

## Nietzsche and Dostoevsky: Creating and Resolving Existential Despair

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In this essay, I want to show that Nietzsche's physio-psychological investigation of human existence is a necessary move in being able to properly assent to moral assertions, but if considered solitarily, the inquiry is insufficient as a full answer to the existential despair that Nietzsche's analysis brings about.<sup>1</sup> For a full account of the human predicament, I would like to turn to Dostoevsky to complete the analysis and give us a sufficient solution to existential despair. In addition, I would like to show that existential despair, interpreted as suffering, is a necessary condition in order to attain an existential resolution that bridges the gulf in human nature.

### The Death of God and Nietzsche's Genealogy of Moral Valuations

In order to assent to moral assertions in a Nietzschean sense, we have to first understand why it is necessary to overhaul the traditional

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this essay served as the final paper for a class, "Nietzsche and Dostoevsky," taught by Professor Mark Wrathall at BYU in the fall semester of 2004. I want to attribute most of the technical analysis to him, and, in particular, the distinction between the demythologization and demagicalization of religion as elucidated in this essay.

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moral dogmas of Christendom. In this section of the essay, I will try to establish the necessity of such a move.

Nietzsche suggests that we find ourselves in this world no longer capable of believing the historical accident of the traditional moral teachings and theories of Christendom because our tastes have changed over time. Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* suggests that “what is now decisive against Christianity is our tastes, no longer our reasons.”<sup>2</sup> The Nietzschean doctrine of the “death of God”<sup>3</sup> has made us realize the ungroundedness of the traditional Christian moral valuations that underpin our countries and societies, and opens the door for a complete overhaul of the way we view the world. The recognition of the ungroundedness of our traditional moral valuations, however, necessarily leads to existential despair, anxiety, and nihilism, as we recognize the lack of any meaning and purpose in our lives. Realizing the necessity of this lack, Nietzsche’s physio-psychological analysis of human existence allows for an existential starting point to reconsider moral valuations as affectionate attunements to the world and create “new tables of what is good.”<sup>4</sup> As such, this kind of psychological analysis provides a study of human behavior completely detached from prior metaphysical explanations of Christendom which seem to amount to nothing more than merely a cover-up and a “subtle nuance”<sup>5</sup> of the real root cause of the human predicament, which is grounded in our passionate affections to the world, and not in the detached theories of Christendom. “The change in general taste is more powerful than opinions. Opinions, along with all proofs, refutations, and the whole intellectual masquerade, are merely symptoms of the change in taste and most certainly not what they still often supposed to be, its causes.”<sup>6</sup> The root cause, according to Nietzsche, can be found at the most fundamental level of human existence in worldly affections. “Buddhism and Christianity may have owed their origin and above all their sudden

<sup>2</sup> *The Gay Science* §132.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, §125 of *The Gay Science*.

<sup>4</sup> *The Gay Science* §335.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* §39.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

spread to a tremendous collapse and disease of the will.”<sup>7</sup> That is, for Nietzsche, the will is the most fundamental connection to our tastes, passions, and affections—that which ultimately drives us—and not the swindle of religion and its derivative philosophical explanations of morality. “What the philosophers called a ‘rational philosophy for morality’ and tried to supply was, seen in the right light, merely a scholarly variation of the common faith in the prevalent morality.”<sup>8</sup>

### Refuting Platonism

Nietzsche’s humanist method of analysis is a necessary move in properly assenting to moral assertions because it purges the moral valuation tables of their gratuitous dogmatic origins. As such, Nietzsche’s physio-psychological investigation of human existence provides a powerful refutation of the detached philosophical dogma of Platonism which has inhibited Christian theology for so long. In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche suggests that “Christianity is Platonism for the ‘people’.”<sup>9</sup> “Plato’s invention of the pure spirit and the good as such,” in the end, amounts to nihilism because of its intrinsic denial of the sensory world in pursuit of the infinite. “The fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is the faith in opposite values.”<sup>10</sup> This opposition is the age-old dichotomy between the sensuous world and a suprasensory heaven. The philosophical hero, motivated by inverted<sup>11</sup> Platonic-Christian moral valuations, wills to deny his passionate side that connects him with the world, and exclusively

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. §347.

<sup>8</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil* §186.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. §2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> This inversion refers to the historical prevalence of the Judeo-Christian moral values (slave morality) in the West that not only replaced the old aristocratic values (master morality), but also revalued and inverted the desirable and good values of the latter as undesirable and evil under the Judeo-Christian morality. See *On the Genealogy of Morals*, particularly “Essay Three.”

affirms his lofty side that supposedly connects him in some mystical way with Plato's heaven. In order to arrive at a correct analysis of the human predicament, the dichotomy between the sensory world and a suprasensory heaven must be brought down all together, and we have to rebuild our "new [moral] tables of what is good" by examining the human condition in terms of "the will to power," the constant overcoming of constraining conditions, because "in real life it is only a matter of strong and weak wills."<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche's system of analysis consists in a reduction of human behavior to the physio-psychological development of the basic forces of the will to power—a refusal of recourse to anything suprasensuous. This, at first, may seem like a reversal of the Platonic position to affirm a suprasensory heaven, but if viewed as merely a negation of the one realm, we are left with the other, namely, the negative valuation of the sensory world. In order to escape this kind of Schopenhauerian despair, we must erase the entire valuation based on this false dichotomy between two worlds and start over. When interpreting Nietzsche as a refutation of Platonism, we must do so in the right context. As Richard Howey points out, "Nietzsche describes his own philosophy as a 'reversal of Platonism.'" But not from within the epistemological confines of Platonism, but from outside the valuation. He continues, "Platonism is guilty of having made Being into something static and permanent—namely 'idea' in conformity with the limitations of the human epistemological situation."<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, according to Heidegger, suggests that Being must be grasped as Becoming. "For both Jaspers and Heidegger, Nietzsche's notion of Being is fully intelligible only in relation to the notions of the Will to Power."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, according to Nietzsche, we have to purge our moral valuations from their dogmatic roots, rebuild our tables of moral valuations, and no longer give any recourse to the historical accident of Christendom. But now that we have recognized that any moral valuation table is going to have some philosophy at its core, how do we

<sup>12</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil* §21.

<sup>13</sup> Howey 55.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

determine which doctrine will serve as a proper foundation for our moral valuations table without recourse to any dogmatic propositions?

### Nietzsche's Solution

It must be noted here that Nietzsche is trying to combat nihilism, not promote it. Because our moral valuations have been purged from their Judeo-Christian roots, and because of the existential shock this purging produces, we now face a grave danger of losing our taste for the belief in any dignified ideals whatsoever. What is to fill this void that has now made life inherently meaningless? We still have a need for meaning and purpose in our lives—we cannot pretend not to need it. The fact that these traditional roots of our moral valuations turn out to be nothing more than a historical accident does not change the inherent need in our nature. Nonetheless, Nietzsche is unable to get us out of despair because his solution gives insufficient weight and attention to the longing for something infinite in human nature. Nietzsche seems to want us to embrace the gulf in human nature and sustain us in the contradiction between our desire for something infinite and something lasting in this world, but somehow not in despair. Nietzsche suggests that by embracing the contradiction and by constantly overcoming the constraints of life, by submersing ourselves in life itself, we can learn to act meaningfully in a world that inherently lacks meaning and purpose. For Nietzsche, dealing with the fact that human existence is essentially and necessarily only preservation and enhancement—having a passionate attachment to the world, but also transcending current constraints—becomes a matter of existential perspective, depending on the form of life we choose.<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche suggests that we must “give style to [our] character,” and “attain satisfaction with [ourselves]; whether it be by means of this or that poetry and art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, §3, §290, and §303 of *The Gay Science*.

<sup>16</sup> *The Gay Science* §290.

## Nietzsche's Shortcomings

In this essay, I claim that the longing for something infinite inherent in human beings is swallowed up in Nietzsche's solution by life itself and is translated into something inherently finite. Nietzsche clearly acknowledges man's need to satisfy his will to enhance his life and transcend constraining conditions. But given the "death of God" and the genealogy of our moral valuations, Nietzsche has no choice but to translate this need into a mundane solution. I argue that Nietzsche's exemplary appeals to art, poetry, friendships, laughter, and dynamic forms of life to fill the human need for something infinite in this world turn out to be inadequate; they eventually become unsustainable when we fully unpack Nietzsche's answer. Not in and of themselves do they become unsustainable, but because of the limited fulfillment they can bring to our infinite longing for something lasting in this world, if they are viewed in the Nietzschean context of temporality and timeliness. Nietzsche succeeds in getting us to laugh at morality,<sup>17</sup> but leaves us feeling deficient in the process. Rather than offering us a complete solution, Nietzsche defers our despair provisionally in virtue of a complete submersion in life itself and by appropriating our need for preservation and enhancement. Because the eternal longing as such has been shown to be a historical accident, this view becomes, according to Nietzsche, unnecessary and obstructive baggage to life itself. "When we hear these beautiful words," Nietzsche says, "we have the ugliest suspicions. What we find in them is merely an expression—and a masquerade—of a profound weakening, of weariness, of old age, of declining energies."<sup>18</sup> The answer here is that Christianity, interpreted as Platonism for the people, has become a theoretical excuse to evade a life that was insuperable for the weak willed. Christianity is the story told in response to the desire to make life beautiful for the "burnt children."<sup>19</sup> All Nietzsche has done, however, is rename the ideal side of human nature "enhancement"—the overcoming of current constraints

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, §1, and §107 of *The Gay Science*.

<sup>18</sup> *The Gay Science* §377.

<sup>19</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil* §59.

and conditions. We are left with a completely secularized view of life and a limited response to the ideal side of our nature. Therefore, Nietzsche's physio-psychological view is a necessary first move to get us into existential despair. By itself, however, it is not sufficient to give a full account of the complexities of the human condition—it requires more.

### Nietzsche as Demythologizing Christianity

Nietzsche appeals to constant overcoming, that is, transcending of current constraints and enhancing one's life, as the proper response to our longing for something infinite, something lasting in this world. If an earthly life and Christianity indeed comprise an insuperable existential dichotomy, then Nietzsche is right, and we ought to perpetually improvise the best we can without Christianity.<sup>20</sup> We must, however, keep in mind that the Christianity Nietzsche critiques is the traditional magical view of Christianity—Platonism for the people—which ascribes supernatural causes and metaphysical explanations to our religious experiences. Since this kind of Christianity necessitates a rejection of the world in which we live, it makes living happily in this world impossible. Nietzsche's method of analysis is so confrontational and offensive to moderate Christians because of the nature of the radical views of Christian asceticism—“the miraculous feat of an inversion of values, thanks to which life on earth has acquired a novel and dangerous attraction for a couple of millennia,” and as such, began the “slave rebellion in morals.”<sup>21</sup> In the process of opposing asceticism, however, Nietzsche demythologizes all of Christianity in a sweeping generalization and leaves no room for it in a solution to existential despair. That is, he purges all of the religious propositions held by Christians from their literal truth value by reducing them to metaphorical claims. In doing so, Nietzsche's Christianity shows up as a masquerade and a cover-up explanation for something very human at the core that it

<sup>20</sup> See §303 of *The Gay Science*.

<sup>21</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil* §195.

seeks to evade. We have to keep in mind that Nietzsche is forced into this position by his premises of the “death of God,” the exposure of the genealogy of our moral valuations, and the reduction of the view of man as a rational being to a historical accident. Nietzsche has, and I think erroneously so, deprived any philosophical or religious explanation which appeals to metaphysics or ontology as capable of any existential persuasion or significance.

### Dostoevsky’s Demagicalization of Christianity

I would like to suggest that the way out of existential despair does involve Christianity as a desired form of life. However, as shown previously, it cannot be a demythologized interpretation or a magical view. In this section of the essay, I would like to consider Dostoevsky’s interpretation of Christianity that not only allows for proper integration with our experience of the world, but also makes it possible to overcome the contradiction in human nature altogether.

The chapter “The Grand Inquisitor” in *The Brothers Karamazov* describes in detail Dostoevsky’s notion and rejection of demythologized religion. As such, it is embodied by the Grand Inquisitor himself who, having lost his own faith, now exploits faith to cause desired behavior in those whom he governs. In addition, Dostoevsky rejects the traditional magical view—the view that, as discussed earlier, caused Nietzsche’s revolt and vehement opposition. Interestingly, the Grand Inquisitor attributes the magical view of Christianity to the incarcerated Jesus, which betrays not only his cynical prejudice and interpretation of who Christ was and what he set out to do, but also the Inquisitor’s secret—namely, his conditioned disbelief in God.<sup>22</sup> Seeing the infeasibility of the magical view, the Inquisitor turned to the only other interpretation of Christianity he could conceive of: a fully demythologized understanding of Christianity—reducing all religious propositions to metaphors and psychological phenomena. With that kind of “superior understanding” over and above the Christian peasants and masses, the Inquisitor

<sup>22</sup> See *The Brothers Karamazov* 261.

suggests that “we shall convince them that they will only become free when they resign their freedom to us, and submit to us.”<sup>23</sup> Christ, in turn, listens silently without defending himself, “apparently not wishing to contradict anything,” which greatly upsets the Inquisitor.<sup>24</sup> As an illustration of the worldly significance of the kind of religious experiences Dostoevsky envisages, Christ “suddenly . . . approaches the old man in silence and gently kisses him on his bloodless, ninety-year old lips.”<sup>25</sup> The kiss is “the whole answer.”<sup>26</sup> Dostoevsky shows in this chapter that demythologizing Christianity in response to the erroneous magical view of religion is insufficient and thwarts the resolution we are looking for. The kiss is distinct from both demythologized Christianity and magical Christianity; it is the demagicalized view of Christianity that gives a conclusive description of the way out of existential despair.

Dostoevsky’s interpretation of Christianity demagicalizes religious experiences without demythologizing them, and reintroduces Christianity as a plausible answer to existential despair. Demagicalization is a subtle alternative to the traditional dichotomy between assenting to religious assertions as either completely metaphysical or as completely mundane. Demagicalization leaves the religious beliefs themselves intact, but suspends with the heretofore necessary need for a metaphysical explanation. That is, it suspends with the notion that there is some magical causation between the sensuous world and the suprasensuous world in virtue of which we can have religious experiences. In Dostoevsky’s view, demagicalized Christianity is the answer to our inherent longing for something infinite in this world as opposed to Nietzsche’s purely humanist, purely physio-psychological solution. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Elder Zosima suggests that “one cannot prove anything here, but it is possible to be convinced.”<sup>27</sup> That is, proof, evidence, and rational deductions

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 258.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 262.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov* 56.

become superfluous in virtue of “the experience of active love.”<sup>28</sup> “The more you succeed in loving,” Zosima continues, “the more you’ll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul . . . try to love your neighbors actively and tirelessly.”<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche was right by suggesting that a true indictment of the human condition will show our passionate affections to the world. What he failed to see was that Christianity itself can be existentialized so that it becomes possible to explain Christianity in terms of life itself—thereby fully doing justice to man’s longing for something infinite. “The essence of religious feeling has nothing to do with reasoning, or transgressions, or crimes, or atheism; it is something quite different and always will be. . . . The important thing, though, is that you will find it most quickly and clearly in [the] heart.”<sup>30</sup>

### Dostoevsky’s Solution

Now that we have found a way to fully affirm man’s lofty side, we must find a way to bridge the gap back to our passionate affections in the world. The only way to properly face up to this task and succeed is to first demagicalize and deplatonize our lofty ideals. The second move requires us to accept our passionate affections and help our ideals find meaningful expression in the world.

Dostoevsky suggests that Christian rebirth is a demagicalized and existentialized principle. The act of baptism is a moment of rebirth which seems to suggest a literal transformation, in which the old man dies, as it were, and the new man arrives—thereby giving us a preliminary taste for what the resurrection is like. The new man succeeds in being a whole person: a harmonious co-existence of man’s earthly passions and higher ideals. A necessary condition for this kind of rebirth, however, is connecting in love with other people in this world. The right kind of love—compassionate love—can satisfy both our earthly, sensual longings as well as our higher ideals. Our passionate

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *The Idiot* 232.

longings are sanctified and find an expression in this world which does not interfere with our heavenly longings.

Each moment of existential rebirth in *The Brothers Karamazov* involves an ecstatic moment, such as Alyosha's vision following his visit with Grushenka, after which he is better able to make a connection with people around him.

It was as if threads from all those innumerable worlds of God all came together in his soul, and it was trembling all over, "touching other worlds." He wanted to forgive everyone and for everything, and to ask forgiveness, oh not for himself! But for all and for everything, "as others are asking for me," rang in his soul. But with each moment he felt clearly and almost tangibly something as firm and immovable as this heavenly vault descend into his soul.<sup>31</sup>

Christianity can transform people in such a way that they can live joyful lives in this world in loving and supporting communities. It is this vision of man in the world that will ultimately justify human existence, and resolve the contradiction in human nature.

### Resolution: Existential Despair as Suffering

A necessary condition for the resolution, however, is existential sanctification. Suffering teaches us the necessary sanctification on an existential level, allowing us to reappropriate both our desires and eternal longings so that they can co-exist, reinforce each other, and bring about a fulfilling and happy life. Zosima explains:

For people are created for happiness, and he who is completely happy can at once be deemed worthy of saying to himself: "I have fulfilled God's commandment on this earth." All the righteous, all the saints, all the holy martyrs were happy.<sup>32</sup>

It is only through suffering that we can find our way out of the contradiction of human nature. This necessary suffering can be

<sup>31</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov* 362–63.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 55.

experienced in many ways, and Dostoevsky elucidates this notion repeatedly in his writings. One of Dostoevsky's recurring themes in both *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* is the instantiation of suffering as the individual experience of existential despair. Ivan, as he realizes his meandering involvement and guilt for the murder of his father, is tormented by an unbearable sense of guilt which eventually leads to his nightmarish hallucination or vision of the devil at the end of the book. Ivan's teachings that "everything is permitted" for those who do not believe in God and immortality in the face of the "death of God" have given his half-brother Smerdyakov, Ivan's philosophical protégé, a carte blanche to commit the murder of their father.<sup>33</sup> "There is no virtue if there is no immortality," Ivan suggested.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore,

there is decidedly nothing in the whole world that would make men love their fellow men; that there exists no law of nature that man should love mankind, and that if there is and has been any love on earth up to now, it has come not from natural law but solely from people's belief in their immortality . . . were mankind's belief in its immortality to be destroyed, not only love but also any living power to continue the life of the world would at once dry up in it.<sup>35</sup>

Ivan continually resists the notion that he bears any moral responsibility for the actions of any other human beings, saying instead that people are only responsible for their own actions. But his conversations with Smerdyakov gradually illustrate for him the role he played in enabling Smerdyakov to murder their father. "It was true what you taught me, sir, . . . 'everything is permitted' . . . because if there is no infinite God, then there's no virtue either, and no need of it all. It was true," says Smerdyakov, "that's how I reasoned."<sup>36</sup> Ivan realizes that he now must follow the dictates of his conscience whose unfamiliar precepts his reasons cannot seem to justify; that is, he cannot seem to endorse

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 625.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 632.

Smerdyakov's wicked actions and he is tormented by unfamiliar feelings of moral guilt. Smerdyakov objects to Ivan's torment when he says that "you yourself kept saying then that 'everything was permitted,' so why are you troubled now, you yourself, sir?"<sup>37</sup> Ivan finds himself forced by his tormented conscience to at least acknowledge Zosima's teachings concerning the universal burden of sin and the saintly community of worship as a possible explanation of his suffering:

But when [someone] knows that he is not only worse than all in the world, but is also guilty before all people, on behalf of all and for all, for all human sins, the world's and each person's, only then will the goal of our unity be achieved. For you must know, my dear ones, that each of us is undoubtedly guilty on behalf of all and for all on earth, not only because of the common guilt of the world, but personally, each one of us, for all people and for each person on this earth. . . . Only then will our hearts be moved to a love that is infinite, universal, and that knows no satiety. Then each of us will be able to gain the whole world by love and wash away the world's sins with his tears.<sup>38</sup>

Ivan involuntarily concludes that not everything can be permitted if there apparently is such a thing to be experienced as moral guilt which, as such, can only be derived from prior principles—principles which he had heretofore insistently rejected. Smerdyakov's revelation that Ivan's teachings enabled him to murder their father finally makes plain to Ivan Zosima's teachings that people are involved in one another's lives and have a moral responsibility on behalf of all and for all.

As mentioned previously, all moments of demagogicalized rebirth in Dostoevsky's writings are preceded by

an extraordinary illumination . . . the highest pitch of harmony and beauty, conferring a sense of some hitherto-unknown and

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 633.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 164, my emphasis.

unguessed completeness, proportion, reconciliation, an ecstatic, prayerful fusion with the supreme synthesis of life.<sup>39</sup>

Ivan undergoes a similar experience after his third and last meeting with Smerdyakov when, unlike his past detached disposition, he is now firm and resolute in his commitment to bring Smerdyakov to justice and set free his brother who has been accused of committing the crime.

It was as if a sort of joy now descended into his soul. He felt an infinite firmness in himself: the end to his hesitations, which had tormented him so terribly all through those last days! The decision was taken, ‘and now will not be changed,’ he thought with happiness.<sup>40</sup>

Immediately following this moment of ecstasy, Ivan, momentarily filled with the kind of compassion and love for all that Zosima taught, saves a peasant whom he had previously knocked to the ground from freezing to death. Analogous to the story of the good Samaritan in the New Testament, Ivan cares for him, pays a tradesman to help him carry the peasant to the nearby police station, and makes sure he is examined by a doctor “while he once again provided liberally ‘for the expenses’.”<sup>41</sup> He would not have performed this act of compassion, he says, “if [his] decision for tomorrow had not been taken so firmly.”<sup>42</sup> Regrettably, he is unable to maintain the momentum of his joyful experience. The familiar philosophical skepticism and rational doubt that have distinguished Ivan throughout the novel yet again get the upper hand during a moment of deliberation when, instead of “[going] to the prosecutor right now at once and [telling] him everything,” he decides to put it off until the next day.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, as he comes home,

almost all of his joy, all his self-content vanished in a moment . . .  
something icy suddenly touched his heart, like a recollection, or,

<sup>39</sup> *The Idiot* 237.

<sup>40</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov* 633, my emphasis.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 633–34.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 634.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

rather, a reminder, of something loathsome and tormenting that was precisely in that room now, presently, and had been there before.<sup>44</sup>

His rebirth and resolution were short-lived. As Joseph Frank points out, Ivan's determination to act decisively wavers and he is once again "caught in the toils of his moral psychological dilemma—the dilemma of intending to follow the dictates of a conscience whose precepts his reasons cannot justify."<sup>45</sup> Upon reflection, he is reminded of his cold, loathsome, and tormenting despair produced by his underlying nihilistic fears which paralyze his prior joyful disposition and render his moral conscience completely ineffectual. His despair is deepened by his failed attempt at resolving his contradiction, and his distress grows to unprecedented heights. His subsequent vision of the devil, who shows up as fully demagogicalized, at times embodies Ivan's conscience revolting against his philosophical rebellion against God and Christianity. In other instances, the devil simply toys with his despair, to which Ivan comically responds by accusing the devil of lying.

The very appearance of the devil on the stage as demagogicalized, and as an apparently corporeal and possible person forces Ivan to acknowledge his presence and to affirm his "realism, because one does not kick a ghost."<sup>46</sup> Ivan desperately tries to explain away this devil in his vision as a lie, an illness, or a ghost of some kind to avoid having to acknowledge the existence of a non-Euclidean world from which this devil seems to emanate; but the upsurge of moral conscience from which he has begun to suffer makes it impossible for him to dismiss the possibility of a non-Euclidean reality. His hallucination of the devil, like the revelation of Smerdyakov's guilt, shows him the nature of a world without God. And having so thoroughly rejected God, Ivan is left defenseless. His breakdown results from the collision between the psychology of doubt and the idea of moral responsibility. Ivan could endure one, but he cannot endure both.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Frank 676.

<sup>46</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov* 638.

Thus, Ivan is incapable of attaining a resolution in *The Brothers Karamazov*. But, as Joseph Frank points out, Ivan's act of compassion "is the first effect of his new resoluteness, which overcomes all the contempt for erring and sinful humankind that he had previously exhibited, and which perhaps foreshadows his role in the envisaged second volume."<sup>47</sup> A better example of a resolution to the contradiction in human nature can be found in the protagonist and hero of the book, Alyosha. In his own preface to the book, Dostoevsky suggests that Alyosha "is a strange man, even an odd one"—yet, Alyosha "bears within himself the heart of the whole, while the other people of his epoch have all for some reason been torn away from it for a time by some kind of flooding wind."<sup>48</sup> It is this whole-heartedness that is required to allow our passionate affections to be properly attuned to our ideals so that a resolution can be attained. In addition, Alyosha's half-brother, Dmitri, emerges as a character in the book that resolves his contradicting drives as a human being near the end of the novel, and is close to the protagonist of the book in his existential significance.

Thus, Dostoevsky captures a solution to the problem posed by Nietzsche that allows for Christian values attuned to properly appropriated passions that ground all human beings in the world in which they live. By demagicalizing Christianity, Dostoevsky overcomes Nietzsche's objection that the Christian-Platonic ideal has no physio-psychological efficacy in our lives. By interpreting existential despair as an instantiation of suffering, as I claim that Dostoevsky does, we vindicate Nietzsche's project of overhauling our moral valuations to better reflect what is existentially efficacious. As such, existential despair and demagicalized Christianity together become the necessary and sufficient conditions for attaining a resolution to the inherent contradiction in human nature.

<sup>47</sup> Frank 676.

<sup>48</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov* 3, my emphasis.

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