

The Politics of Tyranny and the Problem of Order:  
Plato and Dostoevsky's Resistance to the Pathology of Power

By

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## Abstract

Going beyond the surveys and descriptions of institutions and policies that today often define the study of politics, the present study will analyze the political problem of order in light of humanity's basic experience of historical reality, which expresses itself through the perennial need for a sense *truth*, meaning, fulfillment, completion and wholeness. Using Plato's *Gorgias* and *Symposium* and Fyodor M. Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (Books V and VI in particular) as references and attempting to establish equivalences between the two thinker's diagnoses of political reality, I will argue that the fundamental human need for a sense of existential satisfaction (or, in other words, an existentially satisfactory order) is the root cause of all political phenomena and therefore is the interpretive key to any compelling and complete analysis of political reality in both its ordered and disordered forms. In the end, after a close assessment of the works cited above, it will be determined that Plato and Dostoevsky held the common assumption that threats to political order, and thus the emergence of political disorders, result when man, in search for the source true order, denies the notion of eternal transcendence (labeled as either God or the *good*) and embraces secular, tyrannical, power.

**Introduction**

## Understanding the Problem of Order

To gain understanding of his own humanity, and to order his life in the light of the insight gained, has been the concern of man in history as far back as the written records go.

-Eric Voegelin

Although the modern academic field of political science finds its roots in the Classical period of Greek philosophy, it has evolved markedly since the time of its inception. Not only has the discipline grown into a branch of learning that today houses several concentrated areas and spheres of study, but the methodology espoused has also taken several drastic turns. Still, despite the fact that our perceptions and procedures have changed, our basic concerns have not. Though each generation of political scientists confronts them in its own way, the underlying questions are essentially the same: What is the source of order in history? What are the possible means of preserving order? What are the conditions that cause the collapse of order? How does order reemerge among

those who experience crisis? In short, no matter the field of specialization, no matter the approach, all political investigations, at some deep level, are involved, in some way or another, with the question of order.

Now the question of order suggests nothing abstruse or abstract for it flows from the actual condition of man's historical existence and therefore explores issues of practical and elemental importance, such as, what form of government is best. What type of law or education is most appropriate? What sort of traditions, customs, symbols, endorse the finest way of life? Evoking nothing more remarkable than the rudimentary question of *how we ought to live*, the search for order is a search to identify the principles that promote *the best and finest* manner of existence.<sup>1</sup> This, however, leads to the further question of how we go about determining *the best and finest*. What criterion applies when assessing the legitimacy of a community's socio-political configuration? What standard authenticates order and vindicates a community's way of being in history? Again, this issue has nothing obscure or speculative about it. The principles of true order, namely, the ones that confirm the value of a set of traditions, customs, and symbols, the ones that form the basis of the highest forms of law, education, and government, and guide the changes every polity has to engage, are those that speak to man's basic experience of existence, which,

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<sup>1</sup> This while keeping in mind of course the notion of feasibility and the various concessions and compromises that have to be made in view of historical and geographic conditions.

as a result of his contingent and imperfect nature, expresses itself through the fundamental need for a sense of wholeness.

And so, it is in struggling to satisfy the requirements of this need, to the best of their imperfect abilities, that humans give shape to history, society and polity; as the interpretive key for understanding the ways by which humanity structures its existence, the need for wholeness represents the formative concern of human consciousness and serves as the basis of all historical endeavors<sup>2</sup>, one of which is the founding of political order. That is to say, the principal feature of any theory of politics revolves around the fact that every community bears the burden of establishing an order that will, at least, allow and, at best, cultivate, to some degree, the existential experiences required by man for his perfection.

Not only the result of chance or convenience, political order conveys the concrete experience of a particular community's effort to create the best possible conditions for the realization of a particular understanding of human satisfaction. As such, political order is never neutral but instead reveals a distinct

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<sup>2</sup> The longing for wholeness is explained by thinkers such as Hegel and Voegelin as the motor that propels history and serves as the catalyst for humanity's exploration, and therefore knowledge, of reality. To state it differently, and in Nietzschean terms, history is directed by a *will to wholeness* (or *will to order*). Though Nietzsche may be right in claiming that Schopenhauer's *will to life* is subsidiary to the *will to power*, this is true only because it is an expression of man's *will to wholeness*. In other words, as will be argued in the present study, the *will to power* is not the primordial experience of life but is an expression of man's *will to wholeness and order*, and more precisely a derailed expression.

attitude towards the struggle for meaning. Thus, while varying widely in form and while emerging from seemingly incomparable cultures, there exists a profound equivalence between all political orders in that they embody an understanding of what constitutes the source of human fulfillment and what is required to achieve it within the limits historical existence; in the sense that they refer to the same fundamental experience of reality as a tension towards existential satisfaction, different political orders are essentially equivalent. For example, the communist-socialist-totalitarian order of the Soviets and the liberal-capitalist-democratic order of Western Europe differed in many critical ways, yet they both found their inspiration in the need to experience the *good* life.

From this perspective, the views offered by a work such as Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*<sup>3</sup> are revealed as severely limited. Convinced that there are deep-rooted irreducible differences between men that doom any attempt at a *rapprochement*, Schmitt argues that the nature of politics is rivalry and conflict. But despite the claim of being "existential", his analysis neglects the basic experiences of existence that undergird all political orders and fails to notice that behind the variety of *faiths* that structure political reality resides the unity of the question regarding the foundation of *truth* and meaning. Unable to see past the symbolic, Schmitt does not realize that differing political orders are

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

embodiments of alternative possibilities in relation to the abiding need for wholeness and that, regardless of their form, socio-political phenomena are expressions of a universal human drive towards an existentially satisfactory order.<sup>4</sup>

However, if a community, for whatever mistaken reason, adopts an existentially unsatisfactory order that does nothing but frustrate the struggle for wholeness, it will eventually experience a crisis wherein man, disheartened and disoriented, no longer knows *how he ought to live*; crisis denotes the realization that the community's way of being has gone astray and has now become an obstacle to the development of human fulfillment.<sup>5</sup> Enclosed in an environment that accentuates the imperfections of his condition and exacerbates his feelings of estrangement, man no longer finds reason in existence. Still, this does not end his search nor does it extinguish his needs. Crisis announces not only the failure of a community's manner of existence but also, and more importantly, signals the opportunity of attaining a higher understanding of the principles of order, and,

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<sup>4</sup>Before proceeding, I would like to turn the reader's attention towards the relationship between the notion of an "existentially satisfactory order" (or "true order") and the experience of "wholeness". Briefly stated, the test that determines an existentially satisfactory order (or the test that determines the principles of true order) is the experience of wholeness; the experience of wholeness confirms an existentially satisfactory order, i.e., true order, while feelings of frustration and hopelessness designate deformed manifestations of order. Simply put, an order is labeled as *true* or existentially satisfactory and not defective when it addresses, to some degree, the need for wholeness. And so, though there exists cruel and brutal systems of order, they represent derailed orders that neglect the individual's true needs; the Grand Inquisitor's vision, as will be argued in Chapter 3, represents such an order.

<sup>5</sup> However, it must be noted that crisis is not always the outcome of a community's *wrong* choices in relation to the principles of true order. Crisis can also develop from unfortunate circumstances such as those that result from the threat of widespread disease or foreign invasion.

as such, offers the possibility of inaugurating a new and more rewarding way of being. I say possibility, for it is no more than that. History is the story of man's struggle to identify the particular ways of being in the world that best foster the experience of wholeness. Yet, the typically persistent problem concerning the content and structure of these ways of being remains unresolved and thus the effort to reduce the gulf between man's *actual* experience of existence and his *desired* experience of existence does not always produce results of identical form or value. It can end in the establishment of a stable and healthy order favorable to human needs, but it can also derail, producing an untenable situation bound to collapse. While all efforts are valid in that they originate in the same basic experience and strive towards the same end, some efforts are more successful than others. In fact, some fail miserably and instead of alleviating the human experience of unrest, they in effect increase its intensity.

The problem of identifying the perennial engendering sources of these sorts of failed efforts to produce order and meaning is the focus of this study. In an attempt to provide an answer, I will turn to Plato and Dostoevsky for the simple reason that their writings supply some of the more penetrating analyses of the type of disorder that regularly threatens the political community. Typically, Plato's thought is interpreted as either dogmatically systematic (a view notably expressed in the modern age by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Eduard Zeller

and Friedrich Ast) or profoundly skeptical (George Grote)<sup>6</sup>, and is most often mentioned in relation to the fields of ethics, metaphysics and epistemology. On the other hand, Dostoevsky is usually understood as a reactionary/absurdist/pessimist (M.A. Antonovich, Leo Shestov, D.H. Lawrence) or as a man of penetrating religious insight (Nikolay Berdyaev, Henri de Lubac, Vladimir Solovyov)<sup>7</sup>, and his works are generally referred to as commentaries on the socio-religious state of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Here, however, the two thinkers will be considered from a political perspective. Though it has been argued<sup>8</sup> that Plato exhibits a resolute intolerance for the deficiencies and restrictions of everyday political dealings and as a result should not be read as a political thinker, and though Dostoevsky is rarely if ever consulted for his political philosophy, it is this study's contention that it is only when understood as diagnosticians of the search for political order, and particularly its instances of derailment, that one truly appreciates the writings produced not as literature in any usual sense, but as warnings, pleas, offers of help, monumental feats of

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<sup>6</sup> For a more complete survey of the various interpretations of Plato's thought, see: Eugene Napoleon Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1977); R. B. Rutherford, ed. *The Art of Plato: ten essays in Platonic interpretation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995); Gerald A. Press, ed. *Plato's Dialogues: New studies and interpretations* (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993); Charles L. Griswold Jr. ed. *Platonic Writings/ Platonic Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Drew A. Hyland, *Questioning Platonism: Continental interpretations of Plato* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> For a more complete survey of the various interpretations of Dostoevsky's thought, see: Rene Wellek, ed. *Dostoevsky a collection of critical essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1962); Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky: new perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice- Hall, 1984); George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson, "Reading Dostoevsky Religiously" in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-31.

<sup>8</sup> Most notably by Hannah Arendt and Sheldon Wolin. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1960).

*paidia*, grand gestures of civic duty. In short, Plato and Dostoevsky are invoked for they are among those who most aptly reveal the relentless yet subtle measures of human self-deception and the nuanced complexity of personal transformation as they relate to the political sphere.

Entrenched in radically different cultural, religious and intellectual traditions, it, at first glance, seems strange to identify Plato and Dostoevsky as representatives of a common philosophical outlook and yet several commentators have attempted to make such a case. While there is no evidence that the Russian novelist ever seriously contemplated any of the Greek philosopher's dialogues, Miroslav Hanak, in his essay entitled *Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer: A vision of Plato's erotic immortality*<sup>9</sup>, maintains that, driven by a refusal to separate the temporal realm from the eternal, Plato and Dostoevsky shared a common task in laboring to create works that explored the anxious tensions that result from an existence that is conditioned by the demands of, on the one hand, the historical/political and, on the other, the eternal/divine. Pursuing a similar line of reasoning, Ellis Sandoz's important book *Political Apocalypse: A study of*

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<sup>9</sup> Miroslav J. Hanak, "Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer: A Vision of Plato's Erotic Immortality," *Dostoevsky Studies* (1988); available from <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/DS/09/091.shtml>; Internet; accessed 25 October 2007. Miroslav J. Hanak is a professor of literature and languages at East Texas State University. He has written extensively on the political and philosophical dimension of Dostoevsky's writings. He is also translator of several of Eric Voegelin's works.

*Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor*<sup>10</sup> begins by making the case that Dostoevsky follows the long line of thinkers whose works are "pervaded by a love of beauty and of the good which is the preeminent mark of philosophy from Plato onward." Sandoz, who belongs to the group of interpreters that appreciate the significance Dostoevsky's religious vision, also notes that though they lived through vastly different personal ordeals, both men adopt a nearly identical position in relation to what they saw as the cause of social-political trouble -namely, the secularization of human existence.

Inspired by the frame of reference set forth by Sandoz and Hanak, the present work will attempt to demonstrate that while the particular crisis encountered by Plato and Dostoevsky differed greatly, they both interpret the source of personal and political disorder as a misguided search for existential satisfaction. More precisely, they reveal that troubles develop when the need for true order is addressed through the strictly secular means of tyrannical power in an attempt to re-create the conditions of existence and reform man's experience of historical reality. Their literary works therefore assume the task of revealing the detrimental implications of unrestrained power and its inability to provide the existential experience sought. Examples of such literary works are Plato's *Gorgias* and *Symposium*, and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (focusing

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<sup>10</sup> Ellis Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: A study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2000).

almost exclusively on Book V and Book VI). The *Gorgias* is referenced because, through Socrates' encounter with Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, it explicitly illuminates the crucial premise, adopted by the sophists, that reality is a struggle for mastery and therefore the ability to embrace and exercise power without restraint (which when translated in political terms suggests tyranny) consists of the highest and happiest form of human life. The *Symposium* contributes to the discussion started by the *Gorgias* in that it reveals that the embrace of tyrannical power stems from a misguided existential struggle which, in an effort to experience a sense of wholeness, assumes a false image of the *good*, and thus experiences a false *good* and a false sense of wholeness, i.e., disorder. Written from a Christian perspective, *The Brothers Karamazov* differs from Platonic writings discussed above but nevertheless concludes, in agreement with Plato, that tyranny develops and the community unravels when the notion that "all is according to human power" is accepted as an accurate reading of reality.

And so, the *Gorgias* and *Symposium* might seem to have nothing in common with Dostoevsky's last great novel, yet these works were chosen because together they convey certain key equivalences which denote the view that the universal human experience of tension that triggers the search for genuine order is, when derailed towards uninhibited tyrannical power, the origin of most of the recurring dangers that menace political community. In other

words, both Plato and Dostoevsky recognize that instances of disorder can be countered effectively only by dealing with the engendering experience that produces them. Focusing exclusively on external symptoms of crisis, such as confrontations between individuals or communities, does not resolve the troubles. Even if measures are taken and some symptoms disappear, others will inevitably surface, and often in more virulent form. Instead of reacting to superficial manifestations of disorder, both writers therefore encourage the reader to examine the root cause, which springs not from the transitory circumstances of a poorly administered policy initiative but from a distorted expression of man's perennial longing for wholeness.

Accordingly, this reading of political reality holds that political order is achieved and a community's value as an entity within history is reinforced when the desire for existential satisfaction is directed towards the right *things*. Specifically, in relation to Plato and Dostoevsky, order emerges through experiences of self-transcendence that directs one towards the order of eternal *truth*, be it in the form of God or the *good*. The order experienced during history is, in other words, proportionate to the degree humans attune themselves to a universal timeless reality. Consistent with this account of order is the diagnosis, described above, that disorder and political disintegration develops when man, seeking to experience the *good* life, adopts the faulty and unsound principles of

tyrannical power.<sup>11</sup> It is, however, important to note that there are some who dispute, and indeed, reverse this Platonic/Dostoevskian formula and deem all notions of eternal *truth* alienating and corruptive while claiming tyrannical power to be the only true means of establishing an order of wholeness. In Plato's time, this view was nurtured by the rhetorician/sophists while atheist scientific proto-revolutionary movements fulfilled this task in Dostoevsky's 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia.

Though the rhetoricians/sophists were a diverse group, they more or less agreed on certain basic assumptions. A succinct expression of these basic assumptions is found in Gorgias' work entitled *On the Nonexistent*. There the renowned rhetorician/sophist makes the case that no absolute truth exists, but if it did exist, it could not be known, and if it could be known, it would be incomprehensible to humans. Still, even if it were comprehensible, because thoughts cannot be adequately translated into words and because no one thinks the same as another, it would nevertheless be inexpressible and uninterpretable.<sup>12</sup> Maintaining that the act of human perception produces a

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<sup>11</sup> Now even though a tyrannical order may survive for several years on the distorted principles of power and the fear they create, it is clear that because it does not speak to man's longing for true order it is never experienced as satisfactory and thus will ultimately fail; on this point both Plato and Dostoevsky are adamant.

<sup>12</sup> The references above regarding Gorgias' work follow the alpha-numeric system used by Sprague (see below) in the text *The Older Sophists* (B3=*On Non-Being*). Rosamund Kent Sprague, ed. *The Older Sophists* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1972).

distorting effect, the rhetorician/sophist argues that the human realm is entirely separate and isolated from the realm of absolute truth. Every individual necessarily perceives things differently and acts according to his perceptions. And so, in that it cautions against stubbornly holding one's individual perceptions as absolute truths, the rhetorician/ sophist's relativism can potentially foster a more tolerant attitude towards others' points of view and as a result can facilitate the establishment of a certain level of social/political order. However, when applied to moral and philosophical affairs, this relativism breeds skepticism, atheism, hedonism and ultimately leaves the door open to tyranny. For when there are no standards of truth or good beyond man, *might makes right* and the most powerful prevail. This result, of course, is not lamented or unintended. The outcome of tyranny does not reveal an oversight on the part the rhetorician/sophists, but is the logical extension of their worldview. When one understands reality as a chaotic clash of opinions and beliefs, the only hope for an existentially satisfactory order rest in the human ability to create it through the exertion of unrestrained power. This reading of existence, as it will be demonstrated in Chapter 1, incites a passionate response by Plato.

Similarly, Dostoevsky's writings challenge the various radical atheist scientific humanist groups of his time who also viewed the human exercise of power as the only solution to the problem of order and whose symbolic

inspiration was encompassed by the modern monument of the Crystal Palace, an architectural wonder built in London for the World's Fair of 1851.<sup>13</sup> A vast exhibition hall of glass and iron used to display the latest technology developed during the Industrial Revolution, the Crystal Palace was considered a triumph of human ability and scientific knowledge. Indeed, for those devoted to the tenets of atheistic scientific humanism, the Crystal Palace reflected the accomplishments that could be achieved by adhering to a scientific, non-transcendent, understanding of nature, and more particularly human nature.

Interpreting human nature in terms of the necessary laws studied by science, these Russian radicals maintained that human existence, bereft of genuine freedom, was measurable and predictable. Hence, by engineering the appropriate conditions, through political, economic and psychological devices, it was believed possible to manufacture perfect social harmony. Simply put, in the same way that knowledge of the laws of necessity provide for the manipulation of non-human nature thus giving form to the great edifice of the Crystal Palace, knowledge of the laws of necessity also allows for the manipulation of human nature and the possibility of creating perfect societal accord. Now there are without question many differences between the rhetorician/sophists of the

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<sup>13</sup> In *What Is to Be Done?* (Part IV, ch.14: 10), which has been labeled a handbook to radicalism and a fundamental text of Russian socialism, Russian author and philosopher, *Nikolai Chernyshevsky* pledges to transform society into a Crystal Palace thanks to the scientific principles of a socialist revolution.

classical world and the Russian radicals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century -differences which emerge as a consequence of the rise of the Christian paradigm and which are detailed in Chapter 2 of this study. Still, there exists an underlying commonality in that as a conscious attempt to transcend the experience of crisis and find firm ground for the erection of true order, both groups spurn any notion of the transcendent and turn categorically towards secular power.

Working through the debate between Plato and Dostoevsky on the one side and the rhetorician/sophists and atheist radicals on the other, we therefore notice that while the particular crisis encountered by each writer differed greatly, they both interpret the source of personal and political disorder as a misdirected search for existential satisfaction which manifests itself through a pathological lust for power. While presenting a close survey of Plato's *Gorgias* and *Symposium*, and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, this study is thus not intended as a contribution to specialist studies of these thinkers or their writings, but is an attempt to reveal that the quest for true order, which should underlie every investigation, must first begin with a firm understanding of humanity's historical condition and how it can give rise to various misrepresentations of order.

Finally, in the effort to elaborate the topic of the present study, I would be remiss if I did not mention 20<sup>th</sup> century political theorist Eric Voegelin. In fact, it

will have become clear to anyone familiar with Voegelin's work that the assessment of political philosophy given above is an account of the approach basic to Voegelin's interpretation of political reality. Voegelin himself, however, acknowledges that this account is not his own independent formulation but has its roots in the very beginnings of political science in Plato. Now though Voegelin's work possesses a broad scope and flows into several academic disciplines, for the purpose of this study, I wish to direct the reader's focus specifically on his theory of equivalence of symbols and experiences.<sup>14</sup>

Fundamental to a proper understanding of Voegelin's thought, the theory of equivalence maintains that, despite differences of expression, two or more experiences or symbolisms are equivalent if they point noticeably to the same structures in reality. In other words, it is argued that there is an underlying universal way humans experience their participation within reality, which in a sense directs their historical existence. As a result, when creating symbols of historical self-interpretation, humans transmit this universal experience unto their symbols thus allowing for some degree of equivalence among humanity's symbolic creations. More precisely, as mentioned above, human participation within reality, regardless of epoch or culture, stirs the experience of incompleteness and inadequacy, which in turn triggers the search for an order of

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<sup>14</sup> Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Vol. 11, Published Essays 1966-1985, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 115.

wholeness and completion, which in turn, leads to the formation of symbols that depict and narrate the struggles characteristic of this search. Michael P.

Morrissey sums it up adeptly in the following manner:

*[Voegelin's] theory of equivalence was an attempt to overturn the conventional theory of values which dominates the contemporary intellectual scene. The myriad symbols generated throughout human history can no longer be considered as disparate expressions of various cultural experiences relative to one another, but as the multifaceted manifestation of the one search for the divine ground [or, in other words, the source of true order]. And so, for Voegelin, the basis of a comparative study of symbols becomes a search for the constants of experience, one constant being the search itself which has been going on for millennia.*"<sup>15</sup>

But even among many ardent supporters of Voegelin's scholarship, the theory of equivalence has been a matter of some consternation, particularly for Christian commentators who view the weakness of this theory in its alleged tendency to promote a type of pseudo-relativism among religions. For example, in a recent article entitled "*Eric Voegelin's Immanentism: A Man At Odds With the Transcendent?*"<sup>16</sup> Maben W. Poirier produces the important, thought-provoking and bold argument that Voegelin is an atheist. Without going into the details of the debate regarding Voegelin's existential methodology as it relates to

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<sup>15</sup> Michael P Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) , 84.

<sup>16</sup> Maben Walter Poirier, "Eric Voegelin's Immanentism: A Man at Odds with the Transcendent? Part I," *Appraisal: The Journal of the Society for Post-Critical Philosophy and Personalist Studies* VII, no. 2 (October 2008): 21-30. Maben Walter Poirier, "Eric Voegelin's Immanentism: A Man at Odds with the Transcendent? Part II," *Appraisal: The Journal of the Society for Post-Critical Philosophy and Personalist Studies* VIII, no. 3 (March 2009): 25-38. The paper was published in two parts.

Christianity and staying focused on the present issue of concern, Poirier maintains that while the theory of equivalence may be correct when applied to some experiences and symbols it does not apply when referring to the highest and most significant, i.e., Christian, experiences and symbols. In making his case, Poirier produces several elaborate arguments that culminate in the statement that Christianity is unique and has no equivalent. To claim that the experiences conveyed by Buddhist, Christian and Classical Greek symbols are equivalent is not only to rob them of their distinctiveness, but it is to reduce them to relative and meaningless perspectives. The theory of equivalence is therefore faulty for it lends too much credence to, what Poirier would label, defective or incomplete struggles for order.

Though this reading is in a way valid and cannot be easily discarded, in my opinion, it pushes aside the, ecumenic, un-chauvinistic and open quality of Voegelin's theory. By lending an aura of legitimacy to all human efforts at recovering an awareness of the source of wholeness and meaning, Voegelin in a sense unites humans across epochal, cultural, geographic and religious divides making rational human dialogue possible as well as providing an all-important common premise from which it is conceivable to appreciate the universal underlying engendering experiences and ageless questions that constitute the problem of order. This is crucial for only through such a comprehensive

appreciation can the problem of order possibly be addressed in not a reactionary but prudent and reasoned fashion. Thus, informed by this Voegelinian theory and in accordance with what has been stated earlier, the present work will attempt to demonstrate that, even if at the level of ideas they are distinct, there exists a level of equivalence between Plato and Dostoevsky's understanding of the issues surrounding the problem of order made evident by the symbolic representations each man formulated.

This attempted *rapprochement* between Plato and Dostoevsky intends go past the historical symptoms of crisis and develop an interpretation of the two thinkers as participants in the enduring and collective debate concerning the true principles of the *good* life and then use this interpretation to criticize the pathological tendency towards power that periodically imperils human community. Thus, in the end, an assessment of Plato and Dostoevsky's works serves the political discussion by possibly provoking a reassessment of contemporary society's political and social undertakings: In light of man's needs, in light of the perennial desire for wholeness and fulfillment, is today's society on the right course pursuing the right *things*? Precise as man's calculations have become concerning his means, are his selections of ends truly conducive of a properly ordered existence?

## Chapter One

### Plato in Search of Order

Plato's work elaborates an account of human fulfillment whereby the individual is guided away from the lure of tyranny, and from any other spurious ideas of wholeness, and towards a transcendent *good*. That is to say, according to Plato, the need for wholeness rightly understood desires the experience of this transcendence in order to consummate the *good* life. However, as explained earlier, the rhetorician/sophists maintain the belief that fulfillment consists in the ability to see past the illusion of permanency reflected through established custom and convention, perceive the swirl of undifferentiated *becoming* and flux (made manifest through the confusion of human beliefs and opinions) that make up humanity's chaotic reality, accept the fact that all restraining orders are arbitrary constructs, reject limits on human want, and thus free all inclinations for mastery in an attempt to bring forth a truly gratifying order of wholeness. In an exceptionally vivid manner, the dialogue *Gorgias* brings to view the inevitable tension that arises between these two competing readings of human satisfaction and as such will serve to set up the debate concerning Plato and Dostoevsky's diagnosis of personal and political disorder.

Many...say...that by him (Pericles) the common people were first encouraged and led on to such evils as appropriations of subject territory, allowances for attending theatres, payments for performing public duties, and by these bad habits were, under the influence of his public measures, changed from a sober, thrifty people, that maintained themselves by their own labors, to lovers of expense, intemperance, and license...

And so Pericles, at that time, more than any other, let loose the reins to the people, and made his policy subservient to their pleasures, contriving continually to have some great public show or solemnity, some banquet, or some procession or other in the town to please them, coaxing his countrymen like children with... delights and pleasures...

-Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*

Cleon, Pericles' ungentlemanly but unhypocritical successor...told his countrymen, with brutal frankness, that Athens had become a 'dictator state,' and that her only hope of maintaining her now tyrannous rule lay in a policy of 'frightfulness.' This degeneration of the confederacy of Delos into an Athenian empire was a tragedy...The course taken...by Athenian policy under Pericles' leadership led to...the breakdown of the Hellenic civilization...

-Arnold Toynbee, *Hellenism: the history of a civilization*

The event that would decisively bring about the breakdown described by Toynbee, the final expression of the imprudent way of life cultivated by Pericles and briefly outlined in the passages above, is of course the Peloponnesian War. Believing that through the exercise of power, he would be able to acquire the wealth necessary to satisfy his citizens' needs and therefore found a stable and

secure political order, Pericles embarked on a feverish campaign of conquest. This turn towards power however resulted in catastrophe. Instead of order, the Athenian government's imperial policies produced a setting ready for collapse. Enjoying unrivaled wealth and prestige in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Athens arrogantly began asserting its influence and power throughout mainland Greece. Expectedly, this display of what could only be an indication of imperial ambition created a strong sense of discomfort among many Greek city-states. Sparta, a city ruled by military customs and traditions, was particularly displeased by Athens' show of conceit.<sup>17</sup> A smoldering animosity brewed between the two cities until finally conflict erupted when some trivial event in an outlying and rather insignificant part of Greece served as pretext for all out war.<sup>18</sup> This war, remembered evermore as the Peloponnesian War, began in 431 B.C.

After ten years of bloody struggle, the situation reached a stalemate. Battles thundered and raged but failed to produce a victor. A feeling of fatigue settled into the warring camps, and the armies, having no other viable option, agreed to endorse peace. This agreement, however, had little effect and skirmishes continued to erupt in every part of Peloponnesus. In 415 B.C., a

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<sup>17</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Steven Lattimore (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 1998), 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-79.

young man by the name of Alcibiades, employing his dazzling oratorical abilities, persuaded the Athenians to attack Sicily in an attempt to bring the island into the fold of the empire. This expedition was to reaffirm Athens' status as a military and political power, but, in the end, only succeeded in betraying its vulnerability. After a couple of years of fierce fighting, the invading army was defeated, its soldiers imprisoned or killed, its naval fleet destroyed. The Sicilian expedition left Athens an undesirable and tenuous position.<sup>19</sup> Recognizing the rare opportunity that offered itself, the Spartans and Persians agreed to forge an alliance and attack their common enemy. The Athenians fought valiantly, but by 404 B.C., the situation had become impossible. The odds were insurmountable and the inevitable occurred. The Peloponnesian War ended with Athens' complete surrender to Sparta, who in turn tore down the city walls, barred the Athenians from having any kind of substantial army, and installed a puppet government.<sup>20</sup>

Athens, a prosperous city populated by a highly educated and cultured citizenry, was hence reduced to political paralysis by the relatively primitive kingdom of Sparta. The developments of the Peloponnesian War saw the enlightened and sophisticated be vanquished by the vile, the noble and refined

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 306-310.

<sup>20</sup> Thucydides, *On Justice, Power and Human Nature: Selections from The History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated, with introduction and notes by Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), 159-160.

become slave to the boorish. The city that embodied man's highest aspirations was subjugated by a city that habitually endorsed the strategic application of brute animal force. In short, the Peloponnesian War turned the world on its head. The hierarchy that defined the Athenian understanding of reality for centuries and which placed the wise, beautiful and noble (το καλον – to kalon) above the unrefined trait of mere power collapsed in a matter of a few decades. With Sparta's victory over Athens, the harmony of the world had come undone. The cosmos became to be seen as chaos. The Golden Age came to a devastating conclusion and Athens entered an era of political and spiritual crisis. Periods of crisis though are never permanent. The unsettling experience of disorder usually spurs new attempts at recovering the principles of true order. In the case of Athens, these attempts occurred, most skillfully, in the works of Plato.

The circumstances that surrounded Plato's life are fairly well documented. There is no need to go into the many various details. Suffice it to say, that Plato lived through the most volatile period of Athenian history. Born into a war that would last until his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, Plato personally witnessed the downfall of his native city. Still, the troubles did not end with Athens' military defeat. Following the hostilities of war was the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, and following them was a democratic government that committed a crime so unjust as to permanently

mark human history.<sup>21</sup> The tumultuous events of the times, beginning with the Peloponnesian War and culminating in the execution of Socrates, did not, however, provoke a fall into misery or apathy. On the contrary, the enveloping chaos invigorated Plato's sense of obligation and inspired his writings. The dialogues are therefore not the result of intellectual whim but a direct response to the immediate surrounding troubles. Plato's works are not those of an idealist or ideologue but are the works of a *lover of order* (in all its myriad forms) who lived during a time of dis-order.

History has witnessed the rise and fall of countless empires. The true significance of the Peloponnesian War lies not in the fact that it caused the collapse of Athens but that it occasioned the beginning of an era of philosophical insights whose influence is simply impossible to exaggerate. As the age of the Athenian empire vanished, the age of Plato and the philosopher emerged. From the experience of intense disorder evolved a new and equally intense counter-*movement* towards order that would become paradigmatic in the west.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> A better understanding of Plato's early life can be gained through Plato's *Seventh Letter*, particularly sections 324b8-25c5 and Diogenes Laertius' *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, Book III.

<sup>22</sup> "We are not concern with a "Platonic philosophy" or "doctrine" but with Plato's resistance to the disorder of the society and his effort to restore the order of Hellenic civilization through love of wisdom. His effort was a failure in so far as his dream of an Hellenic empire, in the form of a federation under an hegemonic polis, infused by the spirit of the Academy, could not be realized... Nevertheless, it was a success, probably beyond any expectations entertained by Plato at the time when he founded the Academy, in as much as in his dialogues he created the symbols of the new order of wisdom not for Hellas only, but for all mankind." (Eric Voegelin, *Plato*, Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 2000, 5).

### The Gorgias: the pathology of power revealed

Callicles: *The wise man, as the proverb says, is late for a fight but not for a feast.*

Socrates: *Oh? Did we "arrive when the feast was over," as the saying goes? Are we late?*

Callicles: *Yes...*

According to an ancient proverb, the wise are always on time for a feast and are always late for a fight. In other words, those who are *not* wise (or *unwise*) are always late for a feast but on time for a fight. Accordingly, by arriving after the feast, Socrates displays his lack of wisdom and, by implication, his willingness to fight. Meticulously constructed from the very first lines, the dialogue prepares the reader for the battle that is to ensue. The essence of the dispute concerns the principles of true order and the way of life that leads to their realization. Thus, seemingly displaying a *thumotic*, spirited, attitude,

Socrates approaches a gathering organized by rhetoricians in view of defending his vision of what is required for the wellbeing of the city.

A group of young men of noble birth gathers to listen to the great and celebrated Gorgias. After brilliantly delivering a lecture, the renowned rhetorician allows the audience the opportunity to express their doubts. No restrictions are set. Supremely confident in his abilities, Gorgias offers to answer any question regarding any subject. As the demonstration proceeds, it immediately becomes clear that Gorgias is a man of extraordinary talent. His power to resolve all matters addressed to him is simply astonishing. Having thoroughly dazzled the young and having achieved his purpose, Gorgias prepares to withdraw. It is at this point that Socrates discreetly and leisurely approaches the gathering. It is not by chance that Socrates chose to make his appearance only after all have listened to Gorgias and witnessed his skill. The philosopher could have encountered Gorgias anywhere and at any time, but this occasion offers an ideal and unique opportunity. At the time of Socrates' arrival, Gorgias is enjoying the audience's unreserved admiration. The rhetorician has attained an air of radiance and, in a sense, is gleaming in front of the young. Thus, the moment after Gorgias has successfully displayed his talent is the moment Socrates considers the perfect occasion to expose the rhetorician's brilliance and sparkle as simply pretense and façade. The reason is obvious: by

defeating Gorgias after he has achieved an aura of triumph provides Socrates with an excellent opportunity to make a meaningful impression and demonstrate that he, and not Gorgias, embodies the principles of true authority.

Socrates is therefore not part of the audience. He is not there to praise Gorgias, but to fight him. The prize of the fight, what is at stake, is the future of Athens represented by the young men in attendance. They are the ones of value and Socrates' interest in Gorgias is the result of Gorgias' influence over the young. Simply put, Socrates is attracted to Gorgias because Gorgias attracts the young. The philosopher knows that the young are the real victims of the crisis, as it will be their inheritance. They are the ones that will accede to the resulting mess of their fathers' failed attempts at establishing a thriving and healthy political order. Born into a situation of hardship and ruin, the young seek answers in the hopes of soothing their sense unrest. But in their quest for guidance, the young, vulnerable and confused, are at risk of accepting the ravings of false teachers. During periods of intense turmoil, the fall into falsehood is a real possibility.

And so, playing the role of a concerned elder, Socrates vigorously investigates the interests and activities of his young fellow citizens. At first, no one at the gathering is convinced of the purpose of Socrates' visit. Even after

Chaerephon subtly informs everyone that Socrates wishes to see Gorgias, the reason of the visit is not clear. Although it is difficult for him to accept, Callicles nevertheless initially seems to believe that Socrates has presented himself as a sort of admirer.<sup>23</sup> At this point, Callicles does not fully appreciate Socrates' intention, and enthusiastically welcomes him. He urges the philosopher to take part in *the show*. Nothing would make Callicles happier than have Socrates ask Gorgias a question and assume the position of a humble student.<sup>24</sup> Hence, Callicles offers what he believes Socrates is searching for -an example of Gorgias' oratorical ability. Socrates, however, has not presented himself in order to attend the *Gorgias show*, least of all to take part in it. It is not a display of rhetoric that the philosopher seeks but a dialogue. Wishing to put Gorgias' reputed wisdom on trial, Socrates wants answers to his queries.

He thus informs Callicles of the questions he wants to ask Gorgias,<sup>25</sup> but in his excitement and haste to get Socrates to be a participant in *the show*, Callicles fails to consider the implications of the philosopher's words. Yet, once Gorgias appears, Socrates rephrases the question in more direct terms making his intentions clear to everyone present. Through Chaerephon, he asks the rhetorician to reveal, "*Who he is*" (*Οστις εστιν* -447d). Defeating all illusions of

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<sup>23</sup> 447b.

<sup>24</sup> 447c.

<sup>25</sup> 447c.

self-deception, this question places one's very existence in perspective. Thus far, it has been a day of feasting, of lighthearted and fancy conversation, but with this question, the stream of fluffy chatter ends. The discussion takes a sober and serious turn. Everyone at the gathering now realizes that this is not a query from an admirer but a challenge from an opponent. The comedy is over. The drama begins. Gorgias' popularity, especially with the young, stems from the common belief that his teachings not only reveal the path towards the highest and happiest way of life, but they also offer ways of benefiting the community. Wishing to test this belief and the merits of the rhetorician's fame, Socrates wants to know what kind of man Gorgias truly is, what is the task he performs, what precisely does he teach and how does he contribute to the well-being of the city.

Recognizing the significance of the situation and sensing that a fight is brewing, Polus, Gorgias' young and brash student, rushes to intercept Socrates' attack by deflecting the question. Instead of providing the unexpected visitors with a response to their question, Polus, in fine rhetorical fashion, describes how experience has taught man the value of developing crafts. He then goes on to explain that the crafts are hierarchically structured and that the one practiced by Gorgias is the best and most useful; it is the craft that sits on top of the hierarchy of crafts.<sup>26</sup> The young rhetorician, in other words, replies to Chaerephon's

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<sup>26</sup> 448c.

question by stating that the craft practiced by Gorgias' is a great thing but does not reveal what this craft is or what it accomplishes. This elaborate display of rhetoric, needless to say, does not impress Socrates. Nevertheless, Polus' abrupt interruption proves helpful. Because of his inability to control himself, the young rhetorician has unwittingly accepted the challenge of engaging in a conversation that will rest on the basis of the philosopher's reference to the crafts, i.e., the ability to provide rational accounts, thus in effect aiding Socrates' cause. In other words, Polus has thoughtlessly accepted, on behalf of all present, to initiate and partake in a discussion that will depend on Socrates' *reasoned* or rational terms.

Having accepted the philosopher's challenge and having served his initial purpose, Polus is subsequently dismissed by Socrates. Realizing that a conversation with a hot- and hardheaded individual would lead nowhere, Socrates purposely snubs Polus and once again tries to provoke Gorgias into a dialogue. Gorgias initially tries to avoid entering the discussion by encouraging Socrates to take up Polus' invitation. Socrates declines, preferring to deal with the teacher rather than the student. After Chaerephon's attempt at engaging Gorgias fails, Socrates takes matters into his own hands and repeats the question. Seemingly, Gorgias has no alternative but to confront his attacker. Gorgias answers Socrates by stating that he is a rhetorician and has the ability to make others rhetoricians as well. Before proceeding any further, Socrates asks Gorgias

not to behave like Polus and try to divert the discussion by delivering long drawn out speeches. Socrates wants a dialogue and has no desire to chase Gorgias around the twists and turns of his rhetoric. Gorgias agrees. But in order not to seem servile, he states that fulfilling Socrates' request will not require much effort for providing short answers to questions also constitutes part of his talent,<sup>27</sup> hence implying that even with short answers he will be able to evade his rival's attacks. Assured of Gorgias' compliance, Socrates resumes the discussion.

Gorgias has admitted that he practices and teaches rhetoric. This does not astonish anybody. All are familiar with this bit of information. What Socrates wants to know is the purpose of practicing and teaching rhetoric. What concern vital to the community will the young be resolving by being rhetoricians? Since all crafts have a specific concern, Socrates wants Gorgias to name the concern addressed by rhetoric. Gorgias replies that the craft of rhetoric is concerned with speeches. By responding with the obvious statement, which none would deny, that rhetoric has to do with speeches, Gorgias appears to be trying to avoid the issue by providing Socrates with partial truths that do not explore the heart of the matter. He does this in the hope that maybe one of these ambiguous answers will satisfy his opponent thus putting an end to the dialogue. Gorgias is no fool. He is not a young, inexperienced student but a seasoned intellectual who has

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<sup>27</sup> 449c.

argued countless debates and who knows not to expose himself by saying more than is necessary. He is clever enough to understand not to needlessly open himself to attack. Yet not surprisingly, Socrates requires more than partial truths.

The inquiry continues with Socrates pointing out that all crafts at some time or another make use of speeches and they do so in order to communicate a specific type of knowledge that aims to produce a specific type of good, which in effect represents the purpose or end of that craft. For example, the speeches delivered by a physician communicate knowledge that aims to produce health in the patient's body. Promoting physical health is therefore the purpose of the medical craft. Now since Gorgias maintains that rhetoric is a craft, Socrates wants Gorgias to identify the specific type of knowledge that rhetoric attempts to impart and the good it aims to produce. Gorgias answers that rhetoric does not produce anything, at least not in the usual sense. Unlike other crafts, rhetoric does not entail any action on the part of its practitioner; it begins and ends with speeches. The implications of Gorgias' words do not escape Socrates.

The philosopher points out that the speeches of a craftsman communicate a specific type of knowledge in order to produce a specific good. If the speeches of a rhetorician do not produce a specific good, then the suggestion is that his words do not transmit knowledge but something else. The response to Gorgias

("I am not sure I understand what sort of craft you want to call it..."-450c) is the first indication that Socrates doubts whether rhetoric can legitimately be considered a craft. Still, Gorgias' answer does not provide the philosopher with the details needed to expose rhetoric as a *sham*. The acknowledgement that rhetoric does not produce anything, in the sense that most crafts produce something, is only the first step. At this point, we begin to notice that it would have probably been best if the great rhetorician never followed Polus' initial train of thought and agreed to define rhetoric as a craft for he is now compelled to argue his case from Socrates' perspective, which gives the philosopher a decisive advantage. But, of course, Gorgias is in a difficult predicament; denying that rhetoric is a craft would be admitting that he has no knowledge to sell.

The dialogue therefore proceeds with Socrates arguing that, although it produces *nothing*, if rhetoric is to be considered a craft it needs to be a rational enterprise based on a means to end formula and must be motivated by some unique purpose, one that distinguishes it from every other craft. Stubbornly unwilling to expose himself, Gorgias responds that his craft aims and addresses "the greatest human concern."<sup>28</sup> Socrates, unfazed by the rhetorician's evasiveness, remarks that every craft can make the case that it, in some way, addresses "the greatest human concern." Before making such a claim, it would

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<sup>28</sup> 451d.

be preferable for Gorgias to inform the gathering of the purpose and product of his craft. For only thus is one able to judge a craft's utility and value. Finally, in lines 452*d-e*, Gorgias provides an opening, which Socrates does not hesitate to exploit.

Gorgias declares that rhetoric is the best craft because it produces the best product -namely, persuasion. Persuasion is the best product because it offers a person the power to enslave an entire city, which in turn provides him with the complete freedom to attend to the satisfaction of his longings and pursue the *good* life. Simply put, rhetoric provides the power to rise above and escape all that inhibits or frustrates man's desire for a sense of wholeness however deformed or misguided it may be. At last, Gorgias unveils the truth. In paragraph 451*d*, Gorgias argued that rhetoric offers the key to human satisfaction. He now reveals this key to be power. More specifically, power to "rule over others in one's own city", which if taken to the extreme strongly implies tyranny. The significance of the battle becomes clear. The community is in risk of lying in ruins. The need to introduce new principles of existence has reached urgent proportions. And so, the question is which principles will serve to inspire and guide the next generation's efforts of renewal. Gorgias offers the principles of tyrannical power. Socrates for his part will make sure the young understand the implications and dangers of this offer. However, only in

Socrates' discussion with Calicles do all the major elements come out in full view. For the moment, because he wants to engage Gorgias on his own terms, the philosopher is only interested in investigating the merits of rhetoric as a craft.

Gorgias is asked to define, in specific detail, the type of persuasion rhetoric produces. All crafts rely on a certain amount of persuasion. For instance, a physician strives to persuade his patient of the proper medication, while the physical trainer tries to persuade his pupil of the proper exercises to perform. In short, Socrates wants Gorgias to identify the difference between the persuasion produced by other crafts and that produced by rhetoric. Gorgias answers that since the rhetorician practices his persuasion in courts and political assemblies his speeches are concerned with justice.<sup>29</sup> Receiving the answer he anticipated, Socrates changes slightly the direction of the discussion. Aware that the only knowledge he possesses is that he, personally, does not possess knowledge but only beliefs that might at times be *true*, Socrates affirms the importance of both knowledge and beliefs, and therefore proceeds by making the case that there is a

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<sup>29</sup> The struggle for justice, in this instance, is interpreted as the communal-political manifestation of humanity's desire for "true order", that is to say, an existentially satisfactory order. The idea of justice, in other words, does not suggest some abstract decree deduced from some detached utilitarian premise but reflects the communal-political dimension of humanity's struggle to experience an order of wholeness. Thus because his attitude and actions reflect the principles of true existence, a just person is he who experiences a certain measure of contentment, wholeness and completion while the unjust person, who expresses a perverted attitude, is he who endures a life of distress and disillusion. Accordingly, justice, at least for Plato, is not concern strictly with the allocation of public obligations and duties; it also addresses a person's personal spiritual needs and well-being. Thus in relation to the passage above, when Gorgias states that he teaches justice he, in essence, is claiming that he teaches the principles of true order, i.e., the *good* life. And so, when Socrates, later on, challenges this claim, making the case that Gorgias' teachings breed injustice, he is in effect arguing that the great rhetorician's teachings estrange a person from true satisfaction.

difference between them in that knowledge is always true while a belief can be either true or false. As a result, there are two types of persuasion; one based on knowledge the other on belief.<sup>30</sup> Because, as noted in the introductory section of this study, Gorgias' epistemology does not allow for the possibility of certain undeniable knowledge, the rhetorician admits that rhetoric produces beliefs, more specifically beliefs about what is just and unjust.<sup>31</sup>

Returning to the question posed earlier about the difference between the persuasion used by rhetoric and the one used by other crafts, the answer is knowledge. One transmits and communicates knowledge while the other transmits and communicates beliefs. Consequently, the rhetorician's discourse concerning justice has as much likelihood of being false as it does of being true. What was previously implied in the passage 450c becomes plain. Since rhetoric does not produce anything, then its speeches do not transmit or communicate any kind of knowledge. They, in fact, communicate beliefs. In other words, the best a rhetorician can offer his students are *true beliefs*. Yet, even this seems suspicious for without being able to give a consistent account of his beliefs, it seems impossible that a rhetorician would be able to teach anything to others. Though they, at times, produce results identical with those produced by

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<sup>30</sup> Although Gorgias denies the possibility of knowledge, something Socrates takes for granted, he is forced into a dialogue about knowledge; he is thus forced because if Gorgias blatantly denies the possibility of knowledge he has then nothing to offer his pupils or potential pupils.

<sup>31</sup> 455a.

knowledge, *true beliefs* are volatile and random, having no link to the chain of causality with the final cause.<sup>32</sup> However, it should be noted that from Gorgias' perspective the fact that rhetoric produces beliefs instead of knowledge does not in any way denote any kind of intellectual deficiency for, again according to the great rhetorician's epistemological views, absolute knowledge concerning the details of a reality external to human interpretation is simply impossible to attain. Beliefs are all that are available to man. Thus if there is nothing higher than beliefs, the ability to shape beliefs is of crucial importance; hence the significance of rhetoric.

Through persuasive speech, the rhetorician shapes beliefs and opinions, which are malleable because they lack contact with truth, thus modifying human behavior and by extension human reality. Simply put, 1) beliefs and opinions shape and govern human reality 2) beliefs and opinions are themselves shaped and governed by speech 3) rhetoric supplies the necessary means for mastery over beliefs and opinions and by extension human reality. Reality, in other words, is created by man's ability to exercise power, and the foremost way of

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<sup>32</sup> Yet Socrates is also trapped in this predicament but with the important difference that the philosopher acknowledges the possibility of knowledge in the form of wisdom and thus rather than assume the posture of indifference of one such as Gorgias, Socrates seeks and loves wisdom.

exercising power, especially in a democracy, is through the use of speech.<sup>33</sup>

Attempting to seize the appropriate moment in which certain forms of speeches can be used to unite individual desires into a common willingness for action, Gorgias strives for social harmony by resolving the apparent contradictions that perplex human existence and create confusion.

Whereas the inference of absolute knowledge of truth can give rise to crusades against all deemed falsehood, and thus can rouse an intolerance that breeds conflict and civil strife (or as in the example of Euthyphro, the prosecution of one's father), Gorgias' epistemology warns against dogmatic claims hence promoting a more tolerant attitude and the possibility of fostering a certain level of communal accord. Yet, from his side, Socrates is adamant in his outlook and struggles to reveal that the indifference towards truth demonstrated by the rhetorician/sophists unavoidably leads to the disorder of tyranny and the mistaken thesis that power is the source order. One of the tools Socrates employs in his struggle against sophistic relativism is the *elenchos*.<sup>34</sup> The *elenchos* is a

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<sup>33</sup> "This subordination of meaning to occasion entails the view that the truth of an utterance is immanent and not anterior to the situation of the utterance itself. In other words, the persuasive power of a speech does not derive from its correspondence to a preexisting reality or truth. Truth is relative to the speaker and the immediate context. There is no criterion or standard that might once and for all found and orient the progress of knowledge" (Eric Charles White, *Kaironomia: on the will-to-invent*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987, 14).

<sup>34</sup> "*Elenchos* might be roughly translated as 'refutation', 'test', or 'cross-examination'. It is the noun form of the verb *ελεγεειν*, used by Socrates at *Apology* 21c1 in describing his aim of interpreting the Delphic oracle and at *Apology* 29e5 in describing his aim of testing those who profess to care about 'wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of their soul'. Only in the *Apology* does Socrates furnish us with anything like a description of this method. In the other early Platonic dialogue, he practices it with a passion" (Hugh H.

dialectical method of reasoning focusing on philosophical matters where complete certainty may be unattainable but where truth is asserted and pursued to the utmost achievable degree. According to Socrates, by comparing and evaluating statements, the *elenchos* functions by exposing contradictions and forcing a choice between them. But, of course, in order to evaluate and compare, one must possess a standard of reference which itself is not just another case of an opinion or belief. In short, the effort to display the inconsistency of proposals suggests some sort of trust that one's enquiries will lead to some form of truth.

The *elenchos* thus attempts to demonstrate something that Gorgias maintains cannot be demonstrated -namely, that the justifications required to attain knowledge are possible only on the assumption that there exist, apart from private opinion and belief, some substantive notion of truth able to explain the characteristics of things of this world.<sup>35</sup> Although there are a variety of aims to the Socrates' method of *elenchos*,<sup>36</sup> they all seem to come together and form a structure that stands on the premises that, firstly, there exists an eternal

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Benson, *Socratic Wisdom: the model of knowledge in Plato's early dialogues*, New York Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, 32).

<sup>35</sup> "Dialectic, and dialectic alone, goes directly to the first principle and is the only science which does away with hypothesis in order to make her ground secure" (Plato, *Republic*, translated by G.M.A. Grube, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, INC, 1992, 533e).

<sup>36</sup> Hugh H. Benson identifies eight distinct aims to Socrates' *elenchos*. These aims are "1) interpreting the statements of others, 2) testing or examining the knowledge or wisdom of those reputed (by themselves or others) to be wise, 3) showing those who are not wise their ignorance, 4) learning from those who are wise, 5) examining oneself, 6) exhorting others to philosophy, 7) examining the lives of others, and 8) attaining moral knowledge" (Hugh H. Benson, *Socratic Wisdom: the model of knowledge in Plato's early dialogues*, 17).

unchanging truth independent of human interpretation and that, secondly, insights to such a truth are, to some degree, available to man.

Therefore, eager to challenge Gorgias' worldview, Socrates asks the next obvious question: what use is rhetoric to the city if its purpose is to persuade people of beliefs, which may or may not be true? The many and various crafts that are necessary for the survival of a city require a degree of knowledge. For instance, a city cannot survive without physicians who possess the knowledge to heal the sick, nor can it survive without farmers who possess the knowledge to grow crops, and so forth. Yet, the rhetorician, by Gorgias' own admission, possesses no real knowledge. Therefore, what benefit does the rhetorician provide the city? How does the rhetorician contribute to the common good? Before allowing Gorgias the chance to reply, Socrates reminds his opponent of the seriousness of the discussion at hand.<sup>37</sup> For this discussion is not an intellectual game between two men of exceptional understanding. In fact, it is not two men that are competing but two visions of existence, two notions of what is required for the attainment of the most authentic and highest form of human existence. Moreover, Socrates makes it clear that he is not speaking on his own behalf, but on behalf of Athens and its young. Socrates asks his questions because the young want to know what will happen to them if they follow the

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<sup>37</sup> 455d.

path paved by Gorgias. How will they benefit Athens by being rhetoricians?

How will tyrannical power address their worries and help restore the city?

Gorgias responds that it is not difficult to appreciate the use and value of rhetoric for its fruits flood the city. The walls, the monuments, the temples, the docs, the statues, all these glorious things that provide Athens with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction have come to be because of rhetoric.

Through debate, the political assembly decides which projects the city will carry out. Through his persuasive speech, the rhetorician has the power to control political debate and as a result has the power to decide which ventures the community will undertake. Knowledge may very well be necessary in order to create and maintain a city, but without persuasion, without the application of power, nothing would ever come to be. All the crafts required by a city are, in other words, controlled, organized, and disciplined by the rhetorician.

Regardless of the fact that it dispenses no real knowledge, rhetoric determines a community's manner of existence. Simply put, the practice of rhetoric promotes a way of life that is unconscious of standards of good and justice and thus interprets brute power as the substance and source of order in history.

Continuing to flaunt the benefits of rhetoric, Gorgias provides a brief but very interesting statement that may well validate its use. In section *456b*, he states, "Many a time I've gone with...physicians to call on some sick person who

refuses to take his medicine...and when the physician failed to persuade him, I succeeded, by means of no other than rhetoric." As indicated, the crafts need to be persuasive to be effective. The physician who cannot persuade his patients to undergo treatment is in effect useless. Gorgias' claim is that, by convincing people of the truth of knowledge, rhetoric can in effect support and enhance the other crafts. Even though rhetoric is not about knowledge, it can be used in its service. However, immediately after presenting this positive image of rhetoric, Gorgias then offers an example of one of the more disturbing features of his teachings. In section 456c, Gorgias states:

*And I maintain too that if a rhetorician and a physician came to any city anywhere you like and had to compete in speaking in the assembly or some other gathering over which of them should be appointed physician, the physician wouldn't make any showing at all, but the one who had the ability to speak would be appointed, if he so wished. And if he were to compete with any other craftsman whatever, the rhetorician more than anyone else would persuade them that they should appoint him...*

The meaning of this passage is plain. Reiterating his central premise, Gorgias argues that through the power of creating so-called *truths*, that may as well be lies or opinions, rhetoric not only supplements but also possibly surpasses knowledge as the ordering force of historical reality. This display of rhetoric's dazzling power clearly exposes its dangers. For what benefit can physicians that possess no knowledge of the medical craft offer the city? How

does a physician who knows nothing of medicine help his patient? What would occur if a rhetorician were appointed physician? Would not all his patients die? However, it is not the *sham* physician that is Socrates' real concern but the *sham* statesman. Following the same line of reasoning and predicated on the idea that there is objective knowledge, the question arises: What would occur in a city governed by individuals who have no real knowledge of justice? Would not injustice flourish in such a city? The threat is obvious. The city founded upon the speeches of the rhetorician is doomed to fail. Though rhetoric, i.e., power, can serve the cause of justice,<sup>38</sup> it can also breed injustice, and, as a result, cannot form the basis of political order.

Seemingly conscious that he has just revealed a rather unflattering side of rhetoric, Gorgias immediately goes on to say that, "the fact that he [the student of rhetoric] has the ability to rob physicians or other craftsmen of their reputations doesn't give him any more of a reason to do it." Without a doubt, sections 456a to 457c demonstrate Gorgias' great talent as a rhetorician. In order to arouse the appetite of the young in attendance, Gorgias, at first, portrays rhetoric as the primary instrument of communal and political power bestowing great satisfaction to its possessor. Then, in order to appease the audiences' sense of decency and moral indignation, he categorically condemns its abuse. The

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<sup>38</sup> 456b.

rhetorician knows that although young men crave power, most will be suspicious and even repulsed if the choice is clearly between power and integrity. He therefore delivers a lengthy speech in which he jumbles the issues in order to appeal to both the immoral love for absolute tyrannical power and the moral sense of order and justice. But, in attempting to satisfy both the audiences' admiration for power and their sense of decency, Gorgias entangles himself in an inescapable web of contradictions that provides Socrates with a triumphant opportunity to strike Gorgias with a blow that will forever damage the great rhetorician's reputation as a teacher of "*the best craft*."

Before delivering his final assault, Socrates warns Gorgias of what will happen if he does not leave the discussion. Sensing that his opponent has gained the upper hand and having no appetite for a prolonged fight, Gorgias tries to withdraw but fails. Chaerephon, on one side, urges his mentor to deliver the knockout argument and expose Gorgias as a *sham* teacher of a *sham* craft. Calicles, from the other side, implores the great rhetorician not to back down from Socrates' challenge. Because he does not hold to truth the way Socrates does, Gorgias' only concern is with maintaining his reputation and thus has little choice but to continue. Socrates begins by stating that the rhetorician's power of persuasion is effective only with those who are ignorant of the subject discussed (459a). For example, a rhetorician cannot persuade a physician in matters of

medicine. Only a layperson, unacquainted with the medical craft, would comply with the rhetorician's medical advice. By extension, only in a society, that does not know justice from injustice, could a person like Gorgias be successful in swaying the people of the assemblies and courts. Stated differently, only in a corrupt society is the rhetorician a figure of authority and admiration. Hidden in this argument is the suggestion that concerning the subject of justice, the rhetorician's rhetoric is limited by the philosopher's *elenchos*. In front of young inexperienced students, Gorgias might very well be persuasive. His polished words however do not charm Socrates. Gorgias might be able to overwhelm and baffle the young, but Socrates sees through the charade and recognizes the rhetorician's mistakes and contradictions. For instance, Gorgias maintains that rhetoric is a craft whose concern is promoting justice. Yet he also claims that he is not responsible for the injustice that rhetoric may produce.<sup>39</sup> Now if Gorgias is right and rhetoric is a craft whose concern is justice, then how can it be that it sometimes produces injustice?

Crafts have a specific purpose. They are a rational activity that follow a means of fixed methodological procedures and drive towards a specific end that corresponds to a unique good. If it is possible that injustice results from the teaching of rhetoric, whose aim is supposedly justice, then it logically follows

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<sup>39</sup> 457b.

that rhetoric has no specific purpose and is therefore not a craft but something else. In fact, the proof that rhetoric is not a craft is standing next to Gorgias. The confirmation that rhetoric produces injustice is nearby and ready to explode with anger. The rash and impulsive Polus is all the evidence Socrates needs to silence his opponent. Gorgias might very well have continued the discussion and asked Socrates what he considers rhetoric to be, since he claims that it is not a craft. But, as mentioned earlier, Gorgias is no fool. He knows Socrates has successfully imposed his terms on the discussion and as a result, victory now is out of his reach. Extending the discussion would only cause more damage to both Gorgias' value as a teacher and the value of that which he teaches. However, as is often the case, the partisan has more difficulty accepting his side's defeat than the actual participant in the contest. Thus, like any fanatic of a losing team, Polus accuses the victor of cheating. The young rhetorician does not realize that he is the direct cause of his mentor's capitulation. He does not understand that his presence substantiates Socrates' condemnation of his mentor's teachings. To the delight of Socrates and the chagrin of Gorgias, Polus, overcome with rage, enters the conversation and prolongs the battle.

Socrates joyfully welcomes the "most admirable Polus" to the dialogue. This ironic and playful greeting immediately reveals the philosopher's low opinion of Polus' intellectual abilities, which is further betrayed by the way he

does what he wills with the young rhetorician, telling him which questions to ask<sup>40</sup> and even at one point demanding, in a polite manner, that he *shut up*.<sup>41</sup> The respect accorded the teacher will not extend to the foul and impetuous student. Clearly, Polus is not a very astute opponent.<sup>42</sup> Possessing an average understanding, all he does is impulsively react, and this makes him an easy target. Socrates can therefore afford to be playful. Nonetheless, Polus, once again, proves to be helpful in that he provides Socrates with the opportunity to extend his indictment of rhetoric. Socrates opens the discussion with Polus by highlighting the important role the young generation plays as the invigorating and rejuvenating force of a community.<sup>43</sup>

This force is not only physical or biological but also, and more importantly, spiritual. For when the elders substitute the pursuit of true order with the pursuit of wealth and comfort, when the older generation's indifference towards issues of truth causes the community's unraveling, it is the young who rise in protest. Youth's vigor and hunger for the true principles of existence is the only hope for a society's renewal. Still, what the young possess in intensity and enthusiasm, they lack in experience and prudence; there is always the risk that they will be misled and fall prey to unscrupulous types. Youth's association with

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<sup>40</sup> 462d.

<sup>41</sup> 469a.

<sup>42</sup> Interestingly enough, it seems that even Gorgias, who has sold his services to Polus, did not himself hold Polus in very high regards - "*Never mind him [Polus]*" (463e).

<sup>43</sup> 461d.

unscrupulous men arouses unscrupulous desires, and, as a result, the desire for true order dies down. When this occurs, the young are ill equipped to fulfill their duty to the community. Polus aptly proves this point.

Before resuming the discussion, Socrates places the same restriction on Polus that he placed on Gorgias. He will not allow his adversary the luxury of long rhetorical orations that may confuse the audience. The young rhetorician will need to limit the length of his answers and address the issue at hand. Shocked and incensed, Polus challenges Socrates' request claiming that it goes against the tradition of intellectual openness that characterizes Athenian society. The young rhetorician argues that he, as an Athenian citizen, is owed the *right to free speech*.

Freedom of speech, however, does not mean that one is free to say anything regardless of the consequences. A community simply cannot survive such freedom. Athens finds itself in ruin because those in positions of leadership spoke without any sense of prudence or responsibility thus thoughtlessly arousing the people's base appetites -as described by Plutarch in the passages mentioned earlier. Hence, if the young rhetorician is not willing to be accountable for his words, Socrates will abandon the discussion and leave the gathering; there is no advantage in debating someone who will say anything.

Socrates' freedom to walk away therefore limits Polus' freedom of speech.<sup>44</sup> Of course, the rhetorician, whose words conveys opinions and beliefs, by definition, cannot justify his claims. Polus' resistance is perfectly reasonable. Nevertheless, in order to avenge his mentor's defeat, Polus will have to submit. The dialogue with Gorgias ended with the claim that rhetoric is not a craft. The beginning of the Polus section completes this line of reasoning by revealing Socrates' own thoughts concerning rhetoric.

The philosopher argues that rhetoric is a *knack* (*εμπειριαν*) whose focus is not politics but the semblance of politics, and whose purpose is not education but gratification.<sup>45</sup> Provoking an awareness of one's ignorance, an education serves to re-adjust one's habits in order better to conform to what is truly beneficial and not to that which just seems beneficial in light of one's immediate desires. Therefore, while all types of education, to a relative degree, affect, alter and refine one's desires, rhetoric simply provides the means of satisfying them; rhetoric does not induce a turn from unhealthy to healthy desires, from good to bad pleasures, from falsehood to truth. It might be that the rhetorician leaves the distinction between things that are healthy and unhealthy, good and bad, true and false in obvious perplexity, disinclined to act precipitously, yet, it remains that as far as the rhetorician is concerned, what is considered healthy, good, or

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<sup>44</sup> 462a.

<sup>45</sup> 463c.

true is tied to human recognition and the desire for esteem, i.e., power; however the mob recognizes things to be, thus they are<sup>46</sup>. All this was subtly suggested in the Gorgias section, but because of Polus' impulsiveness and uncontrollable anger, it, at this point, has become explicit.

After listening to Socrates' description of rhetoric, Polus asks, "Well? Are you saying that it's something admirable or shameful?" The fact that Polus needs to ask if providing a false image of politics is something shameful displays clearly, from Socrates' perspective, the young man's ignorance<sup>47</sup> and thus additionally validates the philosopher's scolding of rhetoric. Predictably, Socrates' assertions pull Gorgias back into the discussion. The great rhetorician has built his reputation on the claim that he is an exceptional educator and competent teacher of politics. Socrates now reveals this claim to be false. Gorgias therefore tries his best to save his reputation but after the philosopher delivers a lengthy speech<sup>48</sup> wherein he uses detailed illustrations in order to describe the cause of Athens' downfall, Gorgias relapses into silence.<sup>49</sup> Socrates justifies his

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<sup>46</sup> In modern times, this form of reasoning can be found in the thought and works of Alexander Kojève. See, *Introduction to the reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, trans. Bryan-Paul Frost & Robert Howse (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Although the rhetorician/sophist would argue that Polus' question simply illustrates the young man's acceptance of the fact that humans cannot know absolute truth.

<sup>48</sup> 464b-466a.

<sup>49</sup> At this point, I would like to say a few words regarding the Socratic use of rhetoric. Socrates taught a method in the use of rhetoric called *dialectic*, which can briefly be defined as the pursuit of truth through a series of questions. The philosopher believed that if one asked the right questions aspects of truth would come into view. Those like Plato therefore attributed his victories in argument to both his persuasiveness and his ability to convey insights into truth. Now the difference between the rhetoric used by Gorgias and

assault on rhetoric by arguing three points: first, that there are two types of health, spiritual health, fostered by the craft of politics, and physical health, fostered by medicine and gymnastics. Second, that there is sometimes a distinction between health and the mere appearance of health. Third, that there are certain knacks, such as pastry baking in the case of the body and rhetoric in the case of the soul, which present an outward appearance of health but in reality nurture illness and disease.

If we accept Socrates' analogy, which requires that we ignore the fact that the soul does not share the same determining characteristics as the body, his argument becomes evident.<sup>50</sup> Though politics is the craft concerned with man's well-being, when guided by the principles of rhetoric, i.e., power, it does not achieve its purpose. The rhetorician/politician's inability to address the community's need for order, in other words, breeds a sense of profound dissatisfaction and frustration, which in turn gives rise to instances of disorder. Socrates additionally points out that the one able to recognize the difference between health (true order) and the mere appearance of health is one who

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Socrates stems from their views on truth. Although Socrates directed his rhetoric to searching for and convincing others of the truth, Gorgias, who denies the possibility of ever understanding anything about truth, is only interested in convincing the listener of whatever there was to prove at a particular moment. Nevertheless, both Socrates and Gorgias can be said to have employed a type of rhetoric for as Aristotle observes, ". . . one who acts in accordance with a sound argument, and one who acts in accordance with moral purpose, are both called rhetoricians". (Aristotle: *The Politics*. Trans. T. A. Sinclair, Baltimore: Penguin, 1964, p15.) Thus although there is not much in terms of *dialectic* in the paragraphs between 464b-466a, Socrates' speech, unlike the speech employed by Gorgias, is still driven by the pursuit of truth.

<sup>50</sup> These are, of course, the very assumptions that Socrates denies.

possesses the knowledge of what in fact constitutes health. In the case of the body, an actual physician is the one able to make the distinction between a person who is in good physical health and one who simply appears to be. In regards to the soul, it is the true statesman that possesses the ability to see through appearances and perceive the real state of things. This passage subtly anticipates the groundbreaking insights symbolized through the myth of The Judgment of the Dead.

But, despite his elaborate efforts, Socrates fails to reach Polus. The young rhetorician still cannot understand the existential issue at hand (466a). But while he does not grasp the finer points of the argument, Polus is certain of one thing; rhetoric bestows great power to its practitioner. In section 466c, he exclaims, "Don't they [rhetoricians], like tyrants, put to death anyone they want, and confiscate the property and banish from their cities anyone they see fit?" Here the connection between tyranny and the practice of rhetoric is made plain. Polus reaffirms, in more direct terms, Gorgias' statement at 452d-e.<sup>51</sup> Intentions are no longer hidden behind extravagant and sophisticated language. With Polus, there is no subtlety. The young rhetorician's premise is simple; as an instrument of power, rhetoric is valuable because it grants a person the ability to do whatever he wants. Socrates agrees that there is great benefit in doing what one wants, but

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<sup>51</sup> "It [rhetoric] is the source of freedom for mankind itself and at the same time it is for each person the source of rule over others in one's own city."

adds the crucial point that what everybody wants is to experience the *good*. In other words, according to the philosopher, power is not the ability to gratify all desires, as Polus seems to believe, but the ability to know which desires lead to human fulfillment, i.e., the *good*. This, however, requires an education that nurtures the type of character and judgment required to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate desires<sup>52</sup>, which is something that rhetoric fails to provide.<sup>53</sup> Thus, without the benefit of an education, the rhetorician/tyrant finds himself in a powerless state of ignorance. Polus may be correct in arguing that nothing physically prevents the rhetorician/tyrant from undertaking whatever course of action he desires, but Socrates' argument is that without the proper direction, the rhetorician/tyrants undertakings are ineffective and meaningless. And so, if a young man studies rhetoric with the hope of eventually experiencing a sense of fulfillment, he will, in the end, be disappointed and realize that he has wasted both his time and money.

Now the argument that there are certain desires that are appropriate while certain others are inappropriate seems to posit the existence of a universal timeless standard that can serve to evaluate human desires. But, as explained earlier, according to Polus' mentor, such a standard, if it indeed exists, is beyond

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<sup>52</sup> In other words, the purpose of an education is to shape, alter and refine one's desires in the hopes of eventually experiencing the *good*. The desires that are labeled as being "appropriate" are therefore those that lead to the good life while those said to be "inappropriate" are those that lead astray.

<sup>53</sup> 463c.

man's comprehension. Therefore, from the young rhetorician's perspective, the philosopher's stance must appear hubristic and presumptuous. Moreover, because he is only aware of immediate desires and goods, it must seem to Polus that this type of "improvement morality" where man's desires and actions are constantly judged from the standpoint of the unchanging, eternal and divine denotes a rather truncated and perverted attitude towards life.

Bewildered and infuriated, Polus breaks away from the discussion and accuses his rival of lying. Socrates' position is too ridiculous to be sincere. The young rhetorician demands that Socrates be frank and admit the obvious. He, like anybody else, would love to be in a position of power and govern the city. Socrates asks Polus to be more specific: Is Polus saying that Socrates would love to have power and govern the city justly or to have power and govern the city unjustly. Exasperated, Polus responds that the notion of justice is irrelevant. The incessant appeal to justice as the embodiment of a universal *truth* betrays Socrates' unwillingness to confess his own secret ambitions. As far as Polus is concerned, justice has no impact on a person's ability to experience true happiness. The only thing of importance, the only true way to attain a sense of wholeness, is unrestrained tyrannical power. The young rhetorician's show of indifference towards truth has now reached staggering proportions. Polus has proudly announces the governing principles of the corrupt society and Socrates,

annoyed by the shameless display of ignorance, responds by telling him to be quiet.

Impervious to the philosopher's reasoned argumentation, Polus remains defiant. Socrates consequently adjusts his discourse and produces illustrations that are tailor made to fit Polus' crude and reductionist temperament. Because he can only react to things of the body, Socrates conjures up violent images of murders, thefts, and arson<sup>54</sup> in the hopes of perhaps moving his young opponent into realizing that the person who exercises power in a reckless and unrestrained manner is the most miserable of all. Yet, Polus, from Socrates' perspective, once again betrays his level depravity when he responds that the only problem with the philosopher's illustrations is that a common person who kills and plunders in the *agora* will eventually be caught by the authorities and punished by the courts. Polus has no scruples about killing or stealing, if done in such a way as to escape punishment. In this instance, Polus is endeavoring to renew the argument for the use of rhetoric by claiming that even if brought to court, persuasive speech will allow a person to evade punishment. Finally, the young rhetorician offers something of substance to the debate. He is offering the opportunity of satisfying one's needs without the threat of suffering the agonies of punishment;

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<sup>54</sup> 469d.

he is offering powers equivalent to those offered by the Ring of Gyges.<sup>55</sup> Using the example of Archelaus, Polus tries to make the case that a man who is able to attain power, even through criminal means, without suffering punishment is one who is happy and fulfilled. Unlike his mentor, who was reluctant to formulate an explicit relationship between his teachings and the rise of tyranny, Polus is willing, and even proud, to argue that the tyrant is the political embodiment of the rhetorician. Hence, instead of confronting Socrates' position with a relevant counter-argument, Polus goes on to describe Archelaus' criminal rise to political rule believing that this would justify the use of rhetoric. Socrates is not convinced. The philosopher rejects everything Polus has argued in favour of Archelaus' behaviour and refuses to acknowledge the tyrannical life as one that is synonymous with the good life.<sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup>The young rhetorician is incensed. He cannot believe how anyone could deny what the great majority of Athenians take to be evident. If only Socrates would give up his self-righteous and smug attitude, he would realize and accept the obvious: power constitutes the good life. Surely, Socrates cannot stand alone!

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<sup>55</sup> As elaborated in the *Republic*, Book II, 359a-360d.

<sup>56</sup> 471d-e

<sup>57</sup> Again this subtly anticipates and builds towards the end of the dialogue and Socrates' account of the myth of the Judgment of the Dead

With something like frustration, Socrates demands that Polus stop playing to the crowd. Instead of rationally exploring the relationship between rhetoric and justice, which was the stated purpose of the discussion, Polus prefers to produce passionate diatribes aimed at stirring the audience's emotions. The young rhetorician believes that by ensuring the audience's support he would then be in a position to declare victory over Socrates. Evidently, Polus has no real interest in swaying Socrates to abandon his philosophical stance against the tyrannical life. He is a rhetorician, a hired hand, and is only interested in securing the approval of the crowd. But, if that is the case, Socrates asks Polus to stop wasting both their time. The philosopher already knows that Polus benefits from the support of the people. Socrates further admits that the most famous Athenians of past generations, such as Nicias, Aristocrates and even the all-famous Pericles side with the young rhetorician. Still, even if it is true that historical circumstances reveal that Polus enjoys the approval of all Athenians, from past to present, Socrates will not accept this as the basis of defeat.

A community that embodies the principles of order can very well serve as a valid measure of prudence and justice. However, the Athens of Socrates' time is not such a community. Its political rulers, be they tyrants or democrats, are criminals. Its reputable teachers are charlatans. Its great leaders of the past,

animated by the vices of greed, vanity, and the will to dominate, are corruptors of the soul. As a result, its citizens are muddled and confused. Thus enjoying the support of a disordered people inhabiting a disordered society proves and means nothing. Polus' call to conform to the desires of the community is, in this instance, a call to abandon principles of true order. Socrates refuses. After denouncing all those who contributed to the corruption of Athens and to the formation of young men like Polus<sup>58</sup> Socrates goes on to make the argument that marks the end of the second part of the dialogue.

He begins by claiming that committing injustice is worse than suffering it. This claim rests on the notion that all human beings seek to experience, at the level of the soul, the *good life*, and that such an experience is the result of desiring the right *things*. Socrates' contention is that, although physically painful, suffering an injustice does not necessarily mean that one desires the wrong *things*, and, as a result, does not prohibit one from living the *good life*. Committing an injustice, on the other hand, usually reveals the presence of derailed desires that lead to a false sense of wholeness that in turn fail to attend to the soul's needs thus eventually fostering feelings of frustration and anger. And so, while doing an injustice prevents one from living the *good life*, suffering injustice does not; he who commits injustice is therefore worse off. Nevertheless,

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<sup>58</sup> 472a-472d.

there is hope. If he is lucky enough to be caught and punished, the criminal may still have the opportunity of experiencing feelings of deficit or absence that can only be overcome by the desire for true order. As was stated previously, achieving the *good* life depends upon a person's rational desires. One who desires the wrong *things* will behave in a reckless manner, and, as a result, will never experience the *good* life. The significance of punishment is that, through its promise of hardship and pain, it purportedly compels the criminal to re-direct and focus his desire away from the wrong and towards the right *things*.

In this regard, the tyrant is once again at a disadvantage. Because his power over the city is absolute, no one is in a position to punish or amend the tyrant's unjust ways. Having no one to shepherd him towards the proper objects of desire, the tyrant will forever remain unfulfilled, unhappy, and restless. Therefore, the person who seeks to gain power but fails is more enviable than the person who enters public life and acquires the position of an absolute tyrant.<sup>59</sup> Socrates ends his arguments against rhetoric/tyranny by maintaining that since going unpunished after committing a crime means that one will forever be miserable, a person should seek punishment for a criminal who happens to be a friend and clemency for one who is an enemy. The condemnation is now

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<sup>59</sup> 473e.

complete.<sup>60</sup> Because Socrates posits the existence of the human soul and because there is no benefit to the soul in avoiding punishment, rhetoric, and by extension absolute tyrannical power,<sup>61</sup> is useless. Unless it is employed in the service of justice, rhetoric is of no value and has no place in the city.

Socrates is very well aware that his closing argument, which maintains that the tortures of punishment be sought for a beloved but not for an enemy, will strike most as being eccentric and somewhat extreme. Unsatisfied with the level of intellectual competition he has faced thus far, Socrates seems purposely to overstate his point in order to incite a spirited and firm reaction from an audience member who has the capacity to be led into a more revealing conversation. The provocation succeeds. As it is always the case, calls for drastic change incite the hostility of those who stand to profit from the way things are, and thus are willing to debate the propositions set forth in favor of change. Callicles has acquired a reputation as an enlightened politician, one with great potential. Yet, if things take the shape Socrates describes, Callicles' career would certainly end. Indeed the politician might find himself in prison suffering punishment. The calls for intellectual renewal therefore need to be opposed. The philosophical principles put forward by Socrates must be exposed as lies. With

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<sup>60</sup> Though because of Polus' sophistic epistemological beliefs Socrates' condemnation must be experienced by the young man as wholly perverse.

<sup>61</sup> 480a.

intensity, Callicles accuses Socrates of corrupting the traditional ways of the city by making the weaker argument seem the stronger, which is, not surprisingly, the same accusation Socrates will face during his trial.<sup>62</sup> Yet, before entering into battle with Callicles, Socrates makes a benevolent appeal hoping to nurture the possibility of a *rapprochement*.

Attempting to arouse sentiments of friendship, Socrates informs Callicles that, while they are far apart on the level of ethics and politics, there is a shared experience that unites them. Even though Socrates embodies the philosophical and Callicles the tyrannical, the two men are not very different from one another for they both *suffer* (pathos-παθος) their existence in the same manner. In truth, all human beings *suffer* their existence in a common way, and that is through the unsettling experiences of inadequacy and incompleteness that characterizes the human historical condition. Now, though none can escape these *sufferings*, there is something that can offset, to a certain extent, man's experience of discomfort, namely, love. Love (eros- επος) offers a measure of relief for through love one attains and enjoys a higher sense of wholeness and completion. Thus, Callicles and Socrates are the same in that they are both lovers seeking to satisfy their existential longing for wholeness and completion. No matter how different they

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<sup>62</sup> Of course this is Plato's effort to not only illustrate that the indictments were unfounded but also to expose the type of person who put them forward.

are as intellectuals, both men participate in the same human drama that manifests itself in love. Therefore, since the foundation of both the tyrannical and philosophical life is essentially equivalent, Calicles should not view Socrates as a bitter enemy but as a partner driven by an equivalent hope.

But, of course, there is a major difference between the two men. Because a person loves that which he believes will provide the experience of completeness and wholeness, the point of separation between Socrates and Calicles is that each seeks completeness and wholeness through different *things* and thus loves different *things*. Socrates regards wisdom as the only real source of human fulfillment and, as a result, practices philosophy. On the other hands, his opponent loves the *demos* (Δεμος) for he believes that satisfaction is achieved through the sense supremacy experienced when one gains the absolute recognition of the mob. The significance of this is that by adopting different objects of love, Socrates and Calicles come to adopt very dissimilar modes of being in the world. The object of one's love shapes and brings meaning to one's existence. Because we love that which holds the promise of wholeness and completeness, the object of our love guides our existence and, in the end, who we are is a function of what we love. Accordingly, the difference between the potential tyrant and the philosopher is not found in experiences they suffer but in the *things* they choose to love in the hopes of addressing the experiences

suffered. The question that now emerges is which *things* should a person love, which path, the philosophical (the eternal) or the tyrannical (the contingent), offers a real sense of wholeness?

Since Socrates is interested in a rational dialogue during which arguments and judgments can be justified and accounted for, he starts by warning Callicles not to imitate Polus and constantly invoke beliefs held by the people.<sup>63</sup> To do so would be pointless, for, as stated previously, the philosopher is not swayed by the views of the confused mob. Ironically, and very astutely, Callicles uses this warning as a springboard to attack his opponent's character and honesty. Socrates, the politician argues, wants everyone to believe that he does not care what the people think of him and that he is above squabbling for the crowd's attention. He repeatedly claims that he has no use or interest in winning the admiration of the crowd. However, it is precisely with the support of the crowd that he defeated both Gorgias and Polus. Socrates knew very well that Gorgias would not dare reveal in front of an audience that rhetoric is not concerned with justice.<sup>64</sup> He also knew that Polus, although young and emotional, would not publicly declare that violating the laws of the city is not shameful, even though it might be gratifying.<sup>65</sup> It is not the dictates of Socrates' love of truth but the fear of

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<sup>63</sup> 482c.

<sup>64</sup> 461a.

<sup>65</sup> 474c.

offending the crowd that defeated both Gorgias and Polus. Socrates, possessed by a need to conquer, has developed a very clever trick that allows him to use the crowd to his advantage.

By exploiting the conflict between nature and convention and constantly shifting positions between the two, Socrates is able to gain an edge over his adversaries by forcing them into a contradiction.<sup>66</sup> On this occasion, Socrates played with the fact that although nature reveals that suffering evil is worse than doing evil, convention maintains the opposite. Being too afraid and ashamed to defy the conventions of the city, both Gorgias and Polus were forced to submit. Socrates' arrogant claim of "standing by the truth no matter the consequences" is simply fiction, part of a scheme to gain the recognition of the crowd. Like everybody else, Socrates, says Callicles, harbors tyrannical ambitions and is willing to say or do anything in the hope of gratifying his own selfish appetites. Despite his repeated denials, Socrates yearns for power. In fact, using the example of conventions, Callicles goes on to make the case that all historical reality is constituted by power. Formulated by "the weak and the many" in order to restrain the "powerful among men" from "trying to get more than one's share", conventions are arbitrary political and communal obligations that

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<sup>66</sup> "If a person makes a statement in terms of convention, you [Socrates] slyly question him in terms of nature; if he makes it in terms of nature, you question him in terms of convention. That's just what happened here..." (483a).

possess no purpose other than to articulate the weak man's drive towards mastery; reality is a struggle for power and conventions are an expression of the weak man's struggle for power.<sup>67</sup> In short, conventions merely reflect desires that *weak* men choose to impose upon human reality.

Clearly, this interpretation of the origin and function of conventions is an attempt to validate the tenets of the tyrannical life for if conventions symbolize intrinsic meaning then they must be respected and the tyrant's attempt to quash them must be seen as perverse. However, if reality is reduced to a struggle for power, the tyrant's attempt to enforce his desires upon the city can be viewed as a legitimate expression of nature. If conventions are a device created by the *weak* in order to oppress, the tyrannical life then gains legitimacy for it becomes a means of escaping from underneath someone else's capricious rule; the tyrant is one who is able to see through the illusions of meaning imposed by the *weak*. Being aware that all laws, norms and conventions are arbitrary constructions, the tyrant unshackles himself and becomes a "master".<sup>68</sup> If Callicles is right about convention and nature, tyranny becomes an instrument of freedom and thus mastery. The politician Callicles not only defends tyranny by pointing out the

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<sup>67</sup> "I believe that the people who institute our laws are the weak...They do this...with their own advantage in mind." (483c).

<sup>68</sup> "I believe that if a man whose nature is equal to it were to arise, one who had shaken off, torn apart, and escaped all this, who had trampled underfoot our documents... and all our laws that violate nature, he, the slave would rise up and be revealed as our master." (484a).

benefits it offers, he also goes on the offensive and attacks philosophy. Callicles responds to Socrates' indictment that tyranny is something shameful by leveling the same charge against philosophy<sup>69</sup> claiming that it promotes the search of lofty ideals and detracts attention from the real issue of power. Having his gaze constantly fixed towards the heavens, the philosopher neglects the fact that human reality reflects an ongoing negotiation of power between individuals.<sup>70</sup> Being a naïve person who does not understand the hidden motives and true intentions behind people's actions, the philosopher becomes an easy target. In short, those who indulge in the practice of philosophy are like children for they are "defenseless", "unmanly," and "unwise to the ways of the world".<sup>71</sup>

The writing is on the wall. Considering Socrates' reputation and habit of embarrassing the most prominent individuals in the city (such as Gorgias), it is inevitable that Socrates will one day find himself in a court facing charges. When that day arrives, philosophy will fail Socrates. Callicles laments the fact that Socrates could have been a great statesman but instead chose to waste his talent

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<sup>69</sup> "...don't you think it's shameful to be the way I take you to be, you and others who ever press on too far in philosophy?" (486a).

<sup>70</sup> "As opposed to the ascetic and individual pursuit of knowledge, men like these (Gorgias, Polus, Callicles, and Chaerephon) were charged with involving themselves in the everyday challenges brought on by democratic life. They did not have time to search for 'ultimate truths' in the world; they had decisions to make- about war, about guilt or innocence, about how to best govern themselves in a fast-paced and confusing world. In their view, the ideal citizen did not have to be a master of metaphysics..." (James Jerome Murphy, *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*, Davis, Calif., Hermagoras Press, 1994, 25).

<sup>71</sup> 484d.

on philosophy and because of this he will one day die an unjust death.<sup>72</sup> <sup>73</sup> But, the real tragedy is that philosophy has not only rendered Socrates defenseless and weak, it has also done the same to the city. One can almost sense that underlining the Calliclesian worldview is the accusation that philosophy, with its idealistic concerns, has been the cause of Athens' downfall. Rather than paying attention to the crucial questions involving the importance power, Athens, and especially its young, fell victim to the charms of the philosophers, who could only produce *aporia* and not useful practical precepts, and, as a result, paid a heavy price. Taking the charge of corrupting Athens that Socrates pinned on the rhetoricians and redirecting it towards the philosophers, Callicles argues the Machiavellian position that talk of eternal truths weakened the city making it easy prey for the marching armies of Sparta, whose victory is ample proof that brute power is the ordering principles of human existence. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates has attempted to make the case for a way of life governed by the principles of love of wisdom, but within a few paragraphs,<sup>74</sup> Callicles has turned Socrates' principles upside down. Love of wisdom is now defined not as the source of wholeness and fulfillment but of misery and enslavement.

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<sup>72</sup> "...how can this be a wise thing, the craft which took a well-favored man and made him worse,' able neither to protect himself nor to rescue himself or anyone else from the gravest dangers..." (486b).

<sup>73</sup> Socrates would have had to exercise sophistry to achieve any other outcome; in not doing so, he preserves his integrity.

<sup>74</sup> 482c-486c.

During his life, Gorgias has addressed countless audiences and has learned which arguments please and which offend. The great rhetorician's vast experience has taught him how to gauge an audience and adjust his speech accordingly, never revealing too much or too little. It, therefore, appears that Gorgias considered the present situation inappropriate for the type of discussion Socrates wants to initiate. Gorgias is experienced enough to know that if anybody would be offended by the deeper implications of his practices and teachings, it would be the young. Polus, on the other hand, is simply not competent enough to undertake a discussion of the issues Socrates wishes to explore. Even though through his anger and immaturity he reveals the harmful political implications of rhetoric, Polus is too young and emotional to grasp the fundamental significance of the matter at hand. Socrates approached the gathering with the intention of debating the merits of rhetoric as a craft. Unfortunately, neither Gorgias nor Polus were suitable participants. On the one hand, Gorgias is intellectually capable but unwilling to fight, while on the other, Polus is willing but unable to mount an adequate challenge. But, with Callicles' intrusion into the discussion, Socrates' luck changes. Callicles understands perfectly the principles of tyranny and is unashamed to articulate them, even in front of an audience of young men. Callicles will not hide behind rhetorical sermons. He will not try to find refuge in the people's common opinion. With Callicles, Socrates' search for a participant ends and the real debate begins.

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With his opening speech, Callicles attempts to make the case that conventions conceal and corrupt the natural character of existence. His whole line of reasoning depends on the premise that there is a conflict between convention (the weak) and nature (the strong). In sections *488c-498b*, however, Socrates draws our attention to the fact that Callicles' own worldview, which maintains that reality is a struggle for power, contradicts this premise. Callicles argues that "the many" are "weak", but if the "better and superior types" are those who possess the power to impose their desires on others, then does it not follow that "the many" are "the better and the superior"? If reality (nature) is a struggle for power and conventions are an expression of power then there is no clash between nature and convention. One flows from the other. Natural justice is in perfect harmony with conventional justice. Conventions, as a successful demonstration of power, fulfill nature's decree that the superior, i.e., more powerful, govern the inferior.

Callicles rejects Socrates' interpretation and tries to maintain a tension between nature and convention by distinguishing the rule of the tyrant (the superior) from the rule of the many weak (the inferior). He argues that the individuals who deserve to rule are those who are most intelligent and courageous in the affairs of the city. By characterizing the "better and superior"

with traits that are for the greater part absent in “the many weak”, Callicles succeeds in segregating nature from convention. But, even though he saves the consistency of his argument, Callicles has been maneuvered into accepting Socrates’ point that a good ruler needs to possess certain virtues (intelligence and courage).

Thus, it has now been determined, and both Socrates and Callicles concur, that the better are those who possess the knowledge and character necessary to govern a city. Still, there is a second part to Callicles definition of justice. The politician also claims that justice requires that the “better [ , i.e., the rulers] have a greater share than the worse”. Socrates disagrees. Challenging the claim that the better would desire more than their fair share, the philosopher argues that in order to rule and control others, one must first be able to rule and control himself. Callicles disputes this claim. Because the *good* life is possible only when there are no boundaries restricting the growth of one’s appetites, the ruler should devote all his time, intelligence, and courage to the pursuit and enjoyment of “luxury, license, and freedom”.<sup>75</sup> Eliminating the community’s civil and political life, reducing the city to nothing more than a means of gratifying powerful men’s desires, Callicles fervently maintains that the very purpose of being a ruler is to avoid the conventions that restrain a person’s

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<sup>75</sup>492c.

appetites. A man like Socrates who cannot feed his inclinations is a miserable man, whose life is incomplete and not worth living. Socrates is a denier of *life*. He is a corpse describing the virtues of being *dead*. Surprisingly, the philosopher does not quarrel with these assertions, in fact, he acquiesces. If experiencing a continual flow of intense bodily pleasures defines *life*, then yes, Socrates, who has freed himself from the baser hungers of the body, is *dead*. However, quoting Euripides,<sup>76</sup> Socrates suggests that maybe it is not he who is *dead*. Maybe it is Callicles who is entombed in a body. Maybe Callicles' life is the one not worth living.

Socrates is aware that what lures the inexperienced youth towards the tyrannical life is the belief that (1) the experience of continual intense bodily pleasures gives access to an immediate sense of wholeness -in other words, bodily pleasure is the highest good- and (2) that tyrannical power gives access to continual intense pleasures. Seeking to satiate his yearnings, the youth looks at the image of the tyrant, who appears to be satisfied, and is seduced. Therefore, if Socrates is to dissuade the city's youth from adopting a life of tyranny, he must prove that the life of uninterrupted pleasure is not conducive or representative of the *good* life. Using the metaphor of a leaky jar, the philosopher maintains that a person with unrestrained appetites for bodily pleasure will never be whole.

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<sup>76</sup> 492e.

Though he struggles and is willing to perform any act in order to obtain the many things that he hopes will grant him the *good* life, such a person, because he desires the wrong *things*, will never experience true satisfaction. But, despite the use of elaborate metaphors, Callicles discards Socrates' appeal shamelessly claiming that the *good* life consists in possessing the power necessary to acquire all possible sources of pleasures and satiating the body. Since full jars prevent the experience of constantly acquiring additional pleasures, leaky jars are preferable.

It must be noted, that Socrates does not claim that no pleasures of any kind have value for human life. His view is that some pleasures are better than others and therefore some lives, in that they experience more of the better pleasures, are more fulfilling than others. Now in order to measure the benefits of pleasure and be able to differentiate the better pleasure from the worse, one must examine its *object*. In the *Republic* (580d-587c) it is revealed that a person who experiences pleasure from an *object* that is unchanging and eternal, i.e., knowledge, is closer to the *good* life (and thus experiences a superior kind of pleasure) than one, like Callicles, who finds pleasure in *things* of a temporal and perishable nature. Thus attempting to unmask Callicles' understanding of pleasure, Socrates ironically praises his opponents' shamelessness<sup>77</sup> and warns that he will also be shameless ("...I...shouldn't shrink from being ashamed,

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<sup>77</sup> "You certainly won't be shocked, however, or be ashamed, for you're a brave man." (494d).

either.”). The image of a leaky jar has evidently failed to inspire Callicles’ sense of shame. Illustrations of a more direct, and less polite, nature are needed. The politician has mocked and scorned Socrates’ philosophical principles. Socrates at this point returns the favor by associating Callicles notion of the *good* life first, with having the constant urge to scratch, and second, to being a type of sex-slave. The first image arouses feelings of disgust. The continuous and frantic desire to scratch implies some sort of infection, such as a rash, or even worse, a plague (the effects of which the Athenians of Socrates’ time knew all too well!). The second image is much more poignant and its effect is instant. Along with disgust, feelings of moral indignation are also evoked.

Suddenly, the quiet and serene life of a philosopher does not seem all that bad for it is better than being covered with sores that constantly beg to be itched, and is much better than being repeatedly ravaged and violated. The point Socrates wishes to convey is clear. The vision offered by Callicles, according to the philosopher, leads to a restless, agitated and abysmal existence. If one accepts the premise that pleasure is synonymous with the *good*, i.e., the source of human fulfillment, than the greatest accomplishment a person can achieve is becoming a prostitute. With the example of a catamite, Socrates goes to the heart of the matter and reveals that Callicles is attempting to pass off a “frightfully shameful and miserable” life as the happy and *good* life. Enraged by the fact that his views

have been reduced to such unflattering terms, Callicles, out of sheer spite, stubbornly reiterates his position maintaining that pleasure, however understood and enjoyed, gives access to the *good*.<sup>78</sup> This show of stubbornness does nothing but provide Socrates with an excuse to lengthen his attack.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that after this point the politician in a sense withdraws from the dialogue. Insulted, he is no longer willing to be brash and open with his thoughts and simply responds, if he responds at all, in a brief and dispassionate way. This, of course, does not deter Socrates for Callicles is not the one that the philosopher wishes to persuade. Convincing Callicles of the harmful personal and political effects of rhetoric and tyranny is not the reason Socrates decided to visit the gathering. He is not that naïve. Socrates concern is for the city's young.

And so, even though Callicles is no longer interested and mentally shuts down, Socrates continues his efforts to distinguish the *good* from the pleasurable. He does this by first explaining that since it is possible to experience both pleasure and pain at the same time, but that it is impossible to do so with good and evil, it then follows that pleasure is not equivalent to the *good*. In addition, when Socrates argues that pleasure is not synonymous with the *good*, he is also arguing that pain is not synonymous with evil. This of course refers back to the

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<sup>78</sup> 495a.

argument that suffering punishment is not an evil. The distinction between pleasure and *good* is further emphasized when Socrates makes the case that the courageous/intelligent man feels the same amount of pleasure as the coward/foolish man. Although the courageous/intelligent are said to be better (good) than the coward/foolish (evil), there exists no distinction in the amount of pleasure these two types experience. Goodness and badness are allocated in a manner not related to the allocation of pleasure and pain. As a result, good is independent of pleasure.<sup>79</sup>

In order to maintain the consistency of his argument (that pleasure is identical to the *good*), Callicles must now deny that there is any difference between cowardice/foolishness and courage/intelligence. However, to do so would destroy his earlier argument that courage and intelligence differentiates the superior from the inferior type, indeed, it would refute his claim that there exist superior and inferior types. Ultimately, to deny a difference between the coward/foolish and the courageous/intelligent is to deny notions such as virtue and *good*. Callicles is not prepared to do such a thing. He is willing to dispute Socrates' formulation of goodness and virtue, but he is not ready to plunge into anarchy and intellectual absurdity. Though they use different criteria, both men make the claim that there are ways of life (associated with courage and

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<sup>79</sup> 499b.

intelligence) that rank higher in happiness and goodness than certain other ways (associated with cowardice and foolishness). Because Callicles is not willing to admit that the cowardly/foolish way of life is as admirable and worthy as the courageous/intelligent, he is forced to confess that some pleasures are good while others are bad. Having succeeded in drawing the line between the good and the pleasurable, Socrates can begin to address the philosophical issue at the very heart of the dialogue. The question of “*how we’re supposed to live*”, at this point, gains focus.

*For you see, don’t you, that our discussion is about this, about the way we’re supposed to live. Is it the way you urge me towards, to practice rhetoric, and to be active in the sort of politics you people engage in these days? Or is it the life spent in philosophy?<sup>80</sup>*

Periods of good fortune and prosperity do not often ignite deep philosophical explorations. When a people experience order and meaning in the surrounding political and communal institutions and tradition, the matter of “*how we’re supposed to live*” is relatively negligible. The fact that Socrates addresses this issue with a great sense of gravity betrays the extent of the troubles engulfing Athens. The philosopher thus implores Callicles to take the question seriously for at stake is the community’s order and wellbeing. With the

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<sup>80</sup> 500d.

intention of determining the right order of existence, Socrates returns to the argument concerning the difference between crafts and knacks and begins cataloguing various knacks starting from the least consequential to the most. He first describes the rather trivial knack of flute playing and works his way up to the more significant practices of tragic and poetic composition. Both of these “awe-inspiring” practices are powerful forms of rhetoric that provide incomplete impressions of reality and as a result play a disordering and disorienting role. But, although significant, their role is only a supportive one. The highest form of rhetoric and main cause for the spiritual crisis experienced by Athens is found in the city’s political assembly.

Building on the premise that pleasure is not the sole ingredient of the *good* life, Socrates asks if the speeches delivered in the assembly are concerned with providing the citizens with what is most beneficial or with what is most pleasant. Calicles responds that while some politicians are in fact only interested in providing the citizens with sources of bodily pleasure, others are genuinely concerned with the city’s wellbeing. Socrates readily concedes the possibility yet wonders whether anyone in the political assembly is actually possessed by such a concern. Calicles answers that there are no such politicians presently in the assembly, but that there has been in the past. Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles are all examples of political figures that truly cared for the welfare

of Athens. After this declaration praising the leaders of the past, Socrates begs Callicles not to forget their earlier argument and confuse “being pleased” with “being benefited.”<sup>81</sup>

It may very well be true that the great political figures of earlier periods cared for the city. Eager to appease the people’s frustrations, they waged wars hoping to acquire the wealth necessary to gratify the community’s lust for pleasure and mastery. But, whatever their intention, the disordered state of Athens confirms that their actions were not beneficial. By associating the *good life* exclusively with the experience of bodily pleasure, they arranged for the eventual disintegration of the community. It has been some time since Callicles has shown any real interest in what is being said, however, when Socrates assaults the reputation of the great political heroes of the past, the politician suddenly wakes from his slumber, and though he does not say much, his anger is implied by Socrates’ request to remain calm. This emotional outburst though is only momentary; Callicles’ is well aware that his case has already been defeated. Thus, unimpeded, Socrates starts to develop a clear account of the features of the *good life*. He begins by arguing that the practice of politics is a craft and requires politicians to follow the same principles of craftsmanship that apply to all other crafts. Considering such activities as painting and house building, Socrates

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<sup>81</sup> 499d-500a.

arrives at the conclusion that all crafts seek to establish a rational structure of means and ends which produces a type of order which in turn produces a type of good. For example, medicine offers the body a type order that generates health. In this fashion, the craft of politics should aspire to promote the principles of order and harmony, i.e., justice, with the ultimate aim of producing a sense of overall good among the citizens. Indeed, without order and harmony, the community becomes intemperate, unjust, and friendless.<sup>82</sup> The fate of such a community is obvious. Annoyed and helpless, Calicles becomes rude and boorishly dismisses Socrates telling him that he could not care less about what he has to say.<sup>83</sup> Not wishing to allow the discussion to end on such a foul note and be branded a teacher of the ill mannered, Gorgias interrupts insisting Socrates continue presenting his case. With the great rhetorician's encouragement, Socrates proceeds to unify the philosophical principles articulated throughout the dialogue.<sup>84</sup>

Calicles has argued that to be defenseless against unjust accusations is to be miserable. Socrates has now revealed that enduring an existence void of order, and thus void of any measure of meaning and hope of wholeness, is even worse than being robbed, beaten, exiled, or put to death. Through rhetoric,

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<sup>82</sup> 508a.

<sup>83</sup> 505c.

<sup>84</sup> 506d-508c.

Callicles offers power, which, among other things, provides protection against bodily harm. Socrates also offers a type of protection, one that is of greater significance. He is offering protection against the prospect of a hopelessly empty existence and “this is the most shameful kind of protection not to be able to provide, either for oneself or for one’s friends or relatives.”<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, Socrates points out that the protection proposed by Callicles is detrimental to a person’s search for true order. For the only sure way of guarding the body from any kind of injustice, is by imitating the corrupt ways of the tyrant therefore sacrificing one’s ability to enjoy the *good* life. Simply put, perfect immunity from suffering injustice requires that one be perfectly unjust.<sup>86</sup>

On the high grounds of philosophy, Callicles’ challenge has failed. His understanding of the *good* life, his worldview, has proven to be void of substance. The only thing that he can now do is bring the argument down to the lowest common denominator. Appealing to the audience’s primal fears, Callicles attempts to expose, what he perceives to be, a fundamental and undeniable flaw in Socrates’ position. The problem with the philosophical principles put forward is that they lead to suffering and death. How can Socrates maintain that he is describing the *good* life when the only reward one will receive by following his

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<sup>85</sup> 509c.

<sup>86</sup> 510a.

teachings is execution? Callicles' principles may have been defeated but that does not change the fact that he will go on to be a successful politician and Socrates will be put to death. The scenario depicted is not hypothetical, but actual. In order to prosper and be secure in the midst of a disordered society one needs to possess the ability to tyrannize over others. Otherwise, one runs the risk of being tyrannized.

Be they warnings or threats, Callicles' remarks neither surprises nor frighten Socrates. The philosopher is well aware that during times of disorder and confusion there is a possibility that a situation will develop that will demand that one rise above the concern of self-preservation. Callicles has, on many occasions, made the argument that it is unmanly to be like Socrates and be unable to defend oneself or one's friends from unjust accusations. At this point, the philosopher redirects this argument towards his opponent claiming that it is unmanly to be constantly worried about one's physical existence. "One who is truly a man" knows that there is no glory in prolonging an unjust and thus meaningless existence.<sup>87</sup> Socrates' position is not about seeking *death*, but about seeking true *life*, a *life* imbued with a measure of meaning, wholeness and fulfillment. Unfortunately, however, considering the corrupt state of Athens, the search for true *life* will end in *death*. Still, though he is culpable for his choices

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<sup>87</sup> 512e.

and actions, though he is to be blame for contributing to the surrounding disorder, Callicles is not the real enemy. His disordered desires are but a symptom and not the primary cause of Athens' downfall. In reality, the source of disorder is even more significant than Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Themistocles. Although they are ornamented with glorious reputations, these men are nevertheless like any other Athenian politician, simply representative of the real problem.<sup>88</sup> The true source of Athens' troubles is the very way politics is, and has been, conducted. Because she embraces the mistaken belief that mastery and pleasure are the solutions to the problem of order, Athens finds herself deeply immersed in a moral, social, and political crisis.

The notion that love of power grants pleasure, which in turn grants the *good* life is simply invalid; the vision guiding Athenian politics must change. The old ways of doing politics cannot save the city. Restoration requires new ordering principles be adopted. These new principles are extremely simple and clearly laid out in passages 515e-520c: desiring and loving the right *things* produces just behavior that in turn produces justice within the community.<sup>89</sup> The arguments have been made. The existential paths revealed. Which type of

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<sup>88</sup> "You [Callicles] were agreeing that none of our present-day ones [politicians] has [proved to be good at politics], though you said that some of those of times past had, and you gave preference to these men. But these have been shown to be on equal footing with the men of today." (517a).

<sup>89</sup> "For it is clear that what accounts for this is the fact that of all the benefits this one alone makes the one who has had good done to him have the desire to do good in return, so that we think it is a good sign of someone's having done good by conferring this benefit that he'll have good done to him in return..." (520e).

politician should I be, asks Socrates. One that fosters healthy desires, helps the Athenians find fulfillment and make them “as good as possible” or one that simply gratifies their pleasures? Callicles once more responds that the politician who fails to satisfy the appetites of the people will bear the consequences of their wrath. Tired of Callicles attempts at bullying, Socrates flatly declares that he expects to be put to death for he knows that he will be judged “the way a doctor would be judged by a jury of children if a pastry chef were to bring accusations against him.”<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, this injustice is of no importance to Socrates for true *death* lies not in the body’s demise but in never experiencing the *good* life. In order to communicate this philosophical notion in a vivid and effective way, Socrates employs a myth.

Callicles has constantly warned, and even threatened, Socrates that if he continues upon his course, he will meet his demise. Socrates now dramatically counters this argument claiming that if Callicles continues to *live* the way he has, it is he who will suffer eternal *death*. Although it might seem like a fantastic and imaginary tale, Socrates assures Callicles that the myth he is about to share is true. It is true not in that it describes an incident which can be corroborated and verified, but in that it symbolically depicts the workings of the order of the soul and way towards true satisfaction. The myth opens by

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<sup>90</sup> 521e.

recounting that there is an eternal and universal law that was imposed by the god Cronos and is still imposed by his son, Zeus. This law prescribed that the virtue of justice be admired and rewarded while the vice of injustice be punished. However, the manner in which this law was enforced had the effect of negating its noble purpose. In other words, the method of judgment was faulty and rewards and punishments were frequently distributed in an inequitable manner. The unjust were being granted everlasting happiness while the just were condemned to damnation.

The source of the problem lay in the fact that judgment was carried out on earth while both judged and judges were alive. Being unfairly influenced by worldly circumstances, the verdicts favored those with reputation and high status. Disturbed by these events, Zeus reformed this ineffective way of assessing justice in two significant ways. First, no person must be allowed to know which day would be his last on earth, as a result, there would be no time to prepare for one's upcoming trial, and second, judgment would occur after death when both judges and judged are dead. Stripped of all worldly adornments, the souls of the judged would henceforth be exposed. The myth depicts the momentous beginning of a new age initiated by a more profound understanding of the principles of true order. As long as judgment was delivered on earth, it was possible to receive a favorable verdict by impressing the judges

with things pertaining to the world. Being alive and unable to perceive the state of a person's soul, the judges could only go by what they saw and heard as testimony by others. Because of the way the trial was set up, judgments were based on the appearances of others, rather than the state of their souls. This, of course, was of great benefit to those powerful enough to shape the opinions held by the mob. Receiving judgment while alive would provide a man like Pericles, a man of wealth, reputation and rank, with a plethora of witnesses willing to attest to his justice. In fact, anybody who successfully captured the acclaims of the people would have this same advantage. According to this reading, the person who acquired the necessary power to secure great earthly success reflected an image of justice and therefore achieved true satisfaction.<sup>91</sup>

Considering what has been said throughout the dialogue and specifically in relation to Callicles' erotic love, it seems that the first set of judges is a symbolic reference to the Athenian mob (*demos*) for it is they who base their judgments on the grounds of opinion, illusion and pretense. It is they who *live* according to worldly things. As a consequence of being judged by the *demos*, individuals simply concerned themselves with appearances, and the power to manipulate appearances. Evidently, in this scheme of things, the practice of

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<sup>91</sup> Justice refers back to the principles of true order; in other words, the person who abides by the principles of true order is a just person. In Pericles' time, justice and therefore the principles of true order were understood in terms of wealth, status and power; Pericles was said to be just because, it was believed, his existence embodied the tenets of true order.

rhetoric is indispensable. Rhetoric, not philosophy, is the key to the *good* and happy life.

Through his narration of the myth, Socrates has revealed the corruptive elements plaguing the community. Because the powerful, i.e., tyrants, are praised and rewarded, power, i.e., tyranny, has gained an air of legitimacy among the people. The focus on the outward appearance of satisfaction reflected by the tyrant has instituted and ingrained a corrupt manner of being throughout the city; the people all admire the tyrant's disordered way and therefore confirm it as the ordering principle of the community. Yet, a change has now been announced. New insight into the problem of order has been achieved. New standards will now be introduced. The way towards true fulfillment has been altered; mere appearances are no longer sufficient. If it is ever to experience the satisfaction of true order, the community must redirect its desires and adopt the true principles of justice. The Isle of the Blessed can no longer be reached through worldly devices of power; one must adopt a new way of life. The implementers of these changes, the ones who will articulate and carry out the new standards of order announce by Zeus are the *dead judges*. This is not a reference to ghosts or spirits in some mysterious realm. The *dead judges* whom Socrates is alluding to are none other than the philosophers. The philosophers are *dead* not in the sense that they are no more, but in the sense that they have

gone through the catharsis of death and are no longer attached to the earthly things that impress and concern the Athenian mob. They see through appearances and perceive an accurate account of one's commitment to justice. Rhetoric, needless to say, bears no effect on these *dead judges* and is hence a useless endeavor. Standing as the new representatives and guardians of order, the philosophers supersede the Athenian mob; they are now the rightful figures of authority and through their judgments, they will restore the balance between heaven and earth, society and man, truth and community, justice and injustice.

And so, the symbol of *death* articulated throughout the dialogue, and particularly throughout the myth, does not concern physical annihilation but the rupture of man's relationship with true order. When the true source order and meaning is ignored or denied, we experience *death*; but when acknowledged and embraced, we experience *life*. Having followed the path of the rhetorician/tyrant, Athens is a *dead* community. If she is to rejuvenate herself, Athens must abide by the philosophers who are now revealed as the bearers of *life*. Thus, by censuring the corrupt society and lauding the emergence of the philosophers, the myth rescues man's hope of one day experiencing an existentially satisfactory order, both in terms of public and private life. Having recounted his myth, Socrates ends the dialogue by repeating his familiar plea for true order asking Callicles to reconsider. Yet, the *elenchos*, the myth, the final plea all fail. The march towards

the philosophical life is anything but inevitable. Without ambiguity, the demotic use of hemlock confirms the limits of philosophy. The day will therefore come when the *living* judges will denounce and sentence Socrates as a criminal. But, declaring it illegitimate, history will ignore their ruling. The verdict that will in the end be recorded and accepted is the one rendered by the *dead* judges who, inspired by the paradigmatic events of Socrates' life and death, will fill the halls of the Academy, the Lyceum, the Garden, and the Stoa.<sup>92</sup> Their judgment will exonerate the philosopher and condemn Athens. The myth has thus been proven true. The Socratic soul, through the symbols of order it propagated, has indeed found eternal life.

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The encounter with Gorgias, Polus, and, particularly, Callicles, results in exposing the worldview, promoted by sophists, rhetoricians and tyrants, that the *good* life consists not in striving to differentiate between appropriate/inappropriate desires in the hopes of establishing some beneficial ordering of the soul, but rather, in unleashing one's desire for mastery and rule in an attempt to enjoy the truly advantageous life of infinite discretion over one's actions in the pursuit of wealth, glory and bodily gratification. Tyrannical Power is thus regarded as the only sure means of attaining, capturing and experiencing the

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<sup>92</sup> All of these schools of thought are said to have been, to variant degrees, inspired by the paradigmatic events of Socrates' life and death.

*good*. In response, Socrates' holds that once those who have embraced the principles of power eventually realize that power is in effect powerless to reach the *good*, they become gripped by a sense of moral vacuity, frustration and anger, which when expressed ultimately leads to instances of personal and political disorder. Thus, in relation to Plato's analysis of disorder, the *Gorgias*, through the cover of rhetoric, argues that because it is an ineffective way of satisfying man's need for wholeness, tyrannical power breeds an intolerable sense of restlessness that results in disastrous personal and political effects. Pericles' Peloponnesian War serves as a perfect case in point.

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### The Symposium: the pathology of power explained

While the *Gorgias* succeeds in portraying the pathology of power, and while it does so with an air of drama, intensity and urgency that is unique among the works that form the Platonic corpus, the dialogue falls short in way of describing, in an adequate fashion, the underlying tensions that explain the appearance of such pathology. For this reason, we now turn to the *Symposium*. Although it follows the *Gorgias* in providing important insight into the question regarding the principles of existence that might conceivably emerge from the erotic longing for transcendence, and, therefore, addresses extensively the question of man's desire for wholeness in terms that are closely related to those resulting from Socrates' confrontation with Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, the analysis offered in the *Symposium* is more elaborate in that it explains the fundamental disjunction between what the pathology of power aims for and what it actually achieves.

The *Symposium*, in other words, seems to explain the pathology demonstrated by the rhetorician/sophists and potential tyrants encountered in the *Gorgias*. Thus, unlike the *Gorgias*, the *Symposium* specifically explores the origins rather than the consequences of man's desire for tyrannical power; while

the *Gorgias* evaluates the pathology of power through its symptoms, the *Symposium* does the same but through a survey of its causes.

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The passage of time has done nothing to diminish people's interest in the events that unfolded the night Socrates attended a celebration honoring a young poet named Agathon. Several years have gone by and still many fervently investigate the matter. For although accounts are vague and details unclear, the rumors all agree that something special, out of the ordinary, occurred during Socrates' visit. Amid the revelries customary of a Dionysian festival, a symposium is alleged to have taken place during which a timeless subject of great intrigue was discussed and a breathtaking teaching of magnificent heights expounded. Yes, it is often whispered that on that night, long ago, a lesson was delivered said to concern the existence of all men.

It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that those thought to be close companions of Socrates would frequently be asked to divulge any bit of information they may possess regarding Agathon's party. Indeed, thus is the assigned fate of Socrates' devoted follower Apollodorus, who, making his way towards the city, is accosted by an unnamed friend wishing to learn of the celebrated symposium. But, before gratifying his friend's wish, Apollodorus mentions that two days earlier someone else named Glaucon also inquired about the very same events. Because nothing that is recorded in a Platonic dialogue is the result of unplanned coincidence, Apollodorus' remark leads one to assume

that reports of Agathon's party have gained a certain amount of currency and have become the subject of frequent discussion. This assumption is further reinforced by the fact that Glaucon has already been audience to one version of events. That version, however, was incomplete. Unsatisfied and eager to learn more, Glaucon sought out Apollodorus.

The description of Apollodorus' encounter with two men seeking information about Socrates is quite revealing. It is so, not because of any particular question the men ask, but because of who the men are. Usually, Socrates' teachings attract crowds comprised of poets, playwrights, young enthusiastic politicians, and aspiring philosophers. Possessed by a desire to scrutinize their opponent's position, the rival sophists would also form part of the group interested in studying one of Socrates' lessons. Yet, the figures that approach Apollodorus and set up the dialogue are none of these. The two men inquiring about the symposium are, of all things, successful businessmen.<sup>93</sup> Individuals typically assumed to harbor the greatest amount of hostility towards the philosophical way of life are the ones begging to learn of Socrates' words. Clearly, the characteristic indifference shown by the wealthy towards Socrates and his teachings does not apply in this case. None can ignore the matter related that night; its lure draws forth the lover of money as much as the lover of

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<sup>93</sup>173c.

wisdom. All, regardless of wealth and status, are fascinated by the rumors and desire to hear more.

Another interesting detail, which, again, cannot be dismissed as accident or coincidence, is that Apollodorus' friend is not given a name. Possessing no specific identity, the unnamed person can be interpreted as a symbolic figure representing anybody and everybody. Being no one in particular, he speaks on behalf of everyone in general. The questions raised do not reflect a particular individual's excited curiosity but a community's hope of attaining that sense of contentment that accompanies the discovery of an ordering *truth*. Simply put, the opening scene prepares the reader for something of such interest and significance that ever since its occurrence has captured the minds and roused the imaginations of all Athenians.

In addition to highlighting the appeal and importance of Apollodorus' report, the brief introduction also tries to emphasize its legitimacy and accuracy. An unidentified source furnished Glaucon with a shadowy version of events. Indeed, as Apollodorus points out that since this unidentified source was ignorant of the symposium's date, it is difficult to imagine him being knowledgeable of its content.<sup>94</sup> However, there is now no need to worry.

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<sup>94</sup> 172c.

Apollodorus is not one to take issues involving Socrates lightly. Though he was not present at the symposium, Apollodorus has vigorously investigated the subject and can be trusted.<sup>95</sup> Related by a witness (Aristodemus) and approved by Socrates himself, the truth of Apollodorus' account cannot be doubted. Moreover, given that only two days have passed since he last narrated the story, one can expect a polished and rehearsed account, one that will not omit any significant details or matters of importance.

Still, though it is clear that Apollodorus is to disclose something *true*, the many strata of narrative distancing separating Apollodorus from the events in question suggest that the truth of the story is not found on the level of historical accuracy. Considering Aristodemus does not remember everything each speaker said, and that Apollodorus does not remember everything Aristodemus said,<sup>96</sup> a historically precise description of events is simply impossible. Apollodorus' words, therefore, should not be taken literally. The *Symposium* is not a record of an actual event. It is not a biographical effort to recapture Socrates' historical likeness. It is a tale about a tale<sup>97</sup>. It is a mythical or imaginative attempt to evoke an existential experience known, through philosophical experience, to be true.

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<sup>95</sup> 173a.

<sup>96</sup> 178a.

<sup>97</sup> In the instances of Aristophanes and Socrates' speech, *The Symposium* is a tale about a tale about a tale.

The story about to be told speaks not of histories but of mysteries; the philosophical mysteries that comprise the essence of human life.

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A young tragic poet named Agathon has captured the highest honors at the Lenaeon festival. The exceptional nature of this feat creates an enthusiastic stir. Crowds of jubilant supporters form. Figures of prominence gather. A party ensues. After an initial night of celebration filled with people, pleasure and wine, a more intimate dinner gathering is scheduled at Agathon's house for the following evening. It is while making his way towards this gathering that we encounter Socrates. After having failed to attend the previous day's festivities, the philosopher is now ready to visit Athenian society's great new personality. The celebration of this new *star* is a special event, so much so that Socrates washed and even clothed himself in formal wear for the occasion.

Still, it is plain that Socrates' reason for attending the dinner is not to pay court to Agathon and praise the excellence of his tragic poetry. For if the philosopher were truly taken by Agathon and his work, one would think he would have joined the festivities on their original night along with the other enthusiastic admirers. That night, however, did not suit Socrates' purpose.

Celebrated for the superlative insight of his work, the young poet is at the height of his popularity. His victory in the city's most prestigious dramatic competition has fashioned Agathon into a figure of respect, influence, and authority. In view of Agathon's position of prominence among Athenian cultural and intellectual circles, Socrates would have judged the prospect of speaking to this young man as simply irresistible. The opportunity of questioning Agathon and scrutinizing his alleged wisdom must have been enticing. Such an opportunity, unfortunately, would not have been offered during that first night; the unruliness of a crowd eager to celebrate would have prohibited Socrates from achieving his objective. Thus, by snubbing the festivities of the day before, the philosopher reveals his intentions. Socrates is not in search of a feast but an opportunity at a discussion.

On route to Agathon's, Socrates runs into Aristodemus and asks him to come along. Not having been invited, Aristodemus is understandably hesitant but nevertheless at Socrates' disposal. Attending Agathon's party while not being formally called upon might explain why Aristodemus is the only one present at the symposium (that the reader knows of) who does not participate in the discussion. Considering the circumstances, he might have deemed it improper to impose on the rightful guests and speak his mind. Whatever the

reason, Aristodemus' non-participation provides the reader with the possibility of an "outside", impartial, rendering of events and not mere gossip.

As the two men approach their destination, Socrates' pace slows. A thought has grasped his attention and he cannot do otherwise but contemplate it. Evidently, respecting social rules of etiquette and maintaining an appearance of propriety and politeness are not of primary importance; these should always give way to the pursuit of philosophical inquiry. Consequently, Socrates arrives late to the dinner party. But Agathon seems unbothered by his guest's tardiness and does not take offence. On the contrary, he excitedly invites the philosopher to approach, insisting they share the same couch. The young poet hopes that, by way of physical contact, he may siphon some of the wisdom that came to Socrates while wandering outside. In response, Socrates ironically remarks that if wisdom were like water and could flow from the wise to the ignorant, he, and not Agathon, would be the one to profit from the seating arrangement. Wisdom, though, does not flow like water.

The scene subtly suggests the "ancient quarrel" between philosophy and poetry.<sup>98</sup> The substance of the quarrel concerns true *paidea* and the path towards the *good* life. Poetry seems to suggest that wisdom, which encapsulates the

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<sup>98</sup> *Παλιν διαφορά* as referred to in the *Republic* in section 607b.

experience of wholeness and fulfillment, is something that can be passed on in a “fortuneteller” fashion. Even though they fail to develop any rational account for the assertions they voice and only appeal to emotional part of human life, poets nevertheless claim that a recital of their work is enough to provide the ignorant with enlightenment. Philosophy, on the other hand, contends that wisdom is not something that can be offered from person to person across the room. It is not something that is given, but is a way of life, a manner of existence, which demands great effort and personal sacrifice. As will be revealed during Diotima’s speech, wisdom depends upon the objects of one’s erotic longings; it requires an education and training that attempts to direct a person’s desires towards the right *things*. Detecting Socrates’ challenge and not possessing the appetite to meet it, Agathon proposes they postpone their dispute until later that evening, when, as his reference to the god of wine suggests, they will all be intoxicated. An unforeseen turn of events, however, will have the guests occupied with something other than drink.

Following the dinner, a celebration is set to unfold. Flute-girls and wine are to gratify the guests and occupy the night. But as the wine was set to flow and the women play, something odd occurs. A decision is taken; Plans are changed. The guests present at the dinner party, except, of course, for Socrates and Aristodemus, took part in the previous day’s festivities and are in no mood

for another boisterous celebration. All then agree that on this night drinking will not entail drunkenness. Each will be served only as little or as much wine as each desires. In addition, Eryximachus proposes, and all concur, that the mischievous flute-girls be dismissed. Lustful appetites will be held back and placed aside while a discussion is given the opportunity to flourish.

In an attempt to impose a topic, Eryximachus brings to everyone's attention a recent discussion he had with his darling Phaedrus, during which the latter bemoaned the fact that although the poets have applied their talents in praising other gods, none has ever dedicated any song or hymn to a "so ancient and mighty god as Love." Eryximachus recalls Phaedrus' feeling of bafflement towards those who find something as commonplace as salt worthy of time and attention<sup>99</sup> but completely ignore something as extraordinary as Love. Moved by his beloved's grievance and wishing to please him, Eryximachus suggests the night be spent discussing and exploring the much-neglected deity. All, including Socrates, voice their approval.

Therefore, without any opposition, a gathering in honor of the *good* (Agathon) becomes an occasion to celebrate love. The city's most prominent personalities have assembled in order to pay tribute to the *good*, and will do so by

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<sup>99</sup> This is an obvious reference to Gorgias.

reflecting upon love. An intimate relationship between the *good* and love is clearly implied. Phaedrus is the first to speak. The one that lamented the poet's disregard for love will be the first to set things right by delivering the finest speech he can in praise of the god. Phaedrus begins by declaring, "Love is a great god, revered among men and gods for many reasons..."<sup>100</sup> Particularly, this god is revered for the fact that he is the most ancient of the ancient gods. Quoting Hesiod the poet, Acusilaus the logographer and Parmenides the philosopher, Phaedrus makes the case that Love is the oldest and thus one must conclude the greatest of all deities. Specifically, Love reveals his value by steering a person towards noble actions and away from shameful ones. More than the promise of wealth or political power, the promise of love inspires and brings out the best in a person. In short, those, like Achilles and Alcestis, who are moved by love, are moved towards virtue, and, as a result, are cherished and rewarded by the gods. Since virtuous deeds are the result, the *modus operandi*, of a person's profound love for another and since nothing beneficial is possible without virtue, love is essential to the community's survival and wellbeing.

In other words, because of their power to generate and promote strength and excellence of character, erotic relationships should be allowed to flourish and permeate all public institutions, especially the army. Undoubtedly enthused

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<sup>100</sup> 178b.

by the story of Achilles and Patroclus, Phaedrus argues that an army composed of lovers would overwhelm any enemy, as the lover-soldiers would rather die than be dishonored in front of their partners. The essence of Phaedrus' view is straightforward and lucid: erotic longings, which are uniquely directed towards other human beings, invariably lead to the *good* life and thus, in themselves, are the solution to problem of order in history.

The second speaker, Pausanias, starts by criticizing Phaedrus' speech as simplistic. There is more to love than the unproblematic portrait presented. A type of love has been completely overlooked. Hence, before honoring love, it would be wise to first elucidate all its forms and then determine which among them are praiseworthy. Pausanias begins his speech by following Phaedrus' lead and drawing on the authority of renowned educators in order to make his case. Referring to the works of Hesiod and Homer, Pausanias argues for the existence of two gods each representing a specific type of love. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod speaks of a goddess born from the sea impregnated by Uranus' castrated genitals. This motherless deity descendant from the Lord of the Heavens is identified as Heavenly Aphrodite (*Ουρανίας Αφροδιτης*) and she is the mistress of Heavenly Love. By contrast, the *Iliad* refers to a younger Aphrodite, one who, as Homer describes, was the result of Zeus' sexual adventures with a Titan goddess named Dione. Considering the common manner in which she was

conceived, this goddess would come to be known as Common Aphrodite (*Πανδημου Αφροδιτης*) and she inspires the kind of carnal Love that gave rise to her being.

After insisting upon the existence of two separate types of Love, Pausanias goes on to argue that love “in itself is neither good nor bad”, “that [it] derives [its] character from the way in which [it] is used”.<sup>101</sup> Ethical evaluations, in other words, do not apply to the experience of love but rather to the manner in which this experience manifests itself through a person’s character and behavior. Although there is merit to this argument, indeed it foretells certain elements of Socrates’ speech, it seems strange that Pausanias would adopt such a position seeing how it goes against his previous statement that there exists two types of love, one intrinsically good (Heavenly) and one intrinsically bad (Common). It might be that Pausanias is arguing that Heavenly Love inspires one to use love in an appropriate and non-abusive fashion but this does little to reconcile his claim for love’s neutrality with his claim for two types of love, one good and one bad. It seems that Pausanias’ argument is strained by a degree of inconsistency. Nevertheless, apparently unaware of the implications of his statement, he returns to the notion of two separate types of love. Common Love, he explains, is a sensual type of love concerned only with the satisfaction of bodily urges. Its

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<sup>101</sup> 181a.

purely sexual purpose is revealed through its uncontrollable desire for women and boys.<sup>102</sup> In short, Common Love is random and indiscriminate in its quest for physical gratification; all objects, no matter how juvenile or foolish, are worthy as long as they induce bodily pleasure. Heavenly Love, on the other hand, is a pure and enduring love, directed uniquely towards those who have achieved a capacity for rationality and virtue. Its purpose is to foster lifelong partnerships founded on the noble pursuit of excellence and wisdom. Unlike Common Love, which abuses and is detrimental to the beloved, Heavenly Love cultivates a symbiotic relationship that benefits both partners. The lover serves his beloved by teaching him virtue and the way towards a true sense of satisfaction. In return, the beloved benefits the lover by gratifying his needs. Heavenly Love is therefore praiseworthy because it aspires to attain (beloved) or teach (lover) principles of the *good* life.

In the first speech, Phaedrus provided an account of the manner in which love leads to virtue and order. Pausanias refines, deepens, and maybe even complicates this one-dimensional account by revealing that erotic longings can also breed viciousness and disorder. Either love can draw one towards wisdom, i.e., the true source of human satisfaction, or it can lead one astray.

Foreshadowing Socrates, Pausanias recognizes that at the heart of man's

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<sup>102</sup> Lacking maturity, intelligence and virtue, the only pleasure that women and boys can offer is sexual. In other words, the love directed towards women and boys can only express sexual desire.

experience of love is a tension constituted by an upward *heavenly* pull and a downward *primitive* counter-pull. In this way, Pausanias depicts love as something intrinsic to human existence and thus reveals all men, be they virtuous or vicious, to be driven by love. Either one is inspired by good (Heavenly) Love or one is inspired by bad (Common) Love but one is never free from the experience of erotic longings.

Vicious conduct does not arise through an absence of love, which seems to be Phaedrus' position, but is a manifestation of a certain type of love. Whereas Phaedrus failed to account for the shameful, reckless, and tyrannical behavior of men, Pausanias offers a modest but important insight into the condition of those who adopt such conduct.<sup>103</sup> This second speech, in other words, subtly suggests that without an accurate understanding of the nature and power of love one will not understand the nature and power of the tyrannical and corruptive forces plaguing the city. Simply put, because it can also lead to vice (disorder) as well as virtue, love is not only the solution to the problem of order, but is also its cause. The fact that Pausanias understands the possible threats that may arise as a result of derailed eros explains his subsequent turn towards the law. Good men possess the necessary discipline required to temper their sexual desires, but not all men

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<sup>103</sup> Evidence of such insight is provided in passage 183b. Even though he does not explicitly declare a connection between eros and a person's vicious and tyrannical desire for money and power, he strongly insinuates it by implying that those possessed by such shameful cravings behave in a manner similar to one who is in love.

are good, in reality, very few are. Accordingly, Pausanias argues that laws need to be imposed in order to manage and control the more reckless expressions of love. One's initial reaction might be that laws have no business regulating something as private as love. Yet, Pausanias correctly reveals that, private as it may be, love expresses itself in public. A person's desires and erotic longings inevitably produce ripples throughout the community and, depending upon their direction, these ripples can be either beneficial or harmful. For instance, Calicles, seeking the experience of completeness through power, engaged in a love affair with power. The result was the endorsement of corrupt behavior and the promotion of tyranny. On the other hand, the new set of philosophical symbols spurred by Socrates' personal quest for a sense of wholeness, i.e., love, had the effect of reawakening an appreciation of wisdom as the true principles of order and meaning. The idea of sublimating and policing eros, an idea further elaborated in the *Republic*, is certainly legitimate.

One should not however award Pausanias too much praise for his intent in bringing forth this idea is driven by his desire for physical intimacy with the young and beautiful Agathon. Worried that the shameful conduct of some might lead to the unfair and outright condemnation of sexual pleasure, Pausanias suggests the enactment of laws that would prohibit such conduct. By outlawing the more vulgar expressions of physical lust and appeasing the moral objections

of some, Pausanias hopes to legitimize his more “honorable” sexual encounters with Agathon. But, regardless of his claim that there is no shame in giving oneself to a lover in the service of wisdom, Pausanias fails to make the necessary connection between the physical pleasures of sex and a person’s transcendental education. Requests for sexual favors are a capricious and appetitive demand made on the part of the lover.<sup>104</sup> Although he attempts to distinguish love as carnal pleasure from love as spiritual growth, both forms of love nevertheless possess a strong physical element. While intimating a Heavenly cosmic sphere, Pausanias always remains within the physical. Despite surpassing his predecessor in insight, Pausanias’ teachings are limited by the fact that he never abandons the notion, proposed by Phaedrus, that love is always directed towards other human beings. The upward pull of Heavenly Love never reaches beyond the corporeal realm. Albeit there is an attempt to portray Heavenly Love as a higher and spiritual type of Love, it is nevertheless intimately related to physical pleasure.

As Pausanias ends his speech, something rather unusual occurs. A somewhat comical situation develops. Aristophanes, whose turn it is to speak, is burdened by a sudden attack of the hiccups.<sup>105</sup> As a result, the funny sound of an irritated diaphragm abruptly interrupts the stream of poetic tributes. Unable to

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<sup>104</sup> 184c-e.

<sup>105</sup> 185c.

speak, the comic playwright requests that Eryximachus either suggests a cure for his affliction or take his place and speak in praise of love. The physician does both. Consequently, the order of speakers is altered. Though one can make any number of assumptions as to the reason behind this change, two things are clear. Firstly, it allows Eryximachus the chance to complete Pausanias' thoughts, which in turn were built upon the ideas put forth by Phaedrus. Thus it would seem that the author might have intended to point out the substantial difference between the speeches delivered by Eryximachus, Pausanias, and Phaedrus and the ones delivered by the others. Secondly, this forced change in the set order results in moving the comic poet closer to the tragedian Agathon and so ever so subtly preparing the reader for the very last scene of the dialogue.

Pausanias started his speech by accusing Phaedrus of overlooking the deeper implications associated with love. Ironically, Eryximachus directs the same accusation towards Pausanias. Praising Pausanias for his efforts but at the same time noting that they fall short of their purpose, Eryximachus offers his assistance in carrying the ideas initiated by Phaedrus to their proper conclusion. Beginning from where his predecessor left off, the physician reaffirms the existence of two types of Love (Heavenly Love and Vulgar Love) but makes the innovative claim that love is more than an emotional reaction that arises among individuals. The notions of virtue and vice occupied a predominant role during

Pausanias' speech. Considering that these notions refer to qualities only humans can embody, restricting love to expressions of virtue or vice relegates it to a phenomenon contained strictly within the human realm of experience. Valid as Pausanias' argument may be, it does not fully reveal the true nature of love. If, however, Pausanias was not blinded by his overwhelming desire for an intimate relationship with Agathon, he would realize that the real power of love lies in its ability to promote order and harmony among all existing things. Love is a force whose influence is not limited to the governance of human affairs but extends and directs events throughout the cosmos.<sup>106</sup> This turn towards cosmic order might appear out of place, yet its relevance is explained at the very start of the physician's speech.<sup>107</sup> Having decided to explain love through the prism of craftsmanship, Eryximachus needs to identify the possibility of an overarching cosmic design that serves as a paradigm for the lower level "orders" embodied and established by the crafts.

And so, beginning with his craft, Eryximachus describes how everything, from the human body to the universe at large, is composed of various opposing elements (hot vs. cold, wet vs. dry). When governed by Heavenly Love, these rival elements come together and create order. When stirred by Vulgar Love, they clash and produce chaos. Now while there are times when the Heavenly

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<sup>106</sup> 186a.

<sup>107</sup> "I will begin with medicine, to show my respect for the craft." (186b-c).

reigns over the Vulgar, and other times when the Vulgar triumphs over the Heavenly, existence is never completely bereft of either type of Love. Both loves are always present and in tension, always intermingled in everything from medicine to athletics to agriculture to music. Eryximachus thus raises love from the wantonness of human sexual desire and relates it to the universal principles of order and disorder.

Nevertheless, the break between Eryximachus and his predecessors should not be exaggerated. While he abandons the issue of personal human longings, the physician's speech does not necessarily signal a philosophical challenge to Pausanias' position regarding virtue and vice. Bearing in mind that virtuous habits produce order in the soul and body, whereas vicious habits produce disorder, Eryximachus does not contradict but expands and completes the claim made by Pausanias. Eryximachus drives Pausanias' argument that depending upon the type of love that inspires a person at a particular moment, love can either lead to virtuous or vicious habits to its logical conclusion by maintaining that depending upon the type of love that inspires the cosmos at a particular moment, love can lead to either an ordered or a disordered cosmos. Virtue and vice are thus inflated into cosmic forces of order and disorder. Though he distinguishes himself by suggesting that love is not merely an affection of the soul towards another, the physician nonetheless remains within

the frame of reference introduced by his predecessors, namely, he categorizes love into two types, one beneficial the other harmful.

In truth, Eryximachus' speech is quite intriguing. By shifting focus from the particular and individual towards the eternal and universal, Eryximachus seems to be closer to Socrates' position than either Phaedrus or Pausanias. Moreover, his remark that love brings man closer to god lays the ground for Socrates' claim that love incites man to seek out and reconcile himself with the true source of wholeness, i.e., the *good*. Yet, his rejection of love as an expression of a person's personal longing for fulfillment places him squarely at odds with the philosopher. Eryximachus' success in rising above the primitive needs of the body and avoiding the taint of sexual desires is counterbalanced by his portrayal of love as abstract, detached and dispassionate cosmic energy. This interpretation of love would probably not have shocked any of the guests. Predictably, in the hands of the physician, love is described as the power responsible for, amongst other things, the body's condition. While somewhat expected, this account must have struck some as being rather strange. Actually, the next speaker understands Eryximachus' take on love to be downright preposterous.

Albeit pretentious, the argument linking love to all earthly and celestial phenomena undoubtedly earns the physician a reasonable degree of admiration.

His controlled description of a purposive and ordered cosmos must have surely impressed. Still, it would take a simple remark on the part of an audience member to reduce this grand vision to an absurdity. Aristophanes deflates the pompous image offered by highlighting that Eryximachus' train of thought leads to the "utterly laughable" suggestion that hiccups, because they create disorder in the body, are a manifestation of Vulgar Love, while sneezing, because it cures hiccups and restores order, is a demonstration of Heavenly Love. By pointing out the ridiculousness of an argument that explains a sneeze as evidence of a person's erotic longings, Aristophanes sobers the enthusiasm of any who might have been charmed by the physician's high-minded words.

Taking note of the insult directed his way, Eryximachus responds by reminding Aristophanes that the discussion undertaken is one that is serious and if he wishes to participate, he too must be serious, otherwise the audience will be tempted to interpret his upcoming speech as nothing more than an incongruous gag. Attempting to deflect the criticism leveled against him, Eryximachus suggests that Aristophanes' remarks were simply a joke.<sup>108</sup> The truth, however, is that, although funny, the remarks made are serious. The physician forgets that as a comic poet, Aristophanes reveals his deepest thoughts and insights through comedy. In short, his are serious jokes. Even so, Eryximachus, in Socratic fashion,

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<sup>108</sup> 189b.

warns the poet that he will be made to account for his speech. The defense of “I was just kidding” or “it was just a joke” will not do. Aristophanes will need to mind his mouth, and manners. Thus amid these threats and warnings Aristophanes begins his teachings on love.

The comic poet starts by stating that clearly, as revealed by previous speakers, men do not understand the real power of love. This lack of understanding reaches its high point with the physician’s laughable suggestion that love is responsible for the proper functioning of our bodily organs. The silliness of this conclusion reveals that something, at some point, has gone wrong. The arguments have lost their focus. The discussion has degenerated. Allusions to a cosmic force pervading the crafts of medicine, agriculture, athletics, music, meteorology, and astronomy have detracted attention away from the subject at hand. Endeavoring to set things upon the proper course, Aristophanes casts aside lofty notions of universal order and harmony and plunges towards the tumultuous and compulsive longings that, according to him, characterize the experience of love.

Although with the words: “first of all, you must learn about the constitution of man and about its sufferings...,”<sup>109</sup> the playwright signals a return

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<sup>109</sup> 189d.

to the previously discussed premise that love can be understood only within the context of human experience, he will not imitate the first two speakers and rest his thoughts on the superficial or sexual. Moreover, both Phaedrus and Pausanias discussed the effects of love, yet, never explained the reason for man's erotic desires. And so, weaving a fantastic and absorbing myth adorned with gigantic creatures, vengeful gods and obsessive yearnings, Aristophanes will attempt to penetrate deep into the recesses of human consciousness and expose the hidden source of man's intense need for the comforts of love.

The myth begins by recounting that humans were once gigantic round shaped creatures with eight limbs, four arms, four legs, one head with two faces and four ears, and two sets of genitals, male, or female, or both. This bizarre and wacky representation betrays more than Aristophanes' comic talent. While the portrayal of enormous circular creatures means to amuse, it also intends to symbolize the sense of wholeness and even perfection that assumingly once pervaded human existence.<sup>110</sup> Now, as a result of being blessed with qualities typically ascribed to gods, humans developed a bloated (μεγαλα) pride and sought to scale the heavens with the objective of supplanting the reigning Olympian Gods. This show of reckless arrogance, needless to say, the Olympians did not tolerate. The circle was hence split; the feeling of invincibility crushed.

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<sup>110</sup>This of course is in reference to the fact that a circle represents an image completeness, wholeness, independence and perfection.

The Gods disciplined humanity's prideful outburst by replacing the sense of wholeness and autonomy with a one of inadequacy and dependence. No longer perfect, humanity would henceforth suffer existence in brokenness.

Strained by the weight of their punishment and wishing to escape its dreadful reality, humans spend their lives trying to undo the damage done. But, try as they may, they will never again experience the bliss formerly enjoyed. The condemnation is eternal. Fragmented they are and will forever be. The feeling of incompleteness, the feeling that something is missing, is permanent. Man experiences himself, henceforth, as a lack. A legend that began with funny images of a funny creature doing cartwheels evolved into a somber exploration of the deep personal struggles and ordeals that characterize human existence. The delight aroused by the playwright's original description of man has disappeared. The expected comedy has matured into an unexpected tragedy. Still, not all is lost. There is a remedy capable of alleviating the severity of the reality suffered. Tragic as humanity's fate might seem on this Aristophanian view, there exists the possibility of attaining a degree of solace. From the heartbreak of a shattered condition emerges the experience of love.

Guiding a person's search for his lost half, love raises the possibility of satisfaction and as a result offsetting the bitter fact that "each of us is the mere

broken tally of a man." The experience of wholeness and fulfillment is, in other words, the product of allowing oneself to be drawn by love towards the person whose presence purges feelings of incompleteness. Thus contrary to earlier statements, love is neither god nor goddess, neither good nor bad, neither Heavenly nor Common. Love is not two in type but a single, eternal, and universal aspiration for a sense of unity. Simply put, Aristophanes' myth reveals love as evidence not of bliss or harmony, but of the feelings of tension and unrest that structures human existence. The problem of order in history is, according to this perspective, an expression of humanity's erotic search to return to a prior state of wholeness and perfection. Being the first to probe into the nature of love, and therefore the first to go beyond simply explaining its effects or functions, Aristophanes' speech lays the ground for Socrates and as such is crucial to the dialogues' development.

As Eryximachus, the night's self-appointed master of ceremonies, prepares the stage for Agathon, Socrates interjects and, using a mild form of irony, lures the young poet into a brief dialogue. Praising Agathon's ability and intellect, Socrates voices his concern with being the speaker assigned to follow what is sure to be the most insightful and eloquent speech of the night. Fearing the prospect of having nothing interesting to say, Socrates admits to being overwhelmed by feelings of panic and despair. Of course, none, including

Agathon, would have been impervious to the exaggerated nature of these statements. The mocking tone that enveloped the praise bestowed would not have escaped the young poet's notice, but then again, it was never intended to escape his notice. But, while Agathon instantly recognizes the irony in Socrates' words, he misreads its meaning. Believing sabotage to be the goal intended, Agathon accuses Socrates of purposely trying to embarrass him in an effort to upset his focus and undermine his speech. Yet, sabotage is not the motivating cause behind Socrates' irony. The philosopher has never shown himself to espouse such petty behavior. There is a more significant objective sought. Before allowing Agathon the opportunity of employing his dazzling rhetoric sure to hypnotize and effectively persuade, Socrates feels obliged to alert the audience as to the type of character the poet possesses.<sup>111</sup>

Having stirred a reaction from Agathon, Socrates continues to pursue his objective by claiming that the accusation leveled against him is simply ridiculous. No one could possibly embarrass one, such as Agathon, who so shamelessly flaunted himself on a stage set up before a crowd of thousands. The importance of this observation relates to the fact that feelings of shame and embarrassment reflect a person's sense of decency and integrity. In other words, only decent and upright individuals experience shame and embarrassment when

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<sup>111</sup> 194a.

behaving indecently or improperly -and the stronger the sense of decency and integrity, the stronger the feeling of shame and embarrassment. Therefore, by portraying Agathon as a person with no shame, Socrates is implying that he is one not bound by the restraint of decency and integrity and thus is one who will do and say anything in order to attain his goals.<sup>112</sup> Obviously, not wanting to be branded a shameless person, especially considering the occasion, Agathon responds that one does not address "a crowd of fools," such as the one that viewed his play the other night, the way one addresses people of reputation and wisdom, such as his dinner-party guests. The argument is that regardless of his words or actions in the theater, Agathon is an honest and decent person for he would be shamed if he were to say or perform some wrong in front of his esteemed friends and participants in the night's symposium. This answer, the young poet believes, frees him from the philosopher's harsh criticism. The reality, however, is that Socrates has maneuvered Agathon into a difficult and compromising position.

With an air of confidence ("But you surely do not suppose...") Agathon defended himself claiming that he would feel shame before his wise guests but not before yesterday's ignorant crowd. Socrates, in response, points out that there is no difference between the two. The guests gathered at Agathon's

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<sup>112</sup> Though it must be noted that from Agathon's perspective, his oratory is driven by the sophistic aspiration to speak of what conventions, such as "justice" and "decency", cover over.

residence were part of the “crowd of fools” in the theater the day before. If Agathon had no difficulty “doing something discreditable” while addressing the crowd that attended his play, his guests, who formed part of that crowd, should expect Agathon to behave in a discreditable manner. In short, his shameless behavior in the theater confirms one of two scenarios: either Agathon is really a decent person and his guests are fools, in which case he has no problem acting shamelessly before them, or that his guests are wise and he is really a shameless person. Either way, the speech about to be delivered should be listened to with great suspicion for its author is one who, according to his own admission, will now behave shamelessly. Worried that the issue of love will fade and eventually disappear into an ocean of Socrates’ questions, Phaedrus interrupts and suggests Agathon ignore the philosopher’s inopportune advances. The young poet instantly and gladly complies. Happy to escape the burden of being the focus of Socrates’ *elenchos*, Agathon begins to formulate his thoughts on love.

His confidence having been bolstered by his recent triumph, the young poet assumes a tone of authority reprimanding his guests for their errors and educating them in the proper way of composing a panegyric. With arrogance (or maybe shamelessness), Agathon proceeds to lecture his esteemed guests:

*All the previous speakers seem to me to have dwelt upon the happiness of humanity in being endowed by the god with such blessings, rather than upon the praise of the god himself; no one has said what sort of being he is who conferred these gifts. The*

*only right way of composing any panegyric is to set out the nature of the subject of the panegyric as well as the effects of which that subject is the cause; that is the way in which we ought to praise Love, describing first his nature and afterwards the gifts which he bestows.*<sup>113</sup>

The discussion has so far failed to fulfill its purpose. The speeches delivered have all missed the mark. Though much has been said about love's power to inspire virtue, harmony, health, and order, the truth about love remains a mystery. A good portion of the night has passed and still no one has been able to articulate a profound understanding of love. Even the great Hesiod and the renowned Parmenides have proven to be incompetent in this regard. However, Agathon vows to set things straight. His speech promises to be the turning point of the discussion. But, while Agathon opens his speech with the pledge that he will not emulate his predecessors and simply present a list of the various qualities or products that may be attributable to love, this is precisely what occurs.

By describing love as a god who, being beautiful and good, promotes beauty and goodness, Agathon clearly detracts from his stated intentions and breaks his promise. The young poet's words, although poetic, reveal nothing of love's true nature and add nothing of any real significance to what has already been said. Saturating love with all types of superficial qualities without

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<sup>113</sup> 194e.

attempting to provide a consistent account or explanation, Agathon delivers a rhetorical speech that is in way of substance inferior to ones delivered by previous speakers. This is not to say that the young man fails in his attempt to persuade. For while inferior in substance, his speech is superior in style. Indeed, as Socrates ironically remark,<sup>114</sup> Agathon masterfully put the lessons he learned from his mentor Gorgias to perfect use.<sup>115</sup>

Agathon's blissful images of a young, beautiful, and wise deity, dwelling among flowers and floating above the earth fail to convey any insight, but succeed in seducing. Rhetorical speech makes no effort to present a reasoned or philosophically structured argument, even so, its effectiveness in seizing attention is undeniable. To persuade through flattery,<sup>116</sup> or fear, is rhetoric's only ambition, and considering the enthusiastic applause that follow his speech, it is clear that Agathon is an apt rhetorician. Flooding the listener's ears with his graceful and pleasant words, Agathon successfully conceals the cluster of sloppy arguments and groundless assumptions that characterize his speech. An

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<sup>114</sup> 198c.

<sup>115</sup> "In his own oratory and in his teaching, Gorgias used figurative expressions to excess, the result often being a strange sounding and strained style... Gorgias also delivered his speeches with great flourish, almost like a musical composition with cadences and crescendos. He provided his pupils with exercises in the use of these figures... Gorgias' theory of rhetoric, when applied to actual oratory, can appear as pure bombast, sheer display with little substance." (James Jerome Murphy, *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Davis, Calif.: Hermagoras Press, 1994, 35).

<sup>116</sup> Agathon closes his speech by declaring love to be "the best...soldier, comrade (a clear reference to the speeches of both Phaedrus, Pausanias), savior (a reference to Aristophanes); author of order in heaven and earth (a reference to Eryximachus). Thus flattering his guests by incorporating (and thus acknowledging) their ideas into his speech, Agathon secures the approval of all.

outpouring of adulation therefore envelops the poet. Once again, as he had done in the theater the other night, Agathon has dazzled the audience.

Joining the ovation and ironically claiming to be overwhelmed, Socrates confesses that he would be unable to produce a panegyric of the type offered by the young poet, and hence must be excused from the discussion. According to the rules, it is the philosopher's turn to speak but considering the way things have evolved throughout the night, the thought of taking part in the symposium no longer seems appealing. A talk that was to explore, understand and praise love developed into a series of rhetorical speeches which ended with Agathon's spectacular, yet misleading, portrayal of love as a god imbued with beauty and goodness. If Socrates misunderstood and what was in fact proposed by Eryximachus was a symposium during which the guests would "give the appearance of praising Love rather than...actually do so," then the philosopher cannot and will not participate.<sup>117</sup> To extend the series of deceptive rhetorical speeches would be shameful. If he is to contribute, Socrates must be allowed to detract from the pattern already set. Thus, in order to save the discussion and see it to its end, the guests agree to accord the philosopher the freedom to speak in any manner he wishes.

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<sup>117</sup> 198b.

Now, philosophy, in the platonic sense, is born through resistance to falsehood. It dialectically builds its arguments by exposing errors and misapprehensions. It does not deliver sermons that offer ready-made doctrines or systems of existence, but rather struggles to define the principles of true order by identifying and opposing principles that can potentially lead a person astray. In short, platonic philosophy is premised on the notion that in order to appreciate true meaning, it is first necessary to abandon all false illusions no matter how cherished these may be. Hence, before one understands what love is, one must first understand what it is not. Socrates therefore begins his exploration of love by turning his attention towards Agathon and reducing the young poet's glorious rhetorical edifice into rubble.

During his speech, Agathon identified love with beauty and goodness. However, the fact that love desires the beautiful and good does not entail that love is in itself beautiful and good. Indeed, since love is a desire for beauty and goodness and since to desire is not to have, it follows that love is neither beautiful nor good. Somewhat unexpectedly, in stark contrast from Polus and Callicles, Gorgias' other students, Agathon offers no resistance and accepts Socrates' logic. There are no passionate rebuttals, no counterarguments. The poet may be young but he knows enough not to confront Socrates and become entangled in the back-and-forth of the philosopher's *elenchos*. He therefore

chooses the safer course. Hoping to avoid Socrates' scrutiny and maintain, at least partially, his reputation for wisdom, Agathon simply concedes defeat. Stating that Socrates is an irresistible force, the poet flaccidly abandons the discussion ("Let it be as you say"). Though disheartening, Agathon's display of indifference will not upset Socrates' resolve or stifle his efforts. Determined to extract the true nature of love from the accumulation of misleading and embellished words uttered by previous speakers, Socrates will pursue his philosophical investigation by speaking his adversary's position in addition to his own. The result is an account that will be substantially different from those already presented.

Socrates' speech is in the form of a report recounting a dialogue he had with a mysterious, almost mythical, figure named Diotima, a prophetess from Mantinea whose powers once protected Athens against the plague. Though brief and vague, this description of Diotima is quite revealing, not so much of who she is but of what she represents. Being a woman who has already once saved the city from disaster, Diotima embodies the promise of hope and restoration. Her tale concerning love is a *saving tale*, one that needs to be heard if Athens is to be restored. Assuming the identities of both Agathon (Socrates-Agathon) and Diotima (Socrates-Diotima), Socrates resumes the discussion where it left off. It was argued that love is neither beautiful nor good. Instead of the indifference

shown by Agathon, such a conclusion should have aroused surprise and dissent. For to argue that love is neither beautiful nor good is to argue that love is both ugly and bad, at least thus would be the popular assumption.<sup>118</sup> Yet, Diotima-Socrates reveals something mysterious, innovative, and intriguing, something that undermines the traditional understanding of love.

The prophetess announces the existence of a "middle realm" between such opposite extremes as good/bad, ugly/beautiful, and ignorance/ wisdom. She then explains that love resides within this middle realm, and cannot be described strictly as good, beautiful or wise nor can it be held to be bad, ugly or ignorant. Sensing the revolutionary character of this statement and hoping to undo Diotima-Socrates' line of reasoning, Agathon-Socrates promptly counters by citing the popular belief that love is a "great god." This silly attempt to equate belief with truth does nothing but arouse a loud burst of laughter, especially since it has already been demonstrated that Agathon-Socrates himself believes public opinion to be false. Of course, Agathon-Socrates does not realize he believes such a thing, at least not until Diotima-Socrates explains that godliness, by definition, implies goodness and beauty. Thus having endorsed the view that love is neither beautiful nor good,<sup>119</sup> Agathon-Socrates has also endorsed the

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<sup>118</sup> Although I assume it is possible for some to interpret the declaration that love is neither beautiful nor good as a declaration that love is neutral.

<sup>119</sup> 201a.

view that love is not a god. Socrates' attempt to demystify what has customarily been considered a deity does not go unnoticed; a charge of impiety, as we all know, would one day surface.

Shocked by this revelation, Agathon-Socrates asks if Diotima-Socrates means to argue that love is mortal. In his bafflement, he seems to have forgotten that it has previously been established that love is something residing in an "in-between", middle, realm. In other words, it is not because love is not a god that it must be mortal. Love is a "great spirit" (*δαίμων μέγας*), an intermediary, a mediator between humans and gods. In order to better relate the experience of "in-betweenness" and tension that characterizes human erotic longings, Diotima-Socrates narrates the myth of Poros<sup>120</sup> and Penia.<sup>121</sup> She recounts that during a festival celebrating the birth of Aphrodite, Poros became drunk. Overwhelmed by a feeling of drowsiness, he staggered out into the garden of Zeus and eventually fell asleep. Penia, who was begging at the door, perceived in Poros' temporary incapacitation an opportunity to better her plight and plotted to lie with him. The result of this encounter was the birth of Love who, as a child of his parents, inherited the poverty of his mother and the resourcefulness of his father. Simply put, the myth reveals love to be a relentless and determined (Poros) struggle to fill (penetrate) an inherent sense of void (Penia); love is the experience

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<sup>120</sup> Πορος, a Greek term signifying, among other things, resources, or means.

<sup>121</sup> Πενία, Greek term suggesting destitution, want.

of a movement that begins in need and rises towards transcendence, wholeness and fulfillment.

By crediting love with qualities that he, assumingly, enjoys, such as wisdom and beauty, Agathon attempted to portray himself as the living embodiment of love. However, it has now been revealed that instead of possessing wisdom and beauty, love is in their constant search. Love is, in other words, a lack that strives to fulfill itself. The implications are clear. The true representative of love is he who, profoundly conscious of his limitations and possibilities, dedicates his time and effort to seeking out beauty and wisdom. The true representative is the philosopher; it is Socrates. Considering his well-known claim of ignorance regarding the most important issues, Socrates' statement at 177d-e ("Nobody will vote against your proposal, Eryximachus," said Socrates. "I certainly shall not, for I declare that love is the only subject that I understand...") might rightly seem surprising and strange. Yet, its meaning is obvious. Socrates knows and understands love because he is its earthly incarnation. Experiencing and embodying the erotic tension between completeness and incompleteness, Socrates' personifies the *metaxy*. Given the revelation that love possesses no divine attributes, Agathon-Socrates questions love's purpose and asks what benefit can an "in-between" daemon possibly offer humanity. The myth of Poros and Penia identifies love as a longing for a sense of satisfaction, yet does not

reveal what would satisfy this longing. Agathon-Socrates' question is valid for what benefit is love if it is simply a desire that leads nowhere? If love were like a Sisyphean task with no end or meaning, would it not be best to try to suppress its urges. Diotima-Socrates answers this concern by explaining that the only way towards a true sense of wellbeing and satisfaction (ευδαιμονον) is through the *good*<sup>122</sup>, and the only way to the *good* is through love. By inspiring man to seek the source of wholeness and fulfillment, love brings him closer to the *good*. Therefore, love's invaluable function is that it leads man towards the *good*. The intimate relationship between love and the *good* that was suggested at the start of the dialogue is now elaborated.<sup>123</sup>

The *good* symbolizes the source and object of human satisfaction; love symbolizes the experience of being drawn towards the *good*. While he may fail to recognize that which is truly *good*, a person can only love that which he, at least, deems to be *good*, and a person deems *good* that which he assumes will bring a sense of wholeness and fulfillment to his existence. This implies that although all love the *good*, they do not all share the same conception of the *good* and, as a result, do not all love the same *things*. To define love simply as a man's desire for young beautiful boys is to be ignorant of the true scope and impact of love.<sup>124</sup> All

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<sup>122</sup> Something Aristophanes overlooked: "my friend, love is not desire either of the half or the whole, unless that half or whole happens to be good." (206a).

<sup>123</sup> 177e.

<sup>124</sup> 205a.

who seek wholeness and fulfillment, i.e., everybody, seek the *good*, even those who seek it through money, political power, physical prowess or wisdom. In other words, the *good* even in the most limited sense suggests a desire for the highest *good*, i.e., wisdom.

Agathon-Socrates attempted to impede Diotima-Socrates' progress by putting into question the use of a neither beautiful nor good spirit. He obviously failed. Provoked by Agathon-Socrates' doubts, the prophetess elaborated an all-encompassing vision that related love to the deepest and most intimate aspirations of man. So impressive was her presentation that Agathon-Socrates never again tries to resist. From now on, he will follow her lead. Having established love's nature and function, the prophetess initiates the next step. It was argued that the hope of experiencing a sense of satisfaction inspires man to love the *good*. In line 205e, Diotima-Socrates further extends this point by calling to mind the notion of immortality (which she employs as an all-encompassing symbol representing the experience of transcendence and wholeness) in order to better explain human erotic longings, and in particular Achilles' love of Patroclus. This interpretation, however, seems strange and misrepresentative of the private passion these two heroes experienced for one another. Questioning the connection between love and the ambition for immortality, unconvinced by the prophetess' words, Agathon-Socrates asks, "...am I really to believe this?"

Calmly reassuring her listener, Diotima-Socrates claims that one need only notice the behavior of the "honor lovers" (*φιλοτιμιαν*) to discern the truth. Phaedrus was correct in stating that Achilles was inspired by love. Yet, it was not love of Patroclus but love of immortality that spurred Achilles to his end. Realizing his acts of courage and determination would grant him eternal glory, Achilles rushed headlong towards certain death. The struggles and pains men suffer in the name of honor and reputation can only be explained by the desire for a permanent sense of wholeness which is reflected through man's desire for immortality; in fact, without this explanation human action would seem irrational, if not insane (*αλογιας*).

While the longing for immortality, i.e., the experience of wholeness and fulfillment, can be traced from the most heroic to the most ordinary actions of man, it is most apparent in the urge for procreation. By creating something beautiful that will outlast his lifespan, which can assume either a physical or a spiritual form, man extends himself into the future thus realizing, as much as humanly possible, the goal of immortality. Men who are fertile in body seek women in order to produce children who can renew their hereditary line and keep their name, and in some small sense their glory, alive. However, this does not produce the most rewarding instance of immortality. After all, even animals and birds accomplish the feat of physical procreation. A more gratifying

experience, as illustrated by the great poets (Homer, Hesiod) and lawgivers (Solon, Lycurgus) of the past, is gained through the soul and takes the form of wisdom and virtue. Inspired by a youth's beautiful body and character, those whose souls are fertile produce excellent discourse about wisdom and civic virtue with the purpose of educating the youth. Each seeking to fulfill his own longing for completeness, the youth and his mentor form an intimate friendship that results in the impregnation of the youth with wisdom and civic virtue. Though the process is not inevitable and is subject to many pitfalls, this friendship provides the possibility of assuring the survival of a moderate and just political community. In passage *211a-e*, Diotima-Socrates seems to maintain that the basis of a healthy political order depends on a harmonious relationship between the individual's private quest for a sense of wellbeing and satisfaction and the community's public quest for the common good.

However, the true significance of civic virtue is that it allows for the prospect of enjoying higher virtue. As fulfilling as public life may be, it nevertheless cannot carry one towards the ultimate goal. The final insight into the Greater Mysteries of love is revealed only to those who follow the "right path" (ὀρθὸς ἵοντα). While still young, a person begins his way on the "right path" by first falling in love with a particular person's appearance. Overwhelmed by the force of physical attraction, the youth perceives in a lover's

beautiful body the supreme and sole possibility for the appeasement of his needs. But, as time passes, he begins to notice others whose bodies also exhibit beautiful traits. Realizing that physical beauty is an instance of beauty possessed by many, that his lover's appearance cannot in itself sooth his longings, the youth loses interest in his lover. Continuing his search for true beauty, the youth turns his attention towards the virtue of the soul, which in turn leads him to recognize and eventually love the products of these virtuous souls, namely, the laws.

Love of laws then evolves into a love of science and knowledge, which pulls the youth further away from objects that are merely temporal and particular and towards objects that are perfect, universal and eternal. Undergoing this process of maturation, the youth finally develops into a philosopher who engages in the mystical contemplation of absolute eternal *beauty* and reaches the summit of human achievement. Once again, the metaphor of the Ladder reveals that love is the search to identify and merge with the true source and substance of order, meaning and fulfillment in the hopes of finally experiencing a sense of wellbeing and *rest*. The insight that was offered by the myth of the Judgment of the Dead is reaffirmed. Only when one dies to the outside world of appearances, the world shaped by power, is immortality gained. And so, while all are in love with what they privately perceive to be *good*

and *beautiful*, the *good* and the *beautiful* are not relative terms that reflect a person's private feelings, beliefs or opinions. Though they convey no explicit ethical, political or social doctrine, the platonic notions of *good* and *beauty* symbolically invoke the notion of a timeless and universal reality that, firstly, is not a construct of human thought or desire and, secondly, and maybe more importantly, represents the source and substance of man's experience of true order, meaning and wholeness.

Hence, although there is no precise or absolute conceptual way to define the truly *good* and *beautiful*, what separates them from what is simply perceived to be good and beautiful is the experience of true order, meaning and fulfillment. A genuine experience of wellbeing and satisfaction is, in other words, man's proof of true *goodness* and *beauty*. Now, although the climb up the Ladder is primarily about revealing which *object* is worth loving and thus is most conducive to the *good* life, there is also a more subtle announcement made. The Ladder of Love also reveals the emergence of a new age personified by the philosopher. There was a time when Homer, Hesiod, Lycurgus, and Solon embodied the highest and noblest aspirations of man. Their achievements placed them at the apex of Greek civilization.<sup>125</sup> No one was more revered. No one was placed above them. But, as great as Homer, Hesiod, Lycurgus, and Solon were,

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<sup>125</sup> Homer and Hesiod were the fathers of Greek classical culture while Lycurgus and Solon each help found one of the two political 'superpowers' of Plato's time -namely, Sparta and Athens.

Diotima-Socrates' ascent up the Ladder reveals them to have failed in their quest. Philosophy is the only path towards *eudemonia* for it represents a higher plane of existence upon which a higher measure of fulfillment can be achieved. The era defined by the love of honor has been superseded by the new age of the philosopher. The rule of Homer, Hesiod, Lycurgus, and Solon has come to its end. Socrates and Plato emerge as the new representatives of the *good* life.<sup>126</sup>

In the end, the description provided by Diotima-Socrates through the image of the Ladder portrays love as an unwavering force that lifts a person and/or community from the depths of confusion and chaos to the heights of order, meaning and a *good* beyond being which ensures that the all is not to be understood as total satiation of the things of the world. However, this elevating and inspiring description will soon be challenged. The climb towards wisdom is not guaranteed. Tyrannical power will provide as a counter-vision of the *good* life and thus will rival the offerings of philosophy.<sup>127</sup>

Thrusting himself onto the scene the feverish and tyrannical Alcibiades demands to be given access to the *good*. Entering the room wherein everyone is

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<sup>126</sup> Though the mythic and doxic formulations of Homer, Hesiod, Lycurgus, and Solon are not entirely incorrect, Plato portrays philosophy (specifically, his philosophy) as offering insights of great differentiation.

<sup>127</sup> While some may argue that Alcibiades is, properly speaking, not a tyrant but rather a politician and therefore embodies the same political eros that inspired Solon and Lycurgus, his licentious behavior in the concluding scenes of the *Symposium* clearly exhibits the pathology of a tyrannical soul.

assembled, oblivious to his surroundings, compelling Socrates to abandon his seat, Alcibiades forcibly positions himself directly next to Agathon. Even though presumably unaware of what he has done, Alcibiades' behavior metaphorically expresses his intention of distancing Socrates, i.e., philosophy, in the hopes of claiming the *good* for himself. Once comfortably seated, Alcibiades tyrannically assumes control of the gathering declaring himself master and demanding that all emulate his unruly behavior. Either the guests share in his depravity, drink until utterly drunk, or he will leave. The excessiveness that was previously rejected, now, led by the figure of Alcibiades, forces itself back onto the scene. Using philosophical discussion, Socrates has attempted to approach the *good* (Agathon); Alcibiades will endeavor to do the same using the lure of power and pleasure of the crudest form. The night has thus far progressed in an orderly and civil manner. The guests have been courteous, the discussion polite. Even Socrates' somewhat firm treatment of Agathon failed to rouse anyone's passion or anger. But, suddenly, with the appearance of Alcibiades, the night's pleasant course is shattered.

As the philosopher and potential tyrant meet face-to-face, talk of madness, violence and punishment erupts. The subtlety of a philosophical discussion is disrupted by belligerent accusations and threats. The language is unmistakable. The contest is on. There can be no peace between philosophy and tyranny,

wisdom and power. Reconciliation is impossible.<sup>128</sup> Still, despite their differences, Socrates and Alcibiades share the same desire for the *good* made evident, in a symbolic fashion, by their desire to approach young Agathon. In other words, both the philosophical and tyrannical souls are driven by an exceptionally fervent need to rise above the community's traditional ways, founded by figures such as Homer, Hesiod, Lycurgus and Solon, in the hopes of establishing a more direct relationship with the *good* thus realizing a more fulfilling way of existence. Alcibiades has therefore joined the dinner-party with the intention of admiring, flattering and eventually taking possession of the *good*, but he quickly finds that he is in competition with his former teacher. Socrates has already made his case. Speaking through Diotima, he has provided an image of an ascent towards the *good*. Alcibiades will now deconstruct Socrates' philosophical ascent and display what he takes to be its true meaning. Masked behind Socrates' declarations of wisdom and virtue, behind his airs of independence and righteousness, is a ferocious, deep-seated hunger for recognition and power. Describing the philosopher as an aggressive and crazed lover who craves the people's acknowledgment, Alcibiades prepares to tell his story, which on the surface seems to extol Socrates, yet, in truth, attempts to unveil the unsettling implications of his teachings. Annoyed at Alcibiades'

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<sup>128</sup> 213e.

insolence, Socrates tells him to be quiet.<sup>129</sup> Alcibiades, however, is determined and proceeds with his assault. None is more familiar for none was closer to the philosopher. Socrates' words will therefore now be set against his treatment of a once favored student.

Alcibiades begins by comparing Socrates to two rather bizarre mythological figures, Silenus and Marsyas. This comparison might appear to be aimed at stirring the guest's amusement but Alcibiades assures that his intent is serious. Socrates, the young man argues, should be held in suspicion for he, like Marsyas, is an impious, arrogant being who challenges the gods and bullies his fellow citizens into submission. Yet, unlike Marsyas, Socrates has no need of a flute or any other instrument. He aspires to seduce both god and man using nothing but his rhetoric. Furthermore, considering the allegations that Socrates regarded Alcibiades' life as slavish, meaningless and miserable, it can be argued that the comparison between Socrates and Silenus has something to do with Silenus' teachings, which argue that the best thing for man is to never be born and if born to die as soon as possible. Alcibiades further adds that the philosopher would often promote disengagement from the community and actively discourages his pupils from involving themselves in the public affairs of

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<sup>129</sup> 214b.

the city, stating that a life devoted to politics is one wasted. Under the guise of praise, it seems Socrates is being charged with promoting a type of nihilism.<sup>130</sup>

Indifferent to everything and everyone, Socrates simply “plays and pretends with people.” Aware that tyrannical habits bestow the highest sense of satisfaction, this man does not love but enslaves, dominates. The *elenchos* is but Socrates’ attempt to embarrass the city’s most prominent figures and portray himself as superior. There is nothing intrinsically true or noble about Socrates’ words, they are simply a device through which he attains power over others. Even while serving in the army, stationed in camp, Socrates would perform all types of ridiculous stunts, such as walking barefoot on ice or standing on the same spot for hours on end, hoping to attract the people’s respect and admiration. Apparently, Alcibiades interprets Socrates in somewhat the same way Machiavelli interprets Moses -that is, as a shrewd figure who cloaks himself in righteous language and behavior in order to assume dominance over his people.<sup>131</sup> In short, Socrates is not above the struggle for power. He is an astute participant. Relentless, Alcibiades continues his attack by recounting how Socrates parades around town seducing young boys with the promise of wisdom yet never allows them the opportunity to learn. Alcibiades himself begged

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<sup>130</sup> Nietzsche’s accusations are nothing original, Plato was well aware of them even in his own time.

<sup>131</sup> Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Portable Machiavelli*, ed. Peter Bondanella & Mark Musa (New York: Penguin Group, 1979), 93.

Socrates to help him in his quest for the *good* life. The philosopher, however, would have none of it. His only response was stinging irony. In rejecting the handsome Alcibiades, in refusing to be seduced, bought or intimidated, Socrates proudly accomplishes a feat that none other would or could, thus successfully achieving the feeling of power and superiority he craves (“to allow so proud an exploit on the part of Socrates to remain unknown”).

In addition, Socrates’ rejection of Alcibiades illustrates his disrespect and disregard for the city’s traditional customs; customs followed and exemplified by the relationship between Eryximachus and Phaedrus, Pausanias and Agathon. The philosopher’s indifference to carnal pleasure is therefore portrayed as sacrilege, an impious offence against Love. Clearly, Alcibiades aims to expose philosophy not as a way towards wellbeing but as a destructive force, one that promotes nihilism and threatens to corrupt the customary ways of Athens. Alcibiades redefines philosophy as simply another expression of man’s desire for tyrannical power. Undeniably, Alcibiades is brilliant in his rhetoric. Alcibiades’ attack on the philosophical life is much more subtle and thus effective than the one launched by Callicles. Bluntness is replaced by cunning, belligerence by poise and wit. Alcibiades is not a person of ordinary ability. The talented youth embodies the possibility of good, but also represents a potential danger -to both

the city and to philosophy. Thus, the reason for Socrates' initial fascination with the young man is plain.

Though it appears that Alcibiades' speech serves to justify the criminal indictments against Socrates, Plato's intention, most likely, was to reveal how even the noblest individuals can, in their questioning of the city's laws and conventions, be given the appearance of villainy, how the discourse of truth can be twisted, turned, and translated into a discourse of power; there are always those, such as Alcibiades, who interpret everything in terms of crude power. No matter how noble the person, no one is safe from the wrath of the tyrannical soul ready to manipulate reality to serve its interest. Nevertheless, despite Alcibiades' best efforts he does not succeed.

Agathon sees through Alcibiades, ignores his warnings, and returns next to Socrates. Yet, although Alcibiades is bitter in his defeat, Socrates' victory appears ambiguous. Before the *good* has the opportunity to settle next to the philosopher, a wave of disorder crashes through the room and sweeps the guests away from the discussion. The contest, it seems, remains unresolved. Socrates however is determined to continue the conversation with whoever is willing to take part and listen. But, of course, in a platonic dialogue, there is nothing left to chance and, therefore, those who are willing to listen have been carefully chosen

to be the tragedian and comedian. It is hence to Agathon and Aristophanes that Socrates announces the new way of myth making epitomized by philosophy and which replaces both tragedy and comedy by synthesizing them. Beyond tragedy, beyond comedy, the new age of ironic seriousness characteristic of Socratic-Platonic philosophy makes its appearance.

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In combination, the *Gorgias* and *Symposium* offer an approach to politics that centers on the relation between experience and reality with the emphasis moving from the transient to the universal engendering experience of humanity's perennial need for wholeness. In other words, in an effort to bring to view the origins of political phenomena, and particularly disordered political phenomena, Plato's works guide the political scientist's attention away from the narrow concern of who gets what, when, why, and how, and towards the timeless experience of reality which expresses itself in the longing to live the *good* life. And so, in the end, the dialogues studied reveal that when the desire for completeness of such types as Callicles and Alcibiades is not addressed,

challenged, and re-directed towards experiences of transcendence the eventual outcome are outbreaks of political disorder.

Now, turning from Plato's *Gorgias* and *Symposium*, the present study will presently direct its attention on Fyodor Dostoevsky's final novel, *The Brother Karamazov*. Admittedly, this shift may appear abrupt but its purpose is to demonstrate that while these writings are distanced by thousands of years and while they spring from unique historical circumstances, they nevertheless agree on the fundamental premise that grounds politics in the human encounter with reality and the need for wholeness this encounter stirs.

However, despite this basic philosophical point of convergence, there exists compelling disparities between the two thinkers which, briefly stated, arise as a consequence of Christianity. That is, the advent of Christianity introduces ideas that force a reevaluation of Plato's Classical outlook, and particularly its attitude concerning the way man copes and deals with the world.<sup>132</sup> Thus, while the search for order persists, after Christianity, it proceeds within a context of new dimensions. Now in order to appreciate this new Christian context it is first

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<sup>132</sup>For an interesting discussion regarding Christianity's relationship with Plato see Simon Blackburn, *Plato's Republic: A biography*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007, ch.11).

necessary to highlight a few of the more important elements that form the Greek, and later Roman, Classical perspective.

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## Chapter Two

### Equivalence and Difference: The tyrannical disposition from Plato to Dostoevsky

The most notable tenets of Classical thought, at least, those ascribed to by Plato, rests upon the key concept of a fixed *cosmos*, which simply affirms an intrinsic order or structure that pervades the whole of existence. Employed not only in a descriptive but also in a prescriptive sense, the term *cosmos* conveys the impression of order, proportionality, wisdom, harmony and beauty, and when alluded to rouses feelings of reverence, approval and obligation.

This attitude is further reinforced by the adherence to a cyclical notion of time and the eternal recurrence of the same. Understanding time as changing in real but eternally recurrent ways, the Greeks and Romans of the Classical era maintained that any changes that occur, in nature or society, are explained in relation to an overarching principle of temporality in which the same fundamental pattern of birth, maturity and death is repeated in a cyclical manner throughout history. Stated differently, Classical philosophers mostly thought of

the *cosmos* as eternal; it was never created, and it will never end. It figuratively resembles some sort of huge *entity* in perpetual rotation in which after very long periods, all the parts that constitute this *entity* come back to a previously assumed position and the same succession of events then repeats itself again, over and over ceaselessly. Human beings, and their social and political actions, are part of this *entity* and therefore, everything in history has occurred already an immeasurable number of times, and will again occur in the future. The *cosmos* was thus viewed as "non-progressive" for though the universe is in motion, this motion is ineffectual, since it produces no change in the nature of things. As Georges Florovsky describes:

*Greek philosophy was dominated by the ideas of permanence and recurrence. There could be but a disclosure [i.e., in history] of the pre-existing fullness. [Even] Aristotle made this point with a complete frankness: 'What is "of necessity" coincides with what is "always," since that which "must not" cannot possibly "not-be." ...If, therefore, the "coming-to-be" of a thing is necessary, its "coming-to-be" is eternal. ...It follows that the "coming-to-be" of anything, if it is absolutely necessary, must be cyclical, i.e., must return upon itself...It is in circular movement, therefore, and in cyclical "coming-to-be," that the "absolutely necessary" is to be found' (de gen. et corr., II.2, 338a).<sup>133</sup>*

At its deepest level, this reading of time seems strongly to imply a posture of conformity vis-à-vis the order of reality and thus seems to affirm the integrity and value of the *cosmos*. Another important notion that flows from this perspective is *arête*. *Arête*, or virtue, involves the actualization of man's faculties

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<sup>133</sup> Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works: Aspects of Church History. Vol IV* (Belmont, Mass: Nordland Pub. Co., 1975), 68-69.

in an excellent manner. To be virtuous, in other words, is to act according to an inherent nature and do so to the highest degree. In regards to humans, this nature involves a hierarchy of faculties that finds reason at its summit.

But, although the life of reason represents the pinnacle of human development, it does not attain its maximum potential automatically but necessitates effort and education. Born into the world with a desire for a variety of things, man must learn to differentiate and direct his desire towards those things that nurture a virtuous (reasoned) disposition. *Arête* therefore suggests that human fulfillment requires that humans develop the better capacities and tendencies inborn in their nature. Hence, by being virtuous, by understanding and assuming one's place within reality and thereby acknowledging the *cosmos*, one comes to experience the relative degree of excellence and perfection that distinguishes the *good* life.

Insightful as it is, this Classical way of pursuing an ordered existence is nevertheless challenged by Christianity and primarily the ideas expressed through the Christian doctrine of original sin. Maintaining that, as a consequence of the Fall, humanity's corrupt temperament tends to refute the truly *good* and fashion a world distorted by evil and the suffering that accompanies it, the doctrine of original sin conveys the feeling that existence, marred by

imperfection, is *broken*. By unraveling the *cosmos* and highlighting the *fallen* nature of creation, Christianity increases humanity's sense of disorder, which, in turn, provokes a heightened need for order. In other words, within a Christian context, the search for order acquires a greater degree of urgency. Moreover, because sin is a permanent attribute of historical man, the sense of urgency is continuously present. But, while Christianity offers insights concerning the world's *brokenness*, it also maintains that because of God's Grace, it does not remain in that state eternally and thus is also redeemable. That is, in addition to feelings of *brokenness*, Christianity also rouses an expectation of renewal that centers on the notion of divine Grace.

Since the soul is not intrinsically divine, the human person must receive grace, something that is outside human nature, in order to achieve enlightenment and the rehabilitation of the soul through union with God. Human fulfillment depends on a divine act, described as the Grace of divine revelation and the Grace of the Incarnation, by which potential perfection is offered humanity through ontological restoration.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, while Christianity introduces the doctrine of original sin, which upsets the world's harmony, and, as a result, increases man's sense of estrangement, it also offers

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<sup>134</sup> In the end, divine grace necessarily repudiates the cyclical notion of time for if man were destined forever to endure a disordered, *broken*, existence none would be safe from the weighty question of suicide. We see this most clearly in Camus's early writings where he refuses the notion of time as progress yet accepts the *brokenness* of the world.

the future hope of perfect reconciliation as expressed through the promise of Grace and Christ's Second Coming. Accordingly, Christianity<sup>135</sup> has played a pivotal role in enchanting human consciousness with the idea that history is on a linear forward march towards an all-pervading eruption of grace that will result in salvation and restoration.

Marked by humanity's progressive move from a state of alienation and tension to one of wholeness and satisfaction, history becomes a process whose eschatological fulfillment results with a change in human nature. This suggests that order and meaning emerge not from the high standard of self-sufficiency expressed by *arête* (or *eudaimonia*) but from the selfless patience of waiting for the promised moment when God's Grace extends throughout creation rendering all things perfect.<sup>136</sup>

History is therefore meaningful for it reflects a productive series of events, both for the individual and community, of something creative, namely, a move

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<sup>135</sup> While it is true that the notion of time as history developed before Christianity -namely through Judaism, the universalism of Christianity, first formulated by St-Paul, significantly extended its reach affecting the understanding of not only Jews but of men throughout much of the world. In other words, Christianity, through its ecumenical reach, is responsible for transforming the notion of time as history into a worldwide intellectual force.

<sup>136</sup> It must however be noted that while waiting for God's grace Christians are directed to enact Christian virtues, such as charity, faith and temperance.

toward the *eschaton*, the restoration of man's *fallen* existence and a renewal that propels creation from unfinished perfection to absolute perfection.

Undoing the Classical notion of *cosmos* and cyclical time, Christianity affirms that God created the world and exercises continual providence in human history until eventually putting an end to it. Life after death is everlasting, but existence on earth takes place within fixed and relatively short timeframe, with a beginning, middle and an end. In opposition to this Christian reading of time, the Classical perspective, as was implied earlier, maintains that history, whether personal or universal, never leads to the creation and advancement of new forms or modes of existence. Classical thought in general could not accept the idea that a thing could become *more perfect* by receiving or acquiring some quality that was not imbedded in its nature from the beginning.

Thus, affirming the essential integrity and *goodness* of the *cosmos*, the pivotal Christian doctrine of an incarnational design to redeem existence is missing from the thought of the ancient Greek philosophers; the *cosmos* is not in need of the ontological renewal or transfiguration afforded by the Incarnation of God.<sup>137</sup> The *cosmos*, in its essential principles exists from the very inception in a state of full perfection. Christian and Classical thought therefore part ways with

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<sup>137</sup> John Romanides, "Original Sin According to St. Paul," *St. Vladimir's Quarterly*, no. IV (1982): 5-28.

regard to the eschatological and historical nature of human experience and the *cosmos*. Again in the words of Florovsky :

*Usually we do not sufficiently perceive the entire significance of this transformation which Christianity introduced into the realm of Greek thought... It is sufficient to point out just a few examples: the idea of the createdness of the world, not only in its transitory and perishable aspect but also in its primordial principles. For Greek thought the idea of "created ideas" was impossible and offensive. And bound up with this was the Christian intuition of history as a unique – once-occurring – creative fulfillment, the sense of movement from an actual "beginning" up to a final "end," a feeling for history which in no way at all allows itself to be linked with the static pathos of ancient Greek thought.<sup>138</sup>*

Now returning to the Christian perspective for a moment, the paradigm of time as a movement towards renewal and restoration was given its most decisive expression in the fifth century by Saint Augustine. Augustine's thought, articulated best in the *City of God*, designated a key distinction between sacred and secular history and maintained that any progress towards the eschaton occurs solely within the realm of sacred history. The goal of progress, union with the divine, is therefore not something obtainable in this life;<sup>139</sup> the perfection of man is to be understood in a strictly transcendental sense and is possible only through the intervention of God's Grace. Displaying a guarded reserve, Saint Augustine warns that beyond the general understanding that time is divided in

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<sup>138</sup> Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works: Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century. Vol. VIII* (Belmont, Mass: Nordland Pub. Co., 1987), 32.

<sup>139</sup> With the exception of the time of Christ's historical existence.

Six Ages, beginning with the Age of Adam and concluding with the Age of Fulfillment, one cannot, from the point of view of secular history, prophetically decipher the nuanced developments of sacred history. It should, however, be noted that the subtlety and sense of prudence that pervades Augustine's writings is distinctly absent from the works of many subsequent religious/ philosophical thinkers, beginning most notably with Joachim of Flora, continuing with Hegel, and culminating in the modern era of ideology.

From the period of the High Middle Ages to the Reformation and into the Enlightenment up to the Modern Era, thinkers have increasingly adopted an apocalyptic reading of time as the basis for their interpretations of temporal political existence. This has gradually led to what Voegelin described as, "the immanentization of the Christian eschaton."<sup>140</sup> The belief that humans are utterly dependent on God's Grace for any progress towards perfection has, in other words, slowly throughout the ages been transformed and distorted into the idea of imminent secular perfection through the agency of human power.

This is most evident in the radical philosophical and political movements that crystallize throughout Europe after the French Revolution. And so, in the end, by overcoming the *cycle of time*, adhered to by Classical thinkers and

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<sup>140</sup> Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 162-166.

widening the scope of reality to include the idea of humanity's eventual perfectibility, Christianity imposes a paradigm that introduces a new set of limits and possibilities to the perennial search for order.

Dostoevsky's assessment of tyranny therefore deviates from Plato's in that, being influenced by Christian doctrine, the pathology of power he studies exhibits a fervent and distorted Christian apocalyptic expectation that goes beyond the hope of simply renewing the *dis*-functioning order of the community (a hope expressed by Callicles) and focuses on altering the order of human existence.<sup>141</sup> Specifically, Dostoevsky's work is an instance of resistance against humanity's turn towards power as it manifests itself through the perversion of the Christian notion of time as history.

Keeping this discrepancy between Plato and Dostoevsky in mind the present study will now explore *The Brothers Karamazov*, particularly Book V and VI, with the intentions of demonstrating that though the differences in form are undeniable and significant, Dostoevsky's analysis nevertheless follows Plato in concluding that personal and political disorder is the outcome of a derailed search for order and meaning. In other words, the comparison between Plato and

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<sup>141</sup> "In taking biblical apocalypse as its form, it [the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor] employs a conception of history as a present under God which moves from genesis through the Incarnation irreversibly towards the *parousia* and the Kingdom of God" (Ellis Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: a Study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor*), 239.

Dostoevsky will, I hope, bring to view the perennial elements that frustrate human attempts at order.

### Dostoevsky in Search for order

The crisis affected all Europe, for none of it had been untouched by the Revolution and Napoleon, and much of it had been as profoundly altered as France herself. . . . Europe seemed to be rushing into a yawning void. Clearly the old Europe was dead- ten centuries of civilization washed out.

- Roland N. Stromberg, *European Intellectual History Since 1789*

Absolute monarchical government and feudal privileges for the aristocracy and clergy were long considered conditions necessary for the survival and proper functioning of a polity. Yet, by the late 17<sup>00s</sup>, they created a reality that no longer responded to the people's aspirations. Dire economic circumstances accompanied by resentment of royal entitlement and excitement over new ideals of liberty confirmed that France's material and intellectual structures lost their governing authority, thus provoking an unusually fervent need to rearticulate the order of society which eventually developed into an uprising that shook Europe to its foundations obliterating the socio-cultural pillars that for centuries served as its support. Deemed anachronous and impertinent, no longer nurturing the experience of meaning required for successful political rule, traditional beliefs and practices disappeared under the

waves of chaos unleashed by the French Revolution.<sup>142</sup> Europe unshackled itself from its past and was moving forward at a nauseating speed: "The first half of the nineteenth century was the most revolutionary half-century in history up to that time. Everyone felt whirled away by the pace of change."<sup>143</sup>

Though the tumultuous events of the times provoked widespread feelings social and individual fragmentation, it remains that by abolishing the restrictive, cumbersome and arbitrary rule of kings, the Revolution inspired hope and opened opportunities in terms of reassessing the structure of society. But, as the old civilization vanished, the tenets of a new order were yet to be clearly defined and "all over Europe, men felt the need to take soundings and mark out some course."<sup>144</sup> Thus, following the Revolution was an urgent call for a comprehensive reorganization of all aspects of societal life. Personal and political order needed to be reasserted. New foundational principles that would introduce

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<sup>142</sup> "The most basic change wrought by the French Revolution (in principle, for most of Europe) was that which Henry Maine capsulized in the phrase 'from status to contract.' The Old Regime had been hierarchical, organic, inequalitarian, and corporative. Treating people neither as individuals nor as equals, it had yet contained a place for all within the society. Within fifty years of French Revolution Thomas Carlyle could develop a considerable nostalgia for it, on the grounds that the serf at least had had a protector, humble though his role was. The Revolution proclaimed equality and freedom. Men were free to make their own way; they were also free to starve. The medieval peasant had held his land and his duties by custom (status); the nineteenth century worker had lost this security, he could rise, but if he fell there was in principle no one to rescue him. From this enormous change issues a whole series of nineteenth century ideological statements. The socialist were indignant that human labor had been turned into a commodity, and claimed that 'bourgeois freedom' was only a disguise for the greater exploitation of labor. More objectively, historians pointed out that the opposition of classes had been increased, not diminished, by the abolition of the old feudal ranks of society; for now all were theoretically equal but marked off from one another by just the possession of wealth..." (Roland N. Stromberg, *European Intellectual History since 1789*, Prentice-Hall, 1975, 52).

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

a higher, more satisfying, manner of existence needed to be formulated. As a result, several innovative schools of thought demonstrating a radical rethinking of the traditional understanding of reality appeared,<sup>145</sup> and accompanying them were a number of social movements all vying for the privilege of renewing society and setting history on its proper path.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, afflicting Europe during the nineteenth century were, as Polish philosopher Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz observes, “moods of an almost chiliastic and messianic nature, of great expectations and feverish competition.”<sup>147</sup>

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821-1881) was born amidst this agitated atmosphere of uncertainty, and like most thoughtful and sensitive individuals caught in the fury of revolutionary upheaval, he embarked on a personal journey in pursuit of the true principles of order. Reminiscent of Saint Augustine who investigated and participated in the various philosophical and social movements of his time in the hopes of overcoming his personal sense of disorder, Dostoevsky wandered from one intellectual circle to another seeking

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<sup>145</sup> E.g. French Positivism, British Utilitarianism, and Hegelianism.

<sup>146</sup> For a comprehensive account of the social and political ideologies of the nineteenth century, see Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man, & Reason: a study of nineteenth-century thought* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1971); Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *Nineteenth Century Philosophy*, trans. Chester A. Kisiel, (Belmont: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1973); Roland N. Stromberg, *European Intellectual History since 1789*; Patrick L. Gardiner, ed. *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (New York: Free Press, 1968); Harold J. Foster, ed. *European Intellectual History: Bentham to Freud* (House Pub. Co., 1969). Maurice Mandelbaum was professor of Emeritus of Philosophy at Dartmouth. His works include *The Problem of Historical Knowledge an Answer to Relativism* and *The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge*. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz was a polish philosopher, historian of philosophy, historian of art and author of writings in ethics. Patrick L. Gardiner and Harold J. Foster have both published several works examining the history of thought.

<sup>147</sup> Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *Nineteenth Century Philosophy*, 15.

*rest*. Immersed in the intellectual climate of his time, Dostoevsky was first drawn to the new Christian writings of Victor Hugo, George Sand and Balzac, which he embraced as symbolic markers of humanity's coming salvation. Then, while part of a group lead by Mikhail Petrashevsky, Dostoevsky studied the systems of Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Proudhon believing they would provide the means towards a just society wherein man would achieve his completion. During this time, the young author also explored the atheistic and materialistic teachings of the Russian *intelligentsia*.<sup>148</sup> Represented by radical figures such as Herzen, Bakunin, and Belinsky, the *intelligentsia* argued that because religion, the family and property rights were instruments of a corrupt hierarchical order, and therefore obstacles to true justice, they needed to be repudiated.<sup>149</sup> However,

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<sup>148</sup> "An *intelligent* was a person of education in a country where education was rare and usually shallow, a person of essentially Western education in a Russia that was mainly non-Westernized. This tension between an *intelligent's* Russian background and European outlook almost guaranteed that he would feel torn, out-of-place, alienated, unhappy. After 1815, the intelligentsia grew impatient with the reactionary regime, and finally irreconcilably hostile to it. The word *intelligent* came to imply a liberal or radical opponent of the regime, even though many of the intelligentsia were government officials. The intelligentsia were united in their intense life of the mind, and in their opposition to the status quo, but on very little else" (Francis B. Randall, *N.G. Chernyshevskii* [New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967], 27); "The radical intellectuals were often unhistorical, rejecting all specifics, embracing only the abstract. They often saw history as a morality play between revolutionary saints and counter-revolutionary villains. All of history was a struggle between good and evil. Their approach to history was visceral; they were more concerned with judging isolated historical events than analyzing them" (Dmitry Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life 1865-1905*, Westport: Connecticut, Praeger, 1996, 103).

<sup>149</sup> For a detailed account of Dostoevsky's intellectual journey as a young man, see Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, trans. Michael Minihan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967, 114-132); Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: the seeds of revolt, 1821-1849*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 273). For a detailed account of the intellectual climate in Russia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *Road to Revolution: A century of Russian radicalism*, (New York: Macmillan), 1958; Sergei Pushkarev, *The Emergence of Modern Russia, 1801-1917*, trans. Robert H. McNeil and Tova Yedlin (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963); Dmitry Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life, 1865-1905*. Konstantin Mochulsky was an associate professor of Russian at Bard College. He has published extensively concerning various literary, religious and philosophic questions. Joseph Frank is a professor of Comparative Literature Emeritus at Princeton University and Slavic Languages and Literature Emeritus at Stanford University. His five-volume work on Dostoevsky has received great acclaim. Avrahm Yarmolinsky was head of the Slavonic Division of the New York Public Library for three

despite his sincerest efforts at finding some measure of relief from the enveloping crisis, these early wanderings resulted in a dead end. In fact, they ultimately led Dostoevsky to the uninviting prisons of Siberia.<sup>150</sup>

For the ordinary person, prison offers a life of physical and psychological hardship and deprivation, a life not conducive to thoughtful inquiry. Thus, initially, one might assume that incarceration would have prompted Dostoevsky to abandon his philosophical pursuits. Yet, in truth, prison provided a reforming and reinvigorating influence. Isolated from the rhetoric of the *intelligentsia*, Dostoevsky started to question the path he seemed to be taking. Without the persuasive Belinsky present to distract and overwhelm him with emotional appeals for drastic change, the author's mind began to focus and see through the beliefs and opinions he had come to accept.

Prison also granted Dostoevsky the opportunity of living among men who experienced *truth* not as something fabricated or detached, an object to be probed

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decades. He also taught at Columbia University. Among his published works are *The Russian Literary Imagination* and *Turgenev: The man, his art and his age*. Sergei Pushkarev is the author of *Self-Government and Freedom in Russia* and *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union: Reflections on the millennium*. Dmitry Shlapentokh is professor of history at Indiana University, South Bend. He is the author of several books, the most recent among them are *East against West, Pro-totalitarian State* and *Russia between East and West*.

<sup>150</sup> Dostoevsky was arrested and imprisoned on April 23, 1849 for his involvement in the Petrashevsky Circle. Tsar Nicholas I, having witnessed the Revolutions of 1848 in Europe, was determined to put an end to any underground movement or organization that could place his rule in jeopardy. On November 16 1849, Dostoevsky was sentenced to death. After enduring the horrors of a mock execution, his sentence was commuted to four years of exile in a prison camp in Omsk, Siberia. For a detailed account of Dostoevsky's experiences in prison, see Frank Joseph, *Dostoevsky: the years of ordeal 1850-1859* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 69-290; *Ibid.* 133-146.

and analyzed, but as a visceral and intrinsic part of their existence. The intellectuals inhabiting the secretive circles of the city failed to grasp what the peasant-convict intuitively understood -that the apprehension of *truth* does not require rational deduction but a religious and faithful disposition.<sup>151</sup> Now, the *truth* these men recognized as the source of human wholeness and meaning was that embodied by the figure of Christ. Thieves and murderers, the peasant-convicts acknowledged their transgressions which were heinous but never meant as a defiant challenge to Christ's divine authority. Despite their lack of status and education, the peasant-convicts, as Dostoevsky commentator Konstantin Mochulsky describes, possessed an uncomplicated belief "in Christ and by this faith (were) wiser than the non-believers...."<sup>152</sup> Hence, in prison, Dostoevsky gained insight into the possibility of cultivating an appreciation of *truth* unadulterated by ideological precepts and was intrigued.<sup>153</sup>

In 1860, after fulfilling his obligations to the Tsar, which included four years of prison and six years of military service, Dostoevsky returned to Saint Petersburg where he encountered a ferocious new intellectual, social, and

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<sup>151</sup> For a more detailed account of the peasant-convict's role in the regeneration of Dostoevsky's convictions, see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: the years of ordeal 1850-1859*, 116-128. Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 133-154.

<sup>152</sup> Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 154.

<sup>153</sup> "His encounter with Christ in the midst of robbers became a source of light, the beams of which overflowed through all his works after the time of penal servitude" (Ibid. , 153).

political force.<sup>154</sup> A type of radical atheistic scientific humanism “composed of a mixture of Utilitarianism, Utopian Socialism, Feuerbachian atheism, and crude mechanical materialism”<sup>155</sup> began stirring revolutionary fervor with the sole purpose of supplanting the tsarist theocratic autocracy with a socially progressive order. Compelled by the dream of salvation, driven by the expectation of an imminent unfolding of a paradisiacal realm, this new radical force, led by the young *raznochintsy*<sup>156</sup> Chernyshevsky<sup>157</sup>, displayed a deviant form of religious consciousness. “The whole movement,” Sandoz explains, “was...permeated by the glow of fanatical conviction and wholehearted

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<sup>154</sup> For an account of the intellectual climate in Russia during the 1860's, see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 160-166); Avraham Yarmolinsky, *Road to Revolution: A century of Russian radicalism*, 86-110.

<sup>155</sup> Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years 1865-1871* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>156</sup> “Who and what were the *raznochintsy*? They were the sons of priests, petty officials, impoverished landowners, sometimes serfs enfranchised or, not all of whom had managed to acquire an education and to exist in the interstices of the Russian caste system. They had been nourished on the writings of the older generation of gentry-liberals and gentry-radicals like Herzen,... but recognized as their only real ancestor and predecessor the stormy figure of “furious Vissarion” Belinsky, a *raznochintsy* like themselves, who had assimilated the rich literary and philosophical culture of the gentry but whose intransigent social behavior both shocked and delighted his noble friends by its defiance of hypocritical convention” (Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*), 162; “...the *raznochintsy*, literally ‘person of various classes,’ a term applied to those members of classes other than the gentry, usually the clergy or the minor and provincial professional and bureaucratic classes, who sought to pursue a career other than the one their background would normally indicate. Frequently they became members of the intelligentsia, usually after considerable privation. Unlike members of the gentry Schmitt as Herzen or Turgenev, who could always turn to other sources if necessary, they were entirely dependent upon their intellectual labors, whether as tutors, journalists, or writers. ... While there were factions and enmities within the intelligentsia, all its members were in principle agreed on one point: opposition to the conditions of life around them” (Ralph E. Matlaw, ed, *Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Dobrolyubov: Selected Criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton & CO., INC. 1962), viii.

<sup>157</sup> Nicolay Chernyshevsky (1828-1899), was a literary critic and enthusiastic proponent of materialist philosophy. As a journalist for *The Contemporary*, he wrote several critical commentaries on the Russia government's economic and social policies. In 1862, he was arrested and incarcerated for his radical beliefs. While in prison, he wrote the utopian novel, *What's to be done?* In it, he elaborates his deterministic, materialistic and socialist views of science, reason, rationalism and man's perfectibility. The novel had enormous influence on the radical youth of the time. For more on Chernyshevsky, see E. Lampert, *Sons Against Fathers: Studies in Russian Radicalism and Revolution* (Oxford, 1965); Francis B. Randall, *N.G. Chernyshevskii* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1996).

dedication characteristic of adherents of messianic and eschatological doctrine."<sup>158</sup>

Though Dostoevsky shared the concern for social justice that preoccupied the radicals,<sup>159</sup> he rejected their reckless projects of self-salvation as "something that was the acme of egoism, the acme of inhumanity, the acme of economic bungling and disorder, the acme of slander on human nature, the acme of destruction of every human freedom."<sup>160</sup> Troubled and frustrated, watching as false prophets preached their twisted vision of order, the author felt compelled to respond and provide an alternative. While all of Dostoevsky's major works are attempts at rearticulating the true meaning of existence, *The Brothers Karamazov* represents "the very peak of his achievement."<sup>161</sup> <sup>162</sup> The novel relates the fate of

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<sup>158</sup> Ellis Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: A study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor*, 18-19.

<sup>159</sup> "Even though the new doctrines being advocated ran squarely counter to the fundamental credo that Dostoevsky now accepted...his attitude towards the *raznochintsy* was at first by no means hostile. Quite the contrary, and whatever his disagreements, he stressed that the new generation too was inspired by a genuine love for the Russian people. ...it was only when the new generation moved from peaceful arguments in the journals to actual revolutionary agitation that he finally took a hostile stand; but even then, he never impugned their motives or the sincerity of their generous-if, in his view, totally misguided-convictions" (Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*, 7).

<sup>160</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary Volume 2: 1877-1881*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 831.

Richard Peace, *Dostoevsky: An examination of the major novels* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), 218.

<sup>162</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov* is widely recognized as the culmination of Dostoevsky's life's work and as such, forms "the summit, from which we see the organic unity of the writer's whole creative effort disclosed. Everything that he experienced, thought, and created finds its place in this vast synthesis." The novel therefore brings together various theological, philosophical, and artistic features that have already been related through previous works and thereby does not offer a distinctively new vision. One familiar with the author's earlier writings will not find anything atypical or unexpected in *The Brothers Karamazov*. For instance, Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment- 1866*), Prince Myshkin (*The Idiot- 1869*) and Bishop Tikhon (*The Devils- 1871*) anticipate the spiritual perspectives of Ivan, Alyosha and Father Zosima respectively. This being said, it is difficult to ignore the high degree of spiritual discernment and intellectual refinement that marks *The Brothers Karamazov* and which is at least partly a result of the author's close relationship with Vladimir Solovyov. During the year 1878, while working on his final novel

the Karamazov family, which is comprised of four brothers and their father. The eldest brother, Dimitri Karamazov, is a spirited and physically robust young man. Animated by a strong sense of honesty and honor, he is straightforward with his emotions and is not one to disguise his intentions. In stark contrast, Ivan Karamazov is a reclusive, almost mysterious, type. Indifferent to all around him, the young man conceals himself behind a courteous and polished demeanor. Though no one really knows much about Ivan, all know of his exceptional intellect capable of grasping even the most obscure philosophical and theological arguments.

Alyosha Karamazov is the youngest of the brothers. A devout novice at a local monastery, he is patient, caring, and thoughtful, but he is also a Karamazov and it is thus as if it is in his nature to be tempted. In addition, there is also the illegitimate Smerdyakov, whom, despite sharing the same father as the others, is not considered a member of the Karamazov household. He is a profoundly unhappy and mean-spirited person whose unpleasant temperament may be

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in Saint Petersburg, Dostoevsky attended Solovyov's lectures *On God manhood*. Deeply impressed by the young philosopher's vision of "the mystical transfiguration of the world", these lectures helped Dostoevsky focus and strengthen his religious and socio-political creed, which he then articulated throughout his work. Indeed traces of Solovyov are found in both Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov, the two spiritual and intellectual anchors of the novel. Thus as an indispensable source of inspiration, Solovyov's teachings permeate the novel and can be said to be single greatest difference between *The Brothers Karamazov* and Dostoevsky's previous work. Though his final novel explores many of the existential issues treated in the course of the author's earlier writings, it is nevertheless, "the most constructed and ideologically complete of all of Dostoevsky's works." *The Brothers Karamazov* "towers over his earlier masterpieces, and succeeds in achieving a classic expression of the great theme that had preoccupied him since *Notes from Underground*."

explained, at least partially, by the fact that he is employed as a lackey on his father's estate and is thereby obliged to address his visiting brothers as his superiors. Finally, father to all these young men is the self-proclaimed "buffoon", Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, a shrewd businessman driven by decadent desires. Locked in an intense battle with his eldest son over a woman, he becomes the victim of parricide.

At this point, it should be noted that despite the profound differences that set them apart and against one another, each member of the Karamazov family is, in his own particular way, involved in the search for a sense of existential satisfaction. Dimitri's turns towards honor, Smerdyakov's embrace of nihilism, Ivan's intellectual explorations, Fyodor Pavlovich's lust, and Alyosha's love of the divine all have the same hope: to experience a feeling of wholeness. As expressed by Sandoz: "Dostoevsky made this erotic seeking (for true order) the mainspring of his character's motivations....It is this that...gives a touch of the sublime even to such figures as Fyodor Pavlovich or Smerdyakov."<sup>163</sup>

On the most obvious level, *The Brothers Karamazov* is a criminal drama about a father's death at the hands of his sons. On this level, the main protagonist is Dimitri. Everything concerning the crime revolves around him. His actions

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<sup>163</sup> Ellis Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: A study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor*, 207.

create and stir all pivotal situations; the others simply react. However, on a more profound level, the novel is a spiritual drama that depicts a reality spoiled by human inadequacy, strained by despair and suffering, yet balanced by the promise of deliverance and redemption. Thus, as a spiritual drama, the novel hovers between the conviction that everything in the world is revocable and the hope for eternal fulfillment; it strives to convey the various intricacies of man's struggle to gain insight into the meaning of historical existence and the claims placed on it by the experience of the divine. Fyodor Pavlovich's murder, which metaphorically represents the human tendency to sin, is therefore the means through which Dostoevsky chooses to explore the trials that define the unsettling problem of order. On this level, the spotlight shuns Dimitri and shines on his brothers, Ivan and Alyosha.

While the psychological pressures surrounding the struggle for true order are present throughout the novel, they noticeably come to the fore and take dramatic relief in Part 2, Book V (*Pro and Contra*), and Book VI (*A Russian Monk*).<sup>164</sup> These Books, which reveal the tense mood preceding Fyodor Pavlovich's murder, focus on the personalities of Ivan and Alyosha and provide the reader with vivid images of the key assumptions that structure Dostoevsky's thoughts concerning personal and political renewal. The need to experience a

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<sup>164</sup> Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 605; Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, 570.

genuine sense of wholeness that troubles every individual and every community is thus played out between two of the Karamazov brothers, the only two who can truly, and without qualification, be described as brothers.

In a discreet manner, the novel seems to draw Ivan and Alyosha together, firstly, through the fact that unlike the other young men fathered by Fyodor Pavlovich, Ivan and Alyosha share also the same mother, Sofia. Secondly, through the fact that among the multitude of figures that are present throughout the novel, they, and only they, come together to form the work's spiritual and intellectual climax. Thus, the subtle detail of their common parentage, although easily overlooked, symbolically suggests that the brothers are bound by something that sets them apart from others. One can in fact argue that their unique biological relationship is meant to intimate a deeper existential relationship defined by, on the one hand, their father, whose self-indulgent, vile and brutish behavior represents gravity's pull towards the dark mechanics of historical necessity, and on the another hand, by the pure, beautiful and innocent daughter of a deacon, Sofia,<sup>165</sup> who symbolizes the graceful counter-pull of the eternal. As their children, Ivan and Alyosha are inextricably linked for they partake in both extremes; the brothers inhabit the *broken*, contingent and

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<sup>165</sup> In this instance, the name Sofia is a likely reference to the Greek *sophia* (Σοφία) meaning *wisdom* and she serves to reflect the image of a Christ-like figure who symbolizes and imparts the wisdom of absolute goodness and whose life story, specifically the story of her early tragic death caused by the torment and tyranny she endured at the hands of Fyodor Pavlovich, conveys and confirms the limited tolerance, time and space, allotted the representative of absolute goodness on earth.

disordered time-bound world personified by their father, yet, they strive for the perfection, order and promise of wholeness embodied by the selfless Christian goodness of their mother. Thus, although supported and guided by the image of unqualified goodness offered by their mother, the brothers are incessantly challenged by the patterns of viciousness and bestiality assumed by their father. D.H. Lawrence therefore misreads Dostoevsky's intention when he argues that Ivan alone is the pivotal figure of the novel while Alyosha is merely an offset to his older brother.<sup>166</sup> Because the author uses them to compositively canvas the possibilities (Sofia) and limitations (Fyodor Pavlovich) that encompass the search for order and meaning, one cannot focus exclusively on one figure, be it Ivan or Alyosha, and claim to understand Dostoevsky's intentions.

And so, while one brother chooses to embrace Christ and the other atheistic humanism, they are the same *type*, one whose existence is defined by both a profound need to experience an order of *goodness* (Sofia) and a loathing for *brokenness* and disorder (Pavlovich). In much the same manner that both Socrates the philosopher and Callicles the potential tyrant seek to experience the *good* life, even though they go about it in different ways, Ivan and Alyosha are equivalent human types endeavoring to achieve the same existential goals but through

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<sup>166</sup>D. H. Lawrence "Preface to Dostoevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor*," in *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Rene Wellek, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 97.

divergent means. The ideas each espouse, though different in outlook, flow from the same need for a sense of meaning engendered by an intense experience of disorder. Plagued by feelings of crisis, both Ivan and Alyosha are seized by moments of spiritual unrest, which express themselves through questions of *truth* and purpose. Hence, in their disquietude over surrounding instances of historical turmoil, the brothers are the same; Ivan's hate of God is roused by the same concerns that nurture Alyosha's love of God. The differences between the brothers are not found in the experiences they endure but in their response to these experiences.

Still, the fact that one assumes the position of a rebellious atheist while the other follows the path of a devout novice reveals that in addition to symbolizing man's search for the *good* life, each brother also symbolizes a distinct instance of this search. Alyosha's portrays the possibility of humanity's apprehension of divine order, and, as such, typifies one who seeks solace through the experience of open and faithful participation within the process of divine revelation. Ivan's search, on the other hand, develops into a rebellious attitude that refuses the mediation of God. Ivan, therefore, reveals that, like any other search, the search for order holds no promises; it can at anytime derail, foster a spiritually confused and disordered disposition, encourage a turning away from the world, and give birth to disastrous personal and, eventually, political consequences. And so,

while the brothers begin from the same mark, they in the end part ways. But, before they embark upon their separate paths, they meet in the dining room of a local inn. Chance as this encounter is, it proves to be an opportunity for Ivan and Alyosha to become better acquainted.

The Grand Inquisitor: the pathology of power as solution

A conversation with Dimitri was the prize sought and the reason why Ivan and Alyosha coincidentally find themselves at the dining room of The Capital City Inn, yet the eldest of the Karamazov brothers has eluded them both and is nowhere in the vicinity. His absence though is not without significance for it will occasion a discussion that will evolve into a diagnosis of the underlying issues surrounding the perennial problem of order. Thus while their meeting was unplanned, the brothers nevertheless warmly greet each other. Circumstances kept them apart for most of their lives. They are nothing but strangers now. Nonetheless, even if it is simply for a few moments, an air of brotherly affection seems to surface and envelop the two men.

There are therefore no feelings of animosity or rivalry. The reigning atmosphere is one of goodwill. Indeed, so pleasant is the mood between the brothers that Ivan relaxed and good humored, will soon lower his guard and for the first time reveal himself. The young man has never really expressed his deepest thoughts or bared his true intentions to anyone. Apprehensive and distrustful, Ivan drifts through life "*silent as the grave.*" In Alyosha, however, he

finds his *father confessor*. Desperately seeking to partake in the sense of contentment that seems to permeate Alyosha's being, Ivan will undress his soul hoping that the novice will help slay the demons of doubt that gnaw at him. Despite his often callous and malicious demeanor, Ivan is not a scoundrel possessed by a demented mind bent on perversion. He is not an intellectual charlatan, a self-righteous atheist. His desire is not to reduce everything to *nothingness*, but to find stable ground upon which he can rest his anxieties. There will therefore be no attempt to deceive the other into accepting one's point of view. The discussion that will follow will be sincere and frank.

Compelled by a state of despair inspired by the belief that there is no possible cure for his feelings of spiritual diremption and alienation, Ivan begins his confession by immediately broaching the matter of suicide. The issue, in other words, is not whether the experience of order is possible and through which means; that issue, as far as Ivan is concerned, has been explored and resolved. Being nothing more than a series of meaningless calamities, life, Ivan has determined, is irredeemable. Hence, the only question pestering the young man, the one that he contemplates with despair, is whether to endure the turmoil of existence when there is no reason to do so. In truth, if one accepts Ivan's nihilistic conclusion, suicide is the only question that can be raised. Many in Western Europe try frantically to shelter themselves from this truth. In a

desperate attempt to satisfy their longing for true order, they formulate speculative constructions hoping to infuse existence with a purpose whose end will grant humanity an all-pervading sense of fulfillment. But regardless of what they choose to believe, their world is but a graveyard.<sup>167</sup>

This passage clearly brings to focus the disparity between Dostoevsky's symbol of disorder (Ivan) and the one formulated by Plato (Callicles); in truth, it explains why a figure such as Ivan could never exist in a Platonic dialogue. For though both understand the *cosmos* as chaos, Callicles does not exhibit Ivan's profound and agonizing despair. Defined as the deliberate and absolute abandonment of all hope of salvation and inspired by the belief that humanity's sins are too great to ever be absolved, despair is not a passive state of mind but involves a resolute act of will by which a person decidedly and intentionally gives up any expectation of ever reaching the *good* life. These feelings of despair do not trouble Socrates for as previously stated they are the outcome of the deeper, more intense, sense of disorder that emerges from the Christian teachings regarding the contingency of creation and the *fallenness* of man through the voluntary involvement in sin. That is to say, through Christianity man

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<sup>167</sup> "You know, I've been wanting to go to Western Europe and that's where I'll go from here. Oh, I know that going there is like going to a graveyard, but it's a glorious graveyard, I tell you! The dead who lie under the stones there are dear to me, and every gravestone speaks of their ardent lives, of human achievements, of their passionate faith in the purpose of life, the truth they believe in...and I know in advance that I'll prostrate myself and kiss those stones...although the whole time I'll be fully aware that it's only a graveyard and nothing more" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 276).

develops a greater awareness of the world's *fallen* nature, thus resulting in an acute sense of disorder that at times manifests itself in despair. With the advent of Christian doctrine, and particularly its valorization of free will, the source of true order and meaning becomes less accessible and disorder more present -the gap between true order and disorder widens; the result is despair, which when taken to the extreme develops into nihilism.

Nevertheless, despite his overwhelming feelings of doubt, Ivan hopes that with the help of his youth he will be able to substitute pleasure for purpose and successfully fend off the despair that calls for his life. Though Ivan realizes that pleasure can never grant him the experience of satisfaction he seeks, thanks to his youth, he may yet possess the strength to combat the anxiety of living a futile and hopeless existence. But as the years accumulate, as Ivan approaches his thirtieth birthday, his strength will begin to wane and ultimately fail. Youth can be roused by the beauty of a spring day and can become excited over the promise of bodily pleasure. Youth, however, fades and what then? The thoughtless embrace of life's pleasures distract the mind, but once all the pleasurable games have been played and are over, once these games become boring and their numbing effect wears off, one begins to wonder and ponder the meaning of existence. At that point, the absurdity of it all becomes evident and life becomes an intolerable burden. Even so, it may be possible to carry on beyond one's

youth, but to do so would require one to emulate Fyodor Pavlovich's unruly ways and continue feeding on the fruits of sensuality; a demeaning proposition as far as Ivan is concerned.

Clearly, the argument offered in the *Gorgias* and articulated by Callicles regarding the value of pleasure does not persuade Ivan. While the rhetorician views pleasure as the finest solution to the problem of order, Ivan determinedly dismisses it as grossly inadequate. This once again can be explained by the heightened feelings of despair provoked by the Christian belief concerning the *broken* state of the world, which results in the lack of a natural hierarchical set of priorities. Ivan cannot adopt the answer suggested by Callicles for, as a consequence of the vacillations that Christianity gives attention to, his sense of disorder possesses a degree of severity and intensity that exceeds anything experienced by the rhetorician. And so, while pleasure might be enough to provide Callicles with a solution to questions of meaning, it does not begin to address Ivan's concerns. Ivan cannot, therefore, be his father's son.<sup>168</sup> He does not want to assume a place among the *herd*. The turn towards the thrill of bodily pleasure as a process of self-fulfillment and self-validation, in the end, will fail. Though rejected by Christianity, which encourages fortitude and obedience to God, suicide is regarded by Ivan as the only dignified response to the

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<sup>168</sup> Interestingly, it seems that in this instance, Callicles' spirit of rebellion is embodied by Fyodor.

undignified fact of being thrown into an existence that holds no promise of purpose.

It should be noted that though blunt, and arguably overwrought, Ivan's tract on suicide is not inspired by a willful need to shock or transgress. In this instance, suicide is held up as an act of authenticity and protest, an indication that Ivan will not concede or conform to the enveloping disorder embodied by his father's behavior. As contradictory and twisted as it might appear, suicide expresses Ivan's resolute need for true order; so intense is the young man's need for true order that he would rather die than not have it. Ivan's paradoxical frame of mind is perfectly described by Saint Augustine's claim that those who deliberately kill themselves do not seek non-existence but rather a feeling of eternal peace and happiness.<sup>169</sup>

Thus, strangely enough, Ivan's stance against the lower forms of pleasure seems identical to the one adopted by Socrates. Interpreting the life of base pleasures as a desperate and foolish attempt at experiencing a complete sense of wholeness, both Ivan and Socrates would prefer to die than assume such a life. Still, it must be mentioned that although both men protest against the turn towards immediate pleasure, each protest is fuelled by a different motive and

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<sup>169</sup> Saint Augustine, *On Free Will*, 3.8.

takes on a different form. Socrates denounces Callicles' argument with the intent of directing attention towards the true and only source of meaning, while Ivan's rejection of pleasure is meant as a rejection of the very possibility of meaning. Socrates behaves like a martyr, a witness to *truth*, who would rather submit to wrongful punishment than deny his testimony. On the other hand, Ivan, gripped by despair, relinquishes all hope of salvation and contemplates suicide.

Now concerning suicide, Christian doctrine explains that by destroying a thing, one behaves as though one possesses full and independent authority over it. Man, however, does not enjoy such authority in relation to his life. Only God has dominion over that which he created. Accordingly, unless ordered by God (as in the case of Samson), suicide, regardless of the particular situation, always expresses a resolute presumption and denial of redemption and is an act of rebellion driven by a lust for powers that belong strictly to God, thus usurping the divine.<sup>170</sup> Ivan's stance is therefore an expression of a particular pathological urge towards power. Although Ivan experiences a despair that escape Callicles, and although he rejects the suggestion of pleasure offered by the rhetorician, both nevertheless share a fundamental and irrefutable commonality; in their search for principles of true order, both repudiate the eternal and turn decisively

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<sup>170</sup> Saint Augustine, *City of God*, I. 17-27.

towards power. The pathology plaguing Ivan and Calicles though dissimilar in form is equivalent in substance.

But before he surrenders himself to suicide, Ivan tries to find a credible cause to accept life. "I want to live and go on living...Even if I don't believe in the divine order of things, the sticky young leaves emerging from their buds in the spring are dear to my heart...I love those sticky little leaves in the spring and the blue sky."<sup>171</sup> Alyosha construes his brother's confession of love as confirmation that though his mind is muddled, he is on the right path. To affirm life however it comes is the required first step in appreciating its meaning. In order to understand the created order, one must first be receptive and assume an attitude of openness. Ivan's proclamation of love is then assumed by Alyosha to reveal the hope that life can be redeemed. But as will soon be revealed, the novice has overestimated the strength of Ivan's attachment to life and has not fully grasped the depth of his brother's anguish.

Ivan suddenly shifts focus and asks Alyosha if he by chance came across Dimitri during the day. Alyosha responds that he did not but that while looking to find their older brother he encountered Smerdyakov. The mere mention of the lackey's name infuriates Ivan and sours the mood. Visibly irritated by his

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<sup>171</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 265.

surroundings and by the developing state of affairs, Ivan coldly announces that he will soon leave town. He does not care about what happens to either Dimitri or his father. Their fate is not his concern. "I'm not my brother Dimitri's keeper," he declares.

Fuelling this defiance against others and the obligations they place upon us is the belief that there are no limits or boundaries, that there is no moral law or divine reason, and that men are merely isolated beings with no natural connectedness to one another. In this context, the statement "I am not my brother's keeper" is more than merely an expression of vice or viciousness. It announces that the matter of other people's wellbeing is not a legitimate influence or constrain on the individual's ability to act. The difference between what is "appropriate" and "inappropriate" is therefore not to be decided on the bases of some universal communal principle, but subjectively by the individual according to his personal immediate desires. In other words, any and every act can be viewed at some particular moment by some particular person as being "appropriate"; this seems to inevitably lead to the nihilistic premise that "*all is permitted.*" And so, Ivan need not interfere or guide Dimitri in the *right* direction, for the simple reason that there is no *right* direction. There is no obligation to

conform to the rules of *right* conduct for there is no such thing as *right* conduct.<sup>172</sup>

Ivan is not his brother's keeper because *all is permitted* and nothing his brother does really matters, even if it is parricide. No justification is needed or even possible. From the standpoint of Ivan's spiritual perspective, there is simply no cause for him to assume responsibility for the welfare of either his brother or father.

Spawned by a profound sense of disorder roused by a reality that allows for horrific cruelty and indiscriminate suffering, Ivan's abdication of human *brotherhood* conveys the feeling that there is something fundamentally uneven and unjust about the way reality is structured. Loaded with intensity, Ivan's words informs the reader of the profound mood of hopelessness that rages within the individual who, unable to recognize any order or purpose in the cosmos, feels himself to have been thrown into existence. The creature who despairs over his creator's deeds is one who questions the limits placed by divine authority and declares that *all is permitted* hence preparing the ground for an existential battle between He who has given life and him who has received it. Through Ivan's brief statement, Dostoevsky reveals the frame of mind and the

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<sup>172</sup> Of course, this is true only in the absence of a "Leviathan" type of authority hence the importance, according to Ivan, of a tyrannical figure like the Grand Inquisitor.

spiritual disposition of a person who, out of a sense of despondency, has broken away from, and opposes, the eternal order of things.

Though the suggestion that *all is permitted* probably strikes many as excessive and perverse, it is particularly repugnant to one, such as Dostoevsky, nurtured and educated within a decidedly Eastern Orthodox environment. Briefly stated, Ivan's position is that reality reflects man's immediate sense of power and that, in the end, each determines for himself the difference between good and evil. Ivan thus puts forth a notion of selfhood that provides man the power of unimpeded choices, choices that are prompted by nothing other than the individual's arbitrary affirmations of will. Accordingly, humans are not determined by any greater purpose that they have not chosen for themselves, nor do they have responsibilities to any larger communities, except those they chose to join.

In direct conflict with this understanding of power and selfhood is the Eastern Orthodox belief that human fulfillment is utterly dependent on God as He reveals Himself through the various relationships that thrive within the well-balanced and healthy community. Our humanity flourishes, in other words, not through the exercise of uninhibited power but by freely embracing the obligations that characterize and define communal existence. These obligations

are not *chosen*, in Ivan's sense of the term, but are developed through an elaborate network of mutual friendship and family. The teachings of renowned Orthodox theologian and Dostoevsky commentator Nicholas Berdyaev explain that:

*Personality must not be confused with mere individuality or autonomy. Personhood is relational and depends upon being in community with others. Human beings are fully human to the extent that they are in community and that their social existence reflects the perfect communion of the three divine persons through participation in the divine life that God has made possible in Jesus Christ.*<sup>173</sup>

Therefore, from Dostoevsky's Orthodox Christian perspective the notion that *all is permitted* is simply a human created illusion. In reality, there is never the possibility of unrestrained power; there is only the choice of acquiescing or struggling against one's communal, moral, religious obligations. The fact that this deep-seeded Russian teaching has failed to register with his brother saddens Alyosha. The joy that first permeated the scene has evaporated into a cloud of gloom that now dangles over the young novice's head.

Ivan continues his dissertation about life's absurdity by expressing his annoyance with the Russian youths who spend all their leisure time discussing

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<sup>173</sup> Vigen Guroian, "Berdyaev (1874-1948)" in *The Teachings of Modern Orthodox Christianity on Law, Politics and Human Nature*, ed. John Witte Jr. & Frank S. Alexander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 119.

“eternal verities, such as God and the immortality of the soul.” Echoing Socrates in section 461d of the *Gorgias*, Alyosha replies that this need to understand exhibited by the young is a sign of spiritual and intellectual excellence. Unlike the older generation, which has turned its attention towards the “practical” dealings of business, thus enjoying a false sense of wholeness in the realm of finite goods, the young resiliently continue their search for genuine meaning. Unimpressed, Ivan dismissively answers that all philosophical pursuits, especially those focusing on God’s existence, are a “stupid” waste of time. Ivan’s own experience proves this. The young can continue to search, but the contentment they seek will always elude them. Nevertheless, in order to satisfy his brother, Ivan agrees to explore the question of God’s existence using it as the starting point for his rebellion.

Ivan begins by declaring that while the notions of God and divine purpose are beyond the grasp of reason, he is willing to accept the possibility of their reality. Ivan wants to embrace God, he wants to share in his brother’s sense of conviction, and yet something about the state of creation prevents him. Thus, to imitate Alyosha and accept God as the source of human fulfillment would only be an exercise in self-deception. Attempting to explain the motive behind his rebellion, Ivan invites his brother to examine the suffering inflicted upon children. One can understand the suffering of adults. They have tasted the apple

and have sinned. The pain they endure is justified. But what of the blameless children how does one validate the suffering they regularly experience?

With a restless and troubled frame of mind, the young man turns to a catalogue of cruelty he previously assembled and begins to chronicle heart wrenching moments of child abuse. He starts by describing the gruesome details of how a group of Turkish soldiers once pitilessly shot an infant child in the face while being held by its helpless mother. Such horrible acts can however be dismissed as being perpetrated by savage foreigners; such behavior can be expected from non-Christians. Still, the issue of child abuse cannot be explained away so easily. For when it comes to inflicting cruelty, Europeans, those highly cultured people so well admired by Russian high-society, are on equal footing with the Turks. Their methods, to be sure, are different, less primitive, but the result is the same. Although they say that in Europe a person can no longer beat another, this should not be interpreted to mean that Europeans have overcome their appetite for cruelty, but only that they have refined its expression and have given it an air of righteousness. The story of a young man named Richard perfectly illustrates this point.

As a child, Richard was beaten and starved. As a man, he became a thief and murderer. In due time, the authorities caught, convicted, and sentenced him

to death. Once in prison, a flock of pastors visited Richard eventually converting him to Christianity. Happy with their achievement, happy to have rehabilitated a murderous heathen, the pastors congratulated themselves. However when the opportunity presented itself, these Christians behaved in a most un-Christian fashion. As Richard's day of execution came round, no compassion or forgiveness was forthcoming. The man who suffered as a child was once more made the victim of cruelty. Yet this instance of malevolence can again be excused and dismissed as a foreign trait. In truth, what else does one expect from so-called "enlightened" Europeans who accept new heresies and discard the true Christian creed? Ivan will now however begin to relate instances of "home-grown" cruelty. This time, the tortures will not be savage Turks or heretical Europeans but fellow Russians. Moreover, the aggressors will not be soldiers or strangers. This time, the tales will be of children suffering at the hands of their parents. Those who, to a greater degree than others, are deemed to personify Christ-like gratuitous love, those divinely ordained to protect and cherish, will be the ones shown to violate and ravage.

A well-respected Russian couple is in the habit of whipping their little seven-year-old girl. Desiring to inflict the greatest degree of pain, the parents rummage through the surrounding bushes searching for a twig with sturdy knots. Having chosen the appropriate tool for their task, the beating begins and

the screams ring out. As chance would have it, these torture sessions become known and the couple is brought to court. The case though is quickly dismissed. While it condemns Richard, a man who repented his sins, the law condones a father who unashamedly beat his child; the disordered state of the society as a whole is exposed. While Alyosha is noticeably disturbed by his brother's narrations, Ivan is not done. There is one more story he needs to impart.

He begins to explain that one day, an eight-year-old boy, immersed in play, inadvertently hurt the leg of a prized dog. It happened that this dog belonged to a retired General, who, noticing the animal's laborious walk, demanded an explanation. His servants provided an account of what occurred and identified the eight-year-old boy as the one responsible for causing the injury. The child was promptly taken from its mother and presented to the General who then placed the boy in detention. In the morning, the youngster was marched towards an open field, where his accuser, accompanied by a large number of hounds, waited. The boy was then stripped of his clothes and directed to run. Of course, the victim's run simply served as a formality that added to the spectacle's excitement. For in all honesty, there was never any possibility of escape. No matter how fast the youngster ran nothing would have changed, his fate was sealed. Even so, the directive was obeyed and the boy dashed for his life. The General then turned to his dogs and roared out a command to give

chase. In a matter of seconds, the dogs reached their horror-stricken prey tearing him to pieces, devouring his flesh.

Where, Ivan asks, is God in all this? What part does he play? Maybe He is indifferent and does not play any part, but then what kind of God is able to witness the atrocities described and remain unconcerned? It is sometimes argued that human affliction draws man closer to God; yet this does not satisfy. It does not help one understand why reality is set up in such a way, why knowledge of God requires child abuse, but if things must be thus, then Ivan rebels. If suffering is necessary in order to know God, then Ivan wants to remain estranged. Evidently, as Camus observes, Ivan's "rebellion expresses a nostalgia for innocence,"<sup>174</sup> a longing to return to a *pre-fall* state of perfection and wholeness; the young man's rebellion is one that attempts to place order, justice and unity in an opposing and superior position to God. This anticipates the Grand Inquisitor's claim that adherence to God's teachings cannot provide an adequate foundation for human historical order.

It can be argued that from a Platonic perspective, human suffering results from acts of injustice caused by human vanity, rapacity and a will to power, which in turn are caused by misunderstanding or ignorance of what is truly *good*.

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<sup>174</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, (Translated by Anthony Bower. New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 105.

Again, as Camus observes, in the Classical thinker's "universe there are more mistakes than crimes."<sup>175</sup> Experiences of suffering therefore reveal moments of human error that can be remedied by acquiring the right kind of knowledge, i.e., wisdom. As a result, the phenomenon of suffering does not occupy a significant place in Plato's writings for it does not categorically define or determine human reality; suffering reveals little of what it is to be truly human.<sup>176</sup> Christianity however ascribes intrinsic value to suffering through the notion of original sin. Neither the result of a meaningless arbitrary force at work throughout reality nor the product of some evil spirit, the suffering that humanity endures reflects a *fallen* nature that often prefers a *good* of one's own free choosing to the highest *good*, i.e., God. Accordingly, suffering occurs as a consequence of the inherent human tendency to sin and as such discloses something fundamental about the human condition. The fact that Ivan ardently renounces Christianity's validation of suffering reveals the core essence of his rebellion against God, which he fully articulates later on through the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*.

Still, regardless of the fact that Ivan doubts whether anything could ever redeem the anguish caused by human cruelty, anger stirs and needs to be expressed. The young man suggests that maybe the General should have been

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>176</sup> In fact, from the classical perspective, the prudent man, through the exercise of his prudence, can avoid falling into situations where he might experience suffering.

shot if only to satisfy the indignation inspired by such a grisly crime. Though nothing would be gained, though nothing would change, though the boy's body would remain lifeless, even so, maybe the General should have been put to death. Already in a state of spiritual bewilderment, the details of this last story prove too much for Alyosha. Passions have been inflamed to an uncontrollable degree. The temptation is unbearable. The young novice can no longer relate to the reality he once loved. The images of chaos conjured up by Ivan have successfully eclipsed God from Alyosha's view and, in the end, the novice betrays his creed and concurs that the General deserves execution. Entering in league with his older brother, Alyosha refuses the possibility of redemption. Ivan's argument has been confirmed; reality is hopelessly disordered, truth is impossible.

Failing the trial of faith, Alyosha, in this instance, highlights the Christian image of man as a weak and *fallen* creature. Unlike Socrates who, understanding reality as something that falls within the reasonably certain realm of nature, holds steadily to his post, Alyosha's world rests on the uncertain ground of grace and a faith easily lost.<sup>177</sup> Dealing with constant, permanent and divine realities, Classical thinkers such as Plato suggest that some limited insight into the

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<sup>177</sup> Yet it should be noted that Alyosha's faith expresses a restless questioning and should not be confused with the complacent or presumptuous attitude identified with the Socratic notion of *opinion* or *belief*.

workings of these realities is possible through the use of the human reason. The Christian theology espoused by Alyosha is also concerned with a constant, permanent, divine reality and its relations with man, and it also attempts to give as complete an account of this reality as is possible for the human mind.

However, it insists that, because of human imperfection, all certainties are beyond the grasp of the unaided human intelligence and that in order to acquire even a partial understanding of truth, humans need God's help in the form of grace. Thus, because he is a *fallen* creature dependent on another for his happiness, man, on his own, is prone to profound doubts that prompt him to backslide; as demonstrated by Alyosha's endorsement of murder, man's fundamental *weakness* constantly threatens to undermine his faith and convictions.

Aroused by his brother's apparent loss of faith, Ivan continues to rage. The world is nothing more than a collection of random occurrences, he argues. The absurd reality that children are victims of torture precludes the prospect of meaning and negates the possibility of an omnipresent, omnipotent, and benevolent being. But, say, for the sake of argument, that the theories are right, say that history is a bloody struggle but that at some point history will end and perfect order unfold, the question persists: why must history be a bloody struggle in the first place? Why must good come forth from suffering? Even if the

good eventually materializes, the scars vanish and the wounds heal, the cruelty that caused them in the first place will always remain. Children have suffered and nothing, neither forgiving nor punishing the tormentors, can alter that fact.

Simply put, Ivan's confession is devoted to investigating whether innocent sufferers experience any profit that could possibly redeem their suffering. After pondering the question, the young man decides that nothing can excuse such cases of suffering. The suffering of the innocent offers no advantage that could not be revealed without such suffering. The promise of a future paradise fails to address Ivan's needs. The damage done during the course of history is too severe. The surrounding chaos has crushed Ivan's will to live. Not the result of abstract rationalization, the logical conclusion to a theoretical argument, Ivan's rebellion expresses an experience of crisis that is firmly rooted in the horrific reality of human suffering. Serving as a symbol of spiritual atrophy, Ivan resists any enticement to turn towards God and delves within himself, determinedly withdrawing from the created world. Overcome by the spirit of absolute negation and despair, the young man returns his *ticket*.<sup>178</sup>

Alyosha, dispirited and downtrodden, remarks that Ivan's stance is rebellion, but would he, in all truth, oppose his older brother and consent to a

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<sup>178</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 295.

paradise founded on human pain. Would Alyosha allow the torture of even one innocent child so that one day humanity may live in eternal peace? Admittedly, he would not. Thus if Ivan is a rebel so too is Alyosha; Ivan has seemingly transmitted his disease of despair to his younger brother. However, suddenly and rather unexpectedly, as though regaining his strength and focus, Alyosha evokes Christ.

Ivan's words attempt to betray the world as irredeemably shattered, yet he has overlooked Christ, the symbol of reconciliation and the true ordering force of history. In Him, saint and sinner, truth and suffering, heaven and earth, the historical and the eternal come together in perfect unity. The sadistic cruelty of His death brings to view the hate, terror and evil that defines the human ordeal of suffering but it also symbolizes the means of redemption and sets in motion a heavenly plan in which all things eventually will be made new. And so, the figure in whom the trial of suffering is overcome is not some fabulous, recondite, inaccessible, abstract heavenly figure but one that, while plunged into the furnace of life's agonies, cries out in anguish, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" These words reveal that the crisis of meaning is resolved when, in the midst of experiencing human agony, Christ cries not in rebellion but in need to reinforce His union with the Father. One of the most significant features of Eastern Christianity is its emphasis upon the salvific value of Christ's

suffering as redeeming the whole of creation.<sup>179</sup> Hence, the God-man unites what had previously been pushed apart. His pain and sacrifice serves to bolster the communion between all things, particularly between the human and the Divine,<sup>180</sup> and thus changes all assumptions about the inherent evil of suffering.

This spontaneous and reasoned turn towards Christ represents Alyosha's strongest stance against Ivan's despair, and yet, produces no effect. Unmoved by his brother's sudden burst of excitement, Ivan assures Alyosha that he has not forgotten Him. How could he when His sufferings are constantly flaunted and offered as an answer to all that is wrong in the world. The young man has long recognized His unique appeal. He has pondered His words and deeds but remains incredulous. Because the common person cannot bear the absurdity of meaningless suffering, he gives it meaning by formulating comforting illusion.

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<sup>179</sup> This underlines the Christian notion that the cosmos is one and not dualistic.

<sup>180</sup> This brings to mind a notion that marks an interesting difference between Western and Eastern Christianity -namely, the Orthodox notion of "*theosis*". In the Western churches, sin, grace, and salvation are viewed principally in legal terms. God granted humans freedom, they misused it and worked against God's Word, and as a result warrant punishment (in fact, this view underlies Ivan's interpretation of disorder). God's grace results in forgiveness of the transgression and freedom from bondage and punishment. According to the Eastern Church, humans were created in the image of God and made to participate fully in the divine life. The full communion with God that Adam and Eve experienced meant absolute freedom and true fulfillment. In other words, humans experience a true sense of wholeness when they are completely united with God. Sin, then, is explained as an obscuring of the image of God, the presence of a barrier between God and man. Accordingly, salvation is a process not of justification or legal pardon, but of re-establishing man's communion with God. This process of restoring the unity of human and divine is sometimes called "deification" or "*theosis*". This term does not mean that humans become gods but that humans join fully with God's divine life.

Interpreting Christ as such an illusion, Ivan has prepared a response. Approximately a year or so ago, during an intense moment of inspiration, Ivan composed a poem. While he has jealously guarded its content and kept his work a secret, the young man judges that the exceptional nature of the situation merits a recital. In response to his brother's description of a hopelessly *broken* world, Alyosha references the promise of Christ's return. Ivan will now offer his own version of the Second Coming, one that will not end in reconciliation. It is worthwhile noting that the novel's climax and ideological center is in the form of a tale, a poem. This of course is not the result of accident but is intentional and reveals, as theologian/philosopher George Grant observes, that Dostoevsky understood that "the supernatural is beyond the range of art. It can be suggested, evoked, hinted at, but never directly possessed and embodied."<sup>181</sup> Like Plato, when it comes time to turn the reader's attention away from the historical and towards the eternal, Dostoevsky breaks off from the previous flow of conversation and delivers a salutary tale that allegorically summarizes but fully conveys the breadth of his insight and his masterfully grasp of the philosophical issue at hand.

Recognized as a seminal piece of writing in various fields of study, the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, needless to say, has been subject of many readings

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<sup>181</sup> George Grant, *Dostoevsky* in *Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 2 (1951-1959)*, ed. Arthur Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 417.

and interpretations.<sup>182</sup> The present study will attempt to situate itself by commenting on the interpretation offered by Bruce K. Ward in his book entitled, *Dostoevsky's Critique of the West: the quest for earthly paradise*.<sup>183</sup> This work was chosen in particular because it possesses a strong political dimension, and because it seems to have the same objective as the present work, namely, to elucidate Dostoevsky's diagnosis of the causes of personal and political disorder.

Briefly stated, Ward explains the *Legend* as predominantly a critique of western ideas and ideologies (p3-7). Though it conveys several important details and arguments, the problem with such an interpretation is that it pushes to the background and fails to recover the underlying experiences behind all symbolic ideological constructs. Though it is accurate to maintain that the Russian author expresses, through his *Legend*, a profound unease concerning the intellectual abstractions and philosophical systems brewing in the west, the goal of the present study is to draw on Dostoevsky's writing and delve past the level of "ideologies" in order to highlight the experiences that reveal these as expressions of a destructive pathology of power. Dostoevsky's analysis of disorder cannot therefore be limited to the battle between ideologies; his work is carried out on the level of *philosophia perennis*, and on this level, the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*

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<sup>182</sup> For a concise summary of the scope of critical views concerning the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" see Roger L. Cox, *Between earth and heaven: Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and the meaning of Christian tragedy*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

<sup>183</sup> Bruce K. Ward, *Dostoevsky's Critique of the West: the quest for earthly paradise*, (Wilfred Laurier university Press, 1986).

is in its essence a “critique” of the persistent human tendency to rebel against the eternal and embrace the principle of power through the dictum that *all is permitted*. The interpretation of Ivan’s poem adopted by the present study is reinforced by Mochulsky’s observation that,

*The legend’s symbolism consists of many levels: on the surface lies an exposure of the “Antichrist” principle of the Roman Church and contemporary Socialism. But this... condemnation...is only the exterior veil of the religious myth. Beneath it, lies concealed a most profound investigation of the metaphysical meaning of... power.* <sup>184 185</sup>

In short, institutions and ideologies are derivative fabrications. The key driving force behind the Grand Inquisitor’s “western formulation”, and thus Dostoevsky’s primary concern, is to warn against the dangers associated with a derailed pathological disposition towards power. Indeed, as Henri de Lubac points out<sup>186</sup>, this is the basic difference between Dostoevsky’s critique of the west and the one articulated by Nietzsche. Moreover, Ward’s focus on mere

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<sup>184</sup> Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 619-620. Ellis Sandoz also assesses Dostoevsky as one who was acutely aware of how power can control and sway human existence. According to Sandoz, Dostoevsky astutely understood that, “If by perversion it [power] is itself mistaken for the end of action in an absolute sense, then it can only serve the unregulated gratification of the base passions of which it is naturally the ally and servant: it becomes the libido dorninandi and, if institutionalized, becomes despotism and rule by terror.” The Legend, Sandoz argues, is thus an account of the political theory of power and its exercise (*Political Apocalypse*, 239-253).

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<sup>186</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 277-85.

ideology has the effect of concealing the timeless order to which Dostoevsky appeals. In other words, Ward's reductive focus on Dostoevsky's reaction to certain tenets of 19<sup>th</sup> century western "ideologies" severely limits the possibility of establishing a link between Dostoevsky and Plato's analysis of personal and political disorder, which is one of the objectives of the present work.

Now, turning our attention to the poem itself, it opens with an unsettling scene of chaos and confusion. Fifteen centuries after He first appeared, an outburst of lawlessness, of proportions previously unknown, erupted over the land: Faithless heretics rejected His grace and denied His miracles while faithful followers behaved ruthlessly, setting people ablaze in order to glorify His name. Indeed, the Inquisition was in full swing and nowhere did the flames rage higher and brighter than in Seville. It was during this period of upheaval that Christ made His return, appearing in the southern Spanish city the day after nearly a hundred heretics were put to death, burned at the stake, all together, and all at once. It seems that His appearance had been provoked by this extraordinarily horrific event presided over and administered by His church. Undoubtedly, the atrocious massacre proved too much. Christ had had enough and decided to return.

As He made His way through the twist and turns of the city's narrow pathways, the people all instinctively recognized Him. Followed by an adoring crowd, He silently walked about sharing His compassion. At some point, His attention was disturbed. A crowd had gathered at the Cathedral. A young girl suffered death and was being carried in a coffin. She was to be laid to rest. Yet, such a sorrowful scene He could not ignore. "Arise, maiden", He said and the maiden arose. The onlookers were all startled. His ability to prevail over the laws of necessity was well known but to see it performed was something truly astonishing.

None at that point noticed, but the unfolding events were being observed with great interest. In the distance stood the Grand Inquisitor, his cold stare fixed on Him. With a hateful look in his eyes, the cleric ordered his guards into action. As the armed guards approached, the people's love for Him evaporated. No one protested, no one complained. The guards took their prisoner away and no one said a thing. The people all knew what was to come. They knew that when the Grand Inquisitor's men took you away, the next time you would be seen would be on the day of your execution, and still they said and did nothing. The scene strangely imitates the events that unfolded during His first visit; the developments prove once again that regardless of the time or place there is no leniency for absolute goodness in the world. Probably needing some time to gather his

thoughts, the Grand Inquisitor allowed the day to pass before visiting his prisoner. The cleric is an old man, whose life at that point spanned almost a century, and though he bore the look of death, his eyes burned with passion. Puncturing the surrounding darkness with a hand held lantern, he entered the prison chamber alone. Once inside, he quickly fixed his gaze upon the prisoner. After a few minutes lapsed, the old man asked in bewilderment, "You? Is it really You?" He never expected Him to come back. The old man lost his faith long ago.

Thus, unaffected by His presence, the cleric announced coldly that He, once more, will be condemned as a heretic and, once more, He will be tortured and killed. The people, once more, will allow this injustice to happen, and they, once more, will encourage it. Listening to the Grand Inquisitor's threats, the prisoner remained calm and said nothing. Why was He in Seville? Why did He come back? Did the Church's actions not please Him? Did the Inquisition upset Him? Well, if so, He only has Himself to blame. For if the flames rage, if the air is heavy with the scent of scorched flesh, it is because of Him. His callous gift of freedom forced the Grand Inquisitor's hand and made the murders inevitable. Christ is therefore the true criminal. He did not want to bribe or coerce man onto the path of true order but wanted him to discover it on his own. But could He not anticipate that given the freedom, man would stray? The history of human freedom expresses the desire to know *truth*. In this instance, the term *truth* refers not to the coherence of a set of

propositions or to the correspondence of facts, but to reality, the true source and substance of meaning. That is to say, *truth* symbolically represents that which bestows wholeness on human life and speaks to the soul's need for true order. According to the Grand Inquisitor, failure to secure a definite understanding of *truth* therefore provokes feelings of unease and disappointment that when expressed may create patterns of disorder. Abandoned in a condition of ignorance and tension, unappeased consciousness, struggling to attain its satisfaction, at times gives rise to conflict and upheaval. And so, the Grand Inquisitor asks, if humanity's tumultuous history is the result of man's search to possess the knowledge that will save it from a life of discontent, why did God not reveal this knowledge, placate the needs of consciousness, put an end to history, and establish a universal order? Why endow man with a consciousness free to desire true order and meaning and then throw him into a meaningless and disordered world? Why instill the longing for wholeness and then place its source beyond reach. It is as though God created humanity simply to endure misery and despair.

The Grand Inquisitor however takes it upon himself to counter His cruelty and correct His work. He will wrench creation from His hands, assume control, and, by alleviating the tension that structures human existence, solve the problem of order. One way of accomplishing this would be to invalidate the possibility of *truth* by claiming *all is absurd*. Because man's ceaseless struggle to uncover *truth*

represents the greatest impediment to the establishment of permanent order, it might be assumed that the abolition of *truth* would answer the Grand Inquisitor's concerns. But, being a discerning type, the cleric realizes that *truth*, as a symbolic notion, is the dominant determinant of human consciousness and any attempt to abolish it would produce an imbalance resulting, in the final instance, in either murder, suicide or madness. Epitomizing the hope for an order of meaning and wholeness, *truth* grounds human existence and cannot be dismissed in an outright manner without entailing chaos. Hence, the only other course available is to retain the symbol of *truth* yet change its content. Because He agitates consciousness and breeds disorder, God cannot be identified as *truth*; He is not the way towards the *good* life and cannot serve as the foundation of human order. Thus, while preserving the possibility of *truth*, the Grand Inquisitor will turn towards a new source for its realization.

Thoughtful, sensitive and engaged, the old man spent most of his life pondering the question of order. He first believed God would provide the answer. But, unable to reconcile the miserable state of his surroundings with the notion of an all-knowing, all-loving and all-powerful deity, he altered his path, changed his beliefs. Realizing that God cannot soothe his anxieties, the cleric drew away from Him and towards Satan thereby embracing the injunction that *all is permitted*. Clearly, the overthrow of God is something the Grand Inquisitor intentionally

willed by preferring something else as the source of true order -himself, presumably, as his actions demonstrate.

As previously mentioned, the state of the world reflects the state of the human consciousness (or in platonic terms, the human soul), specifically it reflects consciousness' (or the soul's) desire to experience order, meaning and wholeness, i.e., *truth*. And so, if one, such as the Grand Inquisitor, perceives the world as fundamentally flawed and in need of change, all one needs to do is re-shape consciousness by orienting it solely towards fulfilling its desire. With that goal in mind and inspired by the idea that we can overcome our nature, the Grand Inquisitor will devote himself to the task of devising a detailed and definite set of symbolic representations (such as symbols, propositions, precepts, laws) concerning the right order of existence. Accessible and acceptable to all, these representations will produce a permanently valid body of doctrine presented in the form of a culminating *system* whose consummation will result in all-encompassing paradisiacal order, thus finally appeasing man. The solution to man's historical predicament therefore requires that consciousness sever its volatile and fruitless relationship with eternal transcendent order and be persuaded or, if need be, forced into a relationship with an order that is fabricated, yet achievable and convenient. In other words, the experience of wholeness and true order demands that man renounce the hope of divine grace, assume the

responsibility of self-salvation and, through the exercise of power, refashion the substance of his existence. Evidently, the re-organization of society is not the Grand Inquisitor's central concern; it is but the groundwork for more significant and more threatening labor: the transformation of man. Inspired by Christianity, the Grand Inquisitor explains disorder as the result of a *fallen* human condition. Hoping to resolve the enveloping crisis, the cleric therefore focuses his derailed efforts not on amending man's flawed understanding of nature or society, which, as we have seen is, in a sense, Callicles' intention, but in repairing the *fallen* essence of humanity.

Now knowing himself to be promoting a revolution in nihilism yet mindful of man's weakness and inability to withstand the absurd nature of reality, the Grand Inquisitor masks his true beliefs. If his system of representations is to be honored, if he is to usher in a new age of perpetual peace, the cleric must portray a heavenly appeal that is beyond reproach. The order he erects must be understood not as the result of arbitrary human will and power, but of divine providence. Therefore, even if only an illusion, the image of divinity and the promise of a final reward beyond this life has value as a means of securing social/political order. This was all prefigured in an article published in a local journal wherein Ivan maintains that because one has fewer qualms about committing a crime against the state than against God, the Church ought to be given the authority of

administering and enforcing the law.<sup>187</sup> <sup>188</sup> Ivan's belief that *all is permitted* is thus not meant to encourage a Fyodor Pavlovich type of "passive" nihilism that drifts along an endless flow of disorder, but an "active", creative, Grand Inquisitor type of nihilism that strives to invent order.

Most will therefore happily acknowledge the Grand Inquisitor's version of *truth* and they will have no idea that they are working against themselves when they succumb to the cleric's directions. The swing from wisdom to expediency and shrewdness, from faith to calculated tactics, from Christ to false prophet will be camouflaged. Overwhelmed by their desire for order of any kind, and by the illusion of divine grace, men will sheepishly submit to the authority of his representations. Regardless of how it might appear or what He might think, the people understand that the Inquisition as an instrument of power is an instrument of happiness for it creates ordered *truth* and thereby offers the pledge of fulfillment. Through the Inquisition, the cleric will refashion humanity (and by extension the world) according to the principles of permanent order. The Inquisition is, in other words, a compassionate and benevolent response to God's hatred of humanity. Nonetheless, there are always those who attempt to refute the obvious and avoid the inevitable. For them the cleric reserves his anger and

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<sup>187</sup>Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 70.

<sup>188</sup> Here once again we notice a significant similarity between Ivan and Callicles in that both employ rhetoric as a mechanism of power and as the only real means of producing social and political order.

punishment. As long as Christian faith remains in a single person, that person will threaten the Grand Inquisitor because his presence is a constant reminder of eternal *truth*, and therefore a potential challenge to the cleric's worldly accomplishments. Thus, those who resist the declared scheme, those who remain loyal to Him, will be denounced as heretics driven by an inflated pride. Those who claim to understand *truth* in a way that goes against the plan set forth will be deemed arrogant, irrational and insane. And if any are so bold as to persist, they will promptly be set ablaze. The derailed apocalyptic vision must be accepted as the only solution to the problem of order and must be man's sole preoccupation. There must be no competing *truths*. If the Grand Inquisitor's strategy is to materialize, if humanity is to be saved, Christ must not be allowed to interfere.<sup>189</sup> He will share the fate of his admirers and be burned at the stake.

By sitting in judgment of God, Ivan assumes a blasphemous position of superiority therefore suggesting a desire to take His place. In this instance, Ivan's superiority, revealed through *The Legend*, consists of knowing absolutely what is required for the establishment of permanent order, and by extension, what is required for the good of humanity. Ivan, in other words, is superior for he possesses insight into reality that God lacks. Opposing the principle of disorder which he argues animates God's world to the principle of order which he has

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<sup>189</sup> Christ must be rejected for to accept Him is to in a sense validate the problem of order in history.

formulated in his mind and he carries in his heart, Ivan has seemingly developed a pathological disposition that persuades him that he himself embodies the value of true salvation. Convinced that he is right, Ivan metaphorically drags God down into the historical world eliminating His eternal authority and subjecting Him to his power of negation.

Ivan thus expresses an irreducible spiritual attitude whose source is the primal Satanic will to negation. In negating the eternal, Ivan frees himself from it, and as a result, reveals his essence to be unlimited power. In other words, the Grand Inquisitor is Ivan's effort to convey the idea that there is no permanency; humanity, having no guidance but itself is nothing but revocable nature. Because *all is permitted*, because all can be negated, it becomes possible to overcome the natural restrictions and accidents that trouble historical existence and frustrate human wholeness. Once history ceases to be a movement directed towards a divine goal and becomes a sum of sporadic moments that must be endured, man, in his uninhibited freedom and power, gains the responsibility of creating an existentially satisfactory order. *The Legend* reveals that Ivan is taken by the delusion that identifies the individual will as a substance unto itself that has the power and right to impress itself on the world and reality as a whole. With the threats of Christ's negation through execution, the poem reaches its emotional climax. The level of intensity, which progressively increased throughout Ivan's

presentation, has now attained overwhelming proportions. The young man needs to pause. Spiritually depleted, emotionally drained, he is pleased with the way his presentation unfolded.

Alyosha, on the other hand, is troubled and excitedly remarks that the poem's tyrannical and nihilist outlook fails in its aims to discredit Christ. Because freedom as a means of achieving true order is indispensable, the novice understands that a world containing freedom is more worthy than a world without it, and he is also aware that if freedom is to have any meaning, it must not preclude the possibility of disorder. If God creates creatures of free will capable of realizing order, He must also create creatures capable of disorder. In the words of noted Dostoevsky commentator Eliseo Vivas, "To give man freedom is not only to open to him the door of eternal salvation, it is also to open the other door, whose threshold hope cannot cross. You cannot have Heaven without Hell; Heaven entails the General and his dogs."<sup>190</sup> Berdyaev expresses the same insight in the following way, "Free goodness involves the freedom of evil...the denial of the freedom of evil in favor of an exclusive freedom of good ends equally in a negation of freedom and its degeneration—into a good necessity. But a good necessity is not good, because goodness resides in freedom from necessity."<sup>191</sup> And so, unlike Plato

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<sup>190</sup> Eliseo Vivas, "The Two Dimensions of Reality in The Brothers Karamazov" in *Dostoevsky: a collection of critical essays*, Rene Wellek ed., (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1962), 85.

<sup>191</sup> Nicholas Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957, 70).

and Socrates who maintained that the source of order, i.e., the *good*, imposes itself irresistibly on the intellect when clearly recognized<sup>192</sup>, Christian doctrine affirms an autonomous free will upon which nothing can impose itself. As a result, some men while freely searching for true order go astray and create instances of chaos. The fact that men sometimes go wrong, however, is proof neither against God's omnipotence nor against his benevolence for He could have prevented the occurrence of disorder only by eliminating freedom and permanently interrupting the search for order. Simply put, Alyosha's argument is that any possible evil that may arise as a result from human freedom is outweighed by the possible good.

Thus, the young novice sees through to the alluring humanitarian images conveyed and realizes that, because man is defined by the freedom to search for *truth*, the Grand Inquisitor's renunciation of *truth*-seeking consciousness, i.e., freedom, is in effect a renunciation of man. In his quest to eradicate the elements of disorder, i.e., freedom, the Grand Inquisitor forbids man the means of achieving true satisfaction and consequently, increasing man's sense of disorder. The cleric, who adopts a deformed way of existence, aims to create a deformed reality inhabited by deformed human beings, which in the end will resemble, in

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<sup>192</sup> Both Plato and Socrates identify *good* with knowledge and argue that it is impossible intentionally to do what one plainly perceives to be evil. In other words, every man necessarily desires to know the source of order (the *good*) and thus a person who commits an injustice and creates disorder does so out of ignorance of the true source of order. Order therefore emerges from the successful struggle to attain the right kind of knowledge.

behaviour, a heap of mindless ants forming an *anthill*. Refusing the idea of personality, the old man is very definitely cynical if not a despiser of humanity; like Gorgias, the Grand Inquisitor considers humanity an ignorant conglomeration of disjointed and confused opinions in need of authoritarian guidance.

Alyosha recognizes that the nihilistic order revealed is a consequence of an unmitigated worldliness that eventually evolves into tyranny. For as made evident by the Grand Inquisitor's plans, if there is no eternal truth, power finds its only limit in a regime of total tyrannical organization. The novice therefore announces that not Christ but the Grand Inquisitor, driven by an uncontrollable lust for mastery, condemns humanity to a miserable and futile existence. The Inquisition is but a misguided attempt at addressing man's needs; it prepares the way not for true political life and genuine freedom, but for the deterioration of the individual and, ultimately, the community. Amused by his brother's fervor, Ivan laughingly interjects and claims that Alyosha's interpretation of the poem, which, of course, articulates his own personal sense of disorder, is reductive and unfair. Why could the scenario described not be? What is so unbelievable and outrageous about a man who, noticing the disordered state of the world, chooses to rebel? Alyosha may very well be right; the Grand Inquisitor may very well have adopted a turn towards power, but this turn is motivated by feelings of personal anxiety and concern for the community. After all, the Grand Inquisitor is not an inexperienced

youth seeking to further his personal material interest. He is one who has successfully mastered his appetites and possesses no desire for material gain. There is no reason to accuse him of malice. Stricken by a deep sadness, the novice asks whether the poem has reached its end. Replying that there is more, Ivan continues his recital.

Having revealed his creed, the Grand Inquisitor, stood attentively before his prisoner. He knew his criticisms could not have pleased Him and waited impatiently for an answer. However, as is always the case, when confronted with the reality of human suffering, God remains silent. Alyosha interprets this silence as a sign of love and respect, but the old man, mimicking Ivan, believes His silence, which He has maintained throughout His indictment, to be an indication of coldness and indifference. Thus frustrated by the reigning stillness and quiet, the Grand Inquisitor became agitated. Desiring to be proven right, he anxiously hoped for Christ's wrath. Then, suddenly without warning, the prisoner stood and moved towards his captor. As the two men met face to face, Christ stared at Satan's devout disciple and then, with care, kissed him. This simple and small gesture had a noticeable effect. As though acknowledging defeat, the Grand Inquisitor's pride suddenly deflated and his rage disappeared. Something within him stirred, "*his lips seem to quiver.*" Apparently, this kiss is not what D.H. Lawrence identifies as an act of submission or acquiesces on the part of Christ, but

is what Robert Belknap describes as “obviously a blessing (that) burns in the Inquisitor’s heart.” Belknap goes on to say that in light of Christ’s kiss “the Grand Inquisitor’s exploit becomes an empty, unnecessary gesture.”<sup>193</sup> <sup>194</sup> The fact that he unexpectedly commutes his prisoner’s death sentence confirms that at some level the cleric recognizes that he is mistaken.

Nevertheless, this apparent change in mood did not entail a conversion. The Grand Inquisitor walked to the cell door, opened it, and demanded that He go away and never come back. Compliantly, the prisoner left. Though deeply moved, the old man refused to submit and put the incident behind him. He cannot return to his prior beliefs. God’s love does not alleviate the old man’s experience of doubt.

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<sup>193</sup>D. H. Lawrence “Preface to Dostoevsky’s *The Grand Inquisitor*,” in *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 90-91; Robert L. Belknap, “The Rhetoric of an Ideological Novel,” in *Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, 1800-1914*, edited by William Mills Todd III. Reprinted in *Modern Critical Views: Fyodor Dostoevsky*, edited by Harold Bloom. (New York: Chelsea House, 1989, 136-37).

<sup>194</sup> In his study *Dostoevsky, The Major Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), Edward Wasiolek argues that Lawrence’s interpretation is well supported by other critics and while he deviates slightly from Lawrence’s view, he nonetheless ultimately agrees that Christ has no answer to the Grand Inquisitor claims. “The Grand Inquisitor’s argument is not based on idle rhetoric or cheap tricks. Nor is it contradictory, as some have claimed. Logic is on his side not Christ’s...Lawrence, Shestov, Guardini, Rozanov, and many other distinguished critics have taken the side of the Grand Inquisitor against Christ because his argument is powerful and indeed unanswerable...Dostoevsky made the only case he could for Christ, and the truth of Christ he presents does not demolish the Grand Inquisitor’s truth any more than the Grand Inquisitor’s truth demolishes Christ’s truth” (p.166-167). However, in accordance with Belknap’s reading, Mochulsky in his work *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work* maintains that Dostoevsky’s Christ does in fact “demolish the Grand Inquisitor’s truth”. Initially confirming that “the Inquisitor’s monologue is a chef d’oeuvre of oratorical art: his deductions follow logically from the premises, his conclusions strike one as irrefutable”, Mochulsky then argues, “The Christ of Dostoevsky is not only the Savoir and the redeemer, but also the Sole Emancipator of man. The Inquisitor with dark inspiration and burning passion unmasks his Prisoner; the latter remains silent and answers the exposure with a kiss. He does not have to justify Himself: His enemy’s arguments are refuted by the presence alone of Him...” (621-622).

His kiss, His forgiveness, changes nothing. The Grand Inquisitor will carry in his heart the idea that *all is permitted* and will continue his work, “even if” he is wrong.

The poem’s final scene during which Christ reveals none of His godly attributes in an attempts to induce a change upon the Grand Inquisitor but rather humbly obeys His accuser and simply leaves, discloses a very human side of Christ and thus offers a hint of Dostoevsky’s determinedly Eastern Orthodox understanding of Christ as a decidedly *incarnate* Christ whose divinity is balanced by His humanity. “Orthodox teaches that Christ became incarnate so that He could participate in ‘dialogue’ with humanity, and it is Dostoevsky’s awareness of and appreciation for this teaching that we find ‘incarnated’ aesthetically in his works.” That is, the Christ depicted in Dostoevsky’s great novels “is not merely cosmic, but also chronotopic –of space and time.” It is a Christ who “reveals truth through...a particular and contingent life.”<sup>195</sup> The Legend as a whole in fact serves to reinforce Orthodox Christology: First, the poem displays His divinity. The early scenes depicting his unbound compassion and the miraculous resurrection of a young girl confirm, to the highest degree and without doubt, His godliness. Yet, as He is accosted and thrown in prison by the Grand Inquisitor’s soldiers, as He is made to wait until the cleric chooses to visit, and then finally, as He is criticized, indicted,

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<sup>195</sup> Aaron Taylor, “Encountering the Incarnate Subject: Dostoevsky’s Fiction as an Embodiment of and Contribution to Orthodox Theology” in *Dostoevsky’s polyphonic talent* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America Inc., 2005), 42.

and hated, His humanity is brought into view. It is therefore correct to maintain along with Henri de Lubac that Catholic thinker Romano Guardini seems to “exaggerate” when he claims that because Dostoevsky’s Christ is silent and appears detached, He is *un-Christian* in nature.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, from the Orthodox perspective, as articulated by Berdyaev, Christ’s silence and humility is the finest Christian reply one can produce against the Grand Inquisitor:

*The artistic method that Dostoevsky adopts in his narrative is admirable: his Christ is silent all the time and remains in the shadows. The effective religious idea is not expressed in any words...In the end it is through the contradictions of the Grand Inquisitor’s ideas that the truth regarding freedom emerges... This relegation of Christ and his truth to the background is, artistically, most effective. The Grand Inquisitor produces arguments, he is convincing: he is endowed with a potent logic and a strong will bent on carrying out a definite plan. But Christ’s silence, his gentile refusal to speak, carry more persuasion and more decisive influence than the Grand Inquisitor’s force of argument.<sup>197</sup>*

As the poem ends, Alyosha, with the sound of bitterness in his voice, asks Ivan whether he shares the Grand Inquisitor’s demented apocalyptic vision. Playfully, Ivan assures Alyosha that his words are simply the ravings of a naive student. The poem is all but meaningless nonsense. Penned nearly a year ago, it no longer accurately reflects the young man’s intentions. Ivan no longer gives “a damn about anything.” As far as he is concerned, nothing matters. Being an activist and manufacturing order does not seem to interest him anymore for when

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<sup>196</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 305.

<sup>197</sup> Nicholas Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 224.

*all is permitted*, when all is hopelessly meaningless, why do anything or prevent anything from happening. By creating a distance between Ivan and the Grand Inquisitor, Dostoevsky suggests that during the year that elapsed between the poem's composition and its first recital, Ivan's despair has deepened. While the Grand Inquisitor believes that the experience of wholeness can be contrived, Ivan has lost all hope. The illusion of *truth* tendered by the cleric is not enough, for, in the end, Ivan knows that it is all just an illusion. *Rest* is therefore now deemed unattainable. There is no escape from life's absurdity. Suicide is once more on the table.

Noticing the depth of Alyosha's dismay, a sense of sadness comes over Ivan. The older sibling realizes that his lack of faith has greatly offended the young novice. He cannot expect Alyosha's embrace. Yet, suddenly, inspired by the climactic scene described between Christ and the Grand Inquisitor, Alyosha kisses his brother. Though this gesture of kindness and unconditional love emboldens Ivan, it will not be enough. It did not persuade the Grand Inquisitor and it does not persuade Ivan. He will go one way and Alyosha the other. And so, while Dostoevsky creates some space between Ivan and the Grand Inquisitor they both refer back to Callicles, Polus and Alcibiades, and serve to reveal that the acceptance of the true principle of order, even when demonstrate, is never a certainty. Upon leaving his brother, Ivan takes the direction of his father's house.

As he nears his destination, he notices that sitting on a bench by the garden gate is the well-mannered but shrewd Smerdyakov. While Ivan prepares to enter the garden, Smerdyakov rises from his seat. It appears he has something to say. Ivan though is in no mood for a chat. He wants nothing to do with the lackey and intends to walk straight past him and into the house. His intentions however fail to materialize. Compelled by some mysterious force, Ivan approaches and calmly addresses the lackey. During their talk, Smerdyakov explains, in veiled but clear terms, that a crime is soon to take place, the worst crime imaginable: His father will be murdered, his older brother condemned. He additionally states that the crime will occur only if Ivan leaves town. Smerdyakov tries to tempt Ivan by making things easy for the young man. All he needs to do is tacitly consent and the deed will be done.

This, of course, provides Ivan with the opportunity to vent his frustration and the means to prove his theory about life's meaninglessness. If he helps commit parricide, Ivan's view of reality would be substantiated, his despair validated; if he refuses, if he forbids even one act regardless of the act, the young man must admit his error and acknowledge the possibility of meaning against the backdrop of child abuse. After a brief deliberation, Ivan consents, for in truth, as far as he is concerned, there is no valid reason to prevent his father's death. From Ivan's perspective, God's cruelty towards humanity confirms that *all is permitted*, which

then allows the young man to exact revenge and, in turn, be cruel. The murder will thus serve as the crowning achievement of his rebellion for Ivan reads the indifference and malice with which his father Fyodor Pavlovich treats his children as a reflection of the indifference and cruelty with which God the Father treats man. With deicide in mind, Ivan consents to parricide. By killing Fyodor Pavlovich, Ivan metaphorically kills God hence, eliminating the true cause of human anguish and leaving absolute power to man.

The next day, Ivan, with suitcases in hand, boards a carriage. He is leaving for Chermashnya where he will represent his father's interests in a business transaction. Midway through his journey, he suddenly changes his mind. Considering what is to happen, considering that his father will soon be dead, there is really no need to travel all the way out to Chermashnya. As a result, he alters his course and takes the route for Moscow. Before leaving for his new destination, Ivan commissions a coachman in order to relay his decision to his father. While providing directives to the coachman, Ivan hands the man a tip, laughingly stating that he probably will not receive one from his father. The coachman believing that Ivan is referring to Pavlovich's reputed stinginess also laughs. The truth is that Ivan knows that by the time the coachman reaches town his father will be dead and will, of course, not be able to give the coachman the appropriate tip. Standing there chuckling with the coachman, Ivan is evidently amused by the thought of his

father's demise. At the end of this section, it becomes clear to the reader that, as Sergei Levitzky explains,

*[Dostoevsky] discerned that the primary root of evil lies in what may be called humanistic atheism, the denial of God in the name of man. And, because of his artistic intuition, he showed convincingly that the noble and in certain respects humanistic atheism of Ivan Karamazov unavoidably degenerates into a mean and inhumanistic atheism.*<sup>198</sup>

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After exposing the results of Ivan's personal struggle for meaning, Book V ends on a grim and unsettling note. The solution to the problem of order in history offered throughout this section of the novel culminates in the most rebellious of transgressions. The defiant ravings voiced have set the wheels in motion. The crime of parricide has been sanctioned and will soon be committed. The idea that *all is absurd* and therefore *all is permitted* has thrown open the moral and ethical floodgates. Still, though astutely articulated and effectively moving, the nihilist vision revealed will not stand undisputed. An alternative will be offered. Not through a straightforward point for point reply to the arguments formerly expressed but through a shift in focus, Book VI attempts to demonstrate that Ivan's

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<sup>198</sup> Sergei Levitzky, "Dostoevsky –Our Contemporary", *Modern Age* 25, no.4 (1981): 396-7.

is not the only, and definitely not the proper, response to the experience of tension that structures human historical existence. The same questions regarding the possibility of true order are addressed yet, through Alyosha's report of Father Zosima's life and teachings, a different answer is revealed. The story of Markel, Father Zosima older brother, serves as the starting point for the elaboration of a narrative that will attempt to undo the one conveyed in Book V.

Father Zosima: the pathology of power as problem

Markel was a bright and intelligent boy who during adolescence began to exhibit a rebellious temperament. This defiant attitude did not develop on its own but was encouraged and nurtured by an atheist scholar with whom the youth would spend most of his time. While this scholar was eventually driven away, his teachings remained within Markel, ultimately expressing themselves in spiteful anger against God's order. Then, unexpectedly, the youth developed consumption and became gravely ill. One would have anticipated that the sad turn of events would have plunged Markel deep into despair while intensifying his resentment of the world and its creator. But, oddly enough, instead of despair, the tragic nature of the situation produced joy; instead of resentment, the agonizing pains of affliction induced a change of perspective, a *turning around*. Suddenly recognizing his rebellion as senseless, the youth embraced what he once ridiculed and finally experienced a sense of contentment.

The account of Markel's brief existence aims to illustrate that the immediate effect of crisis is that it causes the individual to re-evaluate his attitude and perspective. Previous assumptions and priorities are re-examined

and possibly amended or abandoned all together. The experience of disorder, engendered by concrete instances of suffering, possesses value in that it extracts a person from the trivialities of daily life, shifts attention away from the self-centered routine dedicated to the satisfaction of selfish appetites, deflates the pride characteristic of human sin, and serves to re-position and re-focus the search for true understanding. Twentieth-century religious thinker Simone Weil reaffirms this insight in the following manner: "Suffering, teaching and transformation. What is necessary is not that the initiated [ , i.e., the individuals who are suffering] should learn something, but that a transformation should come about in them which makes them capable of receiving God's teaching."<sup>199</sup> Sermons in ethics and morality will not do, nor will some divine display of displeasure in "thunder and lightning."<sup>200</sup> Only the sense of being hopelessly vulnerable to the most devastating pains can destroy the illusion of power, deny the human presumption of mastery of the whole, rouse feelings of restlessness, and reinvigorate the quest for the *good* life that, according to Dostoevsky, necessarily leads to God. Again, in Weil's words:

*We can get used to, make the best of, and adapt ourselves to anything else except the experience of long-drawn-out suffering; and we make the adaptation, in order to have the illusion of power, in order to believe that we are in control. We play at imagining that we have chosen what is forced upon us. But when a human being transformed [through*

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<sup>199</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 75.

<sup>200</sup> Eleonore Stump, "Narrative and the Problem of Evil," in *The Redemption: an interdisciplinary symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O'Collins (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 231.

affliction], into a sort of animal, almost paralyzed, and altogether repulsive, he can no longer retain that illusion...so long as the lay of circumstance around us leave our being almost intact, or only half impaired, we more or less believe that the world is created and controlled by ourselves. It is affliction that reveals, suddenly and to our very great surprise, that we are totally mistaken. After that, if we praise, it is God's creation that we are praising...Thus affliction is the surest sign that God wishes to be loved by us; it is the most precious evidence of his tenderness.<sup>201</sup>

Many of Dostoevsky's most brilliantly insightful passages come while exploring the moment the character, strained almost to the breaking point in a moment of hardship, makes the choice to turn either toward or against God. If he turns back to God and completes his spiritual reawakening, the character is depicted to be in a superior position than he was previously; the positive change of perspective experienced by Dostoevsky's characters is shown to vindicate God and the suffering the characters experience. Thus, while the experience of intense disorder can evoke feelings of estrangement that result in despair, it also, paradoxically, creates the conditions for a possible union with the absolute eternal *truth*. Although suffering is dreadful and the most subjective of reactions, it can nevertheless provoke questions of meaning which prevent man from submerging into a thoughtless vegetative state of apathy and, as a result, can be an invaluable stage on the road to true fulfillment. As Berdyaev points out,

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<sup>201</sup> Simone Weil, *On Science, Necessity, and the love of God*, 186.

Dostoevsky's theodicy is shaped by a belief "in the redemptive and regenerative power of suffering: life is the expiation of sin by suffering."<sup>202</sup>

Accordingly, from a Christian standpoint, suffering is not an absolute evil that defiles and denigrates, but is a constructive form of chastisement that offers the opportunity to develop greater insight into the essence of one's humanity through detachment from worldly goods. If suffering produces the best possibility for the flourishing of humanity's highest potentialities, then it does not necessarily challenge God's omnipotence and benevolence. Indeed, Weil argues that suffering represents the pivotal and select moment of human existence, exposing its truth and thus making a change of perspective possible.<sup>203</sup>

The story of Job further reinforces this view. Despite the loss of his vast wealth, despite the death of his children, his seven sons and three daughters, despite being plagued with a disease that ravaged his body and caused excruciating pain, despite the fact that reality seemed to take on the appearance of meaninglessness, Job rejected the tenets of rebellion and refused to accept that *all is permitted*. No miracles, no inducements were required. The Lord did not need to provide a bribe (First Temptation) did not need to prove His divinity

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<sup>202</sup> Nicholas Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 95.

<sup>203</sup> "We have to think that it [the suffering caused us] has not lowered us, but has revealed our true level". (Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p5).

(Second Temptation), did not need to possess any form of earthly authority (Third Temptation), Job believed in creation's divine order even though engulfed by unrelenting waves of earthly disorder. His visceral belief in the possibility of salvation allowed Job to accept God's world and affirm life even while acknowledging the reality of human suffering.

Eventually, the trial ended. Pleased with Job's show of unwavering devotion, the Lord provided him with the chance at a new life, a new beginning. Whereas Ivan's experience of disorder leads to talk of self-destruction and murder, Job's experience results in the creation of a new family, which brings new life and hope into the world.

At this point, it should be noted that the teachings and antidotes provided in Book VI reveal that the experience of disorder can have a beneficial effect on not only the lives of the victims, such as Markel and Job, but also on the lives of the perpetrators, those who cause instances of suffering and pain. In other words, though Ivan overlooks the possibility of repentance and, as a result, portrays instances of disorder as permanent and without resolution, Alyosha's provides two examples (one through the story of Afanasy and the other through the story of "the mysterious visitor") of how repentance overcomes disorder and, in the end, presents the possibility of renewal. A few years after his brother

passed away, Zosima's mother made the decision to part with her only remaining son so he may receive a proper education. Taken away from the calm of his native town, Zosima was sent to the hectic city of Petersburg where he attended a reputed military academy. It was not long before Zosima's new surroundings and friends produced an unflattering change in his temperament. The once quiet and gentile boy was suddenly transfigured into a malicious and cold young man. Caught in a whirlwind of debauchery, seduced by his pride, Zosima became preoccupied with the task of gratifying his sensual appetites.

The rowdy behavior continued up until Zosima's regiment relocated to a neighboring town. There, he made the acquaintance of a young woman whom he was convinced was under the spell of his charms. The young woman, however, never felt the slightest attraction towards Zosima. She was engaged to a wealthy local landowner whom she eventually married. Predictably, news of the wedding had a devastating effect on Zosima. Though his vanity and overexcited imagination were the source of his feelings of embarrassment, Zosima nevertheless challenged the young woman's husband to a duel. The night before the scheduled confrontation, Zosima was in an intemperate and wicked state. As he entered his residence and perceived his orderly, Afanasy, he beat and bloodied the man without reason or provocation. While unable to understand his master's cruel actions, the defenseless orderly did not protest but accepted the

humiliating beating in silence. Afanasy never wronged his master. He served honestly and diligently without ever causing offense, yet Zosima crushed this man's dignity for no reason at all.

After the incident, an intense feeling of anxiety overcame Zosima. Gazing out of the window of his room, the young man struggled to identify the cause of his distress until finally it came to him. He realized that his cruel and unjustified behavior towards Afanasy was the reason he could not find *rest*. Zosima, distraught and disgraced, rushed to Afanasy and begged for forgiveness. Afterwards, he met his rival at the agreed upon location and repeated the same plea. But, this was not enough. Desiring to change his whole way of life, Zosima resigned his military commission and made plans to enter a monastery. And so, the moment he realized his actions produced experiences of disorder in others was the moment Zosima's life *turned*; the shame of having committed a crime towards an innocent person propelled Zosima unto the path of renewal.

The unusual circumstances that surrounded his conversion instantly transformed the young man into a local celebrity. Many would often seek out his company hoping to benefit from his newly acquired wisdom. One day a mysterious man suddenly appeared at his door. Donning a stern look, the man approached Zosima and asked him if he would describe, in detail, the events that

led to his conversion. Zosima recounted his run-in with Afanasy and explained that his new life started the instant he realized that he had been the author of an innocent person's pain and humiliation. The two men eventually became close friends, spending their evenings together revealing their most intimate thoughts to one another. After some time, after a certain level of comfort developed, the man made an astonishing confession. He began to recount the details of a murder he committed long ago, in a fit of rage. None, however, suspected the man and the crime went unpunished. Now, if Ivan is right and *all is permitted*, then there should be nothing perplexing about the episode describe by Zosima's new friend. If *all is permitted* then why not act upon the fervor of rage, impulse, or passion, especially if one can escape the punishment of civil authorities. The fact that the man behaved as though *all is permitted* ought to have produced feelings of satisfaction, and yet, that was not the case. Though fourteen years had passed, shame, confusion and misery still prevailed. Interestingly, this passage seems to confirm the Platonic tenet that committing injustice while evading reprisal (e.g. Ring of Gyges) offers no benefit but rather damages the soul's ability of experiencing the *good* life.

Thus, driven by his need for *rest*, the man wanted to endure the change Zosima endured; he wanted to initiate a new beginning. He was told to acknowledge the suffering he caused and, through repentance, accept a change

of spirit that will allow him to recover the ability to love and be reunited with God, a union that the Eastern Church calls *thêosis*. The man accepted the value of this advice but his fear caused him to resist. He tried to redress the damage done by performing charitable acts, but nothing changed; to remain unrepentant in sin is to be isolated from all sources of comfort. Therefore, after great struggle, he overcame his weakness and confessed. And though he was struck by illness almost immediately after his confession and was losing his hold on life, he finally experienced a sense of relief. The story thus ends with an episode of Christian redemption wherein death is experienced not as the end, as the worst of all possible scenarios, but as a passage that carries one into eternal life.

The examples of Afanasy and Zosima's "mysterious visitor" answers Ivan's rebellion in that they convey the possibility that those who have created disorder will acknowledge their errors and play an active role in the struggle for restoration. From this perspective, Ivan's stories of torture, which he holds up as symbolic portraits of reality, are incomplete and offer a deficient and narrow image of human experience. Book V (Ivan's rebellion) makes the case that suffering is the plight of *fallen* humanity. Book VI (Alyosha's answer) confirms this but adds the crucial dictum that suffering is, in the end, counterbalanced by love and is thus not the final word about human existence and does not constitute its meaning. While acknowledging that the derailment of human

freedom breeds disorder and while being truthful about the reality of human hardship, the tales recounted in Book VI also simultaneously convey the principles of a Christian faith that never gives way to the hopeless conclusion that history is simply a cycle of never ending calamities. As George A. Panichas observes,

*The world of Dostoevsky does not end at the frontier of nothingness. Both as a man and as an artist Dostoevsky possessed the "spirit of the gladiator." He knew that tragedy itself was intended to be transcended and transfigured: "Truth dawns in adversity," he wrote in a letter from Siberia (in February, 1854). For him the experience of suffering was a dynamic form of purification; inertia, on the other hand, signified cheap consolation. Suffering testifies to the world's imperfection; it should lead to the contemplation of man's limitations and misery.<sup>204</sup>*

What Ivan therefore fails to understand is that moments of disorder signal not the end but the beginning of renewed and reinvigorated outbursts of order. For instance, Ivan never reveals what happened to the General. Could he have not repented? Could he have not regretted his sins? Ivan's scope of reality ends with suffering, yet the truly significant occurs afterwards. Book VI thus presents order and disorder as two opposite experiences that together constitute the breadth of man's experience of historical reality. That is to say, human existence is revealed to have the character of a tension that moves between the extremes of order and disorder. As a result, one cannot willfully eliminate either experience

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<sup>204</sup> George A. Panichas, "The World of Dostoevsky", *Modern Age* 22, no. 4 (1978): 356.

without deforming human existence into something, which Dostoevsky maintains, is inhuman (thus his use of the *Anthill* metaphor). For if the human search for true meaning and wholeness unfolds in the tension between the desire for order and the disruptions of disorder, any political-philosophical construction that attempts to destroy this tension in effect deprives man of his distinct humanity and, as a result, destroys any possibility of experiencing any measure of satisfaction. In other words, to realize their potential from the Christian point of view of Book VI, humans must imitate Job and foster a faith that knows that its lot is to struggle within the tension of existence.

Thus, in resistance to the notions that "*all is permitted*" and "*I am not my brother's keeper,*" which symbolize forces of estrangement that cancel out notions of communal responsibility, pit one person against another and breed personal, social, and political collapse, Dostoevsky puts forth the message that "*all are responsible for all*" hence affirming the belief that all participate in the same drama of existence, all are ontologically bound to one another, and all are accountable for the deeds of neighbors, friends, and kin. Each individual in his or her uniqueness is a living embodiment of generations of communal interaction. Personal identity, while carrying the mark of free agency, is nevertheless contingent on an organic inheritance the full depths of which it is difficult to comprehend entirely. This is, according to Dostoevsky, what is involved in our

being human and social beings. As philosopher of religion Stewart Sutherland points out, by contextualizing human freedom within a greater notion of social solidarity and outlining the limits and problems of freedom, i.e., power, *The Brothers Karamazov* as a whole serves to denounce the mistaken belief that *all is permitted*.<sup>205</sup>

Because one does not live in a vacuum, because order and purpose permeate existence, because there is such a thing as social solidarity every action undertaken by an individual causes ripples throughout the community influencing the behavior of others. Even the smallest gestures of kindness (or cruelty) have meaning in that they possess the power to spur a multiplicity of other small gestures of similar value. No one is therefore independently guilty of crime; transgressions committed by some reflect the shortcomings of all. Sandoz explains that this philosophical anthropology, which maintains that the disordered behavior on the part of individuals reflects the disordered state of the community, is the foundation of both Plato and Dostoevsky's political thought.<sup>206</sup>

Parricide occurred because the brothers acted as though *all is permitted* and, as a result, none was willing to assume the obligation of being "*his bother's*

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<sup>205</sup> Stewart Sutherland, "The Philosophical Dimension: Self and Freedom" in *New Essays on Dostoevsky*, eds. Malcolm V. Jones and Garth M. Terry (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>206</sup> Ellis Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: A Study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor*, xxvii-xx.

*keeper.*" If only one individual had accepted responsibility for his kin, the horrific crime would have been prevented. In this sense, when Socrates confronts Gorgias, he is acting as his "*brother's keeper*" for one of the reasons the philosopher engages in dialogue is because of his concern for the wellbeing of the community<sup>207</sup> as represented by the city's youth. If none paid any mind to Gorgias, Socrates would certainly not waste his time debunking the rhetorician's teachings. Acknowledging his role as his "*brother's keeper*," a role Ivan despite his declared love for humanity fails to fulfill, Socrates concerns and involves himself in the affairs of the community and investigates Gorgias' intentions towards the young. As argued by Waller R. Newell in connection to the *Gorgias*,

*...the true art of politics begins with the human beings around you, regardless of how the larger political order is constituted...If we are capable of caring for our friends, to that extent we might hope for further improvements in the direction of a city constituted in such a way that its citizens are friends.*<sup>208</sup>

And so, in the struggle against disorder, both Plato and Dostoevsky firmly agree that one must reaffirm the reality of order by expressing care for the wellbeing of others, committing to the community, cultivating friendships, and

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<sup>207</sup> The wellbeing of philosophy and philosophers (, i.e., the ability to practice philosophy and be a philosopher without constantly being threatened with punishment) would also be an issue that would concern Socrates.

<sup>208</sup> Waller R. Newell, *Ruling Passion; the Erotics of Statecraft in Platonic political philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 98.

contributing to the education of the younger generation.<sup>209</sup> Ivan's catalogue of cruelty, starting with the Turks and ending with the General, reveals that both he and Alyosha perceive the cause of disorder in a similar fashion, namely, that in their freedom to search for a sense of true meaning and wholeness men often turn towards power as a means of kindling feelings of self-validation. However, unlike the novice, Ivan through his Grand Inquisitor suggests that the *smaller* individual expressions of power can be defeated by creating a superstructure of power, a kind of Leviathan that will absorb all desire for power and exercise it without restraint. The result of this proposal is clear. If *smaller* individual outbursts of power create disorder, how can the result be different once these outbursts assume universal, all-pervading, proportions? Tyranny on any scale is still tyranny.

Thus, regarding the suffering of children, which he claims is his greatest concern, Ivan rants, rages and formulates speculative theories, but in the end does nothing. Confronted with the reality of disorder, he withdraws in intellectual disgust. Ivan embodies the spiritual disintegration wherein the life of openness and communion has become a life of estrangement consumed by thoughts of absolute tyranny (the Grand Inquisitor), if not parricide and suicide. The young

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<sup>209</sup> Although in the case of Plato, this effort has a more utilitarian quality (, i.e., to acquire stability in the city so he can philosophize. Thus his efforts at order are in part driven by the desire to make the city safe for philosophers) whereas in Dostoevsky care for the community is instrumental to the Christian notion of soul-craft.

man's existence betrays the untenable position of the revolutionary, who maintains a willingness to sacrifice his life for the betterment of humanity, and yet, disengages himself from the community, and in fact, has no qualms about condoning a despotism of terror. Instead of wrestling against the principles of dissolution that plague the community, Ivan's behavior reinforces them.

At this point, it is apparent that Dostoevsky battles metaphysical rebellion not by offering a direct denunciation through partisan sermon admonition, but by demonstrating the confusion, frustration and spiritual bankruptcy to which this rebellion inevitably leads. In Book V, Ivan professes a profound hatred for the world, which he views as being cruel and disordered. Book VI, suggests that Ivan is at least partially responsible for the state of the world for throughout his life the young man has never contributed anything, never assumed any responsibility, never performed an act of kindness, and never formed a meaningful friendship. In fact, despite his alleged love of humanity, one can see in Ivan the anticipation of Sartre's "Hell is -other people!" Ivan's cold detachment, and finally madness, is Dostoevsky's conclusive argument against the notion that *all is permitted*.

Alyosha, on the other hand, devotes himself to doing what he can to make suffering children happier. The moment Alyosha learns of young Ilyusha's pain,<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 646

he immediately befriends the child offering his unfaltering support. But, a more revealing relationship is the one Alyosha forges with a boy named Kolya. Though just a child, Kolya already speaks the rhetoric of revolution. He thereby symbolizes elements of despair that threaten to develop and overtake the community in the future.<sup>211</sup> If not guided, Kolya risks inheriting the despair that seized Ivan and his love of humanity might derail unto the path of suicide or parricide. Thus recognizing that the boy is at a crucial stage of his development, the novice devotes himself to the youngster's education teaching him how better to satisfy his yearnings for genuine order and meaning. The story of Kolya and Alyosha's friendship offers insight into how one person's involvement can possibly save the community from destructive elements of despair: through small, incremental, almost unnoticeable acts of friendship, each possesses the opportunity of maintaining and, if required, restoring the community's spiritual health.

Of course, what is offered is not to be taken as a prescription against suffering, a kind of propaganda to sedate the rebel. Because the source of meaning does not lie within the sphere of human control, Dostoevsky is aware nothing can eliminate the unease of life; the problem of meaning cannot be resolved through "ready-made" solutions. The only thing of importance is that there exists a company of people who are ready and willing to be bound by that communal tie

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 926.

that despair threatens to destroy. The notion of commitment and engagement conveyed throughout the novel has therefore nothing to do with inciting revolution. Pretentious social-political projects fuelled by abstract ideological schemes can never reduce the amount of misfortune humanity is destined to endure. The turn towards power in the hopes of unveiling *truth* and satisfying the demands of human consciousness is doomed to failure. No amount of political-social manipulation can ever do away with human hardship; in fact, the attempt to exercise tyrannical power through political social devices to eliminate suffering simply ends up creating more, as amply illustrated by the Spanish Inquisition, and later, by the Russian Revolution itself. Regeneration requires that one accept and embrace the humbling reality that "*all are responsible for all,*" yet no social-political movement, speculative construct or detached rational theory, can ever successfully convey this reality. Only through the performance of personal, discreet, unspectacular gestures of friendship, kindness, and compassion can the ordering principle that "*all are all responsible for all*" be experienced as a living force within the individual and by extension the community.

In the same way that seeds bring forth fruit with more seeds, gestures of love and friendship are instances of *paidia* that impart the principles of order to latter generations thus assuring the rise of new teachers of hope who in turn, sowing their own spiritual seeds and teach the young to desire the right *things*. The

account of Markel's relationship with young Zosima, Father Zosima's relationship with Alyosha and Alyosha's relationship with the group of twelve boys, demonstrate this point. One act of kindness, of friendship, has the power to change another person's life, and, in a small way, has the potential of changing the world. The archetype of Dostoevsky vision of salvation can readily be identified as Christ's relationship with the Apostles. Through his teachings and acts of compassion, the presence of divine order within Christ was transferred unto the group of twelve friends, who in turn traveled forming new groups friends and spreading the insight they inherited.<sup>212</sup>

This is also clearly exemplified by Socrates who, of course not out of charity as in the case of Christianity but a useful prudent concern, imparted his seeds of wisdom to Plato who in turn shared those seeds with his friends one of whom was Aristotle. Because ordered existence depends on a decision about what one desires and wishes to pursue, the mutually caring relationships between friends offers the opportunity of openly expressing oneself thus measuring one's desires and goals against another's. Through the interaction of a plurality of friendly and honest consciousnesses, the true source of order and meaning comes into view. And so, while neither Plato nor Dostoevsky provide a systematic or definite response

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<sup>212</sup> One must, however, keep in mind that because of humanity's imperfect nature the threat of derailment is constantly present and in the case of Christ's teachings, they have been shown to also give rise to schism and violent reformation.

capable of quelling humanity's tendency towards pathological rebellion, an answer is nevertheless offered. The words of Robert L. Jackson, which are also fully evocative of Plato, express it best: "The power of Dostoevsky spiritually to move and exalt lies, in part, in the extreme narrowness of the victory of good over evil in his art. The margin for hope is vaporously thin, but it is pure and distinct."<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Robert L. Jackson, "The Testament of F. M. Dostoevsky", *Russian Literature*, no.4 (1973): 97.

## Conclusion

As suggested in the introductory section of this study through the figure of Carl Schmitt, most contemporary political scientists, knowingly or not, take their bearings from Hobbes and maintain the view that political reality is determined by an overriding concern with acquiring security against the various threats that may arise as a result of the irrevocable differences that divide humanity. Fear of death is, in other words, the basic human experience and serves as the foundation of stable political order. However, the statement made by both Plato and Dostoevsky is that political reality, in either its ordered or disordered forms, involves more than the search for life, i.e., security, it also and more importantly involves the search for the *good* life, that is to say, it involves the search for a way of life that brings human existence closer, to some degree, to the experience of wholeness.

Indeed, it is often overlooked that behind the Hobbesian tenets that aim to assure security -behind the claim that absolute sovereignty and limited citizen's rights are the only way towards a stable and prosperous communal existence

and are therefore the most effective means of avoiding the factionalism that might lead to civil war- stirs the need and search for the *good* life. Even if the content of Hobbes' conception of the *good* life is much less hopeful and much more limited than, say, the utopian vision of peacefully fishing in the afternoon offered by a figure such as Marx, it nevertheless expresses the ambition of establishing the best possible order in relation to humanity's ability to attain some level of fulfillment and sense of wholeness. "The war of all against all" serves as the symbol of disorder; the sovereign "Leviathan", along with all its decrees, is, according to Hobbes, the path towards the only and best order of fulfillment and wholeness available to humanity. In short, because of his reading of human nature, Hobbes maintains that only a very narrow degree of satisfaction can ever be enjoyed during life on earth. Still, he nevertheless believes that there are particular principles of existence that lead to better, more fulfilling, ways of life. Otherwise, why would he write?

Now, it must be clear that the issue here is not the politicization of the *good*. It is not argued that the human longing for wholeness could be fulfilled permanently and completely through political devices, but that the existential need and search for principles of wholeness, however conceived, drives human existence. Stated in different and more direct terms, it is not proposed that politics can render man *happy*, but that all men need and seek a sense of

*happiness*, and that this need and search is manifest in all human endeavors, including those of a political nature. Although diverse cultures and historical periods go about this search in different ways, it is always the same search that drives political action and incites human explorations of self-understanding. And so, while the differences between them appear stark, both Plato and Dostoevsky portray human personal and political existence as being shaped by the desire to differentiate and understand the principles of existence that would allow, within the limits of humanity's imperfect nature, a measured experience of wholeness.

Before proceeding, it, at this point, seems appropriate to say something regarding the distinct manner in which Plato and Dostoevsky understood the problem of order, and how they presented their accounts of the *good* life. It was alluded to earlier that the features that distinguish one account from the other stem from the fact that one thinker explored political reality from within a Classical paradigm while the other viewed it from a Christian perspective. To elaborate a little further on this contrast between Plato and Dostoevsky, I would like to turn to Voegelin and his analysis of the *noetic* and *pneumatic* experiences.<sup>214</sup> Very briefly, Voegelin explains that though the search for a true order of wholeness is constant, historically it has taken on different forms expressing itself through different symbolisms and activities.

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<sup>214</sup>Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, trans & ed. by Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 136-140.

The *noetic* form refers to the self-awareness and appropriation of the reasoning mind that occurred among the philosophers of the Classical age. It emphasizes the human effort of engaging in methodical procedures of inquiry in the hopes of achieving some level of concrete understanding. In short, the *noetic* form highlights the human activity of *seeking* the source of true order. On the other hand, within the context of the *pneumatic* form, identified with Christianity, the source of true order, i.e., God, *seeks* man through moments of grace and revelation, the most important of which was the revelatory event of the God-man.

Hence, according to Voegelin, the distinguishing feature of the *pneumatic* experience centers around the figure of Christ whose appearance on earth establishes a more direct relationship between God and man and therefore offers increased insight into reality. Classical myths maintained the existence of intra-cosmic deities that mediate the relationship between heaven and earth; the *pneumatic* revelatory presence of Christ eliminated those gods, creating a more intimate basis for man's communion with the divine. However, this close relationship with the God, it must be stressed, rests on the foundation of grace. Therefore, from the Christian *pneumatic* perspective, the satisfaction of humanity's hope for fulfillment is essentially dependent on God's willingness to

“reach out” and save man. As Weil observes, “We [humans] cannot take one step towards the heavens. God crosses the universe and comes to us.”<sup>215</sup>

Consequently, the best man can do is adopt the trustful and faithful attitude of openness. But, as Voegelin remarks, many are unable to assume this vulnerable and tenuous position:

*The life of the soul in openness towards God, the waiting, the period of aridity and dullness, guilt and despondency, contrition and repentance, forsakenness and hope against hope, the silent stirrings of love and grace, trembling on the verge of a certainty which if gained is loss- the very lightness of this fabric may prove too heavy a burden for men who lust for massively possessive experience.*<sup>216</sup>

And so, while one of the advantages of Dostoevsky’s *pneumatic* Christian account of true order is that it offers great rewards, greater than anything offered by Plato (e.g. the perfection of man, heightened sense of immortality, seeing the creator “face to face”), it is also the case that because they depend on a patient faith in divine grace, Christian representations of order are less stable and more susceptible to distortions. An example of a Christian vision that was victim to distortion is, according to Voegelin, expressed through the “apocalyptic ferocity” first embodied by St Paul. By highlighting the eschatological direction of history towards an end-purpose, Christian *pneumatic* experience, at least in its Pauline

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<sup>215</sup> Simone Weil, *On Science, Necessity, and the love of God*, trans. Richard Rees (London, New York: Oxford University Press., 1968), 181.

<sup>216</sup> Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 122.

form, attempts to formulate an all-encompassing meaning of history, something that Classical philosophy does not.<sup>217</sup> As a result, Paul had a certain expectation that the *eschaton* would erupt in time in the near future. This expectation weakened Paul's faith and thus his ability to keep the tension between the constant structure of reality and the movement of history toward transfiguration in check from an overzealous fascination with the *eschaton*. Unlike Plato who obscuring the future fulfillment and immortality of man in ambiguity, Paul expressed his vision in an overt manner and even expected the event to develop within his lifetime. However, according to Voegelin, the real danger of Paul's apocalyptic ferocity revealed itself by motivating many of the modern ideologies to undertake the politically de-stabilizing and potentially perilous task of immanentizing the *eschaton* (e.g. Comte, Hegel, Marx).

In short, Paul's example illustrates that even the momentary loss of faith can lead to an excessive impatience that can eventually nurture the potential failings of a Christian solution to the problem of order. Yet, it should be stressed that Dostoevsky's work, also inspired by the revelatory experience of Christ, escapes this Pauline tendency. In fact, through the guise of the Grand Inquisitor, a figure who espouses an ideological pathological apocalyptic vision, Dostoevsky

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<sup>217</sup> "The classic meaning *in* history can be opposed by Paul with a meaning *of* history, because he knows the end of the story in the transfiguration that begins with the Resurrection." (Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, vol. 17, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Michael Franz, Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 2000), 324.

strives to expose and fight against it. By contrasting the excessive and fervent impatience of the Grand Inquisitor with the balanced, calm and faithful attitude revealed through the stories of Father Zosima's life and teachings, the author attempts to reassert a viable Christian account of the *good* life while conveying the dangers of a derailed expectation of transfiguration.

But, despite the differences that we have just mentioned and that become apparent when we consider the intellectual/religious foundations upon which Plato and Dostoevsky individually formulate their work, it is nevertheless the case that the derailed pathology described by each betrays several key elements in common: 1) a strong sense that some fundamental part of one's humanity is unfulfilled; 2) a need to address the conditions that impede human fulfillment; 3) a belief that the notion of an eternal transcendent reality creates the conditions that prevent the experience of fulfillment; and 4) a belief that human will and power is sufficient to overcome these conditions and bring forth an order of fulfillment. It therefore becomes evident that both men agree on the fundamental premise that concrete moments of disorder spring from the assumption that denies the reality of eternal truth and promotes the belief that by means of tyrannical power man could control the reality in which he participates and through such control bring about a culminating order of permanent satisfaction. Regardless of the fact that one chooses to depict a pathological state that focuses

on a reality marked by God's absence (the Grand Inquisitor) while the other emphasizes the transformation of nature from a normative order onto a physical realm ready for human manipulation (Callicles), both Plato and Dostoevsky concur that replacing the eternal essences of philosophy and Christianity with human creative power as the ontological basis of true order only succeeds in producing instances of frustration that in turn result in outbursts of profound crisis and thus, in reaction, they each evoke images of man and society that can potentially serve as the standard of a properly ordered community.

The symbolic relationship between Socrates and his young listeners and the one between Father Zosima and Alyosha represent Plato and Dostoevsky's attempt to regenerate the spirit of a disintegrating community by creating models of true order. The account of order offered therefore implies the need for a community of friends in which one can find guidance in re-evaluating and refining one's desires and by extension one's existence. This cultivation of friendships, this planting of seeds and teaching of the young to desire the right *things*, is in the end, as far as Plato and Dostoevsky are concerned, the only means of securing the true substance of a well-ordered polis; it is the most significant civic feat a person can perform. Hence, in reaction to their particular experiences of crisis, both Plato and Dostoevsky are adamant that the reality of disorder need not be accepted as final or unavoidable for by developing an

awareness and desire for the right *things*, all possess the ability to prevail over it. And so, in the end, warning against a process that in response to their existential desires reorients humans away from the contemplation of the eternal and towards the destructive view that allows for human mastery of their world, Dostoevsky, consciously or not, continues Plato's crusade to demythologize the notion that tyrannical power can serve as the basis of human order. It is seemingly possible therefore to list Dostoevsky's analysis of disorder alongside Plato's and argue that while the Classical Greek philosopher would be dumbfounded by Dostoevsky's Christian symbols, he would nevertheless understand the essence of the derailed pathology described by the Russian author.

Another important insight that should be highlighted and that could be drawn from Plato and Dostoevsky's analysis of personal and political disorder is that the turn towards power, while reckless and inherently flawed, nevertheless conveys the hope for the *good* life. The tyrannical disposition is, in other words, symptomatic of a pathological desire for power that in turn is symptomatic of a deeper desire for true order. In other words, like Alyosha and Socrates, Gorgias, Callicles, Ivan and the Grand Inquisitor all are engaged in a fight against elements perceived to be the source of crisis. This is relevant and significant, for only by realizing that all men sufferer their humanity in the same manner, and

thus possess the same hope for an existential sense of completion, can an atmosphere of amity develop hence allowing for the possibility of dialogue. By moving to a deeper level of commonality, the level of experience and its symbolization, it becomes possible for those who belong to apparently incompatible political, intellectual, cultural or religious traditions to participate, in principle, in rational conversation. Labeling *madmen* those whose tyrannical temperament breeds chaos yields no insight of any value. It contributes nothing to one's understanding of troubling events and cannot help in the struggle against their recurrence.

Though it is obvious that such acts are reckless and it might be morally satisfying to declare, for example, the events of 9-11 as "a spontaneous act of radical evil," or "a deranged drive towards *nothingness*," it is nevertheless intellectually unfair and imprudent. Tyrannical outbursts of force that give rise to disorder are expressions of a profound existential frustration, thus to reply with further instances of tyrannical force without ever acknowledging the determining cause might be useful in terms of temporary containment but will not resolve the problem, on the contrary, such use of uncompromising power will undoubtedly give rise to additional and maybe more explosive outbursts. Though there are certainly some whose derailed ways will never change and can, as a result, be labeled "lost causes" (such as Callicles, Polus, Alcibiades,

Smerdyakov, the Grand Inquisitor and, in relation to 9-11, Osama Bin Laden<sup>218</sup>) and though it would be best to rid the community of these types, it remains that by marginalizing and describing those who turn towards power as *madmen*, we imprudently prohibit the possibility of dialogue therefore exacerbating the feeling of isolation and frustration that cause initial outbursts of disorder hence unwittingly assuring the propagation of additional incidents of disorder.

While the attempt to approach the selfish tyrannical soul and while taking into account the cardinal underlying commonalities between men grants no guarantees of successful dialogue (as aptly illustrated through Socrates' encounter with Callicles, Polus, Alcibiades, and Alyosha's meeting with Ivan and his Grand Inquisitor), it does offers the best prospect for understanding and therefore the opportunity of maybe avoiding the first rumblings of murder and turmoil that threaten to develop. Hence, while it is often ignored, it is crucial to note that an important feature of Plato and Dostoevsky's portrayal of the problem of order is the notion that, be they philosophers or sophists, saints or sinners, all humans partake in the same drama of existence and that no matter how different the parts played, there exist an undeniable bond between men that makes dialogue possible.

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<sup>218</sup> Though there are obvious differences between a tyrant and a terrorist, they both adopt a pathological turn towards power and thus both are possessed by a tyrannical soul.

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