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## The End of Knowing in *War and Peace*

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The long essay that ends *War and Peace* is at once a critique of history as written prior to the novel and a defence of the novel's own narrative structure. Far from being the ruminations of cranky genius or the uninspired transcription of ideas better expressed by Tolstoy's philosophical superiors, this essay constitutes in its own right a remarkable exploration of the nature and limits of knowing. The main question at issue in this neglected part of the novel concerns the possibility of imposing order on the flux of becoming, of narrating the present, an inherently contradictory task opposing system and freedom, mediation and immediacy, rest and motion; this question reaches to the essence of narrative as the apprehension of occurrence, as the transmission of fluid motion into the fixed forms of language.

Tolstoy's argument unfolds in two distinctive stages. In the first seven chapters of the essay, the narrator is concerned both to state the object and purpose of historical narratives and to point out once more *how* modern historians have shot wide of the mark by preferring to "answer questions no one asks." In the final five chapters, the narrator reveals *why* historians have failed. He identifies the fundamental problem as one of *freedom* and turns subsequent discussion directly to metaphysics. Specifically, having already argued that the explanations upon which historians of various kinds have based their writing of history are unsatisfactory, Tolstoy goes on to trace this result to their belief in the reality of human freedom. In doing so, he develops his own treatment of this problem, the relation of reason to consciousness, that proves to be the summit of rational argument in the novel as well as the fullest exploration of the novel's narrative foundations.<sup>1</sup>

My intention in this article is to provide a careful interpretation of these arguments on their own merits.<sup>2</sup> Since this is a considerable task in itself, questions concerning the application of these arguments to the fictional text will not be addressed as fully as they deserve to be. Moreover, after a brief survey of the first seven chapters, I shall focus my interpretation primarily on the argument concerning freedom and necessity that is in fact the heart of the Second Part of the Epilogue. I do so because important aspects of the first seven chapters have been dealt with in detail elsewhere and because the discussion of the relation of freedom and necessity, a relation which Schelling considered the "mainspring of all striving for knowledge from the lowest to the highest,"<sup>3</sup> is indeed the crucial entry point to Tolstoy's conception of the nature of knowing.

### I The Problem of History

The first lines of the Second Part of the Epilogue restate the object and difficulty of historical writing with arresting simplicity: "The object of history is the life of peoples and of humanity. To capture directly and put into words—to describe—the life of humanity or even of a single people appears to be impossible." The narrator continues:

The ancient historians all employed one and the same method to describe and seize the apparently elusive—the life of a people. They described the activity of individuals who ruled a people, and this activity expressed for them the activity of the whole people.

To the questions: In what manner did individuals compel peoples to act as they wished and by what was the will of these individuals themselves guided? The ancients answered the first by acknowledging the will of a deity that subjected peoples to the will of a chosen man, and the second by acknowledging that the same deity guided the will of the chosen man to predestined ends.

For the ancients these questions were solved by belief in the direct participation of a deity in the affairs of mankind.<sup>4</sup>

Tolstoy maintains that human knowing is ineluctably mediate; the finite mind simply cannot grasp the whole of this life as it is in itself, but only as it appears to us in terms of a given relation to that whole, a mediating element that gives birth to secure knowledge. This mediation, then, is of utmost importance, the acquisition of knowledge depends on it, and that is why the narrator so quickly moves to discuss different types of mediation. According to him, the ancients write history through the prism of the chosen man who represents and guides his people to a divinely ordained goal. This prism is the mediation that seeks to reflect the whole and whose accuracy or truthfulness is underwritten by the assumption that the deity participates in human affairs.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Tolstoy's complaint about modern historians concerns their inability to find persuasive new grounds by which to underwrite and legitimate their narratives:

It would seem that having rejected the belief of the ancients in man's subjection to the deity and in a predetermined end towards which nations are led, modern history should study not the manifestations of power but the causes that give order to it. But modern history has not done this. Having in theory rejected the view held by the ancients, it still follows them in practice. (2E/I)

This is the crux of the arguments which absorb the narrator's attention until the end of chapter VII of the Second Part of the Epilogue. In a typically modern way, Tolstoy tears down the edifice of modern historiography because its *foundations* are inadequate. In this respect, he employs an incommensurability argument to show that none of the methods modern historians use to explain historical events can adequately explain why the event has come to pass. They all fail a deceptively simple test: "To find component forces equal to the composite or resultant force, the sum of the components must equal the resultant" (2E/II), for, as the narrator later remarks: "The only conception that can explain the movement of peoples is that of some force commensurate with the whole movement of the peoples" (2E/III). As a result of this

failure, modern historians resort to a murky concept of *power* to "fill in the gap," one with which Tolstoy has in fact carried on a polemical debate throughout the novel. He asks: How is it that one man can be claimed to have power over others?

So long as histories are written of separate individuals, whether Caesars, Alexanders, Luthers or Voltaires, and not a history of all, absolutely *all*, those who take part in an event, it is quite impossible to describe the movement of humanity without the conception of a force compelling men to direct their activity towards a certain end. And the only such conception known to historians is that of power. (2E/III)

The narrator devotes a sustained discussion to the subject of power and concludes, using a baldly verificationist argument, that power is a really existing phenomenon the explanation of which is insufficient, since attempts to explain power as a cause of what occurs end up in a tautological "circle of infinity." This circle is not necessarily a vicious one, however; it merely indicates that the search for a causal explanation of historical events is not the best way to grasp them or fails to grasp their essence. This is a wholly expected result, given that a key element of Tolstoy's approach to the problems of historical inquiry is to reject the traditional Aristotelian-scholastic notion of cause. We are no longer to ask "Why?" or "What for?" If the narrator claimed that the question of force was *the* crucial question of history, it is now obvious that looking for answers based on such a causal analysis is fruitless. This is so because there are simply too many causes to identify, thus making it impossible to identify an ultimate cause for an event.<sup>6</sup>

The first seven chapters of the Second Part of the Epilogue end inconclusively, revealing a grave metaphysical problem for which they provide no explicit answer. On the one hand, it is clear that to provide a historical narrative which explains *why* an event took place in the way it did is impossible without a grounding in a divine power, one not subject to time and space. On the other hand, it is equally clear that this divine power is no longer

accepted and that no successful substitute has emerged to take its place. This problematic is of course quintessentially modern in that it reveals the difficulties inherent in any attempt at explanation which avoids the issue of a ground or basis that transcends the terms of the explanation. If no basis or final point for such terms exists, one cannot help but come to that very "circle of infinity" that the narrator describes; ultimately all explanations become tautologies; they assert that a thing is because it is.

There are several important implications in this view which the subsequent arguments of the Second Part of the Epilogue bring out with greater clarity. In this sense, the first seven chapters act as a *prolegomenon* to Tolstoy's attempt to provide an account of the dynamic structure that explains the problem of grounding and the need for reliance not on identification of causes but on general laws that describe phenomena without reference to their origins or ultimate ends, rejecting a teleological view of the world in favour of a more mechanistic one.<sup>7</sup> Tolstoy introduces this structure by questioning the nature of freedom, while moving forward to the heart of his discussion in a typically layered manner. He first establishes that freedom and system are in contradiction and then locates the origin of this contradiction in the peculiarities of the relation between subject and object; finally, he generalizes this relation as one between two different kinds of knowing, consciousness and reason, thereby disclosing the central structure of the novel.

I intend to examine each of these layers in detail in the course of the discussions that follow. By doing so I hope to reveal that Tolstoy's thinking is rooted in an essentially Christian-Platonic metaphysics couched in the philosophical language Tolstoy seems to have adopted largely from Schopenhauer. For Tolstoy, man is an inescapably divided creature, at once free and unfree, with one foot in the infinite and the other firmly in the finite. Tolstoy addresses this circumstance through his own original conception of the productive relation between consciousness and reason in which freedom and consciousness, the openness of the present, are associated with man's inner life, while

reason is associated with closure and necessity, man's external or "hive" life [*roevaia zhizn'*].<sup>8</sup> But the core of Tolstoy's position is not in either of the polarities of infinite and finite; it lies in the dynamic relation between the two, in the very fact that man combines these apparently divided spheres in a sort of "inbetween," a liminal being that is neither god nor animal, but rather a sort of erotic *daimonion*,<sup>9</sup> a continuous dynamism that creates and destroys, that emerges and disappears just like the drops in the globe Pierre dreams: man is all struggle, and this struggle is history.<sup>10</sup>

## II

### The Problem of Freedom

#### Freedom

Freedom brings to light the most intractable problems of historical inquiry, but its presence remains unspoken. Near the beginning of chapter VIII of the Second Part of the Epilogue Tolstoy's narrator says:

The presence of the nonetheless unspoken question about freedom of the will is felt at every step of history.

All seriously thinking historians are involuntarily led to this question. All the contradictions and obscurities of history, and the false path taken by this science, are due solely to the lack of a solution to this question. (2E/1)

To clarify the parameters of the question, I shall examine the way in which freedom leads to the "contradictions and obscurities of history," the ineradicable incommensurability that undermines the writing of history.

#### *Freedom as lack of connection*

Tolstoy stresses that freedom of the will leads to "contradictions and obscurities" because it is a negative concept, defined as "freedom from" or a lack of connection. If history is characterized by lack of connection, then history is "accidental," a collection of chance, isolated happenings that

defies unification, having no intrinsic identity; it is an unsoundable chaos stripped of meaning. Freedom denies to history the very orderliness by virtue of which historians could integrate diverse "happenings" into meaningful narratives. Tolstoy comments:

If the will of every man were free, that is, if each man could act as he pleased, all history would be a series of disconnected accidents.

If even one man in a million once in a thousand years had the power to act freely, that is, as he chose, it is evident that this man's single free act in violation of the laws governing human action would destroy the possibility of the existence of any laws for the whole of humanity.

But if there is so much as a single law governing the actions of men, free will cannot exist, for man's will would be subject to that law.

In this contradiction lies the problem of freedom of the will... (2E/VII)

Tolstoy's conception of history expresses a form of "superessentialism," the proposition that absolutely all properties that can be spoken of a given entity are necessary to its identity, and, hence, entails that history only can be knowable as the seamless connection of *all* the "accidents" (which, of course, can no longer be referred to as such if they come together as of necessity)—every action finds itself implicated in a complex web of relations reflecting the narrator's contention that there "... undoubtedly exists a connection among all contemporaneously living beings..." (2E/II). For Tolstoy, knowledge of history is impossible without this level of connection, and laws are the only means by which the latter may be expressed in historical narrative. He does not accept the probable; laws must be absolute. For Tolstoy no action can ever be free in the sense of being free from, or outside the purview of such laws. Freedom of the will acts in opposition to this absolute coherence.

Tolstoy maintains that freedom challenges system, in this case a system of laws, and, ultimately, unity as well, for system is a unifying structure subsuming a multiplicity under one principle or hierarchy of principles. Freedom impedes this kind of cognition and, as such, freedom is a problem.

### *Origin of freedom*

The narrator then proceeds to explain that this problem arises because of the peculiar fact that human beings can observe themselves observing and that, in doing so, human beings have an impression that they are beyond determination as an object, that they are free. The origin of the ability to observe oneself remains mysterious, for this origin cannot go beyond itself to that which is greater and more original, because it is itself that which is forever greater and more original, perpetually retreating from determination.

The narrator distinctively articulates this interpretation of the origin of freedom only a few paragraphs into chapter VIII:

The question is that, looking at a person as an object of observation from whatever point of view—theological, historical, ethical or philosophical—we find a general law of necessity to which he, like all that exists, is subject. But looking at him from within ourselves, as at that of which we are conscious, we feel ourselves to be free. (2E/VIII)

When we observe one of ourselves as an object, we must assume that this object conforms to the rules which have been fashioned to give definition to that object as object, what Tolstoy means by the "law of necessity." Yet, this cannot hold when we observe one of ourselves as a subject. In this case, we consider the other as a subject like ourselves and can only think of the other as being free through this kind of "translation." This is why the narrator uses the verb *soznavat'*, "to recognize" or "to be aware of," instead of *nabliudat'*, "to observe," to describe the kind of recognition of the other as a subject which allows one to observe the other as a subject. That is, the other is not *observed* as another subject, since the narrator seems to limit the notion of observation to "external phenomena" [*vneshnie iavlenia*] or objects. The tortured locution "*iz sebia kak na to chto my soznaem*" emphasizes that the recognition of the other as a subject must be an identification *from within*.

Tolstoy thus draws an essential distinction between two aspects of grasping or perceiving a person, *from without as an object* and *from within as a subject*; in the first case, a person observed strictly as an object of a specific science is governed by the "law of necessity," in the second, that same person cannot be looked at otherwise than as free. The inner dimension of the subject therefore transcends objectification and is in this sense free. As such, it is the origin or ground of freedom called consciousness [*soznanie*].

### Consciousness

Consciousness is an awareness of mysterious immediacy. In the following analysis, I try to shed light on this mysterious immediacy by examining Tolstoy's initial attempt to provide a sort of "definition" of it (again in chapter VIII of the Second Part of the Epilogue). The narrator says that "...consciousness is a source of self-cognition completely separate from and independent of reason. Through reason a person observes himself; but he only knows himself through consciousness." The definition accords with the claim that consciousness is a means of describing an internal dimension of the subject. This can be gathered from the distinction between "to observe" and "to know." "To observe" [*nabliudat*] suggests an externalization or objectification of the subject in so far as the subject must give itself as an object to allow any observation. "To know" [*znat*], on the contrary, suggests another kind of knowing which cannot be easily described as a knowing of any object. In a revealing draft for this chapter Tolstoy writes that "[b]eing conscious of myself, I am free, representing myself (to myself), I am subject to laws" (PSS 16: 255). Here Tolstoy returns to the verb *soznavat* to describe the internal, subjective aspect and to the verb *predstavliat* to describe the external or "objective" dimension of knowing.

This antithesis harkens to the distinction between an inner or intelligible self which is free and an empirical self subject to laws that has its roots in Kantian philosophy. Tolstoy seems to have encountered the distinction in these terms through his reading of Schopenhauer. It is well-known that

Tolstoy started reading Schopenhauer in 1869 as he was working on the Second Part of the Epilogue to *War and Peace*. In a letter to Fet, dated May 10, 1869, Tolstoy writes:

What is the main reason why I am not afraid? Because that which I wrote, especially in the epilogue, is not invented by me, but wrested with effort from within. Another comfort is that Schopenhauer, approaching from another point of view, in his *Wille* says exactly the same thing as I do. (PSS 61: 217)

Boris Eikhenbaum points out that the drafts for the Second Part of the Epilogue provide ample evidence of the extensive influence of Schopenhauer and, in particular, of his famous prize essay, *On Freedom of the Will*. Reference to Schopenhauer in fact establishes a context in Kantian philosophy that clarifies the antithesis between "being conscious of" and "representing" as a tendentious variant of Kant's teaching about the divided nature of selfhood, that there is both an intelligible and phenomenal self.<sup>11</sup>

This distinction follows Kant's essential division of the sources which together constitute human knowledge, sensory intuition [*Anschauung*] and concepts [*Begriffe*], the latter constituted first and foremost by the table of categories or pure concepts. For Kant, knowledge can only result from a combination [*Synthesis*] of such intuitions and concepts derived in judgments of the understanding [*Verstand*]. This kind of knowledge [*Erkenntnis*], the only kind which Kant recognizes as such, is dependent on, and, hence, limited by sensory information received by a subject [*die Rezeptivität des Gemüts*]; it is *phenomenal* in so far as it is based on how things appear to us. Kant maintains that knowledge of a thing as it is "in itself" [*Ding an sich*] and *not* as it appears is noumenal and remains impossible for us.

Schopenhauer extends and rethinks this distinction in a very significant way by expressing it as one between the will and representation [*Vorstellung*]. The inner or noumenal nature of an object is will and as such is not knowable. But its external or phenomenal nature is knowable in the form of a representation in which a certain

objectification of the will [*Objektivierung des Willens*] emerges in conformity with the conditions for understanding of the subject; namely, time, space, and causality. By ascending to ever more complex and refined objectifications of the will through the activity of representing the world and itself to itself, the will comes to “know” itself.

In the essay on free will, Schopenhauer uses a different terminological configuration, distinguishing between self-consciousness [*Selbstbewußtsein*] and the consciousness of other things [*Bewußtsein anderer Dinge*], the former applying to the inner nature, the latter applying to the world outside (49). Schopenhauer indicates that self-consciousness is immediate [*unmittelbar*] whereas the consciousness of other things is the mediate knowledge of the outside world provided by representations [*Vorstellungen*]. Self-consciousness is nothing more than the consciousness of the will of its own self, and, since the will as it is in itself cannot be a representation, self-consciousness can only be unmediated.

Schopenhauer's adaptation of Kant and his particular terminology illuminates Tolstoy's use of the noun *soznanie* and the equivalent verb *soznivat'* as well as the verb *predstavliat'*. Each of these terms corresponds to a German equivalent used by Schopenhauer in distinguishing between the internal and external. *Soznanie* corresponds to the German word for self-consciousness, *Selbstbewußtsein* (or *bewußt sein* which Schopenhauer also uses to translate the Latin equivalent to *soznanie*, *conscientia*, in the prize essay). *Predstavlenie* is equivalent to the German word for representation, *Vorstellung*. This equivalence allows one to surmise that Tolstoy's narrator indeed does create a distinction between two kinds of knowledge of the self that incorporates or reflects Schopenhauer's own interpretation.

Tolstoy seems to be closer to Schopenhauer because self-consciousness in the sense of an immediate apperception of “oneself,” although originally a Kantian term,<sup>12</sup> is appropriated in a distinctive way by Schopenhauer. In the essay on free will, Schopenhauer writes: “...for self-consciousness is immediate. How ever that should be is our next question: What does self-consciousness

contain? Or: how does a person become aware of his own self? Answer: completely as a *willing being*” (50-51).<sup>13</sup> The narrator uses remarkably similar language in the Second Epilogue: “As a living being a person knows himself in no other way than as willing, that is, he is conscious of his own will.”

In an important draft version of Chapter VIII Tolstoy is rather more candid and refers directly to Schopenhauer in support of his own position (in the following translation I have retained the very uneven style of the original):

Schopenhauer, in my opinion, is the greatest thinker of the present century and the only direct heir of the great thinkers of modern philosophy, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Kant, having proved just as successfully as they, using the new tool of our century—the natural sciences [Der Wille in der Natur] in his essay on free will crowned by the Academy, the law of necessity, to which man is subject, in deciding the question [Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung and Grundprobleme der Ethik]. By a complicated path of reasoning he comes to recognition of the source of unmediated knowledge—the very same Ding an sich, which for Kant remained or was understood as pure reason, and the source of this knowledge he sees [that] in the unmediated consciousness of the will—Der Wille zum Leben which in essence is the very same as Kant's reason and Ding an sich—it is nothing else than unmediated consciousness, the very unmediated consciousness which these two great thinkers, through enormous and majestic labor, arrived at by way of thought but which in all its force and clarity lies in the soul of everyone, even the most crude person, the very same consciousness against which Schopenhauer in his Preis[s]chrift über die Freiheit des Willen[s] not infrequently takes up arms and to which he constantly returns. (PSS 16: 246)<sup>14</sup>

The significance of Tolstoy's closeness to Schopenhauer lies in the fact that consciousness as self-consciousness is not a transcendental or a priori unity as it might be in Kant (140b-142b [132B]) or thought thinking itself as it might be in Hegel. *Rather, consciousness is not at all a realm of reason or thought. It is instead a mysterious*

"sense" of immediacy whose exact character can only be rather difficult if not impossible to describe. This difficulty, of course, is not surprising since consciousness seems to relate to a "something," the will, which cannot be known as an object; to do so would indicate that it is "available" to mediation by reason as any other object. But as the narrator indicates, consciousness is a source of self-knowing not accessible to reason as it is in itself, in its immediacy.<sup>15</sup>

Consciousness "of the" will is then a highly problematic expression which can only be inaccurate. Consciousness is not "consciousness of" anything; in this sense, it is consciousness of nothing and is itself somehow a "nothing," an awareness that we cannot explain. This is its link with freedom of the will which is also a "nothing" to the extent it takes no specific phenomenal form, i.e., as it is in itself. Hence, consciousness "of" can only be a misleading phrase whose essential negation works against its own assertion. Consciousness is both "of" freedom and itself free.

### *The mystery of consciousness*

Consciousness "of" freedom is therefore a "locus" of unusual equivalencies which ever retreats from determination. When the narrator uses the verb "znat" to distinguish knowledge of the self as alive from knowledge of the self as an observed or object-self, he is asserting the possibility of a kind of knowledge to which reason has no access. What is more, the narrator asserts that this kind of knowledge is more fundamental than rational knowledge, which would be impossible without it. The narrator says that "[w]ithout consciousness of oneself no observation and no application of reason is conceivable." This assertion forms part of a crucial paragraph in Chapter VIII. Although I have already examined portions of this paragraph, it is worth citing in its entirety:

To understand, observe, and draw conclusions, a person must first be conscious of himself as a living being. As a living being a person knows himself in no other way than as willing, that is, he is conscious of his own will. His will, which constitutes the

essence of his life, a person is conscious of, and cannot be conscious of, other than as free.

Since one cannot be conscious of oneself other than as free, it follows that freedom is *unavoidable*. Surely this is a peculiar conclusion. Yet, it is only a further affirmation of the difference between observing an object from without as object and from within as subject. The latter, of course, is not observation in the sense of a representation of the self as an object at all, but as the problematic consciousness of oneself.

The narrator proceeds to claim that, no matter how convincing the proof is that the will directs itself according to one and the same law, a person cannot otherwise [*ne mozhët inache*] understand this same direction of his will than as a limitation [*ogranichenie*]. Since only what is free may be limited, the narrator concludes that a person imagines his will to be limited only because he is conscious of it as free.

The remaining examples culminate in a rhetorically charged paragraph:

But having learned with certainty that his will is subject to laws, he does not and cannot believe it.

However often experiment and reasoning may show a man that under the same conditions and with the same character he will do the same thing as before, yet when, under the same conditions and with the same character, he approaches for the thousandth time an action that always ends in the same way, he feels as certainly convinced as before the experiment that he can act as he pleases. Every man, savage or sage, however incontestably reason and experiment may prove to him that it is impossible to imagine two different courses of action in precisely the same conditions, feels that without this irrational conception (which constitutes the essence of freedom) he cannot imagine life. He feels that, however impossible it may be, it is so, for without the conception of freedom not only would he be unable to understand life, but he would be unable to live for a single moment.

...  
A man having no freedom cannot be conceived of except as deprived of life.

In all of the examples evidence that the will is not free proves to carry no weight whatsoever. The dual character of any particular action stands out. If one looks at an action as a nexus of causes or as subject to laws, i.e., as rational, it seems determinate and necessary. If one looks at the same action as produced from within oneself, then one cannot help but look at this action as the product of free will, since one cannot consider oneself other than as free. This duality seems to reside ultimately in the inability of the subject completely to determine itself, for this kind of determination can only mean one thing: death. And how can a subject possibly know of its own death?

### III

#### The Relation of Reason and Consciousness

In dealing with history, Tolstoy claims that no resolution of this relation of contradictories, between freedom and reason, is required, since history "concerns not the very essence of the will of man, but representation of the appearance of this will in the past and under known conditions." The narrator restates this view a few lines further in the text: "[h]istory has as its object not the will of man itself, but our representation of it." His repeated use of the word "representation" [*predstavlenie*] is clear confirmation of the Kantian nature of the relation, since it is not the will in itself or as free which can be the object of history, but rather only a representation of it governed by the laws of reason. This still leaves matters open as to what a representation can be in the present context.

Tolstoy explains what he understands by this notion of representation in Chapter X of the Second Part of the Epilogue. In doing so, he begins to sketch out the outlines of a relation between freedom and reason which is much less dependent on Kantian thought as interpreted by Schopenhauer. To begin this discussion the narrator makes an important point:

And so the insoluble mystery concerning the unity of the two contradictories, free will and necessity,

does not exist for history, as it does for theology, ethics, and philosophy. History examines a representation of man's life in which the unity of these two contradictories has already been achieved.

The narrator justifies a refusal to answer the question about the origin of the relation of freedom and necessity. This justification leaves a most important question unanswered, the very question which the preceding interpretation of freedom seems to raise; namely, why is there any relation between freedom and reason at all? This question will remain unanswered, although an answer has been lurking within the novel all along; we cannot know why there is such a relation because that knowledge is vouchsafed to God—the relation is the mark of finitude, the lack that compels us to reason as a way to compensate for the deficiencies in our intuitive knowledge of the world.

For the moment, however, it will suffice to examine how the narrator describes the unity of freedom and reason in history. The narrator begins this description by asserting that every action is a "product" [*proizvedenie*] of freedom and reason. This is so because knowledge is inescapably mediate. One learns about an event only by learning about the conditions in which it took place, not as a thing in itself or through immediate intuition of some kind but through certain mediations.

#### *The three grounds of representation*

The narrator calls these mediations "foundations" or "grounds" [*osnovania*] which underlie and make possible any representation about freedom and reason. They are three: (i) the relation of someone who has completed an action to the external world; (ii) the relation to time; and (iii) the relation to the causes which produced the event (2E/X). Each of the grounds is a structure allowing for a variation in which greater definition of the basic category tends to necessity, i.e., the laws of reason, while the opposite tends to freedom.

Each of the three grounds establishes a *network of connections*. Their guiding function is twofold: to join together diverse elements into a whole and to provide a means of constructing



unities. Without them no notion of calculus would be possible—they constitute the basic building blocks of physical knowledge; that Tolstoy takes this approach to historical narrative, that his sense of a more accurate and comprehensive form of mediation flows from careful attention to the basic relations which determine physical behaviour, confirms his essentially modern attitude, the leaning towards a mathematically-modelled solution to the problems of historical narrative, akin to the calculus of history he mentions in Book III of the novel. Moreover, it is of the utmost importance to grasp the notion of a dynamic relation that Tolstoy brings to the fore with his analysis of these three grounding structures. This relation is a variant of the dynamic movement that culminates in the relation of consciousness to reason; it is in fact Tolstoy's way of introducing the limitations that reason cannot overcome, thereby ensuring that the latter relation will be forever dynamic and open, a structuring principle whose efficacy in the natural world is simply assumed.<sup>16</sup>

### *The fundamental ground*

The foregoing grounds both permit *and* limit knowledge; such limitation is in fact the condition of freedom's possibility. In this paradox we see the basic outlines of the dynamic relation between consciousness and reason which Tolstoy fully describes at the end of Chapter X of the Second Part of the Epilogue. In this pivotal chapter, Tolstoy brings together diverse strands of argument about freedom and necessitating reason within a basic relation between consciousness and reason:

Reason expresses the laws of necessity. Consciousness expresses the essence of freedom.

Freedom not limited by anything is the essence of life in human consciousness. Necessity without content is reason in its three forms.

Freedom is the thing examined. Necessity is what examines. Freedom is the content. Necessity is the form.

Only by separating the two forms of cognition, related to one another as form to content, do we get the mutually exclusive and separately incomprehensible concepts of freedom and necessity.

Only by uniting them do we get a clear conception of human life.

Aside from these two concepts which mutually define each other in their own unity, as form with content, no representation of life is possible.

All that we know of human life is but a certain relation of freedom to necessity, that is, of consciousness to the laws of reason.

These are the crucial culminating determinations of the Second Part of the Epilogue and, indeed, the entire progression of comments on history by the narrator. They reveal a fundamental structure which grounds the preceding structures by bringing them together in a unity. This unity, of course, is the relation of consciousness to reason that the narrator describes in a striking way as a relation of content to form. This fundamental qualification of the relation of consciousness to reason is difficult to grasp. For, how is it that consciousness of freedom or consciousness of freedom of the will, what we have previously understood as a sort of immediacy, can serve as "content" to reason? If one interprets this relation within the framework of Kant, it is all too easy to assimilate it to that of sensory intuition and the concepts of the understanding. If one interprets this relation within the framework of Schopenhauer, it is equally easy to assimilate it to the relation of the will to reason. Neither of these interpretations provides an entirely accurate account of what the narrator means to say or *not* to say.

### *Nothingness and plenitude*

Consciousness is consciousness "of" freedom and as such pure immediacy; this means in turn that it can be literally nothing for reason except a border concept, something defined by what it is not. Freedom is therefore not only a border concept, but a root of negation, since freedom can only be defined as a not-x. This is what the narrator seeks to bring out in the relation of freedom to reason; that freedom is for reason a *not*, a "thing" only in so far as this "thing" is defined by its not being any "thing," by its not lending itself to determination. The narrator further maintains that freedom is an

ineluctable not, that no matter how one tries to determine something that determination can never be complete. As a result, the issue of what freedom is cannot arise other than as what freedom is not. Freedom as it is in itself, namely, freedom defined in a positive manner must be impossible, since to define freedom is to eliminate it. Thus, freedom is always only understood as a relative *not*—as a defined *not*. Without definition, one cannot begin even to speak of freedom.

This reasoning reveals the basic problem of consciousness of freedom. If consciousness, like freedom, only exists (“is”) in so far as it is a defined *not*, whence this defined *not*? For definition is a limitation of something greater. Hence, for example, if freedom is a defined *not* it must presuppose a “greater freedom,” as it were, which exceeds any definition and, therefore, must be absolute. But an absolute freedom cannot be known at all. It can only be a sort of *nihil absolutum* which is absolute negation or “pure nothingness.” If consciousness were also this “pure nothingness,” there would be no way to connect it to reason at all. But the fact that it can be conceived as “pure nothingness” already presupposes such a connection and, in doing so, must pose the most fundamental question of the possibility of this connection in the first place.

While this question sheds light on the mystery of the connection of consciousness to reason, it does not clarify the characterization of this connection as one between content and form. How can reason recognize consciousness as content at all, if consciousness is a kind of nothingness? Here the structure of the narrator’s argument starts to collapse on its own. There must be a hidden assumption or some means by which the connection of consciousness to reason can be explained. If consciousness is a “pure nothingness” it can never submit to reason. Yet, how is it that one can speak of a “pure nothingness”?

Consciousness cannot be “pure nothingness” but must be *plenitude*. It is “nothingness” only in the sense that it can be no particular thing, but it cannot be a “pure nothingness,” for it is not nothing at all. On the one hand, “nothingness” describes a plenitude which can only ever exceed definition;

it is like the infinite in that it must always be greater than any particular representation of it. On the other hand, a “nothingness” which may be considered “pure” literally cannot *be* and, as such, can neither be thought nor be open to any kind of relation. Consciousness, then, is an infinite “plenitude”—it is the *immediate intuition* of life. Yet, we cannot be satisfied with the immediate intuition of life. We require reason to permit knowledge of life—we are finite. That we are finite begs the question of the possibility of the infinite. Whence the notion of the infinite? Whence the lack which we seek to eliminate? It is in this very structure, where reason co-exists with the immediate intuition of a plenitude to which reason can only have access by transforming the plenitude into something finite—a thing which is incomparably *less* than the plenitude to which it owes the very possibility of its existence.

Hence, at one moment, we are both aware of that plenitude and our inability to grasp it. The term “grasp” is useful in this regard. It clarifies the essence of the difficulty which lies in the fact that the attempt to grasp the infinite by reason is an endless labour, for reason can only grasp any thing by making it finite—in attempting to grasp the infinite reason can only lose it and find itself again. This is the iron truth of finitude; the finite mind cannot grasp the infinite and only returns to itself in attempting to do so; the opposition between reason and consciousness, finite and infinite, cannot be overcome, it is in the broadest sense always already there.

#### IV

#### The Problem of Force Revisited

Tolstoy’s placement of an elementary opposition at the heart of human knowing suggests that no final cause or ultimate harmony will ever be available to historians. While this view may seem disquieting, it also points to a way of grasping the force that makes history, that is history. In this respect, the real root of Tolstoy’s exploration of history in *War and Peace* comes to the fore as an overriding concern to understand why history emerges at

all—what is the motive force of history or, indeed, why is there history? And, for Tolstoy, desire is this motive force; namely, the desire to overcome the contradiction that Tolstoy identifies in his relating of reason to consciousness, a relation that is perpetually dynamic, that is homologous to the relations between mediacy and immediacy, thought and being, word and perception. Hence, history in the broadest sense is a narrative of desire that results from this contradiction, from not being able to find a resolution to the contradiction, a stable or final ground for human action. History is the record of this struggle, and *War and Peace* is a grand attempt to narrate the varieties of struggle that yields neither to Greek conceptions of temporal circularity, nor to providential eschatology, nor to Hegelian and Marxist narratives of alienation, whereby struggle comes to an end in a necessary progression of steps towards the absolute, whether that be absolute knowing or disappearance of the state in a new economy of satisfaction.

While Tolstoy's conception of history surely adopts a great deal from Schopenhauer, it has equally significant affinities with many currents in both late Enlightenment and early Romantic thought.<sup>17</sup> In the final account, however, Tolstoy's conception of history seems closest to Rousseau in its tragic dimension (and, in particular, to the latter's discussion of the beginnings of history in the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*), while coming closer to Schelling in stressing the inherently creative nature of the fundamental contradiction in the relation of freedom and necessity; that this contradiction can be resolved only through an ever varying synthesis that is the essence of narrative representation—here contradiction gives rise to action, an attempt to resolve contradiction, that is the origin of narrative.<sup>18</sup> What ultimately seems most innovative about Tolstoy's approach is not only that he conceives of the nature of this contradiction in an unusually open way, being quite unwilling to define his main terms, reason or consciousness, with any great precision, but also that he combines both tragic and creative or comic attitudes to the contradiction in the narrative possibilities that emerge from it. Indeed, Tolstoyan holism is marked by the acceptance of both these

differing attitudes to contradiction, to what amounts to the impossibility of satisfying desire, as necessary counterparts—despair and excitement over the impossibility of fulfilment of desire move hand in hand. This is why Tolstoy appears to affirm the importance of discovering the laws of history while also adding that to do so would eliminate any possibility of life. The identification of life with desire and struggle is unmistakable, and one might be inclined to place Tolstoy in a more modern context of striving within a vacuum. But Tolstoy's position remains perplexing and ambivalent; he at once tends to affirm the existence of an overarching order, suggesting that freedom is illusory, while asserting the precariousness of this illusion, its tendency to dissipate in the lived moment due to the difficulty of grasping that order.<sup>19</sup> Tolstoy derives at least two general attitudes from these assumptions, one of frustration and one of elation at limitation, one tragic, one comic.

These attitudes are sounded in a variety of narrative patterns and, in a striking way, in those patterns that connect and distinguish the lives of the novel's two main heroes, Prince Andrei and Pierre Bezukhov. Both of these characters display a desire to know, to master their destinies—they attempt to give definitive form to immediacy, that being the essence of action, of the will to act. But their responses to the inevitability of failure are very different. Prince Andrei cannot accept failure, he cannot reconcile his striving with failure, and at Borodino he ultimately turns his back on the dynamic of attempt and failure that characterizes the desire to resolve contradiction. Pierre Bezukhov seems to find peace as Prince Andrei cannot, but revolts against that peace—at the very end of the novel, Pierre tacitly rejects the passivity he learned from Platon Karataev to take an active role in what will become the Decembrist uprising. In either case, however, the narrative is nothing else than the record of struggle, of a continuous expansion toward the infinite and contraction toward the finite; an essential rhythm that cannot be overcome—every end is at once an end and a beginning, itself and its other.<sup>20</sup>

Tolstoy's conception of the centrality of contradiction is remarkable in that narrative becomes

the expression of a resolution to the contradiction, a point of view reflected in the immense network of narrative possibilities offered in *War and Peace*. Narrative triumphs over exclusively rational discourse because narrative combines the warring elements of contradiction in a new, synthetic whole, even if that whole's integrity must in fact be precarious. Here, in Tolstoy, one finds an extremely audacious assertion of the sovereign power of the artist as *cosmotheurgos* or world-creator, since every narrative, as an opening up of time and space, is in the broadest sense the creation of a world.<sup>21</sup> This assertion of world-creation is inherently erotic, a response to elemental discontinuity, the divided nature of human being represented by the central contradiction of reason and consciousness, and it raises radical questions about the authority of reason, whether reason is sovereign or not, whether the artist writes in accordance with a defined notion of rationality or, in effect, defines rationality through the medium of narrative.

### Notes

1. Tolstoy writes candidly in a draft fragment for the Second Part of the Epilogue:

I started to write a book about the past. While describing this past, I found not only that it was unknown, but that it was unknown and described completely as the reverse of what was. And unwittingly I begin to feel the need to prove what I said and to express the views on whose basis I was writing. I am told that it might have been better not to express them.

Moreover, as a justification, I can say that, if there had been none of these reflections, there would also have been no descriptions. (PSS 16: 241)

2. The critical reception of Tolstoy's essay has been very mixed. The dominant reaction of Tolstoy's contemporaries (such as Turgenev) was dismissive. This initial reaction retains a seminal influence as does the well-worn claim that Tolstoy was an ample artist and meagre thinker. But in the absence of any full-length interpretation of the Second Part of the Epilogue as a philosophical treatise (Boris Eikhbaum provides the fullest account of the immediate intellectual background), this claim must remain open to question. While many of the ideas outlined in the early parts of

the essay have occasioned critical debate and have been treated with particular skill by Eikhbaum, Berlin, Wasiolek and Morson, the philosophical merit and broader intellectual filiations of Tolstoy's thinking have generally received far less sustained attention. See Wasiolek 112-128, Eikhbaum 1928: 2/2/317-385, Berlin, Debreczeny, Morson (*passim*), and the important discussions of Tolstoy's concern with ways of knowing in Bocharov 34-44, Gustafson 217-233 and Orwin 99-140. Also see Knowles for an overview of nineteenth-century commentary (especially Kareev and Leontiev).

3. Schelling 1987: 221. Schelling continues: "Without the contradiction of necessity and freedom not only philosophy but every nobler ambition of the spirit (*Geist*) would sink to that death which is peculiar to those sciences in which the contradiction serves no function."

4. Tolstoy *SS* 7: 331. This edition prints the text of the novel edited by E. E. Zaidenshnur who conducted an exhaustive examination of published editions and manuscript variants in an effort to eliminate the many problems in the text. All translations are based on two important translations of the novel, one by Aylmer and Louise Maude, the other by Ann Dunnigan, which I have not hesitated to modify where necessary for the sake of greater accuracy and literalness. The locations of quotations are given by the relevant Book, Part and Chapter to facilitate reference for those using other editions of the novel. Books and Chapters are designated by Roman numerals, Parts by Arabic numerals.

5. See, especially, the opening chapter of Part 2 of Book IV.

6. This argument comes from Aristotle and concerns the problem of an infinite regress. Two primary claims about what constitutes knowledge form the basis of the argument. First, knowledge must be of causes; it does not arise from bare assertion of the existence of a thing (*to hoti*, "the that") but must also provide an account of the causes or reasons why (*to dihoti*, "the because") that thing is or came to be as such. Second, knowledge must be complete or of a *whole*; it must include all the causes of a thing, and it must not be possible to add any causes. See *Posterior Analytics* 2: 5 [72b7-16], 2: 33 [83b5-9], and 2: 40 [86a3-10]; *Metaphysics* 994b 16-27. (Where different, the preceding page numbers refer first to the editions in the *Works cited* and then to the pagination of the Bekker edition used in most

modern editions of Aristotle's works). In his critique of traditional historical writing, Tolstoy rejects this Aristotelian model of knowledge (upon which historians have typically relied in fashioning their narratives) in favour of a mechanistic model where the relations among the phenomena are of prime significance and not their causal origins.

7. The preference for laws over occult causes and their inherent teleology is a typically modern gesture with origins in Descartes' mathematization and mechanization of nature. See Cassirer 3-45 and Heidegger 50-83 for an excellent treatment of this fundamental change. Also see the section "The three grounds of representation."

8. Tolstoy uses the term "hive life" in the first chapter of Book III.

9. *To daimonion* is the Greek term that Socrates reports Diotima using to describe the half-state of human striving or *eros* in the *Symposium* (2: 193 [202d11-14]). The preceding page numbers refer first to the edition in the *Works cited* and then to the pagination of the Stephanus edition used in most modern editions of Plato's works.

10. Tolstoy wrote about Dostoevsky that the latter was "all struggle" and that "one cannot place on a pedestal for the instruction of posterity" such a man (PSS 63: 142). There seems to be no discrepancy between this view and those Tolstoy advances in the Second Part of the Epilogue. The ideal characters in the novel like Platon Karataev are not all struggle; it is precisely his lack of struggle, his inner harmony that distinguishes Platon. See Jackson 112-113.

11. See Eikhenbaum 1974: 93-101. Also see Orwin 150. Orwin suggests more aggressively that Tolstoy simply borrowed the "argument on the relationship of determinism and freedom of the will in the second epilogue." While this latter position cannot be denied, evidence that Tolstoy adapted the argument in telling ways must be given due weight as well.

12. Immanuel Kant 155a-156a [A107], 170a-171a [A117], 140b-142b [B132]. Here I use the pagination of Schmidt's useful German edition followed by the pagination of the original first (A) and Second (B) editions that has become the standard for references to the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

13. My translation. Schopenhauer's language reflects the impact of Schelling's essay on free will where Schelling asserts that "Willing is original being." See Schelling 1987: 231.

14. This important passage is also quoted by Harry Walsh who recognized the barely digested presence of Schopenhauer in the Second Part of the Epilogue. See Walsh 573-74. For a more general account of Schopenhauer's influence in Russia, see McLaughlin 15-45.

15. Slavoj Žižek sharply criticizes this kind of account of consciousness, which he calls the "critique of the reflective model of consciousness," and his comments are worth consulting, if only as a worthwhile counterweight to Tolstoy's position. See Žižek 50-52.

16. See Cassirer 3-25; Kojève 25-46.

17. See Crocker 3-35. Here one can perceive the seminal influence of the great debates among the eighteenth-century *philosophes* concerning rival conceptions of man either as being merely another "part" of an indifferent, non-teleological nature or as having a special place in nature. Tolstoy's place in this debate is rather more complex than it might appear at first glance and, hence, cannot be examined closely or adequately here; rather, the many as yet unexplored filiations of Tolstoy's thought with his predecessors merit in their own right an independent study.

18. Rousseau 1992: 43-44. Schelling provides a useful formulation from his "middle period" applicable to the arguments I have explored:

We grasp that the first existence is the contradiction itself and, inversely, that the first actuality can only exist in contradiction. All life must pass through the fire of contradiction. Contradiction is the engine of life and its innermost essence. From this it follows that, as an old book says, all deeds under the sun are full of trouble and everything languishes in toil, yet does not become tired, and all forces incessantly struggle against each other. Were there only unity and everything were in peace, then, truly nothing would want to stir itself and everything would sink into listlessness. Now everything ardently strives to get out of unrest to attain rest.

See Schelling 2000: 90 (translation modified).

19. This point of view is certainly not unique to Tolstoy and reflects some of the central tensions in Enlightenment thinking about freedom and determinism. Diderot, for one, expresses very similar views in *Jacques the Fatalist*. See Crocker 155. Also see Gustafson 264-27. But it is hardly surprising that, once again, Rousseau's presence is probably a decisive one. See Rousseau 1997: 561 and Rousseau 1979: 272-274. Also see Orwin 102.

20. This terminology is derived from Schelling who uses the Goethian analogy of diastole and systole broadly in the 1815 draft of his *Ages of the World* to describe the movement of expansion and contraction underlying the essentially contrapuntal structure, the web of oppositions, that makes up the whole. See Schelling 2000: 21. Patricia Carden identifies a similar movement relating more specifically to the self or subject with what she calls (using terms from Isaiah Berlin), "expressivity."

21. Frank 155-174.

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