



CHICAGO JOURNALS

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Source: *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (Jan., 1994), pp. 26-44

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1203613>

Accessed: 21/12/2014 20:20

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# Dostoevsky's Devil: The Will to Power\*

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I think if the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness. [P. 220]<sup>1</sup>

Many commentators regard Fyodor Dostoevsky's confessional faith stance with suspicion. It is true that Dostoevsky presents most powerfully the dark and sinister side of human nature, the problem of evil, and the skepticism to which these facets of the existential situation give rise. He also develops vividly a Christian vision, exhibits a predilection toward religious mysticism, and espouses active love and compassion as personal ideals. Nevertheless, some scholars argue, this optimistic and positive stance lacks the level of forcefulness, assurance, and cogency that is conveyed in his religious critique, and the reader is left with unresolved tensions and questions that are often interpreted to reflect Dostoevsky's own ambiguity on these matters.<sup>2</sup> So, they proclaim, Dostoevsky's doubts remain ever unappeased, and Ivan's skepticism ultimately wins out.

\*My thanks to Hugo Meynell, Joseph Komonchak, and to a reader for the *Journal of Religion* for very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay. Also, I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

<sup>1</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov: The Constance Garnett Translation, Revised by Ralph E. Mallow, Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1976). All parenthetical references in text are to this work.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Sergei Hackel, "The Religious Dimension: Vision or Evasion? Zosima's Discourse in *The Brothers Karamazov*," in *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), pp. 211–35. In this essay, Hackel suggests that Alyosha's religious experiences are but nature mysticism, which do not overcome or expel the doubts raised by Ivan. Hackel is certainly not alone in thinking that Dostoevsky's religious faith is overshadowed by his doubts. Other examples of scholars who read Dostoevsky very narrowly are Lev Shestov, Richard Peace, D. H. Lawrence, and Václav Černý. Černý, e.g., regards Dostoevsky as "an enormously evil creature, unthinkable cruel, a sadist" (see his *Dostoevsky and His Devils* [Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1975], p. 25). Černý emphasizes the skeptical antireligious and sensationalist characters and events of Dostoevsky's writings, neglecting the importance of his religious vision as a counterbalancing force to the negative elements in his writing. For good summaries of various readings of Dostoevsky, especially as these pertain to issues in theodicy, see Robert Belknap, *The Structure of the Brothers Karamazov* (Paris: Mouton, 1967), pp. 9–16; Victor Terras, *A Karamazov Companion* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), pp. 47–59; and Robert V. Wharton, "Evil in an Earthly Paradise: Dostoevsky's Theodicy," *Thomist* 41 (1977): 567–69.

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But the issue between Dostoevsky's belief and skepticism is not quite that simple. Henri De Lubac and George Panichas, for example, illustrate vividly the importance of dynamic and transformative religious experiences in Dostoevsky's account of the existential situation.<sup>3</sup> These experiences must be taken seriously in evaluating Dostoevsky's perspective. Moreover, Dostoevsky also gives a great deal of negative support for his positive religious stance; he brilliantly outlines the destructive consequences of secular skepticism and nihilism. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, he develops a myriad of symbols and ideas in a penetrating analysis of the dark side of human nature. He brings the demonic vividly to life through the figure of the devil and uses this character to integrate certain key facets of his view on the origin and nature of evil. But in so doing, as we shall see, the devil becomes his own critic, and through him Dostoevsky expresses his own practical moral argument in support of his religious ideal.

Dostoevsky's exposition of the devil in action has been a focal point for various commentators, who usually locate Dostoevsky's most complete vision of Satan incarnate in Stavrogin of *The Devils*.<sup>4</sup> But there has been little attention paid to the question of the source or origin of this evil, or its role, if any, in his religious vision. Focusing in this essay on *The Brothers Karamazov*, I will argue that the source of Dostoevsky's devil is a primary "will," a will that parallels Nietzsche's will in many respects. There is a common metaphysical basis between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, one that shows a striking similarity to Jacob Boehme's mysticism of the will. Given the way the Nietzschean critique and ideal are embraced by some contemporary scholars, these parallels are very intriguing. In fact, Nietzsche's will to power is an illuminating foil to Dostoevsky's religious teleology. While Nietzsche considered the will to be the source of human liberation, Dostoevsky situated the origin of evil in this necessary and isolating vitalistic dynamism—an essential desire gone terribly wrong in the face of ultimate choices. Indeed, despite the similar voluntaristic perspective of the two thinkers, the differences in ideals are quite stark.

In this essay I will compare Nietzsche and Dostoevsky on a number of levels. In order to accentuate this comparison, I will also refer to Jacob Boehme's metaphysics of will and mystic teleology. Jacob Boehme provides the seminal account of primary will, one that indirectly influences both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, most likely through the writings of

<sup>3</sup> George A. Panichas, *The Burden of Vision: Dostoevsky's Spiritual Art* (Chicago: Gateway Editions, 1985); and Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley (New York: Meridan, 1966), pt. 3.

<sup>4</sup> See George A. Panichas, *The Burden of Vision*, chap. 3, or his "Dostoevski and Satanism," *Journal of Religion* 45 (1965): 1. Also, Václav Černý gives an insightful interpretation of the demonic in *The Devils in Dostoevsky and His Devils*.

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Friedrich von Schelling. Boehme also draws the idea into a theological framework that parallels Dostoevsky's positive religious stance, providing an account that resembles closely the transformative elements presented in Dostoevsky's religious vision. Boehme's thought thus not only will serve to clarify the idea of primary will in Nietzsche and Dostoevsky but also will help to illuminate Dostoevsky's positive religious stance in contrast to the Nietzschean ideal. Through the Nietzsche-Dostoevsky comparison, I will draw out the practical moral argument that supports Dostoevsky's spiritual ideal. While for both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche primary will underpins cosmic and human creation, as well as the ideal of the "overman" or "extraordinary man,"<sup>5</sup> Dostoevsky associates both this primary will and the Nietzschean ideal with the devil. Like Jacob Boehme, Dostoevsky considers the principle of primary will necessary to human existence and the religious ideal; tragically, however, it is intimately linked to the devil—the source of evil in human nature. Nevertheless, in the way that it illustrates the negative and disquieting moral consequences of the very religious skepticism Dostoevsky so powerfully portrays, this symbol also lends considerable support for Dostoevsky's religious vision. Although Dostoevsky never overcomes conclusively the doubts he himself raises against his religious vision, I think that his account of the devil provides a strong moral critique of the Nietzschean ideal.

### I. THE PRIMARY WILL TO POWER

The idea of primary will is the essential backdrop to both the extraordinary man or overman and Dostoevsky's devil. I will begin by focusing on Nietzsche's and Boehme's accounts of it. Nietzsche perceives the will to be fundamental to all life. The primary nature of will means that it is misleading to speak of it as an entity; it precedes and determines the notion of entity, and, like theologians referring to God, we are reduced to analogical language to point to its nature.<sup>6</sup> But will is the most appropriate symbol because the essential being of this datum is active, not simply in terms of a self-discharging, desire, strife, or demand, but always in a movement to control—by the "affect of commanding." Will denotes power. There "is no such thing as 'willing', but only a willing *something*."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I apologize for the use of "man" in "overman" and "extraordinary man" throughout this article. I myself interpret the notion inclusively, but I am not sure that Nietzsche and Dostoevsky would. Therefore I do not substitute "person" for "man" in my text.

<sup>6</sup> "There is no such thing as 'will'; it is only a simplifying conception of understanding, as is 'matter'" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale [New York: Vintage, 1968], p. 354).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 353.

The aim is wound up in the essential activity of this fundamental datum: "‘Willing’: means willing an end."<sup>8</sup> Note one of Heidegger's more pedantic readings of Nietzsche: "What the will wills it has already. For the will wills its will. Its will is what it has willed. The will wills itself."<sup>9</sup>

Speaking more plainly, the will corresponds to the notion of first cause. That which effects everything else but derives from nothing does not act for or in terms of anything but itself; it becomes the telos of everything derived from it. "If we wished to postulate a goal adequate to life, it could not coincide with any category of conscious life; it would rather have to explain all of them as a means to itself."<sup>10</sup> In medieval scholastic terms, the will is linked together as both first and final cause. This correlates well with the idea that the will fundamentally commands. To command is to go beyond oneself. By its nature will oversteps itself. In commanding it becomes more than it is. As will it wills to be stronger, to acquire more power, for it is in essence potential power. Again, Heidegger says, "In the name ‘will to power’ the word ‘power’ connotes nothing less than the essence of the way the will wills itself inasmuch as it is a commanding."<sup>11</sup>

Jacob Boehme expands provocatively on this primary will. He refers to it as the source of the natural world. The will is a magical force, a desire that "leads the bottomless to foundation, and the nothing into something."<sup>12</sup> It "is the driving of the essences."<sup>13</sup> Like Nietzsche, Boehme depicts the will as the fundamental principle of creation, both cosmic and human. It is the primary creative force that springs things to life; it is the vital energy behind the cosmic processes. Moreover, it is misleading to speak of primary will as a substantive entity because it is the fundamental principle of all life. Boehme likens it to "a shadow without substance."<sup>14</sup> It is an active principle that attaches itself to essences; it "is a matrix without substance, but manifests itself in substantial being."<sup>15</sup>

Integral to human will is desire grounded in a mysterious freedom. This desire can be described as a stern attraction that is involved in a self-creating elevating motion that "draws itself into itself, and makes itself pregnant."<sup>16</sup> Notice Nietzsche's use of the same feminine symbolism:

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God Is Dead,'" in *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 376.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> Jacob Boehme, *A Short Explanation of Six Mystical Points*, in *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*, trans. John Rolleston Earle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), pt. 5.10.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Boehme, *High and Deep Grounding of Six Theosophic Points*, in Earle, trans., pt. 1.1.1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pt. 1.1.3.

<sup>15</sup> Boehme, *Six Mystical Points*, pt. 5.4.

<sup>16</sup> Boehme, *High and Deep Grounding*, pt. 1.1.38.

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"You creators, you Higher Men! One is pregnant only with one's own child."<sup>17</sup> Boehme finds alchemist imagery appropriate also to illustrate this enigmatic creative independence. He refers to the will as a self-fueled fire: "It is thus, as if a hidden fire lay in the will, and the will continually uplifting itself towards the fire wished to awaken and kindle it."<sup>18</sup> This will finds its mysterious source of existence within itself, one that provides an ungrounded creative impetus to human life. In the inner structure of desire working on itself there resides a fundamental potential freedom. In this inner elevating dynamism of self-expansive passion there is an enigmatic freedom of will that chooses objects of desire. By her very magical nature, desire impregnates herself, resulting in a labor of will, and in the outbirth primary will freely determines itself according to its object of imagination.<sup>19</sup>

This primary ungrounded will-spirit is ever seeking a ground in the objects of its imagination. To put it bluntly, it becomes what it wants. Its freedom lies in the point of desire from which imagination arises and seeks to fulfill itself. Boehme says "desire [only] makes in the will such a being as the will itself is."<sup>20</sup> By its very nature this will commands, thereby not only freely determining its direction and ends but also naturally going beyond itself. This involves a double movement or process, as the will expands outward in terms of power and contracts inward to the potential freedom of ungrounded desire.

Nietzsche's will to power can be understood similarly as a process of interdependent enhancement and preservation. Will posits values by way of these conditions. There is an ongoing interrelated tension between a focus on space, security, and stability and an expansive movement to change, growth, and creativity. Will as enhancement requires preserving security, which in turn allows for the discharge of its force in continued distension. This is the process basic to life, the movement of will, what in essence the human being does in commanding. To add more to this metaphysical picture is to go beyond the apparent facts of the matter.

One cannot, for example, ascribe a cosmic goal that stands above humankind and the individual, at least none besides that of will as commanding. Speculative consciousness is a product and tool of the will. Will

<sup>17</sup> Frederick Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 301.

<sup>18</sup> Boehme, *High and Deep Grounding*, pt. 1.1.2.

<sup>19</sup> Boehme comments: "For the beginning of all being is nothing else than an imagination of the *Ungrund*, whereby it introduces itself through its own desire in an imagination and models, forms and sets itself into images and from the eternal one breathes out to its self observation." This passage is from *The Testaments*, chap. 1.5, as quoted by Howard H. Brinton, *The Mystic Will: Based on a Study of the Philosophy of Jacob Boehme* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> Boehme, *Six Mystical Points*, pt. 5.3.

is that which explains “as a means to itself” all categories of the conscious life.<sup>21</sup> There is no artistic and moral wisdom in Kant’s sense of the ideas—no divine purpose either in the processes of the natural world or in personal moral freedom—but only a becoming that consists of the will to power.<sup>22</sup> There are no principles existing external to the will to which a person has recourse in her moral valuations. Nietzsche insists that “Un-changing good and evil does not exist.”<sup>23</sup> The nature of becoming is determined by this primary and self-justified commanding of the will. The telos is found in the very command; the “end is an ‘inner’ ‘stimulus’—no more.”<sup>24</sup>

## II. THE OVERMAN AND EXTRAORDINARY MAN

Dostoevsky refers to this primary will when he speaks in *The Brothers Karamazov* of the truth of nature asserting its rights (p. 614). Will to power is the primary datum, the truth of nature, and preservation and enhancement are the natural rights of this entity. This self-assertion is exhibited most basically in an instinctive attraction to life itself. Ivan Karamazov speaks passionately of a primitive thirst for life, a vitalistic impetus that pushes a person forward despite the many obstacles that stand in its way. There is a strong centripetal force on the planet that overrides the disillusionment brought on by the disorder and horrors of the world. Quoting Pushkin, Ivan comments: “I have a longing for life, and I go on living in spite of logic. Though I may not believe in the order of the universe, yet I love the sticky little leaves as they open in spring. I love the blue sky, I love some people, whom one loves you know sometimes without knowing why” (p. 211).

Dostoevsky gives the Karamazov family a very strong dose of this vitalistic energy, “the strength to endure everything” (p. 243)—more than their fair share it would seem. This perhaps begins to account for their baseness. Be that as it may, at a practical level will begins as a primitive urge for existence. This is immediately expanded and complicated as primary will asserts its natural rights of power. Nietzsche says, “Only where life is, there is also will: not will to life, but—so I teach you—will to power!”<sup>25</sup>

The goal is what the will makes of its power. The practical outcome of

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (n. 6 above), p. 376.

<sup>22</sup> “Becoming must be explained without recourse to final intentions; becoming must appear justified at every moment (or incapable of being evaluated; which amounts to the same thing); the present must absolutely not be justified by reference to a future, nor the past by reference to the present” (ibid., p. 377).

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 139.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 354.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 138.



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the Nietzschean ideal is described by the devil in his account of Ivan's atheistic goal. This ideal links the will to Dostoevsky's extraordinary man and Nietzsche's overman. Once God is finally put to rest, the devil says, "Man will be lifted up with a spirit of divine Titanic pride and the man-God will appear. From hour to hour extending his conquest of nature infinitely by his will and his science, man will feel such lofty joy from hour to hour in doing it that it will make up for his old dreams of the joys of heaven" (p. 616). Note the striking similarity of Ivan's ideal with that of Nietzsche, as R. J. Hollingdale clarifies it: "Through continual increase of power to transmute the chaos of life into a continual self-overcoming of life and thus to experience in an ever greater degree the joy which is synonymous with this self-overcoming: that would now be the meaning of life."<sup>26</sup>

The culminating goal for both Ivan and Nietzsche is a voluntaristic utopia of joy intrinsic to the self-overcoming of will-enhancement, in a dynamic environment of ongoing creativity and insight. Indeed, in these general terms this atheistic ideal seems very bold, attractive, and compelling, which perhaps begins to explain Nietzsche's popularity and influence in some contemporary scholarship. But there are a number of elements to keep in mind in evaluating this voluntaristic picture.

For one thing, the idea is ultraelitist. The overman is a member of a very small group indeed. Such profound self-overcoming is well beyond the means of the common herd, whose neurotic obsession with preservation severely limits their degree of will enhancement. Their lot is limited to subservience to the creative elite. Also, although Nietzsche recognizes the inhibiting mode of the idea of God, he does not exclude the religious genius from his elitist ideal. The will to power is responsible also for the magnificent figures of religion. Revolutionaries can take many forms, some who, from the vantage point of the herd, are more morally palatable than others. But the teleological point is the majestic idea, the creative genius, the fertile insight—the enhancement of will. These are the signs of the risk takers, the leaders, these overmen or extraordinary men—the truly great spirits of tremendous will whose potential achievements cannot be specifically defined because of the freedom and creativity wound up in the very notion of will to power. The key element is the sublimation of the will to power, that is, the command of the will free of the constraints of mawkish sentimentalism, primitive urges, the superego, or whatever else might interfere with the will's fundamental freedom. What one commands is quite beside the point, because the telos is nothing but the continuous enhancement of will.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 27.



This view is closely paralleled by Dostoevsky. Ivan recognizes that the practical consequences of the creative will are subordinate to the intrinsic good of will to power. Moreover, the ideal is elitist and does not exclude the religious genius. In "The Grand Inquisitor," Dostoevsky examines profoundly the significance and implications of the Nietzschean ideal.<sup>27</sup> In this chapter Ivan responds to the ambiguity of the early Christian message, emphasizing its inability to satisfy the instincts of the herd for preservation. The Gospel teachings are "exceptional, vague and enigmatic" (p. 235). The Gospel authors present moral choices and unrealistic ideals to their readers, rather than satisfying the basic needs of human life; Jesus has not brought the forces of human happiness—miracle, mystery, and authority—but in its stead has secured a hard and heavy moral freedom and an impossible religious ideal. The Inquisitor insists that independent moral conscience is antithetical to human happiness and destructive. In this freedom "the fierce and rebellious will destroy themselves, others, rebellious but weak, will destroy one another" (p. 239). He asks Jesus, "Didst thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil?" (p. 235).

The Grand Inquisitor is one of those few extraordinary persons capable of confronting his natural weaknesses and mastering himself. Like Jesus, this Cardinal too had endured the wilderness, survived "on roots and locusts," and "prized the freedom" necessary to the ideal. But he rejected the isolationist ideal; he "awakened and would not serve madness" (p. 240). Like Nietzsche, he recognized the folly of mystic solitude and the dangers of misinterpreting the experience of one's own power

<sup>27</sup> There has been debate about the relationship between Nietzsche's ascetic priest in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and the Grand Inquisitor of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Those scholars who view Dostoevsky's ideal as that of will to power have failed to interpret "The Grand Inquisitor" in light of other key sections of *The Brothers Karamazov*, which provide a critique of it. For a summary of these issues, see C. A. Miller, "Nietzsche's 'Discovery' of Dostoevsky," *Nietzsche Studien* 2 (1973): 248–54. Also, Joseph Frank argues that Dostoevsky does not parallel Nietzsche's overman ideal. Besides other citations relevant to this issue, Frank refers to G. Fridlender, "Dostoevskii i Nitsche," in *Dostoevskii i Mirovaya Literatura* (Moscow, 1979), pp. 214–54, and mentions Nietzsche's own recognition in a letter to Georg Brandes that "Dostoevsky represented the very slave morality" that he was criticizing. See Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850–1859* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 2:149n. (I thank an anonymous reader who directed me to this brief discussion in Frank.) Although Nietzsche's opinion here does not conclusively prove that Dostoevsky was not himself sympathetic to the overman ideal, Konstantin Mochulsky also insists that the "The Grand Inquisitor" is to be interpreted as a critique of the ideal of the will to power. See Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, trans. Michael A. Minihan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 651. It will become clear in this essay that Dostoevsky's association of the Grand Inquisitor with the devil refutes the view that he espoused the overman ideal.

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as mystical submission to God.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Nietzsche asks, “Has there been anything filthier on earth than the saints of the desert? Not only the devil was loose around *them*—but the swine, too.”<sup>29</sup> But in rejecting the religious ideal, the Grand Inquisitor does not, like Nietzsche, repudiate the role of the devil. In the words of Nietzsche’s voluntarism, the Cardinal imposed commands on himself, obeyed them and mastered himself. This is in contrast to both the saints of the desert and the Inquisitor’s “geese” (p. 242), whose obsession with will-preservation ensures against the kind of profound sublimation necessary to self-perfection.<sup>30</sup> But for the Grand Inquisitor the consequences of this sublimation involve the very irony that brings such power to this chapter. In the Cardinal’s self-overcoming he takes on himself spiritual leadership and attempts to ease the physical and moral burdens of those people too weak to achieve the religious ideal. In so doing, he founds his work on the authority that Jesus had rejected in the temptations of the wilderness (p. 237). He willingly submits to the temptations offered by the devil. He whispers to Jesus, “We are not working with Thee, but with *him*—that is our mystery. . . . We took from him what thou didst reject with scorn, that last gift he offered Thee, showing Thee all the kingdoms of the earth” (p. 238). This requires that the Cardinal put on the Inquisitor’s cassock; for the sake of the herd, those geese too rebellious and weak for the religious ideal, this overman burns heretics.

At first glance it might appear incongruous that a person of such noble insight and ideals could be connected to such a sinister movement.<sup>31</sup> The Inquisitor, however, accepts the logic of the Nietzschean cosmology. Herd moralities do not apply to this creative soul. Burning heretics is merely one of innumerable possible outcomes of will-enhancement. There is no overriding moral teleology, at least none other than will to power. The devil himself makes this point, a theme that recurs many times in *The Brothers Karamazov*. That “everything is lawful” is pronounced by Fyodor

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche says, “in so far as everything great and strong in man has been conceived as superhuman and external, man has belittled himself—he has separated the two sides of himself, one very paltry and weak, one very strong and astonishing, into two spheres, and called the former ‘man,’ the latter ‘God’” (*The Will to Power*, pp. 86–87).

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (n. 17 above), p. 302.

<sup>30</sup> Apparently Zarathustra also recognizes this need of the herd for worship. Out of compassion for his followers, he approves of the ass-service introduced by them, urging them to “do it for love of yourselves, do it also for love of me! And in remembrance of me!” (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, pp. 325–26). Note the parallel in “The Grand Inquisitor”: “And we shall take it upon ourselves, and they will adore us as their saviors who have taken upon themselves their sins before God” (n. 1 above; p. 240). This parallel was brought to my attention by a reader for the *Journal of Religion*.

<sup>31</sup> For example, D. H. Lawrence thinks this association of the Cardinal with the Inquisition to be absurd. See his “Preface to Dostoevsky’s *The Grand Inquisitor*,” in *Dostoevsky*, ed. René Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 94.

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Karamazov and Smerdyakov, as well as Ivan. The devil reminds Ivan in his nightmare that he has said the extraordinary man can “overstep all the barriers of the old morality of the old slave man, if necessary. There is no law for God. Where God stands, the place is holy. Where I stand will be at once the foremost place . . . ‘all things are lawful’ and that’s the end of it!” (p. 616).

This is surely the ideal of will to power, where all values require revaluation. The greatest good belongs with the greatest evil, this being the creative good. Although not of the common sort, a creator in good and evil, like the Grand Inquisitor, must be a criminal. According to Nietzsche, crime belongs to greatness, an observation he sees confirmed by those who have plumbed the depths of great souls.<sup>32</sup> The great man, Nietzsche’s overman, is by discipline and breeding a criminal of the highest rank, condemned by his creative role and insight to a solitary world of his own making. Here, where justice is will, the disrespectable becomes the norm for this criminal on the lam: social familiarity is for the overman a tawdry weakness, deception more effective than truth, and a mask far better than sincerity. Lying “requires more spirit and will” and is, in any case, requisite for one who requires servants and tools in a world consisting fundamentally of will to power.<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche affirms the criminal nature of the genuinely creative souls: “And he who has to be a creator in good and evil, truly, has first to be a destroyer and break values.”<sup>34</sup>

Corresponding to Nietzsche’s overman, and very likely influencing it, is Dostoevsky’s extraordinary man.<sup>35</sup> Besides the Grand Inquisitor, we also have the example of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*. He provides the theoretical underpinning for the plot of the novel in his account of revolutionary figures of history. The very greatness of these people lay in their ability to bring their creative ideals to practical fruition over and against the moralities of the day. Through their tremendous creative wills they institute new laws only in transgressing the old, thereby overstepping sacred moral boundaries. Raskolnikov summarizes their creative

<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 390.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 505.

<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> Avrahm Yarmolinsky says that Dostoevsky “anticipates Nietzsche’s doctrine of the superman.” See his *Dostoevsky: His Life and Art* (New Jersey: S. G. Phillips, 1957), p. 215. But, although scholars think Nietzsche did not read *The Brothers Karamazov*, they are fairly certain he was familiar with *Crime and Punishment* (at least in a French stage version), *The Landlady*, *Notes from Underground*, *The House of the Dead*, and *The Insulted and the Injured*, all in French translation. Walter Kaufmann lists these texts and also notes Nietzsche’s respect for Dostoevsky’s early work. Nietzsche refers to Dostoevsky as “the only psychologist, incidentally, from whom I had something to learn; he ranks among the most beautiful strokes of fortune in my life” (see Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale [Toronto: Vintage, 1969], pp. 150n. and 128n.).

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destiny: “In short, I maintain that all great men or even men a little out of the common, that is to say capable of giving some new word, must from their very nature be criminals.”<sup>36</sup> Of course these men of genius (and women, I dare say) are criminals only from the perspective of the herd. This tiny moral elite has a higher calling that sets them above the morality of the ordinary. So Raskolnikov concludes, “If such a one is forced for the sake of his idea to step over a corpse or wade through blood, he can, I maintain, find within himself, in his conscience, a sanction for wading through blood.”<sup>37</sup>

Though lacking the mystery of Nietzsche’s poetics, Dostoevsky echoes profoundly the overman ideal. *Crime and Punishment* delves into this issue of the extraordinary man in fascinating and profound psychological depth. Crime belongs to greatness. Justice is will. Raskolnikov attempts to put the theory into practice, but proves himself rather unfit for the creative task—a coward in Nietzsche’s eyes.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps Raskolnikov did experience a moment of strength, but he sorely lacked within himself the conviction of the justness of his action. His conscience tormented him relentlessly despite his efforts to reframe it according to a metaphysics of will. In a Nietzschean interpretation, Raskolnikov willed beyond his powers and never assimilated the fact that justice is will; consequently, he had not the “health of soul” that allows the criminal—presumably a healthy criminal—to cleave “to his fate” and not to “slander his deed.”<sup>39</sup>

Like Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov seems not quite strong enough to accept the truth of these metamoral insights presented in *his* story. Indeed, the devil laughs at Ivan’s love for truth, his inability to “swindle without a moral sanction” (p. 616). But Ivan’s illness is no laughing matter, especially when it is recognized that Ivan’s devil represents much more than his struggle with his conscience. Indeed, now we can begin to see just how Dostoevsky associates the devil with the will to power.

### III. THE DEVIL

The devil’s role in *The Brothers Karamazov* goes well beyond Ivan and his nightmare. It seems, for example, that the devil took no small part in the

<sup>36</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 235.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>38</sup> “There are delicate and sickly inclined natures, so-called idealists, who cannot achieve anything better than a crime, *cru, vert*: it is the justification of their little, pale existences, a payment for protracted cowardice and mendaciousness, a moment at least of strength: afterwards they perish of it” (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* [n. 6 above], pp. 689–90).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135. Panichas confirms this reading of the fall of Raskolnikov. In *The Burden of Vision* (n. 3 above), pp. 30–38, he compares Dostoevsky’s extraordinary Man with Nietzsche’s superman and acknowledges Raskolnikov’s inability to wholly assimilate “the

murder of Fyodor Karamazov. Dmitri Karamazov remarks in his defense that "the devil must have killed my father" (p. 449), "it's the devil's doing" (p. 451). Also, Dmitri attributes to the devil the most telling evidence against him, the open door that Gregory observes (p. 572). Ivan would seem finally to agree with his brother about the villain. In a moment of truly ironic self-incrimination, he admits that the devil must have helped Smerdyakov plan the murder (p. 598). Ivan goes on to suggest the devil's presence in the courtroom "under that table with the material evidence on it" (p. 652), an observation supported by one witness to the trial who says, "The devil's bound to have a hand in it. Where should he be if not here?" (p. 715).

The devil is certainly not exclusive to Ivan's nightmare. Everyone seems to have a little devil in him or her. In one bizarre scene of masochism, Lisa Kokhlakov confesses to Alyosha Karamazov how she, like everyone, simply loves the idea of parricide, indeed, secretly loves evil. Alyosha himself admits to dreams of devils, how, in Lisa's words, teasing these devils is "awful fun, it takes one's breath away" (pp. 551–52). Of course there is also Father Ferapont, the lunatic monk who has special sight when it comes to devils. They hide from him behind doors and under cassocks, in internal organs as well as in pockets. Perhaps foretelling Dmitri's troubles, Ferapont had seen one "hanging around a man's neck, . . . he was carrying him about without seeing him" (p. 153).

So this "paltry, pitiful devil" (p. 652), as Ivan refers to his hallucination, is rather significant to the story. Though he focuses on Ivan, he lends himself at times to Ivan's brothers. He hangs around Dmitri's neck, visits Alyosha, and definitely gains the upper hand on Smerdyakov. But he does not confine himself to the Karamazov brothers. His presence, as Lisa points out, is felt to some degree by everyone. He is the source of fearful pride, the tempter of holy men, the witness of sexual infidelity, and the one who coddles suicides along (pp. 527, 612–14). His presence is quite pervasive; so much so that Ivan observes, "I think if the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness."

The devil himself refers to this darker side as quite natural to human beings, as the truth of nature asserting its rights (p. 614). Dostoevsky is famous for his vivid depiction of the negative, neurotic, and destructive aspects of human beings; for him the devil takes a universal human form, a personification that caused him a great deal of religious doubt. The religious believer must face up to an impulse to evil ingrained in the very fabric of the human personality. Ivan perhaps best typifies the struggle;

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full unbridled power of the profane, the power of the annihilation of human and spiritualizing elements" (p. 37).

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his impassioned skepticism is a response to his observations about this negative aspect of human nature and moves many readers passionately to his cause. But it is not merely his questions that illustrate the darker side of human nature. For he himself personifies the devil; the devil, after all, is *his* hallucination.

Ivan says to him, "You are the incarnation of myself, but only one side of me . . . of my thoughts and feelings, but only the nastiest and stupidest of them" (p. 604). However, like Ivan, the devil is not depicted as an utter scoundrel. This is very important. Despite what Ivan says about the devil incarnating only his darker side, there is a positive, even pleasantly congenial aspect to his demonic personality. He claims to be a slandered man; he says he is "genuinely good hearted," and he disdains his negative role as impetus to vice, insisting that he desires to do good, and loves humankind and the truth (pp. 605, 608–9, 614). Indeed, he longs to incarnate in the body of some merchant's wife, to offer in simple faith a candle at church, to believe "all she believes" (p. 605). But he cannot. Though witness to the resurrection event, he was unable to rejoice with the angels in their ecstatic "hosannah." Common sense constrained him; his *responsibilities* held him back (p. 614). Recognizing his essential role to dynamic existence, he sulks: "No, live, I am told, for there'd be nothing without you. If everything in the universe were sensible, nothing would happen. There would be no events without you, and there must be events" (p. 609).

According to Dostoevsky, the devil begins as the law of nature asserting its rights (p. 614). He is associated with the vitalism of life. His source is found in the fundamental impetus to active, dynamic life, he serves "to produce events and do what's irrational" (p. 609). In Nietzsche's terminology, he is will to power. In Boehme's words, he is primary will that arises from the *Ungrund*. For Boehme, this will is the first of three principles of the essence of God. It is a primary ungrounded will-spirit that brings the dynamic forces to the physical world and the human being. It is a nonsubstantial principle of dynamism that has its source within divinity itself. This first principle is imaged in human nature; it is the indeterminate will—a mysterious source of freedom and creative activity. It drives the essences. Boehme speaks of the will as originally a morally neutral creative desire that determines itself according to its own imagination; it only becomes substantive and achieves a moral status when it focuses itself on some object of its imagination. In this very focusing lies its potential freedom; the indeterminate unground becomes grounded and formed according to the objects of its imagination. In an evolving circle of substantiation it contracts inward in terms of a most fundamental freedom, expands outward in power, and thereby determines its moral ends. This corresponds to Nietzsche's idea of the will as essentially a mor-



ally neutral mode of commanding, in terms of the values of preservation and enhancement. In commanding it determines moral valuations and the development of the human personality.

The correspondence ends here. In Boehme's theology we find more than this postulate of primary will; arising also from the *Ungrund* are the second and third principles of the divine essence. Indeed, in the personal God this will is eternally transformed positively into the dynamic and creative goodness of divine Being. Similarly, in human nature the will is not the sole source of moral valuation. It does indeed freely determine its moral ends, as it evolves substantively according to its objects of imagination. But there exists an overriding cosmic teleology of human and divine love that has its basis in the second and third principles of the Divine Essence. Primary will only becomes demonic insofar as it stubbornly refuses to submit itself to the religious telos wound up in the third principle of the Divine Essence. Spiritual relationship in active love is the third principle, and this dynamic mystical communing in the Holy Spirit requires the submission of the creative will to the moral and spiritual virtue of the second principle of the Divine Essence. In theological terms, one must submit oneself to the light, power, and wisdom of the Word, thereby ordinating one's life within the general frame of the Divine Will. But given the isolated, dynamic, and voluntaristic nature of primary will, this is no easy task. Boehme says there is the dangerous potential that human beings will, like Satan's fall, "cast their Imaginations back into themselves" and create "a Will (or Purpose) in the Matrix, to domineer in the Fire over the Light of God and Paradise."<sup>40</sup> This possibility provides the theodical power to Boehme's theology and gives it a truly tragic character.<sup>41</sup> For God cannot will the existence of the third principle; this aspect of the Divine Essence requires for its fulfillment the autonomous spiritual transformation of divinized beings.<sup>42</sup>

The same type of tragic theological framework is at play in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Scholars sometimes neglect this spiritual, religious facet in Dostoevsky and tend to misread a thinker who always, as George Panichas observes, returns to and "revolves around metaphysical principles an-

<sup>40</sup> Jacob Boehme, *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*, trans. John Sparrow (1648), in *The Works of Jacob Behmen, The Teutonic Theosopher* (London: Pater-noster Row, 1764), vol. 1, chap. 5.25.

<sup>41</sup> For further discussion of Boehme's development of the three principles and his theodicy, see my *Evil and the Mystics' God: Towards a Mystical Theodicy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), esp. chap. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Boehme comments on the religious ideal: "When you draw up by faith to God then you break through to heaven and lay hold on God at his holy heart. Then when this is done you are as the whole or total God and are such a person as the whole God in the place of this world." This passage is from the *Aurora*, chap. 23.13, as quoted by Brinton (n. 19 above), p. 118.



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chored in a religious consciousness and a biblical theology.”<sup>43</sup> Dostoevsky’s own positive mystical stance is powerfully illustrated through the characters of Zosima and Alyosha. The religious ideal is traced and supported in the various religious practices and transformative experiences espoused by Zosima, his brother Markel, and Alyosha. But participation in the divine life requires an autonomous moral and spiritual growth that hinges on the dynamics of primary will. Dostoevsky’s “vision is both anthropological and sacramental: he never fails to see the divine in man and the eternal in the temporal.”<sup>44</sup> Will ensures an active and mutable realm of existence, as this mysterious primal desire works its energy in the natural world and expands and contracts creatively in terms of the human being. This corresponds to Dostoevsky’s devil. Without this primary will, this dynamic world would not be. The devil claims that without him life “would be transformed into an endless church service; it would be holy, but tedious” (p. 609). Moreover, the religious ideal requires this play of autonomous and intellectual wills; the “hosannah must be tried in the crucible of doubt” (p. 609). So the devil in Ivan’s nightmare broodingly accepts responsibility: “Well, they’ve chosen their scapegoat, they’ve made me write the column of criticism and so life was made possible” (p. 609).

Ironically and tragically, the devil begins as a necessary principle to dynamic and mutable existence, one that desires the good but ends up as the rogue who only does evil (p. 614). His fundamental role as primary will is to create the conditions for the saving of souls. In Ivan’s case his object is to sow one tiny grain of faith in the hope that it might grow into a mighty oak tree (p. 612). But this first principle has tremendous negative side effects; hence it is transformed into the devil, the cosmic villain. Indeed, the devil laments his scandalous reputation, insisting that it is unfounded. As fundamentally a principle without substance, he is nonexistent. He describes himself as an “x in an indeterminate equation. I am a sort of phantom in life who has lost all beginning and end, and who has even forgotten his own name” (p. 609). In fact, it is only through people that he “gains a kind of reality” (p. 605). We are reminded again of Ivan’s

<sup>43</sup> Panichas, *The Burden of Vision*, p. 21. Panichas also aptly recognizes that Dostoevsky’s religious spirituality is one that “transcends Orthodox ecclesiology. . . . Dostoevsky speaks as a religious visionary and not as a religious doctrinist” (p. 21). Similarly de Lubac (n. 3 above) writes: “The mysticism of *The Brothers Karamazov* is the mysticism of the resurrection. It is eschatological. . . . Eternity is there, at hand. Here and there a strange rent in the web of our human experience affords us a glimpse of it” (p. 244). See Panichas, *The Burden of Vision*, chap. 5, and de Lubac, pt. 3, chap. 3, for excellent developments of Dostoevsky’s spiritual vision. Also, I discuss these religious experiences in my *Evil and the Mystics’ God*, esp. chap. 8, as they apply to mystical theodicy.

<sup>44</sup> Panichas, *The Burden of Vision*, p. 21.

provocative suggestion that, "if the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness."

The devil is only actualized in self-willing. He becomes a negative phenomenon insofar as human beings refuse to submit their wills to the religious telos and attempt, so to speak, to raise themselves up by their own bootstraps. Inordinate pride is perhaps the most serious vice that surfaces in this will to power. Ivan's problems center around it and are most vividly illustrated in his various attitudes and actions: his unhappy disposition and general distress, his loathing and rejection of Dmitri, his callousness toward Lisa Kokhlakov, his bizarre love-hate relationship with Katerina, his later vexation with and avoidance of Alyosha, his incredible self-deception in relationship with Smerdyakov, and his neglectful vengeance toward his father.

The problem is underscored early in Ivan's rebellion when he questions Alyosha as to the possibility of personal active love for an individual. He says, "One can love one's neighbours in the abstract, or even at a distance, but at close quarters it's almost impossible" (p. 218). This observation is later echoed profoundly by the Grand Inquisitor, who too could love humanity but not the individual, indeed, who destroyed the individual in the process of will-enhancement. Like the Grand Inquisitor, Ivan exemplifies the self-isolating tendency of a will gone very wrong, a dominant theme of Zosima's. But Ivan has not completely renounced the possibility of what we might identify as a "will to love." His nightmare develops vividly the internal agony he undergoes in the tension between his skepticism and religious leanings, his man-god ideal and his moral sensibilities. Ivan laments that he knows not how to destroy his devil and "must suffer for a time" (p. 604). What suffering, indeed, he must endure. Like the devil, one part of himself longs to submit to the religious telos. But he remains paralyzed by his skepticism, a cynicism that runs sharply against his moral intuitions. So the devil oscillates in his nightmare, tempting him one way, then the other, and all the time caustically laughing at Ivan's terrible agony of conscience: "But hesitation, suspense, conflict between belief and disbelief—is sometimes such torture to a conscientious man, such as you are, that it's better to hang oneself at once" (p. 612).

To destroy his devil requires that Ivan submit the demon himself, his self-isolating will, to the divine will. Indeed, Ivan's suffering serves to illustrate Zosima's conception of hell, one that hinges on the inability to love another person and the refusal to participate in an active socioreligious life. He says "hell is voluntary and ever consuming: they are tortured by their own choice. For they have cursed themselves, cursing God and life. They live upon their vindictive pride like a starving man in the desert sucking blood out of his own body" (p. 302).

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### IV. IRRECONCILABLE IDEALS

Through Zosima and Alyosha, Dostoevsky denies the possibility of the ideal we find depicted in Nietzsche's metaphysics of will and puts forward a positive religious focus. Although both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky begin with the same ontological premise of a fundamental will as the dynamic source of substantive existence, their ideals stand in stark contrast. The liberation Nietzsche espouses—the joy to be experienced in the sublimation of will to power and the self-overcoming of life—is thought by Dostoevsky to be nothing more than a self-deceiving illusion that poses grave dangers to the moral and spiritual development of the individual. This is a major thrust of "The Grand Inquisitor." Nietzsche's source of the overman, the will to power, is explicitly linked by Dostoevsky to the devil, with whom the Grand Inquisitor claims to have aligned himself. For Dostoevsky, the appropriate teleology is not will to power but will to love. This goal is very much like that espoused by Boehme, one of active love and compassion in a dynamic and creative divine life. The aim is depicted in various sections of *The Brothers Karamazov*, most explicitly by Zosima. In one passage he urges his disciples to "Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth. Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love" (p. 298). Indeed, this ideal is most strikingly illustrated in Jesus' compassionate response to the Inquisitor's monologue; Jesus leaves him with a kiss, one that "glows" in the old man's heart, though he stubbornly—shall we say, willfully—"adheres to his idea" (p. 243).

Unrestricted will to power is symbolized by the devil as he is played out in Ivan's extraordinary man—the man-god who is "lifted up with a spirit of divine Titanic pride" (p. 616). Its extreme consequences are vividly illustrated in Ivan's neurosis, the Grand Inquisitor's contempt for individual human dignity, as well as Smerdyakov's parricide and suicide. The will to power for Dostoevsky is a demonic ideal—a self-destructive mode that leads only to the annihilation of the divine spirit that is inherent in the personal, moral individual. On the other hand, Nietzsche is famous for his critique of religious modes of being in the world. He insists that will to power is often misinterpreted as religiously supernatural and mistakenly ascribed to a higher Being. This amounts to a pathetic and destructive will-denial. Moreover, the psychological disorders experienced by Ivan, as well as Smerdyakov's problems and his suicide, might very

well be symptoms of their inability to rise above outmoded moral valuations and will within their powers.

The two ideals—will to power or will to love—stand against each other in stark contrast. A Dostoevskian moral critique of the Nietzschean goal induces the response of moral question-begging: will to power—not any particular religious teleology—is the ultimate value positer. On the other hand, Dostoevsky points to the moral callousness and self-destruction of the Nietzschean ideal. In so doing, he gives us a provocative moral argument for religious belief. In a world grounded in a primary will, individual freedom and rights, personal self-dignity, and moral teleology hinge on the belief in a religious ideal within which this will is intertwined and might be spiritually transformed. Primary will alone, without the postulation of God and an overriding Divine teleology, provides no imperative to uphold these basic moral tenets—indeed, it denies their fundamental reality and force. But, like Kant, Dostoevsky himself recognizes that this kind of argument has no theoretical grounding in empirical reality. There are no rational proofs sufficient to establish with certainty the truth of this religious perspective—it only has a practical significance and necessity insofar as one *chooses* to regard oneself as a moral person involved in moral teleology and *hopes* that other persons possess the same intrinsic self-worth and natural orientation. So Dostoevsky, in the very logic of his idea of faith, leaves the ultimate religious questions tenuously hanging in Ivan's profound skepticism. After all, not even the devil himself knows if God really does exist (p. 609)!

Dostoevsky thinks that rational argument cannot prove the existence of God and the truth of religious belief; therefore the depth and scope of suffering and evil, which he illustrates so powerfully, place a tremendous and sometimes unbearable strain on the thoughtful and morally sensitive religious believer. Nevertheless, Dostoevsky gives an intriguing moral argument in favor of choosing for the religious ideal, despite the doubts that the reality of evil presses on us. He provocatively illustrates what he takes to be the dangers and futility of voluntaristic skepticism. The will to power is an ideal that has profoundly destructive moral repercussions. Indeed, a metaphysics of will must be informed by a spiritual framework, if we are to continue to regard ourselves and others as intrinsically significant moral beings. This is what Dostoevsky is getting at when young Kolya stutters, "But . . . I admit that He is needed . . . for the order of the universe and all that . . . and that if there were no God he would have to be invented" (522–23). Religious faith is required if one wishes to regard oneself and others as personal beings involved in moral and spiritual teleology. Although there is no unambiguous empirical evidence to justify this negative, practical moral argument, it can be bolstered by the

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experiences of mystic consolation and harmony, toward which Dostoevsky so vividly points. These arise through contemplative prayer and the active love and compassion of the religious life, which Dostoevsky insists support or verify the religious ideal. But such is not a rational response that is sufficient to satisfy the religious skeptic.

This much is clear: if people wish to continue to regard themselves and others as intrinsically significant moral beings, they must reject the ideal of will to power. But Dostoevsky recognizes that the choice is not that easy; he never finally lets the religious believer off the hook. Will to power might very well be the most fundamental datum of life. Intrinsic self-worth, moral and spiritual teleology, and perhaps even mystical experiences might, after all, simply be the illusions and fancies of sentimental fools who have not the strength and courage to will creatively beyond outmoded moral valuations. Dostoevsky passionately contrasts his Christian will to love with the Nietzschean will to power, and though he provides considerable support for his religious vision he never gives us conclusive reasons for choosing the former over the latter. I suspect that he thought that such strong assurance would in any case impinge on the hard and heavy autonomy he considered necessary to the transformative processes and defeat the ideal. So Dostoevsky readily admits that will to power might very well be the ultimate value positer—that choosing the will to love might not reflect the brute facts of the matter. He never finally answers for his readers the teleological question, whether the religious life and ideal—active spiritual love and compassion—are more fundamental than will to power. So I leave readers to ponder for themselves the basic question—the primacy of will or of God—that the devil in his taunting irony poses to an exasperated Ivan: “I know that for a fact, all the rest, all these worlds, God and even Satan—all that is not proved, to my mind. Does all that exist of itself, or is it only an emanation of myself, a logical development of my ego which alone has existed forever: but I make haste to stop, for I believe you will be jumping up to beat me directly” (pp. 609–10).