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LONELINESS AND REBELLION IN DOSTOEVSKY'S EXISTENCIAL PHILOSOPHY: THROUGH THE CHARACTER OF SMERDYAKOV IN "*THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV*"

[SOLIDÃO E REBELDIA NA FILOSOFIA EXISTENCIAL DE DOSTOIÉVSKI ATRAVÉS DA PERSONAGEM SMERDYAKOV, EM OS IRMÃOS KARAMAZOV]

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on elucidating the psychological developments of Smerdyakov in The Brothers Karamazov-a representative character in a quintessential work of Dostoevsky's existential philosophy. Smerdyakov's solitude, yearning, and rebellion as a means of self-assertion profoundly exemplify the "philosophy of mood" within the conflicted social landscape of Russia. The dualistic nature of existence is revealed here: on one hand, resignation to fate; on the other, a reaction striving to overcome it; on one side, submission; on the other, a willful defiance concealed beneath the character's calculated performances-this is the case with Smerdyakov. The article reconstructs the existential crisis through Smerdyakov's loneliness and rebellion, thereby highlighting Dostoevsky's sharp and brilliant literary craftsmanship, as well as his contributions to the existential intellectual current of humanity. This study affirms existential values in Dostoevsky's philosophy, such as pessimism, feelings of isolation and rejection, rebellion against fate intertwined with messages of freedom and responsibility, the unconscious and the eruption of creativity, choice and faith-values that remain worthy of praise and serve as a lasting source of inspiration. These

RESUMO: O presente artigo propõe uma análise do desenvolvimento psicológico da personagem Smerdyakov em Os Irmãos Karamazov, uma figura emblemática dentro de uma das obras mais representativas da filosofia existencial de Dostoyevski. A solidão, o anseio existencial e a rebeldia como forma de autoafirmação expressam, de maneira contundente, a "filosofia do estado de espírito"("philosophy of mood"?) que permeia o conturbado panorama social russo da época. Manifesta-se, na trajetória de Smerdyakov, a dualidade essencial da existência: de um lado, a resignação diante do destino; de outro, uma reação que busca superá-lo; de um lado, a submissão; de outro, uma resistência voluntária encoberta por performances calculadas e ambíguas. Por meio da solidão e da rebeldia dessa personagem, o artigo reconstrói a crise existencial que marca a obra, destacando o refinamento estético e a precisão analítica da escrita de Dostoyevski, bem como sua contribuição singular à tradição filosófica existencial. O artigo reafirma valores centrais da filosofia existencial presentes no pensamento dostoiévskiano, tais como o pessimismo, os sentimentos de isolamento e rejeição, a insurgência contra um destino aparentemente imutável, a liberdade aliada à

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elements are echoed in the thoughts of many later philosophers, both Russian and Western.
Keywords: Smerdyakov; solitude; rebellion; Dostoevsky's existential philosophy; The Brothers Karamazov

responsabilidade, o inconsciente e como força geradora de criatividade, escolha e fé; valores estes que permanecem dignos de louvor e representam fontes duradouras de reflexão e inspiração, reverberando no pensamento de diversos filósofos posteriores, tanto russos quanto ocidentais.
Palavras-chave: Smerdyakov; solidão; rebeldia; filosofia existencial de Dostoiévski; Os Irmãos Karamazov

AUFKLÄRUNG, João Pessoa, v.12, n.2, Ago., 2025, p.107-120

Introduction

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821-1881) was a great Russian writer, thinker, anthropologist, and psychoanalyst. He was one of the forerunners of 20th-century existentialism. This study explores the existential dimensions of his final and most philosophically profound novel, The Brothers Karamazov, through the marginal yet symbolically rich figure of Smerdyakov. While much of Dostoevsky's scholarship centers on the intellectual and spiritual struggles of Dmitri, Ivan, Alyosha, and Elder Zosima, Smerdyakov's presence introduces a darker and more disturbing layer to the novel-one that exposes the psychological and social undercurrents of 19th-century Russia following the 1861 emancipation reform (Bykova, 2022; Nguyen; Dinh, 2024; Xu, 2024).

Smerdyakov's character embodies profound solitude and a deeply rooted rebellion, shaped by his illegitimate birth, social exclusion, and emotional neglect. These experiences culminate in acts of patricide and suicide, reflecting an existential crisis marked by alienation, moral disorientation, and the yearning for freedom. His life and death dramatize Dostoevsky's existential themes: the absurdity of existence, the anguish of isolation, and the individual's struggle to define moral values in a world where divine absolutes seem absent. Dostoevsky's tragic philosophy, as analyzed by Xu (2024), frames this internal struggle not just as personal but as a reflection of humanity's moral dilemmas. In doing so, Dostoevsky challenges traditional philosophical frameworks and constructs a complex metaphysical inquiry grounded in the psychological tension of the human soul (Fung, 2017; Nguyen; Do, 2025).

The relevance of this study lies in re-evaluating Smerdyakov's role not simply as a secondary character, but as a vessel through which Dostoevsky communicates foundational questions of human existence-questions later expanded by philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus. As Maspero (2017) and Jovanov (2021) show, the novel's narrative constructs are embedded in theological, legal, and existential critiques, where characters like Smerdyakov bear the weight of metaphysical inquiry. This research also contributes to the understanding of Russian existential anthropology and its intersections with psychoanalysis and Western existential thought (Besschetnova, 2023; Horváth, 2025; Nguyen; Do, 2024).

The article is structured as follows: First, the Literature Review outlines Dostoevsky's philosophical development and thematic focus on solitude and rebellion across his works. The Results and Discussion section is divided into two main parts: (1) Smerdyakov as a symbol of existential solitude and its ontological implications; and (2) Smerdyakov as an embodiment of rebellion and the individual's aspiration for freedom. Finally, the Conclusion revisits the implications of Smerdyakov's existential crisis and Dostoevsky's contribution to the philosophical discourse on human freedom, moral responsibility, and the tragic complexity of the self (Lara, 2025; Roberts, 2018).

Literature review

The culmination of Fyodor Dostoevsky's philosophical and literary genius is widely recognized in The Brothers Karamazov (Братья Карамазовы, 1879-1880), a novel often regarded as his magnum opus. This work serves as a literary and philosophical summation of Dostoevsky's exploration of moral freedom, existential angst, and spiritual redemption. Among the novel's multifaceted characters, Smerdyakov stands out not merely as a plot device but as a symbolic embodiment of solitude, marginality, and nihilistic rebellion. His characterization allows Dostoevsky to explore the darker recesses of the human condition, revealing contradictions between instinct and reason, servility and autonomy, all while retaining a deep undercurrent of compassion and psychological realism (Lossky, 1953).

The foundations of these themes are traceable to Dostoevsky's earlier works, where he continuously grappled with issues of isolation, moral ambiguity, and spiritual fragmentation. Beginning with The Double (1846) and continuing through The Landlady (1847), Notes from Underground (1864), Crime and Punishment (1866), The Gambler (1867), The Idiot (1869), Demons (1872), and The Adolescent (1875), Dostoevsky consistently articulated a vision of human fate situated at the intersection of existential suffering and redemptive possibility. These narratives reflect the turbulent socio-political landscape of 19th-century Russia, particularly the aftermath of the 1861 emancipation reform, which exacerbated class divisions and existential uncertainty (Nguyen; Do, 2024; Nguyen; Dinh, 2024). This historical context is crucial for understanding Dostoevsky's characters as existential subjects burdened by spiritual desolation yet striving toward transcendence.

Within The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky explicitly links crime and moral disintegration to the breakdown of Russia's social and institutional structures: "all the tragedy of crime… is a product of the deeply rooted customs of the Russian serfdom system mired in chaos" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 716). In this sense, solitude and rebellion in Dostoevsky's narrative are not merely emotional states but philosophical categories, representing both a crisis of identity and a potential gateway to spiritual freedom. The character arc from

The Double to Smerdyakov illustrates a coherent evolution in Dostoevsky's philosophical anthropology-what Xu (2024) terms a synthesis of moral, existential, and tragic philosophies that move beyond conventional psychoanalysis to a profound metaphysical inquiry into freedom.

Smerdyakov-illegitimate and invisible-emerges as a vessel for Dostoevsky's critique of rationalism unmoored from morality. His infamous utterance that "if God does not exist, everything is permitted" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 679), reflects not only Ivan's intellectual nihilism but also the dangers of philosophical abstraction divorced from ethical responsibility (Jovanov, 2021). As Nguyen e Do (2025) argue, Dostoevsky's unique contribution lies in his emphasis on spiritual freedom, which contrasts sharply with Sartrean existentialism by rooting freedom in divine orientation rather than human autonomy alone. Smerdyakov, devoid of such grounding, spirals into moral collapse and suicide-an embodiment of existential despair untethered from redemption.

AUFKLÄRUNG, João Pessoa, v.12, n.2, Ago., 2025, p.107-120

The narrative positioning of Smerdyakov as both marginal and central exposes the fragility of modern subjectivity. Though ridiculed as "Balaam's she-ass" and dismissed for his "gloomy and unsociable personality" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 144), he functions as a philosophical mirror to Ivan, the theorist who kills only in thought. As Lossky (1953, p. 70) notes, Smerdyakov enacts Ivan's doctrine, but lacks the intellectual detachment to bear its consequences, resulting in a complete psychic breakdown. This interplay between thought and action invites readers to confront the ethical implications of abstract ideologies-a theme Dostoevsky explored as early as Notes from Underground and developed more fully in his later works.

Importantly, Dostoevsky's portrayal of Smerdyakov reflects a deeply humanistic concern with the marginalized and degraded. Through this character, Dostoevsky insists that moments of ethical clarity and dignity can arise even from the most abject circumstances (Lifshitz, 2013). This is echoed in Maspero (2017), who emphasizes the theological dimension of Dostoevsky's vision-a laicity of mercy, wherein spiritual belonging is not reserved for the virtuous but extended even to the morally compromised. Roberts (2018) further interprets this in pedagogical terms, aligning Dostoevsky's notion of "active love" with Iris Murdoch's philosophy of attention: love as a transformative force grounded in the recognition of others' suffering.

Despite his philosophical depth, Smerdyakov remains largely overlooked in critical discourse. Yet, recent interdisciplinary studies have begun to reassess his significance. Fung (2017) draws parallels between Dostoevsky's narrative structure and romantic irony, suggesting that Smerdyakov operates within a self-reflexive mode that both affirms and subverts narrative authority. Horváth (2025) extends this insight by exploring the visual-textual interplay in Dostoevsky's graphopoetics, identifying Smerdyakov as a "writing subject" whose silent presence destabilizes the plot and embodies a latent critique of authorship itself. Lara (2025) complements this view by mapping Dostoevsky's

spatial metaphors and architectural motifs, arguing that characters like Smerdyakov are confined within oppressive environments that both reflect and reinforce their psychological entrapment.

Taken together, these studies illuminate how Smerdyakov serves as a conceptual nexus for understanding Dostoevsky's engagement with existential, theological, and aesthetic questions. His character bridges Russian spiritual traditions with Western philosophical currents, anticipating themes later explored by Nietzsche, Freud, and Camus. While Western existentialism tends to valorize individual autonomy, Dostoevsky presents a more tragic anthropology-one that affirms the necessity of faith, community, and redemption even amid the most profound moral chaos (Nguyen; Do, 2025; Nguyen; Dinh, 2024; Xu, 2024).

In sum, the literature reviewed here demonstrates the growing scholarly recognition of Smerdyakov's philosophical import. Far from being a peripheral figure, he exemplifies the central tensions in Dostoevsky's thought: freedom and determinism, solitude and solidarity, intellect and morality. By synthesizing psychoanalytic, existential, theological, and literary-anthropological approaches, this review underscores the necessity of re-evaluating Smerdyakov as a key to unlocking Dostoevsky's enduring insights into the human condition.

Results and discussions

1. Smerdyakov - Solitude as a Mode of Human Existence (Existentia)

Solitude, with its multifaceted expressions, has been depicted throughout the history of human thought across various disciplines-from literature and art to philosophy and religion. Dostoevsky was not the first to reflect on solitude, but he dissected its "mechanisms" and manifestations with extraordinary finesse, like a surgeon of the human soul. His significant contribution lies in providing solitude with a new epistemological form, an intellectual effort to expose the hidden aspects of both the external world and the inner world of humanity-a timeless concern of metaphysics.

Ontology, since antiquity, has sought to uncover the essential "quality" that characterizes human beings in all dimensions of life. When Socrates advised, "know thyself," he implied that intentional separation from others is a condition for the self to be revealed. In this context, the space of separation contains the meaning of freedom. The ontology of solitude thus encapsulates both the human condition and the human aspiration-I am alone. I isolate myself because I wish to understand myself as a being distinct from others. Solitude-whether self-imposed or as a form of escape-carries dual significance: a reaction and a yearning for freedom. Here, ontology connects with phenomenology, from Kant's initial interpretations to Hegel's dialectics. Amid

the turbulent contestations of existence, God appears both as Redeemer and as a symbol of compassionate connection between people, enabling them to overcome their foundational melancholy. Viewed through the lens of separation and reconciliation, alienation and restoration, the category of "solitude" becomes a conventional concept and a metaphor for the hidden corners of human life.

Awareness of solitude arises within spaces of communication; the act of fleeing reveals a problematic social reality, even when such awareness is subjective or one-sided. Solitude forms the dark underside of interpersonal empathy. The concept of "solitude," when considered from psychological-ethical and sociological-anthropological perspectives, refers to separation and self-isolation as a reaction of the subject toward others-individuals, communities, groups, or "the masses"-due to an inability to find empathy or understanding. In this sense, solitude reflects the evolution of individual consciousness and a "reorientation" in human relationships influenced by external conditions or a reevaluation of those relationships. Often, solitude signals a return to the self, a process of introspection and reassessment of the ego in relation to society.

In The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky stages a metaphysical drama about the innermost essence of humanity-an inquiry into human fate-revealing solitude as a fierce, relentless dialogue between opposing forces within the individual, and as a longing to transcend society's impositions upon personal agency. This is Dostoevsky's ontological genius: analyzing the emotional world of the irrational human being. Isupov writes: "In Dostoevsky, we are confronted with the existential question of man within a divine world; his metaphysics is ontological-man appears before God and the world in question-and-answer form… Ontological metaphysics accepts the existence of delicate supersensory aspects that are no more materially real than the 'earth' in the word 'earthly.' Its object eludes rational cognition. The 'authority' of epistemology is characterized by intuition, awakening, religious experience; in art, by mystical pleasure, meditative discourse, impulsive actions, and various irrational impulses-all difficult to fully describe in the endless flow of existence. Dostoevsky's contribution lies in giving this form a new epistemological appearance through his intellectual endeavor to reveal the hidden metaphysical world" (Isupov, 2017).

The intellectual lineage from Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard to Dostoevsky challenges rationalism and seeks to articulate the depths of the human soul-a "quietude" that makes it receptive to disturbance, a point of departure for creative contemplation. Paradoxically, such stillness often heralds eruptions. Solitude, therefore, is interpreted in a second sense: I am alone, therefore I am free. I face the harsh duality of life to discover myself. As Kierkegaard affirms, "An individual must live in absolute solitude to choose freedom and affirm authentic truth" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 85-87).

Earlier, in The Overcoat (1842), Gogol analyzed the solitude of Akaky

Akakievich, a minor bureaucrat perpetually scorned in a cruel and indifferent society (Gogol, 2004, p. 92-95), criticizing the dehumanizing and bureaucratic machinery that suppresses the individual (Fanger, 1979).

Gogol and Kierkegaard's influence on Dostoevsky's reflections on solitude permeates many of his works, beginning with The Double, in which he empathizes with Golyadkin's loneliness in a bustling, unjust city and the duplicity of human relationships (Dostoevsky, 2009). The image of the "double" or "split self" starkly exposes the pain of divided existence in a world of lies, suspicion, and cruelty (Frank, 2009, p. 148-151).

Russian religious philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev-an admirer of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche-noted that Dostoevsky had anticipated Nietzsche's idea of the "death of God" (Berdyaev, 2025, p. 63). Nietzsche's declaration of God's death symbolizes the loss of sacred values passed down through generations, erased in a world of uncertainty. Nihilism does not deny values but reflects the disorientation in choosing them, particularly Christian moral values. Unlike Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, Nietzsche argued that human alienation stems from fanatical belief in the divine. Nonetheless, once "God is dead" (Nietzsche), humans drift from their ideals, fall into existential absurdity, and must seek new modes of self-expression-a distinctive existentia-to escape meaningless existence and suffering.

Solitude became Dostoevsky's "favorite" theme after his exile (post-1854), evident in The Village of Stepanchikovo and Its Inhabitants (1859), Notes from the House of the Dead (1860-1862), Notes from Underground (1864), Crime and Punishment (1866), The Idiot (1869), and Demons (1872). Characters are often split into two solitude types: "positive" solitude (introspective and contemplative) and "negative" solitude (isolation from others). In The Brothers Karamazov, all characters embody one of these types. Fyodor Pavlovich is isolated by his grotesque lifestyle; Dmitri by his futile self-defense and inner conflict between love and lust; Ivan by his conspiratorial madness; Elder Zosima by his need for silence to meditate on life; Alyosha by his spiritual path, alienating him from family. Finally, Smerdyakov is isolated both socially and spiritually, embodying the second form-solitude as self-isolation.

Smerdyakov retreats into shadow to respond to the trauma of his social position. The "strange man" Smerdyakov in The Brothers Karamazov and the "strange man" in Notes from Underground share this retreat into darkness, even if their responses to life differ.

Smerdyakov's solitude began at birth, as his mentally impaired mother Lizaveta died after giving birth to him. Grigory took the orphan in and told his wife, "This heaven-born orphan… is the son of a devil and a righteous woman" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 119). Fyodor Pavlovich refused to acknowledge him and relegated him to servitude as a cook. Thus, Smerdyakov was placed at the lowest tier of society, a "filthy" illegitimate child (the name "Smerdyakov" derives from smerdy, meaning vile or dirty in Russian), despised by the

AUFKLÄRUNG, João Pessoa, v.12, n.2, Ago., 2025, p.107-120

Karamazovs-especially Fyodor Pavlovich, who called him "the lackey" or "Balaam's she-ass." Smerdyakov himself admitted he was seen as a "stinking servant" (p. 253). Grigory viewed him as a monster: "He doesn't love us, nor does he love anyone… Are you even human? You're not; you're born of bathhouse vapor…" (p. 146). Deprived of affection and empathy, he preferred solitude in dark corners, developed arrogance, considered himself intellectually superior, though his soul was filled with hatred-bearing the "possessed individualism" Berdyaev described (Berdyaev, 2025).

This distortion of character was tied to his alienation from others and a peculiar, erratic demeanor. In conversations, Smerdyakov constantly tried to display intellectual superiority and gauge others' intelligence. His dialogue with the "half-baked philosopher" Ivan Karamazov makes this evident. Such contemptuous outlooks were already explored by Dostoevsky in Notes from Underground through the image of a petty bureaucrat who, though he "retreats into his hole" (Dostoevsky, 2023, p. 110), is arrogant about his "excessive consciousness," convinced that "they're all stupid and alike like sheep in a flock" (Dostoevsky, 2023, p. 91).

Smerdyakov's solitude, oddity, even eccentricity-his separation from others-can be understood as an extreme form of rebellion against what he perceived as life's absurdity. He responded to absurdity with absurd acts. As a child, he enjoyed hanging cats and giving them formal funerals, draping himself in a bedsheet like a priest, chanting as he swung something over the cat's body like a censer. This grotesque play, which Grigory witnessed and punished, only deepened Smerdyakov's boundless resentment.

American scholar G.L. Bograd praised Dostoevsky for creating characters that reflect the complexity of human nature amid Russia's historical transformation-where old and new values clashed and intertwined. Existential anthropology, he notes, describes the human being in the depths of the soul, revealed through behavior, attitude, and self-reflection. For Smerdyakov, early experiences were foundational: a loveless childhood as an abandoned child found in a storage room by Grigory after the death of his wife and child. "Raised by Grigory, Smerdyakov eventually became a cook, a servant-though deep inside he had longed for something greater" (Bograd, 2007, p. 163). Bograd even speculates that the childhood resentment and melancholia drove Smerdyakov to join a separatist sect that worshipped "earthly gods" and practiced self-castration (oskoplenie), a ritual called "sacred rebirth." Evidence in the novel suggests that Smerdyakov was a skoptsy sect follower. He had a high-pitched voice (fistulyarny), was indifferent to women, obsessively clean (a requirement for ritual castration), "so clean he found food repulsive," inspecting it like under a microscope, and "his boots always gleamed like mirrors" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 147-148). He preferred fish over meat, was cautious, diligent, never complained, and displayed a rigid honesty. His returning of 300 rubles to Fyodor Pavlovich and 3,000 to Ivan during their third

meeting (p. 148, 672) confirms this. His epilepsy might even have been interpreted as a divine sign, though he later faked seizures to carry out his crime (p. 166).

To be "abandoned" or "cast out" is the ultimate state of solitude: without God or any absolute value to rely on, man bears the weight of freedom and responsibility in a "silent world." Placing himself in darkness, Smerdyakov lived with chronic dissatisfaction. Dostoevsky, both psychologist and thinker, located this dissatisfaction in egoism and solipsism. In his characters, egoistic suffering is often expressed as a pleasure derived from agony and despair. What fascinates in Smerdyakov is how Dostoevsky portrayed a man directing and performing a personal life drama with absolute conviction. This egoism becomes a response to the raw truth of life-echoed in the "Russian gentleman" (p. 683) who appears in Ivan's delirious vision after Smerdyakov leaves: "If everything on Earth were reasonable, nothing would happen at all… Without suffering, there's no pleasure: it would all turn into a never-ending hymn of gratitude. Sacred, but a little dull" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 690).

His epilepsy, intensified after days of "hiding in the corner," became the desperate weapon of a lonely fanatic. The deeper issue is that Smerdyakov's suffering transformed into a form of pleasure-he used it to inflict emotional pain on others, especially after Fyodor Pavlovich began caring for him upon suspecting their blood tie. Smerdyakov's philosophy: he would rather indulge in the pleasure of his own misery, emphasizing his deficiencies, than accept redemption imposed from the outside. What matters isn't just what happens to him-but how it happens (Lifshitz, 2013, p. 42).

His sense of inferiority and misanthropy-"hating all of Russia" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 252) -led Smerdyakov to sever ties with the Karamazovs and society, becoming an outsider harboring secret resentment toward everyone. His self-loathing and isolation became the foundation of a mysterious, detached life philosophy-contemptuous of others, yet content in the illusion of absolute freedom within a self-constructed world. The world is absurd-but this absurdity is part of life's structure. Smerdyakov thus disrupts Feuerbach's humanist vision of rational harmony between reason, will, and love. In The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach wrote: "Man exists to know, to love, to will. But what is the purpose of reason? - Reason. Of love? - Love. Of will? - Free will. We think to think, love to love, will to will-that is, to become free beings. The true being is one that thinks, loves, and overflows with will" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 3). This vision of human perfection is shattered by the irrational structure of existence.

In Dostoevsky's portrayal, Smerdyakov's solitude is not only manifested in his reclusion and disdain for others, but also in his discontent with daily life and thought: dissatisfaction (under the veneer of obedience) ranging from mundane tasks to aesthetic experience. He reads Gogol superficially, failing to

grasp his realist-naturalist style, dismissing it as "fabricated." He couldn't get through ten pages of a history book, found theater boring, and was annoyed when asked about performances. Yet he appreciated art in his own way. A flicker of Russian Romanticism lingers in his gloomy yet longing soul. Dostoevsky captured this rare moment in Chapter V when Smerdyakov plays the guitar and sings for Maria Kondratievna in a "servant-like croon," as Alyosha described (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 251).

AUFKLÄRUNG, João Pessoa, v.12, n.2, Ago., 2025, p.107-120

Smerdyakov is a component in the dialectical structure-thesis and antithesis-outlined by Kant in Critique of Pure Reason. According to Golosovker, "Dostoevsky was not only familiar with the antinomy in Critique of Pure Reason, he internalized it. He turned Kant's paradoxes-more precisely, their antithesis-into the symbolic enemies he wrestled with as writer, polemicist, and philosopher" (Golosovker, 1963, p. 38-39). Ivan and Smerdyakov embody this antithesis: the one is the theorist of "everything is permitted," the other acts it out; one enters solitude by choice, the other was born into it. On the inescapable terrain of human experience, Dostoevsky revealed the precarious tension of paradox-manifested overtly as antithesis in Ivan, and cryptically, even mysteriously, as thesis in Smerdyakov and the devil. Smerdyakov is the grotesque physical embodiment of the antithesis; the devil-a symbolic caricature (Golosovker, 1963, p. 45).

2. Smerdyakov - A Symbol of Rebellion or the Human Aspiration for Freedom

Smerdyakov's form of egoism differs from the early-phase egoism of Berkeley's philosophy. While Berkeley employed egoism to affirm the power of self-consciousness-the "I" that perceives the world-Smerdyakov used it to veil his "secret" world, hiding both the ambiguity of his actions and the profound secret he revealed to Dmitri: the planned patricide, silently conspired with Ivan. This "secret" followed Smerdyakov throughout his life and became the constant companion of his solitude. At the edge of utter loneliness, Smerdyakov carried this secret into death, leaving behind the final words: "I ended my life of my own will. Don't accuse anyone" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 699). Dostoevsky's existential anthropology reveals that, although Smerdyakov rejected God, he still longed for a form of moral salvation. Yet his final isolation, far from offering redemption, ultimately denied it to others. The phrase "don't accuse anyone" failed to persuade the tribunal judging Dmitri, who relied instead on testimonies and "mathematical" evidence.

In life, Smerdyakov was isolated-intellectually and behaviorally. Yet he was not alone in the conspiracy against his depraved and detestable father. His scheme was so meticulously constructed that even Ivan exclaimed, "The devil must have helped you" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 678). Alongside Ivan, Dostoevsky invokes the image of the devil-frequently referred to simply as

AUFKLÄRUNG, João Pessoa, v.12, n.2, Ago., 2025, p.107-118

"he" or "it." And in contrast to the devil, there appears the symbol of divine judgment-God. The patricide, orchestrated to avenge personal humiliation and express an extreme desire for freedom, became an inhuman and irrational act of rebellion against fate, enacted through a tacit "pact" between Smerdyakov and Ivan.

Rebellion is typically understood as the individual's resistance against existing order. But rebellion also reflects an existential crisis-a breakdown in one's mode of being. Such crises stem from an individual's disorientation in relation to others. In Smerdyakov's case, "rebellion" becomes a defense of personal identity, a struggle to elevate himself to the level of those he deems unworthy yet privileged (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 253).

All evil may arise from exaggerating the principle of utility and purpose, from the dismantling of sacred idols-not through Enlightenment, but through servility divorced from wisdom and born from existential absurdity. Rebellion, whether impulsive or calculated, inherently resists norms, dismissing moral codes and individual rights. In Dostoevsky's works-as well as in existentialism before and after him-rebellion takes on a meaning far greater than mere resistance: it becomes a furious, unrelenting assertion of the self against the world's injustices.

Before Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer had already rebelled against Hegelian rationalism, attempting to replace the "myth of reason" with the "myth of will," proclaiming in The World as Will and Representation that "I will" precedes "I can." Following Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard deepened the revolt against rationalism and Christian moral dogmatism. Nietzsche, the father of atheistic existentialism, also rebelled, though differently-condemning bourgeois morality and the idolatry of outdated values. In Camus, rebellion targeted not only the absurdity of existence but also human degradation: "a general corruption" in which people indulge one another.

Smerdyakov's rebellion cannot be equated with Descartes' "I think, therefore I am"; rather, it is a final cry: "I rebel, therefore I exist"-an outburst demanding recognition as a fellow human, not an outcast condemned to darkness. His rebellion anticipates Sartre's approach in Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology (1943).

In The Brothers Karamazov, Smerdyakov-the murderer and the philosopher-are one and the same. Like Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment, his act of murder is also an enactment of philosophy. However, as Golosovker asserts, "Smerdyakov's philosophy is actually Ivan's philosophy: it begins as theory-'everything is permitted'-and is then actualized as murder" (Golosovker, 1963, p. 17).

The sense of being superfluous, abandoned, and discarded may drive a person toward extreme self-assertion-suicide. Here, Dostoevsky connects with Sartre. In Nausea, Sartre wrote: "We are a heap of existents confused about our very existence; indistinguishable from one another, none of us has any

justification for being; and each, confused and vaguely anxious, feels superfluous among the trees, fences, and pebbles…" (Sartre, 1994, p. 240). In The Rebel (L'Homme révolté, 1951), Albert Camus explains: when humans lose meaning, they may blindly rebel-resulting in suicide or murder. Camus identified Dostoevsky, through characters like Ivan Karamazov and Kirillov (from Demons), as a pioneer of this "nihilistic rebellion" (Dostoevsky on the Demonic Decimation of a Shareable World).

Feuerbach (1989) proclaimed, "Theology is anthropology: man creates God in his own image". He believed that by looking inward and shedding metaphysical illusions, one could attain human truth. Yet Dostoevsky exposed the ethical consequences of such self-deification: alienation, crime, and destruction flourish when moral metaphysics is abandoned. Smerdyakov embodies this warning-he kills his father because he believes that in a godless world, "everything is permitted."

19th-century Russian society-caught in the explosion of change-was a pressure cooker of unbearable contradictions. These conditions persisted into the 20th century's wars and dehumanization. Camus wrote: "In this world of shipwreck, everything becomes insane, violent. We torture each other, all are guilty before one another, and we are nailed one by one to the cross without even realizing it" (Camus, 1995, p. 221). In an age where submission and rebellion are inseparable opposites, individuals seek self-reckoning and escape from fate's injustice.

Smerdyakov's confession mirrors the self-examination found in Augustine's Confessions, a tale of sin, indulgence, repentance, and Christian conversion. In Dostoevsky's novel, every major character confesses in their own way. Fyodor Pavlovich and Ivan do so aggressively and cynically; Zosima and Alyosha-more gently, introspectively. Smerdyakov's confession is different: both humble and absurdly proud. In returning the 3,000 rubles to Ivan, he says: "I don't need it. I used to dream of starting a new life with it, in Moscow or abroad… but only because 'everything is permitted.' You taught me that. You said it many times: without God, there is no virtue, and then virtue is unnecessary. You were right. I reasoned the same way" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 679).

Why does the devil-"he"-appear in the patricidal plot between Smerdyakov and Ivan? Who gave the fateful "signal"-the door left open? Again, it was the devil. Alongside Smerdyakov and the devil, there is a third presence: God. Dmitri tells Alyosha: "God will kill him (Smerdyakov after the murder)" (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 637). Between the two murderers stands the "third one": Is it God or the devil? This third figure is God, the Supreme Being now standing beside us (Dostoevsky, 2013, p. 671).

Thus, Smerdyakov did not choose solitude-it was imposed upon him by fate. Yet in the theatrical life he staged, he sought connection-a link to affirm that he had an accomplice, even if the alliance was unspoken.

Conclusion

Smerdyakov, though a minor character in The Brothers Karamazov, carries deep symbolic weight. While the narrative centers on the spiritual and moral struggles of the primary characters-Dmitri, Ivan, Alyosha, and Elder Zosima-Smerdyakov functions as a dark counterpoint, embodying the suppressed tensions and contradictions within Russian society. He represents a marginalized individual suffocating under injustice and existential despair, someone forced to emerge from obscurity and revolt against his oppressive circumstances.

His acts of murder and suicide are not merely personal failings but desperate responses to a spiritual and societal deadlock. These acts invite reflection on the human condition and the burden of moral responsibility. In Smerdyakov, freedom becomes detached from morality; it is no longer about goodness but about escape-a raw, unfiltered assertion of agency through destruction.

His inner turmoil reflects a deeper philosophical struggle-the tension between spiritual transcendence and the brutal reality of existence. Rather than follow a harmonious path toward the ideal, as imagined in classical philosophy, Smerdyakov embodies a fractured soul caught in violent contradiction. This unrest reveals a more complex vision of beauty and meaning, one grounded in human suffering and internal conflict.

His suicide can be seen as a response to existential meaninglessness, a tragic leap that questions the value of life itself. In an era marked by conformity and the loss of individual authenticity, his actions highlight the fragile nature of being and the elusive desire for liberation. Though ultimately a plunge into nothingness, his rebellion forces us to confront the ethical and philosophical dilemmas of existence-freedom, suffering, and the possibility of transcendence in a disordered world.

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