Icons of Faith in *The Brothers Karamazov*: A Kierkegaardian Reading

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Abstract: Through a creative and critical reading of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, this paper explores how the novel portrays a narrative of faith which corresponds to Søren Kierkegaard's philosophical notion of faith.

By analyzing the actions and utterances of the narrative agents, the researcher draws from the novel its conceptions of justice, death and rebirth, acceptance, active love and responsibility, the metaphor of the heart, and mystery. These are subsequently correlated to the Kierkegaardian categories of the double movement, teleological suspension of the ethical, infinite resignation, receiving again, subjectivity, and subjective truth.

The paper has the double-aim of (1) providing a philosophical framework for understanding the convoluted issues of faith explored in the novel, and (2) presenting a novelistic expression of Kierkegaard's philosophy. This dialogue between the two thinkers provides deep reflections on the experience of pain and loss in the world of a Benevolent God.

Keywords: faith, death, acceptance, justice, mystery, teleological suspension of the ethical, infinite resignation, receiving again

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Introduction

Few have dared to plunge deeper into the abyss of the human soul to expose its foul depravity, and fewer have soared higher in search of man's true glory as the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855).[1] However, a practical content for his philosophical concepts is often elusive and finally mysterious. Reading him results in either an intuitive "aha!" or a conclusion that Kierkegaard is hopelessly obscure.[2]

In his search for such concrete content, the researcher stumbled upon the Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky's (1821-1881) magnum opus, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and surprisingly found in it a literary expression for the abstract concepts Kierkegaard strove to articulate. The riveting drama of *The Brothers Karamazov* portrays a panoramic survey of the life of faith. It is an artistic sublimation of Dostoevsky's own harrowing struggles to exorcise his own demons and doubts.[3]

As seminal thinkers of existentialism, their thoughts converge on deeply human questions, and some have already put them into dialogue with each other. Lev Shestov showed how they both shared a revulsion for the arrogance of rationalism and confessed a faith above speculative reason.[4] René Fueloep-Miller observes, "Faith in which all of Dostoevsky's works are steeped was also the core of Kierkegaard's existential philosophy."[5]

However, none of the earlier authors have yet ventured to present a detailed correspondence between particular Kierkegaardian categories of faith with salient themes from *The Brothers Karamazov*, which this paper attempts to do.

This paper aims (1) to provide a philosophical framework to understand *The Brothers Karamazov*'s portrayal of faith; and (2) to present a novelistic expression that is closer to how Kierkegaard envisioned a person of faith: as indistinguishable from the average "bourgeois philistine,"[6] without the radical asceticism he disliked nor the fanaticism that distorted his philosophy.

[1] Ben Alex, *Soren Kierkegaard: An Authentic Life* (Copenhagen: Scandinavia Publishing House, 1997), 14.

[2] Patrick Gardiner, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 110.

[3] René Fueloep-Miller, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: Insight, Faith, and Prophecy,* trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 36-45.

[4] See Lev Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969), 15.

[5] Fueloep-Miller, *Fyodor Dostoevsky,* 57.

[6] Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Repetition,* ed. and trans. Howard Vincent Hong and Edna Hong (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 39. Kierkegaard describes a hypothetical encounter with a man of faith and exclaims how he looks just like a "tax collector" or a "bourgeois philistine." These terms connote a person who belongs to the world and betrays no glimmer of anything extraordinary. Here, Kierkegaard conveys his idea that faith is something personal and hidden, rather than something publicly displayed.

The structure of the paper proceeds by first analyzing and unpacking the actions and utterances of iconic[7] characters in order to unwrap the concepts that constitute the novel's notion of faith. Next, the paper shall conduct a comparison between the identified concepts of the novel with their corresponding Kierkegaardian categories, in order to explore how both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky complement and enrich each other's thoughts. In the cross fertilization of their ideas, insights laden with existential import emerge and fructify as profound reflections which the reader can re-appropriate in his own struggles with faith.

Welcome to the Karamazovs': On Justice and the Mystery of Death and Rebirth

Introduction

The plot of *The Brothers Karamazov* is set into motion by the Karamazov siblings: the sensualist, Dmitri; the intellectual freethinker, Ivan; and the saint-like novice, Alyosha. Their stories climax in the murder of their father, Fyodor Karamazov, leading to the denouement of each son's involvement in the crime. Prominent in this paper will be the themes explored by Ivan and Alyosha.[8]

Since Dostoevsky is more of an artist who expressed his insights through the intuitive spontaneity of his literary art, rather than through a structured philosophy, the researcher shall retrieve Dostoevsky's latent insights by employing a Kierkegaardian framework in this section to artificially structure and lay out the novel's notion of faith. The paper shall focus on the characteristics of the novel's portrayal of faith, rather than on formulating a conclusive definition.

For this section, we first identify the problem raised against religious faith by drawing out Ivan's concept of *justice*. Then we study the novel's governing theme, which is the dynamics of *death and rebirth*, whereby the novel confronts Ivan's arguments. Then we distill the concepts of *acceptance* as the internalization of death, and *active love and responsibility* as the process of rebirth. Then, we expound the metaphor of the *heart* as the *organ* that perceives mystery. Lastly, we explore the concept of *mystery*, as the mode through which the paradox of death and rebirth appears.

[7] Rowan Williams beautifully describes the metaphor of the icon: "The icon as a cultic object shows brokenness healed and plurality reconciled, but translated into the terms of human biography, the icon must be a story, a process that shows the reality of a life that is disrupted by the awareness of loss and sin and still faithful to the world that the icon manifests, faithful enough to become answerable for the world's reality and power." Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (London: Baylor University Press, 2008), 201.

[8] Alyosha will refract many of Zosima's ideas, thus showing the latter's influence on him. In this paper, I have chosen to focus on Alyosha because of the dramatic character development he undergoes. Alyosha's spiritual father, Zosima, on the other hand, although also an icon, is portrayed as already finished, whose struggles are only recalled rather than acted out in the narrative. However, other icons of faith will still be analyzed as contributing to the overall analysis of this paper.

Ivan's Concept of Justice

The Concept

It is Ivan Karamazov who sets up the arguments against religious faith by employing his conception of justice. In his feverish and methodological trial of God, Ivan proves how God presides over an insufferable world of injustice.

Ivan's concept of justice proceeds from his epistemology. He claims, "I have a Euclidean mind, an earthly mind, and therefore it is not for us to resolve things that are not of this world."[9] *Euclidean mind* refers to an epistemology where all certain knowledge comes from observable facts, and valid reasoning comes from causal relationships.[10] It is a hegemonic reasoning that reduces all questions of human existence into intelligible laws of rational necessity.[11] This presupposes that all reality follows the intelligible "laws of Euclidean geometry."[12] Ivan's obsession with the metaphoric language of geometry betrays his fear of uncertainty.[13]

From this limited viewpoint, he tries to survey the whole of reality- an impossible feat.[14] Ivan cannot admit of a worldview where problems irresolvable by a Euclidean mind, may be solved in a higher, transcendent plane. Anything irreducible to Euclidean reason is dismissed as mere myth.

From this, Ivan constructs his concept of justice. Ivan has a symmetric theory of retribution. Retribution is a moral need inherent in every person. To demonstrate this, Ivan challenges Alyosha to provide the penalty for a man who unleashed his hounds to kill a boy. Instinctively, "shoot him!" faintly escapes Alyosha, to which he immediately checks himself, "What I said is absurd, but…"[15] Ivan capitalizes on this "but…" pointing to a moral sentiment demanding symmetrical retribution ("eye for an eye"). Ivan brings out the most unchallenged intuitions about the value of human persons, and how this moral intuition justifies humanity's outrage against the

[9] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Everyman's Library, 1992), 235.

[10] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 244. For Ivan, the human mind is unsuited to probe transcendent, metaphysical questions like immortality or God's existence. This is the reason why, for argument's sake, he simply assumes the proposition "God."

[11] Evgenia V. Cherkasova, "Virtues of the Heart," *Analecta Husserliana: Virtues and Passions in Literature* vol. XCVI (2008): 74.

[12] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 235.

[13] Maria Nemcova Banerjee, *Dostoevsky: Scandal of Reason* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2006), Kindle version, Part II, § III, ¶ 12.

[14] Lee Trepanier, "The Politics and Experience of Active Love in *The Brothers Karamazov,*" in *Perspectives on Political Science,* vol. 39, issue 4 (2009): 201.

[15] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 243.

injustices in God's world.[16] As Maria Nemcová Banerjee puts it, "Thus Ivan's passion for justice, which is real, is converted into the pitiless symmetry of retribution."[17]

Symmetric retribution is coupled with an almost impossible restorative justice. The good that is taken must be restored/redeemed with the exact good which restores the previous loss. Ivan questions, "Can [victims] be redeemed by being avenged? [...] what do I care if the tormentors are in hell, what can hell set right here, if these ones have already been tormented?"[18] What Ivan demands is an impossible restoration. In comparison to Ivan, Thomas Aquinas' concept of justice[19] considers what is *due* to God, which would be religion, worship, and filial trust.[20] Yet these are all absent in Ivan's inversion of sacred values.

A Miscarriage of Justice

In Ivan's demonstration of God's miscarriage of justice, he acts as a lone juror of a kangaroo court advocating for a humanistic impeachment of the cosmic tyrant through the procedural rigors of his Euclidean intellect, where supposedly the Creator is sentenced guilty.[21]

Ivan accepts the proposition "God" with all its Judeo-Christian attributes of omnipotence, justice, etc.[22] He then tests the defendant's miscarriage of justice with the abundance of real life anecdotal evidence of victimized children. Ivan presents his witnesses, whom Dostoevsky takes from real-life cases in Russia. Ivan narrates how a girl of seven is sadistically flogged by her own parents "for five minutes, they flog for ten minutes---longer, harder, faster, sharper. The child is crying, the child finally cannot cry, she has no breath left: "Papa, papa, dear papa!"[23]

[16] Williams, *Dostoevsky*, 232-233.

[17] Banerjee, *Dostoevsky: Scandal of Reason*, Part II, § IV, ¶ 6.

[18] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 245.

[19] *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q 58, Art. 1.

[20] *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q 81, Art. 1.

[21] Banerjee, *Dostoevsky: Scandal of Reason*, Part II, § IV, ¶ 9. Faced with the ugliness of unvarnished reality, Ivan admits that he can only interpret the cosmos as a senseless mechanism of cause and effect, with cold meaninglessness as its blueprint, with having logically no one to blame. Yet he complains, "What do I care that none are to blame and that I know it- I need retribution, otherwise I will destroy myself. And retribution not somewhere and sometime in infinity, but here and now, on earth, so that I see it myself." Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 244. An unjust effect, demands an unjust cause. Thus he imports a Grand Designer from infinity to blame for man's sorry predicament.

[22] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 234. Then Ivan proceeds to recall Voltaire's adage, "If God does not exist, man will have to invent him." Ivan's line of thought betrays his pragmatic use of the concept of "God" in his argument. God would only be summoned for the purpose of taking up the role of the defendant. Whether Ivan believes in God is debatable. We leave the question of Ivan's personal belief aside to focus on Ivan's influence on Alyosha.

[23] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 785. This is an actual court case. see Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Diary of a Writer,* ed. and trans. Boris Brasol (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1985), entry February, 1876, chapter 2.

Ivan goes on to tell many other anecdotes of cruelty against children by the persons who are supposed to protect them, like another girl beaten up and locked up in a privy, while her mother "slept unconcernedly at night, oblivious to the sobs of the poor child shut up in that foul place!" [24] Ivan raises the question: Where is justice in God's world? If God is omnipotent and benevolent, why does He tolerate the intolerable?

Ivan, then, criticizes traditional arguments that explain the existence of suffering. He rejects the idea of punishment due to original sin as humanly incomprehensible.[25] Ivan rejects the argument that suffering has a greater purpose beyond the children: "Why do they get thrown on the pile, to manure someone's future harmony with themselves?"[26] How could dead children be the basis for someone else's *future harmony*? He rejects the eschatological grand-narrative where the purpose of suffering is revealed in a meta-finale he calls "eternal harmony."[27]

Even if that were the case, Ivan defiantly refuses to take part in it because he insists, "We cannot afford to pay so much for admission [again betraying his calculative mentality]."[28] He will take no part in a theatric-drama staged by God because, "It is not worth one little tear of even that one tormented child who beat her chest with her little fist and prayed to 'dear God' in a stinking outhouse with the unredeemed tears!"[29]

Therefore, in Ivan's legalistic distinctions and meticulous procedure, God has failed to satisfy the standard set by Euclidean justice. Regardless of who God is, God's ordering of the world is flawed and dysfunctional even in its own terms.[30] Therefore, Ivan's verdict is, "[I] do not accept this world of God's [...]"[31]

[24] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 242. The girl of five years is also based on an actual court case, the Eugene and Aleksandra Brunst trial, as recorded in the newspaper, *Voice, 79, 80, 82 (1879)*. Also in the *Diary of a Writer,* entry February, 1876.

[25] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 238. Kierkegaard also expresses something similar in his *Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychological Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin.*

[26] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 244.

[27] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 235, 236, 244. When Ivan uses "eternal harmony," he is referring to the end of the world, where the contradictions of life will be resolved. Ivan says, "If everyone must suffer in order to buy eternal harmony with their suffering, pray tell me what have children got to do with it?" Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 244. Furthermore, Ivan says, "At the world's finale, in the moment of eternal harmony, there will occur and be revealed something so precious that it will suffice for all hearts, to allay all indignation, to redeem all human villainy, all bloodshed [...] I do not accept it and do not want to accept it!" Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 236.

[28] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 245.

[29] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 245.

[30] Ronald Osborn, "Beauty Will Save the World: Metaphysical Rebellion and the Problem of Theodicy in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*," *The Modern Age,* vol. 54, nos. 1-4, (Winter-Fall, 2012): 102.

[31] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 235. In Ivan's impeachment of God, there is a twist. He

Death that Brings Forth Much Fruit

Dostoevsky's response to Ivan's polemic is embedded in the entire novel. The governing theme of *The Brothers Karamazov* is an aphorism from the Gospel of John:

> Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit (Jn. 12:24).

The aphorism finds its context in John's Gospel, where Jesus talks about the *hour* of His glorification, when he will be lifted up on the cross. It conveys the dynamics of death and rebirth. Christ is the *primum analogatum* of *death*. It is precisely the demand to reduplicate Christ's death in ourselves that frightens away a prospective believer. Hans Holbein's painting, *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb,* deeply haunted Dostoevsky that he remarked, "One could lose his faith from a painting like that."[32] Furthermore, we find a paradoxical understanding of death as the fullest development of a person in Dostoevsky's journal entry during the vigil of his deceased wife:

> [...] the ultimate development of the individual person must reach the point where man can find out [that] the fullness of the development of his *I,* is, as it were, to annihilate this *I* [...]"[33]

However, self-annihilation is not an end in itself. Death is a prelude to something life-giving; or rather, it is only through death that one bears much fruit. It is the insight that to achieve anything of great value, something of value must be sacrificed. Faith holds the conviction that the ugly, cold, mangled corpse of Christ will come back to life; yet there still remains a gnawing fear that maybe only nothingness follows death.[34]

The aphorism is used twice in direct relation to events in the novel: (1) Foreseeing the painful consequences of Dmitri's own actions, Zosima utters the epigram alluding to how suffering will become a maieutic-event for Dmitri's growth and maturation.[35] Death serves as a purgative and cathartic event.

keeps his verdict in check: "It's not God that I do not accept [...] it is this world of God's, created by God, that I do not accept and cannot agree to accept." See Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 235. Remember that a Euclidean mind can only resolve problems *of this world.* He, thus, narrows his condemnation to a rejection of this world, not to a Being from infinity, because God is simply beyond Euclidean jurisdiction. Ivan vacillates between being an atheist and needing a Transcendent Being to blame for the problem of pain.

[32] K. A. Lantz, *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 189.

[33] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii v Tridtsati Tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-90), 20:172-75, quoted in Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 116.

[34] Wojciech Kaftański, "Beyond the Imagery: The Encounters of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky With the Image of the Dead Christ," *The Dostoevsky Journal*, vol. 14-15, Issue 1 (2014): 116.

[35] G.K. Carey and James Lamar, *The Brothers Karamazov Notes,* (Nebraska: John Wiley & Sons

(2) The passage resurfaces when Zosima counsels an esteemed visitor who committed murder to confess. The haunting specter of the past can only be exorcised by a public admission of guilt. Peace of conscience requires the *death* of his false reputation, his ego, his security, and even the love of his family.

These uses of the term disclose a nuanced meaning of death in the novel. In the first instance, it refers to an *external* catastrophe or suffering. In the second, it involves an *internal* death: a painful process of self-emptying and resignation, a deliberate choice of internal transformation caused by the relinquishing of beliefs, values, and loves that comprise one's identity. These two are related because the impetus for internal death is often triggered by an external misfortune that radically shatters one's own sense of security, like the random cruelty of life.

Death is not a permanent condition, because, as Zosima counsels, "In the end it will turn into quiet joy for you, and your bitter tears will become tears of quiet tenderness and the heart's purification, which saves from sin."[36] Devastating losses, "by a great mystery of human life, gradually [pass] into quiet, tender joy [...]"[37] This paradoxical scheme plays out in Alyosha's character development, as he exercises his novelistic agency.

Acceptance

The Concept

Ivan's response to the problems of injustice is characterized by his defiance: "[I] do not accept this world of God's [...]"[38] Alyosha, too, would temporarily succumb to Ivan's defiance and plagiarize those same words and say, "I simply 'do not accept his world.'"[39] Thus, any hope of escaping from Ivan's cynical nihilism would involve an opposite movement of acceptance. As Trepanier puts it, "[G]enuine

Inc., 1967), 57. Carey and Lamar explain that Zosima's bow is rooted in Dostoevskian philosophy. In *Crime and Punishment*, for example, the antihero, Raskolnikov, bows down before Sonya because for him she symbolizes the suffering of all humanity. Only through great suffering can a man be purified of his sins. Zosima bows down in respect to Dmitri, yet he still hopes that Dmitri could be spared from the impending anguish that he will bring upon himself.

[36] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 50. Here, Zosima is comforting a bereaved mother. She grieves over her son, Alexei, who died just three months short of three years old. During the conception of *The Brothers Karamazov,* Dostoevsky's own son, Alexei, also dies a few months shy of three on May 1878 because of epilepsy. This experience underlies the intense treatment of death in the novel. See Julian Connolly, *Dostoevsky's* The Brothers Karamazov (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 8.

[37] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 292.

[38] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 235.

[39] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 341. The theme of plagiarism is recurrent in the novel. Whenever a character uses the words of another character, it represents the influence the latter has on the speaker. Thus the speaker appropriates for himself the voice of the character he plagiarizes.

happiness is the *acceptance* of life, including all its pain and suffering."[40] Each character development involves some kind of acceptance of death.

The crucial meaning of death is internal death: the voluntary self-annihilation of our "*I*." Acceptance often involves the voluntary and internalized death of one's desires, false beliefs, and mentally-constructed ideal world where one sits comfortably. Acceptance involves a kenotic[41] element of self-emptying of one's will.

On the other side of the coin, acceptance means an openness to the unexpected and unscripted reality unfolding before us, no matter how painful it is. In acceptance, there is contentment and peace in that pain. To accept the deserted, undesirable reality that confronts us is to cease to struggle against that reality. One lets go of the tormenting anguish and indignation that accompany Ivan's refusal. [42]

Alyosha's Acceptance of Death

Alyosha's character develops in a series of errands to mediate between Dmitri and Fyodor, who have both become a spectacle of mutual suspicion and jealousy over Grushenka.[43] Alyosha's encounters force him to face the problem of injustice, reaching its climax in the scandal at Zosima's funeral, where the problem becomes personal.[44] In the narrative, a polyphony of competing voices relentlessly invade his immature faith, de-privileging it as a tenable vision of reality.

One needs to first understand Alyosha's deep bond with Zosima. Alyosha's entry into the monastery has hints of escapism from the complexity of the world.[45] He is further drawn by his admiration for Zosima, whom he believes "is holy, in his heart there is the *secret* of renewal for all, the power that will finally establish the truth on earth."[46] He is also convinced that Zosima "would bring remarkable glory to the monastery."[47] For Alyosha, this "secret" is bound up with that "glory."[48] Alyosha's

[40] Trepanier, "The Politics and Experience of Active Love," 201. Researcher's italics.

[41] Dostoevsky has been influenced by Russian kenotic spirituality, especially by spiritual leaders like Tychon of Zadonsk. Elements of self-abnegation and self-renunciation are common themes in Zosima's teaching (Zosima's character has been partly inspired by Tychon of Zadonsk). A struggle between one's will and reality will only cease when a person willingly surrenders to reality.

[42] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 359.

[43] Grushenka is a local woman of ill repute. She gets involved in a twisted love triangle as Dmitri and his father, Fyodor, compete for her hand.

[44] At Zosima's funeral, his remains emitted a stench of decay far earlier than what is natural. This was interpreted by Zosima's enemies as a sign of God's punishment for his hypocrisy. This defamation spread among the people, who immediately denounced the Elder as a fraud.

[45] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 18. The narrator writes, "It alone struck him and presented him all at once with the whole ideal way out for his soul struggling from darkness to light."

[46] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 30. Researcher's italics.

[47] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 30.

[48] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 9.

faith is wedded to a triumphalist vision of Zosima as a holy sage and wonder-worker, whom God will glorify in due time.[49] Bernard Paris suggests that Alyosha's attachment to this great man fulfils his own secret desire for glory, perhaps to compensate for childhood humiliations. As the narrator puts it, "[Zosima's] glory was, as it were, Alyosha's own triumph."[50] Therefore, the absence of the expected miracle, the early decomposition, and consequent public denouncement precipitated a breakdown in Alyosha's belief system and security at multiple levels.

The Elder's rapid putrefaction brutally demolishes his conceptions of divine providence. Alyosha did not desire for a miracle *per se*, but a "higher justice," a sign of that divine justice which ultimately glorifies the righteous in terms that he can so readily interpret;[51] one that reconciles the laws of nature with the goodness of God.[52] That God abandons the holiest of men conflicted with his conception of God. As Rowan Williams clarifies, Alyosha's religious crisis was not about God's existence, but it was about the nature of divine involvement in the world and His relation to those who believe in Him.[53] It involves the problem of accepting God and His world, and the question of what kind of life that acceptance would demand.[54] It is a question of what man can expect from God.

Dostoevsky's journal entry already hints that Alyosha's crisis can only be resolved by a self-annihilation. Just as Zosima becomes an analogue of the dead Christ, in his despised and abandoned solitude, so, too, must Alyosha embrace death in all its horrors, in imitation of Christ. Here, one discovers different layers of the meaning of death: the biological death of Zosima, the death of the great *cultus* of Zosima, the death of Alyosha's notion of divine providence, and the dethronement of his triumphalist faith and ambitions.

Alyosha's turning point is his experience of *active love* with Grushenka. After this pivotal encounter, Alyosha slowly accepts the painful reality unveiled before him, which he previously rejected, saying, "[I] do not accept his world."

Accepting Zosima's early decomposition is not an isolated movement. In Alyosha's mind, the vilification of Zosima is a representative of the problems in God's world. Alyosha understands Zosima's humiliation as a particular instance of what makes up God's world, and his acceptance of that instance implies his acceptance

[49] Williams, *Dostoevsky*, 9.

[50] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 30. Quoted in Bernard J. Paris, *Dostoevsky's Greatest Characters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 200.

[51] Robin Feuer Miller, *The Brothers Karamazov: Worlds of the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 83.

[52] Trepanier, "The Politics and Experience of Active Love," 202.

[53] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 8.

[54] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 8.

of all of reality's revelation. His embrace and kissing of the ground after the dream/vision of Cana of Galilee signifies his all-embracing acceptance of the whole of God's world.[55]

His acceptance is portrayed when, "The putrid odor, which only recently had seemed to him so terrible and inglorious, did not now stir up any of his former anguish and indignation."[56] What formerly symbolized great humiliation and divine injustice no longer bothered him.

We find a self-emptying of Alyosha's own desire for symmetrical justice. As Robin Feuer Miller puts it, "Faith is an unfathomable giving up of oneself, an acceptance of mystery."[57] Acceptance causes an openness to reality as a whole, including the reality of suffering children. The demolition of his triumphalist faith was necessary to give space for the building up of a new edifice of faith. He learns that a life of faith also involves odorous circumstances. However, acceptance is not equivalent to social passivity. Rather, acceptance implies the opposite: active love and responsibility for others. [58]

Active Love and Responsibility

The Concept

Faith is not a listless awaiting for the arrival of what Ivan mockingly calls "eternal harmony." Dostoevsky stresses the importance of positive actions through the concepts of active love and responsibility. For Zosima, the only response to the problem of evil is the principle of universal responsibility: "Make yourself responsible for all the sins of men."[59] It is the only path to rebirth, to bearing much fruit.

Williams explains that responsibility is the acknowledgement of a fractured humanity and one's share in the blame; it is a recognition of one's obligation to be involved in fixing this brokenness.[60] This is because each person, even in his little way, has contributed to the structure of injustice operant in the world. Directly or indirectly, each is answerable to the victims of injustice. It is also the profound realization that in each person, there is the same capacity for the evil which has

[55] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 169-170.
[56] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 359.
[57] Miller, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 75.
[58] Trepanier, "The Politics and Experience of Active Love," 201.
[59] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 320. Zosima explains, "When the reality of sin troubles you, take yourself up, and make yourself responsible for all the sins of men [and] you will see at once that it is really so."
[60] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 165.

brought about the cruelty described by Ivan.[61] Zosima's universal responsibility is rooted in the interconnectedness of all life.[62]

In the realization "that it is you who are guilty on behalf of all and for all," one is impelled to action, instead of "shifting your own laziness and powerlessness onto others [...]," as Ivan does.[63] This deep sense of shared responsibility becomes a moral imperative to be involved in the plight of others. This carries serious risks without guarantee of a positive outcome in any obvious sense.[64] For Zosima, the core and driving force of responsibility is active love.[65]

Active love is the interpretative key of the novel,[66] as it is embodied in Alyosha, whose "heart could not bear uncertainty, for the nature of his love was always active. He could not love passively; once he loved, he immediately also began to help [...] one had to know firmly what was good and needful for each of them [...]"[67] The qualifier "active" denotes a concrete action proceeding from a concern to benefit the other in his particular situation. For Dostoevsky, love is a fully conscious, self-sacrificing action made for all, which constitutes the highest development of personality.[68]

Active love, however, is impossible unless one first dies. Self-annihilation is a necessary prelude to self-giving love. This is because, "The *I* is an obstacle."[69] In Dostoevsky's journal entry, he explains further:

> "[...] to annihilate this *I*, [is] to give it over completely to each and to all, undividedly and selflessly [...] And this is the greatest happiness."[70]

The very concept "I" connotes separation, boundedness, closed-ness, or being locked inside a shell.[71] On the other hand, Dostoevsky seems to understand

[61] Clinical-psychologist, Jordan Peterson articulated this idea as: "Searching through the lowest reaches of human thought and action, understanding my own capacity to act like a Nazi prison guard or a gulag archipelago trustee or a torturer of children in a dungeon, I grasped what it meant to 'take the sins of the world onto oneself.'" Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2018), 197.

[62] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 319. Zosima says, "For all is like an ocean, all flows and connects; touch it in one place and it echoes at the other end of the world."

[63] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 320.

[64] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 163. This risk is shown in young Zosima's involvement with the mysterious visitor, where he is eventually blamed for the mysterious visitor's mental illness.

[65] Cherkasova, "Virtues of the Heart," 77.

[66] Trepanier, "The Politics and Experience of Active Love," *201.*

[67] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 187.

[68] Petr Vaškovic, "A path to Authenticity: Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky on Existential Transformation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* no. 87 (2020): 21. Accessed March 9, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-019-09732-z .

[69] Dostoevsky, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii v Tridtsati Tomakh*, 20:172-75.

[70] Dostoevsky, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii v Tridtsati Tomakh*, 20:172-75.

[71] Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, 119.

active love as a fusion with the "all" where one disappears in the total self-giving act of love.[72] This "all" encompasses one's fellow men, God, and even nature.

Active love is in no way a romanticized sentiment. Zosima warns, "Love is a harsh and fearful thing [...] active love is labor and presence [...]"[73] Williams explains that active love is directed towards an actual and material presence; towards a specific and not always loveable- if not out rightly repulsive- individual as a bearer of unique personhood and a possible agent of goodness.[74]

Most importantly, active love is intimately related to religious faith. Zosima replies to Madame Khokhlakov's crisis of faith by saying:

> One cannot prove anything here, but it is possible to be convinced [...] by the experience of active love. Try to love your neighbors actively and tirelessly. The more you succeed in loving, the more you'll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul. And if you reach complete selflessness in the love of your neighbor, then undoubtedly you will believe, and no doubt will even be able to enter your soul.[75]

There is an intimate relationship between love and faith because love is a teacher in the ways of faith.[76] Love is the antidote to the crisis of faith.[77] It is a principle of hope which reconquers the meaning of life. Zosima is steeped in Johannine theology, where love is the only means to knowing God, for "everyone who loves [...] knows God (1Jn. 4:7)."[78] Love alone grants access to God, because to love is to live out of the divine source and origin of Love.[79] To love is to be convinced, because to love is to participate in the Divine life.

Active Love and Responsibility in Alyosha's Rebirth

Alyosha experiences the power of active love when he visits the seductress Grushenka and unwittingly finds in her a sister.[80] Alyosha is deeply touched by

[72] Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, 119.

[73] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 58.

[74] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 182.

[75] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 56.

[76] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 319.

[77] Julian Connolly, "Dostoevskij's Guide to Spiritual Epiphany in *The Brothers Karamazov*," *Studies in East European Thought,* vol. 59, no. 1/2, June (2007): 48.

[78] Robert W. Yarbrough, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of New Testament: 1-3 John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 235.

[79] John Painter, *Sacre Pagina: 1, 2, and 3 John* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 268.

[80] After the fracas in Zosima's funeral, the dejected Alyosha is persuaded by Rakitin to pay Grushenka a visit. Alyosha agrees as a symbolic act of rebellion and a surrender to his Karamazovian sensuality. But the treacherous plan to hand over Alyosha to the temptress goes awry, because she surprisingly refuses to be a symbolic instrument of rebellion. Rakitin is a seminarian and companion

Grushenka's act of sympathy of drawing back from her erotic teasing upon learning about the Elder's death. Alyosha then responds with his instinctive appreciation of what is best, beautiful, and pure in others, and recognizes her as his "sister."[81] From their simple dialogue, they both discover the grace to rise up from their despair.

This scene introduces the metaphor of *onions*: simple acts of kindness which become channels of graces and produces salutary effects.[82] Spring onions also symbolize Grushenska's redemption arc.[83]

"So here's where today's expected miracle took place!" Rakitin sneers.[84] His comment is ironic because it is true, although it could hardly be called a miracle in the fantastic sense. Alyosha only experienced the effects of active love and suddenly rediscovered himself.[85] Alyosha realizes that God's grace is operative even in flawed and sinful persons.[86] As Zosima predicted, love gave him the first sprouting of "being convinced." This propels him to his acceptance of God's world.

After the scene with Grushenka, the narrative naturally segues to Alyosha's dream/vision of Cana of Galilee, where the glorified Zosima commissions him to a vocation of active love.[87] Alyosha has perceived a divine action that exceeds Euclidean standards of success and glory; he now perceives clearly what a life of faith truly involves.[88] Genuine faith is not only expressed in heroic and monumental feats, but simple acts of kindness are also valued by God.[89] This is Zosima's secret of renewal; this is his glory.

After this scene, by a sleight of artistry, Alyosha will only be restaged again after almost 200 pages in the midst of school boys, where the earlier theologico-

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of Alyosha in the monastery. He is actually a materialist who entered the monastery for self-serving reasons.

[81] Miller, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 84.

[82] Connolly, *Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov*, 79.

[83] Kate Holland, "Novelizing the Religious Experience: The Generic Landscape of *The Brothers Karamazov*," *Slavic Review* 66, no. 01 (2007): 76.

[84] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 3 and 58. Stewart Sutherlands explains that the miraculous is a "matter of the inner change of emotion and mind," rather than a disturbance of the laws of nature. See Stewart Sutherland, *Atheism and the Rejection of God: Contemporary Philosophy and The Brothers Karamazov* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 132.

[85] Lamar, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 64.

[86] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 9.

[87] After Alyosha witnesses the effects of active love with Grushenka, he returns to the funeral of Zosima. In his half dozed prayer, he has a dream/vision of the scene at the Wedding at Cana, where he sees glorified Zosima celebrating together with Jesus. Whether Alyosha's experience is an epiphany of the supernatural or his own psyche's way of processing his insights in the form of dreams is unclear. It is probably both.

[88] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 10.

[89] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 9-10.

philosophical problems are transposed in a new mode of expression.[90] Alyosha's renewed, radiant appearance bespeaks of his spiritual maturity and discovery of new purpose.[91] Alyosha takes responsibility for actual children, whom Dostoevsky depicted as mean and mindlessly governed by childish bravado. Through active love, Alyosha transforms their fractured gang into a community.

Ivan's anecdotes of victimized children are concretized at the funeral of the boy, Ilyusha, who was humiliated and psychologically tortured to death. Instead of the wailing despair that characterized Snegiryov, the boy's father, Alyosha, on the other hand, inspires the boys with his own faith. Alyosha transfigures Ilyusha into a sacred memory, thus inspiring them "with the iconographic features of beautiful and sacred memory itself."[92] In faith, Alyosha transforms an empty tragedy into a meaningful event. In faith, Ilyusha becomes the innocent victim in whose death the edifice of a new brotherhood is built upon.[93] Ironically, Robert Louis Jackson observes, "the suffering of the child is ultimately the basis for union and harmony, both in an immediate and in a higher sense."[94] Through active love, the squalid scandal of the Karamazov family is overcome by a new little family united in the loving memory of a child's death.

Ilyusha's death is more difficult for Snegiryov, whose wailings echo, in a visceral way, Ivan's refusal to accept any solution. Yet the possibility of recovery was already poignantly hinted by his dying son: "When I die, you get some nice boy, another one [...] call him Ilyusha, and love him instead of me..."[95] Through some great mystery, it is possible even for Snegiryov to find healing and peace, if he learns to love again.

A study of Dostoevsky's notion of active love is incomplete without an exploration of his artistic vision of the heart. Even Ivan admits that one can only love "not with your mind, not with logic, but with your insides, your guts [...]."[96]

[90] Miller, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 100.

[91] Miller, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 101.

[92] Jackson, "Alyosha's Speech at the Stone," 244. Dostoevsky writes in his journal, "Russian children are brought up to behold repulsive pictures such as a peasant whipping a helpless, overburdened horse across the eyes (PSS, 22:26)." Thus he recommends "a series of pure, holy, beautiful pictures [that] would have strong impact upon souls thirsting for beautiful impressions (PSS, 22:24)." See Robert Louis Jackson, "Alyosha's Speech at the Stone," in *A New Word on* The Brothers Karamazov, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 242.

[93] Jackson, "Alyosha's Speech at the Stone," 244.

[94] Jackson, "Alyosha's Speech at the Stone," 237.

[95] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 561.

[96] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 230. In this scene, Ivan puts down his defenses and, even if just for a moment, reveals his human side. Some commentators interpret this as Ivan's deceptive technique to lure Alyosha. However, I consider this *humanity* as existing together with his cold, speculative side. In Dostoevsky's vision, a human person is a creature full of contradictions, where the beautiful and the vile reside together.

This "insides" and "guts" is none other than the heart. Metaphorically, the heart is the organ of life and the organ of love. Evgenia Cherkasova explains that the heart becomes the unquenchable source of life; and inversely, by its natural attunement to life, the heart is able to love.[97]

The heart as a symbol carries with it a whole spectrum of meaning. It is a metaphor for the most profound depth of human convictions, intuitive impulses, and capacity for empathy. It is the core of a person's inner being. Its meaning is indefinable, yet somehow communicable due to our shared humanity.

A person's destiny hinges on the heart, because, as Cherkasova observes, for Dostoevsky, redemption is always manifested in love, and the inability to love is linked with evil.[98] Dmitri reveals the crucial role of the heart: "Here the devil is struggling with God, and the battlefield is the human heart."[99] It is ultimately the heart, the deepest center of the self, that ascends towards the divine or regresses towards the diabolic.

What moves and captivates the human heart is beauty. That is why Dmitri warns, "Beauty is a fearful and terrible thing!"[100] Dmitri is often enchanted by embodied beauty, which only leads to disillusionment. Yet he also recognizes the transcendent aspect of beauty: "The terrible thing is that beauty is not only fearful but also mysterious."[101]

Vladimir Soloviev explains how Dostoevsky understands beauty in his artistic expressions: "He [Dostoevsky] never separated truth from good and beauty; in his artistic creativity he never placed beauty apart from the good and the true [...] for Dostoevsky, these were three inseparable forms of one absolute Idea."[102] Beauty is a glimpse of the beyond, an attribute of the transcendent.

Zosima alludes to how the beauty that permeates God's world reveals a *mystery*: "All things are good and splendid, because all is truth."[103] In Zosima's mind, beauty and God's mystery are always understood together.[104] The heart is drawn to mystery because mystery is a transcendent beauty perceived only by the heart. In this same vein, Dostoevsky makes, Prince Myshkin, his protagonist in *The Idiot*, declare, "Beauty will save the world."

[97] Cherkasova, "Virtues of the Heart," 74.
[98] Cherkasova, "Virtues of the Heart," 74.
[99] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 108.
[100] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 108.
[101] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 108.
[102] Vladimir Sergeyevich Soloviev, *The Heart of Reality: Essays on Beauty, Love, and Ethics*, ed. and trans. by Vladimir Wozniuk (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 16.
[103] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 295.
[104] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 294.

Mystery

Against the Grand Inquisitor's unholy trinity of *miracle, mystery*, and *authority*, Zosima proposes another notion of *mystery*.[105] In the Biblical Job's undeserved suffering, Zosima discovers "a certain spiritual perception,"[106] that surveys the paradoxical mystery of death and rebirth. He says, "What is great here is this very mystery- that the passing earthly image and eternal truth here touch each other. In the face of earthly truth, the enactment of eternal truth is accomplished."[107] It is a spiritual insight that behind earthly realities and even tragedies, a non-Euclidean, eternal truth is being accomplished; a transcending meaning is hidden; God's providence made manifest.

In mystery, there is no effort to explain away the scandal of suffering and evil. To think of suffering as a solvable problem is to objectify individual human experiences. As Ivan's has shown, to give a systematic explanation that justifies human suffering only trivializes and mocks the victim. From the human *vista*, like Job, we are simply left speechless before an unfathomable and impenetrable mystery.

Although each character struggles in vain to articulate this "certain spiritual perception," it is perceived so strongly to the point of sweet pain. The mystery of God's world is simply to be accepted- even celebrated;[108] requiring an unapologetic surrender to the "great, mysterious, inconceivable!"[109]

For Zosima, the perception of this mystery becomes clearer the more one loves and becomes involved in the sufferings of others.[110] In Alyosha's appeal to love, Ivan retorts, "love life more than its meaning?"[111] It is characteristic of Ivan's questioning intellect to be concerned with "meaning" and intelligibility. However, it is only through the heart that one *understands*.[112] According to Cherkasova, it is the heart, as a unique symbol of love, "which embraces irreconcilable contradictions and mysteries."[113]

Just as Alyosha struggled with the irreconcilable contradiction of a loving God and His apparent indifference, so, too, did an ancient Aramæan struggle with the

[105] Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, 99-100. The Grand Inquisitor is an imaginary character from a poem composed by Ivan. The poem is about the Roman Catholic Church's project of a revisionist Christianity with a mechanism of control that uses miracle, mystery, and authority to establish social order.

[106] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 291.

[107] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 292.

[108] Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, 100-101.

[109] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 292.

[110] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 320.

[111] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 231.

[112] Connolly, *Dostoevsky's* The Brothers Karamazov, 60.

[113] Cherkasova, "Virtues of the Heart," 73.

same contradiction of a loving God who demanded him to sacrifice his son. From the study of this Aramæan's ordeal, Kierkegaard developed his philosophy.

Russian Knight of Faith: A Kierkegaardian Reading

Introduction

This section synthesizes the corresponding concepts between Dostoevsky's iconic portrayal of faith and Kierkegaard's philosophical notion of faith. The framework of this section mostly follows the exposition of faith in *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846).

In this section, we explore how *Fear and Trembling*'s notion of faith as the *double movement* corresponds to the theme of death and rebirth in the novel. The double movement is analyzed in its components of *infinite resignation* and *receiving again*. Infinite resignation is compared to the novel's concept of acceptance. The movement of receiving again is given concrete expression in the novel's concepts of active love and responsibility. Then, the *teleological suspension of the ethical* is appropriated as the necessity of suspending Ivan's concept of justice, which is interpreted as a form of *ethics*. Next, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript's* concept of *subjective truth*, further expounded as *paradox, the absurd,* and *the Unknown,* is correlated with mystery. Lastly, *subjectivity* is equated with the metaphor of the heart, while p*assionate inwardness* finds its novelistic expression in the depiction of religious ecstasy.

The Double Movement of Death and Rebirth

In Kierkegaard's penetrating portrayal of faith, he turns to no less than the father of faith, Abraham. Kierkegaard observes that in Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac, he makes a double movement of: (1) infinite resignation and (2) receiving again. Kierkegaard personifies these movements by orchestrating a theatrical distinction between (1) the knight of infinite resignation and (2) the knight of faith, respectively. In Abraham (the knight of faith), the double movement is seen in his total surrender of Isaac to God and his simultaneous conviction that he will receive Isaac again, by virtue of the absurd. Faith is a simultaneous surrender and keeping of Isaac. If we strip the Kierkegaardian dressing, this dialectic struggle of faith boils down to the dynamics of loss and gain, of sacrifice and reward, of death and rebirth.

The novel's governing theme of death and rebirth corresponds to the dynamics of the double movement. Both frameworks require losing; both promise receiving again. The novel describes the transition from death to rebirth as a great

mystery. This is hinted at in all of Zosima's counsels: "Weep, then, but also rejoice."[114] Weep, for you shall lose the most precious person in your life. Rejoice for you will receive spiritual growth through this loss.

We learn from Kierkegaard that rebirth is not a natural consequence of death. Rather, rebirth comes about by virtue of one's faith in God. One is able to bear much fruit because of a second movement. With Kierkegaard's analysis, we can understand the internal movements that make bearing much fruit possible. The correspondence becomes more apparent when we juxtapose the movements of infinite resignation with acceptance, and receiving again with active love and responsibility.

Acceptance and Infinite Resignation

C. Stephen Evans defines infinite resignation as, "A willingness to sacrifice the whole of the finite world, all that a person values in this life, for the sake of what Johannes variously calls 'the infinite,' 'the eternal,' or 'God.'"[115] The knight of infinite resignation surrenders or sacrifices something infinitely valuable to him. He is reconciled to the fact that it is humanly impossible to retain that which he has to sacrifice, because "in the finite world there is much that is not possible."[116] He does not keep a paltry hope for an unforeseen possibility of saving it.

In *Fear and Trembling,* it is easy to get fixated with Abraham's sacrificial action and think that infinite resignation always involves personally relinquishing that object of value. However, this is not always the case. Infinite resignation can be a response to a loss or a frustration caused by an external factor beyond one's control (recall the first meaning of death), similar to how Alyosha responds to the loss of Zosima's prestige, or the death of Ilyusha, or the unvarnished reality of undeserved suffering. Kierkegaard observes that the loss of anything that has an absolute value or meaning may prompt the movement of resignation.[117]

Infinite resignation corresponds to the novel's concept of acceptance of death. Acceptance involves a deliberate internal death of one's desires or self-conception. It is a self-annihilation or even self-degradation. Acceptance involves surrendering to the painful external realities that have a bearing on internal realities, such as one's desires, plans, or fundamental beliefs, that comprise one's identity. Certain fundamental convictions must be sacrificed in surrender to reality. Infinite resignation is a painful process of suffering. According to George Pattison, "For

[114] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 49.

[115] C. Stephen Evans, "Introduction" in *Fear and Trembling,* trans. and ed. by Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xiv.

[116] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* 44.

[117] Kierkegaard, "footnote" in *Fear and Trembling,* 41.

Dostoevsky as for Kierkegaard degradation and suffering come to be seen as a mode of the incognito of [the dead] Christ, although far more graphically portrayed than in Kierkegaard."[118] Spiritual growth requires that the individual will must continually be pushed aside in response to the constant self-revelation of Being.

Kierkegaard himself describes infinite resignation as an "experience [of] *death* before one actually dies," the denial of which is "crass materialism."[119] The capacity to let something inside oneself die, even before biological death marks the spiritual in man. Furthermore, for Kierkegaard, the God-encounter involves a self-*annihilatory* experience, where the self realizes itself as a sinful nothingness before God, becoming what Kierkegaard calls, "infinite nothingness."[120]

For Kierkegaard, the capacity for death distinguishes a person of faith from someone who is merely an admirer of Christ. For both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, one must face the brutal paradox of the Christian demand of death, without attempting to make it palatable to our convenience-driven sensibilities.[121]

However, the results of acceptance are peace and rest, symptoms of one's reconciliation to reality. Kierkegaard writes, "In infinite resignation there is peace and rest and comfort in the pain."[122] This is what Alyosha felt upon returning to the funeral after his encounter with Grushenka: "In his soul there was none of that weeping, gnawing, tormenting pity that had been there earlier."[123]

However, the problem with infinite resignation is that it is oriented towards idealism. Salvation is found in a heavenly realm, out there in infinity or in an eternal harmony. It has little to do with the present, earthly condition of the human person. It would imply that after Abraham sacrificed Isaac, his greatest source of meaning, he would transfigure his love and direct it to God alone, while life on earth becomes bereft of meaning. [124]

Surprisingly, Ivan's solution to the problem of evil is a distorted form of infinite resignation: a hopeless surrender to his own powerlessness, in order to shift the burden of responsibility to God or to others. His solution is found in his poem, "The Grand Inquisitor," in which he imagines a revisionist Roman Catholic despotic-government, where people voluntarily relinquish their individual freedom,

[118] George Pattison, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* (Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 61.

[119] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 46. Researcher's italics.

[120] Vaškovic, "A path to Authenticity," 14.

[121] Kaftański, "Beyond the Imagery," 113.

[122] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 45.

[123] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 359.

[124] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 35.

in exchange for infantile security. Ivan's solution to the evils brought about by human freedom is to subject that freedom to a system of control that would guide people in herd-like contentment. Ironically, Ivan's passionate concern for the suffering of children ends with a cynical view of human nature.[125] On the contrary, Zosima and Alyosha's infinite resignation was nothing like Ivan's passivity, because their acceptance led to positive action.

Love and You Shall Receive Again

For Kierkegaard, infinite resignation is a prerequisite to faith,[126] just as for Dostoevsky, self-annihilation is a prerequisite to love. In the the second movement, the knight of faith does not hope for an unforeseen, unexpected human possibility that would spare him from the necessary sacrifice. However, together with resignation, he simultaneously makes one more movement of receiving again, which marks the movement of faith.

Abraham, while determined to sacrifice Isaac, holds on to his conviction that he will receive Isaac again, by virtue of the absurd. The second movement rests on his deep trust that God will return what he had relinquished. And, indeed, God does.

It seems difficult to compare Alyosha's condition at the end of the novel with Abraham's miraculous receiving again. The novel is painted in broad strokes of tragic realism that ends with the characteristic Bhaktinian "unfinishedness" that marks Dostoevsky's genius. Alyosha does not regain his lost glory nor the life of Ilyusha. The boys he guided could grow up to be the same men who manned the revolution that established one of the most tyrannical regimes in Europe.

In answer to this, Evans clarifies that there is nothing to emulate from Abraham if we interpret the story in the light of the resulting event.[127] We cannot judge the genuineness of faith by what is actually received again. Kierkegaard was open to the possibility of a different ending for the Abrahamic ordeal: Abraham could have killed Isaac and yet still be a knight of faith.[128] He would still be justified because the internal movement of faith is the crucial criterion.[129]

[125] Connolly, *Dostoevsky's* The Brothers Karamazov, 66.

[126] Infinite resignation is the "last stage before faith." "Before" must be understood in a structural or logical sense and not in a temporal, chronological sense. See Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith* (Cambridge: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 33.

[127] Evans, "Introduction," xvi.

[128] See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 63.

[129] Taking in mind the open-ended-ness of the result of the movements opens a variety of mundane experiences as occasion of genuine faith, because we do not judge by the result of actually receiving Isaac again, but by the internal movements. It is the internal movements that matter in faith.

Furthermore, is it really the actual boy, Isaac *per se,* that the knight of faith receives again? Kierkegaard was open to the possibility that "God could give him *a new Isaac,* could restore to life the one sacrificed."[130] What does it mean to be given "a new Isaac" or to "restore to life the one sacrificed?" If we understand Isaac as a metaphor for the whole meaning of a person's existence, then it becomes clearer how Alyosha is a knight of faith. What God actually provides, what the knight of faith receives again is a new personal meaning for his life, the highest meaning of his existence.[131] To receive again is to be given a renewed outlook or a renewed sense of who one is. Receiving again is not so much about the object relinquished, but about the new *object* of absolute value.

What can easily be identified as Alyosha's receiving again is his dream/vision of his glorified Elder. The glory that Alyosha was denied of in the reeking corpse, he receives again in a mystical mode of expression that confirms Zosima's exulted status in the company of Christ.[132] The dream reveals that the secret to Zosima's glory is his participation in the Divine Life through active love. Alyosha, then, ecstatically throws himself to the ground, thus representing his own participation in that glory, as Zosima says, "Do not be ashamed of this ecstasy [. . .] it is not given to many, *but to those who are chosen* [*'but only to the elect'*]";[133] thus restoring his own sense of being an exceptional and significant person.[134] But even before his dream, the "miracle" of Grushenka's conversion already displaces the frustrated miracle of Zosima's corporeal preservation and glorification.[135] What Alyosha receives again is indeed a "new Isaac," transcending the "old Isaac" of triumphalist faith and popular adulation.

Furthermore, the novel does more than just portray the fruits of receiving again. It portrays what the movement of receiving again involves. Thus, it enriches the double movement by providing a positive content in the concepts of active love and responsibility; concepts which are also present in Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard characterizes love as an arduous duty. It is a prescription: "you shall love…" Kierkegaard writes, love "*involves action, not a mere expression about love,* not a reflective *interpretation* of love."[136] It is directed without the slightest discrimination to the "whole race, all men, even one's enemy, and to make no

[130] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* 36. Researcher's italics.

[131] Rhochie Avelino E. Matienzo, "Quiapo Leap: A Kierkegaardian Reading of the Religious Experience of the Black Nazarene Popular Devotion," *Kritike*, vol. 10, no. 2 (December, 2016): 37.

[132] Paris, *Dostoevksy's Greatest Characters,* 221.

[133] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 322.

[134] Paris, *Dostoevsky's Greatest Characters,* 221.

[135] Kate Holland, "Novelizing Religious Experience," 75.

[136] Soren Kierkegaard, *Work of Love*, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949), 154. Italics original.

exception, either of partiality or of dislike."[137] Whereas Dostoevsky advocates an all-encompassing love for all of perceived reality, Kierkegaard only focuses on the human other.

Let us now return to the second movement. The novel shows that receiving again is not a passive awaiting for Isaac or eternal harmony. Faith involves utmost activity. Faith is a movement, a struggle to attain that which is received again through active love and responsibility. Let us now explore how this comes about.

Alyosha's recovery is prompted by receiving compassion from an unlikely source. This he quickly repays with gratitude, and in their dialogue of mutual compassion, both Alyosha and Grushenka cling to each other's proffered little onions and scramble out of their own hellish despair. Onions are shown to be more efficacious than the grandiose schemes of the Grand Inquisitor. In being healed by love, Alyosha realizes the *miraculous* potency of active love.

In contrast to Ivan's Grand Inquisitor, Zosima takes the burden of responsibility from God or a self-proclaimed benevolent dictator and gives it back to the individual person. As Petr Vaškovic puts it, Zosima "redistributes moral responsibility and the responsibility to love among the believers, hoping that each and every one of them will take on this task responsibly."[138] Zosima's answer to the problem of evil is human agency. Receiving again is not just an internal anticipation of God's promise, but a participation in that Divine economy of bringing about the *promised Isaac*.

While Ivan is preoccupied with his speculative rebellion against the perceived tyranny of God, Alyosha participates in the drama of existence. Contrary to Ivan's dry-eyed tirade, Alyosha carries upon himself the responsibility of mending a fractured group of youth. His presence effects a transformative rebirth in a traumatized child, like Ilyusha. Even the would be Socialist, Kolya, who unwittingly finds himself allied with the torturers of children, is moved to a slow, tepid acceptance of Christianity.[139]

In the process, Alyosha discovers a glimmer of meaning and hope. In recognizing one's contribution to a fractured humanity and in taking up the obligation to be involved in mending this brokenness, a new meaning is received again.[140] Be actively involved in loving this desolated world, and a transcendent meaning will

[137] Kierkegaard, *Work of Love*, 17.

[138] Vaškovic, "A path to Authenticity," 24.

[139] Kolya is portrayed as an intelligent and strong-willed boy. He is Ilyusha's best friend. Yet he cruelly turns against Ilyusha in an effort to "make a man out of him," leading to tragic consequences. Kolya has been influenced by materialists and free thinkers. After the compounded psychological trauma that Ilyusha has sustained, he dies of fever.

[140] Williams, *Dostoevsky,* 165.

dawn. Active love is what gives purpose to existence, even if it is punctuated by pain or even predicated on the suffering of children.

Through active love, Alyosha regains the children whom Ivan forever loses in his speculative campaign. Dostoevsky's rebuttal to Ivan's accusations against God is depicted in Alyosha's personal agency: we are God's answer to the cry of the suffering. We are God's answer to the abused little girl who cries out, "dear God, protect me."[141] Thus it means that the apparent silence of God is actually because of the inactivity and indifference of individual persons.

In the world of the novel, love naturally gives birth to faith. We can only speculate why this is so, for even Kierkegaard would say that the second movement is "a miracle of faith."[142] It could be that the more one loves, the more one is convinced of the Divine presence and of one's own immortal significance because to love is to experience God-made-present-in-the-world through one's own agency. Active love evokes the intuition that one's actions meaningfully contribute to the unfolding of a non-Euclidean answer to the problem of evil. As Williams puts it, "As you 'moisten the earth with the tears of your joy,' be confident that your actions are anchored in God's future, nothing less and nothing else."[143] We are invited to have faith that onion expressions of love "will be able to overcome the world."[144]

Faith is not a naïve-childish disposition, but a mature and courageous response to the frightening reality of God's world. The above discussion also shows that genuine faith manifests itself in active love and universal responsibility. By supplementing the concepts of active love and responsibility to the movement of receiving again, Dostoevsky emphasizes the interpersonal dimension of faith, which tempers the individualistic tendency of Kierkegaard.

However, receiving again is not an instantaneous event as in Abraham or the rarefied mysticism of Alyosha. It is a daily striving, as Zosima warns, "You will be filled with this great mother's weeping for a long time [...]"[145] Dostoevsky emphasizes the importance of the process of striving by which one achieves the goal.[146] Merold Westphal explains that an important characteristic of Kierkegaardian faith is that it is a task for a whole life time.[147]

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[141] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 242.
[142] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* 37.
[143] Williams, *Dostoevsky*, 168.
[144] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 319.
[145] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 50.
[146] Malcolm Jones, "Dostoevskii and Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii,* ed. W.J. Leatherbarrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 172.
[147] Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith,* 20.

One could also not conceive of the relationship between acceptance and active love as a linear progress: Was Alyosha's acceptance prompted only by the love he repays Grushenka, or was it simultaneous with his reception of compassion from her, or perhaps a spiral recapitulation from one movement to another and back?

Furthermore, Kierkegaard emphasizes that Abraham's faith is a this-worldly faith. Abraham had faith that he would be blessed here in this world, not in a future eternal harmony.[148] He had faith in a God who is actively involved in his temporal affairs and concerned with the minute details of his life.[149]

Steven Cassedy affirms that for Dostoevsky, too, the theatre of religious activity is in the world and the Christian ministry unashamedly takes place in the mundane.[150] This is portrayed when three days after Alsyosha's ecstasy, in obedience to Zosima, he leaves the security of the monastery to live in the world, where his mystical experience must be translated into ordinary living. The novel's mechanism of spatial perspective conveys a this-worldly emphasis: after a brief gazing up to the heavens in the climactic dream, Alyosha immediately returns his gaze to the earth and throws himself to embrace the ground.[151] A glimpse of the divine effects an embrace of the earth and of all that is human. The novel further incarnates Alyosha's rarified mysticism by presenting a more mundane Dmitri, whose conversion takes the form of a spontaneous impulse to be liable and to face his imprisonment.[152]

Finally, the knight of faith is the only happy man.[153] Joy is a crucial property of faith. Alyosha's rebirth is described as "sweetness" and "joy" and a desire "to give thanks and to love."[154] After the crucible of pain, faith "gradually passes into quiet, tender joy." This is because, while resignation surrenders the mundane for love of God, faith receives God's love together with the mundane.[155] Thus the knight of faith receives *Isaac* more joyfully than when he first had Isaac.[156]

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[148] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 36.

[149] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 34.

[150] Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion,* 155.

[151] Kate Holland, "Novelizing Religious Experience," 76.

[152] Julian Connolly, "Dostoevskij's Guide to Spiritual Epiphany in "*The Brothers Karamazov*," *Studies in East European Thought,* vol. 59, no. 1/2, Dostoevskij's Significance for Philosophy and Theology (June, 2007): 50. Connolly explains that the difference between the faith experience of the siblings is that Alyosha's experience is more mystical in nature, while Dmitri's, because of his sensual character, is more practical in nature. Nevertheless, they both experienced a spiritual epiphany.

[153] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 50.

[154] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 359.

[155] Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard: Guide For the Perplexed* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 123-124.

[156] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 36.

Teleological Suspension of Euclidean Ethics

Kierkegaard's *teleological suspension of the ethical* brings to the fore the tragic dilemma between ethics and faith. In Abraham, one is gripped by a *horror religiosus,*[157] because his binding up of Isaac cannot be anything but unethical, with a clear smack of religious fanaticism. Yet it is his inexplicable actions that earned him the title, "Father of Faith." At this point, a definition of the term "ethical" as used by Kierkegaard is necessary.

In *Fear and Trembling,* "ethics" is translated from *"Sædelighed,"* the Danish equivalent of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's "*Sittlichkeit."* Thus, *Fear and Trembling* actually discusses Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*: the laws and customs of a particular nation or society. For Hegel, "Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time."[158] Thus, laws are historically bound and arise from the moral understanding of a historical tradition, expressed in a particular religious or political society. Therefore, "ethical" here does not refer to Kantian moral imperatives or natural laws. Kierkegaard concentrates on laws of particular societies which purport to be the highest norms by trying to universalize themselves.

The ethical can be read as the human deliberation of what is right and wrong; what is just and unjust; what is worth sacrificing for and what is not worth the price. It also represents humanity's continuous project to secure and govern a just society through communal reason. Thus the ethical signifies a framework of justice that is deduced from the certainty rendered by human reason.

From our analysis of Ivan's concept of justice, we can infer that he is actually offering his own ethical system, his own *Sittlichkeit*. As Paris puts it, "Ivan's highest values are justice and happiness."[159] Euclideanly speaking, that is. In The Grand Inquisitor, he proposes a mechanism of control that establishes order in society: a social ethics. Even Ivan's apparently hedonistic "everything is permissible,"[160] when interpreted in the light of his theory, "The Geological Cataclysm," actually envisions the man-god's establishment of new principles of morality.[161]

[157] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* 61.

[158] G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right,* trans. T.M. Know (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 11.

[159] Paris, *Dostoevksy's Greatest Characters,* 122.

[160] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 69 and 263.

[161] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 649. The "Geological Cataclysm" is expounded by Ivan's devil during his near psychological breakdown (the ontological reality of his devil is debatable. I interpret it as a projection or personification of Ivan's own fragmented psyche). The theory predicts an era when after mankind finally renounces the idea of God and demolishes the old moral order, the "man-god" will arise and expand his power through science and humanist values, and "he will love his brother then without any reward." However, not everyone is prepared to be a "man-god," thus "anyone who already knows the truth is permitted to settle things for himself, absolutely as he wishes,

Ivan's concept of justice proceeds from his intellectual efforts to arrive at an ethical good. It is a version of humanity's continuous project to secure and govern itself through a program that is intelligible.[162] In his poem, the Grand Inquisitor's *secret* is that he sides with the devil, whom he calls "the wise spirit:" a spirit of inordinate rationalism. Yet in the Grand Inquisitor's worship of rationalism, Gary Morson observes, "Out of faithless compassion he becomes the most profound misanthrope in world literature."[163]

Furthermore, Ivan's ethics relies on human prudence within the mediation of society.[164] Ivan's ethics appeals to society's moral sentiments of justice and retribution (recall Alyosha's "shoot him…"). *Sittlichkeit* is described in the same way: ethics is mediated by society and gains the affirmation of the community. Thus, Ivan constructs the same ethics that Kierkegaard wrote against.

It is a characteristic of *Sittlichkeit* to transubstantiate its particularity to a universal status.[165] Likewise, with its self-invested authority, Euclidean ethics sets itself up as a standard for evaluating matters of infinity, eschatology, and divinity. Ivan's Euclidean hegemony is not so much a "[turning] away from the possibility that the cosmos is more capacious or complex than he chooses to accept,"[166] because Ivan does admit of knowing about "infinity." Rather, Ivan absolutizes his Euclidean framework, and invests it with hegemonic authority to judge the whole of reality, including God. As Paris observes, "Ivan arraigns God in the name of human values,"[167] for even God must act according to Euclidean justice. Likewise, in *Sittlichkeit*, God is rendered simply as a personification of social expectations. He is not seen as a Person who might make surprising demands on a single individual. It would be seriously impolite of Him to do so, for even God must follow social etiquettes.[168]

For Kierkegaard, the hegemony of Euclidean ethics is incompatible with genuine faith, and the best way to deal with it is through a teleological suspension. Teleological suspension[169] (Gk. *telos, "*end, goal"; *logos,* "reason") means that the

on the new principles." In this sense, "everything is permitted" to him. This reminds us of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch*.

[162] Siddharta Bayona Chiong, "A Tale by Three Pseudonyms: Kierkegaard's Notion of Faith," *Colloquia Manilana,* vol. 25 (2017): 25.

[163] Gary Saul Morson, "God of Onions: *The Brothers Karamazov* and the Mythic Prosaic," In Robert Louis Jackson, *A New Word on* The Brothers Karamazov (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 110.

[164] Chiong, "A Tale by Three Pseudonyms," 25.

[165] Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith,* 47.

[166] Connolly, *Dostoevsky's* The Brothers Karamazov, 64.

[167] Paris, *Dostoevsky's Greatest Characters,* 121.

[168] See C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 105.

[169] "Teleological suspension" is Kierkegaard's term for Hegelian *Aufhebung.* It is a movement in

ethical is suspended because it is temporarily dispensed for the reason of a higher goal or end. The ethical ceases to be the guiding principle because it is made subordinate to the commands of God, the new *telos*. The ethical, however, is not relinquished or invalidated. Rather the ethical takes on a completely different, even paradoxical expression,[170] like Alyosha's contentment with Zosima's humiliation or his calmness at the sight of suffering.

What faith demands is a teleological suspension of Euclidean ethics; a teleological suspension of man's inveterate tendency to reduce reality within the narrow confines of a Euclidean mind. This does not mean that Ivan's ethics is invalidated (although in its entirety, it does seem flawed), nor are its observations of injustice discounted; rather, it is only subsumed under a higher mode of understanding reality.[171] However, Ivan is deliberately obstinate in his ethics, because he is unable to surrender what his mind orchestrates as "what should be."

What makes Abraham's teleological suspension different from murderous fanaticism is that he only suspended the ethical after being subordinated to it, and he continues to preserve the ethical within his faith. This means that he genuinely loves Isaac (representing the ethical), and should paradoxically love him even more intensely as he sacrifices the boy.[172]

Ivan's anecdotal evidence and the outrage it causes to one's moral sentiments are not dismissed. Alyosha burns with the same thirst for justice as Ivan does. His painful experiences have become part of his narrative of faith. Faith does not ignore the maw of human cruelty nor the deafening silence of God. Rather faith subsumes these realities under a new mode of understanding. Genuine faith exists in spite of, and not in denial of paradoxes. Only illusory faith is blind; genuine faith is clear sighted.[173]

What makes Alyosha's existential stance remarkable is that it is actually more difficult than that of Ivan's. It is easier to accept the world as either a rosy, well-tuned universe or an empty stream of incoherent misery. Yet through faith, Alyosha is able to reconcile these contradictions within the mystery of God's world.

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which something that is taken to be the absolute standard is contextualized or made part of a larger whole, where it is no longer the organizing principle. For example, "the family is *aufgehoben* in civil society; civil society is *aufgehoben* in the state; and finally, the state is *aufgenhoben* in universal history." See Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith,* 50.

[170] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* 70.

[171] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* 54.

[172] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* 74.

[173] Michael Watts, *Kierkegaard* (London: One World Publications, 2003), 111.

Subjective Truth as Paradox and Mystery

Instead of Euclidean certainty, Kierkegaard declared that *subjective truth,* as faith, is the highest truth. He defines subjective truth as: "*An objective uncertainty, maintained through appropriation in the most passionate inwardness, is truth,* the highest truth there is for someone *existing*."[174]

Subjective truth is an objective uncertainty because of the indeterminate nature of the object of faith as it appears to a Euclidean mind.[175] There is order and predictability in God's world, yet there are also many facets that disturb and incite anxiety. As a whole, the believer is left with little objective certainty regarding the destiny of reality, much less the involvement of a divinity. There is no objective assurance of this mystery but faith is the only assurance a knight of faith can cling to.[176]

Subjective truth is portrayed in young Zosima's willingness to risk his life, even if, as the mysterious visitor remarks, "for the sake of *your truth* you risked suffering general contempt."[177] Subjective truth is depicted as the mystery or the beauty of God's world. Alyosha holds on to the objective uncertainty of divine providence despite the counter evidence of a holy man's disgrace or the lurid abuses against children. Kierkegaard further elaborates the subjective truth of faith as *paradox*.

Zosima observes that for "the scoffers and blasphemers," God's mystery is dismissed as incredibly ridiculous.[178] Zosima, indeed, has his ridiculous axioms, like, "A loving humility is a terrible power, the most powerful of all, nothing compares with it."[179] Yet it is this ridiculousness that characterizes mystery.

In Kierkegaardian terms, mystery or beauty is called "*paradox*" or "*the absurd*." A paradox is "a sign, a *riddle*, a compound *riddle* [...] but it does not follow thereby that it is nonsense."[180] Dmitri, too, describes beauty in strikingly similar terms, "It cannot be defined, because here God gave us only *riddles*."[181] Dmitri further says, in

[174] Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs,* trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 171. Italics original.

[175] Matienzo, "Quiapo Leap: A Kierkegaardian Reading of the Religious Experience of the Black Nazarene Popular Devotion," 35.

[176] Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death,* trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 84-85.

[177] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 302. Researcher's italics.

[178] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 292.

[179] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 318.

[180] Soren Kerkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks: Volume 7*, ed. and trans. by Niels Jorgen Capperlorn et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 20. Researcher' italics.

[181] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 108.

beauty, "the shores converge, here all contradictions live together." [182] Paradox is the contradiction of God's loving presence in this world of injustice. Paradox is the non-Euclidean, eternal truth that is being accomplished in human suffering.

Kierkegaard relates paradox with what he calls the *Unknown,* that is unlike any human and is absolutely different.[183] The Unknown is so unintelligible that the understanding cannot even think of the absolutely different.[184] This reminds us of Rudolf Otto's description of the divine as Wholly Other: "A mystery that is beyond the sphere of the familiar and intelligible."[185]

In *Fear and Trembling,* Kierkegaard sketches an indiscernible image of the Divine as a terrifying Unknown. The book describes the "the shudder of the idea" of the sacrifice. It talks about "the terrifying," of "dreadfulness," and the "dreadful."[186] God is perceived as a stranger, even an enemy, who calls man from the safety of Euclidean certainty into the objective uncertainty of mystery. Mystery is an uncanny reality that eludes Euclidean comprehension (Lt. *prehendere*, "to seize").

The *absurd* is also an important Kierkegaardian category. Absurd is what goes beyond human calculation and understanding. Faith is said to be made "by virtue of the absurd," because for God everything is possible- even the impossible. Faith is reached as a result of or by a power that is beyond comprehension. It is absurd due to the nature of the phenomenon, which refuses to be domesticated into the home of the Euclidean mind. Kierkegaard writes, "Faith is the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd [...]"[187] because it repels back any rational categorization.

Ivan is offended by a non-Euclidean resolution to senseless suffering. As Paris puts it, "At the heart of Ivan's position is his refusal, as Albert Camus would put it, to commit philosophical suicide, to give up his human point of view."[188] The absurd is offensive to a Euclidean reason which seeks to comprehend. Kierkegaard explains that *offence* is faith's weapon against the domination of reason. Offense is the mixed feeling of hurt, annoyance, and anger arising from a person's encounter with

[182] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 108.

[183] Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments,* trans. Howard V. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), 57.

[184] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 58.

[185] Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith,* 85. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 25. This common association of the Wholly Other with Kierkegaard is due to Kierkegaard's own language in describing God. Simon Podmore relates how Kierkegaardian advocate, Jean Wahl reacts to Emmanuel Levinas' use of the term "wholly other." According to Wahl, the term naturally evokes the name of Kierkegaard, and perhaps others, probably Otto himself. See Simon Podmore, "The Holy and the Wholly Other: Kierkegaard on the Alterity of God," *Heythrop Journal*, 53, no. 1 (2012): 9.

[186] See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 72, 75, 78, and 114.

[187] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 514.

[188] Paris, *Dostoevsky's Greatest Characters,* 120.

an incomprehensible paradox.[189] This is because paradox implies "the downfall of reason."[190]

Ivan cannot accept the demand for a suspension, a dethronement of his highest faculty: "[L]et all of this come true and be revealed, but I do not accept it and do not want to accept it!"[191] For Ivan, a meaning that is unintelligible to a Euclidean mind is no meaning at all; if it does not satisfy his need, it is thus simply irrelevant.[192] Paradox can only be appropriated and *understood* by the heart.

Subjectivity of the Heart

Instead of the Euclidean mind, for Kierkegaard, the *locus* of the God-relationship resides in a person's subjectivity. God meets a person in the sacred space of his interiority. Subjectivity is the depth of a person's passions and commitments. It is what makes us truly human. Kierkegaard warns, "As soon as subjectivity is taken away, and passion from subjectivity, and infinite interest from passion, there is no decision whatever… all decision, all essential decision, is rooted in subjectivity."[193] The most deeply human decisions are actualized not by reason, but by subjectivity.

This notion of an interiority different from the rational faculty is conveyed by Dostoevsky's metaphor of the heart. It is in the human heart where God and the devil struggle to claim the person. To see reality as a world of senseless suffering or to see its openness to redemptive recreation hinges on one's "prior subjective orientation."[194] To be open to mystery is a choice, or a leap made subjectively, made by the heart. It is a leap because it does not follow the strict dialectics of logic, which is proper to a Euclidean mind. The heart is moved by beauty, but it depends on whether it opens itself to "the beauty of this world of God's,"[195] or be lured by the distorted beauty of Sodom or even Satan's rebellion, for these too can appear great and beautiful.[196]

[189] For Kierkegaard, Christianity's crucial criteria- the absurd, the paradox, the possibility of offense- are its weapons against speculation. Thus Christianity must always be offensive, because it is in the offensiveness that the admirableness shines forth. Kierkegaard writes, "To defend something is always to disparage it… he who defends it has never believed it. If he believes, then the enthusiasm of faith is not a defense- no, it is attack and victory; a believer is a victor." Those who would like to make Christianity a little less absurd, a little more intelligible are actually betraying it, though only out of ignorance. It is as if Christianity is a poor little thing that needs to be defended. See, Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death,* 87.

[190] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments,* 59.

[191] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 245.

[192] Paris, *Dostoevsky's Greatest Characters,* 120.

[193] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* 29.

[194] Osborn, "Beauty Will Save the World," 106.

[195] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 294. The phrase, "This world of God's" is used by Zosima with a positive meaning. Take note of how Dostoevsky puts into Zosima's mouth the very words that Ivan uses to denigrate God.

[196] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 320. Dmitri declares that Sodom, too, is beautiful for many people. Zosima warns that even participating in Satan's pride and rebellion can appear great and beautiful.

Karamazovian Inwardness[197]

Subjectivity is reached through inwardness.[198] Passionate inwardness signifies the subjective aspect of the experience of faith, which becomes the source of dynamism, moving a believer to appropriate a truth beyond comprehension.[199]

Inwardness, in Danish, *Inderlighed*, means "fervour," "intensity," or "heartfelt."[200] Kierkegaard explains, "Inwardness is an understanding, but *in concreto* the important thing is how this understanding is to be understood… The more concrete the content of consciousness is, the more concrete the understanding becomes."[201] Alyosha's religious ecstasy is described as something "he felt clearly and almost *tangibly* […] as firm and immovable as this heavenly vault descend into his soul."[202] Here, "tangibly" conveys the concreteness of inwardness.

Inwardness is an intuitive and visceral perception of mystery. Inwardness is an intense and heartfelt understanding, not acquired by the mind as concepts that merely represent the reality, rather it is a concrete experience, an intense feeling, a living participation in the reality which is perceived. This is conveyed when Markel confesses, "I do not know how to explain [universal responsibility] to you, but I feel it so strongly that it pains me."[203]

Kierkegaard writes, "Inwardness at its highest in an existing subject is passion"[204] because "this understanding is present only in the moment of passion."[205] Unfortunately, as Banerjee observes, Ivan "holds on to the authority of reason with a passion other men invest in their faith."[206] Passion, in Danish *Lidenskab*, is etymologically linked to *lide*, "suffer." To be passionate is to be possessed by an all-consuming conviction or longing that propels one towards action. It is to suffer, "that

[197] Here, the term "Karamazov" is associated with Kierkegaard's conception of a passionate inwardness. "Karamazov" is associated with strong, uncontrollable passion and a lust for life. This is observable in Ivan's use of the term "Karamazovian": "Marvel at me, Alyosha- I, too, love children terribly. And observe, that cruel people- passionate, carnivorous, Karamazovian- sometimes love children very much." Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 238.

[198] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* 29.

[199] Matienzo, "Quiapo Leap: A Kierkegaardian Reading of the Religious Experience of the Black Nazarene Popular Devotion," 35.

[200] Arnold Come, *Kierkegaard as Humanist: Discovering Myself* (London: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), 94.

[201] Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety,* trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 142.

[202] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 362. Researcher's italics.

[203] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 289. Markel is Zosima's older brother who dies during their childhood. He becomes Zosima's inspiration in life.

[204] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* 167.

[205] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments,* 59.

[206] Banerjee, *Dostoevsky: Scandal of Reason*, Part II, § V, ¶ 29.

it pains me," under a strong, inexplicable force that propels one to something beyond oneself. Faith is described as a "prodigious passion," even the "supreme" and "highest passion"; what is "essentially human is passion."[207] The more paradoxical the mystery, the more intense the infinite passion that is required to compensate for the absence of objective certainty.

The intensity of Kierkegaardian passion is matched only by the violent emotions of "astonishment, confusion, and joy" that accompanied Alyosha's "rapturous, nearly sensual religious ecstasy"[208] after his dream/vision of Cana of Galilee.[209] It is described as a moment when, "the silence of the earth seemed to merge with the silence of the heavens, the mystery of the earth touched the mystery of the stars" and Alyosha embraces the earth and "vowed ecstatically to love it."[210] The subjective truth that Alyosha discovers transforms the contradictions of this world, by giving them an *eternal significance*. The qualifier "eternal" connotes that the ground of its existence finds its justification in a transcendent purpose. "The mystery of the stars" casts all earthly tragedies under a new light.

For Kierkegaard, the most intense inwardness is always related to "that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other [...]"[211] which he calls, "*the moment,*" (Dn: Øjeblikket, "glance of the eye").[212] The moment is a religious experience characterized by passionate, inward self-commitment. A discovered *eternal* meaning enters into temporality by giving one's stretched temporal existence an eternal significance. In other words, one discovers a unifying meaning that leads to a lifelong commitment that justifies one's temporal existence.[213] Alyosha's ecstasy clearly communicates the same intuition.

Vaškovic discovers that Dostoevsky uses an equivalent term, "moment," in *The Idiot* and *Demons* to describe a similar religious experience. Dostoevsky wrote about this "occurrence as a union of eternity and time; as ecstatic moments when the 'heavens come down to earth,' claiming it to be an *instant* containing a full

[207] See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 23, 121-122.

[208] Miller, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 87-88.

[209] Dostoevsky speaks of Alyosha's ecstasy thus, "The ensuing scene represents one of the richest and most evocative scenes in *The Brothers Karamazov*"; "the most vital one [in the chapter]... and perhaps even in the novel." See Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: Complete Letters,* trans. and ed. David Allan Lowe and Ronald Meyer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988), 5: 160. Quoted in Connolly, *Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov,* 80.

[210] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 362.

[211] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety,* 80.

[212] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety, 87-93.*

[213] Hubert Dreyfus, "Kierkegaard on the Self," in *Ethics, Love and Faith in Kierkegaard* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 18.

apprehension of God."[214] It is clear that both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky describe the experience in strikingly similar terms.

Although the intense emotions are but temporal and fleeting, lasting only a moment, Alyosha comes out of this moment "steadfast for the rest of his life." [215] Kierkegaard writes that when a person collides with the Unknown, it "results [in] unsettling even man's knowledge of himself."[216] When subjective truth invades one's person, one cannot remain undisturbed, unaffected, for it transforms one's self-understanding, and one is never the same afterwards.

When the narrator says, "Never, never in all his life would Alyosha forget that moment,"[217] the description shimmers with the Kierkegaard's concept of *earnestness*: a lifelong striving that retains the fervor of the moment by constant repetition and recollection of the initial resolution.[218] Passionate inwardness is not a capricious aesthetic emotion for it is always centered around a commitment that marks, qualifies, or establishes a character.[219] Michael Watts explains that inwardness is an "active involvement, manifested by passionate self-commitment to one's innermost moral or spiritual commitments."[220] Subjective truth is an existential category because it is something that one appropriates into one's personal living. It is a direct personal involvement in the moment by moment unfolding of the reality of mystery in the process of one's own existing.[221] It is the highest truth because it is the truth that ultimately defines a person's existence, for which one lives and dies for. Alyosha emerges from his crucible of doubt as a person who has made an earnest, lifelong commitment to a *telos* or vocation.

Conclusion

For the first objective, the paper has shown how Kierkegaard's philosophy provides a hermeneutical framework for organizing and unpacking the complex, interweaving themes and insights latent in Dostoevsky's novelistic art.

Kierkegaard's double movement provides a framework to understand how the governing theme of death and rebirth operates in the novel. With the movement

[214] Vaškovic, "A path to Authenticity," 9. Researcher's italics.
[215] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 362.
[216] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments,* 49.
[217] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 363.
[218] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety,* 147.
[219] Arne Gron, *The Concept of Anxiety in Soren Kierkegaard,* trans. Jeanette Knox (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1994), 72-76.
[220] Watts, *Kierkegaard,* 83.
[221] Watts, *Kierkegaard,* 83.

of resignation, the researcher has brought out and developed the latent concept of acceptance as an expression of internal death. Active love and responsibility are identified as the means to rebirth. Thus acceptance is understood as infinite resignation, and active love and responsibility as the movement of receiving again.

Ivan's passionate demand for justice is interpreted as ethics: a reliance on purely human reason as the source of direction for existence. With his Euclidean mind, Ivan judges all of reality against the standard of his ethics. Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical adduces the process that Alyosha must have undergone in order to overcome his desire for Euclidean justice, thus supplementing for what is not explicit in the narrative.

Zosima's mystery is interpreted as subjective truth, which can only be perceived through passionate inwardness. Using Kierkegaardian categories like paradox, the absurd, and the Unknown, the paper deepens the reader's understanding of the phenomenon of mystery. Just as in Kierkegaard, subjective truth implies a subjectivity which appropriates it, so mystery must imply a corresponding subjectivity. This is discovered in the metaphor of the heart, which is the *organ* for the perception of mystery.

The intense, rapturous religious ecstasy of Alyosha is explained in terms of passionate inwardness. He experiences a concrete *understanding* brought about by an intuitive participation in mystery. The actions of Alyosha after leaving the monastery are interpreted as expressions of his earnest commitment to his new found meaning: to live in love and responsibility for others.

Dostoevsky strove to portray an "artistic picture"[222] where "the whole novel serves as an answer"[223] to Ivan's nihilistic worldview. In this Kierkegaardian reading of the novel, the researcher hopes to have contributed another dimension to Dostoevsky's answer.

For the second objective, the paper has also fleshed out Kierkegaard's notion of faith with a narrative portrayal of how the Kierkegaardian categories may play out in a person's life. Kierkegaard's philosophy unveils its existential import in the human experience of suffering and loss. It details how faith is the process of death and growth in response to the vicissitudes of the human condition. In resigning to God, there is paradoxically an epiphany of grace. Faith is the grace by which a person reconciles himself with the inexplicable contradictions of life.

[222] Dostoevsky, *Complete Letters,* 5: 154-5, entry August 24, 1879.

[223] Dostoevsky, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii v Tridtsati Tomakh* Vol. 27 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-90), 48, quoted in Connolly, *Dostoevsky's*, 14.

Active love and responsibility for others sheds light on how the movement of receiving again is enacted and pursued by a knight of faith. In addition, Dostoevsky supplies a communitarian dimension to the movement of faith, which balances Kierkegaard's individualistic tendency.

Moreover, Dostoevsky portrays how the passionate inwardness of subjectivity need not be expressed in spectacular piety or fanaticism. Rather the intensity of faith can refer to the internal faith-experience of the believer, which can manifest itself through ordinary acts like loving and being responsible for others.

Therefore, in Alyosha, whom the narrator describes as, "by no means great or noteworthy,"[224] we discover an icon comparable to Abraham. Alyosha's bourgeois philistine faith is fittingly an icon of Kierkegaardian faith, a faith which every average person could re-appropriate and embody in himself.

Kierkegaard did not want his readers to end within the text of his works, but his strategy of indirect communication strove to rouse them to question their own motives for living, and to catalyze personal transformation. George Pattison suggests, "Kierkegaard's programme of indirect communication can therefore remind readers of Dostoevsky that they are not merely spectators at a tragedy, no matter how powerful the emotional catharsis such an experience may offer."[225] Likewise, Julian Connolly notes that Dostoevsky's novels are designed to inspire with spiritual feelings and to spur readers to actions, because his goal is "on human, earthly attitudes and behaviors."[226] For both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, their works are an appeal to their readers to respond appropriately to the text by embarking on a moral reorientation of their own personal existence.[227]

As a final note, this paper has shown that there are more similarities between Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky than what has been previously explored. It is the researcher's humble hope that this will encourage further studies between the two as frontiers for academic exploration. PS

[224] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 3.

[225] George Pattison, "Freedom's Dangerous Dialogue: Reading Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard Together," in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 251.

[226] Connolly, "Dostoevskij's Guide to Spiritual Epiphany," 53.

[227] Pattison, "Freedom's Dangerous Dialogue," 253.

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