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European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

AUGUST 17, 2018

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20.08.2018

Tiger Woods, Donald Trump and Crime and Punishment

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel Crime and Punishment raises the complex problem of guilt. The hero, Rodion Raskolnikov, commits what seems to be the perfect crime but is torn by moral dilemmas. A poor student, he murders a pawnbroker for her money, a crime for which he could potentially justify his action. Luckily for him, the objective facts of his guilt are beyond verification; it is his internal feelings of guilt that finally lead him to confess.

The question of guilt comes to mind because of recent headlines concerning the professional golfer Tiger Woods and the continuing popularity of Donald Trump.

Headlines about Tiger Woods electrifying second place finish at the recent Professional Golfers Association Championship (PGA) testify to his role as a predominant athlete in the public's eye. The press exclaimed: "Tiger Woods just showed us his exhilarating future." "A hard-charging Woods had the full-throated support of the fans crammed like packing peanuts into the 200-acre parcel of property that is Bellerive Country Club."

"Tiger Electrifies Bellerive With Final-Round 64 at PGA."

"The full-throated support of the fans" and the headlines made no mention of Tiger's 2009 fall from grace. Boy prodigy, 14 times winner of golf's major tournaments, married and father of two children, Woods' public humiliation because of marital infidelity was world news. The African-American star in the white-man's world of golf was too good to be true. Woods's Swedish wife's beating him with a golf club after learning of his serial

cheating was more than just a sports' scandal; it knocked a popular athlete off a unique pedestal.

His confessions were never convincing – “transgressions,” “I was unfaithful, I had affairs and I cheated. What I did was unacceptable.” They all seemed scripted. His performances before cameras were bad acting, nervous readings from public relations texts. Some, but not all, major sponsors stopped supporting him.

Golfing fans want him to succeed. They want to relive the 1997 Masters Championship when the 21-year-old Woods dominated the field to win his first major tournament by 12 strokes. Why? What is there about him that allows people to forget his cheating? People who are rooting for him most likely would condemn marital cheating and personally find what he did reprehensible. But he is Tiger, the golfing hero. And they are cheering him on. This is not a story of personal resurrection, of overcoming four back operations, or of having radically changed his life. Golfing fans want to see him win again, fist pump and all. His personal past has nothing to do with winning, with his quest to overtake Jack Nicklaus' record 18 major titles.

How does the personal come to be separated from the public? “I have the most loyal people,” said candidate Donald Trump. “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters,” he once bragged. Videos of his vulgarities about women have not changed opinion polls. He won the presidential election and has over 90% Republican support, including many women. If you individually asked people about his personal behavior towards women most of his supporters would reject his comments and behavior. Yet, they can continue to support him. Moreover, unlike Woods, Trump has never apologized for his comments or transgressions. But like Woods, his loyal followers have completely separated the private from the public.

Neither Woods nor Trump has shown the moral anguish of Raskolnikov. That seems too much to expect. But what about the golfing fans and voters? Shouldn't they hold public figures to some level of accountability for their private actions? Tiger, as a sports star, seems immune from any role model criteria. To paraphrase Fox News's Laura Ingraham's rebuking basketball star LeBron James' political comments (“Shut up and dribble”): Tiger, Shut up and putt. Sports is sports, nothing more, nothing less.

Trump has taken political figures as role models to another level. Married three times, he makes no attempt to hide his macho attitude towards women. He is very far from the father figure presidents are supposed to represent. Have you ever seen him show signs of affection towards his son Barron? Has he ever demonstrated a paternal instinct? (This

infamous quote from Trump about his daughter is far from paternal: "...she does have a very nice figure. I've said that if Ivanka weren't my daughter, perhaps I would be dating her.")

The stock market is over 25,000. The economy is churning away at almost 3% growth. Unemployment is under 4%. To paraphrase Ingraham again; "Shut up and allow us to make money."

If neither Woods nor Trump has shown Raskolnikov's moral anguish, why should we bother to question them? Is there something about Tiger's potentially winning a major championship and current U.S. economic success associated with President Trump that overcome any questioning of personal behaviour? If, unlike Raskolnikov, Woods and Trump do not wrestle with their past actions, why should we? If and when Tiger wins another major, we will celebrate with him. As long as the US economy keeps humming along, politicians and voters will continue to overlook Trump's personal behavior and even talk of re-election.

Raskolnikov's anguish was because he realized, and was made to realize, that what he had done was wrong. That led to his final confession. While I can't say if Woods or Trump has a sense of decency, I do wonder about the golfing fans and Trump followers. In 1954 the anti-communist Senate hearings turned on the famous Joseph Welch question to Senator Joseph McCarthy "At long last, have you left no sense of decency?" I wonder in 2018 if anyone would pose the same question to President Trump, and if it would have any effect on his followers.