INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE EXCEPTIONAL RESEARCH

Violence and Inner Conflict: A Reading of Dostoevsky's Philosophy in *Crime and Punishment*

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2583-8261
Volume: 04
Issue: 05
September – October 2025
Received: 18-07-2025
Accepted: 20-08-2025
Published: 05-09-2025
Page No: 07-11

Abstract
Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky is not just a story about murder. It is about violence as an idea and an inner struggle. The novel follows Raskolnikov, a poor young man who kills a pawnbroker. He believes he has the right to do it because he sees himself as "above the law." After the murder, he begins a long journey of guilt, mental pain, and conflict with his own conscience. He also faces the harshness of reality and the kindness of others. This research looks at violence in the novel not just as an act, but as a way to ask deep moral questions: Can violence ever be justified? Is there such a thing as "necessary evil"? The novel does not give clear answers. Instead, it shows an open "mental courtroom" where the human soul is judged by itself. The study focuses on two sides of violence: how Raskolnikov tries to justify it with philosophy, and how this idea slowly breaks down inside him. We also explore how violence affects the self, others, and the idea of justice. The goal of this research is to show how Dostoevsky uses violence to raise deep human questions about good, evil, and moral responsibility.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, Raskolnikov, Crime and Punishment, violence, and moral responsibility

Introduction

1. Can a person justify violence morally if they believe they are doing good?

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), stands as a monumental work in the realm of psychological literature, with its protagonist, Rodion Raskolnikov, embodying the complexities and contradictions of the human psyche. The novel intricately explores Raskolnikov's internal struggles, weaving a narrative that delves into the depths of his moral and existential dilemmas. Raskolnikov is a character of paradoxes, embodying both the enlightened thinker and the tormented soul. His intellectual arrogance leads him to embrace a utilitarian philosophy that justifies the murder of Alyona Ivanovna, whom he views as a scourge on society. This act, intended as a demonstration of his superiority and a challenge to conventional morality, instead becomes the catalyst for his psychological unraveling. The stark contrast between his theoretical justifications and the visceral reality of his crime exposes the chasm between abstract thought and human emotion

The complexity of Raskolnikov's character is further revealed through his interactions with other characters in the novel. His relationship with Sonya, the embodiment of compassion and moral purity, becomes a pivotal force in his journey towards self-awareness and redemption. Sonya's unwavering faith and her willingness to share in Raskolnikov's suffering provide a counterpoint to his nihilistic tendencies and offer a glimpse of salvation through love and empathy. (Petrov 25)

In his novel *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoevsky presents the character of Raskolnikov, a poor young man living in St. Petersburg. He faces the pressures of poverty and social fear, and starts to believe that some people are "great" and therefore allowed to break the law for noble goals. This idea leads him to kill a woman he sees as useless to society. In his mind, the murder is justified as a way to bring about change. But he quickly learns that violence causes deep psychological pain.

On a philosophical level, Raskolnikov uses logical arguments. He believes that society needs to be cleansed, and that the money from killing the pawnbroker can help the poor. But he ignores the emotional and mental cost. After the murder, he suffers from mental breakdowns, nightmares, and inner chaos. Psychological studies show that violence causes a wound in the human soul that does not heal easily (Frank 412). Frank's study on Dostoevsky suggests the writer wanted to show the deep shock a crime causes inside a person, even when the act seems "reasonable."

The time and place of the novel are also important. *Crime and Punishment* was not written in a social or political vacuum. Dostoevsky did not write as a distant observer he lived through state violence himself. As a young man, he was arrested for joining a group that discussed political ideas. He was sentenced to death, but the punishment was later changed to prison and exile. He spent years in hard labor camps in Siberia, where he saw firsthand how the state crushed those who thought differently. In that time, violence was not just in the streets it was built into the system. This shaped Dostoevsky's worldview. Politics, for him, was no longer just about ideas it was about actions that hurt people and break their spirits. This personal experience left a deep mark on all of Dostoevsky's novels, especially *Crime and Punishment*. In the story, Raskolnikov is not a political prisoner, but he represents another kind of moral excuse for murder similar to what the state was doing: killing for a "higher" purpose. Dostoevsky uses this to challenge the idea that the end justifies the means. He shows clearly that violence, no matter how well explained, and leaves a scar on the one who commits it a scar that cannot be erased. What Dostoevsky lived through in prison made him reject any idea that turns a person into a tool for some "great" cause or a victim of a cruel system.

The novel's title, *Crime and Punishment*, shows a clear message: there is an action, and there is a price. But punishment is not only legal. The real punishment begins inside the soul. Raskolnikov did not wait to be caught. He began to fall apart from the moment he committed the crime. This reflects what Dostoevsky learned in prison: that the worst kind of violence is not always seen outside it lives inside a person who feels guilt, shame, or who betrays his own sense of right and wrong. So, this is not just a crime story it's a witness to a hard time in history, when the writer lived through power, blood, and harsh ideas. All of this led him to write something simple but deep: there is no "pure" violence, and no excuse is enough for an act that harms the human soul. Even if the killer thinks he is right, the conscience will not stay silent, and the mind will not find peace.

Raskolnikov sees himself as above the law, but Dostoevsky brings out his humanity in two ways: first, by showing the moment of violence (the murder); second, by showing what happens after, when the killer's ideas break under the weight of his conscience. The Jordan Russia Center describes violence as an infection it first affects the mind, then behavior (Smith). This "violence as infection" idea appears in Raskolnikov's strange behavior: deep isolation, nervous speech, and emotional chaos. The act of murder does not only harm the body. Its effects go deep into the mind of the killer. Leatherbarrow writes that Dostoevsky shows violence like a rock dropped into the soul it shakes everything around it (Leatherbarrow 64). And this is when Raskolnikov's excuses begin to fall apart. The investigator Porfiry does not use physical force. Instead, he uses clever thinking to show how weak the killer's reasoning really is.

Sonia, a suffering but kind young woman in the story, offers a spiritual answer to violence. She did not commit any crime, but chose kindness and mercy in a cruel world. Her presence with Raskolnikov goes beyond words and ideas. A study from the Psychiatry Podcast explains that Sonia represents the healing power of faith, which gives a path away from violence (Puder). She is the one who leads Raskolnikov to confess and to start seeking inner peace. There is also the scene of the horse in Raskolnikov's dream, which symbolizes violence against the weak. It shows that even a "small" crime can cause deep emotional pain. This symbol reminds us of Dostoevsky's own experience under the state, where violence was used in the name of order. Encyclopedia Britannica notes that the novel challenges the idea that reason alone is enough, and it rejects the view that humans are just thinking machines without feelings (Britannica). The novel ends with Raskolnikov confessing and going to prison, but the real change starts there. His inner journey begins only after he is locked up. Violence changes from a simple act into a lesson. The story doesn't give clear answers, but opens up a painful question: Can logical excuses erase pain? Can the conscience stay silent? And can a person kill and still bring about good? Through this, we see how Dostoevsky's goal was to show a bitter human experience a mental path that begins with cold reasoning and ends with a broken soul. Violence here is not just an action; it becomes a deep shift inside the human spirit.

2. Research Methodology

This study uses a literary and psychological approach to understand how Dostoevsky explored violence in *Crime and Punishment*. Researcher focused on a close reading of the original text, along with academic studies and analytical articles. The goal was to see how the writer linked violence to ideas, and how actions affect the human soul. First, researcher carefully read the novel and took note of scenes where violence appears, either directly or indirectly. These include the murder scene, the horse dream, and Raskolnikov's conversations with Sonia and Porfiry. Researcher paid special attention to Dostoevsky's language and to the mental states of the characters after the violence not just before or during the act. Then researcher used a psychological-literary method. This means researcher analyzed Raskolnikov's behavior through signs of mental distress, anxiety, and guilt. Researcher used studies like Frank's analysis, which argues that Dostoevsky shows how the inner conscience fights against cold logic (Frank 412).

Also explored the novel's spiritual and philosophical background, especially the link between faith and regret in the characters' actions. Throughout the study, used a comparative approach, examining Raskolnikov's ideas and how they played out in real life. Researcher worked to connect violence to the key moral question of this research: "Can violence be justified in the name of doing good?"

In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky explores the idea of violence in a different way. He does not show it as just a physical act, but as an inner struggle that starts in the mind and ends with the breakdown of the soul. Raskolnikov does not kill for money or out of anger. He kills because he believes he has the "right" to break the law. He justifies the murder with philosophy and convinces himself that the world will be better without the pawnbroker Alyona. This idea is at

the center of the novel and it quickly falls apart after the murder. Dostoevsky wants to say: no idea can justify killing, because violence leaves a mark on the soul that can't be erased. We see this in Raskolnikov's behavior after the crime. He can't sleep, eat, or even think clearly. He speaks strangely, avoids people's eyes, and tries to run from himself. Frank believes the novel shows how conscience rises up against theory, no matter how logical it seems (Frank 412).

3. Discussion

Violence is never the answer, unless it is in literature. The work of Crime and Punishment is one of the greatest examples of how violence moves along the storyline. The scenes of violence in Crime and Punishment contribute to the work because they drive the characters insane, impact the lives of the characters, and finally, are used as a way for our main character to prove himself as an above-average person. Dostoevsky wrote the novel during a time when Russia was under strict rule, and political revolution was in the air. Raskolnikov looks like a rebel on the surface, but deep down, he represents an idea that failed to face moral truth. Scanlan says Dostoevsky used the novel to oppose the violence of political change and to show that real change begins inside the soul (98). Even today, the novel helps us understand how people justify political or personal violence. Many killers today claim they acted for a "cause." But as Dostoevsky shows, no one escapes the effects of violence on the soul. Wolin argues that the novel revealed the mind's struggle with itself before Freud even spoke of the conflict between desire and conscience (134).

Even the language Dostoevsky uses supports this. He repeats words like "suffering," "anxiety," and "confusion," showing that violence is not just an act it's a lasting state of being. A killer might escape the police, but not himself. Leatherbarrow points out that the novel's psychological structure shows how Raskolnikov's character falls apart slowly and methodically (64). All of this shows that Dostoevsky didn't just write a crime story. He wrote a spiritual and intellectual journey of a man who thought reason justified everything and then learned that being human is more than just ideas. The violence in this novel isn't just about knives it's the violence of thoughts, excuses, silence, and conscience.

One of the most powerful moments is Raskolnikov's dream of a child watching a horse beaten to death. This dream has no direct link to the murder, but it shows the hidden violence inside the self. Smith argues that this dream shows how a person becomes weak in the face of a cruel society, and that Dostoevsky used it to show that violence spreads like a disease (Smith 9). The inner tension grows when Porfiry enters the story. He is the investigator, and he doesn't use force only conversation. He questions Raskolnikov instead of confronting him with proof, as if he knows Raskolnikov cannot escape his own conscience. Their dialogue becomes a mental and spiritual battle, not just a legal one.

Sonia, on the other hand, shows a different face of violence. She is a poor girl who turns to prostitution to support her family, yet she does not hate anyone. She treats Raskolnikov with kindness and asks him to confess, without pressure. Dostoevsky uses her as a symbol of redemption. It's as if she is telling him: true repentance is stronger than any legal punishment. In his psychological study, Puder says Sonia represents inner strength that does not depend on violence, but on faith and compassion (Puder 118). After confessing, Raskolnikov goes to prison. This begins a new stage. He is no longer just a criminal he becomes a man searching for meaning. Here, the religious side of the novel appears. His repentance doesn't happen quickly. It comes slowly, step by step. His bond with Sonia becomes the center of his inner journey toward peace. Encyclopedia Britannica notes that the novel is not just about crime, but about moral struggle and psychological redemption (Britannica 18).

Dostoevsky does not present violence as just a brutal act. He shows its roots inside the human soul. Raskolnikov plans a murder not out of personal anger or instinct, but out of an idea. He sees himself as an "extraordinary individual" who is above the law. This belief isn't just a passing thought; it comes from deep reflection on the idea that one might have the "right to kill for a greater good." This is the real source of violence in the novel not the knife, but the idea that justifies using it. For Raskolnikov, the murder isn't about theft or revenge. It's a "philosophical experiment." He wants to test himself: does he have the courage to be "great," as he believes? Frank explains that Dostoevsky highlights the danger of ideas when they become excuses for violence, and that the human conscience won't let such ideas win easily (Frank 412).

After the murder, Raskolnikov breaks down. He can't sleep, can't eat, avoids people, and speaks with anxiety. His behavior shows that the crime didn't end with the killing it started after it. He suffers deeply, and this suffering shows how violence becomes a heavy burden on the soul. Leatherbarrow notes that the novel carefully and gradually shows this psychological collapse (Leatherbarrow 64). Violence in *Crime and Punishment* isn't limited to the act of murder. Even the dream scene, where a child watches a horse being beaten to death, is a form of violence. No one dies in that dream, but the emotional pain is stronger than the murder itself. Smith explains that the dream reflects the cruelty of the world, and how a person can suffer deeply just by being forced to watch violence without taking part in it (Smith 9). The dream shows Raskolnikov's sense of weakness, as if it's telling him that violence isn't "strength," but "fragility."

Porfiry's character adds an important layer. He doesn't shout or accuse Raskolnikov directly. Instead, he takes a different approach: he lets Raskolnikov's conscience do the work. His sharp questions slowly push Raskolnikov toward collapse. This shows another kind of violence silent violence caused by guilt. Here, Dostoevsky masterfully presents psychological violence. Sonia, on the other hand, never uses violence not physical, not emotional. Yet she lives a harsh life filled with poverty, shame, and prostitution. Still, she hates no one. She treats Raskolnikov with kindness. She tells him he must confess, but never forces him. Puder argues that Sonia represents mercy as a power that counters violence, and that Raskolnikov's path to redemption begins the moment he meets her (Puder 118). Prison is not the end of violence, but the start of something new. Raskolnikov now suffers not just as a killer, but as a man in moral crisis. He begins to ask questions about life, meaning, and faith. Encyclopedia Britannica notes that the novel reveals a deep inner conflict, and that true repentance is not instant it requires a long journey through pain (Britannica 18).

Behind all of this stands Dostoevsky, a writer who experienced political violence firsthand and was imprisoned for his ideas. He knew violence from the inside. That's why his novel offers a deep critique of the idea of using violence

for change. Raskolnikov thinks he's like Napoleon, but he later learns that greatness doesn't come from killing. Scanlan argues that the novel warns against ideas that promote violence in the name of "freedom" or "justice" (Scanlan 98). The novel still feels current today. Now, much violence is committed in the name of "just" causes. Some kill for religion, for the nation, or for justice. Wolin believes Dostoevsky was ahead of his time in showing how violence destroys a person from within even when it seems "justified" (Wolin 134).

Dostoevsky doesn't just tell events; he uses language to show emotional pain. Words like "anxiety," "torment," and "fear" are repeated, as if the writer is telling us that violence lives in the small details. Leatherbarrow explains this technique as intentional, meant to show how a person becomes a prisoner inside himself (Leatherbarrow 64). The core message: Violence in *Crime and Punishment* is not just about murder. It is a sick idea, a mental state, and an inner struggle. Dostoevsky rejects all excuses for violence, no matter how logical they sound. He tells us: Killing doesn't set you free. It ties the killer in invisible chains. The killer not only ends someone's life but destroys part of their own soul. That is the real punishment.

Violence can't be justified morally even if someone believes they are doing good. Violence, no matter the goal, leaves deep marks on both the victim and the attacker. *Crime and Punishment* makes this point through Raskolnikov's story. He kills for the "greater good," but he collapses under the weight of guilt. Raskolnikov, the novel's main character, is a clear example of this moral conflict. He thinks he has the "moral right" to kill Alyona the pawnbroker because he believes she harms society. He argues that her money could save lives if used better. This is cold, logical reasoning based on the idea that "the end justifies the means." But this logic quickly falls apart after the crime. Why? Because murder is not a math problem. Here the moral question becomes clear: Is it enough to have "good intentions" to justify killing? Dostoevsky says no. Good cannot come from an evil act. Violence is never a legitimate means, even if aimed at a noble goal. That's because a person cannot separate from their conscience. The mind may justify, but the soul does not forget. Frank writes that the novel reveals an inner struggle between theory and the self, and that conscience defeats the idea, no matter how convincing it may seem (Frank 412).

Morality is not judged by outcomes alone, but by the means used. Raskolnikov tried to bypass this truth, but he paid the price mentally. He found no peace, no relief. Instead, he lived in fear and confusion. His experience shows that violence is not just a legal problem, but an existential one. A person cannot kill and remain unchanged. Wolin argues that the novel exposes the lie behind this justification, and that Dostoevsky was ahead of his time in linking violence with inner destruction not just physical death (Wolin 134). Even in real life, many justify violence in the name of good: soldiers, revolutionaries, leaders, terrorists. All believe their actions are right because they serve a "cause." But what happens after the act? Does the killer sleep peacefully? Can they escape their conscience? *Crime and Punishment* answers: No. Violence destroys its doer before it destroys the victim. In contrast, Sonia represents moral salvation. She is poor, she suffers, but she never turns to violence. Instead, she faces cruelty with compassion. She urges Raskolnikov to confess not through force, but through love. That act changes his life. Real change comes from within, not from the crime. Puder writes that Sonia represents silent moral strength, defeating violence through faith (Puder 118).

4. Conclusion

At the end of *Crime and Punishment* researcher doesn't simply see a criminal condemned; we see a person reshaped. Dostoevsky is not concerned only with legal punishment, but with the moral and psychological punishment that comes from within. Raskolnikov, despite all his attempts to justify his actions, could not escape himself. Throughout the novel, he lives between two ideas: one that allows the crime, and another that condemns him at every moment. Violence did not begin when he grabbed the axe it began when he decided he was above other people. When he believed some lives had no value and that he had the right to end them, he stopped being fully human and became an abstract idea. This is the real danger: when reason becomes a tool to justify violence.

Salvation did not come from law or philosophy it came from Sonia. She was a quiet voice, but one he could not ignore. She didn't argue much or force him into anything, but she was always present when he broke down. This shows that violence is not healed by more violence, but by compassion and patience. Dostoevsky offers a spiritual model to confront violence: that we must confess our sins not just to be punished, but to change. The novel's ending is not a victory for law, but the start of a deeper understanding of the human soul. The novel poses a simple but deep question: Can a person overcome cruelty through thought alone? The answer is harsh: no. Thought alone is not enough. Logic cannot justify killing. No philosophy can erase spilled blood. Raskolnikov learned this too late. The reader watches him fall not because of the police, but because the idea he believed in could not stand against his conscience.

As we read, we move from following a crime to understanding a torn soul. We live with a protagonist we cannot love, but also cannot hate. This is Dostoevsky's gift. He doesn't make his hero a devil; he shows him as he is tired, disturbed, searching for redemption in the darkness of his mind. The deeper message is that a person can fall, but also rise again. The novel doesn't offer a direct solution to the problem of violence, but it forces us to face its impact. It teaches that violence doesn't end when the victim falls it continues in the soul of the killer. And the most frightening thing is a person who believes they are above others, that their ideas justify anything. In our time, where violence is often justified by religion, politics, class, or ideology, this novel remains a living warning: no one walks away clean after taking a life.

What makes *Crime and Punishment* timeless is that it doesn't just describe a crime it dives into its psychological and spiritual depths. Dostoevsky wrote about 19th-century Russia, but his words still strike at the human heart today. Cruelty has not ended. Justification continues. The inner struggle remains. And amid all this, the need to understand violence not glorify it is the first step toward a more humane society. In the end, Dostoevsky offers no easy answers, but he reveals the true cost of violence. He leaves us to think: Are we really free to justify suffering, or is every person, no matter what they believe, still bound to something deeper than reason their conscience?

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