THE LITERARY SCIENTIST
A Multi-Disciplinary Journal for Literature and Science

https://theliteraryscientist.org/

Volume 1
Issue 1
04.12.2023

Paper Title:

The Euclidean Mind and the major Archetypes in Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Author(s):

Al Minar Mahmudur Reza

Al Minar Mahmudur Reza is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in English at Brainware University

.

The Literary Scientist A Multi-Disciplinary Journal for Literature and Science

The Euclidean Mind and the major Archetypes in Dostoevsky's novel, The Brothers Karamazov

Al Minar Mahmudur Reza

Abstract

According to Euclid's fifth postulate, two parallel lines cannot meet. In the novel The Brothers Karamazov, we are introduced with Ivan Karamazov, for whom a rational approach to reflect upon the logical failure of human consciousness and understanding in reconciling God's goodness with the evil in the world is impossible for a Euclidean mind. Alyosha is a character walking upon the steps of the God figure, Zosima Mitya continues to be the Fool archetype, while Semrdyakov, a shadowy figure, represents the Trickster archetype used in various ways in various literary pieces. Fyodor Dostoevsky addresses the dangers and nuances of these archetypes in his works, especially in The Brothers Karamazov. Nonetheless, the author particularly, addresses the Euclidean mind as the center of his majorly recurring archetypes that deal with the fundamental issues of society and religion.

Keywords: Euclidean mind, Archetypes, Trickster, Faith, Dostoevsky, Suffering.

Introduction

That the individual can easily take this paradox [of faith] for a temptation is true enough. But one should not keep it quiet on that account. True enough, too, that many people may have a natural aversion to the paradox, but that is no reason for making faith into something else so that they too can have it; while those who do have faith should be prepared to offer some criterion for distinguishing the paradox from a temptation.

(Kierkegaard, 2003)1

In Fear and Trembling, according to Søren Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym of Johannes de Silentio, faith is a paradox because it consists of belief in the possibility of the impossible. Faith plays a vital role in the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels, especially in The Brothers Karamazov. In the dialect of Problema I- Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical? Kierkegaard argues that there can be three types of individuals: one who considers his faith a temptation, one who averse the self from the paradox, and the one prepared to believe in it, and thus doing so, must formulate 'criterions' to distinguish the paradox of faith from a temptation. Such distinction in faith is conspicuous in building the distinctive characters in Dostoevsky's novel.

Mitya Karamazov, the drunken sensualist or the man-beast, is driven by external stimuli and takes his faith in God and man for granted. Tempted by the materialistic world of hedonism and pleasures, his view of the paradox of faith as a temptation offered by the possibilities of the impossible symbolized through the three thousand roubles or the "Gold mines" in Book- VIII of Part III, the probable solution to Mitya's escape from debt and disgust which, was in the end, a

criterion offered by Mrs. Khokhlakova. The spiritual Alyosha, the young venerable figure, a believer of Christ, is prepared to offer the 'criteria' for the paradox of faith. Though his apparent image as a 'man of God' can be questioned, he leaves the Church and his 'cossack' monk robe to plunge into the real world where a Christian's faith is forever questioned and attacked. His constant errands to heal the family's rifts are the criteria he offers in the face of faith. At last, the suspicious figure of Semrdyakov, the probable illegitimate son of the 'monster' of the novel, Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, has a natural aversion to the paradox symbolized by his suicide. The narrator represents Semrdyakov, suffering from epilepsy, as a product of society's filth, as he is most probably the son born from the raped village idiot, Lizaveta. His crooked morals and actions, such as the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich arouses equal spite and disgust as the sympathy for the character.

Fyodor Dostoevsky erects three principal pillars of his story, or archetypes: the God, Trickster, and the Fool. In the center, he puts 'The Euclidean mind,' the archetype with the most crucial and dangerous responsibility; Ivan Karamazov seems to be the perfect representation of this archetype, and more precisely, the dangers of the 'Euclidean mind.'

The God Archetype

Before discussing the Euclidean mind, it is necessary to elaborate upon the archetypes and why they are uniquely integral for plot construction. According to the author's narratives, 'The God' remains the first and foremost figure who is an institution beyond good and evil, whose actions, if possible and comprehensible, can only be proved through teleological reasoning. The only

character who seems fit for the 'God' figure is the Hieroschemonach, Zosima, and even Christ in the poems of Ivan in The Grand Inquisitor.

Elder Zosima maintains that the union between God and mankind was made possible through the figure of Christ. The infinity, that is, the space beyond three dimensions and linear time, becomes a new geometrical dimension that is non-Euclidean. Though it is not something that the Euclidean mind cannot comprehend, it is prevalent because nature does not justify its actions; either nature's will is beyond good or evil, or it has no will. In both cases, the non-Euclidean causes are questionable, such as the teleological suspension of the ethical when God commanded Abraham to kill his son, Isaac, and the effects of nature or God's will thus remain violent, such as the death of innocent children as Ivan points out to Alyosha in Pro and Contra.

Regardless of being an Orthodox, Dostoevsky constantly subjects his 'God' to questions. Dostoevsky wrote to his friend Apollon Maikov in a letter2, "The main question which will run through all the parts of the novel is the question that has tormented me either consciously or unconsciously all my life—the existence of God." In The Grand Inquisitor, the Russian churchman undertakes a thorough criticism of the action of Jesus Christ in rejecting the three temptations in the Gospel of Mathew, Mark, and Luke. The 'God' figure rejects all the temptations to show humans have free will. The inquisitor argues that free will is not something that Euclidean minds desire and states: "Nothing has ever been more endurable to man and human society than freedom!" According to him, a rational Euclidean mind, if Christ had taken the bread, the temptation of comfort, he could have offered man freedom from hunger and the unendurable vows of fasting. If Christ had listened to Satan and jumped off from a high place only to be saved by angels and God, he could have appeared as a supernatural being, the temptation of superstition, because the inquisitor argues that men need to see miracles to be

content with their faith. Lastly, when Satan offers Christ dominion over all kingdoms, the temptation of power, Christ refuses this shortcut of uniting man. Such refusal from Christ reflects that he preferred the "confusion of free thought." The inquisitor claims that the Church seeks only the best for mankind, such as providing food, security, and stability, rather than the ambiguous rejection of security by Christ.

The Church and God become two different institutions. Such distinction is also prevalent in the monastery of Elder Zosima, where the hieroschemonachs are rather sour and secretive, and the monastery's collection of wines and arrangement of modest banquets. Meanwhile, Zosima is described by the narrator as an old priest "which many people, not only Miusov, might have taken a dislike. He was a short and hunched-up little man with very frail legs," setting his character apart from the ornate church.

Alyosha can also be considered another 'God' figure, but not until the half of the novel, irrespective of his "cherub" and Holy Fool personality that resonates with Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's The Idiot. Alyosha appears to be a 'raw youth' infatuated with the Church. David McDuff claims in his introduction that Alyosha's "far from innocent involvement with Liza Khokhlakova is not what one might expect in a "man of God" (Dostoyevsky, 2003)3. It is but until he overcomes his shaken faith from the 'putrid smell' of Zosima's corpse. Thus, in light of the Inquisitor, or Ivan's Euclidean reasoning, only a few people like Zosima and Alyosha can endure the sufferings and evil in the world by preferring God over Truth.

The Fool Archetype

Another major archetype used by Dostoevsky in his novels is that of the Fool, often represented by a drunk figure who turns destructive behaviors as an escape from reality, such as Marmeladov from Crime and Punishment, General Ardalion Alexandrovich Ivolgin from The Idiot. Dostoevsky's Fools earn the sympathy of readers through their elaborative speeches and the kernel of goodness within them. Almost every character who is acquainted with the Fools behind the main storyline gives references to their 'inner goodness.' For example, the Fool of The Brothers Karamazov, Mitya had always been considered innocent by the 'cherub' Alyosha, even after being accused of patricide. The archetype of the Fool has always been one of the most exploited characters by Dostoevsky because the author, especially in The Brothers Karamazov, ornaments the novel with the almost poetic speeches of Mitya.

The Fool has no moral codes, even if he can well distinguish between good and evil, driven by impulses than any institutional preset such as The Bible for the 'God' archetype in the novel. The Fool acts before thinking and represents the man-beast prone to fall under the temptations of hedonism and pleasure. The narrator represents Mitya Karamazov as someone 'noble,' yet he rampages throughout the novel by threatening to murder Fyodor Karamazov. He bashes the head of Grigory, his quest for the three thousand roubles, and his fight against his father's desire to marry Grushenka, who is reputed to be sexually promiscuous, but in reality, she is too proud to give herself to lovers. Such actions can only reveal man's nature as a greedy, voluptuous animal or an "ungrateful biped" (Dostoyevsky, 2009)4 according to the underground man in Notes from the Underground.

The Fool is also a character that recognizes the fact that a man demands free will. Dostoevsky mentions this desire for man's independent will in his novel Notes from the Underground; "All man needs is independent volition, whatever that independence might cost and wherever it might

lead." (Dostoyevsky, 2009)5 In The Brothers Karamazov, Mitya is the only character who seems independent of any authority of the church, of society, or even the intellect. Though Semrdyakov, the lackey and illegitimate son of Fyodor Karamazov, could fall under this category, it is precisely his epilepsy and the authority of his master and father that does not seem fit for such an archetype. The Fool is somewhat empirical in nature, and he is not cunning enough to escape from atonement; Mitya realizes his mistakes only after he is charged with patricide. It is also simultaneously true that there are two ways to be fooled: not believing in what is the truth and refusing the truth. The Fool is precisely someone who has the authority to fool himself and fool others. Nonetheless, in Dostoevsky's narratives, Mitya Karamazov, the Fool is often portrayed as someone who cares little about truth and acts impulsively.

The Trickster Archetype

God's grace or the goodness that the individual shall receive is the result of his endurance of earthly evils that implies good exists in correlation to what is evil or an equal or opposite reaction. For the 'Fool,' even if he has no moral code, the scale of good and evil exists and becomes the reason why it is easier to be a fool because of the mutual union of desires of pleasure and the dilemma of morality. On the other hand, the 'Trickster' is beyond such scale with which we can measure good and evil. A 'Trickster' relies upon instincts and intuition rather than institutions or impulses. Lewis Hyde writes in Trickster Makes This World: "The best way to describe trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found- sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of threshold in all its forms." (Hyde, 2010)6

The Trickster figure remains one of the main pillars of culture and civilizations. From Prometheus, who tricked Gods, to the fox and coyotes in children's cartoons, Trickster plays a vital role in any story, and the same goes for Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov. Semrdyakov represents the spiteful and devious nature of man. He is, from the beginning, symbolized as a disease or pest, as his literal name means "son of the stinking one," his epileptic seizures, and Grigory Vasilyevich and Fyodor Karamazov's treatment towards him. He is referred to as a boy growing up "without any gratitude" and "a strange boy who looked at the world from a corner." (Dostoyevsky, 2003)7 His inhuman action of hanging cats and burying them ceremoniously reflects upon his figure not only as a trickster but also as a spiteful and repulsive one. Yet, it is also true that he is an embodiment of man's free will and freedom from society's scale of good and evil. His act of killing Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov not only portrays Ivan's philosophy that if God is dead, everything is permitted but also shows that the Trickster is brave enough to carry out an action that others cannot dare. Several motivations behind the murder majorly include Semrdyakov's belief that Ivan wanted him to kill his father, the three thousand roubles of Fyodor Karamazov about which only he had perfect knowledge, and his hatred for his illegitimate father for not allowing him to be a part of his family, either consciously or unconsciously. Ivan's "Euclidean mind" desires rationality and logical explanations for God's goodness and the apparent baseless suffering of the mortal— that is why the intellect argues that if immortality does not exist, everything is permitted, and the murder, allegorically, signifies the logical extreme of Ivan's arguments. Another evidence of Semrdyakov's 'Trickster' persona is his layered lies about the three thousand roubles to Mitya who was later accused of the patricide and theft of the money.

Finally, Semrdyakov's deceptive character is more prominently visible when he tells Ivan in Book- XI that he faked his epilepsy to commit the murder. It seemed that he had been scheming it for a long time. When Semrdyakov gives the three thousand roubles that he stole after killing Fyodor to Ivan, it shows the daring capabilities of a trickster who trespasses and jumps over the boundary of moralities. Another feature of the archetype is its representation as a sly and cunning animal. He is not as impulsive and bestial as the 'Fool,' but rather calculative in his approach. Carl Jung argues, "In his [of the trickster's] clearest manifestations he is a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level."(Jung, 1969).

The Euclidean Mind

The 'Intellectuals' of Dostoevsky's narratives are deep, and Ivan Karamazov appears to be the more mature of them all. Another example of the intellectual archetype is the infamous character of Raskolnikov from Crime and Punishment. To Raskolnikov, the world is inherently amoral and there are no specific sets of moralities for anyone. Raskolnikov says, "Crime? What crime? ... My killing a loathsome, harmful louse, a filthy old moneylender woman… and you call that a crime?" (Dostoevsky, 2003)9 But Ivan doesn't wish to become any 'Napoleon' like Raskolnikov. Rather Ivan Karamazov wants goodness and justice for everyone and every innocent being. Ivan wants to believe in God's existence, and that His essence is good. Yet, for Ivan, suffering is a 'fact' too great to overcome. To him, suffering, and mostly that of children and innocent lives, is the reason that undermines any notion that God is good. Ivan confesses to Alyosha that he desires that the "offensive comedy of human conflict will disappear like a

pathetic mirage, like the infamous fabrication of the Euclidean human mind." (Dostoyevsky, 2003)10. He wants to believe that at the world's universal finale, something will compensate for all the present anguish and torture. He believes that at that universal finale, humanity will be redeemed, which will justify everything that has happened. Yet, he cannot believe it because he cannot accept the 'fact' of the suffering of children. In other words, what Ivan cannot accept is any form of a teleological suspension of ethics and moralities for a promised greater good, not because he is skeptical towards God, but because according to him, he has an 'Euclidean mind.' He tells Alyosha that if God ever existed, humans were created with an awareness of only three-dimensional spaces. Thus, the only solution for accepting the suffering is to believe that such questions about God are "unsuited" for a mind bounded by the awareness of only three dimensions;

"… and who even make so bold as to dream that the two parallel lines which according to Euclid can on no account converge upon earth may yet do so somewhere in infinity. I've decided that if I can't even understand that, then how am I to understand about God? I meekly confess that I do not possess the faculties needed to solve such questions, the mind I have is a Euclidean mind, an earthbound one, and so how are we to make inferences about which that is not of this world?" (Dostoyevsky, 2003)11

Ivan's thesis has two key themes: Euclid's fifth postulates that parallel lines cannot meet, and the Euclidean mind is an "earthbound one." His proof contains a hypothesis that God exists, and he theorizes that if God exists, He must exist along with all the evil and suffering in the world. As an antithesis, Ivan provides that the Euclidean mind of man bound by rationality cannot comprehend what is beyond its perceptions. Thus, he proves that God's existence, or in more socio-political terms, ethics, and morals, is baseless for humanity.

Yuri Corrigan argues that the characters' initiation of escaping the restraints of the self by means of cerebral actions for the need to colonise the thoughts and ideas of the other, "serve as a foundation for Dostoevsky's developing psychology of evil." (Corrigan, 2019)12 Thus by sticking to rational 'facts' of Euclidean geometry, Ivan alleviates mankind from the burden of attempting to understand the metaphysical. Though Ivan has never considered committing an action, such as murder, to prove the amoral nature of life like Raskolnikov, he is equally and intensely driven by the desire to go beyond good and evil, either by escaping moral limitations or a psychological leap. His attempt to overcome the self through cerebral activity or colonize the notions and ideas of other characters serves as one of the foundations of Dostoevsky's psychological narratives, especially the psychology of evil. This psychology of evil is evident through Semrdyakov's action of murdering Fyodor Karamazov and proving himself guilty in front of Ivan by telling him that Ivan's philosophy has been the main reason behind the murder. It also becomes a strong and recurring theme of Dostoevsky's narratives where the author constantly implies that intellectuals have a moral obligation towards truth and society. If he thinks with his senses, the intellectual becomes a Fool. If he has an amoral code and believes in no ethics, he becomes the Trickster, and when he preaches the absolute truth and believes in whatever is good for all, he becomes the embodiment of Truth, or 'God.'

Conclusion

The Euclidean mind cannot comprehend nature's will. It is because either nature is beyond good and evil or has no will. The very danger of such rationality lies in choosing immorality to favor people and reject God because, to such a mind, the causes of nature's will are questionable, and its effects are violent. Ivan's thesis points towards a utopia where there is no suffering, and the kernel of his utopia is independent volition or free will. If, hypothetically, the free will of man is

ever identified with reasons which too, by the Euclidean earthbound mind, then man may reason and not desire. Ivan's thesis fails to point out man's desires. The Euclidean mind is not something beyond the Fool and the Trickster. It also desires its animalistic needs and sometimes crosses moral boundaries which are often because of desire.

According to Euclid's fifth postulate, parallel lines never meet, but parallel lines can indeed meet if one ought to observe them beyond their plane. If two parallel lines are on a horizontal plane, observed from a zero-degree angle, and the viewpoint is moved to ninety degrees and looked vertically down at the plane, the line not only meets but also becomes one. To Zosima, the Cross is the symbol of two parallel lines meeting together. Again, Zosima, a 'non-Euclidean,' whose soul is oriented towards Christ in love, claims, "all things are good and splendid because all is truth." (Dostoyevsky, 2003)12, even the sufferings. Yet, Ivan and Zosima are equal in one point: to achieve that which is beyond. This notion of transcendence or rising above the mortal being has brought man from the literal center of the universe to nothingness. With the advent of modern science, mankind has been pulled away from the center. Before the blooming of science, man was at the center of the universe, made in the image of God, and elevated above animals, deeming themselves as the greatest creation. Yet, with the rise of Christianity and modern science, we have discovered that man is made of dust and his Euclidean reasoning is nothing compared to the vast universe. Before Copernicus' discovery, the earth was considered to be at the center of everything. Now, the whole planet is an invisible speck of dust in the Milky Way which is also one of the many galaxies inside the vastness of the universe. Darwin proves that man is not special but an animal that evolved and adapted into modern sapiens. Even, our intelligence has been belittled by science and psychoanalysts as it turns out we are hardly the reasoning creatures that we think we are and know very little of our inner psyche. Also, our

language and art seem to be under the threat of AI models that have already invaded the modern man's house. Even though the Euclidean mind may call all these 'scientific victories,' it cannot tell: victories over what?

Again, religion promises the eternal harmony of mankind with the condition of not putting man at the center of everything. Religious preachers say that earthly existence is meaningless, and one must act towards Heaven. In this case, both science and religion go in one direction— away from the self. Though 'God is dead' (Nietzsche F. , 1974)13, the "ascetic ideal" is still alive, and we call it modern science; "All science… nowadays sets out to talk man out of his present opinion of himself, as though that opinion had been nothing but a bizarre piece of conceit." (Nietzsche F. , 2013)14

Yet, Dostoevsky maintains that in one thing, the 'God' archetype prevails, and that is love. If God exists, God's will is accepted over Ivan's will, but if there is no existence of God, Ivan' will is the highest. Through a singular word, his self-will permits everything that is and is not prohibited in a world ruled by God. That singular word is 'I,' the sum total of all being. Dostoevsky maintains that the 'I' is a paradox to overcome the self, not through nihilism or abandoning one's moral obligations, but through loving oneself and all the creation. Elder Zosima believes more in brotherhood and love than truth. Even in The Grand Inquisitor, reincarnated Christ kisses the inquisitor in response to his blame and skepticism towards Christ's decisions of refusing comfort, superstition, and power. Though the Euclidean mind cannot comprehend, it can love, and love over truth remains the key message in the novel, as Zosima said:

Love God's people. Because we have come here and shut ourselves within these walls, we are no holier than those that are outside, but on the contrary, from the very fact of coming here, each of us has confessed to himself that he is worse than others, than all men on earth....And the longer the monk lives in his seclusion, the more keenly he must recognise that. Else he would have had no reason to come here. When he realises that he is not only worse than others, but that he is responsible to all men for all and everything, for all human sins, national and individual, only then the aim of our seclusion is attained. (Dostoyevsky, 2003)15.

References

Kierkegaard, Soren (1985), Fear and Trembling, trans. Alastar Hannay, England: reprint edition; Penguin Classics

Dostoevsky Fyodor (1987), Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew, ed. Joseph Frank and David I. Goldstein, New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2003), The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2009), Notes from Underground and The Double, trans. Ronald Wilkins, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2009), Notes from Underground and The Double, trans. Ronald Wilkins, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Hyde Lewis (2010), Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art, Boston, Massachusetts: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2003), The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Jung C.G,.(1991), The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, Collected Works of Carl Jung. Vol. 9.1: On The Psychology of the Trickster Figure, Oxfordshire, England: Routeldge

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2003), Crime and Punishment, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2003), The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2003), The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Corrigan Yuri (2019), "Dostoevskii on Evil as Safe Haven and Anesthetic", Slavic and East European Journal

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2003), The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Nietzsche Friedrich (1974), Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Great Britain, Penguin Books

Nietzsche Friedrich (2013), On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic, trans. Michael A. Scarpitti, Great Britain, Penguin Books

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2003), The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Corrigan Yuri (2019), "Dostoevsky on Evil as Safe Haven and Anesthetic", Slavic and East European Journal

Dostoevsky Fyodor (1987), Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew, ed. Joseph Frank and David I. Goldstein, New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press.

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2003), The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2003), Crime and Punishment, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2004), The Idiot, trans. David McDuff, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Dostoevsky Fyodor (2009), Notes from Underground and The Double, trans. Ronald Wilkins, Great Britain: Penguin Books

Hyde Lewis (2010), Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art, Boston, Massachusetts: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Jung C.G,.(1991), The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, Collected Works of Carl Jung. Vol. 9.1: On The Psychology of the Trickster Figure, Oxfordshire, England: Routeldge

Kierkegaard, Soren (1985), Fear and Trembling, trans. Alastar Hannay, England: reprint edition; Penguin Classics

Nietzsche Friedrich (1974), Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Great Britain, Penguin Books

Nietzsche Friedrich (2013), On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic, trans. Michael A. Scarpitti, Great Britain, Penguin Books