

Title: Verisimilitude and the Golden Age in Dostoevsky
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In a little-noticed article from the *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky describes what he calls “The Golden Age in Your Pocket.” The phrase refers to his conviction that the “golden age” could be achieved in a single moment through a simple act of will. This viewpoint is just one half of Dostoevsky's ambiguous attitude toward the “golden age”; other pieces from the *Diary*, such as “The Utopian Understanding of History” or “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man,” suggest that universal human happiness is a hopeless mirage after all. The subject of my talk, then, will be the question of the attainability of the golden age in Dostoevsky's *Diary* and in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Scholars from A. S. Dolinin to Joseph Frank to Gary Saul Morson have noted the persistent golden age motif in Dostoevsky's work; my talk will propose that the most urgent aspect of this motif is the need to make it plausible. The texts I will analyze suggest that the achievement of the utopian vision depends on a mental shift in which the golden age becomes real as soon as we believe it is possible. I will argue that a main rhetorical aim of *The Brothers Karamazov* is to promote this shift, in other words to remold the reader's sense of verisimilitude in an effort to bring society closer to realizing the golden age. After discussing the *Diary* articles and showing how ideas from them are reiterated by several characters in *Karamazov*, I will focus on Dmitri as an accessible “entry point” to a Christian ideal that is anchored at its higher levels by Zosima and Alyosha. Although Dostoevsky's lofty vision never becomes fully plausible, I suggest that the effort to make it so exerts a determining effect on the novel.