

The novel *Fathers and Sons* by Ivan Turgenev focuses on the relationship between two subsequent generations during the second half of the nineteenth century. This relationship is often plagued with tension and misunderstanding that results from fundamental differences in philosophy, manners, and lifestyle.

One of the first and most significant rifts centers on the philosophy of Nihilism. The focus of this philosophy is to question tradition and ceremony: “A Nihilist is a man who admits no established authorities, who takes no principles for granted” (25). Turgenev’s characterization of Eugene Vassilich Bazarov portrays him as a representative of the newer, radical philosophy. His point of view contrasts greatly with the older and aristocratic perspective of Paul Petrovich Kirsanov, whose beliefs Bazarov regards as “archaic” (18). Unlike Bazarov, Paul Petrovich believes that the Russian public “has a holy respect for traditions, it is a patriarchal people. It cannot live without faith” (58). His convictions about the value of art, poetry, and tradition are as strong as Bazarov’s repulsion against them. Their mutual contempt for the other’s beliefs leads to a heated argument and eventually a duel.

Another major difference between the “fathers” and “sons” is their varying outlook on manners and propriety. Several times, the author emphasizes Bazarov’s casual and brusque manner of talking and furthermore that “he regarded chivalrous feelings as something in the nature of malformation or disease” (108). Turgenev points out that his manners are much more relaxed than those of Paul and Nicholas Kirsanov, who are much more concerned with appearances. Similarly, Arcady’s perspective on his father’s affair with Fenichka is much more relaxed than his uncle’s: “she has no cause to feel ashamed because of me” (22). Paul Petrovich and Nicholas feel uneasy because the manners of Arcady and Bazarov are far less formal than those of the older aristocracy.

The lifestyles of the two generations are also vastly different. Bazarov views amusements such as reading Pushkin and playing the cello as ridiculous, even goes as far as accusing Paul Petrovich of “doing nothing” (56). His contempt for the somewhat idle lifestyle becomes clear from the start of the novel. Bazarov (and sometimes Arcady) occupies himself with constant experiments, natural sciences, and practices medicine. In general, their lifestyle has a restless energy that is not evident in the peaceful lives of the older Kirsanovs.

Overall, the conflicts between the “fathers” and the “sons” can be attributed to the societal changes that inevitably occur in any time period. More specifically, there are many conflicts that result from varying philosophies, mannerisms, and general conduct. As Turgenev points out, this is especially true of the nineteenth century because of the intellectual developments of that time.