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Donkeys, Jesus, Don Quixote, Kant, and Other Idiots: Dostoevsky's The Idiot *and Nietzsche's* Antichrist

1. The discoveries of Basel: From the Bray of a Donkey to Christ in the Tomb

One of the most enigmatic sentences in *The Idiot* is the one uttered by Prince Myshkin in the beginning of the novel during his first visit to Lizaveta Prokofievna Epanchina and her daughters: "I stand for the donkey, all the same: the donkey is a kind and useful man (*poleznyj chelovek*)" (*ПСС* 8; 49).[1] In response to this comment Mrs. Epanchin inquires: "And you, are you a kind man, prince? I ask you out of curiosity [...]. Everyone laughed again". Thus, an obvious, yet playful, connection is established between the prince's strange appreciation of this animal and his own identity.

The prince's evaluation of the donkey as a "kind and useful man" follows Myshkin's account of his flight from Russia to Switzerland and his awakening from his "torpid condition" by the bray of a donkey in Basel's town square market. What seems to be merely a comic situation is, in fact, a scene that is loaded with symbolism central to the novel: this is the first reference to the importance of the city of Basel for the novel's cultural context, a city where Prince Myshkin not only hears the bray of a donkey, but also sees Hans Holbein the Younger's painting, *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1520-22), which has a profound impact on his psyche. In the same chapter, Myshkin makes his first reference to the extraordinary painting: "I have recently seen in Basel one such painting. I really want to tell you about it. I will tell you about it one day. I was so struck" (*ПСС* 8; 55). The reference to a donkey also leads Lizaveta Prokofievna to her involuntary prophesy: "A donkey? how strange [...] yet there is nothing strange about it. Some of us might even fall in love with a donkey [...]. It happened in mythological times" (*ПСС* 8; 48). Lizaveta Prokofievna may be referring here to Apuleius, in whose *Metamorphoses* (or *The Golden Ass*) donkeys are portrayed as stupid and stubborn animals, although these

1 All translations from Russian are by the author.

qualities do not prevent a wealthy woman from falling in love with a donkey.[2] Lizaveta Prokofievna probably uses the word 'donkey' in a derogatory way. Yet even in Apuleius, the donkey has a dual nature of a man/beast. Not only Lucius exhibits asinine qualities even prior to his transformation into an ass, but he also retains the memory of his asininity when he is metamorphosed back into a human form. Myshkin's peculiar reference to the donkey as an "useful man" (*poleznyi chelovek*) further solidifies a hidden reference to Apuleius' story.

The bray of the donkey that awakens Myshkin from his stupor and restores him to his senses is certainly not fortuitous. In *The Idiot*, Judeo-Christian symbolism converges with other mythological and folkloric connotations of the donkey as stupid, clumsy, and slow.[3] The donkey may even be associated with the philosophical Buridan ass, used as an illustration in discussions of free will, thus obliquely alluding to Myshkin's inept decision making.[4] What makes the

2 In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses,* a rich woman falls in love with and lusts for a donkey (who possesses almost human tastes and intelligence) and asks his keeper, Thiasus, to allow her to spend a night with him. See also Shakespeare's reworking a scene from *The Golden Ass* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

3 See, for example, the Balaam ass associated with the theme of wisdom; Zechariah's prophesy: "Behold, your king is coming, humble and riding on a donkey" (Zech 9; 9); the holy family's flight to Egypt, and Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem.

4 The Christian symbolism of Dostoevsky's reference to a donkey was very briefly mentioned by Karen Stepanian (Карен А. Степанян, "Юродство и безумие, смерть и воскресение, бытие и небытие в романе «Идиот»", in *Роман Ф.М. Достоевского «Идиот»: современное состояние изучения*, под ред. Т.А. Касаткиной (Москва: Наследие, 2001), с. 137-162: 149). For an erudite account of the history of the donkey in antiquity and the Bible, see Nuccio Ordine, *Giordano Bruno and the Philosophy of the Ass* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Ordine concludes: "A comparison of the different materials reveals how the symbolic image of the ass manages to contain large areas of ambiguity, which in some ways makes it a perfect symbol of *coincidentia oppositorum*". The antithetical pairings include: "benefic/demonic, powerful/humble, wise/ignorant" (*Ibid*., p. 9). Ironically, one could say that many of the donkey's inherent symbolic meanings (both negative and positive) apply to Myshkin in one way or another: Myshkin's entry to the world of St. Petersburg from his timeless existence in Switzerland's children's paradise, is a sort of parodic entrance of Jesus to Jerusalem on a donkey. Moreover, Myshkin comes to St. Petersburg "on a mission" ("perhaps, and who knows, maybe indeed I have an intention to teach") and speaks through parables and stories. Myshkin also emerges as a "Balaam ass" who started to speak. Aglaya, for example, is specifically worried about his "speaking" during the special party at the Epanchins, and the prince confesses: "Well, you have made it so that now I'll undoubtedly 'start speaking' and even... maybe... will brake the vase as well [...]. I'm sure to start speaking out of fear" (*ПСС* 8; 436). Indeed, as a Balaam ass, the prince started to "speak" and to teach his audience about the meaning of "true" Christ and Christianity. His inability to make a rational choice (Buridan ass), his clumsiness, his igno-

image of the donkey so complex, is its contradictory meanings: a largely negative one in the Ancient Greek mythology (as allegories for human behavior) and a more benign meaning that emerged in the Middle Ages, when the donkey came to be associated with Christianity.

The convergence of Judeo-Christian and folk motifs is already present in the medieval celebrations of the *Feast of the Ass*, which was a by-product of the *Feast of Fools*, a medieval liturgical drama which features a Mass of the Ass at the end of which the priest turns to the congregation and brays three times, and the parishioners bray thrice in response. The church eventually prohibited this practice, although it was preserved in the folk memory and also found its way into literature and philosophy. Incidentally, Nietzsche dedicates an important section in his *Zarathustra* to the *Ass Festival*. It was in Basel, by the Council of Basel in 1431, that *The Feast of Fools* was finally forbidden under severe penalties (an account of this kind of celebration is also related in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*).

Dostoevsky's novel evokes both traditions – the Greco-Roman one portraying donkeys in negative light, and a benign Judeo-Christian tradition, in which the donkey might even represent a Christ-figure, an image of suffering, patience, humility, and burden. In its derogatory meaning, a reference to a donkey appears not only in Lizaveta Prokofievna's allusion to Apuleius, but it also resurfaces when Ferdyshenko mentions Krylov's fable, *Lev sostarivshiisia* ("A Lion Grown Old"), which this self-appointed fool dubs, "A Lion and a Donkey" (*Lev da Osel*), perhaps, hinting at Myshkin's first name, Lev.[5] Ferdyshchenko then quickly and readily clarifies that he does not view himself as a "lion," but rather as an "ass" ("А я, ваше превосходительство, – Осел").

The image of the donkey in the novel is not only loaded with both Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian symbolism, but also refers to man's dual nature, a theme parodically anticipating the novel's discussion of Jesus' dual nature in Holbein's *Christ in the Tomb*. Apuleius's Lucius, a man turned into a donkey, must survive his adventures before regaining his human shape. He must redeem himself, be "resurrected" to his human nature, and become a true servant of the goddess Isis. This story of conversion is rooted in the duality of man as both human and beast. While externally a donkey, Lucius retains the soul of a human.

rance, and at the same time his wisdom, reflect various other aspects of his "asininity". For an image of the donkey in cultural mythology, see also Jean-Michel Henny, "The Philosophical Donkey (L'Âne Philosophe)", *The Philosopher,* Vol. 101, No. 2, Special Donkey Edition, http://www.the-philosopher.co.uk/2013/09/the-philosophical-donkey-2014.html).

5 Krylov's fable is a reworking of La Fontaine's version of *A Lion Grown Old* by Phaedrus who was retelling the Aesop's fables.

Questions, therefore, arise as to what is the relationship between human-mind and animal-body? What is an animal? What does it mean to be human? Is a donkey only an animal? Is man only a man or also a donkey? Similarly, Holbein's painting raises questions about the duality of Jesus' nature, questions that are central to the novel: is Holbein's Christ only a dead man or also God? Is Dostoevsky's Christ figure (understood as a perfect man) merely a donkey?

The link between the beast of burden and Christ may seem strenuous. Yet there are frequent references to donkeys, as a symbol of meekness, servitude, and humility, associated with Christ's passion, and, as noted above, with the celebrations of the *Feast of the Ass*, a commonly known celebration in Medieval times. Significantly, much later, Robert Bresson's film *Au hazard Balthazar* (1966), inspired by Dostoevsky's *Idiot* (and in particular by the significance of the donkey in the beginning of the novel), draws on Christological motifs, associated with the donkey.[6] Dostoevsky weaves together references to a donkey and Christ as he portrays his asinine hero, Prince Myshkin, as both a "donkey" and a Christ figure. In Dostoevsky's novel, both the image of the donkey as a "kind and useful man" and of Christ as portrayed by Holbein, raise the question of the dual nature of both a man and of Jesus.

The image of the donkey may be marginal in Dostoevsky's novel, yet it illuminates aspects of Myshkin's idiocy and its Christological symbolism and its ambiguity. In fact, it is also worth mentioning that the famous satire, *The Ship of Fools*, by Sebastian Brant was published in Basel and was illustrated with woodcuts, many of which feature donkeys. (Some of the woodcuts may have been created by A. Dürer who worked in Basel as a woodcut designer for publishers).[7] The bray of the donkey that awakens prince Myshkin in Basel is merely an oblique, humble hint at the prince's own "asininity," combining foolishness (idiocy) with Christological connotations. In the end, the "perfectly beautiful man" collapses under the impact of the burden he has to carry, and slips back into idiocy, going through a tragic and reverse metamorphosis. Like Lucius the ass Myshkin tries to interfere in human affairs with miserable re-

6 Indeed, the religious symbolism of a donkey culminates, perhaps, in Robert Bresson's film, *Au Hazard Balthazar* (1966), which amalgamates the symbolic meaning of the donkey as carrier of the burden of human sins on his back, a film that is inspired by both Apuleius *The Golden Ass* and Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. In his film, Bresson depicts what it means to be a "pure and good" animal, or paraphrasing Dostoevsky's project of portraying a "perfectly beautiful man", what it means to be "a perfectly beautiful animal", an innocent donkey.

7 One of the woodcuts, *Of the Mutability of Fortune* (the original attributed to Albrecht Dürer), depicts the wheel of fortune with three fools at various stages of transformation between man and ass. The depictions of men transforming into donkeys show a link between the trope of asinine transformation and folly.

sults, but unlike Apuleius' protagonist who leaves his ass condition behind, is restored to his human image and experiences a religious conversion (symbolically, his name signifies "light," from Latin *lux*), Myshkin does not achieve redemption and sinks into "darkness," back into the chaos of mental disorder. This image of the unresponsive and recognizing-no-one Myshkin, over whose body Elizaveta Prokofievna sheds her Russian tears as in a Pieta of sorts, emerges as a counterpart to the spectator's contemplation of Jesus' rotting body in Holbein's painting. Is a resurrection possible? Lucius might be restored to his human nature, but could Myshkin be restored to sanity? Could Holbein's Christ rise from the dead?

2. Is a Donkey More than a Donkey and an Idiot More than an Idiot?

In the same chapter in which Myshkin tells the story of a donkey and makes his first reference to Holbein's painting, he is not only implicitly compared to a donkey, but is also referred to as an "idiot," a "child," a "babe," an "eccentric", or an "oddball" (*chudak*), and a "philosopher". Each appellation in itself seems to be inadequate in describing Myshkin, but they all converge in a surplus of meaning, that the title of the novel fully conveys. All these appellations – a donkey, a child, oddball, and philosopher – are intricately interconnected, and elucidate various aspects of Myshkin's "idiocy".[8]

A great deal has been written about Dostoevsky's use of the term "idiot".[9] As it has been pointed out, the term "idiot" is derived from Greek ἰδιώτης and Lat-

8 Idiocy understood as stupidity corresponds to the ass's derogatory connotations. The idiot's "childishness" points to his delayed puberty and physiological development, a form of mental retardation. In his analysis of Giordano Bruno's *The Cabala of Pegasus* (*Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*), Nuccio Ordine points out "the semantic common ground of the triad ('asininity', 'madness', 'ignorance') and its counterpart "triad", by quoting Bruno: "Have you never heard that madness, ignorance, and asininity in this world are wisdom, learning, and divinity in the other"? (Ordine, *Op. cit*., 33).

9 There have been various interpretations of the way we should understand the term as used in the novel, including its etymological Greek roots and the concept of holy foolishness. See Степанян, *Op. cit*., pp. 137-138 among many others. See also Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford: Stanford U Press, 1992), p. 89. Of all the possible meanings of the word 'idiot', one that is connected with its original meaning as a layman, that is, an ordinary simple person, is the most relevant to my analysis (See a useful article by A. Kunil'skii: Андрей Е. Кунильский, "О христианском контексте в романе Ф.М. Достоевского «Идиот»", in *Проблемы исторической поэтики*, вып. 5, 1998, с. 392-408).

in *idiota*, that is, "ordinary person, layman", a person not holding a public office; but it acquired its derogatory connotations only centuries later. Yet, as late as the 15th century, an influential German Neoplatonic thinker, Nicholas of Cusa, in his famous *Idiota* dialogues (*Idiota de sapientia*, *Idiota de mente*, *Idiota de staticis experimentis*) presents his Idiot as a wise, though unschooled, layman who acquires wisdom by his insight and higher intelligence rather than by reading books.[10] Cusanus' *idiota* emerges as a philosopher, although "without knowledge of books", in opposition to his more schooled interlocutors, the scholastic Philosopher and the humanist Orator. Cusanus thus introduces a contrast between the human capacities of *ratio* and *intellectus*. *Ratio* is our capacity for thinking, using concepts and judgments. *Intellectus*, by contrast, is a direct intellectual vision, a way to grasp the object by intuition. The distinction between the two types of reason has a long tradition and goes back to Plato's analogy of the divided line with the notion of *noesis* (philosophical understanding) as higher than *dianoia* (mathematical understanding), a concept that is echoed in Aristotle and in neo-Platonism and discussed by Augustine who also refers to *intellectus* (incorporeal reason that is above the human mind) and *ratio* (conceptual knowledge) as a higher and lower reason, respectively.[11]

The concept of the two intellects is alluded to in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. Whatever the source of Aglaya's ideas about the two intellects may be, she refers to Myshkin's particular kind of "intelligence" as a form of medieval "learned ignorance":

> ...and if they say your mind... that is, that you're sometimes sick in your mind, it isn't fair; I've decided and argued about it, because though you are in fact sick in your mind (you won't, of course, be angry at that, I'm speaking from a higher point), the main mind in you is better than in any of them, such as they would never even dream of, because *there are two minds: the main one and the non-main one*" [потому что есть два ума: главный и неглавный]» [emphasis is mine – *SE*] (*ПСС* 8; 356).

10 All of these dialogues, *The Layman on Wisdom, The Layman on Mind,* and *The Layman on Experiments done with Weight-Scales,* were written in 1450. An interest in Cusanus' work was reawakened in the end of the 19th century, and in Russia was stimulated by Vladimir Soloviov. Some considered Cusanus' work and in particular his concept of *docta ignorantia*, as anticipating Kant's ideas about the limits of reason.

11 See K. M. Ziebart, *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and the Intellect: A Case Study in Fifteenth-Century Fides-Ratio Controversy*. Brill Studies in Intellectual History; 225 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 9.

Myshkin is an unschooled layman (his only skill is a practical one, calligraphy), but he is also presented as a philosopher of sorts. "You are a philosopher and came over to teach us," says Adelaida during their first meeting at the Epanchins, and Myshkin seems to agree: "Perhaps, you are right [...]. I am indeed a philosopher, perhaps, and who knows, it may be indeed that I have an intention to teach" (*ПСС* 8; 51). Myshkin is presented as a wise man-philosopher who, as an ancient *idiota*, is an outsider in the world of the polis, but who embodies important virtues of humility, tolerance, and deeper understanding associated with the theological tradition of *docta ignorantia* and some of the "philosophical" qualities of a donkey.[12]

Whether Dostoevsky's novel is a "novel about a Christian" (Роман о христианине), about a "perfectly beautiful man", or the prince-Christ ("князь-Христос"), it is obvious that these concepts – Christianity, Christ, and perfect beauty – evolve into a portrait of an "idiot", and are understood in a peculiar way, incorporating Myshkin's traits as both a philosopher and a donkey. Although Dostoevsky follows Renan in portraying the Jesus-type as an ordinary man, unlike Renan, Dostoevsky is not as interested in the historical Jesus, as in the *psychological type* of Jesus, that is, precisely the topic that will later interest Nietzsche, who thinks that only Dostoevsky properly understands this type. In this interpretation – for both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, if Jesus is only a man, then he has to be an "idiot" of sorts. On that point, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche seem to agree. In what follows, I will consider how Nietzsche, who also draws on the original meaning of the word "idiot" in his discussion of Jesus, may offer a useful and insightful interpretation of Dostoevsky's concept of "idiocy" as it is depicted in his novel.

3. On the footsteps of Dostoevsky: Nietzsche's Jesus as Idiot

Dostoevsky visited Basel, a town in which he saw Holbein's painting that became the central image of the novel, in 1867. Basel may have been the inspiration for much of the novel's symbolism. Only two years later, Nietzsche moved to Basel for a decade, to teach at the university, and most likely he also saw Holbein's painting, which must have confirmed his revelation about the death of God, formulated in "The Parable of the Madman": "Do we hear nothing yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing yet

12 Giordano Bruno, for example, associates donkeys with true philosophy (The donkey, 'presents himself as an example of humility and tolerance, essential virtues in science and wisdom'). See, Ordine, *Op. cit*.

of the divine putrefaction? For even gods putrefy! God is dead!"[13] Basel might also have provided Nietzsche information about the Feast of the Ass and awoken his interest in the image of the donkey. Whether or not Dostoevsky and Nietzsche were inspired by similar sources, they both were interested in Jesus the man and both conceived of him as a type of "idiot".[14]

Comparative images of Christ in Dostoevsky and Nietzsche have received substantial critical attention.[15] Most recent scholarship leaves little doubt that Nietzsche's iconoclastic text *Antichrist* (or *Anti-Christianity*) reveals his familiarity with *The Idiot*. Nietzsche's discussion of Jesus offers an insightful interpretation of Dostoevsky's concept of "idiocy". I will trace the connection between Jesus, Don Quixote, and Kant in Nietzsche's notion of an "idiot" and then consider how Nietzsche's reading of Dostoevsky may help us better understand Dostoevsky's "perfectly beautiful man".

The following are several key references from Nietzsche that have provoked discussion among Dostoevsky and Nietzsche scholars, and that confirm Nietzsche's familiarity with *The Idiot*:

13 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*. Trans. and ed. by R. Kevin Hill (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), p. 134.

14 There has been a lively polemic concerning Nietzsche's familiarity with *The Idiot*. Some scholars support and others refute the view that Nietzsche may have read *The Idiot* prior to his composition of *The Anti-Christ*. Most recent scholarship, especially Paolo Stellino's book *Nietzsche and Dostoevsky: On the Verge of Nihilism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), validates Kaufmann's previous conclusions and leaves no doubt as to whether Nietzsche read *The Idiot* (Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche. Philosophier, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 107-117). In this essay, I am not interested in the question of "influence" and consider it irrelevant to my discussion. Nor am I interested in following Dmitri Merezhkovsky in outlining how Dostoevsky perhaps preemptively refutes some of Nietzsche's ideas. Rather, I see Dostoevsky and Nietzsche as two great minds who share an interest in the depths of human psychology and the problem of the existence of God. Reading Dostoevsky and Nietzsche in tandem is intended to put in relief some important aspects of their thought, their affinities and differences.

15 See Kaufmann, *Op. cit.*, and Edith W. Clowes's among many others: Edith Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche in Russian Literature* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 189-191; Эдит Клюс, "Образ Христа у Достоевского и Ницше", in *Достоевский и мировая культура. Альманах.* № 1 (ч. 1 – 3) (Москва – Санкт-Петербург: Общество Достоевского, 1993), с. 106-131. See also Stellino's study *Nietzsche and Dostoevsky*. Some similarities between Prince Myshkin and Nietzsche's Jesus have been identified by other scholars, although in most cases with little or no conclusions about how these similarities help us to better understand Dostoevsky's novel.

1. "Monsieur Renan, that buffoon in *psychologicis*, has appropriated for his explication of the type Jesus the two *most inapplicable* concepts possible in this case: the concept of the *genius* and the concept of the *hero*. But if anything is unevangelic it is the concept hero. [...] the incapacity for resistance here becomes morality ('resist not evil!': the profoundest saying of the Gospel, its key in a certain sense), blessedness in peace, in gentleness, in the *inability* for enmity [...]. To make a *hero* of Jesus! – And what a worse misunderstanding is the word 'genius'! Our whole concept, our cultural concept 'spirit' had no meaning whatever in the world Jesus lived in. To speak with the precision of the physiologist a quite different word would rather be in place here: the word 'idiot'".[16]

2. "That strange and sick world to which the Gospels introduce us – a world like that of a Russian novel, in which refuse of society, neurosis and 'childlike' idiocy seem to make a rendezvous – must in any case have *coarsened* the type: the first disciples in particular had to translate a being immersed entirely in symbols and incomprehensibilities into their own crudity in order to understand anything at all [...]. One has to regret that no Dostoevsky lived in the neighborhood of this most interesting *décadent*; I mean someone who could feel the thrilling fascination of such a combination of the sublime, the sick and the childish".[17]

3. "I know only one psychologist, who has lived in the world where Christianity is possible and a Christ can arise at any moment... That is Dostoevsky. He divined Christ: – and instinctively he has been kept sheltered from conceiving this type with the vulgarity of Renan ... And they believe in Paris that Renan suffers from too many finesses! ... But can one be more wrong than to make out of Christ, who was an idiot, a genius? To mendaciously make out of Christ, who represents the opposite of a heroic feeling, a hero?"[18]

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*. Trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 153.

17 *Ibid*., pp. 154-155.

18 Posthumous fragment 15[9], spring 1888, titled "Jesus: Dostoevsky": "Jesus: Dostoiewsky. Ich kenne nur Einen Psychologen, der in der Welt gelebt hat, wo das Christenthum möglich ist, wo ein Christus jeden Augenblick entstehen kann... Das ist Dostoiewsky. Er hat Christus errathen: – und instinktiv ist er vor allem behütet geblieben diesen Typus sich mit der Vulgarität Renans vorzustellen ... Und in Paris glaubt man, daß Renan an zu vielen finesses leidet! ... Aber kann man ärger fehlgreifen, als wenn man aus Christus, der ein Idiot war, ein Genie macht? Wenn man aus Christus, der den Gegensatz eines heroischen Gefühls darstellt, einen Helden herauslügt?" (*Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe* – Digital version of the German critical edition of the complete works of Nietzsche ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari; http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1888,15).

In the 1888, the time when Nietzsche was writing *The Antichrist*, Dostoevsky's name figures prominently in this letters.[19]

Let us consider first how Nietzsche deploys the term 'idiot' in *The Antichrist*. Nietzsche's understanding of the term was informed by the Greco-Roman tradition.[20] He draws from antiquity and views a philosopher/ascetic of the type of Socrates and Jesus and later Francis of Assisi to be the highest type of man.[21] In *The Antichrist,* he applies the word 'idiot' to Jesus in a comparable fashion. He obviously does not mean that Jesus was mentally retarded and stupid, although he insists on his delayed puberty. In fact, he respected Jesus and he even considered him a superior human being, endowed with a "free spirit". Speaking about Jesus, he was primarily interested in what he calls "the psychology of the Redeemer" and thought of Jesus as childish, sickly, and naïve, resulting from his delayed puberty. Jesus' particular physical condition and development resulted, according to Nietzsche, in an "instinctive hatred of every reality".[22]

19 Nietzsche starts mentioning Dostoevsky at least since February 1887 (his letter to Franz Overbeck of February 23, 1887, in which he mentions reading *Notes from the Underground*). In his letters, he also mentions reading *The House of the Dead* and *Insulted and Injured*. He frequently emphasizes his appreciation of Dostoevsky. See, for example, his letter to Georg Brandes (October 20, 1888): "And, idiot that I am, I do not even know Danish! I quite believe it when you say that 'in Russia one can come to life again'; any Russian book – above all, Dostoevski (translated into French, for heaven's sake not German!!) – I count among my greatest moments of pleasurable relief". In another letter to Brandes (November 20, 1888) he writes of Dostoevsky again: "I completely believe what you say about Dostoevski; I prize his work, on the one hand, as the most valuable psychological material known to me – I am grateful to him in a remarkable way, however much he goes against my deepest instincts. Roughly as in my relation to Pascal, whom I almost love because he has taught me such an infinite amount – the only logical Christian". *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Ed. and tr. by Christopher Middleton (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 317, 327.

20 In his discussion of Nietzsche, Martin Dibelius (who is quoted by many scholars in later studies) suggests that the original Ancient Greek meaning of the word 'idiot' as a private man in opposition to the man of the polis, is relevant to Nietzsche's concept of an idiot: Martin Dibelius, "Der 'psychologische Typus des Erlösers' bei Friedrich Nietzsche", in *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, Jahrgang 22, Heft 1, 1944 (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag), S. 65-67. In 1938 Karl Jaspers pointed out that "Nietzsche meant idiot in the same sense in which Dostoevsky calls his Prince Myshkin an idiot" (Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche and Christianity* (Chicago: Henry Regnary, 1961), p. 22). On Nietzsche's Jesus see also Ronald A. Carson, "Nietzsche's Jesus", *CrossCurrents* , Winter 1971, Vol. 21, No. 1, 20th Anniversary Issue, pp. 39-52.

21 Kaufmann, *Op. cit.*, n. 405.

22 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, pp. 152-153.

Nietzsche also uses the term 'idiot' not only to explain some psycho-physiological aspects of Jesus' personality but in opposition to the concepts of 'hero' and 'genius' advanced by Renan.[23] He insists that historical Jesus was not a revolutionary (against the Roman Empire), and was completely ignorant of the global political order, very much like ancient *idiota*:

> Such a symbolist *par excellence* stands outside of all religion, all conceptions of divine worship, all history, all natural science, all experience of the world, all acquirements, all politics, all psychology, all books, all art, – his 'knowledge' is precisely the *pure folly* of the fact *that* anything of this kind exists. He has not so much as heard of *culture*, he does not need to fight against it – he does not deny it... The same applies to the *state*, to society and the entire civic order, to *work*, to war – he never had reason to deny 'the world', he had no notion of the ecclesiastical concept 'world'... Denial is precisely what is totally impossible to him.[24]

Jesus' "ethics", according to Nietzsche, are based on what he intuited to be a blessed state of kingdom of heaven in one's soul. He is a natural philosopher of sorts, unbound by any dogma: "He speaks only of the inmost thing: 'life' or 'truth' or 'light' is his expression for the inmost thing- everything else, the whole of reality, the whole of nature, language itself, possesses for him merely the value of a sign, a parable [eines Gleichnisses]..."[25] Thus, Nietzsche views Jesus as a "great symbolist" who accepted only "inner realities as realities", and who was as such an "anti-realist".[26]

What further complicates the matter is that in the same work Nietzsche also refers to Kant as an "idiot". Moreover, it is to Kant that he applies this term

23 It has also been said that Nietzsche considered Jesus an idiot from a psycho-physiological point of view, that is, he believed Jesus had "delayed puberty" that "belongs to the type of certain epileptoid neuroses". See Stellino, p. 114.

24 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, p. 157.

25 *Ibid*., pp. 156-158.

26 Nietzsche speaks about Jesus' "instinctive hatred of *every* reality" as stemming from a "morbid susceptibility of the *sense of touch*": "a flight into the 'ungraspable', into the 'inconceivable', as antipathy towards every form, every special and temporal concept, towards everything firm, all that is custom, institution, Church, as being at home in a world undisturbed by reality of any kind, a merely 'inner' world, a 'real' world, an 'eternal' world.... The Kingdom of God *is within you*'" (*Ibidem*, p. 153). Some scholars also pointed out that Nietzsche used the term in the sense of an aberration, an exception, someone who cannot be imitated (Uwe Kühneweg, "Nietzsche und Iesus-Iesus bei Nietzsche," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 1986, vol. 15, S. 382-397).

even before applying it to Jesus. Why would Nietzsche choose this particular appellation in respect to Jesus and Kant in one relatively short text, if they had nothing in common? To be sure, the question is not about the similarity of their personalities, but rather about a set of ideas and approaches to life that they represent. I believe he criticizes Kant for the same traits he sees in Jesus, and Nietzsche views both of them as decadents and anti-realists. He censures Kant for two main failings: his subversion of reality (or even hatred of reality) and his Christian sense of morality as universal duty. He thus outlines his reasons for calling Kant an idiot:

> Kant's categorical imperative should have been felt as *mortally dangerous!*... and that nihilist with Christian-dogmatic bowels understands joy as an *objection*... What destroys more quickly than to work, to think, to feel without inner necessity, without a deep personal choice, without *joy*? as an automaton of 'duty'? It is virtually a *recipe* for *décadence*, even for idiocy... Kant became an idiot.[27]

In other words, Kant's tendency to turn reality into appearance and his moralism lead to the Christ-like decadence and "idiocy": "The erring instinct in all and everything, *anti-naturalness* as instinct, German décadence as a philosophy – *that is Kant!*"[28] He claims that Kant uses reason against reason itself: "One had made of reality an 'appearance'; one had made a completely fabricated world, that of being, into reality... Kant's success is merely a theologian's success".[29] In other words, Kant, according to Nietzsche, constructs an intellectual loophole with his utilitarian use of reason for rescuing faith. Furthermore, Kant's problem, in Nietzsche's reading, is that he inherits Christian morality and Christian anti-intellectualism: "Christianity also stands in opposition to all *intellectual* well-constitutedness – it *can* use only the morbid mind [kranke Vernunft] as the Christian mind, it takes the side of everything idiotic".[30] Thus, as we see, some of Nietzsche's charges against Kant are similar to those he advances against Jesus: decadence, hatred of reality, and an attack on life. Both Jesus and Kant exhibit, according to him, certain naïve anti-intellectualism:

> Finally Kant, in his 'German' innocence, tried to give this form of corruption, this lack of intellectual conscience, a scientific colouring with the concept of 'practical reason': he designed a reason specifically for the case in which one was

27 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, p. 134.
28 *Ibid*.
29 *Ibid*., p. 133.
30 *Ibid*., p. 181.

> supposed not to have to bother about reason, namely when morality, when the sublime demand 'thou shalt' makes itself heard.[31]

Nietzsche also attributes to Kant a naïve messianic fervor to save the world and "priestly" mentality.[32] This theoretician of the sublime, a moralist, an "innocent" anti-intellectual and hater of reality, a decadent, and moral theologian, emerges in Nietzsche's critique as rather similar to Jesus, who is, in Nietzsche's words a "mixture of sublimity, sickness, and childishness". His *Anti-Christ* is as much against Christ as it is against Kant, an Anti-Kant.

Nietzsche calls Jesus a "holy anarchist" and refers to Kant as "that Nihilist, with his bowels of Christian dogmatism", thus juxtaposing the undogmatic life of Jesus to Kant's priestly dogmatism.[33] Most curiously, Jesus is also the one, who could have been sent, according to Nietzsche, – of all places!!! – to a distant part of Russia, that is, to Siberia (most likely the choice of the location was inspired by Dostoevsky[34]): "This holy anarchist who roused up the lowly, the outcasts and 'sinners', the *Chandala* within Judaism to oppose the ruling order – in language which, if the Gospels are to be trusted, would even today lead to Siberia – was a political criminal, in so far as political criminals were possible in an *absurdly unpolitical* society".[35] Overall, Nietzsche's portrayal of Jesus' "idiocy" is consistent with the ancient and medieval meaning of the idiot as a lay-

31 *Ibid*., p. 135.

32 "If one considers that the philosopher is, in virtually all nations, only the further development of the priestly type, one is no longer surprised to discover this heirloom of the priest, *self-deceptive fraudulence*. If one has sacred tasks, for example that of improving, saving, redeeming mankind – if one carries the divinity in one's bosom, is the mouthpiece of an otherworld imperative, such a mission already places one outside all merely reasonable valuations" (*Ibid.*, p. 135). In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche also writes about Kant's naiveté, "the naiveté of the a country vicar". Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Tr. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 84.

33 About Nietzsche's criticism of Kant's "priestly" dogmatism, see Paul S. Loeb, "Nietzsche's Critique of Kant's Priestly Philosophy", in *Nietzsche and The Antichrist: Religion, Politics, and Culture in Late Modernity*, ed. by Daniel Conway (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 89-116.

34 Not only Nietzsche undoubtedly knew about Dostoevsky's prison term in Siberia and, in general, about this notorious place of exile in Russia, but Siberia is comically mentioned in the very opening of *The Idiot* as a proper place of exile for the crime of blasphemy. As Rogozhin tells the story of his brother cutting off the gold tassels from the funeral brocade cover on his father's coffin, he suggests he could be sent to Siberia for this crime of "blasphemy". Lebedev eagerly agrees: "'A blasphemy! A blasphemy!' the clerk agreed at once. 'And for this to Siberia'? 'To Siberia, to Siberia! Strait off to Siberia!'" (*ПСС* 8; 10).

35 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, pp. 151-152.

man who taught only through practical example, through his own way of living well (without resentment), one who disregarded the moral authority and "learned knowledge" and lived from inner convictions.

Nietzsche's interpretation of Jesus seems to be a fairly accurate description of Prince Myshkin. Nietzsche's notion that "Christianity stands in opposition to all *intellectual* well-constitutedness" echoes Dostoevsky's portrayal of Myshkin's "non-main mind" in Aglaya's definition. However, for Nietzsche, this "idiocy" has a much more negative connotation than for Dostoevsky, because he views any form of sickness as detracting from life. "Christian condition, 'faith'" for Nietzsche "*has* to be a form of sickness".[36]

An excellent and sensitive reader, Nietzsche found in Dostoevsky a congenial mind and he divined the very essence of Dostoevsky's project, that is, a portrait of the human type of Jesus placed within contemporary life; an idiot understood in the sense of a lay philosopher, and a Christian as a fundamentally sick mind, even when this mind might be a higher mind. Yet this kind of mind is incompatible with the reality of the so-called real world. The disintegration of Myshkin's *ratio* is the only possible outcome for this type of man, trying to live only by his "higher reason", or with his "main mind" (*glavnyi um*), as Aglaya suggests.

4. A Comic Knight and a Lofty Idiot

Neither Dostoevsky, nor Nietzsche called Cervantes' foolish knight an idiot explicitly, yet their respective interpretations of Jesus' "idiocy" are contaminated by their views of Don Quixote. Both viewed him as a kind of a failed Jesus figure, and both lamented the satirical portrayal of Cervantes' lofty "anti-realist", although perhaps for slightly diverging reasons. Their respective attitudes toward Don Quixote provide an important additional dimension to their interpretations of the human type of Jesus as idiot. Neither writer interpreted Cervantes' novel as simply a satire on the harmful effects of the books of chivalry, but rather were affected by a strange and disturbing aspect of the novel's ridicule of its brave idealist.

Is not Don Quixote a perfect "idiot" in a sense similar to the one employed by Dostoevsky in respect to Myshkin and by Nietzsche in respect to Jesus? After all, it is not a coincidence that in his portrayal of Myshkin, Dostoevsky was inspired both by Don Quixote and by Jesus, and that an image of Christ

36 *Ibid*., p. 181.

as a perfectly beautiful man, converges in his imagination with Don Quixote. In fact, Dostoevsky was not unique in conflating the idealized image of Don Quixote with the humanized image of Christ, a tendency widely exhibited by the Romantics.[37] Even Turgenev, in his interpretation of Don Quixote as "useful to humanity", links his fate with that of Christ.[38]

Yet what is it that makes Don Quixote, who also exemplifies the mixture of "the sublime, the sick, and the childish" (the same qualities that Nietzsche attributes to Jesus and that also apply to Myshkin) different from Dostoevsky's and Nietzsche's "idiots"? Is Don Quixote's madness similar to Myshkin's and Jesus' "idiocy"? Not completely. The main difference is that as opposed to Myshkin and Nietzsche's Jesus, Don Quixote is more consistently comic and ridiculous, but also more "heroic". Dostoevsky himself pointed out this difference, saying, in The Notebooks for *The Idiot*, that Myshkin "is not comical but does have another charming quality: he is *innocent*" (*ПСС* 9; 239). Nietzsche's Jesus is not a comic figure either. Why did both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche disregard the satirizing of Don Quixote?

37 On the romantics' converging of Don Quixote and Christ, see Eric J. Ziolkowski, *The Sanctification of Don Quixote. From Hidalgo to Priest* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), pp. 106-107. As Ziolkowski comments: "The Romantics' elevated, idealized image of Don Quixote corresponded in one other way to the demythologized, humanized image of Christ that emerged with the quest for the historical Jesus: as Jesus' alleged 'enthusiasm' was viewed in a neutral light by Strauss and later construed in positive terms by Renan and Seely, so did that same quality come to be revered in Don Quixote" (*Ibid*., p. 106). Ziolkowski concludes: "With the Romantic elevation and idealization of Don Quixote, together with the demythologization and humanization of the historical Jesus, and the Romantic tendency to imagine Jesus in aesthetic terms, the evolving conceptions of the savior and the knight in the early nineteenth century became analogous on three prominent points: both figures were perceived as pure idealists, both were viewed as epitomizing the poetic imagination, and both were admired for their enthusiasm, a quality revered in its association with poetic inspiration" (*Ibid*., p. 107).

38 Ziolkowski observes this link in his study *The Sanctification of Don Quixote*, p. 112. He comments: "Prior to Turgenev, the only person who compared Don Quixote to Christ was Kierkegaard, who was not known in Russia. Turgenev's comparison (implied by the allusion to the Pharisees) may have suggested the idea to Dostoevsky. Indeed, Turgenev's essay closes with the praise for Don Quixote as 'the most splendid Beauty', precisely the criterion on which Dostoevsky's comparison is based" (pp. 120-121).

Let us briefly recall Dostoevsky's view of Don Quixote.[39] In his often-quoted letter to Sofiia Ivanova of January 1868, Dostoevsky explicitly links Jesus to Don Quixote:

> The main thought of the novel is to portray a positively beautiful man. There is nothing more difficult than this in the world, and especially at this time [...]. The beautiful is the ideal, but the ideal, neither ours nor that of civilized Europe, is far from being perfected. On earth there is only one positively beautiful person – Christ, so that the appearance of this immeasurably, infinitely beautiful person is, of course, an infinite miracle in itself... of the beautiful characters in Christian literature, Don Quixote is the most finished. But he is beautiful only because at the same time he is also comic [...]. I have nothing similar, nothing decidedly, and therefore I am terribly afraid that it will be a positive failure [...]. The novel is called *The Idiot* (*ПСС* 28_2; 51).

Thus, the concept of the "positively beautiful person", of Christ, of Don Quixote, and of an "idiot" seem to be conflated in this letter, which points to Dostoevsky's concept of "idiocy" being closely connected with his view of both Don Quixote and Jesus. Moreover, while Cervantes' character is "beautiful", he is beautiful because he is at the same time "also comic". Dostoevsky's character, by contrast, for the most part, is not comic, although he is an "idiot". Curiously, Dostoevsky sees Don Quixote's failing precisely in the lack of some of the qualities that Renan attributes to his Jesus, that is, genius:

> Man will not forget to take this *saddest* of all books with him to God's last judgment... He will point to the fact that man's most sublime beauty, his most sublime purity, chastity, ingenuousness, gentleness, courage, and, finally, his most sublime intellect – all these often (alas, all too often) come to naught, pass without benefit to humanity, and even become an object of humanity's derision simply because all these most noble and precious gifts with which man is often endowed lack but the very last gift – that of *genius* to put all the wealth of these gifts and their power to work and to direct it along a path of action that is truthful, not fantastic and insane, so as to work for the benefit of humanity! But

39 The role of Cervantes and of Don Quixote for Dostoevsky received a lot of critical attention. My task here is not to repeat and analyze the multiple allusions that Dostoevsky makes to Don Quixote and which were diligently analyzed by various scholars (T.V. Zakharova, Iu. Mann, Vsevolod Bagno among many others). Rather I would like to focus on the comparative interpretation of Don Quixote by Dostoevsky and Nietzsche in the context of their interest in the human type of Jesus.

> genius, alas, is given out to the tribes and the peoples in such small quantities and so rarely that the spectacle of this malicious irony of fate that so often dooms the efforts of some of the noblest of people and the most ardent friends of humanity, to scorn and laughter and to the casting of stones solely because these people, at the fateful moment, were unable to discern the true sense of things and so discover their *new word* – this spectacle of the needless ruination of such great and noble forces actually may drive a friend of humanity to despair, evoke not laughter but bitter tears and embitter his heart, hitherto pure and believing, with doubt... (*ПСС* 26; 25)

Dostoevsky points here not only to the lack of genius in Don Quixote, but to the "scorn and laughter" that this lack of genius may generate, and thus may even lead humanity to doubt and despair, undermining humanity's faith in the ideals. With the exception of his lack of genius, Don Quixote for Dostoevsky is a "perfectly beautiful man", in many ways similar to Renan's humanized Jesus, whom Renan calls "a perfect idealist" (idéaliste accompli) and a "sublime person", in whom "is condensed all that is good and lofty in our nature".[40] It is important to recall here that the notion of Jesus as a "perfect man" and of Don Quixote as a "perfect man" was part of the Romantic ethos.[41] Don Quixote, similar to Jesus, is an enthusiast, pure in heart, endowed with a lofty and poetic nature and a utopian vision, but as opposed to Jesus, he is a comic figure. That is why in his *Diary of a Writer* Dostoevsky comments on Cervantes' novel as the "saddest" book in world literature and as one conveying a "bitter irony":

> In the whole world there is no deeper, no more powerful literary work. This is, so far, the last and greatest expression of human thought; this is the most bitter irony that a man is capable of expressing. And if the world were to come to an end, and people were asked somewhere: "Did you understand your life on earth, and what conclusion have you drawn from it?" – man could silently hand over *Don Quixote*: "Here is my inference from life. – Can you condemn me for it?" (March 1876, *ПСС* 22; 92)

Although Don Quixote for Dostoevsky represents the best experiment in "Christian literature" in portraying a "perfectly beautiful man", in his own liter-

40 Ernest Renan, *Life of Jesus* (New York: Carleton Publisher, 1863), pp. 141, 375.

41 For a discussion of Jesus' and Don Quixote's portrayals by the romantics, see Ziolkowski, *Op. cit.* Ziolkowski quotes Emerson referring to Jesus as "the perfect man" and Sismondi's perception of him as "homme accompli" (Ziolkowski, pp. 104, 108).

ary experiment he goes further: he wants to find the ways to portray this kind of man (положительно прекрасный человек) without making him comic and without making him a romantic hero, or a "genius".[42]

Nietzsche's view of Don Quixote is unexpectedly close to that of Dostoevsky. His attitude toward Don Quixote offers a peculiar twist to his concept of idiocy and Jesus. In his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche comments on the cruelty that infuses human culture, and observes:

> It was impossible to conceive of a noble household without a creature upon whom one could vent one's malice and cruel teasing without a second thought (– remember, for example, Don Quixote at the court of the Duchess: today we read the whole *Don Quixote* with a bitter taste in our mouths, almost with a sense of torture, and so would seem very alien, very inscrutable to its author and his contemporaries – they read it with the best of all consciences as the most cheerful of books, they almost laughed themselves to death over it).[43]

Thus Nietzsche makes it clear that although for Cervantes and his contemporaries, Don Quixote may be a comical fool, and they do not find beauty or genius in this knight of illusion, Nietzsche's own attitude of Don Quixote is more complex and ambivalent. What does he mean by a "bitter taste in the mouth" provoked by the reading of *Don Quixote*? This "bitter taste" obviously results from Cervantes making the reader laugh at his idealist. Although Don Quixote might be laughable in his pursuit of illusion, his integrity and his readiness to sacrifice his life for the sake of ideals is a quality that Nietzsche admires. Moreover, this is the quality that Don Quixote shares with Nietzsche's Jesus. Nietzsche unites them through their suffering. In *Dawn*, in section 114, "On the sufferer's knowledge", Nietzsche clearly joins Jesus and Don Quixote:

> The condition of the infirm who are tormented terribly and for a long time by their suffering and whose minds nonetheless remain unclouded is not without value with regard to knowledge – quite apart from the intellectual benefits that come with every profound solitude, every sudden and licensed release from all duties and customs. From within his condition the heavy sufferer looks *out* into things with a terrifying coldness: for him all those little deceitful enchantments in which things usually swim when regarded by the healthy eye

42 "Of all the beautiful characters in Christian literature, the most accomplished is Don Quixote" (*ПСС* 28_2; 251).

43 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 47-48.

> disappear: in fact, even he himself lies before himself void of flesh and hue. Supposing that until that point he was living in some sort of dangerous fantasy world: this supreme sobering up through pain is the means to tear him out of it: and perhaps the only means. (It is possible that the founder of Christianity encountered this on the cross: for the bitterest of all utterances – "My God, why hast thou forsaken me!" – understood in the full profundity with which it should be understood, bears witness to universal disappointment and enlightenment as to the delusion that was his life; in the moment of supreme agony he became clairvoyant regarding himself, just as did, according to the writer the poor dying Don Quixote).[44]

Thus, both Jesus and Don Quixote are awakened from a "dangerous fantasy world" through suffering. Yet, although Nietzsche does not endorse Don Quixote's and Jesus' living in the "dangerous fantasy world" and views their final "enlightenment" as "sobering", he still respects their uncompromising strivings for their ideals. Yet as Walter Kaufmann points out, "Nietzsche loved Don Quixote and tended to identify himself with him."[45] Kaufmann mentions Nietzsche's reverence for classical antiquity as, in Nietzsche's own words, "a magnificent example of Don Quixotism: and that is what all philology is at best [...]. One imitates a mere chimera [...] which has never existed".[46] Why would this fool and madman living entirely in the fictitious world and representing a peculiar mixture of sublime and bathetic, be attractive to Nietzsche? Similar to Jesus, as long as he adheres to his own illusions, he is true to himself. Thus, ironically, Nietzsche views Don Quixote's final "enlightenment" before his death as the greatest betrayal of his hero by Cervantes: "Cervantes could have fought the Inquisition, but he preferred to make his victims, i.e., the heretics and idealists of all kinds, look ridiculous [...]. Yes, he does not even spare his hero the dreadful illumination about his own state at the end of his life..."[47] That is why he thinks the book must be considered as "the decadence of Spanish culture" and "a national misfortune".[48] By contrast, Don Quixote in his

44 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Dawn. Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality*. Tr. by Brittain Smith (Stanford: Stanford U Press, 2011), pp. 82-83.

45 Kaufmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 71. On Nietzsche and Don Quixote, see also a very useful article by Rolando Pérez, "Nietzsche's Reading of Cervantes's 'Cruel' Humor in *Don Quijote*", *eHumanista* vol. 30, 2015, pp. 168-175.

46 Cited in Kaufmann, *Op. cit*., p. 71.

47 *Ibid*.

48 *Ibid*. Kaufmann further cites another Nietzsche's note: "Mankind is ever threatened by this ignominious *denial of oneself* at the *end* of one's striving" (*Ibid.*).

pre-renouncement stage might be a fool and a madman, but he is a heroic fool. Nietzsche never calls Don Quixote an idiot as he does Jesus. Yet both Jesus and Don Quixote represent for Nietzsche the uncompromising pursuit of higher aspirations. In the honesty of his delusion, Don Quixote appears to be closer to Jesus than Kant, who constructs, according to Nietzsche, an intellectual loophole with his utilitarian use of reason for rescuing faith.

As opposed to Renan, who considers the human type of Jesus as "hero" and "genius" and as opposed to Cervantes, who portrays his own innocent idealist as a fool to be laughed at, Nietzsche's Jesus might be unheroic, a "mixture of sublimity, sickness, and childishness", but he is not comic. Similarly, Dostoevsky also preserved the dignity of his Quixotic man by making Myshkin's story tragic rather than merely sad and funny. He did, therefore, precisely the opposite of that for which Nietzsche censures Cervantes.

Dostoevsky and Nietzsche seem to agree in their rebellion against Cervantes' laughter: thus, Dostoevsky's reference to "bitter irony" and Nietzsche's referral to "bitter taste in the mouth" upon reading this novel. Curiously, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche meet in their censure of Cervantes' ironizing of his hero. Dostoevsky greatly admires the novel but calls it "the saddest of all the books". Nietzsche refers to it as "one of the most harmful books" and as "the decadence of Spanish culture" and "a national misfortune".[49] The reasons for their assessment of Cervantes' novel as "sad" or "the most harmful" are fundamentally identical: the derision and ridicule of all the highest aspirations. Nietzsche's interpretation of Jesus as idiot in the context of his polemic with Renan and Cervantes is also close to that of Dostoevsky.

5. Myshkin's "Learned Ignorance"

That Prince Myshkin prefigures many of the features that Nietzsche associates with the type of Jesus is obvious: childishness, naiveté, innocence, kindness, his complete lack of resentment, forgiveness, physical ailment, and epilepsy. Myshkin is also not particularly talented (lack of genius) and is emphatically un-heroic, even completely incapable of traditional heroic roles, such as fighting in a duel, for example, although he does not lack courage. Myshkin's lack of genius is mentioned in the very beginning of the novel during the discussion of his "talents" at the Epanchins: "Are you aware of having any talents, any skills, at least of some sort, that could earn you your daily bread?"(*ПСС* 8; 24), to which

49 "One of the most harmful books is *Don Quixote*". Cited in KAUFMANN, *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

Myshkin honestly and almost cheerfully replies: "No, I don't think I have any talents or special skills; rather the opposite, because I'm a sick person and have had no proper education" (*Ibid.*). The prince's anti-heroism is emphasized in Aglaya's ironic remark: "And you, what do you think to yourself when you dream alone? Maybe you imagine yourself a field marshal and that you have defeated Napoleon?" (*ПСС* 8; 354). The prince responds laughingly to Aglaya's comment about his un-heroic nature: "'Well, I swear, I indeed think about this, especially when I am falling asleep', laughed the prince, 'only it's not Napoleon I defeat but the Austrians'" (*Ibid.*). Thus, Myshkin comically compares himself to no other but Napoleon who defeated the Austrians in 1805. Dostoevsky's negative attitude toward any kind of "Napoleonism" is widely known.[50] Whatever heroic ambitions prince Myshkin might have (and he seems to have them only in a drowsy state of half-sleep), they are exposed as not only delusional, but also comic.

Myshkin's particular kind of wisdom is derived neither from his superior mental capacities, nor from his "genius" or "heroism", but from an intuitive deeper supra-rational understanding, a form of "learned ignorance". As Myshkin proclaims in the end of the novel, "one must first not understand many things": "we can't understand everything at once, we can't start right out with perfection! To achieve perfection, *one must first not understand many things!*" ("Чтобы достичь совершенства, надо прежде многого не понимать!") (*ПСС* 8; 458) [emphasis is mine – *SE*].

Myshkin's ignorance is both the subject of ridicule on Aglaya's part, and of her peculiar fascination. His lack of formal education and his awareness of

50 Significantly, Napoleon figures prominently in the imagination of not only Dostoevsky's spectacular criminal, Raskol'nikov, but also in the pathetic buffoonery of the General Ivolgin, telling his absurd story of his encounter with "the great man" in Moscow in 1812. Not only his agitated imagination creates the most fantastic story about Napoleon appointing him, then the ten years old Ivolgin, to be his chamber-page, but the general even identifies himself with Napoleon in his madness preceding his stroke, as he conflates his son, Kolia, with that of Napoleon: "God bless you, my dear boy, for being respectful toward your disgraceful – yes, to a disgraceful old fellow, your father... may you also have such a son... le roi de Rome..." (*ПСС* 8; 419). Although Myshkin is fully aware of the complete absurdity of the General Ivolgin's Napoleonic narrative, he nevertheless shares the general's interest in Napoleon and even indirectly encourages Ivolgin's preposterous tale. Moreover, he demonstrates his particular interest in Napoleon by revealing that he had recently read *Histoire de la campagne de 1815. Waterloo* by Jean-Baptiste Charras, an anti-Bonapartist book that Myshkin does not quite approve. All Napoleonic aspirations, be they the aspirations of Napoleon himself in the farcical account of the General Ivolgin, or the buffoon's own dreams about the Napoleonic campaign, or Myshkin's nighttime fantasies, are presented in the novel as patently ridiculous.

the limits of his knowledge only underscore his other type of knowledge, his "learned ignorance" in opposition to a scholastic learning. His conversation with Aglaya makes this point clear:

> "You know," – Aglaya once said to him, interrupting her reading of the newspaper, – "I've noticed that you are terribly uneducated; you really don't know anything well enough, if somebody asks you: neither precisely who, nor in what year, nor in what article".
> "I've told you that I have little learning", – the prince replied.
> "So what's there in you after that?" (*ПСС* 8; 430).

The answer to Aglaya's rhetorical question is obvious: Myshkin is endowed with a special kind of "ignorance"; he is an idiot, an *idiota* in the Greco-Roman and medieval sense of the word.

In his portrayal of Jesus in *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche seems to follow what he detected in Dostoevsky and what Dostoevsky succeeded in portraying in his novel (I am not talking here about the 'influence", however), that is, a human type of Jesus who becomes psychologically convincing by not being romanticized, à la Renan, by not being "heroic", by not being endowed with "genius", and by not being poetic. Dostoevsky's epileptic "idiot" characterized by his peculiar lack of learning but his superior intuitive insight, is precisely the figure Nietzsche describes in *The Antichrist*: he is a "private individual", withdrawn from society and political life, who is true to his inner self and acts not as a consequence of a particular conscious conviction or faith, but almost as a child unaware of sin.[51] Nietzsche's Jesus exhibits the same kind of ignorance, which is also a form of wisdom, that characterizes Myshkin. Just as Nietzsche's Jesus, Myshkin does not have his own "doctrine", he is a practitioner, not a theoretician. When, however, at the fatal party at the Epanchins', he assumes a messianic role of a preacher, his "doctrine" is presented as patently ridiculous. The numerous "hee, hee!", and "ha-ha!", that punctuate Myshkin's speech and the narrator's ironic reference to Myshkin as an "orator", leave no doubt that Dostoevsky presents Myshkin the "theoretician" as a comic and pathetic figure, even though, at the same time, the prince may express some of Dostoevsky's own ideas. The narrator's evaluation of Myshkin's speech as "feverish tirade, this whole flow of passionate and agitated words and ecstatic thoughts, as if throng-

51 As Stellino correctly points out, just as Myshkin, in the words of Lizaveta Prokofyevna, is a "Sick idiot... a fool, who neither knows society nor has any place in society," so Nietzsche's Jesus "is positioned outside all religion, all cult concepts [...] all politics" (Stellino, *Op. cit.*, p. 116).

ing in some sort of turmoil and leaping over each other" (*ПСС* 8; 453), clearly is intended to prevent the reader from interpreting these ideas as an expression of the final "truth". Myshkin breaks the precious vase precisely during his messianic crescendo about the "Russian God" and "Russian Christ". Moreover, the more prince Myshkin gets carried away with his "ideas" the sicker he becomes. As Myshkin assumes the role of "Balaam's donkey" (an expression that Dostoevsky will use ironically in *The Brothers Karamazov* in reference to another unexpected "theoretician", Smerdiakov), his "theories" become completely discredited by the utter absurdity of his pretense, so incongruous with the humility of his nature:

> I want to explain everything, everything, everything! Oh, yes! Do you think I'm utopian? An ideologist? [...] You thought I was afraid of *them*, that I was *their* advocate, a democrat, an orator of equality? – He laughed hysterically (he laughed every other minute in short, ecstatic laughter) – I'm afraid for you, for all of you, and for all of us together. For I myself am a prince of ancient descent, and I am sitting here with princes. I am speaking in order to save us all, so that our state does not vanish for nothing, in the darkness... Why vanish and yield our place to others, when one could remain at the forefront and be seniors? [...] Listen! I know that talking is not good: it's better simply to set an example, it's better simply to begin... I have already begun [...]. Look at a child, at God's sunrise, look at the grass growing, look into the eyes that are looking at you and love you... (*ПСС* 8; 458-459).

With these last words, Myshkin fell in his epileptic fit. As a "Savior" who wants "to explain everything, everything" he cannot go further than making tacky references to "God's sunrise" and "grass growing".

Significantly, although Myshkin is frequently referred to as Christian by others, he himself never directly confirms his faith in God, and we do not see him in prayer. Thus, in his conversation with Rogozhin, he does not respond to his question about his faith: "'But I've long wanted to ask you something, Lev Nikolaevich: do you believe in God or not?' – Rogozhin suddenly began speaking again, after several steps. 'How strangely you ask and... stare!' the prince observed involuntarily" (*ПСС* 8; 182). Instead of replying to Rogozhin's question, he tells him four stories, four parables, and then, without responding whether or not he has faith, he explains:

> "Listen, Parfyon, you asked me earlier, here is my answer: the essence of religious feeling doesn't fit in with any reasoning, with any misconduct and

> crimes, or with any atheisms; there is something wrong in it, and there always will be; there is something in it that atheisms will eternally gloss over, and they will eternally be talking *not about that*" (*ПСС* 8; 184).

When Ippolit Terent'ev, quoting Kolia's words, refers to Myshkin's Christianity, once again, Myshkin himself does not confirm the truthfulness of this appellation: "'Are you a zealous Christian? Kolya says you call yourself a Christian'. The prince studied him attentively and did not answer. – 'You do not answer?'" (*ПСС* 8; 317). Thus, Myshkin emphatically does not answer the question about his Christianity, because Christianity for him is not dogma but a way of life ("it's better simply to set an example" as he puts it even during his messianic delirium), or "practice" in Nietzsche's terms.[52] Indeed, Nietzsche will insist that "it is not a 'belief' which distinguishes the Christian: the Christian acts, he is distinguished by a *different* mode of acting".[53] Myshkin is not so much a Christian believer, he is a Christian actor; he is *a type of a Christian*. That Christianity for Myshkin is not a set of beliefs but a mode of acting, is further emphasized by his comic "horror" at learning that his beloved guardian, Pavlishchev, converted to Catholicism: "Pavlishchev... Pavlishchev converted to Catholicism? That cannot be! – he exclaimed in horror [...]. Pavlishchev was

52 In fact, even Nietzsche's understanding of the "glad tidings" as an annihilation of the concepts of sin, guilt and punishment, and of the blessedness that is not promised based on certain conditions, but which is the only reality, is present in Myshkin's particular kind of bliss described in his mad and delirious speech at the party at the Epanchins – in his last words before the epileptic fit. This epileptoid bliss is precisely what Nietzsche attributes to his Jesus-idiot: "Blessedness is not promised, it is not tied to any conditions: it is the *only* reality – the rest is signs for speaking of it [...]. The profound instinct for how one would have to *live* in order to feel oneself 'in Heaven', to feel oneself 'eternal', while in every other condition one by *no* means feels oneself 'in Heaven': this alone is the psychological reality of 'redemption'. – A new way of living, *not* a new belief... " (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, pp. 157-158). Apparently Nietzsche understood Myshkin's attempt to be a savior precisely as a reflection of what he viewed as a psychology of redeemer, living according to his instinct of how to feel bliss. He thus describes Christianity: "the 'inner world' of the religious man is so like the 'inner world' of the over-excited and exhausted as to be mistaken for it; the 'highest' states which Christianity has hung up over mankind as the most valuable of all values are forms of epilepsy – the Church has canonized only lunatics *or* great imposters *in majorem dei honorem*..." (*Ibid*., p. 51).

53 Calling this type of man a symbolist, Nietzsche explains: "He speaks only of inner things: "life" or "truth" or "light" is his word for the innermost". Cf. Myshkin speaking about his impression about Aglaya as "light". Cf. Nietzsche: "only Christian *practice*, a life such as he who died in the Cross lived, is Christian... *Not* a belief but a doing, above all a *not*-doing of many things, a different *being*"... (*Ibid*., p. 163).

a bright mind and a Christian, a true Christian [...] how could he submit to a faith... that is un-Christian?.." (*ПСС* 8; 449-450).

6. Idiocy and the Question of Realism

Nietzsche once acknowledged that he owed a great deal to Dostoevsky, although the two writers had radically different views. Both of them were profoundly interested in the figure of Jesus the man, Jesus without divinity. Their portrayals of this type of man are also similar. Moreover, one could say that with all his religiosity, Dostoevsky was no less critical of bourgeois Christianity than was Nietzsche. Yet the implications of their similar representations and solutions to the problems they raise are distinctly different. Nietzsche rejects his idiots and "anti-realists", be it Jesus or Kant, and opts for a heroic model of Zarathustra and Dionysus. At the end of *Ecce Homo* he makes his choice of Dionysus and a tragic heroism explicit: "Have I been understood? Dionysus *versus* the Crucified".

It is also significant that Nietzsche's use of the image of the donkey/ass has none of its Christian connotations that are so important for Dostoevsky. Just as he was skeptical and critical of Christianity, Nietzsche's image of the donkey is also distinctly anti-Christian. In *Ecce Homo*, he even claims himself to be an "anti-ass", that is, Anti-Christ: "I am the *anti-jackass par excellence*, which makes me a world-historical monster, – I am, in Greek, and not just in Greek, the *Anti-Christ*..."[54] Rather than representing Christian humility and wisdom, suffering and service, the ass appears to be for Nietzsche a sign of Christian dogmatism and stupidity. The chapters "The Awakening" and "The Ass Feast" of *Zarathustra* make this explicit. Negative and distinctly anti-Christian connotations of the donkey appear throughout *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where an ass is associated with a mob and with metaphysical philosophers ("the famous wise men" in opposition to "free spirits"): "Life is hard to bear; but do not act so tenderly! We are all of us fair beasts of burden, male and female asses; [...]. As the people's advocates you have always been stiff-necked and clever like asses". A donkey is incapable of any judgment but only of the docile agreement: "But to chew and digest everything – that is truly the swine's manner. Always to bray Yea-Yuh – that only the ass has learned, and whoever is of his spirit".[55] Satiri-

54 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 102.

55 Id., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Tr. and with a Preface by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 41, 103, 194.

cal anti-Christian connotations are especially prominent in the sections titled "The Awakening" and "The Ass Festival".[56] Here Nietzsche is inspired by the Mass of the Ass performed during the Feasts of Fools in Medieval Europe, and mocks Christianity by making his "higher men" worship the ass as their God and emphasizing the asinine stupidity. Zarathustra sees how they kneel "like children and credulous old women, and worship the ass". As the "ugliest man" who killed the old God, performs "a pious, strange litany to glorify the adored and censed ass", the ass responds to each period by braying Yea-Yuh:

> He carries our burdens, he took upon himself the form of a servant, he is patient of heart and never says No; and he whoever loves his God, chastises him.
> But the ass brayed: Yea-Yuh. . .
> What hidden wisdom it is that he has long ears and only to say Yea and never No! Has he not created the world in his own image, namely, as stupid as possible?
> But the ass, brayed: Yea-Yuh.[57]

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the donkey says "no" only under the influence of resentment; when he says "yes", it is not a free choice, but merely acceptance of the drab reality. The following passage from the *Genealogy of Morals*, which makes a reference to some "ascetics" of the "desert", might also point to the fact that Nietzsche associated the image of the donkey with Jesus:

> The aesthetic ideal points the way to so many bridges to *independence* that a philosopher cannot refrain from rejoicing inwardly and clapping his hands when he hears the story of all those who have made up their minds and one day said No to all constraints on freedom and gone forth into some *desert* or other: even assuming that they were merely strong asses and the very antithesis of a strong spirit.[58]

56 On the image of an ass in Nietzsche, see Kathleen Marie Higgins, "Ass Nietzsche and the Mystery of the Ass", in Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph Acampora (eds.), *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2004), pp. 100-118. Referring to the work of Jörg Salaquarda, she insists on a more complex interpretation of the symbol of ass than merely a symbol of stupidity and baseness and suggests that "the ass represents both a crucial stage in spiritual development and the folly that is eventually left behind in spiritual maturation" (*Ibid.*, p. 109).

57 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 312-313.

58 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 87.

Nietzsche's donkey is largely a negative symbol in the tradition of ancient Greece, where donkeys are servile, suborn, and stupid – precisely the qualities Nietzsche associates with Christianity and which he rejects. If for Dostoevsky the donkey may be a metaphor of humanity and Christianity, for Nietzsche the donkey might also be associated with Christianity (although in a negative sense), but is an unlikely candidate of being a wise "tragic figure" that Nietzsche advances as his ideal, even though in *Twilight of the Idols*, he famously proclaims: "Can an *ass* be tragic? – Can someone be destroyed by a weight he cannot carry or throw off?... The Case of the philosopher".[59] Rather the donkey is the image of weakness and servile acceptance.

Dostoevsky, by contrast, is on the side of the "injured and insulted", of the donkeys of this world. Moreover, his "positively beautiful man" is not only a Christ-like figure, a philosopher and an idiot, but also a "donkey" of sorts. As opposed to Nietzsche, Dostoevsky rejects everything heroic (cf. Dostoevsky's criticism of Napoleon and of the Napoleonic mode as compared to Nietzsche's fascination with Napoleon's heroic ethos and his great appreciation of Stendhal's *A Life of Napoleon*), although he never denies the tragedy of the world. Dostoevsky finds "realism in the higher sense" in his "anti-realists" and even claims that his "idealism is more real than theirs" [the traditional realist writers and critics – *SE*].[60] Although Nietzsche no less than Dostoevsky was skeptical of realism understood as a collection of facts (cf. his criticism of Flaubert), he rejected Kant's notion of the two worlds of reality (nouminal and phenomenal) and expressed disdain for all sort of "idealism" understood as a form of metaphysics and as "not wanting to see reality".[61] His "anti-idealism" expresses

59 Id., *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*, p. 157.

60 See Dostoevsky's letter to A.N. Maikov (December 11, 1868): "I have an entirely different notion of reality and realism from those of our realists and critics. My idealism is more real than theirs. My God! If you only render sensibly that which we, Russians, have lived through in our spiritual development, would not the realists scream that this is a fantasy? Meanwhile, this is an original, true realism. This is precisely realism, only a more profound one, while their kind is merely on the surface... 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" (*ПСС*, 28_2; 329).

61 Note that Ivan Karamazov's "collection of facts" leads him only to madness, that is, out of reality. Nietzsche concept of realism is a complex one and cannot be considered in detail here. It has been said that his philosophical perspectivism and the notion of "will to power" as the very essence of reality suggest that he did not completely rule out the idealist mode of thinking. When he praised realism, he did so in opposition to the moral idealists' binaries of the worlds of appearances and of sensible reality, that is, in opposition to Plato and to Kant's the thing-in-itself. But, at the same time, he emphatically criticized vulgar realism understood as certainty of reality as it appears to our senses. In Book 2 of *The Joyous Science*

itself mostly in the rejection of Plato's metaphysics and of the noumenal realm of Kantian things-in-themselves. As he puts in in *Twilight of the Idols*, "The 'apparent' world is the only world: the 'true world' is just *a lie added on to it"*.[62] This "addition", according to Nietzsche, degrades and devalues experienced reality and is in this sense an assault on reality. In the selection of Nietzsche's posthumous fragments known as *The Will to Power*, he insists on the falsity of the opposition between the two worlds: "But there is no *"other"*, no "real", no essential being, – for thus a world *without* action and reaction would be expressed... The antithesis: world of appearance and real world, is thus reduced to the antitheses "world" and "nonentity".[63] In his letter to Malwida von Meysenburg (October 20, 1888), he famously writes: "and I treat idealism as untruthfulness that has become an instinct, a not-wanting-to-see reality at any price: every sentence of my writings contains contempt for idealism".[64]

For Dostoevsky, however, the notion of the two worlds represents the very foundation of his realism, which is Platonic in its essence. Speaking of Dostoevsky's "realism", scholars inevitably refer to Dostoevsky's famous statement about his "realism in a higher sense". When Dostoevsky claims that his aspiration is "with full realism to find the man in a man", he distinctly presupposes the existence of the "truer" realm of reality, an ideal form of a man in a Platonic sense. He then explains what he understands by realism: "They call me a psychologist; this is not true: I am only a realist in a higher sense, i.e. I depict all the depths of the human soul" (*ПСС* 27; 65).

(section 57, "To the Realists") he writes: "You sober men who consider yourselves armed against passion and fantasy, and who like to make your emptiness into a matter of pride and an ornament, you call yourselves realists, and imply that the world actually is the way that it appears to you; before you alone does reality stand unveiled, and it may well be that you yourselves are the best part of it – oh, you dear images of Saïs! But when you yourselves are unveiled, are you not, unlike the cold-blooded fish which see in every water, still extremely passionate and blind? Are you not still too much like enamoured artists? An what is 'reality' to an enamoured artist!" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*. Tr. By R. Kevin Hill (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), p. 79.

62 Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*, p. 168.

63 Fragment 567, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power, Book III and IV. An Attempted Transvaluation of all Values*. Tr. Anthony M. Ludovici (Edinburg, 1913. The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Will to Power, Book III and IV. August 28, 2016 [EBook #52915]), p. 71.

64 "und ich behandle den Idealismus als eine Instinkt geworden Unwahrhaftigkeit, als ein Nichtsehn-wollen der Realität um jeden Preis: jeder Satz meiner Schriften enthält die Verachtung des Idealismus" (letter 1135, ww.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1888). As scholars agree, however, Nietzsche denies moral objectivity and is "an anti-realist about *morality's* normative claims". See Christopher Janaway and Simon Robertson (eds.), *Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 10.

To paraphrase Dostoevsky's words about realism, one could say that in *The Idiot* he created "an idiot in a higher sense", that is, an ideal form of an idiot. Myshkin's idiocy is not merely a phenomenon of an epileptic crushed by unfavorable life circumstances, but his idiocy provides a glimpse into a more genuine reality. The figure of this ideal idiot points to the impossibility of redemption without divinity and the utopia of a "perfectly beautiful man". Myshkin is not simply an "idiot". but a quintessence of "idiocy" understood in a particular, religious, sense. In *The Idiot*, as well as in many others of his texts, Dostoevsky comments extensively on his favorite topic of realism that conveys the very essence of the real through characters that might appear as improbable. Thus, he writes about literary types that are more "real than reality itself" (*ПСС* 8; 383). In reality, Dostoevsky explains, the "typicality of characters is watered down and all these George Dandins and Podkolesins really exist [...] but in a somewhat diluted state" (*Ibid.*). Dostoevsky's "idiot", by contrast, not only shares the quality of "idiocy" with other idiots of this world, but becomes a universal of sorts; his idiocy is a property that exists in an ideal form, and it is this ideal form that Dostoevsky is mostly interested in. Even more importantly, Dostoevsky clearly loves his idiots and eccentrics and even prefers to call them "realists". Dostoevsky insists, for example, that Alyosha Karamazov was "more of a realist than any one" and then explains his concept of realism as independent of the way one perceives the reality that presents itself to our senses: "miracles will never confuse the realist. It is not miracles that dispose the realist to belief. The genuine realist, if he is an unbeliever, will always find in himself strength and ability to disbelieve a miracle, and if he is confronted with a miracle as an irrefutable fact, he would rather disbelieve his own senses than admit the fact" (*ПСС* 14; 24). By the same logic, then, the realist who is a believer will believe in miracles, but this won't prevent him from being realist. This argument, therefore, implies that the realist might be realist regardless of his approach to the question of the existence of "other reality", or of the supranatural. The question of faith in this other "reality" stands as it were in brackets. Faith and realism, according to Dostoevsky, are the two completely independent concepts that do not influence one another. As Dostoevsky puts it in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "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" (*ПСС* 14; 24-25). Both a believer and an unbeliever could be "realists", but their notions of reality either include the otherworldly reality (for a believer) or exclude it (for an unbeliever). Bringing the example of the Apostle Thomas, Dostoevsky concludes: "Was it the miracle that forced him to believe? Most likely not, but he believed solely because he desired to be-

lieve, and possibly he fully believed in his heart even when he said, 'I do not believe till I see'" (*Ibid.*). Thus, according to Dostoevsky, "realism" becomes an act of free choice in respect of which "reality" one prefers to adhere to.

In the same vein, Dostoevsky also proclaims that he prefers to stay with Christ even if "it were proven to him that Christ is outside the truth and that in reality the truth were outside of Christ".[65] This pronouncement may be easily misinterpreted as Dostoevsky's avoidance of truth for the sake of illusion. If this were the case, Dostoevsky's stubborn will to stay with Christ against the evidence of truth, could be viewed as the very opposite of Nietzsche's reverence for truth, as, for example, in this statement from *Ecce Homo*:

> Zarathustra is more truthful than any other thinker. His doctrine, and his alone, defines truthfulness as the highest virtue – that is to say, the opposite of the *cowardice* of the "idealist" who takes flight in the face of reality... To speak the truth and *shoot well with bow and arrows*, that is the Persian virtue. – Am I understood?.. The self-overcoming of morality through truthfulness, the self-overcoming of the moralist into his opposite – *into me* – that is precisely what the name of *Zarathustra* means in my mouth.[66]

Nietzsche's position vis-à-vis truth and God appears to be the direct opposite of Dostoevsky's. In *Dawn* Nietzsche writes:

> *What is truth*? – Who would not accept the *conclusion* the faithful love to draw: "scientific knowledge cannot be true, for it denies God. Accordingly, it comes not from God; accordingly, it is not true – for God is Truth". Not the conclusion, but the presupposition contains the error: what if God were, in fact, *not* Truth, and if, in fact, this were proven? If he were the vanity, the lust for power, the impatience, the terror, this chilling and enchanting delusion of humankind?[67]

65 See Dostoevsky's famous letter to N.D. Fonvizina (January 1854): "This creed is very simple. Here it is: to believe that there is nothing more beautiful, deeper and more sympathetic, more rational, more manly and more perfect than Christ. And I say to myself with jealous love that not only is there no one else like him, but that there could be no one. Moreover, if anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth *in actuality* were outside Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ, rather than with truth" [emphasis in original] (*ПСС* 28$_1$; 176).

66 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo. How One Becomes What One Is and The Antichrist. A Curse on Christianity*. Tr. Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), p. 92.

67 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Dawn. Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality*, pp. 66-67.

Dostoevsky seems to offer his answer to Nietzsche's bold question as if anticipating such a powerful interlocutor as Nietzsche could be: "Moreover, if anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth *in actuality* were outside Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ, rather than with truth" (*ПСС* 28$_1$; 176). While Nietzsche challenges the premise that God is Truth, Dostoevsky is ready to accept this challenge, a stand Nietzsche struggled so passionately to assert his whole life, that is, that God were *not* Truth. Yet Dostoevsky insists he *prefers* to stay with Christ (God) rather than truth, and thus, changes the terms of discussion by introducing the concept of the freedom of choice. Dostoevsky does not reject reality for the sake of illusion, but insists on the centrality of the other reality, a "higher reality", which, although unknowable to our senses, is nevertheless accessible in moments of artistic or religious insight. Thus, in his notes for *The Devils*, writing about Shakespeare, Dostoevsky refers to Shakespeare as a example of the writer who is able to access the "world" that is normally inaccessible:

> This is not a mere representation of the tangible [*nasushchnogo*], which, according to many teachers exhaust reality [*deistvitel'nost'*]. Reality as a whole is not exhausted by the tangible, for the largest part of it exists in it in the form of a yet latent and unexpressed anticipated word. Infrequently appear prophets who divine and express this integral word. Shakespeare is a prophet, sent by God to proclaim to us the mystery of man, of the human soul (*ПСС* 11; 237).

Dostoevsky's use of the word *nasushchnyi* in juxtaposition to *deistvitelnost'* is intriguing. Etymologically speaking, *nasushchnyi* means "the one that is in the present," "the tangible," with the same root as *sushchii*, meaning 'being', 'existing' as a 'thing'. Thus, it would not be a stretch to say that Dostoevsky here juxtaposes the phenomenal realm (*nasushchnoe*) with the realm of being as process, as *becoming*, as *actuality* (*deistvitel'nost'*). The notion of reality as "a form of a latent [...] word" is fundamentally a Platonic one. Thus, Dostoevsky accepts reality over truth.

Moreover, Dostoevsky's skepticism about "truth" is rooted only in the assumption (which he does not share) that truth has some overriding value. For Dostoevsky, the overriding value lies in reality (that includes God) and in the freedom of choice rather than in "truth". Both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche reject the unequivocal identification of truth with God. Ironically, Nietzsche's position in this respect is not so different from that of Dostoevsky, although he approaches the problem from the opposite perspective. Striving for truth,

Nietzsche questions the absolute value of truth, if it is identified with God, as he writes in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

> On this question, consider the oldest and the most recent philosophies: they all lack an awareness of the extent to which the will to truth itself first requires justification, there is a gap in every philosophy at this point – why is that? Because up to now the ascetic ideal has *dominated* all philosophy, because truth was posited as being, as God, as the highest instance itself, because it was *not permitted* that truth should be a problem. Is this "permitted" understood? – From the moment when belief in the God of the ascetic ideal is denied, *a new problem exists*: that of the *value* of truth. – The will to truth requires critique – let us define our own task in this way – the value of truth must for once, by way of experiment, be *called into question*".[68]

Read through the prism of these comments of Nietzsche, one could say that Dostoevsky's choice between Christ and "truth" is, in fact, a choice between Christ and "truth [...] as being, as God, as the highest instance itself", that is, a choice between one personal subjective ideal (Christ) and an idol of truth, a pseudo-god of sorts. Dostoevsky clearly is not an "'idealist' who flees from reality" and he is no less skeptical than Nietzsche. His metaphysics is not based on weakness and resentment that Nietzsche generally attributes to metaphysics and idealism, but on free choice, similar to his interpretation of the Apostle Thomas.

To be sure, Dostoevsky does not recoil from the painful and tragic aspect of "the real world". In fact, the ending of *The Idiot* may be the gloomiest and the most "realist" image one could imagine for the resolution of the story of the "perfectly beautiful man". All the illusions are stripped, and unredeemed materiality seems to triumph. It is Dostoevsky's equivalent of the grim image of Holbein's *Christ in the Tomb*. Is it possible that Myshkin, who sunk into idiocy as deeply as Holbein's Christ into the "nature", be "resurrected"? To be sure, Dostoevsky would have been very naïve if he believed that a perfectly beautiful man could save the world. Nietzsche intuited this part of Dostoevsky's project very well. Nietzsche's Jesus, just like Myshkin, is not a Redeemer and saves no one. For Dostoevsky, the question, however, is not so much about Myshkin's insufficient goodness or his failures, but about the very possibility of "salvation" on earth in the fallen world. Humanity without divinity leads to its natu-

68 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 128.

ral outcome, disintegration, – of the body, as in the case of the rotten corpse of Jesus, and of the mind, as in the picture of Myshkin in asylum (cf. the "nature" of Holbein's Christ in Ippolit Terentiev's words). But divinity without humanity may also be a failure. Significantly, Dostoevsky always vehemently opposes any attempts at denying "nature", focusing, by contrast, on the rotting matter, be it the stinking corpse of Father Zosima, or of Lazarus whose dead body after four days also "stinkieth", or Holbein's Jesus with his affirmation of divine materiality. Dostoevsky and Holbein seem to agree on this point. Indeed, Dostoevsky creates his Myshkin à la Holbein and follows the master accurately. The whole novel with its question of materiality and "nature" weighing heavily on man trying to reach redemption, is a narrative counterpart to the pictorial image of Holbein's Christ. The claustrophobic space of Christ's tomb is echoed in Dostoevsky's portrayal of Myshkin and Rogozhin lying together by Nastasia Fillipovna's already stinking corpse in Rogozhin's gloomy house, in the room with closed windows. The scene offers no escape, only the suffocating space of the tomb. The image of the tomb with no possibility of escape and no hope for "resurrection" is reinforced in the novel's closure, depicting Myshkin in asylum and Dr. Schneider's "sad hints" at Myshkin's "total derangements of the mental organs". "Nature" appears to rule out any possibility of "rising from the dead". Holbein's *Christ in a Tomb* as well as Dostoevsky's novel, seem to be an image of how a dream of a perfectly beautiful man ends and how the Antichrist may begin, Nietzsche's *Antichrist*.[69] Yet Dostoevsky's novel leaves the reader with a question, not an answer, about whether or not the image of *Christ in a Tomb* indeed leads to the loss of faith. Likewise, although Dr. Schneider makes his "sad hints" about Myshkin's mental state, he "does not yet speak positively of incurability" of his patient. Moreover, Schneider's hypothetical verdict in the scene of Myshkin and Rogozhin by the side of Nastasia Philippovna's corpse, is rather ambiguous:

> And if Schneider himself had come now from Switzerland to take a look at his former pupil and patient, even him, recalling the state in which the prince has sometimes been during the first year of his treatment in Switzerland, would have waved his hand and would have said now, as he did then: "An Idiot!" (*ПСС* 8; 507)

69 Dostoevsky believed that in our earthly life, there is no place for Christ understood as a real good man/God. He could be present only in *absence*, in exile, in silence – as in Dostoevsky's last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. He has to be exiled from the world of politics, as he is by the Grand Inquisitor, this quintessential man of politics, for whom Jesus is merely a private man, a silent man, who, as a true *idiota*, does not participate in the polis.

If Schneider's "then" refers to Myshkin's condition prior to his return to Russia, then the reader would know that recovery is actually possible, at least temporarily. The novel ends with an ambiguous, ironic, and slightly comic comment on the nature of reality made by Lizaveta Prokofievna, according to the testimony of the novel's most mysterious character, Evgeny Pavlovich Rodomsky, as presented to us by the narrator: "Enough with being carried away, it's time to serve reason. And all this, and all these foreign lands, and all of this Europe of yours, all of this is one big fantasy, and all of us, here abroad, are one big fantasy" (*ПСС* 8; 510). What is real then? What is fantasy? And what is rational? Russia? If reality as we experience it in the Western world is an illusion and a fantasy, then is there any other, "truer" reality? If this world is only an appearance, a fiction, a construct, is there any other world? The novel's last statement, thrice removed from the reader, gives little ground for a definitive answer; it is the very emblem of uncertainty.

Nietzsche's notion of realism, after all, may not be so dramatically different from that of Dostoevsky, except that he categorically denies the existence of two realities, two realms of being.[70] Both of them were skeptical of vulgar realism understood as a blind worshipping of "facts". Nietzsche eloquently labeled this kind of realism as "fatalism of 'petit faits'".[71] In *The Joyous Science* he questions the very core of reality as it appears to our senses: "In every perception, in every sensation, there is a bit of this old love [love of 'reality' – *SE*]; and similar-

70 In his later years, shortly before his death, Nietzsche seems to claim that he is, in fact, a carrier of "truth", thus, in a sense, contradicting his own criticism of "the will to truth" in his *On Genealogy of Morals*. He claims: "The truth speaks out of me. – But my truth is *frightful*: for thus far the lie has been called truth". (Nietzsche, *Ecco Homo and The Antichrist*, p. 90). Yet his claim for truth is, for the most part, intended only to negate the commonly accepted falsehoods, that is, to establish the "Revaluation of all Values". As such then, his "truth" does not assert a new "value", for it must be also revaluated as all other values. The power of his invective is only directed against the notion of the two worlds: "The concept God invented as the counter-concept to life – in it everything ruinous, poisonous, slanderous, the whole deadly enmity toward life brought together into one hideous unity! The concepts 'other world', 'true world' invented in order to devalue the *only* world there is – in order to leave no goal, no reason, no task remaining for our earthly reality!" (*Ibid*., p. 97).

71 In *On Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche formulates his skepticism of "facts" in this way: "it is in their [European and Christian thinkers – *SE*] belief in truth that they are more inflexible and absolute than anyone else. [...] the venerable abstemiousness which such a belief requires of philosophers, [...] the desire to stop short of the factual, the *factum brutum*, that fatalism of 'petits faits' (*ce petit faitalisme*, as I call it), in which French science is now seeking a kind of moral superiority over German science [...] – all this expresses, broadly speaking, the asceticism of virtue as much as it expresses some kind of denial of sensuality" (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 126-127).

ly also some kind of fantasy, prejudice, folly, ignorance, fear and everything else there! That cloud there! What in them is 'real'? Subtract for once the phantasm and every human *addition* from them, you sober men! [...] No, there is no 'reality' for us".[72] Both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche embraced radical uncertainty. Both of them did not view "truth" as an overriding value, for they insisted that every so-called truth is ultimately based on an act of faith. They differed, however, in the choices they made. They differed in their *preferences*: for Nietzsche, "*Dionysus versus the Crucified*"; for Dostoevsky, Christ/the Crucified versus any other "truth".

With his insight of a genius, Nietzsche understood Dostoevsky's project very well. As opposed to Dostoevsky, he not only has put Christianity on trial, but also affirmatively chose to say a clear-eyed "no", in response to the question of faith. Dostoevsky's own "realism", however, based as it is on the possibility of the two realms of reality, leaves room for doubt and indeterminacy. Both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche were driven by a desperate search for truth and thought of themselves as realists, although they each invested different meanings in the terms. Thus, their respective images of "realists" seem to be almost polar opposite: for Dostoevsky, this is a young and passionate believer, Alyosha Karamazov; for Nietzsche, this is the figure of Zarathustra. We may recall the way Nietzsche explains Zarathustra's concept of *Übermensch*:

> It is at this point and nowhere else that one must a start in order to grasp what Zarathustra wants: this type of man that he depicts, depict reality *as it is* [concipirt die Realität, wie sie ist]: this type is strong enough for that –, he is not estranged from it, not carried away by it; he is *reality itself*, he has in himself as well all its terrible and questionable things; *only in this way can man have greatness...*[73]

Both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche were fascinated with the figure of Jesus the man and his underlying mental dispositions, and they even portrayed him in a similar way, as an "idiot" of sorts. Ironically, however, for Dostoevsky, Jesus was the very embodiment of the "realist" and of the "realism in a higher sense". For Nietzsche, Jesus was an "anti-realist" par excellence and a "hater of reality". The Russian writer embraced Christ for the sake of the "higher reality"; the German philosopher rejected Christ for the sake of his own version of realism. The tragic "yes" of Dostoevsky and the tragic "no" of Nietzsche clashed in their in-

72 Id., *The Joyous Science*, p. 79.

73 Id., *Ecce Homo. How One Becomes What One Is and The Antichrist. A Curse on Christianity*, p. 94.

terpretation of the "positively beautiful man" and the question of faith. Both of them strove to say "yes" to reality, as different as this reality may have been understood by the two thinkers.