

What is Fundamentally Wrong with the Underground Man?

CAS PH 248 Existentialism

The fundamental problem the Underground Man is plagued with is self-doubt and insecurity. This causes his self-destructive behavior and overall negative outlook on life as he states in Part 1 of Notes. His rejection of societal norms causes him to be torn between his rational, logical self and his irrational, emotional self, leading him to his constant skepticism. He also expresses feelings of isolation and low self-esteem, feeling that he doesn't fit in with the rest of society and is unable to find his place in the world. His inability to find this "place in the world," or his meaning in life, leaves him conflicted, and stuck in a state of indecision and inactivity, unable to make a meaningful impact on the world or find fulfillment in life. His feelings of self-doubt are further amplified by his repeated failures and disappointments in life, adding onto the isolation and introspection. Resulting in his general discontentment with life and ongoing existential dilemma.

The Underground Man identifies his skepticism and self-doubt as being "too conscious" and it causes him to think he is an intellectual. He feels that he is superior to others because of his deep and independent thinking, but at the same time he realizes that his intellectualism has not brought him any happiness or fulfillment. This creates a sense of disillusionment and frustration inside of him, leading him to question the value of his own thoughts and beliefs. His constant self-reflection, combined with his rejection of societal norms, gives him insecurity and uncertainty. He finds himself caught between his desire to be accepted and appreciated by society, and his need to maintain his individuality and intellectual integrity, referring to his "unique" view on the world. This heightened sense of consciousness leads him to feel a sense of frustration and isolation.

The inner conflict on his beliefs leads him to question his own identity and sense of self, causing him to constantly feel uncertain about who he is and where he belongs. He opens by saying, "I am a sick man... I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I think there is something wrong with my liver... But I don't want to talk about myself... I will tell you instead what I have done." (Chapter 1) This quote reflects the Underground Man's self-deprecating attitude and dissatisfaction with himself and his place in the world. He sees himself as a flawed and unpleasant person, unable to fit in with a community and feeling disconnected from others.

This introspection and self-hatred leads him to become uncertain about his own identity and place in the world, making him feel stuck and unable to make any meaningful decisions in life. As a result, he becomes increasingly passive and inactive, unable to make a meaningful impact on the world or find any fulfillment in life in general. The Underground Man's insecurity, self-doubt, and indecision form a vicious cycle, leaving him in a state of constant, bitter unhappiness.