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Rethinking the Role of Religious Experience in Tolstoi's Thought

The term religious experience can be understood in several ways. In its familiar connotation, it is associated with the realization and performance of various religious and spiritual obligations, including following scriptures, doing one's duty, and living one's life in an enlightened way (Rankin, 2008, pp. 5-10). The Buddhist practice of Mahakaruna (universal compassion), the Hindu idea of Karmic causation, and the Christian respect for the Ten Commandments can be regarded as the primary manifestation of religious experience in the above sense (Tolstoi, 1987b/1902, pp. 119-121). But there is another way to understand religious experience. On this alternative view, a religious experience is said to be synonymous with the knowledge of the deepest secrets of human life and existence (Smart, 1996, pp. 6-10). In its most profound sense religious experience turns out to be the ultimate knowledge of all ultimate truths and is attributed to the greatest religious leaders of all times, including seers, mystics, saints, and other spiritual perfects, who are said to be in possession of some genuine insights on the nature of Ultimate Truth, Reality and Being (Proudfoot, 1985, pp. 179-189). Irrespective of their internal religious differences, both these views exercise significant impact on Tolstoi's religious and moral thought (Tolstoi, 1987b, pp. 92-93).

Accordingly, my purpose in this paper is to examine the precise role of religious experience in Tolstoi's thought. First, I shall argue that Tolstoi understanding of religious experience is influenced considerably by his critique of conventional notions of

religion. All conventional notions of religion, he argues, betray a narrow belief system, superstitions and intellectual bias, and are susceptible to being used as a justification for various religious and social anomalies. Secondly, I shall show that universal brotherhood and non-violence are essential constituents of Tolstoi's conception of religion and his idea of religious experience. Tolstoi reminds us consistently that our religious experiences must help us relate with the universe in a meaningful way, by cultivating our love and compassion towards other human beings. Finally, I shall establish that Tolstoi understands religious experience in a very unique and spiritual sense. He believes that an individual's religious experiences, in conjunction with her reason and knowledge, can serve as a holy ground for her religion and faith. I shall also point out here that for Tolstoi religious experiences do not require any special religious or moral training and that they can be acquired simply by the force of one's faith.

I.

The very notion of a religious experience in Tolstoi thought seems to have at least two possible implications: 1) an experiential process that an individual goes through during her spiritual encounters, and 2) the existence of some independent spiritual entity or power. In the common religious parlance, the occurrence of such experiences is called revelation and the entity associated with it God. Tolstoi seems to agree with the prevalent religious view of his time that an individual's religious experience must disclose the nature of divine truth or God and the Creative force running through human life and universe (Tolstoi, 1987b, p. 88). Against the same view, he also warns that revelation if understood dogmatically cannot facilitate knowledge of the Ultimate Being or God (Tolstoi, 1987b, pp. 90-91). To understand Tolstoi's above reservations on the spiritual limits of the common conceptions of revelations and religious experiences associated with them, we must attend to his critiques of traditional understanding of religions in the first place.

In his work *Religion and Morality*, Tolstoi discusses three different meanings associated with the term religion and finds each of them equally troublesome and problematic (Tolstoi, 1987c/1893, pp. 131-137). The first meaning of religion, he claims, is well known. It considers religion as revelation made by God to man and proclaims that such revelations disclose the attributes of a loving God to His faithful disciples. This meaning of religion is common to all the monotheistic religions that believe in a personal God and His spiritual supremacy in the material world. Thus we learn in the *Bible* and *Koran* that there was nothing in the beginning and that God created everything. Likewise in the *Bhagvadgita*, we find lord Krishna insisting over and over that the phenomenal world is transitory and that it cannot survive the demands of eternity (Easwaran, 2007/1985, pp. 42-43). According to Krisha, only an individual's supreme self would persist through time and change, and that ultimate spiritual freedom can be acquired through an unconditional belief in God (Easwaran, 2007, pp. 111-114). All the religious texts mentioned above are filled with instances when an individual dedicates herself completely to God, and realizes God through the power of her belief in Him. Tolstoi does not deny that one can attain the highest religious truths through the strength of one's beliefs, but warns against the derivative effects of uncritical beliefs, which can easily fuel superstition and dogmatism in the minds of their followers.

This brings us to the second meaning of religion. According to Tolstoi, the second meaning is construed in terms of superstitions. Religion is now seen as a superstitious collection of fictitious facts, having no proper foundation in reality or experience (Tolstoi, 1987c, pp. 131-132). It is argued now that there is no reason to believe in the existence of God or any other unseen spiritual and religious power. Moreover when we look at the empirical constitution of the world, all evidence is said to point in the opposite direction of God. Science suggests, for instance, that the world is a product of complex material evolution and that it has its locus in matter itself, and not in a spiritual consciousness as assumed religiously (Tolstoi, 1987c, p. 138). Furthermore, the element of human consciousness, which is so often thought as a

special spiritual gift of God to humans, is nothing more than a sophisticated product of evolutionary process. It must be pointed out though that the scientific view, which characterizes religion is a superstition, is no less superstitious. The scientific assessment of religious truths in terms of superstitions appears to be in the violation of the scientific method. Indeed the scientific method is said to rely upon verification as the foundation of its truth claims, and to take particulars, not universals, as the foundation of its knowledge. More strongly, scientific knowledge can never quite explicate the most original conditions of all possible existence, as that task falls beyond the limits of scientific verification and in the realm of religion and ontology (Jaspers, 1953/1949, pp. 85-93). That said, science has an appeal and shapes the perception of many who consider religion as superstition of top order.

The third meaning is much more complex than the previous two. It describes religion as a code of propositions devised by intelligent people to control the passions of masses. On the face of it, there seems some truth to this critique of religion. In the past and even in the present times, intellectual elites often use religion as a tool to advance their interests and control the behavior of the public at large. Religious people, Tolstoi reminds us, are simple and uncomplicated; and for this very reason, they also remain susceptible to manipulation and cunning (Tolstoi, 1987a/1879, pp. 58-59). Moreover, in the past many evil-minded people have abused the simplicity of religious people. It is in this sense that Marx critiqued religion as the opium of the masses.

None of these three meanings of religion appeal to Tolstoi. He writes: "In the first definition an understanding of religion is replaced by the faith of the person making the definition. In the second instance it is replaced by other people's belief in what they consider to be religion. In the third it is replaced by a belief in something that people are given and told as religion" (Tolstoi, 1987c, p. 132). Tolstoi's critique of the second and third meaning of religion appears to be well founded. He is right in suggesting that the second meaning of religion is expounded by the people who themselves are not the practitioners of the discussed faith, and who consequently find the faith in question irrational and

dogmatic on extraneous grounds. An honest evaluation of someone's religious faith requires a refined spiritual consciousness, marked with sympathy and affection for others, not with suspicion or contempt. Without such a consciousness, one cannot truly grasp the contours of other's religious faith, sacrament and ceremony. Moreover, the third meaning of religion turns out equally worrisome as well. It views religion from the vantage point of intellectuals and social elites who have their own selfish agenda and who want to use religion to serve their own particular interests. So the third meaning of religion, like the first two, fails to capture the essence of a true religion.

Tolstoi's critique of the first meaning of religion requires a clarification. In the first meaning, an understanding of religion is said to be substituted by the faith of the person making the definition. But what can be possibly wrong with this understanding of religion as a personal faith? In contemporary times people often treat religion as an issue of private concern, dealing with the personal aspects of an individual's life. It is considered as a hallmark of a civilized society to let its members believe in what they want to believe in as long as their beliefs are not crazy, bereft of reason and harmful to others. To understand the full import of Tolstoi's critique in this context, we need to go beyond the virtues of modern individualism and subjectivism associated with it, and consider religion as a common metaphysical and social experience: "Religion is the relationship man establishes between himself and the infinite, never ending universe, or its origin and first cause" (Tolstoi, 1987c, p.142).

Thus for Tolstoi true meaning of religion can neither be captured in terms of subjective and personal beliefs of the believer nor social superstitions and control of the masses. The essence of religion resides in its ability to disclose the deepest secrets of the universe and answering the most fundamental questions regarding an individual's existence: Why do I exist? What is the nature of my life? What is death? What kind of relationship I share with the universe that surrounds me? These questions cross our minds at point or another and can be answered satisfactorily by religion only (Tolstoi, 1987a, p.61). Needless to say that the

founders of all religions have struggled with these questions, and their efforts have been directed to finding a lasting answer to human condition (Tolstoi, 1987b, pp. 119-120). In this sense, all religions share in the same curious spirit, same starting point, same longing, and same desire to unravel what lies beneath the known and what is not open to the known modes of human perception.

Tolstoi insists that there are only two kinds basic attitudes that an individual can have towards her existence in particular and the world in general. These are personal and Christian attitudes. Tolstoi construes personal attitude in a broad sense, and includes the welfare of family, community and country within it. In other words, for him, personal attitude captures not simply those things that are personal and narrow, but even the priorities that are normally considered broad, ethical and socially significant — for instance, public welfare. So the limitations of personal attitudes do not reside in their reference points. They are located in the narrowness of motivations guiding them. An attitude remains personal as long as the motivation that propels it is material and worldly, lacking a solid spiritual and religious foundation. Thus all personal attitudes suffer form same inherent weaknesses. They are inspired by the finite world and remain valid in the realm of finite only. They cannot connect us with the infinite or the ultimate truth. It seems obvious now that construction of the finite as infinite is also one of the most common mistakes of the earlier three meanings of religion.

The Christian attitude on the other hand consists in seeing the world through the eyes of its Creator. This attitude demonstrates an unconditional and loving attitude not only towards God but also towards His creation (Smart, 1996, p. 359). It reminds us of the purpose of creation and the Creator behind it, and makes us think about the nature of our own existence and spiritual obligations associated with it (Tolstoi, 1987a, p. 65). With Christian attitude, I come to realize that as much as I appear to be a separate-individual with my own body and mind, I am also a spiritual person with divine attributes. This realization of the divine nature of my life and others around me forces me to rethink my life,

purpose and projects in this world. The goals of self-satisfaction, personal gains, welfare of my family and community that seemed to inform my priorities and dominate my mind before lose their impact now. I do not find them persuasive anymore. On the contrary, I find them raw and limiting. They appear to posit arbitrary divisions in my, otherwise, interconnected spiritual being. In addition, this division minimizes the thread of my overall existential potential. Indeed the realization of the divine purpose, grasping of the Christian attitude, and development of fellowship with other human beings constitutes the crux of religious experience in Tolstoi's religious thought (Tolstoi, 1987b, p. 91).

The occurrence of a religious experience is bound to place some obligatory demands on the spiritual agent. These obligations can be metaphorical or Christian, or both. A metaphorical obligation can be defined as a religious obligation that has minimum practical significance. It is essentially nominal yet remains a constitutive part of the religious faith to which it belongs. For instance, this obligation can find expression in an individual's perception of the world i. e. her outlook on the world or her existential status in the world. A Christian obligation on the other hand requires concrete measures on the part of the individual. It tells me that as a religious person I must carry out the requirements of my faith. I must exhibit benevolent attitude in my conduct and abstain form indulging in exploitation of others or in the play of personal attitudes. In his understanding and interpretation of religion and religious experience, Tolstoi mergers the metaphorical obligations with Christian obligations. He remains at peace with the ultimate originality of God on all matters, and wants His will to prevail in this world. But unlike many conventional theists and monotheists, he does not allow any negative emotions to be the constitutive part of the divine persona. Tolstoi's God always remains loving and peaceful, tender and affectionate, and fair and just. His God has no sense of anger or retribution and does not inflict punishment upon the people that He has created. Tolstoi fervently argues that such a loving God cannot support the division of life into rich and poor, worthy or

unworthy, and that those who seek to establish these artificial inequalities among us misconstrue the very purpose divine creation they wish to serve: "Inequality between people, not just between lay and clergy, but between rich and poor, and master and slaves, was established by the Church Christian religion in the same clear cut manner as in other religions. . . . .[But] the people of our world who profess a distorted form of Christianity do not actually believe in it. This is the peculiarity of our times" (Tolstoi, 1987b, pp. 94-96).

II.

Tolstoi takes the division of people into different classes seriously and criticizes religious practices encouraging them. He recognizes that the gradation of people into various classes, higher and lower, rich and poor, competent and incompetent, is a common anomaly of all religions. But in the case of Christianity, it turns out to be even more arbitrary and acute, and threatens the foundations of Christian faith itself (Tolstoi, 1987b, pp. 94-96). Christianity as a religion is meant to accord equal love and respect to all human beings; and Christian faith celebrates the promise of universal brotherhood and salvation of all human beings (Tolstoi, 1987a, p. 69). Yet the division of people into rich and poor draws differences among equal people on contingent grounds and makes some of them look more blessed than others, forgetting that all human beings are the creation of the same loving God and that they all share in the same existential potentialities. Furthermore, this dichotomy corrupts the Christian message regarding the divine equality of all human beings and serves as a preparatory ground for further exploitations (Tolstoi, 1987b, pp. 94-96).

In addition one false belief fuels another and together they lead to the contamination of whole religious system. Tolstoi closely studies the popular Christian religious texts and doctrines contained in them. On rational grounds, he finds their religious and spiritual explanations inadequate and criticizes them for the same. Against the Old Testament, for instance, he holds that the

world is more than six thousand years old and that the light could not have been created before sun. He also rails against the Christian beliefs regarding the virgin mother and God as three persons in one, finding them equally unacceptable. However, he retains his harshest critique for the most crucial of all Christian divine purposes and teachings: "There can be nothing as immoral as those dreadful teachings according to which an angry and vengeful God punishes everyone for the sin of Adam, or that he sent his son to earth to save us, knowing beforehand that men would murder him and be damned for it" (Tolstoi, 1987b, p. 95).

In some ways Tolstoi's critique of Christianity is reminiscent of Nietzsche. Nietzsche too criticizes Christianity thoroughly, accusing it of propagating meek values and false religious ideas (Nietzsche, 1969b/1908, pp. 230-231). According to Nietzsche, Christianity fails to account for the actual human nature, which is selfish and violent, not compassionate and peaceful. Christianity also ignores, Nietzsche contends, the differences in human capacity and will, and instills an irrational idea of guilt among its followers, making them afraid of eternal torment if they do not assume their responsibility in the cosmic mischief (Nietzsche, 1969a/1887, pp. 92-94). In his work, *the Gay Science*, Nietzsche portrays a figurative situation regarding the murder of God to bring out the implications of the gilt ridden Christian ontology. He employs the madman example to expose the depths of human crime and consequent existential burden dawn upon them. He writes: "Where is God gone?' he [the madman] called out. 'I mean to tell you! *We have killed him*, - you and I! We are all his murders! But how have we done it?.... The holiest and the mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our knife, - who will wipe the blood from us" (Nietzsche in Pojman & Fieser, 2011/2002, p. 120). The madman metaphor illustrates an historical Christian context. On the Christian view, the origin of human life and the world appears to be entangled in a moral sin against God. Human beings have got to compensate for their profound mistakes.

One wonders though if it is even possible to compensate for such a horrendous crime against God. Some sins cannot be

washed no matter how hard one tries, the murder of God in the world being one of them. This painful realization of the human crime against God appears to have two major consequences in Christianity. On the one hand, it generates an attitude of resignation. Since man has killed God, no one is left to impart meaning to the human life or to the universe. In other words, the worldly existence has lost its purpose and direction. Moreover after the death of God, there may not be a significant reason to continue with human life or to do the things that one wants to do. As a matter of fact with the death of God, the cosmic scheme itself has been nullified. Faced with all these cruel consequences, man finds himself in a totally hopeless situation, not knowing what to do, when and how? On the other hand, Nietzsche also claims that the death of God could also cause a total emotional breakdown in the religiosity of the believers. It fills them with a sense of pity and disgust, amplifies their intensity for self-surrender to the divine, hoping that this will probably help them wipe out the blood on their hands. The emergent God is all-powerful and ferocious. He punishes those who are guilty of the crime, protects the weak and poor, and answers the prayers of those who are in need and suffering. This instills further fear among the dependent masses, and helps Church acquire more power over the people. In short, it turns people into ignorant masses, seeking a shepherd who can guide and rule them (Solomon, 2003, pp. 109-110).

In Nietzsche's view, the Christian ontology of guilt misconstrues essential attributes of human life and nature (Small, 2001, pp. 179-180). Against Christian conception, Nietzsche holds that the will to power constitutes the core attribute of human life and nature. The realization of this core attribute necessitates domination over others (Small, 2001, pp. 147-148). In other words, an individuals' will to power is not, for Nietzsche, a matter of some spiritual alleviation where he can grow and become a capable person without affecting others. The will to power necessarily implies supremacy and domination over others (Nietzsche in Pojman & Fieser, 2011, p. 123). So the powerful individual must have the capacity to distance himself form others, to look down upon them and force them to follow his will. This

ability to subordinate others and to prevail over them in physical as well psychical sphere is the hallmark of Nietzsche's noble man: "At the commencement, the noble caste was always the barbarian caste: their superiority did not consist in first of all in their physical, but in their psychical power — they were more *complete* men (which at every point also implies the same as "more complete beasts")" (Nietzsche in Pojman & Fieser, 2011, p. 121).

Nietzsche's identification of "more complete men" with "more complete beasts" can easily shock the conscience of any religious person (Solomon, 2003, p. 25). But this identification is particularly damning for the Christians, as Christianity continues to be his reference point (Tolstoi 1987c, p. 111; Solomon, p. 25). He accuses Christianity of denying the importance of will to power and propagating false notions regarding the inherent goodness of all human beings, irrespective of their actual empirical capacities. Neither all human beings are good nor they are equal, Nietzsche contends. In his opinion, many human beings are untruthful and evil, destined to serve the interest of the master who has a superior consciousness (Nietzsche, 1969a, pp. 150-153). The master must use and exploit them for his own good. He must treat them as instruments designed to carry out his will and be harsh on them when they fail to comply (Solomon, 2003, pp. 135). In short, Nietzsche's appears to turn religious Christian values totally up side down, by approving everything that Christianity forbids and forbidding everything that Christianity normally approves of. He writes: "Exploitation does not belong to a depraved, or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the *nature* of living beings as a primary organic function; it is a consequence of the intrinsic Will to Power, which is precisely the will to life. — Granting that as a theory this is a novelty — as a reality it is the *fundamental fact* of all history; let us be so far honest towards ourselves!" (Nietzsche in Pojman & Fieser, 2011, p. 122). With this remark, the substitution of religious ethics by evolutionary ethic seems complete in Nietzsche's thought.

Even though Tolstoi has some serious reservations regarding many Christian values, he finds Nietzsche's evolutionary metaphysics morally repugnant. For Tolstoi, the existential

struggle that human beings go thorough in the world pressures them to ask deeper questions regarding the meaning of value of their existence (Tolstoi, 1987a, p. 61). And this struggle is significant because it captures the contours of human life in an historical context, and serves as a signpost for something spiritually meaningful i.e. the existence of a creator God who has send them in the world. In other words, evolutionary metaphysics of Nietzsche is guilty of a colossal mistake: it turns the worldly process into a justificatory reason, a raw fact into a moral norm, and something material into spiritual — if there is still anything left which can be legitimately called spiritual (Tolstoi, 1987c, pp. 145-147). Beyond any doubt, Nietzsche presents us with a classic case of a reductive and phenomenological metaphysics: he looks at the world as it is — full of conflicts and survival instincts — and claims shortly after that this perception of the world as a chaotic field has exhausted its moral and spiritual potential: "In reply to the question: what must we do? the answer is now put straightaway as: live as you like, without paying attention to the lives of others" (Tolstoi, 1987b, p.111). But this prescription raises more questions than it answers.

Next, evolutionary metaphysics also requires us to adjust our understanding of virtue, nobility and other known moral concepts. Historically virtue has been associated with an individual's sense of self-sacrifice and renunciation, and nobility with a genuine concern for the welfare of others (Tolstoi, 1987b/1902, p. 111). Thus conquering one's own desires and passions for the betterment of others has been an essential element of moral thought since antiquity. However, Nietzsche finds such concerns for others immoral, having disabling effects on the benefactor. He rejects them completely in favor of a more robust will to power: "Unconcerned, mocking, violent — thus wisdom wants *us*: she is a woman and always loves only a warrior (Nietzsche, 1969a, p. 97)". Nietzsche's insistence on raw power as the source of a moral good, if there is still something left that can be legitimately called a moral good, has caused problems in Nietzsche scholarship regarding the role of will to power in the construction of a moral good. Some scholars have even tried to

distance themselves from the traditional interpretations of Nietzsche's metaphysics in term of will to power and proposed a more benign notion of the will to power. Peter Sloterdijk writes: "the will to power is, in my view, not a "metaphysical" thesis that should be read in the indicative, but a hypothetical dramaturgical pose. Its truth-value cannot be discussed in terms of "final statement", but only as that of an intellectual dose to be administered in the midst of the crisis of strength" (Sloterdijk, 1986/1989, p. 47). But even this sympathetic interpretation of Nietzsche may not succeed resolving the tensions concerning virtue and moral good. The problem again is not simply regarding the intellectual dose of strength or power in Nietzsche's thought but that of his conception of a moral good. On his view, there is no affection and compassion residing at the heart of virtues. And so Nietzsche does not add anything substantive to the historical understanding of virtue. All he does is to take the historical notion of virtue, deny its worth, and then proclaim its opposite to be true. The uniqueness of Nietzsche's critique is to be found then not in its novelty but in its platitude:

> The whole world knows that virtue consists in the subjugation of one's passions, or in self-renunciation. It is not just the Christian world, against whom Nietzsche howls, that knows this, but it is an eternal supreme law towards which all humanity has developed, including Brahmanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and the ancient Persian religion. And suddenly a man appears who declares that he is convinced that self-renunciation, meekness, submissiveness and love are all vices that destroy humanity (he has in mind Christianity, ignoring all other religions) (Tolstoi, 1987b, p. 111).

It seems almost impossible to refute either Nietzsche's critique of Christianity or his evolutionary metaphysics. The difficulty here is not that the critique is sound, hence irrefutable, or that his metaphysic is coherent, and hence unshakeable. They are not. The difficulty is ridden probably more in the philosophical standpoints that Nietzsche adopts, in the first principles of his possible

philosophical discourse, agreements and disagreements. If one starts reasoning form an evolutionary standpoint or even a pagan perspective, one may not satisfactorily account for an unconditional love for others. In essence, evolution, like pagan love, propels us in the direction of individualism and self-interest. Note that, for Tolstoi, pagan love, even at its highest aspiration, remains either a manifestation of rational self-love or some other version of it. In either case, pagan love is limited (Tolstoi, 1987c, pp. 136-137). But Nietzsche's evolutionary metaphysics is even more drastic and consequential than pagans. It takes individualism as its starting point and turns the short sightedness of individualism into a moral virtue. Accordingly, Tolstoi contends that on evolutionary grounds it would not be feasible to convince any rational being, who knows the limits her life and lurking possibility of her death, to sacrifice her interests and happiness for others (Tolstoi, 1987c, p. 138). If evolutionary individualism holds, then we are all on our own, without any of hope of support or compassion from others. Yet there is something in human heart that feels indigent with the above situation and calls for universal love and compassion for others. In this calling alone, the most profound critique of Nietzsche is to be found.

III.

Against Nietzsche, Tolstoi argues that the essence of an individual's moral personality cannot be found in her will to power and that we need to look more closely at the spiritual make-up of human beings to grasp their essence. In the same vein, he also contends that there are two aspects to human life — physical and spiritual — and that it is impossible to live peacefully unless an individual develops a harmony between these two aspects. In this harmony of the physical and spiritual, Tolstoi believes, the essence of our moral personality is to be found: "It is in man's nature to create harmony between his rational (spiritual) and his bodily (physical) activity. A person cannot be at peace until he has somehow established this harmony" (Tolstoi, 1987c, p. 106).

Needless to say that this tension between the material and spiritual aspects of human life has stirred human consciousness since antiquity.

Traditional solutions to the reconciliation of material and spiritual aspects of human nature can be categorized under three heads. One of the earliest responses to this problem comes from the idealists. On the idealist view, the conflicts between material and spiritual aspects of human nature can be resolved by taking into account the nature of ultimate truth and reality. Furthermore, according to the idealist interpretation reason or spirit is the true constituent of the ultimate reality. Material element is either accidental or extrinsic to the spirit. Despite their own internal conceptual differences, most idealists often assert the supremacy of mind over matter and plead for the subordination of the one to the other. This subordination of the matter to the mind is sometimes so strong in the idealist thought that they reduce the existence of material world to their mental modes of perception. Accordingly, Berkeley argues that to exist is to be perceived and that God is the ultimate perceiver of all things possible.

Materialist contest the idealist interpretation of reality in terms of reason and spirit and their consequent characterization of the material world in terms of some supernatural or divine perception. Materialism holds that everything that exists is ultimately physical and that it can be placed under the laws of natural or mechanical causation in one form or the other (Leiter, 2002, pp. 63-70). From a scientific point of view, the universe arises from a material cause and that cause alone can constitute the ultimate principle of its totality and coherence (Tolstoi, 1987a, pp. 35-38). In other words, contrary to the idealist view, materialist contend that human reason is an evolutionary outcome of the material progress and that it can only be accounted within the material framework, not divine intervention of sorts (Leiter, 2002, pp. 8-12). More strongly, according to the materialists, "matter provides the irreducible elements of knowledge" (Miles, 2007, p. 43). If so, then the very idea of the supernatural realities — divine perception or God, can neither be verified nor explained in a scientific manner; and hence, they all must be dismissed as the

fictitious imaginations of human mind (Berlin, 1978/1953, pp. 30-33).

Dissatisfied with idealist and materialist explanations, eighteenth century philosopher Rene Descartes proposes another resolution to the above problem (Tolstoi, 1987a, pp. 52-53). He suggests that the spiritual and material aspects of human nature are connected with two radically different substances — mind and matter, and that thought and extension, respectively, are their core attributes. Descartes also holds that the attributes of thought and extension are diametrically opposed to each other, and that they express two drastically different truths. Moreover, for Descartes, these two attributes must remain in their own separate spheres, without meddling with one another's domain. Indeed Descartes wants to avoid the materialist and idealist reductions of reality and makes them seem equally real in a potent sense. This is the crux of Cartesian dualism.

None of these three views of harmony between the spiritual and material impress Tolstoi (Tolstoi, 1987a, pp. 38-39). Idealism and materialism are one-sided and exclusive of each other. They deny the reality of either matter or mind, and reduce the reality of one to another. The Cartesian view on the other hand posits an irreconcilable dichotomy between the above attributes and is replete with a perpetual possibility of mutual opposition and conflict. Tolstoi wants to find a meaningful solution to the above problem. He suggests that prima facie there are two possible ways to create harmony between the spiritual and the material elements of human nature. These are the use of 1) reason or 2) emotion. In other words, the conflict between the material and spiritual impulses must be finally resolved through the use of either reason or emotion.

Tolstoi associates the use of emotions with the evolutionary idea of consciousness as the core instigator of all behavior. Evolutionary consciousness explains an individual's actions in terms of her feelings, emotions, and experiences sorts (Leiter, 2002, pp. 8-12). Indeed this notion of consciousness anchors Nietzsche's thought and resides at the center of his metaphysics as well. Under its impact, an individual's actions are guided by her instinct and

vanities (Tolstoi, 1987c, pp. 141-143). She does what she finds most desirable and satisfying, and in agreement with her material being. Since self-interest is the most common ingredient of her material being, she devotes herself in their pursuit. In Nietzsche's thought this self-instinct takes the form of the will to power and leads to the rise of superman. The same instinct manifests in the evolutionary philosophy of Darwin and Berthelot (Tolstoi, 1987b, p. 84). The main difficulty with emotions as the ground of harmony between material and spiritual elements of human personality is that they require an *ex post facto* rationalization of the goals and projects that constitute an individual's priorities. In other words, emotions first force an individual to do what her instinct demands and then later employ reason to find a justificatory reason for the deed done. This minimizes the possibility of thoughtful actions and condemns us to selfish pursuits: "The second [or emotional] method is typical of the majority of the non-religious people, who lack a general standard of evaluating the worthiness of their actions and who therefore always establish conformity between their reason and their actions, not by subjecting the later to the former but — having accomplished an action under the impulse of feeling — by using reason to justify them" (Tolstoi, 1987b, p. 106).

The complications emerging out of emotions as the grounding principle of harmony between the physical and spiritual aspects of human nature can be avoided. It can be done by adopting reason, not emotions, as the anchor of the above harmony. This adoption of reason as the anchoring principle of an individual's life and conduct would help her discover in advance, i. e. prior to her acting, what is good and what is bad. And with this knowledge of right and wrong, and good and bad, she can now apply herself to pursuing what is desirable and noble, and resisting what is undesirable and ignoble. More clearly, reason has distinctive advantages over emotions in two specific senses.

In the first sense, reason is synonymous with the cognitive ability of the individual, which helps her discern the consequences of her action. Every action carries multiple possibilities, some more desirable than others. An individual's reason helps her

pinpoint the possible outcomes and assess the chances of their possible occurrences. This rational ability to calculate one's options in a given situation or to follow the thread of one's argumentation refines with education and training. And this is how reason has normally understood in the conventional discourses. Tolstoi approves of this conventional characterization of reason in the current context.

In the second sense, reason is used as an intuitive capacity to grasp the ungraspable, that truth which defies ordinary human perception but is still a genuine matter of enquiry on spiritual grounds. Tolstoi calls this truth God (Tolstoi, 1987b, p. 120). Note that unlike many other Christian monotheists, Tolstoi does not strictly subscribe to the idea of a strong personal God. He associates God with the lucidity of human consciousness and infinite universe, and their practical and experiential manifestations. This association of God with the material universe opens up new possibilities in the characterization of Tolstoi's faith and religious experiences central to it. Tolstoi shuns the traditional notions of faith that require a blind belief, imposing strict spiritual obligations upon the religious person. For Tolstoi, faith is a form of conscious relationship with the infinite universe. Since faith is a conscious choice made on the part of the individual in determination of her relationship with the universe, it remains in accord with her reason and does not come at the expense of her other intellectual powers. Moreover this merger of faith and reason in Tolstoi's thought is real and potent:

> Faith is man's conscious relationship with the infinite universe, form which he derives guidance for his activity. And because genuine faith is never irrational, or incomplete with existing knowledge, its characteristics can be neither supernatural nor senseless, as is thought, and has been expressed by the Church Father who said, 'Credo quia absurdum'. On the contrary conditions of true faith, despite the fact they cannot be proven, not only never include anything contrary to reason, or incompatible with people's knowledge, but always explain those things in life without

> which the tenets of faith would appear irrational and contradictory" (Tolstoi, 1987b, p. 98).

The harmony of reason and faith that Tolstoi expounds here helps us understand the nature of universe and human condition associated with it. Furthermore, it can serve as a safeguard against all types of religious dogmatism. On Tolstoi's view, it is possible to live one's life in continuum with nature and realize its infinite possibilities. Thus Tolstoi does not require us to barter faith for reason or vice versa. It is possible to develop a strong faith with equally strong reason. A belief that clashes with the known forms of human knowledge and rationality can never be a part of true faith.

As to what could be the defining feature of such a faith, Tolstoi has no doubts. Such a faith, he argues, must articulate clearly and strongly that all men are brothers, i.e., it must instill an unconditional love among the believer and encourage her to show non-violence and compassion towards all human kind (Tolstoi, 1987b, p. 98). Tolstoi reminds us consistently that the belief in brotherhood and fellowship of human beings is not new and that it captures the essence of Christ's teachings: "The true meaning of Christ's teaching consists in the recognition of love as the *supreme law* of life, and therefore not admitting any exceptions"(Tolstoi, 1987d/1908, p. 176). One finds the instances of similar brotherhood in the Hindu notions of self, karma and transmigration of soul in different bodies. Buddhism too emphasizes the roots of Karmic causation in the creation and individuation of human soul. In Christianity, an individual's brotherhood with others becomes a vocal theme. Even though it may not be possible to establish this idea of brotherhood within the strict framework of evolutionary metaphysics and Nietzsche's thought, it is a common knowledge that brotherhood adds value to human life and soul and that it makes us look beyond the narrow prism of self-interests (Tolstoi, 1987d, p. 179). Accordingly, Tolstoi suggests that universal brotherhood, non-violence, and compassion towards other human beings must be regarded as the constitutive principles of all religious experiences.

IV.

My purpose in this paper has been to clarify the role of religious experience in Tolstoi's thought. I have argued that Tolstoi understands religion in a specific sense and that he derives his notion of religious experience from his understanding of religion. A genuine religion, he argues, does not involve blind beliefs or irrational faith on the part of the believers. On the contrary, such a religion must welcome a critical examination of beliefs. This examination of beliefs, I argue, takes two main forms. On the one hand, it adds criticism and vitality to the religious beliefs and practices. And on the other hand, it puts them to the test of reason and practice. Together they help us develop the positive moral virtues that are often associated with all religions as well religious experiences. Indeed these virtues include universal brotherhood, non-violence and compassion towards all human beings. Accordingly, I conclude that in Tolstoi's thought an individual's religious experiences not only open up new vistas in her spiritual enquiry but also help her develop a meaningful relationship with the wider universe.

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