

---

## Crime And Punishment: Moral Conviction Of Raskolnikov

Central to any crime, especially murder, is the moral conviction that an individual experiences as a result of their actions.

In Fyodor Dostoevsky's psychological drama, *Crime and Punishment*, protagonist Rodion Raskolnikov theorizes that there are certain extraordinary individuals in society to whom mundane laws do not apply as they are "supermen" whose primary objective is the betterment of society through any means necessary. The influences of others on the protagonist, as well as dreams, symbols, and themes function to depict Raskolnikov's psychological progression and moral redemption through his failed pursuit of becoming a superman. Through his transformative journey, Dostoevsky shows how Raskolnikov's fragmented stages of confession, explanation, education, and transformation help him learn that he can achieve fulfillment in life without setting himself apart from society and becoming an extraordinary individual, as well as help in clarifying the nature of Raskolnikov's regeneration (Dauner).

A crucial component of his character, Raskolnikov's superman theory influences much of his psychological experiences throughout the book, as they are all associated with the idea of him testing his postulation. Prior to committing the murders, Raskolnikov believes that he is an extraordinary man, thus takes the stance that he is exempt from abiding by the statutes of society and can break laws as he pleases. He suggests that "extraordinary men" including Napoleon, Lycurgus, Mahomet, and Solon:

...were criminals, from the fact alone that in giving a new law they thereby violated the old one, held sacred by society and passed down from their fathers, and they certainly did not stop at shedding blood either, if it happened...that blood could help them (260).

Using this self-absorbed and egotistical mentality, he decides to commit the heinous crime of murdering Alonya, with the belief that it is merely a test to determine if he is indeed an extraordinary man who is able to transcend the obligations of morality. From the beginning, Raskolnikov tends to compare himself to other individuals; he feels that in order to amount to something meaningful during his lifetime, he must achieve the status of being an extraordinary man such as those aforementioned, thus showing how he is motivated by his societal image. Raskolnikov experiences a deluge of emotions as he debates whether or not he should kill the old crone, ultimately justifying his formulation of the crime by claiming that he is relieving society of evil. He rationalizes:

Kill her and take her money, so that afterwards with its help, you can devote yourself to the service of all of mankind and the common cause: what do you think, wouldn't thousands of good deeds make up for one tiny little crime? For one 'life, thousands of lives were saved from decay and corruption. One death for hundreds of lives—it's simple arithmetic! (65)

A renowned scholar of Russian literature, Edward Wasiolek suggests that Raskolnikov's overt motivations are "...to be a benefactor of family and humanity or to be a superman exempt from the normal constraints of law..." through which "Raskolnikov seems to be saying: I did the murder because I am a special and heroic personality" (Wasiolek). Raskolnikov's pompous

---

mentality exhorts him to test the boundaries of morality while his belief in extraordinary men and his cognitive dissonance leads him to truly believe that what he is doing is not wrong.

In spite of his cruel intentions, Raskolnikov's subconscious thoughts revealed within his dreams manifest his intrinsic capacity for morality. In his first dream, Raskolnikov is a young boy accompanying his father to visit the countryside. The two pass by an atrocious scene in which a drunken man, Mikolka, brutally beats his horse to the point of death. Young Raskolnikov cannot bear to see this sight and rushes in to stop Mikolka. Scholar Ruth Mortimer suggests that this dream parallels Raskolnikov's reality, as she divulges that "Behind Mikolka's act of violence lies the larger design of Raskolnikov's intended murder of the old woman" (p.110) On the surface, Mikolka's killing of the horse symbolizes an aspect of Raskolnikov's murder plan, however delving deeper into the meaning of this dream, the main individuals, Mikolka, the horse, and young Raskolnikov, all represent certain attributes of Raskolnikov's persona. Just like Mikolka kills his horse because he believes that it is his property, Raskolnikov seeks to assert control and power over others through his irrational crime. The horse represents Raskolnikov's inner strife as he feels helplessly trapped and suffocated upon committing the crime. Finally, young Raskolnikov symbolizes the compassion that Raskolnikov gains towards the end of the novel, insinuating his redemption. Raskolnikov's empathy towards the mare indicates that he possesses the capacity for emotion, despite his murderous objective. Even prior to the crime, these manifestations of Raskolnikov in his dream foreshadow the journey towards moral redemption that he will undergo as a result of his actions.