Let me begin with a few remarks about the novel to give some context to those who have not read it, and a refresher to those who have. *The Brothers Karamazov* involves a family of a widower, Fyodor Pavlovitch Karamazov, his grown sons (the brothers of the title), Dmitry, Ivan, and Alexei, who no longer live at home, and a possible illegitimate son Smerdykov, a valet in the father’s house. Attempts to settle a dispute between the eldest, Dmitry and his father over finances brings all the sons together, but this only sets the scene for a whole series of confrontations amongst the characters involving money, romance, philosophy, religion, politics – even a murder mystery. What drives the story and captures the readers’ attention is the journey of each of the sons through a series of personal crises that deeply transform their characters. The youngest, Alexei, whom the author refers to as the hero of the story, is a humble and deeply spiritual young man of twenty, a novice monk in the local monastery. And even though he goes through his own crises, he serves as a catalyst for the successful passage of his brothers through their crises. Alexei, or Alyosha for short, is able to do this largely because of his deep spirituality which, as the story opens, is being formed under the guidance of Fr. Zosima, his spiritual director, the main subject of this talk. An earlier version of the title was “Responsible to all for all”: *The monk Zosima's radical teaching in Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov*, says more about my intention. Fr. Zosima’s teaching about the idea of responsibility directly influences, guides, or give insight into how Alyosha and his brothers come to terms with their crises. I would propose it the most central idea in the novel.

Now, this talk is a work in progress, so much so that the title is already again out of date. The vast majority of readers of the English version of *The Brothers Karamazov* know it through
the classic 1912 translation by Constance Garnett. Every translation has its particular challenges, and every translator has his or her critics. At issue here is how one translates the word “responsibility” in the oft repeated phrase “responsible to all for all.” Let us begin by reading the selection where we first encounter the idea. We will look at the passage using the term “responsibility” first and then consider an alternative. Father Zosima is speaking to his fellow monks in one of his last meetings with them.

"Love one another, Fathers," said Father Zosima, as far as Alyosha could remember afterwards. "Love God's people. Because we have come here and shut ourselves within these walls, we are no holier than those that are outside, but on the contrary, from the very fact of coming here, each of us has confessed to himself that he is worse than others, than all men on earth... And the longer the monk lives in his seclusion, the more keenly he must recognize that. Else he would have had no reason to come here. When he realizes that he is not only worse than others, but that he is responsible to all men for all and everything, for all human sins, national and individual, only then the aim of our seclusion is attained. For know, dear ones, that every one of us is undoubtedly responsible for all men -- and everything on earth, not merely through the general sinfulness of creation, but each one personally for all mankind and every individual man. This knowledge is the crown of life for the monk and for every man. For monks are not a special sort of men, but only what all men ought to be."

How is the term “responsibility” being used here. Of particular note in this excerpt is Zosima’s exhortation to consider oneself “responsible to all men for all and everything, for all human sins, national and individual.” Being responsible to my fellow human being is understandable enough. I have a responsibility to love my neighbor, indeed my enemy. Responsibility in this sense refers to an obligation for me to perform some act toward another. The word responsibility can also be used after the fact of some deed to refer to my having been the cause of some effect, be it good or evil. For example, I could be responsible for having found a solution to a problem, or for having caused damage to property. One is not usually exhorted to be responsible in this second sense. As well, the only actions concerned in these examples of how we most often use the word, are my actions; I am normally not held responsible for the actions of others. What is peculiar about Father Zosima’s teaching, then, is that he exhort his monks to be responsible in both senses,—to all and for “all human sins, national and individual . . . and everything on earth.”

1 Book IV, Ch. 1. Garnett, p. 149; Pevear, p. 164.
The Russian word being translated here as “responsibility” is виноват / vinovat, as is noted in your handout. This word and its derivatives mean to be guilty or blameworthy. Vinobat and its related forms are used throughout our selections except for the fifth one, and there the author uses a word отвечик which is related to the usual Russian word for “responsibility” отвественность. The form отвечик, however, means defendant, or the one who is answerable. The relationship is like saying in English that the one responsible is the one obliged to make a response to a charge. Hence, even in the one place where a word related to the word for “responsible” is used, its sense is closer to meaning of guilty or answerable.

Using the word “guilty” rather than “responsible”, to me, makes the teaching of Zosima seem even more radical, but also truer to the intended meaning of his teaching. This idea plays a major role in the story, and in the time we have I would like briefly to explore first what it means and secondly how it figures in the development of the main characters, the brothers Dmitri, Ivan, and Alyosha. I intend to offer only a limited introduction to the topic, which warrants much deeper and extensive study.

Much of Book VI, “The Russian Monk,” is taken up by a long narrative by Father Zosima, partly autobiographical, and partly homiletic. As he recounts the story of his life, he includes an account from his early youth of his brother Markel’s conversion from atheism near the end of a terminal illness, and it becomes clear that this experience is the source of much of Zosima’s spirituality. In this scene between Markel and his mother he first encounters this idea of universal responsibility.

"And I shall also tell you, dear mother, that each of us is guilty (виноват / vinovat) in everything before everyone, and I most of all... you must know that verily each of us is guilty (виноват / vinovat) before everyone, for everyone and everything."
Birds of heaven, happy birds, forgive me, for I have sinned against you too." . . . "Yes," he said, "there was such a glory of God all about me: birds, trees, meadows, sky; only I lived in shame and dishonoured it all and did not notice the beauty and glory."2

During his terminal illness, Markel gained insight into his solidarity not just with all of humanity, but all of creation. Zosima reflects a similar sentiment when he exhorts his monks to love all:

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.

. . . for all is like an ocean, all is flowing and blending; a touch in one place sets up movement at the other end of the earth. . . . Every blade of grass, every insect, ant, and golden bee, all so marvellously know their path, though they have not intelligence, they bear witness to the mystery of God and continually accomplish it themselves. . . . 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.3

In Orthodox Christian spirituality there is a strong sense of what theologian Kallistos Ware calls the “total Adam”—our lives, our sin, our redemption all happen in solidarity with Adam and thus with all humans, indeed the whole of creation.4 My sin is everyone else’s sin and vice versa. This solidarity extends even to all of creation, which also suffered in consequence of Adam’s sin, that is, my sin in solidarity with Adam. This insight into universal solidarity easily leads to the insight of universal responsibility and universal guilt. I have a responsibility to bring people toward salvation because I have been responsible for, I am in some way complicit in and guilty of, their falling into sin.

Zosima’s experience of his brother was but a seed sown at an early age that bore fruit years later when he had his own conversion experience. While a young officer in the army, he had come to lead a rather wild life with little regard for others. One day he confronted a rival lover, insulted him, and challenged him to duel. On the day before the duel, he lost his temper

2 Book VI, Ch. 2. Garnett, p. 268; Pevear, p. 289.
3 Book VI, Ch. 3. Garnett, p. 298-99; Pevear, p. 319-20.
and savagely beat his servant. He rose early the next day with a troubled heart and while staring out a window at a beautiful warm sunrise, he suddenly realized how viciously and selfishly he treated his servant:

It was as though a sharp dagger had pierced me right through. I stood as if I were struck dumb, while the sun was shining, the leaves were rejoicing and the birds were trilling the praise of God.... I hid my face in my hands, fell on my bed and broke into a storm of tears. And then I remembered my brother Markel and what he said on his death-bed to his servants: "My dear ones, why do you wait on me, why do you love me, am I worth your waiting on me?" "Yes, am I worth it?" flashed through my mind. . . . For the first time in my life this question forced itself upon me.

He had said, "Mother, heart of my heart, truly each of us is guilty (виноват / vinovat) before everyone and for everyone, only people do not know it, and if they knew it, the world would at once become paradise." . . . Indeed, I am perhaps the most guilty (виновнее / vinovneye) of all, and the worst of all men in the world as well!" And all at once the whole truth in its full light appeared to me.5

At the duel, he allows his opponent to shoot first, and then he throws his own gun into forest and begs forgiveness from the man he insulted. His comrades first see his action as cowardly and disgraceful, but once he explains his conversion experience and announces his plan to join a monastery, the whole town accepts him as a man of integrity, even if his “guilty for all” idea was deemed madness.

But not everyone in the town thought his ideas crazy. Among his company was a stranger who started to visit him for conversation. He had been greatly moved by Zosima’s courage in backing out of the duel in the service of truth, and was struggling with his own need to show similar courage in confessing to a crime of murder. As he works his way nearer to confessing, he says to Zosima,

“As for each man being guilty (виноват / vinovat) before all and for all, besides his own sins, your reasoning about that is quite correct, and it is surprising that you could suddenly embrace this thought so fully. And indeed it is true that when people understand this thought, the Kingdom of Heaven will come to them, no longer a dream but in reality.”

It is interesting that he includes the comment about the Kingdom of Heaven, or Paradise

5 Book VI, Ch. 2. Garnett, p. 277; Pevear, p. 298.
6 Book VI, Ch. 2. Garnett, p. 282; Pevear, p. 303.
becoming a reality to those who come to understand they are guilty for all. Both Zosima and his brother Markel also remarked on this in their own conversion experiences. I will say more about this later, but note here only that this image of paradise on earth fits well with Zosima and Markel’s heightened awareness and full embrace of the beauty of all creation, the birds, glistening leaves, trees, meadows, sky. The visitor, with great effort, manages to confess his crime to Zosima, but the idea of public confessions seems too daunting. What finally pushes him to that point is hearing the passage from John’s Gospel (12.24): “Unless a grain of wheat fall to the earth and die it remains alone, but if it should die, it bears much fruit.” It would seem his choice is between solitude or a fruitful life in solidarity with all in a regained paradise. Even though the guilt he is dealing with is his own crime of murder, in the passage above, he expressly affirms to Zosima the idea of being guilty for the sins of others. Either way, the consequence of not owning one’s guilt is the same: remaining in a solitude unto death instead of attaining solidarity with all. And again this owning of guilt, of being a sinner, even the worst of sinners, seems to be the first step.

From this point of his life on, Zosima adopts a life that truly is paradise – he judges no one, fears no one, and serves the needs of all, since he is convinced that he is a worse sinner than all.

In the final sections of Zosima’s narrative, where he relates an number teachings about the life of the monk, he returns yet again to this idea about responsibility, three times directly, and once indirectly.

In the first example from this section (#5) he says,

There is only one salvation for you: take yourself up, and make yourself responsible (ответчиком / otvetchikom) for all the sins of men. For indeed it is so, my friend, and the moment you make yourself
sincerely responsible (ответчиком / otetchikom) for everything and everyone, you will see at once that it is really so, that it is you who are guilty (виноват / vinovat) on behalf of all and for all.\(^7\)

Here he adds the nuance of making oneself responsible. It is more than realizing a state of guilt or responsibility, it is performing an action. In this passage, the word for responsible is not vinovat, but otvetchik, meaning defendant, and I would prefer something more like answerable. In a sense he is saying, “step into the dock and answer for the sin of another;” but he does not mean acting as if one is guilty but testifying that one is in fact guilty.

A little further he says (#6):

> Remember especially that you cannot be the judge of anyone. For there can be no judge of a criminal on earth until the judge knows that he, too, is a criminal, exactly the same as the one who stands before him, and that he is perhaps most guilty (виноват / vinovat) of all for the crime of the one standing before him. When he understands this, then he will be able to be a judge. However mad that may seem, it is true. For if I myself were righteous, perhaps there would be no criminal standing before me now. If you are able to take upon yourself the crime of the criminal who stands before you and whom you are judging in your heart, do so at once, and suffer for him yourself, and let him go without reproach.\(^5\)

He emphasizes again here that one is not simply as guilty as the next person for one’s own sins, but we are actually to blame for each other’s sins. But how can it be that one can be guilty for another’s sin? He introduces a new idea here that suggests how this might be so when he says, “For if I myself were righteous, perhaps there would be no criminal standing before me now.” The implication is that his unrighteousness may have been the cause of the criminal’s downfall – i.e., he may have been responsible for it. The proper action in this situation is to take upon oneself the other’s crime and to suffer for him.

He returns to this idea a little later, he adds some more nuances:

> If the wickedness of people arouses indignation and insurmountable grief in you, to the point that you desire to revenge yourself upon the wicked, fear that feeling most of all; go at once and seek torments for yourself, as if you yourself were guilty (виновен / vinoven) of their wickedness. Take these torments upon yourself and suffer them, and your heart will be eased, and you will understand that you, too, are guilty (виновен / vinoven), for you might have been a light to the wicked, even like the only sinless One, but you were not.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) Book VI, Ch. 3. Garnett, p. 299; Pevear, p. 320
\(^8\) Book VI, Ch. 3. Garnett, p. 300; Pevear, p. 321.
\(^9\) Book VI, Ch. 3. Garnett, p. 300–301; Pevear, p. 321
Here Zosima reveals something about how one puts this teaching into practice. When I stand as judge over a wicked person, and I am tempted to take revenge, I should seek suffering as if I were guilty of that person’s wickedness. The result is that I will be healed of my vengeful feelings and actually see that I am guilty of the person’s wickedness. His last point could be the most important: I might have been a light to this person to keep him from his wickedness, but I wasn’t. That I fail to be a light can allow others to be led astray, and for that I am answerable.

This point is reinforced in a powerful saying on vigilance:

Every day and every hour, every minute, walk round yourself and watch yourself, and see that your image is a seemly one. You pass by a little child, you pass by, spiteful, with ugly words, with wrathful heart; you may not have noticed the child, but he has seen you, and your image, unseemly and ignoble, may remain in his defenseless heart. You don't know it, but you may have sown an evil seed in him and it may grow, and all because you were not careful before the child, because you did not foster in yourself a careful, actively benevolent love.¹⁰

All of the texts we have been examining come from the collection of Fr. Zosima’s teachings in Book VI, where his fellow monks are his principal audience. If, as I believe, the idea of universal responsibility is the leading idea of the whole novel, how does this idea connect beyond the monastery to the rest of the story and its characters?

The principal connection is through the youngest son, Alyosha, called the story’s hero by the author. He is already a disciple of Fr. Zosima and familiar with his teaching on responsibility, but he is also young and inexperienced and this teaching has yet to be actualized in him. We meet him as a young novice monk at the feet of Fr. Zosima, but soon his life is turned upside down when the elder’s health suddenly declines and with only hours left of life, commands Alyosha to leave the monastery and “sojourn in the world.”¹¹ He is plunged into despair by this news, and his condition worsens when the deceased elder’s body suffers premature decay and Zosima’s reputation is besmirched by his critics who claim this unexpected event is a sign of a

¹⁰ Book VI, Ch. 3. Garnett, p. 298; Pevear, p. 319.
¹¹ Book VI: Ch. 4, Garnett, p. 341; Pevear, p. 363.
pretended sanctity. Alyosha’s spiritual crisis comes in an encounter with the character Grushenka, a woman supposedly of low moral standards. In the depths of his despair he allows a friend, Rakitin, to escort him to Grushenka, as he says, “To seek my ruin.” As it turns out Grushenka despised Alyosha the monk because he would always turn away and drop his eyes when passing her on the street, and she was looking for a chance to “get him in her clutches” and ruin him. When they meet however, something rather unexpected happens. Their paths cross, as the author puts it, as “They were each passing through a spiritual crisis such as does not come often in a lifetime.” While sitting on Alyosha’s knee and starting to make her moves, she learns that Zosima has died. She immediately jumps off his knee and expresses a deep and sincere pity. Astonished “Alyosha fixed a long wondering look upon her and a light seemed to dawn in his face.” He says to his friend Rakitin, “Do you see how she has pity on me? I came here to find a wicked soul -- I felt drawn to evil because I was base and evil myself, and I've found a true sister; I have found a treasure -- a loving heart.” Grushenka is herself astonished by Alyosha’s response and is ready to acknowledge her own wickedness. She in turn says,

Alyosha, your words make me ashamed, for I am bad and not good -- that's what I am. . . . Rakitin, I had the low idea of trying to get him in my clutches, but now . . . He called me his sister and I shall never forget that. . . . it went straight to my heart; he has wrung my heart.... He is the first, the only one who has pitied me, that's what it is. Why did you not come before, you angel?"

These two characters, each ready to pass judgment on the other, end up letting themselves be mutually judged as the worst of sinners, and mutually offer each other love and forgiveness. Alyosha’s spiritual crisis is his realization and acceptance that he is, understood in his own way, “the most guilty of all.” Only from this stance is he able, with any effectiveness to love and serve others.

Immediately following this event, in perhaps the most significant scene of the whole novel, Alyosha, while praying at the coffin of Zosima, has a vision of his deceased elder at the
wedding feast of Cana. The elder’s speaks to him about what he did for Grushenka that day noting that that one good deed is sufficient to indicate he is welcome to the wedding feast. “What are all our deeds?”, Zosima says, meaning that since we are all sinners (can each of us be the worst?), what matters most is not the sum total of deeds, good or bad, but a fundamental conviction that while one may be the worst of sinners, one can still love. These words of encouragement banish all doubts in Alyosha’s heart about the genuineness of what Zosima had taught him. He runs out of the cell “over flowing with rapture,” into the open air.

The vault of heaven, full of soft, shining stars, stretched vast and fathomless above him. . . . The silence of earth seemed to melt into the silence of the heavens. The mystery of earth was one with the mystery of the stars. . . . Alyosha stood, gazed, and suddenly threw himself down on the earth. He did not know why he embraced it. He could not have told why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss it all. But he kissed it weeping, sobbing, and watering it with his tears, and vowed passionately to love it, to love it for ever and ever. . . . What was he weeping over? Oh! in his rapture he was weeping even over those stars, which were shining to him from the abyss of space, and "he was not ashamed of that ecstasy." There seemed to be threads from all those innumerable worlds of God, linking his soul to them, and it was trembling all over. . . . He longed to forgive everyone and for everything, and to beg forgiveness. Oh, not for himself, but for all men, for all and for everything. . . . But with every instant he felt clearly and, as it were, tangibly, that something firm and unshakable as that vault of heaven had entered into his soul. It was as though some idea had seized the sovereignty of his mind—and it was for all his life and for ever and ever. He had fallen on the earth a weak boy, but he rose up a resolute champion, and he knew and felt it suddenly at the very moment of his ecstasy.12

This powerful scene of Alyosha embracing not just the earth but all of creation reflects Zosima’s vision of cosmic unity. His throwing himself down on the earth is expressive of the passage from John’s Gospel (12.24) we noted above, and which also serves as the author’s epigraph to the novel, “Unless a grain of wheat fall to the earth and die it remains alone, but if it should die, it bears much fruit.” Alyosha takes a formal step into solidarity in this experience, and the author is clear about the depth and permanency of its effect when he says, “. . . something firm and unshakable as that vault of heaven had entered into his soul. It was as though some idea had seized the sovereignty of his mind—and it was for all his life and for ever and ever.”

Alyosha is now no longer distressed about being sent from the monastery to “live like a

monk in the world,” he can embrace it as a genuine vocation. He is to become a significant carrier of this idea of universal responsibility to all he encounters. In our limited time, I will look briefly at two instances of this in his relationship with his brothers.

Dmitri is a high-spirited, emotional, and often reckless character, but is nonetheless a man of integrity with a deep sense of honor. During the course of the story he twice succumbs to a violent temper, squanders 3,000 rubles of someone else’s money, all but kills his father out of jealousy, and strikes down the servant Grigory (thinking that he has indeed killed him) while trying to escape. He runs through this string of misfortunes all in an attempt to secure the hand of Grushenka, the object of his love. The final blow happens when he hears Grushenka is to run off with and old lover. Faced with this total collapse of any hope for a future, he follows the fleeing Grushenka for a final evening revel in her company and then kill himself at dawn. What concerns us here is what goes through Dmitri’s mind and heart as he faces what he thinks will be his final hours. Racing along the road after Grushenka he has time to reflect. (The author notes, by the way, that this very hour was when Alyosha “fell to the earth, and rapturously swore ‘to love it for ever and ever.’”) Two things can be noted about his thoughts and feelings. First of all, he felt no jealousy for the newly returned lover; he was ready to “step aside” for the lover Grushenka had every right to choose. Secondly, he feels genuine remorse about the things he has done; never once trying to justify any of his misdeeds. He strikes up a conversation with his driver Andrey, and after talking about what sort of people might end up in hell, asks Andrey if he thinks that he, Dmitri, will go to hell. Andrey thinks not, for "you're like a little child... that's how we look on you... and though you're hasty-tempered, sir, yet God will forgive you for your kind heart." This prompts the following exchange:

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"And you, do you forgive me, Andrey?"
"What should I forgive you for, sir? You've never done me any harm."
"No," [said Dmitri] "for everyone, for everyone, you here alone, on the road, will you forgive me for everyone? Speak, simple peasant heart!" 14

The strangeness of this response frightens the driver, but I think we can see by it that Dmitri is beginning to sense how his actions have a universal dimension, how he is in some sense responsible to all for all - his misdeeds don’t just affect select individuals, but everyone, and Andrey, who isn’t just anyone, but a representative for everyone, can speak for everyone and offer forgiveness.

We noted above how an essential element of the teaching on responsibility is the belief that one is the worst of sinners, the most guilty of all. We can see this belief somewhat reflected in Dmitri’s prayer:

Lord, receive me, with all my lawlessness, and do not condemn me. Let me pass by Thy judgment... do not condemn me, for I have condemned myself, do not condemn me, for I love Thee, O Lord. I am a wretch, but I love Thee. If Thou sendest me to hell, I shall love Thee there, and from there I shall cry out that I love Thee for ever and ever.... Thou seest my whole heart... 15

Reflected here again is the state of being a wretched sinner yet still able to love.

As things turn out, Dmitri gets Grushenka back, the servant Grigory lives, but he is still falsely convicted of murdering his father and faces a twenty-year sentence in the mines. Though innocent, he is willing to serve time to make up for a dissipated life. Another indication of his insight into universal responsibility comes in the form of a dream during his interrogation ordeal of a poor starving peasant woman holding out her weeping baby begging for relief after her village had burned down.

[Dmitri] felt that a passion of pity, such as he had never known before, was rising in his heart, that he wanted to cry, that he wanted to do something for them all, so that the babe should weep no more, so that the dark-faced, dried-up mother should not weep, that no one should shed tears again from that moment.

14 Book VIII, Ch. VI. Garnett, p. 389; Pevear, p. 412.
15 Book VIII, Ch. VI. Garnett, p. 389; Pevear, p. 412.
The dream haunts him throughout his trial and finally he divulges its significance to Alyosha, who has been a critical confidant throughout.

Brother, these last two months I've found in myself a new man. A new man has risen up in me. He was hidden in me, but would never have come to the surface, if it hadn't been for this blow from heaven. . . . Even there, in the mines, underground, I may find a human heart in another convict and murderer by my side, and I may make friends with him, for even there one may live and love and suffer. . . . There are so many of them, hundreds of them, and we are all to blame for them. Why was it I dreamed of that 'babe' at such a moment? 'Why is the babe so poor?' That was a sign to me at that moment. It's for the babe I'm going. Because we are all responsible for all. . . . I go for all, because someone must go for all.\textsuperscript{16}

Nowhere in the story does Dmitri hear directly anything about being “responsible for all,” but he has somehow come to be convinced of its fact. I would suggest that it comes from his realization that being “the worst of all sinners,” he is not in a position to judge or look down on others, but on an equal footing with all, equally in need of forgiveness and healing, and mutually responsible for offering forgiveness and healing.

The brother Ivan is introduced as the well-educated philosopher and writer, struggling with belief in God and the notion that if God and immortality do not exist, then all things are lawful. In a telling moment, Ivan reveals to Alyosha how he is unable to love his neighbor:

I could never understand how one can love one's neighbours. It's just one's neighbours, to my mind, that one can't love, though one might love those at a distance. . . . One can love one's neighbours in the abstract, or even at a distance, but at close quarters it's almost impossible.\textsuperscript{17}

Elsewhere, Dmitri calls Ivan “a tomb”; he is utterly alone. Ivan learns about responsibility in such a distressing way that it literally drives him mad. Unknown to him, he has a tragically negative influence on the impressionable valet, Smerdyakov, the real murderer of the father. Ivan discovers too late that his doctrine that if God and immortality do not exist, then all is lawful so enthralled Smerdyakov, that the valet hatched the plot to kill the father, steal his money and escape to a new life, thinking all along that Ivan approved of the plot and even encouraged him to do it. Smerdyakov admits as much in their last meeting:

\textsuperscript{16} Book XI: Ch. 4. Garnett, p. 560; Pevear, p. 591.
\textsuperscript{17} Book V, Ch. 4. Garnett, pp. 217–18; Pevear, pp. 236–37.
No, he [Dmitri] didn't kill him. . . . If you really haven't understood till now, . . . you are still responsible (виновны) for it all, since you knew of the murder and charged me to do it, and went away knowing all about it. And so I want to prove to your face this evening that you are the only real murderer in the whole affair, and I am not the real murderer, though I did kill him. You are the rightful murderer . . . That was quite right what you taught me, for you talked a lot to me about that. For if there's no everlasting God, there's no such thing as virtue, and there's no need of it. You were right there. So that's how I looked at it. 

We are no doubt meant to recall here Zosima’s exhortation to vigilance lest we unknowingly corrupt a child by a mean look or careless cruel word. Ivan’s “doctrine,” probably not held with great conviction, that if there is no God, all is lawful, appears as diametrically opposed to Zosima’s teaching of universal responsibility. It corrupts Smerdyokov, and only too late does Ivan realize he is to blame, that he is responsible for the murder. When Ivan realized he was responsible for this outcome, “something seemed to give way in his brain,” and from this point on his mental health rapidly declines. Nonetheless he is coherent enough to realize his position and he is prepared to appear in court the following day at Dmitri’s trial and explain the whole situation. This resolve to tell all suggests an acceptance on his part to acknowledge himself as much a sinner than anyone (if not the worst?).

In a rather poignant manner, the author includes an event that reinforces how, as debilitating as this revelation of his guilt is to Ivan, it manages to be a turning point toward conversion. On the way to this last meeting with Smerdyakov, Ivan encounters a drunken peasant weaving towards him in the snowstorm trying to sing a song. Reminiscent of the neighbor at close quarters whom he cannot love, he “feels an intense hatred for him before he had thought about him at all,” shoves him down onto the frozen ground, and leaves him there unconscious. Shortly thereafter, at the moment in his conversation with Smerdyakov when he realizes the role he played in the murder of his father, the voice of the singing drunken peasant suddenly echoes in his head. No more is said about this at the time, but a rather extraordinary event takes place on

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his return home. Having resolved to reveal everything about himself and the valet in court the following day, he leaves Smerdyakov’s feeling both happy and hopeful. While on his way he stumbles across the peasant he had knocked down earlier, and what follows is a retelling of the story of the Good Samaritan, even to the point of leaving money to cover expenses. The unique twist to this rendering of the parable is that Ivan is both responsible for the attack as well as the caring for the victim.

While little is suggested here about Ivan having a sense of universal solidarity with all people and creation, it is clearly present in his would-be farewell conversation with Alyosha in a tavern. Ivan has a deep and broad grasp of the scope and beauty of creation in all its splendor, yet he cannot accept that this world allows for the unrequited suffering of defenseless children:

I believe in the underlying order and the meaning of life; I believe in the eternal harmony in which they say we shall one day be blended. I believe in the Word to Which the universe is striving, and Which Itself was ‘with God,’ and Which Itself is God and so on, and so on, to infinity. . . Yet would you believe it, in the final result I don't accept this world of God's, and, although I know it exists, I don't accept it at all. It's not that I don't accept God, you must understand, it's the world created by Him I don't and cannot accept. Let me make it plain. I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage, like the despicable fabrication of the impotent and infinitely small Euclidian mind of man, that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened with men- but though all that may come to pass, I don't accept it. I won't accept it.

Even though he expresses a sure hope and belief in a final harmony, he is a detached observer. While he may understand about solidarity and responsibility, he finds he cannot personally share it in. At this earlier point of the story, as long as he cannot love the neighbor who is near him this vision of the world’s plight will only torment him. This is his nightmare. Yet by the end of the story, he is in a position to come round. He has been the cause of the suffering of a young man, and instigator of a murder. He reaches the point of taking the suffering upon himself. We don’t get to see if he pulls through to forgiveness and healing, but we are left with a sense of hope.

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19 Book XI, Ch. 8. Garnett, p. 600-1; Pevear, p. 633-34.
I have attempted to explore the meaning of this teaching on universal responsibility as explained by Zosima and show how in some respects characters in the novel live it out. If this talk were to be published somewhere, I would have to write a conclusion. However, tonight I propose letting our discussion serve as a conclusion, and I simply propose a question—do you buy it? That is, based on what we have heard, is it all conceivable that you could be convinced that you are indeed the most guilty before all and for all, and that if you can manage to take onto yourself the sins of all and suffer for them, because they are indeed your sins, you crimes, paradise will come to you no longer in a dream but in reality?

Work cited
