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21L.472 Major European Novels
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Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*.

1. Like Vautrin, in *Père Goriot*, Raskolnikov is a "transgressor in principle". Compare him in this respect with Vautrin and also with that aspect of Julien Sorel's character in *The Red and the Black* which leads Julien to blame Prince Altamira for not committing a series of murders that would have undeniably benefitted the mass of humanity. How contemporary is the idea of "transgressing in principle"? Is it a possibility that confronts political leaders today in their efforts to "make war on terrorism"? Has it anything to do with the motives of terrorism itself?
2. And yet, unlike Prince Altamira or a modern political leader, Raskolnikov is not in a position to confer benefits on the mass of humanity. He is only a penniless student. Why, then, does he commit his crime? He gives three accounts of his motive in one of his interviews with Sonya late in the book. What are his three explanations of his motives? Are they in harmony with each other? If not, are any valid?
3. In that interview, Raskolnikov identifies himself with Sonya-or, rather, he identifies her with himself. "It makes no difference whether you sacrifice yourself or another," he says; "the act is still wanton and criminal." Is there any sense in this identification?
4. Raskolnikov has written an article explaining or justifying the position of someone like Altamira (in *The Red and the Black*), only he has Napoleon in mind. The transgressor, he says, violates the morality of the present because he represents the future-his acts look wrong in the eyes of the present but the future will acknowledge their worth. Expound some details of Raskolnikov's theory. Razumihin, Raskolnikov's friend, says that Raskolnikov's theory is more horrible than "the official justification for murder". What is the official justification to which Razumihin is referring and is he correct in his assessment?
5. There are five dreams in the story. Four of them are dreamed by Raskolnikov, and the first concerns an old mare who is flogged to death by the peasant who owns it. How does the dream relate to the waking events of the story? The dream convinces Raskolnikov for the moment to abandon his project of killing the old pawnbroker. But the pawnbroker is a vicious exploiter of the poor and the mare a helpless servant of her master. Is there some discrepancy here? Why does the dream have the effect (if only temporarily) that it does?
6. Raskolnikov is reckless in distributing his few kopeks to those who need charity, but he responds to charity with anger. Among other things, Dounia (his sister) is offering to sacrifice herself for him by making a loveless marriage, and in refusing this offer he responds to it with hatred, not with gratitude. Is his response the right one?
7. Luzhin, Dounia's suitor, has a theory of ethical conduct which is tied to the idea of economic progress. Razumihin immediately identifies this theory with a license to murder, which startles Luzhin. Is there any justification in Razumihin's view?
8. Some of the characters in the book have a powerful wish to humiliate others-Luzhin or Svigdrigailov, for example-while others seem eager to humiliate themselves-Marmeladov and Mrs Svigdrigailov are instances of this. The idea of humiliation figures importantly in the careers of Eugène de Rastignac (in *Père Goriot*) and Julien Sorel (in *The Red and the Black*). In Dostoyevsky, it is tied to the idea of public exposure and public confession. It is urged upon Raskolnikov as the path of redemption by Sonya and also by the public investigator, Porfiry. How would you account for the differences in the notion of humiliation in the three books?
9. *Crime and Punishment* has been filmed no less than five times. In all versions, the character of Svigdrigailov is omitted. How important is Svigdrigailov to the story? Surely, the plot can be managed without him. What difference to the book's overall effect does his presence make?

10. Psychology, observes Porfiry, is a double-edged sword; it cuts both ways. He is referring here to the incapacity of psychology to fathom motives, when people can "double bluff". For example, a criminal thinks: "Only a guilty person would do such a thing. I am a guilty person and may be suspected; therefore I will forestall suspicion by doing such a thing *blatantly*. Thereby I will convince people that I am not guilty, for the thing that I do is such a give-away that a guilty person would never do it. By doing it, I will establish my innocence in their eyes." Both Raskolnikov and Porfiry "double-bluff" each other. Examine this notion closely in relation to any passage where it seems relevant and try to say something about how this notion of "cutting both ways" ties in with the nature of the characters who resort to this practice.
11. Raskolnikov tries to alert a policeman to the plight of a young woman at the outset of the book, but after he arouses the policeman to protect her, he shouts: "Leave her alone. Why is she your business?" Again, he has occasion to think "Mankind is vile," but immediately adds: "But the person who calls mankind vile is really contemptible." How would you account for these violent swings of mood?
12. The dream in the book that does not belong to Raskolnikov is dreamed by Svidrigailov; it concerns a poor suffering child who is revealed during the course of the dream to be a perverted child-harlot. What is the significance of this dream and how does it bear upon Svidrigailov's treatment of women?