

In Leo Tolstoy's 1889 novella "The Kreutzer Sonata," many ideas and rules on how to live one's life in regards to love are explored. Tolstoy's most enduring ideal and suggestion is complete abstinence. He believes sin is an inevitable, inescapable aspect of sensual love (the only type of love capable among humans, according to his beliefs) and thus all people should cut themselves off from sensual sin and commit themselves to fulfilling Christ's message by remaining chaste, single and healthy/pure in body and mind.

Tolstoy is wrong, however in the realisticness of his ideas. He does qualify his following statement by admitting that it's an ideal, and thus not truly capable of appearing on Earth. He writes in the afterword: "it is false, first of all, to claim that the ideal of infinite perfection cannot serve as a guide in life, and that taking this ideal as a guide, one must throw up one's hands, saying that 'I don't need it, since I also will never reach it, or lower the ideal to the level my weakness can tolerate.'" Nonetheless, the ideal is not only so extreme, but not in accordance to what truly makes people happy; happy, not in a self-absorbed, egotistical, purely self-serving way, but happy in the ultimately best and only way. Through loving others, as humans naturally do, in yes, sensual (but also beyond) ways, one is capable of finding a meaning in life they may not be able to otherwise.

Tolstoy's credo appeals to a small minority of devout men or women, if any, because it is so unnatural. Someone like Dostoyevsky on the other hand, appeals and works with, the masses in shaping his Christian ideal in a literal, earthly sense. Tolstoy states: "What are a man and

woman to do who are living in marriage and fulfilling that limited service of God and people, through the raising and education of children? What follows from their situation? The same thing. They should aspire towards a liberation from temptation, to purify themselves, and to cease from sinning, to replace relations which impede the universal and private service of God and people, to substitute for carnal love the pure relations of sister and brother." Tolstoy later contradicts himself because he further concedes that marriage looked at as an indissoluble bond that creates well-cared for children is the only correct course of marriage. This could not follow from a "pure relation of sister and brother." He adds: "This is why it is not true that we cannot be guided by the ideal of Christ because it is too lofty, too perfect and unreachable. We are not able to be guided by it only because we lie to ourselves and deceive ourselves." To work with the masses and understand and sympathize with the whole scope of average people's lives, Tolstoy would interpret as compromise, and thus totally destructive (himself an all-or nothing nihilist and extremist). We are left with an unresolved feeling of guilt and loss of self.

The fact is, in a contradictory and ironic fashion, families allow people to fulfill the tenants of Tolstoy's ideal better than any other solution. Yes, family is the most egotistical thing one can do, but it is the most human and giving connection to other humans you can make. To assume a woman is capable of loving a foreign child more than her own is impossible. Obviously, Tolstoy writes from such a male, one-sided, inflexible, stubborn, arrogant, narrow-minded perspective. He writes: "The ideal of the Christian is love toward God and one's neighbor. Carnal love and marriage are forms of service to oneself, and that is why in every case these are a hindrance to the service of God and to people; this is why, from the Christian point of view, carnal love and marriage are a degradation and a sin." To care for others, and the "starving children" that Tolstoy totes feels unnatural to most women unless they can't or don't want to

have children of their own. However, if every child were raised with the love Tolstoy believes should be given to total strangers, would not we live in a world made up of loved, well-raised, morally sound people? Obviously, even this is not the case and it too an ideal, but it speaks to a much truer and human moral compass Tolstoy spits on. What's good for society is what's good for a family because the world is made up of ever-producing families and always will be, as humans reproduce as a natural part of their life cycle like every other living creature on Earth.

Christ died for our sins. Thus, it is unfair for Tolstoy to assume people bear the responsibility of Christ's actions. There was only one Christ and there was always a huge divide between Christ and the people. Tolstoy implies that Christ's teachings aim to turn everyone into an individual Christ. He writes: "It is possible not to accept the teaching of Christ, that teaching which has permeated all our life and on which our whole morality is based, but if a person does accept this teaching, it is impossible not to recognize that it points toward the ideal of complete chastity" Not only would this eliminate the inevitable divide between the people and Christ, but it gives humans a responsibility not simply beyond their "sinful" capabilities, but a job not for them, but for God or Gods. Many ancient cultures understood this better. For example, ancient Greeks never confused Gods actions with those that should be done by humans.

Regarding sensual love, for Tolstoy this may be all of his life experience, but he makes a narrow-minded false generalization. His personal life is too telling and autobiographical in "The Kreutzer Sonata" to detach it from the self-absorbed and inflicted views present in the novella. Tolstoy lived a life of debauchery before marriage, and, following marriage to a woman far too young for him had a horrible relationship with her. Rather than preaching the fraternal, brother-sister love he felt should comprise all relations between a man and woman, he had twelve children and lacked cordiality to his wife. He forced her to breast feed her children, despite

doctor's firm request not to, until finally his father-in-law prevented him from succeeding in his domineering nature. Thus, it's clear Tolstoy didn't love his wife, or at least his love was solely sensual, and he, a witness and partaker in much debauchery in his day, sees this as the end all and be all. Tolstoy takes too much knowledge upon him, deems himself a prophet and assumes he can understand love between two people, while true intelligence is awareness that there are some things beyond comprehension, or at the very least, things that should not be doubted.

It's evident that "The Kreutzer Sonata" was written after Tolstoy's spiritual crisis. Expounded throughout the entire novella, a concise summary of the relationship between the protagonist and his wife occur in the lines: "We were like two convicts hating each other and chained together, poisoning one another's lives and trying not to see it. I did not then know that ninety-nine per cent of married people live in a similar hell to the one I was in and that it cannot be otherwise." Relations between men and women are portrayed in a much more secure, wholesome albeit complex nonetheless light in works such as *War and Peace*, apparent in the relations between Natasha and Andrei, and later, Natasha and Pierre. The crisis is expounded somewhat more in the tragic, doomed relationship between Vronsky and Anna, who experience passionate and true love, but destroy it through a convincingly inevitable and never-ending cycle of insecurity and jealousy. However, a moral compass, as it were, is shown through Levin and Kitty's relationship in *Anna Karenina*. Both Kitty and Levin experience many personal transformations before consummating their love, as Tolstoy explores in Kitty's break-up with Vronsky, stint at religious piety and serious physical sickness, paralleled with Levin's loneliness, focused dedication to farming and stubborn narrow-mindedness. Thus, their relations are viewed as a resolution to each other's personal weaknesses and dilemmas, illustrating the edifying, wholesome nature of a proper marriage.

If Tolstoy can rationalize every saying in the Bible and all of Christ's "teachings," he is lacking in faith itself, which must to some extent be blind. This faith, a belief in God, whether he likes it or not, can occur between humans. What he views as sensual lust may well have its roots there, but nonetheless take on indisputably greater, metaphysical and abstract forms. Like Dostoyevsky said in a famous statement, "if the truth really did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth." Tolstoy should apply this necessary irrational faith as motivation for people to follow the tenets of his strong beliefs. Rather than make people lose hope in any non-sinfulness in their relations between people, *even if* this sin is inevitable, it is healthier and right to maintain a faith of something more. Only in this way can the inevitable relations between people be carried out with a sense of real duty and purpose.

On the so-called myth that is the joy and love of one's own children, Tolstoy writes: "The pleasure a baby gives them [mothers] by its loveliness, its little hands and feet, and its whole body, is not as great as the suffering caused by the very fear of it possibly falling ill, and dying, not to speak of its actual illness or death. After weighing the advantages and disadvantages it seems disadvantageous, and therefore undesirable to have children. They say this quite frankly and boldly, imagining that these feelings of theirs arise from their love of children, a good and laudable feeling of which they are proud. They do not notice that by this reflection they plainly repudiate love, and only affirm their own selfishness. They get less pleasure from a baby's loveliness than suffering from fear on its account, and therefore the baby they would love is not wanted." If people truly felt their children were nothing more than a nuisance result of a trap of male-female sexual enslavement (which, by the way, is not as rampant as Tolstoy hyperbolizes), those children would not be loved, as they should. No, people are not simply deluding themselves to think otherwise, they make it otherwise by their belief. At the end of the day, the

truth is made by actions and beliefs. This inherent nastiness experienced by Tolstoy is only true if one lets it be, as blind only conquers a lack of faith through rational unbelievable obviousness, heartfelt secure faith.

Faith cannot be acquired through rational thinking; neither can conduct toward other people. Tolstoy relies on his intelligence to speak of matters purely of the heart and sensuality, as it were. Dostoyevsky drew the most human connection in how to reconcile the mind and the hearts as well as the Tolstoy-thought-sinful sensuality/inevitable lean toward debauchery in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Tolstoy, on the other hand, fails to offer any solution to the exaggerated and, in many ways, imagined issues between issues because he underestimates human's ability to feel what's right. Forcing strict rules of external conduct upon people cannot make the love/moral goodness in their hearts simply appear. Rather, an initial connection to that goodness will lead to proper external actions.

Tolstoy's perspective is: one is bad, here are the actions one can take to remedy or at least squash to the bottom of one's feet these repulsive sins. This perspective leaves the reader with curious, irresolvable guilt and needless disillusionment. What is needed to even have people conduct Tolstoy's wishes is a belief in their inherent goodness. Tolstoy contradicts himself and shoots himself in the foot when he lacerates society for their debauchery. The text reads like a rant written from the point of view of an insane, undesirable, non-relatable, horrible man instead of a more subtle subliminal persuasion achieved through showing what is *good* and the *naturalness* of the good in people. Tolstoy promotes functional art only; that is, art that makes people better people. If he really meant that, it would be better achieved by not revealing such a dreadful image to people at all, and rather writing a story on a man and woman he deemed fitting to his idealistic standards.