

The symbol of “Underground” in the *Notes from the Underground* by Dostoevsky

By

Asrafun Nahar Asha

ID: 18203010

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## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

## **Student's Full Name & Signature:**

Asrafun Nahar Asha, ID: 18203010

## Approval

The thesis titled “The symbol of “Underground” in the *Notes from the Underground* by Dostoevsky” submitted by Asrafun Nahar Asha, ID: 18203010 of Summer 2022 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts Examining Committee:

Examining Committee :

Supervisor:

(Member)

---

Professor Sayeed Noman

Assistant Professor

Department of English and Humanities

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Brac University

Departmental Head:

(Chair) \_\_\_\_\_

Professor Firdous Azim

Chairperson, Department of English and Humanities

BRAC University

## Abstract

This research paper is based on Dostoevsky's novella *Notes from the Underground* which represents the inner world of modern man. The nameless protagonist of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* is known as the Underground Man to many critics. This paper explores how this novella is a dialogic text and the setting of the novella depicted the mental turmoil of the character. Moreover, the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century of Russian society was predominant by different philosophies which were imposed by the authority of Russia. Russian common people were bound to follow those philosophies in their everyday life although these philosophies were taken from Europe. Among other philosophies Enlightenment and Existentialism were significant. Then, in this novella, the narrator writes from a different standpoint which depicts the psyche of the Underground Man. Therefore, the term "underground" symbolizes that the underground is not necessarily a place; it is rather a kind of inner mental state. This paper aims to demonstrate how imposing different philosophy by authority shapes the psyche of a modern man like the "underground man". Finally, by using Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this paper tries to show how his actions and behaviors are regulated by his psyche which is influenced by his life experience and philosophies imposed by authority.

## **Dedication**

To my beloved parents: Md. Samsul Islam and Abida Sultana.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* is considered as first Existentialist novel which is written in 1864. It shows the author's different fundamental views on ideologies through the protagonist of this novel as he looks at things from a different perspective. Moreover, most of his writing deals with human psychology. Similarly, *Notes from the Underground* also depicts the people's inner world. Then, this novel reflects Dostoevsky's life experience that he has gone through in his real life. In his writing, he tries to show the reality of the modern world through the character the Underground Man by asking many questions. Therefore, readers not only get the chance to know about the psyche of the main character but also the psyche of the author. During the lifetime of Dostoevsky, the government of Russia introduced different philosophical views to its citizen, and these philosophical views were taken from Europe though the economic condition and lifestyle were different in Russia. Because of that, those philosophical points of view were not fit for the common people of Russia. Therefore, Dostoevsky in this novella tries to demonstrate what can happen to the common people if they embrace the European philosophical view. Moreover, through the term "Underground" the author symbolizes the inner psyche of the unnamed protagonist the Underground Man.

### a. Background information on writing *Notes from the Underground*

Psychologist Fyodor Dostoevsky was born in 1821 in Moscow, Russia. His father was a doctor and he sent him to a boarding school which was St. Petersburg Academy of Military Engineering. From there he completed his graduation and started his writing. Dostoevsky in his writing mostly focused on the concept of human understanding and love. He did not discover or invented those concepts rather he experienced those things in his life. Moreover, his political

point of view was established from an early age when his father was killed by serfs. Then, in 1849, Dostoevsky was arrested as he joined a political group that illegally spreads socialist propaganda. Therefore, he spent four years in Siberia jail which changed his political view. There he found that upper-class Russian people were limited to the freedom of the common people of Russia by imposing different ideologies. These things influenced him while he was living in jail. Scholar N. Bryllion Fagin in his journal article “Dostoevsky's Underground Man Takes Over” addresses that “Dostoevsky in his youth was a member of a revolutionary circle and almost paid with his life for his membership; that episode, and his subsequent years of torture and exile in Siberia, ought to mitigate his political errors in later life” (24). Therefore, he introduced the problem of the modern man in Russian society in his novel *Notes from the Underground*.

Moreover, Dostoevsky stayed in Western Europe during the 1860s. There he was familiar with Enlightenment and other philosophical views reflected in *Notes from the Underground*. Then, in the 20th century, predominant concepts were utopianism and socialism. The Russian revolution was held during that time, and revolutionaries were influenced by those concepts. Similarly, many writers also wrote about utopianism in their writing. For instance, novelist Nikolay Chernyshevsky also wrote a novella about a utopian society. He wanted to create a society that would be dictated by absolute reason and this novella gives the message that if people follow those ideas they will get a utopian society. One of the scholars wrote in his article that:

The outstanding spokes man for the Russian radicals at this moment was Nicolai G.

Chernyshevsky, whose Utopian Novel *What Is to Be Done?* had appeared in the spring of

1863 and had caused a sensation. *Notes from Underground* was intended as an answer to *What Is to Be Done?* (Frank 2)

So, Nikolay Chernyshevsky in his utopian novel *What is to be done?* described that people can resolve problems if they follow the rules and regulations that were established by socialist philosophers. Therefore, *Notes from the Underground* was a reactionary novella of the novel *What is to be Done?* as *Dostoevsky* criticized Chernyshevsky's point of view in his novel.

Finally, the main reason for selecting *Notes from the Underground* as my research topic is that it describes the mental crisis of modern man. Because of materialism people are alienated from each other and live a robotic life. *Notes from the Underground* shows the significant issues that modern men face in their everyday life. Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on the different philosophical view and their impact on modern men's life. In short, this paper aims to intersect the psyche of the protagonist of *Notes from the Underground*.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

A research topic and questionnaires have been selected for the research paper titled “The symbol of “Underground” in the *Notes from the Underground* by Dostoevsky”. Based on the topic and questionnaires, I have collected data, and information from the existing narratives and literary works, and through those data, I have established my argument. This research paper aims to analyze how the settings of the novella reflect the inner psyche of the protagonist, the impact of imposing different philosophies on people which do not suit for every context or society, and how Sigmund Freud’s id, ego, and super-ego has reflected in this novel through the action of the Underground Man. Therefore, for a better understanding of these gaps, research has been done based on the historical background of this novella, and for critical analysis, I have done a close reading of my primary text. Following the historical background, this paper elaborates on study techniques, constraints, and data collecting. A literature review has been done for this ongoing research to seize the existing literature on my research study.

### a. Research questions:

My paper mainly poses the following questions:

1. Why *The Notes from the Underground* is a dialogic text?
2. How does the setting of the novella represent the mental state of the protagonist?
3. How did Enlightenment philosophy influence the Russian people and the Underground Man’s life?
4. How does Existentialism philosophy bring changes in the Underground Man and other people’s lives?
5. What does “Underground” symbolize in the novella *Notes from the Underground*?

Finally, to establish the argument, the primary source is closely analyzed. Moreover, some scholarly articles and books will be used as secondary sources, and a literature review of already existing literature that is related to this topic is provided. However, the application theory will be based on primary and secondary sources which will lead to answering the research questionnaires of this paper.

**b. Enlightenment Philosophy:**

Enlightenment Philosophy is a philosophical and intellectual movement that was initiated during the mid-late sixteenth century in Europe and later on spread to other places. Some of the prominent philosophers of Enlightenment philosophy are Adam Smith, John Lock, Emmanuel Kant, and others. This age is also known as the Age of Reason because of bringing progress in the world scientific method and the rising question has started to use as tools. Enlightenment philosophy introduced liberty and freedom of speech and religion. Therefore, this novella, *Notes from the Underground* is also set in Russian society which is also influenced by Enlightenment philosophy. The unnamed protagonist is also influenced by this philosophy. Therefore, he also misuses his liberty and power. He becomes a spiteful man and misbehaves with people.

**c. Existentialism Philosophy:**

Existentialism Philosophy is a philosophical movement that started in the nineteenth century. It was popularized after the World War by Jean-Paul Sartre. But different Existentialist philosophers have different points of view on describing Existentialism philosophy. This philosophy is mainly concerned with the meaning of life which emphasizes individuals' freedom,

choice, and existence. Moreover, from the perspective of Existentialism philosophy human life is “absurd” which means meaningless. But people can make their life meaningful by embracing them. Similarly, in the novella, we see that protagonist is suffering from anguish and facing an existential crisis. Then, he realizes the absurdity of his life and confesses this in his “notes”.

**d. Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory:**

Psychoanalysis theory can be referred to as a therapeutic approach and psychological ideas that initially originated from the thought, beliefs, and literary work of Sigmund Freud. He firstly talks about the unconscious mind and its influence on human behavior. The core idea of psychoanalysis is that people have emotions, desire, memories, unconscious, and thought. Moreover, Freud divided the human mind into three stages. The first one is unconscious which is outside of people’s awareness. Another is preconscious which refers that all information people are not aware of but after a certain time that can be recalled. The last one is consciousness which is the current state of awareness. The novella, *Notes from the Underground* can be analyzed from the lens of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. In the novella, the Underground man’s unconscious mind is creating inner turmoil as he has repressed emotions from childhood. He is suffering from a mental crisis as he was not able to relieve his traumatic childhood which is also influencing his conscious mind.

### Chapter 3: Literature Review

The main reason for my literature review is to demonstrate what the word “Underground” symbolizes in the novella *Notes from the Underground* and which factors shape the psyche of the underground man. According to Dostoevsky’s biography, he was born in 1821 in Moscow. His novella *Notes from the Underground* is widely recognized as the first existential work in literature. The protagonist of this novella is unnamed and he faces the harsh reality of life. “The novella consists of the confused, contradictory statements and confessions of his detachment from the society” (Choudhary 423). This novella pointed out that Enlightenment philosophy was betrayed by irrational killings, wars, injustice, and large-scale destructions which cause the failure of Humanism. The unnamed protagonist was the product of European knowledge. As a result, the Underground Man becomes the product of unsuccessful or failed Enlightenment. He spends most of his time reading books and tries to lead his life according to his bookish knowledge. Therefore, he always thought himself superior to others and failed to make any healthy relationships. Moreover, he did not know how to behave with others: there was always a contradiction between his action and his promises. Next, in the novella *Notes from the Underground*, the word “Underground” does not refer to a place. It symbolizes the unnamed protagonist’s inner mental state. In his “notes”, the protagonist writes about his inner torment and his thought. Though the narrator was “sick” and unreliable, readers have to rely on his narrative. There was no other option to know him without reading his “notes”. In his notes, he depicts his dilemma about how to become an individual human being in the world. Because of his dilemma, he faced an identity crisis and separation from society. But by making meaningful choices and shouldering the consequences, people get their authentic selves and freedom but the Underground Man fails.

First of all, in *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky gives the hint about the consequences of failed Enlightenment in people's life. In the essay "The Philosophy and Theology of Fyodor Dostoevsky", David J. Leigh examines how Dostoevsky's religious belief reflects on his writing. From the perspective of Leigh, Dostoevsky in his novella *Notes from Underground* attacks the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment philosophy, rationalistic utilitarianism, and scientific determinism. Moreover, Leigh claims that the Underground Man feels compelled because of the social and economic forces and becomes alienated from society. "Denying the forces of Enlightenment rationalism, he affirms human dignity to have free choices, even of the irrational" (Leigh 88). Therefore, he thinks that he can do whatever he wants as it is his free choice. Thus, this essay talks about the main ideologies of Enlightenment philosophy. Though this paper does not talk about the influence of these ideologies on Russian people's life, the paper titled "The symbol of the "Underground" in the *Notes from the Underground* by Dostoevsky" discusses the influence of Enlightenment philosophy on Russian people's life.

However, Dostoevsky in this novella criticizes the philosophers of Enlightenment. So in the article, "Enlightenment", first of all, the author states that in different states there were many Enlightenment thinkers. But they came under one umbrella of Enlightenment. Then he states that from Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant's perspective, Enlightenment philosophy guides people on how to act based on their intellectual understanding. Moreover, in this article author discusses how Enlightenment philosophy influences the belief in religion. Thus, this article helps me to understand the main goal of Enlightenment philosophers.



Moreover, this novella shows the readers how the protagonist was a blind follower of Enlightenment philosophers. The article “The enlightenment and its critics” is written by Michael a Peters. In this article, he briefly talks about “Historiography of the enlightenment” and “The dark side of the enlightenment”. The Enlightenment known as ‘The Age of Reason and Enlightenment can be divided into three stages. The first one is “Early Enlightenment” (1685–1730) and second one is the “High Enlightenment” (1730–1780) and the final one is “Late Enlightenment” (1780–1815). Successfully, in this article, the author talks about many philosophers' ideas about Enlightenment philosophy. Thus, this article highlights different aspects of Enlightenment philosophy which helped me to get into Enlightenment philosophy.

However, this novella depicts the characteristic of an Existentialist novella. The essay “Fyodor Dostoevsky: An Analysis of Existentialism within *Notes from the Underground*”, firstly discusses the Existentialism philosophy. He tells that Existentialism philosophy helps to create meaning in life and people have to take responsibility for their actions. To get the true essence of human life people should follow the Existentialism philosophy. Similarly, the Underground Man also struggles to make his identity and wants to get the true essence of life. Thus, this study helps me to show how Existentialism philosophy brings changes in human life.

Similarly, this novella deals with the Enlightenment philosophy and portrays the reason behind modern man’s alienation. In the text “The Underground Man as a representative of 19th century Russia”, Kumar Susil claims that the 21st century was a “market obsessed world” that leads people to separate from each other. Moreover, he said that to establish Underground Man’s free will he misbehaves with other people. Moreover, the Underground Man is influenced by

“the romantic ideas of European and Russian socialism”. So he tries to follow those ideas in practical life. Thus, Susil establishes the idea that the Underground man is representative of 19th-century Russia. So this study helps me to understand the reason behind 19th-century people’s rootlessness.

However, *Notes from the Underground* can be analyzed from psychoanalytic theory and shows the psychological conflicts of the Underground Man. The article “A Psychological Critical Analysis into Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*: The Underground Man as an Outsider” is written by Mohammed Al-Hiba and Dr. Ajay Tengse. In this article, they talk about “self” and “other”. In the novella *Notes from the Underground*, the Underground Man is not able to cope with the surroundings as he is too much conscious about “self” and “other”. “The self pushes him on towards a normal social contact with the people around him, whereas the other hinders his approaches and stands as an obstacle between his „self“ and the outside milieu” (Al-Hiba and Tengse 82). There is duality in himself; as a result, his action is different from his promise which made him an outsider. Moreover, they say that the Underground Man had not a good childhood and was alone which made him disturbed. He always tries to survive in society by his ability and faces "basic anxiety". Thus, he becomes an outcast in society. So this article helps me to understand the reason behind the Underground Man’s duality. His action gives evidence of his dual mind which leads him alienated from society.

Furthermore, *Notes from the Underground* depicts the existential crisis of the protagonist. So in the journal article, “Existentialist Stance in *Notes from Underground*”, the author claims that because of the “psychological turmoil of the characters”, they become alienated from

society. Similarly, the Underground Man questioned human existence and he expresses his frustration through bitter expressions. Finally, the author describes the Underground Man's mental condition. So this study helps me to understand the reason behind the alienation of the Underground Man from society.

Next, in this novella, we see that the consciousness of the Underground Man has a great impact on his action. The journal article "Consciousness, Ethics and Dostoevsky's Underground Man" is written by Tom Dolack. In this article, he talks about "the foundation of literature's moral efficacy is the very consciousness" (13). To establish his claim, he exemplifies Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and argues that in *Notes from the Underground* the protagonist is obsessed with his consciousness. Moreover, his over-consciousness becomes an obstacle for him to taking any action. When the Underground Man meets with his friend and Liza he wants to come out from his "underground". But his attempts fail to "over consciousness". So, this study gives an explicit idea about the Underground Man's over-consciousness and his actions.

Moreover, the article "Existentialism in *Notes from the Underground* through the Lens of Gita's Philosophical Discourse" is written by Mudita Choudhary, and Dr. Sucharita Sharma. In this article, they briefly talk about Existentialism. First of all, they say that Existentialism helps to get rid of people's identity crises. Then they say that in the novella *Notes from the Underground*, the protagonist faced inner conflict and pity for himself which creates unknown suffering for him. Moreover, *Notes from the Underground* portrays "the paradox of the human mind". Then, as the Underground Man fails to create any meaningful relationship, he remains

“underground”. However, the Underground Man thinks that “traditional social values have no basis and that human existence is essentially useless” (Choudhary 423). So he became alienated from society and thinks that he has no power to “act against the hypocrisy”. Similarly, his over-consciousness makes him inactive and he wants to take his place in the world. Meanwhile, in this article, they say that “Bhagwat Gita is a brilliant text in which this existential perspective is very deeply manifested” (426). Finally, they say that as long as people will not be able to make their own decision, they will face an existential crisis. Thus this study helps me to the reason behind peoples feeling of existential crisis.

In the essay “Socially Constructed Reality and Meaning in *Notes from the Underground*”, the author claims that society and the identity of a person depended on each other. To establish his claim, he uses Peter Berger’s model of “The Sacred Canopy”. From Peter Berger’s perspective, social reality is created by authority and other people accept or take it as real. Similarly, the Underground Man also in the first part of the novella rejects socially constructed reality. In the second part of the novella, the Underground man wants to live in this reality but he finds it meaningless. Thus, in this article, the author says that a human being gets meaning in life when he can establish himself as an individual. Moreover, in the essay “The Philosophy and Theology of Fyodor Dostoevsky”, the author does not give explicit reasons for how Enlightenment philosophy influences the Underground Man to separate him from society. On the other hand, in the text “The Underground Man as a representative of 19th century Russia”, Kumar Susil tries to justify the Underground Man’s rude behavior by telling that he is establishing himself. Similarly, in the text “A Psychological Critical Analysis into Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*: The Underground Man as an Outsider”, the author does not explain how the Underground Man

becomes a part of society and can adjust to his “other” and “self”. Moreover, in the journal article, “Existentialist Stance in *Notes from Underground*”, the authors do not mention how the Underground Man gets rid of existential crisis. Then, in the article “Existentialism in *Notes from the Underground* through the Lens of Gita’s Philosophical Discourse”, the authors do not explicitly tell what “underground” symbolizes in the novella *Notes from Underground*. Furthermore, in the essay “Socially Constructed Reality and Meaning in *Notes from Underground*”, the author does not mention in this article that because of failed Enlightenment philosophy the Underground man faced an identity crisis. However, in the article “The enlightenment and its critics”, the author does not give his own opinion about Enlightenment philosophy. He just exemplifies some critics’ ideas towards Enlightenment philosophy.

#### **a. Points of departure**

As examined above, most of the sources focus on a) the philosophical views of Russian society, b) the reason behind the alienation of the Underground Man from the society c) talks about the conscious, unconscious and, duality of the Underground Man d) Why does the Underground Man face an existential crisis? Based on my review of these sources, the gap in the literature that I identified is a) How does the setting of the novella reflect the inner psyche of the protagonist? b) How does dialogism help to demonstrate the standpoint of the Underground Man c) How does the Underground Man can resolve his existential crisis? d) How do Sigmund Freud’s id, ego and, super-ego reflect through the action of the Underground Man? This gap, as my research question asks: a) author uses dialogism in the novella *Notes from the Underground* to show the different stand point of the Underground Man b) settings reflect the inner psyche of the Underground Man c) Enlightenment philosophy destroyed individual existence of Russian

people d) by making choices and taking his own decision the Underground Man can make his life meaningful e) “Underground” symbolizes the inner psyche of the protagonist will be addressed by this research. Finally, I have not found any paper that talk about the influence of different philosophies on Russian society in a single paper. Through analyzing the prominent philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, this paper will show how these philosophies have a great impact on shaping the psyche of modern man. Therefore, my main concern in this paper is to show the impact of imposing different philosophies on people which do not suitable for every context or society. Though it is not possible to fill up all the gaps in existing literary work, my paper will try address to fulfill those limitations.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

Dostoevsky was known as one of the greatest novelists in the world of literature. He was considered one of the first Existentialist writers and *Notes from the underground* is considered one of the first novels written based on Existentialism which was published in 1864. The protagonist of the novella was unnamed and lived in Russian society. As the situation of Russia was not good and poverty was there, the authority of Russia thought to bring changes in the society by borrowing the Enlightenment philosophy of Europe and America. As a result, Enlightenment philosophy influenced the Russian people and the protagonist of this novella. They lost their individualism and authentic self. So through this novella, Dostoevsky pointed out the faults of Enlightenment philosophy. Moreover, the unnamed protagonist wrote about his life experience in notes which reflects his inner psyche, not a place. Moreover, the Underground Man and other people of Russia faced existential crises. Therefore, *Notes from the Underground* as dialogic text represented the mental condition of the protagonist. Moreover, Enlightenment philosophy had created an immense impact on the Russian people and the Underground Man's life as it destroyed their individualism. Then, in the novella, *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky criticized Enlightenment philosophy through the character of the Underground Man as he faced an identity crisis, and the term “underground” symbolized the protagonist’s inner psyche.

### a. The setting of *Notes from the Underground*

Nineteenth-century St. Petersburg city is the setting of *Notes from the Underground* which is situated in Russia. It is an urban situation and the environment is congested. To describe the environment of *Notes from the Underground*, scholar E. Matlaw claims in his journal article, “In

the Notes, in Petersburg, it is yellow, dingy, wet, unpleasant, troublesome; Dostoevsky uses it for maximum symbolic effect. The narrator at the outset admits that the Petersburg climate is bad for him,” (E. Matlaw 107). Through the description, we can understand that the environment of Petersburg is suffocating which is not an appropriate environment for the Underground Man to lead a healthy life. Moreover, the setting is shown in two ways, one is unbearably hot and another is cold, moderate weather is absent in this novella. In moderate weather, people can enjoy and talk to each other. Therefore, in this environment, people cannot re-energize themselves by going outside. Similarly, when Dostoevsky was in exile in Siberia, he was facing the same situation. When people live in this congested and suffocating environment, he needs to go outside for enjoying nature and fresh air. But this only can be possible when people feel relief within themselves; external reality becomes soothing only when the character feels happiness internally. When a person is a relief from the inside, he will find nature soothing beautiful and positive rather nature is going to reflect inner turmoil and inner crisis. A similar thing happens to the Underground Man: he does not go outside and lives in an ugly, stinky place and feels anguish. Therefore, to describe the setting of the novella author said, “There in its nasty, stinking, underground home our insulted, crushed and ridiculed mouse promptly becomes absorbed in cold, malignant and, above all, everlasting spite” (Dostoevsky 14). So, in this environment, normal life is kind of impossible. Even his family life is also dysfunctional and in this situation, people hardly enjoy a proper meal or maintain regular sleeping hours. Moreover, the Underground Man was not able to adjust to the environment as it was not suitable for him. Thus, the setting of the novella is trying to demonstrate the Underground Man’s mental situation, inner feelings, and turmoil.



### b. **Dialogism in *Notes from the Underground***

The literary term dialogism is coined by Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. Dialogism refers to the use of different voices and tones which are sometimes contradictory to each other and sometimes similar to each other. The first time in early 1920, Bakhtin discovered that Dostoevsky's works are highly dialogic while he was researching Dostoevsky. According to Bakhtin, the characters of Dostoevsky are independent which means they are very free and highly conscious, and they look at one thing from multiple perspectives. These characteristics are also found in the Underground Man. He will talk about the phenomenon from different perspectives and these features made readers completely perplexed. For instance, in the novella, the Underground man said that "I am a sick man. ... I am a spiteful man" (Dostoevsky 3). In the next point, he gives contradictory thoughts and said that he is not a spiteful person. Thus, this character is very unpredictable as it is tough to predict what he is going to do in the next moment.

Another significant feature of this character is that the character speaks for own self. For example, he is the narrator of his notes and talks from his point of view. This fact makes the readers engage more with the characters and less with the narrative and within a very short time after reading the text readers don't care about the author who started this; he becomes non-existent. As a result, readers get more engaged in dialogue with the character, and the reader's response to the question is very much direct which is addressed by Bakhtin. From the perspective of Bakhtin, "In the confession of the Underground Man what strikes us first of all is its extreme

and acute diazotization: there is literally not a single monologically firm, undissociated word” (Bakhtin 227). Moreover, the protagonist of *Notes from the Underground* is an imaginary character who addresses an imaginary audience. He addresses an imaginary audience and asks several questions. He expects answers for this when these answers are asked readers had acted to participate in a kind of dialogue with the imaginary character as a result this makes these notes dialogic. Moreover, he shares some personal ideas that are not properly organized and not properly developed. Therefore, this text can consider a dialogic text as it helps to analyze the psyche of the Underground Man by showing the different points of view of the protagonist.

### **c. Enlightenment philosophy in the *Notes from the Underground***

The 18th century’s European society is characterized by the “Age of reason” or the age of Enlightenment which is defined as the age of philosophical, political, and rigorous scientific discourse. One of the scholars John Delanty writes in his journal article titled “The Enlightenment” that “The Enlightenment is often considered to be the epitome of European civilization and the birthplace of modernity” (149). So in the Enlightenment age people were seeking knowledge and tried to explore the knowledge. They had the interest to know about new things and matters. Moreover, German philosopher Emmanuel Kant is one of the prominent Enlightenment thinkers. One of the scholars addresses in his journal that:

Kant identifies enlightenment with the process of undertaking to think for oneself, to employ and rely on one’s intellectual capacities in determining what to believe and how to act. Enlightenment philosophers from across the geographical and temporal spectrum tend to have a great deal of confidence in humanity’s intellectual powers, both to achieve

systematic knowledge of nature and to serve as an authoritative guide in practical life.

(Bristow 1)

So, from Kant's perspective, people should use their intellect for acquiring knowledge; their actions should depend on their understanding of life. Other Enlightenment philosopher's also emphasized using people's intellectual for understanding life. Thus, there was an immense change in thought and reason in society. As they were interested in scientific knowledge and "individualism" they made their mode and style of thought. Moreover, the beginning of the Enlightenment age was the 17th century and the precursors are Thomas Hobbes, Francis Bacon, and the key natural philosophers of the "Scientific Revolution" such as Johannes Kepler, and Galileo Galilei. Enlightenment philosopher John Lock claimed that knowledge should be achieved by different experiences of life, not conventional beliefs. However, every Enlightenment philosopher has a different opinion from each other. For instance, a human being is destined to do always good things; it's like a human being is not capable of doing bad things. People are inherently good. Dostoevsky shows that despite being in a society like Russia or having the knowledge of Enlightenment, the Underground Man was doing negative or bad things. First of all, he was suffering from toothache and did not go to a doctor for his treatment. As textual evidence, the Underground Man says that "I don't consult a doctor for it, and never have, though I have a respect for medicine and doctors" (Dostoevsky 3). So his behaviors go against the Enlightenment philosophy. His action does not prove that he is inherently good. Moreover, there is hatred for other people within himself. He always tries to take revenge on other people. In the novella, we find that the Underground Man had a fight with an officer but he has not forgotten that incident and always tries to take revenge on him. As evidence from the novella, Underground Man says that:

I often met that officer afterward in the street and noticed him very carefully. I am not quite sure whether he recognised me, I imagine not; I judge from certain signs. But I—I stared at him with spite and hatred and so it went on ... for several years! My resentment grew even deeper with years. At first I began making stealthy inquiries about this officer. (Dostoevsky 65)

So here Dostoevsky gives evidence to the readers that people are not inherently good. There is hatred within them and their negative actions are evidence of their evil thoughts. Thus, through this novel, Dostoevsky is criticizing different philosophies of Enlightenment and pointed out that Enlightenment philosophy is not suitable for the Underground Man.

Moreover, according to Enlightenment, everything has to be reasonable and for every action, there should be a reason behind it. The Authority of Russian society also wanted to build Russia according to Enlightenment. From the perspective of scholar C. Beardsley, “It is this culture, with its view of human nature as "eco- nomic man " and as governed by reason, with its emphasis on money as the basis of human relations, with its attempt to build society on "enlightened self-interest"” (280). But everything in our world is not materialistic. People’s human psyche is not materialistic and through reason, we cannot be able to explain people’s minds. We have to think beyond the logic and reason of every action of a human being. Thus, many prominent philosophers created different ideologies and imposed them on ordinary people. They think of themselves as superiors, intelligent, and have the right to impose their philosophy on other ordinary people. So it makes confusions within ordinary people about which philosophy should they follow.

Then, most of the Russian people were uneducated and poor. So authorities thought to bring changes and come up with the concept of “socialism” and imposed it on lower-class people. The state will decide what is good or bad for individual Russian people and the individual will not have the right to interfere in the decision of authorities. But Dostoevsky was against this rule and philosophy because he thought that it will not bring any positive change in society. There is no way to flourish an individual’s personality. Though Enlightenment philosophy talks about freedom, free will, development, and reasons among them, individualism is lost. Moreover, the American and French Revolutions significantly influenced the Russian upper class. Therefore, they were trying to make changes not merging with the Russian society but with other countries. They were borrowing the idea from continental Europe and tried to apply it to their social and political reality. So Dostoevsky believed that you cannot live based on others' philosophy because their social structure is different from European or American society. One of the scholars named M. Khrapchenko wrote in his article that:

The work of Dostoevsky encompasses many complex conflicts and phenomena that were typical of the Russian society of the nineteenth century. Reflected in it are the characteristic features of its feudal and serf-owning structure and the conflict between the differing social aspiration to be seen in Russia and the period when the bourgeois system was developing apace.... But his main concern was to show the general outline of the life of men, not so much the eternal realities of changing conditions in everyday life as social conflicts and important features in human relations and in man’s psychology. (366)

So borrowing knowledge cannot help people to understand their life rather it destroyed human life. Similarly, Western European culture imitated the 19th-century people of Russia. When the Russian people followed the philosophy of Germany and America, they were known as educated

people. As a result, the Underground man also thought of himself as an educated person as he followed the philosophy of America and other countries. For instance, at that time, in literature “the theme of the redeemed prostitute” was popular. The theme of the redeemed prostitute focuses on the story of saving the prostitute from their miserable life. Similarly, in the novella *Notes from the Underground*, we see that the Underground Man also tells Liza that he will save her from her miserable life. Therefore, he invites Liza to his flat. He wants to save Liza as he follows the ideologies of American literature and his understanding of life was based on bookish knowledge. But he did not save Liza from his painful life. “When she does indeed make her appearance, three or four days later, the underground man confesses with rude annoyance that he has nothing to offer her and cannot live up to his heroic pretence as a would-be, romantic rescuer” (W. Astell 190). Here we can see that in real life all those American ideologies do not work as real life is different from bookish knowledge. As a result, he becomes an unreliable narrator. So we can understand that 19th-century people’s life and the Underground Man's were greatly affected by the Enlightenment philosophy and it was not suitable in real life.

#### **d. Influence of Existentialism philosophy**

The novella *Notes from the Underground* is associated with the century of 19th when men were trapped by consumerism and capitalism. As a result, the problem of fundamentalism, sharp economic inequalities, and unemployment were growing day by day. Moreover, for the use of modern weapons in wars, greed for power created the scenario worst. When people saw the destruction of World War II, they faced an existential crisis. People lost their faith in God as God did not stop the War. It made them believe that there is no God and anyone will not help them in death and destruction. Therefore, they became alienated from each other and became rootless.

Moreover, according to Nihilism philosophy, this external world is meaningless; while living in this life, people will get nothing meaningful. Therefore, to solve these problems some scholars came out with new philosophy which is Existentialism. Existentialist philosophy brings changes in people's lives through their ideologies. They claim that people should convert this meaningless life with meaning.

Existentialism emphasizes human existence. It was originated by Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) in the nineteenth century. His books *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and *Simone de Beauvoir*, Albert Camus and Kafka from the atheistic point of view... They challenge and negate preconceived beliefs and life is incapable of being described in its essential nature. The previous philosophers used to explain life in this manner. Jean-Paul Sartre provides new vistas to existentialism through his novels, plays and philosophical writings. (Sushil 11)

So existentialism philosophy tells us that there is no meaning in human life. But a human can make it meaningful through their actions based on calculated choices. Every material thing in this world has its essence. People have made rational decisions while living in this external irrational world. It deals with the existence, conscious state of the human psyche, and function of man in the external world. It is more concerned with human existence. Therefore, they ask questions like- What am I? Who am I? How should I live it? While this entire question comes in people face an existential crisis and find no reason to live in this life. This is the emphasis on an individual's freedom, free will, and choices. So according to Existentialism philosophy, while people will be able to make their own decision without any influence, they will be able to get the true essence of human life. Moreover, he will not be able to blame other people for the result of

an action. One should take responsibility for his action. Through their life experience, they will be able to make their life meaningful.

Similarly, the protagonist of *Notes from the Underground* feels an identity crisis in Russian society for socialism. People's life is regulated by authority as a result human lost their essence. So, to achieve individuality, he demonstrates his free will which was not accepted by society, and becomes isolated from the people. Gradually he becomes rootless.

The underground man instead of transforming him-self prefers to live in isolation. He has to suffer and comes across topsy-turvy situation in search of meaning of life. He is free to fulfill his natural desires and he takes pleasure in whatever he does or wants to do. He can sleep as long as he wants. But at the same time, he does not accept the establish authority.

Conformity with authority is like a kind of slavery to him. (Sushil 26)

As a result, he was not able to adjust to the reality of society; he was making distance from others. He was making distance from himself in search of meaning in this absurd world. He even did not realize to find out his authentic self, he was lost in his world which leads him to isolation. Moreover,

The underground man's self-hatred is the construct of his existentialist crisis. .... In reality he is isolated not only from the outer world but also from himself. The underground man is unnamed and faceless person who is living in absolute anonymity. He is the representative of a person who is suffering from inertia and society does not support such kind of persons. The underground man experiences the feeling of paranoia due to his existentialist self-hatred attitude. (Sushil 36)



He could have overcome all those burdens by accepting love. By showing love to Liza, he could have been able to bring her back. Though he had the option, he did not do that. Liza had the potential to open his heart and could have saved him from the anguished feeling of nothingness. But he just pulls her out from his apartment and he does this from his ego. As a result, of the existentialist crisis, the Underground Man becomes alienated from society. However, when people will be making a difference between “self” and “other”, they will feel alienated. Mohammed Al-Hiba and Dr. Ajay Tengse wrote in their article that:

The underground man is too conscious of his „self“ and the „other“ so much so that he fails to adapt himself to his surroundings. The self pushes him on towards a normal social contact with the people around him, „self“ and the outside milieu. This conflicting contradiction and paradox has been the prevailing and dominant disposition of the underground man in his relations with the outside world. It has, as a result, made him an outsider to the people and environment around him (82).

So, if people want to become good human beings, people have to get rid of the capital letter “I”. When people will drive their egos out, they will be able to see their life from a different dimension. They have to love other people unconditionally. When people will not expect anything from others and help them at that moment people can love people unconditionally, they can become free and this is an existentialist approach to life. Thus, embracing the Existentialism philosophy can bring changes in their life.

#### **e. Symbol of “Underground” in the novella**

Some of the critics called the protagonist of the *Notes from the Underground* “Underground Man”. When we hear the word “underground”, the first thing that comes to our mind is that “underground” is a place. But when a reader started to read the novella

we realize that the underground is not a place rather it is the psyche of the Underground Man as he talks about himself. The underground is a created space and it is a symbolic space. This place symbolizes the internal conflict and the internal crisis that human being undergoes and faces in their life. People's psyche regulated the people and all their emotions remain in their psyche. Therefore, Dostoevsky explores the degrees of the suffering of a human being and with it explores the various dimensions of human existence. In *Notes from the Underground* protagonist, the Underground Man talks about his life experience. From childhood he did not have any family members, as a result, there was no one to listen to him. Therefore, he suffered a lot and those incidents were repressed in his mind. In his notes, he expresses this thought and psyche.

Next, scholar Joseph Frank claims that “one or the other of the work’s two main aspects....text cannot be properly understood” if one does not understand the psyche of the underground man” (310). So here Frank says that as this novella is written in the first-person narrative, it is quite difficult to understand or think about. To understand him, the reader should analyze his psyche. As the protagonist is brought up in Russian society, he becomes the product of that society. The Underground Man is the main victim of his surroundings and environment. From his childhood, he is suffering as his school life experience was not good. Moreover, as a clerk, his professional life was also devastating and his external life was also not beautiful or cherished. As a result, he moves inward to his inner “psychological word”. His childhood memories give him pain and the memory of school also gives him horrific trauma throughout his life. Therefore, the Underground Man writes in his notes that:

That night I had the most hideous dreams. No wonder; all the evening I had been oppressed by memories of my miserable days at school, and I could not shake them off. I was sent to the school by distant relations, upon whom I was dependent and of whom I have heard..... I could not give in to them with the ignoble readiness with which they gave in to one another. I hated them from the first, and shut myself away from everyone in timid, wounded and disproportionate pride. Their coarseness revolted me.

(Dostoevsky 85)

So here we see that in his notes he writes about his feeling and haunting fear. There is no one to hear his feelings and pain. Moreover, from his childhood, there was no one whom he can trust. All his bad experiences of childhood shape his inner psyche and make him the Underground Man. From his childhood, he has kept all his sorrow within his inner psyche. Gradually, when he was grown up his pain also increased. But there was a need for someone with whom he can share. But in childhood, he finds no one and got hatred from other people as a result his inner psyche is consisting of all of his repressed emotions. When he meets Liza, he tells about his childhood experience. For instance, he says:

See, Liza, I will tell you about myself. If I had had a home from childhood, I shouldn't be what I am now. I often think that. However bad it may be at home, anyway they are your father and mother, and not enemies, strangers. Once a year at least, they'll show their love of you. Anyway, you know you are at home. I grew up without a home; and perhaps that's why I've turned so ... unfeeling. (Dostoevsky 120)

So here readers realize that the Underground Man grew up without a home or warm family members. He tries to make understand to the readers how his inner psyche is built up. Because of his bad experience in life, there is a contradiction of claims and thoughts. Therefore, as a narrator

he is unreliable. Moreover, when he meets prostitute Liza, he tries to open his heart and tries to share his thoughts. But his attempts fail as he also cannot relay to anyone. “Underground man’s interaction to people gives him joy but at the same time tear him down, which is why he chooses to be underground” (Mudita and Dr. Sucharita 423). His unreliable inner psyche reflects on his notes and inaction and throughout the novella, the reader tries to understand his reason for being underground. So basically, the novella “Underground” symbolizes the protagonist's inner psychology rather than a place, and his psyche is built by the failed philosophy of Russian society.

#### **f. Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory applying**

As a reader, if we want to understand the psyche of the Underground Man, we can analyze it through Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis as it deals with human emotions. The main character of *Notes from the Underground* is a confused and unreliable narrator. He switches one idea to another rapidly which shows his mental disturbances. He admits that he needs treatment to recover from his mental illness. Therefore, this novel can be analyzed from Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory as it helps to understand the inner psyche of a human being.

Psychoanalysis is defined as the method of psychological therapy originated by Sigmund Freud in which free association, dream interpretation, and analysis of resistance and transference are used to explore repressed or unconscious impulses, anxieties, and internal conflicts, in order to free psychic energy for mature love and work. (Cuddon 184)

For many years, doctors and psychologists are using Psychoanalysis to understand the mind of people and for their mental treatment. Psychoanalysis works with people’s repressed emotions, fear, guilt, unexpressed thought, and anxiety. Similarly, in this novella, we also see different

kinds of emotions. Throughout the novella, readers try to understand the Underground Man's inner psychology. Moreover, psychoanalysis helps to understand what is happening in the Underground Man's mind and why he is behaving differently. However,

Freud's theories about psychoanalysis are somehow concerned with the nature of the unconscious. Unconscious has the function of being a store for the past memories and traumatic childhood events that have an impact on our unconscious thought and behavior. Repressed feelings, memories, forbidden desires are generally about childhood abuse and sexual harassment. Such problems are kept in the level of unconscious and later can have serious impacts on a person's mental and psychological conditions. (Isaoglu 8-9)

Most works of Freud are based on the notion of unconsciousness which is also part of our mind but beyond our consciousness and "influences" people's actions. He did not "discover" people's unconsciousness but explained how unconsciousness influences people's lives. His uniqueness lies in his attitude toward such decisive roles in our lives but linked with this and this is the idea of repression which is the forgetting or ignoring unresolved conflicts or traumatic past. This happens when we often repress a lot of emotions and thoughts, then those emotions go into another part of our mind which is unconsciousness, and even if those are buried in people's minds; those buried emotions play a significant role to determine people's actions. So here in the novella *Notes from the Underground*, similar things happen with Underground Man. He has no control over his mind. His conflicts with the unconscious mind are reflected in his action or work. In this novella, we find that he gives knowledge about consciousness and unconsciousness. For example, in this novella, the Underground man says to his imagined audience that:

I want now to tell you, gentlemen, whether you care to hear it or not, why I could not even become an insect.....(There are intentional and unintentional towns.) It would have

been quite enough, for instance, to have the consciousness by which all so-called direct persons and men of the action live. I bet you think I am writing all this from affectation, to be witty at the expense of men of action; and what is more, that from ill-bred affectation, I am clanking a sword like my officer. (Dostoevsky 7)

Then, in the novella, the Underground Man is not aware of how his unconscious mind is controlling his action. We find a contradiction in his thoughts and actions. His childhood was not beautiful or ideal as he has gone through a lot of trauma in his life and all his pain was repressed within his mind. He was not able to adjust to the materialistic world which was dictated by the failed philosophies. There was no one with whom he can share his pain or happiness. Those pains were gradually repressed in his mind which is his unconsciousness and his actions were regulated by his unconscious mind. Moreover, he was frustrated by his surroundings and makes the distance from other people. Furthermore, the Underground Man did not go to any doctor when he had a toothache and he finds enjoyment in it. So Underground Man says that “‘Well, even in toothache there is enjoyment,’ I answer. I had toothache for a whole month and I know there is” (Dostoevsky 18). So according to Freud, enjoying the pain and avoiding consulting with a doctor can be “self-punishment” for the Underground Man. He has the option to reduce his pain but he is not doing it because his unconscious mind controls him and gives himself punishment as he follows the Enlightenment philosophy that teaches him liberty.

Moreover, according to Sigmund Freud, people’s personalities or psyche can be divided into three parts. The first one is id-the unconscious which is the pleasure principle. “The id is the part of the personality, which includes our primitive impulses; such as anger, hunger, and hatred. As for Freud, the id is something natural and we were born with these primitive and natural

impulses” (Isaoglu 10). In this novella, the Underground Man always misbehaves with others and finds pleasure which reflects his id. He unconsciously does wrong with others and tries to demonstrate his free will. For instance, he says that “I have been going on like that for a long time—twenty years. Now I am forty. I used to be in the government service, but am no longer. I was a spiteful official. I was rude and took pleasure in being so” (Dostoevsky 3). Here we can see that the Underground Man himself is admitting his bad deeds. Moreover, he insulted unconsciously prostitute Liza as she came to his flat. So Underground Man’s this kind of rude behavior shows his hatred for people and this hatred grew within him unconsciously which reflects in his behaviors.

Then, the second one is ego- the preconscious which is the reality principle. “The Ego is both conscious and unconscious: in that fact lays the explanation for the conflict between instinctual pleasure and reality which takes place within it” (Hoffman 25). So when the Underground Man feels that he is alienated from society and faces the reality, he tries to make good relationships with other people. For example, when the Underground Man insulted Liza because of his id, Liza cries and goes back. But he feels guilty for his action and tries to bring back Liza. As evidence from the text, the Underground Man says that” ‘Liza! Liza!’ I cried on the stairs, but in a low voice, not boldly. There was no answer, but I fancied I heard her footsteps, lower down on the stairs. ‘Liza!’ I cried, more loudly” (Dostoevsky 163). Here, we can see that he wanted to make his existence in this society by making choices and wanting to embrace love. So the Underground Man’s this action reflects his “ego” and this action he does with pre-consciousness.

Finally, the third part of the human psyche is the superego-the conscious morality principle which is based on morals and values. When people realize his faults and admit them he does not give priority to his pleasure but rather concentrates on his bad deeds. So Jackson said that the superego is: “A third major component – corresponding roughly to conscience – is the superego. This consists of social, and in particular parental, standards in projected into the mind. The superego is partly unconscious: it issues blind commands, just as the id issues blind desires, and produces feelings of guilt when its commands are disobeyed” (Jackson 49). Similarly, in the last part of the novella we find that protagonist the Underground Man is feeling guilt and through his “notes”, he is admitting his faults. He has realized how badly he behaves toward others and has broken people’s hearts. As a result, he says that:

I believe I made a mistake in beginning to write them, anyway I have felt ashamed all the time I’ve been writing this story; so it’s hardly literature so much as a corrective punishment. Why, to tell long stories, showing how I have spoiled my life through morally rotting in my corner, through lack of fitting environment, through divorce from real life, and rankling spite in my underground world. (Dostoevsky 166)

So, his repents of guilt come from his superego-the conscious morality principle. His action of admitting faults reflects his superego. Therefore, we can understand that the psyche of the Underground Man is regulated by the imposing philosophies of Russian society. If those philosophies were not introduced into Russian society, his childhood maybe would not like this. His understanding would not be from bookish knowledge but rather from real-life experience and he would not waste his life by over thinking.





## Chapter 5: Conclusion

To sum up, *Notes from the Underground* is a dialogic text in which the setting demonstrates the mental crisis of the unnamed character. Then, the betrayal of Enlightenment philosophers causes the failure of Humanism, so by embracing Existentialism, people get their meaning of life.

Moreover, the underground symbolizes the protagonist's inner conflicts. This is a masterpiece novella in world literature. It represents explicitly the devastated condition of modern man and

“*The Notes from the Underground* is an existentialist stance, as it develops a way of thinking about the fundamentals of one’s being, raises questions of existence. It also exposes ennui,

inactivity, intellectual and moral vacillation and incongruity” (Badgular 493). Finally, the

authority should think practically before imposing any philosophy on society as every

philosophy is not suitable for its citizen. Failed philosophy can make another modern man like

the Underground Man.

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