

Jake's Introduction to Crime & Punishment

Published in 1866, *Crime and Punishment* is an incredibly influential novel that shaped the course of modernist literature and brought the world's attention to Russian literature. It is remarkable for a number of reasons. Thematically, it explores some of the biggest questions that lie at the heart and mind of what it means to be human. As a work of art, Dostoevsky manages to withhold his own opinions and present compelling and believable pictures of the causes and effects of crime and the role of punishment, putting the human front and centre and challenging readers to think twice before forming judgements. It influenced the development of modern criminology (and is still taught in university criminology courses) by foregrounding the importance of environmental and psychological understanding through its exploration of the dualistic nature of human beings.

Crime & Punishment poses many questions to readers:

- Does Dostoevsky want us to agree with Raskolnikov that some people have the right to commit crimes?
- To what extent should we sympathise with criminals?
- What makes people commit crimes?
- Are criminals born, or formed?
- To what extent are we shaped by our environment?
- To what extent are we shaped by destiny, and what is the role of free will?
- What is the role of punishment? Should we punish people, and if so, how and why? To make them better? or to make ourselves feel better (revenge)?
- Suffering: why is it important? Is it important? Would we be human without it?
- What role does love – both human and divine - play in shaping who we become?
- How important are dreams?
- Do 'evil' means justify honourable ends?
- Is there an objective morality? or is morality just a human construct?

Keep these questions in mind as we study. You will have a chance to explore your understanding of these questions at the end of each Part of the book, and one or more in more depth at the end of the Main Lesson.