

Crime and
punishment written by
dostoevsky
philosophy essay



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The famous work Crime and Punishment written by Dostoevsky sets a main important theme about Extra-ordinary man theory. A detailed study and analysis on this aspect is being covered in this paper.

In the novel Crime and Punishment the so-called “extra-ordinary man” theory by Raskolnikov plays an important role setting an extraordinary excuse for crimes that’s being committed. Raskolnikov, who is being both psychology as well as physically ill due to crime and lack of food respectively. Raskolnikov believes that he should be judged as an exception therefore he should be excused from the law that is being imposed on humans by an ordinary man. Raskolnikov had written this theory as an article “On crime” part 3 chapter V two months earlier. It is basically this theory that makes him believe that he had the right to murder Alyona Ivanovna- the pawn breaker.

According to Raskolnikov, in the universe there are certain selected ones among humans, these a handful of selected people were being tagged by Raskolnikov as extraordinary people. Moreover, these extraordinary people has to be considered above the laws that is being made by the ordinary people or man. Extraordinary man should be above the laws of ordinary men and it’s alright if they don’t submit to any kind of moral code that is being stated, also he believes that extraordinary man could ignore the laws as long as his actions benefits human race as a whole in other words also known as holism. On the other hand, Raskolnikov even though he thought that he was doing it for the benefit of all humans he committed the crime for himself as well i. e. he broke the law so that he could benefit himself therefore his own theory as whole contradicted each other. So the question that has to be

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asked at this point is that - Why Raskolnikov believes himself to be one of the chosen one i. e. extra-ordinary men?. There are many answers to this probably but according to my own perspectives and analysis there might be two reasons. One, Raskolnikov's financial state is unsafe so this state of him might have caused him to be pushed off more to the edge of good sense. Two, the natural arrogance which is basically because he thinks he is possessing a great intellectual character in for instance in part 3 chapter VI page 232 " ' Napoleon, the pyramid, Waterloo - and a vile, withered the old woman, a moneylender, with a red box under her bed- what a mishmash... " Does Napoleon crawl under an old woman's bed?" he will say. Oh, what rubbish!.. "' he has opted his main role as napoleon because he thinks he is one of the extra-ordinary man also he mentions that people fought for Napoleons' cause in order to change the world and when he continues in part 3 chapter VI page 233 " ... The only think I knew how to do was kill!" he basically thinks he is like napoleon and hence he could be cold, unfeeling and merciless like Napoleon so he thought that he has the strength to withstand everything. Raskolnikov is a megalomaniac who believes that he is above all men. He thinks that he can revolutionize the world by just killing a pawnbroker which infact is still going die even though if he does it or not because at the end the pawnbroker will die because she will be too old and perhaps die due to aging.

He convinces himself that he killed Alyona invanovna because she was basically a worthless pawnbroker who sucked in the blood of poor people in part 1, chapter VI page 56 " listen, then. On the other hand you have new, young forces running to waste ... since she bit Lizavetas' finger, out of sheer

malice, and it almost had to be amputated” Raskolnikov overhears the conversation and thinks about how much similar they think which is related to his extraordinary man theory and thinks that this all cannot be just coincidence followed by this in part 1, Chapter VI page 56 “ but why must he listen at this particular moment to that particular talk and those particular ideas

When there had just been born in his own brain exactly the same ideas?” added to this many events made Raskolnikov think he is the chosen person to kill Alyona for instance page 53 ” ‘ you come tomorrow, after six. Some of them will be here; you can decide for yourself.’

‘ And we’ll have a drop of tea,’ added his wife.

‘ All right, I’ll come’ said Lizaveta, still rather doubtful and moved slowly away. Raskolnikov had already passed on and heard no more.” By this Raskolnikov believes he is doing mankind a service by removing an unfair pawnbroker. However this all interpretation of Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky makes the readers to think about if Raskolnikov is really the one chosen to kill Ivanovna. For instance before Raskolnikov commits the crime knows that the neighbors’ across the corridor of Ivanovna are moving out from the apartment which later on when he tries to escape from the crime scene as well as the people he enters into that room where he knows that it will be empty. Hence this incident also makes him interpret that he was the chosen one.

It is not until part VI that Raskolnikov admits to himself that his ultimate goal was to break the laws for his own benefit alone in part 5 chapter IV page 353
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to page 354 " ... if I worried for so long about whether napoleon would have done it or not... whether I was capable of stepping over the barriers or not". He finally admits that he killed Alyona invanovna just to see if he could do it in part 5 chapter IV as mentioned. He wanted to know whether he was napoleon i. e. if he was able to commit an evil act and walk away with no remorse. In short, Raskolnikov did not kill Alyona because she of her money but he killer her to simply try it in an egoistic state of mind.

Interestingly the extraordinary man theory when applied to the other characters in Crime and punishment they almost fit to Svidrigailov and Luzhin. When the novel is being analyzed in depth it clearly shows that Svidrigailov is an example of an extraordinary man theory of Raskolnikov who in fact breaks the laws in order to benefit himself only like Raskolnikov did for himself. However, the difference between Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov is that he does things to feel good unlike Raskolnikov does things to prove or to test himself. He is responsible for the death of Martha Petrovna his wife but one more thing that clearly depicts the difference between him and Raskolnikov is that he basically commits crime to improve his state, to be free of from Martha in order to marry Dunya which is why he almost confesses that he poisoned his wife Martha in part 6, page 403 " naturally, I would have sworn to give her eternal love, blissful happiness ... I would have donw it on the spot". Svidrigailov is a man who entirely serves for self-serving actions.

Moving on to Another case in Crime and Punishment, Luzhin who is also known as Peter Petrovich in the novel. He fits to both parts of Raskolnikov's extraordinary theory and even goes against the norms depicted by man.
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Luzhin's attempt to marry Dunya where basically Dunya is a poor girl greatly contrasts with Luzhin's wealth, his aim however is to be a benefactor in this situation. By this way he is hoping to be named among the society as rescuer of Dunya- a poor lady who is at the stage of poverty and starvation. So his attempt of marrying Dunya shows that he as a character is very selfish and in fact wants to do this act clearly out of selfish thoughts.

By these examples stated above it shows that one of the main themes in crime and punishment that Dostoevsky tries to illustrate is the extra-ordinary man theory and these men fail because of their hunger to fulfill their ego. The main concept of extra-ordinary man theory was being above everyone however Raskolnikov at some point kneels down to his knees in front of Sonya, who is a prostitute. Hence this scene can be said to be a major counter attack to Raskolnikov's principles and ideas. I personally believe that Raskolnikov at the end gave up the theory of his. Mainly because no one including his mother, Peter Petrovich and Sonya didn't believe in it and were further disgusted with Raskolnikov's theory at some point.

As a conclusion, Dostoevsky conveys the message that all the human beings who claim to be extraordinary at some point of their life they tried to fulfill their egos, either for their prosperous names or for money. Their actions can never be purely for the good of the mass hence it can't be said that these extraordinary people are never utilitarianists and so they cannot be called extraordinary or superman. Therefore, Dostoevsky implies that when a person overcomes his ego then only that person can be called extraordinary or superman. Since all the characters in Crime and Punishment didn't overcome their egos they cannot be called as extraordinary.

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Word count: 1, 509