

Empire by Consent: Strakhov, Dostoevskii, and the Polish Uprising of 1863

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This is a fateful crisis—almost Russia’s “to be or not to be” moment—likely more important than the year 1812.

—The censor A. V. Nikitenko about the Polish Uprising,
in a note dated 18 March 1863

The closing of the Dostoevskii brothers’ journal *Vremia* (1861–63) has intriguing and far-reaching consequences for the evolution of Fedor Dostoevskii’s political philosophy and for our sense of Russia’s ideological landscape around the time of the January Uprising of 1863 in Poland. The government closed the journal due to an article about Polish-Russian relations by Nikolai Strakhov entitled “Rokovoi vopros” (A Fateful Question), which appeared in *Vremia* in April 1863. Government officials and the public alike were shocked by what they took as the article’s pro-Polish sentiments and its denigration of the Russian nation. Indeed, Andrzej Walicki compares the ensuing controversy to the storm caused by Petr Chaadaev’s famous “Filosoficheskoe pis’mo” (Philosophical Letter, 1836).¹ Acting on Alexander II’s direct order, the minister of internal affairs, P. A. Valuev, closed the journal on 24 May, citing in his decision the “indecent and even subversive content” of Strakhov’s article, which criticized the government and offended Russian national sentiment. The journal’s general direction was also deemed “harmful.”² Valuev relieved the chief St. Petersburg cen-

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1. Andrzej Walicki, “The Slavophile Thinkers and the Polish Question in 1863,” in David L. Ransel and Bożena Shallcross, eds., *Polish Encounters, Russian Identity* (Bloomington, 2005), 90.

2. A. S. Dolinin, “K tsenzurnoi istorii pervykh dvukh zhurnalov Dostoevskogo,” *F. M. Dostoevskii. Stat’i i materiialy* (Moscow, 1924), 2:566, and F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Leningrad, 1985; hereafter *PSS*), 20:253.

sor of his duties.³ Strakhov's name was banned from appearing officially on any editorial board for the next fifteen years.⁴

The history of Russian journalism is chock full of similar postpublication censorship scandals, especially regarding national and imperial issues.⁵ Yet several reasons make the episode with Strakhov worth reconsidering. First, with few exceptions, scholarly accounts tend to rely on Strakhov and Dostoevskii's postfactum protestations that the article was grossly misunderstood. As early as 1971, however, Strakhov's American biographer, Linda Gerstein, disputed this approach to "A Fateful Question."⁶ Walicki's more recent analysis does not cohere with Dostoevskii and Strakhov's explanations either, though it does not overtly tackle them.⁷ Gerstein's skepticism is well founded, and further reasons not to take Strakhov and Dostoevskii's explanations at face value abound. Moreover, Strakhov's article is far from an anomaly in the April 1863 issue of *Vremia*. On the contrary, it fits integrally within its platform of relinquishing Russia's rights to Poland while keeping the Western Provinces. The above claims—about the true meaning, role, and implications of "A Fateful Question"—are further supported by the articles that surround Strakhov's piece. The entire April issue of *Vremia* in fact presented a broad-based proposal, complete with theoretical underpinnings and policy implication, for restructuring the Russian empire into one based on tolerance and the consent of its constituent populations.

Furthermore, the implications of an alternative and more accurate account of "A Fateful Question" and of *Vremia*'s final issue are relevant not only for Strakhov but also for Dostoevskii. While Dostoevskii scholars have ignored Gerstein's brief but insightful comments about "A Fateful Question," her ideas deserve to be introduced into academic circulation within Dostoevskii studies. Dostoevskii is, after all, the one who commissioned Strakhov's article and ushered it into his journal, fully informed of its content. "A Fateful Question" and Dostoevskii's ideological evolution have to make mutual sense.

This will require revising our image of this evolution. Given Dostoevskii's well-known anti-Polish sentiments, the apparently opposite stance taken in *Vremia*'s April 1863 issue needs greater elucidation than it has received. Likewise, Dostoevskii as a political thinker is known for his support of an assertive and militaristic Russian imperial policy and for his deeply conservative nationalism. The widely popular monojournal *Dnevnik pis-*

3. A. V. Nikitenko, *Dnevnik* (Leningrad, 1955), 2:336.

4. Linda Gerstein, *Nikolai Strakhov* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 57.

5. During Nicholas I's reign, Faddei Bulgarin and Nikolai Grech were briefly imprisoned for their newspaper's review of Mikhail Zagoskin's *Iurii Miloslavskii* (1829); *Moskovskii telegraf* was closed down and Nikolai Polevoi banned from practicing journalism after he unfavorably reviewed Nestor Kukul'nik's *Ruka Vsevyshnego Otechestvo spasla* (1834); after Chaadaev's infamous "Philosophical Letter" appeared in print, the censor was relieved of his duties, the journal closed down, its editor exiled to Siberia, and the author officially pronounced insane.

6. Gerstein, *Nikolai Strakhov*, 106.

7. Walicki, "Slavophile Thinkers," 90–92.

atelia (A Writer's Diary), which Dostoevskii published intermittently over the years 1873–1881, has cemented this image of the writer, but it can also be gleaned from his fiction. Why would he lend support to anti-imperial rebels in *Vremia*? Building on existing research that extends Dostoevskii's political liberalism beyond his exile years, I will argue that the affair surrounding "A Fateful Question" opens up the possibility of what may be termed a democratic or tolerant phase in Dostoevskii's thinking about Russia's relation with its imperial peripheries.⁸ Most fundamentally, the affair shows that Dostoevskii had a political program on national-imperial issues already in the 1860s, well before his prominent participation in the country's politics through *A Writer's Diary*. This program ran counter to the opinions of both the government and the vocal nationalists of the Slavophile and conservative orientation.

The Scandal and Its Dramatis Personae

Before setting their sights on *Vremia*, the conservative Moscow journalists Mikhail Katkov and Ivan Aksakov campaigned against Russian émigrés, particularly Aleksandr Herzen, whose London-based *Kolokol* supported the Polish cause. They were also scandalized by the silence of the liberal St. Petersburg press, which they took as an expression of solidarity with the Poles.⁹ Strakhov's "A Fateful Question" polemicized directly with Katkov, who two months earlier called the Polish Question Russia's "fateful question" in an editorial that recommended a decisive crushing of the uprising.¹⁰ Katkov's and Aksakov's journals soon published outraged polemics with Strakhov that doubled as denunciations. They criticized Strakhov's overly sympathetic treatment of the Poles as a galling lack of patriotism and as political recklessness: What will foreigners say? That the Russians agree with the Poles? The foreigners in question did take notice. Assuming the article was Dostoevskii's, the French *Revue des deux mondes* reprinted "A Fateful Question" as evidence of Russian support for the rebels.¹¹ By withholding Strakhov's name and signing the article "Russkii"

8. Ellen Chances has argued that Dostoevskii's political views in the *Vremia* period were closer to those of the radical left than commonly assumed. See her "Pochvenničestvo: Ideology in Dostoevsky's Periodicals," *Mosaic* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1974): 73. On Dostoevskii's liberalism in the 1860s, see also V. A. Tunimanov, *Tvorčestvo Dostoevskogo, 1854–1862* (Leningrad, 1980), 287, and Nancy Ruttenburg, *Dostoevsky's Democracy* (Princeton, 2008).

9. Dolinin, "K tsenzurnoi," 2:565–66. M. N. Katkov edited *Russkii vestnik* and *Moskovskie vedomosti*, while Aksakov edited *Den'*. Nikitenko records reactions to Strakhov's article in his *Dnevnik*, 2:335.

10. M. N. Katkov, "Pol'skii vopros," *Russkii vestnik* 1 [24 February] (1863), see commentary to Dostoevskii, "Otvēt redaktsii 'Vremeni' na napadeniie 'Moskovskikh vedomostei,'" *PSS*, 20:317. The very volume that printed Strakhov's article contained other polemics with Katkov and with *Den'*. See *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 54–65, 103–20. Political differences aside, Katkov's decision to denounce *Vremia* likely involved a wish to eliminate a rival journal.

11. The *Revue* article appeared on 1 August 1863 (commentary to Dostoevskii, "Otvēt redaktsii," *PSS*, 20:318). On *Revue's* mistaken attribution of the article to Dostoevskii, see A. S. Dolinin, "Dostoevskii i Strakhov," in N. K. Piskanov, ed., *Šestidesiatye gody* (Moscow, 1940), 256.

(A Russian), *Vremia* cast “A Fateful Question” as expressing a widespread attitude. *Moskovskie vedomosti* found this presumptuous and taunted the anonymous “masked bandit”: “Quand on a son opinion, il faut en avoir le courage.”¹² Katkov’s newspaper defended the outraged feelings of true Russians upon reading *Vremia*’s falsehoods; ironically, the “true Russian” who signed the note was a K. Peterson.¹³

Katkov, the owner of *Moskovskie vedomosti*, was a powerful political figure. His outspoken attacks against the Poles and calls for a decisive defeat of what he saw as a grave separatist threat to the empire made him the most important public voice in Russia. Andreas Renner calls him “the opinion-maker of 1863”; Herzen was right that Katkov’s denunciation wielded a “terrible power.”¹⁴ In his propagandistic articles, Katkov skillfully stoked the fires of nationalism, portraying Poland as a political vampire raised from the dead to drink Russian blood.¹⁵ Recent accounts of Katkov’s political journalism credit him and his like-minded nationalists with introducing far-reaching changes in the political culture of the empire, such as “inventing from below” the Russification policy of Alexander III.¹⁶ Katkov shaped, rather than propagated, the government’s agenda.¹⁷

For Fedor Dostoevskii, another key persona of the scandal, the year 1863 marked the pinnacle of his postexile rehabilitation—with both the

12. K. Peterson, “Po povodu stat’i ‘Rokovoi vopros’ v zhurnale *Vremia*,” *Moskovskie vedomosti* 109 (1863); for Aksakov’s journal’s denunciation, see *Den’* 22 (1863).

13. This irony was not lost on Dostoevskii when he drafted his reply to *Moskovskie vedomosti*, see Dostoevskii, “Otvét redaktsii,” *PSS*, 20:101.

14. Andreas Renner, “Defining a Russian Nation: Mikhail Katkov and the ‘Invention’ of National Politics,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 81, no. 4 (2003): 674. Emphasis added. For Herzen’s remark, and his regret about the closing of *Vremia*, which dared say “a few humane words on the subject of Poland,” see V. S. Nechaeva, *Zhurnal M. M. i F. M. Dostoevskikh “Vremia,” 1861–63* (Moscow, 1972), 308 (hereafter *Zhurnal “Vremia”*).

15. For studies of Katkov’s journalism during the Polish Uprising, his nationalist philosophy, and his relationship with the government, see Olga Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855–1870* (Madison, 2010), 94–127; Vladimir Kantor, *Sankt-Peterburg: Rossiiskaia imperiia protiv rossiiskogo khaosa* (Moscow, 2008), 320–39; Henryk Głębocki, *Fatalna sprawa: Kwestia polska w rosyjskiej myśli politycznej (1856–1866)* (Kraków, 2000), 301–34; Andreas Renner, *Russischer Nationalismus und Öffentlichkeit im Zarenreich 1855–1875* (Cologne, 2000), 210–26; Renner, “Defining a Russian Nation”; V. A. Tvardovskaia, *Ideologiia poreformennogo samoderzhaviiia (M. N. Katkov i ego izdaniia)* (Moscow, 1978); and Martin Katz, *Mikhail N. Katkov: A Political Biography, 1818–1887* (The Hague, 1966).

16. Renner, “Defining a Russian Nation,” 661; and Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire*, 94–127.

17. Katkov’s activism at the time of the Polish Uprising added impetus to his increasing influence and gave him access to the highest echelons of power. He regularly exchanged information with the minister of the interior, Valuev, and the minister of foreign affairs, Aleksandr Gorchakov, flooding them with policy memoranda. In the late 1860s, Valuev, fed up with Katkov’s unofficial ministering, tried to exclude him from the editorial board of *Moskovskie vedomosti*, only to have his decision reversed by Tsar Alexander II himself. See F. Sleznev and M. Smolin, “Velikii strazh imperii,” in M. N. Katkov, *Imperskoe slovo* (Moscow, 2002), 19–25, and *Dnevnik P. A. Valueva, ministra vnutrennikh del* (Moscow, 1961), 1:251. According to K. P. Pobedonostsev, there were ministries in Russia, “where nothing important was undertaken without consultation with Katkov.” Tvardovskaia, *Ideologiia poreformennogo samoderzhaviiia*, 3.

authorities and readers. As punishment for his youthful interest in French socialism, he had spent the years 1850–1854 in penal servitude in Omsk. In the camp, he was surrounded by an ethnically mixed convict population that he portrayed as a microcosm of the Russian empire in his semi-fictionalized memoir *Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma* (Notes from the House of the Dead). Shortly after returning to St. Petersburg in 1859, he launched *Vremia* with his brother Mikhail. The enormous popularity of *The House of the Dead*, serialized in *Vremia* in 1861–1862, was largely responsible for the journal's success.

The cultural mission of *Vremia* was to reconcile the Westernizing and Slavophile trends in Russian culture in the name of a uniquely Russian third way called *pochvennichestvo*, or a return to the “soil” (*pochva*)—the native basis from which a strong nation would spring.¹⁸ Unlike the Slavophiles, *pochvenniki* did not reject the benefits that accrued to Russia as a result of westernization. Unlike the Westernizers, they saw value in some traditional Russian institutions and in tapping native spiritual resources. Westernization was a necessary phase, but the *pochvenniki* held that the Russian nation now needed to be infused by native springs. To this end, the educated, westernized nobility and intelligentsia was to “relearn” Russianness from the lower, uneducated classes. This would heal the crippling social rift, bring about mutual respect, and create a superior national alloy.

Strakhov did much to render this philosophy coherently on the pages of *Vremia*. Dostoevskii valued Strakhov's enormous erudition and his training in philosophy and natural sciences.¹⁹ Though he wrote prodigiously on a variety of scientific subjects, Strakhov made his mark most memorably as a literary critic and a tireless campaigner against the “nihilists” of the radical left. In the 1860s, the intellectual bond between Dostoevskii and Strakhov was very strong and their exchange of ideas lively. According to Strakhov, as late as 1873 Dostoevskii wrote to him: “half of my views are [really] your views.”²⁰

Fedor Dostoevskii asked Strakhov to join *Vremia*'s staff soon after they met in 1860. Dostoevskii himself entrusted Strakhov with the task of stating the journal's position on the Polish Uprising, asking him to avoid references to current political events and to strike a general tone.²¹ Strakhov

18. Ellen Chances illuminates this philosophy in her work on Dostoevskii and his 1860s journals: Chances, “*Pochvennichestvo*”; Chances, “Literary Criticism and the Ideology of *Pochvennichestvo* in Dostoevsky's Thick Journals *Vremia* and *Epokha*,” *Russian Review* 34, no. 2 (April 1975): 151–64; Chances, “*Pochvennichestvo*—Evolution of an Ideology,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1974–75): 543–51; see also her dissertation “The Ideology of ‘*Pochvennichestvo*’ in Dostoevskij's Journals *Vremia* and *Epokha*” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1972). For Dostoevskii's elaboration of *pochvennichestvo* and for his *Vremia* mission statement, see “*Riad stat'ei o russkoi literature*,” *PSS*, 18:41–103 and 19:5–66.

19. Dolinin, “Dostoevskii i Strakhov,” 238–40.

20. N. N. Strakhov, *Materiialy k biografii Dostoevskogo* (1883), 238, quoted in Dolinin, *ibid.*, 242.

21. Dolinin, “Dostoevskii i Strakhov,” 243; Dostoevskii's phrase was “*obshchaia i otvlechennaia formula*.”

did just that. Dostoevskii was proud of “A Fateful Question.” He supported Strakhov even after the journal’s closure and asked him to collaborate on *Vremia*’s successor, *Epokha*.²²

The Puzzle of “A Fateful Question” and Its Explanations

The author of *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* is not known for his sympathy for the Poles. The government’s ruthless suppression of the previous Polish Uprising of 1830 would have made any editor cautious in 1863. Given *Vremia*’s promising publishing success, the stakes were high. So why would Dostoevskii go out on a limb in such a sensitive political moment and publish an article expressing sympathy for the Poles? The closing of the journal was a major financial and political setback for the Dostoevskii brothers. Yet we know that Fedor Dostoevskii read and approved this article for publication, which would imply that he considered it valuable, consistent with the journal’s platform, and at least partly consistent with his own views.²³ On the face of it, it does not seem to make sense.

The standard explanation for this apparent anomaly, based entirely on Dostoevskii and Strakhov’s own subsequent explanations, is that the general public and governmental authorities misunderstood vaguely worded passages. In a letter to Ivan Turgenev from June 1863, Dostoevskii calls Strakhov’s article “in the highest degree patriotic” and protests: “You know the direction of our journal: it is mainly a Russian direction and even anti-western. Would we take the Poles’ side?” But he also admits that “there were some infelicitous expressions and vague places [*nedomolvki*], which gave rise to false interpretations. These vague places, we now see, were indeed quite serious, and we are responsible for them.” Dostoevskii had hoped, he tells Turgenev, that the journal’s general orientation, by which he means its championship of Russian nationalism, would have prevented a malicious reading of these “vague places.” The point of the article, as Dostoevskii explains it to Turgenev, was that the Poles hate the Russians so much that peaceful coexistence with them will long be impossible. He complains that people took it to mean that *Vremia* considers the Poles right. True, the article says that the Poles consider themselves superior to the Russians, but—Dostoevskii assures Turgenev—it *does not accept*

22. Dostoevskii’s relations with Strakhov began to deteriorate after *Epokha* closed down due to low subscriptions. Scholars disagree about the degree and duration of the two men’s affinity. In A. S. Dolinin’s view, their differences were personal rather than ideological. *Ibid.*, 253. For a view of Dostoevskii and Strakhov’s relationship that stresses their differences, see L. M. Rozenblium, “Tvorcheskie dnevniki Dostoevskogo,” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 83 (Moscow, 1971), 16–23. Rozenblium does not, however, disprove the close personal and intellectual ties that indubitably existed between them in the 1860s. Though their relations began to cool in the late 1860s, Strakhov was the best man at Dostoevskii’s 1867 wedding to his second wife, Anna Grigorievna, who later asked Strakhov to edit Dostoevskii’s posthumous collected works. Gerstein, *Nikolai Strakhov*, 69; Rozenblium, “Tvorcheskie dnevniki Dostoevskogo,” 23.

23. On Dostoevskii approving the article for publication, see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860–1865* (Princeton, 1986), 212.

the Poles' view.²⁴ Strakhov, in his biography published two decades later, advances the same explanation: we were misunderstood.²⁵

According to Strakhov, he and Dostoevskii embarked on a flurry of letter writing to various journals to set the record straight. Replying to *Moskovskie vedomosti*, Dostoevskii apparently complained of the public's incorrect interpretation and steadfastly stood by Strakhov.²⁶ Thanks to eased censorship, Strakhov proudly republished "A Fateful Question" in his *Bor'ba s zapadom v nashei literature* (The Struggle with the West in Our Literature, 1897), along with two rebuttals that he claimed to have sent, back in 1863, to *Moskovskie vedomosti* and *Den'*. The rebuttals exude a faith in the power of Russian culture and harsh criticisms of the haughty Poles that, as we will see, are absent from the original article. Instead of a genuine explication of the fateful article, the rebuttals offer a manipulative reinterpretation that rescues Strakhov as a nationalist and exonerates him from the charge of political apostasy.²⁷

Critics, cultural historians, and biographers of Dostoevskii have tended to rely on Dostoevskii and Strakhov's retroactive clarifications.²⁸ This includes the otherwise perspicacious Joseph Frank, who sums up well the customary approach to "A Fateful Question": "Although intended as a public avowal in favor of the Russian cause, [Strakhov's article] was written in such tortuous and elusive terms that it could easily be misread as a justification of the desperate Polish revolt." Frank also adds, though, that "Strakhov does paint Polish civilization in such glowing colors that the misunderstanding is quite comprehensible."²⁹

Scholars whose principal object of study is not Dostoevskii have been less invested in corroborating his and Strakhov's elucidations when examining "A Fateful Question." Gerstein has found these elucidations unreliable: "There is nothing particularly vague about 'Russkii's' article, and [Strakhov's] explanations are disingenuous. His point was that Russia, by the criteria which she herself accepts, did not deserve to dominate Poland; she would have to earn this by developing a civilized future, on spiritual rather than political terms." Walicki finds in Strakhov's article "an impressive objectivity and even sympathy" for the Polish view of their cultural superiority over the Russians: "[Strakhov] stressed that this was

24. Dostoevskii, letter to I. S. Turgenev of 17 June 1863, *PSS*, 28.2:34. Dostoevskii corresponded with Turgenev about Turgenev's contribution to *Vremia*.

25. Quoted in a commentary to Dostoevskii, letter to Turgenev, *PSS*, 28.2:381 n6.

26. Since Dostoevskii's manuscript is not extant, the authenticity of this letter rests entirely on Strakhov's testimony. He published the reply only two years after the writer's death, in his *Materialy k biografii Dostoevskogo* (1883); see a reprint in Dostoevskii, "Otvét redaktsii," *PSS*, 20:97–101.

27. N. N. Strakhov, *Bor'ba s zapadom v nashei literature* (Kiev, 1897), 2:91–120.

28. See commentary to *PSS*, 20:252–55; Leonid Grossman, *Dostoevsky: A Biography* (Russian original, 1962; London, 1975), 272–75; Ronald Hingley, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work* (London, 1978), 99; Geir Kjetsaa, *Fyodor Dostoyevsky: A Writer's Life* (1985; New York, 1987), 147–48; Nechaeva, *Zhurnal "Vremia,"* 305–13; V. A. Tvardovskaia, *Dostoevskii v obshchestvennoi zhizni Rossii* (Moscow, 1990), 30.

29. Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation*, 211–12; see also Dolinin, "K tsenzurnoi," 2:561.

not merely an arrogant illusion, that the Polish superiority was not imaginary but quite real.” According to Olga Maiorova, Strakhov juxtaposed “with shocking candor” the Polish nation—“vibrant, active, possessed of a highly advanced culture”—with the Russian one “that remained passive and insufficiently developed.”³⁰

These balanced assessments of “A Fateful Question” offer reasons to approach Dostoevskii and Strakhov’s testimony cautiously. After all, they would have certainly been invested in containing the political fallout from the affair. The article is not “tortuous and elusive,” as Frank says—certainly not any more or less so than anything else *Vremia* published or Strakhov wrote. It becomes “tortuous and elusive” only if we try to reconcile it with Dostoevskii and Strakhov’s retroactive insistence that no support for the Poles was intended. In fact—and here is where I depart from Walicki’s argument—Strakhov elaborates very good reasons why the Poles might wish to separate from Russia and fleetingly suggests that this may happen.³¹ Strakhov does *not* call for offering Poland independence, but his broad historiosophic discussion of Polish-Russian relations makes this outcome entirely reasonable. Moreover, with the exception of Gerstein, even recent rereadings of “A Fateful Question” maintain that Strakhov’s true emphasis was on the Russian nation’s future victory over the Polish nation, superior only superficially.³² True, Strakhov closes with hopes that the potential locked in the common Russian people may one day lead the nation to greatness, but these comments are merely hypothetical and timid projections rather than convinced prophecies. So anemic was Strakhov’s assertion of Russian glory that Vladimir Kantor has recently surmised that it was aimed to merely mollify the censor.³³

“A Fateful Question”: Textual Evidence

Strakhov invites his readers to look at the Polish question from the Poles’ own perspective: they consider themselves a superior, civilized culture, and view Russians as barbarians. Dostoevskii assured Turgenev that the article did not endorse the Poles’ inflated self-perception but rather attacked it (Strakhov’s rebuttals echoed this). But this is misleading and untrue. In fact, Strakhov himself nearly admitted as much in a private conversation with Nikitenko.³⁴ As Gerstein, Walicki, and Maiorova have

30. Gerstein, *Nikolai Strakhov*, 106; Walicki, “Slavophile Thinkers,” 91, 90; Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire*, 100.

31. Walicki claims that Strakhov “provided strong arguments against the optimistic belief in the possibility of solving the Polish question through the mild treatment of the Poles and through offering them material concessions.” Walicki, “Slavophile Thinkers,” 91. This seems to suggest that Strakhov advocates treating the Poles harshly and offering them no concessions. I do not find such arguments in Strakhov’s article or any encouragement of such positions.

32. Walicki, “Slavophile Thinkers,” 91; Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire*, 100, 218n28.

33. Kantor, *Sankt-Peterburg*, 347n1.

34. Strakhov told Nikitenko that he had wanted “to convince the Poles not to take pride in ‘their superiority, in their civilization that has overtaken ours’ and so on, but he

stressed, the article supports the Poles' view of their civilizational superiority in the Slavic world. "The Polish nation," Strakhov writes, "is fully justified to consider itself civilizationally equal to all other European nations and they can hardly regard us as anything else than barbarians. . . . It is understandable," he continues, "that the Poles should look upon us with superiority." In fact, Strakhov claims that all Europeans are largely right to see Russians as underdeveloped, imitative, and ultimately alien to European civilization—"let us not fool ourselves," he bitterly intones. Though Russians are proud of their state, statehood does not substitute for "national life" according to Strakhov; it merely creates auspicious conditions for it.³⁵

In demonstrating historic Polish superiority, Strakhov invokes Ivan Kireevskii's expertise. His quote from Kireevskii calls the Polish aristocracy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with some exaggeration, "the most learned in Europe," stresses the Poles' knowledge of foreign languages and cultures and their rich tradition of translations, especially from the classics. Kireevskii also notes that already during Sigismund III's reign (1587–1632), Poland had eighty printing presses and over seven hundred known writers.³⁶

Contrary to Dostoevskii's and Strakhov's denials, the article portrays the Poles in a positive light. Strakhov refers to their struggle for independence as "infinitely heroic," being rooted, as Walicki put it, in "the moral impossibility of accepting a situation in which a cultural European nation finds itself under the rule of uneducated barbarians."³⁷ "The unfortunate nation!" Strakhov exclaims with pity:

Given your high opinion of yourself, how strongly you must feel the entire incompatibility of your position! The higher your civilization, the more subtle your sentiments, the more sophisticated your speech—the deeper your sufferings, the more insufferable appears to you any preponderance whatsoever on the side of your less civilized rivals. Your high culture is your punishment. Where a different tribe could have been pacified and subdued, you in no way can.

Strakhov claims that the Russians have always admitted that these Polish sentiments have "a degree of justice" to them. He goes so far as to justify Poland's claims to the Belorussian and Ukrainian territories on account of its past civilizing successes in these areas.³⁸ Strakhov thus flies in the face of Russian public opinion, which was particularly incensed by Polish insurgents' demands in both 1831 and 1863 for Poland's former east Slavic possessions that Russia now claimed as "Russian."

So how might Russians possibly respond to the Poles? Strakhov sees

did not *fully* express this idea [*ne vpolne vyrazil etu mysl', ne doskazal ee*], see Nikitenko, *Dnevnik*, 2:340. Emphasis in the original.

35. N. N. Strakhov, "Rokovoi vopros," *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 153, 155, 154.

36. *Ibid.*, 153–54. Strakhov quotes from I. V. Kireevskii, "Obzor sovremennogo sostoiianiia literatury," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii Ivana Vasil'evicha Kireevskogo* (Moscow, 1861), 2:30.

37. Strakhov, "Rokovoi vopros," 155; Walicki, "Slavophile Thinkers," 90.

38. Strakhov, "Rokovoi vopros," 155, 157.

two possibilities: 1) to prove that Russians are not in fact barbarians, or 2) to prove that Polish civilization is “not genuine, but carries death in its very root.”³⁹ The second phrase became Strakhov’s refrain in his campaigns of self-defense. Dostoevskii invokes it to Turgenev when denying that *Vremia* pronounced Polish culture superior to the Russian. Nothing of the sort, Dostoevskii argues: “we said it *literally*, that the praised Polish civilization has carried and carries death in its heart. This we said in our article *literally*.”⁴⁰

But they did not. Although this statement about Polish civilization’s deadened core is the most conducive to Dostoevskii and Strakhov’s reinterpretations, it is hypothetical rather than declarative. It appears alongside the equally plausible possibility that Russians are barbarians—the very claim that Dostoevskii and Strakhov later try to erase. Because its national development is in an early phase, Russia as yet cannot, in Strakhov’s opinion, deny a charge of “barbarity.” It can only muster negative evidence: it did not become Polonized and it bypassed Poland when westernizing. Alas, Strakhov soberly concludes, this “negative evidence” only proves that Russians have preserved themselves intact and are now “ready” to develop their nationality. But he warns that “more than that cannot be concluded from this.”⁴¹ Strakhov is basically a skeptical patriot. Like Chaadaev, he wished for Russia’s national coherence and confidence, yet was unwilling to fudge the evidence to prematurely proclaim this goal as accomplished.

Confronting the second possibility, Strakhov wonders if the Poles’ civilization, in view of their loss of independence, was indeed sickly and abnormal. “If we suppose this,” Strakhov hypothetically continues, “we might point to Polish civilization’s un-Slavic foreignness and its lack of grounding in the life of the people.” The trouble is that Strakhov instantly snips this line of inquiry and, moreover, suggests that this is Russians’ wishful thinking, a mere consolation in which they should be indulged: “Let us judge the matter this way and comfort ourselves with the thought that the fate of Poland is its inevitable inner fate. But such consolations are only part of the matter [*Ne v takikh utesheniakh vse delo*].”⁴²

This “consolation” clarifies the article’s importance for Dostoevskii as *Vremia*’s editor. As a *hypothetical exercise*, the notion of Polish civilization’s deadened core offers an instructive lesson for Russia to resist the kind of westernization that may have deracinated the Poles and severed their nobility’s link to the people. This smacks, of course, of Dostoevskii’s *pochvennichestvo*, *Vremia*’s underlying ideology. This moment also clarifies *Vremia*’s and—by extension, Dostoevskii’s—apparent championship of the Poles. It is absolutely essential to understand that the Poles’ fate is quite secondary to the lessons it might offer to Russian nationalism. As for Katkov, the “fateful question” from the title is less about Poland than

39. *Ibid.*, 158.

40. Dostoevskii, letter to Turgenev, *PSS*, 28.2:34. Emphasis in the original.

41. Strakhov, “Rokovoi vopros,” 159, 160.

42. *Ibid.*, 160.

about Russia. In fact, this title links both Katkov's editorial and Strakhov's article to Aleksandr Pushkin's seminal interrogative from his 1831 poem "Klevetnikam Rossii" (To the Slanderers of Russia). Pushkin penned the poem in a historically homologous moment—at the time of the 1831 Polish November Uprising. In it, he famously asks: "Will Slavic streams unite in a Russian sea? / Will it dry up? That is the question [*Slavianskie l' ruch'i sol'iutsia v russkom more? / Ono l' issiaknet? vot vopros*]." For Strakhov and Dostoevskii, in 1863, the Polish question puts in equally sharp focus the existential question about the Russian empire, its fitness, direction, and European prestige. In this, they seem to echo my epigraph's author, Nikitenko.⁴³

Yet Strakhov values the needs of the Russian nation over those of the Russian empire more than Pushkin did. The article does not defend the Poles but promotes Dostoevskii's brand of Russian nationalism. *Vremia* uses the Polish question merely to do what it had always been doing: prodding the Russians to become more Russian and affirming each nation's right to organic development. Only once Russia develops its own national culture will it become an equal of European ones. Only then, Strakhov adds, will Russia's claim to the Ukrainian-Belorussian rim trump the Polish one.⁴⁴ In closing, Strakhov articulates two tasks that will help resolve the "fateful question." The Russians must devote themselves to developing a truly national culture that is harmonious with their inner spirit. The Poles must renounce their pride because it leads to demands that may not be satisfied, in pursuit of which they bear undue sacrifices.

Reading Strakhov's article forces us to consider Dostoevskii's complaints about misunderstanding as an unconvincing attempt at damage control. In my view, Dostoevskii's and Strakhov's explanations belong to the Russian tradition of political apologia offered after offending the country's national pride. This tradition includes Chaadaev's 1837 "Apologiia sumasshedshago" (Apology of a Madman), which elucidated and recanted his "Philosophical Letter" as well as Nikolai Gogol's explanatory texts to his *Government Inspector* and *Dead Souls*, works whose nationalism the public found to be suspect.⁴⁵ The public in fact understood the article well but focused on what for Strakhov and Dostoevskii was secondary: the culture of the Poles and its comparison to Russian culture. For the *Vremia* editors this was a preliminary step toward an argument about the Russian nation. But the public was less interested in that argument and saw the comments about superior Polish civilization as treason and political folly.

Beyond its blow to triumphalist, state-centered nationalism and to the sensitivities of a public reared in its spirit, the article had very uncomfortable implications for Russia's imperial ideology. Given Russia's imperial

43. Historical research corroborates the immense importance of the so-called Polish Question. Even without a Polish uprising on his hands, Alexander III devoted 30 percent of all his decisions to the management of Poland. See A. Miller and M. Dolbilov, eds., *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow, 2006), 436.

44. Strakhov, "Rokovoi vopros," 161.

45. Edyta M. Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), 197–210, 236–53.

stature, Strakhov's stark contrast between Polish civilization and Russian barbarity sounded provocative. In the pan-European schema that Strakhov never questions, empires typically claimed superiority over their peripheries. The noble task of leading the subordinated peoples toward progress made the dirty business of conquest and rule compatible with the metropole's view of its own righteousness. Yet Strakhov denies Russia's superiority. Consistent with *Vremia's* prophecies of Russia's *future* national glory, Strakhov hopes that Russia *will eventually* attain this advantage, that is, a unique, organic national culture that would attract surrounding "tribes." He intimates that when this happens, Russia's native, Slavic civilization may overshadow the Europeanized Polish one.

But Strakhov presents this process as "long and arduous [*vekovaia bor'ba*]."46 So what now justifies Russia's sovereignty over the Poles? Must they wait patiently in the imperial fold as Russians work on acquiring the right to rule them? These were the logical and politically risky questions raised by the article. Strakhov's handling of the dichotomy between "civilized" Poles and "barbarous" Russians made it seem that Polish claims to independence were justified. He even intimates that they might become realized when he prefaces one remark with the hypothetical, "Even if Poland were independent . . . [*Dazhe v tom sluchae, kogda by Pol'sha byla nezavisima . . .*]."47 This was political apostasy, since the official discourse did not admit an alternative to a triumphant reestablishment of Russian rule in Poland.48 Overall, Strakhov offers no practical political solutions, but any reader would be justified to see in his article an implicit support for the rebel cause and a critique of the government's policy.

By publishing Strakhov's article, could Dostoevskii have supported Polish independence and the shrinking of the Russian empire's western dominions? Anyone familiar with his later views on Russia's relations with the Slavic world might doubt this. *A Writer's Diary*, especially its entries about the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, strikes a very different tone. Dostoevskii, by then a revered national prophet, adamantly proclaimed Russia's leadership in the Slavic world and its "manifest destiny" to gather all the less fortunate, that is, stateless, Slavs. The Russia of *A Writer's Diary* is a confident, expansionist Russia that never retreats and never questions its *mission civilisatrice*. But, as is well known, the Dostoevskii of the early 1860s was ideologically more liberal than the Dostoevskii of the late 1870s and beyond. Could he have had a different national-imperial program in the early 1860s?

"A Fateful Question" and Its Journalistic Convoy

Vremia's general coverage of the Polish Uprising shows that this was likely the case. Brief reports on military clashes in Poland appear as early as the

46. Strakhov, "Rokovoi vopros," 162.

47. *Ibid.*

48. As early as 1861, a censorship circular forbade any hints of Polish autonomy, let alone independence. Renner, "Defining a Russian Nation," 672n52.

January 1863 issue. Avoiding any predictable Pole-bashing, the account in the section “Sovremennoe obozrenie” (Contemporary Survey) simply regrets the spilling of “brotherly blood” on both sides and hopes that the disturbances will not escalate.⁴⁹ In February *Vremia* abandons any reporting of news from the ground, which the government made amply available, perhaps signaling its distrust of official sources.⁵⁰ The next two issues focus instead on western European governments’ responses to the conflict, particularly the likelihood of their military and financial aid to the Poles, which worried Russian officials and public opinion in the uprising’s early months.⁵¹

The March issue reports favorably and at length on a speech by a Mr. Billeaud (“Bil’o” in Cyrillic) who apparently advocated French noninvolvement from the floor of the French Senate. Billeaud praises Alexander II’s reforms, which put Russia on the course of “civilization and progress.” He argues that Polish affairs distract Russia’s attention from this worthy domestic agenda, especially its transition from serfdom, whose success, in the final analysis, outweighs any benefit that may accrue to Russia from its control of Poland. *Vremia* thus cites a foreign source to raise the controversial idea that renouncing Poland may in fact benefit Russia.⁵²

Indeed, Billeaud’s remarks anticipate the position of *Vremia*’s next, fateful issue of April 1863, which openly opposed the government’s handling of the Polish Uprising. To say that *Vremia* sympathized with Polish demands for independence would sound misleadingly idealistic. Rather, *Vremia* framed its recommendation in terms of ridding Russia’s body of a festering limb. The larger textual package of the entire issue indicates that Strakhov’s article forms part of a well-articulated and coherent platform on the Polish Question and on the politics of the imperial state. Roughly three-fourths of the 260-page section “Sovremennoe obozrenie” relates in some way to these issues. This thematic focus and the texts’ mutual consistency suggest a conscious editorial decision and a bold political gamble by the Dostoevskii brothers. It is a gamble they promptly lost. The mission proved politically suicidal because it collided with the government’s policy of maintaining imperial possessions at all cost.

The articles surrounding “A Fateful Question” provide the political applications to Strakhov’s theoretical-cultural schema and collectively drive home *Vremia*’s point: the war costs Russia millions of rubles and thousands of lives. Given the Poles’ intransigence, these resources would be better spent on domestic needs, preeminent among them land financing for recently liberated serfs (their obligation to remunerate landlords for the land was widely seen as a de facto continuation of serfdom). *Vremia*’s inclination to let Poland go was thus motivated—and this is key—not by idealistic solidarity with the Polish cause but by nationalist concerns for Russia’s welfare, concerns that animate the journal’s larger critique of the

49. *Vremia*, no. 1 (1863): 64.

50. See the 1863 report of the Third Section, quoted in V. S. Nechaeva, *Zhurnal M. M. i F. M. Dostoevskikh “Epokha,” 1864–1865* (Moscow, 1975), 6 (hereafter *Zhurnal “Epokha”*).

51. *Vremia*, no. 2 (1863): 183–94 and no. 3 (1863): 128–32.

52. *Vremia*, no. 3 (1863): 139–40.

imperial state. *Vremia* wanted the Russian nation to have greater control over the imperial state, which should represent the nation's values and interests. The April issue suggests that a measure of peripheral autonomy would protect imperial integrity better than the coercive tactics practiced so far by the metropole. *Vremia* clearly worried—as did many Russians at the time—that Russia's imperial expansion impeded its growth as a nation.⁵³

"A Fateful Question" is therefore not an anomaly in an otherwise politically correct issue. On the contrary, Strakhov's article fits integrally within the larger matrix of *Vremia*. Strakhov did not need to state outright that Russia should extricate itself from Poland because the domestic and international news segments that directly follow his article do just that. Though unsigned, both segments were authored by *Vremia*'s permanent political analyst Aleksei E. Razin, who was highly prized by the Dostoevskii brothers.⁵⁴ While Strakhov provides a cultural and historical justification for disengagement, the news sections chime in with pragmatics.⁵⁵

Razin's "Our Home Affairs" defends Russian suzerainty over the predominantly Orthodox and "Russian" Western Provinces (comprising the Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian territories), to which Poland lay claims. The Polish kingdom, he writes, is a different matter: ethnically Polish, overwhelmingly Catholic, run by Polish civil servants, and served by a host of separate institutions. Razin sees only two ways of dealing with it. One is to erase Poland's autonomy and effect a complete political and institutional merger with Russia. The other is to cut Russia's losses and abandon the Polish kingdom while keeping the Western Provinces. This clearly emerges as a preferred, pragmatic solution. The Poles have exhausted Russia; they are a "painful ulcer" that should be speedily cut off, only without the meddling of west Europeans:

Common sense dictates getting rid of this painful ulcer [*bolezennnyi narost*] as fast as possible, by means of an operation, if necessary. However, Russia does not wish for . . . someone else to perform this operation. History tends toward the gradual smoothing out of national antagonisms. But this is the more easily accomplished the less one uses violence. . . . Russia entered the path of "expanding social rights" and of "broadening the scope of activity entrusted to the empire's various local institutions." There is no doubt whatsoever that once this path becomes more clearly and tangibly marked, all Slavs—on their own, without any efforts or sacrifices on our part—will cling to Russia with full sympathy.⁵⁶ Then Poland will join Russia of its own will, perhaps will beg for it. And rather than a weakness, Poland will then represent the strength of the

53. See Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); and Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire*.

54. Nechaeva, *Zhurnal "Epokha,"* 74.

55. For the segment devoted to the Polish affairs, see *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 190–97.

56. Dostoevskii later propounds the same scenario for all Slavs; see F. M. Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, ed. and trans. Kenneth Lantz, vol. 1, 1873–1876 and vol. 2, 1877–1881 (Evanston, 1993–94), 1:522–31 and 2:1099–1205, 1206–12.

great Slavic union. The key is that this must happen by itself, naturally, and completely voluntarily.⁵⁷

Renouncing Poland does not mean renouncing empire, the article claims, thus disagreeing with the government's view of Poland as the empire's linchpin. All Slavs will eventually join Russia, but the union *must be voluntary* if it is to be strong. In light of what happened later—Russia's ruthless quashing of the uprising, severe reprisals against the insurgents, and the policy of depolonization under Mikhail "The Hangman" Muravev—the notion of renouncing the Kingdom of Poland while holding on to the Western Provinces sounds radical. Nevertheless, profound skepticism that the Poles would ever reconcile themselves to Russian rule was widespread in the uprising's early stages, giving rise to serious consideration of this option even in government circles. *Vremia* made the mistake of voicing it publicly. Months later even Katkov frames the two solutions to the Polish Question as the choice between total incorporation and partial decolonization.⁵⁸

In his international news segment, Razin reiterates these two solutions, predicting that if Poland's complete unification with Russia is impossible, "Russia will completely get rid of Poland [*izbavitsia ot Pol'shi*], on which are unnecessarily wasted both millions [of rubles] and many tens of thousands of lives."⁵⁹ Indeed, the tremendous cost of keeping Poland was hotly debated at the time by government officials and the public.⁶⁰ The mention of needlessly spilt Russian blood and a colossal waste of money echoes both Razin's domestic news segment and "A Fateful Question."⁶¹ Razin argues that the money spent on the Polish adventure could have paid for the liberated serfs' land and made Russian economy, arts, and sciences flourish.

The next and final article in the issue, P. P. Sokal'skii's provocative "Nashi glavnyye spornye punkty" (Our Main Points of Contention), argues that the state should get out of the business of managing nationalities altogether. Strakhov sees the state as irrelevant, but Sokal'skii claims that it is harmful. In his view, politicians play irresponsibly with nationalities, not realizing that violence and despotism only breed hatred. Sokal'skii is adamant that imperial states must be voluntary unions, based on mutual respect and "love." Tolerance need not lead to the demise of the Russian

57. *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 197.

58. Miller and Dolbilov, eds., *Zapadnye okrainy*, 182. See Katkov's leading article in *Moskovskie vedomosti* 228 (1863). In the next issue, Katkov clarifies that retreating from Poland would be a terrible mistake; see *Sobranie peredovykh statei "Moskovskikh vedomostei"* (Moscow, 1863–1887), 623–26. In private letters to Alexander II and Alexander III, however, Katkov apparently favored giving Poland independence "within its ethnographic boundaries"; see Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism* (Budapest, 2008), 170.

59. *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 220.

60. Ekaterina Pravilova, *Finansy imperii: Den'gi i vlast' v politike Rossii na natsional'nykh okrainakh, 1801–1917* (Moscow, 2006), 137–51, 165–99.

61. Strakhov, "Rokovoi vopros," 155, and Razin's mention of "broshennye miliony" in *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 195.

empire. A gentler touch will ensure, Sokal'skii here echoes Razin, that other nationalities will cling to Russia of their own free will. They will see that "life is good under our patronage and will firmly join us."⁶² *Vremia* basically rejects institutional and coercive Russification and favors instead creating conditions for "Russianization" (*obrusenie*) or a "self-chosen" act of spontaneous cultural assimilation.⁶³ This fit within the contemporary ideal of *grazhdanstvennost'*, or the creation of the imperial civil society.⁶⁴ Needless to say, all of this constituted a political program that challenged the government's treatment, not only of Poles (who are barely mentioned, if clearly implied), but also of other imperial minorities.⁶⁵

Sokal'skii articulates a coherent, theoretically grounded alternative to the state's imperial policy. He never addresses specific recommendations to the Russian government, but his aim is obvious: Russia should reject coercion and militarism, which produce only ephemeral results, in favor of what may be termed a consensual empire. He argues that the state should not interfere in the lives of nationalities or try to amalgamate them by force. They should be free to develop and compete in the realm of culture so that, ultimately, "the stronger civilization will take the upper hand and the task of progress will be accomplished freely."⁶⁶ Tolerance for constituent nationalities is a must in Sokal'skii's vision of an empire by consent. He insists that, contrary to popular assumptions, such an empire would strengthen the state. For this empire to emerge, however, Russia must develop its inner spiritual resources and national self-knowledge. This to Sokal'skii represents Russia's true epochal task and its only guarantee of progress.

Many other articles in the March and April issues of *Vremia* obliquely promote such organic national work, making the empire self-sustaining and basing it on the consent of its constituent ethnicities. A. Bibikov criticized the army's Byzantine bureaucracy and bloated budget, campaigning for decentralization, cost-cutting, and genuine civilian controls over military expenditures. The ongoing military operation in Poland and the well-known fact that the military draft there helped spark the uprising correlate Bibikov's discussion of army reforms with the Polish imbroglio.⁶⁷

62. P. P. Sokal'skii, "Nashi glavnye spornye punkty," *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 257.

63. Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London, 2003), 66, 19. See also Miller, *Romanov Empire*, 49–52. On institutional Russification in Poland, see Theodore Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb, 1996).

64. According to Dov Yaroshevski, *grazhdanstvennost'* became prominent in Russian political culture between 1857 and 1867; see Yaroshevski, "Empire and Citizenship," in Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzarini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, 1997), 65.

65. For example, Sokal'skii harangues against the persecution of the Ukrainian language—a policy that conservative papers supported (e.g., *Den'* or *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*). He claims that the Russians are hypocritical in defending the national rights of the Czechs, the Serbs, or the Slovaks, that is, Slavs who happen to reside in other empires, while restricting these same rights at home; see Sokal'skii, "Nashi," 254.

66. Sokal'skii, "Nashi," 232–33.

67. N. Bibikov, "Territorial'naia voennaia sistema," *Vremia*, no. 3 (1863): 1–16 and no. 4 (1893): 46–62. Apart from the burden of hosting and supplying an enormous Rus-

P. Tkachev's "Nashi budushchie prisiazhnye" (Our Future Jurors) takes up the cause of empowering the people vis-à-vis the state through a trial by jury, which is seen as the only guarantee of a nation's political rights.⁶⁸ This would help counteract the "voicelessness" (*bezmolviie*) of the people that M. Rodevich decries as the fundamental condition of Russian society in the post-Petrine era. Rodevich describes the relation of Russian subjects to their state as passive spectatorship of a "public gathered around an air balloon" or a swarm of insects around a giant, who notices the insects' existence only when stung.⁶⁹ The article recounts historical examples of Russia's absolute rulers' abuses of the people, including arbitrary deprivations of life and private property. The leitmotif of the nation's "voicelessness" reverberates in the article as a call to Russians to demand to be heard. Addressing explicitly imperial questions, Vasilii P. Popov's April article "Prestuplenia i nakazania" (Crimes and Punishments) chastises the British empire for exiling criminals to far-off colonies and using corporal punishment. This could easily be read as Aesopian criticism of Russia's own widespread use of colonial exile: "A nation that proudly holds itself as the head of civilization indulges in barbarity that is fit for savages!"⁷⁰ Strakhov's article, which similarly questions Russia's pretensions to "civilization" and asserts its penchant for "barbarity," begins only three pages after these words. Popov's review sees neither correctional nor colonial benefit in exiling prisoners to peripheral regions and argues that voluntary colonization should replace exile.⁷¹

The final companion piece to "A Fateful Question" worthy of note is a long review of Mykola Kostomarov's *Istoriia severnykh narodopravstv* (A History of Northern Republics, 1863), warmly greeted in a footnote by the journal's editors. Kostomarov was a Ukrainian historian and a vocal supporter of imperial federalism.⁷² Such federalism, according to Kostomarov, was rooted in Kievan Rus' and meant that "independent parts . . . without suspending their separate existence, all jointly formed one state body." The review details federalism's workings in the medieval city-states of Novgorod and Pskov, which involved free elections and citizens' influ-

sian army stationed in Poland (many times that of the British military presence in Ireland), the draft was a permanent source of Polish discontent. According to recent Polish research, of the 200,000 Poles drafted in 1831–1873, 150,000 died while in service. See Miller and Dolbilov, eds., *Zapadnye okrainy*, 442.

68. P. Tkachev, "Nashi budushchie prisiazhnye," *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 103–20.

69. M. Rodevich, "Nekotorye cherty iz istorii poslepetrovskogo vremeni," *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 65, 68–69. Rodevich was *Vremia*'s permanent collaborator.

70. V. P. Popov, "Prestuplenia i nakazania," *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 149. The article subsequently played a role in the genesis of Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment*. Chances notes *Vremia*'s use of Aesopian language in her "*Pochvennichestvo*," 79.

71. Given *Vremia*'s popular serialization of Dostoevskii's *House of the Dead*, which the public knew was based on the author's personal experience of exile, this issue would certainly have been seen to enjoy the writer's personal endorsement.

72. On Kostomarov's federalism, see Alexei Miller, "*Ukrainskii vopros*" v politike vlastei i russkom obshchestvennom mnenii (vtoraia polovina 19 veka) (St. Petersburg, 2000), 76–115, and Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire*, 75–81. Katkov vehemently opposed Kostomarov's federalism, so this review may have helped in getting *Vremia*'s April issue on his bad side (on Katkov and Ukraine, see Katz, *Mikhail N. Katkov*, 131–33).

ence on public affairs. Printed anonymously, the review was authored by P. V. Znamenskii, a future historian of medieval Rus', who sympathizes with the fierce independence of ethnic, political, and kinship factions within the city-states and paints their federal union as a viable "national ideal" (*narodnyi ideal*). He presents the city-states' incorporation into Muscovy as a violent solution that truncated an organic historical process.⁷³ The review's examples smack of a messy, nascent democracy, which contrasts sharply with the "voicelessness" of Rodevich's Russians during the post-Petrine period. Znamenskii comes close to calling for the continuation of the interrupted business of federalism.⁷⁴

In short, the final issue of *Vremia* stages a concerted effort to put the interests of the Russian nation above those of the Russian empire and to propose an alternative vision of this empire: one based on tolerance and consent of the governed minorities. Under the guise of history, *Vremia* asserts the idea of federalism as a viable ideal organically rooted in Russian history. Possible territorial losses incurred in pursuit of a consensual—or federal—empire will prove temporary; a stronger domestic core will eventually buttress the empire. Many articles critique the costly and ineffective current imperial policy, which relies on coercion and war. Strakhov's contribution dismantles the classic Russian justification for imperial sovereignty over Poland. The issue's other articles, unfazed by the prospect of an independent Poland, advocate a halt to the violent suppression of the Polish Uprising. The underlying sentiment—this merits emphasis—is not sympathy for the Poles, but concern for the Russian nation's welfare and the empire's viability. To use a modern metaphor, *Vremia* wants to press the "reset" button in the empire's management.

What Does *Vremia* Tell Us about Fedor Dostoevskii?

The postexile period up to the spring of 1863 represents a time when Dostoevskii experimented with alternative and unorthodox ideas about the Russian empire—ideas that the April 1863 issue of *Vremia* puts into focus. This episode reveals a stage in the evolution of Dostoevskii's national and imperial ideology so far unnoted in the scholarship. Dostoevskii's interest in imperial politics predates by far the punditry of his *Writer's Diary* phase. He appears, moreover, to have supported the shrinking of the Russian empire in the west. He believed that an expensive imperial agenda drained resources from more crucial domestic priorities, such as education and land reform.

While *Vremia*'s ill-fated April 1863 issue thus modifies our understanding of this specific moment in Dostoevskii's ideological evolution, it also

73. [P. V. Znamenskii] (signed M. N.), "Eshche stat'ia o novoi knige," *Vremia*, no. 4 (1863): 4, 27–28. On Znamenskii's authorship, see Nechaeva, *Zhurnal "Vremia,"* 200–201.

74. The ideas of both federalism and empire by consent were confidentially debated in high government circles. Minister of the Interior Valuev reportedly weighed federalism's viability for Russia. Katkov insinuated this when he inveighed in *Moskovskie vedomosti* against high-placed government officials who wanted to transform Russia into a confederation; see Sleznev and Smolin, "Velikii strazh imperii," 24.

calls into question the very model of this evolution, proposed by Joseph Frank's influential five-volume biography of the writer. Taking his cue from Dostoevskii's own statement that the exile caused a "regeneration" of his convictions, Frank makes the exile the fundamental caesura of the writer's biography, which marks off Dostoevskii the revolutionary liberal from Dostoevskii the religious and national conservative.⁷⁵ Although the exile was undoubtedly transformative, this sharp division of the writer's intellectual biography in the end obscures what in truth was a more gradual process of ideological evolution with multiple inflection points, reversals, and significant continuities. The January Uprising and the trauma of *Vremia's* shutdown were for the writer one such *postexile* moment of crisis, introspection, and rethinking of his political positions. Dostoevskii's nationalism up to the Polish Uprising of 1863 was not very conservative. The *Vremia* affair shows a Dostoevskii who, despite the idiosyncrasy of his motives, had more in common with liberals such as Herzen than with conservative nationalists such as Katkov—a possibility to which Frank does in fact remain alert at other junctures of his biography of Dostoevskii and for which Chances had earlier argued.⁷⁶ *Vremia's* final issue documents Dostoevskii's openness to radical solutions regarding Russia's domestic and foreign policy that escapes the *postexile* "regeneration" model. To the extent that Dostoevskii's support for disengagement from Poland was formed in interactions with Poles during exile—as I think it was—then the shutdown of *Vremia* led him to *reverse* a conviction formed during exile.

Of course, one cannot assume that any idea printed in *Vremia* enjoyed Fedor Dostoevskii's personal support. We do know, however, that he did the heavy lifting of editing and shepherding submissions through censorship (his brother mainly looked after the business side of things). He worked hard to put the April issue together. He personally solicited, read, and supported Strakhov's article. The editors did not distance themselves from the views expressed, an option they did exercise on other occasions.⁷⁷ The degree of focus and mutual consistency in the constellation of ideas regarding the Polish and imperial questions signal a conscious editorial move. The cogency and focus of *Vremia's* April issue is unlikely to have been a matter of chance. Its general agenda must have met with Dostoevskii's approval.

Dostoevskii's unpublished comments about the uprising and Poland did come down to us in his "Notebook for 1863–1864." These comments, however, follow the scandal of "A Fateful Question" by roughly a year, showing us a Dostoevskii who was already reacting to the crisis, reevaluating and modifying his positions. Still, these notes reveal a fluid adjustment

75. See, e.g., Joseph Frank, *The Years of Ordeal, 1850–1859* (Princeton, 1983), 87–88.

76. Chances, "Pochvennichestvo," 73.

77. See, for example, the editors' footnote to [A. A. Grigor'ev], "O postepenno, no bystrom i povsemestnom rasprostranении nevezhestva i bezgramotnosti v rossiiskoi slovesnosti," *Vremia*, no. 3 (1861): 39; on Grigor'ev's likely authorship, see Nechaeva, *Zhurnal "Epokha,"* 236, 262n19.

rather than a complete reversal of the political sentiments of April 1863. Here is a selection from Dostoevskii's "Notebook":

1. By freeing the peasants in Poland and giving them land, Russia thus shared its idea with Poland, inculcated Poland with its own character, and this idea is a *link* [*tsep'*] by which Poland and Russia are now inseparably united.

2. Whoever defends too strongly the unity that Russia achieves by violent means, no matter what, doubts the power of the Russian spirit, does not understand it, and if he understands it, then clearly wishes it ill. I myself will support the political unity of this mass [*gromada*] to the last drop of my blood, because this is the only good result of Russia's thousand years of suffering. But this is not the main thing: (what is the main thing).

3. Universality [*obshchechelovechnost'*] can only be achieved through each nation's insistence on its own nationality. The idea of *pochva*, of nationalities, is the basis. The idea of nationality is a new form of democracy.

4. The Polish war is a war of two forms of Christianity—it is the *beginning* of a future war between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, or, in other words, between Slavic genius and European civilization. And so: our development, but not of the official kind (on the Dutch program), but a national one [*narodnoe*].⁷⁸

These notes show Dostoevskii's evolving views on the Polish and imperial questions that resonate with ideas from *Vremia* while avoiding a collision course with the authorities, which the editors of *Epokha* could not afford. Strakhov found nothing in the way of civilizational benefit to Poland from Russia's imperial sovereignty. After Alexander II's edict of 19 February 1864, which freed Poland's serfs and gave them land, Dostoevskii seems to have found this benefit (entry 1, above).⁷⁹ The liberation of the Polish serfs represents an *idea* that Dostoevskii and Strakhov would like to see as cementing the empire: idea instead of war (entry 2). It is the kind of idea that in April 1863 they apparently could not find and that the very minister who banned *Vremia* apparently could not find either.⁸⁰ Dostoevskii also brings up Orthodoxy, absent in *Vremia's* coverage, which in a future showdown of civilizations will guarantee Russia's spiritual triumph not only over Poland but also over Europe. And yet he echoes *Vremia's* April issue in making this triumph contingent upon Russia's internal work

78. *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 83 (Moscow, 1971), 176, 186. Emphasis in the original. Entry 1 from between 16 April and the end of June 1864; entries 2 to 4 from August 1864.

79. The Polish insurgents had been promising the liberation of the serfs from the start. The tsar's edict was widely regarded as a testament to Russia's military challenges: an effort to weaken peasant support for Polish independence.

80. See P. A. Valuev's diary entry for 6 December 1863: "We all seek a moral force on which we can rely, but do not find it. One cannot defeat moral forces with a purely material force. Irrespective of all the foolishness and duplicity of the Poles, the ideas are on their side. On ours—not a single one. [. . .] We talk of Russian rule or Orthodoxy. But these ideas are for us, not for the Poles, and we ourselves invoke these words insincerely. Russia itself is not the point here, but the Russian autocrat, the Polish king, and the constitutional Finnish Grand Prince. This is not an idea, but an anomaly. What is needed is an idea that even a single Pole could accept as his own [*usvoit' sebe*]." *Dnevnik P. A. Valueva*, 1:258–59.

of building national consciousness (entry 4). Nationalism, in turn, has democratizing functions (here modern theorists would agree)—just as *Vremia*'s historical articles show (entry 3). All in all, Dostoevskii now emphatically supports the inviolable integrity of the empire, though he does not finish his thought why “this is not the main thing” (entry 2). All this comes a year after the *Vremia* disaster, however.

Although Dostoevskii's late work, *A Writer's Diary*, reveals a shift in his political positions, it too echoes certain ideas expressed in *Vremia*'s final issue. When celebrating the 1881 Russian capture of the Turkmen fortress Geok Tepe in *A Writer's Diary*, Dostoevskii comes full circle to the notion of reorienting the Russian empire, whose civilizing mission, he claims, lies in Asia, not on its western frontier.⁸¹ Though Poland is not mentioned, any such reorientation would necessarily involve it. Again, this puts *Vremia*'s idea of an empire free from the “Polish ulcer” within Dostoevskii's ideological perimeter. The 1873 entry “Mechty i grezy” (Dreams and Musings), much like *Vremia* a decade earlier, ponders the cost of empire and recommends reallocating the military budget to education.⁸² This shows important continuities with *Vremia*'s platform in the least likely of sources.

The idea of empire by consent also fits integrally with other aspects of Dostoevskii's postexile ideology. Nancy Ruttenburg has recently explored Dostoevskii's intense interest in the idea of democracy by analyzing *The House of the Dead* (the fiction that ran in *Vremia* a year prior). She claims that following his exile in a crowded prison camp, “Dostoevskii envisioned a new world in which [a] mandated physical proximity would have been converted into a consensual national-spiritual unity, the basis of his democratic vision.”⁸³ Ruttenburg also demonstrates that, in Dostoevskii's view, social life based on “common consent” was deeply rooted in the Russian people.⁸⁴ In promoting *Vremia*'s model of a consensual empire, Dostoevskii may have thus merely extended the homegrown Russian ideal of “common consent,” consistent with his pochvennichestvo ideal of reorganizing Russian life in line with Russian national values. *Vremia*'s new imperial model simply applies to a larger political arena the principle of Russian democracy that Ruttenburg traces in illuminating detail in Dostoevskii's prison-camp fiction. After all, as his aphoristic statement from the “Notebook” shows, early Dostoevskii viewed national aspirations in terms of legitimate democratic demands: “The idea of nationality is a new form of democracy.”

The authorities promptly stepped in to make sure that this vision—including calls for consensual empire, its subordination to the needs of the Russian nation, and noises about federalism—would not be propagated. *Vremia* wanted the people to be citizens of the empire; the government treated them as imperial subjects. *Vremia* wanted an empire based on civic institutions; the government wanted one based on the army and

81. Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, 2:1368–78. Dostoevskii may have begun developing this notion as early as 1864, see Nechaeva, *Zhurnal “Epokha,”* 65–67.

82. Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, 2:1368–78, 1:234–40.

83. Ruttenburg, *Dostoevsky's Democracy*, 166.

84. *Ibid.*, 25.

the police. The Dostoevskii brothers understood this and retreated, likely prompted by some combination of a genuine change of heart and the pragmatics of practicing journalism in a repressive state. Even the censors found *Vremia's* successor, *Epokha*, anodyne, noting its rapprochement with the Slavophile *Den'* and Katkov's *Moskovskie vedomosti*—the very journals that brought *Vremia* down.⁸⁵

The experience of penal servitude in a multiethnic Siberian prison camp on the border with Central Asia no doubt prompted Dostoevskii to reflect on Russia's imperial course, just as a journey to Sakhalin later tempered Anton Chekhov's heady support of Russia's colonial mission.⁸⁶ While in Omsk, Dostoevskii gained firsthand experience of the phenomenon that Beth Holmgren has recently dubbed "the indigestible Pole."⁸⁷ In fact, *The House of the Dead*, which describes Polish inmates, offers additional evidence why *Vremia's* final issue, far from being a reckless editorial oversight, reflected Dostoevskii's own politics. This fictionalized autobiography suggests that Dostoevskii found the Russification of "indigestible" Poles doomed and not worth the effort. Of all ethnicities in the camp, the Poles most consistently fail all tests of national-imperial togetherness. The moment of their closest contact with the Russian people takes place during the Christmas theatricals, which harmonize all tensions and bring together representatives of all ethnic, political, and confessional factions. The theatricals scene in *The House of the Dead* and *Vremia's* last issue reinforce each other's message: only Russian culture and ideas can gain the hearts and minds of the minorities. Violence and oppression never will.

Indeed, Dostoevskii's descriptions of the Poles in *The House of the Dead* are less venomous than in his later fiction. The narrator often rationalizes the Poles' behavior, reminding his readers that their noble status and greater remove from their homeland call for understanding:

All of [the Poles] were morally ill [*bol'nye nraivstvenno*], bilious, irritable, and mistrustful. This is understandable: their lot was very hard, much harder than ours. They were far from their homeland. Some of them had long terms—ten, twenty years. And most importantly, they looked at the people who surrounded them with deep prejudice, seeing in the prisoners only brutality. They could not—did not even want to—see in them a single good trait, anything human. This too was understandable: this point of view was unfortunately forced on them by circumstances, by their fate. It was clear that melancholy [*toska*] was suffocating them.⁸⁸

85. Nechaeva, *Zhurnal "Epokha,"* 214. Nechaeva also notes numerous examples of *Epokha* endorsing these two journals' positions. Dolinin may be overstating his case, however, when he sees *Epokha* as proof that the Dostoevskii brothers joined Katkov's camp. Dolinin, "K tzenzurnoi," 2:561–62.

86. Edyta M. Bojanowska, "Chekhov's *The Duel*, or How to Colonize Responsibly," in Carol Apollonio and Angela Brintlinger, eds., *Chekhov for the 21st Century* (Bloomington, Ind., 2012).

87. Beth Holmgren, "Cataclysm, Nation, Self: An Endoscopy of Polish Lives" (paper, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, November 2009).

88. Dostoevskii, *Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma*, PSS, 4:209–10.

Dostoevskii also notes the Poles' instances of integrity and bravery. For example, he reports how one Polish convict carried in his arms a sick comrade during their long journey on foot between prisons.⁸⁹

Interestingly, the serialization of *The House of the Dead* offered Dostoevskii hints that the government was highly sensitive on the subject of Poland—hints that he nonetheless disregarded in 1863. The censors held back the chapter devoted to the Polish political prisoners (Part II, Chapter 8, "Companions"), which was published out of sequence half a year after the work's serialization ended.⁹⁰ Only one out of three editions of *The House of the Dead* during Dostoevskii's lifetime included it. It seems incredible that the description of the hell-like bathhouse or of the consumptive Russian prisoner dying in fetters—the episodes that truly shocked the Russian audience—seemed to the authorities less incendiary than the much less graphic descriptions of the mistreatment of Polish political prisoners. This shows that the state placed a high premium on its imperial commitment in Poland and on maintaining the Russian citizens' belief in the government's benevolent conduct toward its imperial subjects. Dostoevskii ignored this lesson and lost his first journal.

Nation, Empire, and *Vremia's* Final Issue

The scandal of *Vremia's* closing reminds us of the possible gaps with which the historical evidence records social mood. Herzen's London circle was not unique in opposing the government's repression of the Polish Uprising. It was merely unique in its freedom to voice this opposition. Public opinion about the Polish Uprising *within* the Russian empire may have been more varied than what can be seen from the press that was allowed to function. Nor was domestic discontent limited to the (silent) liberal faction. To oppose an expensive and repressive empire, the Dostoevskii brothers marshalled their critique from a moderate and nationalist position in line with the journal's philosophy of *pochvennichestvo*. Strakhov articulates reasons why Russia's disengagement from the Polish kingdom would make perfect sense. The entire issue harmonizes with this message and hazards sharp critiques of the government as well as proposals for restructuring the empire into a benevolent one based on the consent of the governed.

My analysis of *Vremia's* ill-fated final issue shows that the attitudes of the Russian intelligentsia toward the empire were very complicated. We need to attend to this complexity—in particular to the space between "for" and "against"—and to render it with more nuance. The interweaving of imperial questions with national ones also poses a challenge. Olga

89. The Poles whom Dostoevskii met in prison also left their impressions of him. See, for example, Szymon Tokarzewski, *Siedem lat Katorgi* (Warsaw, 1907). For an analysis of the Poles' accounts and for excerpts in English, see Elizabeth Blake, "Portraits of the Siberian Dostoevsky by Poles in 'The House of the Dead,'" *Dostoevsky Studies*, n.s. 10 (2006): 56–71.

90. It appeared in *Vremia*, no. 12 (1862): 235–49.

Maiorova's recent study traces a productive and highly diverse interplay of national and imperial discourses in Russian culture in the postreform era, a topic that has also generated much historical research.⁹¹ "A Fateful Question" and its journalistic convoy participate in this lively debate and yoke imperial concerns to national ones. *Vremia* argues that in its ruthless militaristic expansionism, the state belied core national ideals. An imperial policy more in tune with the spiritual values of the Russian nation (peace, tolerance, cultural diversity) would be more likely to secure a strong and lasting empire.⁹² *Vremia* chafes about the bloodstained and expensive empire, but it does not consider a cheaper one a bad idea at all. The journal's authors clearly distinguish between the government's conduct of imperial policy and the very idea of empire. While the former inspires *Vremia's* critique, the latter faces no objections. After all, Dostoevskii considered empire the best thing that Russia gained in its thousand years of history. The nationalists grouped around *Vremia* simply wanted a *different* empire: less costly and more sustainable. They also wanted ambitious imperial agendas to follow Russia's attainment of strong nationhood. Yet however one conceived it, the empire was the ultimate goal of Russian history for *Vremia*, for Dostoevskii, and for a vast majority of nineteenth-century Russians.⁹³

91. Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire*. Key historical studies of this topic include Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865* (Cambridge, Eng., 1999), and Bassin, "Geographies of Imperial Identity," in Dominic Lieven, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Eng., 2006), 45–63; Hosking, *Russia*; Miller, *Romanov Empire*, chap. 6; Renner, *Russischer Nationalismus*; Vera Tolz, *Russia: Inventing the Nation* (London, 2001). Theodore Weeks, "Slavdom, Civilization, Russification: Comments on Russia's World-Historical Mission, 1861–1878," *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2002): 223–48, and Weeks, *Nation and State*.

92. This is consistent with the position of A. F. Gil'ferding, another prominent voice on the Polish Question. For Gil'ferding the real harm of the January Uprising lay in its forcing the Russians to act in violation of their fundamental national values, such as tolerance, generosity, and respect for other cultures. See Weeks, "Slavdom," 231–32.

93. Mark Beissinger made this argument eloquently in his 2007 Presidential Address to the National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies: "The Persistence of Empire in Eurasia," *NewsNet* 48, no. 1 (2008): 1–8, also accessible in *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2008): 157–76.