



RESEARCH PAPER

Existential Elements in the Character of the Underground Man

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ABSTRACT

The study titled "Existential Elements in the Character of The Underground Man," examines the particular existential elements portrayed by Fyodor Dostoevsky in his work "Notes From Underground", such as absurdity, alienation, freedom, anxiety, or misery etc. In other words, this article investigates the "Notes From Underground" from an existential standpoint. Under the umbrella of the Qualitative method, the study in hand employed textual analysis of selected excerpts from Notes From Underground. The lenses of existential ideas such as freedom, absurdity, alienation, and anguish are utilized to extend and expend the study topic and objectives. This research critically explores various reasons for the protagonist, for instance, the Underground Man's isolation, absurdity, anxiety, alienation, and freedom amongst others, as well as how these existential features contribute to his sufferings in the novel.

KEYWORDS

Absurdity, Alienation, Existentialism, Freedom

Introduction

Plato and Aristotle, two famous Greek philosophers, thought that everything has an essence: a set of fundamental characteristics that are required or essential for a thing to be what it is. The object would be a completely different entity if those properties are removed. A knife would not be a knife without a blade, regardless of whether it has a wooden or metal grip. The blade is the most important feature of the knife since it dictates its purpose. Keeping in mind Plato's and Aristotle's point of view that everything, including ourselves, has an essence, and that our essences exist in us prior to our birth. As a result, sticking to one's core values is a part of what it is to be a decent human, according to this perspective. We may or may not know what our essence is, and we may or may not be capable of living up to it, but the crucial point is that our essence gives us a sense of purpose because we were designed to be someone or something specific.

Until the late 1800s, this belief, known as essentialism, was the prevailing worldview, and many people still embrace it today. However, other intellectuals began to question whether persons have any essence or purpose in the late 1800s, with German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, claiming that life has no ultimate meaning. In the mid-twentieth century, the way had been paved for French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre to return to the subject of the essence and ask, "What if we were the ones who arrived first? What if we were born with no pre-programmed purpose and had to figure out our own essences?" As a result, the groundwork for what we today refer to as existentialism was established. "Existence comes before essence," the company's motto says. To put it

another way, our very existence is a miracle. To put it simply, our existence (birth) comes first, and then each of us chooses who we will be. We must identify our essence by the way we live.

According to the Oxford definition, existentialism is a philosophical system or theory that emphasizes the existence of the particular person as a free and responsible entity who decides his or her own development by willful actions. Existentialists believe that in a meaningless world, mankind must find their purpose. In a world where everything is irrational, they must make sensible decisions. They place a premium on human existence, acts, freedom, and decision-making.

"Existentialism arose from the Wasteland that was Europe during and after World War II." (1976, Charlesworth). Existentialism gained popularity in the years following World Wars I and II. The psychological state of the population was the fundamental reason behind this. Thousands of deaths and war-like scenarios occurred practically everywhere on the planet, leading to a society in which individuals began to question the nature and meaning of their own life. People grew increasingly aware of their dread of existence, which helped existentialism gain acceptance.

Although Soren Kierkegaard is regarded as the first existential philosopher, he never used the term. The terminology existentialism was coined by Jean-Paul Sartre, a French philosopher, for the first time. On numerous occasions, he advocated existential philosophy. On October 28, 1945, Jean-Paul Sartre gave a lecture titled "*Existentialism is Humanism*" to an enthusiastic audience in Paris. It was regarded as something of a manifesto for the Existentialist movement. For the broader public, it is still the most essential introduction to his philosophical concepts for the general public. Sartre's bold and innovative views had a huge impact. The concept of "alienation" is one of his most prominent and impactful ideas.

Albert Camus, a French-Algerian philosopher, essayist, and journalist, is widely regarded as one of the most influential existentialists. To express himself, he produced essays and novels. His concept of "Absurdity" has made him renowned.

Nietzsche, Heidegger, Karl Jasper, and Simon De Beauvoir were among other existential philosophers. Many additional writers, not all of whom were philosophers, had a significant influence on existentialism. Franz Kafka, a German novelist, created novels on existential thought, humanity's self-destructive and unpredictable nature, and existentialist themes of anxiety, guilt, isolation, alienation, anguish, meaninglessness, and absurdity of life, which are represented in Kafka's works. Fyodor Dostoevsky, a Russian author, authored works about existential issues such as "*Notes from the Underground*" and "*The Idiot*."

"Existentialism is actually a term for a variety of revolts against traditional philosophy," which is more accurate for Dostoevsky because he never identified as an existentialist. Despite the fact that Dostoevsky published after Kierkegaard, he is the one who best described existentialist thought. "It's as if Kierkegaard stepped directly out of Dostoevsky's pen," Kaufmann says, adding that "part one of Notes from Underground is the best existentialist intro ever written."

In 1864, Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote the novel *Notes from Underground*. The story follows the lifestyle and thought process of a isolated, spiteful, and ailing person who rants in a journal. "The Underground Man" of Dostoevsky is frequently bizarre, generally brutal, and cut off from the rest of humanity. The Underground Man's anguish stems from his

paradoxical need. He yearns to feel connected to the outer world while also seeking ultimate independence and absolute freedom of choice. *Notes from Underground* is a brilliant work of existentialist philosophy. In the midst of his innumerable failures, the story depicts the existence of a single individual man who tries to live, identify himself, define the environment around him, and belong. The *Underground Man's* diary is a window into existentialism's actual nature.

Literature Review

Much research has been conducted on the novel *The Notes From Underground*. Many researchers have explored it from various angles. Nihilism, Rational Egoism, theology, and other intellectual views are among them. The researcher examines a number of publications on existentialism as well as the above mentioned novel.

Existentialism, according to Rasheed, Khan, and Rasheed, is a philosophical movement that emerged in the late 1800s and rose to prominence in France in the mid-to-late 1900s. According to existentialism, humans must pick their own lives purpose while dwelling in a senseless universe. In an irrational environment, they must make sensible decisions (Rasheed, Khan, & Rasheed, 2021) and (Afaq. M., et al, 2022).

Mullah (2016) has suggested that existentialism is a relatively new philosophical movement. It is also known as a twentieth-century philosophical movement founded on the contributions of contemporary philosophers. Existential philosophy is concerned with the realization of one's basic freedom and responsibility as a human being. Existentialism is the only philosophy that places a premium on individuality. "The value of human as an independent individual, as well as his choice and responsibility, is emphasized by this philosophy." 1. Existentialism can be said to be an endeavor to reach the deepest core of human life in a specific manner. As a result, it's known as "concrete man philosophy" (Mallah, 2016) and (Ishtiaq.M et.al 2021).

In accordance with Burston, existentialism is a doctrine and psychotherapy view that asserts that, despite our various historical and social circumstances, generational differences, race and sex, competence, and on and on, we all share the very same basic structures of emergence, as well as a need to attain purpose and worth to life through choices and decisions, as a result of being human and aware of our impending death (Burston, 2003).

According to Choudhary (2019), in *Notes from the Underground*, the protagonist contends with internal tensions, self-contradictions, and self-pity on a regular basis, to the point where his life becomes an incarnation of an unknown agony. The book boldly declares the human mind's dilemma. Man does not have any kind of safe haven or retreat from the grief and anguish of modern consciousness (Choudhary, 2019).

The "underground man" is the narrator of *Notes from Underground*, and the entire work is made up of his diary entries. The "underground man" adds that he writes for self-reflection and to better understand his views. He is at a loss to understand his life, to understand the fundamental nature of his being, and to make sense of his existence (Rapoport, 2008, p.1). The "underground man" is trying to define himself after coming into contact with his existence in the world. His notebook entries reveal his sadness, dissatisfaction, and loss. He's on his own, and the only way he can genuinely see and understand himself is to be alone. Introspection is how he manifests his own presence in the universe. The "underground man" is having a hard time to have a better knowledge of his own nature and the nature of the universe around him.

The novel is examined from numerous angles and dimensions by many capable scholars, as seen by the provided survey of relevant literature. The work is also less explored from the perspectives of absurdity, alienation, dread, and freedom, as evidenced by the literature study. As a result, this study examines *Notes From Underground* through the vintage point of freedom, alienation, absurdity, and anxiety, all within the context of existentialism.

Material and Methods

The researcher has revealed the researcher's methodology in this chapter. This chapter primarily covers the research design, data gathering sources, theoretical framework, and data analysis method.

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm can be defined as "a set of fundamental convictions collaborated among researchers about how are supposed to be apprehended and handled" Kuhn (1962).

The qualitative research approach is used due to the nature of the investigation, which entails data exploration for questions one and two. It dives into the novel in order to examine DOSTOEVSKY's *Notes From Underground* from an Existentialist perspective.

Data Collection

Data for the dissertation was collected from primary as well as secondary sources.

Primary Data

Primary sources are the data gathered directly by the student. The researcher began gathering data for this study by reading the novel *Notes From Underground*. The novel's text serves as the primary source of data collection.

Secondary Data

The secondary sources of the data collection for this study are books, research articles, thesis, and websites which are related to this topic.

Data Analysis

Textual analysis is a qualitative data analysis process that reveals the hidden and powerful meanings, structures, and functions existing in a textbook. "When we do textual analysis of a text, we generally make an informed guess at some of the most plausible explanations which can be made of the selected text," McKee (2001) says.

The original text of *Notes From Underground* has been textually studied in this research.

Theoretical Framework

The research study focuses on how a person facing existential crisis deals with the absurd world and seeks to uncover the meaning of his life or mere existence. Existentialism is the relevant framework. The basic framework for this study is Existentialism. Absurdity, alienation, freedom and responsibility, as well as dread or anxiety, are key characteristics of existentialism. Philosophers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Karl

Jasper, Simon De Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus all advocated existentialist ideas and notions. Various conceptions of existentialism were established and improved by Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre explores the concepts of freedom and anxiety in his work. He also re-examines the concept of alienation. Albert Camus, on the other hand, was the one who coined the term "absurdity". Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus's notions of existentialism mentioned above are the conceptual Framework for the research.

Absurdity

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was a French-Algerian philosopher whose philosophical concept of 'absurdity' became famous. The universe, according to Albert Camus, is a cruel and irrational place. When a rational being confronts such a universe, life becomes absurd. "The absurd is originated of the clash between human necessities and the world's unaccommodating silence." This is something that must not be overlooked. This must be clung to since it can determine the entire outcome of life, even the irrational, human nostalgia, and the absurd that results from their encounter."(Camus, 1991).

Alienation

The concept of 'alienation' has its origins in Hegel's philosophy. Later, it was re-defined by French author and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Many more intellectuals would later add to this theme. Alienation is a psychological state in which a person feels cut off from society, culture, God, and even oneself. In this situation, a person's interpersonal relationships are severely impacted when compared to normal people. The things with which one should identify are frequently the source of this sensation of alienation. "Alienation refers to a state of mind in which a person perceives himself as alien. He's gotten divorced from himself. The person who is alienated is disconnected from others.

Freedom

Another major issue in existential philosophy is human freedom, and it is the one that is closest to its heart. It's used by a lot of existential philosophers and novelists. Human freedom, according to existentialists, is a true and valuable aspect of the human experience. Unfettered and unlimited freedom characterizes human personality.

"Freedom is equal with existence," Sartre (1946) writes, "and man can be said not to be free only, but he is condemned to be free."

Anguish

Another feature of existential philosophy is anguish, often known as anxiety, dread, and agony. A feeling of unease brought on by the realization that life is ludicrous. According to existentialists, it is a negative emotion that arises from the experience of human freedom and responsibility.

Results and Discussion

Despite the fact that the Underground Man is a fictional character, Dostoevsky says that he represents people who "not only may but must exist in the world, keeping in mind the circumstances within which our society has traditionally been developed." A man who

is fully shut off from civilization is known as the Underground Man. He believes he is considerably more intelligent and "conscious" than everyone he meets. However, he is aware that his consciousness frequently manifests as skepticism, preventing him from having faith in any of his actions. His skepticism has paralyzed him, preventing him from engaging in "life" like other people do. Every thought and emotion that the Underground Man has is constantly scrutinized and questioned. As a result, he is unable to make decisions.

"I tell you solemnly, that I have many times tried to become an insect. But I was not equal even to that. I swear, gentlemen, that to be too conscious is an illness- a real thorough-going illness." (Dostoevsky, 1964, p.10). The storyteller attacks on scientific rationalism by claiming that one of mankind's fundamental problems is an over-developed consciousness, which is paradoxically one of mankind's main flaws. This intense awareness is a terrible disease. The inconsistency of these points of view works on a number of levels. In any community, especially one dedicated to scientific rationalism, a man's education and insights should be celebrated in the highest sense. According to *The Underground Guy*, in order to embrace the prevailing society of his day, one must be a non-thinking man of rapid action. Man's biggest attribute becomes his worst situation as a result of his high level of consciousness, which forces him to reject his civilization.

The ignorant are simply unaware of the world's complexities and defects, but the high mind bears the brunt of humanity's suffering. To put it another way, the great intelligence is conscious of wars and genocides, defenseless suffering, malnutrition in all parts of the globe, ailments and economic hardship, and all of mankind's trials, and thus continues to suffer for all of society's problems, whereas the simple mind, or "the man of direct action," is only concerned about issues of the instant.

"Ha, ha, ha! Next you'll be finding pleasure in a toothache!" you will exclaim, laughing.

"And why not? There is also pleasure in a toothache," I answer. "(Dostoevsky, 1864, p.18)

This paragraph, which opens Chapter IV of the "Underground" section, exemplifies the Underground Man's sociopathy to the greatest degree possible. In the preceding chapter, he went into great depth about how he delights in his own humiliation, relishing the extremities of his cluelessness and helplessness. The quote's "you" points to the Underground Man's target audience, to whom the entire work is directed. This audience represents the rational man's perspective, who would laugh at the absurdity of someone appreciating something that causes him pain. The Underground Man's mocking remark that he'll take pleasure in a toothache next is a denial of the situation's ridiculousness. It would not be enjoyable to anyone in their right mind.

The reference to European civilization links the idea of a toothache to the importance of European civilization's impact on Russia. Indeed, the Underground Man's delight in his toothache reveals not only his sociopathy and eagerness to fascinate his reader, but also the artificiality of his existence. His enjoyment of the toothache morphs into a caricature of his enjoyment of other "developed" pleasures, as fostered by European philosophy and literature. Dostoevsky was a critical critic of how this Europeanized, "molded" way of thinking alienated Russian intellectuals from the country's actual culture and people, who worked as members of a community with the land. In this line, the Underground Man's extravagant embellishing are both a result of and a key cause to his social rejection.

“Question: What is he? Answer: A sluggard; how very pleasant it would have been to hear that of oneself! It would mean that I was positively defined...” (Dostoevsky, 1864, p. 23)

The Underground Man is trying to define his own personality, and, more importantly, his own existence, in this segment. One of life's biggest challenges for the introspective individual is attempting to define the essence of one's own existence. This has been a major problem in twentieth-century philosophy, and it is at the heart of the Existentialism school of thought, particularly as championed by Jean Paul Sartre. At this point, the reader should be aware that much of Dostoevsky's writings were used by modern existentialists to express much of their philosophy. The existentialists, like the Underground Man, believe that too many individuals define their own existence based on what others think of them. Furthermore, far too many people try to define themselves by giving themselves a label or a definition.

According to the narrator, expertise or rationality, however, does not define one's essence or existence. To think so is to be deceived by oneself. Therefore The Underground Man suffers in his life.

“Your advantages are prosperity; wealth, freedom, peace, and so on, and so on...” (Dostoevsky, 1864, p. 26)

One of the most treasured rights of mankind, according to the Underground Man (and Dostoevsky), is the ability to choose one's activities. Man's freedom to choose would be taken away if we were given a logical and scientific society. As a result of our freedom, man frequently chooses what is not in his best interests. As a result, man frequently conducts acts solely to demonstrate that he has the freedom to do so.

The Underground Man also looks into what the term "advantage" means. What kind of man in this world is in charge of deciding or defining exactly what constitutes a man's "best advantage," because what is advantageous to one man may be destructive to another. Furthermore, some men will always choose to deviate from their "greatest advantage" in order to assert their personal independence. Men aren't all mathematicians, and they're more than just brains. A specific Underground Man guy has been known to explain why he is about to do something in clear, coherent explanations, only to turn around and do the exact opposite, and thus illogical, thing. As a result, "to practically every man, something more significant than his best advantages" must exist. Whatever it is, it serves to deconstruct categorization.

“Here it is, here it is at last, the encounter with reality. . . . All is lost now!” (Dostoevsky, 1864, p. 86)

In Chapter V of "Apropos of the Wet Snow," the Underground Man shouts these words to himself as he goes down the steps in pursuit of his former friends. After Zverkov's last supper, with which the Underground Man embarrassed himself and isolated them, the others went to a brothel together. The Underground Man has resolved to find them out, whether to accept a pardon or exact vengeance. He's content for a multitude of reasons. With one thing, he believes that his special brand of sadism has now reduced him to the lowest possible position, which needs some type of confrontation. The Underground Man's indecisiveness is stimulated by the concept of inevitability.

The sense of inevitability is reassuring to someone as indecisive as the Underground Man. He is confident that the crisis will resolve itself in some fashion, with

victory or defeat being the outcome. In either case, the Underground Man will be forced to take part in "life," to truly connect with other humans. The Underground Man craves interaction, and he feels that being presented with "any external incident, no matter how insignificant," will disrupt his repetitive, lonely existence. A combat, a direct confrontation, or a previous enemy adores and remorseful friendship, this incident guarantees to be momentous. The Underground Man's description of this "clash with reality" as a violent encounter is telling. Anger, vengeance, and hate seem to be his only good alternatives for interacting with others. As a consequence, he feels that duels and discussions are his only options for expressing himself. As a consequence, he feels that duels and discussions are his only means of social interaction. The Underground Man's association of reality with violence, fury, ego, and disgrace symbolizes his reaction to Liza's failure. He doesn't really have any non-aggressive strategies towards friendship.

"Science has succeeded in so far analyzing man that we know already that choice and what is called freedom of will is nothing else than... I was rather frightened."
(Dostoevsky, 1964, p.31)

The Underground Man criticizes a utopian world in which man is reduced to a mechanized robot. In such a scientific community, even freedom of choice and will would be limited to "two plus two equals four." The Underground Man argues that if everything is understood long in advance, if everything can be predicted mathematically, man will forfeit some essential elements of his humanity. For example, if it can be mathematically and empirically established that when wishes and sentiments contradict with reasoning, man must "completely stop to realize wish, and rather than operate the rational act," and if man's activities can thus be anticipated with rational surety, life would be uninteresting, and man would turn into a robot.

The Underground Man's individuality and uniqueness are characterized by his freedom of choice, or the freedom to engage in irrational behaviour. If a person lacks this quality, he becomes a mechanized robot who performs routine tasks. As a consequence, man routinely participates in irrational behaviour and deliberately causes chaos and destruction for no other purpose than to exhibit his individuality and independence.

"I dimly felt that she was going to pay dearly for it all this." (Dostoevsky, 1864, p. 120)

The Underground Man recalls his reaction to Liza's entrance at his apartment in this quote from Chapter IX of "Apropos of the Wet Snow." He is dressed in a torn bathrobe and has been screaming with wrath at his servant, Apollon. When Liza walks into the apartment, the Underground Man "dies of shame" and flees into his chamber. He attempts to act respectable when he returns, but he is still extremely embarrassed. Liza's patient, expectant stare irritates him, and he feels forced to do something impressive to match his brothel speech. The Underground Man's shame is compounded by the fact that he felt immense control over Liza in the brothel when he was persuading her of the wrong of her actions. He believed he could control her emotions, affect her life choices, and manage how she felt about herself and about him. He assumed she admired and regarded him.

Following his humiliation at Zverkov's farewell supper, these feelings were especially precious to the Underground Man. He's now lost his cool in front of Apollon, the one person over whom he believes he should have some authority. As a result, the Underground Man feels especially impotent, believing he has lost all respect and dignity in Liza's eyes. He holds her accountable for the fact that she has witnessed him in this dreadful state. Her presence has made him realize how filthy his bathroom, apartment, and

behavior with Apollon are – how filthy his entire existence is. In this way, the Underground Man shifts the blame for his misery onto Liza's shoulders. He can direct his hatred of others against himself, just as he can direct his hatred of himself onto others, particularly when they are weaker, poorer, or less reputable than he is.

“Zverkov walked in at the head of them were laughing; evidently he was the leading spirit...” (Dostoevsky, 1964, p.76)

The fact that the narrator had been waiting for nearly an hour astonished everyone. They all laughed, and Simonov was eventually held responsible. Zverkov was taken aback by the Underground Man's failure to order a drink for himself while he waited.

The Underground Man's early arrival for the party sets a tense tone for the rest of the evening. In the end, he is to blame for the initial uncertainty because he intruded on the private party and also because the group did not know his address and thus could not warn him of the change in plans because he had nothing to do with them. With his super-sensitive awareness, acute consciousness, and sense of humiliation over his "threadbare" garments, he believes he is the embodiment of absurdity for having waited an hour.

The absurdity of his situation is highlighted by his stomping up and down the room as the others conversed. He was well aware that his acts were intended to draw attention to himself, so when "they paid no attention" to him, he became even more enraged. As he admitted in the previous section, he has always felt the need to dominate or tyrannize any relationship; as a result, we can see that he is unable to have a normal conversation or relationship with these people, and thus does everything in his power to dominate the situation. It's a vicious circle: when he's ignored, he becomes further determined to bring the relationship to a close.

Conclusion

The major goal of this study is to examine the novel *Notes From Underground* from the standpoint of existentialism. The research goes deeply into The Underground Man's character in order to comprehend his situation and existential crises. The text analysis reveals that he feels alienation and anxiety all around him in his absurd existence.

The Underground Man appears to be detached from himself and his society, according to the text. He does not identify with society's established norms, values, and meanings. The novel illustrates the absurdity of human life and the world, according to a careful interpretation of the text from the perspective of existentialist. Dostoevsky's *The Underground Man* is repulsive, cruel, and cut off from the rest of people. The underground man's suffering stems from his paradox of need. He yearns for a social integration to the outer world while still seeking complete independence and absolute freedom of choice. *Notes from Underground* is a brilliant work of existential philosophy. The work depicts the existence of a single individual man who, despite his inexhaustible failures, tries to exist, identify himself, define the environment around him.

In addition to this, The Underground Man's own decisions were also one of the factors that led to his sufferings. As the novella unfolds, signs of social anxiety emerge, posing a barrier to the underground man's day-to-day functioning. When it comes to confronting social situations, there have been instances where hesitation in making eye contact, avoiding communication, being extremely conscious, isolating oneself, being afraid of being laughed at in a social setting.

From an existential standpoint, this research examined at the concepts of absurdity and alienation, anxiety, and freedom. This provides insight into the human condition and can assist readers in getting a better understanding of themselves. Many philosophical ideas are there in the work, which can be studied in the future by many researchers from various angles. The novel, for example, can be studied from a psychological standpoint.

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