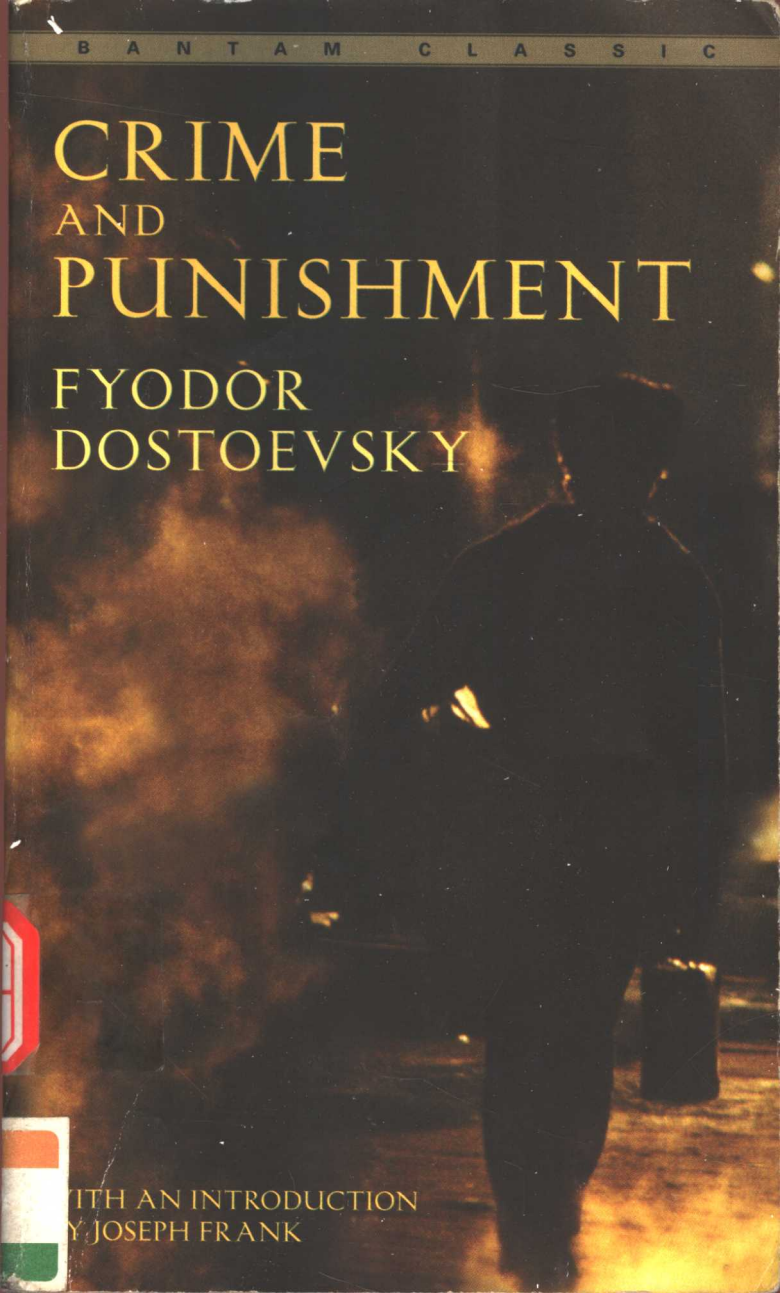
BANTAM CLASSIC

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY



WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY JOSEPH FRANK

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with an Introduction by Joseph Frank

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FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH DOSTOEVSKY's life was as dark and dramatic as the great novels he wrote. He was born in Moscow in 1821, the son of a former army surgeon whose drunken brutality led his own serfs to murder him by pouring vodka down his throat until he strangled. A short first novel, *Poor Folk* (1846), brought him instant success, but his writing career was cut short by his arrest for alleged subversion against Tsar Nicholas I in 1849. In prison he was given the "silent treatment" for eight months (guards even wore velvet-soled boots) before he was led in front of a firing squad. Dressed in a death shroud, he faced an open grave and awaited his execution, when, suddenly, an order arrived commuting his sentence. He then spent four years at hard labor in a Siberian prison, where he began to suffer from epilepsy, and he only returned to St. Petersburg a full ten years after he had left in chains.

His prison experiences coupled with his conversion to a conservative and profoundly religious philosophy formed the basis for his great novels. But it was his fortuitous marriage to Anna Snitkina, following a period of utter destitution brought about by his compulsive gambling, that gave Dostoevsky the emotional stability to complete *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868–69), *The Possessed* (1871–72), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80). When Dostoevsky died in 1881, he left a legacy of masterworks that influenced the great thinkers and writers of the Western world and immortalized him as a giant among writers of world literature.

INTRODUCTION

THE ITALIAN novelist Alberto Moravia once said, in a rather sensational article called "The Marx-Dostoevsky Duel," that *Crime and Punishment* "will for a long time remain as an indispensable key to understanding what has happened in Russia and Europe during the last fifty years." Why? Because, he explained, "although [Raskolnikov] had not read Marx and regarded himself as a superman beyond good and evil, [he] was already, in embryo, a people's commissar; and, in fact, the first people's commissars came out of that same class of the intelligentsia to which Raskolnikov belonged, and possessed his identical ideas—the same thirst for social justice, the same terrible ideological consistency, the same inflexibility in action. And Raskolnikov's dilemma is the very same one that confronts the people's commissars and Stalin: 'Is it right for the good of humanity to kill the old usurer (read: liquidate the bourgeoisie)?' "—or, to update Moravia's example a bit, eliminate the kulaks (wealthy peasant farmers)?

This view of Dostoevsky's great novel, written in the same year and under the immediate impact of Khrushchev's denunciation of the crimes of Stalin (1956), may at first sight seem only a clever literary illustration of a political argument, not something that should be taken seriously as a commentary on Dostoevsky's work. What, after all, does Raskolnikov really have to do with political revolution? His crime is depicted as a totally individual act divorced from any larger movement; and though he is quite aware of the socialist theories of the student radicals of his time, he emphatically *dissociates* himself from them. Besides, Raskolnikov is anything but a people's commissar, and if he does have a "thirst for social justice," he certainly

cannot be said to have "ideological consistency" (actually, he wavers all the time), or "inflexibility in action" (he commits his murder in a sort of waking trance).

Despite such particular objections that could be made to Moravia's remarks, his general point seems, all the same, very well taken. There *is* a connection between the people's commissars, Stalin, and Raskolnikov, and Moravia's intuition has hit on something fundamental, even if it is less univocal and direct than his words suggest. Raskolnikov is not so much a people's commissar as he is Dostoevsky's remarkable prevision of how such a human type eventually would come to be formed and of what its arrival on the historical scene might presage for Russia—and now has come to mean for the world. *Crime and Punishment* was meant to warn against what Dostoevsky considered to be this misshapen birth and, if possible, to abort its existence; the value of Moravia's observations is that they point to this dimension of the book, which is often overlooked or not taken with sufficient seriousness. But, as we shall see, it is precisely from such an attempt to grapple with the moral implications of the social and cultural realities of his day that Dostoevsky produced a work whose timeliness increases rather than diminishes with the years, and whose artistic power has scarcely been matched since it was first published in 1866.

1

Crime and Punishment is the first of Dostoevsky's important novels, and the one in which his genius can perhaps be felt in its purest and most limpid form. He began to write it five years after returning from his exile in Siberia (1850–1860), four years of which he had spent in a work camp, and just after the failure of the second of the two literary-political journals that he edited with his older brother Mikhail during the early 1860s. The novel was written in a period of great personal distress, at a time when Dostoevsky's personal life had suddenly collapsed around his ears and he was desperately searching to establish it on a new footing. His first wife—whom Dostoevsky had once

called a "knight in female clothing," and some of whose character traits appear in Katerina Ivanovna Marmeladova—had died of tuberculosis in April 1864 after a long and heartrending death agony. Mikhail, with whom he worked in close association and harmony, suddenly expired a few months later. And although Dostoevsky had labored like a galley slave to keep their journal *Epoch* (*Epokha*) afloat even after his brother's demise, his efforts proved unavailing and left him saddled with a huge debt.

Hounded by creditors in St. Petersburg, he longed to obtain some peace and quiet by taking a trip to Europe. Residence in Europe had in the past afforded him some relief from his epilepsy, and he also looked forward to a reunion with his ex-mistress, the young writer Apollinaria Suslova, to whom he was still passionately attached. He had remained in correspondence with her and had not yet surrendered the hope of winning her back. Dostoevsky thus scurried around in the spring of 1865 trying to raise the necessary funds for such a journey and managed to obtain a loan from the Literary Fund established to help needy intellectuals and students (Dostoevsky had served as recording secretary of this organization between 1863 and 1865). He also approached several periodicals with the idea for a new novel.

In a letter to A. A. Kraevsky, the editor of a journal called *Notes of the Fatherland*, Dostoevsky described his new idea: "My novel is called *The Drunkards*, and will be related to the present question of drunkenness. It will take up not only this question, but represent all its offshoots, particularly with images of the family, the education of children under such conditions, etc., etc." He added that it would be at least three hundred pages in length, perhaps more; and he requested an advance of three thousand rubles, a rate considerably lower than usual for an author of his stature. Despite this surrender of authorial pride to dire necessity, his offer was turned down. As a result, Dostoevsky was forced to appeal to a cutthroat publisher named F. T. Stellovsky, who paid him the sum requested in return for permission to publish a three-volume edition of Dostoevsky's works; in addition, Dostoevsky promised to supply Stellovsky

with a new work of at least novella size by November 1, 1866. If the writer failed to fulfill his contract, Stellovsky obtained the right to publish all of Dostoevsky's future works without compensation for a period of nine years.

Whether the project of *The Drunkards* had advanced further than the few sentences of Dostoevsky's letter cannot be determined; the perfunctory tone of his remarks leads one to believe that at best he may have made a few preliminary jottings. Moreover, those remarks make the work sound exclusively like the type of social-problem novel Dostoevsky would scarcely have been interested in writing at this stage of his career. But perhaps he spoke of it in such terms only to stress its possible journalistic appeal to a skeptical editor and because, twenty years before, Kraevsky had published such early works of Dostoevsky's as *Poor Folk* and *An Honest Thief* in which drunkards had been portrayed with penetrating and touching sympathy. Scholars agree, however, that whatever notes Dostoevsky may have accumulated for this novel were eventually employed in the subplot involving the Marmeladov family of *Crime and Punishment*.

Stellovsky's contract enabled Dostoevsky to go abroad after distributing most of his funds to creditors, his stepson Pasha, and the numerous family of his late brother. Stopping off at Wiesbaden, where he hoped to replenish his pocket by gambling, he promptly lost what little he had left. Unable to pay his hotel bill, he was literally imprisoned in this German spa for two months while he waited for funds that would allow him to renew his journey. Some image of his state of mind may be gathered from this extract of a letter to Apollinaria Suslova, who had left Wiesbaden shortly before, after paying him a visit:

> My affairs are terrible *ne plus ultra*; it is impossible to go any further. Beyond, there must be another zone of misfortune and filthiness of which I still have no knowledge.... I am still living without meals, and this is already the third day that I live on morning and evening tea—and it's curious! I do not really wish to eat. The

> worst is that they snip away at me and sometimes refuse me a candle in the evening (especially) when some bit of the previous one is left over, even the smallest fragment. But I leave the hotel every day at three o'clock and only return at six, so as not to give the impression that I do not dine at all.

It was during this period of personal humiliation and intense inner rage, when he could certainly feel boiling within himself all the hatred of a Raskolnikov against the injustices of the world, that we catch our first glimpse of the idea for a story that eventually became his novel.

In a letter to his friend A. P. Milyukov, Dostoevsky asks him to make the rounds of the journals and try to obtain an advance on a story. Nothing specific is said about its nature, except that, as Dostoevsky assures his correspondent, "people will pay attention to it, talk about it... nothing of this kind has yet been written among us; I guarantee its originality, yes, and also its power to grip the reader." None of the Petersburg journals were interested, however, and Dostoevsky was reluctantly forced to write to an old enemy, Mikhail Katkov, the powerful editor of what had recently become a conservative journal, *The Russian Messenger*. Katkov was also the publisher of Turgenev and Tolstoy, but luckily, at this particular moment, neither had recently supplied him with any new manuscript, and he accepted Dostoevsky's proposal. A copy of a rough draft of Dostoevsky's letter, found among the novelist's papers, provides our first substantial view of his new conception.

He describes it as the "psychological report of a crime," which is committed by "a young man, expelled from the university, petit bourgeois in origin and living in the midst of the direst poverty." Falling under the influence of "the strange, 'unfinished' ideas that float in the atmosphere," he "decides to break out of his disgusting position at one stroke" by killing an old pawnbroker. She is "stupid and ailing, greedy... is evil and eats up other lives, torturing a younger sister who had become her servant. 'She is good for nothing.' 'Why should she live?' 'Is she at all useful for anything?' These questions befuddle the

young man. He decides to kill her in order to bring happiness to his mother living in the provinces, rescue his sister, a paid companion in the household of a landowner, from the lascivious advances of the head of the gentry family—advances that threaten her ruin—finish his studies, go abroad, and then all his life be upright, staunch, unbendable in fulfilling his 'humane obligations to mankind,' which would ultimately 'smooth out' his crime, if one can really call a crime this action against a deaf, stupid, evil, sickly old woman who does not herself know why she is on earth and who perhaps would die herself within a month."

Dostoevsky also indicates how he plans to resolve the action of the story. A month passes, "no one suspects or can suspect him," but "here is where the entire psychological process of the crime is unfolded. Insoluble problems confront the murderer, unsuspected and unexpected feelings torment his heart. Heavenly truth, earthly law take their toll, and he finishes by *being forced* to denounce himself." What impels him to do so is "the feeling of isolation and separation from mankind which he felt right after completing the crime," and which has continued to torture him. Finally, "the criminal himself decides to accept suffering in order to atone for his deed." Dostoevsky also remarks that newspaper accounts of various recent crimes committed by educated members of the young generation have convinced him "that my *subject* is not at all eccentric," and he instances two examples of murders perpetrated by university students after cool calculation and reflection.

2

It may well have been such reports in the press, to which he always paid the closest attention, that had initially stimulated Dostoevsky's imagination and given him the idea for a story that could be written quickly and be eminently saleable. But if he seized on the latest sensation in this way, it was because he had long been preoccupied with the question of crime and conscience and because, as a result of the attempt of the Russian

radicals of the 1860s to establish morality on new and more "rational" foundations, such questions had taken on a burning actuality.

Dostoevsky's years in the prison camp had brought him into firsthand contact with a terrifyingly extensive diapason of human experience, and he had glimpsed the awful possibility of a world in which the categories of good and evil had simply ceased to control behavior. He was very much struck, for example, as he wrote in his prison memoirs, *Notes from the House of the Dead*, by the lack of any manifest signs of "inner anguish or suffering" among the peasant convicts, almost all of whom were murderers. But he also noted that "almost all of the convicts raved and talked in their sleep," and that what they raved about usually had some connection with their violent past. Nor did any of the peasants reject the moral law by which they had been judged; during the Easter services, they all fell to their knees and asked forgiveness from Christ.

The person who most truly terrified Dostoevsky was not a peasant at all but a clever, handsome, well-educated member of the upper class named Pavel Aristov, who was, Dostoevsky wrote, "the most revolting example of the depths to which a man can sink and degenerate, and the extent to which he can destroy moral feeling in himself without difficulty or repentance." Aristov was a spy and informer who had landed in prison for having falsely accused various people of plotting against the government and then financing his debauches with the money obtained from the secret police to entrap others. Dostoevsky saw such degeneration as an ever-present possibility when moral standards collapsed or were destroyed; and prison camp persuaded him that this was far more likely to occur among the educated élite than among the people. When the character of Svidrigaïlov, Raskolnikov's completely cynical alter ego, first makes his appearance among the early notes for *Crime and Punishment*, he is designated by the name: Aristov.

But in *House of the Dead* Dostoevsky also mentions another type of educated personality, whom he does not identify with any of his fellow prisoners; we plausibly may take him to be an imaginary projection of Dostoevsky himself, brooding

over the revolutionary enthusiasms of his youth, which had included the incitement to shed blood in a pitiless uprising. Such a personality was quite different from a peasant criminal, who might be guilty of a savage murder but "never once . . . reflects upon the crime he has committed . . . and even considers himself to be in the right." The other type of wrongdoer is "an educated man with a conscience, with awareness, heart. The pain in his heart will be enough to do away with him, long before any punishment is inflicted upon him. Far more mercilessly, far more pitilessly than the sternest law, he condemns himself for his crime." Here is the prototype of the character Dostoevsky places at the center of the story he was offering to Katkov.

Dostoevsky's fascination with the theme of crime and the problem of conscience unquestionably arose from such first-hand impressions and reflections, mingled with his immersion in the works of such writers as Shakespeare, Schiller, Pushkin, Hugo, Balzac, and Dickens, where such issues time and again are given powerful embodiment. But his preoccupation came into especially sharp focus because of the agitated climate of Russian social-cultural thought during the 1860s. The radicals were pressing for a revolution and, firmly believing one would occur in the very near future, were at the same time engaged in reshaping the whole notion of what constituted morality. Influenced by the Utilitarian doctrines of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, which Karl Marx considered to be a middle-class apologia for capitalist selfishness, the leading Russian radical thinker N. G. Chernyshevsky proclaimed that "rational egoism" was far preferable to the old idea of conscience propagated by the Christian faith. Human nature was "egotistic," and men preferred whatever was to their own advantage; the notion of self-sacrifice was harmful nonsense; but by the use of reason men would learn that their greatest advantage consisted of identifying their personal interests with the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Such ideas, with their naive belief in the power of rational reflection to control and dominate all the explosive potentials of the human psyche, seemed the sheerest and most dangerous illusion to the post-Siberian Dostoevsky, and his major works of the early 1860s (*The Insulted and In-*

jured, House of the Dead, Winter Notes on Summer Impressions, and Notes from Underground) all attempted to reveal the limitations and perils of such a doctrine.

Indeed, if we look for some general formula to characterize Dostoevsky's works after the ordeal of his exile, they might be described as a dialectical amalgam of what he had learned during that time applied to the theories of the radical intelligentsia that he had encountered on his return. Impressions and observations of the Siberian period—including, of course, the searching analysis to which he subjected his own past—are obviously contained in all of his later works. But these are never presented simply in and for themselves (even in his *Notes from the House of the Dead,* written in the form of journalistic sketches); they are always oriented by the moral implications of the philosophical doctrines of the radical intelligentsia. The combination of, and tension between, these two elements gives Dostoevsky's work both its outstanding human depth and its intellectual and philosophical stature. He measured the possible consequences of radical ideology against those ineluctable verities of human nature whose existence had so strongly impressed itself upon him in Siberia. And he did so by imaginatively projecting the realization of such radical theories *in action,* dramatizing them with the incomparable gift for psychological portraiture that he had displayed from his very earliest work.

3

What began as just a lengthy short story dealing with "the psychological account of a crime," did not remain in that format for very long. Dostoevsky's notebooks contain a draft of this initial conception, which concentrates on the desperate anguish and intense loneliness—the sense of total alienation from humanity—that the narrator experiences after his crime. Written in the first person, the story resembles a self-exposing confession such as *Notes from Underground* much more than it does the novel we know. This version breaks off at the point where the character begins to express resentment, defiance,

and rage as well as to experience dejection and despair, and one has the impression that the character itself grew beyond the boundaries of Dostoevsky's initial idea. Once he began to see his character as *both* rebellious and inwardly suffering, it was no longer possible for Dostoevsky to keep him within the narrow confines of his original plan.

It was probably at this stage of composition that Dostoevsky decided to fuse the story with his earlier project *The Drunkards* and introduced the Marmeladov family, especially Sonia, to aid in the process of bringing about Raskolnikov's voluntary surrender. The "psychological account of a crime" thus widened to become the first of Dostoevsky's novel-tragedies of ideas, a work incorporating a broad social canvas with, at its center, a protagonist who murders under the influence of the fashionable radical ideas of the moment. But as the scope of the work continued to grow under Dostoevsky's hands, he became increasingly troubled by the technical problem posed by his first-person narrator. Such a choice had come naturally with his early inspiration; but as the story turned into a novel, this narrative stance proved increasingly difficult to sustain.

Raskolnikov's state of mind, for example, necessarily had to be represented as continually chaotic and confused by the shock of his crime; there are moments when he is scarcely aware of what he is doing, yet he is also required to function as a reliable narrator in these drafts, and they show him rather implausibly transcribing long speeches by the other characters and sharply noting their expressions and gestures. Since Dostoevsky determinedly wished to maintain his stress on the moral struggle taking place in Raskolnikov's consciousness, he tried various alternatives to solve his dilemma. One was to imagine Raskolnikov sitting down to write only after completing his prison term, and thus contemplating everything as recollected in tranquility; but finally Dostoevsky decided to shift to the third-person form. This is the event that he mentions in a letter to Baron Wrangel (February 1866), in which he confides to his friend that at the end of November, although a good deal had already been written and was ready, "a new form, a new plan swept me away, and I began again from scratch."

In opting for this new form, however, Dostoevsky still did not wish to surrender the advantages derived from viewing the world largely as projected through Raskolnikov's sensibility; and his notebooks show how carefully he thought about preserving this vantage point. "Narration from the point of view of the author," he jots down, a "sort of invisible and omniscient being, who does not leave him [the character] for a moment, even with the words: 'All that was done completely by chance.' " Dostoevsky thus cautions himself to stay as close to Raskolnikov as possible and, even when commenting on the action, to retain his focus exclusively on that character. Brilliantly original for its time, this technique enabled Dostoevsky to conserve most of the psychological intimacy of the first person while freeing himself from its limitations. It also turned him into a precursor of such writers as Henry James and Joseph Conrad in their experiments with perspective and point of view, though Conrad's bitterly anti-Russian animus probably did not allow him to acknowledge how much he had learned from Dostoevsky. (That he knew *Crime and Punishment* by heart is clear to any reader of *Under Western Eyes*.)

By this time, as well, the initial motivation that Dostoevsky, in his letter to Katkov, had given Raskolnikov for the crime had also considerably expanded in scope. Raskolnikov's desire to aid his family is no longer dominant, but has become linked with, and only part of, a much larger framework. Just two years before, Suslova had set down in her notebook a remark that Dostoevsky had made when they were together in Turin. "As we were having dinner, he said, looking at a little girl who was doing her lessons: 'Well, imagine, there you have a little girl like her with an old man, and suddenly some Napoleon says: "I want this city destroyed." It has always been that way in the world.' " Napoleon as the incarnation of absolute, ruthless, despotic power had long haunted the Russian imagination, and Dostoevsky was familiar with many literary sources, including his beloved Pushkin, where Napoleon's image is used as a symbol of a will-to-power uncontrolled by moral considerations of any kind. But this Napoleonic complex of Russian culture, as it might be called, had just recently taken a new lease on life and

become linked, not with the awesome emperor whose figure looms over so much of European Romanticism, but with the Russian *raznochinets* of the 1860s—the intellectuals of the new generation who were Dostoevsky's chief concern.

This came about as the result of an internal development within radical ideology itself. In the years just prior to the writing of *Crime and Punishment*, a new variety of this ideology began to exercise a growing influence on the Russian social-cultural scene. Essentially, it was an offshoot of the doctrine of "rational egoism" already mentioned; but it placed a stronger accent than had Chernyshevsky on individual self-fulfillment, on enjoying the satisfactions of life in the here and now rather than postponing them for some indefinite future of communal social bliss. This new branch of radicalism was linked with the name of Dimitry I. Pisarev, and Dostoevsky dramatizes the contrast between the two currents with his portraits of Raskolnikov and the bumbling but essentially well-meaning Utopian Socialist Lebeziatnikov. "Why was that fool Razumihin abusing the socialists?" Raskolnikov asks himself. "They are industrious, commercial people; 'the happiness of all' is their case. No, life is only given to me once and I shall never have it again; . . . I want to live myself, or else better not live at all."

This is only one of the ways through which Pisarev's ideas enter into Dostoevsky's creation of his central figure. Far more significant are some utterances of Pisarev in a famous essay-review of Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*, in which he defended that book—a work greatly admired by Dostoevsky—against its detractors in the radical camp to which Pisarev himself belonged. The character Bazarov, according to Pisarev, was the exemplar of the new radical hero of the time, and Pisarev glorified him in terms going far beyond Turgenev's skeptical, alternately admiring and undermining portrayal. Indeed, Pisarev elevated Bazarov, a radical Russian intellectual of lowly birth, almost to the level of a Nietzschean superman standing beyond good and evil. "Neither over him, nor outside him, nor inside him," he declared, "does [Bazarov] recognize any regulator, any moral law, any principle." In addition, "nothing except personal taste prevents him from murdering or robbing . . . [or] causes him to make

discoveries in the field of science and social existence." Bazarov is thus declared to be psychologically immune to moral scruples of any kind; and crime is placed on exactly the same footing as outstanding intellectual achievement or important transformations of social life.

Transpositions of such ideas run throughout Raskolnikov's frenzied soliloquies; and if we look anywhere for the origin of Raskolnikov's fateful article *On Crime*, then it is to Pisarev that we must again turn (though he has been generally neglected in this connection). Pisarev draws a clear distinction, as does Raskolnikov, between two types of people—the mass, who live a "customary, dreamily tranquil, vegetative existence," and a small minority of "other people" who live and work on their behalf. These "other people" are "eternally alien to [the mass], eternally regarding it with contempt, and at the same time eternally working to increase the amenities of its life." The mass, writes Pisarev, "does not make discoveries or commit crimes"; but these "other people" most emphatically do, in the name of the mass and for their benefit, and they unquestionably possess the *right* to transgress the moral law that Raskolnikov claims for his "extraordinary people."

Such views, in my opinion, became embodied in the creation of Raskolnikov as we know him in the novel. The "strange, 'unfinished' ideas" that Raskolnikov "completes" are no longer simply those of the all-pervasive Utilitarianism of the early 1860s in Russia, ideas that earlier had been combined with the type of naively utopian humanitarianism Dostoevsky mocks with the figure of Lebeziatnikov. Rather, it is Bazarov, in the monumentally proto-Nietzschean image popularized by Pisarev, who had come to represent the ultimate realization of Utilitarian heroism; and it is these consequences that Dostoevsky found himself envisaging as he feverishly worked on his scenarios. "Now Pisarev has gone further," he had confided to his notebooks in 1862; and among the drafts of a speech by the oily lawyer and capitalist Luzhin—who wished to marry Raskolnikov's sister and specifically attacks a morality of charity and compassion—appear unmistakable references to Pisarev that Dostoevsky later eliminated. It is highly significant,