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Ingratitude and the Underground

In his polemic on free will, the underground man declares that a human is best defined as “a being on two legs and ungrateful” (существо на двух ногах и неблагодарное); “Phenomenally ungrateful” (Неблагодарен феноменально!) (5.116).¹ The underground man obviously refers to Aristotle’s definition of humans as political beings², i.e., as members of a *polis* or civic community, but he also refers to the contemporary debate about Darwin’s theory of evolution.³ By referring to Darwin in his

¹ This statement appears in Part I, Chapter 8. The underground man’s polemic on free will starts in Part I, Chapter 7. The most useful essay for understanding the underground man’s philosophy is James P. Scanlan, *Dostoevsky the Thinker* (Cornell UP, 2002):57-80.

² Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, Chapter 2, section 9 §1253a1-5. Aristotle claims that “the *polis* is by nature”, and a human being (*anthropos*, not *anêr*) “is by nature” a “*politikon zôion*,” i.e., a living being suited for life in a *polis*. The passage next claims that “nature does nothing in vain” as part of its argument that humans have a natural aptitude for “voice” (*phônê*) and *logos*, which they use for communication about what is pleasant and painful, helpful and harmful, just and unjust, and so forth. In *De Anima*, Aristotle outlines a psychology that entails that humans are also rational animals: man’s soul possesses the nutritive, perceptual, and locomotive faculties just like all other animals, but only man’s soul possesses the intellectual faculty, or rationality: “... in the other [s.c. nonhuman] animals, there is no thinking or reasoning ...” (*De Anima* 433b31).

³ As Nadezhda Mikhnovets points out, Dostoevsky started polemicizing with proponents of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* as early as 1863 in his *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*. Although the Russian translation of Darwin’s work appeared only in 1864, his theory was widely discussed in Russia before then, including in *Time*, the Dostoevsky brothers’ journal. The November 1862 issue contained an article (“*Durnye priznaki*”) on Darwin by N.N. Strakhov, one of the journal’s major critics. His article immediately elicited two letters of response from P.A. Bibikov, a frequent *Time* contributor, and one of the major proponents of Darwin’s theory in

polemic on free will, the underground man continues his quarrel with nineteenth-century thinkers who explain human behavior reductively – in materialistic, deterministic, or positivistic terms.⁴ By defining humans as ungrateful rather than social, the underground man challenges Aristotle's claim that human beings are "made by nature" for social relations with other human beings, thereby engaging an age-old philosophical debate about human nature and identity. So what does the underground man gain or prove by defining human beings as ungrateful? Why does he include ingratitude, a moral defect, in his polemic on free will? And why does Dostoevsky have his anti-rationalist underground thinker propose this polemical definition? In what follows, I will show how Dostoevsky uses the underground man's polemical definition and his near identification of ingratitude with caprice to expose his narrator's moral deficiencies, solipsism, desire for recognition, and metaphysical longing.

In order to understand how Dostoevsky exploits the gap between author and narrator to undercut the underground man's claims, let us

Russia. Although Bibikov's December 1862 letters were not published due to censorship, Mikhnovets shows that Dostoevsky as editor was familiar with them, as his polemic on 2x2=5 demonstrates. "*Дарвиновский*" дискурс в Зимних заметках о летних впечатлениях и Записках из подполья Ф. М. Достоевского (Il "darwinismo" nelle *Note invernali su impressioni estive* e nelle *Memorie dal sottosuolo* di F. M. Dostoevskij) // *Su Fëdor Dostoevskij. Visione filosofica e sguardo di scrittore*, a cura di Stefano Aloe. Napoli, "La Scuola di Pitagora Editrice", 2012, pp. 147-164.

Moreover, while Darwin does not expatiate on man as a biped in his *Origin of Species*, the *Origin* anticipates much of his later volume, where he does so: Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871), Chapter 4, pages 139-43; <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34967/34967-h/34967-h.htm>: "Man alone has become a biped; and we can, I think, partly see how he has come to assume his erect attitude, which forms one of the most conspicuous differences between him and his nearest allies." In Plato's *Statesman* (266e), the Stranger defines man as a featherless biped; Plato's attitude toward the definition is not clear. The literary tradition also provides many definitions of man as biped. Sophocles' Oedipus, for example, solved the Sphinx's riddle by identifying man as the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three in the evening; and Shakespeare's Lear says to the fool "unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (III.iv.ii.101-2).

⁴ See Scanlan (2002). Scanlan persuasively argues that Dostoevsky demolishes the claims of his contemporaries who champion a doctrine of "rational egoism" by having them challenged by a "genuine, believable Russian egoist – an authentic, non-altruistic, morally repugnant egoist, someone who by his person and his attitudes would show the reality of egoism in Russia . . ." Scanlan (2002): 62.

explore gratitude. We may understand gratitude as an emotion or a virtue or both. Since gratitude involves givers, gifts, and recipients, and since it fosters reciprocity and builds social relations, philosophers and psychologists call it a prosocial emotion. Since gratitude encompasses the beliefs, feelings, and attitudes appropriate to a well-formed moral character, it qualifies as a virtue.⁵ Thinkers from Seneca to Adam Smith have praised gratitude as an emotion or virtue essential to a flourishing, healthy, even happy society.⁶ Religious writers have extolled gratitude as an essential component of a divinely ordered world.⁷ Yet gratitude is one of the most neglected emotions and underestimated virtues, perhaps because it involves an admission of vulnerability and dependence.⁸

⁵ Christopher Heath Wellman, "Gratitude as a Virtue," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 80 (1999):284-300.

⁶ Edward J. Harpham cites Seneca's *On Benefits* as a critical text for the philosophy of gratitude. He notes that gratitude was an important philosophical virtue from Seneca through the Middle Ages when Aquinas gave a Christian reading to many issues raised by the Roman philosopher. In the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, theologians saw gratitude and ingratitude in terms of relationship with God. After the religious revolutions of the sixteenth century, gratitude moved into the realm of social contract theories. In *Leviathan*, a key social contract text, for example, Hobbes called gratitude the fourth law of nature. In the mid-eighteenth-century, Harpham argues, Adam Smith changed the way gratitude is conceptualized in the West in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where he tried to describe the mechanism that gives rise to gratitude and how it relates to other moral issues. Harpham's observations on Rousseau help illuminate Dostoevsky's underground man. Harpham notes that Rousseau was unable to explain the role of gratitude in modern society: "Paradoxically, Rousseau, the champion of sentimentality, could not accept the human consequences that followed from expressions of gratitude. Benevolence and gratitude may be expressions of our deepest humanity, but they also threaten us with chains no free man could desire. Forced to choose between freedom and humane sentiments, Rousseau chose the former" (p.34). The underground man also chooses freedom over compassion and gratitude, leading me to speculate that the underground man's ingratitude is yet another part of Dostoevsky's lifelong polemic with Rousseau. Edward J. Harpham, "Gratitude in the History of Ideas, in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, eds. Robert A. Emmons & Michael E. McCullough (Oxford University Press, 2004):19-36.

⁷ Robert C. Roberts, "The Blessings of Gratitude: A Conceptual Analysis," in *The Psychology of Gratitude* (2004):72-73; Solomon Schimmel demonstrates that gratitude to God is essential to Biblical covenant theology. Schimmel, "Gratitude in Judaism," in *The Psychology of Gratitude* (2004):37-57.

⁸ Robert C. Solomon, "Foreword," *The Psychology of Gratitude* (2004):v-vi (v-xi). Joseph Amato cites the Eskimo adage "'Gifts make slaves just as whips make dogs'" as an example of the way gifts can debase (p.27). Amato argues that contemporary

Ingratitude, by contrast, gets uniformly bad press. Seneca identified ingratitude as the greatest vice.⁹ Kant identified it as one of three vices that are “the essence of vileness and wickedness,”¹⁰ and Hume called ingratitude “the most horrid and unnatural of all the crimes human creatures can commit.”¹¹ Being ungrateful, as the philosopher Robert Solomon says, “is a sign or symptom of a lack of socialization, whether evident in the inability to appreciate what others have done for one or, worse, the grudging resentment of one’s own vulnerability and the refusal to admit one’s debt to others. Gratitude directed to God may not be demeaning But gratitude toward other people may be more of a problem.”¹²

In characterizing humans as ungrateful, the underground man voices a perverse ethics of autonomy that repudiates the claims of a morality based on gift-giving and gratitude. Yet, as Dostoevsky shows, the underground man’s challenge to traditional morality betrays his awareness that gratitude is the norm. While the underground man rejects the claims of community and the possibility of transcendence, Dostoevsky reveals his narrator’s narcissism and metaphysical longing. The underground man may evoke Aristotle and engage the philosophical tradition, but Dostoevsky uses his narrator’s paradoxical rhetoric to make a case against the underground man himself.

In the second sentence of his *Zapiski*, the underground man defines himself as “злой” (evil/malicious/spiteful) – an adjective that, like “небла-

conscience is formed around the division of gratitude and guilt, emotions which express the radically different the ethics of modern and traditional man. Joseph Anthony Amato II, *Guilt and Gratitude: A Study of the Origins of Contemporary Conscience* (Westport, CT and London, England: Greenwood Press, 1982):xxii. Contributions in Philosophy, Number 20.

⁹ Seneca, *On Benefits*, Part I, section X, “There always will be homicides, tyrants, thieves, adulterers, ravishers, sacrilegious, traitors: worse than all these is the ungrateful man, except we consider that all these crimes flow from ingratitude, without which hardly any great wickedness has ever grown to full stature.” http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_seneca_benefits_i.htm

¹⁰ Cited in Robert A. Emmons, “The Psychology of Gratitude: An Introduction,” *The Psychology of Gratitude* (2004):6. For an excellent discussion of more common ground between Dostoevsky and Kant, see Evgenia Cherkasova, *Dostoevsky and Kant* (Amsterdam-NY: Rodopi, 2009).

¹¹ David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, Book III, Part i, Section 1. <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/humetre3.pdf>, copyright 2010-2015 Jonathan Bennett (p.240). Cited in Emmons (2004):6.

¹² Solomon (2004):vii (v-xi).

годарный” (ungrateful), has moral as well as psychological connotations.¹³ Yet, in the very next paragraph, the underground man proposes a scenario to illustrate that he is not “злой”:

I'm foaming at the mouth, but if someone were to bring me some little doll, give me some tea with a bit of sugar, maybe I'll calm down. I'll even become tenderhearted, though afterwards I'll certainly gnash my teeth at myself and suffer from insomnia for a few months out of shame. Such is my custom.

У меня пена у рта, а принесите мне какую-нибудь куколку, дайте мне чайку с сахарцем, я, пожалуй, и успокоюсь. Даже душой умилюсь, хоть уж, наверно, потом буду сам на себя скрежетать зубами и от стыда несколько месяцев страдать бессонницей. Таков уж мой обычай. (5:100)

The proposed gifts – a little doll or a cup of tea with sugar – seem rather minor in Part I. In Part II, however, Dostoevsky uncovers their symbolic significance. The underground man's satisfaction with the cup of tea in Part I represents his selfish sense of well-being in Part II: “I say let the world go to hell, but I should always have my tea”/ Я скажу, что свету провалиться, а чтоб мне чай всегда пить (5:174). Likewise, his Part I mention of ‘куколка,’ a word which denotes a loose woman in slang,¹⁴ foreshadows Liza's visit in Part II. Months of insomnia would be an excessive response to displayed gratitude over a child's toy but not to the missed opportunity that haunts the underground man – Liza's offer of

¹³ For a discussion of the other adjectives the underground man applies to himself in the opening sentences – “больной” and “непривлекательный,” see Deborah A. Martinsen, “Of Shame and Human Bondage: Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*,” in *Dostoevsky: On the Threshold of Other Worlds: Essays in Honour of Malcolm V. Jones*, eds. Sarah Young and Lesley Milne (Ilkeston, Derbyshire: Bramcote Press, 2006): 159-60. For a helpful discussion of the underground man's maliciousness, see Richard Peace, *Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993):3-6. For a discussion of the translation of the opening lines of *Notes from Underground*, see Lynn Visson, “Несколько фраз из повести Достоевского,” *Мосты: журнал переводчиков*, No. 1(5):2005:41-6 (despite the Russian title, the article is in English).

¹⁴ My thanks to Olga Meerson for noting the ominous double-meaning of “куколка.” She observes that the underground man's equation of a cup of sweet tea with a loose woman indicates the level of his viciousness. She also notes that the word ‘куколка,’ which is a diminutive, is used for magic in Russian fairy tales, such as “Василиса Премудрая.”

compassion, love, and community. The underground man's life experiences in Part II thus illuminate the details of his philosophy in Part I.

The underground man's hypothetical scenario depicts a two-step response to kindness: spontaneous receptivity followed by shame-induced self-directed rage. In both hypothetical and actual cases, resentment at his vulnerability leads him to seek revenge – by punishing self or other. In this two-step scenario, Dostoevsky describes a psychological process that begins with gratitude and ends with resentment, thereby confirming the underground man's perverse response.

Contemporary psychology helps to explain the Dostoevskian scenario linking gratitude and resentment. Although gratitude is a positive emotion and resentment a negative one, Robert C. Roberts has observed that the two have remarkably symmetrical structures. Gratitude involves a benefactor, a benefice, and a beneficiary; resentment involves a malefactor, a malifice, and what he terms a "maleficiary".¹⁵ Roberts could be describing the underground man as he explains the psychology of resentment:

The resentful person does not necessarily ascribe malevolence to his malefactor; mere negligence can be sufficient as the responsible source of harm. But the resenter sees such negligence as attitudinal dereliction – as a lack of due regard.... The resentful person ... is quick to notice offenses and to find people to blame for them, looks for things to resent, and has a hair-trigger readiness to notice offenses and take offense at them. And once the resentful person has been offended by someone, he or she doesn't want to let go the alienation but instead treasures it in his or her heart.¹⁶

Roberts further argues that because gratitude symmetrically opposes resentment, regret, and envy, it mitigates their negative effects.¹⁷ Two other psychologists argue that gratitude has an inverse relation to

¹⁵ Robert C. Roberts (2004):66, 68.

¹⁶ Roberts sees gratitude as a virtue that positively correlates to generosity, openness, humility, and forgiveness. He also notes asymmetries between gratitude and resentment: the resenter wants to return harm to the other for actual or perceived slights; resenter's want to get even; and resenter's dislike being in a benefactor's debt. Roberts (2004):67. Roberts observes that the desire for revenge is built into resentment and lists this as an asymmetry, yet one might argue that such a desire is symmetrical to the desire to return the favor that is built into gratitude.

¹⁷ Roberts (2004):69, 77.

narcissism.¹⁸ A third psychologist demonstrates that gratitude broadens a person's habitual modes of thinking and acting, thereby building personal resources and encouraging further prosocial behavior.¹⁹ Like anthropologists who study traditional societies, all of these scholars agree that gratitude engenders a warm appreciation for somebody or something, goodwill toward that person or thing, and a disposition to act benevolently that flows from appreciation and goodwill. In short, gratitude leads to reciprocity and trust, thereby enhancing social interactions and building communities and societies. It follows that ungrateful persons threaten the social fabric. But, as Dostoevsky demonstrates in the case of the underground man, they also harm themselves.

The underground man's hypothetical scenario perverts the normal gratitude script.²⁰ Upon receiving a freely given gift, one usually feels gratitude and desires to express it. One perceives the giver as an autonomous agent, recognizes the gift as a benefice, and determines the gift's value, usually by identifying the giver's motive and evaluating the extent of his or her generosity. One acknowledges both giver and gift, expressing appreciation to one for the other. The underground man defies the norm: he recognizes the hypothetical gifts and responds positively but then narcissistically refocuses on himself. Since he sees relationships in terms of power dynamics, he cannot feel or express appreciation without losing self-esteem. Since he can only imagine relationships either of superiority or opposition, he refuses to acknowledge that he shares anything with other human beings except negative emotions. His scenario involves a perversion: the underground man spontaneously responds to an act of kindness – “душой” – with his heart or soul. Once aware of his response, however, he suffers paroxysms of shame and punishes himself

¹⁸ Michael E. McCullough and JoAnn Tsang, “Parent of the Virtues? The Prosocial Contours of Gratitude,” in *The Psychology of Gratitude* (2004):123-41. Narcissism is characterized by grandiosity, a sense of entitlement, selfishness, and denigration of others. Gratitude is linked to prosocial emotions and behavior, to high agreeableness and forgiveness, low narcissism and envy. The moral principles most relevant to gratitude are reciprocity and equity.

¹⁹ Barbara Frederikson, “Gratitude, Like Other Positive Emotions, Broadens and Builds,” in *The Psychology of Gratitude* (2004):145-66.

²⁰ In treating gratitude as a social emotion with affective, cognitive, and volitional components, I am following Dostoevsky's lead. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, Ivan's devil complains that his best emotions, such as gratitude, are forbidden because of his social position (15:76).

for not controlling the expression of his emotion.²¹ “Such is my custom”/ Таков уж мой обычай, he declares.

In this early scenario, Dostoevsky emphasizes the issue of choice. In Part I, the underground man chooses to repress his natural gratitude but then struggles with his negative self-description and identifies shame as one source of his perverse ingratitude. In Part II, he acts out his ingratitude, responding to Liza’s magnanimity with aggression. She offers him love, and he gives her money. In choosing ingratitude, the underground man chooses alienation – from self, from others, and, in Dostoevsky’s universe, from God.

This early scenario also links choice to habit. The underground man chooses to foster habits of resentment and self-hatred. In describing himself as “злой” and human beings as ungrateful, the underground man chooses to demean rather than exalt himself and others. Moreover, he chooses to foster perverse, resentful, self-hating responses like gnashing his teeth and developing insomnia. By the time we meet him, the underground man has become resentful and embittered. He blames his distant relatives for sending him away to boarding school (5:139), overlooking the fact that their act has provided him with the education that guaranteed him a job and even could have made his career, had he so chosen (5:135).²² He hates school and resents his relatives’ action, but he also does not express gratitude to the distant relative who leaves him a small inheritance (5:101). He treats these gifts as entitlements.

Gratitude studies supply one clue to the underground man’s ingratitude and perverse choices: he cannot bear the stirrings of gratitude because they make him feel vulnerable and indebted. Biblical imagery provides others. The underground man uses the gnashing of teeth to express his anger and frustration, but Dostoevsky uses it to indicate his narrator’s alienation. In the Gospel of Matthew (8:12, 22:13-4; 25:28-30), teeth gnashers are those who have been cast out into the darkness, a metaphor for separation from God and community. In the Gospel of Mark (9:18), foaming at the mouth and gnashing of teeth signal demonic possession.²³

²¹ In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky will use a similar two-step reaction to reveal Raskolnikov’s spontaneous generosity and its perversion through ratiocination.

²² The underground man graduates at the top of his class and accepts a position from which he transfers in order to escape further interaction with his classmates (5:135).

²³ As V.N. Zakharov and B.N. Tikhomirov demonstrate in their two-volume reproduction of Dostoevsky’s *New Testament* and their commentary to it, Dostoevsky marked his New Testament on these pages. He also made frequent references to the

Like Biblical teeth gnashers, Dostoevsky's narrator is alienated and ill. The underground man diagnoses self-consciousness as both symptom and disease: he is a self-proclaimed citizen of Petersburg, "the most abstract and premeditated city on the face of the earth"/ самом отвлеченном и умышленном городе на всем земном шаре (5:101), and therefore a modern, alienated man, paralyzed by self-consciousness and possessed by an egoistic need for autonomy.²⁴ Gratitude, an act of good will and reciprocity, would cure his social and metaphysical illness.

By choosing to repress his gratitude, the underground man demonstrates his inability to receive. Yet the ability to receive gifts is as important as the ability to give, as Richard Peace argues in his article on giving and accepting in *The Brothers Karamazov*²⁵, and as Linda Ivanits explains in her book on *Dostoevsky and the Russian People*, where she demonstrates how acts of charity not only serve as the *sine qua non* of the moral life but also play a critical role in Dostoevsky's work as signs of God's presence on earth.²⁶ Giving not only allows a person to express

"духом немым" or "дух немой и глухой" in the passage from Mark. *Евангелие Достоевского* (Москва: Русский Мирь, 2010) т. 1 *Личный экземпляр Нового Завета 1823 года издания, подаренный Ф. М. Достоевскому в Тобольске в январе 1850*, стр 80, 87, 125, и т. 2. *Исследования. Материалы к комментарию*, стр 159, 180, 212-3. Clint Walker, who also notes the Biblical link between gnashing of teeth and possession, links Raskolnikov's spiritual illness to Peter the Great. Clint Walker, "On Serfdom, Sickness, and Redemption: The Peter the Great Subtext in *Crime and Punishment*," *Dostoevsky Studies* (Vol. 13):93-108.

²⁴ In his authorial footnote, Dostoevsky identifies the underground man as a fictional character, who "not only may but even must exist in our society, taking into account those circumstances in which our society was formed" (не только могут, но даже должны существовать в нашем обществе, взяв в соображение те обстоятельства, при которых вообще складывалось наше общество (5.99).

²⁵ Richard Peace, "One Little Onion and a Pound of Nuts: The Theme of Giving and Accepting in *The Brothers Karamazov*," in *Aspects of Dostoevskii: Art, Ethics and Faith*, eds. Robert Reid and Joe Andrew (Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics, Vol. LVII) (Amsterdam and NY: Rodopi, 2012):283-91.

²⁶ Linda Ivanits, *Dostoevsky and the Russian People* (Cambridge UP, 2009): 49, 63, 70. Ivanits notes that Dostoevsky locates the faith of the *narod* in charity, repentance, and acceptance of suffering (p.32). In *Crime and Punishment*, she shows that through the theme of the Biblical and folk Lazaruses, "The novel links the action of giving and receiving alms to the theme of resurrected life" (p.62). She notes that "almsgiving implies a mutual exchange in which the poor beggar blesses his benefactor. To be fully integrated into the human community, Raskolnikov, generous in giving, must learn to participate in this rite fully by viewing himself as needy and accepting help graciously" (p.76). In discussing *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivanits links Grushenka's

generosity, it enhances their sense of self, connection to others, and, for believers, connection to God. Receiving graciously, on the other hand, requires humility. The underground man's inability to accept another's charity reveals his pride. His inability to express gratitude betrays his diseased consciousness. Nevertheless, his definition of man as ungrateful biped signals an awareness of his disease as well as its cure.

The underground man links ingratitude with the desire to prove that human beings are genuine agents (чтоб самому себе подтвердить; 5:117) who insist on presenting themselves as such (настоять на своем; 5:117). He shows that to be ungrateful is one way to affirm free will and autonomy, personality and individuality (5:115): it can, he thinks, be a выгода – an advantage, a profit, a blessing. Yet he shows that to be ungrateful is also to act badly and imprudently: as the underground man clearly demonstrates, one may affirm the self (a good) and harm the self (an evil) at the same time (5:115). The underground man thus poses the paradox that he lives with.

In Chapter 7, the underground man contrasts ingratitude (неблагодарность) with prudence or good sense (благоразумие).²⁷ In Chapter 8, he links it with bad behavior (неблагодарие) and imprudence or bad sense (неблагоразумие). Dostoevsky here plays on the shared root благо, which we associate with its common meaning of the word 'good,' linked to the word 'blessing.'²⁸ By having the underground man use the

tale of the onion and Zosima's teachings to the legend of Christ as beggar wandering the Russian earth and thus identifies charity as a rite for interacting with Christ (176). She sees the loftiness of Ivan's compassionate Christ as a symptom of Ivan's refusal or inability to acknowledge God's image in others (178).

²⁷ In Svetlana Grenier's article on the echoes of Herzen's *Кто виноват?* in Dostoevsky's "Кроткая" and *Записки из подполья*, she notes that Herzen's protagonist Beltov uses the word "благоразумие" ironically and suggests that Dostoevsky's pawnbroker (as well as his predecessor, the underground man) may be following Beltov as someone who in his reasoning deliberately discounts morality as nothing more than officially defined, and hence invalid, "благоразумие," i.e., "житейская мудрость, полезная осторожность и расчетливость." Svetlana Slavskaja-Grenier, "Gertsenovskii podtekst v "Krotkoi", *Dostoevskii i mirovaia kul'tura* (Vol. 22):125, 134, 153 n. 54.

²⁸ The word "благо" has antithetical meanings – a good or an evil. Vladimir Dal', *Tolkovy slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*, tom 1, A-Z (Moskva: "Russkii iazyk," 1978): reprint of the dictionary published between 1880-1882. The more common meanings are "good," "useful," and "abundant" (добро; все доброе, полезное, служащее к нашему счастью; хорошо, полезно; много, обильно, достаточно, избыточно), but it can also mean "bad," "evil," "disquieting" (не хорошо, дурно,

negated form of compound nouns, Dostoevsky encourages readers to think of opposites – ingratitude/gratitude (неблагодарность/благодарность), for example. Dostoevsky’s habitual play with roots also evokes related words and concepts. Gratitude/благодарность, for instance, shares not one but two roots with благодать, the Russian word for “grace.” Moreover, in Dal’s nineteenth-century dictionary, one synonym for grace/благодать is выгода, which means “advantage” or “profit”! In Part I, behind his narrator’s back, Dostoevsky thus intimates that divine grace, rather than human caprice, may be mankind’s greatest blessing. In Part II, Dostoevsky pits grace against caprice – Liza’s freely offered gift challenges the underground man’s arbitrary free will.

In creating the underground man, Dostoevsky pushes readers to ask questions about free will. For example, is free will necessarily capricious,²⁹ as the underground man proclaims? Or can one assert the self without harming the self? Is refraining from self-assertion an option?³⁰ Or, finally, is it possible to assert free will in a manner that combines reason, will, and emotion? In linking free will and caprice, the underground man promotes a concept of pure will divorced from reason and positive emotions, such as generosity, gratitude, and love. In using ingratitude almost synonymously with caprice, he highlights the connection between caprice and negative emotions, such as ingratitude, spite, malice, and resentment. He seems to argue that his will and negative emotions constitute his true and authentic self. Furthermore, he rejects reason and represses his positive emotions, presumably because he

беспокойно). Interestingly, the common root блаж also has antithetical meanings: it can mean blessed (as in блаженный) or caprice (as in блажь, блажной, блажить). By having his paradoxalist repeat words whose common root has antithetical meanings, Dostoevsky may be encouraging readers to think antithetically or paradoxically. If this is the case, we can view free will as mankind’s greatest blessing, or, like Ivan Karamazov’s Grand Inquisitor, as its greatest misfortune.

²⁹ In addition to the concept of ingratitude, the underground man introduces the concept of caprice (каприз) as part of his discussion of free will (the most advantageous advantage) in Part I, Chapter 7 (5:113), develops it in Chapter 8 (5:114, 115), and further in Chapter 9 (5:119). Significantly, Dostoevsky chooses the Latinate word ‘каприз,’ rather than the Russian word ‘блажь,’ to emphasize the underground man’s alienation from the Russian soil. For an excellent discussion of free will and arbitrariness, see Evgenia Cherkasova, *Dostoevsky and Kant: Dialogues on Ethics*, Value Inquiry Book Series, Vol. 206 (Amsterdam-NY: Rodopi, 2009):29-51.

³⁰ David Velleman, “The Genesis of Shame,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 30.1 (2001):27-52. Velleman argues that free will involves choosing which parts of ourselves we present.

sees them as inauthentic and untrue to his self. Nonetheless, he longs to end his underground misery: “On the contrary, I would let my tongue be cut off entirely, from sheer gratitude, if only it could be so arranged that I myself never felt like sticking it out again”/ Напротив, я бы дал себе совсем отрезать язык, из одной благодарности, если б только устроилось так, чтоб мне самому уже более никогда не хотелось его высовывать (5:120-21).³¹ This statement reveals a divide between the underground man who uses the Biblical imagery of the Gospel of Mark (9:43-48) unknowingly and Dostoevsky who knowingly alludes to Christ’s statement that it is better to enter life with body parts cut off than to be thrown into the eternal fire of hell. The underground man may be saying that it is better to have no tongue than to live in hell, but Dostoevsky points out that it is a hell of the underground man’s own choosing.

The underground man’s language also betrays him: in stating that he would feel gratitude if he no longer felt ingratitude, the underground man uses the impersonal verb *устроилось* (it could be arranged) to place responsibility outside of himself. He blames external forces for his ingratitude, treats ingratitude as though it were a universal, and expresses the wish that it were not. Yet, on the very first pages of his notes, he demonstrates that gratitude is the universal (he responds to kindness “душой”/with his heart or soul) and ingratitude a choice. Dostoevsky thus reveals that the underground man’s inability to be grateful is linked to his pathological fear of interdependency and vulnerability. In his quest for autonomy, he misinterprets gifts as burdensome debts, compassion as degrading pity, openness and trust as attempts to dominate.

For the same reason, the underground man is unable to forgive and ask for forgiveness. Even as a child he fought his positive emotions: “And generally I hated saying, ‘Forgive me, papa, I won’t do it again,’ – not because I was incapable of saying it, but, on the contrary, precisely because I was all too capable of it”/ Да и вообще терпеть я не мог говорить: «Простите, папаша, вперед не буду», - не потому, чтоб я не способен на это бывал, а напротив, может быть, именно потому, что уж слишком способен на это бывал, да еще как? (5:107). He blames

³¹ Earlier in the same section, the underground man exclaims: “Destroy my desires, wipe out my ideals, show me something better, and I will follow you” / Уничтожьте мои желания, сотрите мои идеалы, покажите мне что-нибудь лучше, и я за вами пойду (5:120).

his heart – his tender heart – for placing him in a position that he considers humiliating:

My heart somehow kept mucking things up here... Here even the laws of nature cannot be blamed, even though it's the laws of nature that continually and most of all offended me my whole life.

Сердце уж тут как-то гадило... Тут уж даже и законов природы нельзя было обвинить, хотя все-таки законы природы постоянно и более всего всю жизнь меня обижали (5:107).³²

The underground man thus identifies his heart, the source of his positive emotions, as the source of his humiliation – his desire to please, to be part of a family, of a community, is so great, that he wants to ask forgiveness, perhaps to be grateful, but he fears the vulnerability that comes with connection. He erects a fortress around his positive emotions and reinforces its walls with theory. The underground man declares that ingratitude is a universal, but Dostoevsky shows that he uses it is a defense.

As I have shown elsewhere, the underground man's free will is not really free but reactive and limiting.³³ If we follow the underground man's argument and agree that ingratitude leads to bad behavior, imprudence, and self-harm, we can see that Dostoevsky is suggesting gratitude as an alternative. Gratitude is an inherently social emotion. Robert Solomon suggests that it is a philosophical emotion, as "It is, in a phrase, seeing the bigger picture. In relationships, it is seeing a particular act or transaction as part of a larger and ongoing relationship."³⁴ The very word for gratitude, *благодарность*, suggests a bigger picture because it evokes thanksgiving or *eucharistia*.³⁵ If we return to the underground man's hypothetical scenario, we can ask what it would be like to accept and acknowledge another's gift. And that is exactly what Dostoevsky explores in Part II with the Liza story – for it is Liza who accepts and acknowledges the underground man's gift, his offer to help her leave the

³² I'd like to thank my colleague Evgenia Cherkasova both for reminding me of the early roots of the underground man's fear of emotion and for her close reading of this article. Her excellent suggestions have sharpened my argument.

³³ Martinsen (2006):157-74.

³⁴ Solomon (2004): ix.

³⁵ I would like to thank my colleagues Svetlana Grenier and Olga Meerson for pointing out the obvious connection between gratitude/*благодарность* and *eucharistia*, which I had initially overlooked.

brothel. Her subsequent magnanimity haunts him, a constant reminder, especially when wet snow falls, of lost communion. The underground man uses Liza's freely offered gift of compassion to humiliate her. He thereby destroys the possibility of love, trust, and community. He dramatizes the antisocial nature of ingratitude by harming another and choosing the safety of solitude.

In closing, I return to my opening questions about why Dostoevsky the author and his underground narrator make ingratitude part of their polemics on free will.³⁶ The underground man sees humans as ungrateful in part because he projects his self-image onto others. He raises the issue of ingratitude in his polemic on free will as the most advantageous advantage in part because he has a narrow definition of will as caprice, i.e., as irrational and arbitrary self-assertion. Guided by his own negative emotions, he cannot offer a positive account of free will.

Dostoevsky, on the other hand, raises the issue of free will because he believes that possessing free will enables us to be moral agents, capable of choosing to perform right or wrong actions. Liza acts as a moral agent, as someone who sees herself in relation to others. She sees the wounded man behind the underground bully and offers him her love. The underground man, on the other hand, thinks narrowly of himself. He confesses that he "was so great an egoist," that he "had in fact so little respect for people," that he cannot imagine another's magnanimity/ Я до того был эгоист, до того неуважал людей на самом деле, что даже и вообразить не мог что и она это сделает (5:177). He is thus haunted by Liza's generosity, compassion, and humility. She both proves and disproves his theory of human nature: she is grateful and he is not.

Dostoevsky uses his paradoxicalist's negative, reactive nature to underscore the limits of his perspective. The underground man's idealization of blind will arises largely from his desire for freedom. He erroneously believes that he is exerting pure will. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, shows how the underground man's negative emotions condition his will. The underground man deceives himself: his will is not free, but reactive. His solipsism blinds him. He cannot understand that humans can freely choose *not* to assert their own egos.

³⁶ Nomi Tamir-Ghez's characterization of the differences between author and narrator in Nabokov's *Lolita* equally applies to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. See Nomi Tamir-Ghez, "The Art of Persuasion in *Lolita*," in *Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: A Casebook*, ed. Ellen Pifer (Oxford UP, 2003):22-3.

Dostoevsky shows us that his narrator's underground philosophy reflects his dilemma. As the underground man proclaims, an ungrateful man reasons and behaves badly. Yet this ungrateful narrator's paradoxical rhetoric reflects an internal struggle. He knows that "the underground is not at all better," that there is "something different, completely different" which he "thirsts for but cannot find"/ что вовсе не подполье лучше, а что-то другое, совсем другое, которого я жажду, но которого никак не найду! (5:121). He has, however, caught a glimpse of light in his underground dark. Liza's ability to see through his misery demonstrates a perspicacity and magnanimity that he "could scarcely imagine"/ даже и вообразить не мог because he has willfully chosen self-enclosure. Behind his underground man's back, Dostoevsky thus demonstrates that self-assertion leads to moral blindness. In self-protectively rejecting others as moral agents, the underground man narrows his field of perception. His anguish derives from his positive intuition of that "something different"/ что-то другое, yet his ingratitude signals an unwillingness to receive and thus a willful withdrawal from the mutual giving that creates and sustains community.

In creating the underground man, Dostoevsky highlights the underground man's alienation but also dramatizes the complex interaction between autonomy and choice. While the underground man proposes ingratitude as a universal condition, Dostoevsky represents it as an active choice. Moreover, Dostoevsky demonstrates that the underground man's ingratitude is capricious, thereby exposing his narrator's most compelling claim as a sham: whereas the underground man represents himself as a champion of free will, Dostoevsky reveals him to be a slave to caprice. Dostoevsky also links ingratitude to resentment, mistrust, and inability to ask for forgiveness, thereby suggesting that one negative emotion spawns others. The underground man's biography in Part II reveals that his Part I theorizing results from the negative, reactive choices of a man whose defensive ingratitude drives and keeps him underground.