

Philosophy of Literature

Final Paper

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In the course of his monologue to Alyosha, two things become clear: firstly, that Ivan fails to reconcile the notion of human free will with the idea of God's intervention, and forgets that God created humans endowed with a free will. Secondly, that humans are not worthy of this free will, because they will choose to inflict suffering. Indeed, he seems to despise the idea of free will, as seen in the story of the Inquisitor, who seems to regard freedom as "the spirit of self-destruction and non-existence." (The Grand Inquisitor, p. 24)

Ivan regards freedom as the downfall of man, and the source of suffering, not as the endowed gift of God; his belief that grown-ups give in to the demon within is because they choose to do so, and thus man is inherently doomed to suffer, because of this choice to succumb to their inherent base instincts of wanting to inflict suffering upon others. In this way, Ivan also rejects the theological belief that man is created in God's image and likeness, because, according to him, man is not inherently good: because he *chooses* to not be good.

He believes children to be less deserving of suffering than grown-ups. His partiality to children stems from the belief that children are unaware of the choice to and thus incapable of committing evil, unaware of the metaphor to "pick the apple" from the tree of good and evil. Their innocence of this choice makes them particularly undeserving of any suffering, in Ivan's mind, and the fact that so many children are subject to the atrocities of grown-ups only serves to support his belief that men are only capable of being wicked.

By focusing upon the sufferings of children, Ivan may possibly be attempting to better manage his grief over the suffering of all humanity; he does not want to be overwhelmed by despair. "Of the other tears of humanity with which the Earth is soaked from its crust to its center, I will say nothing." (*The Grand Inquisitor*, p.14) He clings to the idea of Euclidian understanding to give himself a sense that not all is absurd in the world, and that a harmony can exist between the idea of a God and the suffering of children.

Ivan is an unabashed misanthropist: hateful of because he considers them to be base creatures. This contradicts the Christian theological that man is created in God's likeness, "I think if the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he created him in his own image and likeness." (*The Grand Inquisitor*, p. 9) By attributing man as being ruled by these devilish instincts, Ivan also dismisses the idea that man can be ruled by reason and intellect; an understandable line of logic for him, when taking into account the fact that he is mostly an atheist.

Nonetheless, he demands justice from some greater power, saying that "I must know just...not justice in some remote infinite time and space, but here on Earth" (*The Grand Inquisitor*, p.14). He acknowledges that is also pointless, for the suffering of children still will have occurred, and that vengeance, "hell for the oppressors," would do the children no good, as they were already dispatched from the world knowing the greatest of pain. He finds a different kind of absurdity in this, a lack of harmony in the idea of avenging suffering and death of those children, because he desires that their suffering never occurred in the first place. Only by their suffering never happening could he see a harmony in the universe, to match with his Euclidian understanding of what God is supposed to be.

The story of the Inquisitor is a fantastical retelling of the trial of a single man being tried for his atrocities committed against humanity, immediately condemned to burn at stake. The Inquisitor's statement "people are more persuaded than ever that they have perfect freedom, yet they have brought their freedom to us and laid it at our feet. But that has been our doing." (The Grand Inquisitor, p.24) In saying that, Ivan seems to imply that the trial of the condemned is stripping away the freedom of the person, that "they have at last vanquished freedom" (The Grand Inquisitor, p. 24) The story of the Grand Inquisitor is Ivan's personal utopia: a world in which men allow their freedom to be bought for bread, and for an idol to worship: contentment in being taken care of and being apart of something in exchange for their freedom. "In the end, they will lay their freedom at our feet and say 'make us your slaves, but feed us.'" (The Grand Inquisitor, p.26)

The Inquisitor seems to hope that men will be as children: easily controlled and dependent upon the bread they are given. In this way, they are not as grown-ups, who have knowledge of the metaphorical apple, the choice between good and evil; adults who also possess the capabilities and power to inflict suffering upon their fellow human being. The Inquisitor constantly acknowledges that people with awareness of such a choice will consistently want that freedom to choose, the freedom to rebel, even at the cost of their happiness.

The character of the Inquisitor, however, is not ultimately free from human failings. As Alyosha points out that "it's a simple lust for power, for filthy earthly gain, for domination, something like universal serfdom with them as masters-that's all they stand for." (The Grand Inquisitor, p.34) Even when trying to do good in the world, the person forcing the rest of humanity towards heaven is guilty of the sin of pride. He is utterly incapable of realizing that free will is in fact, a

gift from God, and that those human freedoms which he attributes to be the source of evil can also be a source of good. "God made man from the beginning, and left him in hand of his own counsel; that is free will. (1) Augustine also attribute the will to reasoning, not base instinct, saing that "the will is higher than the intellect, and can move it...because the intellect understands that the will wills, and will wills the intellect to understand."(2) This contradicts Ivan's belief that the will is a *source* of base instinct; rather, the will should be viewed as a source of intellect, when actions are chosen according to reason. For those who believe in God and the goodness of human beings, such choices could be made with the aid of grace.

In conclusion, according to Ivan's poem, no human can be free of any wrongdoing.

Men do not, according to Ivan, deserve freedom: when given a choice, they do nothing but abuse the freedom endowed upon them by God His discourse focuses completely upon the evils that men are capable of doing, and says nearly nothing of the good. Even when discussing the sacrifice of Christ, he does not think to discuss the acts of sacrifice a man can perform to save their fellow human being, or the kindness . His misanthropy shapes the fatalistic ideas that men are doomed to be evil, to choose evil. "And man has actually invented God; the marvel that such an idea, the idea of the necessity of God, could enter the head of such a savage, vicious beast such as man." (The Grand Inquisitor, p.4)

