Notes from the Underground Study Guide

Notes from the Underground by Fyodor Dostoevsky

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Notes from the Underground is a self-portrait of a man who calls himself an "antihero." He is never named but writes in first person his views on several issues ranging from free will to man's ability to make intelligent decisions. He then turns to some events in his own life. Fyodor Dostoevsky makes a note at the beginning of the book that the notes and the writer are fictional. He does, however, note that such a person must exist because the current social climate is such that there's no way he couldn't exist. This fictitious author often makes a particular point, then argues as if the reader were submitting objections, then answers. All the while, he insists that he never intends for anyone to read the notes, but writes as if he's writing to an audience. He does say that it's simply a literary device and that it is simply easier for him to write in this fashion.

The writer tells of two incidents in his personal life—encounters with an officer and a prostitute—that were important to him. He meets the officer by chance in a social situation and feels the officer, by pushing past him, had humiliated him. He spends years working on a way to retaliate. He imagines all sorts of encounters and finally borrows enough money to replace the fur collar on his coat. He feels his appearance in the situation he's planning is important. He meets the man on a walkway frequented by many of the day. The author doesn't step out of the officer's way and they bump shoulders. The author feels that he's vindicated and the officer seems never to have known that anything of importance occurred.

The writer spends an evening with friends at a restaurant, though they clearly don't like him and don't want him there. He remains and admits that he does such things out of spite. He then follows them to a brothel, though he has to borrow the money to go there. He is so angry that he says he plans to challenge one of the men to a duel, but they have already disappeared into the various rooms with women. The author has an encounter and then is angry for having allowed it to happen. He rants at her, telling her that she'll grow old and despised quickly and that she should get out of the business. On a whim, he gives her his address and spends the following days worrying that she'll show up. When she does, they have another sexual encounter, though on his part it's revenge because she's seen him in his poverty. She leaves and he considers going after her, but feels he couldn't make her happy because he himself is not happy. He then ends his notes.

Part I: Chapters I and II

Part I: Chapters I and II Summary

The book begins with a note from Dostoevsky himself saying that the notes and the writer are fictional. He does, however, say that the person writing the notes must exist in the society of his day simply because of the circumstances of society itself. He then says that the person is of the "recent past", and that the text of this book is an attempt to bring out the reasons for his actions and to make it clear why he was "bound to appear in our midst". From this point, the "author", or "writer", of this text is that fictional character claimed by Dostoevsky.

The author begins with the statement that he's sick, spiteful and unattractive, and that his "liver hurts". He says it might be something other than his liver but he refuses to see a doctor out of spite, though he's not certain who is being injured by that show of spite. The author was once in the civil service and says that he was mean simply because he was honest. Because he couldn't take a bribe, he allowed himself to be mean. On the occasion when someone showed a kindness—"some tea with a bit of sugar"—he'd calm down and later be angry with himself for it. After weaving this entire tale of meanness, the author says that he lied "out of sheer spite". The author admits that he had no real power—that he was merely "frightening sparrows to no purpose". He'd gnash his teeth and go on a tirade to a particular petitioner, but in the end he had no real authority.

In fact, the author says that he simply didn't have what it takes to become malicious. He says that he couldn't become mean or a hero or even lazy because a culture, learned man of the nineteenth century is "characterless". He holds the opinion that a man of strong character is limited. He then points out that he's not writing to amuse but will now move to the one topic everyone loves to talk about—himself.

The author writes that his life could be easier if he lived as the "men of action". He says then that some may think that he's just bragging, but that no one would brag on their own diseases or shortcomings. This writer notes that he often commits "vile" deeds, and that as he's trudging back to his own squalid apartment, he goes over those deeds in his mind. His question to his fellow man is whether others feel the same sense of pleasure over those vile deeds that he feels. The point, according to the author, is that you will not change yourself because you just can't do anything about it. The author notes that it's probably not clear at this point but that he's going to explain it all in good time.

The writer is absolutely not laying the blame off on anyone else. He says that he'll realize that he's in deep despair and then, if someone should slap him for his vile deed, he'll know full well that he is at fault for all of it. But, he says that he is at fault "through no fault of your own", because he is smarter than those around him—embarrassingly so. He says that it still rankles, even though the laws of nature are governing all the movements and actions.

Part I: Chapters I and II Analysis

It's interesting to note that the author says that a man of character is limited. He seems to be implying that a man who is of high morals, for example, is limited in his actions because he can't do something immoral. However, the author himself is limited because he is driven to take actions—and to avoid actions—that are not in keeping with his "characterless" nature. He'll put himself in situations that are only going to hurt him and others simply because he isn't able to take a stand. He'll put himself in debt just because of a perceived slight that the other person never even notices.

The author says that the pleasure he gets from the "vile" deeds is the knowledge that he's sunk to his lowest level. That's interesting because he seems to sink to another lowest level again and again. In this book alone, he'll describe several of these "vile" deeds of which he seems proud. And despite the fact that he's proud of his own vile deeds, he admits that his ego is as touchy as "a hunchback or a midget". The author then begins a discussion of the "laws of nature". This will lead into a discussion of free will.

Part I: Chapters III and IV

Part I: Chapters III and IV Summary

Now comes one of the points regarding a man of action, as previously discussed. This man of action, confronted with a wall, will sincerely give up his charge as a lost cause—there is, after all, a wall as a deterrent. This man, according to the author, is a "normal man" and the writer envies the normal man. The man will even believe himself to be a mouse—though an "acutely conscious mouse". This "mouse" will have a different opinion of justice than others because of his "heightened sensibilities". Confronted with men who laugh at the little mouse, he'll slip back into his hole with a shrug of contempt for those others. This, according to the author, is a feigned contempt because he won't really believe it and will live its life wallowing in malice.

The author then goes into a discussion about the laws of nature. He points out that "two plus two makes four" and that's a fact—a law of mathematics. Just as it's impossible to deny that, it's impossible to deny the laws of nature. It's also inconceivable that nature would consult a person to determine if the laws are acceptable. The author says that the person who came to a wall and accepted that it is an indestructible obstacle has no choice but to do so just as a person who determines to find a way around has no choice but to seek out that alternative. He says that there's no doubt that the wall exists but that some people will blame themselves for the wall's very existence even if that's obviously an incorrect conclusion. The situation leads to pain, and the author will soon delve into that as a new subject.

He says that some people may wonder that he'll find pleasure in anything, even a toothache, and that he does so. He says that the person with a toothache moans and obviously finds pleasure in moaning because the moaning serves no other purpose. In the case of a toothache, the only relief lies in the hands of the Waganheims—dentists who advertised their services in Russia. As the author puts it, if that person wishes the toothache to stop, it will. He urges that everyone listen to the moans of an educated man and to note that the moans change after a couple of days. His moans irritate his family and serve no other purpose, but he continues to moan with "trills" and "flourishes". His family knows that he could moan without all the extra but he continues out of spite. The author then says that some readers by now may be feeling the same of his own writing, but that he will continue also out of spite. The author says he's relieved that the reader can see through him. He then questions whether any intelligent man can have self-respect.

Part I: Chapters III and IV Analysis

The "mouse" will recall all this humiliation for "forty years on end". The irony here is that the author has professed to be forty. It seems this mouse is a parallel to the author, though the author won't say this outright. But the mouse, according to the author, will

allow these wrongs to fester for all those years and the wrongs will become more awful will every recollection and with the passage of time. Even on its deathbed, the mouse will remember all the wrongs done—including "the interest accrued" over the course of those years.

It's here that the author says that there's a "deliberate burying of yourself underground" that comes from the "loathsome half-despair, half-belief" of this situation. He says that it's a concept so difficult to grasp that people with "strong nerves" won't understand. He has referred to the dubious pleasure of being slapped and says that the reader might say the underground is understood by the writer precisely because he has been slapped. It seems that the author is again insisting that this man of the underground is not the author, even when the information indicates otherwise.

The author has again drawn a parallel between himself and this underground man. He says that he once had a toothache for a month, and that he played out his role of moaning to the limit so that everyone was sick of it. He says that he doesn't respect himself and that his jokes are bumbling and full of "self-distrust". On several occasions, he talks of his jokes as being not funny and fumbling attempts at humor.

Part I: Chapters V, VI and VII

Part I: Chapters V, VI and VII Summary

The writer says that there are some cases that can't be blamed on the laws of nature. In fact, he would get himself into trouble as a child when he hadn't done anything wrong, seemingly for the opportunity to say that it wouldn't happen again. He says that penitence would be a lie, and that in itself was loathsome. He says the reader may ask why he would do such a thing and answers that it was better than sitting with "folded arms". He says that he made up a life for himself and sometimes pretended offense at something that didn't happen. By the time he was done, he'd have convinced even himself of the offense. He did this so often that he no longer has any control over himself. He says he even tried this with regard to love and did fall in love twice in this way.

The dull, unlearned man takes an "immediate" cause and convinces himself that there's a reason for whatever his current activity may be. The author says that's the difference between him and an unlearned man. For example, a man who believes he has been wronged will find the primary cause of his action to be the quest for justice. The author, taking the same action in the same circumstance, sees himself acting only out of spite. Therefore, the wrong is no longer at issue but becomes—like the toothache—only something to complain about but not something that's the fault of anyone.

He then dwells on the greats of the era—the painters and writers. He says that if he were in a position to do so, he would drink to those who create those beautiful things and in doing so, would grow a large belly and a double chin. He says that people would then say—simply because of his belly and chin—that he must be somebody.

The writer says that anyone can understand what is—and is not—in his best interests and that no one would actually do anything that is not in his best interests. The author says that it seems no one will willingly go off "into the dark" to seek his own way when there's an established route available. But the fact is that some will do just that and for no reason other than that stubbornness pleases them. The fact that the person has the right to do that is a precious right, according to the author.

The writer describes a "friend". This is a person everyone knows who will eloquently tell everyone the facts of truth and reason, but then will act in the opposite. Another example is that of Cleopatra. She is said to have stuck pins into the breasts of her slave girls just to hear them cry. Man today has learned more than in those barbaric ages but still doesn't always act within the laws of reason. That ability to do the opposite of what is thought to be right and true is what the author describes as the "most advantageous advantage" available to man. He says that "independent wishing" is what man wants, regardless of the consequences.

Part I: Chapters V, VI and VII Analysis

The author says that the reason he considers himself intelligent is that he's never accomplished a single thing, and has never even begun anything. He asks what would happen if the true vocation of the intelligent man were to simply babble? That babbling, according to the author, would be like "pouring water over a sieve". He seems to be indicating that there would be nothing accomplished at all; therefore, the intelligent man will not waste his time in "babble". The author then notes that if he were just too lazy to take action, he could take some pride in that. At least in that case he would be something. He says that being lazy could be an entire career and that he could spend his time respecting himself for accomplishing this.

It's noteworthy that the author again spends time talking of appearances. He will at some point say that a yellow stain on the leg of his pants will ruin his evening. He will borrow money to update his coat to the latest fashion. He talks about his own facial expression and how hard he works to make it appear intelligent. Here, he talks of the fact that a lazy man who does nothing but sit around and drink to the artists and writers would have a specific look—a large belly and double chin. While most might not think those positive attributes, the author says he would be happy if people could look at him and discover that he's that person.

The author goes into a discussion of whether man has free will to determine his own actions or whether his actions are dictated by the laws of nature. The author never comes out with a clear opinion that he believes one over the other. He does say that if the time comes when reason can be ordered—as mathematic laws are ordered—life will be orderly, but would likely be bored. That in itself could produce variety as he points out that pins may be stuck into people out of sheer boredom.

Part I: Chapters VIII

Part I: Chapters VIII Summary

The writer talks of what would happen if there became a "formula" for all our "whims and wishes". He suggests that some people simply stop wishing because there'd be no point in wishing when the outcome is determined by a graph, but will quickly point out the flaw in that reasoning. Then he says that most of us make wishes based on what we think would be advantageous to us, but later find that wasn't the case. He says that most people, given the option to wish or to reason, with choose reason. Then he begins to argue the other side. He says that if that were the case, he could predict his life for the next thirty years and that everything he does would have been destined to happen because of that reason. The entire problem with this line of thought, according to the author, is that man simply wants sometimes to be free to do something just because he wants to do it—even if it goes against what would be advantageous to him and even if he has to wish for it.

The author says that life might sometimes be a "sorry mess" but that at least it isn't the result of a calculation of a square root. He then says that the "gentlemen" he's addressing will say that a person simply can't wish for something contrary to their own good, but the author disagrees. He insists that some people will wish for something not in their best interests simply for the sake of being able to wish. He says that some men will become vile, pernicious, and insensible for the sake of wishing for something that's not in their best interests and that they'll hold to those wishes to the bitter end. For the person who insists that there is free will but that reason is still in control, the author has a reply. He says that "two times two will be four even without my will. Is that what you call free will?"

The author next argues that you might try to "cure a man" by using reason, but poses the question how anyone can say that man should be remade. The writer points out that man sometimes needs a change— an outlet. He says that it doesn't matter whether it's ultimately good or ultimately bad in the grand scheme of things, the bottom line is that "smashing something is also very pleasant on occasion". However, man needs a creative outlet and the writer asks what would happen if man didn't have that. He says that is why man constructs a city, causes a war, and tears it down—so that there's something to build again.

The author then argues heavily against reason above wishes. He says that if "two times two makes four" is all there were to live by, an intelligent man would be forced to "stop up" his five senses and to "submerge himself in contemplation". Even that would be a dead end, according to this author, but at least he could—upon occasion—whip himself.

The writer sets up a particular situation in which he's searching for a place to escape the rain. He says that some might say a chicken house and a mansion are exactly the same if the only goal is to escape the rain. He says that's only true if the only purpose is to

escape the rain. He won't be happy with the chicken coop until someone gives him a better idea and that will only happen if someone changes his desires.

The writer says that there are some things men won't admit to anyone other than a very close friend, and some things a man won't even admit to his friends. Finally, there are some things a man won't even admit to himself. Dostoevsky insists that the more decent a man, the bigger the list of things not to be admitted. To test this theory, the author writes that he plans to see if he can be entirely honest with himself.

The possibility that a person can be completely honest might exist, the author says. He's next going to try being completely honest with himself, though he notes that he's not expecting anyone else to read his notes.

Part I: Chapters VIII Analysis

At this point, the writer uses this literary device of "talking with" an audience. He points out that the reader might laugh and say, "There's no such thing as wishing", but that he says that's exactly the point he was trying to make—that "you've startled me for a moment". The author often uses this to argue a particular point. He'll say something, add a comment that the "gentlemen" will say in retaliation, then say that the "gentlemen" are correct or wrong and add why. He argues this back and forth as he's giving his opinion of whether man has free will and the bigger question—whether he desires it. This writer argues that man will use free will even when doing so means that he is going against what's good for him and that he'll do it simply because he has that choice.

The writer addresses the question of why a person works a full week, takes himself off to the bar and spends all his money, then ends up in jail. He points out that the man's actions may seem pointless, but then that man has completed a week's occupation. The writer then goes on to talk about the sameness—the "two plus two makes four" issue. He seems to approve of the workman's actions but doesn't address the fact that he is also doing the same thing over and over. It seems likely that he's pointing out that what the workman is doing outside should be advantageous for a man, and continues with that activity week after week.

The reference to the intellectual with nothing to do whipping himself could be a subtle reference back to Cleopatra sticking pins into her serving girls.

Some may take the attitude that only a man of low morals would have things to hide. The writer takes the opposite stand. He says that a decent man has more things that he won't admit to or will only admit to close friends than does the man of low morals and values. Looking at that critically, it's likely that is because the man of low morals and values isn't typically ashamed of his actions. Therefore, an action that a man of this type is ready to admit would be something a decent man would be ashamed of. The opposite is also true, that a decent man would be ashamed of things the man of low morals would tell anyone. It's not so much that the man of low morals has less to hide, but comes down to what they want others to know.

Part II: Chapters I, II and III

Part II: Chapters I, II and III Summary

The author talks of his own self-consciousness about his appearance. He says that his face carried a "nasty, abject expression" and that he tried to cover that by assuming an intelligent air. He notes that he could stand the revolting facial features if only people could see through that to the intelligence. Still, he remains so aware of his shortcomings that he finds he cannot meet the eyes of others. There are no decent men who do not act as slaves and cowards, according to the writer. He notes that only "asses and their mongrel hangers-on" will show courage at all times, and that these people are not even worth consideration.

The author talks of a period of isolation. He says that others weren't like him, but perversely he would occasionally put himself in a position to be friends with everyone in his office. He says that at those times he put down his isolation to "squeamishness" that he'd actually derived from books. He's play card games and spend time with those people.

Somehow, the writer finds himself in a social setting and encounters an officer. This officer is never fully described, though he's larger than the author. When the writer is standing in an aisle down which the officer is walking, the officer bodily picks up the writer and moves him aside so that he can continue on his way. The writer is offended greatly and begins to imagine that it's an incredible wrong. He works up his courage to engage in a duel, but never makes it happen. He finally borrows money from Anton to buy a new collar for his coat in order to make himself look as presentable as possible, and goes for a walk along a particular place where the officer also often walks. For weeks, the writer works on the courage to bump the officer when they meet along this walkway, but he always steps out of the way at the last moment. Then comes the day when he suddenly works up his nerve and the two bump shoulders in passing. The writer is vindicated, though the officer seems not to even notice the contact.

He admits that he dreams a lot. In his dreams he's either the hero or he's mud. In one case, he dreams that he receives "countless millions", which he gives away to benefit humanity. But that's not the end of this dream. He also admits to everyone his shortcomings which are actually not shortcomings at all but are "lofty and beautiful". He would then accept the kisses from many, though they'd all be dolts, and would "go off, barefoot and hungry to preach new ideas and rout the reactionaries". In this dream, the Pope moves to Brazil and Lake Como is moved to Rome for the celebration. He then says that he's not ashamed of the dream.

The author says that he would alternately dream and then go out in an effort to meet friends. He has only a few who are little more than acquaintances, but feels the need for companionship anyway. One of these companions is a former classmate named Simonov. He notes that Simonov is always surprised to see him, though he apparently

drops in occasionally. On one particular day, Simonov has company—two other former classmates named Trudolyubov and Ferfichkin. The three are planning a farewell dinner for another of their classmates, Zverkov. They continue their discussion of the dinner details until the author says that he'll come along—literally inviting himself. He realizes that he's committing to pay his share and is questioned by Ferfichkin about his ability to pay. Simonov seem embarrassed, and the author already owes Simonov money that he hasn't repaid. The author assures them that he has the money and they agree to meet at five o'clock at the Hotel de Paris.

As soon as he's out the door, the writer is berating himself for deciding to go. He has only a little money and he owes the monthly salary to his servant, Apollon. He recalls his childhood days without fondness. He says that the boys his age, realizing that he read books and was advanced well beyond them intellectually, did not like him. He had no friends and eventually wanted them—even had one but couldn't resist wielding control that drove that friend away. He wants not to go but finds that he's dreaming of how his life would be if he were to somehow win their friendship, and so walks out the door without paying Apollon, hires a coach, and arrives at the hotel just before five o'clock.

Part II: Chapters I, II and III Analysis

The writer talks of two men at his workplace who are regarded with disdain by the others. One has the pockmarked face of a brigand while the other is greasy and smells. The interesting thing, according to the author, is that neither cared as long as their superiors didn't hold those views. What he seems to be ignoring is that those people likely felt the same as he—that they hated those particular qualities about themselves but hoped that others could see through those to better qualities.

The author holds this grudge against the officer for years. It's a reference back to the little mouse in Part I who remembers the injustices "plus interest" until his dying day. It's interesting to note that at the end of this long encounter, the office doesn't realize anything has happened and has likely forgotten the original event in any case.

The author argues that there is no "second role". He says that a person is either a hero or mud and that there's nothing in between. It seems that this man is suffering from the same ailment many current-day people have—the inability to fit in as an ordinary person. What's particularly interesting is that this man didn't grow into this role but admits that he never fit in as a child either.

There's really no discussion as to the reason the author includes having the Pope move to Brazil in his dream. It's noteworthy that in the dream he goes off to "preach new ideas and rout the reactionaries". There's nothing to indicate that he is an atheist or that he's a believer in some alternative religion. He seems fully occupied with learning.

Part II: Chapters IV, V and VI

Part II: Chapters IV, V and VI Summary

The dinner is a disaster for the author. He arrives at five o'clock and waits for more than an hour only to discover that the time was changed to six o'clock and that Simonov forgot to tell him. Almost immediately, Zverkov asks him a question and the author perceives derision that might or might not have been there. Zverkov asks about his salary and the author asks what's the point of the "interrogation", but does tell his salary and then blushes. Both the other former classmates make negative comments about the low salary. Zverkov notes that the author has gotten thin and looks him over. The author is acutely aware of his shabby clothing and his stained trousers.

As the night lengthens, the author begins to drink and soon becomes quite drunk. As the others talk and laugh, the author paces back and forth in the room. On the rare occasions he does talk, it's to cut down Zverkov, which isn't well received by any of the others. Soon even Simonov says that he should not have allowed the writer to attend and they all put it down at least partly to his drunkenness. When the party breaks up, the four friends are going "there", which turns out to be a brothel. The author asks Simonov for enough money to join them and Simonov almost throws it at him. The author does follow, but when he arrives, the four have all gone into rooms with women. A woman approaches him and they walk off to her room together without speaking a word.

The writer wakes in the brothel in the bed of a woman he learns is named Liza. He realizes that they've "fornicated" and he likens it to spiders who indulge in an act that should have been the consummation of love but is not. He asks and she tells him her name is Liza. He then tells her of watching a coffin taken out of a brothel in a poor side of town and weaves a story of the burial that would likely take place in several inches of water because of the snowy weather. He continues to question her and talks at length about the love that can exist between a father and a daughter. After a point, she says that not all families are like that and that some fathers would sell their daughters rather than see them "marry honorably". The writer, assuming this is what happened to Liza, says that poverty is often the reason for this but he says that a lack of Godliness could also be the culprit.

The writer goes on and on about how people can be happy as a family. He says that he had no family of his own, and that's how he wound up as he has. In a family, the wife may be jealous beyond all reason or may harp and nag at a man in order to make up. But the fact remains that a man who watches his wife suckle their child can never turn from that wife, according to the writer.

When Liza takes on a mocking tone, the writer is immediately angry, though he admits that he should have known that it was her way of getting past her shyness.

Part II: Chapters IV, V and VI Analysis

It's the author who says the conversation topic should change and Ferfichkin asks if he's planning to show off his intellect. The author gets in a barb by saying such an endeavor would be superfluous in this setting. When he decides to follow the others to the brothel, he screams and yells at the driver. Then he changes his mind, breaks into tears, and gets out of the sled. Then he gets back in and urges the driver again to hurry.

The author is so caught up with his appearance that he notices his face in a mirror and notes that he looks ferocious. He says that he's glad of that.

The writer questions Liza at length about various aspects of her life. He wants to know about her parents and her reason for falling into the life at a brothel, and tells her that she's a slave and will never escape the life. He points out that she probably owes the madam money already and that she'll eventually move to less reputable houses where she'll be ill treated and eventually die alone and a pauper. It seems that he's trying to talk this girl into going home, then he notes that he's excited about the conversation. He says that, "Surely, I couldn't fail to get the best of such a young soul!" This indicates that he's verbally sparring for the sport of it and that he doesn't care for the young girl's fate at all. He even says that he's excited "about the sport of it". Just seconds later, he swears that she interests him, but doesn't say what it is that is of interest.

It's interesting that the writer launches into a conversation about how everyone can be happy if they simply take time to look about for that happiness. He himself finds little or nothing to be happy about in his own life or with other people. He seems to be contradicting his own life, though it's not yet clear why. He could be trying also to convince himself but is seems more likely that he's using the arguments he believes will work on this young woman.

Part II: Chapters VII, VIII

Part II: Chapters VII, VIII Summary

Thinking that she's making fun of his earlier observations, the writer goes on a tirade. He tells her that she's worse that the common laborer who sells his work for a period of time each day because she's sold her soul and has no hope of anything better now. He says that she's in the position that she'll never find love, for why should a man love her if he has only to command that she do his bidding anyway. He says that he's heard that women in her position may take "lovers", but says it means nothing because he's actually robbing her of her normal fee and that no man could truly love her knowing she could be called from his bed to another at any moment.

He then launches into a tirade about the fate of women in her position. He tells of one he'd seen thrown out on the steps in freezing weather and of the men who gathered around to make fun of her. He says that woman was probably young and in demand not that many years earlier. He says that a woman who dies as a prostitute has no loving hand caring for her on her deathbed, but is shoved into a corner and urged to hurry and die. And once dead, there's no one to care about the burial and no one to shed a tear or care for the gravesite.

The young woman begins to cry dramatically and the writer hurries to gather his clothes. He gives her his address and walks out, but she follows him and shows him a letter from a medical student. It's a love letter and the writer notes that it's not feigned but is an honest declaration of love. Liza says that he gave it to her without knowing what she's doing and that she hadn't yet decided whether she would remain in the brothel. The writer knows that the letter is Liza's one "precious" possession and that she showed it in order to redeem herself in his eyes.

When he wakes in his own home, the writer immediately puts aside all thoughts of Liza, thinking instead of his friends. He writes Simonov a letter of apology in which he lies and says that he'd already had wine while waiting for them and that his being unaccustomed to wine was the reason for his moodiness. He is pleased with the tone of the letter, saying that it reached exactly the right level of apology and "aristocratic playfulness". He notes that it would be impossible for a less learned and cultured man to achieve that effect.

The writer continues to worry that Liza will come to his apartment and that she'll see that he's a pauper living with a shabby couch and poor clothes. He even worries that Apollon, his servant, will insult her just to be contrary to the writer. When she arrives, he is in a heated argument with Apollon. The writer has just told the servant that he must apologize for his insolence if he wants to be paid. Apollon says he has nothing to apologize for and refuses. When the author realizes Liza is here, he runs to his own room and Apollon enters, saying politely, "there's a person out there, asking for you." The writer screams at Apollon to leave his room.

Part II: Chapters VII, VIII Analysis

The writer predicts that once a woman of this situation is dead, she spends her time wishing to be released from the coffin in order that she might see the sunlight and to live at least a little of the life that passed her by. He talks of a young man in the neighborhood who likely vowed love and how wonderful that love would have been when compared to the lonely death of a whore. When he finds that she's crying and seems broken hearted, he loses his drive and says that he wants to comfort her but doesn't dare. He gives her his address and tells her to come to him, but doesn't explain why. He also doesn't offer any personal thoughts as to the reason he takes this step, but continues to want to hurry and get away.

Through all the worry that Liza would appear, the author is dreaming that she does and that she loves him for his efforts to help her see that she should not be working in a brothel. He imagines that she'll eventually declare her love for him but that he'll say that he's always known of it. They'll then travel the world together. As is the case with dreams, he doesn't indicate how he'll suddenly be wealthy enough to travel.

It's noteworthy that the writer sends off a note of apology to Simonov and asks him to apologize on his behalf to the others. He says—as they noted during the dinner—that he is unaccustomed to drinking and that he'd had wine while waiting. He notes that it's a lie, but that he believes it strikes exactly the right cord with regard to an apology. He also says that he would have come in person, but that he's embarrassed by his actions. He sends Simonov the money he owes.

It's interesting to note the writer's relationship with Apollon. He says that Apollon is as much a part of his apartment as the shabby furniture. He also notes that Apollon has his own way of doing things and that he—the master—cannot change any of that. It's also interesting that the writer says it wouldn't have done any good to fire Apollon because he simply wouldn't have gone.

Part II: Chapters IX and X

Part II: Chapters IX and X Summary

Liza appears and the writer invites her to sit then goes to Apollon. He gives him his wages that are due then instructs him to go get tea to serve Liza. When the author returns to Liza, he rails against Apollon and tells her of the servant's faults. He then bursts into tears and realizes that he's in a frenzy and must appear ridiculous. Apollon leaves the tea and neither the writer nor Liza are comfortable enough to serve. They sit in silence and the author notes that he's being mean and that it makes Liza sad. He then begins to scream at Liza, asking her why she'd come and telling her that he'd sell the world for a kopek if it would only gain him a little peace.

Liza looks hurt and the author suddenly realizes that she is in love with him and that she's recognized something only a woman in love could know—that he himself is unhappy. She reaches for him and they fall into each other's arms, crying. Finally, the author is lying on the couch, his face buried in the cushions, and he realizes that he's going to be terribly embarrassed to look at Liza. He says that when he does look at her, he's immediately caught by an emotion that was both passion and revenge. Liza was afraid for only a second, then they embraced.

The author notes that Liza is crying but all he feels is impatience. He says that he knows she's aware that his passion was nothing more than revenge and that it's the final insult to this woman. He says that he didn't hate her, he just wanted her to be gone so that he could be in peace. As she leaves, he considers following her and does yell her name down the stairs before she leaves the building. But he admits that he could never have made her happy and that her leaving was likely for the best.

The author writes that the memory—even after the passage of years—is distressing and that it might be a good time to end the "Notes". He says his story is no uncommon because "we all limp", though some to a larger degree than others. He also points out that the person writing this diary might be unacceptable because he's the opposite of a hero—he's an antihero.

The tone abruptly changes for the final paragraph with Dostoevsky saying that there is more but that he believes it's time to simply stop.

Part II: Chapters IX and X Analysis

The writer notes that he's greeting Liza exactly as he'd imagined in a prior fit of depression—in his tattered robe and without any dignity. He notes that Liza is embarrassed and believes it's because of his appearance and situation, though there's nothing to say that's absolutely the case. He immediately says that a person can be "poor but honorable". Just minutes later he tells her that he's ashamed of his poverty and yells at her for seeing it.

As is the case before, the sexual encounter is not described at all. After their embrace, the author is next pacing as Liza remains behind a screen, apparently crying.

The author says that he is incapable of love but that it's because he can't keep from flaunting his moral and intellectual superiority. He closes by saying that if the world were to "give us more independence", then "we'd all stamp our feet" and seek someone to exert control. Then he reverts back to the literary method and says that the reader would say that it's acceptable for this antihero to say such things but not to say "we" or "us". The author says that his own life is an example of what any life could be. The difference is that he's lived to that extreme while others have not.

The author addresses the "underground" one last time by saying that he doesn't choose to write anymore from the underground. If one believes that the underground is a conscious emotional state such as this writer has described, it could follow that he plans to change his life.

Characters

I

The "nameless narrator" of Notes from the Underground. Some readers and critics refer to him as "the Underground Man". The book is written by Fyodor Dostoevsky and it could be argued that the "I" is Dostoevsky, though he makes it clear from an early footnote that the "I" is fictional. He does note that "I" must exist. "I" is concerned with an array of questions, many of them on the free will and psychological interests of mankind in general. The "I" freely refers to the audience—the reader—and tends to realize questions and arguments that would be forthcoming from a real audience. "I" answers those questions, seeming to give an honest accounting of himself and his life, though he'll point out that it's impossible for a person to be completely honest about all things.

"I" is interested in some of the important questions of life. He wonders whether man has free will to decide his own fate or whether he is bound by the laws of nature or some other set of regulations. One of the points made by this writer is that people hide some things from others and some things even from themselves. He claims that he's going to attempt to be totally honest in an effort to see if that's really true. He adheres to the notion that no one is going to read his writings. He then says that he realizes that he seems to be writing to an audience but says it's merely a literary device—that it's an easier style of writing than any other.

The writer is a selfish man and claims himself incapable of love. He swears that he is more intelligent than others, often to the point of embarrassment. He is anxious always to put on a good front in front of others but finds that he's unable to stand up to their scrutiny or their confrontations. He spends years planning an altercation with an officer and it ends with a mere brushing of the shoulders. He would like to fire his servant, Apollon, but says that Apollon would never leave. He claims to be well-read but is a pauper, barely able to make ends meet and constantly borrowing from those few who will lend him money.

Liza

The woman the writer meets in the house of prostitution. Liza confides in him that she's from Riga, where she lived with her parents. She says that she hasn't fully committed to becoming a prostitute but that she already owes money to the madam of the house. She doesn't say how it is that she came to be in that position, but the writer berates her for her decision. He rants for some time on the benefits of living at home and the negative points of living as a prostitute. He goes on so long that Liza begins to cry uncontrollably. Not knowing what to say, he hurriedly prepares to leave but gives Liza his address in a moment of some weakness that he isn't able to describe. Liza shows a letter, written to her from a medical student. The love letter, according to Dostoevsky, is

genuine as no one can feign those emotions. She seems to hold this letter as a precious treasure and the writer notes that she's trying to redeem herself in his eyes.

It's three days before Liza shows up at his home, though he's been expecting her for all that time. When she arrives, the writer is having a ferocious fight with Apollon. He lives poorly and he's seen himself and his apartment through her eyes. Without giving her time to say or do anything, he begins to rant at her again, telling her that yes, he's a pauper and a liar. He treats her cruelly and then tells her to get out. After she's out of the apartment, he admits what he'd known—that she loves him for trying to help her out of her previous situation. He rushes after her but doesn't catch up. He admits that he would never have made her happy simply because he's not the kind of man who can be happy with another woman and he says that Liza—as a woman in love—saw his unhappiness for what it truly was. Liza is never heard of again.

Apollon

The writer's servant. The writer talks of his hatred for the man because Apollon always carried himself with an air that made it clear that he felt himself superior to those around him—including his employer, the writer. According to the writer's description, Apollon deigned to do little for him and was a tailor on the side. For example, as the writer was preparing to go out with friends, he borrowed the polishing brush in secret to give his boots a second shine because Apollon would never have polished the boots twice in a single day. He's described as carefully attending his own appearance even down to using vegetable oil on his hair to achieve a specific look. His carriage was also careful and he held a subservient attitude that seemed to the writer to be lofty. He remains with the writer for seven years and the writer says Apollon seems a part of his life. After leaving the employ of the writer, Apollon hired out to read the Psalter over the dead and supplemented the income with rat extermination and making shoe polish.

Anton Antonych Setochkin

The writer's office chief. He is described as "serious", but the writer goes to him to borrow money for a beaver collar for his coat in order to present a better appearance upon his meeting with the officer. Anton is said to be the only "lasting acquaintance" of the writer. When the writer is planning to challenge Zverkov to a duel, he believes he'll ask Anton to be his second.

The Officer

The writer first meets the officer when he's standing in the officer's path. The officer moves him to the side, seemingly with no thought to the writer. This angers the writer and he seethes about it for years until he arranges to be in a place where he's certain to meet the officer. He plans to refuse to step aside, allowing himself to bump into the officer. This happens but the officer hardly notices the encounter at all. The writer,

however, is jubilant, thinking that he had succeeded in setting himself up as the officer's equal.

Simonov

A former schoolmate of the writer and the one person he feels comfortable occasionally visiting, though he notes that there are times when he's not at all certain he's welcome. He's among the three throwing the farewell dinner for Zverkov. Before the end of that dinner, he is also angry at the writer. The writer later sends a note of apology for his actions during that dinner, seemingly in an effort to keep this one person who seems to be the one person the writer claims as a friend.

Zverkov

Another of the writer's former schoolmates. The writer doesn't have fond memories of Zverkov, saying that he won out in an argument once and that Zverkov exacted his revenge by winning several others. On the eve of his departure into the service, the writer invites himself along to a farewell gathering for Zverkov. The writer is angry by the end of the evening and challenges Zverkov to a duel which Zverkov says he'll accept but actually puts down to drunken ramblings.

The Friend

A "collective personage" described by Dostoevsky. This friend is that person who explains how everything must be done with "truth and reason" as a guide, but then acts without either.

Gentlemen

The audience to which Dostoevsky talks in this manuscript. The "Gentlemen" sometimes "answer" and Dostoevsky responds with a rebuttal or some counterstatement of his own. This is a literary tool meant to bring the reader into the story.

Workmen

The workmen are those who accomplish a week's work, then move to the bar to spend their earnings and end up in jail. While it might seem pointless to some, Dostoevsky points out that they are engaged and that they've just completed a week's occupation.

Trudolyubov and Ferfichkin

The two friends of Simonov's who plan the farewell dinner for Zverkov. They become embroiled in a heated argument with the writer and go so far as to say that he should never have invited himself and that he should leave. They clearly don't like the writer.

Objects/Places

The Underground

The underground is never described but is referred to on several occasions. It seems likely that this is a state of mind rather than a physical place, but it's ultimately left to the reader to decide where—or what—the underground is.

Kopek

A unit of currency in Russia. At one point, the writer declares that he would sell "the entire world for one kopek" so that he could have peace.

Ruble

A unit of currency used for most transactions in Russia. The writer paid Apollon seven rubles per month as his servant.

The Most Advantageous of Advantages

Dostoevsky defines this as man's "own whim", his "untrammeled desire". While outlining the advantages a man has, this one is typically omitted but is, in Dostoevsky's mind, the most important advantage anyone can have and is the one that overrides reason.

Brazil

The place the writer imagines that the Pope would agree to move his headquarters, if a certain array of happenings were to come to pass, such as a lake being moved to Rome and a ball given for all the people of Italy.

Lake Como

The lake the writer imagines might be moved to Rome for the incredible ball that might be thrown for all of Rome.

Five Corners

The place where Anton Antonych Setochkin lives.

The Brothel

Where the writer meets Liza.

Riga

Where Liza says she is from.

Sennaya Street

Where the writer says he saw some people carrying a coffin from a brothel, and that the bearers almost dropped it. It's apparently a poor part of town.

Volkovo

The cemetery the writer describes to Liza, saying that he'd seen burials there despite several inches of water at the bottom of the grave.

Petersburg

The Russian city where the author lived.

Themes

The Need for Companionship

The author is continually seeking out companionship though he's never happy with the time he spends with another. He talks about his periods of dreaming, saying that he could never hold up to them for more than about three months at a time. It seems that he knows he's happier spending his time in solitude with only his dreaming, but somehow can't resist the need to seek out human companions. He says that he would find time to play card games and spend time with others but would inevitably find it unsuitable to continue spending time with them. Though he doesn't describe the partings, it seems likely that he would have parted with them as he did his former classmates, Simonov Zverkov, Trudolyubov, and Ferfichkin.

In this case, he happened upon a meeting of Simonov, Ferfichkin, and Trudolyubov, and invites himself along to a dinner they're throwing for Zverkov. He says that he sometimes visits Simonov but has seldom seen the others since they were in school. He says that whenever he shows up at Simonov's home, which is apparently fairly sporadically and based on the author's own need for companionship as it comes and goes, Simonov always seems somewhat surprised. After the author does invite himself along to this dinner, he is angry at himself and almost decides not to go. It's interesting to note that he does go but it seems as if he's trying to save face rather than that any interest in spending time with any of the four men.

The interesting thing about the author is that he wants companionship but wants it only on his own terms and in his own timeframe. When he begins to worry that Liza will show up at his apartment, he's angry. He was also angry when he sought her out at the brothel. But he admits that he had almost followed her to ask her to come back. That seems to be an admission that he does need the companionship and that he knows that he'll wish for it later.

The Need for Free Will

The author argues at length about the possibility that human life will someday be taken to a level of mathematical equation. In that case, free will will no longer exist because every action of every person could be determined—and predetermined—by graphs or equations. The problem, according to the author, is that people want the ability to make their own decisions and to do things simply because they want to—not because it's required. As an example, he points out that some people might say that a sane man would never wish for anything that wasn't in his best interests—an "advantage", as the author calls it. But he says that's not true. He says that sometimes people simply wish for something that's not what is in their best interest just because it's what they want to do. This seems to be a topic the author knows a lot about as he spends time wishing for companionship and dreaming of impossible situations. He imagines himself winning

over a group of former classmates by his intellect. But when he's with them, he behaves badly and parts with bitter words. He even plans to challenge one of them to a duel but that never comes about. The author wishes for this companionship in his dreams but says that he would sell the entire world for a kopek if it would only earn him a bit of peace.

The writer talks of free will and man's ability to choose for himself and contrasts that with the mathematical equation, "two times two makes four". This equation becomes the opposite of free will, according to the author. He does say that if people had no free will, there'd be nothing for an intelligent man to do except to submerge himself in thought. He notes that the lack of anything interesting to occupy one's time leads to things like whipping oneself.

Self-Analysis

The fact that the writer of the book calls himself an "antihero" indicates that he's conducted extensive self-analysis. The "Notes" are filled with those sections of analysis. For example, when Liza is in his arms in his apartment, he is suddenly filled with an emotion that he correctly identifies as passion but with revenge as the ultimate motive. He says that she is afraid only for a moment. Afterward, he says that he's done her an incredible wrong. When she leaves, he almost follows her but says that he knows he couldn't make her happy because he isn't the sort of person who could make anyone happy in the long term.

It's interesting that some of his self-analysis seems self-serving while other times he seems brutally honest. For example, he says that he is more intelligent than most people around him and that it's sometimes so obvious that he's embarrassed about it. That's a statement he repeats several times. He says that as a child other boys figured out that he was well-read and that it intimidated them. On the other hand, he tells Liza that he is ashamed of his lifestyle—living as he is in poverty. He says that it's a condition to be ashamed of.

His self-analysis is often focused on his appearance. He is absorbed in his own facial features, saying that he tries to look intellectual. He notes upon heading out to meet his friends that he has a yellowish stain on his pants and that the presence of that stain is likely to ruin most of his pleasure of the evening. That scrutiny passes to his surroundings and he dreads the thought of Liza visiting because she'll see him living with his shabby couch and his tattered robe—all reasons for which he despises himself and believes that others will judge him for.

Style

Point of View

The book is written in first person though the "I" is never fully identified. It is a person who has lived beneath the floorboards, listening in on conversations but never participating. This person could be Dostoevsky, though he adds a footnote at the end of his first page advising that the person is actually fictional. Dostoevsky says that the person must exist but as a collection of personalities making up one person—the fictional character of this work. For the sake of continuity, "I" is identified throughout this guide as Dostoevsky.

There are likely to be various places throughout the book that offer up points or themes with which any reader can identify. At one point, Dostoevsky writes that everyone has something from their past that they won't admit to others and some things they won't even admit to themselves. Most people can probably think of some shameful deed in their own past. That means the "I" could actually become the reader in those cases.

It's noteworthy that Dostoevsky writes to an audience and that he's fully aware that he's writing to an audience, though he continues to insist otherwise. He throws out objections that the reader is likely to voice at a particular point on many occasions. Dostoevsky also says that he's going to test the theory that it's impossible for a man to be totally honest about certain facts in his life. He plans to include some piece of personal information that he's never shared before as a test of that theory—a sure sign that he's aware of the reader. Then he says that he writes in this form only because it's the easiest way to write and that he would be doing things differently if he were indeed writing for an audience.

Setting

The book is set in Russian, apparently in the later part of the mid-1800s, about the time Dostoevsky wrote the book. The setting is fairly limited, consisting of his own apartment, a restaurant where he and three former classmates have dinner, a brothel where he meets Liza, and the streets in and around those places. There is limited description of any of the places except for details that seem important to the writer's mind—the shabbiness of his couch, for example. There are more details given about other things, such as the worn collar of the writer's coat which he borrows enough money to replace. The facts that his fur collar is worn and his pants have a stain on the knee seem much more important to the writer than descriptions of his surroundings, and that's where his focus seems to lie.

Language and Meaning

There are many significant references and nuances that will likely slip past the average reader simply because the reference point is Dostoevsky's time—the mid 1800s in Russia. When he writes of man's need to tear down what he's built, he refers to "that eternal union" which is actually the Civil War. He also writes of the "Wagenheims", which turna out to be a reference to dentists that advertised in the Petersburg newspapers. There are also references to writers and artists who were either highly regarded or greatly criticized at the time of Dostoevsky's writing. He makes sport of those or uses them to create points in several places. The writings of H.T. Buckle, "The History of Civilization in England" and the painting of "The Lord's Supper" by N.N. Ge are among those. There are others, and some translations of "Notes from the Underground" will include footnotes to help the reader catch those references.

In some cases, the writer rants for extended periods and some readers may find it difficult to keep track of the topic at hand among the ranting. Usually, the writer comes back to the original verse and even sometimes explains what happened. For example, he tells of Liza's reaction to his cruel words in his apartment by explaining that she saw what any woman in love would see—that he was unhappy in his own life, prompting his cruelty to her.

It's important that some things are left to the reader to discern. For example, the writer enters the brothel and meets the girl named Liza. There is no description of the sexual encounter other than his thoughts afterward—that they didn't talk at all, that he is repulsed by the entire affair, and that he didn't know her name until afterward.

Structure

The book is divided into two sections, titled simply Part I and Part II. The first is further divided into eleven chapters of varying lengths. The second is divided into ten chapters. Part I is a somewhat rambling account of the writer's thoughts on an array of topics that tend to overlap and recur. He talks of man's free will—or lack thereof—and the reason that people tend to tear things down. In this writer's opinion, it's because man is afraid of accomplishing a final task, thus leaving himself with nothing else to do. Therefore, he starts wars that will tear down what's been built so that there's a need for rebuilding.

The author also talks at length about himself. He says that he's bitter and spiteful and goes on to tell of all the things he does for spite. For example, he says that he's sick but he won't see a doctor-out of spite. He also talks of his intelligence, saying that he's so much more cultivated and learned than others that he's quite embarrassed by the entire issue.

In the second part, the writer relates a story of a farewell dinner for a former classmate. He doesn't like this person overly much but invites himself along to the dinner despite the fact that he knows he's also not particularly welcome. After the dinner, he follows the others to a brothel where he meets a woman who falls in love with him because he

seems to take an interest in her, telling her that she should take herself out of her current situation.

The writer insists that he's never intending for anyone else to read the words he writes, but he does write to an audience. He says that's simply a literary device that works well for him. For example, he makes statements and then poses a question that a reader would likely ask.

Quotes

"I am a sick man . . . I am a spiteful man. An unattractive man. I think that my liver hurts. But actually, I don't know a damn thing about my illness. I am not even sure what it is that hurts."
Part I, Chap. I, p. 1

"Living past forty is indecent, vulgar, immoral! Now answer me, sincerely, honestly, who lives past forty? I'll tell you who does: fools and scoundrels. I will say this right to the face of all those venerable old men, all those silver-haired, sweet-smelling old men! I have a right to say it, because I will live to sixty myself. To seventy! To eighty! . . . Wait, let me catch my breath."
Part I, Chap. I, p. 3

"Because, first of all, I am at fault for being more intelligent than anyone around me. (I've always considered myself more intelligent than anyone around me, and, would you believe me, I've sometimes even felt embarrassed by it. At any rate, I've always somehow looked sideways and could never look people straight in the eye.)"
Part I, Chap. II, p. 7

"Ah, if I were doing nothing merely out of laziness! Lord, how I would respect myself then. Precisely because I would be capable at least of laziness, at least of one definite quality that I myself could be certain of. Question: Who are you? Answer: A lazy man."
Part I, Chap. VI, p. 18

"Ah, gentlemen, what kind of independent will can there be when it comes down to graphs and to arithmetic, when nothing counts but 'two times two makes four'? Two times two will be four even without my will. Is that what you call man's free will?" Part I, Chap. VIII, p. 31

"I give myself up to dissipation alone, at night - secretly, furtively, sordidly, with shame that would not leave me at the most loathsome moments, that even brought me at these moments to the point of cursing. Already at that time I carried the underground in my soul. I was terrified of being seen, of meeting someone I knew, of being recognized. And I frequented all sorts of dismal haunts." Part II, Chap. I, p. 47

"It was sheer torture, a continuous intolerable sense of humiliation at the idea, which turned out to be a constant and direct feeling, that I was nothing but a fly before all that fine society, a revolting, obscene fly - more intelligent, more cultivated, nobler than

anyone else, that went without saying, but a fly nonetheless, forever yielding the way to everyone, humiliated and insulted by everyone." Part II, Chap. I, p. 51

"My office uniform was more or less in order, but I couldn't, after all, go to dinner in my uniform. And worst of all, on my trousers, right on the knee, there was a huge yellowish spot. I knew in advance that this spot alone would robe me of nine-tenths of my self-respect." Part II, Chap. III, p. 68

"The fact is that at those very moments I was more clearly and vividly aware of the revolting absurdity of my imaginings and the entire reverse side of the medal than anyone else in the world could have been. And yet . . . 'Hurry, driver, hurry you rascal, hurry.'" Part II, Chap. V, p. 83

"And yet, let me tell you something about it, about your present way of life: you may be young and good-looking and sweet, with a soul, with feelings, but do you know that when I woke just now, it immediately made me sick to be here with you! A man can come here only when he's drunk." Part II, Chap. VII, p. 98

"Why I would sell the whole world for a single kopek, just so that nobody would bother me. Should the world go to hell, or should I go without my tea now? I'll say let the world go to hell so long as I can have my tea whenever I want it."
Part II, Chap. IX, p. 122

"And what happened was this: Liza, insulted and humiliated by me, understood much more than I had imagined. She understood out of all this what a woman, if she loves sincerely, will always understand before all else. She understood that I myself was unhappy." Part II, Chap. IX, p. 123

"I know, I will be told that this is incredible - that it's impossible to be as vicious and stupid as I was; people may even add that it would be impossible not to return, or at least to appreciate her love. But why impossible? To begin with, I was by then incapable of loving because, I repeat, to me loving meant tyrannizing and flaunting my moral superiority." Part II, Chap. X, p. 125

"Many memories distress me now, but . . . shouldn't I perhaps conclude my Notes at this point? It seems to me that it was a mistake to start them. At any rate, I have felt ashamed throughout the writing of this narrative: hence, this is no longer literature, but corrective punishment."
Part II, Chap. X, p. 129

"This, in truth, is not yet the end of the 'Notes' of this paradoxalist. He could not keep his resolve and went on writing. But it seems to us, too, that we may well stop here." Part II, Chap. X, p. 130

Topics for Discussion

What are some of the characteristics of the writer? What do these say about him?

What or where is the underground? Why do you take this stand? If it is not a physical place, is it possible for others to also be in the underground?

Why does the author seek out companionship if he's not truly friends with any of these people? What do others seem to think of the writer?

Who is Liza? How do they meet? What is the author's reaction to her? What is her reaction to the author? When he admits that he knows she loves him, why doesn't he seek her out?

Who is the officer? Why is the encounter with this man so important to the writer? What importance does it hold for the officer?

Describe the letter the author sends to Simonov after the disastrous farewell dinner party. What does the author say about the letter?

What is the relationship between the author and Apollon? Why does the author continue to pay him when he claims the servant is insolent and rude?