No. I understand. You feel as if you were a huge black bird that someone fastened with a thousand band-aids to a wall. You know that a single tug on your spread wings would be enough to set you free, that even less, perhaps a deep breath taken for a sigh or for a long relieving scream would make the little tapers come loose, and yet you hang there as you have hung there all your life. It's maddening. How can the mincing forsights, cautions and considerations that circle in your brain like the abandoned toy trains of your childhood hold you back? How can a harness of pink ribbons strait-jacket you? No, you will singe them through with the ambers of your passion. You will break free. Your breath will spout in geyser.

Yes. Isn't that how you feel? All the nice reasons that speak for your staying here sound like the echo of a stranger's voice. Their source seems so irrelevant and distant, that your being here is like the working of a spell. It is as if a hypnotist had read them on a tape that now drones on and on under your bed.

For a few moments try not to fulminate against yourself. Try to unclench your teeth, and for a little while subdue your rage against what you consider your own cowardice. Don't swoon away into the dreams of what you will do with your freedom. You think that your experience is ordinary and quite humdrum, that anyone with enough brain to think up a few reasons, anyone with thin, transparent guts is bound to have it. And that may be quite true. But you sit so in the thick of your own self-hatred and you despise yourself so much for wasting time on such a boring, usual, simple feeling, that you don't see how intricate and fascinating it in fact is. More than that. It has genuine philosophical importance. If you had a little patience, and would for a moment detach yourself a little from your impatience for rebellion, then — but no, see for yourself. Let me not lure you with a promise.
Take first the fact that this experience lies at the core of one of Dostoevsky's novels, and that he gives it there quite explicitly and by design a unique and highest status. One might compare this to the Birth of Tragedy. There Nietzsche outlines a world-view in two dozen flashes, and in this world-view Art assumes the highest place. Art alone, he says there, has the capacity to justify existence. Its creation is the only act with metaphysical dimensions. In The Notes from Underground, Dostoevsky does something similar with the act that deliberately rebels against reason. It is proclaimed the sumnum bonum. It alone gives man true freedom, and through it and it alone does man break through the neutral shell of anonymity that holds him captive. It alone marks the individual in the mass of others that are like him. It gives uniqueness; it alone establishes distinction. It first gives definition to the self that otherwise would have no more identity than one egg has among a score. Dostoevsky therefore calls it "the most advantageous advantage." It is more important than peace, prosperity, and well-being. What is most odd is that it, that just this supreme advantage, has usually been omitted when philosophers and others have made their lists of what man wants and what one therefore should provide him. Or is that so odd? Is it so surprising that this one desideratum could not be incorporated in any of their systems?

But of this we shall speak much later. First listen to a piece of the spiteful little secretary's own confessions. Dostoevsky's spiteful little secretary, whose confession makes up the whole text of the novel, writes near the opening of the 7th Section: "Oh, tell me, who was it first announced, who was it first proclaimed, that man only does nasty things because he does not know his own interests; and that if he were enlightened, if his eyes were opened to his real normal interests, man would at once cease to do nasty things, would at once become good and noble because, being
enlightened and understanding his real advantage, he would see his own advantage in the good and nothing else, and we all know that not one man can, consciously, act against his own interests, consequently, so to say, through necessity, he would begin doing good? Oh, the babe! Oh, the pure, innocent child! Why, in the first place, when 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, that is fully understanding their real interests, have left them in the background and have rushed headlong on another path, to meet peril and danger, compelled to this course by nobody and by nothing, but, as it were, simply disliking the beaten track, and have obstinately, wilfully, struck out another difficult, absurd way, seeking it almost in the darkness. So, I suppose, this obstinacy and perversity were pleasanter to them than any advantage.... Advantage! What is advantage? And will you take it upon yourself to define with perfect accuracy in what the advantage of man consists? And what if it so happens that a man's advantage, sometimes, not only may, but even must, consist in his desiring in certain cases what is harmful to himself and not advantageous. And if so, if there can be such a case, the whole principle falls into dust. What do you think—are there such cases? You laugh; laugh away, gentlemen, but only answer me: have man's advantages been reckoned up with perfect certainty? Are there not some which not only have not been included but cannot possibly be included under any classification? You see, you gentlemen have, to the best of my knowledge, taken your whole register of human advantages from the averages of statistical figures and politico-economical formulas. Your advantages are prosperity, wealth, freedom, peace—and so on, and so on. So that the man who should, for instance, go openly and knowingly in opposition to all that list would, to your thinking, and indeed mine, too, of course,
be an obscurantist or an absolute madman: would not he? But, you know, this is what is surprising: why does it so happen that all these statisticians, sages and lovers of humanity, when they reckon up human advantages invariably leave out one? They don't even take it into their reckoning in the form in which it should be taken, and the whole reckoning depends upon that. It would be no great matter, they would simply have to take it, this advantage, and add it to the list. But the trouble is, that this strange advantage does not fall under any classification and is not in place in any list. I have a friend for instance ... Eoh! gentlemen, but of course he is your friend, too; and indeed there is no one, no one, to whom he is not a friend! When he prepares for any undertaking this gentleman immediately explains to you, elegantly and clearly, exactly how he must act in accordance with the laws of reason and truth. What is more, he will talk to you with excitement and passion of the true normal interests of man; with irony he will upbraid the shortsighted fools who do not understand their own interests, nor the true significance of virtue; and, within a quarter of an hour, without any sudden outside provocation, but simply through something inside him which is stronger than all his interests, he will go off on quite a different tack — that is, act in direct opposition to what he has just been saying about himself, in opposition to the laws of reason, in opposition to his own advantage, in fact in opposition to everything ... I warn you that my friend is a compound personality, and therefore it is difficult to blame him as an individual. The fact is, gentlemen, it seems there must really exist something that is dearer to almost every man than his greatest advantages, or (not to be illogical) there is a most advantageous advantage (the very one omitted of which we spoke just now) which is more important and more advantageous than all other advantages, for the sake of which a man if necessary is ready to act in opposition to all laws; that is, in opposition
to reason, honour, peace, prosperity — in fact, in opposition to all those excellent and useful things if only he can attain that fundamental, most advantageous advantage which is dearer to him than all." Two pages later he explains that this supreme advantage consists in "One's own free unfettered choice, one's own caprice, however wild it may be, one's own fancy worked up at times to frenzy — is that very "most advantageous advantage" which we have overlooked, which comes under no classification and against which all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms. And how do these wiseacres know that man wants a normal, a virtuous choice? What has made them conceive that man must want a rationally advantageous choice? What man wants is simply independent choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead."

For the moment let us ignore the somewhat hyperbolic generalization that this is true for all men, but let us assume that it is true for him. Why should his "free, unfettered choice" seem to him such a supreme advantage, and why should only the act that flouts and violates all reason, the act of sheer caprice seem free to him? It must be that he experiences the counsels of reason as dictates, as constraining orders which he conceives as issuing not from himself, but as imposed upon him, as inflicted by an agency that he confronts. As long as he acts in their direction, he does not feel himself to be the master of his own free will. His acts are then not quite his own. They are the outcome of impersonal forces. The considerations effect and balance and outweigh each other in accord with neutral and indifferent laws, and nothing is left to him but to actualize their resolution. He is a passivity, an inertness. He feels that his reason leads him by a leash and that he is free only when this leash is broken. He only experiences an act as his own, he is only convinced that it was he who performed it, if it is clear that he did not merely yield to the pressure
of reason, but countervailed it and steered himself against its current.

A scene from the film made after the life of T. E. Lawrence illustrates you and the Underground Man's experience, only in a calmer and less internal context, so that it becomes even more explicit. The scene occurs in the last third of the film when Lawrence is already in command of a formidable small Arab army that has a whole string of daring exploits to its credit. After a temporary set-back Lawrence is in the process of preparing a major and well-planned campaign that promises hurt to the Turks and glory and loot to his men. He needs troops, however, and the scene narrates his interview with a proud tribal leader. In its course Lawrence tries out reason after reason on the chieftain. "Your fame will spread far if you join me. There will be much money. This is your long sought chance to get even with the Turks. Together we will lead your people out of their servility. We will lift them up out of the posture of their obeisance. You can be the father of a new proud nation." The Arab sits unmoved and distant. Disdainfully he shakes his massive head to each of these reasons. He knows full well what force they have, and he feels it. His gesture is a refusal, a fending off; really the signal of his determination not to submit himself to their power. Eventually Lawrence's arsenal is exhausted. He has given every reason and all have been repulsed with the same refusal, all have been parried by the same wearied headshake. Both men sit through a silence, till Lawrence is just at the point of rising and of taking his curt leave. Then at last the chief speaks: "I will join you," he says, "but not for the fame, nor for the money; not for my people. Not for any of the good reasons that you gave me. I will do it only because it pleases me to do so. It is my whim." This tribal leader in fact acts not against but with reason. Yet he tries to shroud this. He presents it as a coincidence. If the action were the result of reason, it would be forfeited. That would reduce it to
a natural event. And he would be the servant who only does what he must do. So he insists that it was gratuitous; that it was a mere whim. Thereby he isolates his action from all outside forces. He gives it autonomy and the guise of having come from nothing. He sets it free, and thereby makes it more his own.

Now set these examples of the Underground man and of the Arabian chief-tain and your own feeling next to Plato's views on this topic. You will notice that they are the exact denial of each other. The heart of Plato's conception is his celebrated equation of virtue with knowledge; i.e., more precisely his claim that virtue is a species of knowledge. In the *Protagoras* he puts succinctly: "No man voluntarily pursues evil, or that which he thinks to be evil. To prefer evil to good is not in human nature." That amounts to saying that we do evil only when we are mistaken, when we do not know that the act is evil, or when we are unfree, when we are coerced to do it and do it against our will.

This view is one of the taproots of Plato's thinking. Many of his more specific views derive from it or are applications of it to a different, more specific context. To give one example: in the *Republic* Plato compares the man whose acts are not governed by reason to a despotic state. Socrates poses the rhetorical question: "To begin with the state: is it free under a despot or enslaved?" receives the answer that it is of course enslaved, and then continues: "If the individual then is analogous to the state, we shall find the same order of things in him: a soul laboring under the meanest servitude, the best elements in it being enslaved, while a small part, which is the most frenzied and corrupt, plays the master. And just as a state enslaved by a tyrant cannot do what it really wishes, so neither can a soul under a similar tyranny do what it wishes as a whole. Goaded on against its will by a strong desire, it will be filled with confusion and
remorse. Like the corresponding state, it must always be poverty stricken, unsatisfied, and haunted by fear. Nowhere else will there be so much lamentation and groaning and anguish as in a country under despotism, and in the soul maddened by the tyranny of passion and lust." The relationship of this more blazing passage to the sparse equation of virtue with knowledge is quite close. The difference is that in the latter Plato speaks of reason in general instead of the more specific knowledge that an act is either good or evil. The resemblance resides in the fact that Plato insists that we never act freely contrary to either of these two things, i.e., contrary to reason or to our knowledge that an act is good, but that this occurs only through compulsion or through the "despotism" and "tyranny" of "passion" or of "lust."

One has to transport oneself into the experience behind Plato's position to really understand it. He must have thought that a man who fully knew a certain action to be right or reasonable simply could not help doing it unless something stronger intervened. If all other things were equal, if there were no force and no temptation that in some way overcame his better knowledge, then he had to do that action. His doing otherwise would have been inexplicable and totally without foundation. It would have been like an effect that had no cause.

Plato must have thought of it in a way that could be compared to forces. It is as if he thought the rationality or rightness of an act was a pull in its direction, so that one would of course do it, unless there were some other force that intervened.

If one presents it this way it sounds so plausible that one might accept it without second thought or question. And Plato, in fact, never presented arguments for this part of his thesis, i.e., for the claim that we act never freely against our better knowledge. So he must have thought
that that was not contested, that it was a matter of course that went without saying. This is also how it strikes us on a first reaction. We don't experience it as a hypothesis that could be critically probed and questioned. We are as accustomed to it as we are to the taste of our own saliva. It has no taste for us. We accept it as normal. A thousand humdrum everyday sayings have immunized us to this proposition. If a man fights against a temptation and looses, if he is determined not to drink and he nevertheless finds himself eventually in a bar sipping, then we think of him quite naturally as under a kind of coercion. He himself might say: "I really did not want to drink, but there was this thirst, this craving. I tried to tack against it but it was stronger." This would drive a wedge between himself and his action. It would disavow it. He would be the innocent bystander, the victim, and the thirst — that independent natural force — would be responsible, would be to blame. And there are, of course, hundreds of other situations in which we think of a strong emotion as overcoming "us," and as forcing us to act against our will.

The direct extension of this conception to the moral sphere explains still further the strange matter-of-courseness with which Plato announced it, and the captivity in which it still contains us. We quite generally, even apart from Plato, hold a man more responsible for the acts he commits in cold deliberation and think of them as done freely, while we blame people less if they do something from a quick impulse or out of a strong emotion. And this seems so natural that we almost find ourselves on Plato's side. Is he perhaps simply right when he says that acts done in violation of reason are not wholly free and are in a sense not our own, and is this perhaps nothing more than a brute fact, which cannot be argued for or explained, but which can be only stated? Plato insisted that we never freely act contrary to our reason. The Notes from Underground assert the very opposite:
that we are only free precisely when we do this. The question is: What are we to make of this contradiction? Is there anything concealed behind it? Does it have a cause or an explanation? Or is what divides them perhaps nothing more than a personal predilection? For it could be that. It could be that Plato simply favored reasonable actions while Dostoevsky, God knows for what private, twisted reasons, sometimes prized his right to do something downright stupid. Both men might have called the actions that they valued "free," without meaning that in any strict sense. It may have been no more than the hawker's cry with which they praised their wares.

Dostoevsky might have done that. He could have hung the word "free" on the acts that he promoted like a medal or a decoration. But not Plato. His contention grew out of his whole thinking, and he used his words in general with precision, so he must have meant something specific. But what was it? Even to have opened this new question would justify setting Plato for once into confrontation with a man like Dostoevsky. For the bold and cardinal assertion that humans never freely do what they know is evil has so far been at most disputed — usually not even that; usually it has been accepted. Its foundation, what it presupposes, has not been investigated. And it should strike one as strange, as surprising that Plato thought of reasonable acts as "free." More commendable and more efficient, of course. Why not? But why more free?

One sense that philosophers have attached to freedom is that of un-caused, of indetermined. In this meaning the will is said by libertarians to be free. The attempt to demonstrate the possibility of freedom in this context involves the establishment of a so-called causal gap. One seeks to show that the sequential chain in which each succeeding link is the necessary product of its predecessor, is at some place broken, and that some events, at least, are not causally determined by their antecedents. This
could not have been what Plato meant by freedom, since it certainly is not apparent why there should be such a gap when conjectures, thoughts, and worries are among the predeceases of an action, and why such a gap should be so obviously absent, when the act is the outcome of a strong desire, of an impulse, or of whimsy. It is even less clear why an act should not be caused, when it happens to conform to reason but should be utterly determined when it goes against it. If Plato did not mean that the rational act was indetermined, then he must have meant that it was free in the sense of voluntary. But why should he think that? Why should an action be coerced, just because it is not in congruence with reason? Only quite a strange assumption could have rendered this conclusion.

Normally we consider ourselves coerced if some agency separate from us and outside us forces us to act against our will. Now if Plato thought of all actions contrary to reason as coerced, then he must have thought that they all were contrary to our will and that they were forced upon us by something that was in some sense outside us. He must have thought of an impulse or of a desire that lead him to act contrary to reason as not quite his own, else he could not have spoken of coercion. It had to be something like an external force, otherwise he could not have been its victim. He maintained that one could never say of a rational course of action: "But this is not what I want, this is not my desire." The wants and desires that strained against reason were disowned in advance. They were not in the same sense part of him, but were experienced as temptations.

It now becomes apparent that Plato's view depends on a picture. He must have thought that the self consisted of a central inner core and of an outer separate sphere that enclosed this center. To the inner core he assigned man's reason and everything that cooperated with it; the rest he placed in the outer circle. Man's reason and rational impulses constituted
his real self. They were more truly his and belonged to him in the most immediate fashion. Everything else was of course still part of the same person, but it had not to him the same direct relation. It existed at a distance from him. It was once removed.

To contend that Plato and the whole army that walked in his footsteps were entranced by a phantom schema, by a division that superimposed itself for them on human nature, may sound like an impertinent accusation. But it seems to me that it alone explains the two sides of Plato's position. He could not have thought that all evil and irrational acts are involuntary, if he had not thought of everything that prompts them as in some sense opposed to us, as something confronted by us, that is, therefore, not a fully integrated part of us, but somehow "outside." This first made it possible for him to think of it as something that afflicts us. On the other side, he could not have believed that all rational acts are "free," if he had not thought that reason is the genuine self, that it is the real "I." He had to think that we coincide, that we are in a sense identical with our reason; else he could not have thought that reason never exercises a tyranny or a dominion over us. It should govern the passions, the will and the conduct of the whole person; but in doing this it never coerces us. We are free in following it. But that could not be unless we and it were one and the same.

One might think of reason as the "true" and "genuine" self and thereby confer on it an only somewhat privileged status. It could be a value judgment, the expression of an attitude that slights the emotions and gives eminence to the cerebral. No doubt this was part of Plato's intention, and the image of the self that we have described may also be seen as the transfiguration of a value judgment into a picture. But it is crucial to realize that this division of the self was more than a figure of speech or a metaphor
that expressed an evaluation. If it had been only that, Plato could not
have thought of the rational act as "free." It may have been that to begin
with, but it concretized and became a truth. The superiority of reason was
eventually more than a value judgment. Eventually he must have thought
that the self had in fact one relationship to reason and quite a different
relationship to its remaining components.

To charge that Plato's on its face nearly trivial avowal presupposes
a picture - not even a theory, but a vision - and one that is to boot es-
sentially fanciful and arbitrary - may still seem high-handed. A quick
comparison to Aristotle may therefore furnish us with welcome corroboration.
We select three assertions from the Nicomachean Ethics. The first two agree
with Plato; the last makes a telling contrast.

The opening sentence of the book bears a close resemblance to the view
we are now discussing: "... every action and pursuit is thought to aim at
some good," and later, in Book II, chap. V, Aristotle quotes the saying "No
one is voluntarily wicked, nor involuntarily happy" and states explicitly
that he agrees with its first half. So he, too, thought that one never
does evil freely.

In the second paragraph of Book III, Aristotle defines the compulsory
as "That of which the moving principle is outside, being a principle in which
nothing is contributed by the person who is acting or is feeling the passion."
He reiterates this a page later: "What sort of acts should be called compul-
sory? We answer that without qualification actions are so, when the cause
is in the external circumstances and the agent contributes nothing." In
other words, we can be coerced only by something that is outside us.

The third statement is of greatest interest. In the first Section of
Book III, Aristotle asserts that "acts done by reason of anger or appetite
are not rightly called involuntary," and goes on to say (and this is crucial)
that "irrational passions are thought not less human than reason is, and the
actions which proceed from anger or appetite are therefore the man's actions."
(We might add that Aristotle defines involuntary actions as those done in
ignorance of, for example, the nature of their consequences. His example
is a man who lets a catapult go off when he merely wants to explain how it
works.)

We should notice that Aristotle and Plato agree on what makes an act
corroded. Both think that it is coerced if the determining principle is "out-
side" the self rather than in it. But Plato (according to our interpretation)
placed the irrational passions outside the self. Hence, he does not mean
literally outside the whole person, but outside the core of his image. He,
therefore, thinks of the acts prompted by these passions as coerced. Aristotle
means literally outside the whole person, and this brings him immediately to
a rather strange position. In flat violation of his usual adherence to com-
mon sense (compared to Plato), he denies that we are ever compelled by some-
thing that exists inside us. He denies that we are ever coerced by a passion
or by a desire. We are equally responsible for all the actions that are
prompted by something inside us, and they are all equally our actions. Of
greatest interest for us is the fact that Aristotle justifies this (in the
third quoted proposition) by saying that "the irrational passions are no
less human than reason is." This flatly denies the image that we ascribed
to Plato. The irrational is not in any sense outside the self but is in it,
and is on a par with the rest. The self is the whole person.

This corroborates our thesis in the following fashion: we maintained
that Plato thought of the irrational as coercing us because he thought of it
as "outside the self." Now we find that Aristotle does not think of it as
coercing us, but that he also does not think of it as outside the self but
as inside it.
We have argued that Plato considered one class of actions free and Aristotle another, and that the difference between them was due to the locus they assigned the self; Dostoevsky's spiteful official has yet a different, a third conception of freedom. The acts that he believes to be free are neither Aristotle's nor Plato's. That makes it natural to ask: is there perhaps the same general connection? Does he have a yet different self-image that again explains why these actions seem free to him and not others?

To him irrational acts seem free. Does this mean that his image is simply the converse of Plato's? Does he think of the rational as in some sense outside him, and of the irrational as his true self? Does he identify himself with his dark and mad passions, and is it now the cerebral and the foresightful that is experienced as an external constriction? This would be more nearly the self-image of the romantic. It would not fit or explain the Underground man. True, he feels only free when he contravenes the counsels of reason. But that is only one condition. By itself it is not sufficient. It must also not be prompted by a strong, or for that matter, by a mild emotion. When that happens he feels just as in the case of reason. It, too, is experienced as a noxious, irritating pressure from without or from behind him, which he sometimes manages to inoculate correctly, but which more often rushes down upon him when he least expects it and then whirls him into a "vile" and "shameful" action. So he conceives at least both the rational and the passionate as "outside him."

Though this comes closer, it still does not describe him. His own description of when he feels free and of what he experiences as constraining is more specific. "Free" for him is only an act of sheer caprice, of whim, an utterly unmotivated and gratuitous action. The act should not only flout reason but also everything else that could have prompted or motivated or excused the action. To him an act seems free only if it has no basis
whatsoever. It has to be much more than spiteful. Spite is still aimed at a goal, though it is the goal of merely vexing someone. But that has still too much direction. It is still held in bounds by what it aims at. This is not enough for this eternally injured secretary, for the man who spends forty years gnawing at his own mortification. For him an act has to be completely independent, as if suddenly arisen from nothing and from nowhere, a spark that has neither purpose nor direction. It is as if a deed becomes only truly his through complete elimination. In the example from the Lawrence film the Arab chieftain discounted the more obvious reasons for his joining Lawrence and thereby tried to give his choice an air of emanating from him and of being truly free. The Underground Man has to go much further. Anything at all that surrounds or attaches to one of his actions takes it from him. It becomes a blade that cuts through the tenuous connection. It gives to the severed act an objectivity and independence that excludes him. It relegates him to the role of an ineffectual observer. To be truly his, the act has to be sheathed in a pristine isolation. Only then does it return to him the assurance that it was his act, that, for once, he had not been the victim of a soft manipulation.

What self-image is behind this rarified and overwrought, this all-exclusive sense of freedom? There can be only one. He rejects all of his natural components. None is privileged to carry, or to become the locus of his true self. He sees all of them without exception, as dispensable or as outside him. Otherwise they could not all threaten his capricious freedom. He stands at the opposite pole from Aristotle. Aristotle included the whole person in the true self and thought therefore that no component could ever be experienced as coercive. The Underground Man admits no element of his person into his true self, hence none is experienced as voluntary. He continuously perceives his body, his feelings, and even his thoughts as from a
vantage point. They pass by at a distance; they move like placards that someone else carries on the far shore of a river. He remains the helpless, the surprised, the exasperated, the furious observer.

But the hypothesis that he places his true self beyond and behind all his actual experience, that he thinks of himself as immune, as out of reach, as pre-eminently a transcendence — in Sartre's terminology as the pure Nothing at the heart of Being — that his self is above all a capacity for disassociation, for elusiveness, that it is the place to which he escapes from every shred of his actual existence — that hypothesis explains much more than his weird experience of freedom.

The "author" of the Notes is above all spiteful. No single word, of course, sums him up, and almost nothing one can say fits him neatly, since he slips out from under every adjective and ends up standing next to it, jeering at its failure to define him. In the novel, which is his self-description, he invariably about-faces after he has just said that he is such-and-such and denies and mocks that description. It is always a mere pretense, an act, a role that he adopted, nothing that has roots or a foundation in him, that was even a revealing symptom. It was always a ruse, a subterfuge, a disguise put on out of sheer whimsy. He is always more the opposite, than what he has just been saying. Only his spitefulness is an exception. It clings to him through all his weaving and his dodging. From it he cannot detach himself with the avowal that there was no necessity behind it. After he has given some examples of his spitefulness (his liver is diseased, but he refuses to consult a doctor; out of spite he was irritable and capricious as an official), he, as always, turns on his heels and reverses himself. In truth he is not spiteful, for he is most acutely, most painfully conscious of everything in him that is beautiful and sublime precisely at the moments at which he flings his spite into someone's face. Then he
feels himself literally teeming with generous and kind and gentle impulses. But he holds these other elements obstinately and purposely down and spitefully refuses to let them come out. Thus his spite, too, is not a necessity to him. It does not relieve a powerful, uncontrollable urge, but it is gratuitously imposed. He is spiteful out of sheer spitefulness and for no other reason. This is, of course, what makes it so abject and vile.

But he cannot abscond from his spite as he absconds from all his other qualities. Anger gratuitously imposed is no longer anger. But spitefulness gratuitously assumed is not less spiteful. On the contrary, it is more so. Therefore the protestation that his spite is baseless does not, as in all other cases, serve him to escape it. It heightens and purifies his spite. His attempts to escape from his own spite only returns him to it on a higher, more accentuated plain. That is why his spite can be singled out as the one quality that has a different status from all his other attributes.

There is of course a connection to the passage that we cited. It raises spite unto the philosophic shield. And even the very extremity of that elevation is perhaps itself a bit of spite. Certainly some of the subsidiary steps that lead him up to his general conclusion are explicitly self-torturing and taunting, as when he tells himself that it is impossible for an intelligent man to be or become anything: it is impossible for an intelligent man even to have qualities. They will always seem exchangeable, gratuitously assumed, attached only to the surface. How reassuring it would be for such a person to have at least a red nose or to be a sluggard. To be a sluggard—that is like having a profession. It gives firmness and stability to one's whole existence. One has to be stupid, a blockhead, to have the capacity for the taking of even the most trivial action. He knows that this is a sophistry, but he humiliates and teases himself with it. He throws it in front of himself like a piece of unclean food and then relishes the spectacle
of his own degradation when he gorges himself on it, and when he observes with malice that even that sort of consolation gives him comfort.

But spite exists not only on these levels in the novel. Its hegemony rests not only on the triple claim that he acts from spite, that spite is the one quality which his abrogation does not mute, and that his thinking raises spite, out of spitefulness, to the status of a sumnum bonum. We can still add a fourth and final level. Even the act of writing these Notes, the impulse for the composition of his book, is in the fictitious author's life an impulse towards self-denigration. He writes this long confession not to explain or justify himself, not in the hope of greater self-comprehension. His writing is self-flagellation. He writes to injure and humiliate himself. He cuts through all the palliating, hiding covers that protect him from his own past and lays it bare, till he is wild with anguish, till he has scared himself into a dizziness, a vertigo of horror. His pen scratches the scabs from unhealed wounds.

The whole book is thus the variations on a single theme. It is an exploration of the multifariousness of spite, of how much man will do not for a worthwhile end, nor even for some still excusable, though perhaps odious reason, but for just one thing — to hurt himself.

I have said that much about this man can be explained from the single fact of his self-image. I want to show that his refusal to identify himself with any of his actual and empirical ingredients is this man's essential core characteristic, and that the rest of what he is can be regarded as the attending symptoms that complete this syndrome. I want to show that he is the exhibition of a pattern, and that this pattern groups itself around and derives from the primary fact that his "true" self is transcendent, that the privileged area in his self is nothing, that it equals zero.

Let me begin with his spitefulness, which goes hand in hand with the
resentment that he feels for all others and with the hatred he feels for himself. A Freudian might explain this as the result of very severe early training, as perhaps produced by an unresolved Oedipal complex that was left unresolved for certain reasons, perhaps through a lack of motherly affection, or through the intervention of very specific happenings with traumatic content. The explanation would of course be much more detailed, and no summary could do justice to it. But it might pursue such general lines.

The explanation I envision might start immediately from a further development of his experience of freedom. He feels genuinely free only when he performs an utterly capricious act, when the act is neither prompted by a rational consideration, nor by a passion, nor by anything else that is either inside or outside him. The converse side of this already gives us a clue to what feeds his self-hatred. If he feels free only in these actions, then he must live with an almost constant sense of being victimized and managed. No man can perform very many capricious actions: they unavoidably are fairly rare. Most of the time he will respond to some impulse or obey a rational consideration. He must cross streets and has to fill his stomach. And if he experiences all this as an insidious coercion, as something that is forced upon him, that he only does because he lacks the strength to fight against it, then he must inevitably feel a vast and feverish exasperation. Most men grow irritable when only some small elements in their experience exert a subtle and elusive pressure that blurs the difference between what they want and what is clearly an external pressure—when they don't know to what extent they follow their own or really someone else's will. Yet this unclarity shrouds nearly the whole of this poor man's experience. If a situation makes upon him the most humdrum, natural demands; if he satisfies one of his common everyday desires, he can never say: "Yes, this is what I wanted, and therefore I did it." The repose and the calm, the
sense of completeness of "having justified, and having laid it ad acta, is generally inaccessible to him. Every side of his experience must have the sense of hidden, mocking forces, of ground that seems solid only till it is tread on but then opens. It must all be like the world of Kafka. This is part of the price he pays for thinking of his true self as the vantage point from which he witnesses the totality of his experience.

This makes the resentment he feels for all others natural, and it explains why he vents his spleen and his caprice on everyone that comes into his reach. He continuously feels imposed upon. He experiences even his simplest desire to exchange the usual affabilities with someone as the working of a stratagem, as the effect of some part of himself, which he eyes with misgivings, which stimulated and made active by that other goes to work and goads the little pleasantry through his resistance. If this is how even the minutiae of social intercourse appear to him, then God help him in more complicated situations. What a stupendous quantity of rage, of anger fed by an incessant stream of mocking, jeering, humiliations he would accumulate.

Everyone in his world is inevitably a fiendish tyrant who with unfailing and daemonic knowledge knows which spring inside the Underground Man can be touched to make him always do their wills. How could they fail? No matter what reaction they produce, it never can be what he wants, for any influence, or cause, or reason infringes on him, robs him of his freedom. No wonder his whole life is spent lying in wait, no wonder he sits behind his desk ready to ambush a petitioner, to pounce on him, before he, too, will have his way. "For once to force my will on someone" — that must be the Underground Man's only dream. "For once to taste my power, to make someone — and anyone will do — do something that I order." He would do everything he does. He would force himself on the haughty, snobbish, former mates from his boyhood school, though he knows that they despise him, and do it precisely
because he was not invited, and very especially because they celebrate a farewell dinner at which he will be grotesquely out of place. And he would call them louts and boors to their faces. Anything to cool the inflamed and throbbing knowledge that he is always lead by hooks that someone else planted into his soul. And he would force a Liza to face her future, to look into the pit that will be her life; he would drag her there to see her cry, and would give her a five ruble note a minute after she declared her love.

If this is the main cause of his universal, isolating hatred towards others, then it is also, at the same time, one of the prime sources of the venom that he feels for his own person. That, too, is explained by the locus to which he assigns the sense of his true self. If he hates others because they must in all situations tyrannize him, then he hates himself for allowing this to happen, for his incapacity to offer more resistance, in short, for what must appear to him as his insufferable weakness. How weak he must seem to himself can be measured by the fact that even his own thoughts are experienced by him as objective forces. They happen as events that will have consequences. They are not his thoughts. From his point of view there is an it, which relentlessly fires thoughts in his direction. What they are is not his own doing, and their upshot also is not subject to the exercise of his volition. To give a very quick example: near the end of the second section of Part II of the novel, he describes the moments that immediately preceded his intrusion on the schoolmates whom he hates and has not seen for almost a year. He writes: "Climbing up to his fourth story, I was thinking that the man disliked me and that it was a mistake to go and see him. But as it always happened that such reflections impelled me, as though purposely, to put myself into a false position, I went in." Notice, he says, "such reflections impelled me," and he says "always." The reflection is a force, is a visitation on him. He talks as if he had no choice, as if he were under constraint
to obey it. He is the exact inversion of a Stoic. The Stoics tried to parry
the vicissitudes of actual existence, and tried to bring their own reactions
to them under absolute control. Each man's mind could become each man's
own kingdom, and within it he could be happy. The Underground Man is ex-
pelled even from this kingdom. Even over it he has no power. Could the
sense of impotence from which he has to suffer still be surpassed, or is it
ultimate, and driven to the final limit? Nietzsche thought that happiness
was a sense of dominance and power. The unhappiness of the Underground Man
would seem to be boundless.

The overt manifestation of his weakness is his inability to take action.
He himself blames his "hyperconsciousness" for this. He can see too many
sides of every question. Every motive is examined till it suffers chemical
disintegration. Every doubt is so lovingly caressed that his mind never
finds the equilibrium, the stability to initiate a real action. This is his
own explanation. We are not bound to accept it. His self-awareness is
acute, yet it is scarcely greater than that of many men who, in spite of it,
manage to come to decisions and to execute them. So the real cause may be
different. What might it be? Once we ask this question, we immediately
notice that he really does act, in fact constantly and wildly. We must
therefore ask a different question of all the passages in which he lacerates
himself for his passive existence. We must ask: what gives this man the
impression, the illusion that he is unable to perform a single action? The
key to the answer may be that we should not stress the word "action" in the
multiple reiterations of his incapacity to take them. What has to be stressed
is perhaps the he, the personal pronoun. His complaint is not that he cannot
act; it is rather that none of his actions are quite his. He never feels
that it is he who performs them. They flare up around him, they happen, and
he then pursues them. He has the sense of being left behind them. This would
aggravate his sense of impotence still further. It, too, derives immediately from the transcendence which he gives to his true self-hood. One might say he asks for the impossible. He has objectified, has disassociated from himself all the forces that conceivably could generate an action. The area with which he identifies himself is empty. No force operates within it. He is the pure spectator, the astral observer. Thus everything that could generate an action, he does not consider truly his, and what is truly his could not generate an action. He has to feel passive. But the reason for this is not his excessive self-awareness. The reason is at once deeper and more stringent. Given his self-image he must feel this. It is an immediate consequence.

To say that he experiences no actions at all as his own would of course be a slight overstatement. There are exceptions, namely the capricious actions. These however he regards as his, precisely because they seem to him utterly without foundation. (That we may not consider them "without foundation"; that we, from our point of view, may see causes for them, is another matter. It is irrelevant to my purpose, which is to explain his subjective experience.) They alone are the actions of his true self, and they can be, since they alone seem to him not to be caused by any forces.

This makes it possible for us to see his self-hatred in yet a different perspective. Consider: he disavows every action that springs from a genuine motive, or that has a reason. And he only identifies himself with his capricious actions. These he makes his own. These he embraces. But that means that he never gives himself full credit for any reasonable or good actions. All of these will have been forced upon him by some pressure. For the mad, irresponsible, and capricious actions he will take full responsibility, however. These he will put on his own shoulders. If the selection is made in this fashion, even an otherwise healthy and strong person will soon find himself depressed.
On the score of his self-hatred one could still add another factor. If the Underground Man thinks that his true self is the point from which he views experience, if it is situated beyond the horizon from which he perceives the world and is like the metaphysician’s former Subject, then it is not compromised and tainted by the weaknesses and failings of his actual behavior. It remains god-like and sacrosanct. He perceives his own vile and shameful misdeeds from a distance. They occur in the objective world and are not assimilated by the pristine essence of his real being. He sits inside himself pure as an angel and observes from his detachment how his outer guise makes itself filthy. His real self becomes for him an exorbitant, hopelessly high standard. He compares his actual life to it, and the contrast is so flagrant, that he cannot help but be reviled and filled with loathing. Since his real self remains unqualified and unsathed by experience, its demands continue to be absolute and total. It provides no basis on which leniency could gain a footing. He can never give himself forgiveness.

This also explains his constant vacillation between arrogance and self-deprecation. If he saw in himself only a vermin, a white, wriggling, worthless maggot, then at least he could find the peace of resignation. But that is not open to him. He has to live with the constant dissonance, with the war between his self-conceptions. He is arrogant, dizzy with the eminence of his own person, when he views the world around him through the transparency of his sacrosanct self; he explodes into a frenzy of self-castigation when he views himself in the same perspective. Many other qualities of this man could be explained by the locus he gives to his true self. The feeling, for example, that he has no qualities, or that none of his qualities are real, that they are all arbitrarily adopted and could be exchanged for others, that none are deeply rooted, but that they all attach
only to the surface as masks or guises that protect him from too immediate contact with the impingements of the external — that feeling is really nothing but a still different description of the fact that I claim to be central. He has this pervasive doubt of being inauthentic, because he does not identify himself with any part of his empirical being, but sees all of it as once removed, in the same way in which Plato saw the irrational emotions.

But it might grow boring to go into too much detail. The value of this explanation could still be increased if we showed that further facets of his person are effects of his self-image. But we get a much clearer picture of the possible importance of this framework, if we sketch the relationship of its explanatory power to that of a general Freudian nature. It might be best to state first the most modest possible interpretation; i.e., the minimum of power that this explanation could claim and to state then the demands that it might make on a maximal interpretation.

The minimum claim would be as follows. The concept of the "locus of the self" is a terminological innovation that offers us the possibility of giving an alternate description of a syndrome that in Freud would be classified as a variety of neurosis. It has the advantage of being simple and of integrating many otherwise disparate symptoms into one conception. It in no way supersedes the Freudian explanation, but the two may be dovetailed and can complement each other.

In outline this could be done in the following fashion. We state from the fact that this man's condition is describable in two vocabularies. Both could, of course, be more or less detailed, but the phenomena articulated by one would at least overlap and might coincide with the phenomena articulated by the other. This would be the first step. Second step: we employ first the Freudian framework for the causal explanation of these symptoms under either of their alternate descriptions; i.e., if asked why he has this
particular neurosis, or why he gives just this locus to his self, we answer: because he had such and such experiences in his childhood and his youth. The explanation would of course be long. It would pick out a selection of events and connect them with the relevant psychoanalytic generalizations, with statements such as that small boys experience sexual desires for their mothers, or that guilt-feelings that punish us for certain wishes are sometimes greater than those that would follow the corresponding actions. Third step: once this answer is complete or past the point at which its returns have begun to diminish, we could add that there are further explanatory causes; namely those we described in the last few pages. I.e., we could say that these experiences also affected the placing of his self, which meant that he experienced his thoughts and emotions as quasi-objects over which he has no real control, and that his self-hatred, and his arrogance and his resentment, were in part produced by this, and not only by the experiences that the Freudian mentioned. At the very least this would be a way of stressing that a neurosis is not only caused by external circumstances (not external to the person, but external to the neurosis), but that it is a self-reinforcing system. Once a person disassociates himself temporarily or slightly from his own emotions, for example, his experience in the future will exert a pressure towards the enlargement and solidification of this disassociation. The external causes only start the little snowball near the summit of the mountain. It becomes an avalanche through its own weight and motion.

The maximum claim can now be briefly stated. In effect it would eliminate step one and two and regard the third step alone as sufficient. It would lay down as a general premise that most, perhaps all, mental contents can be treated in two ways: either as belonging to the subject, or as quasi-objects. I can either say: "this is my desire, this I want," and thereby endorse it; or I can say: "what a weird obsession. It seems difficult to
master this obstreperous longing." Often I can alternate between these two stances, and which of them I adopt is subject to my own volition. Which of them I choose is, of course, a function of my previous experience, of my values, and of my assessment of the specific situation. The experience of a particular content changes with the change between these stances (it "feels" different), and its effects on me are very different, if I give it one interpretation rather than the other. The crucial point is that the conditions that influence in which of these two ways certain mental contents are experienced, together with the effects of this interpretation, may by themselves be sufficient to explain some characteristics of a person. The strong claim would be that the Underground Man's self-hatred can be explained without recourse to the Freudian generalizations and the events with which they connect. We could simply specify the experiences that may have led him to regard more of his thoughts and feelings as not belonging to his real self than is normal—these might be such facts as that his parents isolated him from his fellows and instilled him with the expectation that he some day would be great or extraordinary. The main burden of the explanation would be born by a detailed description of the various reinforcing mechanisms that this first interpretation triggered. Of some of these I gave a general indication.

Let me recapitulate the general outline of what we have done so far. We started from the fact that Plato, Aristotle and the Underground Man give three different answers to the question: which acts are free or voluntary and which are done under coercion? Plato thought that all evil or irrational actions were involuntary (either done in ignorance or from coercion); Aristotle held that no acts caused by something inside us were unfree and forced upon us; and the Underground Man writes that only the capricious acts are really free and voluntary. We then tried to show that these three men gave three different answers on the basis of three different self-images. Plato thought
that reason was the true self; Aristotle believed that all parts of a person have an equal status, that all equally participate in the true self; and the Underground Man postulated a true self behind experience and disavowed all parts of his actual person. Each of these three regarded as free only what originated from the domain of the true self, and as coerced what originated from outside it. In the last part we took the self-image of the Underground Man and explained the quality of his experience and some attributes of his character from it.

One could do the same with the Platonic or the Aristotelian self-image. One could describe the effects that identifying oneself with one's reason or with one's whole person would have on the quality of one's experience and on the formation of one's psychological condition. Plato's position represents perhaps the most advantageous, optimum solution. If one really believed that all one's evil or irrational actions were not quite one's own, one would already have gone half the distance towards peace with oneself and forgiveness. Real evil would be thought of as always half outside one. One could only blame oneself for weakness, for not having had the strength to offer more resistance. One's whole moral life would be the struggle of a shining knight, who is sometimes defeated, but whose quest is always for the noble. How uplifting for one's ego. But it also would be wonderfully beneficial for the social organism. If all the reasonable and good actions receive in addition to their other merits the still extra topping of being free, of bringing the real "me" into action, while the others spell enslavement, and submission to the knout of what one oneself never really wanted — why, who could resist, when all this is being offered? What a bustle there would be to perform some good and reasonable actions. (Aristotle: the whole person, the condition of the tragic.)

Now at last we are ready to deal with the more general intellectual
content of the novel. Dostoevsky wrote the Notes partly in reply to Chernyshevski's novel What Is To Be Done? Chernyshevski's central theses was that man will inevitably do what is to his own interest and advantage, and that all evil is due simply to ignorance and lack of foresight. All one has to do is to teach men that prosperity and peace are to their advantage, and once man will really understand this, a new world will quite inevitably "of mechanical necessity" come into being. In one of his descriptions of this new world, an eternally singing and "gamboling" mankind, dressed in exquisite white togas harvests giant ears of corn in the shadow of a huge umbrella, which spreads over the whole corn field.

Clearly the whole character of the "author" of the Notes is designed to contradict Chernyshevski's (Plato's) thesis. He continually does what he very well knows not to be to his advantage, and he does it freely. If we combine Dostoevsky's description of this character with the extollation of the freedom attained only in irrational caprice, which this character himself performs (in the quoted passage), then we could reduce the intellectual sub-
stance of Dostoevsky's reply to Chernyshevski into two main propositions: his first point would be that Chernyshevski's thesis is mistaken. Man is not coerced to do what he considers either good or to his advantage. He again and again does voluntarily what he knows to be evil. In fact the freest actions are precisely those that have no reason. His second point deals not only with Chernyshevski's but with all utopias. To make it quite explicit: the Underground Man thinks that all utopian schemes share an as-
sumption. They all presuppose that one can enumerate the things that man wants or that are desirable, and that one can then make a set of rules that will, if followed, actualize these desiderata. He contends that this enumera-
tion, or this list, cannot be made, and not just for practical but for a general reason. One thing that is of great value to man, one thing that he
wants, is to act not with but against the rules. And this desideratum cannot be allowed for; one cannot include in the list a final item that the rules sometimes are to be broken, because what will then be of value, and what will then give man the bliss of freedom, will be to act contrary to this amended list. (Philosophic ethics makes perhaps the same assumption.)

A brief comment on each of these two points is still needed. Dostoevsky's first point is well taken, but it needs elaboration. Plato is not simply wrong (nor is he simply guilty of a circular definition), when he says we never freely do what we know to be irrational or evil. This would be true as long as the true self identified itself with reason. Plato is guilty rather of an unjustified assumption. He presupposes that the true self always coincides with reason. This might be one of many choices open to us, and it might even be the best choice we could make, but we do not always make it. Plato should have said that we will be free in our rational actions. If we identify ourselves with reason, and he should have put this forth as a proposal, as one of the stances that we can take, and perhaps as the one that would benefit us most. The statement: "No man freely does what he knows to be evil," offered as a generalization is false. All those who do not identify their true self with reason are exceptions to it.

To the Underground Man we could say in a similar vein, that his claim that freedom is found only in caprice represents another overgeneralization. It is true for those who think of themselves as beyond experience. And for those it may be the highest value, the advantage that is most advantageous. But this is not true for everybody. It is true that every utopian scheme forces us to choose between the advantages we gain by following the rules and the one advantage, the bliss found by breaking them. Yet for those with a self-image different from the Underground Man's, this bliss may not be so singular and overriding. They experience freedom not just in the moment of