching a dead net" and is considered a token of exceptional luck. Chris for a while is suspected by the police of being involved in the crime but soon he is notified that the Landlady's ring was found in the hands of a drug addict, this coupled with the fact that some pharmaceuticals were stolen from Nola's flat confirms the hypothesis that the whole affair was a drug robbery. Chris' run of good luck continues as his wife soon becomes pregnant and gives birth to a healthy baby. The boy is later blessed by his uncle precisely with "luck" and not goodness.

The significance of *Match Point* lies in two facts. First of all, it has no humorous subplot – in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* this is the role of the tragi-comic episodes from the life of Cliff – the script writer. *Match Point* is more reminiscent of a consistently heavy atmosphere of the French *film noir*. Secondly, *Match Point* unlike *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is not an intellectual film, it is directed at mass audience and apart from the obvious dialogue with Dostoevsky it offers little intertextuality or deep, existential introspective. We encounter a fairly simple and quite brutal story. Chris, in contrast to Judah, kills the victims himself and does not have goons hired to do the job for him. He also suffers more from fear of punishment than remorse, he is cold-blooded and determined to get what he wants. He does not have Judah's money and prestige, he is just in the process of obtaining them. Judah is also a man of science, a worshiper of the positivistic paradigm, Chris has no paradigm, only interests. Neither does Chris love his wife or child, whereas, the genuine attachment to family is one of the most humane features of Judah. Chris's conflict is essentially not a struggle between the super *superego* and *id* but between opposite desires within the *id*. He simply asks himself whether he should choose material security or instant sexual gratification? When he is forced to decide, he just makes a choice almost without regrets.

Time of the filming is also of paramount significance. *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is a 1989

film, *Match Point* was filmed in 2005. Allen seems to say that what used to create at least some moral tension at the end of the 80-ties, for the mass men from the start of the new millennium is only a mild source of anxiety. The issue of justice is no longer a moral question but a question of distribution of goods and fulfilling of the basic desires. One can even try to point out a certain cycle of moral decline – the superhuman described by Nietzsche and personified by Raskolnikov turns first into a petty man (Judah) and finally into a near animal – the last man, who says: "We have discovered happiness, and blink[s] thereby." (Friedrich Nietzsche 1998).

In other words in the passage from the Nietzscheanistically read Dostoevsky to Allen's early movie and then to Allen's latter film we see a reflection of the West's passage from the "egophanic" rebellion (Voegelin 2000, 269) to individualistic nihilism through a morally ambivalent middle-ground between the two. Krzysztof Dorosz a Polish essayist influenced by Voegelin's philosophy writes that: "The history of the European, who reached for spiritual autonomy has come to an end. The pathos and the impetus that were once fueled by the mesmerizing discovery of human capabilities are worn out. The human *ego*, which was once worshiped, now gives away a stench..." [translation mine - Michal Kuz] (Dorosz 2010, 57).

Part II

The Nietzschean last man, however, becomes a product of the reception of Dostoevsky only if one forgets about the political and the social aspect of the Russian writer's thought. At first glance naturally, there is a similarity between Raskolnikov and Judah or Chris, all of them question the standard social understanding of justice and eventually overcome their remorse after the crime. They, however, do it for different reasons. Raskolnikov of course admits, in the epilogue that he regrets nothing:

“and yet he was ashamed even before Sonia, whom he tortured because of it with his contemptuous rough manner. But it was not his shaven head and his fetters he was ashamed of: his pride had been stung to the quick. It was the wounded pride that made him ill. Oh, how happy he would have been if he could have blamed himself! He could have borne anything then, even shame and disgrace. But he judged himself severely, and his exasperated conscience found no particularly terrible fault in his past, except a simple blunder which might happen to anyone. He was ashamed just because he, Raskolnikov, had so hopelessly, stupidly come to grief through some decree of blind fate, and must humble himself and submit to "the idiocy" of a sentence, if he were anyhow to be at peace." (Dostoevsky 2006).

In other words Raskolnikov is ashamed of the puerility of his ideology and this wounds his pride. On the other hand, it is also this sentiment that suppresses any trace of a genuine feeling of guilt stemming from the compassion for the victim. Raskolnikov does not find consolation in private life or material gratification but precisely his pride. He feels there is some nobility in his crime because it was an attempt to immanentize a certain ideal and thus it can be treated as a creative act, a rebellion against the "blind fate". Raskolnikov wanted to experiment with a new demonic philosophy and a new social order. He failed and this pains him, but at the same time he continuously gloats over the audacity of his attempt. This is the interpretation of Raskolnikov's "penitence" proposed by Jerzy Stempowski (2011), Czelaw Milosz (2010) and many other Central and Eastern Europeans.

In his already quoted book Krzysztof Dorosz clearly differentiates between the three ideological mindset that lead to the "inversion of values" (Dorosz 2010, 58). The first mindset can be defined as the modern, Western, materialistic nihilism and it results from the exhaustion of the ideology of the Enlightenment. The two other historically potent reasons for the inversion are: "the negation of our world, which in accordance with the Gnostic paradigm is viewed as ruled by a devilish forces" or "the affirmation of demonic forces." (Dorosz 2010, 58-59) Raskolnikov is clearly an example of the last possibility. Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov are closer to the the second option. Freud is an example of the first one.

Egotic lack of regrets and penitence is something that all "the men of the underground"

(Stempowski 1981, 241) present in Dostoevsky's novels have in common. Raskolnikov, even though he kneels, never really regrets (Dostoevsky 2006), Stavrogin never finds any peace (Dostoevsky 2005), Ivan (Dostoevsky 2009) is never really converted to Christianity. All those characters are products of a truly "cruel talent," (Stempowski 1981, 238) for although, Dostoevsky undermines the does not conclusively answer the fundamental questions about the political and social order, he is not afraid to constantly ask them. The presence of those issues is, however, hardly noticeable for Allen and many other Western readers, who in accordance with Milosz's observations may find it difficult to accept the partial solutions proposed by Dostoevsky. Perhaps this blindness caused Hemingway to write in confusion: "I've been wondering about Dostoevsky," I said. "How can a man write so badly, so unbelievably badly, and make you feel so deeply." (Hemingway, 2009).

The character who perhaps best displays Dostoevsky personal political beliefs known from *A Writers Diary* (1994) and his minor writings is Shatov from the *Possessed* (Kucharzewski 1948). Shatov is a firm believer in the Russian messianism and the imperial theocracy. And let us not forget that the brutal tzarist censorship coupled with a sudden immersion in Western philosophy are precisely, the factors, which led to the revolutionary boiling among the young, Russian intelligentsia. Shatov's zealous, sectarian counterrevolution, nevertheless, makes him as well one of the possessed. Since for Shatov the threat comes from the West along with its rationalism and liberalism, he is anti-intellectual, collectivistic, illiberal, chauvinistic, imperialistic, Gnostic and autocratic. He proclaims that:

"The object of every national movement, in every people and at every period of its existence is only the seeking for its god, who must be its own god, and the faith in Him as the only true one. God is the synthetic personality of the whole people, taken from its beginning to its end. It has never happened that all, or even many, peoples have had one common God, but each has always had its own...."

and later adds:

"A really great people can never accept a secondary part in the history of Humanity, nor even one of the first, but will have the first part. A nation which loses this belief ceases to be a nation. But there is only one truth, and therefore only a single one out of the nations can have

the true God, even though other nations may have great gods of their own. Only one nation is 'god-bearing,' that's the Russian people.” (Dostoevsky, 2005).

Not without a reason does Eric Voegelin see the Russian communism and nationalism as heirs to the tradition of the Great Khan and his cosmological empire. This political entity can free other nations only through incorporation or destruction. The empire in this approach is an expanding model of the universe that tries to consume the reality itself. The model appropriates the world through administering. In consequence, all that does not belong to the empire is treated as a vestige of the primordial chaos and has no right to exist. Voegelin clearly sees this vision in the works of Dostoevsky and writes:

"In Dostoevsky this superimposition of messianism crystallized in the curiously ambivalent vision of an autocratic, orthodox Russia that somehow would conquer the world and in this conquest blossom out into the free society of all Christians in the truest faith. It is the ambivalent vision which, in its secularized form, inspires a Russian dictatorship of the proletariat that in its conquest of the world will blossom out into the Marxian realm of freedom." (Voegelin, 1952, 117).

This vision of messianic theocracy, although as Miłosz (2010) points out may well be insincere and is laid out with a very heavy hand is, nevertheless, the only positive political program Dostoevsky had. Of course a Western reader of Dostoevsky can hardly accept it, let alone sharing Dostoevsky's cultural motives. And, indeed, in accordance with the insights of many Western thinkers the author of this essay finds Dostoevsky's positive moral and political solutions utterly unacceptable. Nevertheless, even this morally distorted experience of the transcendental enabled the Russian writer to see the threats of what Voegelin calls "the secularized form" – the destructiveness of the revolution. Dostoevsky was probably painfully aware that his solution is demonic and imperfect, but having assessed the deficiencies of the ideologies of Modernity, he saw no other. That is why Dostoevsky's somber diagnosis of Modern times in fact differs very little from Voegelin's, which was accurately observed by Ellis Sandoz (2000). Prof. Sandoz, however, is perhaps too optimistic in his assessment of the political goals of Dostoevsky as those of a generally benevolent, law-abiding, conservative Christian. Similarly, another Western

political thinker – Andre Glucksman (2002) is too pessimistic in his making Dostoevsky a hallmark of modern political nihilism.

Clearly Dostoevsky was not a nihilist, but, nevertheless, he was a tragic figure. We must remember that Fyodor Dostoevsky also fell into the Grand Inquisitor's trap that is described in *Brothers Karamazov*. He could not compromise politics with morality or faith and arrive at a safe *modus vivendi*. Thus in accordance with the Grand Inquisitor's logic he left his readers with a choice between a demonic theocracy and an amoral nihilism. Out of those two options Dostoevsky favored the first, whereas, his Western admirers – like Woody Allen often decided to opt for the second. The essence of the trap of the Inquisitor lies in the fact that both a complete separation between the real and the transcendental and the theocratic immanentization lead to similar outcomes. The second option explicitly gives all earthly power to the Inquisitor. The first one turns all morality into a purely inner, solipsistic sensation and thus the Inquisitor is yet again free to rule the material world. In both scenarios absolute power takes over. In the solipsistic world of Ivan Karamzov's mind we know who is guilty but he cannot be punished. In the real world of law, politics and life it does not matter who is penalized. It is enough if the number of sentenced is equal to the number of crimes.

This Gnostic lack of faith in individual crime, punishment and responsibility is something both Allen, Freud and Dostoevsky share. In the case of Freud and Allen, however, it results from a cosmically nihilistic perspective in which every individual is just a plaything in the hands of unconscious powers she or he does not control. Thomas Sowell describes this perspective, with reference to certain American lawyers, in the following way: "From such a viewpoint, particular individuals might turn out to be either criminals or law abiding citizens as a result of innumerable influences resulting from the accidental circumstances into which they are born and which they chanced to encounter as they grew up." (Sowell 1995, 192).

For Dostoevsky the same reflection seems to stem from a certain residual theological element

within the Orthodox Church teachings. This concept can be interpreted as a modern adoption of the Origenian doctrine of apocatastasis, which was extremely popular among Eastern Gnostics as well as some mainstream theologians. Origen of Alexandria (VI c. a. Ch.) speculated that with the second coming of Christ the world will be ultimately purified, thus becoming a flawless reality in which even the devil himself along with all the sinners shall participate (Pelikan 1977). For propagating the doctrine of universal salvation as well as arguing for the preexistence souls and last but not least performing an act of (literal) auto-castration Origen was finally condemned by patriarchs of the Eastern Churches. Nevertheless, his ideas turned out to be very resilient, especially among eastern Christians. We encounter them again in *Brothers Karamazov* where the devil himself confesses to Ivan:

“I might bawl hosannah, and the indispensable minus would disappear at once, and good sense would reign supreme throughout the whole world. And that, of course, would mean the end of everything, even of magazines and newspapers, for who would take them in? I know that at the end of all things I shall be reconciled. I, too, shall walk my quadrillion and learn the secret. But till that happens I am sulking and fulfill my destiny though it's against the grain — that is, to ruin thousands for the sake of saving one.” (Dostoevsky 2009).

Still, the West (especially after World War II) when faced with antinomies presented within Dostoevsky's oeuvre seems to be more sensitive to individualistic nihilism than the Gnostic, moral collectivism.¹ This individualistic nihilism is the essence of the "last man" from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In Woody Allen's film it is initially visible in the comfortable amorality of Judah, who mutes his conscience with the comfort of family life. Interestingly, this kind of muting is also recognized as the major threat to democracy and common political sentiment by the father of modern studies of American politics - Alexis de Tocqueville. The French thinker writes:

"..I see an innumerable multitude of men, alike and equal, constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut their souls. Each of them withdrawn into

¹ Naturally, it is not my intention to undermine the historical significance of Western totalitarianisms. Nevertheless, their ideological roots were shallower and slightly different in kind. Moreover, in Europe and America the typically Occidental, individualistic nihilism turned out to be much more resilient than any totalitarian ideologies. One may argue that the exact opposite is true of Russia and China.

himself, is almost unaware of the fate of the rest. Mankind, for him, consists in his children and his personal friends. As for the rest of his fellow citizens, they are near enough, but he does not notice them. He touches them but feels nothing. He exists in and for himself, and though he still may have a family, one can at least say that he has not got a fatherland." (Tocqueville 1969, 692)

This reflection provides us with a strikingly accurate portrait of Judah, who has so little compassion for law and his fellow citizens that he grants himself the right to kill them when they stand in the way of his minute, personal and familial preoccupations. Chris from *Match Point* is even more ruthless, like the mythical Gyges (Plato 1999), he no longer asks himself whether to do something or not, but how to do it without being caught. Ultimately, Allen seems to put forward the thesis that all major events in life are accidental. He succumbs to something Dorosz calls the "terror of history" (2010, 1). At the same in his obsessive crusade against cosmic justice Allen seems to reveal a perverse craving for precisely that kind of justice and a veiled accusation of the absolute. Lack of a decisive proof for the existence of cosmic justice for a Gnostically disposed mind that years for immanentization might lead to undermining the legal justice that models the everyday life of a given society. In doing so, such a mind seems to forget that lawmakers rarely intend to conclusively confirm the existence of a cosmic justice. In a traditional theophanic perspective, no human code can fully regulate the relations between individual persons and the cosmos. Secular and religious codes, however, should and do regulate interpersonal relations and ritual obligations towards God. Pangs of our conscience after wrongdoing a fellow human are essentially a reversed communal instinct Aristotle (1999) mentions. Only completely atomized or mentally disturbed human beings can cease to see any social bond between them and other members of their society thus effectively silencing their conscience. Dostoevsky apparently was aware of this fact. At the same time he saw the egophanic nihilism as primarily an Occidental development. Thus, to cure the ailment he chose a collectivistic Asiatic medicine, which was an ideology formed much in the tradition of the Great Khan. In short, Dostoevsky desired to artificially create a image of the cosmic justice constructed in accordance with his cultural background. Woody Allen in his films, in

a similarly heavy-handed way wants to disprove the existence of the very same justice. For him and his characters life is an existential drama displayed on the verge of the abyss. Nietzsche in response to the identical problem replaced the transcendental, cosmic justice with a deified human, someone very similar to Raskolnikov. None of them had faith in the collective common sense of societies, that with time subtly connects law with transcendental experiences. None of them believed in the spontaneous ability of the peoples to form laws and abide by them. All three intellectuals were proponents of either a forceful deconstruction of the social tissue or its forceful reconstruction.

Milosz (2010) tries to at least partly justify Dostoevsky's choice by pointing out that the West over the years has grown accustomed to its own nihilism and became partly immune to its most disturbing outcomes, whereas, from the Russian perspective the influx of Western moral nihilism – personified by Ivan Karamazov, Stavrogin and the young Verhovensky was an utter cataclysm. Milosz even uses the metaphor of certain Carpathian communities that had endemically become almost immune to the once-deadly syphilis.

Conclusions

For Dostoevsky the crucial, ideological alternative of modernity was that between the collectivistic theocracy and the individualistic nihilism. His cultural heritage and his patriotism made him inclined to choose the first option. History, however, has shown that theocracy in its modernized and secularized version can be far more atrocious than the former tsarist regime. Many Western readers of Dostoevsky, also because of their cultural background, were to a large extent unable to treat seriously the positive component of his political philosophy. Thus, they focused on the psychological and existential elements of his oeuvre. However, even a misguided usage of Dostoevsky's themes inevitably leads to the same ideological alternative, even if it favors a specific solution. This is clearly visible in the two films by Woody Allen *Crimes and Misdemeanors* and *Match Point*. Both films are consistently nihilistic precisely because

they borrow from Dostoevsky's imagination without seriously asking the same political and social questions. Interestingly, the fairly recent *Match Point* shows a certain progress of nihilism, which becomes more violent than in Allen's previous "Dostoevsky film." The materialistic mass man as portrayed in *Match Point* seems to be so atomized that he has no conscience in the classical sense of the word, at the same time he is not portrayed as a clinical case of sociopath. In comparison to the postmodern Chris, the bourgeois Judah remains a troubled modernist who, with his own words, still feels the "tiny sparks of his religious background" and thus retains an inner sense of justice. The Allenian picture of the Western social and political reality is thus utterly pessimistic. Even the consolation of ironic and erotic jocularly Allen is known for seems futile in the circumstances displayed in *Match Point*. Interestingly, neither Dostoevsky nor Allen speak of common sense and the society's ability to gradually and spontaneously heal its own pathologies. This is as well true of Nietzsche, who is often compared to Dostoevsky. The issue of societies' gradual adaptation is also raised by Czelaw Milosz, who comments on Dostoevsky's overdrawn pessimism. A contemporary political scientist could add that the pessimism about the ability to spontaneously develop notions of justice is unwarranted, even a simple game theory simulation (Axelrod 2006) easily proves that every pattern of anti-social behavior is usually short lived and becomes abandoned after a number of generic decision. With the words commonly but erroneously attributed to Abraham Lincoln one can only "fool some of the people some of the time." (Swartz 2003). Simultaneously, one has to remember that human beings are not in the position to judge the universe as a whole in legalistic terms; as Leszek Kolakowski puts it: "God owes us nothing." (Kolakowski, 1995).

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