

In every society, it is important for individuals to adhere to a set of principles in order to maintain order. In Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Camus' *The Outsider*, however, both protagonists ignored the values of their society. Raskolnikov and Meursault felt their own beliefs were significant, and through their actions they were able to express them. As a result, one man was judged as a social deviant, while the other man suffered psychologically. Through dealing with this strife, Raskolnikov and Meursault gained a better understanding of their values and personal worth.

In the beginning both men rejected the fundamental values of society and formed their own ideologies. Raskolnikov, for instance, believed that "we have to correct and direct nature. But for that, there would never had been a single great man"<sup>1</sup>. In fact, he had written an article titled "The psychology of a criminal before and after the crime". It stated that 'ordinary' men live according to the law and exist only to reproduce the human race, yet 'extraordinary' men may break laws "if in his own conscience it is necessary to do so in order to better mankind"<sup>2</sup>. Raskolnikov believed that indeed, he was an "extraordinary man"<sup>3</sup>, but like Meursault, his beliefs were untested. As a result, he murdered an old pawnbroker women in order to prove himself. Meursault, as well, acted against the social norm. For example, even though it was expected of a son, he did not show sorrow at his mother's funeral<sup>4</sup>. He did not think this was shallow, however, he just refused to falsely show emotion when he did not feel any; "I realized that I'd managed to get through another Sunday, that mother was now buried, that I was going back to work and that, after all, nothing had changed"<sup>5</sup>. In addition, Meursault felt that "nothing really mattered"<sup>6</sup>. He was willing to be transferred to the Paris branch of his office, but Algiers would do for him as well; he was willing to marry Marie, but he would have married anyone else just as easily; and he was willing to write Raymond's letter for the simple reason that he "had no reason not to please him"<sup>7</sup>. This honest and nonchalant way of looking at things was the basis of Meursault's essence. He, and Raskolnikov, had a general sense of who they were; based not on society's principles but their own.

After they committed their crimes, Raskolnikov and Meursault were forced to question their beliefs. Before the murder, Raskolnikov had a dream. In it, a mare was beaten to death by it's enraged master, while a boy tried to defend it<sup>8</sup>. Now after his guilt "had begun already"<sup>9</sup>, Raskolnikov questioned whether he was the man who could "step over barriers"<sup>10</sup> without being punished or if he was the boy, filled with compassion and regret.

I am contemptible and have nothing in me. If I had succeeded I should have

been

crowned with glory, but now I'm trapped. I fail to understand why bombarding people by regular siege is more honorable...I am further than ever from seeing

what I did as a crimell

Yet from this speech it is revealed that, though he now questioned the morality of his

felony, Raskolnikov could still not abandon his intellectual conviction. He was unable to

see the murders as a crime and felt that if he was guilty of anything, it was failing to

prove his theory. "And for that he was contemptible"<sup>12</sup>. In addition, Raskolnikov examined his spiritual beliefs as well. When he stopped to look at a cathedral he attended

in university he "recalled sharply these former doubts and perplexities of his, and it

seemed to him not by chance that he remembered them now"<sup>13</sup>. At this moment, he hurled away the coin just given to him "in Christ's name"<sup>14</sup>. This incident symbolized

Raskolnikov's initial rejection of God, an important moment in his spiritual struggle.

After Meursault murdered the Arab, however, he remained unchanged by immorality of his crime. He felt no regret towards his actions, in fact he "felt kind of annoyance"<sup>15</sup>.

Also, he continued to state the truth;

Then he [the magistrate] asked me if he could say that I'd controlled my natural

feelings that day. I said 'No, because it's not true'. He looked at me in a peculiar

way as if he found me slightly disgusting.<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, during his trial when the prosecutor was emphasizing the fact that Meursault

was smoking at his mother's wake, Meursault not only admitted it but stated; "I offered

him [the caretaker] a cigarette"<sup>17</sup>. Through such actions Meursault refused to "play the

game"<sup>18</sup>. If he had done what society expected (lie, plead, express emotion), he might

have been released. But he would not lie about himself, not even to save his own life.

Though his philosophies did not change, while Raskolnikov's faltered, they both were

confronted by the ethics of their crime.

In time, both Meursault and Raskolnikov realized their beliefs differed society's,

however only Raskolnikov choose to act on it. Raskolnikov had finally realized his false

conception of his place in the world. He was now able to admit to himself that he was not

like the "real master (Napoleon)"<sup>19</sup> who could massacre cities and abandon armies without a thought. Instead, he considered himself and "aesthetic louse" for carrying out a

murder not as "a grand and noble object, but for my own fleshly lusts"<sup>20</sup>. He was at the

end of his "uneasy period"<sup>21</sup> and was ready for some kind of resolution. It was with Sonia's help that he was able to achieve it. She convinced Raskolnikov that

suffering

lead to salvation and that suffering began only after confession. She then gave him

the cross of the murdered woman, Lizaveta, and stated "When you go to suffer, you will put it on. Come to me and I will put it on you. We will pray together, and then we'll go".<sup>22</sup> Yet Raskolnikov replied; "Not now, Sonia. Better later"<sup>23</sup>. Thus Raskolnikov was still not quite ready to confess and accept Sonia's cross, the symbol of suffering. Sonia also suggested that he;

Go now. Go this very moment, and stand at the crossroads; bow down and first kiss the earth which you have defiled; then bow down to the whole world, to the four points of the compass, and say aloud, for all men to hear, "I have killed".

Then God will send you life again...You must accept suffering and redeem yourself by it; that's what you must do.<sup>24</sup> Raskolnikov now had realized the inhumanity of his crime, and knew that his voluntary confession would be the first step towards his regeneration. Meursault, too, realized the alienation of his beliefs. Midway through the trial Meursault "felt something stirring up in the whole room; for the first time I was realized I was guilty"<sup>25</sup>. Not only is this true in a legistic way, but he was guilty in a much larger sense. He was guilty of not accepting the formulas by which society convinces itself it is happy. He was now beginning to see that he was not "like everyone else, exactly like everyone else"<sup>26</sup>. Yet, unlike Raskolnikov, he was not affected by this. He did not want to change. To him, his death was inconsequential. He believed whether he killed the Arab or not, "given that you've got to die, it obviously doesn't matter exactly how or when"<sup>27</sup>. Although Raskolnikov choose salvation, while Meursault refused it, both men became aware of their alienation.

In the end, Raskolnikov and Meursault gained a better understanding of themselves, and their place in society. After he had confessed, Raskolnikov stated that despite his seven years of imprisonment "he had risen again and he knew it"<sup>28</sup>. This conception was also reinforced by a dream of his. He dreamt that the world was swept by a mysterious plague that was going to destroy all but a chosen few. Those attacked by the plague considered their own ideas infallible. As a result, the world was devastated as they destroyed each other in the belief that they alone possessed the truth. Yet, "strangely, the pure chosen ones were nowhere to be found"<sup>29</sup>. From this, Raskolnikov realized the emptiness of he theory. Surely, if everyone began to act according to their own beliefs; unorder, chaos and destruction would follow. This was a turning point in his spiritual struggle. Until then, he was unable to admit the immorality of his crime; "Everything had to change now, did it not"<sup>30</sup>. At last, "life had stepped into the place of theory

and something quite different would work itself out in his mind"<sup>31</sup>. He had progressed from a period of extreme pride to humility. And from the last sentence, when Raskolnikov reached under his pillow for the bible Sonia had given to him and stated, "Can her beliefs not be mine too? Her feelings and aspiration, at least..."<sup>32</sup>, it is clear. He had accepted God into his life. Raskolnikov's spiritual struggle was over, he had abandoned his earlier beliefs and began a new life with Sonia. Moreover, though his values did not change, Meursault was finally able to express his feelings and accept his place in society. During his conversation with the priest while awaiting his execution, he began to "pour everything out at him from the bottom of my heart in a paroxysm of joy and danger"<sup>33</sup>. He expressed that he would not use religion as a vehicle to avoid facing the fact that he must die<sup>34</sup>. Also, he would not look forward to life after death; "he wanted to know how I imagined this other life. So I shouted at him, 'One which would remind me of this life'"<sup>35</sup>. It was during these final pages when Meursault became truly at one with his existence. Finally, he was completely open to life and realized that 'simply to exist is not good enough'<sup>36</sup>. He now understood how;

So close to death, mother must have felt liberated and ready to live her life again.

No one, no one at all had any right to cry over her. And I too felt ready to live my life again.<sup>37</sup>

All that mattered to him now was living, right up to the very end. In the last sentence he wished "that there should be a crowd of spectators at my execution and that they should greet me with cries of hatred"<sup>38</sup>. The crowd's voiced hatred of him would reflect his own self-loathing for a life not lived. Although through different means, both Meursault and Raskolnikov came to terms with themselves in the end.

Through self and social examination, Raskolnikov and Meursault underwent a period of self discovery. Raskolnikov abandoned his earlier theory and accepted his rebirth into Christianity, while Meursault became firm in his beliefs and, in the end, was finally able to declare them. Raskolnikov and Meursault were not afraid to cross the boundaries their societies had set for them. They were free-thinkers, and although they were seen as heretics, men like these play an important role in the growth and improvement of any society.

