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Humanism In Notes From Underground And The Fall

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Abstract: *Humanism is as we all known, a system in which man, his interest and development are understood to both most important factors. Its tendency is to encourage a spirit of revolt - for this it exalts the practical and the cultural rather than the scientific and speculative. NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND (1864) and THE FALL (1956) reveal the stories of two individuals in confrontation with stark humiliation and mockery of life. The lingering bitterness of degradation paves in them a cementing urge for ignoble revenge, because both are men of acute self conscious, extreme sensitivity and thorough awareness. Both novels are aesthetically effective in their design and execution in analysing the secrets of man and laying them bare for wider understanding and deeper comprehension by exalting humanity through practical and cultural association rather than through scientific and speculative ideals. The paper aims at portraying that man is indeed the fountain head of all meaning of life and truth is void without human faculties.*

Key Words: Humanism, Mockery, Degradation, Poverty, Exaltation, Sophistry, Incontestable, Disarray.

Humanism is as we all know a system in which man; his interests and development are understood to be the most important factors. Its tendency is to encourage a spirit of revolt — for this it exalts the practical and the cultural rather than the scientific and speculative. Today it is believed that man is the meaning for all things and, therefore, truth cannot exist nor have any meaning without human faculties and human requirements.

The overriding idea is quiet similar in the two novels. It is difficult to say how much Camus was indebted to Dostoyevsky. It is true he read, translated and even acted in some of his translated works but our aim is not to discover the influence of Dostoyevsky on Camus. it is simply to show how the two authors appropriate the synthesis of the problems of underground and double in human beings through humanism. Notes From Underground (1864) and The Fall (1956) reveal the stories of two individuals in confrontation with stark humiliation and mockery of life. The lingering bitterness of degradation paves in them a cementing urge for ignoble revenge, because both are men of acute self-consciousness, extreme sensitivity and thorough awareness. Ultimately when they embark upon their final endeavours they find themselves face to face with the carious ugliness of their own discrepancies which rent them apart with debauchery.

Shocked and confounded they even try to debate and argue with themselves about this conflicting phenomenon. Unable to overcome their anguish they carve for themselves a self-isolated life in which they turn in upon themselves, confessing their deformities, self-torture, they suffer the awareness of the best and the incapability of getting it and then they come to a conclusion of their own belief that the entire world is like them and it is no use to become better. The Underground man says, "... whose side to be on or where to give our allegiance, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise"¹ Clamence asks, "Are we not all alike for ever up against the same question for which we know the answer in advance?"²

The Charming attractiveness is obviously found in the pathos which is dominant throughout the two novels, but what is more powerful is the unbreached voice of the two writers which perpetually develops into strength by the luxuriant tone of their enchanting message which is humanism, for it naturally brings into solidarity those who throb with life rich in feeling and sensation rather than thought and imagination. Dostoyevsky and Camus were both great exponents of 'hope' in man's existence. Camus was confident that if "hope in life is once reborn then God is powerless against human interest."³ Both novels exalt revolt against existing opinion. The aspirations of Dostoyevsky and Camus grow delicately with grace with every revelation about man. The two intellectuals saw man not as a thing



to dwindle away into oblivion, nor as a tragic source to perpetuate despair but as a complete force of pure dexterity, which underlies his own 'allness' that goes to make him an unalloyed human comprising of total humanity. Kaufman claims, "This individuality is the highest good."⁴ Dostoyevsky declared in his notebook that he was proud to be the first person to have portrayed the 'real man' of the Russian Majority which he said was tragic Camus' faith in the individual was strengthened by seeing the tragic condition of the 'modern' man. He said, "Man is that force which ultimately always cancels tyrants and Gods. He is the force of evidence and human evidence is what we must preserve and our certainty comes from the fact that there is something that still has meaning:"⁵ and this meaning he found in man.

Incidentally the inception of these two novels also share a number of travails. For instance both novels are rancor reaction of ideologies unexpected and unacceptable to the two intellectuals on one hand and personal humiliation which both suffered on the other. Dostoyevsky's *Poor Folk* (1846) was applauded by everyone including Belinsky as a big achievement. But his *The Double* (1846) did not receive even the slightest appreciation. Dostoyevsky's hurt pride and morbid state of health led him to fight with everyone including Belinsky. He was thus reduced from a promising writer of Russian Literature, to a mere laughing stock, mocked and scorned; Likewise Camus suffered humiliation in the hands of his friend, critic, and co-communist. Sartre's comments on Camus' *The Rebel* was that he was writing about things he did not understand. And that Camus had not read either Marx or Engels and yet had utilises the ideas of communist philosophers. His other common friends too began to find inadequacy of philosophy in the book. Camus was hurt, shocked and suffered rejection. Apart from this Camus hated Russia whereas Sartre ever drifted towards it; Camus fought for principles which were different from Sartre's devotion to Socialism.

Likewise Dostoyevsky too suffered a breach of faith and trust in Social Utopian after his arrest and imprisonment. In a letter to Eduard Ivanovich on March 24, 1856 he wrote, "I endured the hatred of my fellow convicts who revenged themselves on me...what caused me the greatest suffering was the fact that I came to understand my delusion..."⁶

Dostoyevsky and Camus became inevitably indulgent in the human condition also due to their own poverty. Camus wrote, "A certain number of years lived without money are enough to create a whole sensibility."⁷ A little later he wrote again, "Poverty prevented me from thinking that all is well under the sun and history and the sun taught, me that history is not everything".⁸ On June 5, 1837 Dostoyevsky wrote to his father, "I suppose that now you are filling your lonely hours with running the estate and farming chores. And I wonder what this year will bring us and whether there will be much in it that will cheer us. Oh, may God send us happiness."⁹

The two writers wanted to save man from the cramps of despair, debauchery, nothingness and hollowness which became a general condition of his life. The Underground man says, "I was always conscious of many elements showing the directly opposite tendency. I felt them positively swarming inside me. These elements I knew had swarmed there all my life asking to be let out. But I wouldn't, I wouldn't. They tormented me and drove me to convulsions..."¹⁰ Clamence says, "I don't know how to name the odd feeling that comes over me. Isn't it shame, perhaps? ...or one of those silly emotions to do with honour. And that emotion has never left me... despite my digression and my inventive efforts."¹¹

On June 9, 1838 Dostoyevsky wrote to his brother, "I have a plan to become a madman, let people become furious...it's terrifying to find a man who has the inconceivable in his power and does not know what to do."¹² In the same letter he expresses his profuse ambition to discover what man is, "But to see only the hard shell in which the universe is languishing, to know that one single explosion of will would be sufficient to shatter it and fuse it with eternity, to know that and to be like the last creature — that is horrible."¹³ Finally, on August 16, 1839 his solemn but silent decree was, "Man is a mystery it must be unraveled. If it takes a whole life, time don't say it is a waste of time. I am preoccupied by this mystery because I want to be a human being."¹⁴

In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) Camus has tried to explain this hollowness which suddenly erupts in man:



I hold certain facts which I cannot separate. What I know and what is certain I cannot deny ... I can negate everything of that part in me which lives in vague nostalgias except this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion, this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy. I do not know whether this World has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that meaning and that it is impossible for me to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me. I can understand only in human terms. What I touch what resists that is what I understand.¹⁵

Because earlier in 1938 Camus' reaction after seeing the pathetic condition of man was, "The spirit of revolution lies wholly in man's protest against the human condition... it's a protest which a man makes against his destiny."¹⁶ And that is why he was very clear when he wrote, "There is no love of life without despair of life."¹⁷ Dostoyevsky's prison experience of 1849 gave him a complete understanding of the real man. -The convicts revealed to him what he needed, 'the allness' of man. On February 1854 he wrote to his brother, "Even in penal servitude I learned in those four years to discern human beings amongst the bandits...some cannot fail to respect and others are admirable. I may not have seen Russia, but I got to know Russian people well".¹⁸ The Fall like Notes From Underground-conceals the dark and mysterious days Camus spent from 1954 to 1957. Isolated from his friends and society he suffered to discover the reverse of common decency which Rieux talks about in The Plague and like Clarence found out, "the keenest of human torments is to be judged without law".¹⁹

In his novel What is to be done ? published in 1863 Chernyshevsky wrote that if a man is enlightened, foresighted, critical and receptive of his own interests he can never be evil and become virtuous. But Underground man condemns its authenticity and says that men have known to have chosen opposite paths out of self will, defiance, obstinacy and even boredom knowing very well that it would lead to meaninglessness of life. And moreover in order to desire his will he has been known to go against all logic and laws of nature. This is perhaps why Raskolnikov commits murder in Crime and Punishment: "All theories of self-interest, virtues and nobility are sophistry. Because man is so partial-to systems and abstract deductions that in order to justify his logic he is prepared to distort the truth intentionally."²⁰ Clamence says in The Fall, "The feeling of the law the satisfaction of being right, the joy of self-esteem are powerful incentives to keep us upright or make us move forward. On the other hand if you deprive men of them you transform them into dogs forthing with rage. How many crimes were committed merely because their author could not endure to be wrong."²¹ This is why Undergroundman says that if one looks around oneself one will find blood flowing everywhere in torrents as if it was champagne.

"There's our nineteenth century—and it was Bukle's century too."²² Clamence mentions the killing of the Jews during the reign of Hitler. He says, "What a clean-up. Seventy-five Jews deported or assassinated, that's real vacuum cleaning. I admire that diligence and methodical patience! When one has no character one has to apply a method I am living on the site of one of the greatest crimes in history."²³ This severity against scientific methodology and speculative calculations is actually a never ending fight against human degradation which the Undergroundman feels obliged to share with his fellow-men through his 'Palace of Crystal', his certitude is that when common sense and science is re—educated then men on their own accord will cease to do crime and indulge in other follies and live a normal life by realizing the difference between the common sense and volition. Moreover laws of nature according to him cannot govern men. On the contrary men have to discover these laws in order to live in harmony with them. This is reflective in the 'Stone Wall' or the law of nature as the Undergroundman calls it. For him it is the conclusion of science and mathematics: "Because the law of nature does not ask for it. She is not concerned with your wishes or whether you like her laws or not. You must take her as she is and consequently her results".²⁴

'Real life' for both Undergroundman and Clamence is servitude. "Just try giving us much independence as possible, untie the hands of anyone of us, loosen our bonds and we should I assure you beg to go back underdiscipline." "At the end of all freedom is a court sentence, that's why freedom is too heavy to bear..."²⁶ and for this reason he (Clamence) calls himself an enlightened advocate of slavery.²⁷ Explaining this Camus say, "I demand for happiness



and the patient quest for it. We need not banish our melancholy but we must destroy our taste for difficult and fatal things. Be happy with our friends in harmony with the world and earn our happiness by following a path which nevertheless leads to death....Always demand now but stay lucid.”²⁸

This leads one to conclude that man is only a custodian of the two factors — underground and the double as he is a caretaker of the law of nature, common sense, lucidity and hope. If, therefore, he exercises his choice of freewill, he is himself responsible for it. And responsibility according to Sartre is the “consciousness of being the incontestable author of an event or of an object”.²⁹ This analysis can be further amplified by the example of Jesus. Christ. Both Dostoyevsky and Camus had a very special understanding of Christ. Camus wrote in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “Christ lived in the midst of falsehood and died for a falsehood. Solely in this sense Jesus personified the whole human drama. He is the complete man, being the one who realised the most absurd conditions...and like him each one of us can be crucified and victimised.”³⁰ On 1st January, 1840 Dostoyevsky wrote to his brother, in which he says, “...Don’t you realise that in the Iliad Homer gave to the world a scheme for spiritual and earthly life with the same force as Christ gave it to the modern world.”³¹ For Dostoyevsky, Christ was also a supreme example of truth which he has expressed in *Brothers Karamazov*.

If Clamence says, “Christ was crucified because he knew that he was not altogether innocent...he must have heard of a certain slaughter of the innocent. The children of Judea massacred while his Parents were taking him to a safe place —why did they die if not because of him. And when he grew up the knowledge of his crime innocent must have haunted him.”³² Clamence lays this claim because he cannot guarantee the validity of the values he has chosen for himself. He is apprehensive because each time he has to make a choice it is self he chooses which is already in a disarray. It is completely distorted because it is in total disassociation with his past, present and his future. He says, “Life becomes less easy for me when body is sad, the heart languishes. It seemed to me I was half unlearning what I had never learned and yet it was probably then that everything began.”³³

The concept of women also is miraculously alike in the two books. One is a fallen woman and another a woman who falls and dies. Both are representative figures of the times in which they lived. It is difficult to agree with Jessie Coulson when he says, “Dostoyevsky’s Liza though belongs to real life; she is a human being, a young woman made of flesh and blood whose everyday existence began before and will continue after the part of her history... Her reality and truth reveal the hollowness of the Undergroundman and the falsity of his ideas...when she vanishes in the thickly falling snow, it is she who goes on.”³⁴ But why should one forget and overlook the fact that Dostoyevsky has quoted Nekrasov’s poem in the novel a number of times. It says:

Clamence says, “A certain type of pretension was so personified in me that it was hard for me to imagine despite the fact that a woman who had once been mine could ever belong to another. But the oath they wore to me liberated me while it bound them”.³⁶ He confesses his sensuality. But his whole approach to life changes when a woman commits suicide while he was crossing River Seine. He heard her shriek and cry for help but he simply passed by and she died. The memory of the whole scene pricked his conscience and an imaginary laughter mocked his being and revealed to him a clear understanding of his hollowness. The realisation which came to him was: “God is not needed to create guilt or to punish. Our fellow-men suffice aided by ourselves”. On May 18, 1959 Camus in a letter to Rene Char said, “The question is only to know what life at least is, what it contains that is worth adoring. Is to become that alone suffices to make one suffer? But if we are unhappy at least we are not deprived of truth”.³⁷ And this truth is definitely not found in solitary tragedy alone but it is available in company and Clamence and the Undergroundman are ever alone.

Both novels are aesthetically effective in their design and execution in analysing the secrets of man and laying them bare for wider understanding and deeper comprehension by exalting humanity through practical and cultural associations rather than through scientific and speculative ideals. Man is indeed the fountain head of all meaning of life and truth is void without human faculties.



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