



Dostoevsky within the problem of evil: influences and reception

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Abstract

Fyodor Dostoevsky has played an influential role in shaping both theistic and atheistic approaches to the problem of evil. This study situates Dostoevsky within the history of theodical discussions by examining the sources that shaped Dostoevsky's engagement with the problem of evil as well as the reception of his work in later debates. This paper identifies three aspects of Ivan's formulation of the problem, a rejection of consequentialist justification of suffering, a radical reinterpretation of truth, and his use of the evidential form, and shows how these arguments emerge from diverse sources including Orthodox apophaticism, Alexander Pushkin, and Immanuel Kant. This paper also illustrates how these have been influential for both anti-theodical and evidential traditions in the problem of evil. I also examine three of Dostoevsky's responses to the problem of evil, the miracle of Job's faith, an appeal to freedom, and an artistic vision of confronting suffering. I show how these are predominantly grounded in his Christian beliefs and can foster productive engagements in theodical literature. This paper aims to further the appreciation of Dostoevsky's contributions to the problem of evil as well as promote a more holistic treatment of the problem of evil.

Keywords Fyodor Dostoevsky · The problem of evil · Russian literature · Philosophical theology · Anti-theodicy · The Brothers Karamazov · Narrative theodicy

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Dostoevsky and the problem of evil

The influence of Fyodor Dostoevsky on the problem of evil is seen from the numerous citations of his work across scholarly and introductory material in the problem of evil. Despite this widespread and recognised influence, less work has been done on tracing the ideas that influenced his writings and on his reception in later developments. This has led many to talk generally of Dostoevsky's monumental influence without reference to the exact traditions that he influenced or was influenced by. For this reason, by examining Dostoevsky's influences and reception, I offer historians of philosophy and literary scholars a clearer picture of his engagement with the problem of evil and the interdisciplinary landscape upon which it is built. I further argue that recognition of this interdisciplinary nature provides fruitful reflection for future discussions in the field. In analytic philosophy, theodiscists often bracket and overlook literary and theological dimensions, leading to an impoverished perspective. However, using Dostoevsky as a model, navigating the fields of literature, theology, and philosophy, allows scholars to better address the multi-dimensional nature of evil.

To accomplish these goals, I begin with the influences behind Ivan's presentation of the problem of evil by focusing on three prominent aspects of his argument, his rejection of consequentialism, his reinterpretation of truth, and his adoption of the evidential form. Following this, I examine how these views have shaped the developments of both anti-theodical and evidential traditions. In the same way, I trace both the influences behind and reception of his three responses to Ivan's challenge, the miracle of Job's faith, an appeal to freedom, and an artistic vision of confronting suffering. I show how these are predominantly grounded in his Christian beliefs and can foster productive engagements in theodical literature.

Ivan's rejection of consequentialism and its influences

The first dimension of Ivan's presentation is his rejection of consequentialism. Anticipating contemporary anti-theodical complaints, Ivan objects to the attempt at justifying suffering with a consequentialist appeal to future goods. This is seen when he asks Alyosha, 'imagine that you yourself are erecting the edifice of human fortune with the goal of, at the finale, making people happy, of at last giving them peace and quiet, but that in order to do it it would be necessary and unavoidable to torture to death one tiny little creature, that same little child that beat its breast with its little fist... would you agree to be the architect on those conditions?'¹ In other words, Ivan questions whether nigh infinite goodness, that of a utopia, can justify even the most minute case of innocent suffering. Although the overwhelming hedonic calculus would make many consequentialists reply in the affirmative, Ivan states with conviction, 'I decline the offer of eternal harmony altogether. It is not worth one single small tear of even one tortured little child'.² As such, Ivan rejects the consequentialist justification of suffering as any appeals to future goods are futile in response to the

¹ Dostoevsky (2003), 321.

² Dostoevsky (2003), 320.

extent of suffering witnessed all around the world.³ Reflecting on the extensive use of consequentialist reasoning across theodical attempts, most notably John Hick's soul-making theodicy, one can see how numerous theologians, if they accept Ivan's criticism, would be forced to reframe their arguments on different moral grounds.⁴

This rejection of consequentialism has three prominent influences, two literary and one philosophical. First, the influence of Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) is worthy of note. In *Le Père Goriot* (1835), Rastignac asks Bianchon whether he would kill a decrepit Chinese if he would get a million francs in return. This example is explicitly mentioned in the manuscript for his famous 'Pushkin Speech' (1880) in the Petrograd Public Library where Dostoevsky writes, 'in one of Balzac's novels, a certain young man, depressed over [the aforementioned problem asks it to a friend Bianchon]... [in a similar way Tatiana, from *Eugene Onegin*, says] No, and the Russian soul decides the same way'.⁵ Leonid Grossman, commenting on this passage, writes 'it is remarkable that [Dostoevsky] turns specifically to Balzac to reinforce... the impossibility of building one's happiness as an individual or even the general good on the suffering of another person'.⁶ However, what is more telling of a direct connection between Balzac and Dostoevsky, is that the version of the 'Pushkin Speech' in *The Diary of a Writer*, instead of quoting Balzac in relation to Tatyana, refers to Ivan's aforementioned question to Alyosha, 'suppose that you yourself are erecting an edifice of human destiny in order to bestow upon men at last tranquility and peace... [imagine] it is necessary and inevitable to torture to death only one human creature... would you agree to be the architect of such an edifice?'⁷ This divergence in manuscripts exposes how Dostoevsky viewed this consequentialist tradeoff in Balzac as an equivalent idea to the argument Ivan presents in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–1880), pointing to the immense influence of Balzac on his work.

Having examined Balzac in light of the 'Pushkin Speech', I turn to Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) in whose honour the speech was given. There are two ways in which Pushkin influences Dostoevsky's objection to consequentialism. First, returning to the aforementioned section within the 'Pushkin Speech', one can see that the question regarding the value of consequentialism is tied directly to Tatiana's decision to send Onegin away in *Eugene Onegin* (1833). Here, Tatiana's rejection of consequentialism, an act embodied in her answering 'nay' to the challenge of Ivan and Rastignac, is interpreted by Dostoevsky as the paradigmatic example of a 'pure Russian heart'.⁸

Second, the influence of Pushkin is seen in their shared condemnation of the Napoleonic archetype. In *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin writes 'we all possess Napoleon's fea-

³ It is important to recognise that Ivan's argument may not be equally as persuasive to the rule-consequentialist who structures consequentialist reasoning with respect to certain pre-established rules and values which may not be violated.

⁴ Hick (2010).

⁵ Grossman (1973), 22–23. I do not have access to this manuscript in the Petrograd Public Library and am relying on Grossman's citation of the manuscript.

⁶ Grossman (1973), 23.

⁷ Dostoevsky (1919), 973.

⁸ Dostoevsky (1919), 974.

tures; the millions of two-legged creatures; are only instruments and tools'.⁹ In both examples, the rejection of a Napoleonic archetype is viewed as a rejection of self-interested consequentialism that is morally callous and dehumanises others. Likewise, in *The Queen of Spades* (1834), the protagonist Hermann, described with 'the profile of Napoleon and the soul of Mephistopheles', kills a countess to gain a secret formula for gambling success.¹⁰ Given Dostoevsky's shared critique of the Napoleonic archetype, most visibly in *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and implicitly across the rest of his fiction, one can see yet another avenue of influence from Pushkin.¹¹

Turning to philosophical influence, similarities between Dostoevsky's duty-based ethics and Kantian ethics can lead one to posit probable influence, even if both positions are not equivalent. By emphasising universal responsibility and answerability through Markel's statement that 'each of us is guilty before all', Dostoevsky argues that we have a duty to be ethical in all interpersonal relations independent of how we are treated by others.¹² Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) formulation of the humanity formula, the imperative that we must always treat humanity as an end in itself, does draw closer to Dostoevsky's ethics due to its emphasis on bringing the moral agent face to face with the other's humanity.¹³ In comparison, Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative, that one must act 'in accordance with that maxim through which you at the same time can will that it become a universal law', is distinct from Dostoevsky as it is directed towards an abstract principle instead of being interpersonal, despite showing a deontological framework.¹⁴ Thus, even if the positions of Kant and Dostoevsky aren't identical, there are important thematic similarities between the two views, especially on the themes of duty and responsibility, that allow readers to hypothesise influence.

While there has been a growing literature focusing on thematic links between Kant and Dostoevsky, scholarly opinions have historically varied on the extent to which Dostoevsky engaged with Kant's critical philosophy.¹⁵ Despite this variation, there are three reasons why Kantian influence is probable: his reading of Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826), a notable Russian historian, his request for the *Critique of Pure Reason* in a letter to his brother in 1854 as well as broader influences of post-Kantian thought on Russian intelligentsia.¹⁶ I shall focus on the first, as the latter two are self-explanatory. During Karamzin's travels to Königsberg, Karamzin interviewed Kant on the latter's moral philosophy. Recalling this interview, Karamzin quotes Kant:

'When I contemplate those moments where I acted according to the moral law that is engraved in my heart, I rejoice. I am speaking about the moral law: let us

⁹ Pushkin (2009), 2.14.

¹⁰ Pushkin, Alexander. *Sobranie Sochineii*, ed. D.D. Balgoi et al., 10 vols. (Moscow, 1956–1962). As cited in Frank (1995), 74.

¹¹ See Jackson (1960) for a further examination of the development of the Napoleonic archetype in Russian literature.

¹² Dostoevsky (2003), 374–375.

¹³ Johnson (2024).

¹⁴ Kant (2018a, 2018b), 4:421.

¹⁵ Cherkasova (2009), 1–6, Shein (1979), 59–61, Tilley (2023), 92.

¹⁶ Frank (1976), 56.

call it conscience, the sense of good and evil—but it exists. For instance, I tell a lie; nobody knows about my falsehood, but I feel shame... [Similarly,] we presuppose the existence of an Eternal Creative Reason, which is everything for every thing and creates all good.’¹⁷

Writing on this connection through Karamzin, Joseph Frank writes that ‘Dostoevsky thus came across these two [Kantian] ideas—that moral consciousness (conscience) is an ineradicable part of human nature, and that immortality is a necessary condition of any world order claiming to make moral sense—when he read Karamzin as a boy’.¹⁸ In fact, these are themes which are echoed throughout Dostoevsky’s fiction. The role of the personal conscience as a judge independent of external verification is reflected in Raskolnikov’s feeling of guilt for his actions despite them remaining anonymous. Likewise, the necessity of an ‘Eternal Creative Reason’ alludes to Kant’s postulate of God as well as Ivan’s often quoted dictum, ‘without immortality, there can be no virtue’.¹⁹ Thus, there is good reason to attribute Kantian influence on Dostoevsky.

Ivan’s radical reinterpretation of truth

Another prominent aspect of Ivan’s problem of evil is his radical reinterpretation of truth. This is seen in the insignificance he places on God’s existence and his limitation of metaphysical knowledge. Through this reinterpretation of truth, he aims to progress theodical dialogue beyond debates about God’s metaphysical existence towards what it means to worship God and the implications that such a choice has for one’s worldview and broader commitments.

As the reader progresses through *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan’s religious beliefs become increasingly difficult to pin down. I attribute this ambiguity to the insignificance he places on God’s existence within his anti-theodical argument.²⁰ In Book III, Ivan appears as a straightforward and staunch atheist. Here, Ivan clearly tells his father, when asked about his theistic views, that ‘no, [God] doesn’t [exist]’.²¹ However, in his conversation with Alyosha in Book V, he revises his statement, adopting a more neutral position stating that ‘[he] long ago decided not to think about whether man created God or God man’.²² This ambiguity persists even in his later encounter with the devil, where Ivan insists that the devil is a projection of his mind.²³ Ivan’s ambiguity represents a clear prioritisation of the concept of God over the metaphysical ‘existence’ of God. Furthermore, he professes to Alyosha that he accepts God’s

¹⁷ Karamzin (1957), 41.

¹⁸ Frank (1976), 57.

¹⁹ Dostoevsky (2003), 95.

²⁰ Rowan Williams notes too that ‘the novel presents [Ivan] as exploring numerous positions, each with its own variety of mental agony for him’ (2008, 2).

²¹ Dostoevsky (2003), 179.

²² Dostoevsky (2003), 307.

²³ Dostoevsky (2003), 814. Some critics have speculated that Dostoevsky based his portrayal of the devil on radical Alexander Herzen.

existence and eternal harmony while still rejecting God out of a love of humanity. He states, 'I accept God... It isn't God I don't accept... it's the world created by Him... it's just his ticket I most respectfully return to him'.²⁴ These are not the views of a straightforward atheist found in contemporary philosophy of religion. Rather, Ivan embraces this apparent contradiction to further strengthen his presentation of the problem of evil. Thus, anti-theodist Nick Trakakis describes Ivan's argument as anti-theodicy radicalised, the view that 'even if Christianity is true, I don't accept Christianity'.²⁵ While this may appear as a slip in reasoning, it is not the only instance where Dostoevsky uses this reasoning. Almost 30 years prior to *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky had already presented the inverse of Ivan's argument in a letter to N.D. Fonvisin. He writes that 'if anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth... I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth'.²⁶ Similar to Trakakis' summary, Dostoevsky can be read as proclaiming to Fonvisin that even if Christianity is not true, he will remain Christian.

Given Ivan's ambiguous theology and the goals of this paper in ascertaining the reception of Dostoevsky in theodical dialogue instead of being an exegetical exercise, I will not delve further and propose an exact interpretation of Ivan's theology. Instead, I will focus on the uniqueness of Ivan's anti-theodical presentation which, as noted above, is independent of the question of God's existence. One can be a theist yet consistently join Ivan in a moral rejection of the divine; alternatively, the atheist may be provided with further motivation to maintain a secular lifestyle even if he is increasingly convinced of theism as a metaphysical proposition. Due to this divide, I present Ivan as relying on a Price-like distinction between belief *in* and belief *that*. Whether or not one believes that God exists is an important, but separate, question from whether one should believe in God, a question determined by one's worldview and moral or aesthetic commitments.

A simple reading of Ivan's argument would suggest that Dostoevsky and Ivan devalue the truth of Christianity. In fact, such a reading can be partially responsible for the 'faith' versus 'reason' interpretations of the novel presented by prominent scholars like Joseph Frank.²⁷ However, following Terrence Tilley, I argue that this interpretation is overly simplistic.²⁸ Instead of devaluing truth, I read both Ivan and Dostoevsky as arguing for a reinterpretation of it. Unlike in English, there are four understandings of the word 'truth' in the Russian language which provide the linguistic and conceptual influence behind Dostoevsky's presentation of truth. Ksana Blank describes the distinctions as follows: high *pravda* which has connotations to morality, justice and religious truth; low *pravda* which is tied to an unembellished reality; religious *istina* which refers to religious transcendent revelation; and, epistemic *istina* which refers to rational knowledge.²⁹ In his letter to Fonvisin, Dostoevsky uses *istina* in an epistemic sense to show that even if Christianity cannot be proven by reason

²⁴ Dostoevsky (2003), 299–321.

²⁵ Trakakis (2021), 709.

²⁶ Dostoevsky (1917) (Letter to N.D. Fonvisin, March 1854).

²⁷ Frank (2002), 578.

²⁸ Tilley (2023), ch. 2.

²⁹ Blank (2010), 97.

alone, and is therefore outside *istina*, it doesn't exclude the potential for Christianity to fall under *pravda*. This is reflected in the logic of Ivan's statement. When Ivan banishes eternal harmony to the realm of the non-Euclidean, he is classifying it as high *pravda*, rejecting it from the perspective of *istina*. For this reason, he can consistently accept both the reality of harmony and God, while maintaining that it is impossible to worship God given the evidence available to him. Therefore, one can read both Dostoevsky and Ivan as stating that religious truth cannot be limited to epistemic *istina*, rather the fullness of the Christian truth lies in *pravda*. However, where they differ is that Ivan remains within the boundaries of *istina* whereas Dostoevsky is willing to transcend *istina* to proclaim his belief in Christ.

A similar reading of Dostoevsky's aims is echoed by Tilley and Rowan Williams. As a polyphonic novel, Tilley writes that Dostoevsky brings numerous possible worldviews or 'faiths' into dialogue which the reader has to navigate between. These 'faiths' do not only include belief in supernatural entities, but represent the 'ultimate source(s) of value and the center(s) of meaning in one's life'.³⁰ Similarly, Williams moves the discussion in the novel beyond the question of the existence of God, noting that Alyosha and Ivan are both predominantly concerned with 'the possibility of accepting God and the world and the problem of what sort of life such acceptance would entail'.³¹ Commenting on Dostoevsky's 1854 letter, Williams further writes that 'the truth' is best understood 'as the sum of rationally and evidentially demonstrable propositions independent of human desire... the empirical world'.³² While writing in different contexts, Williams and I object to the reduction of Dostoevsky's argument to a disagreement on metaphysics. Instead, what is at stake in the novel is one's broader worldview, which includes not only metaphysics, but also questions of aesthetics, ethics, and existential commitments. This clash of worldviews, what can be referred to as the higher *pravda*, is the truth that Dostoevsky, through his multiple characters, is wrestling with.

Developing on the distinction between *pravda* and *istina*, Ivan makes a further argument from the limitation of metaphysical knowledge. Trakakis notes that Ivan presents two views of divinity, a 'Euclidean' view where God is 'amenable to rational understanding' and a 'non-Euclidean' view where God is incomprehensible.³³ Ivan emphasises that one's approach to God must be Euclidean or else one would not be able to make any developments in theology. Thus, he argues that even if he saw 'parallel lines' meet, a metaphor for theodicy, he would not accept it.³⁴ This metaphor shows that even if theodicy is correct, the possibility of eternal harmony is so beyond human expectation and understanding that it cannot be accepted on the terms of rational argumentation. At face value, one can suggest that this limitation of metaphysical knowledge need not entail a reinterpretation of truth. However, when read in the context of Ivan's belief in eternal harmony and God, Ivan does not deny the validity of theodicy, he simply refuses to accept it. To use his more abstract language,

³⁰ Tilley (2023), 14.

³¹ Williams (2008), 8.

³² Williams (2008), 20.

³³ Trakakis (2021), 704.

³⁴ Dostoevsky (2003), 307–309.

he believes that the parallel lines did meet, but that such a meeting simply cannot be accepted. Thus, in order to maintain consistency, it can be reasonably argued that Ivan's second contribution to the problem of evil is his reinterpretation of truth.

Beyond the aforementioned linguistic influence of the distinction between *pravda* and *istina*, there are two further influences behind Ivan's problem of evil. First, Paul Brazier notes that the restriction of Euclidean reasoning is in line with Orthodox Christianity's emphasis on apophatic theology.³⁵ Apophatic theologians turn to God's infinite nature in comparison to humanity's limited rationality to demonstrate the difficulty, and at times impossibility, of making positive statements about God. Granted, Ivan is not an apophatic theologian as apophatic theologians use the limitation of reason as a way to defend and contemplate God whereas Ivan uses it to object to belief 'in' God. Nonetheless, they can be read as adopting a similar epistemological position as both clearly delineate between what can or cannot be said about God.

It is worth noting that in order to present his argument, Ivan is not fully apophatic as any presentation of the problem of evil must rely on some positive expectations about God's action. However, this doesn't undermine the influence of apophaticism. Andrew Louth notes that apophatic theologians do not deny all positive statements about God, writing that instead of undermining cataphatic theology, apophatic theology 'undergirds it'.³⁶ Thus, even if Ivan utilises some positive reasoning about God, he still limits the Euclidean more than most as theodicy and eternal harmony are both rejected by Ivan despite being relatively non-controversial propositions in natural theology.

Second, the limitation of metaphysical knowledge has a long pedigree in Kant and post-Kantian theology. Believing that metaphysical inquiry undermined important moral and religious beliefs, Kant described his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) as '[denying] knowledge, in order to make room for faith'.³⁷ This denial of metaphysical knowledge had drastic impacts on both religious and secular post-Kantian theology. To the religious, removing metaphysics from theology allowed prominent 19th-century theologians to focus their efforts on other aspects of theology; most notably, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) turned their attention instead to feeling and historicism respectively. Alternatively, the rise of secular philosophy and materialism was also motivated by a Kantian denial of the classical proofs for God as well as a rejection of all metaphysics. This rejection of the divine led to naturalistic explanations for religion. For example, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), whose ideas influenced Dostoevsky, presented theology as a form of anthropology, with religion being a projection of important aspects of human nature.³⁸ While Dostoevsky also adopted this limitation of metaphysics in a theistic way, since Ivan's limitation of the Euclidean does not share Kant's motivation to make room for faith, it is most accurate to view Ivan as reflecting the views of post-Kantian secular theologians, many of whom made up the theological milieu that Dostoevsky engaged in, especially the Petrashevsky Circle of his younger years.

³⁵ Brazier (2016), 104.

³⁶ Louth (1998), 73.

³⁷ Kant (2003), Bxxix.

³⁸ Feuerbach (2008), xi–xiii.

Dostoevsky's reception in the anti-theodical tradition

Given Dostoevsky's extensive influence on the problem of evil, I will focus on his reception in two traditions: anti-theodicy and the evidential problem of evil. These are where Dostoevsky's impact is most prominent, the former drawing on his moral critique of theodicy, and the latter on his use of vivid examples of suffering to challenge belief in God.

Defined as a meta-critique of the problem of evil instead of a position within it, anti-theodacists question the feasibility of approaching the theodical project. This is often done by relying on the tools of moral philosophy to argue that engaging in theoretical theodicy is itself immoral and must be avoided. While anti-theodical sentiments can be traced back to the Book of Job, I will focus on two major periods of post-Dostoevsky developments within this tradition, both bearing direct reference to his works.

The first period of note stretches from the end of the nineteenth century to prominent post-Holocaust continental philosophers. There are three figures who are worthy of examination, William James, Emmanuel Levinas, and Albert Camus. Sami Pihlström describes James' and Levinas' anti-theodicy as a rejection of an abstract God's eye view of evil, characteristic of theodicy, instead promoting an interpersonal 'ethical acknowledgement of the suffering other'.³⁹ Despite similarities between James and Dostoevsky, most notably their shared question of whether it is justified to trade the suffering of an individual for the happiness of the majority, temporal proximity as well as a lack of reference to Dostoevsky by James suggest that similarities between the two are coincidental. However, in the case of Levinas, Dostoevsky's influence is clear. Alan Toumayan notes that the aforementioned quote by Markel that 'each of us is guilty before all' can reasonably be viewed as the 'talismanic quotation' of Levinas's ethical philosophy.⁴⁰ To illustrate, Levinas' argument for the primacy of ethics and the need to take into consideration our relation with the other is similar to Markel's argument for infinite responsibility. To Dostoevsky, as it is with Levinas, one is not an abstract mind that can measure the amount of suffering against their respective goodness. Rather, all ethical decisions have to be appreciated first as a relationship with the other. For this reason, Alyosha's speech at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov* and Zosima's reflections in Book VI, both responses to Ivan's rebellion, focus on interpersonal memories and relationships instead of a rigorous, thought out theodicy.⁴¹

Likewise, the influence of Dostoevsky on Camus is well-documented, with explicit references to Ivan Karamazov found throughout his philosophical essays like *The Rebel* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I will rely on Aleksei Rakhmanin's recent examination of Camus' anti-theodicy to examine the influence of Dostoevsky. Drawing on Camus' *The Plague*, Rakhmanin identifies three prominent aspects of Camus' anti-theodicy, that language is corrupted by evil, how evil arises from an attempt to justify

³⁹ Pihlström (2020), 121–122.

⁴⁰ Toumayan (2004), 55.

⁴¹ Jackson (2004).

evil, and an absence of teleology for evil.⁴² While there is not a semantic dimension to Ivan's anti-theodicy, the latter two aspects of Camus' anti-theodicy are clear in Dostoevsky. As discussed previously, Ivan refuses, out of a love of humanity, to accept eternal harmony, a major reason for this being a rejection of a consequentialist framework. Furthermore, in almost a *verbatim* quotation of Ivan Karamazov, when confronted by the suffering children and in response to Father Paneloux's suggestion that one should love creation even if we cannot understand it, Dr. Rieux states that 'to the day [he dies he] shall refuse to love this creation in which children are tortured'.⁴³ Thus, beyond similarities within the philosophical justification of anti-theodicy, it would appear that the emotional weight of Ivan's rebellion also finds its manifestation in the proclamations of Camus' Dr. Rieux.

The second period in anti-theodicy is characterised by an attempt to raise awareness of anti-theodicy in analytic philosophy. Prominent writers in this movement include, among others, D.Z. Phillips, Pihlström, and Trakakis, who use the tools of analytic philosophy to carry out an interdisciplinary study of religious tradition and literature. While Dostoevsky is well-received across numerous anti-theodicies, the prime example of his influence is found in the writings of Trakakis. Trakakis describes Ivan's challenge as 'one of the most potent and influential arguments ever made against theodicy and, more broadly, optimistic teleological narratives of human progress and redemption'.⁴⁴ In the same way that the anti-theodicyist refuses to enter into debates about the existence of God due to moral reasons, Ivan's position is likewise independent of God's existence as his rejection of eternal harmony is based on his rejection of consequentialist thinking instead of any ontological or metaphysical argument. Therefore, one can see how Dostoevsky's influence shapes the development of anti-theodicy across continental and analytic traditions.

Dostoevsky and the evidential problem of evil

Beyond anti-theodicy, Dostoevsky has been particularly influential on the evidential problem of evil through Ivan's evidential formulation. In the analytic philosophy of religion, there are two prominent presentations of the problem of evil. The logical problem posits a logical contradiction between the propositions 'God is good', 'God is omnipotent', and 'evil exists'. Alternatively, the evidential problem turns to examples of evil, like William Rowe's fawn in the forest, to argue that belief in God's existence is unwarranted.⁴⁵ There is little connection between Ivan's argument and the logical problem of evil as Ivan is not making an argument from logical contradiction. However, the influence of Dostoevsky on the latter is apparent through Ivan's vivid depiction of numerous heart-wrenching stories.

One of Dostoevsky's literary goals was to write the Russian version of Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), and it is in Ivan's argument where he comes closest to this goal. In

⁴² Rakhmanin (2024), 212, 226.

⁴³ Camus (2020), 169.

⁴⁴ Trakakis (2021), 707–708.

⁴⁵ Rowe (1979), 335–336.

Book V, prior to Ivan's statement that he had decided 'not to think about whether man created God or God man', he refers to 'a certain old sinner who lived in the eighteenth century [Voltaire]... who once pronounced that if there were no God it would be necessary to invent him'.⁴⁶ Not only does Voltaire (1694–1778) anticipate Feuerbach's view of religion as a projection of human nature which Ivan seems to echo, Ivan's evidential argument can also be read as being inspired by the evidential structure of Voltaire's *Candide*. Here, Voltaire depicts a young student, Candide, who experiences and witnesses all sorts of turmoil and evil which contradict his teacher Pangloss' philosophy that this was the best of all possible worlds, a clear parody of Leibniz. This evidential challenge to Leibnizian theodicy can be seen as a precursor to Ivan's arguments which have since become influential in the evidential problem of evil.

To illustrate, in Adrian Moore's *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, he turns directly to Ivan to challenge Leibnizian theodicy. Moore describes Ivan's position and the broader challenge to Leibnizian optimism as follows, 'if this is the price that has to be paid to attain the best version of a world such as ours, then it would have been better had there never been a world such as ours'.⁴⁷ Likewise, Alvin Plantinga quotes Ivan's protest to illustrate the strength of the problem of evil before he presents his response.⁴⁸ Both writers recognise how Ivan provides an evidential template of turning to examples of evil to argue against God, a theme which has been utilised by various voices. The evidential weight against the possibility of God arises from examples like the tortured children in Dostoevsky's fiction which make it highly improbable that God exists, showing how evidential problems are heavily influenced explicitly or implicitly by the writings of Dostoevsky.

The book of Job and miraculous faith

Despite Ivan's arguments, Dostoevsky remained a faithful Christian until his death. Thus, it is helpful to explore what he perceived to be a successful response to these challenges as well as the influences behind them. There are three notable responses in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the miracle of faith, the importance of freedom, and an artistic vision to confront suffering. Since these do not necessarily justify God, I refer to these as responses instead of theodicies.⁴⁹

Dostoevsky's appeal to the miraculous nature of faith in the face of suffering is grounded in the mysterious strength of Job's faith. The influence of Job on Dostoevsky is seen in Zosima's description of Job as the 'most biblical of tales', one imbued by 'unimaginable greatness and mystery'.⁵⁰ Furthermore, given Zosima's

⁴⁶ Dostoevsky (2003), 306.

⁴⁷ Moore (2012), 85.

⁴⁸ Plantinga (1977), 8–9.

⁴⁹ In line with Tilley, I use the terms 'resolution' or 'response' instead of 'theodicy' to describe Dostoevsky's approach to the problem of evil due to the anti-theodical nature of *The Brothers Karamazov* (Tilley 2023, 2).

⁵⁰ Dostoevsky (2003), 378.

reference to *One Hundred and Four Sacred Tales of the Old and New Testament*, Dostoevsky's first exposure to Biblical stories, Zosima's engagement with Job is almost autobiographical.

There are two prominent mysteries in the Book of Job. First, both the innocent and the guilty in the Book of Job are challenged. It is reasonable that Job's friends are criticised by God for inaccurately attempting to explain and justify Job's sufferings, as their actions not only slander Job, but also speak poorly of God.⁵¹ However, what is surprising is that righteous Job is also accused by God of '[darkening] counsel by words without knowledge'.⁵² To many, God's chastisement of Job can come across as uncalled for and unnecessary, but it is this chastisement which points to the difficulty humans have in providing an exact explanation for the causes of suffering. Second, it is mysterious how God's theophany is sufficient to bring Job peace. If anyone else was in Job's position, they would expect, at the very least, to receive back from God what they have lost. But, for Job, the return of his wealth only occurs at the very end of the book, after Job has already come to terms with God and his circumstance.

For these reasons, Gary Rosenshield writes that 'the mystery of God is great, but so is the mystery of man... just as God blesses his creation, so does Job'.⁵³ In Ivan's terms, everything that Job experienced should, for his Euclidean mind, constitute sufficient reason to reject God. However, Job is able to look beyond the Euclidean, and accept the non-Euclidean. Thus, far from being two disparate arguments, it would appear that Dostoevsky's use of Job places Ivan and faith as two sides of the same coin. Both Job and Ivan are perplexed by the existence of evils and cannot find a way to reconcile them with their conceptions of an all-loving God. However, what sets Job apart from Ivan is his ability to take a leap of faith and accept God's love even if such an action seems counter-intuitive. Theophany, the appearance of God, is akin to Ivan's metaphor of parallel lines meeting. While Ivan rejects such a miracle, Dostoevsky can be interpreted to have undergone a Jobian affirmation. Recall Dostoevsky's early letter to Fonvisin, 'there is nothing lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic, more rational, more manly, and more perfect than the Saviour', the miraculous incarnation of Christ is sufficient to allow Dostoevsky to accept God's creation.⁵⁴ This ability to accept God is the miraculous nature of Job's faith, for if God gave Job an answer or granted all of Job's desires, then there would be nothing special about the Book of Job.

Those who view Dostoevsky as agreeing with the Inquisitor's suggestion that Christ rejected a faith based on 'miracle, mystery, and authority', may object to this appeal to Jobian mystery and miracle. However, applying his rejection of miracles to the context of Job is incorrect. Granted, it is reasonable that Dostoevsky would have believed that Christ did not want a faith which was sustained solely by miracles. Yet, one would be mistaken in forgetting the miracle of the incarnation upon which Christianity is based, especially when the Incarnation played such a central role in Dos-

⁵¹ Job 4:7–11; 8:4–7; 42:7.

⁵² Job 38:2.

⁵³ Rosenshield (2016), 622.

⁵⁴ Dostoevsky (1917) (Letter to N.D. Fonvisin, March 1854).

toevsky's faith as seen in his letter to Fonvisin. Thus, Dostoevsky's Christo-centric faith refutes any wholesale rejection of miracles.

Despite Dostoevsky's reliance on Job, the reception of his appeal to the miracle and mystery of faith is limited when compared to the aforementioned cases of anti-theodicy and evidential problems of evil. While there are superficial similarities between an appeal to mystery and sceptical theism, there are clear differences between the two. Sceptical theism intends to undermine the argument presented by the atheologian, suggesting that human knowledge does not know of all the relations between good and evil. Alternatively, Dostoevsky appeals to miracle and mystery to suggest that one ought to make a leap of faith. Thus, where sceptical theism is a negative argument, Dostoevsky's position is positive, actively promoting belief in God despite suffering. Furthermore, while an appeal to mystery and miracle may be well received within continental philosophy, this appeal to the non-Euclidean would be perceived by many in analytic philosophy to be problematic. Thus, given the analytic approach of contemporary philosophy of religion, Dostoevsky's Jobian appeal has had limited reception.⁵⁵

Dostoevsky's appeal to the necessity of freedom

Another dimension of Dostoevsky's response to the problem of evil is his emphasis on freedom as being essential to God's creation of humanity and our ability to love. This is best seen when both Christ and Alyosha are not fazed by the Inquisitor's accusation. In the tale, Christ remained silent, responding to the Inquisitor with a kiss. Likewise, Alyosha's initial reaction to Ivan was that 'The Grand Inquisitor' is a 'eulogy of Jesus, not a vilification of him'.⁵⁶ This lack of disagreement supports the reading that both Dostoevsky and the Inquisitor agree on the heavy burden of human freedom. However, where Dostoevsky and the Inquisitor differ is that the former believes freedom is worthwhile whereas the latter rejects freedom as too costly.

In many ways, this appeal to freedom reflects the structure of the argument presented above where both theists and atheists are presented with the same facts yet come to different conclusions. While both are presented with the cost of freedom, Dostoevsky argues that the theist must recognise the importance of freedom despite its cost. To Dostoevsky, freedom is essential for humans to be morally responsible agents and for them to love freely and purely. The importance of this love is emphasised by both Zosima and Alyosha. Zosima, when teaching on God's love, proclaims that 'love is such a priceless treasure that the whole world may be purchased with it'.⁵⁷ Yet, as Paul Contino observes, this love requires one to respect the other's freedom. To illustrate, Zosima's respect for Mikhail's freedom demonstrates the necessity of avoiding the temptation to make decisions for others, even when motivated by

⁵⁵ The Book of Job can also be developed in the context of narrative theodicies, such as Stump (2010), which are explored in more detail in Section "[Dostoevsky's artistic vision: narrative as a response to evil](#)".

⁵⁶ Dostoevsky (2003), 339–342.

⁵⁷ Dostoevsky (2003), 73.

love, as doing so would alleviate them of moral responsibility.⁵⁸ Similarly, juxtaposing Alyosha's speech at the stone with Ivan's monologue, Robert Jackson contrasts Ivan's use of the first-person 'I' with Alyosha's use of 'you' to show how the latter is focused on 'love, reconciliation, and universal brotherhood'.⁵⁹ The emphasis on love, and, by extension, the essential role of freedom, is fundamental for Dostoevsky's philosophy.

A prominent influence behind Dostoevsky's emphasis on freedom is his Christianity. Developing upon my aforementioned hypothesis that Dostoevsky sided with the Inquisitor's description of freedom, the Inquisitor's accusation that '[Christ] thirsted for a love that was free, not for the servile ecstasies of the slave' can be read as an accurate representation of the gospels.⁶⁰ Christ's call to discipleship would be senseless if the disciples didn't have the ability to choose otherwise and refuse his call.⁶¹ Likewise, Christianity does not present discipleship as an easy burden, rather it is described as the need to take up one's cross to follow Him.⁶² Thus, the Inquisitor's position that Christ chose to maintain human freedom despite its burden can be viewed as a central tenet of Dostoevsky's understanding of Christianity.

This emphasis on freedom also extends beyond the gospel. It has been argued that freedom also plays a central role in his preference for Orthodoxy over Catholicism and Protestantism. Steven Cassedy writes, 'Catholicism errs by establishing unity through autocratic tyranny. Protestantism errs by establishing freedom only to sacrifice unity for individual freedom and subjectivity. Orthodoxy establishes unity *and* individual freedom'.⁶³ Of course, this is not an airtight theological argument for Orthodoxy, nor is it necessarily an accurate description of Protestantism or Catholicism. Nonetheless, given this sentiment in his writings, one can further see how freedom is found at every stage of Dostoevsky's Christianity, from being an essential presupposition of the gospel to his denominational preference for Orthodoxy.

Those familiar with Kant may further recognise similarities between Dostoevsky and Kant. Anticipating Dostoevsky's emphasis on the importance of freedom for humanity's capacity to love, Kant believes that free will is 'the supreme principle of morality' which allows the will to be 'a law to itself'.⁶⁴ In other words, freedom is necessary for our conceptions of humans as autonomous agents as well as our morality. For this reason, I agree with Tilley that Dostoevsky's engagement with the theme of freedom, through his characters of Ivan and Zosima, can be viewed as developments upon a Kantian emphasis on the importance of freedom.⁶⁵ Granted, there are important differences between their conceptions of freedom. Freedom in Dostoevsky is a gift from God instead of a postulate of practical reasoning. Likewise,

⁵⁸ Contino (2020), 55, 71.

⁵⁹ Jackson (2004), 239.

⁶⁰ Dostoevsky (2003), 334.

⁶¹ Matt. 28:16–20; Luke 9:23–24; John 8:31–38; John 13:34–35.

⁶² Matt. 16:24.

⁶³ Cassedy (2005), 58.

⁶⁴ Kant (2018a, 2018b), 4:440.

⁶⁵ Tilley (2023), 92–98. See Tilley (2023), ch. 6 for an in-depth discussion of Ivan and Zosima's treatment of freedom in light of Kant's philosophy.

Kant objects to the use of free will in theodical conversations, writing that suffering which arises out of ‘necessary limitations of humanity’ ought not be considered as evil.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the substantial similarities between the two writers on this topic provides reasonable grounds to posit influence.⁶⁷

Dostoevsky’s artistic vision: narrative as a response to evil

So far, I have engaged with the individual responses to the problem of evil found in Dostoevsky’s characters. However, these themes of freedom and faith find their fullest expression in the artistic form of the novel itself. Dostoevsky writes in his notebooks that ‘[his critics] haven’t even begun to dream of a denial of God as powerful as the one I have placed in the Inquisitor and in the preceding chapter, to which the *entire novel* serves as a response’.⁶⁸ This response of the novel, similar to his evaluation of Book VI, is best viewed ‘not [as] a direct one... [but] a world view that stands in direct opposition to the one that was previously presented, but again the opposition is not made point by point but, so to speak, in the form of an artistic picture’.⁶⁹ In this section, I engage with the ‘artistic picture’ found within the ‘entire novel’, as examined by Tilley, Williams, and Contino, showing how it can be applied to contemporary theodical discussions.

Central to Dostoevsky’s artistic picture are the ethical and social implications which arise from his polyphony. In his seminal work, Mikhail Bakhtin describes polyphony as ‘a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses... [characters are] not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse’.⁷⁰ This polyphonic vision provides factual as well as normative implications. Factually, polyphony acknowledges the coexistence and conflict of voices, each with their own aims and engaging in constant dialogue. Tilley writes, ‘the novel shows by means of its polyphony how the world could be properly understood in multiple ways and occupied in various manners... We cannot know with absolute certainty which understanding is the best and which actions are right’.⁷¹ Normatively, recognising this diversity dictates a certain way in which we must engage with others. Tilley argues convincingly that this normative vision is best illustrated by the Russian Orthodox concept of *sobornost*, a communal vision which balances the virtues of harmony and freedom.

⁶⁶ Kant (2018a, 2018b), 8:259.

⁶⁷ Given Dostoevsky’s appeal to freedom and the prominence of free-will theodicies, one may be tempted to posit influence between the two. Despite these similarities, the reception of Dostoevsky’s appeal to free will in contemporary theodicies is best seen as implicit, being overwhelmed by the influence of Augustine (354–430). In these writings, it is Augustine, not Dostoevsky, who is used as the paradigmatic historical case of free will theodicies. Thus, his reception within free will theodicies is limited in comparison to Augustine and should not be overstated.

⁶⁸ Kostalevsky 1997, 55.

⁶⁹ Dostoevsky (1987) (Letter to K.P. Pobedonostsev Aug/Sept 1879).

⁷⁰ Bakhtin (1984), 6–7.

⁷¹ Tilley (2023), 9.

However, Dostoevsky recognises that balancing harmony and freedom is a difficult and nuanced task.⁷² A blind desire for harmony, though noble in intention, reduces the other to homogeneity and prevents the individuals' freedom to choose their own destiny. Williams turns to Myshkin as a cautionary tale of how love, no matter how selfless, must relate to the reality of the recipient of love. It is impossible for Myshkin to be dialogically involved with others because he attempts to force Nastasya to be good, despite her *real* inclinations and decisions which lead her towards evil, thereby violating the principles of polyphony.⁷³ Likewise, Dostoevsky shows that over-emphasis on freedom leads to tragic outcomes. The results of misappropriated freedom are depicted in *Demons* to great effect, reflecting Shigalov's adage 'proceeding from unlimited freedom, I end with unlimited despotism'.⁷⁴ Similarly, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Smerdyakov justifies his patricide with Ivan's statement that without God and immortality, 'all things are lawful'.⁷⁵

Despite these difficulties, the attainment of *sobornost* is not impossible and is best embodied by Alyosha's realism in confronting the suffering in the world. Contino recognises Alyosha's and Zosima's realism in affirming that the choice between good and evil and the responsibility attached to it can only be borne by the one making it. One can support the other's decision by being a beacon of active love, embodied in Christ's and Alyosha's kiss of the Inquisitor and Ivan respectively, yet one cannot make the decision for them.⁷⁶ Likewise, Tilley notes that Alyosha is 'neither materialistic nor fanatically spiritual'.⁷⁷ He does not deceive himself about the suffering in the world and recognises the same suffering upon which Ivan formulates his objections. However, unlike Ivan who merely observes and reports on suffering, Alyosha is 'a generous, practical, involved problem solver with eyes wide open to what is going on in the world'.⁷⁸ Alyosha demonstrates that the adoption of realism, embodied by the virtues of wisdom and prudence, is necessary in achieving the ethical vision of *sobornost* which respects the complex realities of the independent voices laid out by polyphony.⁷⁹

Analytic philosophers may object to Dostoevsky's artistic and ethical vision on the grounds that it does not provide a direct response to evil. Yet, as seen in his letter to Pobedonostsev and previous sections of this paper, a direct justificatory argument for evil is not the goal of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Williams writes 'Dostoevsky is not presenting to us a set of inconclusive arguments about "the existence of God," for and against, but a fictional picture of what faith and the lack of it would *look* like in

⁷² Casedy views the balancing of harmony and freedom as being one of the unique aspects of Orthodoxy over Protestantism or Catholicism (2005, 58).

⁷³ Williams (2008), 49–53.

⁷⁴ Dostoevsky (2011), 446.

⁷⁵ Dostoevsky (2003), 808.

⁷⁶ Contino (2020), 54–57, 98–101.

⁷⁷ Tilley (2023), 39.

⁷⁸ Tilley (2023), 40–41.

⁷⁹ Contino emphasises the virtue of prudence as necessary for realism (2020, 12, 16–17). Tilley likewise emphasises practical wisdom and wisdom (2023, 146–147).

the political and social world of his day'.⁸⁰ One may adopt what Contino describes as Dostoevsky's incarnational realism, 'that Christ has died and risen for all; [and] we are responsible for all'. In response to Christ's universal sacrifice, we can follow Alyosha and recognise that we have a responsibility to confront suffering with love and charity whenever and wherever we can.⁸¹ Alternatively, we can follow Ivan's materialistic narrative and remain in rebellion against God and the world, adopting a stance of quietism and inaction. As Tilley reminds us, a polyphonic novel cannot guarantee absolute certainty of one narrative or another.⁸² The reader must make a decision on how suffering is to be confronted and to bear the responsibilities of such a decision.

Despite this clear Christian influence, Dostoevsky's application of narrative and polyphony to theodical literature is a novel development. Bakhtin is right that polyphony is a 'new type of artistic thinking' and a 'new artistic model of the world'.⁸³ His artistic vision reveals an ethical vision which has been under-emphasised and latent within the Christian message. This ethical vision of mutual respect and love challenges the often totalising and inquisitorial nature of Christian dogmatism which not only prevents the dynamism necessary for spiritual growth, but also leads to the anti-theodicist's concern that theodicy trivialises evil.⁸⁴ Dostoevsky ensures that there is no certainty when it comes to confronting evil, yet we should hope that adopting the vision of *sobornost* provides us with the narrative to confront evil and have hope in the resurrection and the future renewal of the world.

Recognising Dostoevsky's reliance on narrative is particularly interesting given the rise of narrative approaches in the last two decades. Eleonore Stump's seminal work *Wandering in Darkness* develops on Biblical narratives of suffering, like Job and Abraham, to provide a more holistic approach to the problem of evil by addressing a sufferer's 'inner life'.⁸⁵ Likewise, feminist theologians, such as Carol Winkelman and Jill Hernandez, have also emphasised the need for theologians to address the individual narratives which victims often create to account for the evils they experience.⁸⁶ While they do not attribute influence to Dostoevsky, one must recognise his role as a forerunner in such appeals to narratives.

As a final point of influence, Tilley notes that *The Brothers Karamazov* responds to the motivating questions behind Kant's three critiques. Dostoevsky's engagement with Ivan's materialism responds to the first Critique's concern with the limits of knowledge. Likewise, *sobornost* provides an answer to 'What ought I to do?' and 'What may I hope?', the questions behind his second and third Critiques.⁸⁷ Given Kant's broader influences on Dostoevsky, this Kantian framing for Dostoevsky's writings is possible even if we do not have direct sources which demonstrate his

⁸⁰ Williams (2008), 4.

⁸¹ Contino (2020), 184.

⁸² Tilley (2023), 9.

⁸³ Bakhtin (1984), 3.

⁸⁴ This ethical vision is elaborated with further depth by Emmanuel Levinas.

⁸⁵ Stump (2010), 373.

⁸⁶ Winkelman (2004), Hernandez (2021).

⁸⁷ Tilley (2023), 140–141.

awareness of the second or third Critiques. However, independent of Kant, these three questions are essential behind any attempt at developing a systematic world-view or narrative. Due to the nature of recent theodical discussions, many theodicies only answer one of these questions. For example, sceptical theism limits knowledge whereas soul-building provides one with future hope. As such, even if they succeed at defeating the problem of evil as presented by the atheist, they fail to provide a convincing narrative through which one can approach suffering. However, in answering all three questions, Tilley notes that *The Brothers Karamazov* provides hope for readers in their confrontation with evil. Thus, Dostoevsky not only anticipates contemporary narrative theodicy but provides criteria by which such responses may be judged.

The problem of evil in light of Dostoevsky

This examination of Dostoevsky's influences as well as his reception allows readers to accurately situate him within the development of the problem of evil. In a recent study, Mark Edwards delineates between the problem of evil in the ancient world and in contemporary philosophy. While the contemporary problem is characterised by the possibility of the coexistence of God and evil, the ancient problem was a contemplative question about the nature of God.⁸⁸ This evolution, beginning in the Mediaeval and Enlightenment periods, was motivated by philosophical developments alongside instances of intense suffering, like the Lisbon Earthquake and two World Wars. This paper shows that Dostoevsky exemplifies and accelerates this paradigm shift. It is with him, and early modern writers like Voltaire and Hume, that a rejection of God in response to evil becomes a tenable option in contrast to how God's existence was simply presupposed in the past.

Through an examination of Ivan's challenges, this paper demonstrates Dostoevsky's literary and philosophical influences and traces his widespread reception within evidential and anti-theodical traditions. Likewise, through an examination of his three responses, one can see how they are inseparable from his Christian beliefs. While Dostoevsky has been less influential within contemporary theodicy, he can still be recognised as the forerunner of recent developments in narrative theodicy, offering not only a model but criteria by which such responses may be judged. I further suggest that reflection on Dostoevsky's communal vision of *sobornost* may prove helpful for future developments in theology, bringing an ethics of freedom and harmony to the forefront of the Christian faith.

For the most part, this paper has reviewed Dostoevsky's place in the historical development of the problem of evil, being of interest to both the historian of philosophy and the literary scholar. However, I would like to end this paper with an open question about how exposure to Dostoevsky can lead to further development in theodical dialogue. Within analytic philosophy, scholars often approach the problem of evil from an abstract and impersonal standpoint. However, given the richness of Dostoevsky's argument, which heavily relies on theological, literary, and philosophical traditions, a strong case can be made that critical engagement with the problem

⁸⁸ Edwards (2023), 297.

of evil should not be done in a philosophical vacuum but must also take into consideration these broader disciplines. Dostoevsky's work demonstrates that confronting evil requires not only direct argumentative refutation, but narrative and vision. In this respect, his contribution to the problem of evil is not merely of historical interest, but promotes new avenues to be explored in theodical dialogues.

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Conflict of interest None. I declare that there are no competing interests, financial or personal, that are relevant to the content of this article.

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