

*The Mind of Narrative and the Narrative of Mind*  
*Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and the Diagnosis of Spirit*

*The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace ~ Romans 8:6*

**Opening Remarks**

Ironically, the ontological demonstration for the existence of God and, as I will argue, the mind, to which Descartes yokes the moral narrative of existence – as delineated within the *Discourse on Method* – has been misunderstood in our post-modern milieu. The irony lies in that what Descartes rightfully postulates as constituting the matrix of modern philosophy – a nexus rendering thought and existence, both divine and human, necessary – post-modern philosophy (both analytical and continental) seeks to refute (doubt); yet, it is precisely this postulate that renders all refutations (all doubting) meaningful.

Instead of going beyond the modern philosophy of Descartes (by being committed to it, fortifying their engagement to its dramatic contemporary implications), post-modern thinkers have attempted to adopt a position outside of it, eschewing the very standard that Descartes explicates as allowing us to be responsible for distinguishing between the true and the false. Indeed, what an examination of Descartes' philosophy demonstrates is that, unless we subscribe to the narrative that all people possess *good sense*<sup>1</sup> equally and entirely we will be unable to demonstrate the existence of the mind, precisely because the existence of the mind is predicated upon the moral narrative of human relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1998. p.1

What Descartes recognizes as he narrates the *coming into existence*<sup>2</sup> of his own mind (and God) is that to render the existence of the mind objective (independent of human subjectivity) is to nullify it, given that it will be subjected to the endless contradictory transformations of sense experience. Nor does one escape the problem of accounting for the existence of the mind (or God) by rendering the mind subjective (independent of objectivity). For, as Descartes explains, that which is solely subjective – in his terms, imaginative – is merely the vacuous reconfiguration of sense impressions. Rather, Descartes perspicaciously proves that the mind (as well as God, the soul, and spirit) exists only insofar as its narrative is both rational and faithful, expressing that all are irreducible to the finite (sense impressions/imagination) if they endeavor to distinguish between the true and the false.

Thus, as post-modern thought seeks to go beyond Descartes' modern thesis by rejecting it, it ineluctably resigns itself to divorcing what must be held together for thought to remain thoughtful. Thinking becomes unthoughtful when it is incapable of contending with dyads that appear to contradict one another (e.g. thinking and emotions; reason and faith; truth and interpretation). The contradictions amongst these dyads result from basing one's understanding of the mind either on sense impressions (objective reality) or on the imagination (subjective illusion). Insofar as these thinkers develop their theories of the mind along subjectivist or objectivist currents, their charge distorts and precludes the amelioration of human relationships in our pluralistic world, stymies their capacity to ascertain truth in their respective fields, and precipitates quite pernicious states of mind for those who subscribe to their presuppositions.

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<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard, Soren. *Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna A. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.198

What compels me to write this dissertation on the way in which Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky amplify the Cartesian project is a fundamental awareness on their part of what ramifications undoubtedly befall the individual who seeks to decouple the relationship of thought and existence in Descartes' *cogito*. The chasm left behind, in the wake of this decoupling, demands that a thinker submit to one of two false positions when dealing with the existence of the mind on the one hand, and the relationship of the truth and falsity of narrative, on the other hand: either the mind is epiphenomenally reducible to the body (in which case mental states are brain states and the mind, for that matter, does not exist) or the mind is an illusory substance, a romantic and ideological fancy; likewise, either narrative is true if it is rooted in the finitude of facts and quantifiable experiences or it is false, denoting the fancies and delusions of an arbitrary and untrustworthy will. A choice of either option results in the cognitive dissonance with which our (post-)modern world is riven, given that neither option embodies the harmony – and the challenge – which Descartes' thesis provides and demands.

### **Aim and Scope**

In relation to the foregoing, this dissertation seeks to position itself against certain post-modern philosophical, religious, psychological, and literary positions by examining Soren Kierkegaard's philosophy of the mind and the narratives of Fyodor Dostoevsky. What I shall undertake to show is that, in order for a mind (soul, spirit, self, consciousness, God) to exist, it must be accompanied by a narrative that reveals its existence and that, in order for a narrative to be true, it must possess a mind that exists as irreducible to finite fact and the delusions of an arbitrary will. That the mind exists only if its narrative is true and that a narrative is true only if it possesses a mind, expresses the dialectical implications of Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*.

The reason why I shall focus here on Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, not on Descartes, is because Descartes does not directly expand upon his own insights into the necessary nexus between the mind and narrative, for which, both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky successfully do. Success, for both authors, is demonstrated by their capacity to illuminate the contradictory ramifications of failing to uphold the necessary relationship between the mind and narrative. These ramifications, as will be explored in this dissertation, will be understood and assessed as symptoms of a tragic mind – the cognitive failure to cleave to the necessary relationship between the mind and true narrative – rather than a mind involved in a necessary relationship with tragedy – a relationship one engages in order to distinguish between the mind of narrative, and, conversely, a narrative without a mind and a mind without a narrative. .

For Kierkegaard – a self-professed proponent of Cartesian doubt as a heuristic of truth – unless one holds fast to the paradox of existence (the demand that to be human one must live the dialectic, the absolute relationship, of the infinite and the finite, ideality and reality – the paradox, he holds, is that which unites the contradictories – but that one can do so only by beginning with, by arguing from, the infinite and ideality) one will become mired in/by contradiction (by diametrically opposing the infinite and the finite, ideality and reality).

The very health of the mind, then, according to Kierkegaard, is contingent upon its ability to resolve contradictions<sup>3</sup> – contradictions that derive from false narratives (those which reduce oneself and the world to what is finitely perceptible or relinquish the world for an illusory beyond). However, to resolve a contradiction is not to choose between either the infinite or the finite, ideality or reality, but, as indicated above, to choose – in following the biblical injunction

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<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard, Soren. *Sickness unto Death*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna A. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press., 1983, p.57

on human inter-subjectivity – the necessary relationship between them. Kierkegaard argues that we must choose to *come into existence*<sup>4</sup> by acknowledging that who/what one is (the content of one's mind) is not the mirror reflection of the finite world (for Descartes, the sensory experience or imaginative construction of the finite world) but embodies the sovereign recognition of one's incommensurability with the finite world.

Kierkegaard demonstrates that faith (like doubt) represents one's leap from (liberates one from) the calculative understanding of the world and oneself – an understanding that reduces the human being to a mere thing amongst other things. Thus, it is only in light of what he develops as the religious disposition, a disposition that qualifies the knight of faith's leap, that one can recognize all human beings as essentially human, possessing incommensurable (absolute) value. Through Kierkegaard's concept of faith, the ontology of the mind is yoked to the narrative event of the will, which courageously confronts what he describes as the either/or of existence: either choose the condition<sup>5</sup> of faith or suffer the contradictory ramifications of refusing to leap. The result of one's refusal to leap; of one's refusal to come into existence; of one's refusal to distinguish between the infinite and the finite; of one's refusal to narrate the existence of the mind and its moral relationship to existence, represents what Kierkegaard categorizes as sickness, anxiety, resignation, and offence (all of which will be taken up within my dissertation).

If, in following Kierkegaard, we maintain that Christian heroism is striving wholly to be oneself,<sup>6</sup> we can infer that to be the hero in one's own narrative (or any narrative, whether fictional or non-fictional) demands that one endeavor – with fear and trembling – to maintain the existence of one's mind by narrating its moral and truthful distinction from the finite. This

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<sup>4</sup> Kierkegaard, Soren. *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 73

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 15

<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard, Soren. *Sickness unto Death*, p.6

distinction, however, does not devolve into what Kierkegaard would call an infinitely resigned disavowal of the world on the basis of a falsely assumed supremacy of the mind but, rather, is a distinction which, once made, involves itself with an earnest engagement with the world's aporias (with the world's habitual reduction of itself and of the self to either sense impressions or the imagination). For, as Kierkegaard further observes (following the Cartesian method), to narrate the existence of the mind demands that one also recognize that, if faith is not accorded to all (if it is not recognized as being the responsibility of all to distinguish between good and evil, the true and the false), then communication (communion, narration) with all – including oneself – is impossible.

In light of this, a truthful narrative is neither true because of its ability to recount facts or events which have observably occurred nor false because it rejects to make use of finite occurrences. Rather, a narrative is truthful only insofar as it possesses the *good sense* to distinguish the infinitude (truth) of the mind from its finite manifestations, while highlighting that the implications of refusing to do so – refusing to apply *good sense* – result in an individual becoming what Dostoevsky alternatively describes as suicidal, demonic, idiotic, sensual, rational, or saintly. Dostoevsky is clear – in the great breadth and diversity of his narrative creations – that, if one does not cleave to the ontological proof for the existence of God (self, soul, mind, consciousness, and the other), then one will ineluctably succumb to the thoughtlessness that permeates the nature of false narratives.

It is customary within the narratives of Dostoevsky for a character to be stymied by her or his penchant to oppose fiction and reality dualistically. However, this is consistently tempered by Dostoevsky's authorial understanding of the necessary and moral relationship between faith, doubt, and reason. That fiction is only fictional insofar as it unreasonably reduces the human

being (mind) to merely finite reality, and that reality is only real (its worth fully realized) insofar as it involves a faithful affirmation of the narrative (fictional) truth that all are irreducible to the finite, is exposed by Dostoevsky to be true only if the basis upon which we assess the relationship between religion, philosophy, psychology, and narrative is one that accounts for the necessary relationship between truthful narratives and the existence of the mind. Indeed, it is precisely this relationship that allows us to overcome our (post-)modern narratological falsifications (our finite relationships with ourselves and others).

What a thorough examination of the fundamental principles and values underpinning the texts of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky can yield is an awareness of the implications that follow cleaving to the conventional ideas of the mind (and of mental health), which result in reproducing the false dualisms that divide the mind against itself. A critical analysis of the works of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, in the context of the relationship between the mind and (its) narrative, will also allow us to overcome the false and falsifying dualisms that divide (post-)modern narrative against itself.

In exploring the major works of both thinkers,<sup>7</sup> I will also want to show that narrative – as expressing mind – demands that we (post-)moderns, in order accurately to avoid our susceptibility to false narratives (false and therefore contradictory states of mind), must make the proper distinction between the Hebraic narrative of the mind (the biblical creation of human relationship, premised on the emergence of the knowledge of good and evil – the emergence of the human being as the neighbour) and the Hellenic narrative of the mind (the impossibility of

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<sup>7</sup> For Kierkegaard, I will be primarily analyzing the following works: *Fear and Trembling*, *Sickness unto Death*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, and *Philosophical Fragments*. For Dostoevsky, I will be primarily analyzing the following works: *The Brother Karamazov*, *Notes from Underground*, *The Idiot*, and *Demons*.

human relationship, premised on ignorance of the good). For, it is only insofar as we are capable of making the distinction between biblical and ancient Greek narrative that we can make the necessary distinction between, on the one hand, (post-)modern narrative (in which we find both stories that embody the truth of the mind and stories that falsify the mind) and, on the other hand, narratives that do not exist as narratives (either truly or falsely) precisely because they do not narrate the story of human existence. What Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky both show is that the principle of narrative (and that of invention/creation) and the principle of the mind (and thus of thinking) is reciprocity – involving not only the relationship between mind and narrative but also the faithful/doubtful/reasonable compact between self and other, author and reader, God and humankind.

Finally, then, in light of the aforementioned, and given that the relationship between the existence of mind and the truth of narrative implicitly entails the ontological structure of identity, the post-modern issues of intersectionality, radicalism and identity politics will be treated and attended to throughout the course of this dissertation, once the relationship between mind and narrative is sufficiently established. It is precisely because so much of modern scholarship is reductive and so utterly bereft of the liberatory hermeneutic of the relationship between mind and narrative that most texts (humans, experiences, thoughts) are radicalized and essentialized, such that their true content is repressed. That the mind is infinite and that narrative is true only insofar as it bears witness to this infinitude embodies a principle of interpretation that can expose modern truth claims as to the nature of the self to be perversions of truth that fragment and distort, rather than augment and edify, our understandings of the human condition. This is why, in concert with this dissertation's concern with establishing the necessary relationship between mind and narrative, it will be equally important to address specific post-modern issues

surrounding what this dissertation would consider obfuscations of the relationship between mind and narrative.

### **Review of Existing Scholarship**

In my review of existing scholarship, I want particularly to focus here, in keeping with the overall theme of my proposal and due to space limitations, not on current/past interpretations of Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard – those shall certainly play a significant role in my dissertation – but on the concept of mind that the two thinkers together allow their readers to bring against the impasses resulting from contemporary interpretations of mind and narrative. What we most often see within contemporary investigations into the existence of the mind is a deliberation that falls either on the side of dualism or monism, with the latter predominating the former. Whether we take a physicalist, behaviourist, functionalist, epiphenomenalist, or eliminative materialist stance on the nature of mind and mental events (thoughts) we nevertheless arrive at the same conclusion, that without a strong notion of the emancipatory value of narrative – as it bespeaks the truthful existence of the mind as infinite – we will be unable to avoid reducing mind to either biological processes or environmental conditions (from which we acquire our most egregious discriminatory practices).

Thinkers like Thomas Nagel, who, ironically, reject the physicalist argument for the existence of mind, are nevertheless incapable of producing an argument which incontrovertibly elucidates the intimate connection between mind and existence, notwithstanding the fact that they find (or he finds) the overwhelming proliferation of objectivist thought so stultifying. For, while Nagel affirms the need distinctly to value the revelations of the subjective mind, he cannot explain how the mind relates to the objective world, given that he possesses no notion of

existence as in-finite. He therefore resigns himself to the postulate that both should be respected as separate spheres of insight (without one being truly able to inform the other).

John Searle, who notes that statements (any verbal or written expression) only have meaning if they are intentional, nevertheless cannot find anything but what he calls background. That is, he cannot find anything in statements that does not correspond to the unconscious conditions, conventions, and tendencies of the individual – cannot work out how statements can possess truth values and be considered ideas. Given that the semantic value of all verbal statements, according to Searle, refer to physical states (all ostensibly mental/verbal statements emanate from the unconscious and its libidinal preoccupations) and represent facts that are either certain or uncertain, how can we assert that the mind possesses an ontologically distinct existence?

One might also consider Hilary Putnam, who fails to recognize that mental states need not simply be causally connected to sensory inputs that result in behavioral outputs but, rather, can represent one's liberation from sensory determination in regard to how one views the worth of his or her own mind. Because, then, Putnam does not consider the mind in terms of a concept of worth or absolute value, she also does not see how the absolute value of one's mind can (must) translate into presupposing the same capacities in the other in order for the connection between mind and existence to be meaningful (intentional, according to Searle).

In relation to the philosophy of narrative (which itself involves historically rigorous linguistic, semiotic, and semantic debates) structuralists and post-structuralists have all struggled with, as I shall argue, the biblical and equally contemporary revelation that the standard by which narrative must be evaluated and critiqued is itself a standard which demands that it be understood in conjunction with the ontological proof for the existence of God (and mind).

Roland Barthes invokes the necessary *death of the author* (intimating/recapitulating the death of God, albeit incorrectly appropriating the Nietzschean dictum) so that all texts (all narratives, verbal or written) can become neutral texts (writerly texts), allowing all to participate in the process of communication (excluding none on the basis of racial, cultural or gendered differences), rather than being passive and uncritical recipients of knowledge (rather than being hegemonically fashioned by an external authority). For Barthes, these insights are stated out of an ethical concern for those who, in our pluralistic context, are marginalized and excluded from reading (thinking) the texts (verbal and written) of those who are naturally constituted differently (those who are environmentally and culturally distinct from the reader). Barthes suggests that – he being a structuralist (and later in life a post-structuralist) – only a scriptor (one who is aware of the structures that produce and influence his/her texts) and not an author (one who believes that she or he is the origin of their own texts) can produce texts that are ethically sound (able to commune un-hegemonically with the other). The scriptors are the ones who seek to avoid (or, at least, be honest about) the cultural constructs that typically determine and structure the method, form, voice, and style of any text. Barthes, however, is unwilling to recognize that true authorship (becoming the author of one's own text/narrative) is not the result of possessing original ideas that bear no relation to what has been done (diachrony) or what is being done (synchrony), which is impossible. Rather, true authorship is the result of having recognized, at what Kierkegaard might describe as an essential – and not simply temporal – moment in one's life, that one is not simply the sum total of external/internal and past events but is an entity irreducible to the finite (irreducible to the finite conditions of existence) so long as one remains beholden to the narrative truth of existence.

Likewise, because Barthes' does not see that the mind's origin is not finite, he does not see that his own theory of authorship cannot account for the origin of his ethical concerns regarding the authority of the writer. He does not see, in other words, that his own narrative (and critique) is rooted in the biblical myth of Adam and Eve. That one's origin is not finite expresses, as I shall show in my dissertation, the biblical exodus from the garden of Eden. If one's origin is not finite but in the infinite principle of relationship, then communion with the narrative of the other (unlike Barthes' revelations) is not predicated upon the absence or presence of similarities. Rather, our communion (communication) depends on whether the others' narrative is true, expressing the irreducible value and worth of all, irrespective of our finite differences.

If one's origin is not finite but thoughtful, representing the inseparable relationship between mind and the existence of all – as irreducible to the finite – then simply exposing the binary theoretical and hierarchical structures (good and evil, absolute and relative, male and female, white and black, love and hate, reason and faith) that underpin thought/society by analyzing the dominant term synchronically in a particular binary set (structuralism) or the apparent inferior term and its diachronic transformations (post-structuralism) will not be fruitful. For it will bring us no closer to exposing and affirming the necessary, nuanced, and reciprocal relationship between mind and narrative, self and other, author and reader. The only way, as I shall show, that we can bring into existence the necessary relationship between mind and existence is by narrating this relationship from an ethical point of view that is committed to exposing the relationship between biblical principles and values and the story of modernity.

Consistent with Barthes' concept of authorship is Jean-Francois Lyotard's insight that the post-modern report on the contemporary condition of knowledge can simply be understood as an extreme skepticism shown towards meta-narratives. Because of the utter plurality of our (post-)

modern world, where meanings, values, and perspectives are exceedingly diverse, Lyotard posits that not only are meta-narratives dubious at best (those narratives which suggest that all human beings progress to and resist certain ends) but also they can be harmful, given that micro-narratives (narratives which pertain specifically to certain types of individuals and not to the entire makeup of the human race) not only abound, but adequately resist being assimilated by meta-narratives.

While this may be an accurate assessment of the current state of epistemological concerns within a plural society, the post-modern disavowal of the meta-narrative of human emancipation is problematic – something that Lyotard fails to acknowledge. The meta-narrative of human emancipation, which is commonly understood as inextricably linked to scientific positivism, religious fundamentalism and Euro-centrism, is rightly to be doubted and *ipso facto* rejected. Yet the biblical meta-narrative of human emancipation, which is both understood and amplified by Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, is not a meta-narrative that demands that all forgo/forfeit their own micro-narratives of existence (their own relative and particular uniqueness and idiosyncrasies, i.e. positionalities) in order to submit themselves unquestioningly to the cultural biases of one group of people (whether that group be European, Asian, African, etc.). Rather, the biblical meta-narrative insists that all must judge their own micro-narratives against the emancipatory truth that all human beings are irreducible to their finitudes – to their appearances in natural time and space.

Because *cogito ergo sum* is not understood to represent the one true metaphor for human thought and existence (in line with Kierkegaard's recognition in *Works of Love* that divine speech, as akin to human speech, is metaphorical insofar as both address the spirit), linguist Michael J. Reddy rightly maintains that our meta-language (that which functions as the very

basis of communication, i.e. our narratives) is so pregnant with conduit metaphors (so pregnant with the conflation of the figurative and the literal) that, although we have a proliferation of sophisticated mass communication at our disposal, we in fact communicate less (we in fact share more false narratives than true ones). This novel insight highlights how contemporary thinkers, in viewing Descartes' axiom as a conduit metaphor rather than an actual metaphor, seek the mind in the brain or the truth of narrative in facts.

The post-modern conflation between conduit and actual metaphor is also why, in more contemporary psychological investigations into narrative identities – itself understood as a therapeutic practice for dealing with mental pathologies – the paradigmatic approach has trumped the hermeneutical approach. The former attempts to classify a patient's narratives, determine associations, draw cause-and-effect relationships, and test and validate hypotheses so that, in order to generate generalizable scientific findings, it ignores the narrative/identity particularities with which the hermeneutical approach concerns itself (the approach which acknowledges the doubtful/faithful/reasonable nature of existence). In doing so, it fails to recognize that the only generalizable truth, the only meta-narrative that exists (which the contemporary world is so hostile towards) is the one which recognizes that the only narrative worthy of human thought and existence (able to properly align the two) is that narrative which recognizes as false all human compulsions to reduce the mind (self, soul, God) to the corporeal, to the conditions of one's environment, to the structures of one's biology, psychology, and/or history. The quintessential pathology that must be contended with, then, in order to alleviate our cognitive dissonance (within and between ourselves and the world) is that pathology which falsifies the metaphysical/ethical presupposition of the existence of mind, substantiated by the narrative of *good sense* common to all.

## **Methodology**

Because the content that I shall investigate – the concepts of mind and narrative embodied in the texts of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky – is never neutral, it is important that I do not employ any one method of research or any one investigative tool, as though any one method can neutrally be applied to all (equally neutral) content. Thus, I shall utilize textual analysis, a narrative inquiry research method, and biblical hermeneutics (the hermeneutical framework of the golden rule). In using these methods of analysis, I shall seek to expose not only the truth of my thesis – that for a mind to exist it must have a corresponding true (moral) narrative and for a narrative to be true (moral) it must possess a mind – but also the truth that, although the authors central to my dissertation are European (culturally distinct individuals from particular parts of the world), what they show us, in their respective works, need not be considered Eurocentric.

The research methods I have selected will enable me to show that, when properly interpreted on the basis of their most fundamental principles (when the hermeneutical dialectic of the infinite and the finite is properly employed) and not reduced to the paradigms within which they lived or their idiosyncratic constitutions, neither Kierkegaard nor Dostoevsky essentializes what is particularly European in their works. Rather, both authors uphold what is truly common to all, insofar as all endeavor to be human (endeavor to distinguish between good and evil). This very sensitive argument expresses the dialectic of content and context – the truth that, although no human content exists outside of its context, the content of humanity (each and every individual human mind) exceeds its immediate context; that is, to be human is to be capable of resisting the seduction of reducing oneself and others to a finite thing amongst other finite things within one's cultural context.

The true context of every human being, therefore, embodies the relationship between mind and narrative. Yet, because this relationship is always subject to falsification, dehumanization would represent the refusal to acknowledge (and therefore to make the judgement) that *who* one is, the content of one's character – to paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. – is irreducible to *what* one is (one shall not be judged by the colour of one's skin, nor where one's gender lies on a spectrum, nor the augmentation or contraction of one's socio-economic status etc.).

My research methods and chosen materials, in the end, will enable me to unearth the hermeneutical principle that the content of both the mind and narrative, diffused within a given text, is directly equivalent neither to its formal qualities nor to its particular and relative affinities or penchants. Rather – if it possesses content – the mind and (its) narrative are found only in and through the universal principles (applicable to all irrespective of finite differences) to which they aspire. Truly universal principles<sup>8</sup> do not subjugate or hegemonically dominate the individual who is othered but, in fact, prove that any given narrative (fictional, non-fictional, or fictionalized versions of historical events) rendered by any given individual (whether they be Black, White, Asian, Indian, gay, straight, transgendered, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc.) can be true so long as it articulates the principles which emancipate the (its) text (person, mind, consciousness, spirit) from being reduced to its relative particularities (the particularities of its finite existence or manifestation).

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<sup>8</sup> I refer here to principles that are true because they do not masquerade themselves as universal while in fact (in praxis) singularly valorize only a perspective relative to a distinct individual, a praxis against which the post-modern environment is so rightly polemical.

## **Chapter Outline**

### **Introduction:** Doubt and Faith, Alpha and Omega, Mind and Narrative

What will be dealt with preliminarily in this chapter – in order to chart the contours of my overall argument – will be the relationship between theology and philosophy. Here I shall introduce the argument that this relationship is grounded in the principle of the golden rule and indicate the way in which it highlights and demonstrates the fundamental dialectic of being and becoming: the dialectic which posits the existence of mind as the reservoir of being and the singular narrative of truth (morality) which is becoming of it. Central to this opening deliberation, will be a careful exploration of the way in which doubt, and faith, in representing the critical end – the distinctive end – to which, as I shall show, Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky hinge maturity and immaturity, contemporary and ancient, beginning and ending, also represents the critical beginning – the distinctive beginning – of contending with the momentous challenges that the existence of narratives (both true and false) pose to the existing mind.

### **Chapter 1:** The Ontology of the Mind and Narrative

In chapter one I will attempt to delineate clearly the distinctive qualities of two central narratives/traditions within the western canon. The first comes from the Hellenic world, Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus the King*, while the second comes from the biblical narrative of creation in Genesis. Both Sophocles' tragedy and the narrative of creation in the Bible will be analyzed in order to expose the distinction between those texts that demonstrate the existence of mind (for which there are both true and false narratives) and those texts that, while lacking a mind, are mistakenly understood by contemporary thinkers to be narratives.

In addition, both texts will be explored so that the distinction between the biblical notion of *Sin* (the consciousness of which, both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky deem central to the ontology of mind and the possession of a true narrative – the ability to engage error, yet, resist being lost in error) and what Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, calls *Hamartia* (the ignorance of ignorance itself; the state of being irredeemably lost in one’s errors without recourse) can be properly distinguished.

In light of the foregoing, through the concept of creation *ex nihilo*, the biblical authors show us, I shall argue, that the creation (metaphysics) of mind is predicated upon the moral and ontological distinction between good and evil (what Kierkegaard calls sin-consciousness) – the narrative (spirit) of human relationship overcoming idolatry. Paganism, on the other hand, demonstrates that mind does not exist insofar as it possesses no narrative that can account for the fundamental distinction between good and evil, and, therefore, no structure of values that can recognize and account for its (one’s) errors. This will be done in an effort to prove that a modern text (person) is any text (is any person) that possesses the necessary values to preserve its content (mind and narrative) in spite of (its) contextual slippages and errors.

## **Chapter 2: The Narrative of Mind**

In this chapter I will be focusing centrally on the texts of Kierkegaard in order to expose the distinction between the existence of mind and the narratives which pervert or impede its existence. What will be shown is that mental offense, in the work of Kierkegaard, whether it manifests as anxiety, despair or resignation, represents – in relation to narrative – the ostensible irreconcilable opposition between reality and fiction, between context and content, between the narrative of mind and the mind of narrative. Faith, then – and love – will be shown in the work of

Kierkegaard to be constitutive and expressive of the dialectical relationship between reality and fiction, context and content, the narrative of mind and the mind of narrative i.e. what will be shown is that the narrative of mind, according to Kierkegaard, either involves what he calls sin-consciousness, or, it never existed. Here, it will be possible to deal with the pernicious aspects of post-modern understandings of identitarian politics, given that what Kierkegaard understands to be the vice of origins involves our recognition that we often locate our identities in the finite or in arbitrary sociological constructs that produce anxiety and, as a result – in the words of Kierkegaard – psychological illness. In light of this, it can be said that identitarian politics speak to an anxiety (the relationship between mind and narrative being unresolved) about one's self-worth (sickness).

### **Chapter 3: The Mind of Narrative**

In this chapter, I will be focusing on elucidating, on the basis of Dostoyevsky's narratives, what certain types of narratives reveal about the ontological status of one's mind. That mind, when improperly narrated, leads to the nihilistic, idiotic, sensual, saintly, demonic, and/or false rationalistic demonstrations of a mind divided against its essence (its truthful existence), will be shown to be what Dostoevsky reveals within the social realism of his narrative creations. Thus, the existence of God (mind) will be shown, in the works of Dostoevsky, to be the anchor, enabling one to distinguish between true narratives and false narratives, and, *ipso facto*, the existence of mind and a mind capable of engaging with existence. Here, it will be possible to deal with the pernicious aspects of post-modern understandings of radicalization and intersectionality. Both are contemporary manifestations of what Dostoevsky dramatically understands to be the result of alien concepts possessing and co-opting human beings that

demand that we see their origin – and the prohibitive/inhibitive ways in which both affect how one views one’s identity – as resulting from viewing the relationship between mind and narrative as divorced, due to the adoption of theories and ideals that alienate one from the truth of this relationship. In light of this, it can be said that both radicalization and the negative aspects of intersectionality produce societal alienation simply because they derive from self-alienation.

**Conclusion:** Communicating the Mind(s) and Narrative(s) of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky

To conclude, insofar as the conceptual content of this dissertation has involved legitimizing the nexus between the existence of mind and the veracity of narrative in the works of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, what will be spoken to here is the way in which that nexus is (must be) indirectly/mysteriously communicated. This indirect or mysterious form of communication, what Kierkegaard calls metaphorical communication and what Dostoevsky rightly understands to be the only way to disclose and delineate the mystery of man, has often confounded most interpreters devoted to making use of the novel insights of the two thinkers. By exploring this, it will be shown that perfect communication and, therefore, intercommunication, of the mind and of narrative, as understood by both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, need not imply a lack of errors (the perfection of communication is irreducible to word choice, grammar, punctuation, language, style or delivery) but is to be measured by the degree to which it challenges and invites an interlocutor to engage with and imbibe the dialectical relationship between self and other, reader and text, and mind and narrative.

That we can go no further than faith, no further than doubt, and, likewise, no further than fiction in our communicative practices expresses the truth that our errors (our failure to interface with the other on loving grounds) can be unmasked only if faith, and doubt – as embodying the

self-critical constellation of values necessary for distinguishing between infinite and finite narratives – are both the beginning and the end of all meaningful dialogue, of all of our meaningful fictions.

### **Contribution to Research**

I intend for my research to contribute to – and make advances in – the areas of philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, philosophy of psychology, philosophy of narrative, and the philosophy of education, while simultaneously helping researchers to rethink their approaches in the areas of narrative medicine and mental health research. What so strongly draws me to this project is, first, my work as an educator (in post-secondary, secondary, and elementary institutions), in which I contend with the harmful and adverse effects of false narratives and their corollaries, anxiety, despair, resignation, and sickness, and second, my work as a project coordinator for the Black Experience Project – a research project spearheaded by Environics research institute, to which much hostility has been shown by those who are staunchly unwilling to deal with (or acknowledge) the vast complexity of Black life within the GTA.

I have taken great pains – in my professional and personal life – to enhance the educational and life outcomes of my students and the young adults I mentor in my non-profit organization called Generation Chosen. What I have noticed in my work and relationships – both professionally and personally – and in the diverse environments I have been privileged to enter into is that, insofar as intersectionality (the idea that one’s life outcomes and identity are determined by the various social categories one fits into: race, class, gender, sex etc.) represents the dominant socio-political (and ethical) paradigm of our post-modern world, it fails to realize

fully the liberating truth of the relationship between the mind and narrative. Because of this, its project, in merely highlighting the error of the prejudice/privilege rooted in the false (tragic) demonization or deification of finite attributes, gets us no closer to arguing explicitly for the acknowledgment of the truth: that all human beings are irreducible to the typologies constructed by either objectivists' or subjectivists' ideologies.

With the advent of identitarian politics and radicalization, we must painstakingly express anew that the answer to our contemporary social tensions does not lie in simply combatting extremist views. Nor does it lie in further entrenching ourselves in those ideologies that specifically pertain to our own constitutions (constitutions determined along racial, gendered, and class lines). Rather, our answer lies in combatting all that exists within our atomized ethos from a position that is categorical for all: the relationship between the infinitude of the mind and its true (moral) narrative. Ideally, what I hope to contribute to the research in this area is proof as to why our conception of the mind must never be reduced to the body and why the truth of narrative must never be reduced to facts; for, if we do both, we will singlehandedly give birth to our own living tragedies.

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\* While it is the case that a theological/philosophical approach to the reading of a text (whether literary, philosophical, theological or political) is not directly contingent upon the reading of a text in its original language, this dissertation will be particularly sensitive to the way in which close textual readings of works in translation, affect the meanings that are derived from a given text. That being said, while there are both limitations and opportunities to reading texts in translation, this dissertation understands the meanings of a given text to be irreducible to the original language or the translated language in which a text manifests itself.

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