

Perception and Action: Sympathy, Charity and Ideal Communities in Eliot's
Middlemarch and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When, jaded with the rush and glare
 Of the interminable hours,
 Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
 When our world-deafened ear
 Is by the tones of a loved-one caressed—
 A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
 And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
 The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
 And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.

 And then he thinks he knows
 The hills where his life rose,
 And the sea where it goes.
 -Matthew Arnold. "The Buried Life," 78-98.

The desire to know and be known is one of the driving forces of the human condition that seems to have been repeatedly examined to the point of cliché, and yet literature has the power to continue reinventing the same question of whether humans can actually understand one another on a deep level or whether they simply learn to coexist, never breaking out of the shell of self-interested perception. The question of selfhood¹ and how it informs one's interaction with others is crucial to understanding not only individual relationships but also specific ways that these

¹ When referring to selfhood, I am not seeking to define the self or determine whether the self is actually "real" in the traditional sense or merely a social construct, since that is not the aim of this argument. When referring to self, I mean the simplest understanding as a person who relates and interacts with the world.

relationships form into communities and the shared experiences of societies. Fyodor Dostoevsky and George Eliot were two authors who believed their literature could reshape how their cultures formed communities by helping bridge the gap between individual experiences. Separately, Eliot and Dostoevsky can be considered two of the greatest voices of the nineteenth century, one speaking through subdued yet penetrating portraits of country life to the magnitude and pride of the British Empire at its height, the other taking on the role of a prophet to a vast but insecure country, still caught between the East and the West and seeking to recover from centuries of struggle and violence to establish itself as a nation. Eliot's masterpiece *Middlemarch* maintains separate storylines that, nevertheless, are still connected as a unified whole. The stories interweave in order to create the identity of the town of Middlemarch, and what the audience sees while progressing through the book is that even though they have been following the lives of characters that at first appear to be self-contained, this perceived isolation and self-containment do not exist. Each life forms a thread in a web of experience. These characters are tied to one another and to the greater community in both positive and negative ways, which can either destroy or save their lives. Dostoevsky died with only vague plans for a sequel to *The Brothers Karamazov*, yet the story he wrote of a fractured family, which slowly becomes entangled in a dark destiny that ends in murder, is a grimmer version of the same theme about community. Through these events, Dostoevsky also reveals the inability for the individual to live completely cut off from family or society, and for good or ill, the brothers are all connected. Though their writing styles and the basic plots of each novel seem in some ways vastly different, Eliot and Dostoevsky have the same basic concern: how isolated individuals can form a community. George Levine says of the author of *Middlemarch*, "The image of George Eliot, bending forward, listening during one of her regular Sundays with selfless and disciplined

attention to her admiring visitors corresponds precisely to the moral and intellectual ideal that informs her novels” (25). The quiet picture of serenity stands somewhat in contrast to Dostoevsky in the last ten years of his life, described by Joseph Frank, “In the eyes of the vast majority of the literate public, [Dostoevsky] became a living symbol of all the suffering that history had imposed on the Russian people, as well as of all their longing for an ideal world of (Christian) brotherly love and harmony” (*Mantle of the Prophet* 3). While perhaps it is easy to meditate on the differences in context between these two figures that became regarded as voices of their age, both Dostoevsky and Eliot were writing with the same mindset that they could profoundly impact culture and change society through their fictional worlds that would teach their readers to embrace the idea of achieving an ideal community through acts of charity in the case of Dostoevsky and sympathy in Eliot’s case.

Dostoevsky and Eliot in Historical Context

Traditionally, the critical community and makers of the literary canon categorize literature based on the obvious contextual factors such as time period, race, religion, nationality, and genre.² Based on these external considerations, Dostoevsky and Eliot do not at first seem to have much in common. Though they were contemporaries, they wrote on different sides of Europe and came from vastly different cultures and personal lives. In the middle of the nineteenth century, England and Russia were at different places in terms of industrialization, political climate, historical legacy, and religion. Though one might simply discredit context and

² For instance, the most respected anthologies, such as Norton and Longman, in their recent editions have a hierarchical system by which they divide material according to geographical area or genres (British Literature, American Literature, World Literature, Poetry, Drama, Detective Fiction), which they then divide into time periods (Restoration, Romantic, Victorian etc.) that sometimes are divided into specific issues or genres (Women’s Issues, Poetry, Industrialism, etc.).

culture by arguing that they are not most important aspects about these authors' works in relation to each other, the influence and impact of context on each author's work cannot simply be ignored. On the contrary, understanding the differences between these two authors based on these categories will help us see better how these authors' backgrounds made them choose such different subjects and style. More importantly, their contexts actually helped shape Dostoevsky and Eliot's ideals for community and the conviction that they could influence society toward these ideals in their literary works.

The Britain that George Eliot portrays in *Middlemarch* is complicated because while Eliot was speaking to the British people of 1870, she did so through a portrayal of Britain in 1830, a time that was perhaps as familiar yet alien to her readers as 1970 seems to Americans today. Thus, some critics have called her vision in the novel apocalyptic.³ The British Empire in the Victorian Age probably reached its peak around the time *Middlemarch* was published. England was the dominant power in the world, having to maintain relative internal peace with its numerous concerns abroad. Many of the British people considered themselves fortunate to have avoided internal revolution like much of Europe had undergone in the 1840s, but many also attributed this peace to the character of the British people. As such a wealthy nation that prided itself on Christian principles and duty, British identity was tied to a sense of having others to whom they could impart morality and the fruits of progress.⁴ In some cases, the British saw

³ See Mary Wilson Carpenter's *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time*.

⁴ The Victorian view of national identity as opposed to Empire was complicated to say the least. For examples of those who took the pro-Imperial position, see James Anthony Froude's *The English in the West Indies* (1888) and Joseph Chamberlain's *Foreign and Colonial Speeches* (1897). For a more critical writing, see J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902). Fictional adventure writers were also influential in critiquing imperialism. Rudyard Kipling most does so in works like "The White Man's Burden," "The Man Who Would be King," etc. Rider

themselves as taking up a noble burden in order to provide happiness for the indigenous peoples, incapable of creating peaceful communities on their own, which Kipling ironically comments on at the close of “The White Man’s Burden”: “And when your goal is nearest . . . / Watch Sloth and heath Folly / Bring all your hope to nought” (24). By the close of the Victorian Age the prevailing optimism during the time Eliot wrote *Middlemarch* would wane as the British continually saw just how difficult it was to create these ideal communities abroad, even though they had believed they possessed all the tools necessary for the task. Also, with this unprecedented growth that went hand in hand with increased industrial output came an anxiety that as England focused on spreading its culture and values around the world and became reliant on machinery and factories, the British people would lose a sense of the identity that had brought it so far. Thomas Carlyle, in the early Victorian Age had seen and predicted this outcome: “It is no longer the moral, religious, spiritual condition of the people that is our concern, but their physical, practical, economical condition, as regulated by public laws. Thus is the Body-politic more than ever worshipped and tendered; but the Soul-politic less than ever” (“Signs of the Times”). If Carlyle’s concerns were true, then why was Britain putting so much effort into civilizing and maintaining power over these other cultures when Britain itself was not an ideal nation by any stretch of the imagination? Even as England grew richer and enjoyed capitalistic success, there was concern that heightened wealth would always come with increased poverty, and caught up in its own moral superiority, the British people would forget that the poor were also part of their culture, as Dickens and other writers sought to raise awareness for social reform through the novel. As they showed, the emphasis on morality did not seem to be reducing the poverty and low quality of life for the lower classes in cities.

Haggard’s *She* and *King Solomon’s Mines* were also extremely popular works that nonetheless provide relevant insight into the British mindset toward these peoples.

Part of this fear stemmed from the growth of city life as opposed to rural communities, an issue that had been a concern for the Romantics, which continued to cause alarm as progress and industrialism marched forward. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams states:

Identity and community became more problematic, as a matter of perception and as a matter of valuation, as the scale and complexity of the characteristic social organism increased . . . the growth of towns and especially of cities and a metropolis; the increasing division of labor; the altered critical relations between and within social classes: in changes like these any assumption of a knowable community—a whole community, wholly knowable—became harder and harder to sustain. (165)

While a smaller community presented rich and poor with the opportunity to know one another in the natural settings and interaction of daily life, large cities made that task harder and the opportunity for one to actually know those he or she saw on the street every day impossible. This changing social dynamic was the chief concern for Eliot, who unlike Dickens is not so blatant in her stance on social issues. Choosing to focus more on observing social dynamics, she was more concerned with changing the individual hearts and consciousness of her readers rather than insisting on government action.

Middlemarch indirectly addresses these British anxieties by depicting a small local community contemplating political and industrial changes, while the author and readers have the benefit of hindsight. However, Eliot does not allow social issues to determine the course of the novel's main action—Dorothea's marriage decision is not directly affected by the building of the railroad and Lydgate's practice does not suffer as a result of the Reform Act—but the larger events are not insignificant to the community as a whole. The one event involving the railroad,

for instance, provides one of the rare situations in the novel that actually gives voice to the working men of the community.⁵ Their assault on the surveyors and subsequent attack on Eliot's honest workman Caleb Garth and his assistant exemplify a scene in which the concerns of the mob of workers as a whole affects Eliot's individual characters. More importantly for the novel's action, the spoiled and idle Fred Vincy intervenes in the affair, which marks a turning point for his path. Thus, Eliot shows a chain of effects in her novels that also mirror an even slower progression in history, where political events that one hears about in the newspapers start to become a concern for an unidentified group of people in the larger community, then affects those one might know, and finally affects the individual, changing him irrevocably. What Eliot shows on a small scale she also indicates happens in the grander scheme of experience as is evidenced only in her closing chapter. She depicts industrialization and the Reform Acts as large events that have moved England forward, but she then asks whether average individuals simply react to decisions made by far removed men in office or if they are able to move these decisions themselves. Characters like Will Ladislaw seek to make a difference through political methods, but in the end, are they simply moving with a wave that inevitably would have come anyway? Eliot raises this problem of individual worth constantly throughout the novel, showing how no true individual perhaps exists in the sense that one is a self-contained vessel whose actions come solely from personal will and freedom. Whether in a rural community or in London society, one person is bound to others. She shows that the provincial, wholesome community and group mentality of her town's inhabitants has both its good and bad sides, and alienation can still occur even within a place where everyone "knows" everyone else. Working with the late nineteenth-

⁵ Some critics have pointed out the lack of significant working-class characters in *Middlemarch* and proposed theories for why this may be the case. For their arguments, see Graver 19-20, Staten 992 and Williams 165-81.

century view of the past as simpler and idealistic, Eliot complicates this view, revealing that the past has its merits, but at the same time society must always move forward, seeking to create its own kind of good out of the present material without going backwards. In the end, Eliot does not want her readers to look for the redemption of the community through mere progress on a national scale but to recognize that in any context, community must begin on an individual level, and if the correct building blocks are in place on the small level, a community can be built in either the country or the city.

While England enjoyed the fruits of military and cultural success, combined with a strong, even if at times fragile, national identity, Russia in the nineteenth century was still in many areas playing catch up with the rest of Europe. Peter the Great, the first aggressively Westernizing czar of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was so controversial because until that point Russia had never exactly considered itself a part of the rest of Europe. The sheer land mass had made Russia difficult to unify until the fifteenth century, and even then, after centuries of Mongol rule, the country was still considered backwards and culturally diverse. However, by Dostoevsky's time, Russia had made enormous strides to reach Europe in terms of industrialism and culture, though the example of serfdom, which was not abolished until 1861, during Dostoevsky's life, gives one an idea of how many practices that Europeans might consider barbaric and vestiges of medievalism were still commonplace in Russian society. Superstition and mysticism, which formed almost a type of syncretism with Christianity, still prevailed among the peasants and can be seen vividly in Dostoevsky's work,⁶ for instance in

⁶ For sources that deal with the interweaving of Russian Orthodoxy, folklore, and superstition, see Simon Franklin's "Nostalgia for Hell: Russian Literary Demonism and Orthodox Tradition," Joanna Hubbs' *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture*, W.F. Ryan and Faith Wigzell's "Gullible Girls and Dreadful Dreams: Zhukovskii, Pushkin and Popular Divination," and Vasily Zenkovsky's "The Spirit of Russian Orthodoxy." For sources that particularly

Alyosha's monastery where one of their most revered inhabitants, Father Ferapont, swears he once caught a devil by the tail, and the visiting monk seems to believe him (169). This brand of Christianity seemed completely foreign to Eliot's Victorians, though Protestant faith was not without its own strange undercurrents.

Despite the strangeness of Russian customs in association with religion, Dostoevsky especially believed strongly in the power and communal identity of the Russian people as a whole, which constantly appears as a theme in his works. Unlike Britain, Russians were not under the supposition that their society was a beacon of light to the rest of the world, yet there was still a strong sense of national identity that sometimes became a Russia-versus-the-rest-of-Europe mentality. Since industrially Russia was behind most of Europe, the fear of factories, progress and city life was not as much of a concern in Russia as it was in England. However, Russians did have a fear of excessive religious and cultural influence by the progressive Europeans. Thus, two broad groups known as the Slavophiles and the Westernizers formed. Joseph Frank asserts that out of these two groups, Westernizers for the most part consisted of the upper-class, who had the European education and manners, while the Slavophiles were mostly peasantry, still rooted to their old traditions (163). Dostoevsky's particular brand of conservative Slavophilism focused mainly on the ideas from France and Germany that he saw as particularly harmful to the integrity of the Russian people, rather than belief in the complete isolation of the Slavic race, which some Slavophiles sought.⁷ He feared whatever would split the fundamental

examine these representations in Dostoevsky, see George Gibian's "Dostoevskij's Use of Russian Folklore," and Faith Wigzell's "Dostoevskii and the Russian Folk Heritage."

⁷ Scanlan sees Dostoevsky's sentiments regarding nationalism and Westernization as somewhat erratic; however there was a definite shift from liberal Westernization to conservative nationalism in his later writings (158-59). Frank believes that Dostoevsky ultimately sought unification between the two camps because he each could benefit the other but seemed torn and ambiguous about his position in several instances (*Mantle of a the Prophet* 263-66).

values of his community, especially those doctrines that at the core encouraged division by declaring relative truth.

In the middle of the century, German thinkers like Hegel, Feuerbach, and Strauss sent tremendous waves through the Russian universities. Dostoevsky himself was caught up in a group called the Petrashevsky circle that preached destruction of the established order. In later years, Dostoevsky would condemn what he then saw as the madness of belief in the unharnessed power of self-assertion, which had led him to believe in the justice of this group's actions. In the hopes of creating a new kind of society, they had believed that the older order had to be completely destroyed. The problem, which Dostoevsky later described through the example of his one-time idol and leader Belinsky, was that they actually believed that socialist philosophy would allow or even create morality:

Treasuring above everything reason, science and realism, at the same time he comprehended more keenly than anyone that reason, science and realism can merely produce an ant's nest, and not social "harmony" within which man can organize his life. He knew that moral principles are the basis of all things. He believed, to the degree of delusion and without any reflex, in the new moral foundations of socialism (which, however, up to the present revealed none but abominable perversions of nature and common sense). (*Diary of a Writer* 7)

Like Eliot, Dostoevsky saw forceful political intervention as a catalyst to the reformation of society as an endeavor bound to fail. Russia had a far more violent recent history than England, and because of its incorporation of Western thought, combined with a political and cultural mindset so different than Western Europe, these radical new ideas had promised to have an explosive impact on Russia, which Dostoevsky as he grew in age and maturity saw more and

more clearly. Instead of the regeneration of community, these ideas would tear everything down that years of progress had sought to conquer, and the Russian people, instead of being left with the beginning of a social Utopia, would only have heartache. He shows this happening on a small scale in *Demons*, where a radical group causes chaos in a town and then literally sets fire to it. By the time he wrote *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky was considered and perhaps even thought of himself as a prophet to his people, responsible for revealing to them the consequences that would happen when individuals ceased to believe in religion and morality. Unlike Eliot, Dostoevsky believed the only way to maintain morality was through a sincere belief in the actuality of a God and a life after death. Thus, his fiction is aimed at teaching through example: his nihilistic characters tend to hurt both themselves and the entire community, showing how personal belief can never remain exactly that. Beliefs become actions, and actions would define who the Russian people were.

While national context profoundly influenced Dostoevsky and Eliot's choices as writers, their lifelong struggles to integrate religion into their visions of ideal community led to divergent views on a number of social issues. George Eliot's phase as a young and passionate convert was a short-lived time in her life that, nevertheless, would impact the subject matter and manner in which she chose to write.⁸ Christian symbolism and imagery prevails in Eliot's writings, even though by the time she began writing novels, she was a confirmed agnostic with no faith in a literal God or in the accuracy of the Christian Bible. Both intentionally and perhaps unintentionally, Eliot keeps Christianity in her novels for reasons including her acknowledgement of the good points in Christian doctrine, the prevalence of Christian principles

⁸ The classic work on Eliot's life is Gordon S. Haight's *George Eliot: A Biography*. New York: Oxford UP, 1967. A more recently acclaimed work on her life is Rosemarie Bodenheimer's *The Real Life of Marian Evans*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996.

in her culture, and perhaps an unconscious imprint of her early teachings in her mind.⁹ Even her ideal image of society as an organism wherein each does his share is reminiscent of the Christian idea of the Body of Christ.¹⁰ However, Eliot rebelled against the moral and epistemological restrictions of Christianity, which was evidenced in her sudden refusal to attend church once she had decided that a great many of its teachings were false at the age of twenty-two, and in her unconventional and controversial relationship with the married George Henry Lewes. By the time she began writing Eliot was a follower of the new teachings of thinkers like Feuerbach, Comte and others who maintained that Christianity could not rationally be accepted, and society would eventually progress to the point where all could acknowledge that morality exists apart from the superstition of religion. By her decision to live in a way unrestrained by the codes and restrictions of society, Eliot affirmed her belief that community was held together ultimately by codes and laws that were meaningless if true communal feeling were not the goal. Eliot's relationship with Lewes fulfilled their own needs and desires for companionship in a way that did not technically harm other people, since Lewes had been estranged from his wife for some time and was simply unable to gain a divorce. Thus, in her mind, there was no true law of sympathy or community being violated in her actions.

However, just as Eliot was not blind to the scandal of her relationship and mindful of society's standards, she also realized that religion and moral laws were still a necessary need for her society as a whole and the debt culture owed to religion could not be cast off lightly. Even if she could not accept the Christian allegiance to one being and one doctrine at the expense of all others, when viewing the reformation of community, she shared some of the same goals with sincere Christians. Eliot was always a realist as much as she was an idealist when viewing

⁹ Mary Wilson Carpenter makes this argument in *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time*.

¹⁰ See 1 Corinthians 12 for this Biblical metaphor.

community and how she could advance her vision both in her personal life through her novels. Just as she would not sacrifice her convictions for the sake of social respectability, she did not take every opportunity to flaunt her unorthodox behavior, seeking instead a more private personal life. In the same way her novels seek to appeal to her audience where they are—as people still firmly tied to morality and religion—while subtly Eliot seeks to elevate them to a more universal sympathy with one another.

Dostoevsky's life was much more turbulent than Eliot's, and though they shared a lifelong challenge of doubt and frustration with the Christian faith, Dostoevsky ultimately kept his belief in spite of lifelong doubts about the existence of God¹¹ and an unsteady personal life, but because of his own mental trials he strove even harder to represent the absolute necessity of belief for the Russian people. Through his bouts with epilepsy, debt, gambling, and depression, Dostoevsky perhaps saw belief in the reformation of man through spiritual redemption as the only means toward a regenerated society. His deep involvement with the revolutionary ideas and eventual imprisonment decidedly changed his views on faith and led to his denunciation of doctrines that claimed to regenerate society without spiritual regeneration through God. As Frank argues, he himself had been beguiled by the promises of Left Hegelianism, never fully losing his faith, but realizing during his time of intense physical suffering at a labor camp in Siberia how he had placed his faith for a time in false philosophies (*Years of Ordeal* 116-118). However, due to his experiences as a radical and revolutionary, he could see both sides of the issues he was portraying. Even his saintly characters like Alyosha have realistic struggles yet he can paint a picture of a maniac with frightening detail. Dostoevsky's firsthand experiences of what men without hope in religion could be driven to, through his experiences with convicts in Siberia, was

¹¹ See Frank, *Years of Ordeal* 160.

convinced that men needed God to believe in the reality of God. Thus, unlike Eliot, Dostoevsky wrote with the aim of maintaining a fading belief among his the Russian people and himself rather than simply allowing humanity to continue progressing toward a new philosophy. He was seeking to preserve the outward religion of his country, while also injecting new life into it by his own philosophy of love and selfless service.

Both Eliot and Dostoevsky were intense idealists in the sense that they had clear visions of what they believed humanity could achieve, yet they were also confronted by the disheartening or even grim realities of the strife and complications that existed within societies. Their tasks as artists were not growing any easier as the forms like religion that had at least outwardly held society together seemed to be wavering and individuals were pulling away from each other as they learned to look inward. Thus, both had to look to their own personal lives as well the situation of their countries in order to find a balance between advancing their personal visions and taking into account the limitations and needs of their audiences. Each recognized that to speak only of ideal communities would not yield true art or change in the readers.

The Artist and Community

Dostoevsky and Eliot came from very different cultural contexts and were speaking to societies with different sets of problems, yet both saw the increasing fragmentation of their societies and the fast approaching wave of modernization. As artists, they felt an ethical imperative to speak through the crafting of fiction about the new problems facing society, some that they believed were universal and others that were particularly problems for the late nineteenth century. The one question they both asked and sought to answer was what is the definition of a community and how or can society achieve it? In relation to this large question,

both saw the importance of religion and personal experience as factors that would determine their answers. As the question of whether a real God exists loomed over Europe, spurred on by the popularity of the German Higher Criticism, Eliot and Dostoevsky had to consider that if man was indeed isolated from God and others as an individual, then what would happen to the way he determined morality?

The individual as citizen and moral agent is a concept riddled with difficulties when considering the fact that an individual, though touched by a social context and in need of interaction for proper development, still will find that even if raised in a similar environment with others, differences in personality, beliefs, behavior, etc. always exist that make one's perception unique from others. Thomas Carlyle states, "Isolation is the sum-total of wretchedness to man. To be cut off, to be left solitary: to have a world alien, not your world" (*Past and Present* 316). However, some may argue that isolation is something humanity has no capacity to control. One's natural state *is* isolation. Small variances, whether they be inherent or external are enough to make one realize he or she is an individual moral agent, who cannot be sure that another will agree or think the same way in the exact same situation. However, many may go through life partially blind to this reality, believing that others' perceptions line up with their own simply because they have not looked far enough outside themselves. George Levine states in *Realism, Ethics and Secularism* that literature's key role lies in awakening the self to the knowledge that others exist, who do, in fact, greatly differ from oneself and that the self is, therefore, an isolated entity in relation to a greater world: "It is like hearing the ravens cawing from tree to tree announcing their absolute difference, announcing a world you never made, that runs without reference to you, that is full of beings that don't know of you" (1). Paradoxically,

literature points out the vast chasm of difference between the self and another, while allowing the opportunity for the reader to live vicariously through the experience of this other self.

This act of seeing can lead to a concept Eliot would call “sympathy,” the act of seeing another person’s experience through an imaginative act in order to better understand that person and humanity as a whole. For Eliot, this process can be best cultivated in a natural way through literature, which ideally one should then make a principle in real life experiences. In “The Natural History of German Life,” she describes this positive act of imagination: “Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contacts with fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot” (Pinney 270). Dostoevsky does not exactly state the same view of his own writing as explicitly as Eliot does, for he sees the writer’s role as more that of a prophet or “seer” into the human condition who can explain these truths through the actions and words of characters. In his *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky praises Cervantes for showing clearly through Don Quixote “one of the most profound and mysterious aspects of the human spirit,” which makes Cervantes “the great poet and seer of the human heart” (qtd and trans. in Frank *Mantle of the Prophet* 280). Thus, Dostoevsky’s act of identification between the reader and the character occurs when the reader sees a conviction or truth in the character’s actions that reveals a mystery about the reader’s self that was perhaps buried in consciousness previously. This process inevitably validates the universality of the human spirit and teaches humanity more about its nature.

While Eliot and Dostoevsky believe that imagining another person’s feelings is possible, though difficult, literature enhances and perhaps prepares the individual for interacting with others because, if the artist has sought to be true to human nature and created a believable character, the reader will be presented with characters who have enough in common with the

individual to create identification yet are different in a way that will force the reader to accept that this fictitious person is acting and feeling in a way contrary to the reader. However, the reader still understands why characters are different because the authorial voice or the narrative itself has made plain the reasoning underneath the surface of reality. This is the major benefit behind fiction that differentiates it from real experience: that a reader is seeing another being not only on from perceived reality but also in ways that only that character or an omniscient narrator would know. Raymond Williams says, “Most novels are in some sense knowable communities. It is part of a traditional method—an underlying stance and approach—that the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways” (165). Omniscient narration has fallen out of favor in the last century, but Eliot uses the craft masterfully in order to sharpen her readers morally. If readers will begin trying to imagine life as Eliot’s narrator, seeing from the eyes of others, they will be closer to becoming building blocks of community.

To understand the way Eliot and Dostoevsky define community, one must see that Eliot and Dostoevsky are working between the real and ideal community in their novels. Neither believes that an ideal community has existed yet in the material world, but both believe that the ideal can eventually become reality, the difference being in how that ideal community would manifest itself. Eliot, working under the influence of Auguste Comte and Ludwig Feuerbach, believes in the progressive evolution of humanity, while Dostoevsky maintains that mankind is limited by a sinful nature that can only be overcome by the re-creation of the world by supernatural intervention. Each, however, is first of all concerned with demonstrating what the community is in actuality. Dostoevsky and Eliot would both agree that communities in nineteenth-century Europe involved more than individuals coexisting alongside one another

merely for survival purposes. In previous times, communities had been linked by shared experiences or values, such as race, allegiance, religion, culture and governments. However, with the changes England and Russia were experiencing, people living side-by-side might no longer share the same views. Of course, to some degree this had always been the case, but with larger communities in cities came greater diversity and more fragmentation. With these changes, however, always came a backlash of those seeking to pull people together under a shared cause. *Middlemarch* and *The Brothers Karamazov* both take place in smaller communities that portray the fragmentation and misunderstanding among individuals, as well as people functioning as a group in order to stand against the outsider or threat to their values. Both show how a group mentality founded on false or weak principles can bring more harm than good, such as the fickle crowd in the courtroom scene of *The Brothers Karamazov* or the gossip that pervades the town of Middlemarch.¹² Therefore, Dostoevsky and Eliot realized they were working with a diverse and ever-changing medium of concrete communities that were in progression toward far-removed ideals of their ideal communities.

Dostoevsky and Eliot both spent years developing their concepts of sympathy and charity as ways of achieving the ideal community. However, their ideas about sympathy and charity can best be seen in action in *Middlemarch* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Thus, the following chapters will deal primarily with examples and analysis from those two works. Chapters Two and Three will focus more on each particular author and how each developed a worldview based on the importance concepts of sympathy and charity, respectively. Chapter Four will explore how sympathy and charity work in the novels themselves, exemplified through the journeys of the novels' protagonists as they grow closer to each author's ideal perspective. Through these

¹² See Gillian Beer's "Circulatory Systems: Money and Gossip in *Middlemarch*" for a discussion of the power of gossip in the novel.

journeys, Dostoevsky and Eliot also exemplify how one must also work within the actual community and accept limitations in order to work toward an ideal. In the structure chosen, I seek to mimic the authors' own priorities in balancing ideal philosophy with a concrete reality. Study of their abstract worldviews must be tempered by an actual example of how each author demonstrates his or her theory in the landscape of the novel. Dostoevsky and Eliot were both incredibly sophisticated thinkers, yet they also believed that their thoughts could best be shown through the medium of a fictional story. The following will examine both why and how each did so.

Chapter 2: George Eliot's Sympathetic Community

Eliot wrote in 1843 after her break with Christianity, "Speculative truth begins to appear but a shadow of individual minds, agreement between intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the *truth of feeling* as the only universal bond of union" (*Letters* I.162). This statement sets the groundwork for Eliot's idea of sympathy, which became the cornerstone of her art. As an artist, Eliot believed that she carried the heavy burden of awakening individuals to their interdependence with one another and advancing the progress of the social organism toward a sense of true community. In her mind, only the artist possesses the tools necessary for the task, whereas the philosopher or historian will fail to awaken social action: "Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment" ("The Natural History of German Life" 270). In other words, Eliot believes the novelist actually creates "moral sentiment" in other individuals. Thus, she has the responsibility to portray accurately the clearest picture of life in her novels, and in them one can see her doctrine of sympathy at work. By showing the movement of her characters toward sympathetic understanding and by realistically relating their stories to her audience, Eliot believes she will effectively reach her readers and broaden their understanding and sensitivity toward others. As her most masterful portrayal of the web of social relations, *Middlemarch* particularly illustrates the progression that Eliot envisions of how one should move from egotism to sympathy and thereby aid the evolution of an ideal community.

While much scholarship has been done on the role of sympathy particularly in Eliot's works, it is necessary to first look at a broader definition of sympathy for the Victorian mind.

Even though Eliot explicitly uses the term more frequently than others, the basic concept of sympathy appears repeatedly in Victorian novels. Audrey Jaffe in *Scenes of Sympathy* has thoroughly explored the cultural factors that contributed to and encouraged the proliferation of the sympathetic paradigm in several works. Though Eliot had refined her particular definition of the idea, she was not without historical and contemporary inspiration from other novelists and thinkers. According to Jaffe, in simple terms, an appeal to sympathy is “a claim for identification, a claim for common humanity” (12). Speaking of sympathy in the financial terms people might imagine today, she elucidates that the plea for sympathy from the “sufferer” and the way in which the “spectator” responds is a complex process: “[T]he sight of a sufferer, associated with requests for money, is imagined as physically invasive or contagious, a metaphorical assault on the observer’s person and a threat to the integrity of his or her identity” (6). This description of sympathy implies that, in a modern view, identity is like a container with a limited space for material. If an individual lets part of his or her identity become another person’s, the individual loses part of what was originally the self. Therefore, sympathy in one respect represents the invasion of another and the loss of self. To what extent this is a positive process in Eliot’s work will be explored later. Jaffe, however, argues that due to cultural contingencies, the Victorian idea of identity differs from the modern: “But because late nineteenth-century ideologies construct individual identity as a function of group identity, the pain sympathy relieves...is not that of physical suffering or class alienation but rather that of a potential separation from identity itself” (23). Jaffe believes that the nineteenth-century mind still has a consciousness of the importance of community in self-definition and seeks to define identity as inextricably linked to the group and, therefore, incomplete if isolated. One cannot find identity outside of a social role. I argue that both the modern and nineteenth-century ideologies

are present in Eliot's work. She affirms the inseparability of an individual and the community, yet she also recognizes a separate part of identity that operates independently from society and its function within the mechanism. However, she sees the limits of identity, since the human mind is finite, which means one can be filled with self-definition and tend toward an egotistic mindset, or one can be defined by others and society, creating an identity dependent on others. Felicia Bonaparte argues that discovering limitations and powerlessness are at the heart of Eliot's novels (xviii). The same can be said of later nineteenth-century authors, such as Conrad, James and other realists, which might imply that Eliot as Victorian was at the beginning of a movement toward a wave that culminated in the fragmentation of modern novels. Eliot as a novelist preceding the modern era was already exploring how far humanity could reach before colliding with reality, and acknowledging these limits extended to identity itself. As she and other novelists like Dostoevsky chronicled the rise of the modern individual, they naturally realized the need to define what an individual actually was and consequently what relation one had to society as a whole.

While understanding the Victorian context for individual identity and sympathy is complicated, the act of sympathy is not without its own difficulties. Jaffe first gives a relatively simple definition: sympathy is an attempt to bring together individuals who possess fundamental differences, class being the major barrier in Victorian fiction (5-6). However, class is not the most important hindrance to social uniformity in the case of Eliot. Jaffe shows how this unification of two individuals through sympathy can only occur if the viewer puts himself or herself in place of the other: "In each, a confrontation between a spectator 'at ease' and a sufferer raises issues about their mutual constitution; in each, the sufferer is effectively replaced by the spectator's image of himself or herself" (2). Eliot struggles throughout her writing these

problems sympathy poses. If a person's own experience will always operate as a filter when viewing another's situation, will true unity exist in a community? Jaffe argues that sympathy is never free of the inevitable satisfaction that radiates back on the one sympathizing. In this assertion, Jaffe echoes Feuerbach, whom Eliot translated and from whom she drew philosophic inspiration. Feuerbach states in his most influential work, *The Essence of Christianity*, "In the object which he contemplates, therefore, man becomes acquainted with himself; consciousness of the objective is the self-consciousness of man" (4). Eliot in part affirms but also struggles with Feuerbach's concept of the unity between self-identity and the external reality of others.

The situation that Feuerbach describes seems to be the case for Eliot's heroine, Dorothea Brooke. Early critics like Henry James praised Dorothea's seemingly high and elevated character and saw no fault in her motives at the beginning of the novel: "She exhales a sort of aroma of spiritual sweetness, and we believe in her as in a woman we might providentially meet some fine day when we should find ourselves doubting of the immortality of the soul" (579). However, more recent critics have argued that even the saintly Dorothea has dubious motives. Clifford Marks says, "Both Dorothea and Casaubon dwell in the world of the impermeable self, demanding that the other must be subjugated to sustain each's narcissism—of Casaubon's grandiose self and Dorothea's grandiose selflessness" (32). Bernard Paris takes an even more extreme stance by arguing that "her craving for 'illimitable satisfaction' is an expression of insatiable neurotic needs, and her 'self-despair' results from hopelessness about actualizing her idealized image of herself as a person of world-historical importance" (242). Calling Dorothea "neurotic" might be going a bit far, but while she does seek to fulfill the needs of others, perhaps unconsciously she senses that completing these actions will grant her self-fulfillment. Eliot maintains that if the self-serving side of sympathy were to become the main focus, such an action

would cease to be true sympathy. However, she might doubt that the good of the self can be entirely removed from the sympathetic formula, for according to Feuerbach the self equals consciousness (1). Eliot recognizes that the self is a problem, though, because of its overwhelming tendency to seek a supreme place in an individual's priorities. Therefore, Eliot must endeavor to alter and expand the existence of her characters by making the self a gateway to a more expansive consciousness. The goal is that the barriers, which the egoist places between himself and others, will start to fall away, and the self will gain satisfaction as it gains greater unity with others. The self ideally will not lose the characteristics that make it distinct from others but open itself to what might at first seem to be opposing viewpoints and the diverse experiences of those who make up a community—for no community of complete likeminded people can exist in reality. Dorothea Brooke voices this sentiment to Mr. Farebrother in *Middlemarch* when discussing her ideal brand of Christianity: “I find one way that makes it a wider blessing than any other, I cling to that as the truest – I mean that which takes in the most good of all kinds, and brings in the most people as sharers in it” (525). Thus, in Dorothea's imagined community, as sympathy takes in more complex and varied forms of personal beliefs and experience, the benefits will also expand.

In addition to Jaffe's observations concerning selfhood, George Levine affirms that if aspects of the self are hindering this transformation, they must be done away with:

[Eliot] believed that submission of the self to the voices of external reality was a condition of intellectual power. The failures of Lydgate and Casaubon result primarily from the failure to submit, that is, to restrain their egoistic needs from influencing their intellectual work. It is not only that reality remains

incommensurate with the desires of an aspiring self . . . but that personality is an obstruction to perception. The common self is merely personality. (1)

Now, as Jaffe claims, sympathy will always reflect back from the object to the sympathizer and will always remain limited by cultural barriers that inhibit true tolerance (22-23). Nevertheless, Eliot is optimistic that these barriers will eventually be overcome individual and internal progress, which will extend outward to society. The fact that certain laws appear by observation to operate within society does not mean that they will not change and evolve to a higher state. This is the hope and optimism that spurs on Eliot's vision and motivates her to persist in exemplifying her goal through fiction. She writes, "I have faith in the working-out of higher possibilities . . . and those who have strength to wait and endure, are bound to accept no formula which their whole souls—their intellect as well as their emotions—do not embrace with entire reverence" (*Letters* III.366). According to Jaffe's definition and in Eliot's fiction, sympathy has the transformative power to reshape and affirm the individual's identity and create bonds between the individual and the community.

Subjectivity and Objectivity

As indicated earlier, sympathy directly influences two sides of existence that seem to be in conflict, the first being the way that one looks inward and understands the self, and the second being the way in which the self looks outside and interacts with others. Both aspects create identity and define how a community will be ordered. To understand sympathy in Eliot's novels, these two aspects of existence must be examined, for sympathy can only alter the way characters perceive reality if it can successfully move between the ideal inner world of the self and the objective existence of others that the self must confront. These two modes of perceiving reality

can be described as objective and subjective perspectives. In her understanding of these concepts, Eliot draws heavily on her knowledge of Feuerbach and those in her intellectual circle, such as her lifelong partner George Henry Lewes, Herbert Spencer, and others. Feuerbach says that man is separate from animals precisely because he has a duplicitous nature, which consists of “an outer and inner life” (1). Especially in relation to religion, Feuerbach treats subjectivity as the desires of the self: “Faith unfetters the wishes of subjectivity from the bonds of natural reason; it confers what Nature and reason deny; hence it makes man happy because it satisfies his most personal wishes” (105). In contrast, to objectify something is to place it at a distance and see an image that appears distinct from the self, which must be perceived by the intellect.

Lewes sees objectivity and subjectivity as expressions of the Aristotelian and Platonist ways of approaching reality, respectively: “We shall best define these by calling the objective intellect eminently *impersonal*, and the subjective eminently *personal*; the former disengaging itself as much as possible from its own prepossessions, striving to see and represent objects as they exist; the other viewing all objects in the light of its own feelings and preconceptions” (*The Life and Works of Goethe* 51-52). Lewes is critical of what he calls the “ideal” school of art, which “argues from an Idea downwards, argues deductively, starting from some conception, and seeking in realities only visible illustrations of a deeper existence” (52). In his view, objectivity is the correct starting place for art, philosophy or science, and a mind disposed in that direction will achieve greater things than the subjectively disposed mind, though neither can exist completely separate from the other (52-53). Eliot illustrates the downfalls of basing one’s understanding of reality solely on subjectivity, most notably in the case of Casaubon, who easily fits Lewes’ description of an idealist scholar, who ignores objective reality to keep nurturing a personal theory, which is essentially a prop for his sensitive ego. However, Eliot does not adhere

as completely to scientific principles as does Lewes, and she sees the positive aspects of subjectivity when kept in its proper place.

The Subjective Mind and the Egoist

To explore subjectivity and objectivity, perhaps the best starting place is the subjective, since that is where Eliot's characters typically began in their journeys. It is also what Eliot believes to be the starting place away from which civilization will eventually move. Subjectivity is a way of viewing reality that originates with consciousness and the self-interest that every human naturally develops. In order to create a positive self-image, one relies on the imagination and focuses on what is possible rather than what exists in actuality. Therefore, imagination is closely tied to the subjective side of reality. The idea of the good of subjectivity and imagination developed before Eliot's time with Romantic writers like Coleridge and Wordsworth, and while Eliot as a Victorian was part of the reaction against many Romantic ideals, she still incorporates some of what she perceives as the positive elements of Romanticism in her fiction. Edward Dramin notes that perhaps the greatest debt she owes to the Romantics is the idea that "inward apocalypse, enhancing the inner life and expanding consciousness, must precede and direct meaningful progress in society and ideology" (274). Instead of societal transformation, she stresses inward change, which the Romantic creation of selfhood to some degree made possible.¹³

Throughout her fiction, Eliot stresses the need for imagination, for it is what can create a hypothesis in the mind of a scientist and enable him to perceive the hidden connections between events, thus giving shape and meaning to particular occurrences that might seem random when

¹³ For another perspective on Eliot's relationship with the Romantic movement, see Daniel Cottom's "The Romance of George Eliot's Realism."

viewed in isolation. Critics sometimes mistakenly oversimplify Eliot's view of subjectivity, because an overly subjective nature often functions as the main source of an egoistic character in Eliot's novels. Carol Gould states in her assessment of Eliot's approach, "A moral narcissist is a subjectivist about value, one who bases his criterion for value on subjective preference rather than rational considerations" (26). Gould makes a valid point about how Eliot's art moves; however, Gould like many critics sometimes focuses exclusively on the negative side of subjectivity without affirming how it can function positively in Eliot's fiction. Subjectivity more readily lends itself to one's creation of individual identity, but it can also be turned into a positive tool for the interpretation of others' actions. In this respect, Eliot again takes some elements from the Romantics and Coleridge's definition of the imagination. Coleridge says that imagination "struggles to idealize and to unify," as opposed to "fancy," which is only "memory emancipated from the order of time and space" (202). Imagination used correctly in Eliot's work is like Coleridge's definition in that it strives toward what cannot be seen and fills in the gaps in perception rather than simply reproducing and arranging memories, as would be the case in a fancy. Imagination, which is primarily an inward function, is crucial in making inferences about others' motives and actions. One must also refer to personal experience in order to interpret what a fact or action may mean. Being a positivist, Eliot believed in the importance of the scientific method and a rational approach to reality, yet one easily forgets that the scientific method consists of two steps, the first being a hypothesis, which springs from a personal interpretation of events. Of course, a hypothesis must be tested by experience and if found lacking should be discarded, which in many cases Eliot's characters fail to do; nevertheless, even scientific principles cannot exist without an element of the subjective.

One of the most important “instruments” that Eliot uses to perceive the hidden reality of an object is the imagination, which when used correctly is not relative, but a scientific tool that the individual should employ wisely. David Carroll defines Eliot’s description of a sympathetic life in the following way: “Living seems to resolve itself at times into a pair of eyes getting closer and closer to an object, and when the eyes fail, instruments of illumination and magnification are used” (75). The imagination is subjective in the sense that it is a faculty of the inward mind and not of the outer objective world that is comprehended by the senses. In *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Eliot explains how her view of imagination has little to do with wishful thinking or propitiation of falsehood but is, in her definition, an essential aspect of existence that endows material impressions and facts with meaning:

Powerful imagination is not false outward vision, but intense inward representation, and a creative energy constantly fed by susceptibility to the veriest minutiae of experience, which it reproduces and constructs in fresher and fresher wholes; not the habitual confusion of provable fact with the fictions of fancy and transient inclination, but a breadth of ideal association which informs every material object, every incidental fact with far-reaching memories and stored residues of passion, bringing into new light the less obvious relations of human existence. (94)

This passage shows the importance of imagination used correctly, though one must remember that Eliot was part of the reaction against the overly subjective Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century. Thus, her fiction stresses that though imagination and subjectivity are indispensable, they cannot be used morally without first being built upon the correct objective foundation.

Eliot places warnings throughout her work of the danger of stressing subjectivity, which leads to egoism and a misuse of one's subjective faculties. Rosemary Ashton states, "Her analysis of feeling was discriminating, and, in this respect especially, she learnt much from Rousseau. She distinguished feeling from excess subjectivity; enthusiasm was a prerequisite of life, but feeling was also potentially 'but egotism and mental idleness'" (150). The imagination is an effective tool needed in order to lead a moral life and achieve community; however, as Ashton makes clear, it is only a tool that can be utilized as the user desires—hence Eliot's desire to differentiate her philosophy of feeling from the failings of the Romantic tradition. The excessive concern with the self and introspection that ignores the outer world is the chief tendency in Romanticism that Eliot rejects. Will Ladislaw is an individual with an obvious disposition toward Romanticism in *Middlemarch*. He exhibits, especially as the novel progresses, the good qualities that such a lifestyle can elucidate when placed in relation to a guiding influence like Dorothea Brooke; however, he is not immune from the characteristic flaws of a Romantic philosophy, which Eliot at times describes with an apt irony. He suffers from the stereotypical failings of the Romantics, being given to dramatic inward dialogue, excesses in action, and a habit of comparing commonplace objects and people to the figures in Classical mythology. All of these eccentricities fall under Will's general desire to have his own way; he tells Dorothea, "I am a rebel: I don't feel bound, as you do, to submit to what I don't like" (414). Dramin notes, "Eliot's characterization of Will suggests that the early Victorian decades must also be redeemed from unwanted aspects of the Romantic heritage – from Will Ladislaw's egoism, overly high expectations, fervid impetuosity, vagueness of intention, and dialectical intransigence" (281). Will's tendency to remain self-enclosed and alienated by rebellion is definitely present in the Brooke's first encounter with Will, who is sitting alone sketching at

Lowick (77). However, his contact with Dorothea and selfless desire to seek her happiness slowly changes his character throughout the novel, and leads him from the private pursuit of personal, but most likely unsuccessful work as an artist, to his public work in the reform movement.

Eliot's wariness toward subjectivity connects to her view of God and the questions of whether a divine order shapes and controls the universe. Eliot never fully separates herself from the ideas and feelings she gleaned from her early years as a passionate believer in Christianity. Instead, she takes what she considers positive about her abandoned faith in order to develop a new view of the universe. Like Feuerbach, she sees the potential benefit of believing in a false Higher Being, who represents complete subjectivity. According to Feuerbach, the best expression of religion allows man to shed his subjectivity in the belief in a personal God: "God is the highest subjectivity of man abstracted from himself; hence man can do nothing of himself, all goodness comes from God. The more subjective God is, the more completely does man divest himself of his subjectivity, because God is, *per se*, his relinquished self, the possession of which he however again vindicates to himself" (26). If man gives his personal will over to a self-interested God, then he loses his own subjectivity through his devotion to the will of God. The problem with Christianity, though, is that religion seldom takes this form in practice, and traditional Christianity has other doctrines that hinder the positive transformation of the individual from subjectivity to objectivity.

One problem with the Christian God for Eliot is that he demands men and women form their view of reality upon doctrines of Scripture rather than what might seem right based on personal experience. She believes traditional Christianity is too narrow, denying the truth of other religions or unorthodox ways of thinking. The German Higher Criticism and the general

atmosphere in the nineteenth-century, which stressed science and empirical forms of knowledge, led many like Eliot away from a firm belief in the supernatural and mystical elements of the Bible. Like any other source of knowledge, Eliot sees the Bible as a document that has to be tested against experience, and if portions are found wanting, they cannot be proclaimed as a basis for the way one lives life. Therefore, Eliot believes that a doctrine, which insists upon a narrow view of truth, hinders the spread of truth and goodness by smothering man's curiosity and alienating those who dissent.

Eliot portrays several examples in her fiction where Christianity draws men away from their love for one another by encouraging what she sees as a dangerously self-centered concern for personal salvation. This aspect of Christianity can be seen at its most extreme in *Middlemarch* in the form of Nicholas Bulstrode, whose spiritualism has led him to become highly egoistic and isolated from the concerns of his fellow men, even though outwardly he appears to be a prominent figure in the community, due to his financial control. Bulstrode strives after what he sees as his possible self without extending his vision to the community. "Providence" is Bulstrode's way of referring to the self. Whatever satisfies the demands of providence conveniently fits with Bulstrode's own wishes, yet others' fates fall under "the unmapped regions not taken under the providential government" (552). Bulstrode's self-deception—that providence smiles kindly upon him when in essence he is merely trying to satisfy his own desires—is an indication that he has never viewed his own wishes objectively, and his disinclination to care about the desires of others shows that he has never extended the positive elements of his subjective imagination to his neighbors. Feuerbach states, "The religious mind does not distinguish between subjective and objective,—it has no doubts; it has the faculty, not of discerning other things than itself, but of seeing its own conceptions out of itself as distinct

beings” (82). Eliot’s narrator is quite blunt in pointing out that Bulstrode’s supposed religion is no more than the manifestation of his egoism: “[I]t was as genuinely his mode of explaining events as any theory of yours may be, if you happen to disagree with him. For the egoism which enters into our theories does not affect their sincerity; rather, the more our egoism is satisfied, the more robust is our belief” (552). His failure to see himself objectively inevitably causes egotism to become the dominating factor in his existence, and as a result, his way of viewing material reality is reversed from the proper order.

Eliot stresses that one should develop an objective perception of the world, even if one begins with a preconceived idea or system. Through experience alone can one determine whether this system is true or not. Only after one has developed a keen awareness of objective reality can one utilize that objectivity to imagine greater possibilities and perceive hidden connections in the subjective stage. However, since Bulstrode’s own view of himself is so inflated, he bypasses objectivity and misuses his subjective faculties when viewing the outer world. He is more concerned with maintaining his own purity than in identifying with and helping even those close to him. When his niece’s husband Lydgate entreats Bulstrode to advance a sum of money in order to avoid bankruptcy, Bulstrode refuses and even uses Biblical phrasing to back up his tight-fistedness: “[B]ut trial, my dear sir, is our portion here, and is a needed corrective” (727). This is the ostensible Christianity that Eliot seeks to remedy with a broader vision of life.

While Christianity is a significant factor in the egotism of Bulstrode and to some degree Dorothea Brooke, Eliot never pinpoints Christianity as being the only source of egotism in her characters. Egotism flourishes apart from any religious tendencies, which can easily be seen in characters like Peter Featherstone or Rosamond Vincy, who are completely worldly but shamelessly care for nothing but their own comfort and satisfaction. Egotism can manifest itself

in vicious ways, such as Featherstone's malicious delight in spiting his relations by leaving them nothing in his will, or in ways that are seemingly harmless like Fred Vincy's idleness. However, what all egotism has in common is that it originates through excessive introspection and disregard for reality or the concerns of others. Even when an egotist like Fred means to do no one else harm, he hurts the Garths, who he cares for deeply, by speculating on his ability to sell a horse for more than he bought it for. In the world of fantasy, Fred sees himself making a profit and thereby paying back the debt that Mr. Garth put his name to, but Fred's subjective world collides with reality when the horse becomes lame (252). He must, therefore, watch as the Garth's give up their savings in order to pay his debt (262). Egotism always affects the community, whether intended or not.

Toward Objective Perception

While Bulstrode represents one of the worst types of egotism and subjectivity, his situation is not uncommon or, unfortunately, simple to remedy. Eliot's novels by far contain more egotists than selfless philanthropists. A shocking event or realization might shake an egotist's internal world and remove the lens of personal interest for the first time, yet that does not mean that individual will see the world in a completely different way from then on. The process of gaining objectivity in Eliot's novels is just that—an arduous and painful process. Dorothea awakens to her own folly during her honeymoon in Rome, but her best moment of successfully putting herself into the place of another she would like to detest only comes at the end of the novel in her confrontation with Rosamond. Casaubon begins to feel the sting of another's perspective when he marries Dorothea but stubbornly persists in his blindness and egotism until his death. Fred learns through the pain of loss and humiliation and then hard,

steady work that a more fulfilling world exists outside of his own comfort. It is ambivalent whether Bulstrode's fall and expulsion from *Middlemarch* will result in a positive awakening to his folly or a return to his shell. Thus, Eliot shows that the journey of reaching objectivity and creating communal feelings in each individual is an organic and unpredictable process.

Continually in her writings, Eliot indicates that the problem with truly believing Christian doctrine is that it is a false system of belief that prevents one from seeing reality. In a letter, she writes, "[R]eligion of the future must be one that enables us to do without consolation, instead of being what religion has been (I think pervertingly) held—chiefly precious as a source of consolation" (*Letters* VI.216). Society must see reality with clear eyes, even if that reality is without hope in a life after death or the other comforts that religion brings. Eliot also denigrates "hope unsustained by reason" (*Letters* II.49). If a person devotes all energy to the pursuit of a goal or belief in something ungrounded in experience, he or she will most likely lose sight of objectivity and become self-centered. However, becoming disenchanted with the idea of Christianity and the hope of perfect communion with others in a future life in Eliot's view might never be an easy reality to live with. She writes of the initial feelings of being released from the expectations and limitations of religion:

When the soul is liberated from the wretched giant's bed of dogmas on which it has been racked and stretched ever since there is a feeling of exultation and strong hope. We think we shall run well when we have the full use of our limbs and the bracing air of independence, and we believe that we shall soon obtain something positive which will not only more than compensate to us for what we have renounced, but will be so well worth offering to others that we will venture to proselyte. (*Letters* I.162)

However, she continues by detailing that this perfect community is not reality and “agreement between intellects seems unattainable” (162). For Eliot, her loss of faith is a struggle, yet she tenaciously fights to find truth through simultaneously seeing and feeling the world around her.

Eliot recognized that two kinds of law are at work in the universe, one related to nature and the other to society. Bernard Paris calls these laws “disparate, yet interrelated orders: the moral order and the non-moral order, or the human order and the cosmic order. Man—being at once a social sympathetic being and an individual, self-regarding being—is a part of both orders” (52). What many nineteenth-century writers, particularly those who followed Eliot in the trend of realism, began to emphasize was the absence of inherent morality in nature. Therefore, instead of God being at the center of nature and humanity, Eliot believes that the progression and evolution of man and nature are what sustain the world. Felicia Bonaparte says, “To be born, in Eliot’s world, is to become an instant prisoner to an indifferent cosmic machine which grinds down with implacable certainty everything that opposes its inalterable order” (1). This “cosmic machine” is an idea of the universe that one can see in the naturalist writers or authors such as Conrad. This view of the universe is more implicit in Eliot’s work but a factor that inevitably leads back to how she views community. If the Darwinist laws of natural selection and competition are scientific facts, then the creation of a community founded on objectivity and not the myths of religion is a hard task.

According to Eliot’s cosmology, God does not exist in actuality, since man has invented the idea of God in order to express his subjectivity. Consequently, one of the chief concerns for the Victorian intellectuals became how to account for order in the universe and to explain human morality. Without a supernatural foundation for morality, Eliot and those with whom she shared philosophical affinities, such as Lewes and Spencer, sought to understand how a moral universe

could be explained when laws and the tendencies of nature itself seemed to be in opposition to doing good. Many feared that society would collapse if the population lost faith in the theological basis for morality. The system to which Eliot eventually ascribed was a combination of science and idealism. One concept that was immensely important to Eliot was the inexplicable idea of duty. To the Victorian mind, duty was such a pervasive concept that it seemed possible to exist without the impetus of religion. One can see how this idea might be appealing and even self-gratifying. If one could act in a moral manner without the hope of future reward from God, then that person would seem more virtuous than the Christian acting “selfishly” in hope of eternal salvation for doing the right thing. Though difficult to define, Eliot seemed to regard duty as an intuitive morality that could not easily be discarded, even when the conscious reason for it was gone. She writes to Elma Stuart:

Put the words ‘cleanliness’ and ‘uncleanliness’ for ‘virtue’ and ‘vice,’ and consider how fully you have come to regard cleanliness as a duty, but to shudder at uncleanliness . . . what are the doctrines which, if taken from you, would make you at once sink into uncleanly habits yourself, and think it indifferent to the health of mankind whether such a habit as that of cleanliness existed in the world or not. (*Letters*. VI.339)

This quote shows what might be called the idealistic side to Eliot’s solution. She was convinced that something, which at the time was still undiscovered by science, would carry humanity beyond the need for religion into what Comte called the Positivistic stage of development.¹⁴

¹⁴ August Comte’s three stages of societal development are the basis for Positivist philosophy. The first stage, the Theological encompasses societies devoted to Christianity and other religions, both monotheistic and polytheistic. The second stage is the Metaphysical, and the third and most advanced is the Positive or Scientific stage. Positivism holds empiricism and the

In respect to the intuitive sense of morality that each individual seems to possess without the aid of experience, Eliot also draws on other scientific theories to aid her philosophy.

Influenced by the teachings of Lamarck, Eliot in her discussion of duty echoes the principle of acquired characteristics—that certain dispositions instilled during life can embed themselves in the collective consciousness of a society by being passed on from parent to child. Thus, a child can be born with an innate sense of tradition and morality apart from environmental factors.

Lewes describes this idea in *Problems of Life and Mind*:

The experiences of many become the guide of each; they do not all perish with the individual; much survives, takes form in opinion precept, and law, in prejudice and superstition. The feelings of each are blended into a general consciousness, which in turn reacts upon the individual consciousness. And this mighty impersonality is at once the product and the factor of social evolution.

(80)

Contributing to the evolution of society is the supreme good that the individual can hope to accomplish in the finite amount of time one has on the earth, but clinging to false doctrines in the fear that society will crumble is folly to Eliot. Community will continue to survive, but only if individuals cease to struggle with their limitations and look outside themselves to others.

The starting place for sympathy is objectivity, which involves a disinterested perception of outward events and actions and an attempt to see reality beyond the borders of one's experience and feelings. An objective viewpoint, therefore, demands that one abandon the fantasies and preconceptions, which might be so deeply ingrained in one's consciousness that the individual no longer has an awareness of them. Since one inherently tends to view the world

scientific method as the only road to truth, and a society based on scientific principles will uphold the rights of individuals and political freedom will be made possible.

from a subjective and self-centered standpoint, objectivity is difficult at best and, one might argue, impossible to achieve fully. The two most important aids to objective perception are a developed use of the senses and an ability to discern the validity of the comprehended information. Through understanding and gauging the actions and movement of other people and objects is difficult enough with the hindrance of self-interest, an even more difficult task for each individual is attaining an objective viewpoint of the self because of one's natural tendency is to view oneself completely subjectively—that is, from the standpoint of personal interest the potentiality of what one might become. Eliot muses on this concern in *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*: “Is it not possible for me to enjoy the scenery of the earth without saying to myself, I have a cabbage-garden in it?” (13).

Like Lewes, Eliot being a Positivist¹⁵ believes in building one's understanding of reality on an objective view of the material world and facts available to the senses. However, to rely only on the material facts is to embrace an incomplete and even false view of reality. In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot gives a compelling picture of how objectivity can fall short of sympathy if it never makes contact with the subjectivity and feelings of an individual's experience:

Perspective as its inventor remarked, is a beautiful thing. What horrors of damp huts, where human beings languish, may not become picturesque through aerial distance! What hymning of cancerous vices may we not languish over as sublimest art in the safe remoteness of a strange language and artificial phrase!

¹⁵ Though Positivist elements are apparent throughout Eliot's work in the form of her dedication to empiricism, the scientific method, and her belief in societal evolution beyond religious belief, her own views toward Comte are a subject of scholarly debate. For discussion of Eliot's view of Comte, see Rosemary Ashton's “The Intellectual ‘Medium’ of *Middlemarch*.” Bernard J. Paris also discusses her intellectual affinities with Positivism in *Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values*.

Yet we keep a repugnance to rheumatism and other painful effects when presented in our personal experience. (114)

For Eliot, ideally subjective and objective perception should work together to produce the fullest knowledge of life. However, to achieve and maintain this balance requires the correct tools and discipline. Bernard Paris states, “The scientist’s dispassionate study of the relations of things, it was hoped, would enable man to discern and submit to the unalterable and to strive effectively after the possible” (3). The scientific model (the combination of hypothesis and experimentation) is Eliot’s ideal approach to art, and the goal of her best characters.

Lydgate and Dorothea: Complementary Lacks in Perception

Middlemarch presents examples of characters that fall on different points in the spectrum of how one views reality, some being overly objective, and others being too subjective. Tertius Lydgate is one of the most compelling and tragic characters of the novel because of his disbelief in employing the imagination in order to perceive the hidden facts of reality. Being a scientist in the modern sense of the term, he only believes in the reality of that which he can see with his senses as opposed to an imaginative vision. The following passage succinctly summarizes Eliot’s appraisal of his strong and weak points:

Lydgate’s spots of commonness lay in the complexion of his prejudices, which, in spite of noble intentions and sympathy, were half of them such as are found in ordinary men of the world: that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour, did not penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture, or women, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons. (155)

Lydgate does not lack imagination or ideals when considering his own prospects and the good that he could do in his profession; however, his correct use of “feeling” does not extend to what Lydgate might consider trivialities in comparison to his work. Hina Nazar says that Lydgate’s fault is “the scientist’s traditionally narrow understanding of the understanding. Hence Eliot does not fault Lydgate for being preoccupied with the primitive tissue, or for withdrawing into the privacy of his study to do his research, but for his inability to see any connection between what he does in his study and what he does in the other rooms of the house” (306). Though Lydgate comes to Middlemarch with no intention of seeking matrimony, he is easily swayed by his misguided perception of reality. He sees Rosamond Vincy’s outward charm and poise and plays the game of courtship with no thought of the consequences that might ensue: “The preposterousness of the notion that he could at once set up a satisfactory establishment as a married man was a sufficient guarantee against danger. This play at being a little in love was agreeable, and did not interfere with graver pursuits” (280). His observation never extends to Rosamond and how his flirtatious actions might be leading her to believe that he will naturally propose. Thus, he continues in ignorance until the obvious fact of Rosamond’s tears forces him into action. If his imagination had been guided by sympathy, then he would have prudently avoided a disastrous marriage and spared the feelings of Rosamond.

Eliot also shows the reader through Lydgate’s example how failure to use feeling correctly can lead to a misuse of feeling. Since he does not correctly assess reality in the areas of women and personal expense, Lydgate consequently misuses his imagination by creating a fantasy world of the home that does not exist in reality: “[He] felt as if already breathed upon by exquisite wedded affection such as would be bestowed by an accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them” (371).

Now that the facts seem to have ensnared Lydgate and tied him to Rosamond, he must preserve his scientific ideals by fitting Rosamond into his life dedicated to science and the betterment of mankind. Instead of thinking what she might be expecting from marriage and weighing both of their desires against the facts, Lydgate retreats into his own mind and distorts his inner self in egotism, which is the worst state for Eliot's characters. Lydgate's situation serves as an excellent example of how closely both sides of reality are tied to one another, and when a character lacks belief in one side, the other also suffers. His creation of a fantasy world is a necessary outcome of his failure to analyze the hidden working of Rosamond's mind. Because he does not really understand her, his expectations of a perfect home-life remain unchecked until after his marriage.

Dorothea Brooke's predicament of marrying without proper expectations might seem comparable to Lydgate's, but her position stems from an opposite failure of not comprehending objective reality, whereas Lydgate fails to employ subjectivity. David Carroll states, "[Eliot] is equally severe on the fanciful mind which getting out of control seeks to prescribe rather than describe reality, and on the mind which refuses to make the act of faith ahead of the facts" (77). Dorothea perceives reality through the lens of her imagination, which sees the possibilities that the raw material of the world has to offer. Her desire to unite both aspects of reality is clear: "Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there" (2). However, the narrator indicates from the beginning that Dorothea has begun to contemplate the possibilities at the expense of facts: "She could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery" (2). Since these details of life seem petty to Dorothea, she is shunning the experience necessary to assess correctly the outward signs of worth in another. Therefore, when she first sees Casaubon, her

grandiose vision of what he might become and how her life might be fulfilled through his completely swallows the fact that Casaubon has as of yet had no immediate fruit of his labor: a clear outward flaw that could be interpreted in two ways. It could be mean, as Dorothea hopes, that he is in need of companionship and encouragement in order to finish his great work, or this fact could be indicative of a more serious inward flaw, which is, in fact, the case.

Dorothea cannot, of course, be faulted for not perceiving Casaubon's inward flaws upon their first meeting; however, further objective observations of him might begin to reveal his mind. Dorothea does not wait before pronouncing her favorable judgment of his character. In fact, there is never a moment where she pauses to consider whether he is worthy of her esteem or not. The smallest encouragement to her aspirations sends her into the ideal realm wherein Casaubon corresponds to her imagined vision of how he should be: "Signs are small measurable things, but interpretations are illimitable, and in girls of sweet, ardent nature, every sign is apt to conjure up wonder, hope, belief, vast as a sky, and coloured by a diffused thimbleful of matter in the shape of knowledge" (20-21). Eliot's narrator is rather ambiguous about whether Dorothea's motivations are selfish or simply misguided selflessness, but regardless of her intentions Dorothea does undergo trials as a result of her view of reality. She tries too hard to assign an ideal meaning to specific occurrences and must be disappointed when she realizes her preconceptions do not always match the particularities of reality.

Conclusion

Because there is not all-powerful Being in Eliot's vision of reality, mankind has no disconnection between itself and God. Redemption in the sense of reconciliation with God is, therefore, absent from Eliot's universe. Humanity is not striving to return to a blessed state of

communion with God, but only striving and changing toward increasing complexity. Without God, the social organism becomes the highest good and an entity in which the individual becomes a small piece. The continuance of the community is the only way that a person can unite with immortality, for each individual is only finite. The evolution and growth of humanity as a whole will continue infinitely, built upon the lives and choices of individuals. Eliot reverences the communion of souls but also tenaciously affirms the value of each unique life. However, the balance between the subjectivity of the self and the objectivity of the unit does not seem completely resolved in this doctrine. Eliot herself sees the tension with finding the correct balance of the self and society—between objectivity and subjectivity:

That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity. (203)

Here, Eliot has a note of optimism when she says the capacity to feel so deeply for another has “not yet” penetrated the human frame. However, she ends in skepticism about whether a mere individual can contain the weight of a universe of feeling. The individual at this point in evolution cannot come close to complete harmony with nature or society, so the question then becomes how much objectivity one can take while still maintaining integrity as a useful individual. Eliot knows she cannot accurately answer this question, yet she endeavors to experiment how this might work through the creation of her characters. In this, she remains true

to her belief in empirically viewing the world. What is true and what is false in a system of belief can only be validated through personal experience and constant contact with the tangible world.

Chapter 3: *The Brothers Karamazov*: Active Love in the Kingdom of God

Eliot through her novels sought to explore the potential of human nature and how close her characters can come to a sympathetic understanding of the greater world, while allowing for their natural limitations. Searching for a way to understand humanity's condition, she turned to the German Higher Criticism and positivist thinkers like Comte in order to lay the groundwork for scientifically and rationally viewing reality without God. During the mid-1800s, the philosophy of Hegel, Comte, Feuerbach and others were sweeping through the rest of Europe, including Russia, where they made a significant impact among students and intellectuals. Dostoevsky was in his early years immersed in the radical groups who took these thinkers to new extremes as fuel for revolutionary thought. Enamored in his early life with these views, Dostoevsky's faith in social idealism and the power of reason led him into association with the Petrashevsky conspiracy and eventually a sentence to Siberia for four years. His time among hardened criminals and daily exposure to the reality of suffering and vice convinced him that a deep flaw lay within the new philosophies that he had once wholeheartedly embraced. Consequently, his later novels reveal a more passionate desire to show the destruction that happens within both the individual and society when the community loses faith in God and chooses a materialist view of reality, which he saw as happening in Western Europe. Though *Demons* (1872) provides the most explicit indictment of materialism and atheism, which in the novel clearly leads to self-destruction and societal chaos, atheistic characters appear in most of Dostoevsky's works, from Ippolit in *The Idiot* (1869) to Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). The presence of these characters is Dostoevsky's testimony to the prevalence of their beliefs in his culture; furthermore, he directly links the despair and destructiveness of these characters to the rationalism and materialism they espouse. Like Eliot, Dostoevsky explores the boundaries of

human nature and what is possible within its tight constraints. However, he also clearly believes that no true community can be reached without the introduction of the divine into the reality of existence. Nature alone, in Dostoevsky's novels, will not contribute to the "growing good of the world" (889), as Eliot calls the movement toward community. He comes to this conclusion due to his belief in humanity's tendency toward evil, which opposes Eliot's optimism about human tendencies and actions. Even in his rational rebellion against God, Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* understands how wicked man can be, despite intellectual progress and scientific development: "And the strange thing, the wonder would not be that God really exists, the wonder is that such a notion—the notion of the necessity of God—could creep into the head of such a wild and wicked animal as man—so holy, so moving, so wise a notion, which does man such a great honor" (235). This statement directly responds to *The Essence of Christianity's* main premise that man has created God and there is something in man's nature that is ennobling and disposed toward morality. Dostoevsky believes that in order to succeed in goodness and create a viable community, man must connect to a source that is outside of the material realm and his finite existence. In agreement with his faith, Dostoevsky shows how man is drawn toward sin and in reality separate from God, and the only way to bring man to God is through charity, an action which for Dostoevsky embodies the optimism of faith and the realism of embracing individuals who are less than ideal in reality.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the conversation between Alyosha and Ivan in which they discuss the inevitability of suffering and injustice highlights the difference between Eliot and Dostoevsky's subject matter. Eliot's events and settings in *Middlemarch* for the most part remain within the realm of what can be considered the ordinary lives of ordinary people. No one commits a serious crime, with the exception of Bulstrode, whose motives and actions are even

then mainly described as an internal struggle between his desire to see a man he loathes die and the necessity of maintaining a moral life. The fatal choice is not an action on his part, but merely the decision to not prevent his servant from disobeying the doctor's instructions (754). Intense physical suffering is also absent from the novel's action. Dorothea experiences mental anguish and disillusionment, but the narrator points out that her situation is not uncommon (203). Eliot's internal focus renders her premise possible that these ordinary lives contribute to the steady evolution of society. Eliot's description of human experience is, therefore, a depiction of the average man for the sake of her position that those who seek to live exceptional lives for the most part must be content only to enact small changes in the human condition that may not be felt or recognized by the community immediately. Man's efforts are the means by which society evolves. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, chronicles heinous crimes and characters that are plagued by internal as well as external suffering. In comparison with *Middlemarch*, the plot and subject matter of *The Brothers Karamazov* seems to border on the sensational and grotesque. Victor Terras notes how "[i]n particular, he is said to have pursued the exceptional instead of the typical. Tendentious distortion of reality is a common charge. In an age of realism, Dostoevsky's penchant for the fantastic, the paradoxical, and the mystical met with much disapproval" (4). Against, the Enlightenment idea in the possible perfectability of humanity through knowledge and reason, Dostoevsky shows extreme forms of human action and character in order to convey a different image of human nature, which affects the exceptional as well as the unexceptional lives of the novel's characters.

The difference between Dostoevsky and Eliot's subject matter lies in the way each understands reality and the human response to it. Eliot's characters need a correction in vision that in many cases requires a jolt or disruption in their perception of reality that brings them to a

more objective standpoint. Sympathy becomes possible only when they have obtained corrected moral vision. Dostoevsky's characters, however, require more extreme or dramatic events since charity is *opposed* to their nature. Terras says, "Dostoevsky believed that a Christian's progress is a struggle *against* human nature . . . man is sustained in this struggle by epiphanies of divine grace" (11). Due to Dostoevsky's Christian view that human nature has fallen from its original state of perfection in the Garden of Eden, he must use extreme or violent acts in order to bring a character to the point of looking outside the self. Dmitri, for example, must face the charge of murder and be threatened with losing everything of his old life in order to finally recognize and embrace others. It is only after all his clothes have been removed and he has been stripped of material possessions that he can say, "I accept the torment of accusation and of my disgrace before all, I want to suffer and be purified by suffering" (509). Dmitri does not merely suffer from inner disillusionment but from an immediate threat to his personal being. The experience is intensely physical and real yet the most spiritual feeling Dmitri has encountered.

Like Eliot's idea of sympathy, Dostoevsky's concept of "active love" or Christian charity is the only way that the disparate elements of the objective and subjective can be brought together and community can be achieved. Dostoevsky recognizes the problem of the individual and how one can possibly feel the pain of others. Ivan Karamazov says, "Let's say that I, for example, am capable of profound suffering, but another man will never be able to know the degree of my suffering, because he is another and not me, and besides, a man is rarely willing to acknowledge someone else as a sufferer" (237). These remarks parallel Jaffe's concerns about the possible loss of identity when sympathizing with another and Feuerbach's statements about subjectivity and objectivity. Ivan also sees the tendency toward egotism in every person: "For everyone now strives most of all to separate his person, wishing to experience the fullness of life

within himself, and yet what comes of all his efforts is not the fullness of life but full suicide, for instead of the fullness of self-definition, they fall into complete isolation” (303). Active love, however, draws a rather different picture from sympathy. The metaphor for sympathy is frequently that of sight, of finding the necessary tools to aid one’s vision of life. Dorothea must actually see Casaubon before she can actually sympathize with his concerns and fears. This picture of sympathy appears passive, as opposed to active love, which implies physical effort and—as is usually the case for Dostoevsky’s characters—intense suffering. Eliot’s sympathy is not always without these elements, but Dostoevsky for various reasons places an intense emphasis on the physicality of his idea. Zosima responds to a woman plagued by doubt, saying that one can be convinced of the truth of eternity “[b]y the experience of active love. Try to love your neighbors actively and tirelessly. The more you succeed in loving, the more you’ll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul” (56). Opposed to the common belief that understanding vice and cruelty makes people question God, Dostoevsky believes that only through suffering and a full experience of the sinful and fallen human condition can one be convinced that there is a divine God.

Dostoevsky paints a world of seemingly irreconcilable contradictions with perhaps the most prevalent concept being the opposition between faith and reason. This idea is throughout Dostoevsky’s work because it was a lifelong struggle for him to reconcile his belief with his intellect. In what Joseph Frank calls “one of the most disputed passages Dostoevsky ever wrote,” (*Years of Ordeal* 220), he tells Nadezhda Dmitrievna Fonvizina, a woman who ministered to Dostoevsky and his fellow prisoners during his imprisonment, how difficult the struggle for faith has always been for him:

[A]t such moments one thirsts for faith as “the parched grass” and one finds it at last because truth becomes evident in unhappiness. I will tell you that I am a child of the century, a child of disbelief and doubt, I am that today and (I know it) will remain until the grave. How much terrible torture this thirst for faith has cost me and costs me even now, which is all the stronger in my soul the more arguments I can find against it. (qtd. in Frank 220)

Even though Dostoevsky clearly pits reason against faith in this passage, the gateway toward belief, however difficult, lies for him in suffering and moments of unhappiness. However, these moments can be transformed into affirmations of truth only because of Dostoevsky’s decision to rely on faith. In *Dostoevsky: The Scandal of Reason*, Maria Nemcová Banerjee discusses the dichotomy between reason and faith, and she believes that this war in Dostoevsky’s soul could only be resolved through conscious action: “He knows that the deadlock of faith and reason in which his mind is trapped cannot be loosened by mind alone. Only a free commitment of will, his wayward will, can affirm the spiritual truth of the radiant image of Christ the Son of God and Man in an ontological act of love” (xi). The solution lies not within perception or intellectual reasoning but within a commitment to one idea, the person of Christ.

Dostoevsky requires an effort of will because there is a chasm between man and God and between man’s sinful nature and his ideal self. In this concept, the Hegelian influence on Dostoevsky’s writing is clearly present. Joseph P. Scanlan says, “Dostoevsky is here suggesting something like the ‘cunning of reason’ that is so critical an element in the Hegelian dialectic: a force opposed to the goal is an essential element in working toward it. In the transitional state in which man exists on earth, development is achieved through the very institutions that prevent its full success” (165). Dostoevsky reaches something like Hegel’s concept of antithesis in the union

of disparate elements, yet his solution cannot be tied up quite as neatly. He is content to leave something of a mystery to the way in which these elements are united most clearly in the person of Christ. Alyosha chides Ivan, “You’ve forgotten about him, but it is on him that the structure is being built” (246). Charity, for Dostoevsky, is the only answer to the paradox of how man can be simultaneously earthly and immortal.

The way in which Dostoevsky sees subjectivity and objectivity differs significantly from Eliot’s definition. When Dostoevsky represents the objective realm of experience, three terms stand out that must be discussed and defined in the context of *The Brothers Karamazov*, which are temporality, depravity, and suffering. While the temporal nature of man is certainly an issue for Eliot, neither of the other two can be considered major themes in *Middlemarch*. Subjectivity is also different for Dostoevsky, since Eliot believes that the subjective qualities man attributes to God actually stem from the self, but she never pinpoints where consciousness originates apart from its chemical composition. Dostoevsky contends that man’s consciousness comes from God, and therefore subjectivity has a source outside of man and material reality in the personality of God. Eternity, perfection and mystery are themes that occur repeatedly throughout *The Brothers Karamazov* in association with God and the eternal realm. Thus, Dostoevsky’s dichotomy is not so much between subjectivity and objectivity as it is between fallen nature and God. Both man’s subjective self and the material world both contain elements of God’s perfection and elements of things that are opposed to God’s attributes. While these aspects of reality might seem irreconcilable, Dostoevsky masterfully shows that men must wrestle with the contradictions in his nature. In this desire to reconcile differences in humanity’s temporal state, his art in many ways resembles Eliot’s, even though he comes to the *Brothers Karamazov* with a very different approach.

The Limitations of Temporality

Since Dostoevsky's novels rely on a supernatural source for ideals in the person of God, his philosophy could have become completely gnostic, rejecting any possibility for good to stem from one's experience of the material world. William F. Lynch says, "[I]f he had troubled to formulate his idea of the function of the literary imagination, he might have been tempted to think of it as an instrument with which to break through to some kind of absolute and unlimited realm that had little, if any, relation to the concrete" (30). However, Dostoevsky was as much a Russian as he was a mystic, and reverence for the earth ran deep in the roots of Russian Orthodoxy. Ellis Sandoz believes this love of the material was partly a result of a pagan influence in Russian religion that never quite died out until the advent of modernity, which combined with Christianity to emphasize the sacramental nature of Christ's incarnation (25). Thus, this mystical feeling for the earth is still present for Dostoevsky himself and the characters in his novels: "The immanence of God in material reality, the experience of the divinity of the cosmos, and the consubstantiality of man with all universally divine being are experiences decisive for the Russian mind...the object of veneration is too easily sacred matter rather than spirit" (Sandoz 31). A strong tension exists within the novel between the sanctity of the earth and the depravity of matter. It displays Dostoevsky's struggle to find the proper balance between the ideal and the real, the subjective and the objective, even though he recognizes how separate the two realms are. Central to the difference between God and man is the inescapability of man's temporal nature. Man is a being who exists in a finite realm and operates in a material body that is fused with his soul. Therefore, limits naturally exist that hinder man from fully understanding the way in which the eternal realm operates.

The disease of epilepsy plagued Dostoevsky throughout his life and particularly provided him with an opportunity to illustrate an experience of how the eternal realm can feel near when consciousness loses contact with the body. Even though Smerdyakov in *The Brothers Karamazov* is an epileptic, Dostoevsky gives his clearest representation of the experience of a fit in *The Idiot* and what disease represents for him in a broader context. His struggle consists not in the suffering of the actual disease itself, but in the detachment from the body that he feels before the physical agony takes place. One scene from *The Idiot* describes vividly the mental agony of Prince Myshkin in the hours leading up to the onset of his epileptic fit. He is filled with dread, paranoia and increasing agitation until the moment directly preceding it:

His mind, his heart were lit up with extraordinary light; all his agitation, all his doubts, all his worries were as if placated at once, resolved in a sort of sublime tranquility, filled with serene, harmonious joy, and hope, filled with reason and ultimate cause. But these moments, these glimpses were still only a presentiment of that ultimate second (never more than a second from which the fit itself began...in a healthy state, he had often said to himself that all these flashes and glimpses of a higher self-sense and self-awareness, and therefore of the 'highest being,' were nothing but an illness, a violation of the normal state, and if so, then this was not the highest being at all but, on the contrary, should be counted as the very lowest. (225)

This moment is what Dostoevsky believes man strives for and which he affirms does exist outside of time and space, an ecstatic vision. The true existence of the eternal and mystical world that stems from God's attributes is not a creation of mankind's imagination or something completely separate from human concerns. However, Myshkin experiences this mysterious state

of being only when on the brink of losing all consciousness of himself as a person. Ironically, the moments when he is most conscious of death and the transience of existence, he comes closest to the opposite extreme. He must travel near to the edge of his material existence to connect with infinity.

The sharp contrast between physical and spiritual nature is one of the greatest differences between Dostoevsky and Eliot. James P. Scanlan goes so far as to say, “Matter and spirit are the strictest of binary opposites for Dostoevsky, mutually exclusive in essence and sharing no properties” (15). He was initially attracted to Hegelian thought and implemented some elements of Hegel’s philosophy, even though he would later reject many of the ideas that grew out of Hegel’s influence. According to Ellis Sandoz, “The particular point influenced by Hegel was the notion of the duality of human nature” (7). The “highest being” seems to exist for a moment, but even towards the end of that second Myshkin is beginning to question the validity of his feeling, which is then sharply contrasted with the grotesque description of Myshkin’s crippling descent into the fit, which is punctuated in this case by the fact that he happens to fall down a flight of stairs and strike his head. This seemingly irreconcilable contrast between an ideal beauty and the ugliness of living in reality marks *The Brothers Karamazov*, raising the question of whether this sublime state exists, and if so, whether man can ever bridge the chasm between his temporal existence and the eternal state. From there, the question becomes how man can then attain the ideal, and if he should even attempt to strive toward this goal. William Lynch comments upon this characteristic of Myshkin:

There is an instinct in all of us which rebels against time. We come upon a moment of goodness and peace—a moment such as Keats was contemplating when he wrote his ode to a Grecian urn—and we try desperately to hold onto it, or

else we strive to make all the moments run together into one fine moment, a single, static thing which will, from the very fact that it has ceased to flow, resemble some kind of eternity. (49)

Myshkin desires to stop living in the finite world for the sake of this divine moment, even though he senses that something unnatural prompts this feeling. Suffering brings him to the point where he wishes to escape from time and his temporal state on earth, even though these aspects are parts of his nature. Through Myshkin's gradual descent into illness and mental incapacity, Dostoevsky seems to indicate that rejecting the material for the sake of the ideal does in fact lead to a lower state of being. Rowan Williams, says that "the self's ideal existence is unattainable, and what is actually experienced in self-awareness is failure and finitude, finitude itself as a form of humiliation" (19). Even though material existence is ugly, painful, and times completely depraved, Myshkin's outcome proves that one cannot escape from material existence. In the end, Myshkin appears as a only a vacant shell of himself rather than a man able to save others. He is a false Christ figure.

Myshkin's quest to reach eternity fails in *The Idiot*, yet Dostoevsky revisits the same theme in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the novel, the reality and inescapability of the temporal world take shape in a rejection of the belief in a fully realized heavenly kingdom on earth. However this desire for a heavenly kingdom on earth stems from a deeper problem, which is the difficulty these characters experience with believing in the eternal. Not only is the eternal realm distant, but also it is nearly impossible for the human mind to grasp, only showing itself in small glimpses. In 1870, as he was in the process of writing *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky wrote to A.N. Maikov, "The fundamental idea, which will run through each of the parts, is one that has tormented me, consciously and unconsciously, all my life long: it is the question of the

existence of God” (*Letters* 190-92). In 1878, he also wrote, “[T]he immortality of the soul and God are all the same thing, one and the same idea” (qtd. in Frank, *The Mantle of the Prophet* 366). The problem for Dostoevsky’s characters is that they have become too focused on material reality, unable to anything mysterious, such as the transformation of the soul and body after death.

Through his encounters with the radical philosophies that were captivating the minds of young intellectuals in Russia, Dostoevsky saw the danger that men would cease to believe anything beyond anything that could only be learned through reason and experience. After reading Pascal at a young age, Dostoevsky wrote the following about reason in 1838:

What do you mean precisely by the word *know*? Nature, the soul, love, and God, one recognizes through the heart, and not through reason. Were we spirits, we could dwell in that region of ideas over which our souls hover, seeking the solution. But we are earthborn beings, and can only guess at the Idea—not grasp it by all sides at once. The guide for our intelligences through the temporary illusion into the innermost center of the soul is called Reason. Now, Reason is a material capacity, while the soul or spirit lives on the thoughts whispered by the heart . . . when our aim is the understanding of love or of nature, we march towards the very citadel of the heart (*Letters* 6-7).

According to this passage, one can only grasp ideas or abstractions outside of reality by relying on feeling instead of reason. However, Ivan argues passionately that the human mind simply cannot grasp anything that works outside the scientific laws of reality, even though he admits that some thinkers claim to believe in truth outside of reality:

[T]hey even dare to dream that two parallel lines, which according to Euclid cannot possibly meet on earth, may perhaps meet somewhere in infinity. I, my dear, have come to the conclusion that if I cannot understand even that, then it is not for me to understand about God. I humbly confess that I do not have any ability to resolve such questions, I have a Euclidean mind, an earthly mind . . . all such questions are completely unsuitable to a mind created with a concept of only three dimensions. (235)

When Ivan is operating based on his reason, he adamantly rejects the existence of God, yet when he becomes emotional, he sometimes betrays a desperate wish that he could believe despite the contradictions he sees in the world. Sometimes he even does appear to believe in the existence of God even though he is defiantly in rebellion against Him.

The answer that Ivan seeks to his torment lies partly in what he calls his “thirst for life” (230). He says, “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” (230). If Ivan would accept this desire to live despite all and give himself wholly his feelings for life, he might be closer to salvation because Alyosha’s most redemptive experience and Zosima’s story of his brother Markel both hinge on strong feelings for the earth. On his deathbed, Zosima recounts the death of his brother, Markel, which later leads to Zosima’s own conversion. Previously claiming to be an atheist, Markel becomes bedridden with consumption, and through his suffering completely changes his outlook on life. The knowledge that his time on earth is short leads him to embrace and love the earth more and accept his own sin: “There was so much of God’s glory around me: birds, trees, meadows, sky, and I alone lived in shame, I alone dishonored everything, and did not notice the beauty and glory of it all” (289).

Markel's speech suggests that to really experience nature is to feel one's own shame and guilt before the earth. Ivan has not come to this point because he still seeks to reason away his feelings for the earth and his temporal life.

The Prevalence of Crime

While understanding the relationship between temporality and eternity is a difficult problem in *The Brothers Karamazov*, an equally harsh reality is the novel's depiction of the depravity of human nature and the presence of crime. Ivan states, "No animal could ever be so cruel as a man, so artfully, so artistically cruel" (238). This is the reality of a world that is separate from God. Just as the brothers must deal with their state as limited and finite beings while trusting in God's perfect knowledge, they also must realize that they are without the perfect goodness that exists in the infinite nature of God. A desire exists in all of them to harm and destroy others. Dmitri identifies this impulse in his sensuality, which drives him brutally to beat his father in a fit of jealousy over his lust for Grushenka. He tells Alyosha that "all of us Karamazovs are like that, and in you, an angel, the same insect lives and stirs up storms in your blood. Storms, because sensuality is a storm, more than a storm!" (108). Dmitri honestly struggles with the contradiction that exists between the love for a beautiful thing and the acts that such a love can drive a person to commit, yet he continues to act in the same destructive manner, believing that he is merely destroying himself. Instead of seeking to close the gap between himself and the purity of God, Dmitri wishes fully feel the extremity of the chasm between himself and the ideal by carrying his depravity as far as possible: "Because I'm a Karamazov. Because when I fall into the abyss, I go straight into it, head down and heels up, and I'm even pleased that I'm falling in just such a humiliating position, and for me I find it beautiful . . . Let me be cursed, let me be base and vile, but let me kiss the hem of that garment in which my God

is clothed” (108). He embraces his sinful nature without caring for the consequences, acting as if his soul does not even have the capacity for a good act. Through Dmitri’s actions and Ivan’s reasoning, Dostoevsky builds up his case for the wickedness of isolated humans who reject grace and faith.

When questioned about a religious article he has written called the “Geological Cataclysm,” Ivan states a premise that without God “nothing would be immoral any longer, everything would be permitted” (69) to which Dmitri responds, “I’ll remember it” (70). Ivan’s theory is “that there exists no law of nature that man should love mankind, and that if there has been any love on earth up to now, it has come not from natural law but solely from people’s belief in their immortality” (69). It would seem that material world in its present state is, therefore, evil, since it relies on a relationship to God for any law or moral order. However, Ivan later says that man has created the idea of God and an absolute Law, which would mean that an ability to curb man’s acts of violence does exist in man embodied in the creation of God, perhaps based on an instinct for self-preservation. If this is the case, then laws are relative and can be changed depending on one’s perception of God’s existence. Dostoevsky, however, believes that a sincere belief in God is necessary for a moral life, insisting when he writes to Nikolai Osmidov that “the immortality of the soul and God are all the same thing, one and the same idea...tell me why I should then live well, and do good, if I’ll die completely on earth” (qtd. in Frank *Mantle of the Prophet* 366). Dostoevsky is not only affirming the need for men to have an ideal in this life, but also a basic need for motivation and assurance that the fruit of his works on earth can be enjoyed. He does not encourage Osmidov to labor for the satisfaction of knowing he is contributing to the good of future generations. He realizes that his own soul is constrained by selfishness and a sense of only finite truths; consequently, he believes men seek a reassurance

that will satisfy both the spiritual and the earthly sides of their natures. While union with God is the ultimate goal of faith and seeking to live a moral life, the reassurance that one's works will count toward a future life is a secondary benefit.

Contrary to Dostoevsky, Ivan does not want to believe in this reality of a future life. Rather, he argues that belief in a later life curbs men's desire to savor the present life. Thus, Ivan's devil mockingly describes how Ivan envisions the godless empire taking the place of hope in a future life :

People will come together in order to take from life all that it can give, but, of course, for happiness and joy in this world only. Man will be exalted with the spirit of the divine, titanic pride, and the man-god will appear. Man, his will and his science no longer limited, conquering nature every hour, will thereby every hour experience such lofty delight as will replace for him all his former hopes of heavenly delight. Each will know himself utterly mortal, without resurrection, and will accept death proudly and calmly, like a god. Out of pride he will understand that he should not murmur against the momentariness of life, and he will love his brother then without any reward. Love will satisfy only the moment of life, but the very awareness of its momentariness will increase its fire, inasmuch as previously it was diffused in hopes of an eternal love beyond the grave. (649)

Ivan seems to be tormented the most by the divided nature of man. He hates how man, though plagued by doubt of the life to come, must follow laws and deny himself pleasure in order to win life in the next world. However, since he has proven the depths to which people can fall in crime and that most men still need to believe in God, Ivan seems to be contradicting himself with this vision of an ideal world without God. A tension exists in Ivan's philosophy between the way

humanity appears in reality and what he would like to believe humanity can become once its belief in the eternal has been extinguished.

Realizing the unlikelihood of man immediately reaching such a perfect state without a belief in immortality, in “The Grand Inquisitor,” Ivan postulates the idea of an intermediate state. In this world, only a select few might be capable of carrying the burden of the true knowledge that God does not exist and there is no life after death to strive toward. These are what Dostoevsky calls the “new men” in Russia. This ideal is comparable to Nietzsche’s idea of the *uber mensche*, who rises above the mentality of the herd of humanity. Characters aspiring to be these “new men” appear repeatedly in Dostoevsky’s novels. Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* seeks to prove that supposed moral laws do not apply to him through his act of murder. The group of radicals in *Demons* seeks to do the same and to create a new order that rejects anything that falls under established law. Dostoevsky’s goal is to show his culture how dangerous and pointless such attempts are when carried to fruition in his novels. The Grand Inquisitor discusses at length how these few would take the place of a God and laws, theoretically allowing anything to be permissible. They in essence would become the new Law on earth. The devil declares when he is recounting Ivan’s ideal that “the new man is allowed to become a man-god, though it be he alone in the whole world, and of course, in this new rank, to jump lightheartedly over any former moral obstacle of the former slave-man, if need be. There is no law for God! Where God stands—there is the place of God!” (649). Unconsciously, Ivan believes that he is one of these men by making himself the judge of men’s criminal acts. In essence, Ivan challenges the justice of a God who would allow men to be redeemed who commit terrible acts against others. He comes to this conclusion because he is a slave to his earthly mind. The insanity of accepting a world as corrupt as the one Ivan sees is the logical outcome of a mind

that only measures the universe based on Euclidean reasoning. He cannot accept the mystery that enables men to become equal before the Law through an act of grace.

However, Ivan's argument can work only if he believes that men actually exist who can transcend the Law that exists as a symbol of God. A vision of the devil ridicules Ivan for believing himself to be one of these men, and by restating Ivan's philosophy in terms that make his theories seem repulsive. Ivan cannot stand to see his thoughts mimicked by those he considers unworthy and "lackeys" like the illegitimate Smerdyakov. He calls the devil by the same demeaning names but becomes truly distressed as he begins to realize through their conversation that this incarnate form of the "devil" is an embodiment of Ivan's own thoughts as seen from another's perspective. Maire Jaanus Kurrick explains how this devil as an expression of Ivan exemplifies base but ultimately inconsequential intentions: "But this devil denies his connection to the grandeur of past evil and rebellion. He cannot be sublimated. And thus all that Ivan has struggled to be and thought that he was is reduced to petty, egotistic, and meaningless evil. The reduction of the demonic is what Ivan finds so unacceptable, even as his mind forces him to recognize it" (100). Ivan's subjective view of himself and his ideals have become objectified in the form of the devil, a distorted type of god. He goes on to say, "I think that the devil does not exist, and man has therefore created him in his own image and likeness" (239) to which Alyosha adds, "As well as God, then" (239). Their references to God and the devil again reinforce the two equally powerful forces that seem to be present in man. Ivan cannot stand to see the base deeds of others, just as he cannot stand the blackness of his own heart because he only admits the reality of the earthly realm, and the promise of heavenly retribution is an ephemeral statement: "I need retribution, otherwise I will destroy myself. And retribution not somewhere and sometime in eternity, but here and now, on earth" (244). He wants to see a world

without contradictions and a world in which the laws of nature do not destroy humanity. He recognizes what Eliot does not fully grapple with—that without hope in the ideal, humanity seeks to destroy itself. However, Ivan will not accept the hope of an eternal order that will somehow right the wrongs committed in the temporal world.

The Problem of Suffering

It is nearly impossible to count the number of times examples or discussions of suffering appear in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky's life was punctuated by times of extreme physical trials and encounters with the nearness of death. He never failed, however, to incorporate these harrowing experiences into his art seemingly as a way of working through the implications of such struggles for the life of the individual. He is concerned with the extremes of human experience, which happen to both ordinary and extraordinary characters, regardless of their positions. Lise, who comes from a comfortable background, is a cripple; Smerdyakov, the lackey, suffers from fits of epilepsy; Elder Zosima, perhaps Dostoevsky's greatest example of a spiritually ideal man, is "a short, bent little man, with very weak legs, who was just sixty-five, but owing to his illness, appeared much older" (40). This emphasis on the weakness and infirmity of living in the material world allows Dostoevsky to draw a sharp distinction between the ideal reality that stems from God and the human situation on earth.

A character who relies on reason, like Ivan, cannot understand the logic or need for suffering in life. He uses children as an example of innocence suffering: "If they too, suffer terribly on earth, it is, of course, for their fathers; they are punished for their fathers who ate the apple—but that is reasoning from another world; for the human heart here on earth it is incomprehensible. It is impossible that a blameless one should suffer for another, and such a

blameless one!” (238). However, though he rejects the solution that faith in God would supply, he has no alternative to set in its place. Sandoz states, “Euclidean rationality can provide no satisfactory answer to the problem with which he is agonized; and, on the other hand, the answer of faith is incomprehensible and, therefore, existentially unpersuasive because the experience of divine grace is absent” (54). Ivan lacks the knowledge of the heart that Dostoevsky believes is necessary for one to comprehend spiritual truths. He is subjecting belief to reason when he sees the revelation of truth. Due to this preference for his native land, Dostoevsky might partly be attributing Ivan’s lack of belief to his Westernization through his internalization of the philosophies of Europe. For Dostoevsky believes that the truly Russian heart has a predisposition toward faith as he indicates in *The Diary of a Writer*: “I believe the main and most fundamental spiritual quest of the Russian people is their craving for suffering . . . The Russian people know the Gospel poorly . . . but they do know Christ, and they have been carrying Him in their hearts from time immemorial” (36, 38-39). He reflects this idea through Zosima, who believes that people are have an idea of faith within them, which must be denied in order for the sense of eternity to die out: “God took seeds from other worlds and sowed them into this earth, and raised up his garden; and everything that could sprout sprouted, but it lives and grows only through its sense of being in touch with other mysterious worlds; if this sense is weakened or destroyed in you, that which has grown up in you dies” (320). Ivan has weakened his sense of other worlds by sacrificing his faith to an inflexible variety of rationalism and questioning the need for suffering. What Dostoevsky is saying through Zosima is that one should not run away from the reality of suffering. Instead, one should embrace suffering by taking upon oneself the burdens of others and suffering for the sake of the community. The answer that Alyosha gives to Ivan’s endless labyrinth of questions about injustice and the needless suffering of victims is to remember the

suffering of the blameless one, Christ. By suffering, people become like Him, Who is the ultimate mediator between the material world and the spiritual world. Being both man and God, He accomplished reconciliation for mankind through his suffering.

Though suffering is the principal way characters find redemption in Dostoevsky's work, it also becomes evident that not all suffering leads one to faith. Many characters suffer for incorrect motives or do not allow their suffering to become an opportunity for faith. Dmitri suffers much mental anguish and remorse for the way he treats others on account of his wild passions. However, he continually tries to justify his actions or revels in the thought of his own baseness. His conduct toward his fiancé, Katerina Ivanovna illustrates the complexity of his mental pattern. After betraying Katerina's trust and spending money she entrusted to him, Dmitri tries to break off their engagement so that he can fall deeper into ruin and marry Grushenka. He claims that he is suffering from the pain he has caused and the faith he has betrayed, but at the same time a part of him enjoys how he is abandoning a respectable life for one that better fits his character. Alyosha says, "and there, in filth and stench, will perish of his own free will, and revel in it" (117). However, Dmitri is determined that he shall not be in debt to Katerina so that he can at least maintain one part of his honor. To have the debt hanging over him would constitute long and painful suffering, which might involve working and saving to pay the money back. Dmitri is not willing to accept this kind of suffering. He can suffer acutely as long as the pain is over quickly. The sharp break with Katerina is much easier than staying with her, for in that situation he would constantly be reminded of his guilt by always being near the one he is indebted to. Suffering and love, which are inseparable in Zosima's philosophy, are always under the threat of being undermined by man's desire to subvert them in selfishness: "Love in dreams thirsts for immediate action, quickly performed, and with everyone watching. Indeed, it will go as far as the

giving even of one's life, provided it does not take long but is soon over, as on stage, and everyone is looking on and praising" (58). Therefore, what Dmitri claims is the suffering of falling into dissipation and abandoning the woman who loves him is really an escape from a more painful and drawn out kind of suffering, which would be closer to charity. The only problem is the debt of three thousand roubles, which he also hopes will be relieved from him: "And I'll sit and wait for a miracle" (122).

Captain Snegiryov, a poor and proud man that Alyosha meets through the captain's son, Ilyusha, has a keen sense of his family's destitution, which is inflamed when Dmitri humiliates him in a drunken rage. However, Snegiryov, in his pitiful romanticizing of his condition, is actually closer to his tormentor than he thinks. What sets him apart from Dmitri is that his state of poverty is not entirely his own doing. He is to some degree a victim of circumstances; however, he finds pride in his circumstances and treats Alyosha with haughty disdain. When Alyosha offers him money in reparation for the wrong done to him, the captain starts to accept the gift until his pride takes over and he throws the money down and stamps on it in a fit of rage, while "[h]is whole figure presented a picture of inexplicable pride" (211). He does not reject the money for the sake of anyone except himself. He scorns the thought of being bound to Alyosha and would rather perish, while feeling superior to other men, than feel morally indebted to another. In this way, he is very much like Dmitri.

Katerina Ivanovna also claims that she is willing to undergo suffering by loving and waiting for Dmitri, no matter what he does. On the outside, this vow appears both rash and sincere, but her motives are not those of a soul's desire to be purified through suffering. Rather, she also is seeking to validate her own superiority to him. She believes she has the power to change people and set them on the right track, which she displays painfully to Alyosha when she

fawns over her rival, Grushenka. He believes that “she truly fell in love with Grushenka—that is, not with Grushenka, but with her own dream, *her* delusion” (155). She perfectly illustrates the second part of the two-fold temptation that Zosima lays out when he discusses love in dreams. The first is the desire for immediacy of action, and the second is the desire for an audience. While Dmitri wants his sacrifice to be over with as quickly as possible, Katerina does not mind how many years it takes, as long as people are watching and know she is sacrificing herself for an undeserving man. She tells both Ivan and Alyosha this idea, since she wants their approval, and declares that even if she is not constantly in front of Dmitri’s eyes, when he becomes unhappy he will know that he can come to her as a savior (189). Her dream of this suffering only persists in the assurance that she will finally be rewarded by Dmitri’s adoration. She never allows the thought to come into her head that he might never appreciate this act on her part. Thus, her suffering is ultimately self-serving. All these characters seek justification or pride through their own suffering, yet Zosima claims that true suffering can only happen when one recognizes guilt before others and suffers as a result. Redemptive suffering can only be realized through accepting the reality of sin, rather than denying that it exists within the self.

Furthering the Heavenly Community

While many characters have different variations of a heavenly kingdom realized on earth, the novel rejects the idea that this can ever fully happen in reality. Scanlan says that in agreement with Kant, Dostoevsky “accepts the binding character of an absolute moral imperative, and he affirms the impossibility of observing the imperative fully on earth” (22). Though humanity should strive for eternal truth and seek to establish a brotherhood of Christian believers on earth, he recognizes the danger of believing in the Absolute being revealed on earth. In his youth and

misdirected zeal, the young novice, Alyosha believes in the immanence of the eternal in the person of his idol, Zosima: “In his heart there is the secret of renewal for all, the power that will finally establish the truth on earth, and all will be holy and will love one another, and there will be neither rich nor poor, neither exalted nor humiliated, but all will be the children of God, and the true kingdom of Christ will come” (31). Alyosha’s fanatic dedication to Zosima leads him to believe this kingdom will be directly realized a literal way on earth. He also shows his desire for immediate heavenly fulfillment by believing along with the rest of the monastery that the elder’s body will not decay. In order for the Zosima’s ministry to become validated in the eyes of the people, the laws that govern the earth must make an exception. Consequently, the pivotal scene in the novel takes place when the monastery realizes they have placed their hope in a false center for community. They have tried to create a Christian community based on a miracle, which in doing so would fulfill the Grand Inquisitor’s vision of a nation of followers enslaved to the institution of the Church. There would be no need for hope in eternity if the people’s need for a miracle were satisfied on the earth.

Zosima recognizes this danger in hoping for immediate gratification, whether it be the assuaging of doubt through a miracle or the relief from suffering. Ivan challenges Zosima by asking how one can submit to God and love others when men commit such crimes, but Zosima has an answer in the recognition of the relation between every part of the created world: “All is like an ocean, I say to you. Tormented by universal love, you, too, would then start praying to the birds as if in a sort of ecstasy, and entreat them to forgive you your sin” (320). Eliot similarly calls her reader’s to a greater awareness of the world, even though she admits that in reality there is no practical way simple humans could stand the “squirrel’s heartbeat” or hearing “the grass grow” (203). Her image of the web of relations calls man to a greater awareness and tolerance

for one another, but she does not ask that each person should take on the world's sins or ask forgiveness from the earth as Zosima proposes. According to Zosima, mankind has caused division by rebelling against God and believing itself to be self-sufficient, and as a result, people have been scattered and separated from each other. The only way to regain this community is not through seeking to purify man on earth, but by accepting each person's sins as one's own. It seems like two contrary principles at work. The acceptance of sin, as opposed to fighting against it as an alien entity, leads to restoration. Ivan will not accept the sins of others, and, therefore, does not acknowledge his own sin. Zosima affirms this doctrine:

There is only one salvation for you: take yourself up, and make yourself responsible for all the sins of men. For indeed it is so, my friend, and the moment you make yourself sincerely responsible for everything and everyone, you will see at once that it is really so, that it is you who are guilty on behalf of all and for all. Whereas by shifting your own laziness and powerlessness onto others, you will end by sharing in Satan's pride. (320)

Community must always start with an individual choice to accept the world's sins as one's own, which simultaneously affirms the responsibility of one as an individual and calls each to an awareness of the impossibility of seeking Christian community and being spiritually isolated from others. Those who seek to suffer, while still maintaining a sense of their pride and superiority to others, do their souls more harm than good, but the way to community begins with an acceptance of one's degradation and feeling indebtedness to all.

Chapter 4: Sympathy and Charity in Action: Dorothea and Alyosha

The Ardent Idealists

In order to achieve believable representations of their ideas about community working within the real world, both Dostoevsky and Eliot had to show complex relationships working in their novels in which the lives of multiple characters entwine to create unified stories. The presence of many important characters makes both novels almost seem to lack protagonists. However, both novels do identify main characters, interestingly before the novels themselves even begin. In “Note from the Author,” Dostoevsky clearly states that Alyosha is the hero of the novel (3), and *Middlemarch* begins with a prelude that specifically pertains to Dorothea and what the novel will demonstrate about her character. The observation of these communities and relationships within which the individuals function are crucial points to both authors; however, the fact that they deliberately choose strong protagonists to move in and out of the action of the novels shows that the portrayal of particular experience is necessary to understanding the whole of each novel’s premise. Alyosha and Dorothea are embodiments of how one might progress toward a correct view of community, yet since they are also individuals, their journeys are neither ideal nor complete. Like their authors, Alyosha and Dorothea experience trial and error as they search to better understand the world and their relationship to it. Similarities between their experiences show how Dostoevsky and Eliot are using similar methods to test their visions, while the significant places where Alyosha and Dorothea’s actions diverge reveal how the authors’ epistemologies of the universe ultimately affect how they solve the problem of community.

In their introductions of the characters, Dostoevsky and Eliot show uncertainty as to whether the readers will understand what might appear on the surface merely odd or vain

struggle on the part of their two heroes. Eliot, implicitly describing Dorothea as a “latter-born Theresa,” says, “With dim lights and tangled circumstance they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness” (3). Dostoevsky voices similar reservations about Alyosha when he states, “To me he is noteworthy, but I decidedly doubt that I shall succeed in proving it to the reader. The thing is that he does make a figure, but a figure of an indefinite, indeterminate sort” (3). This assumed diffidence, particularly on the part of Dostoevsky, might make one question why these authors would choose to focus on characters that the audience might not quite understand. The fairly evident answer is that both authors’ reticence is tinged with irony. They have not chosen these characters as bearers of their vision without reason. Scholars agree that Eliot put the most of her young self into Dorothea, and Dostoevsky explicitly states in the remainder of his short note that Alyosha is a personally beloved character his author (3-4). It can then be argued that to at least some degree these characters mirror the authors’ own struggles and perhaps their resolutions to the question of how the individual can make an impact in the community.

Several key similarities highlight the beginning of Dorothea and Alyosha’s journeys. They are both exceptionally young, both only nineteen when the novels begin. They are at the cusp of adulthood without having yet completely abandoned the follies of youth, even though they demonstrate serious natures beyond their years. Their young age also shows their naïveté and impressionability. The most striking connection between the two is their zeal and ardor for spiritual reality that borders on fanaticism in the first few chapters. Alyosha expresses his asceticism by entering a nearby monastery as a novice. Considering Dostoevsky’s own spiritualism, it is interesting that he chooses to stress that Alyosha is not a fanatic—only zealous

by nature—and if circumstances had unfolded differently, he might have directed his enthusiasm to a profession less spiritual in nature:

Alyosha, was not at all a fanatic, and, in view at least, even not at all a mystic. I will give my full opinion beforehand: he was simply an early lover of mankind, and if he threw himself onto the monastery path, it was only because it alone struck him at that time and presented, so to speak, with an ideal way out for his soul struggling from the darkness of worldly wickedness towards the light of love. And this path struck him only because on it at this time he met a remarkable being, in his opinion, our famous monastery elder Zosima. (18)

Dostoevsky points out that it is not an abstract philosophy but the embodiment of an idea in the person of Zosima that captivates Alyosha's heart. This dedication psychologically makes sense because Alyosha has always lived without a father figure, since his own is so completely dissipated. Until the point where he enters the monastery, Alyosha is presented as having simply a quiet and sensitive disposition "from some inner preoccupation, as it were, strictly personal, of no concern to others, but so important for him that because of it he would, as it were forget others. But he did love people, and yet no one ever considered him either naïve or a simpleton" (19). At the same time, he abhors immorality with a "wild, frantic modesty and chastity" (20). Zosima appears as the projection of Alyosha's own desire for purity combined with love, and so Alyosha chases after this ideal with the ardor of a man about to realize his dream in reality.

Alyosha's preoccupation with the inner, contemplative life and defense of his own morality seem at odds with his innate love for people and acceptance of their actions. He clearly struggles with these desires throughout the novel, but the monastery and elder Zosima offer themselves as an invitation to indulge one side of Alyosha's character while conveniently

shutting out the other without shame or condemnation. His actions imply that he sees a contradiction in living an everyday life outside of the monastery. He has what the narrator calls a “thirst for an immediate deed. As soon as he reflected seriously and was struck by the conviction that immortality and God exist, he naturally said to himself: ‘I want to live for immortality, and I reject any halfway compromise’” (26). Once Alyosha perceives what he sees as truth, he must immediately unite with it, and the rest of life begins to seem like a hindrance to his quest toward truth. At the beginning of the novel’s action, when Alyosha has been living in the monastery for a few months, he already shows signs of a changed attitude toward the outer world. While the narrator describes Alyosha as caring and accepting of others by nature, he is worried at the intrusion of his family into the calm of his monastic life. He fears that somehow the elder’s “glory” will be diminished through association with such a petty and shameful company as his relations represent. These fears show just how far Alyosha has begun to separate the greater truth he sees in the elder from the common sinners in his own family, which actually causes him to mistake the real power of Zosima’s influence in the monastery.

Like Alyosha, Dorothea is literally an orphan, though she has supposedly lived under the stable protection of her uncle, Arthur Brooke. However, though not so utterly depraved and disgusting as Fyodor Karamazov, Mr. Brooke shows that he is intellectually and morally Dorothea’s inferior and gives no protection or guidance as her guardian. On her own, Dorothea develops a natural ardor for the spiritual and intellectual life. The narrator says that “she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it” (2). Dorothea seeks a higher truth somehow removed from the sphere of her everyday existence. She too finds religion as the ultimate source of truth

and a vocation worth pursuing at the expense of the kind of life her uncle and sister enjoy. Dorothea, however, does not have the opportunity of seeking out the monastic order. Instead she has to create a holy life for herself within the circle she moves, as an endowed woman in a small community. The very first chapter makes it quite clear that she is struggling between achieving the kind of life she envisions and reconciling the feelings she has for the things of the world that are not strictly religious. She is trying to lead the life of a convent with all the finery of the world constantly surrounding her. The first scene involves a small representation of this crisis as her worldly sister, Celia, persuades Dorothea to decide how they should divide their mother's jewels. At first, Dorothea condescendingly insists that she has no need or desire to wear such jewelry, even if she is slighting her mother's memory by doing so. In refusing to wear a cross as a necklace, Dorothea also makes Celia uncomfortable for so obviously desiring to wear the jewels herself. However, Dorothea replies with an obvious insinuation of superiority, "Souls have complexions too: what will suit one will not suit another" (8). While seeking to set herself apart from the meaner things of the world for an imagined higher calling, she perhaps unconsciously degrades her sister.

Dorothea's armor has a chink, however, which she reveals when the sunlight hits an emerald ring in a way that touches her inward feelings: "It is strange how deeply colours seem to penetrate one, like scent. I suppose that is the reason why gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St. John. They look like fragments of heaven. I think the emerald is more beautiful than any of them" (8). There is a marked progression and tension in this passage between personal spontaneous experience and the certainty of established truth. She begins by describing her sensation upon viewing the colors, but then moves mid-sentence to a justification for her feeling from Scripture. The feelings that she cannot exactly understand of strong

attraction must be supported by their likeness to the eternity of heaven, but at the end she returns once again to her personal preference for the emerald. Dorothea is clearly a divided woman, and Celia perceives this weakness, dropping a few penetrating comments that are designed to test how far Dorothea will indulge herself. However, the experiment ends in Dorothea becoming defensive and resorting to resume her condescending tone in fear that her personal desires will be exposed (9). The narrative reveals how Dorothea's self-righteousness and attempts to justify and protect her self-worth despite her own preferences result in an unstable consciousness in one seemingly trifling scene.

Both Dorothea and Alyosha show their zeal and the subsequent problems that occur as a result of their dispositions early on. In each novel, the first social situation portrayed coincides with embarrassment on the part of the young protagonist. Alyosha has to undergo the ordeal of watching as the members of his family behave in a disgraceful fashion toward the elder and other monks of the monastery. Even before the meeting takes place, he fears that "[t]he rest would come with frivolous purposes, perhaps offensive to the elder" (32). However, Alyosha's supposed discernment of the elder's disapproval is merely the projection of his own feelings of embarrassment and superiority onto his mentor. Dorothea also feels initial embarrassment before she even knows of Casaubon's character. She has, nevertheless, heard of Casaubon's reputation as a learned man and immediately assumes that like herself, he will be above the idle chatter of a man like her uncle: "Dorothea felt a little more uneasy than usual. In the beginning of dinner, the party being small and the room still, these motes from the mass of a magistrate's mind fell too noticeably. She wondered how a man like Mr. Casaubon would support such triviality" (11). Knowing Mr. Casaubon so little, Dorothea's sensitivity is solely her own and a projection of her feelings onto Casaubon, even though her supposition that he feels superior turns out to be a

correct conclusion. Both Alyosha and Dorothea, therefore, idolize individuals as projections of their idealized views in order to feel superiority toward others. In Alyosha's case, the object is a worthy one, whereas Dorothea chooses her object of veneration unwisely. In any case, the motives of each are the same. Neither can consciously acknowledge their own dissatisfaction with the material world, so both need another that they can defend and support against the opinions of others.

Disenchantment With Reality

Though Dorothea and Alyosha perceive Casaubon and Zosima to be their ideals of the contemplative religious life, in reality they are polar opposites as characters, Casaubon being a supreme egotist and Zosima a Christ-like example of active love. However, even though Zosima and Casaubon differ in personality, they still serve very similar functions in relation to Alyosha and Dorothea. One difference, though, might be that Dorothea gravely misjudges Casaubon whereas Alyosha merely believes the goodness of Zosima will have more of an earthly impact than it does. Here is where the distinction between Eliot's and Dostoevsky's ultimate goals becomes important. Casaubon is a symbol of the higher learning of the past that never touched the lives of ordinary people and strained too far toward religious and abstract realities only to end in egotism. His lifeless philosophy is what Dorothea must move away from in order to reach true sympathy of feeling that can result in practical good, so she must let her ambitions shrink and become practical instead of idealistic. Zosima, on the other hand, is a little more complicated. As a person, he seems to have achieved a balance between earthly service and heavenly ideals. While he works and meets the needs of those in his community, he also is aware that the ultimate reality lies beyond the realm of human experience. Alyosha, however, in his immaturity believes

that since the elder serves and practices such holiness, he will ultimately achieve an earthly kind of glory that will begin the kingdom of God on earth. Alyosha must learn to forget his dream of seeing an earthly reward for the toils of the righteous and be content to work in small ways in hopes of an ultimate fulfillment of his dream in another later life. So while Alyosha and Dorothea must both learn to balance their ambitions and serve their communities, the ultimate progression one must make is to see rewards in an unseen reality, while the other must become focused on the world of the immediate and tangible.

As discussed in chapter two, Dorothea's perception becomes clouded and based on what she wants Casaubon to be, when in actuality he falls far short of the ideal. While she experiences some forebodings that warn her he is not as wonderful as he seems, such as his indifference to her plans to build cottages or any other practical means of service (62), Dorothea effectively blinds herself to his faults until their marriage when he begins to reveal his self-centered and overly sensitive disposition. Particularly her wedding-journey to Rome marks the turning point in her perception. The scales began to fall away from her eyes, she perceives Casaubon for who he actually is, and in him she sees the end of the fantasy of her own importance. Her disenchantment is inextricably linked to the place and context of Rome, which has received much critical attention as Eliot's choice for Dorothea's awakening to her folly. Barbara Hardy sees it as simultaneously a place of historical awareness and foreignness, in which the self breaks up into a plurality of many selves (1-12). In essence, while also being the center of religion, it is the center of civilization and art, two words that cannot easily be separated. Art, for Eliot, always exists alongside a viable community, helping and supporting the proliferation of sympathy between individuals. Dorothea has already betrayed her own ignorance about art, which has been perpetuated as essentially a self-defense mechanism so that her puritanical view can be sustained.

Art unsettles Dorothea because it demands not only knowledge of the ideal but knowledge and acceptance of the real and physical as well—those petty and sordid trifles of everyday existence. She believes that she loves her uncle's tenants and would do everything in her power to better their standard of living, but she cannot accept a life married to an ordinary man like Sir James Chettam, because she believes her life is intended for something better and demands an uncommon man who has the potential to change mankind's understanding. Consequently, her error lands her in a life where she can do less benevolent action than she would have married to Chettam. She is divorced from her community but without the sympathy or higher life she had imagined with Casaubon.

As Dorothea awakens to the tomb in which she has encased herself, Will Ladislaw tries to help her find the way back to the light. He plays an important role in the Rome segment of the novel because he espouses a view of art that out of all the characters perhaps comes closest to Eliot's own. Eliot drew heavily from the philosophy of John Ruskin on painting and realism in art. Ladislaw is somewhat of an exaggeration in that he sees everyone literally as pieces of artwork, uses classical metaphors profusely, and consequently treats his relationship to Dorothea as if she were his Beatrice, but he is not exactly Dante. However, he does have the right idea when he critiques his friend, Naumann, who is trying to impose an abstract idea onto a living being that does not fit her nature: "Yes and your painting her was the chief outcome of her existence—the divinity passing into higher completeness and all but exhausted in the act of covering your bit of canvas. I am amateurish if you like: I do *not* think all the universe is straining towards the obscure significance of your pictures" (198-199). Like Casaubon, Naumann is trying to place an artificial system on nature and becoming an egoist by believing that reality is divinely meant to line up with what he envisions. Joseph Wiesenfarth says, "Eliot

herself admired Ruskin for teaching the one great doctrine of realism in art—realism that, for Ruskin and Eliot, means nature conceived organically, not as the clockwork of the Enlightenment or the chain of being in the Renaissance” (366). Dorothea has been deceived by the attraction of the art that only exalts the ideal without being true to life. She reveals her view of life in her bewildered attitude toward art: “I should be quite willing to enjoy the art here, but there is so much that I don’t know the reason of – so much that seems to me a consecration of ugliness rather than beauty” (231). This demand to know the reason for the ugliness is Dorothea’s weakness. She wants to place everything in her system of the world when some situations simply cannot be arranged in a meaningful way that makes sense. Her marriage to Casaubon was supposed to be part of a beautiful picture she made in her mind, but she is beginning to see that his mind might be part of the ugliness that she has the choice to either ignore or face. She even admits, “I cannot help believing in glorious things in a blind sort of way” (231), not understanding when Will explains to her that even the bad art is soil for the best. The good painters cannot deny that they have some relationship to those preceding them, even if only the desire to better their predecessors. The same metaphor can be applied to community. The contribution of every member has worth and meaning because the structure would fall apart without every piece. History embodies the slow process of building toward a goal, each life not standing by itself but part of one structure.

Dorothea’s decision to live and serve Casaubon effectively becomes a cloistering (as Will observes) in the bleakest sense of the word. Upon the return from her wedding journey, Dorothea realizes she has shut herself off from society and from the plans of benevolent action she had always envisioned. She begins to realize that the mental separation she has been imposing between herself and others is now becoming a physical reality. Casaubon’s great work of

scholarship, which Dorothea was willing to sacrifice her plans for, she also realizes is a hopeless undertaking that seems to involve endless work, leading to nowhere. Instead of feeling her consciousness transported to a higher reality, she has instead become a slave to small tasks devoid of purpose:

The duties of her married life, contemplated as so great beforehand, seemed to be shrinking with the furniture and the white vapour-walled landscape. The clear heights where she expected to walk in full communion had become difficult to see even in her imagination; the delicious repose of the soul on a complete superior had been shaken into uneasy effort and alarmed with dim presentiment. (288)

This passage shows how Dorothea is actually insecure about her own abilities to understand and aid society, expecting to find in Casaubon a type of God figure who can dictate how she must act. In this supposedly ideal situation, she would have been the hands that worked for the intellect, and Casaubon's superiority would have lifted her higher as she served him. However, Dorothea realizes that she is completely alone and must only complete the work itself without the rewards. "Communion" with her husband is only a phantom in her new understanding of marriage, but the duty of remaining faithful to the task before her becomes essential for her sanity. She can no longer be completely blinded and simply imagine that Casaubon is better than he is. She has no future hope of restoration or happiness. Instead, she realizes that true sympathy and service to him will be to discover what he actually looks like in all his ugliness and after that select and find the best shades possible out of the raw materials; only then can she actually know how best to help him. Dorothea is painting a new and realistic image of marriage that will inform the way she views her future benevolent actions. The greatest shift in her view of community and marriage is that she ceases filling her thoughts with the future and only focuses on the present,

however grim it may be. Her view of a community has shifted from the vague dreams of cottages to her role of dutifully seeking to understand and sympathize with a specific person.

Dorothea's plight of unwilling solitude seems at first quite the opposite of Alyosha's trial, for Zosima urges Alyosha to step out into the world, to marry, and serve (77). However, Alyosha shows significant reluctance to leave, supposedly because he hates abandoning the elder in his sickly and weakened state. Another motive might be behind Alyosha's feelings beyond staying by the elder's side until death. By staying in the monastery, he might easily shut himself off from the world and all the shame his family brought upon the monastery, which is still burning in his memory. Recognizing this tendency to retreat, Zosima desires that Alyosha instead do good by helping his brothers, hinting that this must be done before one of them commits an act of violence against their father. Alyosha's journey in search of Dmitri and the difficulties he faces before returning to the monastery, for him, mark a point where he begins to recognize that he cannot yet be like the elder he so admires. He still fears that he can be harmed by the sins of those around him and that which is also festering within his own soul, so he remains apart from them, but at the same time he cannot help alleviate any of their needs.

The first third of the novel shows a consistent pattern in Alyosha's actions. Either he remains too passive and does nothing to prevent the demise of the characters around him or he acts impetuously and ends up feeling as if he caused more harm than good. Though he is keenly aware of others motives and expressions, he cannot seem to decipher how he can best act in order to resolve the situations he finds himself in. First, when the family comes to the monastery to discuss Dmitri and Fyodor's differences, he stands in the background and does nothing but watch in horror the entire interaction that quickly spirals downward in Zosima's presence. Next, he journeys out of the monastery on the elder's orders to prevent Dmitri from committing some

unspeakable act (Alyosha admits he has already guessed it) (89). He stops at his father's place and for the most part listens and responds to his father's thoughts on the existence of God but accomplishes nothing, leaving "more broken and dejected in spirit than when he had entered it. His mind, too, was splintered and scattered, as it were, while he himself felt at the same time that he was afraid to bring the scattered together and draw a general idea from all the tormenting contradictions he had lived through that day" (143). Alyosha knows that Zosima has asked him to in some way intervene in the tangled and hideous affairs that might result in a murder, but he still desires above all to escape and be guided rather than make his own decisions. He fears most of all being so caught up in the machinations of his family that he becomes like them, for he admits to Rakitin that the same lust and murderous thoughts are in his own soul (80). He has the capacity to be just like his father, but he would rather not face the truth. He tries to hide behind a screen where he can think the best of people, telling Fyodor, "You're not an evil man, you're just twisted" (174). After the interview at his father's house, Alyosha loses determination and returns to the monastery where he thinks, "Here was quiet, here was holiness, and there—confusion, and a darkness in which one immediately got lost and went astray" (157). It seems that instead of being willing to accept others in their sin, he wants to change them, or at least see them as better than they are, so that they will not represent a threat to corrupt Alyosha himself. However, realistically this cannot happen, so he sees no alternative but escape.

The second day, Alyosha returns to the task Zosima has set before him, but his main failing seems to be in understanding what will be both immediately and eternally helpful for those he comes into contact with, for Alyosha, unlike Dorothea, thinks more about consequences in a future life in addition to the immediate ramifications his actions will cause:

[W]hat could he wish for each of them amid such terrible contradictions? One could get completely lost in the tangle, and Alyosha's heart could not bear uncertainty, for the nature of his love was always active. He could not love passively; once he loved, he immediately also began to help. And for that one had to have a goal, one had to know firmly what was good and needful for each of them. (187)

The problem with knowing what is “good and needful” for each is that Alyosha must have an unclouded perception, and as long as he doubts and fears for his own spiritual safety, trying to keep their guilt separate from himself, he will fail to determine their needs. Alyosha, however, is missing the elder's main point. Zosima does not command Alyosha to heal every wound he encounters but to “endure everything” and “work tirelessly” (77). Alyosha is trying too hard, which is causing him to fail.

With all his ardor and intense idealism concentrated on the ailing person of Zosima, Alyosha's faith reaches a crisis when Zosima dies. Like Dorothea, Alyosha has been creating his own untrue picture of a community on earth in which the elder is the chief figure, bringing peace and joy to all. Even when the reality of the elder's death sets in, Alyosha must still try to salvage his vision by believing that Zosima's death will be revered and perhaps even bring miracles to the monastery. However, the opposite of Alyosha's wishes occurs when the elder's body actually begins to stink prematurely, causing his opponents to exult and use the opportunity to defame his reputation. Alyosha finds himself so distraught that he flees the monastery for two main reasons that the narrator identifies. First, Alyosha has incorrectly loved Zosima: “[T]his being had stood before him as an indisputable ideal for so long that all his youthful powers and all their yearning could not but turn to this ideal exclusively, in some moments even to the forgetting of “all and

all” (339). This passage would suggest that Alyosha has been wrong to concentrate his love on one person, while he should have been diffusing his passion among others. He also has a strong sense that an injustice has been committed against the elder, which should be rectified (339). Ironically, Alyosha in his distress is forgetting the main commands of his elder, who says in his mystical fashion, “Love all of God’s creation, both the whole of it and every grain of sand . . . If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin tirelessly to perceive more and more of it every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an entire, universal love” (319). Alyosha’s concentrated love and subsequent demand for justice in the name of that love is not furthering his care of God’s creation. Instead, he is putting walls of disdain between himself and the people who defame Zosima. The ugliness of their responses is too much for him to bear, even to the point where he finds himself saying, “I do not rebel against my God, I simply ‘do not accept his world’” (341) in an echo of Ivan’s words.

The deep suffering that seems to have an initially adverse effect on Alyosha’s state of mind changes him suddenly when Rakitin takes Alyosha to Grushenka’s house, intending to corrupt him. Previously, Alyosha felt only terror in the presence of an alluring woman because he feared for himself, but now in his suffering he has forgotten the barrier that before placed him on a pedestal higher than Grushenka, the fallen woman (349). By beginning to see the reality behind his illusion of Zosima as an earthly savior, Alyosha also seems to suddenly realize how he has been holding himself back from others, perhaps trying to keep himself pure enough to be in the elder’s presence. Now, in the moment of despair when he has been ready to throw his purity away, Alyosha finds himself able to take Grushenka’s suffering as his own and embrace her spiritually as an equal. His view of himself, reality, and others is in harmony during this

scene, which results in an inexplicable bond between the two of them, something Rakitin cannot understand because of its seeming absurdity. Immediately following this event, Alyosha returns to the monastery in a purer state of mind that renders him able to receive a mystical vision that explains his experience with Grushenka. In the dream, Zosima tells Alyosha, “I, too, have been called, called and chosen . . . Why are you hiding here, out of sight . . . ? Come and join us” (361). In a moving moment, Alyosha breaks down and literally kisses the earth in a symbolic embrace of all the dirt and nature of humanity (362). He has come to a point where he can accept his own shame and that of others.

A significant break occurs between Alyosha’s revelation in the “Cana of Galilee” chapter and the next time he is present in the action of the story. This long stretch is interesting because it impresses even more the change that has occurred in Alyosha’s role. After Dmitri’s arrest and subsequent ordeals, Alyosha next makes an appearance through the eyes of Kolya Krasotkin, a young socialist being schooled by Rakitin at the tender age of thirteen. Kolya’s perspective shows the shift in Alyosha to the role of teacher and mentor to this younger generation of boys. The last time Alyosha interacted with the sick Ilyusha and his schoolfellows, Alyosha showed a natural affinity for children, but because of his immaturity and desire for unnecessary action, he ended up earning the disdain of Ilyusha’s father (196-203). Now, Alyosha’s gravity and calm attention to Kolya as an equal are what win over the initially egotistical and proud boy. He says, “Oh, how I love you and value you right now, precisely because you, too, are ashamed of something with me. Because you are just like me!” (558). Without the idealized Zosima, Alyosha no longer feels fear or shame that others will dim the glory of his elder. He also does not protect himself anymore but accepts his own shame and even takes Kolya’s sins as his own, blushing for him.

As Dorothea finds her greatest strength and finally realizes the true meaning of art and community when she is suffering the most, so also does Alyosha regain his ability to give charity to others through intense suffering. They have known suffering as an idea before their crises, and thought they were seeking suffering in spiritual lives, but suffering in reality becomes a catalyst for completely shifting their views of themselves and the meaning of sympathy and charity. However, it is interesting to note that Dorothea's suffering through her marriage to Casaubon and subsequent humiliation at the terms of his will are a long and drawn-out process that slowly changes her perspective, whereas Alyosha experiences his change in a very brief period of time that seems like a vision or revelation. Essentially these moves in the narrative show the differences between a humanistic story, wherein the characters must essentially forge a way for themselves through an orderly but natural universe, and a story built on the belief in the power of a supernatural and transcendent being.

Changed Perceptions

At the end of the novels, the protagonists have undergone changes in how they view others and the community, which in turn affects self-knowledge and their beliefs concerning actions and purpose. Dorothea demonstrates that she has discovered the truth about her own capacity when she admits how little she knows what to do with her own money, since she does not have enough to enact the great schemes she imagines (813). Therefore, she has come to a realization of her own capacities both as a benefactor and as a woman. By finally admitting her love for Will Ladislav, she also comes to an acceptance of her own feelings and a belief that her passion can be directed toward something other than an abstract or vague ideal. The revelation that Dorothea is merely a woman with the same weaknesses and feelings as others has

disappointed some critics, who wonder if Dorothea is meant to be portrayed as a failure; to the contrary, Eliot seems to be making a profound statement that acceptance of one's temporal nature is essential for achieving a proper view of life and sympathy for others. Alyosha's self-realization is somewhat less pronounced in the plot of the story but clearly shown through the shift in his role from learner to teacher. At the beginning of the novel, he defines himself chiefly in relation to Zosima and takes the role of the elder's defender and protégé, which results in an unconscious self-gratification. However, the removal of the elder exposes Alyosha to a realization that he must stand on his own and embrace his faults and weaknesses, which is evident in his gentle and mature conduct throughout the remainder of the novel.

As their perceptions of themselves and community have changed, Alyosha and Dorothea must then decide how their roles now differ. Alyosha clearly is evolving into another Zosima at the end of the novel, his impassioned speech to the schoolboys echoing the exhortation of the dying Zosima to love and labor ceaselessly: "Ah, dear friends, do not be afraid of life! How good life is when you do something good and rightful!" (776). While Alyosha seems to be more of an influential presence, compared with Dorothea who sinks into obscurity in the eyes of her community, Alyosha's immediate fate after the tragic events of the trial and funeral is unclear, since he intends to leave the town (774). He no longer admits the same fears and desires to prevent the suffering of others as he did at the beginning of the novel. The disaster has already come to pass, and Alyosha no longer has the choice to run from the situation back to the monastery. After the scene where he symbolically kisses the earth, "watering it with his tears" (362), he continues to act as a mediator for his brothers, but accepts that there can be no easy solution to their troubles. His clearer vision of what he can and cannot change causes him to focus more attention on Kolya and the schoolboys who once hated the sick boy, Ilyushecka.

Within their lives, Alyosha leaves an active and lasting impression, but at the end admits he must leave them and continue wherever he feels called. In contrast to Dorothea, Alyosha's life involves constant motion, so that he can plant seeds of hope in as many people as possible, instead of staying rooted and tending one bit of earth. However, their transformations are similar in that they both have renounced the unrealistic expectations that they had placed upon themselves. Alyosha, though, must focus on the eternal outcomes of his actions instead of temporal comfort and contentment.

Even in the epilogue, Dorothea's realization of her own desires and view of others seem complete, but her own role in relation to the needs of the community still seems a point that she has not fully resolved. Until her conversation with Lydgate, Dorothea is perplexed and frustrated by her inability to know or decide what can best be done with her money. She must submit to the oversight of her uncle and Sir James in how she may realistically carry out her plans for cottages, which turn out to be too expensive for her means. Dorothea's final reflections seem more an defeated admission of her inability to really do what she likes, which is part of her rationalization for marrying Ladislaw. Her sister Celia says, "And then there are all your plans! You never can have thought of that. James would have taken any trouble for you, and you might have gone on all your life doing what you liked" (871), to which Dorothea replies, "On the contrary, dear . . . I never could do anything that I liked. I have never carried out any plan yet" (871). Celia and perhaps the cynical reader interpret Dorothea's decision to marry Ladislaw as yet another desire to make her life difficult and uncomfortable. It would indeed be cynical to believe that Dorothea was making the same mistake she made with Casaubon after all her moral development. However, Dorothea's self-knowledge of herself as a person who "might have done something better, if I had been better" (872) works to change her goals from the impossible and never

accomplished to the small but personally satisfying quiet life of only small acts of kindness. She has become a small, seemingly insignificant brick in the greater structure of community, which should only appear a failure to a reader who like Dorothea at the beginning of the novel only sees merit in great and celebrated acts of magnanimity.

The concept of marriage in each novel acts as a final example of how each author's vision ultimately differs in the working out of community. Both novels deal extensively with the idea of marriage, but *Middlemarch* actually shows what marriage realistically looks like. While there is much talk of marriage in *The Brothers Karamazov* with Dmitri's engagement to Katerina, the threat of his marrying Grushenka, and Alyosha's immature but sincere courtship of Lise, no one actually marries in the narrative of the story, defying Zosima's command that Alyosha should go out into the world and marry. While one reason could be the conventions of genre—British novels tended to follow the marriage plot, while their Russian counterparts had more somber endings—two different epistemologies seem to be at work in these novels that might be influenced by but go beyond the context of culture and genre. Both novelists are creating a picture of community that is both particular and universal, beautiful but infused with everyday life; however, Eliot intimates that the fruit of toil and effort will slowly be seen in reality and is continually evolving on earth. Therefore, when Dorothea learns to correct her vision of art and community through the help of her present mentor, Ladislav, she is able to experience marriage and the present joy, which to a small degree represents those small events that aid the growing improvement of the world. Dorothea has two characters that represent her dualistic nature: Casaubon is the representation of her idealism and systemization, while her relationship with Ladislav teaches her to adjust her vision and be content with a smaller portion. Alyosha, on the other hand, significantly does not have two characters that mark his progression.

Zosima is simultaneously his inspiration and downfall. The living Zosima teaches Alyosha the principles of “active love,” but while he lives, Zosima serves more as a stumbling block for Alyosha’s zealous nature. The dead Zosima, who appears to Alyosha in a glorified state, becomes the catalyst that pushes him toward a more balanced view of community. In other words, Alyosha can only become like Zosima once the other one has passed on, rendering the need for earthly marriage and communion not the ultimate focus for Alyosha. His only hope for marriage is frustrated when Lise becomes insane through the influence of Ivan. Alyosha is denied an earthly union, but he has hope in the central vision of the novel of the marriage ceremony at Cana. This mystical, otherworldly union is the only sure marriage that will take place in the novel, but it is not a temporal union. Marriage acts as an image of each novel’s concept of community. The marriage of Will and Dorothea in *Middlemarch* is the material and immediate outworking of the protagonist’s choice. Alyosha has a certain hope of communion that must, nevertheless, be deferred to some point outside of time itself. His journey as the novel’s protagonist ends with a funeral where he rouses his young protégés to never forget or cease loving each other (772-76). His love, like Zosima’s, has diffused and scattered among the inhabitants of his community, whereas Dorothea finds a more focused satisfaction in her love and influence as a mother.

Conclusion

Dostoevsky and Eliot bring important perspectives to the problem of community in literature and society. They both wanted to see their respective cultures grow toward a correct view of community, though the means by which each believed this could be accomplished were opposed. While both novels show the need for balance and an acceptance of present reality, Eliot and many writers who would follow believed there was no remedy to supplement reality apart

from humanity's efforts. If humanity, through the efforts of private individuals, could not evolve, civilization would never move forward. However, many after Eliot did not share her optimism, and modern and then post-modern literature despaired of achieving harmony through Eliot's man-centered solution. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, was looking backward instead of forward to the mysticism of a past and communion with the earth that he feared society was losing as men constantly looked forward to human progress. His doctrine of faith and hope that one's efforts to create true community would come to fruition in a later life went unheeded by many of his countrymen and the rest of Europe. Dostoevsky and Eliot bring incredible insight into where society was and where it could go at the close of the nineteenth century. Both put forward a difficult proposition of accepting reality, forgetting one's own needs for the sake of others, and tirelessly working toward the goal of social harmony. Eliot, however, offers no hope that the individual will ever see this social harmony. Instead one must be content in believing it will happen and living with the present, a solution that she perhaps knew was not completely satisfactory but the only one she could rationally offer. Dostoevsky, subjugating reason to faith, clings to hope in a second life in which each individual may participate in seeing his actions validated by rational awareness instead of faith. This faith, he maintains, is the only honest way to live a moral life. In the end, though reasoning and faith are both important aspects of consciousness, one must eventually choose to subjugate one to the other in order to create a meaningful vision of community, which is what separates Dostoevsky and Eliot.

Dostoevsky and Eliot's views of community ultimately are reflected in how they connect to a community of readers. Eliot's narrative style might at first seem more accessible based on the fluid way she weaves her storylines together. Each thread in her web connects to another and each is tied of in a satisfactory manner that leaves no question in the reader's mind about what

happens to that character or family. One can literally see the way that communities are formed through the relationships that Eliot portrays in her town. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, leaves the reader with many questions concerning his characters and might even seem alienating with his fantastic subject matter and sometimes fragmented narrative that never completely resolves the stories of some characters. Both of these approaches, I argue, come as a result of the authors' worldviews. Eliot performs the work of interpretation and ordering community for the reader. She supplies the gaps in outward reality by relating the motives and thoughts that result from each character's decision. Each action is so carefully explained that the reader does not have to make sense of the narrative because in Eliot's view of reality both the world of her readers and the world of the novel are ordered by a set of laws and function within the universe that cannot change unless the novelist deliberately tries to transcend mankind's limitations by making clear the unseen connections in human relations. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, leaves many plots unresolved and perhaps a sense of alienation between the reader and character's because he wants to the reader to seek resolution. He shows a picture of isolation at its worst, but leaves it in the reader's hands to imagine how this problem can be solved. Unlike Eliot's somewhat deterministic view of matter and human actions, Dostoevsky shows more faith in his reader's will to transcend their states without his authorial intervention. Another factor in their choices might be that Eliot sees her imagined world as perhaps the only step one can realistically take toward aiding the evolution of society, whereas Dostoevsky has faith in other means beyond mere fiction of finding regeneration for individuals and community.

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