

On Insanity
Leo Tolstoy
1910

translated by Ludvig Perno
C.W. Daniel Co. Ltd., London, 1936

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In the course of many months, and particularly of late, I have been receiving daily two or three letters #1 which young people, especially young ladies, write to me saying that they have decided to do away with themselves. For some reason or other they refer to me, hoping that I, by some advice of mine, shall save them from this. These letters are of three different types.

The first, the most common type, is either that of a village schoolmistress who for the sake of serving common people wishes to give up her occupation to go to college, obviously thinking that the standard of her education is not high enough to enlighten the common people, and she imagines her desire to be so strong and elevated that she has decided to do away with herself if it cannot be realised; of an exalted youth threatening to commit suicide if nobody comes forward to help him to develop his, as he feels, wonderful talents; of an inventor wishing to confer a blessing on mankind; of a poet feeling himself to be a genius; of a young lady preferring to die if she is unable to go to college; of a woman who has fallen in love with the husband of somebody else; or of a man who has fallen in love with a married woman.

The writers of these letters differ according to their sex, age, or social position, but they all have one thing in common, namely, the blind, crude egoism which blots out everything else for them except their own personality. They say: "The world is full of injustice, cruelty, deception, lies, baseness and adultery. All people are bad except myself, and therefore the natural conclusion is that my soul is too elevated for this sinful world, or this sinful world is too bad for my elevated soul, and I can no longer remain in it." Such is

the first category of letters.

The second category comprises letters of individuals who wish to serve the common people, and yet do not find the means of applying their, as they obviously imagine, great talents. A person thinks himself so noble, so elevated, that he cannot live for himself, but wishes to dedicate his life to the service of others, but he either cannot do it – people are in this way – or he himself for some reason or other cannot take up this unselfish service.

. Man never existed before. Suddenly he comes into being and perceives around him God's world: the sun, the stars, the trees, the flowers, the animals, people such as himself, who love and whom he can love, and is conscious of himself with his capacities of reason and love which

he can bring to the highest perfection. All this was given him from somewhere, in some way, free – though he could hardly have deserved it – and probably for some purpose. But he does not trouble himself with such questions.

He was non-existent from all eternity. Suddenly he is conscious of being alive, sees the world with all its joys, the sun, nature, vegetation, animals, people such as himself, attracting him to themselves, promising the joy of mutual love. He feels the possibility of this happiness, can think of nothing higher, and yet he says:

“All this is no good. I do not care for it. I want something quite different, something much more important. I want to have as much money as Mr. So-and-So has, I want that Mary should love me only and no one else. I want to be able to master different sciences and so to obtain the qualifying parchment (that is to say, to obtain the necessary qualifications for settling on the hacks of the common people in the name of serving them).”

Or, perhaps – and this the commonest thing among the younger of the so-called intelligentsia: “I want to be in the position to build a republic, such as Tikhon and Mishin have so well worked out in our group. But this is not attainable, and therefore the world is no good and must be annihilated. As I cannot annihilate the world I shall annihilate myself, and for this purpose there are carriages rolling along the rails, there are third stories, there are revolvers. I

do not wish to live and I am going to leave you – be sure of that.”

This is not a joke, but a horrible and dreadful reality.

Man is yearning and seeking for happiness while he lives. Life is nothing but a search for happiness, and it is attainable only while he lives. Man is indeed surrounded by happiness, for the realisation of which he need only stretch out his arm. or less than that. merely not to reject that happiness which is given to him free. Instead not only does he not accept it, but leaves the environment in which alone the attainment of this happiness is made possible. Just as if a man suffering from thirst and knowing that there is no water anywhere except in the river, would, in order to quench his thirst, walk away from the river, where his longing could be satisfied.

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Sometimes people ask whether man has the legal right to kill himself. The word 'right' is in this case out of place. Legal right exists only for those who live. As soon as a person kills himself he is outside the sphere where considerations of what is legally right are applicable. Therefore, there may only be the question of whether man can kill himself. That he can do this is evident from actual fact. We see people repeatedly doing this in diverse ways: by slowly destroying themselves by profligacy, alcohol, tobacco, opium; by subjecting their lives to great peril in wars and duelling; or by killing themselves outright as in cases of suicide. This capacity is given to man, it seems to me, as a safety valve. Having this capacity man has no right (here the use of the word 'right' is quite legitimate) to say that life is unbearable. If life is unbearable, then kill yourself, for you can do it, and then there will be no one to complain about the unbearableness of life. Consequently the question is not whether man has the right to kill himself, but only whether it is reasonable and moral ('reasonable' and 'moral' always coincide) to do this. To this there has always been and still is only the one answer that it is unreasonable and immoral.

It is unreasonable because true life, being outside of time and space, and consequently not subject to destruction through the death of the body, the person killing himself and thus discontinuing the manifestation of life in this world does not know if the manifestation of it in the other world will be more pleasant to him. Also it is unreasonable because by discontinuing life in this world a person deprives himself of the possibility of tasting and gaining for himself in this world all that is possible for him so to do. Moreover – and this is the most important thing – it is unreasonable because by discontinuing his life in this world when it appeared to him unpleasant he simply proved that he had a distorted conception about the purpose of life, having assumed that it consisted in pursuing his pleasures and not in co-operation in the work which the life of the universe is accomplishing.

This, incidentally, is the reason why suicide is also immoral. Man has been given life under one condition, namely, that he will dedicate it to the service of the life of the universe; but having taken from it all that appeared to him pleasant he refuses to make himself serve the life of the universe when it began to taste unpleasant. Life started to appear unpleasant to him only because he regarded as his welfare that which not only was not but could not be his welfare. The reason why people kill themselves is almost invariably either because life does not yield them 'the pleasures which they desire for themselves or because it appears to them that their lives are meaningless and that they cannot serve the universe – cannot serve it in the form that it has chosen for itself. Both reasons, however, are due to the wrong understanding of the purpose of life.

in the hermitage of Optino in the course of more than thirty years there lay on the floor a paralyzed monk, who had the use only of his left arm. The doctors used to say that he must have suffered terribly. Yet, not only was he uncomplaining about his condition, but all the time he was crossing himself and looking at the ikons joyously, evidently quite sincerely expressing his gratitude to God for that spark of life which smouldered in him. Hundreds of thousands of people saw him and it is impossible to estimate all the good that was diffused in the world through this man deprived of any possibility of active

life.

While there is life in man he can always gain true happiness for himself and also give it to others. By perfecting himself in love he cannot help experiencing that higher happiness which is natural to man when he has made this perfection the aim of his life. At the same time he cannot help furthering the happiness of others by stirring up within them that love which alone can give true happiness to man.

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There can only be two alternatives and they are that either man is conscious of being immediately dependent on some immaterial being unknown to him and yet undoubtedly existing, and sees the purpose of his life in the fulfilment of the law of this being, or, on the other hand, that he regards himself alone as the origin of everything and does not acknowledge any other law except his own desires. But since there can be an infinite number of desires, and they can be of great variety and of most unattainable nature (and, moreover, the realisation of

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desires conditioned by the external world is on the whole not within the power of man), it is evident that for a person with such an interpretation of life – life which gives no opportunity for the realisation of his desires – has no sense or value, and therefore must be destroyed.

Yes, the state of stupefaction to which people of our Christian world are reduced is astounding. It grows more and more intense with every year, with every day. Indeed, it could not be otherwise, since the stupefaction is unceasingly accomplished from two different sides with the same dreadful result upon the people. On the one side the stupefaction is caused by what is called the Church and on the other by what is called Science. i

The stupefaction accomplished by the Church – Catholic, Greek-Orthodox, as well as Protestant in all possible forms – is known to everybody and is clear. It consists in careful

and persistent inculcation into the people under the name of true Christian religion of ideas (such as the creation of the six days, the Trinity, redemption, resurrection, sacraments, and others), which are so completely incompatible with the understanding of life of even the least educated people, that the majority of the so-called educated classes as well as the working people have become incapable of separating religious truth from the falsehood which is mixed up with it. They cease to believe in any religion at all and remain in a state most unnatural to man, namely, that of being without any religion, which means being without any interpretation of the meaning and purpose of life and without the inner guidance to it. Such is the work of the Church.

What is called Science finishes off what the Church has left undone. According to this doctrine the law of human life can and must be deduced from the laws which are observable in Nature. Since the studying of this external Nature reveals to us a struggle of beings for their existence, a modification of species, an advance and progress, we conclude that this is precisely the law of human life, namely, that if human beings fulfil the law of animal existence they will be doing the right thing.

An intelligent religious understanding of life, such as is natural to man as a reasonable being, therefore, is not only completely absent from the whole of Christendom, but instead there exists and flourishes one that completely precludes the possibility of any such understanding of life. This is the only explanation of the existence and even a new revival of various quasi-Christian beliefs strangely out of place for our times, and which would at first appear inexplicable (such as Catholicism, Lutheranism, Baptism, and all sorts of theosophical, spiritualist, and other odd quasi-religious teachings). Some with sensitive conscience feel the absurdity and inner-contradiction of the prevailing interpretation of life by evolution and progress, that is, admitting as good and necessary all that with which everybody is engaged, and, having nothing else to fall back upon, they seize upon the strangest superstitions, which nevertheless satisfy the higher yearnings of their soul. Others, and they are in the majority, obstinate and impenetrable in their delusion – a feature common to all insane – become less and less susceptible to the demonstrations of reason and more and

more self-assured and
conceited.

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Besides these daily letters intimating suicide, to which I have already referred, I also receive some ten letters every week from young and sometimes not so young people, with a remarkably monotonous question: "What is the meaning of life, what do we live for?" These questions are at times astounding in their naiveté and absurdity. The questioners, after perusing a few most up-to-date books, chiefly fiction, and having discovered in them no explanation of the meaning of life, but, on the contrary, in most cases a negation of it, are usually quite convinced that there is no meaning and that to see no meaning in life is very sweet and is a sign of high modern culture. . v

Thus, recently I received a book entitled On the Meaning of Life. The author looked for the meaning of life in the works of Sologoub, Andrieff, and Shestoff.* In his effort to explain its purpose he does not forget to make use of the works of Tchekoff and others, equally competent on this question. As if Brahminism, Buddha, Solomon, Marcus Aurelius, Socrates, Plato,

Christ, Rousseau, Kant Schopenhauer and others never existed. and as if prior to Sologoub,

*Russian authors, the first two being the writers of second-rate fiction, and the third an orthodox philosopher.

Andrieff, Shestoff and Tolstoy, mankind lived without any understanding of the meaning of life, and these men are just on the verge of explaining it to them.

It is the same in the letters I receive. One can feel that to the question what is the meaning of life there is an answer ready at the back of the questioner's mind, namely, that there is no meaning and that there can be no meaning. One, for instance, asks - this is from the actual letter - "Whom must one believe in: Christ of the Gospels, or Sanin of Artzibasheffst novel?" It is evident that the sympathies of the

author are on the side of Sanin.

In such letters the author himself gives the answer to the question he asks about the meaning of life. The answer is always the same, namely, that life has no meaning, that for the truly enlightened people there is none and there can be none; that for them there is evolution, which unfolds itself according to the laws discovered by science, and in our times this has already upset the old out-of-date conceptions about the soul, God and all sorts of superstitions about the purpose of man's life and his moral duties. All this is expressed with boundless self-assurance and conceit.

"All this is old and out-of-date. We want a new definition of the meaning of life, one that would be in agreement with Darwinism or Nietzscheism – with the most up-to-date investigation of life. We have to think out such a new interpretation of the purpose of life which would have for its basis laws of matter operating in infinite space and time, and those only." It would be very much the same if people thought it necessary to invent anew geometry which would postulate that the sum of the angles of a triangle were equal to three and not to two right angles, or something similar. People are now making every effort to invent this new geometry.

.-And so the best of youth, the unfortunate ones, fluctuating between the vanity of knowing all the jabber of Darwins, Haeckels, Marxs, of all sorts of Maeterlincks, Knuts Hamsuns, Weiningers, Nietzsches and others, regarded by them as great thinkers, and the vague consciousness of the absurdity of a life-conception based on these doctrines, still persist in their futile search for an explanation of the purpose of life, and, as it could not be otherwise, they fall more and more into despair and those high strung and unbalanced finish up by committing suicide. According to Kroze's book entitled *der Selbstmord im 19 Jahrhundert*, * the number of suicides in Europe alone, omitting particulars about Russia and other uncivilised countries of Europe, was in the nineteenth century 1,300,000, and the number is gradually growing. This can obviously not be otherwise.

_It is difficult for people of the present age not only to understand the cause of their miserable condition, but even to grasp the fact that their condition is miserable. This is chiefly due to the principal calamity of the age which is called progress

and which manifests itself in a feverish anxiety, hurry, strenuous labour directed towards the production of useless, nay, manifestly harmful, things, in maintaining a state of constant intoxication by following up ever new senseless occupations which absorb their whole. time, and, above all, in a boundless conceit. Life is buzzing with the Zeppelins, submarines, dreadnoughts, skyscrapers fifty stories high, parliaments, theatres, wireless telegraphs, congresses, armies millions strong, navies, professors of all sorts of schools, milliards of books, newspapers, discussions, speeches and investigations. In this fit of restlessness, hurry, anxiety, in this strenuous labour invariably directed towards the production of unnecessary or plainly harmful things, people are so delighted with themselves that they not only do not see, do not wish to see, and in fact cannot see their own insanity, but are proud of it, expect great things from it, and in anticipation of these great blessings subject themselves to ever greater and greater intoxication by means a of all sorts of new senseless occupations with the sole object of dulling their conscience in order to take life easily. People are sinking deeper and deeper into hopeless and insoluble economic, political, scientific, asthetical, and ethical contradictions.

We have—so arranged, or rather deranged, our life that we are in need of an endless number of the strangest and most frivolous things, so that there is no room for the one thing needful, the one thing indispensable to every man.

Religion? Ah! in our enlightened age when we know all about the origin of man and the world, when we communicate stupid and nasty things from one end of the world to the other, when we are on the point of taking wings like the birds of the air, this is quite a useless thing.

{Sanine, by Artzibasheff (Secker, London).

* The Suicides of the Nineteenth Century, a German publication.

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Yes, the thousands of suicides that take place daily are terrible and pitiful indeed, but even more pitiful are the people who are yet alive, in the same condition|of mind and maturing in the

same direction – either getting ready to commit suicide or to lead that senseless sorrowful life which people in similar condition of mind cannot help leading. In that condition are the great majority of the people of this so-called Christian world of our time.

Massarik, the famous Bohemian author, comes to an undeniably right conclusion in his fine book *Suicide as a Social Phenomenon of Contemporary Civilization*, namely, that the cause of suicides amongst the Christian nations is the absence of religion. Unfortunately the conclusion to which he comes in his book, which was written nearly thirty years ago, is far from being full and definite. If the cause of the increasing number of suicides is the absence of religion, the salvation must evidently be in the acceptance of religion. But what religion? Although he states that according to his opinion, or rather feeling, this religion must be Christianity, “gesaubert vom Pfaffen geschmiere” (purged of the pollution caused by the Church); although he expects that such a religion could be one of the sects of Christianity, he does not exactly say which one of them and in what must consist the religion which is to satisfy the demands of our age. There is still the same indefiniteness, the same timidity in this opinion and it is in essence still the same total unbelief which constitutes the chief calamity of our time. How can we wait for a religion which has yet to make its appearance? How about me, and not only me but also the thousands of millions of people? Shall we all have to perish without understanding the meaning of life, living bad, animal, criminal lives and finding comfort in the thought that a new religion which will answer their requirements will spring up for the benefit of posterity? The fallacy of this reasoning is due to the customary perverted scientific thought which treats the simplest phenomena of life as something external, subject to investigation and study. For every living person – except learned ones – religion is not an object of investigation, but an indispensable, unavoidable condition of life. Religion is for the soul of man what air and food are for his body. As it is impossible for us to wait and see what the future generations will do for the gratification of the stomach and breathing, so it is impossible to wait for a future religion and to go on living with famished souls. While there are animals there is air for their breathing and food for the maintenance of their bodies. While there are people

there is and always has been a religious understanding of life which enables them to live like human beings and not like animals. There has always been such a religion corresponding to the intellectual and moral requirements of the period, and there is one now corresponding to the stage of development of the people of our age.

There is this religion and we are all aware of it if we do not purposely shut our eyes to its demands which appear to us so extremely abnormal because they are diametrically opposite to the whole order of our life and condemn all the customary crimes and vices of our life. There has always been such a religion, and it continues to exist. It can be found in the Vedas, in Confucianism, Taoism, in the teachings of the Roman and Greek sages, in those of Rousseau, Pascal, Kant, Schopenhauer, Emerson, Ruskin, La Mene and many others, but above all in the hearts and minds of every man of our time.

This religion can be easily defined. Its fundamental principles are none other than those which are to be met with in all religious and moral teachings of the world, prior to their perversion, and they are all very clear, short and equally comprehensible to an illiterate workman, a child or an aged savant. They amount to this ~ and this has been expressed not by Christ alone but by all great teachers of the world ~ namely, that whilst conscious of a Divine principle within ourselves and acknowledging its presence in everybody else, we should love everybody and refrain from doing to others what we do not wish to be done to ourselves. This has always constituted, and still constitutes, the one religion common to all people. True, there is also a metaphysical side to it, which substantiates the demands of love, but these metaphysical grounds, though naturally the same for all, have never yielded to a verbal definition. Neither do they yield to it now. Therefore, the more careful will people be in their attempts to define them, the fewer obstacles there will be for the acceptance of a universal religious truth, the same for all mankind.

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So that the chief cause for the distressed condition of our life --

the absence of religion ~ is
by no means the fact that a new religion suitable for our
'enlightened' age has not yet been
'thought out' (this religion has always existed and exists to-day),
but the fact is that our life is so
immoral and unreasonable that we dare not accept the only religion,
eternal and common to all
men and of which we cannot help being aware.

The chief reason for the distressed condition of human life in our
time is the fact that we are
living through that inevitable period of transition from one age to
the next which is experienced
by separate individuals as well as by whole nations, in passing from
one conception and order
of life to a new one, more reasonable, more corresponding to the
present stage of development
of mankind, and more perfect. The whole of mankind of our time is
now in that period of
transition.

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There was a time when my thoughts on the insanity of our life
appeared to me so exceptional

they were to such an extent in disagreement with that unshakable
self-assurance of the great
majority of the people leading this insane life – that I felt
embarrassed and alarmed when
attempting to express them. Recently, however, I began to experience
just the opposite. I felt
embarrassed and alarmed when I refrained from expressing my thoughts
on this matter. It has
grown too obvious to me that the majority of mankind, particularly
of Christendom, lead in
our time a life so completely opposite to the demands of reason,
sentiment, and the most
obvious standards of advantage and comfort, that they must
undoubtedly be in a state of
temporary but complete madness – insanity.

A few months ago I picked up a paper – I have not done this for a
long time – and Sei
I read was so strange to me that I could scarcely believe that all
the events described did
actually take place. It was concerning the annexation of Bosnia and
Herzegovina (I am
copying out what I wrote down at the time)

The first article in the paper was describing in the most serious
terms how a few ao

calling themselves the Austrian Government wish to annex, to what they call the Austrian Empire, a few million people. Others, on the other hand, also small groups of people, some calling themselves Serbian, some Turkish, and others Bulgarian, Governments are opposed to . this. Those few people who desire this annexation, as well as those who are opposed to it, want, in order to settle the disagreement, to compel a few hundred thousand men of different nationalities to start killing each other, or, as an alternative, some of them suggest that one side should receive and the other pay a few million roubles collected from the people living on stretches of land called Austria, Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey. On the other hand a small group of people calling themselves the Russian Government thereon declare that they too will send tens of thousands of men to kill other men who obey those calling themselves Austrian or Turkish Governments, if these governments will not agree to apportion areas of land in the way suggested by the Russian Government.

All this is written in French in the most elegant style, though without the mention of those preparations for killing on which all this rests, and it is handed by one government to the other through their respective Ambassadors and is printed in thousands of newspapers and read by millions of people who regard all this as a most natural thing.

One would have thought it quite obvious that millions of people, beings endowed with reason and moral sentiment, would not, without knowing why or what for readily submit to a ruthless deprivation of everything that is dear to man and set out, at the command of some unknown people calling themselves the Government, to kill people they do not know, and that therefore it would be impossible to expect that what the governments with their diplomats decide upon, will happen just as they desire it to happen. It is a remarkable thing that no one doubts for a moment that what has been decided upon by the governments will come about with the same certainty with which we would receive meat to the value of cash sent to the butcher's shop with an order for the meat. As in the case of one purchasing meat, the question is merely how much and what kind of meat does he want and how much cash is to be sent with the order, so in the case of those discussing in the ministries and in the newspapers

the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the question is merely as to how many men should

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be trained for committing murder, or how many must be sent forthwith to kill each other, and precisely which people and in which combinations.

Such was the first article which overwhelmed me. I read the next one, the title of which was Labour and Historical Succession.

The first article was dealing with the question of international administration, namely, how different governments, owing to a disagreement among themselves, were compelling men who obeyed them to kill each other for some purpose, foreign to both those who were killing and to those who were being killed. The second article, on the other hand, was not concerned with the relationships of different governments to each other, but with the relationship between a few people who at present regard themselves as the Russian Government and interfere with the lives of tens of millions of people, and those, also only a few, who would like to be the government and who therefore regard all the instructions of the existing government as evil and useless.

Thus the government, defending themselves, say that "at the present time only one division of people into groups is admissible, namely, into those who do not spare their efforts in the service of the growth and development of the Russian Empire, and those who struggle against her foundations." The author of the article in the newspaper, on the other hand, in arguing against the statement, says that in order to make it possible to work for the growth and development of the Russian Empire it is necessary that those who have a different idea of the development and growth of it should be given the same freedom of action as enjoyed by the government party, and that this is now lacking, namely, that those who have a different idea of the growth of the Empire are hampered in their activity, and so on.

A remarkable thing! Both those who look upon themselves as having the right to control millions, as well as those who wish and hope to take the place of the former by constantly

struggling with them, are just as certain that they have the right to order the lives of tens of millions of people as we are certain that the sun will keep on rising every day. Their arguments and discussions concern merely the question as to what sort of lives these millions shall be ordered to live, while no one has any doubt that they will live according to the laws laid down: for them by a few people called the government.

And what is even more remarkable is the fact that millions of reasonable, moral beings, depending on their own labour, and therefore not only independent of any outside help but actually supporting, with their labour, many thousands of idle people, slavishly obey these idle, quarrelling people who, visibly contrary to their usual hypocritical professions that their chief aim is the wellbeing of the people, are actuated by the meanest and worst passions.

After this follows the third long article, The Constitutional Budget, which discusses the question as to how much of the product of his labours must annually be taken away from each man working for the upkeep of himself and his family, and placed at the disposal of people called the government. One would think it obvious that as there is not the slightest need or occasion for the labouring millions to give up the results of their labour to those who have so far invariably spent: it for such utterly bad and immoral purposes as the manufacture of – murderous weapons, the building of prisons and fortresses, the supply of alcohol, the corruption of people by means of military service and false beliefs – one would think it pretty obvious that under such circumstances there could be no question of a budget and that all discussions about how to collect the revenue and how to spend it would be useless.

So it would seem, but actually the government and those who wish to become the government, having no doubt whatever that the money will be at their disposal, discuss how to extract more revenue and what to do with it. And, lo and behold! the money comes in and is spent. The working people, short of the most necessary things of life, often famished, give up their savings to idle people wallowing in luxury.

The next article is on The Question of State Offences dealt with at the Moscow Congress of

Criminologists. It describes how the delegates assembled in Moscow are trying to determine the points of law according to which people can be deprived of their freedom, be robbed (fined), tortured or killed, and those according to which this cannot be done, how most effectively to apply these points of law, and so on. At first one begins to wonder as to why people who are obviously in disagreement with the government, and stand in opposition to it, do not make a bold declaration of that which is self-evident to every person, what is quite clear to even a most

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primitive point of view – not to mention the Christianity which we all pretend to profess – namely, that no man under any circumstances has the right to rob, torture, or deprive anybody of his liberty or life, and should not commit such acts. One would think, therefore, that an assembly antagonistic to the government would make an open declaration of their allegiance to

a law which is never questioned by any sane person, namely, that no person has the right to use violence against another, for if it is assumed that there can be grounds upon which one set of people can use violence against another, then there will always be found grounds – it has been so and is so now – on which the other set of people can and will use violence against those who have used violence against them.

But the assembled 'learned' men would not do this, but instead advanced most elaborated arguments about the "dreadful consequences that result if legal procedure against state offenders deviated from its usual course"; as to the necessity of "studying state offences from a sociological point of view"; and it was stated finally that "at the meeting of the group the fundamental problem grew even wider and wider, while the impossibility of singling out of this complicated question some brief theses grew more and more obvious."

Again I felt the same astonishment and perplexity. Why does that government which acts now, or that which will be composed of those people who quarrel with the present government and entertain the hope of becoming government themselves, why are these people so dead sure

that the bulk of the people who do not know all these points of law (but who, fortunately, still remember points of other law such as "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," or that "it is better to forgive not seven times but seventy times seven than to take revenge"), that this people will submit to their points of law and will, in obedience to these points of law, commit against themselves, when told to do so, crimes violating all laws, human as well as Divine? And, what is still more astonishing, people not only submit to all these articles, but in the capacity of soldiers, militia, jury, jailers and executioners commit against themselves crimes repugnant to their conscience and contrary to the laws they believe in and acknowledge to be Divine

The next, the fifth article, informs one how a man, calling himself the Russian Emperor,

—expressed his wish that a kind old man who used to live in Kronstadt and is now dead, should be acknowledged as a saint, and also how the Synod, namely, an assembly of people greatly confident that they have the right and power to dictate to the millions the faith they have to confess, decide to celebrate publicly the anniversary of the death of this old man with the view of making his corpse the object of public worship. One can understand — though with great effort — that people can be deluded to such an extent as to believe that they are not so much human beings as the subjects of a certain state, and in the name of this idol, State, to neglect their human duties, as it happens when they are compelled to participate in the military service and in wars. One can also understand that people can be made to give up their savings for purposes which are manifestly bad, as it happens when the exaction of taxes takes place. However strange it may appear one can even understand how, through a long and persistent fostering of a low feeling of revenge, a state of mind can be created in which people will be capable of yielding to demands for all kinds of violence against their brothers, even to the extent of murdering them under the pretext of punishment. But it would certainly appear

impossible that the people of the twentieth century who know the Gospel could be compelled to take a perverted view of the purpose of their lives, to believe in the necessity and beneficence

of the idolatrous worship of inanimate objects.

One would think that at least in this respect Christian people would not submit to the will of others, but instead – a remarkable thing – in the case of the great majority of people this is perpetually taking place, and the man calling himself the Emperor, and all his assistants, and all those ultra-hypocrites or lost people calling themselves the Synod, the Holy Synod, have no shadow of doubt that all their instructions about honouring the dead old man as a saint will be obeyed by the whole mass of the people in the same way as were their earlier deceptions – the relics of saints, ikons and miracles.

Another remarkable thing is that instead of these instructions being met by the millions with contempt, they are quietly accepted and receive the sanctity of time and tradition and displace the sacred and familiar truths of Christianity, thus ruining the lives of the people by delivering

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yem also in all other respects into the bondage of those who deceive them.

Yes, however dreadful all the deceptions under the weight of which humanity suffers, this abtle deception of belief is the most dreadful of all. It is so dreadful because on this deception re based all other deceptions and all the calamities which follow from this.

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Why, when told to do so, should kind, reasonable people join the army, put on uniforms, learn how to kill and set out killing people they do not know, while they are aware that one must not kill but love everybody? Why do they give up to the strangers their savings, knowing that they will be used for undoubtedly bad purposes even while they think that no one has the right to appropriate that which does not belong to him? Why do they go to the Courts of

Justice and demand that punishment should be meted out to offenders and themselves submit to punishment, yet knowing that no one is entitled to judge others and that it is natural for man not to punish but to forgive his brother? Why do people submit to the demands of strangers in the most important matters of the soul, in the acknowledgement of what is sacred, namely, what is good, and what is not sacred, namely, evil?

To all these questions there is and can be but one answer, namely, that people acting like those who order others to accomplish such deeds, as well as those who will accomplish them, are in a state of insanity. Not in any figurative or exaggerated sense, but literally, in the most direct sense of the word. They are guided in their lives not by reason common to all, or its manifestations, expressed in the words and writings of the great teachers of life, but by those accidental grossly irrational creeds which are at present assimilated by the majority of people who are not guided by reason and do not consider that they ought to listen to its demands.

Pascal thought that if our dreams were as regular as real events, the events of life, we would not be able to distinguish dreams from reality. It could be similarly assumed that if irrational activities were regarded by everybody as rational, we would not be able to distinguish irrational activities from rational.

Both these views, however, are untenable, for besides the element of irregularity in dreams and exceptions in the approval of irrational activities, there is one supreme criterion for distinguishing life from that which, is merely its resemblance. This criterion always has been and always will be self-consciousness, the highest property of the soul, from which results moral feeling and moral effort. Therefore dreams as well as insanity – however regular the dreams and however universal. the insanity – can always be distinguished from true life by the fact that in dreams as well as in insanity there is lacking moral effort. If it happened that the dreams of many nights were as regular as the events of real life, or that the great majority of people were completely insane (the very thing that has happened to the people of our 'civilized' world) we are, nevertheless, always capable of seeing, owing to our selfconsciousness and the moral feeling and the possibility of moral effort that follows from it, that

dreams are dreams, and irrational is irrational. As in dreams, when we see ourselves doing ghastly things, but cannot stop so doing, we escape from this condition only by regaining selfconsciousness and waking up, so also in our present insane life, if we feel that we are doing ghastly things and cannot stop so doing, our only means of salvation is rising to self-consciousness and awakening from an insane life to good and reasonable life.

The difference between these conditions is only this: that which Pascal merely surmised about dreams, about their regularity, has now actually taken place in the sphere of reality. All mankind, or the great majority of the people of this world, are in the clasp of insanity. We live an insane life, contrary to the first and simplest demands of common sense. Because we all, or the great majority of us lead this kind of life, we no longer see the difference between insane

life and rational life, and regard our insane life as sound and rational.

As in dreams, in order to escape the horror of what is happening to us, and, above all, the horrors we ourselves are doing, we must rise to self-consciousness and, realising that we are dreaming, wake up; so also in life, in order to escape from that horror in the midst of which we are living and in which we are participating, we must rise to self-consciousness and call forth that moral sentiment and moral effort which is natural to the reasonable man.

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That we are living an insane life is not just a comparison or exaggeration, but the plainest statement of a fact. Recently I happened to visit two large establishments for the mentally deranged, and the impression I received was that I saw establishments built by mentally deranged people suffering from one common epidemic form of lunacy, for patients suffering from different forms of lunacy which do not resemble the common epidemic form. All these different forms of lunacy are sub-divided by those who are afflicted

by the one epidemic form of lunacy into many different classes, sections and classifications, which all disagree and even contradict each other. Each psychiatrist has his own definition of all sorts of psycho-neurosis, mania, paranoia, all sorts of vesania, catatonia, psychopathia, degenerativa, and what not. In general, as one learned author states, for the majority of cases of psychosis the pathognomonic and anatomopathologic substratum (sic) has not yet been found, and therefore no exact 'subdivision is possible. The existing subdivisions, however, serve no other purpose than to be memorised by students who will repeat at the examinations the very words they heard from their professors, and gain diplomas which will subsequently enable them to get appointments with salaries exceeding twenty, thirty or fifty times the wages of a labourer who is doing unquestionably useful work necessary to everybody.

There is but one clear and intelligible classification of lunatics, that which is followed in hospitals and which defines the manner in which they are to be handled.

This classification is as follows:

1. The Restless (they used to be called 'The Violent')
2. The Semi-Restless
3. The Quiet
- 4, Those undergoing Probation.

This classification is fully applicable to the vast majority of citizens afflicted by the lunacy of the so-called culture of our times.

On Insanity by Leo Tolstoy, 1910

Translated by Ludvig Perno, C.W. Daniel Co. Ltd., London, 1936
Source: Collection of the State Library of Victoria, Australia

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