

Suffering According to Feodor  
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According to Dostoyevsky, human beings suffer because they are not worthy. In this suffering they can feel compassion for one another, but this is not an intellectual decision. For example, in *Crime and Punishment*, Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov shows compassion to others who suffer but then he questions his motives. He often acts immediately in compassion but later he thinks about what he has done and doubts whether he really wanted to do so.

Dostoyevsky portrays Raskolnikov as unworthy for many reasons. To begin with, he thinks much more about himself and his problems than he does about others. Because of his self-centered attitude, he is not worthy of the respect, trust, and companionship of his numerous friends such as Razumihin, Zossimov, his mother Pulcheria, and his sister Dounia. His heinous murder of the old pawnbroker Alyona Ivanovna makes him even more unworthy of any respect. Because of his unworthiness, Raskolnikov suffers severely both physically and emotionally. He is constantly plagued by his conscience over the murder, and beyond that he is made physically ill. For days he is too sick to get out of bed. He is delirious, weak, and unable to think clearly.

However, Raskolnikov is not alone in *Crime and Punishment* as unworthy and

suffering for it. Also the entire Marmeladov family suffers. The whole family may be seen as unworthy because they are poor, uneducated, and without hope. Semyon Zaharovitch Marmeladov is unworthy and suffering because he has married a woman of a higher class, and does not provide for his family as he should. Instead he spends all of the family's money on drink. His wife, Katerina Ivanovna, is no less unworthy, though, for she is not of a character suitable for the class into which she was born. Likewise, Marmeladov's daughter, Sonia has had to take on the lowly profession of a harlot to support her family. Therefore, the family suffers immensely thorough poverty, abuse, and hardship.

When Raskolnikov meets Marmeladov for the first time, he immediately has compassion on him for they both have suffered. After hearing Marmeladov's story, Raskolnikov goes home with him and leaves money at the apartment for them, unnoticed on a windowsill. However, almost immediately, he thinks that he should not have left the money. Only a few steps later, "he changed his mind and would have gone back. 'What a stupid thing I've done,' he thought to himself, 'they have Sonia and I wanted it myself.'" Not long after this encounter, Raskolnikov sees a girl on the street that has obviously just suffered through a rape. He feels he

must do something for this girl, so he beckons a police officer and gives him some money to help her. Raskolnikov takes great compassion on her, but given a moment to reflect, he changes his mind completely, saying "Let them be! What is it to do with you?" "Is it for me to help? ...what is it to me? How did I dare give him twenty copecks?" This shows that he has an uncontrollable urge to show compassion for the suffering despite his better judgement.

Still the greatest sign of Raskolnikov's impulsive compassion toward the suffering is shown after he has committed murder and suffered through illness and delirium. While wandering down the street, he finds Marmeladov has been hit by a carriage and the crowd standing around does not know who he is or what to do. Raskolnikov recognizes Marmeladov at once and acts on impulse.

"I know him! I know him! It's a government clerk retired from the service, Marmeladov. He lives close by in Kozel's house...Make haste for a doctor! I will pay, see?"

He does not even think before calling the family together and holding the bleeding and dying man in his arms. Inside the Marmeladovs' home, Raskolnikov gives Katerina Ivanovna twenty rubles, nearly all the money he has. Later he considers this action and knows it was foolish. He claims to

have been delirious. He thinks he must have been to do such a doltish thing. He continually reproaches himself for being overly generous and thoughtless.

This is obviously not a new characteristic for Raskolnikov, though. Some time ago he had been in love with a girl, the daughter of his landlady, who had suffered herself. He described her as "a sickly girl", "quite an invalid", and "an ugly little thing." Now he does not know what made him drawn to such a girl, but thinks it was probably the fact that she was always ill, that is that she had suffered as well. Raskolnikov says that the love affair must have been a sort of "spring delirium." This shows that suffering had made him show compassion for the girl and not any rational thought. The girl also would fit Dostoyevsky's mold. She had a heart for the suffering, was "fond of giving alms to the poor, and was always dreaming of a nunnery." There is another girl, however, that through her suffering empathizes with Raskolnikov and shows compassion to him as he does toward her. This girl is Marmeladov's daughter, Sonia. She may have suffered more than anyone else in the novel. She has lost her real mother, and now her father. She is only eighteen and has been forced out of her family's home so that she might become a prostitute and provide for them. Raskolnikov feels a great burden for this girl and wishes to do anything to

help her. She also has compassion, the compassion of a young woman, for Raskolnikov. She tries to return his kindness by inviting him to the funeral dinner for Marmeladov and by hosting him in her home. With a troubled heart, she thinks, "Oh, he must be terribly unhappy!" After reading to him from the gospel she hopes that he will find salvation. Raskolnikov also sees Sonia as his salvation. He hopes that through their shared suffering, they can redeem themselves.

The theme of suffering and compassion are undoubtedly very strong in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. It is the basis for the novel and for Dostoyevsky's philosophy. Raskolnikov suffered because he was not worthy, and because of his suffering, he felt compassion for others. Yet Raskolnikov did not wish to be so compassionate. He did not think about his actions. His suffering took over and caused him to act with commiseration and pity. Later he regretted his actions, as when he gave Katerina Ivanovna all of his money, but he could not take back what he had done. Thus through his suffering he helped to relieve the suffering of another.