TEN

THE END OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

Dostoevsky'S Confidence Game

Ron Srigley

INTRODUCTION

Most scholars agree that the central philosophical ambition of *The Brothers Karamazov* is a depiction, examination, and assessment of the contest between modernity and antiquity in which modernity is exemplified by the politics and philosophy of Ivan Karamazov and antiquity is represented by the Christianity of Zosima and Alyosha.[1] Most also agree that Dostoevsky frames this contest apocalyptically, such that modernity and Christianity are conceived as antithetical accounts of the whole that exhaust the existential possibilities available to us. For instance, Nikolai Berdyaev says that in *The Brothers Karamazov* "Every man is offered the alternatives of the Grand Inquisitor or of Jesus Christ and he must accept one or the other, for there is no third choice: what appear to be other solutions are only passing phases, variations on one or the other theme."[2] Valentina Vetlovskaya argues similarly that the work's hagiographic narrative is driven by a conflict between the "darkness of earthly malice" (Ivan) and the "light of love" (Alyosha) that "is consistently pursued up to the end of the novel."[3] More recently, Bruce Ward and Travis Kroeker have echoed both Vetlovskaya and Berdyaev's interpretations. They argue that for Dostoevsky "History is characterized by the struggle between ... two laws – one of death and one of life." These are the laws of "individual egoism" and "Christ" respectively and the contest between them takes place against the backdrop of the "cosmic canvas on which apocalyptic images are drawn."[4]

What is odd about *The Brothers Karamazov*, however, is that despite the overwhelming agreement among commentators about its account of the contest between Christians and moderns, the book has generated no consensus about which side Dostoevsky actually favours. In this regard scholarly opinion is almost equally divided and the contest between these rival interpretations is as antithetically structured as their interpretations of book itself. On the one hand there are writers like Berdyaev, Ward, Kroeker, Sandoz, Belknap, Catteau, and others who argue that Dostoevsky's chief aim in the book is to defend Christianity from its modern detractors and to depict graphically the nihilism that follows from its rejection. Sandoz's analysis is representative of this type of interpretation: "The Grand Inquisitor spoke *sub specie mortis*, but Dostoevsky has spoken *sub specie aeternitatis*. His Legend points toward the eternal destiny of man. Through parody and caricature he constructs a devastating refutation of the inflated and spiritually diseased supermen of all the ages of history. His concern is with the spiritual crisis of our time and its dangers for men."[5] On the other hand there are V.V. Rozanov, Valentina Vetlovskaya, and D.H. Lawrence, all of whom claim that Dostoevsky was ultimately on the side of Ivan and the Inquisitor and wrote *The Brothers Karamazov* to indicate the profound failure of Christianity to account for the nature of the human condition.[6] D.H. Lawrence's is the clearest and most frank statement of this interpretation: "And we cannot doubt that the Inquisitor speaks Dostoevsky's own final opinion about Jesus. The opinion is, baldly, this: Jesus, you are inadequate. Men must correct you. And Jesus in the end gives the kiss of acquiescence to the Inquisitor, as Alyosha does to Ivan." Dostoevsky's criticism of Jesus is thus "the final criticism, based on the experience of two thousand years ... and on a profound insight into the nature of mankind."[7]

To make matters worse, both sides can enlist Dostoevsky himself in support of their interpretations. For instance, in a letter to his publisher, Lyubimov, Dostoevsky writes: "My hero [Ivan] chooses a theme I consider irrefutable: the senselessness of children's suffering, and develops from it the absurdity of historical reality." However, only a few sentences later in the same letter Dostoevsky claims just the opposite: Ivan's theme and the critique it provokes is in fact "blasphemy" and that "it will be triumphantly refuted in the next issue [of the *Russian Herald*], on which I am now working with fear, trembling, and veneration."[8]

Interpretations of the type indicated above tend to treat the philosophical ambiguity in Dostoevsky's account as only apparent and therefore resolvable through close readings of the Ivan chapters, appeals to authorial authority, or a combination of both strategies.[9] Though generative of a large body of scholarship, much of it extremely capable and containing genuine insight into the text, such strategies do not adequately address the lingering interpretive questions posed by the opposing side. Sooner or later the doubts raised by Ivan's critique of the Christian theodicy or concerns over the political extremities to which that critique leads Ivan reassert themselves, unsettling the conclusions of both interpretations.

Contrary to the traditional interpretation, I argue that the philosophical alternatives posed by *The Brothers Karamazov* are not real in the sense of being distinct, circumscribable positions, but rather are carefully constructed intellectual traps intended to keep the reader within the range of philosophical opinion they recognize: namely, modernity and Christianity. Any critique that threatens to expose the limitations of these traditions so as to point to a genuine alternative is carefully and rhetorically undermined by the analysis. Not directly, though. To offer a direct critique would be to acknowledge the possibility of an alternative. Dostoevsky's aim rather is to keep the reader with the orbit of the problematic by making the antitheses on which it rests

appear both exhaustive and irresolvable. The book's central interpretive question cannot be resolved because Dostoevsky does not want it to be resolved. It is a contest in which there are no losers. Ivan and Zosima are not opponents properly speaking but two moments of a dialectic whose final ambition is its own perpetual motion.

As to the organization of this chapter, sections one attempts to overcome the limitations of the traditional interpretation, those of Robert Belknap and Albert Camus. Though their accounts are only partially successful, Belknap and Camus both clarify the interpretive situation in a way that makes a fuller, more satisfactory reading possible. In section two I explain the nature of Dostoevsky's rhetorical technique through a comparison with Herman Melville's notion of a confidence game. I argue that *The Brothers Karamazov* is a type of confidence game that is amenable to and reinforces the totalizing impulses of the Christian tradition. In section three I outline what I take to be the core of truth in Ivan's critique of the Christian theodicy. Section four explores the manner in which that truth is undermined by Ivan through the political and philosophical excesses with which he saddles his Inquisitor. Section five completes the analysis by examining how Dostoevsky attempts further to undermine Ivan's critique through the creation of a "pure, ideal Christian" in the character of Zosima.[10] I conclude by arguing that perhaps the important consequence of this type of argument is that it effectively removes from view any tradition other than our own and therefore prevents us from acquiring the insights and wisdom that may be generated from such an encounter. For Camus the tradition most immediately affected in this regard is the Greek one. By losing sight of it we deprive ourselves of an image of life that might help us to overcome the excesses and confusions of the modern predicament so clearly exemplified by Dostoevsky's book.

FROM BELKNAP'S THEOLOGY TO CAMUS' INDECISION: INTERPRETING *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV*

Robert Belknap addresses the interpretive ambiguity of *The Brothers Karamazov* directly and offers an explanation of it in his essay, "The Rhetoric of an Ideological Novel."[11] Belknap acknowledges the existence of the two antithetical traditions of interpretation I have described and wonders how we are to make sense of them. He admits that Dostoevsky's intention in writing the book carries more authority than any commentator's opinion and that Dostoevsky's stated intention tends to support the Christian interpretation rather than one favouring Ivan's philosophy. But he also claims that the book's actual rhetorical effect, exemplified by these antithetical styles of interpretation, raises important questions about its meaning. For instance, given the strength of Ivan's argument, Belknap asks whether Dostoevsky was "rhetorically incompetent" or whether he was "consciously or unconsciously lying" about his intention to critique modern nihilism and defend Christianity. Belknap's answer to this question hinges on his account of Dostoevsky's use of sources. Belknap suggests that Dostoevsky's sympathetic portrait of Ivan is an attempt to do justice to Belinsky, Herzen, and Bakunin, three revolutionary figures Dostoevsky admired personally but disagreed with politically and philosophically. "Dostoevsky's fidelity to this aspect of his sources could have made Ivan Karamazov more attractive in his desperate love than seems fitting or strategic if Dostoevsky's letter expressed his real intent."[12] In order to judge the interpretation, Belknap offers a simple test: "If Ivan's greatness is an accidental side effect of Dostoevsky's fidelity to his sources, we should find in the text a series of efforts to destroy one of the most eloquent and convincing arguments in all literature, an argument whose starting point Dostoevsky himself has called irrefutable."[13] And indeed Belknap does find evidence of just such an attempt in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky seduces the reader into identifying with Ivan and then implicates her "in the feelings

of guilt, self-consciousness, stupidity, and even savagery" to which his radicalism leads him, thus undermining the brilliance of the argument.[14] In this way he "tempts" his readers in order to lead them "through a death of grace as dangerous as Zosima's in his youth, or Alyosha's when his faith is shaken, hoping he can bring them out beyond as fertile disseminators of grace."[15]

Belknap's frank discussion of this ambiguity in *The Brothers Karamazov* is a welcome addition to the literature. Still, we should wonder whether it explains Dostoevsky's ambition in a way that overcomes the limitations of traditional scholarship, as was his intention.[16] If Ivan's argument is sound on its own terms – "one of the most eloquent and convincing arguments in all of literature," as Belknap says – then why "destroy" it at all, rhetorically or otherwise? Belknap's response to this question is ideologically consistent but dramatically inadequate. He claims that the chapters devoted to Ivan and the Inquisitor are indistinguishably a test of the reader's "faith" and a piece of philosophical "manipulation" designed to undermine the rational inquiry on which the critique of those chapters rests. By calling it manipulation Belknap does not mean it is sophistry, however. His interpretation of *The Brothers Karamazov* follows structurally the basic features of the Christian teaching, according to which sinful, autonomous human reason must die in order to be enlightened by grace and to see the world as it truly is. Belknap's acceptance of this structure explains the ease with which he accepts Ivan's destruction.[17] Ivan insists on reason and is therefore justly damned. A dramatic ambiguity is resolved theologically. It also illuminates Belknap's agreement with the religious wing of traditional scholarship. Ivan's appeal, which Dostoevsky derives from sources like Belinsky, Herzen, and Bakunin, is merely bait for the unwary. In the contest between Christians and moderns, the Christians always win. In this regard the only difference between Belknap's interpretation and that of, say, Berdyaev or Kroeker, is Belknap's more sophisticated account of the mechanism of Ivan's undoing.

I agree with Belknap's claim that Dostoevsky undermines Ivan's argument rhetorically in order to justify the theology of Zosima and Alyosha. What I disagree with is his naive acceptance of this tactic and his corollary assumption that such a reading both legitimizes and settles the contest between Ivan and his Christian protagonists. In part this stance is due to Belknap's own ideological commitments. These cause him to travel the book's rhetorical trajectory in only one direction and thus to misunderstand the significance of the encounter as a whole. Dostoevsky may have attempted to defeat Ivan rhetorically in order to lead readers to embrace the Christianity of Zosima and Alyosha. But like all rhetorical victories, this one is neither definitive nor stable because it does not address the excesses of the Christian account that initially provoked Ivan's rebellion. Sooner rather than later those unaddressed excesses lead the reader to wonder whether Ivan might have been right after all.

I think the dilemma posed by the traditional interpretation of *The Brothers Karamazov* reaches its highest expression in the work of Albert Camus.[18] This does not mean that Camus attempts consciously to solve the dilemma or to supersede it. In fact, as interpretations go, *The Rebel* is in many ways completely conventional. Camus begins by accepting the standard scholarly parameters for interpreting *The Brothers Karamazov* and dutifully attempts to choose between Ivan's modernity and Alyosha and Zosima's Christianity. It is not this effort or the arguments in support of it that distinguish Camus' contribution. What sets Camus apart is rather his inconsistent and contradictory approval of *both* Ivan and Alyosha/Zosima, that is to say, his failure to make the required choice and his unwillingness or inability to cover up the resulting inconsistency. For instance, in the most extended discussion of *The Brothers Karamazov* in *The Rebel* Camus sides clearly with Alyosha and Zosima and against Ivan. Ivan's denial of the Christian teaching about transcendence and immortality leads him to a metaphysical rebellion

that is inherently nihilistic.[19] Yet in the concluding pages of the book Camus drops the charge of metaphysical rebellion altogether and argues instead, and in complete contradiction to his earlier account, that Ivan provides us with an image of “the most pure form of the movement of rebellion” – the desire that everyone be saved.[20] Here Ivan is said to be motivated not by a mad desire to annihilate reality but by “love” – for Camus the highest human motivation and the foundation of all true rebellion.[21] Moreover, in these pages Alyosha and Zosima, earlier Camus’ preferred exemplars of virtue and wisdom, are not mentioned at all, nor is the Christianity they represent. Ivan is now presented as the true rebel, who “finds no rest in God or in history.”[22]

Camus’ uneasy and contradictory assessments of *The Brothers Karamazov* teach us more about that book’s meaning than other, more consistent expositions. Why? What Camus recognized, or at least what his analysis demonstrates and what he seems to have felt intuitively, is that one cannot with a clear conscience choose either of the alternatives as Dostoevsky presents them. The reason one cannot do so is that both sides offers insights that make sense experientially but which, as formulated, entail other claims and consequences that one could not possibly accept. To give only one example, Ivan’s analysis of the suffering of children demonstrates how frightening and morally disordering the doctrines of divine providence and the final judgement in the afterlife are. This is a criticism one wants to affirm. But Ivan then goes on, in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor, to claim that our moral sensibilities are dangerous fictions that need to be managed by a ruling elite. Thus, the morality appealed to and relied upon in the former case is eliminated as illusory in the latter. And as we will see below, one encounters similar difficulties in the case of Zosima.

In response to this dilemma the most Camus manages in *The Rebel* is a contradictory affirmation of both accounts that leaves the central problematic unresolved. Nonetheless, there is

evidence in the book of Camus' dissatisfaction with the resulting position and a suspicion that the real problem has nothing to do with interpretive limitations but rather the manner in which the problematic is framed by Dostoevsky. For instance, usually Camus accepts Dostoevsky's contention that the contest between moderns and ancients is equivalent to the contest between moderns and Christians and that this contest is most clearly embodied in the confrontation between Ivan and Alyosha and Zosima.[23] In this reading modernity is a Christian heresy that derives its form and aspirations from the tradition but rejects its substance or meaning. However, there are moments when Camus argues that the quarrel between Christians and moderns is a red herring and that the real existential and philosophical opposition is between the ancients (understood as all traditions that antedate or are other than the Christian) on the one hand and moderns and Christians on the other. For instance, according to the argument of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the death of the Christian God marked definitively the beginning of the modern era. Yet Camus also writes of this event: "If it is false to say that from that day began the tragedy of contemporary man, neither is it true to say that was where it ended. On the contrary, this attempt indicates the highest point in a drama that began *with the end of the ancient world* and of which the final words have not yet been spoken."[24]

Camus' hunch in *The Rebel* that moderns and Christians share a common philosophical heritage and orientation in contrast to the ancients was an important step forward in his own analysis of modernity.[25] But it is a hunch that never led Camus to revisit *The Brothers Karamazov* in order to test its consequences for that book.[26] That is the ambition of the present chapter.

CRITICISM AND CONFIDENCE GAMES

If the seriousness of any critique is to be measured by the seriousness of the alternative it proposes and the persuasiveness of its argument, then I would argue that Dostoevsky's critique of Christianity is not serious.[27] Despite its sound and at times penetrating psychological insights, *The Brothers Karamazov* is essentially an apologetic work. The book's aim is to defend Christianity against its modern critics, and it does so deftly by employing all the various polemical and rhetorical devices common to this type of literature. Chief among these devices is the figure of Ivan Karamazov. To state the meaning of Ivan's rebellion rather bluntly: what begins as a serious and compelling criticism of the Christian theodicy ends up being a totalitarian revolt against all divinity and all morality about which there is nothing serious at all. Or put differently, Ivan's rebellion is a not a genuine alternative to Christianity, as Dostoevsky would like us to believe – it is a parody of such an alternative, whose purpose is to establish rhetorically the superiority of Christianity to *any* account that might be offered in its place. Dostoevsky's entire account is constructed to this end – to lead the reader to believe that this parody, this nihilistic rebellion, is all that remains if one rejects the Christian revelation.[28]

This exclusion of alternatives in *The Brothers Karamazov* is a characteristic feature of all total accounts. It is also a type of confidence game, though not a short con, but a long con in which "distrust is a stage to confidence."[29] The "defects" of the various positions it entails are not genuine; they are there to serve the totality of which they are parts. This means that despite the book's evangelical rhetoric and pious ambitions, it does not really matter where one finds oneself in the cycle of doubt and acceptance, belief and unbelief. Ivan is only a moment away from salvation; and Zosima is Ivan's alter ego. Moving between them is like traveling the circumference of circle where at each point one is equidistant to the center. The point is not to

doubt or believe open-endedly or transcendently but to suffer from *these* doubts, to experience *those* hopes, and to fear the loss of *that* meaning and therefore always to remain within the orbit of the center.

The various emotional and intellectual states involved in the account, the arguments and counter arguments, are merely staged events in a single totality designed to deflect one's attention from any reality that transcends it by satisfying those desires in controlled, homeopathic doses. Ivan is their perfect embodiment and therefore Dostoevsky's preferred and most effective evangelist. The chapters on rebellion and the Grand Inquisitor have won far more believers than those devoted to Alyosha and Zosima combined.[30] Of course, in the event that the dialectics, sophistic parodies, and moral posturing fail to silence the reader's intellectual curiosity, there is always the quiet menace of divine punishment in the background that brings real inquiry to an end. It is remarkable the extents to which modern readers still feel that threat and obey it without compulsion. It demonstrates just how much a part of our emotional and mental landscape this type of intellectual thuggishness has become.

There is a charming scene in the final chapter of Melville's *Confidence Man* in which a young con sells an old man, who is already in the process of being conned by a more senior confidence man, two security devices – a portable door lock and a money belt – to protect him against the wiles of the thieves and pickpockets who are ubiquitous on the steamboats of the Mississippi River. The devices are of course themselves a con because they do not provide the security they promise and in fact open the old man up to the potentially more injurious stratagems of the senior confidence man.[31] Nonetheless, the young con offers the old man a "Counterfeit Detector" gratis, a paper that indicates the typical signs of a forged banknote, as an expression of gratitude for his purchases.[32] The old man calls the boy a "public benefactor" and

proceeds to try out the Detector on a recently acquired three dollar note. To no avail. The sheer number and microscopic character of the features that need to be considered make the task effectively impossible. Judging one set of symbols by another is possible only if both sets of symbols are visible or intelligible. Failing that, any judgment might seem plausible. In the end the old man favors his banknotes, the invisible over the visible, as it were. But there is a still darker problem. As the ambiguity of the name of the device and the manner in which it was acquired suggest, the Detector's own genuineness is in question.[33] The *true* measure is supplied by a confidence man whose intentions are untrue. Once the mark takes the bait the game's outcome is virtually secure for he now judges the truth of what he sees by a measure whose unreliability is assured by its genesis.

In *The Brothers Karamazov* Ivan plays a similar role. The reader is offered his critique as a measure against which to test the Christian apocalypse for its truth. Ivan argues that the apocalypse is madness on the basis of what he can see or "the facts." However, by sticking solely to the facts – to the visible – he too soon becomes mad. How then do we measure him? By the Christian apocalypse! Escaping this circular reasoning is difficult because the rhetoric is designed to conceal from view all measures of truth other than its own.[34] But no crime is perfect. By following Ivan's initial lead and by clarifying these rhetorical techniques we may find a way out of the confidence game and beyond the restrictive totalities of modernity and Christianity.

IVAN'S REBELLION

There are many ways to gain people's assent. One way is to offer them the truth.[35] Ivan's critique of the Christian apocalypse is such an offer and it is only enhanced by the fact that Ivan is, as Dostoevsky asserts, a "sincere man" (BK, 759). Ivan's sincerity is apparent in several

ways, none more powerful than the moral repugnance he experiences when confronted with intellectual dishonesty. Even Father Zosima acknowledges in this regard that Ivan has "a lofty heart" and that he thinks and seeks "higher things" (BK, 61). The object of Ivan's repugnance is the Christian teaching about divine providence and the final judgment. His criticism of these teachings is a critique of Christian theodicy. Ivan claims that if it is true that the events of history move providentially toward their fulfillment, then the divinity that initiated and guides that movement is criminal when considered from the standpoint of human judgment. As such, it is unworthy of human love and respect. His criticism of the Christian teaching about the final judgment has a similar basis. For Ivan the final judgment is both unjust and barbaric.[36] It is unjust because punishing or rewarding people who act as they do under the sway of divine providence is senseless. It is barbaric because eternal punishment is not punishment but vengeance because it does not afford the possibility of betterment. Nor is it vengeance. Vengeance against people who could not act otherwise is not vengeance; it is brutality because no wrong has been committed.

In *The Rebel* Camus offers an interpretation of Ivan's critique of the Christian theodicy. He claims that "it is not the suffering of a child, which is repugnant in itself," that is the source of Ivan's rebellion, "but the fact that the suffering is not justified."[37] For Camus' Ivan "What is missing from the misery of the world, as well as from its moments of happiness, is some principle by which they can be explained."[38] Suffering and evil are repugnant in themselves, but what is really troubling is the absence of an *idea* to explain them. Here Camus follows Dostoevsky's lead by accepting the Christian problematic as the standard by which the success of all treatments of the problem of evil are to be measured and by which critic and believer alike are to be judged. Ivan accepts the Christian ambition but rejects its solution. He may not consider

God or providence to be adequate responses to suffering and evil, but they are the right *kind* of response. Ivan's critique is thus an in-house affair in which rebel and Christian vie with one another for supremacy by arguing the relative merits of their responses to the human desire for totality or completion. Camus summarizes this position: "To kill God and to build a Church are the constant and contradictory purpose of rebellion."[39] Camus is certainly right that Ivan ultimately settles on this type of account, but it is not the type he offers initially. It is in that space, that brief pause between critique and consummation, that we catch a glimpse of something beyond the totalities of the All and the Nothing that ultimately guide the analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Ivan's best criticism of the Christian teaching is not that it fails to offer an explanation of suffering and evil, but that it does. The suffering and evil he describes transcend us and thus cannot be exhausted by any human category. Of course, there are forms of suffering that are more easily accepted because they are intelligibly related to the order of life. The human nervous system is susceptible to pain, but most of this pain is necessary for the proper functioning of the organism. Without it not only would there be no endeavour, movement, and delight in life, but life itself would not exist. This type of pain we accept gladly as the price of our existence. But our feelings change when it comes to the hard cases Ivan describes. Why do children suffer? Why are they prey to the villainy of adults and to the caprices of fortune?

As we know, the Christian solution to the problem is that suffering makes sense or has a purpose when considered from the standpoint of God's design for the world. This explanation allows our outrage at suffering to exist but relieves it of its most dangerous affects by giving us confidence that reconciliation is possible and that its achievement does not depend on us. According to the teaching, one can be troubled by suffering because it often looks quite bad, but

one need not despair because the end of suffering can never be reached, as it lies elsewhere or in the other world. Without such confidence, the end of suffering is reachable but unbearable because it is without meaning. Some more optimistic proponents of modernity resist this final confrontation by expending all their energies alleviating suffering. Ivan's humanitarianism has a similar aim but is more differentiated and differently conceived. He does not avoid that final confrontation himself but for others he offers not cures and therapy but politics and illusions. Politics is power that keeps order, while illusions make human beings happy by preventing them from seeing that their lives are meaningless. But once Ivan starts down this path he cannot stop and must go to end of suffering, which is nothing. If the end of suffering is nothing then life itself must be nothing too. "Everything is lawful" (BK, 244). Once rebellion reaches this point of lucidity and becomes active it will not be satisfied with appearances and will seek to bring life to the final condition apparent in its nature but which is normally hidden by human weakness and dishonesty. Benevolence or humanitarianism can restrain this movement for only so long because benevolence is a human disposition with no support in nature. This is why Zosima says "if that feeling [of contact with other mysterious worlds] grows weak or is destroyed in you, the heavenly growth will die away in you. Then you will be indifferent to life and even grow to hate it" (BK, 299-300).

The end of human suffering may be nothing if "something" is defined as personal immortality in the Christian sense. The desire for nothing, however, is not the only human response to such awareness. Kindness, empathy and prudence are also possible. But for Ivan these responses are unlikely without a frank acknowledgement of suffering and evil and an intellectually honest assessment of their nature. Far from obscuring or eliminating our sense of transcendence and distorting our perception of suffering and evil, Ivan's critique is an attempt to

restore both by exposing the limiting character of the Christian teaching. Christianity softens our despair over suffering and so manages to elude its worst aspects by creating a totality in which all things are explained or accounted for. "All religions are built on this longing," says Ivan, "and I am a believer" (BK, 225). Because this final accounting is in God's hands, and because its fulfillment is thought to lie in the future, it appears transcendent because it is beyond human control. Ivan's critique, however, teaches us that if we look closer the Christian promise is within easy reach of the normal human desires for consolation and comfort and is therefore far less transcendent or mysterious than it initially appears. That is why Ivan, after declaring his desire for such a resolution, says "But what pulls me up here is that I can't accept that harmony" (BK, 225). Why not? What prevents him is not a preference for disharmony or a proud refusal to yield to the divine order, but his awareness that the Christian account of these things is not divine enough and perhaps even morally ugly.[40] This is why Ivan tells Alyosha that his criticism is "not blasphemy" (BK, 225). Blasphemy reduces what is high to what is low and therefore harms or denigrates it. Ivan harms nothing; rather, he resists blasphemy because he wants what is high to remain high even if it means confessing his ignorance and his lack of control.[41]

Ivan's objection to Christianity is a moral one. Christianity corrupts human judgment and eliminates transcendence in favor of a totality the main attraction of which is its satisfaction of the human feeling of self-importance. In this regard his criticism is as profound and effective as Nietzsche's in *The Anti-Christ*: "What sets *us* apart is not that we recognize no God, either in history or in nature or behind nature – but that we find that which has been reverenced as God not 'godlike' but pitiable, absurd, harmful, not merely an error but a *crime against life*... We deny God as God... If this God of the Christians were *proved* to us to exist, we should know even less how to believe in him."[42] For Nietzsche the rejection of the *Christian* God does not entail a

loss of *all* transcendence; nor does it require one to abandon all morality and truth. Indeed he argues that a judicious and impartial assessment of the Christian teaching demonstrates that it is the true source of modern nihilism.[43] "If one shifts the centre of gravity of life *out* of life into the 'Beyond' – into *nothingness* – one has deprived life as such of its centre of gravity. The great lie of personal immortality destroys all rationality, all naturalness of instinct – all that is salutary, all that is life-furthering, all that holds a guarantee of the future in the instincts henceforth excites mistrust. *So* to live that there is no longer any *meaning* in living: *that* now becomes the 'meaning' of life."[44] This is essentially Ivan's argument, though Ivan does not make the stronger claim that Christianity is itself nihilistic. When Ivan says that he could not accept the Christian higher harmony "*even if [he] were wrong*," he is making the same argument as Nietzsche only with a little more rhetorical flair. He means that this God is so morally and intellectually absurd that even if he existed he could not accept him (BK, 226). This type of absurdity characterizes all total accounts. The attempt to unify and to rationalize reality forces one to lie about one's experience because life includes much that is discordant and irrational. Ivan's most important insight is his recognition of the totalizing character of Christianity.

As with Nietzsche's later work, Ivan's critique holds out the promise of a genuine alternative to the Christian teaching, one that escapes the Christian presuppositions sufficiently to make possible a new, non-totalizing account of transcendence and the many ways human beings are related to it as well as a restoration of a non-sectarian morality. So why does Ivan not follow through? Why does he settle on a nihilistic totalitarianism that mirrors the worst features of the Christian teaching he has just criticized? And why, against his better judgment, does he accept that teaching's assertion that nihilism is the inevitable and inescapable consequence of its rejection?

Rhetorically Ivan's critique must be serious enough to gain the reader's assent but excessive enough not to be taken seriously. Moreover, its real meaning and consequences must be concealed, otherwise the apology would turn to real criticism and the rhetorical ambitions of the book would be compromised. But how to achieve this effect? Best to have Ivan do it himself, first by slowly retracting the Christian excesses that initially provoked his criticism and then by having him affirm the very nihilism Zosima argued would attend the denial of Christian truth, thus lending a prophetic air to his eventual destruction.[45] The former Dostoevsky accomplishes principally through Ivan's portrait of Jesus in the Inquisitor chapter and Alyosha's description of the life and teachings of Zosima; the latter is the work the Inquisitor himself and is embodied in the regime he offers as an alternative to the teachings of Jesus. I discuss both passages in turn.

§5. *Ivan's Undoing: The Grand Inquisitor*

The Grand Inquisitor's main argument is that Jesus is wrong because he prefers the loving response of the human heart and the freedom to choose between good and evil to the coercion implied by the devil's temptations of "miracle, mystery, and authority" (BK, 236). The Grand Inquisitor, however, knows that human beings need such things, so he proposes to build a political order based on them. This order anticipates the type of totalitarian rule that Dostoevsky saw prefigured in the revolutionaries of his day.[46] Yet despite the Inquisitor's emphasis on nature and the naturalness of the order he proposes, his account still comes off as an attempt to transform the world magically in comparison to the true order of reality represented by Jesus. The Inquisitor claims that human beings are slavish, selfish and weak. Only the very strong among them can bear the truth of the human condition (BK, 242-243). For these few there is philosophy and knowledge; for the rest there is force and fraud. The Inquisitor ameliorates the

condition of the many by accommodating their slavish nature rather than trying to improve it. He satisfies their desire for illusion and order by offering them miracle, mystery and authority. Real political and existential order requires illusion because human beings prefer spectacle and power to truth and freedom. According to the Inquisitor, this is the "ancient law" that Jesus ignores in favor of the revolutionary idea that human beings are free to "decide for [themselves] what is good and what is evil" (BK, 235).[47] But human beings do not want this freedom, says the Inquisitor. Freedom is a burden too heavy to bear and the responsibility to choose between good and evil leads only to "confusion," "suffering," and "unanswerable problems" (BK, 235-6). Best to have done with them as quickly as possible while continuing to retain the consoling features of the doctrine. Then "peacefully they will die, peacefully they will expire in Thy name, and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death" (BK, 240). The Inquisitor, like Machiavelli's Prince, knows that he must appear "all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion," and he knows that "nothing is more necessary than to appear to have this last quality."[48]

Yet all this is very odd coming from the Grand Inquisitor because he is Ivan's creation. Had Ivan wanted to offer a serious criticism of Christianity he would have begun by pointing out that miracle, mystery, and authority – all the things with which he saddles his Inquisitor – are in fact distinctively Christian phenomena. For instance, had this been his intention he would have said that there is no greater seduction to belief than the Christian miracle of resurrection, in which a dead man comes back to life in his body. He would have argued that there is no greater mystery than the Christian mystery of incarnation, which holds that a man is also God. And finally, he would have pointed out that there is no greater expression of coercion or authority than the Christian notion of a final judgment in which all those who refuse to believe these things will be punished for all eternity. In short, he would have said that all this begins with

Christianity, and that if it is bad, it is bad there first of all. He would also have said that all Christian and modern appropriations of these things are the responsibility of Christianity, and Christianity alone.

Everything the Inquisitor proposes is actually first done by Christians. The Inquisitor (and all moderns with him) merely appropriates the Christian miracle, mystery, and authority for his own purposes. The aim in both cases *is* a magical transformation of reality through the establishment of a totality. The reasonable accounts of love and choosing between good and evil are foreign to both teachings. And more important still is the fact that Ivan's criticism of the Christian theodicy makes it amply clear *that he knows this too*. Nonetheless, the Inquisitor's remarks succeed in shifting all the excesses to moderns or to bad Christians (Catholics/Jesuits) while the true, Orthodox Christianity of Zosima stands out as a beacon of sanity in the midst of the general madness.[49]

Why would Ivan say such things? Because the purpose of his rebellion is not to challenge Christianity seriously and fundamentally but to cast it in an ever more favorable light by parodying the alternatives to it, or more precisely, by claiming that there is only one such alternative: nihilism. This is what is most surprising about the Inquisitor's account. He is guilty of the very same totalizing that Ivan found most objectionable in the Christian teaching. Rather than contend with the "confusions" and "unanswered problems" of the world and acquire the virtues that encounter requires and makes possible, the Inquisitor opts against transcendence altogether and in favor of the easy oblivion of the Nothing. Of course, the world is not so ordered and thus Ivan comes to ruin. But what can he do? Even his most sincere critical efforts serve only to guarantee his destruction.

Ivan's nihilism is even more psychologically and dramatically implausible when we consider what he knows about the order of reality. For instance, Ivan knows just as much as Zosima about the importance of love, though he expresses some honest but benign reservations about the Christian idea that all human beings can and should be equally and without distinction, even the most violent and malicious among them (BK, 212). He understands that a greater or transcendent reality – including God – exists beyond his comprehension (BK, 224). And he also understands that one should not blaspheme that reality; he tells Alyosha explicitly that his own criticism of the Christian theodicy is not blasphemy (BK, 225). He knows that the process of life itself, the immediate, uninterpreted world of reality should take precedence over every idea, every meaning with which we seek to explain it, so he is not an ideologue (BK, 212). He knows that justice, though important and necessary in human life, is by itself insufficient. There are higher states of the soul – love, for example – to which the demands of justice are subordinate (BK, 225-6). He knows that all things are somehow connected, but not knowing how, he is inclined to reject all providential accounts that do injustice to the facts as we all know them, such as the fact that children do not deserve to suffer (BK, 224-5). Ivan, however, states this too mechanistically or geometrically, which rhetorically paves the way for Zosima's account of the connection between things as an order of love (BK, 299). And finally, Ivan knows that we should work to reduce human suffering, despite the tragic in human life and despite the fact that we are not be able to overcome it entirely (BK, 226). Given this understanding, Ivan's nihilism seems forced or artificial at best, much more a doctrinal requirement than the dramatic outcome of his own critical insights.

In one sense the Grand Inquisitor simply repeats the excesses of rebellion found in the preceding chapters, but with more rhetorical flourishes and more literary style. But here Ivan

concedes even more ground to the Christian account than in his earlier remarks. The demonic element is made even more explicit through his use of passages from John's apocalypse, and the Christian expectation of a miraculous transformation of life wherein everything will be set right is muted to the advantage of Christianity (BK, 232, 238). Of course, Ivan's criticism of divine providence remains; but it loses its force because that providence is now shorn of its excesses, precisely the excesses for which Ivan had earlier criticized it. In its place is a rather modest account of Jesus, whose primary role is to teach human beings that the essence of life lies in love and the free but weighty task of choosing between good and evil. This, of course, is both perfectly reasonable and perfectly inconsistent with the description of Christianity that preceded it, so much so that one wonders why in the world Ivan would even contest it. Reformulated this way, Ivan could accept the teachings of Jesus without reservation. The Christian assertion that Jesus demanded too much from human beings is thus merely a rhetorical device, the aim of which is to imply that here we are confronted with an ethical teaching so elevated that it is beyond the comprehension of unaided human reason (BK, 236). The rhetorical effect is that any teaching offered in its place involves a considerable *lowering* of standards. But again, this is not so. If the excesses of Ivan's rebellion are removed, what remains is something very much like this teaching. One must resist evil and love the good – but entertain no illusions about winning a complete victory either way. That, however, is not Dostoevsky's intention. The whole account aims to reinforce the standard Christian distinction between the natural man and the spiritual man, the man without a revelation and the man with one. And, as always, the man without a revelation is forever letting himself off too easily. He is not really serious about good and evil and human salvation, though he may be concerned with that pathetic thing called human happiness. Dostoevsky adds or subtracts the excesses of the Christian doctrines as necessary to

achieve the desired rhetorical effect. But in the end those excesses are always apparent because they are inherent in the teaching itself. This is most clearly seen in Zosima.

§6 *Subduing the Whole World: Zosima' Christianity*

Two short chapters after we learn about Ivan's rebellion and its consequences, Dostoevsky offers us their counter image in Zosima. This placement is intentional. Dostoevsky wrote book 6 of *The Brothers Karamazov* as a "reply to all [the] atheistic propositions" of the preceding chapters. However, he warns that this reply is "not a direct point for point answer to the propositions previously expressed ... but an oblique one."[50] Rather than arguments, with Zosima Dostoevsky gives us a human being "completely opposite to the world view expressed" in Ivan and the Inquisitor (BK, 762). One would think that one argument deserves another in a contest of this type, but Dostoevsky excuses his Christian protagonist from answering Ivan directly. Addressed on its own terms Ivan's argument may be unanswerable; better then to shift the ground away from arguments altogether to forms of life.[51] Though this strategy runs the risk of being interpreted as evasion, it also has the benefit of confirming the standard Christian teaching that natural human reason unenlightened by revelation is blind.[52] More important, it creates the impression that the real antidote to Ivan's excesses is wisdom and that wisdom is most perfectly expressed in the Christianity of Zosima. Zosima is nothing if not an exemplar of good judgment and wise counsel – modest, prudent, loving, generous, and insightful. By comparison Ivan is proud, clever, rational, self-centered, and brutal. Ivan's wise criticism of the Christian theodicy leads him to forfeit morality and to become unwise. But because faith is not wisdom and because wisdom is necessary both for life and for responding to modern excesses

like Ivan's, Dostoevsky adds wisdom to Zosima's faith and allows the objects of faith which are unwise to recede into the background.

Ivan and Zosima are matched throughout *The Brothers Karamazov*. They see similar things and are similarly troubled by life's injustices, particularly the cruelty done to children and the social hierarchies that justify that cruelty and exacerbate human suffering generally (BK, 294, 298, 295). But whereas Ivan's insight leads him to revolt against reality in an effort to correct creation, Zosima's issues in a wisdom that accepts human partiality and sin without giving way either to cynicism or to moral indifference. Here we have a complete reversal of the initial critical situation. Ivan is now the totalitarian who attempts to change reality magically through force while Zosima is a wise Christian whose acceptance of and openness to life's mystery frees him from this totalitarian ambition and from the resentment on which it rests.

Ivan rejects the Christian teachings about divine providence, the incarnation, and the final judgment because they distort human experience in ways that are morally objectionable and intellectually dishonest. As appealing or comforting as these teachings may be, believing them does not make one wise. However, rather than cultivate this wisdom Ivan instead advocates a totalitarian regime constructed on the very principles he initially rejects as Christian sophistry.[53] Zosima's Christian wisdom is presented as a repudiation of these principles in favor of the free decision of the heart and mind advocated by Jesus in Ivan's poem. Whereas Ivan demands retribution as a condition of human harmony,[54] Zosima claims that we "must shun [the desire for vengeance] above all things" (BK, 300). Whereas Ivan recommends force as a means to achieve moral and political order,[55] Zosima argues that the conscience cannot be coerced and that regimes built on such coercion are unstable and will ultimately come to ruin (BK, 297-298). Whereas Ivan offers rewards and punishments as necessary incentives to action – even eternal

rewards and punishments – Zosima tells us to "seek no reward, for great is [our] reward on this earth" (BK, 240, 301). In other words, whereas Ivan conceives order as a construct to be imposed on a world that is at least passively resistant to such efforts, Zosima's wisdom reveals an order that is inherent in reality and apparent in the very movements of life.

Expressed in this way Zosima's account seems comparable to ancient wisdom. Or is it? For the ancients virtue is its own reward. But Zosima speaks and acts as he does because he has assurances. Those assurances are difficult to see because they are more modestly expressed than is customary in orthodox doctrine. Most often Zosima speaks of love, of the freedom to choose between good and evil, and of contact with "other mysterious worlds," all of which suggest an experience of transcendence without further human claim or totalizing expectation (BK, 299). However, once this groundwork is laid and the impression has been created the reasonable account gradually gives way to more conventional expressions of the Christian teachings. While Zosima advocates humility, counsels against the desire for rewards, and repudiates vengeance, he also says that humble love will "subdue the whole world," that "Paradise" awaits the righteous, and that those who reject the Christian teaching will be punished eternally without hope of betterment (BK, 298, 302). Zosima's anticipation of these outcomes does not merely raise the problem of hypocrisy, but compromises the moral value of his teachings fundamentally. To state the matter straightforwardly, humble love employed for the purpose of conquest is not humble; the refusal of some rewards in anticipation of receiving even greater ones is not noble; and forgoing vengeance while receiving assurances that one's enemies will suffer eternally for their wrongdoing is not magnanimous (BK, 302). None of these are real wisdom, because real wisdom is character acquired through engagement with the permanence of the real world. Zosima's wisdom is a temporary disposition based on faith and is designed to hold down the

baser desires in anticipation of a future when they will be satisfied more completely. His talk about goodness and morality is therefore more complicated than it appears because the measure of an action changes depending on the world in relation to which it is judged. This dialectical way of thinking is precisely what provokes Ivan's initial criticism of the Christian theodicy – and Zosima teaches him the real price of his rebellion.

Zosima's concluding reflections on the nature of hell are a graphic depiction of the outcome of Ivan's rebellion – not just the earthly torments of his nihilism but his eternal damnation. It is a set up, of course. Ivan's "*even if*" is what makes it possible. As we have seen, Ivan says that he would not accept the Christian teaching "*even if [he] were wrong*," not even if heaven after the whole thing had been made plain to him (BK, 226). As in *The Antichrist*, this remark is obviously a rhetorical device that Ivan employs for the purpose of emphasis. It means simply that the Christian divinity makes no sense and that Christianity's teachings about providence and the final judgment are so absurd as to be impossible to accept. However, in the context of the Christian apocalypse Ivan's words mean precisely the opposite of what they do in the world of common sense – they mean "I *know* I am wrong but my overweening pride will not allow me to accept the fact." At best they express a type of bad faith. At worst, a demonic resistance to the truth. Whichever the case, they allow Zosima to anticipate imaginatively Ivan's eternal damnation and to paint a vivid picture of the end of all intellectual inquiry that attempts to move beyond the Christian totality.

Zosima's account brings out very clearly the element of force or coercion involved in the Christian teaching: if what we say is not accepted, even though we offer no explanation of it, you "will burn in the fire of [your] own wrath forever" (BK, 302). Why should this be so? Why could one not simply ask a question, ask for a better explanation, even in the afterlife? As with all after

life stories, this one is based on a conception of life as it is experienced here and now. It reveals a type of human being who, despite pious speech and elevated humanity, is in fact a brutish character who would see all those who disagree with his account of human life and some of its most perplexing and enigmatic features – love, death, suffering, God, the nature of the soul, truth – damned for eternity.

CONCLUSION

Ivan's critique raises some difficult but honest questions concerning the Christian teachings about divine providence and the afterlife and their tendency to totalize our experience of reality. Far from being nihilistic, these questions open up the possibility of reflecting on our experiences of divinity and mortality without the mediating influence of either modernity or Christianity, or indeed of any tradition. But in the end the opportunity is lost. Dostoevsky answers Ivan's criticism through the Grand Inquisitor and Zosima. Both teach us that these Christian doctrines only appear totalizing because Ivan refuses to understand and practice the ethic of suffering love on which they rest. Of course, that response is merely the same totalizing impulse Ivan had identified once more, only in a gentler, milder form. Its recurrence in the analysis is instructive as to the nature of all total accounts and the manner in which best to respond to them. There always comes a point at which discussion is no longer possible and one chooses instead to make the account an object of analysis. That inability to achieve understanding through dialogue is a genuine loss, but it also warns us not to squander our intellectual resources. As Camus teaches us, beyond the endless rhetorical tricks and tired formulas there are real alternatives to be explored and other, perhaps more interesting conversations to be had.

[1] James P. Scanlan, "Dostoevsky's Arguments for Immortality," *Russian Review* 59 (2000); Ellis Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: A Study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971); Nikolai Berdyaev, *Dostoievsky* (New York: Sheed & Ward Inc,, 1934), 188; P. Travis Kroeker and Bruce Ward, *Remembering the End: Dostoevsky as Prophet to Modernity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001); Vasily Rozanov, *Dostoevsky and the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972); Jacques Catteau, "The Paradox of the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor in The Brothers Karamazov" in *Dostoevsky: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984); Stephen Bullivant, "A House Divided Against Itself: Dostoevsky and the Psychology of Unbelief," *Literature and Theology* 22 (2008); Anna Kaladiouk, "On 'Sticking to the Facts' and 'Understanding Nothing': Dostoevsky and the Scientific Method," *Russian Review* 65 (2006); Victor Terras, *A Karamazov Companion: Commentary on the Genesis, Language, and Style of Dostoevsky's Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981); Valentina A. Vetlovskaya, "Alyosha Karamazov and the Hagiographic Hero" in *Dostoevsky: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984).

[2] Berdyaev, *Dostoievsky*, 188.

[3] Vetlovskaya, "Alyosha Karamazov and the Hagiographic Hero", 288.

[4] Kroeker and Ward, *Remembering the End: Dostoevsky as Prophet to Modernity*, 23-24.

[5] Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: A Study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor*, 237.

[6] Rozanov, *Dostoevsky and the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*; Vetlovskaya, "Alyosha Karamazov and the Hagiographic Hero", 288; D.H. Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), 233-41.

[7] Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism*, 233-41.

[8] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Complete Letters* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988), Volume Five, to N.A. Lyubimov, June 11, 1879.

[9] An interesting feature of Dostoevsky scholarship is that many of the most vigorous defences of the Christian interpretation of *The Brothers Karamazov* are undertaken with very little reference to the chapters devoted to Alyosha and Zosima, the two key representatives of this tradition in the book. See, for instance, Berdyaev, *Dostoievsky*, 205. Berdyaev's explanation echoes Alyosha's own interpretation of Ivan's poem and helps to explain this approach to the text: "'Your poem is in praise of Jesus – not in blame of him – as you meant it to be'" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976a), 241. Subsequent in-text references refer to this translation.

[10] Dostoyevsky, *Complete Letters*, to N.A. Lyubimov, May 10, 1879.

[11] Robert Belknap, "The Rhetoric of an Ideological Novel" in *Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, 1800-1914*, ed. William Mills Todd III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978).

[12] Belknap, "The Rhetoric of an Ideological Novel", 176.

[13] Belknap, "The Rhetoric of an Ideological Novel", 177.

[14] D.H. Lawrence also recognizes this technique in Dostoevsky. He writes: “Ivan need not have been so tragic and satanic. He made a discovery about men, which was due to be made. It was the rediscovery of a fact which was known universally almost till the end of the eighteenth century, when the illusion of perfectibility of men, of all men, took hold of the imagination of the civilized nations” (Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism*, 233-41). Lawrence is right about the diabolical excesses Dostoevsky adds to Ivan’s account, but he is too accepting and uncritical of the political ones.

[15] Belknap, "The Rhetoric of an Ideological Novel", 201.

[16] “This paper treats the ways in which Dostoevsky’s social and ideological intentions interacted with certain of his sources in the genesis of Ivan Karamazov and Ivan’s Grand Inquisitor. These intentions have eluded some of the best literary minds that have written about Dostoevsky – at least these minds differ so sharply that they cannot all be right” (Belknap, "The Rhetoric of an Ideological Novel", 173).

[17] Belknap, "The Rhetoric of an Ideological Novel", 201.

[18] Camus was one of Dostoevsky’s most serious and perceptive readers. His encounter with Dostoevsky began in the later thirties while Camus was a student at the Lycée in Algiers. The first fruit of that encounter was a theatrical production of Copeau’s *The Brothers Karamazov* for the Théâtre du Travail, which Camus had founded in 1936. It was followed by a series of published discussions of Dostoevsky’s works in books and essays such as *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), “Helen’s Exile” (1946), *The Rebel* (1952), and *The Possessed* (1959).

[19] Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Knopf, 1954), 60.

[20] Camus, *The Rebel*, 304.

[21] Camus, *The Rebel*, 304.

[22] Camus, *The Rebel*, 304.

[23] Ron Srigley, *Albert Camus’ Critique of Modernity* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 48-80.

[24] Camus, *The Rebel*, 102, emphasis added.

[25] Srigley, *Albert Camus' Critique of Modernity*, 81-126.

[26]Oddly, Camus does better in an earlier analysis of this problem – in his essay "Helen's Exile." Though there he is not discussing *The Brothers Karamazov* explicitly, Camus makes it clear that the excesses of Dostoevsky's "buffoons" stems from their unwillingness to face their human condition. And he traces that unwillingness back to a desire for personal immortality: "Ulysses, on Calypso's island, is given the choice between immortality and the land of his fathers. He chooses this earth, and death with it. Such simple greatness is foreign to our minds today. Others will say that we lack humility, but the word, all things considered, is ambiguous. Like Dostoevsky's buffoons who boast of everything, rise up to the stars and end by flaunting their shame in the first public place, we simply lack the pride of the man who is faithful to his limitations—that is, the clairvoyant love of his human condition." Here there is no lingering hesitation that the Christian teachings about divine providence and the afterlife are necessary conditions of moral order and correctives to human rebellion (Albert Camus, "Helen's Exile" in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Thody (New York: Vintage Books, 1970)). An equally clear analysis can be found in Camus' early work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

[27] This interpretation challenges fundamentally Dostoevsky's own assessment of his accomplishment: "Even in Europe such force of atheistic *expression* [as exists in the Inquisitor and Ivan's rebellion] does not now exist *nor did it ever*. Accordingly, it is not like a child that I believe in Christ and profess faith in him, but rather, my *hosanna* has come through the great *crucible of doubt*" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks (1860-81)* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976b), 175).

[28] For reasons that should be partially clear now and will become clearer below, I disagree fundamentally with Bakhtin's celebration of the genuinely polyphonic character of Dostoevsky's book: "Dostoevsky was capable of representing someone else's idea, preserving its full capacity to signify as an idea, while at the same time also preserving a distance, neither confirming the idea nor merging it with his own expressed ideology. The idea, in his work, becomes the subject of artistic representation, and Dostoevsky himself became a great artist of the idea." Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 130.

[29] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 109. Equally apropos is the confidence man's assertion "That from evil comes good" (*ibid*.).

[30] Berdyaev writes in this regard: "Zosima and Alyosha, in whom [Dostoevsky] gave voice to his positive theories, cannot be numbered among his best-drawn characters; Ivan Karamazov is infinitely more strong and convincing, and his very darkness is pierced by a shaft of strong light" (Berdyaev, *Dostoievsky*, 205).

[31] Immediately after the boy has departed the senior confidence man – the Cosmopolitan – asks: "Pray, will you put your money in your belt tonight?" (Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 303).

[32] Such Detectors were in common usage in the period. However, given the sheer number of notes and issuing banks, these documents were often book-length texts and were effectual in the hands of all but a few experts. Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[33] Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States*, 325-330.

[34] For a serious though unsuccessful attempt, see Albert Camus, *The Rebel*.

[35] This is the strategy employed by Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

[36] The extent of the barbarism is apparent in the fact that Ivan has the Virgin Mary plead with God for mercy on the souls of the dead in Hell that their suffering might be relieved. God grants them a small reprieve and justifies his hardness by pointing to the wounds on the hands and feet of Jesus (*BK*, 228).

[37] Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 101.

[38] Camus, *The Rebel*, 101.

[39] Camus, *The Rebel*, 101.

[40] For an example of this type of reading, see Kroeker and Ward, *Remembering the End: Dostoevsky as Prophet to Modernity*, see especially Chapter 1.

[41] "'I am a bug, and I recognize in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is'" (BK, 224).

[42] F.W. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 47.

[43] "Nihilist and Christian: they rhyme, and do not merely rhyme..." Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 58.

[44] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 53.

[45] Ivan agrees with Zosima that meaning in existence depends on a belief in God and immortality, thus anticipating the undoing of his own critique. See *The Brothers Karamazov*, 60.

[46] See Belknap, "The Rhetoric of an Ideological Novel" for a discussion of these figures.XXX

[47] D.H. Lawrence writes: “And Ivan need not have been so tragic and satanic. He had made a discovery about men, which was due to be made. It was the rediscovery of a fact which was known universally almost until the end of the eighteenth century, when the illusion of the perfectibility of men, of all men, took hold of the imagination of the civilized nations” D.H Lawrence, "Preface to Dostoevsky's The Grand Inquisitor" in *Dostoevksy: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. Rene Welleck (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962) Lawrence spots the excessive rhetoric of Dostoevsky’s account but concedes too much ground to the Inquisitor’s assessment of humanity’s moral sensibilities.

[48] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), Book 18.

[49] Alyosha responds to Ivan’s poem by saying “That’s not the idea of [freedom] in the Orthodox Church... That’s Rome, and not even the whole of Rome, it’s false – those are the worst of Catholics, the Inquisitors, the Jesuits!” (BK, 241).

[50] Dostoyevsky, *Complete Letters*, to E.N. Lebedev, November 8, 1879.

[51] In a letter to his editor Dostoevsky writes: “My hero [Ivan] chooses a theme I consider irrefutable: the senselessness of children’s suffering, and develops from it the absurdity of all historical reality” Dostoyevsky, *Complete Letters*, to E.N. Lebedev, May 10, 1879.

[52] Terms like “intellect alone,” “reason alone,” and “science” understood as being antithetical to the “spiritual world” are ubiquitous in Zosima’s speech (BK, 297, 294, 292).

[53] “Miracle, mystery, and authority” (BK, 236).

[54] “I must have retribution, or I will destroy myself” (BK, 225).

[55] “They will tremble impotently before our wrath, their minds will grow fearful” (BK, 239).