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Feature Editor

Editor's Note: In this column, teachers who are currently using literary and artistic materials as part of their curricula will briefly summarize specific works, delineate their purposes and goals in using these media, describe their audience and teaching strategies, discuss their methods of evaluation, and speculate about the impact of these teaching tools on learners (and teachers).

Submissions should be three to five double-spaced pages with a minimum of references. Send your submissions to me at University of California, Irvine, Department of Family Medicine, 101 City Drive South, Building 200, Room 512, Route 81, Orange, CA 92868-3298. 949-824-3748. Fax: 714-456-7984. jfshapir@uci.edu.

Doctor-Patient Relationship Through the Prism of *Notes From the Underground* by Dostoyevsky

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To bring literature and art into medical education is a well-developed approach in Russia, though it is never presented officially in curricula. In many Russian medical schools, however, there are faculty using literature in everyday teaching. Sometimes, in fact, the classic literature pictures clinical phenomena more clearly than any academic text.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky is one of the authors I have used most frequently in my own teaching. The name Dostoyevsky is one in which literature and medicine virtually coexist together. In this article, I share my experience of applying his novel,

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Notes From the Underground, to classes and clerkships for medical students. This novel is written as the diary of a former clerk. In his 40 years of life, the hero believes he has been sick for 20 of them, trying to keep his sickness inside, hidden as his special secret. The dramatic disclosure of the feverish and diverse inner life of this withdrawn and poor man presents much to be shocked about, as well as discussed from a primary care medicine point of view.

Notes From the Underground is a wonderful book that helps you understand the inner experience of disorders, the diagnostic and therapeutic meaning of the interaction of somatic and psychic signs, the interweaving of symptoms of illness and events of life, and the influence of psychological and social-cultural factors on the clinical picture and the doctor-patient relationship. A

discussion of the hero's medical signs, considering him as a hypothetical patient, is a provocative training experience in clinical skills.

The hero of the book does not present himself directly to a doctor, but his diary is a fusing of medical complaints and their psychological and social context. *Notes From the Underground* begins:

I am a sick man. I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I believe my liver is diseased. However, I know nothing at all about my disease and do not know for certain what ails me.

The narrator is overwhelmed with contradictory feelings toward medicine:

I don't consult a doctor . . . and never have, though I have a respect for medicine and doctors.

His complicated attitude toward doctors is no less important than his sickly somatic sensations. It is not possible to separate his liver disease from his rumination about it and from those who might treat it. For example, the narrator identifies his likely relationship with a doctor as one of conflict and provocation.

I refuse to consult a doctor from spite . . . I can't explain who it is precisely that I am mortifying in this case by my spite: I am perfectly well aware that I cannot 'pay out' the doctors by not consulting them; I know better than anyone that by all this I am only injuring myself and no one else. But still, if I do not consult a doctor, it is from spite. My liver is bad, well let it get worse!

The hero's crucial problem is his lack of social skills. In fact, his personality is an insurmountable barrier to visiting a doctor. He feels negatively toward people in general and doctors in particular, not being able to share his experiences with anyone. He conceptualizes that:

Every man has reminiscences which he would not tell everyone but only to his friends. He has other matters . . . which he would not reveal even to his friends but only to himself and that in secret. But there are other things which a man is afraid to tell even to himself, and every decent man has a number of such things . . .

Notes From the Underground brings "such things" into awareness. The genius of Dostoyevsky finds a way to put onto paper things that are beyond conceptualization and consciousness. This opens a unique opportunity to discover the undiscovered—to see what the inner world of such a patient could be like.

It can be a puzzling quest with regard to somato-form phenomena to simultaneously explore the somatic and mental components of a

patient's condition. In the hero's diary, somatic complaints are presented as characterological deviations, but personality disorders in their turn are pictured through somatic experiences. The common core uniting physical and psychological distress is a resonance between the suffering of pain and the drive to inflict pain. Indeed, the narrator develops a special theory about the meaning of pain, based on the premise that "suffering is the sole origin of consciousness." He enjoys remembering how he humiliated people and fantasizing about how he might humiliate them. At the same time, he feels shame and suffers. But, his shame and suffering provoke a feeling close to enjoyment that, in turn, becomes a reason for deeper self-reproach and blaming. Moreover, although the hero is aware of this vicious circle, his realization itself is a complex mixture of pride for his brightness and self-humiliation for his cruelty. He pitilessly concludes that "to be too conscious is an illness—a real thorough-going illness."

This vicious circle forms one of the important story lines the hero tells in this novel. The clerk suffers because of his own poverty and insignificance but simultaneously is full of grandiosity and contempt for other people's mediocrity. Preoccupied with fears about his ridiculous clothes and low position, he tortures himself with fantasies of being an object of ridicule and scorn. Striving to develop a friendship with the leader of his former schoolmates, he almost forces an invitation to dinner from them. During this longed-for event, the hero's behavior is bizarre and aggressive, breaking social norms, while his violence is pitiful and clumsy. The company simply does not see him as an equal, but he continues his *epatage*, accompanied by unremitting and self-humiliating reflection. Finally he finds himself with a young prostitute, whom he blames for her moral and physical degradation and tor-

tures with scenes of a happy family and maternity. Enjoying her anguish, at the same time he reproaches himself for playing with her. Deeply moved, the girl discloses her very soul, trusting the little clerk completely. He invites her to call on him, awaiting this visit with a mixture of fear and aversion. When she does arrive, predictably, he badly humiliates her, then uses her as a prostitute.

This description provides great opportunities to discuss personal aspects of the hero, while suggesting that life is wider than nosological clusters. The true polyphony of a real person with all his or her multifaceted and often contradictory characterological properties, emotional experience, and behavioral patterns cannot be explained solely in terms of personality disorders. *Notes From the Underground* highlights the old truth that illness is not simply a collection of pathological signs and dysfunctions but a part of human life. With pain and power, Dostoyevsky suggests that the medical segregation of a case into its component parts—*anamnesis vitae* (personal history) and *anamnesis morbi* (history of present illness)—is just a technical convenience. The diary of the sickly and tortured clerk stands as a moving testament to the unity of present illness and personal history in the wholeness of the human being.

This book is a classic example of how real life—or real literature, which is nothing but a clear expression of real life—cannot be measured by any system of measurement. Marxist critics found in *Notes From the Underground* proof of the deterioration of a person by capitalistic society. Orthodox psychoanalysis decoded the title as a penetration into the unconscious and derived support for virtually every analytic formulation from the pages of the book. The first line of one of the chapters may be understood as a foreshadowing of the emblematic writing of Franz Kafka:

I want now to tell you, gentlemen . . . why I could not even become an insect . . . I have many times tried . . . But I was not equal even to that.

The hero of this book is referred to once as an antihero, which leads to yet another interpretation: ie, ego and its “black double,” or the plot of dissociation, resonating to Stevenson’s immortal doubling in Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. It is stimulating to interpret *Notes From the*

Underground by seeing it as a clinical case through the prisms of such concepts and theories. What is most important for the student doctor is to learn to respect medicine not simply as a science about pathological processes but as a part of culture, to understand not only a disorder but also the human being experiencing it. Dostoyevsky’s *Notes From the Underground* opens up a fascinating way to develop such an understanding.

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I think that one can look at the ideas presented in Dostoevsky's work as one where tragedy is present. The tragic condition in this novel is one where individuals seek to appropriate the world around them in accordance to their own subjectivity, only to find despair and pain as a result. This is enhanced by the narrator figure. While he is obviously intelligent and insightful, while he is well read and quite perceptive about his I think that one can look at the ideas presented in Dostoevsky's work as one where tragedy is present. The tragic condition in this novel is one where ind

- An effective doctor-patient relationship involves both parties in co-creating a working relationship that is reliable, effective, and durable.
- The doctor-patient relationship accomplishes good outcomes by promoting empowered, engaged, and active partnership with patients who feel heard and accurately understood by their physicians.
- Successful doctor-patient relationships require physicians to practice a welcoming stance, participatory decision-making, and mindfulness about both the patient's and the physician's inner life.
- Especially in psychiatry, the physician must understand and rel