

**Sacrifice is the Ultimate Truth, Yet Truth Itself Must Be Sacrificed:<sup>1</sup>**  
**The Nature of the Ineffable in Tolstoy's *War and Peace***

Isaiah Berlin, in his *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, points to the centrality of the mysterious “spiritual” experiences in *War and Peace*. Especially in the case of the novel’s two major male characters, Andrew Bolkonski and Pierre Bezukhov, these hard-to-define experiences of the ineffable form a kind of invisible pivot upon which the lives of the principal characters turn. Within the overall action of *War and Peace*, the ineffable moments appear central not in spite of but precisely because of their tendency to confound the ability of language to represent and thereby communicate a lived experience. Berlin writes:

What is it that Pierre, [and] Prince Andrew... discover? and what are they searching for, and what is the centre and climax of the spiritual crisis resolved by the experience that transforms their lives?... not a simple admission of Socratic ignorance. Still less does it consist in what is almost at the opposite pole – in a new, a more precise awareness of the “iron laws” that govern our lives... nor yet in some transcendent sense of the inexpressible one-ness of life to which poets, mystics and metaphysicians have in all ages testified. Nevertheless, something *is* perceived; there is a vision, or at least a glimpse, a moment of revelation which in some sense explains and reconciles... What does it consist in? Tolstoy does not tell us in so many words. (1133)

In his struggle to articulate the “experience that transforms their lives [Pierre’s and Andrew’s],” a struggle notably marked by a necessity to define the experience in negative terms (in terms of what it is *not*), Berlin mirrors the difficulty faced by the characters themselves – and indeed by the author who gives them life. The ineffable is ineffable, after all, because its identity, in a positive sense, is a kind of negativity – it *is* something that by its very nature resists the attempt to say what it is. Nevertheless, Berlin makes an effort to define the *it* that Pierre and

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<sup>1</sup> In true Tolstoyian fashion, this part of the paper title derives from a dream experienced by the author of this paper several years ago. In the dream, the author wrote these words on the wall of a stall in a public restroom (do they thus inherently besmirch and vandalize our artificially erected walls of demarcation?). Upon waking, and à la Pierre in his attempt to remember the exact words uttered by his benefactor in a dream, the author anxiously repeated the words so as to avoid losing them to oblivion: *sacrifice is the ultimate truth, yet truth itself must be sacrificed.*

Andrew experience. His description sounds a lot like the Heideggerian notion of the horizon that frames being-in-the-world. Berlin:

...the order which, as it were, “contains” and determines the structure of experience, the framework in which... we and all that we experience... must be conceived as being set, that which enters into our habits of thought, action, feeling, our emotions, hopes, wishes, our ways of talking, believing, reacting, being... It – the medium in which we are – determines our most permanent categories, our standards of truth and falsehood, of reality and appearance... (1134)

In the context of the overall argument of his book, Berlin relates what this paper labels as the “ineffable”<sup>2</sup> in *War and Peace* to what Berlin sees as a tension between the one and the many – or the vision of the hedgehog and the vision of the fox – operative in Tolstoy’s work as a whole. Berlin argues that Tolstoy continually tries to situate his fox-like “power of microscopic perception and analysis” (1136) within a larger, hedgehogesque vision of the whole. In *War and Peace*, according to Berlin, Tolstoy’s attempt to achieve such a larger, all-encompassing vision takes the form of this “order” that “determines the structure of experience,” an order with which the major characters of the novel are frequently engaged. Pierre’s and Andrew’s mysterious spiritual experiences, then, are for Berlin examples of Tolstoy’s attempt to imbue his fictional world with an experience of profound wholeness. Yet, according to Berlin, Tolstoy does not fully succeed in this task:

[Tolstoy] has not, do what he might, a vision of the whole; he is not, he is remote from being, a hedgehog; and what he sees is not the one, but, always with an ever growing minuteness, in all its teeming individuality, with an obsessive, inescapable, incorruptible, all penetrating lucidity which maddens him, the many. (1136)

For Berlin, the ineffable in *War and Peace* remains a bit *too* ineffable.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted – and with thanks to Dr. Baldwin – that this term, “ineffable,” is used in the same vein as Tolstoy’s use of “incomprehensible” to describe Prince Andrew’s experience of the infinite sky (see *War and Peace*, page 255, on which the terms occurs twice). The Russian term translated as “incomprehensible” is “ne-ponyatnay,” which literally means “not-clear.” “Ponyatnieh” is a noun that can signify “understanding,” “conception,” “idea,” or “notion.”

This paper seeks to examine the ineffable in *War and Peace* in all of its complex ineffability. We will sacrifice with Pierre and stare up at the sky with Andrew, in other words, we will examine two representative experiences of the ineffable within the novel, so as to highlight the nature of the ineffable as an *experience* within *War and Peace*; thus, less attention will be paid to the referent of the ineffable experiences – the mysterious *something* to which they point – and more will be devoted to the qualitative nature of the ineffable as a vital experience for both Pierre and Andrew (this focus of attention is in fact paradigmatic vis-à-vis the ineffable experiences themselves<sup>3</sup>). The ineffable experiences in *War and Peace* will be seen to involve the “sacrifice” of a taken-for-granted perspective, and the accompanying joyful realization that such a perspective is only one among many; to experience the ineffable in Tolstoy’s novel is to fall in love with the world anew, which involves the sudden illumination that reality is prismatic, multivalent, and inherently multi-perspectival. In their respective experiences of the ineffable, Pierre and Andrew are able to do *within* the novel the very thing that Berlin says Tolstoy is unable to do in crafting it: find a tranquil and enlivening, albeit ever-shifting, compromise between the one and the many. The ineffable experiences of Pierre and Andrew ultimately reveal the consciousness of freedom – or rather, the consciousness that consciousness itself is the ground of human freedom – at the heart of both the content and method of Tolstoy’s novel.

After days of characteristic torment and indecisiveness, Pierre Bezukhov, having at last left Moscow with the intention of meeting up with the Russian army, experiences while passing through Mozhaysk a “new and joyful feeling he had not experienced before” (671). As he abandons his property and Muscovite way of life so as to fall in with the collective throng of

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<sup>3</sup> The experiential as opposed to content-based nature of the ineffable is revealed in the easy shift that the word itself can make between noun and adjective. That one can have an “ineffable experience” in which one “experiences the ineffable” reveals that the ineffable may perhaps be defined as that moment in which nouns merge with adjectives, as it were – in other words, when the *what* and the *how* become so intertwined that an outside perspective upon the experience from which to articulate it proves virtually impossible.

marching troops, Pierre's internal, spiritual world lights up with a sudden awareness of the ineffable joy of sacrifice:

[Pierre] now experienced a glad consciousness that everything that constitutes men's happiness – the comforts of life, wealth, even life itself – is rubbish it is pleasant to throw away, compared with something . . . With what? Pierre could not say, and he did not try to determine for whom and for what he felt such particular delight in sacrificing everything. He was not occupied with the question of what to sacrifice for; the fact of sacrificing in itself afforded him a new and joyous sensation. (671)

The “something,” the “for whom” and “for what” that forms the dimly intuited alternative to the particular view of happiness – made up of the “comforts of life, wealth . . . life itself” – joyfully sacrificed by Pierre, perhaps refers to the “new light” (690) that Pierre will later apprehend with greater clarity: “He understood that latent heat . . . of patriotism which was present in all these men he had seen, and this explained to him why they all prepared for death calmly, and as it were lightheartedly” (690); and later: “[Pierre] was entirely absorbed in watching this fire which burned ever more brightly and which he felt was flaming up in the same way in his own soul” (709). This fire of patriotism leads Pierre to reflect upon the “*they*,” the simple men who “do not talk, but act” (750), and as such the experience of patriotism fires Pierre's imagination and prepares him – and the reader – to meet the high priest of the *they*: Platon Karataev.

Nevertheless, and in homage to Tolstoy's inveterate claustrophobia in regard to causality<sup>4</sup>, readers must grapple with the above passage on its own terms. Rather than draw the hasty conclusion that Pierre's sacrificial joy can best be understood as “caused” by his incipient encounter with Russian patriotism, it may prove possible experientially to grasp Pierre's joy in all of its as-presented vagueness. Such an effort requires not so much understanding Pierre's joy (viewing it from a removed, causally-oriented perspective) as standing-with it, withstanding

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<sup>4</sup> In both its content and method, *War and Peace* polemically undermines reason's attempt to frame events – both individual and collective – in cause-and-effect conceptual constructions. As the narrator overtly puts it: “Man's mind cannot grasp the causes of events in their completeness” (873).

its complexity so as to experience it from the inside. Interestingly, such a shift in perspective mimics the precise phenomenon in question, namely, Pierre's movement from outside to inside the army, and the joyful change of perspective that accompanies this shift. Thus, fully to grapple with Pierre's sacrificial experience necessitates a change in vision that itself defines that experience, a change in vision in which the attempt to understand any phenomenon fully must be sacrificed.

The above-cited passage that describes the nature of Pierre's sacrifice is clear about its vagueness: "[Pierre] was not occupied with the question of what to sacrifice for." To name the "something," the "for whom" and "for what" for which Pierre sacrifices his conventional notion of happiness would not be true to the precise quality of his "new and joyful feeling." Pierre's happiness involves an experience of sacrifice *for its own sake*, which requires him to sacrifice as well the very idea that in order to sacrifice one must know for what one is sacrificing. The quiddity of Pierre's joy of sacrifice is that it is "new": "[H]e [was] overcome by... a *new* and joyful feeling he had not experienced before... the fact of sacrificing in itself afforded him a *new* and joyous sensation" (690, italics mine). The text's radical de-emphasis of the specific nature of the new way in which Pierre sees the world highlights the experience of a shift in perspective *as itself* a source of joy. The world becomes ineffably new when one manages to see with a kind of double vision that simultaneously sees the world and sees into one's own seeing.<sup>5</sup> To put it another way: Pierre experiences joy as he becomes aware – on a sub-rational, felt level – of the perspectival nature of reality, of his prior perspective of happiness *as a perspective*, as only one possible way out of many in which one can view the nature of happiness. What Pierre most deeply sacrifices, then, is a prior perspective upon happiness that took itself as an absolute and

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<sup>5</sup> Here "to see" is used synonymously with "to experience." Obviously, the literal act of vision does not fully capture one's experience of the world, yet it serves as a metaphor that helps one "see" (experience) the nature of one's engagement and entanglement with(in) the world.

thereby failed to take account of its own perspectival nature. Pierre's ineffable experience – or, experience of the ineffable – reveals to him the freedom of human consciousness to view the world in ever-new ways.

Prince Andrew Bolkonski's ineffable experience of the infinite sky may appear similar to Pierre's joyful sacrifice only in its vagueness. Just as Pierre sacrifices a comfortable notion of happiness for an indefinable *something*, so Prince Andrew, as he fitfully thinks about his new awareness of the sky, concludes: “There is nothing certain, nothing at all except the unimportance of everything I understand, and the greatness of *something* incomprehensible but all-important” (255, italics mine). Further, and despite their shared vagueness, the respective experiences of Pierre and Andrew may appear to proceed in opposite directions: while Pierre joins the army and ostensibly moves deeper *into* collective life, the wounded, sky-gazing Andrew seems to move *out* of life and become disconnected from others. Nevertheless, when examined closely the two experiences are revealed to share a deep similarity.

Andrew, as he gazes into the sky, like Pierre sacrifices a particular perspective upon human happiness. Previously, on the eve of the battle of Austerlitz, Andrew reveals to himself and to readers his deepest longings, his explicit vision of happiness:

“...if I want this – want glory, want to be known to men, want to be loved by them, it is not my fault that I want it and want nothing but that and live only for that. Yes, for that alone! I shall never tell anyone, but, oh God! what am I to do if I love nothing but fame and men's esteem? Death, wounds, the loss of family—I fear nothing. And precious and dear as many persons are to me... I would give them all at once for a moment of glory, of triumph over men, of love from men...” (229-230)

For Andrew, to achieve glory is to be happy. Andrew's hope for glory is notably connected with his complex feelings for Napoleon, whom he both fears and admires because of the glory Napoleon has achieved. Andrew imagines his own Napoleonesque glory, his own “Toulon,” and this leads to a sense of “astonishment at the genius of his hero, a feeling of wounded pride, and a

hope for glory” (142). How striking, then, is the manner in which Andrew, after he looks into the infinite sky, reacts to his supposed hero:

Prince Andrew understood that this was said of him [“That’s a fine death!”] and that it was Napoleon who said it. He heard the speaker addressed as *Sire*. But he heard the words as he might have heard the buzzing of a fly. Not only did they not interest him, but he took no notice of them and at once forgot them. His head was burning, he felt himself bleeding to death, and he saw above him the remote, lofty, and everlasting sky. He knew it was Napoleon – his hero – but at that moment Napoleon seemed to him such a small, insignificant creature compared with what was passing now between himself and that lofty infinite sky... At that moment it meant nothing to him who might be standing over him, or what was said of him. (253)

In this brilliantly crafted scene, Prince Andrew achieves his longed-for moment of glory in the eyes of the very person – Napoleon – who had served for Andrew as an emblematic example of glory. Yet Napoleon’s praise leaves Andrew cold. In his glimpse into the infinite sky, Andrew sees something that severs his prior univocal belief that the *only* happiness is the achievement of glory. Like Pierre, Andrew has undergone a shift in perspective, a sacrifice of a prior way of viewing the world, and he also experiences this shift in a joyful manner: “How was it I did not see that lofty sky before? And how happy I am to have found it at last! Yes! All is vanity, all falsehood, except that infinite sky” (244). Yet what exactly does Prince Andrew see in the sky? In other words, what precisely is the source of his joy? Upon close analysis, what Andrew appears to “see” in the sky is the perspectival nature of his own perspective. As he gazes into the sky after being wounded, Andrew realizes that his prior view of the world co-existed with this other perspective of the sky – *of* understood in a double sense, since the sky as *seen* seems to offer a calm stillness even as it appears to *see* the frantic activity of the troops (an activity that perhaps figures Andrew’s drive for glory) – that he can only now apprehend:

Above him there was now nothing but the sky – the lofty sky, not clear yet still immeasurably lofty, with gray clouds gliding slowly across it. ‘How quiet, peaceful, and solemn; not at all as I ran,’ thought Prince Andrew – ‘not as we ran, shouting and fighting, not at all as the gunner and the Frenchman with frightened and angry faces

struggled for the mop: how differently do those clouds glide across that lofty infinite sky! How was it I did not see that lofty sky before? (244)

Andrew's joy upon his discovery of the infinite sky is thus inseparable from his ability to see the world in a new way, a vision that takes account of perspective, that sees into its own act of seeing. The content of this new perspective, like the *something* for which Pierre sacrifices his view of happiness, is left vague. It apparently has to do with calmness and peace, which prefigures – much as Pierre's experience of sacrifice prefigures his discovery of the patriotic spirit of the *they* – Andrew's later near-death sense of a calm distance from life. Regardless, even if Andrew and Pierre experience the ineffable such that it leads the trajectory of their lives in different directions – Pierre, into the minute particularity of embodied, relational life; Andrew, into the spiritual dislocation of a life in touch with the more-than-human – the two friends share in their experiences a sense of joyful relief from the tyranny of a singleness of vision. They experience a sudden consciousness of human consciousness itself, and in doing so they experientially grasp that the quiddity of human consciousness is its freedom, its taken-for-granted potential to transform the world. As Tolstoy points out in the Second Epilogue to *War and Peace*<sup>6</sup>, it is precisely man's ability to regard himself from *within* (in other words, to be conscious of his own consciousness) that leads to the feeling of freedom, a feeling that is ineradicable despite the equally valid realization – reached when man regards himself from without – that necessity also plays a role in human affairs:

The problem is that regarding man as a subject of observation from whatever point of view – theological, historical, ethical, or philosophic—we find a general law of necessity

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<sup>6</sup> Since this chapter achieved virtual canonical status in our class, I feel some reference to it is necessary, even if its mention reveals that I have given in to the “unconscious, general hive-life” of our class (i.e., followed the predilections of the herd). I admit that by doing so I unwittingly demonstrate the superiority of necessity over freedom, rationality over consciousness. Tolstoy would appreciate the irony that I am apparently not free to avoid inserting his own comments about freedom and necessity into my text. I did hesitate, but a game of patience decided the issue for me.

to which he (like all that exists) is subject. But regarding him from within ourselves as what we are conscious of, we feel ourselves to be free. (1062)

For both Pierre and Andrew, the above-described experiences of the ineffable provide a momentary reprieve from the inherent restlessness that characterizes the two friends – in Pierre’s case, a restlessness defined by frenetic philosophical thought and hyper-rationalization; in Andrew’s case, a restlessness defined by a will that, in its frantic search for glory, has lost touch with itself. However, neither Pierre’s march down the Mozhaysk road nor Andrew’s glimpse of the infinite sky provide an absolute experience that can transform the two men once and for all. It seems that the ineffable experience of human consciousness as freedom must be constantly re-experienced, for the *newness* that results from any one ineffable moment will itself become habitual and unaware of its perspectival status – thus, any given experience of the truth opened up by the sacrifice of an habitual view of the world must itself be sacrificed so that this truth can be re-discovered. Ineffability as the experience of newness requires one to experience it in ever-new ways. Hence Andrew, upon his brief war-time visit to the abandoned Bald Hills, again becomes aware, through his glimpse of the girls with their plums, of the perspectival nature of reality: “A new sensation of comfort and relief came over him when, seeing these girls, he realized the existence of other human interests entirely aloof from his own and just as legitimate as those that occupied him” (627). The “new” sensation of “comfort and relief” may *feel* new to Prince Andrew, but readers will recognize it as similar to his experience of the infinite sky. As then, Andrew’s recent activity is put into perspective by his apprehension of the reality of another equally valid perspective, and the joy and relief that results stems from the newness of the world that is opened up when one senses this movement of consciousness from one perspective to another. Similarly Pierre, amid the horrors of forced imprisonment, suddenly

experiences the presence of a larger perspective that co-exists with his own. As such, he is able to “sacrifice” his view of imprisonment so as to gain a sense of ever-present human freedom:

The huge, endless bivouac that had previously resounded with the crackling of campfires and the voices of many men had grown quiet, the red campfires were growing paler and dying down. High up in the light sky hung the full moon. Forests and fields beyond the camp, unseen before, were now visible in the distance. And farther still, beyond those forests and fields, the bright, oscillating, limitless distance lured one to itself. Pierre glanced up at the sky and the twinkling stars in its faraway depths. “And all that is me, all that is within, and it is all I!” thought Pierre. “And they caught all that and put it into a shed boarded up with planks!” He smiled, and went and lay down to sleep beside his companions. (902)

It almost seems that Pierre and Andrew have traded places – Andrew gains a sense of perspective from his engagement with the life around him, while Pierre has his own opportunity to gaze into the infinite sky and thereby see his current perspective as a perspective. Nevertheless, Andrew’s and Pierre’s new experiences of newness repeat the old movement of consciousness traced in their earlier “sacrifices.”

While Pierre marries Natasha and embraces the concrete particularity of family life, Andrew, in his final days, willingly separates himself from Natasha – and indeed all of earthly life – and embraces death. However, both of these seemingly contradictory experiences – an embrace of life and an embrace of death – are characterized by the same awareness of the prismatic and multivalent nature of reality that defines the ineffable experiences discussed thus far. In his embrace of the concrete particularity of relational life, Pierre in effect embarks upon the attempt to re-discover the ineffable consciousness of newness in the context of other human beings:

There was a new feature in Pierre’s relations... with all the people he now met... This was his acknowledgment of the impossibility of changing a man’s convictions by words, and his recognition of the possibility of everyone thinking, feeling, and seeing things each from his own point of view. This legitimate peculiarity of each individual which used to excite and irritate Pierre now became a basis of the sympathy he felt for, and the interest he took in, other people. The difference, and sometimes complete contradiction,

between men's opinions and their lives, and between one man and another, pleased him and drew from him an amused and gentle smile. (980)

Prince Andrew, in his embrace of death, similarly attempts to re-discover the ineffable consciousness of newness he had previously experienced in his encounter with the infinite sky. To see life from the seemingly unknowable perspective of death, the very thing that Prince Andrew manages to do, is perhaps the paradigmatic example of the ability of consciousness to leap the bounds of the understandable and thereby experience itself as the ground of human freedom. In his felt experience that ““death is an awakening!”” (871), Prince Andrew sacrifices his “too one-sidedly personal and brain-spun” (870) ideas about life and death, and plunges head on (or more appropriately “head off”) into the ultimate Mystery: “And all at once it grew light in his soul and the veil that had till then concealed the unknown was lifted from his spiritual vision. He felt as if powers till then confined within him had been liberated, and that strange lightness did not again leave him” (871).

In life and in death, Pierre Bezukhov and Andrew Bolkonski are able to do the exact thing that Berlin claims Tolstoy fails to do in his fiction: reconcile the one with the many. Pierre's and Andrew's experiences of the ineffable – their ineffable experiences of consciousness, in its inherent multiplicity, as the ground of human freedom – reveal a truth wonderfully expressed by depth psychologist Rafael Lopez-Pedraza: “The many contains the unity of the one without losing the possibilities of the many” (quoted in Hillman 42). The *sine qua non* of a spiritual experience involves the paradoxical insight that individual human consciousness is irretrievably connected with a larger, transpersonal whole. In *War and Peace*, Pierre and Andrew experientially realize the mysterious union of the one and the many; in other words, they experience the ability of human consciousness to *perceive itself*, something that can only be possible if human consciousness is indeed grounded in something beyond itself. This is

key: Tolstoy does *not* suggest that the ineffable, the felt awareness of human freedom, is nothing more than the stirring of individual self-awareness understood as human rationality understands it – consciousness as the result of a physiological blank slate engaged *only* with the literally verifiable, “outside” world; rather, for Tolstoy individual self-awareness is only possible because human consciousness is mysteriously connected to the *something* that is simultaneously the ground of individuality and of common humanity. Berlin fails to grasp that the *it* that he proposes as a structuring agent is thus explicitly equated by Tolstoy with human consciousness. And though Berlin acknowledges that categories such as “‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ are terms that themselves acquire their meanings and uses in relation to – ‘by growing out of’ – it, and not *vice versa*” (1136), he nevertheless fails to realize that the “one” and the “many” are also such terms. The ineffable experiences in *War and Peace* are not reducible to Tolstoy’s supposed failure to unite the one and the many. Instead, the conflict between the one and the many is explicitly accounted for in Tolstoy’s portrayal of the ineffable as an experience of the mysterious, unexplainable freedom of human consciousness (unexplainable because necessity, which also undeniably exists, cannot eradicate the felt experience of freedom that is the essence of consciousness).

The ineffable experiences in *War and Peace* can be thought of as images or emblems of the unique power of Tolstoy’s art: it is precisely when the internal worlds of Pierre and Andrew radically shift that they become individuals who seem to exist not in a novel but in life itself – their discontinuous, illogical, contradictory developments are indeed true to life, true to the self-contradictory nature of all of our deepest selves. As Milan Kundera writes in a discussion of *War and Peace* that echoes the main concerns of this paper:

It is precisely when their interior worlds change shape that Bezukhov and Bolkonsky are confirmed as individuals; that they surprise; that they make themselves different; that

their freedom catches fire, and with it the identity of their selves; these are moments of poetry: they experience them with such intensity that the whole world rushes forward to meet them with an intoxicating parade of wondrous details. In Tolstoy, man is the more himself, the more an individual, when he has the strength, the imagination, the intelligence, to transform himself. (221)

In crafting the ineffable experiences within his novel, Tolstoy makes readers acutely aware that the most significant moments in our lives are often unexplainable: our life is the stuff that ineffable dreams are made on – to echo Tolstoy’s not-so-beloved bard. Tolstoy reveals that our deepest self-identity does not exist *in spite of* changes to our interior worlds but rather because of such mysterious changes. We become ourselves to the extent that we can open ourselves up to the ineffability of life and thereby become *different* from who we thought we were. This is a paradox only when the ground of identity is thought to be static rather than influx, in other words, when the human person is thought to be *fully present* to himself and to others rather than *always-in-the-process-of-being-discovered* by himself and by others. The human self is inherently self-contradictory in that it must define itself precisely in and through its inability to be fully identical with itself; or: the self is better thought of as a verb, as something that *selves*, rather than as a unitary noun. To accept the reality of the ineffable dimension of life is to accept life as an inherently poetic reality, one in which any given human perspective functions not as an absolute view of reality but as a metaphor, as a particular way of pointing to the real by making it human (the “ineffable” as a term, too, must be recognized as a metaphor, albeit a metaphor of metaphor). And to borrow Kundera’s wonderful phrase, Tolstoy makes it clear that to experience the ineffable – the ever-shifting movements of human consciousness that constitute the felt sense of self-identity – is to experience life with such intensity that “the whole world rushes forward to meet [one] with an intoxicating parade of wondrous details.” To read Tolstoy imbued with the ineffable sense of life that his novels provoke is thus to notice such

things as Natasha's nimble (and fetishized) foot, Dolokhov's hairy wrist, Pierre's childlike smile, Mary's glowing eyes, Nicholas's impetuous whiskers, Lise's short upper lip, Petya's penchant for something sweet, and so on. And more: to read Tolstoy while intoxicated with *War and Peace*'s transmitted sense of ineffability is to realize that "real" life, too, can be "read" and thereby experienced with such specificity, with such attention to detail, with such *feeling*. Tolstoy ultimately teaches us that the ineffability of life is ever-present in the passing wink of the world's wondrous details, details that gain in depth and resonance when one realizes the mysterious, unexplainable nature of the very consciousness that perceives them.

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