EXCESS
SEX
&
ELEVATION

A Thesis submitted in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

Institute for Christian Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

by

R K SHUKER

January 19, 2006

Supervisor: Lambert Zuidervaart

Internal Examiner: Jim Olthuis

External Examiner: Diane Enns (McMaster University)

Copyright © 2006 R K Shuker

Library and Archives Canada

Published Heritage Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Direction du Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-43124-5
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-43124-5

NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Abstract

Excess, Sex & Elevation is an attempt to understand the desire for truth in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Nothing is said about what truth is, but rather why it is wanted and how it is sought. Despite their different religious beliefs (Levinas a Jew, Nietzsche an atheist, Dostoevsky a Christian), the three thinkers hold remarkably similar conceptions of truth. Truth is an individual pursuit--upwards. The self experiences a crisis of conscience upon discovering its originary excess, which is sex. The self suffers spiritually for what it is physically through the art of ascesis, turning the lust for sex into the desire for truth. And therein begins the self's elevation to the heights of truth.

In *dedication* to myself …
for my patience, enduring love,
and my remarkable ability to develop a title without a colon
… without me this would not have been possible.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations 4

Preface 5

I. EXCESS 8
1. Prelude 9
2. Need 10
3. Desire 11
4. Levinas's Description of the Self 12
5. Nietzsche's Development of the Self 19
The Savage 20
The Saint 21
The Sage 24
Self-Overcoming 24
Will to Power 26
Eternal Recurrence 27

II. SEX 30
6. Sex & the Self 31
Fornication 31
Extirpation 33
Sublimation 35
7. Why I Am So Sexy 37
8. Dostoevsky's Varieties of the Self 40
Dmitri 43
Alyosha 46
Ivan 49
9. The Karamazov Conscience 53

III. ELEVATION 57
10. The Higher Self 58
Levinas 58
Nietzsche 64
Dostoevsky 69
11. Sex & Truth 76

Bibliography 81

Abbreviations

AC Nietzsche. *The Anti-Christ.*

BGE Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil.*

BK Dostoevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov.*

BPW Levinas. *Basic Philosophical Writings.*

BT Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy.*

D Nietzsche. *Daybreak.*

EH Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo.*

GM Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morals.*

GS Nietzsche. *The Gay Science.*

OTB Levinas. *Otherwise Than Being.*

TI Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols.*

TSZ Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*

T&I Levinas. *Totality and Infinity.*

UM Nietzsche. *Untimtely Meditations.*

WP Nietzsche. *The Will to Power.*

Preface

When asked once what he wished philosophers throughout the history of Western philosophy had written more about, Jacques Derrida responded "their sex lives."[1] Indeed, that would have made philosophy very interesting, for all. But perhaps philosophers have written more about sex—and thus inevitably about their own sex lives—than has hitherto been recognized. After all, is there anything more secretive in a person's life than their sexual desire? And should it then surprise us if this secrecy is retained in the philosophical text?

For over two millennia, Western philosophy has been driven by its desire for truth. But while truth enjoyed its reign our desire for it had gone unnoticed, and thus unquestioned, until a renegade German philosopher posed the simple question—"Suppose we want truth: *why not rather* untruth?" (*BGE* 1). Since then, truth *itself* has been a problem. But the state of distress now surrounding truth's heretofore uncontested supremacy in philosophy, which has spawned a deluge of philosophical literature in its defence, actually belies Nietzsche's deeper concern: that "truth is a woman" (*BGE* Preface), and that *we want her*—that truth *herself* is desired.[2]

If the reader wishes to know more concerning what might be said about truth in the following pages, he or she should read no further. Nothing more will be said *about* truth from one too modest for such an undertaking and too proud to pretend otherwise. This essay asks, with Nietzsche, "*What* in us really wants 'truth'?" (*BGE* 1). What follows is merely one graduate student's meagre attempt to wrestle with this *desire for truth* as it is found in the three great

[1] *Derrida*. Dir. Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering (Jane Doe Films, 2002).

[2] With Walter Kaufmann, I too believe that "although Nietzsche should be defended against witless admirers and detractors, his remarks about women are surely, more often than not, second-hand and third-rate" [see Walter Kaufmann, Editor's Note to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. & ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguins Books, 1984)]. It is to Nietzsche's shame that such a great mind possessed such a glaring flaw. However, that being said, Nietzsche makes a very interesting point here—that we *desire* truth. He is attempting to debunk the idea of truth for truth's sake. Truth is *wanted* for very different reasons than has heretofore been acknowledged in the history of Western philosophy.

thinkers that constitute the bulk of his philosophical maturation: Emmanuel Levinas, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. All three are deeply unsettling to read and will drive one mad if read too much for too long, though not all of them for flattering reasons. All three are given equal airplay, at least in terms of the distributed pagination. The *individual* is central to each man's thought, and the attempt is made to trace out their respective understandings of individuality under the rubric of the "self." Levinas occasionally uses this term, Nietzsche only sparingly, and Dostoevsky not at all. The decision to use the term "self" to designate the individual is strictly for the sake of continuity, comparison, and contrast—nothing more should be read into it at the outset. This essay begins by showing that all three, however differently, hold the basic premise that the self is essentially marked by *excess*. This excess puts the individual into a crisis of *conscience* wherein the self becomes transfixed with a certain part of itself responsible for this originary excess. Conscience—the epicentre of Levinas's metaphysics, Nietzsche's anti-metaphysics, and Dostoevsky's "fantastic realism"[3]—then sends the self into a vortex of suffering, and it is through this suffering that the individual reaches a point where its *true* self is revealed to the self by its conscience—and this constitutes *truth.* Truth is of the self.

But the link between truth and the self, although important, is not the main concern of this essay. The intriguing feature of this link in Levinas, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky, is that all three take aim at *sex* through the application of *ascesis* as the self attempts to "reach" the truth. As conscience brings the self before its true self, truth undergoes an *elevation.* The self is distanced from itself, and "height" suddenly becomes the distinguishing mark of truth. To reach the truth, *to become its true self*, the self disabuses itself of sex by suffering for its sexual desire; and it is through this suffering that the self is elevated to truth. But the asceticism of the

[3] Robin Feuer Miller, *The Brothers Karamazov: Worlds of the Novel* (New York: Twayne, 1992) 5.

necessary suffering is not physical; it is endured on the *spiritual* level. Through its conscience, the self suffers spiritually for what it is physically, and only thus is the self elevated to the heights of truth. The depth of the individual's sexuality turns out to be necessary for truth.

The unique place sex holds in the movement upwards unto truth is the fascination of this essay. Intuitively, the author has always felt uneasy about the way Levinas, Nietzsche, and Dostoesvky each deals with sex, and this thesis remains as the attempt to flesh out this prior intuition academically. But it should not be considered a stretch, or simply a clever dose of sarcasm, if from his analysis of these three men the author finds that in the relationship between sex and truth, the folly of youth becomes the foolishness of old age.

A few acknowledgements, if I may: I would like to thank … the ICS for giving me room to maneuver and space to grow; Henry Schuurman for opening the doors to Nietzsche and Dostoevsky; Jeffrey Dudiak for imbuing me with his love for philosophy, and whom I forgive for exposing me to Levinas; Lambert Zuidervaart for letting me imbibe the requisite, but all too often undervalued, discipline necessary to do philosophy; Robert Sweetman and Jim Olthuis for being much more than just second mentors; Matthew Harrison for his ineluctable passion; Lucas Moord for proving that staunch disagreement can lead to the best conversations; Ben McCabe for being my Christian equivalent; Daniel Anema and Robert Brink for being the worst roommates but the most entertaining Christians and playful conversants; Matthew Klaassen and Michael DeMoor, from whom I have quietly learned so much, unbeknownst to them; George Deibert, who is the best philosopher not doing philosophy at the moment; my parents, for whom this degree will mean more than it will to me; my sister, who will feign interest because I am her big brother and she loves me; and my beloved Harleen, for showing me the meaning of life … play.

I. EXCESS

1. Prelude

"What is truth?" asks the philosopher.

"Who cares?" is the reply.

"Why, all must?"

"Why *must* we? Why must we *at all*?"

"Why, don't you? I did not intend it as a command."

"Very well, then. But why did you ask?"

"Do you not wish to know?"

"Why would we?"

"How can you live without knowing what truth is?"

"How could you go on living if you had the answer?"

2. Need

Let us ask with the philosopher, "What is truth?" But let us first ask ourselves why it is we raise this question. Why do we ask what truth is? What is it about truth that compels us to ask of it? Or—what is it about ourselves that we ask to know what truth is?

The question, then, marks the difference between *ourselves* and *truth*. We might say that when we inquire into truth we are in fact asking about the relationship between us and truth. Now, the question evidences that we do not know what truth is, at least in its entirety, or we would not have made the query. It also indicates that such an interrogation merely begs the question, namely, "Why do we ask what truth is?" Therefore, an examination of truth reveals our *lack* of understanding and our *need* to know. Our relationship to truth appears to carry with it the concomitant relationship of need to lack within ourselves.

This relationship between need and lack proceeds in one direction: it always moves *from* need *to* lack, never the reverse. There are many things we need for which we experience a lack: food, clothing, shelter, touch, sleep, sunlight, etc. However, there are many, many things we lack for which we do not experience a need: perhaps the knowledge of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, having a porcupine for a pet, or owning a DVD collection of Chevy Chase's talk show. Need always precedes lack; however, it only ever manifests itself in relation to lack, and so there is never pure need. *We lack what we need; we do not need what we lack.*

And yet it is without question that we do experience a need for what we lack. We may want more food than our bellies can take, more sleep than our bodies require, more money than our expenditures entail, etc.—and we do experience these as needs. But even with such banalities we venture beyond the satiety of the original needs being met. We are in new territory. We have gotten to the point where we are in *excess* of need. We no longer need, we—*desire*.

3. Desire

The transition from need to desire might be expected to evince a basic calculation of addition: satiety + x = desire. Desire would then follow upon need as *more than* need. As such, the lack that has been increased from the limits of satiety would have to be stripped of its relation to need. But if the lack is torn away from its relation to need, it must also be torn away from me, for the lack could not be found in me or else I would need to fulfill it. Therefore, the experience of lack would have to be altogether different in desire. The lack could not refer to me in my need, but would have to refer to that which had previously fulfilled it. In need lack refers to me, but in desire it refers to what is *other than* me. Thus, desire, as more than need, turns out to be other than me.

If in desire the self is attracted to what is other than itself, without reference to its needs and the satiety thereof, then what constitutes this attraction is that which is in excess of the self. It is not the widening of its consumptive demands in need that would lead the self outwards, but rather the excess of what is other. Yet how would what is other show up differently for the self in desire than in need? The answer: what is other does not show itself at all in need; it is only in desire that what is other is, in fact, recognized as other. Let us take an example: When I am hungry I experience a lack; I need to eat in order to fulfill the lack I experience in hunger. Now, how would what is other show up for me in such an experience? Would it be the cereal I have in the cupboard? The steak in the freezer? The pizza available at the restaurant on the corner? Each of these, we would have to say, could indeed fulfill the lack I experience in hunger. What is other in my experience of hunger would then be *transferable*; I could just as easily relieve my hunger with a bowl of cereal as I could a steak or a slice of pizza. What is other would not be this or that item, but "food" in general. In need, every individual other is subsumed under the lack the self

experiences, which manifests itself in relation to a generality—food, shelter, clothing, people, etc.—, never to an individual. What is other does not show itself in relation to need; it is dissimulated only as *otherness*, a general category of whatever might fulfill the negativity of privation. Conversely, in desire what is other would be *non-transferable*;[4] the individual other could not be substituted for. To continue the example: I would not just be hungry—I would be hungry *for* the bowl of cereal, *for* the steak, or *for* the slice of pizza. The lack I experience would be specific to an individual other, not to the generality of my categorization. What is other shows itself in relation to my desire precisely as *other*, as the non-transferable individuality I desire in excess of my need. In the surplus of exteriority, the self is drawn out of itself towards what is other, while in the negativity of consumption it always remains in itself in its appropriation of otherness. The essential difference is that need drives the self back upon itself, whereas in desire it is drawn out beyond itself. When we lack what we need, the lack we experience is found within ourselves. But in the experience of need for what we lack, the lack changes over into a desire for what is individually other; our lack of the other is actually our *desire for excess*, for what supersedes our need and thus ourselves. We move from the interiority of need to the exteriority of desire. The lack I experience in need as a generality is translated into an excess of individuation in my experience of desire. Ironically, what is the most general becomes the most privative, and what is the most specific becomes the most excessive.

4. Levinas's Description of the Self

The desire for excess as distinct from need as lack is a notion that has been examined by Emmanuel Levinas in his analysis of alterity in *Totality and Infinity*. For Levinas, neither desire

[4] For the distinction between transferability and non-transferability, see Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London: Phoenix Press, 1994).

nor excess come first, both go together. Unlike the relation between need and lack, the terms can be read in either direction: desire is excess; excess is desire. In Descartes' *Meditations*, Levinas discovers this conflation of terms in the cogito's idea of infinity. There he finds the cogito drawn out of the certitude of its self-doubting stance into relation with the perfect God. But it is not God's calling the cogito to accountability that secures this relation. It is the idea of infinity that draws the cogito out of itself towards the excess it has thought. The cogito desires what it has thought, as that which exceeds this very thought. The cogito desires its "*ideatum*"—the 'content' of infinity—, but the *ideatum* is infinite only by way of its excess in the thought of the cogito, and the cogito is drawn towards the infinite only because its idea has thought more than it can think. In a unique interpretation of Descartes, Levinas discovers a *thought* before *thinking*. The chronological movement of the *Meditations* begins with the cogito securing its own foundation with the certitude of its self-doubt and then moves to a proof for the existence of God. However, the logical movement of the *Meditations* is precisely the reverse: the cogito's ultimate foundation is God which subtends the cogito ergo sum; therefore, the thought of the cogito's idea of infinity actually precedes the thinking of the cogito ergo sum. It is a thought the cogito cannot think, for the certitude of self-doubt which secures the cogito ergo sum has not *logically* taken place; and because the chronological cogito is thinking, it is *not yet* when it has thought the idea of infinity.

What Levinas is attempting to do in his analysis of the Cartesian cogito is to lay bare a self open to the other. In doing so, he unearths a self *prior* to the conception of the substantial self, a self-sufficient being tyrannous towards alterity, which he believes has been the pretension of the entire history of Western philosophy. In the conflicting yet mutually dependent movements of the cogito, Levinas appears to have found what he is looking for. In the logical movement of the cogito, he finds a self open to alterity in its desire for excess, which is prior to

the chronological movement that betrays a self enclosed upon the interiority of its own need for self-certitude. This, we note, would place desire *prior* to need; yet not simply as the primordial experience of the self, but as its very inauguration. The methodology of our analysis, then, would only be provisional. Desire would not follow upon need, because "need already rests on Desire" (*T&I* 117). The primordial experience of the self, therefore, would be of excess not lack.

Although the "other" is commonly held to be the heart of Levinas's metaphysics, his entire philosophy rests upon his phenomenology of the self (which may account for the shift in focus from "exteriority" in *Totality and Infinity* to "subjectivity" in *Otherwise Than Being*). This is apparent from his appropriation of the Cartesian idea of infinity. For Levinas, the cogito's idea of infinity is not so by virtue of the infinite itself, but by the excess of thought produced in the cogito. The infinite must be in excess of thought otherwise the cogito would contain the infinite in thought, thereby nullifying its infinity. Thus, it is the cogito's relation to the infinite that produces the idea of infinity and not the infinite itself, for the infinite always remains in excess of the cogito. The cogito has thought the infinite as that which exceeds its idea, but the infinite is in excess of the idea only by virtue of cogito's inability to think it: "The idea of the infinite consists precisely and paradoxically in thinking more than what is thought while nevertheless conserving it in its excessive relation to thought" (*BPW* 19). Strange to say, it is the weakness of the cogito and not the strength of infinity that maintains the infinite. It is this thought before thinking, the weakness of the cogito, that Levinas believes is crucial to Cartesian epistemology, a thought which he appropriates for his philosophy and makes the focus of his phenomenology of the self.

Levinas takes the Cartesian paradox and attempts to weave an entire metaphysics out of it. The self takes over for the cogito, and the infinite is conflated with the other. The idea of

infinity, which had previously signified the relation between the cogito and the infinite (God), now constitutes the relation between the self and the other. The excess of the infinite becomes the *desire* for the infinite: "the infinite in the finite, the more in the less, which is accomplished by the idea of Infinity, is produced as Desire" (*T&I* 50). The infinite is not desired for its infinity, but for the very excess experienced by the self in desire. Desire is tied to the excess of thought, for "if the ungraspable, unthinkable surplus or excess had nothing to do with thought aiming at a theme, there would no longer have been an idea of the infinite" (*BPW* 19). Because the idea of infinity is this excess of thought produced as desire, the self becomes the *desire for excess*; the self desires the infinite because its thought cannot contain it. Therefore, because the desire for excess inevitably leads the self beyond itself, the self desires the infinite, and because "the infinite is the absolutely other" (*T&I* 49) desire becomes the "desire for the absolutely other" (*T&I* 34). But the other can only be the human other, because for Levinas, "metaphysics—is the desire of a person" (*T&I* 299).

The movement from Cartesian epistemology to Levinasian metaphysics via the idea of infinity directly parallels our preceding discussion of the changeover in the self from need to desire. In the chronological movement of the *Meditations*, the cogito moves from its need for self-sufficient interiority to its desire for the excess of exteriority, but in the logical movement it is precisely the reverse. However, despite this conflict the centrality of the cogito remains constant. Likewise for Levinas, the self remains the focus of his metaphysics throughout its tug-of-war between need and desire, interiority and exteriority. The other is not the fulcrum of Levinas's metaphysics, as is popularly thought, though it is perforce indispensable. It is the self that remains the crux of his philosophy, which is why Levinas can say, "Alterity is possible only starting from *me*" (*T&I* 40).

To understand why the self retains this importance for Levinas, we must look to the idea of infinity, and in particular how via this thought the infinite becomes the absolutely other … human being. It is without question that Levinas lets the logical movement of the *Meditations* trump the chronological, for it is there that he uncovers a notion of the self open to the other. But he still has to deal with the conflicting chronological movement that betrays an enclosed self indifferent to alterity. To do so, he takes the cogito's idea of infinity and turns it against the self-doubting stance of the cogito ergo sum. In the logical progression of the self, Levinas takes the idea of infinity, as the thought before thinking, and cites it as that *which calls into question* the thinking of what logically follows, but has chronologically preceded, as the cogito ergo sum. The consciousness of the cogito results from radical self-doubt, but the retrogressive movement of doubt is set in motion only by the cogito initially being called into question by its idea of infinity. Thinking results only via the thought that calls it into question. It is the *conscience* of the cogito begetting the *consciousness* of the cogito ergo sum, because for Levinas, "the self … is a conscience before being a consciousness" (*BPW* 19).

But even if we were to follow Levinas in his rereading of Descartes, we would have to be shown just how the idea of infinity functions as the conscience of the cogito. It is here that Levinas's appropriation of Descartes firmly takes over. The conspicuous addition to the movements of the *Meditations* is Levinas's understanding of desire. In the idea of infinity, the excess of thought in the cogito is translated into the desire of the self for the infinite. The infinity of the infinite is ultimately measured by the self, but it is a measurement paradoxically so by always being in excess of measurement: "It is Desire that measures the infinity of the infinite, for it is a measure through the very impossibility of measure" (*T&I* 62). Desire becomes the impossibility of measurement, and thus of satiety. Unlike need, "Desire … does not proceed

from a lack" (*T&I* 299), but points to the excess of thought in the self. Since this excess is the first thought in the logical movement of the self, Levinas marks the self out as desire; and as the desire for excess, the self is led out of itself towards the infinite, which, as we have seen, Levinas maintains is precisely the human other. This movement towards the other becomes the very 'essence' of the self, but paradoxically so because the self cannot lay claim to it. In its desire for the other, the self as a conscience before a consciousness moves towards the other in the impossible measurement of the other's infinitude. This measurement of infinity is not a vain attempt at the calculation of an irrational number, but the ever-increasing degree of *responsibility* the self experiences in the thought of conscience. The human other is found in conscience as the one to whom and for whom the self is *infinitely* responsible. Conscience betrays the self to the other.

In *Otherwise Than Being*, the palimpsest to Levinas's phenomenology of the self reads, "*the other in the same*" (*OTB* 111), indicating the shift in focus from exteriority to subjectivity. The book marks the fullness of Levinas's thought and shakes the apparent duality of the "same" and the "other" in *Totality and Infinity*. In fact, much of the language from the earlier work is dropped. But the infinite is retained, albeit with an important yet subtle difference: the infinite is no longer conflated with the other, though an important link to it does remain; the infinite now marks the recession of God or of the Good in favour of the other. The self moves towards the infinite with the same impossible measurement of its infinity, but only indirectly through the goodness of the self towards the other. The "glory" of God or of the Good is its substitution for the other, which is testified to through the hands of the self. The self bears witness to this glory as the grace that binds the self to the other—"the other in the same":

> The idea of the Infinite, which in Descartes is lodged in a thought that cannot contain it, expresses the disproportion between glory and the present, which is inspiration itself.

> Under the weight that exceeds my capacity, a passivity more passive than all passivity correlative with acts, my own passivity breaks out in a saying. *The exteriority of the Infinite becomes somehow an inwardness in the sincerity of a witness borne* [italics ours] (*OTB* 146-7).

The infinite, to which the self was directed in the idea of infinity, is no longer the other but the "Spirit" (*OTB* 5)—of God or of the Good—that directs this attention *away* from it and *towards* the other. *The infinite substitutes the other for itself, inspiring the self to expiate itself for the other.* The idea of the infinite is not a direct summons from alterity, but "the glory of the Infinite that orders me to the other" (*OTB* 146). It is the expression of the self that bears witness to the infinite through its expiation for the other: "I am one and irreplaceable, one inasmuch as irreplaceable in responsibility" (*OTB* 103). "The word *I* means *here I am*, answering for everyone and everything" (*OTB* 114). The self is the Abrahamic "I" saying, "'Here I am' as a witness of the infinite" (*OTB* 146) responsible for all others. This point is no more poignantly made by Levinas than in his quotation of Dostoevsky: "Each one of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others" (*OTB* 146).

The idea of infinity is used less to emphasize the alterity of the other than it is to express the subjectivity of the self. The infinite may shift from signifying the other to signifying its deference to the other, but in either expression of the infinite the idea of infinity signifies the responsibility for the other that is always in excess of the self. It is the very heart of Levinas's phenomenology of the self, for in a very real sense the self is only itself when it is for the other. Conscience crushes the self under the weight of this responsibility, only to be resurrected as "the-one-for-the-other" (*OTB* 136) before it is even conscious of its guilt. Thus, before anything else, the self is faced with other: "The face to face remains an ultimate situation" (*T&I* 81). It is not the moment of decision, but the "undecidability" (to borrow a Derridean idiom) of conscience that makes the decisions of consciousness possible. The encounter with the other marks out

everything of the self before it can ever take a stand on itself. The excess of thought experienced in the idea of infinity has drawn the self out of itself before it ever is a self. Like the Cartesian cogito, the self is displaced by the idea of infinity before it even gets underway. Conscience is the moment of the encounter with the neighbour, signifying the primordial experience of the self in its being for the other: "The face of the neighbour signifies for me an unexceptionable responsibility, preceding every free consent, every pact, every contact" (*OTB* 88). The self is for the other before it is (for) itself. Conscience is not only the trauma of the encounter, but the movement towards consciousness. As such, it is the ground from which Levinas's entire philosophy takes flight. The other is infinite only by virtue of the conscience of the self, which is not possessed by the self but constitutes its very possession by the other; and the idea of infinity, though not an idea in the sense of consciousness, is nonetheless the first epiphany of the self, even if its possession by the other is the displacement of itself.

5. Nietzsche's Development of the Self

"In a sense nothing is more burdensome than a neighbour" (*OTB* 88), says Levinas, a statement to which Nietzsche would undoubtedly agree, albeit for very different reasons:

> What does it mean that the welfare of my neighbour *ought* to possess for me a higher value than my own? But that my neighbour himself *ought* to assess the value of his welfare differently than I, that is, that he should subordinate it to my welfare? ... The apparent crazy idea that a man should esteem the actions he performs for another more highly than those he performs for himself, and that this other should likewise, etc. (that one should call good only those actions that a man performs with an eye, not to himself, but to the welfare of another) (*WP* 153).[5]

While Levinas's phenomenology gives us a description of the self, Nietzsche's analysis

[5] All quotes taken from Nietzsche's texts will include the abbreviation followed by the section number. When necessary, Roman numerals will be used to refer to specific essays and/or chapters. Page numbers will not be referenced.

provides us with a development of the self, which can be divided into three stages: *debauchery*, *asceticism*, and *rationality*. In them we discover a flow of excess driven out of the self, redirected upon it, or channelled through it, respectively. As such, these manifestations of excess become the distinguishing marks of the self at each particular stage, displaying themselves in various forms of passion:

> In passion, one person experiences an outbreak of the savage, dreadful and unendurable; another experiences an elevation of himself into a height and grandeur and splendour compared with which his normal state of being appears insipid. A third, who is noble through and through, also experiences the noblest storm and stress, and in this condition of passion he becomes *nature in its wildest beauty* and only one degree *more profound* than nature in its quiet beauty that he usually represents: but men understand him more when he is in passion, bring him a step closer and make him more akin to them. At such a sight they experience delight and terror, and it is *precisely then* that they call him—divine (*D* 502).

The evolution of the self begins in uncontrollable savagery and ends in the awe of divinity, and the path the excess of passion takes is the process by which this is achieved. Passion makes perfect.

The Savage

In its nascent stage, the characteristics of the self exist only in their inchoate forms; various conflicting passions display themselves in the immediacy of fulfillment. The example Nietzsche gives for this stage is "the savage." Although brute strength may be an important physical trait, the savage is actually the least powerful form of the self.[6] It gets caught up in the act of its passions, unable to restrain them from taking over its entire being. The self becomes subservient to its impulses, and with its lack of self-control it seeks only for immediate fulfillment. Here the self is its most natural, though also at its most base. In the savage, Nietzsche

---

[6] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) 196: "The barbarian … is the least powerful."

cites the passions as the excess of *physiological* feeling that turns the self into a satyr. Complete debauchery results, the saturnalia of its animalism. The self is its *body*, but it certainly does not have it. On the contrary, its body possesses the self, which succumbs to the body's requirements and undertakes its demands. In the alleviation of the pain of its bodily demands, the fulfillment becomes *pleasurable*, which results in the excess of passion discharging itself *externally*.

At this point the savage is likened to a baby at the whim of its impulses: "A small baby who acts on impulse … is not immoral but simply not a moral agent yet; and a man urging us to yield to our every impulse would be telling us neither to act morally nor immorally, but—as babies do, i.e. amorally."[7] The savage is not a moral being but *amoral*, and in "the innocent conscience of the beast of prey" (*GM* I.2) the strictly *temporal* concern for itself is the reason for its amoral state. In its concern only for its temporal aspects, the savage is as innocent as a babe. Consequently, it is as vulnerable as one, too. In its excess of passion, the savage always gets the better of itself.

The Saint

In the second stage, the self moves to distance itself from its savagery. It does so through the barbs of ascesis, for which Nietzsche's standard depiction is "the saint." He resonates greatly with this form of the self, for, as Kaufmann points out, "Nietzsche … never loses sight of the fact that he himself was an ascetic."[8] Rebelling against the debauchery of its earlier stage, the saint turns against itself in an excess of self-denial. It seeks to obliterate the desires of the savage through a strict regimen of self-control. It is for this reason that "the ascetic … seemed one of the

[7] Ibid., 214.
[8] Walter Kaufmann, Footnote to *The Gay Science*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) 258.

most powerful of men to Nietzsche."[9] Whereas the act of immediate fulfillment of its desires did in the savage, the self-denial of the saint becomes its salvation. At this stage, the self moves away from its naturalistic beginnings into the realm of *spirituality.* The shift does not lessen the excess of its former stage. Rather, in the conflict between the physiological and the spiritual sides of the self, the excess of the self is simply redirected against those self-same impulses. The result is a war between body and *soul,* with the desires of the body being extinguished by the soul. In doing so, the saint makes a show of display of its *pain.* The anguish of the savage, which sought pleasure in alleviation of the pain of its desires, now forestalls their fulfillment permanently. The excess of the self is now directed *internally.* But this gives rise to a wry sort of pleasure:

> There is also an abundant enjoyment at one's own suffering, at making oneself suffer—and wherever man allows himself to be persuaded to self-denial in the *religious* sense, or the self-mutilation, ... or altogether to desensualization, decarnalization, contrition, Puritianical spasms of penitence, vivisection of the conscience ... he is secretly lured and pushed forward by his cruelty, by those dangerous thrills of cruelty turned *against oneself*' (*BGE* 349).

The stopping up of its desires allows the self to become master of its own body instead of a slave to its passions. This defiance on the part of the saint becomes the first flight of elevation for the self. Kaufmann notes, "it is only in order to fly higher that the man of renunciation sacrifices so much, and that what he gives up does not strike him as a negation because it is really part of his soaring desire for the heights ... renunciation is the price of 'rising higher and higher.'"[10] But Nietzsche warns us not to be duped by the self-denial of the saint, because despite its attempt to obliterate its impulses, the desire for excess continues to manifest itself at an extraordinary rate. The excess of self-denial in the saint fuels the negation of the self in the form of the savage, but it does so only to affirm the self at a higher level:

[9] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 280.

> What does the man of renunciation do? He strives for a higher world, he wants to fly further and higher than all men of affirmation—he throws away much that would encumber his flight, including not a little that he esteems and likes; he sacrifices it to his desire for the heights. This sacrificing, this throwing away, however, is precisely what alone becomes visible and leads people to call him the man of renunciation … he wants to conceal from us his desire, his pride, his intention to soar *beyond* us.—Yes, he is cleverer than we thought and so polite to us—this man of affirmation. For that is what he is, no less than we, even in his renunciation (*GS* 27).

At this juncture the self is dualistic, for just as the opposing movements of the cogito—the chronological and the logical—are in conflict with each other, so too the self is at war with itself. But the greatest conflict, perhaps, is between time and eternity. Whereas the savage has eyes only for temporality, the saint has its gaze fixed firmly upon *eternity.* Temporality acquires meaning only in reference to the eternal, where the saint works out its immortality through the creative work of its salvation. Temporality is set off over against eternity as the means for the kingdom of Heaven its end. The result is two selves: one how it *is*, and one how it *ought* to be. Kaufmann explains,

> To become powerful, to gain freedom, to master his impulses and perfect himself, man must first develop the feeling that his impulses are evil. This recognition is the essence of the bad conscience; man says to himself: my inclinations are damnable, and I am evil. At that point, man is divided against himself. There are two selves as it were, one rational and the other irrational. The one self then tries to give form to the other; man tries to remake himself, to give 'style' to himself, and to organize the chaos of his passions. His impulses are recalcitrant; man suffers and feels guilty; and he does violence to himself and ravishes his animal nature. … he must, as it were burn a No into his own soul; he must brand his own impulses with contempt and become aware of the contradiction of good and evil.[11]

In contradistinction to the amoral savage, the saint is *moral*; thus the self as it *is* always loses out to the self as it *ought* to be. For Nietzsche, conscience begins with the saint, but its first manifestation is with its adjectival form: conscience is inaugurated as the *bad* conscience. Morality, for Nietzsche, does not consist in the encounter of the self with its neighbour, as it does

---

[10] Kaufmann, Footnote to *The Gay Science*, 229.
[11] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 253.

for Levinas, but in the division of the self turned against itself. This is the conflict that requires resolution. The bad conscience is, for Nietzsche, what must be overcome and changed into the *good* conscience. But as the division internal to the self, which splits the self into two selves, that which must be overcome is not its neighbour, but its own self. Conscience is *self-overcoming*.

The Sage

The third and final stage of the self is without a doubt for Nietzsche "the philosopher." After experiencing two extreme and opposing forms of desire, the self stands at a crossroads with a new desire at heart—the harmonization of its elements. The attempt is to hold the savage and the saint together without them destroying the self. Here all points feed into the sage, where it navigates the tension between debauchery and asceticism. It is an unfettered harmony set free from the reckless spontaneity of the savage and the self-denial of the saint, representing a manifest state of equilibrium built upon the chaos of internal conflict. The sage plays the elements of its previous stages off one another, seeking wholeness[12] through the harmonization of distinct and often opposing forces by harnessing the extreme power of these conflicting forms of excess. Its life becomes its work, where the act of the savage and the creation of saint come together in the self-overcoming of the sage.

Self-Overcoming:

According to Kaufmann, the "crown of Nietzsche's philosophy is the dual vision of the overman and the eternal recurrence; its key conception is the will to power."[13] We shall deal with the will to power and the eternal recurrence shortly, but first we turn to Nietzsche's conception

[12] Ibid., 323: "Particular actions seemed much less important to Nietzsche than the state of being of the whole man."
[13] Ibid., 121.

of the *Übermensch.* As Kaufmann notes, the "*Übermensch* ... cannot be dissociated from the conception of *Überwindung*, of overcoming."[14] Self-overcoming marks the attempt by the self to deal with the dualistic structure of excess, to overcome the body-soul, animal-spiritual antithesis between the savage and the saint. The goal is not to synthesize the terms of these dichotomies, but to elevate their excess by channelling it into its highest form. It is not a synthesis because the antithesis remains intact. The sage wants to become master of its impulses, but it does not want to destroy them. Like the savage, it wants to sustain the force of its passions, but with the saint it wants to control their excess. The sage retains the frenzy of debauchery, but it also maintains the severity of ascesis.

The best way to outline this development is through the evolution of Dionysus in Nietzsche's thought. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche uncovers two antithetical principles of life in his analysis of Attic tragedy: the Dionysian and the Apollinian; Dionysus represents "flood and excess" (4), Apollo the "beautiful illusion" (1). Nietzsche later rejected the metaphysical unity he made of these opposing forces, but he did not reject the principles themselves. The uncontrollable passion of Dionysus and the stylizing force of Apollo remain integral elements in his later philosophy. However, Nietzsche does give Dionysus the right to assume the character of both. We should not presume, though, that Nietzsche prefers Dionysus to Apollo. On the contrary, Kaufmann rightly points out that "Nietzsche did not extol one at the expense of the other; but if he favors one of the two gods, it is Apollo."[15] Nevertheless, it is Dionysus who comes to represent his entire philosophy, even Nietzsche himself, as is summed up in the concluding line of *Ecce Homo*: "Have I been understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified?*—" (IV.9).

---

[14] Ibid., 309.
[15] Ibid., 128.

Nietzsche probably chose to retain the use of Dionysus to emphasize his belief in the chaotic state of life as opposed to the illusory principle associated with Apollo. In its essence, Dionysus is excess: "I was the first to take seriously that wonderful phenomenon which bears the name Dionysus as a means to understanding the older Hellenic instinct, an instinct still exuberant and even overflowing: it is explicable only as an *excess* of energy" (*TI* IX.48). As we have shown, this excess is symbolized in the passion of the savage and the control of the saint; however, it also represents the continued conflict of the two. Self-overcoming, the essential component of the later Dionysus, is not the defeat of conflict but the elevation of its continued excess into a new form. The self is to "organize the chaos" (*UM* II.10), not defeat it.[16] In the body-soul, animal-spiritual antithesis the sage becomes *spirit.* The spirit of the sage is the natural ascendancy of self to cut into the excess of its life, not to excise the passions, but to have their energy serve its higher self. It breaks bones only to have them heal even stronger. The sage attains a harmony of conflicting forces, even as the war continues; but the externalizing force of the savage and the internalizing self-denial of the saint now obey the *holistic* framework of the sage.

Will to Power:

In the harmonizing structure of the sage, the self gives style to the competing forms of excess in the savage and the saint. As Kaufmann notes, the overman now "strives for something to which pleasure and pain are only incidental,"[17] because for Nietzsche "*pleasure* and *pain* ... are mere epiphenomena and wholly secondary" (*BGE* 225). The meaning of the self becomes

[16] Ibid., 224. According to Kaufmann, by "organize the chaos" Nietzsche meant "the achievement of an organic harmony."
[17] Ibid., 270.

power, more power—will to power. Self-overcoming is the individual display of will to power in its desire for self-perfection. Through the flow of excess in the pleasure of the savage and the pain of the saint, the will to power finds its highest manifestation in the power of the sage. All along the excess in the development of the self has been in service of its will to power. Debauchery and ascesis have all along been separate displays of the same lust for life. The hedonism of the savage and the masochism of the saint have just been lesser means of the ultimate means for continual self-perfection. The theme of conflict that resonates throughout Nietzsche's corpus becomes the constitutive element of his philosophy of power, and overcoming the conflict of the self is the greatest battle in the war of the will to power. As Kaufmann points out, the "will to power is, as it were, always at war with itself."[18]

Throughout its stages, the flow of excess defines each particular manifestation of the self. At its final stage, we find that these exemplars of excess have simply been in service of the will to power. The superstructure of the sage at the same time secures the dualistic structure of the saint and elevates the substructure of the savage. As the confluence for the flow of excess from these agonistic forces, the sage channels its energy into the highest expression of its will to power.

Eternal Recurrence:

The eternal recurrence just might be the most intriguing and yet the most outlandish part of Nietzsche's philosophy. Although he used it primarily to refer to the acceptance by the overman of the eternal repetition of its self-same life, Nietzsche did believe that it could prove to

[18] Ibid., 242.

be the scientific basis for the entire cosmos.[19] In brief: the eternal recurrence is the infinite repetition of a finite combination of elements; if the universe is finite, and yet we cannot locate its origin, then the combinations must be repeating themselves infinitely in an "eternal return of life" (*TI* X.4), since we surely would have exhausted every possible combination by now. It marks the resolution of the self in the conflict between time and eternity. In the moment of *intersection* between time and eternity, the sage experiences a fulgurating instant in which the temporal moment resonates with eternal significance; not for the reason that it plays an important part in its salvation, like it does for the saint, but that the self alone bears responsibility for having to experience whatever may happen—and yet has already happened—in this self-same moment over again into perpetuity. It is here that Nietzsche's kerygmatic Yes! to life attains its full measure. The self is neither the self as it *is* in the savage, nor the self as it *ought* to be in the saint—it is the self as it *wants* to be in the sage.

In the desire for perfection, the sage becomes the overman; the self has conquered itself through its self-overcoming and arisen to the highest level of the will to power. But the elevation to highest heights of the self could not be reached without the attainment of the good conscience, the moment when the self overcomes itself in order to become itself:

> The proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate, has in his case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct. What will he call this dominating instinct, supposing he feels the need to give it a name? The answer is beyond a doubt: this sovereign man calls it his *conscience* (*GM* II.2).

The eternal recurrence is the culmination of the will to power through self-overcoming, where the self accepts itself in order to become itself. The good conscience marks the overcoming of the guilty conscience. It is where the self overcomes its suffering for others, the

---

[19] See Kaufmann, Editor's Preface to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. & ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 111.

ultimate form of suffering for Levinas, and attains its highest form. The sage becomes what it is through its acceptance of its savagery and saintliness. The time of the savage and the eternity of the saint come together in the eternal recurrence of the sage.

The eternal recurrence is the encounter of the self with the infinite, just as the idea of infinity is the cogito's relation to the infinite. What arises out of it, for both, is conscience, but its inauguration of morality in Levinas is the defeat of morality as nihilism in Nietzsche; conscience is the guilty conscience in the former, the good conscience in the latter. It is the point of contact that affirms the life of my neighbour over mine in one, yet affirms my life in spite of my neighbour in the other. The sage is *immoral*, and Nietzsche the consummate immoralist.[20] The encounter between the self and the other occurs on the battleground of conscience. It is the face of the other towards whom Levinas finds the self turning, yet whom Nietzsche believes the self must turn away from and then overcome … its turning away.

[20] *EH* III.II.2 & IV.2: "I am the first immoralist."

II. SEX

6. Sex & the Self

But there is one markedly curious fact about Nietzsche's development of the self: the centrality of *sex*. It is not simply that each stage has its own distinct take on the sexuality of the self, but that the self actually distinguishes itself from its other forms through its very treatment of sex. The excess that flows from one stage to the next manifests itself in sex: the savage fornicates, the saint extirpates, and the sage sublimates. The very evolution of the self is its sexual revolution. *Excess is sex.*

Fornication

At the incipient stage of the self, sex is at its most raw in *fornication*. The savage is "the sexual athlete, anxious only to 'score.'"[21] It cares nothing for its creative potential; whether it is the consummation of a union between partners or the conception of offspring, it is interested in the act only. Fornication is sex without souls. The act obtains significance for the savage because it is the primary impulse by which it identifies itself with its body. The self moves from urge to release to the next urge and so on in an attempt to reacquire this meaning. As such, it is the encounter that matters; but more than that it is the perpetuation of the encounter, of a *new* encounter, that it strives after. Repetition is only the frequency with which it must occur; the act must still be created anew.

Although the savage is sufficiently base to warrant the charge of pure animalism,[22] it is the insatiable desire for novelty that demarcates it from the animal. Fornication is not bestiality. The fornicating savage does not simply look for a purely physical encounter with another human animal. The very fact that it desires a *different* body not just *any* one, or a *change* in context, not

[21] Scruton, 88.
[22] Ibid., 265: "we are never so revealed as animals as in the sexual act."

simply the "same time, same place" is proof that it is not purely a base physical desire. Even whether the savage chooses promiscuity or monogamy, the desire for novelty remains inherent to it: the promiscuous individual constantly desires a new partner, while the monogamous individual continually desires a new situation; the players change in the former, whereas the context shifts in the latter. In fornication, the savage seeks novelty. It is for this reason that the self is distinct from the animal even in the very baseness of its debauchery, because in fornication the lust for novelty exceeds its gratification. Sexual desire is sexual excess.

It would not be quite right to say that in the novelty of fornication the self is subjugated to its body. Rather, it is more accurate to say that it is subject to its *embodiment*, for only as such could sexual desire then be regarded as a *vice*. The savage, as the weakest form of the self, is made weak by continually succumbing to the sexual impulse, for the excess of sex devastates it even as it is its most exhilarating experience. As the manifestation of the self overwrought by its passions, the savage cowers to the extravagance of sex, whether real or imagined. The pleasure-seeking savage—"pleasure-cats," as Nietzsche once called them (*TSZ* III.XII.17)—tries above all to gratify its sexual desire, but it cannot; its sexual excess continually lies ahead of it in an insatiable desire that feeds upon itself even as it feeds on others.

Nietzsche saw the power the sexual impulse possessed over an individual and believed all other passions were ultimately subservient to it. Not surprisingly, then, he cites it as the great robber baron of the passions, for it alone is the impulse which can manifest all others in a single direction; every other passion is selective in its company. Only in sexual desire can the self both love and hate, be happy and sad, be secure and jealous, feel gratitude and resentment, etc.; only in its sexual desire for another person could the savage manifest every one of its emotions towards one individual human being at one time or another; it alone can possess the self by

forcing the self to be possessed by another. Nietzsche did not feel contempt for debauchery because it only meant being overrun by one's impulses. At some level, he would have at least felt grateful that human beings could still feel intense passion in whatever form. What he despised most about this stage of the self is that it makes one dependent on another, for whether the savage is monogamous or promiscuous the self is still beholden to another or others for its fulfillment. Fornication is emasculation. The sexual excess of the savage allows others to gain control of the self, thereby weakening its will to power.

Extirpation

As the self engenders the saint, the excess of sex gives the self new meaning. In the progression to the second stage of the self, sex becomes the target for an entire somatic *extirpation* of the passions. The saint becomes the chaste individual, a virgin (initial or secondary). But it must become even more than that, for the entire sexual impulse must be destroyed. After all, what would we think of a saint that masturbates or fantasizes? In contradistinction to the savage, the act is abhorred, even feared. However, like the savage, the sex drive also gives meaning to the saint, because in the extirpation of the sexual impulse the self is able to become master of its body, thereby identifying itself with its soul. To secure this meaning requires constant vigilance; the lust of the savage has to be counteracted with the routine of spiritual exercise. The extirpating saint is faced not only with the animalism of the savage but also its embodiment in the desire for novelty, and it has to invoke any means necessary by which the sexuality of the self, as the savage, can be destroyed.

Nietzsche felt that the severity with which the saint deals with its sexual desire is even stronger than the impulse it seeks to extirpate. This led him to believe that in the asceticism of

the saint lay the most extreme form of sensuality: "It is the *most sensual* men who *have* to flee from women and torment their body" (*D* 294). They are the most sensual because of the *pain* they inflict upon themselves. In their attempts to subjugate the body and their embodiment, they counteract the savage's identification with its body in pleasure by forcing the body to yield to its pain. The saint identifies itself with its pain, and soon its suffering becomes an end in itself, just as sexual gratification is for the savage. The lust of the flesh now becomes the lust of the soul: "There are the terrible ones who carry around within themselves the beast of prey and have no choice but lust or self-laceration. And even their lust is still self-laceration" (*TSZ* I.IX). The extirpation of all the other passions follows, because pain has now become the manifestation of excess at this stage of the self. The saint now identifies itself with its show of display of pain: "The ancient mighty sorcerer in his struggle with displeasure, the ascetic priest—he had obviously won, *his* kingdom had come: one no longer protested *against* pain, one *thirsted* for pain; '*more* pain! *more* pain!'" (*GM* III.20). Consequently, the entire gamut of impulses is ripe for extirpation. The pain of the saint supersedes the pleasure of the savage, but the former relishing the severity of its discipline is still as sensual as the latter savouring its sexual gymnastics.

In the conflict between the excesses of fornication and extirpation, the self engages in a twisted inner dialectic resembling the sadist-masochist relationship. The saint deals with the savage through complete abstinence, which it metes out in an attempt to eliminate the sexual impulse altogether. Yet, in the pain of denied desire, the self harbours a wry sort of pleasure—that of the feeling of both inflicting pain upon itself, and enduring it for a higher ideal. As Nietzsche sees it, in the process of extirpation the saint obtains its own sense of power. The garb of ascesis subtly cloaks an empowerment over others. It covers for a sly manifestation of power,

disguised as pity for those weaker than itself to endure pain. The powerlessness of the savage, in the throes of its desire, is then easy prey for the pity of the saint.

Nietzsche saw the power that lay in the ascetic, and he admired it. However, what he admired was not its power over others, but its power over the self and the independence it granted an individual. In the extirpation of the sexual impulse, the self is freed from the capriciousness of sexual desire and thus from the dependency on another for its constant gratification. Yet, without a doubt, Nietzsche despised these ascetics. While he recognized the increase in power that ascesis brought the self, and for that reason extolled it as an important step on the way to the highest form of the self, he nevertheless felt that excess turning against itself was ultimately not life overflowing but the negation of life; and however ambiguous a term it may be, "life" is without question the final principle Nietzsche always appeals to.

Sublimation

As the self enters its final stage of development, the excess of sex gives rise to one of Nietzsche's most subtle distinctions. The concept of *sublimation* is crucial for understanding Nietzsche, because it is the way in which the will to power finally manifests itself as self-overcoming. As Kaufmann notes, "the will to power *is* the core of Nietzsche's thought, but inseparable from his idea of sublimation."[23] It is a concept carefully set over against the asceticism of the saint, because in many respects it closely resembles the saint's harsh treatment of the passions. As Kaufmann points out, the "contrast of the abnegation, repudiation, and extirpation of the passions on the one side, and their control and sublimation on the other, is one of the most important points in Nietzsche's entire philosophy."[24] But it is a difficult distinction to

[23] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, xiv.
[24] Ibid., 223.

make, though, for no other reason than that Nietzsche's own life was chock-full of asceticism. The concept hinges upon how the saint and the sage each deals with the excess of the passions in the savage. Whereas the saint attempts to destroy their excess, the sage channels their power and energy into what Kaufmann calls a "creative spiritual activity."[25] The significance sexual desire would have for the sage's sublimation is obvious: as the most powerful impulse, it would provide the self with its highest potential for power. If the sage could succeed in harnessing the excess of sex, instead of expending itself in an equal if not greater form of excess to destroy it, then it could transform its power over the self into the highest manifestation of its will to power. Sexual desire would then serve to reach the highest form of the self.

At this point, an objection might be raised against Nietzsche's idea of sublimation, for if sexual desire is the most powerful impulse, why not simply tap into its potential by fulfilling it? But as we said in our analysis of fornication, to do so would enslave the self to its passions and thus to another. Nietzsche sought to find a way around the enslavement of the savage and the asceticism of the saint while retaining the power of sexual excess in the sage. He found it in *reason*. Kaufmann describes it thus:

> In the sublimation of sexual impulses, the sexual objective is cancelled. Rationality, however, is *sui generis*, and cannot be similarly cancelled in the process of sublimation.
>
> Reason and the sex drive are both forms of the will to power. The sex drive, however, is an impulse, and in yielding to it in its unsublimated form, man is still the slave of his passions and has no power over them. Rationality, on the other hand, gives man mastery over himself; and as the will to power is essentially the "*instinct of freedom*," it can find fulfillment only through rationality. Reason is the "highest" manifestation of the will to power, in the distinct sense that through rationality it can realize its objective most fully.
>
> While Nietzsche thus comes to this conclusion that reason is man's highest faculty, his view is not based on any other principle than the power standard. Reason is extolled not because it is the faculty that abstracts from the given, forms universal concepts, and draws inferences, but because these skills enable it to develop foresight and

[25] Ibid., 220.

> to give consideration to all the impulses, to organize their chaos, to integrate them in a harmony—and thus to give man power.[26]

In sum: rationality is a faculty and sexual desire an impulse; the latter enslaves the self in its excess, the former grants it self-mastery without destroying the excess. Rationality functions as a kind of switching-station for the excess of power, which previously manifested itself as pleasure and pain. Sensuality is sublimated into a *spiritual* energy, as the excess that lay in the pleasure of the savage and in the pain of the saint finally manifests itself as *power*. But just as pleasure and pain are driven by sexual desire, so too is the power of rationality ultimately a manifestation of the excess of sex. The sage takes the fornication of the savage and the extirpation of the saint and channels these forms of excess into their sublimated form. Rationality becomes the sublimation of sexuality. The rational man is he who can control his desires without negating them, thus granting him the highest form of power. The most powerful impulse fuels the most powerful faculty. Pleasure and pain thus become incidental to the self in its essence, which is its will to power; and the sexual desire of the self supplies the continual flow of excess that allows the self to attain its highest form through the process of self-overcoming in the sublimation of the will to power.

7. Why I Am So Sexy

Although sublimation is an intriguing idea, let us be clear on this point, because, as with Kaufmann, "I love Nietzsche's books but am no Nietzschean"[27]: whether it is "extirpation" or "sublimation," the development of the self still constitutes the *evaporation* of sex. For the man who says, "the deed is everything" (*GM* I.13), the 'dirtiest' one never gets done. Kaufmann,

[26] Ibid., 229-30.
[27] Ibid., vii.

however, anticipates this argument against Nietzsche and provides the following explanation in his defence:

> one may still press the point that "sublimation" covers up a logical confusion and that, if a man does one thing instead of another, a substitution takes place—and the original impulse is cancelled or subdued, but not sublimated. This criticism might be relevant, if Nietzsche maintained that only the energy remains, while the objective of the impulse is changed ... Nietzsche, however, insists ... that what remains is the essence and what is changed is accidental. He considers the will to power, which remains throughout, the "essence," while "'all ends,' 'objectives,'" and the like, are merely accidental and changing attributes "of the one will," "of the will to power." In other words, not only the energy remains but also the objective, power; and those so-called objectives which are cancelled are only accidental attributes of this more basic striving.[28]

One may grant Nietzsche the right to call the "essence" of passion power, and its manifestation (i.e. as love, lust, hate, jealousy, etc.) as "accidental," but a very curious result nonetheless occurs. In the process of sublimation every single impulse is still given sufficient leeway, in one form or another, to be fulfilled. There is not one single passion—save for sexual desire—that is not given an acceptable form of fulfillment, even a necessary form for the philosopher; even the slave morality tenet of *ressentiment*, so vehemently denounced by Nietzsche, is given his approval for the higher being so long as it is discharged immediately.[29] It is hard to believe that for what Nietzsche regarded as the most powerful drive within the human being there is absolutely no form of acceptable fulfillment, however slight. The philosopher, as the highest form of the self, must remain as chaste as the saint; and thus he is just as, if not more, ascetic, and therefore—life negating.

So what exactly is it about sexual desire that Nietzsche is so afraid of (and he did, indeed, fear it)? If women are one of three things that come so easily to the philosopher, even though he

[28] Ibid., 221-2.
[29] *GM* I.10: "*Ressentiment* itself, if it should appear in the noble man, consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and therefore does not *poison*."

does not pursue them,[30] then why not simply take what comes one's way?

The easy answer is to chalk this up to Nietzsche's misogyny. But to do so misses an important element of the will to power in the development of the self and overlooks the deep existential impact of his philosophy. What Nietzsche felt was the *sine qua non* of the development of the self is undoubtedly—suffering. *The will to power is the sublimation of suffering*. It is not simply the sublimation of power into more power; self-overcoming is much more complicated and existentially laden. It is the elevation of one's own suffering, whether physically endured by the self or beheld in another, into the strength of convalescence: "Whatever does not kill me makes me stronger" (*TI* I.8).[31] This well-known epithet of Nietzsche's goes to the very heart of his philosophy. Nietzsche believed the highest form of the will to power is found in the strength of spirit that overcomes great suffering. Great men also suffer greatly: "The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering—do you not know that only *this* discipline has created all enhancements of man so far?" (*BGE* 225). Suffering is, as it were, the sieve through which the sublimation of power occurs. The ascetic ideal of the saint is indispensable to the will to power. It translates the excess of the passions into a greater excess of self-abnegation, and it is only when the will to power has undergone this process that sublimation can occur. Self-overcoming is the suffering *and* (then) sublimation of the will to power. It is the process by which the overman comes to be. As such, it is indispensable to the highest form of the self. As Kaufmann says,

> Without acquiring a bad conscience, without learning to be profoundly dissatisfied with ourselves, we cannot envisage higher norms, a new state of being, self-perfection. Without ascetic ideals, without self-control and cruel self-discipline, we cannot attain that self-mastery which Nietzsche ever praises and admires. But to settle down with a nagging

[30] *GM* III.8: "A philosopher may be recognized by the fact that avoids three glittering and loud things: fame, princes, and women—which is not to say they do not come to him."
[31] For this quotation I prefer Hollingdale's translation as opposed to Kaufmann's. See R.J. Hollingdale, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

bad conscience, to remain an ascetic and mortify oneself, is to fall short of Nietzsche's "Dionysian" vision.[32]

It is not difficult to see why Nietzsche would then regard sexual desire with such a suspicious eye. It is equivalent to almost pure pleasure, for in sexual desire even pain becomes pleasurable: the titillation of the body, the teasing of the mind, the swelling of the genitals all feel good even without an orgasm; but an empty stomach, a cold body, bottled anger, raging jealously, overbearing pride, etc.—none of these are pleasant unless they find fulfillment. As the purest form of physical pleasure, sex is the most difficult impulse to sublimate. One can enjoy suffering, but one cannot suffer enjoyment.[33]

8. Dostoevsky's Varieties of the Self

Fyodor Dostoevsky explores this relationship between sex and suffering in his final work *The Brothers* Karamazov. He too believed they were integral elements to life and the most powerful forces governing human nature. Like Nietzsche, he also held to a vision of "the higher type of men" (*BGE* 30), and *The Brothers Karamazov* stands as his attempt to deal with this idea. Homeland critic Dmitri Tschizewskij explains,

> One of the novel's leading idea's is that of the "higher man" … the whole structure of the novel, with its varieties of human types, with their "revolts" and collisions, the whole hierarchy of types, which rises to a really higher—and genuinely human—form of human individuality in Alyosha and Zosima, the whole thematics of the novel leads us in many ways to the basic theme, the theme of the "higher man."[34]

With this theme representing the backdrop of the novel, a comparison with Nietzsche presents some intriguing possibilities. As with our juxtaposition of Nietzsche and Levinas in Part

---

[32] Walter Kaufmann, Editor's Introduction to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, in *Basic Writings of Nietszsche*, trans. & ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000) 448.
[33] The only exception I have found to this is *tickling*.
[34] Dmitry Tschizewskij, "Schiller and *The Brothers Karamazov*," trans. Ralph E. Matlaw, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, pp. 794-807, trans. Constance Garnett, ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976) 796.

I, the methodologies of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky are also remarkably similar: sex and suffering constitute the base elements in a fundamental force of life—in Dostoevsky it is the "Karamazov force," and in Nietzsche we know it to be the "will to power"; the three Karamazov brothers—Dmitri, Alyosha, and Ivan—parallel Nietzsche's development of the self in the savage, saint, and sage; both men were also cunning psychologists, with each developing his own theory of resentment—Dostoevsky through his concept of "*nadryv*" ("laceration") and Nietzsche through his concept of "*ressentiment*";[35] for each, the absurd stands at the very heart of the world;[36] and they were both staunch opponents of socialism, excoriating the movement throughout their writings. Nonetheless, despite these remarkable similarities, in *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky only makes it halfway to Nietzsche's ideal of "the Roman Caesar with Christ's soul" (*WP* 983); he says, "My moral image and ideal is Christ" (*BK* 769). Like Levinas, Dostoevsky sides with an ethics of responsibility for one's neighbour, as opposed to Nietzsche who lets the concern for oneself trump the concern for one's neighbour. The reason is ultimately—*conscience*. What is the *guilty* conscience for Levinas and Dostoevsky is the *bad* conscience according to Nietzsche, for whom it must be turned into the *good* conscience. Their respective methodologies, then, are crucial for understanding the difference the place of conscience has in their philosophies, and specifically their treatments of sex and its concomitant relationship to suffering, for it is there that Nietzsche and Dostoevsky take leave of each other.

We have seen how conscience makes its foray into the self in Levinas's and Nietzsche's analyses of the self, so let us now look at Dostoevsky's. What in Levinas we called "the description of the self," and in Nietzsche we termed "the development of the self," in

[35] I am indebted to Professor Henry Schuurman of the King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta for this insight.
[36] *BK* 224: "the absurd is only too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and perhaps nothing would have come to pass in it without them."

Dostoevsky we name "the varieties of the self." Unlike Levinas, his notion of the self is prescriptive; and unlike Nietzsche, although he too has distinct forms of the self, there is no sense of its progression in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Although the novel is rich with its "varieties of human types," Dostoevsky gives us three basic forms of the self as embodied in the Karamazov brothers themselves; and, as mentioned above, they parallel the forms of the self in Nietzsche, albeit without the element of evolution: Dmitri embodies the debauchery of the savage, Alyosha the asceticism of the saint, and Ivan the rationality of the sage. In addition, just as the will to power runs through each stage of the self in Nietzsche, so too does Dostoevsky have a basic elemental force governing each form of the self in the brothers: it is the "Karamazov force" as embodied in the father, Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, imbued into the brothers patronymically and essentially as the life force that governs their existence. It is this life force that Dostoevsky wants to emphasize at the outset of the novel; that is why it begins with the history of the Karamazov family which centres round the life history of Fyodor Pavlovich himself. Konstantin Mochulsky says the Karamazov force "is unique and simple: the impersonal, innate, element of life, the terrible force of the earth and sex"[37]; in Fyodor Pavlovich "lives the soul of the ancient pagan world, a cosmic force, the irresistible element of sex."[38] Sex occupies a critical part in the Karamazov force because, as Tschizewskij notes, "the sexual instinct is probably at the base of all higher forms of life"[39]—those being the ideals of the higher self. However, although it is 'basic' it is not necessarily 'base': "The enormous 'Karamazov' force of life has in Fyodor Pavlovich passed into lust and debauchery; but, however stifled it is by this

[37] Konstantin Mochulsky, "*The Brothers Karamazov*," trans. Michael A. Minihan, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, pp. 776-93, trans. Constance Garnett, ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976) 776.
[38] Ibid., 778.
[39] Tschizewskij, 797.

base element, its nature remains spiritual and creative."[40] In the patriarch we find an internal conflict at the most basic level of existence, which recalls the tension evidenced between the savage and the saint. The contrast is between sex and spirit, and the suffering that results from this conflict is essential to the Karamazov force, just as suffering through self-overcoming is to the will to power. As it is for Nietzsche, so too is this the movement of *nihilism* for Dostoevsky who believes "we *are all nihilists* … (We are all, to the last man, Fyodor Pavloviches)" (*BK* 769). The possibility for nihilism is at the very heart of life in both the Karamazov force and the will to power, and the methodology by which the inevitability of suffering incurred is dealt with will mark the point of divergence between Nietzsche and Dostoevsky.

Fyodor is an important character in *The Brothers Karamazov*, not only in the plot for being the victim of parricide, but also because the entire structure and meaning of the novel rests upon the Karamazov force as embodied in him. It runs in the very blood of the brothers. But we, as readers of the novel, are also children of Fyodor with the same characteristically Karamazov passion; for as Tschizewskij points out, "Dostoevsky particularly wants to emphasize that each and everyone participates in the lowest, 'satanic' aspect of nature, in that nature which is characterized by Dostoevsky … as 'insect-like.'"[41]

Dmitri

The metaphor of the "bug" or "noxious insect" is found throughout the novel; Dostoevsky uses it to describe the excess of the Karamazov force. It makes its first appearance and is most prominently displayed in the eldest brother Dmitri: of himself, Dmitri says, "'I am that insect … and it is said of me especially'" (*BK* 96). The insect metaphor is tied to debauchery

[40] Mochulsky, 779.
[41] Tschizewskij, 799.

and the fallout from it that results from continually succumbing to the impulses. Dmitri says, "'I loved vice, loved the ignominy of vice. I loved cruelty; am I not a bug, am I not a noxious insect? In fact a Karamazov!'" (*BK* 97). Of the three sons, Dmitri most resembles his father. Mochulsky remarks that like his father, "He is also a sensualist, also knows the shameful sweetness of debauchery."[42] Dmitri always lets his passions run ahead of him; his raging anger, indomitable pride, and incurable jealousy all get the better of him at various points in the novel. But it is Dmitri's insatiable lust that fuels all his other impulses; it is his desire for Katerina and then Grushenka that consumes him and drives the excess of his debaucheries. Similar to the fornicating savage, Dmitri is driven by the desire for *novelty*; he only wants that which he cannot have, but when he does have it, or knows he could have it, he no longer desires it. The ebb and flow of his desire for both Katerina and Grushenka rests upon the novelty aspect of his sexual instinct. He moves from his attempted prostitution of Katerina, to his obsessive courtship of Grushenka, then back to Katerina at the end of the novel, because the excess of the Karamazov force within him is driven by the base element of novelty in the sexual desire of fornication. Quite simply, Dmitri cannot control himself; and just as the savage is at the whim of its impulses and thus dependent upon others, so too is Dmitri's fate dictated by those around him as a result of his sexual excess. His attempts to procure three thousand rubles from any one of Samsonov, Lyagavy, and Madame Khoklakov humorously exemplify the pain and desperation he feels as a result of this dependency.

But it is at Dmitri's trial that the crushing burden of this dependence is most poignantly displayed. At his trial, though he is innocent, Dmitri finds himself at the mercy of the witnesses, the prosecutor, and to some extent even his own defence attorney. The trial is not a question of

---

[42] Mochulsky, 780.

innocence and guilt; if anything, Dostoevsky uses the setting to blur the line between them in order to make the distinction between good and evil a hazy one at best. In fact, one of the leitmotifs of Dostoevsky's discourse is that good often conceals evil, and from evil often springs good. The trial points to something on the thither side of guilt and innocence, "beyond good and evil," as it were,—and that something is *fate*. Dmitri himself brings this all together in a sweeping statement made at the end of his preliminary interrogation:

> "Gentlemen, we're all cruel, we're all monsters, we all make men weep, and mothers, and babes at the breast, but of all, let it be settled here, now, of all I am the lowest reptile! I've sworn to amend every day of my life, beating my breast, and every day I've done the same filthy things. I understand now that such men as I need a blow, a blow, of destiny to catch them as with a noose, and bind them by a force from without. Never, never should I have risen of myself! But the thunderbolt has fallen. I accept the torment of accusation, and my public shame, I want to suffer and by suffering I shall be purified" (*BK* 481).

In this passage, Dostoevsky shows us the relationship between sex and suffering through Dmitri's experience of the conflicting Karamazov force within him. It is only by suffering for his sexual debauchery that Dmitri believes he will be made clean. This is the touch of ascesis, as exemplified in Zosima and Alyosha, which counterbalances the excess of sex in Dmitri, and leads him on the way to the ideal of the higher self that Dostoevsky has in mind. However, it is not that Dmitri suddenly becomes an ascetic like his brother Alyosha; he remains his uncontrollably passionate self even with his newfound ideal.

What Dostoevsky is attempting to convey is the interconnectedness of sex and suffering in the Karamazov force, and that this relationship is key to the spiritual creativity he believes every human being ultimately longs for. The affinities Dmitri has with the savage are clear: his excessive passions, their being fuelled by his sexual desire for novelty, his complete lack of self-control, and his total dependency on others all resonate with the first stage of Nietzsche's development of the self. But even in Dmitri, whose fundamental characteristic is debauchery, the

effects of the Karamazov force have *spiritual* implications. Through him Dostoevsky seems to be saying that even the most beastly of human beings have spiritual attunement, thus even "the lowest reptile" among us can participate in the ideal of the higher self.

This marks the difference between Nietzsche's development of the self and Dostoevsky's varieties of the self. But the backbone of their philosophies remains the same: both the will to power and the Karamazov force, respectively, rest upon the conflict between sex and suffering. In Dmitri we find a form of the self in throes of debauchery, with the excess of his sexual impulse landing him in a number of predicaments until the fateful blow puts his life in the hands of others. Yet despite the baseness of his being, the Karamazov force within him struggles against his insect nature even while it perpetuates it. For Nietzsche, this conflict could not take place in debauchery; suffering would only be experienced on the level of sentience, because the savage cannot suffer spiritually. But for Dostoevsky it does. Baseness and sublimity collide, and the consequence is spiritual suffering—the suffering of the body is only incidental. Dmitri *never* suffers physically. The only suffering he incurs is the acute mental anguish resulting from the conflicting nature of the Karamazov force within him. The ideal of the higher self Dostoevsky sets for the novel is attained by Dmitri, however fleetingly, only when the insect instinct for sex is put through the sieve of suffering.

Alyosha

In his foreword to *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky lets us know that Alyosha is intended to be the "hero" of the novel (*BK* xvii). But he makes an important caveat for the story's protagonist, which will be critical for understanding how Dostoevsky deals with the novel's theme of the higher self: of Alyosha, he says, "he is by no means a great man" (*BK* xvii).

Dostoevsky gives us no qualification for what he specifically means by "great," but what we can be sure of is that Alyosha is neither the centre of the plot nor the focus of the ideological thrust of the novel. Mochulsky explains,

> The youngest of the Karamazov brothers, Alyosha, is drawn more palely than the others. His personal theme is suppressed by Dmitri's passionate pathos and Ivan's ideational dialectics. ... Alyosha shares in the feelings and experiences of the others, but the action of the novel is not determined by him and his "idea" is only noted.[43]

Alyosha is purely a reactionary character in *The Brothers Karamazov*. He is continually and *wilfully* at the service of others throughout the entire novel. His own little narrative—his life with his elder Zosima, and his future with Lise Khokhlakov—makes up only a small portion of the novel, and it is squeezed into the plot only as a break from the action which surrounds Dmitri.

Dostoevsky calls Alyosha an "eccentric" character (*BK* xvii); he would have to be, given that he is a monk in training. His character is in stark contrast to his debaucherous elder brother. While Dmitri boasts about his many 'conquests' as a military man, Alyosha turns crimson at even the mere allusion to sexuality, and we can be sure that he has never 'known' a woman in his life. And yet, Dostoevsky makes it vividly clear that he too is a "Karamazov" through and through, just like his father and Dmitri. Alyosha himself admits as much:

> "My brothers are destroying themselves, ... my father, too. And they are destroying others with them. It's 'the primitive force of the Karamazov's' ... a crude, unbridled, earthly force. Does the spirit of God move above that force? Even that I don't know. I only know that I, too, am a Karamazov. ... Me a monk, a monk!" (*BK* 202).

"The primitive force of the Karamazov's" comes alive in Alyosha in his brief flirtation with Grushenka. Leading up to the encounter, Alyosha rebels against God for letting his deceased elder stink. As Mochulsky notes, Alyosha revolts and "falls into the power of his Mephistopheles—Rakitin—and the latter takes him to Grushenka. In the chaste youth awakens

---

[43] Ibid., 789.

the Karamazov sensuality."[44] Alyosha eats sausage, is about to drink vodka, and goes to Grushenka seeking his ruin,[45] where the temptress sits on his lap. (We might grant Dostoevsky some latitude with the apparent superficial level of debauchery Alyosha is permitted to sink to. We shouldn't expect him to suddenly bolt to a brothel or start pounding back shots of vodka with the regulars at the local tavern; not only are Alyosha's acts of rebellion believable of the character, but at the very least they add to the comedic value of the episode.) At the moment of Alyosha's greatest temptation we find the interconnection of sex and suffering. As he experiences his most intense sexual experience (however pathetic that may be), he suffers for the legacy of his deceased and stinking elder. Alyosha's own fateful blow deals him his own trial.[46] His sexuality must suffer for his spiritual renewal to occur, and Alyosha is more than willing to suffer in order to have his spiritual world made aright.

Like the saint, Alyosha too is characterized by ascesis. However, it reveals itself quite differently than the caricature Nietzsche makes of the life of the saint, which might be likened to the mockery Dostoevsky makes of just such a saint as depicted in Father Ferapont. Alyosha's asceticism drives his pursuit of "active love," a trait he imbibed from Father Zosima, who describes it thus:

> "By the experience of active love. Strive to love your neighbor actively and indefatigably. Insofar as you advance in love you will grow surer of the reality of God and of the immortality of your soul. If you attain to perfect self-forgetfulness in the love of your neighbor, then you will believe without doubt, and no doubt can possibly enter your soul. This has been tried. This is certain" (*BK* 48).

Alyosha is no less ascetic for it, but the practice of active love puts the extirpation of the passions in a much different light than Nietzsche's second stage of the self. Like Dmitri, Alyosha does *not*

[44] Ibid., 791-2.
[45] *BK* 333: "I came here seeking my ruin."
[46] *BK* 330. Rakitin, who is present during this scene, reflects on what transpires: "each of them was just passing through a spiritual crisis such as does not come often in a lifetime."

suffer physically. Unlike Father Ferapont and his ilk, he does not put his body through the ringer in order to purify his soul. Instead, he attains a level of self-abnegation by suffering *spiritually*, and he does so by suffering for others.

However, that being said, Alyosha's deepest experience of suffering is still his own. His practice of active love is the *spiritual substitute* for the physical experience of sexual love. Although he is an ascetic, the Karamazov trait of debauchery also lies within him. Indeed, the conflict between debauchery and asceticism is in his blood from his parentage: "'You're a Karamazov too, yourself; you're a thorough Karamazov—no doubt birth and selection have something to answer for. You're a sensualist from your father, a crazy saint from your mother'" (*BK* 70). His Christ-like love for everyone and everything, borne from the memory of his mother, could only come at the expense of an enormous sexual energy within him, which comes from his father. That Alyosha's sexuality is virtually absent from the novel's plot and ideological import is because of two reasons: 1) the Christ-like figure Alyosha is intended to portray follows the absence of sexual temptation in Christ's life as depicted in the New Testament narrative; and 2) the simple fact that Dostoevsky gave the character the name of his deceased young boy, Alexey, understandably must have made it difficult for the author and father to depict the character in such a manner—for that Dostoevsky may be forgiven.

Ivan

If Dmitri is the most excessive character, and Alyosha the most eccentric, then Ivan is surely the most enigmatic character in the novel: Dmitri says to Alyosha, "'Ivan is a riddle'" (*BK* 211). Ivan is, without a doubt, the most difficult character in the novel to understand, and much of the literature on *The Brothers Karamazov* has been exhausted on bringing the truth of Ivan to

light. The mystery surrounding Ivan is typically thought to centre round his legend of The Grand Inquisitor. To some extent, this has led to the conflation of the character of Ivan with that of the Grand Inquisitor himself, which typifies much of the criticism of *The Brothers Karamazov*. But like his brothers Dmitri and Alyosha, Ivan cannot be understood without the novel's theme of the idea of the higher self and the ambivalent Karamazov force that drives it. Ivan, like his debaucherous elder brother and his ascetic younger brother, is the son of Fyodor and thus a product of the Karamazov force of life. In fact, he is probably more like his father in character than either of his brothers is: Ivan's obsequious acolyte, Smerdyakov, says, "'You are like Fyodor Pavlovich, sir, you are more like him sir, more like him than any of his children'" (*BK* 599); and the prosecuting attorney, Ippolit Kirillovich, pronounces, "'If there is one of the sons that is like Fyodor Pavlovich in character, it is Ivan Fyodorovich'" (*BK* 662). Their similarity, however, does not display itself through their actions. Dmitri is clearly the son that *acts* most like his father in his debauchery, sexual energy, shamelessness, and buffoonery. The sameness Ivan shares with his father is found in the conflicting nature of the Karamazov force of life, of which Fyodor is the novel's archetypal representation. Of the three brothers, Ivan is the one who feels this conflict most intensely.

As the consummate dialectical character, Ivan is constantly trying to reconcile the baseness of the Karamazov passion with the sublimity of its spiritual creativity. His conflict is essentially between *immorality* and *immortality*, *debauchery* and *asceticism*, and it is borne out intellectually in him. As with the sage, Ivan attempts to reconcile this conflict *rationally*; and like the sage he too suffers greater than any other form of the self. Ivan recognizes the insect nature of his being: "'I am a bug'" (*BK* 224); and he initially sides with the debaucherous element of the Karamazov force, immediately after he gives his story of The Grand Inquisitor to Alyosha:

> "But the little sticky leaves, and the precious tombs, and the blue sky, and the woman you love! How will you love, how will you love them?" Alyosha cried sorrowfully. "With such a hell in your heart and your head, how can you?" ...
> "There is a strength to endure everything," Ivan said with a cold smile.
> "What strength?"
> "The strength of the Karamazov—the strength of the Karamazov baseness."
> "To sink into debauchery, to stifle your soul with corruption, yes?" (*BK* 243).

Ivan soon abandons himself to "the Karamazov recklessness of his passions," "to his mad and consuming passion for Katerina Ivanova" (*BK* 578-9). Again, we find a Karamazov brother succumbing to his sexual desire, but his sexuality soon conflicts with his asceticism. Ivan finds himself contemplating martyrdom for his brother Dmitri because of his love—and, ultimately, his profound respect—for his brother Alyosha.

Ivan's inner dialectic plays itself out fraternally: on the one hand, he is driven by an obsessive desire for Katerina, who is still betrothed to his brother Dmitri, and so he finds himself in direct competition with his brother over the love of a woman—this is the *sexual* side of the Karamazov force within him; on the other hand, Ivan, who has engaged in a fierce ideological debate with Alyosha throughout the entire novel, finds his beliefs put to the test and feels unexpectedly compelled to sacrifice himself for Dmitri—this is the *spiritual* side of the Karamazov force within him. Ivan is in competition with both of his brothers throughout the novel, which reflects the conflict he experiences in his internal dialectic of the Karamazov force. The problem is that Ivan is unable to reconcile this conflict *rationally*, and so he begins to suffer for it. He is torn between recognizing the guilt of Dmitri for the murder of their father and acknowledging his own guilt for the crime—and the prize is Katerina Ivanova. He even recognized this long before the parricide took place. To Alyosha he says,

> "Am I my brother Dmitri's keeper? ... Cain's answer to God, about his murdered brother, wasn't it? Perhaps that's what you're thinking at this moment? Well, damn it all, I can't stay here to be their keeper, can I? I've finished what I had to do, and I am going. Do you

imagine I am jealous of Dmitri, that I've been trying to steal his beautiful Katerina Ivanova for the last three months?" (*BK* 213)

Ivan recognizes the sexual competition he is involved in with Dmitri, but with his reference to Cain and Abel he acknowledges the spiritual competition he is engaged in with Alyosha, and in saying this to Alyosha he presages the conflict he will eventually undergo at Dmitri's trial. As with his brothers, his conflict is between sex and suffering. Ivan must suffer by sacrificing his desire for Katerina in order to attain the ideal of the higher self. But, again, it is a *spiritual* suffering that Ivan undergoes. The sacrificing of his sexual desire allows for his spiritual rebirth, alongside Dmitri's revelation and Alyosha's renewal. Just like his brothers, the spiritual ideal comes at the expense of his sexual desire by way of ascesis. Ivan loses the ideological battle with Alyosha and commits an act of active love. But Dostoevsky has him go mad for it. Ivan is unable to rationalize his actions because they completely conflict with the baseness of the Karamazov force within him. Unlike his brothers, Ivan cannot live with the contradiction, and so he attempts to reason his way out of it. But he fails. As Mochulsky explains, "the Karamazov force—the love for life—conflicts in his soul with another force—atheistic reason, which breaks it down and kills it."[47] Whereas rationality functions as the elevation of the sage, reason is Ivan's downfall. He cannot reconcile the Karamazov force of life with his rationality—and the 'reason' is ultimately because of his *conscience*. Ivan's guilty conscience gnaws at him until his heart gets its way and his head gives out: "'he has a deep, deep conscience. He tormented himself with his conscience'" (*BK* 656).

Shortly after Ivan's mental collapse, Dmitri makes an intriguing remark to Alyosha: "'You know, brother Ivan is superior to all of us. He ought to live, not us'" (*BK* 722). Ivan is indeed superior to both Dmitri and Alyosha, and to everyone else in the novel. But though he is a

[47] Mochulsky, 783.

great man, he is, however, no "hero"; that title belongs to Alyosha. Ivan is ruled by the idea of God—by the idea of *playing* God. Mochulsky says, "Ivan does not believe in immortality and cannot love others. He dons the mask of love for mankind in order to raise himself to the place of the lover of mankind—God."[48] But standing in Ivan's way is his conscience. He cannot usurp the throne of God because his conscience continually beats him down from it. The devil—of whom Ivan says, "'*he* is myself ... All that is base in me, all that's mean and contemptible'" (*BK* 620)—knows this: "'Conscience! What is conscience? I make it up for myself. Why am I tormented by it? From habit. From the universal habit of mankind for seven thousand years. So let us give it up, and we shall be gods'" (*BK* 620). But Ivan cannot and does not cast it aside. He, just like his brothers before him, submits to the insufferable torments of his conscience, which is the only suffering a Karamazov cannot, but must nonetheless, endure.

9. The Karamazov Conscience

The Karamazov conscience is the *guilty* conscience, and all three brothers experience it to varying degrees. But with each brother's experience comes a spiritual conversion; even the atheist Ivan is led upon this path. Alyosha sees it:

> He began to understand Ivan's illness. "The anguish of a proud determination. A deep conscience! God, in Whom he disbelieved, and His truth were gaining mastery over his heart, which still refused to submit." ... "God will conquer!" he thought. "Either he will rise up in the light of truth, or ... he'll perish in hate" (*BK* 622).

Notice what Ivan's "deep conscience" is in the service of: "truth." And so it is with each of the Karamazov brothers. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, conscience is given in the light of truth: Dmitri stumbles upon it, Alyosha seeks after it, and Ivan muses over it—*but each of them suffers for it.* In doing so, truth becomes tied to the idea of the higher self. Truth is suffered for because

[48] Ibid., 785.

each of the brothers believes it will make them a better man. The Karamazov conscience betrays to each brother the man that they are, but it is a man they cannot bear to be, for the truth is about *themselves*. Truth is existential, contingent upon the guilty conscience for its revelation. The Karamazov conscience figures in mightily, because it sets in motion a chain of events that ultimately leads to the truth Dostoevsky purports in the novel. Conscience triggers an awareness of truth, but only insofar as this awareness measures its distance from truth by the failure to live up to it. Truth is revealed in failure. This revelation debases the current way of life in light of a higher standard. But the debasing of the current way of life is not an easy process. One cannot simply cast aside the old way of life in favour of the new ideal; one first has to *suffer* for having lived it in order to live in the new way. Truth demands resurrection, which requires the initial sacrifice.

The suffering necessitated by the revelation of truth lies in the idea of the higher self Dostoevsky sets forth in the novel. If his "moral image and ideal is Christ," than it is undoubtedly held by the characters of Father Zosima and Alyosha. These two figures embody the ideal of the higher self because it is a *spiritual* ideal. Zosima says, "'the spiritual world, [is] the higher part of man's being'" (*BK* 292). But if that is so, then the physical world must be the lower part of man's being, and thus we have the makeup of the Karamazov force of life. It is a war between *body* and *soul*. The ideal of the higher self is a spiritual ideal, which must overcome the body for it to be attained, and thus it is very much an ascetic ideal. Listen to how Zosima describes it:

> "The monastic way is very difficult. Obedience, fasting and prayer are laughed at, yet only through them lies the way to real true freedom. I cut off my superfluous and unnecessary desires, I subdue my proud and wanton will and chastise it with obedience, and with God's help I attain freedom of spirit and with it spiritual joy" (*BK* 293).

But Dostoevsky adds a slight nuance to Zosima's ideal. He is all too aware of the latent evil hidden in ascetic ideals, and so he deploys the character of Father Ferapont to distinguish Zosima's ideal from one that includes self-inflicted physical suffering, the likes of which Nietzsche uncovers in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

The aspect of suffering for the ideal of the higher self is centred round *spiritual* suffering, not physical suffering. None of the Karamazov brothers suffers physically, but each of them does suffer intense spiritual affliction during their respective crises. The physical desires themselves are not the target; otherwise, the suffering incurred would itself be physical. Sensuality has to be changed into spirituality. However, the Karamazov brothers still must suffer for their sensual nature, for the suffering of the passions is the means by which to attain the spiritual ideal. The trick for Dostoevsky is to have the Karamazov brothers suffer *spiritually* for what they are *physically*. This is accomplished through the Karamazov conscience: their guilty conscience reveals the lower part of their being—sensuality—as false, and the higher part of their being—spirituality—as true. The ideal of the higher self sets the standard by which the brothers judge themselves. Their conscience shows them their failure to live up to the spiritual ideal, and so their lives hitherto become false in light of the truth of their higher being. Therefore, to attain the truth of their real being, the falsehood of their sensual being must be atoned for. The guilty conscience causes them to suffer *spiritually* for what they are *sensually*; physical suffering is bypassed in favour of spiritual suffering. It remains an ascetic ideal, but the pride associated with self-mutilation, which Dostoevsky points to in the character of Father Ferapont, is avoided. The Karamazov brothers still sacrifice their physical desires, but only on the level of spirituality. The base element of the Karamazov force is sacrificed to the creative element via the Karamazov conscience. The brothers still suffer for their sensuality, but only in its *elevated* form. Thus, the

suffering Dostoevsky deems necessary for the attainment of truth is accomplished: the brothers move from falsehood into truth, from the physical ideal to the spiritual ideal, and the guilty conscience facilitates the necessary suffering for this transition to be made.

However, the requisite suffering for truth takes an interesting target: it is *sexual desire* that is placed upon the altar of sacrifice. For some reason, sex is the animal that atones for the failure of the past life and permits the truth of the new life to be lived. Sex becomes the switching-station between falsehood and truth.

But why is sex the scapegoat for a life of falsity? What is it about sex that Dostoevsky deems it necessary to be sacrificed for truth? What is the relationship between sex and truth?

III. ELEVATION

10. The Higher Self

The relationship between sex and truth is complicated by an intriguing feature, one that Dostoevsky shares with both Levinas and Nietzsche. It plays off the idea of conscience, whether it is the good conscience in Nietzsche or the guilty conscience in Levinas and Dostoevsky. It functions to describe the affect truth has upon the self resulting from the suffering undergone for the sake of truth. This feature we note in Levinas, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky is—*elevation.*

Levinas

In Levinas sex is in absentia; its presence is only noticed by its absence. Although he employs the language of "desire" throughout, particularly in *Totality and Infinity*, he is clear to distinguish metaphysical desire—desire for the other—from physical desire, including sexual desire:

> The metaphysical desire does not rest upon any prior kinship. It is a desire that cannot be satisfied. For we speak lightly of desires satisfied, or of sexual needs, or even of moral and religious needs. Love itself is thus taken to be the satisfaction of a sublime hunger. If this language is possible it is because most of our desires and love too are not *pure*. The desires one can satisfy resemble metaphysical desire only in the deceptions of satisfaction or in the exasperation of non-satisfaction and desire which constitutes voluptuosity itself. The metaphysical desire has another intention; it desires beyond everything that can simply complete it. It is like goodness—the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it [italics ours] (*T&I* 34).

Levinas works within a distinction in which every desire but ethical responsibility is likened to a need. In every desire, save for that of metaphysics, lies the possibility of satisfaction, however transient, such that even love does not contribute to it: "The metaphysical event of transcendence—the welcome of the Other, hospitality—Desire and language—is not accomplished as love" (*T&I* 254). This is not to say that the self does not love the other, but that love is preceded by ethical responsibility. The reason Levinas wants to break with the notion of

satisfaction is because he believes the true self lies beyond the possibility of satiety. Satisfaction is not the self. But herein lies an interesting dilemma: the difference between satiety and the impossibility thereof reveals a conflict within the self, a conflict that is at the heart of Levinas's discourse; so much so, in fact, that his philosophy is structured by it. Jeffrey Dudiak explains,

> Levinas ... does refer to the violence of reducing the other to the same as a "forgetting." Levinas's discourse would appear, then, at this level, not as prescriptive (telling me what I should do), but as a descriptive invitation (reminding me of who I am)—delineating a structure in terms of which alone the self can, reminiscent of one of the oldest philosophical aspirations, know itself, to know that in sacrificing itself the self does not lose itself, but finds its own (deepest) self.[49]

The difference is, essentially, between the self that *has* forgotten, and the self that *has been* forgotten (hence Levinas's description of the self, as opposed to a prescription of the self). This conflict is critical for understanding Levinas, because it creates a notion of the true self that inevitably ties truth to the self. The trick is to follow the philosophical progression initiated by this conflict, starting with metaphysical desire. The distinction between metaphysical desire and physical desire produces a conflict within the self. This conflict within the self takes place on the battleground of *conscience*, for only thus does metaphysics takes flight: "Conscience accomplishes metaphysics" (*T&I* 41). Conscience triggers the revelation of the true self to itself, but it does so only because the self as it *is*—the self that has forgotten—is a failure. The self is not up to snuff, to its true self—the self that has been forgotten—which is to be for the other. But the self does not then plummet into despair. Rather, its failure in the face of its true self actually produces metaphysical desire. The movement of metaphysics is based upon failure insofar as metaphysics is constitutive of conscience. The self first speaks an apology, not as penitence for an act first conceived, but as the revelation of its inability to ever live up to its responsibility.

[49] Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading in the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001) 147-8.

However, the failure of the self in its responsibility for the other does not presuppose the possibility for success, because, as Levinas notes, metaphysical desire is beyond the dichotomy of satisfaction and non-satisfaction. Rather, it is conscience marking out difference in its deference for the other.

Levinas, however, qualifies conscience: "Conscience accomplishes metaphysics, *if metaphysics consists in transcending*" [italics ours] (*T&I* 261). Here marks the entrance of "elevation" into Levinas's discourse. Conscience opens up an asymmetrical dimension of height, whereby the other is given the status of nobility in which it is *higher* than the self. Metaphysical desire, the plane of this movement of conscience, is this elevation of the other, or transcendence:

> A desire without satisfaction which, precisely, *understands* the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other. For Desire this alterity, non-adequate to the idea, has a meaning. It is understood as the alterity of the Other and of the Most-High. The very dimension of height is opened up by metaphysical Desire. That this height is no longer the heavens but the Invisible is the very elevation of height and its nobility (*T&I* 34-5).

Transcendence is elevation, and it is opened up by metaphysical desire. But it is the conscience of the self that sets it all in motion. Conscience betrays the self to its true self, which is to be for the other. Constitutive of this is the elevation of the other to whom the self rises in the measure that its responsibility continually increases. Metaphysical desire never ceases, is never slaked, because it is infinite responsibility itself; but the inability of the self to accomplish this is its failure, which makes its first words an apology to the other for this inevitability. Elevation is the resulting asymmetry, but the other is only elevated insofar as the self fails to measure up to its responsibility. *The self elevates the other*; and it does so through its conscience—the idea of infinity: "the idea of infinity designates a height and a nobility, a transcendence" (*T&I* 41). As such, the idea of infinity, the thought before thinking—the conscience of the self before it is a consciousness—, triggers the revelation of truth. Conscience breaks the self under the burden of

its true self, which is to be for the other, and through elevation forms the asymmetrical ethical relation. This, in turn, sets truth itself in motion: "The ethical relation ... is not contrary to truth; it goes unto being in its absolute exteriority, and accomplishes the very intention that animates the movement unto truth" (*T&I* 47). The true self is actually prior to the truth itself, and so in a very real sense the self is responsible for truth and thus for all of being.

For this responsibility, however, the self suffers. The self must suffer for truth to be true. The ethical relation, and thus "the movement unto truth," is not established without the self being called into question in its idea of infinity. The idea of infinity, then, is not just the conscience of the self, but the *guilty* conscience, the *shame* by which metaphysical desire moves towards the other:

> The Other is not initially a *fact*, is not an *obstacle*, does not threaten me with death; he is desired in my shame. ... one must measure oneself against infinity, that is, desire him. It is necessary to have the idea of infinity, the idea of the perfect,[50] as Descartes would say, in order to know one's own imperfection. The idea of the perfect is not an idea but desire; it is the welcoming of the Other, the commencement of moral consciousness, which calls in question my freedom. Thus this way of measuring oneself against the perfection of infinity is not a theoretical consideration; it is accomplished as shame (*T&I* 84).

By its shame the self suffers, for in its shame the self is guilty. But, again, it is not as the condemnation of its action. Rather, it is for its imperfection in the face of the perfection of infinity. The self simply cannot measure up; the other will always suffer as a result of the inability of the self to prevent its suffering. However, the suffering of the other is not the ultimate form of suffering. It is the self that suffers absolutely. It suffers for the suffering of the other:

> The vortex—suffering of the other, my pity for his suffering, his pain over my pity, my pain over his pain, etc.—stops at me. The I is what involves one movement more in this iteration. My suffering is the cynosure of all the sufferings—and of all the faults, even of the fault of my persecutors, which amounts to suffering the ultimate persecution, suffering absolutely. This is not a purifying fire of suffering, which magically would count here. This element of a "*pure born*," for nothing, in suffering, is the passivity of suffering which prevents its reverting into suffering assumed, in which the for-the-other

[50] *T&I* 41: "The idea of the perfect is an idea of infinity."

> of sensibility, that is, its very sense, would be annulled. This moment of the "for nothing" in suffering is the surplus of non-sense over sense by which the sense of suffering is possible. The incarnation of the self and its possibilities of gratuitous pain must be understood in function of the absolute accusative characteristic of the self, a passivity prior to all passivity at the bottom of matter becoming flesh. But in the anarchic character of suffering, and prior to all reflection, we have to catch sight of a suffering for suffering, a suffering because of what is pitiful in my suffering, which is a suffering "for God" who suffers from my suffering. There is an anarchic trace of God in passivity [italics ours] (*OTB* 196).

Although it is unclear as to why Levinas relegates this passage to a footnote, its importance is not belied by its placement. The suffering of the self is paramount. Ethics only takes flight because the self suffers for the other, even when the other does not suffer. It suffers because its conscience has shamed itself before the other. Only thus can truth come to be.

So what does all this have to do with sex? The answer lies in the elevation of the other, or—"religion." Conscience makes the self suffer for its shame in the face of the other, yet in its shame it desires the other, and with the ethical relation established, truth is set in motion. But by "affirming truth to be a modality of the relation between the same and the other" (*T&I* 64), Levinas is in essence affirming truth to be a modality of the *purity* of desire. The self desires the other for its purity; and as such it must desire purely, for only thus can the movement towards truth be made. This, we note, however, is only of the true self—the self that has been forgotten; the self that has forgotten certainly violates the other in thought and in deed. But herein lies the conflict. The self desires impurely, while its true self desires purely. The true self is asexual. Sex is sacrificed for truth, since truth follows only from the ethical relation established by metaphysical desire; but the ethical relation itself rests upon a neutered self and a virgin other. The self sloughs off its sexual desire, after conscience reveals its true self to itself, which is to be *for* the other not in *need* of the other, and only thus does the self move towards the other in

metaphysical desire. The ethical relation, then, as the *pure* desire of metaphysics, animates the movement unto truth. But to this relation Levinas gives an interesting name:

> In the concrete the positive face of the formal structure, having the idea of infinity, is discourse, specified as an ethical relation. For the relation between the being here below and the transcendent being that results in no community of concept or totality—a relation without relation—we reserve the term religion (*T&I* 80).

"Religion," in Levinas, carries with it a distinct connection to truth, and yet a dubious but necessary one to sex. He maintains that, "In my religious being I am *in truth*" (*T&I* 253). But truth is sought after in a curious fashion: "Truth is sought in the other, but by him who *lacks nothing*" [italics ours] (*T&I* 62). Truth itself cannot be needed,[51] only desired—metaphysically, of course. "Truth" and "the other" can then be conflated, at least in the manner they are sought after by the self, and "religion" is the way the self desires them. "Religion is Desire" (*T&I* 64). For truth to be true, for the other to be wholly other, the self must remember to be its true self which "lacks nothing," a being without needs who only Desires; it is a religious being. The self which lacks nothing Desires everything—for the other and truth. Sexual desire, sexual distinction, sexual difference[52]—anything related to sex is sacrificed in the name of religion, because it is deemed a need to be satisfied and incapable of Desiring purely. Levinas's notion of

[51] *T&I* 61: "the quest for a truth is precisely a relation that does not rest on the privation of need. To seek and to obtain truth is to be in a relation but because one is defined by something other than oneself, but because in a certain sense one lacks nothing."

[52] Jacques Derrida puts forth a similar contestation to the one we are presenting here in his prototypical quasi-critical, quasi-flatteringly manner. Derrida discovers a "seriature" in Levinas's discourse ("work") wherein that which comes chronologically second conditions that which is first but then thus logically second. In his analysis of a unique turn-of-phrase Levinas uses in *Otherwise Than Being* ("at this very moment"), Derrida comments that "being" is announced first and then the "otherwise than being" second in two chronologically separate "moments" that are nonetheless the same moment despite their iteration. But the otherwise than being is said, by Levinas, to inaugurate being despite its revelation inside being as that which comes second, or after being. In an analogous but constitutive mo(ve)ment in Levinas's discourse, Derrida finds that the sexual differentiation of human being actually conditions the (supposedly) nonsexually marked, neuter, virgin other. From the primal *spiritual* essence of human being, bizarrely designated by the masculine, comes the encounter of the feminine. But it is this *sexual* differentiation of *spiritual* human being, as masculinity, that is the revelation of the wholly other—as femininity. Sexual differentiation, although it comes after their spiritual unity, is actually that which conditions spirituality. The secondary status of sex betrays its pre-eminence over the originary status of spirit. See Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am," trans. Ruben Berezdivin, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, pp.11-48, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

the true self really quite mirrors the life of a saint. His asceticism may happen only at the highest level of abstraction, but the centrality of sex, even if only marked by its absence, is no less important to his philosophy because of it.

Nietzsche

What is elevation for Levinas is abasement for Nietzsche. In a comparison of the two, Dudiak says, "what is height for Levinas (the distrust of one's self) is base for Nietzsche, a movement that for Levinas leads to the truth of theory, and for Nietzsche to the decadence that is both religion and philosophy."[53] Conversely, what is elevation for Nietzsche would be base for Levinas. For Nietzsche, elevation increases in height in the degree to which morality (as we know it) decreases and eventually disappears. R.J. Hollingdale says "he directly connects the 'elevation' of man with the 'death of God.'"[54] The connection is, essentially, between self-perfection and nihilism. The death of God is the sign of nihilism nearing its completion, signalling the advent of the overman; and to the extent that the death of God is perpetuated and nihilism runs its course, the self is perfected and thus elevated. Elevation is not constitutive of morality; it is the corollary of its demise in the progression to the overman: "The overcoming of morality, in a certain sense even the self-overcoming of morality—let this be the name for that long secret work which has been saved up for the finest and most honest, also the most malicious, consciences of today, as living touchstones of the soul" (*BGE* 32).

Elevation is certainly a process for Nietzsche, and not an aspect to the transcendental conditions of being that it is for Levinas. It flows through the evolution of the self, ascending upon each stage of development in the measure that the will to power increases. Elevation is

[53] Dudiak, 157.
[54] R.J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 143.

connected to the will to power, which works itself out historically as nihilism; hence Hollingdale's acuity in the link between elevation and the death of God. As such, we should expect the process to follow the development of the self. Hollingdale says the elevation of the self is an "elevation through some kind of constraint, through exercising one's power *against oneself*" [italics ours].[55] This is the first instance of elevation, which resonates with the second stage of the self; thus it bears the marks of ascesis. For Nietzsche, elevation begins with the saint, in the self turning against itself. In its ascetic excess, the self takes aim at the passions, freeing itself from subservience to them. In doing so, the self attains a higher form of the self.

The elevation of the self is connected to truth and truth to the will to power. Nietzsche makes this connection by citing the *will to truth* as a phenomenon of the will to power in the higher type of beings: "Their 'knowing' is *creating*, their creating is a legislation, their will to truth is—*will to power*" (*BGE* 212). Thus, as Kaufmann notes, truth bears the markings of the will to power: "the will to truth is a function of the will to power."[56] Therefore, if elevation begins with ascesis, the movement towards truth must itself be ascetic: "As long as truths do not cut into our flesh with knives, we retain a certain contempt for them" (*D* 460). The saint can only be sure of having attained a higher form of the self if the war against itself is in the service of truth: "Everyday you must conduct your campaign also against yourself. ... your concern is truth" (*D* 370).

However, for elevation to continue to the third stage of the self, truth would then have to evince signs of divinity, for "As long as the priest is considered a *higher* type of man—this *professional* negator, slanderer, and poisoner of life—there is no answer to the question: what *is* truth?" (*AC* 8). This brings us back to the link between elevation and the death of God. If

[55] Ibid.
[56] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 203.

elevation occurs to the extent that nihilism comes to its fullest measure, thereby forcing humanity to take over the role God had formerly played throughout history, then the progression of truth itself would have to be *nihilistic*; and that's exactly what it becomes for Nietzsche:

> The most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that *every* belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world.* Thus: a *perspectival appearance* whose origin lies in us (in so far as we continually *need* a narrower, abbreviated, simplified world).
>
> —That it is the measure of strength to what extent we can admit to ourselves, without perishing, the merely *apparent* character, the necessity of lies.
>
> To this extent, nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be *a divine way of thinking* (*WP* 15).

Nihilism elevates the self to the highest heights of truth, because it makes the self the arbiter of truth. At the third and final stage, the self knows it has reached its highest form because the sage *creates* truth. Truth is no longer discovery; it is no longer sought. Elevation is creation. "What I want is more; I am no seeker. I want to create for myself a sun of my own" (*GS* 320).

But truth has one more element to it, one it cannot do without if the self is to ascend to its highest form and create truth of its own. Truth must be put through the fire of *conscience*. The self, as the arbiter of truth, puts its own stamp on truth with its own Yes or its own No, and the severity of discipline required resembles the ascetic ideal: "where [truth] still inspires passion, love, ardour, and *suffering* at all, it is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but rather *the latest and noblest form of it*" (*GM* III.23). This suffering, however, is not suffering for the other, as we found in Levinas. It is the sublimation of suffering through the conscience of the self, which happens *in spite of* the suffering of others. Elevation is still the result, but it pays a hefty price: "Of all the means of producing exaltation, it has been human sacrifice which has at all times most exalted and elevated man" (*D* 45). Nietzsche admits this is no easy task, for the elevation of the self to be carried through to its highest height requires a *good* conscience. The suffering for others that the self experiences, which Nietzsche puts at the level of ascesis, must be sublimated

into its highest form. Nietzsche one-ups the ultimate form of suffering, to the responsibility for turning away from suffering in order to remain in the service of truth, the enormity of which would crush a lesser man. Truth, then, becomes tied to the conscience:

> At every step one has to wrestle for truth; one has had to surrender for it almost everything to which the heart, to which our love, our trust in life, cling otherwise. That requires greatness of soul: the service of truth is the hardest service. What does it mean, after all, to have *integrity* in matters of the spirit? That one is severe against one's heart, that one despises 'beautiful sentiment,' that one makes of every Yes and No a matter of conscience (*AC* 50).

Conscience elevates the self to the height where truth becomes its creation. The discipline necessary requires the self to suffer, but it is rewarded: "If we train our conscience, it kisses us while it hurts us" (*BGE* 98).

The kiss of conscience, however, is a strange one. The sweetness of truth and the bitterness of suffering are mixed in the crucible of *sexuality*, and the kiss of conscience is the result of its sublimation. Sexual desire, as the central element to the flow of excess in the self, is the primary impulse targeted for elevation to occur. The reason for this is that Nietzsche believes the sexual impulse is tied to the strength of spirit necessary to suffer for truth through a cast iron conscience. Sex and truth are linked by conscience. Nietzsche, at one and the same time, fears and reveres the sex drive, because it is the passion with the greatest resource for power but with the all too apparent capacity to overrun the self if left unchecked. The key for understanding Nietzsche's treatment of sexual desire, and recognizing the importance it has for his philosophy, is to pay close attention to its various manifestations. In its most basic form, sex is debauchery, the implacable pursuit of gratification. However, as the self is elevated, the form of its sexuality changes. Upon the second stage of the self, debauchery is destroyed and the sexual impulse manifests itself as a virtue. The sins of the body become virtues of soul: "all your passions became virtues and all your devils, angels" (*TSZ* I.V). In the war waged upon the passions, the

saint subjugates its impulses in order to attain self-mastery. The passions become virtues as the savage is tamed and made to obey the *higher* law of the saint—morality. Thus, we find the refinement of sexuality to be the passion responsible for morality: "Pity and love of mankind [are] the development of the sexual drive" (*WP* 255); "it was precisely during the most Christian period of Europe and altogether only under the pressure of Christian value judgments that the sex drive sublimated itself into love (*amour-passion*)" (*BGE* 189).

The connection Nietzsche makes from sexuality to pity and universal love results from a common trait each shares, that is—*pleasure*: "The sexual sensations have this in common with the sensations of sympathy and worship, that one person, by doing what pleases him, gives pleasure to another person" (*D* 76). Nietzsche is really quite frightened by the pleasure sex brings to the self (and to another), and it is not difficult to see why: the extreme pleasure inherent to sex threatens the importance Nietzsche places upon the sublimation of suffering and all the other effects of the will to power—elevation, conscience, truth, etc. That it brings *both* the self and the other pleasure (in either its base or its elevated form) is, perhaps, doubly terrifying. Pleasure receives very little airplay in Nietzsche, and when it does he treats it with derision and even scorn, which is hardly surprising given the close proximity between the man and his philosophy. Structurally, the pleasure of sex presents a significant hurdle for Nietzsche to overcome, and yet he recognizes the importance sex has for the elevation of the self: "The degree and kind of a man's sexuality reach up into the ultimate pinnacle of his spirit" (*BGE* 75). But the kind of sexuality Nietzsche has in mind for the highest form of the self is curious; curious for the reason that as chastity it is virtually indistinguishable from the saint. Because of this, then, he presents himself with the awkward task of criticizing the chastity of the saint while extolling the chastity of the sage. He attempts to navigate this tension thus:

> As for the "chastity" of philosophers … There is nothing in this of chastity from any kind of ascetic scruple or hatred of the senses, just as it is not chastity when an athlete or jockey abstains from women: it is rather the will of their dominating instinct, at least during their periods of great pregnancy. Every artist knows what a harmful effect intercourse has in states of great power and the surest instincts do not need to learn this by experience, by unfortunate experience—their "maternal" instinct ruthlessly disposes of all other stores and accumulations of energy, of animal vigor, for the benefit of the evolving work: the greater energy then *uses up* the lesser (*GM* III.8).

Ignoring the plain fact that the analogy between the athlete and the philosopher fails, for the simple reason that an athlete's chastity is only temporary, the philosophers' chastity is pro*creative* in a different sense. Nietzsche dubs this the "maternal instinct," which does not suppress sexuality but actually delivers it into its highest form. But if the maternal instinct is the desire to create, and only those who reach the heavens through elevation are capable of creation, then sexuality would be the sublimated energy of the will to power by which truth would be effected. The will to power uses sexuality to create truth. Truth, it seems, must be the highest manifestation of sexual desire. But it should not surprise us if its base element is nowhere to be found. It is far too pleasurable to fit into Nietzsche's theory.

Dostoevsky

Truth plays an integral role in *The Brothers Karamazov*, both in the plot itself and in the novel's ideological import. It is tied to the theme of suffering, as Dostoevsky attempts to work out a response for why suffering exists in the world. "Truth," whatever that may turn out to be in the novel, is the answer to the question "Why is there suffering?"

Because of the novel's polyphonic structure, Dostoevsky permits a number of different voices to speak on the subject. However, this results in an inevitable conflict of ideas, none more prevalent than the ideological battle between Alyosha and Ivan. But Dostoevsky does not use his characters merely to represent this cacophony of ideas. As Robin Miller observes, the characters

themselves enact the truth of the ideas: "always, for Dostoevsky, the way in which an idea is expressed, the individual personality behind it, was more important than the idea itself, for the idea exists only in each character's individual manifestation of it. Thus idea becomes inseparable from its mode of presentation."[57] The existentiality of truth, variously embodied in the novel's characters, becomes the litmus test for its legitimacy.

Dostoevsky wants no part of a theory of truth, which is exactly why one will never find such a thing in *The Brothers Karamazov*. It would seem that, for Dostoevsky, truth must answer for its being true. This moves us into a fundamental tenet strewn throughout the novel, like the seeds of its epigraph: Dostoevsky believes we are too busy playing God when we should be playing Jesus; hence, the consistent references to Christ and the almost complete absence of God in the novel. The reason for this is truth's inseparability from the main theme of the novel, which is, as we have already stated, the idea of the higher self. The legitimacy of competing theories of truth is worked out existentially in the varieties of the self, which embody the various ideals of the higher self as represented by the Karamazov brothers themselves. Therefore, the manner in which each brother deals with his suffering is the way in which the truth they embody is either substantiated or refuted.

We must be reminded of the fact, however, that the suffering undergone by brothers is not physical but *spiritual*, which happens at the sight of the suffering of others via the *guilty conscience*, as we have shown in Part II. This does not render the legitimacy of truth to the status of a theoretical anguish. Rather, it represents a strict dichotomy that Dostoevsky maintains throughout the novel—that being the baseness of the body versus the heights of the soul, as represented by the Karamazov force of life inherent to the brothers, and (by metaphorical

[57] Miller, 73.

extension) to us as well. Truth plays itself out upon this inner dialectic of the Karamazov force. It is the attempt to resolve the innate tension of "'the broad Karamazov character ... capable of combining the most incongruous contradictions, and simultaneously contemplating both abysses, the abyss above us, the abyss of highest ideals, and the abyss below us, the abyss of the lowest and foulest degradations'" (*BK* 664-5). The two extremes mark the internal struggle each brother endures in their existential realization of the truth they embody. They are forced to navigate this tension between baseness and sublimity, and the suffering they incur, as the result of this contradiction within their very being, will test the mettle of the truth they are suffering for.

With this another element makes its foray into the idea of the higher self. The struggle of the brothers is their attempt to attain the *higher* ideal, but at the necessary expense of the lower one. The fight is for *elevation*, and an inevitable one, according to Alyosha in a dialogue with his brother Dmitri:

> "The ladder's the same. I'm at the bottom step, and you're somewhere about the thirteenth. That's how I see it. But it's all the same. Absolutely the same in kind. Anyone on the bottom step is bound to go up to the top one."
> "Then one ought not to step on at all."
> "Anyone who can help it had better not."
> "But can you?"
> "I think not" (*BK* 98).

Elevation is the process by which the suffering undergone for the sake of truth legitimates it. Truth is *known* to be true when the ideal of the higher self is *believed* to have been reached. This makes *knowledge* contingent upon *belief*. Each brother's aspiration to truth is the way in which truth itself is legitimated. In the novel, truth is countered by its being true; theory runs up against practice. The difference is between *active love* and *logic*, a belief that both Ivan and Alyosha hold onto: "'I have a longing for life, and I go on living in spite of logic'"; "'Love life more than the meaning of it?'" "'Certainly, love it regardless of logic as you say, it must be regardless of

logic, and it's only then one will understand the meaning of it'" (*BK* 211-2). It is not surprising, then, that Dostoevsky does not give reasons for the truth he is after. In his eyes, the only way we can know the truth is by first living it out. Belief precedes logic, and the idea of the higher self follows this movement from faith to knowledge. The religious thrust of the story becomes even more important as it assumes the framework within which the pursuit of truth in the main theme of the novel works itself out. Tschizweskij explains,

> The only real support, the only possible starting point for the really "higher" man, he who does not view and consider himself high but is so, is religion. Only religious consciousness, which does not deny him the possibility of viewing both abysses nor deny his sensitivity to the beautiful, gives man the firmness and the power to protect himself from the decline into disgrace and shame, and at the same time to guard him from a divorce from reality, from the concrete, from the earth.[58]

The "religious consciousness" is the *conscience*, the switching-station between the two extremes of the Karamazov force. The two abysses of the Karamazov force converge in the Karamazov conscience, and the onslaught of suffering for each brother results in a conversion experience of active love. The ideal of the higher self is a *religious* ideal. What religion does, for Dostoevsky, is force the individual to see the higher truth of its being (by way of the conversion experience), which is, of course, the spiritual side of the Karamazov force. This spiritual truth, in turn, is legitimated only through the existential practice of active love, through its being true. But truth's legitimacy can only be proven if the suffering inflicted by the conscience leads the self to the practice of active love. The result of one's suffering marks the judgment made upon truth. Even as truth is the attempt to answer the question "Why is there suffering?," it is only by way of suffering that truth can give us the answer. But we need only look at the destinies of the Karamazov family—Fyodor, Dmitri, Ivan, Alyosha, and even Smerdyakov—to find out Dostoevsky's answer: Fyodor is murdered, Dmitri is sent to Siberia or forced to flee to America,

[58] Tschizewskij, 801.

Ivan goes mad, and Smerdyakov commits suicide; only Alyosha is left. Only Alyosha survives the attrition because he has the context of religion to support him. Because of Alyosha, active love *is* truth.

But there is one more thing. Like Levinas and Nietzsche, the movement unto truth in Dostoevsky comes at the expense of sexual desire. The suffering that legitimates the truth of active love is the pain that cannot endure the pleasure of sexual love; and yet, despite this—or rather, because of this—sex becomes a central element in the novel's discourse on truth. The centrality of sex to truth has to do with the conflicting nature of the Karamazov force, between the two "abysses"—the lower one, which constitutes the baseness or the passionate side of the Karamazov nature, and the higher one, the spiritual side. More specifically, however, it has to do with what stands betwixt these rival forces: it is *beauty* that stands between the lower and the higher. Tschizweskij says, "For Dostoevsky, ... beauty has a double existence—it participates in two worlds, on the border of which it stands."[59] The "two worlds" are the forces of sex and love, respectively, which are internal to the self. This situates beauty in the same area as the conscience, between the conflicting elements of the Karamazov force of life. However, as Tschizweskij points out, Dostoevsky does not have the same faith in beauty: "Dostoevsky does not believe that beauty can create, secure, and preserve a stable equilibrium between the two forces battling each other in man's soul."[60] Beauty alone is not enough to save the self from itself, but it is nonetheless constitutive of the self and thus of its movement towards truth. We know that beauty does not cut it for Dostoevsky. But we also know that it straddles the same line between baseness and sublimity, which makes its relationship to conscience important. Because of beauty's proximity to conscience, it affects every aspect associated with the pursuit of truth.

---

[59] Ibid., 800.
[60] Ibid.

But more than that, it actually facilitates this movement by being that by which the self, in the various manifestations of it in the Karamazov brothers, must suffer and overcome as it elevates itself towards the spiritual ideal of its higher being. It is beauty, through its being overcome, that animates the movement of the self towards truth.

The structure of beauty in the novel is as complex as the conscience. Situated along the border of two abysses, it manifests itself in baseness as *sexual love* and in sublimity as *active love*. In its base form, beauty is distinctly conflated with sexual desire, which consumes the self. Early on in the novel, we find Rakitin telling Alyosha, the embodiment of active love, about the perils of sexual love:

> "There's something there my dear boy, that you don't understand yet. A man will fall in love with some beauty, with a woman's body, or even with a part of woman's body (a sensualist can understand that) and he'll abandon his own children for her, sell his father and mother, and his country, Russia, too. If he's honest he'll steal; if he's humane, he'll murder; if he's faithful, he'll deceive" (*BK* 70).

But on the flip side, beauty can also be sublime. It can be that which lifts the self to a higher form of love. Late in the novel, we find Fetyukovich telling the jury about Dmitri, the embodiment of sexual love, who nevertheless holds the possibility for active love:

> "these natures often thirst for tenderness, goodness, and justice, as it were, in contrast to themselves, their unruliness, their ferocity—they thirst for it unconsciously, but they do thirst for it. Passionate and fierce on the surface, they are painfully capable of loving woman, for instance, and with a spiritual and elevated love. ... But they cannot hide their passions—sometimes very coarse—and that is conspicuous and is noticed, but the inner man is unseen. Their passions are quickly exhausted; but, by the side of a noble and lofty creature that seemingly coarse and rough man seeks a new life, seeks to correct himself, to be better, to become noble and honorable, 'sublime and beautiful'" (*BK* 706).

These two forms of beauty represent the struggle within the self: on the one hand, we have the base form, the implacable desire for sex; on the other hand, we have the sublime form of an "elevated love." But constitutive to both is the presence of a woman. Mochulsky notes, "Each of the brothers has his own complement in a female image: beside Ivan stands Katerina

Ivanova, beside Dmitri—Grushenka, by Alyosha—Liza Khokhlakov; even Smerdyakov has his own 'lady of the heart'—the maidservant Marya Kondratyevna."[61] The presence of women in the novel marks the possibilities of temptation and elevation that each of the Karamazov brothers experience. It is by the side of a woman that each Karamazov brother will either stand or fall. But, regardless, in either case the brothers must still suffer, their only choice being what they will suffer for.

At this point, the link between sex and suffering in the self, shown in Part II, obtains new significance. The brothers' suffering of the sexual instinct is endured and even necessary for the sake of truth. By overcoming the baseness of his being, each brother transforms the seemingly irresistible beauty of sex into the beauty of spirituality, sexual love into active love. As Mochulsky notes, the "Karamazov 'earthly' force is turned into a transfiguring force."[62] But, again, to do so requires the workings of conscience; it is only there that the elevation of the self can occur. Sex supplies the energy by which the self is elevated into the ideal of the higher self. Conscience makes the self suffer for it, and the suffering incurred, at the level of spirituality, ensures the self of the truth. The conversion experiences of Dmitri, Alyosha, and Ivan all have this same structural movement towards truth.

And yet, Alyosha unquestionably comes out on top as the final representative of the Karamazov force. The novel concludes with rapturous cries of "'Hurrah for Karamazov!'" from Alyosha's disciples (*BK* 735). He has become the embodiment of the metaphor of Christ. He has conquered his insect nature and arisen to the higher ideal, to the practice of active love he learned from his elder Zosima. Truth, it would seem for Dostoevsky, *is* Alyosha; and every single character that comes into contact with him in the novel points to this truth as they are each struck

---

[61] Mochulsky, 777.
[62] Ibid., 793.

down at the inexhaustible love of this Christ-like figure. Alyosha is the one that receives both confessions of his brothers; the only one his father ever truly loved; the only one the aspiring socialist, Kolya, admires; and the one every female falls in love with because of his humility. Even if Alyosha, as Christ, is not *the* truth, Dostoevsky believed he would still *be* true:

> To believe that there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more sympathetic, more reasonable, more courageous, and more perfect than Christ; and there not only isn't, but I tell myself with a jealous love, there cannot be. More than that—if someone succeeded in proving to me that Christ was outside the truth, and if, *indeed* the truth was outside Christ, I would sooner remain with Christ than with the truth.[63]

Sex & Truth

We have not shown what truth is, nor have we wanted to. We wanted to know *why* it is we want to know. From this we could say that we want truth *before* we know what it is. Isn't this Nietzsche's point when he asks, half-mockingly, "Why truth? Why not rather untruth?" (*BGE* 1).

In Levinas, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky, the self takes centre stage. But with each writer's analysis of the self—whether descriptive, developmental, or varied—, one element in particular retains supreme importance: that element is *conscience*. Conscience sets in motion a complex series of events that ultimately moves the self towards truth. That conscience is indigenous to the self, and the self is that which desires truth, thus makes the movement from conscience to truth, and all things in between, essential for understanding why it is that we desire truth. Conscience makes the self, but not before it splits the self in a crisis of reflexivity. This schizophrenia is inherent to each man's formulation of the self. The separation within the self actually enacts the movement unto truth: the self desires itself, its *true* self, which thus renders the desire for truth an extension of its desire for its own self; and conscience is what triggers the separation, which

[63] Miller, 55.

makes its significance for the self important for understanding our relationship to truth. It is the revelation of the disparateness between the self and its true self. In this separation, the self moves towards the truth, which is of itself. This movement is not, however, on the level of knowing. It is desire, which precedes knowledge. Conscience, then, is our *thought* before we *think* it through, and, as such, it sets the desire for truth in motion. Truth, then, whatever that may be, cannot be known unless it is truly (an) *after*thought.

Because of this division of the self, however, conscience makes the self suffer under its desire for its true self. It is not the Aristophanic lamentation for the loss of its other half the two halves of the self each experience; there is a distinct movement from one half to the other. The self must put away itself in order to attain its true self; hence, the self must *suffer* for being its former self. Whether it is the suffering of the self for the other's suffering, the asceticism of the saint, or the purification necessary for conversion, the self suffers under the burden of its conscience. Suffering, then, becomes an indelible part of the self. But the irremovability of suffering comes with the erasure of a specific element of desire. In its desire for truth, the self desires its true self, but to attain it conscience demands that the self suffer for its not being true. In doing so, the self takes aim at itself, and at a specific part of desire that sustains the movement unto truth. *Sex* becomes that for which the self must suffer. Its sexual desire for the other is, interestingly enough, what inhibits its desire for truth. Yet, the inhibition of the self is what gives rise to the revelation of its true self. Sex, even in its negation, is what fuels the elevation of the self into the realm of spirit. Elevation is towards a *spiritual ideal*: the true self is the spiritual self.

Religion is where this spiritualization of the self occurs. It happens *in* religion for Levinas and Dostoevsky, and *through* religion for Nietzsche. Religion is the framework for the inauguration of conscience, which, in turn, reveals to the self its true self—the spiritual self. It is

not difficult to see, then, why Levinas, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky each finds sexual desire to be incompatible with the desire for truth: the sexual self conflicts with the spiritual self; the suffering necessary for the attainment of truth is at odds with the extreme pleasure of sexual desire. The essential difference, then, is between pain and pleasure: the pain of the desire for truth versus the pleasure of sexual desire. Now, in the desire for truth the self must suffer; thus, it must feel pain not pleasure, because the latter is incompatible with suffering. *Almost.* The ingeniousness of conscience is its ability to turn pleasure into pain. In triggering the desire for truth, conscience is able to make the self feel pain for its having felt pleasure. This is not exclusively so only of the *guilty* conscience in Levinas and Dostoevsky, but also of the *good* conscience in Nietzsche where the self is subject to a lifelong struggle between loneliness and solitude. In both cases, the pain undergone by the self is not physical but spiritual. It has to be so, for even the experience of physical pain is not suffering unless it is experienced on the level of spirituality. Suffering is spiritual, hence its relation to truth.

In the necessity of spiritual suffering, however, not just any ol' pain will do. The suffering conscience inflicts upon the self must at the same time be that which sacrifices the former self and raises the self to the truth. Sexual desire is targeted for this simultaneous propitiation and elevation of the self. In all three writers, conscience forces the self to suffer for its desire: in Levinas and Dostoevsky, it is for its having desired the other inappropriately; in Nietzsche, it is for having desired the other at all. In doing so, the higher form of the self becomes completely chaste. Metaphysics, self-overcoming, and active love all have in common the chastity of the self. Whether it is ethical, immoral, or actively loving, the self cannot desire sexually: *the desire for truth is incompatible with sexual desire.* Nevertheless, sexual desire is indispensable for the movement unto truth. It facilitates the elevation of the self into its higher

form: for Levinas, it is the changeover from the impurity of sexual desire into the purity of metaphysical Desire; for Nietzsche, it is the asceticism necessary for the sublimation of the will to power into the overman; for Dostoevsky, it is the sensuality of the Karamazov force that fuels its conversion into active love. Conscience may set the desire for truth in motion, but it is sexual desire that provides the energy necessary for this movement to occur.

The irony surrounding the centrality of sex is that it evinces the ancient philosophical problem, handed down through history, of the war between *body* and *soul.* The conflict between the self and its true self in Levinas, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky, is nothing other than three new spins put on this age-old philosophical problem. The resolution of this dilemma, for each of them, is found when it is put through the sieve of religion, where the higher being of the self resides. In the denigration of the body, through the conscience of the soul, into the elevation of the spirit, the self attains truth. The self is never slaked in its attainment of truth, but it is, nonetheless, *in the truth.* The self will continue to be infinitely responsible, creative, and actively loving, even as it reaches the truth in its highest being.

Whether it is the an-archic trace of God in Levinas, the death of God in Nietzsche, or the incarnation of God in Jesus in Dostoevsky, religion sets the context for truth. The self is originally marked out as excess—in the idea of infinity, the will to power, and the Karamazov force respectively. In its excess, the self is called out by its conscience, the thought before thinking responsible for the advent of consciousness. It splits the self into two selves: one which we might call the "false" self, or at least the self that has failed, and the "true" self—the one to which the self now aspires. In this division originates the desire for truth; the self now desires its true self. But in this separation the self takes aim at itself as it attempts to attain its higher form. In the desire for truth, the self suffers for its imperfection because of its sexual desire. The desire

for sex is sacrificed on the altar of conscience; and in doing so it becomes the martyr for truth. The sacrifice of sex, made by the self, becomes the suffering necessary to sustain the desire for truth. In its sacrificial form, sex is what animates the movement towards truth. The self becomes chaste, for only as such is it deemed worthy of truth. The true self is the chaste self; chastity becomes the spiritual form the self aspires to. In the spiritualization of the self, the self is asexualized. This is not to say the self no longer desires, but that its desire is now in the service of truth. Sex elevates the self to its true self. The self is remembered, overcome, and converted into its higher form as the old self dies off.

Conscience is the key for understanding the complexity of the self in the thought of Levinas, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky. It is a profoundly religious conscience, one that historically and philosophically has done away with sex. Religion and philosophy may have a love-hate relationship, but the one thing they do share is the desire for truth. In the meaninglessness of suffering, truth is desired. It gives meaning to the self for that which, by its very definition, is meaningless.[64] Levinas, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky are doing nothing more than giving meaning to suffering. As *self*-contradictory as that may be, it is, nevertheless, their hope. Do we, in our sexual desire, desire truth? Probably not; and perhaps that is why sex must be jettisoned, according to these three men. Religion and philosophy cannot live on if truth is no longer desired.

Even so, the desire for truth belies its asexuality; sex is not that far away. The desire for truth is the transubstantiation of sexual desire; and the most sexual beings just might be those who lust after truth the most. Perhaps that makes truth the ultimate deviancy.

---

[64] I have Professor Jeffrey Dudiak of the King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta to thank for this insight.

Bibliography

Derrida, Jacques. "At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am," trans. Ruben Berezdivin, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, pp.11-48, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett, ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976).

Dudiak, Jeffrey. *The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading in the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

Hollingdale, R.J. *Nietzsche: The Man & His Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan Peperzak [et. al] (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996).

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002).

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003).

Miller, Robin Feuer. *The Brothers Karamazov: Worlds of the Novel* (New York: Twayne, 1992).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. & ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Twilight of the Idols, The Anti-Christ*).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. & ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000) (*Birth of Tragedy, Beyond Good and Evil, Genealogy of Morals, EcceHomo*).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

Nietzsche. Friedrich. *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Untimtely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Scruton, Roger. *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London: Phoenix Press, 1994).