

**Title** – Ivan and his Doubles: The Failure of Intellect in *The Brothers Karamazov*

**Program of Study** – English

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to explore Dostoevsky's theodicy in *The Brothers Karamazov*, including key critical commentary that enhances an understanding of the text. One of the novel's title characters, Ivan, embodies the emerging spirit of intellectualism and freethinking in nineteenth-century Europe. He confronts the Christian concept of God in two famous speeches. First, Ivan's "Rebellion" epitomizes the problem of evil by asking why an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God allows earthy atrocities. Second, Ivan's "Grand Inquisitor" rejects the moral freedom given to men, reasoning that it is too great a burden for mankind to bear. These arguments remain relevant in theological and apologetic debate today. Dostoevsky's internal rebuttal to Ivan's arguments, then, offers a rich and multi-faceted approach to overcoming present-day gripes with Christian faith and faith in general. Research includes two prongs: an intimate study of the text of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and a broad assessment of critical interpretations of said text. The former details explicit interactions with Ivan's argumentation in the narrative, such as incredulity from his brother Alyosha and praise from his lackey Smerdyakov. The latter attends to the narrative's implicit rebuttals to Ivan—especially through parallelism, foils, and dramatic irony—which critics extrapolate into more formal arguments against a spirit of secularity. This critical survey shows how Dostoevsky, without creating a

straw-man for intellectualism, deconstructs Ivan's arguments comprehensively. The novel strikes artful balance of refutation and subversion. As Ivan's prototypical skepticism persists to this day, this research serves both as a marker to show how well Dostoevsky's dialogic theodicy has aged, and as an invitation future Christians and skeptics alike into new dialogue.