

# Examining Psychological Turmoil: A Freudian Analysis of Guilt, Repression, and the Unconscious in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to explore Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment" through a Freudian concepts of id, ego, and superego, examining the themes of guilt, repression, and the unconscious as manifested in the protagonist, Raskolnikov. He is an intricate personality who lives in isolation, and propounds a bizarre theory of violating a law for the sake of a great objective. The writer Dostoevsky demonstrates the profound impact of guilt on Raskolnikov's inner psyche, driving him into a state of mental tribulation and moral conflict. This theory of an extraordinary man is deeply embedded in his unconscious, and as a result he becomes paranoid. It is also his repressed desire to become a great person that leads him to believe that he can transgress the law and kill a person to save a large number of people. Through Freudian analysis we find that after committing the crime he goes through guilt and intense suffering, and as a result, he wants to confess his sin. In parallel, there is another character svidrigailov who has also sinned, later on, he also suffers intense guilt and then kills himself. By meticulously scrutinizing Raskolnikov's character through Freudian psychoanalysis, the paper aims to explore how his inner turmoil and guilt shape his transformation and quest for redemption.

**Keywords:** repressed desire, guilt, extraordinary man, inner turmoil, unconscious, suffering, id, ego, superego, redemption

## Introduction

A novel *Crime and Punishment* is seen as one of the best novels in world literature. And the novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky is known as one of the finest novelists in literature. This novel talks about the inner turmoil of the characters specifically, Raskolnikov and svidrigailov. The character Raskolnikov is a different person, alienates him, and develops a peculiar theory that the world is divided into two parts ordinary and extraordinary person. And an extraordinary person can violate the law for the sake of humanity. Leigh and David J state about him that, "In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov murders two helpless women to prove two different philosophical systems—utilitarianism, that denies the right of useless people to live, and a Nietzschean superman philosophy that affirms the rights of certain exceptional persons to live beyond the limits of traditional ethics" (88-89). Raskolnikov is deeply troubled when he sees the wicked people suppressing downtrodden people. This incident goes in his unconscious mind, and that's when he decides to become Superman.

The theory of an extraordinary man is deeply embedded in Raskolnikov's unconscious, that's why he executes his plan of killing people. Sigmund Freud has mainly focused on the unconscious. And "All of Freud's work depends upon the notion of the unconscious, which is the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our action" (Barry 97). His repressed desire is unresolved which leads him to commit that crime. It is his repressed desire to become an extraordinary person so that he can serve for society. The term repression means, "Defense mechanism whereby unconscious ideas that are felt to be dangerous to become conscious are, by a secondary force, pushed out of consciousness but which can be brought into consciousness in certain circumstances" (Slade 104).

Raskolnikov divides people into two categories those who rules and those who are ruled. According to his theory, that an ordinary person has no daring to overstep but an extraordinary person can overstep for the sake of humanity. He contends that,

The first category generally categories are fairly well marked. The first category, generally speaking, are men conservations in temperament and law abiding, they alive under control and love to be controlled. To my thinking they live under control and love to be controlled. To my thinking they live under to be controlled, because that's their vocation, and there is nothing humiliating it for them. The second category all transgresses the law; they are destroyers or disposed to destruction according to their capacities. The crimes of these are of course relative and varied; for the most part they seek in very varied ways the destruction of the present for the sake of his idea to step over a corpse or wade through blood. He can, maintain, find within himself, in his conscience, a sanction for wading through blood—that depends on the idea its dimensions, note that. It's only in that sense I speak of their right to crime in my article (you began with the legal question) (Dostoevsky 246-247).

The writer talks about Dostoevsky that, "We think of horrible dream in which Raskolnikov sees a poor, lean, old mare beaten to death with a crowbar, and we may reflect upon Nietzsche's darkest insights: that pain creates memory, so that the pain is the meaning, and is therefore painful" (Bloom 4). Furthermore, Raskolnikov goes through existentialism and nihilism which shows that, "The breaking of Raskolnikov no longer demonstrates the hollowness of existentialism, but only the weakness of Raskolnikov. The story of crime and punishment now becomes the story not of a man's descent into hell and rebirth into glory, but of a failure. Raskolnikov tried to be free, but was sucked back into the diminution of humanity." (Bloom 14).

Freud posited that guilt is a central emotion tied to the superego, the part of the psyche that holds moral standards and societal rules. Raskolnikov's sense of guilt is pervasive and manifests in various ways. His initial crime, the murder of the pawnbroker Alyona Ivanovna, is driven by a theory that extraordinary individuals are above the law. However, post-murder, Raskolnikov's overwhelming guilt indicates the powerful influence of his superego. His guilt is not merely a reaction to his crime but a manifestation of his superego, which Freud describes as the internalized societal norms and moral standards. This is evident in his recurring nightmares and his obsession with the crime scene, which symbolize his inability to

escape his conscience. His journey towards confession and punishment can be seen as an unconscious desire to alleviate his guilt. Freud might argue that his ultimate confession to Sonia and the authorities is driven by a need to reconcile with his superego and achieve some form of redemption.

### Research Methodology

A Freudian analysis of *Crime and Punishment* reveals the intricate psychological dynamics at play within Raskolnikov's mind. His profound guilt, mechanisms of repression, and the influence of the unconscious illustrate the depth of his internal conflict and psychological turmoil. By examining these aspects through Freud's theories, we gain a richer understanding of Raskolnikov's character and Dostoevsky's exploration of the human psyche. There is a conflict between his Id and Superego, his Id is insatiable but his Superego makes him feel his guilt. So Freud's concepts of Id, Ego, and Superego are seen as well as Defense Mechanism, repression, and unconscious through which we can breakdown the inner psyche of Raskolnikov. The writer states that, "The unconscious is the primary process of mental life, according to Freud" (Slade 105).

Freud's theory of the unconscious suggests that much of human disposition is influenced by unconscious desires, fears, and memories. In *Crime and Punishment*, unconscious plays a crucial role in driving Raskolnikov's actions and internal conflict. His dreams, such as the vivid nightmare of the horse beating, serve as windows into his unconscious mind. These dreams reflect his inner turmoil, guilt, and the violent impulses that he tries to repress during his waking hours. Throughout the novel, Raskolnikov experiences moments where his unconscious mind breaks through his conscious defenses. For instance, his inadvertent confessions and slips of the tongue reveal the hidden guilt and anxiety he tries to conceal.

### Critical Analysis

In a novel *Crime and Punishment* the character Raskolnikov propounded a bizarre theory of becoming Superman by violating the law. He wants to show his supremacy and dominance to weak people. Napoleon and Mahomet are the idol for him because they could overstep in order to achieve great objectives. He argues about discoveries of Newton and Kepler and by eliminating some

people how their discoveries can make a major impact on the whole humanity: "I maintained that if the discoveries of Kepler and Newton could not have been made known except by sacrificing the lives of one, a dozen hundred, or men, Newton would have had the right, would indeed have been in duty bound to.... Eliminate the dozen or the hundred men for the sake of making his discoveries known to the whole of humanity" (Dostoevsky 246). Raskolnikov argues that an extraordinary man must have a right to transgress the law for the sake of high purpose. He decides to kill a woman to help a thousand people when he listens from officers that someone must kill that old lady and distribute her money to needy people. One tiny crime can be justified for the sake of humanity and by taking one life we can save thousands innocent people.

But later on, his guilt starts tormenting him for his wrongdoings, and after committing a crime he goes through intense tribulation and his guilt intensely troubles his inner psyche as writers say that, "The subject of culpability is portrayed through Raskolnikov's mental unrest. As a result of his guilt, he experiences extreme psychological distress, hallucinations, and paranoia. He struggles with feelings of shame and self-loathing as his conscience tortures him. Guilt is portrayed by Dostoevsky as a potent force that can afflict and deteriorate the human mind." (Anand, Saiel 36). His psychological turmoil enhances with the passage of time, and his guilt or conscience starts killing him.

As parallel to Raskolnikov, another character is Svidrigailov who is a pedophile, accused of molestation. Svidrigailov's character is layered with psychological complexity. He is haunted by his past, including the mysterious death of his wife, and experiences supernatural visions, suggesting a tormented conscience. His internal struggles and ultimate fate add depth to Dostoevsky's exploration of the human psyche. Through this character, Dostoevsky talks about the themes like the duality of human disposition, the possibility of redemption, and the impact of guilt and sin. His character challenges readers to consider the boundaries between good and evil, and the potential for change within individuals. In the end, his guilt excessively torments him, due to this reason he kills himself. Another side, the character Raskolnikov is also tormented by his guilt, but he is helped by his beloved

Sonia who emphasizes him to confess his sin. He shares his inner turmoil to her that, "I wanted to find out then and quickly whether I was a louse like everybody else or a man. Whether I can step over barriers or not, whether I dare stoop to pick up or not, whether I am trembling creature or whether I have the right..." (Dostoevsky 387). Raskolnikov wanted to know whether he has strength to transgress or not like Napoleon. His major concern was to be like Napoleon and to overstep so that he can become Superman. In response Sonya talks about penance and retribution through the confession of his sin. She opines to him that you must confess your sin so that you can reduce your suffering and guilt. Because Sonia has a huge influence on Raskolnikov, he decides to confess his sin of killing two women.

Raskolnikov just wanted to testify his peculiar theory, and whether he is capable of executing his theory of excluding the moral and ethical constraints to become the great person like Napoleon. The author says that, "Raskolnikov finally comes to another point that he killed neither to help his family nor to get money. He killed the old woman for himself, to testify his own theory of extraordinary man and to know whether he can dare to commit it" (Parmar 167). Later on, crime is committed and he considers himself an extraordinary person who has a right to transgress a law without thinking of societal constraints. But after committing the heinous crime Raskolnikov "is unable to cope with the guilt that comes with his crime, and his mental state deteriorates rapidly. He becomes paranoid and delusional, and he is haunted by the fear of being caught" (Ali 274).

### Conclusion

So in the end, we can conclude that Raskolnikov's Superego is compelling him to feel guilty, and to accept his sin. Throughout the novel, there has been a conflict between Ego and Superego. And his beloved Sonia helps him to confess his sin because this is the only way to come out from this trap. Finally, in the epilogue in prison Raskolnikov is "Sullen, shut up within himself more than ever, isolated from all. Imprisoned by his Ego more surely than by spiked walls and vigilant guards.... He fell ill-from "wounded pride." He did not know why he had confessed" (Squires, Chatham 493). He accepts that whatever he has

done was wrong and he is ready for remorse and punishment. The author Nisha states that, "Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov are true to this moral and psychological turmoil of their respective age. Consequently, agony, crime, nihilism, guilt conscience, or dilemma are the traits that are associated with this novel" (70). Dostoevsky focuses on the realization of the criminal of his sin, as the author Poornima talks about the punishment that, "So the concept of punishment should be to make the offender suffer and thereby teach a lesson. The rationalization of punishment is very important as it affects not only the offender but the society as a whole" (71). The more he tries to repress his inner turmoil, the more he feels guilty. Thus, the compendium of the novel is sinner's realization of his crime so that he can suffer and then expiate his sin.

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