



On the pursuit of meaning: A Comparative Analysis Between “Raskolnikov” and “Meursault” On the Grounds of Existentialism

Mahdi Hajinia¹

1-Allameh Tabatabaei University

Abstract

Camus’ *The Stranger* and Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* are indeed among the most precious literary works of the world. These two novels are so rich in philosophical and psychological ideologies that researchers would be able to review them from many different perspectives—one of which is existentialism. This article intends to review the notion of existentialism in these two novels and shed some light on incidents that could be seen through the same glasses. One of the questions fundamental to existentialism concerns the purpose of life and its meaning, and this paper attempts to find a connection between the protagonists of these novels and the question. It also intends to find ideological similarities and differences between these two novels, especially regarding existentialism, with reference to incidents in the books through a robust thematic analysis procedure. Although it is natural to notice many differences between these two novels, one still might be able to find some ideological similarities in the books and put them under scrutiny.

Keywords: comparative literature, Albert Camus, Dostoevsky, Russian literature, French literature



Introduction

This research mainly focuses on finding similarities between *Crime and Punishment* and *The Stranger*, and meticulously analyses the discourse of existentialism in these two novels. In this research, we would endeavour to answer to questions related to existential dilemmas and how these two novels could be related to each other through the point of view of existentialism. As two of the most prolific and influential writers whose works are of value to philosophers as well as laymen, Camus and Dostoevsky have agreed upon certain ideologies regarding existentialism, which would be the main focus of this research.

Both these novels provide researchers with room for reviews from many different points of view. To cite an example, regarding Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Uwasomba asserts that "Crime and Punishment is a mixture of the psychological novel, the novel of detection, the novel of character, the philosophical novel, etc." [24]. That is why in this study I have tried to run a thematic analysis in which I would compare these two novels only through the spectrum of existentialism. Although there is a large pool of research conducted reviewing these fascinating novels through many different points of view, in this current study, I would only take existentialism as the main theme, and after explaining what existentialism means and how I would perceive it in this study, I would offer the results of the thematic analysis run by the researcher.

Background of the Study

As two of the greatest literary works of Camus and Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Stranger* have always been in the limelight of philosophical discussions. Many writers and researchers have highlighted the philosophical ideologies of these two novels and made efforts to review them based on different theories and schools of thought. Because these two novels have some similarities, and because there has been no systematic review conducted in this regard, this paper aims at making a comparison between the main characters of these two novels and attempts to find incidents in correspondence with each other mainly from an existentialist point of view.

An Introduction to Existentialism

In this chapter, some key principles of existentialism would be discussed. After giving a brief introduction to existentialism, characters and novels would be analysed regarding existentialism. According to Wikipedia, there are 7 key concepts regarding existentialism that can bring many of its core principles to the light: "Existence precedes essence", The absurd, Facticity, Authenticity, The Other and the Look, Angst and dread, Despair.

Sartre's slogan – "existence precedes essence" – may serve very well to touch upon a notion which is fundamental to existentialism, that is to say, unlike inanimate objects, humans' "essence" or "purpose" is not predetermined and one can find meaning in life unique to his or her situation. "Man, first of all, exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards", Sartre says in his lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*. This means that men first live their lives and afterwards, embark on their search for meaning. As mentioned by Gary Cox in his book "*the Sartre Dictionary*", Sartre believes in free will and explores the phenomenon of choice central to existential freedom [7], Cox also mentions how Sartre



supports his notion of existential freedom by arguing that any course of action chosen and embarked upon can be abandoned at any time for an alternative course of action [7].

For Sartre, life is absurd in the sense that it has no meaning in itself except the meaning each person chooses to give his existence. This absurdity is in contrast with the claim that “bad things do not happen to good people” and leads to the notion of “what happens happens”. This means that there is no force to prevent this, and anything can happen to anyone at any time. Many of the literary works of Camus and Dostoevsky contain descriptions of people facing this side effect of absurdity.

Based on the Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy, the notion of facticity includes all those properties that third-person investigation can establish about an individual: natural properties such as weight, height, and skin colour; social facts such as race, class, and nationality; psychological properties such as their web of belief, desires, and character traits; historical facts such as their past actions, their family background, and their broader historical milieu; and so on [8]. This concept refers to faculties containing “me” from a third-person viewpoint and all qualities which make “me”. Facticity is concerning the concept of transcendence, but unfortunately, further explanation of this concept is beyond the scope of this paper.

The next key principle of existentialism is authenticity which many consider an important factor of it. Authenticity means “to be oneself” regardless of what others may expect or what essence requires. Being an authentic self requires freedom in the sense that one can take decisions in line with his or her meaning of life. This concept can be well explained by considering “moral evaluations”. As the Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy notes:

In keeping my promise, I act in accord with duty; and if I keep it because it is my duty, I also act morally (according to Kant) because I am acting for the sake of duty. But existentially there is still a further evaluation to be made. My moral act is inauthentic if, in keeping my promise for the sake of duty, I do so because that is what “one” does (what “moral people” do). But I can do the same thing authentically if, in keeping my promise for the sake of duty, acting this way is something I choose as my own, something to which, apart from its social sanction, I commit myself. [8]

Yale professor Noreen Khawaja, meanwhile, in her work *The Religion of Existence* confirms that “the idea of personal authenticity [is] at the centre of existential thought.”

In *Being and Nothingness* 1943 Sartre examines the look, the significance of being looked at and seen by another person (the Other). Sartre argues that when a person is looked at by the Other, he ceases to be a free transcendence of the world and becomes instead an object in the world of the other. This is in direct relationship with the concept of being-for-others which was proposed by Sartre.

Responsibility and freedom lead to a concept referred to as “angst” which is generally held to be a negative feeling. There is a misconception here that many people believe existentialism is interwoven with the notion of angst and is prototyped in an angsty smoker sitting in a Parisian café drinking coffee and reading books. Although this picture might be indicating many of the background factors of existentialism and may be true in some ways, it could not be always the case, and existentialism deals with more profound philosophical conflicts of humankind rather than a stereotyped angsty philosopher smoking and drinking in a café—which is the crude popular culture realization of existentialism. As a concept fundamental to existentialism, freedom makes us responsible for our deeds. Sartre explains that from the moment when a man



makes a choice, he is committed, and should not place the responsibility for his or her actions onto the shoulders of someone else. As contemporary philosopher Jonathan Webber argues in his 2018 work, *Rethinking Existentialism*, “As originally defined by Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialism is the ethical theory that we ought to treat the freedom at the core of human existence as intrinsically valuable and the foundation of all other values.”

And finally, the concept of despair is defined as a loss of hope. What makes existential despair different from its conventional meaning is that people who lose their perceived meaning of life would despair in reaction to that breakdown of their self or identity.

Existentialism and Literature

Existentialism, as the philosophy of existence itself, has enjoyed a great deal of popularity throughout the last century among many authors and novelists. Between the boundaries of philosophy and literature, existentialism occupies a liminal position [23], and having reached its peak in the mid-20th century in France, it is based on the view that humans define their meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe.

Existentialism had a huge influence on mid-20th century literature. The threat of nuclear bombing, destruction of humanity, the annihilation of civilizations, and loss of beloved ones had caused many to suffer from existential crises and despair. Finding no better way than literature to express oneself, 20th-century authors found solace in existentialism as a philosophy for dismal times. Existentialism freely stated that the responsibility for one’s actions lies on one’s shoulders. It asserted that through self-determination, without any support from conventional doctrines, people can overcome their problems. It is believed by many scholars and philosophers that Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the key figures of the philosophy of existentialism (The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy). Thus, we can consider Sartre’s works as a peak in the history of the philosophy of existentialism.

Martin Heidegger, Simone de Beauvoir, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, and Paul Tillich were among the most prominent existentialist thinkers of the 20th century. It is noteworthy to mention that although the term was repudiated by some of these writers (e.g., Albert Camus), their works are replete with scenes of existentialism and its core concepts.

Fedor Dostoevsky

Fyodor Dostoevsky is unanimously considered by critics, readers and philosophers to have been Russia’s greatest modern writer [16]. His works have had considerable influence on many writers, and his idea and philosophy have been significantly outstanding. He is the writer of *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, and many other priceless literary works.

In his most famous book “*Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*”, Waulter Kauffman devoted a whole chapter to Dostoevsky’s ideas. Although Kauffman does not explicitly call Dostoevsky an existentialist, he highlights the first chapter of *Notes from Underground* as the best overture of existentialism [13, p.14]. He also puts forward the idea of considering some of Dostoevsky’s works as the dawn of existentialism as he states:

Dostoevsky, once wrote ‘if God did not exist, everything would be permitted, and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. [13, p. 294]

Albert Camus



Albert Camus was a French-Algerian journalist and novelist whose literary work is regarded as a primary source of modern existentialist thought [6]. Due to all his contributions to the existentialism school of thought, Albert Camus has explicitly rejected the label and in an interview in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 15 November, 1945, he asserted: “I am not an existentialist”. There might be many possible reasons for this rejection, not least of which is the fact that existentialism tried to provide “pseudo-solutions” to the meaninglessness of the universe which was in direct contradiction with Camus’ notion of absurdism. Camus rejected all attempts toward settling absurdity, and in one of his most famous books, *the Myth of Sisyphus*, he drew a line between existentialist and absurdist writers and he regarded the latter more highly than the former [6].

Nonetheless, no one can deny the fact that Albert Camus concentrated a considerable deal of his works on existential questions and those which might be considered fundamental to existentialism philosophy. Having no clear cut-point between absurdism and existentialism could be considered a mitigating factor, and helps us dismantle the myth of how to deal with Camus’ rejection of the label while many of his ideas are in line with existentialism. It must be noted that however, this paper reviews Camus’ works on the theoretical grounds of existentialism, it does not claim to label him as a pure existentialist. Regardless of labelling Camus as an existentialist or an absurdist, he undoubtedly agreed with some elements of existentialism and there has been a mutual respect between him and Sartre [11, p. 109]

Methodology

The data sources utilized in this study encompass both primary and secondary types. The data is derived from a diverse range of books, journals, and articles. The study primarily employs an analytical method to draw comparisons between the two novels under consideration. Following the elucidation of key principles of existentialism, the research delves into an examination of both novels based on these concepts, thereby identifying similarities and differences that can be evaluated within the framework of existentialism [20].

In order to conduct this research, a thematic analysis was executed by the researcher. At the inception of the study, codes and segments from each novel that alluded to the “meaning” and fundamental tenets of existentialism were identified. Subsequently, these codes were compared and categorized into six distinct categories, which will be elaborated upon later in this study. After presenting the core ideas and considerations of existentialism, the readers will be introduced to the derived code categories, each of which will be followed by an in-depth discussion.

It is important to note that this research includes only those codes that are fundamental to existentialism and are present in both novels. Themes that were exclusive to either of the novels have been excluded from this study.

Results and Discussion

“The Stranger” and “Crime and Punishment”

Both novels shared the story of a murder and its consequences, and explorations of the inner thoughts and motives of the protagonists. Although Camus’ *the stranger* was written nearly a century after Dostoevsky’s *crime and punishment*, both novels could be brought under scrutiny and be analysed based on many shared elements. The stranger and crime and punishment are both murder novels that explore the inner thoughts of two young murderers, Meursault and Raskolnikov respectively, and portray a world full of conflicts and quarrels. Both novels end



with a jury trial for the murders committed by the main characters, and though the crimes were similar, the results were different. During their trials both men's pasts were brought up, however, in one story it helped the murderer and in the other case hurt him. It must be added that we might be able to consider these different endings as reflections of authors' different attitudes towards their countries' judicial systems.

These two books have their differences, but this comparative analysis aims to emphasize scenes and elements which could be reminiscent of their counterparts in the other story. To start with, it would be noteworthy to give a brief introduction to Meursault and Raskolnikov and try to explain how they viewed the world. It must be noted that this paper takes an exploratory approach to this comparative analysis and tries to shed light on some of both characters, similarities and differences from various points of view, especially existentialism and their struggles to find meaning.

Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov

As an impoverished former student of law whose theory of "his responsibility to commit evil to achieve good" has led him to murder, Raskolnikov accepted the role of being the protagonist of Dostoevsky's seminal work, *Crime and Punishment*. At the beginning of the story, through contradictory theories, including utilitarian morality and the belief that extraordinary people have the "right to transgress", Raskolnikov decides to kill an old pawn broker Alyona Ivanovna. In the meanwhile, Alyona's miserable half-sister, Lizaveta, arrives and finds Raskolnikov rifling through her sister's possessions, and Raskolnikov eventually commits his second murder. Raskolnikov, in the meantime, befriends an alcoholic man, Marmeladov, whose daughter Sonya has been forced into prostitution to support her family. Marmeladov's wife is suffering from consumption, and his children are living in a state of misery. Razumihin, Raskolnikov's old friend, also enters the story and is worried about his friend's aberrant behaviour. Raskolnikov's family—his mother and sister—who are living in another town come to St Petersburg in the middle of the story by the invitation of Mr Luzhin, who has proposed to Raskolnikov's sister, Dounia. After reading a letter sent by his mother, Raskolnikov reckons that his sister wants to get married to Luzhin to improve their financial and social position, and thus, he starts to oppose them and tries not to let this marriage take place.

The following summary is taken from Britannica encyclopaedia, and is needed for the sake of drawing an appropriate comparison later:

"The narrative follows the twists and turns of Raskolnikov's emotions and elaborates on his struggle with his conscience and the tightening noose of suspicion. He is ill through most of the story, and he angrily rejects his family's and Razumikhin's attempts to help him. When Marmeladov is run over by a carriage and dies, Raskolnikov gives Sonya and the family money for his funeral. He forbids Dunya to marry the pompous Luzhin, who offends Dunya to the point that she breaks off the engagement. Raskolnikov repeatedly visits Sonya, but he behaves in such an unhinged manner that she is frightened. When it seems that Porfiry, who is investigating the murder, is on the point of charging Raskolnikov, another man confesses. At a memorial dinner for Marmeladov, Luzhin falsely accuses Sonya of stealing from him, and Raskolnikov explains why he would do such a thing. Later he tells Sonya that he murdered the two women. Svidrigailov overhears the confession and subsequently uses that knowledge to try to blackmail Dunya into accepting him, but, when it becomes clear that she will never love him, he kills himself.



At last, Raskolnikov turns himself in. He is sentenced to eight years of hard labour in Siberia. Sonya follows him to Siberia and visits him at every opportunity. Dunya marries Razumikhin. Raskolnikov does not repent for the murders and continues to emotionally shut out Sonya and the other prisoners. However, after an illness, he, at last, comes to the realization that happiness cannot be achieved by a reasoned plan of existence but must be earned by suffering. He then is able to accept and return Sonya's love." [3]

From this discussion, we have seen almost a whole picture of Raskolnikov throughout the story. The character of Raskolnikov was so much loved by Dostoevsky that most of the story is narrated with him being present. His conflicts have been Dostoevsky's inner thoughts in a time, and he has seldom left Raskolnikov except when, in some short scenes, the plot demanded attention somewhere else [18]. In the next section, the writer would observe Raskolnikov's character using Sartrean existentialism since some of his views could be noticed in Raskolnikov's characteristics.

Raskolnikov and Existentialism

There is an intimate relationship between the concept of freedom and existentialism. Sartre firmly states that existentialism is a humanism, and posits freedom as the only essence of a human being. In crime and punishment, Raskolnikov murders out of sheer freedom, and chooses to be a murderer following his definition of "meaning". According to existentialism, an act should be intentional, otherwise, could not be considered an act. Raskolnikov determinedly planned the murder and chose to kill the old Alyona Ivanovna [15]. This issue is in direct relationship with existentialists' notion of freedom in the sense that they believe human beings are free to make choices and they give meaning to their lives based on their choices.

In line with the above discussion is a concern for the motives of actions. The action takes place if preceded by a motive, and it is nearly impossible to see it otherwise. In the essay "the five motives of Raskolnikov", Gennaro Santangelo reveals some of the possible motives behind the murder [21]. However, in the novel it is not clearly stated why Raskolnikov has killed Ivanovna, one could infer some of those possible motives based on Raskolnikov's confession to Sonia.

Raskolnikov says he killed the old lady because he was poor and needed money [21, p. 1]. This motive, as Santangelo states, could be the social justification from poverty. The second motive behind this murder could be observed through glasses of utilitarianism when Raskolnikov argues that he murdered for the reason that he wanted to benefit society. These first two motives are on the level of consciousness. The third motive that Santangelo puts forward is a psychological one. "And do you realize, Sonia, that low ceilings and small poky little rooms warp mind and soul.", Raskolnikov confesses to Sonia. This motive could be regarded as a subconscious compulsion for the murder. "Later he claims as to the fourth motive that he had a right to step over the bounds of ordinary human laws, that his will was above good and evil, as well as law and order", states Santangelo. He believes that this problem is a moral one and a question of the autonomous will and expanded ego. He further quotes Raskolnikov's saying, "Was it the old hag I killed? No, I killed myself, and not the old hag. I did away with myself at one blow and for good. It was the devil who killed the old hag, not I." and puts forward the idea that Raskolnikov killed because he could not place himself in the mystic structure of man's internal relationships and some entity outside self- hence his personality was split [21, p. 2]



These two latter motives besides the second one could be considered as motives rooted in deep existential questions. Motive 2 claims that he has murdered for a better good, and depicts Raskolnikov's urge for searching for meaning in that killing. Motive 4 is emphasising humans' freedom which is regarded as an indispensable trait of humankind by existentialists. To find a relationship between his internal self and some entity outside the self, as in his 5th motive, is a fundamental existential question.

These motives are only based on Santangelo's review and one may claim that there are many untouched motives behind the crime. This leaves room for further review and hopefully would be demystified soon by other researchers.

Besides Raskolnikov's case of murder—which after all was the most noticeable scene in the novel—and its consequences, there are many other characteristics of him reminiscent of existentialism. His gloomy and suspicious personality [9, p. 273] and his alienation from society could be seen in many literary works of existentialists. Raskolnikov, at the end of the story, shouldered the responsibility of his crime and tried to put an end to his suffering. He also found solace in loving Sonia Ivanovna, and one may argue that this was his perceived “meaning” [9, p. 683] as was Svidrigailov's meaning to love Dounia, and after he was disappointed, he put an end to his life [9, p. 617]

Raskolnikov was looking for a meaning in life more than mere existence as the novel says: “Mere existence had always been too little for him; he had always wanted more [9, p. 676]. He lost his purpose of existence in the greed of attaining more than his capabilities [22, p. 24]. When one loses his purpose of existence, as existentialists believe, he would get into a state of despair and hopelessness.

It is through Raskolnikov that Dostoevsky portrays humans' journey for finding their freedom and the purpose of their existence. Heryana, in an influential thesis, scrutinizes Raskolnikov's actions on the grounds of existentialism and asserts, “Finding his life to be meaningless, Raskolnikov wants to show his existence by murdering the old woman pawnbroker” [12, p. 67].

A note for further research is that researchers can review Raskolnikov's existential dilemma through the glasses of Chaos Theory and the butterfly effect [1]. His actions after the murder were in a domino effect and it is in line with chaos theory and its core concept, the butterfly effect.

Meursault

Meursault, the narrator of the stranger, is a young man living in Algiers. At the very beginning of the story, he receives a telegram informing him of his mother's death. He takes a bus to where his mother has died and spends an entire night by her body. However, his actions and thoughts do not comply with tradition and are indicators of his absurdist belief. He starts his narration by stating “Maman died today” [5, p. 1], with no more explanations. This is an indication of his absurdist philosophy and not caring about the world that much. When once Raymond, one of his friends, asks him to vouch for him in a trial, he accepts with no further investigation as if the morality of the act is of his least concern [5, p. 32].

Going to a public beach for a swim, Meursault runs into Marie Cardona a former co-worker of his who asks Meursault to marry her during the story. He explains this scene as,

“That evening Marie came by to see me and asked me if I wanted to marry her. I said it didn't make any difference to me and that we could if she wanted to. Then she wanted to know



if I loved her. I answered the same way I had the last time, that it didn't mean anything but that I probably didn't love her" [5, p. 41].

What separates the two parts of the story is the murder scene where Mersault kills an Arab and explains that he has not killed him out of revenge, but he says, merely because of the disorienting heat and vexing brightness of the sun, which blinds him as it reflects off the brother's knife [5, p. 59]. The second part of the story begins with Meursault's pretrial questioning of his callousness at his mother's funeral and the murder of the Arab. His lack of remorse and sadness, as well as his absurdist viewpoint of the world, does exacerbate his position and earns him the nickname of "monsieur antichrist" [5, p. 71].

Mersault and Existentialism

Mersault was living his individuality in an authentic way. Throughout the story, he was himself without being affected by others' wills and opinions. An example of this is when he asked for a crowd to be present and speculate about his death [5, p. 123]. As mentioned above, authenticity is a key concept of existentialism and is believed by many to be one of the most significant aspects of it. Although Meursault's actions and thoughts could be well explained through absurdism, it would not be absurd to see them through glasses of existentialism as far as they do not contradict reality. As Foley states most of Camus' criticisms were against Sartrean Existentialism, not all main concepts of it [11, p. 3].

In a review written by Bora, he states that "The first sentence of the novel—' Mother died today or yesterday maybe, I don't know—is enough to consider the novel as an existentialist text. The unattached response to the death of his mother shows Meursault's existentialism; he accepts life or death without looking for a deeper significance" [2]. Throughout the story, Meursault's detachment from the world is observed. He believes in no purpose for life, and from that statement, we can draw the logical conclusion of there must have been some search for meaning beforehand. From his mother's funeral to his execution, Meursault did not bother to attune his beliefs to what is believed by society as correct, nor was he concerned about his fate. He even did not seem to be perturbed about his execution.

Honesty is a trait promoted by many existentialists and is believed to be a central concept regarding the existential notion of freedom. One might simply agree with the idea that freedom and honesty are intertwined, and honesty might be deeply rooted in one's notion of freedom. It could be further argued that honesty is in direct relationship with authenticity, another key factor of existentialism. In Camus' novel, Meursault was a paragon of honesty, and instead of putting on an act, he chose to promote his authenticity. He chose to be himself, and his mere "existence" was of more importance to him than his fate which could be mitigated if he hid his honest and genuine feelings. [5, p. 116]

Existentialism believes that existence precedes essence and clearly defines existence as the first and the most important faculty of a human being. When existence is manifested in our being, one would claim that this is the time for the search to begin. It is obvious that finding no meaning in life is naturally a probable result of that search, and however one may not find an acceptable meaning, it does not deny the search itself. Thus, we might be able to assert that the belief in meaninglessness may have roots in existentialism, but an absurdist one. Meursault was concerned about the meaning of life though he did not find one.

Meursault acted freely, especially in choosing his way of life and his attitudes towards existence. As Viktor E. Frankl in his book "*Man's search for meaning*" writes, "Everything



can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s way.” [10]

He also puts forward the idea of suffering or love could be considered as a meaning of life [10, p. 116] and it is not unlikely to claim that Meursault chose to suffer even though he knew there is no meaning. As Milan Kundera proposes the idea of “vertigo” in his novel, some people are afraid of falling, and this fear of falling would go on further to make them desirous about falling eventually [14, p. 57].

Thematic Analysis and Data Analysis

It is an inherent challenge to find two novels that are perfectly analogous in all aspects. Therefore, in comparative analysis, researchers often illuminate those facets that echo their counterparts. Despite the fundamental differences between “The Stranger” and “Crime and Punishment”, one can discern theoretical similarities between their main characters. Additionally, parallels can be drawn in terms of how the authors have crafted these characters and unveiled their personalities (5; 9).

This section primarily focuses on the similarities and differences pertaining to “Meursault” and “Raskolnikov”, and attempts to cite analogous incidents and examples from both novels. Six distinct code categories were derived during the thematic analysis procedure, which will be discussed in detail. These categories include Jury Trial, Momentary Derangement, Heat and Sounds, Psychological Detachment from Society, Their Punishments, and Remorse.

Jury Trial

At the end of both stories, we are invited to watch a jury trial which could be a portrayal of the authors’ respective attitudes toward their countries’ judicial systems. To analyse both jury trials perfectly is a difficult and labour-intensive work which requires further research.

During jury trials, both characters’ pasts had been brought up. In Meursault’s case, it did no more than exacerbate his situation and worsened his position. The jury used his lack of remorse and sorrow against him, and it was a jury for his profound existential elements rather than his mere crime. Raskolnikov, on the other hand, underwent the same procedure with the difference that his past helped him and mitigated his sentence. An interesting point regarding these jury trials is that from an existentialist point of view, we are responsible for our deeds, and from the very moment that we take a decision, we must shoulder the responsibility for its consequences.

The evidence brought to the court however similar in nature, resulted in different sentences. This could be reminding us of “subjectivity”, and would explain how existentialists observe morality. Subjectivity is an inseparable part of our lives, and since we are free to make choices shaping our meaning, the issue of subjectivity would manifest itself.

They both had friends who were present at their trials. Again, Raskolnikov’s friends helped his case, while Meursault’s friends could not be of any help. For existentialists, who are often socially detached and tend to define their meaning of life, the presence of friends and soulmates is essential. All in all, friends are the family that we choose. Friends, unlike family, can be a manifestation of freedom, and help us pursue our paths.

Momentary Derangement

The concept of momentary derangement, as introduced by Dostoevsky in "Crime and Punishment", refers to a transient state of madness from which one recovers to their normality⁵.



This phenomenon underscores the significance of a single moment and the decisions that can be made within that fleeting instant. From a psychological and social perspective, many criminals who have committed major crimes admit that at the very moment of the crime, they were not themselves and could not control their behavior³. This is somewhat analogous to the cases of Meursault and Raskolnikov, who were unable to resist their urge to act. However, it is crucial to note that these characters refuted the idea of momentary derangement and did not accept it.

In "The Stranger", Meursault's lawyers attempted to link his mother's death with a state of momentary derangement, a connection he could not accept. Similarly, Raskolnikov, in "Crime and Punishment", did not embrace momentary derangement, otherwise, he would not feel remorse for his action. One possible explanation for their non-acceptance of momentary derangement could be rooted in existentialism, which emphasizes freedom and the ability to make decisions as fundamental to our existence¹³¹⁴. In other words, we exist, so we can make decisions, and we must be responsible for their consequences. Meursault and Raskolnikov were not eager to undermine the core concept of their existence by accepting the idea of choosing while they have not been themselves.

Heat and Sounds

Both writers have used natural descriptions to shed light on their protagonists' inner conflicts and investigate some profound aspects of their characteristics. It is obvious that Dostoevsky and Camus are among the greatest novelists and their styles are utterly expressive. They both make references to some natural phenomena, for example, heat and sounds, to demonstrate the exact scene and intensify its impact. Looking for a connection between these elements and existentialism, I should not hesitate to confirm that these details are undeniably important in the development of both novels. Meursault, during his certain course of action, explicitly refers to "heat" and "blaze" and implies that these elements have been significantly decisive. Raskolnikov, on the other hand, is influenced by these natural elements and Dostoevsky exploits these descriptions artfully.

Existentialism, as the philosophy of searching for meaning, pays respect to these so-called details, and for many existentialists, they have been of great importance. Existentialists tend to relax and contemplate the universe, observe natural phenomena mindfully, and attempt to find the true meaning of life. Occasionally these elements would act as prompts that consequently would lead to significant actions. This is also in line with Chaos theory which asserts that even the tiniest change in a system could result in significant consequences. As well as Camus, Dostoevsky specifies the heat and the odour coming from places the protagonist encounters crimes. Let it be the dirty streets of Russia where a teenage drunk girl is followed by a middle-aged man or be the house of Sonia, Raskolnikov's love interest and a daughter who has been forced into prostitution by her drunkard father to support the family. [22, p. 23]

Psychological Detachment from the Society

One of the most prominent myths about existentialism is its association with social detachment and dejection. Going back and forth in time we would be able to notice existentialists who detached themselves from the society and embraced seclusion. Raskolnikov was not interested in the status quo of Russian society and secluded himself from society. He even did not seem to acknowledge the few social ties he had with his friends and was escaping



from them. Likewise, Mersault did not pay respect to norms of the society on many occasions, especially at his mother's funeral, and did not attempt to follow those conventions. They both were not interested in society and to borrow from Tahsin's words, they hold society accountable for their sufferings and nefarious attitude toward the innocent [22, p. 5]

From another point of view, Raskolnikov made further attempts to change society. As Nisha [16] concludes, "Raskolnikov, by murdering the lady, wants to remove the harmful segment from the society". Mersault, as a figure of absurdism, did not care about society and how it might feel towards him. He had a detached character without troubling himself with anything [5, p. 102].

Their Punishments

One of the boldest scenes in both novels is their jury trials, and the characters' sentences accordingly. Unlike Mersault, Raskolnikov was given a chance to live and hopefully contribute to society. It is much more likely to view these characters' punishments as authors' respective attitudes towards the present judicial systems of their countries. During their trials, both characters' friends are brought up to cast light on their true personalities. As mentioned before, unlike Mersault, in Raskolnikov's case his friends' testimonies helped him. Mersault and Raskolnikov confessed to the crime and denied no allegations. But again, about Raskolnikov, his confession helped him and mitigated his situation. Mersault confessed to his crime but it did not help him and exacerbated his situation.

According to existentialism, we are all alone in this world, and we alone are responsible for our deeds. Existentialism believes in humans' freedom and individuality and emphasises our responsibility towards our actions. They even go further and put forward the idea of "God has left us", and since we are alone here, we must figure out the meaning of our lives. To draw a comparison between this notion and protagonists' punishments, it must be asserted that no friends and evidence can change our destiny as long as we have chosen another different one. It is us in charge of our destiny, and we alone are responsible for our actions. Thus, no one else could be of help despite our will.

Remorse

One of the major differences between these two characters can be investigated under the title of remorse, that is by definition, deep regret or guilt for a wrong committed (Oxford dictionary). Although Raskolnikov did not accept the wrongness of his action, he was not happy about it and regretted it. Due to authors' style of presenting their stories, it is not an easy task to determine whether one's act is moral or immoral. In *The Stranger*, we are presented with situations containing a clear distinction between right and wrong. In *Crime and Punishment*, the lines between right and wrong are in flux and questionable. If we attempt to compare how morals are presented in the books, we would immediately find many examples which would support our claim. *The Stranger* has Raymond, clearly immoral, and Marie, clearly moral. In *Crime and Punishment*, the characters balance right and wrong. Sonya turns to sinful prostitution, but she has to help her family. She and the other characters are simultaneously moral and immoral. Raskolnikov was convinced that his action is for the greater good and did not consider it immoral. Mersault, as an absurdist, did not care about the morality of his actions and did whatever was his will.



The distinction between good and evil, and the morality of our deeds, is central to both these novels. This could be also considered one of the fundamental questions of existentialism about the nature of morality.

References

- [1] Boeing, Geoff. "Visual Analysis of Nonlinear Dynamical Systems: Chaos, Fractals, Self-Similarity and the Limits of Prediction." *Systems*, vol. 4, no. 4, MDPI AG, Dec. 2016, doi:10.3390/SYSTEMS4040037.
- [2] Bora, Manab Jyoti. "Reflection of Existentialism in Albert Camus's 'The Outsider.'" *International Journal of Management and Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2020, pp. 1–3, doi:10.35940/ijmh.b1139.105220.
- [3] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Rodion Raskolnikov". *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 17 Feb. 2011, www.britannica.com/topic/Rodion-Raskolnikov. Accessed 9 June 2022.
- [4] Camus, Albert. "The Myth of Sisyphus. 1942." Trans. Justin O'Brien, 1955.
- [5] Camus, Albert. "The Stranger. 1946". Trans. from the French by Matthew Ward, 1989.
- [6] Cline, Austin. "Albert Camus: Existentialism and Absurdism." *Learn Religions*, Sep. 10, 2021, learnreligions.com/albert-camus-biography-249944.
- [7] Cox, G. *The Sartre Dictionary*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2008, books.google.com/books?id=hqDUAwAAQBAJ.
- [8] Crowell, Steven. "Existentialism", *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/existentialism/.
- [9] Dostoevsky, Feodor. "Crime and Punishment. 1866", Trans. By Constance Garnett, 1996, Prepared and Published by EBD, www.e-booksdirectory.com/.
- [10] Frank, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Rider, 2004.
- [11] Foley, John. "Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt." *Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010, doi:10.1093/fs/knp237.
- [12] Heryana, David. REVISITING EXISTENTIALISM IN DOSTOYEVSKY'S CRIME AND PUNISHMENT THROUGH THE STUDY OF RASKOLNIKOV'S PERSONALITY CHANGES. 2007, repository.usd.ac.id/26094/2/024214036_Full%5B1%5D.pdf.
- [13] Kaufmann, Walter. *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. Kaufmann, Walter Arnold, Ed: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive. New York, Meridian Books, 1956, archive.org/details/existentialismfr00kauf.
- [14] Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics; Deluxe edition, 2009.
- [15] Labyrinth. DRAGAN KUNDŽIĆ (Gainesville) " Nothing, Nothing, Nothing ": Dostoevsky and Existentialism. no. 1, 2021, pp. 20–38, axiapublishers.com/ojs/index.php/labyrinth/article/download/253/156.
- [16] Nisha, Asst Prof, and Prof Pratibha Tyagi. *Existential Dilemma in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment*. no. 2, 2020, pp. 1042–46, www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR2002360.pdf.
- [17] Reynolds, Jack and Pierre-Jean Renaudie. "Jean-Paul Sartre", *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/sartre/.
- [18] Roberts, James L. *CliffsNotes on Crime and Punishment*. 28 Jun 2022, www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/c/crime-and-punishment/book-summary.



- [19] Rodion Raskolnikov | Fictional Character | Britannica.
www.britannica.com/topic/Rodion-Raskolnikov. Accessed 9 June 2022.
- [20] Sartre, J. P. *Being and Nothingness*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.
- [21] Santangelo, Gennaro, et al. "Him~elf." *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Ed. Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker. Vol. 167. Detroit: Gale, 2006. P710-719. From Literature Resource Center., 1974,
dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/59741/dalrev_vol154_iss4_pp710_719.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- [22] Tahsin, Anika. *A Reflection on Russia's Existential Nihilism from Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment and Notes from the Underground*. no. April 2019,
dspace.bracu.ac.bd/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10361/12324/15103043_ENH.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- [23] Tanzer, M. *On existentialism*. Belmont: Thomson Wordsworth, 2008.
- [24] Uwasomba, Chijioke. "A Socio-Psychological Exploration of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*." *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 560–578.