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Varieties of Belief in *The Brothers Karamazov*

by Gary Saul Morson

Since the Enlightenment, many intellectuals have presumed that religious belief is an aspect of human psychology that can—and ought—to be avoided. Fyodor Dostoevsky rejects this assumption. His novels contend that faith cannot be easily evaded, because belief is integral to human experience. This article explores how Dostoevsky understood faith as an activity that mirrored more ostensibly secular pursuits, like play acting. Morson analyzes four varieties of role playing, and, by extension, of believing, in *The Brothers Karamazov*. These roles include: the liar (Fyodor), the aesthete (Dmitri), the skeptic (Ivan), and the believer (Alyosha). Much like belief, play acting is often distinguished from the real activity. The stage has an illusory quality. Yet Dostoevsky's novels show that the seam between life and acting is more porous than one might think, because pretension and sincerity are often indistinguishable in human psychology. Dostoevsky implies that if actions can be concurrently feigned and genuine, then the basis of all human activity is one of simultaneously believing and unbelieving. The upshot is that "belief" includes doubt and imperfection; faith is a dynamic process. The paradoxes of belief thus illuminate the paradoxes of human nature. Humans are beings in transition; forever striving to believe or reject that what they already, in some sense, believe.

Varieties of Belief in *The Brothers Karamazov*

Gary Saul Morson

Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief. — Mark 9:24

Starting with its first chapter, *The Brothers Karamazov* introduces a theme to be developed throughout the novel: what does it mean to believe something? Could "belief" (or faith—also *vera*) be a single term for several different states of mind? And what about second-order beliefs: can one be mistaken in one's belief about what one believes? Can one believe and disbelieve something at the same time?

Describing Fyodor Pavlovich's marriage to Adelaida Ivanovna, "who belonged to a fairly rich and distinguished noble family," the novel's narrator explains that her choice was perplexing: "How it came to pass that an heiress, who was also a beauty , and moreover one of those lively, intelligent girls not at all uncommon in this generation, but somehow also to be found in the last, could have married such an insignificant 'puny fellow, as everyone called him, I won't attempt to explain."[1] And then, of course, he does, by citing another strange courtship:

> But I knew a young lady, still of the 'romantic' generation before the last, who after some years of enigmatic love for a gentleman, whom she might easily have married at any moment, invented insuperable obstacles to their union, and ended by throwing herself one stormy night into a rather deep and rapid river, and so perished, entirely to satisfy her own caprice, and to be like Shakespeare's Ophelia, and indeed, if this precipice, a chosen and favorite spot of hers, had been less picturesque, if there had been a prosaic flat bank in its place, most likely the suicide would not have taken place (*BK*, 11-12).

There have been many such cases in Russian life, the narrator continues. A person adopts a role and acts it out, like a stage actor who madly decides he really is the character he plays. At the same time, the person subscribes to a whole set of her generation's prescribed beliefs. Does she really believe them?

Elsewhere Dostoevsky describes such thinking as "wearing a uniform." One adopts a prefabricated philosophy wholesale. Dostoevsky loved to satirize people like this: in *Crime and Punishment*, Lebeziatnikov professes one absurd progressive belief after another, and yet it is plain he has never actually assessed the arguments for any one of them. In Dostoevsky's view, people who think this way—especially the educated who pride themselves on their critical thinking—buy a whole package at a time. No arguments or evidence could ever shake any of these beliefs because no argument or evidence led to its adoption. As Jonathan Swift once remarked, no one was ever talked out of a belief he had not first been talked into.

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1. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 2nd edition, ed. Susan McReynolds, the Garnett translation revised by Ralph E. Matlaw and Susan McReynolds (New York: Norton, 2011), 11. Further references are to *BK*. I have occasionally modified the translation.

Hello World

Adelaida Ivanovna resembled this would-be Ophelia, except that the beliefs she adopted were those of the next, radical, rather than romantic, generation. Her marriage to Fyodor Pavlovich, the narrator surmises, resulted from "an echo of alien influences" (or "foreign currents of opinion" [*otgoloskom chuzhikh veyanij*]). Perhaps she "wanted to assert feminine impendence," or "go against social conventions" or "against the despotism of her family and birth"—all canned phrases for hackneyed fashionable ideas. Because she perceived the world through these lenses, "an obliging imagination persuaded her" that the sponger Fyodor Pavlovich was "one of the boldest and most ironical people of that epoch that was transitional to everything better"—the hackneyed ideas accumulate here—even though he was obviously, to anyone not blinded by assumed ways of seeing, "just an evil buffoon and nothing more" (*BK*, 12).

We may ask: did Adelaida Ivanovna actually believe these ideas? She evidently did in the sense that she acted on them. But the element of play acting here—the pleasure of the heroic role and the work of her "obliging imagination"—strongly suggest she didn't. It seems one can sincerely profess what one at some level knows to be untrue. In that case, which does one really believe? This question will recur in Dostoevsky's descriptions of other theatrical behavior, most obviously, that of Fyodor Pavlovich.

Belief (and faith) are examined time and again. Dostoevsky interrupts his description of "The Unfortunate Gathering" with two chapters about faith: "Believing Peasant Women" (Or "Peasant Women who Have Faith"—[*Veruyushchie baby*]) and "A Lady of Little Faith" (*Malovernaya dama*). The repetition of the root *vera* (belief or faith) in these chapter titles suggests the importance and complexity of this theme.

Doubting Thomas

In different ways, Fyodor Pavlovich and his three legitimate sons illustrate important insights about the nature of belief. When the narrator introduces Alyosha, he mentions the boy's belief in miracles. Readers will probably suspect Alyosha of "mysticism and fanaticism," he anticipates, but in this case that judgment would be hasty. Alyosha, he says, "was more of a realist than anyone." To explain this apparent paradox, the narrator expatiates on the nature of belief.

> Oh, no doubt in the monastery he fully believed in miracles, but, to my thinking, miracles are never a stumbling block to the realist. It is not miracles that dispose realists to belief. The genuine realist, if he is an unbeliever, will always find strength and ability to disbelieve in the miraculous, and if he is confronted with a miracle as an irrefutable fact, he would rather disbelieve his own senses than admit the fact. Even if he admits it, he admits it as a fact of nature till then unrecognized by him (*BK*, 28).

Religions usually offer miracles as proof. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, so how can you doubt His divinity? The narrator regards this argument as naïve because it presumes that people are bound to accept clear and indubitable evidence.

David Hume famously refuted miracles by asking, which is more likely: that the laws of nature were suspended or that people in a credulous age, who wanted to believe in the supernatural, found a way to do so? He asked us to weigh evidence rationally, but, according to the narrator of *Karamazov*,

people already committed to one side of the argument will not do so. Even if the miracles were performed right in front of the "realist's" eyes—"if he were [directly] confronted with a miracle as an irrefutable fact"—the demonstration would make no difference to his belief or disbelief. "He would rather disbelieve his own senses."

If that is so, is he truly a realist? Scientific realists supposedly respect the evidence. One does not just deduce or assert a truth, one has to test it by experiment. The experiment can disprove the hypothesis, or it is not a real experiment. As Karl Popper would later say, the hypothesis must be falsifiable. If a scientist is so wedded to a theory that he ignores an experiment that disconfirms it, is he really a scientist at all? Or, to use the narrator's term, a "realist"? As the narrator points out, many who act like real scientists in their day-to-day work find themselves unable to do so when the ideology they associate with science itself is questioned. In *A Writer's Diary* Dostoevsky imagines the chemist Mendeleev, who vigorously denied the existence of supernatural beings, being lifted into the air by demons who perform tricks that preclude scientific explanation. As a respecter of the evidence, Mendeleev would be obliged to acknowledge the supernatural, but would he?

According to the narrator, the scientist has one last resource: to admit the disconfirming evidence he has witnessed, but maintain that this apparently supernatural occurrence is really a "a fact of nature till then unrecognized." The problem with this move is that it makes the argument against the supernatural into a tautology: if anything manifestly supernatural is simply called another form of the natural, then naturalism is true by definition.

The passage from *Karamazov* continues:

> Faith does not, in the realist, spring from the miracle but the miracle from faith. If the realist once believes, then he is bound by his very realism to admit the miraculous also. The Apostle Thomas said that he would not believe until he saw, but when he did see he said, "My Lord and my God!" Was it the miracle that forced him to believe? Most likely not, but he believed solely because he desired to believe and possibly he fully believed in his secret heart even when he said, "I shall not believe except I see" (*BK*, 28).

Evidently it is possible to believe and disbelieve at the same time. One may sincerely profess a conviction and yet, like Doubting Thomas, not accept it in one's "secret heart." The narrator supposes that, even though Thomas thought the miracle convinced him, it in fact merely revealed to him what he already believed. If so, it is possible not only to believe and disbelieve simultaneously, but also simultaneously to change one's mind and not change it.

Thomas believed "solely because he desired to believe." Is it really possible to believe something "solely" because one wants to? I cannot decide to believe in Ptolemaic astronomy just because I choose to. And yet one can get oneself to believe what one either knows or easily could know to be untrue. It happens whenever one deceives oneself.

According to the narrator, Alyosha believed in miracles because he had faith. Far from deceiving himself, he was a "realist" believing without reservation in the world as he experienced it. But what if that world should disconfirm his belief? What if he had to choose between his realism and his belief in miracles? That is precisely what happens.

Fyodor Pavlovich: The Liar

Early in the novel the narrator describes how Fyodor Pavlovich loves to play a part "even to his own direct disadvantage," as he did when Miusov proposes to adopt little Mitya (*BK*, 15). Fyodor Pavlovich's treatment of his infant son has gone far beyond mere neglect: "he wholly and utterly abandoned his child by Adelaida Ivanovna, not from malice towards him or because of any wounded matrimonial feelings, but simply because he completely forgot him" (BK, 14). Describing Fyodor Pavlovich, Dostoevsky sometimes stretches the boundaries of realism: is it possible actually to forget one's child "completely"?

To be sure, Fyodor Pavlovich can be reminded of his son, even if he might pretend otherwise. "Long afterward he [Miusov] used to recount, as a characteristic trait of the man, that when he began to speak to Fyodor Pavlovich about Mitya, for some time he looked completely uncomprehending, as though he seemed surprised that he had a young son somewhere in the house. If there may have been some exaggeration in Pytor Aleksandrovich's [Miusov's] story, still there must have been something resembling the truth" (*BK*, 15). One may suppose that Fyodor Pavlovich, when reminded of what he usually forgot, pretended to be still forgetting—that is, he pretended to be what he really was.

Fyodor Pavlovich takes the greatest pleasure in parodying or mocking anything that anyone regards as sacred. "Great elder, speak!," he proclaims in Father Zosima's cell. "What must I do to gain eternal life?," aping the lawyer's appeal to Jesus (Luke 11:27). One reason it is sometimes "difficult to decide" whether Fyodor Pavlovich is pretending or sincere is that he himself cannot always tell the difference. "With old liars who have been acting all their lives," the narrator explains, "there are moments when they enter so completely into their part that they tremble or shed tears of emotion in earnest, although at that very moment, or a second later they are able to whisper to themselves, 'You know you are lying, you shameless old sinner! You're acting now, in spite of your 'holy' moment of wrath."[2]

One can shed tears "in earnest" while knowing "at that very moment" that one is lying. That isn't true with ordinary self-deception. Neither does it resemble Doubting Thomas's mistaken belief in his change of mind. Fyodor Pavlovich "really" feels what he knows is pretense. But not completely, because the sense of having pretended does not altogether disappear.

But it can, as sometimes happens when people choose to feel insulted. "You know it is sometimes very pleasant to take offense," Father Zosima observes to Fyodor Pavlovich. "A man may know that nobody has insulted him, but that he has invented the insult for himself, has lied and exaggerated to make it picturesque, has caught at a word and made a mountain out of a molehill—he knows that himself, yet he will be the first to take offense, and will revel in his resentment till he feels great pleasure in it, and so pass on to genuine vindictiveness" (*BK*, 43). *And so pass on to genuine vindictiveness*: What begins as pretense becomes genuine feeling—genuine in the sense that one really feels vindictive and loses the awareness of pretense. And yet the feeling is at the same time fake. We lack a name for this condition.

How much of the world's evil is due to it? As Dostoevsky often shows, people sometimes crave to be insulted and injured so as to feel morally superior. As Dmitri says of his fiancé Katerina Ivanovna, she loves her own virtue, not him. She tries to get him to betray her so she can show her nobility.

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2. *BK*, 68. My thanks to Ryan Serrano, who is writing a splendid dissertation on role-playing, for calling my attention to this passage.

But is it nobility to rise above an offense one has deliberately provoked? How aware is she of what she is doing? When Ivan hints at her pretense, she falls into hysterics, which suggests she both knows and does not know at the same time.

Katerina Ivanovna lives a lie, but she does so sincerely in the sense that she does not know she lives a lie. What make Fyodor Pavlovich unique—not only in this book but, I think, in world literature—is that he knows that his "genuine" vindictiveness, which he really feels, is not at all genuine, and yet is able to continue believing in it without losing the consciousness of falsity. Katerina Ivanovna lies, and conceals the lie from herself: Fyodor Pavlovich is fully aware of lying to himself and yet can indulge in it with all the fervor that she does. Indeed, he does everything he can to exaggerate the contradictions, as a kind of sport.

Dmitri

Dmitri tells Alyosha that, in the depths of degradation, he experiences ugliness as beautiful. "Beauty is a terrible and awful thing," he confides. "It is terrible because it has not been defined and is undefinable, for God sets us nothing but riddles. Here the two shores of the rivers meet and all contradictions stand side by side. … We must solve them as we can, and try to keep a dry skin in the water "(*BK*, 98). One cannot keep a dry skin in the water, or water would not be wet; if shores meet, then they are no longer shores; but some contradictions do seem to stand side by side. How, Dmitri wonders, can he regard something as ugly and beautiful at the same time? What's more, a man with the ideal of the Madonna in his heart—who believes in it sincerely—can at the very same moment adhere to "the ideal of Sodom. What's still more awful is that a man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of the Madonna, and his heart may be on fire with that ideal, genuinely on fire, just as in the days of his youth and innocence" (*BK*, 98). In youth, one might well believe in goodness and beauty without being aware of one's own evil and ugly impulses. Lack of self-knowledge would explain that. But what about simultaneously, and with full awareness, adhering to both with equal sincerity? Isn't that like believing in two mutually exclusive propositions? If I believe it is raining, how can I at that very moment believe it is not raining? If one can believe both, what does it mean "to believe"?

Dmitri simultaneously and knowingly believes in Sodom and the Madonna. That is not supposed to be possible, and if it somehow is, it shouldn't be! "Man is broad, too broad, indeed," Dmitri concludes. "I'd have him narrower." That, of course, is what Ivan's Grand Inquisitor proposes to do.

Ivan's Belief and Disbelief

At once an extreme moralist and an amoral denier that objective morality exists, Ivan is even more disturbed than Dmitri by his adherence to contradictory beliefs. As an amoralist, he believes that the laws of nature explain everything. They have no moral content: asking whether Newton's law of universal gravitation is moral or amoral makes no sense. Since people are just complex natural objects subject to the same natural laws as everything else, morality can be nothing more than social convention—necessary for social stability, perhaps, but no less groundless for that. It is one thing on this side of the Pyrenees, something else on the other, as Pascal observed. "Three degrees of latitude upset the whole of jurisprudence and one meridian determines what is true."[3] From this perspective, questions about life's meaning make no more sense than those about morality.

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3. Blaise Pascal, *Pascal Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1987), 46.

The devil who visits Ivan paraphrases his poem "The Geological Cataclysm," which argues that it will be some time before everyone grasps the amoral truth, but "everyone who recognizes the truth even now may legitimately order his life as he pleases. … In that sense, 'all things are permitted' for him." "That's all very charming," the devil retorts, "but if you want to swindle why do you want a moral sanction for doing it? But that's our modern Russian all over. He can't bring himself to swindle without a moral sanction. He's so in love with truth…" (*BK*, 546).

But Ivan also believes just the opposite, that good and evil (at least, evil) are absolute. In reciting his horrifying stories of child abuse, Ivan means to show that such evil cannot be argued away or justified by either religious theodicy, rationalist nihilism, or any other theory. Believing firmly in both evil and moral nihilism, Ivan is torn apart.

A keen psychologist, Zosima diagnoses Ivan's problem. The conflict is "unresolved in your heart and torments it," Zosima tells him. "That question is not solved in you, and it is your grief, for it demands an answer" (*BK*, 65-6). When Ivan asks if his question can ever be resolved "in the affirmative"—whether he will come to believe in meaning and good and evil—Zosima replies that "it will never be decided in the negative." That is, Ivan will never become a complacent nihilist, like his father, but will either find meaning or go on searching. "You yourself know that that is the peculiarity of your heart; and all its suffering is due to it. But thank the Creator who gave you a lofty heart, capable of such suffering, of thinking and seeking higher things, for our dwelling is in the heavens" (*BK*, 66).

The devil who haunts Ivan mocks his hesitation between opposite truths by making Ivan also hesitate between affirming and denying the devil's existence. Ivan tells the devil he is only a hallucination—"It's I myself, speaking, not you"—but does one address a hallucination? "You don't exist" is surely a paradox. The devil doesn't mind this accusation of nonbeing a bit. As if he had overheard the narrator's discussion of Doubting Thomas, he remarks:

> "Don't believe it then," said the gentleman, smiling amicably, "what's the good of believing against your will? Besides, proofs are of no help in believing. Especially material proofs. Thomas believed, not because he saw Christ risen, but because he wanted to believe, before he saw" (*BK*, 535).

The devil taunts Ivan with proofs that he is and at the same time isn't a hallucination. He offers evidence for both possibilities. He also points out that if one has to convince oneself that something is not true, one must believe it at least to some degree. "From the vehemence with which you deny my existence," the devil laughs, "I am convinced you believe in me," if only a tiny bit, and, after all, "homeopathic doses perhaps are the strongest" (*BK*, 542). The devil explains that he leads Ivan "to belief and disbelief by turns" because "hesitation, suspense, conflict between belief and disbelief, is sometimes such torture to a conscientious man, such as you are, that it's better to hang oneself at once. … It's the new method" (*BK*, 542). Ivan's "belief and disbelief" in morality is no less tormenting.

The devil himself claims to reside somewhere between existence and nonexistence. Much as believing while disbelieving is a distinct state of mind, "perhaps-being" is itself a way of being. If only he could either be or not be, the devil pleads, how much better it would be! "What I dream of is becoming incarnate once for all and irrevocably in the form of some merchant's wife weighing two hundred and fifty pounds and of believing all she believes. My ideal is to go to church and offer a candle in simple-hearted faith, upon my word it is" (*BK*, 537). Appropriately enough, this devil is also an agnostic.

Faith, the devil leads Ivan to think, is firm and "simple-hearted," not hesitant and contradictory, but if Ivan really understood Zosima's diagnosis he would realize that sometimes the search for faith can be a kind of faith in itself. In T*he Idiot*, Ippolit explains that "Columbus was not happy when he had discovered America but while he was discovering it. … It's life that matters, nothing but life, the everlasting and perpetual process, and not the goal at all."[4] In *A Writer's Diary*, Dostoevsky explains that "happiness lies not in happiness but only in the attempt to achieve it."[5] As happiness can be processual, so can faith.

If Ivan would only realize the meaningfulness of questing, he would resemble his creator. In his famous letter to Natalya Fonvizina, who was suffering from depression, Dostoevsky consoled her that "at such moments one thirsts for faith like 'parched grass' … I will tell you that I am a child of the [materialist nineteenth] century. A child of disbelief and doubt. I am that today and (I know it) will remain so until the grave. How much torture this thirst for faith has cost me and costs me now, which is all the stronger in the soul for all the arguments against it."[6] Increase in disbelief fuels increase in belief, as the search for faith grows ever more intense.

Dostoevsky next affirms that, in this state of mind, he has formulated his "credo": nothing more beautiful than the image of Christ exists or ever could exist. Of course, belief in the beauty of the image of Christ does not necessarily entail belief in His existence. So Dostoevsky next formulates his oft-quoted paradox: "Even more, 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 the truth." But to believe in something is to believe it is true; how can he believe in Christ lies outside the truth?

The answer is that faith as a striving for faith, faith as a process, involves just such a paradox. Faith lies in the attempt to achieve it.

Alyosha's Crisis

If Ivan suffers from extreme doubt, Alyosha is all too certain. The incidents following the death of Father Zosima "exerted a very strong influence on the heart and soul of … Alyosha, forming a crisis and turning point in his spiritual development, giving a shock to his intellect, which finally strengthened it for the rest of his life" (*BK*,285). To strengthen his faith, Alyosha must first question it.

Alyosha firmly expects the traditional sign that his mentor Father Zosima was a saint, the incorruptibility of his body. He is more than disappointed: not only does the elder's body not diffuse a sweet smell, it emits the most pungent "odor of corruption" even more rapidly than usual. All those who felt "jealousy of the dead man's saintliness" and who out of jealousy had even succumbed "to an intense hatred of him," rejoice at his downfall. It seems to Alyosha that either there was no miracle or, because the smell was "in excess of nature," a reverse miracle. Alyosha wonders resentfully, "Why did providence hide its face 'at the most critical moment … as though voluntarily submitting to the blind, dumb, pitiless laws of nature?" (*BK*, 293).

Rakitin reports that Madame Khokhlakova wrote him a note saying "that she would never have expected *such conduct* from a man of such a revered character as Father Zosima. 'That was the very

4. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Modern Library, 1962), 375.

5. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary: Volume One, 1873-1876*, trans. Kenneth H. Lantz (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1993), 335.

6. I modify the translation of this letter as it is cited in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), 160.

word she used: conduct.'" The joke, of course, is that she treats the rapid decay of Zosima's body as something he was choosing to do. But in a sense it is: this is the action that Zosima would have chosen in order to teach Alyosha not to place his faith in miracles.

The narrator comments: "If the question is asked: 'Could all his grief and disturbance have been due only to the fact that his elder's body had shown signs of premature decomposition instead of at once performing miracles?' I must answer without beating about the bush, 'Yes, it certainly was'" (*BK*, 292). Alyosha demands a miracle: that is precisely what Christ refuses to do in his second temptation. As the Inquisitor paraphrases it: "If Thou wouldst know whether Thou art the Son of God then cast thyself down, for it is written that the angels shall hold him up lest he fall and bruise himself." As fully human, Jesus cannot be absolutely sure that he is who he thinks he is, but he refuses to resolve doubt by demanding a miracle.

A miracle would eliminate uncertainty, but then people would simply be acknowledging power, not demonstrating faith. As the Inquisitor explains, "Thou wouldst not enslave man by a miracle, and did crave faith freely given, not based on miracle. Thou didst crave for free love and not the base raptures of the slave before the might that has overawed him forever" (*BK*, 222). Faith based on power that precludes doubt is not faith at all because it is not "freely given," not a matter of choice; and choice can be real only when there is uncertainty.

From the Inquisitor's point of view, certainty would make people happier. Jesus therefore should have accepted the temptation and performed a miracle, but He didn't. "Instead of giving a firm foundation for serving the conscience of man at rest forever, Thou didst choose all that is exceptional, vague, and enigmatic" (*BK*, 223). And instead of following clear and infallible rules, "man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and evil, having only Thy image before him as his guide." An image inspires, but it does not offer infallible prescriptions.

In demanding miracles, then, Alyosha misunderstands what faith is. He experiences his "critical moment," but in the next chapter, he recovers faith by consoling Grushenka in *her* "critical moment." When Alyosha returns to the monastery and listens to Father Paissy reading the Gospel over Zosima's corpse, he dreams that Father Zosima has praised this very act as truly Christian. The story Father Paissy reads, the marriage at Cana, recounts Jesus's first miracle, which no one but Jesus, Mary, and their servants detect. It is therefore a secret miracle, one that does not call attention to itself. As Alyosha now understands, that is also true of our loving kindness and compassion to each other, which no rationalist theory could explain except as a sort of bargain. Active, inconspicuous love is the true miracle.

When Madame Khokhlakova demands proof of God and immortality, Zosima tells her that "there is no proving it" but that, if one lives the right sort of life of active love, one can be convinced of it. The real miracle is the one always available to us. One is convinced without proof, and since love always flickers, doubt inevitably abides with faith. The narrator refers to Alyosha as his "future hero" because he plans to describe the many tests and temptations, doubts and renewals, that Alyosha will undergo. His faith will always be a search for faith.

"Denying, believing and doubting are to men what running is to horses," observed Pascal, who, like Dostoevsky, considered why God did not give indubitable proof of his existence (Pascal, 208). "If there were no obscurity man would not feel his corruption: If there were no light man could not hope for a cure," Pascal explained. "Thus it is not only right but useful for us that God should be partly concealed and partly revealed" (Pascal, 167). That is why the atheist objection that "there

is nothing in the world which proves" God's existence misses the point. God is, and must be, *deus absconditus* [the hidden God—Isaiah 45:15].

Meditating on the death of his first wife, Dostoevsky recorded his thoughts about life and faith as constant striving. The atheists object that if Christianity is true, why does brotherhood not reign on earth? Dostoevsky answers: because so long as man is on earth he lives in a world of "struggle and development" and that life itself is always "developing." Humanity is always incomplete, always becoming itself, and so "on earth man is in a transitory state."[7] People cannot completely fulfill the ideal of loving others because it conflicts with "the law of … personal identity. … And thus on earth mankind strives for an ideal opposed to his nature" (*UD*, 41).

Abiding in uncertainty and blending affirmation with doubt, faith reflects our "transitory" nature. It is necessary "to develop, to attain, to struggle, to glimpse the ideal through all one's falls and eternally strive towards it": that is what life on earth is (*UD*, 39). What Ivan never comprehends, but Alyosha learns, is that one would not so ardently seek faith if one had not already found it.

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7. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks (1860-1881)*, vol. 1, trans T. S. Berczynski, Barbara Heldt Monter, Arline Boyer, and Ellendea Proffer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973), 39. Further references are to *UD*.