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## From Kant to Schiller to Dostoevsky: Morality and Aesthetics in *The Brothers Karamazov*

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to trace a specific influence from Immanuel Kant to Fyodor Dostoevsky, through Friedrich Schiller. I do so by utilizing Anton Barba-Kay's arguments about Schiller's philosophical reactions to Kant's moral and aesthetic philosophies. Barba-Kay argues that Kant's moral maxim of duty raises a problem of "aesthetic visibility," opening an epistemic gap between external action and internal intention. In response to this widening gap between the external and the internal, Schiller does what Kant refused to do and combines the moral with the aesthetic. In reaction to Kant, Schiller posits two moral/aesthetic types: "Grace" and "Dignity." After showing the general influence Schiller had on Dostoevsky, I show how these two Schillerian moral/aesthetic types play central roles in *The Brothers Karamazov*. I close by showing one literary technique Dostoevsky uses to overcome the problem of aesthetic visibility which Barba-Kay fears.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky, Kant, Moral psychology, Schiller

### I. Introduction

In his article "The Aesthetics of Agency in Kant and Schiller," Aton Barba-Kay argues for two things. First, he argues that Kant's view of moral agency raises a question about what he calls the "aesthetic visibility" of the moral act. He argues that Kant's moral theory opens a gap between an agent's visible exterior act and the hiddenness of their interior motive. Since the interior motive is non-transparent, the two can come apart, both externally for a witness and internally for the agent herself. Second, Barba-Kay argues that Schiller's moral type of "Grace" is modeled on Kant's aesthetic theory as a solution to the gap between the invisible interior act and the visible exterior action. Schiller's solution of Grace requires "the extinction of self-consciousness" within the agent for the act to be considered mor-

al.<sup>1</sup> But this solution still allows for alienation for external witnesses of the act, since Grace requires an inner lack of self-conscious reflection. In both Kantian moral struggle and Schillerian Grace, the question remains of how the external observer can tell if the agent is sincere or merely playacting?

In short, Barba-Kay argues that the more morality depends on the demands for sincerity or an unselfconscious “natural” character of agency, the more aesthetics figures into agency and morality. For the purposes of my paper, I will assume Barba-Kay is right on this matter and will only summarily rehearse the problem that connects Kant’s moral and aesthetic philosophies to Schiller’s response. The important upshot of Barba-Kay’s argument is the claim that Schiller’s two moral/aesthetic types were created in response to Kantian philosophy: the natural and effortless moral genius labeled “Grace” and the character of great moral struggle labeled “Dignity.” Despite their differences, both types rely heavily on the demand for sincere action and aesthetics. After this exposition on the connection between Kant and Schiller, I will turn to discussing the impact Schiller (and therefore Kant) had upon Dostoevsky.

With these pieces in place, I then show how Dostoevsky uses both Schillerian moral/aesthetic types of Grace and Dignity within *The Brothers Karamazov*. Going a step further, I then show how Dostoevsky, as an artist, uses a literary technique to overcome the problem of aesthetic visibility which Barba-Kay argues was raised by Kant’s moral philosophy.

## II. From Kant to Schiller

Since the main target of this paper is not Kantian philosophy alone, but Kant’s influence on Dostoevsky, in what follows, I will present a familiar yet summary-level interpretation of Kant’s moral philosophy. As is well known, in *The Groundworks of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant describes morally good actions as those that are done solely from good will. These are done according to duty to the moral law and for no other reason. In a famous example, Kant claims that the shopkeeper who acts honestly out of self-interest does not act from duty but mere personal advantage. An act which has genuine worth is not done from self-interest or even *natural inclination*. Instead, genuine moral action is done solely from duty to the moral law.

<sup>1</sup> Barba-Kay, A., 2018. The Aesthetics of Agency in Kant and Schiller. *Idealistic Studies* 46(3), p. 261. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5840/idstudies201882069>.

As introduced above, Barba-Kay argues that this gives rise to a problem of aesthetic visibility, both to ourselves and to those outside of us.<sup>2</sup> Not only are others unable to tell if we are acting sincerely from duty, but we may even be self-deceived as to our final motives. As Kant says:

it is absolutely impossible by means of experience to make out with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action that otherwise conforms with duty did rest solely on moral grounds and on the representation of one's duty... it cannot be inferred with certainty that the real determining cause of the will was not actually a covert impulse of self-love under the mere pretense of [duty].<sup>3</sup>

To say that we can *never* know whether our own motives are pure may be an overly rigorous interpretation of Kant once we consider other Kantian texts. However, even if Kant's maxim is not so simple or rigorous, Barba-Kay still thinks Kant raises an aesthetic problem.

The aesthetic problem arises due to the Kantian antagonism between inclination and duty. The honest shopkeeper is inclined to honest action out of self-advantage and not duty. Another reason to be honest may be a natural inclination to enjoy being honest. For example, even if the shopkeeper loses business by being honest, if he possesses the natural desire, enjoyment, or disposition to be honest, then he is still honest according to inclination rather than duty. Kant provides an example of this kind of situation. If people find "an inner gratification" when acting benevolent, their benevolent action "lacks moral content" and "still has no true moral worth."<sup>4</sup> While their behavior is praiseworthy and may conform with duty, morally, their action remains on the "same footing as other inclinations."<sup>5</sup>

Barba-Kay argues that this antagonism between inclination and duty opens a gap in our ability to visually tell if an action is good or not. We cannot tell, by merely looking, whether an action was done from duty alone or whether there is some ulterior motive or hidden inclination. After all, the same honest or benevolent act may conform with duty in every exterior manner. However, its moral worth and content will depend on something interior, on the amount with which the

<sup>2</sup> While I explain his view in a didactic manner, I do not conclusively argue for it.

<sup>3</sup> Kant, I., 2012. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 21 – 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

action was taken out of duty and not natural inclination or self-advantage.<sup>6</sup>

This raises problems of visibility for both outside observers *and* self-deception in what Barba-Kay calls our action's "aesthetic visibility."<sup>7</sup> He takes aesthetic visibility to be a less rigorous way of cashing out the antagonism of inclination and duty. The feeling of disinclination to some moral act functions as neither a necessary condition for, nor a constitutive role of, duty. Instead, disinclination and struggle play an *aesthetic* role; they "clarify the presence of duty in contrast to its surrounding incentives."<sup>8</sup>

But how do struggle and disinclination to perform our duty help us *see* that we are acting from duty alone? Kant describes the good will as shining "like a jewel" amongst the struggle to perform one's duty.<sup>9</sup> Even if struggle is not a necessary condition nor constitutive of dutiful moral action, it is *aesthetically* helpful to make moral action more visible and certain. Not only do struggle and disinclination highlight what moral duty might look like within ourselves but Barba-Kay argues that Kant uses moral dramatizations to illustrate what moral action may look like from the outside.<sup>10</sup> It is as if by witnessing someone struggling to do the right thing, we can gain access to their inner dialogue in the way we can access our own. Kant's moral dramatizations, such as the shopkeeper, give us evidence about and insight into the psychology of the characters who struggle to perform the moral act.<sup>11</sup>

Even if perceiving visible struggle and using our imagination can provide evidence about someone's reasons for acting, it is imperfect. It is not often that when I observe the action of another person that I gain certain and accurate access to their private internal dialogue. Instead, I gain a kind of "hypothetical and imaginative view" of their motives.<sup>12</sup> So, we no longer have direct access by external vision, and our imaginative view of someone's inner dialogue is fallible to say the least. From these considerations, Barba-Kay concludes: "it is clear that the problem of the visibility of moral worth throughout these cases sharpens the problem about the status of the beholder...the pretense of duty could be indistinguishable from the genuine article."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Barba-Kay, A., 2018. The Aesthetics of Agency in Kant and Schiller, *ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, I., 2012. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Barba-Kay, A., 2018. The Aesthetics of Agency in Kant and Schiller, *ibid.*, p. 263. He mentions Kant's suffering philanthropist as an example.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

This inability to be certain of what is genuine from observation gives rise to a threat of deception through theatricality. The threat of theatricality is not only for cases of observing others who may be playacting. It raises concerns of self-deception as well. Perhaps I am even pretending for myself in order to hide my own motives. The potential for deception means that the litmus test for moral action becomes a kind of sincerity. E.g., are you really acting sincerely out of duty to the moral law or are you just playacting? This same potential for deception takes place externally for others and internally for yourself. But how can you be sure that you are being sincere and not just putting on a show?

From this concern about morality, Barba-Kay points out a kind of tension between the Kantian moral demand for sincere struggle, and Kant's aesthetic work on the "genius." In stark contrast to the moral agent for whom sincere struggle is a means of gaining moral visibility, the aesthetic genius is unselfconscious and natural. The genius is so natural in her actions that she seems the perfect candidate to overcome Barba-Kay's fear of theatricality. The genius acts without any self-consciousness. Everything she does is natural and spontaneous. There is no room for a reflexive kind of "faking it." Is this the character whom Kant suggests can overcome moral problems of potential insincerity and self-deceit?

Even if it is tempting to use Kant's aesthetic genius figure as a solution to the fear of theatricality in Kant's moral philosophy, Kant rejects this move. Barba-Kay argues that this is because of Kant's fear of mechanism obviating the moral worth of duty. As we saw above, natural inclination can undermine the moral worth of an act. So, even if the aesthetic genius can act in this natural unselfconscious manner, in moral terms this would count as mechanistic inclination. In the realm of Kant's moral philosophy, this naturalness would *undermine*, rather than bolster, moral worth.

Given this tension between Kant's moral and aesthetic philosophies, Schiller endorses the tempting move which Kant rejects. Schiller connects Kant's aesthetic agency, illustrated in the Kantian genius, with moral agency. Where Kant wished to keep the abiding skepticism and self-consciousness of our motives about duty, Schiller resolves the tension by connecting aesthetic naturalness with morality. Instead of aesthetics and morality being at odds, they now work together organically.

Schiller's person of ideal virtue is the "beautiful soul," whose moral action comes naturally and with a sense of simplicity and self-forgetfulness.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Schiller, F., 2005. *Schiller's "On Grace and Dignity" in Its Cultural Context*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, pp. 152 – 154.

Schiller says that: “One refers to a beautiful soul when the ethical sense has at last so taken control of all a person’s feelings that it can leave affect to guide the will without hesitation and is never in danger of standing in contradiction of its decisions.”<sup>15</sup> In the beautiful soul, reason, duty, and inclination are all in harmony, and grace is “their expression as appearance.”<sup>16</sup> However, the beautiful soul’s *actions* are still not ethically creditable, for an action “satisfying an impulse is never considered creditable.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, Schiller still holds that the beautiful soul is ethically creditable in its essence and by its very being.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike Kant, Schiller also embraces an expressive sense of moral agency. Schiller believes we can get a better read of the internal state from the expression of the external appearance. Someone’s bodily motion and exterior expression may be enough to pick out what is genuine. To support this view, Barba-Kay notes that Schiller thinks you can observe moral agents as if they were unselfconscious works of art.<sup>19</sup> Morality can be seen through the natural and unselfconscious possession of grace. As Barba-Kay puts it succinctly: “To act well, one must lose sight of the fact that one is an actor.”<sup>20</sup> For Grace, to act morally is to act naturally and without any self-consciousness. Their inclinations, reason, and actions are all in harmony. Where Kant feared the specter of mechanism or natural inclination, Schiller embraced the naturalness of the aesthetic genius. Naturalness, instead of struggle, is a sign of moral sincerity and beauty.

However, Schiller is double-minded. Even if Schiller embraced a moral type based on naturalness and grace, he also endorses struggle, and Schiller ends with two important moral/aesthetic types.<sup>21</sup> We’ve just discussed Grace which is modeled on Kant’s aesthetic philosophy and focuses on naturalness and sincerity. The second moral/aesthetic type, Dignity, is modeled on the freedom and dignity of the struggle to act from duty found in Kantian *moral* philosophy. Unlike the genius beautiful soul, Dignity struggles against her natural inclinations.<sup>22</sup> Grace shows inclination and duty in harmony, but Dignity requires them “in conflict.”<sup>23</sup> Here we

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Barba-Kay, A., 2018. *The Aesthetics of Agency in Kant and Schiller*, *ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> For these claims see *ibid.*, pp. 265 – 269.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g., Schiller, F., 2005. *Schiller’s “On Grace and Dignity” in Its Cultural Context*, *ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

see the Kantian moral intuition we discussed above that struggle is the surest sign of genuine moral worth. With Dignity, Schiller goes so far as to say that: “Only when we see the struggle are we convinced that victory [over the inclinations] is possible. Thus, we expect an expression of conflict in the appearance and will never be persuaded to believe there is virtue where humanity is not even present.”<sup>24</sup>

So far, we have quickly summarized Kant’s moral philosophy and how Barba-Kay takes this to open a problem of aesthetic visibility. We then introduced Schiller’s two moral/aesthetic types stemming from Kant. One stemming from Kant’s aesthetic genius figure and the other from the struggle seen in Kant’s moral philosophy. In Kant the genius figure remained in the realm of aesthetics, yet Schiller placed this type into the moral realm with the natural genius who is effortlessly a beautiful soul. As Barba-Kay suggests, in both cases sincere experience is needed for moral worth. In Dignity, sincerity is found in struggle against inclination.<sup>25</sup> In Grace, sincerity is seen in unselfconsciousness and effortlessness; there is no playacting, merely acting. If this is right, then it is not surprising that Schiller’s moral/aesthetic types, originating from Kant, are found in the fiction of Fyodor Dostoevsky.

### III. From Schiller to Dostoevsky

Finding Schiller’s types of Grace and Dignity in the work of Dostoevsky is unsurprising because of the immense influence Schiller’s work exercised on Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky was first exposed to Schiller at the age of ten when his father took him to a performance of Schiller’s play *The Robbers*.<sup>26</sup> Even decades later, Dostoevsky would write that the play made a “tremendous impression” on him and that it “acted very richly on [his] spiritual side.”<sup>27</sup> In the early 1840’s Dostoevsky translated *The Robbers* into Russian with his brother.<sup>28</sup> In the same years, Dostoevsky wrote to his brother that he had “learned Schiller by heart, talked him, dreamed him...the name of Schiller has become near and dear to me, a kind of magic sound, evok-

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>25</sup> Schiller thinks mimicked Dignity can appear as mere bombast or preciosity. E.g., *ibid.*, pp. 168 – 169.

<sup>26</sup> Frank, J., 1979. *Dostoevsky. The Seeds of Revolt, 1821–1849*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 60.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

ing so many reveries.”<sup>29</sup> Preeminent Dostoevsky biographer Joseph Frank even goes so far as to call *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky’s “own version of *The Robbers*.”<sup>30</sup>

Dostoevsky by no means saw Schiller’s impact as some idiosyncratic or merely personal influence. He frequently cites the German Schiller as hugely influential on all of Russia. In 1861, Dostoevsky wrote that “the Russians ought to regard Schiller in a very special manner, for he was not only a great universal writer, but—above all—he was our national poet.”<sup>31</sup> He later wrote that Schiller “soaked into the Russian soul, left an impression on it, and almost marked an epoch in the history of our development.”<sup>32</sup> Dostoevsky frequently placed Schiller amongst the ranks of artists such as Shakespeare, Goethe, and Cervantes.<sup>33</sup> He would also suggest Schiller as a required author to multiple parents seeking reading lists for their children.<sup>34</sup>

It is a clear historical fact that Dostoevsky was greatly impacted by Schiller. So, it should be no surprise that the Schillerian types we’ve traced from Kant should appear in his fiction. To give evidence of the types of Grace and Dignity, I’ll show Dostoevsky’s focus on naturalness and unselfconsciousness on the one hand and sincerity in struggle against inclination on the other. Both types require sincerity and the rejection of self-deceitful playacting. I focus on one of Dostoevsky’s most Schiller-inspired novels – *The Brothers Karamazov*.

#### IV. *The Brothers Karamazov* and Schiller’s Moral Types

According to Frank, “a Schillerian atmosphere envelops *The Brothers Karamazov* from the first page to the last.”<sup>35</sup> I will argue that in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky sets up a Schillerian moral universe in which sincerity is the main virtue and self-deceit is the unforgivable sin. On this moral spectrum, sincerity is found in both Schillerian moral types: Grace and Dignity. “Graceful” characters, like Alyosha, are sincere in their natural unselfconsciousness, while “Dignified” characters, like Dmitri, are

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> Frank, J., 2002. *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871 – 1881*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 394.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 525 and 717.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 717.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 395.



sincere in their struggle against their inclinations and toward the moral law. Self-deceitful characters, like Fyodor, will not struggle for the moral law since they reject sincere motives when they arise.

The themes of sincere naturalness as opposed to intense self-consciousness are present in the novel from the very beginning. E.g., in the introductory chapters we learn that Ivan, at the age of ten, is already highly self-conscious of the fact he lives on the charity of strangers, while Alyosha could not be more unselfconscious about the same charity.<sup>36</sup> Unlike the highly self-conscious Ivan, Alyosha “never cared at whose expense he was living.”<sup>37</sup> Alyosha is given many descriptions which fit the type of Grace, a kind of naturally beautiful soul. He is described as having the “inherent” gift of “making himself loved directly and unconsciously;” it was “in his very nature so to speak.”<sup>38</sup> Schiller says that Grace causes attraction and love. Love is even “a feeling that is inseparable from grace and beauty.”<sup>39</sup>

In school, Alyosha is described as never remembering an insult. After an hour he would forget it had happened. Dostoevsky is careful to tell us that “it was not that [Alyosha] *seemed* to have forgotten or *intentionally* forgiven the insult, but simply that he did not regard it as an insult, and this completely conquered and captivated the boys.”<sup>40</sup> Unlike most school-children, it is not the case that Alyosha was pretending to not care, nor was it even that he cared and then worked to forgive them. Instead, he is so naturally good-tempered that he merely forgets. The school children are captivated by this natural moral beauty. Schiller suggests that there is nowhere that one finds more grace “than in children,” and Alyosha is one such child.<sup>41</sup>

Dostoevsky further describes Alyosha’s naivety and natural charm through the following “aphorism”:

Here is perhaps the one man in the world whom you might leave alone without a penny, in the center of a strange city of a million inhabitants, and he would not perish, he would not die of cold and hunger, for he would be fed and sheltered at once; and if he were not, he would find shelter for himself,

<sup>36</sup> Dostoevsky, F., 2011. *The Brothers Karamazov*. New York City: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, pp. 19 and 23.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Schiller, F., 2005. *Schiller’s “On Grace and Dignity” in Its Cultural Context*, *ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>40</sup> Dostoevsky, F., 2011. *The Brothers Karamazov*, *ibid.*, p. 23. Emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> Schiller, F. 2005. *Schiller’s “On Grace and Dignity” in Its Cultural Context*, *ibid.*, p. 162.

and it would cost him *no effort or humiliation*, and to shelter him would be no burden, but, on the contrary, would probably be looked on as a *pleasure*.<sup>42</sup>

This little vignette highlights the effortless and unselfconscious nature of Alyosha, as well as how irresistible and enjoyable his Graceful personality is. Another characteristic of a Graceful person is their calming effect. Someone who is tense releases their “wild storm of his emotion” on the Graceful person’s “peacefully breathing breast.”<sup>43</sup> This is notable because Alyosha spends much of the novel rushing around, acting as the calming confidant and shoulder to cry on for everyone else, often described as an angel.<sup>44</sup>

Alyosha’s Graceful nature can be highlighted even further by contrast. Ivan is set up to be a character who is highly self-conscious. Even since childhood Ivan “bitterly sensed that he was living on the bread of others.”<sup>45</sup> Both Ivan and Alyosha lived on charity in their childhoods. Yet imagine if both brothers acted as if this charity did not bother them. If Ivan acted as if he were not bothered about being given charity, this would be false and insincere. He would be playacting to his benefactor or perhaps to himself. Yet, the same action from Alyosha *is* sincere; he does so unreflectingly and out of a natural outpouring of his good nature. Ivan would feel like an actor, pretending not to chafe under the charity given him, yet, for Alyosha, there is no acting at all. His carefree Graceful attitude is how he really is.

The theme of sincerity in naturalness is then contrasted with falsity and self-deception in the early confrontation between Fr. Zosima and the sensualist father Fyodor. In the face of Fyodor’s intentional buffoonery and falsity, Zosima commands him, “above all, don’t lie to yourself,” calling Fyodor’s behavior nothing but “deceitful posturing.”<sup>46</sup> Zosima immediately repeats this injunction to Madame Khokhlakov who is also playacting for Zosima: “Above all, avoid falsehood, every kind of falsehood, especially falseness to yourself.”<sup>47</sup> The theme of sincerity and falsity runs alongside the moral status of the characters throughout the novel as Dostoevsky slowly reveals the true inner motives of each character. It is notable that much of the surprise of the novel arises due to the mismatch of characters’ visible actions and their inner moral dispositions. However,

<sup>42</sup> Dostoevsky, F., 2011. *The Brothers Karamazov*, *ibid.*, p. 24. Emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup> Schiller, F., 2005. *Schiller’s “On Grace and Dignity” in Its Cultural Context*, *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g., Dostoevsky, F., 2011. *The Brothers Karamazov*, *ibid.*, pp. 95 & 169.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

not all characters are sincere by means of a natural grace.

Dmitri showcases the second moral/aesthetic type of Dignity, in which sincerity still plays an important role. In Dmitri's case, it is sincerity in his struggle and his complete lack of self-deceit. Unlike the effortlessly good-natured Alyosha, Dmitri's natural inclination is to carouse, fight, and enjoy his life as a sensualist. Even in his dissipated lifestyle, it is made clear that Dmitri lives this way out of a kind of passion. E.g., when Dmitri asks the peasant Andrey if he will go to hell, Andrey replies that even though Dmitri is hasty-tempered, God will forgive Dmitri for his kind heart. To Andrey, Dmitri's passionate vices are forgivable since Dmitri is "like a little child."<sup>48</sup> Even if Dmitri needs to struggle for virtue more than Alyosha, there is nothing deceitful about him.

Dmitri is sincere even if his temperament is excessive and his actions are drunken and violent. When we meet Dmitri, he is struggling to struggle against his natural inclinations! As Schiller suggests about Dignity, "the most courageous spirit, despite being completely opposed to sensuousness, can neither suppress feeling itself, nor desire itself, but can only reject their influence on the direction of the will."<sup>49</sup> Dmitri has currently been failing to reject the influence of his sensuousness. But he is aware of own shortcomings and the need to struggle against his natural inclinations, which he recognizes as vicious.

Early on, Dostoevsky gives Dmitri three chapters worth of Hamlet-like soliloquies in which he confesses his baseness to Alyosha. Notably Dmitri expresses himself through Schiller's poetry, including "Ode to Joy" and "The Eleusinian Festival." Dostoevsky uses Schiller's poetry to highlight the sincerity of Dmitri's "ardent heart" and his interior struggle.<sup>50</sup> Dmitri's emotional and open confessions showcase the struggle of the moral type of Dignity. Faced with the reality of his own contradicting "Karamazov nature" Dmitri struggles to overcome it.<sup>51</sup> It is in these chapters that Dmitri utters the famous line describing his internal struggle: "God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>49</sup> Schiller, F., 2005. *Schiller's "On Grace and Dignity" in Its Cultural Context*, *ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>50</sup> Each of these chapters begins with the title: "The Confessions of an Ardent Heart."

<sup>51</sup> See e.g., Dostoevsky, F., 2011. *The Brothers Karamazov*, *ibid.*, pp. 97 – 98: "For I am a Karamazov. For when I do leap into the abyss, I go headlong with my heels up, and am pleased to be falling in that degrading attitude, and consider it something beautiful. And in the very depths of that degradation I suddenly begin a hymn of praise." Dmitri concludes that "man is broad, too broad, indeed, I'd have him narrower."

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

This early in the novel, it is unclear if Dmitri will win his struggle against his own natural hatred and disgust of his father; it is unclear who will win inside Dmitri, God or the devil.<sup>53</sup> In Schillerian terms, it is unclear if he will display the “independence” of his will and prove himself moral by “crushing the power of desire.”<sup>54</sup> Dmitri’s vice and fury can be redeemed so long as Dmitri remains sincere and willing to face this struggle out of duty to the moral law. His sincerity and willingness to struggle against his inclinations in duty to the moral law is exactly what separates Dmitri from characters like the intellectually hypocritical Ivan, the “contemplative” Smerdyakov, and the ironic and Voltaire-quoting Fyodor.

We can see this contrast clearly when Dmitri is (incorrectly) arrested for the murder of his father. Dmitri explains that his greatest moment of shame was when he acted like Ivan, acting like a calculating thief and not as his usual passionate and sincere self.<sup>55</sup> Dmitri is much more ashamed of the self-conscious scheming to steal a small sum of money, something he views as an insincere action, than the would-be passionate murder of his father and the real-life assault on Grigory. In contrast to Dmitri’s passionate sincerity, consider the characters all associated with intellect or the false manners of high society: Ivan, Smerdyakov, Fyodor, the seminarian Rakitin, the Grand Inquisitor, and Kolya. Each of these characters are described as either self-deceptive or intentionally false in their dealings with others. This ranges from self-conscious social airs to deep self-deception. Each character is more or less aware of their own falseness, and yet each character is labeled as missing the mark due to this falsity.

Between Dmitri and Alyosha we’ve seen the two Schillerian types. Alyosha is the type of Grace, the naturally beautiful soul.<sup>56</sup> Dmitri exemplifies sincerity within the moral type of Dignity. Self-deceived and false characters like Fyodor, are incapable of good acts, as they self-consciously refuse to struggle out of duty to the moral law. We can see the deadliness of irony and insincerity even more clearly in a character who served as a front-runner for Fyodor Karamazov—the absent father Versilov in *The*

<sup>53</sup> E.g., *ibid.*, p. 110. “Oh, I don’t know...I don’t know...Perhaps I won’t kill him, and perhaps I will. I’m afraid that he will suddenly become so loathsome to me with his face that moment... And I won’t be able to contain myself.”

<sup>54</sup> Schiller, F., 2005. *Schiller’s “On Grace and Dignity” in Its Cultural Context*, *ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>55</sup> E.g., Dostoevsky, F., 2011. *The Brothers Karamazov*, *ibid.*, p. 416. Dmitri says: “I put it aside because I was vile, that is, because I was calculating, and to be calculating in such a case is vile...”

<sup>56</sup> This is not to say Alyosha does not change. He is converted to a fuller version of himself, becoming even more Zosima-esque, more charming, good-humored, and serene at the end of the chapter “Cana of Galilee.”

*Adolescent*.<sup>57</sup> Dostoevsky describes Versilov in much the same terms as Fyodor: "Versilov had a very nasty aristocratic trick. After saying (when he could not help it) some particularly clever and fine things, he would all at once intentionally cap them with some stupid saying.... To hear him, one would suppose he was speaking quite seriously, and all the time he was posing to himself, or laughing."<sup>58</sup>

Frank describes Versilov as both aware of his own ideas and inchoate emotions yet disengaged from them by a "twist of his self-reflexive irony."<sup>59</sup> Versilov is self-reflective and aware of his own problems yet "always regards them from a certain ironic distance..."<sup>60</sup> Both Versilov and Fyodor are undercut by their own irony. They avoid taking the moral law seriously by actively undermining whatever normative force it may have on them. Both Versilov and Fyodor know, in some capacity, about the moral law, yet they practice the self-deceit that Zosima warns against. Without struggle against their inclinations, neither character can improve. And one way to never struggle against your inclinations is to deceive yourself about them. Neither self-deceived character struggles, even when they acknowledge their moral shortcomings head-on. Unlike Dmitri, these characters do not fit the moral type of Dignity. They fail to struggle against their inclinations, even when they know they should. When they *do* feel the normative force of the moral law they undercut it with irony or hide in self-deception.

Ivan is also self-deceived, but he is still in flux. He is not as calcified as Fyodor or Versilov. Instead, much of Ivan's character arc is his struggle to find whether he believes in the moral law and whether he will be obedient to it. If Dmitri struggles with his natural inclinations, then Ivan struggles with his intellectual hypocrisy, his own kind of self-deceit. Ivan is not sure of himself or what to believe. Like Dmitri, Ivan struggles, but his struggle is between choosing Dignity or a life of ironic sneering like his father. I continue reviewing the case of Ivan in the final section by discussing a literary technique which overcomes the problem of aesthetic visibility raised by Barba-Kay.

In this section I argued that Alyosha is an example of the Schillerian moral/aesthetic type of Grace and that Dmitri is as an example of Dignity.

<sup>57</sup> *The Adolescent* is considered the biggest failure of Dostoevsky's major novels. However, written directly before *The Brothers Karamazov*, it shared the same mission of attempting to lure the Russian Populist youth to theism.

<sup>58</sup> Frank's translation in Frank, J., 2002. *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871–1881*, *ibid.*, p. 179. See also, e.g., Dostoevsky, F., 2004. *The Adolescent*. New York City: Vintage Classics, p. 130.

<sup>59</sup> Frank, J., 2002. *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871–1881*, *ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

Characters like Fyodor and his predecessor Versilov act as moral warnings. Filled with irony and self-deceit, they refuse to follow Dmitri's example of struggling against his own dispositions. In the final section, I will show how Ivan's character arc is a struggle between the sincerity of Dignity and the moral death of self-deceit about one's own actions and the requirements of the moral law.

## V. Ivan and Overcoming Aesthetic Visibility

As I continue to discuss Ivan's character, I will also answer some aesthetic questions about Dostoevsky. How exactly does Dostoevsky overcome the problem of aesthetic visibility as raised by Barba-Kay? How does Dostoevsky make something invisible, like sincerity of naturalness or struggle, visible? If an observer's knowledge about the moral worth of a person's actions is based on knowing that their action was sincerely about duty to the moral law, then being able to view the conscious internal struggle on the one hand or the unselfconscious naturally "beautiful soul" on the other, will be vital. Earlier, I noted Kant's use of moral dramatizations to illustrate this internal dialogue. In Dostoevsky, these fictions are expanded to the grandest schemes, making him one of the greatest psychological novelists. One of his great achievements in psychological realism is to make what is usually invisible, such as sincerity and self-deception, visible in such a believable and illuminating manner.

This skill has not been lost on literary critics. One of Dostoevsky's techniques for making the interior visible is by means of what Ulrich Schmid calls "split consciousness."<sup>61</sup> Schmid argues that Dostoevsky uses the technique of splitting the consciousness of one individual into several characters, such that each character acts out a *part* of the protagonist. In this case, external dialogue between discrete individuals acts like a running inner monologue within a single individual. With this technique Dostoevsky can show the internal struggle of an individual by externalizing the interior and showing the inner monologue as an external conversation.

This technique can be seen throughout his novels. However, a simple case is that of Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*. Svidrigailov's character acts as an exaggerated part of Raskolnikov's split consciousness. As the two dialogue, Raskolnikov becomes aware of the

<sup>61</sup> Schmid, U., 2011. Split Consciousness and Characterization in The Brothers Karamazov. In: Oddo, S. M., ed. *The Brothers Karamazov*. New York City: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., p. 776.

moral ugliness of Svidrigailov and his ideas. This allows Raskolnikov to realize the moral ugliness of his *own* ideas. However, the technique of split consciousness can be seen at its most dramatic (and most literal) in *The Brothers Karamazov* when Ivan is visited by the devil. Ivan and the devil dialogue about Ivan's deepest intentions, beliefs, and views of morality. What is it that Ivan really believes about God, a universal moral law, and whether all is permitted? The entire interaction is infused with skepticism. Ivan is unsure if his visitor is truly supernatural or just a hallucination of his own diseased brain.

In a very literal way, Dostoevsky externalizes Ivan's invisible interior struggle through this hallucination. The reader is now able to watch Ivan in a heated debate *with himself* and his own conscience as he struggles to decide about his moral duty and whether to accept that a universal moral law exists. It is his indecision and self-deceit on this very topic which causes such psychic torment for him throughout the novel. At this pinnacle moment, since Ivan supposedly does not believe in any moral law, we see Ivan's struggle to do something he has no reason to do, yet which he *feels* he ought to do—sacrifice himself for the innocent Dmitri.

This invisible struggle made visible is Ivan's own struggle to find what he really believes and, as Dostoevsky sets up the case, to undeceive himself about the reality of the moral law. As a type of Dignity, Ivan cannot be saved until he struggles toward the moral law, yet, intellectually, he refuses to be admit such a law exists.<sup>62</sup> He both knows and does not know that it exists. Even though he performs the right action according to the moral law by confessing at Dmitri's trial, his motive for doing so is suspect. We are led to believe that he confesses without any good will at all, but only out of spite. This is much closer to an attitude like his father or Smerdyakov than Dmitri. At the end of the novel, Ivan's future fate is left uncertain. It is unclear if he will fill the role of Dignity and struggle toward the moral law or whether he will collapse into a life of self-deceit and spite.

With Ivan, we have a masterful example of Dostoevsky's literary talent overcoming the hiddenness of psychology, making "moral strength" visible "indirectly through sensuous signs."<sup>63</sup> Dostoevsky overcomes Barba-Kay's concerns of aesthetic visibility through literary technique and through psychologically penetrating and convincing storytelling.

<sup>62</sup> I say only "intellectually" since Dostoevsky's main contention is that Ivan's emotional and volitional reaction is to reject that "all is permitted," even if he intellectually thinks it is.

<sup>63</sup> Schiller, F., 2005. *Schiller's "On Grace and Dignity" in Its Cultural Context*, *ibid.*, p. 158.

## VI. Conclusion

As Schiller took Kant's ideas and expanded upon them aesthetically, so Dostoevsky took Schiller's ideas and expanded them even further, complicating and mixing the ideas of sincerity, deceit, struggle, and naturalness into a rich and complex moral universe. However, Schiller's moral/aesthetic types of Grace and Dignity are still clear. Yet these moral types require visibility; the reader must penetrate into the invisible psychological processes to be certain of their sincerity, either their sublime naturalness or their struggle for the sake of the moral law. Dostoevsky's literary techniques make these invisible attributes visible.

As mentioned before, Barba-Kay suggested that the more morality depends on sincerity, the more important aesthetics becomes. It seems to me that this idea reaches a kind of dual pinnacle in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky's final novel is a crowning showcase of Schiller's Grace and Dignity and the artistic technique to show them to us convincingly. Yet these types stem from Schiller's response to Kantian moral and aesthetic philosophy. So, if art owes nothing else to Kant other than Dostoevsky, through Schiller, then art should be grateful.

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