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FREEDOM THROUGH *AUSSPRACHEN*: THE LANGUAGE OF CONFESSION AND MERCY IN DOSTOYEVSKY'S *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*

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Abstract:
Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment is known for a number of things – its marvellous delineation of the vicissitudes of the human psyche, the loopholes of moral consciousness, its ontological expression of the split "self", etcetera. However, most readers tend to overlook the importance of language as a medium of assimilation of self into the community in order for confession and forgiveness to take place in equal measure as punishment. This paper aims to highlight how both the world of moral law (and, thereby, punishment) and that of compassion and mercy can be called into being by words spoken to each other. Moreover, this paper will elucidate how language can help conscience explain publicly its account of why it acted, and in this case, it relates to Raskolnikov's murder of the pawnbroker and her sister. Towards the end, the paper also makes certain allusions to Richard of St. Victor's concept of 'love as violence' as witnessed in the dialectical relationship between Raskolnikov and Sonya – and how it ultimately relates to mercy and forgiveness that frees the protagonist from his crime.
Keywords: *Dostoyevsky, Language, Confession, Forgiveness, Moral Law, Love, Violence, Ontology, Philosophy, etc.*

Contrary to popular opinion, the philosophical onus of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* does not wholly fall onto the concept of moral law, consciousness, ethics, and criminal psychology. A remarkable analysis can be made if one turns their attention to the significance of the language of confession and mercy that ontologically drives the entire narrative towards a fruitful 'resolution' – that is, Raskolnikov's decision to live an authentic life in prayer and worship of his saviour and forgiver Sonya Marmeladov.

From the onset of the text, we find that Raskolnikov is deeply split between three selves: the legal person, the self as 'moral consciousness' and the self as 'conscience'. This is a particularly Hegelian reading of his character, and each of these types highlights the growing problematic relation between the *individual* and the *universal*. Obviously, as a former law student with a somewhat good academic reputation, he seamlessly fits into the self as a 'legal person', and his haughty yet ironic conviction that the law does not apply to a select few 'great men' who are destined to lead the society is an abject failure of his 'moral consciousness'. This second self wholly manifests itself when Raskolnikov borrows money from

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AlyonaIvanovna, the old pawnbroker, who views him as a self *qua* moral consciousness[1] whose duty is to fulfil the imperative of moral law, that is, repay his debt.

Despite having committed to this moral obligation, Raskolnikov does not fulfil his duty and is instead caught in "an insincere play of alternating between these two determinations" (Hegel, 384) – whether to repay his debt and live scot-free, or escape this duty through a violent crime. This failure of the two selves (the legal person and moral consciousness) gives rise to the conscience ('*gewissen*'), which attempts to reconcile the dilemma between the two through concrete action, which in this case, is his violent crime of double murder of the old pawnbroker and her sister from which he gets away almost unnoticed. However, the psychological implications of his act start to plague him, forcing him to involuntarily expose himself and, ultimately, confess his crime. Moreover, this complicated narrative mixed with hatred, confession and forgiveness helps build a community of 'acting' individuals where Raskolnikov finds his confession validated and is therefore released from his crime.

But before reading into the intricacies of the confession and the events that follow, one should look more carefully at the role that 'conscience' plays in *Crime and Punishment*. The moment when Raskolnikov's conscience decides to commit the act can traced back to the scene at the old tavern where he eavesdrops on a conversation between a student and a young officer about the pawnbroker, where the student says: "don't you think that thousands of good deeds will wipe out one little, insignificant transgression...why, it's simple arithmetic! What is the life of that stupid, spiteful, consumptive old woman weighed against the common good?" (Dostoyevsky, 56). However, the last bit of their conversation yanks Raskolnikov's conscience into the darkness of evil: "I swear I could kill that damned old woman and rob her, without a single twinge of conscience" (Dostoyevsky, 56).

Thus begins the frantic battle between his obligation to repay his debt and his desire to do away with the pawnbroker for the 'greater good'. A struggle, then, ensues between his duties to family, university, moral law, and the pawnbroker, heightened by the "feverish bustle" of the depraved 19th-century Russian economy. However, this dilemma is silenced when his conscience approves his idea of the murder through an emerging conviction– so, now, "no further doubts remained…he had convinced himself." (Dostoyevsky, 60) This marks the conscience's explanation of the 'action' that is to follow – "simple action …which fulfils not this or that duty, but knows and does what is concretely right" (Hegel, 385).

Ironically, conviction is a significant element in *Crime and Punishment*, especially when it comes to driving the action of the novel to its end. This conviction is quite different from the one we regularly refer to, with a positive connotation at least, regarding doing something productive or taking charge of our lives. Of course, Raskolnikov does take charge of his life, but not in the way that is common – his conviction convinces him to murder for the good of all. As Hegel puts it, "just this knowing as its own knowing, as conviction [Überzeugung], is duty [Pflicht]." (Hegel, 387). So, essentially, Raskolnikov conforms to his individual 'duty' in order to be himself, and this seamlessly fits into Hegel's definition of conscience, which is the inner conviction by which 'duty' defines the self.

[1] Referring to the self in the capacity of consciousness adhering to moral laws; here, his responsibility to pay his debts and be a law-abiding citizen. Literally, 'qua' means 'in the capacity of' or 'as being'.

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So, the straight-jacketed free will is forcefully liberated as Raskolnikov indulges in the process of 'self-making' through action. It gets controversial, however, when we come to think about whether the 'duty' is made concrete or real through his conviction of doing the 'right' thing in the context of his moral perception. Raskolnikov is completely self-certain that he has performed his duty to society, if not to the pawnbroker. In Hegelian terms, Raskolnikov's conscience acts according to a law "from which conscience knows itself to be absolutely free, and [to] give [himself] authority to add to and take from, to neglect as well as fulfil it." (Hegel, 392) He creates his own reason to act the way he does and is, therefore, the prototype of what Hegel calls the 'self-assured Spirit'.

This doesn't mean that his conviction and what he thinks is the right thing to do is beyond reproach – the Kantian principle of morality, where the moral worth of an act is based on its intentions, is quite redundant in this case. Even if Raskolnikov 'intends' to do good, the consequences of his act of murder will prevail and are susceptible to judgement; thus, his action is erroneous and unstable in spite of the certainty of his conviction. We "do not know whether this conscience is morally good or evil [böse]" (Hegel, 395), and while other people are free to choose their actions in order to judge them, Raskolnikov, too, is free to choose his action, but to *justify* it. Whether his conscience is morally good or evil then depends on his ability to claim his action as his own and assert authority over its meaning. But he can only do this through language.

It is only language that can act as a "common medium of their connection", between the act and its meaning, and also has the capacity to bring individuals into a moral community per se. Language helps Raskolnikov be directly present to himself and to others and, in a way, acts as a middle term for conscience to publicly explain its account of why it acted. Through linguistic pronouncement (*Aussprachen*), then, Raskolnikov's self-assured action and duty becomes meaningful – everyone around him (himself included) mutually acknowledges each of their consciences. We can thus confirm Hegel's observation that language supersedes the "distinction between the universal consciousness and the individual self" (Hegel, 396).

Raskolnikov doesn't thrive in his self-righteousness for long though, and he finally recognises his crime during his encounter with Sonya's father, Marmeladov. His heart is stung when he sees Sonya, a sensitive young girl whoring away her life to feed her family due to her father's drunken irresponsibility and illness. Marmeladov does recognise the 'good' and desires to do good, but he is compelled to do evil by his character and inclinations. He causes the suffering of innocent Sonya, who loves without judging and condemning, and he is aware of this – Marmeladov hopes to die and assuage his guilt through *punishment*. In my opinion, this is a direct reflection of Raskolnikov's suppressed desire to be convicted; his guilt is too much to bear, and his intentions now seem bizarre. The only way he can be freed of this mental schism is through confessing to a group of people who find meaning in his act.

The rest of *Crime and Punishment* occurs in the space between the fulfilment of 'evil' in his vile act and the declaration of Raskolnikov's conviction, in the form of a confession, to the public. This creates a schism within Raskolnikov, much like his name (meaning schismatic or divided), which starts to manifest itself from the moment he is summoned to the police station for something unrelated to the murder. Sitting at the police station, he overhears the recounting of his crime, which leads to the birth of contradictory desires: the desire to remain

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free and the desire to confess and earn forgiveness – "I shall go in, fall on my knees, and tell the whole story,' he thought as he came to the fourth floor" (Dostoyevsky, 80).

His desire to remain out of jail is more of a punishment, not freedom. Raskolnikov, as Hegel puts it, "in the majesty of [his] elevation above specific law and every content of duty, puts whatever content [he] pleases into [his] knowing and willing. [He] is the moral genius." (Hegel, 397) Since his conviction or conscience helps define himself in whatever way he decides, without requiring corroboration from the community, he is slowly and steadily more estranged from the rest of humanity. (Johnson, 58) He loses his connection to others, retreats into his own shell, and hears internal voices in the form of 'solitary divine worship', where he recognises the divinity in the inner voice. This, however, seems like a classic case of madness and delirium to people around him – he is pitied and not thought capable of carrying out murder.

This very misrecognition of his morally grey conscience, where his friends and family fail to relate his person to his act, widens the schism in Raskolnikov's soul, making his desire to confess to his loved ones burn more fervently. In a way, the failure of the community to see the criminality in Raskolnikov strips him of his meaningful existence or *dasein*[2]. Conforming to the law and serving his sentence would mean becoming a slave to the legal system – which wasn't his life path or destiny, to begin with (as a self-proclaimed superior man, that is) – however, now Raskolnikov craves to slave away in prison just to have his existence validated and his 'power' recognised out of his act of murder.

He now embraces the guilt he was so afraid of in the beginning. Man is man because he has knowledge, because knowledge brings responsibility, because responsibility brings guilt. Man is man because he has guilt (Rubinstein, 140).Unlike Macbeth, who bemoans his act of murder in his famous line, "Will all Great Neptune's ocean wash the blood clean from my/ hand? No, this my hand will rather The multitudinous seas/ incarnadine making the green on red." (Shakespeare, 2.2.56), Raskolnikov now wants the blood of his crime to be seen. Interestingly, Dostoyevsky puts quite a lot of emphasis on the word 'blood' as it is mentioned over a hundred times throughout the novel, and for good reason, too, since 'blood' aptly delineates the growing change in Raskolnikov's soul: "Now a strange idea entered his head: perhaps all his clothes were soaked and stained with blood, and he could not see because his mental powers were failing and crumbling away ... his mind was clouded ... He remembered suddenly that there had been blood on the purse" (Dostoyevsky, 77).

From wanting to hide any evidence that might incriminate him to returning to the crime scene and angrily asking the two workers why they removed all the blood, Raskolnikov has come a long way. The readers now sit on the edge of their seats, twiddling their thumbs, watching how Raskolnikov lets enough hints of his crime slip out in seemingly harmless conversations, for example, those with the acting magistrate PorfiryPetrovich, who begins to suspect him. Regardless of his attempts at self-sabotage and subtle altruistic acts like giving Marmeladov's family twenty rubles, the 'madness' of his guilt returns and can only be mitigated through confession.

[2]Dasein (literally meaning: existence) as the fundamental concept of Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy.

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As already pointed out, Raskolnikov thinks of himself as a class apart, a 'great man' with all the makings of a leader, a thinker, and a change-maker, and this attitude doesn't exactly dissipate even when the evidence of his crime is slowly yet surely seeping out. Like extraordinary men, he, too, has the "right in himself, to permit his conscience to overstep…certain obstacles, but only in the event that his ideas…require it for their fulfillment" (Dostoyevsky, 220). Moreover, Raskolnikov falls into his own trap via the eccentricity of language, as he says, "I developed the idea that all the . . . well, for example, the law-givers and regulators of human society, beginning with the most ancient, and going on to Lycurgus, Solon, Mahomet, Napoleon and so on, were without exception transgressors…" (Dostoyevsky, 220), thus essentially confessing his crime without actually confessing.

In such a way, Porfiry, Zamyotov, and Razumikihn form a closed linguistic feedback group (Johnson, 60) where Raskolnikov can successfully elicit a response in acknowledgement of his self. For example, Raskolnikov asserts the justification of his crime in the presence of the very detective, Porfiry, who elicits his confession. Moreover, he had previously written an article that publicly justified his act (perhaps a subconscious foretelling) before he even committed the murder. So, in Hegelian terms, the article or pseudo confession was written for *himself* and published for *others*, but it was published without his knowledge – eventually, acting as the confession for its author, existing *in and for itself*.

It is, in this instance, that language as a "common medium of their connection" is the thickest and most poignant. The article foreshadows what comes after; it refers to a future that is only later actualised – this shows that morality is insecure and without closure. Something always lingers on and slips through the cracks. For example, when Raskolnikov catches up with the stranger on the street who had asked for him at the detective's house, the man calls him a "'murderer!'...in a low but clear and distinct voice." (Dostoyevsky, 231) Later, Raskolnikov dreams of killing the pawnbroker a second time, but this time, she laughs as he swings the axe. This is the laughter of triumph of the pawnbroker as her death undoes him – he is now helpless, and his community fails to recognise him as the perpetrator.

The change in his course of life now comes with the assimilation of Sonya Marmeladov into his community of feedback and recognition. However, before tracing the course of Sonya as the medium of redemption, it is important to briefly understand why Raskolnikov is in such dire need of community. Raskolnikov needs to know whether he is extraordinary or simply common, and the only way to do that is to act and be recognised through the action. A community such as this, including diverse characters such as Porfiry, Zamyotov, and Razumikihn can recognise the necessity for unjust acts that oppose present justice and moral law in the name of a 'new justice', a new dawn to come. That is not to say that a detective like Porfiry would condone murder, but he has the 'recognitive' ability to bring the ambivalence of conscience and morality into understanding. In this vein, Raskolnikov says: "I wanted to make myself a Napoleon, and that is why I killed her...Now do you understand?" (Dostoyevsky, 350)

In Hegel's words, Raskolnikov "confesses to this other, and equally expects that the other, having in fact put himself on the same level, will also respond in words in which he will give utterance to this identity with him, and expects that this mutual recognition will now exist in fact." (Hegel, 666) But this is not easily achieved - his confession does not get him a

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similar, reciprocal response. At first, when Raskolnikov admits his guilt, Porfiry is not interested in a confession since he already knows he is guilty: "Confess, or don't confess – it's all the same to me now. I am convinced in my own mind, without that" (Dostoyevsky, 386).

Confession contains an expectation of purgation, and when Raskolnikov confesses, he attempts to cleanse himself of the 'evil' by submitting to the power of the two antithetical desires: the desire to be forgiven and to be free. By this logic, then, confession entails forgiveness. (Johnson, 64). Raskolnikov does not view himself as more evil or guilty than others. But in the eyes of others, he has sinned, so certain questions remain: is confession equal to exoneration? Will the community be able to justify his crime and confer forgiveness unto Raskolnikov? Or is his deed truly unforgivable?

For both the confessor and the judger, confession usually implies the emptying of subjectivity, a kind of self-effacement, which Raskolnikov refuses to admit. Until the very last scene in the novel, he still hopes to be placed in the league of extraordinary men. But to confess is to throw away oneself, strip away the remaining tatters of freedom and autonomy, and be vulnerable in front of others. And when Raskolnikov is laid bare, he finally realises the complete dependence of his subjectivity on others' will. He feels hopeless and impotent when he finds out that he is simply a petty criminal in the eyes of others, not an extraordinary man. Yet he is given his chance at redemption, and although he may not be able to resume his life on a clean slate, he sees divine mercy in the glistening, tearful, loving eyes of Sonya Marmeladov.

Sonya turns out to be the most powerful character of all - one Raskolnikov ends up loving and confessing to. She is the redemptive agent whose quality and function in the text is represented through her name, where Sonya or Sophia means 'wisdom'; and often, it is thought to mean 'cosmic love', which aptly resonates with her role in the context of Raskolnikov. Feminist readings may read a little too deeply into the dynamics of this relationship as potentially sexist, derogatory even, but it will completely miss the point of the existence of her character. While Raskolnikov is the dissenter, the split one, she is a regenerative symbol whose acceptance of life, however tragic it might be, actually reconciles the chaos and scattering of the narrative.

Drawing from the usual Dostoyevskian style of characterisation, Raskolnikov and Sonya are the insulted and the Injured. Sonya represents "all the suffering of humanity", and in front of her, Raskolnikov's pseudo-superiority fades away: her humility, innocence, and compassion make him crave mercy. She is the *Anima*[3], the Feeling and Intuition to Raskolnikov's Thinking, fully balancing him out, allowing him to be reborn as a new person. However, before he confesses to her, Raskolnikov expresses his love brutally, perhaps in an attempt to rescue her from her horrifying fate, when he himself cannot be rescued. Here, the readers find truthful echoes of Richard of St. Victor, where he claims that love is so powerful that it "wounds, binds, languishes and brings on a faint"; the same love and infinite charity is the inherent consequence of violence. (Taloș, 61)

[3]In Jungian terms, the Anima is an autonomous complex in the man's unconscious, which represents the opposite of the dominant attitude in the consciousness (Dauner, 205).

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This 'violent love' is not just limited to human beings but has been historically more explicit in the love between the devotee and God. For example, the inherent violence in divine love is expressed in the First Testament, where God presents Himself as being jealous and seduces his prophet Jeremiah with an almost unstoppable, rough force similar to that of rape (Jer. 20: 7). Richard of St. Victor also categorises love into four degrees that emerges from desire (spiritual or carnal): wounding love, binding love, languishing love, and fainting love. He says that only the first degree, that is, wounding love, is appropriate for human relations, whereas all others become increasingly dangerous, destructive, even. (Taloș, 65)

In *Crime and Punishment*, however, we see the next two degrees of love as well. Initially, Raskolnikov treats Sonya roughly, scolding and admonishing her, because the possibility of the sensitive, pure Sonya turning into a hardened criminal is painful to him. He believes that they both share the fact that they have committed crimes, even though murder and prostitution do not really fall on the same plane. He calls her a "great sinner" and believes that "you have ruined a life…your own (it's the very same thing)." (Dostoyevsky, 272) Raskolnikov tries to prevent Sonya's soul from disintegrating into the abyss of crude yet necessary livelihood - but it is he who needs to be saved.

Despite having to whore around to feed her family, Sonya believes in God, she believes that there ought to be justice in everything, and she "demands justice." To her, justice is absolute, and that justice exists but in God, the Absolute (Rubinstein, 143) - and that humans are fallible and are not expected to be 'perfect' like God. Sinners must be punished, yet they must be loved, prayed for, cried for, and felt for before meting out justice. It is in this vein that Sonya responds to Raskolnikov's confession of the crime rather compassionately instead of being repulsed by it:

> What to do?' she exclaimed, starting up, and her eyes, which had been full of tears, began to flash. 'Get up!' (She seized him by the shoulder, and he stood up, looking at her almost in consternation.) 'Go at once, this instant, stand at the crossroads, first bow down and kiss the earth you have desecrated, then bow to the whole world, to the four corners of the earth, and say aloud to all the world: "I have done murder." Then God will send you life again. Will you go? Will you go?' she implored him, shaking all over as if in a fit, seizing both his hands and squeezing them tightly in her own, with her burning gaze fixed on him (Dostoyevsky, 355)

Sonya here expresses her forgiveness instantly, her mercy is amoral, a historical, and uneconomical in that it does not judge its object in any determinate sense - all she wants for him to do is unburden his soul of the sins and find love in God. She takes on Raskolnikov's misery as her own, his bondage as her own, and his destiny as her own. Thus, they now enter the realm of 'binding love', where although Raskolnikov rejects to plead for divine mercy, he subconsciously starts performing acts of prayer:

> It had come down on him like a clap of thunder; a single spark was kindled in his spirit and suddenly, like a fire, enveloped his whole being. Everything in him softened on the instant and the tears gushed out. He fell

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> to the ground where he stood . . . He knelt in the middle of the square, bowed to the ground, and kissed its filth with pleasure and joy. He raised himself and then bowed down a second time (Dostoyevsky, 445).

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel defines forgiveness as the movement of conscience into the Absolute Spirit, absorbing and transforming the suffering and evil of individual selves without moral judgement. So, the movement of Spirit requires the labour of the negative, and in this case, forgiveness. Sonya intuitively knows this, and she also knows that the only way to break Raskolnikov's pseudo-ego and make him come into the full knowledge of his crime is through love - one that is languishing, painful yet redemptive. And her expression of wisdom when Sonya tells him to "accept suffering and achieve atonement through it-that is what you must do…" (Dostoyevsky, 355) with an unsaid promise of waiting and aesthetic solace for Raskolnikov drives him to finally confess to the legal institution.

Raskolnikov starts loving and living his days in the Siberian prison in prayer and worship of the divine, pure Sonya. He toils, shoves away heavy ice, and lies on the stone plank in his prison cell and still marvels at the absurdity of having to humble himself and submit to some "blind decision of fate." Ironically, he has not quite let the fact that he is a criminal sink in, but he continues to strive for atonement to be forgiven by Sonya and the community he built through his crime. As in the process of a cathartic purgation, Raskolnikov falls ill again (a recurrent theme in the novel), but this time, something changes within him. The wounding, binding, and languishing love glues together his scattered soul through the language of suffering and patience. After he recovers, he meets Sonya, who visits him in Siberia. Then comes the most poignant and passionate resolution of the novel:

> How it happened he himself did not know, but suddenly he seemed to be seized and cast at her feet. He clasped her knees and wept. For a moment, she was terribly frightened, and her face grew white. She sprang up and looked down at him, trembling. But at once, in that instant, she understood. Infinite happiness shone in her eyes; she had understood, and she no longer doubted that he loved her, loved her forever, and that now at last the moment had come . . .
> They tried to speak, but they could not. Tears stood in their eyes. They were both pale and thin, but in their white sick faces there glowed the dawn of a new future, a perfect resurrection into a new life. Love had raised them from the dead, and the heart of each held endless springs of life for the heart of the other (Dostoyevsky, 463).

Of course, Dostoyevsky's basic impulse in delineating this climactic scene is religious, but it still follows (without disregarding the religious propensity) that Raskolnikov's inability to love is what held him back from being 'whole' and believing in the Absolute. Sonya's mercy forces him down on his knees to repent for his sin - the lack of love - of which his crime was a direct consequence. The real tragedy, then, was not the death of the pawnbroker and her sister, or Raskolnikov's exile to Siberia for that matter, but the death of his soul. And it is through forgiveness that his soul is reborn. He is reborn not as a 'great man' but a man among men, not

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extraordinary, and that is his greatest triumph. Thus, forgiveness or mercy, which is the true nature of love, rescues the victim-criminal, who is now willing to share the sufferings of others, finally freeing himself from his egotism. Sonya's restorative forgiveness then helps Raskolnikov empty his self and negate the negative, and perhaps this is why Dostoyevsky includes a touching epilogue at the end: "But that is the beginning of a new story, the story of the gradual renewal of a man, of his gradual regeneration, of his slow progress from one world to another, of how he learned to know a hitherto undreamed-of reality. All that might be the subject of a new tale, but our present one is ended" (Dostoyevsky, 465).

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