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TOLSTOY'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY: TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF TRUTHFULNESS IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract: In this article we would like to bring to light the importance of Tolstoy as a moral thinker, in view of the brilliance of his literary work has always eclipsed his more philosophical work. Tolstoy, bewildered by the desperation of death and lack of meaning, built a philosophy of love in which he associates one's own happiness with the happiness of others. For the Russian moralist, people who live for themselves can never achieve happiness and will not live. In contrast, people who choose the path of love and the happiness of others will be happy and will truly live, because this is the reason for living, the meaning of life. The person who lives in love lives an authentic life, far away from falsehood. The ideas of Tolstoy have a practical application in clinical practice. Through an analysis of the novel *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, where we can find condensed the whole of Tolstoy's moral thought, we will discover the negative consequences that are generated by falsehood when taking care of the sick, and above all of those who are dying. And we will see how the Russian author, without having lived through the crisis of medical paternalism, and even less the appearance of the declaration of the rights of patients that emphasise above

all the autonomy of the patient, promoted a model of respectful relationship with the wish of the patient to receive information and know the truth. Through the analysis of a fictional tale, this article aims to invite reflection on the virtue of truthfulness in the clinical relationship.

Key words: *Tolstoy, moral philosophy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, paternalism, truthfulness, conspiracy of silence, clinical practice, autonomy, bioethics*

1. INTRODUCTION

The name Tolstoy is universally associated with literature, and he is recognised as the great novelist of *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina* and *Resurrection*, but despite his literary distinction, he is at the same time a moral thinker, notwithstanding the attempts to remove him from this role both within literary circles and Western philosophy itself. This article has a dual aim: on the one hand, we wish to bring to light the philosophical value of Tolstoy; and on the other hand, we attempt to apply his thought to the area of clinical practice. As a result, we have divided the article into two parts. In the first part we present the figure of Tolstoy as a moral thinker, examine the philosophical influences that enabled him to build his discourse, and analyse the ideas and the foundation of his moral philosophy. Having examined Tolstoy the thinker, we then consider how the moral philosophy of Tolstoy, based on the ideal of love, leads to an ethic of compassion that, when applied to the clinical relationship, places the virtue of truthfulness at the centre of clinical practice. In order to examine this question more deeply, we turn to the novel *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886). Thus, in the second part of the article we explain the philosophical meaning of the story. Next, through a selection of extracts from the book, we describe the protagonist's process of illness and death in order to focus on two fundamental aspects: falsehood and truth. Finally, we close with a reflection on truthfulness applied to clinical practice, which allows us to suggest some changes that can improve the relationship model.

2. TOLSTOY'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

2.1. TOLSTOY: A MAN OF LETTERS AND A PHILOSOPHER

It is frequent among Tolstoy scholars – and particularly amongst those within the field of literature – to distinguish, both in his life and in his work, two periods or two Tolstoys, that are separated by the moral crisis he went through when he was 50. In the first period there was the man of letters, and in the second one the mystic or moralist. This distinction also generally implies an evaluation between the good Tolstoy, the genius, and the bad, mediocre Tolstoy.

This dichotomous vision of Tolstoy, so widespread especially in literary criticism, is not accepted by the majority of the critics of Tolstoy's thought. With the exceptions, for example, of Stefan Zweig, Nina Gourfinkel and André Cresson, who do give weight, in some way, to the 'break theory' or the 'two Tolstoys', other authors defend not so much the unity of his thought as the linearity in how he understood, lived and suffered his life.

Among the authors who consider there are two phases in Tolstoy's life there is Stefan Zweig. His position on the two parts of Tolstoy's life is very clear:

> For thirty years, between the age of twenty and fifty, Tolstoy lived creating, without worries and with freedom. The other thirty years, between the age of fifty and his end, he lived only to find meaning and to know life. [...] In the second period, Tolstoy, the artist, no longer found it rewarding to simply represent life; instead, he consciously sought to give meaning to his art, an ethical mission, placing it at the service of elevating the moral and contributing to the overcoming of the soul [...] The later Tolstoy, who until that moment had been a mere poet of life, became a judge of life (Zweig 2013: 223; 260-261).

Nina Gourfinkel (1946), with a much more literary than philosophical perspective, is also of the opinion that there are two periods in the life of Tolstoy and is willing to fight the second Tolstoy in order to present the authentic man of letters, the artist, the only Tolstoy of value. The philosophical, not at all literary, vision of professor André Cresson (1950) is also aligned with the position of Zweig and Gourfinkel. Cresson maintains that there is a difference between what Tolstoy wrote before and after 1874.

Among the authors who shun the notion that Tolstoy's life was split in two is the humanist Romain Rolland. Rolland, a true authority on Tolstoy's thought, considers that there is only one Tolstoy. But he explains very clearly what he refers to when he speaks of just one man. Tolstoy's thought was very uneven throughout his life, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to claim that it was a permanently homogenous thought. Rolland places unity above all in the continuity of his existential concerns. Rolland does not share the notion of two Tolstoys, and less still the distinction between the literary genius and the mediocre thinker. He maintains 'that his religious faith did not kill his artistic genius, but rather gave it a new impulse' (Rolland 2010: 111).

George Steiner reinforces the same position of unity as Rolland. In his study of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, he considers the distinction made between two periods in the life of Tolstoy to be an erroneous dissociation. Steiner maintains that:

> in reality, most of the ideas and beliefs expressed by the tardive Tolstoy appear in his first writings and the essence of his morality was clearly discernible during his years of learning [...] It would be wrong to distinguish two chapters in the life of Tolstoy (Steiner 2002 247-248).

Antonio Ríos, in his work, sees Tolstoy as someone who is halfway between philosopher and man of letters. For Ríos, there is not only a unity of style but also of idea, 'the idea of the Good constitutes Tolstoy's metaphysics, which makes his art not just art but also philosophical research' (2015: 74). Ríos considers that there is a common thread, a unity of meaning, in the trajectory of both his literature and his thought.

To conclude, it should be pointed out that, even though Tolstoy himself "attempts to spread the idea that it was necessary to distinguish between two periods in his life" (Rabe 2010: 957), and that, for him, overcoming the crisis represented a "second birth"; and although even ten years after the crisis he wrote that for him "1881 was a crucial moment of inner transformation of his whole conception of the world" (De Courcel 1980: 160), at least of his philosophical vision, it is difficult to defend a radical break in Tolstoy's life.

2.2. TOLSTOY'S ENCOUNTER WITH PHILOSOPHY: RECEIVED INFLUENCES

Tolstoy, like so many philosophers throughout history, came up against the fundamental questions of existence: the meaning of life and death. He expressed his concern about death long before his concern about the meaning of life. His angst in the face of death appeared very early and distressingly in his life; we only need to remember that in *Youth* he clearly states that he was often invaded by the thought of his mortal condition and that he feared death. The question of the meaning of existence, while not new, appeared in all its fury in his midlife crisis and triggered a long and fruitful period of philosophical activity.

Tolstoy was a self-taught genius. His time at university was testimonial and full of bad experiences, but that did not prevent him from expressing his artistic and philosophical greatness. He was a restless spirit and a voracious reader throughout his life, and this gave him a solid cultural and intellectual grounding. He had read the great classics of Western philosophy; he devoured the major Russian authors, but also European authors like Homer, Sterne, Stendhal, Dumas, Dickens, or his adored Rousseau, and he knew the ideas of different philosophers like Plato, Hume, Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer. However, his favourite readings, from which he was most influenced, were the Bible, the Gospels and the texts of Rousseau. He also knew the essence of the messages of Eastern wisdom from Confucius, Lao Tzu and Buddhism, and Eastern influences converted his mystical dimension into practical application.

In the Gospel of Jesus he discovered the doctrine of the Master, to which he felt so close. We need to remember that Russian society in the 19th century was essentially religious, and this played a significant role in Tolstoy's thought. He was attracted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophical ideas, basically the notion that human nature was good but corrupted by society and education. He also felt a strong affinity with his pedagogical ideas of forming free men, and his idea of piety.

Tolstoy, as a man committed to the problems of his time and the background circumstances that generated serious situations of injustice, was interested in the theorization of the main political and economic systems both of Russia and the rest of Europe. He read political writers in exile, like Vissarion Belinski and Alexander Herzen, the populist Nikolay Chernyshevsky and the revolutionaries Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, and he knew the 'scientific socialism' of Marx and

Engels, although he did not share their position as it was too materialist and revolutionary – in other words it failed to take into account the spiritual dimension and justified violence in the name of the revolution.

Tolstoy felt closer to the utopian socialism of Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, even though this position came under strong criticism from the Marxists because, despite the laudable desire for social transformation, it was too naïve, utopian and lacked any type of scientific validation. Tolstoy's political conception, despite the influences of the theoretical movements of Russian socialism, possesses its own character. As Blanch pointed out, 'the deep socialism of Tolstoy had a transcendent religious root, more than utopian, evangelical, in firmly believing in the brotherhood of man that God promised' (Blanch 2013: 20).

2.3. TOLSTOY'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY: IDEAS AND FOUNDATION

In the introduction of Stefan Zweig's *Tolstoy* there is a list of six questions that Tolstoy, in the middle of his moral crisis, wished to answer:

> a) Why live? b) What is the reason for my existence and that of any other? c) What is the purpose of my existence or that of any other? d) What does the division I feel within me between good and evil mean, and what is its purpose? e) How should I live? f) What is death – how can I save myself? (Zweig 1939: 4).

In *Confession*, his story of conversion, he repeatedly mulls over the fundamental question of his life, and he formulates and reformulates it with the utmost density and intensity:

> My question, that which at the age of fifty brought me to the verge of suicide, was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every person, [...] the question without which life is impossible: [...] 'What will come of what I am doing today and shall do tomorrow? What will come of my whole life?' [...] Or to put it still differently: 'Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?' (Tolstoy 2013 (1882): 51-52).

Tolstoy's spiritual crisis, the lack of answers to his existential questions, places this writer of universal fame on the verge of suicide. He is tor-

mented by the question of meaning, which is inextricably linked to his intense angst in the face of death, and neither the experimental or positive sciences nor the speculative sciences or metaphysics can provide a consistent answer to his disquietude, because these sciences directly ignore the question of life.

Tolstoy, through philosophical speculation deduced from the observation of humanity, realizes that there are men who appear happy without asking themselves questions about meaning. This is when Tolstoy, very likely influenced by Rousseau, turns his gaze towards the most humble of the Russian population, the *mujik*s (peasants), and discovers that their happiness is related to a knowledge that for him is irrational: faith. Antonio Ríos reminds us that the unique austerity, endurance and strength of the peasants were valued by the artists as the most characteristic and the best of Russia. Artists, especially those with a Slavophile tendency, felt seduced by the faith of the peasants and saw them as a model to learn from.

Tolstoy dreamt of a social transformation through faith, which alone can give meaning to life, a meaning that associates one's own happiness with the happiness of others. This is the central thesis that he defends in his philosophical essay *On Life*. Anthropologically, Tolstoy considers human beings to possess reason and love, and to have two moral options: to live for oneself, with the aim of achieving just individual satisfactions (fortune, social recognition, status); or to follow the reasoning that commands sacrifice of the individual good in order to achieve *blago*, "that which is truly good, [...] what is good for everybody" (Tolstoy 2003: 60). For the Russian moralist, the person who takes the first path, that of living for oneself, will not be able to achieve happiness and will not live. In contrast, the person who chooses the second path, that of love and happiness for all, will be happy and will truly live, because that is the reason for living.

Alexander Craufurd maintains that for Tolstoy this choice is associated with a rational action: 'Reason, as he understands it, was closely and vitally connected to our *ethical* life' (Craufurd 1912: 55). André Cresson, in his essay, explains very well Tolstoy's idea of the authentic life:

> In order to live well, that is, to truly live, thus requires, once and for all, to stop being concerned with oneself and to work exclusively for the happiness of others. All egotistical life is the result of an erroneous assessment and is opposed to a true life. Only the life of love is the result of a true assessment of our real interests. That is the true life (Cresson 1950: 47).

The true life grounded in love for others and in the desire for the happiness of all humanity (*blago*) is the origin of human happiness. For Tolstoy, the person who lives in love does not die. As Ríos puts it, 'his religiousness is founded to a large extent upon seeking a direct exit in face of the horror of death' (Ríos 2015: 356). In this fragment from *The Gospel in Brief*, the transcendent connection that Tolstoy sees between love and death is very clearly reflected: 'man feels in his heart that the love of one's neighbour and the good that is done to him is the only true life, free and eternal' (Tolstoy 2009 (1906): 107). He finds in love a solution to the existential angst produced by the human experience of finitude, but this survival is in no way related to the immortality of the individual soul that Christianity defends. However, nowhere does Tolstoy explain what the fate of the spirit beyond death is.

Tolstoy feels seduced by Christ and believes that following his teachings is the only way to give life a meaning. He does not believe in the divinity of Jesus, he simply considers him a prophet, a philosopher. According to Rolland, Tolstoy refers to Jesus as one more in the lineage of great sages, Brahmanists, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Zoroaster, Isaiah to name a few; prophets who have shown humankind what true happiness is and the path that one has to follow to achieve it. In recognising the wisdom of Jesus, Tolstoy rejects the divinity of Christ, but recognises at the same time the divinity of his teachings.

In *Confession*, his story about conversion, Tolstoy describes his inner struggle of opening up to God and of estrangement from the Orthodox Church. Once the theological foundations of official Christianity were destroyed, Tolstoy was ready to construct his own moral theory, and in this way provide his own original and personal version of the divine message. For this reason he wrote *The Four Gospels Unified and Translated*, with the aim of establishing an ethics of love and fraternity. Out of the fusion of the four gospels came *The Gospel in Brief*, which discusses some rules of life, inspired by Christ. The purpose of this work, however, in contrast to *A Criticism of dogmatic Theology*, is not to oppose the great theological ideas of the Christianity of the official Church but rather to explain and synthesise exactly what the core teachings of Christ the prophet consisted of, which revolved around the following idea: 'The will of the Father is life and the good of all men and, for this reason, fulfilling the will of the Father is the good for all men. Only those who do good live' (Tolstoy 2013 (1882): 208-209).

From the moral idea that happiness is 'loving one's neighbour as

oneself', Tolstoy also developed his ideas on renouncing violent resistance against evil. Any act of violence goes against the nature of faith. And, at the same time, he emphasises the idea of art as a moral and educational vehicle for the suppression of all violence and the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. And it is true that Tolstoy's literary work, as Zweig rightly points out, wishes to improve men, to console them through a moral idea; his art 'has an ethical mission' of social transformation.

The Tolstoyan moral, which consists in searching for happiness through the love of others, appears neither new nor original, because it could be considered a copy of the fundamental bases of Christianity. However, with his personal perspective and interpretation, this Russian mystic lays out his own ethic that differs significantly from the official Christian doctrine. Rolland argues that Tolstoy's philosophy and faith cannot be original because the beauty of the thoughts on love are too eternal to appear as a novelty or a fashion.

3. THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH: TRUTHFULNESS IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

3.1. THE PHILOSOPHICAL MEANING OF THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH

Tolstoy's ethical mission is well represented in his novel *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. This is Tolstoy's first literary work after his existential crisis. In this story Tolstoy recounts the illness and death of Ivan Ilyich, a 45-year-old judge who rebels against his mortal destiny. Tolstoy describes the empty life that the magistrate has lived and how the illness and experience of the proximity of death enables him to realise that he has lived *for himself* and not *for others*. In this work, which is more like a small philosophical tract than a novel, the author wishes to exemplify the distinction between 'life' and 'the authentic life': that those who lives for themselves– like Ivan Ilyich – are already dead before death arrives; whereas those who live for others – like Gerasim, the caretaker – live despite the arrival of death.

Ivan Ilyich is a representative of the European bourgeoisie at the end of the 19th century, a mediocre man, a dutiful and scrupulous official, without ideals or projects, devoid of religion. He is a man who has no thoughts of his own, who lives his life mechanically and unconsciously,

in the established manner of people of his social class. This distinction between what represents 'life' and 'the authentic life' was completely lost on this grey official while he enjoyed good health. And it is precisely when he becomes ill, when he senses the force of death, that he questions with great intensity whether his life has been merely 'a life' or 'an authentic life'. On looking back at his life, he only finds glimmers of happiness in his childhood; after childhood he realises that, thinking that he was being successful, he has cultivated unhappiness and failure.

The process of death that is recounted in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* represents a double novel: that of the body which decomposes and that of the soul which awakens. Dominique Fache, commenting on the novel, explains very well this idea:

> Death is the shock that liberates Ivan Ilyich from a life that bears the stigmas of an even worse death: that of the soul. The society with laws adopted for interest and profit, vanity and appearance, condemns men to the destruction of their spiritual being (Fache 1988: X).

The bourgeois life, characterised by living 'for oneself', is opposed to the authentic life, the life lived 'for others'. For Tolstoy, as it is made clear in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, the person who chooses this inauthentic life or life 'for oneself', chooses to live a great lie. Ivan Ilyich, defenceless and ill, is scorned and abandoned by his family, and it is a *mujik*, a peasant servant called Gerasim, who takes care of his dying master. Gerasim is the representation of simplicity and generosity, the incarnation of living 'for others', of loving one's neighbour, so characteristic of Tolstoy's moral thought. Gerasim, in contrast to the wealthy classes, shows another way of living, based on authenticity, that shuns luxury, appearance, superficiality and falsehood. Imbued with simplicity, he lives for others and accepts death as a natural fact of life.

Gerasim helps Ivan Ilyich to understand that the meaning of life consists in forgetting oneself in order to devote oneself to others, and in attaining the true meaning of life the darkness of death disappears. The *mujik* embodies the Tolstoyan model of the religious man, who places at the centre of his life, in contrast to what Ivan Ilyich's life had been, compassion and love of others. In the novel, like in the real life of Tolstoy's Russia, the simplest, the most humble, those that go unnoticed, are the most important beings and are those that can best teach, through compassion, what the 'authentic life' really is.

3.2. THE PROCESS OF ILLNESS AND DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH: BETWEEN FALSEHOOD AND TRUTH

Ivan Ilyich was an official that sought promotion in order to guarantee his well-being and continue forming part of the bourgeois world. Married for convenience with Praskovya Federovna he was obliged, after a period of close relationship with his wife, to create a world apart from his family, whom he could not abide. His life, centred on his work and wrapped up in appearance, suddenly changed when:

> Once when mounting a step-ladder to show the upholsterer, who did not understand, how he wanted the hangings draped, he made a false step and slipped, but being a strong and agile man he clung on and only knocked his side against the knob of the window frame. The bruised place was painful but the pain soon passed[1].

That same evening when his wife asked him how he had fallen, Ivan Ilyich told her: 'It's a good thing I'm a bit of an athlete. Another man might have been killed, but I merely knocked myself, just here; it hurts when it's touched, but it's passing off already – it's only a bruise.'

However, the pains did not go away, and they gradually got worse to the point that Ivan was so irritable that his wife demanded that he go to see a doctor. He did so, and at the doctor's he immediately realized that the famous doctor was deceiving him. He heard his comments but 'to Ivan Ilych only one question was important: was his case serious or not? But the doctor ignored that inappropriate question. From his point of view it was not the one under consideration.'

Despite the dissuasive arguments of the doctor:

> From the doctor's summing up Ivan Ilych concluded that things were bad, but that for the doctor, and perhaps for everybody else, it was a matter of indifference, though for him it was bad. And this conclusion struck him painfully, arousing in him a great feeling of pity for himself and of bitterness towards the doctor's indifference to a matter of such importance.

[1] All the extracts quoted in this section (3.2) come from the English version of the book: Tolstoy, L. (2014). *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, South Australia: The University of Adelaide. Available at: https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/t/tolstoy/leo/t65d/contents.html

He said nothing of this, but rose, placed the doctor's fee on the table, and remarked with a sigh: "We sick people probably often put inappropriate questions. But tell me, in general, is this complaint dangerous, or not?...". [...]

"I have already told you what I consider necessary and proper. The analysis may show something more." And the doctor bowed.

After the first visit to the doctor:

he was going over what the doctor had said, trying to translate those complicated, obscure, scientific phrases into plain language and find in them an answer to the question: "Is my condition bad? Is it very bad? Or is there as yet nothing much wrong?" And it seemed to him that the meaning of what the doctor had said was that it was very bad.[...] His ache, this dull gnawing ache that never ceased for a moment, seemed to have acquired a new and more serious significance from the doctor's dubious remarks. Ivan Ilych now watched it with a new and oppressive feeling.

Despite the doctor's promises that Ivan would recover:

There was no deceiving himself: something terrible, new, and more important than anything before in his life, was taking place within him of which he alone was aware. Those about him did not understand or would not understand it, but thought everything in the world was going on as usual. That tormented Ivan Ilych more than anything.

Finally Ivan Ilyich, in the face of his deteriorating illness, becomes aware of death. And he says to himself:

It's not a question of appendix or kidney, but of life and ... death. Yes, life was there and now it is going, going and I cannot stop it. Yes. Why deceive myself? Isn't it obvious to everyone but me that I'm dying, and that it's only a question of weeks, days... it may happen this moment. [...] Death. Yes, death. And none of them knows or wishes to know it, and they have no pity for me.

Accepting death in a context where everybody was complicit in lying was something really difficult to cope with.

What tormented Ivan Ilych most was the deception, the lie, which for some reason they all accepted, that he was not dying but was simply ill, and he only

> need keep quiet and undergo a treatment and then something very good would result. He however knew that do what they would nothing would come of it, only still more agonizing suffering and death. This deception tortured him – their not wishing to admit what they all knew and what he knew, but wanting to lie to him concerning his terrible condition, and wishing and forcing him to participate in that lie. Those lies – lies enacted over him on the eve of his death and destined to degrade this awful, solemn act to the level of their visitings, their curtains, their sturgeon for dinner – were a terrible agony for Ivan Ilych. And strangely enough, many times when they were going through their antics over him he had been within a hairbreadth of calling out to them: "Stop lying! You know and I know that I am dying. Then at least stop lying about it!" But he had never had the spirit to do it. [...]

Ivan Ilyich saw that he was dying and both the pain and the anxiety were permanent, but he found solace with Gerasim. He only felt at ease with the *mujik* because he was the only one that understood him, felt sorry for him and did not lie to him:

> Gerasim was a clean, fresh peasant lad, grown stout on town food and always cheerful and bright. [...] Ivan Ilych would sometimes call Gerasim and get him to hold his legs on his shoulders, and he liked talking to him. Gerasim did it all easily, willingly, simply, and with a good nature that touched Ivan Ilych. [...] He saw that no one felt for him, because no one even wished to grasp his position. Only Gerasim recognized it and pitied him. And so Ivan Ilych felt at ease only with him. Gerasim alone did not lie; everything showed that he alone understood the facts of the case and did not consider it necessary to disguise them, but simply felt sorry for his emaciated and enfeebled master. Once when Ivan Ilych was sending him away he even said straight out: "We shall all of us die, so why should I grudge a little trouble?" – expressing the fact that he did not think his work burdensome, because he was doing it for a dying man and hoped someone would do the same for him when his time came. [...] This falsity around him and within him did more than anything else to poison his last days.

In the last days during the doctor's visit:

> Ivan Ilych looks at him as much as to say: "Are you really never ashamed of lying?" But the doctor does not wish to understand this question...".[...] He felt that he was surrounded and involved in a mesh of falsity that it was hard to unravel anything.

On one of the last medical visits Ivan Ilyich said to the doctor:

> "You know you can do nothing for me, so leave me alone".
> "We can ease your sufferings."
> "You can't even do that. Let me be."
> The doctor went into the drawing room and told Praskovya Fedorovna that the case was very serious and that the only resource left was opium to allay her husband's sufferings, which must be terrible.
> It was true, as the doctor said, that Ivan Ilych's physical sufferings were terrible, but worse than the physical sufferings were his mental sufferings which were his chief torture.

The agony that Ivan Ilyich went through was horrifying. 'From that moment the screaming began that continued for three days, and was so terrible that one could not hear it through two closed doors without horror'.

And just before dying he asks himself:

> "And death... where is it?"
> He sought his former accustomed fear of death and did not find it. "Where is it? What death?" There was no fear because there was no death.
> In place of death there was light. [...] "It is finished!" said someone near him.
> He heard these words and repeated them in his soul.
> "Death is finished," he said to himself. "It is no more!"
> He drew in a breath, stopped in the midst of a sigh, stretched out, and died.

3.3. TRUTHFULNESS IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

Literature, like the cinema or theatre, allows us to penetrate the deeper life lessons of the human experience, and at the same time it is a way of making people more ethically sensitive. In this sense, Martha Nussbaum argues that literature, and especially the novel, describes life in a richer and truer way and, at the same time, enables people's ethical education, and with that the creation of a society that is more responsible towards others (Nussbaum 2001).

The Death of Ivan Ilyich is a magnificent novel that achieves what Nussbaum claims. With great realism, Tolstoy's tale helps us become

aware of the negative consequences that paternalism in the care of the ill, and especially of the dying, generates. Nevertheless, we need to bear in mind that Tolstoy's tale attempts, ultimately, to critique science since it is unable to answer the fundamental questions of human existence. This aversion towards science is matched by an aversion towards medicine. In *The Death of Ivan Ilyich,* the work of the doctors is analysed with antipathy and disdain because they are unable to answer the patient's most important questions, and they distract him with scientific arguments that are of no importance to him. Faced to the inability to provide an outlet for the patient's existential angst, a great lie is constructed with the aim of calming him down.

Immersed in this criticism of medical scientism, the conspiracy of silence to which Ivan Ilyich is subjected by the doctors and his family becomes his main source of torment, and significantly aggravates his personal situation. Tolstoy shows how paternalism cuts the patient off from the knowledge of the truth and from making decisions about his own life and health.

It should be remembered that medical paternalism has been usual practice throughout the Western medical tradition, and its roots are so deep that even today, despite recognition of the autonomy of the individual, we find cases similar to that of Ivan Ilyich. Tolstoy's novel, written in the 19th century, breaks with paternalism ahead of its time. In this model the clinical relationship is completely asymmetrical, as the doctor assumes the role of powerful 'father' who decides, with good intentions but unilaterally, what is best for the patient. Lydia Feito reminds us that 'in this traditional model the patient is considered incapable of making moral decisions, because of having lost their natural balance and, therefore, having become not only someone who is physically ill but also morally affected' (Feito 2011: 3).

Ivan Ilyich, since his first medical visit, wanted to know whether his condition was serious, but the first doctor that cared for him considered that the question he asked was inappropriate. However, the doctor evading the question failed to realise that he caused a reaction of rage at first, and then of fear in the patient. But Ivan is a stubborn man and set on knowing, and he tries again. He wants to know if his illness is dangerous or not. Once again the doctor evades the question and, in complicated and confusing scientific language, goes on speaking in order to silence Ivan Ilyich's need for the truth. His visit with another specialist follows the same paternalistic pattern. Yet another doctor Ivan consults when his illness is at an advanced stage promises that he will get better. The patient,

disconcerted due to the lack of information, draws, all alone, the conclusion that his condition is serious and that he will die, but he cannot share this with anybody. This situation, or rather, this shared deception - fostered by the doctors and accepted by the family – becomes a torture for Ivan Ilyich because it condemns him to the most extreme solitude, and this solitude increases his physical and psychological pain.

Tolstoy was providing a radical critique of the doctors of his day, and indirectly of Ivan's family, for their incapacity to feel compassion for a sick man at the doors of death. He shows the suffering and perverse effect caused by paternalism, and how lack of communication and deception destroy relationships. The Russian writer, without having experienced the upsurge of human rights, and much less the appearance of the declaration of the rights of the patient that emphasise above all the autonomy of the ill person, promoted a model of respectful relationship with the wish of the patient to receive information, that is, to know the truth. For Tolstoy, hiding information from someone who wishes to know the truth only 'poisons' the cruelty of the situation itself; and that is why the author of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* proposed a model of relations based on the virtue of truthfulness. The example of this new paradigm is Gerasim, the servant. Gerasim is the only one who understands Ivan Ilyich, which is why, far from all falsehood, he decides not to take part in the conspiracy of silence that has been created around the patient. Tolstoy portrays a caregiver committed to the truth. Further, Gerasim is at the same time an excellent communicator of the truth. He knows how to adapt the information to the sick person, and he also knows when to speak and when to remain silent. And when he tells the truth, he does so with so much sensitivity that he manages to make the sick person feel better, calmer and serene.

Tolstoy, ahead of the changes that medicine has undergone and is continually going through, foretold the end of the legitimacy of paternalism and white lies in the clinical relationship. And through a fictional character like Gerasim, established a model of relationship between indivduals on an equal footing (Camps 2005: 126). The novel offers some highly interesting and valuable directions to transform and improve the reality of professionals in the field of the health sciences. Improvement in professional relations is fully inscribed in the framework of Tolstoy's moral philosophy, because in caring for the happiness, the well-being, of others, we find our own happiness, the meaning of life. And naturally, also the meaning of professional life.

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