

**The human-divine relationship and the role of irony in Kierkegaard,
Dostoyevsky and Camus: A comparative reflection.**

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Abstract

This article aims to understand the views of three prominent figures in existential literature and philosophy: Albert Camus, Søren Kierkegaard, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The analysis focuses on exploring and explaining fundamental concepts of their philosophies, such as morality, the meaning of life, and the relationship with the divine, in order to establish a dialogue among these three authors. The underlying thread connecting these thinkers is the Socratic figure of speech, irony. Through the examination of contradictions and ironic elements present in their works, the article highlights the significance of irony as a central core in their ideas, encompassing both academic discourse and the realms of literature and symbolism. The comparative method employed goes beyond contrasts, also emphasizing points of contact between the ideas expressed through the stages of existence and the personalities of the protagonists in their novels. The initial sections for each author introduce the basic concepts for general understanding. Subsequently, the main ideas are explored through analysis of their masterpieces, leading to a comparative dialogue among them. Contrasts involve the perspectives embodied by characters like Alyosha Karamazov, Meursault, and Zosima, showcasing the authors' opinions, reflecting the zeitgeist, and highlighting their divergences, ultimately providing a comprehensive view of how they influenced and criticized each other within the philosophical tradition.

1. Introduction

I begin this dissertation with what may be the most repeated and pondered question in human thought: What is life? Perhaps some can find their answers in the biological sciences, in their work, in their family nucleus, or in religious temples. And among so many possibilities and exits, I will answer this question through the lens of three great minds from past centuries: Soren Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Albert Camus.

The Danish, the Russian, and the Franco-Algerian. Three authors who made their work an existential reflection, often even autobiographical, between drama and philosophy. Certainly, for those who are familiar with them, it is notable that they arrived at different conclusions (precisely because they took different paths). However, more than the differences, it is possible to notice something that unites them: the human impulse and the thirst for non-contentment, the search for meaning, the act of giving meaning, and the act of living without meaning. The first steps taken in the development of existentialism and absurdism were not taken by renowned intellectuals with systematic and rationalistic writings, but by suffering souls who found in literary writing a way to express their thoughts, who found in the comfort of characters the freedom to say what was stuck in their throats. With the audacity taken by them, the way of seeing philosophy changed, becoming a bridge for dialogue with the common citizen, moving away from a priori and entering into visceral questions of existence. This popularity can be perceived especially after the war that devastated Europe. Philosophy descends from its ivory tower and, through narratives, stories, and novels, enters the homes of ordinary workers, making it possible for the general public to dare and invent themselves in terms of existence.

With all this information in mind, we can now delve into the search for meaning (and its overcoming).

2. The Christian Socrates

In the city of Copenhagen, in the year 1841, the first steps of our reflection are taken: The young Soren Kierkegaard obtains his master's degree with his thesis titled "The Concept of Irony." Drawing from the history of Socrates and the analysis of the texts of those who tried to preserve his spirit in memory (such as Plato and Xenophon), Kierkegaard unravels the idea of irony and the enigma behind this powerful linguistic weapon. The method of the Athenian is seen as negative in that it is not used to develop his system positively, but rather to confront his rhetorical opponent and induce in him the maieutic, that is, to bring forth ideas, not as someone who pours content into an empty bucket, but by retrieving the reminiscence of the soul. And Kierkegaard's work, built upon the idea of irony, is of paramount importance because the Dane relies on it during the construction of "characters." Kierkegaard positions himself as someone who uses irony (and a certain perspective of "deception") in the service of truth, as a means to extract the reminiscence that "Christendom" had taken away from Christianity.

The personas constructed by him could easily be found on the streets of his hometown: Hegelian pastors, conquering and gallant aesthetes, irrationalists opposing rational "Absolutes," and even a judge who finds satisfaction in his marriage. Common figures that represent a range of typical people in the lives of his contemporaries. Through the voices of these characters, Kierkegaard points to the heart of society and shoots. Just as Socrates' Apology condemns the Athenians for killing a wise man, the Danish thinker denounces the evils of those who killed faith. The chosen forms and structures vary: the aphorisms of *Diapsalmata*, the conversation among friends in *In Vino Veritas*, or the religious structure of the sermons in his famous *Edifying Discourses*. Breaking away from academic content and returning to the Platonic order, his pseudonyms were the best way for Soren Kierkegaard to say everything without saying anything.

Now that the notion of the scenario has been constructed, we reach the high point of the author's thought with his two most prominent works: "The Concept of Anxiety" and "The Sickness Unto Death." In this phase, using the recently (and still not very) structured psychology under the name Virgilius Haufniensis, the concept of anxiety is elaborated as the result of the basic condition of human beings: freedom. The human being (and here he takes Adam as the representative of the entire species) finds himself not only facing the possibilities of options that appear to him but also facing the possibility of possibility itself. Therefore, what is called anxiety is defined as the double movement of freedom. This psychological investigation of anxiety ends up preparing the ground for Anticlimacus to enter the scene in "The Sickness Unto Death," dealing with the relationship between the individual and their freedom, determining the human being as the synthesis of necessity and possibility (that is, free in their choices as possibility, but bound to necessity by their own physical-biological limitations). In this case, the Self: a fruit of this relationship and at the same time the relationship itself. It enters as a third term in the synthesis and as a result of the individual's correct stance in relation to the aforementioned conditions. The Self becomes itself to the extent that its infinitude and finitude relate to each other in the right way, both in relation to oneself, to others, and to God. These treatises have a more technical and academic writing compared to works like "Fear and Trembling" and the aforementioned "Edifying Discourses," which indicates that they were indeed written with the purpose of both structuring Kierkegaard's philosophy and targeting a more educated audience. However, the irreverence of his inaugural writing (which was even considered too informal for a thesis) and other subsequent dialogues in the volumes of "Either/Or: A Fragment of Life" were enough to establish the irreverent method of writing that permeated other existentialists, both in form and in the biting critiques and ever-present sarcasm.

2.1 The Self and the Leap of Faith

The next step in our investigation involves Kierkegaard's elaboration of ideas regarding the meaning of life and its central point: the leap of faith. Mentioned more emphatically in "Fear and Trembling," this concept is a complete trust in the absurd. The individual who finds themselves in a world surrounded by

anxiety due to their freedom, a world that often may not make sense, similar to the divine command given to Abraham to sacrifice his only son, must follow the same path as the patriarch: embrace faith, trust that there is a reason, and even if there isn't, divine will remains, for "against God, we are always in the wrong." The Self is born from the rejection of despair and the leap of faith through teleological suspension. The subject detaches themselves from the ideas that have prevailed from classical periods to Hegel, that there is a telos, a final cause, and instead uses divine will as their guiding star, rather than an innate human/rational nature. Just as in the case of Abraham, there is a suspension of the ethical telos, the invitation to become a Self is a call to suspend the ontological telos. There is no general final cause, and as Kierkegaard said, "Cattle are not judged." The only real entity that relates to the absurd and the divine is the Self, the individual in a subjective manner. Unlike other categories and species, the human being is the only one whose singularity surpasses the genus, so that meaning manifests itself uniquely and specifically to each individual. Meaning would be the relationship between the Self and God and the engagement with the paradox, which is capable of revealing the Truth. If Socrates said that he only knew that he knew nothing (and he was correct in that), after the divine revelation, with the One who says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," one can no longer say that they do not know something.

However, at the same time that this truth chose to manifest itself to humankind, a paradox is established: how can the infinite become incarnate in time? How can the eternal be born? The resolution of this problem can only be found through faith. This leap is an act of both trust in God and a humble recognition of human limitations. In opposition to the maxim that everything real is rational, the idea that something transcends human reason acknowledges that paradox and absurdity go hand in hand. Kierkegaard does not believe in God because he can understand Him, but precisely because he cannot comprehend Him, as the Absolute would be unknowable to a being of finite dimensions like ourselves. The detachment of humans from the ambition to comprehend everything and abstract everything from reality and reason would pave the way to the destiny of life. By surpassing this, the individual would reach the end of their leap, falling into the arms of Christ, discarding all despair, and finally inheriting what was offered to them by Grace: the infinite.

3.The Moscow writer

Perhaps few authors have had such complexity and similar influence as Fyodor Dostoevsky. The author used literature as a weapon for the psychology and anthropology of his time, delving not only into the layers of society as in "A Gentle Creature" but also into the depths of the soul with "Crime and Punishment" and "The Brothers Karamazov." His work spread throughout Europe, captivating thinkers like Freud, Einstein, and even Nietzsche himself (the latter referred to him as "the only psychologist from whom I have something to learn").

Fyodor's work also sowed seeds in philosophy, often being referenced (alongside the aforementioned Kierkegaard) as the father of existentialism.

Although it is not a systematic elaboration, Dostoevsky revives the spirit of ancient philosophers and focuses on the backbone of philosophical thought: questions. Questions about the nature of existence, morality, God, and the relationship of these elements with the State, society, and the individual. Given all the elements mentioned here, his importance in the sphere of this dissertation becomes clear as a "heterodox philosopher" in his textual construction and as a provocateur of society, bringing up issues that have been addressed here, such as the institutionalization of religion in relation to the State and the problem of divine morality.

3.1 The Idiot as an ironic Christian

The novel "The Idiot" is perhaps Dostoevsky's most autobiographical work: a prince who suffers from epileptic attacks (a condition that afflicted the author) but maintains an immense innocence. The plot begins on a train, with Prince Myshkin returning from Switzerland, where he had been receiving medical treatment for his condition, and engaging in a dialogue with two gentlemen, where the reader becomes aware of his innocence and humanism compared to the malice of his interlocutors.

Here we perceive the element of irony: by using a prince, Fyodor criticizes the prevailing social order, as a figure who supposedly should symbolize aristocracy ends up being a prince without possessions, without lands, an authority over nothing. Furthermore, we see that although he possesses an almost instinctive ability to understand the character of those around him, something unexpected from someone portrayed as naïve as he is, he does not feel compelled to judge or reprimand them. Thus, we see Myshkin depicted as a Christ figure, but much more comical, mixed with the mad Don Quixote. A character whose interpersonal relationships are based on supernatural charity and a spirited flame of the soul ends up embodying Kierkegaard's scandal of love. His actions shock those who witness them precisely because they do not resemble the everyday behavior of a human being. Myshkin is illuminated by a different light, the "thou shalt love" manifests in the pages where time and again he remains in love.

Furthermore, we once again perceive the ironic values common to the aforementioned Danish thinker regarding Christianity as the killer of Christianity. Towards the end of the work, the prince determines that the Church is the originator of atheism: in its eagerness for power, aspiring to world domination, it ended up not being a continuation of the apostles but of the Roman Empire. The authorities plunged into a materialism that took hold of the throne, grabbed the sword, and engaged in plundering not only physical riches but also spiritual ones (manipulating faith, trampling upon the sincere devotion of believers). Thus, ironically, the Church ends up preaching the Antichrist, the subversion of all originally Christian values, and in its lies and spiritual impotence, generates atheism.

However, there is hope. The construction of Dostoevsky's ideological universe and worldview rests on the element mentioned earlier: faith. In contrast

to a cold rationalism that permeated the atheistic milieu of Western Europe that the Russian author perceived during his travels, the element of faith serves as a foundation to believe that the Russian people would overcome this, that it would be worthwhile to be good, that there is a God-sized void within man that must be filled, and that love endures.

3.2 The Brothers Karamazov: Divine Morality and the Stages of Existence

In the field of moral philosophy, the development of the idea that "if there is no God, everything is permitted" appears as the core of "The Brothers Karamazov," mainly in the character of Ivan, once again a caricature of European nihilism that embraced the absence of moral values. By conveying this idea, he influences the servant of his family to murder his father, Fyodor, which leads Ivan to delirium and madness in a dream/hallucination with the devil. In this context, Dostoevsky argues for the necessity of a universal norm to have a legislator because without God, men would not be sinners but hungry beings. Without the divine element, all that remains for human beings is pure animal necessity, and our bestial nature is devoid of value judgments.

In contrast, we have one of the most controversial events in the Old Testament: At God's command, Abraham takes his son Isaac to the mountain where he will be sacrificed. Ironically, this man breaks with ethics in favor of faith. The premise that without God, there is no morality implies that He is its delimitter, and taken to its ultimate consequences, ethics would be subordinate to divine will. As the Danish thinker concluded, we are always wrong in relation to God.

Ethics, in this case, appears in both authors in distinct and even opposing ways, yet interconnected, once again displaying an ironic element. One could say that there is an "ordinatio voluntatis" in their positions since the necessary condition for morality would be God. However, while Kierkegaard adopts a directly volitional stance with the Abrahamic example of obeying the divine maxim even if it is "madness" (an action called teleological suspension) based on a leap of faith to believe that God will be consistent with His words (in this example, Abraham prepares to sacrifice Isaac despite God telling him that Isaac would be the promised son, an apparently contradictory action), Dostoevsky does not seem to go to that extreme and presents the divine condition as the defining factor of morality based on the Good, suggesting that there can only be objective morality if there is indeed a supreme good manifesting in the world.

Both argue that what is right, what is moral, is obedience to God, but what Kierkegaard does in critiquing the ethical is to subvert the common understanding. The ethical behavior is the one that, upon receiving the order from God to offer his son, would turn away (after all, it is absurd), but the knight of faith follows all orders in his heart. While the Russian author argues that without God, everything is permitted, the Danish philosopher concludes that "everything is permitted" by God.

It is important to note so as not to create a mistaken impression that Kierkegaard would support killing people in the name of God (an attitude of

institutionalized religion that he criticized so much), highlighting this in "Fear and Trembling," stating that a lack of reflection on the subject would lead a listener of this sermon to also offer his own son when he gets home. The moral of love, the duty of "You shall love your neighbor," stands as the basis for all action, the true intent of Soren's provocation with the image of the patriarch was to explain the title bestowed upon him: "Father of Faith." As mentioned earlier, it was revealed to Abraham that Isaac would be the promised son (the one through whom his descendants would be blessed among the nations). Therefore, the act of obedience resides in faith, not only as teleological suspension but as an acceptance of paradox, that opposite actions would still result in divine faithfulness, a genuine acceptance of irony as a way of life.

Bringing this perspective to "The Brothers Karamazov," we perceive a great resemblance between the titular characters and Kierkegaard's theory of stages of existence. We have three brothers: Dmitri, Ivan, and Alyosha. The three possess characteristics that stand out and dialogue with the existential conditions presented in the Danish philosopher's work as a whole, namely the aesthetic stage, the ethical state, and the religious state. Dmitri is the most passionate of the brothers, driven by desires, women, drinks, and hedonism. Because of this, the image he creates of himself makes him the perfect scapegoat for his father's murder. We can relate Dmitri to the aesthetic man, the conqueror who finds pleasure in seduction. Note that his pleasure does not lie in the consummation of carnal acts per se but in seducing, conquering, captivating the heart only to move on to a new target. Just like human passions that are never satisfied, such is the man who lives according to them, and that was Dmitri. However, as life progresses, a man is confronted with the question of death, and passions are restrained in the face of the question, "Am I living the right way?" With this thought, Ivan emerges, representing the ethical stage: a representative of the mind, intellect, and knowledge. Unlike his bestial brother, Ivan's posture is calm, centered, argumentative, befitting an academic. Like him, we have the figure of the married man representing the second stage since, unlike the conqueror, the ethical man seeks the value behind his actions, conforming to social norms, the "good customs" of his time, and everything that has the reputation of being refined, structured, and moral (paralleling here Ivan's nihilistic morality and the religious Hegelian position of Kierkegaard's time). Ivan's actions indirectly cause the death of his father, portraying the symbolic image that "technique" and "rationalism" kill morality. The man based on his senses (albeit in an empirical-investigative manner, unlike the aesthetic who used them for the satisfaction of passions) ends up limiting reality and aspects of human life to a system, a formula, just a small grain in the vast world, thereby removing the weight of actions and throwing it into the abyss. Finally, we have Alyosha, the most spiritual brother, a member of a monastic order dedicated to heavenly matters. The youngest of the Karamazovs embodies the religious stage of man: spiritual and spirited, dedicated to love and charity not only as actions that please his ego but as the duty of love engraved in his heart, helping, for example, the boy Ilyusha or caring for his detestable father. Alyosha is the man who learned to place his faith in the divine, who learned not to soar beyond his capabilities, that human reason

is limited in the face of the vastness of life and God, just like the religious man. He also represents redemption, elevating the Karamazov name, previously tarnished by his father, through the lips of young Kolya who exclaims, "Long live Karamazov!" Demonstrating that the contrite spirit makes forgiveness and the elevation of the sinner possible.

4.The Algerian absurdity

Albert Camus, the philosopher of the absurd, stands out from the authors mentioned here, who, although different, shared the same foundation in their faith. Influenced greatly by Kierkegaard, Camus takes a different path by rejecting the leap of faith, classifying it as a "philosophical suicide." For Camus, the response to the absurd is revolt, which represents the relationship between human beings' search for meaning and the absence of meaning, or at least the rational incapacity to grasp it. The rebellious individual learns to live ironically, using the very lack of meaning as meaning, as life itself is sufficient.

Camus' works maintain a literary structure, presenting concepts explained through novels that portray historical settings and reflect on existence. Among them, the most famous is "The Myth of Sisyphus." In this work, the author uses the Greek myth and reflections on previous philosophical thought to paint a happy Sisyphus despite his curse. Another highly significant work is "The Plague," which, through a fictional city struck by a mysterious disease, refers to a historical moment contemporary to Camus: the Nazi invasion of Paris. It also brings reflections on the transience and levity with which the masses tend to lead their lives.

It is necessary to emphasize that Camus shared the time and place with Jean-Paul Sartre, another renowned existentialist philosopher. They had dialogues and conflicts, mainly due to political issues, as Sartre adopted Marxist precepts while Camus treated revolution with extreme suspicion. These discussions resulted in the book "The Rebel," in which the Algerian author reflects from the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution, highlighting that the rebellion he referred to in his writings was opposed to revolution, as the latter would be a subversion of the former. The ironic also manifests in the book, with the revolution renouncing the initial movement of rebellion for totalitarian aspirations. In other words, there was a perversion of the values used in revolutionary propaganda in favor of selfish and dictatorial benefits and advantages.

With this understanding of the author, we can grasp the magnitude of his work and how it engages with previous authors, allowing for productive contrasts of ideas, which will be further explored below.

4.1The mountain against the cliff

The myth of Sisyphus is one of the most well-known in Greek mythology. After betraying Zeus, deceiving death, and escaping the underworld, King

Sisyphus is punished by the gods themselves with a torment of profound meaning that can drive one mad. His penalty consists of rolling an extremely heavy boulder up a mountain, only to watch it roll back down to the bottom once it reaches the top. Thus, he is condemned to an endless and purposeless task in which all effort leads to no change.

Sisyphus is taken as an allegory for the individual in an existential situation. In the search for meaning in that which lacks it, the subject ends up sinking even deeper and agonizing over their suffering. It becomes necessary to imagine Sisyphus as happy, a Sisyphus who finds contentment in the work itself, where the struggle alone is sufficient to give meaning. In this case, the contrast with previous thinkers becomes clear. Whether in relation to the classical philosophers who delved into rational investigation in search of universal Truth and believed, through reason, in defining a telos for human beings, or in relation to the movement initiated by Soren Kierkegaard and later developed by Gabriel Marcel, who coined the term "existentialism" while seeking meaning that would reside in absurdity, in the lack of cognitive understanding of human minds about life in its entirety. This is because both Kierkegaard and Marcel were Christians, and their ideas resulted in the acceptance of faith.

Sisyphus' proposal denies telos and divinity, or at least the human relationship with it, and establishes that the only necessary condition for living is life itself. For Camus, Sisyphus' mountain discards the need for the precipice of faith, as the meaning of life is immanence, and that alone is sufficient. Transcendence, the leap into the absurd through faith, would actually be a leap into intellectual death, what he calls "philosophical suicide," and not a way out of the absurd.

However, the rejection of the precipice of faith does not immerse Camus in an aesthetic stage; on the contrary, this way of life is also criticized by the author. People who live merely by walking the streets, rushing to their next commitment, trying to accumulate money, only to end up dying or falling ill or becoming too busy to enjoy the fruits of their labor. This portrait of his time remains alive today and once again reproduces irony since the purpose of this life, which would be material possessions, wealth, luxury, is precisely denied in the pursuit of achieving it. The person who surrenders to endless work, constant haste, and cheap pleasures (not in a monetary sense, but in a qualitative one), trying to seek quality of life and meaning, is like a man who sells his car to buy gasoline – the most ironic and lamentable of creatures. Within this view, human suffering and emptiness lie in the attempt to fill the void in a materialistic way, not because of being materialistic per se, but rather due to the attempt to fill that void. As long as Sisyphus continues to try to fill the void of his task, to find meaning, he will only sink deeper into despair, which will only be undone when the very course of his effort becomes the meaning of his existence. It is when we begin to value our own life and not try to attribute value to it through other means that we truly start to imagine a happy Sisyphus.

4.2 Sisyphus the obstinate

Would this then be the end of Kierkegaardian existentialism? What would the Danish philosopher have to say if he could witness the birth of Camus' philosophy? In a certain sense, he already has. In his famous treatise "The Sickness Unto Death," Kierkegaard investigates despair and its forms. One of these forms is precisely "desperately wanting to be oneself" or obstinacy, a term used when the individual desires to be oneself as a mode of revolt against despair. The more self-awareness there is, the more despair intensifies, and in this sense, the obstinate individual has a self-awareness that intensifies their suffering. They are very close to the truth, but precisely because of that, they are infinitely distant from it, as explained in the passage:

A self that desperately wants to be itself laments over one or another affliction that won't let itself be taken away or separated from its concrete self. So he throws all his passion into this very torment, which finally turns into demonic wrath. And if now it happened that even God in heaven and all the angels offered him help to get rid of it, no, now he doesn't want to, now it's too late, some time ago he would have gladly given everything to be released from this torment, but he kept waiting, and now it's no use, now, now he prefers to be angry with everything and be the victim of the whole world, of existence, and it's very important for him to be very aware of the fact that he has his torment in his hand and that no one takes it away from him – otherwise he would not be able to demonstrate and prove to himself that he is right. (KIERKEGAARD,2022, p110)

By accident, the treatise on human despair ends up predicting the movements that absurdism would take as a revolt against "God and the world," obstinately embracing its suffering as its own. Perhaps human pride or the fear of leaping into the unknown causes Sisyphus to firmly hold onto his boulder, to the point that even if Persephone were to come back to help him, he would vehemently reject her. And this is the ironic element of Absurdism: while in despair, human beings prefer to plunge into despair rather than into faith. The stubborn pride of wanting to overcome their condition ends up burying their soul definitively, so close yet so far from their relief.

4.3 Zosima Faces the Absurd

"Looking again from the perspective of The Brothers Karamazov, suicide takes on another meaning. Zosima was the leader of the monastic order to which Alyosha belonged and is responsible for various developments of thought throughout the story in his conversations with the young Karamazov. The excerpts from their conversations and doctrines were recorded after his death and vehemently criticize the lifestyle adopted by society. Zosima speaks of spiritual suicide caused by loneliness and the false freedom promoted by the world, an aesthetic freedom that is based only on what surrounds me directly, on what I can interact with through my senses. This attitude ends up cultivating mere indulgence, which leads to vices and illusion. It is the irony manifested once again, where man, thinking he is free, ends up enslaving himself. In the words of Zosima:

"The way of the religious is quite different. They make fun of obedience, fasting, prayer, yet it is the only path that leads to true freedom; I suppress superfluous needs, tame and scourge by obeying my selfish and proud will, I thus arrive, with God's help, at freedom of spirit and with it spiritual joy! Which among them is more capable of exalting

a great idea, of putting himself at its service, the isolated rich or the religious freed from the tyranny of habits? " (DOSTOIEVSKI, 1970, p 326)

Zosima (and the book as a whole) establishes the meaning of life in a distinct way from what is presented in Camus, which we can take here as an example with the figure of Meursault as a comparative: In the novel *The Stranger*, we have the insertion of Meursault as the narrator of his misfortunes, which begin after the death of his elderly mother. He shows little emotion expected at the funeral and the following day engages in activities such as meeting a lady and watching a comedy. His demeanor is often characterized by existential apathy, significant and one could say even moral based on his questionable actions that lead him to prison and a death sentence. In the end, he describes that he was actually ready to relive it all and that no one had the right to mourn for his mother since she felt the same way. Authentic and unrepentant life for him was the consummation of authenticity.

In this case, the contrast is even clearer between the two authors, as Meursault's apathy and amoral determination directly oppose the charitable love and concern for the state of things expressed by Zosima. Both, reflecting on death, direct their minds to what they have been concerned with and valued. Meursault's introspection turns inward and upon dying reflects on his own existence, his life, his death, and what it means to him, while Zosima's ideal brotherhood preached by Christianity leads him to reflect in his old age on the state of the world. His concern makes him want to teach the younger generation and transmit his values, demonstrating that the sense of absurd emptiness that intellectually plagued Europe was unable to stop the well-grounded Russian spirit, not in a self-closed ego but precisely in others.

5. Conclusion

In light of these reflections, it is possible to perceive the dimension, originality, and even genius of these authors in their elaborations. Such thoughts remain relevant today and were responsible for revolutionizing their respective fields of study, from Kierkegaard's focus on the individual, the unfathomable being in its entirety, influencing later philosophers who didn't even share his position, such as Foucault, Sartre, and Camus, to the artistic and psychological revolution provoked by Dostoevsky, which had an impact in various fields, reaching even Freud with his Oedipus complex and establishing a clear relationship with the death of Fyodor Karamazov, as well as in the field of literature with Kafka being a devoted admirer of the Russian author. Camus is not far behind, being influential mainly in popular culture and even making an impact in Brazil, with Caetano Veloso being an artist openly influenced by his work.

These men, distinguished in their paths but united in purpose, ended up bringing philosophy into the realm of informality. The irony of having an extremely profound and reflective knowledge without a rigorously academic theoretical systematization allows the modern man, now more literate and often turning to novels and romances for leisure and relaxation, to find his place in philosophical dialogue and existential dilemmas. To this day, even the "masses" follow, even if

unknowingly, the terms coined by these thinkers that they use daily, such as "existential crisis," asking questions like "what is life?" and singing songs like "I don't believe in anything anymore."

And in this regard, the irony even manifests itself here, my reader, where in attempting to demonstrate the relevance of the thinkers mentioned, I end up being the conduit for it to occur. As long as there are people willing to disseminate and, more than that, to question and seek answers to the dilemma of life, the legacy of those who dared and tried to respond will remain alive. Kierkegaard's ideas about the irrationality of life, the stubborn embrace of that irrationality as the very meaning, Camus's moral steadfastness and spiritual firmness, and Dostoevsky's moral and spiritual firmness still stand today as indispensable for anyone who endeavors to try to solve the great question posed at the beginning and that I repeat: "What is life?"

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