

A Buddhist/Vedantic Reading of the Brothers Karamazov

Slavic 155

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late? you call this late? anybody who is an adventurous spirit has seen many a sunrise
I don't think that granola making is the most profitable business to be in
what we are doing here is learning to temporarily suspend time and space at will -Mr. Joshi's class first words
The source of repression is the persistent refusal to accept death as a part of life -last words
katha upanishad and gita upanishad
if a cluttered desk means a cluttered mind what does an empty desk mean?
Man made computers in his own image. He said it was good. ~Uncle Dave
Computation is causality. ~Jacob
She's not someone who says "when life gives you lemons, make lemonade" She says f--- the lemons, let's make orange sherbet!

97% complete | version 0.9.9.8 (7:00am, 12/25)

1. 99% complete | Introduce the concept of *avidya* as a framework for understanding human motivation and show examples of how *avidya* explains the behavior of the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*
2. 100% complete | Show how Father Zosima's interactions with characters refocus them on the present moment and reduce *avidya* in a way that's fundamentally yogic.
3. 96% complete | Explain my understanding of how all computers and thinking/living things are channeling the vast computational power of the universe, how intention and motivation arise from this sunlike source of energy, and how finding a way of existence that flows with this source of energy is what is meant by being inspired by "the holy spirit."
4. Discuss how *avidya* disrupts or interferes with this process

1. 99% complete | Introduce the concept of *avidya* as a framework for understanding human motivation and show examples of how *avidya* is a good model for the behavior of the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*

When the 14th and current Dalai Lama spoke at MIT in October 2012 on global systems, one of the panelists asked him: "We know the kinds of changes people need to make to achieve the sustainable well-being of the world. But how do we actually get them to make these changes?" The Dalai Lama gave a surprising response: "We must tell them to be selfish." He then added that in doing so, however, we "must be wise-selfish, instead of foolish-selfish." What he implied by this was that often, when we deeply reflect on our own desires they change, and indeed become very reasonable. In order to live lives that are both individually fulfilling and globally harmonious, thus, we must care for ourselves, but do so with cognizance of the deeper truth of our motivations. We must be selfish in a larger sense. Generally, in yoga philosophy, this clear perception of what we actually want -- the truth that remains when wrong thoughts roll off, is called *vidya*, meaning "right knowledge" in Sanskrit. The opposite of *vidya* is *avidya*, unclear perception. These concepts are the basis for a very powerful framework for understanding human behavior.

The Dalai Lama's simple statement encodes within it deep intuition for some fundamental concepts about the nature of human motivation that play out in strikingly dramatic style in *The Brothers Karamazov*. By reading *The Brothers Karamazov* through the lens of this ideology, we can come to personally relate to and understand why the characters are taking the actions they take and what they actually mean by their often metaphysical Christian philosophies.

Background on Avidya and Buddhist/Vedic Philosophy

The founding texts of Hinduism, the Vedas, derive their name from the Sanskrit word *vidya*, meaning "right knowledge." *Vidya* is placed in contrast with *avidya*, which is "knowledge other than right knowledge," mistaken beliefs. A closely connected concept is that of yoga. The word "yoga" comes from the Sanskrit word "yuj," meaning to yoke, or to bring together. One meaning of yoga is to unite the mind and body, to unite thought and action. To practice yoga is to be fully present in every action. A person can be giving a lecture, but his attention can be divided, thinking about what he is going to have for dinner; this is disunion. But if our thoughts are not elsewhere, but here, if we take action with the whole mind, with awareness and energy -- "like we mean it" -- we can do things with sensitivity, joy, and creativity, and take the action better each time. We can question why we are doing things and come to a full understanding. We can reduce *avidya*. We can relax out of the strange rut of flailing about, taking knee-jerk reactive, meaningless actions that many of Dostoevsky's characters fall into. When we take action "like we *mean* it," it becomes *meaningful*. As it turns out, these sorts of psycholinguistic similarities are more than superficial, and give us insight into the nature of many of the relationships between seemingly disparate ideas.

The fact that we can be functioning but not mentally present at all is a result of "man's great facility to form habitual processes" (Desikachar 2), or *samskara*, as it is called in Sanskrit. This exceedingly useful capacity to become conditioned incidentally also enables us to be thoughtless and enables *avidya* to accumulate. A major goal of meditative practice is to return the mind to an untroubled, *avidya*-free state, the "Beginner's Mind," that is not trapped in faulty patterns. Often, when people are suffering, the thing that is causing their suffering -- the thing that they fear -- need not come to pass if they simply become still, then proceed forward with gentleness, grace, care, and attention. The state of being trapped in faulty patterns is the source of problems for many of the characters in the *The Brothers Karamazov*. At the same time, these characters' intermittent conscious or subconscious glimmers of desire to overcome these faulty patterns acts like an invisible hand, shaping many of their actions.

How Avidya is Expressed

Naming the phenomenon of avidya for what it is gives us the power to become aware of it, and not confuse it with “sinfulness” or “laziness” or any of these phenomena which are the downstream result of avidya. Knowing what it is makes it possible to deal with and reduce it, instead of reinforcing it by taking misguided actions based on false understanding. In the Southeast Asian philosophical tradition, the downstream effects of avidya are classified into four categories so that they can be identified as unwanted byproducts of unclear perceptions and taken care of.

The Four Children of Avidya

Asmita -- “the I thing,” egoism, solipsism, being an angry buffoon out of selfishness/self importance. Stereotypically, this amounts to “brattiness.”

Raga – unhealthy attachment: “we want something today because it was pleasurable yesterday, not because we need it” (Desikachar p.6)

Dvesa – dislike, hatred, repugnance: “If we don’t get what we want we tend to hate it, and if we have a bad experience we don’t want it to happen again” (Desikachar p.6)

Abhinivesa – “The source of fear, the most mysterious aspect of avidya... we feel insecure...we dread how others judge us...we feel insecure when the continuity of our way of life is disturbed. We don't want to face old age” (Desikachar 6)

Finally, avidya often expresses itself in people’s demeanors as a lack of grace, and vidya as grace. “When we know we are right, there is deep within us a feeling of quietness; no tension...I speak slowly, deliberately...However, when I'm not sure of what I'm saying, I tend to speak quickly, I use unnecessary words, and I break my sentences. When our understanding is clear, we feel something serene deep within us. There is no disturbance” (Desikachar 8). As with the word “meaning” above, the psycholinguistic connection between the concept of grace in vidya, and grace as salvation in Christianity is deeply meaningful and will be discussed.

Let us now consider these ideas in the context of the story.

Avidya in the Novel

"The intoxication of cruelty"

In his discussion with Alyosha in the tavern, Ivan describes what he sees wrong about Russian society at length, at one point relating a pattern of negative behavior through an allegory of a horse being cruelly beaten by a Russian peasant. In it, he introduces the concept of the “intoxication of cruelty,” a prime instance of avidya that plays itself out time and time again in the novel. He writes:

“We have our historical, immediate, close pleasure in the torture of beating... a feeble little horse has foundered under too heavy a load and cannot move. The peasant beats it, beats it savagely, beats it at last not knowing what he’s doing in the intoxication of cruelty.” (Dostoevsky 208)

Intoxication is genuinely what those in the frenzy of false self-perception seek. It is the kernel of Underground psychology. Whether they become drunk like Snegiryov or cruel like the imagined peasants beating the horse (a metaphor that is reminiscent of Crime and Punishment and is reinforced in its strength by its cross-novel repetition), they are taking self-destructive action as a temporary way to numb their pain. They, like the Underground Man with his toothache, are even taking “pleasure” in it! “Intoxication” is a perfect word because it hints at alcohol consumption, through which people take “pleasure” in oblivion, and describes the “toxic” nature of this behavior in the same breath.

“The intoxication of cruelty” is a perfect example of raga, or unhealthy attachment, and expresses the relation of avidya to the concept of being “wise selfish”. While clearly, a person in the throes of cruel action would be better off simply stopping and doing nothing, he doesn’t, because of his misperceived attachment to acting in the same negative way he did in the past. Man’s capacity to become obsessed with finishing a job he started (which is often good) is here twisted and results in internally consistent senseless violence that doesn’t bring him happiness. This is the first level on which avidya exists in this scene.

Samskara, Sin, and Psycholinguistics

On a second level, Ivan’s reflection that this pattern of intoxication is a national phenomenon in Russia can be regarded as a recognition that there is avidya in the Russian cultural psyche itself. How does something as personal as avidya get transmitted through “culture”? What cultures carry are not actions, but ways of framing ideas. Citizens, by living in a culture, enter into a dialectic with and frame their thoughts in the language and ideology the culture uses. How, specifically, does the pattern of intoxication spread through this cultural avidya? Consider how Snegirov, mentioned above, describes how he coped with being humiliated by Mitya. As if it were the most normal thing in the world, he matter-of-factly states: "the next day I got drunk to forget my troubles, sinful man as I am, Sir." Because the idea of “sin” is named and deeply rooted in the Russian psyche as something challenging to be struggled against (and which everybody has, and only saints rise fully above) it becomes possible, and even acceptable, to be a sinful man. It makes it possible to be a whole person while being sinful, whereas if "sinfulness" were not named, and if it were instead replaced by the concept of avidya, it would not be considered possible to exist in a stable, settled state of being while committing “sinful” behavior. A sinful person would not be *a type of person*. Snegirov would just be a person not at peace, a man seeing the world unclearly. Perhaps if

there were no archetype of the "sinful" man, he would have just been still, ruminating for the time he spent drinking, and if he had organized his thoughts, he would realize that what he was really seeking was to rebuild his honor and self-confidence. He might have pulled the metaphorical “arrow out of his eye” instead of “matter-of-factly” falling into the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic trap of "sinful" behavior, which he would not have known to be a way of being (not a “fact” at all) if not for the framework provided by the culture in which he lived. In the moment he rationalized his actions through describing himself as sinful, he ceased to be present and to think about what he was doing, but instead downloaded into his mind the avidya-riddled cultural samskaras of drunkenness and belief in environmental determinism, and gave in to the overbearing cultural force towards nihilistic underground thinking. Because the concept of sin primed him to expect it to be difficult, painful, and even impossible to fight off, he became unable to tell that he was “fighting” it in the wrong way when he found it painful. His fear of that difficulty thus, led to a film of avidya that clouded his perception. Thus, culture provided him avidya about the nature of avidya itself, which is in some ways even more dangerous.

Environmental Determinism, Ownership, and Avidya

Belief in environmental determinism, the notion that the environment has an all-important impact on a person's character, was commonplace among Russian radicals in Dostoevsky’s time, and is the fundamental mechanism by which people can become trapped by cultural avidya. Indeed, the Russian original phrase for a person being “ruined by his environment” translates literally as "eaten up by the environment.” It anthropomorphizes the environment as a conscious beast that might have a capacity to control a person (Dostoyevsky 69). As it was, Dostoyevsky personally was an outspoken critic of this idea and environmental determinism in general (footnote in *Brothers*).

When you are placed on a level playing field with others, then it is evident that your talent, cleverness, and dedication will determine your level of success. Then you feel like you have a fair chance at succeeding -- because you have the same chance as the most successful of men. But when you enter into an environment, a cultural dialectic, whose storyline contains the idea that your environment has the power to oppress you (as many of the utopian socialists believed) -- transform you into something, because “nobody” leaves without falling or changing in a certain negative way -- when you succumb to the idea of environmental determinism, and become “eaten up by your environment,” then you suddenly relinquish ownership over your own fate and it spins out of control. It ceases to be a part of you. You withdraw your awareness from your self-determination so that it may be amputated like a gangrenous limb that has lost a battle for survival. Your ego dies.

As a result of this thinking, characters in *Brothers*, like Snegirov, felt that their behavior was determined by their environment and there was nothing they could do about it. But from a Vedic point of view, to the extent to which you are engaged with it, you are one with your environment. Thus, the environment affects you, but you also affect the environment. This recognition provides you the opportunity to use what you have within your environment to achieve your ends. The difference between the Vedic and the deterministic view of the environment is that the former presupposes that you have a goal, and that your goal makes a difference, while the latter does not.

There is a subtle yet profound distinction between reacting to one's environment and using what you have within your environment to achieve your ends. One presupposes a goal, the other does not. In the face of perceived negativity, many characters explicitly or implicitly asked the existential question: what is the purpose of keeping on living? A person of clarity might respond: You have two good legs. Start walking. That's for you to decide for yourself. In that moment of refocusing the mind on the physical body, it becomes clear that the question: “what is the purpose of keeping on living” is not a good. one, it is avidya, and that the truth is that we simply start where we are, use what we have, and do what we can in life, and that that’s what matters. Snegirov failed to do this.

Suffering of Children

The concept of the “Beginner’s Mind” allows us to understand the singular importance of children in the novel. Why does Ivan fixate on the conception of children as ideal creations? The child is not necessarily efficient at what he does, but he is, whether or not he wants to be, irrepressibly aware, both because he is sensitive, and because he has no habitual processes to fall back upon. Thus everything is a challenge that takes his entire attention. In other words, by virtue of being a true beginner, the child by necessity approaches everything with the “beginner’s mind,” open to all possibilities. Because Ivan himself lacks this untroubled state, to make sense of his own feelings, he builds extensive rationalizations explaining why he can’t seem to recapture the mindset he probably remembers having as a child. Thus he, echoing the Christian conception of original sin, speaks of adults as having “eaten of the apple,” and to a large degree excludes caring for their wicked souls from his calculations of morality. He says to Alyosha:

“Dear God. I’m not talking about the suffering of grown-ups, they ate the apple and can go to the devil, and let the devil take them all, but these little ones, these little ones! I’m tormenting you... I’ll stop if you like.” (Dostoevsky 209)

What the metaphor of having "Eaten of the apple” seems to presuppose is that it is impossible to regain innocence and grace once it has been lost. You can’t un-eat something once it has been eaten. Conversely, the metaphor-framework of avidya does not have within it this psycholinguistic trap, which, as I have discussed, I believe to be itself avidya.

What is strange, however, is that at odds with this conception of all men as sinners is a deep wisdom also embedded within the Christian psycholinguistic framework in describing people as “children of God.” When adults realize the truth of this perspective, that they are truly children, not fundamentally different from the beautiful young ones who have not, as Ivan says, “eaten of the apple,” they suddenly tune into their ability to perceive and respond to the world, and to their internal feelings about it, as they actually are at the moment, not as they remember them to have been in the past. They are able to reduce avidya. This tension between fundamentally conflicting models of the world embedded within Christianity, such as is demonstrated here by its contradictory opinions about the permanence of the loss of innocence, seeds (and exacerbates) the internal struggles of characters such as Ivan who undecided about the truth of the Christian ideal. It is thus valuable and astonishing to these troubled characters when Father Zosima, who

fundamentally understood the kernel – the mustard seed, as it were – of positive wisdom within the Bible interprets it for them.

In a book that is largely about wars of storylines (most literally in the phrasing of the trial lawyer's attempt to paint psychological pictures of Dmitri later on) these psycholinguistic traps are all important. They are how characters' philosophies, and thus their emotions, and thus their actions, are decided. They are the mechanisms by which models of reality, vidya-filled or avidya-ridden, influence characters' behavior.

"Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"

"...there was no law of nature that man should love mankind, and that, if there had been any love on earth hitherto, it was not owing to a natural law, but simply because men believed in their immortality... [In the absence of immortality] egoism, even under crime, must become not only lawful but even recognized as the inevitable, most rational, even honorable outcome of his vision." (Dostoevsky 65)

Ivan claimed to believe believed that if there was no God there was no morality and he devotes much of his time worrying about the details of this statement. Only later, when he speaks with Zosima, realizes that he was having the wrong conversation to begin with. He came to Zosima seeking truth and left with peace instead. This phenomenon of “having the wrong conversation” is the final way in which meta-avidya expresses itself.

There are huge arcs of plot – whole lives of characters -- that are completely useless – "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" because they spend them trying to distract themselves from how terrible their lives are. Because they feel impotent to make them better, they become depressed. This behavior passes across the generations. In “The Brothers Get Acquainted” Ivan even reflects: “anything stupider than the way, Russian boys spend their time one can hardly imagine." He recognizes this, and leaves unstated the thought that he might be one such boy, for we when we describe those around us we are really describing ourselves. He claims that “there is a strength to endure everything... The strength of the Karamazov baseness” (Dostoevsky 229). To kill it all away, to “sink into debauchery, to stifle [the] soul with corruption,” with such distraction, with avidya!

In his book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Zen master Shunryu Suzuki writes that if you wish to change someone the worst thing to do is to ignore them. The second-worst thing, he says, is to try to control them. And the best thing to is to sit there and watch them (Suzuki 31). And this is precisely what Jesus does in the Grand Inquisitor scene; he sits and listens for the Grand Inquisitor to unmake himself. Jesus does this because he realizes that what he truly means to convey about philosophy anyway cannot be not “learned” but discovered within. By listening to a person, you implicitly encourage him to shape his message for you as an audience, forcing him to build a model of another person's mind and feelings in the process. This is an immensely clarifying process.

So, in the end, when the Inquisitor finally finds silence, when he finally empties his metaphorical cup, Jesus fills it with the most profound of gifts, a gentle kiss, a note of pure, amorphous positive intention -- as was the seed of all things in the beginning anyway -- that “glows in [the old man's] heart” (Dostoevsky 228). And suddenly, the two are in accord.

It is particularly striking that Ivan is the one to tell the story of the Grand Inquisitor because even as he speaks, Ivan himself is a figure like the Inquisitor, expostulating, analyzing in a way that's fundamentally tormented. Earlier in the novel, like Jesus, Father Zosima is quiet and listens to Ivan expostulate. And even more strikingly, even as Ivan is telling the story, Alyosha is sitting and listening to him, and like Jesus does the Grand Inquisitor, Alyosha kisses Ivan's lips afterwards. Ivan laughs because he thinks this has somehow proved he's right, and he comments on how his brother has “plagiarized him.” This fits with the theme in the brothers Karamazov as a whole of characters in the story being projections of the different voices in the mind of the author and in the collective psyche of Russia. The Grand Inquisitor is a story within the story, a voice within Ivan turned into a character, anthropomorphized, just as Ivan is a voice in the mind of the Russian psyche.

Humans are creatures that try to make pearls of peace out of grains of disquiet. We always tend in the direction to smooth out the lacerations that are within us. Harvard Professor of Cultural History Shigehisa Kuriyama draws the metaphor of a country road in China that exists in the space cleared where a wall used to be. Where we have built walls in the past, he says, there will our paths in the future go. Ivan, in expounding his extensive theories, can be understood to be attempting to overcome such a barrier, a thing that troubled him, an internal “demon.” To name and clearly identify that “demon,” to find that arrow in his eye, he ends up anthropomorphizing it as a voice, as an actor. His isolation of the actor into a separate personality, the Inquisitor, is a very literal way of cordoning it off to consider for separation from his psyche. Looking at Ivan from this perspective, the reader can watch and see his mind slowly gain equilibrium and clarity throughout the process. Just as the Inquisitor comes to peace, so does Ivan. He addresses Alyosha, “resolute,” a word implying By the (with a feeling of excruciating helplessness, trapped by the fourth wall) as he observes the glimmers of clarity that guide his heal, off the actor that is leading to the spirit within the this but the on the self consistent internal philosophy that's leading to his action.

By creating this character of the Grand Inquisitor that unmakes himself, Dostoevsky demonstrates the self-strangling nature of avidya, which distinguishes it from vidya. It is like a tumor, a tangled mass of ingrown veins that that is ultimately irrelevant and distracting from the core body of fire and light and pneumatic tension that produced it in the first place.

In doing this, Dostoevsky shows how the psychology of skepticism walls its bearers off from the world and finds itself mired, in contrast to the psychology of faith and love which on many occasions produces real good. He leaves it to the reader to decide for himself which ideology he finds more beautiful.

2. **100% complete** Show how Father Zosima's interactions with characters refocus them on the present moment and reduce avidya in a way that's fundamentally yogic.

What Father Zosima does in his interactions with other characters can be understood as trying to reduce avidya. Sometimes he meets with more success and others with less, but nonetheless, his advice and approach are profoundly perceptive and reflect an understanding of the soul that transcends cultural limitations.

Let us observe how Father Zosima's interactions are fundamentally reducing avidya. Consider his conversation with Fyodor, which succeeded at least in the short term at getting the dissolute landowner to self-reflect:

“You have known for a long time what you must do, you have **sense** enough: Don’t give way to drunkenness and incontinence of speech; don’t give way to sensual lust; and above all, the love of money.... Above all, don’t lie to yourself. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to such a pass that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love, and in order to occupy and distract himself without love he gives way to passions and coarse pleasures, and sinks to the bestiality in his vices, all from continuing lying to other men and to himself. The man who lies to himself can be more easily offended anyone. You know it is sometimes **very pleasant to take offense**, isn’t it?”

“It is, it is pleasant to take offense. You said that so well, as I never heard it before. Yes, I have been all my life taking offense, to please myself, taking offense on esthetic grounds... I have been lying, lying positively my whole life long, every day and hour of it. Of a truth, I am a lie, and the father of lies” (Dostoevsky 42)

In this passage, Zosima lays out a striking parallel to concepts that appear in yoga philosophy. He explains how when we lie to ourselves, it makes it difficult for us to see truth clearly, which is precisely what Desikachar is referring to when he says that our minds become covered by “a film of avidya.” Moreover, Zosima talks about how in the absence of clear perception we readily take offense; this state is precisely the opposite of the “seren[ity] deep within us” that Desikar describes as a hallmark of vidya. Finally, Zosima’s description of how it can be “very pleasant to take offense” when in a certain state directly parallels the Underground Man’s notion of taking “private pleasure” in a toothache, which is, as discussed earlier, the result of a mind twisted by the avidya that is “the intoxication of cruelty.” Zosima’s action in this conversation can fundamentally be described as identifying key elements of avidya that are disturbing Fyodor.

It is further interesting that Zosima specifically reminds Fyodor that he has “sense” enough. The psycholinguistic connection between sense and sensitivity is more than superficial because, being sensitive -- that is, perceptive, gentle, graceful – is the basis for living a life that is filled with vidya. While Father Zosima might not even be consciously aware of this himself, what he’s actually doing in reminding Fyodor that “he has sense enough” is not just exhorting him to appeal to his common sense, but to listen to what he truly perceives with his *senses*. In doing so, Zosima is implicitly focusing Fyodor on the present moment, so that his mind is not elsewhere, but here. Zosima’s linguistic construct is the antidote to “intoxication,” which specifically diverts the mind from the present. Thus, it is precisely the unification of the attention in the present moment, or *yoga*, that enables the sinful buffoon to, for a moment at least, self-reflect in a positive way.

To further understand the mechanisms by which Zosima’s advice has such a dramatic effect on characters, let us examine another of Zosima’s healing interactions, his discussion with Madame Khokhlakova. He tells her:

“If you’ve been talking to me so sincerely simply to gain approbation for your frankness, as you did from me just now, then of course you will not attain anything in the achievement of real love; it will all get no further than dreams, and your whole life will slip away like a phantom...”

“You have crushed me! Only now as you speak I understand that I was really only seeking your approbation for my sincerity when I told you I could not endure ingratitude. You have revealed me to myself. You have seen through me explain me to myself!” (Dostoevsky 55)

This passage is particularly interesting because it directly demonstrates the act of successfully replacing unclear understanding with clear understanding. Zosima first shows the “woman of little faith” how her approval-seeking is ego-driven (a form of *asmita*) and an attachment (a form of *raga*), and then reveals how will they lead her down a destructive path that she, in truth, doesn’t actually want to take. His words are moving and meaningful because they correctly recognize that seeking approbation as Madame Khokhlakova did is avidya, not an actual deeper human desire. In helping Madame Khokhlakova clarify her thoughts, this passage demonstrates how, in general, shining the light of awareness on avidya reveals its falsehood, and implies without saying that once avidya has been revealed we naturally seek vidya. This compelling demonstration of a person helping another overcome the state of being “foolish-selfish” is extraordinarily important because it is a basis, a case study if you will, from which creating algorithms to clarify people’s motivation at large can be constructed.

Father Zosima’s ability to heal people arose out of the experience he had healing and spiritually awakening himself. This story too is rife with processes by which avidya is reduced. For instance, as he woke in the morning before the duel he was about to fight, he reflected on how he had beaten his servant the night before, and on what he was about to do:

“After all, what am I worth, that another man, like me, made in the likeness and image of God, should serve me? For the first time in my life this question forced itself upon me...And all at once the whole truth in its full light appeared to me: what was I going to do? I was going to kill a good, intelligent, noble man, who done me no wrong, and by depriving his wife of happiness for the rest of her life, I should be torturing and killing her too.” (Dostoevsky 257)

In this moment, what Father Zosima awoke in himself was the capacity to feel something he did not feel before. He (literally) awoke early that morning troubled not because he was about to face death, but because he suddenly realized that he could not justify his mistreatment of his orderly. In the moment he realizes the orderly is “like [him], made in the likeness and image of God,” Zosima goes beyond the trap of seeing only his individual ego; he loses *asmita*. The passage shows his unfolding recognition that other people and their feelings are beautiful and as important as his and shines a light on his *asmita*. As he suddenly begins to perceive his opponent in his full glory as a human being, as “a good, intelligent, and noble man” he realizes that killing the man is not what he actually wants to do. The thought of it newly repulses him. By explicitly enumerating the positive features of his dueling opponent in this passage he guides the reader’s attention across his “good, intelligent, noble” character with specificity, and brings the reader to subjectively share in his experience of appreciating these aspects. That he is able to successfully convey the message of the stories in a way that they are related to is extremely important, as it makes them an example for actions his listeners (and we, the readers), can follow.

Zosima’s process of awakening here is not dissimilar in excitement and suddenness to the epiphany he evokes in Madame Khokhlakova decades later. Indeed, it is precisely he overcame avidya in himself that he learned the general process of doing so, and became able to help guide others to do the same. This passage and Zosima’s larger life story provides a heretofore missing piece of the puzzle of motivating people globally. It reveals how gaining a dry, objective understanding of philosophy -- as Zosima had all his life up until his duel-- does not necessarily motivate a person to change. But the experience of actually tuning to -- seeing -- beauty and sanctity in another is unforgettable and a permanent source of reflection, as is evinced by Zosima’s subsequent personal transformation. That Dostoyevsky, steeped in a completely Western cultural tradition reveals himself to have arrived at the same truth about the nature of healing interactions as the Vedic thinkers is a strong argument for the veracity of the both of their philosophies at describing the world.

[under construction] “3 things are suggested by which we can begin to explore the meaning of yoga and therefore feel avidya. The 1st is tapas, top bus comes from the root word, “to heat, to cleanse.” tapas is the means by which we keep ourselves fit and clean. Often top class is defined as pennance, modification, and dietary austerity, but what is meant here is the practice of a asana and pranayama. apart from other benefits, these practices in a desk in the removal of an series for system. In doing so we gain control of her whole system. Is the same principle as hitting gold purify it.” (Desikachar 11)

"interpreting freedom as the multiplication and rapid satisfaction of desires, men distort their own nature... They live to have dinners, visits, carriages, rank, it and slaves to it on one is looked upon as necessity, fortune life, honor, and human feeling are sacrificed, and then even commit suicide is able to satisfy it-we see the same thing among those who are not rich, while the poor drown there unsatisfied needs in envy and drunkenness. I ask you: is such a man free?

...for how can a man shake off his habits, what can become of him if he is in such bondage to the habit of satisfying the innumerable desires he is credited for himself? He is isolated, and what concern has he with the rest humanity? They've succeeded in accumulating a greater mass of objects, but the joy in the world has grown less.

...The monastic way is very different. Obedience, fasting and prayer I laughed at, yet only through them was the way to real, true freedom.

... Who is more capable of conceiving a great idea and serving it – the rich man isolation for the man who is freed himself from the tyranny of material things and habits?" ~270

“...During the course, Mr. Goenka was asked by a journalist why Vipassana [meditation] is good for prisoners. He responded: Vipassana is good for everyone! We are all prisoners of the negative habit patterns of our own minds. The practice of Vipassana liberates us from this bondage... Vipassana is a tool which can help all suffering people, those who are behind bars separated from their families, and those who are not.' He said: 'What is happening at Tihar is a message of hope which will benefit the whole world.'" ~Goenka

Finally, the character of father Zosima is particularly beautiful because the effects he has, even in death, reflect and reinforce the truth, the vidya, he shares in life. When Zosima’s bones stank upon his death, it made many, even Alyosha, for a moment doubt his holiness and his teachings (saints’ bones, it was rumored, did not stink). But then Alyosha realized that this fact was actually a testament to their truth: it showed that indeed, all men are equal, that we are made of the same stuff, and that Zosima was correct in saying that he was a person no different than all the sinners in the world. By extension, it also reflected the truth of Zosima’s idea that other men too are as good as he -- “made in the likeness and image of God” -- and should not be his servants simply by their birth.

At the same time, the significance of the decay of Zosima’s bones parallels that of Jesus’ rejection of the First Temptation. Just as Jesus refused to throw himself from a cliff and be caught by angels to prove his divinity, as doing so would rob people of their free will to choose their belief in God, so does the failure of a miracle to appear around Zosima’s corpse refocus people on the truer miracle the holy father devoted his life to teaching others to recognize. As critic Roger B Anderson writes, “Alyosha kisses the earth in acknowledgement of the true miracle -- not the false miracle of coercive power, of Zosima's bones not stinking -- but of the true miracle that arises each day in every person when he freely follows the verdict of his heart prefers doing good to doing evil.” This notion that our human nature is fundamentally kind and good in the absence of a coercive force is what Father Zosima sought to help people realize. It is also the very basis of the concept of vidya, and the basic recognition beneath the Dalai Lama’s statement about being “wise-selfish.” The miracle of existence, the power of God, is that if we merely inquire within and perceive what is truly there, we will see that we want to do good things. This is beautiful.

3. 96% complete | Explain my understanding of how all computers and thinking/living things are channeling the vast computational power of the universe, how intention and motivation arise from this sunlike source of energy, and how finding a way of existence that flows with this source of energy is what is meant by being inspired by "the holy spirit."

The God Paradigm

How do we come to personally understand what is meant by the idea of Christian God short of having transcendent experiences? Below I propose a model of doing so that is fundamentally Buddhist or Vedic, though it was derived from modern scientific thinking (which is, in a way, Buddhist). To explain, I will trace you along the steps of my own realization.

This journey began when I was in high school, hiking during a thunderstorm. I was pondering, with some trepidation, how the path of lightning bolts are determined. Suddenly I was struck (by an idea) – if the lightning bolts somehow took some sort of shortest path, could you use them – a natural phenomenon -- to solve the computational shortest path problem? As it turns out, this insight didn't pan out, but the idea stuck with me: to what extent can nature itself actually solve computational problems? It turned out, this was the entrance this was the beginning of a complete revolution in thought for me. Soon, I came to realize that all computers do is follow the laws of physics, and that, as it seems, the universe itself -- nature -- is what is performing the “computing” that they do.

Each instant of time, the universe computes its next state from the previous, in the process moving the processing elements of computers to their next states. All our computers do is channel a small portion of the greater universal computational capacity and use it to process some information we can perceive! This was profound.

But the profounder connection still came when I realized that brains themselves, which do things as fantastic as produce our personal feelings and motivations -- our consciousness -- if they follow the laws of physics too (as we believe they do), aren't actually producing our motivations "themselves," but instead, each tick of time are just having their the next state computed from their previous state by the physics engine of the universe. We, and computers, and all objects moving in the physical world, are animated by this incredible causal "force" that causes time to move forwards. So that made me ask: what is this great computational force that gives rise to the movement of all things moment by moment -- to inanimate objects, to computers, to brains? What is this great computational capacity that my mind, and your mind, and my computer, are merely channeling? And why does it compute anyway?

This suddenly gave me a glimmer of understanding of what God was for the first time, and I suddenly glimpsed what the religious mean when they say that we are figments in the imagination of the "mind of God." In my model, I could construe the "mind of God" to mean the whole universe -- all things, including us personally, even our minds and our bodies -- are but small processing elements being shuttled around by the animus of physics in a much larger system. The notion that God transcends and includes me enabled me to see how even a deist (noninterventionist) God would be a truly conscious entity -- in the same way you or I are, because it is the very thing from which our consciousness flows! We are just a piece of *its* consciousness. Suddenly I understood the God paradigm, its elegance, and its explanatory usefulness. This was my second profound revelation.

Naturally, then I started to try to apply this new philosophical understanding and appreciation for the basis of religious thought to all the texts and ideas I could find, with some success, the Brothers Karamazov among them. I started to reinterpret old passages. For instance, Zosima says to Ivan: "You yourself know that that is the peculiarity of your heart; and all its torment is due to it. But thank the Creator who gave you a lofty heart, capable of such suffering, 'of thinking and seeing higher things, for our dwelling is in the heavens.' God grant that your heart will attain the answer on earth, and may God bless your path!" (Dostoevsky 66)

What Zosima refers to as God the Creator, He who gives you the mind capable of pondering existence of Creator, I represent as the great computational power causing all minds to tick. Because it is a fundamental property of the human linguistic apparatus to look for an actor when we see an action, when we observe the condition of existence, it is our nature to infer the existence of a God or a computational force as an actor. Thus William Blake writes "I myself do nothing. The Holy Spirit accomplishes all through me."

In a similar vein, I understood how the parable of Job is the basis for this thinking, Zosima's philosophy.

"And Job rent his mantle and fell down upon the ground and cried aloud, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return into the earth; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord forever and ever." (Dostoevsky 252)

It's truly just tapping into same cosmic perspective (which, is the same perspective the

Beginner's Mind approach to preventing individual suffering uses as well). It's bringing attention to the mysterious and wonderful source from which we come, and into which we will eventually dissolve. It's referring to the notion that, as Thich Nhat Hanh said,

"The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth, dwelling deeply in the present moment and feeling truly alive."

As I continued to read, I continued to see increasing meaning in the passage. Job attains happiness by reverting to the state of unconditional appreciation for life that every child has. This explains why Ivan, a character desperately seeking to return to that untroubled state -- a lost paradise for him -- sees so much beauty in children. Again consider the passage:

"Dear God. I'm not talking about the suffering of grown-ups, they ate the apple and can go to the devil, and let the devil take them all, but these little ones, these little ones! I'm tormenting you... I'll stop if you like." (Dostoevsky 209)

At the same time in this passage, his own self-loathing expresses itself as he projects his own psyche into other adults. He assumes they too have gone through the same process of loss as he, that it has slipped from their fingers as well.

And that brings me to begin my story.

Entropy and God's Continual Sacrifice

The final and most potent realization I had blossomed out of a conversation with an extremely philosophically well-versed Christian friend who every day, with every thought, sees the world through his direct perception of the Christian worldview. He said, probing the structure of his own deeply-actualized world view, that he believes that Jesus died so that true happiness and meaning may exist. What does this mean? I asked. He continued to explain. For him, on one level, the fact that God loves us so much that he was willing to die to save us touches him, gives him faith, and trust in the caring of God for His children. As he continued to probe his rigorous mental model of his worldview, he clarified that the way he thinks about it, as God is outside time, God is *continuously* dying to save us. That is the act of His love. This confused me for a moment. But then I reflected that he was actually probing a really deep understanding of religion, that there was almost certainly a hidden truth in his words, and that through our philosophies what we were actually doing was speaking a different language to try to describe that same truth. I had to understand this language.

As he said this, I made a sudden connection with the Christian viewpoint. Life, MIT quantum computing professor Seth Lloyd posits, is a set of machines designed to reduce their own entropy and maintain their integrity in the face of the forces of decay. In order

to do this, by the second law of thermodynamics, they must increase the entropy of the overall universe. For our clocks to be wound up, clocks in the external universe need to wind down, and there is loss on every stage. In infinite time, when entropy is at its greatest, all the tension systems in the world will have unwound, reached equilibrium. Therefore, if God is the entire larger universe, every moment He is sacrificing a piece of himself, His computational capacity, for our computational capacity, as computational capacity only exists as long as there are tension systems, as long as entropy does not reign supreme. He is dying for the sake of us individually.

Understanding this, I began to look for the language of entropy in characters actions rife with avidya, those lost from God, and the language of order in those with vidya, those channeling the power of God.

The phenomenal thing is that these psycholinguistic cues to nature of the universe are there all along in the words we use every day. They were there in Dostoevsky's writing, written before any of these ideas were pervasive. We just didn't know they existed because we didn't know to look for them. It indeed makes one reflect on Zosima's statement:

“But I predict that just when you see with horror that in spite of all your efforts you are getting farther from your goal instead of nearer to it—at that very moment I predict that you will reach it and behold clearly the miraculous power of the Lord who has been all the time loving and mysteriously guiding you.” (Dostoevsky 56)

This relation between entropy and avidya is even implied in the language used to describe the characters' behavior, for instance Dmitry is repeatedly said to live a "dissolute" life.

There is a pulsating sun in the psyche, in the universe, that is the source of all human motivation. Occasionally, flares burst through the surface of this sun, reaching out from the sky within, through people's heads, and coming out their hands or their mouths...all of us are motivated by this sun. The metaphor between this sun and the actual sun is very deep -- the sun's physical energy is, fundamentally, what animates us, and the sun is also a disk in an infinite void, like a single-circle Venn diagram containing in the center the sets of positive neurological patterns, ways to channel positive energy, to enter positive feedback loops.

And even in the wildest moments of chaos, fear, and despair, a chance thought can cause us to awake to find it pulsating deep within, witnessed in every breath. Like needlepoint, the meticulous art, our memories pass through and through, reflecting off one another and spiraling outward in expanding intricate, almost floral, patterns to adorn the walls of the heart.

Come to your senses! Come up from the underground and stare the sun in the face and be shocked and blinded when you see your hideous reflection in the light of day! Have the evil seared from you, and become beautiful -- fear not, because beauty comes from within, as it always has. Beauty comes from union with truth, and union comes from prolonged contact. So begin to make contact with truth now by perceiving yourself clearly.

***This is what Father Zosima meant when he told the mysterious philanthropist to confess his sin of murder publically. He was attempting to save him from the trap of denial of truth, which dulled his ability to perceive it, and underground psychology.

Conclusion

By reading the brothers Karamazov through the lens of Eastern ideology, we can come to personally relate to and understand what is actually meant by the metaphysical Christian philosophies of the characters. Even more importantly, by using the concept of avidya to understand what is driving these characters, perhaps more deeply than they understand themselves, we can see how they could have “fast-forwarded” their spiritual journeys and lived better lives. As we see Karamazovian characters in the world today, we can apply this to help them. We live in a time in which atheism is growing faster than ever, but also a time of incredible globalization. It is a tipping point -- will we lose the deep though sometimes obscure wisdom of the ancient traditions in the melting pot, or experience a renaissance of interfaith and atheist dialogue that leads to great worldwide unity and understanding? This depends on us, the individuals, each of whose actions produce an undying stream of ripples. Thus coming to a personal understanding of what is actually meant by these philosophies is more important than ever. It might, it just might help a critical mass of humanity learn how to act wise-selfishly rather than foolish-selfishly, and open their minds so that they may be ignited with inspiration.

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