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Abstract

This article draws from Ivan Karamazov a two-fold challenge to the goodness of God: that no one can forgive the infliction of suffering upon the innocent and that, even when forgiven, this suffering costs more than any good brought out of it. It then looks to Alyosha for a response to these challenges, suggesting that Christ can forgive because of the cross and that his doing so puts the innocent to a choice: either to join their suffering to his – and so maintain God's goodness – or to lose their innocence. This response helps supply another defect of theodicies that appeal to the compensatory goods that God brings out of innocent suffering, namely that it seems to make some kind of salvation necessary and not gratuitous. For here all innocent suffering is joined to the cross and so part of the economy of redemption, not something prior to redemption that renders it necessary.

Introduction

It is often remarked that Dostoevsky sets up the problem of evil. It is less remarked that he responds to it, and those who do remark it often discount the response.[1] Dostoevsky himself takes both sides on this issue: he claims that the objections

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[1] For a catalogue of pessimists about Dostoevsky's response, see Robert V. Wharton, "Evil in an Earthly Paradise: Dostoevsky's Theodicy," *The Thomist* 41 (1977): 567–84; and Victor Terras, *A Karamazov Companion: Commentary on the Genesis, Language, and Style of Dostoevsky's Novel* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 48n34. Many of these agree with Joseph Frank that Dostoevsky refutes ideas "not by explicit argument but by dramatizing their consequences on the fate of his characters" (*Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871–1881* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003], 430), and this is generally taken to mean that "reason and rationality cannot cope with the senselessness of such suffering; and Father Zosima will respond to it only with a leap of faith" (428; see also 571). The influence of Mikhail Bakhtin's influential essay on the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) might be working subtly here: not only does Dostoevsky not give an answer, but it would subvert his whole dialogical approach to give one. This is to assume that a dialogical approach reveals no "overarching authorial position," which seems to be a common assumption, but not Bakhtin's. See James P. Scanlan, *Dostoevsky the Thinker* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 3.

voiced by Ivan Karamazov are irrefutable and that he has refuted them.[2] Complicating the discussion are larger disagreements about the role of reason for Dostoevsky: how far his rejection of rationalism is a rejection of rationality, especially with regard to the religious; how deep runs the dialogical approach ascribed to him by Bakhtin, in particular its relation to private, seemingly monological writings like letters and diaries; how much the dialogical form of a novel implies a substantively dialogical philosophy.[3] I will not dispute Dostoevsky's irrationalism here. I develop Ivan's challenge and a Dostoevskian response because I take them to be philosophically interesting: that this Ivan is Dostoevksy's Ivan I will not make an extensive effort to show, and that Dostoevsky is a Dosteovskian will be treated even more effortlessly (and with exclusive reference to *The Brothers Karamazov*). That is, I am going to be strategically vague about my relation to Dostoevsky: to those who think this makes sense of *The Brothers Karamazov*, or salient features of it, this will be more robustly Dostoevskian; to those who think Dostoevsky and any response to the problem of evil must ever be at odds, this will be a kind of productive misreading. But it is the quality of the product, not the reading, that interests me here.[4]

In particular, the point is to tie our responses to the problem of evil more nearly to the cross, or to read what is sometimes taken as the anti-theodicy of Job not as the last word repeated by Dostoevsky but as a prophetic word whose fulfillment Dostoevsky in his flesh has seen (Job 19:26). For the gates of death have been reveled to us (38:17), in glimpses, on the cross; and Job's total silence prefigures not the total silence but the halting answer of the Christian, and a fuller answer still of the

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[2] "My hero chooses a theme I consider irrefutable: the senselessness of children's suffering." "...and together with the blasphemy and anarchy, their refutation in the last words of the Elder Zosima." Both statements are made in the same paragraph in a letter to N. A. Lyubimov, May 10, 1879; see *The Brothers Karamazov: The Garnett Translation*, Norton Critical Editions (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 757-8. We might wonder here just how monological Dostoevsky is even in his letters.

[3] For an argument that Dostoevsky is dialogical in style but monological in substance, see Scanlan, *Dostoevsky the Thinker*.

[4] Behind this lies a suspicion about the appropriateness of abstracting systematic answers from a novel, especially answers to questions posed in part by Anglo-American philosophy, which theologians accuse of insensitivity to these sorts of texts. But we should be leery of too quick a division between systematic and something like poetic or novelistic thought, not least because it would cut systematic theology itself off from a great deal of Scripture. There is a certain essentialism about texts lurking in the background of this division, as if a text prescribed the uses one can put it to. As should be familiar to these sorts of critics by now, there are an indefinite number of questions one can ask about any text, and – less familiarly – this includes those put to them by Anglo-American philosophy. That these questions are not those of the author, indeed might run contrary to those of the author; that they might run contrary to those of the original audience, or of the subsequent audiences who together give the text its continued prominence; that they do justice to only some of the salient points of the texts and not the whole: none of this by itself undermines a new reading with its own interests and its own criteria for salience and 'doing justice.' (One thinks here of certain atheistic readings of theological works and indeed of Scripture itself in contemporary Continental philosophy.) So there is a kind of Continental justification for many of the reading practices of Anglo-American philosophy, even if we concede their putative clumsiness. Those who can swallow Agamben's fidelity to texts should not strain at van Inwagen. Now I am not claiming this sort of discontinuity between my reading and traditional readings or between my reading and Dostoevsky's own mind, but I am also not arguing for the continuity; and my point here is that even if the discontinuity seems manifest to some readers, that does not undermine the project. For one might think Dostoevsky inveterately opposes giving any response to the problem of evil and that he is wrong to do so, and then find in him resources for just such a response.

beatified.[5] Job in that sense must be read like Ecclesiastes, for there is no new thing under the sun until there is, and where Job stands as its shadow, Dostoevsky is bathed in its light.

Here then is Ivan:

> And if the suffering of children goes to make up the sum of suffering needed to buy truth, then I assert beforehand that the whole truth is not worth such a price. I do not, finally, want the mother to embrace the tormentor who let his dogs tear her son to pieces! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she wants to, let her forgive the tormentor her immeasurable maternal suffering; but she has no right to forgive the suffering of her child who was torn to pieces, she dare not forgive the tormentor, even if the child himself were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, then where is the harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who could and would have the right to forgive? I don't want harmony, for love of mankind I don't want it. I want to remain with unrequited suffering. I'd rather remain with my unrequited suffering and my unquenched indignation, *even if I am wrong*. Besides, they have put too high a price on harmony; we can't afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore I hasten to return my ticket. . . It's not that I don't accept God, Alyosha, I just most respectfully return him the ticket (245).[6]

I want to distinguish two complaints here: that final harmony is unachievable because the sufferers dare not forgive and that this harmony would not be worth the cost even were forgiveness forthcoming. "Daring not to forgive" I take to be a combination of an inability to bring oneself to forgive and a moral complaint that forgiveness is somehow not appropriate here. Dostoevsky answers the inability by appeal to the "great thought" (304), a kind of half-concealed sanctity alive throughout history that shows itself from time to time in monks (313-4), in the Russian people (130-1, 294), in children (775); but any Christian will have a ready (theoretical) solution to the present incapacities of creatures, so I put that aside here.[7] The two moral complaints are more interesting: first, that the ones offended somehow cannot pardon all that needs to be pardoned to approach a final harmony, and second, that even if we pardoned our way to harmony, it would not be worth the cost. The cross looms half-scrimmed, like a silent Christ, in the distance where these parallel lines of questioning converge, so let me follow them out a bit: in the first section, by sharpening the

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[5] There is an implicit skepticism here of claims like Karen Kilby's, that we are right to have questions about evil but that "Christian theology is utterly incapable of offering even an approximate answer." See Karen Kilby, "Evil and the Limits of Theology," *New Blackfriars* 84 (2003): 13–29. One way to put the question to Kilby is to ask whether God sees the answer, and whether the saints in heaven see the answer; and if they do, whether we should really be so skeptical that some approximation of their knowledge is provided in Christ.

[6] All in-line citations are from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).

[7] It is a fine point whether this great idea is transmitted purely pedagogically, which Dostoevsky can seem sometimes to suggest, or also in other ways, e.g. ecclesially or sacramentally. Certainly the great idea seems tied up in some way with the institution of elders, and their formative effect on their communities (both the monastery and beyond) seems subtly deeper than just pedagogy. For an account of this practical problem and how Zosima represents a solution (in ways that tilt toward the pedagogical), see Timothy O'Connor, "Theodicies and Human Nature: Dostoevsky on the Saint as Witness," in *Metaphysics and God*, ed. K. Timpe (New York: Routledge, 2009).

second question against certain kinds of theodicy, especially those that appeal to God's compensation of the victims; in the second, by suggesting what a theodicy would need to answer this question; in the third, by suggesting, in response to Ivan's first question, that the cross supplies what is needed; in the fourth, by applying this to Ivan's hard cases, the suffering of children; and in the fifth, by showing how this turn to Christ can supply another defect in compensational theodicies.

I. Beyond Compensation

Ivan again:

> "Imagine that you yourself are building the edifice of human destiny with the object of making people happy in the finale, of giving them peace and rest at last, but for that you must inevitably and unavoidably torture just one tiny creature, that same child who was beating her chest with her little fist, and raise your edifice on the foundation of her unrequited tears – would you agree to be the architect on such conditions? Tell me the truth." "No, I would not agree," Alyosha said softly. (245)

This is a deep intuition, deeper perhaps than philosophers have yet mined. It lays down a first challenge to compensational theodicies, as if simply rewarding the child for his sacrifice were sufficient.[8] And Aloysha's agreement with his brother here undermines Wittgensteinian approaches: Ivan's protest cannot stem merely from an "idolatrous, anthropomorphic sense" of God or from Ivan's alienation from the properly religious form of life exemplified by Zosima, as Stewart Sutherland argues,[9] for Alyosha shares the concern. Nor will a simple account of defeat answer, in which compensation does not merely balance out the suffering but is somehow organically connected to it, emerging from it and requiring just this sort of suffering for its realization.[10] Ivan might well be conceding something like this organic necessity – the edifice of happiness on the foundation of tears – and still he returns his ticket. What then is he looking for?

An answer is suggested by the story of the Grand Inquisitor, which immediately follows Ivan's complaints. For the Grand Inquisitor would remove from the masses their freedom in exchange for bread and a captive conscience; he would take from them the necessity of choosing with all its weight and all its capacity for ill

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[8] The "unrequited tears" in this passage refer to the unrequited suffering of the previous block quote, which this passage almost immediately follows. So what is meant by 'requiting' these tears does not seem to mean simply overwhelming them with harmony. Swinburne considers the possibility that God might wrong us in permitting evil, but he relies too much on overall benefaction as a justification for this permission for his discussion to satisfy the Karamazovs. "The conclusion of this discussion of God's right to allow humans (and animals) to suffer is that God does have this right so long as the package of life is overall a good one for each of us. Bad aspects have to be compensated by good aspects." Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 235.

[9] Stewart Sutherland, *Atheism and the Rejection of God: Contemporary Philosophy and the Brothers Karamazov* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 97. Ivan is close enough to Zosima's form of life, especially in his deep sympathy with children, to voice real questions about the coherence of the concepts that spring from that life.

[10] For an account of defeat, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 20f. and *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 45f.

consequence and provide in return a "kingdom of peace and happiness" (258). In this, the Grand Inquisitor is something like Ivan's God made Roman. Harmony can be won but only by running roughshod over human freedom. It must be given, not chosen.

Compare here the birds of the air: does God wrong them in building harmony out of their anguish? Perhaps the birds exist to serve the whole and so are not the sort of creatures who need to be compensated. This sort of response has generally been rejected by philosophers where persons are concerned,[11] and one might wonder whether it is adequate even to the dignity of animals.[12] Alternatively, then, one might grant the birds their compensation, acknowledge that in many cases this must be eschatological (requiring some sort of bird resurrection), but hold that, unlike with humans, the eschatological righting of their wrongs requires no decision on their part. The birds accept their suffering with gladness – not a free acceptance, it is true, but it need not be: it is fulsome and entire; it is without revolt. Such is appropriate for birds, since their measure of dignity demands not that they have a free choice for gladness but that they be glad: the birds have no say, not because God wrongs them, but because they are birds. But human beings – this now is Dostoevsky against the Grand Inquisitor – require something more, something compensational theodicies miss. It can be wrong for God to allow to persons an evil and then a gladness beyond the evil if that gift disregards their freedom.[13] Young children are a particularly poignant case, since they have the dignity of freedom without its use.[14] To harm and then make glad is to treat them as instruments when they are more than that: but how can they be more than instruments without the ability actually to act freely? How can these who deserve a say be given a say?

II. Pro aut Contra

One possibility is a compatibilist universalism: all are made freely to accept this compensation. But what about those who reject the predeterminism behind this

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[11] "Undeserved suffering which is uncompensated seems clearly unjust; but so does suffering compensated only by benefits to someone other than the sufferer." Eleonore Stump, "Providence and the Problem of Evil" in *Christian Philosophy*, ed. T. P. Flint (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 66. This might only apply to persons for Aquinas and Stump. See Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 384–5.

[12] As seems to be behind, e.g., Trent Dougherty, *The Problem of Animal Pain: A Theodicy for All Creatures Great and Small* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and certain theological responses to evolution: see e.g. J. B. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989) and Denis Edwards, "Every Sparrow that Falls to the Ground: The Cost of Evolution and the Christ-event," *Ecotheology* 11, no. 1 (2006): 103-23.

[13] Stump thinks that you need the person's consent if you allow an evil in order to produce some greater good but not if you allow it in order to avoid of some greater evil. See *Wandering in Darkness*, 392f. Her account is explicitly restricted to adult suffering, though her examples here are of evils allowed to children. But children present a difficulty: they seem unable to give consent (and so seem able to suffer only involuntarily *simpliciter* and not involuntarily *secundum quid*, in Stump's terms), but it is unclear that the evils they suffer are warding off greater harm (e.g. hellfire). If innocents who die experience no pains of sense in hell, if their punishment is only the absence of the beatific vision, then all sanctifying suffering could possibly do for such innocents is attain for them a good, not prevent for them an evil (assuming that the loss of a good is really different from the presence of an evil, which Stump's account seems to require). If God allows children to suffer in order to gain the greater good of beatific vision, what of their consent?

[14] The Grand Inquisitor tellingly compares us to children (256), as if in denying the use he has denied the dignity.

universalism, either because they are libertarians about freedom or because, compatibilist about freedom, they still think that some important choices – like whether to accept God, and God's compensation – are not predetermined?[15] If God needs us to accept the construction of the edifice in order for it to be justly founded upon our tears, then what of those who weep and withhold acceptance? Do they undermine the whole project?

On the indeterminist view, there are two kinds of suffering: that which accepts its role as founding a harmonious edifice and that which does not. And the first thing I want to suggest here is that, though God might need our permission to bring harmony out of our suffering, harmony-building is not the only way that suffering might be justified – for it might also be deserved. There is not just one type of ticket, for some tickets admit entrance to another kingdom altogether. That is:

(1) Either we accept God's use of our suffering or our suffering is deserved

And this founds the following argument:

(2) Suffering that we accept God's use of does not impugn God's justice or love
(3) Deserved suffering does not impugn God's justice or love
(4) Therefore our suffering does not impugn God's justice or love

Now (1) implies that we are obliged to accept God's use of our suffering, the construction of the harmonious edifice upon the foundation of our tears, though we can refuse. To refuse acceptance is damnable because acceptance is not supererogatory.[16] What then is the source of this obligation?

It cannot, first, just be rooted in the goodness of the edifice itself, as if our final harmony were good to such a degree or in such a way that opposing it is wrong. Alyosha in agreeing with Ivan has already rejected that idea: final harmony as such is not even just, let alone choice-worthy, if the sufferers do not accept it. That is, whatever makes final harmony worth affirming is not independent of the sufferers' acceptance in a way that might oblige them for their part to accept; rather, the choice-worthiness of final harmony *depends* on their acceptance.

So it might, second, be grounded in divine command. The goods of final harmony do not themselves obligate us to consent to have it built out of our tears, but God has the authority to order this consent. The parallel here is the conscript: even if the war as such is not so just as to require our suffering in its service, still a legitimately constituted authority can require that suffering. Most theories of divine command would emphasize that the cause cannot itself be bad for God to command it, and in that sense the goodness or at least non-badness of final harmony matters; but it is the command, not the goodness of the cause, that grounds the obligation. Still, this is not how Alyosha in fact responds to the question, and it is not clear that he thinks

[15] Zosima seems to think that some can freely damn themselves; see Bk VI, ch. 3, (I), 322f. Ivan's devil is less sure, talking himself into his eventual reconciliation (647-8), though he is hardly to be trusted.

[16] Notice that this must be true even for those otherwise innocent. The innocent too must forgive their persecutors to be part of God's kingdom; they are not exempted from the demand for forgiveness by the fact that they have no personal sins to be forgiven in turn. In some ways this is a kind of mirror of original sin: even the innocent need Christ's forgiveness quickening them, if only as subjects and not objects of that forgiveness.

God could command us to suffer in this way – to suffer for the sins of others – in order to secure final harmony.

III. Suffering in Christ

At the very least, he does not seem to think that God has so commanded us. Here is how he responds to Ivan's first challenge, that no one can forgive such offenses because forgiveness exceeds the brief even of those offended:

> You asked just now if there is in the whole world a being who could and would have the right to forgive. But there is such a being, and he can forgive everything, forgive all *and for all*, because he himself gave his innocent blood for all and for everything. You've forgotten about him, but it is on him that the structure is being built. (246, emphasis original)

There is something peculiar about this, for it is not just God that can forgive but a God who has undergone innocent suffering. What difference does suffering make? The point is not exactly Anselmian, that God's forgiveness is more fittingly forthcoming when merited by Christ in his passion, because it is not transferred in quite that way. It is not that this human being has suffered and so God can forgive; it is that this Being has suffered and so *he* can forgive. Something about assuming the suffering makes Christ an especially fitting forgiver. Of course, it is not just anyone who has suffered innocently: it is this capital-B Being; it is God. But it is a suffering God. So if Alyosha's solution is to tell us anything about Ivan's problem, then I take the complaint to be about allocating offense neatly out among the offended parties, as if the mother has her share and the child has his and God has God's, each demanding its bit of forgiveness for full harmony. Instead, God is not offended in addition to the offense to the child but somehow *in* it, and since the offense just is the suffering caused to the child, this suffering too is what God is in. That is, it is fitting that an offense that is unjust suffering violate God not just as offense but also as suffering, that God the forgiver of offenses be not just one more offended party but even in some way the proximate offended party, the one who *suffers* the offense. And the incarnation makes actual this fittingness. It is not simply that in harming our neighbor we also and separately offend by disobedience the one who commanded us not to harm our neighbor, and this one took it upon himself to forgive for himself and the neighbor both. It is not even that in harming our neighbor we offend also the one who made the neighbor, though this one might have more of a claim to forgiving on her behalf. Instead, the point is that in harming our neighbor we harm the one in whom our neighbor is more or less incorporated, the one of whom our neighbor is a member, and it is this one that forgives in turn. Thus what I read Alyosha pushing towards, and Ivan's complaint as adumbrating, is a kind of archetypicality to Christ's suffering, such that all unjust suffering is a kind of participation in Christ's own suffering.[17]

The upshot here is that Christ does not so much order us to suffer for the sins of others as offer us a share in his suffering for others. The ground of obligation, then,

[17] There is much for the mystics and the metaphysicians to work out on this point, but the Pauline roots run deep here (e.g. Gal. 2:19, Col. 1:24, Phil. 3:10, 2 Tim. 2:11; cf. Acts 9:4).

is not a divine command, exactly, but an *exemplum* – and an exemplum not just in the sense of an example to be imitated but of an exemplary cause to be participated in. It is not that God conscripts us into the army but that he himself, as one we are bound to follow and even to be incorporated into, goes to war.

Indeed, there is a sense in which it is already misleading to speak of this as an obligation. For it is less that God requires our obedience and then positively provisions punishment for disobedience than that God makes possible our obedience while allowing us to suffer the consequences of any disobedience. "What is hell?" Zosima asks. "The suffering of being no longer able to love" (322).[18] To say that incorporation into Christ is obligatory, then, is just to say that rejecting it is one's damnation. We can bear our suffering as cruciform or we can reject its cruciformity, and the latter just is to bear it as infernal. The cross here works not as a source of merit or defeat but in putting the sufferer to a choice, for or against. There is no neutral ground.[19]

Standard free will theodicies appeal to our freedom in order to shift the blame for suffering from God onto creatures. God cannot make us choose well, so at most the question becomes why a just God would allow our bad choices to wreak such great effects, and in particular whether God can justly allow some to suffer beyond their sins. This is where compensation, and defeat, are invoked: it is just if compensated correctly. What I am suggesting is that this compensation too be subject to our rejection, though in this case we alone would suffer its loss. God is just not by compensating all those who suffer but giving us the chance to claim the compensation for our suffering. This gives our compensation the requisite dignity to respond to Ivan's challenge – the dignity of our free or contingent cooperation – while preventing the uncompensated from impugning God's justice. They may not have caused their suffering, but they did cause it to be uncompensated or undefeated.

What is often taken to be Dostoevsky's answer to Ivan's cry against the justice of God is a practical one: Ivan goes mad, his epigone commits suicide, his philosophy is not livable. But even granting the intensity of Ivan's insanity, this leaves his philosophical complaints unaddressed; for it might just be madness for which the clear-sighted are destined. Sanity about moral demands and the state of the world may be the surest path to insanity. That is not refutation: it is tragedy. There is an echo of a Catch-22 here, that the qualifications for insanity are that one be sane.[20] I am proposing something like the opposite: an inverted Catch-22, a frustrated tragedy. God gives suffering that is unjust only if you reject it – but then it becomes just. To accept

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[18] As the Volokhonsky text notes: "Zosima's thought here and in the long paragraph that follows is drawn from the homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian, e.g., Homily 84." Given his sense of the interconnectedness of creation, Zosima might be getting at some of Dante's intuitions about hell here, in which the consequence of alienation from God is not just individual anguish but a kind of interpersonal predation (*Inferno*, Canto XXIII) – where *each devours his neighbor's flesh* (Isa. 9:20; cf. Gal. 5:15).

[19] Merit and defeat might be components of our compensation, or ways of binding the edifice of our compensation more organically to the foundation of our suffering, and in that sense can stand as complements to the present account.

[20] "There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane, he had to fly them. If he flew them, he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to, he was sane and had to." Joseph Heller, *Catch-22: 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 56.

suffering voluntarily is to take it on as Christ did, undeservedly and for its eradication, and your suffering no more incriminates the Father than does Christ on the cross. Alternatively, to reject your suffering – to shirk it, to dwell in it as something not ordered to its own eradication, to fail to cruciform it – is to institute the conditions under which it is appropriate: your rebellion from God. God as it were provisions you for the outcome of the choice within the choice itself: the suffering you choose to bear against God is the suffering you deserve in bearing yourself against God. This is the sense in which Ivan's madness is a refutation, for Ivan's madness is deserved. It is insanity as a sign that you can reject the cruciformity of your suffering without impugning the justice of God, and that God guards his harmony with a happy mischief even from its denizens.

IV. Post hoc formation

To put this sort of emphasis on choice is immediately to face an objection. Can we so clearly choose, above all in conditions of suffering, how exactly to take that suffering? Adams draws our attention to horrors, those things that destroy our capacity for meaning-making, and it seems impossible that those who cannot make meaning might make meaningful decisions. Children are Dostoevsky's preferred limit case for the same point: how do we expect them to choose? And if they suffer without choice, then their suffering does not fall into the binary of cruciform or deserved.

But the comparison to children is favored for a reason, for we might be children not just in our inability freely to love and forgive but also in our growth toward love and forgiveness. This is where Dostoevsky looks to the resurrection.[21] Thus Rowan Williams: for Dostoevsky, "we need a dimension beyond history to grow into full understanding and full actualization of our nature."[22] But this is not merely a development of capacities; the kind of forgiveness that Dostoevsky envisions is freely willed and so chosen, such that growth in our ability to forgive only matters if those full-grown can actually exercise their ability. Ivan's very statement of rebellion already suggests something like this eschatological decision: the mother shall see the tormentor and be able to forgive him (though dare not to); Ivan shall stand before God and be able to praise his justice (and decline). This decision need not imply the possibility of eschatological conversion; it may instead be the capstone of an eschatological actualization of the state we choose for ourselves in this life.[23] Ivan resolves to harden himself against precisely such praise in this life, and God may honor his

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[21] E.g. the final passage of the book, 776.

[22] Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 34.

[23] For children, the nature of this decision is more ambiguous: perhaps all will be brought to a free acceptance, perhaps their decision will be in continuity with their state in this life (e.g. baptized/unbaptized), perhaps they will themselves face an undetermined choice. Paul Evdokimov's Dostoevsky inclines to the first of these: "L'enfant dans le Royaume de Dieu peut se réjouir de ses larmes parce qu'elles sont le signe d'une victoire du bien dans l'éternité, qui prend, dans le temps, la forme de la souffrance des innocents. C'est la joie de l'être communiant au Dieu souffrant, à la force de l'expiation." Paul Evdokimov, *Dostoïevski et le problème du mal* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1992), 253. Recent Catholic magisterial statements are somewhere in between the first and second: "Some of the infants who suffer and die do so as victims of violence. In their case, we may readily refer to the example of the Holy Innocents and discern an analogy in the case of these infants to the baptism of blood which brings salvation." See *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptised*, The Vatican's International Theological Commission, paragraph 86.

hardening. Either way, some such decision seems required in Dostoevsky's optimism.

Still, this decision comes after the suffering itself, as if our present suffering provided a kind of matter to be formed by some later choice. And this seems bizarre. But is it so different from our everyday experience? We do not always in the midst of suffering think of it as a participation in Christ's suffering: indeed, if Adams is right, we sometimes cannot, for some suffering destroys our deciding. But there is a kind of after-the-fact narration of our suffering in which we can see it as sent by God and choose to put it on the cross – or not.[24] How could Simon the Cyrene, pressed into service, have known he did the Lord's work? How could he, father of that Rufus who would become *eminent in the Lord* (Rom. 16:13), have failed to know by the end of his life? And did it not from such unknown beginnings redound to his great glory?[25]

Indeed, there is a sense in which our suffering is never finally formed until the final moment. Take a case where you make some sacrifices for a neighbor: perhaps she is in a bind and you give up your day to watch her difficult children; perhaps she has done this several times already and you are inclined to fault her for her lack of foresight. Now at the end of the day, or the following morning, or the next week, when you think about this day, and when you interact with your neighbor in light of it, you can either bear it against her or bear it in love. You can either expect acknowledgement or not count the cost, live resentfully or graciously, let slip sort of accidentally-on-purpose how difficult it was or assuage her worries; you can, in brief, live as dozens of Dostoevsky's characters regularly do or as his few singular characters, sometimes startingly, strive for. Now who is this neighbor? We know from the Good Samaritan. And what is it not to blame her? To accept her burdens as a cross. And when is this decision required of you? In every one of your subsequent interactions with her, right up until you die. To adapt Sirach: call no one merciful before his death (11:28). Even if she burdened you before you were a Christian,[26] even if she burdened you before you left childhood, you have finally a choice, and the choice is finally Christic.[27]

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[24] "The whole of the past, at least with respect to its significance, never ceases to present us with the problem of *what we are going to make of it*." Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. Bernard Noble (Hamden, CT: Harper and Row, 1972), 40 (italics in original).

[25] The history of Illusha – which, significantly, ends the novel – is instructive here. Illusha suffers in large measure out of guilt for feeding a needle to a dog that he thinks killed it; he then learns that the dog was not killed or even much harmed after all. While not much is said about Illusha's subsequent state of mind, he seems to have implicitly re-purposed his suffering, born out of the dog affair, into something Job-like (Illusha's father's lament at the end of book X recalls Zosima on Job (291); and various signs in the novel's final chapter suggest that Illusha has taken Zosima's path: the preservation of the corpse (cf. book VII ch. 1), the flowers (cf. 37), the solicitude for the birds (cf. 289). While the boy might be suffering for the ramifications of his own rather minor sin, the disproportion between his suffering and his sin, and the textual allusion to Job, both suggest a kind of suffering beyond guilt that receives post-hoc formation by the boy.

[26] "She is married outside the Church, but she has faith. She prays for you too." "The prayers we pray then don't count, surely?" "No, but when the moment of Grace comes they rise… all at once together like a flock of birds," Graham Greene, *The Heart of the Matter* (New York: The Viking Press, 1948), 221.

[27] For a nice meditation on the use of the Psalms in this connection, see Walter Brueggemann, "The Formfulness of Grief" in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 84–97.

Perhaps the same worry can be re-framed: our later choice, on this account, seems to cause our previous suffering in some way. God gives us to suffer *because* we will later choose to reject Him (or to accept it). How can we later cause our present pains? But notice the causes in question here. The efficient cause of this suffering is not posterior to its effect: it is, actively, the tormentors, and, permissively, God. What is at issue is what used to be called the meritorious cause, the motivations in justice for God's permission of the act. But meritorious causes for divine acts can occur at any time for a timeless God. They can even be (efficient) effects of the things they (meritoriously) cause. Consider: regardless of how immaculate one considers Mary, if she is sanctified, it is through Christ. But Christ sanctifies only because of Mary's acts (though he could have sanctified in some other way, he in fact did not). Her sanctification is an efficient cause of her *fiat*, which is a (partial) efficient cause of Christ's work, which is the meritorious cause of her sanctification. Why not also, then, in the case of suffering? We might even grant that the child's suffering is a partial efficient cause of the child's sanctification – some kind of soul-building – and that this sanctification is a meritorious cause of the suffering, without contradiction. Nor must this peculiar sort of causal loop determine the subsequent choice: just as Mary can be sanctified even if she should later choose, before Gabriel, to say no to God – because Christ could come through some other virgin and supply her (fruitless) sanctification in that way – so also a child can suffer even if he should later reject this his cross, because suffering can be a foretaste of his alienation.

V. Compensation and Gratuity

Let me pause here to take stock. Ivan put forward two main challenges: first, that no one was in a position to forgive some sins, and second that the compensation for them required our consent. I have suggested that the second of these attacks compensational theodicies for saying both too little and too much: too little, because free creatures should be given some say in their role; too much, because God need only offer these sufferers the possibility of compensation, not actually compensate them.

I defended this second point, that compensation is not just insufficient but in some cases unnecessary, from an incompatibilist perspective. I should note in passing that there is a compatibilist version as well. For it is not clear that those moved by God to suffer in Christ have themselves to receive compensation for their suffering. They have been joined to Christ: God has taken their suffering upon himself in some deep sense, and their consent has taken on the character of his. Their suffering does not impugn God's justice because they consent to a creation in which they suffer in order to overcome the suffering of the world. There must be some kind of global defeat of suffering for their mission to be worth it, then, but it is not clear that this must involve compensation *for them*. They choose to sacrifice themselves for others, and if this is freely chosen, then it is not clear why the sacrifice has later to be rewarded for it to be just. The incompatibilist requires a later reward because the incompatibilist makes this sacrifice obligatory, and it would not be just for God to force us to choose between uncompensated suffering on the one hand and infernal suffering on the other. But the compatibilist need not worry about alternative possibilities; the compatibilist's God can force us

freely to choose to make this sacrifice, and why should one so free need to receive recompense, assuming they know in choosing that they will not receive it? They signed up for it.

Individual compensation is neither necessary nor sufficient, then, though the possibility of compensation will be necessary for the libertarian and global compensation will be necessary for the compatibilist. And there is another problem with compensation that our consideration of Christ has put us in a position to address. I indicated already Ivan's discontent with neatly parceling out blame for the offense – his first worry. Ivan imputes a dignity to innocent suffering that makes a merely conjunctive forgiveness somehow inappropriate. God's forgiveness is not added on to the mother's or the child's but is somehow intimate to it. This is the fittingness effected by the incarnation, a kind of blessed exchange: God's forgiveness gains the fittingness of one suffering by the fault and our forgiveness gains the dignity of encompassing the fault's enormity. Just as God does not forgive as one party among others, a party who, e.g., had his commands disobeyed, so also our forgiveness is not one from among a class of victims who forgive in a kind of concatenated way but comes from the one subject who is the object of all offense. We do not forgive a share of the whole offense so much as we have a share in forgiving the whole offense. We get in some measure God's view of the sin just as God gets in some manner our view. In the end, the mother *can* dare to forgive: because her child forgives, and Christ forgives, and she, like her child, forgives in Christ.

Now we may not be moved by Ivan's intuition here, at least not as it is filtered through Alyosha's response. But to re-christinate our suffering in this way points to a real problem for a specifically Christian compensational theodicy: that it undermines the gratuity of salvation. This blessed exchange of suffering and forgiveness is a particularly fitting way to overcome sin, and the merely fitting need not necessitate God. But that just sets off all the more clearly that the compensation we receive in Christ is, for these theodicies, not just fitting but demanded by divine justice. Even if it need not come through an incarnation, even if it could lack the beauty of the blessedness of the exchange, still the innocent would have to be saved: from their suffering, by a grace that can overcome the deformations of nature. And this undermines the central Christian commitment to grace's gratuity.

The voluntarist way out of this problem is just to deny that God is necessitated in any way as regards creatures, even by the divine wisdom. This abolishes the problem of evil altogether – God can make any sort of creation God pleases – and with it compensational theodicies. An Augustinian way out is to double down on original sin: we all fall in Adam; we are all guilty; therefore there are no innocent sufferers. Compensation no longer serves as part of a theodicy because no one deserves compensation; it is instead an unmerited diffusion of God's goodness and unwavering determination not to let sin alter God's plans.

But the incorporation of innocent suffering into Christ suggests another way, for it makes innocent suffering part of the economy of redemption. Innocent suffering is not a condition that God responds to but a participation in God's response. Its very existence is an anticipation of the cross, not a feature of our natures. For the reason innocent suffering exists is because of the interconnection of creation, because the fall of the first creatures spread its damage more broadly than its guilt. (Even if all are

guilty, not all are guilty enough to deserve the degree to which they suffer.[28]) But the nature of this interconnection is itself an anticipation of the redemption. Adam *was a type of the one to come* just in this, that he had a kind of headship by which sin and death spread to us, a headship which was a shadow of that by which sin and death would be overcome (Rom. 5:14). Adam damages more than he renders guilty because he is a type of Christ, who heals more broadly than he renders meritorious (if only because he heals before he renders meritorious). The way to secure the gratuity of grace is to see the character of this headship and the interconnection it secures as already more than natural; it already partakes of the church and her redemption.[29] God could have created Adam with the same essential natural properties but without such headship – perhaps with some other, more attenuated headship that would have bequeathed us an undamaged nature after the fall – and such an Adam sinning would have engendered no innocent suffering.[30] But neither would he have had the same chance to build up the body that is the church. That there is innocent suffering, then, is due to the fact that God began the work of deifying creation, and gave us some share in that work, even from the beginning. This deification was wholly gratuitous, not owed our natures, even if defections within it demand a divine response. But they demand a divine response in something like the way divine promises demand a fulfillment: as part of an economy in which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit anticipates themself in some of their actions.

This is not all spelled out by Dostoevsky, but it has a deep resonance with his vision. He no less than Augustine has a deep sense of the interconnections of creation; he more than Augustine appeals to it not to ground a universal guilt but to establish the solidarity of suffering. It is just such solidarity that underlies the novel's larger focus on universal responsibility: we are each of us responsible for all and to all because a sin against any part of creation ripples in privative waves across the whole.[31] Fr. Zosima describes this in language, taken from the liturgy, that anticipates Alyosha's description of Christ's innocent blood: the monk must recognize that he "is also guilty before all people, on behalf of all and for all" (164). Every harm is a harm against Christ and so in some sense against everything. This all-for-all-ness is

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[28] See especially on this point Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987). Cf. Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, three volumes, trans. Brian Kerns, OCSO, introduction by Mark DelCogliano (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014–2016).

[29] For those who do think Mary is immaculate, she is the type here: her suffering is undeserved and exceeds the economy of nature.

[30] Does evolution imply that some innocent human suffering is part of our natural condition? By 'natural' I mean what is essential to us as human beings, not the original state in which we find ourselves – for this latter might already reflect the fall of an original angelic head as much as it anticipates the elevation of its future incarnate one. Innocent suffering cannot be part of our natures in this sense since it would be inappropriate for God to make rational creatures who suffer innocently by essence – and perhaps also for animals. Whether, or what kind, of evolution would be present in a purely natural world, which I am suggesting might be a less interconnected world, is difficult to know.

[31] Zosima makes clear that this is different from original sin (164). Perry D. Westbrook's statement that there is no "wholly undeserved suffering for there are no wholly innocent people. Each of us shares in the world's guilt and each must share in its pain" (*The Greatness of Man: An Essay on Dostoyevsky and Whitman* (Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), 77) must at least be qualified, then, if not flatly denied. Compare also Evdokimov, *Dostoïevski*, 253, and on the other side, A. Boyce Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1974), 179–80. Zosima is rather mystical about how this works, though the novel as a whole is a nested set of examples of this phenomenon that the characters themselves slowly begin to untangle (e.g. Dmitri at 425, Grushenka at 457, Ivan at 617, Katerina at 759).

distinguished on the one hand from a kind of Western scientism that acknowledges some of the ways in which we are embedded in this world, notes the influence of circumstance upon our actions, and takes that to exculpate us from sin; and on the other from a self-laceration that notices the wide-ranging effects of our actions and tries to pay for them individually, in a kind of strict transaction between independent individuals, without reference to one's larger embeddedness and the loves and joys that brings.[32] But both of these are corruptions of the consistence of all things together in Christ.[33] And this consistence and this christocentrism, I am suggesting, does not so much obviate compensational theodicies or accounts of defeat as resituate them in a way that supplies some of their defects: on the gratuity of grace; on the interpenetration of forgiveness; above all on the importance, and the intricacies, of our free acceptance of God's plan.

For in the end, even for children, there may be no final innocence, or no infantile innocence, an innocence from all choice. Those lost as infants might somehow be brought freely to love God in beatitude – or to curse God in hell, for those who think such is their fate – and even to do so, mysteriously, with some kind of maturity. In that sense, Ivan's argument can be turned against him. For Ivan, in his rebellion, comes closest of any of the rationalistic humanists to loving humans and not just humanity.[34] His love here is at its most particular and most moving. "It's not God that I do not accept, you understand, it is this world of God's" (235). But this is a dangerous approach, for it makes Ivan susceptible to realizing that the creation he would defend against God has been conspiring against him the whole time, that revolt against the one can only be revolt against the other, and that in coming so close to creation, he is coming close to the Christ in whom all things consist.[35] It pushes him toward an incoherence not just in life, in madness and suicide, but in reason, in a rejection of the very sympathies and intuitions from which his rebellion springs. How can he choose between Christ and the tormented child who sees that Christ lives in the child, and that the child is alive again in Christ?

What then do we say to Ivan? We do not say anything, for the children will speak for themselves. They will beg him with tears of joy watering the ground (362); they will press the ticket into his palm and say, here, I have bought this for you, I who am no longer innocent of that old guilt, who plead with you in my new innocence. What more eloquent statement could there be than this, their little sticky fingers in his half-closed fist, asking if, rejecting not God, he yet rejects them?

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[32] Examples of the first are Rakitin and the defense attorney Fetyukovitch, along with various medical professionals, and of the second are Ivan (e.g. at 653) and Katerina Ivanova (passim). Both of these are nicely set off from Zosima and Alyosha's view of responsibility in Zosima's description of his brother, 286 (in the doctor's opinion and the brother's rejection of grief).

[33] Admittedly, I am reading into Alyosha some of the christological maximalism of his Orthodox tradition. Much more would have to be said to establish just how much Dostoevsky was influenced by this tradition, and in what way. Particularly important here are the Slavophiles, from whom the idea of the inter-connectedness of creation is in part taken, and Dostoevsky's good friend and the model for some of his characters, Vladimir Soloviev. Soloviev in particular spins this tradition in a sophiological direction. See here Marina Kostalevsky, *Dostoevsky and Soloviev: The Art of Integral Vision* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), esp. 9, 43, 110. For others' discussions of Soloviev's influence on *The Brothers Karamazov*, see ibid., 199 n. 99.

[34] Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, 432-3.

[35] Zosima notes that the damned "demand that there be no God of life, that God destroy himself and all his creation" (323).