

Friedrich Nietzsche and Fyodor Dostoyevsky on Solitude

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY
ON SOLITUDE

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

of Master of Arts

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Master of Arts (2000)
(Philosophy)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: Friedrich Nietzsche and Fyodor Dostoyevsky on Solitude.

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NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 85.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Professor Travis Kroeker for his knowledgeable assistance in the completion of this study. I would also like to thank my parents for their support.

ABSTRACT

This paper is an examination of the themes of solitude and community in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. I will argue that there are both areas of convergence and divergence in their treatment of social relations in terms of solitude, isolation and community. Generally speaking, Dostoyevsky diverges from Nietzsche in advocating a humble "active love" towards society, which is capable of moral and spiritual regeneration. Nietzsche has a much more selective conception of higher society, deeming the bulk of society hopelessly fallen. Whereas Dostoyevsky is drawn towards the people, Nietzsche is drawn towards the able few. Despite the areas of divergence, however, I believe that the areas of convergence are more profound. Both men argue that isolation in its various forms is one of society's greatest problems. This isolation can be overcome only through the cultivation of solitude and genuine community.

Introduction

On the surface, it appears that Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche are thinkers of radically opposed convictions and temperament. Nietzsche is often considered a radical individualist and fervent atheist who pronounced the *death of god* and the advent of the *overman*. His notion of the *will to power* has been interpreted as justifying acts of aggression and amoral self-will. Dostoyevsky, on the other hand, was a passionate Christian who championed the traditional virtues of compassion, self sacrifice and brotherhood and interpreted atheism and individualism as the greatest dangers to mankind.

The idea of such a divergence is suggested by Irving Zeitlin, who argues that Nietzsche is an amoral individualist “exclusively concerned with *self*-responsibility, and thus never with responsibility towards others.”¹ By killing God, Nietzsche has created a dangerous amoral “vacuum,” to which he “gave no consideration” (Zeitlin 1994:160). Zeitlin interprets Dostoyevsky, on the other hand, as delivering “a most powerful challenge to the proto-Nietzscheans of his time” by identifying their pernicious nihilism and by affirming a “Christian synthesis as a guide to life”(Zeitlin 1994:161). Peter Berkowitz also interprets Nietzsche as a radical individualist and “instrumentalist” whose

¹ Irving Zeitlin, *Nietzsche: A Re-Examination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 144.

impoverished conception friendship is “utterly devoid of tenderness and compassion.”² Nietzsche’s “self-love” testifies to a “radical egoism” which undermines “every human attachment”(Berkowitz 1995:174). This can be compared with Gary Browning’s interpretation of Dostoyevsky as the advocate of universal brotherhood and “secret renewal,” which he defines as: “an active, humble, forgiving love; acknowledgment and confession of one’s own guilt before everyone, all, and everything; forgiveness; and the divine kinship of all creation.”³

Other recent interpretations suggest that such divergent readings may be too extreme. Richard White is critical of individualistic and “selfish” readings of Nietzsche, arguing that “Nietzsche’s account of the individual will and the *will to power* does not promote a willful self-assertion or celebrate dominion and control.”⁴ Although he interprets the *eternal return* as promoting the “intensification of individual existence insofar as it isolates the individual from the herd and from everything else that is,” it also “disperses the individual within the immensity of eternity” (White 1995:113,115). Ultimately, Zarathustra does not preach a social and spiritual isolation, but openness toward the “sacred” character of life and to the “Other as Other” (White 1995:22,193).

² Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 172, 173.

³ Gary Browning, “Zosima’s Secret of Renewal in *The Brothers Karamazov*,” in *Slavic and East European Journal* vol. 33 (1989), 527.

⁴ Richard White, *Nietzsche and the Problem of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 176.

This interpretation is more in tune with Dostoyevsky's advocacy of openness to and love of others, as well as his belief in the sacred nature of earthly life.

One problem in comparing the thought of these two thinkers is choosing a particular theme that allows us to enter into their most fundamental ideas and concerns. Both writers explored a wide range of subject matter, including psychology, metaphysics, politics, and aesthetics. One element of their thought that helps magnify their most pressing concerns, however, is the theme of social relations, which I will use to interpret Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. My basic aim in this paper is to point out the particular similarities and differences in their treatment of social relations in terms of a number of related issues, including solitude, isolation and community. Solitude is interpreted by Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche not only as physical solitude, but as inward solitude - an internal or existential space we can enter into alone or in groups. According to Dostoyevsky, genuine solitude is a healthy transformative experience characterized by an awareness of others and of God, and requires acceptance of a joyful guilt and the ethic of an active, practical love towards humanity. It is juxtaposed with isolation, the experience of separation from others, from God and from the world which stems from egoism.

The experiences of inward solitude in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, on the other hand, are generally described in abstraction from others and from God. These experiences, which occasionally erupt into ecstatic mystical encounters, tend to pull Zarathustra away

from the crowd.⁵ Isolation from others is also experienced by Zarathustra, but more equivocally; while it is at times interpreted as an incomplete and lonely state, at other times it is interpreted as a rarified and joyful condition. Unlike Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche believes that separation from others, in both a physical as well as a figurative sense, is a prerequisite for self-awareness and coming to terms with one's ultimate concern. For Dostoyevsky, radical separation is both unnecessary and dangerous.

Another important distinction to be made is the difference in the particular forms of community advocated by Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky. While both agree that community in its modern form is deficient, Dostoyevsky defends a universally applicable ethic of active love, self-sacrifice and humility.⁶ Until we overcome separation from each other through this ethic, we will be unable to experience joy and the deepest realities of human existence. Nietzsche, on the other hand, endorses an aristocratic notion of community applicable only to the most ambitious, creative and talented individuals. It is only through this higher form of companionship that individuals can spur each other to realize their fullest potential; active engagement with the crowd poisons one's appreciation of

⁵ Joan Stambaugh argues that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* belies a poetic mysticism lost on most contemporary commentators. She argues that some of Nietzsche's thought is "consonant with an Eastern temper of experience" bearing similarities to Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Meister Eckhart. See Stambaugh's *The Other Nietzsche* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 135-151.

⁶ Although it is the nineteenth-century milieu that they are critiquing, many of their criticisms, including materialism, uncritical atheism, and social isolation, have at least as much relevance to contemporary "post-modern" society.

life and functions as an obstacle to the deepest enjoyment of life.

Chapter One will consist of a thematic exposition of Nietzsche's views on social relations as they appear in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* under the rubrics solitude, isolation, and community. In order to achieve a balanced reading, consideration will be given both to Zarathustra's explicit teachings as well as his experiences within and without society. This chapter will also include a subsection examining whether Nietzsche advocates a radical individualism or whether he ultimately affirms community. Chapter Two will consist of an exploration of Dostoyevsky's treatment of social relations as it is expressed in *The Brothers Karamazov* in terms of solitude, isolation, and community. The thematic breakdown of Chapter One will be followed as closely as possible. In Chapter three, a comparison of their views will be made in terms of both similarities and differences.

Chapter 1: Nietzsche: Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Because of the ambiguity and complexity that characterize Nietzsche's treatment of social relations in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it is necessary to draw out his argument and present the marrow of his own ideas on the subject before considering various ways it has been interpreted by commentators. Nietzsche addresses the basic question of whether our social encounters enhance life or whether they inhibit our development from many points of view, including solitude, community, inward solitude and isolation.

1.1 Physical Solitude

The most basic form of solitude is physical solitude - the absence of other human beings. Physical solitude is one of the central motifs explored by Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and to a large extent he emphasizes its positive aspects. The first endorsement of the solitary life is found in the opening paragraph: Zarathustra, we are told, had abandoned his old self and the society in which it was formed at the age of thirty. He left his home for a solitary life in the mountains where "he enjoyed his spirit

and solitude, and for ten years did not tire of them.”⁷ Although details of his former life are scant, a reclusive old saint provides an illuminating comparison of the new, transformed Zarathustra when Zarathustra returns to society: “No stranger is this wanderer: many years ago he passed this way. Zarathustra he was called, but he has changed...Yes, I recognize Zarathustra. His eyes are pure, and around his mouth there hides no disgust” (Nietzsche 1982:123). He notices that Zarathustra has undergone a transformation, has become a “child” and an “awakened one” (Nietzsche 1982:123). Formerly, the old saint suggests, Zarathustra was more reflective of the society of sleepers to which he belonged. Zarathustra’s decade in solitude has facilitated his transformation from one who lived life without realizing its fullest potential to one who has surpassed the narrow horizons of the masses and become more aware of the world around him. The old saint is consequently baffled when he discovers that Zarathustra wishes to leave his healthy solitude and return to society, because he cannot imagine what returning to the conformist, unambitious masses would accomplish, either for him or them. So fallen has modern society become that, despite the saint’s religious sensibilities, he confesses, “Man is for me is too imperfect a thing. Love of man would kill me” (Nietzsche 1982:123). While the saint had originally embraced the ascetic life as an expression of his love of man, he now loves only God. This early characterization of solitude is evoked by

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in: *The Portable Nietzsche*. ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: The Viking Press, 1982), 121. All further references to this text will appear in brackets in the body of the essay.

Nietzsche not within the context of a barren landscape, suffering or temptation, but as a state of happiness and tranquility in harmony with nature.⁸

A stronger endorsement of solitude is made when, after again renouncing society in *The Return Home* of part three, Zarathustra considers solitude the most congenial mode of existence, despite its inherent loneliness. He describes solitude as “my home,” and compares it to a loving mother who can now reprimand him for leaving her (Nietzsche 1982:295). His return to community is therefore reduced to the mistake an unseasoned adolescent makes before he knows better. Solitude is described as the appropriate medium for those wishing to attain a higher spiritual and intellectual existence. There is a clarity of thought available to the solitary individual, for it is when one is alone that “the words and word shrines of all being open up before me”(Nietzsche 1982:296). He suggests that it is ironically only when one lives outside community that one can best identify with and further one’s understanding of others as well as enhance self-discovery. “One forgets about men when one lives among men: there is too much foreground in all men: what good are far-sighted, far-seeing eyes *there*?” (Nietzsche 1982:297). It is also in solitude that Zarathustra develops a connection with the future disciples he plans to “lure away from the herd” and save (Nietzsche 1982:135). After he realizes that his disciples have become overly reverential towards their teacher, he orders them into solitude that

⁸ Lawrence Lampert identifies an implicit comparison with Jesus of the Gospel account, who was forced to endure a difficult solitude in the desert. See Lawrence Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986),14.

they may learn to love in a more balanced sense. Solitude is more than simply an “antidote to feelings of excessive contempt for the multitude,” as Van Ness argues; it is a state in which one encounters a more profound longing for community than is possible within society.⁹ Entering into solitude himself, his concern for them only grows stronger as he professes his love of them only four days after leaving them (Nietzsche 1982:272).

Zarathustra again suggests the benefits of solitude when considering the training of his disciples. While he believes that a small community of companions is desirable, he resolves to “dig them up and place each by itself, so [they] may learn solitude and defiance and caution” (Nietzsche 1982:273). This isolation, it is hoped, will help inoculate them from idolizing their teacher. Introspection and self-discovery inevitably requires a period of physical solitude in which one’s values, beliefs and education can be digested and evaluated. It gives one the space and time for reflection and introspection that simply cannot be had in community.¹⁰

Physical solitude is generally interpreted by Nietzsche in terms of its benefits to self-understanding and coming to terms with one’s most fundamental concerns. Zarathustra’s numerous journeys into solitude facilitate an understanding not only of self-responsibility, but a responsibility towards others human beings in terms of their own development.

⁹ Peter Van Ness “Nietzsche on Solitude: The Spiritual Discipline of the Godless,” in *Philosophy Today* vol. 2 (Winter 1988), 353.

¹⁰ As Graham Parkes observes, “The earlier phases of self-overcoming occur outside the accepted social and political framework.” Parkes “The Overflowing Soul: Images of Transformation in ‘Zarathustra,’” in *Man and World* 16 (1983):342.

1.2 Solitude as Isolation from Others

Solitude is an essential quality of the most elevated human existence. But is solitude being proposed as a permanent “home” of the rarified individual? Are the fruits of life to be most successfully enjoyed in human isolation? The answer in *Zarathustra* is ambiguous, and perhaps reflects an uncertainty in Nietzsche himself. While he does confess that “One should live on mountains,” there are a number of indications that solitude is not a self-sufficient state, and is at best not a home but a temporary lodging (Nietzsche 1982:298).

Zarathustra’s years of solitude on the mountain were clearly satisfying, as it was there that “he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude, and for ten years did not tire of it” (Nietzsche 1982:121). But despite his great wisdom, he discovers that the life of solitude is ultimately inadequate. Motivated not by his “wisdom,” which seems complete and self-sufficient, Zarathustra is influenced by his “heart” to return to society (Nietzsche 1982:121). The wisdom/heart distinction suggests that Zarathustra is being pulled back towards mankind and society not by his reason or intellect, but by a more elusive, visceral and non-rational impulse. Speaking to the morning sun, he asks, “you great star, what would your happiness be had you not those for whom you shine?” (Nietzsche 1982:121). He suggests that the sun has a much fuller, richer existence when it can share its overflow

with those who welcome it and bless it. He sees the sun as a metaphor for a higher nobility than defines the solitary Zarathustra, an overflow that brings golden light not just unto itself, but outwardly, down even to the depths of the underworld. Inspired by this new insight, Zarathustra decides that, “like you, I must go *under* - go down, as is said by man, to whom I want to descend” (Nietzsche 1982:122). Zarathustra, the embodiment of human solitude, must “go under” or figuratively die so that he can be reborn as a more complete human being, not an untenably “self-sufficient” unit, but as one whose life is nourished by social intercourse and companionship. Mankind is not the only intended beneficiary of his descent, for while Zarathustra hopes that society will benefit from the teaching he will bring, Zarathustra will also enrich his existence in and through his participation in community.

While it would be an overstatement to say that Zarathustra experienced a full-fledged isolation from humanity while on the mountaintop, he nevertheless experiences a degree of isolation from humanity which he feels he must bridge by returning to society. His attempt to overcome that separation, however, fails miserably. Hoping to stimulate a latent “longing” and love of life in the townspeople which can enrich their lives, he finds that they aspire to be “last men,” unimaginative conformists and escapists who aspire to mediocrity, comfort and a banal happiness (Nietzsche 1982:127,130). This failure opens Zarathustra to a much deeper isolation than he experienced alone on the mountain. He talks to them “as to goatherds,” barely able to fathom their superficiality and lack of ambition (Nietzsche 1982:130). He later admits that the his disillusionment and isolation,

as well as the concealed hatred they feel for him, almost kills him - “And I myself was almost a corpse” (Nietzsche 1982:399). His experience is echoed in Thomas Merton’s idea of the dangerous solitude of man in the crowd: “Mere living in the midst of other men does not guarantee that we live in communion with them or even in communication with them. Who has less to communicate than the mass-man?”¹¹ Modern man, the man of the marketplace, does not think, does not listen, and does not speak. He prefers the dull yet comfortable life of conformism, materialism, celebrity worship, trends and other superficial means of titillation and escape. Zarathustra ironically feels a stronger sense of separation from man in the marketplace than he did on the mountain top. After the debacle in the marketplace, Zarathustra is left not with an eager and enthusiastic following but with disappointment and his own thoughts until “at last night came, and a cold wind blew over the lonely one” (Nietzsche 1982:132).

Nietzsche also suggests that we can be isolated from others without even knowing it. Despite appearances, the “last man” characteristic of modern society is deeply isolated from others. . People are increasingly being swallowed up into a faceless and uniform collectivity in which their creativity and individuality are stifled. Instead of recognizing and nurturing a “longing” in others, encouraging a life of struggles and challenges, society embraces a life of comfort, conformity and escape. “Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes into a madhouse” (Nietzsche

¹¹ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1972), 54.

1982:130). If we relate to others in this impersonal way, allowing our lives to be dictated to us by the collectivity, we become separated from one another, incapable of relating to each other as particular human beings with distinctive yearnings and needs.

Another experience of profound isolation is expressed in the section entitled “The Night Song” (Nietzsche 1982:217-219). This song of melancholy expresses the impoverishment of the relationships Zarathustra has been trying to cultivate. Zarathustra, the over-rich star who brings light to the underworld, realizes that his relationships embody a love of giving, but not of receiving; his guidance and instruction have nourished other souls, but left him with a “craving” for another kind of “love” (Nietzsche 1982:217).

Light am I; ah, that I were night! But this is my loneliness, that I am girt with light. Ah, that I were dark and nocturnal! How I would suck the breasts of light! And even you would I bless, you little sparkling stars and glowworms up there, and be overjoyed with your gifts of light (Nietzsche 1982:217,218).

Zarathustra’s lament is only partially “a frustration of the erotic desire to give” (Berkowitz 1995:187). It is also an expression of the “loneliness of all givers” who “live in [their] own light” (Nietzsche 1982:218). His search for genuine and balanced companionship, a companionship of relative equals who spur each other to greater heights, has yet to materialize, fostering an unhealthy desire for revenge: “A hunger grows out of my beauty: I should like to hurt those for whom I shine; I should like to rob those to whom I give...My happiness in giving died in giving: my virtue tired of itself in

its overflow” (Nietzsche 1982:218). It is not recognition for his gift-giving that he wishes to receive, as Berkowitz argues, but a very human need for reciprocation of the same kind of love he bestows (Berkowitz 1995:134).

Later on, Zarathustra argues that the life of solitude is not only inadequate but dangerous. The Hermit who lives alone, he maintains, speaks not to others but to himself, and this questioning and reflective dialogue can be very dangerous. To prevent these cases, Zarathustra recommends companionship: “The friend can serve as “the cork that prevents the conversation of the two from sinking into the depths. Alas, there are too many depths for all hermits; therefore they long so for a friend and his height” (Nietzsche 1982:168). While relations with mainstream society are characteristically shallow and unhealthy, solitude can also be unhealthy: to avoid “sinking” or drowning in the “depths,” metaphors for insanity, desperation, and unbalanced isolation, we need the grounding or stabilizing “other.”

Despite the benefits solitude provides Zarathustra throughout the narrative, he believes that it is beneficial only to the few - “In solitude, whatever one has brought into it grows - also the inner beast. Therefore solitude is inadvisable for many” (Nietzsche 1982:404). While Zarathustra believes that his disciples are capable of handling and benefitting from such a solitude, it is not intended as a universal remedy for the crowd, who Nietzsche believes are destined for a banal life of herdish comfort and pleasure free of hardship.

Despite its benefits, social isolation is a dangerous and impoverished state of being

according to Nietzsche. While social isolation is experienced at the conscious level by Zarathustra, both in solitude and in company with others, it is also experienced unconsciously by the crowd. While one may argue that a degree of physical solitude would benefit us all, Nietzsche seems to have lost all faith in the majority of society who are hopelessly fallen and destined to live an impoverished life. There seems to be no hope for the crowd, who are destined to remain isolated. For the able few, however, Nietzsche believes there is hope in terms of cultivating genuine friendships.

1.3 Isolation From Oneself

Another form of isolation is isolation from ourselves. Nietzsche explains how we are isolated from ourselves in terms of the “common conscience” (Nietzsche 1982:174). While Zarathustra originally left society for a life of solitude on the mountain largely in order to find himself, to learn who he was and what his responsibilities were at the most basic level, he later argues that being physically alone does not necessarily mean that one has left society, for society exists not only around oneself, but in oneself in the form of the “common conscience.” This conscience is the inner voice of society’s norms and habits that speaks in us, that largely defines us and influences the way we think, tending to encumber the expression of an authentic individuality. For the elite, this inner voice of the public serves as a trap and imprisons their perceptions, thoughts and actions. All thinking, speaking and acting is “herdish” and public, all evaluations are made in terms

of the herd, and all interpretations are cliché and unoriginal. Simply following the herd is not the way to ourselves.

The question that must now be asked is what does it mean to be oneself, to “become who you are?” (Nietzsche 1982:351). Selfhood, according to Nietzsche, is not something that we all have in common, but something that must be cultivated by an individual. The thoughts, feelings, choices and actions that define a person are rooted not in a substantial and separate soul but in a multiplicity of earthly forces and drives. As John Snyder explains:

Personal growth occurs when the will to power of the strongest forces within a person triumphs, when weakness is overcome. Only when a person is able to overcome fears and inner weaknesses, allowing inner strengths to prevail, can the person truly become what he or she is.¹²

No matter what our calling or vocation, we must harness self-discipline to let our relevant yearnings and skills develop rather than succumb to the lesser forces which can distract us from such a goal. Self-creation is a constant struggle in which stronger forces are confronted by other forces over which they hopefully prevail, increasing the tension in one’s bow so that one can “shoot the arrow of his longing” (Nietzsche 1982:129). But if we constantly fall prey to our lesser drives, our abilities will atrophy and we will not

¹²

John Snyder, *Nietzsche in: Images of the Human*. Ed. Hunter Brown (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1995), 356.

become the person of which we are capable. As a result, Zarathustra harangues, “I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves” (Nietzsche 1982:129).

Human beings are isolated from themselves to the extent that they do not realize their greatest potential, do not cultivate the unique strengths the successful nurturing of which true selfhood requires. Rather than enduring the agonizing struggle of self-creation, most people choose the more comfortable path of letting themselves be shaped by public opinion and convention, passively allowing society to tell us what type of life to lead, what to think, and how to act.

1.4 Solitude as Introspection.

Introspective solitude is a healthy experience of being alone that one can undergo both in groups or alone. When we examine our own most basic thoughts and feelings we must try and separate ourselves from others in the sense that we cannot let others do this for us - we must do it alone. The first instance of introspective solitude is implied in the prologue when the old Saint recalls Zarathustra leaving society and carrying his ashes to the mountains. While details of Zarathustra’s early life are scant, something triggered a self-examination in Zarathustra while he lived in society. In order to experience a more profound introspection, however, it seems that Zarathustra needed physical solitude, and for ten fruitful years he enjoyed “his spirit and his solitude” (Nietzsche 1982:121).

Introspective solitude, Nietzsche suggests, is possible in the world of society. But in order to more fruitfully experience this solitude, it is necessary to enter into physical solitude.

The relationship between introspective solitude and physical solitude is also suggested in Zarathustra's advice to the disciples he tries to cultivate. Zarathustra tries to kindle introspective solitude in his disciples first by offering his teachings in part one (Nietzsche 1982:137-191). After these teachings, however, Zarathustra does not ask his disciples to apishly memorize and ingrain them in their minds; instead, he intends the teachings to reawaken them to themselves at the most basic level, to spur them to enter into an introspective solitude. "Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you" (Nietzsche 1982:190). Not only are they to enter into solitude, but Zarathustra himself must return to solitude, both in terms of physical solitude and solitary introspection: "Now I go alone, my disciples. You too go now, alone" (Nietzsche 1982:190). Just as his disciples must make the difficult and often ambiguous journey to self-understanding, so must Zarathustra, suggesting that not even Zarathustra himself has finished, or will ever completely finish, this highly personal journey.

While physical solitude is essential for a mature and penetrating introspective solitude, Nietzsche believes that the higher society he and his disciples embody is to some extent conducive to the kindling and nurturing of introspective solitude. But what of conventional society? Does living in conventional society inspire us to enter into

serious self-examination? Nietzsche suggests that it does not, that conventional society encourages us to forget about ourselves while fostering superficial appetites for power, celebrity and money. Conventional society, however, is described in such cynical terms that one could argue it inspires us in a negative sense. The ignorant and uninspired townspeople Zarathustra encounters after descending the mountain aspire to the impoverished wisdom and happiness the last men have fashioned for themselves. “Give us this last man, O Zarathustra,” they shout (Nietzsche 1982:130). But while the townspeople aspire to become such last men, they are depicted as so superficial that one wonders why Zarathustra was able to lure away only a few disciples. If society is indeed on the verge of becoming a last man society, it would seem to offer a powerful motivation for those who have loftier ambitions. It was this fallen community that encouraged Zarathustra, after all, to renounce community and seek self-understanding.

Nietzsche believes that the task of looking into ourselves with the aim of identifying our own innermost needs and responsibilities is a fundamental human responsibility. While it is possible to be awakened to this need in community, Nietzsche believes that the closer we get to conventional society the more we are prone to forget about ourselves. Zarathustra thus plays the role of the “gadfly,” awakening us to ourselves and the danger of mass society, and leads us into physical and spiritual solitude.

1.5 Community

The relative ambiguity in Nietzsche's evaluation of solitude, reflected in his seemingly oscillating advocations of one or the other, is also present in his assessment of community. While community is considered beneficial to life in some passages, in others a complete repudiation of society is suggested.

In the section *On the Flies in the Market Place*, Nietzsche emphasizes the pernicious and parasitic nature of social relations as they are generally practiced in modern society and expresses that fallen, modern society, characterized as a "marketplace," presents the greatest danger to a rarified existence (Nietzsche 1982:163-166). Zarathustra begins the teaching with an injunction to his "friend" to embrace solitude and leave materialistic bourgeois society. "Flee, my friend, into your solitude! I see you dazed by the noise of the great men and the stings of the little men" (Nietzsche 1982:165). The supposedly "great" men of society are characterized as actors who lack creativity and, like the people who flock to them, are capricious and shallow. These people do not have great longings, are not men who struggle for their highest hope. "Tomorrow he has a new faith, and the day after a newer one." As soon as the novelty wears off of any belief or way of life, it is abandoned. Not only are the materialistic masses of the marketplace shallow, they are also dangerous; they are not common houseflies but poisonous flies that "crave blood

(Nietzsche 1982:165) Blood, a symbol for creativity, vitality, and energy, is what the masses do not have yet secretly cherish. But the parasitic masses also suffer from an “invisible revenge,” a resentment towards the great individuals who make the inferior feel insecure in their happy and comfortable lives (Nietzsche 1982:166). The materialistic masses encourage the creative and ambitious individuals to restrain their aspirations of greatness and embrace a herdish mediocrity. “They punish you for all your virtues. They forgive you entirely - your mistakes” (Nietzsche 1982:165). By suggesting that “where solitude ceases the market place begins,” Nietzsche seems to be saying that *all* communal life is shallow and materialistic and that therefore one seeking the best life should renounce *all* social relations in favor of the “dignified silence” of solitude (Nietzsche 1982:163). By “turning away from the “people” and the “herd,”” however, Zarathustra has not turned away from all men, for he subsequently focuses his attention on a striving “elite core of men.”¹³

Community, Zarathustra argues, is not necessarily poisonous and destructive. There is a higher dynamic of community than the relations commonly practiced by the herd in modern mass society. He describes a higher type of relationship that is conducive to the noble virtues of discipline, self-examination and self-overcoming which are the highest expressions of the love of life. The context of war in this section is not literally a battle pitch, but a figurative battle ground of ideas. “You should have eyes that always seek an

¹³ Robert Louis Jackson *Dialogues with Dostoyevsky* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 239,241.

enemy-*your* enemy...Your enemy you shall seek, your war you shall wage-for your thoughts. And if your thought be vanquished, your honesty should still find cause for triumph in that” (Nietzsche 1982:159). For our thoughts to be tested and stimulated, then, we need “enemies,” others whose ideas can challenge our own, and even overturn them. But we should not despise the enemy, for it is through interaction and debate that our highest thoughts can be produced. Zarathustra thus confesses, “my brothers in war, I love you thoroughly; I am and I was of your kind. And I am also your best enemy” (Nietzsche 1982:158). Zarathustra believes that relationships can motivate and facilitate self improvement, and even though Zarathustra is more enlightened than his “brothers in war,” he is still of their kind, still wants the challenge of engaging them and their beliefs in order to improve them. This will help not only them but, ultimately, him as well, as they will be hopefully be able to stimulate and challenge him in the future.

The teaching of the benefits of an agonistic community in *On War and Warriors* is reflected later in *On Child and Marriage*, in which Zarathustra makes an indictment against a shallow type of marriage. Addressed to his “brother,” Zarathustra asks whether he is “entitled” to wish for a marriage (Nietzsche 1982:181). Indeed, the masses marry and procreate for reasons of loneliness, escape, or contentment, which amounts to a “poverty of the soul in pair” (Nietzsche 1982:182). Marriage is described as instrumental yet highly important, for it is a bridge to greater things, to the future. It is “the will of two to create the one that is more than those who created it. Reverence for each other, as for

those willing with such a will, is what I name marriage” (Nietzsche 1982:182). The “higher body” or “creator” that is the object of marriage may mean, literally, offspring who, perhaps through a combination of genetics and proper training, are healthier, more imaginative and more creative (Nietzsche 1982:182). Or it may mean that through marriage we can become a higher body, a new and better self in and through the relationship. It is a “torch that lights up higher paths” in the form of new and superior possibilities of how to live and what to value (Nietzsche 1982:173). In both cases, however, overcoming is a possibility that can be achieved in groups.

That Nietzsche is not averse to all forms of friendship is also illustrated in the section entitled *On The Friend* (Nietzsche 1982:167-169). A healthy friendship, one of “true reverence,” requires that one treat the other as an enemy: “In a friend one should have one’s best enemy...Can you go close to your friend without going over to him?”¹⁴ (Nietzsche 1982:168). The word “enemy” emphasizes the need for struggle and opposition, rivalry and overcoming. In this enemy, or friend, one sees a reflection of oneself who must be treated appropriately. There is an element of compassion in our treatment of the friend, but this should be well hidden under a “shell” so hard “you should break your tooth on it” (Nietzsche 1982:169). Sometimes, compassion can actually be destructive and an impediment to the striving of the other. What one *often* needs,

¹⁴ Heidegger develops the idea of “going close” as opposed to “going over” in Being and Time. See Heidegger’s explanation of authentic care as “leap ahead” for the other as opposed to a “leap in” in *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 158,159.

Zarathustra argues, is a *hard* love, a stern eye, and not consolation, reassurance and comfort. That is why it is important “to know first whether your friend wants compassion” (Nietzsche 1982:169).

According to Nietzsche one cannot be a friend by being a slave or a tyrant. If one is a pushover, or a domineering authoritarian, he will not be able to participate in true friendship. Rather than renouncing friendship as a whole, he rejects a soft friendship in which the participants are not catalyst for struggle and improvement. But clearly, not all friendship is renounced: “as much as you give the friend, I will give my enemy, and I shall not be any the poorer for it. There is comradeship: let there be friendship!” (Nietzsche 1982:169). In addition to promoting relationships which serve both parties best interests, Nietzsche also sees value in helping others. Even when we fail in our own aspirations, we can still find value when we have helped the friend. “Some cannot loosen their own chains and can nevertheless redeem their friends” (Nietzsche 1982:169).

1.6 Solitude or Association?

In light of the ambiguity that surrounds Nietzsche’s treatment of community in Zarathustra, his “final” or “essential” view of the value and role of community has been keenly debated. These interpretations generally fall under the umbrella of politics: Is life maximally enriched by those exceptional individuals who embrace solitude and live outside society, or does Nietzsche believe that ultimately solitude is a transitional stage

for the most gifted individuals, who find their greatest fulfilment in political rule? Does Nietzsche belong somewhere between these two extremes? Before explaining my position, I will look at two conflicting interpretations that represent both sides of the debate.

Berkowitz interprets Nietzsche as a radical individualist who believes that the life of solitude is the highest and most life enhancing state one can hope to achieve. He claims that Nietzsche embraces a “utopian individualism” in which community is of value only to the extent that it frees one from the burdensome need for companionship (Berkowitz 1995:174). Rather than presenting any constructive doctrine of friendship and human relationships,

“Nietzsche’s Zarathustra teaches a new ethics that calls for a radical denigration of political life, a consuming contempt for ordinary human beings, and a form of utopian individualism that relentlessly overturns every human attachment that stands in the path of the creator - and every human attachment does so stand” (Berkowitz 1995:174).

Berkowitz concedes that Nietzsche values love of “the friend” over “love of the neighbor,” but argues that “the fact remains that he describes a bond utterly devoid of tenderness and compassion” (Berkowitz 1995:173). Friendship, where it exists, is merely instrumental, “a disposable torch which illuminates the way, but which must be unsentimentally abandoned even before it burns out” (Berkowitz 1995:173). Berkowitz is right to point out that ordinary human beings are not worthy of the higher man’s

friendship, but he underestimates the value of friendship among higher individuals that Nietzsche endorses.

Berkowitz's individualist interpretation rests on the claim that love directed "outward" to others is renounced by Zarathustra in favor of an exclusionary and selfish love directed "sharply inward" (Berkowitz 1995:173,174). But Berkowitz fails to recognize the importance of the "gift-giving virtue" (Nietzsche 1982:186-191). According to this virtue, to which both Zarathustra and his disciples aspire, love is not directed "inward" *as opposed to* "outward"; rather, one is encouraged to "force all things to and into yourselves *that they may flow back out of you well as the gifts of love* [my italics]" (Nietzsche 1982:187).¹⁵ In the Prologue, the gift-giving virtue is described as a need: "like a bee that has gathered too much honey, I need hands outstretched to receive it" (Nietzsche 1982:122). Indeed, Zarathustra suggests that it is perhaps better to give than receive: "should not the giver be thankful that the receiver received?" (Nietzsche 1982:311). This healthy selfishness is opposed to a degenerate and greedy selfishness that seeks to benefit only oneself at the expense of others.

Berkowitz makes the mistake that Zarathustra's injunction to conceal compassion "under a hard shell" is the same as eradicating it completely. But Nietzsche means that

¹⁵ In "*Counterpoint: Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky*," (237-50) Jackson distinguishes Nietzsche, an "aristocratic radicalis[t]," from Dostoyevsky on the basis that "love plays an overwhelming role" only in the vision of the latter.(239,248). Jackson makes the mistake of assuming that because Nietzsche criticizes love of the neighbor, he criticizes social love entirely. For Nietzsche's views on "love of the friend," see (Nietzsche 1982:172-174).

we should only expose compassion when it is absolutely necessary.¹⁶ For the most part, this disguised compassion will serve one's friends best: "If you have a suffering friend, be a resting place for his suffering, but a hard bed as it were, a field cot: thus you will profit him best" (Nietzsche 1982:202).¹⁷ Zarathustra's conception of a disguised compassion is distinguished from the "folly" of "pitying" (Nietzsche 1982:202). By embracing friendship ("let there be friendship") Zarathustra advocates a healthy altruism which is admirable even when it does not help oneself (Nietzsche 169). By helping the friend, Zarathustra insists, "I shall not be any the poorer for it" (Nietzsche 1982:169).

Berkowitz claims that *On War and Warriors* advocates an *agon* that "results in the combatant's emancipation from the need for friendship: perfect friendship enables one to achieve perfect solitude" (Berkowitz 1995:172). But as the narrative of Zarathustra makes clear, the rehabilitative sojourns into solitude that the protagonist experiences are not perfect in the sense of being a final state. In the prologue, Zarathustra's solitude lasted for ten years before his cup overflowed: between parts one and two, "months and

¹⁶ Bertrand Russell also misreads Nietzsche's teachings on higher love. He argues that Nietzsche's "'noble' man - who is himself in his daydreams - is a being wholly devoid of sympathy, ruthless, cunning, cruel, concerned only with his own power." See *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1945), 760-773.

¹⁷ A good example of "soft love," as opposed to the "hard love" Nietzsche advocates, is endorsed by St. Theresa of Avila. She argues that loving the neighbor requires charity, according to which she has the following advice: "If the opportunity presents itself, too, try to shoulder some trial in order to relieve your neighbor of it." It is this particular "love of the neighbor" that Nietzsche condemns, not *higher* love. R.A. Naulty, "A Capacity that Surpasses Human Understanding," 509

years passed” before he realizes that he has “lost his friends” and must return to community; and at the end of part four, Zarathustra still has not given-up his quest for “proper companions” (Nietzsche 1982:195,437). The experience of Zarathustra suggests, then, that solitude is an important stage in life, a rehabilitative resting spot on the way to the “blessed isles” where his companions stand not apart, but together. It is an overstatement, then, to claim that Zarathustra embraces a radical individualism that calls for the “renunciation of community and tradition, law and political obligation, family, romantic love, and friendship” (Berkowitz 1985:152).

On the other hand, Nietzsche has been interpreted as providing an aristocratic politics. Fredrick Appel concedes that Nietzsche “leaves open the prospect” of a selective notion of friendship “in the lives of stronger, healthier individuals.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, he identifies in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as well as other Nietzsche texts, a “political order” that “can be described as two concentric circles, with an inner circle of higher human beings surrounded by a much larger circle representing a majority population that is both subordinate to the ruling minority and instrumental for its continued flourishing”¹⁹ (Appel 1999:136). Among the higher rulers, “impartial legal codes would be replaced by the self governing instincts of those who design their own

¹⁸ Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 83.

¹⁹ Ibid., 136. Appel’s political reading of Nietzsche is only partly based on *Zarathustra*; considerable evidence is placed on other texts, namely the *Will to Power* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. See Appel, pp.117-143

punishments for breaking promises and other infractions” (Appel 1999:141).

Whether Nietzsche presents a politics in Zarathustra is obviously relevant to his understanding of solitude and friendship, for if the highest goal of exceptional individuals is to rule over society, then the solitude that he supports would seem to be a transitional stage the fulfilment of which is to be found in political involvement. There are passages in Zarathustra that support this political reading, including: “Who can command, who can obey - that is experimented here!” and “the best should rule, the best also want to rule. And where the doctrine is lacking, there the best is *lacking*” (Nietzsche 1982:322,324) Other passages, such as “Oh brothers, it will not be long before *new peoples* originate, and new wells roar down into new depths,” would seem to indicate that Nietzsche harbors a hope that while people are becoming smaller, they will eventually reach a low point and “bottom-out,” after which “they shall stand there like dry grass and prairie - and verily, weary of themselves and languishing even more than for water - for *fire*...It is coming, it is near - the great noon!” (Nietzsche 1982:323,284). While the people of the marketplace are surely not ready to be transformed in the present, it is possible that at some point in the future their ears will find Zarathustra’s words resonant: “I, however, and my destiny do not speak to the Today, nor do we speak to the never; we have patience and time and overmuch time in which to speak...Our great *Hazaar*: that is, our great distant human kingdom, the Zarathustra kingdom of a thousand years” (Nietzsche 1982:352).

But Zarathustra’s experience in the marketplace suggests that these hopes cannot

realistically materialize. The passages reflecting hope in mankind collapse under the sheer weight of those that indicate the sheer incompetency of the masses, and the destructive effects any engagement of them inevitably cause.²⁰ Time and time again, Zarathustra realizes that the “mob” is hopelessly fallen, and struggles to contain his contempt. Their inability to accept his teaching in the Prologue generates the violent thought of smashing their ears (Nietzsche 1982:128). Speaking to the masses is a mistake he does not repeat because he realizes that any involvement with them is not only futile, but dangerous, especially for the exceptional individuals. “Numberless are these small and miserable creatures; and many a proud building has perished of raindrops and weeds” (Nietzsche 1982:165). The last man stage, which society has almost degenerated to, is just that - a last man stage, one from which there is no escape. Further support against a political interpretation of Zarathustra is the paucity of details and logistics of an alleged political doctrine.²¹ The conception of community that receives overwhelming

²⁰ It is important to realize that Zarathustra’s thoughts go through a process of metamorphosis, and that early teachings and passages must be weighed against the body of the text. With respect to mankind, his initial hope of universal human transformation quickly succumbs to the realization that he has misinterpreted their abilities, that “I am not the mouth for these ears” (Nietzsche 1982:128).

²¹ Martha Nussbaum examines not only *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* but most of Nietzsche’s major works to determine his contribution to political philosophy. According to the criteria she uses (material need; procedural justification; liberty and its worth; racial, ethnic, and religious difference; gender and family; justice between nations; and moral psychology), she concludes that Nietzsche’s contribution to political theory is negligible. See “Is Nietzsche a Political Thinker?,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* Vol. 5 (1997), 1-13.

consideration in Zarathustra is not of a political nature; the refined community of exceptional individuals, an arrangement much more conducive to an enriched life, largely provides the framework for the text after his failure in the prologue.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche stresses not only the dangers of community, but also its great importance. For those ambitious and capable individuals for whom the book was written, solitude must be embraced, both physically and spiritually. In the market place, all that can be heard is the buzzing of the flies and the jingling of the pennies. To find oneself, to know oneself, requires delicate ears and a private openness to the cosmos through which one's ultimate concerns can be intimated. The text indicates that it is Zarathustra's private experiences that are the most insightful. But despite his many overcomings and rapturous private moments, Zarathustra's ultimate journey remains unfulfilled. It is a quest for friendship. This quest goes through permutations, and is often implicit. It begins as an ambition to engage and transform mankind as a whole, but soon becomes a quest to lead away a few rarified individuals from the degenerate herd. This process of cultivating friends encounters many obstacles, and causes Zarathustra much suffering, and is even abandoned for short moments. But the desire for friendship persists, in the hope that he may one day love his disciples not as a teacher to pupils, but "with a different love" (Nietzsche 1982:190).

It is not community that is renounced in Zarathustra, but the degenerate form of community that characterizes the ubiquitous marketplace. The spiritually strong, exceptional individuals are not encouraged to permanently resign themselves to a life of

unhealthy isolation. Rather, they must seek isolation as rehabilitation and inspiration, as preparation for the highest kind of companionship. Zarathustra's own experiences in the narrative testify to the importance of a dialectic of solitude and rarified friendship.

Zarathustra's sojourns into solitude are often joyful and fertile periods in which his understanding of himself, others, and life in general grows. But isolation is clearly not the end, not the self-sufficient state that animates his thoughts and actions. "I still lack the right men," Zarathustra says to himself as the narrative ends, but "*My children are near*" (Nietzsche 1982:438). Firmly implanted is the hope that the seeds he has sown will soon germinate, that his quest will be fulfilled.

Chapter 2: Dostoyevsky: The Brothers Karamazov

The themes of solitude and community are central concerns for Fyodor Dostoyevsky and form an important sub text of *The Brothers Karamazov*. As in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, these themes are expressed in a number of different forms, some of which are endorsed by Dostoyevsky and others denigrated. In this section I will identify the different forms of solitude and community that Dostoyevsky examines in terms of solitude, isolation, and community.

2.1 Solitude as Introspection

Solitude as introspection is expressed in a number of characters, but finds one of its most profound models in Zosima, a man who enters the monastery and becomes Alyosha Karamazov's spiritual advisor and father figure. This inward solitude is most powerfully experienced in the context of a religious conversion experience he has as a young cadet. After he discovered that the girl he loves was married, Zosima challenged the husband to a duel, fueled by revenge and pride. The night before the duel, however, he beat his faultless and defenseless orderly, and this has a profound effect on his conscience. He awoke the next day transformed, feeling great shame at having beaten the servant. When

he realized that he had committed an enormous crime, “it was as if a sharp needle went through my soul.”²² After beating the innocent servant, Zosima experiences an profound ecstatic experience which triggers an awareness of himself in relation to others: he was not merely an isolated individual disconnected from others, but part of a fabric of humanity the rupturing of which precipitates a profound self-examination. Not only is one interconnected with humanity, he realizes, one is also interconnected with nature, to which Zosima becomes reoriented: “Look at the divine gifts around us: the clear sky, the fresh air, the tender grass, the birds, nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, we alone are godless and foolish, and do not understand that life is paradise” (Dostoyevsky 1990:299). So moved is he by this awareness of the divine as it is incarnated throughout the physical world, in man and nature, that he embraces an existential guilt and indebtedness to all of creation. This recognition of guilt is expressed in the doctrine of guilt “before everyone and for everyone” and has Biblical undertones, reflecting an awareness that men are made in the “image and likeness of god” (Dostoyevsky 1990:298). All men share this quality, and even in a seemingly insignificant servant there is the reflection of God and therefore grounds for the highest reverence. A human bond or brotherhood is thus presupposed: if others share this likeness of God, then an infinite guilt must also be recognized. “I am, perhaps, the most guilty of all, and the worst of all men in the world as well,” he now believes (Dostoyevsky 1990:298). In a sense, then, we must treat all

²² Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 298.

others, even servants, as we treat God, and when we violate that responsibility by treating them badly or neglecting to help them when the opportunity presents itself, we assume a guilt that transcends the earthly transgression. As Robert Belknap argues, according to Zosima's doctrine of evil, every one of us has at some time in his life acted out of spite or failed to act in the fullness of goodness. If on introspection no one can deny this, and if the world is really a connected whole, then every one of us is implicated in every sparrows fall."²³ Zosima attends the duel, but refuses to shoot the pistol, resigns his commission and enters the monastery.

Zosima's misconduct and subsequent moral and spiritual transformation trigger an inward solitude in the form of an intense self-analysis which awakens him to the importance of self-responsibility towards others. The reborn Zosima works out the meaning and significance of his mystical experience in terms of a profound self-analysis through which he arrives at a meaningful understanding of an individual's proper relationship and responsibility to others.

2.2 Monastic Solitude

One of the most explicit expressions of solitude Dostoyevsky provides is a particular form of monastic solitude. This solitude is embodied by the Russian monk, who is

²³ Robert Belknap, *The Genesis of The Brothers Karamazov: Aesthetics, Ideology and Psychology of Text* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 140.

essentially “humble and meek, thirsting for solitude and fervent prayer in peace” (Dostoyevsky 1990:313). According to Zosima, it is from these monks, “thirsting for solitary prayer,” that “will perhaps come the salvation of the Russian Land” (Dostoyevsky 1990:313). The monastic solitude being advocated here is a tempered physical solitude. Unlike the radical solitude practiced by other orders, the solitary prayer practiced by these men is within the context of a community, flavored and structured by social interaction, Christian Orthodox theology and liturgy, communal meals and spiritual guidance. Dostoyevsky carefully situates the solitude of the monks within the context of a brotherly ministry to mankind. The Russian monk identifies his own well-being with the well-being of the larger community outside the monastery, revealing a solitude that is directed not only towards God, but towards others. “If the people are isolated, we, too, are isolated” (Dostoyevsky 1990:314). Monastic solitude in this sense is clearly not solitude exclusively concerned with personal salvation or enlightenment; solitude is not an end, but a means through which we are able to participate in a richer and genuine human community.

2.3 Solitude as Social Isolation

Another facet of solitude examined by Dostoyevsky is its isolating dimension. Whereas introspective solitude and monastic solitude allow the individual to more clearly see themselves in order that they may integrate with and serve others, solitude also exists

in the form of isolation from other human beings. Social isolation, Dostoyevsky suggests, is not a condition that afflicts only certain individuals, but one that “is now reigning everywhere, especially in our age” (Dostoyevsky 1990:303). Despite a world which seems to be growing more united “by the shortening of distances, by the transmitting of thoughts in the air,” Dostoyevsky believes that humans can live closer together and yet grow more isolated (Dostoyevsky 1990:313). The three Karamazov brothers all embody this isolation to varying degrees.

Of all the Karamazov brothers, however, social isolation is most pronounced in Ivan, the character who most exhibits the pernicious effects of this unhealthy form of solitude. Ivan’s isolation is rooted in his childhood when he was neglected by his father, and after the death of his mother had to be raised by other families. Described by the narrator as “gloomy and withdrawn,” it seemed that the young Ivan was “bitterly aware that he was eating his benefactors bread” (Dostoyevsky 1990:28). He recognized his father’s inexcusable neglect and lack of love inwardly, with shame and humiliation. His childhood and early adulthood reflects the lack of love shown him; rather than cultivate friendships, Ivan exclusively dedicates himself to the impersonal arena of ideas, in which he showed “an unusual and brilliant aptitude for learning” (Dostoyevsky 1990:15). Showing great independence by putting himself through university by writing newspaper articles, Ivan did not even bother to approach his wealthy father for financial support, and it was only when his brother Dimitri, whom he had never met, asked for his help in settling some accounts with his miserly father that Ivan returned to Fyodor’s house to

live.

In addition to being isolated from his father, effectively cut-off both socially and financially, Ivan lost his mother when he was seven. He spent time living with Fyodor's servant Grigory, his deceased mother's benefactress, and Yefim Petrovich, who died before he entered university. By returning to his hometown to help Dimitri settle accounts with their father, Ivan seems to make an attempt to grow closer to his elder brother and heal a rift that threatens to tear apart the family. But he soon eschews any responsibility towards Dimitri, responding to Alyosha's concern over the deteriorating relationship between Dimitri and Fyodor by asking, "Am I my brother Dimitri's keeper or something?" (Dostoyevsky 1990:231). His growing dislike of Dimitri reinforces the detachment and self-reliance he cultivated as a child.

Ivan also is isolated from Alyosha, confessing during a chance meeting the day before he is prepared to leave his hometown for good that "I don't even know if I loved you" (Dostoyevsky 1990:229). Coincidentally, Ivan was contemplating how to say good bye to Alyosha when they exchange their first words since childhood. "I want to get acquainted with you once and for all," he confessed, "and I want you to get acquainted with me. I think its best to get acquainted before parting" (Dostoyevsky 1990:229). Ivan still has feelings for his brother, but his desire to meet the boy just before leaving town for good demonstrates his fear of participating in an authentic and dynamic relationship: better to get it all over with quickly before the disagreements, challenges, conflicts and disappointment inherent in any practical relationship are exposed.

Ivan plans to deal with his social isolation by cultivating abstract intellectual relationships with the European Enlightenment thinkers who, rather than living people, provide him with a sense of brotherhood. Ivan tells his brother that his ambition is to go to Europe, home of the great Enlightenment thinkers, and visit the graves of the minds whose ideas, themselves abstract, detached, and disembodied, helped shape the current intellectual climate:

I want to go to Europe, Alyosha, I'll go straight from here. Of course I know that I will only be going to a graveyard, but to the most, the most precious graveyard, that's the thing! The precious dead lie there, each stone over them speaks of such ardent past life, of such passionate faith in their deeds, their truth, their struggle, and their science, that I - this I know before hand - will fall to the ground and kiss those stones and weep over them - being wholeheartedly convinced, at the same time, that it has all long been a graveyard and nothing more" (Dostoyevsky 1990:230).

Ivan realizes that a relationship with the dead is not a genuine, living relationship. But he does feel kinship with these thinkers, whose thoughts have provided a partial substitute for the companionship he lacked, and by endearing himself to them, he can avoid the risks and hardships that belong to any authentic human bond. Ivan has suffered from his social relations, and is skeptical about the goodness not only of his father, but others in general. He hopes to enjoy a life of intellectual fullness in isolation from his family and from others.

Ivan's solitary aspirations are not without misgivings. He is aware of a strong

intuitive impulse to love life and its creatures that a socially isolated life seems to preclude.

I want to live, and I do live, even if it be against logic. Though I do not believe in the order of things, still the sticky little leaves that come out in the spring are dear to me, the blue sky is dear to me, some people are dear to me, whom one loves sometimes, would you believe it, without knowing why; some human deeds are dear to me, which one has perhaps long ceased believing in, but still honors with one's heart, out of old habit" (Dostoyevsky 1990:230).

Part of Ivan, then, wants to break out of his growing experience of barren isolation and participate in community; he wants to love and seems to recognize the need to overcome his isolation with a practical human love, but admits, "I never could understand how it is possible to love one's neighbor" (Dostoyevsky 1990:236). Ivan is capable of abstract love, but not love "up close:" If we're to come to love a man. The man himself should stay hidden, because as soon as he shows his face - love vanishes" (Dostoyevsky 1990:237). As far as Ivan can see, only Christ was able to love. "True, he was a God. But we are not Gods" (Dostoyevsky 1990:237). Unable and unwilling to cultivate the intuitive impulse he feels towards others, Ivan believes that suicide ultimately the only option left. He decides to remain in isolation until, in his thirtieth year, when his thirst for life expires, he will "drop the cup" from which he has been drinking, and kill himself (Dostoyevsky 1990:230).

Alyosha Karamazov, the brother that least reflects social isolation, show how dangerous and far-reaching isolation can be. On the one hand, Alyosha seems to be the

least socially isolated. Alyosha's early life reflects more than anything a profound sense of connection with other human beings. He is described by the narrator as "an early lover of mankind," and "he lived his whole life, it seemed, with complete faith in people" (Dostoyevsky 1990:18,19). Others also loved him, due largely to the "gift" he had in "awakening a special love for himself" (Dostoyevsky 1990:19). By choosing to enter the monastery, he embraces a narrow yet discernable form of community. In and through the monastic community rather than mainstream society, Alyosha hopes to find the spiritual nourishment and guidance he feels he cannot enjoy outside the monastery walls.

Alyosha's seemingly innate connection with others is severely tested when his mentor, the elder Zosima, dies and suffers a humiliating bodily corruption. Alyosha cannot fathom why such a righteous man should meet a most undeserving end, compounded by the slanderous and spiteful denunciations issued by Zosima's opponents within the monastery. The bodily corruption occurs while Alyosha's faith is already in the midst of crisis. A spirited and seminal discussion with Ivan about the problem of evil has left Alyosha questioning his faith. Alyosha becomes so perplexed after the exchange that he forgets to look after Dimitri, whom he had pledged to protect and who was even more likely to attack Fyodor now that Ivan has decided to leave his father's house for good. Instead of diffusing the potentially explosive situation, a despairing Alyosha decides to visit the tempting Grushenka, apparently willing to succumb to the temptation of drink and sex. In addition to the "great grief in his soul," Alyosha also struggles to contend with a budding sexual arousal masterfully cultivated by the sexy Grushenka, who

embraces him in her arms and tells him she wants to “be naughty” (Dostoyevsky 1990:349). His selfish and undisciplined decision, although perhaps forgivable under the circumstances, nevertheless reflects a movement away from social responsibility and active love and towards self-absorption and social separation. Alyosha becomes disconnected from the people Zosima had specifically ordered him to protect, losing the social focus that he had embraced. In this period of relative isolation Alyosha neglects to prevent the fateful confrontation between his brother and father. And although Dimitri chooses to spare his father’s life, the confrontation is anticipated and exploited by Smerdyakov, who murders Fyodor. Through Alyosha’s submission to isolation Dostoyevsky illustrates that the danger of losing touch with social-interconnectedness is possible among even the most dedicated humanitarians. Even though Alyosha’s isolation is ultimately overcome, it is too late to erase the destruction that subsequently follows and which morally implicates Alyosha in the murder of his father.

Although Alyosha becomes isolated, unlike Ivan who has been greatly isolated since childhood, both brothers reflect a state of self-absorption, detachment from social interconnectedness, and lack of responsibility towards others. While Ivan and Alyosha experience different degrees of social isolation, both reflect Dostoyevsky’s concern that social isolation is a constant threat, a dangerous and destructive element of solitude that threatens to unravel the fabric of human community.

2.4 Solitude as Isolation from Oneself

Dostoyevsky demonstrates that isolation from others is not the only form of social isolation. Another form social isolation is isolation from oneself, which is embodied most explicitly in Ivan Karamazov. As much as Ivan is isolated from others, he is also isolated from himself. On the one hand, Ivan is a very analytical and introspective individual who makes an attempt to understand who he is and what his ultimate responsibilities are. Ivan's discussion with Alyosha in the tavern reflects an attempt at self-understanding. He confesses that when he examines himself he finds two largely opposed elements: the rational or logical and the non-rational or intuitive. His reason encourages a disillusionment and aversion to life, as he rebels against God and rejects a fallen humanity that commits unfathomable atrocities. Despite this antagonistic relationship, Ivan concedes that he is nevertheless moved by an instinctual "thirst for life":

I want to live, and I do live, even if it be against logic. Though I do not believe in the order of things, still the sticky little leaves that come out in the spring are dear to me, the blue sky is dear to me, some people are dear to me, whom one loves sometimes, would you believe it, without even knowing why" (Dostoyevsky 1990:230).

While Ivan prefers to identify himself with the conscious, rational dimension of his

existence, he finds that he is also strongly motivated by this lusty “Karamozovian” drive.

It is particularly through his relations with his father, however, that Ivan becomes isolated from his own feelings and actions, expressing Dostoyevsky’s belief that one can be woefully unaware of the existence and potency of his one’s most basic desires and feelings. Ivan tries to repress the inner hatred of Fyodor that he presumably began cultivating as a child, when Fyodor effectively abandoned him, allowing other families to look after him so that he, Fyodor, could more successfully concentrate on his sexual adventures. Ivan was hugely resentful over his father’s apathy and lack of love, and was “bitterly aware that he was eating his benefactor’s bread” (Dostoyevsky 1990:28). The inexcusable neglect he experienced, however, was dealt with inwardly rather than outwardly, and was largely repressed. So hidden were his genuine feelings that the Ivan returns to live with his father it appears that “they get along famously” (Dostoyevsky 1990:17). But his true feelings begin to surface over a month later, when he slowly begins to realize that “he’s become loathsome to me” (Dostoyevsky 1990:233). Nevertheless, Ivan convinces himself that he will stick to his claim that, despite his wishes in the matter, “I will always protect him” (Dostoyevsky 1990:143).

Ivan’s self isolation becomes so pronounced that he fails to recognize not only of some of his deepest feelings, but some of the actions which result. Prior to departing his father’s house, Smerdyakov tells Ivan that if he goes to Chermashnya, Smerdyakov could feign an epileptic fit, leaving Fyodor unprotected from a likely visit by an angry and violent Dimitri. If Fyodor were to be murdered, he suggests, Ivan could inherit a larger

chunk of Fyodor's estate rather than to let Grushenka marry Fyodor and transfer all the capital to herself, leaving Ivan nothing. The calculating Smerdyakov then advises Ivan to go to Chermashnya, to which Ivan subsequently agrees. "You see...I'm going to Chermashnya," Ivan says as he sets off, implicitly consenting to Smerdyakov's scheme (Dostoyevsky 1990:279). Strangely, however, Ivan does not realize what he has done, wondering "why did I report to [Smerdyakov] that I was going to Chermashnya?" (Dostoyevsky 1980:280). Weeks after the murder, Ivan struggles to understand his involvement in the murder. Over the course of three pivotal meetings with Smerdyakov, Ivan eventually realizes that at a deep level he wanted and expected the murder and that "I am a murderer, too" (Dostoyevsky 1990:617). The meetings represent the culmination of Ivan's struggle to overcome an isolation from that part of himself which helped kill Fyodor. At the conscious level, Ivan experiences isolation from a deeper element of himself, an element that both craves and expects his father to be killed. Tunneling into the shaft of his being,²⁴ Ivan discovers that *he* was much more than he had previously thought, that "perhaps I, too, was guilty, perhaps I had a secret desire that my father...die" (Dostoyevsky 1990:631).

²⁴ The metaphor is borrowed from the early Nietzsche: "Moreover, it is a painful and dangerous undertaking to tunnel into oneself and to force one's way down into the shaft of one's being by the nearest path." Nietzsche's insight that "a man who does it can so hurt himself that no physician can cure him" is of particular relevance to the case of Ivan, whose attempt to find himself leaves him on the verge of a brain fever from which he does not recover. Friedrich Nietzsche *Untimely Meditations* ed. Daniel Breazendale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 129.

Another expression of isolation from self is explored through the characters of Zosima and Kolya Krasotkin. The herdish conformism Zosima embraces before his spiritual-ethical awakening isolates him from a deeper self. The cadets of which he was a member had a world view, a system of values which largely determined their behavior and shaped their identity. But in addition to this “common-conscience,” which was informed by the cadet-herd, there existed in Zosima a deeper self. Zosima realized that by continuing to exist as a cadet is supposed to exist, he was becoming less and less himself: “[I] had to incite myself artificially, as it were, and in the end become ugly and absurd” (Dostoyevsky 1990:297).

Kolya Krasotkin is another character whose early identity is formed artificially. By prematurely accepting trendy liberal theory he sidesteps a more authentic struggle for self-discovery. Kolya’s conversations with the liberal seminarian Rakitin introduced him to modern European ideas, including atheism, which are prematurely embraced. He quotes Voltaire, professes to “believe in the people,” and considers God a “hypothesis” needed “for the sake of order,” but not for the “love of mankind” (Dostoyevsky 1990:553). The boy clearly has not digested the ideas he professes to embrace, and admits to showing off his learning, “ready to mouth all kinds of nonsense” (Dostoyevsky 1990:556).

When Kolya admits gross insecurity, a fear of looking ridiculous, Alyosha is startled at the unnaturally young age at which this fear is to taking place.

What does it matter how many times a man is or seems to be ridiculous? Besides nowadays all capable people are afraid of being ridiculous, and are miserable because of it. I'm only surprised that you've begun to feel it so early, though, by the way, I've been noticing it for a long time, and not in you alone. Nowadays, even children are beginning to suffer from it" (Dostoyevsky 1990:557).

In addition to this fear of looking ridiculous, i.e., of not fitting into the ideological/intellectual herd, is the atrophying of the "need for self-judgement." People are not only feeling greater pressure to conform to the herd, they "have even stopped feeling any need for self-judgement" (Dostoyevsky 1990:558). Self-judgement and self-criticism is often uncomfortable and upsetting; it is easier to let our existence be dictated to us by the currents of the age and by the tastes of the herd. But when we stop feeling the need for self-judgement, it becomes exceedingly difficult not only to stay above the down-dragging currents of the herd, but even to recognize that we are drowning.

2.5 Physical Isolation

The most obvious expression of solitude, physical solitude, is also recognized by Dostoyevsky. While no central characters embrace such solitude as a way of life, Father Ferapont best approximates the acceptance of physical solitude through his self-centered religious asceticism, suggesting that, for Dostoyevsky, even a tempered physical solitude can be unhealthy.

It is not entirely accurate to describe Ferapont as representing radical solitude, for

although he lives outside mainstream society, he nevertheless lives within the monastic community. Ferapont, however, is more closely aligned with physical solitude than the other monks. He is described as living on the fringes of monastic life, “beyond the hermitage apiary, in a corner of the wall in an old, half-ruined wooden cell” (Dostoyevsky 1990:166). Unlike other monks, Ferapont “rarely appeared at a liturgy” and often spent “the whole day in prayer, without raising from his knees or turning around” (Dostoyevsky 1990:167). Preferring private contemplation, Ferapont rarely spoke to anyone, and escaped the “arrogant and unclean” eating habits of other monks by living off mushrooms and berries in the forest (Dostoyevsky 1990:168).

Ferapont is used by Dostoyevsky to emphasize the danger not only of physical solitude but of solitude geared towards the individual rather than towards others. In his autobiographical essay *Rinzo Shiina* writes that the solitude he experienced in prison amounted to a “vacuum of love toward the masses” which “cut me off from the sort of relationships capable of motivating me to social concerns.”²⁵ Ferapont’s isolation and self-imposed silence amounts to a similar insulation from society, contributing to his lack of social consideration. The largely private and isolated Ferapont’s self-centered asceticism does not bring him closer to others, either physically or spiritually, and seems to separate him from the other monks, all of whom he considers lazy and impure. He has given up dining with the other monks for he believes they are possessed by little horned

²⁵ Rinzo Shiina, “Dostoyevsky and I,” in *The Japan Christian Quarterly*, 39 (1973): 220.

devils - “I saw one sitting on one monk’s chest, hiding under his cassock, with only his little horns sticking out; another one had one peeking out of his pocket, looking shifty-eyed, because he was afraid of me” (Dostoyevsky 1990:168). Unlike Zosima, he does not advise and support others, preferring to brag of his own virtue, which he seems to believe separates himself above others.

Ferapont’s hallucinations are not limited to horny little devils, for he believes he is in constant communication with the Holy Spirit, who speaks to him in the form of a dove. At night, a tree becomes Christ, “who “stretches forth his arms to me as if to “grab hold of me and ascend me” (Dostoyevsky 1990:169). The physical solitude that Ferapont largely embraces allows his self-absorption and hallucinations to grow unchecked, pushing him more and more into an unhealthy and distorted sense of self-importance and self-responsibility. He is proud even in his humility, rude and condescending in his conversations. He feels no responsibility to the other monks, who are hopelessly “in bondage to the devil” (Dostoyevsky 1990:168). His inflated sense of his own importance is reflected in his hallucinated “religious experiences” during which he believes he is in direct dialogue with God, his ascension to heaven imminent.

In Father Ferapont Dostoyevsky shows that forsaking society in the journey to self-understanding and self-perfection can pervert one’s understanding of oneself, others and indeed of reality itself. Interpreting his own self-perfection independently of other human beings, Ferapont enters a narcissistic physical solitude that, Dostoyevsky believes, further separates him from community and from God, leaving him isolated both physically and

spiritually.

2.6 Community

Healthy solitude, according to Dostoyevsky, is of great individual significance, as it facilitates an understanding of ourselves and our most pressing aims. But solitude must never lose its proper focus - community. There are two distinct yet related forms of community advocated by Dostoyevsky that exemplify this socially-oriented solitude, institutional monasticism and worldly monasticism. These are opposed to the fallen community of separation, which characterizes modern and post modern civilization.

The community that characterizes modern society, according to Dostoyevsky, has fallen to a state of disunity and isolation from other human beings. Dostoyevsky describes this community as having embraced a conception of freedom that enslaves and separates rather than unites. This idea is communicated through the Elder Zosima: "For the world says: 'You have needs, therefore satisfy them, for you have the same rights as the noblest and richest men. Do not be afraid to satisfy them, but even increase them' - this is the teaching of the world" (Dostoyevsky 1990:313). By enslaving themselves to the satisfaction of needs, "they distort their own nature, for they generate meaningless and foolish desires, habits, and the most absurd fancies" (Dostoyevsky 1990:314). Under the spell of worldly freedom, the rich are drawn to envy, vanity, and materialism, while the poor, unable to satisfy these superficial needs, are drawn to drink. Under such a system,

human beings are drawn not to brotherhood and concern for the whole but, on the contrary, to selfishness, disunity and isolation. The more worldly freedom is cultivated, the more individuals fall into joyless materialism and isolation from each other.

Dostoyevsky's skepticism towards the European Enlightenment ideas of atheism, rational self-interest and freedom as a sound basis of society is reflected in his portrayal of Rakitin. Rakitin is a product and advocate of Enlightenment values, a fervent atheist who professes to embody its virtues. He mouths the mantras of Enlightenment brotherhood: "Mankind will find strength in itself to live for virtue, even without believing the immortality of the soul! Find it in the love of liberty, equality and fraternity..." (Dostoyevsky 1990:82) His actions, however, contradict his abstract ideals. On the social plane, he is proud and petulant, and eschews any responsibility to embrace those he personally dislikes. Of Ivan, he asks, "Why should I like him, dammit? He deigns to abuse me. Don't I have the right to abuse him?" (Dostoyevsky 1990:82). Towards Alyosha, Rakitin is jealous and spiteful. After the death of Zosima, Rakitin attempts to lure Alyosha to Grushenka both to see his disgrace and to collect the monetary reward Grushenka had offered him to bring Alyosha to her. Rather than help the angst-ridden Alyosha, Rakitin chooses to destroy him to satisfy his pride and need for revenge.

True brotherhood, Zosima believes, cannot be achieved on the basis of a "science or self-interest" unable to inspire people beyond materialism and mutual envy (Dostoyevsky 1990:303). Modern society cultivates an unhealthy self-sufficiency by encouraging

individuals to strive to “separate his person, wishing to experience the fullness of life within himself” (Dostoyevsky 1990:303). Modern man “is accustomed to relying on himself, he has separated his unit from the whole, he has accustomed his soul to not believing in peoples help, in people or mankind, and now only troubles lest his money and his acquired privileges perish” (Dostoyevsky 1990:303). As a result, the organism of community is broken apart, leading to a mere aggregate of self-absorbed units doomed to disunity, resentment and spiritual impoverishment.

Monastic community is a higher form of community that helps individuals cultivate self-discipline and provides an environment congenial to introspection and self-understanding. In the monastery, one is best able identify one’s most fundamental concerns and enjoy a spiritual well- being difficult to attain in mainstream society. The benefits of monastic community are described by the elder Zosima in terms of providing the individual with a profound freedom far superior to the impoverished freedom championed in modern society.

Monastic community, as opposed to the community characteristic of the modern world, cultivates “obedience, fasting, and prayer” in the individual, and “alone constitute the way to real and true freedom” (Dostoyevsky 1990:314). By learning to overcome their proud wills, and strip away their “unnecessary needs,” monks are better able to “uphold and serve a great idea” (Dostoyevsky 1990:314). While the contexts of prayer, liturgy, and general monastic structure offered in the monastery are beneficial to one’s education, the disciple-elder relationship also contributes to understanding and

self-awareness. In the case of Alyosha, it was not only monastic life in general that appealed to Alyosha, but his Elder, Zosima, who inspired and captivated him, and in whom the impressionable Alyosha learned to have “unquestioning faith” (Dostoyevsky 1990:30). It is to the elder that a disciple pledges total obedience in order to attain perfect freedom - “that is, freedom from himself - and avoid the lot of those who live their whole lives without finding themselves in themselves” (Dostoyevsky 1990:27,28).

Although Alyosha benefits from the monastic community in general, it is the smaller community of disciple and Elder within the monastic context that has the most influence on Alyosha’s development. The guidance Zosima provides reaches a climax when he decides that it is in the best interest of both Alyosha and his family that his disciple leave the monastery “for a great obedience in the world” (Dostoyevsky 1990:77). It is in this worldly context, Zosima believes, that Alyosha’s faith will be tempered and his character strengthened.

Monastic community is a rarified society designed to help people to find themselves, so that they may in turn help others to do the same. Although not all monks are called to leave the monastery for an obedience in the world, Dostoyevsky implicitly suggests that some are called to such a life. Comparing monastic community with mainstream society, Alyosha comments, “Here [in the monastery] was quiet. here was holiness, and there - confusion, and a darkness in which one immediately got lost and went astray...” (Dostoyevsky 1990:157).

Related to monastic community is the worldly monasticism exemplified by Alyosha.

When Zosima orders Alyosha into the world for a great obedience, he does not intend him to renounce the core values of monastic life. Rather, he intends him to perfect them in and through a ministry of active love. This sojourn in the world, Zosima hopes, will benefit his most promising disciple as well as those whom he must guide. “You still have much journeying before you,” Zosima tells Alyosha, aware that Alyosha’s faith and maturity lack a certain substance and sophistication, as they were formed largely behind monastery walls (Dostoyevsky 1990:77). Earlier in the narrative, Alyosha’s love was directed disproportionately to Zosima. While he loved everyone to a degree, “the entirety of the love for “all and all” that lay hidden in his young and pure heart ...was at times as if wholly concentrated , perhaps even incorrectly, mainly on just one being, at least in the strongest impulses of his heart” (Dostoyevsky 1990:339). But Alyosha has become aware that love in the fullest, richest sense must be directed to all people, no matter how base they may seem. The greatest love overcomes ugliness, baseness, and perceives the core of goodness inherent in all people. In the rapturous experience with Grushenka, which concludes in the hermitage shortly after, an emphasis on the universality of human brotherhood can be detected: he “wanted to forgive everyone and for everything, and to ask forgiveness, oh, not for himself! But for all and for everything, “as others are asking for me” (Dostoyevsky 1990:362,363).

Dostoyevsky suggests that community in its most profound sense is to be found in the world. While Zosima remains in the monastery after his conversion, his residence actually brings him closer to people in both a spiritual and a physical sense. As the Elder

of the monastery, Zosima offers spiritual guidance to the crowds of pilgrims of all classes who come to seek to him to seek advice. In this way he is able to bring people together, nourishing them in the virtues of humility, love and community. In Alyosha the worldly ministry is even more pronounced, as he actually leaves the monastery. Through his ministry, Alyosha's faith undergoes great crises in his life of active love. His initial failures leave him despondent and angst-ridden: "Why had the elder sent him "into the world?" (Dostoyevsky 1990:157). But Alyosha perseveres, and his ability to practice active love matures in edifying Grushenka and uniting the quarreling schoolchildren (Dostoyevsky 1990: 776). By sowing the seeds of active love within mainstream society, a more universal and profound sense of community is felt by Alyosha than he experienced at the monastery.

While monastic community offers a particularly congenial environment for solitude and spiritual understanding and mutual edification, Dostoyevsky is also aware that a genuine community is also possible within the world. It is ultimately through the practice of active love within the world human separation that society can become united and transformed.

Part Three: Convergence and Divergence

Now that the exegetical groundwork has been laid, it is appropriate to begin to compare and contrast Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche in terms of their treatments of social relations. The similarities and the differences of these two thinkers will be examined under the following headings: isolation, solitude and community.

3.1 Areas of Convergence:

Both Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche believe that isolation in its various manifestations is a serious problem that plagues contemporary society. They also believe that isolation can be experienced both in physical solitude as well as in community. Their diagnoses of isolation in its different manifestations bear a number of similarities.

Thomas Merton wrote that “Mere living alone does not isolate a man, mere living together does not bring men into communion” (Merton 1972:55). To a large extent, this insight helps explain both Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky. According to Nietzsche, social isolation is experienced most powerfully within conventional society. When Zarathustra returned to society from the mountain top, he expected to remedy the degree of isolation he experienced while alone. But far from curing him of his isolation, he found that life

amongst conventional society only deepened his experience of isolation. The more he desperately tried to make a connection to the townspeople, first by showing them how they could enhance their lives, and then by showing them what will happen to them if they ignore his message, the more suspicious and hateful they became. Upon reflection, Zarathustra soon realized the reason why he will always be isolated in conventional society: modern human beings have been domesticated into a herd animal in which the desire to transform themselves spiritually and intellectually has all but evaporated. They have no inclination to enhance their lives because, like a pampered herd of cattle with enough grass to eat, they are perfectly happy with a life of basic sustenance. Quite content with the warmth of conformity and a basic form of happiness, they see no reason to make of their lives a struggle and a means to a more rarified life. What “longings” they still have left are pacified and distorted into petty ambitions to acquire fame, money and public recognition. Even the old saint Zarathustra encounters in the forest admits that he is no longer able to love man: “Now I love God; man I love not. Man for me is too imperfect a thing. Love of man would kill me” (Nietzsche 1982:123). Zarathustra subsequently resigns himself to “lure many away from the herd,” people who “follow me because they want to follow themselves” (Nietzsche 1982:135).

Dostoyevsky agrees that we can become socially isolated in and through our social interactions: Evoking the old hermit Nietzsche meets in the forest, Dostoyevsky believes that isolation stems from the difficulty in concretely loving a fallen and imperfect man. Dostoyevsky’s characters are frequently isolated as a result of the personal frictions

encountered in their relationships. Dimitri, for example, decides to exact revenge on Katerina Ivanovna essentially because she implicitly scorns his acquaintance at a party. He becomes resentful over her education and proud character, and forces her to offer herself to him. Dimitri's mistreatment by his father contributes to their mutual isolation, generating in Dimitri a personal hatred so strong that he learns to detest everything about his father: "I hate his Adam's apple, his nose, his eyes, his shameless sneer. I feel a personal loathing" (Dostoyevsky 1990:293).

Ivan's social isolation is also rooted in a personal hatred of people at the concrete level. Ivan feels intense resentment and hatred towards a number of people, including Dimitri. Although Ivan loved Katerina "madly," she confesses her love of Dimitri, who loves another woman, and this "drove Ivan to perfect rage" (Dostoyevsky 1990:611,619). He is so resentful of this reversion that "he hated Mitya more and more everyday" while his love for Katerina becomes contaminated. Eventually Ivan realizes that "the whole of Mitya, even his whole figure, was extremely unsympathetic to him" (Dostoyevsky 1990:604). Ivan reflects on the difficulty of loving people "up close": "If were to come to love a man, the man himself should stay hidden, because as soon as he shows his face - love vanishes" (Dostoyevsky 1990:237). It is not the concept of love that he finds objectionable, but love directed to particular human beings who elicit feelings of jealousy, revenge, hatred and resentment. It's still possible to love one's neighbors abstractly, and even occasionally from a distance, but hardly ever "up- close."

Grushenka also has difficulty embracing people "up close." She plans to revenge

herself on Alyosha because, like Dimitri with Katerina, she feels he inwardly dislikes her: “‘He despises me,’ I thought, ‘he doesn’t even want to look at me’” (Dostoyevsky 1990:354). Grushenka is just one of a number of characters who are driven to separation and isolation rather than solidarity. Dostoyevsky emphasizes that concrete social relations threaten to pull the parties into a contagious and destructive cycle of resentment, hatred and revenge.

While both Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky are drawn towards the love of mankind, and hope to enhance and enrich the lives of society in general, they are both aware of the problem of concretely applying that love. Human beings are imperfect creatures, and these imperfections often prevent the successful application of love.

Social isolation is just one of the forms of isolation humans experience in community; communal life also promotes an isolation from oneself. The experience of self-isolation is expressed by Nietzsche in terms of an inauthentic existence. Living in a society with commonly accepted norms, values, pre-defined roles and expectations allows an individual to side-step the struggles of self-discovery and of deciding what form of existence best suits and inspires us; we can simply let our environment, our institutions and public opinion tell us who we are and what we need. But uncritically embracing the roles society encourages us to adopt does not help us identify and cultivate the particular abilities, needs, and goals that Nietzsche believes the attainment of selfhood requires. Selfhood simply cannot be discovered and molded from without: ultimately, no one can tell us who we are and what inspires us as the deepest level but our own selves.

Dostoyevsky also addresses the problem of becoming what society tells us to become rather than becoming who we are. The early Zosima uncritically embraced the values and norms of cadet society, which shaped the way he interpreted and experienced the world. But Zosima eventually realized that by living as a cadet, he was not being true to a deeper aspect of his self. He discovers that his cadet-self was a superficial self whose artificial maintenance was impeding the expression of a more fundamental and individual self. This process of self-isolation begins at a very young age, Dostoyevsky suggests. Kolya, a precocious young boy, is already being courted by liberals like Rakitin who see him as a promising fighter for their cause. He is indoctrinated by Rakitin with modern European ideas rather than encouraged to first find himself. But Kolya is not mature enough to understand the ideas he self-consciously and prematurely accepts. It is up to Alyosha to give him the confidence he needs to overcome the “fear of looking ridiculous” and begin to first find himself (Dostoyevsky 1990:557). Echoing Zarathustra’s injunction to ignore the conformism of the herd, Alyosha warns the impressionable young boy: “So do not be like everyone else; even if you are the only one left who is not like that, still do not be like that” (Dostoyevsky 1990:558).

Both Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche believe that finding oneself is never an easy task. Blind immersion in conventional society often contributes to the loss of self, particularly among those who identify themselves too closely with public opinion and convention. Given that social life contributes to both isolation from oneself and others, Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche both consider the obvious alternative: life outside society. To a degree,

they both recognize that the solitary life also contributes to social and self-isolation.

Despite its benefits, Nietzsche suggests that the life of physical solitude is ultimately not an adequate solution to the social isolation one experiences in conventional society. Zarathustra initially fled society for the safety of mountain solitude and for a time enjoyed his solitary life. But escaping other human beings is not the same as finding them. After ten years of solitary life, Zarathustra realizes that he is isolated from the people whom he had fled. His years of solitude have exposed a “need” to engage mankind, to share with them the riches that he has cultivated (Nietzsche 1982:122). While he could selfishly enjoy his spiritual and intellectual abundances, Zarathustra realizes, “I have become weary of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need hands outstretched to receive them” (Nietzsche 1982:122). Zarathustra, like the bee, is not an isolated solitary animal, but one whose highest responsibility is to the benefit and enrichment of the larger community. While as an individual he has benefitted greatly from his self-imposed exile, as a member of the human race he feels compelled to enter into a passionate mission, described by Robertson as a need to assist “human beings to come into their own: to take possession of their lives, as to become all that they can be”²⁶

After his return to society, Zarathustra teaches that the life of the hermit can be self-destructive: the hermit longs for the friend without whom one is prone to “sinking into the depths” (Nietzsche 1982:168). He suggests that without a companion, even the

²⁶ John Robertson, *The Loss and Recovery of Transcendence* (Pickwick Publications: Pennsylvania, 1995), 23.

disciplined hermit may fall into despair and insanity. Rather than finding oneself, he suggests, many may find that entering solitude may actually contribute to self-destruction. Solitude is therefore considered “inadvisable for many” (Nietzsche 1982:404). While Zarathustra returns to his solitude a number of times throughout the narrative, he always returns to his social mission.

Dostoyevsky is even more emphatic in denouncing the solitary life. Although there are no full-fledged hermits in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the character who best approximates that life, Father Ferapont, is used by Dostoyevsky to illustrate the dangers of physical solitude in terms of isolation from both others and oneself. Ferapont, the self-absorbed ascetic, attempts to enhance his life by renouncing fallen society. The solitude of Ferapont, however, consumes him, distorting his sense of reality as well as his sense of self. His self-importance develops into hallucinations of Christ and the belief that at any moment he may be ascended directly into heaven. He separates himself from those who may rescue him from his dark isolation, believing them unredeemably sinful. Ferapont’s solitary life serves to cultivate an unhealthy separation from others as well as a distorted view of himself.

While conventional society may encourage isolation in its various forms, fleeing society is clearly no panacea: we can be isolated both within and without community. Community, however, is not exhausted by conventional society. Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky both identify and explore the significance of higher society, an elite community composed of gifted, like-minded people through which the individual lives a

more substantial and enhanced life. This society is distinct from mainstream society.

Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky both believe that modern mainstream society generally inhibits our development and diminishes our lives. Dostoyevsky juxtaposes his interpretation of diseased modern society with higher monastic community.

Conventional society, Dostoevsky believes, has embraced a conception of freedom in terms of satisfying superficial desires, particularly of the sensual variety. “For the world says, ‘You have needs, therefore satisfy them, for you have the same rights as the noblest and richest men. Do not be afraid to satisfy them, but even increase them’” (Dostoyevsky 1990:313). In embracing such a spiritually impoverished freedom, “they distort their nature, for they generate many foolish desired, habits, and the most absurd fancies in themselves. They live only for mutual envy, for pleasure-seeking and self-display” (Dostoyevsky 1990:314). This way separates us from others in an unnatural and unhealthy way, and contributes to a joyless disunity, both within oneself and society.

But, as Zosima argues, “very different is the monastic way. Obedience, fasting, and prayer...alone constitute the way to real and true freedom” (Dostoyevsky 1990:314).

Monastic life encourages the individual to both connect with a more substantial core of one’s being than is promoted in society, as well as to serve mankind. The individual learns to strengthen himself against the slavery to materialism, escapism, alcoholism and public opinion championed by society. The benefits of higher monastic community is perhaps best explained in terms of Alyosha’s experience within the monastery. Zosima, the monastic elder, identified with and attempted to cultivate Alyosha’s need to find

himself in the congenial environment of monastic discipline, a path that presented Alyosha “with the whole ideal way out for his soul struggling from darkness to light” (Dostoyevsky 1990:26). Immersion into monastic life gave the young Alyosha’s life a structure and focus that would have been impossible in conventional society. Living with other monks who shared his thirst for “solitude and fervent prayer in peace” furnished Alyosha with an understanding of the basic roots of his spiritual self and gave him a guiding structure which benefits him as well as others when after he subsequently re-enters conventional society (Dostoyevsky 1990:313).

Like Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche distinguishes the impoverished society of the marketplace from a higher and healthier form of community. Conventional society, according to Nietzsche, encourages us to haggle for political power, money, and fame, but not to find our calling. The fast pace of society assaults us with choices which must be made before we have time to adequately reflect on them. We fall into a vocation before we know what we, as individuals with particular gifts and temperaments, need. Our unique qualities and gifts are stifled and we are encouraged to embrace a conformism in which “everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels goes voluntarily into the madhouse” (Nietzsche 1982:130). Genuine communication is impossible in mainstream society, where “everyone talks and no one listens...One forgets about men when one lives among men: there is too much foreground among men: what good are far seeking eyes *there?*” (Nietzsche 1982:296,297).

Very different is the way of agonistic community. Unlike mainstream society, this

form of higher community encourages us to make of our lives a struggle and means to a more enhanced life, fortifying self-discipline, intelligent discourse, and self-examination. We are encouraged to find and develop our strongest gifts and ambitions rather than indulge our lesser desires and appetites. Unlike mass society, in which “everyone talks and no one listens,” higher community encourages genuine communication and lively discourse through which our highest thoughts and highest hopes are formed and strengthened (Nietzsche 296). It is in higher community, Nietzsche hopes, that we can become all that we are.

Another similarity in the thought of Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky is the importance they place on cultivating selfhood. While this theme has already been touched on above, it is important to clarify the degree of convergence in their conceptions of attaining selfhood.

One area of similarity in the process of achieving selfhood is the need for introspective solitude - looking into oneself with the aim of unraveling and understanding oneself in terms of one’s most basic needs and characteristics. Zarathustra has argued that conventional society encourages the individual to follow the herd, isolating the individual from himself. We become hollow, empty beings shaped by our environment and by public opinion. We are conditioned not to think, not to question ourselves, not to cultivate a longing within ourselves through which we are able to enhance our lives and transform ourselves into something greater. But if it is “your wish to seek the way to yourself,” one must realize that we are more than socially conditioned animals and that

our conscience is more than the voice of the herd (Nietzsche 1982:174). Zarathustra teaches his brother to look beyond our socially constructed self, to follow a deeper conscience and say “I no longer have a common conscience with you” (Nietzsche 1982:174). In order that his disciples and future companions can attain this level of self-understanding they must enter into a profound introspection in which they identify their greatest strengths and highest goals. Zarathustra cannot specifically tell them who and what they are, for such an understanding must be cultivated by the individual himself through profound self-analysis. Zarathustra therefore orders his disciples and future companions into solitude - “Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves: and only when you have denied me will I return to you...with a different love shall I then love you” (Nietzsche 1982:190).

Dostoyevsky’s belief in the importance of introspective solitude in attaining selfhood is suggested in Zosima. Zosima initially identified himself in and through the group of cadets to which he belonged. But he eventually realized that he no longer shared their “common conscience,” that the expression and growth of a more basic self was not being stunted and artificially distorted. His thoughts and actions became separated from a more authentic core of his being of which he suddenly becomes aware through the unprovoked beating of his servant.

Noticing a change in his orientation to others and to the world, Zosima is thrust into a penetrating self-analysis through which a greater understanding of his identity is generated. “Why is it, I thought, that I feel something, as it were, mean and shameful in

my soul?...And suddenly I understood at once what it was..." (Dostoyevsky 1990:297).

While he makes a connection with a deeper self at that time, attaining a level of self-understanding, Zosima decides to enter the monastery where he may cultivate and perfect that deeper connection he makes with himself.

Introspection, then, helps Zosima to find that elusive inner core of his being through which a more authentic identity may be formed.

Another area of convergence is the constant struggle necessary in attaining selfhood. Most people avoid struggle and tension in their lives. "They have left the regions where it is hard to live" (Nietzsche 1982:129). As a result, the dynamic forces of which the self is composed are not harnessed and channeled in new and creative ways. We don't commit ourselves too passionately to anything and we don't seek obstacles and challenges through which our strengths are invigorated and tempered. Most humans prefer the security and comfort of conformism and reconciliation - "that is what good sleep demands" (Nietzsche 1982:141). But Nietzsche is not concerned with peace of mind and sleeping well; he is concerned with engaging life, with confronting new challenges the surmounting of which cultivates our abilities and strongest desires.

Paradoxically, Nietzsche argues that "the way to yourself" requires that you "consume yourself in your own flame: how could you wish to become new unless you had first become ashes!" (Nietzsche 1982:176). Zarathustra is not content to spend the rest of his life on the mountain despite its benefits. After ten years he realized that he had to leave the mountain and transform himself, to "go under" or figuratively die so that his

existence may be intensified and enhanced. Human beings are dynamic life forces in need of the nourishment of new experiences and obstacles in order to thrive. Without new oppositions, Zarathustra warns, the “soil” of mankind will become “domesticated, and no tall tree will be able to grow in it. Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man, and the string of his bow will have forgotten how to whirl” (Nietzsche 1982:129).

Dostoyevsky also believes that selfhood must be cultivated and forged through struggle. As Jackson argues, for Dostoyevsky “Life is a whole art...and to live means to make a work of art in oneself” (Jackson 1993:242). At first this is not understood by Alyosha, who enters the monastery in order to find himself and attain a higher level of selfhood than he felt was possible in conventional society. The monastic life “presented him with the whole way out for his soul struggling from darkness to light” (Dostoyevsky 1990:26). Whereas one is easily lost in mainstream society, life in the monastic regime teaches obedience and self-renunciation with the aim of “self-conquest” and “self-mastery to such a degree that he will, finally, through a whole life’s obedience, attain to perfect freedom” (Dostoyevsky 1990:27). While Alyosha is content to spend the rest of his life in the comfortable environment of the hermitage, however, Zosima realizes that for Alyosha’s faith and understanding to mature, he must leave the monastery. Although he realizes that Alyosha’s worldly journey will not be a pleasant one, that he will have to endure great sorrow and temptation in his mission, he has faith that his pupil will attain a higher degree of selfhood if he is able to successfully navigate the dangerous currents of

conventional society. As Gibson argues, Dostoyevsky “does not end by preaching contemplative mysticism, let alone passive resignation. Alyosha is ordered out of his monastery into the world; it is in the world that the struggle for faith has to be decided”²⁷ After initial failure and anxiety, Alyosha questions his mission, and almost succumbs to temptation in the form of Grushenka’s seduction. But Alyosha is able to surmount these obstacles through his active engagement of society, strengthening his resolve and basic spiritual convictions. The degree of selfhood he attains in the disciplined yet relatively comfortable hermitage is invigorated and reinforced through his journey in conventional society, where he is able to summon a strength he didn’t know he had to help others and himself.

Another area of convergence is the idea that self-understanding and self-creation finds its ultimate fulfilment in community. Morgan argues that deep within the human person “there is that which - for want of a better term - might be described as a door, or an opening. This door or passageway connects us to the full human and cosmic community, to the transcendent Mystery which surrounds all of life.”²⁸ Zosima essentially argues the same thing. There is a surface self which is largely shaped by our

²⁷ Alexander Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky* (London: SCM Press, 1973): 49.

²⁸ Oliver Morgan, “Music For The Dance: Some meanings of Solitude.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 22. Rimvydas Silbajoris uses similar imagery: “All the other children instinctively feel Alesha’s essential identity with them; this is the “secret” which opens for him the door into their hearts,” in “*The Children in The Brothers Karamazov*,” *Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol VII, No.1 (1963), 26-38.

environment, slavery to which separates us from one another and from our deeper selves. Once we identify our deeper self, however, we become aware of a connectedness with others and with the world around us. We become aware that “all is like an ocean, all flows and connects” (Dostoyevsky 1990:319). The cultivation of selfhood therefore finds its highest expression not in self-absorbed separation but by cultivating this deeper and mysterious connection we have with other human beings. The means to this end is active love, a dedicated loving humility which cultivates human brotherhood and integration. Through active love we learn about the needs and strengths of human beings, and begin to overcome the forces that drive us away from ourselves and from others. “Brothers, love is a teacher, but one must know how to acquire it, for it is difficult to acquire, it is dearly bought, by long work over a long time...” (Dostoyevsky 1990:319). The life of the hermit, therefore, will always be impoverished insofar as he tries to cultivate his own self over and above the human community because the self ultimately opens us to the greater human and cosmic community. By separating ourselves from others, as Ferapont does, the window to others is closed, and our ability to achieve genuine selfhood is undermined.

Nietzsche also advocates the virtue of enhancing one's life through the cultivation of genuine community. Because of the individualistic flavor of his writing, it is easy to misunderstand the selfless tenor of Nietzsche's writing. While he stresses the need to find oneself in isolation from others, Nietzsche interprets selfishness as unhealthy and degenerative. “The thievish greed of this selfishness speaks of a diseased body”

(Nietzsche 1982:187). Opposed to this sick selfishness is a healthy selfishness through which one helps oneself by helping others. Zarathustra strives for a healthy love directed towards others. Speaking to his disciples, Zarathustra says: "I have found you out, my disciples: you strive, as I do, for the gift-giving virtue...This is your thirst: to become sacrifices and gifts yourselves...You force all things into yourself that they may flow back out of your well as the gifts of your love" (Nietzsche 1982:186,187).

Zarathustra cannot therefore remain a solitary individual; he must dedicate his life towards regenerating society through his teachings. He must make his life into a "passion" or "mission," and "lead his people into a promised land."²⁹ Zarathustra's ultimate self-fulfilment, then, is to be realized within the context of the larger community of those for whom life is to be rewarded for the opportunity she has given us to do so.

Both Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche, therefore, believe that self-perfection is ultimately to be realized within the context of others. One fulfills one's highest responsibility by sowing the seeds social regeneration.

²⁹ John Neville Figgis *The Will to Freedom* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1917), 58.

Areas of Divergence.

Now that the areas of convergence have been examined, the question that must now be asked is where Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky diverge. One area of contrast is their interpretation of social isolation within mainstream society. While they both believe that society tends to isolate the individual from others, Dostoyevsky is more equivocal: it is possible, he believes, to make meaningful connections “out in the world,” and in fact believes that is where the strongest connections can be made.

Dostoyevsky believes that genuine communion can be experienced even among seemingly incompatible individuals. Nowhere is this more the case than with Alyosha and Grushenka. Alyosha is deeply religious and pious while Grushenka is notorious for her loose morals and capriciousness. Alyosha had thought her “horrible” while she had interpreted his piety with jealousy and revenge and attempted to “eat him up” and “make him pay” (Dostoyevsky 1982:352,354). In spite of these factors, however, they are able to make a profound connection. Upon hearing that Alyosha’s elder had died, Grushenka uncharacteristically crosses her heart in a symbol of reverence and removes herself from his lap. Alyosha is transformed by her compassionate act: “I came here looking for a wicked soul - I was drawn to that, because I was low and wicked myself, but I found a true sister, I found a treasure - a loving soul...You restored my soul just now”

(Dostoyevsky 1990:351). He recognizes that even in the seemingly most depraved and wicked people, there is the capacity for love and reverence. This reflects Dostoyevsky's belief in the "common possession of the spiritual principle" that exists in all people.³⁰ If Grushenka, who has suffered greatly for the five years since her lover abandoned her, "forgives everything, forgives everything, and weeps," then Alyosha can renew his faith in his elder, in God, and in other people (Dostoyevsky 1982:355). Through Grushenka's act of compassion, Alyosha's relationship towards her is purified and transformed.

Nietzsche is much less optimistic about the possibility of genuine social connections in the marketplace. Whereas Dostoyevsky believes that individuals can surmount the jealousy and revenge inherent in many relationships through humility, compassion, and love, Nietzsche is skeptical. "Against you they are nothing but revenge...Your neighbors will always be poisonous flies; that which is great in you, just that must make them more poisonous and more like flies" (Nietzsche 1982:165,166). By living in society, one becomes conditioned to think, speak and act superficially; we become insulated against making the deep connections with others Zarathustra craves: "Everyone among them talks; no one knows how to understand anymore. Everything falls into the water, nothing falls into deep wells any longer" (Nietzsche 1982:297). As social relations in the marketplace are hopelessly poisoned, Zarathustra learns that he has no recourse but to cultivate a higher society outside the marketplace.

³⁰ Bruce Ward, *Dostoyevsky's Critique of the West: The Quest for the Earthly Paradise*. (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1986), 159.

The divergence stems from an instinctive faith in people Dostoyevsky adheres to. While both Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche believe that human beings are diverse in terms of intellectual or emotional talent and ability, Dostoyevsky believes that they all share a basic dignity and capacity for spiritual growth and “human communion” (Dostoyevsky 1982:317). The more we cultivate this capacity through a tireless, active love, the more we are able to withstand and overcome the disruptive forces of the marketplace in general and of our social relationships in particular. The characters in his novel who undergo spiritual and moral transformations do so most fruitfully in and through everyday society. While Zarathustra initially tries to make a profound social connection with the people after descending the mountain, he learns that the majority has fallen to a level of degeneration at which they are destined to remain. Unlike Dostoyevsky, who believes that mankind can still overcome the separation that characterizes society, Nietzsche believes that it is simply too late to harbor any realistic hopes of rehabilitating the masses in whom inspiration and longing have all but disappeared. Human beings, variously described as flea-beetles, cows, and poisonous flies, have generally become mindless animals incapable of thinking, hearing or speaking about one’s most profound needs: “You could ring your wisdom with bells: the shopkeepers in the market place would out jingle it with pennies” (Nietzsche 1982:297). They have become hollow beings with no core, emptied of their substance from their immersion in a poisonous and unhealthy society which distorts our nature as creative and ambitious individuals. Only among the able and like-minded few can genuine community be experienced. While Dostoyevsky

believes in curing society's poisonous relations through a program of humility, compassion and active love, Nietzsche believes that, "To the incurable, one should not try to be a physician" (Nietzsche 1982:297). It is to the sick yet potentially healthy few that Nietzsche engages in an attempt to rehabilitate and save.

One recourse from the forces of separation that society generates is to simply leave society. Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky explore this option and arrive at different conclusions: Nietzsche believes that physical solitude is an important stage in the journey to self-understanding and attaining selfhood; Dostoyevsky, on the other hand, believes that it should be avoided as it easily develops into an unhealthy isolation that impoverishes and undermines genuine selfhood and healthy social relations.

Zarathustra's initial years of solitude on the mountain were healthy, fruitful years in which he re-examined his life and grew as an individual. Solitude provided him with the freedom to identify his most basic needs and abilities in terms of his calling as teacher. Without the distractions of the marketplace he was able to ruminate on the what a responsible life entails, on how he could best contribute to the rehabilitation of his fellow man. When his disciples reach a level of purpose and learning, he orders them to experience solitude that they may mature and further "find themselves" before returning to him and entering into an enriched companionship.

As Merton argues, there is such a thing as healthy solitude, a separation or distancing from the "wheels of a social machine" in which an individual "is no longer aware of human needs as a matter of personal responsibility...Physical solitude has its dangers, but

we must not exaggerate them. The great temptation of modern man is not physical solitude but immersion in the mass of other men, not escape to the mountain..." (Merton 1972:54).

Whereas solitude brings Zarathustra closer to himself and to others in terms of his worldly mission, Dostoyevsky believes that the solitary life amounts to an unhealthy separation from society. We find ourselves and others not on the mountain but in and through our often tortured social relations. The life of the hermit distorts self-understanding, cutting the individual off from the larger human body of which he is a part. In the case of Ferapont, the embodiment of unhealthy physical isolation, he loses focus, concentrating on his own development over and above the well being of the larger community. Not only does he cease to believe in the help of others we all need, he ceases to believe in mankind altogether. Insofar as the heart of the self is a window to the larger human body and a larger order, however, individualistic self-development distorts the self, cutting it off from the whole to which it naturally belongs and from which it derives its strength, nourishment and focus.

While Nietzsche is aware that solitude is not for many, Dostoyevsky believes it is not for any. One establishes a connection with others not alone in contemplation but in and through an active involvement in society. It is through the application of human love at the concrete level that we learn about our strengths and weaknesses and, ultimately, learn to perfect ourselves and regenerate a separated and disunified society. By failing to cultivate our selfhood in terms of active love, which requires the presence of others, we

deny ourselves the fruits of that labor. “Love is a teacher,” says Zosima, but it is “difficult to acquire” and “dearly bought, by long work over a long time” (Dostoyevsky 1990:319). He suggests that not only do we not need to flee society to find ourselves and others, but it is folly to do so.

Another key difference between Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky is their respective interpretations of the abilities and gifts of mankind. Dostoyevsky believes that all humans share a capacity for spiritual growth and regeneration. In terms of the organic imagery they both use, Dostoyevsky believe that the soil of mankind is still rich enough that when we plant seeds of love in society they are likely to grow. Not only do others benefit but so do those who plant the seeds. “All is like an ocean, all flows and connects; touch it in one place and it echoes at the other end of the world, says Zosima”

(Dostoyevsky 1990:319). We are all embedded in the fabric of human life - and even animal life - in terms of a mysterious bond; by helping the whole we also help ourselves as individuals who are part of that whole. This accounts for the emphasis on community and denouncement of physical solitude that permeates *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, believes that the soil of mankind is almost infertile, that most people are already “asleep” or “dead” (Nietzsche 1982:135,140). While he initially feels an obligation to the rest of society, he learns that for the most part society has degenerated to a stage of lifeless stasis from which it cannot emerge. What Zarathustra therefore does is find those individuals in whom his seeds of his teaching can germinate, people who can develop and grow: “Companions I need, living ones - not dead

companions and corpses whom I carry with myself wherever I want to” (Nietzsche 1982:135). The need for community in Zarathustra becomes a need for higher community, a group of like-minded and able companions who believe in a goal and share a capacity for growth the masses lack; the masses, already dead, elicit only nausea and contempt.

Conclusion.

As was stated in the introduction, there is a sizable body of opinion that maintains that Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky are thinkers of radically opposed conviction and temperament. This study has argued that while there are significant areas of divergence between the two men, the areas of convergence are more profound.

Dostoyevsky diverges from Nietzsche in advocating a life-affirming inward solitude through the encounter with society in terms of the practice of a humble “active love.” This simple yet challenging ethic can be successfully practiced by all humans by virtue of their capacity for love and transformation. Despite the fact that humans have different aptitudes and skills, we all share an innate need and potential for self-understanding and human community.

Nietzsche has a much more selective conception of companionship, deeming the bulk of society hopelessly fallen. Unlike Dostoyevsky, who sees all humans capable of making genuine social connections, Nietzsche believes that most people are incapable of genuine inspiration, transformation and community. Whereas Dostoyevsky is drawn towards the people, then, Nietzsche is drawn away from the masses *but towards an elite core of individuals*. Among this elite the practice of a kind of “hard love” is needed which can spur individuals to greater heights.

While their teachings on community reflect the human need for companionship, love and social responsibility, another important aspect of existence is the need for autonomy, independence, self-understanding and self-development. Can this end be reached within a social context, or must we leave society for the mountain? Nietzsche believes that physical solitude is a prerequisite for individuality, self-understanding, creativity and spiritual growth. Although solitude has its dangers, it is generally interpreted by Nietzsche as a healthy state in which one can best come to terms with one's ultimate concern, get in touch with one's deepest thoughts and feelings, and contemplate the mysteries of life.

Although Dostoyevsky recognizes the need for solitude, his paradigm is not the mountain but the monastery, which offers a tempered solitude of prayer, worship and a commitment to social responsibility. For Dostoyevsky we discover and develop ourselves not in isolation but in and through our social relations.

This study has argued that despite the areas of divergence, the areas of convergence are more profound. Both men argue that one of society's biggest problems is isolation in its various manifestations. Despite a world in which people are living closer together and in which communication is made easier through technological advances, individuals are growing farther apart. Genuine communication and genuine community are becoming increasingly difficult to attain. In addition to our growing social isolation is the problem of isolation from oneself. In order to have community individuals cannot be isolated from themselves. Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky therefore stress the importance of self-

understanding and self-perfection through the cultivation of selfhood. Through the cultivation of selfhood individuals can best affirm life, cultivate rich and meaningful relationships, mature spiritually and realize their greatest potential.

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