

THE MIND OF NARRATIVE AND THE NARRATIVE OF MIND
KIERKEGAARD, DOSTOEVSKY AND ONTOLOGY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN HUMANITIES
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

November 2025

Joseph Junior Smith, 2025

Abstract

This dissertation examines the dialectical relationship between the ontology of the mind and the structure of modern narrative through the works of Søren Kierkegaard and Fyodor Dostoevsky. It argues that Kierkegaard's conception of the mind as relational, paradoxical, and marked by anxiety and sin parallels Dostoevsky's method of indirect communication, in which narrative discloses the infinite worth of self and other. Against the ancient Greek logic of contradiction, both thinkers employ biblical principles—especially the golden rule—to distinguish myth from narrative and to ground human existence in the infinite rather than the finite. Through close readings of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings and Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels, the study shows that indirect communication is indispensable for grasping the paradox of existence and safeguarding the irreducibility of the individual. It concludes that the crises of modern philosophy, theology, psychology, and literature derive from false narratives that deny the infinite, whereas the mind itself is best understood as a narrative phenomenon oriented by biblical principles.

Dedication

To my mother, Valerie Rose Smith (1954–2021)

You crossed an ocean with nothing but courage and taught me that a life is not defined by what it survives, but by the love it refuses to surrender. You endured exile, violence, homelessness, and the quiet erasure of your gifts, yet you rebuilt the world from ash so that I might one day stand where you could not. You walked beside me through danger, injustice, failure, and the unraveling of my own mind. When the world tried to break me, you held the center. When I lost my way, you returned me to myself with a tenderness that defied every wound. This dissertation lives because you did — because your strength became the ground on which I learned to think, to hope, and to rise. Though you are gone, this work carries the echo of your spirit.

All that I have become is an inheritance of your love.

Acknowledgements

To God, whose grace carried me through every darkness and into the truth this work seeks to name. To Avron Kulak and Brayton Polka, who taught me how to think—courageously and without fear. To my committee members, Gamal Abdel-Shehid, Mark Cauchi, and Patrick Taylor, whose guidance and encouragement shaped both this work and the scholar behind it. To my father-in-law, Bishop Dr. Glenford Granville Duffus, whose wisdom, mentorship, and unwavering support steadied me in the seasons when I could not stand on my own. To Timothy Carey, whose early belief in me opened a path I had never imagined and first showed me that I belonged in the world of ideas.

And to my wife, Kimarie J. Smith, and our children—Wynter-Ray Rose Smith, Zen Carter Smith, and Zyair Josiah Smith—this work exists because your love kept me spiritually grounded and held my life together through every stage of its becoming.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v

Chapter 1: The Mind of Narrative and the Narrative of Mind

I. The Mind of Kierkegaard and the Narrative of Dostoevsky.....	1
II. The Interpretation and Critique of Truth.....	2
III. The Paradox of Indirect Interpretation.....	7
IV. Myth and Narrative.....	10
V. Philia and Theos.....	11
VI. The Mind and Narrative as the Dialectical Manifestation of the Relationship Between Theology and Philosophy.....	12
VII. The Contours of the Dissertation to Follow.....	13

Chapter 2: Myth and Narrative

I. The Irony of Myth.....	16
II. Mythologization: Socrates, Plato and the Just-Republic.....	21
III. Demythologization: Dostoevsky, Judeo-Christianity and Christendom.....	29
IV. The Sincerity of Narrative.....	40
V. The Mind of Narrative and the Narrative of Mind.....	47

Chapter 3: The Narrative of Mind	58
I. The Structure of Two Narratological Perversions.....	59
II. Coming into Existence: The History of Consciousness.....	67
III. The Either/Or of Anxious Accounts: Discipline and Obstinace.....	77
IV. Despair, Suicide, and Sacrifice: The Dialectic of Illness and Health.....	84
V. Sin-Consciousness and Demonic Possession.....	92
VI. Conclusion.....	99
 Chapter 4: The Mind of Narrative	
I. Going Beyond Existence: The History of Offense.....	102
II. Dostoevsky, Modernity, and Post-Modernity.....	104
III. Demonic Possession: Nihilism.....	114
IV. Demonic Possession: Suicide.....	125
V. Divine Orientation: Spirit Meets Sensuality.....	132
VI. Divine Orientation: Spirit Meets Rationality.....	142
VII. Conclusion.....	151
 Chapter 5: Conclusion: Communicating the Mind(s) and Narrative(s) of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky	154
 Bibliography	168

Chapter 1: The Mind of Narrative and the Narrative of Mind

I. The Mind of Kierkegaard and the Narrative of Dostoevsky

This study examines the relationship between the ontology of the mind and the structure of modern narrative in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard and the literary works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. As we will see, Kierkegaard constructed a system of thought that enables us to conceive of the mind as a relational phenomenon, involving (necessitating), as he understood it, anxiety, sickness, and an awareness of sin (error), if it is ever to be cultivated properly and reflect, what he understood as necessary, the infinitude of the individual. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, developed a methodology for storytelling which postulates that modern communication is either necessarily infinite (bespeaking the inalienable value of self and other) or consists of nothing whatsoever. The central aim of this study, then, is to show that what Kierkegaard demonstrated in his ontology of the mind—that the mind becomes what it is only when it embraces the paradox of absolutely relating to the absolute and in so doing recognizes all minds as incommensurate with the finite—is also what Dostoevsky advanced in his literary works—namely, that only when modern narrative (both the story of ourselves and of existence) is rooted in biblical principles can we develop a notion of the infinite (a demythologized understanding of God, self, and other) that can help us meaningfully distinguish between what is true and false, real and illusory, good and evil.

To elucidate the aforementioned, this study focuses, therefore, on two major concepts: paradox and indirect communication, both of which comprise the major innovations embodied in the works of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, respectively. For it is precisely in understanding that the paradox of the mind's existence and its relationship to itself and others can only be communicated indirectly that we will learn what constitutes the relationship between the mind and narrative, between Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, and among the disciplines that their

respective works brought into conversation: philosophy, theology, psychology, and literature. That is, this study argues that, according to both authors, unless and until we see that the paradox of existence is only a paradox to those who refuse to indirectly communicate, and that indirect communication reveals that only until we transcend finite commensurability can we properly appreciate, engage, and live our finite existences, our modern notions of philosophy, theology, psychology, and literature will be incapable of recognizing the individual as infinite (as irreducible to finite commensurability) and therefore fundamentally comprised of the relationship between mind and narrative.

In short, I undertake to show that, unless we see that modern narrative is paradoxical, which is why it is so rarely understood, and that the existence of the mind can only be indirectly communicated, which is why it is so rarely received, we will continue to misunderstand the modern relationship between philosophy, religion, psychology, and literature. Likewise, unless we see that modern narrative can only be indirectly communicated, which is why it is so rarely understood, and that the existence of the mind is paradoxical, which is why it is so rarely received, we will be unable to recognize that the mind is a story unto itself and that only in the telling and interpretation of stories do we find the mind of human existence.

II. The Interpretation and Critique of Truth

My inspiration to construct a study on the relationship between the mind and narrative, in the works of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, owes a great debt to the work of Brayton Polka. With the axis of his thought resting singularly on the absolute distinction between works produced by the ancient Greeks and extra-biblical peoples on the one hand and the Bible and biblical thinkers (philosophers and theologians alike) on the other hand, the profundity of his contributions rests in his ability to extract some of the most consequential implications that follow an adherence to

the biblical golden rule in our critical analysis of texts (all forms of human expression as Polka makes clear¹). To that end, one of the implications of his thought pertains to the very assumptions and presuppositions we bring to that skill by which we are able to gain access to any text in and of itself: reading.

According to Polka, as it states in his book *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique*, “the very notion of reading a text, the concept of both reading and text, involves what I call the dialectic of interpretation and existence. All reading is interpretative, and every text demands interpretation.”² Polka states that our various readings(interpretations) of existence(text), regardless of what they may be, can be reconciled rather than opposed, if at their heart they hinge upon a single idea, the idea that “there is only one truth, as the Bible proclaims that there is only one God, one law, one community, one people, one book, one messiah, each of which expresses, single-mindedly, the universality of the golden rule comprehending the totality of life: one is to be all and all is to be one in the truth.”³ When Polka writes that the one truth is that one is to be all and all is to be one in the truth, he does not mean that all diverse thinking and perspectives must be subsumed by one singular understanding of existence. When Polka writes that one is to be all and all is to be one in truth he means that “my[his, hers, their] interpretation, if it is to be truthful must bear a relationship to the truth: its truthfulness is the very relationship of truth which it bears.”⁴ In other words truth, any truth that is true, must be able to sustain our diverse perspectives and possessing our diverse perspectives must be understood as only possible in light

¹ Polka, Brayton. *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique: Interpretation and Existence*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

of a context of truth that permits plurality. Put yet another way, a diverse perspective, if it is true, must be able to self-consciously account for its origin (its origination) within a truth that simultaneously recognizes the truthfulness within the existence of other diverse perspectives. For Polka, without the aforesaid premise our attempts at reading a text will result in misunderstanding and our misunderstandings will be read as true.

Polka maintains that in our reading of canonical Western works we must begin with distinguishing between the ancient Greeks/extra-biblical people and the Bible and its heirs. In short, through Polka's analysis of ancient Greek works he finds that the challenge with reading ancient Greek works is that, when it comes to assessing the range of interpretations allowed within their context, it is not possible,

“to choose between dominating your opponents (or being dominated by them) and willing to do unto them as you would have them do unto you, between dominating your opponents (or being dominated by them) and treating them as equals. The only apparent choice in the Greek world is between dominating others as heroic victor (doing evil to them) or dominating others as heroic victim (suffering the evil they do to you).”⁵

The impossibility, in the ancient Greek world, of choosing a set of values that invite the other to read as they would like to be read, to engage as they would like to be engaged, to interpret as they would like to be interpreted, derives from the fact that in the ancient Greek world, “all life is condemned to futility by the law of contradiction, for life exists only in its appearances, and appearances are inherently contradictory: all that appears appears simultaneously to be and not to be - unchanging and changing, one and many, self and other.”⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

For the ancient Greeks, the first principle of metaphysics, the law of contradiction, states that: “something which is identical with its own nature or end cannot both be and not be in the same space at the same time.”⁷ Within the context of the ancient Greeks, diverse perspectives (interpretations/thoughts) in relationship to the truth cannot exist as critique and interpretation render the truth other than what it appears to be in natural time and space. In light of this, Polka shows through his many works that the appearance of critique within the ancient Greek context results in death (as demonstrated by the life of Socrates and others), and the appearance of interpretation results in ignorance (as demonstrated in the life of Socrates and others). For these reasons Polka makes the equally radical claim that Greek texts cannot be read⁸ as they lack (deny, are ignorant of) the dialectic of interpretation and existence (that truthfulness can exist in my perspective and your perspective equally).

Our preliminary exploration of Polka’s approach to reading and interpretation, specifically as it pertains to the ancient Greeks as a result of his understanding of biblical truths, establishes for this study a framework through which thinking through the relationship between mind and narrative and its implications can yield fruitful conclusions. When Polka applies his approach to ancient literature, he comes away with a conclusion that equally prevents us from extracting from ancient literature that which would sustain our modern conceptions of human cognition. In his text entitled *Truth and Interpretation*, Polka notes that “the logic of contradiction blindly supplies the structure of the binary oppositions which shape pagan mythology [classical mythology], while mythical narrative [The Iliad, Odyssey and Oedipus the king to name a few] ignorantly supplies the content, the indemonstrable beginnings or principles,

⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

of the law of contradiction.”⁹ For Polka, because we read ancient Greek texts (specifically fables, myths, epics and tragedies) as if they are not anchored by the logic of contradiction (which forbid us our critiques and interpretations) we read ourselves into those texts and come away misunderstanding both ourselves and those texts.

It is the abovementioned thought from Polka that draws us closer to the catalyst of the following study. In juxtaposition to that which was developed by the ancient Greek tradition he writes that the logic of the biblical, “creation story shows that, although we live *in* the contradictory realm of nature subject to fatal metamorphosis of appearances [like the ancient Greeks], we do not live *of* it. The doctrine that God creates the world from nothing means that spirit replaces nature, freedom replaces fate, the golden rule replaces the law of contradiction, ultimately life replaces death [and ignorance] as the end of human existence.”¹⁰

The principles underpinning the hermeneutical structure extrapolated by Brayton Polka from biblical values have influenced this study’s approach to interpreting the works of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky and have solidified the context against which they are being interpreted. It is this distinction between story and myth, the principles underpinning both, and their impact on the human mind that directs this study. The major concern here is what influence the communication of truth has on its reader and its subsequent interpretation and how the reading of what is communicated, if done well, reveals hidden patterns that tend to beguile us or deliver us from error (self-deception/ignorance and willed deception/ignorance). Paradoxically, both authors I have selected to explore, as it pertains to the relationship between the development

⁹ Polka, Brayton. *Truth and Interpretation: An Essay in Thinking*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 32-33.

¹⁰ Polka, Brayton. *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique: Interpretation and Existence*, 14.

of the mind as a metaphysical entity and the development of narrative as an ethical/moral necessity, bring the readers who seek to interpret their work closer to a level of clarity about the truth if only they can become satisfied with communication patterns that are indirect.

Because this dissertation moves within the long tradition that distinguishes the Greek philosophical imagination from the Jewish-Christian revelatory tradition, it is necessary to clarify why Brayton Polka serves as its primary interpretive lens. Polka stands in a lineage that includes Tertullian, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Rosenzweig, Buber, Strauss, and Levinas—thinkers who, in various ways, refuse to collapse revelation into myth or the ethical command into metaphysical necessity. What distinguishes Polka within this genealogy is the radical simplicity with which he grounds the distinction itself: for him, the difference between Athens and Jerusalem is not primarily epistemological or metaphysical but ethical, expressed most clearly in the contrast between the Greek golden mean and the biblical golden rule. His work provides a hermeneutic in which truth is disclosed through relationality, responsibility, and the narrative structure of biblical thought. For this reason, the readings of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Socrates, and Plato undertaken in this dissertation follow Polka's interpretive logic, employing his ethical and relational framework as the means by which these thinkers' texts are approached and understood. Using Polka as the guiding lens therefore allows this dissertation to articulate its central claim: that the mind is revealed not through metaphysical speculation but through the narrative structure of ethical relation.

III. The Paradox of Indirect Communication

Aside from the content similarities in their works and the interrelations between them, both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky chose to present their material indirectly: that is, through pseudonymous texts and prototypical characters. This indirect communication (to use

Kierkegaard's idiom) presents a series of unique challenges and opportunities for modern readers. For example, when we assume that Kierkegaard believed that "the positive content" of any of his pseudonymous works "[was] not nonsense," but that it made sense to those who "have a sense" of the eternal (God, the self, the other), the "sense" that his pseudonymous works communicate to readers will not be "anything new that they need to be told, [although] if they do not possess that sense, there is no use in their going back over it again in order to try to acquire it."¹¹ It is only when thinkers take on the challenges presented by Kierkegaard's indirect communication of what he calls the "eternal" that we can work out a framework of values that render his work clearer. When we can better grasp the values that underpin Kierkegaard's indirect communication, we can then understand the necessarily paradoxical nature of his pseudonymity. For example, in *Fear and Trembling*, where Kierkegaard used the pseudonym *Johannes de silentio*, "to talk about that of which one cannot speak," we may wrongly enter the text immediately believing that Kierkegaard, through his pseudonym, can properly lead us toward an understanding of the content of the work, which he cannot.¹²

This conventional approach to reading, thinking, or relating liberates the individual from having to position themselves within a text as someone who is responsible for relating authentically to an external entity. Kierkegaard sought to expose the aforesaid tendency. Likewise, when readers see the incongruous transformations and developments in Dostoevsky's characters, they

¹¹ Alastair Hannay, "Søren Kierkegaard," in *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy: Revolutionary Responses to the Existing Order*, eds. Alan D. Schrift and Daniel Conway (New York: Routledge, 2010), 71.

¹² *Ibid.*, 80-81: "The point of the pseudonymity would then be twofold: to disown any *rapport* with a reader lacking that disposition, and to prevent the reader who possesses it from appealing to the real author as an authority for accepting what is written, since any acceptance has to be the reader's alone, as part of his or her own *Bildung* or development."

note that the process by which one is religiously transformed into something existentially authentic is not immediate, direct, or linear. Rather, this process requires that the reader begin with a demythologized notion of God so as to avoid falling victim to the appearance of the text (the other) that always metamorphoses into its opposite when undisciplined by what both authors would call biblical principles. For example, the ways in which “hyperconsciousness paralyzes thinking in [Notes from the] underground,” or how “*Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov* flesh out horrific mutations of freedom into tyranny and humanism into unabashed misanthropy; libertarian ideas solidify as suffocating dogmas; social reformers prove to be degenerates,”¹³ demonstrate the need for the reader to cleave to the principles underpinning the style of communication Dostoevsky employed in these texts. The consequences of not cleaving to those principles is that the reader will fall victim to the same reversals of fate in their thought and existence that Dostoevsky’s characters are subject to as a result of their lack of understanding of those very same principles.

Without authentically engaging the other, the text, God, or oneself, both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard demonstrated that the appearances of truth to which we often fall victim ultimately lead to psychological and sociological turmoil. The method of indirectly communicating the necessary transformation of the modern individual challenges us to articulate proper notions of freedom, responsibility, and love. All three concepts, when properly construed, are necessary to understand what is meant when we speak about narratives (or any communicative practice) as

¹³ Evgenia Cherkasova, “Dostoevsky and Russian Philosophy,” in *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy: Revolutionary Responses to the Existing Order*, eds by Alan D. Schrift and Daniel Conway, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 96.

only true when they are understood as co-authored or the mind as only one's own when it is properly shared.

A number of issues arise as we attempt to unpack the large and dramatic implications of the works of both authors when they are brought into conversation. The challenges their respective works evoke are in fact veiled psychological predispositions that have become conventions within the various disciplines they sought to engage. This is why, in understanding the relationship between the mind and narrative (and the overall aims of this dissertation), it is crucial to analyze three distinct issues that threaten to obfuscate our ability to see clearly what both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard sought to reveal:

1. The difference between myths and modern narrative
2. The relationship between philosophy and theology
3. The revelation of the Judeo-Christian God as they both saw it

Chapter 2 will address these issues directly, while Chapters 3 and 4 will do so indirectly. For now, a brief introduction and analysis of these themes will set the stage for the work to come.

IV. Myth and Modern Narrative

In order to properly contextualize the innovations both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky made to their respective disciplines, this dissertation explores the relationship between the existence of the mind and its constitutive narratives as represented in the Western traditions of philosophy, theology, psychology, and literature. An important part of the distinction between myth¹⁴ and modern narrative involves the avenues through which the Western tradition expresses

¹⁴ Throughout this study, I align narrative with the biblical tradition and myth with the ancient Greek tradition. Insofar as biblical narrative consistently expresses the golden rule, it remains narratological at its core, even though it presents as mythological. The opposite is the case with ancient Greek myth. While ancient Greek myth presents itself as narratological, insofar as it consistently expresses the golden mean, it remains mythological.

its most fundamental ideas about human existence: myth and narrative. What fundamentally distinguishes the two is our modern understanding of the human will (freedom). While modern philosophy and theology make use of myth, they both remain fundamentally unmythological. The ability for modern philosophy and theology, unlike ancient Greek thought for example, to make use of myth without becoming mythological is itself the result of biblical narratives that show ancient Greek thought to rest on values that do not support the existence of human (inter)subjectivity and freedom.

V. *Philia* and *Theos*

To understand the difference between the myth of human ignorance/worthlessness in the ancient Greek tradition – as we will explore through Plato’s Socrates – and the story of human freedom and consciousness in the biblical tradition, let us recall a famous ancient riddle. The theologian Tertullian famously asked, “What indeed does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?” The answer, as Tertullian so fiercely argued, is nothing and, therefore, everything. That is, to see that Athens has nothing to do with Jerusalem—that the *golden mean* bears no relation to the *golden rule*—is to recognize that how we comprehend their relationship has everything to do with how we understand the relationship between modern philosophy and theology.¹⁵ In other

¹⁵ Other than the thinkers this dissertation utilizes primarily, A long lineage of thinkers has drawn a distinction similar to Tertullian’s—marking the irreducible difference between the Greek philosophical imagination and the Jewish-Christian revelatory tradition. In the patristic period, figures such as Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen each wrestled with the tension between biblical revelation and Hellenistic metaphysics. Augustine deepened this contrast by rejecting Neoplatonic necessity in favor of a relational, Creator-creature ontology grounded in grace. In the medieval period, Anselm, Bonaventure, and aspects of Aquinas maintained the priority of revelation over autonomous reason. The Reformation continued this distinction through Luther’s theology of the cross and Calvin’s doctrine of accommodation, each insisting that divine truth cannot be derived from natural speculation. In modernity, Barth, Buber, Rosenzweig, and Levinas reiterated that biblical faith discloses a fundamentally different mode of truth—one grounded in encounter, command, and relation—than the metaphysical abstractions of Greek rationalism.

words, our understanding of the paradox that we confront in Tertullian's question has everything to do with how we understand the relationship between *philia* (brotherly love) and *theos* (God). As this study argues, it is only by accounting for the fundamental difference between ancient Greek and biblical thought that we will see that *theos* (God) gives *philia* (brotherly love) substantive value. Conversely, it is *philia* (brotherly love) that makes the existence of *theos* (God) truly demonstrable. By illustrating this relational exchange, we will see our response to Tertullian's question is integral to comprehending the historical, ontological, and ethical bases not only of *philia* and *theos*, but also of modern literature.

VI. The Mind and Narrative as the Dialectical Manifestation of the Relationship Between Theology and Philosophy

What we learn by examining the biblical notions of faith and doubt is that both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky were thinkers whose works shared the same dialectical content (bore the same relationship to the truth despite their diverse perspectives). Both understood that the existence of God involves the authentic reconciliation of the single-individual or the human "I" with existence. It is only through the reconciliation of the self with existence based on the recognition of God's existence that we can assert that our existence, although materially finite, although finitely terminable, must not be lived on the basis of finite constitutions, but on the basis of divine/human principles. It is the passionate leap of faith (one's willingness to begin faithfully within existence) that constitutes the matrix of the mind. It is the passionate concentration of doubt (one's willingness to end the influence that sensory impressions and the imagination have on one's thinking) that charts the contours of that narrative which renders human life infinite rather than finite and thoughtful rather than sensorial. As I will argue later in this dissertation doubt, faith, and reason, which are all rooted in the golden rule according to both

authors, are responsible for sustaining the ontology of the mind and supplying the mind with a narrative or origin story. When understood properly, the mind and its narrative are capable of resisting that which begets human opposition and psychological conflict as consciousness, according to Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, is constituted by the nexus of doubt, faith, and reason.

What we must be attentive to in our pursuit of the lucid articulations of the ontology of the mind in Kierkegaard's works and of the narrative of truth in Dostoevsky's works is the tragic ramifications that befall the mind and its truthful narrative when we do not cleave to the golden rule. Whether it is extra-biblical notions rationalized as biblical revelation or biblical revelation subordinated to extra-biblical concepts, the result is the same (as both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky demonstrate): the dispossession of one's mind and the perversion of one's narrative.

VII. The Contours of the Dissertation to Follow

In Chapter 2, "Myth and Narrative," we ground ourselves in the work to come by analyzing the difference between mythological consciousness and narratological consciousness. We begin with looking at Socrates through the eyes of Kierkegaard and Plato so as to ultimately make sense of the meaning of the Just-Republic as a myth born out of Socratic Ignorance. By doing this we will be in a better position to properly understand what mythological consciousness is predicated upon and to what extent it impacts the interpretation of modern narrative and our understanding of the mind. We then proceed to explore the biblical narrative of Genesis through the lens of Dostoevsky's *The Dream of a Queer Fellow*. By comparing both narratives, we will be in a better position to illustrate the principles that allow us to distinguish between a mythological reading of scripture—which leads to false narratives of Christendom—and a philosophical reading of scripture, which leads to what both authors would consider to be the true narrative of Judeo-Christianity. I conclude by showing that when biblical principles are

not distinguished from interpretations of scripture laden with cultural import, we ineluctably replicate and reproduce for ourselves the oppositions between thought and existence that preclude the existence of the mind and distort the narrative of existence.

Chapter 3, “The Narrative of Mind,” undertakes an analysis of Kierkegaard’s conception of the ontology of the mind, which itself is engendered by biblical narrative constituting both the mind’s matrix and its history. From there, I explicate what anxiety, despair, and demonic possession mean in light of Kierkegaard’s understanding of sacrifice (the presupposition of the inalienable worth of self/other), sin-consciousness (the knowledge of good and evil), and the mind’s incommensurability with the finite. I conclude by postulating that the mind’s infinite existence is revealed both by its ability to presuppose (narrate) the infinite existence of self/other and by the psychological torment it suffers when it refuses to do so.

Chapter 4, “The Mind of Narrative,” then proceeds to explicate how Dostoevsky’s narratives properly demonstrate the ramifications that follow from the mind’s attempt to avoid its biblical orientation and project, as expressed by his central characters. I analyze Dostoevsky’s *Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov*¹⁶ to explore, on the one hand, two manifestations of demonic possession that Dostoevsky makes central to his work—nihilism and suicidal ideations—and, on the other, the relationship between spirituality, sensuality, and rationality, which, when resolved, allows one’s narrative of existence (the existence of self/other) to orient

¹⁶ While a theological/philosophical approach to the reading of a text (whether literary, philosophical, theological, or political) is not directly contingent upon the reading of a text in its original language, this dissertation is particularly sensitive to how close textual readings of works in translation affect the meanings derived from them. That said, while there are both limitations and opportunities to reading texts in translation, this dissertation understands the meanings of a given text to be irreducible to the original language or the translated language in which a text appears. I therefore read and interpret all of the texts used in this study in English.

itself within principles both divine and human, rather than against them. I conclude by indicating that the mind's capacity to distinguish between truth and appearance depends on its ability to avoid opposing the narrative of the mind and the mind of narrative.

Finally, Chapter 5, "Conclusion: Communicating the Mind(s) and Narrative(s) of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky," reiterates that, insofar as the existence of the mind is necessarily expressed through narrative and not myth, the existence of the mind is a relational phenomenon that is predicated upon (indirect) communicative practices that are, according to the Bible, infinite rather than finite. I shall then explore one way of understanding our modern socio-political tensions—manifested as existential perversions of the psycho-social categories of race, gender, sex, creed, ethnicity, and ability—as the result of false narratives (direct communicative practices) to which the mind, insofar as it is infinite, cannot acclimate itself and which, if it properly attends to the relationships among philosophy, religion, and literature, can overcome.

Chapter 2: Myth and Narrative

I. The Irony of Myth

According to Kierkegaard, the prototypical mythmaker, for whom the idea of the human being as infinite was inconceivable, was Socrates. For Kierkegaard, Socrates, unbeknownst to his interlocutors, achieved this feat by way of introducing irony into the world,¹⁷ and it is often his misperceived ironic nature that deceives us as we try to make sense of what Athens (myth) has to do with Jerusalem (narrative) to invoke Tertullian once more. What we must now explore is the relationship between mythical exchanges made between interlocutors within the ancient Greek world, as far as Socrates' engagement with it is concerned, and the inherent irony of our conventional belief that philosophy as we know it today began with the ancient Greeks, and, more specifically, Plato's Socrates. As Kierkegaard put it in *The Concept of Irony*,

Socrates' questioning was essentially aimed at the knowing subject for the purpose of showing that when all was said and done, they knew nothing whatever. Every philosophy that begins with a presupposition naturally ends with the same presupposition, and just as Socrates' philosophy began with the presupposition that he knew nothing, so it ended with the presupposition that human beings know nothing at all.¹⁸

Socrates' maieutic (the Socratic method) ironically did the opposite of what we imagine it to have done, and that is primarily because the basis of Socratic dialogue is rooted in the assumption that ignorance is a congenital feature of human existence. Therefore, one either admits hubris when they begin to speak as if they know something, or they admit their immanent ignorance in a way identical to Socrates. Socrates was an honest person if our notion of honesty involves communicating exactly what one believes to be true, insofar as "his words mean what they say."¹⁹ As Kierkegaard indicated, there are two ways to ask questions. He states, "one can

¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 9.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

ask with the intention of receiving an answer containing the desired fullness, and hence the more one asks, the deeper and more significant becomes the answer; or one can ask without any interest in the answer except to suck out the apparent content by means of the question and thereby leave an emptiness behind.”²⁰ The latter represents the ironic approach Socrates practiced, as Socrates honestly believed that nothing could be known.

Socrates was not unique in this regard, though Plato’s representation of him speaks to the contrary. Kierkegaard understood these epistemological assumptions to be rooted in the ancient world’s preoccupation with what we would now call the finite (natural time and space, which is complete and at its end in nature), although the ancient Greeks referred to it as the in-finite (that which is not at its end in nature). For example, the idea of “love” cannot immediately be seen, tasted, touched, felt, or heard within the realm of natural time and space. As the commensurable is the standard by which ancient Greek thought was measured, Socrates concluded in the *Symposium* that love does not exist in the world that human beings presently occupy because those who know [love] do not seek [love] and those who seek [love] do not know [love].²¹ For

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ In *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique*, Brayton Polka elaborates on this point: “As Socrates indicates in the *Symposium*, the gods are utterly opposed to philosophers, to those whose love of wisdom reflects their complete lack of knowledge. The Oracle of Apollo at Delphi declared Socrates to be the wisest man of Greece, for in his ignorance he knew nothing which would challenge the supremacy of the gods. Just as the seeking of knowledge is to be forever ignorant, so to possess knowledge, to know the good, is not to seek it, for you can no more seek what you know than you can seek what you do not know.” If you know what you are seeking, all seeking is at its end: it is dead. Seeking, desire, love – all that which we would call effort or willing, the content of our existence – belongs, in the Greek world, to mere appearance, the fatal contradictions of which condemn the individual to blindness, ignorance, and death. Brayton Polka. *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique: Interpretation and Existence*. (New York: St. Martin's Press.), 6.

Socrates the knowers of love were the gods and the seekers of love were human beings like him. As Kierkegaard states in *The Concept of Irony*, “the commensurable in general is Socrates’ proper arena, and for the most part his activity consists of encircling all of man’s thinking and doing with an insurmountable wall that shuts out all traffic with the world of ideas.”²² Socrates believed that the “insurmountable wall” he was building around the human being’s thinking and doing (existence) was a divinely ordained mission—one that would ultimately see him put to death as his existence ostensibly challenged the hubris of ancient Greek society. Socrates’ method of posing questions manifested as an attempt to humiliate others, which put him at odds with the ancient Greek city-state and appeared in a “more definite form as the relation between the abstract and the mythical in Plato’s dialogues.”²³

For Kierkegaard, the mythical was “the idea in a state of alienation, the idea’s externality—for example, its immediate temporality and spatiality as such.”²⁴ In other words, the mythical represents that which is divorced from content that would adequately support the thought and existence of the human being because it exclusively presents itself as accessible through immediate cognition or sensation. This is the notion of the mythical—that is, an idea espoused by someone who does not understand it substantively or its implications—that this dissertation continually makes use of as it deepens the distinction between myth and narrative and justifies the claim that the mind’s matrix is found within the structure and values underpinning narrative as opposed to myth. According to Kierkegaard, every time Socrates compared the understanding of Justice, Love, or Truth to its appearances in natural time and space (the commensurable, the finite, the in-finite) and then concluded that we cannot know

²² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

Justice, Love, or Truth in their true form, given their multifarious representations, he engaged in a type of abstract thinking that could only conclude in highlighting a negative element²⁵—namely, that humans cannot know. As such, when Socrates, after convincing an interlocutor of the vacuity of their thinking, continued to speak about what Justice, Love, or Truth are in their true forms unmuddied by terrestrial concerns, he was speaking mythologically.

Kierkegaard aids us here by specifically outlining what does and does not constitute a mythical exchange. He states that, in everyday speech acts,

one cannot call it the mythical simply because reference is made to some myth or other, because to quote a myth in a presentation does not necessarily make the presentation mythical; nor does using a myth do so, because the using of it simply indicates that one is beyond it; nor does making the myth an object of faith make the presentation mythical, because the mythical addresses itself not chiefly to cognition but rather to the imagination, requires that the individual lose himself in it, and the presentation does not become mythical until it flutters in this manner between the imagination's production and reproduction.²⁶

When abstract thinking, rooted in the commensurable, comes to its unavoidable end in what Kierkegaard calls the “negative element,” then the imagination “expands before intuition”²⁷ to “maintain something that actually is not.”²⁸ Mythological exchanges reconstituted the ideas that underpinned abstract thinking within the ancient world, but they represented the “negative element” in a way that was more digestible to the untrained mind. An idea the invoker does not know but nevertheless imagines characterizes what Kierkegaard represented as the ancient Greek world's pursuit of philosophical truth. This is why Kierkegaard described what he could do in *The Concept of Irony* as a true demonstration of what philosophical inquiry does and as a result defines what the ancient Greeks produced as mere historical artifact that the ancient Greeks

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 106.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 106.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

themselves could not know. He compares his relationship to the ancient Greeks to the relationship between philosophy and (mere) history when he states that,

just as the individual making a confession is certainly able not only to reel off the incidents of his life chronologically but also relate them entertainingly but still does not comprehend them himself, so history certainly is also able to declare the eventful life of the human race with pathos and in a loud voice but must leave it to the senior (philosophy) to explain it and is then able to relish the delightful surprise that at first is almost unwilling to acknowledge the copy provided by philosophy but gradually, to the degree that it familiarizes itself with this philosophical view, eventually regards this as the actual truth and the other as apparent truth.²⁹

What is apparently true is that the ancient Greeks, when and if we consider Socrates, it's preeminent mouthpiece, spoke about matters and produced ideas that still have currency today and that reflect the state of the human condition. What is actually true, according to Kierkegaard, is that the ancient Greeks—whose spirit is embodied in the main character of Kierkegaard's analysis of the concept of irony—were admittedly ignorant of what constitutes the hearth of human life. Socrates did not know that his interlocutors were his neighbors and that they existed, as Kierkegaard pointed out, or that one should love them.³⁰ This is the knowledge the biblical condition presents to the individual, and it is the knowledge that, as we will soon see, offers an alternative to choosing between abstract thinking—as understood by the ancient Greeks—which concludes in negativity, and mythological thinking that appears as insight but is actually ignorant. Drawing on the concept of myth that Kierkegaard developed in *The Concept of Irony*, the next section analyzes in greater depth the principles and values that render the contributions of Socrates, through Plato's articulation of them, mythological.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 342.

II. Mythologization: Socrates, Plato and the Just Republic

According to Kierkegaard, within the ancient Greek context, the construction of myth is predicated upon a particular principle called the golden mean. Fundamentally the concept of the golden mean reflects an opposition, germane to the ancient Greeks, between metaphysical and ethical thinking. Nowhere is this more poignant than in Plato's *Symposium* where we are provided with a lucid delineation of why ancient Greeks unknowingly believed that metaphysics and ethics, being and becoming, and thought and action were utterly opposed. According to the Apollonian oracle Diotima, in contrast to the gods who are wise and therefore do not love or seek wisdom (the gods are, therefore, unphilosophical), human beings—who are not wise and therefore seek wisdom—are in between wisdom and ignorance. Diotima further asserted that the person capable of relinquishing visible images in order to ascertain wisdom—the sensory images of virtue and virtuous acts—can apprehend the essential being of anything (love, beauty, justice, the gods) and hence of true virtue itself. If humans can only develop and practice true virtue when they are divorced from the sensory world, and if the love of wisdom seeks but cannot know or be aligned with that which would prescribe the correct course of action for any human being who endeavors to live virtuously within the sensory world, then what we have before us is a chiasmic divide. In other words, we have an opposition between human existence, on the one hand, and the requisite knowledge to live that existence, on the other. According to Socrates this knowledge is solely in the possession of the gods, who seemingly are not constricted/influenced

by sensorial impressions or desires.³¹ The intermediary position human beings are in demonstrates their ignorance and not their mastery of virtue or being.³²

In Plato's *Republic*, these oppositions between knowing and living and between the gods and human beings are made clear as the result of an inexorable ignorance at the heart of ancient Greek thought that Socrates is both aware of and makes use of. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates elucidates the degree to which the notions of the law of contradiction render impossible any attempt by humans to acquire the knowledge necessary to live a life of virtue. In formulating (without naming) the law of contradiction, Socrates insists that it is, "obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time. So, if we ever find this happening in the soul, we'll know that we aren't dealing with one thing but many."³³ To deal with the many and not the one is to be embroiled in all the tensions, ramifications, excesses, and deficiencies that follow in dealing with those who have not found the *mean* of their existence due to ignorance. It is also, as Socrates states, to be preoccupied with the visible (in ancient Greek terms, the in-finite, or that which lacks its end) and not the intelligible (in ancient Greek terms, the finite, or the end toward which all existence is conceived, which, in the *Republic*, turns out to be what humans cannot know).³⁴

That the same thing, the soul, never willingly undergoes opposites is nothing more than an indictment of those who change. Those who change belong to the realm of becoming (in-

³¹ To further emphasize this point, what Socrates demonstrates in the *Symposium*, and through the *Symposium's* mythological logic according to Polka, is that "Myth is the fatal recognition that the seeker of the good (politician or philosopher) is ignorant of the good which he seeks or loves and that the good which is sought or loved can be known only in itself (without possession by a human being)." Polka, *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique*, 147.

³² Plato, *Complete Works*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1997), 204a.

³³ Plato, *Republic*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1992), 436b.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 506d-e. This study will explore the disparate ways in which the concepts of the infinite and the finite are understood in the biblical and ancient Greek traditions.

finite) and not the realm of being (finite). Those who change miss the mark (*hamartia*) when it comes to locating the mean of their existence and are therefore fatally consigned to become their opposite (either by force or chance) every time they attempt to conduct themselves in a way that is becoming of who they are—which they do not know outside of being defined in opposition to others.

The philosophy of Socrates, and by extension the philosophy of his pupils and heirs, hinges upon this contradictory dialectic,³⁵ known as the dialectic of the law of contradiction. The dialectic implores its followers to simultaneously seek being while resigning themselves to the fact that all seeking ends in the impossibility of knowing the good. Such a pursuit renders its adherents subject to the metamorphisms of becoming (the vicissitudes of the unknowable world of the appearances). When Socrates speaks to Glaucon in the *Republic*, he asks, “do you call someone who is able to give an account of the being of each thing dialectical?” Socrates proceeds to state that:

unless someone can distinguish... the form of the good from everything else, can survive all refutation, as if in a battle, striving to judge things not in accordance with opinion but in accordance with being, and can come through all this with his account still intact, you'll say that he doesn't know the good itself or any other good. But if he somehow gets hold of some image of it, you'll say that it's through opinion, not knowledge, for he is dreaming and asleep throughout his present life.³⁶

³⁵ In Plato's *Republic*, Book VI, line 511b, Socrates states that the “power of dialectic” is illustrated when it reaches “the unhypothetical first principle of everything,” which does not make “use of anything visible at all, but only of forms themselves, moving on from forms to forms, and ending in forms.” What we discover throughout the *Republic*, particularly in interrogating Socrates' statements about dialectical thinking, is that insofar as the forms reflect nothing visible, they are empty. The dialectical thinker is then forced to conclude that existence itself is empty given that the forms possess no content other than what they have separated themselves from. As indicated earlier (see note 1), though the ancient Greeks use the term “dialectic” to describe the opposition between being and becoming and between the intelligible and the sensible, this opposition bears no relation to the concept of dialectic used within this study.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 534c.

To give an account of the good and distinguish it from any image that may *appear* to be the good in nature—the belief that good could never manifest within the images of the natural world—is the focus of what Socrates called dialectical thinking.³⁷ Only those who can clearly delineate the lack of relationship between the visible and the intelligible, becoming and being, humans and the gods, and between ethics and metaphysics are properly practicing dialecticism. This notion of dialectic is not governed by the principle of relationship (as in the Judeo-Christian tradition which we will soon see) but by the law of contradiction. The division these values create is necessary, for if all agree that no one can know being or know the good, justice, love, truth, and virtue, then all members of that society will have to be legislated³⁸ into acting in a way befitting their putative rank. Thus, from the perspective of the ancient Greek thinkers, the only knowledge that human beings are capable of is the knowledge of their inferiority, which Socrates admits when he is told of Chairephon’s visit to the oracle at Delphi. In that moment, he states, “wise is he who knows he knows nothing.”³⁹ That is, wise is he who knows that, in comparison to the gods, human life is futile as it cannot be examined, and humans cannot examine.⁴⁰

³⁷ Another way of formulating this tension is provided to us by Brayton Polka in his *Dialectic of Biblical Critique*. For Polka, “the law of contradiction, in holding that something cannot both be and not be at the same time in the same place, fatally condemns mind, consciousness, spirit, imagination – the interpretation of existence and the existence of interpretation - to immediate identity with, and thus to immediate opposition to, the time and space of nature whose fatal appearances are inexorably contradictory. The contradiction inherent in Greek culture is that immediate identity with nature, with one's telos or end, naturally generates a ruler-ruled opposition between the gods, between gods and humans, between human beings, between polis and polis, between individuals within a given polis (the rule of one, some or many over others), between soul and body, within the soul itself.” Polka, *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique*, 11.

³⁹ Plato, “Apology,” in *Five Dialogues*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1981), 23b.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 38a.

We now come to the crux of this idea in an exchange between Socrates and Glaucon which provides us with what, for the Greeks, constituted the point of argumentation and deliberation about “being” (the gods, truth, justice, beauty, love). When Socrates discusses the nature of what he calls dialectical thinking in light of his own acknowledgement that human life is worthless, he asks,

then isn't this at last, Glaucon, the song that dialectic sings? It is intelligible, but it is imitated by the power of sight. We said that sight tries at last to look at the animals themselves, the stars themselves, and, in the end, at the sun itself. In the same way, whenever someone tries through argument and apart from all sense perceptions to find the being itself of each thing and doesn't give up until he grasps the good itself with understanding itself, he reaches the end of the intelligible, just as the other reached the end of the visible.

Glaucon: Absolutely.

Socrates: And what about this Journey? Don't you call it dialectic?

Glaucon: I do.⁴¹

Yet, given the vacuity of human reason, and given, as Socrates clarifies, that the sensible could never be intelligible—that is, that the intelligible cannot be understood on analogy with the sensible—the song that dialectic sings is a song whose lyrics express the idea that the golden mean (the intermediary between the apparent extremes of sensory existence) cannot be found because it is sought in the realm of becoming and the visible.

If the golden mean cannot be found it cannot be practiced but conversely those who are wise do not seek to do what is wise, since prudence cannot be made manifest in a realm where everything changes *ad infinitum*. The journey from becoming to being is dialectical. However, the only way to know being is not to exist within the realm of becoming. The fatal impasse of Socratic ignorance is established through this brief exchange. The implication of this impasse is crystalized in Plato's fifth book of the *Republic*, where his mythical philosopher king rules the Just-Republic dialectically: forcibly demanding that his subjects act

⁴¹ Plato, *Republic*, 532a-b.

virtuously in accordance with what, we are told, is the noble fiction (myth of metals) determining the worth of their souls (as either bronze, silver, or gold)⁴² and their social functions. The noble fiction is one of many iterations, in mythological form, of the relational and communicative implications of the principal myth that rests on the golden mean, the law of contradiction.

Plato's *Republic* also demonstrates the relationship between justice, agonism, and myth, prefiguring the occlusion of the existence of the mind. In this text, Socrates painstakingly attempts to prove to Glaucon that, while Homer may be "the great teacher" of the Greeks, he merely produced images of images, and, therefore, his works lacked being (existence) or, otherwise put, they are not finite (what the Greeks understood to be the realm of the unchanging, immovable, immutable, and true). Socrates tells Glaucon, tersely and rhetorically: "we say that a maker of an image—an imitator—knows nothing about that which is, but only about its appearance. Is not that so?"⁴³ Socrates, we have seen, at least knows that he knows nothing—nothing about the appearances or about the ultimate truth that underpins the appearances. Homer and all other pre-classical and classical poets and authors knew that appearances are deceptive. Nonetheless, they proceeded to imitate that which, according to Plato/Socrates, they knew not. Ironically, for modern readers, Socrates, in attempting to deny Homeric myth's entry into his mythological Just-Republic demonstrated that he too was beholden to the law of contradiction in stating that it was not myth itself that he would like to remove from the Just-Republic—that which stratifies human life on the basis of perceived natural capacities—but the supremacy of Homeric myth over Platonic/Socratic myth.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 415a-b.

⁴³ Plato, *Republic*, 601c.

As depicted by Plato in the *Republic*, Socrates demonstrates his attempt to banish Homeric myth and replace it with his own when he says, in conversation with Glaucon,

when you happen to meet those who praise Homer and say that he's the poet who educated Greece, that it's worth taking up his works in order to learn how to manage and educate people, and that one should arrange one's whole life in accordance with his teachings, you should welcome these people and treat them as friends, since they're as good as they're capable of being, and you should agree that Homer is the most poetic of the tragedians and the first among them. But you should also know that hymns to the gods and eulogies to good people are the only poetry we can admit into our city. If you admit the pleasure-giving Muse, whether in lyric or epic poetry, pleasure and pain will be kings in your city instead of law or the thing that everyone has always believed to be best, namely, reason.⁴⁴

Prior to demonstrating that, since there is no reason in Homeric myth, the latter cannot be admitted to the Just-Republic Socrates proceeds to develop his city on the noble fiction (mythology) that “the god” who made human beings,

mixed some gold into those who are adequately equipped to rule, because they are most valuable. He put silver in those who are auxiliaries and iron and bronze in the farmers and other craftsman... So the first and most important command from the god to the rulers is that there is nothing that they must guard better or watch more carefully than the mixture of metals in the souls of the next generation.⁴⁵

Thus, Socrates' understanding of justice—the just conditions under which the mind is delimited from developing—whether reflecting Homeric myth or Socratic/Platonic myth, is none other than the opposition between two distinct entities, one of which is to be subjugated to the other (whether those entities be gods and animals, animals and humans, humans and gods, or humans and humans).

The mythology of ancient Greek life and the myths ancient Greek writers produced are rooted in the aforementioned principles of thought: the golden mean and the law of contradiction. From a historical and sociological perspective, David Cohen correctly indicates

⁴⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 606e-607a.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 415a-415b.

that the drama of ancient Greek life—whether manifested in literary, political, philosophical, or religious form—is catalyzed not only by the agonistic nature of Greek social relations, but also, and more importantly, by the values in which this agonism is rooted. Cohen recognizes that, in Greek society, while *taxis* is the specific mental and physical response of a subject to an external stimulus, it socially and politically represents “an artificial order that is imposed to control that element of human nature which tends towards excess and savagery. The *taxis* of human expression is embodied in the rule of law, which institutionalizes the community’s common judgements about good and bad, just and unjust, so as to maintain a stable political order.”⁴⁶ The maintenance of a stable social order, as is the aim of *taxis*, is contingent upon the myth of social hierarchy.

This hierarchy simultaneously provides the populous with its most stringent and entrenched prejudices about the mental potentialities of the other and oneself and sets the stage for the philosophical and religious principles that support a paradigm of inequality. The constellation of these ideas is configured by Greek myth and conditions Greek life and the mind of the ancient Greek citizen. The mind within this social context is, “conditioned by the impulse to conduct social relations with an eye to the normative expectations of others, expectations largely centered upon rivalry for the acquisition of honour and the avoidance of shame.”⁴⁷ The effort to preserve one’s social standing and honor within ancient Greek society delimits the mind⁴⁸ due to the mind’s inability to move the locus of worth from the appearances of nature (the in-finite) to human relationships.

⁴⁶ David Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 37.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁸ What can be gleaned from Cohen’s lucid understanding of the social context of Greek notions of honor and justice is that the mind (which is absent from its own existence)—as

III. Demythologization: Dostoevsky, Judeo-Christianity and Christendom

To demythologize is to bear witness to what Hegel would call the nothingness and nullity of the mythological constructions found within the extra-biblical world,⁴⁹ while also becoming critics of our reproductions of them in our time. As Kierkegaard would argue, to demythologize is to distinguish militantly between the finite and the infinite. For the thinkers who follow in the biblical tradition, the finite refers to all that materially exists within natural time and space. As we will see in this chapter's analysis of biblical imagery, the infinite refers to the principles and values that derive from the Judeo-Christian tradition and render the individual's worth indispensable. These principles and values augment and enrich material existence insofar as they are willed. While the ancient Greek tradition modelled its values and principles off of the appearances of the finite, the heirs of the Judeo-Christian tradition model their thinking off of the values and principles that are not constricted by natural time and space. It is the infinite, and not the finite, that furnishes both the images of experience and the images wrought by the co-creators of biblical revelation with meaning (the golden rule) that adequately supports the ontology of the mind. The art of demythologizing involves critiquing images—both natural and created. The Judeo-Christian critique of images is intended to ensure that, as biblical heirs, we do not conflate the finite with the infinite or misapply infinite values to objects rather than people.

Within the Judeo-Christian context, the construction of narrative is predicated upon particular principles. This tradition inherited the mythological tropes of the pagan civilizations

tragically (in the Greek sense) fated to perform for the other—performs that which is in keeping with social conventions. Cohen writes that “the performative dynamics of competition for honour, thus respond to the pressure of opinion.” And rightly so, for without being enslaved by the social conventions of ancient Greek civility, the mind would not perform for existence but would be that which exists not on stage but in truth (*Ibid.*, 89).

⁴⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 522.

that existed prior to, and at the same time as, Judeo-Christianity. However, what we find within this tradition is a radical rethinking of the meaning of the imagery so commonly used within pagan mythology (as in the case of the apparent dichotomy between God and human beings) and, more importantly, an entirely new subset of principles operating at the base of the narratives that the Bible produces. With the coming into existence of biblical thought, we have an entirely new challenge. For, once biblical thought distinguished itself from pagan ignorance, a temptation emerged. Biblical heirs needed to contend with their own penchant to conflate biblical thought with pagan ignorance and to argue that the structures, values, and practices found within the Bible could equally be found within the works and practices of extra-biblical people. Being seduced by this line of thinking did not result in a benign appreciation for ancient Greek ideas, of the Socratic brand, or that which was produced by the extra-biblical world. The result has always been an attempt (whether knowingly or unknowingly) to reproduce ancient Greek and extra-biblical values within our time under the guise of biblical truth. Another result is the mystification of scripture and the mythologizing of biblical principles. Fyodor Dostoevsky took this idea up in greater depth in his oeuvre, which Chapter 4 examines more carefully. Prior to exploring the constellation of ideas that furnishes the biblical perspective on the existence of the mind and its narrative, this chapter first engages Dostoevsky's analysis of our predicament (post-biblical revelation) through the use of one of his short stories.

In Dostoevsky's *The Dream of a Queer Fellow* (alternatively known as "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man"), he takes us through the fundamental distinction between Judeo-Christian principles and the culture of Christendom. Dostoevsky argues that while the former represents the truth, the latter represents a mischaracterization of the truth rooted in a lie. Dostoevsky's short story first appeared in 1877 in a self-published journal titled *Writer's Diary*. The piece tells

the story of a man who believes that there is nothing of value in the world and, as a result of this anguish, he contemplates committing suicide. What prevents him from doing so is a chance encounter one night with a young girl who needs help—help that he refuses to give. That same night, he slips into a deep dream that captures the heart of what temptations follow biblical revelation. As the protagonist observes,

a terrible anguish had been born in my soul of one thing which is infinitely higher than the whole of me—it was the conviction that had descended upon me that it is all the same, everywhere on earth. I had suspected it long before, but the full conviction came somehow suddenly last year. I suddenly felt that it would be all the same to me if the world really existed, or if there was nothing anywhere.⁵⁰

On one level, we see that the protagonist’s anguish is only possible because he believes that his situation is not what it ought to be. This possibility could never have arisen for Socrates.

According to Socrates and his counterparts, whatever state one finds oneself in has been ordained by the gods and should not be contradicted. Here, however, the story presents the possibility of one’s state being in direct conflict with the principles upon which one believes life ought to be lived. The anguish involved highlights that our protagonist is struggling to live out those principles within his current state. The protagonist’s chance encounter with the young girl gives him an opportunity to revisit those principles. Despite determining that nothing mattered, the protagonist could not escape feeling that his reluctance to help the young girl did matter.

The anguish of which our protagonist speaks—which he characterizes as “infinitely higher than the whole of me”—represents the standard mythological construction to which biblical heirs are prone. To attempt to go beyond one’s infinite relationships with God, self, and/or the other always results in the despairing conclusion that outside of the narrative of these relationships there is nothing. Practically speaking, the protagonist is right. From the biblical

⁵⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Queer Fellow*, (London: Unwin Books, 1960), 12.

standpoint, value does not inhere in anything outside of the principles that temper and enrich these relationships. However, he is wrong conceptually. That is, there are higher and lower hierarchal measurements of value that pertain to a world outside of the biblical context—the extra-biblical world, more specifically. The moment our protagonist conflates the “infinite” with what is “higher,” we can see that he has attempted to go beyond the world within which the ontology of his mind resides. As a result, he experiences an anguish over the meaning of life due to his demythologized(authentic) relationship to the “other.”

For our protagonist, the “other” is a little girl in need who, one night as our protagonist is walking in the street, calls out to him and asks for his help. It is no surprise that Dostoevsky makes it so that his protagonist’s transformation is instigated by the presence of another human sharing a narrative of need and reliance. Our protagonist asks himself this question before no longer being able to ward off sleep: “Why did I not help this little girl, then?”⁵¹ He describes this question as “pulling at me and calling to me”⁵² when in the quiet of his home. If he had concluded that existence is meaningless, what was it inside of him that was responsible for invoking this question? Unable (unwilling?) to answer this question consciously, our protagonist’s dream state seems to function as the only space wherein the psychological defenses preventing him from answering the question can be disabled.

In his dream, our protagonist wakes up in a coffin and is immediately met by a stranger whom he refers to as a “dark being.”⁵³ This being carries the protagonist to a nondescript location, one that our protagonist recognizes as earth prior to the fall. The protagonist recounts that upon meeting the residents of this place, “instantly, at the first glance of their faces I

⁵¹ Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Queer Fellow*, 15.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Queer Fellow*, 19.

understood everything, everything! It was the earth as yet unpolluted by transgression; on it lived men who had yet known no sin.”⁵⁴ As such, our protagonist locates a world prior to the fall, and his dream state offers him the opportunity to work through his nihilism.

Our protagonist recounts how peaceful and loving the residents of the world—prior to the knowledge of sin—were. He describes how they lived in harmony, catered to his needs, and welcomed his presence. But soon after these experiences, he lets the reader in on a secret. He states that,

perhaps all this was not a dream at all! For something happened, a thing to such a degree of horror true that it could not have belonged to a sleeping dream. Let my heart have begotten my dream but could my heart alone have begotten the horrid truth, which happened afterwards! How could I alone have invented it or dreamed it within my heart?⁵⁵

Dostoevsky uses the concept of the heart to describe the very basis of human desire throughout the story. Earlier in the text, our protagonist articulates the following: “dreams are extraordinarily strange... it seems that dreams are the work not of mind but of desire, not of the head but of the heart... in a dream things quite incomprehensible come to pass.”⁵⁶

As Chapter 3 explores in greater depth, when something that is incomprehensible comes to pass, this is not a clear indication that it does not emanate from the mind. Our protagonist here merely reflects the oppositional and therefore unresolved nature of his consciousness.

Dichotomies between thought and feeling, mind and heart, and ideas and desires are reconfigured when they are understood as infinite and rooted in biblical principles. The outlook the protagonist described here is also common when an individual subscribes to the perversion of truth (Christendom) over truth itself (the principles deriving from the Judeo-Christian tradition).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

What our protagonist, like so many others within the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition, fails to see is that it is only because of the emergence of biblical revelation that our questions carry their answers with them. That is, there are no answers outside of the questions produced by the biblical tradition, and, in light of biblical revelation, we are responsible both for our dreams about existence (narratives) and the truth (mind) that arises from them. Upon coming into existence, biblical principles capture and relate themselves to everything within existence (God, self, the other). As such, there is no “outside” of biblical principles—that is, all things once considered outside are brought within the context of biblical principles and are addressed henceforth. Our protagonist wrongly believes that things external to the individual guide, direct, disrupt, and/or stymie the individual. Our protagonist is, in fact, the one responsible for the truth that follows his dream.

The Dream of a Queer Fellow operates in similar fashion to the biblical narrative of the fall. The narration of the queer fellow’s experiences while dreaming inspires questions about how we are to read his summary in light of the biblical narrative of the fall. Is Dostoevsky calling the biblical fall a dream? Does Dostoevsky consider dreams to be real or fake? What is the relationship between the queer fellow’s dream and the biblical narrative of the fall? The text offers us the idea through which we can make sense of the distinction between dreams and reality, and therefore the distinction between narratives as fictional and narratives as non-fictional. After waking up from his dream and sharing what he has learned with others, the protagonist states that, “they tease [him] because it was only a dream.” However, he continues to say, “but is it not the same whether it was a dream or not, if that dream revealed the Truth to me?”⁵⁷ In this passage, Dostoevsky indicates his understanding of the distinction between true

⁵⁷ Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Queer Fellow*, 17.

and false narrative through the framework of the distinction between dreams and reality. What makes a narrative valid is not whether the contents of that narrative did or did not take place in natural time or space. Rather, what makes a narrative valid (or true) is the extent to which it properly articulates the relationship between the infinite—here, the principles that create and demonstrate the need to help a little girl—and the finite. When a narrative fails to do this, it precipitates the falsification of existence. Likewise, what is real is not determined by what does or does not take place in natural time and space. What is phenomenologically real is predicated upon the extent to which truth is revealed. This can take place within a dream just as much as it can while awake. But what, then, is the truth? What are the principles that are embodied in the need to help? Dostoevsky's protagonist takes us on a journey through his dream to uncover the answer he acquired to his initial question: "Why did I not help this little girl, then?"

Moreover, and similar in structure to the narrative of the biblical fall, our protagonist believes that he has corrupted the inhabitants of the peaceful world he has arrived in. He states,

the cause of the fall was I. Like a filthy germ, like an atom of pestilence, infecting whole peoples, so did I infect with my soul that happy land, that knew not sin before me. They learned to lie, and loved lying, and knew the beauty of lies. Oh, this perhaps began innocently, from a jest, from playfulness, in a loving game, perhaps indeed from an atom, but the atom of lie entered their hearts and they loved it. Soon was begotten voluptuousness, of voluptuousness—jealousy, of jealousy—cruelty... Oh, I do not know, I do not remember, but soon, very soon, the first blood was spilled, they were surprised and horrified and began to be disunited and to disperse. Unions appeared, but they were unions one against the other. Reproach and recrimination began. They came to know shame and made of shame a virtue. The idea of honour was born, and each union had its flag. They began to use the beasts ill, and the beasts withdrew into the woods and became their enemies. A war of disunion began, in which they fought for separation, for personality, for mine and thine. They began to speak different tongues. They came to know and to love sadness; they longed for suffering and said that truth could be achieved by suffering alone. Then science appeared among them. When they were angered, they began to talk of brotherhood and humanity, and conceived those ideas. When they committed crime, they invented justice and prescribed for themselves whole codes of laws to maintain it, and to maintain the codes they set up a guillotine. Hardly, hardly did they remember what they had lost; they did not even want to believe that they had once been innocent and happy... the weak readily submitted to the strong, with one aim alone,

that the strong should help them to crush those yet weaker than themselves... to acquire all things they had recourse to murder, and if they failed, to suicide. Religions appeared devoted to the cult of non-being and of self-destruction for the sake of eternal rest in nothingness.⁵⁸

Dostoevsky skillfully uses his protagonist to demonstrate the implications of false narratives within the context of Judeo-Christian values and principles. What starts off as a lie/intentional misrepresentation between individuals turns into the establishment of modern institutions—the most destructive of which is religion in this context. Unbeknownst to the protagonist, his conceptualization of religion as distinct from the truth—or, put another way, a conceptualization of religion made possible only in light of the truth—mirrors his initial articulation of why it is he wanted to commit suicide. If nothing is meaningful or of any value within existence according to conventional Western religious ideology, naturally seeking an escape from existence would be of top priority for the person suffering from such anguish.

However, the religious culture surrounding Judeo-Christian principles, above all else, misrepresents those same principles by offering its adherents the described false narrative of existence: the narrative of Christendom which encircles Judeo-Christian principles but never penetrates them. Such a schism is only possible in light of biblical revelation. Once it is revealed that one shall love their neighbor, it is now possible—under the guise of love—to misrepresent that neighbor's worth and render them expendable. Before seeing the truth of his errors unfold before his eyes, our protagonist saw existence itself as expendable. Upon emerging from his dream state, he realizes that he was in error before falling asleep and understands the truth that has allowed him to see his errors for what they are. He wakes up with a desire to preach—that is, to tell the story of what has happened to him and to offer up his testimony of transformation and of coming into existence, which is predicated on a principle he now considers “so simple”: “love

⁵⁸ Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Queer Fellow*, 25-26.

thy neighbour as thyself.”⁵⁹ Nearing the end of the short story, he goes on to say that “that is the one thing. That is all, nothing else is needed. You will instantly find how to live. Though it is an old truth, repeated and read ten million times, yet it is discovered.” Over the course of one’s existence, one must continually rediscover the old truth of the golden rule as one is both tasked with applying it to disparate situations and circumstances and with protecting it against the penchant to pervert it by misrepresenting it. For example, the contradictory way in which we articulate the relationship between thoughts and feelings—which we see reproduced in the short story—is tempered by the principle that demands that both be employed, as one presupposes the infinite value of the other. Dostoevsky’s character ends with a call to action, one that characterizes the motivation of all biblical heirs that seek to remain true to the golden rule. Dostoevsky maintains that, as biblical heirs, we must fight against the ever-present idea that, “the knowledge of life is higher than life, the knowledge of the laws of happiness—is higher than happiness.”⁶⁰

As an analysis of Dostoevsky’s short story demonstrates, the ultimate divide between thought and existence derives from one subscribing to a false narrative of existence. Our false narratives always project an irredeemable divide between two things that—from the biblical point of view—are not meant to be dissevered. Dostoevsky’s narratives are not real in the sense of having happened in natural time and space. Instead, they are dreams—that is, they are fictions derived from the heart and mind of human beings. And yet, they are real in the sense that they offer us a true narrative of existence through which we can expose all of the false narratives that rob us of our existence. To engage in such a task continuously represents an undying

⁵⁹ Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Queer Fellow*, 30.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

dissatisfaction with all that masquerades itself as true, both in the world that Dostoevsky inherits and the world we have inherited. Although dissatisfaction may characterize how biblical heirs who take seriously the principle of the golden rule feel, there is also a happiness that characterizes them. That is, our protagonist is happy to preach the golden rule to any and all who will listen. He understands that to simply know the truth and the laws of happiness is not as valuable as practicing the truth and the laws of happiness. He has resolved to preach and to tell the story of his mind's coming into existence by virtue of being provided with a true narrative of life.

Herbert N. Schneidau understands our happy dissatisfaction to be our sacred discontent. It is not a discontent directed at the futility of existence, as it will incessantly change and reverse our circumstances. It is a discontent directed at stagnation (the lack of essential change). The stagnation that catalyzes our sacred discontent is the result of the penchant of biblical heirs to arrest their minds (something ancient Greek subjects could never do) and allow moralism to trump morality, appearance to trump truth, and the appearances of the finite to supplant the infinite. It is we, modern readers, who have inherited a "critical attitude, which eventuates in a pattern of inability to be satisfied with any given state of culture, and a need to keep changing it."⁶¹ Cultural mores do not suffice for biblical heirs. That is, for the biblical heir, the confusion of cultural mores with ethical principles represents the idolatry of worshipping what is modelled on nature over spirit. Thus, the biblical protagonist is not concerned with appeasing the normative values of whatever culture they may be situated in simply in order to maintain societal honor. According to Schneidau, "the fundamental message of the Bible... is that of a need for

⁶¹ Herbert N. Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 3.

change which derives from ambivalence toward culture of any kind, but particularly one's own."⁶² What we see represented in both Dostoevsky's short story and in Scheidau's adroit understanding of what the biblical heir must contend with is that the biblical heir who recognizes the momentary or chronic attempt to rest within the boundaries of the cultural norms that have developed in the aftermath of biblical revelation will always experience discontent and anguish. This discomfort with normative values and the status quo, and the desire for the essence of our social context to be exemplified, stems from the biblical heir's ability to think critically and principally about the appearances/images of their socio-political world and psycho-social relations. This capacity is only made possible due to the inheritance of a true narrative of existence which constitutes the matrix of the mind of the biblical heir.

And so, we return to the title of Dostoevsky's short story. It is the biblical heir who is the "queer fellow[person]" and the "ridiculous man[person]" who challenges our social norms with a dream—that is, a vision of the world based on love and the effort to address the needs of one another that are illuminated in light of this love. The biblical heir's discontent, as Schneidau indicates, is sacred rather than profane as it involves a re-evaluation of the values attached to the images found within natural time and space. This discontent is produced by the contemplation of, and commitment to, infinite values that, because they do not derive from cultural norms or the appearances of objects found within natural time and space, demand that the individual never treats with irreverence or disrespect that to which those values are directed: God, self, and the other.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.

IV. The Sincerity of Narrative

Schneidau recognizes that the pagan myth makers and the Yahwist prophets differed fundamentally in how and why they used images. Schneidau writes that,

most significant of all, myth charts paths of meaningfulness among the “systems of difference” which make up a culture, especially in its breeding or laboring aspects. The kinship systems of family, clan, moiety, and tribe, and their counterparts in occupations, crafts, social classes, and functions appear as “givens” in myth, sometimes in coded forms. It would seem that the older theories of myth were not so much wrong as partial: myth does serve to explain the natural phenomenon, to aetiologize the place-name, to rationalize the ritual, to serve as storehouse of the tribal lore. But all of these were aspects of a gigantic project of differentiation and stabilization of culture. The role of the Hebrew prophets, and of the Yahwist’s vision which they articulate, is at variance with these functions of myth. The prophets denounce the culture and probe its ideology to the foundation. Instead of imputing sacredness to the various “systems of differences” which make up a culture’s kinship or division-of-labour structures, Yahweh obliterates preference: before him, all men and their petty distinctions are as the undifferentiated dust of the desert. The privileged have no privilege, the achievers no achievement.⁶³

The images used in myth are directed toward encouraging the stabilization and stratification of pagan society. The mythical images that work to denote divisions along the lines of class, race, and gender are the very images that Yahweh levels. According to biblical scripture, Yahweh cares not for class, race, or gendered preferences of superiority. Rather, Yahweh seeks to influence human beings’ minds irrespective of what they appear to be. Without reference to seeing human beings as ends, image-thinking naturally recapitulates the mores and conventions that pervert human relationships. When we are able to engage our images—our mythological and, therefore, among others, racist, classist and sexist images—thoughtfully, we can resist conflating the worth of the human being (mind/spirit) with its appearances in natural time and space. In considering the aforesaid, Polka noted that the biblical claim to create from nothing,

expresses the natural differences between human beings to be insignificant—in themselves. Indeed, the doctrine of creation from nothing shows that we can truly desire, enjoy and appropriate our natural differences—both our own and those of others—only if

⁶³ Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent*, 10.

we do not oppose them in our blindness and ignorance. The opportunity—and the danger!—is that it is only in light of the doctrine of creation from nothing that difference does not vanish into the indifference of the law of contradiction. What counts is how human beings make use of their natural differences in their relations with others (including themselves), how they make their differences becoming, such that they become what they are (not) and are (not) what they become.⁶⁴

The biblical principle of *creatio ex nihilo* is directed toward the interrogation of appearances.

The concept involves the recognition that the appearances—insofar as they/we blindly accept them to be true, uncritiqued, and submit to them without thought—hold the mind hostage and prevent it from being created. The concept of *creatio ex nihilo* transforms the images of natural time and space into nothing—nothing becoming of human dignity and worth. In speaking about the dynamism of divine creativity, Hegel understood that God, and the divine within us, negotiates the fragile dialectic of the finite and the infinite such that the images to which we are seductively drawn can be distinguished ethically—or, as Kant states, between dignity and price.⁶⁵ Hegel writes that God,

is not the natural and sensuous as such but the sensuous elevated to non-sensuousness, to spiritual subjectivity, which, instead of losing in its external appearance the certainty of itself as the Absolute, only acquires precisely through its embodiment a present actual certainty of itself. God in his truth is therefore no bare ideal generated by imagination; on the contrary, he puts himself into the very heart of the finitude and external contingency of existence and yet knows himself there as a divine subject who remains infinite in himself and makes this infinity explicit to himself.⁶⁶

It would never have occurred to the ancient Greek mind, in keeping with the Socratic understanding of it, that appearances could be thought through based on a principle that qualifies rather than disqualifies them. For the mind of the biblical heir, the aim of divine revelation is to recognize that the infinite is what enters existence to augment and ameliorate our relationship to

⁶⁴ Polka, *Truth and Interpretation*, 226-227.

⁶⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1981), 40.

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 520.

it rather than abrogate it. As distinct from the ancient Greeks, for whom, as we know, the gods took on human form but possessed mythological power, for the ancient Hebrews “the word that might best describe the thrust of biblical thought is demythologizing.”⁶⁷

Of course, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge, as Schneidau did, that “a favourite myth of fundamentalists is that the Bible contains no myth.”⁶⁸ Indeed, “the Hebrews could not, as a culture, avoid having mythology; nor was all of this mythology kept out of the Bible in spite of apparently vigilant efforts.”⁶⁹ However, the lasting influence of and distinction between the Bible and, for example, the *Republic*, is that “Hebrew society and Western society after it ... undercuts or attacks, or interprets—its own myths.”⁷⁰ It is the interpretation of myth and images hitherto taken for granted as true that the Bible brought into existence. Whether experienced or created, images need to be interpreted on the grounds of morality (that is, the will to truth which recognizes all as exceptional and not beholden to what Nietzsche called “herd values”) and not moralism (that is, the idolatry of morality: the pagan *taxis* that oppresses and subjugates the mind) so that we avoid the mystification of the metaphysical (that is, the mystification of the reality of God and human beings).

To avoid mystifying the metaphysical—which ultimately leads to divorcing the metaphysical from how we morally engage with one another—the Bible introduced the idea of objectivity. In Schneidau’s words, “the Bible, read objectively, tells us why we read objectively,”⁷¹ for it tells us why we read with a concern for the object (existence: both self and other) of our thought (truth) and the thought (truth) of our objects (existences). The Bible shows

⁶⁷ Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent*, 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷¹ Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent*, 21.

us why we attempt to explore the ontology of the mind within the texts we read and pinpoint the narratological structure that allows it to develop. In stark contrast to the desire for objectivity within the Bible as a means to avoid mystifying our metaphysical relationship to existence, pagan wisdom—whether manifested poetically, philosophically, or mythically—never begins with an object (existence: both self and other). This is precisely because it is fated to begin anywhere⁷²—that is, it is always fated to contradict itself, for it is unable to qualify the legitimacy of beginning with anything other than brute force or arbitrary norms.

Likewise, pagan wisdom equally possesses no ends that can be qualified. Insofar as pagan sensibilities are intimately pegged to the appearances of the finite (what the ancient Greeks called in-finite), every perceived end is really the exchanging of positions between two entities (gods and humans, humans and animals, and animals and gods). Everything in appearance becomes its opposite in the pagan world, and this is what is tragic from the perspective of the ancient Greeks. In *Truth and Interpretation*, Polka states that,

once the secret fate of contradictory beginnings and ends, however, has been revealed for what it is—which is nothing—then the idolatrous possibility—the horrendous reality—emerges of contradicting nature, of contradicting one's end, something inconceivable and unimaginable to extra-biblical paganism.... Nature takes on so ambiguous and explosive a position within the biblical story of creation from nothing for the very reason that, because human beings are created from nothing, from nothing natural, not only is there nothing which cannot become or be made natural, but there is also nothing which cannot become or be made natural which cannot become or be made unnatural. The things of nature are not what they are in themselves but what they become, not in the sense that we literally create things in space and time from nothing—for that is the idolatry of dualism—but in the sense that we are responsible for our creation of them, for our relationship to them. The preeminent thing of nature is thought and existence—divine and human being. The priority of nature is spirit—the spirit of God and the spirit of being human—that which recognizes that it comes first, in the beginning, from nothing. Once it is we, however, who are responsible for the beginnings and ends of nature—something inconceivable in the extra-biblical world, for it is the finite (perfect, complete, finished) beginnings and ends of nature which are always the secret fatally hidden from thought and existence, both divine and human—we can abuse these beginnings and ends of nature

⁷² Polka, *Truth and Interpretation*, 12.

by claiming to know them, not as our fellow human beings but as things—in—themselves. Instead of making our judgements subject to the golden rule, we call unnatural that which contradicts our view of nature, that which we deem unfit to survive (so we say that Jews are not racially pure by nature, that homosexuality is unnatural, that women are inferior in nature, that blacks are a naturally inferior race...).⁷³

The reason why our cognitive beginnings and ends must be found in principle and not in nature is because our sensate influences will always lead us to opposing—cognitively—the natural images we are most familiar with over and against the natural images most familiar to another. If we were to utilize pagan notions of ends in our creations, we would be setting the stage for a limited understanding of the inherent validity of narrative precisely because it would have been begotten by a limited (and limiting) stance on the poetics of biblical revelation. For example, the images of the Bible are not developed so as to privilege one group over another. The poetics of the Bible are deeply entwined with the moral and metaphysical implications of divine truth.

Objective truth, from the point of view of the Bible, is not the scientific positivism with which our socio-cultural world is now permeated but rather, as Schneidau pointed out, an “exaggerated respect”⁷⁴ for empirical verification. What we can empirically verify on the basis of the golden rule is that the worth of a human being cannot be truthfully reduced to how that person may appear at a specific time or place. The golden rule is that by which we judge what we find in the world of human relationships and the data that becomes known as injustice (not on its own account but only in light of a standard that we bring to it). In the Greek world, the relation of ruler-ruled and master-slave was not unjust since there was no standard by which it could be known to be unjust. In our world, we know it to be unjust only in light of the golden rule. As a result, in order to render truthful, the information that comes to us by way of our senses, the golden rule demands that it must be coupled with the presupposition that human beings are ends

⁷³ Polka, *Truth and Interpretation*, 228.

⁷⁴ Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent*, 25.

and not means and infinite and not finite. Only then can we prevent what we empirically verify to be true from devolving into unqualified ruler-ruled dichotomies, oppressive oppositions, and the limited and limiting conclusions derived from a sensate understanding of our neighboring world.

The writers and thinkers who creatively transcend the immediacies of natural time and space—transcend in no longer taking as a creative beginning the natural generation and regeneration of finite phenomena—“require a conviction that their time’s beliefs are mostly superstitions.”⁷⁵ As such, the one who transcends the immediacies of natural time and space requires a conviction that supersedes and transcends the prejudices, biases, and assumptions that beset and beleaguer human relationships. By invoking the work of Niebuhr, Schneidau observes that those who subscribe to a narrative of the mind that is not biblical will ineluctably attempt to do what cannot be done: that is, they will mythologically conflate the biblical nexus of truth with natural time and space. In detailing those individuals, he writes that, “the more they claim to explain, the more inconceivable it is that they should explain it: for if we are all bounded by our animal natures or class interests, or psychic mechanisms, how can anyone step outside the circle to become aware of this and tell us the news?”⁷⁶ Assuredly, such individuals, insofar as they locate themselves outside of biblical revelation, are ultimately unable to provide their interlocutors with a compelling narrative concerning the origin of their minds because they cannot give an account of the origin of their ability to stand in contradistinction to the truth.

Schneidau points out that “the biblical message registers sharply on the literary mind,”⁷⁷ and it also registers sharply on the minds of those concerned with sharing the narrative of the

⁷⁵ Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent*, 26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷⁷ Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent*, 45.

origin of their mind. The origin of the literary mind enables it to recognize that, while the reproduction of mythological consciousness is the norm⁷⁸ in our everyday society, it is not in keeping with our intersubjective maturity. For those who produce narratives and not myths, their sacred discontent is furnished by their having an origin that is outside of nature.

The most striking feature of the literary mind and “Hebrew ideology is that it claims nothing from nature: all origins, if they come into question, are from Yahweh, who is beyond nature.”⁷⁹ A “beyond” that is irreducible to the appearances of nature is nothing more than a beyond that is primarily conceptual and constitutive of the thought of our existence and the existence of our thought. Quite insightfully, Schneidau understood that one of the stark differences between the ancient Greeks (like Homer, Socrates, and Plato for example) and the scholarly heirs of the biblical tradition (figures like Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche), is that, “whereas” the former “simply accepted their world and its cultures as given,” biblical authors “and the writers who follow [them], take a far more critical attitude: the immediacy of their presentation of life accompanies an alienated viewpoint.”⁸⁰ And so, it is alienation from nature that marks the origin of the literary mind—that is, the expulsion from an existence lived solely on the basis of the appearances of natural time and space.

In speaking about the unique way in which biblical heirs are demarcated from others, Polka understood that their specific notion of the self “exists as a self only in its thinking; and it is a thinking self only because there is an object to its thought which is existence, and existence—God—is true only insofar as it is universally true for all (thinking selves).”⁸¹ What is

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁸¹ Polka, *Truth and Interpretation*, vi.

universal for all human beings is our alienation from being defined on par with the appearances of natural time and space, from being interpreted as merely things in natural time and space. And so, God and the mind, if they are to exist in the way I have articulated, could never have been derived from (or been created by) those whose existence is modeled on the appearances of natural time and space or from that which is directly modeled on the appearances of natural time and space.

V. The Mind of Narrative and the Narrative of Mind

If we turn to the creation narrative of the biblical tradition, which is a transformation of the myths of ancient Greece and the ancient Middle East, we shall find what has hitherto been invoked. From the beginning of the Genesis narrative, there is a distinction between two types of light that enable us to recognize that we are not here dealing with simple natural images but with images imbued with moral content—something our extra-biblical ancestors, whether ancient Greek or Babylonian, could never have fathomed. In Genesis 1:3–4, readers are provided with the narrative context whereby the distinction between divine and graven images in the Bible is made possible. We read that God says, “let there be light; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.”⁸² In this text, God illuminates and elucidates that what is good is that human beings should be made privy to the distinction between their inherent worth (to which moral insight is pegged) and the worth of nature. This is not singularly revealed through the pronouncement God made in Genesis 1:3–4 alone but, rather, when we measure this pronouncement against that in Genesis 1:14, where we read that God created light again, but now the natural light of the sun, moon, and the stars.

⁸² Bible, Revised Standard Version (New York City: Plume Publishing, 1974), Genesis 1:3–4.

Thoughtful readers must make a distinction here between the light God established in Genesis 1:3–4 and Genesis 1:14, bespeaking their own capacity to remain critical, or to grapple with the conundrum as to why God would create the same light twice. If the light God established in Genesis 1:3–4 was not distinct from the light God established in Genesis 1:14, then we are in the presence of a repetition that is, apparently, contradictory. If the light created in both verses is different, might this reflect what Paul evoked as the distinction between spirit and nature?⁸³ Indeed, without the moral understanding that the spirit can provide—that is, the distinction between, on the one hand, a light that is natural and, on the other hand, a light that is not only divine but also, as we learn, equally human—the true worth of existence would elude consciousness. The human mind can exist only if there is a context within which the principles necessary to distinguish between humanity and nature are present. God, in establishing the existence of the two lights that must remain interrelated but nevertheless distinct, expressed the dialectical relationship between our thought and existence such that we are provided, from the outset of the text, with the standard by which the text to follow must (should) be read.

In Genesis 1:26–27, God states: “let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”⁸⁴ In this passage, God bears witness to the difference between the human being, the animal kingdom, and nature. But how are we to understand, here, the image of God and the image of human beings created in the image of God if that image is not to be understood as natural? Human beings are not naturally superior to animals or nature. Our superiority here must lie in something altogether

⁸³ 1 Corinthians 2:7, 14 (RSV).

⁸⁴ Genesis 1:26-27 (RSV).

unnatural if it is to be understood as true. If this is the case, our being—as made in the image of God—must be distinguished from an image of the human being as materially superior to all else that exists. The authors of the Bible put pressure on the mind of the reader, who should by now be attuned to the dual nature of images. Could it be that the Bible is stating here—as in many other instances—that if we do not think in light of the moral context of creation, distinguishing between moral and natural light, we will be unable to distinguish between moral and natural power? Could it be that we will fall victim to the appearances of existence that confound and beset us?

Notwithstanding the fact that this biblical narrative of creation was historically crafted after the creation narrative that begins in Genesis 2:4, members within our Western context possess a general understanding of how the narrative of creation unfolds henceforth. In the narrative, God makes Adam and then proceeds to make Adam a helpmate. God forbids Adam from eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warns Adam that if he does eat from the fruit of knowledge, he will surely die. A serpent then convinces his helpmate, a woman named Eve, to eat from that very tree. After eating, both Adam and Eve realize that they are naked and are ashamed before God. God then banishes them from the Garden of Eden, the home we moderns wish we still possessed when we interpret the text improperly. Despite its apparent simplicity, there are instances that provoke the mind that is morally attuned to the contours of the mythological occurrences here. How can good and evil grow on trees? How could a serpent possibly speak? How can a human be made from the rib of another? Why are there two trees, one of eternal life and one of good and evil? How can trees bear fruit that produces either eternal life or the knowledge of good and evil? Why must Adam resist the temptation to eat from the latter? Why are Adam and Eve expelled from the Garden lest they eat

of the tree of eternal life? Is this a cruel test? Why is existence from the start made flawed and imperfect?

These are all questions for those who—after receiving the moral aptitude to critique the implications of the narrative of creation (an aptitude originating in the Bible)—attempt to unravel a narrative structure meant to induce a collision within the mind rather than precipitate an expulsion from thinking. The serpent did not lie to Eve,⁸⁵ for, in eating the fruit bearing the knowledge of good and evil, human beings do become like God in a way Adam and Eve did not anticipate. For, what was Eve's intention after hearing that she should not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Was it to usurp her overlord, God, who was mysteriously made known to Adam and Eve prior to their knowing whether God is good or evil? We could assert that it was Eve's intention to truly fill the act with the *gravitas* that is missing. And what of Adam? What does Adam understand by the command not to eat and the implications of this if he has no understanding of death or of what disobeying denotes? In Genesis 3:22–24 we have the famous words which, after being uttered, dramatically change the narrative context of human consciousness. After Adam and Eve have eaten the forbidden fruit, God locates them in the mythical garden and, prior to their expulsion from the Garden, says: “behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever.”⁸⁶ For Hegel, God's pronouncement can be interpreted as indicating that it is only in the perpetual conscious negation of the preeminence of natural time and space on moral grounds can humans be like God.⁸⁷ In other words, when human cognition is

⁸⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), vol. 1, 444.

⁸⁶ Genesis 3:22 (RSV).

⁸⁷ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, 446.

no longer solely subject to the mutability of natural time and space they can participate in the divine activity of morally evaluating existence.

We must not take the distinction between God and human beings that the narrative initially appears to set out literally. Humans properly become like God, and therefore properly human, once they know good and evil, are fully aware of the implications of good and evil acts, and can conduct themselves accordingly. In light of divine revelation, the first thing humans feel is shame or humiliation at the sight of the pretenses of their false self-consciousness. Both Adam and Eve are in the same predicament. While Eve was seduced into believing that there was a possibility of becoming like God by virtue of eating fruit (due to the serpent's provocation), Adam unquestioningly accepted the "givens" he was presented with. But how could they be guilty if they did not know good and evil prior to their infraction? The very process of learning is the process by which we catch up to ourselves.⁸⁸ That is, we cannot develop the narrative of the ontology of the mind unless our development involves the requisite principles necessary to make meaning out of change so as to prove to the learner that change need not be fatal or tragic.⁸⁹ Guilt comes into the world at the same time as knowledge. Therefore, the question is not so much how could they (Adam and Eve) experience guilt if they did not know good and evil prior to their infraction but rather, what else could they have experienced other than guilt after becoming aware of the knowledge of good and evil?

⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 46.

⁸⁹ As a final note on the relationship between the creation story and modern consciousness/self-awareness (mind), or, put differently, the creation of the mind and the story of modernity/modern self-awareness, Polka notes that "the creation story shows that, although we live in the contradictory realm of nature subject to fatal metamorphosis of appearances, we do not live *of* it. The doctrine that God creates the world from nothing means that spirit replaces nature, freedom replaces fate, the golden rule replaces the law of contradiction, ultimately life replaces death as the end of human existence. Polka, *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique*, 14.

In the context of Greek mythology, to be ignorant and then to gain “awareness” is to be made fatally aware of how meaningless one’s awareness is in the aftermath of a transgression. In the Bible, transgressions do not lead to empty recognitions. Rather, they lead to recognitions that allow for learning and a change in one’s practice. In the Bible, transgressions lead to the labour involved in living out the dialectic of self and other, the divine and human, the infinite and the finite, and in the nurturing of the infinite in others who may be unwilling to accept the golden rule of thought and existence.

Yes, humans were expelled from the garden of Eden, eternally alienated from simply accepting the appearances of natural paradise. Hegel writes that this presumed state of innocence—which we moderns falsely assert is our rightful state when we misinterpret the text—“consists in the fact that nothing is good and nothing is evil for human beings; it is the state of the animal; paradise is in fact a zoological garden; it is the state where there is no accountability.”⁹⁰ According to Hegel, in the state of innocence we are incapable of knowing the difference between good and evil and are therefore equivalent to animals. Hegel insisted that in a zoological paradise—one that appeals to and piques our sensate interests—accountability, and the ability to take stock of one’s experiences and make meaning out of one’s interfaces with humans and nature, is utterly vacant. The only withdrawal from nature that we are capable of is a withdrawal that is not predicated upon finite death but upon that moral insight that divorces us from natural confinement—that is, the golden rule of thought and existence, the rule that, in order for our minds to house true narratives and our narratives to be comprised of an extant mind, our thinking must involve the necessity of existence and the idea that existence necessitates thought. The narrative of our human past is only rendered meaningful and redeemed

⁹⁰ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, 214.

from the mythological consciousness that knows nothing other than what is present at hand when the mind is able to distinguish between what is infinite and finite and avoid conflating the two.

To reduce the images of the narrative of the mind to its appearances in natural time and space (as in the case of talking serpents, dictatorial gods, fruits saturated with morality) is to create idols that stymie the mind's growth. Schneidau expanded upon this idea when he write that, "many thinkers have equated self-consciousness with the Fall: but it is, more precisely, the flaming sword turning every way that prevents our going back to the Eden of primordial community."⁹¹ In one sense, the narratology of our fall expresses that we have fallen into place and landed on our feet. Our fall represents our finally having come into being with the knowledge of good and evil. However, our self-consciousness is enhanced by our acknowledgement that damage can only be done if we seek to return to a zoological paradise (the logic of the animal kingdom)—namely, a primordial community—which is anything but communal precisely because in it no one can communicate (narrate) the mind to one another. Damage can only be done if, instead of presupposing the infinite in self and other, we inexorably yield to the compulsion to oppose our finite images (imagined preferences: myths) over and against the finite images (imagined preferences: myths) of the other. As Polka writes, through the fall and apparent loss of innocence that Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden of Eden, they had,

fallen from natural innocence to embrace true innocence, which is not ignorance of sin but the overcoming of evil on behalf of the good. To be innocent is not to be without knowledge of good and evil (for innocence, rooted in *nocere*, to do harm to, means to be harmless, that is to negate or to overcome harm). To possess true innocence, the truth of innocence, is to act not from the ignorance of good and evil, but from the power of willing the good, notwithstanding the seductive power of idols.⁹²

⁹¹ Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent*, 44.

⁹² Polka, *Truth and Interpretation*, 161.

Polka writes that true innocence is comprised of willing the good and willing (presupposing) the human being as an end while simultaneously staying cautiously aware of one's idols and our inclination to reduce our will to a conventional act. To avoid doing harm (*in-nocere*: the root of the word innocence) means that one must know what harm is.

Moreover, some will say that the Bible produces fictions merely because they are unaware or unconcerned with what fiction is, insofar as it is not myth. If we understand fiction merely as what is not scientifically verifiable, then our understanding of fiction is impoverished. And yet, in light of this detail, our understanding of fiction must include the very essence of human experience—namely, that which fills life with rich and enriching content, as in the case of love, God, relationships, and the golden rule—none of which is scientifically verifiable. If fiction is understood as that which is not real and that which is not responsible for outlining the very structure of our metaphysical and moral existences, we would be better off substituting myth for fiction here. Schneidau writes that, “not only the fictions, but we ourselves are made: and something made is not real in its own right, but in that of its makers; so that the easy distinction between real and fictional breaks down.”⁹³

To say that humans are “made” in the image of God is to state that humans are a fiction. Schneidau noted that, “fiction, in its literary uses, bears an unsettling resemblance to a historical recounting.”⁹⁴ In light of biblical revelation, fiction traces the history of metaphysical truth (the reality of human relationship) to the ethical bedrock of the human being's diremption from nature. Thus “the truth of literature must lie in the possibility of its taking anything as fictional”⁹⁵ and of its ability to fictionalize, and therefore accurately re-present, what the world is so often

⁹³ Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent*, 277.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

encumbered by. The fictions of our lives—those improperly construed as non-fictional as in the case of racism, sexism, and classism, for example—are what consistently stalk human thought and life and divert our attention away from the principles necessary for sustaining our minds. The human being is a fiction, and only in recognizing it as such can we develop a moral (historical) relationship to the story of being human so that we are not undone by the changes it undergoes. But, just as there is no God without idols, so too there are no fictions without false fictions.

Furthermore, the ontology of the mind is tethered to the ontological demonstration of the existence of God, as both involve a moral (historical) narrative that must remain intact despite its diverse manifestations within existence and across time. Anselm's ontological proof for the existence of God manifests in the formulation that,

if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-can-be-thought... therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-that-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought-exists both in the mind and in reality.⁹⁶

If God is not recognized as both that which must be thought to exist and that which must exist to be thought, there can be no way for us to distinguish our clear and distinct ideas (self, other, God, existence) from the volatility of natural generation and destruction (where there is always a that-than-which-a-greater-can-be-thought).⁹⁷ If, conversely, God is not shown to be real in order for he/she/it to be thought, there can be no way for us to distinguish our clear and distinct ideas (self, other, God, existence) from the volatility of natural succession.⁹⁸ What is real is neither what is

⁹⁶ Anselm, *Proslogion: Including Gaunilo's Objections and Anselm's Reply* (Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2013), 23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

mythological nor what is non-fictional but what is made and fictional, such that we can engage finite existence on terms that are not finite, and neither hierarchical nor mutable.

Likewise, the ontology of the mind depends upon the notion of time that St. Augustine articulated in his *Confessions*. In Book Eleven, Chapter Thirteen, Augustine addressed the sleeping mind that roves, “over the images of fore passed times, and wonders what Thou the God Almighty and All-creating and All-supporting, Maker of heaven and earth didst for innumerable ages forebear from so great a work, before thou wouldest make it.” Augustine beckoned the sleeping mind to “wake up” (begin) and consider that, “very time didst [God] make, nor could times pass by, before [God] madest those times. But if before heaven and earth there was no time, why is it demanded, what [God] then didst? For there was no ‘then,’ when there was no time.”⁹⁹ Before God and before mind, existence was (is) without temporal designations. Existence is void of beginnings and ends precisely because nothing exists that could distinguish between significance and insignificance and between the human being as a divine image (beginning in the knowledge of good and evil, and the knowledge which properly provides one with a before and after)¹⁰⁰ and the human being as a graven image (the human being mischaracterized in and reduced to the fable of existence that exists outside of biblical revelation). Augustine knew that God (mind) encapsulates time and natural chronology,

⁹⁹ St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961), 263.

¹⁰⁰ All “befores” and “afters” in the pagan world are insignificant because every before is itself an after and every after was once a before. Because nothing “comes into existence” (bespeaking the Kierkegaardian recognition that to “come into existence” is to make a leap of faith that sacrifices human calculation and, judging by the results, to receive the human being as incommensurable), nothing goes out of existence (as Socrates recognized, disdainfully; for, in wanting to escape the cage that is his existence and be united with pure being, his tale of Er—with which he concluded the *Republic*—reminded him and his fellow interlocutors that the reward for a good life and the punishment for a bad life is to receive the reverse of what one presently is in the next life).

fictionalizes it, and remakes it in the image of history—that is, in the image of the history of the conscious knowledge of good and evil. Only in light of the aforesaid do “before” and “after” have any significance. Only in light of our cognitive banishment from paradisiacal paganism can we acknowledge that our future lies within the framework of the dialectic of self and other, emancipated from the inherent oppositionality that interfusing truth and appearance breeds.

However, none of this would be possible unless our narratives—the very stories we tell one another—were capable of recognizing that “God is spirit” and that “nature knows nothing of spirit.”¹⁰¹ Unless we recognize, at some point in time, that in our narratives—in the very stories we tell one another—our “humanity in God—and indeed the most abstract form of humanity, the greatest dependence, the ultimate weakness, the utmost fragility—is natural death,”¹⁰² the existence of the mind will elude us. Unless our narratives can recognize that “existence is infinite, thought is infinite, truth is infinite, for they express human liberation, not from the world, but in the world from the world of appearances (idols),”¹⁰³ the existence of the mind will elude us. Unless our narratives involve an understanding that miracles represent “the history of the conversion to the infinite of immediate natural existence,”¹⁰⁴ the existence of the mind will elude us.

¹⁰¹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, 435.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 468.

¹⁰³ Polka, *Truth and Interpretation*, iv.

¹⁰⁴ Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 550.

Chapter 3: The Narrative of Mind

Thus far this dissertation has presented the reader with a distinction between mythological and divine consciousness. Mythological consciousness rests upon the tenets of agonism and Socratic/Platonic ignorance, as found in the case of the golden mean. Divine consciousness, on the other hand, rests upon the biblical notions of love, equality, and revelation, as found in the case of the golden rule. In Chapter 2, this dissertation concluded that once the truth of divine consciousness comes into existence, one can only imitate rather than replicate mythological exchanges between interlocutors, in turn reducing the narratological conditions necessary for the existence of the mind. In addition, in light of the coming into existence of divine consciousness, the imitation of mythological exchanges between interlocutors will be shown to be that which we can categorize as the demonic.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the mind is constituted by narratological expressions between distinct subjects—and not by mythological exchanges. We find evidence of the mind's existence by measuring both the quality of those expressions and the affective and intellectual disturbances that hinder them. This chapter will demonstrate that the obstacles we speak of are demonstrative not of the mind being absent (in like manner to what we saw displayed by the ancient Greeks in the prior chapter), but of the mind being preoccupied with its repudiation of that which constitutes a true/sincere narrative. This chapter will illustrate that a denial of the tenets of a true narrative of the mind manifests itself in a variety of narratological perversions that take the form of anxiety,¹⁰⁵ despair, suicidal ideations, and demonic possession. According to Kierkegaard these perversions rob human beings of their ability to think the truth of their existence in line with the golden rule. It is through the act of expressing the dialectical

¹⁰⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, (Princeton University Press, 1980), 119.

relationship between thinking the truth of existence (self and other) and existing within the truth of one's thought (the golden rule) that Kierkegaard, the primary focus of this chapter, shows us how human beings avoid reproducing mythological exchanges, as in the case of narratological perversions.

I. The Structure of Two Narratological Perversions

In one of Kierkegaard's diary entries from 1852, he explained that both critics and defenders of the Judeo-Christian tradition tended to speak mythologically about the Judeo-Christian tradition, as their existence failed to embody the truth of their thought and their thought did not conceive of existence as truthful. He writes that,

the freethinkers... attack Christianity and call it mythology, poetry. Then its defenders, its official exponents, arrive (the rescue-crew one might call them rather satirically, reflecting what that means in case of fire;) they protest, curse, and swear that it is horrible; to them Christianity is anything but mythology and poetry. Aber, aber [but, but] their expounding, viewed as a whole, completely omits the "Imitation" (even in their sermons they keep almost mum about that side of Christianity), and one would say that their lives, all their protestations notwithstanding, express practically the opposite of living up to Christ's bidding, so to them Christianity actually is mythology, poetry.¹⁰⁶

What Kierkegaard indicated here is that unless one's thought and existence are dialectical expressions of one another and grounded in the bidding of Christ (that is, the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, as in the case of the golden rule), then one can only speak mythologically about Christianity and about their own existence. To speak mythologically about Christianity while considering oneself to be an adherent of the Judeo-Christian tradition is to produce narratological perversions that imitate pagan ignorance.

Within all the texts Kierkegaard directly or pseudonymously wrought, he consistently delineated the distinction between Judeo-Christianity (constituted by the golden rule of thought

¹⁰⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, edited by Peter Rohde (New York: Citadel Press/Kensington Publishing Corp., 1988), 167.

and existence) and Christendom. Kierkegaard likened the latter to the attempt by his contemporaries (all those who exist within the context of Judeo-Christianity) to reproduce pagan mythology. He writes that,

in “Christendom”... what is found there is not Christianity but an enormous illusion, and people are not pagans but are made blissfully happy in the delusion that they are Christians. But since this illusion, this delusion, is that they are Christians, then it of course seems as if the introduction of Christianity would deprive people of Christianity. Yet this is the first thing that must be done; the illusion must go.¹⁰⁷

According to Kierkegaard, Christendom is comprised of individuals who knowingly or unknowingly believe in the mythology and not in the truth of the Judeo-Christian tradition. These individuals (Christians) do not embody the dialectical relationship between thought and existence warranted by the golden rule (Christ’s bidding). Insofar as this is the case, Kierkegaard states that if Christianity (the golden rule) were presented to a Christian, it would deprive them of their Christianity (mythology). To be deprived of the illusion of Christianity can either lead to divine consciousness or catalyze the offense that produces demonic consciousness – which we shall investigate later on. Likewise, without being presented with the golden rule of Christianity, the Christian would continue to “transform the God of spirit into ludicrous blather,”¹⁰⁸ as in the case of imitating mythological exchanges that constitute narratological perversions.

Moreover, Kierkegaard clarified that it is the Christian alone, and not Christendom, that is responsible for not knowing the truth of Christianity. On the one hand, the Christian must be presented with the truth of Christianity to let go of their myths about Christianity. However, on the other hand, if the Christian does not understand what they are being presented with, they will be equally unable to let go of their illusions. Presentation does not guarantee understanding.

¹⁰⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*, edited and translated by Howard Vincent Hong and Edna Hatlestad Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 107.

¹⁰⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*, 122.

However, unlike the ancient Greeks, for whom like Socrates ignorance was an acceptable alibi for not knowing the truth, the Judeo-Christian tradition holds all heirs accountable for not knowing the truth. In another diary entry from 1854, Kierkegaard writes that,

Christianity is right: sin is guilt. For when a man does not do right, it is quite rightly because he does not understand it; if he understood, etc. But the reason he does not understand what is right, is that he cannot understand it, and that he cannot understand it is because he will not understand it—so there is the rub. And only by treating everything as criminal has Christianity been able to manage the world and has managed to keep order.¹⁰⁹

As we will see in greater depth further along in this chapter, sin involves the guilt of not being willing to understand the truth of Judeo-Christianity and instead choosing a lie (as in the case of myth and illusion) over the truth. Once an individual chooses this lie, all they can do is produce the narratological perversions (the imitation of mythological exchanges) that saturate Christendom and beset the thought and existence—mind and narrative—of the modern world. While one form of narratological perversion misleads and impedes the minds and narratives of those who acknowledge that they belong to the Judeo-Christian context, another form involves the “freethinkers” and critics of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The iteration of this narratological perversion held by “freethinkers” displays itself in the tendency of modern philosophy to reduce the truth of existence (that is, the truth of the existence of the mind) to the facts of existence (the supposed fact that the mind’s existence is exclusively contingent upon material conditions). Explanatory theories of the mind such as dualism, monism, functionalism, epiphenomenalism, behaviorism, and realism represent this modern tendency to reduce the truth of the mind to the materiality of existence. One such thinker who exemplifies this practice is the philosopher Thomas Nagel. Nagel writes that, “consciousness is the most conspicuous obstacle to a comprehensive naturalism that relies only on the resources of physical

¹⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Diary of Soren Kierkegaard*, 126.

science.”¹¹⁰ What is so peculiar about Nagel’s insight here is that he did not develop a constructive way to deal with the problem he identified, and he was unable to account for the existence and truth of consciousness outside of an appeal to the natural sciences.

According to Nagel, consciousness is the brute fact of the world that dumbfounds materialist conceptions of it.¹¹¹ This conception of consciousness led Nagel to defend the position that, “since the conscious character” of human organisms “is one of their most important features, the explanation of the coming into existence of such creatures must include an explanation of the appearance of consciousness. An account of their biological evolution must explain the appearance of conscious organisms as such.”¹¹²

In conflating biological evolution with consciousness, Nagel’s reductionism fundamentally suggests that, for the mind’s existence to be intellectually substantiated, it must be understood as a by-product of a biological occurrence. What Nagel fails to realize is that a biological origin for the existence of the mind is not only problematic but also elides, rather conveniently, the requisite explanation for how a biological product is capable of understanding itself as a biological product. That is, how could the effect of a prior cause know itself to be the effect of a prior cause? The very moment that an effect of a prior cause knows itself to be an effect, it can no longer be understood as merely an effect unless that prior cause itself—presently in question—was a knowing subject establishing a context within which an effect can know itself. Nagel knew that that which is conscious of its own cause—as the cause of itself—is what biblical heirs call God. What Nagel was unable (unwilling?) to recognize is that the conventional

¹¹⁰ Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 35.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹² Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 45.

theistic view of God (that is, biblical divinity conflated with the pagan doctrine of opposites), or what Aristotle called the “unmoved first mover,” is neither biblical nor true. Rather, it is a narratological perversion. Nagel possessed no notion of God that existed outside of Christendom. Thus, he had no way of recognizing that the concept of God as the cause of itself is utterly distinct from the concept of God as a first cause or primary mover. As he did not possess this notion, his indirect rationalist critique of the myth of Christendom was itself the result of a narratological perversion of the truth of Christianity.

Moreover, the mind could never be independent for Nagel, for our “subjective experiences... are strongly connected with and probably strictly dependent on physical events in our brains and on the physical interaction of our bodies with the rest of the physical world.”¹¹³ Nagel was utterly unaware of the implications of his claims. If the mind is strictly dependent on the unique biological processes that each individual possesses, not only are all minds isolated within their physical experiences of the world, but also, no two minds could relate to one another unless they both shared the same biological/physical experiences. That Nagel was aware of the skepticism that is the product of such a thesis is made evident when he observed that, “to consider the possibility that none of the people around you may be conscious produces an uncanny feeling. On the one hand it seems conceivable, and no evidence you could possibly have can rule it out decisively.”¹¹⁴

The reductionist tendencies of the philosophies produced in light of Aristotelian formulations divorce the human subject from its ontological origins and *ipso facto* from every other human subject to whom one is proximate—and that condition is what would more

¹¹³ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 36.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

accurately be called solipsism. Nagel sought an explanation for how consciousness came into existence—existence understood as constituted by finite time and space. Nagel did not understand that consciousness comes into existence when it willingly understands the truth of existence as expressed by the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Nagel's narrative of the coming into existence of the mind did not involve the presentation and adoption of the truth by a willing subject. To demonstrate how consciousness and its various incongruencies with nature (that is, mental processes that run counter to naturalistic biological processes and survival instincts) come into being, Nagel writes that,

the just-so story would go roughly like this. Even in the wild, it isn't just perception and operant conditioning that have survival value. The capacity to generalize from experience and to allow those generalizations, or general expectations, to be confirmed or disconfirmed by subsequent experience is also adaptive. So is basic disposition to maintain logical consistency in belief, by modifying beliefs when inconsistencies arise. A further, very important step would be the capacity to correct individual appearances not only by reference to other conflicting appearances of one's own but also by reference to how things appear to other perceivers. That requires recognition of other minds, an ability with obvious adaptive potential. The reach of these capacities can be greatly extended and deliberately exercised with the help of language, which also permits knowledge to be collectively created, accumulated, and transmitted. With language we can hold in our minds and share with others alternative possibilities, and decide among them on the basis of their consistency or inconsistency with further observations. Complex scientific theories that entail empirical predictions are therefore extensions of the highly adaptive capacity to learn from experience—our own and that of others.¹¹⁵

Neither the mind nor its orientation can be derived from experience precisely because experience can never demonstrate on its own how and why human beings must be conceived of as those whom we are commanded to love. In Nagel's view, the survival of the anatomically human species can be safeguarded only at the expense of the ethical constituents of the mind and thus of other human beings. What Nagel shows us is not what he claimed to demonstrate. Instead, he shows us that no part of the narrative of subjectivity can be represented by a purely

¹¹⁵ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 76.

biological/physicalist understanding of it, as that narrative cannot account for Nagel's ability to explain it.

When Nagel communicated the existence of the mind and narrated its constellations, he excluded his uncanny ability to narrate—given that he considered himself a mere product of antecedent biological processes—that which transcends the very function of the anatomically human person. Why did Nagel find it necessary to consider the historical coming into existence of the human mind? Why did Nagel require a narrative to outline the purpose of his mental capacities if his mental capacities presently fulfilled their function in enhancing and extending the survival of human beings? For Nagel, the primary purpose of philosophy was to explain what science produces, and to append words and concepts to the reservoir of facts produced by positivism. The claim that philosophy's role is beyond explanation—for, according to Nagel, explanations are always reductive and rooted in empirical demonstration—would be considered blasphemous to a self-proclaimed atheist like Nagel.¹¹⁶

It was not Nagel's atheism, however, that prevented him from grasping philosophy's true role. Rather, it was his inability to recognize that philosophical inquiry demonstrates, rather than explains, the necessary relationship between context (that is, existence and history) and content (as in the case of thinking and infinitude). On the other hand, Kierkegaard understood philosophy's role to be directed toward demonstrating the relationship between context (existence and history) and content (thinking and infinitude), as in the case of the relationship that constitutes the mind. Without a proper understanding of the mind's historicity and its implications of infinitude, understanding how the mind "comes into existence" and how it manifests itself within our relationships to God, humans, and things is dubious at best. For

¹¹⁶ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 95.

Kierkegaard, it is primarily based on what he called faith (that is, commitment to the incommensurability of the human subject) and love (or what he calls the like for like of human consciousness: the command to love oneself and the other as a neighbor) that we are effectively able to think from a standpoint in existence rather than think from a standpoint outside of existence that we bring to existence.¹¹⁷

As Kierkegaard explained, we do not “demonstrate that a stone exists but that something which exists is a stone.”¹¹⁸ To reason *to* existence would be to stake a position outside of what one wants to illuminate and, by virtue of this severance, to develop formulations that are ineffectual, inconsequential, and do not consider the position from which one is arguing. The task here is not to demonstrate that the mind exists as some entity in natural time and space. The mind is not a natural entity. Rather, the mind is a relational phenomenon constituted by the relationship between history (that is, the history of one’s coming into existence) and infinitude (the principles by which one sustains infinitude). The relationship between history and infinitude is itself constituted by the relationship between what Kierkegaard understood to be the “work of love” and the “leap of faith.” As a result, my task is to argue from existence to convey that, as Judeo-Christian heirs, our thought involves existence, and our existence must involve our thought. My task is to prove that one’s ability to relate to the other *absolutely* is indicative of the existence of the mind, and it tells the story of the principles that necessarily sustain it.

¹¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 40.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

II. Coming into Existence: The History of Consciousness

As we are beginning to see, narratological perversions misrepresent both the Judeo-Christian tradition and the philosophy developed by its heirs. Insofar as narratological perversions are contingent upon a misunderstanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition itself, they derive from an impulse to imitate mythological exchanges that existed outside of the Judeo-Christian context. By doing this, narratological perversions are unable to properly delineate how it is that the mind comes into existence precisely because they do not understand the narrative that sustains it.

In a short, but profound work Kierkegaard wrote pseudonymously titled *Pars Prima/Pars Secunda*, he narrated precisely what coming into existence entails for human subjects by telling the story of the belated beginning of the self-consciousness of his pseudonym Johannes Climacus. Johannes' awareness of the infinitude of his mind began with doubt—a doubt that is eternal insofar as it stretches across temporality (that is, the past, present, and potentially future phenomena)—in order to recognize that whatever did not begin with doubt is unessential, unphilosophical, and ahistorical.¹¹⁹ An essential beginning—that is, a beginning that reveals the essence of one's subjectivity—must begin with doubt in time (or the doubting of temporality as the basis of one's subjectivity) in such a way that it is both historical and eternal¹²⁰—a paradox that an analytical delineation of the narrative of consciousness could never comprehend.

Johannes' journey highlights that the coming into existence of modern philosophy has been similar to the coming into existence of an individual's extant mind. In both cases, this coming into existence is not generated as an effect of an antecedent cause. Rather, the coming

¹¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 134.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

into existence of the mind requires a leap of faith. This leap, however, is not from what Kierkegaard calls, in *Fear and Trembling*, the lower stages of the aesthetic and the ethical to the higher stage of the absolutely religious. Rather, this is a leap that involves choosing to begin with the absolute recognition of the absolute and absolute distinctions.¹²¹ The coming into existence of the mind involves the human being no longer simply having a past. Instead, it entails having a self-conscious relationship to the past and thus having a history that, on the basis of commitment to the absolute and absolute distinctions, binds together the past, present, and future.¹²² As Nagel would hold, to become historical is not to require that our past experiences and sense impressions constitute conceptual wholes from which we can make adequate interpretive decisions to safeguard our biological existence. Rather, to become historical to oneself is to acquire what another self-proclaimed atheist, Friedrich Nietzsche, calls background,¹²³ whereby we are able to critique ourselves on the basis of values and principles that do not derive from the logic of natural experience or custom. To become historical is to recognize that one's existence is not simply finite.

In equal measure, to become historical is to recognize what we cannot see in natural time and space. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard solemnly asks the reader: “have you never seen in life this relationship of infinite superiority, which of course, is not directly visible, for the infinite cannot be seen directly?”¹²⁴ Once again, it is on the basis of what Kierkegaard calls faith and love that the mind is able to “see” its infinitude (insofar as infinitude is irreducible to phenomena in natural time and space) and for others to recognize what it is: bespeaking the golden rule of

¹²¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 108

¹²² Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 79.

¹²³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #78.

¹²⁴ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 228.

thought and existence. Kierkegaard writes that “[a]ll coming into existence” is done in freedom and contains “within itself a redoubling, that is, a possibility of coming into existence within its own coming into existence. Here, in the stricter sense, is the historical, which is dialectical with respect to time.”¹²⁵ The dialectic of time involves thinking from the conclusion that if temporality—which, as Kierkegaard claimed, is all that counts¹²⁶—is to be lived qualitatively rather than simply quantitatively—that is, on the basis of human relationship and not brute survival—it must be recognized that there is a redoubling of one’s coming into existence. An understanding of this redoubling involves the recognition that while we are finitely generated by an event that antedates our biological existence, we must will for ourselves, both lovingly and faithfully, that which makes us historical—namely, the golden rule.

The golden rule is a fundamental component of what Kierkegaard understood to be the historical paradox of faith. In *Fear and Trembling*, he writes that the paradox of faith is that the single individual (namely, the human mind) is higher than the universal—that is, higher than the societal conventions that stymie the potentiality of the human mind—insofar as the single individual (any given mind) relates itself absolutely to the absolute.¹²⁷ The paradox of love reveals that every human being is commanded to be a god¹²⁸ to each other but only insofar as every human being recognizes the other’s (and their own) invisibility¹²⁹ (infinite). What is absolute is the relationship that involves the recognition of the absolute value—or, as Kierkegaard put it, the incommensurability—of all human beings. To recognize that the worth and value of the other and oneself is incommensurable or cannot be seen naturally is to

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 49.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 101.

¹²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 27.

understand that one must presuppose the other's worth and value in like manner to what one should presuppose for oneself.

As indicated before, faith and love are constitutive of the mind and integral to the process of coming into existence. Considering this, time (temporality) only becomes full¹³⁰—that is, fully realized for what it is—when it is imbued with the mind: namely, imbued with those principles and ideals that allow for intersubjective relationality. Outside of the mind's narratological framework of infinitude, time loses all decisive meaning and becomes merely the chronology of events. In adequately assessing what time is when we do not take the essential leap of faith, Kierkegaard understood that,

if time is correctly defined as an infinite succession, it most likely is also defined as the present, the past, and the future. This distinction, however, is incorrect if it is considered to be implicit in time itself, because the distinction appears only through the relation of time to eternity and through the reflection of eternity in time. If in the infinite succession of time a foothold could be found, i.e., a present, which was the dividing point, the division would be quite correct. However, precisely because every moment, as well as the sum of the moments, is a process (a passing by), no moment is a present and accordingly there is in time neither present, nor past, nor future. If it is claimed that this division can be maintained, it is because the moment is spatialized, but thereby the infinite succession comes to a halt, it is because representation is introduced that allows time to be represented instead of being thought. Even so, this is not correct procedure, for even as representation, the infinite succession of time is an infinitely contentless present (this is the parody of the eternal).¹³¹

What is appropriately historical—that is, the coming into existence of the relationship among ends and among human minds liberated from basing their existence on the finite—is brought into existence by virtue of the infinitude to which faith and love bear witness in oneself and the other.

What is appropriately infinite cannot be divided in terms of natural space and time. Time becomes an empty succession of instances if we do not regard it in light of the eternal

¹³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 18.

¹³¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 85-86.

perspective of faith and love. The mind only possesses true content. Therefore, it can only provide content to and presuppose content in—that is, provide content to and in both time and other human subjects—if it is qualified on the basis of principles that do not derive from one’s scientific understanding of nature but from one’s relationship with God. Without this relationship to the absolute, the mind is engulfed and beset by either putative norms or immediate inclinations.

Given that the mind is ultimately relegated to either pole of this dyad when it is improperly construed outside of the framework of the infinite, within *Pars Secunda*, Kierkegaard proceeded to demonstrate what the dialectical composition of the mind involves. The dialectical relationship between reality and ideality enables us to resist conflating existence with the empty succession of time. Kierkegaard asked,

what, then, is immediacy? It is reality itself. What is mediacy? It is the word. How does one abrogate the other? By giving expression to it, for that which is given expression is always presupposed. Immediacy is reality; language is ideality; consciousness is contradiction. The moment I make a statement about reality, contradiction is present, for what I say is ideality.¹³²

Consciousness (the mind), properly construed, involves the dialectical relationship between reality and ideality, which itself involves the relationship between immediacy and language. It is not so much terms and their usage that constitute the type of language Kierkegaard spoke of here. Rather, it is the concepts with which certain terms are infused. As Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love*,

there is no word in human language, not a single one, not the most sacred word, of which we could say: when a man uses this word, it is unconditionally proved thereby that there is love in him. Rather, it is true that a word from one person can convince us that there is love in him and the opposite word from another can convince that there is love in him also.¹³³

¹³² Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 168.

¹³³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 30.

Neither words nor terms in themselves constitute the ideality of the human mind. Rather, the qualification of certain terms and the implications of their usage—when properly interpreted—are what constitute the human mind. However, consciousness as contradictory is incapable of being reconciled so long as what one says about reality does not properly support and respect the reality of a subject’s ideality. Kierkegaard writes that, “Consciousness is the relation.”¹³⁴ He went on to state that one can either “bring reality into relation with ideality or bring ideality into relation with reality. In reality itself, there is no possibility of doubt.”¹³⁵ It is only when one is capable of idealizing their existence that they can begin to doubt (sense impressions, the myths constructed by imagining what the appearances of finite existence mean). Conversely, it is only when one begins to doubt that they can begin to exist within that ideality that befits human existence. And it is only when consciousness embodies the collision between reality and ideality that the mind and its narrative are capable of properly coming into existence¹³⁶ and resolve the tensions that derive from the collision. The collision between reality and ideality demands that one bring to reality the ideal of one’s incommensurability with natural time and space and allow reality to participate in the manifestation of how incommensurability will express itself within temporality. This task is not one that the understanding¹³⁷—or what Kierkegaard calls human calculation—can undertake. As Kierkegaard made clear, understanding is the imposition of the categories of human calculation on human relationship. As he states, the understanding judges the worth of particular phenomena by their results¹³⁸ and therefore is a cognitive apparatus that is

¹³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 168.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 47.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

incapable of developing a narrative that can sustain a relationship whose metric is not tangible, as in the case where the metric is infinite insofar as it can reconcile reality with ideality.

In *Pars Prima/Pars Secunda*, Kierkegaard concluded that doubt reconciles ideality with reality.¹³⁹ The doubt expressed here is not skepticism, which argues not *from* but *to* existence. Rather, the doubt expressed here argues from existence to maintain the intimate relationship between reality and ideality. One must doubt the common (unthoughtful) conflation of the essence of the mind with natural time and space to maintain that which is true about its existence.

The absolute relationship to the absolute (the paradox of existence)—which, for Kierkegaard, determines one's relationship to the universal (both ethical and scientific norms)—includes the absurdity of the formulation that only when one gives up the finite can one receive the finite back (on the basis of, and in light of, the infinite). This principle constitutes the matrix of the mind. In *Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard writes pseudonymously that, “as one can add up only magnitudes of the same order, so each thing is qualitatively that by which it is measured; and that which is qualitatively its measure is ethically its goal; and the measure and goal are qualitatively that which something is.”¹⁴⁰ The mind is qualified by what it is consistently measured against. Moreover, what it is measured against determines the moral end to which it directs its intellectual energy. If the measure of the mind is nature, then ideality (thinking) will be divorced from reality (existence).

The only position in existence from which we are justified to argue as autonomous human subjects is the position that existence necessarily involves the incommensurable relationship between reality and ideality. Either consciousness (the mind) is responsible for

¹³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 170.

¹⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 82.

relating reality and ideality, or it remains merely temporal (sick, harkening back to the anguish that Dostoevsky's admirer wrote about)—that is, lacking the historicity becoming of it. The exact qualification that infuses consciousness with this responsibility is identical to what in *Works of Love* and in *Sickness unto Death* constitutes the trajectory of love and the foundation of Judeo-Christianity: a trajectory that begins with the neighbour or with God or does not begin at all.¹⁴¹

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard tells the story of the distinction between Socratic ignorance—which is impossible to understand given that, according to Socrates, what grounds the mind is impossible for anyone[human] to seek¹⁴²—and becoming the true pupil of an authentic teacher/saviour. Kierkegaard notes that the learner (the human subject) acquires the truth only if the teacher/saviour (for Kierkegaard, this is Christ or God) brings the truth and the condition for understanding the truth.¹⁴³ The truth brought to the learner is that the concept of God must never be idolatrously conflated with the term *God*. Insofar as such a conflation occurs, God and the works of God become decoupled¹⁴⁴—God's work being the establishment of faith as the measure of the mind and love as the ethical goal of the mind as it is the basis of the mind. Insofar as one is capable of learning and of giving up the impulse to use immediate sensations and cognition as the basis for understanding our existence and history, one is capable of becoming a genuine contemporary of God¹⁴⁵ Insofar as one is capable of learning, one is capable of becoming a genuine contemporary of all those subjects who have made the transition from basing truth on the appearances of finite time and space to basing truth on one's

¹⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 141.

¹⁴² Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 9.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 41.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

incommensurability with the finite. It is by virtue of the imposition—that is, the golden rule—that qualifies the terms one uses to meaningfully relate to reality that the relationship of reality and ideality is preserved.

The dialectical relationship between reality and ideality mimics the dialectical relationship between the teacher/saviour and the pupil. According to Kierkegaard, the task of the teacher/saviour is to present both the truth and the condition for assimilating it to willing learners to liberate the learner from both false universals (that is, the ethical conventions of one's particular culture rationalized as universally necessary) and false particulars (namely, the preferential/aesthetic desires that validates human beings only insofar as the individual subject finds them interesting).

Moreover, for Kierkegaard, it was only by virtue of a true narrative that we can assess the presence or absence of the mind of the individual with whom we are engaged. Kierkegaard rightly understood that Socrates did not know the neighbour and did not share any narratives with the other precisely because Socrates did not know that the other was to be loved.¹⁴⁶ It is love of neighbour—the golden rule of thought and existence—that, when embedded within a given narrative, distinguishes a true narrative from a false narrative. It is the affirmation or denial of the golden rule that distinguishes all narratives from the myths of the extra-biblical world. It is by virtue of the narrative of the biblical saviour that Kierkegaard could bear witness to the chasm between Socratic ignorance and the condition of truth—that is, the human condition—bespeaking the necessary relationship between human ideality and human reality.

Thus, Kierkegaard provides us with the two critical distinctions that are pertinent to this dissertation: the distinction between (Socratic) myth and (biblical) narrative as it pertains to the

¹⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 373.

process of coming into existence of the mind, and the distinction, within the latter category, between false and true narrative. In all of his works, he made central the necessary existence of the mind and the existential ramifications of not recognizing it as such. He states that a “consciousness of self is the decisive criterion of the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will, and the more will, the more self. A man who has no will at all has no self; the more will he has, the more consciousness of self he has also.”¹⁴⁷ What happens to the individual who rejects both the narrative condition and the truth of the existence of the mind? What are the implications that follow from a failure to will—faithfully, lovingly, reasonably, and freely—the infinite and absolute relationship amongst human subjects? The historicity of consciousness involves a keen awareness of what could potentially befall the human subject if the mind’s incommensurability is not recognized as the standard, both of what does and does not exist.

The following pages shall explore the notions of anxiety, despair, suicide, and demonic possession to demonstrate that faith and love are themselves constituents of what Kierkegaard called “sin-consciousness,” and to illustrate that sin-consciousness is the very measure against which a narrative of mind can be viewed as either true or false (and therefore historical and actual). While it is only by virtue of the knowledge of good and evil (sin-consciousness) that the mind can distinguish between true and false narratives and between all narratives and myths, the forthcoming pages will illustrate that the process by which we acquire the knowledge of good and evil is an anxious one.

¹⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, 28.

III. The Either/Or of Anxious Accounts: Discipline and Obstinace

Anxiety begins with the invocation (call) of the other. The same imposition that awakens self-consciousness and births the mind also evokes anxiety in the newly awakened self (that is, the mind that is a relational phenomenon). According to Kierkegaard, the human being begins in anxiety precisely because the relationships that each human being has been called into are not contingent upon time or space, as they continually take place within the psyche. No anxiety, no mind. From the biblical standpoint, the message to those who search for equanimity—that is, the mind perfectly at rest and in peace with its natural/social surroundings—is that love and faith disavow all apparently paradisaical peaceful ties with the other, oneself, and one’s environment.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, no tie with existence is meant to be peaceful.

Kierkegaard’s incisive analysis of the story of Adam and Eve meaningfully explores the relationship between anxiety, thinking, and time. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard demonstrated that in the creation narrative, Adam and Eve, prior to the fall, did not exist in actuality but solely in potentiality. However, potentiality is recognized as potentiality only after the fall, when Adam and Eve acquired what is distinctive about human nature: spirit, mind, consciousness, and psyche. Potentiality came to Adam and Eve by and through the conditions set for them in the context of absolute human relationship. As echoed in all of his pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard writes that human beings are, “a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit.”¹⁴⁹ Ideally, human spirit is a dialectical relationship between two distinct entities or components. This relationship births anxiety. With regard to the creation narrative, Adam and Eve begin to

¹⁴⁸ Luke 14:26 (RSV).

¹⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 43.

acquire what becomes essential for all humankind in the moment they realize they can transgress what is essential for humankind, which is the capacity to will the golden rule.

For Adam, God’s prohibition not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil “induces in him anxiety, for the prohibition awakens in him freedom’s possibility.”¹⁵⁰ Directly after the word of prohibition “follows the word of judgement ‘You shall certainly die.’”¹⁵¹ It is because Adam does not understand what God has spoken—as he has not yet received the condition necessary to behold the truth—that “there is nothing but the ambiguity of anxiety”¹⁵² robbing Adam of the ostensible peace and repose that his state of ignorance—the dreaming spirit within him—once possessed.¹⁵³ The consciousness of the nothingness of one’s mindless existence functions as the precursor to anxiety.

In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard explained that there is an imperfection in the narrative of the garden story. This imperfection explains the anxious beginnings of the human mind. Kierkegaard writes that, “the imperfection in the narrative—how could it have occurred to anyone to say to Adam what he essentially could not understand—is eliminated if we bear in mind that the speaker is language, and also that it is Adam himself who speaks.”¹⁵⁴ What he meant by language here is ambiguous. What is striking is that, if Kierkegaard’s claim that God is not a noun but a concept expressing what we have already elucidated—that is, the golden rule through which thought and existence are reconciled—then the language Adam is now bearing witness to represents the “Word.” The Word adequately conceptualized represents language that bespeaks divine principles. In the narrative, we learn that Adam and Eve spoke with one another

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁵² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 45.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

frequently. However, as Kierkegaard illustrates, their communication was essentially vacuous, as it lacked divine conceptual content. These implications are not inherent within the creation narrative. They demand interpretation, as do all narratological practices.¹⁵⁵ Once the language (the divine injunction) that properly allows/enables the human subject to acquire content comes into existence, it produces a dialectical struggle. Kierkegaard asks:

[What is the] relation (of human beings) to this ambiguous power? How does spirit relate itself to itself and to its conditionality? It relates itself as anxiety. Do away with itself, the spirit cannot; lay hold of itself, it cannot, so long as it has itself outside of itself. Nor can man sink down into the vegetative, for he is qualified as spirit; flee away from anxiety, he cannot, for he is qualified as spirit; flee away from anxiety, he cannot, for he loves it; really loves it, he cannot, for he flees from it. Innocence has now reached its uttermost point. It is ignorance; however, it is not an animal brutality but an ignorance qualified by spirit, and as such innocence is precisely anxiety, because its ignorance is about nothing. Here there is no knowledge of Good and Evil etc. But the whole actuality of knowledge projects itself in anxiety as the enormous nothing of ignorance.¹⁵⁶

And, so, as Kierkegaard illustrates, once the imposition of spiritual qualification has been made, anxiety illuminates the human beings' original state of ignorance. That is, the mind becomes aware of the nothingness of ignorance while anxiously attempting to liberate itself from it. Anxiety then, is, as Kierkegaard famously called it, "the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis"¹⁵⁷ of its existence as both a psychic and physical entity. Adam's transgression of God's command not to eat from the tree of good and evil represents the birth, rather than the "fall" of Adam. He falls into a world where he must become that which can maintain the nexus of his thought and existence. He does so by becoming grounded in, and capable of willing, the good over evil. As David Kangas observed, "anxiety

¹⁵⁵ "All reading is interpretative, and every text demands interpretation." Polka, *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique*, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 44.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

conditions the sudden breakthrough of self-consciousness,¹⁵⁸ or, put another way, the transgression of Adam and Eve represents the human mind's fallenness from immediate being into the harrowing depths of substantive being. Kierkegaard states that the anxiety produced by that morally edifying "fall" precipitated the faith required to remain free—that is, free from the illusory determinations of both myth and immediacy. The human mind, as a result, is capable of interrogating and critiquing its state of ignorance and dreaming, and that critique and interrogation are what coming into existence means/demands.

Fundamentally, once one has come into existence, their prior state is now dialectically enveloped by their new state. Kangas writes that, for Kierkegaard, the dreaming spirit "is precisely this: the imagination dreams. Ideal content is apprehended under an estranged form. Myth must be decoded by reflective thought in order to elicit its ideal content."¹⁵⁹ The ideal content that one must elicit exists within the mind of the other (God and human beings) who, on occasion, can be wrongly/falsely mythologized, but who possesses the potential of being understood. Was the other, then, not truly known to Adam or Eve? Did both Adam and Eve improperly relate to one another? As Kierkegaard narrated it, these dynamics mirror the relationships that structure the story of Abraham. If we engage in a demythologized reading of that narrative,¹⁶⁰ we find that conventional interpretations of Abraham have not focused on the anxiety that resulted from receiving a direct call from God. In addition, we are not introduced to either Abraham or Adam and Eve before the context of their being called; with this, the biblical stories demonstrate that all beginnings happen within the context of the anxiety of being called.

¹⁵⁸ David J. Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 163.

¹⁵⁹ Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 34.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

God's call to Abraham established Abraham's dialectical nature—that is, his moral obligation to both God and Isaac.¹⁶¹ The narrative of Abraham matches the narrative of Adam and Eve; in both (all) cases, the recognition of a moral calling to maintain both the integrity and the integration of one's psychical and physical existence (while also relating meaningfully to the other to whom one is a neighbor) incites the anxiety that is both necessary and distressing. For the first time, failure, transgression, and oversight—all of which the mind must now monitor, negotiate, and *think*—are made possible. It is this anxiety of the mind that defines Abraham,¹⁶² just as it subsequently defines each and every human subject.

Anxiety, thus construed, allows the individual to discover the deception that follows when we conflate the finite and the infinite.¹⁶³ Anxiety envelops all ends that are either produced by convention or impulse. Anxiety accords the individual a divine distance from convention and impulse such that one can demonstrate having been educated by infinitude.¹⁶⁴ Anxiety is fundamentally educative: it refines, clarifies, and charges the extant mind with mandates that inform its influence over existence. Regarding this last point, Kierkegaard noted that,

only in this way can possibility be educative, because finiteness and the finite relations in which every individual is assigned a place, whether they be small, or every day, or world-historical, educate only finitely, and a person can always persuade them, always coax something else out of them, always bargain, always escape from them tolerably well, always keeps himself a little on the outside, always prevent himself from absolutely learning something from them; and if he does this, the individual must again have possibility in himself and himself develop that from which he is to learn, even though in the next moment that from which he is to learn does not at all acknowledge that it is formed by him but absolutely deprives him of the power.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 28.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁶³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 155.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 156-157.

To be educated in finitude is not to be educated at all. Rather, it is to allow immediacy to direct the course of one's actions and the direction of one's thoughts. For Kierkegaard, this was the ignorance of pre-historical innocence. And yet, anxiety inverts the meaning of the fall. From the vantage point of the mind, one now falls from infinitude, as in the case of the knowledge of good and evil and the paradox of faith. Anxiety's concern is to preserve the mind—that is, the self-consciousness that is both so necessary yet so fragile—given the great and seductive expanse of finitude. Kierkegaard writes that, “no matter how deep an individual has sunk” into the very pits of spurious conventional assessments of the appearances of natural time and space, where both the loss of anxiety and the nullification of the mind are one's fate, “he can sink still deeper, and this ‘can’ is the object of anxiety.”¹⁶⁶ Kierkegaard demonstrated that anxiety guards the mind against falling victim to the finite associations that otherwise reduce the mind's worth.

Kierkegaard understood that anxiety can be a precursor to psychological maturity rather than neurotic compulsion. He knew that true liberation begins once we properly regard prohibitive utterances. Kierkegaard was able to recognize that the mind originates in infinite relationship. Human relationship is the prohibition that demands that one make free choices in response to the imposition of the other. Anxiety is not an impediment but a reminder. It is the recognition that one is not what one appears to be in natural time and space. And so, when anxiety is not recognized for what it is, the result is not only the neurotic compulsions but despair. In failing to acknowledge the positive purpose that anxiety serves—that is, the cognitive grounding from which freedom is capable of actualizing itself—the self dissipates and recoils in the face of both the other and the objects of its surrounding world, thus losing its very beginning and its narrative context. As Kangas states, this very core of the mind, if willingly relinquished,

¹⁶⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 113.

can destabilize and decenter the human being. “To be,” he writes, in relation to analyzing Kierkegaard’s notion of anxiety,

means simply to have an origin in self-consciousness; self-consciousness is in principle the whole. Only when the logic of self-positing consciousness has been thought to its end, as absolute knowledge, does it become possible to catch sight of what might be left out of total presence: the event, prior to all presence, even total presence, of coming into-existence.¹⁶⁷

It is only when self-consciousness (that is, the dialectical relationship between the infinite and the finite) is recognized as the very source of being and of the mind that one can know and understand existence as a whole and not simply as a sum of component parts or fragments. Indeed, coming into existence involves becoming whole, and becoming whole is the practice of acknowledging and contending with all the ways that one does not live out one’s wholeness. Coming into existence involves being anxious so as to protect the mind from the narratological perversions that result from conflating finite appearances with infinite truth (that is, the mythology of thought and existence). It is only on these grounds that one can establish a relationship to reality that is non-neurotic—namely, that does not devolve into the mind subordinating itself to the objects it beholds—but, paradoxical, and, therefore, capable of distancing itself from all that threatens to rob the mind of its narrative core. To explain the mind in any other terms is to attempt to circumvent and, therefore, rid oneself of the responsibility to choose the other as one’s co-creator of the narrative of mind—an action leading only to despair.

¹⁶⁷ Kangas, *Kierkegaard’s Instant*, 129.

IV. Despair, Suicide, and Sacrifice: The Dialectic of Illness and Health

In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard argued that the formula of all despair is to despair over oneself and, in despair, to attempt to rid oneself of one's self (that is, of one's mind). Despair is the result of a discomfort arising from the mind's contradistinction with finite sensibility and immediacy, as well as a reluctance to deal with the implications of that contradistinction.¹⁶⁸ Kierkegaard states that mental despair "is a sickness in the spirit, in the self, and so it may assume a triple form: in despair at not being conscious of having a self (despair improperly so-called); in despair at not willing to be oneself; in despair at willing to be oneself."¹⁶⁹ The despairing person is ineluctably engaged in the psychic drama of existence without the support of the principle that is responsible for maintaining the mind's infinite relationship to existence. As for the one who is not conscious of having a self, as in the case of Socrates and other pagans, Kierkegaard states that, although we may call their state "despair," it would be improper to use this descriptor, as only those whose minds have come into existence can truly experience despair.

Accordingly, then, it is impossible for the self (mind) to maintain its existence without relating itself to the power that constitutes the dialectical relationship that the human mind is birthed out of—that is, the relationship between the infinite and the finite. According to Kierkegaard, the reluctance to relate to the power that constitutes one's dialectical relationship between the infinite and the finite is a sickness that human beings can be cured of. The disruption of the mind's relational existence and its dialectical form, however counterintuitive, demonstrates humankind's advantage over the beast.¹⁷⁰ Kierkegaard writes that "this advantage

¹⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 37.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, 12.

distinguishes humankind far more essentially than the erect posture, for it implies the infinite erectness or loftiness of being spirit.”¹⁷¹ It is the biblical thinker—who cleaves to the narrative of the mind’s creation from nothing—that is capable of assessing just how pernicious this illness is and how to be cured of it.

Kierkegaard explains that the cure for despair demands that we first understand how despair manifests. He maintained that despair can manifest negatively in two different directions. When the mind is unable to sustain the relationship between the infinite and the finite, its attenuation leaves the mind frail and susceptible to being seduced by the trappings of pure infinitude or pure finitude. In light of his reading of *The Sickness unto Death*, Michael O’Neill Burns explains that, “the first form of despair is the one that emerges when the spirit ventures off into the realm of infinitude and fails to come back and touch the ground of finitude.”¹⁷² As we have already seen, this failure results in the subject being encapsulated by the mythical/mythological. It is ideality—falsely conflated with the finite and superimposing itself on the finite without principally relating to it—that results in both the finite and the infinite losing their distinguishing features. Such despair poeticizes (mythologizes) being instead of allowing itself to be firmly grounded in the self-consciousness of being. This despair imagines, without qualification, the nature of the good without ever being able to apply the good.¹⁷³

In contrast, the reduction of the self—that is, of the mind—to the appearances of the finite (in the form of societal convention or environmental conditions) produces another pernicious form of despair. When what is eternal in a human being (that is, the mind’s capacity

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Michael O’Neill Burns, *Kierkegaard and the Matter of Philosophy: A Fractured Dialectic* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015), 78.

¹⁷³ Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, 93.

to infuse temporality with its most enriching values—namely, the self, the other, and God) is pegged to the finitude of temporal occurrences, the capacity to distinguish between oneself and the world of temporality becomes impossible. Kierkegaard rightly understood this phenomenon of the will as the desire of the determinist and writes that the “determinist, the fatalist, is in despair and as one in despair has lost his self, because for him everything has become necessity.”¹⁷⁴ If human thought considers everything to be necessary, then prioritizing one’s relationship to God, self, and the other—as in the case of that which comprises health—becomes impossible.

The inability for the despairing mind to distinguish between what is and is not necessary is why despair, whether in the direction of infinitude or finitude, represents a sickness unto death. The sickness unto death, which produces despair, is fundamentally the error of all thought that cannot address its errors. The only cure is what Judeo-Christianity prescribes: death. It is the unnatural man (biblical heirs) and not the natural man (for example, the ancient Greeks) who can choose or reject death as an antidote to this sickness. The “unnatural man”—anyone who either is healthy or drowns in despair (momentarily or chronically) due to their unwillingness to be disciplined by the truth of their thought and existence—chooses death or fails to cleave to what the biblical tradition knows one must. The sickness that biblical thinking discovers within the unnatural man is the sickness that emerges from unnatural man’s penchant to worship an idol as God. The alternative presented is that the health of the mind is predicated on the capacity to resolve the contradictions of existence based on a truthful narrative of the mind. The unnatural man’s despairing desire is to worship an idol as God or God as an idol. This desire results in the unnatural man’s attempt to exist within the realm of *mythos*—where God is the deity that

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

authoritatively determines one's existence—or purely within the realm of natural time and space, where the human mind must unwillingly devote itself to the determining power of external stimuli.¹⁷⁵ This sickness, appropriately called despair, cannot consume itself (which is why it remains despair) or consumes the sufferer whole and entire, and this is what demonstrates that the mind is eternal—that is, able to resist complete annihilation by the finite temptations that beset it.

Conversely, to choose death, rather than to delude oneself into thinking that this sickness could lead to one's expiration, represents the triumph of spirit (mind) over the finite. Kierkegaard states that, “despair is indeed that dialectical. Thus, also in Christian terminology death is indeed the expression for the state of deepest spiritual wretchedness, and yet the cure is simply to die to the world.”¹⁷⁶ The remedy for despair is to die to the world of the various contingencies of finite and mythological existence, such that one can truly live within the great expanse of the dialectical world of the relational mind. The Bible's solution to the despair one is inevitably responsible for is found only in one's willingness to die. Kierkegaard writes that “to be sick unto death is to be unable to die.”¹⁷⁷ That is, to be sick is to cling emphatically to either pole of one's dialectical constellation: the infinite or the finite. From the biblical perspective death is not the end. Kierkegaard writes that,

from a Christian point of view, no earthly, physical sickness is the sickness unto death, for death is indeed the end of the sickness, but death is not the end. If there is to be any question of a sickness unto death in the strictest sense, it must be a sickness of which the end is death and death is the end. This is precisely what despair is.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, 28.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, 35.

The individual in willful ignorance of the kind of knowledge that would preserve their mind clings in fear to the notion that to let go of the finite is to lose everything. Death is the last thing for this attenuated mind. Death is the liberation of the mind from the mind's self-potentiated illnesses. The individual ensnared by the appearances of the finite is right to be fearful of death. In considering the infinite, death demands that one sacrifice what once falsely constituted the entirety of the mind's existence, and then suffer in the process. In *Death, Sacrifice, and Tragedy*, Foss understands that this process is germane to the Biblical tradition—that is, the narrative tradition that unfolds and liberates the mind from pagan mythological opposition and contradiction. He recognizes that the Biblical tradition is primarily the narrative that if,

life in its core is a perpetual conversion from a lower sphere to a higher one, destroying the lower for the sake of realizing the higher, then this creative destruction, this sacrificial action, conveys to life its essential character, which is sacramental. It can be called “tragic.” Life in its maturity is a tragic drama because it cannot be lived without the perpetual destruction of that which is dear to us. For whether the object of destruction and sacrifice is corporeal and sensuous or whether it is mental—our past memories and achievements—it is always a part of ourselves which we must sacrifice, it is always self-sacrifice, and thus it is accompanied by sorrow and suffering.¹⁷⁹

The death of the self is really the sacrifice of one's finite associations and confluences with the self. The death of the self is what one must suffer to become the self that one is: an infinite human subject engaged in a principled relationship with all human subjects. Without sacrifice, tragedy does not exist—or, put differently, the context of tragedy is self-sacrifice and nothing more. So long as one refuses to sacrifice, one will suffer, for to attempt to grasp the finite on the basis of the finite is precisely the kernel of despair. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard showed that Abraham anxiously responded to the divine call to reconcile his thought and existence on the

¹⁷⁹ Foss, *Death, Sacrifice, and Tragedy*, 63.

basis of divine principles (the absolute relation to the absolute). Only in doing this could Abraham grasp the finitude of his life. Kierkegaard writes that,

it takes a purely human courage to renounce the whole temporal realm in order to gain eternity, but this I do gain and, in all eternity, can never renounce—it is a self-contradiction. But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage to grasp the whole temporal realm now by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith. By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac.¹⁸⁰

It was in this same vein that Kierkegaard also writes that Abraham (on the basis of his sacrifice), in the process of his dying to the finite, did not believe that “he would be blessed in a future life but that he would be blessed here in the world.”¹⁸¹ That is, that if God did not provide Abraham with a ram, he would surely provide him with a new Isaac. This characterizes Abraham’s thought—as delineated in *Fear and Trembling*—prior to Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac. However, what Abraham did not know is that he would receive a new Isaac¹⁸² after the sacrifice, new in the sense that his relationship to Isaac would be renewed. The strength of Abraham’s absolute love for Isaac, and his absolute love for God, is what the sacrifice exposed. Would he relativize his love for one to make his task easier, or could he bear the weight of his absolute duty to both God and son within a seemingly impossible situation? Absurdity here is understood as that relational phenomenon that is incomprehensible to the despairing mind. In light of the human being’s absolute relationship to the absolute, absurdity is the process by which the finite can be regained—as was the case in regard to Isaac. Absurdity is not based on finite relations but on the infinite value necessarily presupposed and accorded to all sentient beings. The veracity of Abraham’s faith was contingent upon his ability to absolutely love God and others without sacrificing either God or the other.

¹⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 49.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

The despairing mind, hampered by finite exigencies, deems the necessity of sacrifice to be absurd. Kierkegaard states explicitly what Foss knew implicitly: that evasiveness will undoubtedly tempt the despairing mind from doing what is most necessary to be relieved of despair. Foss writes that it is this “psychological motivation” that “may instead explain man’s desertion of sacrifice and escape from destiny, his resistance, his arrest in achievements and the proud self-confirmation they provide.”¹⁸³ However, what both thinkers knew is that the false self-affirmation (that is, the pretenses of subscribing to a mythological or conventional notion of one’s orientation) that exists prior to affirming the absurdity of mental reality is not only the root of despair but also the reason why human life cannot be lived outside of the absurd.

I have already indicated that, in order for a narrative of the mind to be true, it must acknowledge that alleviating one’s despair involves sacrificing that which functions as the mind’s most formidable obstacle: the conflation of the mind’s value with the social conditions of the surrounding world. The truth of this narrative is found whenever we understandably acknowledge that it is only because the mind is inherently infinite—that is, inherently eternal—that we can recognize and critique how it is perennially seduced into acquiescing to temporal and false determinations and categorizations. As we now see, a false narrative of the mind is any narrative that fails to affirm the absurd conditions that illuminate and constitute the existence of the mind as a relational phenomenon.

An example of a false narrative produced by another biblical heir is in the work of Albert Camus. Kierkegaard’s influence on the work on Camus is unmistakable. However, Camus, unlike Kierkegaard, improperly narrated the existence of the mind and, *ipso facto*, was unable to distinguish between narrative and myth. As a result, he was unable to distinguish between the

¹⁸³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 64.

despairing mind and the absent mind. Camus misappropriated the Kierkegaardian notion of the absurd and conflated it with the diametrical oppositions that rive the despairing mind. He writes that “it’s absurd means ‘it’s impossible’ but also ‘it’s contradictory.’”¹⁸⁴ Camus confused the absurd matrix of the mind with contradiction simply because he refused to die—that is, to sacrifice finitude to gain finitude. He noted that, “carrying this absurd logic to its conclusion, I must admit that struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest).”¹⁸⁵ Lack of hope, perceived rejection, and consistent dissatisfaction are indicative of despair. What Camus did not recognize is that hope, rejection, and dissatisfaction all involve relationship—something that his ancient Greek heroes did not know. Given that the orientation of Camus’ thinking is biblical, his attempt to reduce the absurd to the mythological positions him squarely within despair. The oxymorons produced by Camus’ formulations are simply untenable and uninterpretable. He attempted to affirm the mind’s free rejection of the infinite but was only able to demonstrate this on the basis of a type of thinking that was not finite.

The narrative that Camus attempted to utilize to affirm the existence of what he called the absurd mind—what we know is better called the despairing mind—is the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus. Due to relentlessly deceiving and disobeying the gods, Sisyphus is sentenced to push a rock up a hill and watch it fall down the hill eternally demonstrating the futility of the human mind’s attempt to alter its finite circumstances in natural time and space. Camus writes that we

¹⁸⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 33.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

must think of Sisyphus as happy. However, given Kierkegaard's postulations, we know that Sisyphus can neither be happy nor sad, as Sisyphus has not come into existence.

Camus states in contradistinction and direct opposition to Kierkegaard that, "the entire effort of his [Kierkegaard's] intelligence is to escape the antinomy of the human condition."¹⁸⁶ What Camus did not recognize is that it was he, and not Kierkegaard, who was attempting to escape the reconcilable antinomy of the human condition. To escape it, Camus asserted that the goal of absurdism (of a contradictory and despairing relationship to existence) was to live without appeal¹⁸⁷—that is, to live without appealing to the infinitude of the other and oneself on the basis of the golden rule. For Camus, suicide was a false choice as it makes too much out of the meaninglessness of existence. Alternatively, we can infer that Kierkegaard knew (implicitly) that suicide—that is, to kill oneself rather than die willingly in a sacrificial attempt to gain the infinite—is a product of demonic possession. Moreover, suicide is a product of the demonic choice that is made to refrain from adopting the infinite relationship between mind and narrative.

V. Sin-Consciousness and Demonic Possession

The demonic is a state¹⁸⁸ from which only the knowledge of good and evil—*anxiety*, *death*, and *sin-consciousness*—offers an escape according to Kierkegaard. The most insidious manifestation of the unwillingness to bear witness to and imbibe the true narrative of mind is the demonic possession of the mind that befalls the obstinate subject. Kierkegaard asserted that demonic possession is not sin itself—given that sin enters into the world simultaneously with the mind, as both are created *ex nihilo*—but the bondage that envelops the mind as a result of its

¹⁸⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays*, 42.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 123.

being improperly positioned in relation to sin.¹⁸⁹ According to Kierkegaard, this type of mind is polemical to the truth precisely because it has willingly forfeited the condition that accords ground to the human subject.¹⁹⁰

To be the cause of one's untruth is most definitely sin,¹⁹¹ but it is the unwillingness to acknowledge this as a sinful state that constitutes the demonic. What is so paradoxical about this state of being is that it incites one to do what one cannot do in truth—that is, to deny the source of one's thought and existence. Yet, insofar as one denies what constitutes its existence, the denial itself attests to the existence of what I am calling the true narrative of mind. That the mind requires a narrative to which it can attach itself to sustain itself—that is neither literal nor mythical—dumbfounds and offends the demonic human subject. Kierkegaard noted that,

the ultimate potentiation of every passion is always to will its own downfall, and so it is also the ultimate passion of the understanding to will the collision, although in one way or another the collision must become its downfall. This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think. This passion of thought is fundamentally present everywhere in thought, also in the single individual's thought insofar as he, thinking, is not merely himself.¹⁹²

Thought cannot think the beginning of its existence in temporality because its beginning in temporality possesses no content and therefore is not representative of what thinking involves. The mind seeks death—namely, that which is capable of liberating it from its compulsions and fixations in natural time and space. However, for the mind to will its death, it must will the collision of reality and ideality—that is, the same dyad that is transformed into a dialectic once it transparently rests in the divine, as in the case of the golden rule and the paradox of faith. The compulsion to think that which cannot be thought is the compulsion to think beyond the collision

¹⁸⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 113.

¹⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 15.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 37.

of reality and ideality and their resolution. To do such a thing is to locate the beginning of one's mind—namely, the very origin of one's thought and existence—in temporality. The understanding here is no different than what Kierkegaard described in *Fear and Trembling*: the calculative thought patterns of a mind whose *telos* is in nature. This understanding, although it brushes up against what it cannot know in any finite way—namely, the infinite principle/concept of the divine—trembles at the precipice of the injunction made by the divine to sacrifice its current state to acquire a new basis. The understanding—namely, that which apprehends this dialectic as an opposition to its causal and therefore reductive logic—is no longer in ignorance. As such, if the leap of faith is not made, it becomes the demonic. Kierkegaard writes that when the understanding and the paradox of one's thought and existence meet in a “mutual understanding of their difference, then the encounter is a happy one,” but, “if the encounter is not in mutual understanding, then the relation is unhappy... we could more specifically term offense,” and all “offense is a suffering.”¹⁹³

Kierkegaard captured the suffering of the demonic mind well in *The Concept of Anxiety*. There, he argued that one can primarily be anxious about two things: first, anxiety over the good, and second, anxiety over evil. Sin-consciousness involves being anxious over evil in light of knowing the good. Sin-consciousness involves anxiety over evil, but wherein one does not become fixated with evil (neurotically obsessed with evil) such that they idolatrously conflate evil with particular objects in natural time and space and then develop taboos and conventions that stymie the dialectical activity of the mind. Anxiety over the good is the cachet of the demonic. The demonic possesses an unfree relationship to the good¹⁹⁴—unfree in that it does not

¹⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 49.

¹⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 119.

believe in the fruitfulness of willing the good and rather surveys the good as that which, if it could be staved off, would demonstrate that the dialectal nexus of the mind is simply illusory. The demonic mind wants to close itself off from the possibility of the good entering into a thoughtful relationship with evil. Evil here is understood as that which prevents the mind from recognizing itself as infinite and irreducible to its finite conditions (both social and environmental conditions). Unfreedom of this kind makes itself a prisoner, and as such, unfreedom does not want to commune with “Language”—namely, with the “Word” qualified as the freedom of spirit.¹⁹⁵ Kierkegaard noted that this lack of communication manifests itself in a variety of psychological pathologies, from hypochondria to outright capriciousness, hypersensitivity, hyperirritability, neurasthenia, and hysteria, to name but a few. The demoniac understands their mental perturbation to be an indictment of humankind. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard further qualified this state of mind when he writes that,

demonic despair is the most intensive form of the despair: in despair to will to be oneself... Rebelling against all existence, it feels that it has obtained evidence against it, against its goodness. The person in despair believes that he himself is the evidence, and that is what he wants to be, and therefore he wants to be himself, himself in his torment, in order to protest against all existence with this torment. Just as the weak, despairing person is unwilling to hear anything about any consolation eternity has for him, so a person in such despair does not want to hear anything about it, either, but for a different reason: this very consolation would be his undoing—as a denunciation of all existence. Figuratively speaking, it is as if an error slipped into an author’s writing and the error became conscious of itself as an error—perhaps it actually was not a mistake but in a much higher sense an essential part of the whole production—and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred toward him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No, I refuse to be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author.¹⁹⁶

To use the will that established the subject to revolt against that very same will is the *modus operandi* of the demoniac insofar as the demoniac wants to prove that that which cannot be

¹⁹⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 124.

¹⁹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, 87.

thought can indeed be thought. As Camus intimated, one takes the position that the entire world of antinomies that one is obligated to reconcile through thought is absurd, insofar as it demands that one's education rest upon one's capacity to interface with the other—namely, God and self. The revolt against relationship is the demand to be constituted solely by oneself, whether or not this comes at the expense or negation of the other. Burns writes that this, “negation is the individual subject absolutely negating its own grounds in an attempt to assert its autonomy in the face of an absolute that exists absolutely independently of it.”¹⁹⁷ Essentially, within this context, one negates the ground that is one's moral obligation to the other and oneself. This is sin.

The importance of sin is that it “splits men [humans] up into single individuals and holds each individual fast as a sinner, a splitting up that in another sense is both harmonized with and teleologically oriented to the perfection of existence.”¹⁹⁸ It is this individuation of the human psyche that induces the fear and trembling from which many shrink and devolve into the demonic as a result. The demoniac always wants to appeal to the other to join it in revolt against the existence of the mind: that is, the existence of a person viewed as an individuated free subject rather than part of a rebellious crowd. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard understood that this individuation creates particular problems for communication in light of the infinite demand to share infinitude with other human beings. Kierkegaard noted that, if he goes any further than the qualification of the tragic hero—namely, the figure who represents the causality of Platonic Forms i.e. Socrates—he recognizes that he “always runs up against the paradox, the divine and the demonic, for silence is both. Silence is the demon's trap, and the more that is silenced, the

¹⁹⁷ Burns, *Kierkegaard and the Matter of Philosophy*, 39.

¹⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, 146.

more terrible the demon, but silence is also divinity's mutual understanding with the single individual."¹⁹⁹

Paradoxically, both Abraham as the single individual and the demoniac are silent. For the former, silence presupposes the wholeness of the mind of the other. For the latter, silence lures the extant mind of the other (and oneself) into unfreedom: that is, into the prison of despair and resentment as a result of being constituted by the narrative of infinitude. In speaking with the terms that are common to human beings but that are nevertheless qualified differently by infinitude, Abraham remains silent because he cannot make himself understood²⁰⁰ by those who know no other categories in existence than the ones provided to them by convention or impulse. The individual who cannot understand Abraham interprets the dialectic (the narrative) of the mind as an irreconcilable antinomy. That individual lacks the will to think through the truth of their relationships based on the principle that grounds the thought and existence of the mind. Abraham can "say everything," but he cannot say it in a way that would appease the mind that stubbornly wants to conflate thoughtful existence with the appearances of natural time and space. Abraham "speaks in tongues" to all those who do not subscribe to the narrative of mind that commands the individual to will the absolute relationship to the absolute.

In addition, speaking in tongues is a sign of freedom. Freedom always communicates²⁰¹ but is rarely heard by ears that are accustomed to judging by the results of speech (that is, the affective and conventional merits of speech) rather than by the quality of speech (namely, speech imbued with the infinite). Freedom believes what it cannot see—the infinite worth of the human subject, the human mind—and believes away what it can see, presupposing worth in the other

¹⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 88.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁰¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 124.

even when it is questioned by convention or impulse. Only in freedom do we find the divine language that commands and intimidates the dreaming spirit/the defiant demoniac.

In light of this, and as an attempt to transmute the religious terms Kierkegaard utilized in his description of psychological states of being into modern psychoanalytic terms, Polka writes that,

the very concept of neurosis or repression embodies the paradox that neurotic suffering, in waking and/or dream life, bespeaks a consciousness divided against, evading, or denying itself. How consciousness can be simultaneously conscious and not conscious of itself expresses both the miracle and the degradation of spirit. What distinguishes neurosis from psychosis, in principle (however difficult it may be to articulate the difference in practice), is that the neurotic sufferer wills to comprehend his suffering, to liberate himself from neurotic compulsion to become responsible for his unconscious, to render the repressed, he wills to make the lost content of his life a meaningful part of his history.²⁰²

The psychotic sufferer—not the neurotically compelled human being—has lost the will (that is, refused to will) to interpret the disparate and ostensibly divided elements of their life. In order for this interpretation to be beneficial to the subject, it must occur within the context of the co-constructed and co-created narrative of the infinite existence of the mind. The demoniac refuses to interpret existence precisely because they believe that if existence were perfect, it would not require interpretation—it's value and truth would be self-evident.

The demoniac and the psychotic sufferer are utterly distinct from the despairing, neurotic, or anxious subject. The former two have denied or refused the narrative of mind while the latter three do not want to. Burns succinctly highlighted what the Kierkegaardian distinction between anxiety and despair means in relation to the narrative of spirit/mind/psyche when he writes that,

anxiety and despair are both fundamental to being human. Anxiety represents the fundamental disharmony at the heart of subjectivity and the inability of the self to be its own foundation. While anxiety remains an ontological category used to describe the foundational state of universal human subjectivity, despair (which is a category of the

²⁰² Polka, *Truth and Interpretation*, 47.

self) is a qualification of human spirit. While anxiety remains, a category signifying the failure of immediacy, despair is a category of reflection.²⁰³

Anxiety and despair both qualify the human subject and demonstrate that the human subject is no mere contingent by-product of finite existence. Anxiety and despair demonstrate that the human subject is a relation so construed that without sin it could not exhibit that which demonstrates its infinitude. Sin is the acknowledgement that one is beholden to the knowledge of good and evil, and that this knowledge characterizes the metaphysical structure of thinking and, as such, motivates the ethical relationality of intersubjectivity—namely, the very nexus that births the human psyche.

According to Burns, for Kierkegaard, “sin signifies a departure from not only an original innocence that cannot be retracted, but one for which the very effort of retracting constitutes another modality of sin.”²⁰⁴ And so, it is sin that allows us to depart from our primordial state of innocence (ignorance) such that we are excommunicated from paradisiacal paganism and the capacity to feign ignorance when we live as if the ground of our being is not the paradox of faith.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that what awaits the mind once it comes into existence is anxiety over the good: that is, the potentiality of sinking into neurosis or psychosis and the pitfall of demonic possession. It is sin-consciousness that permeates the entirety of the existence of the mind and the dialectical relationship/mis-relationship between the human being and existence. And so, outside of the narrative of mind, there is nothing. It is this nothingness that Camus clings to and that Nagel cannot recognize. It is this nothingness that impinges upon the extant mind and seduces it in times of frailty. The eternity of the mind is proven by its compulsion to reduce the

²⁰³ Burns, *Kierkegaard and the Matter of Philosophy*, 76.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

significance of existence to temporal demonstrations and manifestations of existence. The eternity of the mind is proven by the subject's ineffective attempts to commit suicide—that is, by the individual's rejection of/offense at the truth, which simultaneously represents their acknowledgement of the truth.

As such, the true narrative of existence must be sought on the basis of the dialectic of the golden rule. To search for the origin of the mind outside of the locus that I have articulated through my examination of biblical principles results in a human being opposing their mind to the existence of the other and to the infinite existence of their mind. In light of one's search for the origin of the mind within the finite, the narrative that one chooses will despairingly lead to extreme skepticism, dogmatism, or, worse, demonism. It is due to the fact that the structure of our human reality is ethical, and that ethicality is the only reality human beings can adequately (meaningfully) think up, that demonic possession—the result of anxiety over the good—is possible. One must always be willing to sacrifice immediate cognition and sensation—that is, to be disciplined by the knowledge of good and evil—to acquire the dialectical ground necessary for the development and retention of a true narrative of existence.

The following chapter shall explore the mind of narrative, which comprises the idea that any utterance constitutes a narrative that seeks to be shared about the nature of one's mind. These narratives can either be demonic or divine. As in Kafka's *The Trial* or Ellison's *The Invisible Man*, utterances—whether they manifest in casual everyday speech/actions or as complete publishable compositions—constitute the way that diverse minds seek to appeal to other minds to engage in or suppress absolute relationships.

For a narrative to express a mind, it must be able to account for its missteps and qualify itself based on its infinite truth and not on its finite features. As I shall demonstrate shortly, the

works of Dostoevsky adequately demonstrate that narratives do possess minds that can be affirmed, appealed to, recognized, and thought to exist. Given that the mind does not exist within the brain but in interpreted exchanges between human subjects and existence, the narratives wrought by thinkers who intentionally embed their minds in them—and the plethora of disturbances that either antagonize, disrupt, or remind it of its narrative origins—demonstrate that they require readers. However, these writers do not require just any reader. Rather, they require readers who are adept at attending to the appeals and disruptions of the mind, and those who are faithfully/lovingly capable of bearing witness to and presupposing the ground that allows the other's narrative to be affirmed/received. In the next chapter, the relationships between reader and text, speaker and listener, and narrative and mind will be the lens through which we make sense of the minds Dostoevsky discussed in his works.

Chapter 4: The Mind of Narrative

I. Going Beyond Existence: The History of Offense

In the act of human expression embodying divine truth, the conditions necessary for the mind to come into existence are created. In the preceding chapter, I carefully analyzed Kierkegaard's texts to present a notion of truth that involved the necessary presupposition of infinitude existing in self and other. This presupposition rests upon understanding God (that is, self and other), and by extension all monotheistic religious terms, to be concepts and not things in natural time and space. I argued that the teacher/saviour is responsible for creating the conditions under which that truth, and its implications, could be received. Additionally, in exploring the conditions for receiving the truth, that chapter concluded that human expression is the process by which we are either inaugurated into a relationship with infinitude or discharged into confinement by misperceiving the infinite. That chapter distinguished between two types of human expression/communication: namely, the divine and demonic. While divine communication sustains existence by presupposing value in self and other, demonic communication—in being offended by the truth—seeks to depreciate the conditions (namely, the necessary relationship between self and other) within which truth is realized. Communicative practices and all other forms of human expression represent narratives about the existence of self and others that either reveal the divine or reveal the demonic. These communicative practices can never be neutral/ignorant.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵The concept of absolute relationship is the reservoir from which narration derives both its motive and resolve. When Socrates engaged his interlocutors, the irony of his exchanges was that he offered the myth of knowledge while simultaneously disavowing the notion that myths possess any truth. With the advent of biblical truth, our situation is far more potentiated than the apparent gravitas and tragedy of the ancient Greek protagonists.

In this chapter I will direct us toward an analysis of Dostoevsky's *Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov* by exploring the communication of the divine and the demonic, as well as their implications for assessing the status of one's mind. Through critical analysis of Dostoevsky's characters in these novels, we will be able to see what demonic possession entails, how individuals may become acquainted with the truth—that is, the golden rule—while attempting to circumvent it, and how individuals reveal their quality of mind through the narratives that they either explicitly champion or privately harbor.

As I demonstrated in my last chapter, narrative is infinite and non-mythological given that it can either be true or false but never ignorant. Narrative represents the possibility of communion as in the biblical call. Narrative establishes the context within which a mind can either blossom or wilt—that is, the health and status of one's mind is revealed by virtue of the narrative it can transmit and receive. Moreover, the coming into existence of narrative provides the context for the perversion of truth and the rendering of a satanic narrative: or, as I demonstrate in this chapter, a narrative of offense.

Throughout this chapter I argue that in disavowing the other, the mind that shares a false narrative wants to be affirmed without affirming and acknowledged as true without acknowledging the truth of the other. This chapter demonstrates that we can only recognize the mind (or lack thereof) of a given narrative when we first distinguish between dialectical and dualistic relationships that manifest in the social and the individual. The cognitive offense that attempts to avoid making such distinctions is a rejection of the biblical conception of the necessary relationship between thought and existence. Such offense represents a mind utterly

determined to establish itself beyond the truth of existence and, therefore, one that is embroiled within the history of offense that attempts to go beyond the life of human relationships.²⁰⁶

II. Dostoevsky, Modernity, and Post-Modernity

Dostoevsky stands at—and in—an interesting place in the history of letters as a harbinger of modernist attitudes in the arts and philosophy. What is particularly interesting about his place in history is that what has come after him—the post-modern denial of all that modernism stands for—raises questions about what constitutes the modernity of modernism and the post-modernity of post-modernism.

Rather than simply inviting the reader to explore and peruse diverse ideals and opinions or come away with a modernistic “grand narrative” (that is, an overarching synthesizing/reductive ideal of existence), Dostoevsky’s narratives challenge his readers to know themselves. His texts deliberately create snares for the reader such that unless one thoughtfully engages with the text, one will become lost in its appearances. Dostoevsky’s works challenge the reader to know themselves so intimately and so transparently (as Kierkegaard has put it) that they can avoid opposing a true narrative. Ultimately, in reading Dostoevsky we learn that all narratives (whether secular, biblical, modern, or post-modern) can be satanic if one does not engage them with the principles that constitute thought and ground the mind.

Dostoevsky’s texts will be the benchmark for exploring the mind of any narrative as they force the mind to hold onto its narrative of truth or else suffer the consequences of mistaking error for truth. Given the challenge that Dostoevsky’s works pose for his readers, I want to begin by positioning my analysis in relation to commentary on his works to properly appreciate not

²⁰⁶To clarify, the reality of our fictions (namely, our immaterial truths: God, self and the other) enable us to expel from our thought and existence all that seeks to fictitiously draw a wedge between our thought and existence.

only Dostoevsky's impact, but the problems he poses for conventional interpretations of his work.

In *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky did not write novels with an idea—rather, he wrote about an idea.²⁰⁷ It is precisely the idea of the mind as resolved and of the mind resting transparently in the divine—that is, the mind not sick and therefore capable of engaging sickness, and, *ipso facto*, curing it—that Dostoevsky writes. As such, a novel “with an idea” is fundamentally a persuasive novel—that is, a novel that seeks to coax the reader into agreeing to a particular way of thinking, perceiving, and existing.

Dostoevsky's novels are not of the sort.

Jean Francois Lyotard offers us a critique of novels “with an idea” and generalizes the modernist novel as fitting solely into this category. In *Postmodern Fables*, Lyotard characterizes the modernist agenda—in the arts, sciences, and philosophy—as an agenda that is itself an eschatology. He writes that “eschatology recounts the experience of a subject affected by a lack, and prophesies that this experience will finish at the end of time with the remission of evil, the destruction of death, and the return to the Father's house, that is, to the full signifier.”²⁰⁸ It is the historicity of the modern imaginary that begins with the most influential “grand narrative” of the Western mind—Christianity.²⁰⁹ According to Lyotard, this narrative dictatorially demands that modern artistry seek to present the existence of something unrepresentable, “showing that there is

²⁰⁷M.M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, (Michigan: Ardis, 1973), 19-20.

²⁰⁸Jean François Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 96.

²⁰⁹*Ibid*, 96.

something we can conceive of which we can neither see nor show.”²¹⁰ The mind of a given narrative can manifest itself in the areas of art, philosophy, politics, and religion, just as it does within science, where positivism (that is, eschatology cloaked in scientific garb) is endemic to the outlook of the mind of modernism. Herein lies the origins of the archetype of a text “with an idea” from which it follows that Dostoevsky is anything but modern.

However, on that account, Dostoevsky is also not post-modern, insofar as Lyotard understands post-modernity. Lyotard writes that the post-modern narrative is not a narrative but a fable that relates its narratives to the modern project. In this definition, the modernist movement still constricts post-modern narrative. The fact that post-modernism is offended by the modernist movement demonstrates that the post-modern pursuit is not free. According to Lyotard, the fables of post-modernism are fundamentally unaware of good and evil;²¹¹ signify the end of hope (the modern mind’s hell);²¹² do not respond to the demand for remission or emancipation;²¹³ represent the end of the people as sovereign within the story of existence;²¹⁴ and, like Oedipus, they obey blind local laws and chance.²¹⁵ Lyotard writes that post-modern is the demonstration of how writing—and to this, we could add speaking, thinking, and existing—seeks to cure itself of the contagion of modernism—namely, the contagion of conventional hope and emancipation. In this sense, post-modernity is a period of slackening—and here, the slack is found in the rope linking oneself to the ostensibly modern aesthetic/ideology of modernism.

²¹⁰Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence, 1982-1985*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 11.

²¹¹Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, 100.

²¹²*Ibid.*

²¹³*Ibid.*

²¹⁴Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained*, 20.

²¹⁵*Ibid.*, 93.

As such, if we consider Lyotard's understanding of modernity and post-modernity, the narratives produced by Dostoevsky might be considered anti-modern and anti-post-modern. That is, Dostoevsky's narratives do not "project" their "legitimacy forward while founding that very legitimacy in a lost origin."²¹⁶ Nor do his narratives believe that the human being is an invention of environmental and social predicaments. According to Lyotard, the latter suggests that the hero of a post-modern fable is energy, crude and unexamined change, engendered by external forces.²¹⁷ In a Dostoevskian narrative the "idea" prescribes a type of knowledge that supersedes and transcends the normative metaphysical and ethical connotations that characterize what Lyotard calls modernism. The "idea" presented in a Dostoevskian narrative does not present an existence riven by post-modern apathy, nor does it transfer the authorship of human thought and existence to chance and circumstance. The epistemological concerns of a Dostoevskian text involve the goal of liberating the reader from their predisposition to oppose diverse texts (persons) because of finite preoccupations.

Dostoevsky shows this to be his primary concern when, in a speech given in honor of the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin on the twentieth of June 1880, he rhetorically asks his audience: "for what is the power of the spirit of Russian nationality if not its aspiration after the final goal of universality and omni-humanity?"²¹⁸ Although the Pushkin speech rightly eulogizes the Russian poet, its real value lies in its contemplation of the relationship between the particular and the universal—namely, between what it means to be an individual with a particular constitution

²¹⁶Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, 98.

²¹⁷*Ibid.*, 92.

²¹⁸Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Queer Fellow and The Pushkin Speech*, trans. S. Koteliansky and J. Middleton Murry (London: Unwin Books, 1960), 57.

embodying universal principles that can accommodate all humankind. The Pushkin speech also functions as a reflection of/on Dostoevsky's work. That is, throughout the speech, Dostoevsky understands his literary mission to be of the same ilk: to embed literary characters with the idea that the human being is infinite and not simply finite. Dostoevsky knows (implicitly) that Russian nationalism breeds xenophobia and the other disease of anti-Semitism which he himself fell victim to. In Dostoevsky's work we see a deep desire to transcend that which plagues us all when we reduce ourselves to any one of the sociological categories in which we are placed (race, gender, sex, religion, national origin, etc.). This desire is poignantly captured in the same speech when Dostoevsky claims that,

in course of time I believe that we—not we, of course, but our children to come—will all without exception understand that to be a true Russian does indeed mean to aspire finally to reconcile the contradictions of Europe, to show the end of European yearning in our Russian soul, omni-human and all-uniting, to include within our soul by brotherly love all our brethren, and at last, it may be, to pronounce the final Word of the great general harmony, of the final brotherly communion of all nations in accordance with the law of the gospel of Christ! I know, I know too well, that my words may appear ecstatic. Exaggerated and fantastic. Let them be so, I do not repent having uttered them. They ought to be uttered above all now, at the moment that we honour our great genius who, by his artistic power, embodied this idea. The idea has been expressed many times before. I say nothing new.²¹⁹

When we understand what Dostoevsky means by the law of the Gospel of Christ—that is, the call for absolute relationship—the message transcends his limitations as a representative of those values which he knows must be extended to all. Upon first glance, the reader may come to a Eurocentric understanding of Europe's relationship to the world and Russia's proximity to it. However, it is clear that Dostoevsky believes his work and Pushkin's work is to embody a message that is not new but must be continually renewed in the mind and narrative of the modern world. The core of this message is the biblical notion of the golden rule which constitutes the

²¹⁹*Ibid.*, 57.

epistemological core of all of Dostoevsky's work. As such, this epistemological core is neither modern nor post-modern, but eternal (old and new).

We can now see the stark contrast between Dostoevsky's understanding of the epochal positioning of his narratives and the way thinkers like Lyotard, for example, understand the distinction between modern and post-modern literature. For Lyotard, the epistemological concerns of narrative and the narrative of the modern worlds' epistemological concerns represent the questioning of competence.²²⁰ Competence here refers to that which demonstrates an individual's ability to form "good" denotative utterances.²²¹ According to Lyotard, narratives are vehicles by which society's "consensus" regarding what is good and bad can be transmitted to the other. In other words, competence means one can distinguish between those who know and those who do not, and thereby expose who belongs and does not.²²² For Lyotard, all narration—that is, all communication—is a quintessential form of customary knowledge in more ways than one.²²³ He suggests that post-modern narratives are not narratives but fables because they do not re-inscribe or seek to re-inscribe what is ethically customary or conventional. Instead, post-modern narratives highlight those aspects that are customary or conventionally narrated in "modern" narratives are, themselves, fables. He maintains that outside of this exposure, the post-modern text communicates nothing. Herein lies post-modernism's comfort while also reflecting modernity's "hell."²²⁴ That is, the very thing post-modernity objects to is the very thing that it is;

²²⁰Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984),18.

²²¹*Ibid.*, 18–19.

²²²*Ibid.*, 19.

²²³*Ibid.*

²²⁴Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, 100.

namely, narration with an idea in mind rather than narration about the mind of an idea, or rather, the mind's capacity to hold the idea of the infinite.

In contrast, Dostoevsky's narratives do not strive to reveal what cannot be seen. Instead, they demonstrate that what is seen is rarely what has been revealed. According to Lyotard's understanding of modernity and post-modernity, Dostoevsky's narratives are neither modern nor post-modern. However, if Dostoevsky's narratives are neither modern nor post-modern, where do we place Dostoevsky? If neither modern nor post-modern narratives can account for the origin—that is, the principle of mind—that drives Dostoevsky's narratives, how do we understand his narratives and what standards do we use? Is it not the case that Dostoevsky's narratives, including his narration of the mind in a state of offense, show us how to account for the (false) narratives of modernity and post-modernity that Lyotard describes? Following these questions is the more important question that stands before us as we survey Dostoevsky's works—namely, the question that Dostoevsky provokes and helps us to answer: how do we understand *ourselves—as readers*? Are we modern, post-modern, or are we something else entirely?

We will find that only in and through reading Dostoevsky's works while simultaneously remaining conscious of our defenses (offenses?) to his works are we able to answer these questions truthfully. Dostoevsky's narratives demonstrate that insofar as truth is understood as the coherence of one's beliefs to nature, the idea of the human being will never be found in the mind. This is in direct contrast to the philosophy of John Searle, who, in his *Making of the Social World*—an exploration of the nature of cognitive intentionality—attempts to convince the reader of the validity of the mentalist description of what constitutes the mind. Searle believes that thought, in and of itself, forms the ability to distinguish between intentional thoughts—that is, those that refer to some finite thing—and unintentional thoughts—namely, those that do not refer

to anything in natural time and space.²²⁵ If we understand thought in the way that Searle does, thought can make this distinction by extracting information from the “background” we develop in light of putative norms and the brute facts of our environments.²²⁶ However, unlike Dostoevsky, Searle does not theorize that if the social—namely, the relational phenomena from which the mind emanates—is not understood as at once both mine and yours, the development of the mind will always be subject to collective subordination (either my way or your way).²²⁷

The “idea” that an anti-modern—and therefore an anti-post-modern—narrative is unable to find a home in the mind is rooted in our understanding of the mind as static rather than dialogical. A dialogical mind, by definition, is directed toward resolving the tensions that the relationships among the social and the individual, truth and falsity, and reality and fiction inevitably produce. A dialogical mind is essentially a mind that shares itself with others insofar as it shares a truthful narrative. If social fact derives from social agreement, then the shared mind will be one of domination rather than relation.

One challenge that should be addressed to the Dostoevskyian argument about the consequences of dialogical and narrative minds is the contention brought up by Roland Barthes—another post-modern thinker—that a text is never a dialogue.²²⁸ Barthes argues that the pleasure of textuality—namely, of one’s engagement with narratives—both written and spoken, can only be found when the value of the text is shifted to the sumptuous rank of the signifier—

²²⁵Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*, (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28.

²²⁶*Ibid.*, 31.

²²⁷*Ibid.*, 156.

²²⁸Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 16.

that is, to form rather than meaning.²²⁹ As Barthes explains it, dialogue never permits us our pleasures because dialogue, by its very nature, is the imposition of the other on one's mind. That is, dialogue is the demand to acknowledge, bear witness, affirm, engage, and think of the existence of the other. With these ideas, Barthes implies that dialogue only becomes necessary—and speaking only becomes urgent—as the reality principle constricts the reign of the pleasure principle. For Barthes, the pleasure of the text has been regrettably impeded by modernism which insists on an adherence to rigid tropes and forms. As such, its pleasure is Oedipal.²³⁰ This pleasure, however, falsely engages the other for it takes pleasure in seeking to know what it knows it cannot appreciate—namely, the primordial father and the truth of one's existence.

Dostoevsky's work demonstrates that a truthful narrative is neither "fictional" nor "realist," at least not when realism must mean "serious"—that is, in terms of Searle's understanding of the term which involves human expression being a mere reflection of empirical sense data. However, if we consider a Dostoevskyan, rather than a Searlian, understanding of the above-mentioned terms, Dostoevsky's novels can be understood as "serious" and "realist." Dostoevsky's realism involves bearing witness to the tensions and conflicts that arise when one accepts the necessary fiction (immateriality) of God, self, and the other. A proper understanding of these fictions renders one a contemporary of everyone, irreducible to the temporal classifications of being (as in the case of a modern or a post-modern person). Dostoevsky's narratives are intentionally metalinguistic so that we as readers can self-consciously recognize what social and cultural factors impede the epistemological aims of any work that seeks to embody the golden rule.²³¹

²²⁹*Ibid.*, 65.

²³⁰*Ibid.*, 10.

²³¹Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 151.

Dostoevsky's narratives transcend the confines of the conventional European novel and the nationalistic bent of the conventional Russian novel. His narratives subject the "idea"—that is, the idea of the infinite relationship between self and other predicated upon God—to dialogical scrutiny so that the mind can see itself and the other clearly, and in that way, become able to rid itself of the fictitious (that is, the false and falsifying) fables and myths that stalk it. Nevertheless, despite the appearances of his texts, Dostoevsky rarely displays narratological exchanges between various parties in a text. That is, in a text wrought by Dostoevsky people rarely "speak" or directly communicate with one another. And yet, ironically, he has been considered responsible for the artistic and literary style of polyphony. So, where is the polyphony in his texts, if, as I shall show, only a few words are ever exchanged between subjects? Additionally, we must ask and answer the question: why is such a challenge given to the reader?

As in any meaningful psycho-analytic session, Dostoevsky's texts must be read in light of their resistance to being read and many of his characters must be analyzed not as subjects willing to tell the truth of their existence, but as subjects struggling tirelessly to withhold a truth. The chaos that typically engulfs the plot of Dostoevsky's narratives is the result of an utter lack of communication between their various characters. In response to some critics of Dostoevsky's work, Bakhtin notes that readers may misperceive Dostoevsky's message precisely because they become enslaved by the hero's views. Consequently, those readers end up ignoring or missing the ever-present plurality of unmerged consciousnesses within the texts themselves.²³²

Dostoevsky's texts, then, challenge the reader to resist being seduced by the gorgeously articulate and charismatic personages driving them. If the reader can rise to that challenge, resist enslavement, or overidentification with the "hero," only then will the reader see what is absent

²³²*Ibid.*, 6.

from the text. The text's various characters rarely offer their mind to the reader, and this absence is often unrecognized even by those who are among Dostoevsky's most devout interpreters. Dostoevsky reminds us of what we would need to offer in order to be consciously and passionately committed to overcoming that which impedes our ability to read and be read thoughtfully. The golden rule of reading and being read—of thought and existence—must involve a truthful narrative, and a truthful narrative, as we will see, requires communication between human beings that expresses what Alyosha and Father Zosima describe as active love in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

III. Demonic Possession: Nihilism

The mind that does not believe in its worth—and therefore the mind that is incapable of sharing itself via a narrative of truth (namely, the truth of the mind's infinite origin and infinite ends)—is, according to Dostoevsky, demonically possessed. In his work, Dostoevsky adheres to the Kierkegaardian logic of demonic possession, a cognitive offense towards the truth. As I demonstrated in the preceding chapter, demonic possession is primarily the result of both anxiety over the good (the good being the mind's liberation from the finite by virtue of its faithful relationship to the absolute) and despair at not wanting to be the self that one is, which can also be understood as the act of refusing to adhere to the obligation of contending with existence on the basis of one's infinitude. In his text *Demons*, Dostoevsky conclusively shows that not only is demonic possession an offense against the truth, but that such an offense mutates into an overall offense at existence itself.

One of the psychological ramifications of offense—both in the direction of the truth and existence—is nihilism. Nihilism is a form of demonic possession that represents the mind as opposed to itself. In *Demons*, all the characters are demonically possessed to varying degrees on

a spectrum of nihilism. As Dostoevsky shows, however, the characters in this socio-political drama are not possessed by a mystical force (although this is the impetus or rather the catalyst of their possession), but by their own selves. As such, they become ensnared by nihilist perspectives which makes them unwilling to share in the narrative of truth—that is, unwilling to relate to and share with the other. This unwillingness to share makes them susceptible to demonic possession.

But who or what is ultimately responsible for the nihilistic tendencies that ruin Dostoevsky's created world? On April 18, 1878, Dostoevsky wrote a letter to the students of Moscow University where he stated that, "there are people, and there are quite a few of them, both in the press and in educated society, who are crushed by the idea that young people have rejected the people (that's the main thing and foremost) and then, that is, now, have rejected educated society too."²³³ Having explained to the young people how they are affecting the older generation, he tells them that although they live without an adhesive principle that could ground their existence ²³⁴ they are not responsible for the dreamy and detached way in which they live. That responsibility lies with the "educated society" that birthed them.²³⁵

By "education" Dostoevsky is pointing to the overwhelming influence of Western ideas on Russian society at this time—ideas based on the enlightenment and romanticism, which, like modernism and post-modernism in our time, had the tendency to alienate individuals from themselves—and which Russian educated society, in Dostoevsky's view, obsequiously obeyed. In her exploration of the sub-altern which closely imitates the Fanonian psycho-philosophical

²³³. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Complete Letters: Volume Five*, (New York: Ardis Publishers, 199), 31.

²³⁴*Ibid.*

²³⁵*Ibid.*

assessment of the status of Black Consciousness in the wake of colonialism, Olga Stuchebryukhova writes that Dostoevsky was already preoccupied in the nineteenth century with a very similar problem—the detrimental effect of Russia’s cultural ‘colonization’ by the West on the educated Russian person’s psyche. Similar to Fanon, Dostoevsky is interested in the psychological and philosophical dimensions of the subaltern consciousness.”²³⁶

Stuchebryukhova suggests that Dostoevsky’s works highlight how the external and alien (alienating) force of Western ideals—conventionally construed—came to dominate the Russian subaltern psyche and hold it hostage. Being held “hostage” in one’s thought and existence is simply another way of stating that one is demonically possessed.

Indeed, in *Demons* Stepan Trofimovich is seduced away from the principles that might otherwise have held his thought and existence together by the superficialities of Europeanism. For example, though he reads Kant, he conflates Kant’s notion of reason with scientific rationality, what Kant calls the understanding in the *Grounding*, and therefore misunderstands or misses the most crucial part of Kant’s idea: reason is the capacity to distinguish between ends and means, and dignity and price. This is why, Stepan, being unable to associate his mind with principles rooted in biblical revelation, calls himself an ancient pagan.²³⁷

Still, the question remains: how does one *become* demonically possessed? *Demons* is an allegory about the potentially catastrophic consequences of the political and moral nihilism that was becoming prevalent in Russia in the 1860s. In this text, a fictional town descends into chaos as it becomes the focal point of an attempted revolution orchestrated by expert conspirator Pyotr

²³⁶Olga Stuchebryukhova, “The Subaltern Syndrome and Dostoevsky’s Quest for Authenticity of Being,” (California: Charles Schlacks Jr, Vol.5 2004), 13.

²³⁷*Ibid.*, 37.

Verkhovensky. Verkhovensky organizes this revolution through his secret society, members of which work in the shadows and in the homes of some of the richest people in the town, in an attempt to bring them to ruins. The other dominant figure in the story is his moral counterpart Nikolai Stavrogin, an aristocratic man who has recently returned to town with a new wife and a dark secret. Along with Pytor's father Stepan, Nikolai ends up being an unwitting conspirator in the revolution and eventually hangs himself after his lover is killed.

In *Demons*, the foundation for demonic possession is set by hollow idealism. It is Stepan Trofimovich, the resident intellectual of the Russian village where the narrative takes place, who embodies the hollow idealism that engulfs all the story's characters. By the end of the novel, Stepan realizes that his entire being is a lie—one that he is only able to recognize through renewing his relationship to God.²³⁸ Such idealism, which involves the inner workings of a mythological consciousness that is not conscious of itself, is what divorces every utterance of Stepan Trofminovich's mind from meaning.

Stepan rightly suggests that to acquire a true and just opinion about anything, one must authentically labor on the basis of one's thought and existence. This suggestion recalls the biblical demand to work for one's bread, which is the only noble aim for the life of a sinner. He states explicitly and knowingly that nothing can be acquired *gratis*.²³⁹ However, as Dostoevsky demonstrates with a shrewd sense of irony, Stepan has never labored for anything in the manner he describes. For example, when relieved of his academic duties as a professor and lecturer, he obtained the latitude to dedicate himself to research and learning to enrich his native land, and yet he never produced any research.²⁴⁰ Stepan's whimsical idealism—which sounded so correct,

²³⁸Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, (New York: Random house Inc.,1994), 652.

²³⁹*Ibid.*, 37–38.

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 12.

lofty, and truthful—only made him a slave to a set of ideals that he could not fulfill. We can read Stepan Trofimovich’s decision to abandon his child as following from the same set of flawed ideals. These ideals left him unable to recognize his son as something rather than nothing, and to establish value in something (in this case, a child) that is not purely an ideal.²⁴¹ Stepan’s love of ideals can be best understood as an objectification of ideational content—the reduction of an ideal to a marble statue that one beholds, but to which one can never relate.

What Pyotr Trofimovich learns from this absent-minded father is the impact that ideals and the appearance of truth can have on an individual, and more importantly, how they can be manipulated to garner power. The same hollow understanding of European ideals convinces Pyotr that they demand the destruction of the old world and its customs. Achievement of this task, Pyotr believes, subsequently demands that many people work cooperatively to control the minds of others. To do this, Pyotr holds that one must adopt “the role” of “the golden mean,” as he describes it, and act “neither stupid nor smart, rather giftless, and dropped from the moon.”²⁴² In fact, this approach reflects Pyotr’s fixation on his absent father (Stepan Trofminovich) as much as it does Pyotr’s convictions. Pyotr repeats his unconscious trauma by appearing aloof to others. He knows that by attaining a certain level of distance between himself and others, those with whom he deals with will be more inclined to submit to him, as they too—like Pyotr and Stepan—are drawn in by that which appears foreign. It is weak mindedness of the main characters, and those who the main characters manipulate, that makes everyone susceptible to demonic possession.

²⁴¹*Ibid.*, 92.

²⁴²*Ibid.*, 220.

In one telling passage, Pyotr tells Nikolai about what would make a nihilist like himself laugh, something that both parties can consider comical with regards to the weakness of the minds of others. Pyotr states,

This'll make you laugh: what first of all affects them terribly is a uniform. There's nothing stronger than a uniform. I purposely invent ranks and positions: I have secretaries, secret stool pigeons, treasurers, chairmen, registrars, their adjuncts—it's all very much liked and has caught on splendidly. Then the next force, naturally, is sentimentality. You know, with us socialism spreads mostly through sentimentality. But the trouble here is with these biting lieutenants; you get burned every so often. Then come the out-and-out crooks; well, they can be nice folk, very profitable on occasion, but they take up a lot of time, require constant surveillance. Well, and finally the main force—the cement that bonds it all—shame at one's own opinion. There is a real force! And who was it that worked, who was the 'sweetie' that labored so that there isn't a single idea of one's own left in anyone's head! They consider it shameful.²⁴³

In his effort never to appear at all relatable to any human being, Pyotr applies the principle of the golden mean to remain above them. This naturally results in Pyotr harboring the lie that his socio-political activism and his goal of overthrowing the old Russian world is aimed at equality, when in actuality it is designed to establish a new despotism.

This self-contradictory idealism echoes that of Socrates and Plato, who, as explained in an earlier chapter, sought to expel myth from the just republic only to then found the just republic on the myth of metals. The real aim core to Pyotr's idealism is for one group to switch places with those who have authoritatively ruled over them. The only difference between Pyotr and Socrates and/or Plato is that the fatal contradiction Pyotr harbors is knowable. But Pyotr is unwilling to acknowledge any principle that could meaningfully hold together the infinite relationship between his mind and the narrative of existence he holds to, and, ultimately, expose his contradictions for what they are. The only narratives he can share

²⁴³*Ibid.*, 384–85.

exclude any relationship between the self and other predicated on God. In other words, his narratives exclude the golden rule. Pyotr willingly chooses the golden mean over the golden rule. However, his ability to make this choice is what marks the absolute difference between pagan ignorance and demonic possession. While Pyotr's father became ensnared by the beautiful appearance of Western ideals, the absence of a father resulted in Pyotr being held captive by the utility of those ideals.

Being held captive by the utility of a thing rather than its essence is a form of nihilism, and this form of nihilism demonically possesses Shigalyov, another radicalized youth. Shigalyov equally wants to transform Russian society, but he remains incapable of developing a narrative of transformation distinct from the perceived state of affairs presently afflicting him. As Shigalyov states to a group of young, educated radicals:

Having devoted my energy to studying the question of the social organization of the future society which is to replace the present one, I have come to the conclusion that all creators of social systems from ancient times to our year 187—have dreamers, tale-tellers, fools who contradicted themselves and understood precisely nothing of natural science or of that strange animal known as man. Plato, Rousseau, Fourier, aluminum columns—all this is fit perhaps for sparrows, but not for human society. But since the future social form is necessary precisely now, when we are all finally going to act, so as to stop any further thinking about it. I am suggesting my own system of world organization. Here it is! He struck the notebook. “I wanted to explain my book to the gathering in the briefest possible way; but I see that I will have to add a great deal of verbal clarification, and therefore the whole explanation will take at least ten evenings, according to the number of chapters in my book.” (Laughter was heard.) “Besides that, I announce ahead of time that my system is not finished.” (More laughter.) “I got entangled in my own data, and my conclusion directly contradicts the original idea form which I start. Starting from unlimited freedom, I conclude with unlimited despotism. I will add, however, that apart from my solution of the social formula, there can be no other.”²⁴⁴

From the above it is clear that, for Shigalyov, despotism underpins social harmony. That is, Shigalyov's social formula is fundamentally anti-social. Possessed by the spirit of Western

²⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 402.

utility, he is unable to account for the existence of the mind's incommensurability with the social categories that seek to reduce its capacities. Shigalyov ascribes to people only a conditional—and therefore a utilitarian—value. He thereby reinforces what he thought was constitutive of the Russian society of his time. Moreover, by ascribing to people that conditional and utilitarian value, Shigalyov reveals that he does not believe in his own self-worth, let alone the self-worth of the human beings who would populate his future social order.

Shigalyov articulates his final solution, which comes at the end of his monologue, beginning with the idea that humankind must be divided into

two unequal parts. One tenth is granted freedom of person and unlimited rights over the remaining nine tenths. These must lose their person and turn into something like a herd, and in unlimited obedience, through a series of regeneration, attain to primeval innocence, something like the primeval paradise—though, by the way, they will have to work. The measures proposed by the author for removing the will from nine tenths of mankind and remaking them into a herd, by means of a re-educating of entire generations—are quite remarkable, based on natural facts, and extremely logical.²⁴⁵

This monologue, a satanic narrative, incites Lyasmashin, a student in the audience, who suggests that those who are uneducated should be destroyed so that those who are educated—in a facile European way—can live undisturbed.²⁴⁶ Within the text, the nihilism that runs through all the socio-political organizing and planning comes in different forms, ranging from greater to lesser extremes. Although the above noted rhetoric may appear to powerfully communicate the conclusions of nihilism, in truth, it fails to communicate at all. That is, if communication is a process by which one shares one's mind in good faith so as to receive the mind of the other as the reciprocal gift of divine existence, then the nihilists—ranging from idealists who

²⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 404.

²⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 404.

unconsciously believe in nothing, to ideologues who lack belief in the worth of anything including the self—never communicate.

The nihilist Stavrogin is an important counterpoint here in that he attempts to communicate. In this text, Stavrogin is the anti-hero and although he speaks quite often, it is only in his exchange with Tikhon (the priest) at the end of the text that he attempts to communicate. Like many of the other students in town, Stavrogin was educated by Stepan Trofimovich. The effect Stepan's teachings had on Stavrogin rendered him incapable of living out the hollow idealism that was *en vogue* in his time. Stavrogin is led by his whims and is so devastatingly conscious of this that he disavows any meaningful relationship to his will. He has no grand purpose or design, and yet, almost everyone in the novel, except for Shatov and Stepan, is completely transfixed by his existence.

While the thought of playing a role and existing in a sham socio-political environment strikes Pyotr as an opportunity to dominate the minds of others, for Stavrogin it renders life and its projects utterly meaningless. Stavrogin submits a thought experiment to Kirilov in a narrative that highlights a particular demonic state:

I myself have sometimes imagined, and there's always some new thought here: if one did some villainy or, worse, some shame, that is, disgrace, only very mean and ... ludicrous, so that people would remember it for a thousand years and spit on it for a thousand years, and suddenly comes the thought: 'One blow in the temple, and there will be nothing.' What do I care then about people and how they'll be spitting for a thousand years, right?" "You call that it's a new thought?" Kirilov said, after some reflection. "I... don't call... once, when I reflected, I felt quite a new thought." "Felt a thought?" Kirilov repeated. "That's good. Many thoughts are there all the time, and suddenly become new. That's right. I see much now as if for the first time." "Suppose you lived on the moon," Stavrogin interrupted, not listening and continuing his thought, "suppose that there you did all those ludicrous, nasty things... From here you know for certain that there they'll laugh and spit on your name for a thousand years, eternally, all over the moon. But you are here now, and you're looking at the moon from here: what do you care here about all you've done

there, or that they'll spit on you there for a thousand years, isn't it true?" "I don't know," Kirilov answered. "I haven't been on the moon."²⁴⁷

This answer reveals that Kirilov answers mechanically and with a tone of literalism because he is possessed by a thing utterly distinct from what possesses Stavrogin. Stavrogin's narrative is one of ethical detachment. It is a narrative detailing that insofar as the mind's existence is constituted by the ethical norms of a given epoch, the mind does not exist, for neither the mind nor the transgressions resulting from a failure to adhere to those ethical norms would matter if the context changed. For Stavrogin, the mind is value-less insofar as it is dependent upon societal conventions. Outside of the mind's subscription to those conventions the mind does not exist—for Stavrogin. While Stavrogin consistently lives out this logic in his mis-relationships with every character, he knows more keenly than the other characters what the ramifications are of willingly avoiding the truth. This is the disposition that has potentiated Stavrogin's nihilism. While the other characters in the novel willingly pervert the truth—namely, that it is the other who helps establish the meaning of life—Stavrogin makes himself un-responsible for upholding this truth by distancing himself from the other.

By the end of the story—just before Stavrogin commits suicide—he confesses. He divulges his inner mental processes to Shatov's sister Darya, explaining that, "nothing binds me to Russia—everything in it is as foreign to me as everywhere else... I could not be their comrade because I shared nothing."²⁴⁸ As he tells it, while he tried, he was unable to bridge the gulf between the mind of Nikolai Stavrogin and the existence that surrounds him, rendering Russia and everywhere else foreign to him. The distance between himself and existence is born from his refusal to share, in return, what has been shared with him over the course of his short life. This

²⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 236.

²⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 675.

refusal to share and to invite others to know him is the very reason why—in the same letter—Stavrogin states that he could “never lose his mind” even if he tried. Equally tormenting is the belief that he could “never believe in an idea to the same degree as others around him.”²⁴⁹ Not to be able to do away with one’s mind while simultaneously being unable to cleave to an idea that could sustain one’s mind in a fulsome way is precisely the most potentiated form of the nihilism (of the sickness) that results from demonic possession. Throughout his life, Stavrogin was possessed by the unfathomable nothingness of the gap between not having lost one’s mind completely and being unwilling to attach value to any idea. However, at the end of his life, Stavrogin attempts to communicate the history of his inability to acquire a mind.

In his last confession to Tikhon, the Eastern Orthodox priest, Stavrogin finally communicates the history of his inability to acquire a mind—that is, the history of his inability to acquire an idea that would have enabled him to relate meaningfully to his thought and existence. Ironically, Stavrogin’s last confession finally and effectively proves the existence of his mind. After reading Stavrogin’s letter, which details a plethora of transgressions he made, Tikhon proves to Stavrogin that because he wants to share his letter of repentance and his testimonial of all of the vile things he has done in his life, he believes in God. The narrator of *Demons* states that when Stavrogin committed suicide he was not insane, but remained conscious of everything he was doing until the end.²⁵⁰

The fundamental horror of nihilism is that in the state of nihilism, one may remain conscious of one’s actions—as if they mattered—while at the same time, convincing oneself of the inherent meaninglessness of all actions. As *Demons* highlights, such a mind divided against

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 676.

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 678.

itself cannot survive because survival is contingent not upon consciousness itself, but the actualization of being conscious of the truth.²⁵¹

IV. Demonic Possession: Suicide

The mind that does not believe in its worth—given that it has not allowed itself to be disciplined by the truth of its irreducibility to the finite—will seek to destroy itself. In such a case, the mind holds its own existence in abeyance exactly because it is mystified by the wedge between its thought and existence. The mind in that predicament does not consider itself worth anything. But this does not necessarily lead to suicide, for often, a mind may still be captivated by its nothingness. In such a case, its nothingness will culminate in possession rather than in self-

²⁵¹To this point, Stuchebryukhova, in her essay “The Subaltern Syndrome and Dostoevsky’s Quest for Authenticity of Being” writes, “like Russia, Stavrogin the child has to overcome ‘the distance’ between childhood and adulthood in an unnaturally speedy way, by skipping ‘the first nine steps’ of the normal growth, which cripples his psyche and turns the rear of his life into a farce. Moreover, Stepan Trofimovich instills in Stavrogin the ideals of Enlightenment and Romanticism that are painfully out of touch with Russian reality, which splits Stavrogin’s consciousness between what is (his native surroundings) and what should be according to the conventional bookish idealism of his European education” (Stuchebryukhova, “The Subaltern Syndrome and Dostoevsky’s Quest for Authenticity of Being”, 20) The ‘split’ within Stavrogin’s psyche that Stuchebryukhova writes about is not a direct result of exposure to European ideals, but rather the result of being improperly acquainted with them. Stepan Trofimovich is only capable of conveying to all who care to listen the superficialities of Europeanism because he himself is held captive by the visage of its ideals rather than the substance of them. Likewise, Stuchebryukhova continues by stating that “the thoughtless copying of someone else’s ideas and convictions rigidifies them and turns them into nothing more than ‘fashionable opinions’. Throughout his journalism, Dostoevsky complains about the despotism of such fashionable liberal opinions that substitute existential reality with a few fixed ideas” (*Ibid.*, 23). What transforms “fashionable liberal opinions” into that which can support a meaningful existential reality is the ability to extract from those opinions the dialectical implications of their premises. This, however, would require the characters of *Demons* to be willing to put forth the work to understand the content of their lives, such that their demons could be expelled.

destruction. In Dostoevsky's *Demons*, suicide—whether philosophical or literal—is the consequence of a mind possessed by its nothingness and a mind that has positioned itself in complete defiance to the possibility of redemption. Such a stance results from a stubborn refusal to make sense of existence. The ultimate conclusion of such a mind is that self-destruction is the only revenge one can exact upon existence. The labor that Stepan Trofimovich prescribes as a curative for the sickness of demonic possession—which, as he states towards the end of the novel, would produce (co-create) an idea that would “swallow it all up” and extinguish the demons that haunt Russia,²⁵² and which, as we have seen, he has not managed to accomplish himself—is the very labor that our subject for this present character analysis, Kirilov, refuses to do.

Kirilov is unable to distinguish between good and evil properly and it is precisely this that torments him. Specifically, he is unable to recognize sin as the reduction or deification of the mind. Kirilov knows that thought (his ability to think) lifts him above nature and enables him to engage nature—not on its terms, but on his own terms which enrich his existence. Despite this, he refuses to cleave to the idea that would prevent his thought from losing its vitality. The web of deception in which Kirilov is ensnared leads him to think that “God has tormented” him all his life, when in fact it is his demonic impulse that prevents him from being rid of his torment.²⁵³

Kirilov is not only a civil engineer who studies suicide, but he is also a proponent of suicide as an antidote to dealing with the torment of God. In this, he lives a contradictory relationship to existence. Stepan Trofimovich uncharacteristically exposes the contradiction in the secret recesses of Kirilov's heart when he says, “you want to build our bridge, and at the

²⁵²Dostoevsky, *Demons*, 655.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, 116.

same time you declare yourself for the principle of universal destruction.”²⁵⁴ The description of Kirilov’s contradictory relationship to existence is apt. For example, when he states that suicide is either done judiciously or injudiciously, and that the goal of suicide is to overcome fear, Kirilov intentionally destroys the bridge—metaphorically speaking—that could connect his thought and existence.²⁵⁵ He destroys this bridge by claiming that one can become identical to God through the act of self-destruction.²⁵⁶

For Kirilov, to destroy God, or oneself, is to become God.²⁵⁷ Kirilov refuses to become a likeness of God by submitting consciously to the knowledge of sin and that which transgresses the infinitude of being human. Kirilov demonstrates this through the narrative of existence he shares with Stavrogin:

[M]an is unhappy because he doesn’t know he’s happy; only because of that. It’s everything, everything! Whoever learns will at once immediately become happy, that same moment. This mother-in-law will die, and the girl will remain—everything is good. I discovered suddenly. And if someone dies of hunger, or someone offends and dishonours the girl—is that good? Good. And if someone’s head gets smashed in for the child’s sake, that’s good, too; and if it doesn’t get smashed in, that’s good, too. Everything is good, everything. For all those who know that everything is good. If they knew it was good with them, it would be good with them, but as long as they don’t know it’s good with them, it will not be good with them. That’s the whole thought, the whole, there isn’t any more!²⁵⁸

Given that God is not the standard by which one measures what is good and evil, Kirilov here recounts an experience of false freedom in being able to claim that everything can be considered good insofar as one thinks it good. Kirilov believes that the omnipotence of thought is now an attribute of his own will, insofar as he has sought to destroy God. However, as far as his thought

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 95.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 115.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*

²⁵⁷*Ibid.*

²⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 237–38.

is undisciplined by the truth, it lacks the moral weight required to critique and offer substantive interpretations (narratives) of existence. He remains painfully unaware of the fact that divine omnipotence is not the capacity to do whatever one wills (or narrate whatever one wills) but to do (that is, to think, communicate, and relay) that which sustains all willing minds: thoughtful engagement with knowledge of sin.

Because Kirilov's thought lacks substance it naturally metamorphoses into its opposite. Just prior to writing his suicide note—a note that claims that he is responsible for the killing of Shatov (the anti-intellectual Slavophile)—he tells Pyotr in a fit of excitement that he wants to kill himself, “for all men are scoundrels.”²⁵⁹ It is exactly because Kirilov naturally begins with the premise that everything is good that he naturally (inevitably) resigns himself to the notion that all are evil. In being unwilling to meaningfully distinguish between good and evil, he remains dependent upon the vicissitudes of circumstance and nature to determine what is and is not good. Kirilov is tormented, and he blames God for his torture. However, he knows in his heart that it is only God who can secure the bridge to the other that he longed to build.

Kirilov's particular demonic torment is that he knows “God is necessary, and therefore must exist,” but he simultaneously believes “that he does not and cannot exist.”²⁶⁰ Kirilov knows that necessity and existence must be dialectically brought together—that is, existence cannot be thought unless it exists as a necessity. However, Kirilov's fatal “cannot” is indicative of his literal misunderstanding of God: his belief that God is external to his thought and existence and therefore can be sensibly/rationally determined to be a certain or uncertain fact. As Kirilov explains, “a person with these two thoughts cannot go on living,” precisely because life and

²⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 614.

²⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 615.

living both involve an understanding of existence as necessary.²⁶¹ Kirilov does not know to which he belongs—life or non-life. As such, he is consciously aware of being a part of both. Kirilov thinks he must choose one or the other, but he cannot determine which of the two should house his consciousness.

Kirilov's example shows that while it is only in light of consciousness that the rift between necessary existence and the "cannot" of existence can be recognized, it is only by virtue of the entrance of God into consciousness that one can mitigate the tension between these two sides. Kirilov's possession impedes his ability to embrace the divine truth of his existence. Kirilov's suicide makes Dostoevsky's negative argument clear. Through suicide Kirilov escapes. This is the truth that tells us necessary existence can envelop non-existence, but only insofar as one commits oneself to the reality of the fiction of God. That "fiction" is an immaterial truth, one that would make the worth of existence realizable.

In his final assessment of his suicidal consciousness—that is, a consciousness demonically divided against its existence—Kirilov traces the history of his mental offense to the belief that God is an invention established to prevent human beings from killing themselves.²⁶² He is not wrong to suggest that God is an invention, though he is wrong in the belief that God's invention has been purposed to prevent human suicide. Rather, as the astute reader discovers, in this novel God is the invention of intersubjective relationships premised upon the infinite value of self and the other. Moreover, it is only in light of this invention *ex nihilo* that all aspects of human existence are afforded their proper worth. In this regard, suicide occurs to a human mind

²⁶¹*Ibid.*

²⁶²*Ibid.*, 617.

only when it seeks to venture beyond the fundamental truth of God's necessity within existence. By going beyond existence, it narrates its history of offense.

Kirilov does not want to agree to the premise that he is responsible for the invention of God because he does not want the responsibility of maintaining the truth of God in a socio-political context that constantly attempts to erode it. Kirilov knows that life is pain in the absence of acknowledging God as the constitutive idea of existence. He also knows that life is filled with fear and torment when one refuses to invent oneself in consort with the other based on a consciousness of sin. What embarrasses Kirilov's fatal logic is unendurable—that is, that he is equally an infinite and temporal creature. Kirilov eventually commits suicide, not with the calm resolve of Stavrogin who, in being possessed by nothing can only stay conscious of his actions, but never ascribe value to them, but with consternation. In having been acquainted with the truth, Kirilov knows that his stubbornness holds him captive to the contradictions he is responsible for producing and accepting.

As I have demonstrated, demonic possession is a state wherein the individual is held captive by his/her reluctance to accept that it is necessary to invent existence, or, to put it another way, that for existence to be lived truthfully, it must be created. The narratives of existence relayed by all the characters in *Demons*—with the exception of Father Tikhon—can be said to have failed to communicate anything befitting the infinitude of the mind. Each character struggles with demonic possession in varying ways and degrees, but, conclusively, they all suffer from being unable to actuate the origin narrative of their minds, and, as such, fail to live out the implications of that narrative. The reader may also be unaware of the relationship between their narrative and mind, and as such they falsely ascribe to these characters the status of being in error without fully understanding what their errors are. Apart from the reader, there is no one to

save these characters. It is up to the reader, then, to interrogate the characters' false premises and preserve these characters rather than over-identify themselves with one character over another. Such a reading would reveal that Stepan's idealism naturally begets the suicidal thoughts of Kirilov—a man unwilling to embrace the reality of the invention of God, the self, and the other. As such, he exists as divided against himself.

In *Demons*, the text only offers us monologues. Despite the appearance of a multitude of conversations being had within the text on topics as lofty as religion and the woman question in 19th century Russia, no character here, in fact, is capable of communicating with the other. The characters engage in discursive practices whereby they either refuse to acknowledge the worth of the other's existence (that is, to be possessed by the idea that existence is worthless) or refuse to acknowledge the worth of their own existence (that is, to be possessed by the idea that God's existence is inherently worthless). Meanwhile, the status of God's existence for the characters in this text is tenuous. No one in the text knows God so much as they know either the conventions of Eastern Orthodoxy, conventions against which the younger generation of Russian inhabitants are so polemical, or the pagan image of God wrapped as it is in romantic garb. In not being able to find this pagan or conventional notion of God anywhere around them in natural time and space, the members of the younger generation become conscious nihilists, as in the case of Pyotr, Stavrogin, Shigalyov and Kirilov, rather than unconscious nihilists, as in the case of Stepan Trofminovich.

As all hosts of demonic possession lack a developed understanding of the self's infinite irreducibility, Stuchebryukhova suggests that this lack of mind incites "the thoughtless copying of someone else's ideas and convictions" which "rigidifies them and turns them into nothing

more than fashionable opinions.”²⁶³ In *Demons*, the superficial engagement with ideals that are borrowed or imported from abroad naturally begets the resentment for oneself and one’s most proximate others.

V. Divine Orientation: Spirit Meets Sensuality

I will now explore *The Brothers Karamazov*. Rather than an exploration of demonic possession, this text features a narrative that demonstrates the intricacies and enigmas of the necessary relational orientation one must subscribe to in order to ensure that one’s narrative possesses, communicates, and presupposes the existence of one’s mind. On one level, *The Brothers Karamazov* is a novel about a criminal murder. On another level, this is a novel about our relationship to faith, doubt, and morality and our attempts to destroy those relationships. The novel begins with Fyodor Karamazov—the father—a lustful man who has fathered three sons: Dmitri, a man driven by his passions; Ivan, a man driven by his intellect; and Alexei—also known as Alyosha—who is driven by his faith in Christ. Fyodor was cruel to the boys and their mothers and sent the boys away to be raised by others.

In the story, Dmitri—the oldest son—comes of age and returns to see his father, asking for his inheritance. Although Dmitri is engaged to a beautiful girl named Katerina, he has fallen in love with a woman named Agrafena (also known as Grushenka) and wants to run off with her. Fyodor laughs at this request for money, and as the story progresses, it becomes clear that Fyodor and Dmitri are romantic rivals for Grushenka’s love. The story also establishes that Dmitri and Ivan, who is skeptical about the existence of God, hate and are embarrassed by their father. Alyosha, who has been mentored by the good Father Zosima at a nearby monastery, only

²⁶³. Stuchebryukhova, “The Subaltern Syndrome and Dostoevsky’s Quest for Authenticity of Being,” 25.

hopes to redeem his family members. As we read, we come to find out that Fyodor probably fathered another son with a mentally disabled woman. This son is named Smerdyakov, and he works as a servant in Fyodor's house. We soon find out that Smerdyakov harbors resentment toward his father.

Ivan's skepticism about the existence of God and morality results in his experiencing a series of emotional disturbances and mental struggles but does not stop him from exerting his ideological influence over many of the characters in the novel. In conversation with Smerdyakov, Ivan shares his skepticism, claiming that if God does not exist, everything is permitted. These types of conversations ultimately influence Smerdyakov to kill his father, Fyodor, and then proceed to hang himself out of a sense of guilt. The last quarter of the novel narrates the subsequent legal proceeding wherein Dimitri is accused his father's murder. Ultimately Dimitri is found to be guilty of murder, and Alyosha, in attempting to be the resolute foundation for his family, tirelessly tries to mend broken ties and begins to mentor the young boys in his town.

Through the three Karamazov brothers' relationships the mind of narrative is revealed while the idea of God (self and the other) is deliberated and forms the ideological nexus that makes the human subject's orientation towards God possible. Despite their diversity, each brother respectively holds to the same principle—existence is necessary. However, Dostoevsky illustrates that while each brother may be predisposed to such an idea, they are not all capable of sustaining it.

In his article on the ecclesiastical courts which inaugurates his reputation as an intelligent young progressive on the rise, Ivan Karamazov (the rationalist of the three brothers) states that the separation between church and state is erroneous. For Ivan, the principles upon which the

church rests are the very principles upon which the state rests. Ivan argues, therefore, that a separation of the two will only pervert and impede the development and growth of either, for insofar as they operate in isolation from one another, they fail to achieve their mutually held goal. He writes that it is the principles of the church which encapsulate and insulate the state from running awry. Conversely, he contends that it is the practice of the state to make manifest biblical principles within human societies.²⁶⁴ Ivan’s thought represents the very dialectic that Dostoevsky recognizes as necessary for healthy mental development and the avoidance of demonic possession.

Meanwhile, Ivan’s brother Dimitri—a character who has the occasion to beg Ivan to consider him as more than just a “profligate officer who drinks too much”—states that what he thinks about most in life is the “fallen man.”²⁶⁵ The fallen man, he says, is an insect to whom God has given sensuality as a curse.²⁶⁶ Though he considers himself one such creature, he states that the worldly beauty which arouses his sensuality is a mystery, for within beauty all contradictions collide unresolved. Dimitri’s solution is no different than Ivan’s socio-political commentary or Alyosha’s recognition that the offensive stance Ivan’s Grand Inquisitor takes toward the truth proves the truth of Christ. Dimitri’s solution demands that we “narrow” humankind down for humans are too broad.²⁶⁷ And, in fact, Dostoevsky too, may be understood as posing the argument that this all-encompassing “breadth” of sensuality unavoidably devours humankind unless we cleave narrowly (single-mindedly) to our narrative principles. Here, Dostoevsky has imagined three brothers who all know what it means to possess a divine

²⁶⁴Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), 61–62.

²⁶⁵Ibid., 106–7.

²⁶⁶Ibid., 107.

²⁶⁷Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 108.

orientation. However, only one brother, Alyosha, is shown as capable of adequately exploring and expanding upon this knowledge, and is therefore capable of preserving the nexus of his thought and existence, avoiding the momentary or chronic delirium that befalls both Dimitri and Ivan.

The Karamazovs represent the “smearing of original sin.”²⁶⁸ To the residents of their small-town they recall the sins that follow an adherence to one’s earthly fixations. Ivan and Dimitri are positioned at opposite ends of the spectrum of earthly fixations: the former having an earthly mind, and the latter earthly impulses. As I shall discuss below, both are aware of the limitations and ultimate failures that entail clinging to their natural constitutions. Both are aware that to be redeemed they would need to take seriously the divine thoughts they already possess. In short, both Dimitri and Ivan are oriented towards the divine, however, neither have taken the divine as their orientation.²⁶⁹

Before we explore Dimitri, Ivan, and Alyosha more thoroughly, we will explore the following short story from the novel which accurately shows the distinction between being oriented toward the divine and recognizing the divine as one’s orientation. In the chapter entitled “An Onion,” Grushenka—the sensualist who, in many respects, catalyzes the brothers’ familial strife that enhances the relationships between the brothers while simultaneously throwing all three brothers into psychological torment—recalls a Russian narrative as follows:

Once upon a time there was a woman, and she was wicked as wicked could be, and she died. And not one good deed was left behind her. The devils took her and threw her into the lake of fire. And her guardian angel stood thinking: what good deed of hers can I remember to tell God? Then he remembered and said to God: once she pulled up an onion and gave it to a beggar woman. And God answered: now take that same onion, hold it out to her in the lake, let her take hold of it, and pull, and if you

²⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 784.

²⁶⁹These are the biblical principles that Alyosha manifests in light of Father Zosima’s teachings.

pull her out of the lake, she can go to paradise, but if the onion breaks, she can stay where she is. The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her: 'here, woman, he said, take hold of it and I'll pull.' And he began pulling carefully, and had almost pulled her all the way out, when other sinners in the lake saw her being pulled out and all began holding onto her so as to be pulled out with her. But the woman was wicked as wicked could be, and she began to kick them with her feet: 'It's me who's getting pulled out, not you; it's my onion, not yours.' No sooner did she say it than the onion broke. And the woman fell back into the lake and is burning there to this day. And the angel wept and went away.²⁷⁰

Grushenka calls this a fable, however, it is instead a narrative as it clearly outlines the necessary distinction between the infinite and the finite, as well as what it means to be oriented toward the divine while simultaneously rejecting divine orientation.²⁷¹ Like Dimitri, Grushenska recognizes herself as a fallen human being. She knows that, like Dimitri, she is the woman in the narrative who loses out on her opportunity to experience divine orientation. Grushenka is oriented toward the divine, toward the angel providing her with the gift of the infinite; the onion symbolizing salvation, but refuses the gift because she finds it impossible to negotiate the temptations that emanate from the broadness of existence. The woman in the narrative loses out on salvation as she refuses to share the onion (herself) with others and chooses to hoard the onion (herself) by taking full possession of it at the expense of the others who need it (needs her) as well. Both Grushenka and the woman in the narrative are oriented toward the divine, but fail to acquire a divine orientation because they succumb to finite temptation.

Dostoevsky's insights become apparent in the ways that his characters mis-recognize them. As their failures show, the only kind of good deed that will lead to divine orientation is that which involves sharing the truth of existence: that the finite can only be properly regarded as

²⁷⁰Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 352-53.

²⁷¹This is what Father Zosima acknowledges as the meaning and purpose of holy scripture—namely, that the temporal earthly image and eternal truth can touch one another (Ibid., 320).

beautiful in light of an acknowledgement that the human being is fundamentally infinite. Grushenka claims that she is like this lady because she has been given only one little onion. However, she is wrong because it is Alyosha who has given her the onion and proven that, on the basis of love and forgiveness, her sensual baseness can be redeemed, and her erraticism can be recognized as a perversion of her mind and not the truth of her mind. Neither Dimitri nor Fyodor—both of whom she engages in a love triangle—have truly loved her, for neither have been able to provide her with an onion. That is, more literally, neither Dimitri nor Fyodor have been able to show her that she is more than what she appears to be. Meanwhile, on the same day that his mentor Father Zosima passes away, Alyosha finds a way to embody the condition that would help Grushenka liberate herself from that which holds her mind captive.

As he writes in a letter about this text, the task Dostoevsky sets for himself here is to “force people to recognize that a pure, ideal Christian is not an abstract matter, but one graphically real, possible, standing right before our eyes.”²⁷² However, Dostoevsky also explains Grushenka’s rejection of this vision. Instead of recognizing that the onion was a gift one must willingly receive, relate to, and engage with the narrowness of one’s mind, Grushenka deceptively states that she gave an onion.²⁷³ She claims that she is the cause of her redemption. This false narrative prevents Grushenka from remembering the transaction between Alyosha and herself, thus preventing her from sharing this same onion properly and meaningfully with Dimitri. The onion, then, elucidates the ethical principles upon which this relationship must be fostered while simultaneously representing the orientation one must possess in one’s relationship to existence. In her inebriated delirium Grushenka is unable to recognize that everyone is a

²⁷²Dostoevsky, *Complete Letters*, 89.

²⁷³Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 352.

sinner. As a result, she remains unable to move forward or understand that it is only via sin-consciousness—the recognition of good and evil—that human beings can be liberated from oppression. Sin-consciousness is a condition of the infinite that renders human subjectivity irreducible to either evil in-itself or goodness in-itself. Manifestly lacking sin-consciousness, Grushenka does not accept the forgiveness that Alyosha offers her.²⁷⁴ She is unable to recognize the world is not unilaterally good and her evil. Nor is she good and the world unilaterally evil.²⁷⁵ What is, instead, clear is that everyone is evil insofar as they reduce human consciousness to the knowledge of good or evil, but not both. The same night Grushenka disavows her tie to the onion, Dimitri is picked up by police officers who have been tasked with investigating the murder of his father—this is a hint that Dostoevsky leaves in the text pointing to the cosmic interconnection between disavowal and separation.

Like Grushenka, Dimitri is extremely forthcoming with information that would constitute a religious confession to Alyosha. Both recognize Alyosha as the embodiment of biblical love, or rather, the golden rule that constitutes the matrix and proper orientation of human cognition. However, they both fail to believe their own premises with any real conviction. Dimitri knows that the Devil presents him with appearances of truth. As such, what is true—namely, God—is struggling in his heart for priority and pre-eminence. However, Dimitri resigns himself to the thought: “why kick against the pricks.”²⁷⁶ In other words, why challenge what is apparently broad (the temptations of existence) with what is truthfully narrow (the practice of the golden rule). With this, Dimitri stops short of redemption for he, unlike Alyosha, is unwilling to take the necessary leap that would allow the eternal truth to touch the earthly images that plague him.

²⁷⁴That is, Alyosha prioritizing her impulses over and above human dignity.

²⁷⁵Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 440.

²⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 108.

As Dostoevsky hints, it is Dimitri's "abrupt and erratic mind," un-tempered by the truth that he has already been acquainted with, that makes him seem to be the perpetrator of his father's death.²⁷⁷ In the chapter entitled "Why is Such a Man Alive," Dimitri shows himself to be unable to plumb the depths of Ivan's claim that, without God and immortality, everything would be permitted. His commitment to his own sensuality prevents him from seriously considering the implications of Ivan's statement, thus further depriving Dimitri, in this instance, of taking the divine as his orientation.

Similarly, Fyodor Karamazov—the father whose absence from his children's lives traumatizes all but Alyosha and invites Dimitri and Ivan to repeat his fatal missteps—is the senseless but capable sensualist who considers himself a buffoon. In truth, his buffoonery is a farce and a trap for interlocutors who seek to engage him. He, too, is aware that he lives in error and behaves this way intentionally so as not to take his error seriously. Early in part two of the novel—in the chapter "The Old Buffoon"—Fyodor Karamazov tells the church fathers that he "tells lies in order to be pleasant and make people laugh."²⁷⁸ However, in deepening his claim, he states that as the buffoon, he is aware that this is his "fallenness," which, out of habit he would maintain, but now "wants to rise."²⁷⁹ But how would he rise? Does Fyodor say this in good faith? Alternatively, is this the last act of his entire performance? We learn that his attempt to rise is not uttered in good faith, rather, it is uttered as an attempt to usurp the church fathers in this exchange.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 68.

²⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 42. As Fyodor states in his own words, "I act up just because I'm insecure. If only I were sure, when I came in, that everyone would take me at once for the most pleasant and intelligent of men" (*Ibid.*, 43).

²⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 44.

In “Speech and Being: The Brothers Karamazov,” Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover shows what it means for a speech act to be performed in bad faith. He writes,

the phenomenological subject who is disconnected from its Other—whether this Other is conceived as God, creation or a unified Being—thus hovers over a primal abyss without beginning and end. Instead of a connection via a middle term, the subject and its “other”—Being constituted as the non-Being of the subject—now co-exist in an agonistic and quasi-tautologist relationship. Through this tautology, the subject and Being can only move in opposite directions to one another.²⁸¹

If then, as Vladiv-Glover argues, speech in bad faith widens the gap between the subject and the other, then the opposite—good faith speech—would mean speech performed with principles that sustain the relationship between self and other. In accordance with the former, Fyodor’s buffoonery demonstrates a willful disconnection from those he is most proximate to. By means of his intentionally foolish speech, he hovers over the abyss of his existence. He knows that what the father superior says to him is true—namely, that one should offer the “medicine of Jesus” to all those who curse and revile one for only this can cure one’s “vanity.”²⁸² However, chooses not to engage this principle authentically. Fyodor imprudently pipes up only to say that they are false in their approach to existence, indicting the monks who fast solely to receive a heavenly reward.

Moreover, Fyodor goes on to excuse his own false approach to existence by challenging the monks to “try being virtuous in life, to be useful in society without shutting yourself up in a monastery on other people’s bread, and without expecting any reward up there—that’s a little more difficult.”²⁸³ Fyodor provides this statement in order to excuse his buffoonery, and his own manipulative, spiteful, and vile behavior. Indeed, it is difficult to share the onion. However, while sharing one’s onion may be difficult, such difficulty does not prevent one from sharing the

²⁸¹Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, “Speech and Being: The Brothers Karamazov,” California: Charles Schlacks Jr, Vol.3-4, 2002. 95.

²⁸²Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 89

²⁸³*Ibid.*, 88.

onion. While Grushenka evades divine orientation and Dimitri is intimidated by divine orientation, Fyodor falsely aligns himself with it by attempting to expose the monks as the real buffoons who manipulate the masses, the “bloodsuckers who drink wine on the dime of the peasants.”²⁸⁴

To be oriented toward the divine is different from possessing a divine orientation. Unlike the characters in *Demons* (who either did not come into contact with the truth, or did not come in contact with the truth in a thoughtful way), the characters surveyed thus far in *The Brothers Karamazov* demonstrate that one can be acquainted with the truth yet refuse to develop a relationship to the truth. These characters know that this is a sin, however, they are unwilling to allow sin-consciousness to temper their thought and existence. Fyodor’s sensualism leads him to believe that he can be none other than a pretender and an imitator; he can never embody the dialectic whereby eternal truth touches earthly images. For Fyodor, his play acting keeps both aspects of the truth divorced from one another.

However, Fyodor’s son, Alyosha, enters the monastery and the world and remains authentic in both. This offends Fyodor because it proves to him what he already knows to be true but does not want to acknowledge, namely that his imitation of being and existing has robbed his life of the content with which it could otherwise have been richly furnished. Meanwhile, a similar reluctance to adopt a divine orientation prevents Dimitri, Grushenka, and Fyodor from yielding the narratives of their minds and lives to others which ultimately diminishes both the suppleness of the social and the capacities of the individual for all of them. All three could be considered anti-social precisely because they are unwilling to allow their individualism to be ameliorated and augmented by social relationships.

²⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 89.

In this section, we saw how a collision between spirit and sensuality manifested itself as despair, death, and delirium when spirit was not properly received into a person primarily constituted by sensuality and sensual impulses. The question before us now is: what happens when spirit is introduced to rationality, but it is still rejected? Dostoevsky's thesis in this novel—namely, that the mind is incapable of existing singularly within either sensuality or rationality—will become even more clear as we continue to analyze Ivan. In the concluding section of this chapter, I demonstrate that the unique ramifications of a false narrative of existence shared by rationality without spirit ultimately reduces Ivan (the rationalist) to madness. In cleaving to and being unwilling to sacrifice his false rationalistic narrative of existence, Ivan is unable to distinguish between reality and fiction. As we will see, Ivan is revealed to hold fictional notions of what is real given that his realism cannot account for the miracle (fiction) of existence.

VI. Divine Orientation: Spirit Meets Rationality

Alyosha is the self-conscious (spiritual) center of the text who has been oriented toward the truth and has taken the truth as his orientation. In so doing, his faith, properly construed, enables him to avoid opposing reality (earthly image) and fiction (eternal truth)—something Kirilov, in our section on *Demons*, could not do. It is Alyosha's faith in God that enables him to appreciate the immateriality of human existence, but that is exactly what offends Ivan by challenging the appearances of existence that enslave him. While Ivan considers himself a realist, his encounter with the Devil shows that his realism is only paper thin. In that dialogue he remains unable to sustain what he knows to be true about his mind: that while it is Euclidean it is also loving. Our narrator writes:

A true realist, if he is not a believer, will always find in himself the strength and ability not to believe in miracles as well, and if a miracle stands before him as an irrefutable fact, he will sooner doubt his own senses than admit the fact. And even if he does admit it, he will admit it as a fact of nature that was previously unknown to

him. In the realist, faith is not born from miracles, but miracles from faith. Once the realist comes to believe, then, precisely because of his realism, he must also allow for miracles. The Apostle Thomas declared that he would not believe until he saw, and when he saw, he said: “My Lord and my God!” Was it the miracle that made him believe? Most likely not, but he believed first and foremost because he wished to believe, and maybe already fully believed in his secret heart even as he was saying: “I will not believe until I see.”²⁸⁵

The narrator here explains that one cannot begin outside of the truth and still perceive the truth. One must first commit oneself to the truth to appreciate the truth for what it is. There is no neutral position outside of the truth that one can occupy safely without being challenged or provoked by the truth. One either understands it by beginning with it or loses both one’s mind and the truth by demanding the truth manifest itself in a way that is more palatable. Despite what other characters and, potentially, an uncaring reader might suppose, Alyosha is “more of a realist” than any other character in the text.²⁸⁶ However, his realism is steeped in a faith that enables him to comprehend the miracle of life. It is the abovementioned miracle, which Ivan knows but cannot appreciate, that will now be explored.

Ivan knows that God has been invented (co-authored) by man, but the wonder and miracle of it all is that the “notion of the necessity of God could creep into the head of such a wild and wicked animal as man—so holy, so moving, so wise a notion, which does man such great horror.”²⁸⁷ God as necessary existence—as the miracle that renders human existence necessary—is what Ivan knows should furnish society and the individual with the requisite ideas to resolve the contradictions birthed out of a willful ignorance of this truth. However, as Alyosha keenly recognizes, the reason why Ivan may be unresponsive to this truth—namely, the reason why he may be reluctant to permit its entrance into his mind—is because Ivan seemed to be

²⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 26.

²⁸⁶*Ibid.*

²⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 234.

“preoccupied with something, something inward and important, that he was striving towards some goal, possibly a very difficult one” such that, when he stares at Alyosha, he appears to be “absent.”²⁸⁸

The absence that Alyosha notes is a relational absence. Ivan’s relational absence, whether it be pre-figured by his father’s absence or by his discomfort with his own self, is precipitated by both his earthly mind—what I have called earlier, in accordance with the text, his Euclidean mind—and a lack of commitment to the ethical principles upon which it rests.²⁸⁹ Ivan’s earthly mind influences Dimitri, who considers Ivan “a grave”—a human being dead to life, precisely because he is unwilling to accept the miracle of life—and leads Alyosha, who knows better, to recognize that he is “a riddle” to himself and he is unable to extricate his mind from the earthly force of his heritage.

Ivan’s rationality, at best, can only bring him to romanticism. For example, he expresses his romanticism when he asserts that his romantic love for life—as distinct from a possible divine love for life—is “earthly,” because, as he contends, love for life runs in the blood of the Karamazovs. He insists that Alyosha must also be held captive by this same love, saying,

this thirst for life despite all; it must be sitting in you, too; but why is it base? There is still an awful lot of centripetal force on our planet, Alyosha. I want to live, and I do live, even if it be against logic. Though I do not believe in the order of things, still the sticky little leaves that come out in the spring are dear to me, the blue sky is dear to me, some people are dear to me, whom one loves sometimes, would you believe it, without even knowing why; some human deeds are dear to me, which one has perhaps long ceased believing in, but still honours with one’s heart, out of old habit.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 31.

²⁸⁹Insofar as he does not have the proper principles upon which embracing himself would be made possible.

²⁹⁰Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 230.

Because he is a riddle to himself, Ivan produces only riddles. And yet, while he communicates in the same breath that there is a “centripetal force” running through our planet, he simultaneously states that he cannot “believe in the order” of things. In other words, he cannot believe all things are ordered centripetally towards the resolute truth of existence. Ivan’s love goes against his logic. In this, Ivan is the mirror reflection of Dimitri insofar as his logic cannot render anything beautiful in existence. Dimitri’s illogicality is established by his belief in life’s inherent beauty.

Acting, perhaps, as the author’s mouthpiece, Alyosha properly rebuts Ivan’s claim about existence by stating, “certainly, love it before logic, as you say, certainly before logic, and only then will I also understand its meaning. That is how I’ve long imagined it. Half your work is done and acquired, Ivan: you love life. Now you need only apply yourself to the second half, and you are saved.”²⁹¹ As his realism dictates, Alyosha knows that it is when we begin with faith, and we know the miracle of life, that the idea of God—that is, the invention of the truth of the golden rule—can occur to the wild beast and can be lived out in one’s relationship both to oneself and to the other. Likewise, Alyosha knows, as his realism dictates, that it is only when we first love existence that we can be properly committed to the meaning it will reveal to us. The tension between reality and fiction, and material realism and fictitious sentiment—which Ivan knows is false and yet refuses to be saved from—is what ultimately results in Ivan’s insanity.

Father Zosima, the inspiration for Alyosha’s going out into the world to relate authentically to his brothers, knows that Ivan, insofar as his Euclidean mind can only affirm what science reveals, is limited by that “which is subject to the senses.”²⁹² Father Zosima knows that if only Ivan submitted to the truth, he would know that “the roots of our thoughts and feelings are

²⁹¹*Ibid.*, 231.

²⁹²*Ibid.*, 313.

not here but in other worlds.”²⁹³ According to Father Zosima, our covenantal relationship with God, self, and the other enables us to avoid “annihilating ourselves,” or rather enables us to avoid the very rift in consciousness that plagues Ivan in the end.²⁹⁴

When Ivan falsely (apparently) lets go of the philosophical concern about whether God created man or man created God, he says that he accepts,

God pure and simple. But this, however, needs to be noted: If God exists and if he indeed created the earth, then, as we know perfectly well, he created it in accordance with Euclidean geometry, and he created human reason with a conception of only three dimensions of space. At the same time there were and are even now geometers and philosophers, even some of the most outstanding among them, who doubt that the whole universe, or even, more broadly, the whole of being, was created purely in accordance with Euclidean geometry; they even dare to dream that two parallel lines, which according to Euclid cannot possibly meet on earth, may perhaps meet somewhere in infinity. I, my dear, have come to the conclusion that if I cannot understand even that, then it is not for me to understand about God. I humbly confess that I do not have any ability to resolve such questions, I have a Euclidean mind, an earthly mind, and therefore it is not for us to resolve things that are not of this world... I accept God, not only willingly, but moreover I also accept his wisdom and his purpose, which are completely unknown to us.²⁹⁵

Ivan will not believe that it is possible to know a God outside of the three dimensions of space precisely because he believes that God created human beings to understand that which is within the limits of the three dimensions of space. According to Ivan, it is God’s fault that he struggles to understand God. Ivan ultimately claims that he cannot understand God, but can, however absent-mindedly—without will, thought, or love—accept God’s unknowability. As Ivan understands and experiences, the demand to accept a God that one cannot know and to know a world that one cannot accept results in resentment and madness.²⁹⁶ Given that he believes this is the demand, Ivan comes to resent his own earthly mind and the world at large. Ivan’s realism

²⁹³*Ibid.*, 320.

²⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 318.

²⁹⁵*Ibid.*

²⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 235.

does not begin with faith, which is why it ends with an “essence” that Ivan knows is hallow and devoid of meaning.²⁹⁷ In knowing this to be true, Ivan states to Alyosha that his stupidity is closer to clarity than his beloved reason.²⁹⁸ Ivan suffers, and, in his suffering, he desires to be relieved of his earthly mind.

The world Ivan cannot accept is the world that Ivan himself gives birth to through his narrative of existence when he communicates to anyone who will listen that if God and immortality did not exist, everything would be permitted.²⁹⁹ According to Ivan, the ethical conclusion he has come to is not the result of his hypothetical syllogistic logic. He believes that the ethical conclusion he has come to is the result of the very same earthly mind that he problematically communicates to Alyosha when he surmises that “there exists no law of nature that man should love mankind.”³⁰⁰ Due to his being a riddle to himself, Ivan cannot square with himself the relationship between his values and the laws of nature. Paradoxically, he does not see that the very value that he places on the laws of nature show that his own values are not derived from the laws of nature. That is, the laws of nature do not value themselves. If all his values come from nature, how is he able to be conscious of this when nature itself is not conscious? Moreover, how can Ivan know that his mind has no basis if it is simply a derivative of naturally antecedent phenomena? A riddle indeed—both to himself and others.

Ivan’s narrative of existence reflects his inner rebellion by which he is both transfixed and encumbered. Ivan’s narrative reveals that he knows his mind is vacant of that which would constitute a loving relationship with his brothers. However, based on his logic, Ivan cannot

²⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 236.

²⁹⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 69.

³⁰⁰*Ibid.*

understand why, in the absence of God, “viper will eat viper.”³⁰¹ Alyosha is appalled by the implications of his brother’s ethical premises and conclusions. When thinking through the love triangle that Grushenka has brought both Dimitri and their father into, and recognizing the fury and venom it has incited in both loved ones, Alyosha asks Ivan: “Can it be that any man has the right to decide about the rest of mankind, who is worthy to live and who is more unworthy?”³⁰² To Alyosha’s question, Ivan improperly answers with a question, raising the idea as to whether the question of worth is even pertinent to human thought and existence. Ivan does not recognize that only in presupposing the worth of human life and human subjectivity, is the question of the worth or unworthiness of human life recognized not as a question. Alyosha, whether consciously or unconsciously, knows that the question he asks his brother is intended to get him to recognize that God bequeaths worth to human consciousness. For Alyosha, the choice is never between considering one person worthy and another unworthy. Rather, the question is between recognizing the worth of human consciousness when properly rooted in God over and above the conflation of human consciousness with the appearances of nature.

When Ivan decides to give Alyosha the false gift of himself—the Grand Inquisitor—Alyosha is already aware that Ivan knows the truth but drowns in indignation precisely because he refuses the help necessary to see truth manifested in an existence he cannot accept. The Grand Inquisitor—Ivan’s symbolic representation of his historic offense at God’s existence—knows that the miracle of existence is dialogue.³⁰³ Christ, both in Ivan’s and the biblical narrative,

³⁰¹*Ibid.*, 141.

³⁰²*Ibid.*, 143.

³⁰³The Grand Inquisitor knows, as is clear by the sentiment laden within his inquisition of Christ, that relationship is what liberates the sick mind. It is relationship and engaging in exchanges between diverse parties that gives one the capacity to contend with the challenges of life, of others, and of one’s psyche without being undone. What he does not

engages the Devil (which is indicative of Alyosha's engagement with his brother Ivan) and the existence of earthly opposition to the truth without becoming oppositional. Ivan states that the miracle was not just the appearance of the questions that the Devil asks Christ after his fast of forty days and forty nights, rather, the miracle was in the capacity for Christ to recognize what these questions implied and then to confront them based on his divine orientation. However, even though Ivan appears to recognize this, his Grand Inquisitor misunderstands the nature of miracle precisely because he refuses to begin with faith in existence and in God. According to the Grand Inquisitor, miracles are one of three powers that can hold the consciousness of mankind captive (namely, possessed) and, in turn, make them happy.

The Grand Inquisitor chastises Christ for having rejected the value of the sensate manifestation of miracles. The Grand Inquisitor does this because he believes that the earthly mind led astray by the appearance of miracle and not the truth of miracle will “no sooner reject God ... for man seeks not so much God as miracles.”³⁰⁴ For the human being that, like Ivan, possesses an “earthly” mind, the separation of God from miracles is the result of being unwilling to accept that what miracles truly involve are one's covenantal commitment to existence in spite of earthly pressures, temptations, and demands. The Grand Inquisitor rejects the idea that true miracles consist of loving dialogue (whether verbal or non-verbal) and engagement with the other. However, like Ivan, he believes that human beings—namely, those who are too weak and too feeble to sacrifice their earthly mind so that they can touch eternal truth—will suffer endlessly in pursuing what they are incapable of acquiring yet need. On the basis of miracle, mystery, and authority, the Grand Inquisitor's excuse for the despotism he works to maintain in

know (or refuses to believe) is that this practice is constitutive of acquiring a divine orientation.

³⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 255.

order to correct God's unacceptably free existence is identical to the excuse that masquerades itself as the honest answer Ivan gives Alyosha when asked about the worth of human life.

Christ, with his kiss freely given to the Grand Inquisitor at the end of Ivan's story, bequeaths worth to him in full knowledge that the kiss may be misinterpreted. But Ivan does not recognize that the truth of his narrative is a riddle, even to himself, because he is incapable of accepting the framework of values that would confer to him the worth of his mind. In Ivan's narrative the mind is in a state of offense—that is, his narrative is aimed at destroying rather than liberating the mind.

Ivan's susceptibility to contradiction and self-estrangement has fatal implications, for, in the quiet of his study when he, (un)like Christ, is visited by the Devil, he is unable to wake up from his "nightmare." He does not possess the requisite orientation to distinguish what is real from what is false. As such, Ivan's existence becomes nightmarish as he refuses to know that which would ethically ground the appearances contradicting his thought and existence. Ivan knows that the Devil's appearance is a psychological projection of his most "loathsome side," but he is unable to efface the appearance of the Devil on that account, for it is precisely his loathsome side (earthly side) that he has allowed to hold his mind captive.³⁰⁵

The Devil, which contradicts the truth and has been commissioned to negate, wants to convince Ivan that he (Ivan) is the truth and, in so doing, reduces the truth of infinitude to its finite manifestations.³⁰⁶ As a result, Ivan seeks to see himself as the true orientation of the divine. Ivan refuses to recognize that the Devil is the by-product of one's adoption of the divine orientation and of the mind of the narrative of existence. Ivan does not see that the moment one

³⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 637.

³⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 642.

accepts the divine as one's orientation—that is, the mind that must be present within one's narrative of existence—one must contend with the breadth of material existence, the pretense of human self-estrangement, intimidation by the weight of human worth, and the compulsion to possess rather than live the dialectic of truth. As a result, Ivan believes in the false dichotomy that either one must live based on “reason only”—as the Devil states jarringly to Ivan—or “bread only,” a phrase the Grand Inquisitor uses to mock the existence of Christ.³⁰⁷

VII. Conclusion

Narration, properly understood, not only affirms but constitutes existence. Insofar as narratives—any exchange between two subjects—bear the weight of the mind, they can either be true or false, but never mythological. Throughout this chapter I have demonstrated that narratives are preoccupied with the truth of existence and the biblical dialectic of the golden rule that proves the worth of the human subject is irreducible to the appearances of natural time and space. As such, narratives either presuppose the incommensurability and irreducibility of the human mind or refuse such a presupposition, and, in so doing, falsify existence.

For one's narrative to be truthful one must be disciplined by the truth. The subject's offense at the injunction to maintain the dialectical relationship between mind and narrative can all too easily result in attempts to go beyond existence and posit a truth that does not involve the necessity of the relationship between self and other. However, as this chapter clarifies, and as Dostoevsky shows so precisely in these novels, the attempt to go beyond existence results in four existentially distinct responses to existence: nihilism, suicide, offended sensuality, and offended rationality.

³⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 642.

The nihilist possesses a hollow relationship to the truth. As such, their narratives reduce existence to the same nullity that has arisen out of their misrelationship to existence. Through his characters in *Demons*, Dostoevsky shows that insofar as one's narrative of existence is not disciplined by the truth of existence (the infinitude of the mind), one will be ineluctably possessed by one's misunderstandings. Here, the demonic becomes a metaphor for one's susceptibility to become a host—in the absence of the truth—for ideas (narratives) that are only superficially understood and that, therefore, stifle the existence of the mind. Likewise, in this same text, Dostoevsky demonstrates that the suicidal subject—the one who misapprehends existence and therefore wants to put an end to existence—is the one who believes existence has no meaning as it cannot be immediately comprehended or sensed. The suicidal subject's narrative of existence is a narrative of frustration. The suicidal subject, whether knowingly or unknowingly, is repulsed by the idea that the truth of existence is intimately (and inextricably) connected to the inalienable worth of the subject. By destroying itself, the suicidal subject—as portrayed in *Demons*—believes it can prove existence to be bereft of meaning.

This chapter also highlights how, in the *Brothers Karamazov*, the sensualist and the rationalist are offended by the truth due to their noncommittal relationship to two seemingly distinct propositions. The first proposition involves the idea that a narrow (particular) truth can account for the breadth (universality) of existence. The second proposition involves the idea that our relationship to the material world must be rooted in immaterial principles. The rejection of the first proposition resulted in Dimitri Karamazov being ill-equipped to distinguish between what was apparently good and what was truly good, leading him to commit avoidable evils. Dimitri could not understand, until the very end of the novel, that, although the truth may be narrow, its manifestations are broader than material existence, and that the diversity of his

actions and desires could be accounted for, understood, and refined in light of such a truth. Conversely, Ivan Karamazov, in refusing to cleave to the second proposition, found himself unable to distinguish between reality and fiction insofar as he was reluctant to engage with the fiction—namely, the immaterial truth, the dialectic of the golden rule—that makes the existence of self and other real. Ivan could not recognize that it is precisely what one cannot see, taste, hear, smell, or touch (namely, the understanding of God, self, and the other as infinite) that properly supports the well-being and sustenance of a fundamentally relational existence rather than simply material one.

As has been clearly demonstrated in this chapter, the problematic responses to existence hitherto displayed (in the nihilist, the suicide, the rationalist, and the sensualist) are conditioned by a fundamental misunderstanding of existence. This misunderstanding is the result of the subject's unwillingness to sacrifice immediate cognition and sensation in order that they can adopt the dialectic of God and persons, self and other, and mind and narrative. Through the narratives (communicative practices) that our characters in this chapter have shared, we are able to grasp the mind of a given narrative—that is, the hidden values in which all communicative practices are rooted.

Chapter 5 Conclusion:

Communicating the Mind(s) and Narrative(s) of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky

The hermeneutical principle upon which both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky have been interpreted derive from the works of both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky themselves. We must subject Kierkegaardian texts to the principle of the qualitative leap one must make to become the single-individual (the incommensurable human being). Likewise, we must interrogate a work of Dostoevsky by virtue of the “other-worldly roots” of his thought. Father Zosima understands these roots as the concepts of prayer as education, love as teacher, and hell as the suffering that results from being no longer able to love.³⁰⁸ If we fail to do either, we will ineluctably reduce the mind(s) and the narrative(s) of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky to the appearances of their communicative practices: at times racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, and nativistic.

To demonstrate the principles of understanding on which the existence of the mind and the truth/falsity of narrative rests, I began my investigation by analyzing the intimate relationship between theology and philosophy. This introduced the argument that this relationship must be grounded in the principle of the *golden rule*. I indicated how this principle demonstrates the fundamental dialectic of being and becoming; that is, the dialectic that posits the existence of mind as the reservoir of being and the singular narrative of truth (morality) that results from it. Central to this opening deliberation was a careful exploration of the way in which doubt and faith, in representing the critical end on which Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky hinge the concepts of maturity and immaturity, modernity and antiquity, and beginning and ending, also represent the critical beginning of contending with the challenges that the existence of narratives (both true and false) pose to the extant mind.

³⁰⁸ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 318–22.

In chapter two I delineated the qualities of two central traditions within the Western canon: myth and narrative. We explored the first tradition by primarily investigating Platonic/Socratic dialogues. We explored the second tradition through an investigation of the biblical creation narrative in *Genesis*. This comparison exposed the distinction between texts that demonstrate the existence of the mind (for which there are both true and false narratives) and those texts which, while lacking a mind (lacking that which would constitute a truthful narrative), are mistakenly understood by contemporary thinkers to be narratives rather than myths. Both types of texts were explored so that the distinction between the biblical notion of sin (that is, the consciousness both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky deem central to the ontology of the mind and the possession of a true narrative for it provides one with the ability to engage error, yet, resist being lost in error) and Socratic ignorance (that is, the knowledge of ignorance itself and the state of being irredeemably lost in one's unknown errors without recourse) could be distinguished properly.

This dissertation has demonstrated that the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* is responsible for the creation of mind (metaphysics) and the narrative of human relationship overcoming idolatry (morality). In chapter two, the exploration of paganism revealed that the mind of the pagan (by way of Plato/Socrates articulation of the values that underpin ancient Greek society) does not exist, as it possesses no narrative that can account for the fundamental distinction between good and evil, and, therefore, no structure of values that can recognize and account for its errors. The relationship between the aforementioned ideas has shown that a modern text (person) is any text (is any person) that possesses the necessary values to preserve its content (mind and narrative) in spite of (its) contextual slippages and errors.

In the third chapter I focused centrally on the texts of Kierkegaard to expose the distinction between the existence of mind and the narratives that pervert or impede the mind's existence. This discussion demonstrated that in the work of Kierkegaard, mental offense, whether it manifests as anxiety over the good, or despair and demonic possession represents—in relation to narrative—the ostensibly irreconcilable opposition between reality and fiction, context and content, and the narrative of mind and the mind of narrative. In relation to my thesis, Kierkegaardian texts illustrate that the existence of faith and love highlights that a proper narrative of mind either involves what Kierkegaard calls sin-consciousness without which the mind and its narrative never existed.

In chapter four I used Dostoyevsky's narratives to explore what certain types of narratives reveal about the ontological status of one's mind. I demonstrated that the narratives told by a particular mind within a given text reveals, whether through nihilistic, sensual, suicidal, demonic, or rationalistic delineations, that the mind, if improperly constituted, can be divided against its essence (its truthful existence). I sought to show that what Dostoyevsky reveals within the social realism of his fictional narratives is that only the existence of mind (of God) enables one to distinguish between true narratives and false narratives, and, *ipso facto*, a mind capable of engaging with existence.

To conclude, the conceptual content of this dissertation has involved legitimizing the nexus between the existence of the mind and the veracity of narrative in the works of Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky. What I will now explore a little further is how intimately connected language and communication are to this respective project; that is, the way in which both authors demonstrate that this nexus must be indirectly communicated. This indirect form of communication—or what Kierkegaard calls transferred language and what Dostoyevsky rightly

understands to be the only way to disclose the mystery of man—has often confounded most interpreters devoted to making use of the novel insights of both thinkers.

In *Kierkegaard's Instant*, Kanga argues that, in reading Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*, we find “language is therefore the medium of self-disclosure, the agent of seduction, that operates within innocence to draw latent spirit into self. Prior to self-consciousness explicitly positing itself, language must already have been operative.”³⁰⁹ He continues by expressing that “language, in short, precedes and conditions the movement of self-positing. Moreover, if language (as saying outside of any determinate said) operates prior to and as the soliciting condition of self-consciousness, then self-presence cannot be taken as originary.”³¹⁰ Language is a necessary precursor to self-presence and self-consciousness. Self-presence—that is, the presence of mind accorded to the single-individual by God—is only truly possible if, as Polka writes, we recognize that,

it is evident, then, that we must distinguish between language and communication. All human beings use language. But to communicate is to use words (and other means of human expression) in such a way that we relate to them. Indeed, to relate to a story is to communicate our relationship to the action it contains. We see, consequently, that the Word of the Bible is primordially covenantal: it constitutes our relationships, at once human and divine, as founded on love of neighbour.³¹¹

Indeed, it is precisely because truthful communication involves the love of thy neighbor—which cannot escape this biblical injunction—that Kierkegaard writes in a journal entry, “to be subjective is regarded as something very easy. Of course, every human being is a subject, but [to

³⁰⁹ Kanga, *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings*, 176.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ Brayton Polka, “The Spirit of Metaphor and the Metaphor of Spirit Reflections on the Aesthetic and the Religious in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*,” (Lecture, Kierkegaard Circle [University of Toronto], Toronto, ON, December 2, 2016.), 4.

be] a genuine subject, to comprehend infinite reality and infinite responsibility—only a few accomplish this, perhaps not ten in each generation.”³¹² Every human being is a subject just as all human beings have language. But to communicate what is genuine about subjectivity (infinite reality and an infinite responsibility to this reality) rather than what is commonplace to subjectivity (finite reality—to which one has no ethical responsibility) is a rarity.³¹³ In noting what his summer impressions were when travelling across Europe, Dostoevsky states that what is missing from our communicative practices is the, “rich and ancient tradition of denial and protest.” According to Dostoevsky, this is necessary because in attempting to communicate the truth of one’s subjective existence (predicated upon the knowledge of the other as infinite), one can refrain from succumbing to “impression”—that is, from worshiping appearances—such that one conflates the appearances of existence with the ideals upon which it must be lived. Dostoevsky rightly equates the abovementioned phenomenon with the idolization of Baal.³¹⁴ We presently see denial and protest replete within our polemical socio-political milieu. However, this denial and protest may not be adequately directed towards the most pertinent issues as it does not direct its concerns indirectly.

It is true that decades of racial, sexual, classist, and political oppression have established a cultural ethos of skepticism, radicalism, and identitarianism. Although we have the solutions to combat these issues, we fail to operationalize them as emphatically as one of our biblical forefathers—Jesus. Jesus consistently shows those with whom he engages that they know that which they claim to be ignorant of. Jesus indirectly shows his interlocutors—both through his

Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 39.

³¹³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 28.

³¹⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, (London: Oneworld Classics Limited, 2008), 50–51.

parables and his miracles — that they possess the moral knowledge of good and evil which is grounded in the love of thy neighbor which they will undoubtedly either embrace, subvert, or pervert, but can never truthfully deny.³¹⁵ Herein is where love is represented: to presuppose in the other what one does not immediately know is there.³¹⁶ One is always receiving and giving the infinite debt of perfect love, a debt that can never be repaid given that one does not immediately possess perfect love.³¹⁷

As hinted to above, the main goal of truthful communication—that is, communication that seeks the neighbor in love and loves the neighbor it seeks—, whether it is manifested in political, social, philosophical, psychological, or literary circles and deliberations, is to avoid deception. We, in all spheres of modern society are calling for clarity, transparency, and accuracy with regards to our and the others thought and existence. Yet, we are utterly unaware that clarity, transparency, and accuracy have nothing to do with finite fact and everything to do with the posturing of the heart. Without the previously mentioned posturing—which contemporary post-modern polemics may wrongly interpret as oppressively universal, hegemonic, and Western—we inexorably become encumbered by illusions related to the identification of self (and other) and the appearances of nature or convention. To this point on the subject of communication, Kierkegaard writes that communication does not emanate from the correct posturing of the heart, but rather the,

difficulty is that a great multiplicity of illusions will hold man down in this lower sphere of understanding where deception and being deceived signify exactly the opposite of what they signify in the infinite conception of love. According to this

³¹⁵ Polka, “The Spirit of Metaphor,” 16.

³¹⁶ In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard states that, “the lover presupposes that love is in the other person’s heart, and by this very presupposition he builds up love in him—from the ground up, insofar as in the love he presupposes it present as the ground” (*Kierkegaard, Works of Love*, 206).

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

view, to be deceived signifies simply and solely to quit loving, to be carried away to the point of abandoning love in and for itself, and in this way to lose its intrinsic blessedness. For only one deception is possible in the infinite sense—self-deception.³¹⁸

And so, to quit loving and elocuting loving communication is to deceive oneself and the other by reducing human being and human spirit to finite and sociological appearances. Kierkegaard writes that to determine what love is, “Christianity begins with God or with the neighbour” and only in this way is one led toward life.^{319,320} Life—that is, existence—both of the mind and the truth of narrative, can only be properly known on the basis of love because recognizing the love in the other can only be made known to that person who begins with love. Otherwise put, like is known only by like.³²¹ Without this fundamental ability, interpreting the rhetoric of daily life and engaging it such that one does not either become a victim of it or ignorantly polemical against it becomes impossible. Impossible because,

There is no word in human language, not a single one, not the most sacred word, of which we could say when a man uses this word, it is unconditionally proved thereby that there is love in him. Rather, it is true that a word from one person can convince us that there is love in him and the opposite word from another can convince that there is love in him also.³²²

In the absence of this insight, it is nearly impossible to avoid what I have called demonic possession, which is simply the “holding back” from another human being the debt that is due to them and must be paid so that the mind of a human being can remain supple. Being unwilling to recognize that the mind, like love, is hidden—that is, the mind as incapable of being seen in a

³¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 223.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³²² *Ibid.*, 29.

material sense—results in our narratives about ourselves, others, and existence overall becoming dubious and deceptive.³²³

Deception within our communicative practices is legion. In the absence of the mind's adherence to that which is responsible for sharing and receiving the truth, Kierkegaard knows that "one can be deceived in believing what is untrue, but on the other hand, one is also deceived in not believing what is true... which deception is most dangerous? Whose recovery is more doubtful, that of him who does not see or of him who sees and still does not see?"³²⁴ Insofar as both forms of deception represent the fatal ramifications of conflating communication with language, both demonstrate that the individual who is deceived has not properly committed to the golden rule of mind and narrative. The result is made manifest in one's communicative practices being implicitly directed toward the demonic—that is, one's closure toward the good.³²⁵ Kangas writes that the profundity of the demonic and of demonic communication—which is confused by the love at the genuine roots of its thinking—is its closure toward acknowledging the principles upon which it must rest which is "the reality of the other as the good."³²⁶ Demonic closure proves that it needs and is necessarily involved with the other to whom it may employ a vast array of linguistically, semantically, and syntactically sound and complex statements while simultaneously refusing to communicate with the other.

We see this refusal at play in all areas of civil society and amongst the very pillars of the democracy we have come to ambivalently cherish. We can rightfully call it the demonic, for the political radical refuses to disclose to the other that they too are human (a subject) whose roots

³²³ *Ibid.*, 26.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

³²⁵ Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 178.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

are otherworldly and, therefore, are irreducible to the finitudes of natural time and space. Conversely, the identitarian presumes that in unilaterally claiming identity within a particular social category (i.e., race, gender, sex, and class), they too can alter the atomism of society while simultaneously circumventing the democratic precept requiring one to extend humanity to all as all have been created equally capable of growing in likeness with God's image by God. If it were not for our having been made in the image of God—that is, in the image not of diverse finite contingencies, but in the image of that principle in light of which communication is made possible—we would be incapable of knowing the other and oneself as infinite.

True freedom is not the ability to receive the unique representation of the other in any which way one pleases, but rather the ability to accommodate the representation of the other. Therefore, what is truly aesthetic—just as what is truly political, metaphysical, ethical, religious, or philosophical—is truly biblical and able to receive the expressions of the other as one hopes to be received by the other.³²⁷ To this notion, Polka poses an appropriate question for thinking through the incredible implications of our Genesis narrative—the only narrative of human thought and existence that we can all share irrespective of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and/or able-bodiedness—“does not the declaration that human beings are made in the image of God signify that God is not found outside of his image?”³²⁸ If we understand this correctly and answer it truthfully, should we not recognize that in attempting to locate God's image outside of the image of the human being (either in reducing God's image to certain human beings or rounding off God's image to some 'thing' in nature) our communicative (communal) practices are stymied?

³²⁷ Polka, “The Spirit of Metaphor,” 5.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

It is because “God is love” that we can only resemble God in the act of loving one another—not as things in natural time and space, but as subjects possessing inherent and inalienable dignity.³²⁹ As Kierkegaard argues, hate, then, is “a love which has become its opposite, a ruined love.”³³⁰ Ruined, as he suggests, for it has been unable to stand the test of existence which reveals to the extant mind whether its choices are truly free and its judgements are truly subjective.³³¹ The psychological ramifications of judging incorrectly and without being rooted in love include the self-hate that one will suffer having been deceived by one’s sensuous-psychic predilections.³³² Or, otherwise put, the act of allowing one’s transferred language to be reduced to the literal reception of the spoken and written word. Without love and transferred language (indirect communication), we are utterly incapable of judging soundly, of choosing the self and the other, and of adopting our mind’s divine orientation. Speaking socio-politically, the result of failing to embrace one’s divine orientation is suffering by being reduced to the demonism of factionalism (identitarianism) or the radicalism of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*.

In a letter to his brother Peter (who falls victim to this type of thinking as a result of his leanings toward Christendom rather than Christianity), Kierkegaard writes that there is no truth in the crowd and no truth in the factions one seeks to belong to:

A faction is and remains a faction. It may have good intentions towards a particular individual, it may believe it is looking out for his interests, and yet, it is still more on the lookout for its own interests. Presumably the faction is pleased (by the way, I know this is the case, for when I finally begin to pay attention, I am not a bad observer) that it is reaching you. It believes that your private income assures you an independent position. Thus, it might not urge somebody else to act in this way, and

³²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 74.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 215.

³³² *Ibid.*, 200.

the faction comes to believe that this consideration about your income constitutes concern for you. Suppose your income were ample enough does it follow from this that it would be worth it to expose oneself to all the many discomforts that will appear at once, to that enduring memory that will accompany you when the faction has forgotten everything? Certainly, I am not a coward. I dissuade no one from risking everything, if that should prove necessary—one is prepared to do everything for a cause, nothing for a faction—with respect to this I have experience.³³³

In his text *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard understands the psychological penchant toward factionalism to be resignation, which he argues exemplifies demonic possession. Factionalism is a symptom of being unwilling to take the divine as one's orientation, and of a mind clinging to that which constitutes an "earthly mind." The penchant to view the worth of one's identity as equivalent to an aspect of material existence is a precursor to factionalism and is the result of negation.

Moreover, the factual finite past of time and space and the truthful infinite past of human consciousness can be properly interpreted when we seek to interpret both based on what is equally universal and individual. Only when we interpret in this manner can we properly recognize that the other's individuality ineluctably seeks to tarnish our dogmatic understanding of them (and ourselves). Alternatively, Kierkegaard understands that biblical truths implore us to "beware of men, by customs and externals" so that one does not let themselves "be tricked out of the highest good," tricked out of the divine inheritance one is owed from the other and existence.³³⁴

It is also only then that we can see that the appearances of a text and the context of any human expression—whether it be black, white, female, male, other, abled, disabled, adult, infantile, aged, rich or poor—are not to be confused with the content of a text. If a text is true, its

³³³ *Ibid.*, 148.

³³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 43.

content will invariably communicate what is universally true about human cognition irrespective of its contextual slippages or partialities. A perfect text, just like perfect communication or perfect cognition, is not akin to the Greek notion of being at one's end in nature (*finis*). Rather, it is akin to that which fosters the willingness to communicate as opposed to manipulate language for social or individual gain.

The abovementioned is echoed at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Close to the end of the text, Alyosha is faced with the realization that while one of his brothers has been redeemed, the other brother is near death. At this stage of the story, this family is seemingly torn apart and is now unwilling to embrace what we have hitherto called the divine orientation and indirect communication. Alyosha, in his final moments before the close of the narrative, stands near the tombstone of the young and undersized Ilyusha—the boy with whom we sympathize, despite his attempt to harm a dog by placing a pin in a piece of bread that the animal has been given, because he constantly has to fight off those who have bullied him. In an effort to lift the spirits of the boys who knew Ilyusha well and are now suffering the loss of their friend, Alyosha, speaking to young Kolya—who struggles with identifying ideologically as an atheist, while also demonstrating biblical principles in his actions—says the following (which is worth citing in full),

My little doves—let me call you that—little doves, because you are very much like those pretty gray blue birds, now, at this moment, as I look at your kind, dear faces—my dear children, perhaps you will not understand what I am going to say to you, because I often speak very incomprehensibly, but still you will remember and someday agree with my words. You must know that there is nothing higher, or stronger, or sounder, or more useful afterwards in life, than some good memory, especially a memory from childhood, from the parental home. You hear a lot said about your education, yet some such beautiful, sacred memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education. If a man stores up many such memories to take into life, then he is saved for his whole life. And even if only one good memory remains with us in our hearts, that alone may serve some day for our salvation.

Perhaps we will even become wicked later on, will even be unable to resist a bad action, will laugh at people's tears and at those who say, as Kolya exclaimed today: 'I want to suffer for all people'—perhaps we will scoff wickedly at such people. And yet, no matter how wicked we may be—and God preserve us from it—as soon as we remember how we buried Ilyusha, how we loved him in his last days, and how we've been talking just now, so much as friends, so together, by this stone, the most cruel and jeering man among us, if we should become so, will still not dare laugh within himself at how kind and good he was at this present moment! Moreover, perhaps just this memory alone will keep him from great evil, and he will think better of it and say: 'Yes, I was kind, brave, and honest then.'... Kolya said to Kartashov just now that we supposedly 'do not care to know of his existence.' But how can I forget that Kartashov exists.³³⁵

The abovementioned scene illustrates more than a Russian ex-seminarian speaking to adolescent children, and more than particular individuals with particular histories articulating relative truths unique to their socio-political and historical period. Alyosha knows that true education is tied to the memory of one having come into existence with the knowledge of good and evil. Kolya is held captive by the socialist philosophy that Rahkitin uses to dominate his young mind with. However, Kolya is specifically enamored with Alyosha as Alyosha speaks to him like an adult—and thereby like an equal rather than a child who is beneath him. Herein lies the memorable experience that possesses the power to do to Kolya what was done to Alyosha by Father Zosima: that is, the act of making the soul's transition from darkness to light possible and making the soul's transition from stratification to equality with all other soul's possible.³³⁶

As such, education is the phenomenon of coming into existence and it involves remembering why one is an equal of the other. Alyosha proposes to Kolya and the rest of the group that the worth of their existences (the existence of their being equally human)—each and every one of them irrespective of what they may become, do, accomplish, and fail in doing—

³³⁵ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 774.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

will and must always be remembered. It is the one thing—namely, the existence of their minds and the truth of their narratives—that if forgotten, would render them unrecognizable to one another.

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