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Rebellion

Abstract

In this essay, I discuss a kind of existential problem that Fyodor Dostoevsky raises in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* – namely, determining how to live with clear eyes in world full of atrocities, without abandoning one’s deepest ethical convictions or succumbing to despair – and I reconstruct Dostoevsky’s view that a form of loving attention may help us address this problem. *The Brothers Karamazov* is a catalog of human afflictions: characters labor under the crushing weight of extreme poverty, they are ravaged by war and disease and mental illness, and they experience and engage in horrific forms of physical and emotional abuse. But they navigate these ills in a variety of ways. While some fall into despair, or develop festering resentments that erode their humanity, others find consolation, satisfaction, and even joy amid the sorrows. I consider how these latter characters – and Dostoevsky himself – find these forms of happiness by cultivating a kind of loving attention, which they direct at the natural world and at other people. Furthermore, I explain how finding these forms of happiness helps Dostoevsky’s characters, and may help us, live, and even flourish, in a broken world.