

**DOSTOEVSKY'S RAZUMIKHIN, SVIDRIGAILOV AND RASKOLNIKOV:  
PROTOTYPES OF PSYCHOANALYTIC CONCEPTS?****Ms. Alisha Manuel**

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In his essay entitled *The Intellectual Problem II*, A.D Nuttall posits that a Christian reading of *Crime and Punishment* is rendered impossible by the characters of Razumihin, Svidrigailov and, in particular, Raskolnikov's failure to repent. This paper is an attempt to reread these three problematic characters as part of larger representation of the pre-rational, rational and moral dimensions of the mind of the human being. A trinity of sorts, if they are to be seen as the previously mentioned mental constructs they happily correspond to the Freudian notions of id (pre rational), ego (rational) and super ego (moral) which come later.

**Dostoevsky and Psychoanalysis**

Freud says in his *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930): "To begin with it was only tentatively that I put forward the views I have developed here, but in the course of time they have gained such a hold upon me that I can no longer think in any other way". Perhaps he gave his new sight to the world, as his influence may be found in literature and philosophy alike in the period after the publication of his theories.

The hypothesis here, however, is that Dostoevsky (whose *Crime and Punishment* was first published in 1866 and first translated into English in 1885) was a major influence on Freud (whose first major work was published in 1891 and whose collective works were first translated into English in 1953-1974) and not the other way around. This influence cannot be denied in light of Freud's publication "Dostoevsky and Parricide" which is about the relationship between father and son, his epilepsy, his political and religious views, his gambling, his preoccupation with crime and moral responsibility.

He says of Dostoevsky 's personality: "Four facets may be distinguished in the rich personality of Dostoevsky: the creative artist, the neurotic, the moralist and the sinner." Freud

connects the murder of the father in *The Brothers Kamarazov* (1880) and the fate of Dostoevsky's own father.

Another excerpt reads: "It would be very much to the point if it could be established that his seizures ceased completely during his exile to Siberia, but other accounts contradict this" It would be interesting indeed if we could link Raskolnikov's repentance in Siberia to Dostoevsky's cure of epilepsy but that is the subject of another discussion.

*The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) will really help foreground certain ideas that Freud later developed into his own theory of Psychoanalysis, however for now we will confine ourselves to analyzing the three problematic characters of Razumikhin, Svidrigailov and Raskolnikov as the prototypes of id, ego, super ego. We will start with Freud's theory and back track to its possible origins.

### **Freud's Id, Ego and Super Ego Components of Psychoanalysis**

In order to understand psychoanalysis, we have to understand certain mental structures that Freud has defined; namely, the id (*Es*), the ego (*Ich*) and the super-ego (*Über-Ich*).

The id comprises of all the impulses known to man, but it is comprised mainly of sex and aggression. It is governed by the pleasure principle; that is, it seeks pleasure and avoids "unpleasure" or pain. The ego is an "autonomous and unitary" entity.

The ego is "continued inwards without any sharp delineation into an unconscious mental entity which we designate the id and for which it serves as a kind of façade". The ego works on the reality principle; that is, it seeks opportunities for the fulfillment of the id's wishes. It is also seen as the bridge between the id and the super-ego.

"Originally the ego contains everything, later it separates off an external world from itself." This 'external world' is the super-ego. It is governed by the moral principle; that is, it decides what is "good" or "allowed" and directs the ego to act accordingly to fulfill the id's desires. He however asserts; "the id cannot be controlled beyond certain limits. If more is demanded of a man, a revolt will be produced in him"

Two other important entities that govern the functioning of the id, ego and super-ego are the instincts; *Eros* and *Ananke*\*. The former is the instinct that strives towards happiness and fulfillment, the latter is the principle of necessity

According to Freud we repress impulses that are forbidden, first those that are forbidden by society or significant others, and later as we develop our own sense of right and wrong; that is, our own super-ego; those that are forbidden by our super-ego. So it is that the Oedipal or Electra complex develops; that is the tendency of the male child to covet the mother figure and be hostile towards the father figure, or the tendency of the female child to covet the father

figure and be hostile towards the mother figure. The sexual impulse is denied by the super-ego as incest is not permitted in most societies, and therefore the impulse is repressed into the unconscious. However, the complexes have to be successfully resolved in order to prevent fixations and the resulting psychological complications; this is done through facing one's repressed impulses and identifying with the same sex parent; in the case of the male child it is achieved through "castration anxiety" while with the female child it is through "penis envy".

In a manner similar to the repression of denied impulses, we also tend to repress distressful memories. According to Freud, memories are permanent because "in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish". As with the impulses these memories will have to be dealt with eventually to prevent neurosis or some other psychological problem. Most often we face our repressed impulses and memories in dreams "the royal road to the unconscious" for "Imagination fulfills wishes which are difficult to carry out".

Freud also outlines our coping strategies once brought face to face with our repressed impulses or memories; "In order to bear life we cannot dispense with palliative measures-powerful deflections, substitutive satisfactions, intoxicating substances."

### **Razumikhin as the Id**

Razumikhin is an existentialist and the "pre-rational freedom" of the existentialist is opposed to Christian values. He is a rebel in his own right. He advocates individualism and opposes mechanistic socialism. Like Sartre, he finds human freedom in the ability of the human imagination to think what is *not* the case. Razumikhin asserts that to err is human and that it's better to be independent than a follower. He says: "To go wrong in one's way is better than to go right in someone else's. In the first case you are a man, in the second you're no better than a bird."

Razumikhin is also in a way against Raskolnikov. The latter's claim that the conscience of the so called exceptional man could sanction murder shocks and repels Razumikhin. Herein lays the humanistic appeal of Razumikhin's philosophy. His radicalism is tinged with "incurable kindness". His idea of freedom is simply a form of innocence. He cannot see how freedom may be misused and hence advocates freedom without any reserve altogether. Dounia sees this in him and her first response to his wild ideas is a mixture of agreement and reservation: "Yes, yes...though I don't agree with you in everything. In a way Razumikhin's reactions are one of pure benevolent instinct which the premeditative characters that surround him cannot understand.

It should be noted that his doctrine is untested in him and, for all the purposes of the reader, remains so. The one who practices what he preaches and exhibits uninhibited freedom is

Raskolnikov. Razumikhin may be seen as a man who is a foil to Raskolnikov's doctrine. In this manner, Razumikhin may be seen as the pre-rational, the prototype of the id of the human consciousness, in continuous conflict with super-ego, the moral that is embedded in Raskolnikov. If there is a lack of impulses (sex and aggression) exhibited by him, perhaps these were supplied by Freud later, or perhaps they exist, only are successfully repressed.

According to Nuttall, there is little to nothing to say about the Christian point of view to his character as the pre-rational may be said to pre-date Christianity. From the existentialist point of view he is the existential principle balancing against the moral principle of Raskolnikov.

### **Svidrigailov as the Ego**

Nuttall observes that the man who haunts Raskolnikov, reflecting both his ideas and dealings, is Svidrigailov. Svidrigailov is marked as a "Dostoevskian double", the alter-ego and the answering voice of the character's own mind.

Svidrigailov is first introduced to us in the letter Raskolnikov receives from his mother. She explains that Dounia had to leave the household for which she was working because the master of the house had developed a passion for her. Maria Petrovna, his wife and mistress of the house, makes matters even more difficult for Dounia by suggesting that Dounia had part in instigating the affair. We see of him very little at first, it's only toward the end that his face is revealed to us: "It was a strange face, like a mask; white and red, with bright red lips, with flaxen beard and still thick flaxen hair... There was something awfully unpleasant in that handsome face, which looked so wonderfully young for his age."

Svidrigailov is seen as the embodiment of evil as mystery shrouds certain deaths and emphatically points to his involvement; we are told of a serf by the name of Phillip who died of ill treatment; that he actually killed himself and that it is just possible that Svidrigailov drove him to it. Similarly another powerful suspicion is that which surrounds the rape of the deaf and dumb girl found hanged in a garret. Herein we have the ego, that entity which bridges the pre-rational and the moral, the entity responsible for action rather than thought and Svidrigailov is certainly a man of action when compared to the rest.

The ego is that entity that is completely rational in itself. It works to fulfill the pre-rational demands of the id based mostly on the desires of sex and aggression and those moral demands of the super-ego based on the sense of right and wrong. Needless to say he veers toward the id rather than the super ego and this corresponds to the violent hatred that Raskolnikov harbours for him. Raskolnikov, who is for all the purposes of the present study, is the super-ego in the scheme of things.

Svidrigailov's role moreover is that of an ego that fails at the art of coping, failing miserably at the art of balancing desires against morals in the field of reality. He is in the end driven to a state of despair and eventually suicide. He says to Raskolnikov: "If only I'd been something, a landowner, a father, a cavalry officer, a photographer, a journalist... I am nothing." Perhaps this is Dostoevsky's comment on society, that with that advent of modernity we are losing the art of coping with reality.

From the Christian point of view Svidrigailov fails miserably; he is an incarnation of evil with little exhibition of love and charity. From the existentialist point of view as well he fails at reconciling what he sees himself as and what he actually is; In his own words "I am nothing."

### **Raskolnikov as the Super- Ego**

With Raskolnikov, however, it is just the opposite. If given a chance to restate Svidrigailov's statement he'd probably say "I am everything". Here we have a man who considers himself as a law unto himself, that he is a neo- Napoleon and as such should act as one befitting the role of a great conqueror. "Yes, that's what it was! I wanted to become a Napoleon, that is why I killed her.... Do you understand now?"

He is the super ego, the voice of right and wrong, however irrationally grounded his principles are. Even his arguments against Dounia's marrying either Svidrigailov or Luzhin are tempered with a moral dimension rather than an emotional one.

What would Raskolnikov have to say about Kantian morality and the Categorical Imperative? I suggest that he has taken only parts of Kantian philosophy and reworked it to an extreme in order to suit his own purposes. Kant defines the CI as the law of the autonomous will tempered by rationality. In Kant's own words: "A categorical imperative would be one which represented an action as objectively necessary in itself, without reference to any other purpose." It is a moral principle we give unto ourselves, however, in order to work, this has to conform to the rational principle.

Raskolnikov certainly thinks he is a law unto himself, he has his own ideas of right and wrong, the problem lies in the fact that these aren't grounded in rationality, rather, in a wrongheaded lucidity that defines his ideas as moral obligations unto himself and unto the world. Certainly there is nothing rational about determining to kill an old lady pawn broker who has done him no harm and whose money he's not even interested in. It's only that he has somehow convinced himself that it is his moral duty after having heard or maybe even imagined the conversation between two officers at the police station to the effect of killing the same Lizaveta.

From the Christian point of view, he's a near absolute failure, I say "near" because he does actually repent when in Siberia, but that repentance is so distanced from his actual crime that it renders it null and void. From the existentialist point of view Raskolnikov is a study in the failure of self centered moral principles, these are usually centered in knowledge of oneself rather than believe in something outside oneself and the latter is essential to morality. Quoting Kant once more: "I had therefore to remove knowledge, in order to make room for belief." And once more "Morality is not the doctrine of how we may make ourselves happy, but how we may make ourselves worthy of happiness." Both the quotes show the need for a devotion to an ideal outside oneself in order to allow the CI that is fundamental to human morality to work, this ideal outside of the self is either non-existent or irrelevant in Raskolnikov's world.

### **Conclusion**

If we take Psychoanalysis as a theory that had its roots in *Crime and Punishment*, Freud seems to have seen in the failure of Svidrigailov, the failure of the rational ego under a moral super ego (like Raskolnikov) which harbours warped principles. Or, perhaps, it's the lack of rationality in the ego that is Svidrigailov that points to the failure of the moral super- ego that is Raskolnikov; for rationality is required to direct the assimilation of moral principles. Kind of the chicken and the egg question all over again...

The three characters; Razumikhin, Svidrigailov and Raskolnikov; point to certain Christian, Existentialist and Metaphysical questions on morality. It points to the indispensability of the pre- rational, and the rational to the formation of any kind of moral consciousness, and that a failure in the moral points to the failure in the rational, and vice- versa. The pre rational, that is the id in Razumikhin, is unaffected and constant.

There is also a separation of the moral and prerational completely in Freud's works, otherwise seen as a combination in Razumikhin and Raskolnikov respectively. Razumikhin the pre dominantly pre rational exhibits some strains of morality, (the individualism comment) while Raskolnikov the moral exhibits some strains of the pre rational (the Napoleon comment)

It is more than probable that the mental characteristics of these characters helped Freud develop his constructs of id, ego, super ego, on which his theory of psychoanalysis is based. This does not mean that he lifted the constructs out of these characters, just that their dominant traits inspired him to work upon a theory of human behavior.

\*The terms Eros (*Lebenstrieb*), Ananke, Thanatos (*Todestrieb*) are taken from Greek mythology:

Zeus

Aphrodite

**Eros**

Roman equivalent of Eros- Cupid.

Chaos

Nyx

**Thanatos**

Roman equivalent of Thanatos- Mors.

Chronos+**Ananke**

The Fates [Clotho](#); aka spinner,  
[Lachesis](#); aka allotter  
[Atropos](#); aka unturnable

Roman equivalent of Anake– Necessitas.

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