

## **The Torment of Contradiction: Morality Vs. Desire in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina***

**Priya**

Research Scholar,  
JRD University Chitrakoot.  
[anupriya8853476373@gmail.com](mailto:anupriya8853476373@gmail.com)

### **Abstract:**

The novel “Anna Karenina” by Leo Tolstoy is deeply concerned with the challenge of reconciling one’s moral obligation with what one desires personally, which is central to the tragedy depicted in Anna Karenina. The paper will demonstrate how each of the main characters in this work, notably Anna Karenina, experience the “pain of contradictory events,” which occurs as they attempt to live according to the strict moral expectations of the aristocratic class of Russia and seek emotional authenticity and personal fulfillment. Anna’s intense love affair with Count Vronsky generates considerable psychological and ethical turmoil, thereby exposing the negative impact on individuals created by a society that places great value on moral conformity but does not provide much compassion for individual differences. This paper demonstrates how Tolstoy critiques socially moral behaviours that are hypocritical through Anna’s inner conflict, her social isolation, and her tragic end. It covers Tolstoy’s complexities of how desire can be both life-building as well as life-reducing when discussing Anna’s tragic chase and downfall as contrasted with Levin’s development of greater moral integrity through fulfilling obligations, knowing himself spiritually, and applying his faith while opposing his own self-fulfilling prophecy. It shows that the ultimate connection is not simply that desires must be integrated with our moral values, but that the relationship between human emotions and morals is critical for the overall achievement of moral order; Tolstoy’s view of the connection makes morality real when it is founded on truth, compassion, and spiritual balance.

**Keywords: Morality, Torment, Leo Tolstoy's, Anna Karenina.**

## Introduction

The Russian author *Leo Tolstoy* wrote what many people believe is one of the best realist novels written in the 19th century when he published *Anna Karenina* in 1877. This book has offered a greater understanding of the moral, social and psychological struggles that occur when an individual's desire conflicts with a society's prescribed morals. This book was set in an aristocratic Russian society during the days of the Russian Empire, and it questions the legitimacy of an individual's personal desires in the context of what is considered acceptable behavior by a "moral" society. The opening line of *Anna Karenina*, "All happy families are alike, but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," highlights the many broken moral and emotional parts of our societal construct (Tolstoy, 2000 pp. 1–2). The broken parts of our society are created as a result of the lack of balance that occurs when someone wants something very badly and they have an obligation to act morally. *Anna Karenina* is ultimately one of the best examples of how our society and its definitions of morality can lead to destruction of one's life. Through her extramarital affair with Count Vronsky, Anna demonstrates that her decisions to violate the moral codes that established her societal roles as a wife, mother and virtuous woman of 19th-century Russian society, led to the suffering that was inflicted upon her after refusing to lead a moral double-life (Berlin, 2000, pp. 70–78). Tolstoy portrays Anna as the embodiment of a very sensitive person and someone who possesses a strong moral conscience. Her striving for authentic love puts her in conflict with a society that is focused on outward acts of proper behavior rather than inward truths.

However, Tolstoy's moral view encompasses more than mere condemnation and sympathy. By presenting the character of Konstantin Levin in parallel with *Anna Karenina*, the novel outlines an alternate moral path for Levin. Through his struggles with faith, work, family, and his obligations to society, Levin's journey illustrates Tolstoy's belief that a

person finds true moral satisfaction through sincerity, humility, and by engaging in the day-to-day activities of life rather than through socially constructed ideals (Adelman, Gary.1990, pp. 23–45) The novel illuminates the need for desire to be reconciled within a unified moral framework by contrasting Anna's emotional isolation with Levin's gradual ethical reconciliation. Numerous theorists have suggested that the novel *Anna Karenina* cannot be interpreted through a simple moral framework; however, Bakhtin perceives a moral realism in Tolstoy's writings, in which the experience of the individual determines an individual's morality rather than a prescribed set of morals. (Ardens, N. N. 1963, pp. 102–120) Thus, Anna's death is not a punishment from God for an immoral act and does not occur because of an individual's sin, but rather develops from her unresolved conflict between desire, conscience, and social exclusion; this re-presentation provides new dimensions to moral suffering and human freedom in the text. This paper will discuss *Anna Karenina* from a position of moral contradiction through the interdependence between an individual's desire for individual fulfillment and societal expectations placed upon him/her and the suffering produced via this contradiction. It may be argued that Tolstoy uses Anna as a foil to Levin, where the sufferings of each character serve to identify the ways in which morality and desire are interconnected in their existence and reveal the common human condition of living honestly within societal confines. This depiction of moral dissonance and individual suffering will provide contemporary discussions about morality and literature a substantive basis upon which to engage in dialogue about ethics.

### **Societal Morality**

Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* depicts nineteenth-century Russian society and its rigid moral codes—social reputation, duty to one's spouse, outwardly respectable behavior—at the expense of true emotional expression and happiness. Within the aristocracy of the time, moral authority was determined by adherence to the societal class system and not by the

achievement of moral excellence through the implementation of that code. This moral code created a contradictory society filled with hypocrisy. Moral infractions were allowed to pass as long as no one knew of them; however, when discovered, the offenders would be severely punished. Anna's demise occurs within the confines of this type of moral structure because her refusal to maintain the appearance of being respectable makes her an enemy of the values imposed by society (Tolstoy, 1877/2000).

The punitive aspects of morality can be seen through Anna's exclusion from polite society. Once regarded as fashionable, beautiful, and graceful, she is soon excluded from participating in any aspect of society after her affair with Vronsky is made public. The exclusion is indicative of the double standard that exists for men and women since the male offenders are seldom punished for their similar offenses. Tolstoy illustrates society's exercise of moral authority through social ostracism, rather than by means of legal or religious sanction, and the effects that such an exercise has on Anna and her psychological suffering and alienation (Christian, R.F., 1969 pp. 225–300) According to (Berlin 2000, pp. 70–78), Tolstoy critiques this conception of morality as ultimately inhumane, connecting it to social cruelty rather than ethical compassion.

Karenin's response to Anna's affair is another illustration of the impersonal and institutionalized form of morality found in society. Karenin does not engage with Anna emotionally in response to her actions, but rather focuses on decorum, legality, and public opinion. He is more concerned with the appearance of things than with the reality of the moral situation, and with preserving his social standing than he is with living morally upright. According to (Bayley 1988 pp. 108–120), Karenin's representation of the moral world is that of a rigidly ruled and externally-authority-based moral system, lacking moral imagination and the depth of emotion required for moral engagement. Through Anna's rejection from society

and Karenin's emotional disconnection, Tolstoy presents a critique of nineteenth-century Russian moral culture. The societal moral framework within the narrative context of *Anna Karenina* serves to control individuals, especially women, by inducing guilt and social isolation. Tolstoy argues that when the moral order is separated from compassion it destroys social cohesion and changes moral regulation from an ethical principle to a source of moral pain rather than one of moral guidance (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 45–51). As a result, as *Anna Karenina* exposes this contradiction between the social order and the belief in an ethical basis for social judgement; it encourages the reader to re-evaluate these ethical foundations.

### **Personal Desire**

The personal desires portrayed in *Anna Karenina* are portrayed as being a significant feat of human emotion; they exist within us when we seek an emotional fulfilment, freedom, and to be true to ourselves. Anna desires love for reasons that are not merely for sexual attraction; but also in search of an emotional understanding from others, as well as for herself, all while living in a society that has limited her possibilities of achieving the emotional connection that she craves. As a result of her emotionally disassociated marriage to Karenin, and the absence of that emotional intimacy, the relationship she shared with Count Vronsky would eventually arise from her growing discontentment with her extremely unfulfilled life.

Tolstoy uses the Anna-Vronsky relationship as the predominant representation of this personal desire. In contrast to what is frequently represented in other forms of literature regarding the extramarital affair, this relationship is based on deep emotional dependence on one another, and the pursuit of finding happiness outside of their society's limitations. Anna's willingness to sacrifice her social position, motherhood, and her acceptance/status within her society, represents the degree to which she is willing to go to free herself to feel loved and

free. Tolstoy has created Anna's personal desire as a morally complex entity that validates our need for genuine human authenticity while illustrating the psychological consequences associated with having an intense emotional need for love.

Throughout the evolution of Anna's relationship with Vronsky, Anna finds that her desire for happiness is becoming more and more a source of isolation. As she becomes more emotionally insecure and afraid that she will be abandoned by Vronsky, her desire for romantic love with him becomes transformed into a desire to possess him all to herself. This transition in desire illustrates how Tolstoy views desire as both liberating and damaging. (Mandelker 1993, pp. 141–145) Anna's tragedy comes from not necessarily her desire but from a lack of a social and moral framework that will allow for female autonomy and emotional independence. Where desire cannot be integrated into ethical and social life, it creates the possibility for fragmentation within.

Tolstoy investigates personal freedom in society's moral limitations through Anna's emotional development. While seeking happiness through love, Anna's attempts to reconcile her desires with her social reality results in psychological breakdown. Therefore, Tolstoy conceptualizes personal desire as both an integral part of living, and potentially dangerous and requiring respect, balance, and a moral basis. Ultimately, Anna demonstrates that an individual must pursue happiness through socially accepted means; when they do otherwise, they will experience significant emotional pain (Pattison, 2011, pp. 102–105).

### **Conflict and Consequences**

*Anna Karenina's* primary tragedy arises from the contradictory nature between individual desires and societal values which ultimately leads to Anna undergoing tremendous psychological suffering. Progressively, as Anna's bond with Vronsky grows stronger, Anna faces mounting pressure from her desire for affection to fulfill her emotional needs vs.

people's condemnation of her. The confusion created from the tension resulting from the conflict leads to severe internal turmoil manifested through feelings of guilt, stress, and an increasing sense of separation from others who disapprove of her actions. Tolstoy portrays Anna's mental state with remarkable psychological realism; he shows how Anna's moral agency is integrated with her social sense of self, leading to a struggle within herself to define what is right and wrong according to two competing reference standards (Tolstoy, 1877/2000, pp. 430–438).

Anna's conflict will increase as society and/or personal desire cannot provide complete satisfaction for Anna. Even though the social mores have been rejected, they are still a part of how Anna comes to know and value herself, which splits her into emotion. Anna's love for Vronsky, which provided some liberty, has been changed into jealousy and fear of abandonment instead of being a source of liberation to her. (Williams 2013, pp. 89–93) argues that Anna has no stable moral identity once she has stepped outside the accepted social norms of society, and thus remains psychologically ungrounded.

The moral and emotional conflict Anna has causes her fate to end tragically, which Tolstoy illustrates with her final act of desperation being the end result of her long-term mental suffering. Her experience before her suicide has been characterized as being affected by feeling mentally worn out and alone, as well as her wanting desperately to rid herself of the turmoil inside her. (Troyat 2001, pp. 312–316) states that Anna's suicide is a strike at the façade of a human being who feels split between two unwinnable ethical positions—one is love but has no legitimate position within society; the other is morality that has no emotion. Therefore, this act reflects the social structure's ability to destroy the ability for an individual to achieve a moral reconciliation for themselves.

Tolstoy's critique of moral absolutism and emotional repression comes from Anna's tragedy; the book illustrates that the condemnation of desire without context or the enforcement of morality without compassion leads not to moral order, but to the destruction of man; Anna represents an example of what can happen when established, rigid moral codes deny emotional complexity and truth; the conflict in this book is depicted as an infeasible force and the consequences are portrayed as disastrous certainties that highlight the necessity for a reader's moral responsibilities to be integrated with man's compassion (McLean, 2008, pp. 156–160).

### **Tolstoy's Portrayal**

In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy's approach to morality critiques the rigid social structures that value conformity to norms and appearance of respectability over compassion and understanding. He demonstrates how rigid moral codes of the nineteenth-century Russian aristocracy are harmful by depicting the emotional and psychological harm these rigid normative codes cause for individuals who do not comply. Rather than presenting morality as a fixed system, Tolstoy emphasizes the lived experience and suffering of the characters to illustrate how moral meaning is created from experience. (Orwin 2002, pp. 58–61) states that Tolstoy's critique of institutional morality relies on the significance of conscience and moral responsibility as a result of human sympathy, not informed by social norms. In contrast to his predecessor, whose view of the human condition as rationally driven led him to romanticize desire as an innately virtuous or liberating force, Tolstoy presents human desire to be both a complex and transitory element of the human experience—potentially leading to either realisation or destruction depending on how it exists in relation to a person's moral integration. Although Tolstoy has a substantial amount of sympathy for Anna's desire for love and freedom, he also illustrates that unchecked desire can be emotionally destabilising and create internal conflict when it is divorced from a moral basis (Jones 1994, pp. 203-207).

Tolstoy's realism lies in his portrayal of both passion and moral restraint as being necessary yet also having the potential to be destructive to the human experience; through the balance between the two forces, Tolstoy articulates a moral vision which does not accept any absolute definitions of good and evil. Thus, the reader can conclude that ethical behaviour requires the careful navigation between an individual's desires and their moral obligations. As (Medzhibovskaya 2014, pp. 91-95) states, Tolstoy's ethical framework can be described as being dialogic by virtue of his acknowledgment that the relationship between freedom and duty produces tension which is a fundamental element of the human condition. By depicting morality and desire as interrelated and complimentary rather than oppositional forces, Tolstoy encourages readers not only to challenge their adherence to more traditional morality-based forms of ethics, but also to accept a more compassionate form of ethical understanding.

### **Repetitive Compulsion in Anna**

It turns out that Anna was happy just being around Vronsky as the narrative goes along. "Oh, not over my husband," said she, "... I don't know him; I don't think of him." She was able to take the lead and get undivided attention in her romance with Vronsky, in contrast to her relationship with Karenin. He does not exist, says Tolstoy (1877, 342). Anna chose to disregard the negative aspects of her relationship with Vronsky because the joy she felt from controlling it exceeded the pain she felt from her relationship with Karenin. Remember, says Freud, that adults play and imitate in ways that spectators may find repulsive—for example, when they watch tragedies performed—yet they may find it utterly charming. Despite being beholden to the pleasure principle, it provides us hope that there are enough ways to make something memorable and processable out of something inherently disagreeable (Freud 1920,81).

The id, ego, and superego are the three tiers that make up the human mind, as proposed by Freud (1923). The libidinal desires are stored by the Id, and we are brought back to reality by our thinking self, the ego. If the "workings of repressed drive-impulses" are released, the ego's desires will inevitably be satisfied, even if the Id's desires end up hurting the ego (Freud 1920, 84). This explains why we get a pleasant sensation whenever our repressions are under danger. People feel driven to repeat because of the "pleasure of relief" (David Bain & Michael Brady 2014). On their first meeting, Anna felt a pull toward Vronsky, despite her acquaintance with Karenin and her propensity of suppressing her Id's disapproval. Despite her admiration for his handsome looks and the grandeur that Madame Vronskaya depicted, her ego prevented her from giving in to her suppressed desires.

Indeed, her "pleasure of relief" was consistent every time she crossed paths with Vronsky; "I am like a hungry man who has been given food." According to Tolstoy (1877, 347), despite being cold, exposed, and ashamed, he remains unfazed. This sparked a desire inside her to re-create her experiences, emotions, and bond with Vronsky, as well as an increase in her internal and external flexibility. For example, "Is he killed or not?" is the first thing that comes to mind for Anna whenever she learns about Vronsky's accident in the horse race. Does it sound right? Can we expect him to turn up? Do you think we can meet today? Tolstoy is cited in (1877, 385). Her mind was consumed by thoughts of her upcoming encounter with Vronsky and the fulfillment of his promise to visit her. If there are any gaps in Anna's life, Vronsky helps fill them, making him more than simply a love interest. Until her heart's content, she found joy in his company. Anna continues to deny it even after Vronsky and the family go back to normal.

Anna and Vronsky's love is passionate, yet superficial. Despite Vronsky's admiration for Anna's beauty and poise, Anna loves him because he fills a void in her life. They persist in meeting despite the apparent opposition since they enrich each other's lives. Williams

claims that Vronsky is an example of a man who is "unprepared for a relationship of any permanence" (1995). It appears like "for Anna, everything seems to fit a melodramatic plot centring on a great passion" (Morson 1995, 834), adds Gary Morson. So, it's safe to say that their childbearing, frequent meetings, and use of travel to escape criticism were all just ploys to find extra pleasure. "Repetition is not a secondary effect or the consequence of something going wrong, but expresses the very core of the drives, the fact that they are skewed from the start" (Schuster 2016, 77), as stated in Aaron Schuster's *The Trouble with Pleasure*. Consequently, being with Vronsky and acquiring attention from Levin are the driving forces behind Anna's drives, which have been tempered from her early life of monotony and compromises.

Thus, by bringing focus to one's main impulses, repetition aids in the healing of suppressed memories.

### **Theoretical Literature Review**

Research on *Anna Karenina* has repeatedly shown that *Leo Tolstoy* has a sophisticated perspective on moral themes, desire, and moral awareness. Rather than having one moral philosophy, Tolstoy's works can be understood using several different frameworks, such as moral realism, psychological realism, feminist theory, and ethics. Using these structures, it is apparent that *Anna Karenina* is not an example of moral dualism but provides insight into the reality of ethical conflict.

Moral realists assert that Tolstoy rejects abstract ethics and instead focuses on an ethical system based on lived experience. Regarding ethical realism, Bakhtin (1986) argues that Tolstoy's ethical naturalistic perspective offers moral truths that come through human suffering, contradiction, and dialogue rather than through fixed ideological positions. In this context, Anna's tragedy is a passage not to put into practice a moral lesson about desire but to

reveal the insufficiency of social morality to represent ethical dilemmas with empathy. Tolstoy's narrative technique allows readers to feel Anna's emotional experience, converting moral judgments into moral comprehension.

Psychological realism also offers an alternative way to look at literature. According to McLean (2008), Tolstoy was a pioneer in depicting inner experiences. In *Anna Karenina*, he explored fragmented experiences through the lens of modern-day psychological literature. By exploring how Anna demonstrates the effects of conflicting moral and emotional demands on an individual through her enormous internal conflict, Tolstoy lays the groundwork for contemporary depictions of psychologically fragmented characters. The two conflicting forces within her life are the desire to love another and the value of societal norms or moral codes. These opposing forces, or values, create guilt, anxiety, and self-alienation through the effects of both external judgment and those who think they hold value—namely, through their interpretation of morality. Psychological literary critics therefore view Anna's suicide as caused from the destructive nature of unresolved internal conflict rather than from committing a morally wrong act or failure.

Another critical theoretical lens through which to view the actions of Anna is through feminist literary criticism. Through their view of literature through the lens of social-power relationships, feminist theorists view Anna's violation of the social rules imposed through the Roman Catholic Church as having widespread implications. Mandelker (1993) states that Anna's violation of social norms illustrates that female desire is met with more strictness and punishment than male desire; however, Anna's experience also demonstrates that the punishment received by women is more harmful than any punishment received by men for the same infraction. Feminist literary theorists do not view Anna as simply a tragic hero; they see Anna as representative of the inherent injustices of the patriarchal foundations of Western society. They view the moral values depicted in *Anna Karenina* as an instrument used to

control social behavior in accruing control over women's sexual freedoms and self-determination.

The novel is also commonly interpreted through an ethical and philosophical lens, which typically centers on Tolstoy's disapproval of moral absolutism. In a well-known recounting, Berlin (2000) described Tolstoy as a conflicted thinker struggling with pluralism versus a unified moral system, asserting that *Anna Karenina* shows the impossibility of reconciling all values into a single moral code. An individual's desire and freedom, along with the duties that each has to fulfill in upholding a social order, maintain constant tension with each other, and any effort to support the absolute value for one will result in suffering for the individual concerned. Thus, the manuscript primarily speaks to the complexity of ethical behavior rather than the absolute certainty of an individual's morals.

In the past, many theoretical studies have focused on the dialogical line of ethics that Tolstoy employs, indicating that morality cannot be defined without reference to other people and situations. Medzhibovskaya (2014) contended that the primary tenet of Tolstoy's ethical system is derived from the interaction between individual conscience and the collective social responsibility of his community. The catastrophe of Anna arises out of society's refusal to have dialogue with those who are suffering; society chooses to be judgmental rather than to understand. Conversely, Levin's progressive growth in moral development supports Tolstoy's view that an individual can grow ethically only through the experience of humility, relationality and moral self-awareness.

All of these theories highlight how it is not possible to reduce *Anna Karenina* to just a simple moral story denouncing desire or praising social rules. This book combines (1) ethical philosophy, (2) psychological realism, and (3) a social critique. The literature confirms that Tolstoy's view of morality due to desire is linked by their unresolved conflict with each other,

which creates both ethical and psychological implications. This study builds on these theories by showing how *Anna Karenina* can be understood as an exploration of the timeless difficulty of balancing personal desire and moral obligation.

### **Objective Of Study**

1. Explore the moral and social constraints of nineteenth-century Russian society and their impact on individual choices.
2. Investigate Anna's pursuit of love and personal freedom and the resulting emotional and moral conflicts.
3. Compare Anna's trajectory with other characters, particularly Konstantin Levin, to understand Tolstoy's broader ethical vision.
4. Analyze Tolstoy's narrative and psychological techniques in portraying the complexity of human desire and moral dilemmas.

### **Research Methodology**

Utilizing literary analytical methods, the qualitative research approach of this study analyzes the connections between ethics/morality and individual desires (wants) in *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. This way, I will look at textual and narrative themes, character development, and technology to figure out how Tolstoy shows the struggle between ethics and the actual wants of human beings. The primary data source will be *Anna Karenina*, while the secondary sources will be scholarly literature that discusses moral realism, psychological realism, and feminist literary theory. To examine how ethical truths derive from human experience (realism), the investigation of Anna's internal conflict (psychological realism), the role of gender-related social restrictions (feminism), and the philosophical argument on desire versus moral obligation (ethical), this study will examine *Anna Karenina* using a multi-

theoretical framework. The thematic analysis of the data will focus on the recurring themes of social judgment, personal desire, and moral consequences found in *Anna Karenina*. This comparative character analysis will examine Anna's and Levin's differing methods of reconciling their desires with morality. The scope of this research is limited to a textual analysis of *Anna Karenina*; it will not include other forms of adaptation or non-literary ways of interpreting *Anna Karenina*. While the interpretation is based on previous scholarship, it remains grounded in textual evidence, illustrating Tolstoy's insight into the psychology of individuals as well as criticism of the social and moral paradigms prevalent during his lifetime. This methodology has yielded a complete and thorough understanding of *Anna Karenina's* ethical and emotional aspects; it has also demonstrated that Tolstoy's examination of the conflict between human desires and moral virtue is still applicable today.

## **Result**

*Anna Karenina's* analysis shows that the main theme of the book is the discord between the moral framework imposed onto personal wants, and the psychological distress caused by this dichotomy between society's moral judgments, and an individual's choice to fulfill self-interest. This internal struggle leads Anna to experience guilt, fear, and psychological instability due to her desire for love from Vronsky; ultimately this struggle isolates her from all those around her both emotionally and physically (Tolstoy, 1877/2000, pp. 430-438). Conversely, Konstantin Levin demonstrates how personal ambitions such as building a relationship with Kitty and having a job can be brought together in a way that is consistent with other people's concerns (Bayley, 1988, pp. 112-115). This study also demonstrates society's tendency to make individuals experience greater emotional distress due to the way that socially unaccepted actions are punished or criticized. Anna's being ostracized and Karenin's focus on maintaining an image of propriety show how society uses negative judgments about individuals to punish others while also exacerbating an individual's

internal conflict (Berlin, 2000, pp. 74-76). In addition, the research suggests that Tolstoy views desire as morally indistinguishable; both can bring happiness, but they can also cause destruction if there is no ethical or social foundation to support them (Mandelker, 1993, pp. 141-145). These findings suggest that the book critiques moral absolutes in a nuanced way and that unresolved conflict between desire and morality may result in a tragic outcome. In contrast, when a person's wishes are integrated into their moral framework, they will experience greater psychological stability and fulfillment.

## **Discussion**

This research demonstrates that both individual passions and social morals interdepend and affect one another in the course of the development of the characters and the story in *Anna Karenina*. Tolstoy uses Anna's love for Vronsky as an example of how powerful unmediated passion can destroy a person when confronted by an inflexible social/moral code. Anna's internal suffering, due to the guilt and fear that she feels and the isolation that she experiences, provides an example of the idea of moral realism, or that the ethical truth of a situation is not derived from general moralistic precepts, but rather is derived from personal experience. Ultimately, Anna's experiences demonstrate that Tolstoy viewed the social construct of morality as a means of controlling people, especially women, who must conform to the requirements of a code of conduct that valued outward appearances more than empathy or moral understanding (Mandelker 1993, 141-145). Anna's relationship with Levin illustrates how desiring and being moral do not necessarily stand in opposition to one another but rather will be able to integrate into each other by implementing proper ethical foundations in order for individuals to find inner peace as well as live peaceably in society. As Levin matured and gained value from his meaningful work to support his family and socially reflecting upon what he was doing for society, he came to realize that true happiness

comes from one aligning his values with his responsibilities to society. Anna, on the other hand, demonstrates what happens when someone desires something (i.e. happiness) at the expense of the established norms of society; Levin demonstrates that it is possible for people to reconcile their desires with the ethics set forth by society, to enhance both personal and societal fulfillment. Additionally, the individual's interaction with their moral conscious was an avenue that Tolstoy used to successfully represent the difficulty people have in their thought processes concerning what they think about themselves and the society in which they reside. For instance, Anna's demise cannot only be viewed as an example of societal punishment; it can also be viewed as an example of how one can feel guilty about their actions biting the individual as a result of how they feel about society and who they were/are, thus producing anguish and despair (McLean, 2008, pp. 156-60). By making desire morally ambiguous in nature and social mores protective/abusive in nature, Tolstoy compels the reader to reevaluate whether their understanding of right and wrong is simply black and white. This theory will result in a timeless view of the confusion of what is moral or immoral and what is fulfilling or unfulfilling in people's lives; including the need for people to be empathetic, morally reflect upon their choices, and integrate personal desire within an ethical framework.

## **Conclusion**

*Anna Karenina* is a profound examination of the relationship between moral code(s) and desire(s) that transcends boundaries of culture and time. By examining Anna's journey, Tolstoy illustrates how a moral value system focused on adhering to social standards destroys the individual. Through Anna's suffering, the reader understands that the contradictions between an individual's desire for authenticity and a moral code that lacks compassion cause great anguish. At the same time, the reader is offered an additional larger examination of the

human condition through the use of alternative moral paths in characters such as Levin. Tolstoy ultimately proposes that an ethical existence should be based upon honesty, compassion, and an understanding of oneself. The universal nature of *Anna Karenina* exists through its ability to compel the reader to address the interplay between desire, morality, and the search for meaning. It does not, however, provide easy answers to these issues.

### Works Cited:

Adelman, Gary. *Anna Karenina: The Bitterness of Ecstasy*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990, pp. 23–45.

Ardens, N. N. *Tvorcheskij put' L. N. Tolstogo*. Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1963, pp. 102–120.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (C. Emerson, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press, pp. 45–51.

Bayley, J. (1988). *Tolstoy and the Novel*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 108–120.

Bayley, J. (1988). *Tolstoy and the novel*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 112–115.

Berlin, I. (2000). *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*. Princeton University Press, pp. 70–78.

Berlin, I. (2000). *The hedgehog and the fox: An essay on Tolstoy's view of history*. Princeton University Press, pp. 74–76.

Christian, R.F. Tolstoy, *A Critical Introduction*. London Cambridge uni. press, 1969. pp. 225–300.

Freud, Sigmund. "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through." *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, edited by Ernest Jones, translated by C. J. M. Hubback, The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1920, pp. 83–138. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11189-001>.

Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Edited by Ernest Jones, translated by C. J. M. Hubback, The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1920, pp. 1–83. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11189-001>.

Hardy, B. (2010). *Forms of feeling in Victorian fiction*. Peter Lang, pp. 64–68.

Jones, M. (1994). *The moral vision of the Russian novel*. Princeton University Press, pp. 203–207.

Mandelker, A. (1993). *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the woman question, and the Victorian novel*. Ohio State University Press, pp. 141–145.

Mandelker, A. (1993). *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the woman question, and the Victorian novel*. Ohio State University Press, pp. 141–145.

Mandelker, A. (1993). *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the woman question, and the Victorian novel*. Ohio State University Press, pp. 141–145.

McLean, H. (2008). *In quest of Tolstoy*. Academic Studies Press, pp. 156–160.

McLean, H. (2008). *In quest of Tolstoy*. Academic Studies Press, pp. 156–160.

Medzhibovskaya, I. (2014). *Tolstoy and the religious culture of his time: A biography of a long conversion, 1845–1887*. Lexington Books, pp. 91–95.

Orwin, D. T. (2002). *Tolstoy's art and thought, 1847–1880*. Princeton University Press, pp. 58–61.

Pattison, G. (2011). *Reading Dostoevsky and Tolstoy*. SCM Press, pp. 102–105.

Schuster, Andrew. *The Trouble with Pleasure: Deleuze and Psychoanalysis*. MIT Press, 2016, pp. 1–245. ISBN 978-0-262-52859-7.

Tolstoy, L. (2000). *Anna Karenina* (R. Pevear & L. Volokhonsky, Trans.). Penguin Classics, pp. 1–2, 420–430, 760–768.

Tolstoy, L. (2000). *Anna Karenina* (R. Pevear & L. Volokhonsky, Trans.). Penguin Classics, pp. 342.

Tolstoy, L. (2000). *Anna Karenina* (R. Pevear & L. Volokhonsky, Trans.). Penguin Classics, pp. 430–438, 760–768. (Original work published 1877)

Tolstoy, L. (2000). *Anna Karenina* (R. Pevear & L. Volokhonsky, Trans.). Penguin Classics, pp. 430–438. (Original work published 1877)

Troyat, H. (2001). *Tolstoy*. Northwestern University Press, pp. 312–316.

Williams, R. (2013). *The moral imagination: Studies in Russian literature*. Oxford University Press, pp. 89–93.

Williams, Raymond. “Lawrence and Tolstoy.” *Anna Karenina*, edited by G. Gibian, translated by T. M. Translation, Norton Critical Edition, New York: Norton, 1995, pp. 792–798.