

Study Guide Questions for **Notes** part 1

Some important preliminary things to point out:

Dostoevsky's communication with the reader is indirect. The underground man (UM) is a fictitious persona, and not to be confused with Dostoevsky. However, Dostoevsky uses UM as a mouthpiece for some of his own views. For instance, like UM, Dostoevsky was highly critical of Rationalism.

Part 1 is a combination of an introduction to the personality of UM and UM's rants against many of the institutions toward which he has bitter contempt.

the unifying theme of **Notes** according to Pevear: the instability, the perpetual "dialectic" of isolated consciousness. This theme is "embodied in the person of its narrator, is dramatized in the process of its writing." (vii)

1. What do we really know about UM?
2. As you read along through part 1, you may have noticed that UM paints a picture of humanity. What is that picture like? Do you agree with that picture?
3. Can you identify specific contradictions in the underground man's (UM) diatribe? Does this matter?
4. What is UM "spiteful" about?
5. Why do you think that UM desires pain and suffering? Use examples.
6. What does UM have to say about Determinism, and the project of outlining the human character? How does the symbol of the crystal palace relate to this criticism?
7. If individuality is so important to the underground man, why is he in hiding? Why does he disclose so little about himself? Is this coherent?