

Ivan Karamazov as a Philosophical Type — But Which One and in What Ways? A Narratological Reading of a Philosophical Novel

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The title of this article reads as a response to a classical text in the reception history of Dostoevsky, and more specifically in the tradition of approaching him as a *philosopher*: Sergei Bulgakov’s “Ivan Karamazov as a philosophical type” (1903). Yet this article does not so much engage with that reception history but rather attempts to examine what kind of philosophy Ivan Karamazov may express in *The Brothers Karamazov* and not least *how* and *where* in the novel he does this. Here I propose to do something that other scholars have paid little attention to in their readings: to demonstrate that there is a systematic distinction in Dostoevsky’s novel between Ivan’s own philosophical statements and his statements reported by others, and that the distinction between the two is also thematically significant. The question this article explores is, what do we hear from Ivan’s own mouth in the novel, and what do others attribute to him? And why is this difference important?

The article will map Ivan’s most significant philosophical statements and examine the pattern that emerges from the distribution and representation of different points of view and even worldviews. I will show that the statements coming directly from Ivan possess a positive ethical character, whereas those reported by others are of a more nihilistic and hence negative kind. Different types of representation correspond to a conflict associated with Ivan between *rational egoism* on the one hand and *moral sensibility* on the other, which are the terms that Joseph Frank (2002, 597) uses to describe him. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, thus, a distinction in content overlaps with a distinction in speech representation. This, I will argue, gives meaning to the novel’s structure itself, however loose in many respects (cf. Morson 1994, 137–47).

1. Methodological and theoretical preliminaries

What may count as a “philosophical statement” is surely debatable, but what I have in mind here are articulations that seem to be informed by a particular worldview, be it

atheism, nihilism, romanticism, orthodoxy, to mention the positions that are often associated with the four brothers Karamazov (Miller 2008). Focusing on characters' statements is one way a novel may be considered philosophical or read as philosophy, and as for Ivan Karamazov, atheism and rationalism are cases in point. Given the tension referred to above, it is necessary to reexamine what he actually says and what he supposedly has said.

To examine the philosophical degree and meaning of statements may appear to imply a focus on philosophy *through literature*, as opposed to *philosophy in literature*, to introduce a distinction developed by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen. "Philosophy through literature" typically means philosophical discussions by literary characters in particular situations, but the story in which the discussions take place is not necessarily related to them. By implication, "literary forms are used to communicate philosophical content which has already been worked out" (Anthony Quinton, cited in Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 391). "Philosophy in literature," by contrast, means a literary, narrative presentation of fictive characters with philosophical implications. It is when you have a literary interpretation, an "imaginative world artistically constructed," of a theme also encountered in philosophical deliberation, but on equal terms (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 391; see also Skilleås 2001, 136). In short, the literary form is not external to the content.

"Philosophy in literature" is often associated with the approaches of Martha Nussbaum (1990), Stanley Cavell (2003) and Richard Rorty (2010), or by Gary Saul Morson in Slavic studies (1994; 1998). These scholars approach literature as something beyond mere illustrations of philosophical issues. They see literary works as enabling perspectives on philosophically significant topics that traditional philosophical discourses are unable to provide. To take Cavell's classic studies of Shakespeare as an example, Shakespeare's treatment of scepticism in the tragic form illuminates and exposes the sceptic attitude to life, above all what it covers (unwillingness to accept certain truths). It enables us — as readers or spectators — to reflect on the characters and their views of life in ways they seem unable to do themselves. As Nussbaum emphasizes, the readers' response and reflection sparked by the style of a fictional work is crucial to philosophy "in" literature (Nussbaum 1990, 5).

Lamarque and Olsen's distinction suggests that "philosophy in literature" acknowledges the *literariness* of a work, whereas "philosophy through literature" seems to ignore the aesthetic dimension. Indeed, the classical readings of Dostoevsky-as-philosophy have been characterized as reducing the complexity of the novels that express this philosophy. Mikhail Bakhtin described the philosophical readings of Rozanov, Merezhkovskii, Shestov and others as "the path of philosophical monologization" (1984, 9), as they force a plurality of consciousnesses into a single worldview. In a similar but

complementary vein, Arne Ackermann (1998) has argued that “de-aestheticization” (деэстетизация) is typical of how Russian symbolism received *The Brothers Karamazov*. By contrast, I intend to show that a focus on utterances does not limit us to philosophical “positions” that we may identify in them — one for each brother, so to speak — but that their narrative representation puts them into perspective. Moreover, an analysis of so-called philosophical statements need not be devoid of aesthetic sensitivity if it considers the interaction of style and content.

To accomplish this task, I focus on speech representation. Speech representation is a matter of *distance* (Lothe 2000, 45). Distance does not have to be distortive, but it arises from the mediation through a different character (or narrator) for purposes that may differ from the originator’s when s/he uttered them — as imagined by the reader but also at times as suggested by the text. While Dostoevsky’s novels are certainly “about ideas as much as about people” (Terras 1998, 9), the representation of ideas is also significant. A primary reason is, as Robin Feuer Miller has argued, that in *The Brothers Karamazov*, “we see precisely how important it was to him [Dostoevsky] that characters express their ideas in their own way” (2008, 18). This prompts the reader to “begin to differentiate between the effects that the same truth has coming from the mouths of different characters” (Miller 2008, 32). By implication, as Vladimir Kantor has pointed out in an illuminating reading of the novel, “Ivan Karamazov’s problem is the problem of a person’s responsibility for a word uttered by him” (Kantor 2009, 219). My reading focuses on situations when this “word” is passed on by someone else to a third person and even, eventually, back to the originator, possibly with a new meaning.

A key point in Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoevsky is that ideas are incarnated and that this incarnation makes both characters, ideas, and the relationship between them dynamic. In the second chapter of *Problems in Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin discusses the relationship between author and hero. He emphasizes that the hero’s self-consciousness is “relatively free and independent” (from the author) and thus capable of self-reflection and even, as I see it, self-transgression. What made the hero in the first place a seemingly “completed image of reality” ultimately becomes “material of his self-consciousness” (Bakhtin 1984, 51–52).

In the third chapter, “The Idea in Dostoevsky,” Bakhtin goes on to emphasize that

Dostoevsky was capable of *representing someone else’s idea*, preserving its full capacity to signify as an idea, while at the same time also preserving a distance, neither confirming the idea nor merging it with his own expressed ideology. The idea, in his

work, becomes the *subject of artistic representation*, and Dostoevsky himself became a great *artist of the idea*. (Bakhtin 1984, 85, italics in original)¹

While this statement is first and foremost about the author's relationship to others, it also suggests that the artistic representation of ideas in Dostoevsky's works has a truly dynamic character. Persons do not only incarnate ideas; these persons have a reflexive and even critical attitude to the ideas they otherwise seem to embody. This goes even for the pious Alësha Karamazov, as we shall see in an example later. As Bakhtin puts it, "the idea begins to live [...] only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*" (Bakhtin 1984, 88).² It is, therefore, problematic, as I see it, to state, for instance, that Ivan "represents" rational egoism.

My argument is theoretically based in a well-known statement from Valentin Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1930) about "another's speech" as "reported speech," чужая речь: "Reported speech is speech within speech, utterance within utterance, but at the same time also speech about speech, utterance about utterance" (Voloshinov 1930, 113, translation by Morson and Emerson 1990, 163). For Voloshinov, reported speech creates a discourse characterized by active attitudes and reactions to, and hence by a particular understanding of (cf. Morson and Emerson 1990, 163), the other whose speech is reported. It displays a dynamic, dialogical interaction between two voices and their social contexts in a specific situation (Voloshinov 1930, 117). From this starting point, Voloshinov develops a distinction between a "linear style" as typical of the rendering of authoritative discourse, characterized by firm boundaries between the reported and the reporter, and a "pictorial style," which is more dialogical. Given that Dostoevsky's heroes rarely conform to stable positions and engage dialogically with ideas, his works may be categorized within the pictorial style. However, Voloshinov makes a further distinction within the pictorial style as to whether the discourse is governed by the reporter or the reported. The former case is characterized by humour/satire, enthusiasm or any other "modifier," which may distort the original message in various ways. When the reported speech takes control, or at least the lead, a truly double-voiced discourse emerges, as Bakhtin would argue in his Dostoevsky book, which was written in the same period as *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Morson and Emerson 1990, 166). In *The Brothers Karamazov*, as I will show in the next sections, the reported speech of Ivan Karamazov seems to waver between these two modes.

¹ Bakhtin's discussion of this topic was significantly expanded in the revised 1963 version of the study as compared to the first edition of 1929, one of the additions being an analysis of illustrative passages in *The Brothers Karamazov* (compare Bakhtin 2000, 64 with Bakhtin 1984, 85–92).

² As noted by Elena Namli in her reading of Bakhtin, there is no such thing as a "Dostoevsky's idea" outside of the concrete dialogical context, that is no message that should be associated with either Ivan or Alësha (their statements' "material content"); the meaning lies in the living dialogue between them (Namli 2009, 208).

2. *The first three encounters with Ivan*

The Brothers Karamazov is a first-person narrative, and the narrator (“author”) identifies Alësha as “his hero.” However, this narrator does not participate in the novel, “he” is entirely external to it. We do not know how he has come to witness everything that happens nor who has informed him. In effect, therefore, the novel functions as a third-person narrative (Lothe 2000, 22); that is, the story is told predominantly in the third-person mode by an external, “peripheral first-person narrator” (Oenning Thompson 1991, 28, 35). The narrator never vanishes completely, he resurfaces now and then with a distinct voice, but he also reports things that he as a fictional character cannot have observed, for instance, Liza whispering to Alësha (Oenning Thompson 1991, 37). By implication, the first-person narrator of *The Brothers Karamazov* does not, with a few exceptions, display the existential motivation that defines personal, first-person narrators, according to Franz Stanzel (1986, 93). Even so, Diane Oenning Thompson observes that the novel applies two types of narration: mimetic and indirect. The first type consists of characters speaking “here and now” and is more immediate (or at least creates an illusion of immediacy) and highly focused on *speech*. The second, indirect, type are the parts where the narrator chronicles and reports and is, therefore, more visible or audible, and revealing quite a few attitudes (Oenning Thompson 1991, 28–30). Thus, the narrator adds an additional layer that may be considered but generally has little effect on the issues that I raise here since these situations — with one exception — are reported by others, in the mimetic mode. The diegetic level of the narrator will therefore be omitted in the discussion below, where the focus is rather on the hypodiegetic level (Lothe 2000, 32–34), that is, on reports about reports.

The reader’s first encounter with Ivan happens in the introductory chapter (Book One, “A Nice Little Family”), where all the brothers, their father and their mothers are introduced. Having completed his studies in the natural sciences, we learn that Ivan wrote an article on quite a different topic: an ecclesiastical court and its jurisdiction. Thus, as Miller has noted, “our first real encounter with Ivan occurs through the explication of a text” (2008, 37). However, the narrator does not reveal what Ivan really had to say about this topic, only that he explored various viewpoints before drawing some conclusion. This conclusion, we are told, was “unexpected”: Several clerics found support for their own views, but so did the atheists, while some questioned its sincerity altogether. Thus, we get a vague indication that Ivan’s own opinions are at odds with those held by church representatives but not unequivocally. As the novel proceeds, the reader has few if any indications of what Ivan’s position on religious matters really is. Anticipating a significant tendency in the novel, the narrator does not address the content directly; the focus is on the responses to it.

The second encounter with Ivan is a “real” encounter in the sense that the novel describes a scene where he is present and participates. This happens in Book Two, which takes place in Zosima’s monastery. The Karamazov family gathers in the elder’s cell, but their relative Petr Miusov is also present, as are several clerics (Paisii, Iosif). While they wait for Dmitrii to show up, the others begin discussing Ivan’s article. This time we hear Ivan’s own voice, too: He is asked to present it, and although he is often interrupted by the others who are present, we now become more familiar with the article as the author himself lays it out. The article appears to be about the relationship between church and state and presents the inevitable conclusion from a correct theological point of view. After Ivan Zosima gives a long speech on the issue, where he expands on what Ivan has just said (Zosima admits that he has not read the article, but his librarian has), Zosima seems to fully subscribe to Ivan’s interpretation, and Ivan does not object. This conversation shows that Ivan and Zosima are very much in line.

The next part represents a radical shift. Dmitrii finally arrives, with the usual fuzz that his presence tends to create in this novel. Soon, however, the discussion returns to Ivan and his opinions, but now to a completely different topic, seemingly unrelated to his article. Miusov retells a conversation that took place five days earlier, where Ivan had voiced a series of radical views:

— Вообще эту тему я опять прошу позволения оставить, повторил Петр Александрович, — а вместо того я вам расскажу, господа, другой анекдот о самом Иване Федоровиче, интереснейший и характернейший. Не далее как дней пять тому назад, в одном здешнем, по преимуществу дамском, обществе он торжественно заявил в споре, что на всей земле нет решительно ничего такого, что бы заставляло людей любить себе подобных, что такого закона природы: чтобы человек любил человечество — не существует вовсе, и что если есть и была до сих пор любовь на земле, то не от закона естественного, а единственно потому, что люди веровали в свое бессмертие. Иван Федорович *прибавил при этом в скобках*, что в этом-то и состоит весь закон естественный, так что уничтожьте в человечестве веру в свое бессмертие, в нем тотчас же иссякнет не только любовь, но и всякая живая сила, чтобы продолжать мировую жизнь. *Мало того*: тогда ничего уже не будет безнравственного, всё будет позволено, *даже* антропофагия. *Но и этого мало*, он закончил утверждением, что для каждого частного лица, например как бы мы теперь, не верующего ни в Бога, ни в бессмертие свое, нравственный закон природы должен немедленно измениться в полную противоположность прежнему, религиозному, и что эгоизм *даже* до злодейства не только должен быть дозволен человеку, но *даже* признан необходимым, самым разумным и чуть ли не благороднейшим исходом в его положении. По такому парадоксу можете заключить, господа, и о всем

остальном, что изволит провозглашать и что намерен еще, может быть, провозгласить наш милый эксцентрик и парадоксалист Иван Федорович. (VII, 195–96, italics added)³

There are several things to note in this passage. First and foremost, we do not hear Ivan express these radical views himself; they are reported by someone else, by Miusov. In Victor Terras' apt description, "a major philosophical thesis is brought in through the back door, as it were: it is introduced by a minor character [...] and as an extravagant notion, not to be taken seriously" (Terras 1981, 155). As I will argue, this is not a coincidence but part of a significant pattern in the novel. Ivan's most radical views are reported by others, never directly by himself. In addition, before arriving at Ivan's views themselves, Miusov noted that the context for his verbal action was a circle consisting "predominantly of ladies." Robert Louis Jackson (1993, 295) suggests that this information, in the context of a nineteenth-century ideational novel, may indicate that Ivan mainly sought to amuse and shock. The passage leaves it unclear how serious Ivan's statements are meant.

Moreover, the passage displays a paradoxical combination of intensification and de-intensification in rendering Ivan's views or an intensification that is not logically dissolved. This style can be characterized as "Gogolian":⁴ The narrator Miusov adds more and more, postponing the main point (Мало того [...] Но и этого мало [...] даже, italicized above), but yet it is as if the most important is said at the beginning (people's love for one another and belief in immortality as a habit) since the remaining part was "added parenthetically." In sum, Miusov's account makes it unclear what the core of Ivan's argument really is. In the final sentence, he also indicates the possibility that Ivan no longer holds these views.

³ Quotations are taken from Dostoevskii 2004 (volume and page numbers given in brackets), an edition based on the classic Soviet academic edition that came out between 1972 and 1990 but with some principles of pre-Soviet orthography restored, most notably the capitalization of words referring to *God*. Quotations are furthermore provided in translation as well; I give page numbers only for references to Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky's translation (Dostoevsky 1990) in the footnotes. "Generally, again, I ask you permission to drop the subject', Pyotr Alexandrovich repeated, 'and instead let me tell you another anecdote, gentlemen, about Ivan Fyodorovich himself, a most typical and interesting one. No more than five days ago, at a local gathering, predominantly of ladies, he solemnly announced in the discussion that there is decidedly nothing in the whole world that would make men love their fellow men; that there exists no law of nature that man should love mankind, and that if there is and has been any love on earth up to now, it has come not from natural law but solely from people's belief in their immortality. Ivan Fyodorovich *added parenthetically* that that is what all natural law consists of, so that were mankind's belief in its immortality to be destroyed, not only love but also any living power to continue the life of the world would at once dry up in it. *Not only that*, but then nothing would be immoral any longer, everything would be permitted, *even* anthropophagy. *And even that is not all*: he ended with the assertion that for every separate person, like ourselves for instance, who believes neither in God not in his own immortality, the moral law of nature ought to change immediately into the exact opposite of the former religious law, and that egoism, *even* to the point of evildoing, should not only be permitted to man but should *even* be acknowledged as the necessary, the most reasonable, and all but the noblest results of his situation. From this paradox, gentlemen, you may deduce what else our dear eccentric and paradoxalist Ivan Fyodorovich may be pleased to proclaim, and perhaps still intends to proclaim.'" (69, italics and the final *even* added)

⁴ In describing them as Gogolian, I rely on the two classic studies by Boris Eikhenbaum (1919, 158) and Dmitrii Čyževskij (1937, 67–72), who both pointed to parodic intensification as one of Gogol's main stylistic devices.

To be sure, Ivan is present in the room and hears what Miusov reports. Confronted by these radical views, he does not reject or renounce what Miusov renders, when Zosima questions his views:

— Неужели вы действительно такого убеждения о последствиях иссякновения у людей веры в бессмертие души их? — спросил вдруг старец Ивана Федоровича.

— Да, я это утверждал. Нет добродетели, если нет бессмертия.

— Блаженны вы, коли так веруете, или уже очень несчастны!

— Почему несчастен? — улыбнулся Иван Федорович.

— Потому что по всей вероятности не веруете сами ни в бессмертие вашей души, ни даже в то, что написали о церкви и о церковном вопросе.

— Может быть, вы правы!.. Но всё же я и не совсем шутил... — вдруг странно признался, впрочем быстро покраснев, Иван Федорович. (VII, 196)⁵

However, this is not merely a confirmation. In rephrasing himself (and Miusov), Ivan adds the notion of “virtue” (добродетель), which Miusov did not mention. That “there is no virtue if there is no immortality” is, moreover, a view that is perfectly aligned with the religious worldview of Zosima.⁶ Judging from what we hear Ivan himself utter, his views could be claimed for by opposite sides. Furthermore, we may note that he does not repeat that “everything is permitted.” In sum, I would argue, given the active role other characters play in this scene, Ivan may be said to confirm his previously expressed views, but it is precisely a confirmation rather than an active, self-promoting act. In fact, Ivan seems to hesitate slightly. That he “wasn’t quite joking” reads as a response to Miusov and the latter’s reference to the provocative intention he may have had. This is a moment of embarrassment and yet acceptance. Zosima concludes by describing Ivan’s thinking as *dialectical*, while Ivan’s response is to accept his blessing, even by approaching him in person. At this moment, the quarrel between Dmitrii and his father Fëdor begins, leaving Ivan’s views aside.

Thus, while Ivan’s ideas are rendered in indirect speech, Ivan himself appears both reluctant and willing to take responsibility for his words. Moreover, he admits a certain inconsistency when measured against his article, as observed by Zosima in the dialogue

⁵ “Can it be that you really hold this conviction about the consequences of the exhaustion of men’s faith in the immortality of their souls? The elder suddenly asked Ivan Fyodorovich.

‘Yes, it was my contention. There is no virtue if there is no immortality’.

‘You are blessed if you believe so, or else most unhappy!’

‘Why unhappy?’ Ivan Fyodorovich smiled.

‘Because in all likelihood you yourself do not believe either in the immortality of your soul or even in what have written about the Church and the Church question’.

‘Maybe you’re right ...! But still, I wasn’t quite joking either ...’, Ivan Fyodorovich suddenly and strangely confessed — by the way, with a quick blush.” (70)

⁶ As noted by Jackson (1993, 294), this would also be Dostoevsky’s own, personal view.

cited above. His strongest defence is that he “wasn’t quite joking.” In contrast to the scene reported by Miusov, Ivan is here the confronted, not the confronter. We do not hear him advancing his position himself. This is a crucial point.

After the scene in Zosima’s cell, which ended with intense family quarrels, and Alësha has followed Zosima to bed, Alësha runs into the seminarist Rakitin, who had also been present. Rakitin starts an eager conversation with Alësha and brings up what others reported Ivan as saying (and writing). Rakitin appears more engaged but also more sarcastic and condemning than Miusov. The double-voicedness is here reduced to a minimum in the sense that it is the reporter who clearly governs (cf. Voloshinov), while very little of Ivan himself remains:

— Литературное воровство, Алешка. Ты старца своего перефразировал. Эк ведь Иван вам загадку задал! — с явною злобой крикнул Ракитин. Он даже в лице изменился, и губы его перекосилились. — Да и загадка-то глупая, отгадывать нечего. Пошевели мозгами — поймешь. Статья его смешна и нелепа. А слышал давеча его глупую теорию: «Нет бессмертия души, так нет и добродетели, значит, всё позволено». (А братец-то Митенька, кстати, помнишь, как крикнул: «Запомню!») Соблазнительная теория подлецам... Я ругаюсь, это глупо... не подлецам, а школьным фанфаронам с «неразрешимой глубиной мыслей». Хвастунишка, а суть-то вся: «С одной стороны, нельзя не признаться, а с другой — нельзя не сознаться!» Вся его теория — подлость! Человечество само в себе силу найдет, чтобы жить для добродетели, даже и не веря в бессмертие души! В любви к свободе, к равенству, братству найдет... (VII, 208)⁷

In contrast to Zosima, Raktin seems to make a connection between Ivan’s article on ecclesiastical courts and the nihilism he just overheard, although we have no other indications so far that they are directly connected. In any case, for the second time, Ivan’s nihilistic worldview is presented to us and not least to Alësha by way of reported speech, and now even filled with ironic comments and mockery of Ivan’s “theory,” seemingly from a more secularist-idealist point of view — Rakitin believes that virtue is possible without immortality. Moreover, Raktin’s rendering of Ivan is based on what Miusov reported Ivan as saying — the latter possibly with the intention to provoke. Dmitrii’s commenting voice

⁷ “Literary theft, Alyoshka. You’re paraphrasing your elder. Look what riddle Ivan has set you! Rakitin shouted with obvious spite. He even lost countenance, and his lips twisted. ‘And the riddle is a stupid one, there’s nothing to solve. Use your head and you’ll understand. His article is ridiculous and absurd. And did you hear his stupid theory just now: “If there is no immortality of the soul, then there is no virtue and therefore everything is permitted.” (And remember, by the way, how your brother Mitenka shouted, “I’ll remember!”) A tempting theory for scoundrels ... I’m being abusive, which is foolish ... not for scoundrels, but for boosting schoolboys with “unresolved depths of thought.” He’s just a show-off, and all it amounts to is: “On the one hand on can’t help admitting ..., on the other hand one can’t help confessing ...! His whole theory is squalid. Mankind will find strength in itself to live for virtue, even without believing in the immortality of the soul! Find in it the love of liberty equality, fraternity ...” (81–82)

is also heard (we did hear him shout “I’ll remember” in the previous chapter). By implication, Ivan does not represent any stable, meaningful reference in the novel thus far.

In Book Three, we move to Fëdor Karamazov’s house, where Fëdor and his son Ivan return after visiting the monastery. Alësha arrives later, having first had a long conversation with Dmitrii, or rather having listened to his long romantic-style monologues. The servant Smerdiakov is also present, and we learn that he has taken an interest in Ivan since he moved in, but we do not learn what the conversations between Ivan and Smerdiakov were about. After dinner, the father brings up the question of whether God exists. Ivan says that there is no God; Alësha that there is. Likewise, Ivan says there is no immortality; Alësha that there is. Ivan adds, though, that without God, as invented by humans, there would have been no civilization.

This is the closest we come to Ivan’s radical worldview as presented by himself, in direct speech, though not without the acknowledgement of religion’s positive role. On the other hand, we do not hear him say that there is no virtue and that everything is therefore permitted; that is the most radical corollaries of his rational egoism, according to Miusov and Rakitin’s reports. Alësha, on his part, returns to the theme early in Book Five, where he confesses to Liza that he “might not even believe in God.” Similarly, in the same book, as I will discuss below, Ivan, too, makes some amendments.

As Robert Belknap pointed out in *The Structure of The Brothers Karamazov* (1967), the novel starts as Alësha’s story — not only because the narrator says so at the opening, but because he is present in most of the scenes in the novel’s first 350 pages (Book One to Four). “Ivan’s state of mind,” by contrast, is up until Book Five “presented either behavioristically, or at second hand,” that is “externally, tending to become almost a token of the passionately doubting intellect, a tomb, a riddle” (Belknap 1967, 82). As I have shown so far, it is this part that introduces the most radical Ivan. Thus, for Ivan, there seems to be a correlation between his radicalism and its external representation. More specifically, we have encountered Ivan’s nihilistic-atheistic worldview three times at this point in the novel. The two first presentations were most elaborate, suggesting a rational egoism, but they were made by others and even third-hand (Rakitin referring to Miusov referring to Ivan). In the third instance, we finally heard Ivan utter it himself, in a conversation with his father and Alësha, but void of the conclusions of the rendered versions, regarding, for instance, the question of virtue. Thus, the reader may recognize Ivan as an atheist — he did also somewhat hesitantly confirm what Miusov said — but these scenes taken together also prompt the reader to long for a more complete version from Ivan himself. The stage is hereby set for the encounter between Ivan and Alësha in Book Five. In this conversation, as opposed to the previous ones, Ivan plays an active part. Here we will encounter “the workings of his mind” (Belknap 1967, 87). At the same time,

we will hear little or nothing of Ivan's alleged rational egoism here; the Ivan of direct speech is someone else.

3. *Pro et contra*

In the famous fifth book of *The Brothers Karamazov*, named “Pro et Contra” and containing the chapters “Rebellion” and “Grand Inquisitor,” it is Ivan who leads the conversation. He is the most talkative at the café, whereas Alësha is mostly listening while commenting now and then. Therefore, his role differs from earlier in the novel, where he usually listens, including to what others have reported about him.

In Book Five, Ivan makes few references to what we so far know of his opinions, be it to the article about ecclesiastical courts or “everything being permitted,” though the latter, as we shall see, is brought up towards the very end. At the centre is the question of God's existence, which had also been the topic of conversation at their father's place the day before. Characteristically, we now hear a more nuanced Ivan. After reviewing claims about God being “invented,” he famously ends up not rejecting God (God's existence) but his *world order*. Alësha responds by calling it “rebellion.” The conclusion of Ivan's rebellion is his “return of the ticket” to God. His main reason is children's suffering, for which Ivan provides an extensive catalogue and which God's world order has not been able or willing to eliminate. He manages to make Alësha go quite far in accepting his view as to the unacceptability of this world order.

There is at least one more reference in Ivan's talk to his earlier, radical articulations. Quite early in “Rebellion,” Ivan admits he has never been able to love other people. Herein lies a possible reference to Miusov's report, wherein Ivan is claimed to have said that “there is decidedly nothing in the whole world that would make men love their fellow men” (cf. above). However, Ivan does not present it as a general, doctrinal statement, as Miusov claimed he did. Rather, Ivan talks about *himself* as being unable to love. In what follows, there is little to indicate that Ivan lacks the ability to feel compassion. Moreover, the absence of love and compassion seems unrelated to his overall argument; I read his stories about suffering children as a confirmation of his moral sensibility (Frank), despite the ironic tone that can be heard and may have an additional tormenting effect on Alësha. In sum, Ivan's reasoning in “Pro et Contra” does not disclose any form of nihilism — at least not until Alësha brings up his earlier statements towards the very end, after Ivan's story about the Grand Inquisitor has been finished:

— Это чтобы «всё позволено»? Всё позволено, так ли, так ли?

Иван нахмурился и вдруг странно как-то побледнел.

— А, это ты подхватил вчерашнее словцо, которым так обиделся Миусов... и что так наивно выскочил и переговорил брат Дмитрий? — криво усмехнулся он. —

Да, пожалуй: «всё позволено», если уж слово произнесено. Не отрекаюсь. Да и редакция Митенькина недурна.

Алеша молча глядел на него.

— Я, брат, уезжая, думал, что имею на всем свете хоть тебя, — с неожиданным чувством проговорил вдруг Иван, — а теперь вижу, что и в твоём сердце мне нет места, мой милый отшельник. От формулы «всё позволено» я не отрекись, ну и что же, за это ты от меня отречешься, да, да? (VII, 392)⁸

Once more, it is via speech reported by others that Ivan's alleged nihilistic worldview is brought up. When confronted with the "everything is permitted" idea, we see Ivan again reacts with embarrassment. Previously, he "blushed"; this time he "turns pale," while admitting having said so (если уж слово произнесено; я не отрекись). And again, we are presented with multi-voiced reported speech: It is Dmitrii's version of Miusov's account that is considered "not bad" (редакция Митенькина недурна), albeit "naive." After the initial embarrassment, Ivan offers an ironic, "crooked grin" (криво усмехнулся) and accepts responsibility for what he said, leaving it unclear if it truly matters to him. In my understanding of this passage, a certain distance between Ivan and rational egoism remains.

Ivan still uses "everything is permitted" to challenge Alësha, asking if there still is a place for him in Alësha's heart, his statement notwithstanding. Alësha's final kiss, which imitates Christ in the story about the Grand Inquisitor that Ivan just told, suggest that there is. This brings us to the Grand Inquisitor and the question of its meaning within the novel, more specifically regarding the classical Dostoevskian theme of "the double" (Čyževskýj 1931). Several commentators have identified Ivan with the Grand Inquisitor, among them Victor Terras:

Ivan, who as the Grand Inquisitor professes a burning love of mankind, admits that he cannot love his neighbor [...]. He cannot conceive of his humanist utopia in terms other than despotic rule by an elite of wise men, which means that he sees mankind at large as weak, vile and mutinous [...]. Ivan's alienation from God has led to his alienation from his fellow men. (Terras 1981, 51)

However, it is unclear where in the novel Ivan himself defends "despotic rule," unless one reads the Grand Inquisitor as his exact double. Terras does: in a later study, he claims

⁸ "You mean "everything is permitted"? Everything is permitted, is that right, is it?"

Ivan frowned, and suddenly turned somehow strangely pale.

'Ah, you caught that little remark yesterday, which offended Miusov so much ... and that brother Dmitri so naively popped up and rephrased?' he grinned crookedly. 'Yes, perhaps "everything is permitted," since the world has already been spoken. I do not renounce it. And Mitenka's version is not so bad.'

Alyosha was looking at him silently.

'I thought, brother, that when I left here I'd have you, at least, in all the world', Ivan suddenly spoke with unexpected feeling, 'but now I see that your heart, too there is no room for me, my dear hermit. The formula, "everything is permitted," I will not renounce, and what then? Will you renounce me for that? Will you?' (263)

that the Grand Inquisitor “is a projection of his own innermost thoughts, and so in a sense his ‘double’” (Terras 1998, 114). However, I do not find Terras’ argument very convincing; in my view, there is little textual evidence to suggest that the two overlap as much as he suggests.⁹ On the contrary, in “Rebellion,” Ivan emerged precisely as a defender of the “weak, vile and mutinous.” Likewise, it is unclear to me where we see the “cold, enigmatic [...] builder of systems” or the mind that “calculatingly ensnares” Smerdiakov (Leatherbarrow 1992, 31, 34), unless, again, we identify Ivan with the Grand Inquisitor or refer to events outside the novelistic universe.

I will suggest that Alësha was on point when interpreting Ivan’s story as a “defence” of Christ, that is, the Christ figure as presented here. On the background of the catalogue of suffering in “Rebellion,” the Grand Inquisitor’s “despotic rule” can be read as a continuation of that catalogue. True, the inquisitor’s rule is presented as a solution to the “burden of freedom” and a guarantor of happiness. And Ivan, too, presents the claim that people themselves are to blame for misusing the freedom given to them (which Ivan’s “Euclidian mind” is incapable of accepting), thereby anticipating the inquisitor’s argument:

— [...] Люди сами, значит, виноваты: им дан был рай, они захотели свободы и похитили огонь с небеси, сами зная, что станут несчастны, значит нечего их жалеть. [...] (VII, 372)¹⁰

However, the inquisitor’s solution seems unacceptable to Ivan: According to Ivan’s account, the earthly paradise that provides bread in terms of “miracle, mystery and authority” is for the chosen ones, or rather for a majority, but not for all. Ivan begins his story by describing Seville during the most terrible period of the inquisition with daily executions (*auto-da-fees*). It is possibly these victims that the inquisitor refers to in the following statement:

«[...] Будет тысячи миллионов счастливых младенцев и сто тысяч страдальцев, взявших на себя проклятие познания добра и зла. Тихо умрут они, тихо угаснут во имя Твое и за гробом обрящут лишь смерть. Но мы сохраним секрет и для их же счастья будем манить их наградой небесною и вечною. [...]» (VII, 388)¹¹

⁹ The Grand Inquisitor believes in “joining the clever people,” and according to Terras, this is also Ivan’s view. Ivan even considers himself among the “clever people” (Terras 1998, 123). But Terras refers only to Ivan’s father Fëdor Pavlovich and Smerdiakov having uttered similar ideas, not Ivan himself (Terras 1998, 120, 122). Later on in Book Five, we learn that Smerdiakov describes Ivan as *umnyi chelovek* (“a clever man”) and this seems therefore to be another description of Ivan made by others, and not so much his own.

¹⁰ “[...] So people themselves are to blame: they were given paradise, they wanted freedom, and stole fire from heaven, knowing that they would become unhappy — so why pity them? [...]” (244)

¹¹ “[...] There will be thousands of millions of happy babes, and a hundred thousands sufferers who have taken upon themselves the curse of the knowledge of good and evil. Peacefully they will die, peacefully they will

According to the Grand Inquisitor, a minority of suffering souls is acceptable if it creates harmony for the majority. This is precisely the kind of harmony that Ivan will never accept: *He хочу гармонии, из-за любви к человечеству не хочу* (VII, 373).¹² Thus, the Grand Inquisitor story and its conversational frame suggest that Ivan has no other option than “returning the ticket” due to a moral sensibility evident in the dialogue with Alësha. His ethics cannot possibly permit that everything should be permitted, at least not without violating the logic of his own “Euclidean mind.”

In general, the Grand Inquisitor story is difficult to map onto the novel’s characters, not least due to all its literary qualities and ambiguities. Alësha’s kiss (and listening attitude) makes him a double of Ivan’s Christ. But we cannot identify Ivan with the Grand Inquisitor, at least not directly.¹³ Ivan is no proponent of the idea that freedom causes evil, despite his accounts of suffering. As Alësha’s response to the story suggests, it is a defence of human freedom, and early interpreters of the “Legend” read it as a story founded on “virtue” (Rozanov 1894; Bulgakov 1903). By the end of Book Five, then, we have two Ivans: one radical nihilistic, who believes that God is dead, there is no virtue and that everything is permitted, meaning that human beings themselves must invent the yardstick. And we have an ethical Ivan defending the vulnerable human being. In the remaining part of the novel, it is the radical Ivan who is at stake, again based on statements reported by others.

4. *Ivan’s “Stupid Ideas”*

Ivan’s nihilistic worldview in the remaining part of the novel is portrayed through the confrontations between Ivan and Smerdiakov in Book Eleven: the “three meetings with Smerdiakov” that eventually triggers Ivan’s hallucinations, nightmares and conversation with the Devil. Before this, Alësha visits the prison to see Dmitrii, who, in the meantime, has been arrested for the murder of their father. They start talking about the seminarist Rakitin, who is planning to write a book about Dmitrii’s case, whereby Ivan, too, becomes a topic of their conversation, if only indirectly. The thought of Rakitin makes Dmitrii furious:

expire in your name, and beyond the grave they will find only death. But we will keep the secret, and for their own happiness we will entice them with a heavenly and eternal reward. [...]” (259)

¹² I don’t want harmony, for love of mankind I don’t want it. (245)

¹³ Vetlovskaja (1977, 90) sees Smerdiakov as the Grand Inquisitor’s double, which opens up for an identification of Ivan with the Inquisitor via Smerdiakov. Kantor, meanwhile, claims that “the Grand Inquisitor has no doubles” (2001, 198). A more recent reading that seems to identify Ivan with the Grand Inquisitor quite directly has been offered by Rainer Grübel (2014), who on the basis of Ivan’s story refers to “his ethical model”/“concept” and to the inquisitor as “his alter ego” (Grübel 2014, 190, 191, 194, my emphasis). A more nuanced reading in this respect is, in my view, provided by Dirk Uffelmann in the same volume, who points to Ivan’s self-distancing with regard to his story about the inquisitor as well as to the Christian compassion that his ethical judgements after all are founded on (2014, 203, 213). Yet the parallels between Christ and Alësha emerging from the latter’s imitation are obvious, be it Alësha’s kiss (cf. Grübel 2014, 193) or his silence when listening to Ivan (Uffelmann 2014, 209–212).

— [...] А не любит Бога Ракитин, ух не любит! Это у них самое больное место у всех! Но скрывают. Лгут. Представляются. «Что же, будешь это проводить в отделении критики?» — спрашиваю. «Ну, явно-то не дадут», говорит, смеется. — «Только как же, спрашиваю, после того человек-то? Без Бога-то и без будущей жизни? Ведь это, стало быть, теперь всё позволено, всё можно делать?» «А ты и не знал?» — говорит. Смеется. «Умному, говорит, человеку всё можно, умный человек умеет раков ловить, ну а вот ты, говорит, убил и влопался и в тюрьме гниешь!» Это он мне-то говорит. Свинья естественная! [...] (VIII, 80)¹⁴

According to Dmitrii, Rakitin seems to have become more receptive to Ivan's radical ideas (contrary to the conversation with Alësha earlier), while Dmitrii, who has been described as forthcoming several times earlier in the novel, now seems more sceptical. In this passage, notably, there are no references to Ivan at all, which means that ideas earlier attributed to him now circulate independently from its alleged originator, in this case, between Rakitin and Dmitrii, who were both present in Zosima's cell in Book Two.

A little later, we also hear that Dmitrii was rude to Ivan when Ivan, despite a certain dislike for Dmitrii, came to see him after the murder and arrest:

Над свидетельством Григория об отворенной двери лишь [Дмитрий] презрительно смеялся и уверял, что это «черт отворил». Но никаких связных объяснений этому факту не мог представить. Он даже успел оскорбить в это первое свидание Ивана Федоровича, резко сказав ему, что не тем его подозревать и допрашивать, которые сами утверждают, что «всё позволено». Вообще на этот раз с Иваном Федоровичем был очень недружелюбен. Сейчас после этого свидания с Митей Иван Федорович и направился тогда к Смердякову. (VIII, 95)¹⁵

The narrator's account says nothing about how Ivan reacted to Dmitrii's provocative and mocking confrontation with his radicalism. Instead, we get another description of how his ideas circulate. The text then continues to the three encounters between Smerdiakov and Ivan after the murder.

¹⁴ “[...] And Rakitin doesn't like God, oof, how he doesn't! That's the sore spot in all of them! But they conceal it. They lie. They pretend. “What, are you going to push for that in the department of criticism?” I asked. “Well, they won't let me do it openly,” he said and laughed. “But,” I asked, “how will man be after that? Without God and the future life? It means everything is permitted now, one can do anything?” “Didn't you know?” he said. And he laughed. “Everything is permitted to the clever man,” he said. “The intelligent man knows how to catch crayfish but you killed and fouled it up, and now you're rotting in prison!” He said that to me. A natural-born swine! [...]” (589, adjusted)

¹⁵ “[Dmitry] merely laughed contemptuously at Grigory's evidence about the open door, and insisted that it was ‘the devil who opened it’. But he could not present any coherent explanation of this fact. He even managed to insult Ivan Fyodorovich in this first meeting, telling him abruptly that he was not to be suspected or questioned by those who themselves assert that ‘everything is permitted’. Generally on this occasion he was very unfriendly to Ivan Fyodorovich. It was right after this meeting with Mitya that Ivan Fyodorovich went to see Smerdyakov.” (604)

Earlier in the novel, we heard that since Ivan came to stay with his father, Smerdiakov took great interest in Ivan and, despite working as a servant, showed up during dinner every day and remained in the room for a while (cf. Book Three, chapters vii and viii). We were told that Smerdiakov listened attentively to what Ivan had to say, but, quite significantly in my view, not what these conversations were about.

Of the “three meetings with Smerdiakov” in Book Eleven, only the last one is narrated mimetically, whereas the others are flashbacks to earlier encounters. It is in the third and last meeting that Ivan realizes that Smerdiakov may have been their father’s murder and, moreover, that he has committed the crime based on what Ivan has thought him during their earlier conversations. Again, Ivan is confronted with what he has previously said:

— Была такая прежняя мысль-с, что с такими деньгами жизнь начну, в Москве, али пуще того за границей, такая мечта была-с, а пуще всё потому, что «всё позволено». Это вы вправду меня учили-с, ибо много вы мне тогда этого говорили: ибо коли Бога бесконечного нет, то и нет никакой добродетели, да и не надобно ее тогда вовсе. Это вы вправду. Так я и рассудил.

— Своим умом дошел? — криво усмехнулся Иван.

— Вашим руководством-с.

— А теперь, стало быть, в Бога уверовал, коли деньги назад отдаешь?

— Нет-с, не уверовал-с, — прошептал Смердяков.

— Так зачем отдаешь?

— Полноте... нечего-с! — махнул опять Смердяков рукой. — Вы вот сами тогда всё говорили, что всё позволено, а теперь-то почему так встревожены, сами-то-с? Показывать на себя даже хотите идти... Только ничего того не будет! Не пойдете показывать! — твердо и убежденно решил опять Смердяков. (VIII, 123–24)¹⁶

Ivan reacts at first with his “crooked grin” (cf. Book Five as cited above) but then, as Smerdiakov’s continuation suggests, seemingly backs out facing the implications. When the third conversation with Smerdiakov is over, Ivan’s hallucinations — for which the narrator gives us medical explanations — conjure up the Devil. The Devil’s speech is full

¹⁶ “‘There was such a former thought, sir, that I could begin a life on such money in Moscow, or even more so abroad. I did have such a dream, sir, and even more so as “everything is permitted.” It was true what you taught me, sir, because you told me a lot about that then: because if there’s no infinite God, then there’s no virtue either, and no need of it at all. It was true. That’s how I reasoned’.

‘Did you figure it out for yourself?’ Ivan grinned crookedly.

‘With your guidance, sir’.

‘So now you’ve come to believe in God, since you’re giving back the money?’

‘No, sir, I haven’t come to believe, sir’, whispered Smerdyakov.

‘Why are you giving it back then?’

‘Enough ... it’s no use, sir!’ Smerdyakov again waved his hand. ‘You yourself kept saying then that everything was permitted, so why are you so troubled now, you yourself, sir? You even want to go and give evidence against yourself ... Only there will be nothing of the sort! You won’t go and give evidence!’ Smerdyakov decided again, firmly and with conviction.” (632)

of irony and mockery, fragmentary without any coherent line of reasoning. The Devil confronts Ivan — or Ivan confronts himself — with what he has written and said earlier, most of which have not been presented in the novel thus far — the Devil introduces ideas and texts that are new to the reader. An exception is one remark about the Grand Inquisitor, which Ivan refuses to hear. We understand that this is one among several essays by Ivan, but we never hear what the Devil thinks of it and its ideas about freedom contra harmony. Instead, the Devil brings up another text, “The Geological Revolt” (Ivan reacts furiously to the very reference), which seems to be where he proclaimed that “everything is permitted.” The presentation remains fragmentary and ironic, and, in contrast to the Grand Inquisitor, which we have read in full, it is also conspicuously short. At one point, Ivan throws a glass at the Devil, who disappears, and then Alësha knocks on the door, informing Ivan that Smerdiakov has hanged himself.

The Devil’s main objection to Ivan’s theory is that virtue can never be entirely absent: If humans reject God, they will have to invent a moral (and immoral) substitute yardstick. The Devil lays this out by imitating Ivan’s (“my young thinker”) mind and responding to it (from *Всё это очень мило* / “It’s all very nice”):

— Вопрос теперь в том, думал мой юный мыслитель: возможно ли, чтобы такой период наступил когда-нибудь или нет? Если наступит, то всё решено, и человечество устроится окончательно. Но так как, ввиду закоренелой глупости человеческой, это, пожалуй, еще и в тысячу лет не устроится, то всякому, сознающему уже и теперь истину, позволительно устроиться совершенно как ему угодно, на новых началах. В этом смысле ему «всё позволено». Мало того: если даже период этот и никогда не наступит, но так как Бога и бессмертия всё-таки нет, то новому человеку позволительно стать человеко-богом, даже хотя бы одному в целом мире, и, уж конечно, в новом чине, с легким сердцем перескочить всякую прежнюю нравственную преграду прежнего раба-человека, если оно понадобится. Для Бога не существует закона! Где станет Бог — там уже место Божие! Где стану я, там сейчас же будет первое место... «всё дозволено», и шабаш! Всё это очень мило; только если захотел мошенничать, зачем бы еще, кажется, санкция истины? Но уж таков наш русский современный человек: без санкции и смошенничать не решится, до того уж истину возлюбил... (VIII, 142)¹⁷

¹⁷ ““The question now,” my young thinker reflected, “is whether or not it is possible for such a period ever to come. If it does, then everything will be resolved and mankind will finally be settled. But since, in view of man’s inveterate stupidity, it may not be settled for another thousand years, anyone who already knows the truth is permitted to settle things for himself, absolutely as he wishes, on the new principles. In this sense, ‘everything is permitted’ to him. Moreover, since God and immortality do not exist in any case, even if this period should never come, the new man is allowed to become a man-god, though it be he alone in the whole world, and of course, in this new rank, to jump lightheartedly over any former moral obstacle of the former slave-man, if need be. There is no law for God! Where God stands — there is the place of God! Where I stand, there at once will be the foremost place ... ‘everything is permitted’, and that’s that!” It’s all very nice; only if

Here the Devil exposes, in a mocking fashion, the seemingly unforeseen implications of Ivan's radical ideas. What the readers have been offered after Book Five, then, are several voices — those of Rakitin, Dmitrii, Smerdiakov, and the Devil — rendering Ivan, and they do it in a predominantly ironic-sarcastic (Rakitin, the Devil) or increasingly rageful manner (Dmitrii, Smerdiakov). What we never hear, however, is Ivan's own attempt to explain what he really meant by "everything being permitted" and why he said so in the first place. What he manages to say in the conversation with the Devil is that the latter has picked up his "bad" and "most stupid" thoughts (VIII, 130, 140; "stupid" was also how Rakitin described them to Alësha, cf. above). As *The Brothers Karamazov* reaches its climax, Ivan has lost control over his most provocative thoughts, while his more serious ideas, or what was meant as such, are no longer taken seriously.

The novel contains one final reference to Ivan's nihilistic ideas, which again is another character reporting Ivan's speech. It takes place in court, in the case against Dmitrii, where the prosecutor considers whether Smerdiakov may be guilty and whether it was because of Ivan's influence:

«[...] Здесь умер вчера, самоубийством, на краю города, один болезненный идиот, сильно привлеченный к настоящему делу, бывший слуга и, может быть, побочный сын Федора Павловича, Смердяков. Он с истерическими слезами рассказывал мне на предварительном следствии, как этот молодой Карамазов, Иван Федорович, ужаснул его своим духовном безудержем. „Всё, дескать, по-ихнему, позволено, что ни есть в мире, и ничего впредь не должно быть запрещено, — вот они чему меня всё учили“. Кажется, идиот на этом тезисе, которому обучили его, и сошел с ума окончательно, хотя, конечно, повлияли на умственное расстройство его и падучая болезнь, и вся эта страшная, разразившаяся в их доме катастрофа. [...]» (VIII, 189–90)¹⁸

In this passage, we hear the prosecutor report what Smerdiakov, allegedly in a hysterical manner, claimed Ivan had taught him. Moreover, Smerdiakov maintains that Ivan did so without restraint (безудержем). The prosecutor portrays a manipulative Ivan whom we never encounter in the novel directly. True, the reader may have felt that Ivan, in

one wants to swindle, why, I wonder, should one also need the sanction of truth? But such is the modern little Russian man: without such a sanction, he doesn't even dare to swindle, so much does he love the truth." (649)
¹⁸ "[...] Yesterday a certain sick idiot died here, on the outskirts of our town, by suicide; a person much involved in the present case, the former servant and, perhaps, illegitimate son of Fyodor Pavlovich, Smerdyakov. In the preliminary investigation he told me, with hysterical tears, how this young Karamazov, Ivan Fyodorovich, had horrified him with his spiritual unrestraint. "Everything, according to him is permitted, whatever there is in the world, and from now on nothing should be forbidden — that's what he kept teaching me about." It seems that this thesis, which he was taught, ultimately caused the idiot to lose his mind, though, of course, his mental disorder was also affected by his falling sickness, and by this whole terrible catastrophe that had broken out in their house. [...]" (696–97)

“Rebellion,” went quite far in tormenting Alësha by describing suffering children, but it was combined with an utmost sincere agenda of justice and dignity. By contrast, the manipulative Ivan promoting rational egoism in an unrestrained manner is only known to us via others, and mostly via more than one person, in a truly multi-layered, heteroglossian and dialogical discourse.

5. *Conclusion*

The Brothers Karamazov contains several plotlines, and in this article, I have sought to uncover one more: how ideas circulate within the novel, how they are expressed by Ivan, but also how they are attributed to him, picked up, responded to and presented by others. In the beginning, we proceed from one report of uttered nihilism and rational egoism to another, before being offered, in Book Five, a direct encounter with Ivan, where it is rather his moral sensibility, or “the depth of his ethical questioning” (Kantor 2001, 208) that is at the forefront. In the remaining part of the novel, Ivan’s radicalism, and not least its fatal consequences, are again in focus.

This otherwise loosely structured novel seems to be quite consistently organized in that Ivan’s most radical views are never presented by himself, or at least not on his own initiative. It is always reported by others in an evaluative manner by those reporting, whereby “speech in speech” becomes “speech about speech” (Voloshinov 1930). Therefore, *The Brothers Karamazov* is not only about ideas and their consequences, but also about their representation, circulation and, at times, “dubious report” (cf. Morson 1994, 136).

To be sure, Ivan does acknowledge his nihilistic utterances and sometimes (but not always) takes responsibility for them. Still, my point is that we never hear him pronounce them directly. This matters because Ivan takes a far more active part in other parts of the novel, and in these situations, he prefers to bring forth something else. By implication, the novel thematizes the issue of self-expression contra attribution by suggesting that Ivan’s nihilism and rational egoism may be seen as more peripheral concerning him as a person and yet crucial with respect to the crime committed in the novel. Thus, Ivan’s reported nihilism turns out to matter more to other characters than to himself. Since we never learn how and why it was uttered in the first place, the novel’s focus shifts to the consequences ideas may have when they are passed on and uttered by others. Kantor has rightfully pointed out that “Ivan was not able to predict how his word would echo or resound” (2001, 219), and in my view, it is by omitting the original scenes of this “word” and focusing instead on its circulation that the novel so effectively draws the attention to the echo as such.

Finally, from the patterns uncovered in the analysis above, it follows that moral sensibility is, after all, more central to Ivan than nihilism and rational egoism, although he ultimately fails to communicate it. This was also a point made by several readings in the early, philosophical reception of Dostoevsky. Here I have in mind Vasiliï Rozanov

(1894) and Sergei Bulgakov (1903), who both saw Ivan as a deeply ethical character and a critic of religion — but on a religious basis. These readers have later been criticized for not understanding the novel correctly (Terras 1998, 6), but as Harriet Murav (2004) has argued, they were quite on point in seeing Ivan as providing an absolute defence of the “absolute singularity of the other.”¹⁹ His tragedy was that his surroundings did not see this.

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¹⁹ Murav’s article discusses Rozanov’s contribution, but I think her point is applicable to Bulgakov as well.

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