

THE SEARCH FOR THE SELF

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There is a familiar determinist argument that runs: those of my actions that are most my own are those that express my character. But I did not make my character, it was made for me by heredity and circumstances. Those whose characters have been so made that they do good acts are lucky; those whose characters make them do bad acts are unlucky. Perhaps some people can change certain of their qualities, so that they act better after the change. But to have the desire and ability to make the change is simply something else about the way they are made - they are lucky. Actions that express one's character may be chosen, but if one can do nothing about one's character one surely cannot be blamed for it, or for what, given that one is like that, one will inevitably choose to do.¹

There is a curious defence of freewill which accepts nearly everything in this determinist argument. It concedes that character determines action and that character is made by other factors than one's own choices. But it claims that in the exceptional situation where one's moral duty requires an action that is incompatible with what one's character would suggest one becomes aware that the self is more than one's character, and the common or garden *me* that is my character can be over-ruled by the transcendent *I* which sees where duty lies.²

This is an extreme example of a recurrent theme in philosophy—the identification of the self-observing self with the

¹This presentation of the argument is a free adaptation of J. Hospers, "What Means this Freedom?" in *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science*, ed. by Sidney Hook.

²See, for example, C.A.Campbell, "Is 'Freewill' a Pseudo-Problem?" *Mind*, LX No. 240 (October 1951).

good rational self. In this version it is surely unacceptable because it implies that the capacity to see where duty lies and the strength of will that enables one to go through with it have nothing to do with the character that is formed by experience, the empirical character. And it also implies that qualities that belong to the empirical character—a man's generous disposition, his stubbornness, his indifference to or endurance of suffering—have nothing to do with what gives a man moral worth or makes him a suitable bearer of responsibility. One must protest that it is precisely in those actions that express my character, which include my heroic victories over temptation, as well as my ignoble defeats, that I am a responsible moral agent. And further, it does seem that we admire, respect, condemn or despise people for their qualities of character and find it intelligible that people should feel regret and remorse not only for actions they have performed, but for traits and dispositions of their own which they view with disapproval.

But if one's character is in this way an object of moral attitudes, is it possible to avoid the conclusion that it was chosen, that I could have avoided having the character I do?

II

Much more interesting than the libertarian position that I briefly sketched a moment ago is the position taken by Kant in his late work *Religion within the limits of reason alone*, in which he claims that our most fundamental moral character is freely chosen. Kant is here trying to reconcile his conception of the will as free, both in the virtuous and the vicious individual, with his conviction that there is such a thing as an innate disposition to evil, or original sin.

There is no evidence, Kant observes, that human beings in any part of the world have ever been exempt from moral weakness, impurity and perversity. Of these it is perversity that is fundamental. This is the disposition to give priority to principles of self-love over moral principles. Not only is this disposition universal, but it is observable in any person from the moment when he begins to act as a person at all. When someone is faced with a choice between an action that would satisfy some desire and an action that is required by morality he has to choose between two kinds of reason. Not every act that is deliberated upon, and done as a result of deliberation, is prompted by *moral* reasons. Some rational acts are done for the sake of satisfying desires, possibly with a general view of the agent's plan of life controlling the decision about what desires deserve fulfilment. So, when a man must decide what to do when his prudential deliberation leads to one action, and his moral deliberation to a contrary one, his decision will express the

preference he gives to one *kind* of principle over the other, and this preference will itself be capable of being formulated as a principle. Now Kant's argument is that if we are to hold a man accountable for his perversity in putting his happiness before his duty, then we must suppose that this higher order principle—this policy of acting on principles of prudence rather than moral principles—is one that he has chosen to adopt. The propensity to evil (understood as the disposition to subordinate moral to non-moral principles) cannot be equated with the mere existence, as elements of man's animal nature, of sensuous inclinations. For these we are not accountable, Kant says, "for since they are implanted in us we are not their authors". Nor could the existence of such implanted sensuous inclinations explain the choice of the will when it allows prudential reasons to take precedence over moral, for if that were so something outside the control of the will would make it jump one way. The original choice of the will is, therefore, inexplicable. Particular choices can be explained by more fundamental choices, but such explanation must come to an end, and it is impossible to switch to a different track, explaining the first term in the order of acts of the will by reference to factors outside the will.

If we were to assign a time in a person's life at which the original choice of evil was made it would have to be unrealistically early, because, as he has said, the disposition is apparent from the first manifestations of freedom. Kant suggests that the choice is not an origin in time but an origin in reason. I think that his meaning can be explained, in language different from his own, like this: to explain an action as a freely chosen one is to cite the reasons for it, but reasons are not events or occurrences. Or: to explain an action as a freely chosen one is to subsume it under a principle, as an instance covered by the principle. But that is a logical relation not a temporal one. It is therefore a mistake deriving from a confusion between two kinds of explanation that leads to the idea that the choice of ultimate principle is an event that takes place at a certain time in a person's life. We say that the propensity to evil is innate—Kant allows it as a way of speaking—but it is admissible only as a figurative way of putting in temporal terms the fact that the disposition to subordinate moral to non-moral principles is derived from a choice that can be inferred as presupposed by each specific action, from the very earliest moments of active life.

The distinction between temporal and logical relations is sound, but it will not by itself do the work that Kant puts it to. A principle is not an occurrence, but an act of choice by which a principle is adopted, is. So if one is found to act on a general principle of subordinating moral to non-moral principles it certainly must *make sense* to ask when it was adopted. It may still be true

that no particular day or time can be pointed to. It may be that the general principle is implicit in the decisions one makes from time to time, in such a way that a time comes when it seems clear beyond doubt that one has chosen a certain policy of life. Now such an implicit choice, which one may come to see *in retrospect* that one has made, is still in time, even though it is not an event that takes place at a time. Moreover, it surely is impossible to suppose that the earliest actions of a child, even when they have a character that can be related to later moral traits, are already expressive of a disposition that can be thought of as chosen. If we want to say that the mature person's distrust or secretiveness or inability to relate to others is a matter of his will, then we shall have to suppose, whatever Kant may say, that the will can in some way be grounded in habits of action which are *not* chosen.

It is important, I believe, to see that Kant is grappling with a real problem, and one that does not arise just for those who accept the doctrine of original sin, at least not just for those who accept a view under that name. The problem is that failure to live up to the principles and ideals of morality is widespread and ineradicable, and yet we cannot say that there is nothing we can do about it if we consider that in an individual case a normal agent, able to form and act upon intentions, could choose to do a good action when what he chooses to do is an evil action. And if nothing prevents such a choice in one instance, nothing prevents one's choosing the good in all cases. And if that is possible for one normal person it is possible for all. Now surely it cannot be my *character* that prevents me from choosing the good. For it seems paradoxical, as Aristotle pointed out, to allow a man to explain away his vicious acts by saying that he can't help them because he has a vicious character. And yet it seems that though this is paradoxical because if a man has a vicious character he chooses to act viciously, it still seems to be a real point that the desires that lead to these choices are not themselves chosen. If a man's character is such that moral considerations have no meaning for him how can he be expected to act morally? It is not that he can't but that he doesn't want to. Yet it still seems in place to say that he can't help being such that he doesn't want to.

Kant's answer to that is that the moral law is within every man. He believes not only that no man can disclaim knowledge of the moral law, but also that no man "repudiates the moral law in the manner of a rebel (renouncing obedience to it)". Both beliefs seem optimistic. Even if there are principles of moral reasoning which, when understood, are seen to be necessary, it is not necessary that any man should be endowed by nature with an understanding of them. And recent history shows the actual occurrence of what—under the name of malignant evil—Kant denies the existence of.

III

In Kant's theory there is a close connection between the view that we choose our characters and the view that we can each attain a true conception of morality through the exercise of reason. But it is possible for the first view to survive the rejection of the second. Sartre's existentialism is the outstanding demonstration of this possibility. Perhaps the doctrine with which Sartre is most closely associated in people's minds is that what I shall be in the future is decided by what I shall do, and what I shall do is entirely for me to decide. Character as a set of habits, dispositions, or qualities which determine my actions he entirely rejects. Character is simply a deposit left by my choices in the past. I cannot change what I did in the past, and in that sense the character that I *have* had is given (with the important qualification that by my future actions I can change the significance that can be attached to my past actions). But since freedom is the whole being of a human person there has never been a time when I have not been making myself by projecting myself towards some as yet unrealised state of affairs—in other words I have always been doing, and have existed only in doing.

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre warns against the mistake of supposing his doctrine to imply that a human life is just a series of random disconnected episodes. Each of our projects, as Sartre calls our intentional actions, can be fitted into a more comprehensive project. If I buy a new pipe it is as part of my project of being a pipe-smoker. The project of being a pipe-smoker might be a part of my project of being, or seeming, mature, reliable and thoughtful. Ultimately, Sartre suggests, all our projects can be shown to relate in this way to the *original* project that each of us has chosen, which is the fundamental way and in which I relate myself to the world. The original project corresponds to what would normally be called character, personality or temperament. It incorporates elements of a person that would often not be thought of as chosen, such as an inferiority complex. Sartre is not merely suggesting a new set of terms to mark familiar distinctions. He is re-drawing the lines between the voluntary and the involuntary, between what we do and what happens to us, in new places.

So in saying that the original project corresponds to character, one ought to emphasise that Sartre is insistent that the relation between it and particular actions is not that of cause and effect. An action could not be free and indeed would not be an action, but merely an event, if it were to be explained as the effect of some state of the organism, whether a physical or mental state. The relation of action to project is that of a particular detail in the implementation of a plan. There is a clear similarity to Kant here. For both the relation between an action and a continuing disposi-

tion must be that of a particular choice which exemplifies and confirms the agent's adherence to a more general plan or policy which is chosen.

When is the plan or policy chosen? Not at any time, Kant says, because it is the act of a self which is not in time. Sometimes, at least, in very early childhood, Sartre says, for since Sartre cannot use Kant's notion of a non-empirical self he cannot refuse the question *When*?

It would be a misunderstanding of Sartre to suppose that he thinks that we self-consciously choose all our projects, or that we are, at the moment of choosing or later, automatically in a position to articulate the nature of our original project. But Sartre does not guard against the exaggeration to which the use of the word 'choice' can all too easily lead.

It may indeed be appropriate to think of many dispositions formed early in life as attitudes that a person takes up, strategies of defence or attack that have a purpose. Many parents and teachers will recognise the child who finds mathematics too difficult and turns his face against understanding what one is quite sure he could understand. We may call this a reaction to the stress of excessive demands, which emphasises passivity. It may be more correct to think of it in positive terms, as a strategy to protect the self against anxiety. If the strategy works once it may be tried again, and may set the pattern for an adult personality which presents itself as one of which not too much ought to be expected.

But to say this is very far from saying that we should attribute to the child a choice made with explicit awareness of its significance. If we characterise the resultant attitude or disposition as weak, unambitious, complacently limited, we cannot justifiably say that the person has chosen to be weak, unambitious, complacently limited. This would be as absurd as to say that someone has chosen to be addicted to a drug which he did not know to be addictive simply because he has voluntarily taken it, for other reasons, a sufficient number of times.

So if we are thinking of responsibility as required for blaming, reproaching and punishing, it would be monstrous to suppose that Sartre has given us good reason to say to anyone that his character is his own fault. It may not be just what he *is* in the way that he has a certain physique; but if one is clearly to be blamed for one's adipose disposition because that is how nature made one, should one be held blameworthy for what one has become as a result of choices that one cannot remember and whose consequences one could not know?

IV

The reasoning that underlies these two heroic positions (Kant's and Sartre's) is that we are responsible for what we are—for the character we have as agents; but one can only be responsible for what one has chosen; consequently it is necessary to say that we have chosen our characters. We could of course abandon the notion that we are responsible for our characters, and in the sense of responsibility in which it is a necessary condition of blame, punishment or reward that these treatments should only be meted out to those who, given their knowledge, abilities and opportunities, could have chosen otherwise than they did, it is no doubt reasonable to give up the attempt to hold people responsible for being brave or cowardly, selfish or unselfish.

But taking this enlightened view we are still left with a problem. Kant would argue that it is not only punishment, reward, praise and blame that are ruled out if we cannot attribute responsibility in this sense. If a man cannot be said to have chosen his good or evil dispositions, in such a way that it was up to him which to choose, we cannot impute them to him as moral attributes. Not only should we not punish a man for being wicked, we cannot even, without misuse of language, say that he is wicked. Nor can we think that he could, without irrationality, view his character with guilt or remorse. Only the *will* can be the subject of moral attributes. Whatever does not originate in the will cannot be thought of as part of a self to which moral qualities belong.

In stressing this fundamental point of Kant's, I hope to bring out the intimate connection between a particular conception of moral judgment and a particular way of thinking about the nature of the self. Both Kant and Sartre, whatever their differences, agree in identifying the real or essential self with an active will which is completely autonomous. Around this self as an empirical thing, the substantial self of particular desires and traits is built up by acts of choice of the central self. and of course the central active self never appears on the scene. It is not the observable traits of a person, but is what is inferred as their origin.

It is this picture of the self, in which the truly active part is an unseen and featureless nucleus, which has to be banished if we are to maintain that character is a proper object of moral appraisal even though unchosen.

To some degree that picture derives its plausibility, I suspect, from a natural tendency to take the appropriation of objects as a model of what makes something mine. No doubt it is a metaphor when one says that a person's collection of books, or furniture or pottery is *part* of him, but it is not a superficial metaphor, and we are most likely to use it when the objects are seen as

things that he has chosen. We need to resist the idea that this model can be pressed into service when we are thinking not of a person's possessions, but of his personal characteristics. It is *most nearly appropriate when we are thinking of bodily appetites*, to which a man can give a more or less important place in his life. A gluttonous or lecherous man, we may say, has adopted one or other of his bodily appetites and thereby, by his choice, has made it part of his character—part that is of the self that chooses. But if we insist on regarding all of those dispositions of the substantial self which are exercised in choosing, as themselves *chosen*, and only parts of the self because they are chosen, then we are driven to ask what it is that chooses these dispositions, and then the pure nuclear will appears on the scene.

It may be worth pursuing for a moment the metaphor of the collector of objects. Let us suppose someone's collection to display a certain consistency and individuality of taste. Though to say that his taste is what guides his choice is natural and correct, it may seem more illuminating here to say that his taste is that which makes choices. It is a complex of interest, directed perception and inclination which is the man in this department of his life. Do we need to suppose that his taste, to be part of him, must itself be appropriated as an object of choice? If we admire or deplore his taste it is not because we think he has chosen it, but simply because it is indeed an aspect of what he is. If a man lives in an ugly house because that is all he can afford or because that is all the locality offers, we do not judge him adversely. But if he likes it, if it expresses his taste, then we deprecate his rotten taste.

If now we think of features of a person's character which we judge as virtuous or vicious the same point can be made, with the addition that we are likely to feel that these features are more important constituents of the person than his taste in furniture. As Hume says: "If any *action* be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character."³ More specifically, virtues and vices are qualities of character that combine in a particular way beliefs, modes of perception, feelings and actions or tendencies to action. A compassionate man, for example has a view about what human beings are, in the light of which he thinks that certain things about their lives are important, and also attends to the needs and feelings of people with whom he has to do — 'attends to' in the sense of 'tries to see' and in the sense of 'tries to do something about'. We judge this to be a morally

³ D.Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part II, Section I; page 575, in Selby-Bigge's edition.

valuable quality in a man because it is a part of him that shapes his deliberate and his spontaneous actions in his relations with others.

How could such a quality be chosen? It is something that develops, in part through things that one does and through reflecting on what one does, in part through the treatment one gets from others and what one makes of that. A time may come in a person's life when he consciously reviews himself and undertakes the task of cultivating his compassion, but he must to a considerable degree be compassionate already for such a realisation and resolve to be possible. Nor do we have to withhold our admiration until such a moment of conscious resolution arrives. R.E. Hobart, a philosopher famed for a single classic article, summed up the view that I am presenting here: "The final fact we esteem or disesteem in a man is some subsisting moral quality. Morality has its eye upon acts, but an act is fleeting, it cannot be treasured and cherished. A quality can be, it lasts. And the reason why it is treasured and cherished is that it is the source of acts. Our treasuring and cherishing of it is (in part) our praise. It is the stuff certain people are made of that commands our admiration and affection. Where it came from is another question; it is precious in its own nature; let us be thankful when it is there. *Its origin cannot take away its value, and it is its value that we are recognising when we praise*".⁴

But if moral qualities are thought of in this way, what is there that will enable us to draw a line between moral qualities and other features of people that would normally not be thought of as suitable targets of approval or disapproval. Why should we not morally admire a man's ability to tell good stories, his astuteness in business, or his handsome physique? What is to stop us insulting with our moral disfavour the poor, the deformed and the insane? These were the very lines that Kant was trying to draw in insisting that only what originates in the will can be imputed as morally good or evil. And it has to be admitted that Hume, who refused to draw a line between moral and intellectual virtues, argued that since both qualities of intellect and qualities of character were largely natural endowments, but equally useful, it would be arbitrary to draw a line. I call this an admission, inasmuch as I have already cited Hume as an ally.

The answer is that Hume is mistaken in supposing that if the criterion of voluntariness does not separate qualities of intellect from qualities of character, there is no distinction to be made. The distinction is in fact implicit in the way that I have presented the nature of character-traits—that is as constituents of a person that make choices, dispositions (among other things) to form and act upon intentions in the light of perception and thought. But

⁴R.E. Hobart, "Free Will as Involving Determination and Inconceivable Without It", *Mind*, XLIII, No. 169 (January 1934).

physical features and intellectual abilities do not have those features, and are not action-shaping constituents of the self. The view that I have presented does not then have the consequence that we cannot distinguish the targets of moral approval and disapproval from features of people which it would be inappropriate to regard in that way. Nor does it reduce moral disapproval of a man's callousness to deploring a natural fact like the state of the weather.

V

It might still be objected to this account however that it does not allow for the possibility of a person's being responsible for or feeling responsible for his character, except to the possibly slight extent that he has modified it by conscious choice. With this objection one might conjoin the complaint that I have spoken of character-traits too much as though they are just given, or have just grow'd. I have lost sight of the importance of the fact that human beings have the capacity to stand back from themselves and ask whether they like what they see. If I have lost sight of this let me try to put it clearly in focus now.

It may be that all human beings have this capacity, or that if they lack it completely they cannot be regarded as persons and it would be pointless to hold them responsible. Quite certainly most human beings have it, but there is a great variation in its extent and in the practical possibility of its being exercised. Sartre is the philosopher who puts most emphasis on the inescapability of the step back. A human being is a being whose being is always in question, by which he means that every human being is potentially aware that his future is in no way determined by his past, and so is threatened by the awareness that he is free to choose a totally new self.

But one must ask: what is this self that steps back. What is its character? If it has some conception of an alternative set of characteristics in which to cloth its future embodiment is it attracted by them? Does it prefer them to the old ones? If it has nothing to say for itself let it hold its peace.

The self in Sartre's theory may be pictured as the chairman of a committee who has no policy but a capacity to reverse the decisions of the committee for no reason. To reject this picture is not to reject the possibility of self-appraisal and self-criticism. Unless one rejects the insane notion of a responsibility which is total because it is groundless one cannot begin to make sense of the notion of responsibility that we actually have. For this notion is conditioned by the fact that an individual person's life has a continuity which is independent of his own will. At any time a

human being has certain dispositions, desires, projects, ambitions— and so on. Some of them he is not fully aware of, or not aware of at all— that is he cannot articulate them clearly. For that reason he cannot be certain to what extent they will interfere with other projects or desires that he has. Some of his dispositions or desires may be concerned with other features of himself— for instance he may have a clear determination to rid himself of the desire to smoke. And he may have the capacity to carry that determination through. Some of his dispositions however will be concerned not to remove or control a lower-order desire but to foster it, as for instance a compassionate man will foster his desire to help others by loving attention to their needs, and by trying to see them as they are. This structure, of higher-order desires which are concerned with the regulation of other desires, is in fact internal to a complex trait such as compassion. It is a mistake to think of it as a bare feeling which reason directs. It is, from one point of view, an aspect of the rational self—to the extent, that is, that we are not just using ‘compassion’ in a liberal way to describe a man’s occasional impulsive acts. Since no one is just compassion personified, everyone will have to protect his compassion from the inroads of pride, resentment, fear of involvement and so forth. Philosophers have sometimes spoken of conscience as the referee who protects the virtuous dispositions and discourages the vicious ones, but I think that there are dangers in postulating internal overseers. And since an overseeing conscience may come to be thought of as itself compassionate—why else should it favour compassion as opposed to pride? —it is more economical to attribute directly to compassion the awareness that it must beware of pride. If one is determined to avoid all personification of aspects of the self then one can say that to attribute compassion to a man as a stable part of his character is among other things to say that he has both an awareness of desires and dispositions that run counter to his compassion, and an effective will to control them.

Now it is very tempting to identify the real self with those desires and dispositions that a man approves of in himself. And there is a point of view from which that is quite right. If the desires and dispositions that you approve of in yourself are good ones then it is appropriate to approve of you for approving of them. Even if your pride is often too much for your compassion it makes a real difference whether you wanted it to be. But from another point of view it is the whole self as shaping actions that has to be regarded as the real self. For what does a man who is committed to being compassionate do when he has to face the realisation that he has failed to be properly compassionate because his pride was injured? “Not me, but my pride acted”, if intended

as an excuse, suggests a curious dissociation, for it implies that somehow one's compassionate self is left untouched by the act. But the same words can be decently said as a way of recognising that the desires of which I approve are not yet, and maybe never will be, the whole of myself. But that recognition must be painful, not complacent.

In other words, although there will be for any man projects that he willingly avows and which are not, at the time, in question, he pursues them against a background of desires which he either has not shaped and would not avow as commitments, or which he has shaped and avowed but would now disavow. And since these desires will not just lie down, but will heckle and interrupt, he cannot ignore them, push them out of consciousness, pretend that they lie on some beach that he has disappeared from. It is their thrusting to the surface in behaviour that disrupts the steady pursuit of the avowed projects. So to the extent that I would really be the self that I avow and approve of I have to be prepared to acknowledge as mine both the aberrant bits of my behaviour and the unassimilated sources of them in my character. This acknowledgment is remorse, which is the recognition that something that I view with hatred and repugnance is something that I cannot help seeing to be an action of *mine*, or a facet of *my* character.

A person may be viewed as responsible to the extent that he has projects which he readily avows as central concerns of his life. He accepts responsibility for those because wherever they came from they *are* his central concerns. While they constitute the main direction of his life they cannot be thought of as currents in which he passively floats. And he accepts responsibility for aspects of himself with which he would not identify in that sense because unless he can master them or come to terms with them they will push out these concerns which he would wish to be his real ones.

VI

In trying to dislodge the Kantian and existentialist picture of the central self as pure will, and to replace it with a picture in which the will itself is identified with more substantial and identifiable features of a person, I have allowed one bit of the old picture to stay put. Even if one says—to put it roughly—that the self is the character it is hard not to accord a special status to what some psychologists call the self-concept—to those traits, dispositions and desires that a person, as I have put it, avows as constituting the main direction that he wants his life to have. One is apt to think that a person achieves selfhood or integrity to the extent that he masters or sublimates the passions, often childish and

unrealistic, that threaten to subvert the projects of the more mature and realistic self. This makes the search for the self into a highly conscious, rational and deliberate matter. And it also assumes that the submerged and disavowed facets of the person are undesirable, or must seem undesirable to a mature and rational person. Their victory is always a disaster. This of course is Kantian, but it is also Platonic: the equating of the good self with the rational self, and of reason with conscious ratiocination is a venerable tradition.

For Sartre, of course, there is no longer a consciousness which is in direct touch with an order of rational values. But he still holds that a man is most himself when he is most explicitly reflective, and it is then that he is aware that by a deliberate choice he can abandon his past self and give himself a completely new fundamental project. He speaks of such moments as "These extraordinary and marvellous instants when the prior project collapses into the past in the light of a new project which rises on its ruins and which as yet exists only in outline, in which humiliation, anguish, joy, hope are delicately blended, in which we let go in order to grasp and grasp in order to let go". And in giving examples he reminds us of "the instant when Raskolnikov decides to give himself up".⁵

I should like to dwell on this example for a few moments, for it provides considerations that count against the primacy of the conscious self.

First, then, the moment in *Crime and Punishment* when Raskolnikov decides to give himself up is not the moment of his repentance of his crime. That comes some months after his departure for Siberia to serve his sentence, and if one looks for a particular instant which could be regarded as a crucial turning point, from which his eventual repentance flows inevitably, there are several which might be selected. His confession to Sonia costs him as much, and is quite as crucial, as his decision to give himself up. So much for the 'instant'.

This not just to score a point off Sartre, however, for the reason why it is a mistake to look for an instant of blinding self-awareness is that this overlooks what Dostoevski is at pains to show us: that the change that finally overwhelms Raskolnikov in the last pages of the novel is the final emergence of a suppressed and unavowed self which has been working away in him all along, but emerging in behaviour which to his conscious self is unwelcome and unintelligible. He suffers from a kind of inverted neurosis.

⁵ J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel Barnes, University Paperbacks 1969, page 476.

Raskolnikov is a young man—a student with strong humanitarian feelings and an ambition to do great things for his fellow men—who is hampered by poverty in embarking on his career. He has convinced himself that there are exceptional people who are justified in stepping over the normal moral bounds in the execution of great ends, and believes that he is such a person. He therefore deliberately plans the murder of an old woman, a money lender who parasitically lives off the poverty of others, whose money will enable him to prepare himself for his mission in life.

He finds that he cannot sustain the role. The crime itself is bungled, he escapes from the house undetected by good luck, and afterwards falls ill, losing consciousness for days at a time. When he comes to himself his actions are obsessive and he is subject to nameless fears and paranoid suspicions. In his lucid moments of reflection he interprets this as signifying that he was wrong in thinking himself to be an exceptional person.

“No, those men are not made like that. A real *ruler of men*, a man to whom everything is permitted, takes Toulon by storm, carries out a massacre in Paris, *forgets* an army in Egypt, *wastes* half a million men in his Moscow Campaign, and gets away with a pun in Vilna. And monuments are erected to him after his death, which of course means that to him *everything* is permitted.. No! Such men are not made of flesh and blood, but of bronze.”⁶

At no time does he think that he has done a dreadful thing—only that he was not the right person to do it.

Yet he does many things that are unintelligible in that perspective. He hides the money under a stone, without even counting it, and gives money for Marmeladov’s funeral from what his mother has scraped together for him; he asks the little girl Polya to pray for him, and is drawn to Sonia, a girl who lives in mortal sin, to her own conscience, yet is not in despair. If the reader is impelled to say that he confesses to Sonia because he sees in her the possibility of being saved from his own despair, that is not a thought that Raskolnikov can formulate.

His suppressed good self he sees only as weakness, limitation.

“ ‘I should have known it’, He thought with a bitter smile. ‘And how did I dare, knowing the sort of man I was and knowing how I would behave, to take a hatchet in my hand and cover myself in blood! I

⁶ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, translated by David Magarshack; Penguin Books, page 291.

ought to have known beforehand. Oh! but I did!
I did know beforehand!' he whispered in despair."⁷

The reflection that he knew beforehand is borne out by a dream that he has when he is planning the murder. In the dream he is seven years old and back in the provincial town of his childhood. He is walking to church with his father. They see an old horse, harnessed to a heavy cart full of peasants, being beaten by its driver with an iron bar. He finally, in uncontrolled fury, beats it to death.

"But by now the poor little boy was beside himself. He pushed his way through the crowd to the grey-brown mare, put his arms round her dead, bloodstained muzzle, and kissed her, kissed her on the eyes, on the lips..... Then he suddenly jumped to his feet and rushed in a rage at Mikolka with his little fists.[Waking] 'Good God!' he cried 'is it possible that I will really take a hatchet, hit her on the head with it, crack her skull? But what am I thinking of?' he went on. I know very well that I wouldn't be able to carry it out, so why have I been tormenting myself with it all this time?"⁸

Through the dream the good self is represented as a construction of Raskolnikov's childhood. It is suppressed by deliberate and calculative reason and becomes the self that is repudiated as alien to the avowed and approved aims with which he identifies himself.

The general lesson to be drawn from this is that the consciously acknowledged self cannot be identified with the good self. That is obvious. But beyond that the example, if it strikes us as describing a possible human situation, sets us a problem. If we think of the consciously reflective, critical capacity of a person as the only means by which he can organise and integrate himself, then what can we say about the case in which it is precisely this faculty that is deluded and corrupt? It is no use appealing to reason. When Raskolnikov reflects he misses the important thing—he sees a weakness not something positive. He is not saved by something that he *does* but by something that, from the point of view of his reflective self, simply happens to him.

Can even a secular moralist avoid granting significance to the idea of grace?

⁷Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, translated by David Magarshack; Penguin Books, page 290f.

⁸*Ibid.*, page 77f.