

Psychoanalytic Interpretation of *Crime and Punishment*

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Abstract. As a masterpiece of Dostoevsky's psychological novels, *Crime and Punishment* tells the story of Raskolnikov, a college student, who committed a crime because of the opposition between reality and ideal, and then was punished, understood, and atoned for his sins. Attempting to analyze the process of Raskolnikov's "crime" and "punishment" through the psychoanalytic theory put forward by Freud in Ego & Id, this thesis aims to provide a better interpretation of the theme of "crime and punishment".

Keywords: Ego and Id; Crime and Punishment; Psychoanalysis; Dreamland.

1. Introduction—Understanding of Crime and Punishment and Topic Selection

As the masterpiece of Dostoevsky's psychological reality novels, *Crime and Punishment* has a strong religious concept, which in essence tells the story of a frustrated college student, Raskolnikov, who tries to exercise God's judicial power with his inner impulse and the fantasy of becoming a "superman", ending up in the crime of murder and choosing to punish himself through exile in the great psychological torture, inner collapse, and disillusionment. First of all, two questions about the reasons for summing up *Crime and Punishment* in this way and the topic selection are clarified.

Although the author knows almost nothing about religion, he has read and thought about the description and role language of Satan (Morpheus) in *Paradise Lost* and *Faust*. Milton portrays a rebel in *Paradise Lost* who is even evaluated as "unintentionally taking the devil's side", which is a great sin of trespassing from the perspective of God. Later, Satan's "personality" was as weakened as a worm by Milton to save his image. According to the author, Satan, who sought to usurp the dominant God in the previous chapters, is more in line with the powerful image of "sin". Sin should be "arrogance" with ambition, not humble stupidity or selfishness, so as to stand proudly on the opposite side of light and redemption. *Faust* portrays a slightly funny but more "ordinary" real devil who lures people to commit the sins in the "id".[1] What does this have to do with *Crime and Punishment*? In fact, these two Satans have entered the chaotic mind of Raskolnikov in silence. Just as Faust who was rich but lost would listen to Morpheus, Raskolnikov, a college student, unconsciously embarked on the devil's road because of the inequality between reality and ideal. His lowest ambition is to be an "extraordinary person", or Nietzsche's so-called "superman", which urges him to commit great trespassing. After he put his evil ideas into practice, great pain tormented him, but he tried to escape evilness with his "laziness" and "rage", which always existed implicitly and was activated after being punished. Laziness tends to escape reality, while rage is likely to cope with embarrassment. In the end, under the guidance of the "angel", he was redeemed and transcended his id by self-punishment. Therefore, the theme has already come to the fore. In fact, the history of Raskolnikov's "crime and punishment" is each stage of his "id, ego, and superego" dominating his performance. Although this is a subjective understanding, it still can be justified after checking Freud's original works. By the same token, this is why the author has "praised" the sin of "arrogance". Only such sins as arrogance and trespass deserve to be a good tragedy. As for the "evil" part in the protagonist's "id", if Raskolnikov only has ordinary dirty sins such as greed, laziness, and indulgence in his id, it is impossible to play such a tragedy.

At the same time, the author reflects on Raskolnikov's crime and punishment from his state of mind or spiritual changes through psychoanalysis of Freud, so as to avoid the topic of dream analysis. However, in the search for "self", the author found that dreams are still inevitable, which is a means of escaping from reality after committing crimes and a window for him to communicate with himself. What Raskolnikov saw was the darkest moment in the world: horses were driven to death, the streets

were full of domestic garbage and stinking, and people wandered in the streets aimlessly. At such a moment, “it seems that the whole world, together with all its inhabitants, strong and weak, as well as with their dwellings, whether the sanctuary for the poor or the gilded palace, becomes similar, a fantastic, magical daydream or dream, which will suddenly disappear and evaporate into the deep blue sky.”[2] It can be said that Raskolnikov’s experiences in four dreams and the combination of “laziness” and “rage” in his groggy state caused by long sleep are a must to explore his “crime and punishment”.

2. Theory of Spiritual Hierarchy in Ego & Id

Ego & Id was published by Freud in 1923,[3] whose original intention was to further develop and supplement the *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In fact, it objectively perfected his early subconscious theory. Based on the psychological structure of consciousness, unconsciousness (more similar to “subconsciousness” in definition), and pre-consciousness mentioned in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the personality structure composed of the id, ego, and superego is extended. The following definitions of these concepts in the book are explained as follows.

Conscious and unconscious are a pair of concepts. In the chapter *Consciousness and What is Unconsciousness*, Freud put forward that consciousness comes from the change of ideas, but some cannot become conscious because of some resistances. The state before this idea becomes consciousness is “repression”.

Under the theory of “repression”, the concept of “unconsciousness” was proposed by Freud. The repressed state is the initial “unconsciousness”. There are two kinds of unconsciousness, one is latent which can become consciousness. The other is repressed that cannot be conscious at all. The repressed “unconsciousness” is called “unconsciousness”, and the “unconscious” that can be conscious is called “pre-consciousness”, which is closer to consciousness than unconsciousness.

Based on the above contents, the root of “consciousness” in Freud’s psychoanalytic theory can be understood. According to Freud, “with the deepening of psychoanalysis, these differences alone are far from enough”,[4] which leads to the concept of “self”, that is, “a coherent organization of psychological processes in the spirit”. Consciousness is attached to the self, which controls the initiative of the organism and actively releases excitement to the outside world. Repression also comes from the ego, which in this way drives some tendencies in the spirit out of consciousness and even “sends out other forms of effects and activities of these tendencies”.

In the following introduction, Freud refers to George Grodike’s claim that “the so-called self is passive in life.” In fact, we occasionally feel what Grodike said, that something else seems to dominate us besides our own initiative, so Freud decided to enable the concept of “id” to take a place in his theory. His method of distinguishing is to call what is developed by the “perceptual system” and contains pre-consciousness “self”, and to call other parts of the spirit “id” such as a deeper repressed one, specifically the expanding parts and parts that behave like unconsciousness. More intuitively, “the role of perception in the self is the same as that of instinct in the id”,[5] which expresses the essence of both. It is precisely because the part of “instinct” is defined as “id” that the lower consciousness in the self has been integrated into the id. As for ordinary people, the self is the one who grasps the initiative and suppresses the id. To put it simply, it is to restrict one’s behavior by “not violating the rules”.

The concept of the “superego” is slightly obscure, but the author believes its essence is the development or sublimation of the first two after being produced by the id and suppressed by the self. Freud used “sex” to introduce and explain the concept of the “superego”. Given it has nothing to do with this paper, simply speaking, the “superego” is a thing that opposes the self in the form of self-ideal after the id is disintegrated, and different tendencies of new development are selectively “combined” by “self”,[6] which will also play a role in resisting self.

These are related concepts extracted from the first four sections of *Ego & Id*. Meanwhile, in the last chapter *Self-dependence*, there are some small viewpoints that can explain the development of *Crime and Punishment*, which are included as follows:

From the control and moral perspective, the id is immoral, the ego manages to become moral, while the superego can turn moral or cruel like the id;

The id is the second external world of the ego... with the help of the superego, the ego uses the past experience stored in the id in a way we still do not know;

The ego serves three masters and is therefore threatened by three dangers: the outside world, the libido of the id (sexual power), and the strict demands of the superego.

As for the ego, the superego plays the role of protection and salvation, which is the same as the early father and the later “God” and “destiny”. [7]

3. Psychoanalysis of the Protagonist in Crime and Punishment

The research status of this topic is introduced in this section. In 2010, there was a psychoanalysis of *Crime and Punishment*, which is not perfect in theoretical narration and the interpretation of its thought could be further supplemented. Besides, the author divides in some of its viewpoints, such as Sonia as a symbol of pain. [8] In addition, there are few journals that directly analyze *Crime and Punishment*, but the interpretations corresponding to id, ego, and superego, such as “arrogation”, “suffering reflection”, and “redemption”, appear in many high-quality journals including core journals without detailed demonstration. At present, due to the time limit, the author may not exhaust all aspects, but the “reading and critical thinking” will be reflected.

In the beginning, Raskolnikov showed “self” and existed as a college student who tried to live under the social framework. At this stage, the initiative of the ego is playing an active role, and the id is suppressed without exposure. However, being poorer and poorer in his life, Raskolnikov began to fall into the thoughts of “how to do great things (make money)”. The tear between ideal and reality, id and self start to make his initiative out of control, which was gradually replaced by rage and greed in “id”. In fact, when he first met Malmerakov, he still maintained his dignity as a college student, listening to him and sympathizing with him. But as his mood and situation got worse, he felt that all mankind was “despicable”. By the time he received a letter from his mother, his ego was completely consumed because he could not maintain sustainable living conditions.

The id is “activated” and falls into immorality. After being stimulated by “greed” and “rage”, Raskolnikov began to dream and had to borrow money from Ivanov because of urgent impoverishment. At this time, the separation of his ideal and reality gave him an opportunity to activate his “id”. Hearing the chat between college students and officers in the pub, he was quite longing to be “someone like Napoleon”, so he dropped into the abyss of trespass. Then, his first dream once again explained that if he fails to be an extraordinary person, he must be ordinary, who will only be driven, bullied, abused, and even killed by the extraordinary. This dream strengthened Raskolnikov’s determination to be “extraordinary”. He wanted to be the hero who could cross the boundaries of law and morality and do whatever he wanted as long as their purpose was for a so-called great human cause, such as those who “capture Toulon, slaughter Paris, leave the army in Egypt, lose 500,000 troops in an expedition to Moscow, self-excuse with a wisecrack in Vienna, and then still build many bronze statues for themselves...” [9] In the end, it allured Raskolnikov to kill Ivanovna.

“Self” changes and falls into pain. After killing the old woman, Raskolnikov spirit quickly lost support in his spirit. Facing Razumikhin, the maid, the police chief, and others all with strange behaviors, he was made the object of suspicion. In any case, he was caught in the punishment of fear, and the lasting torture was to punish him for overstepping God’s power to judge mortals’ sins. With cranky and depressed psychology, sick body, and various fears after killing people, Raskolnikov who had nightmares again and again dreamed that the landlady was beaten by police officer Ilya Petrovich and the old usury lady could not be cut to death. When he woke up, he could not even tell whether it

was a dream or a reality. Idling away every day became his “self” in this period, which tortured him endlessly. After realizing that he did not have the extraordinary psychological quality, he finally admitted that it was not poverty or desperation that pushed him to desperation, but his indulgence. It was himself who challenged his weakness to do things out of the allowance from God. However, a body without its soul can not bear the condemnation of such a painful conscience in any case. His wavering attitude towards God, conscience, and social order is strengthened by reality, after which he understood that he must accept punishment to be reborn.[8]

When angels come, the “superego” awakens. Sonia has been guiding anguished Raskolnikov in her image of “Suffering with Christ”. Previously, we thought Raskolnikov’s surrender was a result of superego awakening, which was actually the beginning. Sonia accepted exile together with Raskolnikov to help him recognize his sins, obey the truth of Christ, and realize spiritual resurrection.[11] However, it was not until Raskolnikov dreamed of the crazy plague that he finally realized that the world had become so bad because everyone is mistaken that they had mastered the truth and could become “extraordinary”, which awakened the superego in the end and accepted the redemption of “Suffering with Christ” from their hearts. The truth of God revealed by the vast land of Siberia finally ignited “the hope of resurrection and renewal of life” for sinners.[12] Thus, Raskolnikov also completed the process from “self” to “id”, “new self”, and then to “superego”. In this process, he completed the “crime and punishment” and “redemption”.

References

- [1] One of the two types of ‘instinct’, sexual instinct. See Freud, S. (2021). *Ego & Id*. Huang, W. trans. Xi’an: Shaanxi Normal University Publishing House, 169, ‘Two Types of Instinct’.
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