

Self-Laceration and Resentment:
The Terms of Moral Psychology in Dostoevsky
and Nietzsche

ONE OF THE motivating forces of modern thinking has been the utopian belief that the rational organization of society will bring freedom and moral perfection. For modernity's greatest antirationalists, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, such aspirations are admirable, even tempting, but ultimately problematic. Neither thinker accepts the idea of the progressive betterment of human nature, its eventual liberation from itself through various plans for social or theological engineering. Any moral code that dictates absolute law, that assumes human nature to be mere clay molded by some unassailable notion of the good, is doomed to fail in the modern age when people are increasingly *self-conscious*: the modern consciousness is founded on a conflict between personal value, with its emphasis on self-esteem, uniqueness, and originality, and received social-religious traditions, with their demands for conformity and self-denial.

The powerful, pathbreaking changes in Western moral consciousness that Dostoevsky and Nietzsche helped to instigate are founded on a shift in the conceptualization of morality. Both argue with the notion of morality as law, that is, with normative or absolutist concepts of morality. Dostoevsky, for example, addresses two sources of moral absolutism: the rationalist reliance on logic and ratiocination (*razum*), and, strange as it may at first seem, the old Orthodox virtue of total submission and self-abnegation (*smirenie*). Nietzsche argues chiefly with Judeo-Christian "laws"—the Ten Commandments and Christ's commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself—and, it should be said, all kinds of philosophical dualism that posit some absolute realm in which are rooted unalterable moral laws and rules. In place of such externally imposed moral systems, both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche apprehend an inwardly generated, transfigurative moral con-

sciousness based on the self-conscious person's effort at deep self-knowledge and "self-creation." In this essay I will argue that Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, far from abandoning the moral concepts of freedom and responsibility central to Western modernity, rather conceived an entirely new approach to understanding the difficulties in their realization, a moral "psychology" that confronted the complexity of modern human consciousness. Each then used his psychological insight to apprehend a "masterplot" by which moral selfhood might be lived.

Following the lead of that great antirationalist and philosophical psychologist, Schopenhauer, both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche stood out as moralists of a new formation. Each called into question traditional, uncritically received approaches to the philosophy of morality. As Nietzsche aptly put it in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

With a stiff seriousness that inspires laughter, all our philosophers demanded something far more exalted, presumptuous, and solemn from themselves as soon as they approached the study of morality: they wanted to supply a *rational foundation* for morality—and every philosopher so far has believed that he has provided such a foundation. Morality itself, however, was accepted as "given." How remote from their clumsy pride was that task which they considered insignificant and left in dust and must—the task of description—although the subtlest fingers and senses can scarcely be subtle enough for it.¹

Until the nineteenth century, Nietzsche argued, morality had always been treated axiomatically, subjected neither to the scrutiny of rigorous logic nor to the dramatic ideological debates evident in the modern novel of ideas. Part of the "revolution of moral consciousness" that Dostoevsky and Nietzsche introduced concerns both thinkers' challenge to this approach to moral codes as something "natural." As Dostoevsky knew and Nietzsche realized as early as *The Birth of Tragedy*, moral codes are "anti-natural" (*BGE*, 188); that is, they emerged as conceived "artifacts."

Both thinkers probed the monolithic facade of moral doctrine by examining the impact of abstract values and beliefs on concrete human behavior. Thus both may be seen specifically as the greatest *psychologists* of morality.² Each undertakes as perhaps his central problem to dramatize, each in his own kind of discourse, conventional Christian virtues, such as love of truth, love of one's neighbor, and self-sacrifice, and each comes to quite unexpected conclusions. For example, Nietzsche's rejection of neighborly love in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is notorious. But what is less appreciated is the psychological depth and complexity of his own conception of love and his enduring effort to define a notion of genuine love. He did not avoid the troubling paradox that love means not harmony but productive contention, response and counterresponse with the beloved of a sort that clarifies both strengths

and weaknesses of character. The equality that must be a precondition for real love, in Nietzsche's view, means a strong sense of opposition—and not identity and sympathy—to the other. Likewise, although he sought a practicable notion of undying love and was drawn to the ideal of selfless love, Dostoevsky spent his mature life, beginning with the underground man's self-destructive battles with Liza, writing about the struggle that love for another entails with one's own visceral need for self-esteem. By contrast, Prince Myshkin, his one image of a selflessly loving person, brings about responses in other people that are disastrous.³

As thinkers concerned with moral psychology, both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche devised new forms of writing in order to bring out the novelty of their approach to morality. Their writings disclose a high degree of what Bakhtin would call "novelness" and "heteroglossia." Dostoevsky is unique among novelists in the degree to which ideas become embedded in moral and psychological tonalities.⁴ Valuable codes are given practical shape through the psychological orientations of the people who think them. Theory and enactment, although closely intertwined, stand in an adversarial relationship to one another. And the outcome of that conflict is central to the formation of personal moral integrity, or what Robert Louis Jackson calls the moral image (*obraz*) of the inner self.⁵ Nietzsche's writings tend toward polemic between voices representing radically opposite points of view. In short, they are strongly "novelized." Nietzsche deliberately breaks with a traditional academic style. For example, he brings automatized metaphors back to life, and he attacks the closed systemicity of the German philosophical tradition, preferring novelists, especially Stendhal and Dostoevsky, as his greatest teachers. The result is a philosophical text as a fragment, a remarkable adumbration of closely observed instances of moral discourse and moral behavior, a kind of semiotics of morals, but one always existing in the force field of some "speaking voice" with its particular set of values and emotional responses.

Although we must consider a major difference between the Russian writer and the German philosopher to be the overt adherence of the one to traditional virtues in the face of strong opposition from the radical materialists and the other's jubilant and malicious iconoclasm, it is nonetheless true that the two share similar psychological approaches to morality and moral nature. Moreover, the actual psychology of morality of both is based on very similar considerations. Despite their diametrically opposed valuations of conventional virtue, both concur in the understanding of the deep goals and purposes of moral judgment and moral behavior. And both seek a practicable context in which an individual can meaningfully enact moral responsibility by making conscious moral choices. Here it is possible even to apply Nietzsche's typology of moral nature to Dostoevsky's moral psychology.

For Nietzsche, the character of moral activity is based on a deep, sub-

conscious sense of "power," meaning both social influence on another person or group of people and spiritual strength within one's own personality. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* he distinguishes three kinds of power relationships, symbolized by the images of the master, the slave-priest, and the philosopher-ascetic. His three moral mentalities appear at first in a diachronic perspective as three stages in the "genealogy" or "evolution" of the human psyche. Such historical imagery, it should be stressed, has nothing to do with the usual subject of history, the development of collective human entities, whether social or state structures, but rather offers a metaphor for the subconscious development of the human psyche.

The archetype of the master represents Nietzsche's most primitive moral complexion. This type is endowed from the start with a physical and social power that is never challenged and thus never refined. Although such a psyche has a strong, seemingly innate sense of spiritual "health," it lacks what Nietzsche values as the highest spiritual traits: long memory, the power of observation and reflection, insight, abstract critical ability, the imaginative ability to transpose an image into metaphor and ultimately into myth. This is rather a simple, indeed, childishly naive and brutal mentality, capable of immediate action and able instantly to forget the consequences of such action. At most, such a type can be trained to observe certain customs and behavioral limits, but it is incapable of deeper "moral" consciousness.

A parallel to the master mentality can certainly be found in Dostoevsky's depictions of "men of action," the type characterized by the officer Zverkov in *Notes from Underground*. The closeness of the parallel is evident in the name given to this type: for both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, the direct, active, unreflective mentality is "beastly," the closest visible image there is to subliminal human instinct and drive, the basic "stuff" of human nature. "Zverkov" derives from the word for "little beast" (*zverek*); another term that Nietzsche relates to the "master" mentality is "blond beast." One difference here is that whereas Dostoevsky stresses the smallness of spirit, the stupidity, and the narrowness inherent in the man of action, Nietzsche emphasizes the uncomplicated brute power, the psychological simplicity of the master, as the basic intractable material that the real moral consciousness must confront as it develops through the slave-priest and the philosopher-ascetic stages.

Moral consciousness as such, based on a capacity for symbolic thought, develops in Nietzsche's second and third archetypes. Of particular importance as a psychological foundation for deep moral consciousness in both priest and ascetic philosopher is the notion of resentment, literally *ressentiment*, or "re-feeling." In the priest this is a negative response to the simple, clear sense of self and spontaneous, direct behavior characteristic of the master. It is a complex response full of both envy at the master's ability to take action and contempt at that type's naïveté and lack of insight.

Similarities to the priest mentality can be found in Dostoevsky's underground man, who, at once frustrated with his own ineffectuality and powerlessness vis-à-vis the "men of action" and secretly envious of the Zverkovs of this world, perversely makes a virtue out of his reflectivity and sense of insult and injury. By agonizing over his own insufficiencies as well as undermining the legitimacy of those who enjoy an uncomplicated relationship to the world, the underground man-priest type creates out of what Nietzsche calls the "ancient animal self" an antinatural consciousness and self-consciousness equipped with the equally antinatural attributes of long memory, powers of logical reasoning, and metaphorical imagination—that is, the ability to distance signs from objects and to associate signs with abstract meanings. The final result of this gnawing at oneself is, indeed, an enduring devaluation of the master-Zverkov-man-of-action type and, more important, a real deepening of consciousness.

Dostoevsky finds valuable in his underground man the apprehension of a new mentality that spurns the mere achievement of material contentment and strives toward some higher spiritual insight. Although Nietzsche shares this contempt for the attainment of material contentment as a life goal, he finds resentment in and of itself dangerous ground for a moral consciousness. He considers the priest's concealment of feelings of envy behind a screen of contempt and condescension to be dishonest. The priest does not recognize his or her own insufficiencies as such but instead objectifies them, projecting them as an a priori characteristic of the world. In a position of power, the priest type would be inclined to give vent to such unacknowledged impulses, wreaking vengeance on opponents, punishing those within reach while asserting an absolute, unquestioned authority. What is more, contempt for naïveté and spontaneity easily translates into an inclination to repress everything "natural" in human nature. Concealed here is a willingness to dispense with the very real life energy of subliminal impulses and the direct power embodied in the mentality of the master. The divining of an "ideal" state of being, to Nietzsche, is dishonest and destructive because it is motivated by a desire to disown this primordial, animal stuff of which humans are made. In this denial, this reversal of material and spiritual values, Nietzsche finds the kernel of a nihilist consciousness.

Another stage of formation of moral consciousness, one that builds on and potentially reaches beyond the reactivity of the underground man and Nietzsche's priest mentality, is Dostoevsky's concept of what is typically translated as "self-laceration" (*nadryv*). Self-laceration includes notions of tearing away, of mocking and undercutting one's own instinctive responses—in short, of self-torment. Self-laceration is essentially a semiconscious conflict between cherished moral "ideals," for example, love, self-sacrifice, or honesty, and the way they are realized in the complex and contradictory human psyche of the "insulted and injured." If resentment is founded on a

vicious desire to avenge oneself for one's feelings of inadequacy, then inherent in self-laceration is likewise a projection of one's own sense of insufficiency onto a person perceived to be more powerful, a "tormentor," and a desire to punish that person for one's own suffering. One way of doing this is to claim the moral high ground, to project oneself as being morally superior to the "other." Although not fully articulated, such an emotional complex certainly motivates the underground man's behavior toward Zverkov and his crowd.

It is in *The Brothers Karamazov* that the notion of self-laceration is fully developed. Although nearly every character suffers his or her own torment (with the exceptions of Zosima and Fedor Karamazov), one of the central dramas of self-laceration is played out in the character of Katerina. A proud, highly principled woman, Katerina resents her indebtedness to such a seemingly unprincipled "lush" as Dmitrii Karamazov, who, by magnanimously giving money to her and her father, makes her social "fall" painfully obvious to her and thus becomes for her both a savior and a tormentor. Vowing to set him free of his debauched life but to deny herself and follow him faithfully everywhere, she secretly wishes to punish him and to bind him with the same chains of insult and injury that she feels herself. Thus, she wants in equal parts to sacrifice herself for Dmitrii's salvation and to hurt him. In this inner moral contradiction, the genuine desire to enact high moral values and the equally strong urge to use them to do harm embody the essence of the moral dilemma in self-laceration and, to a lesser degree, in resentment. Moreover, inherent in both—and a central quality of moral consciousness—is a valuative dualism, that is, a concurrent recognition of the insufficiency of subliminal human drives and a will to shape them in some way according to some perceived "higher," more desirable blueprint.

One of the most important aspects of Dostoevsky's and Nietzsche's moral psychologies is the process of making oneself conscious of self-laceration and resentment as an emotional complex derived from one's own suffering due to one's self. A morally conscious person must recognize the impact of this complex on any perception of the world and must understand that this perception is not some absolute, objective reality. The most important outcome of this recognition is a willingness to confront self-laceration or resentment as a part of one's emotional constitution without repressing or objectifying it. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche speaks eloquently of a struggle between master and slave impulses as a chief attribute of his ascetic philosopher:

The two *opposing* values "good and bad," "good and evil," have been engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years; and though the latter value has certainly been on top for a long time, there are still places where the struggle is as yet undecided. One might even say that it has risen ever higher and thus become

more and more profound and spiritual: so that today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a "*higher nature*," a more spiritual nature, than that of being divided in this sense and a genuine battleground of these opposed values.⁶

For both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, dealing with this moral-psychological tangle is essential to finding in oneself a principle of moral-aesthetic integrity. Both replace the old notion of freedom as escape *from* oneself with a freedom gained by admitting one's true nature to oneself. Just as, for Nietzsche, coming to terms with resentment, with the "slave" in oneself, is essential to growing toward a constructive moral consciousness, so, for Dostoevsky, facing self-laceration is crucial to forming moral integrity, that moral image he believes exists in every person. It is in the self-conscious answerability to oneself and to the other that one can ultimately find whatever constructive freedom is to be had in the world.

Perhaps the most generalized expressions of the roles of self-laceration and resentment in moral psychology are the images of Jesus conceived by Ivan Karamazov in "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" and by Nietzsche in his essay *The Antichrist*. In important ways, each work represents a key step in its author's effort to acknowledge the deeper valuative implications of self-contempt, insult, and envy in himself.

It is important to note in passing a historical point of contact between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, one long recognized in Nietzsche criticism, that concerns this discussion of moral psychology and its realization in the image of Jesus. In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche hails Dostoevsky precisely as a great *psychologist* and regrets that during Jesus' day there was no such psychological genius as his Russian "mentor" who could document the complex spiritual life of a man of whom all that remains are the strange, mysterious symbols and allegories that he used to encode his inner experience.⁷ Here, too, Nietzsche first speaks of Jesus as an "idiot" from a Russian novel (A, 29), meaning that Jesus, in Nietzsche's view, lacked the strength and will to bring about the renewal of the world. Many literary historians have raised the question of Nietzsche's familiarity with Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*, which, it appears, he did not know. Nietzsche was quite forthright in acknowledging his debt to Dostoevsky, readily mentioning those of Dostoevsky's novels that he *did* know, for example, *Notes from the House of the Dead* and *The Underground Spirit* (*L'esprit souterrain*), a French compilation of "The Landlady" and the second part of *Notes from Underground*.⁸ In all probability we should seek the source of the word *idiot* elsewhere. It is worth remembering that a student of the historical Jesus, Ernest Renan, whose work *The Life of Christ* (*La vie de Jésus*) both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche read, referred to Jesus as an "idiot" well before either of the other two did.⁹ It is thus likely that each borrowed the term from Renan independent of the other.

As the critic Uwe Kuhneweg notes, Nietzsche used the term *idiot* to

mean something quite different from Dostoevsky's concept. He meant *idiot* as "exception," or a person whom it is impossible to follow or imitate.¹⁰ Nietzsche, for example, writes in *The Antichrist*: "Basically there was only one Christian, and he died on the Cross. The 'Evangel' died on the Cross. What was called 'Evangel' from this moment onwards was already the opposite of what he had lived: 'bad tidings,' a 'dysangel'" (A, 151). If we agree with Nietzsche that one can only call a Christian a person of purely beatific spirit, free of resentment and of the desire to punish people, whose behavior is so consistent and true to itself as to lead to an extreme fate, such as death on a cross, then indeed Jesus is an "exception" or "idiot" in Nietzsche's sense of the word.

There are remarkable parallels between the image of Jesus in *The Antichrist* and "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor."¹¹ Both represent a Jesus free of the many legends woven around his life and without his divine "connections," that is, without his mythic function as mediator between heaven and earth. It is noteworthy that without these added embellishments Jesus stands out in sharper relief as a spiritually powerful personality. Although in neither of the two texts does he possess broad social or political powers—for example, the power to prevent kings and priests from enslaving the mass of humanity—he does offer in his concrete actions a credible *personal* alternative to enslavement in the idea of personal choice and personal responsibility (with Ivan) and the notion of moral integrity unhampered by resentment (with Nietzsche) (A, 147–48).

These images represent their authors' personal confrontation with self-laceration and moral resentment. Ivan, for example, feels an astonishing passion for life, but his feelings are inhibited by equally strong feelings of offense at the injustices of human life and the cruelty of those who wield power, and of fastidiousness toward his fellow humans. As a sign of protest and revenge, he conceives in "The Legend" a theocratic world order where the right of moral choice is denied. An extremely reduced image of Jesus hardly speaks or moves and lacks even a name (Ivan refers to him with the scant pronoun *he*). This Jesus would seem too weak to argue for human freedom. He neither rebels nor incites others to resist the Inquisition. His very silence would seem to affirm the nonacceptance of God's world by his author, Ivan. Nonetheless, as Alesha justifiably remarks, Ivan secretly seems to be praising Jesus. His silence in the face of the Inquisitor's threats and his one significant action, the gentle kiss he gives the Inquisitor, may be interpreted as a powerful expression of resistance to the verbal tyranny, indeed, the moral "monologism" of a person in power. With his silence, Jesus hints at another possible approach to human interaction, to language, to dialogue—in short, to morality.

Just as Ivan seems to show a disembodied Jesus who is only half a person, thus overtly attempting to cast down a seemingly all-powerful symbol of

freedom and moral responsibility, so Nietzsche offers an image of an imbecilic Jesus, emotionally arrested in childhood and suffering from a religious psychosis. But having put forth such a condemning image, Nietzsche, like Ivan, hints that he is transforming what for him has come to symbolize the mentality of resentment, of revenge on the world-as-it-is. Nietzsche attributes to his Jesus a psychological integrity not unlike that of his "higher nature," his philosopher-ascetic who confronts in himself his desire for revenge, his "slave" psychology of inferiority. Nietzsche admires in Jesus the moral consistency with which he pursued his chief value, love, even when this pursuit paradoxically led to sacrifice on the cross. Nietzsche sees in this Jesus the real, direct truth of the maxim that the kingdom of heaven is within you: "The 'kingdom of God' is not something one waits for; it has no yesterday or tomorrow, it does not come 'in a thousand years'—it is an experience within a heart; it is everywhere, it is nowhere" (A, 147). Jesus, in Nietzsche's view, is a "higher type" not because he sacrificed himself to an objectively existing god and not because he wanted to redeem humanity, but because he knew himself profoundly and remained true to himself: he died as he lived, according to the prompting of his heart. He left humanity not some prescriptive, normative moral system but something much more valuable: a *practice* of love.

This "bringer of glad tidings" died as he lived, as he *taught*—not to "redeem mankind" but to demonstrate how one ought to live. What he bequeathed to mankind was his *practice*: his bearing before the judges, before the guards, before the accusers and every kind of calumny and mockery—his bearing on the *Cross*. He does not resist, he does not defend his rights, he takes no steps to avert the worst that can happen to him—more, *he provokes it*. . . . And he entreats, he suffers, he loves *with* those, *in* those who are doing evil to him. (A, 147)

In his loyalty to personal integrity, even to the death, Nietzsche's Jesus embodies something other than the nihilist resentment that Nietzsche finds at the heart of Christian doctrine. But like Ivan's Jesus, this image in no way claims to offer a blueprint or model, a new myth negotiating between the seemingly irreconcilable oppositions inherent in concepts of both self-laceration and resentment. Rather, these figures offer very personal, honest responses to their author's semiacknowledged feelings of vengeance, the destructive desire inherent in both Nietzsche's and Ivan's quests for moral "truth," merely to tear down existing symbols of spiritual power. Their reduced visions of Jesus are not so nihilistic as they first seem, in that they set some minimal level on which moral integrity can exist. For Ivan, it is inner fortitude, an ability to recognize and resist the moral and verbal despotism that those in power try to impose on their subjects. For Nietzsche, it is a childlike clarity of vision and impulse and an immediacy of self-acceptance.

Nietzsche attempts a further extension of the problem in the third part of *On the Genealogy of Morals* in his treatment of the philosopher-ascetic and the notion of "bad conscience."¹² And both authors attempt corresponding refigurations of Jesus, Dostoevsky in Zosima and Alesha and Nietzsche in Zarathustra. We have already said that Nietzsche's "higher nature" recognizes and accepts in himself both "slave" and "master" impulses. His is a deepened self-consciousness that refuses to project personal failing as the hateful condition of an evil world. He is willing now to accept and suffer personal weakness for what it is. Through this clear-sighted, honest suffering of oneself, Nietzsche hopes, can come inner integrity and a transfiguration of moral consciousness (*BGE*, 68). Beside the priest morality of inhibition and "taming" of animal impulses, of universal, prescriptive moral "rules" (which will certainly continue to exist, and even should, in Nietzsche's view, as a necessary way station in the spirit's development) will come, he says, only to the most self-aware, strongest spirits a notion of moral consciousness as acceptance and sublimation of animal urges (*GM*, 111). This attitude informs a kind of transfiguration of Jesus in Nietzsche's philosopher-ascetic, Zarathustra, and Dostoevsky's holy types, Zosima and Alesha. It is important to repeat that none of these protagonists offers a model or blueprint adequate for all humans. At the heart of this thinking is the conviction that all people who venture beyond morality-as-law have to make sense of their subliminal nature and apprehend the specific ground for moral integrity on their own.

It will be useful here to reflect on the relationship between acknowledgment of oneself, moral integrity, and the moral issues of freedom and responsibility. Clearly neither Dostoevsky nor Nietzsche accepts the Enlightenment concept of a free will or the notion that human nature is something from which people can free themselves. Whatever freedom there is to be had comes in the process of apprehending and knowing oneself as one is and in the process of self-transfiguration. Whatever responsibility there is rests in one's effort to act in a coherent manner and to enact one's sense of personal integrity while answering to oneself and to other people.

Both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche arrive at a narrative (*fabula*) of human moral experience that is not as rigid as a formula or a law prescribing the good life. It is based not on imitation, as perhaps such codifications of value as the Ten Commandments or Russian saints' lives were, but on the inner quest of a personality integrated in conscious conflict with itself. Thus, rather than create a new dogma, both writers stress the interplay between rational, system-making faculties and subconscious, system-breaking impulses within the psyche.

Although critics have frequently found in Zosima and Alesha the inheritors of the Russian hagiographic tradition, it must be said that this obvious inheritance of virtues of simple resignation and self-denial is made to con-

front deeper psychological complexities.¹³ We even encounter a form of Christianity that shares a good deal with Nietzsche's "antichristian" acceptance of the "ancient animal self" (*GM*, 87) as the raw material for the formation of moral personality. Dostoevsky is not interested either in life after death or in people such as Father Ferapont, who spend their lives condemning this world and readying themselves for the other world. Nor is he interested in miracles or the intervention of some supernatural realm in human life. His focus is firmly fixed on earthly life and human society. For example, events in *The Brothers Karamazov* occur primarily in four locales, three of which correspond to the three spheres of the Christian universe: the monastery at Zosima's, or "heaven" (characterized by a moral psychology of self-abnegation [*smirenje*]); the town or "purgatory"—"earthly life," with its moral psychology of self-laceration; and the house of Fedor Karamazov, or "hell," with its moral psychology of sensuality (*sladostrastie*). The fourth, Mokroe, corresponds to a non-Christian sphere, adjacent but not identical to the "earthly life" of the town. It is the locus of Dmitrii's "orgy" and appears, to some degree, as a "field of battle" between subconscious drives and the ruinous effects of self-laceration.

In *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, each thinker affirms the *daimon* within human nature, which Dostoevsky calls sensuality and which Nietzsche variously terms the "Dionysian," the "ancient animal self," the "body," or the "big self."¹⁴ This subliminal realm of dark, violent impulses both gives a person the energy and desire to live and dictates to the ego or "small self" how it should proceed. It seems almost like a god within—what ancient Greeks might have called the god Dionysus—existing as if beyond human will and intention, yet exerting a strong influence on moral character and motivating behavior. It is worth remembering that, for Nietzsche, one has a choice about how to treat this inner realm, either to repress and "tame" it through an authoritarian moral code or to recognize its potentially constructive role, to form and transform it through a process very like sublimation. And perhaps in this choice is the ultimate moral freedom.

A close parallel to this inner Dionysian realm may be found in Dostoevsky's concept of Karamazov sensuality (*sladostrastie*). In its naked form, it is a brutish display of violence, lust, and power; morally it is ruinous, subverting all higher tendencies in human nature. Yet it is also the source of life energy. It is enough to remember that Dostoevsky focuses his novel on none other than the Karamazovs, all of whom in some way embody this instinct, the premoral "thing-in-itself" from which proceeds both the worst evil and the greatest good.

The closeness of this concept of sensuality to the Dionysian is further emphasized through the use of Dionysian leitmotifs in *The Brothers Karamazov*—for example, the connection of wine-drinking to expressions of sensuality, the references to Karamazov "orgies," and the use of Dionysian names,

in particular Dmitrii. Dmitrii, whose name comes from that of the Greek goddess Demeter, the mother of Dionysus, treads a path leading perilously close to his father's life of wantonness. And yet in his very sensual character we find a basis for moral honesty and integrity lacking in his father, who was long ago consumed by self-laceration and has resolved the problem by abandoning all claim to the moral high ground and giving in to the worst excesses of sensual behavior. Dmitrii, by contrast, listens to the dictates of his intuition, according to which he spontaneously, if inconsistently, modifies his behavior.

Smerdiakov and Ivan are both very squeamish about and contemptuous of human nature. The two are close in age, and in their mentality they share something with Nietzsche's priest. Both reject spontaneous feeling in themselves, seeing it as weakness. In Smerdiakov this denial is expressed as cynicism, petty calculation, and vulgar sentimentalism. Although Ivan, by contrast, is capable of sincere and noble feeling, he continually denies it in himself. The weakening of such spontaneous energy leads to a total reliance on divine force for the priest, and reason for Ivan, in order to "tame" the most destructive and violent human urges. The repression of the Dionysian impulse in these two men figures in the leitmotifs of the novel through their almost complete abstention from wine.

Dionysian leitmotifs associated with Alesha's moral-psychological development reveal the seeds of a transfigurative morality. During his crisis of faith after the death of Zosima, Alesha goes with Rakitin to Grushenka's to drink champagne. Here his intention of drinking wine points to a possible willingness to lose himself in the blind, amoral force of sensuality. Later, when he returns to the monastery and prays at Zosima's coffin, he hears Father Paisy reading about the miraculous transformation of water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Falling asleep, he dreams of finding Zosima at the wedding. Zosima rejoices that the water is being turned to wine for the people. Here, just as wine is used in the parable to celebrate the energy and joy of life, so the expression of Karamazov sensuality in Alesha is sublimated to a life-affirming ecstasy.

The narrative of an emergent moral consciousness at the heart of *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* alludes in important ways to Jesus' life. Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that Jesus died too soon. Dostoevsky's and Nietzsche's quests for an integral moral image are not embodied in but rather represent extensions of the life of Jesus. For example, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* starts when Zarathustra is thirty years old, near the age when, according to legend, Jesus died on the cross. Zarathustra may be understood as Jesus, had he lived into old age. Zarathustra has much the same willingness to deal with all people, the kind and the malicious, the pathological and the simple. Although he admires the child as a symbol of new creation, he does not suffer from the childish psychosis that Nietzsche

finds in the historical Jesus. He acknowledges the whole complexity of human instinct and grapples with the problem of making sense of these instincts in the framework of moral personality. Still, Zarathustra is more circumspect than Nietzsche's Jesus: he is wary of people (indeed, the majority of people) who are not willing or able to understand him, who will distort his words in a vulgarly literalist way. This fear is what pushes him away from the mob at the marketplace, where his metaphors and parables are taken at face value and made absurd.

The Christian-Dionysian narrative that Dostoevsky and Nietzsche create, each in his own way, comprises four major events. And here, it should be stressed, is the heart of Dostoevsky's and Nietzsche's concepts of freedom and responsibility. The first event is the protagonist's "moral rebellion," that is, an insistence on freedom *from* the existing state of things. Here is a passionate rejection of the earth, of everything ugly and base in human nature, and, ironically, a willingness to submit to some high ideal that promises to purify and deliver one from oneself and one's baser nature. And here is the source of self-laceration and resentment.

The second event is the recognition of the falseness of one's contrived moral identity and of the effects of self-laceration or resentment in one's relationship to oneself as well as to other people. Protagonists sacrifice the "small self" as the third stage in this narrative, only to founder near madness in agony and self-torment, having lost all moral orientation, accepting neither the "earthly" nor the "divine," neither the real nor the ideal. Here is the essence of what Nietzsche calls "bad conscience."

The final stage is a new clarity of vision based on an ecstatic acceptance of human nature as the source of life energy. This stage goes beyond priestly processes of denying violent urges. Protagonists in this state of ecstasy stand in the midst of human existence, having shed their earlier contemptuous, "otherworldly" attitude. As with Alesha's dream of the marriage at Cana, the renewed moral consciousness channels and transfigures subliminal impulse. Achieving such a life-affirming perspective, protagonists become free *for* productive purposes. The acceptance of earthly existence gives one the basis for genuine "answer-ability." Instead of denying and refusing to respond to human nature or blindly following the Dionysian impulse, one can see the effects of both urges and respond to them honestly, as they occur in oneself and in the other.

A major point about this "self-overcoming," this transfiguration of the animal self, is that it cannot happen once and for all. Rather, it is a momentary realization, an epiphany whose memory stays with one for life. There is no final "happy ending." People must continually confront the psychological complexions with which they were born. The difference is that the epiphany experienced and remembered gives people the desire to know themselves as they are. This experience of deep self-knowledge and self-acceptance can

recur. It saturates Nietzsche's later writings and specifically informs Zarathustra's struggle, beginning with his early rejection of humanity as an unthinkable "herd" and his somewhat malicious counterpositioning of a progressivist notion of the "superman," that is, superman as final stage of the evolutionary path from "ape" and passing through "man." Following this moral rebellion, he comes to the realization that his disciples can only come to *their* own self-knowledge if they reject him as their master and his philosophy as their faith. This realization is a form of sacrifice of the "small self." Thereupon Zarathustra suffers a period of deep agony at the ugliness of human nature within himself. But in contrast to the first stage of rejection, this stage marks an introspective and more clear-sighted meditation on human nature, culminating in the deep recognition of existence as it is, embedded in the idea of "eternal recurrence." Zarathustra has become free of his progressivist claims and has arrived at the deeper, regenerative concept of revaluation of values. Here is also a notion of self-creation in the rethinking of a whole religio-philosophical tradition in the light of an honest confrontation with oneself.

Dostoevsky also conjoins Christian and Dionysian impulses in his Karamazov protagonists. Each of them pursues his inner quest in a different way, and each is at a different stage of the process. For example, if we are to believe the predictions of Zosima, Alesha's experiences during the deaths of the elder and of his own father are only a pale prefiguration of future torment. Ivan, by contrast, has denied in himself that power of blind instinct that later becomes objectified in his fantasy as the devil. He comes to understand what role he has played in his father's murder and guesses at the power of the subconscious forces that he tried to repress through sheer mental effort. This flash of insight represents the beginning of Ivan's torment, but it is a torment without a conscious sacrifice of his "small self," his ego, and its claim over his inner being. This festering self-laceration leads to serious and possibly lasting psychological disorder. Within the limits of the novel, Dmitrii goes farthest in his spiritual quest. While he spends most of the novel in a condition of torment, of earnest confrontation with all the ugliness in his nature, in Mokroe he reaches a resolution in the dream about the dying child. Here he discovers in himself a new sensitivity and tenderness, a profound acceptance of human nature and, in particular, his *own* nature. The impending years of Siberian incarceration become less daunting because he has punctured his contempt for human suffering, whether of others or his own, and embraced the shared humanity that links him with other people. At this moment he has become capable of real response to himself and others, of productive, life-affirming interaction. For at least an instant, he has become morally responsible.

For Dostoevsky, as for Nietzsche, a moral consciousness striving for freedom and responsibility rests on a paradox. Ultimately, one has very little

choice in life, and the only choice one has is to act willfully or to gain perspective and self-awareness and thus some control over one's actions and reactions. It is only through an *acceptance* (although decidedly not passive resignation) of the basic and unchanging conditions of human nature, gained through a meditative perspective, an acquired consciousness of the action of subconscious or semiconscious impulses in one's own personality, that one becomes able to "use" them, to focus and channel them toward productive ends. An acceptance of the ultimate intractability of human nature and of the relative weakness of forces of reason in the whole chemistry of the human psyche, therefore, makes possible a kind of provisional change, a "self-overcoming," as Zarathustra would say. This is not a canceling of the "minuses" and an emphasis on the "pluses," but a transfiguration of blind violence, will, sexuality, by channeling them toward some creative, life-affirming goal, whether personal, sociopolitical, or intellectual-scientific.

This being said, it is essential finally to reemphasize the very real differences in Dostoevsky's and Nietzsche's moral concepts. Dostoevsky's moral consciousness is much more socially oriented than Nietzsche's. If Nietzsche is concerned primarily with penetrating the complex interactions of subliminal forces in the *intrapersonal* sphere, Dostoevsky is most interested in the resolution of conflicts between demands of personal integrity and social conformity in the *interpersonal* sphere. Thus, whereas for Nietzsche "responsibility" pertains largely to one's ability to apprehend and deal honestly with the other *within* oneself, Dostoevsky's notion of responsibility includes this as well as a full awareness of one's impact on the whole ecology of human relations. And certainly Dostoevsky much more than Nietzsche finally endorses his own somewhat idiosyncratic notion of equality and gives less weight to the notion of self-creation than to a dream of social unity and harmony.