

PRO AND CONTRA
THE EXISTENCE OF GOD
IN
FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

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PREFACE

Dostoevsky is widely quoted in modern books on the problem of the existence of God, but there has not been a really comprehensive study of his approach to the problem. His struggles with God are often referred to, as are portions of his answers; but there is no detailed presentation of his arguments against the existence of God, along with a detailed presentation of his attempt to answer those arguments.

This thesis is a respectful attempt to present, in detail, Dostoevsky's argument against the existence of God on the grounds of physical and moral evil, and his answer to those arguments.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of atheism, for Dostoevsky, is a much deeper and more complicated issue than the simple question of whether or not one intellectually accepts or denies the existence of God. For him, atheism is a matter of the heart, a choice made in the depths of a man's personality.

If intellectual assent to the existence of God is made the criterion of atheism, then all of Dostoevsky's arch atheists are at best only agnostics; for each of them, at one time or another, either openly asserts, or at least it is implied, that they do accept the existence of God; and yet, there is no question that they are atheists.

In The Brothers Karamazov, Ivan, in his discussion with Alyosha, openly states that he accepts the existence of God;¹ and yet Alyosha tells his brother that he is an atheist.² When Smerdyakov tells Ivan that he killed his father, he mentions that there is a third person present with them, and when Ivan asks who it is, he answers, "That third is God Himself, Providence. He is the third beside us now." But he adds, "Only don't look for him, you won't find him."³

¹Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, Translated by Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 279.

²Ibid., p. 311.

³Ibid., p. 758.

Later, Ivan asks him if he now believes in God, and Smerdyakov answers, "No, I don't believe."⁴ The Grand Inquisitor speaks as though he intellectually assents to the truth that Christ is God: "And what use is it for me to hide anything from Thee? Don't I know to Whom I am speaking? All that I can say is known to Thee already."⁵ However, Alyosha says that the only secret the Grand Inquisitor has is atheism.⁶

In Crime and Punishment, when Porfiry asks Raskolnikov if he believes in God, Raskolnikov answers, "I do";⁷ but in prison, the other convicts shout at him, "You're an infidel! You don't believe in God."⁸

In A Raw Youth, Versilov says that he loves God;⁹ but Nikolay Semyonovitch wrote to Dolgoruky that Versilov is "without any sort of religion,"¹⁰ and Dostoevsky states unequivocally in The Diary of a Writer that Versilov is an atheist.¹¹

⁴Ibid., p. 769.

⁵Ibid., p. 305.

⁶Ibid., p. 310.

⁷Fyodor Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, Translated by Constance Garnett (London: Landsborough Publications Limited, 1914), p. 221.

⁸Ibid., p. 444.

⁹Fyodor Dostoevsky, A Raw Youth, Translated by Constance Garnett with an introduction by Ernest J. Simmons (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1959), p. 597.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 606.

¹¹Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer, Translated and annotated by Boris Brasol (New York: George Braziller, 1954), p. 266.

In The Idiot, Ippolit says he will admit future life and Providence;¹² but Lizaveta Prokofyevna calls him an atheist.¹³

In The Possessed, Kirillov says he has no higher idea than disbelief in God;¹⁴ but Pyott Stepanovitch says that he probably believes more thoroughly than any priest.¹⁵ Stavrogin declares that he is an atheist;¹⁶ but he also says that he was not lying when he spoke as though he had faith.¹⁷

It becomes obvious, then, that Dostoevsky is treating the problem of atheism on a plane deeper than the one on which it is usually treated.

He deals with the traditional problems of physical and moral evil. The atheist contends that because of the existence of physical and moral evil, there cannot be a God. Dostoevsky shows that if there is no God, physical evil becomes intolerable to the point of demanding suicide; and he shows that moral evil can also be a proof for the existence of God. Dostoevsky is well able to counter each of the atheistic accusations, showing that if the atheist considers the proposition "God exists" as absurd, the proposition "God

¹²Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Idiot, Translated by Constance Garnett (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1915), p. 405.

¹³Ibid., p. 279.

¹⁴Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Possessed, Translated from the Russian by Constance Garnett (New York: The Modern Library, 1936), p. 628.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 262.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

does not exist" is, at least, equally absurd; all of which indicates that since the existence of God cannot really be conclusively proved or disproved by rational argument, the basic problem lies elsewhere. Dostoevsky then carries the problem into the realm of the human heart where he discloses the real problem which is that of a choice against God, and not an intellectual conviction that He does not exist.

That faith is primarily a matter of choice is brought out explicitly a number of times in The Brothers Karamazov: Dostoevsky, speaking of miracles, says,

It is not miracles that dispose realist to belief. The genuine realist, if he is an unbeliever, will always find strength and ability to disbelieve in the miraculous, and if he is confronted with a miracle as an irrefutable fact he would rather disbelieve his own senses than admit the fact. Even if he admits it, he admits it as a fact of nature till then unrecognized by him. Faith does not, in the realist, spring from the miracle but the miracle from faith.¹⁸

Ivan's "devil" tells him that

Proofs are no help to believing, especially material proofs. Thomas believed, not because he saw Christ risen, but because he wanted to believe, before he saw.¹⁹

Mitya uncovers the basic attitude of the atheist:²⁰ speaking of the theology student, Rakitin, who does not believe, he says, "And Rakitin does dislike God. Ough! doesn't he dislike Him! That's the sore point with all of them. But they

¹⁸Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 25.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 774.

²⁰Dostoevsky admits that there are good atheists: see The Brothers Karamazov, p. 194; he also admits the reality of unconscious faith: see The Brothers Karamazov, p. 203 and The Possessed, p. 727. Here he is speaking of the man who has truly turned away from God.

conceal it. They tell lies. They pretend."²¹

It is Dostoevsky's realization that faith is a choice, and not primarily an intellectual conviction, that makes him show all of his non-believers, at one time or another, speaking as though they had faith. It is also this realization that explains the particular tactic that he takes in his argument for the existence of God; for his real argument ends up being the lives and personalities of his believers.

One may pose the question, "how does the existence of Markel, Alyosha, or Zossima, and their experiences, constitute any argument, much less 'proof' for the existence of God?" The answer lies in the fact that Dostoevsky knew full well that a man is not convinced ultimately by logic; faith comes about through a conversion experience involving the whole person. Because of this, he attempted to involve the whole person in an experience of Christianity through the medium of his art. It is the very beauty and meaningfulness of the personalities of his believers, a beauty and meaning which does not originate from themselves, but from the mysterious faith which moves them, that constitutes his argument. It is, in other words, in their value as "witnesses" that their power lies.

Dostoevsky has only one starting point for his argument, and that is the value of life itself. Life is good and whatever fosters life is good; whatever causes death and

²¹Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 717.

destruction is evil. Then he proceeds to show that atheism, or the choice against God, does, in fact, lead only to despair, destruction and death; while the choice for God causes joy and life. Dostoevsky attempts to dispose a person to make the choice for God; but it is up to that person, in the mystery of his freedom, to choose his own destiny.

CHAPTER I

PHYSICAL EVIL

Ippolit,¹ a young man, seventeen years old, is dying of consumption. Hearing that he has only a fortnight to live, he writes an "Explanation" for the suicide which he plans to commit. The fact that the suicide attempt is an abortive one is irrelevant to the part that Ippolit plays as spokesman for the denial of God because of the cruelty of nature, the physical universe.

In bitterness, he reflects upon Holbein's painting of the dead Christ, a painting which Myshkin had noted earlier could make a man lose his faith.² The picture spares no details of the mutilating torture and suffering which Jesus had undergone, so much so that Ippolit wonders how anyone could believe that death would be overcome and the Christ would rise again. Looking at this picture, nature appears to him as an "immense, merciless, dumb beast," or as "a huge machine of the most modern construction which, dull and insensible, has aimlessly clutched, crushed and swallowed up a great priceless Being, a Being worth all nature and its laws, worth the whole earth, which was created perhaps solely

¹A character in The Idiot.

²Dostoevsky, The Idiot, p. 212.

for the sake of the advent of that Being."³ In his delirium, he sees that "dark, insolent, unreasoning and eternal Power" assume the incredible shape of "a huge and loathsome spider."⁴ The utter sense of humiliation, and the inability to accept a gloomy power that takes the shape of a spider, helped to bring about his final decision to kill himself. A feeling of repulsion, and not a logical conviction, brought him to the final moment of full determination.⁵

The fact that Myshkin brings Ippolit to beautiful Pavlovsk Park for his last days only heightens the bitterness and irony that he feels. What good is all this beauty, this endless festival, when he knows for certain that, from the beginning, he is excluded from it by the knowledge of his death sentence? ". . . Even the tiny fly, buzzing in the sunlight . . . has its share in the banquet and the chorus, knows its place, loves it and is happy, . . ." while he alone is an outcast.⁶

Ippolit will admit future life, and has been unable to conceive of there being no Providence, in spite of his desire to do so.⁷ But Lizaveta Prokofyevna calls him an atheist,⁸ and rightly so, for he has no faith in the Chris-

³Ibid., p. 400.

⁴Ibid., p. 401. The spider is an image which recurs often as a symbol of evil in Dostoevsky's works: see The Possessed, p. 535, 716; Crime and Punishment, p. 243.

⁵Ibid., pp. 402-403.

⁶Ibid., p. 404.

⁷Ibid., p. 406.

⁸Ibid., p. 279.

tian God. He will accept that perhaps a "higher power" has doomed him for some purpose. He will accept his being devoured, but he refuses to praise what devours him. He cannot imagine that there is really Somebody Who would be upset by his not finishing out his fortnight; he does not believe it. More than likely all that is needed is his "worthless life, the life of an atom, to complete some universal harmony; for some sort of plus and minus, for the sake of some sort of contrast, and so on, just as the life of millions of creatures is needed every day as a sacrifice, as without their death, the rest of the world couldn't go on."⁹ He will admit that it is necessary to the arrangement of the world to have this continual devouring, and will admit even that he cannot understand anything about that arrangement. But the one thing that he knows for certain is that once having been allowed to be conscious of his existence, it does not matter to him that there are mistakes in the construction of the world, and that without them it cannot go on. Ippolit cries out that it is ironic and unjust; and if he had had the power not to be born, he would have refused existence upon conditions that are such a mockery. But he still has the power to die, although the days he gives back are numbered. It may be a small mutiny, but, as he says, "a protest is sometimes no small action. . . ."¹⁰ He makes it very clear that he is not killing himself because he would

⁹Ibid., p. 405.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 406.

not be able to bear the few weeks left him.¹¹ It is definitely a protest, and one which he claims he would have made even if this consumption had not turned up.¹²

Dostoevsky, in The Diary of a Writer, elaborates on this theme in an article which he calls "The Verdict". It is likewise the last testimony of a man who commits suicide because he cannot endure the stupid and humiliating comedy to which nature is subjecting him. Man, the only being created with consciousness, is also the only one who is aware that nature is proclaiming some sort of "harmony of the whole" in which he neither can, nor ever shall, participate, nor will he ever comprehend what it means. But he is forced to submit, abase himself, and for the sake of the harmony of the whole accept his suffering and consent to live.¹³ But, of course, there is no conceivable reason why he should consent to live under such humiliating circumstances. The only possible reason would be because it is pleasurable; but then, life is not pleasurable. The only people who are happy in this world and who consent to live are those who are

akin to animals and come nearest to their species by reason of their limited development and consciousness. These readily consent to live but on the specific condition that they live as animals, i.e., eat, drink, sleep, build their nest and bring up children.¹⁴

¹¹Ibid., p. 406.

¹²Ibid., p. 290.

¹³Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer, p. 471.

¹⁴Ibid. In Notes from the Underground, The "Underground Man" came to realize that "the direct, the inevitable, and the legitimate result of consciousness is to make all action impossible, or - to put it differently - consciousness leads to thumb-twiddling." (p. 122) Men of action are

But what is the use of living if one has already conceived the idea "that for man to live like an animal is disgusting, abnormal and insufficient?"¹⁵ The only other reason would be for the sake of the preservation of the species; and if he could be sure of the "preservation" of the species, perhaps this could constitute a motive. But he knows that this planet is not eternal and mankind even less so.¹⁶ The same inert laws of nature that doom individual lives will eventually reduce mankind to the same zero; and faced with "to-morrow's zero" what does it matter?¹⁷

The final insult, the most unbearable one of all, is that there is no one guilty, no one to blame.¹⁸ It is simply the workings of that "dull, dark dumb force," crushing and annihilating while consciousness stands horrified and unable to accept such an absurd condition. The only truly logical conclusion to such a realization is suicide. It is also the only one befitting the dignity of a conscious being in the face of "the muteness of the surrounding inertia."¹⁹

active because, due to the fact of "arrested mental development they mistake the nearest and secondary causes for primary causes and in this way persuade themselves much more easily and quickly than other people that they have found a firm basis for whatever business they have in hand . . ."
(p. 122).

¹⁵Ibid., p. 540.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 472.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 540.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 472. This theme is also found in Notes from the Underground, p. 118.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 538.

Kirillov, a character in The Possessed,²⁰ carries this philosophy a step further. He has been convinced by the brutality of nature that God cannot possibly exist. His profound admiration for Jesus causes him to anguish over the tragedy of Christ Who said with such faith to the thief, "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise," and yet died, finding neither Paradise nor resurrection. It is partly such reverence for Christ that causes his utter despair, for

if the laws of nature did not spare even Him, have not spared even their miracle and made Him live in a lie and die for a lie, then all the planet is a lie and rests on a lie and on mockery. So then, the very laws of the planet are a lie and the vaudeville of devils. What is there to live for?²¹

Kirillov arrives at the conclusion that all this falsity comes from belief in God,²² and that God, in reality,

²⁰In a letter to A.N. Maikow, Oct. 9/21, 1870, Dostoevsky, speaking of the miracle in St. Luke's Gospel concerning the devils entering into the herd of swine, says:

"Exactly the same has happened with us in Russia. The devils went out of the Russian and entered into a herd of swine, - into the Nechayevs, Serno-Solovioiches, etc. (terrorists). These are drowned and will be drowned, and the healed man, from whom the devils had been cast out, is sitting at the feet of Jesus. So it ought to happen. Russia has spewed out the abomination on which she has been surfeited, and certainly nothing Russian was left in those spewed-out scoundrels. And observe this, my dear friend: he who loses his people and nationality, loses also the belief of his father, and God. Well, if you want to know, - this is precisely the theme of my novel. It is called The Devils (called The Possessed in the existing English translation), and it is a description of how these devils entered into a herd of swine."

Fyodor Dostoevsky: Letters and Reminiscences, Translated from the Russian by S.S. Koteliansky and J. Middleton Murry (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), pp. 92-93.

²¹Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 629.

²²Ibid.

is only the pain of the fear of death and must be conquered.²³ He is determined not to be afraid of death and so has decided to kill himself.²⁴ Although there have been many suicides, they have always been committed with terror, and not for the specific purpose of killing fear. He insists that the man who can kill himself only to kill fear will himself become God at once.²⁵

Later, just before he takes his own life, he tells Pyotr Stepanovitch that he has never understood how an atheist could know that there is no God and not immediately kill himself. "To recognize that there is no God and not to recognize at the same instant that one is God oneself is an absurdity, else one would certainly kill oneself."²⁶ He reasons that if there is a God, then everything is His will and no one can escape from His will. But if there is no God, then all is man's will, and man is bound to show self-will.²⁷ He had searched for three years before realizing that the attribute of his godhead is self-will, but once he did, he was led to the inevitable conclusion that to show the highest point of self-will would be to kill himself with his own hands.²⁸ For he has no higher idea than disbelief in God, and so is bound to show his disbelief. Man has always invented God so as to go on living and not kill himself. Now, Kirillov will be the first one who will refuse to invent God,

²³Ibid., p. 114.

²⁴Ibid., p. 381.

²⁵Ibid., p. 115.

²⁶Ibid., p. 629.

²⁷Ibid., p. 627.

²⁸Ibid., p. 628.

and by his suicide will become the new savior of the human race by proving that he himself is God. It is necessary that someone, some first person, offer himself as a sacrifice, which he believes will transform the earth and recreate the next generation physically, "for with his present physical nature man can't get on without his former God."²⁹ But all he has to offer as "savior" is the revelation of the secret of the deception: "There is no freedom beyond; that is all, and there is nothing beyond."³⁰

Kirillov is a man who could not compromise with an idea.³¹ Once he had decided that there was no God, he followed that idea out to its logical conclusion, and in so doing became increasingly insane. His insanity becomes more and more evident as the moment for the supreme manifestation of his godhead approaches. He shuts himself up in a room while Pyotr Stepanovitch awaits the shot. After ten minutes, hearing nothing, Pyotr Stepanovitch cautiously opens the door, but "something uttered a roar and rushed at him" with savage fury.³² Pyotr Stepanovitch slams the door and waits again. But fearing that he will not go through with it, and the candle almost out, he approaches the door with a revolver. Flinging it open, he discovers the room seemingly empty. Upon closer investigation, however, he finds Kirillov standing in a very strange way in the corner formed by the cupboard and the wall:

²⁹Ibid., p. 630.

³⁰Ibid., p. 116.

³¹Ibid., p. 686.

³²Ibid., p. 633.

. . . motionless, perfectly erect, with his arms held stiffly at his sides, his head raised and pressed tightly back against the wall in the very corner, he seemed to be trying to conceal and efface himself. Everything seemed to show that he was hiding, yet somehow it was not easy to believe it.³³

Pyotr Stepanovitch is struck by the wax-like figure, the unnatural pallor and the strange, fixed eyes staring at some point in the distance. One gets the impression that Kirillov has somehow died before having the chance to kill himself. But as he touches him, something hideous happens:

He had hardly touched Kirillov when the latter bent down quickly and with his head knocked the candle out of Pyotr Stepanovitch's hand; the candle-stick fell with a clang on the ground and the candle went out. At the same moment he was conscious of a fearful pain in the little finger of his left hand. He cried out, and all that he could remember was that, beside himself, he hit out with all his might and struck three blows with the revolver on the head of Kirillov, who had bent down to him and had bitten his finger. At last he tore away his finger and rushed headlong to get out of the house, feeling his way in the dark. He was pursued by terrible shouts from the room.³⁴

As Pyotr Stepanovitch ran from the house, he heard a loud shot, and, returning to the room, found the dead body of Kirillov who had blown out his own brains and thus had achieved the highest point of self-will.³⁵

There is no dignity in this death. Dostoevsky not only asserts that "without faith in one's soul and its immortality, man's existence is unnatural, unthinkable, impossible,"³⁶ but he also exposes the Satanic pride resulting from atheism as essentially pitiful and ridiculous. Without

³³Ibid., p. 634.

³⁴Ibid., p. 635.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 635-636.

³⁶Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer, p. 538.

God, man becomes grotesque and absurd, and eventually ends in self-destruction.

In itself this is no absolute proof for the existence of God or for personal immortality (which he saw as one and the same - "an identical idea.")³⁷ But for Dostoevsky it constitutes a strong argument. Science has made it clear that "every single organism exists on earth but to live - not to annihilate itself."³⁸ But he saw clearly that humanity cannot, and should not, logically, affirm its own existence if there is no God. So, if there is in fact no God, then one comes to the absurd conclusion that nature has produced an organism (mankind) which is not subject to the universal law of self-preservation, but is destined to destroy itself.³⁹ If then,

Faith in immortality is so essential to man's existence, it is therefore a normal condition of the human race and, this being so, the immortality itself of the human soul exists undeniably. In a word, the idea of immortality is life itself - 'live life,' its ultimate formula, the mainspring of truth and just consciousness for mankind.⁴⁰

He argues further that if one reflects on the "I" which can grasp all this, the "I" which stands above and judges all other things, one realizes that the "I" is

not only liberated from the earthly axioms, the earthly laws, but has its own law, which transcends the earthly.

³⁷Fyodor Dostoevsky, Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends, Translated by Ethel Colburn Mayne (New York: Horizon Press, 1961), p. 234.

³⁸Ibid., p. 233.

³⁹Ibid., p. 234.

⁴⁰Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer, p. 542.

How, whence comes that law? Certainly not from earth, where all reaches its issue, and vanishes beyond recall. Is that no indication of personal immortality?⁴¹

If there is no personal immortality would one be worrying about it and searching so for an answer? He states that one cannot get rid of one's "I" which "will not subject itself to earthly conditions, but seeks for something which transcends earth, and to which it feels itself akin."⁴²

However, the apex of his argument for the existence of God in the face of physical evil lies precisely in the fact that only in terms of an act of faith in God and His Revelation can one give meaning to life, and come to terms with the constant destruction that one sees in nature. If one makes the choice for God, then at once, death takes on a totally different meaning: "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."⁴³ Death becomes then, not an end, but a beginning. And nature is transformed from the appearance of an unreasoning, crushing, dark power to the very mysterious and beautiful agent of life and rebirth.

A good example of this case is Zossima's older brother, Markel, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who died at the

⁴¹Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends, Translated by Ethel Colburn Mayne, p. 234.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 234-235.

⁴³St. John 12:24. This is the epigraph chosen by Dostoevsky for The Brothers Karamazov.

age of seventeen of consumption.⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that he is of the same age and dying of the same disease as Ippolit. Markel is presented, at first, as an unbeliever, having fallen in with a free-thinking political exile and scholar. But his reaction to imminent death is totally different. He begins to go to Church, at first, in order to please his mother, but by Easter time a marvellous change passes over him.⁴⁵ His spirit is transformed and life appears to him as glad and joyful. He becomes fond of saying, "life is paradise, and we are all in paradise, but we won't see it, if we would, we should have heaven on earth the next day."⁴⁶ While before he was of hasty and irritable temperament, he becomes sweet and gentle, bright and joyful. He becomes aware of other people, amazed and humbled that they should love him, and desirous to be a servant of the servants. He is so painfully aware that everyone is responsible to all men, for all men, for everything, that he cannot conceive how he used to be angry and quarrel, trying to out-

⁴⁴Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, pp. 340, 342.

⁴⁵Dostoevsky does not give any explanation for the change in Markel from disbelief to belief. However, in the cases of the other significant conversions - Alyosha, Zossima and Raskolnikov (also Mihail) - he gives as the influencing elements both the "sacramentality" of some person and the power of the Word of God. There is one other instance of a conversion, that of Mitya Karamazov, which employs the element of the "sacramentality" of another person, but not of the Word of God. However, like Alyosha, a dream is used as a manifestation of the option for God and a means of a deeper integration of his faith.

⁴⁶Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 343.

shine others and keeping grudges. Looking out of the window and seeing the works of nature he is overcome by their beauty; but unlike Ippolit, he feels very much a part of it all. In fact he feels as though he is in heaven and his only problem is that he does not know how to love enough.⁴⁷

One of the main differences between Markel and Ippolit is that Ippolit feels very much sinned against, and Markel is very much aware that although having sinned against everything he has been completely forgiven. This awareness brings about an overwhelming feeling of gratitude which overflows in joy and happiness up to the moment of his death. He dies the third week after Easter, having made a profound and lasting impression upon Zossima which, remaining in his heart, would be "ready to rise up and respond when the time came."⁴⁸

The climatic example of a faith interpretation of death however, is that which evolved from the crisis of faith experienced by Alyosha at the death and subsequent premature corruption of his beloved elder, Father Zossima. The significance of the experience is foretold in a small incident shortly after Zossima died. Father Paissy, remembering that he had not seen Alyosha since the previous night, notices that he is sitting on the tombstone of a monk who had been famous for his saintliness long ago.⁴⁹ The monk on whose tomb he was sitting had been named "Job."⁵⁰ And

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 344.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 345.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 395.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 397.

Alyosha was weeping bitterly.⁵¹

Now there had been, in this history of the monastery, monks who had lived a saintly and ascetic life and whose bodies, upon dying, had resisted corruption. This fact was considered by all as a blessing and promise from God of still greater marvels to be expected from their tombs in the future.⁵² Father Zossima had had an extraordinary reputation for holiness in his lifetime and was revered by almost all as a great saint. As the news of his death reached the town, great crowds of people began flocking to the monastery, bringing their sick, and fully persuaded that the body of the elder would have a power of healing.⁵³

But that afternoon, a terrible scandal took place. Zossima had not been dead even twenty-four hours when the smell of decomposition began to come from his coffin.⁵⁴ The news of this phenomenon swiftly reached all the monks and visitors, throwing them into amazement, and finally spread to the town, exciting everyone in it.⁵⁵ There were many who had been jealous of the elder's saintliness who were extremely delighted by the smell of decomposition, and there were others who had been devoted to him who were almost mortified and personally affronted by it.⁵⁶ And some rejoiced simply because "men love the downfall and disgrace of the

⁵¹Ibid., p. 395.

⁵²Ibid., p. 397.

⁵³Ibid., p. 396.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 396-397.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 398.

righteous."⁵⁷

People began coming out of curiosity and there was much malicious whispering and criticism of the former ways and teachings of the elder. Some of the monks took up the opinion that it was a sign from heaven; for if the decomposition had been natural, it would only have become apparent after twenty-four hours. But in this case it "was in excess of nature," and therefore was meant as a sign.⁵⁸ In response to this, Father Paisy who was reading the Gospel over the coffin cried out, "It's not for man to judge but for God. Perhaps we see here a 'sign' which neither you, nor I, nor any one of us is able to comprehend."⁵⁹

Alyosha, seeing all this, leaves the hermitage in grief, without seeking a blessing, and without even caring to be respectful to Father Paisy to whom his elder had confided him as he lay dying.⁶⁰ All the love that Alyosha had in his young heart had been concentrated on Father Zossima, and he could not bear to see that holy man exposed to the jeering and spiteful mockery of a frivolous crowd.⁶¹ It was not miracles per se that he needed; but "the higher justice" had been outraged, and it was inevitable that the "justice" looked for by Alyosha would take the form of the miracles which everyone in the monastery expected, even those whose intellects Alyosha revered.⁶² But his heart cried out that,

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 397.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 399-401.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 403.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 406.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 407-408.

⁶²Ibid., p. 408.

even had there been no miracles . . . why this indignity, why this humiliation, why this premature decay, 'in excess of nature,' as the spiteful monks said? . . . Where is the finger of Providence? Why did Providence hide its face 'at the most critical moment' (so Alyosha thought it), as though voluntarily submitting to the blind, dumb, pitiless laws of nature?⁶³

Later, Rakitin comes upon Alyosha and begins to tease him about being in a temper with his God, rebelling against Him because He had not done something special to honor his elder. Alyosha looked for a long time at Rakitin, and

there was a sudden gleam in his eyes . . . but not of anger with Rakitin. "I am not rebelling against my God; I simply 'don't accept His world.'" Alyosha suddenly smiled a forced smile.⁶⁴

These are, of course, the famous words of Ivan which will be taken up later.

Alyosha is not losing his faith in God, or, for that matter, his love, but he is murmuring against Him,⁶⁵ and expresses his mutiny outwardly by eating the sausage that Rakitin offers him, asking for vodka and consenting to go with him to Grushenka.⁶⁶

Grushenka is delighted to see Alyosha and sits on his lap. But his grief is so strong that this only arouses in him a feeling of the most intense and purest interest and without any of the dread which he had formally felt for her.⁶⁷ She tells him that she loves him; and although she did have "sly designs" on him, she also loves him in a dif-

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 410.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 409.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 410-412.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 419-420.

ferent way, looking upon him as her conscience.⁶⁸ When Rakitin tells Grushenka that Alyosha is rebelling against God, he mentions that Zossima died that day. Upon hearing that, she jumps off his knee in dismay, crossing herself, as she had not heard of Zossima's death. Alyosha is deeply moved by this and says,

. . . do you see how she has pity on me? I came here to find a wicked soul - I felt drawn to evil because I was base and evil myself, and I've found a true sister, I have found a treasure - a loving heart. She had pity on me just now. . . . Agrafena Alexandrovna, I am speaking of you. You've raised my soul from the depths.⁶⁹

Then Grushenka tells Alyosha the story of the Officer who had wronged her years ago, but who is now coming for her. Alyosha is completely overwhelmed by her readiness to forgive that man, humbled by the great love which she has.⁷⁰ And she in turn is overcome by Alyosha's love and acceptance of her.⁷¹

He returns to the monastery and enters into the elder's cell. He kneels and begins to pray, feeling a sweetness in his heart. He notices that they had opened the window; so the smell must have become stronger.⁷² But the thought of the smell of corruption no longer fills him with misery or indignation. ". . . There was reigning in his soul a sense of the wholeness of things - something steadfast and comforting - and he was aware of it himself." He begins to listen to Father Paissy reading the Gospel.⁷³ It

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 421.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 422.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 427.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 429.

⁷²Ibid., p. 432.

⁷³Ibid., p. 433.

is the story of the Marriage in Cana. Reflecting upon this first miracle which Christ worked in order to "help men's gladness," he falls into a kind of sleep, and begins to dream. The room begins to grow wider . . .

" . . . it's the marriage, the wedding . . . yes, of course. Here are the guests, here are the young couple sitting, and the merry crowd and . . . Where is the wise governor of the feast? But who is this? Who? Again the walls are receding. . . . Who is getting up there from the great table? What! . . . He here, too? But he's in the coffin . . . but he's here, too. He has stood up, he sees me, he is coming here . . . God!" . . .

Yes, he came up to him, to him, he, the little, thin old man, with tiny wrinkles on his face, joyful and laughing softly. There was no coffin now, and he was in the same dress as he had worn yesterday sitting with them, when the visitors had gathered about him. His face was uncovered, his eyes were shining. How was this then, he, too, had been called to the feast. He, too, at the marriage of Cana in Galilee. . . .

"Yes, my dear, I am called too, called and bidden," he heard a soft voice saying over him. "Why have you hidden yourself here, out of sight? You come and join us too."⁷⁴

He tells Alyosha that he is drinking the new wine of great gladness because he "gave an onion to a beggar,"⁷⁵ and that

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 434-435.

⁷⁵This refers to a story which Grushenka had told Alyosha:

"Once upon a time there was a peasant woman and a very wicked woman she was. And she died and did not leave a single good deed behind. The devils caught her and plunged her into the lake of fire. So her guardian angel stood and wondered what good deed of hers he could remember to tell to God; 'she once pulled up an onion in her garden,' said he, 'and gave it to a beggar woman.' And God answered: 'You take that onion then, hold it out to her in the lake, and let her take hold and be pulled out. And if you can pull her out of the lake, let her come to Paradise, but if the onion breaks, then the woman must stay where she is.' The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her; 'Come,' said he, 'catch hold and I'll pull you out.' And he began cautiously pulling her out. He had just pulled her right out, when the other sinners in the lake, seeing how she was being drawn

many there had given only an onion each - just one small onion each. He tells Alyosha to begin his work, and that Jesus is unceasingly changing the water into wine "that the gladness of the guests may not be cut short."⁷⁶

"Something glowed in Alyosha's heart, something filled it till it ached, tears of rapture rose from his soul. . . . He stretched out his hands, uttered a cry and waked up."⁷⁷

He gets up and quickly goes over to the coffin. Gazing at the dead man lying there, he can still hear the voice of the resurrected Zossima ringing in his ears.⁷⁸ Alyosha runs outside, and overcome with the beauty and the mystery of the earth, flings himself upon it, embracing and kissing it.

He could not have told why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss it all. But he kissed it weeping, sobbing and watering it with his tears, and vowed passionately to love it, to love it forever and ever.⁷⁹

He longs to forgive everyone and to beg forgiveness for all men and for everything. Some idea has entered firmly and

out, began catching hold of her so as to be pulled out with her. But she was a very wicked woman and she began kicking them. 'I'm to be pulled out, not you. It's my onion, not yours.' As soon as she said that, the onion broke. And the woman fell into the lake and she is burning there to this day. So the angel wept and went away."

(The Brothers Karamazov, pp. 423-424.)

⁷⁶Dostoevsky stated in a letter to Nikolai Peterson, March 24, 1878, that he believed in "a real, literal and personal resurrection and that it will come to pass on earth." Dostoevsky's Occasional Writings, Selected, translated and introduced by David Magarshack (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 305.

⁷⁷Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 435.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 436.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 436.

unshakably into his soul and would remain forever. "He had fallen on the earth a weak boy, but he rose up a resolute champion, and he knew and felt it suddenly, at the very moment of his ecstasy."⁸⁰

Anyone could see the dead body of Christ, mutilated beyond belief; but it takes faith to see the resurrected Christ. Anyone could smell the stench of corruption coming from the elder's coffin; but only the Gospel can plant a seed of faith in a man's soul that gives him the vision to see the resurrected Zossima. It is a new Spirit that makes Alyosha able to look upon a decaying body and hear a living voice still ringing in his ears. It is the hearing of the Word and the acceptance of the truth of that Word that gives a man a vision of life and nature that makes it possible not only to find great joy and happiness in this earthly existence; but indeed it is a condition for the choice of life itself. It is the only answer to the problem posed by Ippolit and Kirillov, but the answer cannot be given in terms of logic or scientific proof. One can carry the argument just so far intellectually, as Dostoevsky did, to the point where one can see the necessity for God or immortality as a condition for life itself. But how one comes to the personal belief and acceptance of this God is a mystery which will never be simply rational or wholly comprehensible to man's intellect, for faith is rooted in the mystery of God's grace and election, and is chosen by freedom in the core of a man's person-

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 437.

ality which is not totally accessible to the conscious mind. There is an irrational element in man's freedom which has its say in the choice a man makes.⁸¹

It is precisely, then, to the whole man, and not just to his intellect that Dostoevsky directs his "argument." And he does this through the medium of his art so that one may be drawn into an experience of the beauty and meaning given to life by the Christian perspective.⁸²

⁸¹This point is brought out again and again by Dostoevsky's use of dreams (or hallucinations) to illuminate the unconscious elements of the primary option for or against God. In this case the hearing of the Gospel story of the changing of the water into wine elicits from the very depths of Alyosha's soul an act of faith in the vision of reality which the Word is presenting. The unconscious element of the option is manifested in the dream, and Alyosha awakens to an experience of faith which has stood the test of reality and has been integrated and synthesized on a deeper level. His renewed faith is a result of the encounter with God through Grushenka and the hearing of the Gospel, and not a result of the dream. The dream is a manifestation of his option and a means of a deeper integration of his faith, but not the cause of it.

⁸²In a letter to Konstantin Petrovich Pebiedonoszev, Aug. 24, 1879, Dostoevsky states this objective of answering in an "indirect" way "in an artistic picture." (Dostoevsky: Letters and Reminiscences, Translated by S.S. Koteliansky and J. Middleton Murry, p. 251.) Although in this letter - which will be quoted in full later - he writes specifically of the Sixth Book, "The Russian Monk" in The Brothers Karamazov, it would seem that this is sufficient indication of his intention so that it may be broadened to include other portions of his novels.

CHAPTER II

MORAL EVIL

Section 1: The Denial

The second argument against the existence of God, which Dostoevsky attempts to answer, is the one from the existence of moral evil. How can one believe in a God who creates men who not only find themselves unable to actively love their neighbor, but who also are well aware that men are capable of the most cruel and outrageous brutality against even the most innocent of creation, children?

Versilov, speaking to Dolgoruky on love of neighbor, asserts that it is impossible to love people as they are. The only possible way to do them good is by overcoming one's feelings, "holding your nose and shutting your eyes (the latter's essential)."¹ He tells him not to be taken in by man's goodness because it is often when they are good that they are most base. He knows about this last fact by judging from himself. Any man who is the least bit intelligent will not be able to live without despising himself, and to love one's neighbor without despising him is impossible. Versilov believes that man has been created physically incapable of loving his neighbor. The only "love for humanity"

¹Dostoevsky, A Raw Youth, p. 242.

that one might have is "love for that humanity which you have yourself created in your soul (in other words, you have created yourself and your love is for yourself) - and which, therefore, never will be in reality."²

Ivan, too, feels that Christ-like love for man is a miracle which though possible for Christ who was God, is not possible for us who are not gods. He brings up the example of man's inability to admit another's suffering, not from malice but simply because the sufferer has a stupid face or smells unpleasant, or some other such idiotic reason.³ He suggests that beggars should never ask for charity in person, but should advertise in the newspapers, for "one can love one's neighbors in the abstract, or even at a distance, but at close quarters it's almost impossible."⁴ Possibly if beggars would come on as on a stage, wearing silken rags and tattered lace, begging for alms and dancing gracefully, one might like looking at them, but even then one would not love them.⁵ He mentions the incident of a saint who took a hungry and frozen beggar into his bed, holding him in his arms and breathing into his mouth which was putrid and loathsome from some disease. Ivan tells Alyosha that he is convinced that he could only have done that from "self-laceration," or as a penance, not from real love; for to love a man he must be

²Ibid.

³Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 281.

⁴Ibid., p. 282.

⁵Ibid.

hidden, and love ceases the moment he shows his face.⁶

Madame Hohlakov, speaking of her doubts of faith to Father Zossima, admits that she feels she could never endure in a life of active love unless she received "payment" in terms of gratitude and praise.⁷ And Zossima tells her the story of the doctor who "loved humanity," but was incapable of living in the same room with anyone for more than twenty-four hours. By that time he would begin to hate the best of men "because he's too long over his dinner," or "has a cold and keeps blowing his nose."⁸

It is this experience, familiar to most men, of their own inability to love, or at least their inability to love purely, which can cause a man such bitterness that it makes him either suspect there is no God, or even rebel against Him if such is His creation.

However, the real crisis of faith comes in truly facing not only one's own inability to love, but mankind's capacity for active hatred of such a diabolical nature that Ivan tells Alyosha that if the devil does not exist, man has created him in his own image and likeness. "People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beast; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel."⁹ He tells Alyosha about the crimes of the Turks and Circassians:

⁶Ibid., p. 281

⁷Ibid., p. 63.

⁸Ibid., p. 64.

⁹Ibid., p. 283.

These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from the mother's womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mother's eyes. Doing it before the mother's eyes was what gave zest to the amusement. Here is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They've planned a diversion; they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn't it? By the way, Turks are particularly fond of sweet things, they say.¹⁰

Ivan then turns to the more sophisticated cruelty of the Europeans and relates a story about a murderer, Richard, who was executed in Geneva. Richard had been raised like an animal by some shepherds who did not bother to clothe or feed him. He was beaten when he stole from the mash given to the pigs. He grew up to become a thief and ended by killing and robbing an old man. He was tried and sentenced to death. While in prison, he was surrounded by "pastors, members of Christian brotherhoods, philanthropic ladies and the like" who taught him to read and write and preached the Gospel to him. He was converted and all Geneva flocked to the prison, kissing and embracing him, while Richard could do nothing but weep with emotion. However, since he had "shed blood," he must die; so on the last day they all followed Richard to the scaffold crying, "Die, brother, die in the Lord, for even thou hast found grace!" Covered with their kisses, Richard is taken to the guillotine and "they chopped off his head in

¹⁰Ibid. All of these stories are taken from real life. Dostoevsky relates these and other stories told of the Turks in The Diary of a Writer, p. 751.

brotherly fashion, because he had found grace."¹¹

Finally, Ivan speaks of the peculiarly Russian form of cruelty which is the "direct satisfaction of inflicting pain." He cites Nekrassov's description of the Russian peasant lashing a feeble little nag on its eyes,¹² and the case of a well-educated gentleman and his wife who beat their child with a birch-rod until it was almost dead.¹³ When the man and wife were brought into court, they were acquitted on the grounds that this was "such a simple thing, . . . an everyday domestic event. A father corrects his child." There was another case of a five year old little girl who was so cruelly beaten by her parents that her body was one bruise. Her mother and father

shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy, and because she didn't ask to be taken up at night (as though a child of five sleeping its angelic, sound sleep could be trained to wake and ask), they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement, and it was her mother, her mother did this. And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child's groans!¹⁵

Lastly, Ivan tells Alyosha the story of the general who had a serf-boy of eight who had thrown a stone, accidentally hurting the paw of the general's favorite dog. The next morning, the general had the child stripped naked and forced to run. He then set the whole pack of hounds on him tearing him to pieces before his mother's eyes. The general was later declared incapable of administrating his estates.¹⁶

¹¹Ibid., pp. 284-285.

¹²Ibid., p. 285.

¹³Ibid., p. 286. This actual case is brought up, in detail, in The Diary of a Writer, p. 211.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 287.

Speaking of the psychology of this love of torturing children, Ivan says that it is

just their defenselessness that tempts the tormentor, just the angelic confidence of the child who has no refuge and no appeal, that sets his vile blood on fire. In every man, of course, a demon lies hidden - the demon of rage, the demon of lustful heat at the screams of the tortured victim, the demon of lawlessness let off the chain, the demon of diseases that follow on vice, gout, kidney disease, and so on.¹⁷

Ivan says his problem is not the existence of God; since he has an "Euclidian earthly mind," and no faculty for settling questions that are not of this world, he has resolved to accept God simply. But he absolutely refuses to accept this world.¹⁸ He knows that there will come a day when "the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear," when the mother will embrace the fiend who set his dogs on her child,¹⁹ when "something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood they've shed, that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened with men;" but he will not accept such a harmony.²⁰ And he refuses to accept that harmony because it is not worth the tears of that "one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind

¹⁶Ibid., p. 288.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 287.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 279.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 290.

²⁰Ibid., p. 280.

God!"²¹ There is no way in which those tears can be atoned. To avenge them in hell would simply mean more suffering; and besides what good is hell since those children have already been tortured?²² If there is a hell, there is no harmony. Ivan does not want vengeance; he wants to forgive, but he will not forgive the sufferings of those children.

I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him!²³

Of course, if they dare not forgive, there is no harmony; but he does not want harmony. Because of "love of humanity" he would rather be left with his unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, even if he were wrong.²⁴ He does not even want to try to understand:

I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind long ago not to understand. If I try to understand anything, I shall be false to the fact and I have determined to stick to the fact.²⁵

He is afraid that perhaps if he lives to see the world's finale, or rises again to see it, he might also cry aloud, "Thou art just, O Lord!" But he does not want to cry that then, and is determined to protect himself from that possibility while on earth.²⁶

²¹Ibid., p. 290.

²²Ibid., pp. 290-291.

²³Ibid., p. 291.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 289,

²⁶Ibid., p. 290.

And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket.²⁷

Dostoevsky, in a letter to Konstantin Petrovich Pobiedonoszev, May 19, 1879, states that the theme of this book, "Pro and Contra," is a "denial of God."²⁸ He goes on to say,

The denial I described just as I felt it myself and realized it strongest, that is, just as it is now taking place in our Russia in nearly the whole upper stratum of society, and above all with the young generation. I mean, the scientific and philosophical refutation of the existence of God has been given up, it no longer occupies at all socialists of today (as it occupied them throughout the whole of the last century and the first half of the present one); instead, men are denying with all their might and main the divine creation, the whole world of God and its meaning. These are the only things which modern civilization finds utter nonsense.²⁹

In Dostoevsky's mind, then, the denial of God's world is simply another form of atheism, and this conviction is expressed at the end of Ivan's argument by Alyosha's sorrowful retort: "You don't believe in God."³⁰

²⁷Ibid., p. 291.

²⁸Dostoevsky: Letters and Reminiscences, Translated by Koteliensky and Murry, p. 241.

²⁹Ibid., p. 242.

³⁰Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 311.

Section 2: The Alternatives

If one denies the existence of God because of moral evil, the question then becomes: upon what basis can a "better," or more moral, society be constructed? One must attempt to find some way of dealing with the problem of evil. Dostoevsky examines three possible solutions: The "Crystal Palace" ("Palace of Glass"), the view that science and reason will eventually solve the problem; the "Tower of Babel," the socialistic theory, prevalent at the time, that if man knows there is no after-life, he will of himself naturally construct and even better life out of love of humanity; and the "Man-god," the denial of evil as defined by God, and the divinization of the will of man, resulting in the axiom that "all things are lawful."

Dostoevsky attempts to show that all three of these "solutions" simply cannot work and will only end in destruction.³¹

The Crystal Palace

The discussion of the "Crystal Palace" takes place largely in a short story, Notes from the Underground. The "Underground Man" argues against this "theory" which proposes the idea that man behaves badly only because he does not know his own interests; but once he can be shown that to behave honorably is best for him, then he will become auto-

³¹There is a good analysis of these three ideas in: Henri De Lubac, S.J., The Drama of Atheist Humanism (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 188-213.

matically good because "no man ever knowingly acts against his own interests."³² The "Underground Man" brings up the question: "When, to begin with, in the course of all these thousands of years has man ever acted in accordance with his own interests?"³³ There are millions of examples of men, fully knowing their own interests, willfully and obstinately doing, at times, what is most to their disadvantage. And it seems that man's ultimate advantage sometimes consists in something that is harmful to him. There are "advantages" which cannot possibly be calculated and fitted in any classification.³⁴

Advocates of the "Crystal Palace" have drawn up an entire list of positive human values by taking the averages of statistical figures and relying on scientific and economic formulae. The list includes the obvious values of reason, peace, freedom, prosperity, wealth, etc. It would seem that anyone who would go contrary to the whole of that list would be a madman. And yet, every man has had the experience of intending to act in accordance with the laws of truth and reason; and then "without any sudden or external cause but just because of some inner impulse which is stronger than any of his interests, he will do something quite different, that is to say, he will do something exactly contrary to . .

³²Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Notes from the Underground," The Best Short Stories of Dostoevsky, Translated with an introduction by David Magarshack (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), p. 125.

³³Ibid., pp. 125-126.

³⁴Ibid., p. 126.

the laws of reason and against his own interests, in short, against everything."³⁵ And he will do this because there exists another thing, which is being overlooked, that is dearer to almost every man than his greatest good, and for which he is willing to give up everything and challenge all laws.³⁶

But the advocates of this theory respond that as soon as common sense and science have completely re-educated human nature and directed it along the road of normal behavior, man will cease making deliberate mistakes and will refuse to allow his will to act contrary to his normal interests. Moreover, science will teach man that he possesses neither will nor uncontrollable desire, and never has, and that he is nothing more than a sort of "piano-key" or "organ-stop." Whatever he does, he does according to certain laws of nature; and as soon as these laws are discovered, man will no longer have to answer for his actions.³⁷ Then, all human actions will be computed according to these laws, and everything will be calculated and specified so exactly that there will be no more independent actions or adventures in the world. New economic relations will be established, calculated with mathematical exactitude, and all ready for use. Ready-made solutions will be provided for all sorts of problems so that the problems will vanish in an instant.³⁸ "It is then that the Crystal Palace will be built. Then - why,

³⁵Ibid., p. 127.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 129.

³⁸Ibid., p. 130.

in fact, the Golden Age will have dawned again."³⁹

The "Underground Man" brings up the objection that even then one will not be able to guarantee that people will not be bored to tears; when everything is so calculated and tabulated, there will be nothing to do. And when people get bored, all sorts of strange ideas enter into their heads. He says that he would not be surprised at all if without the slightest possible reason, "a gentleman of an ignoble or rather a reactionary and sardonic countenance were to arise amid all that future reign of universal common sense and, gripping his sides firmly with his hands, were to say to us all, 'Well, gentlemen, what about giving all this common sense a mighty kick and letting it scatter in the dust before our feet simply to send all these logarithms to the devil so that we can again live according to our foolish will?'"⁴⁰ And it is undoubtable that this "gentleman" would find followers because men prefer, above all, to do as they choose, and not in the least as their reason or advantage dictates.

One's own free and unfettered choice, one's own whims, however wild, one's own fancy, overwrought though it sometimes may be to the point of madness - that is that same most desirable good which we overlooked and which does not fit into any classification, and against which all theories and systems are continually wrecked. And why on earth do all those sages assume that man must needs strive after some normal, after some rationally desirable good? All man wants is an absolutely free choice, however dear that freedom may cost him and wherever it may lead him to.⁴¹

But science says there is no free choice, and one

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

day it will discover the formula of all our desires and whims.⁴² When that happens, an enlightened and mentally developed man - the man of the future - cannot possibly desire deliberately something which is not a real "good."⁴³ The "Underground Man" agrees, except in one case, when "man can deliberately and consciously desire something that is injurious, stupid, even outrageously stupid, just because he wants to have the right to desire for himself even what is very stupid and not to be bound by an obligation to desire only what is sensible."⁴⁴ This whim of ours may really be accounted more important by us than anything else on earth, because "it preserves what is most precious and most important to us, namely, our personality and our individuality."⁴⁵ If man were showered with all earthly blessings, he would risk all of them for the sake of proving to himself that he is a man and not "keys of a piano on which the laws of nature are indeed playing any tune they like."⁴⁶ Even if it were mathematically proven to him that he is only a piano-key, he would refuse to accept it, and would work destruction and chaos to carry his point. And if even that destruction and chaos could be calculated by mathematics "so that the mere possibility of calculating it all beforehand would stop it all and reason would triumph in the end -

⁴¹Ibid., p. 131.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 133-134.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 136.

well, if that were to happen man would go purposely mad in order to rid himself of reason and carry his point!"⁴⁷ For the whole meaning of human life consists in man's proving to himself, at every instant, that he is a man and not an organ-stop.⁴⁸

Besides, perhaps man will never give up destruction and chaos just because he is instinctively afraid of reaching the goal and completing the building he is erecting. Perhaps he only loves the building from a distance, or loves building it, but not living in it. Perhaps the whole aim of man simply lies in this incessant process of achievement, or in life itself, and not in the attainment of any goal. Man is passionate in his quest, but to really discover what he is looking for is fearful to him. If he finds it, there will be nothing more for which to look, nothing more to do.⁴⁹

Society will never be rationalized, because there is an irrational principle in it, that is, the individualistic principle which will not tolerate the yoke of reason nor of an obligatory welfare.⁵⁰

If, then, it would be impossible to establish a society based upon reason, one is still confronted with the question of how to handle the problem of evil. If reason

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 138-139. This theme is also found in The Idiot, p. 386, and in The Diary of a Writer, p. 193.

⁵⁰Nicholas Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, Translated by Donald Attwater (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957), pp. 54-55.

and science cannot solve the problem, then one must attempt to find another solution.⁵¹

⁵¹Dostoevsky included the possibility of the "Crystal Palace" theory working in the article, "The Verdict," in The Diary of a Writer:

"And, finally, even were one to presume the possibility of that tale about man's ultimate attainment of a rational and scientific organization of life on earth - were one to believe this tale and the future happiness of man, the thought itself that, because of some inert laws, nature found it necessary to torture them thousands and thousands of years before granting them that happiness - this thought itself is unbearably repulsive. And if you add to this that this very nature which, finally, had admitted man to happiness will, for some reason, tomorrow find it necessary to convert all this into zero despite all the suffering with which mankind has paid for this happiness and - what is most important - without even bothering to conceal this from my consciousness, as it did conceal it from the cow - willy-nilly, there arises a most amusing, but also unbearably sad, thought: 'What if man has been placed on earth for some impudent experiment - just for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not this creature is going to survive on earth?' The principle sadness of this thought is in the fact that here, again, there is no guilty one; no one has conducted the experiment; there is no one to damn, since everything simply came to pass as a result of the inert laws of nature, which I do not understand at all, and with which my consciousness is altogether unable to reconcile itself." (p. 472)

The Tower of Babel

The idea of the "Tower of Babel" is described in a kind of "picture" imagined by Versilov:

I picture to myself . . . that war is at an end and strife has ceased. After curses, pelting with mud, and hisses, has come a lull, and men are left alone, according to their desire: the great idea of old has left them; the great source of strength that till then had nourished and fostered them was vanishing like the majestic sun setting in Claude Lorraine's picture, but it was somehow the last day of humanity, and men suddenly understood that they were left quite alone, and at once felt terribly forlorn. I have never . . . been able to picture men ungrateful and grown stupid. Men left forlorn would begin to draw together more closely and more lovingly; they would clutch one another's hands, realizing that they were all that was left for one another! The great idea of immortality would have vanished, and they would have to fill its place; and all the wealth of love lavished of old upon Him, who was immortal, would be turned upon the whole of nature, on the world, on men, on every blade of grass. They would inevitably grow to love the earth and life as they gradually became aware of their own transitory and finite nature, and with a special love, not as of old, they would begin to observe and would discover in nature phenomena and secrets which they had not suspected before, for they would look on nature with new eyes, as a lover looking on his beloved. On awakening they would hasten to kiss one another, eager to love, knowing that the days are short, and that is all that is left them. They would work for one another, and each would give up all that he had to all, and by that only would be happy. Every child would know and feel that every one on earth was for him like a father and mother. 'To-morrow may be my last day,' each one would think, looking at the setting sun; 'but no matter, I shall die, but all they will remain and after them their children,' and that thought that they will remain, always as loving and as anxious over each other, would replace the thought of meeting beyond the tomb. Oh, they would be in haste to love, to stifle the great sorrow in their hearts. They would be proud and brave for themselves, but would grow timid for one another; every one would tremble for the life and happiness of each; they would not be ashamed of it as now, and would be caressing as children. Meeting, they would look at one another with deep and thoughtful eyes, and in their eyes would be love and sorrow. . . .⁵²

⁵²Dostoevsky, A Raw Youth, pp. 510-511.

In The Diary of a Writer, Dostoevsky, in commenting on his own article, "The Verdict," examines the possibility of living in order to work for the future happiness of mankind. He says this is a "magnanimous thought and one full of suffering;" but even if this dream were attainable, the simultaneous realization that, after enduring so much for the attainment of that dream, mankind itself would eventually be annihilated even kills in one that very love of mankind. "Similarly it has been observed many a time that in a family dying from starvation, father and mother - when at length the suffering of their children grew intolerable - began to hate them, those hitherto beloved ones, precisely because of the intolerableness of their suffering."⁵³ He asserts that the very realization that one is unable to alleviate the sufferings of mankind "may convert in one's heart love for mankind into a hatred of it."⁵⁴ Dostoevsky concludes that love of mankind is absolutely impossible without faith in the immortality of man's soul.⁵⁵

Moreover, contrary to the idea that faith in immortality dilutes a man's love for, and interest in, this life, it is the promise of eternal life that ties a man all the more strongly to earth.

Here there is a seeming contradiction: if there is so much life - that is, if in addition to earthly existence there is an immortal one - why should one be treasuring

⁵³Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer, pp. 540-541.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 541.

⁵⁵Ibid.

so highly his earthly life? And yet, the contrary is true, since only with faith in his immortality does man comprehend the full meaning of his rational destination of earth. However, without the faith in his immortality, man's ties with earth are severed, they grow thinner and more putrescent, while the loss of the sublime meaning of life (felt at least in the form of unconscious anguish) inevitably leads to suicide.⁵⁶

Kraft, a committed socialist, who came to realize that the "idea that sustained men has utterly gone," committed suicide;⁵⁷ and Ivan, who cries that he does not want his body, with its sufferings and its shortcomings, to serve simply as manure for the future harmony, sees that the only alternative is to commit suicide. Right now his youth and his irrational love of life is so strong that it will not permit it, but by the time he is thirty, he figures he will be ready to "leave the cup."⁵⁸

Dolgoruky, speaking to a group of young radicals, brings up other objections to this presupposition that men, without God, will choose to love one another:

And why should I be bound to love my neighbour, or your future humanity which I shall never see, which will never know anything about me, and which will in its turn disappear and leave no trace (time counts for nothing in this) when the earth in its turn will be changed into an iceberg, and will fly off into the void with an infinite multitude of other similar icebergs; it's the most senseless thing one could possibly imagine. That's your teaching. Tell me why I am bound to be so noble, especially if it all lasts only for a moment?⁵⁹

He says that there is nothing more difficult than to answer

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 541-542.

⁵⁷ Dostoevsky, A Raw Youth, pp. 86, 181.

⁵⁸ Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 274.

⁵⁹ Dostoevsky, A Raw Youth, p. 78.

the question, "Why one must be honourable?"⁶⁰ He had a friend in school, Lambert, who honestly felt that it would give him great satisfaction to eat meat and bread while the children of the poor were dying of starvation. Dolgoruky asks them how he is to explain to Lambert why he should be honorable. What possible reason could they offer for acting in one way if the opposite were more to his advantage?⁶¹

Dostoevsky poses the same question in a letter to N.L. Osmidov, Feb., 1879: if there is no God or personal immortality, why is one to live decently and do good, if one dies irrevocably here below? Why not simply live out one's appointed day, and let the rest go hang? If one is clever enough not to be caught by the law, why not kill, rob, steal, "or at any rate live at the expense of others? For I shall die, and all the rest will die and utterly vanish!"⁶²

There is, of course, a pragmatic solution if men refuse to voluntarily establish the "earthly paradise." They can be forced to do so; and that is the conclusion to which Shigalov arrives. He is somewhat perplexed by his own data and by the fact that his conclusion is a direct contradiction of the original idea from which he started: "Starting from unlimited freedom, I arrive at unlimited despotism." Although he admits that he has been reduced to despair, he

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 79.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends, Translated by Ethel Colburn Mayne, p. 234.

is convinced that there is no other solution to the social problem.⁶³ He suggests that mankind be divided into two unequal parts. One-tenth would have absolute liberty and complete power over the other nine-tenths, who would have to give up all individuality and become a herd. Through boundless submission, and by a series of regenerations, they would attain primaeval innocence, something like the Garden of Eden. However, they would have to work.⁶⁴ He proposes a system of spying as means for depriving them of their freedom and transforming them into a herd. Every member of the society would spy on the others, and it would be his duty to inform against them. All would be slaves, but they would be equal in their slavery; and although in extreme cases slander and murder would be advocated, the great thing about it would be the equality. It would be necessary, of course, to lower the level of education, science, and talents. A high level of education and science is only possible for the great intellects, and the society would have to get rid of them. Great intellects have always done more harm than good as they inevitably seize power and become despots. They would have to be banished or put to death.⁶⁴

Cicero will have his tongue cut out, Copernicus will have his eyes put out, Shakespeare will be stoned - that's Shigalovism. Slaves are bound to be equal. There has never been either freedom or equality without despotism, but in the herd there is bound to be equality, and that's Shigalovism!⁶⁶

⁶³ Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 409.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 410-411.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 424.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 424-425.

The one thing that is necessary in the world is discipline. Culture, family ties or love simply arouse the desire for property; and that desire must be destroyed. In order to do that, use would be made of drunkenness, slander, spying, and incredible corruption. Every genius would be stifled in its infancy, and everyone would be reduced to a common denominator. There would be absolute submission, absolute loss of individuality; but once in thirty years they would have a shock, and begin eating each other up to a certain point, simply as a precaution against boredom.⁶⁷

Dostoevsky saw any attempt to build a social system that denied God or immortality as inevitably ending in violence and slavery. In The Diary of a Writer, commenting on the socialist leaders of the day, he says:

if all these modern, sublime teachers be given ample opportunity to destroy the old society and to build it up anew, there would result such a darkness, such chaos, something so coarse, so blind, so inhuman, that the entire edifice would crumble away to the accompaniment of the maledictions of mankind, even before it would finally have been constructed. The human mind, once having rejected Christ, may attain extraordinary results.⁶⁸

Dostoevsky also saw the possibility of an even more terrible form of the "earthly paradise," one which would not only enslave men physically, but would, in Christ's name, deprive them of that which constitutes them men, namely, their freedom of conscience. He felt that the Roman Church

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 425.

⁶⁸Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer, p. 151.

was in fact attempting to do this,⁶⁹ and his vision of the Tower of Babel built in the name of Jesus Christ is described in Ivan's story of the Grand Inquisitor.

The Grand Inquisitor, striving for perfection himself, comes to realize that the majority of mankind are weak rebels and would never be able to use their freedom in order to complete the tower and attain the great ideal of harmony for mankind. He sees that "nothing but the advice of the great dread spirit could build up any tolerable sort of life for the feeble, unruly, incomplete, empirical creatures created in jest."⁷⁰ And so, he turns back and out of "love of humanity" accepts lying and deception in order to ensure their happiness and comfort. He sees that as long as men try to live under the freedom that Christ gave them, they will inevitably fail in building their tower. Freedom only brings them to slavery and confusion, causing them to rebel and destroy one another. "Freedom, free thought and science, will lead them into such straits and will bring them face to face with such marvels and insoluble mysteries, that some of them, the fierce and rebellious, will destroy themselves, others, rebellious but weak, will destroy one another, while the rest, weak and unhappy, will crawl fawning to our feet and whine to us: 'Yes, you were right, you alone possess His mystery, and we come back to you, save us from ourselves!'"⁷¹

⁶⁹Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, pp. 309-311; The Possessed, pp. 425-426; The Idiot, pp. 532-534.

⁷⁰Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 310.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 306-307.

The Grand Inquisitor will persuade them that they will only become free when they renounce their freedom and submit;⁷² that it is not "the free judgment of their hearts, not love that matters, but a mystery which they must follow blindly, even against their conscience."⁷³ And they will be happy to believe that because it will relieve them of the anguish they experience in making a free decision for themselves.

And all will be happy, all the millions of creatures except the hundred thousand who rule over them. For only we, we who guard the mystery, shall be unhappy. There will be thousands of millions of happy babes, and a hundred thousand sufferers who have taken upon themselves the curse of the knowledge of good and evil. Peacefully they will die, peacefully they will expire in They name, and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death.⁷⁴

This "solution" to the problem of evil ends in completely destroying any dignity or meaning that men might have. In fact it reduces them to the level of the "ant heap," but the secret of the Grand Inquisitor is atheism,⁷⁵ and Dostoevsky saw that atheism could lead to nothing else.

The Man-god

There is one more possible "solution" to the problem of evil, that is, to deny the existence of evil and divinize the will of man, resulting in the axiom "all things are lawful." There are four major characters who take this stance and attempt to live out its implications: Kirillov, Stavrogin, Raskolnikov, and Ivan.

⁷³Ibid., p. 305.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 308.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 310.

Kirillov rejects morality altogether,⁷⁶ and suddenly realizes that everything is good. Stavrogin asks him if someone dies of hunger or if anyone insults and outrages a little girl, is that also good? Kirillov answers,

Yes! And if anyone blows his brains out for the baby, that's good too. And if anyone doesn't, that's good too. It's all good, all. It's good for all those who know that it's all good. If they knew that it was good for them, it would be good for them, but as long as they don't know it's good for them, it will be bad for them.⁷⁷

He tells Stavrogin that he prays to everything, even to the spider crawling on the wall. He looks at it and thanks it for crawling.⁷⁸

Since the character of Kirillov has already been taken up in some detail, it is necessary to restate only briefly where this philosophy led him. Rejecting God, he not only denies the existence of evil and morality, but comes to the conclusion that he himself is God. He sees himself as the Man-god who must teach that all are good and so end the world.⁷⁹ He intends to become the savior of the human race by the sacrifice of his own life, transforming the earth and re-creating the next generation physically. He achieve this salvation by committing suicide.

Kirillov is the most extreme case of the Man-god type, and the absurdity of his position is evidenced by the conclusion to which he came.

Stavrogin is a man who is not taken in by the idea

⁷⁶Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 93.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 240.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 241.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 241.

that civilization could be founded on the principles of science and reason; nor does he believe that atheistic socialism, which intends to establish itself exclusively on the elements of science and reason, could ever work.⁸⁰ But he has no God, and so has lost the distinction between good and evil:⁸¹ "I have neither the feeling nor the knowledge of good and evil, and not only have I lost the sense of good and evil, but good and evil really do not exist (and this pleased me) and are but a prejudice; I can be free of all prejudices, but at the very moment when I achieve that freedom I shall perish."⁸² Because of this, he becomes unable to make a real decision either for good or for evil. Everything he does tends to be lukewarm and ridiculous. He finds equal beauty in good and in evil,⁸³ and at the same time as he is doing vile things, he is seriously engaged in the study of theology.⁸⁴ Shatov accuses Stavrogin of sowing the seeds of God in his heart while at the same time he was infecting Kirillov with the false, malignant ideas which brought him to insanity and eventually suicide. Shatov declares to Stavrogin that Kirillov is his own creation, and yet at the same time it is Stavrogin who is the father of Shatov's faith.⁸⁵ Shatov asks him if he is an atheist, and Stavrogin answers "yes," saying that he was an atheist at the time he was instilling those ideas into Shatov's head, but also says he was not lying

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 255.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 257.

⁸² Ibid., p. 712.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 257.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 704-705.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 251.

when he spoke as though he had faith.⁸⁶

At one point, Stavrogin goes to a retired Bishop, Tihon, with a full written confession concerning a little girl he had violated and driven to suicide. He is being driven to distraction by this crime, although he admits it is not the worse he has committed;⁸⁷ but he is suffering from hallucinations of the devil which is only himself "in various forms."⁸⁸

He wants to publish the confession out of a need for punishment and public chastisement.⁸⁹ However, Tihon tries to dissuade him; for although Stavrogin seems to want to appeal to the judgment of the whole Church, he does not believe in the Church, and it is as though he is already hating and despising in advance all those who will read what he has written.⁹⁰ When Stavrogin persists in his intention to publish it, Tihon asks him if he will be able to bear not only people's hatred, but their laughter.⁹¹ Stavrogin is taken aback by this although he had a foreboding that Tihon would find him ridiculous.⁹² He asks Tihon what is the most ridiculous thing about his confession, and Tihon answers:

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 252.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 717.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 696. Dostoevsky did not accept the existence of devils, per se: see The Diary of a Writer, p. 191.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 701.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 720.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 724.

⁹²Ibid.

The ugliness of it will kill it. . . . It is a truly unbeautiful crime. Crimes, no matter what they are, are the most imposing, the more picturesque, so to speak, the more blood, the more horror there is; but there are truly shameful, disgraceful crimes which are not redeemed by horror . . .93

Tihon suggests another penance for Stavrogin:

You are possessed by a desire for martyrdom and self-sacrifice; overcome this desire, too, put aside these sheets and your intention, and then you will overcome everything. You will put to shame your pride and your demon. You will end as a victor, and achieve freedom.⁹⁴

He asks Stavrogin if he would become a novice, secretly, to a saintly old hermit monk for five or seven years, as long as he would need. At this suggestion, Stavrogin tells him in a disgusted voice to "quit it" and he rises to leave.⁹⁵ Tihon rises, too, and standing before him, exclaims with intense grief and fear,

. . . never, poor lost youth, have you stood nearer to a new and more terrible crime than at this moment. . . . a day, an hour perhaps, before the great step, you will plunge into a new crime as a way out, and you will commit it solely to avoid the publication of these sheets, upon which you now insist.⁹⁶

Later, in a letter written to Darya Pavlovna, Stavrogin says of himself:

I am still capable, as I always was, of desiring to do something good, and of feeling pleasure from it; at the same time I desire evil and feel pleasure from that too. But both feelings are always too petty, and are never very strong. My desires are too weak; they are not enough to guide me. On a log one may cross a river but not on a chip. . . .

As always I blame no one. I've tried the depths of debauchery and wasted my strength over it. But I don't like vice and I didn't want it.

.
One may argue about everything endlessly, but from me nothing has come but negation, with no greatness of soul, no force. Even negation has not come from me. Everything has always been petty and spiritless. Kirillov,

in the greatness of his soul, could not compromise with an idea, and shot himself; but I see, of course, that he was great-souled because he had lost his reason. I can never lose my reason, and I can never believe in an idea to such a degree as he did. I cannot even be interested in an idea to such a degree. I can never, never shoot myself.

I know I ought to kill myself, to brush myself off the earth like a nasty insect; but I am afraid of suicide, for I am afraid of showing greatness of soul. I know that it will be another sham again - the last deception in an endless series of deceptions. What good is there in deceiving oneself? Simply to play at greatness of soul? Indignation and shame I can never feel, therefore not despair.⁹⁷

However, later that same day, his mother and Darya Pavlovna found Stavrogin in the loft where he had hung himself. He left a note saying, "No one is to blame, I did it myself;" and on the table beside the note, there lay a hammer, a piece of soap, and an extra nail in case of need. The cord upon which he had hung himself was thickly smeared with soap. Everything indicated that the suicide had been premeditated, and he had been conscious up to the last moment. At the inquest, the doctors absolutely and emphatically rejected all idea of insanity.⁹⁸

Raskolnikov also has rejected the "Crystal Palace," and the "Tower of Babel":

. . . life is only given to me once and I shall never have it again; I don't want to wait for 'the happiness of all'. I want to live myself, or else better not live at all. I simply couldn't pass by my mother starving,

⁹³Ibid., p. 726.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 728-729.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 729.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 730.

⁹⁷Ibid., pp. 685-686.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 688.

keeping my rouble in my pocket while I waited for the 'happiness of all.'⁹⁹

He seems to be ambivalent about the existence of God; for at one point he tells Porfiry that he believes in God, the New Jerusalem, and Lazarus' rising from the dead,¹⁰⁰ and yet he tells Svidrigailov that he does not believe in a future life.¹⁰¹ At one time he speaks of calling on Providence,¹⁰² but he suggests to Sonia that there might not be a God at all.¹⁰³ However, Sonia knows that he does not believe;¹⁰⁴ and, when he is in prison, although he had never talked to the prisoners about God or his belief, and he took the sacrament and went to Church with the others; the prisoners shouted at him, "You're an infidel! You don't believe in God . . ."¹⁰⁵

Raskolnikov toys with the notion that the idea of evil is simply a prejudice: "What if man is not really a scoundrel, man in general, I mean, the whole race of mankind - then all the rest is prejudice, simply artificial terrors and there are no barriers and it's all as it should be."¹⁰⁶

He comes to the conclusion that all men are divided into the "ordinary" and the "extraordinary." An "extraordinary" man has an inner right to decide in his own conscience

⁹⁹Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, pp. 231-232.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 220-221.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 243.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 269.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 444.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 28.

to commit a crime and to transgress the law if it is essential for the practical fulfillment of his idea, which could sometimes be of benefit to all of humanity.¹⁰⁷

I maintain that if the discoveries of Kepler and Newton could not have been made known except by sacrificing the lives of one, a dozen, a hundred, or more men, Newton would have had the right, would indeed have been in duty bound . . . to eliminate the dozen or the hundred men for the sake of making his discoveries known to the whole of humanity. . . . legislators and leaders of men, such as Lycurgus, Solon, Mahomet, Napoleon, and so on, were all without exception criminals, from the very fact that, making a new law, they transgressed the ancient one, handed down from their ancestors and held sacred by the people, and they did not stop at bloodshed either, if that bloodshed - often of innocent persons fighting bravely in defense of ancient law - were of use to their cause.¹⁰⁸

He maintains that all great men, or even men just a little out of the ordinary, that is, capable of giving some new word, must, by their very nature, be more or less criminal.¹⁰⁹

It is this theory, of course, that drives him to murder the old pawnbroker. He tries to explain to Sonia that he had come to realize that whoever is strong in mind and spirit will have power over men.

Anyone who is greatly daring is right in their eyes. He who despises most things will be a law-giver among them and he who dares most of all will be most in the right.¹¹⁰

But a man comes into power only if he will dare to stoop and pick it up; he must dare. Then, for the first time in his life an idea took shape in his mind which he felt no one had ever thought of before. No one had ever had the daring to

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 219

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 219-220.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 220.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 345.

go straight for it all and send it flying to the devil! He wanted to have the daring, and that is why he killed the pawnbroker.¹¹¹ He had to find out if he was "a louse like everybody else or a man." He had to know if he could step over barriers or not, whether he dared to stoop and pick up or not, whether he was a trembling creature or whether he had the right to kill.¹¹²

Even before he actually committed the murder, his pre-occupation with such ideas was driving him to illness. He completely withdrew from everyone, sometimes not even eating for days at a time. "He was in the condition that overtakes some monomaniacs entirely concentrated upon one thing."¹¹³

After the murder, Raskolnikov progressively goes to pieces.

He felt with sudden loathing how weak, how physically weak he had become. 'I ought to have known it,' he thought with a bitter smile. 'And how dared I, knowing myself, knowing how I should be, take up an axe and shed blood? I ought to have known beforehand. . . . Ah, but I did know!' he whispered in despair.¹¹⁴

Besides his bouts of delirium and fever, he begins to be aware of a "gloomy sensation of agonizing, everlasting solitude and remoteness" taking form in his soul.¹¹⁵ He begins to feel "an immeasurable, almost physical, repulsion for everything surrounding him, an obstinate, malignant feeling of hatred."¹¹⁶ Even his mother and sister whom he had

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 92.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 346.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 231.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 98.

loved so much, are now repulsive to him. He feels an almost physical hatred for them and cannot bear to have them near him.¹¹⁷

He comes to realize that he did not just murder the old woman - he murdered himself; he was not only incapable of "overstepping," but, in fact, he was hardly capable of killing.¹¹⁸

At one point he thinks of suicide and has a hard time making up his mind;¹¹⁹ but finally he gives up and confesses to the police.¹²⁰ However, Raskolnikov does not consider himself wrong; he sees only that he is weak,¹²¹ a louse like all the rest.¹²² He is not in any way convinced through his experience of failure that there is a God, or even that there are certain things a man may not overstep. He is only certain that he is not capable of "overstepping," that he is not capable of being of Man-god.

Although the conclusion to Raskolnikov's story is a conversion, Dostoevsky spells out the conclusion to which he would have come if he had not eventually converted. He describes that conclusion in the character of Svidrigailov who is a kind of alter-ego. That Dostoevsky intends for Svidrigailov to be an alter-ego is indicated in a number of places: When Svidrigailov first enters, Raskolnikov is asleep and dreaming. He awakens to find Svidrigailov sitting

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 232.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 231.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 424.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 435.

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 425, 443.

¹²²Ibid., p. 346.

there, but is not sure at first if it is still a part of his dream.¹²³ Svidrigailov says that there is something in common between them, that when he came in and saw Raskolnikov asleep, he said "here's the man."¹²⁴ Svidrigailov keeps fancying there is something about Raskolnikov that is like him;¹²⁵ and later Raskolnikov asks Razumihin if he also saw Svidrigailov, obviously fearing that Svidrigailov is only his own hallucination.¹²⁶ He thinks about him all the time,¹²⁷ and is obsessed with the thought that Svidrigailov is dogging his footsteps.¹²⁸

Although Svidrigailov tells Dounia that he has the same theory as Raskolnikov,¹²⁹ Raskolnikov cannot figure out what they could have in common.¹³⁰ He can see no similiarity between their evil-doings, and feels that Svidrigailov is "very unpleasant, evidently depraved, undoubtedly cunning and deceitful, possibly malignant."¹³¹

Svidrigailov is depraved. He had outraged a little girl, driving her to suicide,¹³² and had also driven a servant to suicide.¹³³ He most likely killed his wife;¹³⁴ and while he is trying to seduce Dounia, he is romancing with very young girls.¹³⁵ He is also vulgar. In his first conver-

¹²³Ibid., pp. 234-235.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 241.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 246.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 447.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 361.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 381.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 403.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 381.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid., pp. 250, 416.

¹³³Ibid., p. 251.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 406.

sation with Raskolnikov he says:

We always imagine eternity as something beyond our conception, something vast, vast! But why must it be vast? Instead of all that, what if it's one little room, like a bath house in the country, black and grimy and spiders in every corner, and that's all eternity is? I sometimes fancy it like that.¹³⁶

He adds that he would certainly have made it like that. This sends a cold chill through Raskolnikov, but immediately after that, Svidrigailov makes the comment that they are "birds of a feather."¹³⁷

After learning about Raskolnikov's crime,¹³⁸ Svidrigailov wants to help him to escape, but only on condition that Dounia give in to him. When she refuses, he realizes that she would never be able to love him; and this reduces him to despair.¹³⁹

That night he has a dream about a five year old child. He finds a little girl, wet and numb with cold, huddled in the corridor. He brings her in to his bed, undresses and covers her.¹⁴⁰ Later he goes to see if she is asleep; and while he is looking at her, something terrible happens:

He suddenly fancied that her long black eyelashes were quivering, as though the lids were opening and a sly crafty eye peeped out with an unchildlike wink, as though the little girl were not asleep, but pretending. Yes, it was so. Her lips parted in a smile. The corners of her mouth quivered, as though she were trying to control them. But now she quite gave up all effort, now it was a grin, a broad grin; there was something shameless, provocative in that quite unchildish face; it was depravity, it was the face of a harlot, the shameless

¹³⁵Ibid., pp. 394-396.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 243.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 405.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 408.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 417.

face of a French harlot. Now both eyes opened wide; they turned a glowing, shameless glance upon him; they laughed, invited him. . . . There was something infinitely hideous and shocking in that laugh, in those eyes, in such nastiness in the face of a child. "What, at five years old?" Svidrigailov muttered in genuine horror. "What does it mean?" And now she turned to him, her little face all aglow, holding out her arms. . . . "Accursed child!" Svidrigailov cried, raising his hand to strike her, but at that moment he woke up.¹⁴¹

He leaves his room and, walking along the street, comes to a big house with a tower. A soldier, with a copper Achilles helmet on his head, is leaning against the gates. Svidrigailov stares at him for awhile until Achilles asks him what he wants. Svidrigailov answers, "Nothing, brother, good morning." And then this strange, pathetic, almost funny dialogue takes place between them; the soldier begins:

"This isn't the place."

"I am going to foreign parts, brother."

"To foreign parts?"

"To America."

"America?"

Svidrigailov took out the revolver and cocked it.

Achilles raised his eyebrows.

"I say, this is not the place for such jokes!"

"Why shouldn't it be the place?"

"Because it isn't."

"Well, brother, I don't mind that. It's a good place. When you are asked, you just say he was going, he said, to America."

He put the revolver to his right temple.

"You can't do it here, it's not the place," cried Achilles, rousing himself, his eyes growing bigger and bigger.

Svidrigailov pulled the trigger.¹⁴²

Later a suicide note was found which stated that he was in full possession of his faculties and that no one was to blame for his death.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 418.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 419.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 434.

Svidrigailov is a personification of the theory of Raskolnikov carried to maturity. Losing the distinction between good and evil, he becomes completely corrupted; and the dream is a manifestation and self-revelation of the depths to which he had fallen. He ends in the same depravity, despair and self-destruction as did Stavrogin.

Ivan also reached the conclusion that "all things are lawful" after having rejected God and the idea of a future harmony. The "devil" who is "the incarnation . . . of one side" of himself,¹⁴⁴ reminds him of the intellectual process by which he came to this conclusion: He had at one time hoped for a future in which men, denying the existence of God and the old morality, would unite to take from life all it can give, but only for the sake of joy and happiness in the present world. The Man-god would appear, filled with the spirit of divine Titanic pride, and by "extending his conquest of nature infinitely by his will and his science," would feel a joy that would make up for all his old dreams of the joys of heaven. He would know that he is mortal, and would accept death "proudly and serenely like a god." He would love his brother without hope or need for a reward; and the very consciousness of the momentariness of life would intensify its fire, which would no longer be dissipated in dreams of eternal love beyond the grave.¹⁴⁵

But then he began to question. . . ."is it possible

¹⁴⁴Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 775.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 789.

that such a period will ever come?" If it does come, then everything would be determined and humanity would be settled forever. However, owing to man's inveterate stupidity, this period would not come about for at least a thousand years; so anyone who recognized the truth now would be able to order his life on the new principles.

In that sense, 'all things are lawful' for him. What's more, even if this period never comes to pass, since there is anyway no God and no immortality, the new man may well become the man-god, even if he is the only one in the whole world, and promoted to his new position, he may lightheartedly overstep all the barriers of the old morality of the old slave-man, if necessary. There is no law for God. Where God stands, the place is holy. Where I stand will be at once the foremost place . . . 'all things are lawful' and that's the end of it! 146

Ivan knows there is nothing in the world to make men love their neighbors, that there is no law of nature according to which men should love one another; and if there has been any love at all, it is because men believed in personal immortality. He knows that if one were to destroy this belief in immortality, every living force maintaining the life of the world would dry up. Moreover, for anyone who does not believe in God, egoism, even to crime, becomes not only lawful but even the inevitable, the most rational, the most honorable outcome of his position. 147

However, Ivan cannot live with the practical consequences of this theory. According to his philosophy, he must admit that his father's ideas are "right enough," but

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid., pp. 78-79.

he despises his father and thinks of him as a "pig."¹⁴⁸
 After the old man is murdered, and Ivan still thinks Mitya did it, he hates Mitya more and more every day "just because he was the murderer of his father."¹⁴⁹

When Ivan finally is faced with the truth that Smerdyakov killed his father, which means that Ivan is, in a sense, the real murdered, "something seemed to give way in his brain, and he shuddered all over with a cold shiver."¹⁵⁰ Smerdyakov, watching him tremble, makes the comment, "you were bold enough then. You said 'everything was lawful,' and how frightened you are now."¹⁵¹

He tells Ivan that although he murdered the old man, he was only Ivan's instrument;¹⁵² and Ivan recognizes Smerdyakov as an extension of his own personality to the point where he says, "Do you know, I am afraid that you are a dream, a phantom sitting before me."¹⁵³

Smerdyakov can no more live with the Man-god philosophy than can Ivan. He asks Ivan to take the money he had stolen from Fyodor Pavlovitch; and when Ivan asks why, Smerdyakov says he does not want it anymore.

I did have an idea of beginning a new life with that money in Moscow or, better still, abroad. I did dream of it, chiefly because 'all things are lawful.' That was quite right what you taught me, for you talked a lot to me about that. For if there's no everlasting God, there's no such thing as virtue, and there's no

¹⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 162, 722. ¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 754.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 758. ¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 760.

¹⁵²Ibid., pp. 758, 762. ¹⁵³Ibid., p. 758.

need of it. You were right there. So that's how I looked at it."¹⁵⁴

Ivan asks him if he came to all this by himself, and Smerdyakov answers, "With your guidance." Then he asks Smerdyakov if his giving back the money means he now believes in God.

"No I don't believe," whispered Smerdyakov.

"Then why are you giving it back?"

"Leave off . . . that's enough!" Smerdyakov waved his hand again. "You used to say yourself that everything was lawful, so now why are you so upset too?"¹⁵⁵

Ivan tells Smerdyakov that he is going to go into court and give evidence against himself;¹⁵⁶ but Smerdyakov tells him he will never do it as he is too interested in his own "undisturbed comfort" to take such a disgrace on himself. He then shocks Ivan by declaring: "You are like Fyodor Pavlovitch, you are more like him than any of his children; you've the same soul as he had."¹⁵⁷

Ivan leaves, intent upon confession, but then decides that instead of going directly to the prosecutor, he would wait until to-morrow.¹⁵⁸ Upon entering his room, he feels something "like a touch of ice on his heart . . ."¹⁵⁹ That evening, on the brink of "brain fever," he has his encounter with the "devil" who taunts him with wanting to perform an act of virtue when he does not believe in virtue.

And it would be all right if you believed in virtue. . . . No matter if they disbelieve you, you are going for the sake of principle. But you are a little pig like Fyodor Pavlovitch and what do you want to go meddling if

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 768.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 769.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 767.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 769.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 770-771.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 791.

your sacrifice is of no use to any one? Because you don't know yourself why you go! Oh, you'd give a great deal to know yourself why you go! And can you have made up your mind? You've not made up your mind. You'll sit all night deliberating whether to go or not. But you will go; you know you'll go. You know what whichever way you decide, the decision does not depend on you. You'll go because you won't dare not to go. Why won't you dare? You must guess that for yourself. That's a riddle for you!¹⁶⁰

He calls Ivan a coward, and says, "It is not for such eagles to soar above the earth."¹⁶¹ Ivan is beginning to see himself as he really is, not a god, but like his father whom he despised, like Smerdyakov whom he loathes,¹⁶² and like this "devil" whom he sees as "trivial" and "frightfully stupid."¹⁶³

Ivan is being torn apart by the agony of self-knowledge; and by inner division: "God in Whom he disbelieved and His truth were gaining mastery over his heart, which still refused to submit."¹⁶⁴ However, it is difficult to know exactly what eventually happens to Ivan. He does confess, but he does it with a great deal of contempt for himself and everyone else.¹⁶⁵ Naturally, no one believed his story; and he had to be taken forceably from the courtroom, yelling and screaming something incoherent.¹⁶⁶

However, Ivan's "instrument," Smerdyakov, hanged himself, leaving a note which said: "I destroy my life of my own will and desire, so as to throw no blame on any one."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 795.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 315, 740.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 792-793.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 796.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 834-835.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 836.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 791.

Once again, the conclusion to the Man-god theory is self-destruction. This does not prove the existence of God, but it does indicate that this philosophy is no answer to the problem of evil. Camus, in The Rebel, sums up the paradox thus:

The same man who so violently took the part of innocence, who trembled at the suffering of a child, . . . from the moment that he rejects divine coherence and tries to discover his own rule of life, recognizes the legitimacy of murder. Ivan rebels against a murderous God; but from the moment that he begins to rationalize his rebellion, he deduces the law of murder. If all is permitted, he can kill his father or at least allow him to be killed. Long reflection on the condition of mankind as people sentenced to death only leads to the justification of crime. Ivan simultaneously hates the death penalty . . . and condones crime, in principle. Every indulgence is allowed the murderer, none is allowed the executioner.¹⁶⁸

Ivan, caught between "unjustifiable virtue and unacceptable crime, consumed with pity and incapable of love," is finally driven insane by contradiction.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Albert Camus, The Rebel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1956), p. 58.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

Section 3: The Answer

Dostoevsky has examined three possible positions, all atheistic, that one may take regarding the problem of evil; and no one of them has proved to be an adequate solution to the problem. Although this does not, in itself, prove the existence of God, it does indicate that the problem of evil remains just as acute without God as it does with God. The burden of proof now falls on the believer: is there, in faith, a vision of life which can give a meaning to the existence of evil, and at the same time, make possible the acceptance of evil in such a way that one is not ultimately destroyed by it, but in fact is led through it to a greater good? The answer to the first part of this question is, oddly enough, given by Ivan himself; but he cannot follow it through to the acceptance of evil because, although he understands the answer given by faith, he does not personally have faith. As Mitya says, Ivan has an idea, but not a God.¹⁷⁰

His answer, however, is probably one of the most profound recorded in human history, and it is given in his "poem," "The Grand Inquisitor."

This story takes place in the sixteenth century, in Seville, Spain, during the most terrible time of the Inquisition.¹⁷¹ It concerns a short appearance of Jesus among the people and His capture by the Grand Inquisitor, the ninety year old Cardinal who had long since transferred his

¹⁷⁰Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 721.

¹⁷¹Ibid., pp. 292, 294-295.

alleigiance from Christ to Satan.¹⁷² During the night, the Grand Inquisitor visits Jesus in prison and speaks openly of what he has thought in silence for all these years.¹⁷³

He accuses Jesus of being the cause of mankind's evil and suffering because He chose to make men free, and rejected the only way by which they might have been made happy. He explains his accusation in terms of the temptations in the desert, and the resistance of Jesus to these temptations. The "wise and dread spirit, the spirit of self-destruction and non-existence" put three possibilities before Jesus, the acceptance of which would have meant the end of human freedom, and consequently the end of evil and suffering. But Jesus rejected all three and in so doing destined men to rebellion, confusion, and misery.

In the first temptation, Satan warns Jesus that He is going into the world with empty hands, with a promise of freedom which men do not understand, do not want, and would not be able to live; "for nothing has ever been more insupportable for a man and a human society than freedom."¹⁷⁴ However, if He would turn the stones into bread, men would run after Him like a flock of sheep. They would be grateful and obedient, though always fearful that He would cease to feed them. But Christ rejected this temptation because it would have deprived men of freedom, and "what is that freedom worth, if obedience is bought with bread?"¹⁷⁵ The Grand

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 310.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 297.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 299.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p. 300.

Inquisitor tells Christ that men will never be able to share freely their bread with one another; nor will they ever be able to be really free for they are "weak, vicious, worthless and rebellious."¹⁷⁶ They will come to hate Christ for asking of them what they cannot give, and will end by renouncing their freedom for the sake of that earthly bread.

If Christ had chosen "bread" He would also have satisfied the universal craving to find something to worship which would be beyond dispute, so that everyone would agree to worship together. Men feel this need of common worship so strongly that wars have been fought for the sake of it; but Christ rejected the one infallible banner which was offered to Him to make all men bow down to Him alone: "the banner of earthly bread."¹⁷⁷

The Grand Inquisitor accuses Him of going even further: Christ knew that men need not only to live, but to have something to live for, so much so that they will quickly hand over their freedom to whoever is able to appease their conscience. But instead of giving a firm foundation for setting their conscience at rest, Christ chose all that was exceptional, vague, and enigmatic; and instead of taking possession of their freedom, He increased it, burdening the spiritual kingdom of mankind with its sufferings forever. The Grand Inquisitor says,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 301-302.

Thous didst desire man's free love, that he should follow Thee freely, enticed and taken captive by Thee. In place of the rigid ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Thy image before him as his guide.¹⁷⁸

And yet, man will finally reject His image and His truth if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice which has posed so many unanswerable problems and caused such confusion and suffering. "Didst Thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil?"¹⁷⁹ In the desert, Satan had offered Jesus the means of conquering and capturing man's conscience forever: the power of miracle, mystery and authority. But Christ rejected all three when He refused to jump from the pinnacle of the temple. The Grand Inquisitor tells Him that He acted like God in refusing to ask for a miracle; but the weak, unruly race of men are not gods. They would never be able to face such a temptation. "Is the nature of men such, that they can reject miracle, and at the great moments of their life, the moments of their deepest, most agonizing spiritual difficulties, cling only to the free verdict of the heart?"¹⁸⁰ They cried out to Him to come down from the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 302.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. This sounds like a contradiction to the "Underground Man's" assertion that man prizes his freedom above all things, but Berdyaev states in his book Dostoevsky, that "Man accepts a compulsory organization of his life because he is afraid of the burden and responsibility of freedom, but behind his renouncement there is also an excessive affirmation of freedom, of his own arbitrary will." (pp. 83-84)

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 303.

cross; but He would not come down because He would not enslave man by a miracle and wanted faith given freely, not based on miracle.

Thou didst't crave for free love and not the base raptures of the slave before the might that has overawed him for ever. But Thou didst think too highly of men therein, for they are slaves, of course, though rebellious by nature. . . . I swear, man is weaker and baser by nature than Thou hast believed him! Can he, can he do what Thou didst? By showing him so much respect, Thou didst, as it were, cease to feel for him, for Thou didst ask far too much from him - Thou who hast loved him more than Thyself!¹⁸¹

He tells Jesus that men will come to recognize that He who created them rebels must have meant only to mock at them; and this blasphemy will only cause them further suffering, "for man's nature cannot bear blasphemy and in the end always avenges it on itself."¹⁸²

The Grand Inquisitor asks Him why He rejected the last counsel of the mighty spirit. If He had accepted all the kingdoms of the earth, He would have fulfilled the third and last anguish of men, to be united all in one "unanimous and harmonious ant-heap."¹⁸³ He could have founded the universal state and given universal peace; "for who can rule men if not he who holds their conscience and their bread in his hands?"¹⁸⁴

Men will only be happy when they give themselves in complete submission; but Christ lifted them up and taught them to be proud. The Grand Inquisitor intends to correct

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 304.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 304.

¹⁸³Ibid., pp. 305-306.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 306.

His work, and show them that they are weak, pitiful children, but that childlike happiness is the sweetest of all.

Oh, we shall allow them even sin, they are weak and helpless, and they will love us like children because we allow them to sin. We shall tell them that every sin will be expiated, if it is done with our permission, that we allow them to sin because we love them, and the punishment for these sins we take upon ourselves. And we shall take it upon ourselves, and they will adore us as their saviours who have taken on themselves their sins before God.¹⁸⁵

Although the Grand Inquisitor does not believe there is anything beyond the grave, he says if there were anything in the other world, it would not be for such as they; if Christ does return in victory, He will come with only the chosen few who have been able to live His freedom. Then the Grand Inquisitor will show Him the thousand millions of happy children who have known no sin, and say, "Judge us if Thou canst and darest."¹⁸⁶

He tells Christ that tomorrow He will see that obedient flock "heap up the hot cinders about the pile on which I shall burn Thee for coming to hinder us. For if any one has ever deserved our fires, it is Thee."¹⁸⁷ Then he waits for his Prisoner to answer him.

His silence weighed down upon him. He saw that the Prisoner had listened intently all the time, looking gently in his face and evidently not wishing to reply. The old man longed for Him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But He suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless aged lips. That was all his answer. The old man shuddered. His lips moved. He went to the door, opened it, and said to Him: 'Go, and come no more. . . . come

¹⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 307-308.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p. 308.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p. 309.

not at all, never, never!' And he let Him out into the dark alleys of the town. The Prisoner went away.¹⁸⁸

That kiss glows in the old man's heart, but he adheres to his idea; and so does Ivan.¹⁸⁹

The atheism of Ivan is tremendous in depth because of the profundity of his understanding. There is evil because there is freedom; but if there were no freedom, there would be no love either, nor any possibility of goodness. Man, without freedom, would be what the Grand Inquisitor wants him to become: "weak, pitiful children," slaves with no intrinsic value or meaning. However, the fact that there is evil in the world, and that men can make the distinction between good and evil, and feel their effects, proves the existence of freedom. Furthermore, although the existence of evil has always been used as an argument against the existence of God, Dostoevsky sees that it can also be a proof for the existence of God. Berdyaev sums up this argument for the existence of God in a paradoxical form:

The existence of evil is a proof of the existence of God. If the world consisted wholly and uniquely of goodness and righteousness there would be no need for God, for the world itself would be god. God is, because evil is. And that means that God is because freedom is.¹⁹⁰

Christ comes to make man free because He has an immense respect for him, and an immense belief in him. But man's destiny can only be fulfilled in Christ; for turning away from Him entails the destruction of freedom itself,¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹⁹⁰ Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, p. 87.

and hence the destruction of human personality. This last fact has been well illustrated in the lives of men like Kirillov, Stavrogin, Raskolnikov, and Ivan.

Ivan knows this; he knows that rejecting Christ, the only way he will be able to endure is to "sink into debauchery," to stifle his soul with corruption, and then when he is thirty, to "dash the cup to the ground."¹⁹²

Ivan also knows, unlike the Grand Inquisitor who speaks of Christ coming with only His "chosen few," that there is no rejection on the part of Jesus. The Grand Inquisitor rejected Christ, but Jesus kissed him in reply. The Kingdom of God is not just for the "elect" of which the Grand Inquisitor speaks; it is even for the Grand Inquisitor himself, if he would have it. Dostoevsky had no narrow idea of who is acceptable to God. One of the most beautiful and moving acts of faith in the forgiveness and acceptance of Christ is given in Crime and Punishment by the old drunkard, Marmeladov:

He will come in that day and He will ask: 'Where is the daughter who gave herself for her cross, consumptive step-mother and for the little children of another? Where is the daughter who had pity upon the filthy drunkard, her earthly father, undismayed by his beastliness?' And He will say, 'Come to Me! I have already forgiven thee once. . . . I have forgiven thee once. . . . Thy sins which are many are forgiven thee, for thou hast love much. . . .' And He will forgive my Sonia, He will forgive, I know it . . . I felt it in my heart when I was with her just now! And He will judge and will forgive all, the good and the evil, and the wise and the meek. . . . And when He has done with all of them, then He will summon us, 'You too come forth,'

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁹²Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 312.

He will say. 'Come forth, ye drunkards, come forth, ye weak ones, come forth, ye children of shame!' And we shall all come forth, without shame and shall stand before Him. And He will say unto us: 'Ye are swine, made in the Image of the Beast and with his mark; but come ye also!' And the wise ones and those of understanding will say: 'Oh Lord, why dost Thou receive these men?' And He will say: 'This is why I receive them, oh ye wise, this is why I receive thee, oh ye of understanding, that not one of them believed himself to be worthy of this.' and He will hold out His hands to us and we shall fall down before Him . . . and we shall weep . . . and we shall understand all things! Then we shall understand all! . . . and all will understand.¹⁹³

Ivan knows that one day even the ones who tortured the children will repent and be forgiven; but though Christ forgives them, Ivan will not.

Dostoevsky has shown that no atheistic answer to the problem of evil is able to adequately solve the problem; and he has presented a profound faith understanding of the meaning of evil through Ivan. However, although Ivan understands he does not accept, which is of course the most basic element in faith.

What is it, then, that makes possible the leap from knowing about the answer given by faith to the actual acceptance of that answer, so that one is able to come to terms with evil and be drawn through it to a greater good? The answer, once again, is given only in the mystery of conversion to a personal faith.

One of the basic elements of this conversion is an experience of God in which one feels loved and accepted by Him; and in responding to that love and acceptance, one is

¹⁹³Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, pp. 24-25.

enabled to admit one's guilt and to forgive one's self. This experience of God usually comes through the hearing of the Word of God, and the "sacramentality" of another human being, (and sometimes also through the "sacramentality" of nature).

The conversion of Raskolnikov is an excellent example of this. The seeds of his conversion are planted by hearing the Gospel reading of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead,¹⁹⁴ and Sonia's Christ-like acceptance of him when he tells her that he killed the pawnbroker and Lizaveta.

"What have you done - what have you done to yourself?" she said in despair, and, jumping up, she flung herself on his neck, threw her arms round him, and held him tightly.

Raskolnikov drew back and looked at her with a mournful smile. "You are a strange girl, Sonia - you kiss me and hug me when I tell you about that. . . . You Don't think what you are doing."¹⁹⁵

Her kiss is reminiscent of Jesus' reply to the betrayal of the Grand Inquisitor who does not, however, allow himself to respond to it. Raskolnikov, on the other hand, does not resist, and her acceptance leaves its mark.

A feeling long unfamiliar to him flooded his heart and softened it at once. He did not struggle against it. Two tears started into his eyes and hung on his eyelashes.¹⁹⁶

Then Sonia tells him that he must go and stand at the cross-roads, bow down and kiss the earth which he has defiled and then bow down to all the world and say to all men aloud that he is a murderer. She says that when he does this, God will send him life again.¹⁹⁷ Although Raskol-

¹⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 273-275.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 340.

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 347.

nikov's conversion is only in embryo form, he finally does as she says.

It came over him like a fit; it was like a single spark kindled in his soul and spreading fire through him. Everything in him softened at once and the tears started into his eyes. He fell to the earth on the spot.
 . . .198

As he kisses the earth with "rapture and bliss," the people around begin to make fun of him. "These exclamations and remarks checked Raskolnikov, and the words, 'I am a murderer', which were perhaps on the point of dropping from his lips, died away."¹⁹⁹ However, he bears the remarks quietly, and turns toward the police station.

In prison, he is amazed at the fact that his fellow prisoners seem to love and prize life so much.²⁰⁰ But what surprises him most of all is "the terrible impossible gulf that lay between him and all the rest."²⁰¹

They seemed to be a different species, and he looked at them and they at him with distrust and hostility. He felt and knew the reasons of his isolation, but would never have admitted till then that those reasons were so deep and strong.²⁰²

He cannot understand why they hate him so, and call him an infidel; nor can he understand why they love Sonia so much.²⁰³

Finally, his wounded pride drives him to the point of physical illness; and he is confined to the hospital from

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 431.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

²⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 443-444.

²⁰¹Ibid., p. 444.

²⁰²Ibid.

²⁰³Ibid.

the middle of Lent until after Easter.²⁰⁴ In the midst of fever and delirium, he has a strange dream. It concerned a terrible plague, sweeping across Europe, in which some kind of microbes, endowed with intelligence and will, attacked the bodies of men, driving them mad and furious. But the men who were attacked considered themselves never so intellectual nor so completely in possession of the truth. They were absolutely convinced that their decisions, their scientific conclusions, their moral convictions were infallible. However, each one was also convinced that he alone possessed the truth. They were totally incapable of understanding one another; nor did they know how to judge or what to consider good or evil. They did not know whom to blame and whom to justify; so they began killing each other in a sort of senseless spite. Everything became involved in chaos and destruction.²⁰⁵

This dream, of course, reveals Raskolnikov's unconscious realization of the inevitable destruction to which his theory could only lead; and Raskolnikov is haunted and worried by the impression of this feverish delirium. Shortly after having this dream, he looks out of the window and chances to see Sonia in the distance. "She seemed to be waiting for someone. Something stabbed him to the heart at that minute."²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 442, 445.

²⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 445-446.

²⁰⁶Ibid., p. 446.

When he is discharged from the hospital, he is sent to work on the river bank, and that morning Sonia comes and sits beside him.

How it happened he did not know. But all at once something seemed to seize him and fling him at her feet. He wept and threw his arms around her knees. For the first instant she was terribly frightened and she turned pale. She jumped up and looked at him trembling. But at the same moment she understood, and a light of infinite happiness came into her eyes. She knew and had no doubt that he loved her beyond everything and that at last the moment had come. . . .

They wanted to speak, but could not; tears stood in their eyes. They were both pale and thin; but those sick pale faces were bright with the dawn of a new future, of a full resurrection into a new life. They were renewed by love; the heart of each held infinite sources of life for the heart of the other.²⁰⁷

Later that day, Raskolnikov fancied that even the other prisoners now looked at him differently; he had spoken to them and they had answered in a friendly way. He realized that everything was now bound to be changed.²⁰⁸

That night he took out the New Testament which lay underneath his pillow. The book had belonged to Sonia and was the same one from which she had read the raising of Lazarus to him. He had worried that Sonia would pester him about religion, but she never mentioned it to him, and gave him the New Testament only because he had asked her for it. He had never opened it, and did not open it now; but one thought passed through his mind: "Can her convictions not be mine now? Her feelings, her aspiration at least. . . ."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷Ibid., p. 447.

²⁰⁸Ibid.

²⁰⁹Ibid., p. 448.

This is where Dostoevsky ends the story of Raskolnikov. It is only the beginning; but as he says, the story of the gradual renewal of a man would be the subject of another book.²¹⁰

There is another element contained in the full experience of conversion which is not presented with Raskolnikov, probably because the story does end with only the beginning of his renewal, and possibly because Dostoevsky had not himself formulated this notion at the time of writing Crime and Punishment. That other element consists in the capacity to forgive all men and to suffer for all men because one has seen that "all are responsible for all." This acceptance of responsibility for all men is brought out in the conversion of Mitya, in The Brothers Karamazov, after he is charged with the murder of his father.

The hearing of the Word of God is missing in this conversion story, but the "sacramentality" of another human being is present in Grushenka's love for him.²¹¹ Mitya's realization of this fundamental truth of responsibility comes to him in a dream.

At the end of the preliminary investigation, Mitya falls asleep and dreams that he is driving somewhere in the steppes when he sees a group of peasant women, one with a baby in her arms. The women are begging, and the child is blue with cold and crying. Mitya asks why it is crying, and

²¹⁰Ibid.

²¹¹Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 531.

the driver answers, "The babe's cold, its little clothes are frozen and don't warm it." Mitya asks, "But why is it? Why?" And the driver answers, "Why, they're poor people, burnt out. They've no bread. They're begging because they've been burnt out."²¹²

"No, no," Mitya, as it were, still did not understand. "Tell me why it is those poor mothers stand there? Why are people poor? Why is the babe poor? Why is the steppe barren? Why don't they hug each other and kiss? Why don't they sing songs of joy? Why are they so dark from black misery? Why don't they feed the babe?"

And he felt that, though his questions were unreasonable and senseless, yet he wanted to ask just that, and he had to ask it just in that way. And he felt that a passion of pity, such as he had never known before, was rising in his heart, and he wanted to cry, that he wanted to do something for them all, so that the babe should weep no more, so that the dark-faced, dried-up mother should not weep, that no one should shed tears again from that moment, and he wanted to do it at once, at once, regardless of all obstacles, with all the recklessness of the Karamazovs.²¹³

While he is in prison, but before he is convicted, Mitya tells Alyosha that a new man has risen up in him, one that would have remained hidden except for this "blow from heaven." He is no longer afraid, for even in prison one may still live and love and suffer. It is possible to make friends with another convict, to thaw and revive a frozen heart, to wait upon another for years until one brings up from the dark depths of that person a lofty soul, a feeling suffering creature. One might create a hero, or bring forth

²¹²Ibid., p. 615.

²¹³Ibid., pp. 615-616.

an angel.²¹⁴

There are so many of them, hundreds of them, and we are all to blame for them. Why was it I dreamed of that 'babe' at such a moment? 'Why is the babe so poor?' That was a sign to me at that moment. It's for the babe I'm going. Because we are all responsible for all. For all the 'babes' for there are big children as well as little children. All are 'babes.' I go for all, because some one must go for all. I didn't kill father, but I've got to go. I accept it.²¹⁵

Later, after he is convicted of the murder which he did not commit, he comes to realize that he is not ready for such a cross. Grushenka would not be able to go with him; and he would not be able to stand it if a guard would beat him. He knows he would probably kill him and be shot for it. "I wanted to sign a 'hymn'; but if a guard speaks to me, I have not the strength to bear it."²¹⁶ Alyosha tells him that he does not need such a martyr's cross when he is not ready. If he had murdered his father, it would grieve him if Mitya should reject his punishment; but he is innocent and such a cross is too much for him. He tells Mitya that although he wanted to make a new man of himself by suffering, if he would only remember that other man always, all his life and wherever he goes, that would be enough.

Your refusal of that great cross will only serve to make you feel all your life an even greater duty, and that constant feeling will do more to make you a new man, perhaps, than if you went there. For there you would not endure it and would repine, and perhaps at last would say: 'I am quits.'²¹⁷

Mitya recognizes this and agrees to the escape plan devised

²¹⁴Ibid., pp. 719-720.

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 720.

²¹⁶Ibid., p. 925.

²¹⁷Ibid.

by Katerina and Ivan.

It is interesting to note the difference between Mitya, who, after his conversion, is able to accept his limitations, and Stavrogin who refused to take the "lesser way" suggested by Tihon, and ended by destroying himself in his pride.

Raskolnikov and Mitya are able to accept and forgive themselves because they have responded to someone who has forgiven them; and even though Mitya is not strong enough to bear it yet, he has come to feel responsibility for all men and therefore is on the road to complete forgiveness of all men and the ability to love and suffer for all men.

Both of these conversion illustrate partially the truth Dostoevsky was trying to present; however, he wrote one book in The Brothers Karamazov which he meant to be his full and complete answer to the atheistic propositions put forth by Ivan in the book, "Pro and Contra." It is the book containing the conversion which is the prime example of the acceptance of this world, and the principles which resulted from that conversion.

On August 24, 1879, Dostoevsky wrote a letter to Pobiedonoszev, concerning, in part, this book.

. . . I had intended Book VI, "The Russian Monk," to be a reply to all this negative side; it will appear on August 31. And therefore I fear on its account: will it be a sufficient reply? The more so because the answer is, indeed, not a direct one, not an answer to the propositions expressed before (in "The Great Inquisitor" and elsewhere) point by point, but an indirect one. In my reply is represented something directly opposite to the world-conception expressed in the earlier book, but again it is represented not point by point, but, so to

say, in an artistic picture. And that's just what worries me, that is, shall I be understood and shall I achieve even a particle of my aim. . . . Then there are the monk's precepts, at which people will just shout that they are absurd, for they are too ecstatic; certainly they are absurd in the everyday sense, but in the other, the inner sense, I think they are right. Anyhow, I worry much, and I should very much like to have your opinion, for I value and respect it very much. I wrote the book with great love.²¹⁸

As the book opens, Father Zossima is dying; but in the few hours left him, he tells the story of his life and conversion, giving the principles which he considers to be basic to the Christian life, and which are the answer to the denial of God presented largely by Ivan in the first section of this chapter.

Zossima speaks first of his brother, Markel, and the great influence which he had upon his life. He is convinced if it had not been for his brother, he would never have become a monk.²¹⁹

He then speaks of the great influence of Holy Scripture upon his life. He remembers, at eight years old, his mother taking him to Mass on the Monday before Easter. It was the first time that he consciously received the seed of God's Word into his heart;²²⁰ and it occurred while listening to the book of Job.²²¹ He marvelled at the great mystery

²¹⁸ Dostoevsky: Letters and Reminiscences, Translated by Koteliansky and Murry, pp. 251-252.

²¹⁹ Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 40.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 346.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 347.

that, after such torments, God looks upon Job and praises his creation; and Job, in turn, praises the Lord.²²²

He turns to recollections of his youth before he became a monk: Zossima spent almost eight years in the military cadet school in Petersburg, picking up so many new habits and opinions that he was transformed into "a cruel, absurd, almost savage creature." He acquired a surface polish of courtesy and society manners, along with the French language, but prided himself on drunkenness, debauchery, and devilry, as did the other officers; but Zossima says that he was worse than the rest of them for he was much more impressionable than his companions. He came into his own money and threw himself into a life of pleasure.²²³

He lived this way for four years; then he was stationed in a town where he formed an attachment to a beautiful young lady; but he put off making her an offer because he was not willing to part with the allurements of his "free and licentious bachelor life." Then, all of a sudden, he was ordered off for two months to another district.²²⁴

When he returned, he found the young lady already married to a rich landowner.²²⁵ He learned that she had been betrothed to him for a long time; and although he had met her often in her house, he was so blinded by conceit that he had noticed nothing. He was filled with "sudden irrepressible

²²²Ibid., p. 348.

²²³Ibid., pp. 352-353.

²²⁴Ibid., p. 353.

²²⁵Ibid.

fury," and determined upon revenge.²²⁶

Finally he was able to insult his "rival" in public, forcing him to ask for an explanation and behaving so rudely that he accepted Zossima's challenge. The duel was to take place the next day; but then something happened, marking the turning point of his life.²²⁷

He came home that evening in a savage and brutal mood, and flew into a rage with his orderly Afanasy, striking him twice in the face with all his might so that it was covered with blood. Then he went to bed, slept for about three hours; and when he awoke, day was breaking. The sun was rising; it was warm and beautiful and the birds were singing.²²⁸ As he stood looking out of the window, he began to feel something vile and shameful in his heart. For awhile he did not know what it was; and then, suddenly, he realized it was because he had beaten Afanasy the evening before.²²⁹

It all rose up before my mind, it all was as it were repeated over again; he stood before me and I was beating him straight on the face and he was holding his arms stiffly down, his head erect, his eyes fixed upon me as though on parade. He staggered at every blow and did not dare to raise his hands to protect himself. That is what a man has been brought to, and that was a man beating a fellow creature! What a crime!²³⁰

²²⁶Ibid., p. 354.

²²⁷Ibid., pp. 354-355.

²²⁸This scene most likely stirred up unconscious memories of Markel who had experienced God so deeply through nature; for in a few moments those memories become conscious in his mind. This "sacramentality" of nature is a constant theme in Dostoevsky's works: one experiences God through nature, and one may respond to God by kissing the earth or speaking kindly to the birds, etc. This is consistent with his conviction that to reject God's world is a form of atheism.

²²⁹Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 355.

Zossima felt as if a sharp dagger had pierced him right through. He stood as if he were struck dumb, "while the sun was shining, the leaves were rejoicing and the birds were trilling the praise of God . . ." ²³¹ He hid his face in his hands, fell on his bed and burst into tears. Then he remembered his brother Markel and what he had said to his servants as he lay dying: "My dear ones, why do you wait on me, why do you love me, am I worth your waiting on me?" ²³² The same question forced itself on Zossima: "Am I worth it?" He remembered his brother Markel saying, ". . . in truth we are each responsible to all for all, it's only that men don't know this. If they knew it, the world would be a paradise at once." ²³³

Zossima, still weeping, realized that perhaps he was, more than all others, responsible for all, "a greater sinner than all men in the world." The full impact of what he was about to do hit him: he was going to kill a good, clever, noble man, who had done him no wrong; and by depriving his wife of happiness for the rest of her life, he would be torturing and killing her too. ²³⁴

Suddenly, his second came running in, saying that it was time to go. Not knowing what to do, Zossima went with him to the carriage; but then said he had to go back for his

²³⁰Ibid.

²³¹Ibid.

²³²Ibid., pp. 355-356.

²³³Ibid., p. 356.

²³⁴Ibid.

purse. He went straight to Afanasy's room, stood before him and said, "I gave you two blows on the face yesterday, forgive me." Afanasy started as though frightened, and Zossima saw that it was not enough; he dropped to the floor, in his full officer's uniform, and bowed his head to the ground, saying, "Forgive me." Afanasy was completely aghast and cried, "Your honour . . . sir, what you you doing: Am I worth it?" He then burst into tears and hid his face in his hands. Zossima flew out to his second and jumped into the carriage.²³⁵

Taking position for the duel, Zossima let his "rival" have the first shot, which just grazed his cheek and ear. Then he cried, "Thank God . . . no man has been killed," and threw his pistol far into the woods. Immediately he turned to his adversary and asked his forgiveness for provoking him into a duel in the first place, and forcing him to fire his pistol.²³⁶

This action upset everyone: his second accused him of disgracing the regiment, and his adversary was much annoyed. But Zossima could only respond happily: "Look around you at the gifts of God, the clear sky, the pure air, the tender grass, the birds; nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, only we, are sinful and foolish, and we don't understand that life is heaven, for we have only to understand that and it will at once be fulfilled in all its beauty, we shall em-

²³⁵Ibid.

²³⁶Ibid., p. 357.

brace each other and weep."²³⁷ As he said this, there was such bliss in his heart as he had never known before.

All the way home, his second upbraided him; and later there was much criticism from his comrades. But as soon as he told them that he had resigned his commission and planned to enter a monastery, they burst out laughing, forgiving him, and becoming friendly at once.²³⁸

The society of the town, hearing about the incident, began to take an immense interest in him, and it was during a social gathering that he met Mihail, an official in the town.²³⁹ Mihail and Zossima became good friends, and Mihail finally confessed to him that fourteen years before he had murdered someone.²⁴⁰ All these years he had been tormented by a desire to confess his crime, but it was only after hearing of Zossima and the duel that he had been able to make up his mind to go through with a confession.²⁴¹

Zossima was very much moved by the fact that his decision concerning the duel could have so great an effect, not only upon himself, but upon another human being as well; and this incident immeasurably strengthened his conviction of the solidarity of mankind.²⁴²

Zossima, after this experience with Mihail, left the town and entered the monastery.²⁴³

Zossima had a deep experience of evil; but he was

²³⁷Ibid., p. 358.

²³⁸Ibid., pp. 358-359.

²³⁹Ibid., p. 360.

²⁴⁰Ibid., p. 364.

²⁴¹Ibid., p. 368.

²⁴²Ibid.

brought through it to a deeper experience of good through conversion to God. Dostoevsky knew that although God has not fully explained the mystery of evil to man, nevertheless, He is the only solution to the mystery of evil, and there is no other solution. If Zossima, Raskolnikov or Mitya had resisted the saving grace, choosing against God, it is impossible to see them as ending in anything but self-destruction in one form or another. The choice against Him being despair and death. One must choose; and the heart of man is indeed, as Mitya says, the battleground on which God and the devil are fighting.²⁴⁴

From these life experiences, Zossima goes on to give certain basic principles of the Christian life which are explicitly directed against the denial of the existence of God because of moral evil. These principles concern the two problems of man's experience of his own inability to love, and the experience of mankind's capacity for active hatred and cruelty.

Zossima is well aware of the difficulty in loving one's neighbor. He speaks of the difference between active love and love in dreams, saying that "love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams." When one dreams of loving, one is greedy for immediate action, and wishes to perform it rapidly and in the sight of all. A man would give his life if only the ordeal would not last too long and if everyone were watching and applauding as though

²⁴³Ibid., p. 374.

²⁴⁴Ibid., p. 127.

on the stage. However, active love takes labor and fortitude and is, in a sense, almost a complete science.²⁴⁵

Active love is difficult, but not impossible; although it takes constant watchfulness and care.

Every day and every hour, every minute, walk round yourself and watch yourself, and see that your image is a seemly one. You pass by a little child, you pass by spiteful, with ugly words, with wrathful heart; you may not have noticed the child, but he has seen you, and your image, unseemly and ignoble, may remain in his defenceless heart. You don't know it, but you may have sown an evil seed in him and it may grow, and all because you were not careful before the child, because you did not foster in yourself a careful, actively benevolent love. Brothers, love is a teacher; but one must know how to acquire it, for it is hard to acquire, it is dearly bought, it is won slowly by long labor. For we must love not only occasionally, for a moment, but for ever. Every one can love occasionally, even the wicked can.²⁴⁶

He emphasizes the necessity for penance, telling a little story of one "champion of freedom" who told him that when tobacco was taken away from him in prison, he was so desperate that he almost betrayed his cause in order to get it back. "And such a man says, 'I am fighting for the cause of humanity.'" No one like that is capable of holding out for long. He says that although obedience, fasting, and prayer are laughed at, yet it is only through them that one can attain to real, true freedom; for it is only a man who has freed himself from the tyranny of material things and habits who is capable of conceiving a great idea and serving it.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵Ibid., p. 65. This theme of love being a science is also taken up in The Idiot, p. 396.

²⁴⁶Ibid., p. 383.

²⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 376-377.

Ivan had objected that love of one's neighbor is impossible; and although Dostoevsky maintains the possibility of love, he recognizes that perfect love will never be achieved in one's life-time, but will be accomplished only at the end of time. He sees the present age as a time of process and development, an idea which is contained in some reflections jotted down in his notebook on April 16, 1864.

To love your neighbor as yourself, according to Christ's commandment is impossible. The law of personality on earth prevents it. The I prevents it (And yet) Christ alone was able to do it, but Christ is eternal, an eternal ideal toward which man aspires and is bound to aspire according to nature's law. And yet after Christ's appearance as an ideal of man in the flesh it became as clear as daylight that the highest and last development of personality must (at the very end of its development, at the very point of achieving its goal) reach the point at which man will find out, realize and become convinced, utterly convinced, that the greatest use a man can make of his personality, of the fullest development of his I, is in one way or another to destroy this I, to give himself up wholly to all and everyone, selflessly and wholeheartedly. And that is the greatest happiness.

.....
This is Christ's heaven. The whole history of humanity and, to a certain extent, of each individual is merely the development, the struggle, the aspiration for and the achievement of this goal.

Once achieved, humanity will no longer have to develop any further, that is to say, to struggle and aspire toward this ideal, to catch a glimpse of it every time it falls from grace, to strive for its achievement everlastingly.²⁴⁸

This sense of "evolution" is reflected in Zossima's dream of the future when the most corrupt of the rich will become ashamed of his riches before the poor;²⁴⁹ and man will find his joy only in deeds of light and mercy and not in cruel

²⁴⁸Dostoevsky's Occasional Writings, Translated by David Magarshack, pp. 305-306.

²⁴⁹Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 379.

pleasures of gluttony, fornication, ostentation, boasting, and envious rivalry of one with another, as they do now. It will come when it is destined to come; but he believes that with Christ's help, this great thing will be accomplished. There will come a time in the future when men will be united and will not desire to make servants out of others, but will desire to be the servants of all, as the Gospel teaches.²⁵⁰ "Believe me that it will end in that; things are moving to that. Equality is to be found only in the spiritual dignity of man."²⁵¹

Zossima had asked Mihail once when all of this would come to pass and Mihail answered that it would come, but not now, "for every process has its law."

It's a spiritual, psychological process. To transform the world, to recreate it afresh, men must turn into another path psychologically. Until you have become really, in actual fact, a brother to every one, brotherhood will not come to pass. No sort of scientific teaching, no kind of common interest, will ever teach men to share property and privileges with equal consideration for all. Every one will think his share too small and they will be always envying, complaining and attacking one another. You ask when it will come to pass; it will come to pass . . . and then the sign of the Son of Man will be seen in the heavens . . .²⁵²

This theme of "evolution" is also found in Crime and Punishment. Razumihin is speaking against the socialists of the day:

Everything with them is "the influence of environment," and nothing else. Their favourite phrase! From which it follows that, if society is normally organised, all crime will cease at once, since there will be nothing to protest against and all men will become righteous in one instant. Human nature is not taken into account, it is

²⁵⁰Ibid., p. 381

²⁵¹Ibid., p. 379.

excluded, it's not supposed to exist! They don't recognise that humanity, developing by a historical living process, will become at last a normal society, but they believe that a social system that has come out of some mathematical brain is going to organise all humanity at once and make it just and sinless in an instant, quicker than any living process!²⁵³

The perfection of man, then, is not something which an individual accomplishes by himself, nor is it completed in any one person during his life-time. The perfection of the individual is part of a process, and it comes about as the entire community moves closer and closer to the end of time. But it is a living process, directed by the Holy Spirit, and cannot be forced by any social organization.

Perhaps this sense of development partially explains Dostoevsky's strong emphasis upon self-forgiveness; for in the light of an evolutionary process, an infinite amount of humility and patience with one's self is needed. Self-forgiveness is so important that Tihon tells Stavrogin that if he believes he can forgive himself; and if he seeks to attain to that forgiveness in this world by his suffering, then he has complete faith.²⁵⁴ Zossima tells Madame Hohlakov not to be scornful of herself and to avoid fear. "Never be frightened at your own faint-heartedness in attaining love. Don't be frightened over-much even at your evil action."²⁵⁵ And, on his deathbed, he counsels an even deeper humility: "If you sin yourself and grieve even unto death for your sins or

²⁵²Ibid., p. 363.

²⁵³Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 216.

²⁵⁴Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 727.

²⁵⁵Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 65.

for your sudden sin, then rejoice for others, rejoice for the righteous man, rejoice that if you have sinned, he is righteous and has not sinned."²⁵⁶

This kind of humility demands a community orientation and self-forgetfulness that a man like Ivan does not possess; so, of course, the recognition of his own inability to love leads him into a kind of cynicism concerning the possibility of practicing Christianity.

To stress the need for patience and humility is not thereby to encourage laxity. It is imperative that man struggle with all his might to practice active love; for he has been given only one life in which to fulfill his destiny, only one moment in which he can practice "active living love." If he rejects this moment, there is no other in which it may be accomplished. Zossima maintains that hell "is the suffering of being unable to love," and says that the torment of such a person who has scorned and rejected the moment given him lies precisely in being able "to rise up to the Lord without ever having loved, to be brought close to those who have loved when he has despised their love."²⁵⁷ For then he will see clearly and will thirst to love, but there will be nothing great, no sacrifice in his love, for his earthly life is over. Even though he would gladly give his life for others, it can never be; "for that life is passed which can be sacrificed for love, and now there is a gulf fixed between that life and this existence."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶Ibid., p. 386.

²⁵⁷Ibid., p. 387.

²⁵⁸Ibid.

Furthermore, Zossima maintains in the face of doubts concerning the existence of the future life, that although its existence cannot be proven, there is a way to become convinced of it, and that is by the experience of active love.

Strive to love your neighbor actively and indefatigably. In as far as you advance in love you will grow surer of the reality of God and of the immortality of your soul. If you attain to perfect self-forgetfulness in the love of your neighbor, then you will believe without doubt, and no doubt can possibly enter your soul.²⁵⁹

The second problem that Ivan had raised concerning the existence of God was the experience of mankind's capacity for active hatred and cruelty. He was completely scandalized by, and unable to forgive, the torturers of the children.

Zossima takes up this point explicitly and tells his fellow monks that if the evil doing of men moves them to indignation and over-whelming distress, or causes in them a desire for vengeance, they should shun above all things that feeling. They should go at once and seek suffering for themselves, as though they were guilty of that wrong. If they can accept that suffering and bear it, their hearts will be comforted, and they will come to understand that they too are guilty; for they might have been a light to the evil-doers. If they had been a light, they would have lightened the path for others too, and the evil-doer might have been saved by their light from his sin.²⁶⁰ Zossima says that everyone is responsible for all men and for everything on earth, "not

²⁵⁹Ibid.

²⁶⁰Ibid., p. 63.

merely through the general sinfulness of creation, but each one personally for all mankind and every individual man;²⁶¹ and it is only through this knowledge of responsibility that one's heart will grow soft with infinite, universal, inexhaustible love.²⁶² He tells them never to let the sin of men confound them, nor fear that it will wear away their work and hinder its being accomplished.

Do not say, 'Sin is mighty, wickedness is mighty, evil environment is wearing us away and hindering our good work from being done.' Fly from that dejection, children! There is only one means of salvation, then take yourself and make yourself responsible for all men's sins, that is the truth, you know, friends, for as soon as you sincerely make yourself responsible for everything and for all men, you will see at once that it is really so, and that you are to blame for every one and for all things. But throwing your own indolence and impotence on others you will end by sharing the pride of Satan and murmuring against God.²⁶³

He tells them to remember particularly that they cannot be a judge of anyone.

For no one can judge a criminal, until he recognizes that he is just such a criminal as the man standing before him, and that he perhaps is more than all men to blame for that crime. When he understands that, he will be able to be a judge. Though that sounds absurd, it is true. If I had been righteous myself, perhaps there would have been no criminal standing before me. If you can take upon yourself the crime of the criminal your heart is judging, take it at once, suffer for him yourself, and let him go without reproach. And even if the law itself makes you his judge, act in the same spirit so far as possible, for he will go away and condemn himself more bitterly than you have done. If, after your kiss, he goes away untouched, mocking at you, do not let that be a stumbling-block to you. It shows his time has not yet come, but it will come in due course. And if it comes not, no matter; if not he, then another in his place will understand and suffer, and

²⁶² Ibid., p. 194.

²⁶³ Ibid.

judge and condemn himself, and the truth will be fulfilled. Believe that, believe it without doubt; for in that lies all the hope and faith of the saints.²⁶⁴

He tells them they must remember that they are working for the whole and acting for the future. It may take time, but their light will not die even when they are dead.²⁶⁵ Above all, they must be willing to love a man even in his sin, "for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth."²⁶⁶

This is exactly what Ivan refuses to do because he has no sense of solidarity, either in goodness or in evil. He condemns the torturers because he does not see that he is as bad as they; nor does he think of himself as in any way connected with, or responsible for, their crimes. He does acquire some insight into himself when he is forced to admit that he is a murderer, and when he begins to realize that he is like his father and Smerdyakov, and his "trivial devil." However, the outcome of this crisis is never clarified; but it is certain that if Ivan does not turn to God for forgiveness, and subsequently come to forgive his fellow-men, he will end by destroying himself out of hatred and pride.

It is interesting to note that each of the characters who choose against God has one characteristic in common:

²⁶⁴Ibid., p. 384.

²⁶⁵Ibid., p. 385. This theme is taken up in detail in The Diary of a Writer, pp. 12-16.

²⁶⁶Ibid., p. 386.

Kirillov,²⁶⁷ Stavrogin,²⁶⁸ Raskolnikov (before his conversion),²⁶⁹ and Ivan²⁷⁰ are completely devoid of a sense of solidarity, and hold themselves aloof from everyone. On the other hand, Zossima is friendly and loves sinners.²⁷¹ Alyosha never judges anyone;²⁷² he even loves and accepts his father.²⁷³ He is fully aware that he is a "Karamazov,"²⁷⁴ but humbly accepts this solidarity in sin.²⁷⁵

Finally, Zossima counsels love, not only for men, but for all of creation.

Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.²⁷⁶

He speaks of the fact that his brother had asked the birds to forgive him, and says that although that sounds senseless, it is right, for "all is like an ocean, all is flowing and blending; a touch in one place sets up movement at the other end of

²⁶⁷Ibid., p. 382.

²⁶⁸Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 93.

²⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 723, 700, 717.

²⁷⁰Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, pp. 20, 232.

²⁷¹Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, pp. 13, 19.

²⁷²Ibid., p. 29.

²⁷³Ibid., p. 17.

²⁷⁴Ibid., p. 24.

²⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 129, 262.

²⁷⁶Ibid., p. 436.

the earth.²⁷⁷ He tells them to throw themselves on the earth and kiss it, to love the earth with an unceasing, consuming love; to love all men, everything.²⁷⁸

While Zossima was speaking, he suddenly seemed to feel an acute pain in his chest; he turned pale, pressed his hands to his heart, and, still smiling, he slowly sank from his chair to his knees. He bowed his face to the ground, and then "stretched out his arms and as though in joyful ecstasy, praying and kissing the ground, quietly and joyfully gave up his soul to God."²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 382-383.

²⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 383-384.

²⁷⁹Ibid., p. 387.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Dostoevsky has attempted to show that the existence of physical and moral evil can be just as much an indication of the existence of God as an indication of the non-existence of God. He has done this by showing that physical evil is intolerable in the face of a godless and meaningless universe, for the very knowledge of this meaninglessness tends to drive a man to suicide. But if there is no God or future life one must then contend with the possibility that nature has produced an organism which is not psychologically equipped to choose for, or deal with, this existence, a fact which would be inconsistent with nature's universal law of self-preservation. The existence of God is essential not only to the possibility of a productive and meaningful life, but to the very choice for life itself. Furthermore, in the light of faith, physical evil becomes not only tolerable but takes on a profound meaning and purpose. This does not in itself prove the existence of God, but it does indicate that an atheistic position is just as problematic, or more so, than a theistic one.

In the case of moral evil, Dostoevsky tried to show that there is no adequate solution to the problem of moral evil outside of the promise of a future life which gives

man and his actions an intrinsic dignity and meaning. He examines the three alternatives of "The Palace of Glass," "The Tower of Babel," and "The Man-god" and attempts to show that none of these constitutes a workable solution. He then goes on to show that the very existence of moral evil itself would seem to be an indication of the existence of God for if moral evil did not exist this world would be completely good and hence would be God itself. Human freedom is the explanation for the existence of evil, but human freedom is also capable of choosing the Good for which man is destined. If there were no human freedom there would be no evil, but there would be no possibility for the choice of the Good either. Furthermore, it is only the mystery of Grace which can bring about the conversion of heart able to transform a man from the depths of selfishness and cruelty to the heights of sanctity. The existence of God or future life is the only explanation for, and solution to, the problem of moral evil. Once again, this does not absolutely prove the existence of God; but it does show that an atheistic position is not able to offer a better explanation or solution to the problem of evil; in fact the problem seems to become even more intense.

In this way Dostoevsky brings one to see that since the implications of an atheistic position are, at least, as equally problematic as a theistic one, the primary motive behind faith, or the lack of it, is not intellectual conviction but choice.

In the light of this, he proceeds to give his real argument for the existence of God in such a way as to appeal to man's heart rather than just to his intellect. And he does this through the medium of his art in the creation of characters and a vision of life designed to bring out the sublime beauty and meaning of the Christian perspective. His "proof" is along the same lines as that given in Scripture which is not in terms of an intellectual syllogism, but in terms of the Witness of the Son to the Father and of the Holy Spirit to the Son through the believing community who attest to the value and worth of the Revelation in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Dostoevsky, living in the late nineteenth century, espoused theological ideas which the rest of the world is only coming to in the latter twentieth century: he laid strong emphasis upon the importance of Scripture, and upon the necessity of hearing the Word of God in order to believe; his sense of the Incarnation was amazing - he worked constantly in terms of the "sacramentality" of persons and even of nature; he saw human nature, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not as a static phenomenon, but as involved in a dynamic process which would culminate only at the end of time;¹ his understanding of faith went far beyond the traditional idea of intellectual assent; he saw and understood

¹It is possible that Dostoevsky's sense of "evolution" was partially inspired by certain aspects of the socialism which he espoused in his early days.

the possibility of "unconscious faith," and perceived depths of atheism in the human heart of which the conscious mind was unaware.

One may well ask the question, how did Dostoevsky come to these ideas? The answer seems to be very much through his own experience. His own conversion took place in prison, brought about by reading the New Testament² and by the "sacramentality" of the other prisoners. Dostoevsky felt that the Russian consciousness was based on Christianity,³ and that it was the contact with this consciousness that converted him. It was "the direct contact with the people, the brotherly merger with them in a common misfortune, the realization of the fact that one has become even as they, that one has been made equal to them, and even to their lowest stratum."⁴

It is undoubtable that his profound understanding of faith and atheism came from his own inner struggles. Dostoevsky was a man tormented by God. By his own admission

²Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer, p. 9.

³Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends, Translated by Ethel Colburn Wayne, p. 258.

⁴Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer, p. 152. He also emphasized strongly the importance of childhood experiences for the later formation of the person, and recalls that the breakthrough in his hostility towards his fellow prisoners was the memory of an encounter with the Peasant Marei when he was only a small child; see The Diary of a Writer, pp. 205-210.

he was a child of this age, "a child of unfaith and scepticism," and feared that he would remain so until the end of his life.⁵ Out of his own doubts and torments, he wrote some of the most forceful arguments against the existence of God ever devised; but, working through his own arguments, he also created some of the most compelling arguments for the existence of God. He says of himself: "It was not as a child that I learnt to believe in Christ and confess his faith. My Hosanna has burst forth from a huge furnace of doubt."⁶

⁵Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends, Translated by Ethel Colburn Mayne, pp. 70-71.

⁶Quoted from: Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, p. 31.

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