

How would you refute
the claim that
raskolnikov in
dostoyevsky's crime
and punish...



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Dostoyevsky is justifiably famous for his studies of the human mind.

His powerful analytical style forms the backbone of his novels and his characters are undoubtedly deep individuals with a real scope for psychological exploration. In *Crime and Punishment* our central character, Raskolnikov, is given this treatment around the context of a murder. We comprehend from the outset that Dostoyevsky's character is desperate and struck by poverty, and so it would not be unreasonable to primarily suggest that the murder is committed for the pursuit of material wealth. Although exploring Raskolnikov's reasoning for committing the murder stands at the heart of the novel, it remains a complex structure which is never fully explained.

Dostoyevsky himself is at odds when trying to draft Raskolnikov's motivation. The novel therefore remains chiefly a search for the reasons, without laying them clearly out before the reader. He who searches will find a variety of different explanations that can be grouped in two. On the one hand might lie Raskolnikov's desire to help humanity, though he himself is in need of help. A Russian Robin Hood who helps the most needy through committing evil in the first place. Though financial gain still plays a major part in this explanation, it is not longer to his own advantage.

But is Raskolnikov really so selfless? Though I will argue such a point, I will also point to Raskolnikov's personal pursuit of power. How can such a figure set himself apart from his fellow sufferers, those who just trot along? The two points are irrefutably linked but it is his pursuit of power not through wealth but by his violent control of others that is the most intriguing aspect of the

novel. But to try and explain Raskolnikov's emotion in packages might be oversimplifying them. The author intends for Raskolnikov and his personality to remain ambiguous.

So it is, that on the same page as the murder in question, there are not less than three references to his insecurity and uncertainty of his actions.

Citations such as " Raskolnikov lost his head", " He did not intend to say this" and " hardly conscious of what he was doing" ¹ are to be found throughout the beginning of the novel and suggest that Raskolnikov himself is not yet certain of the motivation behind his actions. If Raskolnikov himself expresses this uncertainty, how then is the reader supposed to know? The reader is left to speculate, but not for very long. Throughout the novel the reader follows Raskolnikov as he explores these emotions himself.

In a first step he clears all thought of his murdering for financial gain by handing out money to those he deems more needy. In part I, chapter IV for instance, he assists a drunk victim by paying for the taxi fare and supporting the Marmeladovs with " forty-seven or fifty" ² kopeks. It is so that he has, in charity, squandered all his money. But although this makes his financial situation worse, it does not drive him to desperation. For one, the murder was planned even before we ever find out that he squandered all his money (though we do now from the first paragraph onwards that he is not rich), he also continues to give or throw money away after the murder³ and turns down a translating job offered to him by Razumihin⁴ Razumikhin is also participant in a conversation held in part three in which Raskolnikov discusses a near- forgotten article, written by Raskolnikov, exploring the nature of criminals. It is an interesting incident in which Raskolnikov is forced

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to analyse himself in the presence of the investigating detective, Porifry Petrovich.

In this article he claims that a extraordinary man, a point we will come and discuss later, “ has the right in himself to permit his conscience to overstep ... certain obstacles, but only in the event that his ideas (which may sometimes be salutary for all mankind) require it for their fulfilment. “ 5 He seeks, in effect “ transgressed the moral law” 6 The murders would in this case have been acts of passion, as he killed for love. Not love of one person, but that of all mankind.

Raskolnikov continues with his of search for motives, further emphasizing his lack of financial motivation with the help of figures like Sonja, the daughter of Semion Marmaladev who prostitutes herself for the sake of the family, much like Raskolnikovs own sister does, though in slightly different terms. It is to Sonja that Raskolnikov feels closest. “ I know only that our paths lie together, and I know it for certain - that is all. We have one goal! “ 7 Sonjas presence flusters Raskolnikov, but the exchanges that he has with her reveal in a most in-depth way his growing reasoning and, in the end, is the place where Raskolnikov first confesses. Suddenly, after this confession, his motivation becomes clear. He was not trying to assist those in need, and his generous personality, which saw him giving to charity before and after the murder, was not impacted by the crime.

Raskolnikov was much rather looking to be the “ extraordinary” not for monetary gain but for the surge in power. I did not commit the murder in order to use the profit and power I gained to make myself a benefactor to

humanity. Rubbish! I simply murdered, I murdered for myself, myself alone!

“ 8 This however, for reasons described above, disregards any financial gain that he might have through this. He murders for the power itself, for being recognised an extraordinary man, a Napoleon. It is his craving for control and immortality that drives him and as “ power is only given to the man who dares stoop and take it” he kills to achieve this end. Thus he receives a sense of power from the actual crime, being able to choose who and where and when it will hit, and he receives a deep satisfaction and feeling of immortality from the recognition he expects as the murderer.

However, this does not go quite as planned. No one, not even the detective who knows of his guilt, will give him this recognition. In the face of this Raskolnikov becomes increasingly desperate. His illness and his uncontrollable “ whirling like a tornado” 9 are a sign that his orderly life, if he ever had one, is over.

Instead, the narrative feels like he is being reborn, with all the pain and worry that goes with a pregnancy. This gradual renewal finds a spiritual quality whilst talking to Sonja, but in essence he remains a broken soul who tries to skip a difficult process of human development by murdering. In the end he does not even choose to use his gain in power and profit to assist other people. It is an all about selfish act.