

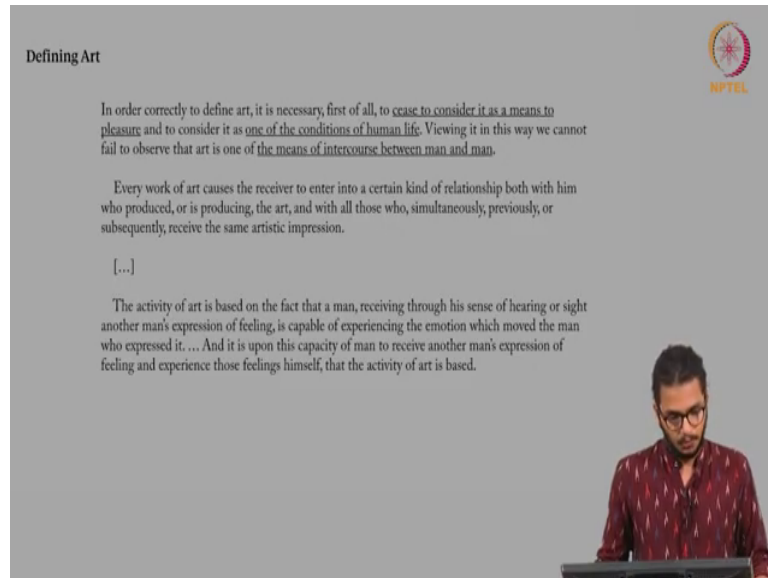
**Literary Criticism (From Plato to Leavis)**  
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**Leo Tolstoy's 'What is Art?'**

Hello. Welcome to this session of the NPTEL course on Literary Criticism. In today's session, we will be discussing Leo Tolstoy's book called *What is Art?* In relation to the other texts which we deal with in this course, this is a bit of a lengthy text. It is almost a book of 300 pages, first published in 1897, written in Russian but first published in its English language edition as there were a couple of problems with Russian censorship and the contents of this text. This text is openly available, it is free to download from our internet archive; just search for *What is Art?* by Leo Tolstoy. And since it is a very huge text, we will not be dealing with the entirety of the text. We will be just dealing with some extracts from the text and we will be trying to go for a general outline of what this text is all about. Let us start with talking a little bit about Leo Tolstoy.

Leo Tolstoy in his initial formative years had a very leisurely life and it was only to the latter end of his life that he changed his worldviews a lot and it is this changed worldview that we will be seeing throughout this text called *What is Art?* The main part of this change was his change from having little political views to being a very strong Christian anarchist. This might seem a little complicated because of how both terms come together.

Basically, he thought that between God and humans there should not be any other authority mediating the relationship, between man and God, and he called this relationship between man and God as religion; and for him, religion was Christianity. And although, after the publishing of this particular text he was ex-communicated from the Russian Orthodox Church for his radical views on religion. The entirety of text actually kind of reflects this change in Tolstoy's world view.

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The slide is titled "Defining Art" in the top left corner. In the top right corner, there is a circular logo with a red and white design and the text "NPTEL" below it. The main text on the slide is as follows:

In order correctly to define art, it is necessary, first of all, to cease to consider it as a means to pleasure and to consider it as one of the conditions of human life. Viewing it in this way we cannot fail to observe that art is one of the means of intercourse between man and man.

Every work of art causes the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship both with him who produced, or is producing, the art, and with all those who, simultaneously, previously, or subsequently, receive the same artistic impression.

[...]

The activity of art is based on the fact that a man, receiving through his sense of hearing or sight another man's expression of feeling, is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it. ... And it is upon this capacity of man to receive another man's expression of feeling and experience those feelings himself, that the activity of art is based.

In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a photograph of a man with glasses and a red patterned shirt, sitting at a desk with a laptop.

Let us start with what Tolstoy is trying to define art as. Let us read this excerpt. “In order correctly to define art, it is necessary first of all, to cease to consider it as a means to pleasure and to consider it as one of the conditions of human life. Viewing it in this way, we cannot fail to observe that art is one of the means of intercourse between man and man”. Let us disregard the political incorrectness in this “man and man” and let us read on.

“Every work of art causes the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship, both with him who produced or is producing the art, and with all those who, simultaneously, previously, or subsequently, receive the same artistic impression”. I continue, “The activity of art is based on the fact that a man, receiving through his sense of hearing or sight another man’s expression of feeling is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it. And it is upon this capacity of man to receive another man’s expression of feeling and experience those feelings himself, that the activity of art is based”.

Let us take a closer look at this. In order correctly to define art, it is necessary first of all, to cease to consider it as a means to pleasure. So he is first of all defining what art is not, it not a means to pleasure. So he is against the aesthetic way of describing art as a means to pleasure, as beauty. If you read the entire text you will start to see that for Tolstoy, pleasure and beauty were kind of synonymous. We should not consider it as a means to pleasure but as another means of intercourse between man and man.

Here we see that Tolstoy is considering art as a medium of communication. So basically, if you try to see how mediums are defined by people like Marshall McLuhan later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and so on, we will see that for Tolstoy it is a condition of human life. It is how people relate with each other, it is how people talk to each other, it is how people exchange feelings with one another. So, the particularity of having strong emotions is very strong here, it is a way of exchanging feelings, exchanging emotions.

So it is not aesthetic beauty, it is not aesthetic pleasure, it is not something which we derive from seeing or hearing or reading a piece of art, but it is just to be considered as the means of communication, between humans. This is the preliminary definition which Tolstoy gives to art.

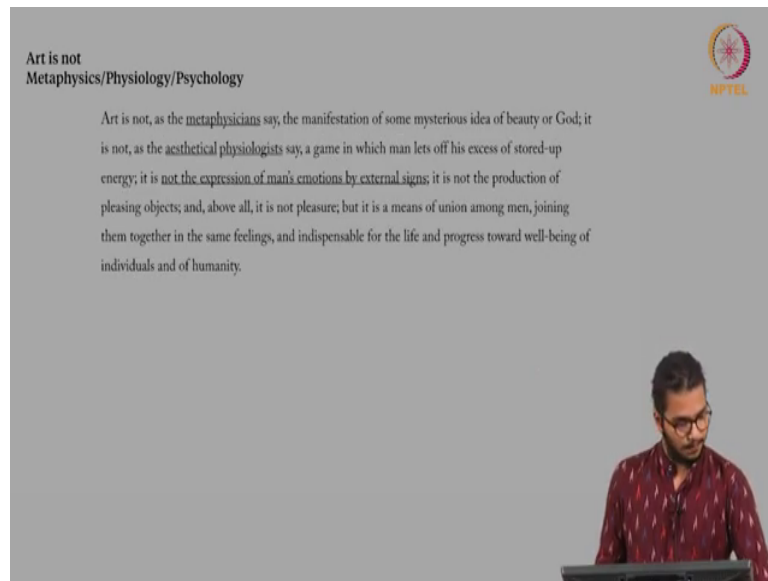
Now, this might seem like a very rudimentary definition of art. The style of Tolstoy in this work is, he builds upon rudimentary definitions and it gets complex as it goes on, and then he kind of adds qualifiers to these definitions to arrive at a more complex and wholesome definition of art. Let us just take it as what he says: It is a means of intercourse between man and man and it is one of the conditions of human life.

So for him, art is very functional and has a function in human life; it is one of the primary conditions of human life, for human life to exist. "Every work of art causes the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship, both with him who produced or is producing the art and with all those who receive the same artistic impression". So everyone, not just the intended audience, but the audience gets into a kind of relationship with both the producer, the author of the art piece and also with the rest of the audience. It is a kind of community building exercise. So art is something of a socio-cultural exercise for him, it is not just aesthetic, it is not just stylistic.

"The activity of art is based on the fact that a man receiving through his sense of hearing or sight". Tolstoy says hearing or sight, so it is just audio visual. But when we come to the other part of this essay, we will see that he even considers things such as ornaments or jokes or lullabies or even the kind of silence one gets out of seeing a natural landscape as art. He is kind of going to broaden it as we go on. And it is "an expression of feelings". This is the key phrase here, the feeling and the expression of feeling and building a community. This is what art rudimentarily means to Tolstoy.

Now let us see what it is not. We just saw that we should cease to consider it as a means to pleasure.

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If it is not a means to pleasure let us see what Tolstoy has to say more about that. “Art is not metaphysics or physiology or psychology”. I think it was in chapter 5 or so, that is not very relevant here so we are just looking at this piece. He says that the game of art is not the game of metaphysics or physiology or even psychology. It is not something that has to deal with the audience’s mind or body or even the things, metaphysics, (which is kind of above the real world, it is not part of an ideal world).

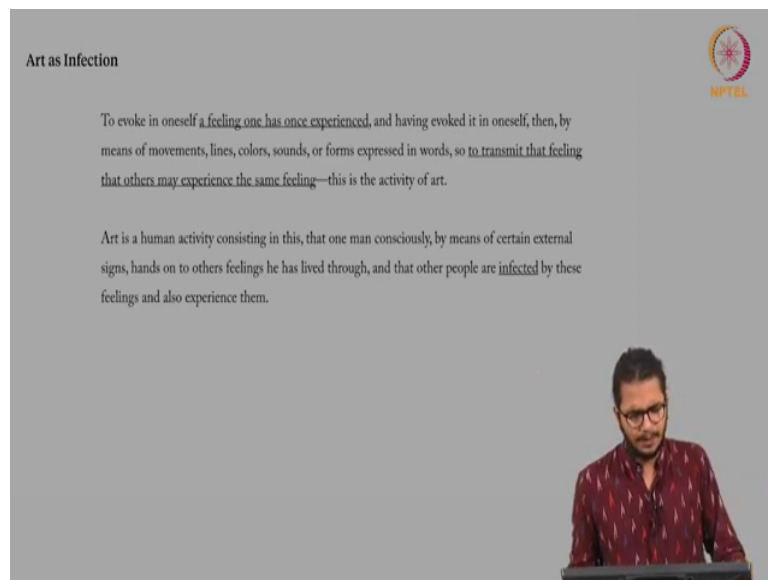
So Art is not, as the metaphysicians say. We will see that Tolstoy is also referring to Plato and that this not as how Plato thought of it, it is not imitation. We are going away from Plato. In fact, if you read David Richter’s book called *The Critical Tradition*, he places Tolstoy just after Plato in his collection. He says that Tolstoy is actually, kind of trying to talk back to the Platonic idea of art as imitation of the ideal world. So art is not, as the metaphysician say, the manifestation of some mysterious idea of beauty or God. We see Plato clearly here, it is not a mysterious idea of beauty, as Plato would have said.

“It is not, as the aesthetical physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored up energy”. This is a kind of popular thing which we even hear today, that art is some kind of channelling of our bodies’ stored up energy and et cetera, so he says that it is not that. And “it is not the expression of man’s emotions by external signs. It is not the production of pleasing objects, which we already saw, and above all, it is not pleasure. But it is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity”.

So art, for Tolstoy, plays a very significant role in social well-being. And it is not about singular and individual ways of being pleased by the aesthetics of an art piece, it is more functional, it has more value which it adds to the society and it is not value added just in terms of pleasure.

Now let us look at this particular piece. “It is not the expression of man’s emotions by external signs”. So this is very interesting because he says, now, that it is not an expression of man’s emotions by external signs. But later, in the same essay, we will see Tolstoy kind of travelling away from this definition and he actually says that it is, in fact, some sort of expression of man’s emotions by external signs but not all expressions of such emotions can be classified as what is real art.

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Let us go to the most famous part of Tolstoy’s view on art-- art as infection. This is probably the most well-known part of Tolstoy’s view of art. So, “To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced, and having evoked it in oneself, then, by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling, this is the activity of art”. So it is kind of very concise here, very precise.

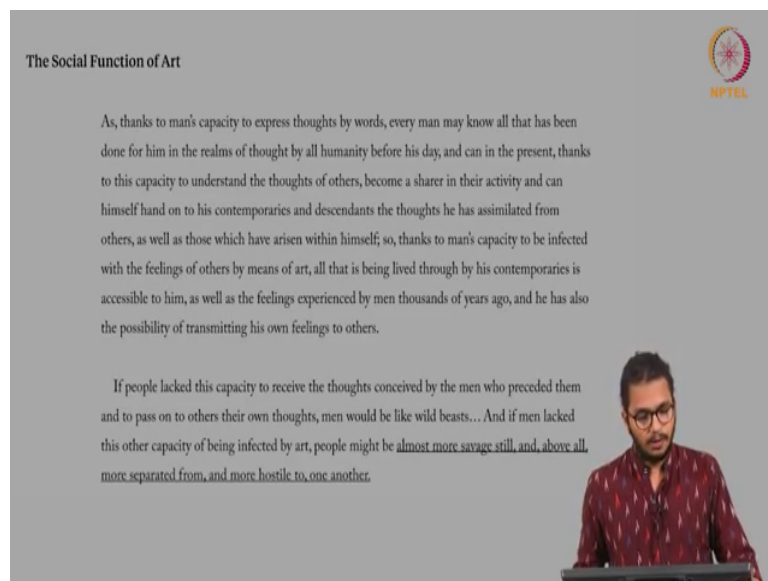
We can actually somehow see Wordsworth’s definition of poetry from his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* kind of echoing here. It is evoking a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it in oneself again by means of movements et cetera, and to transmit that feeling to others so that they may experience the same feeling. The author or the creator of this art piece has once felt some emotion and he is evoking it in himself by means of movements, lines,

colours, sounds or forms expressed in words. These are the means through which art can be produced. To transmit that feeling to the audience, this is the activity of art. This is a very clear-cut definition of what he thinks art is.

And “art is a human activity”, it is “a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them”. So proper, real, good art should be infectious. This is what Tolstoy’s famous saying is, that it should be infectious. And by infectious he means that the kind of art, whatever it is, has to be proper, has to transfer the feeling from whoever is the creator to the audience.

And this transfer of feelings from the creator to the audience is not just one way, but also even amongst the audience there should be this transfer of feeling and there should be a kind of a unity which forms across the audience as a kind of a community-building exercise. So this is the activity of art. This is very important-- art as infection.

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The Social Function of Art

As, thanks to man's capacity to express thoughts by words, every man may know all that has been done for him in the realms of thought by all humanity before his day, and can in the present, thanks to this capacity to understand the thoughts of others, become a sharer in their activity and can himself hand on to his contemporaries and descendants the thoughts he has assimilated from others, as well as those which have arisen within himself; so, thanks to man's capacity to be infected with the feelings of others by means of art, all that is being lived through by his contemporaries is accessible to him, as well as the feelings experienced by men thousands of years ago, and he has also the possibility of transmitting his own feelings to others.

If people lacked this capacity to receive the thoughts conceived by the men who preceded them and to pass on to others their own thoughts, men would be like wild beasts... And if men lacked this other capacity of being infected by art, people might be almost more savage still, and, above all, more separated from, and more hostile to, one another.

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What is the social function of art? We saw right now that art is basically a kind of exercise which is trying to build unity among humanity and this is the social function of art. Let us read another excerpt on the social function of art. “As, thanks to man’s capacity to express thoughts by words, every man may know all that has been done for him in the realms of thought by all humanity before his day, and can in the present, thanks to this capacity to understand the thoughts of others, become a sharer in their activity and can himself hand on to his contemporaries and descendants the thoughts he has assimilated from others, as well as those which have arisen within himself.

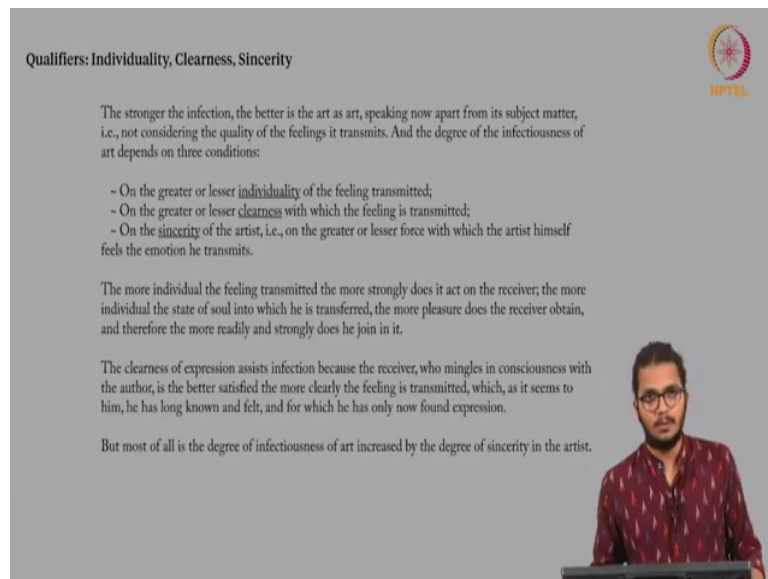
So, thanks to man's capacity to be infected with the feelings of others by means of art, all that is being lived through by his contemporaries is accessible to him, as well as the feelings experienced by men thousands of years ago, and he has also the possibility of transmitting his own feelings to others".

Tolstoy is giving us an idea that art is actually capable of going beyond time's grasp and he says that people even from say, thousands of years behind us, before us, can transmit their feelings to us and we can transmit our feelings not only to our contemporaries but also to our descendants. It is kind of a particularly humanistic tendency to historicise what art can be. He is kind of taking art away from time's grasp and saying that art and the feelings that they invoke can be transferred as they are, if it was a proper piece of art, across generations, across thousands of years. It is very much a kind of liberal humanism that we see here.

If people lacked this capacity to receive the thoughts conceived by the men who preceded them and pass on to others their own thoughts, men would be like wild beasts. And if men lacked this other capacity of being infected by art, people might be almost more savage still, and above all, more separated from and more hostile to one another. This is the social function of art. If we lacked the ability to perceive these thoughts and if we lack the ability to produce art, to consume art, we would almost be more savage still and above all, more separated from and more hostile to one another.

For Tolstoy, we clearly see that art has a particular function and it is a function of serving the society. It is a function of acting as a social solvent, social cement to bring everybody together. If we go to somebody like Matthew Arnold in English literary history, we see that even for him literature, if not all kinds of art, is kind of a social cement. And it is by not being able to read and write and understand literature that people would probably lose all of their civilizational aspects. So, art for Tolstoy also has a very strong, civilizing mission to complete.

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Qualifiers: Individuality, Clearness, Sincerity

The stronger the infection, the better is the art as art, speaking now apart from its subject matter, i.e., not considering the quality of the feelings it transmits. And the degree of the infectiousness of art depends on three conditions:

- On the greater or lesser **individuality** of the feeling transmitted;
- On the greater or lesser **clearness** with which the feeling is transmitted;
- On the **sincerity** of the artist, i.e., on the greater or lesser force with which the artist himself feels the emotion he transmits.

The more individual the feeling transmitted the more strongly does it act on the receiver; the more individual the state of soul into which he is transferred, the more pleasure does the receiver obtain, and therefore the more readily and strongly does he join in it.

The clearness of expression assists infection because the receiver, who mingles in consciousness with the author, is the better satisfied the more clearly the feeling is transmitted, which, as it seems to him, he has long known and felt, and for which he has only now found expression.

But most of all is the degree of infectiousness of art increased by the degree of sincerity in the artist.

So, let us move on to qualifiers. As we saw now, the kind of definitions Tolstoy gave us were kind of very rudimentary, so although it can be seemingly very complicated, it is kind of very rudimentary. Because as Tolstoy goes on writing the other chapters, he makes it very complex and it is a web of too many connections. Now, we are travelling from that rudimentary set of definitions, now we are going to add some qualifiers. We are going to see what the qualifiers that Tolstoy adds to his definition of art are and how he reaches a more holistic understanding of what art is. Now are going to add these qualifiers.

To make understanding easier, there are a couple of qualifiers which add to his definition of art and these are kind of internal qualifiers. In the sense that, he is being very moral about what art is, he is trying to define what good art and what bad art is. So, there is a very clear moral approach to his definition of art. There is good art, there is bad art. There is good art, which is good for the society and bad art, which is not good for the society. He is trying to moralize his definitions. And in this way of moralizing, there are a couple of qualifiers which he adds so that the moralizing and the degree of moralization can be made easier. So, he adds these qualifiers to define what good and bad is.

These are the internal kind of moral qualifiers. Then there are the external kind of moral qualifiers, so these are very broad frameworks. The external qualifiers are very broad frameworks which further define what art is. We will be talking about these internal, small bits and pieces of qualifiers and then we will jump to the bigger framework. Right now, what we most probably should be seeing on the screen is individuality, clearness and sincerity.



If we think about people like, say, Longinus and his text *On the Sublime*, in *On the Sublime* he has a couple of qualifiers as to what makes a text actually sublime. Just like that, Tolstoy also gives us a set of qualifiers which makes art good. “The stronger the infection, the better is the art as art, speaking now apart from its subject matter that is not considering the quality of the feeling it transmits. And the degree of the infectiousness of art depends on three conditions”.

So infection is still, Tolstoy maintains, a basis of art, but the degree of this infection depends on three conditions. “The first condition is the greater or lesser individuality of the feeling transmitted. Second, greater or lesser clearness with which the feeling is transmitted, and third, the sincerity of the artist that is on the greater or lesser force with which the artist himself feels the emotions he transmits”.

So let us see-- individuality, clarity and sincerity are the three conditions which qualify art as good or bad. So, the more individual, clear, the feelings are and the more sincere the artist is, it is going to be good art. Let us see what he means by individuality. “The more individual the feeling transmitted, the more strongly does it act on the receiver. The more individual the state of soul into which he is transferred, the more pleasure does the receiver obtain, and therefore the more readily and strongly does he join in it”.

‘Join’ is the key word here. By individuality Tolstoy actually means our uniqueness. So, the feeling which is to be transmitted should be strongly unique and it will act uniquely on the receiver only if the person who creates it actually feels that. So, the feeling has to be very unique and very strong in the mind of the creator; and if and only if, the feeling is very strong in the creator’s mind, will the feeling be transmitted with such strength and clarity to the audience. This is what he means by the individuality of the feeling.

Next one is clarity. “The clearness of expression assists infection because the receiver who mingles in consciousness with the author, is the better satisfied the more clearly the feeling is transmitted, which, as it seems to him, he has long known and felt, and for which he has only now found expression. So this pretty self-explanatory. The clearness of expression assists infection because the receiver, that is the audience, mingles in consciousness with the author.

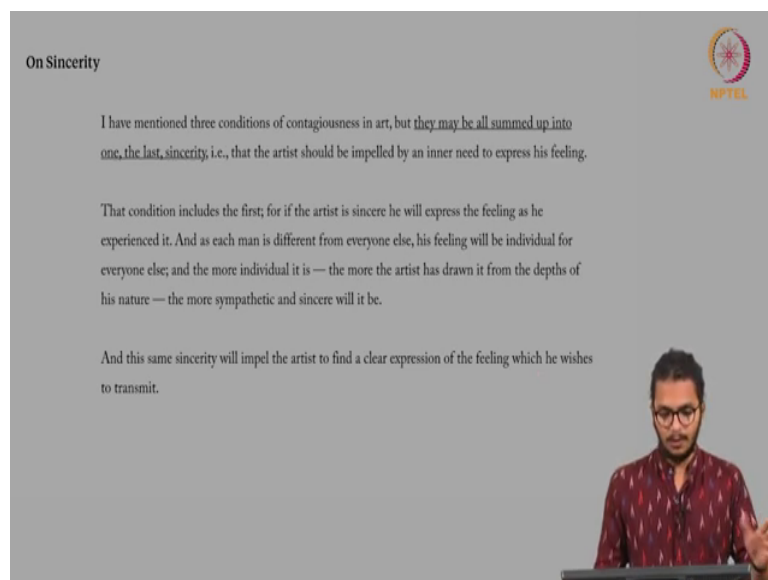
This is pretty important here. If you think of later developments in literary theory, there was something called the phenomenological literary criticism. It was not very fashionable, I assume and it is not anymore in fashion, but their idea was very similar to this. The consciousness of the author is something with which audience should participate. And the

closer the audience gets inside the consciousness of the author, the better these feelings can be transmitted.

Tolstoy is saying almost the same thing as they said; that clarity of expression means that the mingling of the audience and the author has to be very strong. And only by going deeper into the consciousness of the author, will we clearly see, clearly feel, the feeling which is transmitted. “But most of all, is the degree of infectiousness of art increased by the degree of sincerity in the artist”.

He has talked on length on individuality and clearness, now the sincerity of the artist is quite important in this regard.

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The slide is titled "On Sincerity" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. The text on the slide reads: "I have mentioned three conditions of contagiousness in art, but they may be all summed up into one, the last, sincerity, i.e., that the artist should be impelled by an inner need to express his feeling." Below this, it says: "That condition includes the first; for if the artist is sincere he will express the feeling as he experienced it. And as each man is different from everyone else, his feeling will be individual for everyone else; and the more individual it is — the more the artist has drawn it from the depths of his nature — the more sympathetic and sincere will it be." At the bottom, it concludes: "And this same sincerity will impel the artist to find a clear expression of the feeling which he wishes to transmit." A man with glasses and a red patterned shirt is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide, appearing to be the speaker.

We see that Tolstoy has dedicated a couple of pages for his discussion on the artist’s sincerity. We will just take a look at what sincerity means. “I have mentioned three conditions of contagiousness in art, but they may be all summed up into one, the last, which is sincerity”. We saw that there were three qualifiers: individuality, clearness and sincerity; now he is going to collapse all of them into the last one, sincerity. “That the artist should be impelled by an inner need to express his feeling”. The artist should be truthful, that is what he is meaning by sincerity. The artist should be honest, should be truthful, should be sincere with the feeling that he is feeling so as to transfer that feeling to his audience.

“That condition includes the first, the first condition being individuality. For if the artist is sincere, he will express the feeling as he experienced it, and as each man is different from everyone else, his feeling will be individual for everyone else”. So, if the artist is sincere then

he will express the feeling as he experienced it and since each man is different from everybody else, then the feeling also will be different; it will be unique.

“And the more individual it is, the more the artist has drawn it from the depths of his nature, the more sympathetic and sincere will it be”. If it is truly individual, it means that the artist has experienced it with a lot fervour that his expression will be more sympathetic and sincere; and the same sincerity will impel the artist to find a clear expression of the feeling which he wishes to transmit.

By collapsing individuality and clarity into sincerity, he is kind of harping on the importance of sincerity. Most of the literary critics had their own ways of putting this. If for Tolstoy it was sincerity, you will see that for somebody else it was probably disinterestedness. In most of these works of literary criticism you will see such similarities can be found overlapping everywhere.

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Qualifiers: Universality

"It will be the same with our present art; it will be understood when everybody is as well educated as are we the people of the upper classes who produce this art," say the defenders of our art.

But this assertion is evidently even more unjust than the former; for we know that the majority of the productions of the art of the upper classes, such as various odes, poems, dramas, cantatas, pastorals, pictures, etc., which delighted the people of the upper classes when they were produced, never were afterwards either understood or valued by the great masses of man kind, but have remained, what they were at first, a mere pastime for rich people of their time, for whom alone they ever were of any importance.

If, as in our day, it is not accessible to all men, then it is one of two things: either art is not the vital matter it is represented to be or that art which we call art is not the real thing.

The image also features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner and a man in a red patterned shirt speaking in the bottom right corner.

Next qualifier is universality which is also important. “It will be the same with our present art; it will be understood when everybody is as well educated as are we the people of the upper classes who produce this art”, say the defenders of our art.

Tolstoy is quoting the upper classes of his contemporary Russian literary circles, they were complaining that it is not up to art to be great but only if the people, only if the audience who are partaking in this art are actually well educated, will art be good. They are kind of transferring the onus of being good from art onto the audience; so the audience has to be

good if the art has to be good. It is not the problem of art but of the audience-- that is what Tolstoy's contemporaries are saying.


Tolstoy says, "But this assertion is evidently even more unjust than the former. For we know that the majority of the productions of the art of the upper classes, such as various odes, poems, dramas, et cetera, which delighted the people of the upper classes when they were produced, never were afterwards either understood or valued by the great masses of mankind, but have remained, what they were at first, a mere pastime for rich people of their time, for whom alone they ever were of any importance".

Tolstoy is saying such high art was actually just produced for the consumption of the rich and it was only produced by people who were patronized by these rich people. And so, the upper class actually never valued art for what it was and they just valued it for the beauty and the aesthetics which it provided. Tolstoy, as we saw, is against this aesthetic beauty, aesthetic pleasure; we have here Tolstoy being very egalitarian about art.

Actually if you see or read Tolstoy's work, you will see that he was very pro-peasant revolt. The liberation of serfs happened in Russia during this time and he was very much in approval of the liberation of the serfs. We see that his literary criticism also kind of reflects his worldview. "If, as in our day, it is not accessible to all men, then it is one of two things; either art is not the vital matter it is represented to be or that art which we call art is not the real thing".

Unless art is actually universal and actually accessible for all, then it is not art, it is not good art. So it is not the real thing. As we saw, it has to be sincere, individual, and clear and not only these three--it also has to be universal. So we see that Tolstoy's idea of art is very egalitarian.

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**Qualifiers: Religion**

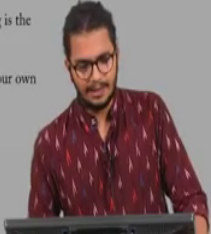
By art, in the limited sense of the word, we do not mean all human activity transmitting feelings, but only that part which we for some reason select from it and to which we attach special importance.

This special importance has always been given by all men to that part of this activity which transmits feelings flowing from their religious perception, and this small part of art they have specifically called art, attaching to it the full meaning of the word.

Religious Perception: A relation to the whole immense infinite in time and space conceived as one whole.

In every period of history, and in every human society, there exists an understanding of the meaning of life which represents the highest level to which men of that society have attained, — an understanding defining the highest good at which that society aims. And this understanding is the religious perception of the given time and society.

Religious feelings are our best feelings, as they are our feelings about what would constitute our own betterment and ultimately, our perfection.



Now, with universality we have concluded our discussion on the internal moral qualifiers. By various degrees of universality, individuality, sincerity and clarity, Tolstoy could form a hierarchy of art, from good to bad. But then he goes on to say something about religion. This is the broader framework which informs Tolstoy's worldview. This is also one of the major frameworks which inform his idea of what art is.

“By art, in the limited sense of the word, we do not mean all human activity transmitting feelings, but only that part which we for some reason select from it and to which we attach special importance”. Not all human activity which transmits feelings is art; but only that part which for some reason we select from it and to which we attach special importance. It is a human activity of transmitting feelings but not all, and only those human activities to which we attach special importance.

“This special importance has always been given by all men to that part of this activity which transmits feelings flowing from their religious perception; and this small part of art they have specifically called art, attaching to it the full meaning of the word”. This word, “religious perception”, is key here. He is saying, not all art is good art but only such art forms through which there is a transmission of feelings, flowing from their religious perception. By ‘their’, he is referring to the society.

The society's religious perception has to be transmitted through art in order to make it good art. So, what this religious perception is all about. Tolstoy being an anarchist, an anarchist

Christian, is not trying to say that art should be religious in the sense of institutionalized religions, but it is a very atypical, a kind of spiritual definition of religion that he has.

Tolstoy says that religious perception is “a relation to the whole immense infinite in time and space conceived as one whole”. This is very metaphysical here. Ironically, it is very metaphysical but this is not taken from this essay. This sentence- a relation to the whole immense infinite- is from Tolstoy’s another work, but for sake of clarity, let’s go to the second one.

“In every period of history, and in every human society, there exists an understanding of the meaning of life which represents the highest level to which men of that society have attained, an understanding defining the highest good at which the society aims. And this understanding is the religious perception of the given time and society”. This is a very clear definition of what religious perception is.

He is saying that there exists an understanding of the meaning of life which represents the highest level which men of that society have attained. Basically, it is what philosophers might call as the ground of being. An easier definition would be probably if you look at myth critique, so literary criticism with respect to myths.

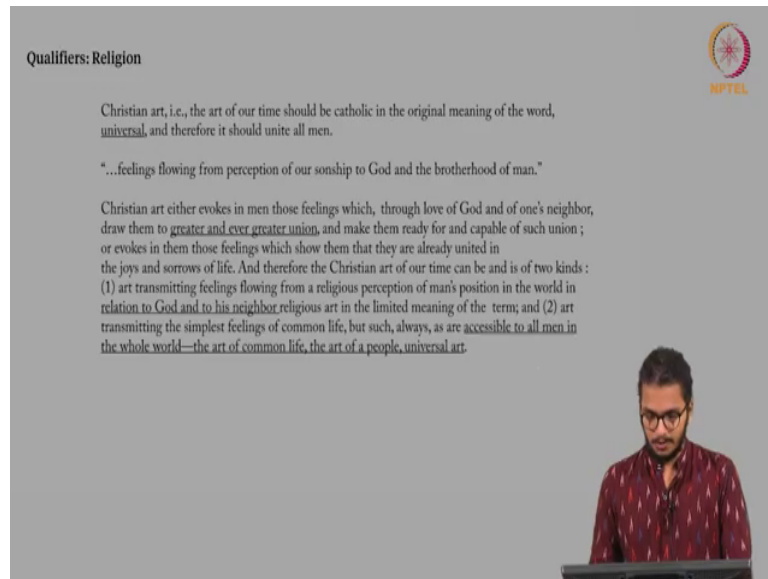
We see that there is something called the *mythomoteur*, which is that for every society there is a fundamental myth, the origin myth which kind of acts as a framework on which all the values of that society rest upon. For every religious community, for every geographically enclosed community, there will be certain myths upon which their life values are built and these values are actually what is called as the religious perception of the given time and society.

For each society, in every time period, there will be certain myths which inform the total values, total social values. And if the feelings are going along with these social values then they are good feelings and they are the religious perceptions that Tolstoy is talking about. Basically, religious perception for Tolstoy is those values which are going along with the society’s already inculcated values.

So, if the society’s origin myths are going along with these values then they are good values. And if such feelings are being made in the name of these values then they are good feelings, and good art is that art which transmits these good feelings. Feelings and emotions have to be parallel to the myths of the society, that is what he means by religious perception.

The last definition of religious perception is not by Tolstoy. “Religious feelings are our best feelings, as they are our feelings about what would constitute our own betterment and ultimately, our perfection”. This is a kind of neat summarization of what I was trying to say. It is our best feelings as they are our feelings about what would constitute our own betterment and ultimately, our perfection. Those feelings are the basis of what Tolstoy calls good art.

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Qualifiers: Religion

Christian art, i.e., the art of our time should be catholic in the original meaning of the word, universal, and therefore it should unite all men.

“...feelings flowing from perception of our sonship to God and the brotherhood of man.”

Christian art either evokes in men those feelings which, through love of God and of one's neighbor, draw them to greater and ever greater union, and make them ready for and capable of such union ; or evokes in them those feelings which show them that they are already united in the joys and sorrows of life. And therefore the Christian art of our time can be and is of two kinds : (1) art transmitting feelings flowing from a religious perception of man's position in the world in relation to God and to his neighbor religious art in the limited meaning of the term; and (2) art transmitting the simplest feelings of common life, but such, always, as are accessible to all men in the whole world—the art of common life, the art of a people, universal art.

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“Christian art i.e the art of the time should be catholic in the original meaning of the word, universal and therefore it should unite all men”. We see that his entire idea of religion is that it should be catholic in the original meaning of the word, universal. So he is not putting catholic in opposition with other sects, but just saying that catholic originally meant universal and art, good art, good Christian art should unite all men.

Since we already saw that his idea of what Christian is, what Catholic is, what religious is, is not in terms of institutionalized religions, we should try to move away from all other communal connotations that this might have and try to understand what Tolstoy is saying. He says it is universal and therefore it should unite all men.

He says, “...feelings flowing from perception of our sonship to God and the brotherhood of man”. So, the relationship between man and God which is religion, and man and other people which is brotherhood of man, are the primary points at which art colludes with everybody and unites everybody.

So, Christian art either evokes in men those feelings which through love of God and of one's neighbour, draws them to greater and ever greater union, and makes them ready for and

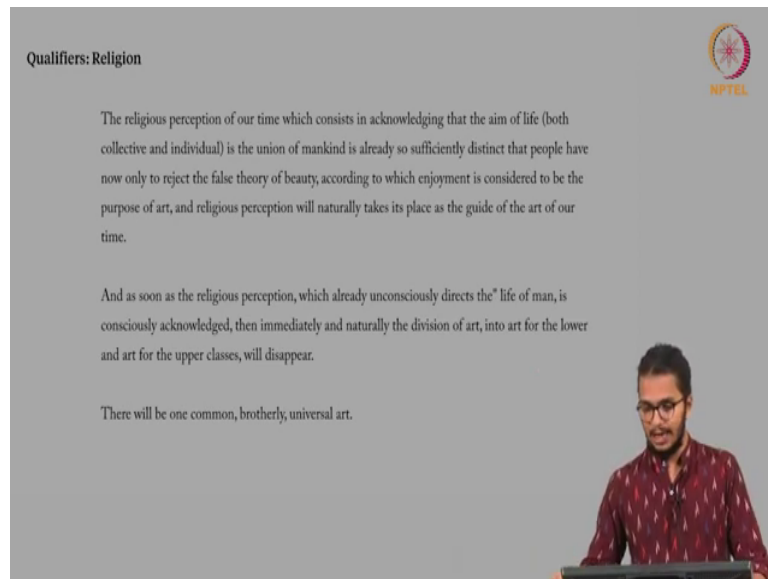
capable of such union; or evokes in them those feelings which show them that they are already united in the joys and sorrows of life. This idea of unity is very important for Tolstoy. We already saw even in the preliminary definitions that unity is very important for Tolstoy; he says that greater and ever greater union should be the aim of good art.

“And therefore, the Christian art of our time can be and is of two kinds: First kind is, art transmitting feelings flowing from a religious perception of man’s position in the world in relation to God and to his neighbour, religious art in the limited meaning of this term. And second, art transmitting the simplest feeling of common life, but such, always, as are accessible to all men in the whole world. The art of common life, the art of a people, universal art”.

So in Tolstoy’s moral universe, good art is Christian art (by Christian he means universal art), which is always accessible to everybody of the community, without having a high art or a low art, which corresponds to having an upper class and a lower class, but equally accessible to everybody. We already saw the other qualifiers, such as, it should be clear and sincere and universal and so on. Now, he adds this religious, particularly atypical religious aspect to his idea of art. This is what he means by the religious qualifiers.



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The slide is a video frame with a grey background. In the top right corner, there is a circular logo with a red and white design and the text 'NPTEL' below it. The text on the slide is as follows:

Qualifiers: Religion

The religious perception of our time which consists in acknowledging that the aim of life (both collective and individual) is the union of mankind is already so sufficiently distinct that people have now only to reject the false theory of beauty, according to which enjoyment is considered to be the purpose of art, and religious perception will naturally take its place as the guide of the art of our time.

And as soon as the religious perception, which already unconsciously directs the life of man, is consciously acknowledged, then immediately and naturally the division of art, into art for the lower and art for the upper classes, will disappear.

There will be one common, brotherly, universal art.

In the bottom right corner, a man with glasses and a red patterned shirt is visible, looking down at a laptop.

He says, “The religious perception of our time which consists in acknowledging that the aim of life, both collective and individual, is the union of mankind, is already so sufficiently distinct that people have now only to reject the false theory of beauty, according to which enjoyment is considered to be the purpose of art, and religious perception will naturally take its place as the guide of the art of our time”.

He is saying that already our society knows that the religious perception should be what determines art to be good. We just have to drop the false theory of beauty, the theory of aesthetic, the theory of aesthetic beauty and aesthetic pleasure. And if you drop that, then religious perception will naturally take its place as the guide of the art of our time.

He is saying that by dropping this false theory of aesthetics, false theory of aesthetic life, (which he interestingly finds took place during the Western Renaissance) the society will be good, art will also be good. And as soon as the religious perception which already unconsciously directs the life of man is consciously acknowledged, then immediately and naturally the division of art into art for the lower and art for the upper classes will disappear.

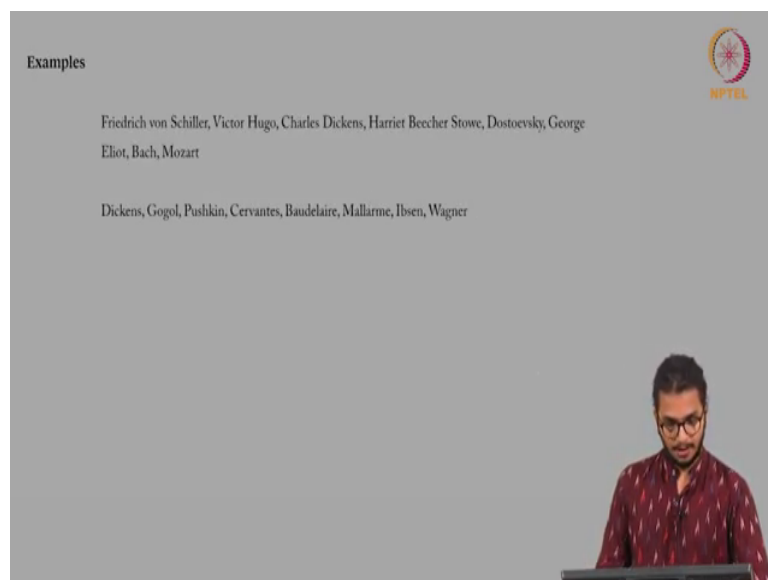
If we get that religious perception into picture then all the hierarchical modelling of art for lower and art for upper classes will disappear. There will be one common, brotherly and universal art. This is what Tolstoy is saying about art: we have to drop the false theory of aesthetics, we have to drop this hierarchy between lower and upper class art, and we have to take into consideration these qualifiers such as religion, individuality, sincerity, clarity and

universality. And by taking into consideration these things, we will figure out what is good art and what is bad art; and good art is very functional for society.

Although he is saying that we should not have such hierarchies based on classes, he is actually introducing a hierarchy of morals into his picture. We might think that it is very amoral. He is saying that we do not want to conform to such theories of beauty, but he is also somehow unconsciously making us buy this definition of immorally good and morally bad art. But Tolstoy's definition of art is very humanistic.

As this course progresses, most probably, you will be seeing more of liberal humanistic tendencies starting to come in classical works of literary criticism.

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Leo Tolstoy also gives us examples of good artist and bad artist, and as usual, as we read about this part, he does not differentiate between art as visual art and he does not differentiate between textual and non-textual kinds of art.

So we see Schiller, a German poet, Victor Hugo, a French writer, Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe who was the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Dostoevsky is from his own nation, George Eliot, Sebastian Bach and Mozart being in the good list of artists. We have Bach and Mozart, both of them are musicians and then we have these writers who Tolstoy thinks are good writers.

And then we again see Dickens here, Gogol and Pushkin, again his own people. Cervantes, Baudelaire, Mallarme, Ibsen and Wagner, so again we have one more musician here, Wagner.

Then we have French writers, Baudelaire and Mallarme et cetera, and we have Dickens here again. And interestingly, he is very consistent in his differentiation of bad art and good art.

He actually says that even his works, his own works such as *Anna Karenina* was not really good art because it did not conform to his own touchstones of what good art must be. He is pretty consistent and very honest about his own work and his own worldview and there is not too much of internal contradiction.

Although there are a couple of problems with his moralizing; but this is an explanatory work, so we do not have to worry about too much scepticism here. We started with his rudimentary definition, what art is not, and art as infection which is the most important of his rudimentary definitions. Then, art as having a social function, and from there we start having the rudimentary definitions and then we jumped into more complex parts which he starts from adding qualifiers such as individuality, clearness and sincerity.

Then we went on and talked about sincerity because sincerity is very important to Tolstoy. Then universality, the egalitarian mission of Tolstoy, then we jumped into religion and we talked about religion and we saw some examples. That is mostly what we will be discussing about Tolstoy.

As I already mentioned, this is a long work and is quite complicated in places so we are just reading the excerpts here. And if you want to read the entire thing you can find it online, freely available, as I said. Thank you for listening. We will meet in the next session, thank you.