

# Nietzsche, Cosmodicy, and the Sainly Ideal

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## Abstract

In this essay I examine Nietzsche's shifting understanding of the saintly ideal with an aim to bringing out its philosophical importance, particularly with respect to what I call the problem of 'cosmodicy', i.e., the problem of justifying life in the world as worthwhile in light of the prevalent reality of suffering. In his early account Nietzsche understood the saint as embodying the supreme achievement of a self-transcending 'feeling of oneness and identity with all living things', while in his later account he viewed the saint as a representative of an unhealthy, life-denying 'ascetic ideal'. This shift, I contend, is due in large part to Nietzsche's development of an 'ethic of power' as part of his turn against Schopenhauer's ethic of compassion, which needs to be seen in light of his ongoing effort to articulate and defend an adequate cosmodicy. My ultimate aim in this essay is to read the earlier Nietzsche against the later Nietzsche – with the help of Dostoevsky's novelistic depiction of the saintly ideal – and to suggest that when properly articulated the saintly ideal is able to provide a more adequate cosmodicy than that which is offered in Nietzsche's ethic of power.

## Introduction

The topic of the significance of the figure of the 'saint', who over the course of history has often stood as an ideal for human existence, is one that preoccupied Nietzsche throughout his writings. Yet, his account of the saintly ideal has received surprisingly little attention in the scholarly literature.<sup>1</sup> It will be my task in this essay to

<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche's account of the 'ascetic ideal' has received much more attention in the scholarly literature. Although in his later philosophy Nietzsche understands the saint as a representative of the ascetic ideal, nevertheless, this literature does not account for the shift that took place in Nietzsche's understanding of the saintly ideal and its significance. On the 'ascetic ideal' see: Ivan Soll, 'Nietzsche on Cruelty, Asceticism, and the Failure of Hedonism', *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chs 8 & 13; Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*. New York: Routledge, 2002), chs 7 & 8. One of the few instances in which

examine Nietzsche's understanding of the saintly ideal with an aim to bringing out its philosophical importance, particularly with respect to what I call the problem of 'cosmodicy', i.e., the problem of justifying life in the world as worthwhile in light of the prevalent reality of suffering.<sup>2</sup>

For those familiar with Nietzsche's writings it is known that in his early work 'Schopenhauer as Educator', the third of his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche regarded the figure of the saint, along with the philosopher and the artist, as one of the highest human exemplars towards which culture should aspire. Although it is acknowledged – e.g., by Walter Kaufmann – that Nietzsche later removed the figure of the saint from this triumvirate of human exemplars, what has been overlooked is the fact that his understanding of the saint itself underwent change.<sup>3</sup> In his early account Nietzsche understood the saint as

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Nietzsche's view of the saint has been explicitly addressed in William James's lectures on 'The Value of Saintliness' in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004 [1902]), 322–7), but unfortunately this fails to give evidence of any serious engagement with Nietzsche's writings and instead it depends in large part upon popular caricatures. Walter Kaufmann nicely sums up the failure of James's engagement with Nietzsche on the topic of the value of saintliness in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974 [1882/1887]), §373, n. 135.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow the term 'cosmodicy' from Charles Guignon, who uses it to describe the problem put forward by Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* ('Introduction', *The Grand Inquisitor: with related chapters from The Brothers Karamazov* [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993], xxx). Ivan forcefully presents the problem of evil and suffering for theists and non-theists alike and then says he hands back his 'ticket' to life in the world. One might also recall here the well-known remarks at the beginning of Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*: 'There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest [...] comes afterwards' (*The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien [New York: Vintage, 1991 (1942)], 3).

<sup>3</sup> See Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 175, 196, 252, 285, 322. Although Kaufmann notes that in Nietzsche's later works the 'saint has dropped out of the picture' and 'those who achieve self-perfection' have 'taken the place of the saint' as human exemplars, along with the philosopher and the artist, nowhere does he mention any shift in his understanding of the saint (285, 322). Instead, he only

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embodying the supreme achievement of a self-transcending ‘feeling of oneness and identity with all living things’, while in his later account he viewed the saint as a representative of an unhealthy, life-denying ‘ascetic ideal’. This shift, I contend, is due in large part to Nietzsche’s development of an ‘ethic of power’ as part of his turn against Schopenhauer’s ethic of compassion, which needs to be seen in light of his ongoing effort to articulate and defend an adequate cosmodycy. My ultimate aim in this essay is to read the earlier Nietzsche against the later Nietzsche – with the help of Dostoevsky’s novelistic depiction of the saintly ideal – and to suggest that when properly articulated the saintly ideal is able to provide a more adequate cosmodycy than that which is offered in Nietzsche’s ethic of power. However, we must first begin by considering in more detail Nietzsche’s earlier and later accounts of the saintly ideal.

### Cosmodycy and the Sainly Ideal

In ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’ Nietzsche is centrally concerned with addressing the problem of cosmodycy, as indeed he is throughout much of his work. In other words, he is concerned with the question of how our life in the world is to be *justified* as worthwhile in light of the prevalent reality of suffering.<sup>4</sup> That life should *require* justification is only the case if life presents itself to us as *prima facie* problematic with respect to its worthwhileness. By taking extensive suffering as the main problematic feature of life in light of which justification is required, Nietzsche is following Schopenhauer. For Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, this problem becomes especially acute for those ‘good Europeans’, like themselves, who no longer regard as tenable any religious interpretation of the world as purposefully ordered according to ‘the goodness and governance of a god’.<sup>5</sup> As both realize, even if one no longer regards theodicy as viable, this still leaves the

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acknowledges Nietzsche’s later account of the saint in terms of ascetic self-mastery, which he also (misleadingly) presents as encompassing Nietzsche’s earlier account of the saint as well (252). Nowhere does Kaufmann cite Nietzsche’s early description of the saint in ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’ as embodying the supreme achievement of a self-transcending ‘feeling of oneness and identity with all living things’.

<sup>4</sup> The awareness of extensive suffering, we might say, is part of a general sense that the world is deeply ‘out of joint’.

<sup>5</sup> *The Gay Science*, §357.

problem of ‘cosmodicy’ (though neither uses this term). Indeed, theodicy is only the most historically dominant form in which the problem of cosmodicy has been addressed. Schopenhauer of course did not think that life could be justified given his view of the all-encompassing reality of suffering due to the insatiable and contradictory nature of the will and thus he advocated the resignation of the ‘will to life’. Nietzsche, for his part, sought to overcome Schopenhauer’s pessimism (i.e., ‘nihilism’) through providing a perspective according to which one could affirm all of life, including suffering. ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’ represents one of his most significant early attempts (along with *The Birth of Tragedy*) to overcome Schopenhauer’s pessimism and provide a justification for human existence.

According to Nietzsche in ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, what is needed in order to justify our existence is to provide suffering with a higher purpose or meaning sufficient to make life *worth* living. However, doing so requires that human beings transcend their animality, since for animals as mere animals all suffering must remain ‘senseless suffering’ without any higher significance.<sup>6</sup> What is distinctive about being human is precisely the capacity to transcend our animality and ‘turn the thorn of suffering against itself’ by providing it with a higher sense of significance.<sup>7</sup> Above all, Nietzsche

<sup>6</sup> *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1873–1876]), 157. Earlier in the second of the *Untimely Mediations* Nietzsche remarks: ‘If [...] the doctrine of sovereign becoming, of the fluidity of all concepts, types and species, of the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal – *doctrines which I consider true but deadly* – are thrust upon the people for another generation with the rage for instruction that has by now become normal, no one should be surprised if the people perishes of petty egoism, ossification and greed, falls apart and ceases to be a people; in its place systems of individualist egoism, brotherhoods for the rapacious exploitation of the non-brothers, and similar creations of utilitarian vulgarity may perhaps appear in the arena of the future’ (112–3; my emphasis). Walter Kaufmann comments: ‘Nietzsche was aroused from his dogmatic slumber by Darwin, as Kant had been by Hume a century earlier; and again it was a question of creating a new picture of man in reply to the “true but deadly” nihilism from beyond the Channel’ (*Nietzsche*, 167; see also 136–7, 150–2, 161, 175, 246, 285, 329, where Kaufmann discusses the significance of Darwin for Nietzsche’s thought).

<sup>7</sup> *Untimely Meditations*, 157. Note that it is also distinctive of human life – as contrasted with the life form of non-human animals – that we are the kind of beings for whom the problem of cosmodicy arises. The deep

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claims, this higher sense of significance is provided by those *true* human beings who ‘are no longer animal’: viz., the philosopher, the artist, and the saint.<sup>8</sup> These three figures stand as the highest human exemplars precisely because of the ways in which they are able to utilize suffering for the sake of great achievements that go far beyond what is possible for non-human animals. In doing so they provide suffering with a ‘higher significance’ as well as a perspective from which life in the world can be justified. Thus Nietzsche contends: ‘It is the fundamental idea of *culture*, insofar as it sets for each one of us but one task: *to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist and the saint within us and without us and thereby to work at the perfecting of nature*’.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, he says: ‘Mankind must work continually at the production of individual great men – that and nothing else is its task. [...] How can your life, the individual life, receive the highest value, the deepest significance? [...] Certainly only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable exemplars’.<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that there is much in these remarks that prefigures Nietzsche’s later philosophy, especially his statements about the ‘overman’ (*Übermensch*) in the prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The noticeable difference is the inclusion of the saint, along with the philosopher and the artist, as one of the highest human exemplars. In a remarkable passage from ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, Nietzsche describes his understanding of the saint in the following terms:

And so nature at last needs the saint, in whom the ego is completely melted away and whose life of suffering is no longer felt as his own life – or is hardly so felt – but as a profound feeling of oneness and identity with all living things: the saint in whom there appears that miracle of transformation which the game of becoming never hits upon, that final and supreme becoming-human after which all nature presses and urges for its redemption from itself. It is incontestable that we are all related and allied to the saint, just as we are related to the

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human need to address this problem can be regarded as indicative of our distinctive nature as ‘meaning-seeking animals’.

<sup>8</sup> *Untimely Meditations*, 159. Traditionally these three figures are seen as representatives of the human pursuit of truth (the philosopher), beauty (the artist), and goodness (the saint).

<sup>9</sup> *Untimely Meditations*, 160.

<sup>10</sup> *Untimely Meditations*, 161–2.

philosopher and artist; there are moments and as it were bright sparks of the fire of love in whose light we cease to understand the word 'I', there lies something beyond our being which at these moments moves across into it, and we are thus possessed of a heartfelt longing for bridges between here and there.<sup>11</sup>

Although there are no specific 'religious' references here, Nietzsche's understanding of the saint in this passage is in fact similar in spirit to the kind of understanding of the saintly ideal that we find in many of the great religious traditions: i.e., the understanding of the saint as embodying the supreme achievement of the religious life in *self-transcending communion with all being*.<sup>12</sup> We also find here the apparent influence of Schopenhauer's moral ideal of 'compassion'. According to Schopenhauer, compassion 'presupposes that to a certain extent I have identified myself with the other man, and in consequence the barrier between the ego and the non-ego is for the moment abolished'.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for the compassionate person 'others are not non-ego for him, but an "I once more"'.<sup>14</sup> Lastly, it is striking that Nietzsche describes the saintly ideal as the 'final and supreme

<sup>11</sup> *Untimely Meditations*, 160–1; cf. *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000 [1872]), 36–40.

<sup>12</sup> In his discussion of 'Saintliness' in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James writes: 'the best fruits of religious experience are the best things that history has to show. They have always been esteemed so; here if anywhere is the genuinely strenuous life; and to call to mind a succession of such examples [...] is to feel encouraged and uplifted and washed in better moral air. The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown for religious ideals' (230). James goes on to identify 'saintliness' as the 'collective name for the ripe fruits of religion in a character', which has the following characteristics: (1) a 'feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests; and a conviction, not merely intellectual, but as it were sensible, of the existence of an Ideal Power'; (2) a 'sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life, and a willing self-surrender to its control'; (3) an 'immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down'; and (4) a 'shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections, towards "yes, yes," and away from "no," where the claims of the non-ego are concerned' (239–40). In short, saintliness represents the heights of human achievement in self-transcending love or concern for others.

<sup>13</sup> *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1995 [1840]), 166.

<sup>14</sup> *On the Basis of Morality*, 211.

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becoming-human after which all nature presses and urges for its redemption from itself', which appears to suggest that the saint transcends even the philosopher and the artist in importance.<sup>15</sup>

This passage becomes all the more remarkable once we consider the contrast with Nietzsche's later understanding of the saint after he had removed this figure from his earlier triumvirate of human exemplars. The following passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* exemplifies Nietzsche's later understanding of the saint. He remarks:

So far the most powerful human beings have still bowed worshipfully before the saint as the riddle of self-conquest and deliberate final renunciation. Why did they bow? In him – and as it were behind the question mark of his fragile and miserable appearance – they sensed the superior force that sought to test itself in such conquest, the strength of the will in which they recognized and honored their own strength and delight in dominion: they honored something in themselves when they honored the saint. Moreover, the sight of the saint awakened a suspicion in them: such an enormity of denial, of anti-nature will not have been desired for nothing, they said to and asked themselves. There may be a reason for it, some very great danger about which the ascetic, thanks to his secret comforters and visitors, might have inside information. In short, the powerful of the world learned a new fear before him; they sensed a new power, a strange, as yet unconquered enemy – it was the “will to power” that made them stop before the saint.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In *The Birth of Tragedy* the emphasis is placed on the role of the artist: 'it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified' (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 52; cf. 35, 141). However, there are passages that point towards the saintly ideal as well; e.g., Nietzsche writes: 'Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man. [...] Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him, as if the veil of *māyā* had been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity' (37; cf. 38, 40).

<sup>16</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000 [1886]), §51. Other passages that exemplify Nietzsche's later understanding of the saint include: *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986 [1878–1879]), §§136–44; *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1881]), §14,

We can observe here that Nietzsche no longer views the saint as one of the highest human exemplars who justifies life through the achievement of a self-transcending ‘feeling of oneness and identity with all living things’. Instead, the saint, like the figure of the ‘ascetic priest’ in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, is now regarded as an embodiment of an unhealthy, life-denying ‘ascetic ideal’.

In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche describes this ‘ascetic ideal’ as fundamentally concerned with the task of providing meaning for suffering. But rather than doing so in a way that justifies human existence, it brings ‘fresh suffering with it, deeper, more inward, more poisonous, more life-destructive suffering’.<sup>17</sup> This is because the ascetic ideal interprets all suffering as just punishment for sin, which gives rise to feelings of guilt and the desire to deny our instinctual drives to life, such as sensuality, pride, lust to rule, avarice, and vengefulness – all of which are expressed in the fundamental instinct of the ‘will to power’.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the ascetic ideal looks for redemption from suffering either in the annihilation of the ego (as in Buddhism) or in another life (as in Christianity). For Nietzsche, these two modes of ‘redemption’ from suffering in fact amount to the same thing: ‘the desire for *unio mystica* with God is the desire of the Buddhist for nothingness, Nirvana – and no more!’<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in the case of the saint, the ascetic ideal is simply ‘a pretext for hibernation, [...] their repose in nothingness (“God”), their form of madness’.<sup>20</sup> He concludes then that the meaning of the ascetic ideal is that ‘man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will’.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the ascetic ideal is essentially a desire for power over the conditions of life itself, which is the direction the will to power takes in those individuals who are not

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§113, §294; *The Gay Science*, §150; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1995 [1883–1885]), ‘Prologue’ §2, IV ‘On the Higher Man’ §13; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §47, §50, §271; *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage, 1967 [1887]), III, §1; *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1954 [1888]), ‘Morality as Anti-Nature’ §4; *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968 [1901]), §359.

<sup>17</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, §28.

<sup>18</sup> See *Beyond Good and Evil*, §23; *Twilight of the Idols*, ‘Morality as Anti-Nature’ §1; *On the Genealogy of the Morals*, II, §18.

<sup>19</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I, §6; cf. III, §17.

<sup>20</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, §1.

<sup>21</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, §28.



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healthy or powerful enough to affirm all of life, including suffering as a precondition for growth in the will to power.<sup>22</sup>

With this stark contrast in place between Nietzsche's earlier and later understandings of the saint, we must now turn to examine the reasons for this shift.

### Nietzsche *contra* Schopenhauer

The shift in Nietzsche's understanding of the saint can be observed starting from *Human, All Too Human*, which was published four years after 'Schopenhauer as Educator'.<sup>23</sup> It is significant that it was starting with this work that Nietzsche also began his campaign against Schopenhauer's morality of compassion (or 'pity', as the German word *Mitleid* is often translated in Nietzsche's works). This is significant precisely because of the apparent influence of Schopenhauer's ideal of compassion on Nietzsche's earlier account of the saint. In the preface to the *Genealogy* Nietzsche describes his campaign against Schopenhauer's morality of compassion starting from *Human, All Too Human* and onwards as follows:

What was at stake was the *value* of morality – and over this I had to come to terms almost exclusively with my great teacher Schopenhauer [...]. What was especially at stake was the value of the "unegoistic," the instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, which Schopenhauer had gilded, deified, and projected into a beyond for so long that at last they became for him "value-in-itself," on the basis of which he *said No* to life and to himself.<sup>24</sup>

The reference here to Schopenhauer projecting the value of the 'unegoistic' (i.e., 'selflessness') into a 'beyond' such that it had 'value-in-itself' alludes to his attempt to account for the reality and value of 'selfless' compassion for others in a world otherwise driven by egoistic desires. Schopenhauer did so by positing a metaphysical monism with the help of the resources of Kantian epistemology: i.e., he claimed that individuality is only an appearance in the 'phenomenal' realm of space and time, whereas in the 'noumenal' realm of the 'thing-in-itself' all beings are a manifestation of a single 'blindly striving will'.<sup>25</sup> Compassion is possible for a person then on the

<sup>22</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, §11.

<sup>23</sup> See *Human, All Too Human*, §§136–44.

<sup>24</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'Preface' §5.

<sup>25</sup> Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, 'Introduction', in *Daybreak*, xix.

basis of ‘recognizing in *another* his own self, his own true inner nature’.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, it is precisely because in compassion we realize our true numerical identity with others in the noumenal realm of the ‘thing-in-itself’ that compassion can be considered to have ‘value-in-itself’.

For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer’s devaluation of the individual self and the natural world in favor of a realm ‘beyond’ the natural world where the ego is annihilated in the ‘metaphysical identity’ of all being essentially amounts to saying ‘no’ to life. In other words, Schopenhauer’s morality of compassion is simply a form of nihilism, i.e., a ‘new Buddhism’.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, in his campaign against the morality of compassion, starting in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche sought to show how so-called ‘selfless’ motives of compassion could be accounted for without appealing to any metaphysical realm beyond the natural world. In doing so he also hoped to show how these so-called ‘selfless’ motives are actually driven by ‘ulterior motives’ that are egoistic, or ‘human, all too human’.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, Nietzsche would account for these ‘all too human’ or egoistic motives in terms of his doctrine of the will to power, which seeks to explain ‘our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of *one* basic form of will – namely of the will to power’.<sup>29</sup> In short, the fundamental, all-encompassing instinctual drive of each individual human life is the continual striving for greater power or ‘empowerment’ through *overcoming* limitations or resistances.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *On the Basis of Morality*, 209.

<sup>27</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ‘Preface’ §5.

<sup>28</sup> Clark and Leiter, ‘Introduction’, xxii; see *Human, All Too Human*, §103.

<sup>29</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil*, §36.

<sup>30</sup> See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I ‘On the Thousand and One Goals’, II ‘On Self-Overcoming’; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §225, §259; *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I, §13; *The Antichrist*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1954 [1888]), §2; *The Will to Power*, §699, §702. I am indebted here to Bernard Reginster’s interpretation of the doctrine of the will to power in *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), ch. 3. In this essay I am focusing on the ‘psychological’ aspect of this doctrine, which is intended to provide a unified account of human motivation. However, some of Nietzsche’s texts suggest a wider ‘metaphysical’ or ‘ontological’ application of this doctrine. For instance, in a well-known passage from *The Will to Power* he says: ‘*This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!’ (*The Will to Power*, §1067). This seems to suggest a

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The resistances to be overcome here can be something internal to the agent, such as a psychological or motivational inhibition (e.g., fear), or something external to the agent, such as factors in one's physical and social environments.<sup>31</sup> Overcoming internal resistances can take the form of self-mastery (hence the role of the will to power in Nietzsche's account of the ascetic ideal), whereas overcoming external resistances can take the form of domination, control, exploitation, or appropriation. Nietzsche writes: 'life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation [...]. "Exploitation" does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the *essence*

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monistic metaphysic of some sort. The status of this metaphysical or ontological aspect of the doctrine has been a point of debate among scholars (see Maudemarie Clark, 'Nietzsche's Doctrines of the Will to Power', *Nietzsche* (eds) John Richardson and Brian Leiter [New York: Oxford University Press, 2001]; John Richardson, 'Nietzsche's Power Ontology', *Nietzsche* (eds) Richardson and Leiter; and Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, ch. 6); however, for the purposes of this essay I leave this issue aside and focus on the psychological aspect of the doctrine. As an account of human psychology, Nietzsche intends his doctrine of the will to power to supplant the doctrine of psychological hedonism, as can be seen in the following passage: 'Man does *not* seek pleasure and does not avoid displeasure [...]. [What] man wants, what every smallest part of a living organism wants, is an increase of power. Pleasure or displeasure follow from the striving after that; driven by that will it seeks resistance, it needs something that opposes it – Displeasure, as an obstacle to its will to power, is therefore a normal fact, the normal ingredient of every organic event; man does not avoid it, he is rather in continual need of it; every victory, every feeling of pleasure, every event, presupposes a resistance overcome' (*The Will to Power*, §702; cf. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, ch. 9). Establishing this doctrine is in fact vital for Nietzsche's attempt to justify life in the world – as will be seen shortly – since if he can show that suffering or displeasure is in fact an essential ingredient in achieving human fulfillment, then he can overcome Schopenhauer's pessimism (see *Beyond Good and Evil*, §225).

<sup>31</sup> I think Reginster convincingly shows that the fundamental instinct of the will to power 'has the structure of a *second-order desire*: it is a desire whose object includes (first-order) desire. It is, specifically, a desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of some determinate first-order desire' (*The Affirmation of Life*, 132). Common first-order desires mentioned by Nietzsche include sensual desire, avarice, lust to rule, vengefulness, desire to create, desire for self-esteem (i.e., pride), and so forth (see *Twilight of the Idols*, 'Morality as Anti-Nature' §1; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §23).

of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life'.<sup>32</sup>

On the basis of his doctrine of the will to power Nietzsche seeks to articulate an 'ethic of power', which he thinks is able to affirm life in the world as worthwhile, unlike Schopenhauer's morality of compassion. He writes: 'What is good? – Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? – Everything that is born of weakness. What is happiness? – The feeling that power is *growing*, that resistance is overcome'.<sup>33</sup> Such an ethic of power affirms suffering as part of a worthwhile life because it regards suffering as integral to the process of overcoming resistance and achieving greatness in the expression of the will to power (e.g., in artistic, athletic, or intellectual achievement).<sup>34</sup> Moreover, for Nietzsche, the greatest expression of the will to power is found in the ability to say 'yes' to all of life, including the prevalent reality of suffering.<sup>35</sup> In his account of the 'overman' in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – the individual who transcends the all-too-human or mediocre level of human achievement by achieving something truly great – we find an idealization of this ethic of power, which offers a rival ideal of self-transcendence to that of the saint.<sup>36</sup> Instead of self-transcendence in love or concern for others, we have here self-transcendence – or 'self-overcoming', as Nietzsche would put it – through continual growth in power, whereby one moves towards ever more enhanced forms of achievement in overcoming limitations or resistances.<sup>37</sup> For Nietzsche, this

<sup>32</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil*, §259. For most people this is obviously the more problematic aspect of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power as involving the overcoming of 'resistance'.

<sup>33</sup> *The Antichrist*, §2; cf. Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 176–84.

<sup>34</sup> See *Beyond Good and Evil*, §225.

<sup>35</sup> See *The Gay Science*, §276, §357; *Twilight of the Idols*, 'What I Owe to the Ancients' §5; *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage, 1967 [1888]), 'Why I am so Clever' §10, 'The Birth of Tragedy' §2.

<sup>36</sup> Here Nietzsche differs from Hume who also offers a critique of the ascetic ideal in his well-known comments about the 'monkish virtues' in his second *Enquiry*. Whereas Hume sought to replace religious aspirations with what he regarded as a self-sufficient life in pursuit of fame and fortune within polite, commercial society (conceived as a social order based on mutual benefit), Nietzsche offers an ideal of self-transcendence through power that goes beyond such a life and indeed calls it into question as a form of 'wretched contentment' (see *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 'Prologue' §§3–5).

<sup>37</sup> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 'Prologue' §§3–5, II 'On Self-Overcoming'.

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represents the ideal of a healthy, life-affirming expression of the will to power. As aforementioned, he believes that the will to power is operative in all of human life, including in the so-called 'selfless' motives of the morality of compassion. But in this latter case, he thinks that the will to power takes an unhealthy, life-denying form and thus represents a bad or inadequate expression of the will to power.

We can take the following passage from the *Genealogy* as an example of Nietzsche's method of interpreting so-called 'selfless' motives of concern for others as mere expressions of an individual's will to power:

[By] prescribing "love of neighbor," the ascetic priest prescribes fundamentally an excitement of the strongest, most life-affirming drive, even if in the most cautious doses – namely, of the *will to power*. The happiness of "slight superiority," involved in all doing good, being useful, helping, and rewarding, is the most effective means of consolation for the physiologically inhibited.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, such compassion or love of neighbor is essentially an expression of the will to power over others in those who are too weak to express such power in a more honest and direct manner. This is why the morality of compassion (*Mitleid*) is better rendered as the morality of 'pity' in translations of Nietzsche's writings since it involves a kind of looking down on another person, rather than a 'feeling-with' another person (as the word compassion suggests).

Nietzsche argues that to regard such pity or 'love of neighbor' as a moral ideal is in fact inimical to life understood as will to power. First of all, he thinks it is bad for the person pitied because it transgresses against his or her pride or self-esteem.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, he thinks it is bad for the pitier because it makes suffering contagious and has a 'depressing effect' on the fundamental instinct of life – viz., the will to power – such that we are deprived of our strength and vitality.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, he thinks that the morality of pity is an expression of a 'slave morality' in those who are too weak to honestly and directly express the will to power – unlike those who hold to the 'master morality' – and hence they do so indirectly through condescending pity and the ascetic ideal.<sup>41</sup> However, the problem is that these indirect expressions of the will to power are actually counter-productive to

<sup>38</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, §18.

<sup>39</sup> *The Gay Science*, §338; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II 'On the Pitying'.

<sup>40</sup> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II 'On the Pitying'; *The Antichrist*, §7.

<sup>41</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§259–60; *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *passim*.

realizing the fullest and most life-affirming expressions of the will to power. We have already seen how Nietzsche claims that the ascetic ideal seeks to deny our instinctual drives to life. In regard to the morality of pity, he sees it as putting forward an ideal of 'selflessness' in concern for others that stands opposed to the honest and direct expression of individual will to power. The ideal of selflessness enjoins a concern for the weak that distracts us from pursuing our own self-enhancement and from encouraging the development of strong and creative individuals who are capable of fully affirming life, including suffering, and who through their greatness in power can justify existence.<sup>42</sup>

Ultimately, Nietzsche regards the morality of pity as the 'practice of nihilism' as it expresses 'hostility to life'.<sup>43</sup> It seeks to do away with suffering, but since life is necessarily bound up with suffering, Nietzsche sees this as an attempt to do away with life itself. Suffering must be affirmed as a necessary part of growth in the will to power; only in this way can we achieve an adequate cosmody. <sup>44</sup> In one of his most chilling passages, Nietzsche goes so far as to say: 'Quite in general, pity crosses the law of development, which is the law of *selection*. It preserves what is ripe for destruction; it defends those who have been disinherited and condemned by life; and by the abundance of the failures of all kinds which it *keeps* alive, it gives life itself a gloomy and questionable aspect'.<sup>45</sup> We are here miles away from his earlier idealization of the saint. However, it is important to note that elsewhere in his later writings Nietzsche says that he is not opposed to all forms of pity and beneficence towards others, but to have value they must result from healthy expressions of the will to power or from an 'overflow' of strength.<sup>46</sup> Of course, this hardly

<sup>42</sup> See *The Gay Science*, §338; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I 'On the Love of Neighbor'; *The Antichrist*, §7.

<sup>43</sup> *The Antichrist*, §7.

<sup>44</sup> See Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*.

<sup>45</sup> *The Antichrist*, §7.

<sup>46</sup> In the noble and powerful individual, Nietzsche says, 'there is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow: the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power' (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §260; cf. *The Gay Science*, §13; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I 'On The Gift-Giving Virtue'). With regard to good pity, he writes: 'a man who has his wrath and his sword and to whom the weak, the suffering, the hard pressed, and the animals, too, like to come and belong by nature, in short a man who is by nature a *master* – when such a

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can be considered to represent an ideal of 'selflessness' since it is an expression of one's own power, which we have seen can also result in cruelty, domination, and exploitation of others.<sup>47</sup>

Now, given this critique of the value of 'selflessness' as life-denying, I believe we can see here an important reason why Nietzsche abandoned his earlier account of the saintly ideal as the achievement of a self-transcending 'feeling of oneness and identity with all living things': viz., even without accepting Schopenhauer's metaphysical monism, the saintly ideal appears too similar to Schopenhauer's ideal of 'selflessness', which is opposed to the will to power as the fundamental instinct of life. We might further assume that Nietzsche's growing opposition to religion also played a role in his reinterpretation and rejection of the saintly ideal, since clearly the 'saint' is a figure most commonly associated with religious worldviews, even though Nietzsche's earlier understanding of the saint contained no specific 'religious' references.

But we must now ask: is Nietzsche right to abandon the saintly ideal? I think he is not, at least when this ideal is properly understood. Indeed, I will argue that the saintly ideal can offer a better path of cosmodycy than that which is offered in Nietzsche's later work.

### The Nature of Love

In the foregoing we have seen that Nietzsche's rejection of the saintly ideal is predicated on his critique of Schopenhauer's morality of compassion. However, apart from Nietzsche's critique, I think we have reason to question Schopenhauer's account of compassion, which also provides reason for questioning Nietzsche's own understanding of compassion or 'love of neighbor' as well as the shift in his account of the saint. As we have observed, Schopenhauer attempts to account for the feeling of unity with others in compassion by positing a monistic metaphysic that denies both the value and reality of the

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man has pity, well, *this* pity has value. But what good is the pity of those who suffer. Or those who, worse, *preach* pity' (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §293; cf. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II 'On the Pitying'; *The Will to Power*, §367, §388). It is noteworthy that for Nietzsche there is nothing *about* the recipients themselves that makes them *worthy* of such beneficence (see *Beyond Good and Evil*, §60).

<sup>47</sup> See *The Gay Science*, §13; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I, 'On the Gift-Giving Virtue'; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §259; *The Will to Power*, §388.

individual self. In doing so he was motivated by his acceptance of a Kantian-esque view of the conflict between an individual's desire for his or her own happiness and the requirements of morality, which for Schopenhauer takes the form of an opposition between egoism and compassion, or between self-regarding and other-regarding concern, or finally, between selfishness and selflessness. Nietzsche, as we have seen, questions these dichotomies by arguing that all forms of so-called 'selfless' concern for others should be interpreted as in fact egoistic expressions of the will to power. However, I think that we can also question these dichotomies in a different way on the basis of what I believe is a more accurate understanding of the nature of 'self-transcendence' in love for others when this love is understood as a kind of interpersonal *communion*.

To achieve 'self-transcendence' in love for others, I contend, is *not* in fact a form of 'selflessness'; rather, it involves transcending a normatively 'lower', more enclosed mode of selfhood for the sake of a normatively 'higher', more *extended* mode of selfhood in communion with others. By the latter I mean the self that is attained by extending our sense of self through affective identification such that we intersubjectively include the being of others as a part of our own sense of 'self'.<sup>48</sup> This constitutes what might be called a 'we-self' or 'communal-self' in which we experience both the happiness and unhappiness of others as our own and thus we wish and pursue good for them as though for our own self. In this way the dichotomy between self-regarding and other-regarding concern is overcome, since there exists a shared form of happiness such that wishing and pursuing good for others can be considered as both self-regarding and other-regarding.<sup>49</sup>

Now, in saying that this communal-self attained through love of others is a normatively 'higher' mode of selfhood I mean to suggest that it also involves transcending a 'lower good' for the sake of a 'higher good'. In other words, we experience a greater sense of fulfillment or fullness of life in communion with others – who are seen as

<sup>48</sup> In other words, our sense of self is coextensive with that with which we identify.

<sup>49</sup> My account of love here is indebted to Aristotle's account of the friend as 'another self' in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (IV.4–9), Josiah Royce's account of the 'ideally extended self' in *The Problem of Christianity* (IX–X), and Aquinas's account of the 'love of friendship' in Questions 26–28 of the First Part of the Second Part of the *Summa Theologiae* (see especially Aquinas's discussion of the love of friendship in terms of 'benevolence' [q. 26, a. 4], 'union' [q. 28, a. 1], 'mutual indwelling' [q. 28, a. 2], and 'ecstasy' [q. 28, a. 3]).



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worthy of our love because of their human dignity and perhaps also because of other particular lovable qualities – than we would apart from it since such communion involves affectively including the being and happiness of others as part of our own sense of self and happiness. Thus, love for others is not based merely on commiseration and the desire for the alleviation of others' suffering, but more positively, it is above all based on the desire for fullness of life in communion with others.<sup>50</sup>

For both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche this understanding of the 'self' as intersubjectively extended in communion with others is not adequately recognized because each in his own way tends to presuppose an atomistic conception of the 'self', which makes 'self'-love something inherently narrow and therefore problematic in regard to understanding the motivation for other-regarding concern. Thus, Schopenhauer must presuppose a metaphysical monism in which there is numerical identity between persons in order to make sense of the motive for compassion. But this is unnecessary if we understand love for others as a kind of *communion*, which preserves the reality and value of the individual within the *intersubjective* union of love and the shared happiness it makes possible.<sup>51</sup> As we have seen, Nietzsche, for his part, attempts to account for the motive of other-regarding concern by interpreting such concern in terms of individual expressions of will to power or as the overflow of strength.<sup>52</sup> However, a key significance of Nietzsche's early

<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that communion is of course most fully realized when there is *mutual* love between persons, but we can speak of communion in any case where we affectively identify with the being and happiness of others.

<sup>51</sup> As the word 'communion' suggests, there is a 'co-union' with others such that there is both unity and difference.

<sup>52</sup> In general, Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power, understood as an individual's drive to overcome internal and external resistances, involves an atomistic or individualistic mode of being related to others. For instance, he contends that love, whether in the form of the 'love of neighbor' or sexual love, is basically the same instinct as avarice: it is a kind of 'lust for possession' (*The Gay Science*, §14). There is no recognition here of the communal-self that I discussed above. Furthermore, Nietzsche often emphasizes the combative nature of human relationships and the value of having 'good enemies' (see *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I 'On War and Warriors', III 'Old and New Tablets' §21; *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I, §10, §13; *Twilight of the Idols*, 'Morality as Anti-Nature' §3). Even friendship is conceived of in these terms: 'In a friend one should have one's best enemy. You should be closest to him with your heart when you resist him' (*Z I 'On the Friend'*;

understanding of the saint as embodying a self-transcending ‘feeling of oneness and identity with all living things’, I contend, lies in the fact that it shows that he felt moved by something like what I have described as a communion-perspective on the self and human fulfillment – even if he was not able to adequately articulate the experience – which cannot be interpreted as merely an expression of an individual’s will to power. If Nietzsche’s early account of the saint is understood in this way then I believe that we have reason to question his later rejection of the saintly ideal.

First of all, his early account of the saint presents the possibility of another mode of human fulfillment besides the individual mode of fulfillment achieved through the feeling of power growing in continually overcoming internal and external resistances: viz., human fulfillment through self-transcending communion with others whereby we achieve a normatively higher mode of selfhood through affectively identifying with the being and happiness of others such that they are included within our own extended sense of ‘self’.<sup>53</sup> In fact, these two modes of human fulfillment need not be regarded as

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cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*, §260). This view of human relationships as fundamentally combative is responsible for some of the more troublesome consequences of his doctrine of the will to power when it is expressed in domination or exploitation of others (see *Beyond Good and Evil*, §259, cited above). Where Nietzsche does seem to allow for identification with others is with respect to the ‘overman’ or those powerful and creative individuals who demonstrate the possibility of great human achievements, which he believes provide a justification and higher significance for human existence (see *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘Prologue’ §3, I ‘On the Love of the Neighbor’). However, there is no suggestion by Nietzsche that love for or interpersonal communion with others, including with those who are weak and who suffer, might itself provide a justification and a higher significance for human existence precisely through the greater fullness of life that I have argued is experienced when we affectively include the being and happiness of others within our own extended sense of self. In fact, Nietzsche maintains that love for humanity as such is unintelligible once we have abandoned any divine sanction: ‘To love man *for God’s sake* [...] has so far been the noblest and most remote feeling attained among men [...]. [The] love of man is just one more stupidity and brutishness if there is no ulterior intent to sanctify it’ (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §60; cf. *Twilight of the Idols*, ‘Skirmishes of an Untimely Man’ §5). It is indeed difficult to see how such love could be intelligible given Nietzsche’s all-encompassing doctrine of the will to power.

<sup>53</sup> It is important to note that my account of self-transcendence as the transcending of a lower mode of selfhood for a higher one can also be

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mutually exclusive. The most fulfilling human life can include both fulfillment through self-transcending communion and fulfillment through continually overcoming internal and external resistances in the development of our various human capacities. It should also be noted that of course love itself involves 'overcoming resistances' as we grow deeper in communion with another person. But the fulfillment experienced in such communion is not merely the experience of 'overcoming resistance'. Above all, it is the experience of the communion itself in which we achieve a higher, more extended mode of selfhood through affectively identifying with the being and happiness of others. However, granted that the two ideals of human fulfillment through self-transcendence can both be viewed as part of a holistic account of human fulfillment, there remains the issue of which mode of fulfillment should have priority if a conflict arises.<sup>54</sup> One important question to ask here is: which mode of fulfillment is more integral to our humanity? I maintain that it is our need for communion with others since it seems that human beings can more easily live without great achievements than without love.<sup>55</sup> But we can also ask: which provides a more adequate path for justifying life in the world as worthwhile in the face of suffering? I contend that it is the path of love as charted out in a proper understanding of the saintly ideal.

### Dostoevsky versus Nietzsche on the Sainly Ideal

In order to make my case here we need a better depiction of the saintly ideal, and for this I turn to the work of Dostoevsky. One of Dostoevsky's central concerns in his fictional work is to provide a realistic portrayal of the 'sainly ideal', which will show the significance of Christianity for the modern age.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, throughout his

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applied to Nietzsche's account of self-overcoming in which one's grows in self-empowerment.

<sup>54</sup> We might think here of the case of Paul Gauguin, who abandoned his family in order to pursue his art in Tahiti. Did he act well? I think not. The case is discussed in Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ch. 2 and John Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 25–31.

<sup>55</sup> See, again, Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, 25–31; cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.1 & IX.9.

<sup>56</sup> Dostoevsky expresses his artistic goal of depicting a truly good person in two letters written while working on *The Idiot*: 'For a long time already,

major works we find a number of 'saintly types',<sup>57</sup> though in what follows I will focus on the depiction of Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who is based on real exemplars and is arguably Dostoevsky's most successful portrayal of the saintly ideal. Most importantly for my purposes, Zosima's life and teachings offer an especially powerful expression of Dostoevsky's religious views and provide a rival to Nietzsche's solution to the cosmic problem.<sup>58</sup>

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there was one idea that had been troubling me, but I was afraid to make a novel out of it because it was a very difficult idea, and I was not ready to tackle it, although it is a fascinating idea and one I am in love with. That idea is – *to portray of perfectly good man*. I believe there can be nothing more difficult than this, especially in our time' (*Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, trans. Andrew MacAndrew, (eds) Joseph Frank and David I. Goldstein [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987 (1868)], 262). Likewise: 'The idea for the novel is an old favorite of mine, but it was so difficult that for a long time I did not dare to tackle it, and if I have done so now it is only because I was in a state verging on despair. The main idea of the novel is to portray a positively good man. There is nothing more difficult in the world, and this is especially true today. All writers – not only ours but Europeans as well – who have ever attempted to portray the *positively* good have always given up. Because the problem is a boundless one. The perfect is an ideal, and this ideal, whether it is ours or that of civilized Europe, is still far from having been worked out. There is only one positively good figure in the world – Christ – so that the phenomenon of that boundlessly, infinitely good figure is already in itself an infinite miracle. The whole of the Gospel of Saint John is a statement to that effect; he finds the whole miracle in the Incarnation alone, in the manifestation of the good alone' (269–70).

<sup>57</sup> E.g., Liza in *Notes from Underground*, Sonya in *Crime and Punishment*, Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, Bishop Tikhon in *Demons*, Makar in *The Adolescent*, and Alyosha and Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

<sup>58</sup> In a letter Dostoevsky writes: 'The next book will cover the Elder Zosima's death and his conversations with friends before he dies. It is not a sermon but rather a story, the tale of his own life. If it succeeds I shall have done a good deed: *I shall compel them to recognize* that a pure, ideal Christian is not something abstract but is graphically real, possible, obviously present, and that Christianity is the sole refuge for the Russian land from all its woes. I pray God it may succeed, it will be a moving thing, if I only have enough inspiration. And the main theme is one that could not even occur to any of today's writers and poets, therefore something completely *original*. The whole novel is written for its sake, if it will only come off, that's what worries me now!' (*Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, 759–60). Elsewhere he writes: 'I don't know whether I succeeded. I

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Zosima is an Elder in the local Orthodox monastery and the spiritual mentor to the youngest Karamazov brother, Alyosha. He is portrayed as a man of deep humility, great compassion, and profound insight into human life.<sup>59</sup> His two fundamental teachings are that 'life is paradise' and that 'we are responsible to all and for all'. These are in fact related teachings and Zosima takes them over from his brother Markel, who underwent a spiritual transformation as the result of a terminal illness. Zosima reports his brother as saying that 'life is paradise, and we are all in paradise, but we won't see it, if we would, we should have heaven on earth the next day'.<sup>60</sup> Then later he reports Markel as saying that 'we are each responsible to all for all, it's only that men don't know this. If they knew it, the world would be a paradise at once'.<sup>61</sup> Zosima himself remarks: 'we don't understand that life is a paradise, for we have only to understand that and it will at once be fulfilled in all its beauty, we shall embrace each other and weep'.<sup>62</sup>

To see life as paradise is clearly an affirmative stance towards the world – i.e., it is to see life as fundamentally good and a source of joy and fulfillment – and Dostoevsky intends this as a response to Ivan Karamazov's rejection of life in the world as worthwhile due to the problem of evil and suffering. The claim then is that life already is paradise, even in the face of evil and suffering, but this paradise can be more fully realized by acknowledging our responsibility to all and for all and by engaging in turn in active love for others and thereby helping to 'heal the world'.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the recognition

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reckon myself that I wasn't able to express one tenth of what I wanted. Nevertheless, I look upon this *sixth* book as the culminating point of the novel. Of course, many of Elder Zosima's exhortations (or one might better say the manner of their expression) belong to him, that is, to the way he is depicted artistically. Though I completely share the thoughts he expresses, if I had expressed them as coming *from me* personally, I would have expressed them in a different form and in different style. But he *could not* express himself either in a different style *or in a different spirit* than that which I gave him. Otherwise there would have been no artistic character' (760).

<sup>59</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett, rev. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976 [1880]), 23.

<sup>60</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Garnett, rev. Matlaw, 267.

<sup>61</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Garnett, rev. Matlaw, 277.

<sup>62</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Garnett, rev. Matlaw, 279.

<sup>63</sup> See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 452; Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA:

that life is paradise and that this can be fully realized through active love can inspire such love, though love for others and for the world can also help to more fully appreciate how life is paradise, i.e., it can bring about a transfiguration in the way we see the world.<sup>64</sup> Zosima teaches:

Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.<sup>65</sup>

We find here in this 'all-embracing love' a significant overlap with Nietzsche's early view of the saintly ideal as the achievement of a self-transcending 'feeling of oneness and identity with all living things', but there is the additional claim that this love makes possible an awareness of the 'divine mystery in things'.<sup>66</sup>

Another way to put this, which could appeal to the theist and non-theist alike, is that the saintly ideal – i.e., the ideal of an all-embracing love – seeks to give proper recognition to the sacred character of the world, where the sacred is understood as that which is worthy of reverence. The transfigured vision of the saintly ideal is thus one that

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The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 16–7, 388–9, 680–5, 701–3.

<sup>64</sup> On the idea of transfigured vision see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 441–55, where Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer are all discussed.

<sup>65</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Garnett, rev. Matlaw, 298.

<sup>66</sup> Earlier Zosima says: 'Every blade of grass, every insect, ant, and golden bee, all so amazingly know their path, though they have not intelligence, they bear witness to the mystery of God and continually accomplish it themselves. [...] [The] Word is for all. All creation and all creatures, every leaf is striving to the Word, singing glory to God, weeping to Christ, unconsciously accomplishing this by the mystery of their sinless life' (273–4). Human beings of course are not sinless because we have reason and with it a moral conscience (and thus sin becomes an appropriate category), but it is also in virtue of this that we bear the mark of the 'Logos' (i.e., the 'Word') in a special way as we are able to conscientiously strive after the ideal of Christ-like love (I will return to this point later). We can see here that Dostoevsky embraces a cosmic understanding of Christ as the 'Logos' by which all things were created and towards which all things by nature strive to be united (a key source of this understanding is of course the prologue to the Gospel of John).

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takes us from our profane or mundane experience of the world to an experience of the world as imbued with the sacred. Indeed, the claim that life is paradise is often expressed in many of the great religious traditions as the claim that life is sacred, or a sacred *gift* (a more theistic rendering), which is *worthy* of being loved, cherished, and revered.<sup>67</sup> We should see then a crucial element that was missing in the preceding characterizations of the saintly ideal by Nietzsche: viz., the saint is motivated not only by compassion for the suffering of others, but also and more fundamentally by a sense of the sacred, including with regard to these others.<sup>68</sup> In short, on my view it is the sacred that is most definitive of the saintly ideal as the would-be saint is one who seeks to become holy or sanctified through a proper relationship in feeling and action to what is seen as sacred or holy. Above all, the proper relationship is one of an all-embracing love for the world. But it is important to be clear that this is not mere abstract love. Zosima warns of the danger of ‘love in dreams’ where we abstractly love humanity in general but fail to love human beings in particular. It is important then that an all-embracing love for humanity always find its terminus in ‘active love’ for particular human beings.<sup>69</sup> One cannot of course actively

<sup>67</sup> When I say that ‘life is sacred’, I mean that all of life is worthy of reverence, though human life is typically seen to be sacred in a special way (often involving a claim of *inviolability*), just as God, for theists, is seen to be sacred or holy in an even more special way. Of course, one might also say that non-living things are also sacred, but not to the degree of living things. We might say that what this expresses is an evaluative version of the ‘great chain of being’.

<sup>68</sup> Raimond Gaita has an illuminating discussion of the saintly behavior and attitude of a nun who came to visit a psychiatric ward at which he worked when he was seventeen. Gaita writes: ‘everything in her demeanour towards [the patients]—the way she spoke to them, her facial expressions, the inflexions of her body—contrasted with and showed up the behavior of those noble psychiatrists. She showed that they were, despite their best efforts, condescending, as I too had been. She thereby revealed that such patients were, as the psychiatrists and I had sincerely and generously professed, the equals of those who want to help them; but she also revealed that in our hearts we did not believe this’ (*A Common Humanity* [New York: Routledge, 1998], 18–9). In other words, what the nun revealed through her love was that ‘all human being are sacred’, i.e., ‘all human beings are inestimably precious’ (23; cf. 17–27).

<sup>69</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1990 [1880]), 57–88; cf. 18, 26–7, 236–7. Zosima says: ‘active love is a harsh and fearful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams thirsts for immediate action,

love everyone, but the feeling of love for everyone – where there is an imaginative affective identification, since we cannot know every individual human being that exists – is still important since it makes us disposed to actively love those particular people who are a part of our lives as well as those who happen to come across our path, as in the Gospel story of the ‘Good Samaritan’.

I believe this picture of the saintly ideal as centered on an all-embracing love ethic provides a much better path for justifying life in the world as worthwhile in the face of suffering than does Nietzsche’s rival ideal, which is centered on an ethic of power that finds its fullest expression in those who are able to say ‘yes’ to all of life, including suffering. The fundamental problem with Nietzsche’s account is that it does not say *why* one should say ‘yes’ to life beyond claiming that doing so enhances one’s own self-empowerment. In other words, it does not explain what it is *about the world* that makes it *worthy* of such affirmation.<sup>70</sup> The same problem remains if we seek an ‘aesthetic’ justification through artistic creation.<sup>71</sup> By contrast, the saintly ideal, as I have described it, regards the world as worthy of our affirmation because of its fundamentally sacred character. It is of course true that the saintly ideal does not affirm suffering as such and indeed it often seeks to reduce suffering, and for Nietzsche this means that it fails to affirm all of life, since suffering is a necessary part of life. However, the point of cosmody is not to affirm all aspects of life as good – e.g., the prevalence of cruelty, oppression, suffering, and so forth – but to affirm that life is *fundamentally* good and worthwhile. Nietzsche

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quickly performed, and with everyone watching. [...] Whereas active love is labor and perseverance, and for some people, perhaps, a whole science’ (58).

<sup>70</sup> Consider here the following remarks by Susan Neiman: ‘Nietzsche’s paradigms of suffering sound more like *weltschmerz* than anything else. And *weltschmerz* may be acceptable where suffering is not. You may be willing to embrace pain in the course of a life that is richer than one where you feel very little at all. But your willingness may stop at the sort of pain that annihilates great souls instead of ennobling them. (To say that they wouldn’t have been annihilated if they’d been greater is to beg too many questions, which Nietzsche sometimes does.) To put the problem differently: one can’t help suspecting that Nietzsche sometimes imagined himself on the wrong side of the *auto-da-fé*. Embracing the evil involved in watching (not to mention causing) suffering is another matter than embracing what’s involved when you’re consumed by it’ (*Evil in Modern Thought* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002], 223).

<sup>71</sup> See n. 15.



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himself does not affirm *all* of life since he does not want to affirm the weak and the failures, as they are thought to give life ‘a gloomy and questionable aspect’. In this way the saintly ideal is more ‘life-affirming’ with its all-embracing love ethic.

Now, the foregoing account of the saintly ideal and the claim that it provides a more adequate cosmodicy depend upon being able to affirm that life is sacred and worthy of our love, affirmation, and reverence, which in turn depends upon our overall worldview. In fact, it may depend upon seeing the world as ‘a moral order’ that expresses ‘ultimate moral purposes’, which for Nietzsche is no longer tenable.<sup>72</sup> However, even if one is not able to believe in such an idea of a moral teleology at work in the universe – and I think this is an open debate<sup>73</sup> – it is still worth exploring what is at stake in whether or not we do believe in it. What may be at stake in fact is the possibility of a viable cosmodicy. According to William James, the belief or at least hope that the world is a moral order and expresses ultimate moral purposes ‘not only incites our more strenuous moments, but it also takes our joyous, careless, trustful moments, and it justifies them’.<sup>74</sup> In other words, it can inspire the strenuous activity of making ourselves ‘responsible to all and for all’ in order to heal the world and it also can justify the affirmation that ‘life is paradise’ – i.e., life is fundamentally good and a source of joy and fulfillment – in spite of the evil and suffering that exists.

Consider again Zosima. He claims that we would be altogether lost without the ‘precious image of Christ before us’ and our ‘mysterious sense of our living bond with the other world’. Moreover, if this sense is weakened or destroyed he says that we can then become ‘indifferent to life, and even come to hate it’.<sup>75</sup> The ‘image of Christ’, for Dostoevsky, represents the perfection of the saintly ideal of an all-embracing love and in a notebook he describes the image of Christ as an ‘eternal ideal toward which man aspires and is bound to aspire according to nature’s law’.<sup>76</sup> Here we see a moral and spiritual teleology at work and Dostoevsky claims that it is in aspiring after and

<sup>72</sup> *The Gay Science*, §357; cf. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, §27.

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g., Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, ch. 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981 [1907]), 51; cf. 49–51. See also n. 12 above, which outlines James’s account of the saintly ideal. He writes: ‘here if anywhere is the genuinely strenuous life’. And presumably here if anywhere is the genuinely joyous and life-affirming life (which is suggested by James’s four characteristics of saintliness).

<sup>75</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky, 320.

<sup>76</sup> *Dostoevsky’s Occasional Writings*, trans. David Magarshack (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997 [1864]), 305.

achieving this ideal – or at least approximating it – that our happiness or fulfillment it to be found: ‘the greatest use a man can make of his personality, of the fullest development of his *I*, is in one way or another to destroy this *I*, to give himself up wholly to all and everyone, selflessly and wholeheartedly. And that is the greatest happiness’.<sup>77</sup> While this might at first suggest a total renunciation of the self, I think it is best interpreted in terms of my account of self-transcendence in love: viz., as the transcending of a lower, more enclosed mode of selfhood for the sake of a higher, more extended, more fulfilling mode of selfhood. Hence he speaks of achieving ‘the greatest happiness’. Likewise, Zosima says: ‘people are created for happiness, and he who is completely happy can at once be deemed worthy of saying to himself: “I have fulfilled God’s commandment on this earth.” All the righteous, all the saints, all the holy martyrs were happy’.<sup>78</sup>

It is particularly noteworthy that Zosima says that our ‘mysterious sense of our living bond with the other world’ is important for affirming our this-worldly existence due to its connection with a transcendent purpose for human life. This stands in strong contrast to Nietzsche’s tendency to see anyone who affirms the ‘transcendent’ or the ‘other-worldly’ as being life-denying. It must be acknowledged that Nietzsche’s later understanding and critique of the saintly ideal as embodying an unhealthy, life-denying ‘ascetic ideal’ certainly provides an insightful account of at least the worst representatives of various religious perspectives. However, as we have seen, there are better religious representatives who are affirmative of our this-worldly existence for religious reasons.<sup>79</sup> Dostoevsky is in fact well aware of the sort of critique that Nietzsche leveled against asceticism. Earlier in *The Brothers Karamazov* the narrator remarks that ascetic practices are ‘a double-edged weapon, which may lead a person not to humility and ultimate self-control but, on the contrary, to the most satanic pride – that is, to fetters and not to freedom’.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, in the

<sup>77</sup> Dostoevsky’s *Occasional Writings*, 306.

<sup>78</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky, 55.

<sup>79</sup> E.g., on the best understandings of Judaism and Christianity the nature of love for God is such that it should lead to and arise from love and affirmation of the goodness of the world, rather than hatred and denial of it. This is clearly seen in the Jewish ideal of *tikkun olam* (i.e., repairing or healing the world) and the Christian ideal of *agape* (i.e., unconditional love for all). See the ‘Introduction’ to Taylor’s *A Secular Age*, esp. at 16–7, where he describes well the relationship between the desire for ‘transcendence’ and the love and affirmation of the world that follows from it in Jewish and Christian traditions.

<sup>80</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky, 29.

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character Father Ferapont, the great faster and keeper of silence, Dostoevsky provides an artistic portrayal of the kind of unhealthy, life-denying 'ascetic ideal' that Nietzsche critiques. For Dostoevsky, however, certain ascetic practices, properly directed, remain important for the moral and spiritual transformation that is needed for growth in self-transcending love for all.

That human life requires such transformation is due to what Dostoevsky describes as the 'broadness' of human nature in allowing for fundamentally opposed tendencies.<sup>81</sup> On the one hand, we find ourselves naturally inclined towards the ideal of self-transcending love wherein our true happiness resides. On the other hand, however, we may also find in ourselves certain opposing motives, including tendencies towards self-enclosure, diabolical pride, and even violence. For Dostoevsky these are directions the 'thirst for life' can take when not properly trained and ordered towards the ideal of self-transcending love.<sup>82</sup> Key to this training (i.e., *askesis*) is the

<sup>81</sup> The most memorable expression of this is by Dmitri Karamazov. He says to his brother Alyosha: 'I want to tell you now about the "insects," about those to whom God gave sensuality: "To insects – sensuality!" I am that very insect, brother, and those words are precisely about me. And 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! Beauty is a fearful and terrible thing! Fearful because it's undefinable, and it cannot be defined, because here God gave us only riddles. Here the shores converge, here all contradictions live together. I'm a very uneducated man, brother, but I've thought about it a lot. So terribly many mysteries! Too many riddles oppress man on earth. Solve them if you can without getting your feet wet. Beauty! Besides, I can't bear it that some man, even with a lofty heart and the highest mind, should start from the ideal of the Madonna and end with the ideal of Sodom. It's even more fearful when someone who already has the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not deny the ideal of the Madonna either, and his heart burns with it, verily, verily burns, as in his young, blameless years. No, man is broad, even too broad, I would narrow him down. Devil knows even what to make of him, that's the thing! What's shame for the mind is beauty all over for the heart. Can there be beauty in Sodom? Believe me, for the vast majority of people, that's just where beauty lies – did you know that secret? The terrible thing is that beauty is not only fearful but also mysterious. Here the devil is struggling with God, and the battlefield is the human heart' (*The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky, 108).

<sup>82</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky, 230–1. Nietzsche in fact also endorses a form of channeling desire towards a 'higher end': viz., he advocates 'spiritualizing' or 'sublimating' our natural instincts of sensuality, pride, lust to rule, avarice, vengefulness, and so

practice of active love itself. ‘Brothers, love is a teacher’, says Zosima, ‘but one must know how to acquire it, for it is difficult to acquire, it is dearly bought, by long work over a long time, for one ought to love not for a chance moment but for all time’.<sup>83</sup> Important also are other spiritual practices such as obedience, fasting, and prayer: ‘Obedience, fasting, and prayer are laughed at, yet they alone constitute the way to real and true freedom: I cut away my superfluous and unnecessary [desires], through obedience I humble and chasten my vain and proud will, and thereby, with God’s help, attain freedom of spirit, and with that, spiritual rejoicing!’<sup>84</sup> Ultimately, these spiritual practices seek to enable an all-embracing active love, which is the most truly powerful force in life. Zosima remarks: ‘One may stand perplexed before some thought, especially seeing men’s sin, asking oneself: “Shall I take it by force, or by humble love?” Always resolve to take it by humble love. If you so resolve once and for all, you will be able to overcome the whole world. A loving humility is a terrible power, the most powerful of all, nothing compares to it’.<sup>85</sup> Here we have an important insight – whatever we make of the theological perspective that Dostoevsky couches it in – that is missed in Nietzsche’s later account of the saintly ideal.

## Conclusion

In the foregoing I have tried to read the earlier Nietzsche against the later Nietzsche and to argue that when properly articulated – with the help of Dostoevsky – the saintly ideal is able to provide a more adequate cosmodycy than that which is found in Nietzsche’s later work. Nietzsche was not wrong to move away from Schopenhauer’s morality of compassion, but I have argued that he moved in the wrong direction. The right direction involves a move towards a better account of the nature of the saintly ideal of self-transcending love for other persons and for the world.<sup>86</sup>

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forth, for the sake of great achievements of the will to power in overcoming internal and external resistances (see *Twilight of the Idols*, ‘Morality as Anti-Nature’ §1 & §3; cf. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, chs 7 & 8).

<sup>83</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky, 319.

<sup>84</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky, 314.

<sup>85</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky, 319.

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