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Introduction: Fiction beyond Fiction: Dostoevsky's Quest for Realism

Svetlana Evdokimova and Vladimir Golstein

Discussing historical processes leading to the development of nations, Ivan Pavlovich Shatov, a character in Dostoevsky's novel *The Devils*, expresses his profound skepticism about modern science and rationalism:

> There is no nation that set itself up on the foundations of science and reason; there has never been an example of it, unless for a second only, out of stupidity . . . Science and reason have, from the beginning of time, played a secondary and subordinate part in the life of nations; so it will be till the end of time. Nations are formed and moved by another force which orders and rules them, the origin of which is unknown and inexplicable . . . It's the spirit of life, as the Scriptures call it . . . It's the aesthetic principle, as the philosophers call it; they also identify it as the ethical principle. "The seeking of God," as I call it more simply . . . God is the synthetic personality of the whole people, taken from its beginning to its end . . . Reason has never been able to define good and evil or even to distinguish good from evil even approximately. On the contrary, it has always confused them, shamefully and pathetically; science, in its turn, provided only fist-enforced solutions. Half-science, unknown to humanity till our century has excelled at that in particular, being the most dreadful scourge of humanity, worse than plagues, famine, and war. Half-science is the despot, of a kind that has never been imposed upon humanity before. This despot has its priests and slaves, before

> this despot everyone bows with love or superstition hereto unimaginable; the science itself trembles before it, while shamefully condoning it.[1]

Although the question of national formation and nationalism is not the focus of the present volume, the connection between science, religion, philosophy, and aesthetics is. Shatov's voice is not Dostoevsky's own. However, the way Shatov identifies "the spirit of life" (*dukh zhizni*) with aesthetics (*nachalo esteticheskoe*), moral philosophy (*nachalo nravstvennoe*), and with theology (*iskanie Boga*) as the history-shaping forces, is indicative of Dostoevsky's awareness of the intense interaction between diverse spheres of knowledge and modes of inquiry. Shatov does not simply dismiss rationalism and empiricism for their inadequacy in resolving moral questions. Instead, he targets science's "fist-enforced solutions" (*razresheniia kulachnye*), that is, the doctrinaire imposition of scientific truths as absolute and final truths, and criticizes the blind application of scientific principles to all aspects of human life, or the practice referred to by Shatov as "half-science" (*polunauka*). The ascending power of scientism was a serious intellectual threat that Dostoevsky—along with his numerous contemporaries—had to confront. Dostoevsky's art and his search for "realism in a higher sense,"[2] represent his response to the pressures and challenges of this despotism. By aspiring to provide a counterpart to merely scientific and rational inquiry, Dostoevsky's "realism," therefore, assumed an extraliterary task. In this sense, Dostoevsky went a step even further than such nineteenth-century luminaries as Pushkin, Gogol, and Tolstoy, all of whom strove to transcend the boundaries of fictionality and were therefore perceived as more than "authors," more than mere fiction writers.[3]

It might be a risky proposition to claim that Russian literature is inherently more intergeneric and interdisciplinary than its Western counterparts, that it is

1 F. M. Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* [*PSS*], ed. V. G. Bazanov et al. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–1990), 10:198–99; hereafter cited as *PSS* by volume and page. All translations are ours unless otherwise specified.

2 *PSS*, 27:65.

3 Russian writers' stubborn denial of generic indebtedness, their insistence on their ability to transcend and transform the inherited Western literary patterns, was typical of Russian culture in general, and of its literature in particular. It is not surprising then that Russian readers routinely perceived the great classic authors of Russian literature as thinkers and visionaries, philosophers and gurus who shaped Russian national and cultural identity.

more deeply involved with other areas of human knowledge than literary traditions of other countries, or even that it has created distinctly new forms of literature. It is of paramount importance, however, to explore how the writings of such powerhouses of Russian cultural development as Dostoevsky are interconnected with other domains of human knowledge and discourse. What is there in Dostoevsky's fiction that is "more" than fiction or that goes "beyond" fiction? Dostoevsky's ambition to create realism "in a higher sense" should be considered precisely in the context of his struggle to transcend the boundaries of fictionality and to respond to the pressures and challenges posed by modern science. In line with Russian cultural tradition, Dostoevsky was relentless in his drive to go "beyond" fiction by engaging not only with major contemporary issues (including questions of social justice, philosophical, and theological debates) but also with various methods of inquiry. Indeed, Dostoevsky's oeuvre with its wide-ranging interests and active engagement with philosophical, religious, political, economic, and scientific discourses of his time represents a particularly important case for the study of cross-fertilization among disciplines. The primary goal of this volume is, therefore, to consider Dostoevsky's real or imagined dialogues with the aesthetic, philosophic, and scientific thoughts of his predecessors, contemporaries, and heirs. Such issues as the interaction between scientific and social discourses, the positivistic and idealist components of intellectual history and aesthetics, and philosophical and theological contexts of his oeuvre form the core of the intellectual framework of the volume.

Dostoevsky's "fantastic realism" or "realism in a higher sense" was deeply rooted, as this volume aspires to suggest, in the scientific and philosophical thought of his time. In his frequently cited letter to N. D. Fonvizina (1854), Dostoevsky announced, "I can tell you about myself that I am a child of this century."[4] Many readers acknowledged Dostoevsky's enduring ability to be engaged with modernity, but what exactly did Dostoevsky mean when he referred to himself as "a child of his century"? The way he grappled with the most pressing challenges presented by the science, philosophy, religion, and aesthetics of his time tells us a great deal about his sense of modernity. Referring to doubt as the prevailing attitude toward religion ("a child of doubt and disbelief"), Dostoevsky reveals that his religious hesitance may have been

4 *PSS*, 28(1):176.

formed under the impact of the ascending power of scientific discourses. Dostoevsky's doubt, however, extended both to the power of science and to the validity of religion.

Although Dostoevsky, in his later years, in particular, consistently rebelled against the exaggerated trust in the efficacy of the natural sciences' methods as applied to all areas of knowledge, he nevertheless took the challenge of science seriously. Moreover, some of his contemporaries even observed Dostoevsky's almost "chemical" method of characterization. Commenting on *The Double*, V. N. Maikov emphasizes Dostoevsky's "scientific" approach to his character's mental state and compares it to "an inquisitive person penetrating the chemical composition of matter": "What could be more positivistic, so it seems, than a chemical view of reality? And yet, the picture of the world illuminated by this view always appears to us as if bathed in some kind mystical light."[5] Indeed, the science of the period had acquired a heretofore unknown prestige. Richard G. Olson, among others, scrutinized this phenomenon, observing in his *Science and Scientism in Nineteenth-Century Europe* that "social theorists and those literary and artistic figures who molded the larger public culture continued through the nineteenth century to borrow heavily from development in the natural sciences in formulating their understanding of humans and their societies."[6] Exploring the issue from the Russian perspective, Diane Denning Thompson commented that "scientific ideas and methods spread into areas of thought where they had hitherto been absent: into biblical scholarship, history, philosophy and social and political theory."[7] As a "child of his century," Dostoevsky himself was to a certain degree a man of science. Let's not forget that Dostoevsky's father was a doctor, and Dostoevsky himself was an engineer by education, facts that are frequently glossed over. He received a good scientific education, including a solid grounding in mathematics and geometry. It is not a coincidence that his rebellion against knowledge offered by science frequently takes the form of a mathematical rebellion. But Dostoevsky's Underground Man hardly makes his notorious attack on "twice two is four" out of ignorance or

5 V. N. Maikov, "Nechto o russkoi literature v 1846-om godu," in *Literaturnaia kritika: Stat'i, retsenzii* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1985), 182.

6 Richard G. Olson, *Science and Scientism in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 2.

7 Dianne Denning Thompson, "Dostoevsky and Science," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, ed. W. J. Leatherbarrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 192.

stubborn irrationalism.[8] Without trying to dismiss all scientific knowledge, Dostoevsky vehemently argues against *simplifications* (one of his favorite terms), suggesting that a particular brand of science cannot and should not usurp absolute and complete dominance over other fields of intellectual exploration. Dostoevsky had a particular distaste for axioms of all sorts, be they mathematical or ethical ones. In this respect he took a stance very different from that of his famous older French contemporary, Victor Hugo, a writer whom he otherwise greatly admired. Deploying the notion of "twice two is four" not to subvert rationalism but, on the contrary, to mock people's predilection for rewriting simple equations and questioning the axioms of Euclid's geometry, Hugo asserted that the notions of good and evil are also "axioms" of sorts. In *Napoléon le Petit* (1852) he writes,

> Here are some axioms of which you have probably an idea. Two and two make four. Between two given points the straight line is the shortest. The part is less than the whole. Now, get seven million five hundred thousand votes to declare that two and two make five, that the straight line is the longest road, that the whole is less than its part; get it declared by eight millions, by ten millions, by a hundred millions of votes, you will not have advanced a step . . . There are axioms in probity, in honesty, in justice, as there are axioms in geometry; and the truth of morality are no more at the mercy of a vote than are the truths of algebra.[9]

Dostoevsky would disagree. For him, the truths of morality are not at the mercy of a vote, but they are not axioms either. Hugo's sense of moral certainty might appear a bit strange in a Romantic, but Hugo was also an heir to the venerable rationalist tradition; he clearly owed his certainties to the moral authority of science and logic, articulated with unprecedented boldness by one of his

8 *PSS*, 5:119. "Twice two makes four seems to me simply a piece of insolence. Twice two makes four is a pert coxcomb who stands with arms akimbo barring your path and spitting. I admit that twice two makes four is an excellent thing, but if we are to give everything its due, twice two makes five is sometimes a very charming thing too" (ibid.). Dostoevsky, for sure, wasn't the first, nor was he the last, to play with the idea of "two times two may be five." The notion that two and two could somehow become five was already mentioned by George Gordon, Lord Byron, who states in his 1813 letter to his fiancée, Annabella Milbanke: "I know that two and two make four—and should be glad to prove it too if I could—though I must say if by any sort of process I could convert 2 & 2 into *five* it would give me much greater pleasure." Lord Byron, *Selected Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 340. Undoubtedly, this Romantic concept appealed to Dostoevsky.

9 Victor Hugo, *Napoleon the Little* (London: Vizetelli and Company, 1852), 185.

countrymen, Pierre-Simon Laplace, who in the preface to his 1814 "Philosophical Essay on Probabilities" penned this vivid, and supposedly the first, articulation of scientific determinism:

> We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed, if this intellect were also vast enough to submit these data to analysis, it would embrace in a single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the tiniest atom; for such an intellect nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes.[10]

Dostoevsky, however, didn't share this confidence in scientific, mathematical, and moral axioms and their explanatory power. In part, his suspicion of "axioms" may have been nourished by his exposure to Russia's scientific climate of the time. We recall that the Underground Man's rebellion against "twice two is four" goes hand in hand with his rebellion against Euclidian geometry.[11] His protest, however, is not against arithmetic per se. Rather, he suggests that self-evident ideas, such as two plus two equals four, comforting as they are, may, in fact, have no reality outside the mind. Dostoevsky's interest in non-Euclidean geometry highlights the fact that he must have been well aware that some Euclidean proofs might very well be—in the words of Russian mathematician and geometer Nikolai Lobachevky—"merely explanations and were not mathematical proofs in the true sense."[12] Lobachevsky produced geometry that he called "imaginary," and this concept might have been more congenial to Dostoevsky's notion of "realism in a higher sense" than its Euclidean counterpart. Curiously, the connection between a scientific outlook and a corresponding type of realism would be later elucidated by Albert Einstein, who drew on the non-Euclidean geometry and its further development in the theory of complex numbers, the theory of vectors, and the theory of relativity. In his "Remarks on

10 Pierre-Simon Laplace, *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities* (New York: Dover, 1951), 4.

11 For Dostoevsky's interest in non-Euclidean geometry, see Dianne Denning Thompson, "Dostoevsky and Science," 205–7. See also "Dostoyevsky & Science: The Brothers Karamazov," *Cambridge Forecast Group Blog*, November 3, 2007, https://cambridgeforecast.wordpress.com/2007/11/03/dostoyevsky-science-the-brothers-karamzov/.

12 Quoted in Jason Socrates Bardi, *The Fifth Postulate: How Unraveling a Two-Thousand-Year-Old Mystery Unraveled the Universe* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 142.

Bertrand Russell's Theory of Knowledge," Einstein makes a distinction between an "aristocratic illusion" concerning the power of pure thought to gain the knowledge about the "objective world" and the "plebeian illusion of naïve realism," based solely on sense perception:

> During philosophy's childhood it was rather generally believed that it is possible to find everything which can be known by means of mere reflection. It was an illusion which anyone can easily understand if, for a moment, he dismisses what he has learned from later philosophy and from natural science; he will not be surprised to find that Plato ascribed a higher reality to "ideas" than to empirically experienceable things. Even in Spinoza and as late as in Hegel this prejudice was the vitalizing force which seems still to have played a major role.

The more aristocratic illusion concerning the unlimited penetrative power of thought has as its counterpart the more plebeian illusion of naïve realism, according to which things "are" as they are perceived by us through our senses. This illusion dominates the daily life of men and of animals; it is also the point of departure in all of the sciences, especially of the natural sciences.[13]

Dostoevsky's realism definitely was not an example of what Einstein viewed as "plebeian illusion of naïve realism," nor was it a purely "aristocratic" one. Dostoevsky defended his "higher realism" specifically against naïve realism, stressing the fundamental need to go beyond empirical comprehension into the realm of spiritual apprehension as the only way of grasping the very essence of reality: "I have my own view of reality (in art), and what most people regard as fantastic and exceptional is sometimes for me the very essence of reality. Everyday trivialities and conventional view of them, in my opinion, not only fall short of realism but are even contrary to it."[14]

Dostoevsky proposes here his version of "imaginary realism," or realism that reaches beyond the surface rather than blindly embracing *a priori* concepts, sensory experiences, and conventional views. Without denying the importance of sensory experiences and "real facts," Dostoevsky suggests a more integrative approach, including both observation of empirically

13 Albert Einstein, "Remarks on Bertrand Russell's Theory of Knowledge," in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell, ed.* P. A. Schlipp (New York: Tudor, 1944), 281.

14 Dostoevsky, Letter to N. N. Strakhov, February 26, 1869, *PSS*, 29(1):19.

experienced things and penetration into the realm of "ideas."[15] In his letter to A. N. Maikov (December 11, 1868), he writes, "I have entirely different notions of reality and realism from those of our realists and critics . . . With their kind of realism you cannot explain so much as a hundredth part of the real facts which have actually occurred. But with our idealism we have even prophesied facts."[16] Dostoevsky, therefore, links realism to epistemology. His realism, rooted as it was in both sensory experiences and Platonic idealism, was shaped, at least in part, under the impact of new trends in science. Dostoevsky focused on the epistemological doubts (it is in this sense also, that he viewed himself as "a child of doubt and disbelief"), on skepticism connected with the empirical sciences' ability to capture the dynamic nature of reality, on science's dependence on ever-changing scientific paradigms, each overturning the "absolute foundations" of the previous one. As he puts is in his Notebooks for *A Raw Youth*:

> Facts. They pass before us. No one notices them . . . I cannot tear myself away, and all the cries of the critics to the effects that I do not depict real life have not disenchanted me. There are no bases to our society . . . One colossal quake and the whole lot will come to an end, collapse and be negated as though it had never existed. And this is not just outwardly true, as in the West, but inwardly, morally so. Our talented writers, people like Tolstoy and Goncharov, who with great artistry depict life in upper-middle-class circles, think that they are depicting the life of the majority. In my view they have depicted only the life of the exceptions, but the life which I portray is the life that is the general rule. Future generations, more objective in their view, will see that this is so. The truth is on my side, I am convinced of that.[17]

What Dostoevsky suggests here is that conventional realist writers, such as Tolstoy and Goncharov, while trying to depict reality, have barely touched on the real itself, having not being fully aware that our inquiries into the nature of reality result in dynamic and perpetual state of flux. His "imaginary realism"

15 Malcolm Jones provides an important insight in Dostoevsky's integrative approach to realism by ascertaining that his fantastic realism "is about the intersubjective experience of reality and the elusiveness of a much sought-after, universal Truth." Jones, *Dostoevsky after Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoevsky's Fantastic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 30.

16 *PSS*, 28(2):329.

17 *PSS*, 16:329.

stubbornly juxtaposes the "reality" of empirical facts to the "reality" of "essences." In *Diary of a Writer*, he presents his philosophical view of realism in clear opposition to the prevailing literary one: "'One must depict reality as it is,' they say, whereas such reality does not exist and has never even existed on earth, because the essence of things is inaccessible to man who perceives nature as it is reflected in his ideas, after passing through his senses; therefore one has to give more room to the idea and not to be afraid of the ideal."[18] We see how in Dostoevsky a "pure thought" claims its epistemological validity "independently of sense perception." Here Dostoevsky seems to be closer to Einstein's awareness of the "gulf" that logically separates the concrete world of material objects, on the one hand, from the abstract world of ideas, on the other.[19]

Along with some other "realist" Russian writers, who inherited the Romantic ethos of the "age of wonder," such as Tolstoy, for example, Dostoevsky exhibits profound suspicion of science as absolute truth and therefore engages in creating alternative narrative structures, highlighting the limits of deterministic, logical, predictable, that is, "scientific" unfolding of both a

18 *PSS*, 21:75. Curiously, in Dostoevsky's thought, the personal truth of an individual consciousness is often presented in its juxtaposition to empirical facts, whether this personal truth takes the form of acceptance of a higher ideal of Christ or of earthly axioms of Euclid's geometry. Although Ivan Karamazov draws on the authority of geometry, his ideas and conclusions belong to the domain of "personal truth": "Even if parallel lines do meet and I see it myself, I shall see it and say that they've met, but I still won't accept it" (*PSS*, 14:214). In an almost complete reversal of this argument, Dostoevsky insists in his aforementioned letter to Fonvizina that "if someone proved to me that Christ is outside the truth, and that in reality the truth were outside Christ, then I should prefer to remain with Christ rather than with the truth" (*PSS*, 28[1]:176). What is remarkable about these quotations is that while the speakers' visions of truth are radically different (belief in Euclid's "earthly" truth versus belief in Christ), the structure of the argument remains the same. The acceptance of God and acceptance of Euclid's geometry become ultimately a matter of faith, of personal preference, and commitment. What Dostoevsky suggests here is that he prefers to accept Christ as something that goes beyond and transcends empirical reality and established scientific facts. By the same token, Ivan Karamazov refuses to accept the "truth" of non-Euclidean geometry (which postulates that the parallel lines might meet) even if it is proven to him empirically, preferring to stick to his belief in Euclidean geometry. In other words, in both cases the argument is made in favor of a personal conviction, based on some deep-seated intuition or insight, against the "reality" or "truth" proven through traditional scientific methods or arguments.

19 Einstein writes, "We have the habit of combining certain concepts and conceptual relations (propositions) so definitely with certain sense experiences that we do not become conscious of the gulf—logically unbridgeable—which separates the world of sensory experiences from the world of concepts and propositions" (Einstein, "Remarks," 287).

character and a plot (similar to Tolstoy's attempt to delineate the limits of historiography). Dostoevsky's concept of the individual was formed in clear opposition to both the philosophy of the Enlightenment, with its belief in progress and cumulative organic growth, and to nineteenth-century realism and naturalism, preoccupied with the effects of heredity and environment upon the individual, presenting an individual character as the sum of causal and deterministic unfolding of his traits. Dostoevsky's characters, by contrast, affirm their radical freedom by evolving through sudden leaps and turns that defy the predictability of behavior. To some extent, this fascination with the eccentric can also be attributed to the Romantic ferment of science that swept across Europe at the end of eighteenth century but reached Russia somewhat later. Discussing a sudden series of breakthroughs in the fields of astronomy and chemistry that may have influenced the Romantic age and the Romantic taste for poetic inspiration coupled with "intense, even reckless, personal commitment to discovery," Richard Holmes writes,

> Romantic science would seek to identify such moments of singular, almost mystical vision in its own history. One of its first and most influential examples was to become the story of the solitary brooding Newton in his orchard, seeing an apple fall and "suddenly" having his vision of universal gravity. This story was never told by Newton at the time, but only began to emerge in the mid-18th century, in a series of memoirs and reminiscences.[20]

Much has been made of Dostoevsky's particular taste for "sudden" changes taking place in his novels, including mystical illuminations, personal epiphanies, and transformation, and for the overall prominence of such concept as "suddenly" in his poetics. It might be fruitful to link those elements of his poetics to the Romantic "ethos" of "sudden" discovery and to the very scientific climate that have shaped this ethos.[21] While Dostoevsky, similar to his famous

20 Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (New York: Pantheon, 2008), xvii.

21 Dostoevsky scholarship has long paid attention to on overwhelming prominence of the words "sudden" and "suddenly" in Dostoevsky's poetics. Cf. V. N. Toporov, "O strukture romana Dostoevskogo v sviazi s arkhaichnymi skhemami mifologicheskogo myshleniia. (Prestupleniie i nakazanie), in *Structure of Texts and Semiotics of Culture*, ed. Jan van der Eng (The Hague: Mouton, 1973). Toporov observes that the word "suddenly" occurs 560 times in *Crime and Punishment* and concludes: "The maximum frequency in the use of this word

Russian and Western European contemporaries, such as George Eliot, was striving to create adequate forms of literary realism, their respective versions were shaped by the different ways each of them responded to scientific theories of their time. A "breeding ground" for Dostoevsky's aesthetics and his religious and philosophical views included the thought and works of not only Darwin but also of Lobachevsky and such scientists as Mechnikov, Mendeleev, and Pavlov. Rather than merely modifying and reaffirming the claims of the historically received scientific discoveries, these scientists articulated a new paradigm and, therefore, attracted Dostoevsky's scrutiny, even though he frequently disagreed with the specific conclusions or implications of their research. These nineteenth-century scientists generated "scientific revolutions,"[22] to use Thomas S. Kuhn's term, or, in Alain Badiou's terms, created an "event," that is, they discovered a rupture in the appearance of normality and opened a space to rethink reality. In this volume, two of those scientists, Darwin and Pavlov, receive particular attention.

Even though great examples of the two- or three-way exchange between science, literature, and then back to science can be found throughout this volume, the first part of this collection specifically addresses Dostoevsky's engagement with the challenges posed by the works of Darwin, Pavlov, and other scientists whose biological discoveries paved the way toward the reconceptualization of social, cultural, political, artistic, and psychological categories. This process of reconceptualization provoked Dostoevsky to his own groundbreaking literary discoveries and reconceptualizations.

David Bethea and Victoria Thorstensson's "Darwin, Dostoevsky, and Russia's Radical Youth" gets the ball rolling in chapter 1 as they concentrate on the very lively polemics within Russian fiction and journalism on the issues of uses and abuses of Darwin's theories. The chapter presents Darwin's reception in the writings of Russian radical intellectuals, such as Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Dmitry Pisarev, and Varfolomei Zaitsev, their ambitious and frequently groundless claims about the promise of science, and their consequent dismissal

occurs at such narrative steps, which coincide with transitions or depiction of emotional changes. In Russian literature, there are no other examples (with the exception of other texts of Dostoevsky) that would even remotely come close to *Crime and Punishment* in terms of their saturation with this word" ("O strukture romana Dostoevskogo," 234, 266–71).

22 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

of idealism and metaphysics, resulting in the radical reinterpretation of basic categories of society, art, and religion. These young radicals' highly partisan reading of Darwin was bound to produce reaction both in the journalism of the period and in fictional writings, including the major texts of Dostoevsky. Bethea and Thorstensson suggest that Darwin is present in Dostoevsky's oeuvre in various mediated forms, as a person, as a scientist, but even more importantly as an exaggerated figure conjured up by the imagination of his Russian epigones and their ideological opponents, be it the journalists Nikolai Strakhov and Mikhail Katkov or conservative writers, such as Nikolai Leskov and Alexander Diakov. Bethea and Thorstensson's discussion of these authors provides a very concrete and helpful background to Dostoevsky's thinking on the subject of science and biology, in particular. The overextension of science's claims, carried out by Dostoevsky's radical contemporaries, and their embrace of the caricatured vision of Social Darwinism clearly took educated Russians by storm, leaving its mark on their perception of science and philosophy, materialism and religion. Such spectacular misreading could not but trouble Dostoevsky, who was ready to challenge their assumptions and conclusions, moving boldly to "anti-empiricist, anti-positivist, anti-'mechanico-chemical' thought." Dostoevsky's skepticism toward all worldly truths, which are separated from the dynamic and open-ended approach that he associated with Christ, had put him on alert when Darwin's insights were mechanically and slavishly applied to the study of human development.

Darwin's thought, however, influenced not only the natural and social sciences but also the development of literary narratives. As Gillian Beer argues in her study *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Darwinian ideas insinuated themselves into the very texture and structure of the nineteenth-century English novel so that Darwinian notions of time, inheritance, variation, and selection permeated its very structure. As Beer explains, such novels as *Middlemarch* deal explicitly with the "web of affinities" determining relations within a specific time and space: "The web exists not only as an interconnection in space but as succession in time. This was the aspect of the image emphasized by Darwin in his genealogical ordering."[23] Taking Beer's argument as a point of departure, Liza Knapp,

23 Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 157.

in chapter 2, "Darwin's Plots, Malthus's Mighty Feast, Lamennais's Motherless Fledglings, and Dostoevsky's Lost Sheep," offers a compelling argument about how Dostoevsky's response to Darwin penetrated deep into the aesthetic level of his works, pervading the very plots of Dostoevsky's narratives. Yet Knapp demonstrates that, as opposed to his English counterparts who were also influenced by the Malthus-inspired social Darwinism, Dostoevsky, resistant as he was to Social Darwinism, processed Darwin's plots differently from English novelists. Even in his early novels, such as *Netochka Nezvanova*, Dostoevsky counters Darwin's plots of the survival of the fittest with his Christian plots, novelizing the struggle for Netochka, the poor and unfortunate one, to be given a place at nature's "mighty feast." Knapp also points to the example of *The Idiot*, which clearly reveals Dostoevsky's subversion of Malthusian-Darwinian scenarios in his defiance of the "realistic" triumph of Malthusian "truths." Although, as Knapp insightfully concludes, "the consumptive and the lost sheep perish and the epileptic ends as an idiot," the novel as a whole "sustains its spirit of metaphysical rebellion."

Moreover, one could add that in his search for "realism in a higher sense," Dostoevsky strove to combine the plots based on the "low truths" of Darwinian struggle with cases and situations that seemed to defy probability ("fantastic and exceptional"), but which, nevertheless, convey "the very essence of reality." In opposition to the English novel, which is grounded in causality and predictability, Dostoevsky developed a particular taste for narrative and ideological surpluses, for the overabundance of characters, situations, causes and ideas, for broken continuity, for eruptions, epiphanies and all kinds of sudden changes; these narrative strategies disrupt the predetermined, "evolutionary" plot structure and overburden it with excess and schematic violations. Dostoevsky seeks for alternatives on the level of plot, theme, and characterization, and he tends to create characters marked as "oddballs," as eccentrics who are not immediately recognized as typical or average.[24] Such are his Alyosha

24 Dostoevsky was clearly sensitive to the statistical fashion of deterministic scientific studies. Cf. the discussion of the impact on his work of statistical studies by Adolphe Quetelet in Irina Paperno's *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 19–45. Several studies in our volume discuss the role of oddballs in Dostoevsky's poetics, be it Kalganov in *The Brothers Karamazov*, or Porfiry Petrovich, the highly eccentric detective in *Crime and Punishment.*

Karamazov, or Prince Myskhin from *The Idiot*, or the Ridiculous Man from "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man."

Anna Berman's "'Viper will eat viper': Dostoevsky, Darwin, and the Possibility of Brotherhood" (chapter 3) foregrounds this complexity and ambiguity in Dostoevsky's approach to Darwin. Grappling with the subject of Darwin, Berman takes as a point of departure Daniel Todes's pioneering work on Darwin's reception in Russia. In his study, Todes explores and articulates the dominant line of thinking of both Russian scientists and philosophers, who were vehement on the subject of keeping Malthus and Darwin apart. Consequently, many Russians proved to be extremely hesitant, if not resistant, toward applying some radical ramification of Darwinian thought to the domain of social relationships. At the same time in Europe, such applications fell on rather fertile grounds, to the great dismay of such diverse Russian thinkers as Ilya Mechnickov, Peter Kropotkin, Andrei Beketov, Nikolai Danilevsky, and, of course, Dostoevsky. It is clear that the idea of cooperation as the powerful force within the unfolding biological drama was very dear to Russian thinkers. Dostoevsky mocked the facile reading of Darwin through his scathing portrayal of Andrei Semyonovich Lebezyatnikov, a character in *Crime and Punishment* who exemplified these "new ideas": "In England compassion is forbidden, giving way to political economy."[25] However, as Berman shows, Dostoevsky, true to his character, loved to play devil's advocate. When Beketov finds faults with Darwin's theory on the basis of his inability to imagine violent and bloody struggle between father and son over the last sip of water, Dostoevsky, in his last novel, demonstrates precisely the opposite. For Berman, Dostoevsky's view of the family hardly remains static, unfolding from seeing family as a tightly knit knot of mutual commitments in *Crime and Punishment* to the family of *The Brothers Karamazov*, where the Karamazovs are based on accidental and random relationships, and therefore exposed to the pitfalls of Darwinian struggle. In her meticulous and creative reading of Darwin's impact on Dostoevsky's last novel, Berman views Ivan's psyche as split between the two opposite stances concerning the familial relationships: love and sacrifice versus Darwinian struggle and competition to the bitter end.

25 *PSS*, 6:14.