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Christianity as Active Pity in *Crime and Punishment*

Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too.
William Blake

The importance of the concept of pity in Dostoevsky's Christian faith has not been sufficiently addressed in Dostoevsky studies, although the term often appears on the list of Christian virtues—together with humility, Christian love, and redemptive suffering—that his protagonists must accept in order to be saved. I will argue that in *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky presents pity and/or compassion as the most important Christian virtue, one above the other Christian virtues and human emotions for which scientific and political theories have no place. He in effect posits pity as the essence of Christianity. Dostoevsky thus privileges an emotion with a rather problematic status, one that many influential thinkers of his day see as Christianity's weakest point. Dostoevsky builds an argument against such detractors of pity as Kant and Nietzsche: he argues against Kantian distrust of pity and in fact preempts Nietzsche's future claim that pity is the most harmful of all Christian virtues and his definition of Christianity as "active pity for all the failures and all the weak."¹ In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky shows that Christianity is in essence active pity and in this lies its greatest strength.

Pity or compassion is commonly understood as recognition of another's suffering followed by an impulse to alleviate it. Scholars define compassion as a combination of cognitive, affective, and volitional

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 570.

components: “In compassion, we see another’s distress (cognition), we feel moved by it (affectivity), and we actively seek to remedy it (volition).”² When a person recognizes the feelings of the other, a connection is formed between the object of pity and the one who feels the emotion. That leads to a compassionate act of taking on the other’s suffering and acting to lessen it. A compassionate act is, therefore, an intersubjective act, “a social and aesthetic technology of belonging” to a community.³

The contemporary philosopher Martha Nussbaum shows compassion to be “[t]he basic social emotion” and suggests ways to “produce it and remove obstacles to it.”⁴ She argues, as do a number of scholars,⁵ for incorporating the concept of compassion into economics, law, politics, educational and public institutions, in other words, for creating a “compassionate nation.”⁶ Dostoevsky’s view of pity is strikingly relevant to this project: it is not against science or law that he directs his argument; rather he perceives them as ineffective without a Christian foundation. Both Nussbaum and Dostoevsky posit pity as essential for social cohesion, however, what for Nussbaum is a secular concept, for Dostoevsky is inextricable from Christian faith. Thus if pity is necessary for social community and pity is inherently Christian, then social cohesion is impossible without Christianity.

In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov’s oscillation between opening his heart to pity and fighting it, as well as between extending and receiving pity, serves as a dramatic representation of his spiritual path. The novel presents multiple manifestations of the conflict between compassion and rationality: internally—in Raskolnikov’s impulses underscored by his very name, and externally—in characters who either reflect various aspects of Raskolnikov’s character, or symbolize the moral choices that will determine his future. Raskolnikov’s actions, both before and after the murder, show an internal clash between compassion and rationality; they are marked by a “double movement,” as in Robert Louis

² Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion. Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 18.

³ Lauren Berlant, ed, “Introduction” to *Compassion. The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (New York, London: Routledge, 2004), 5.

⁴ Martha Nussbaum, “Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion,” *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 13: 1 (Winter 1996): 28.

⁵ See Jonathan Miller, *The Compassionate Community. Ten Values to Unite America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Richard Reilly, *Ethic of Compassion. Bridging Ethical Theory and Religious Moral Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008); Lauren Berlant, ed. *Compassion. The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*.

⁶ Nussbaum, 58.

Jackson's phrase: "a motion of sympathy and a motion of disgust, of attraction and recoil..."⁷ In his last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky reformulates Christianity as active love, however, in *Crime and Punishment* he poses pity as the essence of Christianity. This is why by the end of the novel Raskolnikov's achievement of Christian faith coincides with his willingness to extend and receive pity.

In contemporary discourse, pity has acquired negative connotations of condescension, however, this is a relatively new development: of the post-Victorian era for European,⁸ and of the Soviet period for Russian, cultures.⁹ In different historical periods and in different languages, pity and compassion comprise pairs with variously defined relationship.¹⁰ In Russian culture, especially in pre-Revolutionary Russia, pity has been synonymous with compassion and has carried mostly positive connotations. It has often been perceived as synonymous with love: "zhalost' was always understood as one of the supreme values, as a feeling close to love and not offensive at all."¹¹ Anna Wierzbicka, a linguist, explores the difference in the essence of the concept in different languages. "Unlike pity," she writes, "zhalost' is, potentially, a feeling that can embrace all living creatures, just as love can."¹² She quotes Geoffrey Gorer's studies of the Russian "national character" where he contrasts English pity and Russian *zhalost'*: "in contrast to pity, it is perhaps even more desirable to receive *zhalost'* than to offer it. It can be, and often is, felt for all undergoing moral and spiritual anguish, whether personally known or not."¹³

From Aristotle and the Stoics forward, pity has provided an equally fertile ground for aesthetical, ethical, sociological, linguistic, and religious debates. The issue at the heart of any discussion of pity has been whether it involves reason or whether it is purely instinctive and therefore

⁷ Robert Louis Jackson, "Philosophical *Pro* and *Contra* in Part One of *Crime and Punishment*," in *Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov*, ed. Harold Bloom (Broomball, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 22.

⁸ Nussbaum, 29.

⁹ Irina B. Levontina, Anna A. Zaliziak, "Human Emotions Viewed Through the Russian Language," in *Emotions in Crosslinguistic Perspective*, ed. Jean Harkins, Anna Wierzbicka (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001), 318.

¹⁰ David Konstan, *Pity Transformed* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 13; Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion. Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition*, 234; Nussbaum, 28.

¹¹ Levontina and Zaliziak, 319.

¹² Anna Wierzbicka, *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition. Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 168.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 169.

irrational. Philosophers searching for a stable system of morals have disagreed on whether pity has any moral value. Kant and Nietzsche argued, in contrast for instance to Rousseau and Schopenhauer, that pity is an irrational force that may do more harm than good.

This argument touches upon the main intellectual concerns of the 1840s and 60s. Philosophical theories from Rousseau to Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer formed a part of general philosophical education and were the building blocks of Russian intellectual culture.¹⁴ Critical opinions vary on the extent of Dostoevsky's familiarity with Kant's work; perhaps his knowledge of Kant was largely indirect;¹⁵ it is safe to assume nevertheless that Dostoevsky was keenly interested in the problem of moral law and its relation to reason and faith. Kant is the philosopher who most famously reinterpreted the relationship of morality and reason.

In order to define a moral law that is truly universal and not undermined by subjectivity, Kant eliminates emotions from the list of acceptable motivations for human acts. The only truly moral acts are those motivated by duty, i.e. the moral law, the intrinsic sense of right and wrong we all possess. Kant allows for love, respect and gratitude to be considered as duties and therefore acceptable motives for moral acts, yet he denies the status of duty to compassion:

In fact, when another suffers and, although I cannot help him, I let myself be infected by his pain (through my imagination), then two of us suffer, though the evil really (in nature) affects only *one*. But there cannot possibly be a duty to

¹⁴ Steven Cassedy writes: "One could certainly argue that German idealism was so much a part of the intellectual culture in which Dostoevsky passed his early adult years that no reading, writing, and thinking person could resist its lure" (137). "The Shape of Russian Idealism: from Kant and Hegel to Dostoevsky to Russian Religious Renaissance," in *Cold Fusion: Aspects of the German Cultural Presence in Russia*, ed. Gennady Barabtarlo (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

¹⁵ The sources on the subject are rather limited. There are several articles exploring similarities and divergences in Dostoevsky's and Kant's views, i.e. Evgenia Cherkasova, "Kant on Free Will and Arbitrariness: a View from Dostoevsky's Underground," *Philosophy and Literature* 28: 2 (Oct., 2004); Susan McReynolds, "Aesthetics and Social Justice: The problem of Dostoevsky," *Literary Imagination* v 4: 1 (Winter 2002): 91-105; Alexander von Schonborn, "Church and State: Dostoevsky and Kant," in Barabtarlo, ed. *Cold Fusion*, 126-136. There is a multitude of sources in Russian, of which only one, and by far not the most useful, is routinely mentioned in English language criticism: Iakov Goloskover, *Dostoevsky and Kant* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk, 1963). The assertion that Dostoevsky knew Kant's philosophy rests on his familiarity with popular intellectual topics of the day and his request in 1854 for a copy of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Another possible link: in 1863, two years before starting work on *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky traveled to Turin with Apollinaria Suslova who, according to her diary, was at the time reading "some philosophical treatise about Kant and Hegel." Quoted in David Magarshack, *Dostoevsky* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1962), 295. She would no doubt share her impressions with Dostoevsky.

increase the evil in the world and so to do good from compassion. This would be an insulting kind of beneficence, since it expresses the kind of benevolence one has toward someone unworthy, called pity; and this has no place in men's relationship with one another, since they are not to make a display of their worthiness to be happy.¹⁶

Kant here labels acts motivated by compassion, rather than by rational sense of duty, as insulting to the other and therefore immoral.

Nietzsche, in his stand toward pity, found the only point of agreement with Kant's philosophy, and one of the few points of disagreement with his "great teacher Schopenhauer."¹⁷ Nietzsche cautions against "the great danger to mankind [...] in the ever spreading morality of pity." For him, pity is an illness of "the will turning *against* life."¹⁸ At best, it serves the weak as "the means to endure the pressure of existence."¹⁹ Having begun with the "problem of the value of pity and of morality of pity," Nietzsche proceeds to question and reevaluate the very concept of morality.

It is not in the least surprising that in *Crime and Punishment* we find so much resonance with Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity. Without being aware of his works Dostoevsky argues with the worldview inherent in Nietzsche, one that he knew well from the works of some of Nietzsche's predecessors²⁰, and from the general intellectual climate of his time. The two thinkers were children of "their age, the children of unbelief and doubt"²¹ and were diagnosing the same crisis in European thought that was undermining the traditional foundations of morality. Both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche realize that morality is based on faith (here Nietzsche is in expressed disagreement with Kant) and both see the crisis of faith threatening the very foundation of society, yet, where Nietzsche rationalizes and welcomes the crisis by finding fault in the very

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Second Part, § 34.

¹⁷ Nietzsche also lists Plato, Spinoza, and La Rochefoucauld, among the philosophers united by "their low estimation of pity," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Holligdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 19.

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 19. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 397.

²⁰ Most significant in this respect is Max Stirner's 1844 book *The Ego and its Own*. This German philosopher is one of the most important predecessors if not sources of Nietzsche's philosophy, and his book was widely known in Russia's intellectual circles in the middle of nineteenth century. Kirpotin suggest that Stirner's book is indirectly quoted in *Crime and Punishment* as the "one book" on account of which Raskolnikov writes his article (note 3, p. 67-70).

²¹ Dostoevsky's letter to Natalia Fonvizina, Jan.-Feb., 1854.

premises of morality, Dostoevsky champions the Christian society and endeavours to prevent the collapse of Christianity.²²

Kant's argument for rational bases of morality and his view of religious faith as a logical conclusion of moral law would be unacceptable to Dostoevsky. To Kant's argument that moral judgments must be disinterested he provides a counterargument of Raskolnikov's experience where the emotional involvement with another human being—intersubjective experience of compassion—produces moral behavior, while disinterested reasoning leads to isolation, moral degradation, and, in an extreme, to murder. To the Nietzschean view of pity as an integral part of the morality of the weak, Dostoevsky opposes the experiences of the novel's weakest characters, the powerless and destitute Dunia Raskolnikov and Sonya Marmeladov, whose strength lies in their ability to bring out and to extend pity.

The debate about pity opens early in the novel, in Raskolnikov's conversation with Marmeladov in chapter two of *Crime and Punishment*. This scene, at the very beginning of the action, introduces Raskolnikov and the reader to a number of major characters and announces pity as the novel's central theme. Two problematic characters, the pathetic Marmeladov and the ridiculous Lebeziatnikov, open the debate on pity in the way that will shape the rest of the novel. They are "entrusted" with establishing one of the most important philosophical oppositions of *Crime and Punishment*: rationalism versus Christianity, and it is not accidental that Lebeziatnikov (in Marmeladov's rendering) reduces this opposition to that of science against compassion.

In his speech, Marmeladov distinguishes between poverty (*bednost*) and destitution (*nishcheta*), suffering (*stradanie*) and compassion (or co-suffering—*sostradanie*), and finally, most importantly, pity (*zhalost*) and justice (*spravedlivost*). He begins by excusing his drinking on the grounds of his abject poverty and then introduces his neighbor Lebeziatnikov, and his daughter Sonya. It soon becomes clear that Lebeziatnikov represents views directly opposed to Marmeladov's on the

²² Literature on the subject "Dostoevsky and Nietzsche" is quite enormous in Russia, Germany and everywhere else. Among representative articles in English see Janko Lavrin, "A Note on Nietzsche and Dostoevsky," *Russian Review* 28, no. 2 (Apr., 1969); A.D. Hope, "Dostoevsky and Nietzsche," *Melbourne Slavonic Studies* 4 (1970); Miroslav John Hanak, "Dostoevsky's Metaphysics in the Light of Nietzsche's Psychology," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 9 (1972); René Girard, "Superman in the Underground: Strategies of Madness: Nietzsche, Wagner, and Dostoevsky," *Modern Language Notes* 91 (1976); in German, Jordi Morillas, "Über das Verbrechen: Raskolnikows philosophische Lehre," *Dostoevsky Studies* XII (2008): 213-37.

issues central to his speech: pity and justice. The world Marmeladov describes is the world in its lowest depth; he has brought his family to utter destitution, yet there is one thing this man still considers his due—pity. His confession culminates with a passionate hymn to and a demand for pity, with its feverish pitch building from the beginning of his speech. “Has it ever happened to you,” he asks Raskolnikov, “to petition hopelessly for a loan?” He admits that there should not be any reason for a person to give him money knowing that he would never repay the loan. “From compassion?” he offers a possible reason. “But Mr. Lebeziatnikov who keeps up with modern ideas explained the other day that compassion is forbidden nowadays by science itself (*sostradanie v nashe vremia dazhe naukoi vospreshcheno*), and that that’s what is done now in England where they have a political economy” (12).²³ V. Kirpotin observes that Marmeladov uses Lebeziatnikov as a point of reference and his “confession is, from beginning to end, as if ‘punctuated’ by Lebeziatnikov” (14). Indeed, Lebeziatnikov, marginal and ridiculous as he may be, is an important character because he represents, here and throughout the novel, the same ideas that torture Raskolnikov’s mind.

Marmeladov ends his heartbreaking tale by asking its central question: “Who will have pity on a man like me, eh? Do you pity me sir or not? Tell me, sir, do you pity me or not? He-he-he.” This question is repeated several times by Marmeladov, by the tavern owner, by Marmeladov again; the word *pity* resounds in several grammatical forms—noun, verb, adverb—(this effect is often lost in translation) until it is absolutely clear that this is what the whole confession was about. “To be pitied? Why am I to be pitied?” Marmeladov suddenly declaimed, standing up with his arms outstretched, as though he had been only waiting for this question. “Why am I to be pitied, you say? Yes, there is nothing to pity me for! I ought to be crucified, crucified on a cross, and not pitied! Crucify me, oh judge, crucify me, and having crucified, pity me.” Marmeladov here summons the image of Christ, and thus evokes the opposition between justice and pity. Christ’s pity that led him to suffering and death had nothing to do with matters of retribution and justice, and here lies the crux of the matter. Pity and justice belong to different systems of thought: pity is not arrived at through the logic that is the basis of earthly justice. Justice based on logic and accountability belongs on

²³ Fedor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Ernest J. Simmons (New York: The Modern Library, 1950). I consistently modify this translation where the Russian word *pity* and its derivatives are translated with other synonymic expressions, i.e., “to take pity on someone” is often translated as “to feel for someone.” In such cases I restore the original wording.

earth, pity belongs with Christ. “He will pity us Who has had pity on all men, Who has understood all men and all things, He is the One, and He is the judge” (21).

Marmeladov’s tale not only introduces pity as a topic but also forces Raskolnikov and the reader to experience it. Here, as throughout the novel, Dostoevsky uses pity as a powerful tool for involving the reader in the argument about its value. As he vividly describes a succession of scenes of poverty, sickness, and despair, he compels the reader to feel compassion for the suffering characters. The reader thus becomes emotionally connected with the objects of his compassion and deeply involved in the story and in its arguments. Deborah Martinsen describes a similar effect of exposing the reader of *Crime and Punishment* to scenes of shame: Dostoevsky “collaps[es] the intersubjective distance between characters and readers by having us witness scenes of shame.”²⁴ Unlike shame, however, pity has a long service record of eliminating the distance between the characters and the audience: in the Aristotelian formula²⁵, together with fear, pity is the aesthetic instrument of tragedy, and is crucial in bringing the audience to cathartic experience. By making the reader feel pity, Dostoevsky collapses the distance between the text and the reader just as the distance between Raskolnikov and Marmeladov is collapsed when Raskolnikov feels and acts on pity for Marmeladov’s family.

Raskolnikov’s reaction to Marmeladov’s story of “painful (*boleznen-naia*) love” for his family, is similarly painful: “[he] listened intently but with a painful sensation” (*s oshchushcheniem bolezennym*) (19). Raskolnikov opens himself to the distress of the other, which is the essence of compassion. At the same time, the reader also becomes an observer on par with Raskolnikov, and like him, experiences pity. This experience consists of specific elements of seeing, being moved by, and acting to lessen another’s distress. Raskolnikov’s (and the reader’s) senses are affected twice and therefore with doubled force: having listened to Marmeladov’s tale, he takes him home and actually sees his wife Katerina Ivanovna, the abject poverty of her quarters, and the sick and hungry children. Raskolnikov reacts by impulsively digging into his pocket for his last pieces of change and leaving them, anonymously, on the windowsill. He thus follows through all the elements of compassion from cognition of suffering to the volitional act of remedying it.

²⁴ Deborah Martinsen, *Surprised by Shame : Dostoevsky’s Liars and Narrative Exposure* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003), xiii.

²⁵ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. James Hutton (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1982)

The reader has no such possibility for action and is left with the painful sensation he has experienced throughout the chapter. Thus when at the very next moment Raskolnikov “comes to his senses” and wants to go back and retrieve his money, he is arguing not only with himself—“What a stupid thing I’ve done...”—but with the reader as well. The reader who is not yet privy to Raskolnikov’s plans and theories, sees his impulsive act of helping the suffering other as a natural reaction. The sudden reversal on Raskolnikov’s part invites the reader to question his own impulses as well. In this instance the reader becomes a participant in the argument about the value of pity.

All Raskolnikov’s charitable acts follow the same structure as Marmeladov’s episode of the oscillation between impulsive compassionate act and rational questioning of this act. When he sees a drunk and disoriented girl on the street, he reacts impulsively and immediately: he enlists the help of a policeman who shows “sincere compassion” and he once again gives all of his money. And then the moment of compassion ends, and that of rational thinking begins: “At that moment something seemed to sting Raskolnikov; in an instant a complete revulsion of feeling came over him.” He refutes his own actions with scientific and logical explanation: “But what does it matter? That’s as it should be, they tell us. A certain percentage, they tell us, must every year go...that way...to the devil, I suppose, so that the rest may remain chaste, and not be interfered with.”²⁶

Raskolnikov feels uneasy about his compassionate acts because he knows, albeit subconsciously, the importance of pity in healthy society, which for Dostoevsky is synonymous with Christian society. Raskolnikov’s crime and its motives place him outside and above society, but a compassionate act is an intersubjective activity that pulls him back to being a member of community. When after the murder Raskolnikov throws away money given to him out of pity—a random blow by a whip from a passing coach made passersby feel sorry for him (*ikh razhalobil*)t—his marks the moment when he “cut himself from everyone and everything” (105). The scene in which Raskolnikov refuses to be the object of charity illustrates what Nussbaum describes as the social function of pity. Nussbaum argues that compassion (which she, like Dostoevsky, uses synonymously with pity) is a basic social emotion and

²⁶ See for instance Harriet Murav’s analysis of this scene in her *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky’s Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992), 55-59. See also Liza Knapp, *The Annihilation of Inertia. Dostoevsky and Metaphysics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 50-51.

“a central bridge between the individual and the community” as “it brings human beings together through the thought of their common weaknesses and risks.”²⁷ When Raskolnikov feels pity, and when a stranger feels pity toward him, his and the stranger’s act of charity include him in the greater community of human beings, the community united by a common perception of good and evil and a common ability to be affected by other’s distress. Moreover, compassion involves the realization that societal well-being is based on individual well-being.

Nussbaum’s ideas about the role of pity in society correspond remarkably with Raskolnikov’s rejection of pity as a way to sever his ties with society. However, for Dostoevsky pity is not a secular concept, but rather the essence of Christianity. Thus if social cohesion is impossible without pity, then it is impossible without Christianity. One of Dostoevsky’s objectives in *Crime and Punishment* is to show the limitations of secular pity and the impossibility of secular morality. To that end, he shows how an attempt to eliminate religion from the foundation of society leads to moral degradation. Raskolnikov’s struggle against his god-given ability to be compassionate leads him to an attempt to break with the society afflicted by suffering and to become instead someone who is too far above the masses to be ruled by their laws or affected by their pain.

Since for Dostoevsky, faith is the prerequisite for moral living, it is not enough for Raskolnikov’s spiritual survival to accept the Kantian postulate that “not all things are lawful;” he must also accept that only his personal faith in God can provide this certainty. Some scholars consider Dostoevsky’s theology ethical, that is, Kantian in the sense that like Kant Dostoevsky “reasons from the meaningfulness of his moral obligation to his belief in immortality.”²⁸ Most, however, agree that Dostoevsky saw faith as the source of morality. James Scanlan argues that Dostoevsky saw the origins of the innate sense of right and wrong to be “a ‘gift’ of the Creator in the sense of an initial structural endowment.”²⁹ The theologian L. Zander also presents Dostoevsky’s views as directly opposed to Kant’s autonomous ethics, because for him “morality is impossible without religion.”³⁰ Indeed, Raskolnikov’s case is a caution against god-less

²⁷ Nussbaum, 28, 44.

²⁸ R. Maurice Barineau, “The Triumph of Ethics over Doubt: Dostoevsky’s Brothers Karamazov.” *Christianity and Literature*, 43: 3-4 (1994): 376.

²⁹ James Scanlan, *Dostoevsky the Thinker* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 88.

³⁰ L. A. Zander *Dostoevsky* (London: SCM Press, 1948), 32.

compassion: his initial sharing in the pain of others—his family, Marmeladov's family, and the whole world of poverty around him—leads to a protest, to a demand for immediate changes. But since he rejects God and the religious interpretation of suffering and compassion, there is nothing to stop Raskolnikov from attempting to become a god—call him Napoleon or Mohammed—with the power to decide the worth and fate of other people. Compassion without faith leads Raskolnikov to murder.

Other characters' actions in the novel are likewise defined by their relationship with the problem of pity. Luzhin, Svidrigailov, and, most important, Sonya, are characterized by their ability or inability to share in the pain of others. Luzhin is not a complex individual: he is a greedy, calculating, and unequivocally negative character. His role is to pervert every idea and feeling he comes in contact with, including love and compassion. He chooses Dunya as his bride without any feelings for her; and he performs an ostensibly charitable act of giving Sonya money not because he sympathizes with her plight. His goal is to discredit Sonya and through her Raskolnikov; for this reason he sets up a scene in which he hands Sonya a ten ruble banknote while slipping a hundred ruble note in her pocket and planning to expose "the theft" later. As he proffers his money, he can't resist lecturing Sonya and flattering himself on his good deed: "so then from the feeling of humanity and so to speak compassion I should be glad to be of service..." (336). This "so to speak compassion" speaks volumes about Luzhin. Even if it were not followed by the ugly scene of "unmasking" Sonya as a thief, this perversion of Christian compassion and charity serves to condemn him.

When Luzhin delivers his argument against loving one's neighbor—"what came of it? [...] It came to my tearing my coat in half to share with my neighbor and we both were half naked"—he not only perverts an important biblical image but also closely follows Kant's logic: according to Kant, the acting out of compassion leaves not one but two men half naked, and that increases evil in the world. Luzhin (and Dostoevsky) extend Kant's argument to include the proposition that pity breeds evil; acts motivated by compassion are not moral; and charity is not a personal responsibility. Dostoevsky undercuts this logic by making its proponent into a caricature of a man, but he is well aware of the dangerous allure of these theories when they are delivered in subtler, more sophisticated forms.

Svidrigailov, Raskolnikov's double,³¹ is a much more complex character. At a crucial point in his life, during his last meeting with Dunia, he allows himself to feel and act on pity, but then hardens his heart against the feeling and thus refuses the chance of redemption. Svidrigailov thus proves to be Raskolnikov's double in a most important way: they both oscillate between acting on pity and cynically rejecting it. At the meeting, he attempts desperately to win the affection of Dunya, because he sees her love as his last chance of redeeming himself and starting a new life. He is ready to use force and comes very close to doing just that, but stops at the last moment and allows Dunya to leave. This same night he commits suicide.³² The sole reason why Dunya escapes Svidrigailov is his pity for her: later that night "he recalled how in that instant he felt something like pity for her (*tochno pozhalel eyo*), how he felt a pang in his heart... (*kak by serdtse sdavilo emu*)" (454) He immediately stops his own thoughts: "damnation, these thoughts again! I must put it away," and so in resisting the curative effect of pity he refuses the cathartic experience and follows the alternative path to the suicide. Thus Dunya is saved by Svidrigailov's pity even if it does not save him.³³

Why is Svidrigailov denied and Raskolnikov given a chance of redemption? Perhaps, as Boyce Gibson asserts, the difference between them is "that Svidrigailov has traveled much further along the same path."³⁴ He is older and more cynical than Raskolnikov; with a much darker past; moreover, his story is necessary to serve as the alternative to

³¹ Edward Wasiolek adheres to the common view of Svidrigailov as Raskolnikov's double: "Sonya represents the choice for good and Svidrigailov for evil," "On the Structure of *Crime and Punishment*," *PMLA* 74, no. 1 (Mar., 1959). Maurice Bebe comments that "Svidrigailov not only stands for the sensualist in Raskolnikov but also represents the outer-directed form of the sensuality which in Raskolnikov is primarily inner-directed," Maurice Bebe, "The Three Motives of Raskolnikov: A Reinterpretation of Crime and Punishment," *College English* 17: 3 (Dec., 1955). 155; Tatiana Kasatkina, on the other hand, opposes the generally accepted view of Svidrigailov as Raskolnikov's double: "we have here in fact two parallel stories [...] completely opposite stories..." (Tatiana Kasatkina, "*Voskreshenie Lazaria: opyt ekzegeticheskogo prochtenia romana F. M. Dostoevskogo 'Prestuplenie i nakazanie,'*" *Voprosy Literatury* 1 (2003). Harold Bloom posits Svidrigailov as "Raskolnikov's patient nemesis" and the more fascinating of the two characters. *Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov*, ed. Harold Bloom (Broomball, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004)

³² On Svidrigailov and suicide, see Nikolai Nasedkin, *Samoubiystvo Dostoevskogo. Tema suitsida v zhizni i tvorchestve pisatel'ia* (Moscow: *Algoritm*, 2002), 213-229.

³³ Henry Russell analyses this scene in terms of a clash between purity and cynicism. This is a plausible interpretation although not explicitly supported by the text. See Henry M. W. Russell, "Beyond the Will: Humiliation as Christian Necessity in *Crime and Punishment*," in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 321.

³⁴ A. Boyce Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 97.

Raskolnikov's. However, Raskolnikov's, the unrepentant double murderer's salvation in the epilogue displays less psychological motivation than Svidrigailov's suicide. There is a break between the psychological authenticity of the novel and the lack of motivation of the events in the epilogue. Raskolnikov's transformation into a believer is not explained; in fact, Zander maintains, it should not and could not be explained because Raskolnikov is saved by a miracle. Zander points out that the description of Raskolnikov's conversion emphasizes the unknowable nature of the forces that suddenly seize him: "Dostoevsky describes in them a true *miracle*—the immediate action of divine grace, the visitation of the human soul by the Holy Spirit."³⁵ Logic is inadmissible to the story of grace entering one's soul, because Law and Grace belong, like justice and pity, to different planes.³⁶

The miracle of the epilogue is akin to mercy entering the legal process in the form of executive pardon,³⁷ which is exactly what Dostoevsky gives Raskolnikov at the end. As in Marmeladov's formula, Raskolnikov is crucified and then/nevertheless pitied. Like a compassionate God of the universe of his own creation, Dostoevsky saves his character from moral death for no other reason than compassion. As an author constructing a narrative, Dostoevsky emphasizes the miraculous, divine nature of mercy by withdrawing a realistic motivation for Raskolnikov's conversion.

At the end of the novel, Raskolnikov learns to extend and to receive pity and is granted a new life. The miracle of his salvation occurs simultaneously with his realization of his love for Sonya, the human personification of compassion in the novel. Throughout the novel Sonya Marmeladov guides him toward this acceptance; this is her main function in the novel. Otherwise her character is remarkably underdeveloped: she has no inner voice³⁸, and is to a large extent a symbol rather than a real character, "a symbol of intuitive wisdom and boundless faith."³⁹ Sonya's name, Sophia, denotes divine wisdom⁴⁰, although in the novel this

³⁵ Zander, 18.

³⁶ See a related argument on the role of mercy in law and legal justice in Ivan Esaulov, "The Categories of Law and Grace in Dostoevsky's Poetics," in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*.

³⁷ "Pardoning, or clemency, is exclusively in the domain of the executive, rather than the judiciary branch of government," Konstan, 34.

³⁸ Gary Rosenshield, *Crime and Punishment: The Techniques of the Omniscient Author* (Lisse: The Peter de Ridder Press, 1978), 30.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30

⁴⁰ See George Gibian, "Traditional Symbolism in *Crime and Punishment*," *PMLA* 70 (December 1955), 979-996.

wisdom manifests itself only in Sonya's infinite power for compassion. When we actually hear Sonya speak during Raskolnikov's two visits she speaks only of pity and faith, and her face expresses "a sort of *insatiable* compassion (*nenasytimoe sostradanie*)." This is a striking phrase and Dostoevsky draws the reader's attention to it by the italics and by following it with "if one may so express it" (287), as if asking us to ponder the meaning of the phrase.

The power of Sonya lies, paradoxically, in her weakness, in her limitations, and in her status as a victim. They produce the feelings in Raskolnikov that Friedrich Nietzsche would soon call, with derision, "the 'unegotistic' instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice..."⁴¹ It is by both evoking and extending pity that Sonya brings Raskolnikov back to humanity. When she describes a heart-wrenching scene with Katerina Ivanovna: "what a pitiful sight it was!" (*tak zhalko bylo smotret'*), she answers Raskolnikov's skepticism with 'And don't you pity her? (*A vam razve ne zhalko*) Don't you pity? [...] You gave your last kopek yourself' (288). Pity is her reaction to Raskolnikov's confession as well: 'What have you done—what have you done to yourself! [...] There is no one—no one in the world now so unhappy as you' (370)⁴². Dostoevsky defines Sonya's feelings at the moment as "passionate, agonizing sympathy (*sochuvstvie*) for the unhappy man" (371). Her compassion affects Raskolnikov: "a feeling long unfamiliar flooded his heart and softened it at once. He did not struggle against it" (370). This unnamed feeling might be what Marmeladov expects to feel in answer to his demand for pity; and it is Raskolnikov's chance to start on the long road back to God. In accepting compassion he makes a step toward becoming part of human society again, the society that for Dostoevsky is necessarily Christian, just as his earlier refusal of charity symbolized his break with it.

Nietzsche believed pity to be an affliction, and defined all religion as preaching pity and with it self-contempt.⁴³ He famously defined Christianity as "active pity for all the failures and all the weak." Kant, too, believed that the position of an object of pity is humiliating, "since it expresses the kind of benevolence one has toward someone unworthy, called pity; and this has no place in men's relationship with one

⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 19.

⁴² In Sonya's reaction we find an echo of Dostoevsky's earlier observation in *The Notes from the House of the Dead* about Russian perception of crime as misfortune: "the whole of the Russian people in all of Russia calls crime a misfortune, and the criminal an unfortunate wretch."

⁴³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 340

another.”⁴⁴ Raskolnikov and Sonya’s relationship refutes this dynamic: she herself is the giver and the object of a great deal of compassion in the novel, yet compassion is her very strength, and the instrument with which she pushes Raskolnikov on to the road to redemption.

Sonya’s character also refutes Nietzsche’s views of compassion as a relationship between the strong and the weak. Nietzsche views pity as the instrument of control both for the strong and for the weak. The strong exercise control when they extend benefits to sufferers; and the weak infect others with their pain, thereby retaining at least one power, the power to hurt others. From such a point of view, everyone loses when pity is involved. Dostoevsky, however, presents a very different picture: in it, the weak Sonya does indeed exercise power over Raskolnikov by making him feel pity, act on it for others and at long last accept it for himself, and this leads to good. Dunya arouses pity in Svidrigailov and is saved from rape. Both Sonya and Dunya are classic representatives of the weak—they are poor, powerless women, and indeed their only power proves to be the power to elicit pity. And by this power they save, or attempt to, as in the case of Svidrigailov, themselves and others, rather than hurt them.

Dostoevsky’s last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, advances a very specific formula of Christianity as active love (*opyt deiatel’noi liubvi*, in Zosima’s words). There seems to be a progression in Dostoevsky’s major novels from the exploration of pity’s potential to symbolize Christianity in *Crime and Punishment* to posing love as the essence of true belief in his last novel.⁴⁵ This shift might be explained by the differences in the nature of compassion and love. In Christianity this difference is not immediately apparent. The contemporary philosopher Khen Lampert observes “complete overlap between the concept of love and compassion in Christianity” and interprets the New Testament understanding of love as compassion: “Love is the perception of another’s distress and action to assist that person: in other words, love is compassion.”⁴⁶ However, he

⁴⁴ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 250. For a comprehensive analysis of similarities in Kant and Nietzsche’s views see David E. Cartwright, “Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche on the Morals of Pity,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45: 1 (Jan.—Mar., 1984).

⁴⁵ This progression also includes *Notes from the House of the Dead* and *The Idiot*. In the Notes, Dostoevsky repeatedly stresses the Russian folk’s capacity for compassion and forgiveness. For an analysis of Myshkin as compassion see chapter Four in Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*: “He [Myshkin] is compassion: he is drawn inevitably to the greater weakness and the greater need” (115) and “the version of Christianity which Myshkin represents, and which Dostoevsky does not disdain, commands a disproportionate concern with the afflicted...” (118).

⁴⁶ Khen Lampert, *Traditions of Compassion. From Religious Duty to Social Activism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 20.

points out that “the concept of Christian love is broader than the concept of compassion,”⁴⁷ i.e. love might be joyful and unrelated to the moments of distress. It is, in other words, more inclusive. Moreover, the complex nature of compassion as a succession of cognitive, affective, and volitional elements implies a possibility that the sequence can be left incomplete, that a person might stop at the affective stage and refrain from the act of help. In another extreme, the emotional response could be so strong that the person is moved to anger, as Ivan Karamazov is, and revenge rather than compassionate act. This volatile aspect of pity is absent from the concept of Christian love. That makes love easier to postulate but harder to dramatize in a novel: unlike pity love doesn’t have an identifiable pattern of the emotion and the accompanying action.⁴⁸

In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky, like Nietzsche, presents Christianity as active pity. Pity’s function in the novel is not, as Kant assumed, to multiply suffering in the world, but rather to ease the burden of suffering by first sharing it, and then working to relieve it. When Sonya tells Raskolnikov that he must “suffer and expiate his sin by it” she means accepting responsibility for his crime, without which his redemption is impossible. Yet when Mikolka the young old believer (*raskolnik*) confesses to Raskolnikov’s crime in order to voluntarily accept suffering and thus purify himself, the gesture is immediately refuted. The brilliant detective Porfiry is very much aware of the religious sources of this confession, and disregards Mikolka’s admission of guilt. He muses almost sarcastically on the appeal of the concept, on “the force of the word ‘suffering’ (*postradat’*),” and on the “need to suffer” (*postradat’ nado*). Had Sonya met with the unfortunate Mikolka, she would surely have told him that rather than bring more undeserved suffering into the world, he should co-suffer, that is, feel compassion for those who are already in need of help: *ne postradat’*, *a sostradat’* would be the gist of her argument as well as Dostoevsky’s.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁸ Pity and a character’s relationship with it plays an important role in the plot of *The Brothers Karamazov*. One important scene is Alyosha’s visit to Grushenka at the moment when his faith is assaulted by doubt after the elder Zosima’s death. When Grushenka realizes this, she jumps off his lap and cancels her plan to seduce him. Alyosha, recognizing Grushenka’s “loving soul,” is moved to tears, grateful for her compassion: “she spared (*poshchadila*) me just now” (351). Grushenka, in turn, is moved by Alyosha’s willingness to see the best in her. She interprets Alyosha’s gift to her as pity: “I don’t know, I don’t know what he told me, my heart heard it, he wrung my heart...He is the first to pity me (*pozhalet on menia*) and the only one, that’s what.” (357). In the middle of this scene comes the parable of an onion, the story of mercy and compassion.