

Tolstoy:
A Very Human Journey

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Table of Contents

Dedication – page 5

Introduction – page 7

Chapter 1: Biographical Interludes – page 13

Part I: Tolstoy's Demons – page 17

Part II: What Manner of Love? – page 53

Chapter 2: The Heart of Anna Karenina – page 119

Chapter 3: Confessions – page 239

Chapter 4: The Kingdom of God – page 295

Chapter 5: The Nature of Religion – page 385

Chapter 6: Some Foundational Beliefs – page 449

Chapter 7: Anarchy and Beyond – page 507

Chapter 8: Jesus (p.b.u.h.) and the Mystical Way – page 527

Bibliography – page 551

Dedication

This book is primarily dedicated to my wife, Maureen, who helped induce me to take a look at Tolstoy's work and life in the hope that I might be able to offer some constructive possibilities concerning his ideas. However, this book is also dedicated to Sofya Tolstoy who I believe has not always been well-thought of by certain observers and commentators but who, nonetheless, was a true collaborator in Tolstoy's life and helped him to struggle toward being a better man than he might otherwise have become.

Introduction

Many years ago, when I first met my future wife, she talked about a time, earlier in her life, when she read various works of Lev (Leo) Tolstoy. Among the publications she mentioned and discussed were *Resurrection*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and, of course, *Anna Karenina*.

She was very enamored with what she considered to be the artistry in Tolstoy's writings. That literary artistry included his ability to descriptively capture the character of all manner of emotions, relationships, situations, personalities, and ideas with tremendous vividness and insight that seemed to confer a certain degree of multi-dimensional 'you-are-there' reality to his stories.

At that point in her life, my future wife was – and would remain so for many years – an avid reader. Tolstoy was one of her favorite writers ... perhaps her favorite author.

However, after reading a few of the non-fiction works of Tolstoy, my wife-to-be also became perplexed somewhat by Tolstoy because she couldn't understand how someone as talented, intelligent, and insightful as Tolstoy also seemed to have such difficulty coping with various aspects of life. This perplexity revolved about, among other things, several years in Tolstoy's life when he went through a lengthy period of suicidal depression in which – despite enormous literary and career success -- he had to struggle with himself on a daily basis in order to keep from giving into the dark thoughts and feelings that were occupying much of his waking consciousness and urging him, again and again, to end his life.

Consequently, to a certain extent, my future wife's encounter with Tolstoy was rather disconcerting. She was vexed by the fact that someone of Tolstoy's intellectual and creative talents was, apparently, capable of becoming lost in life, and this led her to wonder whether, or not, she

(who considered herself to be far less gifted and intelligent than Tolstoy) would be able to come up with a way of successfully coping with life's many problems ... a concern that has revisited her from time to time.

At various junctures along the way of our relationship, my wife would try to interest me in exploring Tolstoy's work. She was curious about what I might have to say and whether, or not, I might be able to offer anything that would be able to add something of a constructive nature to Tolstoy's search for the truth.

For many years I was fully engaged in a variety of other research pursuits and really had no time or plans to read Tolstoy. Although there have been a few times early in my life when I read a certain amount of fiction, those times were rather limited, if somewhat eclectic, in scope (James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Aldous Huxley, Joseph Heller, John Barth, Hermann Hesse, Thomas Hardy, John Knowles, Ken Kesey, J.D. Salinger, Tom Wolfe, John Fowles, George Orwell, Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and John Steinbeck), and, for the most part, the contents of their creations have dissipated into a mist of ideas that inhabit various nooks and crannies of my consciousness.

During my undergraduate years, I had read a couple of Russian authors (Dostoyevsky -- *The Brothers Karamazov*; I tried *Crime and Punishment* a number of times but never seemed to be able to get past page 100 -- and Goncharov, *Obломov*). Nonetheless, my ignorance concerning Russian writers was fairly extensive, and, for many decades, I was quite successful at maintaining that level and quality of understanding ... or lack thereof.

Consequently, for a variety of reasons, I was not all that inclined toward spending time with Tolstoy despite all the praise that has been heaped upon him by my future wife as well as by many other individuals. Nonetheless, as a number of projects got removed from my bucket list of things to do before I pass on from this life, some time was

freed up, and I decided to take a few hesitant steps into Tolstoy's world.

Because of its subject matter – which was based on actual events in Russian history – I started with *Hadji Murat* (which was not published until a few years after Tolstoy passed away). I wanted to see what Tolstoy might have to say about Muslims and Islam.

After completing the novella, I read a few commentaries by academics concerning their take on that work. This included several treatments that discussed some of the supposed “Sufi” overtones of *Hadji Murat*, and, as well, several of those essays referred to other works by Tolstoy in which Islam was touched upon.

One thing led to another, and before I knew it, I had read a fair amount of material by, and on, Tolstoy. This included: *Resurrection*, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and a considerable number of his non-fiction books and essays.

As I proceeded through the foregoing material, the general outline of a possible book began to emerge. Toward the end of my research – actually, I had arrived at a point when I believed research was finished – my (now) wife hinted (somewhat strongly) that, perhaps, I should read *Anna Karenina* before I started writing a book on Tolstoy.

Part of me didn't really want to do this because by this time I was pretty Tolstoyed-out. Moreover, I wasn't quite sure how reading that novel would be all that helpful with respect to the project I had in mind because I had become much more interested in his non-fiction work than his fictional creations, and, therefore, my orientation was actually directed toward engaging in a critical reflection concerning the ideas that populated his non-fiction material rather than his fictional efforts.

One of the ways in which my wife sought to persuade me to read *Anna Karenina* was by indicating that it had

been, probably, the best book she had ever read, and this was saying a lot, because, over the years, she has read a great many books. In addition, during a conversation that I had with my niece around this same time, my relative also indicated that *Anna Karenina* had been the best book she had ever read – even though this took a long time for her to be able to accomplish because she was juggling education, work, and family responsibilities at that juncture in her life.

As tempting as the foregoing recommendations were, I still was rather resistant to extending my research and taking the time that would be required to read a rather lengthy book. Nonetheless, after meditating on the matter for a short period of time, I decided to read *Anna Karenina*, but this decision was not because several people I knew both said that it was the best book that they had ever read.

Instead, my decision to read the book was because I wanted to see if I could detect any clues or signs within that book which might indicate why Tolstoy went into a suicidal spiral following the release of that work ... a book which had been very favorably received and which merely added to the growing legend of an individual who also had written, among other things, *The Cossacks* as well as *War and Peace*.

By the time I finished *Anna Karenina*, I had come to the conclusion that the aforementioned book seemed – at least to me – to constitute a very important source of themes that might help explain why Tolstoy fell into a depression and how that depression – and his response to it -- changed the course of his life. More specifically, I now believe that *Anna Karenina* represents Tolstoy's initial attempt to work out a solution – through literary means --- to the depression and suicidal thoughts that had been plaguing him long before he completed *Anna Karenina* and, in fact, may well have served as a primary – though possibly largely hidden -- motivation for writing the book

in the first place... a possibility that will be more fully explored later in the present work.

There is much that I admire about Tolstoy. At the same time, there is much that he has done and written which I consider to be rather problematic.

I do believe there are several crucial elements that resonate with tragic overtones and undertones which are embedded in Tolstoy's life that are given expression through various aspects of his writings and which became manifest, perhaps most poignantly and concretely, in the form of the events that led to his departure from his wife, Sofya, and his estate at Yásnaya Polyána (which means 'Clear Glade') during the last month of his life and which, subsequently, ended with his death at the Astapovo train station on November 20, 1910. The following chapters seek to provide an account concerning the sorts of elements that are being alluded to in the foregoing comments, as well as to offer some possibilities that might inhabit the conceptual territory that lies beyond such tragic elements.

Something is often considered to be tragic if what occurs raises the possibility that it might have been avoidable. To what extent the manner in which Tolstoy's life and writing could have been other than they were involves considerations that are beyond my pay grade.

I am not a Tolstoy scholar, but, rather, I am someone who -- with a gentle, yet persistent, prodding from my wife -- became interested in the ideas and life of Tolstoy. During the course of my research, I have developed a certain critical perspective concerning his work and, as a result, I have endeavored to give expression to that perspective in the pages of this book.

My understanding concerning various aspects of Tolstoy's thought might be correct, in part or in whole. Alternatively, my understanding of Tolstoy might be incorrect in part or in whole.

However, in some rather important ways, I'm not sure to what extent any of those issues matter. My primary motivation for writing this book was to take the reader on a very human journey of exploration concerning an array of ideas.

If this book induces readers to think about such possibilities, then, I believe that both Tolstoy and I will each have accomplished -- at least in part -- what we (in our respective manners) set out to do. We each, in our own way, wished to encourage people to explore issues of existential substance concerning love, religion, meaning, purpose, truth, reason, character, value, possibility, and community.

Socrates might, or might not be, correct that the unexamined life is not worth living. However, Socrates, Tolstoy, and I all share the belief that life is a mystery and to whatever extent one does not seek to seriously and critically engage the challenge to which that mystery gives expression, then, to that extent we do not serve our essential potential and identity which is tied to that mystery in intimate and, potentially, knowable ways.

Chapter 1: Biographical Interludes

There were two broad lines of interest that shaped my intention to learn some of the biographical details that help give expression to the life of Leo Tolstoy. To begin with, I wanted to look for possible clues that had the potential to shed some light on, as well as provide a certain amount of insight into, why Tolstoy might have engaged in a series of fierce, running battles involving hand-to-hand, mortal combat with himself during the 1870's which revolved around the issue of whether, or not, he would commit suicide. Secondly, I wanted to mine data from Tolstoy's life to determine if I might be able to discover why he seemed to believe that he had no choice but to interact as he did in relation to his wife, Sofya, during the weeks that led up to his death at the Astapovo train station in November of 1910.

One common or frequent explanation for the foregoing rift between Tolstoy and his wife, Sofya, is that it was due to differences between them involving the disposition of royalty rights concerning Tolstoy's works of fiction and non-fiction. Another explanation for the aforementioned rift is that Sofya supposedly was opposed to Tolstoy's desire to live the life of an ascetic but, rather ironically and counter-productively, acted in a manner that drove Tolstoy away.

Both of the foregoing possibilities seem to be, at best, overly simplistic, if not problematic, ways of trying to make sense of the turmoil that emerged not only toward the end of Tolstoy's life but, from time to time, erupted during earlier periods of their lives together as well. Consequently, I wanted to explore other possibilities that might account for the walls of separation that seemed to be present in their lives and, as a result, I hoped becoming familiar with certain aspects of the lives of Tolstoy and his wife would assist me to satisfy my curiosity in that regard.

Some – perhaps many -- people might consider the foregoing two issues – i.e., thoughts of suicide and the

antagonism that seemed to arise between Tolstoy and his wife -- to be independent of one another. However, those two issues could indicate, on the one hand, that there might have been substantial elements of unresolved trauma that populated various aspects of Tolstoy's life and helped color his thinking and feelings concerning, among other things, his wife and on the other hand, thoughts of suicide as well as an on-going desire to disengage from his wife and family also could be seen to be part of a long series of incidents in Tolstoy's life that were self-destructive in character, and, as such, appear to generate a litany of data points for which one could calculate a regression-like representation that describes a fault-line, of sorts, which seems to run through, and helps provide a context for, various facets of Tolstoy's life.

In fact, given the foregoing possibility, someone might wish to argue – and I will -- that a great deal of Tolstoy's literary life (both fiction and non-fiction) appears to consist of attempts to discover a coping strategy that might be capable of helping him to keep his self-destructive tendencies in check even though his efforts in this regard were not always successful. Seen from this kind of vantage point, Tolstoy's foray into spirituality could be understood, at least in part, to be more of an intellectual exercise than some kind of religious conversion phenomenon.

Tolstoy wanted to acquire a religious form of faith that was as vibrant as that which appeared to exist among not only the many peasants that Tolstoy encountered on his estate and during his travels, but, also included the examples that were provided by, among others, his mother (at least symbolically), as well as his Aunt Aline and Aunt Toinette. However, even though he struggled to embrace the religious form of life of the foregoing individuals and adopt, or adapt, those practices to his own life, he had difficulty figuring out a formula that he could tolerate and which worked for him, and, as a result, he, perhaps, felt

drawn to the possibility of trying to construct his own framework of spirituality.

If so, *Anna Karenina* might be understood as a transitional work concerning the foregoing issues and, therefore, should not necessarily be understood as constituting a study of the details or insights that are entailed by the famous opening statement of that novel -- namely, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way". In fact, I'm not really sure to what extent the contents of *Anna Karenina* are even capable of demonstrating the truth of the aforementioned opening statement because I believe that a very good case can be made with respect to *Anna Karenina* that all happy families exhibit the presence of, and each unhappy family demonstrate the absence of, certain kinds of character qualities, and, therefore, Tolstoy might not be correct when he claims that each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

More specifically, families that demonstrate qualities of trust, honesty, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, resilience, fairness, generosity, and humility tend to be happy. However, families that interact with one another in ways that demonstrate the absence of the same foregoing qualities tend to be unhappy.

If the foregoing claim is true, then, perhaps, something more fundamental is going on in *Anna Karenina* that reflects crucial aspects of Tolstoy's mental state during the process of conceiving and writing that novel. For instance, one possibility is that *Anna Karenina* is an exploratory journey concerning a set of problems that resonated with a variety of Tolstoy's own thoughts involving the psychological and emotional forces that underlay suicide as well as his many brushes involving self-destructive behavior.

As such, *Anna Karenina* might give expression to Tolstoy's attempt to deal with an array of demons -- involving the idea of suicide together with his life-long

tendency to engage in various forms of self-destructive behavior -- that were, and had been haunting him, at the time that he began to map out and write *Anna Karenina*. While that novel might have contained a few conceptual seeds (which emerge toward the very end of that creation) that showed some therapeutic promise for resolving some of life's most pressing problems, nonetheless, in the light of the terrible struggles that he had with thoughts of suicide following the release of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy might have realized that much more rigorous work would be required to solve the sorts of existential problems with which he was preoccupied, and, as a result, he began to concentrate on putting together the sort of spiritual, non-fictional studies that, hopefully, might provide him with a constructive solution to the demons that haunted him and with which he was largely preoccupied during the next three decades of his life

The foregoing considerations are intended to serve as a way of helping to orient the reader somewhat in relation to that which is forthcoming in the remainder of the present chapter as well as the rest of this book. Hopefully, each chapter will add something of value to the sort of portrait that is being fashioned concerning Tolstoy, his ideas, and the nature of life.

Part I: Tolstoy's Demons

There were many sources and forces of trauma that were shaping Tolstoy's life in unknown ways prior to the existential crisis that dominated his life for a number of years before, during, and following, the publication of *Anna Karenina*. One might begin with the fact that when he was two years old, his mother died.

Tolstoy might, or might not, have experienced his mother's death as traumatic. However, the absence of a mother in his life certainly is likely to have had a considerable impact on his mental and emotional condition.

For instance, although he seemed to have had few, if any, clear memories concerning his mother, the very presence of such an absence of memories is likely to have influenced him in a variety of ways. Many children have had to deal with a similar trauma in their lives, and each child adapts to that reality in her, his, or their own ineffable manner ... either: Constructively, problematically, or through a mixture of the two.

Tolstoy did not even have a photograph of his mother. The image he had of her was based on a characterization that his mother's maid, Tatyana Filippovna, had related, at some point, to him and others in the Tolstoy household. According to that characterization, his mother was, somewhat paradoxically, supposedly reserved and self-possessed, on the one hand, as well as, on the other hand, being hot-tempered, and, in addition, his mother was described as a very modest individual who was reluctant to judge others.

To what extent the foregoing characterization is true is unknown. Nevertheless, to whatever degree it is accurate, it is not much for a child to have by which to remember his mother, and as such seems somewhat reminiscent of the way the complexities of a living person become reduced to an array of chemical elements after that individual has been cremated.

Later on, Tolstoy came across information that filled in a few more gaps concerning his mother's life. Although for the first seven years of her life, she had little contact with her father because of his military service, after her father retired from the army, he brought his daughter to Yásnaya Polyána and took a special interest in helping her to become educated.

As a result, she not only developed proficiency in five languages but became an accomplished pianist as well. In addition, when a teenager she studied various forms of government, as well as explored issues in astronomy, mathematics, agriculture, and some of the classics.

Moreover, Tolstoy's mother had an artistic, creative side. She wrote elegies, poems and odes, and she also told – and, sometimes, wrote down – stories that captured the interest of those who gathered to listen to her spin her tales.

His mother entered the state of matrimony fairly late in life -- at least for those times. She was 32 when she was married, and, then, eight short years later she had left this world.

Although Tolstoy had few, if any, concrete, existential memories of his mother, nonetheless, he felt a deep attachment to her throughout his life. For instance, earlier in life when he had been faced with temptation of one kind or another, he often would pray to his mother to assist him, and given that more often than not Tolstoy seemed to give in to such temptations, one wonders how – if it at all -- this might have modulated or complicated his feelings concerning his mother and/or the efficacy of prayer.

Later on, Tolstoy would write about times when he would go on long walks through the forests and fields of Yásnaya Polyána and, while engaged in those exercises in solitude, he would think about his mother. Finally, even when Tolstoy was more than 80 years old, he had difficulty refraining from crying when he spoke about his mother.

For Tolstoy, his mother was an idealized symbol of love. Yet, that love was also something of a will-o'-the-wisp that always seemed to evade his grasp.

There is one other dimension involving the character of Tolstoy's mother that might be quite significant while trying – as presently is the case -- to understand what sort of demons might have been harassing Tolstoy when he was all but consumed with thoughts of killing himself following the publication of *Anna Karenina*. Tolstoy's mother was deeply religious.

One can't help but wonder about the sort of conflict and turmoil that might have arisen within Tolstoy as a result of the foregoing consideration. On the one hand, Tolstoy felt a deep attachment to his mother, and, yet, on the other hand, he engaged in the sorts of behaviors (gambling, drinking, and womanizing) that likely would have been deeply disappointing to his mother, and given how much Tolstoy thought about his mother throughout his life, such problematic behaviors must have been a constant source of psychic pain for Tolstoy.

When Tolstoy was nine -- just seven years removed from his mother's death -- he also lost his father. This event took place shortly after the family had moved to Moscow from Yásnaya Polyána.

Tolstoy's father – Nikolay Ilyich – had been born into a relatively wealthy family. As often was the normal course of affairs with many young, male Russian noblemen of that time, when he was 16, Nikolay had been presented with a peasant girl who was assigned the responsibility of assisting the young man to maintain his physical health by offering certain services of an intimate nature.

Today, the foregoing arrangement might be categorized as a form of human trafficking. Be that as it may, the aforementioned arrangement resulted in the birth of an illegitimate boy -- Mishenka – who, once Leo was born, would become his elder brother, and Tolstoy

(like father, like son) also would help make possible the birth of an illegitimate child later on in his own life.

At some point in time, Tolstoy encountered Mishenka when the latter individual had become an adult and was leading a deeply impoverished life. Tolstoy indicated that he found the experience to be rather unsettling, and, yet, Tolstoy didn't appear to be inclined to bring his own illegitimate child out of a condition of considerable poverty when confronted with a similar situation.

Despite auspicious beginnings, Tolstoy's father, Nikolay, went through perilous times when his own father's financial fortunes began to flounder. As a result, Nikolay was forced to resign his commission in the highly regarded, but expensive, Calvary Guards to which he belonged -- and with which he fought during the War of 1812 -- and, subsequently, took a job as a civil servant.

Tolstoy's father, Nikolay, once again became financially well-off when he married Princess Maria Volkonskaya whose family was not only quite wealthy but whose social pedigree was fairly substantial -- much more so than was the case with Tolstoy's father's side of the family. The foregoing set of events is immortalized within the pages of *War and Peace* when Nikolay Rostov, one of the main protagonists in that novel, is able to solve many of his own financial problems when he marries the wealthy Princess Maria Bolkonskaya. More specifically, Nikolay Illich (Tolstoy's father) is to Nikolay Rostov (a character in *War and Peace*) as Princess Maria Volkonskaya (Tolstoy's mother) is to Princess Maria Bolkonskaya. (a character in *War and Peace*) whose name -- at least in English -- differs from that of Tolstoy's mother by one letter (a 'V' is replaced by a 'B').

Tolstoy's mother died in 1830. This occurred shortly after giving birth to Maria, Tolstoy's only sister.

Although she saw her husband often enough to conceive five children, the couple spent a great deal of their married life separated from one another. This was

primarily because her husband, Nikolay Ilyich, had become entangled in a variety of legal issues while trying to resolve the financial problems that his own father had bequeathed to him and, as a result, spent considerable amounts of time engaged in court battles at some distance from home.

However, after his wife passed away, Nikolay Ilyich became a caring, stay-at-home dad who took on the responsibilities of managing and developing an estate. Tolstoy later indicated that he didn't realize how much his father had meant to him until long after his father had died when Tolstoy was nine years old.

His father was an avid reader and added many books to a library that Tolstoy would subsequently inherit. In addition, his father was a talented artist who not only was capable of creating works involving watercolor as well as pen-and-ink, but, he also used to enthrall his children with an array of drawings and sketches.

Tolstoy's father had a keen sense of humor (which, to a considerable degree, Tolstoy seemed devoid of) that often was in high gear at the dinner table. Through his humor, along with his artistic talent and the knowledge that had been gained from reading and worldly experience, he exuded a charismatic quality to which Tolstoy and the other children were drawn.

Apparently, Nikolay Ilyich tended to be fairly moderate when dealing with the serfs who lived on his estate (that contained more than 200 individuals in 1832), as well as in relation to other serfs over whom he had control (which, by 1837, totaled more than 2000 individuals). Unlike many landowners of his time, he only infrequently engaged in the practice of corporal punishment when interacting with them.

From an early age, Tolstoy, along with his three brothers, were initiated into the culture of hunting. Their father was an avid huntsman who considered the activity to be a venue for learning about, and an opportunity for exhibiting, both a flair for courage and a daring-do

attitude, and some of Tolstoy's fondest memories of his father involved riding, hunting, and walking along the grounds of the estate.

In addition, Nikolay Ilyich had considerable skill as a businessman. Despite entering marriage with the albatross of his own father's financial mistakes hanging about his neck, nevertheless, he was able to substantially increase the value of the dowry that his wife had brought to the marriage, and, as a result, could leave his children a considerable financial legacy.

Finally, Tolstoy was particularly impressed with the sense of independence and integrity through which his father engaged life. Unfortunately, Tolstoy was only able to be exposed to the quality of that character for a relatively short period of time before his father passed away.

Although his father had his weaknesses when it came to sexually exploiting some of the female serfs under his care and control – a weakness which Tolstoy not only shared but to which he might have been even more vulnerable than his father had been, nonetheless, Nikolay Ilyich became a successful businessman and manager of his property. In addition, he appeared to be a man who was self-reliant, independent, and of relatively good character.

As previously indicated, his father's example influenced him in many ways. This extended from: An enthusiastic interest in hunting and riding, to: An enjoyment and appreciation of nature, as well as a desire to exercise a certain amount of tolerance and lenience with respect to peasants, and, of course, a commitment to maintaining a certain quality of family life.

Consequently, Tolstoy could have felt that many facets of his adult life would have been deeply disappointing to his father if his dad had lived into old age. This might have been especially true with respect to the manner in which Leo's inclinations toward gambling, drinking, and living the life of a wastrel eventually forced him to have to sell

various villages and, perhaps, more poignantly, even the house where he had been born and which his father had helped to complete.

Dealing with the foregoing kind of emotional baggage on a daily basis might have eventually taken its toll on Tolstoy's psychological condition. As such, it could have played a role in rendering Tolstoy susceptible to suicidal ideation over a period of time.

As an orphan, the absence of parents might have meant that Tolstoy would have been able to by-pass many of the conflicts that children tend to have with their parents during the formative years of life. Nevertheless, on the other hand, his status as an orphan also meant that he would not be able to have access to the emotional, psychological, and social set of supportive resources that parents are able to offer to their children during those same formative years.

Therefore, growing up as an orphan might have helped fuel Tolstoy's legendary capacity for an acute sensitivity to, and awareness of, the way in which emotional and cognitive aspects of lived existence changed in subtle ways in response to on-going circumstances. This was a capacity or talent that was manifested again and again across the pages of his fictional works and provided his reading audience with dynamic, captivating, and moving insights concerning the inner lives of the characters about whom he wrote and, quite frequently, those insights reflected, or resonated with, Tolstoy's own phenomenological way of engaging the world.

At the same time, growing up without parents could have contributed to Tolstoy's life-long, sometimes frantic quest to figure out where he belonged in the scheme of things. He was constantly searching for a place or set of conditions that he could call home, and, even though, from time to time, he might have found temporary oases of relative peace and stability, he often was dissatisfied with the way things were unfolding in such seemingly idyllic

states and, as a result, became restless ... hoping, perhaps, that whatever he was seeking might be discovered somewhere beyond the deceptively near horizon.

There were at least two other inhabitants in the Tolstoy household who served as important influences in Leo's life. These were his aunts – Aline and Toinette.

At the young age of 19, Aline had become married to Karl von Osten - Sacken, the son of the Saxton Ambassador to Russia. However, not very long after the wedding, the young man seemed to have begun to become entangled in the tentacles that emanated out from some form of mental illness.

Before being committed – and, probably, constituted one of the reasons why he was committed -- Aline's husband shot her when she was pregnant. Although she survived the assault, her baby was later still-born.

In the aftermath of the foregoing events, her family decided to arrange for the recently delivered child of a court chef to serve as a substitute for Aline's still-born child. As often happened in conjunction with various aspects of Tolstoy's life, a version of the foregoing set of events later emerged in the pages of his fictional work ... in this case it was *Anna Karenina*.

Eventually, Aline came to live with the Tolstoy family. By the time that Lev was born, she had become quite religious.

In addition to actively participating in rituals such as fasting and prayer, she spent considerable time not only reading hagiographical accounts concerning the lives of various spiritual personalities, but, as well, she liked to visit different monasteries and interact with a coterie of holy fools, monks, spiritual travelers, and nuns.

Some of the latter individuals were received as guests at Yásnaya Polyána. Others resided at various locations on the estate, and still others were encountered at, or during, her journeys to various monasteries.

Aline backed up her belief in Christianity with numerous acts of kindness toward people from all manner of social and economic stations in life. This included giving away money to the poor on a regular basis.

Her diet was simple, and she showed little concern for her external appearance. The lack of concern about appearance might have extended to considerations of personal hygiene because Tolstoy comments in his memoirs that there was something of an unpleasant, odoriferous quality emanating from this aunt.

Despite the fact that Tolstoy had taken the time to mention, in a somewhat critical fashion, the issue of odor concerning his aunt, Tolstoy, himself, seemed vulnerable to a similar sort of obliviousness concerning the potentially problematic ramifications that his conduct had for others later on in his life. This was especially the case with respect to – but was not limited to -- the manner in which his lifestyle impinged on his wife and family in problematic ways (and this will be explored to some degree in Part II of the present chapter).

His Aunt Aline gave expression to the sort of person that Tolstoy later aspired to be like ... that is, someone who: Was immersed in a life of spirituality; was committed to acts of kindness; was interested in helping the poor, and was rooted in a life of simplicity, both with respect to diet as well as clothing. And, yet, for much of the first half of his adult life, he lived a life that was the complete antithesis of everything that his aunt studied, believed and lived.

To a certain extent, his aunt Aline constituted something of a mystery for him as were the spiritual lives of many of the peasants that he met. How they able to find their way to such pious and loving states of being?

Her kind of spiritual orientation appealed to him and seemed to be calling to him more and more as he approached and passed through the middle part of his life. Nonetheless, the process of transitioning to such a way of life seemed to Tolstoy -- who was addicted to gambling,

drinking, and women -- to be, as Churchill once said of Russia: "A riddle wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma."

Tolstoy was even more influenced by, and felt closer to, his Aunt Toinette despite the fact that she wasn't actually related to him. She had been an orphan who had been taken in, and cared for, by Tolstoy's grandparents.

Tolstoy's mother had been an ethereal symbol of the sort of motherly love that had been longed for by, but never realized in, Tolstoy's life – at least not in the sort of concrete manner that could be remembered in the form of actual events that arose through lived life. However, his Aunt Toinette served as something of a living template for the quality of love.

Her love began with Tolstoy's father and radiated out from there. In other words, she was deeply in love with Tolstoy's father and, as a result, she loved everything that he cared about, including his children.

Toinette and Nikolay Ilyich had grown up together. She had been enamored with him for years, and, yet, she was willing to put aside her own interests so that Nikolay Ilyich might find a woman from a wealthy family that would enable him to resolve the many problems entailed by the financial mess that his father had left behind.

Maria Nikolayevna was that woman. Moreover, because Toinette loved Nikolay, she befriended Maria and became close with her.

Tolstoy's father actually had proposed to Toinette some six years after the death of his wife, Maria. For reasons best known to Toinette, she refused the offer, but, nonetheless, she did agree to the request of Tolstoy's father that she become a mother to his children.

Unlike Tolstoy's Aunt Aline, Toinette did not speak much about religion or try to tell people how to live life. In addition, she did not enter into discussions concerning the issue of prayer.

Instead, she devoted her time and efforts to loving people. According to Tolstoy, she interacted with people on a daily basis through a humble kindness that was bestowed on everyone she met.

During Tolstoy's twenties, Toinette was the person to whom Tolstoy was most likely to write and whose opinion and advice helped to constrain – at least to a degree – some of Tolstoy's reckless and self-destructive inclinations. She was also the one who believed in Tolstoy's talent as a writer and frequently encouraged him to continue to give active expression to that ability.

Over a period of more than three decades, Tolstoy had never known her to utter an unkind word to anyone. Moreover, although she did not seem to spend much time thinking about issues concerning social justice, she was deeply opposed to the idea of anyone inflicting corporal punishment on the serfs who lived on their estate ... or any other estate.

As indicated earlier, Toinette's love was directly primarily toward Tolstoy's father, Nikolay Ilyich. Her love for everyone else was a reflected version of that love.

The foregoing dynamic carries an obvious implication for spirituality. In other words, just as Toinette used her love for Tolstoy's father to fuel her love for others, so too, perhaps, people might use love of God to fuel their love for the rest of creation.

The foregoing idea is central to Tolstoy's subsequent, spiritual worldview. Nevertheless, just as Tolstoy seemed to be having difficulty figuring out how to make the transition from a life shaped by gambling, drinking, womanizing, and killing to the simple, pious, kindly lifestyle of his Aunt Aline, so too, he was having difficulty working out a way to find a concrete path to the sort of unselfish, thoughtful love that had been expressed through the life of his Aunt Toinette.

The seeds of a possible solution, in which love plays a central role in harmonizing the lives of individuals, families, communities, as well as, nations began to form in the mind and heart of the character of Levin toward the end of *Anna Karenina*. Yet, in many ways, the problem of how to realize that solution remained as mysterious to Tolstoy as were the capacities of his two aunts -- Aline and Toinette -- to be able to live simple, selfless, committed lives of spirituality, kindness and love ... lifestyles that Tolstoy found to be alluring and, yet, quite alien to someone who had spent so much of his life under the influence of gambling, drinking, womanizing, fighting, privilege, and the complicating impact that literary fame often has on those who are both blessed and cursed with its presence.

Love might be the solution. Yet, how to go about accomplishing or realizing that solution constituted a considerable problem.

Seeing such a possibility, and, yet, not knowing how to translate it into a lived reality, might have seemed to Tolstoy like a page from the mythological life of Tantalus. Perhaps, the foregoing kind of dilemma helped fuel the suicidal thoughts that appeared to begin to dominate Tolstoy's life during, and following, the writing of *Anna Karenina*.

In January 1837, when Lev was eight years old, the family moved to Moscow. Although the primary reason for the move supposedly was to help the oldest brother, Nikolay, who was fourteen at the time of the move, to prepare for university, there also might have been some health concerns as well involving the father that had carried over from the time when he had served in the military during Napoleon's invasion of Russia.

After the move, Lev saw very little of his father. From January 1837 -- the time of the move -- until his father's death, a few months later at the age of 43, due to a stroke and hemorrhage in his lung, Lev's father had become

embroiled in a legal dispute concerning some property that he had purchased near Tula and, in fact, had died in that city while trying to resolve the issue.

Tolstoy's Aunt Aline assumed responsibilities for managing things after Nikolay Ilyich died. Unfortunately, given her preoccupation with spiritual matters, she was unsuited to the task.

Nikolay Ilyich's mother also sought to pitch in and help organize various aspects of the children's lives. This included replacing the German tutor with a French tutor who was a disciplinarian and, among other things, forced the Tolstoy children to beg for forgiveness while in a kneeling position with respect to whatever misbehaviors might have been deemed to have been committed.

The punishment handed out by the French tutor included locking young Lev up. This incident was sufficiently upsetting and humiliating to Tolstoy that he would write about it some six decades later.

Less than a year after Tolstoy's father died, his father's mother passed away at the age of 76. After she died, the household was thrown into a certain amount of turmoil.

Aunt Aline and the two oldest brothers stayed in Moscow but relocated to a smaller and more manageable residence. The two youngest brothers (one of whom was Lev) as well as their sister Masha returned to Yásnaya Polyána with Aunt Toinette.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, one might also consider the ramifications that the general circumstances of life at Yásnaya Polyána might have had upon Tolstoy. More specifically, the first eight years of his life had been spent within the borders of a rather idyllic, self-sufficient setting that was relatively cut off from the rest of the world.

Life at Yásnaya Polyána gave expression to a protected environment that was woven from the efforts of serfs, household servants, tutors, and an extended family that

provided the necessities of life and made a life of privilege possible. It was a life that was filled with memories from the activities of hunting, riding, adventures, story-telling, creativity, family life, education, and nature.

To a considerable degree, Tolstoy was removed from the foregoing setting when he was 8 years old. With the exception of a few, relatively short periods of time here and there (like the one noted above), Tolstoy did not return to Yásnaya Polyána for an extended stay until he was 19 years old, and when he came back, he was, in many ways, a very different person than when he had left for Moscow around the time that he was eight years old, or so, since in the intervening years he had spent considerable time in a relatively unsheltered, environment that was, in many respect, antithetical to what had been the case at Yásnaya Polyána, and that urban lifestyle had left its mark on Tolstoy.

One might suppose that the two worlds – namely, on the one hand, the world of his youth that, for the most part, had been ensconced in the protected confines of Yásnaya Polyána, and, on the other hand, the world of his teenage years which were entangled in the distractions, seductions, possibilities, and problems of an urban, worldly way of life – served as poles of an on-going conflict in him with respect to his attempts to make sense of life.

His first eight years of life were pulling him in certain directions, while, with the exception of a few instances, the years of his life between, say, nine and his mid-twenties were pulling him in other directions. These sorts of diametrically opposed influences might have helped fuel his subsequent struggle with the issue of suicide.

The foregoing dynamic might have been presciently captured by an event that Tolstoy recalled that occurred during the early years of his life. A family relative – a cousin of his mother – had come to spend some time at Yásnaya Polyána.

Young Lev was near the man, and the cousin picked the lad up and sat Lev down on the cousin's lap. The man held on to Lev while he spoke with other people in the room.

At some point, Lev tried to get down from the man's lap. However, the man just held onto the boy more tightly.

Tolstoy later reports that he became deeply infuriated because the man would not let him go. He wanted to be free, but he was being prevented from being able to do so.

With the exception of isolated incidents like the foregoing one, Lev Tolstoy had lived a life of tremendous freedom for the first eight years of his life. However, during his teenage years he began to encounter forces that were capable of undermining his freedom since even though being able to gamble, drink, and womanize whenever he "chose" (?) to do so might seem to give expression to freedom without restraint, in reality, such activities were all ventures that, little by little, were eroding Tolstoy's capacity to be truly free.

His predilections for gambling, drinking, and womanizing had replaced his mother's cousin who had held Lev tightly while the young boy sat on the older man's lap. Previously, Lev had been trying to extricate himself from the constraints imposed by the grasp of his mother's cousin, and, now, he was being tightly held by the grasp of his own internal demons, and unlike the case with his mother's cousin, Lev wasn't sure that he wanted to break free from the hold that gambling, drinking, and womanizing had upon him.

When Tolstoy returned to Yásnaya Polyána eleven years later he was, to a considerable degree, bound to a way of life that was anything but free and which had turned him into someone who was quite willing to exploit and abuse -- both sexually as well as financially -- various aspects of that former idyllic setting. One might suppose that the memory of the sense of freedom which he had as a youth might have been calling out to him throughout his life, and, perhaps, part of his later suicidal tendencies were

rooted in his awareness that he, somehow, had lost contact with something that, once, had been vital to his existence, but, he was not certain where to look for that which had been lost, or if found, how to go about becoming reintegrated with what had been lost.

On Tolstoy's 13th birthday Aunt Aline passed away. The responsibilities of guardianship for the three youngest Tolstoy brothers (Nikolay had turned 18) as well as Masha now transitioned to Aline's younger sister Polina who lived in Kazan and who the Tolstoy children hardly knew.

Nevertheless, in late 1841, the children all moved to live with their Aunt Polina. Kazan, which is in the former Republic of Tatarstan, is located some 462 miles to the south-east of Moscow.

This was the third major, geographical transition that had occurred in Tolstoy's life between the ages of 9 and 13 (From Yásnaya Polyána to Moscow, and from Moscow back to Yásnaya Polyána, and, finally, the move to Kazan). Having experienced something similar in my own life, I know that these sorts of events can be quite disruptive ... involving a significant sense of loss, stress, conflict, opportunity, and challenge all at the same time

For example, much of Tolstoy's first thirteen years had been spent in the company of two adults – namely, his Aunt Aline and Aunt Toinette who were pious, kindly, and loving characters. Unfortunately, this sort of influence was largely absent after they moved to Kazan.

Aline's younger sister, Polina, was consumed with the life of a socialite. In addition, she was married to someone who was frequently unfaithful to her.

Consequently, neither she nor her husband exercised very much moral authority over the Tolstoy children. As a result, Lev and his siblings were left without much supervision and, thus, were free to indulge themselves to whatever extent they might be inclined to do so.

A year later, Lev did just that. With the assistance – and, perhaps, encouragement -- of his two older brothers, he went to a brothel and became sexually active.

Interestingly enough, however, after “doing the deed”, Tolstoy stood near to the bed, as well as woman -- where and with whom -- the act had been consummated and cried. Obviously, there was something more going on within Tolstoy than just the satisfaction of lust and which gave expression to a much more sensitive side of Tolstoy that was clearly distraught by what had taken place.

Earlier, while living at Yásnaya Polyána, an eleven-year old Lev had begun to question his religious faith and whether, or not, God even existed. In Kazan, a 14-year old Lev, who had been transitioned to conditions that were largely indifferent to his moral well-being, had begun to conduct himself in ways that went counter to the tenets of the faith that he had begun to question three years previously.

Much later in life, Tolstoy wrote about the many problematic behaviors in which he had begun to participate during his four and half years of moral freefall that had taken place in Kazan. Although, initially, he might have pursued those kinds of activities in order to impress or please his older brothers – especially Sergey -- he soon began to pursue those sorts of interests because he had become acclimated to that kind of lifestyle and, as a result, actively chose to entangle himself in those kinds of activities for nearly two decades.

During this time, he dedicated himself to gambling, drinking, and especially women. In addition, throughout this period he was driven by ambition and a desire to be esteemed for his intelligence and talent by other individuals.

More than 45-years later, the experience of losing his virginity, along with a great many other losses (such as huge gambling debts and constructive role models like his mother as well as Aunt Aline and Aunt Toinette), had

begun to pile up and also had begun to haunt him. What had been gained (e.g., physical gratification and worldly fame) might have been measured against, or compared with, what had been lost (e.g., innocence and faith), and, perhaps as a result of reflecting on such matters, Tolstoy struggled to find reasons why he should continue to live.

As previously noted, while living in Kazan, Lev Tolstoy had begun to drift away from a religious life. However, his brother Dmitry, who was only a year older than Lev, began to move in the opposite direction.

Dmitry started to attend church on a regular basis. In addition, he began keeping all of the fasts as well as observing other rituals.

Like his Aunt Aline, Dmitry became unconcerned with his unkempt appearance. Consequently, he was a source of embarrassment to his brothers.

On the one hand, Tolstoy, along with his older brothers, ridiculed Dmitry's religious activities, referring to him pejoratively as "Noah". On the other hand, Tolstoy also envied Dmitry's capacity to be indifferent to what others thought of his commitment to those sorts of activities.

Dmitry was a loner and was considered to be an eccentric by his brother Nikolay. He didn't even spend very much time with any of the members of his family.

Nonetheless, there was a quality in Dmitry that might have affected Lev Tolstoy rather deeply. It was the sort of quality that a much older Tolstoy might have admired and considered himself deficient in when he was contemplating suicide.

More specifically, despite his somewhat anti-social nature, Dmitry exhibited a truly remarkable sort of humble, loving, compassion for others. This was most clearly exemplified in his treatment of Lyubov Sergeevna, an illegitimate child that Aunt Polina had decided to take in for reasons – given her life as a socialite – that aren't entirely clear.

Among other things, the child was afflicted by a condition in which her face frequently became puffy and bloated. In addition, she seemed inured to the presence of flies on her face and, as a result -- especially during the summer months -- often presented a rather unsightly appearance.

Moreover, like their Aunt Aline, the girl gave off an unpleasant odor. Whether this odor was due to poor personal hygiene or was a function of some sort of physical illness from which she suffered is unknown.

The girl lived in a room that also carried an offensive odor. Because the windows in her room remained closed, the odor had no opportunity to escape and, as a result, lingered on as a palpable inducement for most of the members of the household to keep their distance from both the girl and her room.

The rest of the family made no attempt to hide their discomfort concerning the girl's appearance, condition, and smell. Tolstoy later referred to the young girl as being a rather "pathetic" individual.

Yet, Dmitry -- the "eccentric" loner who kept his distance from others -- befriended the girl and spent a great deal of time with her, both listening to and speaking with her. Furthermore, Dmitry gave no indication that he felt like he was doing her a favor when he spent time with her or gave any sign that her condition was an unpleasant experience.

Instead, he seemed to feel that what was taking place was the right thing to do. Consequently, the foregoing behavior was not isolated or sporadic, but was steady and on-going.

He was a close friend of the girl. This relationship continued right up until the time she died following his first year of university.

Dmitry's way of interacting with and showing love to such an individual would have been fully consonant with

the values and ideas that Tolstoy – when he became committed to his own religious orientation in later years -- would encourage people to emulate, and, yet, during his days in Kazan, Tolstoy merely made fun of his brother's religious activities. Perhaps, one of the demons that haunted Tolstoy during the time when, day after day, he contemplated taking his own life, might have been the memory of a brother whom he had ridiculed for his religious way of life but was someone who, nonetheless, had a capacity for love that a suicidal Tolstoy could only dream about having.

Quite a few of Dmitry's antisocial and eccentric qualities ended up shaping the character of Levin's brother Nikolay in *Anna Karenina*. Yet, the aforementioned quality of deep compassion exhibited by Dmitry did not seem to be on ready display in that character but, instead, appeared, to some extent, to have been transferred to the character of Levin.

One wonders what might have been going on in Tolstoy's mind when he wrote about the character in *Anna Karenina* that was, to a certain extent, based on his brother Dmitry. Why would he, seemingly, accentuate the negative and eliminate the positive when it came to portraying the character in *Anna Karenina* – namely, Levin's brother Nikolay – that, in many ways, was based on his brother Dmitry?

As indicated previously, when Tolstoy was about eleven years old, he experienced a number of doubts concerning religion, and, as a result, started to engage that topic through a process of critical reflection rather than unquestioning acceptance. This dynamic of distancing himself from religion accelerated when he was sixteen and had begun to undertake a serious interest in philosophy.

After reading *Emile*, *The Social Contract*, *Confessions*, and much of the rest of the collected works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Tolstoy believed he had found something of a soul mate. In fact the extent of his regard for Tolstoy was

such that when he was 15-16 years of age he later indicated to Paul Boyer during a conversation that took place in 1901 that instead of wearing a crucifix around his (i.e., Tolstoy's) neck, he chose to wear a medallion that bore the likeness of Rousseau.

Like Rousseau, Tolstoy came to believe that so-called civilization had led human beings astray and, in the process, had undermined and corrupted the essential nature of human beings. In addition, Tolstoy's perspective also resonated with the ideas of Rousseau because Tolstoy felt that organized religion should be replaced by a framework in which human beings would be able to seek the truth in accordance with an understanding that was forged by the conscience of an individual rather than through the imposed beliefs of religious institutions and so-called authorities.

Following his first year of university – which ended with a series of failed exams – Tolstoy spent the summer back at Yásnaya Polyána. Much of that summer was spent reading and reflecting on a number of Greek philosophers – sometimes referred to as Cynics and which included Diogenes – who had explored the idea of living an ascetic, simplified lifestyle through, among other things, divesting oneself of material possessions.

Despite a few semi-successful attempts to translate theory into practice, Tolstoy's efforts in this regard were often thwarted by his own inclinations. As a result, his time at university tended to oscillate between, on the one hand, attempts to bring order or discipline into his life, and, on the other hand, conduct that was immersed in various kinds of non-university pursuits.

For instance, at one point during his second year of university, he was required to serve time in the university's jail because he had missed too many classes as a result of his social activities. In addition, during the spring of 1847, some of Tolstoy's journal entries were

written while spending a month, or so, in the university's clinic for venereal disease.

One of the efforts that Tolstoy made during the aforementioned period which had been directed toward simplifying his life had unintended consequences. More specifically, he had created a simple style of clothing that permitted him to mix with the peasants on his estate without the latter knowing that he was a member of the family of landowners that controlled their lives.

While dressed in the forgoing garment, he was able to listen in on a multiplicity of conversations during which peasants made known their feelings about, and attitudes toward, the landowners. Tolstoy was shocked to discover how little regard peasants had for their owners and, as well, peasants harbored considerable hostility toward nobility in general.

Landowners were able to enjoy the quality of life they had largely because of the efforts of the serfs they owned. Not only were the serfs exploited economically but, as well, many of the women were exploited sexually and all of them were vulnerable to being the recipients of oftentimes arbitrary, harsh and cruel forms of corporal punishment.

Tolstoy's life had once been saved by a group of peasant women. Apparently, he once had decided that he would try to impress a group of women by plunging into the waters of a large river and swim to an island while fully clothed and soon was in considerable difficulty.

If it had not been for the efforts of a group of women peasants who helped drag him into shore with their rakes, he likely would have drowned. Yet, it was women like those individuals whom Tolstoy later sexually exploited when he came into his considerable inheritance (including 300 serfs) after coming of age.

Two years prior to 1861 – the year in which serfs were given their freedom -- Tolstoy had initiated an education project on behalf of the serfs that he owned. Undoubtedly,

this project was shaped in part by the impact that Rousseau's ideas concerning human beings and education had upon Tolstoy, but one also might entertain the possibility that part of that project could have been rooted in a certain amount of guilt that Tolstoy felt with respect to his years of sexual exploitation involving some of his serfs as well as in relation to his surreptitiously-gained awareness of how much – and, perhaps, with good reason – serfs disliked their owners.

The aforementioned project to help improved the lives of the peasants that Tolstoy began in 1859 was, in part, educational in nature. However, that project also might have been an exercise in restorative justice through which Tolstoy sought to give back some of what he had taken from them through the process of economic and sexual exploitation.

Consequently, by 1859, Tolstoy had an understanding of the serfs that was unsettling and conflicted. On the one hand, he had come to learn about the fairly intense negative opinion that serfs had toward landowners and nobility, yet, on the other hand, he continued to exploit peasants economically and sexually while occasionally – as in the case of his 1859 and 1861 projects to benefit the peasants educationally – seeking to make amends -- at least in part -- for his current and past problematic behavior concerning serfs.

The foregoing sort of nuanced understanding might have haunted Tolstoy for some time. Indeed, it might have been one of the demons that might have helped grease his skid down into the depths of a dark night of the soul and helped torment him to the point where, on a daily basis, he was seriously considering taking his own life.

Earlier, I mentioned a shift in thinking that led Tolstoy away from religion and toward philosophy, and while such a shift might have been pregnant with all manner of ideational possibilities, nevertheless, that conceptual transition left Tolstoy rather directionless when it come to

developing concrete plans of action. For example, even though Tolstoy began to keep a written account through which he tried to map out a plan of action for him to follow each day, more often than not, those plans went unfulfilled, and, eventually, he stopped that sort of mapping process.

Similarly, Tolstoy next began to draw up a list of exercises that were intended to help him improve his will power or to generate a network of rules for organizing his life, only to see this intentions for improvement dashed on the rocks of his habits and inclinations. For instance, he would create a rule about visiting brothels just twice a month, only to see the rule crushed beneath the intensity of desires that, repeatedly, had priority.

Later on, when Tolstoy became drawn into the psychological maelstrom that was formed by his suicidal thoughts, he once again became strung out between a similar set of opposed and conflicting forces concerning action. Part of him seemed to want to engage in self-destructive behaviors (i.e., suicide), and part of him seemed to be trying to discover a course of action that would counter those tendencies, but, from one moment to the next, he did not know which set of forces might be victorious, and, as a result, during that period of his life he was constantly walking along a very unstable, thin wire that traversed a deep existential abyss of darkness that resonated with the same sort of directionless struggles that had characterized his life when he was a fifteen year old as well as during his three years of being a university student.

After receiving his inheritance at the age of 19, he dropped out of university and returned to his early childhood home in Yásnaya Polyána, nearly 7.5 miles southwest of Tula which, in turn, is 124 miles directly south of Moscow. His inheritance consisted of: Yásnaya Polyána, a number of villages, 300 serfs, and a sizable amount of money.

He knew nothing about agriculture or how to manage an estate. Lacking competence in those areas as well as suffering from the absence of any direction in his life – religious or philosophical -- he began to major in the lifestyle of an aristocratic reprobate who occupied much of his time with squandering substantial portions of his inheritance on gambling, drinking, and women.

The gambling addiction to which Tolstoy succumbed was sufficiently severe that several villages on his estate had to be sold and, in addition, at one humiliating low point in 1854, in order to raise the money that was necessary to cover the debts Tolstoy had accrued due to his predilection for gambling, he was forced to sell the house in which he had been born and which his grandfather, Nikolay Sergeyevich Volkonsky – the father of Tolstoy’s mother – had directed to be built after Nikolay had retired from the military just prior to the start of the 19th century and which, as well, had been completed by Lev’s own father.

Leo Tolstoy’s self-serving pursuit of women tended to be as unrestrained as was his inclination toward gambling. The former interest included many peasant women who lived on his estate and, in at least one case, Tolstoy became involved, for roughly three years, with a married peasant woman, Aksinya Bazykina, which, somewhere around 1859, led to the birth of a son – Timothy -- who, with the exception of becoming a coach driver on Tolstoy’s estate, seemed to be largely ignored by Tolstoy.

However, side by side with such libertine pursuits, Tolstoy was often inclined toward trying to lead a more puritanical kind of life. Sometimes he even tried to work out compromises between the two tendencies and, in an attempt to behave in a more disciplined manner, he might restrict himself sometimes to two sexual encounters a week or month from his usual set of trysts that tended to occur on a daily basis.

At the age of twenty-three, footloose and fancy free, Tolstoy journeyed with his brother, Nikolay, to the Caucasus region of Russia. At the time, his brother was a military officer, and at a certain point after reaching the Caucasus, Tolstoy also joined the military.

Three years later he received his commission and, subsequently, was transferred to several locations -- first to Bucharest, Hungary, and, then, to Crimea. In the latter posting, he took part in a number of the battles that occurred between October 1854 and September 1855 when Sebastopol was placed under siege by military forces from France, Britain, and the Ottoman Empire during the Crimean War.

The gambling, drinking, and womanizing that had begun when Tolstoy received his inheritance at the age of 19 also continued on throughout his time in the military and may well have intensified. To whatever the stresses and tensions were that were associated with such activities, he added the trauma that was generated by his experiences concerning the carnage, killing, and brutality that are entailed by war.

The following year, in 1856, his brother, Dmitry (who was a year older than Lev Tolstoy) died at the age of 29. Lev Tolstoy retired from the military that same year.

As indicated previously, at some point during his teenage years, Dmitry had sought to change the direction of his life and, unlike his other brothers, had become quite religious. His brothers, including Lev, often made fun of Dmitry for his religious beliefs and practices.

One can't help but wonder if Leo Tolstoy might not only have been deeply affected by the death of, yet, another member of the family, and, as suggested earlier, Leo Tolstoy might also have felt a certain amount of guilt in conjunction with the role he had played when he was younger that ridiculed Dmitry concerning the latter's religious beliefs. Tolstoy had behaved badly toward his brother in this regard, and, now, his brother was gone ...

along with the possibility of being able to reconcile with his brother concerning such issues.

Unresolved and irresolvable differences do not just disappear. They tend to hang around and continue to weigh on a person's mind and heart.

Four years later, his brother, Nikolay -- with whom Leo Tolstoy had traveled to the Caucasus nine years earlier and who he had followed into the military -- also died. Tolstoy considered Nikolay to be his closest friend as well as an individual for whom he had the greatest respect

After nursing his sick brother for several weeks in the south of France, Tolstoy's best friend had died in his arms. The loss of Nikolay was devastating to Tolstoy, and it was added to the losses he felt in conjunction with his parents and older brother Dmitry.

Lev Tolstoy was only 32 years old. Yet, he had felt the impact of not only the deaths of his mother, father, and two of his four siblings, but, in addition, he had been witness to the deaths of many people in both the Caucasus and Crimea.

Some 70-80 years later, Stalin is reported to have said in a rather self-serving manner that: "A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." Although Tolstoy's experience in this regard involved more than a single death, nonetheless, they were all of a personal nature -- i.e., tied to his own experience of life -- and, therefore, were all tragic in character.

Tolstoy had not, yet, achieved the level of acclaim, success, and royalties that would come to him following the publication of *War and Peace*. Nonetheless, he already was gaining acclaim for: (1) *Childhood* which had been published in 1852; (2) *Sebastopol in December* which had been released in 1855, and (3) a relatively short novel, *The Cossacks*, that had been published in 1863 ... the same year in which he had begun releasing installments of *War and Peace* that were enthralling substantial segments of the

Russian population – both among the intelligentsia as well as among members of the general public.

In 1859 he had opened a school at Yásnaya Polyána that was intended to educate peasants. Then, during the following year – i.e., 1860 -- he went on his second journey to Europe.

This trip was intended to expose him to the pedagogical methods that were being used in various countries in Western Europe. He hoped to learn about how to help improve what he was trying to accomplish with respect to the education of peasants at Yásnaya Polyána.

Upon returning from his second trip to Europe, Tolstoy became involved with opening more schools for peasants during 1861. He also began publishing a relatively short-lived journal that focused on a variety of educational issues.

In 1861, the Czar emancipated – at least to a degree -- the serfs of Russia. Prior to that edict, serfs could not marry without the approval of their owners, nor were serfs entitled to be owners of property, and, as well, they represented a source of relatively free labor for the landowners.

Moreover, Tolstoy's dalliances with the peasant women on his estate was not unique to him but gave expression to a practice that was fairly widespread among so-called noblemen who owned land in the Russian countryside. Furthermore, the degree of control that the landowners exerted over the serfs on their property not only involved sexual services but extended, as well, to the right of landowners to inflict on serfs whatever manner of punishment might be deemed to be appropriate for whatever offense – real or otherwise – that was considered to have occurred, and such punishments included the possibility of being banished to the harsh and, frequently, life-threatening conditions that existed in Siberia.

Unlike a lot of landowners, Tolstoy's grandfather, Nikolay, appeared to have a relatively humane relationship with the serfs on his estate of Yásnaya Polyána. More specifically, in the light of information that Tolstoy gleaned from a number of peasants who had known Nikolay his grandfather did not beat the serfs, nor was he cruel toward them.

Furthermore, Tolstoy's grandfather also did not maintain a harem of peasant women as many landowners did. Nevertheless, he did father a number of children by way of his servant Alexandra and sent those children off to an orphanage.

Tolstoy admired the relatively lenient manner through which his grandfather had interacted with the serfs that lived on Yásnaya Polyána. Tolstoy sought to honor that tradition when he took an interest in helping them to become educated.

Shortly after the serfs were emancipated in 1861, Tolstoy was appointed to serve as a Justice of the Peace. In addition, he opened up a number of new schools to help educate peasants, and, as well, he founded a journal which explored various aspects of the process of education.

Due to his growing fame -- both locally and well as nationally -- as a result of his published writings, and, as well, due to the character of his decisions as a Justice of the Peace -- which, among other things, sought, like his grandfather, to treat peasants fairly -- as well as due to his educational efforts on behalf of the peasants, Tolstoy had begun to attract the attention of the national Secret Police. Consequently, in 1862, while he was away on a trip to Samara, the Secret Police raided his compound at Yásnaya Polyána.

Nothing came of the raid. However, knowing that he was, now, on the radar screens of the Secret Police presumably added one more set of stresses to Tolstoy's life that could have help generate various themes of traumatic pressure in his life.

In 1862, he married Sofya Bers. Because of his sordid past involving gambling, drinking, and womanizing, Tolstoy seemed to feel – and, perhaps, with good cause -- that he was undeserving of such a beautiful, intelligent, socialite as Sofya. Nonetheless, he insisted that his wife-to-be should read entries from his diary that provided various details concerning Tolstoy's sexual escapades involving young, peasant woman during his years of worldly excess.

Tolstoy's treatment of his wife in the foregoing manner deeply hurt and upset her. In fact, Tolstoy's actions toward his wife in this regard appeared to be little more than a variation on what Tolstoy had done with respect to the woman on whom he had forced his physical attentions and about whom he was informing his wife.

Perhaps the hurt and upset that she was experiencing was two-fold in nature. On the one hand, her husband had imposed an emotionally devastating fait accompli upon her by insisting that she read his journals concerning a reprehensible incident from Tolstoy's past life, and, on the other hand, she had to learn about, and deal with, the nature of the perverse act itself to which Tolstoy was forcibly drawing her attention.

Conceivably, over time, Tolstoy might not only have felt that he was married to a woman whom he did not deserve, but, as well, he might have begun to feel, from time to time, that he was undeserving of an array of things in his life. The idea that he did not deserve his good fortune could have extended from: His wife, to: His aristocratic standing and wealth, as well as, in addition, also could have encompassed his survival of war together with his literary success.

In the fall of 1869, while on a trip to inspect some land in Penza province that he was thinking about purchasing, he had difficulty sleeping despite being exhausted. Suddenly, in the wee hours of the morning, he found himself engaged in hand-to-hand combat with an intense,

almost overwhelming fear of death and dying which left him with a deep sense of dread and anxiety concerning the fragility and unpredictable nature of life.

In addition to the foregoing set of emotional stresses, Tolstoy also went through an emotional wringer that was forged by the deaths of a number of close friends, as well as a few of his own children. For example, his best friend, Dmitry Dyakov -- who Tolstoy had known since their student days -- lost his wife, and, then, the daughter of another friend, Sergey Urusov, also died.

Moreover, the sister of Tolstoy's poet friend, Afanasy Fet, along with two of the latter's brothers-in-law passed away as well. Tolstoy had been a friend of one these latter two individuals -- Vasily Botkin -- for more than a decade.

Finally, five of Tolstoy's and Sofya's thirteen children died before the age of seven. Three of those five children died during the half decade-long period in which Tolstoy wrote *Anna Karenina*.

Pyotr -- Petya -- Tolstoy was born in 1872 just ahead of the time when Tolstoy began to write *Anna Karenina*. The child died a year later around the time when the aforementioned novel was beginning to set sail on its four-year odyssey.

A year later, Nicholas Tolstoy was born. Ten months after emerging onto the stage of life, the infant died from meningitis and exited stage left.

Finally, in 1875, two years prior to the completion of *Anna Karenina*, Varvara Tolstoy was born prematurely. The child died within an hour of birth.

Traumatic elements of some -- or all -- of the many possibilities that have been outlined previously could have surfaced at any time but might have been pushed to the periphery of his awareness by the sheer pace of events during the first 41 years of his life. However, by the time that he was beginning to conceive of, and write, *Anna Karenina*, he seems to have been having more difficulty

suppressing many of the previously noted demons due to the way in which the aforementioned sources of trauma in his life might have begun to wear him down.

By the time that Tolstoy completed *Anna Karenina*, he was 49 years of age. Ten of the previous 14 years had been spent writing two of the most celebrated novels in literary history, and all through this time Tolstoy has been trying to navigate his way through a minefield of personal, familial, social, political, existential, and creative issues.

Despite his acclaim, success, wealth, and power, he was having difficulty orienting himself with respect to issues of purpose, meaning, identity, happiness, and death. The world was looking at Tolstoy in one way, but Tolstoy might have been looking at himself quite differently.

As his novels demonstrate, he is a person whose eyes do not miss much. As a result, his talent for capturing detail might have been turned inward toward himself and been reflecting on the 49 years of trauma that had been shaping his life.

The image that he might very well have seen reflected back from the mirror of his memory is an individual who, in many respects, has lived the life of a wastrel. With a few exceptions here and there (such as his experiments trying to educate peasants), he had wasted enormous amounts of time, money, resources, and property,

Furthermore, the mirror formed by his memory is likely to have reflected the image of an individual who – at least to this point in his life -- lacked direction, discipline, or discretion. Moreover, the individual staring back at him would have been someone who – in order to better serve his own appetites -- had been willing to exploit many vulnerable people – mostly peasant women.

While Tolstoy was someone who, for a time, might permit himself to become distracted from trying to understand the nature, if any, of life's purpose through exploits of gambling, drinking, womanizing, and war,

nonetheless, sooner or later, his capacity for honesty and integrity – which were substantial -- would not let him continue to marginalize questions concerning the foregoing issues of direction, meaning, and so on or to permit him to ignore the seeds of ugliness that he had been sowing in life. Furthermore, Tolstoy was a person whose life was not only haunted by the specter of death in relation to his parents, several siblings, two aunts, as well as a number of his own children, but, in addition, there were an indefinite number of lives that had been lost during his time in the military, irrespective of whether those deaths had been by his own hand, or they – both enemies and compatriots – were deaths that he had witnessed.

One also might wonder about whether, or not, Tolstoy's superstitious side might have affected his thinking concerning the things that were transpiring in his life. Even though Tolstoy considered himself to be a man who was governed by reason, the fact is there was a rather deep-rooted and irrational vein running through his life that was irredeemably irrational in nature.

More specifically, Tolstoy considered the fact that he had been born on August 28, 1828 to be, somehow, preternaturally significant. As a result, the number 28 began to set down roots in his consciousness, and he, subsequently, identified it as a transformative number for his life.

He would wind his watch 28 times. He would open books to the 28th page to see what that page had to offer to him.

The number 28 also figured into the birth of his first son, Sergey. This wormed its way into the process when he insisted that his wife should resist giving birth until the following day, which was the 28th of June.

Tolstoy might also have inserted the number 28 into some of his fiction. For example, *Resurrection* ends in section three which consists of 28 chapters.

Finally, the number 28 also figured into the last days of his life. More specifically, his departure from Yásnaya Polyána – and, this might have been a conscious decision -- took place on October 28, 1910.

Superstitions are a form of behavior that are governed by a way of thinking that tends to be impervious to facts and which become entangled in relatively closed loops of “logic” – if it can be called that – and ideation. Thoughts of suicide also tend to give expression to systems of ideation that often are relatively impervious to facts and, as well, form closed loops of reasoning that are shaped by arbitrary forms of “logic”.

Given Tolstoy’s willingness to give himself over – at times – to the irrationalities of superstition, he might have been vulnerable to similar forms of ideation that often are present in suicidal thinking. Consequently, just as part of Tolstoy’s life had been captured by the irrational forces underlying superstition, so too, part of Tolstoy’s life might have come under the influence of the irrational forces that sought to drive him to comply with their lethal dictates.

Depression and suicidal ideation did not just happen to Tolstoy due to some mysterious and arbitrary cascade of brain molecules that, supposedly, resulted in the sort of chemical imbalance that modern psychiatry often likes to champion despite the absence of any rigorous proof to demonstrate the correctness of such a theory. Tolstoy’s deteriorating emotional and mental condition was, on the one hand, a function of a series of bad life choices that he made in response to a litany of existential contingencies which occurred over the course of many years, and, on the other hand, his descent into depression and suicidal ideation was a function of something that entailed both a gift and a curse in his life – namely, his capacity to be acutely sensitive to the emotional lives of other people and, therefore, vulnerable to being affected by, among other things, their deaths.

As a result of all of the foregoing considerations, Tolstoy's life might have entered an arc of crisis by the time that he had begun to map out and write *Anna Karenina*. I believe that novel not only gave expression to aspects of that crisis but, as well, constituted an attempt to develop a way to resolve some deeply-felt existential problems that had been haunting the corridors of Tolstoy's life and memories for quite some time (which have been explored throughout Part 1 of the present chapter), and some of these issues will be critically engaged during chapter three.

Part II: What Manner of Love?

Having explored some of the demons or sources of traumatic experience that might have populated the phenomenology of Tolstoy's consciousness and, thereby, could have helped fuel various forms of suicidal ideation, let's, now, take a look at Tolstoy's relationship with his wife, Sofya/Sonya (She was referred to by both names). Although they were married for 48 years, had 13 children - - five of whom died - and formed a formidable production team that helped to give expression to Tolstoy's creative genius, nonetheless, there are a number of disturbing features that are manifested in that marriage which make me wonder about the nature of the relationship that Tolstoy had with his wife and what manner of love he might have felt.

There is a refrain in one of the compositions of Gregory Hoskins -- a Canadian songwriter, musician, and singer - in which he suggests that there should be as many words for love as the Inuit have for snow. After all, there are a lot of people who act as if they don't seem to believe that the quality and character of love that is given and received on a daily basis has as much importance to their lives as the Inuit know that the character and quality of snow has in shaping the decisions that the latter people make in order to survive.

Tolstoy was an individual for whom the idea of love came to play a central role in his religious world view. Yet, there are dimensions of his post-fictional life that seem to suggest that, in certain ways, he might not have had much insight into, or understanding of, that which he considered to be a key which was capable of unlocking the mysteries of life, and if this sense of things is correct, it constitutes one of the great tragedies of Tolstoy's life.

The foregoing issue is tied to the *Anna Karenina* novel in ways that resonate with the manner in which the idea of suicide is tied to that same novel. More specifically, the

Tolstoy proposes a solution during the very last part of the aforementioned novel.

At the very beginning of *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy indicates that every happy family is alike while every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. Putting aside, for the moment, questions concerning whether, or not, that opening statement can be shown to be true by means of all that follows it in *Anna Karenina*, let's consider an implication entailed by the belief of the character, Levin, from that novel concerning the way in which all happy families are alike might have something do with the presence of love in those families ... more specifically, love of God and love of one another.

During the last days of his life, Tolstoy's family life was terribly unhappy. Consequently, if we apply the logic of the opening line of *Anna Karenina* to Tolstoy's relationship with his wife and family, then, not only were he and his wife unhappy in their own unique manner, but, in addition, if the conclusion of the *Anna Karenina* story concerning the importance of loving God and loving one another is correct, then, this would seem to indicate that love might have been absent from Tolstoy's relationship with his wife – at least during those last tragic days.

The foregoing perspective alludes to the possibility that although Tolstoy might have come up with a tenable solution for life during the final pages of *Anna Karenina* – to love God and to love one another -- apparently, he didn't necessarily always know how to implement the principle that is at the heart of his solution – namely, love – in his own life. Furthermore, the conclusions of the previous paragraph also tend to give rise to several questions – namely, on the one hand, what, exactly, is meant by the idea of love, and, on the other hand, how does one make the transition from the theoretical form of love to a concrete realized manifestation of that form?

Considered from one perspective, *Anna Karenina* can be understood as Tolstoy's creative way of trying to work

through his own demons concerning the issue of suicide by arriving at a solution (i.e., to love God and to love one another) that he felt might be capable of helping to lend the sort of purpose, meaning, and identity to his life that could be capable of defeating the lure of suicide and other self-destructive tendencies. However, considered from another perspective, *Anna Karenina* can be understood as a transitional work that motivated Tolstoy to subsequently go in search of the sort of concrete rational arguments, critical analysis, and kinds of evidence that he felt might be capable of supporting and shoring up the theoretical solution that had been given expression during the closing pages of *Anna Karenina*.

This latter set of projects is extremely important. In fact, a great deal of the remainder of this book will be spent critically reflecting on the ways in which Tolstoy attempted to accomplish the foregoing tasks.

Before undertaking such analysis, however, I would like to take a little time to examine certain aspects of Tolstoy's relationship with his wife. To whatever extent Tolstoy is correct that love might constitute a solution to many of life's problems, nonetheless, that potential solution also entails a variety of questions concerning its nature as well as problems involving how to go about realizing it amidst the many stresses and conflicts of life, and some of those questions and problems are given expression through certain aspects of Tolstoy's relationship with his wife.

The majority of what follows in the rest of the present chapter will focus in on some of the circumstances, issues, and events that surrounded and Tolstoy's final days. Nevertheless, there are also a few other biographical matters that should be considered prior to continuing on with the foregoing topics because such matters tend to resonate with, and, as well, might help to provide some degree of insight into, those circumstances, issues and events.

Lev Tolstoy was 34 years old when he married a young woman – Sofya Andreyevna Bers – who, only relatively recently, had celebrated her 18th birthday. Tolstoy was seeking a young woman to be his wife because as his son, Sergey, subsequently indicated, his father wanted someone who would be something of a blank slate upon which Tolstoy could inscribe his own likes and dislikes concerning all manner of issues.

After the marriage, Sofya/Sonya had been quite prepared to conform to Tolstoy's way of orienting oneself in life, but, nevertheless, this arrangement later led to some problems. For example, when Tolstoy decided to change the direction of his life some 15 years, or so, after their wedding had taken place, Sofya was operating out of a world view that had, in many respects, been fashioned for her by Tolstoy, and, as a result, a certain amount of existential inertia had accumulated in her life that made undergoing a radical shift in philosophical direction difficult to do even if she had the time to do so ... which she didn't because she had her hands full giving birth to children, raising a family, receiving all manner of visitors and guests, as well as transcribing Tolstoy's often illegible handwriting into a form that could be read by editors and publishers.

Tolstoy had considerable time to question, think, reflect, meditate, and analyze various possibilities. Such activity was a major part of who he was, but this was not how his wife spent the majority of her time since she was much more caught up in the pragmatics of everyday life doing the sorts of things that helped provide Tolstoy with plenty of free time.

Consequently, when conflict and tensions began to emerge due to Tolstoy's decision to change course in life, a great deal of that conflict and tension was because Sofya did not have the time, energy, inclination, or resources to follow suit. The fault-lines that had begun to emerge in their marriage were, to a considerable degree, created by

Tolstoy himself due to the way that he, initially, had induced his wife to go about life during the first fifteen years of their marriage, and, then, went about creating a new philosophical and religious paradigm while his wife continued to operate out of the previous world view into which he originally had deliberately initiated her.

As noted briefly during Part I of the present chapter, prior to marrying Sofya/Sonya, Tolstoy had insisted that his wife-to-be should read entries from his diary that discussed some of his sexual dalliances when he was a younger man. Sofya/Sonya found this exercise to be very upsetting and unsettling.

Tolstoy might have considered his action to be merely an expression of honesty. Nonetheless, there seems to be more than just a little disregard on Tolstoy's part with respect to considering how the information that he was insisting she read might adversely affect her or even hurt her.

Just as discretion might be the better part of valor, so too, discretion might be the better part of honesty. Tolstoy seemed to be more concerned with unburdening himself than he appeared to be interested in supplying his wife with the sort of information that would be a thoughtful, constructive addition to Sonya's life.

Tolstoy indicated that he wished to repent for those sorts of sexual activities. Yet, the foregoing process of forcing his diaries upon his wife-to-be appeared to share more similarities with a man forcing some unwanted physical attentions on a woman than they gave expression to an act of repentance to demonstrate the love he had for the woman that would soon be his wife.

When Sofya/Sonya arrived at Yásnaya Polyána, the living conditions were relatively primitive. Among other things, the sleeping accommodations left much to be desired, the kitchen contained unhygienic elements, and the house had no place to bathe.

Although the first few days of married life at Yásnaya Polyána seemed to indicate that the marriage was a happy one, soon differences emerged. Sofya/Sonya began to worry about losing her husband's affection, and after encountering a few rough patches, Tolstoy concluded that his marriage was not special in any way and began to turn his attention to a variety of intellectual pursuits because he felt his life had been caught up in matters of wedded practicality rather than engaged in the serious work of the mind.

Tolstoy wanted to finish an article he had been writing which was developing the idea that teachers had more to learn from peasant children than those children had to learn from teachers. However, Sofya/Sonya never warmed to the peasants in the way that Tolstoy had begun to do through his peasant education project.

Although part of the reason for why Sofya wished to keep her distance from the peasants had to do with her urban lifestyle of her first 18 years of life which had been devoid of contact with peasants, nonetheless, there actually was a more tangible problem associated with the peasants that was a cause of concern for her. More specifically, as pointed out earlier, Tolstoy had forced Sofya/Sonya to read entries from his diaries that, among other things, described his romantic and sexual encounters with peasant women, including Aksinya Bazykina -- who was still living on Tolstoy's estate -- and about whom Tolstoy had once said (in diaries that Sofya/Sonya had been forced to read) that he loved Aksinya as he had never loved anyone before.

Sofya/Sonya indicated in her own diary that she found the whole situation deeply disturbing. Peasants -- especially peasant women -- had become a constant, unseemly reminder to Sofya/Sonya of a lurid and shocking history that Tolstoy had imposed on her prior to their marriage ... an ironic and unintended consequence of

Tolstoy's desire to both disclose the past as well as leave that past behind.

Marriage did not only bring changes into Sofya's life, it also re-oriented Tolstoy's life in various ways. For example, a number of months after becoming married, Tolstoy discontinued his journal on education and closed down the peasant schools he had established as well.

Tolstoy was beginning to organize his life so that he would have the space, time, and energy he needed to begin work on *War and Peace*. One of the last things he did to free up the resources that would be needed for that project was to finish a novella – *The Cossacks* – that he had been working on, here and there, for a decade.

Interestingly enough, the foregoing novella, was about a young military officer who -- not unlike Tolstoy had done -- came to appreciate the sense of natural freedom and inherent nobility that the people who lived in the Caucasus region of Russia had exhibited in the place where the officer had been stationed. Although the officer wanted to become more like those individuals, nonetheless, over the course of the story he eventually realizes that his own aristocratic background prevented him from living a life close to nature in the way that the Cossacks did.

Similarly, a little over 15 years later, Tolstoy began to realize that as much as he admired and was drawn to the simple and unshakable spiritual faith of the peasants whom he encountered on Yásnaya Polyána and elsewhere, nevertheless, like his fictional military counterpart in *The Cossacks*, he came to realize that he could not live the sort of primitive, spiritual life that the peasants lived and, therefore, he would have to find a way of life that seemed less alien to his own spiritual sensibilities.

Tolstoy attempted to bring his wife closer to nature by trying to interest her in the process of milking. However, she found the smell of manure that accompanied the task of milking to be exceedingly unpleasant and, like the main protagonist of *The Cossacks*, sought out activities – such as

tree planting – that were more acceptable to her city-girl background.

Shortly after marriage, Sofya became pregnant. There came a time during the later stages of pregnancy when Sofya found most activities to be difficult if not impossible to accomplish, and, yet, Tolstoy criticized her for not being more active.

Upon learning of the foregoing circumstances, the thought that came to my mind was that Ginger Rogers could do everything that Fred Astaire could do – at least as far as dancing is concerned -- except that she did it backward and in high heels. The fact of the matter was that Tolstoy couldn't become pregnant and really didn't know anything about what a woman experienced during pregnancy and, therefore, he really had no business criticizing his wife's lack of activity in her condition and, as such, would seem to be a little like Astaire might have been if the latter individual had tried to criticize Rogers for dancing as she did when the situation didn't really allow her to do much of anything else.

Part of Tolstoy's personality was to become so enthusiastically committed to a given interest or activity that he would virtually abandon people – such as his wife - - for extended periods of time. At one point, for instance, he became passionate about bee keeping.

The foregoing interest in beekeeping lasted for several years. During this time, his wife was repeatedly left alone for long periods of time, and Tolstoy seemed to have little awareness of how his passion was impacting the life of someone he claimed to love.

People might wish to admire Tolstoy for the enthusiasm and passion that he exhibited with respect to so many topics, causes, and ideas. However, that commitment had a price associated with it that had to be paid for by, among others, his wife in currencies of patience and tolerance.

On the one hand, passion and enthusiasm tend to be quite easy. One merely has to give oneself over to them, and Tolstoy did this quite frequently. In fact, at times, he would even become belligerent toward some of those who might not share his passion and enthusiasm for this or that topic to the degree that he considered to be appropriate.

On the other hand, patience and tolerance are hard. One has to work at mastering them, and Sofya/Sonya often found herself confronted with the struggles inherent in that process of mastery that was set in motion by the challenges – for others – that might be entailed by Tolstoy’s vacillating interests.

His wife seemed to make a great many accommodations for her husband. The reverse often did not seem to be true.

For instance, after their first child, Sergey, was born, Sofya/Sonya suffered from mastitis. This is a painful inflammation of the breast and makes breastfeeding difficult if not impossible.

However, Tolstoy would not permit a wet nurse to be brought in to resolve the problem. Instead, he continued to insist that his wife should continue on with breastfeeding despite her condition and its attendant pain.

Leaving aside the issue of motherhood, Sofya/Sonya played a significant role in Tolstoy’s literary career. Her support in this regard might have manifested itself most strikingly – and, perhaps, critically -- through the fair copies of Tolstoy’s often illegible scrawl that she produced on her husband’s behalf in order to ready his creative work for publication.

She began the foregoing process of generating a fair copy in conjunction with a short story entitled “*Polikushka*” that would be published in early 1863. The story explored some of the problems entailed by the system of serfdom that previously had existed in Russia.

She soon graduated to producing multiple fair copies of, among other things, *War and Peace* which ran to more than 5,000 manuscript-sized pages. However, her support of Tolstoy was not limited to the production of fair copies since, for example, she often encouraged, as well as comforted, him when he ran into creative dry spells and, as a result, would become discouraged with, or depressed about, his work.

Although Tolstoy tended to think of married women – including Sofya/Sonya -- primarily in terms of their – her -- capacity to give birth to children as well as to nurture them, he lucked out when it came to his wife. She became an indispensable component in his creative life.

She made copies of his work. She made suggestions.

She translated his hard-to-decipher amendments to his initial thoughts into intelligible, publishable results. She encouraged him to finish material that he had begun at some earlier date. She helped provide him with the space and time that he needed to do research.

In short, she lent support to his creative efforts in an array of different ways. One wonders what would have happened if Sofya/Sonya had not been present to provide her husband with the sort of practical and concrete forms of assistance that allowed Tolstoy to concentrate on writing.

Tolstoy took a while to ease his way into his role as a father. Thus, for the initial two years of Sergey's life – his first born -- Tolstoy would not even hold his child.

Gradually, however, he became settled in family life both with respect to his wife as well as their son. Apparently, this process of adjustment helped to not only set Tolstoy's creative energies in motion but also ushered in a period of intense happiness and contentment with his wife and family life.

Tolstoy testified to the foregoing by indicating in a 1863 diary entry that he was able to write and think as he

had never been able to do previously and that he was so happy with his status as a father and husband that all he desired was for his present way of life to continue on as it was. In addition, His lone diary entry for 1864 stated that he and his wife meant more to one another than did anyone else.

He reiterated the foregoing kinds of sentiments the following year, 1865, during another diary entry. More specifically, he asserted that the happiness he had found with Sofya/Sonya was something that might only be encountered once among a million couples.

By this time, work on what would, eventually, become known as *War and Peace* was well under way. Toward the end of 1864, 38 chapters of the new novel that, at that point, he was calling “The year 1805” (and which would, subsequently, form the first two sections of volume one in *War and Peace*) had been fair copied by his wife and sent to the *Russian Messenger* journal to appear in the first two issues of that publication during 1865.

The happiness about which Tolstoy bubbled in his diaries was not only because his wife had given him a son or because he was thinking and writing in highly creative ways. In addition, Tolstoy was extremely happy because his wife was helping him to translate his creative efforts into publishable material through the fair copies she was producing of his work by staying up late at night after all of her other household tasks had been completed.

Over the six years during which *War and Peace* came into existence, Sofya/Sonya underwent her own lived edition of war and peace due to: A miscarriage; the birth of four children; the challenges associated with caring for those children, as well as engaging in seemingly endless rounds of copying and, then, producing updated versions of what already had been copied. She became so deeply immersed in Tolstoy’s creative process that she developed a sense for when Tolstoy might, initially, have said things in a way that, upon added reflection, might not have been

to his liking, and, therefore, she would point out such problems to Tolstoy.

Sometimes Tolstoy would appreciate her input and set about rewriting those sections. On other occasions, Tolstoy would explain to her why he wanted what he had written to stay as it was.

Obviously, in light of the foregoing considerations, Sofya/Sonya was more than someone who produced fair copies of Tolstoy's work. She also had taken on the task – at least in part – of serving as an editor who was trying to help Tolstoy produce the best version of his work that he could.

Sofya/Sonya considered her husband to be a genius, and she once wrote in her diaries that when Tolstoy was engaged in the creative process, he was frequently late for dinner. She comments on such tardiness by observing that those sorts of concerns might have been too petty a concern for a genius, yet, her own genius for finding ways to support Tolstoy's genius – including arranging meals and waiting for him to make an appearance – also seems to be considered by some people to be a petty sort of concern, and, as a result, often goes unnoticed ... perhaps at times, even by the genius, Tolstoy, himself.

When Tolstoy was actively benefitting from his wife's many forms of support, he indicated numerous times in his diary how happy he was. Yet, near the end of his life, when he was engaged in conflict with his wife over, among other things, royalty issues, he seems to have forgotten just how significant a role she had played in getting his creative efforts into published form.

Several years after completing *War and Peace*, Tolstoy fell into a depressed condition. He confided to a friend that he had lost his desire to live.

Part of the reason for Tolstoy's sense of depression following the completion of *War and Peace* might have been due to the criticism that was directed at that work by

the many people who found fault with various aspects of Tolstoy's sense of history in which his account of certain events could not be reconciled with the available facts. Given that Tolstoy was, at times, notoriously thin-skinned, then, conceivably, the criticism that came his way after six years of grueling, intense, detailed, exhausting, work might have weighed upon him emotionally.

In addition, Tolstoy also might have felt that writing *War and Peace* had exhausted his creative talent. Although various creative possibilities occurred to him, from time to time, following the completion of that work, more often than not, he felt that his creative life might be over and, as a result, he wanted to die.

He was still three years away from beginning *Anna Karenina*. However, the demons that had been the focus of Part I in the present chapter were beginning to surface and his post-*War and Peace* emotional condition might have induced him to become vulnerable to those sorts of debilitating forces.

Consequently, phenomenological dynamics concerning death and suicide were beginning to percolate within his awareness. In addition, given Tolstoy's inquisitive nature, then, presumably Tolstoy also might have begun to search for some way of resolving the challenges that were entailed by the possibilities of death and suicide presented to him.

Tolstoy indicated in an 1870 letter to Afanasy Fet (a distinguished Russian poet) that before writing a novel, he -- i.e., Tolstoy -- liked to consider the many life trajectories that his characters in a future novel might take. After considerable thinking and reflecting concerning such possibilities, eventually, he would select the kind of existential trajectory that would be used for each character in his novel.

After a great deal of contemplation across the ensuing three years, Tolstoy might have arrived at a point in the creative process in which the *Anna Karenina* character

would come to represent or symbolize the problem and tragedy that were at the heart of his forthcoming novel. On the other hand, the Levin character would give expression to an antidote for, or way of resolving the problem that was entailed by, and given expression through, the Anna character.

Tolstoy's emotional condition was given expression through both of those characters. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Anna's essential problem is the same one with which Tolstoy had begun to struggle following the release of *War and Peace*, but, as well, there were aspects of Tolstoy's mind and heart that were working their way toward the kind of solution that would emerge – in synoptic form -- through the thoughts of Levin in the last part of the *Anna Karenina* novel.

Tolstoy struggled to finish *Anna Karenina*. As much as he was inspired and invigorated during the six years that were needed to write *War and Peace*, Tolstoy was being dragged down by an emotional undertow that ran through the four years that were required to finish *Anna Karenina* and, consequently, throughout the writing of the latter novel, he constantly was fighting to free his mind from the threatening currents that were seeking to pull him toward the darkness of the unknown.

To keep his head above water in the foregoing sense would have been almost impossible to do because the arc of the tragedy that awaited Anna Karenina – an arc that Tolstoy had mapped out prior to beginning the novel -- was death by suicide. Yet, this was the very issue with which Tolstoy might have begun to grapple with in his own life prior to, during, and following the completion of *Anna Karenina*.

During August, or so, of 1871, both Sofya/Sonya and Tolstoy noted in their respective diaries that something of a significant nature had broken or went astray in their relationship with one another. Apparently, one of the

primary sources of tension and conflict that had arisen between them concerned the role of women in marriage.

Sofya/Sonya had begun to push back against the foregoing paradigm. Earlier in 1871, Sofya/Sonya had given birth to their fifth child and second daughter.

The delivery had been problematic, and, this was followed by a bout of puerperal fever which is a bacterial infection of the reproductive canal that sometimes occurs after a miscarriage or birth. She almost died from the disorder.

As a result, she began to feel that she did not want to become pregnant again. This was deeply disturbing to Tolstoy.

Tolstoy believed that the essential role of women was a matter of: (a) Getting pregnant, and, then: (b) Giving birth to, (c) breastfeeding, and, finally, (d) nurturing the development of children. The foregoing ideas concerning the role of women were fixed in Tolstoy's mind despite the considerable evidence that had accumulated to the contrary during the six years in which *War and Peace* came to fruition,

Given that there were eight more pregnancies that occurred, Sofya/Sonya obviously deferred to her husband's wishes when it came to his desire to continue to have children. Nonetheless, a substantial emotional and conceptual chasm, of sorts, had arisen between the two of them and would become deeper and wider as a result of a variety of subsequent events.

For example, although Tolstoy was insistent that Sofya/Sonya should give birth to further children, apparently, when it came to the issue of royalty rights and establishing financial security for his children as well as for the woman that was giving birth to, and looking after, his children, he didn't seem to feel that his wife should have any say in how those royalties should figure into that

financial security despite the substantial role that Sofya/Sonya had played in making such royalties possible.

There is another dimension of the foregoing divide that was beginning to emerge between Tolstoy and his wife that tends to raise a few questions concerning the nature of Tolstoy's relationship with his wife. More specifically, in Part I of the present chapter, a brief description was given concerning a restless and traumatic night that Tolstoy spent in August of 1869 while on a trip to inspect property.

At the center of the August-1869 episode was a deeply distressing and intense sense of impending mortality that had enveloped Tolstoy's consciousness and left him in a debilitated state of anxiety concerning the future. Whatever the cause of that phenomenological encounter might have been, the experience left a deep mark upon his psyche.

Yet, when his wife related to him her own fears about worries concerning her worries about dying in conjunction with some future pregnancy that arose following her recent, near-fatal post-pregnancy illness, Tolstoy seemed to be more concerned about his desire to have more children and about the role of women was to become pregnant and give birth than he was concerned about his wife's fear of death. However, in light of Tolstoy's August-1869 night terror, one would have thought that Tolstoy might have had much more empathy and compassion for his wife's similar feelings of anxiety and dread involving the possibility of death should she become pregnant again.

At times, Tolstoy seemed to be more in love with an image of what he believed a wife should be than he appeared to be in love with the actual person who was his wife. As indicated previously, very early in his marriage Tolstoy became disillusioned with the way things were going and indicated -- his hopes to the contrary notwithstanding -- that his marriage was not really any different from any other marriage.

Subsequently, during the writing of *War and Peace* – when he was the beneficiary of the yeoman service of his wife’s fair copying and editorial assistance which had nothing to do with Tolstoy’s understanding of a wife’s proper role -- he noted in his diary how much he and his wife loved one another and that the quality of their marital relationship was so rare that one was not likely to encounter something of a similar nature except, perhaps, once in a million couples. Yet, at about the same time, he insisted that his wife endure the pain of mastitis while foregoing the relief that would be afforded by a wet-nurse, and, as well – despite having experienced deep anxieties concerning the prospect of his own death just a few years earlier -- he sought to rebuff and dismiss the worries his wife had with respect to the possibility of death in relation to future pregnancies simply because he was offended – if not horrified -- by the idea that a woman (for example, his wife) might wish to do something with her life other than become pregnant, give birth, breastfeed infants, and supervise their ensuing development.

Following his argument with Sofya/Sonya over the issue of future pregnancies, Tolstoy reported in his diary that he felt a sense of loneliness. Conceivably, the loneliness that he was feeling might have been due to the discrepancy he had begun to recognize between the sort of idealized wife he wanted and the kind of living, breathing wife that he had.

To some extent, many – if not most -- couples have to struggle with trying to deal with the differences between, on the one hand, their idealized image for a partner and, on the other hand, the existential reality of the individual to whom they are married. As noted above, this sort of dilemma also seemed to be present in Tolstoy’s life, and, as a result, one can’t help (at least I can’t) but wonder about the nature of Tolstoy’s professed love for his wife or wonder about which wife – the idealized one or the actual one – he had in mind when he made such statements.

Raising questions in the foregoing manner concerning Tolstoy's understanding of love is not an idle consideration. Starting with the closing pages of *Anna Karenina* and continuing on with Tolstoy's transition to the mostly non-fictional work that followed the release of that novel, the idea of love became one of Tolstoy's central foci, and, therefore, probing how Tolstoy goes about expressing what he considers to be love in the midst of lived life – rather than in some theoretical context -- would seem to be a relevant issue.

Sofya's/Sonya's disagreements with Tolstoy's perspective concerning the role of women in marriage were not just due to her worries about the possible fatal complications and illnesses that might be entailed by future pregnancies. As noted in a diary entry for June-1870, she indicated that with each succeeding birth, a woman has to give up thoughts of doing something with her life other than caring for children.

Sofya/Sonya loved her children. Nonetheless, she did harbor thoughts about life that were independent of, and separated from, the many activities that consumed a woman's time, resources, and space while fully engaged in nurturing the lives of their children.

Families that belonged to Tolstoy's and Sofya's/Sonya's socio-economic class generally divided their lives by living on their country estates during the summer months while dwelling in their city homes during the winter months. However, Tolstoy liked the relative isolation of country life, and, as a result, Sofya/Sonya often had to forgo the cultural, social, and educational opportunities that were associated with the sorts of city activities and interests with which she had grown up.

Here, again, there did not seem to be much give and take between Tolstoy and his wife. For the most part, their lives were arranged in a manner that catered to Tolstoy's inclinations, interests, and ideas concerning how life should be lived.

During a letter that she wrote to her sister Tanya in November 1871, Sofya/Sonya clearly indicated that she did not feel that the life of isolation she was living at Yásnaya Polyána would be capable of meeting her needs if all of her capacities and desires were to become awakened. She had dreams, but her husband appeared to have little awareness of, or interest in, what those dreams might be or whether, or not, there was something he could do to assist his wife to realize some of those dreams.

Discerning the presence of any deep, abiding love amidst the absence of concern that Tolstoy seemed to have for the aspirations, interests, or desires of his wife that were independent of children seems rather difficult to do. Unfortunately, there appeared to be a certain element of intransigence and fundamentalism that shaped the way Tolstoy thought about his wife, in particular, and married women, in general, and, as such, he might have loved his idea of women more than he actually loved women as human beings ... much as his earlier sexual exploits likely were more about satisfying his own desires rather than being concerned about giving expression to a deep and abiding love for the human beings that he used to satisfy himself.

Tolstoy's ideas concerning women carried over into his attitudes toward prostitutes. For example, while agreeing with a scholar – Strakhov – concerning the latter individual's belief that the place of woman was in the family, Tolstoy took issue with that scholar's negative characterization of prostitutes when Tolstoy claimed in response that they helped to preserve family life and, subsequently, wondered about what would become of family life if prostitutes were not available to service the men of those families.

The foregoing perspective of Tolstoy actually shows little respect for the intrinsic human value of prostitutes as human beings or for the feelings of the wives who are expected to tolerate the extra-marital dalliances of their

husbands, brothers, and sons, or for the capacity of men to have control over their bodies, or for the concept of a family. Whatever social problems Tolstoy believes he is solving by having a favorable opinion concerning the constructive role for family life that he believes prostitutes are capable of contributing, he is simultaneously exhibiting a rather desensitized and callous disregard concerning the nature of the conditions (e.g., love, trust, empathy, compassion, integrity, and sincerity) that actually are needed to help ensure the emotional and social well-being of families.

There appears to be something quite pathological that is present in the idea of a man who tells his wife that he loves her madly, deeply, and completely as he goes out the door in search of a prostitute (and the situation involves something even more pathological if he doesn't tell her). Moreover, there are dimensions of the actions of the aforementioned husband involving not only the prostitute, but, as well, his wife, and the whole idea of a loving family that is rather exploitive and entirely self-serving.

Indeed, the foregoing scenario lends a twisted sense to the opening lines of *Anna Karenina* – namely, “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” In other words, given Tolstoy's aforementioned perspective concerning prostitutes, one might suppose that the presence or absence of prostitutes determines, respectively, whether families will be happy or unhappy.

After completing *War and Peace*, Tolstoy returned to exploring and reflecting on the process of education that he had begun in the early 1860s. He envisioned putting together a reading primer (ABC or Azbuka) that would provide lessons of graduated difficulty concerning an array of topics that ranged from: Fables, morality tales, and science-based accounts of various issues, to: Mathematics, scriptural passages, hagiographical stories of various

saints, and chronicles drawn from various aspects of Russian history.

During the foregoing project, Tolstoy decided to learn Greek. One of his motivations for doing so (he also wanted to be able to provide his son, Sergey, with the elements of a classical education) was to be able to provide accurate translations of some of the fables from Aesop that he wanted to include in the reading primer that was being prepared, and, as a result, learning ancient Greek became his new obsession.

In late 1870, he induced a seminarian from near-by Tula to come to Yásnaya Polyána in order to help Tolstoy get started with language learning program. Within a month, Tolstoy was reading various selections from Greek literature in their original form.

A few months later, he was translating excerpts from, among other Greek works, Homer's *The Iliad*. After a few more months had gone by, Tolstoy was undertaking a journey to the Russian steppes in order to spend the summer camped out in a Bashkirian tent east of Samara, living on a diet consisting largely of mutton and fermented mare's milk, and, among other things, reading various Greek classical works in their original form.

Soon, Tolstoy's exploits concerning his mastery of the Greek language in a matter of months had become something of a legend among various social and intellectual circles within Moscow. However, little, or nothing, was said about the exploits of his wife Sofya/Sonya who -- by looking after his children and running the household at Yásnaya Polyána -- helped provide Tolstoy with the time, space, and support he needed to enable him to have the opportunity to be able to concentrate on learning the Greek language, just as she had done a number of years earlier when Tolstoy's obsession had been learning about bee keeping.

Twice -- once in 1871 and again in 1872 -- Tolstoy left his wife and children for periods of six weeks or more in

order to spend time on the steppes amidst the Bashkiri Muslims. During his forays into the wilderness, Tolstoy lived in the sort of primitive conditions that he relished, drank lots of koumiss (which Tolstoy considered to be curative, of sorts, for various of his physical ills), and did as he pleased.

Tolstoy also did as he pleased when it came to acquiring some property from the Bashkirs. Despite writing to his wife and promising her that he would not complete the sale without her approval, he went ahead and purchased the property prior to receiving a response back from his wife indicating that she was not in favor of such a transaction.

One might also note that while Tolstoy was researching, translating, and compiling his ABC reading primer, he had Sofya/Sonya -- along with his niece, Varya, and Kostya, an uncle of his wife -- serve as a fair copyist for the 758-page project. Moreover, as had been the case with many parts of *War and Peace*, the primer went through a succession of changes before Tolstoy was satisfied with the final edition of the material, and, therefore, this meant a lot of extra work for those who were providing fair copies of the primer.

In addition, soon after completing his primer, Tolstoy re-opened his school for peasant children and began to test the value of his reading primer with 35 actual students. The school was operated through the main compound of Yásnaya Polyána rather than elsewhere on the estate as had occurred a decade, or so, earlier when Tolstoy had established schools for peasant children at twenty-one different locations on his property.

Tolstoy taught the peasant boys in one room, while Sofya/Sonya taught the peasant girls in another room. The foregoing classes took place in the afternoon following morning sessions involving their own children.

Over the last 150 years, or so, many people have lauded Tolstoy's remarkable efforts involving the education of

peasant children. However, far fewer individuals mention – or, even, seem to realize – that Sofya/Sonya took an active part in that same program.

On the one hand, Tolstoy might have done what he did with the peasant children because he had an interest in the peasants (which, in many ways, his wife did not share and, consequently, makes her willingness to help out even more noteworthy). In addition, he was invested in his ABC reading primer and wanted to see if it worked.

Thus, he needed his wife's assistance to produce a fair copy of his reading primer. In addition, he required his wife's assistance in order to be able to translate educational theory into realized practice.

On the other hand, however, Sofya/Sonya is likely to have served as a fair copyist for, and teacher in, the education project because she cared for her husband. She wished to please him and lend whatever support she could in relation to his various endeavors.

I don't have much difficulty detecting the presence of Sofya's/Sonya's love for her husband in relation to the foregoing set of circumstances. However, I'm not sure that I see much in the aforementioned arrangements that might suggest the presence of love on Tolstoy's part with respect to his wife.

After all, needing someone's assistance to be able to complete one's own aspirations is not necessarily equivalent to loving the individual whose help one needs. Or, said in an alternative manner, Tolstoy's relationship with his wife could be construed as merely being a function of his needing – and, possibly, appreciating – someone helping him to do what he wanted to accomplish because throughout his married life he appeared to be more interested in what his wife could do for him and seemed far less interested in what he might do for his wife.

I believe one would have difficulty trying to argue – at least successfully -- that Tolstoy lived in a time in which

the subjugation of women was just part of the zeitgeist and, consequently, Tolstoy was merely living in blind accordance with the principles that governed a form of life concerning the role of women that existed in Russia at that time. There were many of Tolstoy's fellow citizens who had been reading translations of John Stewart Mills' *Subjection of Women* which emerged not long after their English edition had been released in 1869 and who were aware that Mills had been among the first members of British Parliament to serve as an advocate for women's suffrage and associated rights.

Tolstoy was not ignorant of the debate concerning the role of women that was taking place in Russia and Europe. Instead, he actively chose to reject arguments in favor of extending more rights to women, and, apparently, he didn't appear to see any contradiction between his advocating for the rights of peasants while, simultaneously, failing to advocate for the rights of women such as his wife.

Therefore, calling upon his wife to assist him in his various projects was not an expression of his belief that the role and responsibilities of women should be expanded beyond those of becoming pregnant with, giving birth to, breastfeeding, and nurturing children. Rather, the uses to which he put his wife appeared to be a function of his needs and ambitions rather than giving expression to a recognition concerning her status as a human being who might have needs and projects of her own.

Tolstoy believed that the ABC reading primer would surpass the success of *War and Peace* – both critically and commercially. He was wrong – considerably so -- on both counts.

For a variety of reasons, reviews of the ABC book tended to be fairly negative. Furthermore, although Tolstoy had been hopeful that the primer might be officially adopted in schools across Russia – especially

given that a distant cousin, Dmitry Tolstoy, was Minister of Education – his hopes were, at least for a time, unrequited.

Eventually, after several years of struggle, his primer was approved for use by the central government in 1874. However, the book never became an established fixture within the educational system and, before long, disappeared from view, and its use – limited as it was – discontinued as well.

The high expectations that Tolstoy had for the ABC primer, together with its poor reception, might have been one more source of trauma -- to be added to the ones listed in Part I of the present chapter -- that could have exacerbated Tolstoy's emotional struggles that had begun to surface following the release of *War and Peace*. Given that Tolstoy had reported to his friend Sergey Urusov back in 1871 that he had lost his will to live, one might anticipate how three years of intense, but relatively fruitless, struggles involving the primer would not have been likely to brighten or lighten his mental condition.

Moreover, Tolstoy had begun work on *Anna Karenina* while all of the foregoing problems were taking place. The lack of success which Tolstoy encountered in relation to the ABC primer together with the struggles he experienced while trying to persuade others of that book's value might have spilled over into Tolstoy's work on *Anna Karenina* and negatively affected his feelings about, and undermined his commitment to, the latter novel because he was having difficulty working on it.

In addition, there also were other aspects of Tolstoy's life that were spilling over into the writing of *Anna Karenina*. For example, toward the end of October 1875, Sofya/Sonya became quite sick with a bout of peritonitis while pregnant with Varvara, and, as a result, began to go into labor.

Due to the illness, the infant was born three months prematurely. The child died shortly after being born.

The experience of the death of her premature child as well as her own sickness during that same pregnancy, coupled with her previous near-death encounter involving puerperal fever with an earlier pregnancy, once again had a negative impact on Sofya/Sonya attitudes toward the idea of future pregnancies. She didn't want more children, and she was thinking about using some form of contraception to prevent her from becoming pregnant, and this was another topic about which Tolstoy and his wife disagreed because Tolstoy believed that all forms of contraception were immoral.

The foregoing issues showed up in the pages of *Anna Karenina*. More specifically, during a conversation in the novel between Anna and her sister-in-law Dolly, Dolly becomes deeply disturbed with Anna's confession that she (Anna) has been using contraceptive methods. Dolly's reaction is giving voice to Tolstoy's opinion concerning the use of such methods.

Tolstoy might believe that the use of contraceptives is an immoral act, but whether, or not, he is correct cannot be proven. Nonetheless, despite Sofya's/Sonya's very real concerns about the potential health problems associated with pregnancy for both her and her unborn child, Tolstoy expected his wife to abide by his beliefs with respect to the issue of contraception, and this became a source of contention between the two of them.

The foregoing difference of perspective also reveals a potential weakness inherent in Tolstoy's interpretation of an idea to which he subscribes and which, in later years, would become one of the mainstays of his religious orientation. The idea being alluded to in the foregoing claim is the so-called Golden Rule – namely, 'Do unto others as one would have others do unto you.'

For example, as noted earlier, Tolstoy believed that any form of contraception was immoral. Given that Tolstoy would have wanted to be treated by others in accordance with an idea in which he believed – namely, the immorality

of contraception – then, perhaps, he might not have had any hesitation in imposing that same idea on someone else -- such as his wife – and, presumably, would have felt that such a course of action would have been completely consistent with his understanding of the Golden Rule.

However, let's reflect on the foregoing possibility. On the one hand, everyone might be willing to agree that if one wants to be treated with kindness, honesty, patience, forgiveness, tolerance, friendship, compassion, and generosity, then, one should be willing to treat other people in the same manner. Nonetheless, on the other hand, one would seem to be entering rather contentious territory if one were to interpret the Golden Rule to mean that if one subscribes to some idea – such as the immorality of contraception -- then, the aforementioned moral principle entitles one to impose one's opinion concerning – in this case – contraception onto others simply because one wouldn't mind if other people were to treat one in accordance with a belief to which one is committed.

Interpreting the Golden Rule in the foregoing fashion tends to make morality a function of an individual's likes and dislikes instead of giving expression to a general, universal standard with which everyone might agree. As a result, there is a fairly significant shift taking place in hermeneutical orientation in the foregoing approach to the Golden Rule.

That is, one seems to be switching from a process that focuses on a process of reciprocation with respect to principles of character (such as kindness, honesty, patience, forgiveness, etc.) with which everyone might agree, to entertaining a process that gives emphasis to an array of possible beliefs (such as considering contraception to be immoral) with which not everyone might be in agreement. Therefore, this would not necessarily be in accordance with the way in which everyone wished to be treated.

Tolstoy not only was opposed the use of contraceptives but, despite his wife's concerns about subsequent pregnancies, he was insistent that Sofya/Sonya should continue to have children. Nonetheless, he often went missing in action when it came to being available to the children that he wished to bring into the world.

To be sure, the three, older children of Tolstoy (Sergey, Ilya, and Tanya) who grew up during the twelve years, or so, that extended from 1863 to 1874 or 1875 tended to have greater access to their father – at least when he wasn't engaged in writing or research -- than did the two children (Andrey and Misha) who grew up in 1880s and 1890s. While the three older children often had the opportunity to go riding, hunting, walking, and skating with their father, the latter two children tended to become lost amidst the shuffle of emotional, professional, political, religious, and economic events that began to sweep Tolstoy along the trajectory of his life.

In fact, Sofya/Sonya was sufficiently concerned about her husband's lack of interaction with the two younger children that she complained (without success) about his apparent willingness to sacrifice his children on the altar of his various professional activities. His lack of attention concerning Andrey and Misha was reciprocated, in turn, by the subsequent lack of interest that those two children showed with respect to any of their father's ideas.

The next set of issues that served as a source of conflict and tension between Tolstoy and his wife were a function of their differences concerning religion. Sofya/Sonya was happy and at peace within the framework of Russian religious orthodoxy, but Tolstoy was neither happy with, nor at peace with, the teachings of the Orthodox Church.

Tolstoy had begun to question religious teachings when he was 13 years old. Furthermore, he gave up praying when he was 16, and, then, abandoned religious beliefs altogether when he was 18.

However, by the time he entered his late 40s, religious feelings, of one kind or another, had begun to surface in his consciousness. In many ways, this re-emergence of religious sentiments in Tolstoy's life was an expression of desperation.

More specifically, for a number of years – that is, prior to, during, and following the writing of *Anna Karenina* (and, therefore, throughout much of the 1870s) -- Tolstoy had been struggling to stay alive amidst the onslaught of a set of internal demons (some of which have been itemized in Part I of the present chapter) that were attempting to drag him toward suicide. The only thing that seemed to be preventing him from acting on the suicidal ideations that were flooding his awareness was due to a rather tenuous, but somewhat tenacious, conceptual hold some part of his mind or heart had which clung to the hope that some kind of religious salvation might be possible but which, perhaps rather ironically, seemed to be – at least initially -- largely devoid of belief in God.

Tolstoy had reached a juncture in his thinking and understanding in which he readily acknowledged – at least to himself and his friend Strakhov -- that the puzzle of life could not be solved through either philosophy or science. Consequently, he came to believe that decoding the mystery of life entailed some form of religious resolution.

Eventually, and despite, at that time, his lack of belief in God, he began to read various treatises on religion. Yet, he found them to be unsatisfying in various ways.

Nonetheless, inspired by the example and deep faith of many peasants who lived on his estate as well as an array of peasants he encountered elsewhere during his travels, Tolstoy began to actively observe various aspects of their religious practices. Apparently, his hope had been that he might be able to acquire the quality of faith that he observed in many peasants by emulating some of their religious activities ... such as fasting several days a week,

attending church services on Sunday, and saying prayers on a daily basis.

Moreover, during the summer of 1877, Tolstoy made the first of several pilgrimages to Optina Pustyn, a monastery located in Kaluga province some 135 miles west of Yásnaya Polyána. Although Tolstoy first learned about the monastery from his aunt Aline -- who throughout his childhood had sought to inculcate in him, and in his siblings, a deep respect for the monastery and its attendant elders, Tolstoy also had heard about the Optina Pustyn monastery from many of the peasants he encountered.

The individual at the aforementioned monastery with whom Tolstoy most wished an audience was an elder known as Ambrosy. The latter individual was famous throughout Russia and was the person who oversaw the operational activities of that facility.

People from across Russia visited the monastery seeking spiritual guidance and assistance concerning a wide variety of family, economic, and medical problems. The purpose of Tolstoy's visit was to seek answers to many of the religious questions that, for a long time, had been haunting the corridors of his consciousness.

Tolstoy, as he had hoped to do, did get an audience with Ambrosy. At some point during their interaction, the elder indicated to Tolstoy that he (i.e., Tolstoy) should give confession and, then, take communion. Tolstoy did as he was directed, and, then, later on, he interacted with a number of other individuals who lived and served at the monastery.

In 1907 a friend of the individual – Strakhov – who had accompanied Tolstoy on one of his pilgrimages to the Optina Pustyn monastery, published an account that purported to reflect Ambrosy's spiritual assessment of Tolstoy. The – possibly apocryphal -- account indicated that the spiritual elder acknowledged that while Tolstoy's heart was sincerely searching for God, nonetheless,

Ambrosy reportedly felt there was not only considerable confusion in Tolstoy's way of thinking about religious issues, but, in addition, Tolstoy's understanding was skewed, to varying degrees, due to what Ambrosy considered -- supposedly -- to be elements of spiritual pride.

In addition, the aforementioned spiritual elder believed that Tolstoy's version of the Gospels would result in considerable damage being inflicted upon various individuals due to the nature of Tolstoy's problematic way of translating and interpreting that material. However, since Tolstoy's rendition of the Gospels would not be published until several years after his audience with Ambrosy, one is confronted with a dilemma: One could either (a) question the authenticity of the account being given by Strakhov's friend because the elder was talking about something that had not, yet, happened, or (b) one could suppose that the elder's assessment might have given expression to a prescient intuition concerning, or clairvoyant reference to, the impact that Tolstoy's forthcoming edition of the Gospels would have on various people at same later point in time.

Finally, Ambrosy allegedly claimed -- in a rather pointed and somewhat deprecating manner -- that Tolstoy believed he (i.e., Tolstoy) understood the Gospels better than anyone before him had been able to do. Whether the foregoing claim -- or any of the other previously noted observations -- really gives expression to what the spiritual elder allegedly disclosed concerning Tolstoy to Strakhov's friend, is unknown, and the account just might have been -- as suggested earlier -- an apocryphal story intended to cast aspersions upon Tolstoy's reputation and work.

Ironically, the foregoing episode is simultaneously countered, as well as strengthened, given additional details that Strakhov's friend related concerning the sort of impression that other religious figures who lived at the

monastery had of Tolstoy. For example, a number of the Holy Fathers who resided at the monastery felt that Tolstoy not only possessed a splendid soul but, as well, intimated that Tolstoy did not suffer from the sort of intellectual pride that, supposedly, had been exhibited by certain other famous individuals ... such as Gogol who had visited the monastery in 1850.

Apparently, opinions concerning Tolstoy's spiritual character were somewhat divided at the monastery. The fact that both positive and negative assessments of Tolstoy were forthcoming from Optina Pustyn suggests that, perhaps, the information that was published by Strakhov's friend might have been real rather than fake news.

Nonetheless, one might wish to exercise a certain amount of caution concerning the veracity of that report if one were to ask why an allegedly spiritually elevated individual like Father Ambrosy would bother disclosing such a critical assessment to anyone other than Tolstoy. However, perhaps, in the mind and heart of Father Ambrosy, releasing that sort of personal information may have been considered justified as a means of warning people about the dangers of entertaining some of Tolstoy's ideas concerning religion, and, while the Father might have otherwise remained silent on the matter, if he were asked for his opinion about Tolstoy, he might have felt duty-bound to give his honest assessment of the man.

Tolstoy's attitude toward the elder, Ambrosy, on the other hand, was quite favorable. While Tolstoy was suitably impressed with the spiritual quality of all of the people that he met who were associated with the monastery, Tolstoy was most taken with what he considered to be Father Ambrosy's 'spiritual power' (whatever that might mean).

If the spiritual power that Tolstoy believed he had detected in Father Ambrosy were actually present, then, conceivably, the negative impression that Father Ambrosy supposedly had concerning Tolstoy might be understood

as constituting a manifestation of such power. However, leaving aside, for the moment, whether, or not, the previously outlined anecdote of Strakhov's friend concerning Father Ambrosy's assessment of Tolstoy is correct, one wonders whether Tolstoy's opinion of the elder would have remained the same if, or when, he come to learn of the aforementioned account.

Tolstoy was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901. If the account published by Strakhov's friend in 1907 concerning Father Ambrosy's alleged assessment of Tolstoy spiritual condition -- based on the 1877 audience at the Optina Pustyn Monastery -- had been seen, subsequently, by Tolstoy, he might have construed the Father's opinion as merely constituting the sort of response that one might expect from an individual who was part of the orthodox religious system that existed in Russia.

On the other hand, if Tolstoy were to have responded in the foregoing manner, then, such a judgment also would tend to call into question Tolstoy's own capacity to detect the presence of spiritual power in another human being such as he had proclaimed in relation to Father Ambrosy following his meeting with the elder. Alternatively, if Tolstoy had come to learn about Father Ambrosy's alleged comments concerning Tolstoy's visitation to the monastery, Tolstoy might have acted charitably and: Given Father Ambrosy the benefit of a doubt, considered the story of Strakhov's friend to be apocryphal, and continued to treat the elder as a spiritually powerful individual despite the latter's affiliation with the Orthodox Russian Church.

Irrespective of the truth of any of the foregoing considerations, they do tend to lead to an important issue concerning the differences of religious orientation between Tolstoy and his wife. More specifically, although Tolstoy's understanding of various religious issues might have been correct, one also needs to be open to the

possibility that his understanding concerning such matters also could have been wrong, either wholly or partially.

In fact, without necessarily feeling compelled to concur with the religious perspective of either Tolstoy or his wife, one might wish, nonetheless, to ask whether, or not, Tolstoy was warranted in treating his wife the way he did (which will be explored shortly) as he became more deeply committed to his vision of religious truth. Certainly, the foregoing question is unavoidable if it turns out that Tolstoy was wrong in conjunction with many of his religious ideas.

However, even if Tolstoy were correct with respect to his understanding of various religious issues, one might still wish to raise certain kinds of moral questions concerning his attitudes toward, and treatment of, his wife following the changes that took place in his religious orientation. More specifically, in many respects, some of his interactions with, and opinions concerning, his wife (to be discussed shortly) do not seem to readily reflect one of the principles that Tolstoy claimed was at the heart of his religious framework – namely, that we should love one another despite whatever differences might exist between ourselves and other people ... in this case, his wife, and, in the light of some of the interactions that took place between himself and Sofya/Sonya (some of which were discussed earlier in Part II of the present chapter, and some of which are to be discussed shortly), one also might wonder what manner of love Tolstoy actually might have had for his wife.

Quite frequently, Tolstoy used words that were supposed to give emphasis to the importance that “love” had for his religious perspective. Nonetheless, understanding precisely what he meant by such references is not always easy to decipher – especially in conjunction with his wife -- when a great many things that Tolstoy did appeared to be self-serving and, therefore, could be

interpreted to indicate that something other than love might be operative in such circumstances.

For instance, consider the Domna affair. This episode took place in 1878-1879, some sixteen years, or so, after Tolstoy's marriage to Sofya/Sonya had occurred and also after his wife had played key roles in assisting Tolstoy to produce *War and Peace*, the *ABC* primer, and *Anna Karenina* as well as give birth to and nurture five children.

Domna was a married woman. Her husband was in the military, and she was employed in the servant's kitchen at Yásnaya Polyána.

Domna was tall, young, attractive, and her husband was not present. Tolstoy had decided to pursue her.

He began his amorous pursuits of the young woman by attempting to get her to notice him through a series of soft whistles that were intended to attract her attention. Eventually, he was able to strike up a conversation with the young woman and had arranged to meet her at some point in time at a secluded part of the garden that was enclosed by some trees.

Tolstoy had left the house and was on his way to meeting with Domna when his plans were interrupted by his son, Ilya who had shouted to his father from a window of the house to remind Tolstoy that there was supposed to be a Greek lesson taking place. Circumstances rather than character, principle, or love had intervened in Tolstoy's life and intervened to oppose his original intention concerning the satisfaction of his sexual desires.

There is a line in the Gordon Lightfoot song "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" that asks: "Where does the love of God go when the waves turn the minutes to hours?" One might ask in a similar vein: Where does the love of a man go when his lust turns his heart so sour?

Tolstoy's love for his wife had disappeared and was replaced with visions of Domna. One wonders about what manner of love could be so easily displaced by a desire to

seek sexual release with someone other than the one that he professed to love.

Sofya/Sonya and he had argued about the morality of contraception. In addition, he had arguments with her about what he considered to be the fundamental role of women with respect to becoming pregnant, giving birth, breastfeeding, and the nurturing of children despite her concerns about what implications those pregnancies would have for her health or the health of associated fetuses.

Even if one puts aside the issue of Tolstoy's hypocrisy with respect to his expectations concerning how his wife should behave while simultaneously giving himself a pass when it came to sexual ethics, there is still a very important question that remains. What manner of love does Tolstoy have for his wife if he was so willing to cast her aside in favor of the possibility of a sexual tryst with a peasant worker and was prevented from carrying through on his intention only because he was reminded that he was supposed to give a Greek lesson to his son.

Because Tolstoy apparently was feeling quite vulnerable with respect to the siren call that had arisen in conjunction with Domna, the servant woman, he confessed the whole sordid set of circumstances to a young man, Vasily Alexeyev, who had been hired as a tutor for Tolstoy's children. To Tolstoy's credit, following the foregoing set of events, he insisted that the tutor accompany Tolstoy during walks about the estate in order to help Tolstoy protect himself against himself by creating a sort of buffer zone that would help Tolstoy to weather the turbulence that lust had introduced into his life in relation to Domna.

Nevertheless, not only had lust induced Tolstoy to lose touch with his alleged love for his wife, but that lust also had induced him to forget – at least temporarily -- his duty to, if not love for, his son. As asked earlier, what manner of love is so easily dislodged by the presence of lust?

There were other incidents that also raise a variety of questions concerning what manner of love Tolstoy had for his wife. For instance, reflect on the following considerations.

Because Sofya/Sonya often stayed up late to finish her work as a fair copyist for Tolstoy's various projects, she often slept in after such late nights. The bedroom was next to the drawing room where Tolstoy and Alexeyev frequently talked about a variety of philosophical, political, economic, and religious issues.

As a result, while getting dressed, she often overheard different parts of the foregoing conversations. Some of the discussions carried implications for the future, financial stability of the family.

Alexeyev was an atheist, committed socialist, and espoused radical politics. Nonetheless, Tolstoy was deeply impressed by him primarily because the young man behaved in a manner that was quite consistent with Christian ethics and, as well, he had the same abiding interest in helping to improve the condition of the peasants as Tolstoy did.

However, Sofya/Sonya wanted Tolstoy to get back to writing the sort of literature that she felt might have some commercial potential through which the family could be supported. Unfortunately – at least from Sofya/Sonya's point of view -- Tolstoy was becoming interested in, among other things, the spiritual welfare of the peasants.

Tolstoy didn't feel that the Church was adequately addressing the essential needs of the peasants. More specifically, Tolstoy believed that many peasants were attracted to various kinds of sectarian religions that populated the Russian countryside because of the ability of those religious frameworks to provide explanations for various aspects of life in simple Russian rather than becoming bogged down in the theological complications that were often associated with many Church doctrines.

Sofya/Sonya didn't feel that her husband's concerns about the spiritual welfare of peasants would be commercially viable. Although she considered Alexeyev to be both a good tutor and hard worker, nevertheless, she was becoming concerned about the sort of influence that the young man was having on her husband.

For her, charity began at home. However, Tolstoy had other ideas concerning such matters.

There is something constructive to be said for each side of the foregoing difference of opinion. Tolstoy, however, often seemed to be disinclined toward entering into some sort of compromise with his wife since, quite frequently – if not invariably -- he believed that his assessment of such matters was correct and, therefore, should not be subject to any sort of compromise.

Although Tolstoy had the intellectual and creative capacity to marshal all manner of rational arguments in support of his various religious positions (and I will examine a variety of those arguments in subsequent chapters of the present book), he couldn't necessarily prove that he was right about those matters. As a result, Tolstoy's beliefs – and not necessarily his knowledge – concerning the correctness of his religious perspective often seemed to be more important to him than love for his wife appeared to be, and, as a result, he would engage in arguing with her about such matters rather than find ways to demonstrate his love for her notwithstanding the presence of whatever religious differences might exist between them.

When such discussions arose, Sofya/Sonya seemed to be seeking some sort of balance and equanimity. She wasn't necessarily trying to control what Tolstoy believed or did, but she didn't necessarily want to be controlled by him in such matters either ... and, so, arguments ensued.

However ineffectual her attempts might, or might not, have been, Sofya/Sonya appeared to be trying to engage Tolstoy through the currents of her love for him in the

hopes, perhaps, of finding common ground from which to move forward. This did not always seem to be the case with Tolstoy who, at times, appeared to be more concerned about being right than being loving.

Although – and, rightly so – Lev Tolstoy has been lauded for his directing, and hands on, famine relief work in aide of, among others, starving peasants that took place in 1891 (affecting some 14 million people and extending from the Tula region near Tolstoy’s home, south of Moscow, to Samara hundreds of miles to the east), the fact of the matter is that Sofya/Sonya was also busily engaged in such efforts as well. For example, on November 3, 1891 she made an appeal through the *Russian Gazette* on behalf of famine-stricken individuals in various parts of Russia -- an appeal that also was printed in a number of papers in both Europe and the United States.

She not only supervised the collection of the funds and other resources that emerged in response to her appeal, but, as well, she organized sending what had been collected to locations where it is was desperately needed. As a result, she purchased trucks containing all manner of vegetables – including beans, cabbages, corn, and onions, and, in addition, she not only paid to have garments of various kinds sewn using the materials that various textile manufacturers had contributed to her project, but she also participated in the sewing activity.

While Sofya/Sonya might not have had the same deep regard and concern for the peasants that her husband often expressed, nonetheless, she was not indifferent to their problems. She not only had been willing to accept peasant children into her home in order to help educate them, but she was willing to take the time and make the effort to help them when they were starving.

Consequently, the arguments that she had with her husband in relation to his ideas for assisting the peasants – spiritually or otherwise -- were not a matter of wishing to advance the interests of herself or her children at the

expense of the peasants but, instead, those interchanges seemed to be about trying to find some sort of balanced path that would be able to accommodate both her family and, where necessary, the peasants.

One also should not forget that Tolstoy was carrying a lot more psychological and emotional baggage in the form of guilt concerning the peasants than was true for his wife. She had grown up in the city and had no contact with the peasants prior to becoming married and moving to Yásnaya Polyána, whereas a great deal of Tolstoy's life had been subsidized – directly and indirectly -- through the struggles, sacrifices, and scars associated with peasant life.

In many – but not necessarily all – respects, Tolstoy might have been trying to remove stains from his past when it came to his interaction with, and attitudes toward, peasants. As a result, his arguments with his wife involving such matters might have been animated and colored by his desire for contrition concerning peasants and, therefore, his mind and heart might not have been very receptive to Sofya/Sonya's – possibly, more objective or, perhaps, her more nuanced -- judgments concerning those sorts of issues.

The foregoing possibility might help explain why Sofya/Sonya reported in her autobiography that despite her various attempts to improve the conditions of, or lend assistance to, the peasants, her husband was often dissatisfied with her efforts. Tolstoy mentioned in his diary that he wanted to commit himself to some great act of renunciation so that he, finally, might become free to start a new life unencumbered by the past, and, as a result, he often saw his wife and family as preventing him from realizing his dream.

Conceivably, the act of renunciation which Tolstoy wished to pursue might actually only have been a disguised form of his search for absolution concerning past sins committed against the peasants ... including sexual exploitation. In a potentially classic case of displacement,

Tolstoy might have been trying to transfer responsibility for certain problems in his life to Sofya/Sonya and the family by blaming them for being obstacles in the way of his desire to live in accordance with what he claims was a spiritual aspiration to break free from the world but actually might only have been a process of being tempted to sacrifice his wife and children on the altar of expiation that he had constructed for himself.

What Tolstoy didn't seem to understand is that no matter where he went, there he would be. His wife and children were not the obstacle that was preventing Tolstoy from becoming free.

Tolstoy might have been his own worst enemy in that regard. Consequently, perhaps Tolstoy had become mesmerized by a idea of a geographical sort of cure in which he believed that by changing the physical or environmental circumstances of his life, he would, ipso facto, be able to undergo the sort of spiritual transformation he appeared to be seeking.

In the meantime, his willingness to voice discontent in relation to his wife's religious orientation or the manner in which she ordered her existential priorities, together with his assorted references concerning his need to undergo some sort of transformative process of renunciation independent of the family were quite hurtful to his wife. In her autobiography, she indicates that while she did believe her husband loved both her and the family, nonetheless, she also, quite frequently, felt tortured by his incessant desire to distance himself – emotionally and physically – from them.

Without necessarily suggesting that Sofya/Sonya was correct in everything that she thought and believed and without wishing to claim that she was necessarily right in everything she did, nonetheless, there does seem to be a problem with the manner in which Tolstoy sometimes went about dealing with differences of opinion involving religion and some of the other matters that separated

himself and his wife. Tolstoy had needed more than fifty years of: Mistakes, struggle, research, exploration, critical reflection, and experience to arrive at his hermeneutical stance concerning life, and, yet, he seemed to feel that his wife – who he tended to believe should concentrate on becoming pregnant, giving birth, and nurturing children (when, of course, she wasn't helping him to get his writing in publishable form) -- should bow down to what he considered to be the "obvious" rationality of his perspective despite the fact that such alleged rationalism had escaped him -- a man supposedly devoted to reason -- for much of his life.

One wonders how someone – such as Tolstoy -- who appeared to have so much insight into the psychology of human behavior could have been – more than occasionally -- so seemingly dense when it came to understanding his own wife. Perhaps the answer to the foregoing puzzle is that, unfortunately, all too frequently, whatever the nature of the medium through which he engaged his wife, the element of love often seemed to be missing.

From at least the time he finished *Anna Karenina* – and possibly earlier -- Tolstoy had come to believe that love of God, together with love of one another, is one of the essential key for unlocking the mysteries of life. Yet, sometimes, when interacting with his wife, the key that he felt he had discovered just seemed to generate nothing but scratch marks and, as a result, Tolstoy appeared to become frustrated and disgruntled when his wife seemed so resistant to what he considered to be his great discovery.

However, love is patient. Love is forgiving, tolerant, noble, fair, supportive, friendly, generous, humble, kind, compassionate, as well as empathetic, and, yet, these qualities often appeared to go missing in action when Tolstoy interacted with his wife.

As an old proverb once stated -- "There is many a slip twixt cup and lip." Similarly, between the cup of theory concerning love and the actual practice of ingesting that

love so that it can influence one's demeanor, there are many interstitial existential openings through which error might emerge, and Tolstoy, unfortunately, seemed to become entangled in quite a few of those opportunities when it came to his wife.

For example, during the autumn of 1879 Tolstoy was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with various inconsistencies, limitations, and problems he had detected – whether through reading, discussion, and/or critical reflection – that appeared to be a function of the institutions and teachings of religious orthodoxy. In conjunction with the foregoing sorts of concerns, Tolstoy had taken several trips to Moscow and also travelled to Tula in order to seek the truth concerning a variety of religious issues, and by the time he had returned from those explorations he wrote in an October entry of his diary that he believed the Church -- at least, since the third century -- had engaged in considerable cruelty, as well as had constructed a theological framework made from lies and deceptions.

Tolstoy's ideas about spirituality were beginning to resonate with the many sectarian religious traditions that had sprung up in Russia – both in the 1800s as well as in during previous centuries. As a result, he had a growing sense of spiritual restlessness and, consequently, he was becoming much more open to the idea of finding a way to break free from the religious orthodoxy to which he previously had become committed.

Sofya/Sonya, on the other hand, spent most of 1879 being pregnant. Furthermore, much of her attention was consumed with running the household or teaching the children.

In addition, during the spring of 1879 a great deal of Sofya/Sonya's time had been commandeered by the task of sewing. She was preparing summer clothes for her six children, and she had become so fed up with the task that she wrote her sister, Tanya that she wished she could

break free from her circumstances because she had very little, if any, time for herself.

Tolstoy, of course, was free to make whatever journeys he wished to undertake in his search for, religious or spiritual freedom, but Sofya/Sonya felt shackled to a life that did not permit her very much opportunity, if any, through which to pursue her own interests. Indeed, as she wrote to her sister Tanya in January of 1880, she had been cloistered in the house since the previous September, and she felt like she had been imprisoned by someone.

She wanted to escape from her circumstances. Yet, she felt trapped.

Just as the peasants on his estate had been helping to subsidize Tolstoy's life style for much of his life, so too, Sofya/Sonya also was subsidizing, in substantial ways, Tolstoy's latest search for the truth by looking after the many mundane chores and tasks of life that freed up the time and space that helped make Tolstoy's travels and researches possible. Somewhat ironically, however, while Tolstoy had become interested in helping peasants to realize their spiritual and existential potential, he did not seem to have a similar interest in conjunction with his wife unless she was willing to conform to, and comply with, his way of understanding things ... which she wasn't prepared to do.

In fact, as Tolstoy disclosed to his friend Strakhov during an October-1880 letter, he (i.e., Tolstoy) had begun to arrive at a point of his life in which he saw his desire for a family as constituting just one more expression of the worldly aspirations that had been ordering most of his life in accordance with a litany of fantasies and hopes such as: Being awarded the St. George Cross, owning land, or writing successful novels. All of the aforementioned worldly aspirations, and more, were preventing Tolstoy – or, so, he felt -- from truly being able to become committed to an authentic life of spirituality based on the Gospels.

Since, in many respects, Sofya/Sonya had been left holding the bag of worldly responsibilities concerning the many tasks that were required to look after the household and the children from which Tolstoy had begun to disengage himself as he underwent his religious transformation, Sofya/Sonya had been able to experience, close up and personal, Tolstoy's process of alienating himself from family and friends. This sort of realization appeared to contribute (as disclosed in the previously mentioned January-1880 letter to her sister, Tanya) to Sofya/Sonya's feeling that she had become trapped by someone, and, as a result, she desperately wanted to discover a way to escape to freedom as soon as possible.

One wonders where Tolstoy's love went in relation to the friends, relatives, and family from whom, little by little, he was breaking away. Apparently, unless one believed as Tolstoy did – for instance, he rejected the idea that Christ was Divine – then one should be prepared to become engaged in acrimonious discussions, and, as a result, there didn't seem to be much room left for the dimension of reciprocity that tends to grace loving relationships.

The foregoing observation is not about endorsing or rejecting Tolstoy's perspective on questions involving, say, the Divinity of Christ. Rather, the point being made alludes to the element of inflexibility that seemed to be entering Tolstoy's spiritual understanding and which, rather ironically, was a mirror-image of the sort of institutionalized, theological rigidity of the Orthodox Church against which Tolstoy was rebelling.

On the one hand, Tolstoy believed, among other things, that Christ was not a Divine being. On the other hand, many of his friends, relatives, and family members believed otherwise.

Yet, what do such beliefs have to do with love? Why are differences in belief being permitted to remove love from, or mitigate the extent to which love is given expression in, the equations of conduct?

Didn't Tolstoy contend that the Gospels counseled people to love one's enemies? Consequently, why was Tolstoy distancing himself from even friends, relatives, and families due to differences in beliefs rather than busying himself with loving the individuals who might differ from him conceptually ... especially in the case of his wife.

What manner of love was Tolstoy exhibiting? How could he propose to reconcile, on the one hand, his desire to commit himself more fully to the teachings of the Gospel – a commitment that Tolstoy believed was calling him to disengage from friends and family -- with, on the other hand, his failure to live according to the principle of love in relation to his friends, relatives, family, or enemies with whom he differed despite Tolstoy's belief that the foregoing principle is the very essence of the Gospels to which he aspires?

In the spring of 1884, Tolstoy and his family lived in Moscow. Tolstoy resided in one part of the house and was becoming increasingly ensconced in a life of renunciation, while Sonya and the children lived in another part of the house and were oriented otherwise.

Sonya was, once more, pregnant but she also was still breastfeeding two-year old Alyosha. Nonetheless, she found time to enjoy herself by participating in various social events – such as balls – that were taking place in Moscow.

Tolstoy complained – both in diary entries as well as during letters to, among others, Chertkov -- about the manner in which the differences in existential orientation between himself and his wife were interfering with his ability to induce his family to align itself with his religious perspective, and, as well, he indicated that he felt as if he were the only sane person in a madhouse, but he never seemed to stop to consider the possibility that, at least to a degree, other people could have felt that, perhaps, Tolstoy might be considered to be the one with the irrational modes of thinking.

The following summer, the family moved back to Yásnaya Polyána. The divide between Tolstoy and his wife continued to grow, helped, in part, by the fact that Tolstoy would get up very early to spend the whole day away from the house in order to mow grass with the peasants, and, thereby, be unavailable to his wife or the rest of the family.

Tolstoy also attempted to adopt a more ascetic way of life by giving up drinking, eating meat, and smoking. Unfortunately, his ascetic practices were not enabling him to either resolve outstanding differences between his wife and himself or assisting him to engage his wife with any degree of equanimity, and, as a result, by the beginning of summer he was starting to think more and more about withdrawing from the family altogether by moving somewhere else.

Following a June 17, 1884 argument about money, and despite the fact that Sofya/Sonya was in the final days of her pregnancy, Tolstoy decided to leave home. He got as far as Tula before an attack of guilt induced him to reverse course and return home where Alexandra was born the next morning.

Previously, Tolstoy and Sofya/Sonya had had arguments concerning the use of wet-nurses in conjunction with nursing their children. This was especially the case when she had been suffering from mastitis, and, consequently, breastfeeding was very painful.

Up until the birth of Alexandra, Sofya/Sonya always had complied with her husband's wishes and refrained from using wet-nurses. On this occasion, however, she had been so fed up with Tolstoy's unwillingness to help out around the house and because he had been so distant and antagonistic toward her throughout much of the pregnancy, Sofya/Sonya decided to ignore her husband's wishes concerning the matter of wet-nurses.

Marital difficulties spilled over into the remainder of the summer. Sofya/Sonya disclosed in a July letter to

Alexandrine – her husband’s former confidante (before the two had a falling out over a protracted argument concerning the topic of Christ’s Divinity) – that never before in their marriage had Tolstoy given expression to the sort of extreme forms of thinking that interfered with being able to establish sufficient commonality of purpose and orientation from which constructive compromises might be forthcoming.

Without wishing to say that Sofya/Sonya was a perfect wife or mother, let’s focus on Tolstoy for a moment. Although he might have had a keen sense concerning some of his shortcomings as a human being – and often recorded such failings in his diaries -- what he really needed to do was to learn how to deal with conflict at close quarters.

In other words, he needed to learn how to be a loving human being in the presence of, among other things, either passive or active resistance to his religious orientation. Instead, however, his coping strategy in such circumstances often seemed to be shaped largely by his inclinations toward either becoming angry or running away.

Whether, or not, Tolstoy was aware of the fact, an opportunity – or series of opportunities – was (were) being presented to him in the person of, among others, his wife. These opportunities gave him the chance to work through some very complex problems concerning intimate, interpersonal interaction while immersed in a context of conflict.

These were the sorts of problems to which the opening lines of *Anna Karenina* presumably were alluding – namely, “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Presumably, happy families have found methods for resolving the foregoing problems, whereas unhappy families fail to resolve those same kinds of difficulties but do so in an array of different ways.

Tolstoy's family life – at least in the middle-to-late 1880s -- seemed to be unhappy. Therefore, he had not been able to discover the necessary coping strategies through which to amicably resolve the differences that were capable of leading to such varied forms of unhappiness.

The challenge facing Tolstoy seemed to be one of love. That is, how does one learn to love another human being – say, one's wife -- for who that individual is and not for whom one wants that person to be? How does one learn to let differences go and develop one's capacity to focus on the essential qualities of character – such as compassion, empathy, patience, humility, honesty, kindness, forgiveness, tolerance, and fairness – that are necessary in order to be a loving human being?

Solving the forgoing challenge would not have been an idle issue for Tolstoy because, as noted previously, a substantial portion of his religious framework was being built upon the premise that all problems were capable of being solved through love of God, as well as love of one's fellow human beings, and, indeed, love for all creation. However, even the most promising theories of love could easily flounder – as often was the case in relation to his marriage with Sofya/Sonya -- amidst the turbulence caused by the many problematic emotional, physical, ideational, or motivational undertows and cross-currents that constantly course through one's existence, and, consequently, something more than theory will be needed to resolve such a challenge.

Tolstoy's Interpersonal problems were not restricted just to his relationship with his wife. He also was experiencing conflict in conjunction with two of his older children.

For example, Tolstoy had an on-going series of arguments with his third oldest son, Lev, about a variety of issues. In addition, when Tolstoy visited his son, Ilya, and his family in 1889, Tolstoy disapproved of what he

considered to be the somewhat extravagant life style of his son, and this became a bone of contention between the two of them for a number of years.

In addition, because Tolstoy relied on, and needed the support, of his favorite daughter, Masha, he actually sabotaged several of her romantic aspirations in order to assure her availability for assisting him in one way or another. His relationship with his daughter might not have been characterized by conflict, yet, nonetheless, one can't help but wonder what manner of love encourages a father to interfere with his daughter's prospects for happiness in order to make his own life easier or more stable in some sense.

Moreover, Tolstoy's relationship with Masha's elder sister, Tanya, also was deeply strained. Among other things, she was distraught with the manner in which her father always appeared to have time for everyone else – including complete strangers -- but he never seemed to have time for his own daughter.

One of the ways in which she distanced herself from her father was through an affair with an older man. The individual with whom she had the affair was fourteen years her senior, married, and had six children.

Tanya's alienation from her father had problematic consequences. She often had assumed the role of a peacemaker with respect to her parents' marital discord and, therefore, her absence removed yet another stabilizing influence from the troubled dynamic between Lev and Sofya/Sonya.

Finally, Tolstoy's relationship with his youngest children: Andrey (11), Misha (9), Alexandra (4), and the infant, Vanechka were bordering on being nonexistent. Therefore, the children were raised, for the most part, by Sofya/Sonya, together with the assistance of an assortment of governesses and tutors that might, or might not, have helped pave the way for some of the problems with which those children subsequently became entangled.

For example, later in life, Andrey ran up an assortment of substantial debts which, for some reason, he considered were his mother's responsibility to honor. Alexandra, on the other hand, grew up harboring considerable animus toward her mother ... perhaps because the two of them never seemed to establish an essential connection with one another.

Despite Tolstoy's relative neglect of his younger children, he continued to insist on having more children and despite his knowledge that his wife did not want to do so. Even though Tolstoy criticized himself in his diaries concerning his inability to renounce his sexual appetites as he had done in relation to his desires for eating meat, drinking wine, smoking, and hunting, nevertheless, he could not stop seeking sexual relief from his wife, and, as a result, Sofya/Sonya became pregnant again in 1890 only to, subsequently, suffer a miscarriage.

Somewhat ironically, Tolstoy had claimed that vegetarianism would lend support to the life of an ascetic because, among other things, such a dietary regimen supposedly would play an instrumental role in helping a person to control his, her, or their carnal desires. Yet, the practice of vegetarianism which Tolstoy had begun to follow several years earlier didn't seem to have been able to quiet his sexual desires.

Notwithstanding his marital difficulties, Lev Tolstoy and his wife were drawn together by the grief they experienced in relation to the death of their son, Vanechka, who had died of scarlet fever just a few days short of his seventh birthday. Vanechka was a physically fragile child and, therefore, was often sick, but he was loved by everyone in the family for the quality of goodness that seemed to manifest itself through him.

Nonetheless, despite temporarily bringing husband and wife closer together emotionally, nevertheless, in time, the death of Vanechka also constituted something of a fork in their respective life paths. Although Tolstoy had been

attentive and caring toward Sofya/Sonya following the passing away of their son, nonetheless, little by little, he once again, returned to being entangled with his evangelical desire to promote his religious ideas and, therefore, wanted to spend time with Chertkov.

Chertkov was enamored with Tolstoy's ideas in a way that Sofya/Sonya was not. Tolstoy was enamored with individuals who were enamored with his ideas.

Correspondingly, Sofya/Sonya had begun spending a lot of time with Sergey Taneyev, a young pianist and composer who not only had been a pupil of Tchaikovsky as well as a teacher of Rachmaninov and Scriabin, but the talented musical artist also was a friend of the Tolstoy family and used to play chess with Lev and shared a mutual interest in Esperanto with him.

Sofya/Sonya used to find solace in Taneyev's musical artistry. In addition, he was willing to listen to her concerns about a variety of issues of a relatively mundane nature ... the sorts of concerns for which Tolstoy had no time or interest.

Despite the development of considerable jealousy on Tolstoy's part toward the much younger Taneyev's attentions regarding his wife, nonetheless, the attention that the pianist/composer paid to Tolstoy's wife did not transition into some sort of illicit affair. This was because, on the one hand, the young artist was so completely absorbed in his music that he had no time or inclination to pursue romantic liaisons with women and, moreover, to a considerable degree, the artist actually felt awkward around, as well as somewhat intimidated and flummoxed by, women in general.

On the other hand, from, Sofya's/Sonya's perspective, her interest in the pianist was limited, for the most part, to the comfort and solace she derived from listening to the music he played. Furthermore, that interest also was a function of his willingness to offer an empathetic ear concerning her thoughts and feelings.

Tolstoy's intense discomfort with respect to the relationship between his wife and the pianist/composer finally reached a flash point in 1897 that induced Tolstoy to, once again, seriously consider leaving his home. In fact, he actually wrote a letter to Sofya/Sonya about his intention to depart, but hid the communiqué when the two of them reconciled, and Sofya/Sonya indicated her willingness to refrain from extending any further invitations for Taneyev to come to Yásnaya Polyána.

Quite apart from the renewal of Tolstoy's previously mentioned evangelical activity, his manner of dealing with grief concerning his son's, Vanechka's, death differed from Sofya's/Sonya's manner of doing so in, yet, another way. Thus, despite being 66 years old, he became passionate about learning how to ride a bike and, as a result, devoted considerable time to that activity.

The death of their son also differentially affected the couple in a further fashion. For instance, Tolstoy began to think more about his own date of departure from this world and how he wanted his passing to be handled, whereas, for more than a year, Sofya/Sonya discontinued making entries in her diary and seemed to have difficulty moving on with her life.

Perhaps part of the reason why she might have had difficulty moving on – relative, say, to her husband – could have been due to the differences in the nature of their relationship with Vanechka. To be sure, Tolstoy was deeply saddened by the boys passing away, and, as a result, he often cried when thinking about that event.

In addition, he also felt a deep sense of disappointment concerning the boy's death. More specifically, Tolstoy had begun to entertain the possibility – however prematurely - - that, maybe, one day, the boy might grow up to carry on Tolstoy's work, but now that hope was gone.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, Tolstoy's experience of Vanechka's passing probably emerged from a phenomenological milieu that was quite

different than the one out of which Sofya/Sonya operated. After all, Sofya/Sonya was the one who had carried the child for nine months, and she was one the one who -- in the face of Tolstoy's on-going tendency to alienate and distance himself from the family, including Vanechka -- had nurtured the boy since birth, and she was the one who ministered to the boy's various illnesses, including the final, fatal one which had exhausted her.

Over the next ten years, or so, Tolstoy's relationship with his wife ebbed and flowed through a series of emotional tides. For example, on the one hand, she would be deeply disturbed by Tolstoy's depiction of sexual predation involving the character, Katyusha Maslova, that was described in his novella, *Resurrection*, and which was somewhat autobiographical in nature because the scene was based, in part, on Tolstoy's own sexual exploitation of a peasant girl, Gasha Trubetskaya who had worked for his sister ... an incident that had taken place when he was a young man. On the other hand, she would contact various powerful individuals, or write letters of criticism, concerning the unfairness of the edict that excommunicated her husband from the Orthodox Church or she would work hard on her husband's behalf to find ways to promote Tolstoy's novella, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, despite the fact that -- due to its subject matter -- she had never liked the work

At other junctures, and much to the consternation of her husband, Sofya/Sonya might threaten to sue certain peasants who had cut down some oak trees on the estate, or much to the consternation of local villagers and her husband, she might seek to hire guards to protect cabbages in the family vegetable garden from being further plundered by various, unknown assailants. However, in response to the foregoing actions of his wife, Tolstoy might threaten to leave home yet again.

In contrast to the foregoing considerations, on several occasions, Sofya/Sonya would help to nurse Tolstoy back

to health from serious illnesses, including once in the Crimea, toward the beginning of the twentieth century, when her husband appeared to have arrived at death's doorstep. Tolstoy, in turn, would lend support and assistance to Sofya/Sonya when she nearly died a few years later in September of 1906.

Alternatively, later that same year, they would commiserate with one another when their daughter, Masha, died at the age of thirty-five just as they had done in conjunction with Vanechka earlier. Tolstoy, especially, was hard hit by the passing of his daughter because she had been his favorite child ... someone who always had supportive of his ideas, and ,in many respects, she was someone who had been as devoted to, and concerned about, the peasants as her father.

In 1908, as Tolstoy was about to turn 80, Chertkov, returned to Russia from England. Chertkov had been admiring, supporting, promoting, publishing, as well as archiving, Tolstoy's work for a quarter of a century, and, in addition, had maintained a fairly intensive history of correspondence with the aging writer.

Chertkov and his family constructed a new home in Telyatinki, approximately three miles from Yásnaya Polyána. The property was part of the inheritance that had accrued to Tolstoy's youngest daughter, Sasha.

Sasha recently had become 25-years old. For quite some time, her relationship with her mother had been a contentious one.

One manifestation of her antagonism toward her mother came in the form of her alliance with her father and Chertkov with respect to, among other things, the issue of copyrights and royalties. In addition, Sasha's willingness to let Chertkov build a house on her land was just another facet of that alliance.

Although Tolstoy was extremely happy to have Chertkov -- his friend, follower, confidante, and

collaborator -- living so close to him, Sofya/Sonya became opposed to her husband's friend in various ways. For instance, she was concerned about the threat which she felt Chertkov represented with respect to the issue of who would have control over the publication, distribution, and royalties associated with her husband's work.

Her husband and Chertkov were interested in placing all of Tolstoy's writings in the public domain, thereby making those materials royalty free. However selfless and noble such a desire might have been, the intention also was somewhat naïve since such writing does not produce itself, and, consequently, various entrepreneurs would seek to exploit the foregoing arrangement and make a profit because, in part, they wouldn't have to pay any royalty fees.

However, Sofya/Sonya didn't want publishers, distributors, and book sellers becoming the sole financial beneficiaries from Tolstoy's work. She wanted to ensure that her children's financial future would be secure, and, as a result, she struggled to establish some degree of legal authority concerning the issue of copyright in relation to as much of her husband's writing as she could.

The fact of the matter was that Sofya/Sonya had considerable sweat-equity invested in a great deal of her husband's writing. Long before Chertkov arrived on the scene, she was the one -- not Chertkov -- who had served as fair copyist, editor, booster, part-time therapist, as well as a consultant, of sorts, for her husband throughout his many difficult, but productive, years of creative struggle. In addition, she had been the one who had sacrificed her own desire to be free and develop her potential in order to help nurture a framework consisting of the sort of time, space, and resources that Tolstoy would need to have in order to be able to conduct research, reflect on ideas, and give expression to his creative talents.

However, Tolstoy appeared to have a short memory when it came to the foregoing sorts of issues. Indeed,

notwithstanding all of her husband's concerns about matters of justice and fairness, he, somehow, didn't seem to grasp the idea that, perhaps, considerable injustice would be perpetrated against his wife as a result of his desire – and Chertkov's machinations -- to make Tolstoy's work royalty free.

Nonetheless, despite Chertkov's efforts to ensure that Sofya/Sonya would not have legal authority over any of Tolstoy's writing, Sofya/Sonya demonstrated her own sense of fairness concerning at least one issue that emerged in 1909. More specifically, because of Chertkov's association and work with Tolstoy, he became a political target of officials who were opposed to Tolstoy's ideas concerning governance and religion, and, as a result, Chertkov, together with his family, were ordered to vacate the residence that had been built on Sasha's land the previous year and, as well, to leave the province of Tula.

The aforementioned governmental edict was consistent with the general strategy of those in power to leave Tolstoy alone due to their fear of what the general population might do if officials were perceived by the public to be overtly going after a very popular and esteemed literary icon of the Russian people and, therefore, the government tended to go after people who were followers of Tolstoy rather than punish the writer himself. However, despite Sofya's/Sonya's on-going differences with Chertkov, she actively protested the foregoing government action against Chertkov and his family by writing letters of support for, and in defense of, Chertkov.

Despite her efforts on behalf of Chertkov and his family, the relationship between Tolstoy and his wife continued to disintegrate throughout much of 1909. Among other things, Sofya/Sonya had discovered a yet-to-be-published short story by Tolstoy entitled 'The Devil'.

The story explored a young nobleman's passionate pursuit of a peasant girl. Consequently, it brought to the

surface elements of Tolstoy's past that had been deeply upsetting to Sofya/Sonya when she first learned about them prior to the marriage.

Sofya's/Sonya's consternation toward the newly discovered story, *'The Devil'*, added to the emotional strain that already had been generated a decade previously due to one of the early scenes in the *Resurrection* novella concerning the same sort of issue of sexual exploitation which had been based on Tolstoy's own involvement in similar events when he was younger. These were events that Tolstoy had foisted on his wife-to-be because he felt that she should know about this side of Tolstoy.

The revelations had been deeply upsetting to her (and Tolstoy had been made aware of this). Yet, for whatever reasons, he had decided to write about such matters on a number of occasions and, thereby, knowingly risked upsetting his wife again and again.

Later on in 1909, Sofya/Sonya came across evidence indicating that the power of attorney which Tolstoy had given to her in 1883 concerning the management of his writings did not involve any actual legal rights with respect to that material. In addition, not very long after the turn of the century, when the family had been in Crimea, Tolstoy's daughter, Masha, had succeeded in getting her father to sign a will that, among other things, relinquished all of the Tolstoy's family's claims concerning copyright.

Subsequently, Sofya/Sonya succeeded in restoring her name to the aforementioned will as a financial beneficiary of Tolstoy's writings. However, both Tolstoy and Chertkov were intent on changing that status.

Toward the end of June, 1910, Chertkov was permitted by government officials to return to Telyatinki. After this occurred, Sofya/Sonya attempted to prevent her husband from seeing him.

Some people have found fault with Sofya/Sonya for, among other things, her foregoing efforts to keep her

husband and Chertkov apart. Yet, previously, Tolstoy had been extremely jealous of the relationship that had developed between his wife and the musician/composer Taneyev -- despite the fact that there was nothing of a romantic nature taking place between his wife and the artist.

On that earlier occasion, part of the reconciliation agreement between Tolstoy and his wife had been to agree that in the future Sofya/Sonya would not invite Taneyev back to Yásnaya Polyána. Consequently, in the Tolstoy-Chertkov matter, one might suppose that what is good for the gander should be good for the goose, as well.

However, once again, Tolstoy was concerned only with what served his interests. He appeared to care little for what his wife might feel about a relationship with which she felt threatened in a manner that was, somewhat, similar to the way in which Tolstoy had felt threatened by his wife's earlier relationship with Taneyev.

Another source of contention that arose between Tolstoy and his wife during the final year of his life concerned the issue of who should have access to the last decade, or so, of Tolstoy's diary entries. Previously, Tolstoy and his wife always had permitted each other to have full access to their respective diaries, but, now, Tolstoy had begun to refuse Sofya/Sonya access to his diary entries. Instead, he handed those entries over to Chertkov.

After Sofya/Sonya engaged Tolstoy in a variety of acrimonious arguments concerning the foregoing matter, Tolstoy finally relented -- at least partially. Although he took back the diary material that he had given to Chertkov, he, subsequently, decided to turn over his diary entries to his daughter Tanya so that they could be placed in a Tula bank for safe keeping.

In addition, during June of 1910, Tolstoy arranged to have another will drawn up to which Sofya/Sonya was not privy. The will assigned rights for all of Tolstoy's writings to his daughter Sasha, and, as well, contained provisions

indicating that if Sasha were to die, then, the rights to Tolstoy's writings would go to his other daughter Tanya.

Sasha and Tanya had contributed little, if any, sweat equity to the vast majority of Tolstoy's creative output. On the other hand, Sofya/Sonya had been a faithful assistant to Tolstoy's creative efforts for nearly 48 years, and, yet, her husband was casting her aside like a used tissue, by, among other things, keeping secrets from her concerning his diaries as well as excluding her from participating in the generation of a newly re-constructed will.

As a result, Sofya/Sonya took angry exception to the aforementioned conduct of her husband. Her behaviors in that regard were diagnosed by a number of doctors as exhibiting signs of hysteria and paranoia.

To begin with and medical degrees notwithstanding, Sofya/Sonya was not being paranoid. Indeed, she had come to correctly understand that Chertkov, her husband, and her daughters had been engaged in secretive plots to actively thwart her interests.

Furthermore, given that there were a variety of ways in which Tolstoy had been acting toward his wife in a very unloving manner during the last year of his life, then the fact that Sofya/Sonya had become upset with her husband in a variety of ways – perhaps even intensely so – does not necessarily constitute evidence that she was behaving in a hysterical fashion. For almost their entire married life, Tolstoy was not happy unless all manner of things were done in accordance with his likes and dislikes, and when Sofya/Sonya had enough of Tolstoy's self-serving machinations, she tried to push back by, among other things, seeking to financially protect her children, as well as find her own existential voice.

Unfortunately, as indicated previously, some doctors had decided to place the label of hysteric on Sofya/Sonya because she took exception with how she was being treated by her husband, daughters, and Chertkov. Consequently, one might well ask whether such doctors

were really all that objective or whether they merely were complying with the dictates of a patriarchal system of power arrangements that were serving the wishes of her husband or trying to perpetuate the sort of mythological nonsense that often tends to surround famous people and protect the latter sorts of individuals from critical scrutiny.

How ironic that despite all of Tolstoy's remonstrations and writings that railed against governmental injustices concerning the manner in which officials exploited and abused those without power, Tolstoy should have become the one who would be acting so abusively and in such an exploitive manner toward someone in his household, and, as a result, he had been seeking to unjustly deprive his wife of that to which she was entitled after 48 years of servitude to her husband and his work. Rather than being concerned with labeling Sofya/Sonya as being paranoid or hysterical, perhaps doctors should have been asking what manner of love was Tolstoy displaying toward his wife during 1910, as well as in conjunction with many other years of their lives together, given that the core principle at the heart of Tolstoy's philosophy supposedly was founded on love for God and love for one another.

During September-1910, things did venture into what might have been a small corner of the Twilight Zone when Sofya/Sonya invited an exorcist to Yásnaya Polyána. However, the rites she was requesting were not to be used in conjunction with her husband but, rather, they were to be directed toward what she believed were the evil influences emanating out of Chertkov.

Even if Chertkov were not serving as a conduit for evil, there might have been an element of undue influence present in his relationship with Tolstoy. In other words, on and off during his latter days, Tolstoy's health had been shaky and, as a result, from time to time, he had been experiencing a certain amount of disorientation, confusion and memory loss.

Conceivably, as a result of his own self-serving desire to have control over Tolstoy's vast body of work, Chertkov might have been exercising an exploitive form of undue influence in relation to Tolstoy's weakened physical, emotional, and mental condition. Possibly, Sofya/Sonya might have witnessed such instances of undue influence and interpreted them as signifying the presence of evil spirits.

Whatever one might think about the efficacy of exorcism rites and irrespective of whether, or not, one believes Chertkov might have been a deserving candidate for such practices, Sofya/Sonya's decision to bring in an exorcist was neither necessarily hysterical nor paranoid in nature. She was trying to cope with her situation in accordance with the coping strategies that were available to her world view.

When, apparently, the exorcism did not bring about the result for which she had hoped, she resorted to more worldly solutions. Among other things, this involved going through papers and documents located in her husband's study in search of some sort of evidence that she might use to help her situation.

Did the foregoing actions cross a line of propriety? Perhaps, but the case is not necessarily open and shut.

More specifically, nearly a half century earlier, Tolstoy had insisted that prior to getting married, Sofya/Sonya needed to read diary entries concerning one of Tolstoy's aggressive, abusive, exploitive, sexual escapades. Allegedly, out of a desire for full disclosure on Tolstoy's part, he wanted Sofya/Sonya exposed to material that could prove very upsetting and disturbing to her, and, yet, in October-1910, when Tolstoy discovered that his wife had gone through material in his study, he decided to quibble and dissemble over the matter of full disclosure in matters that also carried ramifications that were capable of adversely affecting his marital partner.

Moreover, for decades, he and his wife had full access to many of their most intimate thoughts and feelings through their reciprocal exchange of diary entries with one another. Yet, when Tolstoy discovered his wife going through papers and documents in his study during October-1910, then rather unilaterally, Tolstoy had changed the rules of his relationship with his wife, and, as a result, Tolstoy got extremely upset because he had decided – seemingly without informing her of such changes – that she was no longer welcome to have access to his thoughts and feelings.

In addition, at various junctures during Tolstoy's marriage to Sofya/Sonya, he had insisted that his wife – despite her deeply felt, legitimate concerns about her health because she had nearly died or suffered considerable pain in conjunction with those such matters - - had no rights with respect to issues involving birth control, pregnancy, or breastfeeding children. In October-1910, however, Tolstoy apparently felt that his own rights had been so egregiously violated when he found his wife going through papers and documents in his study that he began to plan his secret departure from his wife.

On October 28, 1910 – a day chosen by Tolstoy for its superstitious, numerical significance (28 was his lucky number) – he surreptitiously packed up his tents and stole away into the night. Initially, he had left with just one companion – namely, Dr. Dusan Makovicky, Tolstoy's personal physician, whose salary was paid by Chertkov -- but, a few days later, he was joined by his daughter Sasha.

From Yásnaya Polyána, he traveled, first, to the monastery at Optina Pustyn. Apparently, he was seeking some sort of spiritual counsel and/or confirmation concerning his decision to leave his wife and home.

When Tolstoy was unable to obtain whatever he might have been seeking from the elders at the monastery, he visited the convent where his sister resided. After spending a little time with her, he proceeded to take a train

south to Rostov-on-Don which required him to get off at the Astapovo train station.

He, then, became ill. The station master made his house and a bed available to Tolstoy.

When Sofya/Sonya learned about her husband's departure, she walked into a nearby pond. Some might interpret such behavior as being indicative of some sort of hysterical, acting out behavior, but, perhaps, Sofya/Sonya was merely exhausted by the emotional turmoil that had been transpiring at Yásnaya Polyána for such an extended period.

Rather than being hysterical, she merely might have entered into a state of de-realization, depersonalization and/or dissociation as a result of her sense of betrayal, abandonment, grief, and despair. As a result, in her traumatized state, she didn't necessarily clearly understand what she was doing when she walked into a nearby pond.

Her action of walking into the water might have been the act of someone who deeply loved another person whom she felt had hurt her in a variety of fundamental ways. Her conduct might not have been a very effective coping mechanism, but I do believe that it was rooted in love for her husband.

However, I'm not sure the same can be said for her husband's decision to leave his wife and home. His actions – more than the conduct of his wife -- lend themselves to questions concerning what manner of love – if any – might have been governing the way that he was treating his wife throughout 1910, as well as during the previous 48 years of marriage, and which culminated in his departure for the Optina Pustyn monastery on October 28, 1910.

Tolstoy's daughter, Sasha, notified Chertkov about the turn of events. Chertkov reached the Astapovo station on November 2, 1910.

Sonya showed up a little later. She had made arrangements to bring Andrey, Misha, and Tanya with her.

Rather inexcusably, Sonya was not permitted to see her husband until after he had slipped into unconsciousness. Presumably, those who kept her from seeing her husband were merely artifacts of her paranoid delusions.

Tolstoy died on November 7, 1910. Members of the Church hierarchy had been notified of Tolstoy's imminent passing and decided that someone should make an effort to bring him back to the fold of orthodoxy from which it had excommunicated him. As a result, the Orthodox Church sent one, or more, representatives to Astapovo Station to try to induce some sort of spiritual reversal in Tolstoy before he passed on.

Sasha, however, stopped the forgoing intentions from being realized. Consequently, one also wonders if it was Sasha – or, perhaps, Chertkov and, maybe even the two of them working together – who had been responsible for Sonya not being able to be with her husband before he became unconscious.

One cannot imagine who else – besides Sasha and Chertkov – might have had the desire, opportunity, chutzpah, motive, or cruelty to prevent a wife from being with her dying husband. If such actions came from members of Tolstoy's inner circle, then, one would have good reason to suppose that something besides Tolstoy might have been dying on that occasion (e.g., his teachings).

Chapter 2: The Heart of Anna Karenina

Before undertaking critically reflective open-heart surgery on the eponymous character of Tolstoy's novel, *Anna Karenina*, let's quickly outline the thrust of the argument which the present book is pursuing. The previous chapter explored two biographical themes – namely, (1) what were some of the possible demons in Tolstoy's life that -- either individually or collectively -- might have pushed him toward suicide following the release of *War and Peace* and continuing on through the planning, writing, publishing, and aftermath of his novel, *Anna Karenina*? (2) Given that the idea of love – both for God and for one another – was at the heart of Tolstoy's Gospel-based theology, can one necessarily conclude that Tolstoy's relationship with his wife was reflective of, or consistent with, the aforementioned premise concerning the centrality of love?

The analysis that occurs during Chapter 1 lends support, I believe to the following possibility. Haunted by an array of psychological and emotional demons that, to a considerable degree, were the result of a combination of problematic life choices and poor coping skills involving a number of personal tragedies that occurred in his life, Tolstoy became caught up in an arc of crisis during his forties that rendered him vulnerable to self-destructive thinking that flooded him with suicidal ideation.

As a result, Tolstoy was desperate to discover some sort of hermeneutical perspective that might be capable of stabilizing and grounding his life in a tenable form of meaning and purpose that could defend him against his inner demons. Although Tolstoy believed he had caught sight of such a perspective during the writing of *Anna Karenina* and, in fact, began to give concerted expression to it starting around Chapter 12 of Part 8 in the aforementioned book, nonetheless, at that time it was only the germ of an idea and, as such, was not capable of withstanding the onslaught of suicidal ideation that had

begun to flood Tolstoy's consciousness, and, consequently, following the publication of *Anna Karenina*, he undertook a more rigorous research program that would be capable of strengthening, deepening, broadening, and enriching the religious insights that had begun to emerge during the writing of *Anna Karenina*.

Tolstoy's zero-sum game with suicide did not come to the surface only after the release of *Anna Karenina*. In fact, within a few years of the completion of *War and Peace* almost a decade earlier, he clearly indicated to his friend, Sergey Urusov that he had no desire to continue on with life.

In addition, Tolstoy experienced considerable difficulty with respect to completing *Anna Karenina*. While some of his difficulty was due to the on-going problems surrounding his attempts to get general approval, in general, and government approval, in particular, for his ABC reading primer, one must also take into consideration the debilitating impact a number of personal tragedies that occurred during this period had upon his psyche, and, indeed, the combination of professional and personal problems, might have helped trigger a series of encounters with depression that robbed Tolstoy of the creative energy he needed to finish *Anna Karenina*.

The specter of suicide haunts the pages of *Anna Karenina* almost from beginning to end. For instance, there is a certain degree of symmetry in the novel's structure involving, on the one hand, the death of a man – whether by misadventure or by suicide is not entirely clear – that occurs at a train station fairly early during the novel and in conjunction with which Anna enters the narrative, and, on the other hand, Anna's own death by suicide at a train station toward the end of the novel and through which Anna's character exits the story.

Furthermore, Anna's lover, Count Vronsky, also tries to commit suicide. In addition, even the character, Levin -- who Tolstoy, at least toward the end of *Anna Karenina*,

wishes to assign to the category of families that are happy -
- has some thoughts, however fleeting they might be, about
the possibility of ending his life.

Clearly, the issue of suicide is a prominent theme in Tolstoy's mind prior to, and during, the writing of *Anna Karenina*. Consequently, to suppose that, perhaps, the reason why the topic of suicide is on his mind is because thoughts of the possibility of his own suicide have, very likely, begun to careen about his consciousness as he struggled to work his way through completing the novel does not seem to be an unreasonable consideration.

There is another, perhaps even more substantial, clue concerning Tolstoy's possibly growing fascination with the idea of suicide that might be hiding in plain sight within *Anna Karenina*. This has to do with the condition of Anna's heart as it is described over the course of the novel because I believe that Anna's underlying psychological profile gives expression to a person who is, at heart, spiritually empty and, I also believe that her empty heart is a reflection of Tolstoy's own inner condition prior to, during, and following the release of *Anna Karenina*.

Throughout the novel, Tolstoy's soul is engaged in mortal combat with itself. On the one hand, there is a search for meaning that culminates with Levin's religious epiphany toward the latter part of Book 8 in *Anna Karenina* and to which Tolstoy is seeking desperately to hang on to as he battles his inner demons.

On the other hand, Tolstoy is also suffering from the vulnerabilities that have been induced though the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune as a result of life history, personality, bad choices, poor coping skills, and traumatic circumstances of life that are capable – at least potentially -
- of framing the idea of suicide in – for Tolstoy -- an appealing light. These are the same sorts of vulnerabilities to which the character Anna is subject.

The foregoing qualities of the two protagonists of the novel – namely, Levin and Anna -- give expression to two

major phenomenological currents that were running through Tolstoy's being prior to, during, and following the writing of *Anna Karenina*. And while many people often are inclined to believe that the Levin character gives expression to Tolstoy's preferred perspective concerning life, the fact of the matter is that the more dominant and dynamic dimension of Tolstoy's emotional orientation at the time that he wrote the novel might be found in the spiritual emptiness that is present in the heart of the Anna character since this state of affairs helps explain the desperation that Tolstoy felt after the release of *Anna Karenina* notwithstanding the hope for the future that was present in Levin's religious insights which were outlined toward the latter part of the novel.

To be sure, the aforementioned religious insights associated with the Levin character in *Anna Karenina* provided the kind of motivation that helped induce the post-novel Tolstoy to rigorously undertake a program of research that would be capable of rationally shoring up the aforementioned spiritual insights as well as lessen the many doubts, uncertainties, and questions he had concerning those insights. Nonetheless, for several years following the release of *Anna Karenina* -- and before Tolstoy could gain some tangible, viable, religious traction -- Tolstoy lived in a hell of spiritual emptiness ... the same sort of emptiness that exists at the heart of the Anna character and, as a result, he found the idea of suicide appealing even as the still weak call of spirituality helped him, from time to time, to resist staring too deeply into the abyss that had opened up in his mind and heart.

On the surface, *Anna Karenina* is -- despite a few forays, here and there, into such topics as economics, history, governance, community, religion, contraception, agriculture, and philosophy -- a story of two broad choices that face every human being. One choice involves happiness, and Tolstoy believes that all families are happy in the same way, while the remaining option involves

unhappiness, and Tolstoy maintains that unhappy families are unhappy each in their own way.

Adultery is the theme that Tolstoy uses to illustrate and give definition to his foregoing contention. However, adultery is a function of a set of underlying psychological, spiritual, and moral dynamics that tend to be the mirror image of the kind of dynamics that characterize happy families.

In other words, happy and unhappy families are functionally related to the same set of qualities. More specifically, families that demonstrate qualities of trust, honesty, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, resilience, fairness, generosity, and humility tend to be happy, whereas families that interact with one another in ways that bear witness to the absence of the foregoing qualities or which bear witness to the inversion of such constructive qualities -- in the form of, for example, deceit, hostility, arrogance, unfairness, intolerance, and so on -- tend to be unhappy.

The absence of the aforementioned constructive, positive qualities of character or the presence of the inversion of those sorts of qualities can be traced to the condition of a person's heart. When an individual's heart is preoccupied with, and absorbed in, the ego, while being indifferent to questions of truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being, then, acquiring the qualities of character upon which happiness is dependent -- such as: Compassion, forgiveness, resilience, honesty, nobility, tolerance, humility, love, and so on -- becomes quite difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish, and, as a result, one's life tends to become characterized by unhappiness.

Notwithstanding Tolstoy's opening statement in *Anna Karenina* and despite whatever differences might exist, nonetheless, happy families are similar to one another and unhappy families also are similar to one another. The similarities are a function of the presence or absence,

respectively, of the sorts of character qualities that have been listed above.

Although, to a certain degree, the Anna character exhibits some of the aforementioned constructive qualities, nonetheless, for the most part she is relatively devoid of those qualities because she is too absorbed in her desire for attention. In effect, she is an attention junky, and this tends to undermine and interfere with her ability to develop the kinds of qualities that she needs to have an opportunity to achieve happiness, and, as a result, she seems to be empty of any substantial, essential sense of constructive purpose or meaning in her heart.

Similarly, prior to, during, and following the writing of *Anna Karenina*, I believe that Tolstoy also was too preoccupied with his inner demons to be in a position to acquire the sort of qualities which would be necessary for him to be happy. Like Anna, he was in a condition of existential, spiritual emptiness and, consequently, could not establish any stable sense of purpose and meaning to which he might be able to commit himself.

Although, eventually, Tolstoy was able to invent an intellectual system of Gospel-based theology that served as a successful coping strategy to combat, and help keep at bay, his inner demons, along with their attendant suicidal ideation (and, the structural character and nature of Tolstoy's rationalized form of spirituality will be explored in a number of subsequent chapters), nevertheless, he always seemed to have trouble developing the sort of deep rooted spiritual faith that, among other things, would enable him to master the intricacies of the character qualities – such as love – that would have enabled him to be able to conduct himself consistently when trying to practice what he preached with respect to the significance of, say, love in his life – and, by implication, all of our lives - - as has been shown during the course of Part II of the previous chapter that dealt with some of the problems surrounding his marriage to Sofya/Sonya.

What follows will be an attempt to flesh out, so to speak, the character of Anna. However, it will be done through an understanding that, conceivably, might disclose something fundamental concerning Tolstoy's personality at the time of, and following, the writing of *Anna Karenina*.

In addition, the ensuing analysis of the Anna character will attempt to provide evidence (and this is one of the reasons why that analysis is so extensive and detailed) which is capable of supporting the contention that I do not believe there is much, if any, evidence in Tolstoy's novel that will support the view – which some people seem to have -- that the Anna Karenina character either gives expression to: A love story and/or constitutes a tale that, among other things, describes a woman – namely, Anna -- who is, essentially, a decent individual who becomes entangled in a set of circumstances from which she tries to extricate herself so that she can live a life free of the hypocrisies that she believes characterize the times in which she lives.

Anna's story in *Anna Karenina* is a morality tale that is similar to, but much longer than, the kinds of morality tales that appear in Tolstoy's *ABC* book. Her story constitutes an in-depth study of what happens when reason and moral integrity are undermined by the presence of passion and, as such, resonates with – and, in certain ways, reflects – the manner in which Tolstoy, himself, had permitted passion to subvert reason and moral integrity in his own life, and, as a result, like the Anna character, Tolstoy found himself entangled in a web of suicidal ideation.

Anna Karenina does not begin with a description of Anna's unfaithfulness to her husband but, rather, starts

with tales of infidelity involving her brother, Stiva – that is, Prince Stepan Arkadyevitch Oblonsky. Apparently -- for reasons that, currently, are unknown – adultery runs in the family.

Stiva permitted his desire for Mlle. Roland -- a French governess who had been employed by his family -- to overcome whatever reservations he might have had concerning the propriety of such activity. When his wife Dolly – Darya Alexandrovna -- found out about the affair, Stiva had been banished to the purgatory of a couch in his study and the rest of the household had descended into chaos.

The Stiva character is described as feeling sorry that his wife and children are suffering as a result of his actions. Nonetheless, his capacity for compassion toward his wife and children is not sufficiently great to have prevented him from doing what he did in the first place, and, therefore, his sense of sorrow is relatively devoid of any quality of soulfulness.

He hopes for some manner of forgiveness, but he is inclined to believe that his wife is unlikely to extend such mercy toward him. However, he doesn't necessarily want forgiveness because he feels badly about having deeply hurt and embarrassed his wife but, rather, he hopes that forgiveness will be forthcoming because such an act of absolution would be the easiest and most convenient way for him to be able to continue on with his life in the manner to which he has become accustomed.

Stiva permits his wife to operate the household and look after the children according to her own sensibilities concerning such matters. She appears to be happy with the arrangement and, in return, Stiva feels it is only fair that he also should have an opportunity to be happy by being permitted to manage his own life as he sees fit, but his wife takes exception with the degrees of freedom that he has granted to himself.

Despite the fact that his wife has given birth to seven children, five of whom were still living, Stiva does not love his wife. According to his way of looking at the situation, Dolly is no longer young and beautiful, and even though he is a year older than his wife, nonetheless, in a typically self-serving manner, he considers himself to be still handsome, and, perhaps more relevantly, he also is someone who is inclined to commit additional acts in the future that are similar to his interaction with the French governess and, therefore, quite likely will be considered to be equally unforgivable in the eyes of his wife.

Stiva believes he is incapable of lying to himself, but using reason to analyze one's condition does not always lead to objective results. Instead, reason often tends to act as a public relations propagandist in support of whatever manner of desire might have requisitioned its services.

He has no real interest in science, politics or art. Rather, he absorbed, as if by osmosis, a set of values that reflected, and served, his desires ... values such as the idea that the institution of marriage (rather than, for example, choice) forced people to engage in hypocrisy and lying and, therefore, needed to be re-imagined.

However, his wife is working in accordance with a different operating system of reasoning concerning, among other things, the idea of marriage. Consequently, he would not be able to employ reason – at least as he understood it – as a way of talking his way out of his present predicament and, therefore, he was in need of some kind of intervention.

Such a potential intervention comes in the form of his sister, Anna Arkadyevna. Her forthcoming arrival has been foretold by telegram.

Stiva goes to the train station in order to meet his sister, Anna. While waiting for her train to arrive, he meets Vronsky, an aristocratic, intelligent, handsome, cultivated, rich, well-connected, good-natured, likeable, and rising officer within the military and the upper echelons of social

life in Petersburg who also is waiting at the station in order to receive his mother.

In time, he will enter into a relationship with Stiva's sister, Anna Karenina, a woman who is married to Alexey Alexandrovitch. The nature of that affair raises many questions and Tolstoy intends to contrast what transpires in the foregoing affair with what occurs in the relationship between two other characters – namely, Levin and Kitty -- in order to demonstrate, among other things, the manner in which Tolstoy believes all happy families are alike, whereas unhappy families – of the sort represented by Vronsky and Anna and, perhaps, as well by Anna and her husband, Alexey, or Stiva and his wife, Dolly – are, allegedly, unhappy each in their own way.

Vronsky does not love his mother. His memories concerning his father are largely faded or absent.

While he is outwardly respectful toward his mother, nevertheless, he does not hold her in high regard. His attitude toward his mother is, in part, due to the fact that his mother had sailed through a series of illicit affairs both during and after her marriage that were not well-kept secrets, and, despite Vronsky's negative attitudes toward those events, nonetheless, like his mother, he also engaged in an array of sexual affairs – the only difference is that, up until now and unlike his mother -- he had carried on his affairs in locations other than Petersburg.

Given the nature of the home life in which he grew up and the feelings that were nurtured by such an atmosphere, one is not surprised to discover that Vronsky is someone who – at least toward the beginning of Tolstoy's novel -- is interested in Kitty (the person that the Levin character hopes to marry), but Vronsky's interest in Kitty is not necessarily rooted so much in a desire to marry her. Instead, the fulcrum of his internal dynamic revolves around the idea of conquest – emotionally, psychologically, and physically.

Vronsky's first, fleeting encounter with Anna occurs as she is leaving the train in search of her brother, Stiva, and Vronsky is entering the train in search of his mother. As they pass one another and, in the process, acknowledge each other's presence – however seemingly perfunctorily such acknowledgement appears to be – Vronsky notices an ineffable quality manifest itself in Anna's countenance as they pass one another ... a vulnerability that runs counter to her usual default setting for willfully ordering her world and revealed itself through a flashing of eyes that were subtly connected to the smile from her lips in a manner that gives expression to a suppressed inclination toward being open to certain, unknown, illicit possibilities.

As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, via the way of William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, might have said, "The game's afoot." What ensues is a dance of desire that is tone-deaf to the forthcoming musical notes of consequence that will serve as counterpoint to their various steps of increasing intimacy.

Vronsky learns quite soon after meeting Anna that she has an eight-year old son from whom she, for the first time, has become separated as a result of her journey to visit with her brother, Stiva, who, in a letter, had requested her to come to his (i.e., Stiva's) rescue and intervene on his behalf with his wife, Dolly, in conjunction with his latest infidelity. Despite Anna's direct knowledge -- via her brother's extramarital affairs -- concerning the considerable pain and difficulties that result from adultery, nevertheless, the existence of Anna's child does not prevent her own dance of infidelity from being initiated, and, in time, the failure of Vronsky and Anna to take the boy's existence into account as their dance of intimacy begins will have a huge impact on how their collective futures unfold.

Although many people have a tendency to throw the word "love" around without necessarily understanding the reality of that to which the term refers – and achieving

such an understanding tends to be a very subtle issue -- nonetheless, being attracted to another human being, no matter how intense that attraction might be, is not necessarily an indication that love is present. Indeed, the foregoing failure of Vronsky and Anna to factor in the eight-year old boy to their interpersonal calculations constitutes one of the many early warning signs in their story that some manner of pathology -- rather than love -- is, quite probably, driving the relationship between Vronsky and Anna because they both are all too willing to thoughtlessly throw an innocent boy under the bus of their reckless romance.

As Vronsky, his mother, Anna, and her brother are beginning to leave the train station, news arrives that a man has been crushed by a train, and that man's wife, who was present at the time of the accident, has thrown herself on top of her husband's body because, among other things, he is described as having been the only source of support for her and their large family. When Anna expresses concern for the widow's financial future, Vronsky responds by making arrangements for several hundred rubles to be given to the widow.

Upon leaving the station, Anna -- who is, now, alone with her brother -- begins to cry. When she is asked to explain the tears, she says that "It's an omen of evil," but one is uncertain if she is referring to: (1) The death of the man; (2) the tragedy facing that man's wife and family; (3) the crossing of paths with Vronsky that Anna's own husband had set in motion by booking her a seat on the train in the same compartment as Vronsky's mother; (4) the fact that Vronsky was giving money to the widow in order to impress Anna with his chivalry; (5) Anna's horror in relation to the train station death which might have triggered a prescient intuition within her concerning her future appointment with a similar fate, or, (6) perhaps, one combination, or another, of the foregoing set of possibilities.

The scene shifts from the train station to the house of Dolly and Stiva. Despite the fact that Stiva's wife, Dolly, has sensed the presence of some sort of hard-to-define disquietude that seems to pervade the household of her sister-in-law whenever Dolly visited with them, nonetheless, Anna had never shown Dolly anything but warmth and kindness.

The forgoing two dimensions of Dolly's sister-in-law were like disparate emotional currents that ran through Anna. Their coexistence suggests that, perhaps, Anna's external persona might not always be in synch with her soul.

Initially, Dolly feels that if the purpose of Anna's visit is intended to reconcile Dolly with her husband, then, this is something in which she is not interested. Nevertheless, little by little, Anna is able to help pull Dolly back from the brink of the marital abyss into which Dolly has been staring since she found out about her husband's affair with their governess.

However, there is some degree of doubt concerning the depth of Anna's empathetic connection with Dolly's dilemma. For instance, when she discloses to Dolly what Anna finds most significant in conjunction with her brother's current psychological condition in the aftermath of his infidelity, Anna couches her response in terms that she believes will be most likely to affect Dolly's emotions in a positive manner and, therefore, the fact that Anna employs techniques of persuasion while discussing things with Dolly indicates that Anna might not have any substantive empathetic connection with her sister-in-law's situation ... she has come to serve in the role of a fixer for the mess her brother has created rather than as a real friend to Dolly.

Intentions are often hidden in the phenomenological shadows that frame visible actions. In fact, like her creator (i.e., Tolstoy), Anna is someone within whom there are many shadows that tend to hide and camouflage the

formative currents that shape and orient whatever might be taking place in the exterior world.

Dolly indicates to Anna that throughout her marriage she has served her husband and provided him with children. As a result, the time, effort, sacrifices, suffering, and resources consumed by the marriage have depleted Dolly of, among other things, her former beauty. In response to her having given everything that she had to give to her husband and the marriage, Stiva became enamored with younger women.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the foregoing theme of a husband's willingness to dispense with his wife once she has served his purposes has more than a little resonance with what subsequently transpired in Tolstoy's relationship with Sofya/Sonya. The primary difference between Stiva and Tolstoy – notwithstanding Tolstoy's flirtations (and almost sexual escapade) with one of the servants on his estate despite being married to Sofya/Sonya – is that once Sofya/Sonya had served her husband's purposes, Tolstoy's flirtations tended to be with various ideas, beliefs, and ideological commitments.

There is nothing wrong with a married man (or woman) searching for and committing oneself to whatever truths can be discovered. The issue is, on the one hand, whether such a quest necessarily legitimizes a husband's (say Tolstoy's) or wife's inclination to abandon – either emotionally and/or physically – the one (namely, his wife or husband) who might have played such a substantial supporting role in helping her husband (wife) to be in a position to undertake that sort of journey in the first place, and, on the other hand, the issue is whether such an inclination toward emotional and/or physical abandonment is compatible with claims of love concerning one's wife or husband.

In such matters, Tolstoy – as is true for many of us – doesn't always seem to be able to distinguish between the trees and the forest. At times – due to different modalities

of emotional and psychological blindness -- this also seems to surface in relation to some of Tolstoy's characters since writers -- as is the case for many of us -- tend to have difficulty being aware of the biases through which one's experiences -- and, therefore, the lives of one's characters -- are filtered and framed.

Next, Dolly and Anna explore the issue of forgiveness. Dolly wants to know whether, or not, Anna could forgive infidelities like the ones committed by Dolly's husband.

After some initial uncertainty concerning the matter, Anna stipulates that while she could forgive such indiscretions, the process would change her. Yet, Anna claims that her forgiveness would be so complete that she would be able to continue on in the hypothetical relationship as if those sorts of activities had never taken place.

Anna's actual, lived capacity for forgiveness -- rather than her claimed, theoretical capacity for forgiveness -- will be tested by an array of events that, subsequently, will unfold during the novel. In the meantime one can't help but wonder how someone -- as Anna suggests -- might be changed as a result of the aforementioned sorts of betrayal and, yet, still be able to proceed as if one had never been betrayed or various infidelities had never occurred.

Consequently, once again, one comes face to face with questions about the sincerity of Anna's interaction with Dolly. Do Anna's words come from the heart, or are those words merely meant to have a certain kind of impact on Dolly irrespective of whether, or not, Anna actually believes anything that she is saying to Dolly?

One has difficulty resisting the possibility that Anna might not be as sincere toward others as she wishes to give others the impression that this is the case. Moreover, as indicated in the previous chapter, one also faces similar questions in conjunction with Tolstoy's behavior ... especially when this involves his relationship with his wife

and, to some extent, his interaction with some of his children.

Following the discussion between Dolly and Anna, Kitty, Dolly's sister, enters the picture. Kitty is immediately charmed by, and enthralled with, the older, more seasoned Anna.

Like Dolly, Kitty senses there is more going on within Anna than the latter's surface actions might suggest. Kitty believes that while Anna's external conduct is rather simple and straightforward, nonetheless, the dynamic which is taking place beneath that surface might be fairly complex.

Kitty characterizes the deeper dimension of Anna as revolving about a more refined, poetic set of interests. However, Kitty is also someone who has mistaken Vronsky's intentions concerning her (i.e., Kitty) as being expressions of traditional courtship practices that are a prelude to marriage rather than the predatory, sexually exploitive machinations that are actually transpiring, and, consequently, Kitty's assessments involving the nature of Anna's interior world is not necessarily reliable.

Thus, on the one hand, Kitty might be right that there is more going on in Anna than the latter's observable actions might reveal. On the other hand, Kitty might be quite wrong concerning the character of the phenomenology that gives expression to the hidden side of Anna.

During an ensuing conversation, Anna responds to Kitty's allusions to those kinds of social balls or gatherings where one always enjoys oneself through a mixture of mystery and, perhaps, a touch of melancholy. Anna describes those occasions as being a time between childhood and a world of future possibilities that are, simultaneously, both inviting and threatening.

Given the nature of Anna's observations, Kitty wonders about what Anna's romantic past might have been like. She does so in the context of Anna's husband, Alexey

Alexandrovitch Karenin who Kitty remembers as being a rather unromantic individual ... at least in appearance.

The discussion turns to talk of Vronsky. Anna relates that during the train ride, Vronsky's mother had told Anna about her son ... how – once, when quite young -- he had saved a woman who might have been drowning. Yet, while on the subject of chivalry, Anna thinks about, but fails to mention to Kitty (who is obviously beguiled by Vronsky) the two hundred rubles that Vronsky had given to the woman whose husband had died at the train station during Anna's arrival, and Anna senses that her failure to speak of Vronsky's act is because, on the one hand, she believes his act -- quite ignobly – might have been more intended to play upon Anna's emotions than to assist the woman whose husband had died, and, on the other hand, Anna felt there had been something of a disturbing, dark nature that was present in Vronsky's act.

Yet, rather than disclose – however indirectly and provisionally -- some of Anna's concerns to Kitty involving the potentially troubling aspects of Vronsky's actions, Anna remains silent. The hidden aspects of Anna's being appear to be preoccupied with working out the calculus of her own desires and, as a result, she is not prepared to caution Kitty about the, possibly, less than chivalrous character of certain aspects of Vronsky's personality.

Late one evening, Vronsky shows up unannounced and unexpectedly at Dolly's and Stiva's house to inquire about the details of a forthcoming dinner party. He does not stay, but before he leaves, he and Anna catch sight of one another.

There is a struggle, of sorts, taking place in Anna. When, during the aforementioned late night visit, Anna views Vronsky below from a balcony that overlooks the reception area, she is flooded with a sense of pleasure while simultaneously feeling currents of dread.

Desire meets insight. Part of her is inclined toward Vronsky, and part of her realizes the danger that lurks in the shadows of those desires.

At a subsequent social gathering (a ball), Anna initially rebuffs Vronsky's attempt to draw closer to her as she dances away with someone else. Kitty notices the interaction but, due to her innocence and inexperience, does not fathom the meaning or significance of the Vronsky-Anna dynamic that is taking place.

Subsequently, Vronsky approaches Kitty. Kitty expects him to ask her to dance, but he does not do so right away and only begins to dance with her as the music stops.

While waiting for the music to begin again, Kitty and Vronsky stand close to one another. Kitty reveals her love for Vronsky through her eyes and facial expression, but Vronsky does not reciprocate by displaying his own look of love, and Kitty feels her heart break.

Later on during the evening, Kitty notes that a considerable change has taken place in Anna's manner. She has an excitement, joy, and confidence about her that is palpable.

Initially, Kitty wonders if the change in Anna might be a response to the all of the festivities and high spirits that often occur at such gatherings. Reluctantly, but slowly, the realization emerges within Kitty that Anna's bubbling, vivacious condition is tied to the attentions of one individual – namely, Vronsky.

Kitty had been accustomed to seeing Vronsky conduct himself in a reserved manner irrespective of the circumstances. Now, however, she sees a man who has entered into a mutual admiration society with Anna that has no time or room for anyone else.

The fascinating aura of a higher set of mysterious, poetic interests that Kitty previously had believed were present in Anna's nature were replaced by an entirely different sense of Anna. Now, Kitty saw something within

Anna that radiated waves which were still alluring and fascinating but gave expression to something dark and devilish.

Following the ball, even the children in Dolly's and Stiva's household seem to intuit a change in Anna's mode of being. For example, prior to the ball the children had been completely enthralled with Anna and, consequently, were constantly gravitating toward her, but the day after the ball, the children sensed that Anna had lost interest in them, and, as a result, they appeared to become indifferent to her.

Once again, there seems to be a doppelganger, of sorts, associated with Anna. More specifically, on the one hand, there is a surface version of Anna that, among other things, is capable of cultivating the attention and affection of children, while, on the other hand, there also appears to be a hidden edition of Anna that moves in ways that are hard to fathom and which are, in some sense, not pleasant to experience.

However, as is made clear during a conversation between Dolly and Anna that takes place just before Anna's return home, Anna is aware – at least to a degree – of the difference between the surface Anna and the hidden Anna. Thus, when Dolly becomes effusive in her praise of Anna for the assistance she has given to help reconcile Dolly with her husband, Dolly remarks how “everything is clear and good in your heart”, nonetheless, Anna responds by saying that: “every heart has its own skeletons.”

The foregoing discussion could easily be about Tolstoy, himself, rather than Anna. In other words, while the public might see many admirable qualities in the surface Tolstoy, the literary genius knows where all the bodies and skeletons of his life are buried in his memory.

Anna knows that she had upset Kitty during the previous evening's festivities. However, in a bout of disingenuousness with herself, Anna only accepts a “tiny bit” of the responsibility for what transpired despite the

fact that she and Vronsky were both equally responsible for what occurred.

Dolly feels that what happened at the ball between Anna and Vronsky might be a good thing. After all, given the way Vronsky so quickly dismissed Kitty from his consciousness while becoming totally enamored with Anna, Dolly worries about the problematic implications such emotional volatility might have for Kitty should she become married to Vronsky.

Anna remarks that such talk is nonsense. Nonetheless, Anna is flooded with a sense of pleasure as Dolly gives voice to her own concerns about Vronsky and Kitty.

Later, just prior to boarding the train to begin her return trip home to her husband and child, Anna reflects on the events that occurred during her stay in Moscow. With pleasure, she remembers Vronsky and his submissive demeanor towards her.

Part of her believes there is nothing associated with those events that she considers to be shameful. Nonetheless, another dimension of her being feels an intense sense of shame concerning those very same events.

A battle for control of Anna's soul is occurring. Desire is struggling with propriety and decency, but desire cares nothing for either propriety or decency.

Anna wonders what her relationship with herself is. She wishes to resist the call of those feelings within her that she understands are illicit, and, yet, she also senses the incredible gravitational pull of those desires.

Anna is not in the thrall of a set of unconscious, inchoate forces. She is aware of what is transpiring within her.

She could cede her agency to her illicit desires, or she could cede her agency to those forces that seek to resist such desires. The choice is hers to make.

Anna makes her choice. She experiences the tragic possibilities inherent in the choice as a shriek that, on the

one hand, sounds as if someone is being torn asunder, while, on the other hand, she is overwhelmed by the presence of a blazing, red light and the erection of a wall that compartmentalizes and separates her choice from the rest of her life.

Anna becomes captive to her own decision. Her heart is held hostage by her determination to proceed in one way rather than another, or, perhaps, more accurately, she is being held hostage by the choice that her puppet-master, Tolstoy, has imposed on her, and we should not forget that what goes on in the life of Tolstoy's characters is tied, in one way or another, to what is going on in the mind of Tolstoy.

Suddenly, Vronsky appears. Although Anna already knows the answer to her question, she inquires about why he is there, and he indicates that he has come so that he can be with her wherever she might be.

Anna's heart deeply resonates with the many imaginings that flow forth from his words. She has longed for just such a response from the 'right' person – a man like Vronsky and not her husband -- for much of her life.

Was it love that Anna longed for and felt? Or, was something else involved?

Her meeting with Vronsky has filled her with a sense of ecstasy which is tinged with a certain amount of tension and conflict that keeps her awake for much of the night. In the morning, following a short round of sleep, she awakens to thoughts of her son, husband, and the forthcoming events of the day.

Yet, when she sees her husband at the train station, she becomes aware that she is upset with herself. More specifically, she recognizes within herself the presence of a sense of hypocrisy that has pervaded all of her interactions with her husband throughout their marriage ... a feeling which she understands has been present within her, like a

low-grade fever, for a long time but which only now is being acutely felt.

Her husband speaks to Anna of his own impatience with which he has struggled while waiting, during her absence, to be reunited with his wife again and, in addition, he indicates that he is as committed to her as he had been on the first day of their marriage. Anna, however, ignores his words and asks after her son, Seryozha.

Her husband is disappointed by her rebuff. Whatever his shortcomings might be as a human being – and, as will become evident later in the chapter, he does have his faults – nonetheless, one wonders if the sense of hypocrisy Anna feels concerning the marriage is something that is self-inflicted rather than the result of something her husband has done to Anna to cause her to feel that way.

Meanwhile, and elsewhere, Vronsky is deeply enamored with Anna and has been thinking of her during the train ride back to Petersburg. He is uncertain what the future will bring but, he is living in the present tense, and, consequently, he believes that his happiness and life's meaning springs from being in her presence.

Upon disembarking from the train, Vronsky observes Anna interacting with her husband and finds the scene distasteful. This is because Anna's husband is acting in a manner that seems to suggest to Vronsky that Anna's husband believes he is entitled to occupy a place near Anna that Vronsky believes belongs only to Vronsky.

Desire recognizes only its own claims. All other claims concerning the nature of the truth are measured according to the units of a metric through which desire seeks to gauge the nature of reality.

Anna's husband, Alexey Alexandrovitch, treats Vronsky's presence in a dismissive manner. However, Vronsky's passion and desire overcome whatever sense of discretion might be present within him, and, consequently,

he, in turn, disregards the husband's presence and asks Anna if he (i.e., Vronsky) might call on her."

After Vronsky departs, Alexey Alexandrovitch sees his wife to a carriage and informs her that he must go to a committee meeting and, therefore, he will not be home for dinner. However, as he does so, he presses her hand, smiles, and sincerely confesses that he has missed her.

As indicated earlier, Anna believes her marriage is entangled in a web of hypocrisy. Nonetheless, given the sort of information that is contained in the previous paragraph, her husband actually seems to care for his wife even if -- to borrow a word previously used by Kitty to describe him -- he seems rather "unromantic" in appearance.

Upon arriving home, Anna is greeted by her son. Once again, as occurred when she met her husband at the train station, Anna feels a sense of disappointment.

Her new feeling of disappointment is not tied to the sense of hypocrisy she has concerning the marriage. Instead, her feeling is due to the qualitative difference she believes she has noticed between the more exalted edition of her son that constitutes her memory of him and the lesser version of him to which his actual reality seems to give expression.

When Anna lowers her expectations concerning her son, she has no trouble enjoying the pleasure of his company and appreciating the loving way he looks at her. Unfortunately, Anna's perception of reality might be as skewed when it comes to her son as her perception is in relation to her husband because in both cases reality is a function of how Anna wishes to frame or filter events and not necessarily as they actually are.

The foregoing sense of disappointment that Anna has toward her son resonates with the previously discussed sense of disappointment that Tolstoy had toward his wife and his marriage when, not long after they had been

married, they argued, and, as a result, he became disappointed that the reality of their relationship appeared to be less than he previously had considered it to be. Moreover, the sense of hypocrisy that Anna has with respect to her marriage seems to resonate, as well, with Tolstoy's later attitudes concerning his marriage, and his desire to break free from its perceived hypocrisies so that he would be free to live the life of a wandering ascetic.

Tolstoy often seems to have tremendous insight into, among others, the character of Anna. Perhaps this is because he has the capacity to look into the mirror of his own soul and describe -- in transformed literary terms -- what he sees.

Anna sees her life as being steeped in a marriage filled with hypocrisy. Her husband views his life as one that is immersed in a litany of governmental duties, obligations, appointments, and meetings that he seeks to juggle along with the responsibilities associated with his family life.

Anna is dissatisfied and lonely. Yet, even if her husband were able to have been more physically and emotionally available to Anna, she would very likely continue on with being dissatisfied and lonely concerning the course of her life because reality still would not be aligned with what she longs for in a relationship ... which is something other than her husband as well as something more than the kind of attention that her husband has to offer to her.

Anna's dissatisfaction with her husband is somewhat surprising. After more than eight years of marriage to him, she considers him to be: "... a good man; truthful, good-hearted, and remarkable in his own life", and, in addition, she knows that not only does he try to keep abreast of books dealing with various aspects of theology, politics, and philosophy, but, as well, he attempts to critically reflect on, and where possible, rigorously investigate various issues about which he harbors doubts or questions.

Nevertheless, she cannot find her way to loving him in any essential, substantive manner. Among other things, she wonders why his ears stick out in such a peculiar manner.

Unlike Anna, Vronsky is not seeking some elusive, mysterious, ineffable quality of love. Furthermore, he is contemptuous toward those individuals who subscribe to laws that limit the sorts of relationship that men and women can have or who believe that women should be modest and innocent while men must be strong and self-possessed.

Instead, Vronsky maintains that one should be willing to give oneself over to one's passions. Everything else is fodder for laughter.

His present passion is Anna. He begins to plot out the tactics and strategies that might allow him to chart a course that would be likely to intersect with Anna's movements through Petersburg society at multiple junctures.

Anna, as well, begins to come up with her own form of strategic calculus that is intended to assist her to engage the dynamics of Petersburg society in a manner that might heighten her prospects for realizing her own desires. As a result, she eliminates from consideration the strata of society which consists of all the members of officialdom who once had intimidated her but in the hindsight afforded by her experience with them has led her to the understanding that they are all individuals who possess their own set of weaknesses.

Her strategic calculations also induce her to marginalize the circle of powerful and influential people that have helped make her husband's career possible. She has done this because she has come to consider them to be insincere individuals.

While such people might, or might not, have been insincere in one way or another, those modes of insincerity

– to whatever extent they exist – are not necessarily what Anna had in mind. Insincerity for Anna, as is true for many people, tends to involve whatever cannot be reconciled with her way of looking at things.

Anna decides that the dimension of Petersburg society that is most likely to be able to help her realize her desires belongs to those individuals – such as her cousin, by marriage, Princess Betsy Tverskaya. These are people who are caught up in appearing fashionable and who organize all manner of social gatherings in order to offer themselves opportunities to demonstrate their fashionable inclinations.

Vronsky, who is related to Betsy Tverskaya, often shows up at such venues. Anna begins to do so as well.

He uses those occasions to give voice to various facets of his passion for Anna. She pretends to disregard his overtures, but, secretly, she revels in the pleasure that she feels in conjunction with Vronsky's words and attentions ... and, of course, she continues to choose to risk having to endure those sorts of encounters by showing up at such venues again and again.

The shadowy lairs frequented by the fashionable people of Petersburg's supposedly upper echelon of society are conducive to, if not encouraging of, Vronsky's pursuit of Anna. In the light of the many social, career, and reputational risks that, potentially, are associated with such a passion, the denizens of those habitats seem to consider the predatory pursuit of a married woman to be a laudable challenge for someone like Vronsky to undertake.

Vronsky and Anna might each, in his and her own way, be making bad choices concerning the unfolding, tragic character of their relationship with one another. Nonetheless, in many respects, those choices are being aided and abetted by a whole class of people – i.e., those who aspire to be fashionable – that don't have the sense, inclination, or strength to aspire to something more worthy of life's vast potential.

During one of the foregoing gatherings, Anna talks to Vronsky about the illness that is afflicting Kitty and goes on to criticize Vronsky for the heartless manner in which he treated Kitty. In response, Vronsky claims that he feels badly about what went on in relation to Kitty but seeks to avoid responsibility for his actions involving Kitty by blaming Anna for, allegedly, making him do what he did ... as if he had no choice in the matter.

Anna also attempts -- at least temporarily -- to avoid acknowledging her own possible contribution to Kitty's present situation. She does so by becoming confused when Vronsky unflinchingly alludes to her role in that matter and, as a result, eventually admits to herself that Vronsky might not be the heartless person she is accusing him of being and, in fact, acknowledges to herself that she is both attracted to, as well as is afraid of, the passion that she feels emanating from his heart.

Part of the aforementioned fear could be due to Anna's concerns about where Vronsky's passion -- with her assistance -- might be taking her. However, part of that fear could be due to her concerns about what might happen to her if Vronsky's passion were to be withdrawn from her as it had been withdrawn from Kitty, and, as a result, Anna's seemingly altruistic mentioning of Vronsky's heartlessness concerning Kitty might have less to do with Kitty than it has to do with Anna's worries for her own, future, emotional well-being ... a worry that tends to haunt Anna throughout her relationship with Vronsky.

Anna forbids Vronsky to use the word "love" in relation to her. Yet, she validates and lends support to the use of that word when she tells Vronsky that if he really loves her, then, he will go to Moscow and ask Kitty to forgive him.

However, Anna's concern is not necessarily about righting a wrong with respect to Kitty, for if Anna really wished to right a wrong in relation to Kitty, Anna would have gone to Moscow herself and apologized to Kitty for

the rather self-centered and boorish way in which Anna intervened in, and disrupted, Kitty's life during the ball. Instead, Anna wants someone else – namely Vronsky -- to have to bear the emotional burden of humbling himself and asking Kitty to forgive him so that Anna might be able to find peace and relief from the stress of the tug-of-war that is taking place within her between social propriety and her own desires.

In short, Anna's directive to Vronsky – namely, that if he really loves her, then, he will go to Moscow and ask Kitty's forgiveness – is largely, if not entirely, self-serving. Anna is less interested in helping Kitty to relieve Kitty's torment than Anna is interested in finding a way for Anna's torment to be alleviated.

Vronsky indicates that he is unable to grant Anna the peace she seeks. He confesses that his own inner world also is in turmoil as a result of what he feels for Anna, and Anna's eyes are communicating to Vronsky a message that resonates with the emotions he has in relation to her, and it is a message which is very different from the words of resistance that are being mouthed by her lips.

At one point during the foregoing conversation, Vronsky claims – whether sincerely or not -- that he would be willing to disappear if his presence is distasteful to Anna and, as a result, she wants him to leave. Notwithstanding the sentiments within her indicating that she should discontinue the relationship, Anna rejects her opportunity to end things with Vronsky and tells him that she does not wish to drive him away.

A little later in the evening, her husband suggests to Anna that the time has come to return home. Once again, she has an opportunity to distance herself from Vronsky but, instead, she tells her husband that she is going to stay for dinner.

Seemingly oblivious to the whispered attentions that Vronsky and his wife have been attracting while engaging each other apart from the rest of the gathering, her

husband accepts Anna's decision to stay for dinner. He leaves for home alone.

After Anna's husband departs, Vronsky continues to speak of his love for her. Anna, however, indicates that the reason why she doesn't like Vronsky to use the word "love" in relation to her is because the term is far too important to her and means much more to her than he understands.

Her statement is both a challenge and a warning. If Vronsky is going to love her as she wants to be loved, then, much more might be expected of him than, currently, he is prepared to give, and, moreover, what she wants from him might even be more than he has the capacity to give. In fact, what she desires may entail questions concerning whether, or not, what she seeks is actually love rather than some other manner of phenomenon that she calls "love".

Notwithstanding Anna's resistance to his overtures, Vronsky is happy. He believes he is nearer to realizing his purpose than he has been for several months, and the purpose which he wishes to realize is, like Anna's allusions to love, not necessarily about love either but are a euphemism for another kind of desire.

Upon arriving home, Alexey Alexandrovitch begins to reflect on the social gathering that he had just attended and he is not jealous that his wife and Vronsky had spent so much time together apart from the rest of the participants who attended that occasion. However, what did concern him was that other individuals who were present at the gathering seemed to have noticed the time that Vronsky and Anna spent together and, to varying degrees, appeared to have been perturbed about the manner in which those two individuals were interacting with one another.

Consequently, although Alexey Alexandrovitch has been someone who tends to shy away from dealing too directly with the contingencies of life, he senses that something of an inexplicable nature has enveloped his wife and that the situation needs to be addressed. He loves his

wife, and he had always assumed that his wife loved him, but, now, the horrifying thought has arisen within him that, perhaps, his wife did not love him after all but, instead, loves someone else, and he feels compelled to speak with his wife about the matter.

His concerns are four-fold. To begin with, he not only worries about the way in which his wife's actions might be perceived as constituting a transgression of the public's sense of decency, but he also feels that she might need to be reminded about the religious dimension of marriage as well as be induced to consider the possible problematic ramifications that her relationship with Vronsky might have for her son and for her own long-term happiness.

When Anna finally comes home, her husband tries to bring the foregoing issues to her attention. In response, Anna seeks to gaslight her husband by pretending that she has no idea what he is going on about and that, perhaps, he is not well.

In addition, Anna attempts to rationalize her situation to herself by imagining that her husband does not really care for her because – or, so, she believes -- he is more concerned about what other people think. Furthermore, she tells herself that although he speaks to her about love, nonetheless, he doesn't know the meaning of love.

However, one can't help but wonder if Anna, herself, actually has any conception of love. She doesn't seem to care about what impact her actions are having, or could have, on her husband, her son, or herself, and, moreover, she prefers to immerse herself in secrets and lies that seem incompatible with one of the significant themes to which love gives expression – namely, a disposition to do no harm to those (such as a son or a husband) who care for, in this case, a wife or mother and who are in need of, among other things, honesty from a person who plays such an important role in their lives.

Alexey Alexandrovitch is even willing to admit the possibility that he is mistaken about everything that he is

saying about Anna and that if this is the case, he begs her forgiveness. Nevertheless, he is not mistaken, and after she induces him to go to sleep, she lays in bed thinking about Vronsky with a sense of guilty pleasure that not only serves as a form of unspoken verification concerning all that her husband has said but gives expression to an awareness within her about something which is going on in her life for which a sense of guilt might constitute an appropriate sentiment.

Despite the foregoing sorts of thoughts, there still is part of her that would like her husband to continue his attempt to persuade her to step back from the emotional, marital, and social chasm into which she seems intent on jumping. Yet, the part of her that fears and is resisting a continuation of his efforts to prevent her from doing something foolish seems to be gaining in strength.

Anna rebuffs her husband's subsequent entreaties concerning her relationship with Vronsky by continuing to act in a puzzled, gas-lighting manner whenever her husband speaks of the inappropriate nature of her interaction with Vronsky. In the meantime, the two -- brazenly and repeatedly -- engage one another in full public view.

After nearly a year of flirting with one another, Vronsky and Anna finally relieve the sexual tension that has existed between them. In the aftermath, Anna experiences a strangely complex sense of humiliating, but rapturous, shame concerning her part in the affair, while Vronsky feels like someone who has robbed Anna of something that is vital to her sense of being and, yet, wishes to continue on with things because their intimacy has brought him a sense of happiness.

Following her physical intimacy with Vronsky, Anna is haunted by a recurrent dream. In the dream Alexey Alexandrovitch and Alexey Vronsky have become her husbands, and she is intrigued by, as well as laughing about, the manner in which both men are content with the

arrangement, and, yet, she awakes in terror ... perhaps, knowing, that what has been dreamt will never be realized and, instead, contrary to the nature of the dream, she understands that everyone, in fact, will be unhappy with the state of affairs.

Although Vronsky's military colleagues were aware of his relationship with Anna, that awareness did not come from Vronsky. Drunk or sober, he never spoke to them about the matter, and, moreover, whenever any of his friends and acquaintances spoke about the relationship, Vronsky quickly quashed such talk.

Many of the younger, military colleagues that he knows admire him because the woman with whom he is involved happens to be the wife of a high-ranking government official. However, young women who are acquainted with Anna seem to be filled with a sense of schadenfreude concerning her situation and appear to be excited about the prospect that someone who frequently has been considered to be a virtuous individual is, now, being discussed in much less flattering terms.

Initially, Vronsky's mother had been pleased with the "elite" nature of her son's affair, feeling that this would actually enhance his career prospects. Later, when she is informed that her son's relationship does not necessarily qualify as an instance of the sort of "acceptable" liaisons that often form within elite circles and might be more of fleeting, passion-fueled affair, she begins to change her opinion of the situation.

She also learns that in order to remain with his regiment and, thereby, be close to Anna, her son has turned down an important career opportunity. In addition, Vronsky's mother discovers that high-ranking members of the military establishment were displeased with Vronsky for having refused the important career opportunity that had been offered to him, his mother's opinion of the affair becomes even more pronounced. As a result, her initial

positive attitude toward the relationship turns entirely negative.

His elder brother also has a negative opinion of Vronsky's relationship with Anna. His brother's perspective is not based on the fact of the relationship per se, because he, himself, despite being married, indulges in such affairs, but, rather, his opposition is because he, like his mother, has discovered that the wrong sort of people were displeased with Vronsky when, in order to remain close to his paramour, Vronsky turned down the career opportunity that had been extended to him.

Therefore, people, both inside and outside Vronsky's family, did not look at his sexual escapades as evidence of a character flaw but framed those actions in terms of whether they might help or hurt his career. However, the attitudes that people adopted in relation to Anna's involvement in the affair tended to be rooted in assessments concerning her character.

The truth is, however, that if Vronsky had been a person of consistent character, he would not have pursued Anna for nearly a year in order to achieve the physical intimacy that he desired. Furthermore, if Anna had been a person of consistent character, then -- her occasional protestations notwithstanding -- she would not have encouraged (if not enabled in various ways) Vronsky to continue on with trying to seduce her for nearly a year.

They both suffered from character flaws. Nonetheless, because of the inequitable manner in which the moral character of men and women are evaluated in Tolstoy's times -- as well as today -- Anna is the one whose public persona suffers the most.

The topic of character is further obfuscated when Tolstoy subsequently, describes Vronsky's best friend, Yashvin. Vronsky believes that Yashvin is the only person he knows who might understand that the passion which Vronsky feels for Anna is more than a passing fancy, but Tolstoy describes Yashvin in contradictory terms.

On the one hand, Tolstoy paints Yashvin as someone who is totally immoral. Yet, on the other hand, Tolstoy also refers to Yashvin as someone who commands the respect of his comrades and superior officers because of his strength of character.

Society holds men and women to different standards of character assessment. In addition, apparently, some individuals can be both either “without moral principles” or steeped in immorality, while, simultaneously, having the sort of strength of character that commands everyone’s respect.

At one point in his life, Tolstoy was like Vronsky and Yashvin, and, yet, presumably, he would like to think of himself as a person of character. Perhaps, the only way that Tolstoy can square the ethical circle when engaging the issue of character is to suppose that character can be both present and absent at the same time ... but this is as true for Anna as it is for Tolstoy, Vronsky, and Yashvin.

Character is dispositional in nature. It is not necessarily an all or none phenomenon but can show up in some circumstances of a person’s life while being absent in other facets of that same individual’s life.

Issues of character notwithstanding, Vronsky is extremely angry with his mother and brother for writing to him about their disapproval of his relationship with Anna. He wants to know how they can justify their attempt to interfere with his life.

According to Vronsky, he believes his mother and brother consider the affair to be just a tawdry, passing passion. Consequently, they cannot grasp why he is permitting the relationship to undermine his career and tarnish his image in the eyes of his superiors ... that is, they fail to understand how -- for Vronsky -- life, itself, is woven from the fabric of his relationship with Anna.

For Vronsky, apparently, the relationship is not a peripheral matter but seems to be essential to his whole

sense of being. If Vronsky cannot live a life of happiness with Anna, then, life has no purpose for him at all.

Although, from time to time up to this point in the unfolding of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy may have hinted that there could be something more substantive to Vronsky's feeling for Anna than a desire for sexual conquest, the present juncture of the novel gives expression to one of the first, clear indications that there is a dimension to Vronsky's feelings for Anna that readers previously might not have suspected was present. Nonetheless, while, conceivably, Vronsky's mother and brother might not understand the character of his feelings for Anna, Vronsky's relationship with Anna seems to have blinded him to the ways in which those feelings are also impacting the lives of other people in problematic ways.

In other words, however deep his feelings for, and passion toward, Anna might be, does the intensity of those emotions justify his interfering in the lives of others – such as Anna's husband or her son. After all, if Vronsky is angry with other people for their attempts to interfere with something that he believes is essential to his life and which he feels they do not understand, then does Vronsky have the right to interfere in the lives of other people – such as Anna's husband or her son -- just because he is oblivious, and, therefore, does not understand, the problematic impact that the intensity of his feelings is having on issues that are just as essential to the lives of those individuals – such as Anna's husband and son -- in which Vronsky's relationship with Anna is interfering?

Seemingly, we are confronted with something of a dilemma. When – if ever – does one person's sense of love or what that person considers to be essentially important to him, her, or them have the right to undermine, or interfere with another person's sense of love or what the latter individual considers to be essentially important to her, him, or them?

The foregoing issue is an important one for a variety of reasons but, especially, because of the implications it carries for Tolstoy's belief -- as Tolstoy indicates toward the end of *Anna Karenina* -- that the answer for many, if not most of, life's problems revolves about a person's willingness to commit herself, himself, or themselves to the idea that one must love God and, as well, one must love other human beings. Yet, what happens when one's love for God interferes with loving other human beings, or one's love for other human beings interferes with one's love for God?

For example, what if one were to consider the relationship between Tolstoy and his wife Sofya/Sonya? Quite frequently, Tolstoy seems to feel that Sofya/Sonya is interfering with something that he considers to be essential to his life -- namely, struggling to become closer to God. Yet, Sofya/Sonya, also feels that Tolstoy is interfering in something that she considers to be essential to her life -- namely, her love for, and concern about the welfare of, her husband, her children, as well as her own relationship with God.

Possibly, one is faced here with a situation in which an unmovable object might be encountering an irresistible force. I'm not sure that when it comes to matters of action rather than just words in relation to, say, God, his wife, and his children that Tolstoy ever arrives at a satisfactory way for navigating the cross currents of those dynamics.

Vronsky's manner of resolving the foregoing issue -- at least for himself and Anna -- involves searching for a means through which to help Anna find a sense of peace, dignity, and security, if not happiness. Vronsky believes the only way of realizing the foregoing possibility would be for the two of them to remove themselves from Petersburg and travel to some place where they will be alone and have a chance of becoming immersed in their love for one another.

Unfortunately, Vronsky's would-be solution does not properly take Anna's son into consideration. In fact, the boy's presence seems to throw into disarray any plans Vronsky and Anna might develop in order to be able to successfully stay afloat while travelling through their troubled and danger-laden existential waters.

While in the boy's presence, Vronsky and Anna act as if they are merely good friends with one another. Nonetheless, the boy also senses that his father, governess, and nurse all share a deep dislike not only for Vronsky but, as well, for the relationship between Vronsky and his mother.

The boy is being buffeted about by opposing sets of forces. He is puzzled by what is going on and, as a result, he does not know how to feel about things or how to act.

Consequently, the boy's manner of interacting with Vronsky is erratic. Sometimes it is marked by friendliness while on other occasions, the boy feels cold and distant toward him as well as toward his relationship with his mother.

The boy harbors questions and uncertainties concerning the nature of the bond that seems to connect Vronsky and his mother that are difficult, if not impossible, to articulate. However, Vronsky tends to filter and frame the boy's conduct through Vronsky's own interests or concerns rather than trying to engage those actions through the boy's perspective, and, consequently, Vronsky considers the boy's behavior to constitute some form of hostility toward Vronsky.

Anna's son is inclined to blame himself for not understanding what was going on in the house when Vronsky is present. Vronsky also is inclined to blame the boy for being a constant reminder that Vronsky and Anna are not free to be as they wish to be with one another.

The boy's troubled condition supplies clear evidence to Vronsky and Anna that there is something wrong with the

latter two's relationship with one another. Nonetheless, Vronsky and Anna choose to disregard the warning signs and continue on as if something were wrong with the world rather than with them.

As Vronsky is preparing to participate in a forthcoming horse race, he notices that something is weighing on Anna. After he presses her several times to disclose what is troubling her, she responds by indicating that she is pregnant.

For Anna, the pregnancy is problematic in a number of ways that she hopes Vronsky will be able to appreciate, but her hopes are in vain. Vronsky, military man that he is, wishes to use the pregnancy as a tactical advantage that he believes will enable them, finally, to break free from the constraints of their current situation in a sort of *fait accompli* manner.

Anna is weighed down with worries concerning her son and the world's opinion of her relationship with Vronsky. She claims her husband does not exist for her, but despite her desire to vanquish him from her life, nonetheless, she senses that in the not too distant future he is likely to become a source of considerable difficulty in her life, and someone – if she had not been so self-absorbed -- to whom she should have paid more caring attention.

Vronsky continues to try to persuade Anna that they should run away together. Anna counters by saying that her husband will be upset with the likely scandal that would be created by their running away, and this will anger him and turn him, she claims, into a spiteful automaton that is incapable of feeling compassion for other human beings.

Moreover, she is concerned that running away will mean she will be perceived as being nothing more than Vronsky's mistress. However, she does not appear to grasp the fact that as long as she persists in her illicit

relationship with Vronsky, she will be considered his mistress irrespective of whether she goes away or stays.

Notwithstanding her concerns about what her husband will do or how other people might look at what she has done, Anna's deepest worries involve her son. She is worried about how he will think of her if she leaves her husband, and she is worried what impact the scandal might have on the boy's reputation both in the present as well as in the future.

Despite the legitimacy of her concerns about her son, her worries have come a little late in the scheme of things. She should have thought about such matters before the fact of her relationship with Vronsky rather than after the fact of that liaison.

Vronsky feels that Anna is unhappy, and this is painful for him to witness. She seeks to allay his concerns by indicating that she is like a hungry person who has been given food ... such an individual might be dressed in rags, cold, and laid low before the world, but that person is happy with the food that is being given to assuage her, his, or their hunger. Nevertheless, one is not quite certain what the nature of her hunger is and what manner of sustenance she is ingesting.

If asked, Anna presumably would claim that she is hungry for love and that this is what she is receiving from Vronsky. As the novel unfolds however -- and as subsequent discussion in the present chapter will point out -- that kind of claim does not necessarily correspond with what might actually be transpiring.

In the meantime, Anna induces Vronsky to promise that he will not bring up the idea of running away again. She indicates that the situation is more difficult than Vronsky seems to suppose is the case, and, therefore, because she believes she understands the situation better than he does, she asks him to leave the matter to her.

Alexey Alexandrovitch – Anna’s husband – has immersed himself in his work more than he usually does – which is much of the time -- in order to keep thoughts concerning his wife and Vronsky away from his consciousness. While the foregoing coping strategy is successful to a certain degree, it has a side effect which leads him to lose touch with his real feelings about Anna and his son, and, as a result, he often ends up interacting with them in a cold, perfunctory, and sarcastic manner.

Furthermore, although his coping mechanism enables him to keep many unwanted thoughts from his awareness, that method also prevents him from understanding the significance of many things that are happening in his life. For example, he isn’t quite able to grasp why his wife has been so persistent with respect to her desire to stay on at Tsarskoe where her friend, Betsy (Vronsky’s relative) is residing ... a place which also just happens to be in relatively close proximity to the location at which Vronsky’s regiment is encamped.

Consciously, Alexey Alexandrovitch goes about his life as if nothing has changed in his life. In the deepest recesses of his heart, however, he knows that his wife is continuing to carry on her affair with Vronsky.

Seryozha, the son of Anna and Alexey, has always been shy and reserved when he was around his father. The tension that permeates the boy’s thoughts – as a result of the complex of relationships involving: Vronsky and his mother, as well as his father and his mother, and, finally, his father and Vronsky -- tend to incline the boy toward distancing himself from his father even more so than usual.

The only person with whom the boy feels comfortable is his mother. Ironically, she also is one of the primary architects of the difficulties that he is experiencing.

Anna announces that she is about to depart from a chance intersection of her, her husband, and her son. She kisses her son and offers her hand to her husband for him to kiss.

He does so, and she leaves while giving the impression that everything is wonderful and as it should be. Yet, as soon as she is out of sight of her son and her husband, she looks at the place on her hand that her husband has kissed and is filled with disgust.

Whatever faults Anna's husband might have, however unromantic a figure he might be, and irrespective of the extent to which his ears might stick out in a ridiculous manner, he is trying to be civil toward his wife while dealing with a situation that is not of his own creation – indeed the situation is entirely her handiwork -- and which he doesn't know quite how to handle. In addition, he continues to provide money to his wife so that she might look after her personal needs as well as the needs of the household and which, to a certain extent, he may suspect is being used against him by helping to underwrite some of the costs that are entailed by her relationship with Vronsky.

Yet, Anna is repulsed by her husband. If she were to look at the situation fairly and honestly, the only actions, especially in relation to her husband and her son, that she should find repulsive are her own.

However, Anna is engaged in a round of case-making. In other words, she wants to be able to justify to herself that what she is doing with Vronsky, as well as in relation to her husband and son, does not have a questionable ethical pedigree, and one of the ways of accomplishing her aims in this regard is by demonizing her husband in whatever way she can.

Whereas earlier in the novel, Anna thought of her husband as: "... a good man; truthful, good-hearted, and remarkable in his own life", now Anna perceives her husband as operating on the basis of: "Nothing but ambition, nothing but the desire to get on, that's all there is in his soul," she thought; "as for these lofty ideals, love of culture, religion, they are only so many tools for getting on." The only difference between the foregoing two

junctures of her relationship with her husband is that in the earlier assessment she felt her husband was serving her interests, whereas in the latter assessment she feels her husband is impeding her interests.

While Anna's current judgments concerning her husband might, or might not, be true, one has difficulty resisting the temptation to apply similar criteria to Anna's life. In other words, Anna is someone who also seems to be consumed with a desire to pursue her current ambitions -- i.e., Vronsky -- and just wants to get on with satisfying those ambitions, and, as a result, her claim of love for Vronsky (whatever that might actually involve) is merely a tool for getting on with satisfying her current desires and ambitions -- namely, to do what she wants to do when she wants to do it.

The foregoing possibilities have a certain resonance with Tolstoy's relationship with his wife. When Sofya/Sonya is serving his interests, he seems to be happy with her and has good things to say about her, but when she is perceived to be an obstacle that stands in the way of his being able to realize his ambitions and desires, then, he becomes embroiled in arguments with her and uses "lofty ideals, love of culture, religion ..." and so on as tools in the attempt to justify: What he wants to do when he wants to do it and, in the process, engages his wife in accordance with whatever set of perceptions concerning her that seem to assist him to get on with pursuing his ambitions and desires.

During a horserace that takes place in *Anna Karenina*, Vronsky and the horse that he is riding take a spill. There is uncertainty about how extensive the damage might be with respect to both the rider and the horse involved in the mishap.

Anna, who is among the crowd that is attending the race, is consumed with fear concerning the accident. Although her husband is not sitting with Anna, he has been witnessing her behavior, and it is clear to him -- as,

presumably, it would be clear to anyone else who might have been observing Anna during the race -- that her focus throughout the race has only been on one rider: namely, Vronsky.

Ever since Vronsky and his horse went down, Anna has been in an agitated state. She wants to rush to Vronsky to see how he is.

Finally, word comes that while the rider has escaped the ordeal relatively unscathed, the horse is severely injured. Upon hearing this, Anna quickly sits down and begins to cry in an uncontrollable manner.

Her husband approaches Anna and offers his arm to her in order to lead her away from the racing grounds and take her home. Initially, she does not hear his offer, but when the offer is repeated, she declines.

Her friend Betsy, with whom she is attending the race, tries to intervene and says that because Anna came with her, then, she (i.e., Betsy) should be the person with whom Anna leaves. Anna's husband remains resolute in the face of Betsy's machinations. He indicates that because his wife is not feeling well, Anna really should accompany him back to their home, and, not knowing what else to do, Anna complies with the offer.

On the way home, Anna's husband initiates a discussion that is critical of Anna's behavior at the race. Anna is coy in her response and wants to know what behavior her husband considers to be unbecoming.

Her husband describes the manner in which she responded with such grief in relation to, first, Vronsky's accident and possible injury, and, then, broke down in tears of relief after being notified that the rider was okay. Her husband goes on to indicate that, previously, he had tried to impress upon her the importance of publically conducting herself in a manner that will not give anyone an excuse to speak negatively about her.

He adds that while on other occasions he has voiced concerns about Anna's need to change the way she thinks about the situation involving Vronsky, his present remarks are restricted in scope and concern just her public conduct. He is asking her to curb her public interaction with Vronsky.

Because of past interchanges concerning such matters, Anna's husband is expecting her to continue claiming that nothing is going on between Vronsky and her. However, Anna surprises her husband and confirms that his suspicions about Vronsky and her have not been mistaken.

She confesses that she thinks about Vronsky all the time, that she loves him, and that she is his mistress. She further stipulates that she hates her husband, cannot bear to be with him and, in addition, is afraid of him.

Her husband remains silent throughout the remainder of the journey home. Upon arriving home and just prior to helping her from the carriage, he indicates to Anna that he has heard what she has said but, nonetheless, until he decides what to do in order to try to protect his reputation and honor, he expects her to conduct herself with a sense of propriety while out in public.

Shortly after her husband departs, Anna receives a note from Betsy indicating that she (Betsy) has received information from Vronsky revealing that he is physically okay and desirous of being in Anna's company. Disregarding what her husband has said to her upon arriving home, Anna looks forward to Vronsky's arrival and is glad that she has told her husband everything ... feeling that things are over between her husband and herself.

Although Anna wants to be with Vronsky rather than her husband, nothing has transpired in *Anna Karenina* to this point which would justify Anna's hatred of her husband or why she would have reason to be afraid of him. Furthermore, instead of taking the opportunity provided by the ride home from the races to discuss their situation

in a civil fashion and seek a solution that might be acceptable to everyone, Anna has antagonized, if not hurt, her husband and, thereby, undercut any hope that some sort of constructive conversation might take place.

Anna claims to love Vronsky. Yet, her vindictive confession to her husband has done nothing to protect that love, and, instead, merely increased the likelihood that in the future problems rather than solutions might be forthcoming from her husband. In addition, Anna claims to love her son, but her angry outburst concerning her husband during their ride home tends to betray that love by backing her husband into an emotional, psychological, and social corner where he might become more resistant – rather than open – to the possibility of signing off on some sort of arrangement in which everyone might benefit.

Anna had asked Vronsky to leave matters to her because she, supposedly, understood the situation with her husband better than Vronsky did. Nevertheless, when an opportunity arose to resolve matters in a productive fashion, she was more interested in ceding control of her rational agency to vengeful, angry, spiteful, hateful dimensions of herself than serving the love that she claims to have for Vronsky and her son.

Anna seems more like a person who is entangled in the desire to do whatever she wants to do when she wants to do it than she is like an individual who is immersed in love. In fact, one can't help but wonder if what Anna means when she uses the word "love" might be more a function of her being able to do whatever strikes her fancy at a given time rather than being an expression of some deep sense of love involving either her son or Vronsky.

There is no room in love for: Anger, vengeance, spite, hatred, pride, self-absorption, duplicity, or an absence of compassion for all who might be problematically impacted by that love. Consequently, given that Anna's behavior seems circumscribed by all of the foregoing kinds of

negative character qualities, one can't help but question the sincerity of Anna's claims of love.

Perhaps, Anna has conflated the intensity of her sexual desire with the notion of love. Or, maybe, Anna has confused her desire for a certain kind of attention with the idea of love.

Was Anna's despair concerning Vronsky's possible injury during the horse race focused on his welfare or was it about her own sense of physical and emotional vulnerability. Was the possibility of Vronsky's injury or death in the horse racing accident a concern for what Vronsky might be losing or was her concern a matter of what she felt she might be losing?

Was her grief centered on the other? Or, was her grief directed toward herself?

An argument can be made that love is not necessarily about the self. Love may be more about the other, and I'm not certain to what extent the "other" figures into Anna's claims of love for Vronsky or her son.

Following the carriage ride home from the horse races during which Anna, finally, admits to being involved with Vronsky, Alexey Alexandrovitch begins to reflect on the options that might be available to him for dealing with his predicament. The first thought that crosses his mind involves demonizing his wife just as, previously, she had engaged in a similar process with respect to him when she did not get what she wanted.

As his wife had behaved in relation to him, he begins seeing their life together in hues of distorted extremes "No honor, no heart, no religion; a corrupt woman. I always knew it and always saw it, though I tried to deceive myself to spare her," Anna's husband thought to himself. Now, everything that has occurred in their marriage is being filtered through a demon-lens of retrospection.

Unfortunately, and without justification, Anna's husband decides to cast his son into the same pit of

demonization that already is consuming his wife. Indeed, the boy's father decides that he is no longer interested in his son and that the father's only concern is to try to extricate his honor from the mess that, supposedly, his wife - and rather inexplicably, his son - have, in his opinion, created and are creating.

Another thought that crosses Alexey Alexandrovitch's mind while he is engaged in reflecting on how to handle his present situation involves the possibility of challenging Vronsky to a duel. Although Anna's husband is not in the habit of handling weapons of any kind and despite his awareness that he is inclined toward cowardice, nonetheless, he is attracted to the sort of phantasmagorical aura that he feels surrounds the thought - but not necessarily the reality -- of a duel. However, notwithstanding the romantic allurements of a duel, he wonders what purpose would be served if he were to kill another man for the sake of a wife and son who are guilty, or so he thinks, of crimes against existence (especially his).

After dismissing - presumably on humanitarian grounds -- the idea of fighting a duel, Alexey Alexandrovitch's thoughts transition to the idea of divorce. This possibility also is fraught with an array of difficulties.

His hope would be to have a legal proceeding which demonstrates that only his wife is at fault for what has happened in their marriage. However, he realizes that obtaining the requisite proof to substantiate the foregoing position would be hard, if not impossible to accomplish.

Moreover, even if the necessary proof could be acquired, he suspects that such evidence might tarnish his public image. He feels that the resulting scandal could be used by his enemies in order to try to undermine the effectiveness of the vital services that he provides to the people through his governmental activities.

The next possibility that Alexey Alexandrovitch considers involves the idea of separation. Not only does he feel that such an option has the same kind of potential for

scandal that divorce has, but, in addition, such an arrangement would permit Anna and Vronsky to be together and, therefore, would seem to hand victory to them, and Alexey Alexandrovitch cannot stomach such an outcome.

Whatever happens, he does not want Anna to feel like she has won. Whatever happens, he wants Anna to undergo some form of punishment for the manner in which she has disrupted his life as well as robbed him of his sense of peace and honor.

Eventually, he decides that the best course of action will be to envelop his wife's relationship with Vronsky in a shroud of secrecy. In addition, he will try to do whatever he can to prevent them from getting together.

As far as keeping Anna's affair with Vronsky a secret is concerned, well, that horse already has escaped from the barn. Furthermore, the prospect of being able to keep Anna and Vronsky apart seems rather unlikely.

In any event, Alexey Alexandrovitch believes that the aforementioned plan of action will provide his wife with an opportunity to work toward changing her life path. He also believes that by pursuing the foregoing approach, he will be able to lend support to help his wife to struggle to move in a proper direction even though all his previous attempts to accomplish precisely that have fallen on deaf ears as well as encountered a resistant, rebellious heart and mind.

Anna's husband believes that his plan is thoroughly consistent with the requirements of religion. However, he does not bother to consult with any religious authorities in order to determine if there might be other options that should be entertained ... perhaps afraid that such religious authorities might seek to dissuade him from his desire to ensure that his wife (as well as his son) will suffer for what has taken place.

However innocent Alexey Alexandrovitch might, or might not, be with respect to the emergence of his marital

problems, his desire to demonize and punish his wife and child in the aftermath of those difficulties has pushed him deep into moral and spiritual territory where considerable fault can be assigned to his manner of going about trying to resolve his marital situation.

From time to time, he has claimed that he loves his wife and child. Nonetheless, the idea of: Loving someone while simultaneously wishing to punish that person or have that individual suffer is oxymoronic.

Both Alexey Alexandrovitch and Anna use the word “love” in conjunction with various individuals who are in their lives. Yet, based on what has been written in *Anna Karenina* – at least to this point -- the reality appears to be that neither one of them has any insight into what love actually entails.

On the morning after Anna had subjected her husband to an emotional diatribe toward the end of their journey home from the horse races, Anna is having difficulty understanding how she could have said some of the things that she did to her husband. In hindsight, she realizes that yesterday she had been operating out of a sense of despair, hopelessness, and shameful disgrace concerning her situation.

She felt like she had wanted to say something else to her husband during their journey home, although she is not quite sure what the concrete nature of that ‘something else’ might have been. Yet, her emotional condition pushed her in another direction that was completely unproductive.

On the one hand, Anna worries that Vronsky does not love her ... that he has become tired of her. Consequently, she feels that forces are in play which will prevent their relationship from moving forward.

On the other hand, she wonders if her husband will now announce her misdeeds to the world and throw her out of the house. If he does do what she fears, she does not know where she will go or what she will do.

Just as she feels that neither Vronsky nor her husband will be able to help her situation, Anna also believes that religion cannot resolve her plight. Religion, she believes, will require her to renounce the very thing – namely, her feelings for Vronsky – which is the only source of meaning she has in her life.

Anna never seems to ask herself whether what she considers to be the only source of meaning in her life should form the foundation of meaning in her life or what, precisely, is entailed by such a meaning and what it has to do with the rest of reality. Instead, notwithstanding whatever doubts and anxieties she has concerning the difficulties that characterize her present life, she remains steadfast in her belief that her sense of love – whatever that might be -- should continue to serve as the north-star that will help her navigate her way through life.

Although she fears that Vronsky may wish to reject her and that her husband will force her to leave her home, she realizes, suddenly, that there is still one person in life from whom she always can draw support. That person is her son, Seryozha.

Consequently, she is beginning to entertain the possibility of making arrangements to take the boy and move somewhere ‘far from the Madding Crowd’ before the boy is taken from her. However, there are many questions that arise in conjunction with Anna’s plan to abscond with the boy and whether, or not, it is rooted in a sincere love for him, along with an attendant concern for his welfare, or whether, she is motivated by a need for his presence as a means of lending a form of emotional support that might help to stabilize her life.

However, love is not about using others to serve one’s own interests as Anna seems to be doing with respect to her son. Rather, love is about a willingness to sacrifice one’s own interests in the service of another’s interests ... for example, in the present case, what might be in the best interests of her son.

Subsequently, while trying to impress on her son the importance of not repeating a certain kind of naughtiness in which he has been engaging, Anna stipulates that he is never to do such things again and, then, asks him whether, or not, he loves her.

She fears that the boy will discontinue having positive feelings for her, and, as a result, she begins to cry. However, her primary concern here seems to be with herself rather than with attending to whatever her son's needs and concerns might be.

As Anna begins to implement her plan to leave her husband and take their son with her, a carriage arrives with a courier who is delivering a letter to Anna that has been written by her husband. The courier has been instructed to wait for a reply.

The material accompanying the letter outlines Alexey Alexandrovitch's decision concerning the marital situation. He will: Ignore what already has transpired between Vronsky and Anna; require Anna to return home to her husband, and they will carry on as if nothing has happened.

The letter catches Anna by surprise. She had been ready for anything except what actually is being indicated.

Anna is upset and begins to engage in recriminations against her husband. She feels that although everyone thinks of her husband as being a religious, principled, and upstanding citizen, she know otherwise ... even if she is not able to prove the truth of what she believes to be so.

For eight years, her husband, supposedly, has taken every opportunity to oppress and humiliate her. Anna feels that he has sought to crush her need for love, but, eventually, she reached a point when she could no longer deny the fact that God had created her as a being that must be able to love.

Not enough information is provided in *Anna Karenina* to substantiate any of her claims against her husband.

Maybe her husband was a brute, or, perhaps, her husband was someone who didn't know how to love his wife – or anybody, for that matter, including himself -- but did the best he could to hack his way through territory for which he had not been properly prepared to explore by family, school, society, or religion. As a result, apparently, what he had to offer her was not acceptable to her, and its inadequacy might have felt oppressive to her.

Rather than realize that just as her husband's attempt to love her might have been riddled with lacunae, so too, her own attempts to love him – whatever they might have involved -- also seemed to be problem-laden. However, the finger of accusation tends to rigidly point in only one direction.

Besides – or, so, Anna feels – she has no responsibility for what took place with Vronsky. God created her to be someone who must live and love, and, therefore, nature merely took its inevitable course.

Anna doesn't appear to want to step back and critically reflect upon the possibility that even if God created her to live and to love, there still might be some question as to precisely how or why one should try to go about living and loving. Moreover, Anna also doesn't seem to be willing to entertain the possibility that God might have created her with a capacity to be able to identify the character of the right way to go about living and loving, as well as given her the ability to choose accordingly.

She thinks about another line of the letter from her husband that concerns her son ... a line which she interprets to be some sort of legal threat that would result in her child being taken from her if she does not comply with the conditions set forth in the letter. Anna feels the line in question also gives expression either to her husband's belief that Anna does not love her son or the line from the letter constitutes evidence that her husband actually despises the love she has for her son ... a love that, according to Anna, he always has ridiculed.

Anna goes on to speculate that her husband is using her love for her child to hold her hostage. She feels confident in her suspicion because her husband knows that Anna will never abandon her child, and he knows that without her child, she would have no life even if she had the opportunity to be with Vronsky.

Obviously, if her husband knows that Anna could never abandon her child, then, he does not believe – as Anna previously speculated in conjunction with one of the lines of her husband’s letter to her – that Anna doesn’t love her child. As for the other possibility is concerned about which Anna had speculated – namely, that her husband actively despises the love she has for her son – the available evidence in *Anna Karenina* is indeterminate. Conceivably, her husband didn’t despise the foregoing love – even if, from time to time, he might have made fun of it – so much as the husband might have experienced a certain amount of jealousy and insecurity in relation to the love that she had for her son because it might have made Alexey Alexandrovitch feel like an outsider in his own family.

Anna seems to acknowledge, and agree with, the idea, that if she ever abandoned her son, then, she would be among the vilest of women. However, she believes – as she feels her husband also believes – that she would never do such a thing.

Yet, later on during the novel, Anna does do precisely what she believes her husband and she did not feel she was capable of doing. In other words, she abandons her son when she decides to give preference to her own desires over the needs of her son.

Of course, to whatever extent Alexey Alexandrovitch’s letter to Anna was meant to convey threats to her concerning their son in order to gain a tactical advantage over the family dynamics, then, such intentions also constitute a form of abandonment. If this were the case, the son would have been transformed into a pawn that, if necessary, could be sacrificed to serve the father’s

interests and desires in the war between husband and wife.

Given the nature of the foregoing circumstances, then, in one way or another, the husband, wife, and child are all vulnerable, each in his or her own way. Nonetheless, the individual who is most vulnerable is the child, and it is the child's needs that are being ignored by both husband and wife, and, as a result, one wonders – their pronouncements notwithstanding -- if either one of the parents actually loves their son.

Next, Anna meditates on the aspect of her husband's letter to her that indicates how -- despite the miserable nature of their current relationship -- things will go on as before in their marriage. She believes that because he knows that she loves Vronsky (an assumption because he actually is waiting for the passion to burn itself out), then, such an expectation can lead nowhere but to lying and deceit ... something that she claims to dislike and that she believes is against her nature but which – or, so, she says -- her husband, supposedly, enjoys.

Whatever the nature of Anna's feelings for Vronsky might be – and it is uncertain that what she feels for him is real love rather than some other form of desire or emotion to be discussed a little later in this chapter – she also claims to love her son. If she really does love her son, then, she should recognize that her feelings for her son should have priority over her feelings for Vronsky, and, consequently, she should be willing to make the sacrifices that are needed to suppress her own desire for Vronsky and, if she were to do this, then, there would be no need for lying or deceit.

There was also another force operating within Anna. While reflecting on the letter that her husband has sent to her concerning his decision about how he wished to proceed with respect to the marriage, she realizes that she is not sufficiently strong to be willing to give up the social position she currently occupies – and enjoys -- in exchange

for the opportunity to abandon her husband and child in order to become her lover's mistress.

In light of the foregoing information, then whatever Anna's feelings for Vronsky might be, they appear to be less than the attachment she feels for the style of social life that she had been enjoying prior to Vronsky's entrance into her life. She might not love the person – namely, her husband – who provides her with a way of life that she is unwilling to give up, but, apparently, she also seems to be unwilling to give up that life for someone – namely, Vronsky – whom she does claim to love, and, therefore, one can't help but wonder what manner of love – if any – she has for Vronsky.

Anna decides to put her plans for leaving her husband on hold. However, she wants to get in touch with Vronsky to discuss the situation and sends a message to him via courier.

An argument can be made that Vronsky's feelings for Anna might be more genuine – or, at least, have a greater potential for genuineness -- than do Anna's feelings for him. Among other things, one might reflect on the following considerations.

Up until the time that Anna came into his life, Vronsky had no intention of marrying anyone, including Kitty who, at an early juncture of *Anna Karenina*, had been described by Tolstoy as believing that Vronsky was about to propose to her when, in fact, Vronsky was merely pursuing Kitty in order to gain control over her, physically and emotionally, for however long this pleased the captain to do so.

Vronsky lived according to a code of conduct that was characterized by a number of inconsistencies. For example, prior to meeting Anna, he believed – unquestioningly – that while one should never lie to a man, nonetheless, it was okay to lie to women.

Moreover, he believed – steadfastly – that while one should never cheat most people, nevertheless, husbands

are fair game. In addition, he also maintained that although one should always pay one's debts to a cardsharp, he was free to make other members of society wait for whatever debts one ran up with such merchants in order to support his lifestyle.

His code was all about permitting him to do whatever he needed to do in a way that would enable him to go on living life as he wished to do without having to worry about ethical considerations that required him to treat everyone fairly, honestly, or in accordance with principles of consistency. In short, his code of conduct was oriented toward always serving his likes and dislikes.

However, after meeting and spending time with Anna, he has begun to wonder if his code of conduct is as complete as he, previously, had believed to be the case. Among other things, he has begun to feel that he would rather sacrifice his own interests in order to ensure that Anna would not be hurt, humiliated, or regarded with disrespect.

The foregoing feelings intensify when he learns that Anna is pregnant with their child. For instance, Vronsky considers Anna's husband to be nothing more than an interloper who was without rights in the matter.

Vronsky's attitudes toward Alexey Alexandrovitch were more in keeping with the verities of his old code of conduct. But, Vronsky's feelings concerning Anna are running contrary to, and constitute a departure from, the earlier code of conduct that had governed his life.

Another change that takes place in Vronsky concerns his life in the military. Prior to meeting Anna, he had mapped out a fairly ambitious map for his career.

That ambition was derailed, somewhat, when he committed a mistake during an earlier phase of his career by refusing to accept a certain posting in the belief – a false one as it turned out -- that doing so might enhance his value. As a result of the foregoing decision, he began to be

passed over for the sort of appointments that would enhance his career prospects.

Moreover, subsequently, he becomes known as an independent sort of officer and plays the role accordingly. However, he also had begun to suspect that all manner of people perceived him as a person who was not a team player and, therefore, could not be trusted to behave in any manner other than in accordance with the characteristics that governed someone who was playing the role of an independent individual, and, therefore, had become someone who was not likely to be promoted.

Due to his relationship with Anna – who, because of her husband’s position in the government, was viewed by many military people as something of a high-profile sexual “target” -- Vronsky had gained a certain amount of notoriety and attention within the military that, for a time, stoked his ambition. However, when he re-connects with someone from his past – a fellow by the name of Serpuhovskoy -- who is the same age as him but who has become a general, and, therefore, is no longer a captain like Vronsky, Vronsky begins to realize that he prefers to continue his relationship with Anna rather than try to climb up the hierarchy of the military, and, consequently, he is prepared to sacrifice the sort of military ambition that once had ruled his life for the opportunity to be with Anna.

Love – or, at least, genuine feelings for Anna -- has induced Vronsky to re-examine the code of conduct through which he previously ordered his life and, in addition, to alter that code’s character so that it might accommodate Anna’s presence in his life. Moreover, Vronsky was ready to loosen his hold on the ambition that had driven much of his life prior to meeting Anna.

Yet, one can see nothing comparable in Anna’s life or conduct that would indicate or suggest that her emotional attachment to Vronsky also has induced her to change the way she thinks about some of her basic beliefs or has

inclined her toward being willing to sacrifice something that once played a overarching role in her life as Vronsky seems ready to do. If anything, since meeting Vronsky, Anna merely appears to be more willing to sacrifice other people – such as: Kitty, her husband, her son, as well as Vronsky -- in order to better serve her own desires -- whatever those might be – but none of this seems to resonate with the idea of love in any genuine manner.

Vronsky is far from perfect, and he is more than a little morally callous in the manner in which he thinks about, or acts toward, Anna's husband or her son. Nonetheless, there does seem to be something genuinely transformative in his feeling for Anna that does not appear to be present in the way that Anna feels about Vronsky.

Anna arranges a meeting with Vronsky. She wants to tell him about – indeed, show him -- the letter that her husband has sent to her.

Although Anna feels that, on her own, she lacks the strength to leave her husband and son, nonetheless, she is hoping that Vronsky will respond to her news in a way that would enable her to break free of her marriage. More specifically, if she feels that Vronsky conducts himself in the way that Anna hopes – namely, passionately, unwaveringly, and resolutely -- then she would be willing to leave her husband and child.

Unfortunately, Vronsky acts in a manner other than what Anna had hoped. In other words, instead of taking command of the situation and making clear to Anna that he wants her to come away with him now, Vronsky has begun mulling over in his mind the possibility of a duel with Anna's husband ... as if the only issue at stake involves some sort of personal affront to Vronsky's honor.

Vronsky also is remembering what transpired during his recent meeting with his old friend Serpuhovskoy, now a general. His friend had said that love of a woman tended to be incompatible with a military career and that if one were not going to get married – which his friend thought

was the only way a person would be able to free himself in order to be able to pursue a military career, then, one might be best advised to not allow oneself to become tied down at all.

Vronsky had been thinking along similar lines prior to his meeting with Anna. However, Vronsky did not feel he could share such thoughts with Anna.

Anna feels that Vronsky is hiding something, and, therefore, she senses that he is not prepared to be completely forthcoming with her. As a result she feels her fate has been sealed because she will not be able to escape from the conditions that her husband wishes to impose on her.

In short, Anna interprets Vronsky's behavior as indicating that he appears to be retreating from being willing to make a full commitment to Anna. As a result, Anna also feels compelled to step back from the brink somewhat and play the game in accordance with the rules through which Vronsky seems to be engaging her.

There is an attraction for one another that is present, and there is a passion for one another that is present. Nevertheless, while there is an emotional dynamic that exists between Anna and Vronsky, the term "love" might not necessarily be an appropriate way of characterizing that dynamic.

A discussion ensues. Vronsky wants Anna to leave her husband and let Vronsky begin to make plans for arranging their life together. Anna objects to his idea and indicates that this would require her to leave her child behind, and she is not prepared to do that.

Just moments earlier, if Vronsky had been willing to respond in the way that Anna had hoped he would, she had been ready to go with Vronsky – even if this meant abandoning her son. However, Vronsky's behavior has scuttled that possibility because she felt there had been an

element of reservation in his conduct and thought which ran contrary to her need for complete commitment to her.

In other words, apparently, she would have been willing to abandon her son if the price had been right. She wanted all of Vronsky's attention and commitment, but Anna felt that Vronsky was not prepared to offer her that.

Nevertheless, quite independently of what Vronsky did, or did not, do, Anna had been prepared to leave her son. Therefore, at that time what was most important to Anna was not love for her son but, instead, was her desire to be loved by, or attended to, in a certain manner by Vronsky.

Vronsky believes that Anna would be much better off if she were to go with him and leave her child. Vronsky believes that leaving her son would be much better than having to continue to live in conditions of degradation with her husband.

Anna urges Vronsky not to speak in terms of ideas such as degradation. She indicates that as long as she has Vronsky's love, then, she has no sense of humiliation or degradation ... that she is, in some sense, proud of her relationship with Vronsky, but as she says this, she breaks down and begins to weep tears of shame and despair ... implying, thereby, that part of her might feel that she does not have Vronsky's love.

Vronsky feels badly for Anna. He also has a sense of helplessness concerning her situation because he cannot think of what he can do to help her.

As a result, he feels responsible for her wretched condition, and, of course, Vronsky is, indeed, responsible – at least in part -- for Anna's situation. However, Anna also bears responsibility for things being the way they are.

Vronsky wonders if Anna might consider leaving her husband and taking her child with her. Anna acknowledges his suggestion as a possibility but indicates that everything would depend on her husband, and, therefore, she needs to speak with him about such a possibility.

When Anna and her husband meet, Anna tells him that she does not believe she can carry on as if nothing has happened and wants to know what he expects from her. Her husband informs her that he doesn't want her to meet with Vronsky at their home or anywhere else that might lead to gossip, and, moreover, he doesn't want her to do anything that would bring embarrassment or disgrace to him.

If she is prepared to do as indicated, then, he is willing to accord her the privileges to which all faithful wives are entitled. He would be prepared to do so even if she does not fulfill certain other duties that tend to be expected of a wife.

Although Anna's husband is attempting to keep up appearances of a normal family life by interacting with his wife at least once a day, nevertheless, the two are living separate lives. Moreover, despite her husband's wishes, Anna and Vronsky continue to meet with one another.

Somehow, Anna's husband is aware that such trysts are taking place. However, all three of the individuals are putting up with the uncomfortable nature of such awkward dynamics because they each -- in his, or her, own way -- feel that in the near future their situation will -- rather inexplicably and improbably -- change for the better.

Disregarding her husband's wishes to the contrary, Anna decides to invite Vronsky to the Karenin residence. She informs Vronsky that her husband is going to be away from the house for several hours, and she wants Vronsky to come and be with her.

Vronsky decides to go. Although some of his ideas about Anna have been changing, nevertheless, his passion for her has remained.

Shortly after arriving at the Karenin house, he runs into Alexey Alexandrovitch as the latter individual is leaving the house to attend the opera. Currents of tension flow between them -- especially given that Anna's husband had

been very explicit about not wanting Vronsky to be invited to, or seen at, the Karenin home – but nothing happens as, following a perfunctory acknowledgment of one another's presence, Karenin continues to walk out of the house and Vronsky continues to walk into the house.

There is something rather Tolstoyan in the brazen manner that Anna and Vronsky are behaving, for, despite – as previously noted -- Alexey Alexandrovitch's clear indication that he did not want Anna and Vronsky to meet at the Karenin residence, the latter two individuals have decided that what they wish to do is far more important than what anyone else might like. Thus, just as Tolstoy ran up gambling debts, went on drunks, exploited peasant women, engaged in all manner of promiscuous behavior, and treated his wife however he liked without really caring how what he did affected anyone else, so too, Vronsky and Anna are going about things in a similar, self-serving, uncaring, and unapologetic fashion.

Tolstoy is well-known for the way in which he incorporates various biographical aspects of his actual life into his novels. Apparently, he also likes to take – consciously or unconsciously -- some of his own qualities of personality and inject them into some of his characters as well ... as seems to be the case with respect to Vronsky and Anna when they disregard what Alexey Alexandrovitch wishes and just do as they please, and as will be outlined a little later, I believe that a great deal of Tolstoy is reflected in the character of Anna Karenina ... especially when considering the issue of love.

In any event, when Vronsky and Anna finally come together at the Karenin residence she begins complaining about how long she had to wait for Vronsky finally to arrive. Soon, a discussion ensues concerning a work-related task that Vronsky has been required to perform – namely, entertaining a visiting prince.

As part of his military duties, Vronsky has introduced the prince to various aspects of Russian nightlife. Because

women have been involved during the process of entertaining the prince, Anna is both disgusted with, and jealous about, Vronsky's possible activities while hosting the prince.

Vronsky informs her that such suspicions hurt him. He indicates that nothing happened during the time that he spent with the prince – in fact, he found the whole experience rather disquieting -- and asks her whether, or not, she trusts him any longer.

She says she does. However, elements of jealousy remain.

Vronsky knows that Anna's jealousy is fueled by her feelings for him. Nevertheless, such episodes – which have been increasing in frequency – tend to leave Vronsky feeling cold toward Anna.

Jealousy is not necessarily an indication that love is present. Indeed, jealousy might be more a function of experiencing a certain kind of fear that revolves about the possibility that something one desires might be come under the controlling influence of someone else.

The issue of control is at the heart of jealousy. The person who is jealous feels that the individual toward whom one's jealousy is directed constitutes a threat to one's capacity to have influence over, or control, all or part of a given set of circumstances.

Jealousy does not concern itself with the happiness or well-being of the individual one professes to love. Instead, jealousy emerges when a person's own sense of happiness, well-being, desire, or access seems to be obstructed or threatened in some manner.

Anna's growing jealousy does not give expression to her love for Vronsky. Rather, her jealousy suggests that she is afraid that she will lose, or is losing, Vronsky's passion for her.

Vronsky is unhappy, and has been unhappy, for some time. He feels that Anna has changed – both physically and emotionally – for the worse

His current sense of Anna is that she is like a flower whose internal and external beauty has faded if not decayed. Yet, Vronsky also feels as if he bears responsibility for whatever deterioration might have taken place in conjunction with that flower.

At times, he feels like he does not love her. Be that as it may, he also believes there is a bond between them that cannot be broken, and, possibly, this bond might be more a function of his recognition of the role he has played in helping to alter Anna's life in problematic ways together with a countervailing desire to try to alleviate some of the difficulties that he has brought into her life.

Their discussion turns to her condition of pregnancy. For the first time, Anna discloses that she has had a dream indicating that she will die during childbirth and suggests such an event would solve everyone's problems.

After returning home from his night at the opera, Anna's husband checks the coat rack to see if there is a military coat hanging there. When he sees that no such coat is present, he goes straight to his room and instead of going to bed as he normally does, he paces back and forth in his room until three o'clock in the morning.

While pacing, his thoughts are all directed toward Anna's breach of the rules of engagement that, previously, had been set in place. At that time, he had stipulated that if she failed to abide by the indicated rules, then, he would have no choice but to divorce her and take custody of their son, and, now – after Anna's act of defiance -- he feels she had backed him into a corner and that this requires him to follow through on his stated threat.

Although there were a variety of technical problems surrounding the issue of divorce, nonetheless, over the years, improvements had been made in the rules

governing that process. Consequently, Anna's husband feels he might be able to find a way to navigate through some of the tricky currents that are present in the formal dimensions of divorce.

In the morning, Alexey Alexandrovitch barges into Anna's room and informs her – after some preliminary discussion – that he plans to go to Moscow and will not be returning to the residence they are now occupying. In addition, he is going to arrange to have his lawyer begin divorce proceedings.

Finally, he indicates that their son – Seryozha – will be going to Alexey's sister. When Anna objects and says that her husband does not love their son and is only sending the child away to hurt her, Anna's husband admits that he has lost affection for his son because his feelings for the boy have become entangled in the sense of repugnancy that Alexey feels toward Anna, but, nonetheless, their son is going to live Alexey Alexandrovitch's sister.

Anna might, or might not, be correct that her husband's decision to send their son away is motivated by his desire to hurt Anna. Yet, Anna continually has been giving preference to satisfying her own desires over the needs of her son, and, in addition, she knowingly has exposed her son to the risk of being separated from her because she has transgressed against her husband's wishes on the matter of inviting Vronsky into the Karenin residence.

Whether living with Alexey's sister will be in Seryozha's best interest remains to be seen. Nonetheless, there is also considerable uncertainty surrounding the idea of having the boy stay with his mother because, based on her past behavior with Vronsky as well as with the boy, she doesn't necessarily appear to be capable of conducting herself in a manner that will be in the best interests of the child.

Part of the reason why Anna wants the boy to remain with her is because she can't stand the idea that her husband might gain some sort of victory in their marital

tug-of-war. Such reasoning is hardly a solid endorsement in support of her claim that she loves her son.

Another reason why Anna wants her son to stay with her is because she feels emotionally isolated from both her husband as well as, to a certain extent, Vronsky, and, as a result, Anna needs the boy's emotional support to help her try to stabilize her life. In other words, she needs to be loved by the boy but appears to be much less concerned with the boy's need to be loved by her, and, therefore, once again, a variety of questions permeate the nature of Anna's emotional relationship with her son.

At one point – noted earlier -- Anna had claimed that she would never abandon her son. Yet, if Vronsky had acted as Anna had hoped he would when she disclosed to him that she had told her husband everything about the affair, she was prepared to leave her husband and abandon the boy, and, so, once again, Anna's claims of love concerning her boy are often contradicted by what she actually does, thinks, or says.

A little later in *Anna Karenina*, the paths of Stepan Arkadyevitch, Anna's brother, and Alexey Alexandrovitch intersect. Alexey is invited to dinner, but he feels he must decline because he is in the process of trying to divorce Anna.

Stepan Arkadyevitch is shocked by the news, and after stipulating that his wife loves both Anna and her husband, he implores Anna's husband to speak with Dolly, his wife, before proceeding further with the divorce. As a result, Anna's husband decides to accept the invitation to dinner.

Alexey Alexandrovitch arrives at the gathering, but before he has an opportunity to speak with Dolly, a conversation takes place amongst the guests concerning women and education. Anna's husband is of the opinion that there is nothing wrong with educating women as long as that process does not become conflated with, or confused for, the emancipation of women which he considers to be a much more problematic issue.

The conversation broadens and begins to explore issues of rights and duties in conjunction with women. One of the guests, Pestsov, wishes to direct Alexey's attention toward the idea that an inequality exists in marriage because Russian society – both legally and socially -- treats the infidelity of women differently than it treats the infidelity of men, but in the light of what Anna's brother has found out about the possibility of divorce between Alexey and Anna, Stepan Arkadyevitch tries to move Alexey's attention in another direction.

Eventually, Anna's husband and Dolly find time and space in which to explore the issue of divorce. Initially, Dolly feels that Alexey is treating her friend Anna in a very cold, cruel, and unjust manner.

Consequently, she begins the conversation by asking Alexey what fault he finds with Anna. Anna's husband alludes to the problem, but Dolly is having difficulty believing what she is hearing.

Anna's husband addresses Dolly's doubts concerning Anna's behavior and character by telling Dolly that there can be no doubt about the matter when his own wife is the one who has informed him about where things stand. Upon hearing his, Dolly wonders if divorce is really the best way to proceed.

Alexey Alexandrovitch responds by saying that he cannot continue to live with such a situation. Dolly indicates that she understands what he is saying, but does he think that such an action would be the Christian thing to do and asks him to reflect on what impact divorce would have on his wife.

Anna's husband tells Dolly that he has tried to resolve the situation by giving Anna a second chance that provides her with an opportunity to change the nature of the path along which she has been traveling. However, she refused to alter her conduct, and, consequently, he feels there is no way forward except through divorce.

In a last ditch effort to try to persuade Anna's husband otherwise, Dolly tells him about similar problems that she has had with her husband. She also discloses that Anna had intervened and saved the day.

Dolly suggests that one must forgive and love those who hate one. Anna's husband replies by stipulating that he can never forgive Anna for what she has done, and, in fact, he believes that trying to love a person that one hates is an impossible thing to do.

Whether, or not, Alexey Alexandrovitch ever truly loved Anna is difficult to say. For eight years he appeared to care for her, and when she returned home after being away for the first time since they had been married, then, as noted earlier in this chapter, Anna's husband tried to communicate to her just how much he had missed her.

By then, however, the die of fate had been cast. Whatever Anna's husband had to offer to her was not enough to thwart the inertial forces of passion that had begun to build between Vronsky and Anna.

If love is present in a relationship, then, when it is tested by turbulent circumstances, love often has a way of weathering the storms that are manifested through those circumstances. Unfortunately, love did not seem to be present in the relationship between Anna and her husband because neither one of them appeared to be inclined to treat the other – or their son -- with an appropriate sort of kindness and compassion, or with the requisite sense of humility, nobility, integrity, patience, equitability, and self-sacrifice ... all of which tend to be entailed by the notion of love.

However, of the two of them – and notwithstanding his faults – Anna's husband seems to exhibit signs that might be considered to be more proximate to the quality of love than his wife appeared to show toward him. Furthermore, when it comes to matters of tolerance, patience, understanding, and forgiveness, Anna seems to expect

more from her husband than she is prepared to give to him in return.

For instance, consider the note that Anna sends to her husband as she is nearing the time when she will go into labor. In the note she says that she is dying and that death will be easier for her to bear if he were willing to forgive her.

Although Anna's husband initially thinks that the note could just be a ploy to manipulate him in some way with respect to the issue of divorce, he begins to reflect on the matter and consider the possibility that the note might actually constitute a sincere effort to reach out to him. Perhaps, she really is dying and has a desire to repent for what she has done, and, if so, to ignore her request would be cruel and ill-advised.

Alexey Alexandrovitch decides to go to Petersburg. If Anna's request turns out to be part of some sort of stratagem to manipulate him, he will just return home, but, if her request turns out to be sincere, then, he is prepared to forgive her.

His deliberations concerning the foregoing matter are not entirely selfless in character. More specifically, as uncertain as he might be concerning the sincerity of his wife's request for him to come to Petersburg, he hasn't failed to take note of the possibility that her death would solve a lot of his problems.

When he arrives at the residence in Petersburg, he notices that Vronsky is present and visibly upset. Vronsky's suffering makes Anna's husband uncomfortable -- as he is whenever he witnesses anyone crying or suffering -- and, so, he hurries on to where Anna is lying down.

Anna's state is agitated. When she finally realizes that her husband is by her side, she indicates to him that there are two women living within her.

She is afraid of one of those women – the one who loved Vronsky and tried to induce her to hate Alexey Alexandrovitch. Anna exclaims that she is not that woman.

She tells her husband that she only wants one thing. She wants to be forgiven.

Next, she indicates that she knows that she cannot be forgiven. She tells him he is too good and that he should go away as she holds onto him with one hand, while pushing him away with her other hand.

Anna's husband feels filled with love and forgiveness for his enemies. He lays his head in the curve of his wife's arm, breaks down, and cries.

Vronsky approaches the bed where Anna is lying and buries his head in his hands. Anna tells Vronsky to uncover his face and look at her husband who is a saint.

When Vronsky fails to look, Anna tells her husband to take Vronsky's hand away from his face. Anna's husband does so and sees a countenance wracked by shame and pain.

Anna tells her husband to take Vronsky's hand and forgive him. Her husband does as he has been asked. Her husband continues to cry.

Anna has been experiencing delirium, fever, and unconsciousness on and off throughout the day as a result of the puerperal fever that is afflicting her. Doctors are uncertain whether, or not, she will survive, and she has been given morphine from time to time in an effort to alleviate some of her suffering.

Whereas previously Anna felt nothing but hatred for her husband and considered him to be a cruel, oppressive human being, now, she is singing his praises. How much of what she currently is saying is due to the delirium associated with her physical condition and/or the morphine she has been given -- rather than expressions of how she genuinely feels but tends not to voice – is uncertain.

However, what is readily apparent is that Anna's husband is the one who has come to her bedside ready to forgive her. He is the individual that tolerates Vronsky's presence, and Anna's husband also is the person who is filled with a sense of love and forgiveness, and, he is the one who has taken Vronsky's hand, and he is the individual who has laid his head in the curve of Anna's arm while breaking down in tears.

In addition, at some point during the night, Vronsky goes home but returns the next morning. Anna's husband meets him in a hallway and not only suggests that Vronsky should stay in case Anna asks for him, but, as well, guides Vronsky to Anna's boudoir so that he can be close to her.

Three days later, Anna's husband is still permitting Vronsky to spend time near Anna as she alternates between fevered agitation and unconsciousness. On the third day, Anna's husband enters his wife's boudoir where Vronsky is sitting and indicates that he has something to say to Vronsky.

Initially, Vronsky does not wish to listen, but Anna's husband takes his hand and indicates that what he has to say needs to be heard. Anna's husband proceeds to disclose that when he first came to Petersburg to see about his wife's condition, he was: Burdened with uncertainty about many things; entertaining a desire to exact revenge on both Vronsky and his wife, and, as well, he even thought about how his wife's death might solve a lot of problems.

However, when he saw her, he entered fully into the spirit of forgiveness, together with a willingness to offer his other cheek if treated badly, and, as a result, forgave everyone and everything. His only wish was that God would not remove this condition of forgiveness from him.

Anna's husband further indicates that he doesn't care if Vronsky decides to ridicule him or tries to run roughshod over him. Despite such possibilities, he will not abandon his wife, and he is not interested in criticizing Vronsky.

Nonetheless, Anna's husband indicates that, for now, he would like to be with his wife. He tells Vronsky that he should go and that if Anna wishes to see him at some later point then, he would let Vronsky know of her wishes.

Anna's husband might, or might not, love Anna. However, during the turbulence of current circumstances, he is the one who seems to be behaving in a manner that appears to reflect qualities which suggest that love for Anna of some kind might still be present within him because he is the one who is actively exercising qualities of compassion, kindness, tolerance, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, nobility, perseverance, and courage toward both his wife – and for the sake of his wife – Vronsky.

Before moving on, one might mention a strange sort of symmetry that appears to exist between, on the one hand, Anna and her husband, and, on the other hand, Tolstoy and his wife which seems worth noting. For instance, just as Anna discloses to her husband that there are two women within her – one of which she fears – so, too, as Tolstoy sinks deeper into suicidal ideation (beginning at some point after completing *War and Peace*, then, becoming more entrenched during the writing of *Anna Karenina*, and, finally, worsening following the completion of the latter novel), Tolstoy has disclosed through his writing (both fiction and non-fiction) as well as in other ways, that there are, at least, two men living within Tolstoy ... one that wants to die and whom Tolstoy fears, and another man within him that wishes to live and is fighting tooth and nail to stay alive.

The dimension of himself that Tolstoy fears is -- as is the case with Anna -- a force that has induced him (and her) to engage in all manner of libertine activities. Moreover, just as is the case in relation to Anna's belief concerning the woman within her that she fears and whom she feels is not who she is in essence, so too, Tolstoy tries to indicate in various ways that the aforementioned

repository of libertine tendencies within him is not whom Tolstoy believes himself to be.

Moreover, although some people seem to come away with the impression that, more than anything else -- and just as is the case with Anna's husband -- Sofya/Sonya represents an existential obstacle that seeks to prevent her husband (or, in the case of Anna's husband, prevents his wife) from flying spiritually (or romantically), the facts of the matter -- in both real life and in the fictional world of *Anna Karenina* -- is that, perhaps, both Anna's husband and Sofya/Sonya do not receive proper acknowledgment for the constructive roles they have tried to play in their partner's lives. Thus, like Anna's husband, Sofya/Sonya -- despite whatever shortcomings she might have -- has attempted to be a constant source of support for her spouse and tried to help him in whatever way she could ... indeed, in ways that Tolstoy had no right to expect given his view that the primary task of women was to: Become pregnant, give birth, and, then, nurture children. Moreover, like Anna's husband, Sofya/Sonya has been willing to forgive her spouse for his transgressions and insensitivities toward her ... such as in relation to matters of birth control, having more children, or doing whatever he feels like doing irrespective of how what he does might impact his spouse or children.

Like Anna, Tolstoy has pronounced tendencies toward being self-absorbed. Moreover, like Anna's husband, Sofya/Sonya -- despite whatever her (his) faults might be -- seems to be a lot more considerate and loving toward their respective spouses than Tolstoy -- or Anna -- seems to be toward his -- or her -- partner.

As noted earlier in this chapter, just as Tolstoy likes to interject aspects of his own life into the fabric of the stories that he writes, so too, many of the qualities of the characters that he explores in those stories are borrowed from people whom he has met or with whom he is familiar ... including himself. In *Anna Karenina*, there is a great deal

of Tolstoy's inner phenomenology that has been given expression through the eponymous character of that novel, and this is a point to which I will return toward the last part of this chapter.

After Anna's husband has asked Vronsky to leave, Vronsky enters into a strange state while standing on the steps leading to the Karenin residence. Not quite certain where he is or where he is going, he becomes immersed in feelings of guilt, humiliation, disgrace, and shame concerning the manner in which he has been conducting himself not only in relation to Anna but, as well, with respect to her husband.

Up to now, Vronsky has dismissed Anna's husband as a pathetic creature whose only quality of note seems to involve the tendency of Anna's husband to ineffectually serve as an obstacle who tries to meddle with Vronsky's wish to realize his own desires concerning Anna. Nonetheless, while standing in front of the Karenin residence, Vronsky has come to realize that he - Vronsky - is the pathetic fool.

Anna's husband has proven himself to be a decent, kind, considerate, sincere, courageous, and compassionate, individual. Vronsky, unfortunately, has proven himself to be a petty, base, false, covetous, and disgraceful individual.

Adding to Vronsky's misery is his realization that over the last three days he feels that he has come to clearly grasp the nature of Anna's soul and - perhaps for the first time -- he has come to love her. Yet, in her presence he has conducted himself poorly and, having failed to love her as she ought to be love, he has disgraced himself.

Whether Vronsky actually has gained accurate insight into the soul of Anna is uncertain and, perhaps, in light of what will eventually take place toward the end of the novel, rather unlikely. Similarly, although his perspective concerning Anna might have changed somewhat, one also is uncertain about whether, or not, Vronsky loves Anna any more now than previously had been the case because

Vronsky's idea of love – to the extent that he has any understanding of it at all – has been more like a series of exercises in guerilla warfare in which he pursues, ambushes, inflicts damage, and, then, disappears into the night.

Vronsky tries to sleep but cannot. As he drifts close to sleep, he awakes with a start.

He recalls the way in which Anna had looked with a loving gaze not at him but at her husband. In addition, the lingering image that he has of himself – the one he believes has become burned in Anna's memory -- is one of humiliation when Anna's husband – at Anna's direction – pulled Vronsky's hands from the latter's face.

He desires reconciliation with Anna. However, given present circumstances, Vronsky cannot envision any path that will lead to such a possibility.

Again, Vronsky tries to sleep. Yet, sleep is elusive as Vronsky is haunted by whispers that seem to suggest that Vronsky has failed to properly appreciate his relationship with Anna.

Entangled in an emotional condition that is steeped in a deep sense of humiliation, convinced that he has lost his one chance at happiness, and moved by the thought that he faces a future without meaning, Vronsky picks up a revolver that is lying on a nearby table. Pointing the gun toward himself, he pulls the trigger.

Although he is wounded and losing blood, Vronsky has managed – intentionally or otherwise -- to avoid doing any lethal damage to his body. Nonetheless, his psyche is left to sort out the ramifications that ensue from a – possibly -- failed attempt at suicide.

Vronsky has attempted suicide, and, in the near future, Anna will succeed at suicide. The issue of suicide has not found its way into the pages of *Anna Karenina* through happenstance.

The foregoing acts of desperation that are given expression through the characters of Vronsky and Anna are manifesting real life currents that are coursing through the being of the one – namely, Tolstoy -- who has fictionalized their reality. Tolstoy seems to be attempting to use his creative imagination as a coping mechanism for trying to deal with the suicidal ideation that is present within him.

In the aftermath of the difficulties that beset Anna during her last stage of her pregnancy and in conjunction with the subsequent birth of her baby girl, Alexey Alexandrovitch has undergone a number of changes. For example, he genuinely feels badly for Vronsky when he hears about the latter's suicide attempt.

In addition, he blames himself for the lack of attention that he had been paying toward his son, Seryozha. He also has begun feeling more positively disposed toward the boy.

Perhaps most remarkably is the tenderness that he is experiencing in relation to the newly born infant who is not even his flesh and blood. Anna's husband has helped look after the girl while Anna has been ill, and, in the process, he has begun to regard her with affection.

Despite the presence of a deep sense of peace and contentment concerning life in which he was ensconced, there were a number of countervailing forces that were seeking to erode the foregoing emotional and spiritual orientation of Anna's husband. More specifically, he began to become aware that not only did other people seem to be expecting him to act differently than he was doing, but, as well, there seemed to be a growing sense within him that his relationship with his wife was not stable or healthy.

For whatever reason, and rather inexplicably, Anna has been behaving as if she is afraid of her husband. Furthermore, she appears to be unhappy with things as they are and seems to be expecting her husband to act in some fashion that he cannot quite fathom.

At some point, the baby becomes ill for a short period of time. During this interim, Anna appears to have little, or no, interest in tending to the baby.

Alexey Alexandrovitch then overhears part of a conversation between Anna and her friend, Betsy, concerning Vronsky. The issue appears to be whether, or not, Anna should be willing to receive Vronsky in order to say goodbye to him before he leaves for Tashkend.

Betsy is about to depart from the Karenin residence and addresses Anna's husband. She advises Anna's husband to permit Vronsky to pay a visit.

After Betsy leaves, Anna and her husband discuss the Vronsky issue. Alexey Alexandrovitch begins by saying that in light of the fact that Vronsky is going away, there seems to be no need to receive Vronsky before he leaves.

Anna is irritated with her husband's words. She blurts out, rather sarcastically, that, of course, there is no need to receive someone who is going away and who loves the woman to whom he wishes to say goodbye, and who had been willing to die for her sake, and who is someone without whom that woman cannot live.

Anna's husband suddenly realizes that the world and his wife are not willing to let him continue on as he wishes to proceed. While his preference is that Anna should not see Vronsky anymore, he actually is prepared, if necessary, to permit that relationship to be renewed as long as the children will not be disgraced and as long as Anna's husband will be able to maintain contact with the children.

He felt that the foregoing sort of arrangement would be better for all concerned. On the other hand, he felt that a divorce would be disastrous for her, him, and the children.

Unfortunately, an array of forces appears to have some other solution in mind. Collectively, those forces are actively aligned against his desire to follow what he considers to be a more humane course of action.

Irrespective of whether, or not, Alexey Alexandrovitch's belief is true that divorce would have entailed excessively problematic consequences for everyone involved in his family dynamic, his plan does not appear to be rooted in a desire to hurt anyone but, instead, seems to be based on a desire to find a construction way to resolve a set of problems that was not of his own making.

Yet, Anna hates her husband for precisely this reason. She doesn't hate him because he is cruel, abusive, mean, or inconsiderate, but, rather, she hates her husband because her husband's magnanimity is, somehow, making her so unhappy that the very sight of him makes her physically uncomfortable, and, as a result, she cannot abide living with him.

Once again, Anna is unwilling to accept responsibility for what is taking place within her. Her husband's magnanimity is not causing Anna to be unhappy, and his magnanimity is not causing her to feel uncomfortable.

She is doing this to herself. She has chosen to respond to her husband in the way that she has.

Anna begins to feel that, perhaps, the only way out of her dilemma is death. Yet, if she is dissatisfied with the plan through which her husband wishes to deal with the family dynamic, then, she should either try to persuade her husband that divorce is not necessarily the disaster that he supposes it might be, or she should come up with some other alternative way for constructively dealing with their situation, but, unfortunately, she would rather spend her time stewing in hatred of her husband and blaming him for all her problems.

At this point, Anna's brother, Stiva, intervenes. He suggests that he should go to Anna's husband and talk to him about the idea of divorce.

Before Stiva can say much to Alexey Alexandrovitch about the issue of divorce, Anna's husband hands Anna's brother a note that is intended for Anna. In effect, the note

is asking Anna to let him -- her husband -- know what sort of solution to their predicament will give her peace and happiness and he is prepared to abide by her decision.

Anna's brother suggests that divorce might be the best way forward. Anna's husband already has given considerable thought to such a possibility and is disinclined to move in that direction.

Alexey Alexandrovitch's reasons for feeling as he does are not necessarily self-serving. Instead, he has tried to take into consideration what might be best for his wife and their son.

For example, to begin with, Alexey Alexandrovitch has too much respect for religion to become involved in some scheme in which they would take upon themselves a false charge of adultery just so that a divorce could take place. Furthermore, given that he already has forgiven his wife for what occurred, he did not wish to expose her to public ridicule.

In addition, under existing laws, Anna would not be able to marry again until the husband she is divorcing -- i.e., Alexey Alexandrovitch -- died. This would mean that in the interim period Anna would be forced into an illegitimate arrangement ... both with respect to herself as well as in relation to her two children -- Seryozha and the newly born girl -- and Anna's husband did not wish to inflict such a fate upon his wife or the children.

Moreover, divorce would deprive his wife of the opportunity to change the course of her life and move away from the temptations to which Vronsky had been inviting her. Furthermore, because he felt that in a few years, Vronsky very likely, would be going to cast Anna aside, then, divorcing her would merely be greasing the skids of her ruination, and since he is still concerned about his wife's welfare, he has no wish to see his wife become a ruined woman.

At one point or another, Alexey Alexandrovitch also has entertained the possibility of retaining custody of Seryozha. However, Anna's husband knows that this would just be a way of trying to exact some sort of revenge on his wife, and he no longer wishes to do that.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, Alexey Alexandrovitch finally gives in to the persistence of Anna's brother concerning the issue of divorce and indicates that he would be willing to take on to himself the disgrace of adultery. He is even willing to relent in relation to the issue of custody concerning Seryozha.

Meanwhile, Vronsky is making preparations to leave for a posting in Tashkend that has been arranged for him by his friend, Serpuhovskoy. While engaged in his preparations, Vronsky receives a note from Anna indicating that she is not willing to receive him before he departs.

He accepts her decision and feels that it will make things easier for him. Vronsky believes that the act of nearly taking his own life has, somehow, served to cancel his sins in conjunction with Anna's husband, and, therefore, his leaving will serve as an indication that he is renouncing her and will not come between Anna and her husband again.

A short while later, Vronsky receives a second note from Anna indicating that she can, after all, receive Vronsky because according to her brother, Alexey Alexandrovitch is willing to go through with a divorce. Whereas previously Vronsky had intended to leave Petersburg, but was doing so with a heavy heart because he felt that he had missed his chance at happiness with Anna, now, Vronsky rushes to the Karenin residence, enters the house without permission, and proceeds directly to Anna's room, where he hugs her and showers her with kisses.

Anna accepts his behavior. She acknowledges that she is his and will be so forever, but she also indicates to him

that there is a dimension of what is happening that is worrisome.

She goes on to indicate that she cannot accept her husband's generosity. Nothing matters to her except her uncertainty as to what her husband will do in the matter of their son.

She says that it would have been better if she had died. She simultaneously cries and tries to make Vronsky feel better by also smiling.

Subsequently, in order to be with Anna, Vronsky decides to commit career suicide by turning down the posting in Tashkend that had been arranged for him. As a result, he retires from the military, and, then, he and Anna journey to Italy while leaving Seryozha behind and dispensing with the idea of seeking a divorce.

One of the reasons for going to Italy is because Vronsky had been concerned with Anna's health. He thinks that spending time in Italy will help her to recover.

Anna's health does return. Furthermore, during the first months of their journey, Anna is quite happy.

One of the things that helps make her happy is the fact that, apparently, her husband is unhappy. However, given all her husband has tried to do to accommodate Anna's desires, her attitude toward him is fairly mean-spirited and, consequently, tends to reveal more about Anna than it does her husband.

Although Anna believes she has been engaged in wrong-doing, and, as a result, she has lost both her good name as well as her son, nonetheless, she is prepared to accept the suffering that, normally, one would anticipate might accompany such losses because she believes that she deserves to be unhappy for the things she has done. Yet, notwithstanding the foregoing sorts of beliefs, Anna is extremely happy.

She is not even perturbed that the son she claims to love is not with her. Instead, her thoughts are often

occupied and shaped by the affection she feels for the infant that Vronsky and she have brought into the world, and, therefore, she rarely thinks of her son.

The fact that Anna is so easily able to push Seryozha from her thoughts suggests that whatever claims of love she might have made with respect to him are suspect. One does not forget those that one loves.

Anna feels her love for Vronsky is growing as she comes to know him better. But her feelings for Vronsky are often couched in terms of a sense of being in complete control of his attentions.

Consequently, one can't help but wonder what might happen if she should feel that his attention were starting to be directed elsewhere. Indeed, if her feelings concerning Vronsky are rooted in a sense of ownership toward him, one can't help but wonder whether what she feels is actually about love at all.

When one loves someone, one tries to find ways -- according to one's capacity and circumstances -- through which one can be of service to, or in support of, such an individual. One does not think in terms of ownership or control as Anna seems to have been doing with respect to Vronsky.

Anna adores everything about Vronsky. Yet, she fears that Vronsky will suddenly come to realize her own insignificance relative to his luminous qualities and, as a result, she will lose his love.

In other words, an understanding seems to elude her that love is not a rational operation for which reasons are required. Furthermore, she fails to understand that love is a gift of grace and -- like all such gifts -- it frequently arrives undeserved and, inexplicably.

Anna often feels overwhelmed with the solicitude that Vronsky shows toward her. Its intensity weighs on her, and, perhaps, one possible reason for her feeling as she does is because the dynamic of solicitude that exists within

their relationship is not reciprocal and, consequently, she fears that she could be the reason why such solicitude might cease to be forthcoming at some point in the future.

Vronsky remembers that once, when he sought to entertain himself as he used to do during his bachelor days, Anna became depressed. Vronsky feels that the extent of her emotional response is disproportionate to the nature of what actually happened – namely, he had gone out to supper with a few of his friends who happened to be bachelors.

Due to incidents like the foregoing as well as other considerations, Vronsky is becoming restless and bored in conjunction with the dynamics of his life with Anna. Although, initially, he feels free and in love as Anna and he had venture into the unknown while journeying through Italy, more and more, he is feeling dissatisfied with, and unhappy about, various aspects of their relationship.

Vronsky has begun to realize that he has desires beyond Anna. Originally, he thought that Anna was all he needed, but he has begun to understand that, at best, she is capable of filling only one part of his life.

As a result, Vronsky -- who has some talent and studied art previously -- starts to paint and, as well, assumes, to a degree, the life of an artist. One of the paintings Vronsky is working on involves using, as a model, the nurse who is looking after their daughter, Annie.

Anna is jealous. Vronsky seems to detect the presence of that jealousy.

In time, Vronsky abandons his life as an artist. Whatever artistic sensibilities he possesses seem to persuade him that continuing to paint would be inconsistent with those sorts of sensibilities.

Boredom – like nature -- abhors a vacuum. As a result, when activities involving painting begin to disappear from their lives, Vronsky and Anna decide to fill up their

windfall of unused hours by moving to the Russian countryside.

From the time that Anna left her husband in order to go with Vronsky to Italy, Alexey Alexandrovitch had been struggling to give the impression to others that everything is as it should be. Eventually, his resolve begins to crumble, and, as a result, more and more he becomes swept up in the ocean of grief that exists within him.

He had been happy with Anna and their son. Now, he is miserable and alone.

For much of his life, Alexey Alexandrovitch led a fairly isolated existence. He did not remember his father, and he lost his mother when he was ten years old, and, consequently, he has grown up as an orphan

He did have two brothers. Although Alexey had been close with one of them, that brother worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, consequently, often was absent while serving in one distant posting after another.

The aforementioned brother had died almost a decade ago. He passed away in some foreign land shortly after Alexey Alexandrovitch had become married.

Alexey Alexandrovitch had done well in both high school and university. Shortly after graduating from university, his uncle had helped him obtain a government posting, and from that time onward, he had become largely consumed with the life of a politician.

As a result, even though he had been able to forge many acquaintances as a result of his government service. Nevertheless, for the most part, he never really had the time to make friends.

Nonetheless, there had been one friend with whom he did become friends while attending university. However, the fellow was working in a distant part of Russia, and, therefore, Alexey Alexandrovitch was pretty much alone in the world, with no one to talk to about what he was feeling.

When he was governor of a province, Anna's aunt – who was a wealthy resident of that province, had manipulated Alexey into marrying her niece who was twenty years, or so, his junior. More specifically, the aunt had induced an acquaintance to spread a rumor that Alexey already had compromised the girl in question and, as a result, he was duty-bound to marry her.

Despite the circumstances that led to the marriage, Alexey had been devoted to Anna. Indeed, notwithstanding the fact that Alexey didn't really have many friends, Anna had come to satisfy all of his needs for friendship and intimacy, and, now, she was gone, returning him to his previous condition of isolation and loneliness.

If Anna initially had just confessed her love for Vronsky and announced that she was leaving, Anna's husband would have been unhappy. However, what he found to be particularly vexing was the following: Namely, despite being willing to forgive Anna and even though he had cared for her when she was ill and permitted Vronsky to be close to her during that illness, and despite having developed affection for a child to whom his wife had given birth due to her relationship with another man, nonetheless, he had become the person who was alone and for whom everyone seemed to harbor resentment.

Apparently, no good deed goes unpunished. To add insult to injury, Anna is quite happy that her husband is suffering despite – with the exception of a few missteps here or there (such as distancing himself from his son for a time) – the fact that Anna's husband has not really done anything to warrant such animosity.

Of course, deep down, Anna's feelings of hatred are not really about her husband. Rather, they are a reflection of her feelings about herself but since Anna has a hard time accepting responsibility for anything she has done, focusing her venom on her husband makes it easier for her to live with herself ... although that condition of emotional projection tends to be rather tenuous and unstable,

thereby rendering Anna vulnerable to the riptide currents coursing through the dark abyss of human folly that resides in Anna's heart.

When Anna and Vronsky return to Petersburg, Anna uses a courier to contact Countess Lidia Ivanovna because Anna has come to understand that – at least nominally – the Countess has taken over the management of various household responsibilities for Alexey Alexandrovitch. Anna wants to make arrangements to meet with Seryozha before she moves to the countryside with Vronsky.

The Countess instructs the courier to indicate that there is to be no reply to Anna's message. The Countess, then, writes to Alexey Alexandrovitch to indicate to him that there is something that is both urgent and difficult that must be discussed.

When Anna's husband hears that Anna is in town and that she wishes to see her son, Alexey does not wish to oppose Anna's desire to see her son. However, the Countess begins working on trying to persuade Anna's husband to change his mind on the matter.

The Countess seeks to raise doubts in Alexey Alexandrovitch's mind concerning the sincerity of Anna's claim that she loves her son. The Countess also asks Anna's husband to reflect on the possibility that, perhaps, allowing Seryozha to have contact with his mother might not be fair to the boy who has become used to his mother's absence and, consequently, such a meeting should be opposed.

In fact, for a time, Seryozha did not think of his mother as just being absent. The Countess had told the boy that his mother was dead and had gotten Anna's husband to confirm what was not actually true ... something, obviously, that he should not have done.

Later on, and quite by chance, Seryozha learns that his mother is not dead. The Countess and the boy's father scramble to reframe their previous narrative by saying

that, in effect, the mother is dead because she is living an evil life.

In any event, toward the end of her conversation with Alexey Alexandrovitch about the possibility of letting Anna get together with her son, the Countess indicates to Anna's husband that she is willing to write a note indicating that Alexey Alexandrovitch is opposed to Anna's proposed visit. He agrees to her proposal.

Anna is deeply hurt by the rejection. As a result, the message brings about a result that the Countess unconsciously -- but, maybe, not so unconsciously -- had hoped to effect.

Once Seryozha learns that his mother is not actually dead, he often looks for her wherever he might go. Although his mother had been described as evil, the boy loves his mother and views her through that lens rather than through the one that has been crafted for him by the Countess and his father.

Somewhat like Seryozha, Vronsky also is someone who looks at Anna through a different lens than others do ... or, at least, he tries to do so. In his heart of hearts, Vronsky knows that in the eyes of society, Anna is an outcast, but, nonetheless, he wants to believe that people might still be willing to look at Anna as his wife even though a divorce has not been obtained.

Vronsky knows that his hope for Anna to be accepted by society as his wife and treated accordingly is never going to be realized. He also is aware that as far as society is concerned (and rather inconsistently, if not hypocritically) he, himself -- despite his part in helping to bring about the present state of affairs -- does not share in Anna's pariah status.

As Vronsky seeks to struggle against those who are opposed to the possibility of Anna's social rehabilitation, he notices a theme that has emerged in Anna's conduct concerning him. More specifically, although, at times, she

seems to act as if she loves him, he notices that there also are times when he feels like she is radiating a deep coldness toward him that seems to be rooted in some sort of secret that she is withholding from him.

Although for a time in Italy Anna induced herself to not think about Seryozha by using thoughts of her daughter, Annie, as a substitute for her son, nevertheless, she begins to think about her boy more and more. She wants to see him and believes that her return to Petersburg might provide the perfect opportunity for such a meeting to be arranged and, therefore, as she approaches Petersburg, her anticipation begins to soar.

Her excitement about seeing Seryozha is not necessarily because she loves him. One should keep in mind that a certain divide has begun to open between Vronsky and Anna, and, as a result, Anna may feel the need to find another source of attention to replace what she believes she might be losing from Vronsky.

After receiving a message of “no answer” in response to her initial overture to Countess Lidia Ivanovna that proposed arranging a meeting with Seryozha, Anna is devastated. Unfortunately, Anna doesn’t believe she can tell Vronsky what is happening because she feels that he is part of the problem.

In other words, Vronsky tends to exhibit a certain amount of coldness concerning her son because Vronsky always seems to consider the boy as little more than an impediment to the realization of Vronsky’s desires for Anna. Consequently, Anna does not feel that Vronsky will be able to appreciate how deeply Anna has suffered in conjunction with her absent son, and, in fact, Anna feels that if that topic were to become an object of discussion, Vronsky’s likely expression of coldness toward the boy would induce her to hate Vronsky, and she does not wish to risk such a possibility.

Whatever truth is present in Anna’s assessment of Vronsky’s attitudes toward her son – and, Anna is not

wrong about Vronsky in this regard – nonetheless, once again, Anna tends to resist clearly seeing the nature of her own role in the dynamic involving herself, Vronsky, and her son. Yes, Vronsky does consider Seryozha to be an obstacle to the realization of his desire and, therefore, wishes to marginalize the boy whenever his name comes up, but Anna is the one who has permitted such marginalization to occur again and again in order for her to be able to realize her own desires concerning Vronsky.

She might wish to avoid broaching the topic of her son with Vronsky because she is afraid that this will lead to her hating him. However, she also might wish to dodge the topic of her son because doing so would give her reason to hate herself since, quite consistently, she has chosen to be with Vronsky rather than with her own son.

For example, as indicated previously, prior to Anna and Vronsky leaving for Italy, Anna's husband magnanimously had offered to give up custody of his son in order to accommodate Anna's wishes. Yet, Anna – conceivably due to Vronsky's influence -- had left Russia without her son and, for a time, forgot about the boy while traveling through Italy.

Anna is desperate to blame anyone but herself for her sense of unhappiness. Nevertheless, the existential buck of choice starts and stops at Anna's desk.

When Anna receives the second note that Countess Lidia Ivanovna sends – the one that rejects Anna's proposal about arranging a meeting with Seryozha -- Anna becomes determined to ignore what is being communicated to her. Consequently, she decides that she will simply go to the Karenin residence tomorrow, on Seryozha's birthday, and do whatever is necessary to see her son.

As Anna is ushered into the Karenin residence the next morning, she hears sounds of her son awakening, and without waiting for permission, she rushes up the stairs toward his room. While separated from her son, the

images that have been echoing in the corridors of Anna's memory depict Seryozha as she remembers him when he was four years old and when Anna found him to be most lovable.

Yet, when she sees her son now, he is not four years old. In addition, he has grown since she last saw him.

The boy embraces his mother. He tells her that he knew she would appear on his birthday as he had hoped, and, then, falls back asleep.

Upon waking again a minute, or so, later, the boy finds his mother crying. He asks her why she is crying.

She says they are tears of joy. However, they might also be tears of regret salted with the realization that – the present reunion notwithstanding -- she has done something she said she would never do – namely, abandon her son – in order to satisfy her own desires.

As the time for Anna's unannounced visit is coming to an end, she doesn't want to say goodbye. Instead, she asks the boy: "You won't forget me?" – wondering, perhaps, if Seryozha might do to her what she has done to him.

The boy comes close to her and whisperingly implores her to stay a while longer. Alluding to his father, the boy informs her that there is still time left before "he" will appear.

When Anna looks at her son, there is a frightened look on his face. The boy seems to be uncertain about how to view his father.

Anna tells the boy to love his father ... that her husband is better than she is and that she has wronged him. However, as Alexey Alexandrovitch enters the room, sees her, stops abruptly, and bows his head, Anna glances at him with a sense of hatred, repulsion, and jealousy for looking after the son that Anna had turned her back on not once, but many times.

When Anna returns to her hotel room, she reflects on her situation. She feels that, once again, she is alone and,

her sense of aloneness suggests that the primary issue for her might not be so much a matter of her love for her son but, instead, may be more a matter of her own existential stance in the world and whether, or not, she has the loving support she feels she needs to continue on with things.

Her actions have demonstrated that she does not necessarily care whether, or not, Seryozha has to be in the world alone. What concerns her seems to be a function of whether, or not, she will have to be in the world alone.

The nurse brings in Anna's daughter. Anna realizes that even though she is charmed by the infant, nonetheless, Anna does not – and cannot -- feel about that baby with anything approaching the sense of emotion that Anna feels toward Seryozha.

Anna sees her son as coming from an unloved father, and, as a result, she believes she had to turn away from her husband, and, instead, invest her hopes for love in her child. However, Anna might be framing the situation to suit her sensibilities because to refer to her husband as an “unloved father” may only mean that Anna is dissatisfied with what is coming to her via her husband and, therefore, feels she needs to look elsewhere for that which might provide her with what she feels she needs and, as a result, looks to her son to provide her with an appropriate level of an emotional return on investment.

In addition, after further reflection, Anna realizes that another difference between Seryozha and her daughter is that Annie was born, and is being raised, in circumstances that effectively have precluded her daughter from receiving even a small fraction of the attention that had been invested in Seryozha. Yet, by trying to blame the lack of care given to Annie on circumstances, Anna apparently fails to appreciate that the primary reason for why the circumstances are what they are is because Anna is the way she is.

While looking at photographs, she looks at one featuring Vronsky. Part of her feels positively disposed

toward Vronsky, but part of her blames him for her present unhappiness, and she wonders why he has left her to face her unhappiness alone, and, thus, once again, her perceptions are filtered through a lens that is ground from emotions that are more about her than others.

Anna sends a message to Vronsky indicating that she needs to see him right away. She is hoping to be able to explain to him everything about which she is thinking and she is hoping that, in response, he will provide her with the sort of supportive, caring, consolation which she desires.

Unfortunately, Vronsky is with Prince Yashvin and cannot come right away. However, he asks Anna if it will be okay if he brings Prince Yashvin when he does come.

If Prince Yashvin comes, Anna will not have the opportunity to explain everything to Vronsky as she hoped to do, and, therefore, Anna's desires are being thwarted. As a result, she begins to question whether Vronsky loves her and, subsequently, enters into a state of despondency and despair.

The feeling that Anna has for Vronsky – as also is true in relation to her son -- may have less to do with having love for him than it does with what she needs from him ... as well as from her son. She needs to be attended to by others in a way that satisfies her, and when she does not get what she is seeking in precisely the manner she wishes, then, she feels alone.

An argument ensues between Anna and Vronsky concerning Anna's desire to go to the theater with Princess Varvara. On the one hand, Vronsky is perturbed because Anna doesn't seem to understand – or want to – that going to the theater under present circumstances is tantamount to simultaneously announcing herself as a fallen women while thumbing her nose at society, but, on the other hand, Anna is defiant concerning, and insistent on, her right to feel that she does not have to care about what other people think or feel.

Vronsky may be correct in his assessment of the situation. However, if he were honest with himself, he also should realize that he is the one who helped enable Anna to act with such defiance toward, and disregard of, the views of other individuals when, so many months ago, he continued to pursue her in defiance of, and disregard for, the feelings of other people ... including Kitty, Anna's husband, Anna's son, and, perhaps, even Anna herself.

Anna's actions are causing Vronsky to lose respect for her. Yet, if he were truly fair about the matter, he also should be losing respect for himself for precisely the same reasons.

Although, eventually, Vronsky does show up at the theater, nonetheless, Vronsky initially announces that he will not be going to the theater. He believes that Anna is putting him in an impossible situation with respect to his family who, undoubtedly, will be in attendance.

In fact, Vronsky seems more concerned with the problematic ramifications that might accrue to him as a result of Anna's visit to the theater than he is concerned for Anna's welfare. So, like Anna, he primarily is engaged in a calculus of the self.

Following the events at the theater, Vronsky and Anna exchange complaints and recriminations against one another. Eventually, despite the sense of loathsome unease that he feels, he tries to console Anna with words of love, and Anna, receiving the fix that she needs, gradually calms down.

After Anna and Vronsky move to the country, Dolly – Kitty's sister – decides to visit Anna despite the belief of Kitty's husband – Levin – that people should have nothing to do with Anna. Dolly considers Anna a friend, has love for her, and, consequently, makes arrangements for the visit.

When they meet, Dolly feels that she sees signs on Anna's countenance that are indicative of a woman in love.

Later, Anna informs Dolly that she – Anna -- is happy in a way that seems magical.

Perhaps, because Anna and Vronsky have moved to the country and, therefore, are relatively removed from society, she is in a position to be the recipient of more attention from Vronsky than might be the case if they had not been living in a relatively rural area, and, as a result, she is happy. However, given that Anna blames Vronsky for coming between her and her son and given that, once again, Anna has abandoned her son, one wonders if Anna's confessions of happiness and/or the signs of being in love that Dolly believes she has seen in conjunction with Anna are merely expressions of Anna's on-going re-enactment of the performance that she gave at the theater following the previously mentioned argument with Vronsky when she sought to give people the impression -- despite battling with feelings of anxiety and fear beneath surface appearances -- that she is entirely happy with her circumstances irrespective of what others might think.

The possibility that Anna is operating out of a performance-driven perspective is given credence by an observation of Dolly's that occurs later during her visit with Anna. More specifically, Dolly notices that after Anna has recovered from the shock of being visited by someone – i.e., Dolly – who actually wants to spend time with and associate with her, Dolly notices that Anna begins acting in a superficial, glib manner that is intended to prevent other individuals -- such as Dolly -- from being able to know what actually is going on within Anna.

Anna also reveals the fragility of her emotional condition when she thanks Dolly for saying to her: "I always loved you, and if one loves anyone, one loves the whole person, just as they are and not as one would like them to be." As Anna hears the foregoing words, tears well in her eyes because she senses that most people – perhaps including Anna herself -- are not willing to accept her for who she is.

Yet, even after Dolly tells Anna that she – Dolly – loves Anna for whom she is, Anna seeks further reassurance. Thus, Anna indicates to Dolly that she – Anna – is glad that Dolly will see her – Anna -- for who she is, but Anna also indicates that she is waiting for Dolly to tell her – Anna – what she – Dolly – thinks of Anna.

Anna further stipulates that all she wants to do is live and to do no harm except to herself. Yet, while Anna's way of living has, in fact, done damage to her, her desire to live life in the way she does also has damaged the lives of other people including her son and her husband.

Anna needs to be loved, but she wants to be loved in a certain way. Indeed, her world tends to fall apart when she feels that she is not the recipient of the sort of love she is seeking.

Although Alexey Alexandrovitch did seem to love Anna, what he had to offer her did not comply with what Anna believed she needed and, therefore, she might have felt unloved. As a result, she became vulnerable to someone like Vronsky who Anna perceives to be someone that may be able to provide her with the sort of attention she desires.

When Vronsky attends to her in the way in which she wishes, she is happy. However, when that sort of attention seems to be absent, she feels unloved.

Anna's relationship with Vronsky is not necessarily so much about her love for him as it is about the nature of the emotion that he brings into her life. Similarly, Anna's relationship with her son is not necessarily so much about her love for him as it is about the nature of the emotion that he can bring into her life.

The sin that Anna's husband has committed is not necessarily a matter of his having failed to love her as best he was able to do. His error is that he did not love Anna in the way that she wanted to be loved, and this facet of things may have played a fundamental part in why -- quite

unreasonably -- Anna hates Alexey Alexandrovitch despite the fact that he doesn't seem to have done anything to deserve such venomous animosity.

Anna's husband also compounds the foregoing "mistake" in several ways. Not only does he fail to love Anna in the way that she wishes to be loved, but, in addition, he also has the misfortune of being perceived by Anna to be the one who is standing in the way of her being able to be loved by Vronsky and her son in the manner she desires.

Rather than examine the unreasonableness of the perceptual filters through which she engages her husband, Anna finds it easier to hate her husband. He stands -- despite the relative innocence with which he stands -- in the way of Anna being loved in the manner in which she wishes to be loved.

Although Anna -- perhaps somewhat narcissistically -- uses the name "Annie" to refer to her young daughter, the full name of the infant has, yet, to be settled upon. Technically, the child is a Karenina, but Vronsky is unhappy with this state of affairs, and when Dolly alludes to the issue, Anna evades the matter by indicating that the name issue will be something that will have to be sorted out at a later point in time.

Anna takes Dolly on a tour of the nursery. Dolly soon discovers that Anna does not seem to spend much time with her daughter for, among other things, Anna is unaware of the two teeth that, recently, have taken up residence in her daughter's mouth.

In addition, despite the fact that the nursery is filled with luxurious objects -- as is also true of the rest of the house -- Dolly believes that one of the nurses caring for Annie is not the sort of person that a mother who is concerned about her child would choose. In addition, Dolly feels that any nurse of quality would never permit herself to become entangled in a 'family' such as the one that has been created by Vronsky and Anna.

Anna indicates that she tends to feel as if she is rather superfluous when it comes to her daughter and mentions that this was not the case with her son. Dolly is surprised by Anna's words and shyly wonders why things are not the reverse of what Annie is indicating. In other words, given that Dolly does not love Alexey Alexandrovitch but, supposedly, does love Vronsky, then, one might suppose that Anna would have been inclined to become more invested in the daughter that she had with Vronsky rather than with the son she had with her husband.

The answer to Dolly's sense of puzzlement could be that Anna is viewing her daughter in a manner that is similar to the way in which Vronsky views her son – namely, as a distraction from, or obstacle to, the realization of their respective desires. In Anna's case, she wants to be on the receiving end of attention, and while Vronsky and her son represent – she hopes -- viable springs for supplying such attention, her daughter is the one who, currently, is in need of attention and, as a result, Anna does not want to have to compete with her daughter for something that Anna considers to be so essential for her own life.

Dolly does not find fault with Annie for turning away from her husband and seeking a new life with Vronsky. In fact, Dolly sometimes has fantasized about doing something of a similar nature in conjunction with her own husband – Stiva – and wonders, rather mischievously, what the look on her husband's face might be if he were to discover that his wife was doing to him what he has been doing to her on a regular basis.

Nevertheless, Dolly does not like Vronsky. Aside from his wealth, she doesn't feel he has much to offer and believes that he exudes an excess of pride.

Whether, or not, Vronsky knows how Dolly feels about him is uncertain, but, irrespective of what might be the case in that regard, Vronsky arranges to be alone with Dolly in order to speak with her about Anna. Vronsky is

concerned that Anna is refusing to look at things as they are instead of how she wishes them to be, and, among the issues that she is failing to take into proper consideration are the legalities surrounding their present daughter and, possibly, any future children they might have.

Vronsky indicates that while he loves Anna and even though he feels she is happy with things (which Dolly has begun to question), nonetheless, he has felt the need to pursue an occupation and wants to use his life to build something of value. Furthermore, he would like to be able to bequeath whatever he accomplishes to his children, and, presently, he cannot do that.

Legally, his daughter -- along with whatever other children he might have -- belongs to another man who Vronsky believes feels nothing but hatred for Vronsky's present child or his future children. Vronsky seems to be unaware -- or has forgotten -- that Alexey Alexandrovitch actually has affection for his daughter and took an active role in looking after her while Anna was sick with puerperal fever, as well as when Anna was recovering from that illness.

In any event, Vronsky wants Dolly to persuade Anna to write to Alexey Alexandrovitch and request that steps be taken to obtain a divorce as Anna's husband previously indicated he was prepared to help them do. Vronsky indicates that before he can even petition the Tsar for his relationship with Anna to be given official sanction, he needs the divorce to be finalized.

Dolly agrees to do as Vronsky has asks. However, she is uncertain how such a request will be received by Anna because Dolly has noticed that there is a dimension to Anna's behavior which suggests that part of Anna is actively trying to ignore certain aspects of reality.

For example, Dolly realizes that although Anna is willing to serve as hostess with respect to managing conversations among her guests, Anna does not appear to be interested in overseeing household operations -- a

normal responsibility for someone in her position. Meals, like many other activities in the house, are not being arranged by Anna but are being organized by Vronsky.

Dolly also has detected the presence of an on-going sense of friction between the couple that is chafing both Vronsky and Anna. The underlying problem seems to have something to do with the fact that Vronsky is becoming more interested and involved in issues of local politics, and, apparently, Anna is unhappy with this aspect of things ... presumably because Anna views the issue of attention as something of a zero-sum game in which whatever attention is directed elsewhere cannot possibly be directed toward her.

Eventually, Dolly is able to act on Vronsky's request and speaks to Anna about the issue of divorce. Dolly explains to Anna that Vronsky is worried about the legal status of their daughter and also is concerned about the legal status of any children they might have in the future, and, as a result, he wants to get married, but, in order to do that a divorce must, first, be obtained.

At this point, Anna discloses to Dolly that she does not wish to have more children. When Dolly asks Anna how she proposes to avoid having children, Anna alludes to the idea of contraception.

Anna further indicates that she can either choose to have more children or she can choose to be a companion of her husband. Anna chooses to follow the latter course of action.

She further discloses her belief that any children she might bring into the world would be burdened with the stain of their mother's past, and Anna believes this would lead to their unhappiness. If children do not exist, then, they cannot be unhappy, but if she has children, and they are unhappy, then, she would feel directly responsible for their suffering.

Even if one were to acknowledge the legitimacy of Anna's worries about the potential for suffering and unhappiness that could be experienced by any future children she might have, those concerns do not address the issue of her already existing daughter. Anna claims that she doesn't want to be responsible for the unhappiness and suffering that her future children might experience if Anna were to choose to have more children, but her perspective fails to resolve questions concerning the child she does have and who, therefore, might be able to benefit from a divorce.

Yet, Anna appears to be unwilling to do anything to help her daughter have a chance to escape the very sort of suffering and unhappiness that Anna claims she wants to prevent. There seems to be a fundamental inconsistency at the heart of Anna's way of thinking about such matters, but, unfortunately, Anna appears to be prepared to sacrifice her daughter on the altar of Anna's desire to live life in a manner that serves Anna's interests.

Dolly urges Anna to reconsider her position. Anna wonders what such an exercise would accomplish because she believes that all possible outcomes will entail her being humiliated in some fashion.

Anna elaborates. If she writes to her husband, this will place her in an unbearable position in which despite simultaneously hating her husband while realizing that she has wronged him, Anna will feel humiliated by the very fact of having to ask for his help.

Thus, among other things, Anna appears to be unwilling to critically examine the unreasonableness of her hatred for her husband in case, presumably, she might discover something unpleasant and unsettling about herself. In addition, Anna does not seem to be willing to risk the pain of humiliation in order to provide her daughter with a chance to be able to avoid the suffering that is likely to arise in conjunction with the issue of her daughter's unresolved legal status.

In short, what is of paramount importance to Anna is her ego. She cares more for that than she does for Vronsky, her son, or her daughter.

Anna continues to elaborate on her perspective. She begins by asking Dolly to imagine that Alexey Alexandrovitch is willing to help bring about a divorce, but, then, Anna introduces a new fly into the ointment of negotiations -- namely, her son.

Anna claims that her husband will never be willing to give up custody of Seryozha. However, Stiva previously informed Anna that her husband was prepared to give up custody of the boy as long as doing so would not preclude Anna's husband from being able to have access to the child from time to time.

Apparently, from Anna's point of view, Seryozha and Vronsky are mutually exclusive choices. In other words, if, on the one hand, she has Seryozha, she believes she can't have Vronsky, and if, on the other hand, she has Vronsky, she believes she can't have Seryozha.

However, one wonders why Anna insists on parsing the world in the way she is doing. Her husband already has indicated that he is willing -- or, at least, he had been willing to do so at one point in time -- to make both a divorce and custody of Seryozha possible.

Moreover, if the stumbling block involving Seryozha is Vronsky, then Vronsky should be willing to take on some of the suffering and realize that he can't have everything his way. If he really wants to move forward with marriage, then, he is going to have to make some sort of compromise when it comes to Seryozha.

If Vronsky truly cares about Anna, he should be willing to try to do what he can to accommodate Anna's desire -- whatever might be motivating it -- to include her son in their household. Furthermore, if Anna really cares about Vronsky, she will be willing to run the risk of being humiliated in order to help Vronsky get what he wants as

well as help herself realize her own desires -- namely, Vronsky and her son.

Anna's foregoing position is disturbing in several ways. On the one hand, she claims to love two people for whom she is not willing to make the sort of sacrifice (e.g., risking humiliation) that would seem to be fully compatible with the idea of love ... that is, if any kind of love actually is present. The other disturbing aspect of Anna's perspective is that her daughter Annie is not included among the names of the people she claims to love.

Anna states that Dolly does not understand how much Anna has been suffering. However, Anna's pain seems not only to be entirely unnecessary but appears to be constructed in such a way that it has created a cul-de-sac of suffering from which Anna knows there is no escape.

Anna seems intent on insisting that how she sees the world is how reality actually is. As a result, she appears to exhibit considerable resistance toward any suggestion -- from Vronsky, Dolly, or her husband -- indicating that things could be, and in fact are, other than the way she supposes them to be.

Seemingly, Anna does not wish to resolve her situation in a way that might be capable of limiting the amount of problems that arise. Instead, she appears to want to arrange things so that suffering will be unavoidable for everyone, and, therefore, she appears to want to punish the very ones that she claims to love.

Anna does not appear to love herself. If so, then, her proclamations to the contrary notwithstanding, she will find it difficult, if not impossible, to truly love anyone else, and, thereby, be able to make the sacrifices and compromises that are necessary for love to have a chance to abide.

She is actively engaged in the sabotaging of her own life. Unfortunately, in the process, she also is sabotaging the lives of all those who care for her.

Unable, or unwilling, to face the reality of what she is doing, Anna seeks to dull her pain – and her sensibilities -- through the use of morphine. Such behavior doesn't enable her to resolve problems but, instead merely helps to multiply them.

Anna seems to be inclined toward the way of the ostrich. That is, she appears to feel that by burying her sense of self-awareness in the sands of everyday contingencies, then, the problems that she does not permit herself to see while buried in such preoccupations are non-existent.

Anna is very intelligent. Unfortunately, intelligence does not come with a guarantee that protects one from living a life of delusion.

Anna spends a great deal of time by herself. She uses that time to read.

She reads both fiction and non-fiction. She explores materials that are mentioned through the newspapers, but, as well, she investigates all manner of things that are of relevance to her husband's various economic and political activities.

Vronsky discusses such matters with her and often seeks her council concerning those kinds of issues. He is always impressed with her grasp of, and memory regarding, whatever topic is being discussed.

Anna doesn't necessarily assist her husband out of love for him or for what he trying to do. Instead, she often seems to do so more out of a sense of trying to repay the debt she believes she has incurred as a result of all that Vronsky had to give up on her behalf.

Vronsky appreciates the assistance that Anna gives him. Nonetheless, he also has grown weary of the many ploys being used by Anna (e.g., trying to be of assistance to him is one of those ploys) to induce Vronsky to feel bound to her.

Vronsky feels an increasing desire to be free from such stratagems. Yet, if it were not for the unpleasantness created by Anna whenever Vronsky wishes to do something on his own, he would be perfectly content to go on living the way he is living.

He does not seem to want to stay with Anna because he loves her, and Anna does not appear to stay with him because she loves him. Rather, the bond between them appears to be drawn from an odd combination of needs, desires, a sense of indebtedness, pride, ego, uncertainty about what they might do if they were not together, and, finally, more than a soupcon of existential inertia.

Provincial elections are at hand. When Vronsky announces his intention to participate in those elections, he is expecting that a quarrel of some kind will be forthcoming, and, as a result, he steels his resolve and interacts with her while radiating an aura of hardness toward her. Much to Vronsky's surprise, Anna conducts herself in a composed, but enigmatic, manner which suggests to Vronsky that Anna is acting in such a fashion because she has some course of action in mind that she is keeping from him.

Vronsky feels uneasy with Anna's conduct. However, wishing to avoid an argument as well as desirous of wanting to assert a sense of masculine independence to which he believes he is entitled, he decides against probing what might be going on within Anna, and, consequently, departs for the forthcoming elections.

Initially, Vronsky tells Anna that he will be away for a number of days and is planning to return on a Friday. However, things go on longer than he expects, and, already it is Saturday.

Vronsky receives a note from Anna. She says that Annie is quite ill, and Anna not only wants to know why her husband has been delayed in returning home, but, she indicates as well that she is beside herself with uncertainty about how to proceed in relation to their daughter.

She indicates in the note that she entertained the possibility of traveling to the site of the provincial elections in order to track him down, but she knew that Vronsky would be unhappy with that, and, so, she remained at home. Vronsky is puzzled by the letter because if Annie is so sick, then, why would Anna consider leaving her daughter in order to travel to meet him. In addition, Vronsky is mystified by the hostile tone that appears to pervade the note.

While Vronsky is away, Anna occupies her time by reading during the day and taking morphine at night. She has begun to worry that Vronsky is becoming indifferent to her.

As she enters into a state of panic concerning the possibility of such indifference, Annie becomes ill. Anna attends to the child but because the illness is not actually serious and because Anna, by her own admission, is devoid of love for her daughter, Anna begins to think about taking a trip to see Vronsky in order to be reassured by him that he still loves her.

Instead of departing to see Vronsky, she decides to write the aforementioned note that reached him on the Saturday following the provincial elections. After sending the note, she receives word from Vronsky that his return home will be delayed, and Anna regrets having sent him her note.

When Vronsky arrives, Anna is afraid that he will be displeased with her. She also is ashamed of the manipulative manner through which she tried to induce Vronsky to return home.

In an attempt to suppress the sense of fear and shame she is feeling, Anna tries to engage Vronsky through a show of charm. Vronsky is tired of the charm and adopts the very sort of stern demeanor toward her that she feared might be forthcoming.

Vronsky indicates that he must go to Moscow. Anna indicates that she will go with him but says it in such a way that Vronsky feels like he is being threatened because she informs him that either they must be together or they must separate.

He informs her that his wish for them is that they will never be parted. However, while saying this, he looks at her in a way that Anna feels is cold and vindictive ... a look that she feels she will never forget.

The issue of divorce arises. Anna tells Vronsky that she is prepared to write to her husband in order to ask for Alexey Alexandrovitch's assistance.

Subsequently, she writes to her husband about the divorce. Shortly thereafter, Anna and Vronsky depart for Moscow, and Anna waits every day for a response from her husband.

In Moscow, Anna and Levin meet through the agency of Anna's brother Stiva. Levin finds her to be a beautiful, intelligent, cultured, graceful, witty individual who does not shy away from realizing what she considers to be the truth or reality of her situation.

Levin also senses that she is a woman who feels things deeply. In fact, he wonders if Vronsky really appreciates the qualities that Levin believes to be present in the depth of her feeling.

Previously, Levin had been inclined – from a distance - - to judge her rather harshly. Now, having spent time in her proximity, he has changed his mind concerning her.

Later, Levin tells his wife, Kitty, that he has spent time – at Stiva's and Dolly's urging – with Anna and that he has changed his opinion of her. Kitty is upset.

Levin asks her what is bothering her. She answers him by saying that Levin had been drinking and gambling and, then, he spends time with a woman who has used her charm to seduce him.

A great deal of time is needed for Levin to be able to calm his wife. During this period, Levin realizes that he has spent too much time in Moscow and, as a result, has succumbed to its lifestyle of eating, drinking, endless conversation, and degeneracy.

After Levin and Stiva leave visiting with Anna, she reflects on the fact that she has spent the whole evening seeking to induce Levin to feel love for her. Nevertheless, as soon as her guests have departed, she forgets all about Levin.

Despite the depth of feeling that Levin believes he sees in Anna, nevertheless, she appears to be fairly empty of genuine emotion. She has spent all evening practicing her art on Levin in precisely the same way that she does with everyone else ... in other words, she sought to induce him – as she has done with everyone else -- to have feelings for her.

While Anna is waiting for Vronsky to arrive after her guests have departed, she engages in a variety of recriminations that are directed toward him. When he finally appears, they become engaged in a quarrel.

Anna discloses to Vronsky that she feels like she is on a precipice that is overlooking some sort of calamity. In addition, she indicates to him that she is afraid of herself.

Although Anna believes that Vronsky loves her, she feels that another force has entered their lives. She senses that this evil force is the source of the constant tension that exists between them, and, more importantly, she feels such a divisive presence cannot be exorcised from their lives.

Anna's brother, Stiva, approaches Alexey Alexandrovitch in order to talk to him about the issue of divorce and plead on behalf of his sister. Although, at one point, Anna's husband had been prepared to grant Anna everything she wanted, he is now re-considering his position and tells Stiva that he will give his answer in a day, or so.

Before leaving, Stiva visits with Seryozha. The child has not seen his mother for a year, and, in the meantime, the young boy has been going to school, making friends, and thinking of his mother less and less.

He appears to have reconciled himself to the idea that some kind of quarrel separates his parents. He is trying to adapt to life with his father as best he can.

Despite promising Alexey Alexandrovitch that he would not do so, Stiva asks Seryozha if he remembers his mother, and the boy says that he does not. Later the boy is found in an upset condition, and without explaining what is taking place within him, he wishes everyone would leave him alone.

Eventually, due to a combination of theology, the words of a medium, the undue influence of Lidia Ivanovna, and a failure to follow through on a promise that he had made, Alexey Alexandrovitch releases his final position concerning the issue of divorce. He has decided to refuse Anna's request.

Irrespective of whether Anna's husband is right or wrong to have decided matters in the way that he does, enough mistakes have been made by everyone involved to render the issue of assigning responsibility a complex problem. However, in the light of the foregoing decision, whatever sort of resiliency might remain in Vronsky's and Anna's relationship is going to be severely tested.

Instead of returning to their country residence, Vronsky and Anna remain in Moscow. They both dislike living in that city, but they can't agree on how to proceed, and every attempt they make to resolve their sense of differences with one another merely makes matters worse.

Anna feels that Vronsky is displaying less and less love for her. She concludes that this only can mean that he has found another woman or other women upon whom to shower his affections.

Vronsky is annoyed that he has allowed himself to be placed in such a difficult position by Anna. Moreover, he does not feel that she is doing anything to alleviate the tensions that have arisen as a result of such difficulties.

Instead of taking constructive steps to resolve their problems, Vronsky and Anna engage in a game of blame. Each is only concerned with pointing out how the other is wrong.

Anna feels a mounting sense of jealousy toward Vronsky in conjunction with issues both real and imagined. She believes that if he really loved her, then, he would behave toward her in certain ways, and, since, he is not conducting himself as she would like, then, she feels his actions prove that his love for her is diminishing with each passing day.

When Vronsky is away doing whatever he is doing, Anna becomes lonely and feels silly that she is carrying on as she is and vows to make amends concerning their differences when she sees him. However, when Vronsky returns, the foregoing sorts of promises to herself all vanish and are replaced with a new round of jealousies and recriminations.

Anna accuses Vronsky of being a dishonorable and heartless individual. She feels that not only does he lack love for her, but he actually hates her.

She indicates that if there is no love, then, things between them must end. Her thoughts begin to turn to the question of how things might be terminated.

Anna recalls her pregnancy with Anna. She remembers wanting to die and feeling that her death would solve a lot of problems.

In addition, Anna considers the possibility that others might be remorseful if she were to die and, then, realize that they love her. She seems to be pleased with the prospect that others might suffer for her sake.

The foregoing sorts of thoughts are alternated with bouts of berating herself. She refers to herself as an immoral woman who has become an albatross in Vronsky's life and wishes to set him free from such difficulties.

A short while later Anna is speaking of Vronsky's mother in critical terms because Vronsky's mother wants to match him with someone other than Anna. With Vronsky's mother in mind, Anna says that: "A woman whose heart does not tell her where her son's happiness and honor lie has no heart," and, yet, those words could just as easily have been addressed to herself because she does not seem to know where the happiness and honor of her own son lies.

More and more, Anna is fixating on things that Vronsky has said that she feels have been hurtful. To those sorts of thoughts she adds others that involve what Vronsky did not say but which she is sure that he felt.

Once again, the thought of death offers itself as a solution to her problems. She believes that if she were to die, her death would cause Vronsky to realize that he loved her, after all, and with that realization, he would suffer, and this pleased Anna.

Nothing mattered to her now except to cause Vronsky pain and suffering. As she poured out her nightly doses of opium, she thought how simple everything would be if she were to simply consume the whole bottle, and, then, she fantasized about how Vronsky would suffer when he realized that she was gone.

Later, she wakes with a start. The prospect of death horrifies her, and all she wants to do is live and become reconciled with Vronsky.

Terrified, Anna goes to Vronsky's room and finds him asleep. She looks at him with tenderness and wishes to wake him, but she believes that upon waking, Vronsky will

engage her with coldness and demand that she prove that her assessment of his conduct has been correct.

Anna withdraws from Vronsky's room. When she returns to her own bedroom, she takes more opium and falls into a restless, semi-conscious state.

In the morning, Vronsky informs Anna that they will be returning to the country tomorrow. Before leaving, she replies that Vronsky will be going there alone.

When he protests that they can't continue to go on in the manner in which they are, and have been, doing, Anna again indicates that Vronsky will be going to the countryside alone, and she adds that he will be sorry for what is taking place, and, then, leaves the room.

Vronsky is frightened by the tone that is present in Anna's voice, and starts to follow after her, but stops. He feels that he has done everything that he can, and, perhaps, the only option left open to him is just to ignore her moods.

Later, Anna asks where Vronsky has gone and been told that he has gone to the stables and has left instructions that if she would like come out that the carriage would be available shortly.

She decides to write a note to Vronsky. The note states: "I was wrong. Come back home; I must explain. For God's sake come! I'm afraid."

After sending the note, Anna does not want to be alone. She goes to the nursery, but she is confused and wonders why Seryozha is not present and, instead, she finds another child.

Twenty minutes have passed, and Vronsky has not appeared. Subsequently, she is told that the message-bearer had not been able to catch Vronsky and that he has driven off.

Anna is reminded that she was supposed to visit with Dolly. A carriage is called, and Anna leaves.

When Anna arrives at Dolly's, she is informed that Dolly is with someone. When Anna inquires about the identity of the guest, Anna is informed that the person is Kitty, and immediately, Anna begins thinking to herself that Kitty is the person who Vronsky has loved, and the person whom, undoubtedly, he regrets not marrying.

Eventually, Dolly comes to greet Anna, but she does so without Kitty. Anna feels that Kitty's absence is a sign that no decent woman would be willing to meet with Anna, and Anna feels hatred toward Vronsky for having induced her to sacrifice so much for him ... as if Anna had no choice, or role, in the matter.

Eventually, at Dolly's urging, Kitty overcomes her initial reluctance to meet with Anna and goes to her and greets her.

Kitty senses that Anna is looking at her with hostility. Kitty attributes the hostility to Anna's difficult situation and feels sorry for her.

Anna asks after Kitty's husband. Anna mentions that she had seen Levin and liked him a great deal but does so in a malicious sort of manner. Anna says good-bye, and after she leaves, Dolly comments that there seems to be something strange going on with Anna.

Anna returns home. There is a note from Vronsky indicating that he cannot come before ten o'clock.

Not considering the possibility that Vronsky might not have seen her earlier note to him, she interprets his absence as a sign that is informing her about what she needs to do. Anna runs upstairs, packs a bag, and intends to go and find Vronsky in order to tell him what she thinks before leaving him forever.

For unknown reasons, Anna believes she will find Vronsky at the railroad station. She arranges for a carriage and senses that she will never be returning.

At the train station, Anna asks a porter if Count Vronsky has left any message. As she is doing this, her

coachman approaches her and presents her with a message from Vronsky.

The message indicates that he is sorry that her note did not reach him, and reiterates the information of his previous message – namely, that he will not be able to get home before ten o'clock. Anna feels that the message has confirmed everything that she has been thinking.

She does not know where she is going. As she walks along the platform of the train station, a luggage train is arriving. Anna thinks of the man who had been crushed at the train station when she arrived on her way to try to help her brother save his marriage from his infidelities, and she realizes what she must do.

Anna takes steps that place her in harm's way. As she does so, she wonders why she is doing what she is doing and becomes terrified.

She tries to remove herself from the fate that is bearing down on her, but something strikes her head, and she is unable to struggle anymore. She asks for God to forgive her for what she has done in life, and, then, the awareness that for so many years has been bearing witness to the ways of the world disappears into the unknown.

Considerable care has been taken over the last 110 pages to provide a fairly complete cataloguing of evidence in relation to the sorts of dynamics that appear to be taking place in the mind, heart, and soul of Anna Karenina. This has been done for several reasons.

First, as had been indicated during the opening pages of the present chapter, I believe the eponymous character in Tolstoy's novel reveals a great deal about the writer's own inner world prior to, during, and following – for a year or two -- the publication of *Anna Karenina*. As such, the novel appears to constitute an invaluable resource for gaining insight into who Tolstoy might have believed himself to be – at least during that juncture in his life – and, consequently, I wanted to take an extended period of time reflecting on that material and considering what it might disclose about Tolstoy at that point in his life.

Secondly, and as also has been noted during the opening pages of the current chapter, I wanted to put forth evidence indicating that any reasonable parsing of the events in *Anna Karenina* does not seem to support the idea advanced by some that the novel is either, essentially, a love story and/or a tale which describes, among other things, how a woman – i.e., Anna – struggles to live her life free of hypocrisy so that she can realize her deepest aspiration concerning love. Instead, the relationship between Anna and Vronsky appears to be more like the story of how a moment of sexual chemistry that takes place during an ill-fated meeting in a train station, then, catalytically brings about a cascade of further reactions (i.e., events) that give expression to the pathological dynamics of a fatal attraction that, in time, leads back to a train station in which that initial sexual tension dissipates amidst the chaotic mists that constitute a terminal form of existential entropy.

While the story of Levin and Kitty offers a romantic picture of a couple who, initially, seem to be star-crossed lovers but, eventually, come together and, notwithstanding

some misunderstandings here and there, go on to live a happy life, the relationship between Anna and Vronsky is neither romantic, nor, eventually, happy, but, instead, is simply star-crossed and is relatively devoid of a sense of any real love being present (although Vronsky might come closer to feeling love for Anna than is true of Anna in conjunction with either Vronsky or almost anyone else in her life). Instead, the story of Anna and Vronsky describes the unfolding of a train wreck in slow motion that is brought about by the ego-driven pathologies that tend to govern both Anna (her need for attention and to be considered desirable by others) and Vronsky (his need for conquest and control).

Although Levin and Kitty have qualities to which Tolstoy believes his readers ought to aspire, Anna Karenina is the sort of character that is likely to resonate most deeply with the lives of many people, including Tolstoy. Anna is someone who is charming, intelligent, well-read, insightful, and cultured, but she also is someone who is: Hollowed out; self-absorbed; given to jealousy; stubbornness; selfishness; desirous of being in control; trapped within her own desires; willing to hold her soul hostage to the way in which her ego parses the world; convinced that she has the right to do whatever she likes irrespective of how those actions might affect other people, and, finally, she is someone who is incapable of love – at least in her current unredeemed form of pathology ... and the previous 110 pages have provided the blow by blow evidence that Anna Karenina is almost completely devoid – if not totally empty – of anything that appears to be remotely rooted in qualities – such as humility, compassion, trust, gratitude, self-sacrifice, sincerity, nobility, patience, forgiveness, tolerance, resiliency, and caring – to which love tends to give expression.

While the details might differ, Anna's story is Tolstoy's story. Thus, despite surface appearances that are marked

by the privileges of aristocracy and other signs of worldly success, Anna's story gives expression to a series of events that mark a downward spiral into self-destructive behavior, and, similarly, despite outward signs of worldly success and the privileges of aristocracy, Tolstoy's life – up to, and for a few years following, the release of *Anna Karenina* – also gives expression to a series of events that constitute a downward spiral of self-destructive behavior since prior to, during, and following the completion of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy was engaged in a life and death struggle with suicidal ideation.

Tolstoy intends for the example of Levin and Kitty to be inspirational, and, he holds in high regard the epiphany concerning the importance of love -- both with respect to God as well as in relation to other human beings -- that Levin experiences toward the end of the novel. However, rather ironically, Tolstoy, like Anna, seems to be incapable of love – at least at the time of writing *Anna Karenina* and, perhaps, later, as well.

Tolstoy is familiar with the concept of love. He seems to be less familiar with the practice of love.

Like Anna (and the series of observations that follow focus, for the most part, on that aspect of Tolstoy's life which is being lived just prior to, during, and following the publication of *Anna Karenina*), Tolstoy considers himself to be an immoral person. Indeed, Part I of Chapter 1 itemizes a number of reasons why Tolstoy might have felt as he did.

Like Anna, Tolstoy sees love as an elusive kind of Promised Land that can never quite be reached. Moreover, like Anna, Tolstoy often seems to feel that his death might constitute a merciful end to the litany of problems that he has generated and is generating in the lives of other people.

Like Anna, Tolstoy longs for love – at least as he conceives love to be. Like Anna, he seems to be his own worst enemy when it comes to realizing his deepest desire.

Like Anna, Tolstoy is often inclined toward being self-absorbed, selfish, controlling, self-righteous, indifferent to the views of others, proud, and jealous. Like Anna, Tolstoy often appears to be confused about what he actually wants or how to go about realizing what he wants.

Finally, like Anna, there is – prior to, during, and following the release of *Anna Karenina* – a dimension of emptiness to Tolstoy’s life that he desperately would like to fill with something that might be capable of investing his life with a viable sense of value and meaning. Yet, like Anna, he seems to be uncertain how to go about realizing that for which he longs.

Tolstoy tends to write about what he knows or what he thinks he knows. Therefore, his description of the mental and emotional states of characters about whom he writes is drawn, in part, from his keen observation of other people, but those descriptions also are the result of reflections involving his own internal phenomenology.

As a result, there is, I believe, a great deal of him that shows up in the Anna Karenina character. For example: Pride; jealousy; stubbornness; a desire to control situations; self-destructiveness; a lack of concern for – or appreciation of -- how his actions affect others; being ego-driven rather than love-driven; lack of commitment to a purpose and meaning in life that is not driven by physical desire, and a considerable sense of entitlement and self-righteousness are all qualities that Tolstoy seems to share with Anna Karenina.

Given the foregoing considerations, I believe one should reflect on the heart of the Anna Karenina character and, then, filter that data through the lens that is provided by the material in Part I and Part II of Chapter 1. In many respects – and in terms of issues rather than particular details – I believe one might be willing to become open to the possibility that – whether intended or not – the art of creating the Anna Karenina character tends to imitate

aspects of Tolstoy's character, personality, and emotional orientation.

If so, then, if one understands how Anna Karenina establishes a cul-de-sac for herself across the course of the novel, then, one also might develop insight into how Tolstoy went about constructing his own kind of self-destructive cul-de-sac across the course of his life and, like Anna, ended up dealing with suicidal ideation. Levin serves as a reflection of an intellectual ideal of sorts (and this latter character does give expression to dimensions of Tolstoy – through Levin's interest in philosophy, nature, governance, economics, justice, the peasants, religion, education, history, music, art, and literature), but Anna is the character with whom Tolstoy appears to most closely identify in terms of his emotional life ... she seems to be closest to how he emotionally engages many aspects of his own life. Tolstoy is seeking to find a way out of the Anna Karenina paradigm of pathology in which his actual life is immersed to varying degrees.

Anna's way of escaping from that paradigm is through suicide. For a number of years, Tolstoy had to struggle against Anna's solution becoming his own solution of escape as well, and, fortunately, he found the resolve to move in another direction – both intellectually and emotionally -- when he constructed his Christian-oriented religious philosophy.

Part II of Chapter 1 -- which preceded the present chapter -- provides a great deal of evidence to indicate that irrespective of how much Tolstoy might have talked about love, the fact of the matter is that he often seemed to experience a great deal of difficulty when it came to actually loving his wife or – like Anna – even some of his own children. Tolstoy didn't appear to know how to bridge the gap between theory and real life when it came to the issue of love.

I believe that Tolstoy was painfully aware of the foregoing problem. Moreover, the fact that he couldn't

figure out how to make the transition in real life from Anna Karenina and Vronsky to Kitty and Levin was so deeply frustrating to him that it formed an integral facet of the struggle he experienced in conjunction with suicidal ideation.

Given the tragic manner in which his life ended – and, by this, I mean the folly of his belief that he had to leave his wife in order to be able to live a spiritual life – Tolstoy never appeared to solve the problem of transition that is being alluded to in the previous paragraph ... that is, the process of going from, on the one hand, the ego-based lifestyle of Anna Karenina and Vronsky to, on the other hand, the sort of love-based orientation of Levin and Kitty appeared to elude his grasp. Having failed to discover the secret underlying the process of realizing the mysteries of spiritual love in actual life (as opposed to fiction), Tolstoy pursued what he considered to be his second best option – namely, he went in search of a rationalized coping mechanism that might allow him to provide some of the same benefits as a love-based approach, and, consequently, he began to conduct a systematic set of meditations concerning Christianity in order to arrive at a solution with which he might be able to live.

Consequently, *Anna Karenina* is a key juncture in Tolstoy's life. The novel posed a problem (i.e., the pathology of Anna Karenina in which, to varying degrees, Tolstoy's life had become entangled), and, then, proposed a solution (Levin's epiphany .. to which Tolstoy aspired but with respect to which he also realized that seeing a possibility is not necessarily the same thing as bringing that possibility to fruition).

Since Tolstoy did not know how to realize the quality of love that was at the heart of Levin's epiphany, then, as indicated earlier, Tolstoy felt he needed to construct a rational work-around with respect to that – namely, love – which he did not know how to bring to fruition within himself. The following chapters – which give expression to

a sampling of Tolstoy's ideas that are drawn from material written, roughly, every ten years, or so -- will attempt to explore, in a critically analytic fashion, not only the nature of the framework that Tolstoy constructed which, as indicated in the following four chapters, I consider to be fairly arbitrary in both form and content -- but, as well, I will try (in the final three chapters of this book) to entertain some possibilities that might have escaped Tolstoy's consideration.

Chapter 3: Confessions

In his book: *A Confession* (published in 1884 but written 3 to 5 years earlier) , Tolstoy indicates that although he was baptized within the Orthodox Church and, in addition, was brought up in accordance with its teachings, nonetheless, by the time he was 18 years old, he indicates he no longer believed any of the Church's teachings. In fact, he can remember having doubts concerning many aspects of the Church's perspective quite early on during his youth.

For example, when he was 11, Tolstoy recalls how one Sunday he and his brothers were visited by a young student who, somehow, had been introduced to the idea that God did not exist. Tolstoy indicates that he and his brothers found the idea to be both interesting and possible.

Tolstoy doesn't specify what he or his brothers found to be interesting about the idea. Moreover, he doesn't provide any details concerning why he and his brothers considered the idea that God did not exist to be possible.

All Tolstoy seems to confirm is the following possibility. At one point in his life he believed one way, and, then, he began to believe in another way.

We know virtually nothing about the intellectual, social, or emotional dynamics that gave expression to his transition in existential orientation toward the idea of God's existence. Consequently, one is not able to develop any understanding concerning the character or quality of the thinking that induced Tolstoy to move from one conceptual framework to another.

Tolstoy does indicate that when his older brother, Dmitriy, was a student at university, the young man became quite passionately devoted to the teachings of the Orthodox Church and, in the process, began: Going to services on a regular basis, fasting, and trying to lead what his brother considered to be a spiritually moral life. His

brothers – including Tolstoy – rewarded Dmitriy’s efforts by dumping a steady rain of sarcasm upon him which, among other things, referred to the young man as “Noah” and made fun of him in other ways.

Irrespective of whether Dmitriy is considered to be right or wrong in what he believed or in how he went about living his life, one thing is clear – namely, his brothers (including Tolstoy) did not treat him in a very loving manner. In other words, their interaction with Dmitriy lacked: Compassion; empathy; tolerance; fairness; kindness; friendship, or humility.

Tolstoy goes on to note that even some of the grown-ups who knew Dmitriy also tended to mock the young man for his religious commitments. Consequently, Tolstoy indicates that one of the conclusions he drew from the behavior of those adults is that although “learning catechism is necessary”, nonetheless, one should not take those teachings very seriously.

Tolstoy doesn’t offer any reasons or rational arguments which explain how something – namely, catechism – can simultaneously be both “necessary” as well as something that should not be taken seriously. The point being made here remains relevant quite independently of whether the content of catechism gives expression to truth, falsehood, or some combination of the two.

In an attempt to provide some sort of insight into, or contextual framework for, why people such as Tolstoy might lose whatever sense of religious faith they once had, Tolstoy suggests in *A Confession* that the foregoing phenomenon has something to do with the lack of perceived relevance that religion appears to have for everyday life. In other words, he feels that people tend to be opposed to such faith (although he doesn’t specify – at least for the time being – why people are opposed to that sort of faith) and, consequently, they do not talk about it or apply it in their lives.

Tolstoy also discloses that because religious doctrines tend to be accepted on trust and, then, maintained through social pressure, he believes those sorts of ideas are vulnerable to a constant process of erosion as a result of the contraindicative impact that life experience and various kinds of knowledge have on such religious principles, and, as a result, little by little, he believes religious ideas begin to disappear from the repertoire of conceptual, emotional, and practical tools that people use to navigate their way through life.

Unfortunately, Tolstoy doesn't explain – at least at this stage of things -- how or why experience comes to be given preference to religious ideas or why that experience comes to be interpreted in a non-religious manner rather than in a religious way. Moreover, he doesn't provide an account for why a person might decide to treat a certain understanding as giving expression to knowledge rather than giving expression to a set of beliefs that might, or might not, be true.

He proceeds to provide an anecdote he heard from someone he describes as an honest and truthful person. Apparently, the incident being described, which occurred during a hunting trip, occurred when his acquaintance was 26 years old.

The foregoing individual stated that at a certain point during his adventure, the people with whom he was traveling stopped for the evening. The person who related the story to Tolstoy indicated that during the stoppage he kneeled and began praying.

When he had finished praying, his older brother who had been watching him asked a rhetorical question – namely, “So, you still do that?” Tolstoy's acquaintance, then, related how from that point on he never prayed again or went to church.

Tolstoy uses the anecdote to support his own contention that many people often already have lost their faith as a result of the onslaught of experience and

knowledge, of one kind or another, and, are not even aware that this is the case. Consequently, when something happens – such as the foregoing comments that were made by the brother of Tolstoy’s acquaintance – a person often realizes that she, he, or they don’t believe in what is being done (for example, praying) and, therefore, such activities stop.

There are other ways of parsing the foregoing anecdote being related by Tolstoy. For example, just as people might have a tendency to accept, on trust, the truth of various religious doctrines to which they have been exposed during childhood, so too, people might have a tendency to accept, on trust, the words of someone about whom they care and/or whose opinion they value and, as a result, permit themselves to be influenced to act in one way rather than another without necessarily having any good reason for changing the way in which they believe except that someone has sought to criticize or ridicule what they are doing, and, consequently, people might feel a certain kind of emotional and cognitive pressure to stop doing whatever sort of action is being criticized or ridiculed.

In addition, if a person discontinues one set of actions – say, praying – then, that individual might discontinue other kinds of actions – for instance, going to church – in order to feel there is a sense of consistency among his, her, or their beliefs. None of what happens is necessarily because an individual has given a great deal of thought to those kinds of issues but, instead, might be because many people tend to be vulnerable to social influence irrespective of whether that influence is directed at belief or unbelief.

Tolstoy, himself, once accepted, on trust, various principles of religious doctrine to which he had been exposed during development. Then, after being exposed to the idea that God did not exist and being influenced, to varying degrees, by the excitement of brothers whom he respected and trusted concerning that kind of an idea,

Tolstoy, himself, began to have doubts – not because he necessarily understood what he was doing but because he, like many of us, tend to be vulnerable to forces of social influence.

Furthermore, while still operating out of a hermeneutical framework that has been shaped, to some degree, through the influence of several of his brothers, he began ridiculing Dmitriy in relation to that brother's religious beliefs. This was not because Tolstoy necessarily understood such issues better than Dmitriy did but, rather, Tolstoy did as he did because he was operating out of a hermeneutical framework that, in part, might have been due to the social influence of several of his brothers.

While Tolstoy is disclosing certain information in *A Confession*, nevertheless, to this point there is a certain degree of epistemological shallowness to what is being said. In other words, he is describing a variety of surface events, but, so far, he has not provided any in-depth understanding of what might have been transpiring beneath, and giving shape to, those surface events.

Tolstoy notes that from the time he was 15 he had begun to read a variety of philosophical works, and goes on to stipulate that unlike what appears to be the case with many other people in which the beliefs that were inculcated during youth simply disappear over time as a result of various experiences or the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge that run contrary to those beliefs, Tolstoy maintains that as a result of his encounters with various philosophical texts, he began to make conscious choices with respect to various religious doctrines and practices such as going to church. Once again, however, Tolstoy doesn't provide an account of the conceptual dynamics that led him to decide to move in one hermeneutical direction rather than another.

Somewhat oddly -- if not inconsistently -- Tolstoy states that although he knew he believed in something, he wasn't quite sure what the nature of that something was.

He further indicated that while, on the one hand, he didn't exactly deny the possibility of God or, on the other hand, reject Christ and his teachings, nevertheless, Tolstoy wasn't really sure what any of this involved or meant, and, therefore, notwithstanding his previous claim that he knew he believed in something, one can't help but wonder whether, at this stage of his life, he actually really did believe in much of anything.

Tolstoy asserts that the one form of faith to which he was committed had to do with his desire for perfection. However, Tolstoy adds that the whole notion seemed to be rather amorphous in character because he did not know the nature of the goals to which he ought to aspire to realize his desire for perfection, and, moreover, he did not have a reliable metric through which to measure possible progress in his quest for perfection.

He goes on to inform his readers that he tried to perfect himself physically, mentally, and conceptually. Yet, without a set of reliable criteria for determining the nature of the sort of perfection that is to be sought, all Tolstoy appears to be saying is that he was constantly trying to enhance his level of competence, understanding, and performance in whatever way seemed to make sense to him ... but why any given instance of conduct in that regard might have made sense to him as a sort of improvement is unknown.

Tolstoy does indicate that a certain point during his life his desire for perfection moved away from the attempt to become better according to his own standards of what he considered to constitute an improvement as well as moved away from what might be considered to be pleasing to God. As a result, he began to define perfection in terms that were a function of his becoming richer, more famous, stronger, or more influential than other people.

He laments in *A Confession* that no matter how much he aspired to, and sought to realize, qualities of moral goodness in his life, he would encounter ridicule and contempt from other individuals, while whenever he

pursued activities of a morally questionable nature, then he would be showered with praise and encouragement. Tolstoy, indicates, that as a result of the foregoing sorts of dynamics, he began to gamble, lie, steal, kill, challenge people to duels, exploit peasants, and live a life of debauchery.

What Tolstoy does not explain in the foregoing account is why – at least at this point in his life -- he seemed to be so susceptible to the effects of, among other things, ridicule and contempt while his brother, Dmitriy, who -- as previously noted -- also had been subjected to being treated with considerable ridicule and contempt by others – including Tolstoy and Dmitriy's other brothers – but did not appear to be influenced by those attitudes in the manner that Tolstoy had been. Why did Dmitriy appear to be able to resist certain social pressures that were being directed toward him while Tolstoy -- at least for a number of decades -- did not appear to be able to do so?

Tolstoy seems to want to lay the blame for his descent into a problematic lifestyle at the feet of those people who ridiculed him when he tried to conduct himself in a moral fashion and who also sought to reward and encourage him when he made morally questionable decisions. However, in truth, Tolstoy was the one who was choosing the kinds of influences to which he was prepared to open himself.

Moreover, earlier, I noted that Tolstoy said that he, unlike a lot of other people, made conscious decisions concerning matters of belief and that a lot of those decisions were a result of reflections he made in conjunction with a variety of philosophical texts that he had read. So, one can't help but wonder why, or how, such reflections would have induced him to believe that living a debauched life, lying, killing, gambling, fighting duels, and exploiting peasants might have been the 'right' thing to do.

Although Tolstoy was a very intelligent and talented individual, nonetheless, his conduct and certain aspects of his thinking processes during much of the first half of his

life suggest that he might also have been something else. More specifically, by his own account, Tolstoy sounds as if, for many years during the first half of his life, he also was a very confused individual who was driven by forces that, quite frequently, overwhelmed his capacity to operate in a rational manner.

To be sure, Tolstoy, like all of us, tends to be a product of both nature and nurture. Nonetheless, he also possessed – as, I believe, we all do -- a capacity to choose the way in which he tries to struggle – or not – with such forces of nature and nurture in an attempt to modulate, to varying degrees, the extent to which the two aforementioned sets of forces might manifest themselves in one’s life. The capacity to choose is like the third rail of human existence, and, for many years, Tolstoy seemed to be in denial concerning the role that he played in the many forms of self-destructive behavior that were given expression in his life.

In short, for many years, Tolstoy lacked an effective set of coping strategies through which to engage problematic dimensions of his way of being. As a result, following the publication of *Anna Karenina* – but overlapping in many ways with the period during which that novel was written -- much of the second half of his life was directed toward constructing a set of coping strategies for dealing with life.

Anna Karenina helped give expression to, as well as provided a hermeneutical orientation for, the general nature of the kind of solution he was seeking. However, as indicated in the previous chapter, I believe Tolstoy felt that considerable detail needed to be added to the foregoing general solution at which he had arrived, and this sense of need shaped much of the research program that he conducted during the second half of his life.

Prior to releasing *The Cossacks*, *War and Peace*, and *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy already had become an established writer by the age of 27 whose talent was acknowledged not only by certain segments of the public but also had

found acceptance with fellow artists as well. In *A Confession*, Tolstoy describes how he adopted the aesthetic philosophy out of which many writers at that time operated, and, as a result, Tolstoy came to believe that he was one of a group of people – namely, artists -- whose primary function was to teach humankind and help it develop.

Tolstoy was not quite certain what, exactly, he was teaching, but he was told – and he accepted the explanation – that artists taught by being artists. Apparently, through an osmotic-like process, people absorbed beneficial forms of knowledge and understanding just by being exposed to artists doing artistic things

Artists, according to Tolstoy, were like the priests of a religion. He was one of those priests, and he found the vocation to be a relatively profitable one that carried a variety of other, pleasurable benefits.

However, in time, Tolstoy began to detect the presence of what he considered to be a variety of fault lines in the artistic aesthetic that had been orienting his life. For example, he noticed there was considerable disagreement among artists concerning the nature of life, and, consequently, artists appeared to be teaching contradictory things to the public.

In addition, he realized that all too many artists – including himself -- were immoral people. As a result he began to become disgusted with his role as an artist.

Nonetheless, despite suspecting that artists were perpetrating a fraud upon the public, as well as upon themselves, Tolstoy continued to be a part of the literary priesthood until his marriage in 1862. Apparently, his desire to carry on being considered an artist was due to the money, fame, influence, and other benefits that were associated with being a member in good standing of that group.

One of the themes, among others, that artists believed they were transmitting to the public had to do with the notion of “progress”. Progress seemed to have something to do with the idea of making continuous improvements in the manner in which life is engaged (and the metric one uses to measure such improvements plays a crucial role in shaping one’s understanding concerning the nature of progress), but even though he considered himself to be a member of a group – namely, artists – who, among other things, considered themselves to be agents of such change, nonetheless, when Tolstoy traveled to Paris, he witnessed a beheading execution, and the experience convinced Tolstoy that such acts could not possibly be reconciled with any viable notion of progress.

Irrespective of how one feels about Tolstoy’s perspective concerning either capital punishment and whether, or not, capital punishment can be reconciled with the notion of progress, Tolstoy’s account leaves one unsatisfied with its lack of detail. In other words, one finds oneself wishing that Tolstoy had been more forthcoming and provided the reader with some insight into how his experience in Paris helped to change his ideas about progress because, for example, some individuals believe – whether rightly or wrongly -- that the sense of shock and brutality to which capital punishment gives rise is part of the value of that practice and, therefore, having the sort of negative reaction to capital punishment that Tolstoy did is not necessarily as problematically self-explanatory as Tolstoy seems to believe is the case here.

Following another journey abroad, Tolstoy began to immerse himself in various educational projects, both by teaching peasants directly as well as through writing and publishing a magazine for more learned individuals. Furthermore, he also became quite active serving as an official arbitrator for the government in conjunction with an array of problems that arose in relation to the freeing of the serfs that occurred in 1861.

All through this period of time, Tolstoy had a sense that he really didn't know much and, therefore, he had a difficult time figuring out exactly what he was teaching, or what he should try to be teaching, to anyone. Later on during his life, Tolstoy continued to think of himself as a teacher, but he also became more focused about what he believed were the kinds of ideas and principles that he felt were worthwhile to teach – namely, his hermeneutical approach to Christianity.

The aforementioned change in focus and confidence that shaped and oriented the method and content of Tolstoy's teaching gives expression to a very important dimension of his life story, Nevertheless, notwithstanding the importance of such considerations with respect to helping to illuminate the nature of Tolstoy's beliefs and values, whether, or not, Tolstoy was able to successfully demonstrate that those sorts of changes necessarily brought him closer to the truth is a separate matter.

In other words, Tolstoy came to be supremely confident in the value of what he taught. How much of that confidence is a reflection of the truth that is inherent in his point of view and how much of Tolstoy's confidence in his ideas is a function of an error-ridden – and, therefore, a potentially delusional -- process of thinking will be of fundamental importance throughout the remainder of the present book.

Eventually, Tolstoy became emotionally and mentally exhausted as a result of the foregoing conflict that was taking place with him (which involved, on the one hand, his desire to teach and, on the other hand, his feeling that he didn't know what to teach or why), and, as a result, he gave up everything he was doing and proceeded to withdraw from civilization in order to: Reside among the Bashkir people who lived on the steppes of Russia; drink kumys (a fermented drink made from mare's milk), and pursue a life that was close to nature.

Not too long after returning from living with the Bashkirs, Tolstoy was married. For the next fifteen years, he became consumed with marriage, children, family, writing, and earning money in order to try to aspire to realize the best possible life for his family and himself.

However, a variety of questions began to haunt him. These questions concerned issues (such as the nature and purpose of life) for which he felt he had no ready answers and for which he did not feel that he had had sufficient time to devote himself over the last fifteen years due to his many activities involving, among other things, his wife, children, and writing.

The foregoing kinds of question began to arise within him more incessantly. Therefore, because he didn't have a clear sense of why he was doing the things he was doing, he encountered a variety of motivational difficulties and, as a result, he experienced considerable suffering ... including, among other things, becoming flooded with suicidal ideation.

While Tolstoy does not, at least at this point in *A Confession*, mention the sorts of life events that have been outlined in Part I of Chapter 1 – namely, *Tolstoy's Demons* – of the present book, nonetheless, one might suppose that more issues might have been weighing on his mind, heart, and soul than just questions concerning the nature and purpose of life. Among other things, he had done a lot of things in his life that had hurt various individuals -- including him – and oftentimes, mid-life (which is, roughly, where Tolstoy was at this point in his life) is when a lot of these kinds of self-evaluative issues begin to emerge in the lives of many people.

Although Tolstoy's emotional and conceptual problems began to emerge following the publication of *War and Peace*, those difficulties became somewhat more intense during the writing of *Anna Karenina*. Moreover, while the aforementioned novel offered – in the form of Levin's epiphany during the latter part that work -- a general

response to the sorts of existential questions that were bothering Tolstoy, nonetheless, I also believe Tolstoy understood that, emotionally speaking, he was closer to the Anna Karenina character even though intellectually speaking he was closer to the Levin character, and, consequently, he was faced with the problem of how to make the transition to actually living – and not just theorizing about -- the life to which Levin's epiphany gave expression, and, in the process, overcome the inertia to which the Anna Karenina-like qualities of his personality and life gave expression.

Tolstoy's book – *A Confession* – appears to be the first step in the post-*Anna Karenina* environment that he takes in an attempt to start building a bridge which he hopes will permit him to traverse the chasm that exists between the intellectual promise of Levin's epiphany (e.g., one needs to love God and love others) and the emotional pathologies that are present in the Anna character -- the sort of pathologies that are fully capable of undermining Levin's proposed way of resolving life's problems and which resonate, in so many ways, with the actual character of Tolstoy's lived life. Furthermore, one does not have to look any further than the many problems that existed between Tolstoy and his wife (which have been outlined in Part II of Chapter 1) in order to begin to appreciate the nature of the problem that Tolstoy had with respect to putting the concept of love into lived practice.

As Tolstoy indicates in *A Confession*, his inner world would become much worse before it started to become better. Therefore, despite whatever potential for solutions might exist within the pages of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy continued to experience life as being essentially meaningless, and, in addition, he felt and believed that he had nothing to which he might look forward except suffering and death.

For Tolstoy, life became a struggle between, on the one hand, an inchoate sense of hope concerning life's unknown

potential, and, on the other hand, a deep fear of the sense of annihilation that seemed to be built into the nature of life. In many ways, Tolstoy felt as if he – along with the rest of the world -- were the butt of an evil, cosmic joke that, lacking rhyme or reason, had been imposed on human beings by some mysterious set of forces.

Tolstoy indicates that as long as a person is fully occupied with just living life – and not thinking about it – then, one can manage to find a way to survive. Yet, as soon as one starts to reflect on the nature of life, one often tends to become entangled in what seem to be the overwhelmingly cruel, pointless, and stupid properties of life since one realizes that very soon – all too soon – whatever one has done will be largely, if not entirely, forgotten and, as well, one will disappear as if one had never existed at all.

In *A Confession* Tolstoy states that he came to a point in his life when he could no longer lose himself in the living of life. Increasingly, he found himself beset with questions concerning the nature and purpose of life that disturbed the somnambulistic manner through which he felt he previously had been engaging life.

As a result, Tolstoy saw no point to trying to protect, educate, nurture, or love his family. After all, presumably, that which Tolstoy believed was waiting for him was, undoubtedly, also waiting for the members of his family as well.

More will be said concerning the following topic at a later time in this book, but, for now, one might point out that Tolstoy's manner of thinking that is being described in the preceding several paragraphs raises an interesting problem. More specifically, given that Tolstoy believes what he does about – at this juncture in his life – the pointlessness of existence, what right does Tolstoy have to engage his family in accordance with such beliefs?

In other words, what a person does to, or for, himself, herself, or themselves as a function of what that individual

believes might be one thing (although not necessarily), but affecting the lives of other people as a function of what one believes seems to entail an array of ethical problems. In other words, irrespective of whether, or not, the implementation of one's belief constructively or adversely impacts the lives of others, then, seemingly, one will have difficulty avoiding questions concerning the responsibility one has for whatever consequences (be they "good" or "bad") which might ensue for others as a result of one's seeking to go about life living life in accordance with one's beliefs.

For example, all through this period of his life, Tolstoy was thinking about committing suicide. Whatever right he might suppose he had with respect to living life in accordance with such a terminal choice, what right does Tolstoy have to make a choice for, seemingly, just himself that actually carries so many potential consequences for those individuals who know him and, perhaps, even carries potential consequences for those who do not know him but who, nonetheless, might be affected in some way by such a decision?

In any event, whereas previously Tolstoy had considered art to constitute an instructive, if not aesthetically pleasing, means of reflecting on different facets of life, and, thereby, become better oriented as one tried to navigate one's way through existence, Tolstoy began to feel that the relationship between art and life was not as useful – or pleasant -- as he once considered it to be. In fact, he felt like he had become lost in both life and art and was merely blindly stumbling about from one moment to the next.

Tolstoy points out in *A Confession* that, for a time, he continued to explore both experimental and mathematical sciences to see if he could find anything that might shed light on the questions that were haunting him. However, he stipulates that even though he felt those sciences might be able to provide some sort of potential clarity on certain

issues, nonetheless, he also felt that he would not be able to find a home within its abstractions.

While one might have a sense of what Tolstoy could be saying here, there also is considerable ambiguity that is present in his position. For instance, one is not really quite sure about what the precise nature of the 'clarity' is to which he is alluding, and, in addition, one is uncertain about the what the properties of the home are which he is seeking in such an unrequited manner.

Tolstoy further indicates that however clear such sciences might be, he already knew that they could not meet his needs. Yet, one is less clear about what it is that Tolstoy claimed to know concerning the relationship between sciences and his needs or why such knowledge would be unable to satisfy him.

This is not to say that one should be inclined to disagree with the point that Tolstoy is trying to make. Rather, this is more a matter of wishing that Tolstoy had spent a bit more time giving expression to what he claimed to know and why such knowledge would not be able to satisfy his needs.

In other words, Tolstoy often provides readers of *A Confession* with various conclusions. Unfortunately, he does not always seem ready to offer the reader many details about, or any insight into, how he arrived at those conclusions, and, consequently, to the extent that he does this, his story-line seems somewhat incomplete, and, as a result, tends to interfere -- to varying degrees -- with being able to acquire a fuller understanding of his perspective.

Tolstoy does stipulate that while science seeks to be responsive to the questions that people, including Tolstoy, ask, nonetheless, he feels that whatever answers science might provide to such questions will not be substantially different from the sort of understanding that Tolstoy already had arrived at independently of science -- namely, that life is devoid of meaning and has no significance.

The belief that is outlined in the previous paragraph might, or might not, be true. Unfortunately, at this point, Tolstoy fails to provide the reader of *A Confession* with any means to evaluate the extent – if any – to which such a perspective might be correct because his discussion lacks specificity with respect to what, exactly, Tolstoy means by science and whether, or not, science necessarily leads one to conclusions such as the idea that life is meaningless.

Tolstoy proceeds to offer several examples of what he considers science to be when he mentions ideas such as: The chemical composition of stars, or the movement of constellations, or the interaction of particles. Yet, strictly speaking, the foregoing ideas are not so much instances of science as they are examples of what the process of science has generated when engaged in certain ways by certain individuals under certain circumstances.

Consequently, Tolstoy doesn't seem to understand that science is a methodology rather than a litany of alleged facts that are generated through that methodology. As such, science embodies a process of exploring experience (i.e., the source of empirical data) through the use of instrumentation both natural (e.g., senses) and synthetic (e.g., telescopes, microscopes, measuring devices) that require calibration in order to become reliable modes of engaging experience in unbiased (i.e., objective) ways so that predictions concerning the character of experience can be made, tested, and verified (or falsified) by a community of investigators who are responsible for critically analyzing the quality of the process that yielded the kinds of results that are being considered.

If Tolstoy doesn't believe that knowing how particles interact or what the chemical composition of a star is or why constellations move in the way they appear to do has little, if any, relevance to question concerning life's purpose, then, perhaps, he should try to determine whether, or not, there is any way to apply the methodology of science to the kinds of questions that Tolstoy considers

to be of significance. Tolstoy's problem might be less a matter of being dissatisfied with the relevance of the "facts" that science generates and more a matter of the kinds of questions one asks and how to adapt science so that it might be able to address those kinds of questions in a constructive and productive fashion.

According to Tolstoy, truly abstract science – which he refers to as genuine philosophy (and, as such, he believes should be distinguished from the sort of "professional philosophy" that Tolstoy maintains – without proof -- is preoccupied with nothing more than categorization and labeling) is rooted, he claims, in essential questions which lead, according to Tolstoy, as well as people that he mentions such as: Socrates, Schopenhauer, the Buddha, and Solomon, to the same sort of terminal point – namely, discovering the truth about how to free oneself from the body and all the evils to which the body gives rise, and, therefore, according to Tolstoy and, supposedly, the other individuals he mentions, death is quite consistent with the foregoing kind of project of genuine philosophy because in death one supposedly is freed from the evils that are generated through the body.

One does not feel compelled to agree with Tolstoy that the aforementioned way of proceeding is necessarily the only possible manner of engaging the essential questions of life. To begin with, irrespective of whatever evils might be associated with the inclinations of the body, the body also gives expression to the mystery of life and, as a result, offers one an opportunity to explore and discover the possibilities inherent in life's potential, or the nature of one's relationship with Being, or the character of one's nature, if any, and so on.

In addition, there seems something problematic with Tolstoy's claim that the body is the source of evil. To be sure, the body does have its desires and proclivities that are all forces of nature with which individuals must reckon, but, at the same time, there are an array of

cognitive capacities which exist along side of the inclinations of the body that appear to include the ability to decide whether, or not – and, if so, under what circumstances and to what extent and in what way -- one should cede one's agency to this or that desire.

Moreover, Tolstoy seems to suggest that death will resolve life's essential question of how to escape from the gravitational pull of the body, but such a claim is being made by someone who has never died, and, therefore, that claim is being made by someone who has no idea what – if anything – is waiting for him on the other side of the existential divide, and consequently, he is not in any position to know whether, or not, death of the body will resolve what he considers to be the essential question of life.

Finally, perhaps, death – even if one were to consider this to be a viable means of resolving life's essential questions -- is not necessarily the only way to break free of the gravitational pull of the body's desires. For example, maybe one needs to discover a method for developing the sort of character traits (e.g., patience, perseverance, courage, nobility, love, tolerance, humility, sincerity, resiliency, and so on) that might enable an individual to resist the call of the body's desires.

Conceivably, the sort of death to which some people (e.g., the Buddha or Solomon) might be alluding is not necessarily about the death of the physical body but, instead, could refer to the death of that within us which keeps ceding away its agency to the body rather than choosing those options – such as the development of character – that might help one to become the master of one's desires rather than their slave.

During *A Confession*, Tolstoy introduces a lengthy quote from Schopenhauer that concerns the idea of "will". According to Schopenhauer, will is the essence of everything, and its manifested forms range from the

unconscious forces of nature to the conscious faculties of human beings.

Schopenhauer maintains that any attempt to voluntarily renounce the will or to destroy the will would lead to the disappearance of all phenomena – such as subject and object, as well as space and time. In addition, he claims that all forms of striving would come to an end.

Tolstoy does not indicate how anyone might come to know that what Schopenhauer claims to be true is, in fact, true nor does he indicate how one would go about demonstrating the truth of Schopenhauer's claims concerning the 'will'. Therefore, those kinds of claims stand in need of proof.

In addition, one can't help but wonder if the character of 'that' to which Schopenhauer refers to as 'will' entails more than just 'will'. For example, does that which 'wills' have intelligence or other qualities such as: Compassion, patience, forbearance, fairness, a sense of humor, love, and so on that might orient 'will' in one way rather than another, and if 'it' does have those sorts of qualities, then, wouldn't this suggest that, maybe, more is going on than just willing?

Furthermore, when discussing what he believes would happen if the will were to voluntarily renounce or destroy itself, Schopenhauer appears to leave no room for the possibility that "Will" – whatever, ultimately, that turns out to be – might manifest Itself differently from level to level of existence, and, therefore, conceivably, there could be 'lower' forms of manifested Will that have the capacity to renounce or suppress certain aspects or dimensions of themselves in order to better reflect the aspirations of the 'higher' will with respect to such lower forms. In short, Schopenhauer doesn't seem to consider the possibility that some lower manifested forms of Will might not only have the capacity to renounce aspects of themselves without destroying the ultimate nature of Will that makes those lower manifested forms possible, but, as well, have the

potential to 'purify' themselves so as to better reflect the aspirations of the higher Will (and, both the processes of renouncing and purifying still would constitute instances of willing).

Tolstoy continues on with Schopenhauer by quoting further excerpts from the latter's philosophical writings. Within the material quoted is the idea that there is something within human beings that resists the transition into nothingness and that this "Wille zum Leben" or 'will to live' gives expression to our essential nature and is responsible for the form that we take as well as for the form that the world takes.

What seems to be missing from the foregoing position is any account concerning the nature of the capacity or potential that gives expression to the character of the dynamic that links 'will' and 'form'. More specifically, how do different forms (involving ourselves or the world) arise if we are nothing more than expressions of 'will'?

Some potential or capacity would appear to be necessary to orient will in different ways in different circumstances. For example, does choice play any role in the way in which will manifests itself?

While choice, itself, might give expression to the presence of will, the ideas, possibilities, analyses, judgments, and so on that shape, color, and orient those choices would seem to be a function of processes that involve more than just acts of willing. Some kind of vectored, tensored, or directed willing appears to be taking place, and one would like to know what makes those directed forms of willing possible.

To claim that everything – object, subject, the world, forms – is a function of just willing tends to obscure, rather than lend clarity to, the character of willing. When everything becomes a manifestation of some sort of willing, then, the idea of willing tends to lose any sense of meaning or specificity, and, as a result, one has no idea

what willing actually is or how it works or what its potential or possible limits are.

From Schopenhauer, Tolstoy turns to Solomon. Once again, an extended quote is given.

Within the extensive quote provided by Tolstoy, one finds the following:

“And, I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit ... For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.”

Leaving aside, for the moment, whether, or not, Solomon actually said what is being attributed to him in the foregoing quote (and Tolstoy, himself, mentions such a possibility at the end of the material he is quoting), one might ask the following question. Did God only give human beings the capacity to acquire knowledge and wisdom so that humankind would be able to discover grief or increase its sense of grief, or is it possible that God gave human beings the capacity to distinguish between what is essential – e.g., the spiritual – and what is inessential – i.e., the worldly – and that, indeed, relative to what is essential, then, true knowledge and wisdom enable one to see that “all the works that are done under the sun” are nothing but “vanity and vexation of spirit,” and, as a result, proper use of that knowledge and wisdom could be alluding to a process of choosing to spend life pursuing what is essential rather than what is inessential – which is nothing but vanity -- and, thereby have an opportunity to avoid the grief to which reference is being made in the previous quote.

Next, Tolstoy relates the story of Sakya Muni a prince who had been cocooned within a sheltered life that was devoid of any experience involving old age, sickness, or death. Eventually, the prince is brought into contact with those three phenomena and learns that all human beings, including the prince, are subject to such realities.

When the prince comes to understand that, in time, his body also will break down, or become vulnerable to the ravages of illness, or lose the light of life and, consequently, will rot, decay, and become nothing but food for worms, he is unhappy. He decides to do everything in his power to free himself, and others, from the scourge of such evils by attacking them at their roots (life) and, thereby, eradicating (through death) their possibility.

In a sense the foregoing prince seems to have trouble seeing the forest through the trees. Up until the time that he learns about sickness, old age, and death, he had been healthy and happy.

Instead of being grateful for what he had, the prince began to worry about what, someday, would be taken from him. Rather than continue to enjoy good health, youth, and life, he began to devote all his energies, time, and talents on something other than enjoying, appreciating, and being thankful for the gifts that he had been given. Instead of using his good health, youthful energy, and life to explore the full potential of existence, the young prince decided to restrict himself to finding ways to disengage himself from what will happen rather than becoming fully committed to what actually is happening or trying to discover what, if anything, might be happening beside old age, sickness, and death.

By all means, one should be aware that human beings are susceptible to old age, sickness, and death. Indeed, death, or sickness could come at any time, and, no one who continues to live will be able to avoid the ravages of old age.

Nonetheless, there may be more to life than old age, sickness, and death. Perhaps whatever life, energy, and health one has should be used not only to prepare for the sorts of contingencies with which the prince became preoccupied, but, as well, a person might want to use those resources to determine if there is more potential inherent in life than illness, old age, and death.

Influenced by his interpretation of, among others, Socrates, Schopenhauer, Solomon, and Sakya Muni, Tolstoy seems – at least at this point in his life -- to have arrived at some premature conclusions concerning issues of purpose, meaning, potential, and existence. As a result, he chooses to look at life as an exercise in diminishing returns instead of as an opportunity through which to explore the many possibilities that might be inherent in life's potential.

A little further along in *A Confession*, Tolstoy admits he might be mistaken in his belief that his understanding of life is both definitive and correct. However, he isn't quite able to identify what the nature of the problems is in his thinking might be, and, as a result, he continues to resist the possibility that he might be wrong about various issues, and, as a result, he becomes entangled in a conceptual and existential cul-de-sac of his own construction ... just as his primary female protagonist had done in *Anna Karenina*.

Eventually, Tolstoy begins to suspect that since his conclusions had been drawn from a very small sample size, then this could have skewed his understanding in problematic ways. In other words, just because the limited number of people whose writings he had read or the restricted circle of individuals with whom he interacted in his own life seemed all to have arrived at conclusions that were similar to his as far as the meaninglessness of life is concerned or as far as the idea that death constitutes the best solution to, or way of escaping from, the vanities of life is concerned, one cannot, therefore, necessarily conclude that all thinkers throughout history thought in the foregoing fashion, nor does it follow that the vast

majority of people in the world would necessarily agree with those kinds of sentiments.

Consequently, Tolstoy begins considering other possibilities. For instance, instead of restricting himself to looking for the meaning of life amongst those individuals who appeared to have lost their way while engaged in such a search and, as a result, wanted to kill themselves, he felt he should expand the sample size upon which he is reflecting to include individuals who think differently than do the sorts of people that previously comprised his sample, and such individuals should be drawn from the past as well as the present, and both from among those who were considered to be sophisticated thinkers as well as from those who came from the poor and unlearned strata of society.

Over time, Tolstoy came to believe that there was at least one major difference between, on the one hand, those who found life to be meaningless and, therefore, felt that death constituted a way of resolving such meaninglessness, and, on the other hand, those who considered life not to be meaningless and, consequently, felt that life was well worth living despite whatever problems it might entail. The difference-maker appeared to revolve about the issue of “faith”.

Unfortunately, this presented Tolstoy with a dilemma. He considered faith to be irrational, and, given that he believed himself to be a man of reason, he felt like trying to base his life on faith would be to abandon the very quality that rendered meaning possible for him.

Tolstoy, then, proceeds in *A Confession* to list some of the ideas that he considers to be expressions of faith. For example, he mentions notions such as: Devils, angels, and the idea that creation took place in 6 days.

However, irrespective of the truth or falsity of the foregoing sorts of ideas being mentioned by Tolstoy, a person does not necessarily have to accept those kinds of possibilities as a pre-condition for having faith that life

might be about more than old age, sickness, death, vanity, and the like. For example, simply by engaging the opportunities that life entails and experiencing the many forms of learning, love, joy, interest, complexity, possibilities, problems, challenges, triumphs, disappointments, artistic expressions, and friendships that emerge during the living of life, one might develop faith in the idea that life has more potential to offer than Tolstoy seems to suppose is the case.

Experience, itself, is a form of intrinsic meaningfulness that encompasses many more possibilities than just sickness, old age, death, or vanity. Experience gives expression to empirical data that one can explore, question, analyze, reflect upon, make judgments about, and test in an attempt to determine what, if any, truths it might contain beyond the ones previously noted by Tolstoy.

If one finds life interesting, then, this provides one with an array of evidence from which one might be able to draw certain kinds of reasoned conclusions that help one to deepen, if not broaden, one's sense of faith concerning the ways in which life is meaningful. If the ups and downs of life help one to learn about one's strengths and weaknesses, then, having faith in the promise and potential of life because of the constructive ways in which it enhances one's understanding of oneself would appear to be rational forms of commitment.

If solutions to problems do not immediately bubble to the surface, then, developing faith in the capacity of, say, patience to provide the contingencies of existence with the opportunities and time that are needed to bring possible answers to the surface might be a rational way of engaging some of life's difficulties. If life is characterized by both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, then, seeking to enhance one's faith with respect to identifying those coping strategies that seem to assist one to adapt to such experiences in constructive ways would appear to be a meaningful process in which to have faith and,

consequently, seeking to test the continued reliability of that sort of faith would appear to be a rational response to life.

If one finds that engaging life and other people through qualities of character such as: Humility, friendliness, honesty, forgiveness, equanimity, nobility, kindness, and generosity rather than qualities of: Arrogance, enmity, dishonesty, ignobility, revengefulness, cruelty, and selfishness tends to lead, on the whole, to much more co-operative and harmonious forms of social dynamics, then, having faith in the more positive character traits – as opposed to negative character traits – would seem to be a rational activity in which to engage. If one discovers that being willing to ask questions satisfies one's curiosity more than does refraining from asking such questions, then, developing a sense of faith in the process of asking questions would seem like a rational thing to do.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, perhaps faith is a much more complex and dynamic concept than Tolstoy seems willing to acknowledge. As the foregoing examples suggest, faith might involve more than just being a function of this or that sort of theological consideration ... indeed, faith gives expression to how one wishes to orient oneself with respect to life in general so that one might have a reliable, heuristically valuable basis for making choices concerning possibilities involving: Truth, purpose, meaning, identity, values, principles, and methodology.

In *A Confession*, Tolstoy divides human knowledge into two broad categories. One facet of that knowledge he believes is rooted in experimental and mathematical considerations, while the other branch of knowledge is based, he feels, on considerations of abstraction as well as principles of metaphysics ... what makes something – irrespective of the category to which it belongs – a species of knowledge is not indicated.

However, focusing on the aforementioned experimental side of things, Tolstoy starts from the premise that everything seems to develop in accordance with the principle that life continues to increase in complexity and perfection. However, nothing is said about the actual nature of complexity or how such complexity comes about or what criteria are to be used to demonstrate that one life form is more perfect than another.

One might suppose that life exists because it has the capacity to function effectively in a given environment or set of environments. Presumably, to the extent that a given life form is able to properly function, then, one has a way of describing life that does not require one to invoke arbitrary considerations of “perfection”.

Alternatively, one might say that if a life form is capable of effectively functioning then, in a sense, it is giving expression to some minimal sense of perfection – namely, that it works effectively (and, materially speaking, what other standard of perfection would one want) -- irrespective of whatever differences there might be in the degree of complexity that is entailed by such functionality. Consequently, as far as biology is concerned, functionality seems to be a more useful concept than either the idea of “complexity” or “perfection”.

Nevertheless, for a time, Tolstoy continued to try to assess his situation by trying to figure out where his developmental status stood in the evolutionary scheme of things. Indeed, as long as he felt he was developing in some sense, then, he believed that, to one degree or another, such development was giving expression -- in some unknown manner -- to the underlying principle of evolution.

However, without a reliable metric to measure what is actually meant by either ‘complexity’ or ‘perfection’, the whole notion of development was rather amorphous in character. Furthermore, Tolstoy indicates in *A Confession*

that he had reached a point in his life when he felt that all sense of development appeared to have come to a standstill, and, as a result, he began to suspect that, in reality, there might not be any law of evolutionary development and, instead, he had merely come to believe that whatever was happening within him was a manifestation of such a law despite the absence of the sort of clear-cut evidence that was needed to demonstrate the truth of that possibility.

Tolstoy goes on to note – at least to a degree -- how he came to believe that there could be no law of endless development of the kind that seemed to be inherent in what many considered to be the law of evolution. However, the reason cited by Tolstoy to support his contention that there could be no law of endless development is that “in the infinite there is neither complex nor simple, neither forward nor backward, nor better nor worse,” and, consequently, irrespective of whether Tolstoy is right or wrong with respect to his belief that there can be no law of endless development, one has no way of testing his idea that in the infinite “there is neither complex nor simple, neither forward nor backward, nor better nor worse”, and, in fact, one has no non-arbitrary reason for qualitatively or quantitatively defining the infinite in one way rather than another.

Either the infinite is real -- and, if so, has whatever character it has by virtue of its ontological nature and, as such, definitions must reflect that character – or, the infinite is not real -- and, if so, all definitions of the infinite are entirely arbitrary. The ideas of Cantor and others notwithstanding (which, with all due respect, is more about indefinitely large sets rather than, necessarily, infinity per se), one has difficulty comprehending how anyone – including Tolstoy -- proposes to use reason to grasp the nature of the infinite in a non-arbitrary manner or to be able to demonstrate that even if there were a viable way of understanding a kind of infinity in

mathematical terms that, therefore, this sort of understanding would necessarily permit one to be able to understand a kind of infinity that was not mathematical in nature.

Because Tolstoy considers himself to be a rationalist – that is, one who operates in accordance with reason (which is something of a will-o'-the-wisp) – he is attempting to work his way through *A Confession* in a step-by-step manner that he believes will be capable of withstanding rigorous rational analysis, but as the foregoing abbreviated discussion involving Tolstoy's concept of the infinite suggests, his reflections on the nature of reality are not necessarily as unambiguously rational as he might suppose is the case.

Next in *A Confession*, Tolstoy reflects on various possibilities involving what he refers to as abstract sciences. For instance, he considers the possibility that not only do human beings use certain kinds of spiritual principles and ideals – religious, scientific, political, and artistic – as forms of guidance for life, but, in addition, those principles and ideals somehow become more advanced over time and, as a result, assist humanity to achieve more and more enhanced levels of welfare, but what the criteria are for determining what constitutes advancement or what justifies the use of such criteria is not really explored.

Tolstoy indicates that, after a time, he came to understand the extent to which such guiding principles and ideals entailed various irresolvable problems. Unfortunately, as indicated above, he tends to skip over any sort of detailed discussion concerning the kind of substantive issues that might have enabled him to reach the conclusions that he did, so, although one comes to know some of the changes that take place in Tolstoy's thinking concerning the foregoing sorts of matters, nonetheless, one is not able to gain any insight into the particulars that permitted him – or, so, Tolstoy believes –

to make the transition from an earlier conceptual perspective to the one which succeeded it.

In any event, after all is said or done, Tolstoy maintains that science is incapable of providing viable answers to fundamental questions concerning human existence. Tolstoy came to believe that such questions are beyond the competence of science to answer.

Moreover, Tolstoy points out in *A Confession* that while philosophy has the capacity to help human beings to ask fundamental questions concerning the nature of human existence in a clear manner, and although philosophy offers a way to allude to the possible existence of some sort of essence that various individuals refer to through the use of terms such as: “Will”, “idea”, “spirit”, or “substance”, nevertheless, philosophy is only able to ask those kinds of questions and is incapable of answering what it asks. In addition, Tolstoy indicates that philosophy is unable to provide any sort of viable account for what makes such an essence – whatever its name might be – possible or why it exists.

Even if one were inclined to agree with the perspective being outlined by Tolstoy in the foregoing paragraph, nonetheless, Tolstoy’s position largely consists of a series of conclusions that are strung together to give the appearance of a rational argument. However, much of the detailed reasoning that led Tolstoy to such conclusions is conspicuously absent from his account, and, consequently, like an iceberg, much of his thought lies hidden below the conceptual surface.

During the opening pages of Chapter IX in *A Confession*, Tolstoy indicates that at a certain point he began to realize that the sort of answer he was seeking was not necessarily aligned with the question that he had been asking. More specifically, he maintained that the question he had been asking was concerned with determining the meaning of life “beyond time, cause, and space,” whereas the replies he was giving in response to that question actually were

related to another question altogether – namely, “What is the meaning of my life within time, cause, and space?” As a result, after considerable thought, he came to the conclusion that life had no meaning.

Irrespective of the truth of Tolstoy’s contention that he might have begun by asking himself one question but, without realizing it, he had become preoccupied with answering what he, subsequently, considered to be a completely different question, there seems to be a certain amount of anomalous thinking inherent in Tolstoy’s aforementioned claim.

For example, although Tolstoy seems to believe that the question he asked originally was different from the question that he was trying to answer, Tolstoy’s foregoing belief might not be rationally sound. In other words, is it necessarily true that the meaning of life “beyond time, cause and space” is unrelated to a question that is focused on the meaning of life “within time, cause and space?”

If what transpires in that which, supposedly, is ‘beyond time, cause, and space’ makes possible that which is ‘within time, cause, and space’, then, seemingly, issues concerning the meaning of life give expression to what is both ‘beyond time, cause, and space’ as well as what is ‘within time, cause, and space.’ The meaning of life would require different answers only if one could demonstrate that what – if anything -- transpires ‘beyond time, cause, and space’ has nothing to do with what occurs ‘within time, cause, and space,’ and, to this point of *A Confession*, Tolstoy has not shown that this is the case.

Moreover, even if one were to accept Tolstoy’s contention that the two realms (i.e., ‘beyond time, cause, and space’ and ‘within time, cause, and space’) were completely separate from one another, Tolstoy still did not demonstrate – as indicated in an earlier discussion during the present chapter – that there is no meaning to life. Although Tolstoy stipulates that, at a certain point, he had been persuaded by the perspectives of individuals such as

Socrates, Schopenhauer, Solomon, and Sakya Muni, nevertheless, he did not show that those perspectives were either definitive, correct, or necessary ... he only demonstrated that the views of the individuals he referenced are a possibility to be considered.

To a degree, Tolstoy actually acknowledges the foregoing point when, during *A Confession*, he conceptually withdraws from his earlier position – i.e., that life has no meaning – and argues that reasoning only permits one to reach indefinite conclusions concerning such matters. At this juncture of *A Confession*, Tolstoy introduces the notion of faith as a species of “irrational knowledge” through which human beings are able to link the finite and the infinite.

One might note, to begin with, that the term “irrational knowledge” seems somewhat oxymoronic in character. Perhaps, Tolstoy is alluding to a form of transrational understanding through which one gains reliable insights into the nature of certain aspects of reality through non-rational processes ... for instance, various kinds of intuition might be able to correctly grasp the character of a given facet of reality but does so through a process that might not be based on modalities of ratiocination.

In addition, one might also take exception with Tolstoy’s apparent contention that faith is only about the relationship between the finite and the infinite. Indeed, there are all manner of species of faith that tend to be focused only on the realm of the finite.

For example, most of our relationships with parents, siblings, neighbors, friends, acquaintances, teachers, business people, politicians, officials, pets, and even ourselves tend to fall somewhere on the spectrum of faith-based relationships that are developed over the course of a lifetime. There are people (and, hopefully, we are among such individuals) who, on the basis of an array of interactive experiences, we come to trust and, therefore, in whom we have developed faith, and, as well, there are

people who, on the basis of array of interactive experiences, we do not trust and, therefore, in whom we have not developed faith that such individuals will treat us or others in, say, morally acceptable, humane, loving, or fair modes of behavior.

Such expressions of faith are not necessarily irrational in character. Indeed, they tend to be based on direct experiential – and, therefore, empirical – behavior which we reflect on, analyze, question, test, and about which we often reach reasoned conclusions ... that might, or might not, be true.

One could also take issue with Tolstoy's notion that faith is a way of tying the finite to the infinite. Leaving aside considerations concerning whether, or not, infinity is an ontological or invented form of reality, one might want to consider the possibility that the finite is merely a manifestation of the infinite, and, therefore, faith is not what links the finite to the infinite, but, rather, the character of ontology is what links the so-called finite and the infinite such that what is referred to as "finite" might be nothing but a limited engagement or form of understanding concerning one, or more, dimensions of the infinite.

Given the foregoing scenario, one might wish to argue that faith concerning the natural realm (both in its infinite and finite senses) would be a variation on the sorts of previously mentioned, experiential-based relationships that one develops in conjunction with human beings as one seeks to discover reliable forms of behavior or manifestation to inform one's way of living life. In other words, just as one attempts to arrive at experientially-based conclusions concerning people on which one can rely, and, therefore, in which one has faith, so too, one tries to generate experientially-based conclusions in relation to natural phenomena on which one can rely, and, therefore, as a result, one develops faith in the reliability of certain scientific ideas, theories, principles, laws, worldviews,

instruments, and methods, and when those kinds of ideas, theories, and so on no longer prove to be reliable, then one's faith in them tends to diminish.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, Tolstoy proceeds to argue in *A Confession* that whereas he, on the basis of what he considered to be rational knowledge, had come to believe that life was without meaning and, therefore, he wished to kill himself, he also realized that many other people lived life on the basis of a faith that not only considered life to be meaningful, but, as well, such people believed that the sort of meaning that guided their lives was not destroyed by illness, old age, or death. However, the question that Tolstoy does not appear to raise in conjunction with such acts of faith is whether, or not, they are warranted ... that is, whether, or not, they are true.

There could be an indefinitely large number of systems of faith that emerge in conjunction with one's life experiences. Whether any of those systems of faith reflect the actual character of reality is another matter.

Tolstoy claims that "only in faith can we find for life a meaning and a possibility." Leaving aside, for the moment, a discussion that will appear in a later chapter about whether, or not, there might be forms of understanding other than faith (e.g., mystical forms of knowledge) that are capable of reflecting life's actual meaning rather than merely referring to the possible meanings that life might have, Tolstoy seems to believe that because such possible systems of faith exist then, somehow, the existence of those systems "gives to the finite existence of man an infinite meaning."

Unfortunately, Tolstoy does not explain how faith accomplishes the foregoing kind of transformation. In other words, he doesn't provide an explanation that accounts for how faith confers infinite meaning on man's finite existence, for, even though the possibilities surrounding such faith systems may be indefinitely large,

nevertheless, one might anticipate that the indefinitely large might still be indefinitely less than the infinite.

Tolstoy contends that faith cannot be reduced down to notions such as: “The evidence of things not seen” (whatever that might mean), or revelation (which Tolstoy does not define or discuss at this point), or man’s relation to God (and, as used by Tolstoy, this is a rather amorphous concept). Tolstoy, however, does not indicate why faith should not be considered to be a function of “the evidence of things not seen,” or revelation, or something that gives expression to the relationship between a human being and God, but, instead, he merely stipulates that: “Faith is a knowledge of the meaning of life in consequence of which man does not destroy himself but lives.”

How does one know that a given species of faith constitutes knowledge of the meaning of life as opposed to merely being a possible meaning of life? If one’s system of faith gives expression to a meaning of life – and not necessarily the meaning of life -- then, one’s knowledge of meaning may be limited to the properties of that system, and, as such, has little, or nothing, to say about the actual meaning of life – if any.

Leaving aside, for the moment, the foregoing considerations, Tolstoy’s position in *A Confession* at this point resonates with some of Viktor Frankl’s ideas in *Man’s Search for Meaning* that were published in 1946, nearly seventy years later. As a result of the time that Frankl spent in a concentration camp during World War II, he observed how those people who possessed some sort of system of meaning in which they had faith tended to survive longer and, frequently, were more resilient than individuals who were devoid of such a system of meaning, and, similarly, during *A Confession*, Tolstoy also seems to be claiming that people who operate out of a system of meaning tend to live whereas those who don’t possess such a system of meaning often end up like Tolstoy and, as a result, want to kill themselves or, they may become more

susceptible to the process of dying during difficult life circumstances.

Tolstoy indicates that he became convinced that in order for human beings to want to continue to live, then, human beings must either not consider the infinite (and Tolstoy's thought processes here seem rather murky), or they must possess a system of meaning that enables them to connect the finite with the infinite. As outlined previously during the present chapter, Tolstoy first looked for such a system of meaning in the sciences and philosophies of his day, but felt that he had come up empty, and, consequently, he began to explore the idea of constructing such a system for himself.

His project concerning faith was guided by one premise – namely, he indicated that he was ready to accept faith as long as that phenomenon did not bring him into conflict with reason. Unfortunately, Tolstoy does not define what he means by reason, nor, at this point in *A Confession*, does he provide any account of what criteria are to be used – and why – to give reliable direction to, or persuasive results for, the process of reasoning.

Tolstoy goes on to indicate that his research involved reading material that concerned Buddhism and Mohammedanism. Mostly, however, he engaged the ideas of Christianity both through books as well as in conjunction with individuals that he knew or had met during his travels.

No indication is given – at least in *A Confession* – about what books Tolstoy read in conjunction with his exploration of Buddhism and whether, or not, those books were written by practitioners of the Buddhist faith or by outsiders. Furthermore, Tolstoy does not elaborate – at least at this point – on whether, or not, he discovered anything during his engagement of Buddhism that might have been useful or problematic.

In addition, when it comes to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), although Tolstoy, apparently, had

studied Arabic while, for several years, attending university in Kazan, how proficient he was in that language is not clear. Moreover, later on in his life, Tolstoy indicated that whatever knowledge he once had of Arabic had largely vanished.

In any event, his understanding of such matters did not seem to be sufficiently extensive for him to know that Muslims do not refer to their faith as “Mohammedanism” but, instead, use the term “Islam” ... that is, they use the name that the Qur’an employs to identify the form of faith followed by Muslims. In addition, given that Tolstoy’s travels brought him into contact with Muslims who lived in different parts of Russia (including Kazan where he lived and attended university), one wonders why Tolstoy only decided to restrict himself to discussions involving living human beings in the case of Christianity, but not in relation to either Buddhism or Islam.

Tolstoy began his investigation of Christianity by talking with those individuals he believed might be most knowledgeable about their religious tradition – namely, orthodox monks and theologians. Nonetheless, Tolstoy came away from these sessions dissatisfied because he felt that the information such individuals provided in response to his questions tended to obfuscate the meaning of life rather than illuminate that issue.

The standard which Tolstoy used to measure the quality of what people said concerning Christianity revolved around what people did rather than what they said. More specifically, Tolstoy felt that if people really had a form of faith that was capable of successfully overcoming fears of suffering and death, then such faith should be reflected in what they actually did.

Yet, in many, if not most cases, Tolstoy observed that the conduct of various orthodox monks and theologians with whom he interacted were indistinguishable from, if not worse than, the conduct of unbelievers. In other words, the orthodox monks and theologians with whom he talked

seemed to be quite adept at busying themselves with doing all they could to make sure that they do not deprive themselves with respect to enjoying the amenities of the world, and, thereby, expose themselves to the possibility of suffering.

Tolstoy was not looking for a form of faith that would induce people to find ways of avoiding suffering and death. Instead, he was interested in forms of faith that were resilient and, therefore, were capable of helping individuals to persevere despite the presence of suffering, poverty, and death.

Consequently, he began to study, and reflect upon, the lives of people who were simple, poor, uneducated, downtrodden, and who led lives that consisted largely of hard work. While Tolstoy noted that such people appeared to be governed by a combination of superstition and Christian teachings, nevertheless, he felt that the faith that governed their lives enabled them to maintain a life of meaning in the face of difficulty rather than merely giving expression to some form of emotional and/or intellectual diversion as seemed to be the case amongst the “professional” class of orthodox believers with whom Tolstoy previously had been engaged in discussions.

Although Tolstoy indicates that the lower class pilgrims, monks, peasants, and sectarians in whom he became interested lived in accordance with a framework of meaning that consisted of a mixture of Christian truths and superstitions, clearly, even if one accepts, without critical reflection, the idea that the truths to which he is alluding are, in fact, true, nevertheless, by referring to the presence of superstition in such faith orientations, Tolstoy is indicating that a system of meaning in which one has faith doesn't necessarily have to be entirely true in order to be effective.

In effect, Tolstoy is really talking about the idea of coping strategies. In other words, a coping strategy is a method that is intended to help a person to constructively

deal with the difficulties (such as suffering, pain, illness, poverty, oppression, death, and so on) that are present in an individual's life, and to the extent that such a method enables a person to continue to function and persevere, then, the individual develops a sense of faith in that strategy irrespective of whether, or not, in some ultimate sense, the strategy is rooted in a meaning concerning the nature of life that can be proven to be true.

Tolstoy does not indicate what percentage of the systems of meaning in which peasants, pilgrims, or sectarians, have faith is based on Christian truths (however these are characterized) or what percentage of those systems of meaning is a function of superstitions of one kind or another. Consequently, one does not know whether the systems of meaning to which Tolstoy is alluding are largely true (let us assume) with only a few superstitions scattered amongst such truths, or whether those systems of meaning consist of a considerable number of superstitions in which a limited number of truths might have become embedded.

In addition, one has no way of knowing the centrality of the roles that are being played by either truths or superstitions. Conceivably, some pilgrims, monks, and peasants might consider certain superstitions (or what Tolstoy considers to be instances of superstition) to have more importance than beliefs that Tolstoy considers to be true, whereas other pilgrims, monks, and peasants might place more emphasis on the importance of certain beliefs that are considered by Tolstoy to be true rather than on those beliefs which Tolstoy might consider to be examples of superstition.

The fact of the matter is that Tolstoy does not provide the reader with an account that helps a person understand how one should go about distinguishing between so-called superstition and alleged Christian truths. Moreover, given Tolstoy's own penchant for superstitious beliefs (e.g., his beliefs concerning the number 28), one finds the whole

discussion of superstition and truths in *A Confession* somewhat ironic.

One might also suppose that the meaning systems of peasants, pilgrims, monks, and sectarians are not necessarily all the same. Indeed, the very notion of being sectarian is characterized by systems of meaning that are different, in some manner, from what are considered to be orthodox beliefs of Christianity.

Therefore, one is uncertain which, if any, of the systems of meaning to which Tolstoy is alluding are predominately about truth rather than superstition. The only thing that seems to matter to him is whether, or not, a given system of meaning is able to help a person persevere in the face of life's difficulties, and, as such, Tolstoy appears to be talking about coping strategies which assist an individual to get along in life without causing that person to lose his, her, or their sense that life has meaning rather than he seems to be engaged in talking about systems of meaning that can be proven to be true.

Tolstoy was deeply impressed with the way in which all manner of non-orthodox peasants, pilgrims, and sectarians that he met, or about whom he knew, were able to face suffering and death with considerable equanimity and resiliency. As a result, Tolstoy became very attracted to such individuals, and, as well, was increasingly influenced by their example.

Tolstoy reports in *A Confession* that over the course of a two-year period during which he benefitted from the example of, and inspiration generated in him by, such people, he began to notice changes within himself. For instance, among other things, Tolstoy not only became less and less enamored with the lifestyles of rich, famous, and educated individuals, but, as well, he began to believe that the sorts of discussions involving art and science in which he previously had been interested or engaged were little more than exercises in self-indulgent pretension.

Instead of concluding that all life is evil and meaningless as he had been inclined to do when he wanted to kill himself, Tolstoy came to understand that the particular form of life he had been living is what had been evil and meaningless rather than life in general. In other words, he realized that meaning, when considered in the context of the life issue, depended on how one conducted one's life and, consequently, whether, or not, one's actions were in rational and moral alignment with one's beliefs.

Thus, after various kinds of experiences and considerable reflection on those experiences, Tolstoy discovered that his actions and beliefs had been incongruent with one another. He had been speaking in one fashion, but acting in another, contrary manner.

However, although Tolstoy is alluding to the existence of a mismatch between what he said and what he did, he doesn't go into detail about whether the underlying problem is merely one of consistency or whether there might have been problems with some of what he previously did irrespective of what he might have said. In other words, Tolstoy doesn't spend time itemizing his pre-marital excesses involving alcohol, sex, games of chance, and the exploitation of some of the serfs that he owned, nor does he disclose some of the ways in which he might have oppressed, if not abused, his wife, and, consequently *A Confession* is not so much an account of his shortcomings as an individual as it is a description of the steps and missteps that were part of his search for a solution to help him to overcome his desire for self-destruction.

Indeed, Tolstoy's disclosures in *A Confession* are more about the nature of the conceptual and philosophical mistakes he believes he made while trying to find a way to escape from his suicidal ideation. As such, those kinds of disclosures do not really provide any insight into how the many demons that are likely to have been present in Tolstoy's life (and which are described in Chapter 1 of this

book) might have rendered Tolstoy vulnerable to all manner of suicidal ideation.

Thus *A Confession* is a narrative about how Tolstoy believes he found a way out of the cul-de-sac that his life had become, and, therefore, constitutes an attempt to give expression to a constructive response concerning the problem that is entailed by *Anna Karenina* (and which was explored in Chapter 2 of the present book) – namely, how does one make the transition from the self-destructive orientation of the Anna character to the life-affirming orientation of the Levin character. Left in the shadows, however, is the story of how Tolstoy might have allowed himself to become trapped in such a dilemma to begin with.

The character, Anna Karenina, entered her cul-de-sac of self-destruction by allowing her passions to dominate her moral integrity and capacity to reason rather than becoming the master of those inclinations. Similarly, Tolstoy entered his cul-de-sac of self-destructiveness by permitting his passions (i.e., gambling, sex, drink, exploitation of peasants, and abusive treatment of his wife) to become his master rather than vice-versa, and, in this way, the Anna Karenina character becomes a metaphor for certain dimensions of Tolstoy's life.

In short, the Anna character shows what happens when reason and moral integrity are compromised by the presence of passion. Indeed, the Anna character resonates with, and, to varying degrees, reflects, the chaos in Tolstoy's own life as a result of the way in which he had permitted all manner of passions to paint his life into a potentially lethal corner just as the Anna Karenina character had done.

The foregoing considerations lead back to Tolstoy's search for a solution to his struggles with suicidal ideation – a search that began in the *Anna Karenina* novel and, continued on during *A Confession*. For example, Tolstoy states in the latter work that: "The life of the world

endures by someone's will," and, moreover, he maintains that: "To hope to understand the meaning of that will one must first perform it by doing what is wanted of us."

One does not have to disagree with Tolstoy's claim that "the world endures by someone's will" to be able to realize that such a claim is in need of substantiation and to realize that Tolstoy does not offer what is required in *A Confession* to demonstrate what the nature of the truth is in conjunction with such a need. Similarly, one doesn't have to reject Tolstoy's contention that one must understand what is wanted of us by that Will to realize that before one can proceed, one should critically reflect on just what actually might be wanted of us and whether, or not, Tolstoy is correct in his analysis of things with respect to this issue (i.e., understanding what is wanted of us).

Tolstoy argues that just as one grasps the idea that birds have to build nests and collect food, and just as one understands that animals must feed themselves as well as their families, so too, human beings must act in certain ways in order to deal with the realities of existence. Tolstoy adds that the only difference between, on the one hand, what birds and animals do in this respect, and, on the other hand, what human beings do in this regard, is that human beings must provide for everyone and not just themselves.

One might wish to take issue with Tolstoy's foregoing position by pointing out that in contradistinction to Tolstoy's previous claim about the difference between, on the one hand, birds and animals, and, on the other hand, human beings is that the latter category of beings – i.e., humans – also appears to have the capacity to choose to do, or not to do, what birds and animals seem to be required to do as a function of their nature.

In other words, human beings appear to have the capacity to choose to provide, or not to provide, for themselves, their families or others. In fact, Tolstoy's struggle with the: be-or-not-to-be aspects of his lengthy

suicide watch concerning himself would appear to lend support to the foregoing contention.

After all, for an extended period of time, Tolstoy had been faced with the choice of whether to provide (i.e., live) or not to provide (i.e., commit suicide), with respect to himself, his family, or others. Indeed, for quite some time, he was uncertain how that issue was going to be resolved.

To whatever extent Tolstoy might, or might not be correct with respect to his belief that “the world endures by someone else’s will”, the necessity which seems to govern the actions of birds and animals does not appear to be present in human beings. Therefore, due to a capacity for choice that appears to exist in human beings, then, knowing what is wanted of us may not necessarily be as clear-cut as Tolstoy seems to believe is the case at this point in *A Confession*.

Tolstoy believes that what is wanted of us is to labor as simple, unlearned working folk do – that is, to continue on with life without criticizing the one who has made life possible for the difficulties and suffering that are associated with life. One might be willing to agree to the latter aspect of the previous sentence – namely, that one should learn how to continue on with life without criticizing that which makes life possible for the difficulties and suffering that are associated with life – without necessarily supposing that one has no choice with respect to what kind of labor one will perform, or how, or why, or when, or where, or with whom, or for whom such labor will be engaged.

Tolstoy seems to believe that he knows what is wanted of us. I’m not sure that he does even though one might readily acknowledge that he certainly is interested in developing a system of meaning that, among other things, explores the issue of what the Will – through which the world endures -- may want of us.

Of course, he might be correct about certain aspects of what is wanted of us by the will through which the world

endures. Nonetheless, as suggested previously, there also might be considerable room for disagreement concerning such matters.

Tolstoy came to believe that if he was going to be able to understand life and its meaning, he could not live the life of a parasite that, in part, he felt he previously had been living, and, instead, he wanted to learn how to live what he considered to be the kind of “real life” that was given expression through the exemplars of “real humanity” such as the non-orthodox peasants, pilgrims, sectarians, and so on that he had met from time to time during his travels. The foregoing perspective contains a subtle change in focus from, on the one hand, the manner in which, previously, Tolstoy had spoken in *A Confession* about the general idea of ‘a’ system of meaning that might be capable of helping someone to engage the difficulties of life without permitting those difficulties to sour one’s commitment to, or attitudes toward, life, to, on the other hand, talking about ‘the’ meaning of life ... yet, having a system of meaning for life that is functionally effective does not necessarily demonstrate that one has discovered the meaning of life as Tolstoy now seems to be suggesting.

Moreover, however impressed Tolstoy might be with the quality of life that he believes is manifested through those individuals who belong to what he refers to as “real humanity,” this does not mean that there couldn’t be other kinds of human beings that give expression to the notion of “real humanity” as well. In fact, other than possessing a system of meaning that assists one to persevere in life despite the presence of difficulties, one is not entirely sure what Tolstoy might mean by the idea of “real humanity.”

Is one’s humanity only real when one pursues life in accordance with Tolstoy’s way of understanding things? Or, is humanity a potential that might include many more possibilities than Tolstoy supposes to be the case?

Tolstoy indicates that throughout the period in which he was struggling with the issue of suicide, he searched for

answers. However, he did so with a heart that was beset with a painful sense of isolation, fear, and longing with respect to whether, or not, someone or something would help him to escape from his difficulties.

Tolstoy states that the foregoing search was not so much a matter of trying to intellectually prove God's existence – which, following Kant and Schopenhauer, he didn't believe could be done -- but was, instead, a function of a hope that God was present and might help him, and, as a result, he began to pray for assistance from Divinity. Unfortunately, according to Tolstoy, the more he prayed, the more convinced he became that God did not hear him.

One wonders what the metric might be for reliably demonstrating that God did not hear Tolstoy's prayers. For instance, hearing prayers does not necessarily entail responding to them, and responding to prayers does not necessarily mean that the one whose prayers are heard will be able to recognize such a response if it were to occur.

Over time, Tolstoy reflected on hundreds of conceptual variations revolving around the idea that God existed. Evidentially, Tolstoy felt that none of the conceptual variations he considered was sustainable, and, yet, Tolstoy noted that whenever he thought of God, he wanted to try to continue to struggle to live life, but whenever he forgot about God, Tolstoy felt as if, to varying degrees, he had died emotionally.

Eventually, Tolstoy came to feel or believe that God is present in the very seeking of Divinity. As such, Tolstoy came to see such awareness and thoughts concerning God as giving expression to the presence of 'That' without which he could not live.

Previously, I noted that Tolstoy indicated in *A Confession*, that despite praying a great deal, the more he prayed, the less he believed that his prayers were heard. Yet, conceivably, the fact that Tolstoy was able to arrive at the foregoing sort of position – i.e., one that seemed to

work for him by helping him to persevere amidst life's difficulties -- could have been God's answer to the very prayers that Tolstoy believed God did not hear.

Whether 'That' without which Tolstoy could not live was merely an idea – i.e., a coping strategy -- or was the Reality which made such an idea – along with Tolstoy (and everything else) – possible is uncertain. In any event, a distinction needs to be made between, on the one hand, the process of filtering experience through a system of meaning that frames such experience in one way rather than another and which might, or might not be, true – that is, accurately reflective of the nature of reality -- and, on the other hand, the issue of whether, or not, God exists, and, if God does exist, whether the nature of that existence is being accurately reflected by the system of meaning a person – for instance, Tolstoy -- uses to engage existence.

Obviously, independently of the issue of whether, or not, God exists, Tolstoy discovered a system of meaning involving the idea of God that helped him want to persevere in life despite whatever difficulties and suffering might be associated with his existence. Moreover, just as little by little over time Tolstoy had descended into an emotional abyss that entangled him in thoughts about ending his life, so too, little by little, as a result of becoming open to the example set by various spiritually non-orthodox-oriented peasants, pilgrims, sectarians and the like, Tolstoy began to return to a form of faith that was characteristic of his early days of life.

For instance, one again, he accepted the idea that there was some force of Will that had brought him into being and which, as well, wanted something from him. In addition, as had been the case earlier in his life, Tolstoy began to become more and more concerned with how to improve the manner in which he went about seeking to conform to the Will of God, and, as also was true of his earlier life, he believed there was a tradition that told individuals how to proceed in life.

Tolstoy developed a theory about what he believed the Will that made him possible wanted from him, and, as well, his theory described the nature of the tradition through which Tolstoy believed one could learn how to engage that Will. However, to what extent his theory might be true – if at all -- and, similarly, whether, or not, Tolstoy might have been successful in his attempt to establish a reliable metric for determining the extent to which a person was, or was not, conforming to the will of God, or whether, or not, Tolstoy had correctly identified the tradition that, supposedly, taught one how to engage that Will are topics that are to be engaged in subsequent chapters of this book,

The essence of the aforementioned system of meaning to which Tolstoy committed himself consisted of the following principles: (1) Human beings exist in this world by virtue of God's will; (2) each individual has the capacity to choose whether to destroy one's soul or save it; (3) the purpose of life is to save one's soul; (4) in order to save one's soul, one must live life in a manner that is pleasing to God; (5) to please God, one must not only renounce the pleasures of life, but, as well, one must be willing to spend life engaged in laboring, suffering, being merciful, and being humble, and (6) the foregoing set of principles constitute the system of meaning that is transmitted to believers by pastors as well as through an array of living traditions that are observed by the people. However, Tolstoy also indicated there were aspects of the system of meaning being outlined above which he found to be rather arbitrary and problematic.

For instance, Tolstoy objected to the idea of: Fasts, Church services, as well as the manner in which many people engaged in the practice of venerating, if not worshipping, various kinds of icons and relics. However, one is uncertain why Tolstoy found fasts, Church services, or the veneration of relics and icons to be any more objectionable than, say, his claim that the purpose of life is

to save one's soul, or that the way to save one's soul is through such activities as laboring and suffering.

What is the soul? How does one know that the soul exists?

What is meant by the idea of saving the soul? Why does the soul need to be saved?

How does laboring and suffering – or being humble and merciful – save the soul? Is Tolstoy in any position to prove that fasting, going to church, or venerating icons and relics are incapable of helping to save an individual's soul?

Despite Tolstoy's reservations concerning various facets of the system of meaning pursued by the peasants, pilgrims, and sectarians that he admired, he decided to incorporate all their practices into the system of meaning out of which he was operating. Therefore, instead of judging those practices to be nonsensical as he previously had done, he considered them to have meanings that needed to be discovered.

Tolstoy justified the foregoing change of attitude in the following manner. He argued that just as his body had come into being through the will of God, so too, Tolstoy maintained that his reasoning and understanding also had been made possible by virtue of the will of God, and, as a result, Tolstoy claimed that since reasoning and understanding had been made possible by God, then, they could not give expression to false results.

While one might be prepared to accept the idea that whenever one reasons correctly or one properly understands something, then this reflects capabilities that have been placed in human beings by God. Nonetheless, one is not thereby required to believe that any instance of reasoning or understanding that transpires within human beings is necessarily correct.

For example, previously Tolstoy believed that the observance of certain kinds of sacraments – such as fasting or attending Church services – were “unnecessary

gibberish". Now -- at least, for a time -- he believed differently, and, so, if all instances of reasoning and understanding arise by virtue of God's will, then how could one show that whatever people sincerely believe in must, necessarily, be true given that, as indicated above, reasoning and understanding are capable of leading to mutually contradictory possibilities?

Tolstoy does go on to indicate in *A Confession* that he believes "every faith consists in its giving life a meaning which death does not destroy." Yet, such a perspective has removed the idea of truth, per se, from the discussion, and, instead, has made 'effective functioning' the criteria through which the dynamics of a given situation are being assessed, irrespective of whatever the truth of those circumstances might be.

In *A Confession*, Tolstoy notes that as much as he wanted to lose himself in the religion of the peasants and pilgrims he had grown to admire and love, he had difficulty complying with their manner of living. He felt that doing so required him to lie to himself and act contrary to ideas that were sacred to him.

Nevertheless, he cobbled over such problems by allowing himself to be influenced -- at least for a time -- by various theologians who, among other things, had been promoting the idea that the Church is infallible. Moreover, since the Church -- which, according to some theologians, is infallible -- has defined itself as "an assembly of true believers united by love and therefore possessed of true knowledge," Tolstoy comforted himself with the possibility that irrespective of whether, or not, he understood some given doctrine or sacrament, then as long as he operated out of the framework provided by the Church, he would be okay.

Consequently, at the time, Tolstoy did not bother to question whether, or not, one actually could reasonably derive particular beliefs, creeds, or practices from the presence of love no matter how extraordinary the love was

that allegedly united the true believers that made up a given congregation. In short, Tolstoy was able to continue engaging in all the practices, sacraments, and beliefs of the peasants and pilgrims that he found to be inexplicable (such as attending Church services, receiving Communion, genuflecting, observing fasts, and reading prayers) by leaving unexamined the idea that the Church is infallible, as well as by leaving unexamined considerations concerning the nature of the relationship among 'true believers,' love and 'true knowledge.'

Tolstoy indicates in *A Confession* that approximately two-thirds of the services he attended were incomprehensible to him. Among other things, the incomprehensibility of the services was due to the way in which narratives concerning one kind of miracle, or another, often were woven into those services, and, as a result, Tolstoy felt like he was engaging in a process of lying that was destroying his relationship with God.

One does not have to come down on one side of the argument or the other with respect to the issue of miracles to realize that Tolstoy is not necessarily disclosing the nature of truth when he indicates in *A Confession* -- or elsewhere in his writings -- that he found himself at odds with many facets of church services due to, among other things, the alleged connection of various facets of those services with different manner of so-called miracles. In other words, he is disclosing how he feels about the issue of miracles -- namely, that he is inclined to reject the possibility of their reality -- and, therefore, although Tolstoy felt that, for instance, having to believe in miracles was interfering with his relationship with God, his beliefs and feelings in this regard are not necessarily reflective of the truth concerning the issue of miracles.

Indeed, given the absence in *A Confession* of any definition concerning the idea of a miracle and despite the absence of any justification for such a definition in the same aforementioned work, one is not quite sure what

Tolstoy finds objectionable about the idea of miracles. Whether rightly or wrongly, some people find that the idea of miracles – whatever this might involve – enhances their sense of faith and, consequently, seems to lend support to their relationship with God -- or, so, they believe -- and, therefore, the fact that Tolstoy feels that the idea of miracles interferes with his relationship with God, really says nothing about whether, or not, miracles are real or whether he is right or wrong to feel the way that he does.

To be sure, on the one hand, by rejecting the possibility that miracles – or, at least, some of them – are real phenomena, Tolstoy actually might be helping himself to become disentangled from the sort of falsehoods and disinformation that -- or, so, Tolstoy believes -- are capable of undermining and adversely affecting his relationship with God. On the other hand, by rejecting the idea of miracles – or, at least, some of them -- as being real phenomena, Tolstoy actually might be closing himself off to certain truths and, as a result, undermining and adversely affecting his relationship with God.

Tolstoy describes his rejection of miracles as a choice that is correct and which he believes helps clarify his relationship with God. However, he might have made the wrong choice in that regard and, as a result of that choice, he developed an attitude toward the idea of miracles that might never permit him to examine the issue objectively -- or as objectively as human beings are capable of doing – and, as such, could affect his relationship with God in problematic ways.

What has been outlined in the previous two paragraphs is the dilemma inherent in many choices that human beings make. We are uncertain about the value and wisdom of those choices, and, yet, like Tolstoy, we live life as if we knew what we were doing, and, thus, our fate is, to varying degrees, cast upon the waters of existence because of the choices that we make.

For three years, Tolstoy permitted himself to live a life that he believed was a mixture of truth and falsehood. He tried to differentiate between: (a) Those beliefs that involved issues which, spiritually, were above his pay grade and, therefore, despite being true (he assumed), nonetheless, Tolstoy did not have the capacity to understand, and: (b) Those beliefs that could not – euphemistically speaking – be “understood” unless he lied to himself concerning them.

Having read a great deal of Tolstoy, I’m not certain what the nature of the criteria were that might have permitted him – empirically speaking – to reliably differentiate between (a) and (b) above. Some beliefs and practices that he accepted or observed left him with a sense of oppressiveness and painfulness, and he interpreted the presence of those feelings as an indication or sign that such beliefs or practices were, in some sense, false and, therefore, would require him to live a lie in order for him to be able to continue on accepting or considering them to be true, but, conceivably, the sense of oppressiveness or painfulness that he experienced in conjunction with certain beliefs and practices might have been nothing more than his ego’s or soul’s attempt to distance himself from the very beliefs and practices that might have helped him to make spiritual progress.

Tolstoy does stipulate that he was very much influenced by the idea that “truth lay in union by love”. Consequently, he felt that theological disputes concerning who was right or wrong with respect to various issues was actually being counterproductive to the very thing – namely, love – that he believed theology should be helping human beings to embrace.

However, Tolstoy also claims that “the assertion that you are in falsehood and I am in truth is the most cruel thing one man can say to another”. Consequently, leaving aside the fact that the foregoing claim seems to exclude women and, therefore, in terms of this aspect of exclusion,

might also constitute another most cruel thing that a man could say irrespective of the issue of truth or falsehood, one also should note that Tolstoy seems to be engaging in the very behavior which he is criticizing because, notwithstanding the fact that one is uncertain about what, exactly, Tolstoy means by the notion that “truth lay in union by love,” nevertheless, in effect, when he makes such a statement, he appears to be indicating that what he is saying is truer, in some sense, than other kinds of theological statements and, as such, gives expression to a perspective that he considers to involve truth rather than the sort of falsehood that, by implication, he would appear to be attributing to other kinds of theological statements ... which, according to Tolstoy, is “the most cruel thing” one can do.

Of course, one of the possibilities that most concerns Tolstoy in conjunction with the matter of the foregoing sorts of conflicting claims concerning truth and falsehood, is the way in which different groups of human beings are so ready to use violence to ensure that their sense of the truth will prevail and/or to ensure that someone else’s way of “falsehood” should be vanquished. Thus, he is horrified by the way in which all manner of Church officials, monks, and teachers are ready to justify killing in the name of Christianity, but, nevertheless, at this point, one still is not certain how Tolstoy proposes to use the notion of “truth in union by love” to avoid the pitfalls of dueling systems of meaning that conflict with one another concerning issues of truth and falsehood.

Over the course of *A Confession*, one does get an increasingly clearer idea of what Tolstoy believes. Nonetheless, what the relationship is between such beliefs and the nature of reality or truth remains unknown.

As indicated previously, Tolstoy believes there is truth in the teachings of the Church, but he also believes there is falsehood present there as well. Therefore, he feels that the challenge with which he is confronted is one that requires

him to differentiate between what is true and what is false, and, as a result, he indicates toward the end of *A Confession* that he began to undertake a closer examination of the foundations on which his thoughts concerning religion and spirituality rested so that he might be in a better position to disentangle himself from whatever falsehoods might be present.

Thus, by the end of *A Confession*, Tolstoy has solved the coping strategy problem for which he had been searching after completing *Anna Karenina*. That is, he discovered a system of meaning capable of structuring his life in a way that permitted him to deal with his demons and not be destroyed by them. Nonetheless, he still had not solved the “Anna syndrome” because love – in the sense of a selfless service to, and caring for, others -- was not at the heart of his coping strategy, but, rather, as his deteriorating relationship with his wife indicated (and as was outlined in Part II of Chapter 1), Tolstoy still was subject to forces – such as his passion and ego -- that were capable of overpowering his reasoning and moral integrity when it came to actively – rather than merely theoretically -- loving his wife and children.

Chapter 4: The Kingdom of God

Nearly ten years after Tolstoy released *Confessions* – the critically reflective focus of the previous chapter -- he arranged for the publication of *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. The latter book required a couple of years to finish and actually had been completed several years prior to its official release date.

The full title of the work was: *The Kingdom of God is Within You Or, Christianity Not as a Mystical Teaching but as a New Concept of Life*. However, as will be indicated later on in the present chapter, there is some question as to how new the ‘concept of life’ is to which the foregoing book gives expression.

Furthermore, Tolstoy’s use of the term “mystical” in the above title is fairly idiosyncratic because he appears to consider that concept to be a way of referring to whatever he did not feel was consistent with, or capable of being reconciled with, his idea of rationalism which tends to treat religion as a conceptual system or set of beliefs rather than as a metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, existential, and/or phenomenological phenomenon.

There were a number of mystical traditions that existed in Russia during Tolstoy’s lifetime – for example, consider the teachings and practices associated with the principles of Hesychasm (inner stillness) as well as the Philokalia (Love of the Beautiful) that were observed and pursued by various individuals in, among other places, Russia. Nonetheless, he seems to have had little understanding of those traditions or had little insight into the nature of mysticism in general, and this is a topic to which we will return during the discussion that takes place in the last chapter of the present book.

Following the title – namely, *The Kingdom of God is Within You Or, Christianity Not as a Mystical Teaching but as a New Concept of Life* – but prior to the beginning of the actual contents of his book that give expression to his ideas, Tolstoy includes an excerpt from the Gospel of John.

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free –
John 8, 23

One doesn't have to disagree with the general tenor of the foregoing excerpt in order to realize that, nevertheless, a number of questions tend to surface in conjunction with those words. For instance, how will the truth be known, and how will one know that it is the truth?

A person might also raise questions concerning the sort of freedom that, supposedly, is associated with coming to know the truth. For example, what is meant by the idea of being free, and why is this notion of freedom important?

An individual also could ask whether truth – even if known – is enough to set one free. For example, one might also need to possess the sort of character and will that would be necessary to choose to engage the truth in a way that will set one free in the desired sense.

Just as various issues – some of which are noted above -- emerge in relation to both the title of Tolstoy's book as well as the previously-noted excerpt from the Gospel of John, there also are many other observations and questions that tend to arise in conjunction with the remainder of Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. The following discussion will seek to critically reflect on some of those topics.

The point of the ensuing exercise is not to try to prove that Tolstoy is wrong in what he says – for, indeed, there are many things he says (especially when it comes to the matter of governance) with which I agree. Nonetheless, as I believe the ensuing discussion will demonstrate, there also are some problems that are present in his aforementioned work.

More often than not, the difficulties to which I am alluding reveal potential weaknesses or flaws in the way in which he goes about employing the process of reasoning. As a result, those conceptual problems call into question the tenability of the rationalized system he is building to resolve the previously discussed Anna Karenina transition problem -- that is, how to go

about making the spiritual transition from the loveless, empty, perspective of the Anna character that was described in considerable detail in Chapter 2 (which also, in many ways, gives expression to Tolstoy's own spiritual condition prior to, during, and following the completion of the *Anna Karenina* novel) to the life-affirming, Gospel-based spiritual perspective of the Levin and Kitty characters that is present – at least in outline form – during the last part of *Anna Karenina*.

Among other things, *The Kingdom of God is Within You* is an attempt to critically reflect on the ways in which governance, orthodox Christianity, violence, force, and public opinion are problematically related to one another. In addition, the aforementioned book also seeks to provide a way of resolving such problems by means of the principles and values that are at the heart of what Tolstoy calls “true” Christianity.

According to Tolstoy:

“... war, that is, the maiming and killing of men is incompatible with a religion which is based on love of peace and good-will to men, the Quakers affirm and prove that nothing has so much contributed to the obscuration of Christ's truth in the eyes of the pagans and impeded the dissemination of Christianity in the world as the non-acknowledgement of this commandment by men who called themselves Christians, -- as the permission granted to a Christian to wage war and use violence.”

Without wishing to dismiss the significance of values involving qualities of love, peace, and good-will toward others for Christianity, can one necessarily claim that there are no other principles that are at the heart of Christianity? For instance, from time to time during *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy also talks about the importance of seeking to do the will of God, and, consequently, wouldn't one need to ascertain – that is, epistemologically -- how God understands love, peace, and good will before one would be in a position to act in accordance with those principles?

Moreover, what about qualities such as compassion, justice, or fairness? How do these values affect the way one seeks to exercise love, peace, and good will?

For instance, can there be peace without justice, fairness, or compassion? Or, alternatively, if one's sense of love does not properly reflect God's will, can one necessarily say that what one does actually gives expression to love?

In addition, one wonders about Tolstoy's use of the term "pagan" in the foregoing quote. Is one really exercising good will toward others when one refers to them as pagans?

Finally, is the problem of war really a matter – as Tolstoy appears to believe -- of the way in which people who call themselves Christian ignore what Tolstoy considers basic to Christianity and, as a result, grant people permission to act contrary to those values? Don't the people who are on the receiving end of such permissions have a responsibility to choose whether, or not, to cede their agency to the permissions that, allegedly, are being given to them?

Sometimes, Tolstoy argues that people are too stupefied – as a result of, among other things, the power of hypnotic suggestion -- to be able to resist complying with the permissions – such as war – that are being extended to them. However, this merely tends to lead to, yet, another question – namely, why do people allow themselves to become stupefied or come under the influence of hypnotic suggestion in the first place? ... Do they not have any capacity (and, therefore, responsibility) for making choices about which influences they wish to modulate their lives?

Therefore, perhaps, in addition to values of love, peace, and good will toward others, a person not only needs a certain amount of wisdom or insight into why those who grant people permission to engage in war appear to be ignoring basic principles of Christianity, but, as well, an individual also needs the courage necessary to be able to stand by one's commitments if one believes that certain people are seeking to lead one away from complying with such values. Perhaps, the nature of

Christianity might be more complex and nuanced – as well as less absolutist -- than Tolstoy seems to suppose is the case.

Later on during Chapter 1 of *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy claims that:

“Christ’s teaching, which entered into the consciousness of men, not by means of the sword and of violence,” they say, “but by means of non-resistance to evil, can be disseminated in the world only through humility, meekness, peace, concord, and love among its followers.”

Is behaving in accordance with principles of humility, meekness, peace, concord, and love pursued so that Christian teachings can be disseminated? Or, are such acts ends in themselves because they give expression to the will of God quite independently of whether, or not, those teachings are disseminated?

Did Jesus (peace be upon him) attract people because he spoke about principles such as humility, meekness, peace, and love? Or, did he attract people because he gave expression to those qualities through his actions and, thereby, lent credibility to whatever was said?

Is dissemination merely a matter of ideas, principles, values, or teachings getting transmitted linguistically or conceptually? Or, is dissemination a function of the resonance that is established between what is being communicated (i.e., principles as manifested through behavior or conduct) and the way in which what is being communicated is being received by that within an individual which is receptive to the lived presence of such principles, values, ideas, and so on?

Did Christ’s teachings enter into the consciousness of people through the principle of non-resistance to evil (and how would one go about proving such a claim)? Or, did the idea of non-resistance to evil gain credibility because it was said by someone who exercised qualities of humility, love, peace, and concord?

During Chapter 1 of *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy includes the complete text of a 'Declaration of Sentiments Adopted By the Peace Convention' that occurred in Boston during 1838. The Declaration was given by William Lloyd Garrison (a well-known champion of abolitionism) and expressed the view that universal peace could be realized only to the extent that people were willing to acknowledge the commandment of non-resistance to evil that was outlined in Chapter 5 of Matthew, verses 38 through 42.

Is the idea of non-resistance to evil an absolute commandment that harbors no exceptions? Or, does that idea give expression to a form of guidance that, on the one hand, serves as an ideal for which we aspire but also that might allow certain degrees of freedom involving the intercession or modulating effect of other principles or values (such as love, compassion, and fairness) as one works one's way toward realizing that idea more and more fully?

As attractive as the notion of universal peace might be, can one be certain that the purpose of life necessarily is to realize or establish such peace? Moreover, to whatever extent the principle of "resist not evil" might be able to provide a way to achieve peace, nonetheless, that principle does not necessarily account for why evil exists in the first place.

Is evil nothing more than what results from people's failure to live in accordance with the principle of "resist not evil"? Or, is evil a phenomenon that encompasses something more than those kinds of failures?

If the latter possibility were the case, then, acting in accordance with the principle of "resist not evil" will not necessarily lead to universal peace. This is because there might be aspects of evil that will continue to persist even if the principle of "resist not evil" were adopted by everyone.

Consequently, the idea of "resist not evil" might not be about achieving universal peace. Instead, the commandment or guidance could be about what might constitute best practice from a personal point of view despite the fact that one could be confronted by a form of evil that will not necessarily disappear

even if all human beings were to abide by the idea of “resist not evil”.

Furthermore, even if one were to acknowledge that universal peace is what we all should be seeking, can one necessarily conclude that the best and only way to achieve that goal is a matter of complying with the principle of non-resistance to evil? For example, are there duties of care that are entailed by principles of, say, love, compassion, and justice that, in certain circumstances, are capable of over-riding, or modulating, the principle of “resist not evil”?

Even Tolstoy’s *The Gospel In Brief* contains a substantial amount of material that gives expression to a lot of qualities, principles, values, and possibilities beside the idea of “resist not evil”. Therefore, to contend that the default option for all issues and problems is, or should be, “resist not evil” is not necessarily as obvious as Tolstoy appears to suppose is the case.

However, none of the foregoing questions are intended to provide the sort of conceptual wiggle room that might be used to justify war or violence. Rather, such questions are intended to induce one to reflect on the potential problems that might be entailed by the process of trying to know and do God’s will in any given set of circumstances.

For instance, treating the notion of “resist not evil” as an absolute that brooks no exceptions has a potential for enabling violence. In other words, if someone knows that no matter what she, he or they does, it will not be met with forceful resistance, then some people (e.g., psychopaths or sociopaths) might be inclined to continue pushing the envelope when it comes to giving expression to violent conduct, and, therefore, the very act of ‘resisting not evil’ might enhance the likelihood of violence occurring – and, thereby, serve as a means of enabling ensuing instances of violence rather than increasing the likelihood that such possibilities will diminish in frequency.

In addition, to idly stand by while one observes other people being injured, killed, raped, robbed, or oppressed through acts of violence might not necessarily be as principled as it sounds. To intentionally allow violence to occur is to oppress other

individuals – namely, the people who are being subjected to violence -- by marginalizing them and treating them as collateral damage in the service of one's belief system.

The foregoing, oppressive imposition of ideas and values seems to involve a dimension of force because a person who subscribes to the "resist not evil" perspective is permitting the violent acts of other individuals to provide that person with an opportunity to live in accordance with her, his, or their values at someone else's expense. If all life is sacred, as Tolstoy believes, then, why does he feel that it is okay for violent people, as well as those who subscribe to the idea of "resist not evil," to get to do what they want while permitting others to suffer who do not necessarily subscribe to either of the aforementioned perspectives?

What is the nature of the moral or spiritual calculus that says letting presumably innocent people suffer is better than preventing violent people from acting or is better than denying people the right to "resist not evil" by refraining from doing anything that might help prevent or avert such suffering? To ask the foregoing question is not to imply that there is no justifiable response to such a query, but, rather, the question is intended to induce a person to critically reflect on Tolstoy's position and, perhaps, realize that the latter perspective might not be as straightforward, obvious, and simple as he, sometimes, seems to believe is the case.

After providing the full text of William Lloyd Garrison's 1838 'Declaration of Sentiments Adopted By the Peace Convention' that was originally delivered in Boston, Tolstoy went on to indicate that shortly after the Boston convention concluded, Garrison established a society and a periodical (namely, *The Non-Resistant*) -- both of which were dedicated to exploring the idea of non-resistance in considerable detail. However, neither the society nor the periodical that he established lasted very long.

Tolstoy points out that one of the reasons for the short-lived character of the aforementioned two projects is because many individuals felt that if the principles of non-resistance were

pursued too rigorously and stringently, then, this might adversely affect the abolitionist movement. Apparently, the principles of non-resistance were considered too radical by many people who were interested in freeing slaves.

Following his presentation of the Garrison material, Tolstoy introduced the work of Adin Ballou from Hopedale, Massachusetts. Ballou had worked with Garrison, but, over a period of some five decades, Ballou also made contributions to the issue of non-resistance (e.g., *The Catechism of Non-Resistance*) that were independent of Garrison.

Tolstoy and Ballou exchanged a number of letters concerning the issue of non-resistance. In addition, Ballou also sent some of his own writings on that topic to Tolstoy.

At one point during *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy quotes a few excerpts from Ballou's *The Catechism of Non-Resistance*. For example:

“Q. Is the word “resistance” to be taken in its widest meaning, that is, as showing that no resistance whatsoever is to be shown to evil?

A. No, it is to taken in the strict sense of the Savior's injunction; that is, we are not to retaliate evil with evil. Evil is to be resisted by all just means, but never with evil.”

The latter answer to the former question raises the issue of whether, or not, there are some “just means” that involve violence or force that are not necessarily evil. In other words, can one necessarily equate all forms of violence with evil?

How does one distinguish between an evil means of resistance and a just means of resistance? What are the criteria for differentiating between the two possibilities?

Tolstoy continues on with another Q and A excerpt from Ballou's *The Catechism of Non-Resistance*:

Q. May a man kill or maim another in self-defense?

A. No.

Apparently, according to Ballou, self-defense constitutes a means that cannot be used to resist evil because, in some way, self-defense is considered by him to be an evil. However, at this point, no explanation is given as to why self-defense is considered to be an evil.

Indeed, if all life is sacred, then, why doesn't one have a right to protect that which is sacred? After all, self-defense need not involve killing someone but could be limited to using whatever minimal amount of force is necessary to protect the sacredness of one's own life while, simultaneously, trying to protect the existence of the life (i.e., one's attacker) that has placed one's own sacredness in such a precarious position.

To add further detail to the discussion concerning non-resistance, Tolstoy provides a further excerpt from Ballou's writings:

Q. May he fight with an army against enemies, or against domestic rebels?

A. Of course not. He cannot take any part in war or warlike preparations. He cannot use death-dealing arms. He cannot resist injury with injury, no matter whether he be alone or with others, through himself or through others."

Why is inflicting an injury while protecting against injury considered an evil? No explanation is given.

Presumably, Ballou and Tolstoy believe they understand the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him) in the manner that they feel Jesus wanted them to understand such guidance. Yet, leaving aside, for the moment, whether, or not, Jesus (peace be upon him) actually said that which is being attributed to him [and, one should keep in mind here, that not only did Jesus (peace be upon him) not speak in Greek, Arabic, Latin, or any other language into which Aramaic is being translated but, as

well, the provenance of, or chain of transmission concerning, such words is uncertain], questions also tend to arise in conjunction with whether, or not, Tolstoy's, Ballou's, or Garrison's interpretations of the words that are being ascribed to Jesus (peace be upon him) are correct.

To say that one should not resist evil with evil is one thing. However, depending on what is meant by the idea of evil, to stipulate that killing is an impermissible means of resisting evil – even in defense of one's own life or the lives of one's family -- is, possibly, saying something quite different than that one should not resist evil with evil.

Moreover, to stipulate further that one cannot resist evil through the exercise of any sort of force that would result in the injury of an individual who is committing violence is to advocate something that, potentially, might be different from the notion that one should not resist evil with evil. For example, to offer one's left cheek might be a better response to being struck on the right cheek than killing someone or injuring another individual, but what if the person being struck initially is someone other than oneself ... such as a child?

In other words, the guidance in the Gospel concerning non-resistance seems to be directed toward what individuals should do when they are the object of an attack. Possibly, however, that guidance doesn't necessarily extend to situations in which someone other than a person himself, herself, or themselves is being struck, or sued, or forced to go a mile.

In light of the foregoing considerations, one might wish to argue that Jesus (peace be upon him) intended for the principle of non-resistance (and assuming that he actually said what is being attributed to him) to be generalized so that it also encompasses instances in which other people are struck, or sued, or forced to go a mile. Nonetheless, the previous argument tends to be predicated on the assumption that what Jesus (peace be upon him) intended when he allegedly said what is being attributed to him in Mathew 5, 39-41 is actually known, but such an assumption might not be warranted.

In addition, being struck on the cheek or being sued or being forced to walk a mile, all constitute forms of force or violence that are relatively mild in nature and with respect to which one might be guided to avoid any similar kind of violent or forceful retaliation. However, if the lives of either oneself or others (irrespective of whether, or not, one loves those individuals) are being threatened, then, the way forward is not necessarily clear because a slap on the cheek is not at all like a lethal attack.

There also are other possibilities upon which one might critically reflect that extend beyond the foregoing considerations. For example, the principle of non-resistance that is stated in Mathew 5, 39-41 is preceded by the words below:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’”

The principle of non-resistance is introduced after the above statement.

Conceivably, the guidance that is being given following the foregoing excerpt is being directed toward the problem of seeking revenge or is meant to apply to the tendency of human beings to keep a conflict going independently of considerations involving justice, propriety, and/or common sense. Consequently, perhaps, the principle of non-resistance is attempting to encourage people to struggle toward de-escalating situations rather than automatically rushing to respond out of revenge or engage in a process of tit for tat and, thereby, participate in a process in which one is resisting one form of evil (the initial attack) with another form of evil (i.e., revenge).

Perhaps revenge -- rather than the use of either violence or force per se -- is the evil about which people are being warned. Maybe, one is being asked to critically reflect on one's phenomenological condition and assess whether the emotions and motivations that are present are rooted in some sort of revenge scenario or are rooted in a desire to perpetuate

hostilities for their own sake, and that if such motivations and emotions are present, then, one might be better off to turn one's cheek, or let whoever is suing you to have your cloak and not just the shirt for which they were suing, or walk with them an extra mile beyond the that which one was forced to travel.

Limits are being placed on conduct. Transgressing those limits for the wrong reasons (such as revenge) might constitute an evil and, therefore, is being discouraged.

Tolstoy cites another passage from Ballou's writings:

Q. In what does the chief significance of the doctrine of non-resistance consist?

A. In that it alone makes it possible to tear the evil out by the root, both out of one's own heart and out of the neighbour's heart. This doctrine forbids doing that by which evil is perpetuated and multiplied. He, who attacks another and insults him, engenders in another the sentiment of hatred, the root of all evil ... "

While what we do certainly can have a contributing influence to what transpires in another individual, nonetheless, to claim that the person who attacks someone else engenders or causes hatred to arise in the person that is being attacked is not necessarily warranted. After all, the person who is being attacked has a certain amount of responsibility for looking after the character of the emotions and thoughts that might arise in that individual as a result of some sort of physical provocation from another person.

For instance, if the person being attacked were serious about living in accordance with positive qualities of character (such as tolerance, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and so on), then, hatred might not be the sentiment that is engendered in the person being attacked. A lot would depend on the quality of that person's character and how morally disciplined that individual might be.

Furthermore, one might also wish to object to Ballou's claim in the foregoing excerpt that hatred is the root of all evil. Surely, qualities such as: Pride, jealousy, selfishness, greed, impatience, and dishonesty might not only constitute their own forms of evil but, as well, the exercise of these sorts of qualities could induce other people to develop enmity toward the individuals giving expression to those qualities and, thereby, be causes of hatred.

Finally, contrary to what is said in the previous excerpt, one cannot be certain – as Tolstoy and Ballou seem to be -- that if a given person operates in accordance with the idea of “resist not evil” that this, ipso facto, will help remove the desire to resist evil in the person that is acting in problematic ways. While encountering someone who actively practices “resist not evil” could serve as a powerful influence or model, nevertheless, in order for change to be possible, an individual who is manifesting evil must be aware of and receptive to the nature of such an influence or model, as well as be willing to struggle against her, his, or their own demonstrated capacity to perpetrate evil of whatever kind and, as a result, make choices that, God willing, lead away from a continuation of those kinds of evil actions.

Tolstoy and Ballou appear to believe that the nature of “true non-resistance” is such that its mere presence is capable of eliminating evil sentiments in others. However, in the light of the foregoing considerations, the dynamics of the transition from perpetrating evil to “resist not evil” appears to be a lot more complex – at least, potentially -- than either Tolstoy or Ballou seem to suppose is the case because such change requires the individual who is undergoing that sort of transition to actively participate (via, among other things, intentional choices to which one becomes committed) in the accompanying struggle to overcome one's tendencies to act in accordance with negative qualities of character such as hatred.

Tolstoy, himself, actually lends credence to the foregoing contention. More specifically, following his relatively brief discussion of Ballou's ideas concerning non-resistance, Tolstoy goes on to indicate that for many years Ballou served as a spiritual leader of a community, and during his reign of

leadership, he gave nearly 9,000 sermons, wrote more than 500 articles, and officiated at approximately a thousand weddings, and, yet, when Ballou passed away in August of 1890, the obituary that appeared in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, a somewhat Christian-oriented, American periodical, did not contain any reference to the idea of “non-resistance”.

If Tolstoy and Ballou were correct that the mere presence of a person who was committed to the principle of “resist not evil” should have been sufficient to induce changes in people who came in contact with that sort of influence, then, one might expect that something would have been said – whether approvingly or critically -- about the idea of non-resistance in the aforementioned obituary. Yet, this was not the case.

Despite 50 years of persevering activism, apparently very few people were influenced by Ballou’s example. Of course, the absence of any discussion concerning the idea of “resist not evil” in the foregoing obituary does not necessarily indicate that Ballou’s example and teachings had little, or no, impact on the spiritual community that he led.

Indeed, in order to get a better sense of the extent, if any, of his influence, one would have to conduct a detailed study of those whom he sought to guide, or those to whom he preached, or those he married, or those who read his articles. In addition, one would have to determine whether that influence – whatever it might be -- was largely theoretical and conceptual in nature or whether it was practical and concrete in character.

However, given that such a rigorous study was not done, one is left to wonder about the nature of the impact that an individual like Ballou might have had. Moreover, given that his obituary was devoid of references to the issue of “resist not evil”, the only evidence that is available – namely, the obituary – tends to suggest that the dynamics of causal influence in matters of social change might not be as straightforward as Tolstoy and Ballou believed.

Tolstoy introduces further evidence that also tends to undermine his idea that merely being exposed to the principle of “resist not evil” necessarily will induce people to gravitate

automatically toward such a teaching. For example he mentions several historical works – namely, Draymond’s book *On War* that was first published in 1824 and Daniel Musser’s 1864 work *On Non-Resistance* -- which explore the relationship between Christianity and the military from a concrete and practical perspective rather than from a theoretical and abstract point of view.

Tolstoy feels the aforementioned books have a great deal to contribute to the issue of non-resistance. Yet, nonetheless, he proceeds to note that most people remain ignorant of those two books, and, therefore, once again, one can’t help but wonder why the idea of non-resistance doesn’t appear to spread in the manner Tolstoy and Ballou previously seemed to indicate would be the case – namely, easily and virtually automatically ... like many candles being lit from just one wick.

Prior to mentioning the foregoing two books, Tolstoy also talks about a fifteenth century work entitled *The Drawnet of Faith* by Chelcický, a Bohemian (westernmost part of present day Czech Republic). Initially, Tolstoy was not able to obtain a copy of the actual work and, therefore, had to rely on an account of the book’s contents that appeared in Pýpin’s “History of Bohemian Literature”, but, eventually, Tolstoy was able to secure some of the proof sheets for Chelcický’s book as it was being reprinted.

The title of Chelcický’s book – i.e., *The Drawnet of Faith* – is based on the Gospel teaching in which Jesus (peace be upon him) supposedly invited his disciples to be fishers of human beings. However, Chelcický goes on to indicate that although many people were captured through the drawnet that was thrown by Christ and his disciples, some of those who were initially bound by the drawnet (namely, kings, rulers, princes, popes, and other individuals with power who refused to renounce their positions of influence and only paid lip-service to the teachings of Jesus – peace be upon him) used their power to rip holes in the fabric of the drawnet and escaped through the openings they had created, and, over time, induced others to leave the confines of the drawnet as well, and in the process the

drawnet, according to Chelcický, was left largely, but not completely, empty.

Chelcický claimed that, originally, the Church was intended as a place where seekers could seek and live the truth in an atmosphere of companionship, equality, freedom, and love. In addition, he believed that the members of the early Church community understood that to be successful the foregoing sort of search depended on individuals developing qualities such as kindness, meekness, humility, a willingness to offer the other cheek when one cheek has been struck, and forgiveness of sins.

Tolstoy notes that Chelcický considered the foregoing qualities to be inconsistent with the wielding of power which usually is exercised through one form of violence or another. Consequently, he maintained that a person could not, simultaneously, be a Christian as well as a landowner, merchant, soldier, or ruler (Chelcický believes that anyone who wages war or observes capital punishment is an “oppressor, malefactor, and murderer.”)

Furthermore, Chelcický maintained that true Christianity continues to hold in high esteem the structural character of the primitive church which gave expression to the foregoing set of principles. Unfortunately, those who became infected by the desire for power and its concomitant companions, violence and force, began to brand the teachings of true Christianity as a form of heresy, and, consequently, the truth became lost and, as a result, needed to be recovered through the exercise of reason.

Chelcický contended that if people could find their way back to the true Christianity of the primitive or early Church, then, there would be no need for secular or religious leaders. He felt that if people could recover the principles of true Christianity – namely, love, humility, meekness, forgiveness of one’s enemies, equality, and freedom – then, this would be enough to create a viable, self-regulating community.

Tolstoy ends his summary of the fifteenth century work of Chelcický by saying:

“And yet this book has for more than four centuries remained unprinted, and continues to be unknown, except to learned specialists.”

Once again, Tolstoy seems to be undermining his earlier contention that the idea of non-resistance is easily -- if not virtually automatically -- transmitted to other individuals. In fact, he is providing evidence that the principle of non-resistance has been introduced over and over again for hundreds of years, and, yet, seems to be forgotten or ignored once it does surface.

Earlier during *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, Tolstoy claimed:

“Thus, if all kept the commandment of non-resistance, it is evident there would be no offences, no evil deeds. If these formed a majority, they would establish the reign of love-and-good-will, even toward the ill-disposed, by never resisting evil with evil, never using violence. If there were a considerable minority of these, they would have such a corrective, moral effect upon society that every cruel punishment would be abolished, and violence and enmity would be changed to peace and love. If there were but a small minority of them, they would rarely experience anything worse than the contempt of the world, and the world would in the meantime, without noticing it, and without feeling itself under obligation, become wiser and better from this secret influence. And if, in the very worst case, a few members of the minority should be persecuted to death, these men dying for the truth would leave behind them their teaching, which is already sanctified by their martyr’s death.”

To begin with, even if everyone adhered to the principle of non-resistance, this would not necessarily mean that “there would be no offences, no evil deeds.” As pointed out previously, evil might be a function of more than just the human tendency toward exhibiting enmity, and, therefore, dishonesty, pride,

jealousy, impatience, arrogance, selfishness, and greed could all lead to offences and evil deeds of one kind or another even if everyone eschewed violence, force, and war while engaging in such evil.

Secondly, even if a majority of the people operated in accordance with the principle of “resist not evil”, this would not necessarily guarantee that there would be “a reign of love and good-will”. In other words, refraining from violence or the use of force is one thing, but giving expression to love and exercising good-will toward others would seem to require additional qualities of character beyond being able to control one’s tendency to respond to violent acts with further acts of violence.

Thirdly, notwithstanding Tolstoy’s belief that if there were a fairly large number of people who practiced the principle of non-resistance that those individuals “... would have such a corrective, moral effect upon society that every cruel punishment would be abolished, and violence and enmity would be changed to peace and love,” nonetheless, the latter conclusion does not necessarily follow from the former premise. For instance, there could be some sort of tipping point phenomenon in which the number of people committed to the principle of “resist not evil” might make a difference to whether, or not, the example of non-resistance would have an impact upon the rest of society.

In addition, the social, economic, educational, and/or religious status of the individuals committed to non-resistance might also determine to what extent, if any, the rest of society might be influenced by the example of those people. Moreover, Tolstoy’s idea of spiritual change appears to be entangled in a dynamic that makes the foregoing kind of change a function of the impact which spiritually principled people have on those who are not as spiritually principled, and, as a result, he seems to underestimate the extent to which less spiritually principled people have to be receptive to, and struggle to realize, any given, possible change in spirituality or conduct.

Fourthly, the following claim of Tolstoy also seems rather problematic – namely, that if only a small minority of any given

population were committed to the principle of non-resistance, then, nonetheless, “the world would in the meantime, without noticing it, and without feeling itself under obligation, become wiser and better from this secret influence.” While Tolstoy might be correct in what he says, nevertheless, he fails to provide an account that is capable of plausibly explaining how such a “secret influence” might operate so that people, without feeling under any sense of obligation, would become “wiser and better” in some undefined sense.

Finally, Tolstoy mentions the possibility of instances in which just a few individuals might be killed from among the minority that are committed to the principle of “resist not evil”. In conjunction with such a contention, he maintains that individuals who die for the truth would be able to leave behind the legacy of their commitment to the truth and that their death would sanctify that truth.

Without wishing to diminish the potential significance of the principle of “resist not evil,” one cannot necessarily assume that Tolstoy’s interpretation of that principle is correct. Consequently, while one might be prepared to respect someone’s willingness to sacrifice his, her, or their life for what they believe, nonetheless, such willingness does not – in and of itself -- render the foregoing belief true nor does that death necessarily lend sanctity to such a belief or automatically confer the status of martyr on the individual who is professing that belief.

Toward the beginning of Chapter II in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy asks several questions:

“... did Christ actually demand from His disciples the fulfillment of what He taught in the Sermon on the Mount? And so, can a Christian, remaining a Christian, go to court, taking part in it and condemning people, or seeking in it defense by means of violence, or can he not?”

Did, in fact, Jesus (peace be upon him) demand that people fulfill the Sermon on the Mount? Or, was he introducing individuals to certain aspects of the ontological and metaphysical logic - i.e., the structural principles - that characterizes life.

Was Jesus (peace be upon him) commanding people to perform certain acts or was he guiding them so that they might keep certain principles in mind when making decisions? Perhaps Jesus (peace be upon him) was attempting to convey to people the idea that one ignores certain spiritual principles at one's own risk, just as one ignores, at one's own risk, the laws of gravity or electricity or any other set of principles concerning the nature of reality, and, therefore, rather than commanding people to observe the principles of spirituality, Jesus (peace be upon him) might have been cautioning human beings about the central role that certain principles play in life, but whether, or not, individuals heed that kind of guidance is a matter of personal choice for which they bear responsibility.

This matter of guidance versus commandment might be an important distinction. For instance, Tolstoy argues that:

“Very much has been said in reference to my book about how incorrectly I interpret this or that passage in the Gospel, how I err in acknowledging the Trinity, the redemption, and the immortality of the soul; very much has been said, but this one thing, which for every Christian forms the chief essential questions of life: how to harmonize what was clearly expressed in the teacher's words and is clearly expressed in the heart of every one of us, -- the teaching about forgiveness, humility, renunciation, love of all men, of our neighbors and of our enemies, - with the demand of the military violence exerted against the men of one's own nation or another nation.”

Without wishing to take sides as to which, if any, of the interpretations of the Gospel are correct, surely, notwithstanding Tolstoy's desire to take exception with those

who criticized his perspective, nevertheless, the issue of what, if anything, constitutes a correct understanding of various passages in the Gospel is a legitimate issue. This matter is especially crucial given the willingness of all too many people to impose their understanding of those sorts of issues onto other individuals.

What Tolstoy believes is “clearly expressed in the teacher’s words and is clearly expressed in the heart of every one of us” might not be as clearly expressed as he supposes. Among other things, the words of the Gospel that people read are translations (European) of translations (Latin) of translations (Greek) of linguistic usage (Aramaic) that might, or might not, accurately reflect what originally may have been said.

Surely, people have a right to exercise a certain amount of caution concerning the foregoing kinds of issues. This is especially so when one is considering the use of force or violence in order to impose various modalities of understanding onto other people ... modalities that are couched in all manner of uncertainties.

Therefore, while one might be willing to agree with Tolstoy that one should be circumspect in matters involving the exercise of force or violence, the reason for doing so is not necessarily because Jesus (peace be upon him) is commanding people to do this but, instead, might be due to the possibility that there are a variety of uncertainties – some of which have been discussed earlier in the present chapter -- concerning just what Jesus (peace be upon him) might have meant by principles such as, for instance, “resist not evil” or love, as well as whether Jesus (peace be upon him) was trying to command us to fulfill his words or whether he simply was trying to guide us with respect to a better way for engaging life than is possible through violence or force .

Arguing against those who seek to justify the use of violence by nations and governments that call themselves Christian, Tolstoy states that:

“According to the concept of these men, the Christian government is not in the least obliged to be guided by the spirit of humility, forgiveness of offences, and love of our enemies.

It is useless to refute such an assertion, because the men who assert this refute themselves, or rather, turn away from Christ, inventing their own Christ and their own Christianity.”

If it is “useless to refute such an assertion”, one wonders why Tolstoy seems to spend so much time trying to do precisely that. However, having said that, the problem we all face is the following: -- namely, trying to determine who is “inventing their own Christ and their own Christianity” or their own Muhammad (peace be upon him) and their own Islam, or their own Buddha and their own Buddhism, and so on, is very difficult to establish. Therefore, what is problematic about the foregoing set of circumstances is that all too many people are often predisposed to arbitrarily impose their own hermeneutical systems onto other people despite the presence of considerable uncertainty that surrounds and often obscures the precise nature of the truth in such matters.

Tolstoy continues on with his critical analysis of those who are resistant to the idea of applying Christ’s teachings to principles of governance by outlining a second argument of such individuals which

“... consists in asserting that, although Christ really taught to offer one’s cheek and give up a shirt, and this is a very high moral demand, there are malefactors in the world, and if these are not curbed by the exercise of force, the whole world and all good men will perish.”

There are several issues to address with respect to the foregoing considerations. Thus, among other things, one might inquire about whether, or not, force is necessarily the only way one might curb alleged malefactors, and, consequently, whether

force or violence should be made the default positions to which one automatically resorts when difficulty arises.

For example, there are certain groups of indigenous people who employ “healing circles” to engage -- in a non-violent manner -- individuals who have committed various acts of violence (such as domestic abuse, rape, or murder). The purpose of the aforementioned healing circles is to seek forms of restorative justice by constructively addressing the disharmonies that have arisen within individuals and a community rather than engage such issues by means of one, or another, violent or forced-based forms of punishment.

Tolstoy contends that arguments which claim that force or violence is necessary in order to deal with the malefactors that reside in society or a community are ungrounded:

“... because, in the first place, if we allow ourselves to recognize any men as special malefactors (Raca), we thus destroy the whole meaning of the Christian teaching, according to which we are all equal and brothers, as the sons of one heavenly Father; in the second place, because, even if God permitted the exertion of violence against malefactors, it is absolutely impossible to find that safe and indubitable sign by which a malefactor may be unerringly told from one who is not ...”

There seems to be an almost complete lack of discernment in Tolstoy’s foregoing position. To begin with, given all of the inequalities of, among other things, talent, intelligence, ambition, and physical abilities that are quite easy to demonstrate as being present in the world, Tolstoy has not, yet, successfully delineated precisely what is meant by the notion that “we are all equal and brothers”.

Moreover, what about sisters? Are they equal to brothers, and if so, why aren’t they included in his statement of equality, and if not, what – if anything -- justifies such inequality?

Perhaps, we are all equal before God as a function of our respective capacities to exercise choice concerning issues involving truth, meaning, purpose, identity, and character. However, the nature or character of those choices might simultaneously constitute a basis for determining whether, or not, a given individual qualifies as some sort of malefactor.

The foregoing approach to the issue of equality might be different from what Tolstoy had in mind when he referred to that term. However, notwithstanding Tolstoy's foregoing claim to the contrary, nonetheless, making such distinctions would not necessarily remove the idea of equality from Christian teachings and, thereby, could allay some of his fears in that regard.

Furthermore, if -- as Tolstoy asserts in the previous excerpt from *The Kingdom of God is Within* -- there are no sure signs for being able to identify who is a malefactor, then, presumably, one also might wish to argue that there are no sure signs for being able to identify who is telling the truth. Yet, given that Tolstoy believes there are, in fact, certain truths which are being communicated to human beings through the alleged words of Christ --- such as the notion of "resist not evil" -- then those 'truths' establish a baseline of comparison against which one might distinguish between someone who is committed to those truths and someone who deviates from those same truths, and, ipso facto, becomes a malefactor.

From Tolstoy's perspective, using violence and force as a default position for dealing with evil could identify someone as a malefactor because Tolstoy maintains that anyone who seeks to forcefully resist evil is giving expression to a form of evil, and, if this were not the case, then, Tolstoy would have no reason for promoting the idea of "resist not evil". Moreover, malefactors also might refer to individuals who do not operate in accordance with the truth (whatever that turns out to be).

In addition, to deny someone sovereignty despite the fact that no one else has been shown to suffer as a result of the exercise of that sovereignty might make one a malefactor. Alternatively, using arbitrary grounds to defend a given form of

governance might constitute grounds for considering someone to be a malefactor.

Tolstoy continues on with his attempt to explicate and, thereby, defend his position concerning the idea of non-resistance when he contends that the:

“... justification of violence used against a neighbor for the sake of defending another man against worse violence is always incorrect, because in using violence against an evil which is not yet accomplished, it is impossible to know which evil will be greater, -- whether the evil of my violence or of that against which I wish to defend my neighbor. We execute a criminal, thus freeing society from him, and we are positively unable to tell whether the criminal would not have changed on the morrow and whether our execution is not a useless cruelty.”

If Tolstoy is correct that knowing which kind of evil will be greater (i.e., whether the evil of my violence or of that against which I wish to defend my neighbor) is impossible to determine, then, knowing which “good” will be greater (namely, refraining from committing an act to resist potential evil or actually proceeding to commit such an act of resistance) also will be equally impossible to establish. The uncertainties run in both directions.

If Tolstoy wishes to argue – as he does from time to time in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* – that acting in accordance with principles such as “resist not evil” is an ideal which human beings approach as an asymptote (i.e., coming closer and closer but never quite getting there), then, in the face of the many uncertainties that surround choices concerning whether, or not, to resist evil in any given set of circumstance, perhaps, human beings have no choice but to try to establish clear guidelines for the use of force because, if Tolstoy is correct, then, our inability to realize the ideal of non-violence means that violence will occur.

When guidelines concerning the use of force or violence are transgressed, then the community would need to come together in order to try to assess whether such a transgression is warranted (and, when necessary, update the guidelines for dealing with one another). Such transgressions offer opportunities for learning experiences to take place, and by means of these opportunities, communities might be able to develop, among other things, the kinds of principles of restorative justice that might be necessary to protect people's sovereignty rather than automatically assuming that such problems require communities to curb transgressions concerning force and violence through the use of violent punitive measures.

If one were to proceed in the above manner, one neither would be sanctioning violence nor forbidding it. Instead, the foregoing perspective indicates that because people are attempting to progress along an asymptote relationship with, among other things, the ideal of "resist not evil" (and, therefore, admitting that we always will fall short of realizing that ideal), then, perhaps, communities – through, for example, healing circles – could embrace non-violent forms of restorative justice as much as is feasibly possible (given our imperfections) in order to attempt to restore harmony to both individuals and the community.

In Chapter III of *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy states:

"Eighteen hundred years ago there appeared in the pagan world a strange, new teaching, which resembled nothing which preceded it, and which was ascribed to the man Christ."

If there actually had been nothing prior to the aforementioned teaching which resembled it, then how did Jesus (peace be upon him) come to be the first individual to give expression to that teaching? Tolstoy never really seems to answer this question.

Was Jesus (peace be upon him) the source of that teaching? Or, was he the locus of manifestation through which that teaching emerged.

If the latter possibility is the case, then, what was the nature of the relationship between Jesus (peace be upon him) and the Source of those ideas and principles that permitted Jesus (peace be upon him) to access those teachings? Was this a purely rational process – as Tolstoy maintains – and, if so, how did it work, or did this process involve epistemological capabilities that were non-rational or transrational (which does not mean supernatural) in character?

For example, does insight or intuition necessarily constitute rational phenomena? Or, do they give expression to non-linear processes that are complementary to reason but are independent of it and, as a result, engage reality in a non-ordinary way and, conceivably, at a different level than reason does?

Putting such considerations aside, there have been many teachings involving: Jains, the Vedanta, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Australian aborigines, various indigenous peoples of North America, as well as the Middle East Prophetic tradition out of which Jesus (peace be upon him) arose that have contained an array of beautiful teachings concerning the nature of: Character, truth, our relationship to Being, as well as many other dimensions of the potential that resides within human beings. Given that the historical record seems to suggest otherwise, why does Tolstoy believe that Jesus (peace be upon him) was the first to voice such ideas?

The foregoing question might assume even more importance when one takes into consideration – as pointed out earlier in the present chapter -- how Tolstoy, himself, acknowledged in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* that the teachings of the primitive Church had been distorted and altered in various ways by subsequent generations of political and religious leaders who, thereby, sought to gain control over people in order to induce the latter individuals to serve the interests of the former rulers and leaders. In other words, if

Tolstoy is willing to admit that certain people who came after Christ changed the teachings that came through Jesus (peace be upon him) in various ways, then, why not consider the possibility that there might have been teachings similar to those being promulgated by Jesus (peace be upon him) which existed prior to him but which had been distorted by various individuals in order to try to control people and resources just as certain people had done following the days when Jesus (peace be upon him) existed?

Perhaps individuals like Jesus (peace be upon him) have appeared from time to time precisely because, across the ages, there have been successive groups of individuals who have been more interested in, for example, power than truth, and, as a result, those people became actively engaged in changing problematic (for them) teachings concerning love, purpose, life, character, and identity that existed in their time and which might have been similar to the teachings of Christ. As those sorts of ideas and principles were altered or suppressed, there would have been a need for certain individuals to emerge (e.g., Jesus – peace be upon him) who would re-introduce the original teachings that had been distorted, changed, or obscured in some manner, and, therefore, while from Tolstoy’s perspective, such teachings might have seemed to be new and unprecedented as far as Europeans were concerned, nonetheless, this does not preclude the possibility that those kinds of ideas and principles – or ones similar to them -- might have been introduced to many generations prior to the time of Jesus (peace be upon him).

According to Tolstoy:

“Amidst the elaborateness of the religious rules of Judaism, where, according to Isaiah, there was rule upon rule, and amidst the Roman legislation, which was worked out to a great degree of perfection, there appeared a teaching which not only denied all the divinities, -- every fear of them, every divination and faith in them, -- but also all human institutions and every necessity for them. In the place of all the rules of former faiths, this teaching advanced only the model of an inner perfection of truth

and of love in the person of Christ, and the consequences of this inner perfection, attained by men. – the external perfection, as predicted by the prophets, -- the kingdom of God, in which all men will stop warring, and all will be taught by God and united in love ... In place of the threats of punishments for the non-compliance with the rules, which were made by the former laws, both religious and political, in place of the enticement of rewards for fulfilling them, this teaching called men to itself only by its being the truth.”

In the foregoing passage, Tolstoy speaks about the advancement of a model that gives expression to “an inner perfection of truth and love in the person of Christ.” Tolstoy claims the foregoing model replaced the earlier systems of religious and political rules (Judaic and Roman) that previously had governed people.

More specifically, the old systems supposedly, were based on threats of punishment for failing to act in accordance with a network of rules that had been generated by various political and religious leaders, or, alternatively, those older systems were based on the promise of rewards for complying with those same rules. However, according to Tolstoy, the new system was rooted neither in punishments nor rewards, but only in the truth.

Unfortunately, Tolstoy does not seem to provide an account for how Jesus (peace be upon him) came to have the capacity for perfecting an inner realization of truth and love. In other words, if, on the one hand, no one prior to Christ had a capacity for perfecting an inner sense of truth and peace, then, one has to explain the origins of such a capacity, but, if, on the other hand, certain individuals prior to Christ had a similar capacity for perfecting an inner sense of truth and love, then, why – at least according to Tolstoy -- did such a capacity only become activated during the life of Jesus (peace be upon him).

Similarly, Tolstoy does not offer an explanation for how or why people during, and following, the life of Christ came to have the capacity for being able to recognize the nature of the truth

as well as become responsive to that truth rather than have their behavior shaped either by threats of punishment or by the possibility of rewards as – according to Tolstoy -- had been the case previously. In other words, if prior to the emergence of Jesus (peace be upon him) people did not have the capacity to grasp the truth and, instead, only responded to threats of punishments or promises of rewards, then, one needs to explain the transition in motivational dynamics that apparently characterized people prior to, and following, the emergence of Jesus (peace be upon him), but if people prior to the time of Jesus (peace be upon him) already had the capacity for recognizing the truth and operating in accordance with it, rather than acting in compliance with various threats and rewards, then, why were they not able to grasp the truth prior to the time of Jesus (peace be upon him)?

If one likes, one can say that Jesus (peace be upon him) had some sort of impact on the people of his times as well as on individuals in ensuing generations. However, not everyone seems to have been impacted in the same way, or to the same degree, and, consequently, one has to explain the differential in the nature of that impact.

Moreover, given that Tolstoy rejects any hint of supernaturalism, then, he needs to provide some sort of an account that is capable of delineating the dynamics of the impact process being alluded to above. What is the nature of the capacity within a human being that is receptive to, or not receptive to, the presence of the sort of teachings to which the life of Jesus (peace be upon him) gives expression?

Is reason the only faculty that is necessary for understanding the nature of truth and love? If so, how does reason grasp the nature of truth, or how does reason grasp the nature of love?

Tolstoy indicates that the process of hypnotic suggestion is often responsible for inducing people to accept many of the ideas, values, and principles that are other than the truth which are being promulgated by religious and political leaders. However, if reason is not enough to protect human beings from

being vulnerable to the influence of hypnotic suggestion in the first place, then, why suppose that reason is capable of freeing people from hypnotic suggestion when someone – such as Jesus (peace be upon him) -- introduces them to principles such as “resist not evil” or the foundational importance of love?

Furthermore, if reason is all that one needs, then, what role does Jesus (peace be upon him) play? On the other hand, if reason is not enough to grasp the character of truth or love, then, what else is necessary and what role, if any, does Jesus (peace be upon him) play in that non-rational process?

In addition, one might like to know whether, or not, reason is enough to translate understanding into action? How does reason generate the will to act given that, quite frequently, we might be able to see and understand what we should do – i.e., that which truth and love might indicate is the best way to engage life – and, nonetheless, we often cannot bring ourselves to act as we know we should ... as was the case, many times, in Tolstoy’s life when he was caught up in his compulsions involving gambling or engaging in various sexual escapades or exploiting his serfs in one way or another despite being aware that such actions were not necessarily in his best interests?

According to Tolstoy:

“The truth alone will free you. God must be professed in truth only. The whole teaching will be revealed and will be made clear by the spirit of truth. Do what I say, and you will know whether what I say is true.

No proofs were given of the teaching, except the truth. The whole teaching consisted in the knowledge of the truth and following it, in a greater and greater approximation to it, in matters of life”

While one might be willing to agree that “God must be professed in truth only”, nonetheless, one still wonders about what the precise nature of the knowledge is that truth involves and how does one know that such knowledge is true? Moreover,

one also wonders how the “spirit of truth” will make the whole teaching clear ... as if the individual being exposed to the truth had no role to play in being receptive to the truth rather than being resistant to it.

In addition, one wonders how a person will know what constitutes ‘properly doing’ what is being said. Moreover, assuming one does what is said properly, how will one know whether, or not, what is said is true? ... That is, how does one determine what constitutes the truth?

One also wonders about how one is to measure “greater and greater approximation” to the truth. What criteria are to be used in such a measure, and what justifies the use of those sorts of criteria?

Tolstoy maintains that:

“... in the earliest times, there appeared men, who began to assert that the meaning which they ascribed to the teaching was the only true one, and that as a proof of it served the supernatural phenomena which confirmed the correctness of their comprehension.

It was this that was the chief cause, at first, of the failure to comprehend the teaching, and later, of its complete corruption.”

Although what Tolstoy claims in the foregoing passage might, or might not, be true, his assertion also raises a few questions. For example, just as supernatural phenomena cannot confirm the correctness of a given comprehension unless one, independently, can demonstrate the reality of such phenomena and how those phenomena constitute proof that one’s understanding is correct, so too, reason cannot serve as proof of Tolstoy’s comprehension of the teachings of Christ unless one, independently, can demonstrate how reason demands that one cannot reach any other conclusions than the ones that Tolstoy is offering in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and, therefore, one is left with the following question – namely, how can one know whether, or not, Tolstoy isn’t engaging in a variation of what he

indicates men were doing in earliest times (i.e., that the meaning being ascribed to the teaching of Christ is the only true one) but instead of claiming that supernatural phenomena confirm what he is saying, Tolstoy is maintaining that reason confirms (in an, as yet, unspecified manner just as was the case with respect to the issue of supernatural phenomena) the truth of his understanding?

With respect to the issue of supernatural events, Tolstoy notes that:

“... the assertion that the Holy Ghost, that is, God, spoke through the apostles, had again to be proved. And for this it was necessary to assert that on the day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost came down in the shape of tongues of fire on those who asserted this

But the descent of the Holy Ghost had to be confirmed for those who had not seen the tongues of fire (thought it is incomprehensible why a tongue of fire burning above a man's head should prove that what a man says is an indisputable truth), and there were needed new miracles, cures, resurrections, putting to death, and all those offensive miracles, with the Acts are filled, and which not only can never convince a man of the truth of the Christian teaching, but can only repel him from it.”

Tolstoy might be perfectly justified to question whether or not the foregoing sorts of phenomena actually occurred, as well as to question – assuming such phenomena did occur -- what they might have meant. After all, one could agree with Tolstoy that it would be reasonable to question why one should assume that the presence of fiery tongues – if they actually were present, as alleged, on the day of Pentecost -- proves that what was said on that occasion is the truth rather than indicating something, possibly, quite different ... such as: The tongues of fire symbolize the presence of falsehoods that will lead one to the fires of hell if one abides by what is being said.

Nonetheless, Tolstoy's reliance on the use of reason does not necessarily place him in any better position than anyone else as far as determining whether, or not, such allusions are specious is concerned. Reason might be useful for raising questions concerning potential weaknesses that could undermine the credibility of claims involving those sorts of phenomena, but reason cannot determine whether, or not, such events actually occurred, and if such phenomena did occur, reason cannot necessarily determine what those phenomena actually meant.

In short, the use of reason might legitimately be able to induce one to exercise caution or a certain amount of skepticism concerning claims about various kinds of anomalous phenomena (e.g., alleged miracles). However, the use of reason does not necessarily enable one to prove that all such claims are spurious.

Tolstoy goes on to claim that:

“There is nothing but the assertion of the churches to show that God or Christ founded anything resembling what the churchmen understand by church.

In the Gospel there is an indication against the church, as an external authority, and this indication is most obvious and clear in that place where it says that Christ's disciples should not call any one teachers or fathers. But nowhere is there anything said about the establishment of what the churchman call a church.”

The foregoing claim might, or might not, be true. However, if it is true, then, one may also wish to ask why anyone should consider Christ to be a teacher or why someone would want to become a disciple.

After all, if Tolstoy is correct that ‘the Kingdom of God is within you’, then, perhaps, one should not be looking for that Kingdom in someone else – such as Jesus (peace be upon him) -- but, instead, one must try to find the presence of that Kingdom within oneself. The true source of spiritual governance is within the individual.

While someone such as Jesus (peace be upon him) might be able to help remind one where to search for the Kingdom of God, and while someone such as Jesus (peace be upon him) might help to inspire individuals to seek that source of spiritual governance within themselves, and while someone such as Jesus (peace be upon him) might serve as an exemplar concerning the sorts of qualities involving character, love, identity, purpose, and truth for which one should aspire in order to be able to undertake the journey within in search of the Kingdom of God, nonetheless, ultimately, the nature of the spiritual quest is to learn how to make contact with the teacher – i.e., God – who is in charge of one’s inner Kingdom, and by realizing that inner Kingdom, one is able, God willing, to manifest outward conduct that reflects, and is in accordance with, the properties of that inner Kingdom and, thereby, help establish an external Kingdom of God.

So, in light of the foregoing considerations, one has difficulty refraining from asking at least one question concerning the tenability of Tolstoy’s following position:

“Every church deduces its profession through an uninterrupted tradition from Christ and the apostles ... Every church offers precisely the same proofs of its succession and even of the miracles in favor of its own authenticity; thus there is but one strict and precise definition of what the church is (not as something fantastic, which we should like it to be, but as something which in reality exists), and this is: the church is an assembly of men, who assert that they, and they only, are in the full possession of the truth ... these assemblies, which later on, with the aid of the support of the temporal power, passed into mighty institutions, that were the chief impediments in the dissemination of the true comprehension of Christ’s teaching.”

The question that arises in conjunction with the foregoing perspective is this: How can one be sure that Tolstoy, himself, is not just one more impediment “... in the dissemination of the true comprehension of Christ’s teaching” when he seeks to give

his readers the impression that he is in the possession of the truth concerning those teachings?

Tolstoy does say that:

“No matter at what stage of comprehension and perfection a disciple of Christ may be, he always feels the insufficiency of his comprehension and of his fulfillment, and always strives after a greater comprehension and fulfillment. And so the assertion about myself or about an assembly, that I, or we, possess the complete comprehension of Christ’s teaching, and completely fulfill it, is a renunciation of the spirit of Christ’s teaching.”

While Tolstoy is to be commended for being willing to acknowledge that neither he, nor any assembly of human beings is in full possession of the truth concerning the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him), nonetheless, one still, legitimately, could ask about what the nature of the measure is that Tolstoy is using to indicate that he has even a partial understanding of the truth, and, in addition, one also might wonder whether, or not, he would be able to identify, let alone justify, which part of the truth he has and how he knows that what he believes he understands concerning the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him) is the truth, partial though it might be?

Moreover, given Tolstoy’s aforementioned references to “assemblies of men”, presumably, he also meant to include the twelve disciples of Jesus (peace be upon him) as constituting one of the assemblies to which he is alluding that are not necessarily in full possession of the truth. In other words, just as one legitimately could raise questions concerning the nature of the partial truths that Tolstoy may have known, one also could raise questions concerning the nature of the alleged truths that – though, perhaps, partial in nature – might have been known by the twelve disciples.

The purpose of introducing the foregoing sorts of questions is not to discount the possibility that different individuals (such as Tolstoy, or Paul) or various assemblies (such as the twelve

apostles) might have had some sort of correct knowledge or understanding concerning the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him). Rather, the reason for giving expression to questions concerning what people (both individuals and assemblies) might, or might not, actually know with respect to the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him) is to make an appeal for the exercise of a certain amount of caution and critical reflection before rushing to judgment in relation to what Jesus (peace be upon him) might, or might not, have been teaching.

Furthermore, what one decides to do in such matters with respect to one's own life is one thing. However, when one begins to impose those sorts of uncertain understandings on other people (such as, for example, Tolstoy did with respect to his wife and children), then this becomes a very different kind of spiritual and ethical issue because one is no longer making decisions that affect just one's own life but, rather, one also is seeking to make decisions that affect the lives of other people as well.

While critically reflecting on the idea of a church, Tolstoy mentions the issue of heresy. He contends that:

“The only definition of heresy (the word *ἄρесьις* means part) is the name given by an assembly of men to every judgment which rejects part of the teaching, as professed by the assembly ... Heresy is the reverse of the church. Where there is the church, there is also heresy. The church is an assembly of men asserting that they are in possession of the indisputable truth. Heresy is the opinion of people who do not recognize the indisputableness of the church truth.”

To reject the “indisputableness of the church truth” does not necessarily make a perspective true just because one wishes to replace the church version of things with that new perspective. A church's ideas concerning the nature of ontology as well as the heretical counterparts to those ideas are competing theories concerning some aspect of reality, and, consequently, neither of

those competing theories is necessarily true -- either wholly or partially -- and, therefore, both are dependent on whether, or not, which, if any, of the two positions is capable of reflecting the actual nature of reality.

However, Tolstoy claims that:

“Every step of moving forward, of comprehending and fulfilling the teaching has been accomplished by the heretics: such heretics were Tertullian, and Origen, and Augustine, and Luther, and Huss, and Savonarola, and Chelcický, and others. Nor could it be otherwise.”

Unfortunately, Tolstoy fails to specify (or justify) the nature of the criteria that are to determine what constitutes a measure of “moving forward” with respect to “comprehending and fulfilling the teaching” of Jesus (peace be upon him)? In other words, he does not provide any reliable way to distinguish between heretics that might be wrong and heretics that might be right, and, as a result, we are not provided with the sort of insight that might be able to explain why we should accept the heretical ideas (relative to the teachings of a given church) of “Tertullian, and Origen, and Augustine, and Luther, and Huss, and Savonarola, and Chelcický rather than the heretical ideas (relative to the teachings of a given church) that emanate from other individuals.

Tolstoy goes on in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* to note that:

“A man who believes in God-Christ, who will come again in glory to judge and punish the living and the dead, cannot believe in Christ, who commands a man to offer his cheek to the offender, nor to judge, but to forgive, and love our enemies.”

The foregoing comments suggest that Tolstoy might be somewhat confused about the relationship between human

beings and God. More specifically, whatever human beings might be required to do (e.g., offering the other cheek, loving one's enemies) in order to, God willing, constructively realize human potential – and this task of realizing one's potential is at the heart of the metaphysical and ontological challenge facing human beings – does not necessarily simultaneously impose upon God a similar need to follow the same set of rules as human beings are required to observe as a function of the existential challenge with which they are confronted.

Assuming that Jesus (peace be upon him) actually taught the principles being mentioned by Tolstoy (i.e., offering the other cheek, loving one's enemies), nevertheless, acting in a manner that is contrary to what Jesus (peace be upon him) might have taught, does not, thereby, make God a hypocrite by, for example: (a) Judging certain human beings for having failed to fulfill their essential potential, or (b) taking certain human beings to task for not living in accordance with such a potential, or (c) refusing to forgive them ... if that is what God decides to do. Moreover, judging human beings or holding them to account for their misdeeds or refusing to forgive them under certain circumstances does not, thereby, automatically preclude the possibility that God still loves the ones who might have to undergo a form of repentance that is painful in certain ways (e.g., to the ego) and, therefore, is experienced as punitive even though the ultimate goal of such experiences may well be an exercise in restorative justice (e.g., to help move an individual toward realizing his, her, or their essential potential), and, as such, constitutes a Divine mercy.

God is the One Who has created human potential as well as provided human beings with an opportunity – via existence -- to realize that potential. Consequently, human beings are the ones who have the task of engaging or ignoring the foregoing challenge, and God has no need to engage such a challenge or satisfy the conditions and requirements of that challenge.

What Jesus (peace be upon him) might have taught was, and is, for the guidance of human beings. God is the One Who made that guidance possible, but, nonetheless, the act of making such

guidance possible does not necessarily make God subject to its requirements as Tolstoy's previous quote tends to lead one to believe might be the case.

Fairly early during Chapter IV of *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy states

"The essence of religion lies in the property of men prophetically to foresee and point out the path of life, over which humanity must travel ..."

Tolstoy does not explain, at this point what he means by the phenomenon of being able to "prophetically foresee" a given path of life. However, elsewhere in his writing (for example, see: *What Is Religion?* which was critically reviewed in an earlier chapter of the present book), he indicates that, from time to time, certain individuals come along who offer a new conception of life or a new system of meaning, and although such new conceptions of life or systems of meaning are not necessarily spiritual in nature, they are, nonetheless, religious in character because, for Tolstoy, religion is rooted in the human need to seek and generate systems of meaning.

In addition, aside from questions concerning the general issue of what it means to 'prophetically foresee' certain kinds of ideas, the foregoing quote raises a number of other questions, such as: Where does prophetic understanding come from? Should it be trusted and, if so, why should it be trusted?

Why do only certain individuals seem to have this capacity to foresee? And, finally, why is it that humanity must travel over a given path?

According to Tolstoy, both individuals and nations pursue, as well as acquire, systems of meaning that govern their conduct. Indeed, Tolstoy stipulates that:

“... nations cannot help but have a conception about the meaning of their collective life and the activity resulting therefrom.”

However, what, precisely, is meant by the idea that “nations cannot help but have a conception about the meaning of their collective life”? For example, what are the forces which necessitate nations must “have a conception about the meaning of their collective life”?

Is the system of understanding concerning the collective meaning of life something separate from individual systems of meaning concerning life? Or, alternatively, could systems involving collective meaning merely constitute some individual system of meaning that, for reasons both known and unknown, has been disseminated among, and accepted by, many of the people within a certain population?

Given the reality of human differences with respect to such properties as: Intelligence, interests, motivations, talents, experiences, and so on that exist in any population, can one assume that everyone in a certain nation necessarily will adopt a common understanding of what their collective lives mean? Or, is Tolstoy only talking about some sizable portion (or a powerful minority) of a nation’s population that operates in accordance with one kind of meaning system rather than another and, for whatever reason, such a system has come to dominate the way social, political, economic, philosophical, spiritual, and/or historical issues are interpreted?

The foregoing considerations also tend to lead one to wonder about the nature of the social, political, economic, cultural, educational, and religious phenomena that might have helped a certain conception concerning the meaning of collective life to have been able to establish dominance in a nation. Furthermore, one could also raise questions about why everyone in that nation might not necessarily have adopted such a dominant conception concerning the alleged meaning of their collective lives ... that is, why do some people seem able to resist such dominant conceptions?

Tolstoy claims that:

“The difference between the individual and the whole of humanity in this respect consists in this, that while the individual in the determination of the comprehension of life, proper to the new stage of life into which he enters, and in the activity which arises from it, makes use of the indications of men who have lived before him and who have already passed through the period of life upon which he is entering, humanity cannot have these indications, because it all moves along an untrodden path, and there is no one who can tell how life is to be understood, and how one is to act under the new conditions into which it is entering, and in which no one has lived before.”

The foregoing excerpt seems to offer an explanation for how the issues facing individuals are different from those that face a collective (such as a nation or humanity as a whole). However, upon closer examination, the reality of an explanation seems to evaporate.

For example, in the case of individuals, Tolstoy speaks of “the comprehension of life, proper to the new stage of life into which” an individual enters. Unfortunately, he doesn’t explain what makes a given comprehension of life “proper to the new stage of life into which” a person enters, nor does he explain what is meant by the notion of such a “new stage of life” or what induces a person to enter into it?

Furthermore, Tolstoy describes how individuals make “use of the indications of men who have lived before ... and who have already passed through the period of life upon which” a person is entering. Yet, Tolstoy fails to identify what the properties of such “indications” are or how individuals go about making use of the sorts of indications to which he is alluding.

In addition, Tolstoy does not really provide much, if anything, in the way of specific details concerning the nature of what the new stage of life is into which an individual supposedly is entering or in what way, and to what extent, previous people

have already passed through such a stage. Similarly, Tolstoy doesn't really explain why the path along which humanity -- or some collective -- moves is necessarily untrodden, or why those who have gone before couldn't have provided certain "indications" -- as Tolstoy believed occurred in relation to individuals -- to help humanity to navigate its way through whatever circumstances of life are present.

The stages of life that Tolstoy mentions in the previous quotes seem to be connected to the notion of a 'conception of life'. More specifically, Tolstoy believes there are just three conceptions of life which form the foundations of all religions, both present and past, and these are: (1) The personal or animal; (2) the social or pagan, and (3) the universal or Divine

"According to the first life-conception, man's life is contained in nothing but his personality; the aim of his life is the gratification of the will of this personality. According to the second life-conception, man's life is not contained in his personality alone, but in the aggregate and sequence of personalities,—in the tribe, the family, the race, the state; the aim of life consists in the gratification of the will of this aggregate of personalities. According to the third life-conception, man's life is contained neither in his personality, nor in the aggregate and sequence of personalities, but in the beginning and source of life, in God."

Tolstoy doesn't indicate what the nature of the forces or dynamics are that shape a given individual's personality or will. Moreover, in the light of the diversity that is present in any given population, then, personality and will might give expression to complex phenomena that are capable of generating an array of possibilities, including personalities which are interested in exercising their will to establish systems of meaning involving aggregates (such as families, nations, institutions, and corporations) or systems of meaning that are rooted, in one way or another, with that which is universal or the idea of God.

For example, one could describe Tolstoy as a personality who willed his way to the construction of a system of meaning involving God. As such, his existential orientation was a function of both personality (the first life-conception noted by Tolstoy earlier) as well as the idea of God (the third life-conception cited by Tolstoy in the previous quote).

In the light of the foregoing considerations, there really is no reason why an individual couldn't integrate features from all three life conceptions (namely, the individual, the aggregate, and the spiritual) to form systems of meaning that involved values, principles, and ideas that were capable of generating possibilities that entailed various combinations of the three life-conceptions. So, instead of just the three, separate, systems of meaning that are specified by Tolstoy which, allegedly, serve as the foundation for all religions, past and present, there could be an indefinitely large set of integrated combinations featuring different facets of those three life-conceptions that are possible.

Consequently, if, as suggested earlier, 'life-conceptions' and 'stage of life' have roughly equivalent meanings for Tolstoy, then one still wonders – as previously asked -- what Tolstoy means when he refers to:

“... the comprehension of life, proper to the new stage of life into which he enters ...”,

or what he means when he speaks about making:

“... use of the indications of men who have lived before him and who have already passed through the period of life upon which ...”

a person supposedly is entering.

What determines the nature of the “comprehension of life” that will be “proper to the new stage of life into which” a person enters? Moreover, what determines the ‘stage of life’ into which

a person enters or what are the criteria for identifying whether, or not, someone actually has passed through a given stage of life or what determines which “indications” from those who, supposedly already passed through a given period of life will be used or how those indications will be used?

Furthermore, does one have to suppose – as Tolstoy believes -- that the path pursued by a given collective (in the form of institutions, communities, nations, states, or humanity) will necessarily be untrodden? In addition, notwithstanding the fact that as long as the nature of the truth has not been established, then, everyone’s quest – whether individual, collective, or universal in nature – is somewhat untrodden, and, yet, nonetheless, there is a certain similarity or overlap inherent in such quests – whether individual, collective, or universal in nature – because one of the primary problems with which all systems are (sooner or later) confronted is the same – namely, what is the character of one’s (or our) relationship with Being?

Tolstoy claimed in a previous quote – rather vaguely and problematically as has been demonstrated during the last several pages of exploratory discussion -- that individuals who lived during an earlier era might have been able to assist ensuing generations of individuals who were entering into a stage of life that had been experienced by individuals from the earlier era. The nature of such assistance would be in the form of providing certain “indications” that might help individuals living at a later time to gain insight into how to proceed with respect to a given stage of life ... a process, unfortunately, which Tolstoy failed to specify or substantiate.

However, Tolstoy continues on by contending that current humanity (as opposed to individuals) cannot derive any benefit from previous generations of humanity in the matter of life stages because the path of present humanity has not been trodden by previous generations of humanity. While there might be any number of existential experiences that are likely to be unique to a given generation of humanity, nonetheless, Tolstoy really hasn’t shown that earlier generations of humanity couldn’t have certain forms of guidance or “indications” to offer

subsequent generations of humanity despite whatever differences might separate the two.

Tolstoy has set things up in the way he has in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* because the framework he is constructing in that work serves the system of meaning – or, religion – that he wishes to promote. For instance, he wants the path of Christ to be new – i.e., untrodden -- and, therefore, earlier generations have no help (“indications”) to offer with respect to understanding that message because, according to Tolstoy, none of them have entered into the new stage of life (i.e., the universal) that Tolstoy believes Christ was inviting human beings to enter.

The three stages of life-conception that he mentions and which have been outlined earlier are like progressive steps that are somewhat developmental in nature in the sense that those stages seem to form a fixed sequence. In other words, the aforementioned life stages begin with the personal, then, at some point in history, the personal is followed by a transition to some sort of a social/pagan system of meaning or religion, and, then finally, during a subsequent era of history, development moves on to a universal system of meaning – or religion -- in the form of the teachings of Christ.

Thus, Tolstoy states:

“The whole historical life of humanity is nothing but a gradual transition from the personal, the animal life-conception, to the social, and from the social to the divine. The whole history of the ancient nations, which lasted for thousands of years and which came to a conclusion with the history of Rome, is the history of the substitution of the social and the political life-conception for the animal, the personal. The whole history since the time of imperial Rome and the appearance of Christianity has been the history of the substitution of the divine life-conception for the political, and we are passing through it even now.”

Unfortunately, Tolstoy has done nothing in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* to demonstrate that his three stages of life-conception actually are inherent in, or hardwired into, the nature of existence. Instead, he appears to arbitrarily have invented or created a conceptual framework of progressive, developmental, life stages in order to try to justify his ideas about Christ and the teachings of Christ (for example, that nothing like those teachings have ever appeared before in previous generations of humanity).

Tolstoy claims that:

“The man with the divine life-conception no longer recognizes life to consist in his personality, or in the aggregate of personalities (in the family, the race, the people, the country, or the state), but in the source of the everlasting, immortal life, in God; and to do God’s will he sacrifices his personal and domestic and social good.”

While a divine life-conception might help to reorient or redefine an individual’s understanding concerning what the nature of ‘the good’ is with respect to the potential of personality or in relation to the potential of an aggregate of personalities, why does Tolstoy appear to presuppose that such a reorientation requires that the “personal and ... social good” must be sacrificed? Why assume that doing the will of God is not capable of leading a person to realize the constructive potential of an individual or aggregates of individuals, and, thereby, establish what is good with respect to the personal and the collective level, as well as the universal dimension of development?

In fact, given that Tolstoy is trying to help his readers understand what is meant by idea that *The Kingdom of God is Within You* in both an internal (i.e., the individual) as well as an external sense (i.e., the collective), one wonders why Tolstoy believes that doing God’s will requires that a person must sacrifice both personal and social facets of the good. For

instance, on the level of personality, if -- as Tolstoy argues -- the divine life-conception involves the recognition that “the source of the everlasting, immortal life” is God, and if doing the will of God offers one the opportunity to have access to such an “everlasting, immortal life”, then, how does this require an individual to sacrifice a personal good?

Tolstoy goes on to stipulate that the “prime mover” for the universal or divine system of meaning – i.e., religion – is love. Leaving aside for the moment that Tolstoy never really seems to define what he means by love and, notwithstanding the fact – as discussed in Chapter 1 of the present book -- that his own complicated history with his wife and family makes one wonder what he actually understood by the idea of love, one might raise a number of other questions concerning Tolstoy’s foregoing perspective.

For example, why not suppose that the prime mover of religion is not just a function of love – whatever this might involve – but, as well, the prime mover of religion might also be a function of: Truth, understanding, insight, grace, and/or character (e.g., patience, humility, honesty, integrity, nobility, kindness, and so on)? Or, one also might ask how the change or transition in perception or orientation (e.g., from the social to the universal) comes about, or how does one acquire the love that is necessary to make the transition away from one’s sense of personal or aggregate good to the sort of good to which the universal or divine life-conception gives expression?

In addition, one could ask: Why weren’t people able to see or grasp the presence of God prior to Christ? What prevented it?

Whatever the answer to the foregoing might be, one, then, would need to ask: What enabled human beings to overcome the forces that prevented human beings from grasping the presence of God prior to Jesus (peace be upon him)? In other words, why did the transition to a God-based/love-based orientation not occur until the rise of Christianity?

According to Tolstoy, one impediment to grasping the character of the universal or divine life-conception is as follows:

“What is taking place is what in the majority of cases serves as a source of the coarsest human errors,—men who are standing on a lower level of comprehension, coming in contact with phenomena of a higher order, instead of making efforts to understand them, instead of rising to the point of view from which they ought to look upon a subject, judge it from their lower point of view ...”

Although the foregoing perspective seems to offer an explanation of sorts, there are a number of questions that might be asked concerning it. For example, does failure to understand a given topic automatically make that topic a phenomenon of “a higher order”? What makes a given topic “a higher order” phenomenon, and how does one acquire the capacity to recognize the presence of “a higher order” phenomenon?

In addition, one might ask: How do people rise “to the point of view from which they ought to look upon a subject”? Or, how does one know that one is properly understanding that which is “higher”?

Tolstoy contends that those who stand on a lower level of comprehension:

“... do not understand that this teaching is the establishment of a new comprehension of life.”

The foregoing phrase: “this teaching” refers to the teachings of Christ. Unfortunately, Tolstoy does not explain what enabled Christ to establish such a new comprehension of life when, supposedly, no one else before him was able to do so.

Did Christ invent such a new comprehension of life or was he transmitting what had been revealed to him? Moreover, if the latter is the case, then, why didn’t anyone before him receive such an understanding, or, contrary to what Tolstoy believes, were there certain people before Jesus (peace be upon him)

who were recipients of an understanding that was similar in various ways to what had been revealed to Jesus (peace be upon him), and, consequently, Tolstoy is merely presenting a theory that is giving expression to a distorted history of religion?

The following excerpt from *The Kingdom of God is Within You* is, purportedly, one of the teachings of Christ that is cited by Tolstoy:

“Go and sell that thou hast, and follow me, and who hath not forsaken father or mother, or children, or brethren, or fields, or house, cannot be my disciple.”

To raise questions concerning the foregoing passage does not necessarily mean – as Tolstoy might claim -- that one is resisting the life-conception that is being discussed or that one is necessarily engaging “a higher order” phenomenon from a “lower level of comprehension”. One merely might be trying to seek more information in order to better understand the perspective being described by Tolstoy.

For example, what does it mean to forsake “father or mother, or children, or brethren” and, yet, love them at the same time? After all, if – as Tolstoy previously stipulated -- the prime mover of the divine life-conception is love, then, how does one simultaneously forsake and love one’s father, mother, children, or brethren?

Does loving others entail some sort of commitment to those individuals? Or, can one love someone in a purely intellectual way that does not spill over into duties of care concerning those individuals?

Moreover, in the passage quoted above, Tolstoy indicates that Christ is teaching that whoever does not forsake one’s: “father or mother, or children, or brethren, or fields or house cannot be ...” his (that is, Christ’s) disciple. If we assume that Jesus (peace be upon him) actually said what is being indicated in the foregoing quote, can one also necessarily assume that Christ words were being directed to all succeeding generations

of human beings rather than just to certain people who might have existed at the time that Jesus (peace be upon him) lived, and how does one come to know which of the foregoing possibilities constitutes the right kind of understanding?

One also might ask – and there is no intention to be frivolous in doing so -- what is to be done with the money that is received for selling the property concerning which one, supposedly, is being asked to divest oneself? Should one share it with others, and, if so, with whom should one share it and for what purposes should the money be shared ... should the money be spent for merely physical, worldly needs or just for spiritual purposes?

In addition, one might wonder whether, or not, the selling of one's possessions to others might serve to encumber the latter with worldly burdens that could make the transition from, say, a personal life stage to the universal or divine life stage more difficult for those individuals to whom one's possessions have been sold. Whether one gives one's possessions away to other people or one sells them to other individuals, one is transferring the burden of possessions to someone else, and, as a result, possibly, making their lives more difficult as far as being receptive to the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him) is concerned.

According to Tolstoy:

"... the Christian teaching says to a man of the aggregate, of the social conception of life ... 'repent', μετανοεῖτε, that is, bethink yourselves, or else you will perish. Remember that this carnal, personal life, which originated to-day and will be destroyed to-morrow, cannot be made secure in any way, that no external measures, no arrangement of it, can add firmness and rationality to it. Bethink yourselves and understand that the life which you live is not the true life: the life of the family, the life of society, the life of the state will not save you from ruin."

While one can understand that a social conception of life that is devoid of the universal is likely to be the sort of life about

which Tolstoy believes that people might wish to 'bethink themselves' and, therefore, repent, nonetheless, one wonders why the life of the family or the life of society or the life of the individual couldn't be a part of the "true life"? Presumably, in order to be able to realize the kingdom of God – internally as well as externally – then, both the personal and the social will have to be shaped by, and give expression to, the right kind of orientation with respect to the universal or divine-based conception of life.

Consequently, there seems to be a certain amount of inconsistency at the heart of Tolstoy's belief system. On the one hand, he appears to want individuals and collectives to turn away, respectively, from the personal as well as the social and, instead, devote themselves exclusively to fulfilling the will of God, while, on the other hand, Tolstoy indicates that in order to establish the kingdom of God on Earth (something that is inherently collective in nature), one must first turn inward and change the orientation of the personal (away from the animal self and toward God), and, then, use this new orientation to give expression to an externalized manifestation that will transform social, collective life and, thereby, establish the kingdom of God in the outer world.

If the personal dimension of life does not matter, then, why threaten individuals with the possibility of perishing – as Tolstoy does in the foregoing quote -- or why does he seek to entice them with the promise of "everlasting life" (as Tolstoy did in an earlier quote)? Is not the whole idea of realizing that the kingdom of God is within intended to induce human beings to look to a different dimension of the personal – i.e., the universal -- other than their willful, animal selves?

Furthermore, if the social or collective realm does not matter, then, why advocate establishing the kingdom of God on Earth? Is not the whole idea of an externalized version of the kingdom of God intended to be a way of transforming the collective life (whether in the form of a family, community, nation, or humanity as a whole) in a manner that will reflect the will of God?

Tolstoy stipulates that Jesus (peace be upon him) teaches:

“My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to do His work. Not my will be done, but Thine; not what I want, but what Thou wantest, and not as I want, but as Thou wantest. The life is in this, not to do one’s will, but the will of God.”

What does God want, and how do we discover what it is that God wants or wills and how do we know that what might be discovered with respect to the issue of that ‘will’ is the truth?

Moreover, how does one discover how to want what God wants? How does one learn to will what God wills?

Tolstoy indicates that God wants individuals to: “turn away from” themselves. However, given that one of the purposes of turning away from oneself is so that an individual can learn that the kingdom of God is within one and, thereby, be able to gain access to everlasting life, can one really say that one is being asked to turn away from oneself, or are human beings only being asked to turn away from certain dimensions of themselves, and, if so, from which dimensions of themselves (both individually and collectively) are they being asked to turn away?

In fact, a person might hypothetically propose that one of the reasons why Tolstoy seems to have failed in various ways with respect to marriage and family life is precisely because of his extremist hermeneutic when it came to the will of God. For Tolstoy, all traces of the personal and the social had to be vanquished because he believed that they constituted lower, inferior remnants of earlier, historical stages of life-conception, and, yet if annihilation of the personal and the social is the goal, then, struggling to establish the kingdom of God within and without really doesn’t appear to make a great deal of sense.

One might well ask: For whom is one trying to establish the kingdom of God if not to serve God through benefitting both the individual and the collective? God, being God (One Who is considered to be perfect and complete), has no need for the

kingdom of God, but human beings, who have a knack for creating personal and collective messes, do seem to have such a need, and, therefore, perhaps the will of God is intended to serve human beings – both individually and collectively – rather than serving God, per se.

Moreover, as far as the will of God is concerned, Tolstoy has not really proven in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (or elsewhere in his writings) that God necessarily wants people to turn away from the personal or the social. Indeed, if love is actually a prime mover in the matter of religion as Tolstoy indicated in a quote cited earlier in this chapter, then, perhaps, what God wishes is for human beings to use their love of God to struggle to re-orient their lives on a personal as well as a social level so that these both reflect the will of Divinity rather than the will of the animal self or some arbitrary will of an aggregate.

One also might ask: What sort of ‘ruin’ is Tolstoy talking about in the last line of the previous quote? Is this a reference to some sort of punishment that is forthcoming, or could it be a warning about lost opportunity?

More specifically, since we all will perish no matter what we do, what really is at stake here? Aren’t we – at the very least and most concretely -- talking about the possibility of losing the opportunity (i.e., life) to be able to struggle to seek the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with existence, and, thereby, also losing the opportunity to be able to realize human potential (both individually as well as collectively) to varying degrees?

At one point in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy states that:

“The misconception of people who judge about the Christian teaching from the social point of view consists in this, that they, assuming that the perfection pointed out by Christ may be attained completely ... This assumption is false, because the perfection pointed out by Christ is infinite and can never be attained; and Christ gives His teaching with this in view, that

complete perfection will never be attained, but that the striving toward complete, infinite perfection will constantly increase the good of men, and that this good can, therefore, be increased infinitely.”

How does Tolstoy know that the assumption of certain people concerning the idea that “the perfection pointed out by Christ may be attained completely” is false? How does he know that the perfection pointed out by Christ is infinite in nature and, therefore, can never be attained, and, moreover, even if the perfection to which Tolstoy is alluding can never be attained, does this necessarily mean that such perfection is infinite in nature?

What does it mean to strive “toward complete, infinite perfection”? What exactly is the nature of the perfection toward which one is striving?

In what does the aforementioned process of striving consist? How does one know that such striving is sincere or effective?

How does one grasp that which is infinite and unattainable? Moreover, given the allegedly infinite and unattainable nature of the sort of perfection toward which we are supposed to be striving, how does an individual evaluate his, her, or their progress concerning that sort of goal (i.e., one that cannot be grasped or attained)?

For example, if, as Tolstoy believes, love is considered to be the prime mover of a divine life-conception, then, what does it mean to love in a manner that is infinitely removed from perfection? What qualifies an act as loving that is infinitely removed from perfection?

In addition, how would a person know whether a given act that is characterized as loving in nature -- despite being infinitely removed from perfection -- is any closer to perfection than another act that also is characterized as loving despite being infinitely removed from perfection? How would one know whether a given act was increasing or decreasing the good if the

standard against which it is being measured is infinite and unattainable?

What if the notion of perfection were tied to the nature of that which is to be perfected, and, consequently, was a function of the character of the potential that is being realized rather than being a matter of some universal standard of perfection that is applied to everyone and against which their progress is to be measured. In other words, just as differences among various individuals exist in conjunction with, say, intelligence and talent in a given population, then, so too, there might be differences in spiritual capacity among individuals as well.

As such, the potential of, for example, Jesus (peace be upon him) might give expression to one kind of perfection, while the potential of other individuals – say Tolstoy -- might give expression to other possible modalities of perfection. Perhaps, perfection is about whether, or not, an individual's potential is, or is not, fully realized rather than being a function of some universal, possibly infinite standard of perfection that is applied to everyone.

The idea that perfection in relation to any individual is necessarily infinite in nature or that one standard of perfection is to be applied to everyone might be true but, it also could be quite arbitrary. Perhaps, although the kinds of perfection that might be possible could be infinite in nature (even mathematics allows for more than one kind of infinity), nonetheless, the good is advanced when each individual struggles to realize her, his or their own potential to the fullest degree possible.

What is the structural character of the human being and just what are human beings capable of doing? Is the challenge facing human beings a matter of striving toward an unattainable sort of divine perfection or is the challenge with which we are faced a matter of striving toward the sort of perfection that is a function of what a given human being is actually capable?

Can the human condition be increased infinitely or is improvement limited by the nature of one's essential potential?

Or, stated in an alternative manner, while the human potential for improvement might be indefinitely (rather than infinitely) great, this does not necessarily mean that such a potential is capable of becoming God-like.

According to Tolstoy:

“Christ's teaching differs from previous teachings in that it guides men, not by external rules, but by the internal consciousness of the possibility of attaining divine perfection. And in man's soul there are not moderated rules of justice and of philanthropy, but the ideal of the complete, infinite, divine perfection. Only the striving after this perfection deflects the direction of man's life from the animal condition toward the divine, to the extent to which this is possible in this life.”

How does awareness of a possibility that refers to a dimension of reality that is infinite, unattainable and, therefore, presumably, unknowable guide human beings, and how does one know that such a possibility is actually possible? What is the specific nature of the dynamics of consciousness that supposedly would not only be capable of grasping “the possibility of attaining divine perfection” but, as well, would be capable of grasping the reality to which such a possibility alludes?

What motivates someone to strive after a form of perfection that is characterized simultaneously as being a ‘possibility’ that is ‘unattainable’? How does awareness of such an unattainable possibility deflect the direction of a person’s life away from an animal condition and toward the divine? What are the specific properties that are involved in the dynamics of that process of deflection?

How does Tolstoy know that: “only the striving after this perfection deflects the direction” of human life away “from the animal condition toward the divine?” The foregoing seems more like an argument that is steeped in nothing more than assertion rather than being an exercise in rational analysis.

Tolstoy does add a qualification in the last line of the foregoing quote which suggests that striving after the possibility of the divine ideal is done “to the extent to which this is possible in life.” Unfortunately, he fails to indicate to what extent such striving is possible in life or what factors will shape and modulate that kind of dynamic.

Tolstoy contends that:

“The true life ... according to Christ's teaching ... consists in the greatest approach to the divine perfection, as pointed out to every man and inwardly felt by him, in a greater and ever greater approach toward blending our will with the will of God, a blending toward which a man strives, and which would be a destruction of life as we know it. Divine perfection is the asymptote of the human life, toward which it always tends and approaches, and which can be attained by it only at infinity.”

If, according to Tolstoy, the divine ideal is infinite and unattainable, how does one identify or establish what constitutes “the greatest approach to the divine perfection? Moreover, in what way is the foregoing sense of “the true life ... pointed out to every” human being and “inwardly felt”?

How does one know whether, or not, what is “inwardly felt” is merely delusional in nature? In other words, although an individual might believe that one is achieving “a greater and ever greater approach toward blending” her, his, or their “will with the will of God,” how can such a person be sure that what he, she or they are feeling actually constitutes a blending of that individual’s will with the will of God?

What are the criteria through which such blending is assessed? What justifies the use of those criteria in the assessment process?

In *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy asserts that:

“Only this ideal of the complete, infinite perfection acts upon people and moves them to activity.”

Unfortunately, Tolstoy does not provide any of the details that would be necessary to help explicate how the ideal of infinite perfection moves people to activity nor does he indicate what kinds of activities would be generated through a person’s awareness of the presence of the ideal of “complete, infinite perfection”. Instead, we only have his unsubstantiated assertion that what he claims is the case.

For Tolstoy:

“Life, according to the Christian teaching, is a motion toward divine perfection. No condition, according to this teaching, can be higher or lower than another. Every condition, according to this teaching, is only a certain step, indifferent in itself, toward the unattainable perfection ... so there can be no obligatory rules for this teaching ...

All degrees of perfection and all degrees of imperfection are equal before this teaching; no fulfillment of the laws constitutes a fulfillment of the teaching; and so, for this teaching there are, and there can be, no rules and no laws.”

The logic that, supposedly, is present in the foregoing statements seems rather elusive. For example, if -- according to Tolstoy’s understanding of the Christian teaching -- “no condition ... can be higher or lower than another”, then, this would appear to indicate that there is no motion, only stasis.

In other words, if “no condition ... can be higher or lower than another, then, there can be no steps ... “indifferent” or otherwise that move one closer to the ideal of perfection. The very notion of taking “a certain step ... toward the unattainable perfection” suggests that there is a sense of higher and lower entailed in such a process, just as 2 is closer to infinity than 1 is despite the fact that the difference in closeness to infinity of the two numbers is infinitesimal in character.

In addition, if perfection is unattainable, then there are no degrees of perfection prior to the attainment of that perfection. Instead, whatever exists prior to such attainment is a degree of imperfection.

Of course, determining how one would go about identifying which of those degrees of imperfection might be closer to, or further away, from the ideal of perfection would appear to constitute a considerable challenge. Nevertheless, one cannot automatically conclude, as Tolstoy seems to, that all points along the asymptote curve to which such degrees of imperfection give expression are all the same, anymore than one can conclude that all natural numbers are neither higher nor lower than one another simply because none of them is capable of touching that which is infinite in nature.

Finally, and, perhaps most inexplicably, one has difficulty understanding the nature of the logic in Tolstoy's argument which supposedly ties together: (a) A process of striving through various degrees of imperfection with (b) his claim that "there can be no obligatory rules for this teaching." For example, if acquiring qualities such as: Humility, honesty, compassion, patience, sincerity, kindness, love, tolerance, and forgiveness were considered to be part of the process of striving toward the ideal of divine perfection, then, however imperfectly such qualities might be acquired, there would seem to be a dimension of imperativeness inherent in that acquisition process that could not be dismissed without abandoning the process of striving altogether.

Therefore, one has trouble understanding how Tolstoy reaches the conclusion that "there can be no obligatory" dimensions inherent in such a spiritual project. To be sure, qualities of humility, honesty, compassion, and so on, might not be governed by rules of an obligatory nature, but, nonetheless, there do seem to be modes of behavior that might be considered necessary if one hopes to move – however imperfectly – toward the ideal of divine perfection.

Thus, to be honest, humble, compassionate and patient – in however imperfect a manner -- seems somewhat closer to the

ideal of divine perfection than does just being honest. Similarly, to be honest all the time seems to be somewhat closer to the ideal of divine perfection than does just being humble only occasionally during any given day.

Tolstoy might, or might not, be right that there is no dimension of obligation associated the process of acquiring such qualities of character. Nonetheless, if the acquisition of the foregoing qualities is considered necessary to the process of striving toward the ideal of divine perfection, then, the possible gap between necessity and obligation could be a distinction without a difference.

Moreover, suppose one assumed – with Tolstoy -- that there is neither a dimension of necessity nor obligation associated with the possibility of striving toward an ideal of divine perfection. Nevertheless, given the specter of death that haunts us all, surely there should be some element of urgency that is present in conjunction with the issue of striving toward the ideal of divine perfection because unlike Tolstoy's fictional character Ivan Ilych we might not go through a protracted period of physical decline prior to death that affords us the opportunity to repent for the wrongs that we might have done or to try to discern the purpose of life, pain, and death, nor can we necessarily assume that all will necessarily be forgiven in the rather convenient, if not self-serving manner, which Tolstoy provides in his tale concerning the death of Ivan Ilych.

Even if one were to accept the idea that both (1) a person who does next to nothing with life, as well as (2) an individual who has spent her, his or their life trying to realize the nature of the truth concerning their relationship with existence, have each failed to realize the ideal of divine perfection, nonetheless, one has difficulty accepting the idea that neither of the two can be considered to be higher nor lower with respect to whatever the ideal of divine perfection might be. Furthermore, even if one were to accept Tolstoy's perspective on this issue and treat both of the foregoing cases as being the same – that is, neither higher nor lower than one another -- there is no guarantee that God sees things in the same manner, and, consequently, Tolstoy has

not necessarily demonstrated that what he claims – namely, that: “No condition, according to this teaching, can be higher or lower than another – is true.

Further along in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* Tolstoy maintains that:

“... the Christian commandments (the commandment of love is not a commandment in the strict sense of the word, but an expression of the very essence of the teaching)—the five commandments of the Sermon on the Mount—are all negative, and they all show only what men may not do at a certain stage of human development.”

To begin with, Tolstoy’s way of stating things in the foregoing – or, at least, the translation of what Tolstoy might actually have said – creates some difficulties. For instance, what does it mean to say that “love is not a commandment in the strict sense of the word” because love is “an expression of the very essence of the teaching”?

How does being the expression of the essence of a given teaching necessarily preclude the possibility that such an expression might constitute a commandment? In what way is love: “not a commandment in the strict sense of the word”?

The foregoing questions are not intended to suggest that Tolstoy is necessarily wrong in what he says during the first part of the foregoing quote. Rather, the point of mentioning such potential problems is to indicate how -- as has been demonstrated at many other junctures during the present book -- Tolstoy is not always as clear about what he means or as logical or rational as he might suppose he is, and, as a result, from time to time, he tends to place conceptual obstacles in the way of those individuals – like myself – who are trying to understand his perspective.

I do not know whether, or not, love is a commandment. What I do feel, however, is that love – in some, non-superficial sense of this term -- seems to play a crucial role in shaping or

determining the nature of one's relationship with Being, and, unfortunately, both conceptually as well as behaviorally, Tolstoy – as is the case in the previous quote -- often tends to create a great cloud of ambiguity about the character of his understanding concerning, among other things, the term “love”.

If love is not a commandment or rule, then, what actually is being said? Is use of the word “love” merely a way of trying to call people's attention to a certain dimension of the nature of reality, and, then, the issue with which an individual is confronted becomes a matter of choice with respect to whether, or not, one will pursue that – i.e., love -- to which one's attention is being drawn?

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, the quote that appears on the previous page also states that the five commandments which Tolstoy believes are present in the Sermon of the Mount – and these five directives serve as central principles in Tolstoy's religious perspective – [those five commandments] are described as being negative in nature, and he indicates this means that “they all show only what men may not do at a certain stage of human development.”

Presumably, the “certain stage of human development” to which Tolstoy is referring in the foregoing quote concerns the era of Christianity ... although Tolstoy does not provide an explanation for why human beings may not do the five things indicated below at such a stage in human development nor does he indicate whether, or not, doing those sorts of things was okay prior to that stage of development, and, if so, why. In any event, the five commandments to which Tolstoy is alluding are:

- (1) To possess no ill-will towards others and to refrain from doing anything that would induce such ill-will in others;
- (2) To maintain complete chastity, even in thought, in relation to those with whom one is not married;
- (3) To avoid making promises to others – especially in conjunction with governments or religious authorities;
- (4) To not respond to evil with evil (i.e., resist not evil);

(5) To love one's enemies and to do no evil to them, and this includes speaking well of them.

As has been pointed out earlier in this book, from time to time, Tolstoy experienced a certain amount of difficulty abiding by commandments (1), (2) and (5). For instance, even if one were to give Tolstoy the benefit of a doubt and assume that he did not harbor ill-will (whatever this might mean) toward others (such as his wife at certain junctures of his life, especially during the last year, or so, of their relationship), nonetheless, the nature of his writing often appeared to induce ill-will to arise in some individuals (which is one of the reasons why – however ill-considered and unnecessary this might have been – he was excommunicated from the Orthodox Church), and, as well, he did not always speak well of various individuals about whom he was critical, and, thereby, this brings into question how much – and in what way -- he could be described as loving some of his enemies ... a least as far as the issue of speaking well of others is concerned.

Moreover, the fifth commandment – namely, the challenge of loving one's enemies -- does not seem to be entirely negative in the sense indicated by Tolstoy (i.e., that such acts only involve refraining from doing certain kinds of things). Seemingly, loving one's enemies also might require one to show, among other things, positive qualities of kindness, compassion, forgiveness, patience, tolerance, nobility, sincerity, and honesty toward those that could be construed to be "enemies".

In fact, one might wish to note that the very use of the term "enemy" would seem to constitute a violation of the fifth commandment mentioned by Tolstoy because it requires one to make a distinction among individuals who all are supposed to be engaged through a loving equanimity. In any event, the behaviors mentioned in the previous paragraph seem to be rooted in constructive, proactive kinds of conduct rather than just focusing on refraining from exhibiting the sorts of conduct that Tolstoy appears to be referencing by his use of the term "negative".

After providing an outline of the aforementioned five commandments that are developed more fully in his work *My Religion*, Tolstoy states:

“... these commandments fail to form a teaching, and do not exhaust it, and form only one of the endless steps in the approximation toward perfection. After these commandments there must and will follow higher and higher ones on the path to perfection, which is indicated by the teaching.”

As the foregoing quote indicates, Tolstoy believes in the existence of other, “higher” kinds of commandments” that are beyond the five that he has discussed in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* and which complement those five directives by, allegedly, assisting individuals to move along the path to perfection. Unfortunately, he doesn’t specify what the nature of these “higher” kinds of commandments are or whether they, like the five commandments he does mention, are, for the most part, negative in character.

Although the following possibilities might, or might not, be among the sorts of steps that Tolstoy had in mind when he made the foregoing statement, nevertheless, despite the fact that Tolstoy would have been inclined to reject some of the items listed below, the following possibilities would seem to be consistent with any path that seeks to assist one to discover and realize the nature of one’s relationship with Being. More specifically:

(1) One should seek the truth in all matters;

(2) One should acquire or develop constructive qualities of character such as: Patience, integrity, honesty, compassion, kindness, humility, courage, perseverance, tolerance, and forgiveness;

(3) One should purify the false self or ego through acts of: Fasting, seclusion, night-vigils, contemplation, meditation, and chanting (Tolstoy, without any real proof, rejected all of the

foregoing practices as being capable of helping a person spiritually);

(4) One should seek to do justice to all members of creation by, among other things, helping to establish conditions that are conducive to assisting everyone to be able to realize their potential – both individually and collectively;

(5) One should seek God's assistance through prayer (although Tolstoy did believe that some prayers had a certain amount of value, he also tended to express a variety of reservations – again, without any real, solid arguments to support his position -- concerning the efficacy of other kinds of prayer).

In fact, one is tempted to say that establishing – or working to establish -- the foregoing five principles gives expression to a set of prerequisites that forms the foundations which make the observance of particular commandments – like the five that are listed by Tolstoy – possible. In other words, in order to be able to comply with Tolstoy's five commandments requires one first, to have access to the foregoing five principles which give expression to dimensions of (1) truth, (2) character, (3) purification, (4) justice, and (5) grace

Tolstoy does indicate that:

“The difference between the Christian teaching and what preceded it is this, that the preceding social teaching said: "Live contrary to your nature (meaning only the animal nature), subordinate it to the external law of the family, the society, the state;" but Christianity says: "Live in accordance with your nature (meaning the divine nature), subordinating it to nothing,—neither to your own, nor to anybody else's animal nature,—and you will attain what you are striving after by subordinating your external nature to external laws." The Christian teaching takes man back to the primitive consciousness of self, not of self—the animal, but of self—God,

the divine spark, of self—the son of God ... self as this son of God, whose chief quality is love.”

If the Christian teaching takes human beings back to a primitive consciousness of self -- not of self, in the sense of an animal, but of self in the sense of the divine spark within -- then, why not suppose that there could have been many individuals before Christ (some of whom are known and many about whom little or nothing is known) who tried to alert human beings to the presence of the divine spark that is within them and, the duties of care that are entailed by the presence of that divine spark which calls for human beings to “live in accordance with that nature ... subordinating it to nothing”? Is there really such a difference between the Christian teaching and other authentic teachings (whatever constitutes an expression of essential, fundamental truth) which preceded it? Isn't Christianity nothing less and nothing more than another effort to revisit, renew, or manifest the same set of underlying principles involving truth, character, purification, justice, and grace or dependence on the Source of all possibilities as has been the case with earlier teachings concerning those same five principles?

Unfortunately, a self-aggrandizing form of “exceptionalism” often emerges in conjunction with many spiritual traditions, not because of the spiritual tradition, per se, but because of the way various people sometimes choose to interpret that tradition through the filters of the false self and the desires of the false self. One of the symptoms to which such a pathology gives rise is the idea that only the spiritual tradition to which one is committed has access to the truth, and, as a result, those who operate under the influence of that kind of a delusional dynamic tend to be resistant to the possibility that the truth – either partially or wholly – might also exist in other spiritual traditions besides the one to which one is committed.

For example, Tolstoy claims that:

“Man does not love because it is advantageous for him to love this man or these men, but because love is the essence of his soul,—because he cannot help loving.”

The foregoing statement seems, quite palpably, to be problematic and, this is because it appears to be more a function of the hermeneutic that Tolstoy is seeking to impose on religion in order to satisfy the needs of the conceptual belief system that he is constructing to address his own psychological and emotional needs (e.g., his struggles with suicidal ideation) than such a position necessarily serves as a reflection of some sort of unassailable truth. Even though human beings might have a potential or capacity for love, there are, nonetheless -- and as history clearly shows -- a variety of forces acting on, through, and within human beings that tend to be opposed to: The presence of love, the expression of love, and the development of love.

The capacity for love -- to thrive or be realized -- must be nurtured and protected. In the absence of such nurturance and protection, love does not necessarily become the default operating position for human beings. Consequently, notwithstanding Tolstoy's claims to the contrary, one has difficulty believing that human beings -- even if one accepted the idea that love is the essence of their souls -- “cannot help loving”.

Indeed, as has been stated on several previous occasions, one has difficulty understanding what Tolstoy even means, at times, by the notion of love? This issue becomes particularly acute when one reflects on the nature of the troubled relationship that Tolstoy had with his wife as well as with many of his children, and, as a result, if one considers the matter carefully, one cannot avoid asking the question that Part II of Chapter 1 in the present book seeks to explore -- namely, what manner of love characterizes Tolstoy's troubled relationship with, among others, his wife?

According to Tolstoy:

“... the Christian teaching represents itself to the men of the social, or pagan, world-conception in the form of a supernatural religion, whereas in reality there is in it nothing mysterious, or mystical, or supernatural; it is nothing but the teaching about life, which corresponds to that stage of the material development, to that age, in which humanity is, and which must therefore inevitably be accepted by it.”

While Tolstoy might be quite right that Christ is seeking to introduce human beings to nothing more than a “teaching about life,” the nature of life might be richer, deeper, broader, and more nuanced than Tolstoy seems to believe is the case. For example, he might be quite wrong that there are no mystical dimensions to life (and the issue of mysticism will be addressed -- at least to a degree -- in the final chapter of this book).

The mystical is that which transcends the capacity of the rational mind to understand (which is one of the reasons why the mystical seems so mysterious because people tend to filter it through rational lenses of one kind or another) and, therefore, is rooted in epistemological modalities of engaging, and being engaged by, God that cannot be reduced to rationalized systems of thought even as the former modes of understanding (i.e., mystical dynamics) tend to complement, ground, and orient the latter forms of understanding (rational dynamics). Unfortunately, due to Tolstoy’s ignorance concerning the nature of mysticism (both with respect to its rigorous discipline as well as its rootedness in an experience-based system of epistemology), Tolstoy tends to unnecessarily – and unjustifiably -- impose restrictions on what Christ might have been teaching concerning the nature of the potential which exists in human beings by insisting that such potential be filtered and framed in accordance with various rational assumptions, predilections and limitations.

Apart from the foregoing sorts of mystical considerations, Tolstoy might also have ventured into contentious territory when he states in the previous quote that Christ’s teaching “corresponds to that stage of the material development, to that

age, in which humanity is, and which must therefore inevitably be accepted by it.” However, Tolstoy doesn’t seem to consider the possibility that the teachings of Christ might be independent of the “stage of the material development” or “to that age, in which humanity is” because those teachings are directed toward the potential that is inherent in human beings quite independently of whatever the stage of material development might be in which human beings are ensconced at some given period of history.

Historical circumstances might change. However, even if what is materially transpiring during any period of history might have the capacity to affect – both constructively as well as problematically – whether, or not, human potential is realized (partially or wholly), nonetheless, the essential potential inherent in human beings does not necessarily change.

To whatever extent the foregoing is true, then, while certain aspects of the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him) might reflect certain changing, material dimensions of history, the essential character of that teaching – which is directed toward awakening the unchanging nature of human potential – has no need to reflect, or address, the stage of material development in which human beings might live. Furthermore, aside from the act of asserting (as Tolstoy does in the earlier quote) that the teaching of Christ “corresponds to that stage of the material development, to that age, in which humanity is, and which must therefore inevitably be accepted by it”, Tolstoy really hasn’t put forth any evidence to prove that what he is asserting (either with respect to the issue of correspondence or the issue of acceptance) is true.

In fact, Tolstoy fails to specify what the nature of the correspondence supposedly is between, on the one hand, Christ’s teaching and, on the other hand, the stage of material development that allegedly characterizes human existence. In addition, Tolstoy says nothing about the dynamics of the alleged acceptance process that he claims makes such a process inevitable.

Tolstoy does say that:

“Just as the individual seldom changes his life merely in accordance with the indications of reason, but as a rule, in spite of the new meaning and the new aims indicated by reason, continues to live his former life and changes it only when ... there arises a series of contradictions and sufferings, which poison our life and demand changes.”

Nevertheless, even if one were to agree with Tolstoy that experiencing the foregoing sorts of contradictions and sufferings tends to poison life and, as a result, induce individuals to seek change, there is nothing which Tolstoy has said that demonstrates why such sought-for change must – “inevitably” -- be in the direction of Christianity rather than, say, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, or some other kind of spiritual, political, economic, scientific, or philosophical system of meaning.

According to Tolstoy:

“... we, having imbibed this consciousness, which is borne in the Christian atmosphere, know with our whole heart, and we cannot help but know, that fundamental truth of the Christian teaching, that we all are”

children of God who are “subject only to the law of love”.

Yet, Tolstoy lived in a Christian atmosphere for nearly 50 years before transitioning into his post-Kareninan lifestyle in order – at least in part – to try to save himself from his battle with suicidal ideation, and, yet, nonetheless, he did not live in accordance with the law of love. He killed; he raped; he exploited others, both sexually and economically; he gambled compulsively; he drank to excess, and, as well, by his own subsequent admission, he was caught up in the machinations of his ego.

So, why did it take so long for that which “we cannot help but know, that fundamental truth of the Christian teaching” to emerge in his consciousness? Apparently, even if one grants Tolstoy’s point that God implanted a capacity for love in the heart of human beings, this, in and of itself, does not necessarily mean that such a potential will automatically be realized.

Undoubtedly, Tolstoy, might wish to counter the foregoing with something along the following lines – namely, becoming entangled in various kinds of stupefying behavior (such as drinking, gambling, and sex), as well as having to deal with the impact of hypnotic suggestions that are imparted to individuals through government, the media, education, and the church could account for why so many decades had to pass before that which “we cannot help but know” (i.e., that fundamental truth of the Christian teaching) was able to bubble to the surface in him despite his having been able to imbibe a consciousness that is “borne in a Christian atmosphere” for more than half of his life.

Tolstoy indicates that:

"What characterizes the slave is this, that he is in the hands of his master like a chattel, a tool, and no longer a man. Just so it is with a soldier, an officer, a general, who march to murder and to death without any care as to justice, by the arbitrary will of ministers.... Thus military slavery [emphasis mine] exists ..."

One could reach similar conclusions in conjunction with various other dimensions of so-called civilization that involve elements of: economic slavery, educational slavery, political slavery, media slavery, financial slavery, and religious slavery.

However, what Tolstoy does not seem to be able to explain is how he became disentangled from the influences of various forms of stupefying behavior that shaped so much of his life, or how he was able to break free from the impact of an array of institutional forms of hypnotic suggestion. Conceivably, Tolstoy’s battle with suicidal ideation -- his desire to go on living rather than perish – might have served as a catalyst to help

initiate the process of breaking free – at least to a certain extent – from the debilitating effects of stupefying behaviors and hypnotic suggestion, and, thereby, help him to be in a position to try to work out a hermeneutic of Christianity that would be compatible with Tolstoy’s rationalistic sensibilities ... which is what most of his intellectual and creative efforts involved starting with, as well as following, the writing of *Anna Karenina*.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, then, while one might agree with Tolstoy that we all have been given a capacity for love, nevertheless, in order to even begin to become “subject only to the law of love”, perhaps, in one way or another, one needs to undergo a struggle of some kind in order to become open to the potential inherent in love’s presence rather than being entangled and bogged down in the machinations of stupefying behavior and hypnotic suggestions that govern a great deal of what goes on in the world, and therefore, contrary to what Tolstoy believes, the process of accepting love is not the inevitable phenomenon that he appears to suppose it is.

During Chapter 7 of *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy contends – in contrast to the foregoing perspective -- that liberation from the forces underlying stupefying behavior and hypnotic suggestion is achieved neither through struggle nor:

“... by the destruction of existing forms of life, but only by means of the changed comprehension of life. The liberation takes place in consequence of this, in the first place, that a Christian recognizes the law of love, which was revealed to him by his teacher, as quite sufficient for human relations, and so regards all violence as superfluous ...”

Yet, Tolstoy doesn’t really explain the nature of the dynamics that are involved in the process of bringing about a “changed comprehension of life”. In other words, he doesn’t provide a clear account of how a Christian comes to recognize

that the law of love which is revealed to that individual by one's teacher is "quite sufficient for human relations".

What Tolstoy does say is that:

"What serves as a guide for a Christian's acts is only the divine principle that lives within him and that cannot be oppressed or directed by anything."

However, if the divine principle that lives within an individual "cannot be oppressed or directed by anything," then, how do stupefying behavior and hypnotic suggestion come to have, by Tolstoy's own admission, such oppressive control over the lives of many, if not most, individuals in society?

Of course, Tolstoy might have meant that the aforementioned divine principle "serves as a guide for a Christian's act" only after an individual has come to recognize or realize that the law of love is sufficient for all human relations. Yet, if an individual were to accept the foregoing possibility, then, once again, a person is faced with the problem noted earlier – namely, what is the nature of the dynamics that make possible such a process of recognizing or realizing the sufficiency of the law of love in the first place.

According to Tolstoy:

"A spiritual influence is an action upon a man, such that in consequence of it the very desires of a man are changed and coincide with what is demanded of him. A man who submits to a spiritual influence acts in accordance with his desires."

Assuming one agreed with Tolstoy's foregoing characterization of "a spiritual influence", this kind of agreement doesn't necessarily get one very far. More specifically, even if a person were to accept such a characterization, nevertheless, not only do we still not know how "the very desires of a" human being are changed through

the presence of a spiritual influence, but, in addition, there could be a difference of opinion about what the nature of the forces are to which such “demands” are giving expression.

Thus, whether, or not, a given change of desire was considered to be evidence for the presence of a spiritual influence, might depend on whether, or not, that which was demanded of a person was considered to be spiritual in nature. Desires might change for many reasons, but not all of those reasons necessarily reflect spiritual considerations and, instead, could be a function of what might be demanded by various philosophical, political, economic, scientific, or educational possibilities.

Previously, Tolstoy indicated that a person: “... who submits to a spiritual influence acts in accordance with his desires. Yet, one could just as easily have said that a person who acts in accordance with his, her, or their desires might be submitting to a philosophical, political, economic, scientific, or educational influence as well, and, therefore, Tolstoy has failed to provide any compelling arguments demonstrating that if desires (changed or otherwise) correspond with a given demand, than spiritual influences are necessarily involved.

Moreover, if we return once more to issues concerning what the specific nature of the dynamic is through which desires change, one still wonders what Tolstoy might mean by a “spiritual influence” since he does not believe in mysterious, supernatural forms of causal forces. Therefore, even if one were to assume that spiritual influences are those that bring about changes in the desires of an individual that coincide with what is demanded of that person, nonetheless, this still does not explain how such spiritual influences induce the desires of a human being to change in the desired direction of what is demanded.

In Chapter 8 of *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy follows up on the foregoing notion of spiritual influence, when he claims that:

“Now the new life-conception can be acquired only in two ways: in a spiritual (internal) and an experimental (external) way. Some people—the minority—immediately, at once, by a prophetic feeling divine the truth of the teaching, abandon themselves to it, and execute it. Others—the majority—are led only through a long path of errors, experiences, and sufferings to the recognition of the truth of the teaching and the necessity of acquiring it.”

Tolstoy offers very little, if any, insight concerning the nature of either of the foregoing two ways through which, supposedly, the new Christian life-conception is acquired. For example, he doesn't explain how one divines the truth through a prophetic feeling, or how one knows that what is 'divined' in this manner is true, or why only some individuals – a minority – have access to such a method.

In addition, he doesn't provide any sort of a tenable account concerning the nature of the process by which, allegedly, a majority of people are led “through a long path of errors, experiences, and sufferings to the recognition of the truth”. After all, one could argue -- with some degree of persuasiveness -- that pretty nearly everyone's life involves “a long path of errors, experiences, and sufferings” of one kind or another, and, yet, not everyone necessarily is led to the truth (Christian or otherwise) as a result of those errors, experiences, and sufferings.

Tolstoy later states that:

“People frequently say that if Christianity is a truth, it ought to have been accepted by all men at its very appearance, and ought at that very moment to have changed the lives of men and made them better. ... The Christian teaching is no legislation which, being introduced by violence, can at once change the lives of men. Christianity is another, newer, higher concept of life, which is different from the previous one. But the new concept of life cannot be prescribed; it can only be freely adopted.”

Thus, according to Tolstoy, Christianity will not be adopted through violence or legislation. It must be chosen freely.

However, he does not offer an account which viably explains what induces one person to freely adopt Christianity whereas another individual does not. Furthermore, given that various people often accept different versions of the Christian life-conception, Tolstoy doesn't indicate why some people adopt one kind of Christian life-conception while other individuals might adopt a different version of such a life-conception.

Tolstoy indicates that:

“A man need but understand his life as Christianity teaches him to understand it, that is, understand that life does not belong to him, his personality, or the family, or the state, but to Him who sent him into this life; that, therefore, he must not fulfill the law of his personality, his family, or the state, but the unlimited law of Him from whom he has come, in order that he may feel himself quite free from every human power.”

Another, more general way of stating the foregoing is to contend that an individual's life does not belong to that person, or does not belong to that individual's personality, or to one's family, or to the state. Instead, our lives belong to the truth - whatever that might be, and the fundamental challenge with which we all are faced is to try to figure out what the truth is concerning the nature of our relationship with Being and, thereby, determine what, if anything, the truth demands of us or what the degrees of freedom and constraints are to which truth gives expression and, as a result, defines the nature of our lives.

A short while later in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy states that:

“A man need but understand that the aim of his life is the fulfillment of God's law ... the divine law of love, which is implanted in the soul of every man and is brought into consciousness by Christ,”

Once again, Tolstoy does not explain what is entailed by the “divine law of love” or in what form that law is implanted in the soul. Moreover, he does not indicate whether, or not, the divine law of love that supposedly is implanted in the soul of everyone is embedded in all souls in precisely the same way and to precisely the same degree on each occasion, and, therefore, he does not spell out what fulfilling that law might mean for any particular individual, nor does he explain how that law is brought into consciousness by Christ if, as indicated in an earlier excerpt from Tolstoy: “... the new concept of life cannot be prescribed; it can only be freely adopted.”

During Chapter 9 of *The Kingdom of God is Within You* Tolstoy maintains that

“The worldly powers were led by the course of life to the proposition that for their own preservation they had to demand from all men such acts as could not be performed by those who professed true Christianity. And so in our time every profession of true Christianity by a separate individual most materially undermines the power of the government and inevitably leads to the emancipation of all men [my emphasis]. What importance can there be in such phenomena as the refusals of a few dozens of madmen, as they are called, who do not wish to swear to the government, or pay taxes, or take part in courts and military service? These men are punished and removed, and life continues as of old. It would seem that there is nothing important in these phenomena, and yet it is these very phenomena that more than anything else undermine the power of the state and prepare the emancipation of men. They are those individual bees which begin to separate from the swarm and fly about, awaiting what cannot be delayed,—the rising of the whole swarm after them. The governments know this, and are afraid of these phenomena more than of all socialists, communists, anarchists, and their plots with their dynamite bombs.”

Tolstoy is of the opinion that isolated, individual acts of true Christianity will prepare the way for the inevitable emancipation of all human beings. Assuming agreement could be reached on what constitutes “true Christianity” (and this might, or might not, coincide with Tolstoy’s approach to Christianity), and even if one also were to assume that the foregoing sorts of individual acts of true Christianity (whatever that might mean) have been pursued, in one form or another, by various individuals for 1800 years, nonetheless, the kinds of large-scale changes to which Tolstoy is alluding in the previous quote (e.g., “the emancipation of all men”) seem – at least at the present time -- to be anything but inevitable and, consequently, people are still “awaiting what [supposedly – my addition] cannot be denied.”

Given that the current condition of the world does not seem to reflect Tolstoy’s previously stated beliefs concerning the emergence of that which “inevitably leads to the emancipation of all human beings” and, as a result, we continue to wait for that which, supposedly, “cannot be denied,” then, one might wish to consider the possibility that Tolstoy’s understanding of things in this regard is wrong. For example, perhaps, the standard against which events should be measured is not a matter of whether, or not, all human beings are emancipated (as desirable as this might be) but, rather, maybe the corrupt conditions of the world that are created by, among other forces, worldly powers are intended to serve as a challenge and testing ground so that the real purpose of life can be realized ... namely, developing one’s essential capacity as best one can in the circumstances one is in and, thereby, try to become the change that one wishes to see in the world since if Tolstoy is right that “... the new concept of life cannot be prescribed; it can only be freely adopted,” then, change constitutes an individual project, not a collective one.

Therefore, whether, or not, individual change ever morphs into collective change is not something over which the individual has any control, and, consequently, is not something for which a person needs to spend time awaiting and, in

addition, is not necessarily something that is “inevitable”. Thus, irrespective of whether a collective kind of change ever occurs which is capable of leading all human beings to become emancipated in the right way, the task of the individual begins, and ends with, that person’s efforts to merge horizons with the truth -- conceptually, spiritually, and behaviorally – quite independently of what transpires on a collective level.

Tolstoy, however, continues to try to link the acts of individuals to collective change during Chapter 10 of *The Kingdom of God is Within You* when he says:

“... outside of violence, which never puts a stop to evil, there is another means for the abolition of violence, the assertion that violence will never stop is not correct. Violence grows less and less, and must evidently stop, but not, as the defenders of the existing order imagine, because men who are subject to violence will in consequence of the influence exerted upon them by the governments become better and better (in consequence of this they will, on the contrary, always become worse), but because, since all men are constantly growing better and better, even the worst men in power, growing less and less evil, will become sufficiently good to be incapable of exercising violence.”

Unfortunately, Tolstoy fails to explain – at least in a defensible manner -- the specific nature of the dynamics through which human beings “... are constantly growing better and better” or, stated in an alternative fashion, “growing less and less evil” so that they “become sufficiently good to be incapable of exercising violence.”

Tolstoy does contend that:

“This process takes place in the following manner: the worst elements of society, having seized the power and being in possession of it, under the influence of the sobering quality which always accompanies it, become less and less cruel and less able to make use of the cruel forms of violence, and, in

consequence of this, give place to others, in whom again goes on the process of softening and, so to speak, unconscious Christianization.”

However, Tolstoy does not indicate what the precise nature of the aforementioned sobering quality is that supposedly always accompanies the acquisition of power, nor does he provide any evidence to demonstrate that such a sobering quality actually does always accompany the acquisition of power as he claims. Furthermore, he fails to explain why someone who is operating under the influence of the ego and its addiction to power (along with its many other weaknesses) might be open to such a sobering quality and, as a result, not only pay attention to that sort of quality but, as a result, change one’s behavior so that a person’s conduct become reoriented in accordance with that kind of a sobering quality.

Tolstoy does mention a process of “unconscious Christianization” [my emphasis] toward the end of the foregoing quote. Yet, this sort of a process seems to be at odds with Tolstoy’s previous claim that “... the new concept of life [i.e., the Christian life-conception ... my addition] cannot be prescribed; it can only be freely adopted,” since one has difficulty understanding how an unconscious process would be able to give expression to something that is “freely adopted”.

Further along in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy says:

“Having through experience, under the influence of Christianity, learned the vanity of the fruits of violence, men, at times in one, at others in a few generations, lose those vices which are evoked by the passion for power and wealth, and, becoming less cruel, do not hold their position, and are pushed out of power by other, less Christian, more evil men, and return to strata of society lower in position, but higher in morality, increasing the average of the Christian consciousness of all men.”

To begin with, one might question whether, or not, the assumption that is present in the foregoing quote is correct. In other words, is Tolstoy right when he claims that within a generation, or two, human beings "... lose those vices which are evoked by the passion for power and wealth" due to the influence of Christianity?

Tolstoy might, or might not, be correct when he states the foregoing. Yet, without evidence, he is merely making an unverified assertion.

In addition, one also might wish to challenge the veracity of a subsequent claim concerning another issue that appears in the foregoing quote from Tolstoy. More specifically, according to Tolstoy, as people in power become less cruel and violent due to the influence of Christianity they tend to get pushed from power by more evil, less Christian individuals, and, as a result, the former individuals return to society "lower in position, but higher in morality, increasing the average of the Christian consciousness of all" human beings."

Not only could one question whether, or not, people in power are influenced by Christianity (or Judaism, or Islam, or Buddhism, or Hinduism) to such an extent that they become less evil and more moral, but one also could question whether, or not, such individuals -- once they return to society after being pushed from power by, allegedly, more evil individuals -- actually would be able to increase the average of the "Christian consciousness" that supposedly characterizes the society in which they exist. One also might wonder how either component in the foregoing set of considerations -- namely, being "less evil" or "more moral" -- would be measured.

For example, there are various considerations involving population statistics that might affect whether, or not, people who, supposedly, have become less evil and, therefore, are pushed from power really would be able to increase the average of goodness in such a society. After all, the individuals who are ascending to power and who are considered to be more evil than the ones who are being pushed from power exist in the same society as do the so-called improved individuals.

Therefore, irrespective of whatever improvements in morality that might have transpired in conjunction with the people who have been pushed from power (assuming there actually were improvements), nonetheless, one might anticipate that such “improvements” easily could be cancelled out (if not entirely diluted) by the evil of the individuals who currently are ascending to power (after having pushed various individuals from power), as well as be cancelled out, if not entirely diluted, by the evil of those who are waiting to ascend to power (by pushing others from positions of authority when the opportunity to do so arises). In addition, one also might have to factor in individuals who are evil that might migrate to such a society or factor in individuals who are born into families with a predilection for doing evil that could influence the young to pursue evil ways, and, thereby, also possibly counter, or dilute, the impact of those individuals who are pushed from power who might, or might not, have improved as a result of Christian influences.

Conceivably, there might be an indefinite number of individuals in any given society who were inclined to seek power but who have not, yet, been affected by, among other things, the ‘sobering quality’ that supposedly accompanies the acquisition of power. If this were the case, then, one could not automatically suppose that those individuals who have been pushed from power would have become sufficiently moral that they would be able to increase the overall average of the Christian consciousness of people in that society.

Moreover, if the birthrate of those who were inclined toward evil exceeded the rate at which formerly evil people became less evil as a result of, among other things, the sobering quality that supposedly accompanies acquisition of power, or if individuals who were trying to escape the evil of those in power were migrating away from a given society at a greater rate than the emergence of people who, allegedly, had become morally improved prior to being pushed from power, then, one would not necessarily be able to detect any increase in the average good (however that might be measured) that might occur in

such a society. Consequently, Tolstoy's mode of reasoning in the foregoing quote appears to be rather arbitrary and overly-simplistic, if not incorrect, and, as a result, his notion of an 'averaging dynamic' seems to rest on rather shaky conceptual and evidential grounds.

Subsequently, Tolstoy maintains that:

"...men do not attain the truth simply because they perceive it with a prophetic feeling or experience of life, but also because at a certain stage of the dissemination of the truth all men who stand on a lower stage of development accept it all at once, out of confidence in those who have accepted it in an internal way, and apply it to life. ... the men who stand nearest to those who have attained the truth in an internal way one after another, at first after long periods of time, and then more and more frequently, pass over to the side of the new truth, and the number of men who recognize the new truth grows larger and larger, and the truth grows all the time more and more comprehensible. The greater the number of men who attain the truth and the more the truth is comprehensible, the more confidence is evoked in the rest of the men, who in their ability to comprehend stand on a lower stage, and the easier does the attainment of the truth grow for them, and the greater is the number who make the truth their own."

The dynamic being outlined in the foregoing quote – namely, that “at a certain stage of the dissemination of the truth all men who stand on a lower stage of development accept it all at once, out of confidence in those who have accepted it in an internal way, and apply it to life” – seems to be questionable in several respects. For instance, if someone stands “on a lower stage of development”, then why assume that such individuals would be able to identify, let alone have confidence in, those individuals who, allegedly, have accepted a given teaching -- which might or might not be true – as a result of some mysterious internal, prophetic form of divination? How do the individuals “who stand on a lower stage of development” know that those

individuals who claim to have realized the truth on the basis of some mysterious internal, prophetic form of divination are actually telling the truth rather than being some sort of spiritual charlatan who is seeking a means of leveraging other individuals for purposes of acquiring money, power, fame, sexual favors, and so on?

What is the nature of the dynamic that supposedly induces individuals “who stand on a lower stage of development” to accept something as being the truth or to develop confidence that what someone is saying constitutes the truth? Furthermore, how does Tolstoy know that as the “number of men who recognize the new truth grows larger and larger”, then “the truth grows all the time more and more comprehensible”?

What does comprehensibility have to do with the number of people who believe that something is the truth? Going along with whatever ideas might have captured the fancy of the public does not automatically make those ideas more comprehensible.

In fact, more and more people might become increasingly inclined to accept such ideas as more people jump onto a given conceptual bandwagon for reasons other than the issue of comprehensibility. For instance, due to techniques of undue influence, more and more people might blindly accept certain ideas (the opposite of being more comprehensible) due to, among other things, the social pressure that is being exerted on them to acquiesce to a given system of meaning or belief.

In Chapter 10 and 11 of *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy mentions the significance of public opinion as a means for disseminating certain ideas ... such as Christianity. For example, he stipulates that:

“The judge of everything, the fundamental force which moves men and nations, has always been the one invisible, impalpable force,—the resultant of all the spiritual forces of a certain aggregate of men and of all humanity, which is expressed in public opinion.”

Unfortunately, Tolstoy does not indicate how the spiritual force of a certain aggregate of human beings comes to be the way that it is. Moreover, one should keep in mind that Tolstoy's comments concerning public opinion really don't seem to demonstrate much of anything other than that while certain ideas might gain ascendancy at certain times, nevertheless, such a dynamic of gaining ascendancy does not necessarily have anything to say about the truth of things?

One might be willing to agree with Tolstoy that public opinion constitutes a powerful force. However, public opinion does not necessarily give expression to what is true

Tolstoy goes on to contend that:

"The men in power are convinced that it is only violence that moves and guides men, and so they boldly use violence for the maintenance of the present order of things. But the existing order is not maintained through violence, but through public opinion, the effect of which is impaired by violence."

However, contrary to what Tolstoy claims in the foregoing quote, public opinion is not necessarily as free of violence and force as he seems to suppose is the case. Indeed, public opinion often wields its own form of force and violence in conjunction with to whomever does not comply with its perspective.

For example, ridicule, bias, prejudice, bullying, humiliation, isolation, shunning, bigotry, gas-lighting, hiring or firing, and so on are all techniques that might be used by those who are part of the power structure of public opinion. These techniques – which frequently are emotional and psychological in nature but also can involve physical force and violence as well -- are used to control, limit, and oppress whoever is not part of that collective.

Subsequently, Tolstoy maintains that:

“To subjugate to Christianity all the wild people outside the Christian world,—all the Zulus, Manchurians, and Chinese, whom many consider to be wild,—and the savages within the Christian world, there is one, only one means,—the dissemination among these nations of a Christian public opinion, which is established only through a Christian life, Christian acts, Christian examples.”

Given that there are many different hermeneutical possibilities concerning what constitutes “a Christian life”, or “Christian acts”, or Christian examples”, one cannot be certain that public opinion will necessarily coalesce around a clearly identifiable and understandable Christian perspective. Consequently, public opinion could become fractured in a number of different directions, and as a result, this might tend to generate a variety of countervailing forces that compete with one another for acceptance rather than being able to “subjugate to Christianity all the wild people outside the Christian world ... and the savages within the Christian world ...” and induce them to agree to one central understanding of Christianity.

Thus, when Tolstoy talks about:

“ ... what no one can keep back,—that among men there will be established a Christian public opinion, with the same force and universality as the pagan public opinion, and that it will take the place of the pagan one ...”,

one cannot help but wonder about the alleged inevitability of a process that, supposedly, will replace pagan public opinion with Christian public opinion, for not only has Tolstoy failed to provide much, if any, evidence to demonstrate that history will proceed in the way that he indicates, but, for the most part, Tolstoy really hasn't demonstrated much, if anything, beyond the fact that public opinion is powerful and, moreover, over time, it changes for reasons that aren't very clear.

Throughout *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy has sought to rationalize his approach to Christianity. In other words, he has sought to put forth an array of arguments which were intended to lend credence to, as well as to help justify, a hermeneutical perspective concerning Christianity that was given expression, in outline form, toward the latter part of *Anna Karenina*.

Tolstoy was committed to a project of rationalizing and developing the aforementioned hermeneutical perspective because that position had been the means through which he had been able to find a way to begin to overcome his inner struggles with the forces responsible for generating intense waves of suicidal ideation that had begun to undermine so many facets of his psychological stability and emotional equilibrium following the publication of *War and Peace*. Since he believed he had found a set of spiritual tools in the form of a nascent sense of Christianity that had bubbled to the surface during the planning and writing of *Anna Karenina*, he set about in many of his post-*Anna Karenina* writings (both fiction and non-fiction) constructing a system of meaning that he hoped would strengthen, deepen, and broaden the conceptual orientation that emerged during the process of generating the aforementioned novel.

Unfortunately, as has been pointed out during the present chapter, as well as in several earlier chapters, and which, hopefully, also will be brought forth during several ensuing chapters, there is much in Tolstoy's writing that is arbitrary. Therefore, Tolstoy does not necessarily succeed in accomplishing (i.e., justifying) what he was trying to do in much of his work following *Anna Karenina* – namely, as noted earlier, to strengthen the conceptual position that surfaced toward the latter part of that novel.

Tolstoy was a rationalist. Both the strengths, as well as the weaknesses, inherent in such a methodology are on full display in works such as *The Kingdom of God is Within You*.

The many problems that permeate the aforementioned work tend to suggest that a significant amount of Tolstoy's non-

fictional work concerning spirituality might have been more a function of his creative talents than they were a reflection of legitimate discoveries he had made that were capable of establishing the truth of the spiritual perspective for which he was advocating. In other words, while the system of meaning – or life-conception – which Tolstoy constructed (created) during, and following, the writing of *Anna Karenina* was able to minister to many of the psychological and emotional needs that arose in conjunction with his life and death struggles involving suicidal ideation, nevertheless, the system he created might have been more of a coping strategy for dealing with his own inner turmoil rather than it was a process of discovering the truth concerning the actual nature of his relationship with Being or God, and, perhaps, the arbitrary and problematic nature of many of his ideas and arguments in this regard (as pointed out in the current chapter and elsewhere in the present book) would seem to constitute evidence in support of the foregoing claim.

Thus, when Tolstoy contends that:

“... the germinating Christian public opinion, which at a certain stage of its development is to change the whole pagan structure of life, is beginning to be active”,

the foregoing position appears to be more of an exercise in wishful -- or creative -- thinking than anything else. This is because despite the fact that over a century has passed since Tolstoy wrote the foregoing words, nonetheless, there seems to be little evidence to indicate that Christian public opinion is beginning to actively replace a pagan structure of life, and, instead, one tends to be witness to a multifaceted struggle that is currently taking place – and has been for some time -- involving an array of meaning systems or life-conceptions.

Chapter 5: The Nature of Religion

In February of 1902, a little more than eight years before he died, Tolstoy released a work that, in English, is entitled: *What Is Religion? And What Is Its Essence?* He begins the book by claiming that in every society there comes a time when the religion that is practiced in such a society begins to drift away from the ideas and meanings that were inherent in the original form of the religion.

Tolstoy does not indicate whether, or not, the original religion served as a means of giving expression to the truth in some sense. Furthermore, he does not disclose whether, or not, the process of drifting away from a given religion, leads toward, away from, or is neither here nor there with respect to the truth.

According to Tolstoy, as a society's religion changes, the vast generality of people are pulled along in the wake of such changes by a sort of inertial undertow but, little by little, the influence of the religion is felt less and less in their lives as people, more and more, begin to operate in accordance with various social customs and laws of government. Tolstoy also indicates, however, that because, usually speaking, the educated class tends to believe that religion is necessary for purposes of controlling the public and, thereby, maintaining order, the members of that class continue to believe in religion despite the ways in which religion has changed.

At this point in *What is Religion?*, Tolstoy does not offer any insight into whether, or not, the reason why, over time, people tend to feel the influence of religion less and less in their lives is because they feel, rightly or wrongly, that their religion does not give expression to the truth and, as a result, is not seen to be relevant to the lives of the people. Or, alternatively, could the reason that religion loses its influence over time is because, for whatever reason, the people chose to close themselves off to whatever truths their religion might have to offer?

Notwithstanding such considerations, the foregoing scenario provides an outline of how Tolstoy believes society and religion supposedly interacted in the past, but, now (that is, at the beginning of the twentieth century when the aforementioned book was written), Tolstoy believes something is transpiring which has never occurred before. More specifically, he maintains that the ruling and educated classes – which he believes have the most influence on the generality of people in a society – not only do not believe in religion, as such classes supposedly did – Tolstoy believes -- in the past and, instead, those classes have begun to actively promote the idea that not only is religion not necessary but, actually constitutes something that is pernicious in its effects upon society.

Tolstoy continues on by claiming that some representatives of the educated class wish to argue that religion is nothing more than an atavistic remnant of a animistic process that sought to spiritualize the phenomena of nature. However, such individuals contend that science has been able to demonstrate that the foregoing atavistic and animistic ideas are products of an unenlightened time, and, as a result – at least according to such people -- humankind has been released from the superstitions to which it had, for too long, been shackled by religion.

Tolstoy wishes to take issue with the above perspective. He feels that it resonates, rather strongly, with the same problematic sense of infallibility that characterized the Church in conjunction with so many topics, and, as well, Tolstoy doesn't believe that science has much of anything to offer to human beings in the way of guidance for life.

Instead, Tolstoy maintains that all rational human beings require religion. This is because – Tolstoy maintains – “... religion alone gives the rational man the necessary guidance as to what” should be done and when.

In addition, Tolstoy indicates that while every animal is guided in its actions by instinct, human beings are guided by reason. Due, however, to the many possible outcomes with which human beings are confronted in any given set of circumstances – some involving positive outcomes and others entailing problematic outcomes – Tolstoy does not believe that rational processes alone are capable of providing definitive solutions to the multiplicity of choices that human beings have.

In order to be able to choose wisely or correctly, Tolstoy feels that the rational individual must develop a relationship with the whole universe which Tolstoy considers to be infinite in time and space. According to Tolstoy, when a person is able to establish the foregoing kind of connection with the universe, then, such an individual will be able to derive guidance concerning how he, she, or they should proceed in a given set of circumstances.

The process of establishing a connection with the whole universe as well as deriving guidance through that connection is what Tolstoy calls “Religion”. However, even if one were to agree with the general idea of Tolstoy’s foregoing definition concerning ‘Religion,’ one is still faced with a number of problems.

For example, how does one know when one has established a connection with the whole universe? How would establishing a connection with only a part of the universe affect one’s understanding of the whole? How does Tolstoy know that the universe is infinite in time and space?

Is Tolstoy proposing some sort of pantheistic notion concerning the relationship between God and the universe? Or, is there some sort of distinction between the two such as the possibility that while God makes the universe possible, nonetheless, God cannot be reduced

down to the universe even if the latter is infinite in time and space?

In addition, one might also ask various questions about the nature of the process through which, according to Tolstoy, one supposedly derives guidance from the universe. For instance, does guidance only come through some sort of rational process, and, if so, how does one know when any given process of alleged guidance is rational and is genuine?

Alternatively, is it possible that guidance might come through modalities other than rational ones? In other words, how does Tolstoy know that rationality is the only means of receiving guidance from God?

Tolstoy claims that inherent in the etymology of the term "Religion" is the notion of binding. In other words, religion is the way in which human beings bind themselves to God.

One might be inclined to agree with the general idea that is being expressed in the foregoing paragraph. Nonetheless, one still would like to know what, precisely, is entailed by the way or manner through which human beings are, according to Tolstoy, supposed to become bound to God.

Apparently, Tolstoy believes that the way or method that binds human beings with God does not necessarily refer to just one thing. For example a short while later in *What Is Religion?* he suggests that Jewish people, Greek individuals, Brahmins, and Buddhists all describe the nature of their connection to Divinity differently ... thus, Greeks believe that the nature of their relationship with the universe is such that they must please the gods in various ways, whereas Brahmins supposedly are required to unite with the highest being through the renunciation of life, and Jews understand their connection to God as being that of a chosen people who have made a Covenant with God that must be actively maintained.

Tolstoy contends that:

“Every religion is an establishment by human beings of their relation to the Infinite of which one feels oneself a part, and from which relation one obtains the guidance for one’s conduct.”

Yet, if what Tolstoy is saying above is true, then, seemingly, different groups of human beings are deriving different forms of guidance from the universe, and, one wonders why this should be the case. Is the guidance that God communicates to various peoples different, or do people distort – because, for whatever reasons, they are not receptive to -- what is being communicated to them by God, or could it be some combination of the two foregoing possibilities?

Tolstoy also indicates that even though someone might feel that they have a connection with God, nevertheless, if such a connection is established through ideas or propositions that are contrary to reason or modern knowledge, then, such a connection does not satisfy the conditions of being a religion.

Leaving aside, for the moment, questions concerning the nature of reason and how one is to go about identifying something as being rational or irrational, one wonders, in light of what Tolstoy has said previously about science in *What Is Religion?*, what one is to make of the foregoing claim that unless one’s connection to God is in agreement with modern knowledge, then, such a connection does not give expression to religion. More specifically, just a few pages earlier in *What is Religion?*, Tolstoy states that:

“What is called science today consists of a haphazard heap of information, united by nothing, often utterly unnecessary, and not only failing to provide one unquestionable truth, but as often as not containing the

grossest errors, today put forward as truths, and tomorrow overthrown.”

One, of course, might wish to take issue with whether all, or part, of Tolstoy’s foregoing contention is actually true, but irrespective of whether one does, or doesn’t, take issue with one, or more, aspects of Tolstoy’s previous statement, nonetheless, one continues to be uncertain about what the nature of the relationship is between someone’s claim of connection with God and the status of some given facet of modern knowledge and, consequently, whether, or not, the latter would be capable of demonstrating the extent to which a given claim of connection with God accurately reflects the nature of reality.

To be sure, modern knowledge might include more than information generated through science. However, at this point, one is not sure what Tolstoy means by the idea of “modern knowledge” or what the criteria are for determining whether, or not, something actually constitutes knowledge.

Subsequently, Tolstoy also maintains that without religion, there can be no rational life. What he means here is not clear.

Previously, Tolstoy claimed that religion must satisfy conditions of rationality and modern knowledge. Now, he is contending that without religion, there can be no rational life, and, consequently, one is uncertain whether reason is a function of religion or religion is a function of reason or precisely what the nature of the dynamic is between reason and religion.

Tolstoy also maintains there are many different religions because the nature of the relationship between God and the human beings who populate a given nation is a function of the stage of development that characterizes such a nation. In the light of the foregoing perspective, one

not only wonders how reason might affect development or how development might affect reason, one also would like to know how Divine guidance affects, and is affected by, the process of development.

What makes someone open to, or resistant toward, guidance? What is the nature of the dynamic among reason, social development, guidance, and choice?

How do individuals or societies find their way to the actual nature of the guidance that is being communicated to them by God? Can one necessarily refer to the manner in which individuals or societies seek to establish a connection with God as constituting "Religion" if those sorts of connections are shaped by forces of development, choice, and irrationality that distort and undermine Divine guidance?

Do the differences in the manner in which different nations seek to connect with God all give expression to "Religion"? Or, alternatively, is it possible that the nature of guidance that comes from God has always been the same, and differences in the way that individuals or societies try to connect to God is not an indication that religion can vary from individual to individual or from society to society, but, rather, differences may indicate that, somewhere along the way, various individuals and/or societies might not have properly understood the nature of the guidance that has been, or is being, communicated to them?

According to Tolstoy, religions go through cycles of, first, emerging and, then, maturing, before entering into a period of decline, that, in time, is succeeded by a period of revival as the cycle completes itself and starts, once again, to move through another round of the religious cyclic process. However, Tolstoy does not indicate how one knows whether a system of meaning that emerges at some point in time gives expression to an authentic modality of God's guidance that is being communicated to certain human beings rather than merely giving expression to a

set of ideas that various individuals are claiming constitutes Divine guidance but, in reality, might only be a product of some philosopher's, theologian's, or charlatan's creative imagination.

In addition, Tolstoy is unclear (at least this seems to be the case at this point in: *What Is Religion?*) about what is meant by the idea that after an authentic instance of God's guidance emerges -- let's assume, for the moment, that such guidance is authentic -- and, then, that original guidance goes through a period of so-called development or maturation. What is the nature of that sort of developmental process?

Does such maturation involve further guidance from God? Or, have human beings -- at least, some of them -- become more receptive and sensitive to the depth and richness of the original communication, and if this latter possibility is the case, then, what makes such increased receptivity or sensitivity possible at one juncture in history rather than another?

One also wonders about the nature of the process of decline. Why do people -- gradually or suddenly -- disengage themselves from Divine guidance (assuming, of course, that what such individuals are disengaging from is actually Divine guidance)?

Finally, during the so-called revival process, do people actually re-discover the nature of the original Divine communication (we are assuming)? Or, does the revived understanding give expression to a reconstituted edition of the initial guidance, and, as such, it could be missing important elements that were present in the original communication from God?

Tolstoy provides a very brief overview of Brahmanism and Buddhism, as well as Greek, Roman, Christian, and Mohammedan traditions. That overview seems to give the impression that all of the aforementioned systems of meaning are causally related in some way, but one is not

entirely sure what the nature or dynamics of that relationship might be.

He further claims that:

”...every religious teaching in its true meaning, however crude it may be, always establishes the relation of man to the Infinite, identical for all men. Every religion recognizes man as equally insignificant in relation to Infinity; -- and therefore every religion always contains the idea of the equality of all men before that which it regards as God.”

One wonders how – or if -- Tolstoy actually knows what constitutes “the true meaning” of any religious tradition. Furthermore, even if one were to push aside questions concerning, whether, or not, he did know what “the true meaning” of any religious meaning involved, one still might like to raise some questions about whether the notion of equality that he is introducing actually reflects the nature of reality or necessarily means what he believes it does.

For example, conceivably, the egalitarian dimension – or, at least, one of them – that is inherent in the connection between human beings and God might have to do with the possibility that the same truth or reality encompasses all human beings. In other words, truth is one, and, therefore, different people are not entitled to claim notions of truth that are independent of, and, therefore, not functionally dependent on, the nature of reality.

Notwithstanding the foregoing sense of equality – i.e., the nature of truth or reality is the same for everyone – such an acknowledgment does not necessarily mean that the relationship that each individual has with God is the same. In fact, the evidence of life overwhelmingly contradicts the latter idea and tends to show that people possess different: (1) Kinds of talents as well as different degrees of those talents; (2) levels of intelligence; (3) qualities of beauty or handsomeness; (4) social-economic

circumstances; (5) opportunities; (6) career success; (7) life difficulties; (8) family circumstances; (9) circles of friends; (10) physical attributes; (11) educational experiences, (12) medical histories, and (13) spiritual competencies.

Moreover, Tolstoy claims that the property of equality that he believes is inherent in every religion is the reason why some people -- for whom the notion of such equality constitutes a threat to their selfish interests -- seek to distort religious guidance in order, among other things, to be able to hide the issue of equality from the general population. In this way, according to Tolstoy, the people who are inclined to deceive others or hide things from the latter groups of individuals will be in a position to exploit historical circumstances for their own advantage by denying people the equality to which Tolstoy believes everyone is entitled.

Irrespective of whether, or not, everyone is equal in Tolstoy's sense, nonetheless, everyone would seem to be entitled to have the opportunity to realize whatever constructive potential is present within such individuals. Perhaps, one will be judged not for what one cannot do or does not have but, rather, one might be judged according to what one has the potential to do and the extent to which that potential is realized.

Some people might be able to exploit others not because the former individuals are successfully able to hide the equality that Tolstoy believes is inherent in every religion, but, instead, acts of exploitation are due to deficits of character in certain people that enable those individuals to be able to prevent the generality of people in a given society from having the opportunity to realize whatever potential the latter individuals have which is a function of the nature of their relationship with Divinity.

Tolstoy claims that all human activities are a function of three influences – namely, Feeling, Reason, and

Suggestion. According to Tolstoy, the latter notion of “Suggestion” is a form of hypnosis.

He further stipulates that feeling is what draws a person toward a given activity, while reason involves verifying the manner in which the foregoing sort of activity agrees with the present, past, and future that are entailed by the conditions out of which such an activity arises. Finally, suggestion gives expression to a process through which an individual is compelled to realize the act to which feeling has drawn one and which reason has verified as being appropriate in a given set of circumstances.

Tolstoy does not say why certain activities seem to induce feelings (the process of being drawn to a given activity) in some people but not others. In addition, Tolstoy does not indicate how reason goes about verifying the extent to which a given activity conforms to, or complies with, a given set of conditions.

Moreover, Tolstoy does not account for how the process of suggestion compels a person – without feeling or thought -- to fulfill the act to which feeling, supposedly, has drawn that individual and which reason, allegedly, has verified in some way. Nor, does he satisfactorily explain why thought and feeling are not present during the suggestion dynamic.

Tolstoy does state that during the process of fulfilling (via suggestion) a given act to which an individual has been drawn and which reason has verified in some sense, a person’s feeling and reason become disengaged from that process of fulfillment so that feeling and reason can be available for the next activity. Nonetheless, none of this really accounts for why reason and feeling must operate in a fairly linear manner and, therefore, couldn’t be involved in a number of acts simultaneously, and, consequently, Tolstoy seems to be more inclined to issue declarations concerning the foregoing sorts of dynamics rather than actually provide an explication for the processes of feeling, reason, and suggestion.

According to Tolstoy, religion – like many other activities -- also operates in accordance with the principles inherent in the processes of feeling, reason, and suggestion. In other words, Tolstoy maintains that feeling calls human beings to establish a connection with Divinity, while, on the one hand, reason defines the nature of that connection and, on the other hand, suggestion – without thought or feeling -- impels human beings to fulfill the act of establishing a connection with God that reason has verified as being sound.

Tolstoy goes on to indicate that the foregoing set of processes only occurs in a fully functional state prior to the time when a given religion begins to become distorted. Once distortion sets in, then, Tolstoy believes that the dynamic of suggestion tends to become dominant – as feeling and reason become progressively weaker, if not absent – and, therefore, people are induced to act in certain non-religious ways because they have become vulnerable to all manner of artistic, political, educational, and cultural influences that seek to push or pull people away from religion as originally observed, understood, and practiced.

Once again, however, Tolstoy doesn't specify what kind of connection to God should be established through feeling or why different people often are drawn, by feeling, to different kinds of proposed connections with the Divine. Furthermore, Tolstoy does not explain why reason is used by some people to verify that religion – or, so, they claim – should be defined in one way, while other people use reason to “verify” that the nature of the connection with God should be defined in a different manner.

Finally, Tolstoy doesn't provide an account (at least, not at this point in: *What Is Religion?*) which explains why people become, or are, susceptible to various forms of suggestion. He does say that as the impact of suggestion grows more substantial, feeling and reason fade into the background – that is, become weaker -- but, nevertheless,

Tolstoy doesn't indicate, on the one hand, whether, for instance, feeling and reason first become weaker somehow (and, if so, how), and, then, this weakened condition opens people up to the dynamics of suggestion, or, on the other hand, whether people, somehow (and, if so, how), become more susceptible to suggestion and, this, erodes the dynamics of feeling and reason, causing the latter processes to become weaker.

Aside from the foregoing sorts of considerations, Tolstoy also does not seem to have left any room for the element of choice in his tri-partite manner of engaging the dynamics of religion (i.e., feeling, reason, and suggestion). For example, a person might wish to choose whether, or not, to permit herself, himself, or themselves to be drawn toward a given kind of connection to, or relationship with, God.

Similarly, an individual might wish to choose to use reason in one way rather than other in conjunction with the process of defining or verifying the nature of the connection to which one is being drawn through feeling. Moreover, an individual might wish to choose which forms of suggestive influence – if any -- to cede his, her, or their agency.

According to Tolstoy, distortion enters religion through three entry points. One ideational channel-way of distortion maintains that only certain individuals – usually men – are capable of serving as mediators between human beings and God.

A second idea that, supposedly, is connected to the distortion and degeneration of religion involves the notion that miracles either have occurred or are occurring. Such miracles are said to constitute evidence that demonstrates the truth of what is being said by those individuals who allegedly have been appointed to mediate the relationship between human beings and God.

Finally, the third principle through which degeneration supposedly enters into religion has to do with the idea that

there are various phrases written in books or repeated verbally that are considered to be sacred, and, therefore, infallible. Supposedly, the foregoing sorts of words give expression to the unchangeable will of God or gods.

Tolstoy contends that the aforementioned three doctrines – either individually or collectively – enter into religion through the influence of suggestion. When this occurs, then, according to Tolstoy, human beings become divided into groups of: clergy and laity; the powerful and the powerless, saint and sinner, orthodox and heretic, or those who know and those who do not know.

One might be willing to acknowledge that there are some people – perhaps many -- who claim to have been assigned a role by God that is intended to help guide human beings to the truth but who are not necessarily what they claim to be. Indeed, throughout history, there are many individuals who would seem to qualify as being spiritual charlatans of one kind or another.

Nonetheless, given the foregoing possibility, can one demonstrably maintain that all people who indicate that they have been selected as Divine emissaries are necessarily not what they claim to be? What criteria could be used to prove such a possibility, and what would justify the use of one set of criteria rather than another, and how would one measure the extent to which those criteria have been verified or confirmed in any given case?

What is meant by the idea of someone mediating between God and human beings? Does such mediation cover all human activity or only certain kinds of activity?

Is the foregoing kind of spiritual mediation meant to be engaged literally or are there degrees of freedom concerning the scope and nature of that mediation? Is it possible that the process of mediation is intended only to be general in character, and, therefore, individuals have a responsibility to struggle to understand the significance of such generalized, mediated guidance before -- according to

the capacity of those individuals to do so -- applying their understanding of that guidance to their lives?

Why accept as true what Tolstoy is saying about the issue of spiritual mediation? Moreover, by saying what he does, isn't Tolstoy seeking to become – inadvertently or otherwise -- a mediator (e.g., of the truth) between human beings and God?

Questions similar to the foregoing arise in conjunction with Tolstoy's second doctrine concerning the issue of miracles. More specifically, what, precisely, is the nature of a miracle?

The issue of definition presents as many problems for those who believe in miracles as it does for those who don't believe in them? For instance, just because some phenomenon is inexplicable does not automatically indicate that what is taking place is miraculous in nature, and, moreover, one cannot necessarily conclude that nothing miraculous is, or had been, transpiring either. Miracles – assuming one can viably define what they are – might, or might not, occur, but most of us are not in any position to know enough about the dynamics that are present in past events or current events to be able to reliably differentiate between what is miraculous and what is not miraculous.

Certainly, if someone points to the alleged occurrence of various miracles and maintains that such events constitute proof that what an alleged spiritual mediator says is true, then, exercising a certain amount of caution might be a prudent thing to do. Nonetheless, exercising such caution might not mean anything more than that one, currently, is uncertain concerning the truth status of various claims concerning the miraculous.

Therefore, the fact that assertions concerning the alleged existence of miracles are being made does not necessarily demonstrate that the religion within which those sorts of claims are being made is, consequently, in decline. Much would depend on whether, or not, those

claims could, or couldn't, be proven to be true or false, and in the absence of sufficient proof one way or the other, one is in no position to know the truth of the matter, and until one does know the truth, one can't make any definitive statement about the possible condition of decline or degeneration of a religion in which the idea of "miracles" are being entertained.

Given the foregoing, one might have good reason to exercise caution in conjunction with such claims. Nonetheless, one does not necessarily have sufficient reasons to make adequately defensible claims concerning the foregoing kinds of matters.

Last, but not least, although Tolstoy contends that a religion in which words that are written down or verbally repeated are claimed to be sacred, if not, infallible constitutes a sign that such a system of meaning has declined or is degenerating, Tolstoy doesn't seem to have any proof to demonstrate that what he is asserting is actually true. Tolstoy might be right concerning the foregoing issue, then again, he might be wrong, but the act of making a claim is far removed from the kind of evidence that would be needed to prove that certain words weren't sacred, infallible expressions of God's will.

Consequently, while one can acknowledge the possibility that some – perhaps many -- religions might very well go into decline and begin to stray from the nature and character of a given system of meaning as originally intended, nevertheless, such an admission does not force one to accept as true Tolstoy's claims that the presence of the three aforementioned doctrines -- concerning the existence of mediators, miracles, and/or sacred, infallible words – necessarily demonstrates that the religion within which such claims are made is in decline or degenerating.

Rather ironically, Tolstoy seeks to lend credibility to his position concerning the issue of mediators, miracles, and the sacred, infallible nature of words, by treating ideas

from the Gospels (e.g., no one can be the teacher of another, or, that it is the spirit of the words which is important not the letter of those words, and that Jesus – peace be upon him – bases the truth of his teaching on their merits and not miracles) as being sacred, infallible expressions of God’s Will. What makes such an attempt somewhat ironic is that unless one considers Jesus (peace be upon him) to be a spiritual mediator who is communicating Divine truths to human beings, then, one really has no reason to abide by the words he is alleged to have said, nor does one have any reason to consider those words to be sacred, infallible expressions of God’s Will, and, in fact, according to Tolstoy, they both (the existence of a mediator and the existence of words that are considered to be true and, therefore, sacred and infallible) are signs indicating that such a religion is in decline or degenerating.

Is, or isn’t, Jesus (peace be upon him) a spiritual mediator? If he isn’t, then, why listen to him (or, said, in an alternative way, how do we know that what he is saying is the truth), but if Jesus (peace be upon him) is a spiritual mediator, then, according to Tolstoy this is a sign that the religion is in decline ... unless, of course, Tolstoy is wrong about whether the existence of spiritual mediators is necessarily a sign of spiritual decline or degeneration and, as well, unless Tolstoy is wrong that the process of treating certain words of Jesus (peace be upon him) – if true – as being sacred and infallible necessarily constitutes a sign that a religion is in decline.

Tolstoy also uses the Gospels as a way of validating his contention that all men are equal. For example, he states that one of the fundamental teachings of Christianity is that all men – not just Jesus (peace be upon him) -- are recognized as being the sons of God.

Notwithstanding the absence in Tolstoy’s discussion so far concerning any sort of definitive statement indicating that women, as well, are to be included in the principle of

equality that is being espoused and that women also are as much the children of God as men are, one wonders why, from Tolstoy's perspective, one should accept the idea of equality at all since if one cites the Gospels as the warrant for what is being said (and Tolstoy appears to be alluding to such a possibility), then, this would seem to be conferring a certain amount of sacredness and infallibility as a function of the truth of such a claim, and, yet, attributing a sense of sacredness and infallibility concerning certain words – written or spoken -- is, according to Tolstoy, a sign of spiritual degeneration and decline.

Tolstoy maintains that through the use of subterfuge, certain people – both in the past as well as during his lifetime -- have tried to ignore the clear warnings that are in the Gospel concerning the equality of all human beings. More specifically, Tolstoy contends that the nature of this deception involves the attempts of certain individuals, who consider themselves to be special, to induce the generality of people to believe that before Jesus (peace be upon him) ascended to heaven, he allegedly left instructions that only certain individuals -- namely, those men who make up the body of the Church.: (a) have the right to communicate Divine truths to others; (b) have the ability to save people, and (c) have the authority to transmit the foregoing right and ability to further generations of similarly "special" individuals.

According to Tolstoy, the individuals who were, and are, seeking to mislead the generality of believers in the foregoing manner were, and are, inclined to interpret the Gospel in a manner that serves their desires (i.e., the desires of those seeking to manipulate other individuals). As a result, the latter people failed to engage the Gospel in accordance with what Tolstoy considers the requirements of common sense to be ... even though Tolstoy never really identifies what common sense involves or why reason

should be in compliance with such a conceptual understanding or orientation.

In any event, according to Tolstoy, those who controlled the Church stipulated that spiritual mediators were necessary only because the individuals who acted as mediators felt that such a role served their own interests and not because the Gospel demanded it. In addition, Tolstoy maintained that miracles were said by the mediators to be true because the reality of miracles served to lend credibility to their status as being mediators between God and human beings, and, finally, the Bible was accorded infallible, sacred authenticity because – or, so, Tolstoy believed -- this is what the mediators desired and, not necessarily because that is what the truth required.

Among the ideas of the Old Testament that the aforementioned Church mediators sought to promulgate -- and which Tolstoy considered to be at odds with common sense, reason, and modern knowledge -- are the following examples: The notion that light could be created prior to the existence of the sun, as well as the belief that the earth was created six thousand years ago.

Without wishing to either defend the Old Testament or to criticize it, one might note that contrary to Tolstoy's aforementioned beliefs, the Bible doesn't actually say that the world was created six thousand years ago. The latter figure is drawn from the work of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, who tried to estimate the age of the Earth using the genealogies that are listed in the Book of Genesis as a guide.

Secondly, the idea that light could be created – or exist – independently of the sun is not really as absurd as Tolstoy seems to believe is the case. For example, the phenomenon of background cosmic microwave radiation that is part of the standard model of modern cosmology constitutes a form of electromagnetic radiation or light that is not produced by the sun or a sun but, instead, is believed by some cosmologists to have been generated as a

result of the intensely hot Big Bang event and the subsequent cooling down process of the early universe.

Tolstoy also asserts:

“... what can be more senseless than the assertion that the mother of God was both a mother and a virgin – that the sky opened and a voice was heard issuing from it – that Jesus flew away into the skies and is now sitting somewhere there on the right hand of the Father.”

Whatever one might wish to think about the idea of the possibility of virgin births in human beings, parthenogenesis – that is, a process in which an unfertilized egg gives rise to viable off-spring -- does occur in nature fairly often. Although most known examples of this phenomenon occur among so-called lower plants and arthropods, parthenogenesis also occurs in some species of vertebrates such as reptiles, fish, and certain birds, and, consequently, the possibility of virgin birth in human beings might not necessarily be as senseless as Tolstoy seems to believe is the case ... and, moreover, given the foregoing considerations, one might also add that the idea of parthenogenesis can be considered quite independently from the issue of whether, or not, Jesus (peace be upon him) should be accorded some sort of Divine status.

Similarly, while Tolstoy is entitled to believe whatever he likes concerning voices from the sky, nonetheless, the phenomenon of directed sound technology does exist. In other words, individuals can be induced to hear projected, voiced messages that are inaudible to other people that might be in the general vicinity of the person toward whom sound is being directed. Thus, entertaining the possibility that God might have had the capacity to do thousands of years ago what some physicists only relatively recently have discovered how to do does not

necessarily seem as senseless as Tolstoy appears to suppose is true in his foregoing quote.

Whether the claims that have been made concerning the sort of events being alluded to by Tolstoy are true or false are a separate matter. The point at issue in the previous discussion is only whether, or not, certain claims are as senseless as Tolstoy supposes them to be and not whether those claims are true or false.

In addition, just because Tolstoy doesn't understand how something is possible – for example, Jesus (peace be upon him) ascending to heaven and being in spiritual proximity to God (i.e., for which sitting on the right hand of Divinity might be a metaphor) – does not demonstrate or prove that what he doesn't understand isn't possible. One's ignorance of the universe or of Being cannot be used as a metric for demonstrating what can and can't be, anymore than one's ignorance of the universe or of Being can be used to lend credence to whatever claim one might like to make.

Tolstoy mentions a number of other issues in: *What is Religion?* concerning various beliefs which exist in Christianity and about which he is skeptical. Tolstoy doesn't present any evidence to substantiate his skepticism, and, so, to a considerable degree he merely proceeds by making assertions rather than establishing detailed, evidence-based arguments.

Tolstoy might be right or wrong in relation to the assertions being alluded to in the previous paragraph. Be that as it may, most of us – including Tolstoy -- don't have sufficient knowledge concerning the issues and events he is questioning to be in the kind of epistemological position that would enable us to arrive at an informed opinion concerning such matters, and, as a result, whether one agrees with, or disagrees with, Tolstoy in conjunction with various religious topics tends to depend more on one's likes and dislikes than on the presence of any rigorous,

evidence-based, critically reflective discussion concerning such matters.

For instance, did God induce Noah (peace be upon him) to build an ark? Was Noah (peace be upon him) ridiculed by many people for undertaking such a project? Did a member of his own family withdraw from that project and, subsequently, died from drowning? Did the life forms that were gathered for the ark encompass all living organism or were only a subset of possible organisms selected? Was there an enormous flood that occurred, in part, as a result of rain that fell for 40 days and 40 nights? Did that flood engulf the whole world or did the flood only affect 'the world' known to Noah (peace be upon him) as well as those whom he addressed in the hope that they would heed his warnings about what he believed was forthcoming? Did all life on Earth that was not aboard the ark perish or were only certain kinds of life forms (e.g., non-aquatic organisms) in certain areas (e.g., the world known to those who experienced the flood) adversely affected by the flood? Is the Biblical account of the flood narrative accurate?

Irrespective of the truth or falsity concerning different facets of the foregoing narrative, neither Tolstoy nor most of the rest of us are in an epistemological position to know what happened during the time to which the Bible alludes. One might accept that narrative, in full or in part, or one might reject it, completely or partially, but the narrative, itself – depending on the nature of the details -- is not necessarily as nonsensical as Tolstoy seems to suppose it is.

In a sense, Tolstoy is asking his readers to accept his rejection of the Biblical story concerning the flood and ark on the basis of having faith in his assessment of the issue just as most individuals who accept the foregoing Biblical narrative are being asked to accept the latter account on faith. For most of us – including Tolstoy – such issues are hermeneutical rather than epistemological in nature,

although, unfortunately, all too many people want to grant a status of knowledge to that which is merely an interpretation of, or speculation about, certain events, facets of history, possibilities, and various kinds of data that is treated – rightly or wrongly – as evidence of one kind or another.

Tolstoy claims in his book, *What Is Religion?*, that:

“Faith is not hope and not confidence, but a separate mental state. Faith is man’s consciousness of a certain position in the world which imposes on him the obligation to fulfill certain actions. A man acts according to his faith, not, as it is said in the Catechism, because he believes in the Unseen as much as the seen ...”

Is faith a mental state or a spiritual state, or, depending on circumstances, perhaps there might be some species of faith that are mental while other species of faith are spiritual in nature? Are all spiritual states necessarily reducible to one, or another, mental state, and how would one know that this to be the case?

If my understanding of my position in the world turns out to be wrong – but I am not aware of this or do not accept it -- do I still have an obligation to fulfill certain actions as a function of that understanding? Is there a difference between, on the one hand, feeling compelled to fulfill certain actions because one’s beliefs indicate one should do so and, on the other hand, feeling the need to complete certain actions because the nature of reality indicates that one cannot live a life of truth if one ignores the way things are?

Does obligation follow from beliefs, per se? Or, does obligation only arise in conjunction with a process of being able to correctly grasp the character of the necessity to which truth or reality gives expression in a given set of circumstances?

Should one draw a distinction between “authentic faith” and “pseudo-faith”? For example, is it possible that authentic faith is an attempt – which occurs within a context of incomplete knowledge -- to engage the truth in a good-faith effort concerning some aspect of reality, while pseudo-faith is, in a sense, a bad-faith attempt to engage ontology through the lenses of beliefs that are arbitrary, and, therefore, problem-laden constructions concerning the nature of reality?

Is it possible that faith constitutes a phenomenological dynamic consisting of cognitive (conceptual, emotional, and motivational) as well as non-cognitive spiritual elements in which a defensible understanding arises in conjunction with one’s manner of engaging reality? Is Tolstoy right that faith is a matter of what is seen rather than what is Unseen, or is it possible that faith is a function of whether, or not – and to what extent – the process of seeing – i.e., perception -- actually relates to the unknown and, therefore the Unseen, in reliable ways?

Could there be different levels of faith depending on the degree of compliance between one’s understanding and the aspect of existence one is trying to understand? Is faith like the notion of a limit in calculus in the sense that the more closely a given understanding approaches full reflective compliance with some aspect of reality, then, the closer to full knowledge one comes, but prior to reaching such a point, one’s understanding still involves elements of faith and, therefore one’s phenomenological condition is a matter of how what is known – incomplete though it might be – orients itself toward all that remains unknown?

Tolstoy refers to faith as a sort of calling in which – based on one’s understanding concerning one’s alleged position in the universe – one acts in one way rather than another. Surely, however, whether one is being called toward the truth or toward falsehood would, presumably, make a difference in the character of one’s faith.

According to Tolstoy:

“Faith is the same as religion, only with this difference, that by the word religion we imply a certain phenomenon externally observed, whereas by faith we mean the same thing experience by man within himself.”

One is still uncertain precisely what the nature of the “phenomenon” (i.e., religion) is to which Tolstoy is alluding and which, supposedly, is being “externally observed”, or by whom that phenomenon is being externally observed (e.g., theologians, academics, politicians, scientists, the media, and/or some other aspect of a given population). Although one can conceive of instances in which some system of meaning (e.g., an institutionalized form of religion) is imposed on a given population through propaganda and other modes of undue influence, and, as a result, religion and faith become mirror images of one another, one can also conceive of instances in which an individual’s sense of faith defines what that person considers religion to be, and, therefore, religion would not be a function of what is “externally observed” but, instead, religion would give expression to the way in which a person’s faith manifests itself over time ... some of which might be capable of being observed externally but not necessarily entirely so.

Tolstoy goes on to further complicate matters when he states in *What Is Religion?* that:

“Faith is man’s conception of his relation to the Infinite Universe, and the direction of his activity resulting from that conception. And therefore true faith is never irrational, or in disagreement with existing knowledge, and its feature cannot be supernaturalism and senselessness ... “

Notwithstanding the potential for gender bias that is present in the foregoing statement and notwithstanding

the possibility that the Universe is not necessarily infinite but may only be indefinitely large, nonetheless, one might be willing to agree with Tolstoy's perspective that faith concerns an individual's understanding of her, his, or their relationship with Being, but one might have difficulty accepting Tolstoy's idea that what he is referring to as "true faith" can never be "irrational or in disagreement with existing knowledge" and, in fact, one has difficulty understanding how Tolstoy might even be able to justify such a statement.

For thousands of years, the faith of mystics has been at odds with a great deal of so-called "existing knowledge". Consequently, quite irrespective of whether, or not, the beliefs of mystics are true, nevertheless, for many centuries, there have been differences between the claims of mystics and the claims on behalf of various "official" forms of knowledge, and this indicates that the faith of the former individuals (i.e., the mystics) can be, and often has been, in disagreement with various modalities of certain institutionalized forms of understanding (e.g., sciences of one kind or another), and as a result, Tolstoy's foregoing contention is not viable ... that is, faith can be irrational – or transrational – and faith can be – for better or worse – in disagreement with what is officially alleged to be "knowledge".

Furthermore, one also is uncertain why, according to Tolstoy, one must consider all forms of "true faith" (whatever this means) to be incapable of being irrational. Indeed, unless one supposes that what he means by the idea of "true faith" is a tautology of some kind such that faith is deemed to be equivalent to what is true (and, if so, he needs to explain how this is so), there would seem to be all manner of possibilities concerning various kinds of faith orientations that are not necessarily rational in nature since even though one's form of faith might give expression to what one feels one is being called to do, and therefore, the two are consistent with one another and, in

that sense, is rational, nonetheless, what one believes one's relationship with Being might be is not necessarily what one's relationship with Being actually is, and, if so, then, both one's sense of faith as well as what one believes one is being called to do are inconsistent with the nature of reality or truth, and, consequently, irrational ... which is contrary to what Tolstoy claims is the case.

Subsequently, Tolstoy does indicate in *What Is Religion?* that since faith gives a meaning to life that the latter would not have in the absence of such a faith, then, the presence of that faith automatically makes life more understandable and, therefore, more rational. However, if one's mode of faith turns out to be incorrect, then, even though at one time that mode of faith might have helped to give one the impression that life was understandable, and therefore, rational, nevertheless, in point of fact, such a person was operating in accordance with a delusion because that in which he had faith turned out not be true and, as a result, what he believed was comprehensible and understandable actually wasn't.

In other words, Tolstoy has relativized the notion of rationality. Instead of requiring rationality to give expression to some sort of objective standard that establishes the degrees of freedom and constraints within which everyone must operate conceptually, Tolstoy has made rationality a function of that which gives meaning to someone in the face of the potential incomprehensibility that might exist in the absence of such a sense of meaning, and in doing so, has made every manner of delusional system of meaning an exercise in rationality because of the way those systems permit a person to believe that existence is comprehensible rather than incomprehensible.

Tolstoy does indicate in the previous quote cited toward the bottom of page 319 that "true faith" cannot be characterized by "supernaturalism and senselessness." However, as noted earlier in the present chapter, what

Tolstoy considers to be senseless oftentimes is a function of the way he hermeneutically engages life and, consequently, might, or might not, be senseless in some non-arbitrary sense and, thus, Tolstoy seems to be operating out of a potentially arbitrary conceptual or hermeneutical system.

Furthermore, Tolstoy doesn't really specify – or defend – what is meant by the idea of “supernaturalism”. If one doesn't fully understand the nature of reality, this doesn't, ipso facto, turn that which is not understood into supernatural phenomena.

For example, to whatever extent miracles exist, are they supernatural phenomena (whatever this means)? And, if so, just what is meant by those kinds of phenomena, and how do they come to be manifested in a, supposedly, naturally occurring world?

Alternatively, one could ask if miracles might give expression to natural events that are not fully understood. If so, such phenomena would only appear to occur outside of known natural principles and dynamics due to our ignorance concerning the way reality actually works.

In any event, as it stands, Tolstoy's contention that “true faith” cannot involve elements of “supernaturalism and senselessness” is not as obvious as he seems to feel. To be a plausible possibility, his statement requires the sort of details that would be capable of clarifying as well as lending reliable support to what he means by those two terms, and Tolstoy has not provided those kinds of details.

In fact, Tolstoy's perspective at this point in his book: *What Is Religion?*, appears to introduce a fair amount of his own form of senselessness into the discussion. This is because his foregoing perspective doesn't really seem to offer solid explanations – in the sense of being able to reveal aspects of the truth -- and, instead, merely appears to further confuse matters by becoming entangled in a cloud of ambiguity, ignorance and circular thinking concerning the issue of faith.

According to Tolstoy's own stated criteria, what he is advocating is "not faith but a distortion of faith." Therefore, on the basis of his own principles of reasoning, Tolstoy's notion of faith "lays no obligations" on human beings because it does not avoid the issue of senselessness ... a standard that he believes must be satisfied if "true faith" is to be considered present.

Tolstoy contends that when faith becomes corrupted, then, human beings believe that God should serve human beings by fulfilling their desires in exchange for activities such as prayer and fasting. While Tolstoy's foregoing observation might be true in relation to some individuals whose faith has become corrupted, the statement seems to be more an expression of his subjective impressions based on a limited, informal, anecdotal sampling of people than it depends on any sort of rigorous, statistically viable analysis of what people actually do when their faith has become corrupted.

When faith is corrupted and, as a result, people lose the sense that life has a meaning which is capable of being grasped or understood, all manner of pathologies seem possible. When faith is corrupted, anomie begins to seep into people's lives because existence seems to lack purpose, direction, and meaning, thereby rendering people vulnerable to an array of social, political, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual disorders.

However, when true faith is in ascendancy, then, according to Tolstoy, people understand that one is being called to do God's will and to serve Divinity. For Tolstoy, this is the inverse of what happens when faith is corrupted.

Even if one were to agree with Tolstoy's foregoing perspective, there are still important questions that need to be asked. For instance, what is the nature of God's will, and how does one come to know this, and in what ways should God be served?

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, Tolstoy might be getting ahead of himself when he claims that the

nature of true faith is, first and foremost, a function of seeking to do God's will and, thereby, serving Divinity ... as if faith did not, first, have to learn how to become receptive to whatever the nature of the message is that God might be communicating to human beings in order for human beings to be in a position to know what the nature of one's relationship with Being is and what follows from such a relationship as far as doing God's will and serving Divinity is concerned.

Perhaps, irrespective of whatever else faith might entail, faith gives expression to a person's willingness to commit oneself to exploring the unknown in the hope of, among other things, discovering the nature of one's relationship with that which makes one's being possible. Maybe, faith is the motivational dynamic that induces one to explore the nature of various aspects of life's potential.

Now, seeking to discover the nature of one's relationship with Being and seeking to explore the nature of various aspects of one's potential might both give expression to God's will concerning human beings. However, until one successfully undertakes such a project, one will not know what actually is entailed by one's ontological status in the universe.

Consequently, in a fundamental way, spiritual faith is the intuition that existence has meaning and such meaning can, to varying degrees, be known. Furthermore, the development of faith is what helps one move toward acquiring the knowledge that is needed to understand the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being, and what implications such knowledge and understanding have for grasping the specific nature of God's will concerning one and, as well, what "service to God" might involve.

Faith becomes true to the extent that one's search to discover the nature of one's relationship with existence is realized. Faith becomes corrupted when one permits oneself to lose contact with the foregoing sort of project.

In *What Is Religion?* Tolstoy maintains that most people who live in his day and age are devoid of faith. He doesn't actually know what he is claiming here, but he suspects that what he believes is true.

According to Tolstoy, so-called educated individuals – who constitute a minority within society -- have removed themselves from the Church's sphere of influence, and, as a result, this class of people tends not to believe much of anything in conjunction with religion even as its members acknowledge that religion is often used as a tool for controlling the generality of people.

He also is of the opinion that most people in society – most of whom are uneducated – do have religious beliefs, but have arrived at the perspective they have through the dynamics of suggestion. Moreover, because Tolstoy believes that the understanding such individuals have is not capable of explaining the nature of their relationship to the universe, he feels that those individuals do not possess what he considers true faith.

The foregoing contentions imply that Tolstoy believes he does know what true faith is as well as who has it and who doesn't. While it might be the case that Tolstoy knows what he means by the idea of faith, nevertheless, as discussed earlier in this chapter, one is considerably less certain about the extent to which, if any, Tolstoy's understanding accurately reflects the nature of reality when it comes to the issues of faith and religion.

Tolstoy does have a way of explaining things that makes sense to him. Yet, there is no accompanying evidence to demonstrate that his way of explaining the issues of faith and religion accurately reflects the actual structural character of the relationship between human beings and existence.

Something only has value as an explanation in the matter of faith and religion when it offers an accurate account of what the nature of an individual's relationship with Being involves, and Tolstoy has not necessarily done

this. Therefore, without the foregoing sorts of evidence, the “explanation” put forth by Tolstoy is not necessarily a viable explanation.

He has offered a possibility concerning the nature of our relationship with Being. But, he has not necessarily captured the reality of, or truth concerning, that relationship.

Tolstoy claims in his book, *What Is Religion?*, that the equality of men is the essential precept in all religions. Leaving aside the issue of just how inclusive Tolstoy’s notion of “men” is (e.g., does it include women and children), his claim still seems problematic.

More specifically, one might suppose that the most essential principle in all religions is the truth. Without truth, one begins at no beginning, and one works toward no end.

One can agree with Tolstoy when he talks about the great cruelty that human beings are, and have been, inflicting on one another. However, the cruelty exists because human beings appear to have lost touch with the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with existence rather than being a function of the principle of equality per se.

The idea of equality might, or might not, be part of the truth to which our relationship with existence gives expression. Nonetheless, one cannot know this until one discovers the nature of the truth that is inherent in the aforementioned relationship, and, therefore, prior to acquiring that kind of an understanding, one does not know whether, or not, equality plays an essential role in such matters.

Given the way in which qualities such as intelligence, talent, health, and physical attributes are distributed unevenly across every population of human beings, one might be inclined to believe that equality is not an essential part of our relationship with the nature of

existence. Nevertheless, the reality of such inequalities notwithstanding, the variable distribution of those qualities does not necessarily entitle one to exploit others, and, in fact, there might be non-egalitarian principles of justice inherent in the nature of existence that prevent anyone from using qualities such as intelligence, talent, physical abilities, and so on in a way that disadvantages other individuals.

Tolstoy goes on to argue in *What Is Religion?* that:

“If men do not regard themselves as brothers, and human life is not considered the most sacred object, which not only cannot be violated but the maintenance of which should be regarded as man’s first and most urgent duty; -- that is, if men do not regard each other religiously, they will always for their own personal advantages ruin each other’s lives.”

If life is sacred, this is because the truth of one’s relationship with existence has made it so. Whether, or not, life can be violated and, if so, under what circumstances depends on the nature of that same truth, and, in addition, whether, or not, the maintenance of life should be one’s first and most urgent duty again depends on the nature of what the truth is concerning our – both individually and collectively -- relationship with existence.

During his discussion of equality and the sacredness of life, Tolstoy provides a number of examples to help illustrate his perspective. Previously, I noted that Tolstoy had presciently captured the seminal idea in Viktor Frankl’s notion of *Man’s Search For Meaning* some 70 years, or so, prior to Frankl’s work, and one of the examples cited by Tolstoy in his discussion of equality and sacredness of life demonstrates that he also was more than half a century ahead of individuals such as Ralph Nader with respect to understanding that some business people

use cost-benefit analysis to determine whether putting people's lives at risk is a more cost effective manner of doing business than having to spend money on modernizing equipment in order to make things safer for people.

Thus, in his book: *What Is Religion?*, Tolstoy points out that:

"In Chicago approximately the same number of men are killed on the railways every year. And the owners of the railways quite naturally do not adopt those appliances which would reduce the number, calculating that the annual payment to the injured or their families is less than the interest on the cost of the appliances."

While Tolstoy uses the foregoing example to illustrate his belief that many people in his day (including certain business people) did not consider other people to be like their brothers and sisters – that is, they were not considered to be their equals – and, therefore, some business people were prepared to treat the latter individuals cruelly, one might also point out that quite independently of the issue of equality, business people who consider money to be more important than the lives of people are arbitrarily – that is, without sustainable justification – imposing their own likes and dislikes onto reality rather than trying to discover what reality or Being actually requires of them.

Yet, in a sense, Tolstoy might be making a similar sort of mistake. Just as business people who value money more than people are seeking to arbitrarily impose their perspective onto reality despite the absence of any proof indicating that this is in accordance with the nature of our relationship with existence, so too, Tolstoy is trying to arbitrarily impose his ideas about equality onto the nature of reality before he knows (rather than just believes)

whether, or not, the issue of equality actually is fundamental to our relationship with the nature of existence.

Tolstoy's ideas about equality might sound more magnanimous and ethically appealing than a business principle which maintains that it is perfectly alright to sacrifice lives for the sake of profit. Nonetheless, in as much as both of the foregoing perspectives lack viably demonstrable evidence indicating that they are in alignment with the nature of reality, they both are equally arbitrary.

One can agree with Tolstoy when he reminds us that many people tend to forget the cost in human lives that subsidizes many of the great achievements in history – such as the building of the pyramids or the construction of transcontinental railroads or various palaces. One also can agree with him when he indicates that such achievements might be a source of legitimate pride if they were built by people who are free rather than people who are slaves of one kind or another (e.g., political, religious, and/or economic).

Perhaps, however, the issue is not entirely a matter of free human beings versus slaves. Maybe, at least part of what is at issue is the extent to which arbitrary considerations enter into determining who is free and who is a slave.

If individuals who are objective and, therefore, whose acts of inquiry are driven by qualities of character (such as honesty, humility, fairness, openness, independence, impartiality, and so on) are not able to establish beyond a reasonable doubt that the use of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, economic status, education, and/or social position are in compliance with the nature of reality and, therefore, can be used as a basis for determining whom should serve whom, then operating contrary to what can, or cannot, be demonstrated is to engage in arbitrary acts of control. The central issue is not about equality, per se, but, rather, the

fundamental issue is about the presence or absence of the quality of arbitrariness that might underwrite a given way of doing things.

Tolstoy goes on to describe how so-called Christian nations also have taken pride in subjugating, among others, populations that are Hindu, Native American Indian, Chinese and African. However, Tolstoy claims that the aforementioned sorts of conquests are not an indication that Christian nations are spiritually superior to those whom they conquer, but, quite to the contrary, he considers this a sign of the spiritual inferiority of Christian nations relative to those whom they conquer. Tolstoy believes in the foregoing way because, as he notes:

“... even the Zulus had and have obligatory rules of some kind which imposed certain actions and forbade others; whereas our Christian nations have none.”

Notwithstanding Tolstoy's somewhat condescending manner of referring to “even the Zulus”, spirituality, surely, is not a function of whether the people who are conquered did, or did not, have a set of rules that specified what could and could not be done. Presumably, spirituality, like religion and faith, depends on the extent to which someone – individually or collectively – has been able to discover the truth concerning the nature of humanity's relationship with existence or Being.

Therefore, while one can conceive of the possibility that a given group of people who might have a good grasp of the nature of the relationship between human beings and existence could, nonetheless, be conquered by others who do not necessarily have a good grasp of the nature of humanity's relationship with reality, nevertheless, more often than not, the people who are conquered do not necessarily have any better grasp of their relationship with reality or existence than the people do who are engaged in

the process of subjugating the former. In other words, oftentimes both the conquerors and the conquered tend to operate in accordance with a form of life that gives expression to a set of rules, laws, principles, and/or beliefs that stipulate what can, and can't be done, but do so in an arbitrary manner ... that is, both the conquered and the conquerors do so in a way that cannot be shown to have reliably captured the truth concerning the nature of the relationship between human beings and existence.

Much of history appears to be a record of arbitrariness – both with respect to the acts that are being recorded as well as in conjunction with the manner in which those acts are described and analyzed. As a result, trying to understand just what it is that “history” indicates or demonstrates as far as issues of spirituality, religion, and faith are concerned is a considerable challenge.

According to Tolstoy:

“Complete unity in the most perfect, lofty reason, and therefore complete welfare, is the ideal towards which humanity is striving; and every religion which answers the questions of the men of a given society both as to what is the Universe, and what they are in the Universe; -- unites men, and therefore brings them nearer to the realization of complete welfare. But when reason abandoning its proper function of defining man's relation to God, and his corresponding activities, is directed not only to the service of man's flesh, and not only to cruel strife with men and other beings, but also to the justification of their life, which is contrary to both the nature and destiny of man, then occur these terrible calamities from which the majority of men are now suffering and those conditions which appear to preclude all possibility of a return to a rational and righteous life.”

While one might be willing to agree that – at least for some (including Tolstoy) -- “complete unity in the most perfect, lofty reason, and, therefore complete welfare, is the ideal toward which humanity is striving,” the problem is that there is not complete unity about just what “the most perfect, lofty reason” involves. Not only are there substantial differences among people concerning the nature of “the most perfect, lofty reason” to which Tolstoy is alluding, but, as well, there are differences among various individuals about whether, or not, reason alone – even if properly grasped – is capable of giving expression to what constitutes a human being’s or humanity’s “complete welfare”.

Furthermore, even though different religions might attempt to provide answers concerning the nature of the universe as well as in conjunction with humanity’s relationship to that nature, and, as a result, establish a rallying point around which the members of that religion might unite, nevertheless, being able to offer answers to such questions does not necessarily indicate that those answers are correct ... either with respect to the nature of the universe or in relation to humanity’s position within that universe. Unfortunately, people can be united in relation to false ideas as well as true ones.

Consequently, contrary to Tolstoy’s foregoing line of argument, the fact that people can be united in their agreement concerning the alleged truth of various claims associated with a given worldview does not, in and of itself, make such a worldview true. In addition, such agreement does not necessarily mean that those who are in agreement on the foregoing kinds of issues have, therefore, been brought closer to the realization of “complete welfare”.

Until one is capable – in a viably demonstrable manner – of realizing the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with existence or reality, then, one will not be in a position to make non-arbitrary claims concerning: (a)

the nature of the universe; (b) one's position within that universe; (c) the character of "the most perfect, lofty reason, or (d) the nature of "complete welfare".

Moreover, Tolstoy's contention that the proper function of reason is to define a person's or humanity's relation to God is not necessarily viable as it stands. To begin with, if the nature of a person's or humanity's relationship with God transcends the limits of reason (and, as a result, is transrational -- not irrational -- in nature), then, reason -- even if properly grasped and used -- will not necessarily be able to establish the truth concerning the nature of the aforementioned relationship.

Reason -- when appropriately operated -- might well have a role to play in helping a person to work toward a proper understanding of the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with God. However, until one comes to understand the possibilities and limits inherent in reason's nature, one is not in a position to know whether reason, by itself (whatever this turns out to be) is capable of determining the full nature of one's relationship with God, and, therefore, Tolstoy might be premature when he claims that the proper function of reason lies in "defining man's relationship to God."

Tolstoy maintains in his book: *What Is Religion?*, that human beings can be divided into four categories. Firstly, there are those who look upon religion as a useful tool for subjugating others, while secondly, there are those individuals who consider religion to be an exercise in nonsense, and, thirdly -- which Tolstoy feels constitutes the great majority of people -- there are those individuals who are operating under the influence of suggestion or other forms of undue influence, and, as a result, have been induced to accept as true something that is not true.

The fourth category into which Tolstoy assigns people is by way of implication. These are individuals who, supposedly, have become aware that "there is a

progressive movement towards truth” with respect to matters of religion, spirituality, and faith.

Tolstoy doesn’t come right out and state that he is a member of this latter group. Nonetheless, based on what he does say in *What Is Religion?*, there is little doubt that he considers himself to be among the very tiny minority of individuals in the present or during the past who have been able to open themselves up to the influence of some manner of “progressive movement towards truth” in matters of religion.

Despite the fact that Tolstoy doesn’t clearly define what he means by the notion of a “progressive movement towards the truth”, one still can develop a sense of what Tolstoy has in mind. For instance, on the basis of the analysis of Tolstoy’s perspective that has taken place already in this chapter, one might suppose that Tolstoy believes that any such progressive movement should be: (a) shaped by reason; (b) devoid of qualities such as senselessness and supernaturalism, and (c) give expression to the nature of the universe as well as one’s relationship to that universe.

Unfortunately, as previously noted in this chapter, there are a variety of conceptual problems that plague Tolstoy’s notions of reason, senselessness, supernaturalism, as well as his ideas concerning the nature of the universe and the nature of one’s position in the universe. Consequently, notwithstanding the presence of the foregoing sorts of concepts, one still is not quite sure what a “progressive movement towards the truth” is all about, and, furthermore, if the progressive movement to which Tolstoy is alluding is only a movement towards the truth, what is to make of the status of such a movement prior to the time that it actually reaches the truth?

Tolstoy believes the reason why we live in a world in which various individuals seek to control, manipulate, coerce, judge, exploit, and execute other individuals is because the former group of people – and, to some extent,

the latter set of human beings as well -- has lost touch with the principle that he feels is at the heart of every religion -- namely, that all human beings are equal. In order to obscure, or distract attention away from, what Tolstoy considers to be the aforementioned fundamental principle of religion, he indicates that those who desire to dominate others write all manner of books -- scientific, political, economic, historical, and religious -- which seek to justify the practice and enforcement of inequality.

While Tolstoy might, or might not, be correct that the idea of equality is at the heart of many, if not most, and, perhaps, all forms of religion, what he has not shown is that the principle of equality is an essential feature of either the nature of reality or the nature of humanity's relationship to that reality. What people believe -- however sincerely and passionately -- does not necessarily give accurate expression to the way things are.

However, what does stand a good chance of being able to be demonstrated is that attempts to control other people tend to be founded on arbitrary grounds ... that is, grounds which cannot be demonstrated in a manner that the vast majority of people would be willing to acknowledge -- beyond a reasonable doubt -- as likely to be true. And, the reason why this is the case is because, in one way or another, systems that seek to place one group of people in control of another almost invariably tend to depend on assumptions that cannot be shown to be true ... that is, the underlying assumptions are often arbitrary.

Notwithstanding the fact that inequalities can be found everywhere in life, the existence of those inequalities says nothing about why they exist. In other words, to cite the existence of such inequalities as justification for treating people differentially or for permitting some individuals to control other individuals requires one to interpret the significance of the facticity of inequality, and such interpretations depend on assumptions that cannot,

themselves, necessarily be shown to be true, and, as such, are arbitrary.

What is pervasive among humankind is not equality, per se, but, rather, ignorance concerning the actual nature of reality or the actual nature of humanity's relationship with existence. Thus, in a sense, the vast majority of human beings are equally ignorant concerning the meaning and significance of reality, as well as in relation to the nature of our relationship with reality.

In the face of such ignorance, perhaps one should proceed in accordance with some sort of cautionary principle. For instance, one might be willing to acknowledge that substantial inequalities in natural abilities, physical qualities, and life circumstances exist across various human populations but, nonetheless, the existence of those inequalities should not be permitted to disadvantage those who, in one way or another, are less equal because to do so tends to make things worse than they otherwise need to be and, as a result, runs the risk of eventually undermining everyone's well-being due to the fault-lines of discontent, instability, and rebellion that often arise in such circumstances of abuse, oppression, and exploitation.

Therefore, the existence of inequalities should be seen as an opportunity to constructively help others (irrespective of their position in society) ... not for the purpose of making them equal but in order that everyone might have the prospect of improving the quality of their lives and, thereby, have an enhanced opportunity to seek the truth concerning the nature of reality and the nature of their relationship with reality. Moreover, when the presence of inequalities is used to empower people to control, judge, execute, imprison, coerce, exploit, or deprive those who are less equal with respect to whatever natural talents, physical abilities, or circumstances are being considered, then, sooner or later, as history has often shown, all people – both the haves and the have-nots – are

placed at risk, and, as a result, everyone's opportunity to seek the truth and/or to realize the nature of their relationship with reality becomes weakened.

Until one can establish -- beyond all reasonable doubt for the vast majority of people -- what the truth is concerning the nature of reality or what the truth is concerning the nature of humanity's relationship with reality, one should proceed with caution. The caution to be exercised has to do with ensuring that those who have talents, intelligence, physical abilities, and/or felicitous circumstances that others do not should not be enabled to use such inequalities to advantage only themselves or to control others and, thereby, act in demonstrably arbitrary ways.

In other words, those who are gifted relative to others should comport themselves in a manner that works to everyone's advantage. Proceeding with caution in this fashion in order to avoid making things worse than they might otherwise have to be may also be an arbitrary way to proceed, but, if so, then this form of arbitrariness would seem to be more defensible because it seeks to serve everyone's well-being and not just the well-being of the few.

'To have' is a challenge for character. 'To have not' is also a challenge for character.

Both manners of challenge require qualities capable of constructively engaging the problems and choices associated with each of the foregoing set of circumstances (having and non having) The qualities of character that are to be used while engaging the foregoing sorts of challenges raise issues of considerable importance.

More specifically, in the absence of indubitable knowledge concerning the truth of life's nature or knowledge concerning our relationship with reality, one could argue that, perhaps, the most constructive thing a person might be able to do -- irrespective of one's circumstances -- is to engage life through qualities of:

Patience, love, humility, perseverance, courage, nobility, honesty, fairness, compassion, charitableness, tolerance, gratitude, and sincerity, as one searches for the truth concerning the nature of reality or the nature of one's relationship with reality. Proceeding in the foregoing manner might be the most constructive thing one can do because trying to operate in accordance with such qualities of character would seem to prepare one to be in the most objective, receptive, and open position in which one can be in order to be able to try to understand the nature of reality or the nature of one's relationship with reality because, given such qualities of character, one is ready to rigorously listen in as unbiased a fashion as possible with respect to what reality might be trying to communicate concerning its nature.

Even if one were of the opinion that the "best" way to engage life (and this would require a person to provide a means of reliably and objectively assessing what qualifies as being "best") was through qualities of enmity, dishonesty, pride, jealousy, impatience, ingratitude, cowardice, ignobility, selfishness, intolerance, and insincerity, nonetheless, in the face of uncertainty concerning the ultimate nature of reality or uncertainly concerning the essential nature of one's relationship with reality, one should consider the possibility of whether, or not, what one does in this world (such as pursuing a lifestyle entangled in negative qualities of character) has any bearing on subsequent modalities of existence, if any. Furthermore, given the state of our ignorance, one cannot necessarily be sure whether exercising such negative qualities of character might be preventing one from being able to explore, or have access to, other dimensions of one's potential that might have the capacity to serve one's essential interests better than such negative qualities of character are able to do.

This is because negative qualities of character like the ones noted above tend to interfere with our capacity to be

open, judicious, and patient with respect to such matters. This tends to effectively undermine one's ability to be able to listen in an unbiased manner to what, if any, message reality might be communicating to one.

The central issue throughout the foregoing several pages of analysis is not – contrary to what Tolstoy believes – the principle of equality. Rather, the fulcrum against which the foregoing discussion pivots involves (a) issues of ignorance in relation to the nature of existence and/or the nature of one's relationship with reality, as well as (b) the notion of arbitrariness that is entailed by many philosophical and scientific approaches to the puzzle of existence ... including the way in which Tolstoy approaches this challenge.

Tolstoy states in *What Is Religion?* that:

“Before one can pour anything into a vessel one must first empty it of what it already contains. So, also it is necessary to free men from the deceit in which they are held in order that they may accept true religion, that is, a true relation to the source of all – God, -- corresponding to the development of humanity, and a guide for their actions deduced from this relation.”

While one might agree with the initial premise of the foregoing statement – namely, that “before one can pour anything into a vessel one must first empty it of what it already contains,” nonetheless, the second premise that appears in the above quote – namely, “So, also it is necessary to free men from the deceit in which they are held in order that they may accept true religion, that is, a true relation to the source of all – God,” -- might not be true.

Not only does Tolstoy believe that human beings are being held in a condition of deceit concerning religion, but, as well, he believes he knows what the nature of that

deceit is. Tolstoy might, or might not, be right that human beings are being held in a condition of deceit, and, in addition, he might, or might not, be right concerning the nature of the deceit in which humanity is being held, however, more than a few examples – which is what he provides at this point of *What Is Religion?* – will be necessary in order for him to be able to prove that what he is asserting in the foregoing quote is correct.

Furthermore, one might, or might not, be willing to grant Tolstoy's point that "true religion" constitutes "a true relation to the source of all – God". Nonetheless, even if one were to accept such a perspective, one is less inclined to suppose that Tolstoy necessarily knows what the nature of that "true relation to the source of all" actually involves.

Conceivably, Tolstoy might be engaged in an exercise that is not appreciably different from the process of moving deck chairs around on the Titanic in an effort to save lives. In other words, what Tolstoy is offering as his version of "true religion" could be just another form of deceit that is being used to fill up the vessel of human beings in yet another problematic manner, and, therefore, instead of assisting humanity to develop by helping it to draw closer to the truth, he actually is merely replacing one form of deceit with another (i.e., his theory of religion) and, thereby, helping to keep human beings in a condition of deceit rather than actually helping to free them.

A short while later, Tolstoy asks, and, then, answers his own question – namely, "does a true religion really exist?" Although he admits that many religions differ from one another in their external forms, nevertheless, he claims that some of those same religions agree with each other when one considers their fundamental principles and that such principles give expression to true or universal religion.

According to Tolstoy, the principles to which he is alluding are few in number. For instance, one of the principles cited by him in this respect involves the idea of a

God that is the Source of everything, however, to claim that God exists and is the Source of everything, does not indicate what the nature of everything is, nor does such a claim specify what the nature of the relationship is between an individual and God.

Tolstoy continues on by stipulating that another fundamental principle on which all true religions agree concerns the idea that within human beings there is a particle of the Divine that can either be constructively enhanced or destructively diminished. Even though one might be willing to agree that within human beings there is a potential that can be constructively enhanced or destructively diminished, nonetheless, the identity of that essential potential tends to be a subject of some controversy, and, consequently, while many religions tend to agree that the Source of all is what makes such a potential possible, not all religions necessarily agree that such a potential gives expression to a “particle of this divine element” (whatever that means).

Another fundamental principle cited by Tolstoy as being common to all true or universal religions involves the idea that in order to be able to constructively enhance the potential within that links one to the Source of all, one must suppress one’s passions while developing one’s capacity for love. Yet, Tolstoy does not provide a detailed account for how passions are to be suppressed, nor does he explain what love is (and one hopes love involves something more than what often transpired between him and his wife over a period of more than forty years and which has been outlined in Part II of Chapter 1 in the present book) or a detailed account of how one should go about developing one’s capacity for love.

Tolstoy does stipulate that a practical method which, supposedly, helps one to suppress passions and develop one’s capacity for love involves the idea that an individual should interact with others as one would like those other people to act with her, him, or them. However, one

remains uncertain just how one will go about acting in accordance with such a practical method since doing so seems to presuppose being able to suppress the very passions, as well as being able to develop the very capacity for love that the aforementioned practical method – the so-called golden rule -- is alleged to help one to be able to accomplish or realize.

Moreover, there are some aspects of the aforementioned practical method – i.e., act toward others as one would have them act toward you – that seem problematic. For example, if I like football should I, then, interact with others in a manner that would require those people to like football too, or, alternatively, if I am liberally or conservatively inclined, does the aforementioned practical method mean that I should treat other people in accordance with liberal or conservative principles because that is how I want them to act toward me? What kinds of behaviors is Tolstoy's practical method actually calling one to observe since the foregoing, problematic examples would appear to suggest the possibility that something other than the indicated actions (involving football or liberal and conservative politics) is what Tolstoy might have in mind.

Interestingly, Tolstoy didn't believe in practices such as fasting, chanting (i.e., repeating certain words or phrases), visiting shrines, ritual prayer, mysticism, or any other activity that his rationalistic worldview – often arbitrarily – was not prepared to accept, and, yet, his inclination to separate himself from the foregoing sorts of practices might have been the very reason why Tolstoy had such difficulty meeting the challenge of love when it came to his relationship with his own wife and family (a difficulty to which he gave conceptual expression in the way in which the character of Anna Karenina is virtually devoid of any genuine form of love and is, I believe a reflection of Tolstoy's state of mind prior, during, and following the release of that novel), and why there was such a

discrepancy between his public advocacy for sexual abstinence and his actual, private behavior, or why he was not able to master his jealousy concerning his wife's innocent relationship with a musician that was helping her to grieve the loss of one of her children, or why he had been stalking and, subsequently, was on his way to commit adultery with one of the servants on his estate but was saved from his own, nearly out of control passion when his son called out to him from the house to remind Tolstoy about the study lesson that he (i.e., his father) was supposed to give to his son at just that time, or why Tolstoy kept wanting to run away from that – namely his wife and family – which presented him with problems that he didn't know how to solve in a constructive fashion.

Tolstoy was a rationalist. Yet, reason not only had failed to save Tolstoy from himself (although his reason had provided him with a coping strategy to help him overcome his suicidal ideation as well as be able to engage many aspects of life in a largely constructive fashion), but, in fact, the manner in which Tolstoy used reason also might actively have prevented him from learning about, and gaining facility with, the spiritual practices that have been at the heart of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Taoism, and so on.

As a rationalist, Tolstoy gave priority to a specific set of religious ideas (i.e., God is the Source of everything; there is something within us that has a relationship with God and which is capable of growing or withering; that in order to enhance the Divine gift within us we need to suppress our passions and increase our love for others, and, finally, that we should act toward others as we wish them to act toward us). He believes the foregoing set of ideas is held in common by all major, true religions, and he referred to the foregoing concepts as the fundamental principles of all true religions.

Yet, what truly could have been the set of fundamental principles that is held in common by all true religions

might not have been so much a matter of ideas as it is a function of spiritual practices. For example, fasting, chanting, praying, bearing witness, and pilgrimage might have been what rendered, among others, peasants and poor pilgrims receptive to realizing whatever the nature of their relationship with existence might have involved, and, as a result, Tolstoy could have been preoccupied with the wrong sort of commonalities that he believed were present among so-called true religions.

There is a hadith – or, saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) – which stipulates that:

“There are 71 sects among Jews, and only one of them is correct. There are 72 sects among Christians, and only one of them is correct. There are 73 sects among Muslims, and only one of them is correct.”

On the one hand, the foregoing saying is remarkable because despite the fact that so many people are of the opinion that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are mutually exclusive spiritual traditions that are necessarily – supposedly -- essentially opposed to one another, nonetheless, the foregoing saying of the Prophet bears witness to the common truths that are present in certain editions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and, to this extent, lends credence to Tolstoy’s notion that there are various fundamental dimensions of commonality among, at the very least, the three major religious traditions. However, notwithstanding the foregoing confirmation of the aforementioned theme of commonality being advanced by Tolstoy, nevertheless, he might not only have been wrong with respect to his understanding concerning the precise nature of the truths that he believes Christianity holds in common with other spiritual traditions, but he also could have been wrong with respect to his understanding of Christianity and, as such, might be endorsing one of the sects of Christianity to which the

Prophet alluded in the foregoing hadith or saying as being wrong.

According to Tolstoy, the people of his time were inclined to reject what Tolstoy is claiming in conjunction with the fundamental principles that he believes are held in common by all “true religion” because – or, so, he argues – such individuals demand that religion must be “senseless and incomprehensible (credo quia absurdum” – I believe because it is absurd). While Tolstoy’s foregoing contention might be true in relation to the manner in which some people believe, Tolstoy seems to overlook the possibility that what some – perhaps many – people might have found to be both practical and comforting was the manner in which observing spiritual practices such as fasting, prayer, chanting, pilgrimages, and so on were able to help sustain those individuals through difficult times when beliefs alone, no matter how rational those beliefs might have been, were found to be wanting, if not empty.

As noted several times previously, Tolstoy had great respect for the peasants and pilgrims who demonstrated resiliency and perseverance in the face of many kinds of existential challenges, deprivations, and sufferings. However, in the end, he tended to reject precisely those aspects of the faith of peasants and pilgrims (namely, their practices and notwithstanding the fact that some of those practices might have been entangled in superstitions of one kind or another) that may have – like the hair of the Biblical Sampson – been the source of their strength in the presence of adversity. Moreover, when Tolstoy played the role of Delilah to his own Sampson and cut off his hair by distancing himself from the practices of the peasants and pilgrims, then in effect, he cut himself off from what he needed to do to develop, over time and God willing, the sort of resiliency, perseverance, and other spiritual qualities of character that are necessary for life, and, instead, he proceeded to hang out with reasons and ideas that turned out to be incapable of spiritually sustaining

him ... a deficit that was clearly reflected in his troubled relationship with, among others, his wife.

Tolstoy claims that:

“Religion must define the relation of man to the source of all, the destiny of man which follows from this relation, and the rules of conduct from this destiny. And the universal religion, the fundamental principles of which are identical in all faiths, entirely satisfies these demands. It defines the relation of man to God as that of a part to the whole; it deduces from this relation the function of man as the increase in himself of the divine element; and from this function it deduces practical rules from the principle of acting towards others as one wishes others to act toward oneself.

Unfortunately, neither Tolstoy, nor anyone else, can show -- using reason alone -- that “the relation of man to God is that of a part to the whole,” and, therefore, one cannot deduce from such a premise – as Tolstoy supposes one can – that the function of man is to increase himself in a divine element (as opposed to developing or enhancing a potential that has been created and, therefore, is, in some way different from Divinity – the uncreated), let alone demonstrate that there is some practice – such as do unto others as one would have them do unto one -- that can be deduced which automatically and necessarily will bring about such an increase independently of what God permits and does not permit.

Among other things, Tolstoy’s way of reasoning lacks humility. His way of reasoning lacks an understanding of as well as insight into what reason can and cannot do, or what can and cannot be validly deduced through reason.

One can agree with Tolstoy that we should cease and desist from killing one another or that we should discontinue abusing and exploiting each other or that we

should not seek to disadvantage others in order to advantage ourselves. However, one's willingness to agree to the foregoing principles is not because those sorts of prohibitions are necessarily the only set of rational deductions that can be made in conjunction with the idea that one should act toward others as one wishes them to act toward one (a proposition that previously has been called into question) but because, instead, God is the One Who has informed us – through communications such as the Ten Commandments – that the foregoing sorts of behavior or conduct are part and parcel of humanity's relationship with Divinity.

Furthermore, Tolstoy also seems to be on shaky grounds when he tries to argue that the foregoing kinds of behaviors should be:

“... instilled with the same strenuousness and become as obligatory and intransgressible as faith in the sanctity of the sacraments, icons, and so on, for those whose faith is founded more on confidence than on a clear inner consciousness ...”

The shakiness of the grounds on which Tolstoy is seeking to tread is due to the difficulty one has understanding how he proposes to help people avoid ending up killing one another, or abusing and exploiting one another, or disadvantaging others while advantaging themselves when they begin to make the foregoing sorts of behaviors “obligatory and intransgressible” by imposing those principles on everyone. The grounds on which Tolstoy is seeking to build his conceptual edifice are also shaky because there might be considerable difference of opinion not only about what constitutes the process of abusing, exploiting, or disadvantaging one another, but, as well, there might be considerable disagreement about whether, or not, there could be defensible instances of killing another human being.

For instance, is the prohibition against killing that is present in the Ten Commandments absolute in nature? Or, are there some forms of ending another person's life that do not constitute killing.

Conceivably, the term "killing" might refer only to acts that are arbitrary and which cannot be justified. However, there might be other acts that end in the termination of life that do not qualify as acts of killing because they can be justified in some manner.

Of course, allowing for exceptions to the principle that "one shall not kill" might constitute something of a slippery slope. However, much of life seems to entail similar kinds of slippery slopes, and, therefore, one of the challenges of life revolves about the need to learn how to engage and traverse such moral geography with both constructive qualities of character as well as considerable caution.

Tolstoy wants:

"... to instill into children and adults those clear, simple truths of the religion common to all ..."

humanity. Yet, one wonders about the ethical character of the dynamics through which the 'instilling' process supposedly will take place.

How does one instill such "clear, simple truths" into someone without arbitrarily transgressing against, or interfering with, or undermining a person's capacity to be able to seek the truth concerning the nature of reality or the nature of one's relationship with reality in her, his, or their own inimical manner? What justifies Tolstoy's understanding of "clear, simple truths" being instilled, for example, in me and, thereby, becoming my understanding of those "clear, simple truths", and, in addition, if the truths to which Tolstoy is alluding are so clear and simple, then, why do they need to be instilled at all ... as opposed to, for

instance, being grasped during the process of development in a manner that is similar to, say, the learning of language.

According to Tolstoy:

“If instead of the faith that children are taught and adults are confirmed in, that God sent His Son to redeem the sins of Adam, and to establish His Church which must be obeyed, and the consequent rule that one should pray and bring offerings at certain times and at certain places, and refrain from a given food at a given time and on certain days of work, -- if instead of this they were taught and confirmed in the faith that God is a Spirit whose image lives in us, the power of which we can increase by our conduct; -- if only they were taught this and all that naturally follows from these principles, in the same way they are taught at present those unnecessary legends about impossible events and the rules of the senseless rituals which follow from such tales, -- then, instead of irrational strife and separation, very soon without the help of diplomatists, international law, peace congresses, political economists, and socialists of all sections, a peaceful, friendly, happy life would come about for humanity, directed by this sole religion.

But nothing of the sort is attempted: not only is the deceit of false religion not destroyed and the true religion not preached, but on the contrary more and more men farther and farther recede from the possibility of accepting the truth.”

While one might be willing to acknowledge that issues concerning whether, or not, God actually sent His Son in order to redeem the sins of Adam (peace be upon him) are legitimate lines of inquiry – and this is, at least, a three-part question – and while one might be willing to acknowledge that pursuing questions about whether, or not, God actually wished for institutions (in the form of:

churches, temples, mosques, or synagogues) to serve as intermediaries between individuals and Divinity could help to give expression to an array of important questions (not the least of which is that even if God did wish for such institutions to become established, this does not automatically resolve questions concerning the manner of that service), and while one might be willing to acknowledge there is nothing necessarily inherently inappropriate with raising questions concerning the value, if any, of fasting, prayer, and charitable donations, nonetheless, one still might wish to raise questions concerning whether, or not, Tolstoy is right when he claims that “God is a Spirit whose image lives in us, the power of which we can increase by our conduct”?

To begin with, even if one were to believe in God’s existence and even if one could agree on what is entailed by the idea of Spirit, such understandings do not necessarily force one to accept the notion that God is a Spirit. Furthermore, even if one were to accept as true the possibility that God’s image lives within us, such an admission does not resolve the problem of determining precisely what is meant by the idea that God’s image lives within us or how one would go about proving that such is the case or what the potential of that image might be.

In addition, even if one were to assume – as Tolstoy does – that there is a Divine image of some kind within us whose powers can be unlocked and developed through certain kinds of conduct, there are still other questions that need to be addressed. For example, what kinds of conduct are needed to activate the potential of the image that allegedly lives within us (such a question might take us beyond Tolstoy’s idea that we merely have to act towards others as we wish them to act toward us), and will such conduct make that image become manifest in everyone in the same way or to the same degree, and is the right sort of conduct sufficient to enable such a

transformation to take place, or does God have a role to play in what will, or will not, happen?

Tolstoy considers the beliefs of certain strains of Christianity -- along with various other religious traditions -- to consist of “unnecessary legends about impossible events and the rules of the senseless rituals which follow from such tales. Yet, he seems oblivious to the possibility that other people might look at what he is saying concerning, for example, God, Spirit, the Divine image within, conduct, and the realized power of such an image also appear to give expression to an array of “unnecessary legends about impossible events” that also lead to what some would consider to be senseless rules and practices.

The point of the foregoing discussion is not to induce people to come down on one side or the other of such controversies or to indicate that one side or the other is necessarily right or wrong. Rather, the purpose underlying the above reflections is to introduce a few possibilities which might suggest that the issues being addressed by Tolstoy may be a lot more complex than the “clear and simple truths” that he believes are present in those matters.

Tolstoy believes that what he considers to be “true religion” contains answers for how to avoid “irrational strife and separation.” He also believes that through what he considers “true religion” people will be able to have “a peaceful, friendly, happy life”, and, as well, people will be able to do so without the help of “diplomats, international law, peace congresses, political economists, and socialists of all sections.”

While one might be willing to share Tolstoy’s skepticism concerning the capacity of “diplomats, international law, peace congresses, political economists, and socialists” (not to mention communists, capitalists, libertarians, fascists, and freedom fighters of one description or another) to be able to assist people to live peaceful, friendly, and happy lives (or to be able to assist

humanity to discover the truth concerning the nature of its relationship with existence), nevertheless, to be fair, one also should entertain a certain amount of skepticism concerning the capacity of Tolstoy's notion of "true religion" to be able to assist people to lead peaceful, friendly, and happy lives because if one looks at Tolstoy's family life -- right up to its tragic end -- that life frequently was not peaceful, friendly, or happy, and a lot of the blame for that state of affairs -- although not all of it -- lies with Tolstoy himself and his apparent inability or unwillingness to practice what he preached when it came to his family and, especially, his wife.

One could agree with Tolstoy when he argues that perhaps:

"the chief reason why people do not do what is so natural, necessary, and possible, is that men of today, owing to a prolonged irreligious life, have become so accustomed to organize and establish their mode of living by violence -- bayonets, bullets, prisons, gallows, -- that they image such an order of life is not only normal but that no other is possible."

To the forms of violence that are mentioned by Tolstoy -- such as bayonets, bullets, prisons, and gallows -- one might wish to add: Unjustifiable wars (which includes virtually all, if not all, of such conflagrations); militarized police forces; racial profiling; standing armies; bloated defense budgets; intelligence agencies that serve the agendas of special interests rather than the people; an ideologically-driven judicial system; corporate welfare; educational systems that indebt people in exchange for arbitrary, ineffective, and biased systems of learning that are intended to serve the way of power; religious institutions that betray their constituents by encouraging their members to support wars of aggression, ignore sexual improprieties, and remain silent about the many forms of

violence and injustice that exist in society so that those institutions might continue to, among other things, enjoy a tax-free status; regulatory agencies that serve the very entities that such agencies are supposed to regulate; a Patriot Act that virtually no one read – except the non-elected individuals who wrote it, and, therefore, according to Article IV, Section 4 such legislation is unconstitutional; a media that can't seem to differentiate between fake and real news because this serves the interests of those who advertise through such media; Executive Orders that give the President the very sorts of tyrannical, monarch-like powers to which the people of 1787 America were opposed; congresses that represent no one but themselves; the unwarranted and unjustified intrusions of the National Security Agency into the lives of citizens; a FISA court that does not exercise due diligence and merely rubber stamps pretty much everything that comes before it; a National Defense Authorization Act that is offensive and belligerent in character; a medical business that kills tens of thousands people every year and is one of the most costly and ineffective health systems in the world; a banking system that serves the few rather than the many; torture, and an arrogant, self-indulgent, out-of-control CIA that has a history of assassinating opponents, overthrowing governments around the world, and running drugs. Surrounded by so many forces of undue influence, the average citizen becomes cocooned, if not entombed, from a very early age and is actively prevented from ever breaking free from their cultural, economic, political and educational prison cells to be able to question – let alone actively oppose – the ways of power that deprive people of their sovereignty.

One is quite impressed with Tolstoy's insight into the nature of the dilemma in which human beings found themselves in his times ... a dilemma that also bedevils the people of today. However, one is less impressed with Tolstoy when he maintains that:

“... those who have endeavored to replace the order of life founded on violence by a rational one founded on mutual service and love have always thought ...”,

not because the idea of seeking to replace a system of violence is wrong but, rather, because he has not actually shown that the nature of such a process of replacement must be entirely rational in nature (as opposed, for example, to a system of understanding involving dimensions of human beings that engage life through transrational capacities -- such as the heart or the spirit -- that are complementary to, but might be considerably different from, rational processes), and nor has he shown precisely what is meant by the notions of “mutual service” or “love” ... a deficiency that, as noted previously, is exacerbated by the apparent absence, oftentimes, of a sense of “mutual service” and “love” which mars his relationship with his wife Sonya/Sofya and, as a result, predisposes one to raise questions about just what Tolstoy meant by notions such as “mutual service” and “love” ... and not just theoretically but in actual, practical, lived terms.

Tolstoy also proclaims that every human being who is guided by true religion acts with qualities such as mutual service and love:

“... because the human soul enlightened by religion no longer lives merely by the life of this world as irreligious people live, but lives by the eternal infinite life for which sufferings and death in this life are ... insignificant.”

Irrespective of whether, or not, life is, ultimately, eternal and infinite, one might question whether such a life actually renders the sufferings and death in this life to be insignificant.

Even if it were the case that when compared to the nature of the life to come whatever suffering that occurs in this life are relatively insignificant, nonetheless, such a position seems to gloss over the issue of suffering and why -- if God is a loving God -- it exists at all. What constructive purposes might be served by suffering?

Among other things, suffering represents a challenge that enters into the lives of everyone. By engaging that challenge, one has the opportunity to develop qualities of character such as: Patience, resiliency, courage, perseverance, gratitude, sincerity, humility, friendship, tolerance, forgiveness, compassion, and so on ... qualities that might not have a chance to develop if suffering did not exist.

Conceivably, a loving God might want to give people the opportunity to have the experience of going through a difficult struggle in order to realize the potential -- involving, among other things, character -- that has been placed within them. There is a sense of joy, accomplishment, and contentment that often comes with achieving competence in becoming fully human ... a sense of joy, accomplishment, and contentment that is quite independent of whether, or not, one succeeds in a worldly sense.

There are other possibilities to consider as well when it comes to the issue of suffering. For instance, what happens if that which occurs in this life carries potential ramifications -- both good as well as problematic -- for what transpires in a subsequent life that, with Tolstoy, we are assuming -- at least for the moment -- is eternal and infinite? If there is a functional relationship between this life and the next such that what we do in one life affects what happens in the other life, then quite independently of considerations involving eternity and infinity, whatever suffering or death takes place in the present life would not seem to be insignificant.

Thus, for instance, if one makes choices with respect to how one goes about, say, pursuing the process of mutual service or loving others (whatever this might mean in concrete terms) that turn out to be wrong or problematic in some manner, then suffering (whether one's own or that of others) might lead to one set of consequences in the next world, whereas if the choices one makes in conjunction with how one goes about giving expression to mutual service or love in this world turn out to be right and constructive for others in some sense -- despite the suffering that such acts might cause the one performing those acts -- then, this might lead to a different set of consequences in the next world, and, therefore, clearly, suffering could have different meanings in different contexts and, therefore, might have considerable significance for what takes place in the next world, and, therefore, irrespective of how infinite and eternal the next world might be, suffering would not necessarily be significant, but, instead, the ramifications of suffering might have the potential to color the nature of one experiences throughout the whole of infinite, eternity.

Similarly, the dynamics of death in this world might not be insignificant when considered in the context of a next world. For example, if one were never able to extricate oneself from the cocoon of oppression within which, as previously noted, the ways of power seek to entomb individuals, then death might entail a very different set of consequences from instances in which people were able to successfully extricate themselves from the form of imprisonment within which the way of power seeks to entangle them, and, as a result, these latter individuals went on to live constructive lives of mutual service and love, then, death might entail quite different consequences in a subsequent life, and, therefore, would not be insignificant.

Death might signify the termination of opportunity. If so, then, when we die, and how we die, and why we die,

and for what we die could all affect the extent to which one has lived a life that either has taken advantage of or wasted the opportunity that life offers and which death ends.

Contrary to what Tolstoy says in the foregoing quote with respect to the idea that suffering and death are insignificant when considered in the context of an “eternal infinite life, what we do, or do not do, in life has significance. If Tolstoy did not believe this, then, he would not have argued that people must, on the one hand, try to free themselves from the influence and deceits of false religion and, on the other hand, open themselves up to the influence of true religion.

I agree with the general tenor of Tolstoy’s foregoing perspective. However, as indicated throughout the present chapter, I tend to take exception with many of the details that he tries to introduce as alleged expressions of that general perspective.

Chapter 6: Some Foundational Beliefs

Let's take a look at some of the ideas and beliefs that Tolstoy considered to play a fundamental role in his spiritual perspective. For example, at the very beginning of Maureen Cote's introduction to Tolstoy's *Path of Life* (a book that he began during January 1910 and finished in October 1910, dying a little over a month later), one finds the following excerpt from his writing:

"In God's sight there is neither small nor great; there is only what is straight and what is crooked. Enter into the straight path of life and you will be with God and your work will be neither small nor great but will be God's work."

One might be willing to agree with the basic principle that is being espoused in the foregoing quotation, but what are the criteria through which one determines what constitutes the nature of 'straightness and crookedness'? Everything depends on being able to specify – as well as be able to justify – such criteria, and without an understanding of what is entailed by the nature of those criteria, then, the principle – as wise as it might sound -- comes to nothing. One could put forth almost any kind of framework to give expression to that sort of a statement, but unless one can demonstrate that a given framework encompasses the right sort of verifiable ideas – that is, the criteria of straightness and crookedness – then one begins at no beginning and one works toward no end.

According to Maureen Cote's Introduction, the *Path of Life* discloses Tolstoy's formula for how to find continuous happiness in life and how to die without fear. However, what happens if the purpose of life is not necessarily about finding continuous happiness or discovering a way to die without fear?

Perhaps, one should be seeking the truth and let that take one wherever it leads. If successful, such a search might lead to happiness – at least, perhaps, some of the time – but it might also involve considerable struggle, difficulty and pain before one ever – if one ever -- encounters any happiness. Sacrifice is not usually a matter of happiness but a matter of what is considered necessary, and a life of sacrifice will not necessarily entail a life in which one will be continuously happy even if one might be content with engaging existence in such a manner.

Similarly, having a certain amount of understanding and perspective concerning the prospect of death might not necessarily be a bad thing. The realities of the human condition are such that, maybe, having a little humility toward the prospect of death might be appropriate because once that event takes place, then, one's opportunity to realize one's potential or to seek the truth may come to an end, and one could be stuck where one is rather than where one needs to be.

According to Cote, Tolstoy believed that:

“.. the only true religion is the one that all humanity can believe in, and he believed that such religious truth is in a constant dynamic process of being revealed by new teachers in every country in the world.”

One wonders what the justification is for the foregoing perspective. That is, why should it be the case that the only true religion must be one that all of humanity can believe in? Isn't it possible that the truths of religion might be like some of the truths of science – namely, discoverable by a few (to whatever extent this is possible) but disseminated to everyone else according to the capacities, interests, and understandings of the latter individuals?

If the foregoing claim of Tolstoy were correct (i.e., that “the only true religion is the one that all of

humanity can believe in”), this might be an important principle to keep in mind. Nonetheless, one wonders whether, or not, such a contention is actually true irrespective of however much one might like it to be so?

Tolstoy is imposing a condition on the truth – namely, that in order for something to be true, everyone must be capable of agreeing to it. While, undoubtedly, such a condition gives expression to an attractive idea, nevertheless, proving that this is the case is another matter.

In effect, Tolstoy is claiming that his understanding of things is correct, and, therefore, whoever disagrees with him must be misunderstanding the nature of reality. Yet, if I don’t agree with Tolstoy about various points concerning the nature of religion, then quite irrespective of who (if either of us) might be right or wrong in conjunction with various considerations concerning this or that aspect of religion, then, the very existence of such a disagreement would seem to constitute an ipso facto, prima facie case that Tolstoy’s idea that true religion is that upon which everyone agrees rests on rather shaky conceptual and evidential grounds..

Moreover, if the nature of religious truth is such that it can be grasped by all of humanity, then, why is the truth concerning religion – as Tolstoy maintains is the case -- constantly being updated or added to by new teachers in various countries? And, if not everyone agrees to what is supposedly being “revealed”, then how do we know that it is true?

The fact of the matter is that people who disagree can agree on – or stipulate to the truth of – certain statements without feeling compelled to agree about any number of other issues that might be connected to those sorts of stipulated possibilities, and this sort of process goes on in courtrooms, political forums, and academic debates every day of the week. Just because Tolstoy considers or accepts only those statements of other individuals with which he

agrees, or which coincide with what he believes, this doesn't mean that the truth has necessarily been discovered, but, instead, this might only mean that on some points different people agree even while the extent to which truth is given expression through such agreement remains unknown and open to discussion.

In her introduction to *Path of Life*, Cote maintains that Tolstoy argued that:

"... inspired religious leaders were considered divine, because they were able to penetrate and articulate a truer definition of life that creates lasting inner peace and eliminates the fear of death. Their followers then elevated them to divine status."

How does someone know when a given religious leader was "able to penetrate and articulate a truer definition of life?" How does one measure whether, or not, lasting inner peace has been established or that fear of death has truly been eliminated through such an allegedly "truer definition of life"?

People can delude themselves about the extent to which they are happy or the degree to which they have lost their fear of death. But, let the bombs start falling, or the bullets start flying, or the earthquakes begin, or the flood waters commence, or the volcanoes become active, or the onset of some terminal disease take hold, and one is likely to obtain a far more accurate picture of the extent to which someone continues to remain happy or carries on in life free of fear concerning death.

Furthermore, individuals can be manipulated into adopting perspectives that seem to deliver lasting peace and happiness, as well as take away their fear of death. Yet, those individuals do not necessarily have the truth and, therefore, their condition is delusional ... however happy and free of fear concerning death such people might be.

In addition, to whatever extent Tolstoy's claim is true concerning the way in which followers elevate inspired religious leaders to a divine status, this process of elevation takes place despite clear indications being given that such a perspective has dubious merit. For instance, in at least three different places in the Gospels, questions concerning Jesus (peace be upon him) and goodness' are raised: (Matthew 19:17 -- Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19). Two such instances are as follows: "Why do you call me good? No one is good -- except God alone." Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is described in the Qur'an on a number of occasions as being just a warner ... the conveyor of a message.

In addition, this process of deification is not necessarily the case among Buddhists or among various indigenous forms of spirituality. Furthermore, Moses (peace be upon him) is not raised to the status of Divinity by the Jewish people, nor is Lao Tzu – although revered by adherents of Taoism – raised to the status of a deity.

Maureen Cote also indicates in the introduction to her translation of *Path of Life* how:

"Tolstoy believed that God is present in every man's soul and can be heard by every man"

One could agree with the foregoing claim and, yet, still ask whether, or not, everything that a person hears within himself, herself, or themselves is necessarily the voice of God speaking to them or communicating with them in some way. Furthermore, even if one were to accept the idea that God is present in every person's soul, this does not preclude the possibility that finding that presence within one can involve a difficult struggle which does not always end successfully.

Cote further states that Tolstoy:

“ ... listened respectfully, although discriminatingly, for the voice of God as expressed by every truly religious person he met, because he believed that God’s voice was implanted in all human beings through the voice of “conscience”.”

This raises the following problems. First, how does one distinguish the voice of conscience from other voices that might be speaking within an individual ... for example, the voice of ego, or the voice of Satan, or the voice of society, or the voice of theology, or the voice of science, or the voice of one’s parents and so on? Secondly, how does Tolstoy know that the framework or filters through which he is listening – respectfully but critically -- to someone necessarily is a function of the voice of God within his own conscience rather than merely giving expression to some form of rationalism, science, philosophy, theology, desire, aspiration, or the like that is present within him?

Cote notes in her introduction to *Path of Life* that:

“Tolstoy thought that it would be illogical to expect that an all-powerful God would limit His children’s access to His voice – by expressing His voice only in the distant past, or through only one spiritual teacher, or through only one particular religion, or in only one sacred book, or to a minority of self-appointed interpreters of the sacred book (a clerical hierarchy).”

By saying things in the foregoing manner, Cote is indicating that Tolstoy was seeking to impose his own logical conditions on how God operated or what God would or wouldn’t do. However, conceptually and metaphysically, this seems to be a rather dangerous and slippery slope to traverse.

God could have given human beings the tools they needed to seek out the truth, but, nonetheless, there is not

necessarily anything logically inconsistent if God were also to have made the unpacking, purifying, calibrating, testing, and applying of those tools a challenge or series of problems that needed to be solved. In other words, conceivably, the path to the discovery and mastery of such tools might be as important as are the results that come through the use of those tools.

Life might be a test. It could be a proving-ground. It might be intended to be a challenge and, as such, is fraught with difficulties and struggles.

Contrary to what Tolstoy claims, an illogical course of thought might be to do what Tolstoy is doing – namely, to prejudge what God would consider to be logical or illogical or to speculate on how God might go about things. It is truth or reality that should indicate how one is to proceed rather than arbitrary and artificial notions of what is logical or illogical.

One could agree with Tolstoy that the truth has not been limited to the past or to one spiritual teacher, or to one particular sacred book, or to a certain group of self-appointed “experts”, and so on. Nonetheless, one also might have to struggle to determine where the truth resides and why certain voices, individuals, books, or religions from the past do not necessarily give expression to the truth while others might.

It might be illogical to suppose – although God knows best -- that Divinity has given us no tools for navigating one’s way through the numerous possibilities concerning the past, individuals, books, and religions in order to find the truth. Nevertheless, to suppose that finding one’s way to those tools has been embedded in a context of problems, difficulties, obstacles, mysteries, challenges, and the like, is not necessarily illogical

In the introduction to *Path of Life*, Cote maintains:

“Tolstoy believed that this voice of “God-conscience” placed in each person was the true source of humanity’s moral evolution.”

What is the nature of the natural arc that is supposedly mapped out by that process of evolution? Where did it start and why did it start like that, and where is it headed or why and why not suppose that the essential potential for moral and spiritual development has been present from the very beginning and that, as has been the case in every generation, some people realize that potential while others do not?

Cote indicates that Tolstoy’s used a method in *Path of Life* in which he quoted – or paraphrased -- a variety of individuals rather than merely developing his own understanding. He went about things in the foregoing manner in order to make a point.

More specifically, he wanted to indicate that he was just one individual among many people who was bearing witness to the truth that had been bequeathed to human beings by God. As such, the aforementioned technique – that is, quoting a variety of people on any given point or principle – served to demonstrate that what had been placed in him and other individuals was universal in nature. However, if such ideas and principles were universal in nature, then, why speak of moral evolution?

If something is universal, then, there is no evolutionary arc of development. Everything that is necessary for spiritual and moral realization is present from the very beginning, even though some people might succeed in accessing that material while others might fail at that task.

According to Maureen Cote, Tolstoy believes that:

“all people share one soul and that, therefore, all individuals, and not just Tolstoy, inherently know basic religious truths.”

However, the fact that some people agree on certain ideas, principles, and values does not necessarily mean that those individuals are hooked into some universal set of truths since, as noted earlier, people can stipulate to the truth of certain ideas while, simultaneously, disagreeing about a host of other issues, but, perhaps somewhat more importantly, Tolstoy's foregoing claim does not explain why some individuals seem to be able to access such universal and inherent truths or principles, while many – if not most -- other individuals do not seem to be able to achieve this.

To be sure, Tolstoy refers to those individuals who are capable of accessing universal and inherent truths as possessing divinely-inspired wisdom. Yet, he never really explains how such inspiration works, nor does he seem to provide an account for why it is that if everyone has access to the same innate, universal truths, only some people are described as being divinely inspired.

Cote maintains that the 31 chapters of Tolstoy's book, *Path of Life*, are meant to be read a chapter at a time over the course of a month (I guess one is out of luck if one starts the book during a month with only 28, 29, or 30 days). The chapters are intended to serve as a "plan of action for improving the soul." However, improving the soul is more than acquiring a certain set of beliefs.

One also has to act on those beliefs, ideas, and principles and incorporate them into one's life and apply them wisely (i.e., appropriately). In other words, belief is not enough ... one must have a means of putting those beliefs into practice, and as the details of Tolstoy's life indicate, he – like many of us – often encountered an array of difficulties when he attempted to put his beliefs into practice.

The chapters in Tolstoy's book provide an outline of an array of human errors that serve as obstacles to realizing the spiritual potential that has been implanted in human

beings. Among these errors are the sorts of passions that help undermine the process of realizing one's inherent spiritual potential.

In addition, during the 31 chapters of *Path of Life*, Tolstoy explores the manner in which the Church, state, and science induce people to unquestioningly accept their proclamations concerning the nature of life. These sorts of "superstitions" also interfere with people's ability to access the spiritual potential that God has placed in human beings, but it doesn't explain why some people seem to be more vulnerable to such influences than are other individuals.

Cote indicates in her introduction to *Path of Life* that Tolstoy did not begin to seriously focus on spiritual issues until he was 50 years old. This was precipitated, at least in part, by a suicidal depression that inundated him at that time.

Among other things, his depression was rooted in his inability to escape the conclusion that notwithstanding whatever worldly accomplishments he had achieved or might achieve, nonetheless, his achievements would all be reduced to nothing through the event of death. He sought for a meaning to life that was capable of transcending the prospect of death, and, as a result, he began to scour the teachings and writings of people from all over the world that might be able to provide insights into the nature of life.

According to Cote's introduction, Tolstoy maintained that humanity is spiritually evolving through the manner in which various individuals across history were refining ideas, principles, and values that were central to spiritual development. However, one is not exactly sure what Tolstoy has in mind here because, on the one hand, he claims that religious truths are universal in nature and have been placed in every human soul, and, therefore, as a result, one wonders what exactly is evolving, or how are such improvements or refinements are being made

possible, or what the nature of the refinements is that are being introduced, or what are the criteria that are being used to measure improvements, and how does one go about measuring those sorts of refinements and improvements or justifying the use of such criteria?

While Tolstoy felt that the founders of all world religions had given expression -- each in his, her, or their own way -- to the universal truths that have been embedded in the souls and consciences of humanity, nevertheless, he believed that the teachings and life of Jesus (peace be upon him) constituted the most faithful account of the universal truths that have been given to human beings. However, Tolstoy felt that the apostles had, to varying degrees, misconstrued the essential character of the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him) by giving emphasis to the miracles that were manifested through Jesus (peace be upon him) rather than focusing on the moral values that were being espoused by him.

Among those moral values that Tolstoy had in mind was the idea that one should respond to evil through good and that one should love one's enemies. Tolstoy considered this latter principle -- namely, that one should love one's enemies -- to reflect the very heart of the truths that had been instilled in the souls of human beings.

However, the idea of love -- in all its complexities and nuances -- is only very vaguely treated by Tolstoy. And, perhaps more importantly, Tolstoy never really explained how an individual is to activate the qualities -- such as character -- that appear to be necessary for love to become an on-going presence in one's life because love both gives expression to, as well as, to some extent, seems to presuppose, such qualities as: Patience, nobility, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, courage, perseverance, resiliency, humility, sincerity, and honesty.

Love is not merely a belief. It entails all manner of wise and insightful conduct.

Tolstoy also never really provides the details for how one is supposed to compare the lives of, say, Jesus (peace be upon him) and the lives of other religious teachers. Among other things, we lack accurate historical records to do much more than speculate about the lives of those individuals and how they might compare with one another.

In addition, Tolstoy never seems to provide a detailed account of why one should accept his judgment about what constitutes the most essential element of the universal truths that have been placed in the souls of human beings. For instance, one might wish to argue that as important as love is, nonetheless, knowledge – insight, intuition, unveiling -- might be as important or more important than love because through such knowledge, one comes to understand how to give expression to, say, justice – that is, giving to everything what is due to it.

Loving God or loving human beings might give expression to certain dimensions of human nature. Acquiring insight into the nature of various facets of Divine dynamics might give expression to other dimensions of human potential.

In fact, truth might help inform, orient, and direct love. In addition, love might help modulate how one goes about implementing justice and, in the process, giving everything what is due to that aspect of reality, while character enables justice to be implemented through truth and love. Consequently, knowledge concerning truth, love, justice, and character all seem to give expression to very important dimensions of the universal principles and values that might have been instilled in the human soul.

Tolstoy maintained that individuals such as Jesus (peace be upon him) were not Divine. Rather, they were divinely inspired.

However, Tolstoy doesn't really explain why some individuals are inspired while others are not. Nor does he provide a plausible account for why God didn't just inspire everyone independently of such inspired individuals, or

why, if the basic truths of religion were universal in nature and accessible to every human being, inspiration was necessary at all.

Furthermore, if Tolstoy – as previously noted – believes that new divinely-inspired truths are being revealed with each succeeding age, then, what about the possibility that someone might come along with a divinely-inspired idea that either replaces, or modulates, what Jesus (peace be upon him) or other, earlier, divinely-inspired individuals bore witness to? What is the relation of earlier instances of divine inspiration to later instances of such inspiration?

Furthermore, Tolstoy doesn't allow for the possibility that some individuals – such as Jesus (peace be upon him) -- have a relationship with God that, in certain respects, could transcend the relationship that other people have with God. Thus, for example, Tolstoy doesn't accept the idea of a prophetic tradition that might have constituted a series of special emissaries of Divinity who had the specific mission of introducing people to the possibility of realizing one's essential potential through the transmission of revelation and their own (i.e., that of the prophets) example of spiritual excellence.

Different non-Prophetic individuals (e.g., philosophers, theologians, mystics) across history might have things to say that reflect the truths that have been instilled in human souls. However, these unveilings and intuitions might only be partial or limited expressions of various, universal truths or, sometimes, such spiritual unveilings might be more in-depth disclosures concerning the truth and, therefore, the spiritual roles of those kinds of individuals are complementary in nature to, and often derivative from, the mission of the Prophets.

According to Cote's introduction to *Path of Life*, Tolstoy argued that Jesus (peace be upon him) sought to induce his followers to listen to the voice of conscience that had been implanted in the souls of human beings. Yet, Tolstoy,

doesn't provide an explanation for why the followers of Jesus (peace be upon him) – who supposedly possessed the same universal truths within them that Jesus (peace be upon him) did – failed to grasp what Tolstoy considered to be the essential dimension of those teachings (namely, the teachings about love) and, instead – at least, according to Tolstoy -- focused on the phenomena of miracles.

In other words, apparently – at least according to Tolstoy -- the apostles failed to properly attend to the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him) and went off on a tangent. Yet, if the foregoing perspective is accurate, then why did the apostles act in the way that Tolstoy claims they did? What prevented the followers from paying heed to the central teachings, and why was Tolstoy – who had never been in the presence of Jesus (peace be upon him) -- able to hear that message when those individuals who spent years with Jesus (peace be upon him) seemed deaf and blind to what was being said?

Tolstoy might, or might not, be right about his assessment of the followers of Jesus (peace be upon him). However, Tolstoy's position raises a variety of questions that need to be addressed and Tolstoy never seems to do this ... or do so, in my opinion, very persuasively.

According to Maureen Cote's introduction to *Path of Life*, Tolstoy also believes that when individuals listen to the voice of conscience – which, according to him, gives expression to the universal truths of God – this leads to a spiritual rebirth. Supposedly, individuals who listen to the voice of conscience within them are freed from a condition that gives expression to an animalistic, ego-driven life, and awaken to the presence of the universal truths within them and through which they become "Sons of God".

However, once again, Tolstoy never provides a concrete account concerning what the nature or dynamic of that rebirthing process involves. Moreover, Tolstoy does not appear to provide many details about how to go about attending to the process of listening to conscience and how

one should go about trying to differentiate between -- or be able to identify what constitutes listening to -- the universals embedded in one's conscience rather than listening to the many other kinds of influences (worldly, social, scientific, theological, satanic, passions, interests,, and so on) that are being given expression through the phenomenology of an individual's consciousness.

Tolstoy was not only critical of the manner in which all too many people sought to place arbitrary constraints on, and distort the true nature of, religion, but he also was critical of the way in which the science of his day -- the scientific materialism that dominated thought in Germany, England and France beginning around 1860 -- sought to make reality a function of material processes. Tolstoy was of the opinion that materialism would never be able to achieve success in its search to provide a material account for the evolution of consciousness, and, in addition, Tolstoy felt the explanations that science offered to account for various phenomena -- such as consciousness -- were rather superficial and unconvincing.

However, to be fair, one could also add that Tolstoy was never able to offer any plausible account for how God made consciousness possible. Religion and science were competing theories concerning the nature of reality, but each of those frameworks entailed a variety of problems when it came to providing a clear, detailed, step-by-step account of how things worked with respect to the phenomenon of consciousness.

Tolstoy might be right that the origin of life is far too complex for scientific materialism to explain, the origin of life. At the same time, the issue of the origin of life might also be far too complex for a spiritual approach to explain as well.

Although he came to believe that having wealth was contrary to Christian principles, nonetheless, he benefitted from the wealth entailed by his estate, Yásnaya Polyána, right up to the time he left that estate for good during the

last days of his life. Tolstoy also claimed that Christians should conform to a celibate life style. Nevertheless, he fathered 13 children, with the last coming after he was in his 60s, and, of course, in a manner that is somewhat reminiscent of St. Augustine who maintained a set of concubines and prayed for God – with, presumably, the members of his concubine in mind -- to make him Christian ... but not quite yet, so too, earlier in Tolstoy's life, he frequented brothels but, sometimes, tried to keep the visits down to just several times a week when he was trying to be good.

Moreover, there were running philosophical and spiritual battles that were fought between, on the one hand, Tolstoy, and, on the other hand, Tolstoy's wife and many of his sons. The very existence of such battles and conflicts seemed to be at odds with many of the principles and values about which Tolstoy tried to teach in his books, letters, and talks.

Tolstoy did not deny the many contradictions that seemed to populate his life. He was very critical of himself in the diaries that he maintained throughout much of his life.

Indeed, in a September 21, 1905 diary entry – a little more than five years before he passed away -- he wrote:

“I have all the vices, and to an extreme degree: Envy, greed, stinginess, lust, vanity, ambition, pride, and malice. No, I am not malicious, but I can feel resentment, and I am deceitful and hypocritical. I have every vice, every vice – and to a far greater degree than most people. My only salvation is that I know it and have been fighting and fighting against it all my life.”

One admires the brutal honesty and sincerity that Tolstoy displays in the foregoing, but one can't help but wonder how such a state of affairs could exist if – as previously

discussed -- God has instilled certain essential truths into our souls and that all one has to do is listen to the counsel of one's soul – the voice of Divinely-inspired conscience – in order to be reborn as a 'Son of God'.

Obviously, Tolstoy appears to be missing something. How can it be that someone has access to the truths that God has instilled in one's soul, and, yet, such an individual can't seem to escape the gravitational pull that is exerted by all of his lower passions?

Tolstoy did attempt to fight the good fight for much of his life. Nonetheless, he was often on the losing end in many of those battles, and, as a result, his life was filled with a variety of contradictions.

Tolstoy also wrote that:

“All books are made by human hands and, therefore, contain what is useful and what is harmful and what is true and what is false.” (cf. Chapter 1 of *The Path of Life*).

Given that Tolstoy's books have been issued by human hands, one wonders what is harmful in the books that he has issued and what is false in them, and one wonders how one might go about distinguishing between what is useful and harmful and what is true and false within his works. In addition, one might also wonder how one would go about proving that what Tolstoy is saying in those works is true.

For instance, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) released the *Meccan Openings* and the *Bezels of Wisdom* nearly 900 years ago and insisted that he did not compose one letter of either work ... that the materials came to him in the form of spiritual experiences and that he merely took down or transcribed what had been given to him. Of course, it might be the case that such works were merely the words of someone who was deluded about what supposedly was transpiring in his life, and, yet how would one prove either possibility to be the case.

Tolstoy proclaims that all books are made by human hands. Yet, his proclamation is based on an assumption that he never actually demonstrates to be true, and, consequently, as such, his books could be the sorts of things to which he alluded in the foregoing quote that come from human hands which are not true and, consequently, potentially harmful.

As Tolstoy, himself, acknowledged in the Foreword to *Path of Life*, he took liberties – in the form of various kinds of changes -- with the rendering of the ideas from other individuals that are included in the 31 chapters of his book *Path of Life*. He translated those ideas using simple Russian words because he believed that truth must be stated in clear and simple terms, and, yet, this leaves open the possibility that Tolstoy might have filtered the ideas of others through his own assumptions, biases, values, and beliefs, and, in the process attributed things to others that were not necessarily entirely accurate.

Furthermore, Tolstoy is assuming that he has a simple and clear understanding of the truth, and through this sort of understanding, he is able to identify what is true in the writings of others. However, this is rather presumptuous – both with respect to whether, or not, he really does have a clear and simple understanding of the truth, as well as whether, or not, he has a clear and simple understanding of what is true in the writings of others and whether, or not, his renderings of what others say is accurately reflective of what those individuals actually said.

During the first chapter (entitled “Belief”) in *Path of Life*, Tolstoy says:

“To live well, we must know what we should or should not do. To do that, we need a belief system. A belief system describes our knowledge of what man is and what he lives

for in this world. All rational people have always had a belief system.”

What is meant by the idea of “to live well”? What are the criteria for determining what constitutes conditions of living well, and what justifies the use of such criteria?

Contrary to what Tolstoy claims, belief systems do not necessarily describe “our knowledge of what man is and what he lives for”, but, rather, such a belief system often only gives expression to an understanding, theory, or philosophical framework concerning what we believe man to be and what we believe man lives for, and, therefore, there is no guarantee that such a belief system will necessarily correctly show a person how to live well.

Even if one accepts as true that “all rational people have always had a belief system” what does this say about the idea of rationality given that so many of those belief systems are contradictory with respect to one another. Furthermore, historically speaking, there have been so many belief systems that have been proven to be wrong or, at the very least, problematic in a variety of ways.

During the first chapter in *Path of Life* -- under the heading “Definition of True Religion” -- Tolstoy states:

“To live good lives, we must understand what life is and what we should and should not do in this life. The wisest people in every era have taught this, and the good lives of people in all cultures have illustrated this. The basic teachings of these wise people all coincide and are concerned with one thing. This one thing is how to define human life and how to live it – and this is what constitutes true religion.”

How and when does one know if one has properly understood “what life is and what we should and should not do in this life”? What is it that makes a life good?

Moreover, just because someone has addressed those sorts of issues, does this necessarily make their understanding an expression of wisdom? Indeed, what makes an understanding wise?

Tolstoy goes on to ask:

“What is the meaning of this boundless world surrounding me and about whose beginning or end I know nothing? What significance does my life have in this infinite world, and how should I live my life? Only religion answers these questions.”

If what Tolstoy subsequently points out is true – namely, that: “There can be many pseudo-religions, but there is only one true religion” (and, apparently, this idea comes from Kant) -- then one needs to know how to distinguish between something that is a true religion from something that is a pseudo-religion. The fact that a belief system attempts to provide answers to such questions does not necessarily make it a true religion, and, indeed, it is only when the answers that are provided by a belief system turn out to be demonstrably accurate or correct in some sense that one knows one is dealing with a true religion rather than a false or pseudo-religion, but, unfortunately, this is just what remains to be shown, and, until then, one has no idea with what one is dealing – that is, truth or falsehood.

Tolstoy states that:

“True religion consists of knowing the law that is higher than all human law and is the same for all people in the world.”

How does one know when one has discovered such a law, and how does one know that such knowledge will consist

of a law rather than a set of principles? Laws are often linear or rule-like, and, therefore, require everyone to observe those laws in precisely the same way, whereas principles often are non-linear in character and provide people with a certain amount of creative degrees of freedom while still complying with the nature of the principle being considered, and in this sense, love might be a principle that permits a variety of responses rather than a rule-like law that requires everyone to operate in the same fashion.

Furthermore, how does one know that people will necessarily understand and know the truth in precisely the same way? Isn't it possible that just as not everyone has the same set of cognitive, physical, and creative abilities, so too, it might be the case that not everyone has the same spiritual capacity with respect to understanding the truths that God might have instilled in the souls of human beings?

In *Path of Life*, Tolstoy maintains that:

“If you doubt your religion, then, it is not a religion. Religion is only religion when it does not even enter your mind that what you believe could be untrue.”

Tolstoy's foregoing claim might be stating things in a rather problematic way. More specifically, he fails to distinguish between, on the one hand, being certain – on the basis of a correct understanding of verified evidence – that something (for example, 'religion x') is true, and, on the other hand, being convinced -- on the basis of one's beliefs and an unverified interpretation of available data – that something (e.g., one's understanding of 'religion x') is true.

In short, believing something is true is not necessarily equivalent to knowing that something is true. Having real knowledge concerning the truth of something might, or

might not, be inconsistent with having doubts about what one knows to be true ... for example, one could know something to be true and, for whatever reason, just not have much confidence in one's understanding of things.

However, unverified beliefs tend to be very vulnerable to the presence of doubts even if what one believes is actually the case. Therefore, there is nothing necessarily inconsistent about the possibility that one might believe – but does not know – that 'religion x' is true and, yet, nonetheless, one doubts the truth of 'religion x' even if 'religion x' turns out to be true.

Similarly, one could believe – but not know – that 'religion x' is true, and, yet, contend that 'religion x' is true even though this might not be so. If this were the case, then despite the fact that doubt is not present concerning the purported truth of 'religion x', nonetheless, the absence of doubt does not necessarily guarantee the truth of one's beliefs, any more than the presence of doubt in the previous paragraph demonstrates that one's understanding concerning the truth of 'religion x' is necessarily untrue.

Truth is not a function of whether, or not, doubt is present or absent, but, rather, truth is a function of the extent to which a person's understanding accurately reflects a given state of affairs ... in the present case, that state of affairs has to do with the nature of the relationship between 'religion x' and reality. As far as the issue of truth is concerned, the presence of doubt can be as misleading as the absence of doubt can be, and consequently, the previous quote of Tolstoy concerning doubt and true religion seems to be on rather shaky conceptual grounds.

The presence or absence of doubt gives expression to one's attitude toward one's understanding of a given state of affairs – say, the truth or falsity of 'religion x'. How one feels about, or one's attitude toward, one's understanding concerning a given state of affairs – in the present case, the nature of 'religion x' -- need not be related in any essential

way to the truth of one's understanding and whether that understanding gives expression to verified knowledge or to true or false editions of unverified belief.

Tolstoy goes on to maintain in section I. 'Definition of True Religion', point 6, of the first chapter that:

“There are two types of religion: A religion of blind belief in what people say, that is, belief in a person or in a group of people, and there are many such religions; and there is a belief in our dependence on the One who sent us into this world. This is a belief in God, and this kind of belief is the same for all people.”

If the kinds of religion – which, allegedly, are numerous -- involves a blind belief in what a person says, and Tolstoy is a person, then, if I accept what he says concerning the nature of what constitutes a true religion, will I be pursuing the sort of belief to which Tolstoy seems opposed? If, on the other hand, the other kind of religion -- the one that, supposedly, is the same for all people -- is rooted in a belief in one's dependence on God, how is one to understand, and act on, such acknowledged dependence, and will it necessarily be the case that everyone's understanding of the nature of dependence will be the same?

Consider just one possibility. Let's suppose that one person might have a belief that acknowledges his, her, or their dependence on God but believes that one must pray, worship, chant, morally behave, and/or dance in particular ways in order to best honor and give realized expression to the aforementioned dependence, while another person might have a belief that accepts her, his, or their dependence on God but believes that no particular form of prayer, worship, chanting, moral conduct, and/or dancing is necessary to give expression to that dependence. Given the foregoing two possibilities (and those possibilities are

multiplied by the fact that different religions propose different theological formats for praying, worshiping, chanting -- or not praying, worshiping, chanting -- and so on), how -- as Tolstoy claims is the case -- does acknowledging dependence on one God necessarily entail the same kind of belief for all people?

Under section II -- "Teachings of True Religion Are Always Clear and Simple" -- during the first chapter of *Path of Life*, Tolstoy contends that:

"To believe means to trust in what has been revealed to us -- without asking the reason it is this way or what the outcome will be. This is true religion. It shows us who we are and therefore what we should do, but it does not explain what will happen as the result of our doing what our religion demands. If I believe in God, I do not need to ask what will be the result of my obedience to God because I know that God is love, and only good can come from love."

If a person believed that something had been revealed, then that individual might be willing to trust such a disclosure without necessarily asking about the reasoning underlying what one believed had been revealed or without wondering about where following that revelation might take one, but approaching things in the foregoing fashion side-steps the whole issue of whether, or not, what one believes to have been revealed actually gives expression to Divine revelation. Furthermore, while there is nothing illogical about proceeding in the aforementioned manner, there also is not necessarily anything wrong with inquiring into the nature and purpose of a given instance of purported revelation or trying to understand what the value of complying with the guidance that is believed to be present in such a disclosure.

Tolstoy maintains that if one believes in God, then, there is no “need to ask what will be the result of my obedience to God.” However, what if God doesn’t just want someone to believe and let it go at that but would like human beings to acquire insight into, and knowledge about, the nature of revelation?

Alternatively, what if God doesn’t want obedience, *per se*, but, rather, wants human beings to seek to develop a form of informed consent concerning revelation? Perhaps what God seeks from us is not blind, unquestioning obedience but, instead, seeks from us a form of conscious compliance because one comes to understand that such revelation gives expression to the truth, and, therefore, one has nowhere else to go if one wishes to operate one’s life in conformity with the truth.

The choice is not necessarily between obedience and disobedience. The choice could be between truth and falsehood, or said in another way, the choice might be between insight and ignorance.

If so, then, one is not necessarily seeking to become obedient to the truth. Rather, one is seeking to determine what the nature of truth is so that one’s spiritual path will be able to operate in accordance with what is true since to do otherwise would, be to unnecessarily complicate and undermine one’s life with beliefs that were false.

If one were interested in rejecting truth in favor of that which is false, then, one would have to wonder what purpose is served by proceeding in such a fashion. In fact, if a person were more interested in pursuing what is false rather than what is true, then, presumably, one is really dealing with some kind of pathology involving a blind obedience, or attraction, to that which is false.

Finally, Tolstoy contends in the previous quotation that if a person believes in God, then, such an individual does not need to know what follows from such a belief because Tolstoy knows that God is love, and only good can come from love. What he says might be true, but one would like

to understand the sense in which Tolstoy's idea that God is love is a function of knowledge rather than belief.

In other words, Tolstoy claims he knows that God is love so even if one agreed with him on that point, one still would like to know how he knows what he claims to know. One also would like to know what he means by the notion of love and whether love gives expression to just one kind of phenomenon.

For example, is the emotional and cognitive condition of a teenager's first romantic interest equivalent to the way that a mother feels about her children? Is the love that is rooted in a belief about some aspect of reality the same as a love that is rooted in actual knowledge concerning such an aspect?

Is the feeling that someone has for humanity in the abstract the same as the feeling that such a person has for concrete instances of humanity? Is the love that someone professes for God precisely the same as the love that God has for creation, and how would one measure or prove that this is the case?

Could the love that God has for creation entail the possibility that pain, difficulty, and struggle will play important roles in the lives of created beings? If so, could part of such pain, difficulty, and struggle be inherent in any attempt to discover, or live in accordance with, what the nature of love involves rather than blindly accepting the idea that God is love?

Tolstoy states that:

"The real law of life is so simple, clear, and understandable that people cannot possibly justify living bad lives by saying that they do not know the law. If people live contrary to the law of true life, they can only do it in one way – by denying reason. And they do."

Presumably, Tolstoy believes that the real law of life is rooted in love. This possibility is supported by the fact that he follows up on the previous quote with a paraphrasing of words and ideas that are attributed to Grigory Skovoroda and with which Tolstoy is in agreement – namely, “The law of life does not demand anything from us but love for our neighbor. Loving is easy to do, not difficult.”

Yet, roughly a month after releasing *Path of Life*, Tolstoy left his wife, family, and home because he considered the prospect of continuing to be with – while, supposedly, loving -- them to be intolerable. Apparently, loving people from afar is somewhat easier to do than is loving people up close and personal.

Somewhat facetiously (i.e., with tongue firmly planted in cheek), one might note that, perhaps, Tolstoy felt that leaving his wife and family was quite consistent with the law of life because – as noted above -- according to Gregory Skovoroda all that law supposedly required one to do was to love one’s neighbor. As a result, maybe Tolstoy’s reasoning was that one’s family did not qualify as members of the class of neighbors and, as a result, one did not have to love them.

Or, alternatively, one might conclude that love is not necessarily as easy to do as Tolstoy and Skovoroda are indicating is the case. Although Tolstoy claimed to love his wife and family, nonetheless, I’m not sure that leaving them just weeks before he died was necessarily a loving thing to do ... although it might have been, and if it was, then, love is not necessarily as “simple, clear, and understandable” as Tolstoy seemed to suppose was the case in the previously noted quote, nor is it necessarily as easy to do or as free from difficulty as Grigory Skovoroda appeared to believe.

Tolstoy claimed that:

“When a person understands what true religion is, he feels as though he has turned on a light in a dark attic ... all of a sudden everything becomes clear and his heart fills with joy.”

If the foregoing claim is accepted at face value, one might suppose that if Tolstoy were acting in accordance with the law of love when he left his wife and family, then, his heart must have been filled with light and joy. However, by all accounts this was not the case, and, therefore, one wonders what actually might have been taking place at that juncture of his life.

Furthermore, love often requires sacrifice. Sacrifice, by its very nature, tends to be painful and difficult.

If there were no element of sacrifice present in Tolstoy’s decision to leave home in the last weeks of his life – for example, if he were merely interested in gaining some peace and quiet away from the chaos, conflict, and turbulence of family life -- then, one might rightly question whether any element of actual love was present in his decision to leave his wife, family and home. Moreover, if he left home for some purpose other than love, then, by his own stated criteria, he would have been living contrary to the law of life – which, supposedly, is about love rather than acting in accordance with one’s self-interests -- and, as a result, he would have been deeply entrenched in the denial of reason since he could not possibly hope to justify living a bad life because he did not know the nature of a law that he considered to be “so simple, clear, and understandable.”

Section III of Chapter 1 in *Path of Life* is entitled: “True Religion Is Love of God And One’s Neighbor.” Tolstoy starts off this section with words that he attributes to Christ:

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

Without any wish to be difficult here, one might well ask what Jesus (peace be upon him) had in mind when – and if – he said the foregoing. How did Jesus (peace be upon him) love the people whom he was addressing?

One might venture to say that he loved those individuals with: Honesty, humility, nobility, courage, forgiveness, patience, perseverance, generosity, empathy, fairness, justice, friendship, sincerity, tolerance, selflessness, and so on. To this extent, one could agree with Tolstoy that “love has always been understood the same way by everyone.”

However, what might not have been understood in the same way by everyone is how one goes about acquiring the capacity to love as Jesus (peace be upon him) loved the people he, supposedly, was addressing when he is reported to have made the foregoing statement – namely, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

According to Tolstoy:

“We become immortal, when we unite with the Divine Spirit in which every living thing lives and moves. We do not become immortal through prayers, sacraments, or rites but only through love.”

In other words, for Tolstoy, uniting with the Divine Spirit is equivalent to the process of engaging in love in accordance with the manner in which Jesus (peace be upon him) loved those he is reported to have been addressing in the earlier quote. Yet, the details of the process which involves uniting with the Divine Spirit as well as the details of how one goes about learning how to love as Jesus (peace be upon him) loved remains somewhat mysterious and elusive.

In fact, how can Tolstoy, be certain that the way to activate, or acquire, one’s potential for love – and, thereby, unite with the Divine Spirit – might not be achieved through engaging in prayers, as well as various kinds of

sacraments or rites? Or, how does Tolstoy know – and did he actually know – that prayers, sacraments, and rites could not constitute ways for giving expression to love of God and, consequently, contrary to his belief, such prayers, sacraments, and rites, might be able to assist an individual to gradually enhance one’s ability to love God and one’s neighbors?

In Section IV of Chapter 1 in *Path of Life*, Tolstoy stipulates – based on some words of Kant -- that:

“Genuine religion is not about speculating about God or the soul or about what happened in the past or will happen in the future; it cares only about one thing – finding out exactly what should or should not be done in this lifetime.”

One can agree with Tolstoy that the focus of genuine religion should not be preoccupied with speculating about God, the soul, or what might happen at some point in the future. In addition, one can agree with Tolstoy that one’s religious or spiritual efforts should be directed toward discovering how to best engage the time that has been made available to us through the present life.

As Tolstoy pointed out earlier in the first chapter of *Path of Life*, a constructive possibility for engaging the foregoing challenge might involve learning how to love. However, Tolstoy is rather vague with respect to how one should go about doing this, and despite his claims to the contrary, learning how to love is not necessarily as “simple, clear, and understandable” as he seems to suppose is the case.

Pointing out the crucial role that love plays in life is one thing. Explaining how a person comes to acquire such a dynamic ability to love is quite another matter.

Every religion puts forth its own solution for addressing the foregoing challenge. Consequently, one is still left with the problem of determining which, if any, of

the methods proposed by various religions for “finding out exactly what should or should not be done in this lifetime” might constitute the best solution with respect to the epistemological and spiritual puzzle to which Tolstoy is alluding.

There are a number of other chapters in *Path of Life* that explore various obstacles that prevent people from being able to live in accordance with the laws of life to which he believes genuine religion give expression. These obstacles include: Gluttony, greed, lust, sloth, and anger.

Almost everyone might agree with Tolstoy that the foregoing behavioral tendencies constitute substantial impediments to being able to make religious and spiritual progress. What tends to not be agreed upon however is the nature of the concrete steps one should take in order to try to overcome the tendencies toward gluttony, sloth, greed, lust, and anger that virtually everyone is quite willing to acknowledge are problems that are present in most human beings.

Tolstoy makes a number of statements concerning the importance of love. However, he does so without (as indicated earlier) offering any detailed, concrete account with respect to how one should achieve such a spiritual station.

As noted earlier, Tolstoy states words that are attributed to Jesus (peace be upon him) – i.e., “Love one another as I have loved you” Tolstoy goes on to give emphasis to the following point – namely, Jesus (peace be upon him) “... did not say: ‘if you believe in this or that but if you ‘love’.”

However, within the very next section in *Path of Life*, namely – ‘Religion Guides People’s Lives’, Tolstoy contends that:

“People who live bad lives do so because they do not have a religious belief. The same can be said of nations. Nations live evil lives, if they lose their religious belief.”

So, if – and, as observed previously, Tolstoy, himself, makes a special effort to point out that Jesus (peace be upon him) is talking about actual love and not about belief “in this or that”, then, why is Tolstoy now talking about the central role that belief supposedly plays in the lives of individuals and nations?

Presumably, if someone busied herself, himself, or themselves with loving one another as Jesus (peace be upon him) loved those with whom he interacted, and, yet, the aforementioned individual did not possess much, if anything, in the way of religious beliefs, nonetheless, this sort of individual would – by Tolstoy’s own account -- be complying with what had been taught by Christ whereas a person who had some sort of religious belief but did not love as had been indicated would not be in compliance with what Jesus (peace be upon him) had reportedly said.

The right sort of belief might serve, of course, as an important, preliminary step prior to the development of love within a person. However, at this point in the *Path of Life*, Tolstoy does not state things in the foregoing manner even if this is, more or less, what he might have wanted to say. Nonetheless, even if one were to suppose that the above way of stating things gives expression to what Tolstoy wanted to convey to his reading audience, nevertheless, he doesn’t clarify what the nature of such religious beliefs should be or why one should accept those sorts of beliefs, or how one makes the transition from, on the one hand, a mere belief concerning the importance of loving God and one’s neighbor to, on the other hand, an active form of loving God and one’s neighbor.

Tolstoy goes on to state that:

“People’s lives are either good or bad based on how they understand the true law of life. The better people understand the true law of life, the better their lives are. The worse they understand the law, the worse they live.”

In the foregoing excerpt (which is point 5 under Section IV in Chapter One of *Path of Life*), Tolstoy has switched his focus from ‘belief’ (which was mentioned in point 4 of Section IV) to ‘understanding’. Although for some individuals the difference between ‘understanding’ and ‘belief’ might not seem to be all that great, the fact of the matter is that the processes of understanding and believing do not necessarily serve as synonyms for one another.

To be sure, a person can have “an understanding” of something that is really nothing more than having a belief about whatever that understanding concerns. Nonetheless, if someone actually understands how something works, then, this state of mind gives expression to a form of knowledge or insight rather than mere belief.

Tolstoy stipulates that “people’s lives are either good or bad based on how they understand the law of life,” and, as a result, Tolstoy goes on to argue that people’s lives are either better or worse according to the degree to which they properly or improperly understand the nature of that law of life. The foregoing perspective gives rise to the following questions: How does one know when one properly understands the law of life, and what are the criteria that are to be used in measuring the extent to which one’s understanding is correct, and how does one justify the use of those criteria?

Section V. -- Pseudo-religion -- begins with the following claim:

“The law of life – to love God and one’s neighbor – is clear and simple.”

As pointed out previously, the law of life is not necessarily clear or simple. In fact, at this point, one still is not quite certain about the precise manner in which Tolstoy understands how Jesus (peace be upon him) loved those with whom the latter individual interacted so that one can love God and one another as Jesus (peace be upon him) loved them.

Furthermore, given the manner in which Tolstoy has described the law of life – i.e., to love God and one’s neighbor -- one might argue that the law, as stated, is incomplete. For example, one might suppose that the law of life should not only include love for God and love for one’s neighbor, but, as well, the process of behaving in loving ways should be extended to oneself as well as encompass all of creation.

However, given the foregoing, one is confronted by the following question. How is one supposed to love God, one’s neighbors, oneself, and creation?

How does God wished to be loved? How does one go about determining this?

How should one love one’s neighbor? How does one come to know what this involves?

What is entailed by loving one’s self? How does one resolve conflicts – should they arise -- between loving others and loving oneself?

How should one love creation? What does this require from us, and from where are such requirements derived, and what justifies such a derivation?

How does one balance loving God, one’s neighbor, oneself, and creation in a harmonious fashion? How does one resolve conflicts when the process of love pulls one in different, seemingly irreconcilable directions in which one doesn’t seem to have enough love to go around?

According to Tolstoy:

“Upon reaching the age of reason, every person recognizes it (the law of life) in his heart. If it were not for false human teachings, everyone would follow this law ...”

While being exposed to false human teachings might interfere with a person’s ability to follow up and act on one’s initial realization – which supposedly took place when an individual reached the age of reason -- that the law of life is present in one’s heart, Tolstoy seems to be suggesting in the foregoing quote that people have no capacity for choosing whether, or not, they wish to be influenced by the teachings to which they might have been exposed. Tolstoy, himself, indicated that when he was a young lad of 14-15, he made a conscious choice to move away from religion, and although his choice was made in conjunction with various philosophical materials with which he had come in contact, nonetheless, he made choices concerning which aspects of those materials he accepted – as well as why -- and he also made choices concerning why he was inclined to reject various facets of the religious teachings to which he had been exposed.

In addition, there are many emotional and motivational forces acting on the choices that one makes with respect to various systems of thought that are encountered by an individual. Likes, dislikes, interests, purposes, goals, desires, needs, talents, and passions of one kind or another can all shape how one feels about, or engages, any given philosophical or religious framework, and, therefore, an individual’s choices about whether to accept or to reject a system of thought becomes more than a matter of whether those teachings are false or true.

In fact, the aforementioned sorts of emotional, motivational, intellectual, and existential contingencies could have a great deal to do with the character of the choices one makes with respect to what one considers to be a true or pseudo-religion. In other words, people often

do not identify what they consider the truth to be on the basis of a rigorous, critical examination of available evidence but, instead, do so as a function of their needs, likes, dislikes, goals, desires, and passions, and, as such, truth often becomes a function of what serves our perceived interests rather than being a function of what reflects the nature of reality independent of those interests.

Tolstoy indicates that:

“...one should not believe any human teachings that are inconsistent with loving God and one’s neighbor.”

However, given that Tolstoy has not, yet, clearly described what is meant by, nor has he specified what is entailed by, loving God and one’s neighbor, one is not in any position to understand what is inconsistent with that love. For example, if one devotes all one’s time to loving God and leaves one’s neighbors in peace, is one in compliance with the law of life, or must one express one’s love for one neighbor through concrete deeds that are intended to benefit one’s neighbor in some manner, and, if so, what should those concrete actions involve?

If one’s efforts to love one’s neighbor should interfere with one’s neighbor’s life or have unintended adverse consequences for the latter individual or, in some sense, are viewed by the neighbor one is trying to love as being unwelcome, or creates an advantage for some while, simultaneously, disadvantaging others, are such efforts really all that loving? What are the criteria that one needs to consider to determine what constitutes loving behavior, and what justifies the use of those sorts of criteria?

Tolstoy maintains that:

“You should not think that a religion is true because it has been in existence a long time. On the contrary, the longer

humanity exists, the clearer the true law of life ought to become. To think that you should believe the same thing that your fathers and grandfathers believed is like believing that when you grow up, you should wear the same clothes you wore as a child.”

If -- as Tolstoy previously indicated in *Path of Life* -- the law of life (namely, that one should love God and one’s neighbor) is accessible to everyone who reaches the age of reason, then, why should it be the case – as stipulated in the previous quote -- that such a law ought to become clearer the longer that humanity exists? What does the capacity of reason to be able to recognize the existence of the law of life have to do with the passage of time, or, stated somewhat differently, how does the passage of time make the existence of the law of life become clearer to reason?

Is the law of life an innate principle that is discovered by reason? Or, does the law of life give expression to a fundamental theme of the universe, and reason is somehow able to grasp that this is the case?

In the above two cases, how does the passage of time make such a principle clearer? Is Tolstoy talking about a deductive or inductive process of reasoning, and irrespective of which of the two foregoing logical possibilities one is considering, how does reason grasp the nature of life’s law?

Finally, regardless of whether the law of life is an innate idea that is uncovered through the exercise of reason or the law of life is a fundamental characteristic of the universe that is discovered by reason, presumably the law of life is now as it always has been. That is, whatever constituted love thousands, if not millions, of years ago, is, presumably, what continues to constitute love in every succeeding age.

So, as noted previously, love is not a matter of belief but, instead, supposedly gives expression to a dimension of reality and, in addition, one's grasp of the law of life – if one truly does have insight into the nature of that law -- gives expression to an understanding – rather than a belief -- concerning the character of reality. Therefore, this is not a matter of believing the same thing as one's father or grandfather but of realizing the same law of life that is inherent (either innately or otherwise) in the nature of the universe and which also might have been grasped by one's father, grandfather, and so on.

While it might be the case that humanity's understanding with respect to the law of life might deepen over time, the law itself would remain the same, and, therefore, it would not be affected by the passage of time. On the other hand, if understanding concerning the nature of the law of life were to change over time, then, one is inclined to ask: What made such a change in understanding possible – that is, why is reason more clearly – allegedly -- able to understand that law at a later time than was the case during earlier periods of time?

If the foregoing argument were accepted, then, one of the implications of such a perspective is that the law of love might have become clearer for Tolstoy than it was for Jesus (peace be upon him). Yet, according to Tolstoy, one is being counseled by Jesus (peace be upon him) in the previously noted passage to “Love one another as I have loved you” and, consequently, Tolstoy is maintaining that Jesus (peace be upon him) has established the standard for what it means to understand the law of life and, thereby, love God and one another, so, how does one improve on the clarity of understanding which was present in Jesus (peace be upon him)?

Later on during the discussion that takes place in ‘Section V. Pseudo-Religion’ of Chapter One (Belief) in *Path of Life*, Tolstoy rejects the idea that God's law is revealed to only a few special people and contends that

God's law is "revealed equally to everyone who is receptive."

How does Tolstoy know that God's law is equally accessible to every human being who is receptive to that law? Although Tolstoy might believe that what he states is true, he certainly does not offer any evidence that is able to support his claim that God's law is "revealed equally to everyone who is receptive."

Moreover, other than indicating that he doesn't consider the idea that God's law is revealed to only a few special people to be very logical or rational, Tolstoy presents no evidence or extended explanation concerning this issue that shows why anyone should accept such a claim. Nor does Tolstoy consider the possibility that while God's law might only be revealed to a few special people, nonetheless, once revealed, everyone could have the capacity to understand -- as well as to accept or reject -- such a law if, and when, it becomes known to them.

Tolstoy goes on to claim:

"There are no miracles, and all tales of miracles are invented, it is also untrue that there are books in which every word is true and inspired by God."

There are a number of problems inherent in the foregoing claims.

To begin with, Tolstoy fails to define the notion of miracle. In addition, he does not provide an evidence-based account of how reality works or how such reality precludes the possibility of miracles.

Tolstoy might, or might not, be right with respect to whether, or not, miracles take place. However, claims that miracles are non-existent advances nothing but a claim to that effect.

Lack of definitions notwithstanding, one also wonders how a person would go about proving that “all tales of miracles are invented.” One has no way of re-creating an exact duplication of the past that can be proven to be accurate, and, therefore, most claims concerning miracles – whether for or against – are enshrouded in a cloud of unknowing and ignorance.

The foregoing considerations also are relevant to claims concerning whether, or not, there are certain books that are inspired by God or which give expression to Divine revelation, or whether all books are, as Tolstoy asserts, merely the products of human hands. Certainly, a person has the choice of either believing in or rejecting the idea that any given book gives expression to Divine inspiration or Divine revelation, but belief to this effect does not constitute knowledge that one’s belief is necessarily true.

Furthermore, Tolstoy has, to some extent, painted himself into a bit of a conceptual corner by claiming what he does in the previous quote. More specifically, elsewhere in his writings, Tolstoy has maintained that individuals such as Jesus (peace be upon him) are inspired by God to have the insight and understanding they do concerning the nature of, for instance, God’s law, but if “books are made by human hands”, then, why should one suppose that Jesus (peace be upon him) along with the rest of humanity, has insight -- equal or otherwise -- into Divine laws?

On the one hand, Tolstoy contends there is some sort of connection – via the soul – between God and human beings, and through that connection, all people who are receptive have access to the law of life that has been placed in their hearts by God. Presumably, the foregoing connection serves as a channel way of inspiration concerning such things as the law of life (i.e., to love God and one’s neighbor).

Nonetheless, on the other hand, Tolstoy is also saying that:

“All books are made by human hands and therefore contain what is useful and what is harmful and what is true and what is false.”

If the foregoing assertion is true, then, how does inspiration fit into the notion that all books (and, therefore, presumably, the ideas to which they give expression) are the product of human hands? Moreover, if the foregoing claim is accurate, then, how does one go about distinguishing between either what is harmful and what is useful or go about differentiating between what is false and what is true since, on the basis of the above quote from *Path of Life*, Tolstoy is implying that even the words of Jesus (peace be upon him) – along with all of the other individuals whom Tolstoy quotes or paraphrases in *Path of Life* -- are a function of human activity rather than Divine inspiration.

According to Tolstoy, in order:

“... to find true religion, a person should first temporally renounce the religion that he was blindly following and use reason to verify everything he was taught as a child.”

However, one might question either the feasibility or wisdom of, first, being required to renounce “the religion he was blindly following”? Why not merely subject one’s beliefs to some sort of process involving critical reflection in order to determine which – if any – of those beliefs are capable of withstanding rigorous examination?

Tolstoy is pushing an extreme, scorched-earth proposal involving the renouncing of all beliefs. However, a more moderate project of -- as needed or indicated -- replacing a few planks at a time in one’s conceptual ship as it sails through life might be a less overwhelming, and, consequently, more reasonable course of action.

Of course, Tolstoy might wish to argue that only by, first, renouncing one's beliefs can one hope to establish the sort of objective starting point that, presumably, would be necessary for conducting a truly rational inquiry into the tenability of such beliefs. Yet, given -- as Tolstoy noted earlier -- that all books -- and, by implication all ideas -- are the products of human hands or human cognition, one wonders if an individual would necessarily be any closer to conducting an objective examination by, first, renouncing all one's previous beliefs than if one were to rely -- perhaps blindly -- on a notion of rationality that is entirely a function of human activity.

What are the criteria for determining what constitutes a rational analysis? This question is especially critical in view of the fact that Tolstoy acknowledges -- as pointed out in an earlier quote -- that human cognition contains both what is harmful and useful, as well as what is true and false, and, consequently, it leaves unresolved the identity of the criteria of rationality that are to be used to enable one to distinguish between the two possibilities.

Furthermore, given Tolstoy's concerns about blindly following ideas or beliefs, one might be well-advised to turn that sort of concern back on to Tolstoy's beliefs and ideas as well. Therefore, just because Tolstoy recommends a given course of action -- for example, renouncing all one's beliefs -- does not relieve one of the responsibility to subject his perspective to a process of rigorous, critical reflection before deciding whether, or not, to heed his counsel.

Tolstoy tells a short story during Chapter One in *Path of Life* in which a person is traveling home after work and meets an individual who claims that he is going the same way as the worker and suggests that they undertake the journey together. For some reason, the worker trusts this individual and accepts the offer to travel together.

They two individuals continue to walk for a number of hours, and, over time, the worker begins to feel that they

may be taking the wrong route because the landmarks are different from what he remembers from earlier trips back to his house, and, as well, the journey is becoming increasingly difficult. However, his companion maintains that not only are they on the right road, but, in addition, the path they are on will permit them to reach their destination much more quickly.

After continuing to travel for some time, Tolstoy indicates that the worker runs out of the food and drink which he had been carrying with him and, yet, they still seem to be at some distance from their destination (How this is known is never explained). Despite these problems, Tolstoy states that, gradually, the worker begins to let go of his misgivings concerning whether the path on which they are travelling is the right one, and, finally, he becomes convinced that the road on which they are traveling is the correct way to get home, and, as a result, the worker becomes lost for a considerable amount of time.

According to Tolstoy, the moral of the foregoing story is that just as the worker became lost by listening to the wrong person, so too:

“... this is what happens to people who do not listen to the voice of God within them, but who believe other people’s words about God and God’s law.”

Even though the foregoing morality tale has a point, the story on which it is based is artfully contrived in order to lend credence to the conclusion that Tolstoy seeks to impose on his readers.

For example, why did the worker trust the individual whom he met? What was the basis of such trust?

Was the worker’s decision to trust the passerby the result of an arbitrary set of considerations? Alternatively, one could ask whether the worker’s choice to travel with the passerby might have been based on a series of past

experiences with that individual which involved determining the best way to get from one place to another ... determinations about which the worker had never known, or rarely known, that individual to be wrong?

What if -- despite the fact that the road taken did not lead the worker back to his home -- the journey led to a variety of interesting experiences that provided important insights into the nature of life or led to the discovery of resources that subsequently would prove to be of considerable utility to the worker or to his family? How would one measure the value of what had been gained through the new experiences that had been encountered against what had been lost by failing to reach home?

In addition, Tolstoy offers no explanation for why the worker would gradually overcome his misgivings concerning the reliability of the path they were traveling as a way to get home. Moreover, in light of the fact that the road on which they were walking did not appear to be leading the worker back to his home, why would the worker suddenly conclude that his companion had been right all along about the path they were taking?

What if the passerby who suggested to the worker that they should proceed along one path rather than another was, say, Jesus (peace be upon him) -- or someone like him who was blessed with a certain amount of insight and understanding? What if that passerby had been thinking in terms of one's eternal home rather than one's worldly home, and, as a result, led the worker on a different kind of journey.

What if the worker came to change his mind because he gradually began to understand the nature of the journey on which he was being taken? Contrary to what Tolstoy is suggesting in his morality tale, the worker might very well have listened to the voice of God within him, and this was the reason -- as intuitive and ineffable as it might have been when he first accepted the suggestion of the passerby to make the journey together -- why he trusted the

passerby to begin with, and, furthermore, this was the reason why he changed his mind about the road on which he was traveling.

When are we listening to the voice of conscience?
When are we listening to something else?

These are not necessarily straightforward questions. One of the reasons why those questions are not straightforward is because a person can engage such questions through different frameworks of critical evaluation that operate on the basis of alternative assumptions or starting points.

Tolstoy was telling the foregoing story from his own perspective in order to arrive at a conclusion that would serve his purpose. However, that same story can be engaged in alternative ways – as was done above – and, thereby, demonstrate rational possibilities other than those to which Tolstoy had limited himself and his readers.

Chapter 1 (Belief), Section VI – Outward Ceremonies – Point 1 in *Path of Life* states:

“True religion does not mean believing in miracles, sacraments, and ceremonies, but it means believing in a single law that all people in the world can accept.”

As I indicated elsewhere *at some length* (*The Spirit of Religion*), whatever the details may turn out to be, religion, in general, involves a search for the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being ... a relationship that one considers to be, in some sense, sacred and, in some way, epistemologically as well as morally binding. Depending on what one discovers to be the case concerning religion, that relationship might, or might not, involve miracles, sacraments, and ceremonies of some kind, and, as well, that relationship might, or might not, involve a single law that all people in the world can accept.

However, Tolstoy does not seem to have much to offer in the way of proof, evidence, or rational arguments – either in *Path of Life* or elsewhere in his writing -- which is capable of demonstrating, on the one hand, that true religion does not, and cannot, entail miracles, sacraments, or ceremonies, and, on the other hand, that shows how true religion necessarily consists of but a single law (whether Tolstoy’s law of life – i.e., to love God and one another – or some other idea or principle) that all people can accept. In fact, unfortunately, Tolstoy often confuses and conflates what he, personally, finds to be persuasive in such matters with the sort of universal rational principles that he believes should govern everyone’s way of thinking about these topics.

Oftentimes, Tolstoy proceeds by way of assertion rather than analysis. For example, point 2 under Section VI of Chapter 1 in *Path of Life* states:

“True religion does not require churches, artwork, choirs, or large gatherings of people. On the contrary, true religion only enters the heart in silence and solitude.”

While one might agree with Tolstoy that religion does not necessarily “require” artwork churches, large gatherings or choirs, nonetheless, there could be any number of individuals for whom religious institutions, large gatherings, music, and artwork that might serve, in various ways, to help enhance or deepen the quality of one’s relationship with Being. Moreover, while it could be true that there are some people – e.g., Tolstoy – for whom true religion enters their hearts only through silence and solitude, nevertheless, Tolstoy fails to provide any evidence to indicate that silence and solitude are necessary for everyone in order for true religion to be able to enter their hearts to varying degrees, and, instead, he merely asserts that this is the case.

Tolstoy is also presumptuous when he argues by way of assertion – and, therefore, without proof or evidence -- that:

“people who think they can please God with prayers and church services want to deceive God.”

To begin with, Tolstoy is in no position to know what is taking place in the minds and hearts of other human beings when it comes to attempting to please God. While Tolstoy might have his suspicions – based on experiential considerations with other people as well as with himself -- concerning the motivations of this or that individual and whether, or not, such people are trying to deceive God, Tolstoy has no way of knowing what is transpiring in the hearts and minds of millions of other individuals and whether, or not, such people are trying to deceive God through offering prayers or participating in church services.

Furthermore, his confident assertions notwithstanding, Tolstoy also is not in any position to be able to know what God will, and will not, find to be pleasing. Conceivably, the prayers and church attendance of some individuals might not be pleasing to God because there is something amiss with the intentions underlying such activities, while the prayers and church attendance of other individuals might be pleasing to God because the motivations through which such activities are pursued are done with sincerity, humility, and trust in God’s concern for their lives.

Tolstoy goes on to assert that:

“true religion does not consist of observing fasts, attending church, listening to or repeating prayers but in always living a good life and in always treating others as we would wish them to treat us.”

How can Tolstoy be certain that part of living a good life doesn't involve observing fasts, attending church, or listening to and repeating, various kinds of prayers? He might, or might not be, right, concerning such matters, but this sort of issue cannot be resolved through mere assertion.

In addition, if Tolstoy believes that a fundamental principle of true religion consists in "treating others as we would wish them to treat us", then one might suppose that if Tolstoy doesn't want people to tell him how to pursue religion (and his criticisms of Russian Orthodoxy are, in part, because he doesn't believe the Church has the right or authority to tell people how to approach religious issues) then, perhaps, he should be willing to refrain from trying to tell other people how they should seek the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being. If observing fasts, attending church, or listening and repeating certain prayers doesn't seem to help to enhance or deepen Tolstoy's relationship with Being, then so be it, but, nevertheless, what works – or does not work -- for Tolstoy should not become a rigid rule or law that is imposed on other people in order to try to influence or control how those individuals seek the truth concerning the nature of religion.

Instead, Tolstoy should be willing to extend the degrees of freedom that are necessary for other people to be able to discover what serves to enhance and enrich the nature of their relationship with Being. This remains the case even if their search for truth involves fasting, going to church, or listening and repeating various kinds of prayers.

Tolstoy also asserts that:

"... the time is coming, and, indeed, has arrived when real disciples will worship the Father neither in Gerizim (the holy place of Samaritans) nor in Jerusalem but in spirit and truth."

Presumably, the point that Tolstoy is trying to make in the foregoing quote is to urge people to understand that worship of God should not be a function of place but, instead, needs to be a function of spirit and truth no matter where it takes place. However, to say that worship should be a function of spirit and truth need not preclude the possibility that worshiping God in this manner might be given expression in particular places (e.g., Gerizim and Jerusalem) as well as concrete buildings (e.g., churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, prayer halls, and shrines), as long as worship is not limited to those places or buildings and as long as worship is always a function of spirit and truth.

At this point, Tolstoy relates a story about a worker who seeks to get other people to intercede on his behalf with a Boss because the worker has not been attending to his work-related duties in a proper fashion and, as a result, knows that the Boss is dissatisfied with his efforts in this regard. The story ends with the Boss telling the worker that he should busy himself with doing his (the worker's) work instead of becoming entangled in various activities (such as asking other workers to intercede on his behalf or engaging in public exhibitions of praising the Boss) that are designed to serve as a substitute for doing the work that he has been assigned.

Tolstoy goes on to argue that:

“people who pray to saints asking them to intercede for them to God and who try to please God by lighting candles, making sacrifices, building churches, and singing his praises are doing the same thing as this worker [i.e., the worker in the foregoing story]. Christ taught that people do not need anyone to stand between them and God or to give God presents. They need only to do good works.”

What is the criterion or what are the criteria for determining what constitutes good works? One might suppose that anything which finds acceptance with God constitutes a good work, and one might also suppose that Tolstoy is not necessarily privy to what, and what does not, meet with God's approval.

For example, if someone is actually a saint – that is, an individual who has been raised up in spiritual proximity with respect to God – how does Tolstoy know that if someone were to ask such a saint to pray to God on behalf of this someone that God wouldn't be pleased by the humility which underlies such a request as well as be pleased by the faith and sense of spiritual etiquette that the one making such a request has with respect to the idea that although God may listen to all prayers – irrespective of who says them – nevertheless, God might pay special attention to the prayers of authentic saints? Moreover, asking someone else to pray on one's behalf does not preclude the possibility that an individual might wish to add her, his, or their own prayers to whatever prayers are being requested from others.

Moreover, one does not necessarily have to limit oneself – as Tolstoy does -- to considering only cases in which a person asks a saint to pray on his, her, or their behalf. One has no way of knowing whose prayer might become reality, and just as one might ask family, friends, or acquaintances to assist one in various ways, one of the ways in which one might request assistance from others is in the form of having them pray for one's welfare.

Is God pleased with the lighting of candles, or the making of sacrifices, or the building of churches (temples, synagogues, mosques, and prayer halls), or the singing of God's praises? I don't know – although I might have beliefs concerning such issues -- but I suspect that Tolstoy does not know the answer to these questions either even as, like me, he obviously has beliefs about these sorts of possibilities.

Once again, Tolstoy has made a variety of assertions in relation to religious issues. Once more, however, such assertions often seem to be rooted in beliefs of one kind or another rather than being based on verifiable knowledge and understanding.

According to Tolstoy:

“When a person fulfills the demands of religion because he hopes to gain external rewards in the future, this is not religion but a “calculation,” and this calculation can never be accurate. The calculation is always inaccurate, because the reward of true religion comes as happiness only in the present and never brings external rewards in the future.”

Tolstoy seems to be making a distinction without a difference. More specifically, one wonders if, perhaps, there really might not be any substantial difference between believing that acting in accordance with the requirements of religion will lead to some sort of reward in the future as opposed to believing that compliance with religious requirements will result in being happy in the present.

In both cases, one is seeking to obtain a return on investment in conjunction with one’s efforts. The only distinction to be noted in the two cases is that one return on investment supposedly comes in the present, while the other return on investment allegedly arrives at some point in the future, and, consequently, to use Tolstoy’s term, both approaches seem to involve a calculation of sorts.

If the nature of reality is such that when certain conditions are fulfilled, then, certain consequences follow – either in the present or in the future – then, making a calculation concerning return on investment with respect to the if-then character of the universe seems perfectly compatible with the nature of reality and does not necessarily involve anything of an untoward nature as

Tolstoy seems to be implying may be the case in the foregoing quote by placing the notion of 'calculation' in quotation marks. Another possibility beside engaging in such calculations, however, might be to take all considerations of return on investment out of the picture and merely try to determine what the nature of the truth is concerning one's relationship with Being and live in accordance with that because, hopefully, that is the truth of things and, under such circumstances, the only real choice one has before one is whether, or not, one will live in accordance with truth or live in non-compliance with that truth ... come what may in either case.

Tolstoy maintains that:

"False teachers try to convince people to live a good life by frightening them with punishments and deceiving them with promises of rewards in another world – that no one has ever seen. Genuine teachers teach only that the source of life – love -- lives in everyone's soul and that the person who unites with this source will find happiness."

The foregoing statements seem to involve a contradiction of sorts. On the one hand, Tolstoy is criticizing fraudulent teachers who try to scam people with threats and promises concerning a world to come that no one has ever seen, while, on the other hand, Tolstoy claims that genuine teachers talk about an entity, force, or capacity -- namely, the soul -- that no one has ever seen and makes promises that are not necessarily true concerning the prospect of happiness when living a life of love.

If Tolstoy's position is that it is rational to believe – which he does – in the existence of the soul despite the fact that no one has seen the soul (except, perhaps, Dorian Grey in the reflected, symbolic form of a picture), then, why is it not also rational to believe in the existence of a heaven or hell that no one has ever seen? The foregoing issue is not

about trying to induce the reader to believe in either the soul or to believe in heaven and hell, but, rather, the purpose of the exercise is to bring attention to Tolstoy's inconsistent application of a principle that he considers to be rational in one case (that of an allegedly genuine teacher) but considers not to be rational when used by a so-called false teacher despite the fact that in each instance the principle involves not having seen that in which one is being asked to believe.

In addition, Tolstoy claims that fraudulent teachers try to manipulate people into living a good life through warnings of punishment or by making promises concerning rewards involving some sort of life after death. However, what if a teacher is not trying either to frighten someone with talk of possible painful consequences or to mislead the latter individual with promises of future rewards, but, instead, is merely trying to relate something about the nature of reality?

If someone tries to warn another person about the dangers and possibly tragic consequences that might ensue from playing with guns or fire, does this act of warning make the first individual a fraudulent teacher? To be sure, there is considerable evidence to back up warnings involving guns and fire, but Tolstoy is assuming without proof -- that he understands the nature of reality when he claims that all talk about the problems and prospects associated with life after death serve to demonstrate the fraudulent intentions of whoever talks about such possibilities.

He might be right concerning such matters. On the other hand, he might be wrong.

Consequently, Tolstoy has no evidence to offer concerning what is reasonable or rational to believe with respect to the possibility of a life to come after death. As a result, the criteria he uses to distinguish between genuine and fraudulent teachers are problematic.

Furthermore, as indicated earlier in this chapter, Tolstoy cannot necessarily prove that the exercise of love always gives expression to happiness. Love of God is often fraught with problems, challenges, difficulties, suffering, sacrifice, pain, disappointments, loss, unrequited longing, as well as dark nights of the soul, and despite the possibility that if a person is sufficiently patient and perseverant during the long process entailed by seeking to live one's life in accordance with the rigors of love that happiness may, one day, bubble to the surface, the appearance of happiness – if it comes in this life – often doesn't follow any predictable schedule.

Love of human beings tends to involve many of the same sorts of problems that love of God does. While intermittent periods of relative happiness may occur in conjunction with our love of other individuals, more often than not, such love tends to be simultaneously entangled with a multiplicity of experiences involving heartbreak, loss, pain, disappointment, and sacrifice that are the antithesis of happiness.

At this point, Tolstoy cites approvingly words that are attributed to Angelus Silesius – namely:

“If you serve God to receive an eternal reward, you are not serving God but yourself.”

The foregoing gives rise to the following question: What purpose is serving God intended to realize?

One possible answer to the foregoing question is that God requires such service and, therefore, is in some sense dependent on what human beings do and do not do. Or, perhaps, God does not need human beings to do anything and goes about Divine activities quite independently of whether, or not, human beings are engaged to service to God or are not so engaged.

Another possible answer to the previous question is that such service might be intended – at least in part – to benefit the individuals who seek to comply with the requirements of that service. A further possibility is that serving God might bring benefits to the individuals engaged in such service and that those benefits could, then, be used to assist other human beings – as well as the rest of creation -- in various ways.

If serving God were to bring benefits of one kind or another – such as the emergence of and/or enhancements in qualities of moral character (i.e., patience, courage, humility, honesty, perseverance, love, forgiveness, tolerance, nobility, generosity, and so on), then, serving oneself is not necessarily inimical to serving God. Furthermore, if part of the purpose of God’s desire for human beings to serve Divinity had something to do with what might, or might not, transpire in a life to come, then, once again, serving God and serving oneself need not be in opposition to one another.

Tolstoy claims that:

“The main difference between true and false religion is that a person with false religion hopes that his prayers and sacrifices will cause God to do what he wants. A person with true religion wants only one thing – to do what God wants.”

I’m not sure how many people believe that their prayers and sacrifices cause God to do what they want. In fact, based on my own observations and discussions with other individuals, I tend to think that many people are not quite certain what the nature of the relationship is among prayers, sacrifices, and God’s manner of valuing and, possibly, responding to such activities.

I feel fairly confident that people who pray to God or make sacrifices for the sake of God do so with a certain

amount of hope that God will, somehow, take in to consideration such prayers and sacrifices when mapping out our lives. Nonetheless, the precise nature of that consideration process tends to be steeped in mystery for many people.

On the one hand, to believe that our prayers and sacrifices “cause” God to do anything sounds rather presumptuous and narcissistic. On the other hand, to entertain the possibility that such prayers and sacrifice have no value in God’s eyes and, therefore, have no role to play within the dynamics of spirituality or religion entails a variety of worrisome possibilities.

Tolstoy might be a little too either-or in the way in which he differentiates between true and false religions. While I attend to agree with Tolstoy that “a person with true religion wants only what God wants”, quite possibly part of what God wants from us could be a certain amount of prayer and sacrifice, and, consequently, distinguishing between true and false religion in the manner in which Tolstoy does might not be as clear cut because determining precisely what God wants from us might be a lot more complicated than Tolstoy seems to believe.

God might want human beings to be loving individuals. However, God might also want human beings to be humble, honest, patient, tolerant, forgiving, courageous, persevering, fair, kind, generous, compassionate, and so on.

In addition, God might want people to realize their full spiritual potential. As a result, although love may well constitute a fundamental theme with respect to such potential, nonetheless, insight, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom concerning the nature of the universe, together with other dimensions of reality, might be inherent in that same potential and need to be developed as well.

Tolstoy stipulates that:

“Tales about miracles cannot be used as a means of proving the truth.”

This might, or might not, be good advice. Much depends on the nature of the evidence and what a person seeks to prove on the basis of that evidence.

Tolstoy offers an example of what he has in mind. For instance, he argues that:

“... even if I actually saw with my own eyes someone rise from the dead and ascend into heaven – and then this person turned around and asked me to believe that $2 \times 2 = 5$, I would still not believe that $2 \times 2 = 5$.”

The foregoing is a rather curious argument.

If that individual’s death and ascent into heaven had been witnessed by Tolstoy (and leaving aside, of course, questions concerning how Tolstoy would be capable of verifying that the individual had died and had, indeed, been raised up to heaven), one wonders why a person would attempt to use the former information to try to prove that $2 \times 2 = 5$. The more natural argument might be that such a person would point out that evidence has been disclosed to Tolstoy indicating that a certain set of events had occurred and now both Tolstoy and that individual were privy to experiential data indicating the existence of heaven and an afterlife ... something of considerable more importance – not to mention relevance concerning such events – than the notion that $2 \times 2 = 5$.

Tolstoy goes on to assert that:

“We should make use of the law of life as described by ancient philosophers and saints, but we must use our own

reason to verify what they teach us and to accept what is consistent with reason and to reject what is not.”

Unfortunately, Tolstoy fails to specify how reason is to be used to verify what has been taught by ancient philosophers and saints (or how reason is to be used to determine what the difference is between a philosopher and a saint). Moreover, Tolstoy has not identified what the criteria are that permit one to determine what is consistent with reason or help one to reject that which is inconsistent with reason.

Finally, Tolstoy claims that:

“Although the law of life itself is unchanging, people are able to come to an increasingly better understanding of it as well as how to better implement it in their lives.”

However, just as Tolstoy did not disclose how reason is to be used to verify what has been taught by philosophers and saints, so too, Tolstoy does not provide an account of how people are able to arrive at increasingly better understandings concerning the law of life, or what the criteria are for measuring such improvements of understanding, or what the criteria are – along with their justification – for measuring and evaluating what constitutes a better way of implementing the law of life.

Chapter 7: Anarchy and Beyond

In 1851, when Tolstoy was a relatively young man of 23, he accompanied his brother, Nikolai, to the northern Caucasus region of Russia. Shortly thereafter, Tolstoy became a soldier like his elder brother.

As a result, he soon was entangled in the business of subjugating various mountain tribes on behalf of the Russian government. Tolstoy nearly lost his life by way of an exploding grenade in the process.

During his stay in the Caucasus, Tolstoy noted that many communities of peasants in the region did not accept the idea of privately owned land and, as well, tended to interact with one another through a combination of voluntary agreements and various customs rather than through some form of established, institutionalized government. According to Tolstoy, the self-governing communities he observed in the Caucasus region exhibited qualities of order and well-being that were not present in other parts of Russia where private property was protected by means of government violence.

However, rather than further pursuing a political philosophy that incorporated his observations concerning the character of peasant communities in the northern Caucasus, Tolstoy moved in another conceptual direction. More specifically, he indicated that he wished to devote himself – at least at that time -- to establishing some sort of aristocratic-monarchal hybrid of governance that required elections.

Three years later, in 1854, Tolstoy received a military commission and was sent to help defend Sevastopol during the Crimean War. His experiences during that conflict deeply affected him, and several years later, in 1856, he wrote *Tales from Army Life*, as well as *Sketches of Sevastopol*, that discussed, among other things, the horrors of war.

As a result of his experiences in the Caucasus region of Russia as well as the Crimean War, Tolstoy came to the conclusion that conscription was just one more expression of the violence that governments inflicted on their citizens, and, consequently, eventually he began to recommend that individuals – especially young men – should refuse to engage in military service. Apparently, he took his own advice because he withdrew from the army.

A year, or so, later – in 1857 – Tolstoy decided to take a six-month trip to Western Europe, and, consequently, spent time in Germany, Switzerland, and France. While in Paris, he observed the public guillotining of a person who had been convicted of murder.

The foregoing experience imprinted a lasting, negative impression upon him. He felt that government-sanctioned executions were an exercise in arrogance and constituted yet another form of moral corruption that ate away at the heart of existing forms of governance.

Not long after returning from his trip to Western Europe, Tolstoy established a school for peasant children on his estate at Yasnaya Polyana. However, because he felt that life in general, rather than a formal curriculum, constituted the most important dimension of the learning process, he permitted students to regulate their own learning and, consequently, he tried to avoid imposing any form of compulsory methods upon students in his 'schools'.

Thus, there were no examinations. In addition, as much as possible, Tolstoy tried to remove all elements of reward and punishment from the learning process that did not seem to be natural expressions of a student's interests and genuine needs.

In 1860, he went on a second journey to Western Europe. While visiting Brussels, he had the opportunity to speak with, and was impressed by, Proudhon, an anarchist thinker and activist.

Tolstoy was particularly influenced by Proudhon's belief that processes of governance in which some human beings regulate the lives of other human beings is inherently oppressive in nature. Moreover, although Tolstoy was critical of what he considered to be Proudhon's excessive materialistic approach to social and political issues, nevertheless, Tolstoy appreciated Proudhon's belief that order and the practice of anarchy were not necessarily antithetical to one another.

Upon returning home to Yasnaya Polyana following his second excursion into Western Europe, Tolstoy was appointed to serve as an arbiter in disputes that arose between the serfs who had been freed in 1861 and their former, land-owning masters. His experience as an 'Arbiter of the Peace' led him to believe that the best interests of the people could not be served through litigation and courts.

Due to his involvement in peasant schools, as well as statements that he wrote concerning the importance of freedom that appeared in a monthly review of educational and social issues that he had established in 1862, as well as statements which he made while serving as Arbiter of the Peace, Tolstoy's compound at Yasnaya Polyana was raided by the police who suspected him of being involved in revolutionary activities of some kind. This experience also further soured him on the idea of government, and he expressed his dissatisfaction concerning such matters in a letter to Alexander II.

Due to his experience in Paris when he witnessed a public execution during his first trip to Europe, Tolstoy had begun to realize that the idea of progress in society and government was not necessarily inevitable, and, consequently, he had decided he could not be part of any form of governance that was so entangled in its own arrogance that it was blind to the horrors of executing people. The aforementioned (1) public execution in Paris, along with (2) his experiences involving the horrors of war

and military life, as well as (3) his encounter with peasant communities in the Caucasus region that lived their lives without established forms of government or without the concept of private, land ownership, together with (4) his commitment to the idea of non-interference in conjunction with the way peasant children went about learning, plus (5) his philosophical exchanges with Proudhon in Brussels, as well as (6) the frustrating unsatisfying nature of his experiences in government when serving as an 'Arbiter of the Peace', and, finally, (7) the police raid on his compound at Yasnaya Polyana collectively began to move Tolstoy toward the idea of anarchy.

Thirty years later, in 1900, Tolstoy wrote a short article that was entitled: "*On Anarchy*." Despite having previously referred to anarchists in critical, disparaging ways in his writing, Tolstoy began the foregoing article by stipulating that "... Anarchists are right in everything."

For example, he stipulated that anarchists were right when they claimed that the level of violence would not be greater in the absence of established institutions of governance than it would be in the presence of such official bodies of governing authority. Moreover, Tolstoy also agreed with anarchists when they maintained that the existing order of governance, or way of doing things, needed to be dismantled.

Tolstoy believed all forms of governance were engaged in processes that actively defrauded its citizens. For instance, he believed that governments relied on techniques of undue influence – involving, among other things, the imposition of blind, unreflective forms of patriotism upon its people – to induce citizens to support, among other things, the government's unending quest to solve all problems (both domestic and internationally) through modalities of militarism and policing that were inherently violent and inclined toward the use of force as a default position.

Nonetheless, Tolstoy did part company with anarchists on one issue. More specifically, he disagreed with those anarchists, like Bakunin, who believed that political, social, and legal change presupposes some sort of violent revolution, and this issue of violence and force was the primary reason why Tolstoy did not tend to refer to himself as an anarchist.

While Tolstoy refrained from specifying the form that a community, state, or nation should, or would, assume if it were to operate without governing officials or institutions of governance, he did stipulate that individuals should base their decisions on the exercise of personal conscience rather than on the political dynamics of governing bodies and officials. He also believed that: "... nothing evil can result from my following the higher guidance of wisdom and love, or wise love, which is implanted in me ..."

In the foregoing statement, Tolstoy is assuming that the sort of guidance that will be given expression through the exercise of conscience will necessarily be a function of wisdom and love, rather than other kinds of – possibly evil and problematic – motives or intentions. However, even if one were to accept the possibility that a conscience which is operating properly actually functions in accordance with principles of wisdom and love (whatever might be meant by those two terms), nonetheless, Tolstoy did not provide any sort of evidence to indicate that his conscience, along with the conscience of other individuals, would necessarily be operating as they should, nor does he provide any account which indicates how one could know whether a given conscience was operating properly, or how one would go about justifying the criteria that are to be used to identify or measure what constituted "proper" functioning.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations and given that Tolstoy described his youth and early manhood as a time of "coarse dissoluteness, employed in the service of ambition, vanity, and, above all, lust," one might have anticipated that Tolstoy would have been inclined later on

in life to adopt some sort of libertarian approach to the idea of anarchy. However, he tended to move in the opposite direction and, instead, felt that a person's ego and sensual desires needed to be controlled rather than be indulged.

Thus, Tolstoy indicates that the teachings of Christ – as he understood them – came to play a central role in the way he approached, among other things, issues of governance. However, although Tolstoy considered Jesus (peace be upon him) to be a great moral teacher, he did not consider Christ to be the divine son of God and, instead, felt that all human beings were children of God and, therefore, had a potential for realizing a God-given capacity for love and wisdom (whatever these might mean).

Tolstoy maintained – and he believed this to be the case for all human beings – that Jesus (peace be upon him) had a capacity for reason that was rooted in a source of light that was external to human beings. When the foregoing capacity functioned properly, it led human beings toward God.

Furthermore, he believed the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him) were irrefutable. However, Tolstoy does not offer much, if anything, in the way of evidence during the relatively short essay – “*On Anarchy*” -- to demonstrate to readers of that essay why they should consider those teachings to be irrefutable.

Instead, he merely asserts that he believes this to be the case. For instance, during his essay “*On Anarchy*”, Tolstoy argues that if there is a God, then, Tolstoy feels we will be asked to account for our behavior while on Earth, and, as a result, our behaviors either will be evaluated in accordance with the standard of Divine law or those behaviors will be measured against various sorts of ‘higher qualities’ that have been implanted in us. On the other hand, according to Tolstoy, if there is no God, then, reason

and love (which he leaves undefined) will become the standards against which one's actions will be measured.

To begin with, in the foregoing, Tolstoy appears to be assuming, – despite an absence of evidence – that if there is a God, then, Tolstoy knows what the nature of the “higher qualities” are that, supposedly, have been planted within us as well as how such qualities will be evaluated by God. Secondly, and contrary to what Tolstoy indicates in his essay “*On Anarchy*”, if there is no God, then, one cannot necessarily suppose that there will be any process of evaluating conduct that takes place, nor can one necessarily assume that if God did not exist that anyone would necessarily possess the kind of authority to conduct a process of evaluation that would be recognized and accepted by other individuals.

In the ‘light’ of the foregoing considerations, Tolstoy believed that each individual is faced with just three options in relation to the issue of governance. One can: (1) seek to use violence in order to combat the violence of governance; (2) negotiate with, and participate in government in a manner that, over time, might be able to reform or rehabilitate government officials and institutions of governance; (3) pursue neither the way of violence (1) nor the way of participation/negotiation (2) but, instead, one should resist all forms of governance through the non-violent use of “thought, speech, actions, life” and so on.

Tolstoy maintained that as far as the first option listed above is concerned, violence will never bring forth anything but more violence, and, therefore, he rejects that possibility. In addition, Tolstoy also believed that anyone who seeks to participate in, or negotiate with, government – that is, pursue option (2) noted earlier -- will, sooner or later, become compromised, marginalized, or eliminated in one way or another.

Consequently, he felt that the third option – mentioned above -- constitutes the best way to proceed. He believed

that the third option was in accordance with the teaching of Jesus (peace be upon him), as well as the will of God.

Tolstoy claimed that the aforementioned third option gave expression to a continuing revolution of moral improvement that gradually would help all human beings to become better individuals. Moreover, in time, he felt such a continuing project of moral regeneration will be able to assist human beings to disengage more and more from all forms of governance.

Seeking to implement some sort of anarchistic-oriented political philosophy involving people whom one will never encounter or with whom one rarely will interact is one thing. However, living in accordance with such a perspective in conjunction with individuals with whom one will interact on a regular basis tends to be an entirely different sort of challenge.

For instance, although Tolstoy was favorably disposed toward the idea of anarchy and, therefore, as previously indicated, took Proudhon's maxim to heart that any system in which one person seeks to regulate the life of another is inherently oppressive, he often seemed to forget, or ignore, the foregoing principle in relation to his wife. Thus, when his wife indicated that she did not want to have any more children due to her very legitimate worries concerning her own physical well-being and safety (based on several precarious encounters with pregnancy and child-bearing issues), Tolstoy insisted that she have more children.

Similarly, when Sonya/Sofia brought up the issue of contraception, Tolstoy rejected her perspective because it clashed with his beliefs ... beliefs for which he could offer no evidence that was independent of those beliefs. In addition, when Sonya/Sofia suffered from mastitis (an inflammation of the breast that often involves infection), and she wanted to use a wet nurse for her newly born child, Tolstoy ignored his wife's pain and insisted that she continue to breast-feed the child simply because he

believed – but could not prove -- that his way was the right way to proceed.

Moreover, sometimes when he became interested in some topic – such as, for example, bee-keeping – he often would leave his wife alone for days and weeks with little concern for whatever her concerns or problems might be. Furthermore, despite his wife's yeowomen's efforts on his behalf as an editor and fair copyist for many of his works, Tolstoy appeared to ignore her numerous contributions when making decisions about financial and copyright issues concerning those works.

More often than not, Tolstoy seemed to be consumed with just his own wishes and beliefs concerning the foregoing topics. However, notwithstanding whatever thoughts his wife might have had for her own financial welfare with respect to financial and copyright issues, she also was concerned for the welfare of their children – both in the present as well as for the future – in a way that Tolstoy did not seem to be.

Theoretical, or abstract, forms of anarchy in which one never has to deal with the complications generated by the presence of other individuals, is one thing. Principles of anarchy that must be lived amidst other individuals who tend to believe and act differently from each other tend to be another matter altogether.

Tolstoy seemed to be quite good in conjunction with theoretical or abstract forms of anarchy. He seemed to fare less well when he had to deal directly with other individuals – such as his wife -- who thought and believed differently from him.

Many of Tolstoy's problems concerning the observance of various principles of anarchy – such as Proudhon's maxim that situations in which one person regulated the actions of another were inherently oppressive – may have been a function of Tolstoy's belief that his way of understanding Christianity was correct, and, therefore, whoever differed with him about those matters – such as

his wife -- was incorrect. Consequently, Tolstoy had difficulty living in accordance with the principles of anarchy because – despite promoting ideas -- such as “do unto others as one would have others do unto you” -- he did not seem to have discovered a way to live his life in a manner that did not involve requiring other people (such as his wife) to live in accordance with the system of meaning that governed his beliefs and behavior but was not necessarily in accordance with the system of meaning that governed her beliefs and behaviors.

Perhaps a good rule of thumb might be the following: If one operates out of a belief system that is causing disharmony in one’s family, then, such an orientation is also likely to lead to dysfunction when enacted elsewhere in the world. For whatever reason, Tolstoy had difficulty understanding that there seemed to be some sort of disconnect between what he professed to believe to be true (e.g., anarchy or his conception of Christianity) and the manner in which he conducted himself within his family.

While one might tend to agree with many of Tolstoy’s criticisms concerning the numerous problems that permeate the issue of governance, nonetheless, there are still a variety of problems (many of which have been given expression in the previous chapters of this book, as well as during the current chapter) concerning Tolstoy’s attempt to ground his interpersonal project of moral regeneration in what seems to be a problematic hermeneutic of Christianity. However, no one should interpret the foregoing comments to be an attempt to discredit Christianity.

Instead, the intent of the foregoing observations is meant to serve as a way of trying to help people become more sensitized to the potential ways in which their manner of understanding and living life could be experienced as being controlling or oppressive by other individuals with whom one interacts. In fact, one might

wish to argue that, perhaps, the best approach to the sorts of problems of governance that Tolstoy critiques so relentlessly and eloquently in one, or another, of his works should be non-denominational in character.

The foregoing non-denominational approach might be least likely to alienate individuals who are committed to other spiritual and philosophical perspectives. Therefore, such an approach could have the best chance of inducing people from different philosophical and spiritual backgrounds to co-operate with one another as they each, in their own way, seek to have an opportunity to discover, and live in accordance with, the nature of the truth concerning their respective relationships with Being.

Although the following set of conditions are, I believe, entirely compatible with the general idea of anarchy – which seeks to avoid all forms of hierarchy as well as institutionalized modes of governance – nevertheless, the term “anarchy” does not appear in the material below. Instead, the following conditions and principles are in response to a question that someone once asked me – namely, “What is sovereignty?”

Furthermore, although I believe there is no inherent contradiction between sovereignty and at least certain forms of anarchy, nonetheless, the principles and conditions of sovereignty give expression to a form of self-governance that is capable of lending a methodological rigor and order to such considerations that is not often associated with the idea of anarchy. Consequently, there is a sense in which the conditions and principles of sovereignty that are given below give expression to a form of self-governance that goes beyond anarchy even as the former seeks to maintain the latter’s emphasis on being non-hierarchical in character as well as avoiding institutionalized, centralized forms of regulating interpersonal interaction.

(1) Sovereignty is indigenous to, and inherent in, the potential of human beings. It is not derived from society or governments but, in fact, exists prior to, and independently of, the formation of society and governments.

(2) Sovereignty is the right to realize essential identity and constructive potential in ways that are free from techniques of undue influence (which seek to push or pull individuals in directions that are antithetical to the realization of sovereignty) but, as well, in ways that do not infringe on the like rights of others.

(3) Sovereignty entails the human capacity (and corresponding duties of care) to be able to push back the horizons of ignorance concerning the nature of reality.

(4) Sovereignty encompasses rights to the quality of food, shelter, clothing, education, and medical care that are minimally necessary to realize identity and constructive potential through the process of pushing back the horizons of ignorance.

(5) Sovereignty is rooted in the duties of care that are owed to others to ensure that the foregoing rights of sovereignty are established, protected, and nurtured for everyone.

(6) Sovereignty is the right to choose how to engage the dynamics of: 'neither control, nor be controlled'.

(7) Sovereignty entails establishing local councils that constructively promote and develop principles of sovereignty and if necessary those councils would help mediate disputes that arise along the boundary dynamics involving the principle of: 'Neither control nor be controlled'. The composition, selection, and nature of the council would be similar to that of a grand jury.

In other words, council members would not be elected but chosen through an agreed-upon random-like process and, then, subject to a vetting procedure to determine the suitability of a given individual for taking on the responsibilities of the aforementioned council ... much like

prospective jurors go through a voir dire process. In addition, the length of service would be for a limited time (6 months to a year) before new members would be selected through the aforementioned sort of non-manipulated manner of selecting and vetting prospective candidates that was noted earlier. Like a grand jury, the members of a local sovereignty council would be empowered to investigate whatever issues and problems seem relevant, but, unlike a grand jury, that council would have the authority to research issues, subpoena witnesses, and present their results directly to the community for further deliberation without having to go through the office of a prosecutor or attorney general.

(8) Sovereignty is the responsibility of individuals to work toward realizing their own individual sovereignty within a collective context that gives expression to the idea of sovereignty being writ large for the community as a whole.

(9) Sovereignty is rooted in economic activity that serves the principles of sovereignty, not vice versa. Corporations should be permitted to exist only as temporary charter arrangements devoid of any claims of personhood and they should be designed to serve specific purposes of value for the constructive development of sovereignty for both individuals and the collective. Whatever profits accrue from corporate activity should be shared with the communities in which the corporation operates.

(10) The constructive value of money is a function of its role in advancing the principles of sovereignty for everyone. The destructive value of money is a function of the way it undermines, corrupts, and obstructs the principles of sovereignty.

Money acquires its value through the service it provides in relation to the establishment, enhancement, and protection of sovereignty. The money-generating capacity of banks should serve the purposes of sovereignty

both individually and collectively. Banks should be owned and regulated by local communities as public utilities. Moreover, whatever profits are earned in conjunction with bank activities should be reinvested in the community.

(11) Capital refers primarily to the constructive potential inherent in human beings and only secondarily to financial resources. The flow of capital (in both human and financial terms) should serve the interests of sovereignty, both individually and collectively.

(12) Sovereignty is not a zero-sum game. It is about co-operation, not competition.

(13) Sovereignty is rooted in the acquisition of personal character traits involving: Honesty, compassion, charitableness, benevolence, friendship, objectivity, equitability, tolerance, forgiveness, patience, perseverance, nobility, courage, kindness, humility, integrity, independence and judiciousness.

(14) Sovereignty is not imposed from the outside in but is realized from the inside out through struggle by individuals for purposes of coming being able to grasp the meaning of the following notion: 'Neither control nor be controlled'.

(15) Sovereignty is rooted in struggling against: Dishonesty, bias, hatred, jealousy, greed, anger, selfishness, intolerance, arrogance, apathy, cowardice, egocentrism, duplicity, exploitation, and cruelty.

(16) Sovereignty is the process of struggling to learn how not to cede one's moral and intellectual agency to anything but: Truth, justice and character in the service of realizing one's identity, and constructive potential, as well as in the service of assisting others to realize their identity and constructive potential.

(17) Sovereignty can never be defended, protected, or enhanced by diminishing, corrupting, co-opting, or suspending the conditions necessary for the pursuit,

practice, and realization of sovereignty. Sovereignty should not be subject to the politics of fear.

(18) Sovereignty is rooted in the principle that no person can represent the sovereign interests of another individual unless the sovereign interests of everybody are equally served at the same time.

(19) To whatever extent: Governments, nations, institutions, and corporations exist, their activities should always be capable of being demonstrated -- beyond a reasonable doubt -- to be in the service of people's sovereignty, considered both collectively and individually.

(20) Sovereignty is rooted in the principle of de-centralization whenever doing so would serve, in a clearly demonstrable manner, the interests of sovereignty better than some form of centralized system of governance would be able to accomplish.

(21) Efficiency and wealth should be measured in terms that enhance the way of sovereignty, not the way of power.

(22) The principles of sovereignty should be rooted in the notion of sustainability, and those principles should not be pursued or realized at the expense of destroying the environment ... either with respect to short term possibilities or in conjunction with long term prospects.

(23) Sovereignty is rooted in the cautionary principle. In other words, if there is a reasonable doubt about the safety, efficiency, judiciousness, or potential destructive ramifications of a given activity, then that activity should be suspended until a time when the foregoing sorts of doubts have been completely, successfully, and rigorously addressed.

(24) The defense of sovereignty is best served through the co-operation of de-centralized communities of sovereign individuals ... with only occasional, limited, and secondary assistance from centralized institutions and groups.

(25) Standing armies do not serve the interests of sovereignty but, rather, serve the interests of the bureaucracies that organize, fund, equip, and direct those standing armies. Being able to defend one's country and communities from physical attack does not require standing armies but, instead, requires sovereign individuals who understand the value of defending the principles of sovereignty that help a community and network of communities to flourish.

(26) The police should serve and protect both individual, as well as collective, sovereignty. The police should not be the guardians and enforcers of arbitrary laws that are designed to protect centralized governments, corporations, institutions, and other bodies that tend to operate in accordance with the way of power and, therefore, in opposition to the way of sovereignty.

(27) When done correctly, the practice of sovereignty creates a public space or commons that is conducive to the pursuit and realization of the principles of sovereignty by everyone who is willing to struggle toward that end.

(28) Sovereignty is rooted in the principle that the commons – that is, the resources of the Earth, if not the Universe – cannot be proven, beyond a reasonable doubt, to belong to anyone. Therefore, the commons should be shared, conserved, and protected by all of us rather than be permitted to be treated as individual, institutional, corporate, or government forms of private property.

(29) Whatever forms of private property are considered to be permissible by general consensus, that property should serve the establishment, enhancement, and protection of the principles of sovereignty, both individual and collective.

(30) Aside from what is necessary to operate a business in an effective and productive manner, as well as what is necessary in the way of resources to be able to improve that business through research and development, and/or is necessary to provide a fair return for the

employees of such a business for their collective efforts, then any profits that are generated by a business should be shared with the community or communities in which that business resides. The shareholders of a business should always be the entire community in which a business is located and not just a select number of private shareholders.

In exchange for foregoing kind of arrangement, there should be no taxes assessed in conjunction with businesses. At the same time, both businesses and the community become liable for whatever damages to individuals, the environment, or other parts of the community that are adversely affected by the activities of those businesses.

(31) A market in which all of its participants are not sovereign individuals is not a free market. Markets that exploit the vulnerabilities of participants are not free. Markets that are organized by the few in a way that undermines, corrupts, or compromises the principles of sovereignty are not free.

Markets in which the participants are all equally sovereign are free. Nonetheless, the freedom inherent in those markets should serve the interests of sovereignty for those who are both inside and outside of those markets.

(32) Sovereignty is only realizable when it is rooted in a collective, reciprocal, guarantee that we will all treat one another through the principles of sovereignty.

(33) Violations of sovereignty are an impediment to the full realization of the principles of sovereignty. However, those violations should not be primarily or initially be subject to punitive forms of treatment.

Instead, violations of sovereignty should be engaged through a process of mediated, conflict resolution and reconciliation intended to restore the efficacious and judicious functioning of sovereignty amongst both individuals and the collective. This mediated process is,

first and foremost, rooted in a rigorous effort to determine the facts of a given situation before proceeding on with the process of mediation, conflict resolution, or reconciliation.

A community has the right to defend itself against individuals who violate, and show a disregard for, the sovereignty rights of other individuals. The aforementioned right to self protection might assume the form of: Treatment, exile, incarceration, parole supervision, community service, and other forms of negotiated settlement with respect to those who undermine the principles of sovereignty.

(34) Alleged scientific and technical progress that cannot be rigorously demonstrated -- beyond a reasonable doubt -- to enhance the pursuit and realization of principles of sovereignty for everyone is subject to being governed by the precautionary principle.

(35) Sovereignty is not a form of democracy in which the majority rules on any given issue. Rather, sovereignty is a process of generating consensus within a community that can be demonstrated, beyond a reasonable doubt, to serve the sovereignty interests of everyone.

(36) Sovereignty is rooted in the principle that before making a community decision concerning a given practice, a community should take into consideration what the impact of that practice is likely to be on generations seven times removed from the current one.

(37) Everyone should underwrite the costs of pursuing, establishing, enhancing, realizing, and protecting sovereignty -- both individually and collectively -- according to his or her capacity to do so.

(38) Sovereignty is not a function of political maneuvering, manipulations, or strategies. Rather, sovereignty is a function of the application of: Reasoned discussion, critical reflection, constructive reciprocity, creative opportunities, and rigorous methodology in the pursuit of pushing back the horizons of ignorance and

seeking to establish, enhance, realize, and protect sovereignty, both individually and collectively.

(39) Sovereignty is not about hierarchy or leadership. Advisors and technical consultants who are capable of lending their expertise and experience to a given project that serves the interests of sovereignty in a community are temporary facilitators whose responsibilities do not extend beyond a given project or undertaking. Those facilitators often tend to arise in the context of a given need and, then, are reabsorbed into the community when a given need has been met.

(40) Education should serve the interests of establishing, developing, enhancing and protecting the principles of sovereignty – both individually and collectively – and not serve the interests of the way of power. Education should not use techniques of undue influence that push or pull individuals toward accepting, or rejecting, specific philosophical, political, economic, or religious perspectives.

(41) To whatever extent taxes are collected (and the issue of taxes needs to be considered and justified – to the extent that this can be accomplished -- in a critically, rigorous fashion), those taxes should be assessed only on a local basis and only after all sovereignty needs of an individual for a given period of time have been addressed. Those taxes should be proportional -- within generally agreed upon specific limits -- to a person's capacity to pay those taxes without undermining a person's ability to fully pursue realizing the principles of sovereignty.

Whatever taxes are collected can be used only in conjunction with projects of which the individual taxpayer approves. Disputes concerning the issue of taxation should be handled through mediated discussions and not through punitive or coercive policies.

The foregoing statements of principle concerning the idea of sovereignty mark the beginning of the exploratory process, not the end. We all need to critically reflect on the foregoing set of principles because what we have today is working for just a very small number of individuals that follow the way of power and, as a result, seek to prevent people in general from being able to pursue, establish, enhance, realize, and protect the principles of sovereignty,

Sovereignty is not something new. The idea of sovereignty has been inherent in human beings for a very, very long time, but, unfortunately, as events have demonstrated again and again for thousands of years, people's aspirations for sovereignty have been thwarted persistently and rigorously by the way of power at nearly every juncture of history.

A person can commit one's moral and intellectual agency to the cause of sovereignty or an individual can cede that moral and intellectual agency to those who belong to the power elite – economically, militarily, socially, intellectually, politically, and religiously. A great deal hangs on the nature of the judgments one makes with respect to the issue of how one decides to cede one's moral, intellectual, and spiritual agency.

Chapter 8: Jesus (p.b.u.h.) and the Mystical Way

In the Introduction to the present book, I indicated that shortly after meeting my future, current wife we had a number of discussions concerning Tolstoy. Those conversations were fairly one-sided since, at the time, I was unfamiliar with his work, but among the things during those talks she indicated to me that although Tolstoy was one of her favorite writers, nonetheless, after reading several of his fictional creations (e.g., *Anna Karenina* and *Kreutzer Sonata*) as well as a little of his non-fiction work, she felt that, in certain respects, Tolstoy also seemed lost because of, among other things, his intense struggles with suicidal ideation, as well as the many problems he experienced in conjunction with his family.

My future wife was concerned because if someone as brilliant and as talented as Tolstoy could struggle in life, then, where did that leave her ... someone who considered herself to be far less brilliant and talented than Tolstoy. She wanted to know if there was anything that a Sufi (i.e., me) might be able to offer Tolstoy that could help him out in some way.

Of course, there are many individuals who do not feel that Tolstoy needs any assistance. Such people are likely to indicate that even though at a certain point in his life Tolstoy might have encountered a problematic fork in the path of his existence that required him to choose between the way of negation (suicide) or the way of affirmation (life), nevertheless, he was able to successfully overcome those problems and, as a result, continued to explore some of life's possibilities and, in the process, mapped out a very rich and nuanced method for navigating through the challenging waters of meaning, purpose, identity, and religion.

However, over the course of the last 500-plus pages, a considerable amount of evidence has been put forth which suggests that, maybe, Tolstoy didn't necessarily know as much as he – and, perhaps, others -- might have thought he

did with respect to the foregoing issues. Although, to be sure, he did succeed in creating a coping strategy for dealing with his demons and, thereby, was able to resist the Siren call of suicidal ideation, nevertheless, the system of meaning or life-conception that he generated over the second half of his life appeared to be riddled with an array of unanswered questions, lacunae, and problematic forms of reasoning ... some of which have been examined during the course of this book.

The difficulties that seem to permeate his reasoning process are of crucial significance because Tolstoy believes that “true religion” is founded upon a form of reasoning which is common to everyone. Yet, even if one were to agree with Tolstoy that the sort of reasoning on which true religion is supposedly founded were available to everyone to the same degree and in the same way (and in the light of the extensive evidence concerning the individual differences that tend to exist in a population I’m not sure that Tolstoy’s belief in this respect is tenable), one cannot necessarily assume that Tolstoy has successfully discovered the nature of such a reasoning process, and, in fact, most of the previous chapters in the present book have been directed toward lending credence to just such a possibility.

In the current chapter, I would like -- in a relatively brief manner -- to explore what seems to be an additional problematic dimension of Tolstoy’s reasoning process in relation to the issue of religion. More specifically, one of the mistakes that I believe Tolstoy makes during various facets of his non-fictional work involves what seems to be his tendency to seek to impose his hermeneutic onto reality and treat the former as if it were the truth rather than working on himself (through, for example, fasting, prayer, chanting, meditation, seclusion, and similar forms of discipline) in order to render himself more receptive -- possibly -- to what reality might have to tell him about the nature of truth.

Although reason has a role to play when trying to grasp the nature of reality, nonetheless, reason is dependent on the quality and character of the experiences one has. Reason cannot generate those experiences but, instead, must rigorously engage those experiences after the fact in order to become properly oriented toward what they might have to say about the nature of Being.

Thus, in matters of religion, Tolstoy appears to be more inclined toward wanting to invent or create what he considers the truth to be than he is interested in becoming open to letting reality inform him about the nature of the truths to which it is giving expression. Consequently, he tends to use reason to filter and frame reality, and in the process, he not only loses contact with the methodology (i.e., fasting, prayer, chanting, meditation, seclusion, and similar forms of discipline) he needs to correct his rationalized process of filtering and framing reality, but, in addition, he shuts himself off from being receptive to the kinds of experiences that might be able to teach him – to the extent that he is open to being taught -- about the actual nature of his relationship with Being.

In other words, if one were to return to my wife's aforementioned request concerning whether, or not, a Sufi, such as myself, might have any help to offer to Tolstoy, my counsel might be that people (including Tolstoy, myself and most other human beings) need to learn how to be receptive to the presence of Being rather than seeking to impose our own ideas about things onto reality. Unfortunately, Tolstoy -- as is the case with most of us -- appears to have become too preoccupied with his own way of thinking about life and, as a result, he appears to have closed himself off to some of the potential of "true religion".

To lend specificity to the foregoing -- hopefully helpful -- suggestion, a brief introduction to the life of Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) (born – 1165 A.D., passed away – 1240 A.D.) might well be in order here. One easily

could have selected individuals from other spiritual traditions – e.g., Christianity [including examples from the spiritual tradition of Hesychasm (inner stillness) and the Philokalia (Love of the Beautiful) that existed in, among other places, Tolstoy’s Russia], Judaism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Aboriginal spirituality, as well as various North American indigenous peoples -- in order to illustrate the nature of the counsel that is being offered to Tolstoy, but Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) has been selected because he is not only someone with whose life and teachings I have a degree of familiarity, but, as well, Jesus (peace be upon him) played a significant role in his life and, as a result, would appear to have considerable resonance with Tolstoy’s Christ-centric perspective.

In *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya* (the multi-volume series of writings that, among other things, gave expression to the spiritual illuminations that were experienced in Mecca), Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) indicates that he first underwent conversion (that is, a process of turning away from the distractions of both the world as well as the ego that, simultaneously, involves a re-orientation of the soul toward God) through Jesus (peace be upon him). Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) further states that during his spiritual encounter with Jesus (peace be upon him), God’s emissary not only prayed that Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) would persevere along the path of religion in both the present world and the world to come, but also counseled him to become committed to the way of renunciation and self-denial, as well as referred to Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) as his beloved.

Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) also maintains in *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya* that Jesus (peace be upon him) was his first teacher. Moreover, he states that

Jesus (peace be upon him) was a teacher who, in an on-going manner, showed him great kindness.

According to the *Futûhât*, Jesus (peace be upon him) constantly watched over and cared for Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him). Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) also indicates that, on many occasions, he encountered, and benefitted from meeting, Jesus (peace be upon him) during various spiritual experiences.

Two chapters of the *Futûhât* (*Meccan Openings*) and one chapter of *Fusûs al-Hakim* (*Bezels of Wisdom*) contain material on his encounters with Jesus (peace be upon him). Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) insists that neither of the foregoing works gives expression to his own ideas but, rather, arise entirely out of spiritual experiences that he had which give expression to what was disclosed to him through his encounter with Jesus (peace be upon him).

Among other things, the chapters in the aforementioned books indicate that at certain points in the lives of various saints such individuals are brought under the umbrella of assistance involving spiritual guides like Jesus, Moses, and Abraham (peace be upon them all). As a result, those who are brought into this kind of spiritual proximity often are clothed in gifts or charismata that are characteristic of those guides.

For example, by God's grace, some individuals are opened up to Christic or Isawi influences (The Quranic name for Jesus – peace be upon him – is Isa – peace be upon him -- and 'Isawi' is a term that means 'related to Isa' – peace be upon him). Due to the aforementioned spiritual relationship, some individuals might become clothed in qualities that tend to be associated with Jesus (peace be upon him) such as: Being inclined to see what is good in people, universal compassion, and the ability to walk on water.

Consequently, due to his conversion experience at the hands of Jesus (peace be upon him), as well as a result of having been counseled by Jesus (peace be upon him) to

pursue the way of renunciation and self-denial, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) -- while still a very young man -- gave up his claim to all of his material possessions. Normally speaking, when an individual decides to commit himself, herself, or themselves to the way of renunciation and self-denial, that person will transfer her, his, or their possessions to one's spiritual guide, but because the initial, teacher of Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) was not of this world, the young man entrusted his worldly possessions to his father and, subsequently, never inquired about what had been done with his prior possessions.

Ibn al-Arabi (may God be pleased with him) stipulates in the *Futûhât* that giving away one's possession is not required of individuals who wish to pursue the way of renunciation but who also have a family for whom they have a responsibility. Thus, if, during his travels, Tolstoy were to have met someone like Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him), and if Tolstoy had asked the latter individual what Tolstoy should do given that Tolstoy both had a family as well as had a desire to pursue the path of renunciation, then, Tolstoy might well have been counseled to refrain from abandoning his family and to discontinue arguing with his wife about the issue ... that serving God was not inconsistent with a family life.

In fact, later in life, while continuing to observe a life of renunciation and self-denial, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) took on the responsibility of looking after several sisters, a number of wives, and some children. With God's help, he managed to fulfill the foregoing duties of care despite moving from place to place in northern Africa and the Middle-East, as well as continuing to observe a rigorous schedule of teaching, writing (somewhere between 400 and 600 books), and spiritual practices.

I witnessed similar sorts of commitments in my own spiritual guide. For instance, at some point during every

year of the sixteen years or so that I knew my spiritual guide, he would go into seclusion for 40 days.

This spiritual practice required him to spend time in a small room by himself (he lived in a two bedroom apartment with his family) where he would keep the fast during the day, observe the night vigil, and struggle to become receptive to God's presence. This was done through prayer, remembrance (zikr or chanting), reading the Qur'an, contemplation, as well as meditation, and the purpose of the foregoing set of spiritual exercises was to provide a person with the opportunity to: Eat less, sleep less, be with other people less, and remember God more.

Yet, my guide was also a devoted husband and father of six children who took an active role with, and interest in, members of his family. Consequently, he tried – successfully I believe -- to balance the requirements of family with a commitment to the mystical path, while also holding down a full-time job that enabled him to financially support his family.

Moreover, he spent a great deal of time engaged in helping other individuals in a variety of way, and I knew this to be true because I had the good fortune to be able to assist him in many of those projects. His help was available irrespective of whether, or not, those individuals were initiates of the Sufi, mystical path.

Consequently, if Tolstoy had known my spiritual guide, and if Tolstoy had broached the issue of whether, or not, Tolstoy should pursue the way of renunciation and self-denial or attend to the needs of his family, I believe my teacher's response might have been similar to what Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) said in the *Futûhât*. In other words, I believe my spiritual guide would have counseled Tolstoy to try to find a way of honoring both of those commitments.

The tragedy that took place at the end of Tolstoy's life when he left his wife and family, traveled about for a number of days, and, then, died of pneumonia at the

Astapovo train station, as well as the tragic nature of the many arguments that Tolstoy had with his wife over copyrights, finances, and Tolstoy's desire to be free to pursue a spiritual path in the way he wanted, might all have been avoidable. However, Tolstoy often seemed to become entangled in his own ideas, desires, and motivations concerning how things should proceed, -- and such entanglements also often tend to characterize the lives of many of the rest of us -- and, as a result, we often are the architects, in one way or another, of whatever tragedies or tragic circumstances that enter into our lives.

There is another dimension in the lives of Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) and Tolstoy that demonstrates an important difference between, on the one hand, the manner in which Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) approached spirituality or religion and, on the other hand, the way in which Tolstoy engaged spirituality or religion. This dimension revolves about the sort of emphasis that is given to the role of spiritual experiences relative to the use of reason.

As indicated during previous chapters of the present book, Tolstoy was someone who maintained that in order for something to be an expression of true religion, then that 'something' had to be compatible with the demands of reason and rationality. This is why Tolstoy tended to distance himself from any perspective that seemed to entail elements of the mystical, the mysterious, the supernatural, or the miraculous, and, as well, why he tended to reject the observance of ritual prayers, chanting sacred words, fasting, and other sorts of practices that seemed to Tolstoy to be tied, in one way or another, to the mystical, the mysterious, the supernatural, or the miraculous.

The foregoing position is rather ironic given that Tolstoy was, in various other respects, quite superstitious and, for example, believed that certain numbers -- such as 28 (see toward the bottom of page 49 and the top of page

50 in the present book to view further details concerning this topic) – possessed strange, magical powers. Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, nonetheless, generally speaking, Tolstoy tended to be dismissive of anything that could not be understood through the use of reasoning processes that were accessible to everyone.

Although Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) valued logic and reason, he, nonetheless, believed that the primary form of spiritual illumination was a function of having certain kinds of experiences (in the form of visions, flashes of intuition, spiritual disclosures, states, stations, and dreams) that tended to be beyond the capacity of reason to generate, grasp or analyze. As is the case with experience in general, one cannot bring such phenomena into existence through the use of reason but, instead, those experiences must, to a certain degree, be given to one.

Furthermore, while reason might be used to critically reflect upon various dimensions of the foregoing sorts of experiences, nonetheless, realizing the significance or meaning of those experiences is not necessarily a function of a linear process of step-by-step reasoning but tends to come through flashes of intuition or spiritual disclosures that come as non-linear wholes and, like the foregoing experiences themselves, are given rather than produced through rational processes.

The foregoing experiences are not necessarily supernatural in character but, instead, are phenomena that mystics believe give expression to certain aspects of the relationship between an individual and Being according to the manner in which God wishes to disclose those possibilities. Furthermore, while the kinds of experiences being alluded to above might appear to be mysterious to those who do not have them, nonetheless, they are quite concrete and tangible to whoever is graced with their presence.

To be sure, there are, and have been, individuals who may have had various kinds of extraordinary experiences that are a function of hallucinations, delusional states, and other manner of pathological conditions. However, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) did not believe he was referring to such spurious possibilities when he described his own experiences (and the reader will have to make up his, her, or their own mind concerning the ontological status of the following considerations).

One of the earliest spiritual experiences that Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) talks about is when he was a teenager. Somehow, the great philosopher Abu al-Walid Ibn Rushd (known as Averroes in the West) heard about the boy's spiritual experience and was so deeply impressed with what he heard that the famous thinker and writer wanted to meet with the youth. Since the philosopher was a friend of the father of Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) father, a meeting was arranged.

As Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) notes in the *Futûhât*, an exchange took place between himself and Averroes. The latter is reported to have come away from that interchange with the realization that the youth had an understanding of, and insight into, the nature of reality which transcended that of the philosopher.

Thus, a man who was renowned for his capacity to reason had come face-to-face with the extraordinary depths and power of spiritual experience. Apparently, reason had not won the day.

Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) also indicates in the *Futûhât* – and this resonates with aspects of Tolstoy's life as a young man – that there was a juncture in the life of Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) when he seemed to be gravitating toward a military career. For instance, as a youth, he loved to spend time pretending to be a soldier, and later on he loved to ride horses, parade in military camps, as well as handle swords.

Eventually, he did enter military service. However, this did not last long.

After becoming a soldier, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) describes going to the mosque with a certain prince and observed the Prince prostrating humbly before God. The young soldier was deeply impressed with the Prince's piety, but remembers thinking that if such a high official as the Prince is prepared to submit himself to God, then, perhaps, the world in which the Prince is a sovereign is not all that important, and, as a result, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) left the Prince and the army in order to step onto the mystical path so that he might serve the One to Whom the Prince was prostrating with such humility.

Shortly after leaving the military, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) observed a lengthy spiritual retreat. He later wrote that he entered into seclusion prior to dawn on a given day, and by sunrise, spiritual illumination filled his awareness and marked an ecstatic disengagement from his previous life.

The foregoing retreat lasted for 18 months. During that time, he maintains that many secrets were disclosed to him ... secrets that reason could not generate or grasp and, therefore, the meaning and significance of those secrets had to be disclosed to him through spiritual means rather than rational ones.

To provide a context, of sorts, through which to engage what is being said -- or alluded to -- in the foregoing paragraph, consider the following quote from *The Path of God's Bondsmen From Origin to Return* by Najm al-Din Razi (translated by Hamid Algar):

"Fire is to be seen at several stations, and it has a different meaning at each. Sometimes it may be a sign of traversing the attribute of fire; sometimes it may be a sign of the ardor of the quest; sometimes it may be a sign of the dominance of the attribute of anger; sometimes it may be a sign of the dominance of the attribute of devilry; sometimes it may be the light of zikr appearing in igneous form; sometimes it may be the fire of longing that effaces all human attributes; sometimes it may be the fire of wrath, and sometimes it may be the fire of guidance,

as it was with Moses, upon whom be peace. ... Sometimes it may be the fire of love that burns all other than God; sometimes it may be the fire of gnosis ... sometimes it may be the fire of sainthood ... sometimes it may be the fire of witnessing. (page 367)”

What is true in conjunction with the foregoing symbol of fire is also true with respect to a multiplicity of other symbols that are given expression through dreams, flashes of intuition, unveilings, and visions. However, unless the meaning or significance of those symbols is disclosed or given to an individual through spiritual means or through the guidance of an authentic spiritual guide, then, one will never be able to reason one’s way to what is being communicated through those symbols.

A person can choose to believe in the foregoing sorts of possibilities -- as Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) did—or, a person can choose – as Tolstoy did – to dismiss those possibilities. However, irrespective of the direction in which one decides to go, that choice does not determine the truth or falsity of what is chosen but, rather, the reality of the matter is independent of the choices that might be made in that regard.

Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) uses the Arabic word, jahiliyya, to describe the period of his life that transpired prior to the spiritual experiences that occurred during his aforementioned enlightenment-laden retreat. Jahiliyya is a term that refers to a time of ignorance.

Earlier in this chapter, mention was made of the encounter that Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) had with Jesus (peace be upon him) who, among other things, counseled the young man to take up a life of renunciation and self-denial. During that same spiritual experience, Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) also encountered Moses (peace be upon him) and Muhammad (peace be upon him).

According to Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him), Moses (peace be upon him) gave the young seeker ‘the disk of

the sun' – a symbol whose meaning and significance must be given through spiritual disclosure – and informed the young man that he – i.e., Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) – would receive knowledge of God through the science of Unicity or Oneness. Finally, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) counseled Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) that if the young seeker became closely aligned with the example of the Prophet, then, the young man would be safe.

Through the foregoing network of rich spiritual experience, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) had been taught by three of God's elect. Those three lessons were complementary to one another – that is, the renunciation/self-denial of Jesus (peace be upon him), as well as the science of Unicity to which Moses (peace be upon him) introduced the young seeker, together with the invitation from Muhammad (peace be upon him) to adhere closely to the example of the Prophet, were all part of one and the same path to God.

Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) did not begin to be spiritually guided by people in the material world until he was 19 years old. For instance, the first individual who resided in the material world that provided Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) with spiritual guidance was Shaykh 'Uryani (may God be pleased with him).

The aforementioned spiritual master was illiterate and did not even know how to count. However, what that individual did know was how to practice servitude to God, and, therefore, despite the fact that the 19-year old Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) already had been the beneficiary of a number of spiritually enlightening experiences by the time that he met Shaykh 'Uryani (may God be pleased with him), nevertheless, the latter individual had much to offer to the young seeker.

Indeed, despite an absence of knowledge about how to read, write, or count, Shaykh 'Uryani (may God be pleased with him) possessed a deep understanding of, and insight into, the nature of the spiritual path. As a result, he could expound on many subtle, spiritual topics in considerable detail.

Notwithstanding the foregoing kinds of esoteric knowledge, the real treasures that Shaykh ‘Uryani (may God be pleased with him) shared with the spiritual seekers who were fortunate enough to be able to associate with him involved the science of servitude. Some individuals might seem to know a great deal about the theory of spirituality or the mystical way, and, yet, know little about the actual practice of mysticism, whereas individuals such as Shaykh ‘Uryani (may God be pleased with him) were, first and foremost, dedicated to the practice of servitude and not to whatever theory might be associated with that practice.

God willing, spiritual arrival is a matter of becoming committed to certain kinds of practices while associating with various masters of the mystical sciences rather than merely becoming adept in the theory of the mystical way. In fact, although there are exceptions to the foregoing general rule (and, to a certain extent, Ibn al-‘Arabi – may God be pleased with him - - was such an exception even though the pre-practice spiritual experiences that he underwent when a young teenager subsequently resulted in a rigorous commitment to practice), spiritual knowledge tends to arise subsequent to establishing a spiritual discipline or set of practices under the guidance of a spiritual master.

Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) wrote about many other individuals who also were committed to various spiritual practices. For example, in contrast to Shaykh ‘Uryani (may God be pleased with him), there was one individual (his name was Mirtuli – may God be pleased with him) who was not only somewhat educated but also was the imam of a small mosque, and, in addition, he was a fairly talented poet.

However, the substantive lessons that Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) learned from the latter individual were not a function of that individual’s education, or his role as an imam, or his talents as a poet. Rather, among the lessons that the aforementioned individual helped to instill in the heart of Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) – and which, just as

importantly, the young seeker was ready to receive -- had to do with the active practice of qualities such as compassion.

For instance, the aforementioned imam and poet about whom Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) wrote possessed a private library. Whenever that person learned about someone's financial difficulties or heard about someone's inability to afford food, the man would sell a book from that library and give the proceeds to whoever might be in need.

Eventually, all of the books in the man's library were disposed of in the foregoing manner. When the last book had been sold and the proceeds for that book had been distributed to the needy, the man passed away.

Tolstoy, like Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him), also was someone who was greatly impressed by the qualities of resilience, character, and service to God that often were exhibited by some of the peasants he met and came to know, and many of these peasants were illiterate in ways that were similar to Shaykh 'Uryani (may God be pleased with him), mentioned previously, who was the first teacher -- from the material world -- of Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him). The qualities of resilience, character, and service to God were present in the peasants admired by Tolstoy despite the fact that they often had to endure numerous difficulties during their lives.

Yet, even though Tolstoy indicates in his written work (e.g., *A Confession*) that he tried to discover the nature of the secrets that might underlay the development of qualities such as resilience, character and service to God that he often observed in certain of the peasants that he encountered, and even though Tolstoy tried to adopt -- at least for a time -- some of the practices (such as fasting, prayers, and various other spiritual practices) that were fairly common among many of those peasants, nevertheless, unfortunately, his rational predilections seemed to induce him to discontinue such pursuits (perhaps, because he was, among other things, too impatient to wait for positive results to manifest themselves in conjunction with those practices). Consequently, notwithstanding the array of

humane deeds that Tolstoy performed during the last half of his life, nonetheless, in many ways, Tolstoy appeared to be more comfortable with writing about the theory of religion than he seemed to be at ease with rigorously pursuing the sorts of spiritual practices (such as fasting, prayer, chanting, seclusion, contemplation, night-vigils, meditation, or serving an authentic spiritual guide) that might have assisted him to acquire the qualities of resilience, character, and service to God he was seeking and that he so admired in peasants and which tend, as well, to play such important roles in helping to, strengthen, deepen, and enrich spirituality.

Thus, on the one hand, by the time that Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) set foot on the spiritual path, he already was firmly rooted in spiritually enlightening experiences as well as practices of self-discipline that helped nurture, among other things, the qualities of character (such as humility, patience, gratitude, perseverance, compassion, kindness, and so on) that are necessary to serve God properly. On the other hand, by the time that Tolstoy stepped on to his own rationalized, speculative version of a spiritual path, he seemed more interested in engaging spirituality through various kinds of rational filters and frames through which he chose to view and engage reality than he appeared to be interested in learning how to pursue the sorts of spiritual practices that might help him to become open or receptive to whatever spiritual secrets God might wish to disclose to him.

In Ramadan, 1202 A.D., Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) observed the month of fasting while staying in Cairo. He had gone to that city with the hope of, among other things, visiting a well-known spiritual center in order to meet with individuals who might have been brought into Divine proximity.

He was disappointed. What he found was a group of people who seemed more accomplished in cleaning their beards and frocks than they were adept in the mystical way.

Instead of discovering those who were engaged in the process of instructing others about how to search within oneself in order to be able to realize the Divine Presence by means of a

rigorous journey of, God willing, personal transformation, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) encountered an institutionalized form of communal pseudo-mysticism that was leading people away from truth and reality.

Following the month of fasting in Cairo, he journeyed first to Jerusalem in Palestine and, then, continued on to Mecca where he joined other pilgrims in, among other things, circumambulating the cubic building known as the Ka'ba. At a certain point during the process of circumambulation, he indicates that he had an extraordinary, deeply illuminating experience.

The phenomenon began when he was near the black stone that is embedded in one of the corners of the Ka'ba. It marks the place where pilgrims begin and end any given circuit of that building.

According to Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him):

“... just as I found myself in front of the Black Stone, I encountered the radiant young man, the silent interlocutor, he who is neither living nor dead, he who is simple and complex, he who is enveloped and who envelopes ... Then God had me know the dignity of this young man and his relation to ‘where’ and ‘why’. When I understood his dignity and his lineage, when I saw his rank in existence and his state, I kissed his right hand, I wiped the perspiration of revelation from his forehead, and I stated: “:Look upon him who aspires to your company and longs for your intimacy!” He answered me by signs and enigmas, that he had been created in such a manner that he never spoke except by symbols. ... He made a gesture and I understood. The reality of his beauty was unveiled to me, and I was overwhelmed by love. I was drained of strength, and instantly fell to the ground. When I regained consciousness, my ribs still quaking with fear, he knew that I had understood who he was. He said: “Take note of the details of my composition and the arrangement of my form! ... I am Knowledge, the Known, and the Knower. I am Sapience, the Sapiential Work, and the Sage ... I am the mature orchid and the total harvest! Now lift up my

veils and read what my inscriptions contain. What you see in me put down in your book and preach it to all your friends.”

More than 10,000 pages of exposition – both subtle and overt -- eventually gushed forth from the pen of Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) ... words that reflected what had been disclosed to him on that occasion. Yet, as Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him), himself, subsequently indicated, notwithstanding the extensive nature of what eventually was written down concerning his experiences near the Ka’ba, nonetheless, those 10,000 pages only constituted a small part of what had been disclosed to him on that occasion and, moreover, that what had been disclosed to him was only a small part of what was knowable.

The foregoing quote touches on an issue that was briefly explored earlier in the present chapter. Spirituality is not necessarily a rational, linear process that involves logical steps capable of being grasped and followed by one and all. Again and again, the foregoing quote indicates that Ibn al-‘Arabi learned through spiritual disclosure rather than through various processes of reasoning.

For instance, in the foregoing quote, Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) indicates that he had to have God inform him concerning “the dignity of this young man and his relation to ‘where’ and ‘why’.” Moreover, Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) had to see the young man’s “rank in existence and his state, “

Furthermore, Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) points out that the young man in his experience “answered me by signs and enigmas, that he had been created in such a manner that he never spoke except by symbols.” Consequently, when the young man “made a gesture” and Ibn al-‘Arabi (may God be pleased with him) indicates that he understood the gesture’s significance and meaning, one cannot assume that such an understanding was the function of some sort of process of ratiocination, but, instead, one might want to consider the possibility that the understanding which arose in the

consciousness of Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) is likely to have emerged by way of flashes of intuition that were similar in nature to the manner in which God previously had disclosed to him "the dignity of this young man and his relation to 'where' and 'why'."

In addition, one should note that Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) contends that: "The reality of his [i.e., the young man's] beauty was unveiled to me, and I was overwhelmed by love." Unveiling is not a process of reasoning but is a phenomenon in which the individual is opened up to the nature of a certain dimension of reality all at once rather than in the step-by-step linear fashion that is characteristic of reasoning.

One should also take notice concerning the sequence of events to which attention is being drawn in the foregoing paragraph. More specifically, first, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) stipulates that the reality of the beauty of the young man – which is subsequently identified to be: "Knowledge, the Known, and the Knower ... Sapience, Sapiential Work, and the Sage" -- was unveiled to Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him), and therefore, he did not reason his way to that understanding but, rather, that understanding was disclosed to him.

At that point, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) was overwhelmed with love, drained of strength, and fell unconscious to the ground. Thus, understanding concerning "Knowledge, the Known, and the Knower ... Sapience, Sapiential Work, and the Sage" came first, and, then, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) was overwhelmed with love.

Finally, the aforementioned young man instructed Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) to: "... lift up my veils and read what my inscriptions contain. What you see in me put down in your book" Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) is not being asked to undertake a process of reasoning concerning the inscriptions that lie beneath the veils that must be lifted up – since those inscriptions are expressed in the form of symbols whose meanings must be grasped through

spiritual means --, but, rather, he is counseled to remove veils (which could entail a process of spiritual struggle and work) and see what is contained in "... the details of my composition and the arrangement of my form".

"Seeing" is a process of bearing witness to the significance of what is being disclosed. Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) was being asked to see rather than interpret, speculate, or theorize about what is present beneath the veils as one might do if one were attempting to reason one's way to the truth of what is encountered beneath those veils.

Tolstoy invites people to love God and one another. The goal is admirable, but Tolstoy appears to fail to establish or describe a spiritual path that is capable of leading a person to be able to realize the sort of love to which Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) is alluding in the foregoing quote.

Many of Tolstoy's non-fictional works on spirituality seek to give expression to a set of rational arguments (many – but not all -- of which are quite forceful and eloquent). Tolstoy's literary exercises in rationality are intended to lend credence and direction to the significance that he believes is present in the idea of loving God and others.

On the other hand, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) seeks to induce people to move in a different direction from the one indicated by Tolstoy. In other words, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) is describing a path in which love – real love -- follows upon, and is rooted in, a process of realizing the beauty inherent in: "Knowledge, the Known, and the Knower ... Sapience, Sapiential Work, and the Sage". Therefore, according to Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him), an individual should busy herself, himself, or themselves with learning how to become receptive to the nature of the presence of Knowledge, the Known, and the Knower that makes existence possible. In addition, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) is also indicating that the foregoing sort of realization must be acquired through a process of disclosure or unveiling and, therefore, cannot be reached through a process of reasoning.

Although Tolstoy was knowledgeable about many things, he never seemed to consider the possibility that, perhaps, he was preoccupied with seeking knowledge in the wrong kind of way – that is, through rationality rather than through experiential disclosures and unveilings of a spiritual nature that transcended reason’s capacity to grasp various dimensions of the nature of one’s relationship with Being that existed beneath the surface phenomena of sensory experience and logical thought. Furthermore, perhaps, because he never pursued knowledge in the foregoing manner – and, in fact, often tended to reject such ideas -- he prevented himself from becoming open to, or be receptive to, the fountain of love that was inherent in such knowledge, and, as a result, he might have missed out on learning how, among other things, to love his wife in a way that would have been consistent with the idea of doing unto her as he would have her do unto him.

The folk of tasawwuf (in the West, the term “Sufism” is often used) indicate there are, at least, nine stages of love that are inherent in the mystical path. Those stages are: (1) compatibility; (2) inclination; (3) fellowship; (4) passion; (5) friendship; (6) exclusive fellowship; (7) ardent affection; (8) enslavement, and (9) bewilderment.

Each of the foregoing stages involves a different kind of knowledge, understanding, and adab (spiritual etiquette). Moreover, different internal, spiritual faculties [such as the heart (which consists of different potentials such as the qalb, fo’ad, and so on), sirr (secret), kafi (more hidden) aqfah (mystery), and ruh (spirit) – as well as different combinations of the foregoing spiritual faculties] may serve as the locus through which a given stage of love is manifested and experienced.

The following is but one the ways that people of the mystical path give expression to the experiential flavor and orientation of one of the higher stages of love noted above:

“I [God] created human beings, and they were bound to Me, and they were coming to Me. When I showed them the world,

9/10ths of them became world-bound, and 1/10th remained with Me.

When I told them about Paradise, 9/10ths of those who had remained with Me desired Paradise and only 1/10th remained with Me.

When I poured My troubles and My pains upon those who stayed with Me, they cried for help, and 9/10ths left and 1/10th remained with Me.

And when I threatened those who remained with Me that I would heap upon them such troubles as would make the mountains crumble, they said: "As long as it comes from You, it is alright with us."

Clearly, the mansion of love is a house with many rooms. Moreover, each of those rooms would appear to have its own individual character.

Although Tolstoy indicates that love is infinite in nature and that one progresses along the path of love bit by bit, Tolstoy also often seems to give the impression that the stations of love are equally accessible to everyone and that everyone necessarily has the same capacity for being able to love God and other human beings.

However, the capacity of Jesus (peace be upon him) to love would seem to be substantially different from the capacity of many human beings to love. Moreover, the testimony of mystics such as Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) tends to suggest that the nature of one's love is deeply affected by the sort of knowledge that has been disclosed to an individual with respect to the nature of one's relationship with Being., and if this is the case, then, what is meant, for example, by the idea of doing unto others as one would have others do unto you might vary in accordance with one's knowledge and the stage of love that was associated with such knowledge, as well as, perhaps, vary in accordance with a person's spiritual capacity.

Tolstoy seemed to love God, his wife, and family in accordance with the level of knowledge and stage of love that might have characterized the nature of his relationship with Being at different junctures in his life. However, one might also contend – and, I believe Tolstoy might agree with this – that he could have, and should have, done better in the manner in which he went about trying to love them and, in fact, similar things could be said in conjunction with the manner in which most human beings go about pursuing the nature of their own relationship with Being.

We could have done better and we should have done better. Furthermore, in the divide between the two lies the tragedies of our lives.

There were constructive and problematic potentials inherent in Tolstoy's life ... as is the case in all of our lives. The choices he made concerning those potentials – some of which have been explored in the foregoing pages – and the choices we make in conjunction with the aforementioned potentials is what makes life a very human journey.

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