

“Incomprehensible, but all important”

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"There is nothing certain, nothing at all except the unimportance of everything I understand, and the greatness of something incomprehensible but all-important."

- *War and Peace*, Book III, Ch 13, pg 255

War challenges men to question their roles in life. Confronted with the atrocities committed in the name of honor and glory, most will be forced to examine what such sacrifices were for. Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace depicts a full spectrum of people who feel the effects of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. Tolstoy's depiction of Prince Andrew Bolkonski is of particular interest. Andrew's moral compass is in flux between calm and conflict. Other characters are also ambivalent but this inner struggle is most detailed with Prince Andrew. I will investigate how Andrew wrestles with these dilemmas to better understand his development.

The first encounter that the readers have with Prince Andrew occurs near the end of Anna Pavlovna's soiree. After the party Andrew and his good friend Pierre discuss the war. In this discussion Andrew reveals several important traits about his character. Pierre, having just returned from studying abroad, holds many naive views on the war with Napoleon. In contrast Andrew views appear more realistic. Andrew states sarcastically:

“If no one fought except on his own conviction, there would be no wars.”
he said.

“And that would be splendid,” said Pierre.

Prince Andrew smiled ironically.

“Very likely it would be splendid, but it will never come about . . .” (Book I, Ch 2, pg. 21).

Andrew is aware that the idyllic system that Pierre describes is a fantasy. While Pierre means well, he doesn't have the practical experience that Andrew has and remains sheltered by lofty thoughts. However, instead of giving Pierre a clear idea of his thoughts on the war, Andrew hides his true feelings in sarcasm. While Andrew's disillusion is understandable it highlights his cynicism. He has resigned to the world as it is, rather than hoping for an idyllic future.

Pierre then inquires why Andrew would fight in the war if he has such a bleak outlook:

“What for? I don't know. I must. Besides that I am going. . . I am going because the life I am

leading here doesn't suit me" (Book I, Ch 2, pg. 21). Andrew is dissatisfied with his home life, and the idea of fighting in the war is an attractive alternative. Considering how serious a decision going to war is, one would expect him to consider the very real consequences that he might encounter. But Andrew displays no thoughts of death, no fear, nor confidence. Rather, he appears indifferent. Andrew's dissatisfaction may be more widespread than just with his home life.

Tolstoy depicts an interesting contrast. Generally men joining the armed forces experience extremes of emotion. Some feel more alive, driven by their anticipation of glory earned in battle. Others cling to life more vigorously, quaking with fear at the thought of losing it. Andrew appears to be indifferent to it all. He is neither afraid of, nor eager for his new duties but accepts them as he would any mundane task. Andrew doesn't so much commit to joining the war but instead views it as a means of escape from his dull life. If Andrew had seen an opportunity earlier to leave home he would have. With this "opportunity" Andrew seeks to do something new and finds a chance to leave behind all that is familiar.

Andrew's wife Lise and domestic life seem particularly oppressive to him. Lise often chides Andrew for intending to leave her and their unborn child at his father's home. After the soirée Andrew, clearly not inclined to argue while Pierre is present, suggests that she go to bed early. After Lise leaves the room Andrew urges Pierre:

"Never, never marry, my dear fellow! that's my advice: never marry till you can say to yourself that you have done all you are capable of. . . My wife . . . is an excellent woman, one of those rare women with whom a man's honor is safe; but, O God, What would I not give now to be unmarried! . . . You talk of Bonaparte and his career, . . . but Bonaparte when he worked went step by step toward his goal. He was free, he had nothing but his aim to consider and he reached it. But tie yourself up with a woman and like a chained convict, you lose all freedom!" (Book I, Ch 2, pg. 24)

Miserable with his current lot, Andrew anticipates the war will return his freedom. There is a curious juxtaposition in Andrew's dilemma. Andrew is in a good position in society: he is well liked, he has a good wife, soon he will have a child, and he lives in a comfortable house with his father and sister. Yet he seeks to leave the peaceful comforts, which he views as vexing and confining. In the war he aims to join a weaker army and face off against Napoleon, the greatest military mind of the time. Also he envisions finding freedom within the army. This is quite curious as armies have strict hierarchies and rely on a system of order and obedience. Rather than gaining freedom the individual relinquishes it. Before, Andrew had the freedom to do as he wished. However, upon entering the army he willingly gives up his freedoms and gives authority to those in command. What freedom was Andrew pursuing?

Andrew may have been envisioning a freedom from responsibility. However, while shedding responsibilities to his wife and child, he takes on serious responsibilities as a soldier. His loss of freedom is much more absolute than he anticipates.

In 1805 Prince Andrew gets his first experience of combat at the Battle of Schön Grabern. Schön Grabern proves to be a bitter experience for Andrew, for this battle reveals to him the incompetence present in the officer corp. Until now he has been serving as a valuable aide to General Kutúzov, leader of the Russian army. Hoping to assist in the battle however he can, he requests permission to help on the front line. Andrew is assigned to Prince Bagration's company. After arriving at Bagration's company headquarters he is struck by the disposition of the men:

In Bagration's detachment no one knew anything of the general position of affairs. They talked of peace but did not believe in its possibility; others talked of

a battle but also disbelieved in the nearness of an engagement. (Book II, Ch 11, pg 148)

After serving with the General Kutúzov, Andrew expects the other officers to be just as motivated as the general. What he finds instead is that the higher command is neither as focused nor involved as they should be. It is the duty of the officers to make sure that they do everything they can to prepare for an upcoming battle. To be unfamiliar with the strategy or doubt that the battle will even happen at all are serious problems. It makes one question how one can convince troops to sacrifice themselves under such limited direction.

Shortly after his initial observations, Andrew meets Prince Bagration. He offers Andrew the opportunity to serve in the rearguard; since Bagration expects a full retreat shortly after the battle commences. Andrew dismisses this idea and requests the chance to examine the layout of the army should the general send orders to him. Bagration agrees and the two ride to the central artillery battery commanded by Captain Túshin. When Andrew arrives he surveys the surrounding area:

He made some notes on two points, intending to mention them to Bagration . . . Prince Andrew being always near the commander in chief, closely following the mass movements and general orders, and constantly studying historical accounts of battles, involuntarily pictured to himself the course of events in the forthcoming action. (Book II, Ch 12, pg 153)

This passage details how seriously Andrew takes his position as an officer. He considers everything he can to make sure that they are prepared for the coming battle. In contrast Bagration disconnects himself from the fate of his subordinates like the officers in the company headquarters. His resigned and cynical assumption that the army will retreat indicates how little involved or concerned he is.

Soon after the battle commences a segment of the main battle line falls into disarray and requests reinforcements. Bagration takes the covering troops from the central battery and orders them to reinforce the main line. However this does not help sway the tide of battle. Hours later the entire Russian army has begun to retreat, save the central battery.

Túshin's battery had been forgotten and only at the very end of the action did Prince Bagration, still hearing the cannonade in the center, send his orderly staff officer, and later Prince Andrew also, to order the battery to retire as quickly as possible. (II, 15, pg 165)

The battery which Bagration personally visited only hours ago is completely disregarded. Tolstoy's language in the passage illustrates how disconnected from and indifferent Bagration is to his troops. He only responds at the last possible moment. The staff officer Bagration sends arrives at the battery to find it under heavy fire from French troops. The officer quickly tells Captain Túshin to retreat before running back to safety. Just as the staff officer flees, Andrew arrives to help with the retreat.

The first thing he saw on riding up to the space where Túshin's guns were stationed was an unharnessed horse with a broken leg, that lay screaming piteously. . . Among the limbers lay several dead men. . . He delivered the Order but did not leave the battery. He decided to have the guns removed from their positions and withdrawn in his presence. Together with Túshin, stepping across the bodies and under a terrible fire from the French, he attended to removal of the guns. (Book II, Ch 15, pg 167)

War reveals individuals in stark ways—some will abandon their duty out of fear, some through incompetence; Andrew exhibits a stronger sense of integrity. Andrew is forced to confront the brutal realities of the battlefield. Unlike his earlier avoidance of his domestic responsibilities, Andrew doesn't shirk his duty to the troops. His experience of war encourages his moral development.

Once the retreat is sounded the central battery continues firing not knowing that the rest of the army is leaving. The French sent waves of troops to take the position but Túshin's battery held resisted them. With the majority of allied troops gone, the battery becomes the focal point of the French attacks and suffer many losses including the destruction of two cannons. Realising the severity of the situation, Andrew decides to oversee and assist in the battery's retreat. Andrew exemplifies the qualities that make a good officer. Rather than just deliver the order to retreat and run away like his counterpart, Andrew stays and oversees the retreat despite the risk to his own life.

With the removal of the central battery the Russian army is able to make a full retreat. On his way back to Bagration's headquarters Andrew is forced to walk by many of the troops wounded in battle. Once at headquarters Andrew finds Bagration and his staff celebrating. Andrew catches the last of Bagration's speech:

“Gentlemen, I thank you all; all arms have behaved heroically; infantry, cavalry and artillery. How was it that two guns were abandoned in the center?” . . .
(Prince Bagration did not ask about the guns on the left flank; he knew that all the guns there had been abandoned at the very beginning of the action.) (Book II, Ch 16, pg 171)

Expecting a somber mood Andrew is shocked to find that Bagration is congratulating his fellow officers on their acts of heroism during the battle. Nothing could be further from the truth. Bagration chooses to punish the one officer who allowed a successful retreat rather than acknowledging his own failure to protect the troops. The entire left flank had abandoned their artillery pieces. Túshin arrives shortly after Andrew and is then questioned by Bagration:

“How was it a gun was abandoned’ asked Bagration . . .”
[Túshin] with his lower jaw trembling was hardly able to mutter:
“I don't know . . . your excellency . . . I had no men . . . your excellency.”
“You might have taken some from the covering troops.”

Túshin did not say that there were no covering troops, though that was perfectly true. He was afraid of getting some other officer into trouble, and silently fixed his eyes on Bagration as a schoolboy who has blundered looks at an examiner.” (Book II, Ch 16, pg 171)

Túshin is powerless. While he can't defend the loss of the two guns he knows he cannot dispute the military hierarchy without consequences. Bagration is completely unaware of the situation Captain Túshin faced and seeks to blame him for own his incompetence. Tolstoy grimly reminds us that the person in power writes history.

Seeing Túshin's helplessness Andrew acts to end the tirade. Andrew confronts Bagration furiously with the facts:

“Your excellency! . . . You were pleased to send me to Captain Túshin's battery. I went there and found two thirds of the men and horses knocked out, two guns smashed, and no supports at all.”

Prince Bagration and Túshin looked with equal intentness at Bolkonski who spoke with suppressed agitation. “And, if your excellency will allow me to express my opinion, . . . we owe today's success chiefly to the action of that battery and the heroic endurance of Captain Túshin and his company.” (Book II, Ch 16, pg 172)

Andrew effectively underlines Bagration's complete ignorance of the situation. Bagration didn't have the slightest idea of what the situation on the ground was, yet he was willing to incriminate the man who enabled the successful retreat of the army. The Battle of Schön Grabern offered an important lesson to Andrew on a reality of war. Officers have a duty to protect their subordinates. Schön Grabern depicts the its utter failure. The disconnect between Bagration and Túshin forever changes how Andrew views the military life he had longed for. Soldiers of many wars have expressed this same disgust and disillusionment with their superiors. “He felt sad and depressed. It was all so strange, so unlike what he had hoped” (Book II, Ch 16, pg 172). At the beginning of the battle Andrew imagined that his fellows would be just as inspired and devoted

as he was. Sadly Andrew uncovered another ugly truth that some will abuse their position just for the sake of power, a sense of superiority, and importance.

Just before the Battle of Austerlitz, for the first time Andrew considers the possibility of death. Rather than being shaken by this thought it seems to invigorate him:

“Yes, tomorrow, tomorrow! . . . Tomorrow everything may be over for me! All these memories will be no more, none of them will have any meaning for me. Tomorrow perhaps, even certainly, I have a presentiment that for the first time I shall have to show all I can do.” (Book III, Ch 11, pg 229)

His previous indifference towards the war now shifts to beaming confidence. The prospect of glory draws his attention away from the dark aspect of war. Because of this Andrew acts as if in daze. Instead of fear Andrew is seduced by a passionate desire for glory, for which he is prepared to risk all.

“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! . . . 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—father, sister, wife—those dearest to me—yet dreadful and unnatural as it seems, I would give them all at once for a moment of glory” (Book III, Ch 11, pg 229–30)

Andrew appears maddened by this thirst for glory. Part of him recognizes that there is something wrong with this insatiable lust but he can’t break free of it. In the first line he suggests that he has been carried away by his passions for glory and he cannot be blamed. But why should glory drive Andrew to such extremes? Glory in its most basic form is a recognition of a meritorious deed. Before the war Prince Andrew was known in many circles for being an interesting and intelligent man. Others recognized him as important because he was from a noble family. Andrew didn’t earn this societal respect but inherited it. He saw the war as a chance to individually earn the respect and admiration of his comrades. He expected this recognition to

provide a great deal of happiness. But he questions his willingness to abandon all that he holds dear for a moment of glory.

The last sentence of the chapter seems to compound the idea that Andrew is being deceived by this notion of glory: “All the same, I love and value nothing but triumph over them all, I value this mystic power and glory that is floating here above me in this mist!” (Book III, 11, pg 230). While Andrew is not aware of this deceptive nature of glory he does notice its mysterious seduction. Andrew had previously admitted that he shouldn’t be willing to sacrifice his family and friends for the sake of glory. However he has become blinded by this untenable passion. Before the Battle of Austerlitz Tolstoy describes a mist on the battle field. Mists can suggest a will-o-wisp or a light that misleads travelers at night. Tolstoy uses the mist to convey a similar idea. Rather than leading Andrew astray it obscures his vision of what is truly important. Glory isn’t the highest good that one should seek. In the midst of battle Andrew realizes the vanity in seeking glory.

While the Russian troops are moving into position to engage the French, Kutúzov and his men are caught off guard by French troops emerging from the fog. Shortly after the first shots of the battle Kutúzov is injured and the Russian army starts to retreat. Andrew, seeing the fallen standard, grasps it and charges forward rallying the troops.

“Forward, lads!” he shouted in a voice piercing as a child’s. “Here it is!” thought he, seizing the staff of the standard and hearing with pleasure the whistle of bullets evidently aimed at him. Several soldiers fell.

“Hurrah!” shouted Prince Andrew, and, scarcely able to hold up the heavy standard, he ran forward with full confidence that the whole battalion would follow him. And really he only ran a few steps alone. One soldier moved and then another and soon the whole battalion ran forward shouting “hurrah!” and overtook him. (Book III, Ch 13, pg 243)

This is Andrew's perfect moment to gain glory. The battle will be lost if the infantry does not rally; Andrew recognizes this and seizes the banner. The standard bearer serves to inspire the entire army. When Andrew takes the flag, the spirit of the army rests upon his shoulders.

Recognising the importance of the moment, he rushes forward heedless of danger. Of all the glorious actions that Andrew could have performed none could be as noble as leading the army itself. He seizes his moment of glory only to have it taken from him an instant later. After receiving a blow to the head Andrew falls and reflects:

He opened his eyes. . . Above him there was now nothing but the sky—the lofty sky, not clear yet still immeasurably lofty, with gray cloud 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. . . How differently do those clouds glide across that lofty infinite sky! 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. There is nothing, nothing, but that. But even it does not exist, there is nothing but quiet and peace. Thank God!” (Book III, Ch 13, pg 244)

Tolstoy illuminates Andrew's realization beautifully. Not only is there the contrasting idea of finding peace in the midst of the battle but also through the medium in which Andrew comes to this knowledge. In the middle of fierce combat Andrew recognises how pointless fighting is when compared to the immortal state of nature. Humans only have a limited time on earth yet waste their lives doing frivolous things like fighting and seeking glory. He contrasts the sky which simply is and is beautiful for just existing. Andrew didn't notice the beauty that was right in front of him. This moment serves as an awakening to Andrew. Before he was dissatisfied with life, but upon viewing the infinite sky just above him, he became aware of all the beauty around him that had gone unnoticed.

As the mist serves to cloud Andrew's judgement, the sky reminds him of the preciousness of life. The mist obstructs his vision of what is truly important and instead leads him on the vain pursuit of glory. The vision of the sky teaches him the insignificance of his own personal glory when compared to life itself. This comparison is important because it shows Andrew's character is evolving. Now he recognizes the beauty of life which he previously disregarded. Thus with a recognition of the beauty around him he experiences a deep satisfaction. However, this change is not a complete transformation. Tolstoy describes the sky as still clouded, implying Andrew has more to learn.

Andrew lays among the fallen at the edge of death. After the battle the French troops press forward and Napoleon surveys the battlefield. He observes Prince Andrew with the army's standard. Napoleon comments that such actions are worthy of a fine death. Andrew, while barely conscious was able to recognise Napoleon:

“He knew it was Napoleon—his hero—but at that moment it meant nothing to him who might be standing over him, or what was said of him; he was only glad that people were standing near him and only wished that they would help him and bring him back to life, which seemed to him so beautiful now that he had today learned to understand it so differently.” (Book III, Ch 13, pg 253)

Prior to being injured Andrew had been ready to sacrifice his life and his family to experience a moment of glory. After his experiences in battle, having Napoleon the leader French army praise him should be extraordinary. Yet none of that is of any interest to Andrew. Even Napoleon's stature is insignificant when compared to life itself. Before the war Andrew was restless and dissatisfied with life. After seeing the infinite sky he realises the importance of life. Sadly, though, this moment isn't sustained.

Andrew is placed among the other injured officers by the French soldiers. Napoleon praises the Russian officers present for fighting bravely but Andrew is unimpressed.

“Everything seemed so futile and insignificant in comparison with the stern and solemn train of thought that weakness from loss of blood, suffering, and the nearness of death aroused in him. Looking into Napoleon’s eyes Prince Andrew thought of the insignificance of greatness, . . . the still greater unimportance of death, the meaning of which no one alive could understand or explain.” (Book III, Ch 13, pg 254)

Andrew’s realization takes a different turn. Rather than extolling the beauty of life and happiness he focuses on a darker aspect. Before, Andrew saw greatness in personal glory. Here he says that greatness is insignificant. Further, one doesn’t achieve greatness in death. Before the war he was going through a depression, at the Battle of Austerlitz he has an epiphany on the beauty in the world. Now he realises how misguided his earlier notions were.

After Napoleon leaves Andrew remembers his life and joys at home that he had discarded. Looking at the icon that his sister Mary gave him, he reflects on the divine:

“It would be good if everything were as clear and simple as it seems to Mary. How good it would be to know where to seek for help in this life, and what to expect after it beyond the grave! . . . If I could now say: ‘Lord have mercy on me!’ . . . But to whom should I say that? Either to a Power indefinable, incomprehensible, which I not only cannot address but which I cannot even express in words—the Great All or this amulet by Mary! There is nothing certain, nothing at all except the unimportance of everything I understand, and the greatness of something incomprehensible but all-important.” (Book III, Ch 13, pg 255)

Andrew is in need of a divine presence with whom he can interact. Given what he saw in battle he is seeking divine meaning to provide meaning to the experience. However, he struggles to find a way to articulate his questions. Everything he previously believed doesn’t console him. His is consumed with the need to understand “something incomprehensible but all important.”. Andrew is humbled by uncertainty about what is “all-important”.

After his release by the French, Andrew returns to his family's estate at Bald Hills. The army declared him missing in action. Two months after the battle of Austerlitz, General Kutúzov informed Bolkonski the elder that his son had not been found. The old prince interprets this to mean that his son was killed and falls into a state of depression. Princess Mary can't bring herself to tell Lise, who is about to give birth and resolves to inform her after the baby has been born. Andrew returns to the estate just in time for the birth of his child. He first goes to see his wife in her bedroom:

Prince Andrew entered and paused facing her at the foot of the sofa on which she was lying. Her glittering eyes, filled with childlike fear and excitement, rested on him without changing their expression. "I love you all and have done no harm to anyone; why must I suffer so? Help me!" her look seemed to say. She saw her husband but did not realize the significance of his appearance before her now. Prince Andrew went round the sofa and kissed her forehead. "My darling," he said—a word he had never used to her before. "God is merciful . . ." (Book IV, Ch 9, pg 284)

Having returned from the battle alive and realising the beauty of life, Andrew hopes to reconnect with his family. However, upon seeing his wife he witnesses despair instead of happiness. The only words that are spoken are Andrew's. Lise remains silent while her husband is present. Andrew was hopeful at the thought of seeing his family but his wife's eyes reveal her suffering. Andrew has not adequately anticipated the significance of this moment to her. One would expect she should be happy to see that he is well. Her expression however is similar to Andrew's when meeting Napoleon. Neither reacts in awe and reverence but instead are disillusioned by the actual experience. Andrew is unable to recognize how much his wife has suffered and believes his mere presence will restore everything to normal.

Immediately after this Andrew leaves the room and Lise gives birth. But when Andrew returns to the room to see the child, the first thing he glimpses is that his Lise is dead:

A woman rushed out and seeing Prince Andrew stopped, hesitating on the threshold. He went into his wife's room. She was lying dead, in the same position he had seen her in five minutes before and despite the fixed eyes and the pallor of the cheeks, the same expression was on her charming childlike face with its upper lip covered with tiny black hair. (IV, Ch 9, pg 285)

Andrew now recognizes the significance of the look in his wife's eyes. They had been crying for help, but Lise didn't receive any assistance.

During her funeral when Andrew looks into her eyes he sees that same expression, he felt that "something gave way in his soul and that he was guilty of a sin he could neither remedy nor forget" (IV, Ch 9, pg 285). After his near death experience at Austerlitz he hoped to come home and reconnect with his family. Even though he didn't care for his wife before he left for war, upon his return to Bald Hills he had hopes for a new intimacy. The realization at Austerlitz helped convey the unappreciated beauty of home life. However when he arrived home all he saw in Lise's eyes was despair. He believes her death is his fault. Andrew abandoned his family to satisfy his personal need to escape his domestic responsibilities. While he did return to fulfill this role, the damage of his actions had already been done. Now he must suffer the anguish of not helping his wife in her most desperate hour. Andrew had once soared with the vision of the beauty that was all around him. Sadly now, that vision has been replaced with the dark clouds of guilt.

One year after the battle of Austerlitz, Prince Andrew's friend Pierre visits him on Andrew's southern estates. There Pierre engages Andrew in a discussion about how he found happiness by leaving his dreadful wife and joining the Masons. Through the conversation Andrew can barely tolerate Pierre's presence, radiating an aura of indifference:

"You lived for yourself and say you nearly ruined your life and only found happiness when you began living for others. I experienced just the reverse. I lived for glory. And after all what is glory? The same love of others, a desire to do

something for them, a desire for their approval. So I lived for others, and not almost, but quite ruined my life. And I have become calmer since I began to live only for myself.” (Book V, Ch 9, pg 335)

While Andrew was in the Army he held glory above all else. He believed his role in the military would be important. However, seeing the incompetence of some of the officers he became disillusioned. It was not until he was injured that he realized that glory was a vain pursuit. After seeing that infinite sky he realised that he loved life and his family and wished to see them again. He hoped to correct his mistakes when he returned home to his wife and family. Sadly his wife dies before he can fix things. Andrew now sees that his decision to join the army as ruining his life. In trying to live for the army and glory he ignored the importance of his family. Weighed down by guilt Andrew seeks to live in seclusion and indifference to the outside world.

Pierre, concerned by his friend’s outlook, tries to convince him that living for others could not possibly be a bad thing. Pierre then discusses how he aims to make life better for his serfs by building schools and hospitals on his estate. Andrew disagrees with Pierre, offering his own perspective:

“You want to raise him [pointing to a peasant] . . . from his animal condition and awaken in him spiritual needs, while it seems to me that the animal happiness is the only happiness possible, and that is just what you want to deprive him of . . . Then you say, ‘lighten his toil.’ But as I see it, physical labor is essential to him, as much a condition of his existence, as mental activity is to you or me. . . If he didn’t, he would go to the drink shop or fall ill.” (Book V, Ch 9, pg 336)

Andrew’s speech highlights his cynicism since his epiphany at Austerlitz. Imagining the peasant content with his life, Andrew believes that any change would deprive him of his base happiness. In his explanation Andrew is trying to defend his own actions. Andrew has resolved to live in isolation and doesn't want Pierre to interfere. Just as physical labor keeps the peasant from drinking, Andrew’s isolation keeps him from spreading or incurring more misery.

It is not until later in the conversation about the peasant that Andrew displays how cruel his thoughts have become: “He is dying, and you come and bleed him and patch him up. He will drag about as a cripple, a burden to everybody, for another ten years. It would be far easier and simpler for him to die” (Book V, Ch 9, pg 336). Here Andrew equates the ultimate kindness of saving a life as worthless and burdensome to everyone. Since returning from the war Andrew has lost the spark that enabled him to pursue glory and to appreciate that everlasting sky. Perhaps Andrew believes that he should have died on that day and now he will only be a burden to those he loves. He believes an individual’s life is only useful if not a burden to others.

Pierre is shocked by this revelation. Why would Andrew desire to live if he holds such thoughts to be true? Andrew’s reply details how hopeless he is for the future: “One must make one’s life as pleasant as possible. I’m alive, that is not my fault, so I must live out my life as best I can without hurting others. . . Life as it is leaves one no peace. I should be thankful to do nothing” (Book V, Ch 9, pg 336-337). Andrew, who was so full of zeal at the prospect of attaining glory, is now only an echo of his former self. Pain has corrupted Andrew, changing him from a man of action into one who idles just to pass time with no hope of meaning or transcendency.

Later in the evening Andrew and Pierre take a ferry ride. Pierre, dismayed by how bleak his friend’s outlook on life is inquires if Andrew believes in a future life. Andrew offers a trembling response: “When one sees a being dear to one, bound up with one’s own life, before whom one was to blame and had hoped to make it right, . . . and suddenly that being is seized with pain, suffers and ceases to exist. . . . Why? It cannot be that there is no answer” (Book V, Ch 10, pg 339). Andrew is a sharp and knowledgeable person but when confronted with the

unknown prospect of an afterlife he trembles. His wife's recent death has forced him to confront this difficult question. Andrew tries to rationalize the world around him but Lise's death presents an obstacle. He intended to fix the problems that had arisen between them but her death prevented that. Now Andrew is left with his unresolved guilt. All other problems in his life he is willing to dismiss and hold in indifference, but Lise's nonexistence seems unfathomable.

After hearing Andrew's solemn words Pierre recognises the difficulties that his friend is suffering. In one short speech Pierre attempts to offer hope to Andrew at his lowest point: "If there is a God and future life, there is truth and good, and man's highest happiness consists in striving to attain them. We must live, we must love, and we must believe that we live not only today on this scrap of earth, but have lived and shall live forever" (Book V, Ch 10, pg 340). Pierre reminds Andrew that he must take action in order to attain happiness. While Andrew has lost his wife he should not stop loving all together. Furthermore Pierre encourages Andrew to make the most of his life and believe in a life after death.

After hearing Pierre's words Andrew scans the scenery around the raft. The sun was just setting leaving a bright red shine on the water. While observing this scene Andrew thinks about Pierre's words:

Prince Andrew felt as if the sound of the waves kept up a refrain to Pierre's words, whispering: 'Its true believe it.' . . . He looked up at the sky; . . . for the first time since Austerlitz [he] saw that high, everlasting sky he had seen while lying on the battlefield; and something that had long been slumbering that was best within him, suddenly awoke, joyful and youthful, in his soul. It vanished as soon as he returned to the customary conditions of his life, but he knew that this feeling which he did not know how to develop existed within him. His meeting with Pierre formed an epoch in Prince Andrew's life. Though outwardly he continued to live the same old way, inwardly he began a new life. (Book V, Ch 10, pg 340).

Pierre's words manage to reach Andrew. Since his grand epiphany at Austerlitz, Andrew had become disillusioned with life. Now nature again provides him a beautiful vista to contemplate his life. The waves echo endlessly "believe it" while the everlasting sky stands above him. Andrew is reminded of that joy he experienced at Austerlitz yet he doesn't yet fully embrace it. While it may appear that Prince Andrew has not made the most of this experience, he has taken the first steps to a profound change. Earlier in his argument with Pierre he was resolute that he could not partake in the same happiness as Pierre. He believes that his best recourse of action is to isolate himself from society and live a life of solitude. However Pierre's words give Andrew hope. While he still feels guilt about his wife's death, there is the possibility of redemption in a life after death. To pursue that dream he must embrace the love of life that he experienced at Austerlitz. On the surface he may still appear cold and dismissive but some small part of him hopes that he can learn to love life once more.

The following year Andrew continues to live a peaceful life maintaining his estates. However the guilt and misery of his wife's death still cling to his heart. While visiting the Ryazán estates in the spring Andrew notices a peculiar scene:

At the edge of the road stood an oak. Probably ten times the age of the birches that formed the forest, it was ten times as thick and twice as tall as they. It was an enormous tree, its girth twice as great as a man could embrace, and evidently long ago some of its branches had been broken off and its bark scarred. With its huge ungainly limbs sprawling unsymmetrically, and its gnarled hands and fingers, it stood an aged, stern, and scornful monster among the smiling birch trees. Only the dead-looking evergreen firs dotted about in the forests, and this oak, refused to yield to the charm of spring or notice either the spring or the sunshine.

"Spring, love happiness!" this oak seemed to say. "Are you not weary of that stupid, meaningless, constantly repeated fraud? Always the same and always a fraud! There is no spring, no sun, no happiness! Look at those cramped dead firs, ever the same, and at me too, sticking out my broken and barked fingers just where they have grown, whether from my back or my sides: as they have grown

so I stand, and I do not believe in your hopes and your lies.” (Book VI, Ch 1, pg 368-369)

Tolstoy gives us a very powerful image to mirror Prince Andrew’s present condition. He paints a picture of this grotesque oak that refuses the comforts of spring. The tree is damaged and tormented by the elements. The tree like Andrew is nearly devoid of life, a mere hulking shell. Having witnessed the futility of war and the death of his wife Andrew sees little reason to be happy. At the time when it is natural for trees to blossom the oak refuses and instead insists it is “stupid, meaningless.” Andrew similarly resolves such happiness meaningless and fraudulent.

For the sake of his estates Andrew is required to meet Count Ilya Rostóv in Otrádnoe. It was here that he first sees the Count’s daughter Natásha playing outside. His mood improves and he becomes curious:

Suddenly, he did not know why, he felt a pang. The day was so beautiful, the sun so bright, everything around around so gay, but that slim pretty girl did not know, or wish to know, of his existence and was contented and cheerful in her own separate - probably foolish- but bright and happy life. “What is she so glad about? What is she thinking of? . . . Why is she so happy?” (Book VI, Ch 1, pg 369)

After viewing Natásha cheerfully playing Andrew begins to change. In contrast to the ragged appearance of the oak, the sky takes on a simple and clear beauty. No longer completely focused on the misery in his life he sees the beautiful happiness within hers. While he thinks that her happiness may be due to her own blissful ignorance he is genuinely curious what makes her so happy. The fact that Andrew is curious at all is astonishing. When looking at the oak he had a firm resolve that the vibrancy and happiness present in the other trees were not for him. He was certain that his life would be without happiness. But in just a moment all that changed! The mere action of viewing Natásha in a happy state was enough to make him question why. From sad resolution to simple curiosity Andrew takes his first step to raising himself from his piteous state.

Andrew chats with Ilya Rostóv about affairs on Andrew's estates and finds that certain necessary paperwork has not arrived requiring that Andrew stay the night. Upset that the necessary papers were not ready on his arrival, Andrew has a hard time falling asleep. Opening his window he discovered a beautiful night sky with the moon shining brightly. While gazing at this he overhears a conversation taking place a floor above him:

“Sonya! Sonya! . . . Oh, how can you sleep? Only look how glorious it is! Ah, how glorious. . . . There never, never was such a lovely night before . . . I feel like sitting down on my heels, putting my arms round my knees like this, straining tight, as tight as possible, and flying away!”(Book VI, Ch 1, pg 370)

Natasha too has noticed this lovely sight. Back at the Battle of Austerlitz Andrew believed himself to be the only one to have noticed the beauty of the infinite sky that was right above them. In the middle of the night he would have expected to be the only one to appreciate the beauty of that moon. Then he discovers the same girl who was so full of joy earlier in the day appreciating the beautiful view as well: “In his soul there suddenly arose such an unexpected turmoil of youthful thoughts and hopes, contrary to the whole tenor of his life.” (Book VI, Ch 1, pg 371). When readers first encounter Prince Andrew he is a miserable young man. The Battle of Austerlitz and the death of his wife only compound this. While on the ferry with Pierre Andrew has a glimpse of happiness but quickly dismissed it. Andrew once faced life with grim resolution that he would remain unhappy and sullen his whole life. But now Andrew has hope for the future and the change it might bring.

On his return trip home he passes by the same forest where he had seen the sickly oak. He wanders for some time before he discovers the tree.

Without recognizing it he looked with admiration at the very oak he sought. The old oak, quite transfigured, spreading out a canopy of sappy dark green foliage, stood rapt and slightly trembling in the rays of the evening sun. Neither gnarled fingers nor old scars nor old doubts and sorrows were any of them in evidence

now. Through the hard century-old bark, even where there were no twigs, leaves had sprouted such as one could hardly believe the veteran could have produced. (Book VI, Ch 1, pg 371)

Tolstoy gives us another beautiful canvas to describe the changes Andrew is undergoing. Earlier the tree was an ugly deformed mass of tough wood unwilling to embrace the renewal of spring. Yet when he returns the forest to the tree is no longer in such a wretched state but teeming with life. Now Andrew foresees a new vibrant view of life with hope for the future. He declares his newly found conviction:

“No, life is not over at thirty-one! . . . It is not enough for me to know what I have in me—everyone must know it: Pierre, and that young girl who wanted to fly away into the sky, everyone must know me, so that my life may not be lived for myself alone while others live so apart from it, but so that it may be reflected in them all, and they and I may live in harmony!” (Book VI, Ch 1, pg 371-372)

Andrew transforms his motivation to live. He anticipated being content, isolating himself away from society on his estates. His discussion with Pierre, seeing Natásha, and the oak causes him to reevaluate what he previously held to be true. Andrew previously felt he was forced to resign himself to cynicism and despair. But with these new experiences Andrew realizes that he determines how to envision his life. While deeply saddened by his past, he is capable of enjoying the present. Emboldened by his new found happiness, Andrew triumphantly returns, embracing his own happiness and sharing it with others.

On New Year’s Eve of 1809, Andrew attends the Emperor’s Ball. Andrew talks with some military officials who are present. He notices that the Emperor has begun dancing but everyone else is too intimidated to follow suit. At this moment Pierre tells him that Natásha Rostóva is in need of a partner. Andrew immediately breaks away from his military colleagues

and followed Pierre in hopes of finding the young Rostóva. Seeing her in the crowd he reflects on the helpless look in her eyes:

The despairing, dejected expression of Natásha's face caught his eye. He recognized her, guessed her feelings, saw that it was her debut, remembered her conversation at the window, and with a expression of pleasure on his face approached Countess Rostóva. (Book VI, Ch 9, pg 405)

Andrew seeks to relieve her of the despair of not being noticed. Just as she had helped him recognise his own worth, Andrew wishes to reciprocate through this action. "He asked her to waltz. That expression on Natásha's face, prepared either for despair or rapture, suddenly brightened into a happy, grateful, childlike smile" (Book VI, Ch 9, pg 405). This scene parallels Natásha's observation at her windowsill earlier in the book. Her observation about the beauty of the night sky fills him with similar joy. Natásha doubted she would be recognized the entire night. On the contrary she becomes one of the most sought after dancing partners at the entire ball. She has never been happier in all her life.

A few days later Andrew visits the Rostóv's home in Petersburg. The family he had judged so harshly were now dear to him, especially Natásha. He believes she has brought about his new view on life:

In Natásha, Prince Andrew was conscious of a strange world completely alien to him and brimful of joys unknown to him, a different world, that in the Otrádnoc avenue and at the window that moonlight night had already begun to disconcert him. Now this world disconcerted him no longer and was no longer alien to him, but he himself having entered it found in it a new enjoyment. (Book VI, Ch 11, pg 411)

Through Natásha's eyes, Andrew now sees joy in the world. Previously he had a narrow perception of the world because of his grief and bitterness. Natásha enables him to have an

expanded view of the world. The pain of his life does not weigh as heavily as it did before. Her presence makes him happy and lighter.

Later in the evening Natásha is asked to sing for the Rostóvs' guests. Andrew is chatting with some of the guests when he is struck by her voice:

In the midst of a phrase he ceased speaking and suddenly felt tears choking him, a thing he had thought impossible for him. He looked at Natásha as she sang, and something new and joyful stirred in his soul. He felt happy and at the same time sad. He had absolutely nothing to weep about yet he was ready to weep. What about? His former love? The little princess? His disillusionments? (Book VI, Ch 11, pg 411)

Every moment with Natásha offers some new happiness of which Andrew was previously unaware. His tears are not solely motivated by her voice. He questions what has moved him so deeply. Perhaps the experience is similar to hearing Chopin for the first time. The many emotions that are evoked in a single piece can be hard to express in words. Yet there is something much more profound that Andrew experiences here.

Still listening to her melody, Andrew recognizes what has caused his conflicting feelings:

The chief reason was a sudden, vivid sense of the terrible contrast between something infinitely great and illimitable within him and that limited and material something that he, and even she, was. This contrast weighed on and yet cheered him while she sang. (Book VI, Ch 11, pg 411)

I believe Andrew is experiencing divine love, namely the “infinitely great and illimitable,” within himself (although he is not yet aware what exactly “it” is). Much later in the story Andrew becomes aware of this divine love within all humans. He contrasts this idea with his and Natásha's own mortal lives. I will discuss this concept of divine love in further detail later in the text. At this point Andrew experiences it but does not fully recognise it as divine love.

After her performance Andrew compliments Natásha on her performance then leaves the house. As he struggles to fall asleep he finds himself still thinking of her:

It did not enter his head that he was in love with Natásha; he was not thinking about her, but only picturing her to himself, and in consequence all life appeared in a new light. “Why do I strive, why do I toil in this narrow, confined frame. When life, all life with all its joys, is open to me? . . . Pierre was right when he said one must believe in the possibility of happiness in order to be happy, and now I do believe in it. Let the dead bury their dead, but while one has life one must live and be happy!” (Book VI, Ch 11, pg 411-412)

Natásha is undoubtedly an important influence in changing him for the better. While Pierre’s speech on the ferry may have provided an idea of a happy life, Natásha presents it as a reality. Her joy encourages Andrew to live again. The grief that constantly clung to him is now diminished. The world which had been so cold and colorless is now seen as warm and beckoning. Andrew wishes to explore this new world, taking in the beauty that is newly apparent to him.

Andrew returns several times to the Rostóv’s home and the entire family expects him to propose to Natásha. First Andrew returns to his father's estate to ask for his approval. He father, believing the wedding to be a bad idea, asks for a one year delay. When Andrew returns to the Rostóvs’ home in Petersburg he discovers that Natásha has been eagerly awaiting his proposal. Upon hearing it she instantly confesses she has loved Andrew since their meeting in Otrádnoc. Now officially engaged, an unexpected change occurs:

Prince Andrew held her hands, looked into her eyes, and did not find in his heart his former love for her. Something in him had suddenly changed; there was no longer the former poetic and mystic charm of desire, but there was pity for her feminine and childish weakness, fear at her devotion and truthfulness, and an oppressive yet joyful sense of the duty that now bound him to her forever. The present feeling, though not so bright and poetic as the former, was stronger and more serious. (Book VI, Ch 14, pg 422)

Prior to this Andrew experienced a different kind of love for Natásha. That love was that of young lovers solely seeking romance and affection. Now that he is engaged Andrew's sense of their relationship deepens; his sense of responsibility is heightened. He sees in her a purity and fragility that he wants to preserve and protect. Unlike his responsibility to Lise which he found boring, oppressive, and took lightly, his feelings of responsibility now reinforces his resolve to marry Natásha. He had failed his wife Lise; now he has the chance to redeem himself and live a happy responsible life. Just as the real experience of war led Andrew to a more substantial understanding of duty so too his experiences in his private life have deepened his responsibilities to those he loves.

Andrew informs Natásha that the wedding must be postponed upon his father's request. Andrew tells her that the engagement will be secret, and should she decide to call it off, he will understand. Frantic at the thought of waiting an entire year Natásha begs him to reconsider. Sadly he informs her the delay is a necessary condition for their engagement. After that Prince Andrew travels to Switzerland to get his son a tutor and returns to unwelcome news.

With Andrew abroad Natásha suffers as a child might home alone for the first time. He is constantly in her thoughts and she is tormented by not being with him. While attending an opera with her family she is introduced to Anatole Kurágin, who immediately begins to seduce her. Anatole is a nefarious man but also handsome and charming. At first Natásha resists his advances but after multiple encounters with him finally she succumbs. Sensing an opportunity Anatole attempts to elope with Natásha. Their plan is foiled by Natásha's cousin Sonya who discovers a love letter Anatole wrote. As it turns out, Anatole couldn't have married Natásha in any case since he was already married to a woman in Poland. Recognizing the gravity of

Anatole's betrayal of her and her own betrayal of Andrew, Natásha attempts to poison herself. However she becomes frightened after drinking a little of the poison. Natásha does get ill but doctors are able to administer an antidote in time.

Soon after the poisoning Andrew returns from abroad and hears all the news at once. Pierre drives Anatole away from Natásha and informs her of Anatole's marriage to the Polish woman, but he resolves to remain near the Rostóvs' should he be needed. Andrew requests to speak with Pierre. When Pierre arrives he finds that his friend avoids speaking of Natásha and speaks instead of Switzerland. While listening to him Pierre sees through Andrew's façade:

Pierre now recognized in his friend a need with which he was only too familiar, to get excited and to have arguments about extraneous matters in order to stifle thoughts that were too oppressive and too intimate. (Book VIII, Ch 21, pg 531)

Natásha had been the center of Andrew's new found happiness. Without that foundation Andrew falls back into despair. Pierre has seen this in Andrew before. In their talk on the ferry years ago Andrew argued to keep from thinking of his wife's death. In this case the grief is overpowered by bitterness.

After their extraneous discussions Andrew inquires if reports that Anatole Kurágin tried to elope with Natásha were true. Pierre confirms this and then describes Natásha's illness shortly thereafter. Andrew responds coldly: "I much regret her illness," said Prince Andrew; and he smiled like his father, coldly, maliciously, and unpleasantly" (Book VIII, Ch 21, pg 531).

Andrew's father has been portrayed as a cold and cruel man throughout the novel and was against the marriage from the start.

Now Andrew reverts to a bitter imitation of his father. "I said that a fallen woman should be forgiven, but I didn't say I could forgive her. I can't" (Book VIII, Ch 21, pg 531). Andrew

embraced the idea of loving humanity as a whole, but he quickly reverts to a bitter and selfish stance toward Natásha and the world. Suddenly the endless possibilities of life offered to him have vanished. All he can think of now is his bitter feelings towards Natásha. When Pierre asks Andrew if there is any chance the two may reconcile, Andrew quickly dismisses this thought: “Yes that would be very noble but I am unable to follow in that gentleman’s footsteps. If you wish to be my friend never speak to me of that . . . of all that!”(Book VIII, Ch 21, pg 531-532). Andrew displays how far Natásha has fallen in his eyes. He only feels the bitterest of hatred for her now. Andrew even threatens to end his friendship with Pierre should he mention her name again. Once again the loyal “soldier” is punished for his loyalty and integrity. Andrew reverts to cynical nihilism. One wonders how deep his epiphanies were if they are so easily dismissed.

After meeting with Pierre in Petersburg, Andrew searches for Anatole Kurágin and learns that he has been posted to Turkey. Andrew travels to Turkey with the army hoping to instigate a fight with Anatole. However when he arrives he learns that Anatole has been transferred once again. Andrew finds that the scenery of Russia only reminds him of his bad memories. The unfamiliar surroundings of Turkey are a bit more bearable but cannot eradicate the problems he faces within.

After his betrothed had broken faith with him—which he felt the more acutely the more he tried to conceal its effects—the surroundings in which he had been happy became trying to him. . . . It was as if that lofty, infinite canopy of heaven that had once towered above him had suddenly turned into a low, solid vault that weighed him down, in which all was clear, but nothing eternal or mysterious.” (Book IX, Ch 8, pg 557-558)

When Andrew was at his lowest point after Austerlitz he still remembered the magnificence of the eternal sky he saw on the battlefield. Now far away from Natásha and all his memories in

Russia he is still haunted by her broken promise. The sky which he views as the “infinite canopy of heaven” now is reduced to a cold dark tomb.

Gradually Andrew’s bitterness towards Natásha subsides and is replaced by grief and pain. Once again an emptiness is created in Andrew’s being wrought out of pain. Before, Andrew was lacking a desire for love and happiness. Natásha filled this void, serving as a lens to see all the beauty in life through her eyes. With Natásha gone the void has not only returned but has expanded. The lesson that Andrew gained from seeing the infinite sky was the desire to live. However that sky now weighs down on him and feels empty. Life now feels burdensome to him and Andrew’s desire to live is extinguished.

1812 marks Napoleon’s invasion of Russia; both armies assemble at Borodinó, one of the bloodiest battles of the war. After his tour in Turkey Andrew returns home to his father’s estate at Bald Hills. While there he gets into an argument with his father about his son’s education. Andrew leaves before reconciling with his father and soon thereafter his father becomes ill and dies. Napoleon sweeps through Russia forcing Andrew’s family to abandon their estates. When Andrew arrives at a Russian outpost a young officer asks if he partook in the retreat: “I had the pleasure . . . not only of taking part in the retreat but of losing in that retreat all I held dear—not to mention the estate and home of my birth—my father, who died of grief” (Book X, Ch 15, pg 658). Andrew is at his lowest point. He has lost his father, his home, Natásha and his desire to live. Before Andrew used the army as a means of escape from his mundane responsibilities at home. Now he sees the army as his only alternative. He has lost everything.

The night before the Battle of Borodinó Andrew struggles with the idea that he could die on the battlefield:

He knew that tomorrow's battle would be the most terrible of all he had taken part in, and for the first time in his life the possibility of death presented itself to him . . . not in relation to any worldly matter or with reference to its effect on others, but simply in relation to himself, to his soul—vividly, plainly, terribly, and almost as a certainty. (Book X, Ch 24, pg 685)

At Austerlitz Andrew contemplated the possibility of death but dismissed it quickly when he considered the reward of glory. Andrew now has no such motivation for glory and expects he will die in battle. Tolstoy emphasises the stark reality with his language: “vividly, plainly, terribly, and almost as a certainty.” Andrew is confronting this with open eyes, he is keenly aware that he is mortal.

The prospect of an imminent death inspires a kind of awe. Considering death makes him reconsider his own life:

From the height of this perception all that had previously tormented and preoccupied him suddenly became illumined by a cold white light without shadow, without perspective, and without distinction of outline. All life appeared to him like magic-lantern pictures at which he had long been gazing by artificial light through a glass. Now he suddenly saw those badly daubed pictures in clear daylight and without a glass. (Book X, Ch 24, pg 685)

Andrew's thoughts on death have given him perspective. Tolstoy describes that in this vision Andrew sees three causes of suffering in his life: love for a woman, his father's death and Napoleon's invasion of Russia. In each case he had hoped that reality would match the ideal: Natásha staying faithful, his father being able to live on his own land and for Napoleon to recognize the destruction he left in his wake. None ended as he hoped.

Shortly after his vision Andrew hears a figure walking to his building. Pierre appears and Andrew invites him inside to discuss the coming battle. In their discussion Pierre questions what factor determines who is the victor in a battle. Andrew, who has long considered this, shares his thoughts:

“A battle is won by those who firmly resolve to win it! Why did we lose at Austerlitz? . . . [Because] we said to ourselves that we were losing the battle, and we did lose it. . . . Tomorrow means this: a Russian army of a hundred thousand and a French army of a hundred thousand have met to fight. . . . The side that fights more fiercely and spares itself least will win . . . we shall win!”(Book X, Ch 25, pg 689)

Andrew echoes General Kutúzov’s words on the spirit of the army, which Kutúzov describes as a mysterious force that determines the outcome of a battle. It is not the number of men nor the quality of the equipment but the will of the soldiers fighting that determine the outcome of the battle. This applies not just to armies but to individuals as well. Andrew, for example, is not the summation of his experiences but it is rather how he reacts to crises that informs us who he is. Andrew has not made this connection on the smaller scale yet but I believe he does later in the text.

Andrew and Pierre continue their discussion outside when they hear two German strategists talking nearby. The Germans suggest the war should be expanded further abroad to weaken Napoleon’s forces and that individual losses can’t be a main concern. Andrew, furious at what he overhears, voices his thoughts:

“Those German gentlemen won’t win because they have nothing in their German heads but theories not worth an empty eggshell and haven’t in their hearts the one thing needed tomorrow. . . They have yielded up all Europe to him, and have now come to teach us. Fine teachers!” (Book X, Ch 25, pg 690)

Andrew believes the German theorists put too much faith in battle plans. What infuriates him is what they call a plan. Their aim is not to fight the war but simply to exhaust the enemy. This would require the Russian people to make tremendous sacrifices both in terms of people and resources. The German strategists have less at stake than the Russians do in this regard. They are serving as advisors and do not risk the loss of their homes, lives and livelihoods. Andrew is

reminded again of his distaste for incompetence and indifference in the military. While their strategies may be sound in theory they blatantly disregard the cost in human lives.

Pierre and Andrew's discussion quickly shifts to the ethics of waging war. Andrew advocates for the use of total war: uncompromising and taking no prisoners. He feels this makes war less cruel. He believes that nations only play at war and that glory is a means to hide its true gruesomeness:

“If there was none of this magnanimity in war, we should go to war only when it was worth while going to certain death, as now. . . War is not courtesy but the most horrible thing in life; we ought to understand that and not play at war. . . As it is now, war is the favorite pastime of the idle and frivolous.”(Book X, Ch 25, pg 691)

Tolstoy uses Andrew here to point out the hypocrisy of war. War is dressed up with the beguiling veil of glory but hides its sinister nature. People pretend that there is something noble and glorious to be gained from pursuing this “chivalrous cause.” It is not until it is too late that people discover this deception. The only people who gain from this terrible ruse are those far from battlefield pulling the strings. Andrew wishes we would recognize war for its true nature so that we would never commit to it again.

Andrew needs to rest and encourages Pierre to do the same before the Battle of Borodinó. Pierre doesn't get the chance to properly say goodbye before his friend walks away; it is the last time the two see each other. Andrew returns to bed and falls asleep. He dreams of Natásha; she is telling him a story of a man she met but can't find words to describe him. Andrew patiently listens and encourages her to tell her story as best she can. Looking into her eyes he realises:

“I understood her, . . . that inner spiritual force, that sincerity, that frankness of soul; . . . it was that soul I loved. . . [Anatole] did not need anything of that kind. He neither saw nor understood anything of the sort. He only saw in her a pretty and fresh young girl!” (Book X, Ch 25, pg 692)

Andrew loves Natásha despite his bitterness. He sees something pure and free from the corruption of the world he inhabits. She sees the good in life and opens Andrew up to it as well. Anatole only sees what he wants and used her to serve his desires. He corrupted what was pure and was careless. Andrew had believed that Natásha was solely at fault but now he saw that Natásha only fell because of Anatole's unscrupulousness.

When the battle commences Andrew's unit is placed in the reserves. He and his men await orders while under artillery fire. Andrew shouts orders for troops to spread out to avoid being caught in an explosion. Moments later a shell lands a few feet in front of him. Those near him tell him to find cover but Andrew hesitates, instead gripped by a thought: "Can this be death? . . . I cannot, I do not wish to die. I love life - I love this grass, this earth, this air" (Book X, Ch 36, pg 722). Just as he did at Austerlitz, Andrew wishes to live.

The threat of death prompts him to remember what is truly important and he seeks to share it with the rest of the men around him: "It's shameful, sir! . . . What . . ." (Book X, Ch 36, pg 723). Before Andrew finishes what he plans to say the shell explodes, wounding him. He is quickly transported to the medical tent. What had Andrew planned to say? Tolstoy uses this short passage to emphasize the brutal indifference of war. War takes soldiers in unfair ways, at inopportune times. Many fall just as Andrew has, on the verge of some new chapter in their life. Andrew might have another epiphany like he did at Austerlitz—an epiphany in which the whole of his life can change in a moment. If I can envision the sentence continuing, I believe that Andrew would have stated: "It's shameful . . . what man does with life when he doesn't appreciate it." Andrew struggles through a cycle of disillusionment since the beginning of the book. Whenever there was a good thing in his life there was also something that diminishes it. In

his bitterness Andrew says many reproachful things. Yet his experiences also teach him that he must keep believing that life is a gift. For all the pain it brings, it also holds many joys and beauties. Tolstoy leaves his intent ambiguous but I do believe Andrew has finally appreciated the gift of life as something truly glorious and worthwhile.

Andrew is quickly transported to a field hospital that is overflowing with injured troops. Before being treated for his injuries, the surgeons remove his bloodied clothing. Andrew is in a state of bliss:

After the sufferings he had been enduring, Prince Andrew enjoyed a blissful feeling such as he had not experienced for a long time. All the best and happiest moments of his life—especially his earliest childhood, when he used to be undressed and put to bed, and when leaning over him his nurse sang him to sleep and he, burying his head in the pillow, felt happy in the mere consciousness of life—returned to his memory. (Book X, Ch 37, pg 725)

While being changed out of bloodied garments Andrew thinks back to the pleasure of going to bed as a child. Long forgotten joys of childhood, renew feelings of joy. He is alive and comforted and for the moment that is sufficient.

The man next to Andrew is brought in crying in tremendous pain. He seems eerily familiar. He has just had his leg amputated when Andrew glimpses his face:

In the miserable, sobbing, enfeebled man whose leg had just been amputated, he recognized Anatole Kurágin. . . Ecstatic pity and love for that man overflowed his happy heart. . . “Compassion, love of our brothers, for those who love us and for those who hate us, love of our enemies; yes that love which God preached on earth . . . I did not understand—that is what made me sorry to part with life, that is what remained for me had I lived.” (Book X, Ch 37, pg 726)

The man he despised for taking Natásha now is before him. Gone was Andrew’s desire for vengeance. In its wake Andrew experiences an outpouring of compassion. He is reminded of the Gospels that his sister preached to him and only now after seeing his enemy in such a state does

he understand what she was trying to teach him. This compassion is divine love, the same he experienced when he heard Natásha sing for the first time.

Once Andrew is treated he is transported along with the other injured troops to Moscow now being evacuated. Encamped outside the city Andrew sleeps and contemplates that feeling he felt while looking at Anatole:

“I experienced that feeling of love which is the very essence of the soul and does not require an object. Now again I feel that bliss. To love one’s neighbors, to love one’s enemies, to love everything. It is possible to love someone dear to you with human love, but an enemy can only be loved by divine love. That is why I experienced such joy when I loved that man.” (Book XI, Ch 15, pg 817)

This divine love that Andrew describes doesn’t require an object and can simply be freely given. The human love that he had experienced was limited but the divine love is unlimited. Andrew was incapable of loving Anatole previously because he lacked an understanding of divine love. But after his experience in the field hospital and tremendous pain Andrew is paradoxically in a state of bliss.

Now Andrew is reminded of Natásha and how he had hated her actions:

When loving with human love one may pass from love to hatred, but divine love cannot change. . . It is the very essence of the soul. Yet how many people have I hated in my life? And of them all, I loved and hated none as I did her’ . . . Picturing to himself her soul . . . he understood her feelings, her sufferings, shame and remorse. He now understood for the first time all the cruelty of his rejection of her. (Book XI, Ch 15, pg 817)

Andrew, devastated by his unwillingness to reconcile with Natásha, only considered his perspective and how he had been hurt from her betrayal. He hadn’t considered Natásha’s perspective and how she suffered for the harm she had done to him. Andrew believes he survived Borodinó in order to understand divine love. When Natásha sang for Andrew he experienced it

but didn't recognize it as divine love. Now enlightened, Andrew feels compelled to share this with Natásha.

Andrew slowly feels himself regaining consciousness from his contemplation of divine love. At the end of the room a mysterious figure approaches him. Once he regains full consciousness he is overjoyed to see the real Natásha before him:

When he came to himself, Natásha, that same living Natásha whom of all people he most longed to love with this pure divine love that had been revealed to him, was kneeling before him. (XI, 15, pg 818)

Natásha begs for his forgiveness. Andrew, already relieved to see her, forgives without a second thought. Natásha works tirelessly to bring Andrew back to health.

Hearing of her brother's injury at Borodinó, Princess Mary travels to Yaroslávl to meet her brother's caretakers. She is greeted by Natásha who tells her Andrew has taken a turn for the worse. A few days before Mary arrived Andrew had a dream. In the dream he was back in perfect health and in front of him was a door rattling violently. Death was trying to break down the door and take him:

He rose and went to the door to bolt and lock it. Everything depended on whether he was, or was not in time to lock it. . . He was seized by an agonizing fear. And that fear was the fear of death. It stood behind the door. . . Something not human—death—was breaking in through the door. . . He seized the door, making a final effort to hold it back—to lock it was no longer possible . . . His last superhuman efforts were vain and both halves of the door noiselessly open. It entered, and it was *death*, and Prince Andrew died.

But at the instant he died, he remembered that he was asleep, and at the very instant he died, having made an effort, he awoke.

“Yes, it was death! I died—and woke up. Yes death is an awakening!” 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. (Book XII, Ch 4, pg 870-871)

Tolstoy depicts the death of Andrew quite beautifully. Andrew's final struggle is a confrontation with death. The fear of the unknown seizes him in the dream. However on awakening he realizes that death is not something to be feared but serves as a beginning to a new chapter. This experience signifies the death of Andrew's body and the awakening of his soul.

From that day an awakening from life came to Prince Andrew together with his awakening from sleep. And compared to the duration of life it did not seem to him slower than an awakening from sleep compared to the duration of a dream. (Book XII, Ch 4, pg 871)

When the soul departs all that remains is flesh and bone. Andrew doesn't experience the mortal death that will take place days later for his life really ended when he awoke from his dream. Once Andrew completes his reconciliation with Natásha, all that remains for him to do is to face death.

Looking back on the events depicted in War and Peace, how Andrew responds to his death or deathlike experiences is key to understanding Tolstoy's illustration of the character. His dream is not the only time Andrew has encountered death. When Napoleon spoke to Andrew at Austerlitz, Napoleon's doctor Larrey said the following: "He is a nervous, bilious subject," said Larrey, "and will not recover." And Prince Andrew, with others fatally wounded, was left to the care of the inhabitants of the district" (Book III, Ch 13, pg 255). Tolstoy marks Andrew for death early in the book, yet he survives for a considerable time. Andrew is left fatally wounded and is expected to die. But he manages to stay death's hand by finding new motivation to live. When he witnesses the eternal sky, he is reminded of all the beauty in the world that he has overlooked. At Borodinó, staring at the artillery shell, Andrew expects to die. Yet seconds before the shell explodes Andrew experiences a new love of life that compels him to live. Confronted with death Andrew is again reminded of the beauty in the world and wishes to experience it. Finally in his

dream, Andrew meets death. Awakening from his dream, he learns that death is not the end but an awakening to a new chapter. What had been incomprehensible in life gained a new clarity in death. Each of his death experiences furthered his understanding of what is truly important. At Austerlitz he awakened to the fickleness of glory in war and begins to search for the “incomprehensible but all important” force that he had seen in the sky. At Borodino he awakened to the importance of divine love, and from that point until his dream, Andrew gains an understanding of death. Andrew serves Tolstoy as an important vehicle to describe the mysterious force called the spirit. Earlier, Andrew learns from Kutúsov how the spirit of the army was the deciding factor in any battle. In Andrew’s life, his spirit has pushed death back and compels him to live longer and more fully. It is his desire to understand this incomprehensible force that was present in the sky over Austerlitz that motivates him to continue living.

Andrew has been struggling to understand this incomprehensible force since Austerlitz. In truth one cannot fully comprehend something that is incomprehensible. Andrew, however, has found a way to get closer to this—divine love. Throughout the book we see the effects of the absence of love in many ways. One example of this is when Andrew and Natasha were separated. Andrew becomes self absorbed and vindictive. But when he discovers his nemesis Anatole in a hospital bed beside him, he is not filled with hatred as we would expect, but is filled with a compassion for their shared humanity. Andrew has gone beyond the limits of self centered love to an understanding of all encompassing divine love. The power of this love is depicted in his final dream. In his dream of death, he struggles to hold the shuddering door closed. Finally, Andrew succumbs and death’s doors “noiselessly open”. When he awakes he does not cry out in fear at having been so close to death but accepts the experience. Just as Andrew had learned to

love Anatole in the hospital, he embraces death in the same way, unconditionally. And in so doing Andrew embraces his life in all its incomprehensibility.

While Andrew is just one character in the vast story known as War and Peace, he provides Tolstoy a canvas to portray a spectrum of human dilemmas. In the character of Andrew we see a torturous cycle of self exploration. Andrew is continually confronted by experiences that challenge his beliefs. Through this one character we see the brutal realities of war, dismay at human failures and the limits of self centered importance. These experiences compel Andrew to consider his perceptions scrupulously. Andrew's final moments provide insight into the all importance of divine love. While the epiphany comes late for Andrew, the reader bears witness.

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