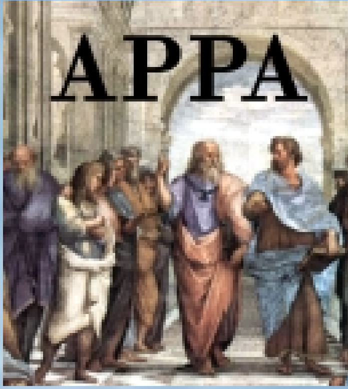

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Nemo Veritatem Regit
Nobody Governs Truth

Dostoevsky and Modern Rage: On the Possibility of Counseling the Underground Man

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Abstract

It is said today that we live in the "Age of Rage." This paper explores the phenomenon of modern rage through an analysis of the psychic conflicts of Dostoevsky's underground man as he tries to reconcile the newly imported values of modernity with his own irrational needs and desires. By interpreting rage through the Greek notion of the *daimonic*, I examine how the modern attempt to rationally control and suppress rage and violence actually exacerbates the underground man's cruel and self-destructive behavior and cuts him off from the possibility of emotional connectivity and wholeness. I conclude by pointing to some therapeutic possibilities within the tradition of existential and phenomenological psychotherapy that might allow the underground man to understand himself by recognizing the sources of his own rage.

Keywords: *Rage, daimonic, the Karamazov, existential psychotherapy, Dostoevsky, Heidegger*

Introduction

A recent article in *The Times* describes an incident that has become increasingly common. A man standing in a long, slow moving line at a local supermarket was punched in the face and killed by an impatient man standing behind him. This impulsive act of violence was referred to as an incident of "check-out rage," just one of any number of random, anger-filled explosions—road rage, plane rage, parking lot rage, office rage, shopping rage—that we hear about regularly on the nightly news. (Midgley, 2008) These disturbing incidences are certainly telling us something about the stresses and frustrations of contemporary life and perhaps reveal a shift in the cultural mood of America. In the first half of the twentieth century, following the mechanized horror of two World Wars and the threat of nuclear annihilation, the poet W. H. Auden (1947) famously referred to the "Age of Anxiety." The conformist consumption sparked by the advertising industry of the post-World War II economy ushered in a new kind of emotional flatness and boredom, what psychotherapist Woodburn Heron (1957) might have called the "Age of Depression." Although the empty consumerism and self-absorption of the Prozac Nation persists, we may be entering into another era, the "Age of Rage," as we witness increasing outbursts of violence on the news, explosions of extreme partisan hate on talk radio, sexual aggression in popular music and pornography, and the emergence of savage, blood-filled video games. Indeed, a recent study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) attests to this fact, reporting that up to 7.3 percent of adults or 16 million Americans will suffer from a pathological rage condition, now called "intermittent explosive disorder" (IED), in their lifetime. (Lane 2007, p. 195)

There are, of course, many ways to theorize the etiology of rage—from instinctivist (whether Darwinian or Freudian), environmentalist, and behaviorist approaches—however, with recent advances in genetic research, pharmacology, and neuroscience, the model that mainstream psychiatry and psychology tends to embrace is neurophysiological which makes it possible to medicalize rage as an organic pathology. Unfortunately, viewing rage as a brain or neurological disorder invariably fails to contextualize the phenomenon by overlooking the unique social and historical forces that shape the temperaments and dispositions of a

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culture. Rage is reduced to a medical condition that can be attributed to low levels of neurotransmitters (such as serotonin or dopamine) or lesions in the brain that affect one's ability to control aggression and impulsivity. This reductive biological interpretation is problematic on at least two fronts. First, it fails to address, what might be called, our "hermeneutic situation," understood as the background of shared historical meanings that is always tacitly determining our behavior and moods. Second, the bio-medical interpretation overlooks the unsettling possibility explored by existential philosophers and depth psychologists that these irrational and violent drives constitute a vital aspect of the human condition. On this view, rage is not necessarily interpreted as a pathology that needs to be suppressed with tranquilizers or behavior modification but as an existential given, a condition of being human, one that needs to be actively acknowledged and attended to in order to achieve wholeness.

The writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky are especially helpful in this regard. Not only does Dostoevsky's work anticipate the insights of twentieth century existentialism and depth psychology by acknowledging the irrational human drives for cruelty and violence that lurk below the surface of our everyday lives, he also carefully situates his characters within the context of mid-nineteenth century Russia and the radical socio-cultural upheavals that were taking place as it went through a period of rapid modernization. Of all of his tortured characters, none embody the conflicts of modernity more than "the underground man," the voice behind his famous 1864 novella, *Notes from the Underground*. Indeed, in the prologue to the story, Dostoevsky tells the reader that it is precisely because of the upheavals of modernity that such a man "positively *must* exist in our society." (1864/2009, p. 1, my emphasis)

This paper draws on the character structure of the underground man because of the unique torment that he embodies as he tries to reconcile newly imported Enlightenment values with his own sensual needs and desires. The result of this conflict is the emergence of an archetypal modern character filled with rage. The aim of the paper is to identify the source of the underground man's rage by interpreting it through the ancient Greek notion of the *daimonic* and show how the daimonic can be understood within the context of modernity. The paper concludes by pointing to some therapeutic possibilities within the tradition of existential and phenomenological psychotherapy that might heal the ruptures in the underground man, allowing him to come to terms with what he calls "the whole of real life," including the dark penumbra within himself.

Dostoevsky and the Daimonic

Western philosophers have long been interested in the phenomenon of anger and rage. From Plato to Seneca, the emotion has been deemed largely destructive, an obstacle to be overcome in order to achieve personal harmony and social tranquility. In his essay, *On Anger*, Seneca writes:

> We are here to encounter the most outrageous, brutal, dangerous, and intractable of all passions; the most loathsome and unmannerly; nay, the most ridiculous too; and the subduing of this monster will do a great deal toward the establishment of human peace. (DiGuiseppe & Tafrate 2007, p. 4; Basore 1958, p. 345)

Rage represented a lack of self-control; it impaired rational judgment and created disharmony and agitation within the soul and society as a whole. It was as an impulsive emotion that needed to be mastered and guided by reason. This classical interpretation of rage as a deficiency and weakness of the soul continues through the Middle Ages and into the modern era. In *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), for example, René Descartes describes how the weakest person is one who "continually allows [himself] to be carried away by present passions...put[ting] the soul in the most deplorable condition it can be in." For Descartes, happiness can be achieved only when the unruly passions are mastered and one is guided by the judgments

of cool, disinterested reason. It is then that "the most vigorous assaults of the passions never have enough power to disturb the tranquility of the soul." (1649/1999, p. 154)

The Cartesian bifurcation between soul and body began to fade with the rise of scientific materialism in the nineteenth century. As a result, rage came to be viewed largely through the mechanistic paradigm of biological determinism; it was an instinctive reaction to a threat and part of our evolutionary development. Charles Darwin in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) argues that rage is something that humans share with animals. When the animal exhibits a certain kind of behavior such as snarling aggressively, it is signaling that it is angry or feeling threatened, and it may lash out. (DiGuiseppe & Tafrate 2007, p. 7) Anger and aggressive behavior is simply a causal reaction, a naturally occurring instinctive response to a potential threat and, as such, is essential to survival.

Dostoevsky challenges this biological and mechanistic account by pointing out that it does not help us understand the uniquely human capacity for pointless, sadistic violence or outbursts of rage that are clearly self-destructive. In developing his central characters, he also reveals the disturbing possibility that our capacities for cruelty and self-destruction are not only an essential aspect of being human but emerge from the same emotional wellsprings that make it possible for us to be loving and tender. Here, Dostoevsky appears to be drawing on a much older interpretation of rage that can be traced back to the Greek notion of the "*daimonic*." In *Love and Will* (1969), existential psychotherapist Rollo May explains this ambiguous aspect of the human condition:

> [The daimonic] *is any natural function which has the power to take over the whole person*. Sex and eros, anger and rage, and the craving for power are examples. The daimonic can be either creative or destructive and is normally both… The daimonic is obviously not an entity but refers to a fundamental, archetypal function of human experience—an existential reality. (p. 123)

The daimonic, then, is not to be confused with demonic or diabolical behavior. It is an emotional possession that can also be constructive and caring. It can both tear us apart and integrate us and, as such, transcends the simple binary between good and evil. In his brilliant 1996 study, *Anger, Madness and the Daimonic*, psychotherapist Stephen Diamond points out that in contrast to the demonic, "the daimonic includes the *diabolic* as well as *divine* human endowments, without making them mutually exclusive; it is that numinous aspect of being and of nature that is both beautiful and terrible at the same time." (p. 81, my emphasis) Diamond identifies pre-Christian religions like Hinduism whose gods Shiva, Kali, and Durga represented both good and evil. Similarly, in the Hebrew religion, Yahweh was regarded both as light and darkness, creativity and destructiveness. And in the early period of Christianity, especially among the Gnostics, the serpent-footed Abraxas was a composite of a luminous God and a malevolent Satan. (p. 81) In his novel *Demian* (1919/1989), Herman Hesse describes Abraxas in terms of

> ... delight and horror, man and woman commingled, the holiest and most shocking intertwined, deep guilt flashing through the most delicate innocence: that was the appearance of … Abraxas. Love had ceased to be the dark animalistic drive I had experienced at first with fright, nor was it any longer the devout transfiguration I had offered ... It was both, and yet much more. It was the image of an angel and Satan, man and woman in one flesh, man and beast, the highest good and the worst evil. (1919/1989, p. 98)

Beginning with his first published story, *Poor Folk* in 1846, Dostoevsky's central characters—a rogues' gallery of petty clerks, thieves, prostitutes, alcoholics and gamblers—often embody the indivisible attributes of the daimonic. They are torn apart by a host of destructive and violent cravings but often possess

the capacity for integration and redemption, transcending these cravings with acts of tenderness and love. These depictions were fortified during his decade in prison. Among the most violent and hardened criminals, Dostoevsky found traces of a deep-seated morality rooted in feelings of love and self-sacrifice, and the daimonic took the shape of a sensual wellspring from which human acts of love and compassion as well rage and cruelty emerge. In his last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80), Dostoevsky refers to these raw and inchoate drives as "the Karamazov," a reference to the fact that human beings are earthly and sensual, filled with irrational and oftentimes conflicting drives and desires. This account breaks radically with the prevailing modern view that regarded humans as fundamentally rational and who are capable of mastering and controlling their emotions and behavior and are happiest when they do so.

The underground man is an incarnation of this modern conflict. He senses that living one's life based on rational control and self-mastery invariably alienates him from his own desires. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky will refer to the attempt to suppress or master the daimonic in terms of "laceration." For Dostoevsky, laceration emerges when we try to deny our own violent and destructive drives, recoiling from the irrational upsurges in an effort to rise above them. (Guignon, 1993, pp. xxii-xxiii) The problem is that if we deny one half of the daimonic, we deny the other, namely our capacity for emotional connectivity and tenderness. Rational detachment for the sake of moral superiority cuts the underground man off from "real life," resulting in his own incapacity to love.

> I was incapable of love … With me loving meant tyrannizing and showing my moral superiority. I have never in my life been able to imagine any other sort of love, and have nowadays come to the point of sometimes thinking that love really consists in the right freely given by the beloved object—to tyrannize over her … And what is there to wonder at in that, since I had succeeded in so corrupting myself, since I was so out of touch with "real life." (1864/2009, p. 93)

He goes on to describe this experience of laceration in terms of a kind of existential oppression and death.

> Why, we don't even know what *living* means now, what it is, and what it is called!... We shall not know what to join, what to cling to, what to love and what to hate … We are oppressed at being men—men with a real individual body and blood ...We are still born, and for generations past have been brought into the world by parents who are dead themselves. (p. 96)

The underground man is acutely aware of the irrationality of "real life" exhibited in our outbursts of pointless cruelty and self-destruction and realizes that this conflicts with the image that was dominant among the Russian social reformers in the 1860s, most notably Nikolai Chernyshevsky, whose philosophy the underground man attacks. Informed by the Enlightenment values of Western Europe, Chernyshevsky was a "rational egoist," maintaining that we are ultimately motivated to act on the basis of rational self-interest, and the powers of reason are sufficient to create a "Crystal Palace," a perfect, scientifically designed moral order based on the principles of rationality and social engineering.

The underground man mocks this utopia, suggesting that it is doomed from the start because it suppresses and distorts the sensual drives that make us human. What Chernyshevsky's utilitarian calculations omit is the evidence that we often act in impulsive, destructive ways that are in direct violation with our rational self-interests. "When," asks the underground man, "in all these thousands of years has there been a time when man has acted only from his own interest? What is to be done with the millions of facts that bear witness that men *consciously*…rushed headlong on another path, to meet peril and danger?" (p. 15) The realization that human beings are not fundamentally rational, good or benevolent, but harbor a deep

capacity for violence and cruelty confuses the underground man, filling him with frustration that culminates in explosions of rage.

Boredom and Rage in the Crystal Palace

By the time of his release from prison in 1859, Dostoevsky was convinced that Europe was in decline. It was losing touch with an older sense of spiritual community and self-sacrifice for the modern values of individualism, industrial progress, and crass materialism. His summer trip to Western Europe in 1862, two years before writing the *Notes*, fortified these suspicions. After his visit to Paris, Dostoevsky (1863/1955) describes what he sees as the illusion of fraternity covering over an empty, self-satisfied egoism:

> The Westerner speaks of fraternity as a great motivating force of humankind, and does not understand that it is impossible to obtain fraternity if it does not exist in reality … But in French nature, and in Western nature in general, it is not present; you find there instead a principle of individualism, a principle of isolation, of intense self-preservation, of personal gain, of self-determination of the *I*, of opposing this *I* to all nature and the rest of mankind as an independent, autonomous principle entirely equal and equivalent to all that exists outside itself. (p. 111)

In London, he encounters the nerve shattering pace, filth, and alienation of the mechanized metropolis.

> What gigantic, overwhelming vistas there are there! A city as unfathomable as the ocean, bustling day and night; the screech and roar of machines; railroads passing over the houses (and soon under them, too); that boldness of enterprise; that apparent disorder which is actually bourgeois orderliness in the highest degree; that polluted Thames; the air saturated with coal dust; those splendid commons and parks; those terrible sections of the city like Whitechapel with its half-naked, savage, and hungry population. (p. 90)

It is in London that Dostoevsky visits the famous Crystal Palace at the Great Exhibition that symbolized Chernyshevsky's scientific utopia.

As a display of the latest technological developments of the Industrial Revolution, Dostoevsky did not associate the Crystal Palace with human achievement or progress, but as an "Apocalypse," a sign of "zombie-like" mass conformism and a mutilation of our sensual existence. He writes:

> The Crystal Palace…you sense that here something has been achieved, that here there is victory and triumph. You even begin to fear something. However independent you may be, for some reason you become terrified. "For isn't this the achievement of perfection?" you think. "Isn't this the ultimate?"… People come with a single thought, quietly, relentlessly, mutely thronging into this colossal palace, and you feel that something has come to an end. It is like a Biblical picture, something out of Babylon, a prophecy from the Apocalypse coming to pass before your eyes…In the presence of such hugeness, of the colossal pride of the sovereign spirit, of the triumphant finality of the creations of that spirit, even the hungry soul takes flight; it bows down, it submits, it seeks salvation in gin and debauchery and believes that everything is as it ought to be. The fact lies heavy; the masses become insensible and zombie-like. (p. 92)

For the underground man, the aim of Chernyshevsky's Crystal Palace is to "re-educate" human beings in such a way that we act in conformity with the rational laws of nature. Humans, on this view, are regarded as little more than de-animated matter, just one more physical object among countless others whose

behavior is causally determined and can be scientifically controlled my means of social engineering. The underground man mocks this conception of human existence.

> [It is] something like a piano key or an organ stop; that…there are natural laws in the universe, and whatever happens to him happens outside his will, as it were, by itself, in accordance with the laws of nature. Therefore, all there is left to do is discover these laws and man will no longer be responsible for his acts… (1864/2009, p. 18)

The underground man realizes that this re-education is deadening to the spirit because it denies the willful, irrational, and sensual aspects of human existence and is unable to make sense of human suffering, and it is our capacities for free will and suffering that distinguish us from unfeeling, rational machines. Thus, he is convinced "man will never give up true suffering" for the tedious and mechanized comforts of the Crystal Palace. (p. 19) To live on the basis of reason is not actually living. It is merely the satisfaction of our "rational requirements" whereas deep desire and feeling are a "manifestation of the whole life."

> Reason is an excellent thing, there's no disputing that, but reason is nothing but reason and satisfies only the rational side of man's nature, while desire is a manifestation of the whole life, that is, of the whole human life including reason and all the impulses. And although our life, in this manifestation of it, is often worthless, yet it is life and not simply extracting square roots. (p. 21)

For the underground man, life ruled by "mathematical precision" and "predetermined timetables" may be comfortable and predictable, but it will also be "*deadly boring*." (p. 19) Everything will be governed by the laws of nature and replicated in the repetitive, automated conformism of the Industrial Age, resulting in a meaningless, emotionally flat existence. In response to this mechanized predictability, the underground man rages. He "will contrive destruction and chaos, will contrive sufferings of all sorts, only to win his point!" And if the suffering and chaos can also be "calculated and tabulated…[then he] would purposely go mad in order to be rid of reason and win his point." (p. 23) The only response to boredom, then, is to engage in capricious and impulsive acts of destruction; these acts, "however wild," become our "most advantageous advantage" because they are in direct violation with our own rational self-interests. (p. 20) As an exercise of rebellion, the underground man refuses to be limited or constrained by the laws of nature and society. Thus, whenever he encounters a social situation that restrains or poses a limit on him, he acts in a contrarian way, doing the opposite. In the second part of *Notes*, we see the results of this impulsive behavior as he acts outrageously, hurting people for no reason in vicious and senseless ways and deriving a kind of voluptuous pleasure from his own degradation and humiliation.

Dostoevsky's insights anticipate a number of recent psychological studies that link boredom to a host of maladaptive behaviors such as sadistic aggression and eruptions of violence that temporarily disrupt the feeling of emotional flatness. (Baumeister & Campbell, 1999) What these empirical studies often fail to address, however, is the historical situation of modernity itself that provides the lived-context for boredom and rage. Although Dostoevsky understands that the underground man's behavior is an "extreme" incarnation of the tensions of modernity and is not representative of "all of us," (p. 96), he also makes it clear to the reader that the underground man is a product of an increasingly rational and mechanized way of living, one that leaves him alienated from his own daimonic drives. And, as an "anti-hero," there is no redemption or salvation for him. But this makes *Notes* an anomaly in Dostoevsky's corpus because, philosophically, he was neither an irrationalist nor a nihilist. His critiques of modern Western ideologies are always shaped by a deep concern with the existential integration and wholeness of the human being, and, to this end, his writings forecast a number of key insights in the tradition of twentieth century existential psychotherapy. Whether or not the underground man's behavior is actually pathological and a clinical test-piece for this

kind of therapy is beyond the scope of this paper, but we can begin to gesture towards what this kind of intervention might look like in theory.

Existential Psychotherapy and the Recovery of Wholeness

The underground man understands the modern need to suppress and control the daimonic because it can be threatening to one's self and to the prevailing social order, reminding us of our own existential frailty and capacity for violence. Yet, it is this suppression that leaves the underground man feeling "crippled" and "divorced from real life." (p. 95) His outbursts of rage and self-destruction can be interpreted as a response to this emotional suppression. He makes his case by pointing out how the modern attempt to defuse the daimonic for the sake of a more harmonious, civilized, and controlled society simply does not work. Indeed, it actually leads to greater violence.

> Have you noticed that it is the most civilized gentlemen who have been the subtlest slaughterers… In any case civilization has made mankind if not more bloodthirsty, at least more vilely, more loathsomely bloodthirsty. In the old days he saw justice in bloodshed and with his conscience at peace exterminated those he thought proper. Now we do think bloodshed abominable and yet we engage in this abomination, with more energy than ever. Which is worse? (p. 18)

The underground man's question gets to the crux of Dostoevsky's critique of the importation of Western ideologies into Russia and foreshadows the insights of depth psychology and existential psychotherapy. For Dostoevsky, the rational suppression of rage splits us apart, making it impossible for us to achieve wholeness by closing us off from the unconscious wellspring of emotion that can integrate the self and bind human beings together. This experience of psychic fragmentation triggers the underground man's delusional behavior, his bizarre revenge fantasies, the self-deception regarding his own greatness, and his sadistic need to hurt others. They can be interpreted, following Diamond (1996), as "an [unconscious projection] of his disowned anger, rage, and power onto others making *them* the murderous, omnipotent demons…a delusional compensation for profound feelings of helplessness and impotence." (p. 226) What is needed from a therapeutic standpoint, then, is not the suppression or medicalization of rage but a recognition and understanding that it is—like anxiety and death—an existential given. Existential psychotherapy would allow the underground man to confront his rage as a fundamental aspect of being human and understand that it is only through this confrontation and acceptance that he can become whole.

In counseling the underground man, the therapist, using an existential and phenomenological approach, would first situate him within the experiential world that he has been thrown into and attempt to enter this world by patiently listening and attending to his experiences *as he describes them*, with no psychiatric assumptions about the way the world and psychic phenomena 'really are'. His experiences of festering rage and his crippling incapacity to feel love would not necessarily be deemed pathological. They would be regarded in terms of existence, of being concretely involved in a particular historical situation. This recognition contextualizes the underground man's feelings of frustration and anger and allows him to move in the direction of self-understanding. Instead of seeing himself as "a sick man," as "the nastiest, stupidest, absurdist, and most envious of all the worms on earth" (1864/2009, pp. 3, 91), he begins to understand himself in terms of, what Martin Heidegger calls, *Dasein*, as a finite situated *way of being* that is already shaped by the world. The aim is to see that affects like rage cannot be understood in isolation because they are always already embedded in a context of shared historical meanings.

Heidegger's word for "affectivity" (*Befindlichkeit*) is especially helpful in capturing the way in which behavior and moods are embedded in the worldly situation that one "finds" (*befinden*) oneself in. (Stolorow,

2007) Although the German word *Befindlichkeit* is often translated as "state of mind," this gives the misleading impression that moods and affects reside 'inside' the mind of an encapsulated individual. Heidegger (1927/1962) makes it clear that, insofar as we are "being-in-the-world" we are always already in a mood and this makes it possible for things to emotionally *count* and *matter* for us in the first place. Heidegger explains:

> A mood assails us. It comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside', but arises out of being-in-the-world, as a way of being… the mood has already disclosed, in every case, being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something. Having a mood is not directed to the psychical in the first instance, and is not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on things and persons… [Thus] being-in as such has been determined existentially beforehand in such a manner that what it encounters within-the-world can "*matter*" to it in this way. (p. 176)

Thus, *Befindlichkeit* is perhaps better translated as "situatedness" or "being found in a situation where things already matter." (Dreyfus 1991, p. 168) For Heidegger, this means the public situation that one finds oneself in already shapes and determines the possible moods an individual might have.

> The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood—that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world "matter" to it. The "they" prescribes one's [moods] and determines what and how one 'sees'. (1927/1962, p. 213)

In order for the underground man to understand his own behavior and emotional states, the therapist would not begin by attending to his symptoms in isolation but to his situatedness, understood as the affective, relational context that he finds himself in.

In this regard, the therapist would not interpret rage as a discrete entity contained 'within' the underground man. Rage, rather, is "already there" as part of the public atmosphere that the underground man is immersed in. Indeed, it is only because he is concretely immersed in this atmosphere that he can be enraged in the first place. Heidegger (1929-30/1995) explains:

> Moods are *not side-effects*, but are something which in advance determines our being with one another. It seems as though a mood is in each case already there, so to speak, like an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which then attunes us through and through. It does not merely seem so, it is so; and, faced with this fact, we must dismiss the psychology of feelings, experiences, and consciousness. (p. 67)

In recognizing the extent to which *Befindlichkeit* is always at work behind our backs as part of the worldly atmosphere that we grow into, the therapist is able to better attend to the singular uniqueness of the underground man's experience. This attentiveness involves not only acknowledging the broad socio-cultural upheavals taking place in mid-nineteenth century Russia but also the particular traumas of the underground man's own childhood and upbringing. In attending to his worldly situation in this way, the underground man can begin to understand why certain things matter to him, why he defensively lashes out at others, and why he interprets himself so negatively.

Dostoevsky offers a brief glimpse of this contextual self-recognition in the underground man's encounter with the prostitute Liza as he begins to open up about the psychic wounds of being raised an orphan, of growing up without parents and without love.

> 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 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. (p. 70)

Unfortunately, the emotional exposure and vulnerability of this intimate confession is too painful for him. It manifests overwhelming feelings of shame, humiliation, and self-loathing, and he reflexively retreats to a defensive posture of mastery and control. His tender longing to be loved and connected is suddenly replaced by homicidal rage.

> A horrible spite against her suddenly surged up in my heart; I believe I could have killed her… I had been humiliated, so I wanted to humiliate; I had been treated like a rag, so I wanted to show my power… Power, power was what I wanted, sport was what I wanted, I wanted to wring out your tears, your humiliation, your hysteria—that was what I wanted (p. 89-90)

Working in a clinical setting with an empathic therapist, one can imagine a different outcome for the underground man, one where he would be encouraged to safely invite these frightening emotions to come forth instead of defensively lashing out, recoiling, or trying to master them. In this way, the therapist does not ask the underground man to *do* anything with his feelings but simply to *dwell* with them, allowing him to confront and eventually tolerate the daimonic wellsprings of "real life." Indeed, in letting go of the need to reflexively react to his rage and inviting the feelings to come forth, the rage itself may begin to lose its threatening power.

The Buddhist philosopher David Loy (1996) explains the therapeutic dynamics of inviting and dwelling in these unsettling feelings. "One does not do anything with [them] except develop the ability to dwell in [them] or rather as [them]; then having nowhere else to direct [themselves], [they] consume [themselves]." (p. 57) Although Loy is referring to Søren Kierkegaard's conception of anxiety in the face of one's own death, by interpreting rage as an existential given we can apply this account of acceptance and integration to rage. In substituting rage for anxiety, we might say,

> The path of integration is an awareness that does not flee [rage] but endures it, in order to recuperate those parts of the psyche which splits off and return to haunt us in projected symbolic form… The way to integrate [rage] is to become completely [enraged]: to let formless, unprojected [rage] gnaw on all those 'finite ends' I have attempted to secure myself with, so that, by devouring these attachments, [rage] devours me too and, like the parasite that kills its host, consumes itself. (p. 64)

Of course, inviting rage to come forth can be dangerous, and, for this reason, the kind of existential therapy I am envisioning would not preclude the use of mechanistic interventions—in the form of cognitive/behavioral therapy, medication, or even hospitalization—in order to protect the underground man from harming himself or others. But the overall aim is not to defuse or eradicate his rage but to allow him to feel it, recognize it, and try to come to grips with its sources. The suggestion here is that it is only on the basis of receiving the daimonic that the underground man can become whole, opening himself up to his own inchoate feelings and accepting the emotional risk and vulnerability of being-with-others.

This approach is obviously a radical departure from conventional interventions that rely on protocols that compartmentalize human behavior and emotions into specific diagnostic categories. If the therapist, for instance, were to diagnose the underground man's rage in terms of a particular kind of disorder—say, "intermittent explosive disorder" (IED) or "obsessive compulsive disorder" (OCD)—that can be managed and controlled with the appropriate pill or therapeutic technique, one can imagine Dostoevsky saying that this only addresses "the rational side of man's nature," not the whole person. (1864/2009, p. 21) For Dostoevsky, this instrumental approach betrays not only the inexpressible complexity of the human condi-

tion but also the possibility of transcendence, of integration and wholeness that comes only with accepting the mysterious reservoir of emotional life. The underground man reminds us that, "human nature acts *as a whole*, with everything in it, consciously or unconsciously, and, even if it goes wrong, it lives." (p. 21, my emphasis) Becoming whole, then, does not begin with the psychiatric manipulation or management of rage but with a willingness to move toward and accept it as an existential given. As Dostoevsky makes clear with his idea of "laceration," any attempt to rise above and control rage will invariably cut us off from the emotional wellspring that harbors our own capacities for connectivity, tenderness and psychic healing.

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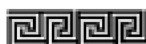

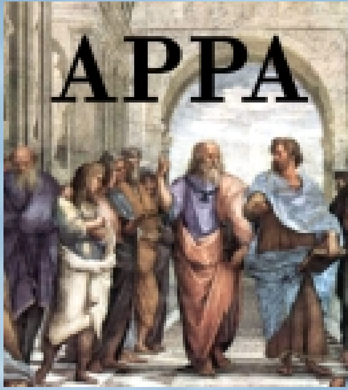

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