

## Dostoevsky's Existential Philosophy: A New Contribution to Freedom

*A Filosofia Existencial de Dostoiévski: Uma Nova Contribuição para a Liberdade*

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### ABSTRACT:

This paper highlights Dostoevsky's existential philosophy, emphasizing his portrayal of characters who are perpetually tormented and deeply troubled in their search for the meaning of existence. Like other existential philosophers, Dostoevsky deeply respects human aspirations, even the humblest and most base desires in contemporary Russian society. Hence, Dostoevsky's existential philosophy consistently emphasizes spiritual freedom. The new contribution presented here lies in analyzing Dostoevsky's fundamental existential concepts, specifically his views on spiritual freedom and the process by which existential subjects achieve spiritual freedom. This article affirms Dostoevsky's novel contributions to the category of freedom, including developments in understanding freedom, delineating paths toward authentic freedom, and through this, establishing the "Russian character" for the Russian people.

**KEYWORDS:** Dostoevsky, existential philosophy, human spiritual freedom, Russian character

### RESUMO:

Este artigo destaca a filosofia existencial de Dostoiévski, enfatizando sua representação de personagens que são perpetuamente atormentados e profundamente perturbados em sua busca pelo significado da existência. Como outros filósofos existencialistas, Dostoiévski respeita profundamente as aspirações humanas, até mesmo os desejos mais humildes e básicos da sociedade russa contemporânea. Portanto, a filosofia existencial de Dostoiévski enfatiza consistentemente a liberdade espiritual. A nova contribuição apresentada aqui está na análise dos conceitos existenciais fundamentais de Dostoiévski, especificamente suas visões sobre a liberdade espiritual e o processo pelo qual os sujeitos existenciais alcançam a liberdade espiritual. Este artigo afirma as novas contribuições de Dostoiévski para a categoria de liberdade, incluindo desenvolvimentos na compreensão da liberdade, delineando caminhos para a liberdade autêntica e, por meio disso, estabelecendo o “caráter russo” para o povo russo.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Fiódor Dostoiévski, filosofia existencial, liberdade espiritual humana, caráter russo

## Introduction

Existential philosophy notably emerged in response to profound economic and social upheavals that led individuals toward spiritual impasses and existential helplessness, particularly during the tumultuous mid-20th (Aho, Altman;Pedersen, 2024, Cropper;Browne, 2024). This philosophical movement became especially prominent against the historical backdrop of the Second World War, the Nazi death camps, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, events creating circumstances known as the “existentialist moment” (Aho, 2023, Baert, 2015). Existential philosophers endeavored to explore and alleviate deep spiritual suffering by addressing the existential crises confronting individuals, offering them conceptual tools to navigate such tumultuous periods (Dinh;Pham, 2024).

Among existential philosophers, Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) stands out as a profound analyst of existential dilemmas (Petrov, 2024, Savelieva, Budenkova;Kraevskaya, 2024), particularly highlighting the intricate human psyche within oppressive societal conditions and existential despair (Nguyen;Do, 2024, Nguyen;Dinh, 2024). Dostoevsky’s literary masterpieces such as “Crime and Punishment,” “The Idiot,” and “The Brothers Karamazov,” present characters deeply entrenched in existential struggles, compelled to confront the moral tensions between freedom and slavery, noble ideals, and base desires. His characters exemplify profound internal conflicts and symbolize the broader philosophical exploration of freedom and meaning within a contradictory and unjust society (Nguyen;Do, 2024, Nguyen;Dinh, 2024). Dostoevsky’s literary narratives deeply resonate with core existentialist principles, notably illuminating the anxiety and ambiguity associated with human freedom and choice, crucial aspects that define the existential human condition (Aho et al., 2024, Baert, 2015).

A distinctive contribution by Dostoevsky to existential thought lies in his nuanced emphasis on spiritual freedom, an essential divergence from the political and material freedom emphasized by other existential philosophers. While Sartre famously asserts that humans are “condemned to freedom,” thereby framing freedom as an inescapable moral responsibility resulting in anxiety and existential burden

(Sartre, 2001, Tran, 2022), Dostoevsky presents a divergent perspective. His interpretation of freedom highlights it as inherently spiritual, profoundly connected to internal struggles, self-awareness, and solitary contemplation, essential for genuine liberation and self-realization (Nguyen;Do, 2024, Nguyen;Dinh, 2024). This underscores his unique contribution to existential philosophy by promoting solitude and introspective suffering as vital pathways to achieving spiritual authenticity.

Existentialism also critically explores human existence as essentially embodied, relational, and historically embedded, stressing that human life is continuously shaped by the socio-historical context and individual subjective experience (Baert, 2015, Heidegger, 1962). This philosophical framework has significantly influenced diverse fields, from literary and psychological studies to ethics and psychotherapy, reflecting existentialism's ongoing relevance in contemporary philosophical discourse and practical applications.

Hence, this research critically engages with Dostoevsky's unique philosophical perspectives, aiming to deepen our understanding of existential freedom by examining the spiritual and psychological dimensions embedded within his narratives. The main objectives are to analyze the significance of solitude in fostering self-awareness, evaluate the existential implications of spiritual freedom, and clarify how Dostoevsky's philosophical exploration of existential struggles informs our broader understanding of human authenticity and resilience amidst spiritual and existential turmoil.

## Literature Review

Among the major streams of modern Western philosophy, existentialism or existential philosophy in the mid-20th century became one of the most fashionable doctrines (Dinh;Pham, 2024). The existential human figure, constantly tormented and struggling to find the meaning of existence, discovering truth, and aiming toward freedom in a chaotic world filled with numerous injustices, became a central concern for philosophers (Nguyen;Dinh, 2024). The exploration of existential subjects' psychological developments across multiple dimensions and layers has contributed to the continuous evolution of existential philosophy up to today. Nguyen (2006) argues that existential philosophers have dissected human beings to their core, revealing their true portraits. It is a portrait of existence, of a life immersed in death, risk, uncertainty, fear, sadness, and contradiction (Do, 1998). Another study asserts that God is dead and the universe has turned its back on human existence.

Existential philosophy frequently underscores the theme of abandonment, where the absence of divine guidance leaves humanity in existential solitude and despair. Humanity is left abandoned with its uncertain destiny, with no other ultimate purpose (Nguyen, 2011). Within this context, the freedom to choose becomes a means for humans to confront harsh reality and life's absurdity. According to Camus, the path to authentic existence involves rebellion—rebellng against absurdity to affirm individual value in society (Nguyen, 2017). Studying Sartre's existential philosophy, Tran (2022) emphasizes that all

categories within Sartre's existential philosophy highlight human freedom. Existential conditions such as loneliness, absurdity, nausea, anxiety, bad faith, projection, and death are all inner reactions to the reality of life. Similarly, Nguyen (2019) states: "the existential human being is one who surpasses themselves through subjective insight and the oars of freedom, yet forever remains alone, unable to truly connect or share with others. This is the greatest tragedy faced by existential individuals and represents existentialism's significant limitation regarding human nature".

In contrast, Dostoevsky offers a unique philosophical perspective emphasizing spiritual rather than merely existential or political freedom (Nguyen;Dinh, 2024). Nguyen and Do (2024) argue that Dostoevsky perceives loneliness not simply as social isolation but as a profound metaphysical state reflecting internal human struggles and the dual potentials of despair and liberation. Dostoevsky's characters, exemplified by figures like the "Underground Man" and Prince Myshkin, embody these struggles, illuminating the internal conflicts between human instincts, social expectations, and spiritual aspirations (Nguyen;Do, 2024).

Nguyen and Dinh (2024) reinforce that Dostoevsky views solitude as integral to spiritual freedom, facilitating deep introspection, catharsis, and the potential for authentic self-awareness. Faith, in Dostoevsky's thought, serves both as protection against societal decay and as a vital force enabling transcendence of intrinsic human flaws (Nguyen;Dinh, 2024).

Thus, most existential philosophers agree that freedom is the highest value among human values and a prerequisite for human existence. However, Dostoevsky offered a distinct view of freedom compared to other existentialists. Dominating Dostoevsky's existential philosophy is the idea of spiritual freedom, markedly different from political or material freedom. While Sartre argues human freedom resembles a condemnation—"humans are condemned to be free," and freedom represents human responsibility amidst suffering (Tran, 2022, p.19) —Dostoevsky maintains that spiritual freedom remains a constant human aspiration. To achieve such freedom, however, individuals must embrace loneliness and endure pain and torment.

## 1. Humans Must Confront Themselves to Realize Freedom

A philosophical evaluation of freedom of an individual starts off with an exploration of the life of a human being as a Dostoevsky. According to him, pure freedom arises from the barriers put on an individual to live like a human being. People are deprived of their basic human attributes and feelings because of such disallowed and unjust conditions. They are completely mentally restrained devoid of any form of expression which leads them to the loss of their true self. An illustration of this is a person who comes face-to-face with himself in the mirror that reflects the idea of self-identification, self-recognition and starts to appreciate the existence of freedom, thus discovering the true essence of it. Such a person is caught in subjective imprisonment in a repetitively mundane and soul-numbing existence void of any

semblance of meaning which turns him into a spiritual captive. Enclosed in a metaphorical basement that is dark and devoid of light, the subservient desperately wishes to break free from all bounds and order to enjoy the bliss of self-determined life.

Being an existential thinker, Dostoevsky persistently analyzes human existence emphasizing the dilemmas of the individual versus society, the individual's loneliness versus crowds, and freedom versus morality. In particular, Dostoevsky conveys, "My will, my free choice, my unpredictable nature, however irrational or insane it may be—yes, that is precisely what has been pushed aside" (Dostoevsky, 2016, p.146-147). This personal confrontation drives one to the tragic acknowledgment of "I am a sick man," "I am a man good-for-nothing," "I am a scoundrel," "a villain," "I am a coward, a slave" (Dostoevsky, 2016). Also, Dostoevsky stresses, "Such is man. It all arises from something trivial and insignificant: the fact that man, whoever he is, always and everywhere longs to act according to his own wishes, not the reason, not self-interest." (Dostoevsky, 2016, p.146). This in fact is the pathway through which people seek, identify, and put judgement on themselves. Only this path enables people to realize that freedom, indeed, is the most precious and highest value of a human being and the most humane feature of every human being. One may lose external freedom, but inner freedom is sacrosanct.

No one can escape the enduring ache of the spirit when faced with self-reflection. In Dostoevsky's society, any attempt towards freedom or even enlightened thinking was regarded as a divergence from the norm, forcing people to adopt a survival strategy marked by cruelty, deceit, and hypocrisy. Dostoevsky observes with keen insight how the attempt to flee one type of suffering results in succumbing to another (Dostoevsky, 2011). To acknowledge the good, the true, and the beautiful is to plunge humans deeper into depraved desires, urging them to wrestle with moral decline. Quoting Dostoevsky, "The whole point is this, what angers me most is that even at my moments of greatest irritation, I am ashamed to recognize I am neither wicked nor genuinely angry... I simply enjoy pretending to frighten children to comfort myself" (Dostoevsky, 2016, p. 130). This form of "pretending" is fundamentally an avoidance, a way to escape, bypass the real world, and drown in fantasies. The Russian society back then was a vicious cycle, a cage that conditioned people, enslaving them to their reality. So, Dostoevsky states, "Now, suppose someone gave us more freedom, and loosened their grip, expanded the scope, let us roam more freely ... I would be certain, in that case, we would instantly begin begging to be guided again as before" (Dostoevsky, 2016, p. 225).

The works of Dostoevsky strikingly illustrate the profound emptiness, despair, and pettiness of human existence. Humans seek freedom but are terrified of it. The moment they become self-aware, all they can see is a maniac waiting to be unleashed, fueled by primal urges and putrid lusts. These conditions can only be forged when people judge themselves extremely and fight against their inner self to achieve freedom, even if it is through madness or might (Dostoevsky, 2011). Perhaps such a condition, under social doctrines and unjust oppression alongside rage against a spiritual stranglehold, expands across

existentialist thought. Existential crisis stems from a life spent metaphorically cooped up in a dimly lit basement as a prisoner of circumstances, while simultaneously yearning for the freedom to be true to oneself sans society's constraints, transcending lures of primal instincts. The subjects of existentialism can be unimaginably tortured but choose to live in any undefined a-chronological notion of time which they ascertain as "reality."

Paralysis from analyzing all the options one has with self guided choices compels a human being to face themselves to achieve free will and self awakening. This quote by Dostoevsky sums up a lot, "I cannot become wicked, nor become anything else: neither evil nor good, neither dishonest nor honest, neither hero nor insect. Now, I live out my days in this hole, soothing myself cruelly and without purpose because an intelligent person can never become anything, and only fools achieve something. Indeed, a 19th century intelligent man must adhere to a moral duty and as such, characterless. Yet, a man of action and individuality does become despicable" (Dostoevsky, 2016, p.130-131). Raskolnikov, alongside Ivan, discover the sobering reality of their starting confusions while seeking self realization. As noted by Pham (2001), this enigma is commonplace amongst Russians seeking authenticity, a life beyond the constructs of society's expectations.

## 2. Spiritual Freedom – The Greatest Aspiration of Existential Subjects

In the context of 19th-century Russia, marked by intense social tensions and escalating contradictions, the dominance of outdated social orders and morals forced individuals into states of suffering, madness, and impotence merely to survive. People constantly grappled with internal contradictions. On one hand, they yearned for freedom—to live authentically, experiencing life's finest values, including humanity, love, faith, and social responsibility. Yet on the other hand, social realities entrapped them in frustrations, injustices, and suppressive constraints. These invisible prisons prevented people from escaping their predicament, and indeed many did not desire escape, since rational clarity was viewed by society as abnormal, a deformity needing elimination; thus, the deeper humans thought, the more they saw their own pettiness, selfishness, and wretchedness (Dostoevsky, 2016, p.129-130). Dostoevsky vividly captures this inner torment: "I know they have been within me all my life, demanding release, but I deliberately refuse them freedom. They humiliate and drive me mad, finally making me utterly weary. Oh, how exhausted and bored I am!" (Dostoevsky, 2016, p.130). Existentially troubled individuals constantly endure internal struggles and torment.

Dostoevsky presents his characters with two choices: either reject reality by isolating themselves from the collective, confronting their flaws and striving for freedom; or accept corrupt societal morals, surrendering to base desires and living selfishly and dishonestly. However, this latter choice is fraught with confusion, contradictions, and reluctance. His characters continually struggle and agonize over these choices, torn between their desire for freedom and their fear of its consequences—loneliness, suffering,

and anguish. Although haunted by loneliness and inner turmoil, they willingly embrace these conditions to achieve spiritual freedom, even at the risk of personal tragedy.

Dostoevsky's existential philosophy aims to dismantle outdated prejudices, establishing new values. His characters, faced with choices between nobility or baseness, good or evil, morality or immorality, emerge as rich, multifaceted existential subjects, deeply humane and responsible for their chosen way of life. Raskolnikov struggles between morality and conscience after committing murder ("Crime and Punishment"). The narrator in "Notes from Underground" considers himself vile and petty, mockingly ridiculing himself. Vasily epitomizes existential anxiety and confusion under social manipulation ("The Landlady"). Myshkin becomes naive and flawed within a chaotic society. Ivan Karamazov suffers deeply, becoming mentally unstable from remorse over patricide ("The Brothers Karamazov"). Generally, these characters share a fate of becoming slaves to their circumstances. Under societal and aristocratic moral constraints, humans must choose slavery to ease their pain—essentially rejecting freedom. Yet, they accept the agony of freedom, realizing: "Lately, I've felt terribly uncomfortable using any moral measure to judge my actions and thoughts. Something else guides me." (Dostoevsky, 2002, p.35). The fate of Dostoevsky's characters reflects the condition of Russian intellectuals and society at the time.

The intense suffering, remorse, and conscience-torment experienced by existential subjects are inevitable reactions during their self-enlightenment. Deep within, "Consciousness of life and self-awareness dramatically increase" (Dostoevsky, 2002, p.339-340). Through an existential lens, Dostoevsky affirms that freedom remains humanity's true aspiration. Understanding genuine freedom makes striving for and seeking freedom central to human existence. Nevertheless, contradictions and irreconcilable gaps exist between aspiration and reality. Dostoevsky underscores existential meaning by giving his characters strong fighting spirits. Despite physical oppression and helplessness, their spiritual selves bravely overcome the harsh bonds of reality.

Dostoevsky's primary concern is spiritual freedom. According to him, achieving spiritual freedom requires embracing solitude and withdrawing from collective society. He explains solitude as absolute, noble, and the only choice enabling true self-awareness: "Nothing is more beautiful and appealing than recognizing one's strength alone. I possess strength, and I am calm" (Dostoevsky, 2016, p.118). Individuals must accept solitude to understand one another, reassess themselves, and decipher their identities within contemporary value systems. Solitude is the sole path enabling humans to overcome base desires, greed, and selfishness, moving toward goodness. The greater their solitude, the clearer their self-awareness becomes. Accepting loneliness, crisis, and torment leads to true freedom, enabling them to resist base temptations and be authentically themselves. These courageous individuals confront existing orders, societal morals, and aristocratic dominance. The complex internal worlds of Dostoevsky's characters embody the profound pain of their era and the collective suffering of Russia and its people.

## Discussion

### Introducing a New Concept of Freedom – Spiritual Freedom

Dostoevsky contributes significantly to the evolution of the concept of freedom, particularly emphasizing spiritual freedom. Dostoevsky was deeply interested in the spiritual life of individuals, moving beyond abstract generalizations typical of traditional philosophy to explore the complex inner workings of human psychology. J. Locke defended personal freedom against intentional coercion by the state, church, or public opinion, allowing individuals to live their private lives (Do;Nguyen, 2022). J.J. Rousseau viewed human freedom as sacred, inviolable, and protected by natural law (Do, 2023). J.S. Mill focused on the necessity of freedom from the oppressive influence of majority opinions, advocating for freedom from conformity on moral and social grounds (Do, 2021). In contrast, Dostoevsky concentrated on humans and human nature from the perspective of spiritual freedom. He paid little attention to collective or action-oriented individuals. His concept of spiritual freedom differs markedly from traditional approaches. Instead of denying free will like R. Descartes, Dostoevsky emphasized spiritual freedom. The path to achieving spiritual freedom involves confronting numerous hardships, unlike Spinoza's easy exploration and adherence to natural laws. Existential subjects do not experience the loving religion envisioned by L. Feuerbach; instead, they must endure inner torment, moral self-questioning, suffering, and profound responsibility in their continuous choices.

While most philosophers focus on freedom in terms of its outward manifestations, few examine the essential components of freedom, especially spiritual freedom. Dostoevsky highlights the philosophy that humans, under any circumstances, must remain true to themselves and eliminate spiritual oppression. A developed society is one that prioritizes both the physical and spiritual well-being of its members.

According to Dostoevsky, spiritual freedom differs significantly from political freedom. Achieving spiritual freedom requires individuals to maintain clear self-awareness and self-reflection. The aspiration for spiritual freedom displayed by Dostoevsky's characters reflects his own desire to build a society founded upon moral principles. This moral model, without coercive rules, relies purely on individual conscience and aligns closely with human nature. Such a model is essential for dismantling outdated social orders and establishing a new society, thus enabling true freedom. Indeed, the values of truth, goodness, and beauty humanity strives toward inevitably require creativity, surpassing old frameworks, standards, and narrow prejudices.

Dostoevsky greatly contributed to challenging existing orders and guiding new values through his views on freedom. The existential subjects in his works are vibrant, alive not just in their actions but in their thoughts and reflections. These individuals represent their era's complexities and contradictions, rejecting restrictive, outdated norms, and continuously striving to remove barriers for progressive development. His vision foresaw a spiritual revolution, suggesting that creating something new and ideal



may require suffering and considerable sacrifice, yet this is a necessary path because life cannot be guided by reason alone—it must also embrace emotions and willpower. Ultimately, Dostoevsky emphasizes that the highest virtue is a moral, cultured personality capable of self-confrontation, remaining authentic, and accepting spiritual pain.

### Charting the Path to Freedom

Dostoevsky's approach significantly diverges from traditional philosophical perspectives. While traditional philosophy often links the path to freedom with economic ownership and external expressions, Dostoevsky emphasizes ownership of spiritual life, regarding spiritual freedom as the true value. According to Dostoevsky, genuine freedom lies in possessing spiritual life, yet the journey toward this freedom is immensely challenging. He writes: "Whoever desires ultimate freedom must dare to kill themselves spiritually. Those who dare will break through the secrets of deception. There is no freedom greater" (Dostoevsky, 2007, p.134). Having directly witnessed societal injustices, he observed that those labeled as "lowly" sometimes possess more genuine virtue than those recognized as elite, as they maintain faith and self-awareness. In contrast, the so-called elite, chasing fame and power, lose their authentic selves, resulting in existential trauma. Consequently, Dostoevsky criticizes the crowd mentality, hypocrisy, and cruelty.

Dostoevsky meticulously examines the inner complexities of individuals who, when faced with existential crises, simultaneously desire freedom yet fear it. Their internal struggle intensifies when freedom becomes attainable, prompting them to reject it and revert to self-enslavement. They comfort themselves with deception, adhering once again to restrictive old morals, thus becoming unwilling to embrace spiritual freedom fully. Such a society treats spiritual freedom as pathological, resulting in psychological disorders. Intellectuals, proud before society, often succumb to humility, moral corruption, and spiritual cowardice. However, true reflection of human essence in reality comes through spiritual introspection rather than action-oriented behavior. Responsibility must accompany freedom to avoid moral corruption and evil (Do, 2007).

Dostoevsky's existential dilemmas reflect contemporary concerns as humanity faces significant challenges, despite the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty. Today, despite global issues like ecological imbalance and loss of faith shaking humanity's spiritual life, Dostoevsky's vision of spiritual freedom offers profound answers. He emphasizes that individuals must continuously question their conscience, challenging existing moral standards because conventional morality may itself be morally compromised. Dostoevsky urges existential subjects to surpass established social judgments and traditions, revealing that genuine morality often necessitates challenging societal standards. His vision highlights the necessity of spiritual freedom and liberation from oppressive mental constraints.

According to Dostoevsky, achieving spiritual freedom requires withdrawal into solitary introspection, isolated from society's pressures. He asserts: "I require only solitude to understand my strength alone. I have strength, calmness" (Dostoevsky, 2016, p.118). In self-awareness, existential individuals must embrace solitude and endure intense internal struggles. Dostoevsky suggests overcoming pain and loneliness through spiritual strength, rather than rationalization. He argues that when societal morality oppresses spiritual life, religion provides essential comfort, easing inner suffering. Thus, spiritual freedom necessitates a supportive religion and a firm spiritual foundation. Dostoevsky argues true spiritual freedom cannot be forcibly achieved but requires a spiritual revolution.

To Dostoevsky, achieving spiritual freedom involves isolation, self-awareness, and confronting personal struggles. He emphasizes humanity's need for belief in God, viewing freedom as divine in origin, bestowed by God. Only through divine grace can individuals transcend their baser instincts and embrace genuine virtues. Dostoevsky famously declared, "Beauty will save the world" (Mai, 2019), asserting that only Christianity provides the spiritual liberation necessary to overcome pain and loneliness. This salvation must occur spiritually, not through coercion. Tran (2008) notes that Dostoevsky's religion is less institutional and more a divine presence within human beings.

Through these views, Dostoevsky critiques atheism, emphasizing that freedom is a process impossible to achieve by removing religion through sheer will. He recognizes religion's spiritual strength and its essential role in bringing beauty and moral harmony to society. Dostoevsky ultimately seeks a peaceful, progressive Russia grounded in faith, compassion, generosity, and religious respect.

#### Establishing the "Russian Spirit and Character" Through Spiritual Freedom

Dostoevsky's idea of spiritual freedom carries significant socio-political implications, reflecting the intellectual concerns in Russia regarding the nation's future and direction. He frequently referenced the "Russian idea," the "Russian God," and the "Russian Christ," asserting through his characters that "the Russian person will grow into a figure of immense, powerful, yet gentle, wise, and sincere divinity before the entire world" (Dostoevsky, 2002, p.827).

Dostoevsky's philosophy of spiritual freedom vividly mirrors the oppressive and bleak atmosphere of Petersburg in particular and Russia generally, thus embodying the spirit of contemporary Russian society. The loneliness and spiritual crisis depicted in his works symbolize the crisis of conscience among Russian intellectuals amid prevailing social conditions. Existential subjects constantly wrestle with finding pathways toward truth consistent with moral values. This reflects a demand for organizing social life under a new order, dismantling outdated moral codes to alleviate individual spiritual suffering. The conscience of Russian intellectuals became complex, combining faith and reason, irrationality and rationality, speculation and experience. Dostoevsky highlights Russian societal complexity as primarily spiritual. Hundreds of 19th-century struggles were essentially aimed at challenging Russia's spiritual order

(Nguyen, 1996). As societal contradictions intensified, Russians engaged in numerous struggles to determine a new future. Intellectuals struggled to define the ultimate goal on the path toward freedom, wavering between entirely dismantling old values or overly criticizing their national character. In other words, they were trapped within ideals of a utopian society, fervently discussing it without clear contributions toward realization, creating a spiritual vacuum among intellectuals and the broader Russian population (Mai, 2015). Consequently, Dostoevsky advocated for a society grounded in faith, humanity, and benevolence. The people's suffering observed by Dostoevsky was not merely material but deeply spiritual, as individuals sought self-understanding and awareness of their societal roles.

By elevating spiritual freedom, Dostoevsky indirectly affirmed that the Russian people's struggles were not merely about material conditions but significantly concerned spiritual values. Achieving this freedom required dismantling the old Tsarist regime and aristocracy to establish a government representing the people, alongside awakening the conscience of Russian intellectuals toward true freedom. Dostoevsky's concept of spiritual freedom reflects Russia's social realities and the intellectual mood, thereby offering insights into Russia's future and humanity's broader fate. Dostoevsky predicted beauty would save Russian history and humanity, advocating for the incorporation of Christianity into social-political spheres. This foresaw the ethical direction of early 20th-century Russia, notably the socialist morality of Soviet society (Mai, 2018). Dostoevsky explained that true goodness cannot arise from rebellion or impulsive individual actions, illustrated by characters like Raskolnikov and Ivan, who faced severe consequences for their actions. These characters' fates symbolize Dostoevsky's revolutionary foresight—that genuine spiritual revolution involves innovation accompanied by profound spiritual suffering. Addressing evil through violations of good results in severe spiritual pain. Hence, Dostoevsky's characters and contemporary intellectuals were deeply troubled while seeking new values and peaceful paths for Russia's future. Dostoevsky advocated for unity among people, emphasizing that genuine freedom must stem from inner goodness, overcoming evil from within.

## Conclusion

Fundamentally, the human spiritual world aggravates and enriches human actions. As a pillar of Dostoevsky's philosophy, the idea of freedom includes not the absence, but deep suffering and intense struggles the conscious womb undergoes on the way to liberation, reflecting in utter pain, existential conflict, tragic freedom. Through this, Dostoevsky introduced a new notion of freedom: freedom of the spirit. For him, freedom of the spirit is authentic freedom—the greatest good for which suffering, solitude, and sacrifice must be endured. Since it is profoundly linked to modern Russia, it captures the spirit and nature of the Russian people. Dostoevsky, through the destinies of his existential characters, provides humanity with profoundly insightful analyses of human beings' destinies aligned with psychological and psychoanalytical approaches. The experiences of the subject on the path toward liberation are akin to deep evocations in therapy. Dostoevsky was an accurate predictor of what awaits

humanity. Today, to achieve freedom of the spirit, one must strive harder and face enduring self-reflection, self-criticism, and struggle inwardly to adopt new values for the individual and society at large.

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