

DOSTOEVSKY ON THE MEANING OF HUMANITY

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Fyodor Dostoevsky, acclaimed as one of the greatest writers the world has yet produced, wrote a sentence which, while not among the most-cited passages in world literature, is nonetheless of sufficient significance to anyone concerned with maledicta to be worthy of special note. The remark in question is from Dostoevsky's *Zapiski iz podpol'ja* (*Notes from Underground*). All those who would discuss Dostoevsky's philosophy, his view of humanity, his character, or his literary work, should be cognizant of this forceful statement, in which he demonstrates the meaning of humanity and the importance of maledicta for understanding that meaning. The passage is cited below in the original Russian and translated by this author.

Проклятие пустит по свету, а так как проклинать может только один человек (это уж его привилегия, главным образом отличающая его от других животных), так ведь он, пожалуй, одним проклятием достигнет своего, то есть действительно убедится, что он человек, а не фортепьянная клавиша! (Записки из подполья, 1:8)

He will let out a curse on the world, and as only a human being can curse (for it is his privilege, the main thing distinguishing him from the other animals); thus, you see, perhaps by means of a single curse he will achieve his goal, that is, he will truly convince himself that he is a human being, and not a piano key! (Notes from Underground, Part I, Chapter 8)