

What is Art?

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Tolstoy is a more or less universally acclaimed imaginative writer, in fact as good as they come. Any attempt to present a collection of the very best writers mankind has ever produced would ill-afford to ignore his name, would it aspire to be taken seriously. This is rather uncontroversial. The man himself on the other hand presents a bundle of contradictions. For one thing he combines great penetrating intelligence with startling naivety, brutal honesty with disingenuousness, high moral grounds with reckless depravity, (be they separated in time), great wisdom with crankiness. And an all-consuming disinterested love of mankind coupled with almost total egotism. In fact one surmises that the one is both a prerequisite and consequence of the other. Tolstoy was a great artist, who later in life instead became a crank and a proto-hermit repudiating all what he had done before. Clearly the present book was written during his later period and should not be representative of the man as a whole, and ignored as the misdirected ravings of a man, not yet mad, but on the road to eventual madness. I found the book in my library, where it has languished unread for more than thirty years, bought it for what I know no reasons, ignored it because I imagined it to be misdirected, betraying everything that was good in him, a diatribe on the level of his *Kreuzersonata*. Of course I was wrong, in spite of the list of contradictions, he is of one piece, and it is not only the case that his altruism and egotism need and reinforce each other, the same goes for any pair of opposites in his character. In particular his tract 'What is Art' is to a large part superb, combining limpid intelligence with a lively and engaging prose, presenting a cogent and often sophisticated argument, rivaling that of the best of philosophers. He may be a literary man, a poet of sorts, but his prose is clear and factual, as would he be a scientist, yet of course in the end he degenerates into a preacher. He may have initially planted his feet firmly in the ground, but the effect is that in the end his head is mired in the clouds (because he is so tall?). Once again in spite of the contradictions exhibited in the book, it is still of one piece. The book may have been largely ignored, because of reasons I have adduced above, still I believe it has exercised a certain influence in modern philosophy. I believe that Collingwood was definitely inspired by him, when he wrote his 'Principles of Art'¹

Tolstoy looks for a useful and illuminating definition of art, a definition that in true Aristotelean spirit aims at getting to the essence of the concept. The classical concern of Art is with beauty. But what is beauty? Tolstoy reminds the reader that the traditional Russian word is *красота* which only applies to visual beauty, and the idea of extending the notion of beauty beyond the visual realm, as the Greek did (and other west-european languages following suit), would be unimaginable to the honest Russian peasant, to whom the notion of a 'beautiful' act would be incomprehensible. With Plato there was a conflation

¹ Reviewed July 1, 2007, in my collections.

between the 'good' and the 'beautiful' , thereby rendering the later objective². Tolstoy then surveys the modern treatment of 'beauty' in which there is both a somewhat naive identification along the lines of Plato, and a cynical distinction, as with Winckelmann. Once beauty is separated from the good, the flood-gate are being opened, the author implies darkly. In the end Tolstoy concludes that what is ultimately meant by beauty is the pleasure it engenders in people, be it of a disinterested kind or not. This clearly does not do, and thus Tolstoy offers an entirely new characterization of art, one which is ultimately of an ethical, and not an aesthetical nature, and in so doing making a major innovation³. To Tolstoy Art is simply the transmission of feeling. The point of Art is to make the feeling of the artist infectious. The more contagious, the better the art, and the more generally understood, the more successful. Art is about communication, a communication of feeling, just as speech is a communication of thought. Good Art is achieved when an artist feels compelled to share his emotions, and succeeds to do so, be it through writing, painting or the composition of a piece of music (and of the three it is obvious that Tolstoy is most susceptible to the last).

Now two things are slyly pushed across without further acknowledgment. First that the general word of 'pleasure' is made to coalesce with that of mere 'amusement', thus making the appreciation of beauty appear as a kind of frivolous diversion. Secondly that there exists a clear distinction between 'thought' and 'feeling' later to be implicitly exploited.

Tolstoy sets as an ideal an Art which is universally understood, which so to say speaks directly to the heart (it is after all a matter of 'feelings') and does not presuppose any kind of education, which in the view of Tolstoy is too often a euphemism for perversion. Against this he sets the perverted art, which is not really an art, but a counterfeit, and the sole possession of the upper classes, meant solely for their amusement, and for which so much suffering is being exacted. In fact he begins his book very effectively by recounting an experience he once had of visiting a dress-rehearsal and becoming privy to all the discomfort and humiliation such a one entailed, just to satisfy the indolence of a jaded public. And it is in the setting of a parasitic and perverted upper class against the unsullied innocence of a lower one, that much of the indignation that fuels his cause and fires his arguments can be found, and which will lead up to the eventual preaching in the end of the book, which will alienate most of the sympathetic readers.

The fact that Art should be universally accessible is a key notion in his criticism of modern art, which he dismisses as pseudo-art. In a rather embarrassing section he ridicules modern French symbolic poetry, especially that of Baudelaire, Verlaine and Maeterlinck, as nonsensical and incomprehensible⁴. He does realize though that much of the Art he himself has valued, such that of Goethe and other 18th century classics, may be just as non-sensical and incomprehensible to the untutored peasant, as Baudelaire et al is to him. And that this might very well imply, that his lack of appreciation stems from a similar source, namely ignorance. The solution out of this embarrassing dilemma is simply to state

² This conflating still makes the basis for Collingwoods account of Art, to him, both the 'good' and the 'beautiful' are aspects of the 'True'.

³ To be taken up by Collingwood.

⁴ This is supplemented by an account by one of his daughters of a modern art-exhibit in Paris, in which she makes fun of the paintings by Impressionists, Neo-Impressionists and Symbolists.

that the less accessible a putative work of art is, the more insignificant. Art which is only available to a small coterie is a sham. In particular his own appreciation of Goethe is also a sham, be it a lesser one, an artifact of a perverting education, the specious consequences of having been born into an idle class. That in fact the education of taste, which makes the appreciation of such monstrosities as that of Baudelaire possible, is nothing but a habituation, a kind of mesmerizing and self-suggestion, having less to do with edification than stupefaction.

How to recognize counterfeit art, when by appearance it seems far more artful than genuine art, and which may profit from a fairly large and appreciative following? The problem is to an extent similar to the hypothetical one facing artificial intelligence people of the 20th century, namely how to tell a real person from an impersonating zombie⁵. But it is far easier solved, and in a masterly analysis he presents four classical techniques that have been employed to produce so called art, which is no real art, because it does not involve the transmission of any feeling on the part of the Artist, simply because there is no feeling in the first place to be transmitted and shared. Those techniques are respectively borrowing, imitation, striking effect, and interestedness.

By borrowing is meant employing 'poetical' images that have worked before. Thus by using the inventory of past artistic successes, the semblance of a work of art is being made. Examples of such 'poetical' inventory are moon-light over lakes, palm trees rustling their fronds, passionate but chaste maidens waiting for their lovers, birds chirping at dawn. Admittedly only the stupidest would resort to such stratagems, at least if exclusively employed. More subtle and harder to see through are the remaining three.

By imitation Tolstoy does not mean the plagiarism of previous artists, but the imitation of nature, referred to as realism. This means a superfluity of details that not only makes for a tedium of irrelevance, but comes in the way of transmission of feelings. Of course if there are no feelings to convey, imitation, i.e. the deliberate piling of details, becomes a convenient mask behind which to hide emptiness and supply work for an unemployed imagination. It is clearly Tolstoy as the professional writer who is talking here, giving good advice on how not to write. That Art is a matter of the artful selection, and imagination reveals itself as much in what it chooses to omit, as in what it agrees to make up. Realism may have its charms, he later admits, but at the price of becoming provincial and only understandable to the few, and thus when they have departed, only of an antiquarian interest to posterity. Art it is not.

By striking effect Tolstoy means the use of illegitimate short-cuts, often in the form of over-blown exaggerations. The effect has nothing to do with art, more with the excitement engendered by say the spectacle of an execution, which may inspire in the audience no other feeling than the grim satisfaction of being spared the fate themselves. Once again Art is about experiencing a feeling, a feeling suggested by the medium of the art, not one actually manifested. Seeing something as if real often blocks the ability to imaginatively identify. Where the imagination is being overwhelmed, its natural instinct is of withdrawal rather

⁵ This problem can in fact be traced back to Descartes, whose own introspection and his dismissal of animals as soulless automata, naturally must have led him to the possibility of zombies. Descartes, ironically or not, dismissed the problem as trivial. The distinction would naturally reveal itself during a conversation. Turing three-hundred odd years later was not quite as sanguine.

then engagement. In this sense pornography cannot be art, it works not by imaginative suggestion but by employing the real thing. Arousal is not art, it is biology. Once again it is the writer Tolstoy who is doing the thinking and holding the pen.

Finally by making something interesting, you may succeed in making it interesting and informative and even instructive, but it is not art, because it is not feelings which are being conveyed, but information. Such works may well hold the attention of the reading public, but it will only satisfy its demand for diversion, not for feeling. As typical examples of something being interesting he takes up word-plays, hidden meanings to be patiently revealed, noting that a true work of art should not be a rebus to be painstakingly translated. Clearly James Joyce would be dismissed under this heading. A work of art is not a crossword puzzle.

Using those four criteria for counterfeit art, Tolstoy proceeds by making a devastating as well as hilarious criticism of Wagners *Nibelungenlied*. I doubt that no one who has read and enjoyed this extended act of assassination will ever be able to take Wagner seriously after that. He first presents a synopsis of the libretto, intended to reveal its total inanity, then he observes that it being a dual art, namely that of music and text, it is bound to be out of harmony. If you intend to versify a piece of good music, the music puts restraints on your versification. This is fine if it is merely a matter of versification, a game of trying to formally fit into some rather arbitrary constraints, but it has nothing to do with the sincere conveyance of feeling. Similarly if you want to set music to a words, the words will get in the way, unless there getting in the way constitutes the nature of the challenge. Then it is again the challenge of a game, not that of conveying a feeling. Tolstoy points out that in nature, no two leaves are identical. If you find two identical leaves, one of them has to be artificial, and most likely both. Thus with an opera, either the music or the libretto is fake, most likely both.

Now Wagner as a talented charlatan, makes use of all four stratagems. The borrowing is in the adaptation of those ancient dramas. Dwarfs, nymphs, valiant heroes, dragons, gods, that is the stuff of which myths are made. Inventory as we called them above. Wagner packs them all in. Imitation lies in the elaborate dresses and details exhibited on the stage. A lot of research has obviously gone into this, the latest results of archeology having been exploited. The result is a most striking facsimile set to delight the audience as well as bamboozle it. As to the special effects (and what would Tolstoy have made of the pivotal role those nowadays play in spectacular block-busters on the screen?) he mentions all the thunder and lightening, all the heavy noise made by the musicians, all the dramatic reversals of a plot that really is no plot but just a meaningless meandering back and forth, much sound and fury, as told by a Wagner, signifying nothing according to Tolstoy. Some of the effects are simply risible, Tolstoy remarks as to the crudeness of their execution, such as that of the dragon impersonated by two men. Something that might not even fool a child at a country fair, but which now entralls grown up men and women who pride themselves on their sophistication. Finally there is the interest. There is much that is interesting in a Wagner opera. Wagner is imaginative in the way he makes up ways that musical sounds should represent a variety of natural sounds. Also Wagner is clever, the way he lets the music reflect what is happening on the scene. Every character has its own musical leitmotif which is played whenever they enter on the stage. Thus a Wagner

opera is engrossing, you find yourself wandering what Wagner will be up to next, how he will solve this and that problem. The effect is that you do not pay attention to what is really going on in the musical play (because really is nothing going on), nor do you pay attention to the personages, because you are more interested in what Wagner is making them do, than what they are doing themselves. Once again interest blocks out feelings, or rather becomes a surrogate for feelings.

And still how come such large audiences are taken by it, there surely must be something to it beyond what meets Tolstoy's eyes? No, he claims, there is nothing going on beyond what he has described, and least of all are any feelings conveyed through the Opera, as opposed by the spectacle of the staging of the Opera. First, the audience is drawn from a very narrow sector of the population, a sector who has had their taste and appreciation of art perverted. Secondly they are being seduced and mesmerized through a process more of psychological violence than artistic contagion. To sit for hours in the dark, to be surrounded by people of abnormal constitution, and having been told to see merit in the spectacle unless risking being brandished as unsophisticated, the pressures eventually break down the strongest opposition (except that of Tolstoy's?)

Now it is not only Wagner that is the target of Tolstoy's ire, almost the entire canon of the 19th century including in addition to Wagner also Ibsen (Strindberg is never mentioned, maybe because he was not generally fashionable as was Ibsen?) and the French realists such as Zola, are being summarily dismissed. As are Shakespeare and the classical Greek dramas. Many a reader may find some satisfaction in finding that Tolstoy shares their incomprehension, which they may never have dared to voice; but by making his list so comprehensive as to include almost everything that has been revered, the chances are that he will antagonize those very readers as well.

Could it be really be that all of those artists are sham, all those that we have been taught to admire. Does that not mean that Tolstoy is exaggerating for rhetorical effect, or that he is mad and should not be taken seriously?

An important philosopher does not merely tinker with what his predecessors have done, he radically puts it on its head. Hume e.g. called into doubt many of the things people before took for granted, such as cause and effect, or the existence of an 'I' actually perceiving that bundle of perceptions which constitute an experience. Was Hume mad or a great philosopher? In fact he was both and neither, splitting himself into a philosopher of daring and a rather conventional human being. Tolstoy on the other hand is of one piece and he puts forward a claim that all of the art we have been educated to admire, from the plays of the ancient Greeks, through those by Shakespeare and Goethe, up to and especially including their ultimate excesses by modern art, is but a shame, not genuine but an intellectual fashion. People are not touched as opposed to informed by them. The heart is not involved. Of course Tolstoy touches a very sore point here. How much of the professed enjoyment of art is really genuine? How many people who are enraptured by a play by Shakespeare are so on their own accord or because they have been told to be so, and become aware that such admiration confers status and indicates a refined mind? Beauty famously is in the eye of the beholder, maybe great Art is nothing but a prevailing fashion of a culture, and a degenerate culture to boot?

Tolstoy's diatribe against Art is ultimately about genuineness, of the real as opposed to

the counterfeit, and hence have applications beyond that of art. A mathematician writing a paper. Is he really trying to convey a new exciting idea he cannot help expressing and wanting to disseminate, or is he just playing a game for the galleries, going through the motions mindlessly churning a technical machine, thus just adding to his list of publications, vying for promotion, getting an invitation, fulfilling a formal duty? Does Tolstoy himself have something really to say in this book? Is he fired by a true and sincere indignation? propelled by repulsion? inspired by an insight and a vision? If so the writing of the book is no formal exercise to satisfy the demands of a publisher for a profit, a jaded public for momentary diversion, but meant to effect the minds of men and bring about a change of heart. It is indeed at least a sincere attempt at real art, the greatness depending on how contagious his vision is, how persuasive his arguments⁶. In the same way one may ask how sincere is the writer of this review. Has the reading of the book inspired him, generated thoughts, some in concordance with those of Tolstoy, others in opposition? Has he formed a kind of vision, be it limited, that he is dying to express and formulate, and in so doing wanting to communicate it (the two features not really to be separated from each other but forming part and parcel of the same impulse)? If so he is engaged in a genuine attempt at art, no matter how feeble. He is producing a text which is no mere a compilation of words, but one directed by a purpose, everything that is written is there for a reason, a reason never lost sight of. His motivation goes beyond that of displaying cleverness and seeking appropriation and praise, it touches upon something that is bigger and transcends the merely personal, something existing independently of the artist, something that needs to be expressed and conveyed and shared lest it be lost. A real piece of Art is indeed independent of the artist, thus the attribution of his name to it is incidental. We are then talking about genuine art, maybe even good art, but not necessarily great art. If he fails to convey what he wants, be it because of a faulty vision, a confused idea, a feeble feeling, or if not, be it due to a lack of talent and command of the medium, a loss of discipline, a temptation to digression, a sullyng of purpose, it is failed art. But a kind of art nevertheless however insignificant.

The spectacle of counterfeit art, which Tolstoy sees as the dominating form of art⁷ in the present society is due to three conspiring conditions. First the professionalism of artists, second the cadre of critics, and third the existence of art schools. Due to the first the natural condition for the creation of genuine art spontaneity and disinterestedness. The artist becoming a professional, means that he is becoming a prostitute. Art is like Love given freely, but an art that needs to please and to expect remuneration, is not given freely but demands payment and gratification. Just as true love needs no embellishment, love that is being bartered needs to be spiced up, embellished, made enticing. In short be made marketable. Thus the cleverness of sophisticated art, its glossiness and superficial attractiveness. In fact counterfeit art, as noted above, often looks far more enticing than the real thing, just as a tart appears far more alluring than a loyal and devoted wife.

⁶ Tolstoy confesses that the writing of the book has taken him fifteen years. Not that he has been at it fifteen years continuously, but that the matter has been in his mind for so many years, and that he has struggled to give it a satisfactory form, and only lately conceived of a wholeness of vision, enabling him to bring it to a compelling conclusion

⁷ he even makes a quantitative statistical estimate and concludes a ratio of 1:100'000.

For the professionalism of artist to thrive there have to be critics, whose purpose it is to propagate and to pervert. What is the role of a critic? Tolstoy asks. It is to explain the works to a public. But real art works by infection, and if it succeeds in transmitting a feeling, what need is there for an explanation? And conversely if an explanation can do the work of a piece of art, what is the point of the latter? Why did the artist bother to paint, to make up a melody, write a novel, if it all can be reduced to an explanation? Why not give the explanation instead? It would save time and confusion? But that is absurd. Consider the case of a joke, either you get the punch-line or not, and if the case of the latter explanation is a feeble substitute for the former. Counterfeit art is like jokes that need to be explained. And finally what can a school of art teach? It cannot teach artistic mastery, only provide the inventories of the activity. Thus it can only hone the skills of borrowing. What distinguishes a piece of real successful art from a failure is often some very delicate things. A wee change here and there on a drawing may lift it from lifelessness to exuberance. (And it is in those wee changes art really begins, he lets one of his friends, a painter and teacher, explain.) For a piece of art to be successful everything has to be right to an incredible precision, Tolstoy explains. So many disparate strains have to come together in perfect harmony. How it all comes about is a mystery, and one you certainly cannot be taught, because teaching is a crude and approximative business and imparting such perfection is obviously beyond it.

What Tolstoy brings up is important and something that we cannot avoid but have to come to terms with. True, he is of course not original, the ideas he presents strike a chord, however uncomfortably with most readers. Philosophy is ultimately about morals, how to conduct the good life. A good life being characterized by performing genuine deeds, a life devoted to truth not to the sham appearances of the same. And Tolstoy is of course a moralist, and the whole purpose of his tract is a moral one. It should make us inspect our consciences, our motives, our inspirations. Do we really live a true life, or are we merely going through the motions of so doing? As we will see Tolstoy's ruminations on art is part of a larger vision, a kind of utopia of how society should be arranged, and as such it invites comparisons with Platos Republic, in which Plato takes a similarly censorious view of art, making it subservient to ulterior purposes. Tolstoy writes approvingly of Platos conclusions visavi art. Tolstoy and Plato can indeed be directly compared. Both are aristocrats, highly educated, highly intelligent. Both able to write both clearly and evocatively. Tolstoy is foremost a man of literature, but a very able philosopher. Plato is more than a very able man of literature, and as an intelligence, not to mention a philosopher, he is a notch or two above Tolstoy in sophistication. In Tolstoy there is sincerity but very little irony, with Plato there is a profusion of irony, yet coupled with a sincerity that goes beyond that of which Tolstoy would ever be capable of. Tolstoy's sincerity is of the heart, Platos of the mind. The former is fickle and filled with contradiction and ultimately confined by the weakness of the flesh that is man, while the latter is iron-clad and ultimately inhuman.

Tolstoy presents a cogent argument, clearly presented, imaginatively evoked, and thus quite compelling. Yet it is not watertight, it leaks. The heart may leak, but the mind cannot. The leaking vessel ultimately becomes empty, no matter how insignificant the leaks. Tolstoy loves art, he finds it (unlike what Plato claims in his Republic) to be essential to man, in fact it constitutes the ultimate experience. Thus Tolstoy cares deeply

about art and he has very definitive opinions of what he likes and does not like. This is good, this is how man should react to art, to follow no guide but that of his heart. Either he is touched or he is not. The problem is that when Tolstoy presents what is good art and what is bad, the list seems so idiosyncratic. He rejects the major contributions and lifts up (true to his intentions) the insignificant as exemplars. Sometimes a single artist is brought forward, his major works rejected, his minor ones extolled as instances of genuine artistic sincerity. Tolstoy is of two minds about Beethoven and Bach, he seems to like the early work of the former, but finds the latter incomprehensible, explaining that the composer was after all deaf, and what can you expect of a deaf composer, nothing in music can replace real hearing, those sounds conjured in the mind cannot compete with those in real life. As to his own work he rejects everything that brought him fame and brings up one or two minor works that he thinks can possibly pass muster. It is not always that he can find cogent explanations for his dislike, as he does so masterly with Wagner (providing incidentally a brilliant piece of art criticism an activity which he purports to despise), on the other hand when he tries to explain why Beethoven's Ninth is not good art, but bad art, his usual powers of articulation fail him totally. His argument seems to boil down to the fact that music cannot transmit feelings, something that he elsewhere contradicts. In fact one gets the impression that if there is any medium of art congenial to Tolstoy it is music. Music touches him more than words and sights, deeper than literature and paintings. He also extolls decoration, because decoration speaks directly to us by their visual beauty. But did not Tolstoy at the outset dismiss the contemplation of beauty as a mere indulgence in pleasure? We have to respect what Tolstoy likes or not likes in Art (as opposed to pretends to like and dislike in art), but as a general guide his taste is too haphazard to be instructive. Why extol Schiller but not Goethe? Because the former has become overshadowed by the latter? This is a good argument in social life, when you are entitled to your likes and dislikes of people, without having to supply logical reasons for your choices, but as a philosophy of art it fails. Tolstoy provides an excellent criterion for art, and as noted above, one taken on by future philosophers, notably Collingwood, but his judgement is too clouded by his personal passion and the disgust out of which a critical survey runs the imminent risk of degenerating into a mere diatribe.

As we noted in the beginning of the essay, Tolstoy does not take the question of beauty seriously, he is allowing himself to be seduced by the association of mere words. 'Pleasure' in a general sense need not to be confined to amusement. And more importantly, Tolstoy makes a clear distinction between thought and feeling, and this is essential to his argument. Replace feeling by thought, and his carefully constructed edifice collapses. With thought the argument of elitism and exclusivity evaporates immediately. The true beauty of say mathematics can only be apparent to the prepared mind. Thought is dynamic, generating new thoughts and accumulating old ones in the process. A thought conveyed is meant to provoke criticism and embellishment, to be part of an ongoing conversation, an ongoing construction. In short a thought is meant to generate new thought. Thoughts make no sense in isolation, they have to be connected and associated with each other. Thus indeed the inaccessibility to much of thought, be it science and mathematics, is indeed the fault of those insufficiently prepared. But to Tolstoy feelings are different, they should be accessible to all instinctively, and the transmission of feeling is expected

to be passive, feelings themselves are static. One who has received a feeling through art is merely expected to be happy and contented. In short to feel good. (And what is the difference between feeling good and experiencing pleasure?). The crucial claim of Tolstoy is that feelings are universal and hence accessible instinctively to all (at least those who have not had their minds and tastes perverted by society). One may argue that Tolstoy is a populist and that by inner logic he would be bound to extol popular culture in all its inanities, especially as it is manifested today. (Tolstoy would no doubt easily deflect such a charge by simply claiming that popular culture is not genuine art, it is commercial counterfeit.). Thus art can in particular not evolve, or at least any evolution is to the worse.

Tolstoy's theory of Art does not make sense without being embedded into a larger vision, to which we have alluded but not yet made explicit. The vision is based on a sentimental view of the innocent mass of the lower classes as opposed to the degenerate upper classes. This is not a very original idea, and it has been prevalent in leftist rhetorical politics until the 80's. The point is that Tolstoy seems to embrace it with the passion of a Gandhi⁸ and genuinely believe it. Thus in contradistinction from Goncharov, who claimed that Turgenev in his sketches had completely finished the subject of the peasants, while the upper classes provided an unlimited font of material, Tolstoy held that on the contrary, the feelings of the upper classes were confined to those of pride and vanity, sexual allure, and finally the most fashionable of them all - ennui; while those of the lower classes were infinitely varied, involving the whole range of basic human feelings, such as love, the care of children, the struggle for existence, the closeness to nature, religious ritual. To Tolstoy real art is exemplified by Homer and the stories of the Hebrew Bible. A story like that of Joseph and his brothers, is universally understandable across cultures, because of its lack of superfluous detail, striking effect and interesting digressions. Its narrative speaks directly. Human life is, according to Tolstoy, guided by religion, whether or not people acknowledge it, because religion is like the flow of a stream, it is there to be contended with no matter what. The religion of today, due to the revolution brought about by Christ, is one of universal brotherhood, and as such it is an advancement on the former exclusive religions of the ancients. Thus the only acceptable feelings to be conveyed by Art is of two kinds. Those instructing on our relationship to God, and those that provide a sense of universal togetherness. What higher bliss, Tolstoy seems to indicate, is there in a piece of art forming a bond between people through the sharing of a common joy? One should also note that for Tolstoy, as all sincere religious people, there is a distinction between Church and religion, the former being an obstacle to the latter, and a perversion of one piece with that perpetrated by the upper classes. Art that merely confirms the prevalent oppression is bad art, only art that serves the brotherhood of man is good. And Tolstoy goes one step further by including science. Science likewise suffers from the disease of art, made to be subservient to the interest of the powerful, and frittering away by studying things out of mere curiosity and petty application⁹.

' This vision of Tolstoy appears to many of us rather utopian and naive, and if ever his

⁸ So enamored was Gandhi of the spiritual blessings of poverty that he tended to side with the rich landowners in order to preserve and protect its base.

⁹ Tolstoy censured a famous astronomer who had lectures on the spectral analysis of the stars in the

prophecies of a more spiritual future have not been materialized, instead they appear much further away than ever. What would Tolstoys reaction been today? Clearly there would have been disappointment and disillusion. His verdict would have been that the mass of man had been perverted by the examples of the leisured classes, and a most repulsive consumer society had been erected instead, debasing art even further. Surely he would have advocated a return to basic values, a life in which man is not so much a consumer as a producer, in which his impact on the environment is more benign. He would have been considered an even bigger crank, but one whom I have to admit I would feel great sympathy for.

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Milky Way. Why not instead explain to the audience the elementary fact of night and day, and seasonal variation, of which most in the audience would be ignorant? The astronomer had replied that this was too difficult, it was much easier to hold forth on a technical subject.