Abhinav Suri

Rhetoric, Composition, and Literature—Period 6

Mrs. Williams-Eddy

20 March 2015

Underground Man Journal Pt. 2

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Quote** | **Analysis** |
| “And what if it so happens that *sometimes* human advantage not only can, but even must, lie precisely in the fact that under certain circumstances man desires what is bad for himself and not what is advantageous? And if this is so, if this circumstance is even possible, then the whole rule is blown to the wind” (Dostoevsky 22). | In this quote, the Underground Man once again questions the validity of rational egoism, asserting that man often yearns to do what is considered irrational and non-beneficial, contrary to the beliefs of rational egoists who affirm that a rational person will act according to self interest and that action will lead to whatever is best for the man. The Underground man utilizes the wind metaphor to indicate that the idea of rational egoism is something which is fleeting and temporary. Because people don’t desire what is often considered beneficial, their choices are not rational, contrary to the beliefs of rational egoists. |
| “You see, if at some stage it were calculated and proven to me that if I made an aggressive gesture at someone then it was for the very reason that I could not help making it, and that I was absolutely bound to make that particular gesture at him, what kind of *freedom* would I have left, especially if I’m learned and have studied science somewhere? You know I’d then be able to calculate the next thirty years of my life; in short, if they do work this out, there will be nothing we can do about it—we’ll have to accept it anyway” (Dostoevsky 28). | The Underground Man calls into question the fundamentals of determinism and how it suppresses the freedom of the individual. Through the use of the rhetorical question at the end of the quote, the Underground Man highlights that the idea of determinism leads to the suppression of the human soul and is not conducive to free thought. Here he is expressing an incompatibilist view (specifically hard determinism) whereby free will and determinism are not compatible, as evidenced by him stating that his actions have direct causality. The Underground Man laments the inability of man to maintain a sense of freedom under this mode of thought, the key flaw in the determinist theory. |
| “But I repeat to you for the hundredth time, there is only one instance, just one, when man may deliberately, consciously desire something injurious, foolish, even extremely foolish, namely: in order to *have the right* to desire even something foolish, and not to be bound by an obligation to desire only what is intelligent. You see, this very foolish thing is your caprice, and in actual fact, gentlemen, it can be more advantageous to us all than anything else on earth, especially on certain occasions” (Dostoevsky 29). | The Underground Man is criticizing the culture and mindset of the rational egoists in this quote as he asserts that it is nearly impossible to avoid acting against one’s self interests. According to the Underground Man, rational egoism theory places too much of a burden on the ordinary man who will inevitably find himself in a situation where he want to be foolish and irrational according to his own self interest. This quote counters the ideology of rational egoism, which affirms that people must act according to their self interests in a rational manner. This quote also highlights the theme of free will versus determinism as man cannot control his urges to be irrational. |