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Response Paper #2

After reading Notes from Underground (*Zapiski iz podpol'ya*) by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

The questions “What values are expressed in this novel? And Does it suggest any substitute values, or is everything completely false?” were made. In other words, the work seems to attack most values that people hold dear.

To begin answering these questions is necessary to have a little of the context of this novel. We need to know that the protagonist is the same as the narrator, the Underground Man. This is something we do not see often, especially exposing the life of the writer himself. The narrator speaks in the first person, describing his thoughts and feelings and narrating events that occurred sixteen years earlier in his life. This point of view of the book makes the reading a little more personal and at some points it makes us feel the same way that the protagonist is feeling. The major conflict is that The Underground Man rejects many of the values and assumptions of the society in which he lives, and this conflict often manifests itself in smaller, resentful conflicts between the Underground Man and other people who represent the problems he has with society.

The first section of the novel is told in the present tense. In the second half, the Underground Man narrates a long story from his past, telling this story in past tense with occasional present-tense commentary. The rising point of the novel is when the Underground Man's various attempts to interact with society, including his attempt to fight a duel, his bungled dinner with

four of his school acquaintances, and his attempts to rescue a prostitute, Liza, from her life of sin.

The man from the underground is a little strange, maybe crazy some people would say. The underground man describes himself as “a sick man, wicked man, and an unattractive man” but we see in the reading that he is also a well-read and highly intelligent man. We can also see a really important characteristic of this man through the reading on which we are going to be basing this paper. We see around the underground man that he feels miserable, depressed, and sad. He divides people into two categories: doers and thinkers. The underground man is in the second category of highly self-conscious thinkers and it is this very self-consciousness that makes him unable to act. We can see in this next part of the novel that he sees the self-consciousness as a disease:

“I swear to you, gentlemen, that being overly conscious is a disease, a genuine, full-fledged disease.”

The underground man continues talking and expressing himself but he says the main idea in that part of the text.

I think the values presented by the underground man are mostly negative and make us want to be better than what is presented in the novel. The act of judging other people is something that nobody should do. Everyone has problems and we address them differently. I think it is always good to be conscious of what we do and think. What thing this novel notes from underground mentions is that humans have free choice. This is true, we cannot do something without first deciding to do so.

“And, since all desires and reasons can be tabulated, since someday the laws of our so-called free choice are to be discovered, then, all joking aside, it may be possible to establish something like a table, so that we could desire according to it.”

Notes from underground give values that are very negative, dark, and of them cruel. The novel talks about how life can be difficult and filled with boredom and absurdity. If I am being honest sometimes it feels like it can be the truth. Especially when we feel in the routine, I can not talk about the adult part of life, but so far it feels like the work we do can be pointless and that we do not need it. As Christians, we have the hope of the second coming of Christ which gives us a purpose to keep fighting. Other people just fight for a better future for their families or future families. There is truth in this novel but it has to be seen from a different point of view. Purpose moves us, pushes us, and makes us what we are. It is like going to college, working harder than everyone else, and finally getting a diploma, the normal thing to do is leave and go do something out in the “real world” otherwise why would someone stay in college? We as humans have to be in constant movement, and when the underground man lost his purpose, he started being negative and a terrible person.

I think the underground man is reflecting what society is capable of and can turn down a good provenance man. Also, the underground man I think is a reflection of what we think or feel in one way or another. To explain this better, I will be using a really simple example. In comics, we all know the villain “The Joker”, he was a quote that explains all my points “All it takes is one bad day to reduce the sanest man alive to lunacy. That’s how far the world is from where I am. Just one day” and if the underground man had a bad day after another, well that might helps us understand him a bit more. The underground man hated himself, did things he knew were

wrong and he did not reach out to help others but was self-absorbed. Sadly, every person has these characteristics too. Humans are naturally sinners, we are free to choose whatever we want but unless we were taught to “behave” we will choose wrongly, and who knows, maybe our actions pushed somebody to certain key decisions in their lives. We need God to be better and positively influence people all the time. We are free but that does not mean our decisions are not going to have consequences. With God on our side, we will be making the best decisions possible with a very good outcome. The underground man did not have God to help him.

In summary, my answers to “What values are expressed in this novel? And Does it suggest any substitute values, or is everything completely false?” I think the values presented here are not others but the ones we have present in our lives. We all go through something similar or will go through something like that. But the values we have marked in our lives would shine through those circumstances. The underground man is a reflection of our bad moments, he is the result of modern society. We push each other in bad ways but also in good. We have the power to choose what we are going to do with our lives, do and think. The underground man’s values were completely false, if you ask me, they were complete and brutally honest. Those values were not appropriate but it was the way he was feeling. He was a smart guy, well educated and he was offered a position in the government but he did not want to do it. Just because we are good people, smart, or whatever does not mean that we have to do what everyone sees as good. We are free to choose whatever we want but the decisions we make are always better with God.

References

Notes from class

<https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/underground/facts/>

<https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/underground/summary/>