

SUNY Undergraduate Research Conference

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Presentation Title: Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and The Problem of Evil

Abstract:

Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov Resolves His Crisis of Faith Through His Rejection of Theodicy

Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* examines a key religious-philosophical issue usually called theodicy, or the problem of justification of God: How can man reconcile belief in an all-loving and all-powerful God with the problem of evil affecting even the most innocent in the world? Such is the question Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov faces within the pages of the novel. Confronted with unmerited suffering throughout his life, Raskolnikov adopts an atheist outlook after being exposed to Russian Nihilism in St. Petersburg and attempts to correct God's supposed mistakes through his own theory of the "extraordinary man," modeled off extreme interpretations of Utilitarianism and particularly Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* In the end, however, Raskolnikov is left guilt-wrecked from his enactment of his theory and found recommitting himself to his Russian Orthodox roots. Though many have seen Raskolnikov's restored faith as Dostoevsky's attempt to tack on a happy ending, this paper draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's studies of Dostoevsky to argue that there is a steady—if subtle—shift within Raskolnikov throughout the novel that occurs through the polyphonic voices of Sonya and Svidrigailov, who respectively speak to Raskolnikov's Christian and atheist selves. Through Raskolnikov's interactions with the Christ-like Sonya and "extraordinary man" Svidrigailov, Raskolnikov is able to understand the falseness of his theory and accept his need for God's love. The paper argues that Dostoevsky's ending is both psychologically true and a rejection of philosophical theodicies: Raskolnikov makes the connection that, while he may never understand how an all-loving and all-powerful God could allow evil to exist, he is forever grateful for a God powerful and merciful enough to bestow upon him unmerited love.

Key Words: Dostoevsky, Theodicy, Chernyshevsky, Bakhtinian Theory, Religion, Utilitarianism, Übermensch-figures, Christ-figures

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