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Dostoevsky via Kierkegaard: Interrelations of the Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious

Parlin, Maxwell

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DOSTOEVSKY VIA KIERKEGAARD:

INTERRELATIONS OF THE AESTHETIC, THE ETHICAL, AND THE RELIGIOUS

Maxwell Parlin

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Abstract

This dissertation interprets Dostoevsky through the lens of Kierkegaard. The overarching claim is that Kierkegaard conceptualizes much of the enigmatic material in Dostoevsky's fiction and thus clarifies the scholarly controversies that it has generated. Specifically, Kierkegaard elucidates the paradoxical interrelation of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious in Dostoevsky, an interrelation often misconstrued in the scholarship. Ultimately, this interrelation boils down to the interrelation between heaven and earth, time and eternity, God and man, the absolute and the relative. In a word, heaven simultaneously nullifies and sanctifies earth. Heaven and earth are unified by faith, but in a way that – paradoxically – accentuates the distinction.

Kierkegaard is particularly helpful because he conceptualizes this interrelation, this "paradox dialectic," in relation to other dialectical forms that scholars ascribe to Dostoevsky, namely synthesis and separation. Basically, the tragic or nihilistic reading of Dostoevsky claims that his works envision a separation of heaven and earth. In contrast, the idealist reading claims that his works envision a synthesis of heaven and earth. Both readings account for undeniable aspects of Dostoevsky, but he ultimately abandons both dialectical modes in favor of an alternative: neither synthesis nor separation but paradox, a paradoxical unity that accentuates difference. Several scholars have approximated this dynamic, but Kierkegaard provides further nuance. Elaborating the paradox dialectic of faith in relation to both tragedy and German Idealism, Kierkegaard helps us understand the circuitous journey of Dostoevsky's fiction from "Athens" to "Jerusalem," from "reason" to "revelation," from Hellenic categories natural to the human mind to Hebraic or biblical categories of faith.

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Note on References, Translation, and Transliteration

References to Dostoevsky appear parenthetically in the body of the text and refer to his complete collected works (*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*). When citing volumes one through eight, I refer to the second edition, the in-progress St. Petersburg edition, indicated by a subscript 2. For example, "Beauty will save the world" (8_2:317). When citing volumes beyond the eighth (everything after *The Idiot*), not yet published in the second edition, I refer to the first edition, the classic Leningrad edition, indicated by a subscript 1. For example, "Beauty is a fearful and terrible thing!" (14_1:100). Both editions are listed in the Bibliography.

All translations from the Russian, whether of Dostoevsky or another author, are mine unless otherwise noted. However, I have at times consulted and borrowed from the following translations, listed under Primary Sources in the Bibliography: Michael Katz, *Notes from Underground* and *Crime and Punishment*; David McDuff, *The Idiot*; Robert Maguire, *Demons*; Susan McReynolds, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

References to Kierkegaard also appear parenthetically in the body of the text and refer to the Hong translation of his complete works published by Princeton University Press. Each work is listed in the Bibliography and is abbreviated as following:

CUP – Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments
EO – Either/Or
FT – Fear and Trembling
PC – Practice in Christianity
PF – Philosophical Fragments
PV – The Point of View
SD – The Sickness unto Death
SLW – Stages on Life's Way

For the sake of consistency throughout the study, I have modified the Hong translation's spelling of "esthetic" to "aesthetic."

Transliteration from Cyrillic follows the Library of Congress system, except in the cases of names and forms that have become standard in English or in translations of Dostoevsky's novels: Tolstoy and Dostoevsky instead of Tolstoi and Dostoevskii, Dmitry Merezhkovsky instead of Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, Fyodor and Alyosha instead of Fedor and Alesha, Nastasya and Sonya instead of Nastasia and Sonia. In this study, which deals primarily with canonical fiction and scholarship, exceptions may be more common than the rule, which applies primarily to Russian titles in the footnotes and Bibliography.

Biblical references, unless otherwise noted, refer to the English Standard Version.

Introduction

Why Kierkegaard? Three Dostoevskian Dialectics

> "It would be fascinating to inquire into the source of the Dostoevskyan dialectic. […] These matters pertain, however, to a more technical study."
> ~ George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*

Reading the scholarship on Dostoevsky, one may have the impression that there is not just one Dostoevsky but rather three, if not more. The interpretations generated by his fiction are so notoriously contradictory that if one were to read only the scholarship, one might doubt whether such a writer really exists. One way to frame these three "Dostoevskys" is in terms of their underlying dialectical structures, that is, how they reconcile – or do not reconcile – oppositions, particularly the opposition between heaven and earth. At the center of Dostoevsky's works is the pressing question of how to reconcile heaven and earth, time and eternity, God and man, the absolute and the relative. The three Dostoevskys reconcile heaven and earth in three different ways.

Three Dostoevskys

The first Dostoevsky is Dostoevsky the German Idealist. Raised on Romanticism and indoctrinated with Schelling in his youth, this Dostoevsky ardently believes, with his beloved Prince Myshkin, that beauty will save the world. Radically optimistic, this Dostoevsky is a utopian who shares Myshkin's visions of total universal harmony and his belief in the fundamental goodness of humanity. The paradigmatic presentation of this Dostoevsky is Robert Louis Jackson's classic study, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, which draws out, in the Russian

writer, "all that German philosophy dreamed of from Kant to Schelling."[1] In terms of the dialectical mode of interrelating heaven and earth, this Dostoevsky, in accord with the tenets of German Romantic Idealism,[2] envisions a *synthesis*.

But there is a dark side to this Dostoevsky, who shares Myshkin's Russian-religious chauvinism as well. Influenced by Romantic nationalism, this Dostoevsky believes in the messianic mission of his *volk*, or, rather, *narod*. This is Dostoevsky the millenarian crusader, who envisions, in *Diary of a Writer*, Russia's victory over the Turks and repossession of Constantinople. This Dostoevsky dreams, in his 1880 Pushkin Speech, of Russia's uniting "Aryan" Europe. This is Dostoevsky the anti-Semite. As we know especially from the twentieth century, such millenarianism or apocalypticism, the desire to prematurely fuse heaven and earth (with one's own ethnic group leading the way), is extremely dangerous.[3] This Dostoevsky is real, and in no way do we seek to excuse him of his chauvinism and antisemitism. However, it must be recognized that the writer, despite himself, also perceived the danger of synthesizing the absolute with any relative entity, whether a nationality, a religious group, or aesthetic beauty. Significantly, the synthesis-Dostoevsky shares Prince Myshkin's epilepsy. As the author knew too well, visions of total synthesis collapse into darkness and despair, the natural habitat of a very different Dostoevsky.

The second Dostoevsky is Dostoevsky the nihilist or the tragic Dostoevsky. Disillusioned with his youthful ideals by Siberian labor camp, where he dwelt among Russia's fiercest

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[1] Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1966), 212.
[2] For a discussion of the importance of synthesis for German Romanticism and German Idealism (and what many call "German Romantic Idealism"), see chapter six.
[3] See David Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York UP, 2005). For the Russian/Soviet context, see Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2017).

criminals, this Dostoevsky sees not human innocence but an abyss of human evil. This is Dostoevsky the pessimist, the "gloom and doom" Dostoevsky. This Dostoevsky shares the nihilism of the Underground Man and Ivan Karamazov. The paradigmatic presentation of this Dostoevsky is Lev Shestov's *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy*.[4] Here the writer is painted as a full-blown nihilist who doubts all ideals, both the Western idealism of his youth and his later faith in the Russian people. This is the Dostoevsky who ironizes his own transcendent visions in *Diary of a Writer*, who subjects Myshkin to the harsh realities of life that shatter his sentimental humanism and utopian dreaming. In terms of the dialectical mode of interrelating heaven and earth, this Dostoevsky envisions their tragic, hopeless *separation*.

But there is also a third Dostoevsky, one who is neither a nihilist nor an idealist, one who envisions neither a synthesis nor a separation of heaven and earth but reconciles them in a different manner. This Dostoevsky subjects his own beliefs – his idealism and his nihilism, the aesthetic and political credos of his journalism, his faiths and his doubts – to the trial of his brutally honest fiction. This Dostoevsky is more complex and harder to define. A. Boyce Gibson notes that commentators who "fasten on one or another of the conflicting elements, whether of thought or of feeling, and try to piece them together, or to explain one of them away […] recast Dostoevsky in their own image."[5] In other words, this Dostoevsky is neither Prince Myshkin nor Ivan Karamazov, both of whom are ultimately criticized by the fiction. This Dostoevsky, rather, is in constant dialogue with his heroes, with whom the author must not be confused. The paradigmatic presentation of this Dostoevsky, distinguishable from his heroes-interlocutors, is Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. In terms of dialectical form, Bakhtin,

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[4] Lev Shestov, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy*, trans. Spencer Roberts, in *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1969), 141-322.
[5] A. Boyce Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 1.

contra both *synthesis* and *separation*, speaks of a non-Hegelian unity of "unmerged" voices, "a higher unity, so to speak, of a second order," "the unity of a polyphonic novel," "the complex unity of an Einsteinian universe."[6] However, Bakhtin does not elaborate on this mysterious unity. Moreover, this unity is applied to form and genre, not to the interrelation of heaven and earth.

Noting Bakhtin's reticence about this "higher unity," scholars in his wake have both attempted to define it more clearly and suggested its relevance to the interrelation between heaven and earth. For example, in his study of *Diary of a Writer*, Gary Saul Morson defines this unity in terms of meta-genre, namely meta-utopia, an oscillation between utopia and anti-utopia.[7] Ultimately, this oscillation yields, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, to "a paradoxical set of formulations" Morson calls "the mythic prosaic."[8] While Morson defines this "higher unity" in terms of genre, Ksana Blank defines it more philosophically and theologically: comprised of thesis and antithesis without synthesis, this "antinomic" unity is formulated by twentieth-century Russian religious thinkers (influenced by Dostoevsky) and has ancient precedent in Heraclitus, Lao Tzu, and patristics.[9] Blank applies this antinomic unity to several oppositions in Dostoevsky, not focusing explicitly on the interrelation of heaven and earth. However, some of the Russian

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[6] M. M. Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963), 36, 20-21.
[7] Gary Saul Morson, *Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's "Diary of a Writer" and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981). See also Gary Saul Morson, "Introductory Study: Dostoevsky's Great Experiment," in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, trans. and ed. Kenneth Lantz, vol. 1, *1873-1876* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1993), 1-117.
[8] Gary Saul Morson, "The God of Onions: *The Brothers Karamazov* and the Mythic Prosaic," in *A New Word on* The Brothers Karamazov, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2004), 107-124, 109.
[9] Ksana Blank, *Dostoevsky's Dialectics and the Problem of Sin* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2010), 7-10, 111-117. See also Ksana Blank, "The Rabbit and the Duck: Antinomic Unity in Dostoevskij, the Russian Religious Tradition, and Mikhail Bakhtin," *Studies in East European Thought* 59, no. 1-2 (2007): 21-37.

religious thinkers in her study, namely Pavel Florensky and Semyon Frank, do apply antinomic unity to this interrelation.[10] Here is where Kierkegaard comes in.

Enter Kierkegaard

I claim that Kierkegaard's "paradox dialectic," a dynamic of faith involving a unity that is not a synthesis, very accurately conceptualizes the central question of the interrelation of heaven and earth in Dostoevsky's fiction. Building on the above readings of this "third Dostoevsky," I claim that Kierkegaard's concepts provide further nuance to our understanding of Dostoevsky's dialectics, both in terms of the interrelation of heaven and earth and in general.

In terms of the heaven-earth dialectic, Kierkegaard is particularly helpful because he elaborates the *paradox* dialectic of the third Dostoevsky *in relation to* the dialectical modes – *synthesis* and *separation* – of the first two Dostoevskys. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard conceptualizes Abrahamic faith (paradox) in relation to tragedy (separation). In a prodigious paradox of faith, Abraham simultaneously renounces and recuperates Isaac, as opposed to the tragic heroes who merely renounce their children, heroes for whom heaven and earth are hopelessly separated. Kierkegaard formulates the double-movement of faith (paradox) also in relation to monasticism (also separation). Whereas the knight of faith renounces and recuperates the world, the monk, for whom heaven and earth are separate, merely renounces it. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and elsewhere, Kierkegaard elaborates faith (paradox) in relation to German Idealism (synthesis), particularly the Hegelian fusion of God and humanity. Moreover, as we shall see, Kierkegaard formulates synthesis and separation in relation to one another, primarily in the form of monasticism and (Hegelian) mediation. Thus, Kierkegaard helps us understand the reciprocity of synthesis and separation in Dostoevsky.

[10] Ibid., 112-115.

In terms of dialectics in general, Kierkegaard illuminates the legitimate role that synthesis and separation play in Dostoevsky's works. In correctly recognizing Dostoevsky's fundamental opposition to Hegel, for example, some scholars[11] risk neglecting the fact that Hegelian dialectic actually plays a vital role in Dostoevsky. If ultimately criticized as a mode of reconciling *absolute* oppositions like heaven and earth, synthesis applies well to many *relative* oppositions, as Kierkegaard insists. Granting both separation and synthesis their validity, Kierkegaard helps us see how both of these modes, manifesting primarily as tragedy and idealism, have their indisputable place in Dostoevsky's works. Jackson's and Shestov's diametrically opposed readings pick up on two very important aspects of Dostoevsky. Ultimately, however, that is, in terms of heaven and earth, synthesis and separation yield to paradox, and Kierkegaard helps to show the precise point of this transition. Thus, Kierkegaard illuminates the interrelation not only between heaven and earth in the third Dostoevsky, but also the interrelation among the three Dostoevskys themselves.

The interrelation of heaven and earth may be elaborated in terms of what Kierkegaard identifies as the three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Kierkegaard writes, "The aesthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious the sphere of fulfillment" (*SLW* 476). These spheres interrelate in the following way: the ethical eclipses but does not invalidate the aesthetic, which it sanctifies, just as the religious eclipses but does not invalidate the ethical (and the aesthetic), which it sanctifies.

[11] See, for example, Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 35-37, and Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, trans. Elinor Hewitt (Athens: Ohio UP, 1969), 12.

Here we must also distinguish between "existence-sphere" and "existence-stage." Existence-spheres interrelate synchronously: one may be a religious person and enjoy the experiences of the aesthetic *sphere* or fulfill one's duties in the ethical *sphere*. Existence-stages, however, interrelate diachronically, that is, one graduates from one stage to another along the eponymous "stages on life's way." If one knows nothing higher than pleasure, for example, then one is in the aesthetic *stage* of existence. Regarding *stages* (not *spheres*), Kierkegaard writes, "There are three stages, an aesthetic, an ethical, a religious, yet not abstract […] but concrete in the qualification of existence categories as pleasure-perdition, action-victory, suffering" (*CUP* 294). In an example to which we shall return, both Fyodor Pavlovich and Zosima enjoy sweets (*sladosti*; 14_1:113, 301). But the former *lusts* after sweets as a sensualist (*sladostrastnik*); he is in the aesthetic *stage*. The latter, in contrast, is not beholden to the aesthetic *sphere* he transcends but nonetheless enjoys. Here it is also worth noting that the aesthetic sphere is a broad realm in Kierkegaard, encompassing not only aesthetics in the strict sense (beauty and art) but also the aesthetic in the broader (etymological) sense of perception and sensory pleasure in general, and in the broadest sense the tangible and temporal world.

In a word, the problem with the aesthetic *stage* is that it treats what is valid or relative (the aesthetic *sphere*) as ultimate or absolute. Reidar Thomte writes that "Kierkegaard speaks of the aesthetic as being *dethroned* from its dominating position in the personality, yet remaining in its relativity and transformed by the ethical" (emphasis in original).[12] Similarly, Stephen Dunning writes, "Ultimately, it is not the finite as such that is to be renounced, but only that false

[12] Reidar Thomte, "The Interrelationship of the Stages," in *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1948), 97-110, 103.

consciousness that treats the finite as the locus of infinite meaning."[13] In a paradoxical dynamic we shall explore at length in this study, higher spheres *simultaneously nullify and sanctify* lower spheres. Ultimately, the infinite – God, heaven, the absolute – *simultaneously nullifies and sanctifies* the finite – man, earth, the relative. This simultaneous renunciation and recuperation of the finite, this death and rebirth, is incapsulated by the epigraph of *The Brothers Karamazov*: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24, KJV). This cryptic dynamic, the interrelation among the spheres and ultimately between heaven and earth, I argue, is conceptualized by Kierkegaard in a way highly applicable to Dostoevsky.

Survey of Scholarship on Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky

Given what I am claiming to be the great applicability of Kierkegaard to Dostoevsky, the reader may be wondering about the scholarship connecting the two. Surprisingly, it is relatively small. Though Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky are associated with one another in the modern mind, finding themselves side by side in anthologies of existentialism,[14] of which they are considered forefathers, their most common link is the indirect one of having influenced the same twentieth-century figures. If direct parallels are drawn, they typically involve general trends like the limits of reason, paradox, tragedy, anxiety, despair, nihilism, and faith. While such parallels certainly exist, deeper connections between the two remain largely unexplored.

There are, of course, exceptions. Lev Shestov draws on Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky in developing his own existential philosophy. Calling Dostoevsky Kierkegaard's double,[15] Shestov

[13] Stephen Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of the Theory of Stages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1985), 197.
[14] For example, Walter Kaufmann, ed., *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (London: Penguin, 1975).
[15] Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, 21.

at his best perceives that "both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard (the first without realizing it, the second fully aware of it) saw their life work as a struggle with, and victory over, that system of ideas embodied in Hegelian philosophy."[16] But he is not always accurate. "Shestov is a powerful thinker and writer," writes Joseph Frank, "but an extremely irresponsible literary critic who neglects or rejects whatever aspect of a writer does not jibe with his opinions. As a consequence he simply tosses out Dostoevsky's Christianity as 'hypocritical.'"[17] Acknowledging Shestov's valuable insights, George Pattison criticizes his and later existentialists' misinterpretations: "It is certainly true that both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard are critical of totalizing rational systems and bourgeois complacency, but they are equally critical of the kind of arbitrary, capricious and individualistic protest that Dostoevsky portrays in the Underground Man and Kierkegaard in his various aesthetic characters."[18] Recognizing the centrality of Christianity to both thinkers, Pattison approaches the connection by way of René Girard and makes good observations, but the relation remains mediated by a third thinker. Eventually he introduces Bakhtin, asserting that Kierkegaard "cries out for a Bakhtinian reading."[19]

This is precisely the reading provided by Alex Fryszman, who indicates "the depth of Bakhtin's indebtedness to Kierkegaard," of which "most scholars are either unaware or mention merely as a curiosity."[20] Bakhtin himself claims that Kierkegaard's "affinity to Dostoevsky is

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[16] Ibid., 12.
[17] Joseph Frank, "Nihilism and *Notes from the Underground*," *The Sewanee Review* 69, no. 1 (1961): 1-33, 6n2.
[18] George Pattison, "Freedom's Dangerous Dialogue: Reading Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard Together," in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 237-256, 240-41.
[19] Ibid., 249.
[20] Alex Fryszman, "Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky Seen Through Bakhtin's Prism," *Kierkegaardiana* 18 (1996): 100-125, 103.

astonishing" (*blizost' ego k Dostoevskomu izumitel'na*).[21] Fryszman highlights the formal aspects of this astonishing affinity, underlining shared polyphony, dialogism, and an indirect, Socratic-maieutic approach. He claims that "Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works [may] be read as a polyphonic structure of the sort Bakhtin describes" and that "Kierkegaard's reflections on his production of 'the creat*ing*, poetically actual individuality' [are] the ideal introduction to Bakhtin's poetics."[22] Fryszman goes even further, claiming that Kierkegaard ultimately outdoes Dostoevsky: "The virtuosity with which Dostoyevsky employs the method of indirect communication in his novels may well be surpassed only by Kierkegaard," whose "rupturing of familiar literary genres and forms of literary communication in his pseudonymous authorship represents a type of poetic praxis that corresponds to Bakhtin's theoretical concepts and embodies these concepts in a more refined manner than even Dostoevsky's poetics."[23] By way of Bakhtin, Fryszman delves deeper into the inner workings of this astonishing affinity whose depths have yet to be plumbed.

Virtually unexplored, however, is the *direct* applicability, unmediated by another author, of Kierkegaard's concepts to Dostoevsky's works, in particular the paradoxical interrelation of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. "It is precisely this transgression of aesthetics," writes Fryszman, "where literature transcends itself, that so fascinates readers of Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard."[24] Scholars recognize that Dostoevsky raises questions beyond the scope of aesthetics, but how these other spheres relate back to the art in which they are embodied, remains largely unconceptualized. Elaborating the interrelation of the spheres, the interrelation of heaven

[21] Ibid., 103. Original quote in Mikhail Bakhtin, "Razgovory s Bakhtinym. Sem'ia i gody ucheniia," *Chelovek*, no. 4 (1993): 141-54, 151.
[22] Fryszman, "Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky," 105.
[23] Ibid., 113, 108.
[24] Ibid., 108.

and earth, Kierkegaard provides a fitting conceptual accompaniment to Dostoevsky. Almost as astonishing as their affinity is the lack, to my knowledge, of a book-length study devoted entirely to these two authors. This gap the present study seeks to remedy.

Outline of the Argument

In order to unfold the strange paradox dialectic in all of its nuance, this study begins neither with the interrelation of heaven and earth nor with the interrelation of the spheres, but rather with the individual spheres themselves. Part one addresses the sanctity and the limits of the aesthetic (chapters one and two), the sanctity and the limits of the ethical (chapters three and four), and the transcendence of the religious, which sanctifies the lower spheres (chapter five). Dostoevsky presents a *positive* vision of a paradox dialectic among the spheres only in *The Brothers Karamazov*, whereas the works anticipating it primarily critique synthesis and separation, thus presenting only a *negative* defense of a paradox dialectic. Therefore, part one focuses primarily on Dostoevsky's final novel. (We shall address the negative, the critique, especially in *The Idiot* and *Demons*, in part two.) Each chapter is basically tripartite: it begins with an interpretive tendency in the scholarship; it moves on to a "Kierkegaardian corrective," that is, how Kierkegaard can help clarify the content in Dostoevsky that is misrepresented by this tendency; and then it moves on to an interpretation of Dostoevsky's works, drawing on these Kierkegaardian concepts.

Chapter one, on the sanctity of the aesthetic, focuses on Zosima's affirmation (with Kierkegaard's knight of faith) of the aesthetic in an all-encompassing sense: art, nature, beauty, pleasure, and the tangible world in general. It thus refutes readings, often tinged with tragedy and mysticism, that question the sanctity of the aesthetic (or of this present world) in Dostoevsky.

Chapter two, on the limits of the aesthetic, focuses on the Karamazov sensualists who reveal the despair of the aesthetic *stage*, precisely as Kierkegaard conceptualizes. It also includes the Underground Man and Stepan Trofimovich, who with Dmitry Karamazov are vexed by the possible proximity between the sublime and the sewer. Chapter two refutes readings that apotheosize the aesthetic, confusing it with the religious.

Chapter three addresses the validity of the ethical in Dostoevsky's works, with particular attention to Ivan and Zosima. It refutes readings, whether Nietzschean or antinomian "Christian," that view Dostoevsky as promoting life "beyond good and evil." Even if it transcends ethics, as Kierkegaard formulates, Christianity by no means *invalidates* the ethical.

Chapter four, on the limits of the ethical, revisits Ivan and Zosima, before turning to *Crime and Punishment* and its controversial epilogue, where Raskolnikov and Sonya transcend the ethical precisely according to Kierkegaard. Chapter four critiques readings that do not distinguish between the ethical and the religious.

Chapter five examines the religious transcendence of both the aesthetic and the ethical, as well as the religious affirmation of both. It thus questions readings that speak of Dostoevsky's "rosy Christianity," readings that see only the second movement of the double-movement of faith, only Zosima's and Alyosha's life-affirmation and not the terrifying trials prerequisite to their hard-earned merriness, to their paradoxical reaffirmation of the aesthetic. In addressing the simultaneous religious renunciation and reaffirmation of lower spheres, incapsulated by the death-life dynamic in the epigraph of *The Brothers Karamazov*, chapter five paves the way for part two, in which we turn from the spheres to the *interrelation* of the spheres.

Part two of this study is devoted to dialectics, the paradoxical interrelation of the spheres, which boils down to the interrelation of heaven and earth, time and eternity, God and man.

Chapter six, on the validity of synthesis, shows how Dostoevsky, like Kierkegaard, uses dialectical synthesis to his advantage, thus qualifying readings that risk suggesting that Dostoevsky has no use whatsoever for Hegelian dialectic. We give particular attention to Dostoevsky's journalism and to *Demons*.

Chapter seven, on the limits of synthesis, shows how Dostoevsky pushes dialectical limits to the extremes – the absolute distinctions like God and man – upon which it runs aground, as Kierkegaard likewise insists. Paying particular attention to *The Idiot* and *Demons*, we question readings that view Dostoevsky's vision as ultimately one that merges the absolute with any relative, whether Russia, humanity, beauty, or Orthodoxy. While Dostoevsky was prone to idolize all of the above, in the end he makes an unequivocal distinction between the absolute and the relative, at least in the fiction.

Chapter eight addresses the validity of separation, how Dostoevsky, like Kierkegaard, uses monasticism as a category that helps distinguish the absolute from the relative. In this chapter we question readings that go too far in suggesting Dostoevsky's antipathy to (Aristotelian) distinctions. We focus on monasticism in *The Brothers Karamazov*, particularly on Zosima's celibacy.

Chapter nine, on the limits of separation, discusses how Dostoevsky, like Kierkegaard, shows also the hazards of monasticism and the need to reconcile heaven and earth, even – paradoxically – in light of the absolute (and still valid) distinction between the two. Revisiting Alyosha's leaving the monastery and the general affirmation by Alyosha and Zosima of even the most mundane aspects of finitude, chapter nine raises some quibbles with Bakhtin.

Chapter ten takes a step back to consider *interrelations of interrelations*, that is, between synthesis and separation, how the two oscillate in a reciprocal relationship. Drawing on

Kierkegaard's thinking about the reciprocity of monasticism and mediation, we address broadly the "shape" of Dostoevsky's mature fiction, how synthesis and separation (of absolute and relative) oscillate and are both criticized. In light of this broad shape, we suggest a new interpretation for the curious structure of *Notes from Underground*.

Chapter eleven returns once again to the affirmation of finitude in light of eternity, with specific attention to the epilogue of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which Alyosha encourages the bereft boys to enjoy the pancakes at Ilyusha's funeral reception. We take this to be emblematic of Kierkegaard's paradox dialectic: affirming the finite even in full awareness of its transience. In this chapter we consider approximations of this paradox dialectic in Dostoevsky and how Kierkegaard provides further nuance.

In conclusion, we discuss synthesis and separation in Tolstoy.

Caveats

Before we begin, two caveats. This is a study of Dostoevsky, not of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is the lens through which we are viewing more precisely some of the murkier phenomena in Dostoevsky's fiction and the controversies in Dostoevsky scholarship. Kierkegaard works as a conceptual lens because he is much less ambiguous than Dostoevsky. This is not to say that there is no ambiguity in Kierkegaard. There sure is. But the ambiguities of Kierkegaard are drastically narrower than those of Dostoevsky and remain beyond the scope of our study. While both authors blend genres, Dostoevsky writing philosophical literature and Kierkegaard writing literary philosophy, the distinction that library catalogues make in deeming one a fiction writer and the other a philosopher is certainly valid. In philosophy, ambiguity is a liability, while in fiction ambiguity is the name of the game. If Kierkegaard were more ambiguous, he would not work as a clarifying, conceptualizing lens.

Therefore, while any study can be enriched by more scholarship, and while I hope that this one, in a future iteration, will be so enriched, I have found Kierkegaard's writings sufficiently clear for my present purposes, so there is little Kierkegaard scholarship. I have read enough of it to be assured that my interpretation is sound, but just in case, I have asked Professor Hans Halvorson of Princeton University's Philosophy Department to read what I have written about Kierkegaard. He has confirmed my suspicion that everything I have written about Kierkegaard would be considered basic and uncontroversial for any Kierkegaard scholar. I thank him for his expertise and generosity.

Given that we are dealing with "basic Kierkegaard," this dissertation may be read not only as a study of Dostoevsky but also, additionally, as an introduction to Kierkegaard and to some of his core concepts. But this leads to another crucial caveat. While Kierkegaard is much more conceptually clear than Dostoevsky, he does not write traditional philosophical treatises. Rather, he uses pseudonyms and a highly literary style to ensure that his writings are non-didactic. At one point, pseudonym Johannes Climacus complains of a review of one of his earlier works, a complaint worth quoting at length:

> [A]lthough the report is accurate, anyone who reads only that will receive an utterly wrong impression of the book. […] The report is didactic, purely and simply didactic; consequently the reader will receive the impression that the pamphlet is also didactic. As I see it, this is the most mistaken impression one can have of it. The contrast of form, the teasing resistance of the imaginary construction to the content, the inventive audacity (which even invents Christianity), the only attempt made to go further (that is, further than the so-called speculative constructing), the indefatigable activity of irony, the parody of speculative thought in the entire plan, the satire in making efforts as if something *ganz Auszerordentliches und zwar Neues* were to come of them, whereas what always emerges is old-fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful severity – of all this the reader finds no hint in the report. […] But my distinctive procedure […] consists primarily and decisively in the contrastive form, and if and when this is pointed out there can be, if necessary, brief mention of a fragment of didactic distinctiveness. (*CUP* 274-76*)

Having "pointed out" this "distinctive procedure," I now feel permitted to proceed with this dissertation, whose synopsis of Kierkegaard's ideas might be called a "brief mention of a fragment of didactic distinctiveness." At one point, Kierkegaard laments the tendency to have a thinker "world-historically butchered, salted, and packed in a paragraph" (*CUP* 107). Alas, this is what we have been constrained to do, but at least we have acknowledged the procedure and pointed out the importance of the form.

One result of this "butchery" is that Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are usually referred to as "Kierkegaard" in this study. Except for aesthete A and ethicist Judge Wilhelm, whose names I preserve, the (religious) pseudonyms in this study (Johannes de Silentio, Frater Taciturnus, Johannes Climacus, and Anti-Climacus),[25] in terms of the *content* of their thought, are indistinguishable from Kierkegaard as he has expressed himself in his signed works. Kierkegaard's primary reason for having different religious pseudonyms is not to entertain different points of view (this he does with his aesthetic and ethical pseudonyms) but rather to distance himself from the reader and thus make his writings non-didactic.

To put it in Dostoevskian-Bakhtinian terms, the "polyphony" among Kierkegaard's religious pseudonyms is like a conversation among several Zosimas. If there is an essential difference in the thought-content of the religious pseudonyms, whose thought seems to cohere perfectly, I have not been able to detect it, and this difference – if it exists at all – remains far beyond the scope of the present study. That said, in the epigraphs I have made sure to ascribe the quotes to the pseudonyms, so as to preserve, in the midst of our "fragment of didactic

[25] "The prefix 'Anti' may be misleading, however. It does not mean 'against.' It is an old form of 'ante' (before), as in 'anticipate,' and 'before' also denotes a relation of rank, as in 'before me' in the First Commandment." Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, "Historical Introduction" to *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980), ix-xiii, xii.

distinctiveness," a flavor of Kierkegaard's literariness and to remind the reader of "the contrast of form," "the inventive audacity," "the indefatigable activity of irony," etc.

Part One

Spheres: Aesthetic, Ethical, Religious

Chapter One

Eating Cherry Jam to the Glory of God: The Sanctity of the Aesthetic

"He allowed himself sweets, he ate cherry jam with tea, liked it a lot, ladies sent it to him, should a monk drink tea?"
~ Zosima's Enemies, *The Brothers Karamazov*

"I nevertheless have the conviction that nothing is able to crush the aesthetic in a human being, a conviction so powerful, so blessed, so fervent that I thank my God for it as for a gift of grace."
~ Judge Wilhelm, *Either/Or*

For centuries, writes Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Christendom has been plagued by a "monastic, 'black' Christianity"[1] that negates earthly life by preaching that the corporeal world and its temporal joys and pleasures are essentially evil and that the highest spirituality, therefore, is to escape from the world to the monastery. This intellectual-spiritual plague, asserts Merezhkovsky, infected both Nietzsche and Tolstoy, who confused Christianity with this earthly-life-negating doctrine. While Nietzsche rejected it and Tolstoy accepted it, they shared this longstanding, common misconception.[2] Dostoevsky, in contrast, saw past this entrenched denigration of the physical, ultimately hallowing the body and the material world.[3] Leaving Merezhkovsky aside for now (we shall return to him later), we might say, in terms of Kierkegaard, that Dostoevsky depicts not only the first movement of faith, renunciation, where

[1] D. S. Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii* (Moscow: Nauka, 2000), 452.
[2] Ibid., 248-49.
[3] Ibid., 475.

"monastic, black Christianity" ends, but also the second, paradoxical movement: return to the finite.

Anti-Aesthetic Readings

There is a major tendency in Dostoevsky scholarship to focus exclusively on this first movement to the neglect of the second movement. Such scholarship questions, whether implicitly or explicitly, the sanctity, in Dostoevsky's works, of the temporal and the tangible, that is, of the aesthetic sphere in the broadest sense. (Though some of these readings are pro-aesthetic in the strict sense of art, they imply that art is a means of escape from physical reality, which we are calling the aesthetic sphere in the broadest sense; see the introduction.) To be sure, Dostoevsky's works include the necessary step of renunciation, the need to transcend the finite and the perceptible, but they ultimately advocate a wholehearted affirmation of even the most mundane aspects of finitude. The notion that his works devalue the temporal world tends to arise in readings that construe Dostoevsky in tragic, mystic, gnostic, or monastic terms. This devaluation, often an unintended corollary of readings that are otherwise superb, paints Dostoevsky as one-sidedly otherworldly. Such readings correctly identify the first movement of faith, renunciation, but neglect the second movement, return to or recuperation of the finite.

The Tragic Dostoevsky

The widespread tragic reading of Dostoevsky, most famously set forth by Viacheslav Ivanov and later George Steiner, abounds with insight, especially regarding form and genre. That the "inner structure of [Dostoevsky's] creative genius was tragic," in the words of Ivanov,[4] that

[4] Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life: A Study in Dostoevsky*, trans. Norman Cameron (Wolfeboro, NH: Longwood Academic, 1989), 7.

Dostoevsky is "one of the great masters of tragic drama," in the words of Steiner,[5] is beyond dispute. Illuminating many facets of Dostoevsky's "novel-tragedy," to use Ivanov's apt coinage, the tragic prism is widely used for good reason.

However, if the tragic reading does not recognize its own limits, it risks overemphasizing the tragic aspect of Dostoevsky – the diminishing of the temporal – to the neglect of another indisputable aspect: the hallowing of the temporal. The one-sidedness of the tragic reading becomes manifest when it tries to account for matters of faith. Contrasting him with Tolstoy, Steiner writes, "But in Dostoevsky we do not actually see the promised land (except for a momentary, shadowy glimpse of Raskolnikov's Siberia). […] the reconciliation which Tolstoy's protagonists find on the land, the 'great sinners' of Dostoevsky will find only in the Kingdom of God. And to Dostoevsky – in utter contrariety to Tolstoy – that Kingdom is not, and cannot be, of this world."[6] Steiner is right that the Kingdom is not *of* this world (John 18:36),[7] but his reading neglects that the Kingdom, if not *of* the world, exists *in* the world (Luke 17:21).[8] In a Siberia not at all "shadowy" but rather "flooded with sunlight" (6_2:472), Raskolnikov's reconciliation, if not "on the land" in the Tolstoyan sense, nevertheless involves the land as a crucial part of conversion. Raskolnikov falls to the *earth* at Sonya's feet, clutching her knees, her

[5] George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in the Old Criticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1996), 133. Steiner continues, "As the mind moves, via chronology, onward from *King Lear* and from *Phèdre*, it pauses in immediacy of recognition when, and only when, it reaches *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. As Vyacheslav Ivanov said, in his search for a defining image, Dostoevsky is 'the Russian Shakespeare'" (ibid.).
[6] Ibid., 93.
[7] "My kingdom is not of this world."
[8] "The kingdom of God is within you" or "in the midst of you." Compare the corporate *body* of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), a spiritual temple made up of the "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:5) of believers whose individual bodies are temples of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Cf. John 2:21.

body (6_2:473). He does not simply catch a glimpse of an ethereal realm; rather, he comes *face to face* with the Kingdom of God, embodied by Sonya.

In contrast to Dostoevsky, writes Steiner, Tolstoy "would not believe that those who dwell in [the world] are merely insubstantial shadows."[9] The ethereal quality of Dostoevsky's fiction, especially in contrast to the solidity of Tolstoy's, is undeniable.[10] But to neglect the importance for Dostoevsky of *substance*, of the earth and the body, is to miss a key point. Despite his otherworldly inclinations, Alyosha is no "insubstantial shadow." Lest the reader suppose Alyosha to be "a sickly, ecstatic, poorly developed nature, a pale dreamer, a consumptive and emaciated person," the narrator describes him as "solid, red-cheeked, with a bright visage, radiating with the health of a nineteen-year-old adolescent" (14_1:24). For Alyosha's conversion, no less than Raskolnikov's, embodiment is vital: he falls to the earth. Furthermore, if tragedy from Aeschylus to Chekhov is unified by "a vision of […] the infirmity of man's estate,"[11] then Dostoevsky depicts, along with this infirmity (we do not deny the tragic), access to something unshakably firm. Alyosha rises from the earth "a champion," after "something firm and unshakeable" enters his soul" (14_1:328).

The ultimate positivity of *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment* – a positivity reached through tragic negativity, to be sure – Steiner explains as "melodrama [that] is anti-tragic."[12] Thus he sees *The Idiot* and *Demons* as more consistent with Dostoevsky's

[9] Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 261.
[10] See Dmitry Merezhkovsky's apt distinction between Tolstoy's realm of genius and Dostoevsky's: the psychosomatic versus the psycho-pneumatic, respectively. *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 103-120, 144-46, and *passim*.
[11] Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 5.
[12] Ibid., 209.

fundamentally tragic vision.[13] Working well for much of Dostoevsky's fiction, Steiner's tragic categories run aground on some of its most crucial aspects, those that transcend tragedy.

That the positivity in Dostoevsky's fiction runs deeper than melodrama, Ivanov recognizes. He qualifies his own claims that for Dostoevsky "life is basically tragic" and that the "basic conception" of his novels "is thoroughly and essentially tragic."[14] Later,[15] Ivanov writes, "Dostoevsky's novels are tragedies […]; but, if their deepest content and artistic intention are examined, they seem to depict supra-personal, metaphysical events."[16] Ivanov takes seriously Dostoevsky's Christian content, but he does not distinguish it from the tragic, with which it more or less merges.

Thus, like Steiner, Ivanov paints Dostoevsky's religion in otherworldly colors. Plato-esque, Dostoevsky drifts into "visionary contemplation of the transcendent" and "transcendent mystery."[17] Ivanov essentially agrees with Steiner in that Dostoevsky's Kingdom of God is remote: "No signs reach him from a Beatrice awaiting him in Heaven. Only the 'holy sickness' at moments lifts before him the curtain over the entrance of Paradise."[18] Abounding with insight, Ivanov's study, in its strains of mysticism and Gnosticism,[19] nevertheless construes Dostoevsky as one-sidedly metaphysical.

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, 5, 9.
[15] Ivanov's study incorporates, in chronological order, three previous essays, so the qualification comes "later" both in the study and chronologically. For the complicated history of this text, see Robert Louis Jackson's introduction to *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, vii-viii, n1.
[16] Ibid., 9, 49.
[17] Ibid., 115.
[18] Ibid., 112.
[19] Nastasya Filippovna, "like the Ashtaroth of the Gnostics, becomes imprisoned in matter and desecrated," "the Beauty who languishes in the bonds of Earth." Ibid., 97, 104.

The Gnostic Dostoevsky

Explicitly deeming Dostoevsky a Gnostic,[20] Nikolai Berdiaev, for example, in what is often a brilliant reading, writes that Dostoevsky's art is "all about deep spiritual reality, about metaphysical reality" and is "least of all concerned with empirical existence."[21] While Dostoevsky's concerns indeed transcend the empirical and while his art is certainly about profound spiritual realities, to say it is completely unconcerned with physical reality or that the physical world did not occupy him at all is an overstatement.

Dostoevsky the Mystic

Dostoevsky is often associated with mysticism. As in Ivanov's reading, so in Jackson's the tragic and the mystical likewise fuse. First, "the quest for form is a tragic quest […]. All that can be hoped for is a creative tension […] in moments of the highest strivings, but more often in the long moments of slackening, disintegration, and despair."[22] This tragic quest is related to medieval mysticism.[23] From a different angle, Denis Zhernokleyev, in an incisive reading to which we shall return, invokes Russian Orthodoxy as "a fundamentally mystical tradition" to advance an interpretation of Dostoevsky "wherein the aesthetic is renounced in favor of a non-ethical religious perception."[24] While the mystical element has its place in Russian Orthodoxy and in Dostoevsky, it is noteworthy that the Russian Orthodox Alyosha is emphatically "not a mystic at all" (14_1:17) but a "realist" (24). Fyodor Pavlovich and Kolya Krasotkin mislabel him

[20] N. Berdiaev, *Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo*, in *Fedor Dostoevskii: Post Scriptum*, ed. Iustin Popovich (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007), 7-169, 11.
[21] Ibid., 20.
[22] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 4.
[23] Ibid., xv, 187.
[24] Denis Zhernokleyev, *Beholden by Love: A Study in the Apophasis of Dostoevsky's Poesis*, PhD diss. (Princeton University, 2016), 14, 173. Insofar as Zhernokleyev speaks of the aesthetic *stage*, we agree that it must be renounced, but his "aesthetic" encompasses the aesthetic *sphere*.

as a mystic (123, 499). Rather, it is Svidrigailov from *Crime and Punishment* who identifies as a mystic (6_2:407). Moreover, in *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky writes, "In Russian Christianity, in actual fact, there is not even any mysticism at all" (23_1:130). Moreover, it is precisely this *lack* of mysticism in *The Brothers Karamazov* that garnered contemporary criticism from the Russian Orthodox monastery.[25] Dostoevsky seems wary of the mysticism often ascribed to him.

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: The Double-Movement of Faith; Return to the Finite

Kierkegaard's concept of the double-movement of faith clarifies both Dostoevsky's works and the above interpretations. It clarifies the paradoxical simultaneity of 1) Dostoevsky's otherworldliness, which the "otherworldly" readings rightly identify and 2) his insistence on the importance of *this* world, which eludes such readings. The double-movement of faith involves a simultaneous renunciation and recuperation of the finite, a dynamic *Fear and Trembling* traces back to Abraham, the father of faith. Kierkegaard is particularly helpful for our discussion because he conceptualizes faith in relation to the tragic, mystic, and monastic modes. He conceptualizes the "knight of faith" in relation to the "knight of resignation."

Kierkegaard gives resignation and renunciation their due respect.[26] The first movement of faith, giving up the finite, requires great courage and pathos. Tragic heroes Agamemnon,

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[25] In a letter of 1891 to Vasily Rozanov from Optina Monastery, where he had recently taken vows, Konstantin Leontiev writes, "In Optina *The Brothers Karamazov* is *not recognized as a correctly Orthodox work*; and the *elder Zosima not at all*, neither in *teaching* nor in *character*, is *like Father Amvrosy*. […] Fr. Amvrosy *above all* had a strictly *ecclesiastical mysticism* [*mistika*] […]. Fr. Zosima (through whom Fed. Mikh. speaks!) has above all morality, 'love,' 'love,' etc., but his mysticism [*mistika*] is *very* weak" (italics in original). E. V. Ivanova, comp., *V. V. Rozanov i K. N. Leont'ev: Materialy neizdannoi knigi "Literaturnye izgnanniki," Perepiska, Neopublikovannye teksty, Stat'i o K. N. Leont'eve, Kommentarii* (St. Petersburg: Rostok, 2014), 219.

[26] There are differences between the resigned tragic hero and the monk who renounces, but for the purposes of our study we shall focus on their parallel single-movement away from finitude, which is contrasted with the double-movement of faith.

Jephthah, and Brutus Junius, in sacrificing their children for the higher cause of the nation, elicit "tears of compassion for their agony" and "admiration for their deed" (*FT* 59). Respect is given to monastic renunciation as well, to "the deep and earnest souls who found rest in a monastery" (*FT* 100). Like the tragic hero and the monk, the mystic makes a similar renunciation: "For the mystic the whole world is dead; he has fallen in love with God" (*EO* 2:242). While the mystic is wrong to teach that finitude "is vanity, illusion, sin" (*EO* 2:248), his dying to the world, as we shall see in chapter five, is no small feat. Whereas "the slaves of the finite, the frogs in the swamp of life" are "completely absorbed in worldly joys and sorrows," "benchwarmers who do not take part in the dance," the "knights of infinity are ballet dancers and have elevation" (*FT* 41). Otherworldly readings of Dostoevsky share this nobility, recognizing his works' imperative to transcend, to venture out upon the infinite.

But Kierkegaard's thought reveals one further, paradoxical imperative in Dostoevsky: not only to transcend the finite, but also to return to it. If the knights of infinity have elevation as leaping ballet dancers, they wobble when they land, whereas the knight of faith seamlessly returns from infinitude to the finite (*FT* 41). While monastically renouncing the finite is preferable to "bourgeois philistinism" (*FT* 38), nevertheless "to enter a monastery is not the highest" (*FT* 100). Zosima tells Alyosha to leave the monastery. Leaving the monastery, the knight of faith and his prototype, Abraham, go beyond renunciation. Like Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus Junius, Abraham surrenders the finite in the person of Isaac, but unlike them he gets his child back. He *simultaneously* 1) gives up his son and 2) believes he will get him back "by virtue of the absurd, for human calculation was out of the question" (*FT* 35). Abraham is to Isaac as the "knight of faith" is to the world: the believer simultaneously renounces and recuperates the finite.

Kierkegaard paints a picture of the knight of faith that helps understand Alyosha and his emphatic corporeality. Johannes de Silentio, the skeptical pseudonym of *Fear and Trembling*, inspects his knight of faith to detect "a bit of heterogenous optical telegraphy from the infinite, a glance, a facial expression, a gesture, a sadness, a smile that would betray the infinite in its heterogeneity with the finite. No! I examine his figure from top to toe to see if there may not be a crack through which the infinite would peek. No! He is solid all the way through. His stance? It is vigorous" (*FT* 39). Think of Alyosha's above-mentioned hale and hearty youth.[27] Returning from work, the knight of faith "thinks that his wife surely will have a special hot meal for him when he comes home […]. If he meets a kindred soul, he would go on talking all the way to Østerport about this delicacy with a passion befitting a restaurant operator. […] to see him eat would be the envy of the elite and an inspiration to the common man" (*FT* 40). Think of Alyosha's future work and wife, prescribed by Zosima, and of Zosima's delight in food, which Alyosha learns and teaches, urging the bereft boys to enjoy the salmon served at Ilyusha's funeral reception (15_1:197).

Despite his immersion in the finite, the knight of faith is always "making the movement of infinity. He drains the deep sadness of life in infinite resignation, he knows the blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything […] but he does it with such precision and assurance that he continually gets finitude out of it" (*FT* 40-41). In a word: "absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian – only that knight can do it, and this is the one and only marvel" (*FT* 41). Central to *The Brothers Karamazov*, this marvel is mastered by Zosima, who teaches it to Alyosha. Morson writes, "Alyosha begins the novel with the wrong sort of faith.

[27] The passage about the knight of faith continues: "if one did not know him, it would be impossible to distinguish him from the rest of the crowd, for at most his hearty and powerful singing of the hymns proves that he has good lungs" (*FT* 39).

How he finds the right faith is his story in this novel."[28] This "right sort of faith" that Dostoevsky depicts, Kierkegaard accurately conceptualizes, correcting the entrenched interpretive tendency to minimize the importance of the temporal world, the aesthetic sphere in the broadest sense, in Dostoevsky's works.

The Sanctity of the Aesthetic in Dostoevsky

The sanctity of the aesthetic sphere is implied throughout Dostoevsky's works, both negatively and positively. Negative examples include unequivocally villainous desecrations of beauty, as in the defilement of icons of Mary, whether by Pyotr Verkhovensky's vandalism in *Demons* or by Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov's expectoration. But there are also positive examples of aesthetic sanctity, as in the beneficent effect of nature, of St. Petersburg's verdant islands, upon the manic Raskolnikov at the beginning of *Crime and Punishment*, or the beneficent effect of art, of the theatrical production, upon the prisoners in *Notes from the House of the Dead*. But the most explicit affirmation of the aesthetic sphere, of art, nature, beauty, pleasure, and the tangible and temporal world, comes from Zosima.

To narrow the argument, we shall focus on Zosima as the clearest evidence of the compatibility of the religious and the aesthetic spheres, of the sanctity of the aesthetic. In the person of Zosima, Dostoevsky combats what Merezhkovsky calls "monastic, black Christianity." Of course, Zosima is a monk, and we shall address monasticism in depth later, in chapters eight and nine. For now, what matters is that Zosima contrasts sharply with his monastic milieu in his vehement affirmations of finitude. I shall defend the orthodoxy of Zosima's position by backing it up with Scriptural references, primarily in footnotes. I do this to anticipate an idea introduced later in the study: that the paradox dialectic shared by Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard ultimately

[28] Morson, "The God of Onions," 109.

boils down to the same biblical mode, as opposed to other dialectical modes that either invalidate or idolize the physical world.

Nature

Zosima rapturously affirms the goodness and beauty of the created world. He affirms not only sunrises and sunsets (14_1:265), but "everything," "every blade of grass, every little bug, ant, golden bee" (267). He lives out this explicit affirmation of beauty by surrounding his cell with "an abundance of rare and beautiful autumn flowers" (35) and by decorating the interior of his cell with flowers too (37). Allegedly, the flowers postdate Zosima's predecessor, the Elder Varsonofy, who did not approve of such "refinements" (35). If Zosima flouts an arbitrary human tradition, he has God on his side. The orthodoxy of his position is substantiated by Genesis 1, which he cites in his rhapsody on nature: "Here the Creator, as in the first days of creation, crown[s] each day with praise: 'Good is that which I have created'" (265). Not only valid as "God's gifts" (*dary bozhii*; 272), plants, birds, and skies display "God's glory" (*slava bozhiia*; 263), as in Scripture: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1, NIV). Unlike the "monastic, black Christianity" that pervades his environment, Zosima's Christianity is colorful.

Art

Affirming the beauty and value of creation, Zosima also affirms the beauty and value of art, of human creativity. His small cell contains objects and furniture that are "crude, poor, and only the most necessary" (14_1:37). The word "necessary" (*neobkhodimye*) is directly followed by the next sentence, "Two flowerpots stood on the window sill, and in the corner many icons […]" (37). So begins a description of Zosima's art collection. The implication is clear: beauty is not just valid but *necessary*, an axiom made explicit by Dostoevsky's 1861 journal article "Mr. –bov

and a Question of Art." Like his author, and unlike some of his fellow monks, Zosima robustly affirms the aesthetic sphere. His display includes not just icons but also religious and secular artwork, high and low, of various media, including painting, sculpture, lithograph, and engraving (37). The "refined" (*iziashchnykh*) engravings call to mind the "refinements" (*iziashchnosti*) of which the gloomier Varsonofy disapproves (35).

In addition to visual beauty, Zosima affirms auditory beauty, from birdsong (14_1:270, 272) to the "sweet singing" of church choir (264). Kierkegaard highlights the knight of faith's "hearty and powerful singing of the hymns" (*FT* 39). Zosima echoes his older brother Markel, instrumental in his younger brother's conversion, who also delights in birdsong and bird-laughter (*ptichki gogochut*, *poiut*; 14_1:263). After his spiritual transformation, Dmitry predicts his impending "hymn to God" (15_1:31). Zosima celebrates song also in the figurative sense: his heart "sings" at sunrise (14_1:265), and "all creation and all creatures, every little leaf […] sings praise to God" (268). Again, Zosima's imagery is biblical: the auditory image of all creation singing praise to the Creator abounds in the Psalms.[29]

Zosima also affirms the literary imagination and literary beauty (14_1:264-267). Indeed, the word is not only valid but sacred: Zosima affirms the identity of "Christ" as the divine "Word" (268; cf. John 1:1; Heb. 1:2). Zosima shares a prototype[30] with the monk Tikhon in *Demons*, whose bookshelf includes not just holy books but also secular literature (11_1:7). While Ferapont embodies an anti-aesthetic, anti-intellectual strain of religion, fuming at Zosima's erudition (14_1:303), Kierkegaard's pseudonym Frater Taciturnus agrees with his fellow erudite monks Tikhon and Zosima: "it is a mistake for the religious to be angry at poetry, because poetry

[29] See Ps. 96 (v. 12 for singing trees), 98, 148, e.g.
[30] Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724-1783). See Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 5 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976-2002), 5:455-56

is and remains lovable" (*SLW* 461). Zosima's disciple Alyosha affirms another form of literature, theater: speaking of the connection between theater and child's play, Alyosha mentions the universal "need for art" (*potrebnost' iskusstva*; 14_1:484). Once again, art is not only valid but also necessary.

Pleasure

Like Kierkegaard's knight of faith, Zosima affirms not only visual and auditory beauty, but also the earthier senses of smell and taste, enjoying sweets and tea and cherry jam (14_1:301). Yet Zosima's more ascetically minded adversaries, especially Ferapont, denounce him, over his dead body, for his enjoyment of food, for his not fasting with adequate severity (14_1:301, 303).[31] Once again, if Zosima flouts some manmade rules – not fasting per se but its legalistic perversion by "monastic, black Christianity" – his enjoyment of sweets receives divine sanction in Scripture, which even uses sweetness to analogize spiritual reality.[32] (Legalistic prohibitions,

[31] This denunciation has precedent in accusations aimed at Jesus, who, though he fasted forty days and taught fasting (Matt. 4:2; 5:16), is slandered as a glutton and a drunkard (Matt. 11:19). He is slandered because, like his disciple Zosima, he enjoys meals with friends. Besides fasting, which has its place, he teaches that the kingdom of God is not ultimately about manmade religion with its myriad rules and regulations, into which fasting, like any spiritual discipline, can devolve. It is ultimately about giving one's heart to God: "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men" (Mark 7:6-8, citing Isaiah 29:13; cf. Matt. 15:7-9). Just as the Pharisees attack Jesus for neglecting manmade traditions (Mark 7; Matt. 15), so the pharisaic Ferapont, consumed by the legalistic minutiae of fasting (the satire is scathing; 14_1:153), attacks Zosima for not being strict enough with fasting (303). Asked why his disciples do not fast like the Pharisees, Jesus responds with a rhetorical question: do people fast at weddings? Unable to fast for joy in the presence of the "bridegroom," his disciples will fast later (Matt. 9:15; cf. Mark 2:19-20). Paul, who fasts often (2 Cor. 11:27; cf. Acts 9:9, 13:2-3, 14:23; 2 Cor. 6:5), makes a similar qualification: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

[32] God promises "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). Solomon writes, "Eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. Know that wisdom is such to your soul" (Prov. 24:13-14). Here sweetness is not only valid but also an analogy for

in contrast, receive censure.)[33] Zosima likewise speaks of the figurative sweetness (*sladko*, *sladostnoe*) of divine reverie and song (14_1:268, 264). Literal sweetness is affirmed too, for example, in the meal to which the monastery treats its visitors. This meal includes "two bottles of superb monastery mead" (14_1:79), that is, made from the honey from monastery's apiary, which ties in with Zosima's rhapsodized "golden bee" (267).

That gastronomic pleasure is a divine gift is pictured by this sumptuous meal. Among other things, it includes "superbly baked bread of three sorts [and] two bottles of wine (14_1:79). Affirmed, indeed mandated, at the Last Supper, bread and wine are not only gifts from God,[34] but also analogize spiritual sustenance: "Take, eat; this is my body […]. Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:26-28).[35] Jesus analogizes food and drink in several contexts to show how physical reality indicates spiritual reality.[36] Even so, physical food and wine remain goods in and of themselves, as attested by the miracle at Cana of Galilee, the turning of water into wine (John 2). *The Brothers Karamazov* vehemently affirms the goodness of food and drink by invoking this

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spiritual delight. Elsewhere, too, sweetness is analogized in Scripture, whose words are "sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb" (Ps. 19:10, NIV).

[33] The Apostle Paul reserves the harshest terms – demonic apostates and hypocritical liars (1 Tim. 4:1-2) – for those who "require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:3-4).

[34] For explicit statements that bread and wine are a gifts from God, see Ps. 104:14-15, Prov. 3:9-10, Is. 25:6, Joel 2:19, 23-24, Matt. 6:11, e.g.

[35] Cf. Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:24-25; John 6:35.

[36] "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again" (John 4:13-14). "I have food to eat that you do not know about. […] My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work (John 4:32-34). "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit" (John 7:37-39).

miracle at a pinnacle moment, Alyosha's conversion (14_1:326). Moreover, the Wedding at Cana affirms not only wine, but also sexuality.

Even touch in its most intense form, sexual pleasure, is affirmed when Zosima advises Alyosha to leave the monastery and to marry. Though called to celibacy (to be discussed in chapter nine), Zosima is careful to uphold marriage. Similarly choosing the single life, Kierkegaard defends marriage in *Either/Or*. In "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage," Judge Wilhelm lauds "the aesthetic validity of marriage," which "is not cold, unbeautiful, unerotic, unpoetic" (*EO* 2:10). In other words, "All the beauty implicit in the erotic of paganism has its validity in Christianity insofar as it can be combined with marriage" (ibid.). Judge Wilhelm and Zosima are on solid scriptural ground[37] against religious traditions that deem sexuality inherently sinful. The celibate Jesus[38] and Paul[39] uphold marriage in its sanctity. It is demonic apostates and hypocritical liars "who forbid marriage" (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Beyond human sexuality and its spiritual symbolism, Zosima's advice to marry affirms procreation, human history, and thus time itself.

Temporality

Zosima explicitly and implicitly affirms history and thus the temporal world in light of eternity. He says that one of his favorite childhood memories was learning "sacred history" (*sviashchennaia istoriia*; 14_1:264). Far from annihilating history, eternity sanctifies it. In

[37] Marriage is celebrated by Jesus at Cana of Galilee, as it is by the Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon), which affirms erotic love as a wonderful gift from God. In the biblical view, human sexuality is not only invented by God (Gen. 1:27, 2:24); it also analogizes God's steadfast, loving union with his people (Eph. 5:31-32, e.g.). In the Old Testament, God calls Israel his bride (Is. 54:5, Jer. 31:32, Ezek. 16, Hos. 3:1, e.g.). In the New Testament, correspondingly, Jesus is "the bridegroom" of the church, his bride (Matt. 9:15, Mark 2:19, Luke 5:34, John 3:29, Eph. 5:25-32, 2 Cor. 11:2, Rev. 19:9, 21:2, e.g.). Not only validated by eternity, sexuality is elevated by eternity, whose spiritual realities it symbolizes.

[38] Matt. 19:4-6, citing Gen. 1:27, 2:24. Cf. Matt. 5:32; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18.

[39] Eph. 5:25-32, also citing Gen. 2:24. Cf. 1 Cor. 7:1-5, 28, 36; 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:1-3.

particular, Zosima speaks of how the eternal and temporal intersect in the story of Job, in which time plays a therapeutic role (265). Earlier in the novel, Zosima says the same thing to the peasant woman bereft of her little son: though she should grieve and refuse to be comforted, even her great maternal suffering, over time, will become quiet joy (46). Another subtler affirmation of the temporal is Zosima's use of modern medicine. The monastery's anti-intellectual contingency raises its eyebrows at what it considers Zosima's worldliness in prescribing not only prayer and fasting but also medicine to a hallucinating monk (303). Employing medical means, Zosima implicitly affirms historical progress and thus history itself, which others in the monastery seek to escape.

Joy

In the person of Zosima and his disciple Alyosha, *The Brothers Karamazov* affirms joy, even temporal joys. Thus it combats a severe and gloomy religious establishment, which serves as a foil for the merry Zosima. Alyosha is initially surprised that Zosima is not at all "severe" (*strog*) but almost always "cheerful" (*vesel*) (14_1:28). The surprise is warranted, for Zosima is surrounded by "severe" (*surovykh*) figures more traditionally associated with monasticism (301). It is these figures who slander him over his dead body. Joining in these accusations, the austere Ferapont attacks Zosima particularly for affirming joy: "He taught incorrectly; he taught that life is a great joy" (14_1:301). To be sure, suffering is essential to the religious, and we shall discuss religious suffering (which is nothing like Ferapont's self-torment) in chapter five. But as suffering is essential to the religious, so is joy.

Contrary to his accusers, in affirming that "people are created for happiness" (14_1:51), Zosima teaches correctly from a Christian standpoint.[40] Lest one suppose that eternal joy invalidates temporal joys, there is that prominent first miracle at Cana (John 2), which helps Alyosha arrive at a personal understanding of his mentor's wisdom: "Not grief, but human joy Christ visited when he worked his first miracle, it was human joy that he helped" (14_1:326). It is no accident that the Wedding at Cana passage inspires Alyosha's decisive conversion, or that the novel's epigraph is directly preceded by Dostoevsky's dedication of *The Brothers Karamazov* to his wife, Anna. Alyosha realizes that Jesus came to bring joy, and not just other-worldly joy but also the tangible joys of a wedding, a life-affirming celebration which he does not stifle (as the gloomy, "pious" Ferapont would) but rather enhances with conspicuously good wine (John 2:10). And so he leaves the monastery and pursues marriage, as his elder instructs.

Falling to the earth and embracing it, Alyosha embodies what Kierkegaard conceptualizes as the double-movement of faith, the affirmation of the temporal in light of eternity. Kierkegaard writes, "The person who has made the monastic movement has only one movement left, the movement of the absurd" (*FT* 101). Three days later, Alyosha leaves the monastery in accordance with Zosima's command to "dwell in the world" (14_1:328). Thus he actualizes the paradox of faith: "absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian" (*FT* 41). At Alyosha's moment of conversion, as he flees the monastery into the open air, this paradoxical unity is pictured: "the mystery of the earth touched [*soprikasalas'*] with the mystery of the stars" (14_1:328). The many "otherworldly" readings of Dostoevsky run aground on *The Brothers*

[40] Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). John echoes these words (1 John 1:4), and Paul even commands: "rejoice in the Lord *always*. Again I will say, rejoice" (Phil. 4:4, emphasis added). This imperative coheres with the rest of Scripture, which frequently mandates joy, especially in the Psalms (32:11, 33:1, 66:1, 97:12, 98:4, e.g.).

Karamazov, which presents the life-affirming, joy-affirming nature of authentic, biblical Christianity, in which heaven and earth are compatible

In addressing the sanctity of the aesthetic sphere, we have focused on the second movement of the double-movement of faith: return to the finite. In later chapters we shall focus on the first movement: renunciation of the finite. In this connection, we shall address monasticism in more detail, both its merits (why it is understandable and preferable to bourgeois-philistinism) and also its hazards. We shall also address in greater detail the second movement of faith and the paradoxical unity of the aesthetic and the religious. Suffice it to say here, in chapter one, that the religious does not invalidate, but rather sanctifies the aesthetic sphere. Any reading of Dostoevsky, therefore, that questions the validity of the aesthetic sphere and of earthly life must neglect, among other things, Dostoevsky's magnum opus and its most positive hero, Zosima.

Conclusion: Beyond the Aesthetic

The anti-aesthetic misreading is nevertheless understandable and has the merit of taking seriously the first movement of faith, renunciation. If the aesthetic *sphere* is valid, the aesthetic *stage*, the existence that knows nothing beyond the aesthetic *sphere*, receives extensive criticism in Dostoevsky. Indeed, until *The Brothers Karamazov*, which affirms the aesthetic *sphere*, the major novels primarily emphasize the problems of the aesthetic *stage*. Thus, in terms of sphere versus stage, the misreading that invalidates the aesthetic *sphere* at least rightly acknowledges the problems of the aesthetic *stage*. Let us now turn to Dostoevsky's critique of the aesthetic *stage*, in light of which these anti-aesthetic trends are understandable.

Chapter Two

Sensualists in Despair: The Limits of the Aesthetic

"The most burning pleasures occur in despair."
~ The Underground Man, *Notes from Underground*

"It is manifest that every aesthetic view of life is despair, and that everyone who lives aesthetically is in despair, whether he knows it or not."
~ Judge Wilhelm, *Either/Or*

In the previous chapter, we questioned the anti-aesthetic tendency in Dostoevsky scholarship by highlighting the affirmation of the aesthetic in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Now, we turn to the opposite problem: a tendency to apotheosize the aesthetic. Rightly recognizing the vigorous affirmation of the aesthetic sphere in its sanctity (and thus correcting the anti-aesthetic readings), some readings go too far, making the aesthetic ultimate, equating it with the religious. If Dostoevsky's works hallow the aesthetic sphere, they also delimit it. If Dostoevsky critiques sanctimonious scorn for aesthetic pleasure, its dismissal by "monastic, black Christianity," he also critiques the opposite: the worship of the aesthetic. Idolized, unbridled, not subject to the ethical and the religious, the aesthetic sphere becomes twisted, as Dostoevsky luridly depicts throughout his authorship. First, we shall address readings that apotheosize the aesthetic in the loose sense (the tangible world and its pleasures), and then we shall address those that apotheosize art specifically.

Aesthetic-Apotheosis Readings

In the Loose Sense

In celebrating Dostoevsky's corrective to "monastic, black Christianity," some commentators go too far. Rightly perceiving the compatibility of the aesthetic and the religious, Merezhkovsky mistakenly dissolves the distinction. His dialectic is basically Hegelian: pagan sensuality (thesis) and ascetic Christianity (antithesis), merge into a pagan-Christian synthesis.[41] Vasily Rozanov thinks along similar lines, deeming Zosima's life-affirmation pagan.[42] Steven Cassedy likewise considers Zosima a pantheist (more on this in chapter seven).[43] Though Paul Contino rightly views Zosima's life-affirmation as essentially Christian, not pagan, he nevertheless posits a "synthesis" between eros and agape.[44] To be sure, both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard attest to the compatibility of the two, but whether this harmony constitutes a *synthesis*, we shall see (in more detail in part two of this study).

In the Strict Sense

Other readings suggest that Dostoevsky's works divinize art. The paradigm of the art-apotheosis reading is Robert Louis Jackson's. Jackson writes, "Artistic and religious vision are ultimately one vision, reveal the same absolute reality" for Dostoevsky.[45] Christ is an "aesthetic-religious ideal," so "the act of remaining with Christ (beauty) is itself precisely a leap of faith […] The perception of beauty is inseparable for Dostoevsky from the leap of faith."[46] Jackson

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[41] Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 350, e.g.
[42] See Anna Lisa Crone, "Nietzschean, all too Nietzschean? Rozanov's Anti-Christian Critique," in *Nietzsche in Russia*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1986), 95-112, 105.
[43] Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005), 171.
[44] Paul J. Contino, *Dostoevsky's Incarnational Realism: Finding Christ among the Karamazovs* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 221-22n20.
[45] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 57.
[46] Ibid., 53, 38.

explicitly identifies this aesthetic absolute as German Idealist.[47] Insofar as Jackson limits himself to the "philosophy of art" propounded in Dostoevsky's non-fiction,[48] then his study is a superb examination of the lasting influence of German Idealism on Dostoevsky's *non-fiction*. But when it is claimed that this philosophy "dominates Dostoevsky's entire world outlook,"[49] Jackson goes too far, for the fiction eviscerates German Idealism, as we shall see (especially in chapter seven).

In recognizing Dostoevsky (with Kierkegaard) as an arch-opponent of German Idealism, Shestov corrects Jackson,[50] yet he shares with Jackson a conflation of the aesthetic and the religious. Shestov perceives the division between Dostoevsky's fiction and non-fiction, how the former in some respects undermines the latter. But he then, like Jackson, conflates German Idealism with Christianity, claiming that Dostoevsky attacked *all* beliefs, both Romantic-aesthetic and religious.[51] He neglects the fact that essential to Kierkegaard's project, as to Dostoevsky's, is disentangling Christianity from the tentacles of German Idealism. Thus, Shestov makes the same error that Kierkegaard finds in Hegel: failure to distinguish between aesthetic immediacy and the higher immediacy of faith.

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[47] Ibid., 212, e.g., and *passim*.
[48] In the preface, Jackson limits his study to the "strict focus" of "critical writings, letters, notebooks, and the testimony of those who were close to him. […] analysis of his stories and novels in themselves plays almost no role in this study. Ibid., xiii.
[49] Ibid., xv. Jackson dissolves the pronounced and widely accepted distinction between "the reflective artist" and the "impetuous commentator," between "artistic insight" and "prose convictions," in the words of Gibson. *The Religion of Dostoevsky*, 3, 38. Cf. Steiner: "The expository and polemic writings are of historical interest. But it is in the novels that the Dostoevskyan world view is most coherently and fully set forth." *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 287
[50] Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, 12: "both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard (the first without realizing it, the second fully aware of it) saw their life work as a struggle with, and victory over, that system of ideas embodied in Hegelian philosophy."
[51] Shestov, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, 146, 217, 267, e.g., and *passim*.

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: Aesthetic versus Religious Immediacy

Kierkegaard's distinction between the aesthetic and the religious illuminates the same distinction in Dostoevsky's fiction. As we have seen, Kierkegaard hallows the aesthetic *sphere*. But however sacred, however compatible with the religious, aesthetic immediacy is ultimately distinct from faith. Kierkegaard writes, "Faith is not the first immediacy, but a later immediacy. The first immediacy is the aesthetic, and here the Hegelian philosophy certainly may very well be right. But faith is not the aesthetic" (*FT* 82). Lacking an orientation toward something higher, aesthetic immediacy devolves into what Kierkegaard critiques as the aesthetic *stage*. To reiterate: "Ultimately, it is not the finite as such that is to be renounced, but only that false consciousness that treats the finite as the locus of infinite meaning."[52] This distinction accounts for the difference between the *enjoyment* of the aesthetic sphere by Zosima and the *worship* of the aesthetic sphere by Fyodor Pavlovich. For example, both men enjoy sweets (*sladosti*; 14_1:113, 301), but the latter *lusts* after sweets as a sensualist (*sladostrastnik*).

Kierkegaard's analysis of the aesthetic stage and its despair helps bring this phenomenon in Dostoevsky into focus. Whether in the strict or the loose sense, aesthetic immediacy apart from higher spheres is ultimately despair, even if it appears not to be. The first substage of the aesthetic stage, "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic" (the opening essay of *Either/Or*), is desire, emblematized by Don Giovanni. At a glance, the jubilant Don Giovanni could not be further from despair, or at least what is commonly called despair. Rather, he exhibits anxiety: "In the overture there is not what is commonly called – without knowing what one is saying – despair. Don Giovanni's life is not despair; it is, however, the full force of the sensuous, which is born in anxiety; and Don Giovanni himself is this anxiety" (*EO* 1:129). If not "what is commonly called"

[52] Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*, 197.

despair, the sensuous life is nevertheless despair: whether conscious or not, "it is always despair to have one's life in something that can pass way" (*EO* 2:3); "The common view has a very poor understanding of despair. Among other things, it completely overlooks […] that not being in despair, not being conscious of being in despair, is precisely a form of despair" (*SD* 23).

Therefore, however happy it may appear, Don Giovanni's life, and all immediate existence, is unconscious despair. "Deep, deep within the most secret hiding place of happiness there dwells also anxiety, which is despair; it very much wishes to be allowed to remain there, because for despair the most cherished and desirable place to live is in the heart of happiness. Despite its illusory security and tranquility, all immediacy is anxiety," which is unconscious despair (*SD* 25). Hence Don Giovanni's "intense, energetic life, the secret of which is still despair. In [this] case, the individual in despair is like the consumptive: when the illness is most critical, he feels well, considers himself to be in excellent health, and perhaps seems to others to radiate health. This form of despair (ignorance of it) is the most common in the world" (*SD* 44-45). Kierkegaard helps to see more sharply what Dostoevsky depicts, the unveiling of the immediacy of desire (the first substage of the aesthetic) as anxiety, which is unconscious despair, the latent sickness unto death.

One might expect aesthetic cultivation to deliver from despair, but all this does, in Kierkegaard's analysis, as in Dostoevsky's fiction, is intensify the consciousness of despair, the consciousness of one's underlying state as despair. Judge Wilhelm writes his aesthetically and intellectually cultivated friend: "it is manifest that every aesthetic view of life is despair, and that everyone who lives aesthetically is in despair, whether he knows it or not. But when one knows this, and you certainly do know it, then a higher form of existence is an imperative requirement" (*EO* 2:192). In later works Kierkegaard more thoroughly conceptualizes the limits of the

aesthetic mode, which are precisely its strength: its *disinterestedness* (*CUP* 390, 432, e.g.). Despair may be temporarily alleviated through art, as we see in the case of the Underground Man, but despair is decisively surmounted only through the religious, which requires an infinitely *interested* personal decision that is by definition non-aesthetic.

The Limits of the Aesthetic in Dostoevsky

Sanctified at the Wedding of Cana, the God-given gifts of wine and sexuality, as well as the more refined pleasures of aesthetics in the strict sense, are abused and perverted throughout Dostoevsky's works. Whether "sensualists" or "connoisseurs," Dostoevsky's heroes who inhabit the aesthetic *stage* are revealed to be in despair. The aesthetic is distinct from higher spheres, without which it devolves into debauchery. First, we shall address the less conscious despair of aesthetic immediacy in the loose sense, before turning to the more conscious despair of aesthetic immediacy in the strict sense.

In the Loose Sense

The sensualists of *The Brothers Karamazov*, namely Dmitry and Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov,[53] have their lives primarily in the immediacy of desire, the first substage of the aesthetic. Thus they remain largely unconscious of their underlying despair. At times, however, this despair manifests itself, revealing the latent sickness unto death that underlies the aesthetic stage of existence.

In many ways Dmitry Karamazov resembles Don Juan. He is a passionate, exuberant, swashbuckling, singing, carousing womanizer. When he orders lavish provisions, including a variety of alcohol (champagne, cognac, red and white wine) for his bacchanal at Mokroe, he insists upon "champagne, above all [*glavnoe*] champagne" (14_1:360). Kierkegaard concludes

[53] Ivan is a sensualist of a higher order and is beyond the scope of this chapter.

"The Immediate Stages of the Erotic" with a comment on the champagne aria of *Don Giovanni*, which "does not stand in an accidental relation to Don Giovanni. Such is his life, effervescing like champagne. And just as the beads in this wine, as it simmers with an internal heat, sonorous with its own melody, rise and continue to rise, just so the lust for enjoyment resonates in the elemental boiling that is his life" (*EO* 1:134). These words apply well to the effervescent Dmitry, whose Karamazovian thirst resembles that of his sensualist father. Both Ivan and Alyosha tell the ever-thirsty Fyodor Pavlovich to lay off the cognac (14_1:124-5, 159).

Even more than in their thirst for wine, Dmitry and Fyodor Pavlovich resemble Don Juan in their lust for women. At Mokroe, the primacy of champagne cedes to that of woman: "serve champagne right away… But above all [*glavnoe*] – girls, girls, and Marya without fail" (14_1:375). In the same scene where he orders champagne, Dmitry adds: "Woman I love, woman! What is woman? The queen of the earth!" (367). His father Fyodor Pavlovich boasts of a quality that is quintessentially Don Juan's: that he finds all women sexually attractive (125).

It is no coincidence that both father and son are attracted to Grushenka, who aligns perfectly with Mozart's Zerlina. Alyosha is surprised by Grushenka's ordinariness when he meets her: "before him stood what seemed, at first glance, the most ordinary and simple being – a kind, nice woman, beautiful, yes, but so similar to all other beautiful yet 'ordinary' women!" (14_1:136). Kierkegaard writes of the "deep inner significance" of Zerlina's ordinariness (*EO* 1:96): "Zerlina is young and beautiful, and she is a woman; this is the extraordinary that she shares with hundreds of others. But it is not the extraordinary that Don Giovanni desires, but the ordinary that she shares with every woman" (*EO* 1:97). In the same way, Dmitry and Fyodor are smitten by Grushenka, whose ordinary beauty distills their generic passion for the female sex.

This endless pursuit of pleasure, the immediate life of erotic desire, Dostoevsky reveals to be despair, the sickness unto death. In this same scene (provisioning for Mokroe) Dmitry, "though ecstatic and expansive, was somehow sad" (14_1:366). The very next words after his toast to woman as "queen of the earth" are: "I'm sad, sad, Pyotr Ilyich. Remember Hamlet: 'I'm so sad, so sad, Horatio… Ach, poor Yorick!' It is I, perhaps, who am Yorick. That is, now I am Yorick, and a skull later" (367). In this scene, Dmitry speaks of his plan to kill himself at sunrise, and on the way to Mokroe he is filled with "despair" (*otchaianiem*; 370).

Fyodor Pavlovich, too, shows symptoms of the underlying sickness of a purely immediate existence. "Sensualists" opens with a description of the paterfamilias's anxious attacks, the essential anxiety (and despair) of sensualism. "These were almost morbid [*boleznennye*] occurrences. Depraved and often cruel in his lust [*sladostrastii*] like an evil insect, Fyodor Pavlovich would suddenly feel within himself at other times, in drunken moments, spiritual fear and moral trembling, almost, so to speak, even physically resounding in his soul. 'My soul simply quakes in my throat at those times,' he would say" (14_1:86). He likes having his servant Grigory around "to defend him – from whom? From someone unknown, but fearful and dangerous" (87). The anxiety, writes Kierkegaard, "that characterizes spiritlessness is recognized precisely by its spiritless sense of security. Nevertheless, anxiety lies underneath; likewise, despair also lies underneath, and when the enchantment of illusion is over, when existence begins to totter, then despair, too, immediately appears as that which lay underneath" (*SD* 44). In precisely this way, Fyodor Pavlovich's despair, the spiritual sickness underlying the anxiety that periodically punctures his spiritless life, betrays itself, precisely according to Kierkegaard's formulation.

In case the sensualists' anxiety attacks and moments of dejection are not loud enough, Dostoevsky hammers home the deadliness of sensualism by depicting the carnage that lies in its wake. The debilitating effects of lust and drunkenness luridly permeate Dostoevsky's works. It is therefore no surprise that the central conflict of *The Brothers Karamazov* involves lust. As mentioned above, Dmitry intends to shoot himself after his "orgy" (14_1:390).[54] While Dmitry is spared from death, his father is not so fortunate. Underscoring the deadliness of drunken lust is the fact that Fyodor Pavlovich is drunk when he, to prove his universal sexual attraction, rapes the mentally disabled Lizaveta (91-92),[55] who begets Smerdiakov, who murders his father. This trajectory is biblical: "Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:15). The name Smerdiakov evokes *smert'*, the Russian word for death.[56] Significantly, chapters "Stinking Lizaveta" and "Smerdiakov" belong to Book Three, "Sensualists." Dmitry proves himself more honorable than his father when he resists the temptation to rape Katerina Ivanovna, but the temptation to behave "like an evil tarantula" (14_1:105) is strong, and his near-rape contributes to so much disaster in the novel, including not only his near-suicide but also Ilyusha's tragic death.

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[54] While his father's "orgies" lack a qualifier (14_1:13), Dmitry's escapade at Mokroe, to be precise, is described as "almost an orgy" (390).

[55] Discussing a novel that so famously attests that evidence can mislead, we cannot say definitively that Fyodor Pavlovich is Smerdiakov's father, though the evidence is compelling, and the crime fits with the psychology of the suspect, a confirmed sexual predator.

[56] The first associations are of course *smerdet'* (to stink) and the French *merde*, which are ultimately cognates. See Charles E. Passage, *Characters Names in Dostoevsky's Fiction* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982), 95. But the close connection with *smert'* (death) has also been noted: see, for example, Dmitri Nikulin, "The Gods and Demons of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche," in *Nietzsche and Dostoevsky: Philosophy, Morality, Tragedy*, ed. Jeff Love and Jeffrey Metzger (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP), 173-200, 192.

Though coupled with lust in these examples,[57] drunkenness is treated individually in the scene with the peasant Lyagavy. Unresponsive to Dmitry's beatings and finally waking only to drink more vodka (14_1:340-41), Lyagavy emblematizes biblical warnings about drunkenness: "'They struck me,' you will say, 'but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink'" (Prov. 23:35).[58] A small detail about the meal at the monastery, discussed in chapter one, is significant: there is wine and mead but "no vodka at all" (14_1:79). The good gift of alcohol must be enjoyed with measure and caution. The work that evolved into *Crime and Punishment* originally treated the topic of alcoholism,[59] a theme still extant in the person of Marmeladov, who is trampled to death when drunk. Joyous and generative at Cana, wine and sexuality (and the sacred aesthetic sphere in general), when worshipped, beget despair, the sickness unto death, and its physical analogy, physical death.

In the Strict Sense

At this point in the argument, someone might suggest that what these debauched sensualists need is high art; that aesthetic experience in the strict sense – transcendent, disinterested, sublime – would open their eyes to the world beyond their carnal selves; that the beautiful, in keeping with Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, necessitates the good. However, precisely such a conflation of the aesthetic and the ethical, and Schiller in particular, is criticized by Dostoevsky. If the aesthetic and the ethical are compatible, as both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky insist, they are nevertheless distinct, not to be confused.

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[57] Close associates wine and eros are linked in Kierkegaard too: the portion of *Stages on Life's Way* on the aesthetic stage, entitled "In Vino Veritas," depicts a symposium, in the original (etymological) sense, where the topic of discussion is erotic love. In *Either/Or*, Don Giovanni's life is likened to champagne (*EO* 1:134; see above).
[58] Cf. Eph. 5:18, Prov. 23:20, 28-35, e.g.
[59] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 4:30-31.

The sensualists are not unfamiliar with aesthetic pleasure in the strict sense. At Mokroe, Dmitry insists upon not only wine and women but also song (14_1:374-75), which likewise accompanies Don Giovanni's escapades. The sensualists are not altogether uncultured. For anyone who believes in the transformative potential of literature, as do I, it is a sobering reminder that Fyodor Pavlovich is not without literary taste. He enjoys Gogol, recommending *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* to Smerdiakov, whose lack of interest vexes him (115). He also enjoys Schiller, citing *The Robbers* (66). This love for Schiller is shared by his elder sons. Dmitry quotes Schiller's poetry in translation, specifically "Eleusinian Festival" and "Ode to Joy," which celebrate the aesthetic splendor of the natural world (98-99). Ivan quotes Schiller's "The Glove" in the original (175), and his "Grand Inquisitor" is influenced by Schiller's *Don Carlos*.[60] Ironically, the sensualists' love for Schiller's poetry undermines Schiller's philosophy.

Despite their exposure to aesthetics in the strict sense, sensualists remain in despair, from which beauty, along with their baser pleasures, provides temporary respite but does not deliver. It is in praising Schiller that Dmitry undermines his thought. Speaking of Schiller's poetry, Dmitry says to Alyosha, "Did it reform me? Never!" (14_1:99). He goes on to express horror at the potential amorality of the aesthetic, about the convergence of "the ideal of the Madonna" and "the ideal of Sodom,"[61] about how God and the devil fight over beauty, and how "the battleground is the human heart" (100). In other words, there is an ethico-religious or spiritual (imperceptible) war being waged over the aesthetic (perceptible) realm. If the perceptible can

[60] Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 336.
[61] Mary and Sodom converge at the Mokroe bacchanal: the chorus girl Mary, whom Dmitry favors, dresses up as a beast, exposes herself, and is pursued sexually by the debauched Maksimov (14_1:392, 394), who proceeds to entertain everyone with animal noises (397). The chorus devolves into "unprintable" song (393). Grushenka's ex-lover refers to the "orgy" (390) as "Sodom" (388).

indicate imperceptible reality, as discussed in chapter one (recall Ps. 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God"), Dmitry disagrees with Schiller that the beautiful *necessitates* moral transformation, that the aesthetic and the ethical are essentially one and the same. Dmitry undermines the "moral-aesthetic spectrum" that informs Jackson's study, which is steeped in Schiller.[62] Writing of Dostoevsky's disillusionment with his past humanism in Siberia, Joseph Frank notes "the biting sarcasm with which, in the future, [Dostoevsky] will portray all such instances of tenderhearted Schillerism."[63] Whether in the Underground Man's escapes into "the beautiful and the sublime" (5_2:149) or in the tragic (not at all sarcastic) failure of Myshkin's credo "beauty will save the world" (8_2:317) or in Stepan Trofimovich's insight that "that the loftiest artistic talents can be the most terrible reprobates" (10_1:252), Dostoevsky contradicts Schiller, distinguishing between the ethical and the aesthetic.

The Underground Man's more conscious despair, coupled with Kierkegaard's conceptualization, helps to explain this essential difference between the aesthetic and the ethico-religious, how the strengths of the aesthetic are precisely its limits. The Underground Man is aesthetically cultivated. He reads voraciously (5_2:142), sings Italian arias (147), and dreams poetic dreams (149). And yet all this aesthetic activity leads to a disconnect with reality: "how much love I experienced at times in those dreams of mine, in those 'escapes [*spasen'iakh*] into everything beautiful and sublime.' Even though it was fantastic [*fantasticheskoi*] love, even though it was never directed at anything human, there was so much of it, of this love, that afterward, in reality [*na dele*], I no longer felt any impulse to direct it" (149). The Underground's

[62] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 212.
[63] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 2:105.

fantasy of embracing "all humanity at once" (150) and his subsequent despair is conceptualized by Kierkegaard as "infinitude's despair," which lacks concretion.

Infinitude's despair involves not the religious infinity which returns one to the finite, but rather an aesthetic infinity that leads to a loss of self. "Infinitude's despair," writes Kierkegaard, "is the fantastic, the unlimited, [which] is most closely related to the imagination [*Phantasie*], [which] is the medium for the process of infinitizing" (*SD* 30). His formulation applies perfectly to the Underground Man:

> When feeling becomes fantastic in this way, the self becomes only more and more volatilized and finally comes to be a kind of abstract sentimentality that inhumanly belongs to no human being but inhumanly combines sentimentally, as it were, with some abstract fate – for example, humanity *in abstracto*. […] the person whose feeling has become fantastic is in a way infinitized, but not in such a manner that he becomes more and more himself, for he loses himself more and more (*SD* 31).

The Underground Man complains that he cannot become anything (5_2:112), and his lack of personhood is reflected by his anonymity, which is underscored by *imenno*: "who am I namely? [*kto zh ia takov imenno?*] […] a collegiate assessor" (113). Like the anonymous aesthete A in *Either/Or*, the Underground Man's anonymity is significant, and it is related to what the ethicist calls the "spurious infinity" of the aesthetic (*EO* 2:26). The ethicist validates aesthetics, but he shows the need also for becoming oneself through ethical action and concrete choices. In direct applicability to the Underground Man, he writes: "the aesthetic in a person is that by which he spontaneously and immediately is what he is; the ethical is that by which he becomes what he becomes" (*EO* 2:178). The immediate infinity of aesthetic experience is both its glory and its limitation.

At the crux of the issue is the essential disinterestedness of aesthetic experience, which is both its asset and its liability. Kierkegaard writes that "aesthetically the highest pathos is the pathos of disinterestedness" (*CUP* 390). By definition disinterested, aesthetic experience gives a

sense of the infinite, and this disinterestedness is precisely its merit. But this temporary transcendence (a God-given gift, to recall chapter one) can be abused, not unlike alcohol,[64] to avoid deeper levels of subjectivity. "The aesthetic pathos distances itself from existence […], whereas the existential pathos immerses itself in existing, pierces all illusions with the consciousness of existing, and becomes more and more concrete by acting to transform existence" (*CUP* 432). This pathos requires an infinite *interestedness* in one's own personal, ethical, existential actuality. "Ethically the highest pathos is the pathos of interestedness (which is expressed in this way, that I, acting, transform my whole existence in relation to the object of interest)" (*CUP* 390). In other words, "poetry is related to an observer. But the religious address ought to relate itself to an acting person, who when he comes home must work at doing accordingly" (*CUP* 442). Aesthetic splendor may very well elevate one's gaze, but spiritual transformation ultimately requires what Kierkegaard calls a "leap," an inward act of will, infinitely interested in one's own personal, ethical, existential actuality, and thus different from the disinterestedness that is precisely the merit of aesthetic experience in the strict sense.

This distinction applies to Zosima's injunction to Madame Khokhlakova at the beginning of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Like the Underground Man, Khokhlakova dreams of helping humanity, which she loves, but she cannot stand individual humans. Zosima validates her dreams (again, the aesthetic, imagination, is a good thing), but insists that she must actualize this through

[64] Telling his young friend that he is "intoxicated with aesthetic pleasure" (*EO* 2:122) and "intoxicated with dreams" (*EO* 2:146), Judge Wilhelm warns, "Frequently I have noticed in life that the costlier the liquid on which a person becomes intoxicated, the more difficult the cure becomes; the intoxication is more beautiful and the consequences apparently not as pernicious. The person who becomes intoxicated on aquavit is soon aware of the pernicious consequences, and there is hope for rescue. It is more difficult for a champagne drinker to be cured. And you – you have chosen the very finest" (*EO* 2:194-95). Compare the Underground Man's moments, in his dreams, of "positive intoxication" (*polozhitel'nogo upoeniia*; 5_2:148).

the arduous trial of concrete "active love," which in its interestedness belongs to a sphere other than aesthetics (14_1:52). Compare Zosima's counsel with Kierkegaard's words: "ethically […] the existing person will not be lured into wasting time imagining and imagining – but be prompted to act" (*CUP* 393). Without active love, fantastic love leads only to despair, as the Underground Man reveals.

In Dmitry and Fyodor Karamazov, we see primarily the anxiety, the unconscious despair of the sensual, which periodically bubbles up to the surface, whereas the Underground Man reaches more conscious levels of aesthetic despair. In Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage, the next substage after desire is grief, which arises from frustrated desire: "when desire is frustrated, it turns to grief, and grief begets inwardness in the form of reflection."[65] Accordingly, the Underground Man writes of "all that venom of unfulfilled desire turned inward" (5_2:117). But how can this be called aesthetic? The Underground Man assures us of the subtle "pleasure of despair" (*naslazhdenie otchaiianiа*; 115), a pleasure that "can sometimes reach the highest degree of voluptuousness" (*do vysshego sladostrastiia*; 119). Ultimately, in a dynamic that exceeds the bounds of this study, the masochistic pleasure of self-torment morphs into a self-worship, which Kierkegaard calls "demonic despair," that torments and dominates others. We see the beginnings of this more advanced despair of the aesthetic stage (no longer "grief" but "deception") in the Underground Man's psychological seduction of Liza.

Much more could be written about aesthetic despair in Dostoevsky as conceptualized by Kierkegaard, about the rising fever of the sickness unto death, about Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov, Rogozhin, Stavrogin, Ivan, and the Grand Inquisitor. We have just scratched the surface. What matters here is that aesthetic immediacy, even as it becomes more and more reflective, a process

[65] Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*, 38-39.

we see in the Underground Man, is different from the religious immediacy of faith that delivers from despair.

Conclusion: The Ineluctability of the Ethical (Conscience)

As despair becomes more conscious, so does one's consciousness of the ethical. While this is especially apparent in more acute cases of despair (like Ivan Karamazov's), the sensualists of a lower order also reveal the ineluctability of the ethical. Dmitry contemplates not just physical death (suicide) but also spiritual death, asking his coachman, "Will Dmitry Fyodorovich Karamazov go to hell or not, what do you think?" (14_1:372). Earlier, in "Sensualists," Dmitry confesses to Alyosha and condemns his insect lust (*sladostrastie*; 100). Fyodor Pavlovich, too, reveals ethical awareness. His illusions are punctured by the presence of Alyosha. "Alyosha's arrival seemed to affect him from a moral direction, as though something had awakened in this prematurely old man which had long been dead in his soul" (21). His son's unmerited love and devotion "'pierced his heart' […]. All this was a complete surprise for the old lecher who had dropped family ties, completely unexpected for him who had till then loved only 'filth.' When Alyosha left [to the monastery], he confessed to himself that he had understood something that till then he had not wanted to understand" (87). However hardened, dulled, and dimmed, Fyodor Pavlovich's conscience is still alive on some level.

Like Dmitry, Fyodor Pavlovich exhibits ethical awareness in bringing up final judgment. Hearing Alyosha's intention to enter the monastery, Fyodor Pavlovich responds, "You'll pray for us sinners; we've sinned too much here. […] It's impossible, I think, for the devils to forget to drag me down to hell with their hooks when I die" (14_1:23). This prediction recalls the end of *Don Giovanni*. The key difference between the Karamazov sensualists and Don Juan, however, is that the former are more conscious, more reflective. Kierkegaard's words apply: "it is manifest

that every aesthetic view of life is despair, and that everyone who lives aesthetically is in despair, whether he knows it or not. But when one knows this, and you certainly do know it, then a higher form of existence is an imperative requirement" (*EO* 2:192). In speaking of hell, the Karamazov sensualists demonstrate an awareness of this "imperative requirement." Zosima confirms this, telling Fyodor Pavlovich that he has known for a long time what he must do (14_1:41). With that, let us turn to the ethical.

Chapter Three

Don't Lie, Don't Lust, Don't Be Comforted: The Sanctity of the Ethical

> "You have known for a long time what you must do, you have sense enough: don't give way to drunkenness and incontinence of speech; don't give way to sensual lust and especially to the love of money. And close your taverns. If you can't close all, at least two or three. But above all – don't lie."
> ~ Zosima to Fyodor Pavlovich, *The Brothers Karamazov*

> "Yet ethics and the ethical, by being the essential stronghold of individual existence, have an irrefutable claim upon every existing individual."
> ~ Johannes Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

Anti-Ethical Readings

Canonical scholarship on Dostoevsky has often questioned the sanctity of the ethical in his works. At the turn of the twentieth century, under the pervasive spell of Nietzsche, many of Dostoevsky's first commentators saw his works as endorsing existence "beyond good and evil." For example, Lev Shestov insists that, along with his author, "Raskolnikov stands 'beyond good and evil' – and this was thirty-five years ago, when Nietzsche was still a student."[1] Whereas Shestov doubts Dostoevsky's Christianity, Dmitry Merezhkovsky affirms it. Despite this difference, however, Merezhkovsky shares Shestov's Nietzschean views, which he projects onto Christianity itself. In other words, both attack the ethical, which Shestov associates with

[1] Shestov, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, 213.

Christianity and which Merezhkovsky utterly separates from it, writing: "Yes, Christ is not a moral but a religious phenomenon, supra-moral [*sverkhnravstvennoe*], *transgressing* [*prestupaiushchii*] all limits and barriers of the moral law, a phenomenon of supreme freedom *'beyond good and evil'*" (italics in original).[2] Like Shestov's supra-moral Raskolnikov, Merezhkovsky's Christ is a transgressor (*prestupnik*). Even Bakhtin, whose dual concern with form and ethics marks a new phase of Dostoevsky criticism,[3] speaks of Raskolnikov's actions as "suprajuridical."[4] Despite their differences, Bakhtin, Merezhkovsky, and Shestov all doubt the authenticity of the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* as an unfortunate instance of authorial moralizing. We shall address the epilogue in detail in chapter four. Like Raskolnikov himself, these commentators express disappointment at his inability to endure life beyond good and evil.

Ethical Correctives

Today, questioning the sanctity of the ethical in Dostoevsky is less popular, perhaps given the terrors of the twentieth century, which proved him stunningly prescient.[5] No longer projecting a Nietzschean worldview onto his works, scholars have caught up with Dostoevsky in discovering what he had already clearly identified as the carnage that lies beyond good and evil. Famously correcting Shestov's conflation of The Underground Man with his author, Joseph Frank, in his groundbreaking reading of *Notes from Underground*, shows how the Underground

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[2] Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 296-97.
[3] Bakhtin's study is a departure from the "ontologically and metaphysically-oriented school of Dostoevsky criticism" at the turn of the twentieth century. Jackson, Introduction to *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, vii-xxxi, vii.
[4] In Sergeiy Sandler, "Bakhtin on Shakespeare: Excerpt from 'Additions and Changes to Rabelais,'" *PMLA* 129, no. 3 (2014): 522-537, 523.
[5] Citing a section of Grand Inquisitor's speech, George Steiner writes, "Recent history has made it difficult to read this passage from *The Brothers Karamazov* with detachment. It testifies to a gift of foresight bordering on the daemonic. It lays before us, in precise detail, a summation of the disasters peculiar to our times." *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 340.

Man demonstrates the ineluctability of the ethical by violating his conscience.[6] Against the moral vacuum of the nihilism he appropriates, the Underground Man negatively affirms the ethical.

Throughout his monumental biography-commentary, Frank gives ethics its rightful, central place in Dostoevsky's oeuvre. Contra Nietzschean readings, Frank highlights Dostoevsky's *critique* of going beyond good and evil.[7] For example, he ascribes Stavrogin's "abominable violation of little Matryosha and his unspeakably vile observation of her death throes" to his "attempt to pass beyond the limits of good and evil, to put into practice, with the maniacal determination of Dostoevsky's negative heroes, the conviction that good and evil simply do not exist. […] Like Raskolnikov's crime, Stavrogin's revolting and despicable escapades had been a great moral-philosophical experiment."[8] This experiment conspicuously fails: "Stavrogin's desire to transcend the human, to pass entirely beyond the bounds of good and evil, nonetheless runs aground on the hidden reef of conscience."[9] Frank points out the obvious: Dostoevsky's "supermen" are *negative*. Today, thanks to scholarly correctives like Frank's, considerations of Dostoevsky's ethics are standard.[10]

Antinomian Readings

Despite this trend-shift, however, the sanctity of the ethical in Dostoevsky continues to be questioned. While there remain those who, like Silver Age critics, regret what they deem the

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[6] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 3:310-47. The initial corrective was in his article "Nihilism and *Notes from the Underground*," *The Sewanee Review* 69, no. 1 (1961): 1-33.
[7] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 2:137, e.g.
[8] Joseph Frank, "The Masks of Stavrogin," *The Sewanee Review* 77, no. 4 (1969): 660-91, 684.
[9] Ibid.
[10] See, for example, Sarah J. Young, *Dostoevsky's* The Idiot *and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative: Reading, Narrating Scripting* (London: Anthem, 2004); Greta Matzner-Gore, *Dostoevsky and the Ethics of Narrative Form: Suspense, Closure, Minor Characters* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2020); Alexander Spektor, *Reader as Accomplice: Narrative Ethics in Dostoevsky and Nabokov* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2021).

moralizing nonsense of epilogue of *Crime and Punishment*,[11] a more prevalent questioning of ethical validity comes from the direction of the religious, specifically from Christian (or "Christian") antinomianism. Traditionally, Christianity teaches that while believers are no longer beholden to the *ceremonial* law (like dietary regulations and animal sacrifices), the *moral* law (like the Ten Commandments, e.g., prohibitions of murder and theft, speaking of Raskolnikov) nevertheless stands in its validity.[12] If the law is unable to justify a sinner before God, if the law is transcended by categories of grace and forgiveness, it nevertheless stands in its validity.[13]

Contrary to this traditional, scriptural validation of the moral law, antinomianism suggests that Christians need not obey the moral law. Merezhkovsky's version of Christianity "beyond good evil" is essentially antinomian, and this trend, the notion that the religious *invalidates* the ethical, is alive and well in Dostoevsky studies today. Ivan Esaulov, for example, writes of the "antinomy of Law and Grace": "the ideas of law and Grace are not simply *different* by their nature, but are in a certain sense antinomical" (italics in original).[14] In correctly distinguishing the *legal* from the *ethical*, Esaulov then confuses the ethical, which he validates,

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[11] Harold Bloom, for example, laments the "unfortunate epilogue," defending "the fierce ecstasy [Raskolnikov] has achieved in violating all limits." Introduction to *Fyodor Dostoevsky's* Crime and Punishment (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 1-4, 2.

[12] For examples of Jesus rendering the ceremonial law obsolete but upholding the moral law, see, respectively, Mark 7:19 and Luke 18:20.

[13] Paul elaborates this dynamic with particular care in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans. Insisting that "a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified" (Gal. 2:16), Paul nevertheless upholds the law: "Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not!" (Gal. 3:21). Cf. Romans 3:31: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law" (NIV).

[14] Ivan A. Esaulov, "The categories of Law and Grace in Dostoevsky's poetics," in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. George Gibian and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 116-33, 119. It must be noted that "antinomic" has a broader meaning in the realm of logic, as we shall see later in this study, while "antinomian" refers to a specific kind of Christian belief.

with grace. He cites Dmitry Karamazov's words about his father: "legally he doesn't owe me anything […]. But morally he surely owes me something" (14_1:111).[15] This is a distinction *within* Law, between the legal and the moral aspects of Law,[16] but not a distinction *between* law and grace. Dmitry's complaint has nothing to do with grace. Fyodor Pavlovich has not just withheld grace; he has violated his paternal duty, his moral obligation to his son, the Law in the moral sense, as Dmitry rightly observes. While grace or charity transcends duty – in this Esaulov is correct – moral duty remains valid, as his own textual evidence testifies.

Likewise separating the ethical and the religious utterly, Zhernokleyev writes of Dostoevsky's "non-ethical religious perception."[17] Like Silver Age Nietzschean critics, he claims that Raskolnikov's murder "is not an immoral act" because his "transgression [*prestuplenie*] is not *an overstepping* some rule of law but *a stepping outside* the ethical and into the ontological realm where the buttressing of law is altogether absent" (italics in original).[18] Like Esaulov, Zhernokleyev invokes Eastern Christianity as less concerned with ethics than its Western counterpart.[19] But this very point poses problems for his argument, for being *less* concerned does not mean being *unconcerned*. Eastern Orthodoxy is not antinomian. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724-1783), for example, a canonical figure of Russian Orthodoxy and prototype for Zosima, commenting on 1 John 3:4, "sin is lawlessness," writes that sin "is the destruction of God's holy,

[15] Ibid.
[16] Jesus famously makes such a distinction in the Sermon on the Mount, where he essentially equates rage with murder and lust with adultery (Matt. 5:21-22; 27-28). A harsh word or a wayward glance, though they escape *legal* punishment, are both *ethical* violations of the Law, of the Sixth and Seventh Commandments.
[17] Zhernokleyev, *Beholden by Love*, 173.
[18] Ibid., 132.
[19] Ibid., 170-71.

just, eternal law."[20] If for Dostoevsky (and for Christianity) the religious *transcends* the ethical (in this the antinomian reading is correct), it by no means *invalidates* the ethical. The antinomian reading goes too far, contradicting Dostoevsky's works, as we shall see.

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: The Eternal, Infinite, Universal Validity of the Ethical

Meticulously unfolding the subtle biblical interrelation of the ethical and the religious, that is, how the religious paradoxically transcends *but does not invalidate* the ethical, Kierkegaard helps interpret this confusing dynamic in Dostoevsky. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard writes of how Abraham, in his binding of Isaac, goes beyond the ethical in an "absolute duty to God" (68). We shall address this dynamic in more detail in the next chapter. For now, what matters is that this dynamic fundamentally differs from the Nietzschean and the antinomian annulment of ethics. Kierkegaard writes, "From this it does not follow that the ethical should be invalidated" (*FT* 70). Abraham's "ethical obligation" to Isaac – "to the son the father has the highest and holiest" (*FT* 28) – remains valid at every point. "The ethical is the universally valid precisely by always being valid" (*CUP* 263). It is from being in tension with the ethical in its "infinite validity" (*CUP* 143), its "eternal validity" (*CUP* 259), "its holiness" (*CUP* 142) – compare Kierkegaard's words with Tikhon's above – that gives rise to the eponymous fear and trembling of the religious. In violating his paternal duty, Abraham is no Fyodor Pavlovich.

The Sanctity of the Ethical in Dostoevsky

Like Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky validates the ethical. Dostoevsky's defense of ethics is primarily negative, a depiction of the horror and destruction that result from a moral vacuum. Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov, Rogozhin, Totsky, Stavrogin, Pyotr Verkhovensky, Fyodor

[20] Cited in Tatyana Kasatkina, "The Epilogue of *Crime and Punishment*," in *Fyodor Dostoevsky's* Crime and Punishment: *A Casebook*, ed. Richard Peace (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 171-87, 182.

Pavlovich, Ivan, and Smerdyakov immediately come to mind. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, however, this negative affirmation of the ethical (the *reductio* of amorality) finds positive accompaniment in Zosima's direct, simple commands and precepts.[21] Implicit in the procession of negative heroes, the notion that the external "freedom" of pursuing one's carnal desires leads to "slavery and suicide," is plainly preached by Zosima (14_1:284).

Injunctions: The Ten Commandments

Just as Zosima fully endorses the aesthetic sphere from a religious standpoint (see chapter one), so he endorses the ethical. A good example of this is in the opening scene of *The Brothers Karamazov*, at the monastery. Fyodor Pavlovich echoes the rich ruler in the Gospel when he asks Zosima, "Teacher! – he suddenly threw himself down on his knees – what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (14_1:41).[22] Accordingly, Zosima echoes Jesus's response, tailoring it to Fyodor Pavlovich: "You have known for a long time what you must do, you have sense enough: don't give way to drunkenness and incontinence of speech; don't give way to sensual lust and especially to the love of money. And close your taverns. If you can't close all, at least two or three. And, above all – don't lie" (14_1:41).[23] Like Jesus, Zosima invokes some of the Ten Commandments. If the Law cannot justify, as Jesus implies with his preceding rhetorical question,[24] it nevertheless stands in its validity. *The Brothers Karamazov* thus reflects a biblical

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[21] This is not to say that *Dostoevsky* speaks directly, for the words belong to Zosima, most of whose teachings are mediated by Alyosha in book six, "The Russian Monk." In the same way, Dostoevsky does not directly condemn his villains in a "monological" conclusion, but lets the realism – the physical and psychological consequences of crime – speak for itself.

[22] Compare the biblical text: "a man ran up and knelt before [Jesus] and asked, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" (Mark 10:17; cf. Luke 18:18). Besides the omission of "good" (*blagii*) in "good teacher," Fyodor Pavlovich quotes the Synodal Translation verbatim.

[23] Compare Jesus's response: "You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother'" (Mark 10:19; cf. Luke 18:20).

[24] "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18/Luke 18:19).

reality that Kierkegaard helps us see more clearly: if not ultimate, the ethical stands in its "holiness," its "eternal validity," its "infinite validity."

Moreover, a detail in Zosima's response captures the logical flow of Jesus's response, which affirms the Ten Commandments as a unified whole. When the rich ruler claims to have kept these (Commandments Five through Nine) from his youth, Jesus tells him to sell everything, give to the poor, and follow him (Mark 10:20-21), thus evoking the Tenth Commandment: Thou shalt not covet. Yet the Tenth Commandment is related to the First and Second, for covetousness is the worship of money or possessions over God. Paul makes this link explicit, prohibiting "covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5), and famously claiming that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Tim. 6:10). So by underscoring "the love [*obozhanie*] of money" (14_1:41), more literally rendered as "the *worship* of money," Zosima likewise evokes the First and Second Commandments and thus the Ten (and the Law) as a whole. To be sure, the Gospel passage shows the limits of the ethical and the power of sin: the rich ruler goes away dejected (Mark 10:22). In the novel, Fyodor Pavlovich shows no signs of loosening his tight fist. But just because there is a category beyond Law, namely Grace, does not mean that the Law does not stand in its "holiness," its "eternal validity," its "infinite validity."

In the very next chapter, "Believing Women," Zosima continues to uphold the ethical – and the Ten Commandments in particular – while superimposing the religious category of forgiveness. Comforting a bereft woman who has left home with no intention to return, Zosima nevertheless tells her it is a "sin" (*grekh*) to abandon her husband (14_1:47). A young widow who has murdered her much older, abusive husband, says she has "sinned" (*sogreshila*) and that she fears her "sin" (*grekha*). While Zosima comforts the repentant woman with God's boundless mercy, he upholds her "sin" as "sin" (48). Zosima does not relax the Sixth Commandment;

rather, he emphasizes God's mercy. Jesus does the same with the Seventh Commandment for the woman caught in adultery, telling her to "go, and sin no more" (John 8:11, KJV). Likewise, Zosima assures another woman of her "great sin" (*velikii grekh*) before assuring her that it is forgiven (14_1:47). He upholds the ethical without casting stones, for he, too, is "sinful" (*greshnyi*; 48). Sin and the Law stand in their validity; Grace is simply greater (Rom. 5:20). Indeed, without justice, mercy makes no sense: there is nothing to forgive. The religious does not efface the ethical, as in antinomianism. Rather, it is superimposed upon the ethical, precisely according to Kierkegaard's formulation.

Zosima's commands are not just a bit of moralizing tacked on to a body of works that is unconcerned with morality, as some suppose. Rather, his prohibitions of drunkenness, lust, greed, and lying are simply positive expressions of what Dostoevsky's works imply as a whole. Throughout his authorship, Dostoevsky depicts the ravages of alcoholism and unbridled lust (see chapter two). Throughout his authorship, beginning with his first novel, *Poor Folk*, Dostoevsky depicts the harrowing plight of the urban poor, the injustice of economic oppression and its ultimate source: greed. If his proposed remedy shifts from Western Socialism to a Russian religious solution, if his themes expand beyond economic inequality, his concern for the poor persists, unabated, to the end of his authorship. Think of the hungry waif who freezes to death amidst the holiday opulence of St. Petersburg in "The Boy at Christ's Christmas Party" in *Diary of a Writer*, or of Ilyusha's questions to his father about the rich and the poor in *The Brothers Karamazov* (14_1:189), or of Dmitry's dream of the starving babe.

Throughout his authorship, Dostoevsky depicts the perniciousness of lies. Stepan Trofimovich, who has lied his whole life (10_1:497), spawns a gang of terrorists in *Demons*. Fyodor Pavlovich, too, has lied his whole life (14_1:41), and we see the bitter fruits of this in the

novel. The negative does not disappear in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and it is not contradicted by the positive. Rather, the negative is simply accompanied, at last, by a clear, positive ethical statement that draws much of its resounding force from the Ten Commandments, a summary of the ethical in its "infinite validity," "eternal validity," and "holiness."

Injustice: Refusing to be Comforted

The negative defense of ethics that pervades Dostoevsky's authorship – the woeful picture of injustice – becomes even more explicit in *The Brothers Karamazov* in the person of Ivan. Consciously and rationally, of course, Ivan uses injustice and the atrocities permitted on earth as a case against God. Questioning God and immortality, Ivan concludes, famously, that "all is permitted" (14_1:65). Consciously and rationally, therefore, Ivan denies the reality of the ethical. But if Ivan's catalogue of atrocities leads him ultimately to "return his ticket" (223) to God, his sheer indignation testifies to something else in him that, if subconsciously or intuitively, validates the ethical. The contradiction between intellect and intuition manifests itself also in Ivan's claim that his father "lived like a pig, but he reasoned correctly" (32). Ivan's moral disgust, the value judgement inherent in these words, testifies against this "correct" reasoning.

On the one hand, Ivan's complicity in patricide accords with his doctrine of amorality: all is permitted, including patricide. On the other hand, the patricide might be seen as Ivan's wielding of divine justice in the spirit of the theocrats in his article on church and state, an article that reveals his concern with justice. Fyodor Pavlovich is indirectly present among the child-abusers in "Rebellion": the general who sics his dogs on the little boy (*Atu ego!* 14_1:221) echoes Fyodor Pavlovich, who just previously sicced his defenders on his own Dmitry (*Atu ego!* 128). So when Ivan insists that the general ought to be shot (221), the discussion is more than theoretical. In any case, Ivan's intuitive ethical sensibility gains the upper hand against his

intellectual doctrines in his guilty conscience after the patricide. Even the negative, rebellious Ivan, creator of the negative, rebellious Grand Inquisitor, testifies, against his will, to the ineluctability of the ethical, "universally valid," in the words of Kierkegaard (*CUP* 263).

While Alyosha correctly identifies his brother's position as, ultimately, one of rebellion, Ivan's diatribe is relatively unproblematic from a biblical standpoint, contrary to the prevailing interpretation. Grief over injustice and a desire for things to be made right are lauded attributes in the Bible: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted […]. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5:4, 6). Of course, Ivan lacks some the other attributes in the beatitudes, like meekness and mercy (5:5, 7), but his grief over injustice, if incomplete, is valid from a biblical point of view.

Zosima, whose teachings are an indirect rebuttal to "Rebellion," de-problematizes the grief over injustice, in particular over the suffering of children, by recasting it in a biblical framework. In other words, Zosima reminds us that the suffering of children *is problematic in the Bible*, so Ivan's rebellion is not as blasphemous as it first appears. While invoking religious categories – the afterlife, the mystery of healing over time, the transformation of sorrow into joy, divine comfort – Zosima fully validates grief, pain, and the sense of brokenness and injustice in this world. When a peasant woman bereft of her three-year-old son does not find comfort in the idea that her son is in heaven, Zosima fully validates her anguish. He encourages her to weep and to grieve and thus – if only temporarily – to refuse to be comforted (14_1:46). He substantiates this counsel with the biblical precedent of "Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more" (Matt. 2:18, citing Jer. 31:15, NIV). While outright rebellion against God is not condoned biblically, grief over injustice, questioning God, and even aggressive grievances to God for allowing such injustice, have ample biblical precedent.

Rachel is not alone in refusing to be comforted because of her children. Her husband Jacob "refused to be comforted," thinking his son Joseph to be dead (Gen. 37:35). Zosima mentions this story (14_1:266). Central to *The Brothers Karamazov*, Job, likewise bereft of children, refuses to be comforted, famously taking God to task for the pervasive injustice on earth. Job's friends, who speak of God's immediately visible justice, are censured by God, whereas Job is commended (Job 42:7-9). Jeremiah, "the weeping prophet," the one who writes of Rachel's refusal to be comforted, himself refuses to be comforted in his extreme suffering, at one point calling God a liar (Jer. 20:7). Throughout Scripture,[25] we hear refrains like "O Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?" (Ps. 94:3) and "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?" (Ps. 82:2). Far from subverting a biblical worldview, the disjunction between God's perfect justice and the injustice we see around us is a central theme and pressing concern in the Bible.

Like Jeremiah, for whom he is mistaken (Matt. 16:14), Jesus, too, weeps over sin and death (Matt. 23:37; John 11:35). Incensed at unrighteousness (the money-changers in the temple, e.g.), Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5:6). On the cross, Jesus himself questions God: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, citing Ps. 22:1). Not only prophets and patriarchs, but also God Himself questions God![26] While the biblical sufferers, after a period of refusal of comfort, ultimately humble themselves before God and His oftentimes inscrutable will, as Job famously does, Ivan at least joins the chorus of lament, if he does not (yet) join that of comfort in God.[27]

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[25] Besides Job, another book of the Bible devoted to this question is Habakkuk.
[26] Here the paradox of the Trinity is in full swing. We shall address such things, which require "a crucifixion of the understanding" (*CUP* 564), in the second part of this study.
[27] For a compelling argument for Ivan's nascent conversion at the end of the novel, see Contino, *Dostoevsky's Incarnational Realism*, 152.

Ivan's rage finds its most fitting biblical precedent, perhaps, in Psalm 137, quoted by Captain Snegiryov, Ilyusha's grieving father, and having the same historical context (Babylon's conquest of Judea) as the Jeremiah text (Rachel's refusal) quoted by Zosima. Saying that he does not want another child to replace Ilyusha, Snegiryov laments, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem…" (14_1:507). Mostly about the Jews' longing, from Babylonian exile, for their homeland, the psalm ends with a shocking imprecation: "O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" (Ps. 137:8-9). Just as Alyosha agrees, "Shoot him!" in a fit of indignation at the general who sics his dogs on the little boy before his mother (14_1:221), so here the psalmist, who likely witnessed children (perhaps even his own) murdered by Babylonian soldiers,[28] refuses to be comforted, crying out for justice to be meted out.

Of course, the Bible's final word is to leave vengeance to God (Rom. 12:19, e.g., citing Deut. 32:35, the famous epigraph of *Anna Karenina*), to turn the other cheek and to love one's enemies (Matt. 5:39, 44). Turning the other cheek, however, does not mean that the right cheek feels no pain or that suffering and even rage cannot be expressed honestly to God.[29] In order to love one's enemies, one must first honestly identify them as such. If *The Brothers Karamazov* follows the scriptural mandate in calling us to forgive, it also calls us to honestly acknowledge pain, suffering, brokenness, and wrong. It is impossible to forgive without first acknowledging the injustice, without going through at least a season, however brief, of refusing to be comforted.

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[28] See Lamentations, written by Jeremiah, for the terrors of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.
[29] One way to understand the difference between Ivan and the biblical lamenters is that the latter address God directly, whereas Ivan talks *about* God, "returning his ticket" to the personal God-relationship. The Bible affirms venting not about God but *to* God: "pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge" (Ps. 62:8); "cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you" (Ps. 55:22); "cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

Indeed the very concept of mercy – turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:39) – presupposes justice: eye for eye, tooth for tooth (Matt. 5:38). The religious presupposes the ethical, which stands "eternally valid," without which the higher religious categories of repentance, mercy, and grace fall apart. If there is no sin, there can be no forgiveness of sin. If there is no justice, there can be no mercy. The ethical and the religious, as Kierkegaard formulates, lie "so close that they continually communicate with each other" (*CUP* 162). The religious transcends but does not invalidate the ethical, which it requires for its very existence.

Conclusion: Beyond the Ethical

As much as we have combatted the view that the religious invalidates the ethical, it must be acknowledged that such readings are not without merit. Identifying a realm beyond the ethical in Dostoevsky, such readings serve as correctives to readings that do not adequately distinguish between the ethical and the religious. In other words, the ethical readings correct those that invalidate the ethical, but then the antinomian-religious readings correct those that make the ethical the highest. If the antinomian reading goes too far, invalidating the ethical, which for Dostoevsky, as for Kierkegaard, is eternally valid, it at least recognizes that the ethical has its limits, that there is a need to distinguish the ethical from something higher. Let us now turn to the limits of the ethical in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

What Would Become of the Criminal? The Limits of the Ethical

> "And what would become of the criminal, O Lord, if even Christian society, that is, the church, were to reject him even as the civil law rejects him and cuts him off?"
> ~ Zosima to Ivan, *The Brothers Karamazov*

> "Either the single individual as the single individual can stand in an absolute relation to the absolute, and consequently the ethical is not the highest, or Abraham is lost."
> ~ Johannes de Silentio, *Fear and Trembling*

In the previous chapter, we considered the anti-ethical or antinomian tendency in Dostoevsky scholarship. Now, we turn to the opposite problem: a tendency to treat the ethical as the highest, or, in other words, not to distinguish between the ethical and the religious. Rightly recognizing the vigorous affirmation of the ethical sphere in its sanctity, ethical readings, like Joseph Frank's, serve as correctives to the alleged dismissal of the ethical in Dostoevsky's works. In giving the ethical its proper place, however, such readings often neglect to adequately distinguish it from the religious, yet this distinction is crucial for Dostoevsky. If his works hallow the ethical, they also delimit it. If Dostoevsky critiques "beyond good and evil," he also critiques the worldview that does not recognize what transcends the ethical: the personal relationship with God. If the ethical is the highest, there is no room for mercy, without which human relationships become impossible and human society would devolve into dystopia, as Dostoevsky illustrates.

Kierkegaard's nuanced distinction between the ethical and the religious helps to perceive more clearly this distinction in Dostoevsky's fiction. As we have seen, Kierkegaard hallows the ethical *sphere*, which is infinitely and eternally valid. But however sacred, however compatible with and indeed necessary for the religious, the ethical is ultimately distinct from the higher category of faith.

Ethico-Religious Readings

Canonical scholarship on Dostoevsky often speaks of the "ethico-religious" realm in his works without acknowledging the crucial distinction between these two spheres. For example, in "The Religious-Ethical Significance of Dostoevsky," Sergei Askol'dov, while rightly emphasizing the importance of both spheres in Dostoevsky's works, tends to conflate the two.[30] This merging manifests in the hyphenation that begins in the title itself and pervades the essay.[31] At times, however, Askol'dov does hint at such a distinction,[32] most notably, if implicitly, in his apt if overstated claim that "all [Dostoevsky's] novellas and novels are, in a way, variations on the Parable of the Prodigal Son."[33] This parable sharply distinguishes between the ethical and the religious spheres. The Prodigal Son is a moral disaster. Viewed ethically, the older brother is rightfully indignant at his father's actions, which, from a strictly ethical point of view, are unjust. Deserving of disownment, the younger son is given honor that is completely unmerited. Viewed

[30] S. Askol'dov, "Religiozno-eticheskoe znachenie Dostoevskogo," in *F. M. Dostoevskii: Stat'i i materialy*, ed. A. S. Dolinin (St. Peterburg: Mysl', 1922), 1-32.
[31] "To uncover the foundations of this worldview in its religious-ethical content will be our task" (ibid., 2). Askol'dov writes of: crime as "a vivid positing of a religious-ethical problem" (10); "moral-religious skepticism" (10) "the religious-moral crisis" (11); "Dostoevsky's religious-ethical paradox" (21); and "moral-religious intuition" (26). When the religious and ethical are not separated by a hyphen, they are separated by an "and" (4, 8, 23).
[32] He writes of "the inevitable moral crisis of irreligious consciousness" and "the true and only buttress of moral law – religion" (ibid., 8). Raskolnikov likewise displays "the return to the religious basis of the moral law" (13).
[33] Ibid., 12.

religiously, however, the younger son is superior to the older son: he feels his unworthiness, while his self-righteous older brother is embittered by his father's mercy (Luke 15:11-32). Askol'dov's perception of this parable in Dostoevsky's works suggests this crucial distinction that remains unexplored in his article.

Later scholarship on Dostoevsky has likewise neglected to adequately distinguish between the ethical and the religious. Like Askol'dov's, Jackson's conflation of the spheres manifests itself in abundant hyphenation. We have already considered the "aesthetic-religious" (see chapter two), which is fused also with the "ethico-religious."[34] That is, the "moral-aesthetic spectrum" involves "faith in a higher beauty, in Christ, in moral-aesthetic perfection."[35] Similarly, Frank at times conflates the spheres, writing of Dostoevsky's "'leap of faith' in the moral beauty of the Russian peasantry."[36] In general, Frank writes of "moral-religious meaning," "moral-religious precepts," and "moral-religious crisis" in Dostoevsky, without clearly distinguishing between the two categories.[37] As Jackson relies on Dostoevsky's non-fiction, so Frank, for this "leap of faith in moral beauty," relies on *Diary of a Writer*, questioning the relevance of the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* for Dostoevsky's biography.[38]

Insofar as they represent Dostoevsky's proclaimed ideology in his non-fiction, Jackson and Frank are quite accurate, and indeed it would be a mistake to conflate Raskolnikov with his author. A problem arises, however, when we take this conflation of the ethical and the religious (and the aesthetic) to be Dostoevsky's final word, because his fiction sharply distinguishes between these spheres. For the vast majority of the time, Frank's historical-biographical

[34] Jackson, Introduction to Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, xvii.
[35] Jakckson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 212.
[36] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 2:125.
[37] Ibid., 4:315, 377, 469.
[38] Ibid., 2:117.

approach is greatly illuminating. At times, however, his approach dissolves the crucial distinction between "the reflective artist" and the "impetuous commentator," between "artistic insight" and "prose convictions," in the words of Gibson.[39] Steiner's point is apt: "The expository and polemic writings are of historical interest. But it is in the novels that the Dostoevskyan world view is most coherently and fully set forth."[40] Whether Dostoevsky's personal religious conversion more resembled that of the "diarist-writer" or that of Raskolnikov (or, most likely, included elements of both), we cannot know. What matters is that the text of *Crime and Punishment* – along with Dostoevsky's other major fiction – sharply distinguishes between the ethical and the religious, contradicting Dostoevsky the theorist-propagandist who never quite shook the synthesizing dogmas of the German Romantic Idealism of his youth (more on this in chapters six and seven).

Also, in fairness to the interpretive tendency that does not deal with the subtle ethical-religious distinction, literary scholarship usually does not require such a distinction. Furthermore, even in the context of religion, the ethical and the religious are deeply intertwined and often difficult to distinguish. Kierkegaard notes their "essential relation" (*CUP* 294) and close proximity (*CUP* 162). In the case of Dostoevsky, however, this distinction is vital. Indeed, it is one of his great insights, an insight he shares with Kierkegaard. The latter helps us to see this insight more clearly by conceptualizing the distinction between the ethical and the religious in a way that is relevant to aesthetics.

[39] Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*, 3, 38.
[40] Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 287.

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: The Ethical vs. the Religious

Kierkegaard famously distinguishes between the ethical and the religious in *Fear and Trembling*, which is largely an interpretation of Abraham's binding of Isaac (Genesis 22). What usually tempts a person, writes Kierkegaard, is that which keeps one from one's duty (*FT* 60). We tend to think of duty, the ethical, as synonymous with the will of God. Normally, it is. In Abraham's horrifying situation, however, the ethical itself – "to the son the father has the highest and holiest [ethical obligation]" (*FT* 28) – becomes the temptation (*FT* 60).

Abraham, insofar as we do not condemn him as a murderer, reveals a sphere beyond the ethical. Kierkegaard raises three questions: "Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical?" (*FT* 54), "Is there an absolute duty to God?" (68), and "Was it defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from Isaac?" (82). Insofar as Abraham is the father of faith, the answer must be affirmative. For if there is no higher religious sphere, then Abraham "ought to be sent back to a lower court and shown up as a murderer" (55). In other words: "Either the single individual as the single individual can stand in an absolute relation to the absolute, and consequently the ethical is not the highest, or Abraham is lost" (113). As we have seen in the previous chapter, Kierkegaard's "teleological suspension of the ethical" is nothing like Nietzsche's "beyond good and evil." Kierkegaard's religious sphere transcends but *does not invalidate* the ethical. The tension between the two is precisely what generates the eponymous fear and trembling.

While Abraham's situation is unique, the categories of sin and repentance generate an analogous tension between the ethical and the religious. Kierkegaard writes: "when the single individual by his guilt has come outside the universal [the ethical], he can return only by virtue of having come as the single individual into an absolute relation to the absolute" (*FT* 98). Yet

this dynamic limits the ethical. "As soon as sin emerges, ethics founders precisely on repentance; it is the highest ethical expression, but precisely as such it is the deepest ethical self-contradiction" (98n). The Prodigal Son is a good example: he recognizes his moral bankruptcy, affirming the validity of the ethical, but then transcends the ethical in his repenting and receiving forgiveness. "An ethics that ignores sin is a completely futile discipline, but if it affirms sin, then it has *eo ipso* exceeded itself" (*FT* 99) because the doctrine of sin places everyone essentially in conflict with the ethical (*CUP* 267).

Jesus connects sin with the limits of the ethical – and of judgement in particular – when he says, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone" (John 8:7, KJV), or when he commands: "Judge not" (Matt. 7:1). In other words, the ethical "requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt" (*SLW* 476). This bankruptcy is surmounted by way of the religious (ibid.). Though eternally valid, "the ethical nevertheless is always somewhat distanced from the absolute God-relationship" (*CUP* 488). If Dostoevsky's works are variations on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, as Askol'dov aptly notes, then this notion of universal moral bankruptcy before God, the universal need for repentance, and the concomitant limitation of the ethical, is at the heart of Dostoevsky's fiction.

The Limits of the Ethical in Dostoevsky

Ivan versus Zosima on the Criminal

If Ivan's moral outrage is perfectly valid from an ethical standpoint, as we have argued in the previous chapter, his proposed solution to injustice in his academic article reveals the limits of the ethical. Ivan's article proposes that the church subsume all states and thereby categorically eliminate crime and evil from the face of the earth (14_1:59). This conclusion reflects Kierkegaard's logic regarding the strictly ethical worldview: "if I exclude every other thought

and think only of the ethical, I will demand with ethical sanction to see the good triumph with a boundless speed, to see the evil punished with boundless speed" (*SLW* 441). And yet Zosima cautions against a society that allows no room for repentance, that prohibits this higher sphere.

In accord with Kierkegaard's defense of a higher religious sphere that "spaces out the limitless speed of the ethical" (*SLW* 442), Zosima expresses religious concern (mercy) for the criminal in Ivan's merciless theocracy. No, says Zosima, the church, "like a tender and loving mother," should avoid punishment, because without her who would have mercy on the criminal, who is punished harshly enough by the state (14_1:60)? If those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed (Matt. 5:6), so are the meek and the merciful (5:5, 7). Righteous zeal must be tempered, must be sandwiched, as in the logic of these three verses in the Sermon on the Mount, by the meekness and mercy Zosima extends to the criminal.

Zosima's ethical demands are made in a spirit of humility and mercy, a category that places him beyond the ethical without invalidating it. When he invokes the Ten Commandments in response to Fyodor Pavlovich, he does so "with a smile" (14_1:41). Even the narrator, who is harsh in his censure of Fyodor Pavlovich (86-87, e.g.), is not without a note of compassion, saying, with regard to Fyodor Pavlovich, that evil people are more simplehearted than we think, and so are we (10). Ivan, in contrast, disdains his father, who rightly fears his merciless son: "I fear Ivan; more than the other [Dmitry], I fear Ivan" (130). When Zosima tells the peasant woman to return to her husband, he does so meekly (47). And to the woman who has murdered her husband, he says that he, too, is a sinner (48). By essentially equating himself with this woman, by refusing to cast a stone (without minimizing her sin), by affirming that he, too, is "bankrupt" before God, Zosima limits the ethical, even while affirming it. This compassion for the criminal is prefigured by *Crime and Punishment*, which likewise limits the ethical.

Debt in Crime and Punishment

Even while upholding the ethical in its sanctity, *Crime and Punishment* delimits the ethical, primarily through the categories of debt and its corollary, what I like to call "burdensome beneficence." A central question throughout Dostoevsky's works is how to benefit the other without indebting and enslaving the other, without making oneself a moral superior. If the ethical is the highest, then there exists a moral hierarchy, a *quantitative* difference in righteousness inherent in all moral superiority. If the ethical is the highest, then the benefactor indebts the beneficiary and cannot help but be filled with self-righteousness. The category of sin, however, while essential to the ethical, delimits the ethical by placing everyone in the same *qualitative* position: a moral debtor to God. Burdensome beneficence is one of the pervading themes of Dostoevsky's fiction, going all the way back to *Poor Folk*.[41] Much could be said about this phenomenon that pervades Dostoevsky's works, so to focus our argument we shall consider *Crime and Punishment*, which depicts not only the crushing burden of moral debt but also its release through forgiveness. In other words, without invalidating the ethical, the novel shows the limits of the ethical and the need for the religious.

The social relations of *Crime and Punishment* take the form of a toxic hierarchy of debt, both moral and monetary. At the top sits the wealthy and dutiful Marfa Petrovna Svidrigailova, who ransoms (*vykupila*) Svidrigailov from debtors' prison in exchange for marriage (6_2:244). Svidrigailov turns around and extends this "beneficence" to Raskolnikov's sister Dunya when he tries to purchase her love (30). When Marfa Petrovna, having accused and shamed Dunya, discovers that the accused is innocent in the matter with Svidrigailov, she repents and vindicates Dunya. At a glance, this is a noble deed, but upon closer consideration, we see that it is not

[41] See Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 1:140-41.

unproblematic. Marfa Petrovna repents with a very public display at church, praying publicly for strength to "fulfill her duty" (*ispolnit' dolg svoi*; 32). She parades around town for days on end reading the exonerating evidence (a letter from Dunya to Svidrigailov) to curious crowds who even make copies of the letter. Raskolnikov's mother finds this inappropriate and "excessive," but "Marfa Petrovna is of such a character" (32). Marfa Petrvona does not stop there, but gives Dunya an expensive gold watch, leaves her three thousand rubles in her will, and provides a fiancé, Pyotr Petrovich Luzhin (197, 251, 32).

This behavior suggests that Marfa Petrovna wants more than simply to right her wrong, to do her duty and pay her debt, united by the Russian word *dolg*. She wants to reestablish her place as benefactress, moral and monetary. The way to pay debts without creating more debts is through the religious, where one may pay debts on a human level but never pay one's own debt to God. (God does this himself; Col. 2:14.) Marfa Petrovna, by going overboard in her repentance, or, rather, penance (to be discussed next chapter), seems to want to pay her debt in an ultimate sense, to justify herself. Genuine repentance, as opposed to penance, acknowledges one's moral bankruptcy, whereas penance pretends that one is not quite bankrupt but able, through tireless effort, to repay (see the next chapter). While restorative good works should flow also from repentance, they will be done in a spirit of total humility, devoid of the meritoriousness inherent in penance. Paying her own debts, the self-righteous Marfa Petrovna burdens others with debt, and this burden trickles down to all her moral and financial debtors.

A relative of Marfa Petrovna's (6_2:32) and suggestively sharing her patronymic, Pyotr Petrovich Luzhin is an extension of her "beneficence."[42] But his desire to dominate others

[42] The relatives are linked by Raskolnikov's and Razumikhin's shared suspicion (6_2:188, 197) that Dunya's watch is a gift from Luzhin, while it is really from Marfa Petrovna (who provided both watch and fiancé, so in a sense the young men are right to link the watch with Luzhin).

through debt is even more explicit. He tells Dunya and her mother that he prefers a wife without a dowry, because she will consider her husband her "benefactor" (34). Eventually rejected, and having wielded monetary debt to no avail, Luzhin invokes moral debt, claiming to have recovered Dunya's tarnished reputation (262) and chastising his beneficiaries for their "black ingratitude" (263). In every sphere, Luzhin keeps score, as seen also in his behavior with his roommate Lebezyatnikov.[43] Endless score-keeping is symptomatic of a worldview devoid of forgiveness.

Through Dunya, the debt is transferred to the Raskolnikov family. Both Dunya and her mother, Pulkheria Alexandrovna, go into debt for their dear brother and son (6_2:29, 36). Not only that, mother and daughter agree to Dunya's self-sacrifice to Luzhin for the sake of Raskolnikov's career (38). Luzhin's money can fund Raskolnikov's studies (35), after which Luzhin can hire him as a litigator (34). Far from helping Raskolnikov, all this self-sacrifice burdens and offends him. He accuses his sister of playing Christ – "It's hard to ascend Golgotha" – and his mother of sacrificing her daughter (playing God the Father?) (38). Throughout Dostoevsky's works, from the Underground Man's attempt to save Liza to Myshkin's attempt to save Nastasya Filippovna, playing the savior is problematic. Even if the benefactor's intentions are noble, as are Pulkheria's and Dunya's, without the religious, where everyone is essentially a debtor, the beneficiary is crushed with unbearable, unpayable debt. Humiliated, the beneficiary often rebels, as does Raskolnikov, who dreams of being a benefactor of humankind. He starts with the Marmeladov family, which, with the Rasolnikov family, is low on the totem pole of debt.

[43] "Petr Petrovich noticed this smile and immediately held it against his young friend [*postavil molodomu svoemu drugu na schet*]. Recently he had found a lot to hold against him [*postavit' na schet*]" (6_2:311).

The transfer of debt to the Marmeladovs is pictured by Raskolnikov's giving the money his mother gives him (for which she has gone into debt) to the Marmeladov family (6_2:161). Within the Marmeladov family itself there is a moral hierarchy. Penniless from her husband's alcoholism, the self-righteous Katerina Ivanovna guilts Sonya, another mouth to feed, into selling herself into prostitution to support her starving family. Sonya's self-sacrifice, which Raskolnikov equates with Dunya's (40-41), crushes her already guilty father with more guilt. He drinks away the income of her prostitution, descending deeper into despair and alcoholism, which eventually kills him: he is trampled to death when drunk (152-60). From top to bottom, from the wealthy landowner Marfa Petrovna to the homeless and penniless Marmeladov,[44] the burdensome benefactor, whether well- or ill-intentioned, kills the beneficiary with kindness.

Redemption in Crime and Punishment

At the bottom of the moral pecking order, Raskolnikov and Sonya, the "murderer and the harlot" (6_2:284), find forgiveness and freedom – release from this crushing debt – in the religious, which transcends the ethical. What Kierkegaard calls the "absolute relation to the absolute" and its "teleological suspension of the ethical," Dostoevsky evokes through two biblical subtexts, previously unnoticed in the scholarship, to my knowledge. Both are related to the raising-of-Lazarus subtext, and both involve repentance and the transcendence of moral duty (without invalidating it). Kierkegaard's categories help frame these subtexts and their centrality to the meaning of the novel, as well as the scholarly controversy surrounding the epilogue.

The first biblical subtext, the Anointing of Jesus, is recorded in all four Gospels: Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 7, and John 12, though it is mentioned in John 11, the very chapter Sonya

[44] More direct lines from Marfa Petrovna to the Marmeladovs are drawn, for example, when Luzhin falsely accuses Sonya of theft and berates her for her "blackest ingratitude" (6_2:340).

reads aloud to Raskolnikov. In this chapter, Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus, is identified as the one who anoints Jesus in the next chapter. Whether the four Gospel accounts refer to the same event and woman – there are various theories – is irrelevant for our purposes. What matters is that they are closely associated and have been traditionally and historically conflated.

This scene is evoked when Raskolnikov repents at the feet of Sonya. "Early in the morning, at six o'clock, [Raskolnikov] set off to work, to the bank of a river, where in a shed there was a kiln for *alabaster* and where they crushed it [the alabaster]" (6_2:472; emphasis added). Given the surrounding abundance of biblical imagery – Abraham is in this very paragraph – alabaster rings a bell: in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the anointing oil is contained in an alabaster jar.[45] This is the only use (three uses, one per Gospel) of alabaster in the New Testament. In Luke, the anointer is identified as a sinful woman (likely a prostitute) who mingles the oil on Jesus's feet with her own tears of repentance. Just as this sinful woman weeps tears of remorse amidst broken[46] alabaster at the feet of her Lord, so Raskolnikov, a sinful man, weeps tears of remorse amidst broken alabaster at the feet of his lady.[47] We do not know whether Mary of Bethany weeps as she anoints Jesus's feet in John 12, but she does weep at his feet in John 11 (over her dead brother Lazarus). Thus the tearful prostration of Jesus's anointer is previously read aloud by Sonya, who dreams, while reading, of Raskolnikov's falling, weeping, and believing (6_2:280-81), a dream fulfilled in the epilogue.

The Anointing subtext distinguishes the ethical from the religious in two related ways: repentance and transcendence of moral duty. First, we shall look at repentance, which is framed in this scene, as throughout the New Testament, in terms of release from debt. In Luke, the

[45] Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3; Luke 7:37.
[46] Mark 14:3.
[47] See Kasatkina, "The Epilogue of *Crime and Punishment*," 176.

Anointing scene is interrupted by a brief parable. Warned by Simon the Pharisee that he is being touched by a sinful woman, Jesus responds: "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" (Luke 7:41). When Simon answers correctly that the one with more debt will love more, Jesus rebukes him for his lack of hospitality, commends the woman for her ardent love, and forgives her sins, saying, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace" (7:50). From a strictly ethical standpoint, the Pharisee is superior to the prostitute, but through the religious sphere, by way of an "absolute relation to the absolute," this woman is forgiven and favored. Elsewhere, to the self-righteous religious leaders, Jesus says: "the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31). Surely Dostoevsky had in mind Jesus's mercy toward prostitutes when creating Sonya. In the redemption of a murderer and a prostitute, Dostoevsky portrays the heart of Christianity: acceptance by God *not* by one's own righteousness but by grace, by being forgiven through faith, as is this anointer of Jesus.[48]

The Anointing scene shows the ethical-religious distinction also in what Kierkegaard calls a "teleological suspension of the ethical" or an "absolute duty to God." In Matthew, Mark, and John, the woman who anoints is rebuked by the disciples for wasting the expensive ointment that could have been sold and given to the poor. However, Jesus defends the woman, commending her for preparing him for his burial. He then says to the disciples that they always have the poor with them, but they do not always have him. Second to none in concern for the poor, Jesus either contradicts himself, or else there exists a "teleological suspension of the

[48] Paul writes of "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Phil. 3:8).

ethical." Like Abraham, this woman places "absolute duty to God" above all other duty, even the vitally important duty to the poor.

The transcendence of regular duty in favor of "absolute duty" is seen also in the second subtext, also involving Mary of Bethany. Just as she weeps at the feet of Jesus in John 11 and anoints his feet in John 12, so in Luke 10 Mary of Bethany is again at his feet. Rebuked by Martha for neglecting her duties as a co-hostess, Mary is defended by Jesus, who tells Martha she is concerned about many things, that one thing is necessary (namely a relationship with him), and that Mary has chosen better (Luke 10:41-42). From a strictly ethical point of view, one may share the dutiful, diligent Martha's indignation at her sister's neglect, but from the religious standpoint of a "teleological suspension of the ethical," Mary is preferred.

It is no coincidence that the chief of the moral hierarchy in *Crime and Punishment* is named *Marfa* Petrovna, and that the morally bankrupt Raskolnikov is associated with Mary of Bethany in the epilogue by way of broken alabaster, tears, and silence at the feet of Sonya, who embodies the divine. By way of these subtexts, the novel sharply delimits the ethical, which devolves into tyranny without the religious, as in Ivan's theocracy that eradicates the Russian convict. In accordance with Zosima's vision of the church as a "tender mother" (*mat' nezhnaia*; 14_1:60), Sonya, whom the convicts call "our tender mother" (*mat' ty nasha, nezhnaia*; 6_2:470), shows mercy to the criminal. Debt and the infinite ethical duty that invariably bankrupts are transcended by the "absolute duty" of the personal God-relationship, which breaks psychological chains and relieves the crushing burden of *dolg*.

Conclusion: The Controversial Epilogue

Much of the controversy surrounding the epilogue has to do with a lack of a theoretical framework for understanding the deeply paradoxical Hebraic categories at play in these subtexts,

namely the supra-ethical religious sphere that poses problems for aesthetics. Kierkegaard provides such a framework in his discussion of Abraham, who makes a cryptic appearance at the tail end of Dostoevsky's epilogue (6_2:472). The reader's sudden loss of access to Rasolnikov's interiority, previously accessible through an omniscient narrator and endless dialogue, is striking. Critics, most famously Bakhtin, have criticized the epilogue as a superficial, "monological" appendage of authorial moralizing.[49] And yet Kierkegaard shows us that the epilogue is neither moralizing nor monological.

We have already seen why it is not moralizing: repentance transcends the ethical. The novel's sympathy for the murderer over, say, the dutiful Marfa Petrovna, is ethically (in the strict sense) problematic, as is Jesus's preference for Mary over her dutiful sister and the altruistic disciples, or for the sinful woman over the Pharisee. Ironically, contra the Nietzschean critics[50] who lament the epilogue's upholding the ethical, it is precisely in the epilogue where the ethical is transcended. To be sure, there is big difference between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, and repentance presupposes ethics, but to read the epilogue as *moralizing* is to misread the epilogue.

Nor is the epilogue monologic in the Bakhtinian sense, because the author does not finalize the heroes, whose silence is, ironically, the ultimate fulfillment of Bakhtinian poetics. Bakhtin celebrates dialogue, a lack of which he considers objectifying: the hero no longer speaks

[49] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 39-40, 92. Another good example is Ernest Simmons, who deems the epilogue "neither artistically palatable nor psychologically sound." *Dostoevsky: The Making of a Novelist* (New York: Vintage, 1962), 153. In response to the strong prosecution of the epilogue there has mounted a strong defense. See, for example, George Gibian, "Traditional Symbolism in Crime and Punishment." *PMLA* 70, no. 5 (Dec 1955): 979-996; David Matual, "In Defense of the Epilogue of *Crime and Punishment*," *Studies in the Novel* 24, no. 1 (1992): 26-34; Tatyana Kasatkina, "The Epilogue of *Crime and Punishment*." My observations here contribute to the idea advanced in these readings about continuity of biblical subtext between the epilogue and the rest of the novel.

[50] For example, Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 289.

for himself, is deprived of the final word. In light of Kierkegaard's thought and these biblical subtexts, however, this silence is indicative of the deepest possible interiority and subjectivity.

Kierkegaard's (Johannes *de Silentio*'s) reflections on religious silence clarify Sonya's and Raskolnikov's sudden silence. For Kierkegaard, the ethical is the universal, the sphere of transparency and communicability, so when Abraham ventures beyond the ethical, he becomes incomprehensible to anyone but God: "Abraham remains silent – but he *cannot* speak" (*FT* 113, emphasis in original). The absolute relation is essentially incapable of being externalized or aestheticized: while the tragic hero can express sorrow to sympathetic listeners, Abraham is silent, and so aesthetics cannot do much with him without betraying him (86-87). In the same way, aesthetics cannot do much with repentance (112): "Poetry cannot use repentance; as soon as it is assumed, the scene is internal" (*SLW* 446). It is not that poetry cannot use internality per se, but rather that the absolute relation is internal in such a way that it is cancelled if externalized.

Both of the subtexts we have discussed accord with Kierkegaard's formulation of religious silence. In the Anointing scene, the woman, whether Mary of Bethany or the anonymous prostitute in Luke's Gospel, remain silent in the face of rebuke. Again, Mary says nothing in response to Martha's rebuke. Not unlike Mary of Bethany or Abraham, whose interiority remains hidden, who "*cannot* speak," Raskolnikov and Sonya "wanted to speak, but could not" (6_2:473). That the couple sees the next seven years as seven days (474) alludes clearly to Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 29:20), suggesting, together with Abraham's flocks a few paragraphs prior, that they have entered this biblical mode of personally relating to the absolute, a mode originating with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a mode conceptualized by Kierkegaard.

Likely influenced by Kierkegaard, Erich Auerbach juxtaposes Abraham with Odysseus and, generally, the Hebraic hero with the Homeric, linking the inaccessibility to interiority with

its depth. In Homer, everything is "fully externalized," nothing "must remain hidden and unexpressed," while in the Bible much "remains in darkness," "thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches."[51] This opacity grants the biblical heroes a "multilayeredness" of consciousness: "The Homeric poems, then, though their intellectual, linguistic, and above all syntactical culture appears to be so much more highly developed, are yet comparatively simple in their picture of human beings."[52] Ultimately, argues Auerbach, this depth of consciousness is more representative of reality: "How fraught with background, in comparison [to Homer's], are characters like Saul and David! How entangled and stratified are such human relations as those between David and Absalom, between David and Joab! […] Here we are confronted […] with psychological processes of characters whose depth of background is veritably abysmal."[53] The same might be said of Mary of Bethany.

Whereas Bakhtin supposes that the lack of dialogue objectifies the heroes, Auerbach and, before him, Kierkegaard, maintain that this silence, evoked by the subtexts in Dostoevsky's epilogue, indicates the deepest level of subjectivity. It indicates the ultimate independence of hero from author. It is through silence, ironically, that Dostoevsky attains the ideal of Bakhtinian dialogue, the ultimate freedom of the hero.

If critics of the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* are wrong to dismiss it, it must be granted that the shift in form is indeed a jarring, if perhaps necessary to convey the supra-ethical religious content of absolute interiority. But is this formal shift necessary? Without *The Brothers Karamazov* and Alyosha's conversion, one might be inclined to say yes. However, in light of *The*

[51] Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus's Scar," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2013), 3-23, 6, 9 11.
[52] Ibid., 13.
[53] Ibid., 12.

Brothers Karamazov, it is evident that the religious content can be better woven into the fabric of the novel. That the form of the epilogue does not cohere with that of the novel must be granted to the many detractors of the epilogue.

Raskolnikov's double-movement of faith is a rudimentary approximation of what is to come. The paradox of his movement is weaker than Alyosha's and Zosima's, both in his renunciation and his return to the world. In terms of the first movement, away from the world, we see the difference between tragic resignation, a despair that still clings despairingly to the self, and monastic renunciation, wherein the self is annihilated before God (more on this next chapter). For Raskolnikov to experience repentance and rebirth, he must, by definition, experience this annihilation, but we readers cannot catch a glimpse of it; it is fully internal. Moments before his conversion, he still does not repent (6_2:468). In terms of the second movement, return to the world, though Raskolnikov commits to a woman and to the earth, to temporal life, he is still removed from civil society and does not feel the full weight of historical time: seven years are for him a moment. He is not as "incarnate," so to speak, as is the fully integrated Alyosha.

The Brothers Karamazov greatly expands this kernel expressed in the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment*, dwelling deeply on the paradox of faith. Dostoevsky's final novel breaks down the various stages of faith into their components so that we may see them more clearly. The novel depicts the religious transcendence of the aesthetic (what Kierkegaard calls dying to immediacy); the religious transcendence of the ethical (what Kierkegaard calls becoming eternally guilty); and then – from a point of deepest disconnect from temporality, from a point of total, monastic renunciation of finitude – the religious return to immediacy (what Kierkegaard

calls a new creation by virtue of the absurd). And Dostoevsky does this indirectly, without violating the interiority of his characters. Let us turn now to the religious.

Chapter Five

Fear in the Hands of the Living God: The Costly Comfort of the Religious

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."
~ Zosima's Mysterious Visitor, *The Brothers Karamazov*

"The essential existential pathos in relation to an eternal happiness is purchased so dearly that in a finite sense it must be plainly regarded as lunacy to purchase it."
~ Johannes Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

At the beginning of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in a note "from the author," Dostoevsky expresses trepidation that readers will not understand his hero's heroism: "And what if they read the novel and do not see, do not agree with the remarkableness of my Aleksey Fyodorovich?" (14_1:5). His fears are warranted: Shestov is the first of many to question Alyosha's heroism, writing of "this infant's babbling."[1] Dostoevsky's problem is the one we addressed at the end of the last chapter: how to convey religious inwardness, whose heroism is essentially hidden, resistant to aestheticization?[2] Unlike the knight of faith, the knight of resignation or tragic hero possesses "that distant and aristocratic nature by which the knight of the infinite is recognized" (*FT* 39). One thinks of Stavrogin. In contrast, the knight of faith, though he likewise makes the

[1] Shestov, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, 221.
[2] Here is a verse that captures this less dramatic but greater, inner heroism: "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Prov. 16:32). Wrath is highly conducive to aestheticization: think of the opening verse of *The Iliad*. Self-control is much more subtly conveyed. In the opening scene in Zosima's cell, the elder's heroic serenity is easily outshone by the wrathful family drama.

movement of infinity, returns to the finite. And he returns to the finite so fully that he might be mistaken for "a tax collector" or a "bourgeois philistine" (*FT* 39). One may conceal the deepest interiority beneath an inconspicuous exterior. God himself could be a carpenter from a backwater town. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

In delineating the stages of the religious, in breaking them down into their components, Kierkegaard helps bring to light Alyosha's hidden heroism. As we shall see, the innocent-looking novice has been through spiritual trials that the uninitiated can hardly begin to imagine, trials that bring Zosima's mysterious visitor, a man of tremendous willpower and psychological strength, to the grave. But Kierkegaard also conceptualizes the emergence from these harrowing trials to joy, and the essential, Christian link between joy and suffering.

In chapters one and three, we considered the sanctity of the aesthetic and the ethical. This sanctity corresponds to the second movement of faith: return to the finite and to oneself. In chapters two and four, we considered the limits of the aesthetic and the ethical. These limits correspond to the first movement of faith: renunciation of the finite, dying to the world and to oneself. This dying and living is captured by the epigraph of *The Brothers Karamazov*: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24, KJV). Kierkegaard writes of how these two movements – renunciation and recuperation – must ultimately occur simultaneously for the knight of faith. But this paradoxical double-movement requires practice, and the believer must begin by making the first movement.

This first movement, renunciation, Kierkegaard conceptualizes as Religiousness A. Culminating in guilt, Religiousness A is "the annihilation in which the individual sets himself aside in order to find God" (*CUP* 560). It is not necessarily Christian (*CUP* 555). The second movement, rebirth, Kierkegaard conceptualizes as Religiousness B. This movement culminates

in radical innocence (justification by faith, total forgiveness, rebirth) and is uniquely Christian. These categories and their interplay help us to see the same dynamic in Dostoevsky, a dynamic inadequately conceptualized in the scholarship.

"Rosy Christianity" Readings

Noticing the radical life-affirmation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in particular by the merry Zosima and his disciple Alyosha, readers of Dostoevsky have often failed to notice the novel's severity, the spiritual rigors prerequisite to this hard-won joy. Konstanin Leontiev, for example, is the first of many to deem Dostoevsky's religion "rosy Christianity."[3] He complains that Dostoevsky's works (allegedly) say nothing about the fear of the Lord.[4] In a letter to Vasily Rozanov from the monastery, he complains that Zosima is not otherworldly enough.[5] The Nietzschean Rozanov, in contrast, approves of Zosima's world-affirmation, but he likewise considers Zosima less than Christian, more pagan.[6] In terms of Kierkegaard's religious stage, both commentators highlight Religiousness B, the return to immediacy, to the neglect of Religiousness A, dying to immediacy and to oneself, becoming guilty. The monk, as one might expect, wants A without B; the Nietzschean, as one might expect, wants B without A.

Others likewise doubt the centrality of guilt in Dostoevsky from a religious standpoint. Seeing Dostoevsky's affirmation of corporeality as quasi-pagan, Merezhkovsky denies the

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[3] See Crone, "Nietzschean, All Too Nietzschean?" 105.
[4] See Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*, 7.
[5] "In Optina *The Brothers Karamazov* is *not recognized as a correctly Orthodox work*; and the *elder Zosima not at all*, neither in *teaching* nor in *character*, is *like Father Amvrosy*. […] Fr. Amvrosy *above all* had a strictly *ecclesiastical mysticism* [*mistika*] […]. Fr. Zosima (through whom Fed. Mikh. speaks!) has above all morality, 'love,' 'love,' etc., but his mysticism [*mistika*] is *very* weak" (italics in original). E. V. Ivanova, comp., *V. V. Rozanov i K. N. Leont'ev: Materialy neizdannoi knigi "Literaturnye izgnanniki," Perepiska, Neopublikovannye teksty, Stat'i o K. N. Leont'eve, Kommentarii* (St. Petersburg: Rostok, 2014), 219.
[6] See Crone, "Nietzschean, All Too Nietzschean?" 105.

reality of guilt, deeming Raskolnikov innocent of his crime in the first place.[7] In a similar vein, Ivanov claims that the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* depicts "the spiritual revival of a man who is inherently good, but has gone darkly astray."[8] Jackson even calls Dostoevsky a Pelagian: man has "a capacity to effect his own salvation – a Pelagian point of view that Dostoevsky shares with Goethe."[9] Cassedy adds another accusation of heresy, calling Dostoevsky a pantheist.[10] All of the above perceive the affirmation of immediacy (B) without fully accounting for the death to immediacy that precedes it (A). This makes sense in light of Kierkegaard, for the religious movement is largely hidden, and it is difficult to discern whether someone enjoys immediacy directly or enjoys immediacy after having renounced it (*FT* 38).

Contrary to those who doubt the centrality of guilt in Dostoevsky, one of Zosima's core teachings is that "all are guilty, and for all" (14_1:275). Alfred Bem aptly notes that "Dostoevsky's focus is not crime at all, but its corollary – guilt."[11] The agony of a guilty conscience is a theme that pervades Dostoevsky. In response to Leontiev's complaint about no fear of the Lord, we might indicate that one of the few Bible verses directly cited in *The Brothers*

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[7] Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 282. Compare Shestov: "Raskolnikov is not a murderer; he is guilty of no crime." *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, 214.
[8] Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, 13.
[9] Robert Louis Jackson, Preface to the Second Edition of *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art* (Bloomington, IN: Physsardt, 1978), ix-xi, x. For the opposite view, see George Grant, who writes, "Dostoevsky's works are a vast anti-Pelagian treatise. Although totally free, man cannot save himself; he must be redeemed. Raskolnikov has to wait for the prostitute and Siberia before repentance is granted to him; it is not until Mitya Karamazov is convicted for a murder which he has not done, that he can sing a hymn of joy to God; Shatov by watching his wife give birth to another man's child discovers the glory of God just before he is murdered; but Kirillov and Stavrogin are destroyed by their very attempt to be their own redeemers." *Collected Works of George Grant*, vol. 2 of 4 (Toronto: U of Toronto P. 2002), 413.
[10] Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, 173.
[11] Alfred L. Bem, "The Problem of Guilt," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations* of Crime and Punishment: *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 77-80, 77.

Karamazov (and one of only two that include the reference in the text) is Hebrews 10:31, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (14_1:281). Zosima brings this verse to the attention of Mikhail, his "mysterious visitor," in a scene that is all about what Kierkegaard calls "the totality of guilt-consciousness in the single individual before God" (*CUP* 554). Kierkegaard helps us not to be confused or misled by the ultimate merriness of Zosima and Alyosha, but rather to see the paradoxical connection between their happy innocence and their guilt, between rebirth and renunciation, between suffering and joy, between dying and bearing fruit.

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: The Hidden Heroism of the Religious

For Kierkegaard, the ultimate task for the knight of faith is "to relate himself simultaneously to his absolute τέλος and to the relative – not by mediating them but by relating himself absolutely to his absolute τέλος and relatively to the relative" (*CUP* 407). But this double-movement is much easier said than done. If it looks easy on paper, in existence it is very difficult and acquired only with practice (ibid.). So the individual must begin not with this simultaneous double-movement but with a single-movement, orienting toward the absolute and renouncing the relative.

Absolute Orientation

This first step, this single movement away from the relative toward the absolute, Kierkegaard parallels with the monastic movement (*CUP* 387-431). While for Kierkegaard the monastic movement is not the highest and has its pitfalls, it is preferable to modern mediation and bourgeois-philistine complacency in that it at least has absolute passion and takes the first step of faith. But we shall address this later. Two chapters, eight and nine, are devoted to monasticism, a major category for both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, who use it very similarly. For now, the point is that the monk has the virtue of valuing the absolute, for which he forsakes

the relative. "The first true expression of relating oneself to the absolute τέλος is to renounce everything" (*CUP* 404). In making his hero a catechumen, Dostoevsky's thinking aligns with Kierkegaard's, which explains, specifically to the modern person for whom monasticism seems ridiculous, the heroism of Alyosha's passionate decision.

Dying to Immediacy

The second step is dying to immediacy, which we might also call dying to the aesthetic (see chapter two on its limits). It might seem that once one has oriented oneself absolutely toward the absolute, then one is ready to relate relatively to the relative, but this is not the case. Again, it looks easy on paper, but existence is something else (*CUP* 431). Before making the double-movement, the individual must take "the enormous detour that is dying to immediacy," that is, "suffering as dying to immediacy, suffering as the distinctive mark of an existing person's relation to the absolute τέλος" (*CUP* 526). While dying to immediacy need not have a physical expression (*CUP* 439),[12] Kierkegaard, like Dostoevsky, uses analogies of physical suffering (in particular suffocation) to depict this dying. "Immediacy expires in misfortune; in suffering the religious begins to breathe" (*CUP* 436). Images of expiration continue in a passage worth quoting for its relevance to Zosima's brother Markel, as we shall see:

> The effect that a person's conception of God or of his eternal happiness should have is that it transforms his entire existence in relation to it, a transformation that is a dying to immediacy. […] This is the cessation of immediacy and the death warrant of annihilation. Just like the bird that flutters about carefreely when it is captive, just like the fish (which undauntedly cuts through the water and unerringly steers between the enchanted regions

[12] "Just as Lafontaine sat weeping and made his heroes unhappy in three volumes (quite properly a poetic task), so the religious speaker, if I may say so, should have his fun in making his heroes just as fortunate as they want to be, turn them into kings and emperors and millionaires and happy lovers who win the girl and so on – but he must also see to procuring suffering for them in their inner beings. The more good fortune and favor in the external world, when there nevertheless is suffering, the more clear it is that this is in the inner world, precisely in the inner world" (*CUP* 438-39). Tolstoy does this at the end of *Anna Karenina*: replete with good fortune (family, health, wealth), Levin experiences inner turmoil to the point of near-suicide.

> of the shoals) when it is lying on the ground outside its element, so, too, the religious person is captive, because absoluteness is not directly the element of a finite existence. Just like someone who is sick and cannot move because it pains all over, and just like someone who is sick but cannot keep from moving as long as there is life, even though it pains all over, so, too, the religious person, in his human lowliness, is bound in the finite with the consciousness of the absolute conception of God. (*CUP* 484)

This dying corresponds to the first half of the epigraph of *The Brothers Karamazov*: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single seed" (John 12:24). In accord with the context of this verse, Jesus's predicting his own physical death, this dying to the world is emblematized by the suffocating, bedbound Markel. Ultimately, Markel affirms immediacy (and Jesus rises again), but this affirmation comes only in and through the deepest disjunction with immediacy (for Jesus, the cross), pictured by Markel's terminal illness and excruciating suffering.

Guilt

The third step is becoming guilty before God, the "eternal recollecting of guilt-consciousness" (*CUP* 535), which we might call dying to the ethical or acknowledging that one is ethically "bankrupt" (*SLW* 476). Whereas the ethical involves self-assertion, an assertion of one's higher or "underlying" self, the religious involves "self-annihilation before God" (*CUP* 572). The suffering of guilt is sharper than that of dying to immediacy: "now the existing person is really in agony" (*CUP* 527). In the religious, "the positive is distinguished by the negative: the relation to an eternal happiness is distinguished by suffering. Now the negative expression is decidedly stronger: the relation is distinguished by the totality of guilt-consciousness" (*CUP* 532-33).[13] This totality is achieved when the individual

[13] This guilt is "the decisive expression for an existing person's pathos-filled relation to an eternal happiness, and in such a way that every existing person who does not have this consciousness is *eo ipso* not relating himself to his eternal happiness" (*CUP* 527).

> joins the conception of God together with the conception of his guilt, whether it is ever so little – no, wait a minute, the individual does not know this, because this, after all, is the comparative that leads astray. When the conception of God is included, the category of guilt changes into a category of quality. Joined together with the comparative as the criterion, guilt becomes quantitative; directly face-to-face with the absolute quality, guilt becomes dialectical as quality. (*CUP* 530)

In other words, "human justice sentences to life imprisonment only for the third offense, but eternity sentences forever the very first time" (*CUP* 533). That the religious is "simply and solely qualitatively dialectic" (*SLW* 443) is expressed in the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28). Kierkegaard helps us to recognize that this step of becoming guilty – joining the conception of one's guilt to the conception of God – is precisely what Alyosha does, as we shall see. And this is heroic, a trial of introspection not for the faint of heart.

Kierkegaard also helps us to see how Dostoevsky reveals this heroism indirectly, magnifying the trial of guilt and confession in the scene of "The Mysterious Visitor." Kierkegaard writes of the severity of the trial: if "someone says that no human being can endure such an eternal recollecting of guilt, that it is bound to lead to insanity or to death, then please note who it is who is speaking, because finite common sense frequently speaks that way in order to preach indulgence" (*CUP* 536). Mikhail, the visitor, literally dies from the psychological-spiritual torment of guilt and confession of his murder, and he is suspected of insanity, as is Markel, who likewise speaks of his totality of guilt. It is Mikhail who reads from Zosima's Bible Hebrews 10:31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Yet Leontiev claims that there is no fear of the Lord in Dostoevsky, and others claim there is no guilt.

Ultimately, Mikhail, like Markel, affirms immediacy from his deathbed. He receives forgiveness and the concomitant peace of conscience that enables him to enjoy his wife and

children for the first time in his life. But before this brief return to the finite, "the eternal recollecting of guilt as the highest expression must come between, lest the spheres be confused and the essentially Christian be chattered into childish categories of the forgiveness of sin" (*CUP* 538-39*). Many commentators, focusing exclusively on the merry return to immediacy, accuse Dostoevsky of such childish categories, but this idea runs aground on scenes like "The Mysterious Visitor." The death of Mikhail highlights the heroism of Alyosha, who is no "infant babbler," as Shestov would have it, but a "champion" (14_1:328). His courage, largely hidden but subtly brought to light, is in his throwing himself into the hands of the living God.

Rebirth

After these three steps of Religiousness A – absolute orientation toward the absolute, dying to immediacy, and guilt – comes the next stage, Religiousness B, which is rebirth, wherein guilt is relieved and one is reborn (*CUP* 538*). We shall discuss the paradoxes of regeneration later. For now, the point is that this step corresponds to the second half of the epigraph: "but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." According to Jesus, only through this agonizing death can one truly live; only by first losing oneself can one truly find oneself (John 12:25, the next verse; cf. Matt. 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24). As Dostoevsky depicts Alyosha's death in various ways, so he depicts his hero's rebirth in the chapter "Cana of Galilee." Kierkegaard helps us understand Alyosha's leaving the monastery: "The person who has made the monastic movement has only one movement left, the movement of the absurd" (*FT* 101).

The Hidden Heroism of the Religious in Dostoevsky

It is noteworthy that the epigraph appears thrice in the novel, each time connected with one of these three steps of Religiousness A. Its first appearance is as the epigraph on the first page, just before the reader learns of Alyosha's orienting toward the absolute by entering the

monastery. The next appearance is in connection with Markel (14_1:259), who emblematizes dying to immediacy. And the third and last appearance is in connection with Mikhail, the mysterious visitor (281), who emblematizes guilt. Only after these three appearances of the epigraph, which speaks of the necessity of death for new life, does Alyosha experience regeneration.

Absolute Orientation: The Monastic Movement

It is no coincidence that both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard make use of monasticism as a picture of this step. At the beginning of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Alyosha enters the monastery, in which some of the action of the novel takes place. We shall examine monasticism, its merits and its hazards, in detail in chapters eight and nine. For now, we note that Alyosha's joining the monastery pictures an absolute orientation toward the absolute, just as Kierkegaard formulates.

Dying to Immediacy: Markel

Just as the initial expression of existential pathos (orientation toward the absolute) is pictured by monasticism for both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard, so the essential expression (dying to immediacy and to oneself) is pictured by physical death for both. This is no coincidence: the context of John 12:24 is Jesus's physical death. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, this counterintuitive process – resurrection through death – is embodied by Markel, Zosima's older brother, whose conversion and death take place, significantly, during Lent and Easter.

Even before his terminal illness, Markel's congenital infirmity (14_1:261) prevents him from participating in immediate life like other boys. "Strangely silent," he has no friends, and one year before his illness he prophesies: "I am not a dweller on this earth among you, I may not live another year" (260-61). In a certain sense, Markel has made the move of resignation, yet it is more tragic than monastic, for he is an atheist (261). However, as he suddenly begins to die of

consumption, as his body suffers, he comes to relate to an eternal happiness and, however counterintuitively, to affirm life, even temporal life, ecstatically. He makes the double-movement of faith.

The counterintuitiveness of this dynamic is seen in the shock of Markel's friends and family. When with a "sudden change" of heart Markel, "quiet, meek, smiling, sick but with glad and joyful countenance," allows his old nurse to light a lamp before the icon, apologizes for prohibiting her in the past, and suggests that they both pray to God, "these words seemed strange" to Zosima and his family (14_1:261-62). His mother responds with perplexity to his affirmations of life as joy: "what sort of happiness is there for you when you burn with fever all night and cough as if your chest was about to burst?" (262). When he tells them not to cry and reaffirms that "life is paradise," "everyone marveled at his words, so strangely and decisively did he speak" (262). As he proceeds to preach, "with more and more tenderness, rejoicing and all atremble with love," about universal and especially his own personal guilt (the next stage of the religious, to be discussed) and about how everyone should love and serve one another and bless life, even temporal life, his mother and doctor ascribe these words to his illness and to impending madness (262). However deranged Markel's joy seems to his companions, the link between suffering, here pictured by extreme physical torment, and eternal (and even temporal) happiness accords with the counterintuitive religious stage as unfolded by Kierkegaard. "If […] merely a great and comprehensive plan, when it should be implanted and held fast in a person's mind, has shattered the fragile vessel; if it is supposed to have happened that a girl by being loved by the one she admired is annihilated in the suffering of happiness – no wonder then that the Jew assumed that the sight of God was death and the pagans that the God-relationship was the harbinger of madness!" (*CUP* 484)

Kierkegaard helps explain the seeming "strangeness" of Markel's joy: "it might seem strange to say that the essential expression of existential pathos […] is suffering. But this is only apparently the case, and again the sign of the religious sphere is manifest here – that the positive is distinguished by the negative" (*CUP* 432). In general, the religious is paradoxical: "revelation is marked by mystery, eternal happiness by suffering, the certitude of faith by uncertainty, easiness by difficulty, truth by absurdity" (*CUP* 432*). Thus the religious seems especially strange to "finite commonsensicality": "The essential existential pathos in relation to an eternal happiness is purchased so dearly that in a finite sense it must be plainly regarded as lunacy to purchase it" (386). An embodiment of "finite commonsensicality," Markel's German doctor perceives his patient's belonging to a different sphere: "He is not dweller on this earth" (14_1:262). It is at this moment that the doctor ascribes this otherworldliness to madness. Suspected of madness and jesting about his impending death (14_1:262), Markel embodies this imagined sufferer: dead to the finite, he is nevertheless "strengthened by the very same conception that destroyed him, by the conception of God" (*CUP* 488). In the religious, where the positive is distinguished by the negative, such captivity indicates a higher freedom (*CUP* 534). In the very same rasping breath in which he jests about death, Markel affirms life, and not just eternal life but finitude, namely the beauty of the paradisical garden outside his window (14_1:262). Though apparently the antithesis of life, "this sickness is not unto death" (*CUP* 488).

Alyosha likewise undergoes this dying to immediacy, but it is harder to depict a happy, healthy nineteen-year-old at odds with immediacy. Besides his entering the monastery, we get only glimpses of this death to immediacy in his implied fasting, for example: he has frequently not eaten in the novel. One of the ways Dostoevsky magnifies this death to the finite is through Markel's terminal illness. Another way is through Zosima's celibacy, which we shall address in

chapter eight. Not only does Zosima die to immediacy; he also, like Markel before him, becomes infinitely guilty, and the inward suffering of guilt separates the sufferer even further from immediate joy, makes the eternal happiness even less recognizable, even more counterintuitive.

Guilt: Zosima's Mysterious Visitor

As Bem notes,[14] Dostoevsky is preoccupied not so much with crime as with guilt, a central theme of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Throughout the novel we see the secret pangs of conscience among various characters, for example those who indirectly facilitate Dmitry's supposed patricide. Ivan, Grushenka, and Katerina Ivanovna all eventually confess to their essential culpability in the matter with Dmitry. But the agonizing process of recognizing one's guilt is distilled in the scene with Zosima's Mysterious Visitor.

Far from being happy like Zosima, the Mysterious Visitor is described as "strict" (14_1:273), "serious and strict" (274), "strict and gloomy," and "severe" (279). The cause of his misery is his secret guilt (for a murder he committed long ago), as he confesses to Zosima. "For fourteen years I've been in hell" (280). His captivity of conscience is illustrated by Kierkegaard:

> He is forever imprisoned, buckled in the harness of guilt, and never gets out of the harness […]; not even at night is he essentially out of the harness. Call this recollecting of guilt a chain and say that it is never removed from the prisoner, and you will describe only one side of the matter, because a chain is most closely connected only with the idea of the loss of freedom, but the eternal recollecting of guilt is also a burden that must be dragged along from place to place in time. Therefore, rather call this eternal recollecting of guilt a harness and say of the prisoner: He will never be unharnessed. (*CUP* 534)

The Mysterious Visitor tries to free himself from these chains with penance, but to no avail. After the murder, Mikhail, as he is called, appeases his conscience with charitable work, which gives him temporary relief (14_1:278). He continues to practice philanthropy, for which he gains a reputation as "righteous" (275). But this does not spare him from tormenting rumination (278).

[14] Bem, "The Problem of Guilt," 77. See above.

He tries to return to immediacy by marrying and starting a family, and he tries to obtain more righteousness by "zealously fulfilling his duty" as a husband and father (279). But this plan backfires: before his wife and the "innocent, clear faces" of his children, he feels his guilt and hypocrisy only more acutely (279). So he seeks another form of penance: "I'll atone for it all with this secret torment of mine" (279). He figures that "for the spilled blood [he] was punished by torments" (280). But fourteen years of torment bring him no relief.

Mikhail's penance fails precisely according to Kierkegaard's thought. "Recollection's eternal storing up of guilt is the expression for existential pathos, the highest expression, even higher than the most inspired penance that wants to make up for the guilt" (*CUP* 538). In other words, "All self-inflicted penance is a lower satisfaction, not only because it is self-inflicted, but because even the most enthusiastic penance makes guilt finite by making it commensurable, whereas its merit is inwardly to discover guilt that evades the attention not only of the police but even of Nemesis. […] the penance of the Middle Ages […] is still a childlike and enthusiastic venture" (*CUP* 542). Kierkegaard further explains: "The childlikeness of self-inflicted penance is that the individual still wants piously to persuade himself that the punishment is worse than the recollecting of the guilt. No, the most rigorous punishment is the recollecting itself" (*CUP* 550). This idea, that the painful recollecting is the true punishment as juxtaposed with the relatively superficial punishment by external authorities, is essential to both *Crime and Punishment* and to Dostoevsky's earlier work, *Notes from the Dead House*, about Siberian labor camp. Accordingly, it is just when Mikhail gets away with the crime, just when he evades the police and all external punishment, that "the punishment began" (14_1:278).

As Markel's dying to immediacy is analogized and accompanied by physical death, so Mikhail's suffering from guilt is likewise analogized and accompanied by physical death. As

Mikhail hesitates to make his confession, Zosima points him to John 12:24 (14_1:281), just as he cites the epigraph in connection with Markel. When Mikhail makes his confession, his commonsensical audience deems him insane (282), as a similar audience deems Markel insane when he speaks of his infinite guilt. Though he physically dies shortly after his confession, though experiencing hellish torment, though miserable by all appearances, Mikhail relates himself to an eternal happiness. That he does so is evidenced not only by his suffering of guilt but also in his explicit faith in the Second Coming (276).

While he relates to an eternal happiness, Mikhail manages, like Markel, to affirm the finite and the temporal just before death. He tells Zosima that he is finally happy, that he can finally love his wife and children (14_1:283). No longer alienated from immediacy by his guilt, he is able, if only for his brief remaining time on earth, to make the double-movement of faith, having both renounced and now returned to immediacy, even the immediacy of his little children. That this is nothing less than the miracle of rebirth is suggested by the fact that his confession takes place on his birthday (281).

Markel's agony illustrates the severity of the trial Alyosha has been through. When Dmitry confesses his sexual sin to Alyosha, Alyosha responds that he is essentially the same, that it is only a matter of quantity, not of quality (14_1:101). Alyosha's insight is made possible by his association with the absolute: "Joined together with the comparative as the criterion, guilt becomes quantitative; directly face-to-face with the absolute quality, guilt becomes dialectical as quality" (*CUP* 530). Being in the monastery has allowed Alyosha to see his essential guilt with painful clarity. Writing of the merits of monasticism, Kierkegaard mentions "the solitary and silent association with the absolute, in which the least loss is an absolute loss, in which the slightest regression is perdition, in which there is no distraction (none at all, but, like a sunstroke,

the recollection of the ever-so-slight regression burns the unhappy one, who has no place for escape), in which every weakness, every flatness, every state of low spirits is like a mortal sin" (*CUP* 417). Just as Markel, after all his torment, receives a second birth, so does Alyosha.

Rebirth: Cana of Galilee

Having oriented toward the absolute, having died to immediacy, and having acquired a total guilt-consciousness, Alyosha is primed for next step, returning to immediacy as "a new creation by virtue of the absurd" (*FT* 40). "The person who has made the monastic movement has only one movement left, the movement of the absurd" (*FT* 101). Just before his rebirth, Alyosha dies to immediacy and to himself (his self-righteousness) decisively. He loses his last worldly hope, his beloved Elder whom he idolized (14_1:306-7), as well as his last shred of self-righteousness. One of the problems of monasticism, which we shall address further in chapter nine, is "the error of presumed meritoriousness" (*CUP* 405). Alyosha loses any of such merit when he despairingly succumbs to Rakitin's temptation and pursues Grushenka, abandoning his monastic celibacy. To his surprise, however, Grushenka shows him compassion for his loss, gives him an "onion," and he returns to the monastery grounds, where he experiences a spiritual transformation.

As he prays by Zosima's corpse, listening to the Gospel reading of John 2, where Jesus turns water into wine, Alyosha experiences a vision by which he enters Religiousness B: he receives the "forgiveness of sin [as] the paradoxical satisfaction by virtue of the absurd" (*CUP* 538*) and returns to immediacy. Alyosha has died to immediacy, but in John 2 he hears of Jesus's visitation to and celebration of immediacy: "It was not men's grief, but their joy Christ visited, He worked His first miracle to help men's joy" (14_1:326). As the walls expand into an epiphanic vision, Alyosha tells the alive-and-well Zosima that he is afraid to look at God.

Zosima responds, “Do not fear Him. He is terrible in His greatness, awful in His sublimity, but infinitely merciful. He has made Himself like unto us from love and rejoices with us” (327). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, as we have seen, but this God before whom all go morally bankrupt is infinitely merciful, hence Zosima’s words: “Do not fear him.”

This category of mercy eclipses the ethical. Zosima says to Alyosha, “What are all our deeds?” (14_1:327). Second to none in his emphasis on the good deeds of “active love” (the ethical is eternally valid), Zosima knows a higher category, the essence of Christianity: that one’s salvation does not depend upon one’s own righteousness. Ultimately, salvation is an unmerited gift, and good works (which Zosima mandates in this very passage) are not the *root* of salvation but rather the *fruit* of salvation, whose root is faith.[15] Paul formulates this dynamic at great length, but one of its most lapidary instances is in three verses in Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Justification does not depend upon one’s good works.[16] But it surely yields good works: the next verse says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10). Accordingly, Alyosha becomes “new creation by virtue of the absurd” (*FT* 40), having grasped this core Gospel tenet of salvation by grace. He runs outside and falls to the ground in worship, and he leaves the monastery “in accordance with the words of his elder, who had bidden him to ‘dwell in the world’” (14_1:328). Contra the “rosy Christianity”

[15] This fruit/root metaphor traces back to ancient Christian writings and to the Bible itself, and it has especial felicity in modern English because of the rhyme.
[16] See Galatians and Romans, e.g., for a fuller treatment of this topic. Jesus puts it briefly throughout the Gospels: “Your faith has saved you” (Luke 7:50, e.g.).

readings, Alyosha has died to the world in a terrible, fearsome trial, and his joyous, fearless return to the world is very different from a pantheistic first immediacy. It is hard-won.

This paradoxical double-movement, becoming a "new creation by virtue of the absurd," requires a "break with immanence" (*CUP* 569-71), a break with oneself. This is exactly how Dostoevsky describes Alyosha's change: the events surrounding Zosima's death "constituted in [Alyosha's] soul, as it were, a fracture [*perelom*] and overturn [*perevorot*], which shook but also strengthened his mind definitively [*okonchatel'no*] for his whole life and toward a definite end [*tseli*] (14_1:297). This break, this rebirth, has to do with multiple layers of paradox that we shall address in chapter eleven. Having addressed the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious in part one of this study, we now turn to part two to address the fundamental dialectical structure of the interrelation of the spheres, of heaven and earth.

Part Two

Dialectics: Synthesis, Separation, Paradox

Chapter Six

1840s + 1860s = 1830s: The Validity of Synthesis

"Dostoevsky was a dialectician of genius."
~ Nikolai Berdiaev, *Dostoevsky's Worldview*

"The psychologist and the mystic are supported by a powerful dialectic."
~ Viacheslav Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*

"I have had a complete course in dialectics."
~ Anonymous Aesthete A, *Either/Or*

Introduction to Part Two

In part one of this study, we examined the existence-spheres, the sanctity and limits of the aesthetic, the sanctity and limits of the ethical, and the supremacy of the religious. In the most recent chapter, we considered how the religious eclipses yet paradoxically sanctifies the aesthetic and the ethical, how one must die to the world and to oneself to be renewed. Now, in part two, we delve deeper into the paradoxical nature of this dynamic. As it turns out, the "paradox dialectic" is emblematized by the paradoxical unity of the dual nature of Jesus the Godman, whom Kierkegaard calls the "Absolute Paradox" (*PF* 37, e.g.). Dunning writes, "Here a genuine unity is achieved, but one that accentuates rather than supersedes the contradiction between the two poles. The most famous historical example of such a dialectic is doubtless the Chalcedonian claim that Christ is one person in two distinct natures."[1] Clearly, this dialectic is not Hegelian, as

[1] Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*, 8.

we have seen in part one: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, while they may be *combined*, are qualitatively distinct, not to be *conflated*.

In recognizing Dostoevsky's non-Hegelian unity, scholars have proposed alternative forms of unity. While these forms account for much of Dostoevsky's universe (and *the* universe), they do not account for the paradox dialectic among the spheres and (ultimately) between heaven and earth. As we shall see, the Absolute Paradox is very peculiar and presents serious problems to the human mind, problems Kierkegaard elucidates with dialectical precision. For Kierkegaard, the highest level of comprehension, in terms of the Absolute Paradox, is to see with perfect clarity the utter incomprehensibility.

One way to view both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky is in terms of the ancient dichotomy of Athens and Jerusalem, also called Hellenism and Hebraism or, more broadly, reason and revelation. The dialectical modes of synthesis and separation make sense and are thus "Hellenic" in the sense of "reasonable" (not necessarily Greek). For example, a dialectic of separation is famously presented by Aristotle, whose logical laws help make distinctions. A dialectic of synthesis is famously presented by Hegel, whose system helps mediate oppositions. While some draw parallels between Hegelian synthesis and Heraclitus's unity of opposites,[2] others see Heraclitan unity as more complex. Ksana Blank, for example, perceives in Heraclitus, and in Lao Tzu and in patristics, an antinomic unity of thesis and antithesis without synthesis.[3] While this dialectical form is more nuanced than synthesis or separation, while it may be called "paradoxical," it is nevertheless comprehensible and finds ancient and widespread expression across various cultures and individuals who sense a yin-yang reciprocity in the universe.

[2] This well-known parallel is noted by Kierkegaard (*CUP* 307*).
[3] Blank, *Dostoevsky's Dialectics*, 7-10. See our discussion in chapter eight.

The paradox dialectic, however, is utterly incomprehensible, as Kierkegaard explains, and thus it is not Hellenic or native to human reason but rather Hebraic or biblical. If its emblem is the Absolute Paradox of the Godman, the paradox dialectic can be traced all the way back to the book of Genesis, to Abraham's binding of Isaac. Kierkegaard seeks "to draw out […] the dialectical aspects implicit in the story of Abraham (*FT* 53). As we have seen in part one of this study, the paradox of (Abrahamic) faith involves a simultaneous renunciation of the finite – an absolute distinction between heaven and earth – and a recuperation of the finite – a paradoxical surmounting of this insurmountable distinction.

Therefore, approaches that apply "Hellenic" dialectical modes to Dostoevsky, whether a tragic separation of the spheres or idealistic synthesis of the spheres, misrepresent the Hebraic interrelation of heaven and earth in his works. These Hellenic dialectical modes are valid and have their indisputable place, as we shall see. But they run aground on what Kierkegaard calls "absolute distinctions": between the absolute and the relative (*CUP* 414), between time and eternity (*CUP* 570), between God and man (*CUP* 492). They run aground on what Kierkegaard famously calls the "infinite qualitative difference between God and man" (*SD* 127, *PC* 140), a difference that defies mediation. Let us turn now to synthesis. Before addressing the limits of synthesis, we turn now, in the present chapter, to its validity.

Anti-Synthesis Readings

When scholarship on Dostoevsky claims that he critiques synthesis, it is basically correct. Shestov's apt words are worth repeating in this study: "both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard (the first without realizing it, the second fully aware of it) saw their life work as a struggle with, and

victory over, that system of ideas embodied in Hegelian philosophy."[4] This point is a welcome corrective to German Idealist readings that view Dostoevsky as an inveterate utopian. True, he had his flare-ups, as in the (in)famous Pushkin Speech, but his mature fiction is overwhelmingly opposed to German Romantic Idealism and its visions of ultimate synthesis. *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *Demons*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* posit "the infinite qualitative difference between God and man." These sober novels depict the carnage that ensues from the self-apotheosis that blurs this sharp line. Synthesis has its limits.

Given Dostoevsky's challenge to synthesis, scholars have suggested alternative forms of unity that underlie his works. Bakhtin, like Shestov, recognizes Dostoevsky's ultimately anti-Hegelian stance, explicitly mentioning Hegel.[5] Instead of uniting via synthesis, "the incompatible elements of Dostoevsky's material […] combine into a higher unity, so to speak, of a second order, into the unity of a polyphonic novel […] the complex unity of an Einsteinian universe."[6] And yet the nature of this alternative to Hegelian unity is not clearly defined by Bakhtin, as Gary Saul Morson notes.[7] Nor is it "clearly defined in Bakhtin scholarship," writes Ksana Blank, who aptly defines this Bakhtinian higher unity as "antinomical: it contains both a thesis and antithesis without expectation of synthesis."[8] We shall return to Blank and to this mysterious unity in chapter eight. For now, what matters is that Dostoevsky's ultimate unity is not synthesis.

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[4] Lev Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, 12. In words equally applicable to Kierkegaard, Norman Cameron writes, "Dostoevsky does not admit a philosophy without a premise. His very refined dialectic is based on a fundamental premise given by the first and determining decision taken by man." In Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, 113n1 (translator's note).
[5] Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 35-37.
[6] Ibid., 20-21.
[7] Morson, *Boundaries of Genre*, 7.
[8] Blank, "The Rabbit and the Duck," 29, 21.

While I basically agree with these readings, they risk, in rightly challenging the scope of synthesis, overlooking the vital role that Hegelian synthesis plays in Dostoevsky and (regarding Shestov's words above) in Kierkegaard as well. There is no doubt that both authors challenge German Romantic Idealism at its core, but there is also no doubt that this challenge comes only after deep personal appropriation and use of its doctrines of synthesis. Because Kierkegaard so vehemently critiques Hegel, it is often overlooked just how indebted to Hegel his dialectic, at least in part, truly is.[9] Indeed, Kierkegaard himself recognizes the validity of synthesis, as we shall see, and this recognition applies to the validity of synthesis in Dostoevsky.

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: The Validity of Synthesis

Kierkegaard is known for criticizing Hegelian "mediation," for defending Aristotelian logic, with its classic distinctions, against what he sees as the heresies of modern logic and the utter confusion it generates.[10] It is no accident that his first book is entitled *Either/Or*. In part two, Judge Wilhelm writes to his young, inert, Hegelian friend about the importance of decisions in life, the reality of dilemma, choice, and concrete actions that necessarily preclude alternatives. Yet while criticizing "people whose souls are too dissolute to comprehend the implications of such a dilemma, whose personalities lack the energy to be able to say with pathos: Either/Or," he makes an important qualification: "There are conditions of life in which it would be ludicrous or a kind of derangement to apply an Either/Or" (*EO* 2:157). In other words, he validates synthesis.

Kierkegaard makes the same point in the *Postscript*, in a context of criticizing mediation. Dialectical synthesis is pernicious, says Kierkegaard, when it mediates the absolute telos (God) with relative ends, when it obliterates categorical distinctions between good and evil or God and

[9] Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*, 4.
[10] For one instance of Kierkegaard's defense of Aristotle against Hegel, see *CUP* 109-110.

man, distinctions that cannot be dissolved in all eternity. However, outside of these absolute distinctions, that is, regarding relative distinctions, mediation has its validity (*CUP* 404). This dynamic applies to Dostoevsky, who likewise challenges the ultimacy of synthesis but not its validity. Indeed, as we shall see, it is precisely by way of synthesis in its validity that Dostoevsky will arrive at its limits.

The Validity of Synthesis in Dostoevsky

Art

Dostoevsky's mastery of synthesis, of reconciling apparent antitheses, pervades his art. If Bakhtin emphasizes the "utterly incompatible elements" of Dostoevsky's material – like independent human consciousnesses – that unify in a way other than synthesis, others have recognized Dostoevsky's genuine synthesis of relative distinctions, especially of disparate genres. Leonid Grossman writes of Dostoevsky's fusion of biblical genres with the boulevard.[11] Donald Fanger argues that Dostoevsky's "romantic realism" melds those two seemingly opposed aesthetic trends of the nineteenth century.[12] Dostoevsky's prose mixes not just modern poetic genres but also ancient ones, namely tragedy, as Ivanov and Steiner argue (see chapter one).

Ideology

Dostoevsky merges not only disparate genres but also disparate ideologies. His 1861 article "Mr. –bov and a Question of Art," for example, challenges the entrenched notion that art for art's sake lacks utility. "Dostoevsky's critique of Dobrolyubov," writes Jackson, "is an effort to synthesize […] the idea of the absolute freedom of the artistic process (and of the artist) with

[11] Grossman, L. P. *Poetika Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk, 1925), 18-19.
[12] Donald Fanger, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965), 129, e.g.

the idea of art (and the artist) as essentially a servant and service to man and society."[13] Dostoevsky's journalism, at least in the early days of *Time* (*Vremia*) and *Epoch* (*Epokha*), often sought middle ground between clashing ideologies. The ideological tendency of these journals, *pochvennichestvo* or philosophy of the soil, "was an attempt to synthesize the conflicting views of the Westernizers and the Slavophiles," in the words of Ellen Chances.[14] Even after his journalism became more anti-Western, Dostoevsky once again voiced hope for harmony between Slavophiles and Westernizers in his 1880 Pushkin Speech (26_1:172). Slavophiles versus Westernizers, utilitarianism versus art for art's sake, Romanticism versus Realism – all of these distinctions are relative, not absolute, and thus synthesis is appropriate.

Dostoevsky's lifelong penchant and capacity for dialectical synthesis may be traced back to his early years. From childhood he was steeped in Russian and European literary culture.[15] At the forefront of this culture in the 1820s and 30s, when Dostoevsky grew up, were the related movements of Romanticism and Idealism, whose tenets made a deep and lasting impression on the youth.[16] Initially imbibed from his parents' and his own readings at home, these tenets were ratified at boarding school by his literature professor I. I. Davydov, "one of the small group of academics responsible for propagating Schelling's ideas in Russia, who thoroughly indoctrinated Dostoevsky with the whole tradition of German Romantic Idealist art and aesthetics that

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[13] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 139.
[14] Ellen Chances, "'Pochvennichestvo': Ideology in Dostoevsky's Periodicals," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 7, no. 2 (1974): 71-88, 88. Chances explains, "The Slavophiles were incorrect in worshipping the anachronistic forms of pre-Petrine Russian life, but the Westernizers were also wrong in paying blind homage to all things Western European. Russia must acknowledge the benefit reaped from its contact with Europe, yet it must not at the same time deny the valuable features which are indigenous to the Russian soil" (ibid., 74).
[15] See Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 1:33, 54-59.
[16] Ibid., 1:105.

dominated Russian culture in the 1830s."[17] While the precise relationship between Romanticism and Idealism is "understudied and disputed,"[18] among their shared attributes is an essential doctrine of synthesis.[19]

Art and Ideology: The Case of Demons

The fusion of genres and the fusion of ideologies are themselves fused in *Demons*, a prime of example of Dostoevsky's dialectical prowess. In *Demons*, the formal synthesis of ancient and modern genres (biblical-tragic and novel-newspaper) is reflected in the synthesis of ideological content. The Russian generations of the 1840s and 1860s merge into a modern egoistic essence, which then merges with its ancient precedent.

Demons reveals that the generations of the 1840s and 1860s, apparently so at odds, share an underlying essence. Ivan Turgenev's 1862 *Fathers and Children* (*Ottsy i deti*) and Nikolai Chernyshevsky's 1863 *What Is to Be Done?* (*Chto delat'?*) focus primarily on the differences between these generations.[20] Largely in response to Chernyshevsky, Dostoevsky's 1864 *Notes*

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[17] Ibid., 1:63.

[18] Frederick Beiser, "Romanticism and Idealism, in *The Relevance of Romanticism: Essays on German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 30-43, 31. While some distinguish sharply between the two, Beiser contends that such distinctions are misguided. Peter Thorslev makes no distinction in an article whose title says as much: "German Romantic Idealism," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, 2nd ed., ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 82-102. If the distinction is already murky in the late eighteenth-century German context, it is at least equally so in Dostoevsky's early nineteenth-century Russian context, where Frank makes no sharp distinctions, writing often of "Romantic Idealism." *Dostoevsky* 2:245, e.g.; cf. 1:63, quoted above, 102, 180.

[19] M. H. Abrams writes, "Romantic philosophy is thus primarily a metaphysics of integration, in which the key principle is 'reconciliation,' or synthesis, of whatever is divided, opposed, or conflicting." *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 182. That German Idealism, culminating in Hegel, is about synthesis, goes without saying, though Thorslev puts it nicely: "From Hegel, finally, we have the Grand Synthesis, the Ring Cycle of Romantic philosophy." "German Romantic Idealism," 87.

[20] Of course, father and son Kirsanov ultimately align in their humble submission to the natural world and the flow of (Russian) life, while "father" Pavel Kirsanov and "son" Bazarov align in

from Underground does not simply defend the disparaged 40s against the lionized 60s, but rather implies that the 60s are inherently linked to the 40s and that both generations are flawed. If in *Notes from Underground* the causality is implicit, by the time of *Demons* (1871-72), it is explicit.

In *Demons*, the liberal idealist of the 1840s, Stepan Trofimovich, a father figure to the next generation (10_1:29), spawns an 1860s band of nihilists led by his biological and spiritual sons, Pyotr Verkhovensky and Nikolai Stavrogin. Stavrogin's "whole education and moral development" are "entrusted entirely" to Stepan Trofimovich (35). When Stavrogin begins to disturb society, the question of his tutor's influence is raised by the Governor von Lembke: "Wasn't it you who were a tutor in the house of General Stavrogin's widow? For twenty years you have been creating a hotbed of everything that has now come to a head…all the fruits" (345). Stepan Trofimovich himself comes to acknowledge the influence, and he is vexed by his own generation's ideas in *What is to be Done?* "Were we striving to these conclusions?" (238). The "Mangod" of the 1860s, to use Kirillov's Feuerbachian term,[21] simply brings to its logical end the synthesizing of the generation of the 1840s, incarnate in Stepan Trofimovich. "I do believe in God," says the liberal idealist, "*mais distinguons*, I believe in God as a being that is conscious of himself only in me. I certainly can't believe like my Nastasya (his servant)" (33). It is likely this credo that leads Frank to deem Stepan Trofimovich "a species of Hegelian Deist."[22] Stripping God of transcendence, mediating the absolute with the self, paves the way for the overt self-deification of the next generation. Hegel paves the way for Feuerbach.

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their Westernism and pride, but for Turgenev the link between generations exists largely despite ideologies, while for Dostoevsky the ideologies themselves are essentially linked.

[21] A reversal of the ancient coinage (by Origen in the third century) of *theanthropos*, Godman.

[22] Frank, "The Masks of Stavrogin," 689. Compare Kierkegaard's similar satire of this theology: "God is metaphysically laced in a half-metaphysical, half-aesthetic-dramatic, conventional corset, which is immanence" (*CUP* 156).

The egoism of the 60s simply brings to an extreme that of the 40s. If Stepan Trofimovich's penchant for wine, cards, and Paul de Kock (10_1:51) looks innocuous at a glance, the novel suggests otherwise. Stepan's son Pyotr likewise enjoys drinking and cards. At the end of the novel, with so much blood on his hands, he flees to Petersburg on the express train, where he sits down with gusto to a game of whist (10_1:479). The train smoke is seen in the distance by the runaway Stepan Trofimovich, who suddenly fears Fedka (481), not knowing he has been murdered by his son. The link is suggestive: the father destroys Fedka's life, "losing him at cards" (conscripting him to pay a gambling debt) (373), and the son finishes him off with a bullet and sits down to a game of cards. The danger of Stepan Trofimovich's apparently innocent appetites is made explicit by his rapacious son, who brings the moderate selfishness of his father to its sociopathic extreme.[23] Stepan's emergence from the flames of arson suggests his culpability in the carnage, to which he himself confesses at the end (499).

Stavrogin, like Pyotr, has a "wolfish appetite" (10_1:326), and his child-rape is not unrelated, the novel suggests, to the childhood influence of Stepan Trofimovich. Stavrogin's "nerves" are "disturbed" in his youth by his teacher's nocturnal visits (35), which are ominously suggestive. Susanne Fusso detects initiation into masturbation,[24] while Robin Miller suggests more active sexual abuse: "The ramifications for Stavrogin of Stepan's middle-of-the-night

[23] There is an intriguing parallel between Pyotr and Smerdiakov: neither enjoys reading like his father; both take interest in gastronomy; both are neglected by their fathers, who do not, their novels declare, deserve to be called fathers; both serve as henchmen to their more sophisticated idols, Stavrogin and Ivan; both are considered stupid and yet both are geniuses of calculated crime; both, one might argue, distill the selfishness of their fathers into its essence. Much more sympathetic than Fyodor Pavlovich, to be sure, Stepan Trofimovich nevertheless confesses to total selfishness in the end. This confession, it could be argued, is what distinguishes them.
[24] Susanne Fusso, *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2006), 172-73n30.

encounters and tearful embraces of the child are dreadful to contemplate."[25] When Stavrogin "the beast show[s] his claws" (37), the reader might share Governor von Lembke's suspicions of a dark influence from his spiritual father, who is at one point likened to a "tiger" (101). But Stavrogin's sins are more than sins of the flesh, for he shares with his mother, woman of the 40s, exceeding pride and the concomitant capacity for moral domination to the point of tyranny (see the discussion of "burdensome beneficence" in chapter four). Tikhon detects spiritual similarity between mother and son (11_1:8). The 60s, the novel reveals, simply put the shrouded, subtle sins of the hypocritical 40s on lurid display.

The end of the novel completely fuses the two generations. Disillusioned with his ideology and its bitter fruit, contrite over his vain life, and newly inspired, Stepan Trofimovich perceives that both generations, the 40s and the 60s, are possessed by the same Western demons (10_1:499). Just before suicide, Stavrogin writes Darya Pavlovna, "Last year, like Herzen, I became a citizen of the Canton of Uri" (513). The novel's penultimate paragraph begins: "The citizen of the Canton of Uri was hanging right there behind the door" (516). Stavrogin, demonic essence of the 60s, merges with Herzen, emblem of the 40s, into a nameless citizen of Switzerland, a point of generational continuity throughout the novel. "It was Alexander Herzen," writes Victoria Frede, "who first defended the principle that egoism and the pursuit of pleasure are the core element of human life."[26] If Turgenev and Chernyshevsky focus primarily on thesis and antithesis when it comes to the generational dichotomy, Dostoevsky, master dialectician,

[25] Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky's Unfinished Journey* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2007), 211n15.
[26] Victoria Frede, "Radicals and Feelings: The 1860s," in *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Valeria Sobol (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 2011), 62-80, 69.

synthesizes the 40s and 60s into an underlying egoistic essence, exposing the dichotomy as one that is ultimately false.

But the synthesis transcends the two generations and a strictly historical dialectic: the egoistic essence is ancient. Stavrogin is not simply a product of the 40s. Frank calls him "a Byronic type, a blood-brother of […] Onegin and […] Pechorin, associated in Russian culture with the 1820's and the 1830's."[27] But that a man of the 40s begets a Byronic type of the 30s presents historical problems, constituting for Frank (and his historical reading)[28] a design-flaw.[29] Frank demonstrates how Stavrogin grows to mythic proportions during Dostoevsky's creative process, thus breaking the mold of Dostoevsky's initial 40s-60s causality-schema.[30]

Far from a design-flaw, however, the complication of causality, I argue, if initially unintended, is essential to the novel's meaning. By blending the 40s and 60s into the 20s-30s, rather than the emerging 70s, as we might expect from a strictly Hegelian-historical dialectic, Dostoevsky collapses the historical dichotomy altogether. Transcending history, he arrives at timeless truths, revealing a common thread that predates both generations, whose "progress" is rendered illusory. *Demons* reveals an underlying essence that traces back not only to the 1830s, but via the 1830s to antiquity.

By way of the 1830s, the radicals of the 60s blend with ancient prototypes. Stepan Trofimovich links Turgenev's Bazarov, mythic paradigm of 60s nihilism, with Byron, mythic

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[27] Joseph Frank, "The Masks of Stavrogin," 667, cf. 683.
[28] Let me here express gratitude for Joseph Frank's superb scholarship and immense contribution to our understanding of Dostoevsky. I simply point out that the strength of Frank's meticulous historical approach is also its weakness on occasion, as in this case, where Dostoevsky confuses history to transcend history.
[29] Ibid., 668. Frank acknowledges that Stavrogin is rooted in his own generation (680), but he also considers Dostoevsky's attempts to distinguish Stavrogin from his Byronic prototypes as compensation for the anachronism (671).
[30] Ibid., 668.

paradigm for the Russian Romantics of the 30s (10_1:171). *Demons* is not alone in this connection. In *Crime and Punishment*, 60s radical Raskolnikov wants to be Napoleon, hero of the Romantics. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan's devil gleans in his nihilist of the 60s "a romantic streak" (15_1:81). Yet this Romantic streak has ancient precedent. If Kirillov's Mangod of the 60s looks new, his roots, via Russia's 30s and its Romantic models (Byron and Shelley, e.g.), reach down into the ancient soil of Prometheus, primordial rebellion, and the demonic. Ivan the rebellious "romantic" has a brush with the devil, and in *Demons* this link between Romanticism, the demonic, and antiquity is suggested at the outset by the dual epigraphs: Pushkin's "Demons" ("Besy," 1830) and the exorcism in Luke 8. It is upon hearing this gospel reading that Stepan Trofimovich declares that both generations are possessed (10_1:499). If modern in appearance, ideologies of the 40s, 60s, and 30s ultimately fuse into an ancient demonic essence.

The promethean and demonic strains are common also to Goethe, who likewise bridges modern European culture and antiquity in *Demons*. Speaking of his beliefs, Stepan Trofimovich calls himself "an ancient pagan, like the great Goethe, or like an ancient Greek" (10_1:33). Stepan Trofimovich's *poema*, written in the style of the 1830s (9), draws on Goethe's *Faust*, part two, which abounds with imagery from classical antiquity. Modern Europe and classical antiquity are fused also in *Diary of a Writer*, where Dostoevsky ascribes "Mangod" not to contemporary philosophy but to the ancient world (26_1:169). If Kirillov's Mangod is formulated by Feuerbach in recent history, he has ancient precedent, according to Dostoevsky, in the Greco-Roman gods, in the very Hellenism of Stepan Trofimovich's *Faust*-like *poema*.[31]

[31] Kierkegaard makes a similar link between modern (specifically German) literature and philosophy, associating the notion "that the human race is the true or presumably even God" with Goethe and Hegel" (*PV* 87-89*).

Stavrogin's spiritual essence traces even further back than classical antiquity to the more ancient Near East, and through this biblical context to timeless spiritual reality. Stavrogin's name evokes Antichrist in combining the Greek *stauros* (cross) with the Russian *rog* (horn), linguistically synthesizing modern Russia with classical and biblical antiquity. Stavrogin's wanderings make a similar link: he has sojourned in Egypt and in Jerusalem (10_1:45). Stavrogin is associated also with Babylon by way of Stepan Trofimovich's *poema*, in which a beautiful youth on a black horse (reminiscent of Stavrogin) facilitates the completion of the Tower of Babel (10). In the Bible, "Babylon" is more than just an ancient empire: it is a timeless spiritual reality and a symbol of human pride, self-sufficiency, and rebellion against God.[32] In the end, Russian generations of the 1860s, 1840s, and 1830s meld with an essential egoism native to ancient Rome, Greece, and Babylon, an egoism that, in one biblical interpretation, precedes even human history in Satan's rebellion against God.[33] Dostoevsky uses synthesis to unveil the timeless essence of current ideological trends.

Conclusion: The Limits of Synthesis

And then this elaborate synthesis collides with something that refuses to be mediated. Dostoevsky collapses all the (ultimately) false dichotomies into one half of a *true* dichotomy not to be synthesized: Mangod versus Godman, self-exalting Antichrist versus self-emptying Christ. When Stavrogin confuses the two, Kirillov puts it bluntly: "There's a difference" (10_1:189). By depicting the inevitable tragic failure of self-apotheosis (in Kirillov's suicide, for example), *Demons* upholds "the infinite qualitative difference between God and man." This difference,

[32] See Genesis 11, Isaiah 13-14, Daniel 4, and Revelation 18, e.g. "Lucifer" comes from the Vulgate's (and the KJV's subsequent) translation of what more modern versions render as the "day star" (ESV, RSV) or "morning star" (NIV) of Isaiah 14:12, a prophecy against the self-exalting King of Babylon.
[33] See Ezekiel 28:12-29.

claims Kierkegaard, has been mediated by "modern philosophy [which] is neither more not less than paganism" (*SD* 93). *Demons* makes precisely the same point: Hegelian Deist Stepan Trofimovich is "not a Christian" but "an ancient pagan" (10_1:33). Kierkegaard would applaud Stepan Trofimovich for his honesty, for he faults modern philosophy *not* for being pagan – "to be in kinship with Socrates is not too bad" – but for wanting "to delude us into believing that this is Christianity" (*SD* 93). While the pagan Mangod seeks to merge human and divine, the Godman, paradoxically, as the "Absolute Paradox" (*PF* 37), upholds this distinction upon which synthesis runs aground. It is precisely by way of elaborate synthesis that *Demons* then delimits synthesis, revealing the absolute line between Creator and created beings, the same line drawn in the story of the Tower of Babel and conceptualized by Kierkegaard.

In other words, *Demons* uses Hegelian dialectic against Hegelian dialectic. The novel reconciles the moderate Hegelianism of the 1840s (thesis) and the radical Left-Hegelianism of the 1860s (antithesis) into an essential egoism (synthesis) that, in the failure of its extreme form (Mangod), challenges the supremacy of synthesis. The overt self-deification that ends in carnage is merged with its covert counterpart, apparently benign, in the preceding generation, the essential dialectical synthesis that blurs the line between God and humanity. Using synthesis in its validity, applying it to relative distinctions, Dostoevsky arrives at absolute distinctions. Thus he employs dialectics in precisely the way Kierkegaard recommends: "everything has its dialectic – not, please note, a dialectic by which it is made sophistically relative (this is mediation), but by which the absolute becomes distinguishable as the absolute by means of the dialectical" (*CUP* 525). Like Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky reveals that the Hegelian notion of God as historically developing collective humanity subtly strips God of transcendence, divinizes

humanity in a kind of neo-paganism, and paves the way for the full-blown ego-worship of the next generation, an ego-worship that is as old as time.

Chapter Seven

Mangod vs. Godman, Apollo vs. Christ: The Limits of Synthesis

"Then took place the clash of the two most opposite ideas that could exist on earth: Mangod met the Godman, Apollo of Belvedere – Christ."
~ Dostoevsky, *Diary of a Writer*

"In paganism, man made god a man (the man-god); in Christianity God makes himself man (the God-man)
~ Anti-Climacus, *The Sickness unto Death*

Given Dostoevsky's mastery of dialectic, his capacity to reconcile opposites, it is perhaps unsurprising that some canonical scholarship construes his vision as, ultimately, one of synthesis. In other words, scholarship on Dostoevsky often blurs what Kierkegaard calls the "absolute distinction" between the absolute (God) and the relative (*CUP* 414). To put it negatively, scholarship often neglects to acknowledge this absolute distinction in Dostoevsky's works. To some degree, such scholarship is correct. Unlike Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky was not immune to merging the absolute and the relative. Indeed, he was quite prone to doing so. I shall argue, however, that Dostoevsky does ultimately make this distinction, if not in his non-fiction, then most certainly in his fiction. Kierkegaard's formulation of the "infinite qualitative difference between God and man" (*SD* 127, *PC* 140) and of the "Absolute Paradox" (*PF* 37) of the Godman, who bridges this difference without dissolving it, will help us tease out an identical, if less explicit, insight by Dostoevsky.

Readings that Synthesize Absolute and Relative

Art, nature, Russia, Orthodoxy, and collective humanity are among the things Dostoevsky idolizes, and scholars have taken note. Jackson senses the influence of a "medieval

Christian aesthetic with its […] deification of art."[34] As for Schiller, so for Dostoevsky art facilitates "the salvation of humanity."[35] In a word, "Dostoevsky died a Christian, but he found his salvation in art."[36] Jackson perceives an undeniable trend in Dostoevsky's non-fiction,[37] but in claiming Dostoevsky, overall, for German Romantic Idealism, in portraying an author who fuses art and God, Jackson goes too far. The major fiction, which carries more interpretive weight than the journalism, clearly separates art and God, as we shall see. Here Jackson overemphasizes the lesser half of the divided Dostoevsky.

Others claim that Dostoevsky deifies nature as a pantheist. Steven Cassedy, for example, writes of "the earth-worship of Alesha and Father Zosima" and of Dostoevsky's own "earthbound pantheism."[38] From his *pochvennichestvo* to the ecstatic affirmations of nature in his final novel, Dostoevsky indeed hallows the earth and the soil and the body, which collaborate with the spirit to humble the proud, rebellious mind.[39] We have addressed the sanctity of the earth in Dostoevsky in chapter one. While this radical affirmation perhaps at times flirts with pantheism, whether because of Dostoevsky's residual Romantic Idealism or because of Orthodoxy's more inspired view of nature than Western Christianity's, the accusation of full-

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[34] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 187.
[35] Ibid., 198.
[36] Ibid., xv.
[37] Insofar as Jackson limits himself to the "philosophy of art" explicitly propounded in Dostoevsky's non-fiction, then his study is a superb examination of the lasting influence of idealism, and its fusion with Christianity, on Dostoevsky's non-fiction. In the preface, Jackson limits his study to the "strict focus" of "critical writings, letters, notebooks, and the testimony of those who were close to him. […] analysis of his stories and novels in themselves plays almost no role in this study" (ibid., xiii). But these limits are transgressed. This philosophy of art, it is then claimed, "dominates Dostoevsky's entire world outlook" (xv). Jackson goes too far in merging the pronounced and widely accepted distinction between "the reflective artist" and the "impetuous commentator," between "artistic insight" and "prose convictions," in the words of Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*, 3, 38.
[38] Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, 171, 173.
[39] See, for example, Morson, "The God of Onions," 118-21.

blown pantheism goes too far, as we shall see. In the end, Dostoevsky distinguishes creation from Creator.

Dostoevsky at times blurs the line between God and man, if not as an individual[40] then as a collective à la German Idealism or Romantic nationalism, as in the case of Dostoevsky's "idolized Russian folk."[41] Dostoevsky was, without a doubt, an unapologetic Russian chauvinist. In essence, nationalism is idolatrous, taking what is valid or relative (one's country) and making it ultimate or absolute. Frank chronicles Dostoevsky's dual conversion, in Siberia, to both Christ and the Russian people as the image-bearers of Christ.[42] The evidence for this duality is beyond dispute, but Frank goes one step too far. "The features of the two [conversions]," he writes, "would remain blended together forever in Dostoevsky's sensibility, and eventually lead to that literal 'divinization' of the Russian people he was one day to proclaim."[43] While the two were indeed blended, while Dostoevsky indeed divinized the *narod*, I question the idea that the two remained *forever* united. Eventually, as I shall argue, Dostoevsky does indeed distinguish between the absolute (God) and the relative (Russia). If to his dying day the journalist-rallyist cannot quite separate the two, as we see in his Pushkin Speech, the more self-honest novelist most certainly can, and he does.

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[40] Though some claim that he blurs the line even for individual man, Dostoevsky's fiction unequivocally critiques ego-worship as a Western evil. Merezhkovsky, for example, claims that Dostoevsky ultimately envisions a fusion of Mangod and Godman, of Christ and Antichrist, but this unsubstantiated claim is obviously a product of its author's overt Nietzscheanism, which he proclaims on the same page. Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 296.

[41] *Obogotvoriaemogo vami russkogo naroda* (25_1:76). These words belong to a Jewish correspondent, whose letter Dostoevsky includes in his article "On the Jewish Question" in *Diary of a Writer*. This incisive accusation of idolatry obviously hit a nerve.

[42] Frank, "The Peasant Marey," in *Dostoevsky*, 2:116-27.

[43] Ibid., 126-27.

This conversion to Christ-as-Russian-people was "intimately and indissolubly" linked with Orthodoxy.[44] Today, in post-Soviet Russian scholarship, there is a tendency to emphasize Dostoevsky's Russian Orthodoxy. This rediscovery of recently suppressed religious themes has produced much excellent scholarship.[45] While it is certainly a grave oversight to neglect the clear and prominent place of Russian Orthodoxy in Dostoevsky's works, I wonder whether we may speak of Dostoevsky's official Russian Orthodoxy and his Christian faith completely synonymously. As with the Russian people, so with the Russian Church: if Dostoevsky the journalist is prone to blur the line between his church and the absolute, Dostoevsky the author makes a clear distinction, I shall argue.

These various syntheses between heaven and earth are related to the doctrines of synthesis that Dostoevsky imbibed in his youth. Dostoevsky's apotheosis of the aesthetic is explicitly German Romantic Idealist.[46] His pantheistic strain is likewise related to Schelling,[47] and his nationalism is influenced by Romanticism. Both German Romantic Idealism[48] and its more politically minded counterpart, French Utopian Socialism,[49] tended to fuse their essential humanism with Christianity. French Utopian Socialism, especially, was formulated largely in the name of Christ. Through the fiction of Victor Hugo and George Sand and the utopian theories of

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[44] Ibid., 126.
[45] Among such scholars, Ivan Esaulov writes, "My goal is to reestablish the significance for Russian culture of Christian religiosity, which for seventy years was silenced or slighted, and the focus of my scholarly work is the Christian subtext of Russian secular literature." "New Categories for Philological Analysis and Dostoevsky Scholarship," in *The New Russian Dostoevsky: Readings for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Carol Apollonio (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2010), 25-35, 28. Other such scholars are Tatiana Kasatkina, Karen Stepanian, and Vladimir Zakharov, for example.
[46] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 212 and *passim*.
[47] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 1:97.
[48] Ibid., 1:98.
[49] Ibid., 1:184.

Saint-Simon, Cabet, and others, Dostoevsky's generation became immersed in "Christian socialism," a "New Christianity" that sought to realize the kingdom of heaven on earth.[50] At the heart of this new religion was an overly optimistic faith in humanity.[51]

In Siberia, however, this faith was destroyed. In the words of Frank, "it is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of this destruction of Dostoevsky's humanitarian faith in the prison camp."[52] His disillusionment came from witnessing human evils "surpassing anything he had known before."[53] In other words, Dostoevsky came to accept the biblical view of human sin, upon which humanism runs aground. In his essay "Hebraism and Hellenism," Matthew Arnold identifies sin as the dividing line between Athens and Jerusalem.[54] Dostoevsky makes the same distinction: as we shall see, pagan Mangod denies the doctrine of original sin, which the Godman, in contrast, upholds.

The essence of Dostoevsky's synthetic strain, and its critique in his fiction (his self-critique), may be framed in terms of Athens and Jerusalem. While Dostoevsky was not purged of idealism overnight, while his Western humanism was subtly reborn in a more Russian and religious form (see Frank, above, on the dual conversion), even this newer, subtler form is critiqued in his post-Siberian fiction. One way to view Dostoevsky's fiction is as an agonized

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[50] Ibid., 1:130, 184.
[51] Ibid., 1:129.
[52] Ibid., 2:105. Frank chronicles Dostoevsky's "estrangement from his previous 'progressive' Christianity, whose doctrines he could well castigate as the fatal source of all his old illusions. An essential feature of such doctrines had been a naively optimistic glorification of the people as an inexhaustible fount of moral virtue; but such an image could hardly continue to be valid for Dostoevsky in its old sentimental, idyllic, quasi-Rousseauian form. This form had been destroyed" (2:126).
[53] Ibid., 2:148.
[54] Matthew Arnold, "Hebraism and Hellenism," in *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 126-37, 131.

self-critique, a personal spiritual journey from Athens to Jerusalem, from the enchantments of idealism, with its divinized humanity (even in Russian religious form), to a more sober, biblical worldview of God and sin and the Godman as Redeemer. Unlike the Mangod, the Godman upholds the "infinite qualitative difference between God and man," indeed between the absolute and the relative in general. The scholarship that focuses on Dostoevsky's syntheses identifies a very real strain, Hellenic in its mediation of the absolute, but this strain, I claim, is ultimately outweighed by a Hebraic strain that gains ascendancy in the major fiction.

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: The Infinite Qualitative Difference

Kierkegaard's Hebraic categories help us to see this ascendancy. Arnold observes that the Reformation may be seen as a Hebraic backlash against the Hellenism that had entered the Church of Rome during the Renaissance.[55] Kierkegaard is heir to the "solas" of the Reformation, which, in contrast to the Roman Church, sharply distinguish God (*soli Deo gloria*) from pope, priest, church, human tradition, and indeed all creation. This sharp line between Creator and creature, this designation of an Absolute above and beyond all creation (even while permeating it, paradoxically),[56] is fundamentally Hebraic. Russia, of course, had neither Renaissance nor Reformation, and in many respects Russian Orthodoxy falls somewhere between Roman and Reformed Christianity. For example, the Eastern Church has no pope (one of the central issues of the East-West Schism in 1054), but it is still more hierarchical than most Protestant churches. Therefore, on the Athens-Jerusalem spectrum, Kierkegaard is closer to Jerusalem than is Dostoevsky.

[55] Ibid., 134.
[56] See Psalm 8, e.g.

This difference is advantageous, for Kierkegaard's more sharply defined Hebraic distinctions help us to tease out Dostoevsky's own, less explicit formulation of these very same distinctions. Unlike Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard was immune, at least in his writing, to synthesizing the absolute and the relative. His writings are devoid of chauvinism, for example. He was neither a nationalist nor a supporter of the Church of Denmark (indeed, just the opposite).[57] Kierkegaard would have been repulsed by much of *Diary of a Writer*. Nevertheless, despite the deep influence of German Romantic Idealism, with its (Hellenic) mediation, despite his less categorically distinguishing Russian Church, Dostoevsky's works do, in the end, represent a worldview that is fundamentally, if less explicitly than Kierkegaard's, Hebraic or biblical in its absolute qualitative distinctions.

Central to the "infinite qualitative difference between God and man" is the Hebraic category of sin, which "confirms the qualitative difference between God and man more radically than ever before" (*SD* 121). To be sure, "it is Christianity that has taught us about the God-man, about the likeness between God and man" (*SD* 120-21), and we shall address this unprecedented proximity later. For now, we highlight the fact that this radical unity paradoxically accentuates the difference: "by being held together in this way the differences show up all the more sharply, just as when two colors are held together" (*SD* 121-22). This contrast is sharpest in view of sin: "As a sinner, man is separated from God by the most chasmic qualitative abyss" (*SD* 122). This qualitative distinction itself separates Athens and Jerusalem: "In paganism, man made god a man (the man-god); in Christianity God makes himself man (the God-man)" (*SD* 126). These clearly

[57] See Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Christian Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011).

drawn lines – between God and man, Godman and Mangod, and Athens and Jerusalem – help us to see precisely the same lines in Dostoevsky.

The Limits of Synthesis in Dostoevsky

Myshkin as an Agonized Critique of Synthesis (Self-Critique)

Dostoevsky's most profound critique of synthesis (that is, synthesis of the absolute and the relative) is *The Idiot* and its hero, Prince Myshkin. If *Demons* also delimits synthesis, upholding the absolute qualitative difference, as we have seen, it is more tendentious as a novel. Whereas the heroes in *Demons* are predestined to destruction, Prince Myshkin is adored by his author who genuinely wants him to succeed. This makes the tragedy all the more agonizing. The hero's anagnorisis is shared by his author in a kind of meta-tragedy. Frank writes: "with an integrity that cannot be too highly praised, Dostoevsky fearlessly submits his *own* most hallowed convictions to the same test that he had used for those of the nihilists" (emphasis in original).[58] These convictions are Dostoevsky's still-evolving Christianity, rife with idealism. In a letter about the novel, the one in which he writes of his plans to depict a "positively beautiful man," he calls Christ an "ideal" (28.2_1:151). In the tragedy of *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky agonizingly separates the one from the other, idealism from Christianity.

Myshkin is clearly linked with German Idealism. The moment before an epileptic attack, Myshkin thinks, a moment that is "in the highest sense harmony, beauty, gives a previously unheard-of and undreamt-of feeling of fullness, measure, reconciliation, and ecstatic prayerful fusion [*slitiia*] with the very highest synthesis [*sintez*] of life" (8_2:208). That Dostoevsky has in mind the German Idealist sense of "synthesis" is suggested by Myshkin's use of "dialectical"

[58] Joseph Frank, Introduction to *The Idiot*, trans. Anna Brailovsky (New York: Modern Library, 2003), xi-xli, xli.

[*dialekticheskuiu*] just a few sentences later (208). Like his author, Myshkin synthesizes the absolute with several relative entities: beauty, nature, Russia, Orthodoxy, and humanity. All of these syntheses are critiqued separately in *Demons*, but they can all be traced back to Myshkin in *The Idiot*. In this chapter, we shall begin with *Demons* and then work backward to the ultimate synthetic vision of Myshkin and his tragic failure. So let us begin with humanity,[59] picking up where we left off at the end of the previous chapter, with Kirillov's indissoluble distinction between Mangod and Godman.

Humanity

The difference between Mangod and Godman, it turns out, has to do with sin. Kirillov says that the one who teaches that all are good will bring about the apocalypse. Stavrogin, betraying his ignorance, replies that "the one who taught that was crucified." Kirillov continues, "He shall come, and his name shall be Mangod." Stavrogin asks "Godman?" to which Kirillov replies "Mangod, there's a difference [*raznitsa*]" (10_1:189). Kirillov is correct: Jesus consistently and unequivocally upholds the doctrine of sin: "no one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; cf. Matt. 19:17); "he who is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone" (John 8:7).[60] Stavrogin's ignorance is understandable, given that his tutor, Stepan Trofimovich, "had not read the Gospels in at least thirty years" (10_1:486).

In terms of this scene in *Demons*, Myshkin resembles Stavrogin's Christ (or Kirillov's Mangod), a Christ who redeems not by dying for sin on a cross but rather by denying sin

[59] My analysis of *The Idiot*'s critique of humanism draws on the analysis in my recent article, "Three Levs Nikolaevich: Tolstoy, Myshkin, Odoevtsev: Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* in Light of Andrei Bitov's *Pushkin House*," *The Dostoevsky Journal: A Comparative Literature Review* 22 (2021): 124-49, 133, 136-37.

[60] Cf. Matt. 7:11, Rom. 3:23, e.g. In Arnold's analysis, Christianity is in this regard squarely Hebraic in its emphasis on sin and the need for redemption. "Hebraism and Hellenism," 131.

altogether, who proclaims not universal sinfulness and the need for atonement but rather universal innocence. Myshkin's belief in human goodness is linked, mostly via Switzerland, with Rousseau's humanistic faith. For example, Keller diagnoses him with a "Swiss understanding of man" (8_2:285). Myshkin is linked with Rousseau also by way of Tolstoy. Donna Orwin notes that Myshkin cites a pedagogical article by Tolstoy, who therein writes, "Man is born perfect [*sovershennym*] – this is the great word uttered by Rousseau, and this word, like a rock, remains hard and true."[61] Myshkin lives out this credo, explicitly so when he calls Nastasya Filippovna "perfection" (*sovershenstvo*; 131). The tragedy of the novel is Nastasya Filippovna's proving Myshkin wrong: "So you think I am perfection? […] you are mistaken. I will remind you of that this very day" (131).

Myshkin's faith in human goodness manifests itself also in his relation to Rogozhin. Myshkin chastises himself for continuing to suspect Rogozhin of an impending murder: "Is it not a crime, is it not baseness on my part to make such a hypothesis so cynically and openly?" (8_2:211); "No, Rogozhin is slandering himself; he has an enormous heart that was able both to suffer and to have compassion" (212). Despite his better instincts and common sense, Myshkin preserves his blind faith to the end. When Rogozhin attacks him with a knife, Myshkin shouts, "Parfyon, I don't believe it [*Parfen, ne veriu*]!" (8_2:216). David Bethea observes that the Russian could be translated literally as "Parfyon, I don't believe!"[62] I suggest, therefore, that Myshkin's

[61] Donna Orwin, "The Return to Nature: Tolstoyan Echoes in *The Idiot*," *The Russian Review* 58, no 1. (1999): 87-102, 89 (Orwin's translation). The article is "Who Should Be Teaching Whom to Write: Should We Be Teaching the Peasant Lads, or They Us?" ("Komu u kogo uchitsia pisat', krest'ianskim rebiatam u nas, ili nam u krest'ianskikh rebiat?"). For the original citation, see L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8 of 90 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1936), 322.
[62] David Bethea, "*The Idiot*: Historicism Arrives at the Station," in *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989), 62-104, 94.

outburst may be considered a delayed response to Rogozhin's question, one chapter prior, as to whether he believes in God (201), a yes-or-no question that Myshkin neglects to answer clearly (compare Alyosha's and Ivan's clear answers in *The Brothers Karamazov*; 14_1:123). However, even if read in the more immediate sense – disbelief that Rogozhin could murder – this exclamation still addresses the faith-question. Myshkin has faith in Rogozhin, in Rogozhin's goodness, that is, in the goodness of humanity.

Myshkin's chivalry and pity and trusting nature are highly sympathetic, to be sure, but his theology evokes Mangod. Exposing the baseness of his surroundings, he wins the affections of author and reader, who are rooting for him, and his failure is heartrending. Nevertheless, he does, at least in his Rousseauian credo, align with Kirillov's Mangod. And just as *Demons* juxtaposes Mangod with Godman, so *The Idiot*, ultimately, juxtaposes Myshkin with Jesus. At the novel's end, Myshkin is explicitly contrasted with Jesus in John 8, where he saves the adulteress from stoning (8_2:532).

Whereas Jesus acknowledges the reality of this woman's sin – "go, and sin no more" (John 8:11) – Myshkin heaps praise on Nastasya Filippovna (8_2:532), praise that is unbearable. We must be very cautious in speaking of Nastasya Filippovna's sin: unlike the woman caught in adultery, she is not guilty of sexual sin; she is an abuse victim. Her sin is rather her "demonic pride" (532), that willful self-laceration that Kierkegaard diagnoses as "demonic despair" (*SD* 73). More importantly, even though she is not guilty of the abuse committed against her, the point is that she feels guilty. Irina Kirillova writes, "Nastasya Filippovna feels herself a sinful, fallen, and defiled woman, she needs a miracle, the spiritual transformation of repentance, forgiveness and resurrection into new life. Instead of forgiveness the prince assures her of her

innocence."[63] Thus he unintentionally bars the way to forgiveness: Myshkin, writes Larisa Levina, "does not even forgive, but rather simply denies the fact of sin," preventing Nastasya Filippovna's "only possible escape from all her spiritual and moral problems, her only real healing of inner pain – through repentance."[64] Though sympathetic and well-intentioned, Myshkin, in denying sin, in teaching fundamental goodness, aligns with Mangod.[65] In defending the reality of sin, *The Idiot* upholds the "infinite qualitative difference" and the uniqueness of the Godman.

Someone might object that Myshkin is a critique only of Western, secular humanism, of Dostoevsky's Rousseauian faith that was destroyed in Siberia, but not of his newer Russian religious convictions. While it is true that Myshkin is primarily a critique of the "Swiss understanding of man," he also includes elements of this subtler humanistic faith in the Russian people. In any case, this Russian religious humanism is overtly critiqued in *Demons*, so we shall start there and trace it back to Myshkin as well.

The Russian Religion

If Kirillov's Western Mangod fuses the absolute with the individual ego, Shatov's Slavophilism fuses the absolute with the collective. When Stavrogin asks Shatov whether he believes in God, Shatov answers, "I believe in Russia, I believe in her Orthodoxy… I believe in the body of Christ… I believe that the Second Coming will happen in Russia… I believe…"

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[63] Irina Kirillova, "Kniaz' Myshkin – sozdanie khristopodobnogo obraza i sryv v tragicheskuiu parodiiu," in *Obraz Khrista v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Tsentr knigi Vserossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi biblioteki inostrannoi literatury im. M.I. Rudomino, 2010), 82-90, 87.
[64] L. A. Levina, "Nekaiushchaiasia Magdalina ili pochemu kniaz' Myshkin ne mog spasti Nastas'iu Filippovnu," *Dostoevskii i mirovaia kul'tura*, no. 2 (1994): 97-118, 112.
[65] In playing or "parodying" (see Kirillova's title) Christ, Myshkin also aligns with other imposters. See Karen Stepanian, "Dostoevskii i Servantes: Dialog v bol'shom vremeni," *Inostrannaia literatura*, no. 12 (2011): 235-54.

(10_1:200). Stavrogin interrupts, "And in God? In God?" (201), to which Shatov confesses that he "will" believe in God, that is, that he does not yet believe (201). Unlike the bowing Alyosha and Raskolnikov, Shatov does not "come as the single individual into an absolute relation to the absolute" (*FT* 98). Shatov relates to the absolute through the universal in a way that is basically Hegelian, but this is not personal faith, as Dostoevsky makes plain. However much Dostoevsky idolized the *narod* and her Orthodoxy in his fiction, this exchange between Stavrogin and Shatov reveals a clear distinction between faith in Russia and faith in God. Frank's view, among others, that Russia and Christ were inseparable for Dostoevsky is an overstatement.

Shatov's faith in Russia and her Orthodoxy is anticipated by Myshkin, who has a similar exchange with Rogozhin. Myshkin does not directly answer whether he believes in God or not, and it is interesting to speculate what Myshkin's answer might be, were Rogozhin to press him further, as Stavrogin presses Shatov. Would he reveal something similar? In any case, shortly after this exchange, as Myshkin wanders about St. Petersburg trying to convince himself of Rogozhin's goodness, he notes that he is beginning to "believe passionately" in "the Russian soul" (8_2:210). Later in the novel, at the soiree at the Epanchins', he rants about the supremacy of Russian Orthodoxy before nearly having an epileptic fit. Morson notes similarities between *The Idiot* and *Diary of a Writer*.[66] If Dostoevsky gets carried away in his *Diary*, in *The Idiot* he reveals a keen awareness of his own susceptibility – not unrelated to his epilepsy – to this kind of diatribe, its risks and its follies.

Were it not for *The Brothers Karamazov*, were *Diary* the final work, this argument, that the fiction refutes the journalistic chauvinism, would be less compelling. After *The Idiot* and *Demons* undermine Dostoevsky's "Russian God," separating the absolute from the relative,

[66] Morson, *Boundaries of Genre*, 110, 182. Cf. Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 168.

Diary relapses into chauvinism. Ivanov observes that Dostoevsky simply answers Rome with another Rome, the Third Rome.[67] But in *The Brothers Karamazov* there is a marked change of tone. To be sure, this final novel is still very pro-Russia, pro-Orthodoxy, and generally anti-Western, and it contains regrettable moments of anti-Semitism and anti-Polish sentiment. But there are nevertheless glimmers of ecumenicism that suggest a shift.

To say that Dostoevsky warms up to the Church of Rome would be a great overstatement. But he at least recognizes diversity within this vast denomination, that not everyone is a Jesuit (a great insult in Dostoevsky's fiction), that it, too, has had its saints. After hearing Ivan's "The Grand Inquisitor," Alyosha says that this "is not all Rome, this is not true – this is the worst of Catholicism, the Inquisitors, the Jesuits!" (14_1:237). After their meeting, Ivan sends Alyosha away to his "Pater Seraphicus" (241), thus linking Zosima with St. Francis, an identification Alyosha affirms by repeating it (241). Zosima's ecumenicism is evidenced also by the presence, among his religious art, of "a Catholic cross made of ivory with the Mater dolorosa [the Roman alphabet stands out here, as it does for "Pater Seraphicus"] embracing it and a few foreign engravings from the great Italian masters of past centuries" (37). Even with its withering critique of Rome that is "The Grand Inquisitor," *The Brothers Karamazov*, as we see from these details, has a nuance, an acknowledgement of complexity that is lacking in *Diary*. The Russian religion is not absolute.

It would also be an overstatement to say that Dostoevsky warms up to Protestantism in a significant way, but he at least tips his hat to it in the person of Dr. Herzenstube, one of the novel's most positive heroes. Near the end of the novel, we find out that Dr. Hezernstube is "some sort of Moravian brother" (15_1:103). The Moravian brethren trace back to Jan Hus, the

[67] Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, 155n1.

early Czech reformer and martyr at the hands of Rome. It is hard not to smile at this detail: if Dostoevsky throws a bone to Protestantism, it is to Protestantism of a *Slavic* variety, not German, as the reader might have suspected from the doctor's surname. And the allusion to Hus, of course, bolsters the critique of Rome in "The Grand Inquisitor." But there is a shift in tone.

Furthermore, while Russian Orthodoxy is obviously the novel's religion of preference, it does not escape criticism. Readers see life in the monastery, warts and all. Zosima admits, "True, alas, true, even in monasticism there are many sluggards, gluttons, voluptuaries, and insolent beggars" (14_1:284). Religious hypocrisy is a theme throughout Dostoevsky, for example, in *Crime and Punishment*, when Dunya and her mother stop attending church because the gossip (about her alleged affair with Svidrigailov) becomes unbearable (6_2:31). Like the distinction between God and man, the distinction between God and church (made up of sinful people) has to do with sin. The Russian Church, made up of regular people (sinners), is not absolute.

On a related note, the novel clearly distinguishes between the church as a body of believers (as we see in Zosima's interaction with the peasant women or in his informal gatherings with friends) and the church as an institution. The institution is not dismissed, but it is shown to be limited. One detail shows this resoundingly: in Zosima's cell, the icons are on one wall, while pictures of church figures are on other walls, separate from the icons (14_1:37). Zosima acknowledges the institutional church, but he does not mingle it with his holy of holies. He distinguishes between the absolute and the relative. Despite such distinctions, Zosima has been accused of pantheism, to which we now turn.

Nature

Zosima's affirmation of the natural world is distinct from that of Kirillov, who truly is a pantheist, and the distinction, as with those above, also has to do with sin. Kirillov insists that

everything in the universe is fundamentally good, including – when Stavrogin presses him – child rapists, who are "not good" only because "they do not know they are good. When they find out, they won't rape little girls" (10_1:189). This definition of sin as mere ignorance Kierkegaard explicitly identifies as pantheistic (*SD* 96). Kirillov corroborates this with his explicit pantheism. When Stavrogin asks him whether he prays, he says he prays "to all [*vsemu*]," including the spider on the wall (10_1:189).

Zosima, too, affirms the essential goodness of creation (see chapter one), with one key exception: man, who alone is alienated from it because of his sinfulness. In the same passage mentioned in chapter one, where Zosima affirms "every blade of grass, every little bug, ant, golden bee," he mentions the sinlessness of animals (*na nem net nikakogo grekha*; 14_1:267). He then adds that "all, all except man, is sinless" and that sinless animals and all creation share a mysterious connection with "Christ" as "the word" (268; Zosima likely has in mind John 1:3). In contrast to Kirillov's immediate fusion with the universe, Zosima suggests that the way to be in harmony with the universe is not direct, by a return to a kind of primordial innocence (from which sin bars us) but rather through the renewed innocence Christ has to offer. It is through the higher immediacy of faith that one returns to the first immediacy of animals and nature. The former sanctifies the latter (see chapter one). This is essentially different from pantheism.

Zosima's view is anticipated by that of his brother Markel, who likewise speaks of his alienation from "God's glory" all around him: "birds, trees, fields, skies, I alone lived in disgrace" (14_1:263). This is in accord with Kierkegaard's formulation that sin isolates the individual sinner (*SD* 121). Markel tells the birds, "I have sinned before you" (263). If his asking for forgiveness seems, at a glance, like Kirillov's pantheistic praying to spiders, it is not. He is acknowledging his fundamental (non-pantheistic) disconnect from the universe, and there is a

difference between begging forgiveness and deification: one may very well ask another person for forgiveness without deifying that person.

Myshkin's affirmation of the world anticipates Kirillov's ecstasy more than Zosima's. Both Myshkin and Kirillov have moments of total harmony for which they would give their lives, and these moments, in both novels, are associated with epilepsy, Muhammad's pitcher, and the apocalyptic angel who says that "there shall be no more time" (8_2:208-209; 10_1:450-51, 188). This blending of time and eternity, one of Kierkegaard's "absolute distinctions," facilitates that "pantheistic self-obliteration" associated with Romanticism.[68] Both Myshkin and Kirillov tragically run aground on distinctions between time and eternity and between heaven and earth, disjointed ever since the Fall. There is no way back to Eden. Myshkin's "return to nature" does not work.[69] For Zosima, in contrast, the way to harmony with creation is not backward but forward, through the higher immediacy of faith, becoming "a new creation by virtue of the absurd" (*FT* 40).

Art

The Idiot distinguishes art from the absolute through the tragic failure of the "positively beautiful" Myshkin (28.2_1:151) who believes that "beauty will save the world" (8_2:317). Jackson's apotheosis of the aesthetic depends largely upon a positive reading of Myshkin that neglects his tragic failure, upon an acceptance of these highest moments of synthesis as unambiguously good, without acknowledging their dark side.[70] For Jackson these pre-epileptic visions are the pinnacle of art for Dostoevsky.[71] But in the novel, this beauty and its "positively

[68] Frank, *Dostoevsky* 1:97.
[69] See Orwin, "The Return to Nature."
[70] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 50-52, e.g.
[71] Ibid., 50.

beautiful" representative fail to save. To the contrary, salvation comes from an image devoid of beauty: the only "Savior" (*Spasitel'*; 8_2:200) identified as such is Holbein's *Dead Christ*.

I suggest that the novel's textual juxtaposition of Myshkin and Jesus is echoed visually by a juxtaposition of the positively beautiful prince and Holbein's ugly Christ, and that this juxtaposition anticipates Mangod versus Godman in *Demons*, where Myshkin aligns with Mangod and Holbein with the Godman. The commonplace, negative reading of Holbein as a blasphemous picture of no resurrection is of course valid; it is commonplace for a good reason.[72] But the painting is polysemic, and there is another valid interpretation, represented by Tatiana Kasatkina,[73] that sees the painting positively, as simply "the monumental kenosis of Christ and […] an adequate representation of this kenosis."[74] We might add that it is therefore a picture of sin incarnate, of Christ's becoming sin on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21, e.g.), the sin that the Godman acknowledges and takes upon himself as a willing sacrifice, but that Mangod denies.

The alignment of Myshkin with Mangod and Holbein's Christ with the Godman is strengthened by Dostoevsky's contrasting Mangod-Apollo of Belvedere with Godman-Christ in *Diary of a Writer*. In describing the collision of the Greco-Roman world (Athens) with Christianity (Jerusalem), Dostoevsky writes of "the clash of the two most opposite ideas that

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[72] For example, W. J. Leatherbarrow calls it "a Christ emptied of its divine content is no Christ at all. It is a pretender, an imposter, a deceit, and is thus ultimately blasphemous and demonic." *A Devil's Vaudeville: The Demonic in Dostoevsky's Major Fiction* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2005), 109. Rowan Williams writes that Holbein's painting "is a kind of anti-icon, a religious image which is a nonpresence or a presence of the negative." *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2008), 53. Sarah J. Young calls it "a direct challenge to the entire basis of Christianity." "Dostoevskii's *Idiot* and the Epistle of James," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 81, no. 3 (2003): 401-420, 404.

[73] Tat'iana Kasatkina, "Kartina Gans Gol'beina-mladshego 'Khristos v mogile' v strukture romana F.M. Dostoevskogo 'Idiot': posle znakomstva s podlinnikom," in *Sviashchennoe v povsednevnom: dvusostavnyi obraz v proizvedeniiakh F.M. Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2015), 249-69.

[74] Ibid., 251.

could exist on earth: Mangod met the Godman, Apollo of Belvedere – Christ" (26_I:169). Jackson, throughout his study, speaks of Dostoevsky's "classical Christian" ideal of beauty,[75] yet here Dostoevsky sharply distinguishes between classical antiquity and Christianity as "the two most opposite ideas that could exist on earth." Jackson speaks of Apollo of Belvedere as an emblem of beauty for Dostoevsky, and he is right insofar as this reflects Dostoevsky's "Mr. –bov and a Question of Art." But this aesthetic article contains precisely the Schillerism and "Winckelmann-Hellenism"[76] that run aground in *The Idiot*. Dostoevsky perhaps alludes to this association between Apollo and Myshkin through Myshkin's name: Apollo is sometimes given the epithet "smintheus," from the Greek for mice, hence *Mysh*kin.[77] As in *Demons*, so in *The Idiot*, classical antiquity (Apollo) and modern European culture (idealism, Rousseau) merge into one Hellenic essence that is juxtaposed with its Hebraic counterpart.

The alignment of Myshkin with Mangod and Holbein's Christ with the Godman is further strengthened by Kierkegaard's formulation of the Absolute Paradox, which complements Kasatkina's reading by highlighting the orthodoxy not only of the kenosis but of its ugliness, its lack of beauty. Kierkegaard juxtaposes a paganized "Christ," immediately recognizable for his divine beauty, with the "incognito" paradox of the Godman:

> Christ becomes the divine child, or for the somewhat older child the friendly figure with the kindly face (the mythical commensurability), not the paradox in whom no one could detect anything (literally understood), not even John the Baptist (see John 1:31, 33), not even the disciples before they had been made aware (John 1:36, 42), what Isaiah had prophesied (53:2, 3, 4, especially verse 4). The child-conception of Christ is essentially a fantasy perception, and fantasy perception's idea is commensurability, and commensurability is essentially paganism, whether it is power, glory, or beauty.

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[75] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 68 and *passim*.
[76] Ibid., 198.
[77] R. B. Shchetinin makes the same observation about Myshkin's name, likewise linking Myshkin with Apollo. "Razvitie obrazov Myshkina i Rogozhina v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo 'Idiot,'" *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Iazykovanie i literaturovedenie*, no. 304 (2007): 26-29, 26.

> Commensurability is direct recognizability. The form of a servant is the incognito, but the kindly face is the direct recognizability. (*CUP* 599)

This childlike, fantastic, friendly, mythical, pagan "Christ" evokes Myshkin, whereas the paradox and these Bible verses, especially from Isaiah, evoke Holbein. Isaiah writes:

> He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. (Is. 53:2-4)

Just a few verses earlier, Isaiah writes: "many were appalled at Him – His appearance was disfigured beyond that of any man, and His form was marred beyond human likeness" (52:14). Not only is the Godman unrecognizable as God; he is repulsive. Not only that, he appears to be in opposition to God, "smitten by God" (Kierkegaard highlights verse 4; see above). Whereas for Jackson Dostoevsky's Christ is "aesthetically conceived,"[78] the biblical Savior is not aesthetically remarkable or attractive, but rather, at least in his atoning work, repulsive, as Holbein faithfully depicts. Isaiah's words and Kierkegaard's interpretation reflect a general Hebraic wariness of physical beauty,[79] which, however sacred (see chapter one), risks being idolized (see chapter two). In *The Idiot*, Nastasya Filippovna's extraordinary beauty is more of a curse than a blessing, while blessing comes, counterintuitively, not from the positively beautiful man but from the deformed Savior who became "a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13).

In contrast to the synthesizing Myshkin, Holbein's Christ, as the Absolute Paradox, sharply divides the absolute from all of the relative entities we have discussed: beauty, nature, humanity, and ethnic and religious groups. We have just discussed beauty. As for nature,

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[78] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, ix.
[79] See, for example, Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003), 418-25.

Holbein's painting shows that the universe is not simply a good place with which one may merge pantheistically, but rather under the curse of sin. Ippolit uses Holbein's painting to argue that something is seriously wrong with "the laws of nature" (8_2:376-77). As for the Russian religion, Holbein's painting underlines the fact that Jesus came not as a military conqueror, to the outrage of many, including the disciples, who expected a militant messiah. As for humanity, Holbein's painting reminds one that humans are beings who form mobs and crucify people.

Myshkin says that Holbein's painting could make one lose one's faith (*ot etoi kartiny u inogo eshche vera mozhet propast'!* 8_2:201). In all the scholarship I have read on *The Idiot*, it is always assumed that "faith" here refers to God as the object of faith, but the novel gives us no reason to make this assumption. Of course, the "no resurrection" reading of Holbein is perfectly valid as one way to read the painting. But it also makes sense to read this "faith" not as faith in God but as faith in the above-discussed idols that the crucifixion can certainly destroy. Few things can so easily destroy one's faith in humanity, for example. The novel insists that "faith" need not be in God. It is shortly after these words about losing faith that Myshkin mentions his nascent faith in the Russian soul (210). And he identifies Rogozhin's thirst "to believe in anything! To believe in anyone!" (*vo chto-nibud' verit'! v kogo-nibud' verit'!* 212). While uniting God and man, heaven and earth, time and eternity, the Absolute Paradox of the Godman paradoxically accentuates the difference between absolute and relative, demanding absolute allegiance (see chapter four) and destroying one's faith in the relative, whether beauty, nature, church, state, or collective humanity.

Conclusion: Synthesis Leads to Separation

Dostoevsky, and *The Idiot* in particular, shows how visions of universal harmony and pantheistic fusion lead to isolation, how synthesis begets separation. This dynamic is

incapsulated in a key subtext, Pushkin's "Poor Knight," with whom Myshkin is associated. Absolutely devoted to an ideal image of female beauty (synthesizing relative and absolute), the Poor Knight neither looks at nor speaks with real women (separating himself from the relative). He also confuses absolute and relative in blending the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth in the crusades, which were apocalyptic in outlook.[80] But the millenarian dreams are elusive, and the knight dies not in paradise but miserable and alone in his castle. Merging absolute and relative, he ends up alienated from the world. Similarly, Myshkin's apocalyptic visions ("there shall be no more time") end in darkness and isolation back in the asylum.

As Kierkegaard insists throughout the *Postscript*, to mediate the absolute is to lose the absolute. Jackson observes this dynamic in Dostoevsky: "Art in Dostoevsky's concept is profoundly religious; yet, paradoxically, and in the highest sense, it enables man to live without God."[81] If only we specify "Dostoevsky the German Idealist" or replace "Dostoevsky" with "Myshkin" (they are the same in Jackson's reading), then Jackson is correct. Jackson notes that this ideal vision begets a tragic cleft between heaven and earth,[82] which we see in both Myshkin and the Poor Knight. The Poor Knight does not pray to God.[83] Perhaps Pushkin's poem reveals Myshkin's secret. Synthesis between absolute and relative leads to their tragic separation.

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[80] See Jay Rubenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: The Crusades, Apocalyptic Prophecy, and the End of History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2019).
[81] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 135.
[82] Ibid., 4. See the discussion of this in chapter one.
[83] *Nest' mol'by Ottsu, ni Synu, / ni Sviatomu Dukhu vvek / ne sluchilos' paladinu, / strannyi byl on chelovek*.

Chapter Eight

The Russian Monk: The Validity of Separation

"The image of Christ, splendid and undistorted,
they preserve in their solitude, in the purity of
God's truth."
~ Zosima, *The Brothers Karamazov*

"No, it behooves us to have respect for the
monastic movement of the Middle Ages."
~ Johannes Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific
Postscript*

Given Dostoevsky's critique of synthesis in the ultimate sense, that is, applied to the absolute and the relative, it is unsurprising that scholars have recognized Dostoevsky's critique of Hegel. We have already mentioned Shestov in this regard. Bakhtin also proposes his anti-Hegelian "unity of a higher order" that he neglects to define.[1] Several scholars have provided insightful definitions of this unity, but in so doing they, not unlike Hegel, question the validity of Aristotelian logic, namely the laws of identity and non-contradiction. If not ultimate, these laws remain valid, especially when it comes to absolute distinctions.

To be sure, what I claim to be Dostoevsky's and Kierkegaard's "paradox dialectic" and its emblem, the Absolute Paradox of the Godman, do *ultimately* violate Aristotelian logic. Nevertheless, the Absolute Paradox – paradoxically, of course – affirms the *validity* of these logical laws. Indeed, the Paradox requires these laws in order to be a paradox. Tinkering with logic is simply to lessen the force of the paradox, just as tinkering with the ethical (justice) saps the religious (mercy). Without making Dostoevsky's and Kierkegaard's dialectic out to be

[1] Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 21.

Western (it is essentially Hebraic), without denying the "non-Euclidean" element,[2] this chapter defends Euclid and Aristotle in their validity in Dostoevsky's works.

Anti-Aristotelian or Non-Euclidean Readings

Defining the unity that Bakhtin neglects to define, Ksana Blank delves into the essence of Dostoevsky's dialectics, which she deems "antinomic" and traces back, via Russian religious thought, to Eastern patristics and also likens to ancient Eastern thought.[3] Influenced by both Dostoevsky and patristics, Russian religious thinkers of the early twentieth century formulated a kind of unity called "antinomian monodualism," in Semyon Frank's coinage.[4] Though "completely different from Hegelian synthesis,"[5] this unity shares with Hegel an antipathy to Aristotle: Florensky, Berdyaev, and Sergei Bulgakov all explicitly refute Aristotelian logic.[6] Blank finds analogies in Heraclitus, Lao Tzu, and yin-yang reciprocity.[7]

Likewise finding analogies between Dostoevskian unity and Eastern thought, namely Zen, Grigorii Pomerants also questions the validity of Aristotle (and Euclid). He claims that "the law of identity [or] A=A," though apparently harmless, ultimately yields "detachment; the atom closes in on itself and becomes surrounded with emptiness and *alienation*" (emphasis in original).[8] To substantiate his attack on Aristotle, Pomerants notes the problems that arise when

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[2] For an excellent discussion of the non-Euclidean in Dostoevsky, see Liza Knapp, *The Annihilation of Inertia: Dostoevsky and Metaphysics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1996), 172-216. See also Liza Knapp, "The Fourth Dimension of the Non-Euclidean Mind; Time in *Brothers Karamazov* or Why Ivan Karamazov's Devil Does not Carry a Watch," *Dostoevsky Studies* 8 (1987): 105-120.
[3] Blank, *Dostoevsky's Dialectics*, 7-10, 112-14
[4] Ibid., 115.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 112-14.
[7] Ibid., 7-10.
[8] Grigorii Pomerants, "Euclidean and Non-Euclidean Reason," in *The New Russian Dostoevsky: Readings for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Carol Apollonio (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2010), 65-92, 80.

traditional logic is applied to the person of Christ. Referring to the Council of Ephesus, he writes, "The clash of terminology – 'without merging together [*nesliianno*]' and 'indivisibly' [*nerazdel'no*] – seems to be an example of logically impermissible and absurd scholasticism […] – a combination of logically incompatible terms – an absurdity."[9] Kierkegaard would only add: precisely, and to believe this absurdity requires a "crucifixion of the understanding" (*CUP* 600). We shall address this further in chapter eleven.

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: The Aristotelian-Monastic Division of Absolute and Relative

Aristotle

At a glance, "antinomian monodualism" reflects Kierkegaard's (and Dostoevsky's) "paradox dialectic," emblematized by the Absolute Paradox of the Godman, who unites heaven and earth, God and man, without merging them. Florensky, like Kierkegaard, links this form of unity to the hypostatic union, the dual nature of Christ.[10] In *Dostoevsky's Incarnational Realism*, Paul Contino likewise connects his incarnational, analogical thinking with Blank's antinomic dialectics.[11] Upon closer inspection, however, Kierkegaard's (and Dostoevsky's) "paradox dialectic" is different. It is more radical than antinomian monodualism and presents deeper problems for human reasoning.

Before turning to Kierkegaard, we must acknowledge that the chiaroscuro, the yin-yang of "antinomian monodualism" accounts for much of Dostoevsky's universe, because it accounts for much of *the* universe. Heraclitus, Lao Tzu, and Russian religious philosophers of the twentieth century all picked up on a sense of reciprocity in the cosmos, something that is neither Hegelian synthesis nor Aristotelian distinction: an "inseparable wholeness of contrary parts" or

[9] Ibid., 83.
[10] Blank, *Dostoevsky's Dialectics*, 113.
[11] Contino, *Dostoevsky's Incarnational Realism*, 221n19.

"interdependence of opposites" like day and night, good and evil, etc.[12] Furthermore, even the Trinity, the triune God at the center of the universe (from the Christian point of view) may be considered in terms of antinomy, as Vladimir Lossky suggests.[13] We may speak of all three persons of the Trinity as mutually necessary and inseparable, yet distinct. Dostoevsky's final novel is deeply trinitarian.[14] In terms of temporal phenomena like night and day, we may say the same. But what happens when eternity itself unites with temporality, as in the Godman?

Here, with regard to the Absolute Paradox, "antinomian monodualism" breaks down because God and man are emphatically *not* mutually necessary. (We should note that it is not Blank, but rather Florensky and Frank, who apply antinomian monodualism to God and man or Creator versus creation.[15] Blank applies this dialectic more appropriately.) In the biblical view, God and man are not like yin and yang, two mutually necessary, timeless forces, of "equal strength" and "equal significance," in Bulgakov's formulation of antinomy.[16] God is timeless and necessary; man is not. Man has a beginning; God does not. God does not depend upon man; man depends upon God. God did not have to make man. To be sure, the Incarnation violates Aristotelian logic, and it might look Heraclitan at a glance, but to speak of a unity of equal opposites is greatly misleading and weakens the paradox. Before positing the Incarnation, the radical unity of God and man, we must first fully grasp "the infinite qualitative difference," lest the paradox be loosened.

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[12] Blank, *Dostoevsky's Dialectics*, 7.
[13] Ibid., 114.
[14] David S. Cunningham, "*The Brothers Karamazov* as trinitarian theology," in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 134-55.
[15] Blank, *Dostoevsky's Dialectics*, 113, 115.
[16] Ibid., 15.

Kierkegaard's insistence upon the absolute distinction between the absolute and the relative and his validation, in this regard, of Aristotelian logic, are essential to Christian orthodoxy. Criticizing Hegel for his tinkering with classical logic (*CUP* 109-110, e.g.), Kierkegaard writes that "the principle of contradiction has absolute validity" (*CUP* 315). The absolute distinction between time and eternity "is an expression for the principle of contradiction" (*CUP* 570).

The outright dismissal of Aristotelian logic leads to the inseparability and mutual necessity of *all* contraries, including eternity and temporality, and this goes patently against biblical orthodoxy and thus the "paradox dialectic" in Dostoevsky, as we shall see. In deeming eternity and time, Creator and creation inseparable and mutually necessary, Semyon Frank, among others, goes too far.[17] If creation is *necessary*, then God created the world neither freely nor (what follows) out of love, and yet God's omnipotence and love are tenets of Christianity. Frank also goes too far also in applying antinomian monodualism to good and evil.[18] If evil is eternally *necessary*, then humans are not free, for the Fall was predetermined, and God is responsible for creating evil. The mutual necessity of good and evil is not a Christian idea but belongs to Manicheanism, which posits an endless reciprocity, an endless battle between good and evil, light and darkness. As difficult as it is for us to imagine, as much as yin and yang account for our *present* circumstances, the Bible speaks of a future, ultimate reality in which there is no evil and no night (Rev. 21:27; 22:5; cf. Ps. 37:10).

Evil, night, and even creation itself, while deeply intertwined with good, light, and Creator, respectively, are not absolutely and eternally *necessary*, as antinomian monodualism

[17] Blank, *Dostoevsky's Dialectics*, 115.
[18] Ibid.

supposes. In other words, they are ultimately separable from their counterparts. Kierkegaard's Aristotelian distinction between absolute and relative helps us to see this ultimate separability. In further defense of Aristotle, we might add that Aristotle deduced, through his logic and to the amazement of many a monotheistic philosopher-theologian throughout history (whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim), the necessity of an eternal, omnipotent Deity, a "first cause" or "unmoved mover," the notion of an Absolute beyond space and time that thus transcends a yin-yang reciprocity.

I have just made a case for the "ultimate separability" of absolute and relative, and yet even that is transcended, without, however, invalidating Aristotle or returning to antinomian monodualism. This is where human thought really starts to break down, precisely as Kierkegaard delineates. Now, in the Absolute Paradox of the Incarnation, God freely chooses to overcome this separation, to *make* Himself and man inseparable (without losing the difference). However, God's binding Himself inseparably to man is still not eternally *necessary*; it is a free choice. God does not *need* to save people but chooses to out of love (1 John 4:10, e.g.). God does not even *need* to make man in the first place (see the above point about creation from freedom and love). So even while Aristotelian logic is transcended by the Absolute Paradox, it is not invalidated, as antinomian monodualism supposes. The Absolute Paradox derives its very force, its very paradoxicality, from Aristotle's valid laws.

Monasticism

One of the ways that this hard line, this Aristotelian-logical distinction between absolute and relative manifests itself in Kierkegaard, is in his analysis of monasticism, which illuminates a similar dialectic in Dostoevsky. Kierkegaard defends the monk's passionate choice of absolute over relative, a choice informed by Aristotelian distinction, against the modern, complacent

bourgeois philistine, whose lack of choice is informed by a lack of this absolute distinction: "Bourgeois-philistinism always has its roots in the use of the relative as the absolute in relation to the essential" (*CUP* 547). Kierkegaard writes: "even if the Middle Ages erred in eccentricity, it by no means follows that mediation is commendable" (*CUP* 402). In other words, "to enter a monastery is not the highest, but by no means do I therefore believe that everyone in our day, when no one enters the monastery, is greater than the deep and earnest souls who found rest in a monastery" (*FT* 100). The monastic movement is preferable to complacency because it "is a passionate decision, as is appropriate with respect to the absolute τέλος, and to that extent is far preferable in its nobility to the wretched brokerage wisdom of mediation" (*CUP* 402). While Kierkegaard's target here is primarily Hegelian mediation, his defense of an Aristotelian distinction between absolute and relative applies also to antinomian monodualism.

The Validity of Separation in Dostoevsky

Like Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky uses monasticism to underscore the absolute distinction between the absolute and the relative. For Dostoevsky, as for Kierkegaard, the monastic movement is not the highest, but its passionate decision stands in its validity, and the hard (Aristotelian) line between heaven and earth abides even for the knight of faith who leaves the monastery. Before leaving the monastery, before recommitting with the world, the knight of faith must give it up completely, and this resignation, this hard line never leaves him or her, even if it becomes invisible to others as a purely internal distinguishing (*CUP* 387-431).

Miusov versus Monastery

The Brothers Karamazov opens with precisely Kierkegaard's juxtaposition between monasticism and bourgeois-philistinism, neither of which is ideal, but the former of which is preferred. The final incarnation of Dostoevsky's Western, liberal idealist of the 1840s, the

mercenary Miusov, "a man very sensitive with regard to money and bourgeois honor" (14_1:20), is pitted against the monastery at the novel's outset. Concerned with his motherless nephew Mitya, whom he promptly abandons, only for financial gain (11), Miusov also seeks money from the neighboring monastery in a protracted lawsuit over property rights. Having never seen a monastery and having not been to a church in thirty years (32), he considers "a trial with 'clericals' even his civic and enlightened duty" (10-11). Viewing himself very highly (32), "completely satisfied with himself" (80), he is offended when, upon arrival at the monastery, no one greets him, "a very wealthy landowner and very educated, so to speak, person, on whom they all partially depended …." (33). As a consequence of his wounded vanity, increasingly wounded throughout the uproarious monastery scene, his witticisms against the monastery wax into ire and disdain (34, e.g.). "If it is permissible as a matter of course to caricature the one [the monk]," writes Kierkegaard, "then it surely must also be permissible to depict the other [the bourgeois philistine] as it has caricatured itself" (*CUP* 401). Miusov is precisely such a caricature, and he ridicules the opposite caricature, the "short, very pale, and emaciated" "little monk [*monashek*]" (14_1:34) who greets him.

In accord with Kierkegaard's formulation, Miusov uses this caricature to exempt himself from the absolute. Kierkegaard writes: "worldly wisdom has known how to derive great advantage [from the monastic movement], which even now it sometimes uses to preach indulgence from all engagement with the religious" (*CUP* 401). In other words, "It is really sad that the eccentricity of the Middle Ages is repeatedly misused to teach people to plume themselves on being such deucedly great fellows" (*CUP* 417). Miusov explicitly critiques the Middle Ages in the form of ultramontanism (57), as does the novel (especially "The Grand Inquisitor"). Indeed, both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard critique papacy itself. But then Miusov

uses this modern criticism to plume himself on being a deucedly great fellow. Alyosha the "eccentric" (14_1:5), in contrast, does not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Alyosha's Absolute Decision and Distinction

In contrast to the emaciated *monashek*, the robust[19] Alyosha is no caricature but a highly sympathetic individual who, in direct contrast to the acquisitive Miusov, gives up everything for God, thereby distinguishing the absolute from the relative. "I want to live for immortality, and I will accept no half-compromises" (14_1:25) Precisely, for Kierkegaard, the monk's merit, this passionate decision is put in monetary terms: "I can't give two rubles instead of 'everything,' or merely go to mass instead of 'come, follow me'" (25). Alyosha's zeal is obviously preferable to Miusov's greed and "wretched brokerage wisdom of mediation." If Alyosha's escapism, in the end, is immature and criticized by the novel, the distinction between absolute and relative is valid. Moreover, the escapism is also perfectly understandable. When after a traumatic upbringing Alyosha comes home to his father's "harem" (9) to visit his mother's grave, the reader sympathizes with his decision to enter the monastery, "the ideal of escape for his soul, struggling from the darkness of worldly evil to the light of love" (17). The reader has been reminded how much there is in this broken world to escape.

In rejecting the lust and greed of his father, Alyosha does not mediate in any way, whether Hegelian or Heraclitan, between the absolute and the relative. He does not simply bridle his desires. No, he dies to the relative. He does not find some compromise, whether Hegelian or Heraclitan, between his and God's will. As Kierkegaard formulates the absolute relation as self-annihilation (see chapter five), so Dostoevsky depicts this in Alyosha, whose task in submitting

[19] Neither a fanatic nor a mystic (14_1:17), Alyosha is radiates "with the health of a nineteen-year-old adolescent" (24).

to his Elder is complete self-denial and self-mastery (14_1:26), as in Kierkegaard's mandate: "all the passions of finitude must be dead" (*CUP* 472). As in chapter five, so here we think of the novel's epigraph. Unless a grain of corn fall into the ground and *die*…but if it *die*… The next verse reads: "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). What better way than the monastery to emblematize this hating of one's life in this world.

Zosima's Celibacy

In the end, Alyosha leaves the monastery to marry and to "dwell as a monk in the world" (14_1:259, cf. 71). As Abraham receives Isaac back, so Alyosha receives finitude, including the family life (and the sexuality) he gave up. Through the Absolute Paradox of the Godman, the absolute and the relative are not only absolutely distinct but also brought closer together than ever before (*SD* 120-21). But lest we suppose that this return to the finite is a mediation in any way, whether Hegelian or Heraclitan, monastic resignation, emblematized by Zosima's celibacy, stands guard over the absolute distinction (*CUP* 387-431), which is by no means invalidated, whether by synthesis or antinomian monodualism.

Celibacy, a lifestyle patterned by Jesus himself and Paul after him, renounces the best of the relative (family) in clear favor of the absolute. As we have seen in chapter one, both Jesus and Paul are careful to validate marriage, which is not only sacred but also central to Judeo-Christian theology.[20] To recall, it is those demonic apostates and hypocritical liars who forbid marriage (1 Tim. 4:1-3). But Paul is also clear that if one has the gift of celibacy, namely the requisite self-control, one should pursue it (1 Cor. 7). Zosima wisely perceives that Alyosha *Karamazov* does not have this gift, and so tells him to marry. But Zosima chooses not to.

[20] See chapter one for how marriage analogizes the God-relationship.

If marriage is upheld in *The Brothers Karamazov*, it is not the highest relationship, as it is not the highest relationship in Kierkegaard. From the perspective of the absolute and of eternity, marriage, despite its tremendous blessing, "is still only a jest. I see this when I put marriage together with the absolute τέλος, with an eternal happiness, and in order to be certain that it is the absolute τέλος of which I speak, let death as the arbitrator judge between the two – then I dare to say with truth: It is a matter of indifference whether one has been married or not, just as it is a matter of indifference whether one is Jew or Greek, free or slave" (*CUP* 456). *The Brothers Karamazov* protects the absolute relation, safeguards it against any mediation, by way of monastic resignation, pictured by Zosima's celibacy. Kierkegaard writes, "Resignation has made the individual face […] toward an eternal happiness as the absolute τέλος. […] resignation's absolute distinction will at every moment safeguard the absolute τέλος against all fraternizing" (400). Even in the world, even in his marriage, Alyosha will preserve the absolute distinction.

Abraham gets Isaac back, but he will never confuse his son with the absolute; he passed the test precisely because he was able to distinguish. And so Alyosha will marry, but having learned the absolute distinction, he will not confuse his wife with the absolute. Kierkegaard finds analogies between Abraham's unique trial and similar "collisions" that occur for any believer. He draws attention to the following troublesome verse (*FT* 72): "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). To be sure, the knight of faith will always love (*FT* 74), but he will distinguish between familial relations (the best of the relative) and the absolute relation so radically that his preference for the absolute looks something like hate, as it does in the case of Abraham, who loves his precious son, to be sure (*FT* 74; cf. Gen. 22:2). When

it comes to the absolute distinction between absolute and relative, Aristotelian logic and its categorical either/or distinction stands in its validity.

In defense of those who dismiss it, however, it must be acknowledged that Aristotelian logic, even while fully valid, is not the highest. There is still one step more, a radical joining of absolute and relative in the Absolute Paradox. Even while Zosima clearly distinguishes the spheres by his celibacy, it is he who teaches Alyosha to radically affirm the finite, as he does, even while paradoxically giving it up, as a monk in the world.

Chapter Nine

A Monk in the World: The Limits of Separation

"You shall dwell as a monk in the world."
~ Zosima, *The Brothers Karamazov*

"The person who has made the monastic movement has only one movement left, the movement of the absurd."
~ Johannes de Silentio, *Fear and Trembling*

Given the importance, in Dostoevsky's works, of the absolute distinction between the absolute and the relative, between heaven and earth, it is no surprise that many readings view heaven and earth as ultimately separate. We have already addressed such readings in chapter one, from the angle of the spheres, where we called these "anti-aesthetic" readings. Tending toward tragedy, mysticism, Gnosticism, and monasticism, these readings tend to invalidate the aesthetic sphere, showing the temporal to be irreconcilable with the eternal. In terms of the absolute and the relative, these readings rightly perceive a gulf between the two. But they go too far in deeming this gulf insurmountable: either heaven or earth, either God or this world. As we have seen in previous chapters, this distinction is not only valid but necessary as the first movement of faith, renunciation. But the gulf *is* surmountable: not in a way that mediates the gulf, which stands eternally valid, but by way of the Absolute Paradox of the Godman.

One More Reading that Separates the Absolute and the Relative

In the previous chapter, we took issue with antinomian monodualism when applied to absolute distinctions. In a word, this kind of unity does not adequately distinguish between the absolute and the relative. Here, we critique antinomian monodualism from the opposite angle:

inadequate integration of the absolute and the relative. If the Absolute Paradox absolutely separates absolute and relative, it (he) also – paradoxically – integrates them with radical proximity (*SD* 120-21).

Blank's helpful definition of Bakhtin's "higher unity" as antinomian monodualism illuminates Bakhtinian theory's inability to account for closure. Though very different from other tragic readings, Bakhtin's reading, Ilya Kliger suggests, may be a subtler development of the tragic theories of Dostoevsky developed by Ivanov and Pumpiansky.[21] In a word, Bakhtin reads Dostoevsky as "staging the tragedy of individuation on the level of every utterance."[22] For Bakhtin, endless internal division and non-identity with oneself is a good thing, a sign of "unfinalizability," but this leads him to celebrate, for example, the Underground Man's "speech with a loophole."[23] And it leads him to dismiss the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* and other such "monological" moments of great import in Dostoevsky (see chapter four).

In a word, Bakhtin cannot account for the closure involved in the leap of faith and rebirth. Bethea puts it well, claiming that Bakhtinian theory "cannot adequately respond to the sense of an ending, where silence and the discontinuation of dialogue obtain – be it Raskolnikov's conversion or Stavrogin's suicide. For Dostoevsky death and rebirth are not merely convenient ploys with which to end a story. They become meaningful when placed in the larger context of God's plot. […] An end, therefore, may involve a tragic and just punishment, as it does for Stavrogin, or it may involve a new beginning, as it does for Raskolnikov, but both possibilities have their place in the higher design."[24] In terms of our study, we might say that Bakhtin's

[21] Ilya Kliger, "Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy: Genre and Modernity in Ivanov, Pumpyansky, and Bakhtin," *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 73-87.
[22] Ibid., 83.
[23] Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 313-14.
[24] Bethea, "*The Idiot*," 104.

"higher unity," at least when applied to heaven and earth, does not adequately integrate the two. He is right that Dostoevsky is not ultimately Hegelian, but if Dostoevsky critiques synthesis, he also critiques the separation of heaven and earth and, on the level of utterance, the endless separation from oneself. This radical integration of heaven and earth and of oneself is pictured in Alyosha's leaving the monastery.

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: Problems with Monasticism

In the previous chapter we considered Kierkegaard's validation of monasticism as a passionate (Aristotelian) distinction between heaven and earth. Here we turn to his critique of monasticism, which illuminates Dostoevsky's analogous critique. If the Absolute Paradox upholds the distinction between God and man, he also brings God and man closer than ever before (*SD* 120-21). The monastic movement takes separation too far, or, rather, makes it too external. The absolute distinction between heaven and earth is best preserved within the individual, who protects it in its absoluteness by keeping it from externalization.

If monasticism is a helpful picture of the passionate distinction, it is problematic precisely because it is a *picture*. Kierkegaard writes, "The dubious character of the monastic movement (apart from the error of presumed meritoriousness) was that the absolute interiority, probably in order to demonstrate very energetically that it existed, acquired its obvious expression in distinctive separate outwardness, whereby it nevertheless, however one twists and turns, became only relatively different from all other outwardness" (*CUP* 405). By this visibility, this conspicuousness, the absolute actually becomes mediated: "The monastic movement wants to express interiority by an outwardness that is supposed to be interiority. Herein lies the contradiction, because to be a monk is just as much something outward as being a councilor of justice" (*CUP* 409). Being mediated, the absolute by definition is lost: "the Middle Ages wanted

a little cubbyhole in order to be able to occupy itself properly with the absolute; but it was precisely by this that the absolute lost, because it still became something outward" (*CUP* 408). This problem, the monk's defining his "difference from *worldliness* by foreign dress, [which] is a contradiction, since with that he defines himself in a worldly way" (*CUP* 410, emphasis in original), is embodied by Dostoevsky's worldly monks, especially Father Ferapont and the Grand Inquisitor, whom we encounter not in his pomp but in his monastic robe (14_1:227).

The exact opposite of these pompous monks would be a humble king who lives *in* the world but is not *of* the world. In a great example of what the paradox of faith might look like for a believer in reality, Kierkegaard writes,

> Perhaps he gains the whole world, but he is not like one who craves that. Perhaps he becomes king, but every time he places the crown on his head and every time he extends his scepter, resignation first inspects to see if he, existing, is expressing the absolute respect for the absolute τέλος – and the crown dwindles into insignificance, even if he wears it regally. It dwindles into insignificance as it did that time in the great moment of resignation, even though he now wears it in the third decade of his rule. It dwindles into insignificance as it will some day before the spectators' eyes and before his own dying eyes in the hour of death, but it dwindled into insignificance this way for him at the peak of his vigor. What, then, became of mediation? And yet there was indeed no one who entered the monastery. (*CUP* 410)

In a similar way, by a dual emphasis on resignation, pictured by Zosima's celibacy, and return to the world, pictured by Alyosha's leaving the monastery, *The Brothers Karamazov* advocates being *in* but not *of* the world. The worldly monks, however, are *of* but not *in* the world.

The Limits of Separation in Dostoevsky

Worldly Monks

At the beginning of *The Brothers Karamazov*, there is a description of the rigorous ascetic trial of submitting oneself to an elder. While this can lead to total self-control, it can also lead to "satanic pride" (14_1:27), which we see in monks like Father Ferapont and the Grand Inquisitor. For Dostoevsky, dying to oneself is more complicated than just going to a monastery.

Regarding dying to oneself, Kierkegaard writes: "all selfishness rooted out, the selfishness that wants to have everything and the selfishness that proudly turns away from everything. But that is just the trouble, and here is the suffering in dying to oneself" (*CUP* 472). Ferapont abandons the selfishness that wants to have everything, but in so doing he acquires a greater selfishness, the pride that turns away from earthly life and spurns it. In contrast, Zosima has truly died to himself and has the humility to accept his humanity and enjoy cherry jam (see chapter one).

Before becoming a murderous tyrant, the Grand Inquisitor begins as an ascetic (14_1:237). Like Ferapont, he turns away from a lower selfishness to a higher one, to pride and vainglory. Again, Kierkegaard's words apply: "A person renounces vanity – but he wants to be admired because he does it" (*CUP* 564). The Grand Inquisitor suffers from the "sorry error" of "becoming honored as a holy person," of wanting "literally to be like God through virtue and holiness instead of becoming more and more humble" (*CUP* 565). The "satanic pride" of the Grand Inquisitor is explicit: he admits to Jesus that he is in league with Satan (234). And he becomes totally worldly, wielding Caesar's sword, not separating Caesar and God, whom Jesus clearly and absolutely distinguishes (Matt. 22:21).

At the end of chapter seven, on the limits of separation, we encountered the strange phenomenon that synthesis between absolute and relative begets their separation, as evidenced by Myshkin's trajectory. Here we see the counterpart to this phenomenon: beginning with separation from the world, Ferapont and the Inquisitor wind up in the most flagrant synthesis: trying to become God. Though very different from these two megalomaniacs, Alyosha undergoes a similar process in forsaking the world but then granting absolute value to Zosima, whom he idolizes (14_1:306-7). Precisely as Kierkegaard formulates, the external separation of the monastic movement, by being external, dilutes the absolute and merges it with something else, whether

one's righteousness, pride, power, or, in Alyosha's case, another person. Before his decisive conversion after Zosima's death, Alyosha confesses to Lise that he maybe does not even believe in God (201). Perhaps at this point his faith is like Shatov's or Myshkin's: he believes in Russia, her Orthodoxy, his adored Elder. But in God?

Monks in the World

However counterintuitive or paradoxical, the best way to preserve the absolute distinction between heaven and earth is to remain firmly on earth, integrated into human society, an act that requires humility and the acknowledgement of one's humanity and limitedness. Kierkegaard writes at length of this radical reintegration with the relative (while still relating absolutely to the absolute). In one of his lengthiest and most humorous examples, Kierkegaard, or rather the doubting Johannes Climacus, writes of the heroic feat, the great challenge, of enjoying an amusement park with the conception of God and eternity. This is so difficult because "the more decisive an undertaking […], the easier it is to join the God-conception together with it" (*CUP* 486), but "the more unimportant something is, the more difficult it is to join the God-conception together with it" (*CUP* 487). Therefore, writes Climacus, "it never occurs to me to bring such trifles as going out to the amusement park into connection with the thought of God – indeed, to me it seems to be an insult to God, and I know that it does not occur to a single one of the many people I know, either" (*CUP* 477). And yet, just as Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* marvels over the knight of faith, who renounces finitude and then lives in it, so Johannes Climacus marvels as such a feat of faith: "I admire it as the greatest marvel, but also frankly admit that I do not succeed in being able, from and with the highest conception of God and his eternal hippiness, to enjoy myself in the amusement park" (*CUP* 499).

In chapter one, we considered the details of Zosima's cell and how they demonstrated the sanctity of the aesthetic sphere. Here we examine one more detail that speaks volumes, affirming, like Kierkegaard's amusement park example, the aesthetic sphere in the broadest sense of the temporal, even in its most mundane. It is one thing to affirm marriage (see chapter one), which has as much gravity as it has gladness, or to affirm the high art of "the Italian masters" (14_1:37). But it is another thing to affirm "arts and crafts": Zosima's cell includes also "the most common Russian lithographs" that are "sold for kopecks at all the fairs" (37). Given what we know about Zosima, his humility and humanity, we may assume that he enjoys himself at such fairs where he purchases these cheap lithographs. Zosima accomplishes precisely Kierkegaard's marvel of faith: to enjoy the most lighthearted human joys in full consciousness of eternity, "absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian" (*FT* 41). Zosima acknowledges his human lowliness and thus, participating in the world, not extricating himself from it like Ferapont, he actually distinguishes absolutely between himself in his finitude and God in his infinitude. He tells Alyosha to go and do likewise, to be "a monk in the world" (259).

The Validity of Monasticism

Someone might object that Zosima is still officially a monk, and that he does not achieve the highest for Kierkegaard: the second movement of leaving the monastery. As we have seen before, here the denominational difference is felt: the Russian Orthodox, overall, is a bit more friendly toward monasticism (despite the harsh critiques) than the Lutheran. However, it is worth noting, and it might come as a surprise, that Kierkegaard actually does validate monasticism, under one condition, the exact same condition given by Dostoevsky. Kierkegaard validates monasticism insofar as the monk acknowledges that there is no merit in his monasticism but that he is actually worse than the civilian: "if he does that, then there can be no further objection to

his choice, no matter what one deigns to say in the nineteenth century" (*CUP* 414).[25] In precisely the same way, Zosima encourages the monks to reject any idea of their superiority, but to acknowledge their inferiority (14_1:149).

Furthermore, Zosima is not a monk in sense that Ferapont is a monk. He is deeply engaged with the world. He interacts with people. Yet another detail about his cell speaks volumes: it is technically outside the walls of the monastery (14_1:33). Zosima is no hypocrite in telling Ayosha to make the final movement of faith by leaving the monastery. Zosima, too, is a monk in the world.

[25] Here is the full quote: "But the monastic movement must not be made as something meritorious; on the contrary, it must be made humbly before God and not without a certain sense of shame. Just as a sick child does not regard it as meritorious to be allowed to remain at home with his parents, just as a beloved does not regard it as meritorious that she cannot at any moment do without the sight of her lover and is unable to gain the strength to have the thought of him with her as she goes about her work as usual […] so must the candidate for the monastery regard his relationship with God. And if he does that, then there can be no further objection to his choice, no matter what one deigns to say in the nineteenth century."

Chapter Ten

The Yin-Yang of Synthesis and Separation

> "Dostoevsky's thinking is almost impossible to pin down; it is even difficult to follow; it slips and writhes like an eel, and finally, as if on purpose, disappears in a thick fog of irreconcilable contradictions."
> ~ Lev Shestov, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*

Part one of this study addressed the existence-spheres, their sanctity and limitation and thus, implicitly, their interrelation. Part two of this study explicitly addresses the interrelations of the spheres, of heaven and earth, and the forms of these interrelations, namely synthesis, separation, and paradox. We have just examined synthesis and separation, their validity and their limits, over the past four chapters. Before moving on to paradox in our final chapter, we pause here to take a step back and to consider one more layer of analysis, the interrelations *of these interrelations* of the spheres, that is, how synthesis and separation are themselves interrelated.

As we have seen in chapter seven, synthesis ultimately yields separation, according to Kierkegaard's formulation. Myshkin's fusion of heaven and earth, his epileptic visions "of highest synthesis," end in darkness and unconsciousness, and the Poor Knight's visions of divine beauty and millenarian crusading end in isolation. As we have seen in chapter nine, separation ultimately yields synthesis. Apparently forsaking the world, Ferapont and the Grand Inquisitor become worldly. In the present chapter, we trace the spiral of this interrelation (of interrelations) throughout Dostoevsky's works, a spiral Kierkegaard formulates in terms of monasticism and mediation, which are not unrelated (*CUP* 387-431). We trace how synthesis and separation oscillate and are ultimately dismissed in favor of the paradox dialectic of *The Brothers*

Karamazov. We have seen how antinomian monodualism does not apply to the absolute distinction. Here, however, it applies well, for there is a yin-yang reciprocity between synthesis and separation.

Synthesis-Separation Reciprocity in Dostoevsky

Notes from Underground

The first example of this phenomenon in Dostoevsky's mature fiction is in *Notes from Underground*. Scholars have suggested many reasons for the reversed chronological structure of *Notes from Underground*, whose part one takes place in the 1860s and part two in the 1840s.[1] On the basic level of historical context, Joseph Frank observes that by putting the 60s first, Dostoevsky maximized polemical impact with Chernyshevsky, whose *What Is to Be Done?* had just been published.[2] While this certainly makes sense, other scholars suggest more essential reasons for this structure. For example, Ellen Chances notes that the non-linear structure of *Notes* reflects a general non-linearity essential to Dostoevsky in general.[3]

To these good reasons I add yet another reason for the reversed chronology, which reflects the endless cycle of synthesis and separation. (This cycle, as we shall see, gains increasing clarity throughout Dostoevsky's mature fiction; I do not claim that Dostoevsky was fully aware of all the dialectical implications in this structure of *Notes from Underground*, which most likely reflects a subconscious link that grew increasingly conscious.) We have already discussed, in chapter six, the interrelation of the 1840s and 1860s, primarily with regard to

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[1] See Ellen Chances, "Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* Revisited, Plus a Few Thoughts about Winnie-the-Pooh," in *Teaching Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Belknap*, ed. Deborah Martinsen, Cathy Popkin, Irina Reyfman (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 186-98.
[2] Frank, "Nihilism and *Notes from the Underground*," 32.
[3] Chances, "Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* Revisited," 198.

Demons. As was suggested in passing, this interrelation in *Demons* – and its chronological confusion – is anticipated in *Notes from Underground*. The young Underground Man of the 1840s embodies (and undermines) the Romantic Idealist sensibilities of the time, namely the infatuation with "the beautiful and the sublime." Broadly speaking, the idealistic 1840s, rife with German Romantic Idealism, in particular Hegelianism, exhibit a core doctrine of synthesis (see chapter six). In the 1860s, the middle-aged Underground man embodies (and undermines) the nihilistic sensibilities of the time, namely the deterministic "laws of nature" that he tries and fails to adopt. Broadly speaking, the nihilistic, deterministic 1860s, no longer humanistically merging with the divine but banishing the divine, exhibit a core doctrine of separation.[4]

Chronologically, therefore, *Notes from Underground* shows how doctrines of synthesis beget doctrines of separation, how theistic Romantic Idealists beget atheistic nihilists, as in *Demons*. Narratologically, however, the trajectory is reversed: 60s doctrines of separation (in part one) lead backward into 40s doctrines of synthesis (part two). This trajectory accords with the curious dynamic we have just seen the previous chapter: that separation of the absolute and the relative morphs into their synthesis, into absolutizing or idolizing the relative. So, on the one hand, as *Notes from Underground* suggests, synthesis leads to separation (chronology), but on the other hand, separation leads to synthesis (narratology).

The way out of this endless cycle of synthesis and separation, of idealism and nihilism, of illusion and disillusionment, is the leap of faith, as *Notes* suggests. Chapter ten of part one was essential to Dostoevsky's purpose in demonstrating "the necessity of faith and Christ," a purpose clouded by censorship.[5] If not yet depicted, as in the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment*, the leap

[4] As we have seen in chapter nine, this separation leads to extreme synthesis, to man's usurping and becoming God, as in the case of the Grand Inquisitor. Consider also Kirillov, man of the 60s.
[5] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 3:328.

is at least implied in *Notes*. Synthesis and separation fold into one another, circling around paradox, the leap of faith.

Crime and Punishment and The Idiot

If it seems tenuous that the structure of *Notes* could bear such complex dialectical significance, let us consider *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*, which, taken together, reflect a similar structure. (It is not inconceivable to consider them as a unit, as the latter followed swiftly on the heels of the former, and as they have often been treated as such in scholarship.)[6] *Crime and Punishment* is analogous to *Notes*, part one, in that a split man (*Raskol*nikov), a nihilist in despair, arrives negatively at "the necessity of faith and Christ." (While Raskolnikov makes the leap of faith, the Underground Man does not, but he approaches it.)[7] Moreover, both texts about split men approaching wholeness lead into texts about wholeness-seeking idealists who become increasingly split, that is, into *The Idiot* and *Notes*, part two.

However different Myshkin and the young Underground Man, both seek to save fallen women in their quest for the beautiful and the sublime, which runs aground on the harsh reality of sin (see chapter seven). Both texts, beginning with naïve hope in immediate transcendence (synthesis), end with sin and despair (separation). The Underground Man cries out, "I can't be…good!" (5_2:196) and runs out after the spurned Liza "in despair" (198). Myshkin's positive affirmations of innocence fail to save Nastasya Filippovna from Rogozhin's knife, and the beautiful and the sublime run aground on the crucified Lamb who had "no beauty" (Isaiah 53), as Holbein's painting depicts. Myshkin's and the young Underground Man's synthesis of the aesthetic and the religious ends with their tragic separation.

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[6] Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 366.
[7] See Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 3:328.

Thus the endings of *Notes*, part two, and of *The Idiot* come full circle to the beginnings of *Notes*, part one, and of *Crime and Punishment*: to doubt and despair, the sickness unto death, emblematized by Raskolnikov in his "coffin" of an apartment (6_2:198) and the Underground Man in his lair. Chronologically, the sentimental idealism of the young Underground Man and of Myshkin (who betrays influence of Rousseau and Schiller and Hegel, as we have seen) leads to the nihilism of the middle-aged Underground Man and of Raskolnikov. Narratologically, however, the middle-aged Underground Man and Raskolnikov precede the young Underground Man and Myshkin. Taken as a whole, therefore, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* suggest, like *Notes* I and II, that synthesis leads (via sin) to separation (chronology), which in turn leads to synthesis (narratology), and the circle continues, unless interrupted by paradox, the leap of faith at the center of both diptychs.

On the one hand, to be sure, the structures of *Notes* and the combined novels suggests that separation leads not to synthesis but rather to paradox, to Raskolnikov's faith and to the Underground Man's at least discovering its necessity; but on the other hand, the paradox of faith is not yet represented in its essence, as it is in Alyosha's conversion in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Rather, in these earlier works, the paradox of faith is glimpsed as a nebulous phenomenon, a vision of the absolute that retains strong elements of separation and thus of ensuing synthesis. By his transcendent vision of timeless nomadic life on the steppe, Raskolnikov is resurrected out of chronology and his prosaic Petersburg novel (separation) into a mythic fusion of time and eternity (synthesis).[8] When Myshkin descends from the idyll of his Swiss alps to prosaic Petersburg, the implicit question is, to use Gary Saul Morson's formulation, can the "mythic" be

[8] Zhernokleyev writes, "To underscore the idea of discontinuity between the aesthetic and religious visions, Dostoevsky places Raskolnikov's miraculous experience in the epilogue, thus structurally removing his experience from the main body of the novel." "Beholden by Love," 14.

(re)integrated with the "prosaic"? Tragically, it cannot, at least not via Myshkin's synthesis. The synthetic strain present in Raskolnikov's conversion is then tested in the crucible of *The Idiot*, where it is destroyed by tragic separation. Synthesis begets separation begets synthesis.

Demons

Demons confirms the spiraling shape of the interrelation of synthesis and separation, shedding retrospective light on the reversed chronology of *Notes*. In *Demons*, not only does the synthesis of the vaguely theistic, idealistic 40s lead to the separation of the atheistic, nihilistic 60s. But also, as we have seen, in a significant chronological confusion, the 60s are linked, via Stavrogin, back to the 30s, which precede the 40s. So, in another sense, the separation of the 60s leads (via the 30s) to the synthesis of the 40s, as in the structure of *Notes* and in the structure of *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* taken together. But the confusion does not end there, for the 60s, as we have seen, show strong elements not only of separation (banishing God) but also of synthesis (becoming God; see chapter six).

Mangod is a kind of meta-synthesis, fusing synthesis and separation: on the one hand, he is at enmity with God; on the other hand, he seeks to become God. Mangod's fusion of synthesis and separation, his self-apotheosis, traces back, via 30s Romanticism, to an ancient Promethean egoism, as we have seen. Feuerbach's Mangod of the 60s is native, according to *Diary of a Writer*, to classical antiquity (26_1:169). Dostoevsky links Mangod, this fusion of synthesis and separation, with Apollo of Belvedere, whom he juxtaposes with Christ the Godman (169), just as Kirillov likewise juxtaposes Mangod and Godman (10_1:189). Thus *Demons* and *Diary* bring to further clarity the ultimate dichotomy (not the false dichotomies of 40s-60s or idealism-nihilism) running throughout *Notes*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Idiot*: not synthesis versus separation (a relative dichotomy), but rather, synthesis-separation versus paradox. That is the synthesis-

separation spiral that culminates in Mangod contrasts with the paradox of the Godman. Neither synthesis nor separation, paradox represents an altogether different way of interrelating the spheres.

With the clarity of the dichotomy of Mangod and Godman, presented in *Demons* and *Diary of a Writer*, we can retrospectively identify such a dichotomy more subtly rendered in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*. At the end of *Crime and Punishment*, Svidrigailov is associated with Achilles by way of his suicide scene (6_2:442), and Raskolnikov is associated with Abraham by way of his conversion scene (472). The self-willed demigod Achilles is a type of Mangod, and Abraham, submissive unto sacrifice, is a type of the Godman. (Kierkegaard traces biblical paradox dialectics, which culminate in Christ, back to Abraham; *FT* 53). The self-willed Svidrigailov exhibits *both* synthesis and separation in suicide, as does the self-apotheosizing Kirillov. Raskolnikov, however, leaves his self-will behind when he bows in submission, making the paradoxical leap of faith. Before his bow at the feet of Sonya in the epilogue, he bows at the crossroads, and at this moment a drunk jokes that he is "going to Jerusalem" (6_2:454). Figuratively this is true: Raskolnikov leaves his Napoleonic, megalomaniacal mode of Mangod to enter the Abrahamic, humble faith of the Godman.

In *The Idiot*, aspects of Apollo-Mangod can be gleaned in the idealistic Myshkin and the nihilistic Rogozhin,[9] who merge at the end, while the paradox of the Godman is prominently displayed by Holbein's painting (see chapter seven). Holbein's "Savior" (8_2:200) does not fuse the aesthetic and the religious, as does Myshkin, but rather, while affirming beauty and creation

[9] The Myshkin-Apollo association is further strengthened by the association of Rogozhin with Dionysus. See Shchetinin, "Razvitie obrazov Myshkina i Rogozhina," 26. These two opposite forces somehow fuse tragically (in accord with Nietzsche's Apollonian-Dionysian framework in *The Birth of Tragedy*) in the destruction of Nastasya Filippovna.

(see chapter one), distinguishes absolutely heaven and earth and between God and man, which he bridges paradoxically. Once again, synthesis-idealism and separation-nihilism, apparently so at odds in the persons of Myshkin and Rogozhin, come together as one half of the true dichotomy of Mangod versus Godman, synthesis-separation versus the Absolute Paradox.

Diary of a Writer

Diary of a Writer provides the most extensive example of the spiral of synthesis and separation, native to Athens, as opposed to paradox, native to Jerusalem. My thinking on *Diary* is informed by Gary Saul Morson's work.[10] Morson frames *Diary* as a boundary genre or meta-genre of utopian and anti-utopian, of mythic and prosaic.[11] This framework corresponds to the cyclical nature of the synthesis and separation of absolute and relative, where utopia/myth corresponds to synthesis of heaven and earth and anti-utopia/prose to the separation of the two. As Morson demonstrates, mythic visions of apocalypse, of the fusion of time and eternity, oscillate with prosaic irony that undercuts such visions and that implies an endless march of time, a lack of transcendence. Thus the shape of *Diary* corresponds to the cyclical relationship between synthesis and separation throughout Dostoevsky's mature fiction. In contrast to this spiral of synthesis-separation, there begins to emerge, in *Diary*, the "paradoxical" mythic prosaic that comes to full fruition in *The Brothers Karamazov*.[12] This mode of being, which finds "mythic" significance in the most "prosaic" deed, rather than seeing the two as mutually exclusive, has to do essentially with the Absolute Paradox of the Incarnation, though Morson

[10] Namely, Morson, *Boundaries of Genre* and Morson, "Introductory Study."
[11] "The mythic prosaic" is formulated primarily in relation to *The Brothers* Karamazov, but also in relation to *Diary*, where it appears rudimentarily. See Morson, "The God of Onions."
[12] Morson, "The God of Onions," 109.

mostly limits himself to questions of genre. In *Diary*, the Hellenic spiral of synthesis and separation eventually yields to the Hebraic paradox of faith.

An Instance of Synthesis versus Separation in the Scholarship

As we have seen from the very beginning of this study, some readings of Dostoevsky incline toward his synthesis or "mythic" side, while others incline toward his separation or "prosaic" side. One example of this contrast is the diverging visions of Jackson and Bakhtin. Juxtaposing the two, Caryl Emerson writes, "Before Jackson's readers is the prophet who, during his Pushkin speech, insisted on inspired transformation, on maximalism, on leaps rather than continuities. In this portrait, Jackson confirms Dostoevsky as a mainstream Russian thinker, part of a tradition stretching from the Orthodox saints up through the Symbolists, Futurists, and Formalists, a tradition unified first and foremost by its discrediting the ongoing stuff of everyday life (*byt*) in the interests of the miracle-working icon or the isolatable and estranging artistic device."[13] In contrast, "Ends and apocalypse are not very interesting to Bakhtin."[14] Both scholars capture an important aspect of Dostoevsky, but both of these modes, both synthesis and separation, are ultimately discarded as misguided ways of interrelating heaven and earth.

How to reconcile ultimate transcendence and *byt*, the "mythic and the "prosaic," heaven and earth – this is the question that plagues Dostoevsky and that he finally answers positively in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The solution has to do with the Absolute Paradox of the Godman, who emblematizes a dialectical mode essentially different from Mangod's synthesis and separation. With that, let us turn to the final chapter in this study.

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[13] Caryl Emerson, "Word and Image in Dostoevsky's Worlds: Robert Louis Jackson on Readings That Bakhtin Could Not Do," in *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, ed. Elizabeth Cheresh Allen and Gary Saul Morson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1995), 245-66, 263.
[14] Ibid.

Chapter Eleven

Enjoying Pancakes at a Funeral: The Absolute Paradox

"It's all so strange, Karamazov, such grief and then suddenly pancakes – it all seems so unnatural in our religion!"
~ Kolya Krasotkin, *The Brothers Karamazov*

"The religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful."
~ Frater Taciturnus, *Stages on Life's Way*

Much of the ground of this chapter has already been covered. We have approached the paradox dialectic from different angles throughout this study. Unlike synthesis and other, more complex forms of mediation (like antinomian monodualism), the paradox dialectic draws a sharp (biblical) line between absolute and relative, God and man. While reconciling it, the Godman paradoxically accentuates this difference, as we have seen. Unlike separation and its subtler manifestations (as in Bakhtin's subtly "tragic" reading), the paradox dialectic, having radically separated heaven and earth, joins them radically. While the divide between the two forever remains, the absolute and the relative are united by the knight of faith, whose task is ultimately "to relate himself simultaneously to his absolute τέλος and to the relative – not by mediating them but by relating himself absolutely to his absolute τέλος and relatively to the relative" (*CUP* 407). In the present chapter, we review some approximations of the paradox dialectic, before reviewing Kierkegaard's corrective and how this corrective makes sense of a tiny detail in the epilogue of *The Brothers Karamazov*, a detail that, as usual in Dostoevsky, speaks volumes.

Approximations of the Paradox Dialectic

There have been several illuminating approximations of the paradox dialectic between heaven and earth at the heart of Dostoevsky's fiction. They all, in some way or another, recognize that Christology is somehow related to Dostoevsky's dialectic. While many of these approximations are quite accurate, Kierkegaard's conceptualization can provide further nuance.

Chapter one opened with a discussion of Merezhkovsky's apt diagnosis of "monastic, black Christianity,"[1] and what he sees as Dostoevsky's corrective to this problem. At a glance, Merezhkovsky's formulation of Dostoevsky's dynamics looks similar to Kierkegaard's paradox dialectic. He writes of an initial rejection of the flesh in favor of the spirit, followed by a spiritual affirmation of the flesh.[2] This sounds a lot like Kierkegaard, but when we look closer, we see a big difference.

Ultimately, Merezhkovky's vision is one of Hegelian synthesis between heaven and earth and God and man, a synthesis that dissolves the infinite qualitative difference. Flesh (thesis) is negated by spirit (antithesis), before the two are mediated by the spiritual flesh (synthesis). The dialectic is palpably Hegelian. This becomes especially clear when it comes to Mangod and Godman, Christ and Antichrist: Merezhkovsky envisions a fusion of the two.[3] As we have seen in chapter three, Merezhkovsky dismisses ethics, preaching an Nietzschean or antinomian "Christianity." At the basis of this confusion lies a deficient Christology. A mantra of Merezhkovsky's study is "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).[4] But this is only part of the paradox. We might bring Merezhkovsky's attention to this verse: "But concerning that day and

[1] Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 452.
[2] Ibid., 199.
[3] Ibid., 350.
[4] Ibid., 249, e.g.

hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matt. 24:36). Father and Son are one, to be sure, but they are also paradoxically distinct. Similarly, the Godman does not obliterate the infinite qualitative difference, but paradoxically upholds it. Without this difference, God and man, Christ and Antichrist, merge into a synthesis, precisely as they do for Kirillov, whose dialectics can be traced, via Feuerbach, back to Hegel.

Explicitly deeming Dostoevskian unity non-Hegelian,[5] Bakhtin serves as a corrective to the synthesis in Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age in general. He perceives a complex unity of a higher order, but, as scholars have noted, he does not go into detail about what this might be (see chapter six). Moreover, his focus is not the interrelation of heaven and earth, and his study, likely for political reasons, has little to do with Christology, at least explicitly. At one point Bakhtin writes of Dostoevsky's fiction as a church of unified but unmerged voices,[6] but he does not elaborate.

Defining the mysterious unity Bakhtin identifies, Blank provides a rich theological framework. While her approach is not strictly Christological, her presentation of antinomic unity draws deeply on Russian religious thinkers who explicitly formulate the hypostatic union (Florensky) and the Trinity (Lossky) in terms of antinomies (see chapter eight). As we have argued, the Trinity may very well be formulated in terms of antinomies: all three persons are eternally necessary and mutually inseparable. But the hypostatic union, the Godman's dual nature, may not (see chapter eight). We have also argued that antinomic unity does not account for the absolute difference between good and evil (the latter is not eternally or "absolutely"

[5] Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 36.
[6] Ibid.

necessary).[7] Here we disagree less with Blank, whose focus is primarily on other antinomies (not heaven and earth), than with the religious thinkers she draws upon. Though in many ways like antinomian monodualism in being an opposition without a synthesis, the Absolute Paradox is different: it both separates and reintegrates much more radically.

Though primarily defining this higher unity in terms of genre, Morson does bring in Christology, speaking of how Dostoevsky figures out a way to make Christianity prosaic.[8] While his formulation is fitting in many ways, there is a problem in speaking of "prosaic Christianity." It is not, as Morson implies, that Christianity is mythic and that Dostoevsky finds a way to make it prosaic. Rather, Christianity, in its paradoxical essence (as we shall see momentarily), is an unthinkable unity of time and eternity (a sharper dichotomy than mythic and prosaic). It is not that Dostoevsky found some sort of new Christianity; rather, his past "Christianity" was so infused to idealism that it became mythic, as in Myshkin's fusion (see chapter seven). The crucible of Dostoevsky's fiction purged away the dross until Christianity appeared, unalloyed, in his final novel, as a paradoxical unity of time and eternity.

In a recent study steeped in theology, Paul Contino correctly, in our view, sees the Incarnation as absolutely central to *The Brothers Karamazov* and Dostoevsky's "incarnational realism."[9] I agree with much of Contino's illuminating study, but in some subtle ways our readings diverge, ways that have to do with mediation. To go into detail about these differences would require a venture into theology that is beyond this study, but in a word, Contino is one step closer to mediation than the paradox dialectic, as we have noted in his proposed "synthesis"

[7] Here the theological distinction between *absolute* necessity and *consequent* necessity would be helpful, but that would bring us beyond this study.
[8] Morson, "God of Onions," 109.
[9] Contino, *Dostoevsky's Incarnational Realism*, 7-26.

between eros and agape (see chapter two). Eros and agape may indeed coexist with radical proximity, but the notion of "synthesis" suggests a friendliness toward mediation that is lacking in the paradox dialectic.

Contino notes that Christianity encompasses an "either/or" and a "both/and."[10] At a glance, this is the paradox dialectic: there is a severe either/or between heaven and earth, an absolute distinction, followed by (or rather, ideally, accompanied by) a radical integration, an overcoming of this distinction. And yet, in Contino's study, mediation ultimately gets the upper hand, for the mediation of either/or and both/and is itself a both/and of sorts.[11] Kierkegaard discusses at length why this kind of mediation between Christianity and mediation itself (a common phenomenon in German Idealism) is problematic.[12] In a word, the final "shape" of Contino's dialectic is more of a reciprocity than Kierkegaard's (and Dostoevsky's, I claim) paradox dialectic. Contino himself acknowledges the parallel between his thinking and Blank's,[13] and I agree: it aligns, in the end, with antinomian monodualism, which does not quite account for the severity of the either/or that precedes the radical reintegration, the overcoming of the difference that – paradoxically – accentuates the difference and precludes a "both/and."

Contino, like Morson, rightly identifies the reasonable aspect of Christianity[14] in Dostoevsky's final novel,[15] an aspect too often neglected by many commentators who misconstrue Dostoevsky (and Kierkegaard, for that matter), as full-blown irrationalists.[16] Along

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[10] Ibid., 8.
[11] Ibid., 222n21.
[12] This is one of the central concerns of *Philosophical Fragments* and reappears in the *Postscript*.
[13] Contino, *Dostoevsky's Incarnational Realism*, 221n19.
[14] Peter says to be "ready to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). Paul writes, "let your reasonableness be known to everyone" (Phil. 4:5).
[15] Ibid., 18.
[16] See Pattison, "Freedom's Dangerous Dialogue," 240-41, for a corrective to this misreading.

with the reasonable, Contino emphasizes the cataphatic,[17] the positive. While this must be emphasized, the negative must also be held together with it, and here Zhernokleyev's apophatic reading, discussed in previous chapters, might balance out Contino's. There is at once a radical death to the world, a radical break with oneself, and a rebirth, a reintegration with reality and with oneself. Contino emphasizes the latter, Zhernokleyev – the former, but both the positive and the negative are essential, insists Kierkegaard, to the religious (*CUP* 532, 534, e.g.).

A Kierkegaardian Corrective: The Absolute Paradox

In his impassioned analysis of the unthinkable, Kierkegaard takes great pains to underscore the validity of thought and reason and understanding and scholarship (*CUP* 25, 47, 564-65, e.g.). He simply insists that, however much evidence one has for the truth of Christianity (and he does not deny the historical evidence), there remains at the heart of it the Absolute Paradox, indeed several paradoxes, that are utterly hostile to human thinking. These paradoxes are: 1) "The dialectical contradiction that constitutes the break: to expect an eternal happiness in time through a relation to something else in time," 2) "The dialectical contradiction that an eternal happiness is based on the relation to something historical," and 3) "The dialectical contradiction that the historical under consideration here is not something historical in the ordinary sense but consists of that which can become historical only against its nature, consequently by virtue of the absurd" (*CUP* 570-80). With great powers of reason, Kierkegaard meticulously highlights the absurdity of all this, but what matters for us is that these paradoxes are where thinking ends, where immanence ends, and where faith and transcendence begin. This absurd unity of time and eternity, a unity that accentuates difference, is marvelously rendered by a little detail in the epilogue of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

[17] Contino, *Dostoevsky's Incarnational Realism*, ix, 18.

The Absolute Paradox in Dostoevsky

At the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, at Ilyusha's funeral, the disjunction between heaven and earth is felt painfully. Here Dostoevsky's powers of tragedy are in full swing. The author had recently experienced the death of a child himself, his three-year-old Aleksei, and the pathos comes through with full force. Given the tremendous grief, not to mention guilt (the boys share in the responsibility for Ilyusha's death, for it was one of their stones that triggered his illness), the idea of eating at the funeral seems preposterous. Kolya says to Alyosha, "It's all so strange, Karamazov, such grief and then suddenly pancakes – it all seems so unnatural in our religion!" (15_1:194). When another boy pipes up that there will be salmon, too, Kolya flies into a rage (194). He seems offended at the very thought. The conversation moves on, but in the novel's penultimate paragraph, when Alyosha concludes his pathos-filled speech to the boys, he laughs, "Don't be put out at our eating pancakes – it's something ancient, eternal, and there's something good in that" (197). Alyosha has learned from his Elder how to affirm the finite, even when it is utterly eclipsed, and he passes this wisdom on to the boys.

Eating pancakes at a funeral is the perfect emblem of the paradox, "the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful" (*SLW* 477). In chapter one we saw how the finite, the aesthetic, is sanctified by the infinite, the religious. In chapter five we saw how this sanctity exists despite the fact that the infinite, before it sanctifies, first *nullifies* the finite: the individual dies to immediacy and becomes eternally guilty. In chapter eight we saw that even when one returns to immediacy, resignation remains, forever distinguishing absolute and relative. In chapter nine we saw that despite this resignation, the finite is affirmed, indeed even more radically, perhaps, than the picture presented in chapter one. The religious affirms not only high art and marriage, but also something as superfluous and

lighthearted as a fair, as evidenced by Zosima's lithographs. To affirm such trifles even with the highest consciousness of God, insists Kierkegaard, is truly difficult. And here, in chapter eleven, we have the paradox in its most paradoxical. Here we have an affirmation of the mundane, eating pancakes, not just in light of eternity, but in light of *mortality*, which emphasizes the tragic aspect of finitude – pain, loss, grief, death, even the death of a child. And yet in the midst of this tragic brokenness all around us, despite our inevitable death, we must still live and affirm life, even joyfully. We must eat pancakes at a funeral. Kolya is absolutely right. This is strange and unnatural. And yet it is our condition. Kierkegaard, as I have argued throughout this study, conceptualizes precisely the strangeness, the unnaturalness, the paradox of existence that Dostoevsky depicts.

Conclusion

Synthesis and Separation in Tolstoy

"Pierre glanced up at the sky and the twinkling stars
in its far-away depths. 'And all that is me, all that is
within me, and it is all I!'"
~ Pierre Bezukhov, *War and Peace*

"All is vanity, all falsehood, except that infinite sky.
There is nothing, nothing, but that. But even it does
not exist, there is nothing but quiet and peace.
Thank God!…"
~ Prince Andrei, *War and Peace*

So what about Tolstoy? We began this study with divergent Dostoevskys. Let us conclude with divergent Tolstoys. The yin-yang reciprocity between synthesis and separation that we traced throughout Dostoevsky's works (see chapter ten) applies to Tolstoy as well. Indeed, it might apply even better. While the first half of his authorship tends more toward synthesis, and while the second tends more toward separation, with *Anna Karenina* being the turning point, both dialectical modes are present in the same works, even in the same characters. Like their author, Tolstoyan heroes experience a perpetual cycle of enchantment (treating something relative as absolute) and disillusionment (disappointment with the relative entity that does not lastingly satisfy).

The Cossacks, for example, begins with Olenin's disenchantment with civilization, which he abandons for the more primitive Caucasus. Life in the Caucasus is characterized by harmony between man and nature, a harmony embodied by Uncle Eroshka, Tolstoy's paragon of pagan

wisdom, according to Merezhkovsky.[18] Out hunting with Eroshka, Olenin experiences a moment of cosmic harmony in the stag's lair, and he also falls in love with Maryanka, who embodies Nature itself. But if Olenin's epiphany first resembles communion with nature, it leads into an "unnatural" ethic of self-sacrifice that alienates him from the primitive Cossacks. For example, his subsequent selfless gift of a valuable horse to Lukashka baffles everyone and raises suspicion. Failing to connect with Maryanka and to find satisfaction among the Cossacks and their natural way of life, he leaves the Caucasus a superfluous man, just as disillusioned as when he left Moscow.

War and Peace depicts a dual vision of synthesis and separation simultaneously. On the one hand, the epic novel portrays a grand synthesis or, to use its own calculus terminology, an integration of the spheres. Natasha specifically and the Rostovs in general exemplify this harmony of the spheres, a harmony between man and nature and the divine. Their experiences in nature are religious: "oneness with nature," writes Caryl Emerson, is nothing less than "a state of grace" in Tolstoy.[19] Pierre has moments like this, too. On the other hand, however, the novel separates the spheres. Fused by the Rostovs, the spheres are separated by the Bolkonskys, whose spiritual strivings are markedly otherworldly, invalidating earthly life. Marya dreams of abandoning everything to lead the life of a pilgrim. This dream runs throughout Tolstoy and is realized by the author himself at the end of his life. Seeing the sky at Austerlitz, Andrei learns that all is vanity and never recovers from this insight. If the novel tends toward synthesis, it ends on a note of separation in the first epilogue, where the aesthetic and the ethical are disjointed in

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The epigraph quotes refer to the Maude translation in the Bibliography.
[18] Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 18, 141, e.g., *passim*.
[19] Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, ed, Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, and Randall A. Poole (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020), 184-204, 187.

marriage, which is emphatically unaesthetic. Natasha's spark is extinguished by the dirty diapers that consume her life. Instead elevating the aesthetic, as in Kierkegaard, the ethical seems to quell it in Tolstoy. The second epilogue, anticipated by the philosophical interpolations throughout, presents a worldview that might be considered nihilistic in its determinism. The note of separation at the novel's end anticipates *Anna Karenina*.

Levin in *Anna Karenina* seeks the kind of synthesis shown in *War and Peace*, but he is not as successful as the latter's heroes. Moments of harmony are less frequent in *Anna Karenina*. However, they are still there, one of the best examples being the mowing scene in which Levin achieves cosmic bliss, harmonizing self, other, and nature. By the end of the novel, after a prolonged and agonizing wrestling with meaning that almost leads to suicide, he seems to find harmony in family and faith, but it is very precarious. After *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy the moralist cannot tolerate Tolstoy the fiction writer, who sporadically rears his head. To generalize broadly, in late Tolstoy, the infinite and the finite are at odds.

What Tolstoy and Dostoevsky thought of each other is a fascinating and enigmatic topic that may, in part, be understood in terms of synthesis and separation. One point of contact between the two novelists has to do with Levin's spiritual quest in *Anna Karenina*. In *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky acknowledges *Anna Karenina* as a masterpiece of world literature (to the glory of Russia, which in its culture now rivals Europe's). But then he takes issue with Levin, who criticizes the Russo-Turkish war that Dostoevsky champions.

In this instance, we see Dostoevsky the German Idealist, the synthesis-Dostoevsky, colliding with Tolstoy the nihilist, the separation-Tolstoy. At the apex of his jingoistic, anti-Western Russophilia, Dostoevsky is bothered by what he considers Levin's individualism, egoism, and alienation from the *narod* (25_1:193-94, 203, 205). He is especially bothered by

Levin's disillusioned perception that many Russians are using the war to flee from regular, "prosaic" responsibilities in search of more glorified meaning (213-15), the kind of apocalyptic, millenarian, "mythic" meaning with which Dostoevsky is at this moment intoxicated. Despite his own follies, which we have discussed, Dostoevsky predicts, with some insight into Tolstoy's future, that Levin's newfound faith will not last, that he is too cut off from his compatriots (205). At this point, to recall, Dostoevsky's faith resides in Christ-as-Russian-folk. Dostoevskian utopian synthesis collides with Tolstoyan anti-utopian separation.

Another point of contact between the two novelists is *The Idiot*, which reveals the exact opposite scenario: Dostoevsky the nihilist-tragedian colliding with Tolstoy the idealist. In what Steiner calls "the oddest allusion to Tolstoy in all of Dostoevskyan fiction,"[20] Dostoevsky gives his positively beautiful Prince Myshkin Tolstoy's name and patronymic, Lev Nikolaevich. Among other allusions to Tolstoy in *The Idiot* (see chapter seven for another example) is the fact, noted by Robin Miller, that both Myshkin and Pierre Bezukhov return from Switzerland at the outset of their respective novels.[21] Donna Orwin further explores the influence of Pierre on *The Idiot*.[22] *War and Peace* was still being serialized when Dostoevsky started work on his novel. So here, in a reversal of the dynamic we discussed above, the "gloom and doom" Dostoevsky, the separating Dostoevsky, takes to task the synthesizing, Rousseauian Tolstoy, manifest in Pierre and *War and Peace* in general.

So, synthesis and separation continue to spiral, not only in Dostoevsky and Tolstoy individually but even among these two authors. As we have seen, Dostoevsky found a way

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[20] Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 327.
[21] Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky and* The Idiot: *Author, Narrator, and Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981), 59.
[22] Orwin, "The Return to Nature," 97-99.

beyond these dialectical forms, ultimately leaving them for the paradox dialectic conceptualized by Kierkegaard. Whether Tolstoy found an alternative dialectic, and if so, what that might be, is a question for a future study.

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