
Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia

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5 Dostoevsky's Fiction: The Metaphysics of Suicide

In the 1860s–80s, the problem of suicide, debated in science and the press, attracted the attention of many Russian writers.¹ Dostoevsky, in particular, seems to have been preoccupied by the issue.² Yet in his ruminations on suicide, the writer formulated the problem differently from scientists and journalists. Dostoevsky's heroes met their deaths as the result of the existential dilemma that faced a whole generation of Russians, not because of a medical or social disorder.

In *The Possessed* (Besy, 1871–72), the hero, Kirillov, is caught up in a conflict between two apparently reasonable but mutually exclusive propositions (expounded in his dialogue with Petr Verkhovensky):

- God is necessary, and therefore must exist.
- Well, that's wonderful.
- But I know that He does not and cannot exist.
- That's more like it.
- Don't you understand that a man with these two thoughts cannot go on living?
- Must shoot himself, you mean?
- Don't you understand that a man can shoot himself for that alone?
(10:469/615–16)³

In the end, Kirillov commits suicide while Verkhovensky, an atheist, commits murder. As Nietzsche noted in his synopsis of *The Possessed*, this syllogism also “devoured” Stavrogin.⁴ After Stavrogin's suicide, his body was subjected to a postmortem examination, but “our medical men, after the autopsy, completely and emphatically ruled out insanity” (these words conclude the novel; 10:516/678). Clearly, medicine could not detect the problem.

The existential dilemma that killed Dostoevsky's heroes had tormented Russian intellectuals since the 1840s. In his memoirs, *My Past and Thoughts* (Byloe i dumy, 1852–68), Alexander Herzen describes a “historical” conversation with a friend (Timofei Granovsky, professor of philosophy at Moscow University) in the summer of 1846:

I observed that the development of science, its contemporary condition, *oblige*s us to accept certain truths apart from whether we like them or not; that, once recognized, they cease to be historical problems and become simply irrefutable facts of knowledge like the theories of Euclid, like the laws of Kepler, like the connection of cause and effect and the indivisibility of spirit and matter.

“All that is so far from being obligatory,” answered Granovsky with a slight change in his face, “that I never shall accept your dry, cold idea of the unity of soul and body; with it the immortality of the soul disappears. You may not need it, but I have buried too much to give up that belief. Personal immortality is essential for me.”⁵

Dostoevsky (in Kirillov) and Herzen present the conflict as a clash between two types of knowledge—positively-established, scientific facts, on the one hand, and personal convictions, drawn from experience or dictated by a moral imperative, on the other.

This dilemma had received a philosophical formulation in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781): it is a perpetual contradiction between two heuristic principles, “dogmatism” and “empiricism,” which is inherent in the very nature of human reason. Dogmatism affirms a set of transcendental ideas: the existence of God, a being from whom everything receives origin and unity; the immortality of the soul, which is indivisible and therefore indestructible; and free will, “raised above the compulsion of nature.”⁶ Pure empiricism, explaining phenomena, denies these postulates. Thus, claims Kant, empiricism robs us, or seems to rob us, of moral principles and ideas: “If there is no original Being, different from the world; . . . if our will is not free, and our soul shares the same divisibility and perishableness with matter, *moral ideas* and principles lose all validity.”⁷ Although his personal sympathies lay on the side of dogmatism and its transcendental truths, Kant warned that taking one side and ignoring the other presents mortal dangers: “[reason] is tempted . . . either to abandon itself to skeptical despair, or to assume a dogmatic obstinacy, taking its stand on certain assertions, without granting a hearing and doing justice to the arguments of the opponent. In both cases, a death-blow is

dealt to sound philosophy, although in the former we might speak of the *Euthanasia* of pure reason."⁸

In Dostoevsky's age, the conflict received special poignancy: developments in positivistic science presented a powerful threat to transcendental truths. Kant's antinomies of pure reason became topical. (Dostoevsky's contemporary and friend, A. F. Koni, cites the case of an eighty-two-year-old learned Jew, Schwartz, who was found dead from an overdose of morphine with an open volume of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.)⁹ In his writings, Dostoevsky presented Kant's "scenes of discord and confusion"—dramas created by the conflict of the laws (antinomies) of pure reason.¹⁰ Dostoevsky himself was clearly among those for whom the immortality of the soul was a personal necessity. Keeping vigil by his wife's dead body (on April 16, 1864), he jotted down in his notebook: "Masha is lying on the table. Will I see Masha again?" He continued to reflect on the immortality of the soul and concluded by condemning materialism as a doctrine of death: "The materialist doctrine—universal inertia and the mechanism of matter; this means death" (20:173, 175).¹¹ But, as Kant admonished, Dostoevsky "granted a hearing" to the arguments of his opponents, the materialists and atheists, in his writings.

Thus, in addressing the common problem of suicide, the writer asked not "what is suicide?" but "what if there is no God and no immortality of the soul?" "Then, everything is permitted, even murder and suicide," concluded some of Dostoevsky's heroes. In his writings, suicide is the answer to these questions, an end point of a syllogism. The high incidence of suicide and murder among those of his characters who espoused atheism suggests that, for Dostoevsky, belief in God and immortality was a necessary condition of human existence.

The Method

Roaming the streets of Petersburg, Raskolnikov, the hero of *Crime and Punishment* (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, 1866), encounters drunks, prostitutes, and would-be suicides. He laments the fate of society's outcasts and the possible fate of his sister, Dunia: "They say that's just how it ought to be. Every year, they say, a certain percentage has to go... somewhere... to the devil, it must be, so as to freshen up the rest and not interfere with them. A percentage! Nice little words they have, really: so reassuring, so scientific. A certain percentage, they say, meaning there's nothing to worry about. Now, if it was some

other word... well, then maybe it would be more worrisome... And what if Dunechka somehow gets into the percentage!... If not that one, then some other?.." (6:43).¹²

This is a retort to Russian positivists, who thought that moral statistics proved that a natural law doomed a percentage of the population to moral decay, crime, and suicide.¹³ (Adolphe Quételet's *Treatise on Man* appeared in Russian translation in 1865 and provoked heated discussions.)¹⁴ One of the novel's heroes, Lebeziatnikov, promotes a popular anthology of Western European studies on social statistics and physiology, *A General Conclusion Concerning the Positive Method* (Obshchii vyvod polozhitel'nogo metoda, 1866),¹⁵ as a book containing answers to such problems. It might seem that in his novel, which features a murderer, a prostitute, and a suicide, Dostoevsky offers an alternative to the positive method; unlike the social scientists of his day, he deals not with statistics but with individual cases; unlike medical men, he works not with the body but with human consciousness and ideas.

As Mikhail Bakhtin claimed, Dostoevsky's hero "is merely the career of an independently valid idea."¹⁶ What Dostoevsky does, I believe, is to show how a given idea might be developed and realized in action by an empirical, historically specific individual. The main project of his post-Siberian years is to test the atheist worldview. Each character (the Underground Man, Raskolnikov, Ippolit, Kirillov, Ivan Karamazov, Smerdiakov) represents a model of the "new man," who is "infected with atheism" (10:269); each model tests the initial hypothesis that "there is no God and no immortality of the soul." Thus Dostoevsky proceeds by a method borrowed from positivist science: human consciousness serves as the nutrient medium in which an idea is allowed to grow—the writer stages a scientific experiment.¹⁷ In this way, Dostoevsky anticipated Emile Zola, who suggested in his essay "The Experimental Novel" (*Le roman expérimental*, 1879) that the experimental method advocated in Claude Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* (*Introduction à la médecine expérimentale*, 1865) could be practiced by writers in novels.¹⁸ But while Dostoevsky's method is similar to Zola's and to the method used by positivist scientists, his object is different. Zola justified using the experimental method in literature by announcing that "the metaphysical man is dead." "Our whole territory," he claimed, "is transformed by the advent of the physiological man"—a new object of literature.¹⁹ In his novels, Dostoevsky applied the experimental method to the metaphysical man, whose death he refused to certify.

Aside: The Genealogy of the Method

Far from being solely a product of the positivism of the 1860s, Dostoevsky's experimental model has Romantic roots. Among its direct sources is Vladimir Odoevsky's *Russian Nights* (Russkie nochi, 1844), a book that introduced Russians to Romantic epistemology.²⁰ The work features several experiments staged by characters whom the author calls "experimental spiritualists" (*dukhoispytатели*). An inserted story, "The Last Suicide" (Poslednee samoubiistvo), composed by a young man in the grip of an "all-consuming dialectical doubt," presents a "symbolic vision" of what the future would be if society were to develop according to Malthusian ideas (and these ideas alone); non-being would become a desired state and mass suicide would put an end to humankind. Odoevsky presents his hero's vision of mankind's collective suicide as a "monstrous" creation of "purely experimental knowledge," a worldview untouched by faith.²¹ Believing that empiricism and materialism ("forms of old and new paganism") were "highly inadequate means for the cognition of truth,"²² Odoevsky advocated Schelling's mystical idealism, which opened "the still unexplored part of the world: the human soul."²³ In the words of one of his characters, nineteenth-century science, because it focused on "crude matter," failed to grasp the essence of life; its object is dead. Thus, in vain medicine "puts questions to the cadaver . . . the cadaver is silent or provides answers that only make one more uncertain about the workings of life." In vain scientists strive to define the laws of society; in their social investigations they limited themselves "to an invention of a phantom that they dared to call 'human society'"; their object "remained a phantom," or "merely a word."²⁴ Knowledge of organic life is tainted because the concepts applied to inorganic bodies were transferred to organic bodies: "Recall the words of Bichat, the great experimenter and laboratory physicist who was killed by his anatomical experiments. . . . Bichat had to admit that 'we need to invent a new language for organic bodies, because all the words that have been taken from the physical sciences and applied to animal and plant economies, invoke concepts which do not at all correspond to physiological phenomena.' With each word we speak, we exhale the remains of a thousand ideas that have been conferred upon this word by the centuries, by various nations, and even by individual people."²⁵ Language failed scientists. It was the poet who had the privilege of bringing to knowledge the first hope of attaining positive truth.

In the light of this history, one can better understand Dostoevsky's

use of experimental models. Dostoevsky shared Odoevsky's concern with the nature of knowledge, also drawing on the opposition between the truth of science—which is dependent on the investigation of matter, verbal mediation, and logical reasoning—and the truth of faith, which is directly apprehended. The latter found its clearest expression in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and his philosophy of revelation, which attempted to synthesize science and art. Dostoevsky followed the "Russian Schelling," Odoevsky, in his choice of an object: he worked not with the body, but with the soul. But, unlike Odoevsky and his hero (the author of the story "The Last Suicide"), Dostoevsky had no qualms about reverting to experimental models. Romantic ideas reemerged within the new context, reinforced by scientific positivism. Striving to surpass the scientist, the writer took upon himself the role of experimenter.

Experimental Design: *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné*

The young would-be suicide Ippolit is a crucial figure in the novel *The Idiot* (1868).^{*} An eighteen-year-old youth dying from consumption, he decides to commit suicide before his life runs its natural course, and to shoot himself publicly after reading to the assembled guests a document entitled "My Necessary Explanation" (*Moe neobkhodimoe ob"iasnenie*): "My 'Explanation' would explain everything sufficiently to the police. Those who are keen on psychology and anyone else who likes are at liberty to deduce anything they will from it. I would, however, like my manuscript to be published [*chtob eta rukopis' predana byla glasnosti*]. . . . I bequeath my skeleton to the Medical Academy for the benefit of science" (8:342/422).²⁶ The youth "bares" both his soul and his body for "science."

Ippolit describes himself as "the one condemned to death." The sentence was handed down by nature, in accordance with the law of physical decay and death, and announced by a medical student, "a materialist, atheist, and nihilist," who declared that Ippolit had several weeks left to live (8:323). In this situation, Ippolit, who (in Dostoevsky's words) refuses to recognize any jurisdiction over himself, asks himself: Is it worthwhile to do good deeds? Why refrain from crime and murder? Ultimately, he asks whether there is any reason for him to wait patiently for the death sentence to be executed: "Finally, there's the temptation: nature has so limited my activities by its

^{*}According to the early plans, "Ippolit is the main axis of the novel" (9:277).

three weeks' sentence that suicide is perhaps the only thing I have still time to begin and end of my own free will. Well, perhaps I want to take advantage of the last possibility of *action*. A protest is sometimes no small matter..." (8:344/425). Having read his confession, Ippolit pulls the trigger. But he survives the attempt, much to his own embarrassment, and soon dies a natural death. The "deed" remains undone, but the word has been spoken.

The story of Ippolit is an emblem of the human predicament in the age of positivism and atheism: if the soul is not immortal, then time is measured for every human being.²⁷ In a godless world, every man is condemned to death. A "nihilist," Ippolit constructs his argument as if the laws of nature were the sole ordering force in the universe. He is suffering not only from consumption but also from a lack of belief.

Dostoevsky used the situation of a man condemned to death (whether by medicine, in accordance with the law of nature, or in a court of law) as an experimental investigation into the effect of man's awareness of his finitude. One specimen, Ippolit, found life itself pointless: his thoughts turned to suicide. In Dostoevsky's fiction this experiment was repeated several times, most notably with Kirillov and Ivan Karamazov as alternative subjects, under slightly different conditions. On the whole, the experiment proved Kant's deductions to be true: for the possibility of moral existence we must believe we each have something like an infinite amount of time; that is, we must believe in the immortality of the soul.²⁸

By using an experimental model, Dostoevsky beat the positivists at their own game. He demonstrated that their project of removing God from human consciousness would result in the collapse of morality and, ultimately, in the annihilation of humankind through suicide and murder. Contrary to the opinion voiced by Zola, it was not the meta-physical man who was dead, but the atheist—dead by his own hand.

Throughout his experiment, Dostoevsky was interested in determining not only the final outcome of the situation but also the psychological condition of his subject. As he commented in his prison memoir, *Notes from the Dead House* (*Zapiski iz mertvogo doma*, 1861), "I tried to imagine the psychological state of a person being led to his execution" (4:152). Time and again, Dostoevsky attempted to reconstruct the experience of a man facing death. In *The Idiot*, Myshkin, who speaks repeatedly of the torments of a condemned man, forms a hypothesis that pain comes primarily from the awareness that death is certain: "Yet the chief and the worst pain is perhaps not inflicted by wounds, but by your certain knowledge that in

an hour, in ten minutes, in half a minute, now, this moment your soul will fly out of your body, and that you will be a human being no longer, and that that's certain—the main thing is that it is *certain*" (8:20/46). (Like an experimental scientist, Myshkin recorded the subject's reactions at regular intervals.)

It was Voltaire (in *Dictionnaire philosophique*) who said that the real content of the experience of dying is not the fact of dying, but the certainty that we have to die.²⁹ This idea is developed by Victor Hugo. His famous *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné* recreates the diary of a condemned man, who recorded his experience during the last day of his life, up to the very last minute. The certainty of death drives Hugo's character to suicidal despair.³⁰ Dostoevsky probably borrowed the thought expressed by Myshkin from Hugo, but Myshkin also seeks confirmation of his hypothesis in real-life experience: "Possibly there is a man who has had a death sentence read out to him and has been given time to go through this torture, and has then been told, You can go now, you've been reprieved. Such a man could perhaps tell us" (8:21/46).³¹ Such a man was Dostoevsky himself.

Arrested in the spring of 1849 (at the age of twenty-seven) for his participation in the meetings of the Petrashevsky circle (where he discussed socialist and materialist ideas, from Fourier's to Feuerbach's), he was, along with several other members of what was deemed to be a subversive secret society, sentenced to death. Although the original sentence was commuted to penal servitude, it was read to the prisoners, assembled in a public square in Petersburg to face a firing squad; minutes later a retreat was sounded and a commuted sentence was read. In a letter to his brother Mikhail written on the same day (December 22, 1849), Dostoevsky described the events: "they read us all our death sentence, allowed us to kiss the cross, broke a sword over each of our heads, and attired us for execution (white shirts). Then three of us were placed at the post for the execution to be carried out. They were calling three names at a time. I was in the second group and so I had no more than one minute left to live" (28/I:161).³² A fellow prisoner described Dostoevsky's reaction to the death sentence: "Dostoevsky was quite excited, he recalled *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné* of Victor Hugo, and, going up to Speshnev, said: 'Nous serons avec le Christ' [We shall be with Christ]. 'Un peu de poussière' [A speck of dust]—the latter answered with a twisted smile."³³

This "experiment," staged by Emperor Nicholas I, could have taught Dostoevsky that a believer, who expected "to be with Christ," and an atheist, who anticipated solely the disintegration of matter, experi-

enced "le dernier jour" differently. In this case, Dostoevsky himself was the control subject; the variable was faith.

Death of an Atheist

In Dostoevsky's life and works the experimental and experiential went hand in hand with the symbolic, which provided access to the metaphysical meaning of death and endowed individual experience with a paradigmatic quality.* Judging by his writings, Dostoevsky interpreted his own experience of facing execution as a "parable, with the death sentence representing man's mortality and the reprieve, resurrection into eternal life."³⁴ He wrote to his brother Mikhail: "Why, didn't I face death today, live with this thought for three-quarters of an hour, live through my last moment, and now I am living once again!" (28/I:163-64).

One paradigm for such an experience was to be found in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. In *The Idiot*, speaking of the pain of a prisoner awaiting execution, Myshkin evoked Christ's torment: "It was of agony like this and of such horror that Christ spoke" (8:21/46). But in the age in which man was viewed primarily as a material being, that is, as a body liable to physical decay, the interpretation of Christ's death and resurrection was subject to revision. Dostoevsky addressed this issue in Ippolit's reflections on Hans Holbein's painting of the dead Christ (1521), an "icon" from the age of humanism:

The picture depicted Christ, who just been taken from the cross. . . . It was a faithful representation of the dead body of a man who has undergone unbearable torments. . . . The face has not been spared in the least; it is nature itself, and, indeed, any man's corpse would look like that after such suffering. I know that the Christian Church laid it down in the first few centuries of its existence that Christ really did suffer and that the passion was not symbolical. His body on

*His contemporaries also thought in terms of shared cultural paradigms. Thus Apollon Maikov described Dostoevsky the revolutionary as a dying Socrates. He recalled how, in January 1849, Dostoevsky paid him a visit (and stayed to spend the night) in an effort to recruit him into a secret society: "I recall how Dostoevsky, sitting like the dying Socrates before his friends, wearing a night shirt with the collar unbuttoned, exerted all his rhetorical eloquence in telling me about the sanctity of this cause, about our duty to save the fatherland, and so forth" (Letter of A. N. Maikov to P. A. Viskovatov, 1885; quote from Dostoevskii 18:191).

the cross was therefore fully and entirely subject to the laws of nature. In the picture the face is terribly smashed with blows, swollen, covered with terrible, swollen, and bloodstained bruises, the eyes open and squinting; the large, open whites of the eyes have a sort of dead and glassy glint. But, strange to say, as one looks at the dead body of this tortured man, one cannot help asking oneself the peculiar and interesting question: if such a corpse (and it must have been just like that) was seen by all His disciples, by His future chief apostles, by the women who followed Him and stood by the cross, by all who believed in Him and worshipped Him, then how could they possibly have believed, as they looked at the corpse, that that martyr would rise again? Here one cannot help being struck with the idea that if death is so horrible and if the laws of nature are so powerful, then how can they be overcome? . . . The people surrounding the dead man, none of whom is shown in the picture, must have been overwhelmed by a feeling of terrible anguish and dismay on that evening which had shattered all their hopes and almost all their beliefs at one fell blow. . . . And if, on the eve of the crucifixion, the Master could have seen what He would look like when taken from the cross, would he have mounted the cross and died as he did? This question, too, you can't help asking yourself as you look at the picture. (8:338–39/418–20)

The experience of contemplating Holbein's dead Christ represents the trial facing faith in the age of positivism. In its effect on believers, this "quasi-anatomical vision of the dead Christ" (Holbein is believed to have found his model—a body recovered from the Rhine, possibly a suicide—in an anatomical theater)³⁵ is like positivist science, which revealed the perishable, bodily side of man's nature. Ippolit placed the God-man, Christ, in this situation. What if Christ could see himself as a decomposing body? One thing is clear: in the age of positivism, man was no longer capable of submitting to execution like Christ. Incapable of joining Christ in the Gethsemane prayer, "Let Thy will be done," modern man died by his own will—by suicide.

The significance of Ippolit's suicide attempt lies not in the individual, but in the symbolic dimension of experience. It is Dostoevsky's first attempt to modify the classic paradigms of voluntary death; most importantly, the death of Socrates and the death of Christ.³⁶ Dostoevsky reinterpreted elements of the paradigms and rearranged them into a new pattern. Like Socrates, Ippolit is a man condemned to death who chooses to die before the appointed time, by his own hand. He does not, however, accept his sentence gracefully. Unlike Socrates, Ippolit

does not see death as liberation of the soul from the prison house of the body. His death resembles Seneca's, who took his life in anticipation of Nero's death sentence (and struck a clumsy blow), or Petronius's, who died in the midst of a feast, having chosen to preempt the vengeful death sentence imposed by a despot. In Seneca's words, they renounced nature and flung her gift back in her face.³⁷ In death (said Lucretius), they closed their eyes to the sun and returned to eternal night. As if following their example, Ippolit chose a classical setting for his suicide, which he saw as a rejection of nature's gift: he planned to die at sunrise, after a "feast" (a celebration of Prince Myshkin's birthday), with a glass of champagne in his hand. Thus, with Ippolit's death, Dostoevsky abandoned the tradition that led from the death of Plato's Socrates to the death of Christ as well as the view of voluntary death as a royal road to immortality. The writer pursued a side line of cultural evolution: the neo-pagan overrode the Christian.

The pattern was also embodied in Dostoevsky's plans for the story "Death of the Poet" (*Smert' poeta*, contained in his notebook for 1869–70 along with the plans for *The Idiot*). An Atheist, a Priest (*Popik*), an Old Believer (*Raskol'nik*), a nihilist Doctor (*Doktor-nigilist*), and a Poet gather to converse "about liberty and liberated man (N.B. according to the apostle Paul.)" (9:120). In the end, the Poet reads his "last confession" (a confession of nonbelief), drinks champagne, and shoots himself.

According to St. Paul, man had a choice between two ways of life—"after the flesh [and] after the Spirit." The first leads to death; the second to life eternal.³⁸ Through participation in the life of the spirit, following the example of Christ, "the creature . . . shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). In Dostoevsky's fragment, the Poet rejects this Christian view of life and the example of Christ in favor of the paganism of classical antiquity: "The poet [speaks about] the deification of nature, [he is] a pagan. . . . Delirium, his last moments, 'Götter Griechenlands.' Death" (9:120).³⁹ Deaths like Ippolit's in *The Idiot* and the Poet's in Dostoevsky's unwritten story befit the age of the new paganism—mid-nineteenth-century materialism.

Le Dernier jour of a Nation

If an individual needs to believe that he has an unlimited amount of time, a nation needs to believe that it has a historical future. This conclusion follows from the case of Kraft, a hero of *The Adolescent* (*Pos-*

drostok, 1875): "He [Kraft] has deduced that the Russians are a second-rate people . . . destined to serve as raw material for a nobler race, and not to play an independent part in the history of humanity. In view of this theory of his, which is perhaps correct, Kraft has come to the conclusion that the activity of every Russian must in the future be paralyzed by this idea, that all, so to speak, will fold their hands and . . . " (13:44/47).⁴⁰ And he committed suicide.

The idea itself had a firm scientific foundation: "Kraft himself conceived of his death as a logical conclusion. . . . He left behind him a manuscript book full of abstruse theories, proving by phrenology, by craniology, and even by mathematics, that the Russians are a second-rate race, and that therefore, since he was a Russian, life was not worth living for him" (13:134–35/159–60).

Kraft had a real-life prototype in the lawyer Kramer, who died in the early 1870s, having committed ideologically motivated suicide. Students of Dostoevsky surmised that the writer learned the story from the jurist A. F. Koni, who was involved in the investigation of Kramer's death. Years later, Koni described the case in his memoirs and provided extensive quotes from Kramer's diary.⁴¹ A different version of the same document (a short diary, started several days before the suicide and completed at the time of death; ostensibly, moments before the shot was fired) can be found in the appendix to A. V. Likhachev's 1882 statistical treatise, *Suicide in Western Europe and European Russia*, a publication that seems to have so far escaped the attention of Dostoevsky scholars. In this document the suicide explains his beliefs:

I am not an atheist, nor am I a theist—for me there is no life after death; I acknowledge only the life of atoms which manifests itself in the various combinations produced by the force of mutual attraction. As a person, I am composed of a certain mass today, which, after my death, disbands and forms other organisms without ever vanishing, and for this reason I find it of no consequence whether I live in my present form or assume another. Probably as a result of a particular mold of the brain (I do not acknowledge the existence of convictions, and that which others call convictions I consider to be an act predicated upon a given mold of the brain), I have reached the conclusion that the human race is just as transient as all other things and that even the earth itself is not eternal. Only atoms, with their mutual attraction, are eternal. But it's not this that compels me to raise a hand against myself—these thoughts only give me the strength to bid farewell to my life.⁴²

(These notions are informed by Büchner's theory of the immortality of matter—a positivistic replacement for the immortality of the soul.) The suicide then elaborated on his motivations, maintaining that it was not a lack of faith in the individual's future life that led him to kill himself, but an awareness that Russia had no future. Like the individual organism, the social organism was destined to decomposition: "I am convinced that . . . its [Russia's] only purpose is to preserve and fertilize the land they now live on for another nation [to come]."43

What struck Dostoevsky was that this idea (which echoed Chaadaev's famous "Philosophical Letter" of 1829)⁴⁴ found its realization in the actual act of suicide (13:135). He connected the ease with which the word became deed with that particular moment in Russian history when science proved that life was naturally limited (13:171). Whereas in Ippolit's case it was the individual body that was condemned to death or corruption, in Kraft's case it was the social body—the body of the nation.

Suicide Diaries in Life and Fiction

Dostoevsky's character Kraft recorded his experience of dying in his diary: "The last entry in the diary was made just before the fatal shot, and in it he mentioned that he was writing almost in the dark and hardly able to distinguish the letters; that he did not want to light a candle for fear that it should set fire to something when he was dead. 'And I don't want to light it and then, before shooting, put it out like my life,' he added strangely, almost his last words" (13:134/158).

What is the significance of documents that record the suicide's final thoughts and sensations? Two characters (the narrator, the Adolescent, and his friend Vasin) discuss this issue:

I expressed aloud my surprise that although Vasin had had this diary so long in his hands (it had been given him to read), he had not made a copy of it, especially as it was not more than a sheet or so and all the entries were short. "You might at least have copied the last page!" Vasin observed with a smile that he remembered it as it was; moreover, that the entries were quite unsystematic, about anything that came into his mind. I was about to protest that this was just what was precious in this case, but without going into that I began instead insisting on his recalling some of it, and he did recall a few sentences—for instance, an hour before he shot himself, "That he was chilly," "That he thought of drinking a shot to warm himself,

but had been deterred by the idea that it might cause an increase in the flow of blood." "It was almost all that sort of thing," Vasin remarked in conclusion. . . .

"But the last thoughts, the last thoughts!"

"The last thoughts sometimes are extremely insignificant. One such suicide complained, in fact, in a similar diary that not one lofty idea visited him at that important hour, nothing but futile and petty thoughts." (13:134/159)

Like his hero, Dostoevsky was intensely interested in the experience of apprehending death directly, an experience he himself had at the time of his mock execution. What could such a man tell? Curiously enough, in a letter to his brother Mikhail written on his execution day, Dostoevsky said little about his actual experience during those minutes he spent face-to-face with death.* Indeed, he had much more to say about the experience of awakening to a new life after the retreat was sounded. But the focal point of the letter is the symbolic potential of the situation, which resembles the death and resurrection of Christ.

What could be learned from the experience of others? Among reports on the last moments, in which death becomes a matter of direct experience, the suicide's report carries special weight: as the person who wills, controls, and monitors death, the suicide is seen as having a better chance of gaining access to the most inaccessible of all human experiences.⁴⁵ Dostoevsky had always been fascinated by the disorderly narratives of minds laying themselves bare. There is evidence that he had access to such documents.** In his depiction of Kraft's death in *The Adolescent*, Dostoevsky was guided by two genuine suicide records. In both cases, the suicide recorded his experience at regular intervals, in the format of an experimenter's log. The last-minute thoughts that the writer found in these documents were as trivial as those that his character Vasin found in Kraft's diary.

One of the documents used by Dostoevsky was Kramer's diary. Ac-

*All Dostoevsky said was: "I had no more than a minute to live. I remembered you, brother, and your whole family; at that last moment you, only you, was [sic] in my thoughts" (28/1:161).

**In a December 1876 issue of *The Diary of a Writer* Dostoevsky mentioned that "A year and a half ago, one highly talented and competent member of our judicial system showed me a bundle of letters and notes he had collected that were written by suicides, in their own hand, immediately before they took their lives, i.e., five minutes before death" (24:54) (English from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, trans. Kenneth Lantz [Evanston, 1993], vol. 1, p. 742). According to commentators, the jurist was A. F. Koni.

cording to Koni, who quoted Kramer's diary in his memoirs (published in the 1920s), the last entry read: "It will soon be twelve o'clock! Everything is ready. I am slightly shivering from the cold and yawning a bit, but I am absolutely calm. I wanted to drink some cognac, but they say that alcohol intensifies bleeding—and I am already going to leave a mess here. What an awful book Donders's *Anatomy* is! Two large volumes of small print, and one still can't learn how to find the exact location of the heart."⁴⁶

Likhachev gives a more extensive version of the diary, one strikingly different from Koni's. In Likhachev's publication, the last entry reads:

Thursday 1:45 A.M.

I don't feel the least bit nervous or afraid. It's as if I am getting ready to lie down to sleep. I actually rather feel like sleeping. But I don't know why I am shivering so much, I have had the chills for a month now. To warm myself up, I drank several shots of rum; I know that rum also intensifies bleeding, like all hard alcohol, and this is also why I am drinking it—I am certainly not getting drunk to make it easier to shoot myself. I feel so much unflagging determination within me that I could stand in front of the barrels of dozens of rifles pointed directly at me and not bat an eyelash. But I really don't care what people will think of me.

The more hardened my heart becomes, the more respect I begin to have for myself. I now understand how Christ felt on the cross...

2:45 A.M.

I am surprised at Draper's physiology textbook: in three volumes there is not even an indication of where the heart is located. What a misfortune to have left my anatomy book in Moscow! Three o'clock is approaching, I beg the pardon of the landlord for disturbing the peace in his house.⁴⁷

A man of the positivist age, this suicide staged his death as a scientific experiment—a textbook on physiology and a logbook in hand. But he was also guided by another paradigm: the experience of Christ on the cross which he relived in his suicide.

A note is due on the relationship between the document, in its two versions, and Dostoevsky's fiction. Kraft's diary in *The Adolescent* is closer to Koni's version. For instance, Dostoevsky's character was concerned about leaving a bloody mess—a detail present in Koni's version, but absent from Likhachev's. In fact, according to Likhachev's text, the suicide wanted to increase the flow of blood (and thus en-

sure death). Likhachev's scholarly publication is obviously more reliable than Koni's memoirs. But which version did Dostoevsky read? One may speculate that it was Koni's and that Koni told Kramer's story to Dostoevsky in a conversation—just like Vasin in *The Adolescent*—quoting the diary from memory (as he later did in his memoirs).

Dostoevsky also used the last letter of the suicide A. Ts—v published in the newspaper *Grazhdanin* on November 18, 1874. Like Kramer, Ts—v viewed his own death as a scientific experiment. His diary, in which he wanted to record “insofar as possible the sensations experienced at the approach of death,” ended with the following detail: “I’m writing by memory, and in case I grow numb or forget to blow out the candle and start a fire, I am blowing it out now.”⁴⁸

What was to be done with this material? The scientists who published Kramer's diary⁴⁹ offered a medical reading: “The oppressed state of his mind, caused by a self-awareness of the insignificance of his social value and an unwillingness to part with his fictitious grandeur, produced a pathological condition in his brain functions. Chills, appearing already for a month, as the author points out, and the treatment by rum on the day of the suicide allow us to conclude that the psychological disorder already had a real organic basis.”⁵⁰ What scientists saw in this document were clear signs of organic cerebral pathology.

What the writer saw in these accounts, couched in the language of science and filled with trivia, were potential symbols. Dostoevsky's hero, who does not want to leave a bloody “mess” after him (a remark from Koni's account of Kramer's diary), is also concerned about starting a fire (a remark made by Ts—v). Dostoevsky developed the symbolic potential contained in the idea of leaving a fire and in the image of the extinguished candle. In a conversation with the Adolescent, shortly before his suicide, Kraft describes a special quality of contemporary life: “Nowadays they are stripping Russia of her forests, and exhausting her soil. . . . It's as though they were all in a hotel and were leaving Russia tomorrow” (13:54). In his preliminary notes for the novel, Dostoevsky connected this attitude to his central argument—“if there is no immortality of the soul, then everything is permitted”: “there is no other life, I am on the earth for one moment, why bother? . . . ‘What do I care if they disappear not just in the future, but at this very minute, and I along with them; après moi, le déluge.’ A parallel: the extent to which the soil is becoming exhausted and the forests destroyed in Russia” (16:8–9). In this context, Kraft's precautions against starting a fire become a symbolic gesture:

they are a rejection of the "après moi, le déluge" attitude. He also rejected the gesture of extinguishing a candle: "And I don't want to light it and then, before shooting, put it out like my life" (13:134). A common metaphor for death, the extinguished candle has a specific meaning in the Russian Orthodox service for the dead, known to every Russian. At the end of the funeral mass, candles are extinguished as a sign that earthly life has come to an end and the soul has departed to join God, the source of light.⁵¹ Kraft refuses to enact this symbolic confirmation of the immortality of the soul; he also rejects the act of symbolizing itself. Thus the symbol is both present and absent in the scene of Kraft's death.

According to the notes for *The Adolescent*, Dostoevsky planned to address the question of "the reasons that compel almost everyone (or very many people) to write a *confession* before the final moment (N.B. with the means at their disposal, perhaps everyone would write confessions)" (16:68). His conclusion is that suicide, although it is an act motivated by specific biographical reasons, is a metaphysical quest:

People kill themselves for a host of reasons; they also write confessions for complicated reasons, not out of vanity alone. But one can also find common features, for example, that at such a moment everyone feels the need to write. *Golos*: a man who killed himself with a knife in a tavern: "The image of dear K. is continually before me." . . . But here again is a common feature: right here, in the note that he left (*despite his dear K.*, whose image, *of course*, would not leave him if he killed himself on her account)—right here, he makes the comment: "My head is surprisingly empty. I used to think that at this moment there would be special thoughts."⁵² Whether such a remark is intelligent or stupid, it's important that they are all looking for something, that they are asking questions about something to which they can't find an answer, that they are interested in something that resides completely outside their personal interests. In some kind of general and everlasting concern, even in spite of the image of dear K., which, without a doubt, could have warded off any general idea and the necessity to delve deep into the self and could have turned this deed *into a completely personal one*. (16:68–69)

Convinced that the supra-individual is present in every individual act, Dostoevsky ascribed metaphysical meaning to his hero's last-minute entry by turning a practical detail from the suicide's record into a symbol. Symbolic interpretation lent meaning and significance to personal experience, which seemed to have been inaccessible to the subject.

In conclusion, let us reexamine the relationship between the documents and Dostoevsky's fiction. By the time Koni quoted Kramer's diary in his memoirs, he had, without a doubt, read *The Adolescent*. This might explain the discrepancy between the version of the document in Likhachev's publication and the one cited by Koni. Koni *remembered* that the suicide expressed concern about making a mess because Dostoevsky had made this detail into a symbol. It is quite likely that fiction created this document.

The Law of Corruption

The world of Dostoevsky's novel *Adolescent* is ravaged by a suicide epidemic.⁵³ At early stages of his work on the novel Dostoevsky planned to dispose of almost all of his heroes by suicide. This suicide epidemic is a consequence of the "corruption" that plagues Russian society. Planning his novel in his notebook, Dostoevsky elaborated: "The idea of corruption pervades everything, because everyone has been *separated* and there are no ties left—not only in the Russian family, but not even human ties among people. . . . *Corruption* is the main visible idea of the novel" (16:16–7). The word "*razlozhenie*" (corruption or decomposition) was immediately identifiable to the reader of the "thick journals" as a common element in public discourse, usually applied to the condition of postreform Russia. Widely used in the press, it acquired distinct symbolic connotations: the disintegration of the social body.⁵⁴ To these generally accepted connotations, Dostoevsky adds a layer of meaning that draws on the theological concept of "corruption" prominent in the writings of St. Paul and the fathers of the Eastern church.

According to the theological tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy, it was through original sin that man, created in the image and likeness of God, forfeited his divine attributes and, like the rest of physical matter, became subject to natural laws—that is, to corruption, decay, and death. "Corruption," that is, mortality, or (in a personalized sense) simply death, has been viewed as a "cosmic disease" which holds humanity under its sway, both spiritually and physically, and is controlled by the devil, "the murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).⁵⁵ In Gregory Palamas's words, with the mind's submission to the flesh, "we ourselves are dead and, before the death of the body, we suffer the death of the soul; that is to say, the separation of the soul from God."⁵⁶ The death and resurrection of Christ will bring every man deliverance from the "bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8:21). This promise

is tied to the Christian conception of man: "man is truly man because he is the image of God" (and not an autonomous being). Thus, man is exempt from the law of corruption "if he preserves in himself the image of God."⁵⁷

These notions, familiar to any well-read Christian of Dostoevsky's generation, offered themselves for reinterpretation in the positivist context: Feuerbach's anthropotheism was the modern equivalent of the serpent's "you shall be as gods" and materialism was the new form of subjection to the law of the flesh. Like original sin, these transgressions led to corruption (in its broad metaphorical meaning) and death.

Underlying corruption as the novel's "visible" idea, or its social theme, is a metaphysical and theological one. It is especially prominent in the phraseology and imagery of Dostoevsky's early plans. Consider the following succinct note: "Society decomposes chemically. . . . all of these families and the entire nation [*narodnost'*] decompose; even an image of them will not remain" (16:16). The use of "obraz" (image) is far from accidental. "Obraz" reappears in his plans (and in the novel) as the holy image, the Orthodox icon: the main character, an atheist, "slashed icons," "can't stand icons . . . he shoots himself" (16:42, 43).⁵⁸ The implication is that the loss of God's image in man leads to disintegration and self-imposed death.⁵⁹

Another entry in Dostoevsky's notebook offers a model of the world defined in spatial terms: "Planet earth is in contact with God, the whole, and immortality (the family is being destroyed, and ancestors, and personality (without God); the human race remains; things are restricted, therefore, to earth, and at the resurrection a meeting, knowledge)" (16:170). The starting point is the image of the planet earth in (physical) contact with God. Two notions follow: the whole and immortality. A statement in parentheses refers to the destruction of the family and personality (*lichnost'*, from the root *lik*, face, or image), and "without God" points to the cause. The conclusion is that, with nothing but a succession of generations left, human existence is reduced to its earthly form. These cryptic notes seem to contain a condensed theory of man and the world that is informed by patristic thought.

The novel also questions the integrity of the family. The main heroes form "a type of accidental family, in opposition to an ancestral family" (16:434). The elder hero, Versilov, a gentry intellectual and a European wanderer, formed a ménage with a married peasant woman, Sofia, his former serf (clearly, a symbol of Russia). The couple has two children: a son Arkady (the Adolescent), and a daughter

Liza. By the end of the novel, Liza is pregnant by the young prince Sokolsky, an aristocrat who forges bonds. Versilov attempts to kill a woman he passionately (and hopelessly) loves (Akhmakova), and then shoots and wounds himself. (Completed suicide was planned in the drafts.)* Prince Sokolsky is arrested and dies before the trial (in the drafts, he dies by his own hand), while Liza suffers a miscarriage (according to earlier drafts, she was to commit suicide). Clearly, this is a picture of "corruption"—disintegration of the family unit, disruption of the succession of generations (*rod*), and moral disintegration and decay of the individual.

In early drafts, "atheism" figured as the core of Versilov's personality and an explanation for his family drama: "HIS entire misfortune is that HE is an atheist and does not believe in *resurrection*" (16:15). In the final text, the theme of atheism culminates in Versilov's vision of a future in which God and immortality are absent: "The great idea of immortality would have vanished, and they would have to fill its place; and all the wealth of love lavished of old upon Him who was immortal would be turned upon the whole of nature, on the world, on men, on every blade of grass. They would inevitably grow to love the earth and life as they gradually became aware of their own transitory and finite nature, and with a special love, not as of old, they would begin to observe and could discover in nature phenomena and secrets which they had not suspected before, for they would look on nature with new eyes, as a lover looking on his beloved (13:379/466)." This vision of earthly paradise, an echo of socialist utopias, remains incomplete. In his heart, Versilov feels that such a utopia, if at all possible, will be temporary. The completion of this vision was always an image of the second coming of Christ.

The question arises: what comes in between? In his novel, Dostoevsky refrained from giving an explicit answer. He did, however, supply one missing piece in *The Diary of a Writer* (January 1876 issue), making a clear connection between the loss of faith in immortality and the suicide epidemic (a matter for later comment). The social reality presented in *The Adolescent* prefigures a world disrupted by the

*This episode had a real-life basis in the famous hotel Belle Vue case (September 19, 1873), involving the wife of A. S. Suvorin, Anna Suvorina. Dostoevsky's plans for this episode contain direct references to the case: "I . . . I . . . I will destroy you, that's what I'll do (he stood up from his seat, pale). Belle vue" (16:374). "N.B. N.B. About shooting the woman if she does not agree, Suvorin's feuilleton of November 3, No. 303" (16:195). A. S. Dolinin discussed this connection in *Poslednie romany Dostoevskogo* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1963, pp. 141-42); he misquoted Suvorin's feuilleton.

rebellion against God, a world populated by men who fail to preserve the image of God in themselves. Ruled by him who is "the murderer from the beginning," this world is subject to the law of corruption.

It can safely be assumed that the disintegration of individual and social bodies in Dostoevsky's novel is governed not only by the laws of contemporary social and natural science which informed the discourse of the press, but also by the principles of patristic theology. Relying on an additional source, Dostoevsky revealed the metaphysical meaning of individual acts and social events. In this, Dostoevsky's fiction differs from the writings of contemporary scientists and journalists, frequently printed under the same cover with Dostoevsky's novels in the "thick journals." (*The Adolescent*, for example, was serialized in *Otechestvennye zapiski* in 1875.)

To conclude, in dealing with suicide, Dostoevsky used the same language as scientists and journalists—a discourse built from a specific set of metaphors. As scientists and journalists of his time, he described pursuit of knowledge as an experiment—an observation that intervened at the point where life and death converged. In picturing the world, the writer operated with the same spatial model defining the relationship of part and whole (in his case, not the individual and society but the individual and God). And yet, using the same categories and the same words, the discourse of science, the press, and fiction created different meanings.

The Death of Kirillov

In the suicide of Kirillov in *The Possessed* (Besy, 1871–72) Dostoevsky created a paradigm of death for the age of atheism, which informed philosophical notions for years to come (most notably Nietzsche's and Camus's—see below).

Kirillov is an ideologue and proponent of suicide. He preaches that anyone would kill himself were it not for two "prejudices": fear of pain* and "the other world." But the "new man," free of these prejudices, is coming: "There will be a new man, happy and proud. He for

*Kirillov's assertion "if it were not . . . for the fear of pain," probably comes from Schopenhauer, whose outlook captured the imagination of Russians in the 1870s and 1880s: "Perhaps there is no one alive who would not already have put an end to his life if this end were something purely negative, a sudden cessation of existence. But there is something positive in it as well; the destruction of the body. This is a deterrent" ("On Suicide," from *Parerga and Paralipomena* [1851]; quoted from Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, London, 1970, p. 79).

whom it will make no difference whether he lives or does not live, he will be the new man. He who overcomes pain and fear will himself be a god. And this God will not be" (10:93–94/115). The capacity for voluntary death transforms man into god.

The argument unfolds over a series of dialogues. One of Kirillov's interlocutors (the narrator) comes up with a medical explanation of his ideas: the man is clearly insane (10:95). A better-educated listener, Stavrogin, has another explanation:

"Old philosophical places, the same since the beginning of the ages," Stavrogin muttered with a certain squeamish regret.

"The same! The same since the beginning of the ages, and no others, ever!" Kirillov picked up with flashing eyes, as if this idea held nothing short of victory.

(10:188/237)

Indeed, in the death of Kirillov, Dostoevsky combined diverse philosophical commonplaces into a single, seemingly coherent pattern.* The organizing principle, which gives unity and meaning to the whole, comes from Plato's *Phaedo*—a dialogue on death and immortality that ends with a suicide. As Plato was said to have done, Dostoevsky seeks "living words, which are planted and grow in living minds."⁶⁰ The argument emerges in the interaction between the philosopher and his interlocutors. The dialogue unfolds in a situation of impending death, which elevates the spoken word to the status of truth. Moreover, as with Socrates, who takes poison at the close of the argument, this truth is ultimately tested in the act itself.⁶¹

Kirillov's death reenacts the deaths of both Socrates and Christ, conflating the two patterns. For one, Kirillov is unable to tolerate (or even to imagine) the fact of Christ's death: "There was one day on earth, and in the middle of the earth stood three crosses. One on a cross believed so much that he said to another: 'This day you will be with me in paradise.' The day ended, they both died, went, and did not find either paradise or resurrection. . . . And if so, if the laws of nature did not pity even *This One* . . . why live then?" (10:471/618).

Indeed, for nineteenth-century man, Christ's death had a tragic

*Contemporary readers had reactions similar to Stavrogin's. One reader recognized Hegel in the statement on the equivalence of being and nonbeing: "In his own original way, this insane man merely reproduces the well-known Hegelian tenet: being and nonbeing are one and the same (*Sein und Nichtsein ist dasselbe*)" (E. Markov, "Kriticheskie besedy," *Russkaia rech'*, 1879, no. 6: 197; quoted in Dostoevskii 12:268).

meaning. The idea was introduced by Hegel: "*God has died, God is dead*—this is the most frightful of all thoughts."⁶² The tragedy was rooted in the disintegration of the relationship between man and God established in the doctrine of God-manhood. For nonbelievers, Hegel claimed, the history of Christ is just what the history of Socrates is "for us": the death of a human being who showed humanity what must constitute the basis of human consciousness. Viewed as a human being, Christ has died a death that implies absolute finitude. And the thought of the death of God might just be more that a man can endure.⁶³

Caught up in the Kantian antinomy between the moral necessity for God's existence and the empirical knowledge of God's absence, Kirillov attempts to resolve it by fulfilling God's role: "If there is no God, then I am God" (10:469–70/617). His attempts to explain this transfiguration logically take the individual will as a starting point: "If there is God, then the will is all his, and I cannot get out of his will. If not, the will is all mine, and it is my duty to proclaim self-will. . . . It is my duty to shoot myself because the fullest point of my self-will is—for me to kill myself" (10:470/617).

Kirillov's argument on the new terrible freedom of the individual echoes Hegel's reflections on "absolute freedom and terror"⁶⁴—a state of consciousness brought about by the Enlightenment and the French revolution, which marks the beginning of the end of history. The essence of this new mode of consciousness is disharmony in the relationship between individual will and universal will. In Hegel's view, "universal freedom can produce neither positive achievement nor a deed; there is left for it only negative action; it is merely the rage and fury of destruction." Therefore, the realization of this terrible freedom is death, and "the most cold-blooded and meaningless death of all." Moreover, death is the only deed that an absolutely free individual can accomplish, and the terror of death is the individual's absolute lord and master.⁶⁵ People of Dostoevsky's generation applied their readings of Hegelian concepts to a variety of contemporary problems. Dostoevsky apparently found in Hegel a model of nihilistic death—death brought about by absolute atheistic freedom which freed the individual will from subjection to the universal will.

For Dostoevsky and his contemporaries, the will (a notion derived from various sources, from Hegel to the Orthodox catechism) was central in mapping the changing relations between man and God. Christian anthropology regarded free will as the cornerstone of the model of man: the exercise of free will is checked by man's responsibility for his own sins and ultimately rests on a faith in the existence

of God and the immortality of the soul. Positivists, having abandoned God and rejected the idea of immortality, replaced the notion of free will with determinism. But Dostoevsky arrived at a different conclusion. His heroes who live in a godless world exhibit a malignant hypertrophy of individual volition, or Hegelian absolute freedom of self-will, not a subjection to determinism. For Dostoevsky, self-will finds its ultimate expression in self-murder (murder of another, suggested by Verkhovensky, is an inferior form of self-willfulness) (10:470). But what is ultimately at stake is God-manhood—with an act of willful death, Kirillov hopes to establish his credentials as the new Savior: “I will begin, and end, and open the door. And save. Only this one thing will save all men and in the next generation transform them physically” (10:472/619). Thus Kirillov becomes God because, in choosing to die a voluntary death for the salvation of humankind, he identifies himself with Christ. (Like Christ, Kirillov—who plans to work on the construction of a new railroad bridge—is a mediator between God and man, or heaven and earth, a pontifex.)

With Kirillov's death, Dostoevsky joined the centuries-long theological debate on whether Christ can be considered a suicide.⁶⁶ The location of the will was a pivotal issue in this controversy: those who argued that Christ's voluntary death cannot be considered a suicide, pointed to Christ's appeal in the Gethsemane prayer, “Let *Thy* will be done.” Kirillov, who emphatically asserts “Let *my* will be done,” clearly commits suicide. A self-willed Christ, Christ the suicide, he is the new god.

Kirillov's dialogue with Stavrogin indicates the philosophical source of his idea of the new Savior:

“He will come and his name is the man-god.”

“The God-man?”

“The man-god—that's the whole difference.”

(10:189/238)

The concept of a “man-god” was favored by the followers of Ludwig Feuerbach, who was immensely popular in Russia. On the surface, Feuerbach, who proclaimed Kant's postulates of faith (the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the freedom of the will) to be completely unnecessary, was a positivist. Make do with this world—he insisted—the world given in sensory experience; God is nothing but a mental projection of an object in empirical reality—man. In giving primacy to God, religion “preferred the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality.”⁶⁷ By con-

trast, Feuerbach thought of himself as a "realist" in the positivist, not scholastic sense: in "deciphering" the Christian doctrine, he read statements about God as statements about man, and statements about a future, heavenly life as statements about earthly life. As a result, in Feuerbach's representation, this world acquired obvious similarities to the other world. In the end, he identified the divine with the human subject, and Christian religion with atheism: "It is not I, an insignificant individual, but religion itself that says: God is man, man is God. . . . I have only found the key to the cipher of Christian religion, only extricated its true meaning. . . . If therefore my work is negative, irreligious, atheistic, let it be remembered that atheism—at least in the sense of this work—is the secret of religion itself."⁶⁸ Thus Feuerbach presented his revolutionary conclusions as the result of a rereading of Christian doctrine—a rereading that by reversing the relationship between the sign and the thing revealed its hidden meaning.

Feuerbach's Russian follower Nikolai Speshnev used his doctrine ("the main principle of the new time") as license to reject any higher authority and to posit self-will as the only law. (A member of the Petrashevsky circle and Dostoevsky's mentor in radicalism, Speshnev is believed to have served as a prototype for Stavrogin.)⁶⁹ This is how Speshnev interpreted Feuerbach's teaching: "I now understand that all this means only that no authority, creator, or god exists for mankind—and concerning the philosophical god, mankind is the highest and most genuine incarnation of this god; therefore, there can exist no other god for it, other than mankind itself: like any god, mankind doesn't take orders from others; its own voluntary determination, its own will, its own desire—this is the only law. I am avoiding here . . . [the manuscript breaks off]."⁷⁰

In spite of its far-reaching consequences, Feuerbach's Russian readers, like Feuerbach himself, saw the revolution in the relationship between God and man as a mere linguistic operation. In the words of Speshnev, "Instead of the god-man we now have the man-god. Only the word order has changed. Is the difference between the god-man and the man-god really all that great?"⁷¹ In Kirillov, Dostoevsky demonstrated that a change of word order had the most important consequences: the difference was a matter of life and death.

Among the main implications of this revolution was the new status afforded the body. Feuerbach affirmed that the "identity [between God and man] at last extends even to the flesh, even to the body."⁷² At the same time, he insisted that his man was a "positive" and "real" being,

that is, man as Matter (with a capital M). This implied a promise that the body would be immortal. Kirillov, as he explains to Stavrogin, believes in physical immortality "not in a future eternal life, but in eternal life here [on earth]" (10:188). Accordingly, he sees the physical transformation of man as a matter of necessity: "in the present physical form . . . it is in no way possible for man to be without the former God" (10:472/619). (Indeed, without the old God, man will find his ultimate end in the body's corruption.) Kirillov explains the mechanism of such transformation to his interlocutors. In a conversation with Stavrogin, he claims:

"There are moments, you reach moments, and time suddenly stops, and will be eternal."

"You hope to reach such a moment?"

"Yes."

"It's hardly possible in our time. . . . In the Apocalypse the angel swears that time will be no more."

"I know. It's quite correct; clear and precise."

Kirillov's belief rests on his trust in the absolute reality of philosophical categories:

"And where are they going to hide it?" [asks Stavrogin]

"Nowhere. Time isn't an object, it's an idea. It will die out in the mind." (10:188/236-37)

From a philosophical perspective, this is a moment in which the St. John of Revelation joins hands with Immanuel Kant. But, as Kirillov elaborates (in a conversation with Shatov), these moments of personal apocalypse are given in direct sensory experience; ultimately, this experience results in the transformation of the flesh:⁷³ "There are seconds, they come only five or six at a time, and you suddenly feel the presence of eternal harmony, fully achieved. It is nothing earthly; not that it's heavenly, but man cannot endure it in his earthly state. One must change physically or die" (10:450/590). Kirillov clearly sees such a transformation as a guarantee of physical immortality on earth, for this new condition makes procreation unnecessary: "Why children, why development, if the goal has been achieved?" (10:450-51/591). His interlocutor, Shatov, viewing it from a medical perspective, describes Kirillov's experience as the sensation that precedes an epileptic attack—a condition Dostoevsky knew from personal experience.⁷⁴

Logical proof for the new, positive immortality was obtained by re-

versing Plato's famous argument in *Phaedo* that death is the separation of the soul from the body:

- Do we believe that there is such a thing as death?
- Most certainly, said Simmias, taking up the role of answering.
- Is it simply the release of the soul from the body? Is death nothing more or less than this, the separate condition of the body by itself when it is released from the soul, and the separate condition by itself of the soul when released from the body? Is death anything else than this?
- No, just that.*

This argument served as the basis for the Christian conception of immortality. In the nineteenth century, Feuerbach described this conception in the following way: "[in the conception of God] the mind is occupied with the separation of the soul from the body . . . with the separation of the essence from the individual;—the individual dies a spiritual death, the dead body which remains behind is the human individual; the soul which has departed from it is God." He then suggested that, in the age of positivism, it was imperative to invert this pattern, restoring the initial wholeness: "But the separation of the soul from the body, of the essence from the individual, of God from man, must be abolished again. Every separation of beings essentially allied is painful. The soul yearns after its lost half, after its body; as God, the departed soul yearns after the real man. As, therefore, God becomes man again, so the soul returns to its body, and the perfect identity of this world and the other is now restored."⁷⁵ In reversing Platonic and Christian death, Feuerbachian death fuses the body with the soul, reuniting them after centuries of separation. Clearly, it is Feuerbach's notion of immortality—the immortality in this world—that Kirillov strives to achieve.

Combining and reinterpreting existing philosophical paradigms, most importantly, the death of Socrates and the death of Christ, Dos-

*Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, p. 47. Dostoevsky used a similar narrative pattern; cf. Kirillov's conversation with the narrator:

"But aren't there ways of dying without pain?"

"Imagine," he stopped in front of me, "imagine a stone the size of a big house; it's hanging there, and you are under it; if it falls on you, on your head—will it be painful?"

"A stone as big as a house? Naturally, it's frightening."

"Fright is not the point; will it be painful?"

"A stone as big as a mountain, millions of pounds? Of course, it wouldn't be painful at all." (10:93/114)

toevsky created in Kirillov's suicide a new paradigm of death, one befitting the age of positivism and atheism.

For Dostoevsky, attention to the metaphysical and symbolic meanings of death went hand in hand with his interest in psychology. Guided by his life-long fascination with the direct apprehension of death, the writer offered his readers voyeuristic glimpses of Kirillov's last moments, presented through the eyes of an onlooker, Petr Stepanovich Verkhovensky. This is what Verkhovensky witnessed when, impatient to see Kirillov dead, he entered the room to which Kirillov had disappeared with a revolver:

to the right of the wardrobe, in the corner formed by the wardrobe and the wall, Kirillov was standing, and standing very strangely—motionless, drawn up, his arms flat at his sides, his head raised, the back of his head pressed hard to the wall. . . . Pyotr Stepanovich . . . could observe only the protruding parts of the figure. . . . What struck him above all was that the figure, despite his shout and furious lunge, did not even move, did not even stir one of its members—as if it were made of stone or wax. The pallor of its face was unnatural, the black eyes were completely immobile, staring at some point in space. Pyotr Stepanovich moved the candle from up to down and up again, lighting it from all points and studying this face. He suddenly noticed that, although Kirillov was staring somewhere ahead, he could see him out of the corner of his eye, and was perhaps even watching him. Then it occurred to him to bring the flame right up to the face of “this blackguard,” to burn it and see what he would do. . . . The moment he touched Kirillov, the man quickly bent his head down, and with his head knocked the candle from his hands; the candlestick fell to the floor with a clang, and the candle went out. At the same instant he felt a terrible pain in the little finger of his left hand . . . he had struck . . . with the revolver on the head of Kirillov, who had leaned to him and bitten his finger. He finally tore the finger and rushed headlong to get out of the house, feeling his way in the darkness. Terrible shouts came flying after him from the room:

“Now, now, now, now . . . ”

Ten times or so. But he kept running and had already reached the front hall when there suddenly came a loud shot.
(10:475–76/624–25)

This description shocked some readers. One of them was Dmitry Merezhkovsky: “The description of Kirillov's suicide is one of Dostoevsky's creations in which he steps beyond the boundaries of art; it

is something that one should not write about, one should not even talk about. It is cynical, terrible, perhaps criminal—artistically as well as morally criminal. It is a kind of vivisection, an anatomical dissection of a living soul. Gazing at the gaping wound and the bloody guts of the human soul, we watch their final shudderings with disgust and horrible curiosity.”⁷⁶ In Merezhkovsky’s words, Kirillov in his last moments is not the man-god, but a mental patient. It appears that, at the last moment, Dostoevsky switched from the metaphysical frame of reference to the medical one. Yet, as we know, Dostoevsky borrowed details for this scene from Hugo’s *Le Dernier jour d’un condamné*.⁷⁷ And contrary to Merezhkovsky’s impression, the writer refrained from depicting the very moment of suicide: the shot is fired behind the scenes. Artistic vivisection failed to capture the moment of death itself. The experience of dying remained inaccessible even to the artist.

The Real Kirillov

The relationship of art to reality was crucially important for Dostoevsky, who, like an experimental scientist, took pride in his ability not only to represent, but also to anticipate, life.⁷⁸ In Kirillov, he saw his intuition confirmed. Soon after completing the novel, Dostoevsky encountered his character in real life: his name was Alexander Malikov. Dostoevsky referred to this event in his notebooks for 1876 (misspelling Malikov’s name): “I have been told *that* Kirillov is unclear. I should have told you about Mal’kov” (24:163) and (earlier) “I heard about Mal’kov”.⁷⁹ A “nihilist,” Malikov participated in the revolutionary movement and was arrested in 1866 in connection with the Karakozov affair. Living in exile, this renegade revolutionary turned to preaching the religion of god-men (*bogocheloveki*). A fellow revolutionary, A. I. Faresov, described his conversion. One day in March 1874, Malikov greeted him declaring: “In your absence I stopped being an ‘old’ man. Listen . . . you too must open up [*vs kroite*] the ‘godly soul’ in yourself. Become a Christian. Rebuke the thought that violence is abolished by violence.”⁸⁰ Every man, he elaborated, is made in the image and likeness of God; therefore, every man is a god-man; “he breathed out his soul into us and made us god-men.”⁸¹ Another fellow revolutionary learned of the event from Malikov’s son: “Malikov’s little son, while hopping on one leg, reported this news to him: Daddy is god! Daddy is god! . . .”⁸²

Malikov’s belief in the divine nature of man was founded on the no-

tion of the unity of human beings treated collectively as a single body. Following organic models in social science, he called the body "the social organism"; following physical theories, he pictured the individual as an "atom" of this organism. He identified the social organism with the body of Christ, which, following Christian theology, he saw as a corruptible, yet immortal, entity. The social organism was to become an object of worship in the revolutionary milieu: "A Christian regards even an evil person as an imperfection in his own body, understanding that they both are part of one mankind, that all people are atoms of the social organism that I now worship. I am convinced that many Russian revolutionaries will be reborn, if they see and talk to me!"⁸³ This sequence of reasoning, propelled by the power of metaphors, seemed to ensure personal immortality.

Malikov's proselytizing did not fall on deaf ears: several well-known members of the revolutionary movement were influenced by his ideas, among them Nikolai Chaikovsky, a leader of the important populist circle, and O. I. Kablits, author of the influential *Foundations of Populism* (*Osnovy narodnichestva*). When Malikov was arrested (the same year), he preached the religion of the social body to the police. Faresov mentions the following episode, ostensibly related to him by an officer of the gendarmes: "When they brought him to us, he started talking about God, about the social organism that needs the great and the little men alike, just as each of us needs not only a brain, but each of our fingers . . . He was immediately set free."⁸⁴ In influencing his jailers, Malikov met with more success than Christ.

Personal—physical—immortality was a crucial part of these beliefs. According to another contemporary, the writer ~~Nikolai~~ ^{dimir} Korolenko, Malikov and his followers actually hoped that the human spirit would overcome the corruptibility of the flesh. Korolenko once heard them discussing the fate of the early Christian martyrs who chose voluntary death in imitation of Christ. Their argument went as follows. Metaphorically speaking, the martyrs' spirit triumphed over the flesh: their faces bore expressions of delight as their flesh burned, although their bodies were consumed by flame. Malikov reasoned: "Yes, the body burned . . . But must this always be the case? . . . Can you imagine one more step in this direction: an even larger exertion of faith and fire will lose its power to burn the body." (Examples were then quoted from Holy Writ that allowed for such an interpretation.) Bewildered, Korolenko asked Malikov's followers: "Do you really think that the human body can become inflammable as a result of purely nervous functions?" One of them, an "old materialist," answered un-

equivocally: "Yes, I do."⁸⁵ It appears that these materialists believed that metaphors could be transformed into physical reality.

Malikov was not a suicide; the quest that took him from atheism to anthropotheism ended happily with his return to the Orthodox faith.* And yet, in the course of his personal evolution, the idea of voluntary death in *imitatio mortis Christi* did arise for him and his followers. On the whole, the story of Malikov seems to show that, as Dostoevsky hoped, his fiction could transcend the limits of empirical reality and reveal a possible future reality. In the long run, Dostoevsky's experiment seems to have worked: it showed that when men lived in the consciousness that there was no God and no immortality of the soul, self-annihilation seemed to be permitted and even desirable, both to those who, like Kramer, believed in the eternal life of atoms and to those who, like Malikov, believed that the social organism was God.

Thus suicide was a test case in Dostoevsky's investigation of the consequences of atheism. Dostoevsky also made use of suicide for a scientific project of a different order: for transgressive, voyeuristic penetration into the very process of dying. What the writer performed was, in Merezhkovsky's words, a vivisection of the soul. This enterprise, which shocked Merezhkovsky, would have won the approval of Claude Bernard, who insisted on the scientific value of vivisection ("an autopsy of the living"), citing examples of "experiments and vivisections" performed on men condemned to death.⁸⁶

But what did Dostoevsky learn? Reports of those who faced death, be they Dostoevsky's own letter to his brother or the last-minute diaries of suicides, offered disappointingly little. Was the experience itself inherently meaningless? Or was it forever inaccessible to the subject as well as to the external observer?

In an effort to make individual experience significant, the writer read it as a metaphor that had a long tradition and far-reaching symbolic resonance: suicide was seen as an act of *imitatio Christi* performed by an atheist—the predicament of humankind in a faithless world. By infusing it with symbolism, which turned an individual act into a cultural paradigm, the writer gave meaning to the meaningless.

*Desire to realize his teachings in real life brought Malikov to America, where he organized a commune, but the enterprise met with little success. Toward the end of his life, Malikov (who died in 1904) was close to Tolstoy and the Tolstoyans; in the end, he returned to Orthodoxy.

Coda: From Dostoevsky through Nietzsche
to the Twentieth Century

For many philosophers, Kirillov's suicide, like that of Socrates, became a paradigm. It was the model death of a modern man. Several reread Kirillov's death from a modernist perspective; moreover, viewing them through Dostoevsky, they reread the philosophical sources that informed Dostoevsky's image of Kirillov.

One of the first to do so was Friedrich Nietzsche, for whom Dostoevsky's novels seem to have colored his reading of the Gospel and image of Christ: "That strange and sick world to which the Gospels introduce us—a world like that of a Russian novel, in which the refuse of society, neurosis and 'childlike' idiocy seem to make a rendezvous. . . . One has to regret that no Dostoevsky lived in the neighbourhood of this most interesting *décadent* [Christ]." ⁸⁷ Nietzsche was keenly appreciative of the fact that Dostoevsky lived in the neighborhood of the man-god—the nineteenth-century nihilist. In his notebooks for 1887–88, Nietzsche made summaries of selected passages from *The Possessed*, ⁸⁸ which most likely belonged to his plans for *The Will to Power* (*Der Wille zur Macht*), a book that was to be largely devoted to the theoretical and practical advent of nihilism. The greatest event in Nietzsche's history of nihilism was man's recognition that "God is dead." ⁸⁹

Nietzsche's summaries of Dostoevsky's novel are preceded by his sketch "The Diary of the Nihilist" which describes the spiritual "catastrophe" of modern man: the "nihilist" suspects, as does Nietzsche himself, that the origin of meaning—otherwise called God—lies in human interpretation and that meaning is nothing more than a fiction. ⁹⁰ "The Diary of the Nihilist" is followed by a summary of the letter Stavrogin wrote to Dasha shortly before his death. Thus Nietzsche's genre of choice in presenting the advent of nihilism is a personal document—as Dostoevsky before him, he presented disbelief as an inner experience. But rather than summarizing Stavrogin's letter, Nietzsche rewrote it in the form of a suicide note. In Dostoevsky's version, the letter cannot be understood as such: reiterating his inability to kill himself, Stavrogin invites Dasha to join him in an escape to Switzerland. In Nietzsche's notebook, Stavrogin's letter opens with what could be the literal translation of a conventional Russian formula used in suicide notes (*nikogo ne vinit*): "No one is to blame—[*Niemanden anklagen*]." ⁹¹ His version of the letter, furthermore, omits all references to Stavrogin's future plans and ends by confirming his intention to commit suicide: "I know that I should kill myself, that I should clean

the earth of myself, like a miserable insect.”* Thus Nietzsche confirms and reinforces the importance that Dostoevsky accorded to suicide in his analysis of nihilism: suicide is the inevitable psychological consequence of disbelief.

Further in his notes, Nietzsche meticulously records the main points of Kirillov's theory of suicide: suicide is “the most perfect way to prove one's independence [from God]”; “if nature has not spared its masterpiece [Jesus], then the planet rests on a lie”; “fear is the curse of humanity”; “five, six seconds of eternal harmony . . . in order to endure this longer one would have to transform oneself physically”; and “why have children if the goal is attained?” But what seems to fascinate him especially in Dostoevsky's novel is how the philosophical, or logical, development of atheistic principles converges with the psychological process at work in the mind of a man possessed by these ideas. Two sections of Nietzsche's notes are subtitled “Toward the Psychology of a Nihilist” and “The Logic of Atheism.” In “The Logic of Atheism,” Nietzsche quotes almost verbatim from Kirillov's classical formula defining emotional consequences of denying God's existence: “To feel that God does not exist, and not to feel at the same time that one therefore has become God, is an absurdity: otherwise one would not fail to kill oneself. If you feel this, you are a tsar, and far from killing yourself, you will live at the height of glory.”⁹² Nietzsche then rephrases Kirillov's antinomical argument on the existence of God in the form of a syllogism:

God is necessary, therefore he must exist
But he doesn't exist
So one can't live anymore.⁹³

Thus he juxtaposes a transcription of personal feeling with logical deduction; what Nietzsche saw in Dostoevsky was the psycho-logic of nihilism.⁹⁴

For Nietzsche, taking notes from Dostoevsky's novel was like rewriting a text that he had already written. Indeed, many of these ideas

*Nietzsche, p. 384. In Dostoevsky's novel the letter continues: “I know I ought to kill myself, to sweep myself off the earth like a vile insect, but I'm afraid of suicide, because I'm afraid of showing magnanimity. I know it will be one more deceit—the last deceit in an endless series of deceptions. What's the use of deceiving oneself just to play at magnanimity? There never can be indignation and shame in me; and so no despair either” (10:514). English from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, 1994), p. 676.

had appeared in his own earlier writings.* In his speeches on God and the Superman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (first published in 1883), Nietzsche's prophetic hero deals with concerns similar to Kirillov's; furthermore, Zarathustra's reasoning is grounded in the same logic as Kirillov's. And for Nietzsche, as for Dostoevsky, the conclusion is a psychological state—a desire for annihilation:

if there were gods, how could I endure not to be a god! *Therefore* there are no gods.

I, indeed, drew that conclusion; but now it draws me.

God is a supposition: but who could imbibe all the anguish of this supposition without dying?⁹⁵

These two literary characters share the same view: like Kirillov, Zarathustra envisions two possible outcomes, a negative one (death) and a positive one (the transformation of the ordinary man into the Superman).** But their creators differ on this point: whereas Dostoevsky considers suicide to be the only possible, logical outcome of ni-

*The general opinion is that Nietzsche did not know Dostoevsky until 1887. This view is based on Nietzsche's own claim, made in a letter to his Russian-born friend Franz Overbeck, of February 23, 1887: "A few weeks ago, I did not even know Dostoevsky's name. . . . A fortuitous reach in a bookstore. . . ." (Quoted in Kaufmann, who forcefully advanced this view; see Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 3d ed. [New York, 1968], p. 318, n. 10. For a detailed review of the connections between Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, see also Wolfgang Gesemann, "Nietzsches Verhältnis zu Dostoevskij auf dem europäischen Hintergrund der 80er Jahre," *Die Welt der Slaven*, 1961, no. 2:129–56.) Nietzsche's assertion may or may not be true. Since there was no translation, he could not have read *The Possessed* at the time when he wrote *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. There were, however, personal links between Nietzsche and Russian nihilism. Dostoevsky's ideas could have been transmitted orally by two women friends born in Russia and steeped in Russian culture. One of them was Malwida von Meysenbug (a friend of Herzen's family and a tutor to his daughters), whom Nietzsche met in 1872 and on whose advice he contemplated marrying Herzen's daughter Natalie in 1876 ("the best qualified" candidate for matrimony, as he put it in a letter to von Meysenbug; see R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy* [London, 1965], p. 133). Another was Lou Andreas-Salome (whom Nietzsche also considered a candidate for matrimony); there is a widespread belief (challenged by some scholars) that she influenced the ideas expressed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

**It is worth noting that Nietzsche's Christ is a suicide. According to Zarathustra (in "Of Voluntary Death"), "the Hebrew Jesus . . . was seized by the longing for death" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 98). In a section (no. 131) of *The Gay Science*, subtitled "Christianity and Suicide," Nietzsche associated the craving for suicide with the coming of Christianity.

hilistic thought, Nietzsche believes that such thinking can inspire man to overcome the self. In this way, Nietzsche's view coincides not with Dostoevsky's judgement, but that of Dostoevsky's character Kirillov.

The coincidence of some of Dostoevsky's and Nietzsche's ideas is easy to explain. Their thought was informed by the same sources: the precepts of Christian theology as reworked by Hegel and the Hegelians.⁹⁶ Hegel had employed the notion of "God is dead" quite frequently—particularly when speaking of the union of God and man in Christ. As Hegel argued, Christ's death is both the death of a man and the death of God. For a Christian, the terrible thought of Christ's death (the death of God) is tolerable because it is inextricably linked to the resurrection, which "belongs just as essentially to faith as the crucifixion."⁹⁷ While Hegel affirmed this fairly optimistic view, some of his followers questioned the notion of resurrection. David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach replaced divine entities with human ones. Max Stirner, in *The Ego and His Own* (*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, 1845), went still further and maintained that man, who, "in our day," brought the work of the Enlightenment to a victorious end by vanquishing God, has killed God in order now to become the sole God. Later in the nineteenth century, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, in their reenactments of the death of the God-man, brought the sequence of events known to every Christian to a halt at the moment of Christ's death. The final verdict was "God is dead." As if echoing the words of Dostoevsky's Ippolit, Nietzsche reported in *The Gay Science* (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882): "Do we smell nothing yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."⁹⁸ But both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky viewed the declaration that "God is dead" not as a dogmatic statement about supernatural reality, but as a diagnosis of the current psychological state of man.⁹⁹ The death of God was an event in the history of human experience, a psychological fact. Both writers portrayed man at the moment when his philosophy, or logic, was translated into experience and became psychology.

What united Dostoevsky and Nietzsche was not only the common sources of their ideas, but also their shared heuristic strategies: they worked not only as epistemologists concerned with the mode of knowledge but also as epidemiologists concerned with the state of the human psyche. In each case, the philosopher assumed the role of doctor.

Some readers found the coincidence of Dostoevsky's and Nietzsche's thought truly miraculous. One such reader, the ideologist of Russian

modernism Dmitrii Merezhkovsky, believed that Dostoevsky's Kirillov had prefigured Nietzsche with "mathematical precision" at each and every point of the latter's thought. Merezhkovsky believed, moreover, that the coincidence of these two prophetic visions attested to their divine inspiration.¹⁰⁰ For him, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche were characters in a revelatory text written by a divine hand.

Reading Nietzsche through Dostoevsky (in a work from 1901), Merezhkovsky identified the philosopher with Kirillov. Nietzsche-Kirillov—as the writer called his hero¹⁰¹—prefigured the new man, the man-god who overcame death psychologically (by conquering the fear of death) and physically (by having imperishable flesh). But the Russian Nietzsche, Kirillov, went further in his experience, becoming a super-Nietzsche. While both of them understood the theological idea of man's physical transformation in the context of the theory of evolution, only Kirillov combined the sensory with the extrasensory (or mystical) in his thought and experience. For Merezhkovsky, Kirillov's "kingdom of the *Übermensch*" approaches the ideal of the New Jerusalem from the Revelation of St. John; one more step and the teaching of Kirillov—an improved version of Nietzscheanism before Nietzsche—would coincide with the teaching of Christ.¹⁰²

Merezhkovsky was clearly striving for the synthesis of man-god and God-man, an ideal that inspired fin-de-siècle thought in Russia. He had to admit, however, that, in the long run, both Nietzsche and (to a lesser degree) Kirillov fell short of this ideal—for each had failed to attain full religious consciousness. This emotional, or experiential, failure was coupled with an intellectual shortcoming: their denial of the existence of God had been predicated on an error in deductive reasoning. Kirillov and Nietzsche failed to appreciate the Kantian principle: that the notion of God lies beyond the realm of sensory experience. After Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Merezhkovsky claimed), Kirillov's argument ("God is necessary, therefore, he must exist; but I know that he does not exist, therefore, I cannot live") can only be considered a philosophical blunder. Insisting that God could be killed by reason, Kirillov and Nietzsche both made the mistake of ignoring Kant's argument (Nietzsche, according to Merezhkovsky, went so far as to claim that "Kant is an idiot").¹⁰³ Along with Büchner and Moleschott, they had replaced God with "a dead frog."¹⁰⁴ (a mistake, one might add, that Turgenev's Bazarov made as well). This mistake in reasoning, moreover, had fatal consequences for their mental health, in Merezhkovsky's words, "from one picayune mistake in the critique of knowledge, all wisdom suddenly becomes madness."¹⁰⁵ Dostoevsky's Kirillov dies not as a man-god but as a mad-

man, howling, kicking, and biting. For Merezhkovsky, Kirillov's death (a clinical phenomenon described by Dostoevsky the vivisectionist) is an analog of Nietzsche's death: "The Superman, the Man-God, has turned into a man-animal. The terrible titan Zarathustra-the-Antichrist has turned into a pitiful cripple, the former German doctor of philology Friedrich Nietzsche who is being kept in a mental hospital."¹⁰⁶

The coincidence of the two deaths is interpreted by Merezhkovsky as a warning of a future epidemic illness: "The madness of Kirillov and Nietzsche is only the first weak strain of the historic world-wide contagion of insanity."¹⁰⁷ Thus, in the end, by diagnosing the world-wide contagion of insanity, the writer-philosopher assumed the role of doctor.

Another twentieth-century philosopher, Albert Camus, writing in 1940, insisted that suicide, which had been formerly approached solely as a social problem, must be now considered as a phenomenon of individual life and thought. ("Suicide has never been dealt with except as a social phenomenon," Camus claimed arrogantly.)¹⁰⁸ He opened his book on suicide, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, with a statement that has since been quoted by many a scholar of suicide: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. . . . And if it is true, as Nietzsche claims, that a philosopher, to deserve our respect, must preach by example, you can appreciate the importance of that reply, for it will precede the definitive act."¹⁰⁹ A modern philosopher was put into Socrates' position. But Camus's immediate reference point was Dostoevsky's Kirillov. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* he gave his own account of Kirillov's death, rereading Dostoevsky through Nietzsche.*

Summarizing, retelling, and citing selected passages from *The Possessed*, Camus followed the course of Kirillov's argument, analyzing its "logic." (He also considered Dostoevsky's Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov, characters in which he saw Kirillov "reappear.") Like Merezhkovsky, Camus identified Dostoevsky's Kirillov with Nietzsche, his thought and his personal fate. Prompted by the knowledge of Nietzsche's death in an insane asylum, he emphasized that the logical outcome of atheism was madness, a condition which ultimately led Kirillov to suicide: "Of course, like Nietzsche, the most famous of

*Camus was primarily inspired by *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche's notes on *The Possessed* were not published until 1970.

God's assassins, he [Dostoevsky's composite hero] ends in madness."¹¹⁰ Thus Camus's reflections on the metaphysical condition of modern man, like Merezhkovsky's, end in a medical diagnosis.

Ludwig Wittgenstein was another philosopher who saw in Dostoevsky a paradigm of suicidal logic. For Wittgenstein, suicide was not only a subject for philosophical reflections, but also an intensely personal matter. (Three of Wittgenstein's brothers committed suicide, and he contemplated killing himself at several points throughout his life.) In January 1917, Wittgenstein jotted down the following thoughts in his notebook:

If suicide is allowed then everything is allowed.

If anything is not allowed then suicide is not allowed.¹¹¹

This argument is clearly patterned on the statement from *The Brothers Karamazov*, "if there is no God, then everything is permitted." An attentive reader of the novel, Wittgenstein knew that suicide was central among Dostoevsky's "things permitted."¹¹² In his own philosophical reflections, he took suicide as a point of departure for further development of his ideas on ethics. For Wittgenstein, like for Camus, suicide was a fundamental philosophical problem. Like Nietzsche, Wittgenstein committed his thoughts on suicide to his private notebook:

This sheds light on the nature of ethics, for suicide is, so to speak, the elementary sin.

And when one investigates it, it is like investigating mercury vapour in order to comprehend the nature of vapours.

Or is even suicide in itself neither good nor evil!¹¹³

The wording of his concluding remark clearly evokes Nietzsche. Like other philosophers, Wittgenstein investigated suicide under the dual influence of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche.

And as was the case for other philosophers, metaphysical reflections overlapped psychological ones. In fact, Wittgenstein considered thought a kind of experience, which does not need a subject:

Is belief a kind of experience?

Is thought a kind of experience?

All experience is world and does not need the subject.¹¹⁴

The death of Kirillov retroactively influenced the twentieth-century reading of Dostoevsky's main philosophical source—Hegel. Thus reflections on Dostoevsky's Kirillov—read through Nietzsche—affected Alexandre Kojève's influential interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (his lectures delivered at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in 1933–39).¹¹⁵ Kojève sees notions of “man's faculty of death” and “man's fear of death” as central concerns in Hegel's philosophy; suicide (voluntary death without any vital necessity) is the most obvious manifestation of negativity, or freedom, in Hegel. (Kojève remarked in a footnote that this Hegelian theme was taken up by Dostoevsky in *The Possessed* and dramatized in the death of Kirillov.¹¹⁶) According to Kojève, Hegel asserts that one can become a free Christian man only by becoming a man without God, “or, if you will, a God-Man”: “[man] must realize *in himself* what at first he thought was realized in his God. To be *really* Christian, he *himself* must become Christ.”¹¹⁷ And if man can kill himself, in emulation of Christ, he can thereby render himself immune to death. Kojève claimed that “Hegel actually asserts this [idea] on several occasions,” but he failed to show that Hegel ever posed suicide as a central philosophical issue.¹¹⁸ In presenting the Hegelian understanding of the Christian world as nothing more than a progression toward the acceptance of death, or an atheistic awareness of man's essential finiteness, he was clearly prompted by Nietzsche. I believe that his understanding of both Hegel and Nietzsche was also influenced by Dostoevsky's Kirillov. Born Aleksandr Kozhevnikov, in Russia in 1902, Kojève reread Hegel through Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, or rather through the thought of a composite philosopher created in the imagination of twentieth-century thinkers—Nietzsche/Kirillov.¹¹⁹

To conclude, major twentieth-century philosophers, writing after Nietzsche, saw Kirillov's suicide as a paradigm of death in the godless world. The death of Kirillov played a role similar to the role that the deaths of Socrates and Christ had played in the philosophical thought of the previous centuries. The fictional character, Kirillov, whom modern thinkers, influenced by positivism, tended to view as a clinical case, replaced Socrates and Christ. Inscribed on a palimpsest, Kirillov's image reshaped the images of his predecessors.

ucated young man who was formerly a translator in the editorial office of one of the newspapers." In this and other notes published by Likhachev, in compliance with medical ethics, all personal names and other identifying information has been replaced by such conventional signs as "N." Brackets indicate omitted personal information.

27. L. W., "Iz zhizni i sudebnoi praktiki."

28. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols., 23:25. In the rest of the chapter, references to this edition are given in the text. (The English translation of this sentence is from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, 2 vols., trans. Kenneth Lantz [Evanston, Ill., 1993], 1:497.)

29. Likhachev, *Samoubiistvo*, p. 248 (no. 27).

30. "Samoubiistva," *Nedelia*, May 11, 1886, p. 650.

31. Likhachev, *Samoubiistvo*, p. 245 (no. 13).

32. Dostoevsky discussed this case in the notes for *Podrostok*. See more in the chapter that follows. Quote from the commentaries to Dostoevskii, 17:405-6.

33. From Khlopin, ed., *Samoubiistva, pokusheniia na samoubiistva i neschastnye sluchai*, p. 73 (no. 3). Khlopin's brackets.

34. Likhachev, *Samoubiistvo*, p. 236 (no. 4). Marked "The note of a kitchen aide who hanged himself."

35. Ibid., (no. 2). The suicide is presented as an "honorary citizen" of his town (*lichnyi pochetnyi grazhdanin*).

36. Ibid., p. 238. Likhachev did not publish the text of the note.

37. Ibid., p. 245 (no. 14).

38. Ibid., p. 247 (no. 21).

39. L. W., "Iz zhizni i sudebnoi praktiki."

40. All quotes are from *Grazhdanin*, November 18, 1874.

41. Paraphrasing Thomas Mann, in *The Magic Mountain*.

42. Nikolai Mikhailovsky, "Zhiteiskie i khudozhestvennye dramy," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 1879, nos. 1 and 2; quoted from *Sochineniia N. K. Mikhailovskogo* (St. Petersburg, 1897), 4:641.

43. Ibid., pp. 643-44.

44. Ibid.

45. Likhachev, *Samoubiistvo*, pp. 237-38 (no. 7). It is unclear whether the ellipsis is the author's or the publisher's.

46. Mikhailovsky, "Zhiteiskie i khudozhestvennye dramy," p. 644.

47. Ibid.

48. *Samoubiistva sredi uchashchikhsia*, pp. 6-7.

49. *Stradaniia samoubitsy v potustoronnem mire. Magicheskoe otkrovenie (Punar Bhava) Ch. von Chinskogo. Perevod s frantsuzskogo E. L.* (St. Petersburg, 1910), p. 22.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. For a review of literary texts dealing with suicide, see Ian Lilly, "Imperial Petersburg, Suicide, and Russian Literature," *Slavonic and East European Review* 72, 3 (1995): 401-23.

2. For a list of suicides in Dostoevsky, see N. N. Shneidman, *Dostoevsky and Suicide* (Oakville, Ontario, 1984).

3. All references to the works of Dostoevsky are to Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols. The second page number refers to the English translation. This and subsequent English translations of *Besy* are taken from: Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, 1994). Capitalization of God follows editions of Dostoevsky's novels that appeared in his lifetime.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Nachgelassene Fragmente Herbst 1887 bis März 1888," *Nietzsche Werke*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 8, part 2 (Berlin, 1970), p. 386.

5. A. I. Gertsen, *Byloe i dumy*, parts 4–5 (Moscow, 1967), p. 156 (chapter 32); English from *My Past and Thoughts. The Memoirs of Alexander Herzen*, trans. Constance Garnett (London, 1924), p. 349.

6. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. F. Max Muller (New York, 1966), p. 332 ("Transcendental Dialectic," book 2, chapter 2: "The Antinomy of Pure Reason").

7. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

9. Koni, *Samoubiistvo v zakone i zhizni*, p. 20.

10. Kant's formulation; *Critique of Pure Reason* (p. 296). I believe that there is a direct link between Kantian antinomies and Dostoevsky's images. It was Dmitrii Merezhkovsky, in his *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii* (part *Religiia*), who first connected Kirillov's dilemma to the Kantian antinomy (*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 24 vols. [Moscow, 1914], 12:192–93). Ia. E. Golosovker, in his *Dostoevskii i Kant* (Moscow, 1963), interpreted the confrontation between the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* over the issue of faith and atheism as a personification of Kant's thesis and antithesis. This book, written in the genre of "a reader's meditations," has been largely ignored by scholars. The role of Kant in Dostoevsky's thought remains underestimated.

11. For a recent interpretation of this note, see Liza Knapp, *The Annihilation of Inertia: Dostoevsky and Metaphysics* (Evanston, Ill., 1996), pp. 1–2 and *passim*.

12. English from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, 1992), p. 50.

13. On Raskolnikov's tirade about moral statistics, see Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, 1992), pp. 57–59.

14. A. Kettle, *Chelovek i razvitie ego sposobnostei*, t. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1865). On Dostoevsky's connections to Quételet, see G. M. Fridlender, *Realizm Dostoevskogo* (Moscow–Leningrad, 1964), pp. 150–57. On Quételet in the Western European context, see chapter 1.

15. Translated and edited by N. N. Nekliudov (St. Petersburg, 1866). The book included works by Rudolf Virchow, Claude Bernard, Moleschott, Theodor Piderit, and Adolph Wagner. Lebeziatnikov especially recommends Wagner's *Zakonosobraznost' v, po-vidimomu, proizvol'nykh chelovecheskikh deistviiakh s tochki zreniia statistiki* (an essay based on the 1864 *Die*

Gesetzmässigkeit in den scheinbar willkürlichen menschlichen Handlungen vom Standpunkte der Statistik) and *Mozg i ego deiatel'nost'*. *Ocherk fiziologicheskoi psikhologii dlia vsekh mysl'ashchikh chitatelei d[okto]ra Piderita* (from Theodor Piderit's *Gehirn und Geist* [Leipzig, 1863]). On this edition, see Fridlender, p. 151, and Dostoevskii 6:307, 7:391–92.

16. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 79.

17. Dmitrii Merezhkovsky, in his *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii* (part *Tvorchestvo*), described Dostoevsky's method as a scientific experiment. In his words, Dostoevsky, like an experimental chemist, places "human souls . . . in extraordinary and artificial conditions, not knowing himself, but waiting to see, what will become of them" (Merezhkovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 10:106–7; English from Dmitri Merejkowski, *Tolstoi as Man and Artist, with an Essay on Dostoevsky* [Westport, Conn.], 1970, pp. 254–55).

18. Zola's essay was first published (through Ivan Turgenev's efforts) in *Vestnik Evropy* in 1880.

19. Emile Zola, *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays* (New York, 1893), p. 54.

20. Similarities between Dostoevsky's method and Odoevsky's were first noted by R. G. Nazirov, in "Vladimir Odoevskii i Dostoevskii," *Russkaia literatura*, 1974, no. 3.

21. Vladimir Odoevskii, *Russkie noch'i*, ed. B. F. Egorov et al. (Leningrad, 1975), p. 53.

22. Odoevsky quoted in P. N. Sakulin, *Iz istorii russkogo idealizma. Kni-az' V. F. Odoevskii. Myslitel'. Pisatel'*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1913), 1, 1:483. See also commentaries to *The Russian Nights*, Odoevskii, *Russkie noch'i*, p. 281.

23. Odoevskii, *Russkie noch'i*, pp. 15–16.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 141–42. Odoevsky's quotation is from Bichat, "Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort" (Paris, 1829), p. 108.

26. This and subsequent English translations of *Idiot* are taken from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. David Magarshak (London, 1955).

27. Noted by A. L. Bem in his "Pered litsom smerti" [1936], in his *O Dostoievskem. Sbornik stati a materialu* (Praha, 1972), pp. 168–69. See also Knapp, *The Annihilation of Inertia*, for an extended analysis of the symbolism of Ippolit's death and the death sentences in *The Idiot* (pp. 67–75, 84–96).

28. Paraphrasing *Critique of Practical Reason*; see J. B. Schneewind, "Autonomy, Obligation, and Virtue: An Overview of Kant's Moral Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge, 1992), p. 332.

29. On Voltaire's idea, see P. L. Landsberg, *The Experience of Death* (London, 1953), pp. 1–3.

30. "Est-il bien vrai que cela ne se peut, qu'il faudra mourir demain, aujourd'hui peut-être, que cela est ainsi? O Dieu! l'horrible idée à se briser la tête au mur de son cachot!" Victor Hugo, *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné*, préface de Roger Borderie (Paris, 1970), p. 287 (end of chapter 7). On Dos-

toevsky and Hugo's story, see V. V. Vinogradov, "Iz biografii odnogo 'neistovogo' proizvedeniia. Poslednii den' prigovorennogo k smerti," in his *Evolutsiia russkogo naturalizma. Gogol' i Dostoevskii* (Leningrad, 1929); see also Bem, "Pered litsom smerti," *passim*, and Dostoevskii 9:429-30.

31. The translation has been edited.

32. English from *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, ed. Joseph Frank and David I. Goldstein, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (New Brunswick, 1987), pp. 50-51.

33. F. N. Lvov, "Zapiska o dele Petrashevtsev," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, no. 63 (Moscow, 1956), p. 188. English translation from Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 57-58. In the letter to his brother, relating the experience, Dostoevsky recalled (and quoted) *Le Dernier jour* again (Dostoevskii 28/I:162).

34. In the words of Liza Knapp; see her introduction to *Dostoevsky as Reformer: The Petrashevsky Case*, ed. and trans. Liza Knapp (Ann Arbor, 1987), p. 26, n. 52.

35. The formula and information are from Julia Kristeva, "Holbein's Dead Christ," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York, 1989), 1:248.

36. See my Introduction for a discussion of the deaths of Socrates and Christ as cultural paradigms.

37. I am referring to the final paragraph of Seneca's "On Providence."

38. Dostoevsky commentators mistakenly identified the source as St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (9:497); it is clearly the Letter to the Romans, chapter 8 (especially verse 1-21).

39. The reference is to Schiller's poem (1788), translated by Dostoevsky in 1861 (9:497).

40. This and subsequent English translations of *Podrostok* are taken from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Raw Youth*, trans. Constance Garnett (London, 1916).

41. A. F. Koni, *Na zhiznennom puti*, (Revel-Berlin, 1924), 3, 1:180-81. The connection between Kraft and Kramer was first established by I. I. Lapshin in "Obrazovanie tipa Krafta v 'Podrostke'," in *O Dostoevskom. Sbornik statei*, ed. A. L. Bem (Prague, 1929), 1. Lapshin compares Kraft's motivation to that of Otto Weininger, who killed himself (in 1903) after having argued, in scientific terms, that Jews were an inferior race (p. 143).

42. Likhachev, *Samoubiistvo*, p. 242.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 243. In his diary, Kramer wrote of his (unrealized) plan to postpone the execution of his death sentence so that he could develop a scientific corroboration of his view on Russia: "I have thought about staying alive for another five or six years to devote myself to the investigation of scientific proofs confirming the truthfulness of my views" (Likhachev, *Samoubiistvo*, p. 243). What remained unrealized by Kramer in real life was fulfilled by Dostoevsky's character, Kraft, who is said to have left a notebook of such scientific deductions.

44. Noted in commentaries to Dostoevskii (17:366). The connection to Chaadaev does not stop here: rumor had it that Chaadaev's death in 1856 was a suicide (see Charles Quénét, *Tchaadaev et les lettres philosophiques* [Paris, 1931], pp. 387-93).

45. I am indebted to Liza Knapp for this argument.
46. Koni, *Na zhiznennom puti*, p. 180.
47. Likhachev, *Samoubiistvo*, pp. 240–45.
48. *Grazhdanin*, November 18, 1874, p. 1140. It was A. S. Dolinin who established that Dostoevsky used the letter published in *Grazhdanin* for the suicide letter of Kraft in *The Adolescent*. See his *V tvorcheskoi laboratorii Dostoevskogo* (Leningrad, 1947), p. 101, and *Poslednie romany Dostoevskogo* (Moscow–Leningrad, 1963), p. 140. In reproducing the letter, Dolinin made serious mistakes. For example, instead of “self-composure has not left me; I have no desire to live [zhit’],” Dolinin has: “self-composure is leaving me; I have no desire to drink [pit’].” The suicide figures as A. P., not A. Ts—v.
49. They were A. V. Likhachev, a social scientist, and a medical doctor, G. I. Arkhangel’sky.
50. Likhachev, *Samoubiistvo*, p. 241.
51. The extinguished candle plays a central role in the symbolism of Anna Karenina’s suicide. (See a comment by Elisabeth Stenbock-Fermor in her *The Architecture of Anna Karenina* [Lisse, 1975], p. 44) (Dostoevsky’s *Adolescent* appeared while Tolstoy was working on *Anna Karenina*.) The image of the candle also plays a significant role in the scene of Kirillov’s last minutes in *The Possessed*.
52. Dostoevsky is quoting a newspaper report from *Golos*, August 24, 1874 (see Dostoevskii 17:405–6). This suicide probably inspired Vasin’s remark in the novel: “one such suicide complained, in fact, in a similar diary that not one lofty idea visited him at that important hour, nothing but futile and petty thoughts” (13:134/159).
53. The theme of suicide in *Podrostok* was briefly reviewed by A. S. Dolinin in his *V tvorcheskoi laboratorii Dostoevskogo*, pp. 96–104, and *Poslednie romany Dostoevskogo*, pp. 134–42.
54. For discussion of this metaphor, see Chapter 3.
55. As defined by John Meyendorff in *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York, 1979), p. 144. This view was articulated in Gregory of Nyssa’s treatise *On the Creation of Man* (see Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, pp. 138–39; Georges Florovsky, *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century* [Vaduz, 1987], p. 193). The patristic roots of the concept of “corruption” are discussed by Knapp in *The Annihilation of Inertia*, pp. 56, 70–71, and passim. I am indebted to Liza Knapp for drawing my attention to this concept.
56. Quoted in Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 141.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 141 and 143.
58. A reference to “image” appears also in the notes to *The Possessed*; Kirillov is explicating his theory of suicide: “If there is no God (image) [*Esli net Boga (obraz)*]” (inserted on the margin) (11:294).
59. On the connotations of *obraz* in Dostoevsky, see Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky’s Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art* (New Haven, 1966), pp. 58–59 and passim.
60. Richard McKeon on Platonic dialogue in “Dialogue and Controversy in Philosophy,” in *The Interpretation of Dialogue*, ed. Tullio Maranhao (Chicago, 1990), p. 27.

61. On the genre of Socratic dialogue and its relevance for Dostoevsky, see Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, pp. 110–12. Bakhtin did not connect Kirillov's argument to *Phaedo*; he demonstrated that Dostoevsky evoked *Phaedo* in a parodic treatment of the theme of the immortality of the soul, his story "Bobok" (1873) (see pp. 137–41).

62. See Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* [1827], ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley, 1988), p. 465, n. 199. The importance for Dostoevsky of Hegel's claim "God is dead," is noted by Knapp in *The Annihilation of Inertia*, p. 223, n. 6. It should be added that the theme first appeared in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) (in the conclusion to section C of Chapter 7).

63. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 463, n. 196, and p. 465, n. 199.

64. The title of section 3 of part B in Chapter 6 of *The Phenomenology of Mind*.

65. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* [*Phänomenologie des Geistes*], trans. J. B. Baillie (London, 1949), pp. 600, 604–5. These ideas were extended in the reading of Hegel advanced by Alexandre Kojève in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols (Ithaca, 1969), see especially pp. 56–57.

66. For a review of these debates, see my introduction.

67. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York, 1957), p. xxxix. (From the author's preface to the second edition, 1843.)

68. *Ibid.*, p. xxxvi.

69. See chapter 18, "Dostoevsky and Speshnev," of Joseph Frank's *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821–1849*.

70. From draft of a letter to a friend, ca. 1847; original in German. Quote from N. A. Speshnev, "Pis'ma k K. E. Khoetskomu," in *Filosofskie i obshchestvenno-politicheskie proizvedeniia Petrashevtsev* (Moscow, 1953), p. 502.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 496. On the connection between Kirillov's theory and interpretations of Feuerbach by Petrashevtsy, see commentaries to Dostoevskii (12:221–22).

72. Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, p. 183.

73. The physical, sensory nature of Kirillov's experience was noted by Dmitry Merezhkovsky, who also commented on the convergence of Apocalypse and Kant in this episode. See Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii. Religiiia*, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 12:188 and 190.

74. On this experience, see James L. Rice, *Dostoevsky and the Healing Art: An Essay in Literary and Medical History* (Ann Arbor, 1985), pp. 77–108.

75. Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, p. 183.

76. Merezhkovskii 12:198 (from *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, written in 1900–1902).

77. Vinogradov, "Iz biografii," pp. 150–52.

78. This was Dostoevsky's reaction to the case of A. Danilov, a student whose crime, committed after the publication of the first parts of *Crime and Punishment*, resembled Raskol'nikov's. (See Dostoevskii 7:349–50.) One

might recall Claude Bernard's insistence that experimental method permits us to foretell the appearance of phenomena.

79. That "Mal'kov" is A. Malikov is noted in the commentaries for *The Possessed* (Dostoevskii 12:223); commentaries for the notebooks and the name index, however, list "Mal'kov" as an "unidentified person" (22:399; 24:447; 30/II:262).

80. A. I. Faresov, *Semidesiatniki. Ocherki umstvennykh i politicheskikh dvizhenii v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1905), p. 297.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 298-99.

82. V. G. Korolenko, *Istoriia moego sovremennika*, in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1955), 7:181.

83. Faresov, *Semidesiatniki*, p. 300.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

85. Korolenko, *Istoriia moego sovremennika*, p. 185.

86. See Bernard, *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* [1865], pp. 99-104.

87. *Antichrist* (1895), quoted in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London, 1968), pp. 152-53.

88. The notes, made in German, were taken from the French translation of Dostoevsky's 1872 novel, published in 1886; the title (in Nietzsche's hand) is transliterated Russian, "Bes." The notes were first published in the Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari edition of Nietzsche, "Nachgelassene Fragmente Herbst 1887 bis März 1888," *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, (Berlin, 1970) 8, 2. This document was discussed in detail by Iu. Davydov in his *Etika liubvi i metafizika svoevoliia* (Moscow, 1989).

89. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1967), p. 45, n. 39.

90. Nietzsche, *Werke* 8/2:382. Davydov believes that the diary of Nietzsche's nihilist is based on Stavrogin's last letter (see Davydov, *Etika liubvi*, pp. 167-70).

91. Nietzsche, *Werke* 8/2:383. This and subsequent translations of Nietzsche's notes are by Andreas Johns.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 387. Cf. Dostoevskii 10:471.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 386. Cf. Dostoevskii 10:469.

94. Davydov created the pun *psikho-logika*.

95. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London, 1969), p. 110 (Part Two, chapter "On the Blissful Islands").

96. Nietzsche's connection with Hegel and the Hegelian school was discussed, among other authors, by Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (New York, 1964), pp. 181-88; Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 100; and Hollingdale, *Nietzsche*, p. 40. Dostoevsky's connection to Hegel is a topic that remains to be investigated. D. I. Chizhevsky, in his comprehensive study of Hegel in Russia, *Gegel' v Rossii* (Paris, 1939), failed to find "visible traces of familiarity with Hegel" in Dostoevsky's writing (p. 321; see also bibliographic note on p. 353). However, Dostoevsky belonged to a generation and a literary circle who knew Hegel by heart.

97. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 465, n. 199 (from the 1831 lectures).

98. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1974), p. 181 (section 125).

99. I am paraphrasing and extending Kaufmann: “Nietzsche’s pronouncement does not at all purport to be a dogmatic statement about a supernatural reality: it is a declaration of what he takes to be a historical cultural fact. . . . an attempt at a diagnosis of contemporary civilization” (Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 100).

100. Merezhkovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 12:184–85 (from part of *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii* written in 1901). Merezhkovsky believed that Nietzsche did not know Dostoevsky and could not have been influenced by him (*ibid.*).

101. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 190–91.

103. *Ibid.*, pp. 192–94. For “Kant is an idiot,” Merezhkovsky gives a reference to Nietzsche’s *Der Wille zur Macht*, published the same year as chapter 4 of *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, in 1901 (Merezhkovsky mistakenly gives the date as 1899).

104. *Ibid.*, pp. 194–95.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

108. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York, 1961), p. 4 (first published in 1942).

109. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

111. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2d ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Chicago, 1979), p. 91.

112. According to his biographer, Ray Monk, Wittgenstein knew whole passages of *The Brothers Karamazov* by heart (Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* [London, 1990], p. 136).

113. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, p. 91.

114. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

115. Published (from the transcript made by the poet and novelist Raymond Queneau) as Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris, 1947). For a brief discussion of Kojève’s role in proselytizing Hegel in twentieth-century France, see Mark Lilla, “The End of Philosophy: How a Russian Emigré Brought Hegel to the French,” *Times Literary Supplement* (April 5, 1991), pp. 3–5.

116. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 248, n. 33. Kojève thanks Jacob Klein for this interpretation of the Kirillov episode.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

118. Kojève quotes from the essay “Natural Right” (1802): “pure freedom in its appearance is death; and through the faculty of death the subject shows himself as [being] free and absolutely elevated above all constraint” (*ibid.*, p. 247). One other reference (on the same page as the reference to the Kirillov

episode) is to Hegel's *Lectures at Jena* of 1805–1806 (*ibid.*, p. 248, n. 34).

119. The fact that Kojève's Hegel is a blend of the ideas of Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Heidegger, and Nietzsche has been noted by many scholars. According to Judith R. Butler, Kojève's commentaries to Hegel "are extensions of the text, they are the text in its modern life" (*Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* [New York, 1987], p. 63). See also a recent book by Shadia B. Drury, *Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Post-modern Politics* (New York, 1994), pp. xi and 13. Nobody, however, has seen Dostoevsky in Kojève's Hegel. Consequently, Drury sees no reason why "gratuitous suicide" plays such a large role in Kojève's vision of the end of history (p. 63).

Notes to Chapter 6

1. Here and further references are to Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols.

2. The notebooks in which Dostoevsky recorded his plans for the *Diary* indicate that he took most of his material from the liberal *Golos*. He also regularly used *Birzhevye vedomosti*, *Novoe vremia*, *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, *Russkii mir*, and *Moskovskie vedomosti* (the last he considered to be the best Russian newspaper; 24:163, 259). Dostoevsky took a particular interest in suicide reports; among the notes on suicides that did not find their way into the *Diary* are those in 24:71, 72, 98, 151, 190, 223.

3. For an extensive discussion of the *Diary* as a genre, see Gary Saul Morson, "Introductory Study: Dostoevsky's Great Experiment," in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, 2 vols., trans. Kenneth Lantz (Evanston, Ill., 1993 and 1994), vol. 1.

4. Dostoevsky's archive contains about two hundred letters from readers of the *Diary* for 1876–77, many more than he received for any of his novels. The number of subscribers was about six thousand (a figure close to the subscription of the main "thick journals"). See Igor Volgin, "Pis'ma chitatelei k F. M. Dostoevskomu," *Voprosy literatury*, 1971, no. 9:173; see also his "Dostoevskii i russkoe obshchestvo ('Dnevnik pisatel'ia' 1876–1877 godov v otsenkakh sovremennikov)," *Russkaia literatura*, 1976, no. 3.

5. L. W., "Iz zhizni i sudebnoi praktiki."

6. This and subsequent English translations are from Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, trans. Kenneth Lantz. The first page reference refers to Dostoevskii's *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*; the second to the English translation.

7. The translation has been edited.

8. See chapter 4 for details and references.

9. See the anonymous article "Skuka zhizn'iu," *Nedelia*, June 29, 1875. A brief note on this suicide appeared in *Golos*, June 18, 1875, and *Novoe vremia*, June 22, 1875 (for this information I am indebted to Peter Pozefsky). On this case, see Peter Pozefsky's Ph.D. dissertation, "Dmitrii Pisarev and the Nihilist Imagination," pp. 303–12. In the words of Pozefsky, "the two incidents blended in Dostoevsky's imagination . . . in his writings the suicide