

The Concepts of Sin and Crime in Dostoevsky's Works¹

Afrah Sofi Abdel Hussein, Tayseer Sabbar Kadhim Al Hamad

*Department of English Language, College of Education,
Sawa University, Al-Muthana, Iraq*

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to study the different concepts of sin and crime in Dostoevsky's works. Throughout the paper the nineteenth-century Russia will be examined and the disaster that gave people and influence to fight over the government and the eighteenth-century significance and how Russia had to deal with the need to change the autocracy and serfdom institutions that were the foundations of its way of life at the end of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century. Moreover, Dostoevsky's literary achievements are discussed and how he was a great Russian writer and respected globally for his writings. Dostoevsky specialized in the examination of the feelings of humiliation, self-destruction, despotic dominance, and deadly wrath as well as the investigation of abnormal mental states that result in insanity, murder, and suicide. Lastly, an examination will be given on the differences between sin and crime, the importance of distinguishing between these terms, Dostoevsky's doctrine on sin, and a portrayal will be given on his literary works.

Keywords: *Sin; Crime; Doctrine; Belorussia; Lithuania.*

CHAPTER ONE

Nineteenth-Century Russia

Russia was in a poor, feudal state at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Many attempted to revolt and fight for a constitution that would give the people influence over the government, but Czar Nicholas I put down this uprising with the help of the secret police. Russia was increasingly cut off from the rest of Europe as a result. Russia lost the Crimean War as a result of its backward state, and its people began to grumble. Alexander II of Russia attempted to ignite industrialization, but he only focused on the economic transformations that come with it rather than the corresponding social transformations. (Mometrix, 2022:1)

The eighteenth century had three significant and far-reaching events that had an impact on the rest of the century and beyond. These three events were the Decembrist Revolt, Napoleon's invasion, and serf liberation. The Russian Golden Age of culture was produced as a result of these events, which also served as inspiration for writers and painters throughout Russia. The Russian Empire also established trading posts in Alaska and California during this century and expanded into Finland, Poland, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far East. (Rusmaina:1)

Russia had to deal with the need to change the autocracy and serfdom institutions that were the foundations of its way of life at the end of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century. At this time, Central Europe underwent similar transformations, especially in Austria and Prussia. After suffering a severe blow from the Napoleonic Wars, these nations realized that they had to adapt to a world that was undergoing fast change in the following of the Great French Revolution. Radical changes abound in Russian history. As a result, the Russian political and social system was rife with serious problems at the start of the nineteenth century. Russia combined enormous military power with social and economic backwardness, and its backwardness served as the basis for its power. (Polunos, 2005-5)

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Russia annexed Belorussia, Lithuania, and the Western portion of Ukraine. At the start of the nineteenth century, it annexed central Poland. The Result was a steady increase in the ethnic diversity of the Russian state. By the start of the nineteenth Century century, the Russians made up less than 50% of

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the nation's population (Ramaina:1)

Russia faced a crisis in the latter half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Not only did technology and industry continue to advance more quickly in the West, but also new, competitive major powers emerged on the international stage: Otto von Bismarck united Germany in the 1860s, and the United States after the American Civil War expanded and became more powerful, Russia was unable to raise enough money to finance rapid industrial development or to compete commercially with developed nations. As Russia's economic and social structure changed, there was political unrest, especially among the intelligentsia. However, there were also notable advances in the natural sciences, the fine arts, music, and literature. (Curtis, 1996:1)

Compared to the major European countries to its west, Russia's economy grew more slowly throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Although Russia's population was far larger than that of the more advanced Western nations, the vast majority of its citizens lived in rural areas and practiced comparatively rudimentary agriculture. While the state was more involved in industry overall than it was in Western Europe. The emperor Alexander II started significant changes in the military, judiciary, government, and schools. He declared the freedom of around 20 million privately owned serfs in 1861. Local commissions, which were mostly made up of landlords, helped the serfs achieve liberation by granting them land and some degree of independence. The former serfs typically continued to live in the village commune, but they had to pay the government back for their servitude over a nearly fifty-year period. (Ibid.)

1.1 Dostoevsky's Literary Achievement

Dostoevsky was well-known in his native Russia during his lifetime and is today respected for his writing on a global scale. He is most renowned for his psychologically insightful novels, particularly those that explore the psychology of those who lose their sense of reason and turn violent or murderous. The young man Fyodor Dostoevsky was born in Moscow, Russia, on November 11, 1821, Dostoevsky grew up in a strongly religious family and maintained that faith. Throughout his life. He started reading extensively when he was young. At first, his parents and tutors taught him, but when he was thirteen, they sent him to a private school. His mother passed away two years later. Despite being trained as a military engineer, Dostoevsky preferred reading and did not enjoy going to school. After graduating from college, he decided to pursue writing instead of the job for which he had been trained. (Abaza, 2003, p.1)

Dostoevsky specialized in the examination of the feelings of humiliation, self-destruction, despotic dominance, and deadly wrath as well as the investigation of abnormal mental states that result in insanity, murder, and suicide. These important works are also renowned for being outstanding "novels of ideas" that tackle relevant and timely philosophical and political issues. In Dostoevsky's representations of intellectuals, whose "sense ideas" in the depths of their souls, psychology and philosophy are closely related. (Morson, 2022:1)

Dostoevsky who did not come from a family belonging to the landed gentry. This is a fact of great importance, and influenced the view he took of his own position as a writer. In his numerous writings, Dostoevsky genuinely attempts to offer an accurate representation of human desires, compulsions, and life itself. He does not just try to write appealing fictional stories. The aspect of Dostoevsky's work that sets him apart from his contemporaries is his willingness to explore the complexity of a person's mental health (Rockwell, 2014:3)

Even though Dostoevsky's greatest works were written after the discipline truly took off, the growing psychological ideas, particularly those of Sigmund Freud, had a striking resemblance to the works of the Russian novelist. The characters and themes of Dostoevsky's works, particularly *Crime and Punishment* and *The Double*, may really be analyzed and understood using many of Freud's key theories, including repression, trauma, the ego, and the id. Furthermore, the use of Freudian psychology extends beyond Dostoevsky's literature and can shed light on the psychological complexity of the author himself and how these complexities are reflected in his works. (Ibid.)

Dostoevsky completed *Poor Folk*, a social novel about a down-and-out government employee, in 1843. Dostoevsky's second novel, *The Double* (1846), on the other hand, is often regarded as his best early work and was innovative in many respects. His life and activities were marked by aimlessness and confusion between 1846 and 1849. The majority of the short stories and novels he produced during this time period are experiments with various formats and topic matters. Dostoevsky worked with his brother Mikhail to edit the magazine *Time*, and he also produced a variety of fictional works to sustain himself. *Memories from the House of the Dead*, a fictional work based on his experiences in jail, was published by him in 1861. In general, his writings from this time did not significantly improve upon his earlier work artistically and did not hint at the grandeur that would appear in 1864 with his *Notes from the Underground*. Dostoevsky's life during this time was marked by ill health, extreme poverty, and challenging

emotional circumstances. (Abaza, 2003, p.2)

The most well-known of Dostoevsky's great books, *Crime and Punishment*, was published in 1866. It can be interpreted as an intricate and serious piece of art or as an exciting detective narrative. Raskolnikov, a student, kills an elderly woman in the book while executing a heist in an effort to support his family and his own career. The murder occurs at the very beginning of the novel, and the rest of the book has to do with the pursuit of Raskolnikov by the detective Porfiry and by his own conscience. *The Possessed*, also known as *The Devils*, was written by Dostoevsky in 1870 and published in 1871-1872. The book started out as a political pamphlet and was based on a murder that took place on November 21, 1869, in Moscow. Dostoevsky gives a little occurrence in *The Possessed* immense significance by elevating it. Many readers view *The Possessed* as a prophetic statement about the direction of politics in Russia and beyond, in addition to being an accurate description of the politics of the period. (Abaza, 2003, p.20)

The Brothers Karamazov (1879-1880) is considered to be Dostoevsky's best book. The murder of their father, Fyodor, and the guilt of his four sons are the central themes of the book. A major characteristic that can be used to describe each of the boys is: Dmitri by passion, Ivan by reason, Alyosha by spirit, and Smerdyakov by everything detestable about human nature. The other three brothers are partially at fault for Smerdyakov's murder of their father in terms of their thoughts and desires. (Frank, 2010:15).

CHAPTER TWO

The Differences between Sin and Crime

In order to be able to understand the theme of crime in Dostoevsky's novels, it is important to distinguish between the terms 'sin' and 'crime'. The distinction between right and wrong varies at the individual, societal and international level. In this relationship, we have the concepts of sin and crime. An act or behavior may be a sin, but it needs not to be punishable by law. (Soni, 2022)

Sin is a subjective term and refers specifically to something that has no basis for measuring the degree of punishment. Crime is the set of rules by the social laws of a nation, and if these rules are violated, punishment is provided. Every crime is a sin, but not every sin has to be a crime. For example, adultery is morally wrong and is considered a sin. At the same time, adultery is not considered a crime as it is not punishable under any law in India. Thus, if a crime is committed, then the law is punishable by law, and if a sin is committed, then the punishment will be after the death of the sinner by God, and he would be looked down upon by society. (Ibid.)

A person must be subjected to a moral obligation to act in a particular way, and it must also be able to be punished. *Mens rea* or guilty mind, or evil intention, is the second essential component of a crime. *Mens rea* refers to the physical component that is necessary for a particular offence. If committed with a good intention, no wrongdoing by a human being can be considered a crime. When doing a criminal act, there must be an evil intention. (Ibid.)

Dostoevsky's Doctrine on Sin

To critics and readers alike, Dostoevsky's treatment of sin has created major challenges. The Problem of sin, according to Dostoevsky, raises important questions about theology and human nature, but he seems to have contradictory answers. Many of his characters depict religious men who have admitted to crimes and seek repentance, often through the process of confession. On the other hand, more than a few of his characters are contradictory, appearing in the darker areas of the human psyche where good evil and the most rational and noble intentions turn to a desire to corrupt. This facet of him has been referred to as by Russians. The mind is a complex organ, in which opposing thoughts do not only coexist with one another but also depend on one another. These characters, in effect, illustrate that good and evil are two sides of the same coin; they are inseparable and in constant dialogue. (Fuchs, 2014:67)

Dostoevsky's novels do not reach conclusions but are open-ended. As a result, these sinning characters are part of an eternal dialogue between good and evil. First, we must undertake an analysis of what dialogue and dialectic mean. The fundamental premise of a dialogue work is that it is in communication with other works. A dialogues work does not seek to find any final solutions. It does not answer, or extend previous and future works but informs and is informed by previous work. This can occur at the level of the individual word. For example, a Russian using the term "motherland" uses the term in relation to a specific past of the Russian State in which the phrase was used, namely the Soviet Union. Similarly, the word "Britain" used by an Englishman is in constant interaction with Britain's history as an empire. Perhaps the idea of a dialogue word can be best portrayed by its antithesis. The invented language "Newspeak" in Orwell's 1984 is the exact opposite of a dialogue language. Words become only relevant to the present

and are not pointed towards the past and the future. (Fuchs, 2014:57)

The concepts of the dialectic and dialogic have been applied to Dostoevsky's work multiple times. The epilogue to *Crime and Punishment* can be viewed as dialectic rather than dialogic. Many prominent critics of Dostoevsky, such as David Manual, argue that Raskolnikov's conclusion is a synthesis of pre-existing factors illuminated by Dostoevsky throughout the novel. He argues that Raskolnikov has a demonstrated capacity to change and sees seed of Raskolnikov's earlier piety as a platform for that change. He points out a powerful set of factors, including Raskolnikov's compassion for the humiliated, his childhood feelings and a powerful sense of revulsion at the crime that he committed. (Ibid., 2)

The key factor among these is a desire to suffer. These factors provide a powerful anti-thesis to the thesis of his crime and create a ground for the synthesis and finalization. The result of this is that *Crime and Punishment* achieves a sense of closure as Raskolnikov achieves a form of resurrection through repentance. He ends his argument stating that: "He (Raskolnikov) is psychologically capable of the metamorphosis he is about to undergo. He is compelled (emphasis added) by preternatural force to conceive, commit and confess the crime. The epilogue is the inevitable result of all that precedes it." (Ibid., 121)

The use of the term compelled here provides evidence that Raskolnikov is a character that mechanically undergoes thesis anti-thesis and synthesis. The fact that the synthesis is not elaborated in detail does not detract from the fact that there is an "Inevitability of a happy conclusion." The professor Gary Rosen shield agrees that there is a degree of overlap between the earlier chapters of the novel and the epilogue, to the extent that it achieves a sense of closure. Raskolnikov claims that the novel has a sense of finality. (Fuchs, 2014:122)

Crime in Dostoevsky's Literary Works

The first work Dostoevsky published was a rather free and emotionally enhanced version of Honoré de Balzac's novel *Eugenie Grandet*, and the French writer's career was to have a major influence on his own writing. Dostoevsky did not have to live long in obscurity. He had not written his first novella, *Poor Folk*, before being lauded as the greatest new talent of Russian literature by his day's most influential critic, the "furious" Vissarion Belinsky. (Gary, 2023)

Sin is an inextricable force that entangles an individual who has committed a crime; only through confession can a man be free of his sin. In *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky manifests the evil and goodness of Raskolnikov. Depicting the need for him to change the need for the confession of his sin. Throughout the novel, Raskolnikov is lost and suffers from the consequences of his sin. Although he is in a struggle between good and evil, Raskolnikov cannot simply renounce his sins by his own determination; therefore, he must surrender his will and pride and be willing to confess his sin. By emphasizing the theme of confession and redemption, Dostoevsky effectively portrays the spiritual rebirth that Raskolnikov experiences when he confesses, especially through the story of Lazarus. Through the Biblical allusions in *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky illustrates the theme of redemption as Raskolnikov experiences sin and atonement. Raskolnikov is not only a sinner because of his crime of murder but also because of his self-confidence and self-centeredness. He retains an inherent and strong belief in himself and places "his trust in himself, not in prayer" Ironically, Raskolnikov places faith in himself although he is well aware of his own crime. He is not willing to listen to the opinions of others nor God. (Sin, 2018)

Therefore, Raskolnikov's sin is not merely the physical sin of committing murder but also the sin of placing faith in himself rather than God. Jacques Madaule states that "evil is in man as an unalterable quantity". Raskolnikov's evil exists as his arrogant attitude of trusting only himself causes him to lose direction, wandering aimlessly as he wishes to absolve himself of his sin. Without placing trust in God, Raskolnikov will never be able to expiate his evil and find his direction in life. In fact, Dostoevsky clearly underlies the idea that Raskolnikov is a lost man lacking direction: "A young man came out of his little room...and turned slowly and irresolutely." The word resolution appears on several occasions in the novel and displays Raskolnikov's inability to come to a decision, especially the decision of whether to confess his crime or not. Often describing Raskolnikov's actions as irresolute, Dostoevsky stresses the idea that Raskolnikov is a man lacking true direction and purpose in life, exhibiting Raskolnikov's extreme emotions of different sides, which range from wanting to confess his sins to wanting to conceal his crime. (Sin, 2018)

Dostoevsky's conception of guilt is distinguished from other conceptions of guilt by several things: Guilt is a quantitative characterization of the individual; it refers to freedom and personality. Guilt is thus freed from external constraints and allowed to make assertions about man's character, his ontological existence. Guilt refers not to external or conventional assumptions about a person but to an internal determination. Guilt is correctly understood in a religio-

theological sense. The doctrine of the brotherhood of all men is both a precondition and a fulfillment of this religious conception of guilt. It is the recognition of personal involvement in this community of guilt that leads to the realization of the alleged brotherhood as a whole. (Bridges, 1980:62)

The recognition of personal Involvement in this community of guilt leads to the realization of the alleged brotherhood as a whole Men. The nature of man's guilt is determined by his place in this spiritual context: guilt is only regarded as damnation outside of this religious context. These insights into the nature of guilt come in large part from a shift in the subject's context. Although the wickedness of man has a place to play in Dostoevsky's analysis as the primary source of man's sufferings, it is not the primary indicator of guilt. Dostoevsky understands guilt as suffering in a broken world. The confrontation with suffering gives rise to a sense of guilt. Guilt is not primarily recognized by comparison to others' wickedness, but by the recognition that one has caused and contributed to the world's suffering. (Ibid.)

CONCLUSION

Various strategies have been employed by Dostoevsky to manifest the experiences of guilt and redemption. This research focuses on the possible causes of crime, nature of guilt, internal or external struggle for existence, quest for redemption, and the ways through which universal order can be restored. Interestingly, Dostoyevsky himself lived a very turbulent and uneasy life that was full of bitterness and horrible experiences. It appears that he has mirrored his own biographical sketch through the portrayal of the character of principal protagonist, Raskolnikov, in his philosophical masterpiece Crime and Punishment. The writer has also dealt with quite magnificently various psychological issues and concepts like crime, guilt, redemption, and punishment in their different perspectives and in the context of the then prevailing socio-economic, socio- political and cultural environment and challenges through his characters.

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