

Non-Activity

Leo Tolstoy

1893

Contents

Here is the full speech of Zola:	3
Dumas says quite the opposite. Here is his letter written to the editor of "Golua." . . .	11

The editor of Paris magazine "Revue des revues", assuming, as he writes in his letter, that the opinion of two famous writers on the current state of minds will be of my interest, sent me two clippings from French newspapers. One of them contains speech of Zola, another - letter of Dumas to the editor of "Golua." I am very grateful to Mr. Smith for his parcel. Both documents - the fame of the authors, their modern, and most importantly, opposite views make them very interesting to compare, and I would like to express a few thoughts triggered by them.

It is hard to find on purpose in the current literature a more concise, strong, and vibrant form of expression of the two the most fundamental forces that drive humanity: one of them - the dead force of inertia, striving to keep humanity on the path once chosen, and the other force - the live power of reason, which leads to light.

Here is the full speech of Zola:

"TO YOUNG PEOPLE.

Ladies and gentlemen!

I am very pleased and happy that you have elected me as a chairman of this year's meeting. There is no better society, more delightful, and, most importantly, more appealing audience than the youth, before which my heart opens widely, full of desire to be loved and listened to.

Alas! I'm already in those years when it comes a regret of past youth and when people already take care of the younger generation. They will be our judges and successors.

I feel in them the birth of the future and often anxiously ask myself a question: that will they reject and what will they preserve, what will our business become in their hands, because it is only in their hands it will become the business, only then it will continue, if they will take it to expand and bring it to its conclusion. That's why I passionately follow the change of thought in the modern youth, read progressive newspapers and magazines, try to recognize new spirit that invigorates schools, to learn, finally, where you all go, you - the mind and will of the future. It is true, ladies and gentlemen, there is selfishness here, I don't hide it. I am like a worker, completing the construction of a house in which he hopes to spend the rest of his days and who worries what the weather will become. Won't the rain destroy its walls? Or what if the north wind will suddenly blow and tear the roof off the house? And, most importantly, has he built the house firmly, will it can stand against the storm? Is the material durable, are accidents thought after? I say this not because I believe that any products of human work can be everlasting and final. The greatest of them must come to terms with being only a moment in the continual development of the human mind. It's enough to recognize oneself a carrier of the word of one generation, even for the shortest time. And because you cannot halt the literature, and everything continuously develops, everything starts over again, you need to be prepared to see how the younger ones are born and grow, those who will replace you, those who perhaps will erase even the memory of us. This is not to say that the old fighter in me doesn't at times feel the desire to resist, when he sees an attack on his work. But, in respect to the upcoming next century, I have more curiosity than outrage, more hot sympathy than personal anxiety, and let me vanish, and let all my generation vanish with me if we indeed are only good for filling up pits, and let's ease the way of light for those who follow us.

Gentlemen! I hear constant rumors that positivism ends now in the dying throes, that naturalism is dead already, that science will go bankrupt very soon because it didn't bring the moral

peace and happiness to people which it promised. You understand very well that I don't try to solve here the great challenges concerning these issues. I am ignorant. I have no right to talk on behalf of science and philosophy. If you wish to know, I'm just a novelist, a writer, sometimes making a good guess, and all my value comes from the fact that I observed and worked a lot. And only as a witness, I let myself speak to you about that what my generation was, or at least wanted to be, the people who are now fifty years old and who your generation will soon name ancient.

I was very surprised the other day, during the opening ceremony of the exhibition on the Champ de Mars. It was assumed that these were all the same pictures. It is a confusion – the evolution is slow, but how astounding it would be if it'd be possible to restore the previous exhibitions! I personally remember well the exhibitions, academic and romantic, in the year 1863. Work on the air (in "full light", plein air) wasn't in fashion yet, there was an overall tone of Bitum de Judee; it was some kind of mania, some roasted tones, the twilight of workshops. Then, fifteen years later, after the victorious and so much disputed the impact of Mr. Mane, I recall new exhibitions, with the glittering bright tone of full sun. It was as though the flood of light, care about the truth, made each frame a window widely open into nature and bathed in bright glitter. And yesterday, fifteen years later, I could see as though something like mystical fog rises among this freshness of works. It is still the same concern for truthful art of painting, but the reality changes, shapes are elongated somehow, the need for originality and novelty carry the artist beyond dreams.

I'm talking about three phases of modern art because they, I think, clearly display the change of ideas of our time. In fact, my generation after famous predecessors, to whom we were followers, sought to open window widely on nature: to see everything, to say everything. In it, even between the most unconscious, a prolonged effort of positive philosophy and analytical and experimental sciences has ended. We were overfilled with science, which surrounded us from all sides, we lived it, by inhaling the air of that time. Now, I can admit, I personally was even a sectarian, trying to bring the rigorous method of a scientist into the realm of literature. But where is the man who in his fight does not go any further that is necessary, and who is satisfied with his victory without shattering its benefits? However, I have no regrets and I continue to believe in the passion, which is willing and acting. And then, what enthusiasm and what hopes we were inspired to! To know everything, to be able to do everything, to win everybody! By means of truth to make mankind higher and happier! And here, gentlemen, you, young people, are coming onto stage. I'm saying, young people - something indefinite, distant and deep as the sea: because where are they - the youth? What will they be in reality? Who are called to speak in the name of them? I should stick to those thoughts, which are attributed to them. And if these thoughts do not belong to many of you, I ask you to forgive me in advance. I address those who have deceived us with dubious information, probably more in line with their desires than with reality.

So, ladies and gentlemen, we are assured that your generation breaks with ours, that you don't have hopes in science, that you have recognized the social and moral danger in having everything built based on science, and that you have decided to return to the past, and to create for yourselves a living belief out of the remnants of previous beliefs. Of course, we are not talking about a complete break with science - it is assumed that you accept all its last accomplishments and that you intend to expand them. It is assumed that you acknowledge the proven truths, and diligently re-fit them to the ancient teachings. In essence, science is put aside from faith. It's being sent

back to its original place. Science is a simple exercise of mind and an allowed research as long as it doesn't touch the supernatural and beyond. They say that the experiment has already been done, that science is not capable of once again conquer the sky that it emptied, unable to return happiness to souls, that naive world which it used to destroy. Time of its deceitful celebration is over. Science should stay modest, because it cannot know everything, cannot enrich everything, or heal everybody. And if you still do not dare to say to intelligent young people that science should throw its books and leave its teachers, there are already saints and prophets who walk among people, praising the virtue of ignorance, the clarity of simplicity, and for overly academic and getting old humanity - the need for refreshment in the depths of a prehistoric village among the ancestors, who have just separated from the Earth, up to every society and every knowledge.

I do not deny the crisis that we are experiencing; it is the fatigue and resentment at the end of this century, after such hectic and enormous work, the aim of which was to know everything and to say everything. It seemed that science that had just destroyed the ancient world, was supposed to recreate the world vividly according to the ideal that we have in regards to justice and happiness. We waited 20, 50, even 100 years. And then, when saw that justice hadn't yet reigned, that happiness hadn't come, many gave in to the growing intolerance, having been discouraged and denying even the possibility of achievement of the blessed will by means of knowledge. It's a known phenomenon: no actions without reactions, and we observe the inevitable fatigue, characteristic of long journeys: people sit on the edge of the road, and, looking at the boundless plain of the unfolding next century, are despaired ever to reach the goal; they come even to the state when they doubt even the passed path, regret that they didn't lay in a field to sleep in it for ages. Why to go if the goal will always move away from you? Why to know if you cannot know everything? It's better to remain in pure simplicity, in blissful ignorance of a child. That's what people think about science, which was supposed to bring us happiness and went bankrupt before our eyes.

But did science promise happiness? I don't think so. It promised the truth, and the question is whether you can make a fortune from the truth? To be satisfied with it, without a doubt, you need a lot of stoicism, full renunciation of your own "I", the clarity of satisfied mind, which can be found only among the select ones. Meanwhile, what scream we hear from the suffering humanity! How can we live without lies and illusions! Is there somewhere another world, where justice reigns, where the rich are punished and the good rewarded? How to live without resenting this abominable human life? The nature is unfair and cruel, and science brings us to an ugly law of the strong, so that any morals are destroyed and every society leans to despotism. And here, in this ongoing reaction, in this fatigue of the surplus of knowledge I mentioned, there's also a retreat before the truth, yet poorly explained and seemingly cruel to our eyes, unable to even understand and penetrate all laws. No, no, let's return to the quiet sleep of ignorance! The reality is a school of perversion, need to kill it, and deny, because the reality is only an outrage and a crime; and people jump into a dream, and there is no other salvation as an escape from Earth, trust in afterlife, and hope that finally we'll find satisfaction from our need in fraternity and justice.

This desperate appeal to happiness we hear now. It touches me immensely. And notice, it is heard from all sides, like a pitiable wail amid the thunder of the traffic of science, which does not stop their wheels and machines. Enough of your truth, give us chimeras! We will find peace only when we will dream about what does not exist, when we'll be taken into the infinite: only there those mystical flowers bloom, the smell of which will lull our suffering. Music has already

responded, literature seeks to satisfy the new craving, and painting is in line with the new fashion. I told you about the exhibition the Champs de Mars: you'll see there the bloom of this flora of ancient painting on windows, liquid and slim Madonnas, visions in the gloomy shadows, frozen faces with broken gestures of the primitivists. This is the reaction against naturalism, which has died and was buried, as they tells us. Anyway, the movement is undoubted because it has captured all the manifestations of the spirit, and you have to reckon with it and explore and explain it, if you don't want to despair in tomorrow.

From my side, gentlemen, I, like an old and hardcore positivist, see in it only an inevitable stop in forward motion. Actually, there's no stop, because our libraries, laboratories, amphitheatres, and schools are not emptied. What inspires confidence in me is that the social soil has not changed, it still remains the same democratic soil on which our contemporaries have grown. In order for other art to flourish, for new beliefs to change the direction of the movement of mankind, it is necessary for this belief to have new ground, too, in which it could grow, because there is no new society without new soil. Faith does not rises from dead; it's only possible to get a mythologies out of dead religions. Therefore, the next century will be only the assertion of our, in that democratic and scientific impulse that hooked us up and continues to do so. All I can assume is that in the literature we have closed horizons too much.

Personally I have already regretted that I was sectarian, wanted in art to stick with just proven truths. Newcomers have opened horizons, captured the unknown and the secret, and they've done well. Between truths established by science, and therefore unshakable truths, and the truths that it will rip out tomorrow from the realm of the unknown in order to fix them, in turn, there is an undefined field of doubts and researches, which, I think, belongs to as much to literature as to science.

Here we can do our job of best pioneers, explaining the actions of unknown forces, according to the nature and the strength of mind. Because ideal is nothing else but the inexplicable, like the forces of that infinite world in which we bathe without knowing them. And if we can come up with solutions that explain the unknown, can we afford to doubt the laws already open, by imagining them to ourselves as being different and thus by denying them? As science moves, the ideal undoubtedly retreats, and it seems to me that the only meaning of life, the only joy that should be in life is this slow conquest, although we had to admit the sad evidence that we'll never know everything.

At the time of troubles, which we are experiencing, ladies and gentlemen, in our time, so over profuse and so seeking, pastors of souls appeared, who are concerned and offer faith to young people. Their offer is generous, but, unfortunately, this faith is being changed and perverted according to each prophet who offers it. There are many different, but none of them seems to me neither pretty nor very convincing. They beg you to believe without explaining clearly in what. Maybe it's can't be otherwise, or maybe they are indecisive to do so. You are invited to believe for having a good fortune to believe; mainly for you to learn to believe. The question is not bad by itself: of course, it is the great happiness to rely on the veracity of the faith, whatever it may be; but the trouble is that you can't control the grace: it blows wherever it wants.

So, I'll finish by offering you, from my side, also a faith, and by begging you to have the faith in work. Work, young people! I know this advice may seem banal. There is no public event where this wasn't repeated in the midst of universal indifference of the listeners. But I ask you to think about it; and I'll let myself, all-time worker, to tell you about the blessing that I have extracted from the prolonged labor that has filled my entire life. My entry in this life was

difficult: I knew poverty and despair, then I lived in struggle, I still live in it, being re-assembled, denied, covered with insults. And what? I had only one faith, one force - work. I was only supported by the enormous work that I set for myself, there was always a goal in front of me, in the distance, to which I was moving, and it was enough to lift me up, to give me courage when the bad life overwhelmed me. Labor that I'm telling you about is truthful, daily work, a lesson, a responsibility that I have set for myself - to move at least one step forward in my field every day. How many times in the morning I would sit behind my desk with lost mind, bitterness in the mouth, tormented by some great pain, physical or mental! And every time, regardless of the outrage of my misery, my lesson for me was relief and reinforcement. I always left my daily activities comforted, consoled, sometimes with a broken heart, but not yet collapsing and able to live until tomorrow.

Work! Gentlemen, just contemplate about it, it is the only law in the world, that regulator which pulls the organic matter to its certain goal! Life has no other meaning; there's no other reason to be; we all show up just to make our share of labor and to disappear.

Life is nothing but a coordinated movement that it receives and transfers to the next, and that, in essence, is nothing else but work, just like the work of great deed committed in all ages. And therefore how can we not be modest and not to accept that lesson which is assigned to every one of us, without resentment, and not to yield to the pride of our own "I", which considers itself the center and does not want to set foot in the ranks?

Once this lesson is learned, it seems to me that peace must settle in any man, even in the most troubled. I know that there are minds troubled by infinity who suffer from mystery; to them I appeal brotherly, advise them to indulge in some labor of great difficulty, which they wouldn't be able to see the end of. This is the pendulum that will give them a chance to go straight, it is this hourly scattering, it is a grain, thrown to mind so that the mind would grind it and make bread of it with the satisfied consciousness of completed duty. Of course, this does not allow any metaphysical task, this is only empirical means to honestly or nearly peacefully live ones' lives; but is it too little benefit - to acquire the moral and physical health, to avoid the risk of dreams by resolving through work the hard question of acquiring the greatest possible happiness on this earth?

I confess I never trusted chimeras. There is nothing less healthy for both the individual and for the nations than a superstition: it destroys the effort, it dazzles, it is vanity for the weak. To continue to hold on to a legend, to hide reality from yourself, to believe that it's enough to dream of the strength in order to be strong, - we've seen where it leads, to what terrible disasters. Peoples are told that they need to look up, to believe in a higher authority, to be exalted to an ideal.

No, no! Such speeches at times seem to me ungodly. Strong nation only the one that works, and only work gives courage and faith. To win, you need to have your arsenals full, armament - the most robust and advanced, army - trained and trusting to their superiors and into itself. All this is acquired: you just need to have a good desire and an approach. In the next century, the unlimited future belongs to labor. Let anybody not doubt this. And don't we already see in the rising socialism the future embryo of the social law of the future, the law of labor for all, labor - which is the liberator and conciliator?

So, young people, take up the work. Let each of you take his own lesson which must fill the whole his life. No matter how modest the case is, it will nevertheless be useful; whatever it is, it only must uplift you. When you organize it, without fatigue, having given the amount of efforts

that you are able to put every day, it will give you the opportunity to live healthy and with fun, and it will save you the agony of infinity. What healthy great human society would be a society in which each and every member of it has put his logical share of work! A person who works is always good. And because I am convinced that the only faith that can save us is the faith in the committed effort. It's great to dream of eternity, but for an honest man it is enough to go through this life by completing his job”.

Mr. Zola does not approve the fact that new teachers persuade the youth to believe in something undefined and unclear, and he is absolutely right on this, but, unfortunately, from his side he offers them faith, too, and the faith in something even more obscure and undefined: faith in science and in work.

Mr. Zola considers it completely settled and unquestionable that the science in which we must not cease to believe does exist. To work in the name of science! But the thing is that the word "science" has a very broad and little defined meaning, so that something that some people consider science, i.e. a very important matter, is considered by the greatest number of people, all working people, to be unnecessary folly. And we cannot say that this is only because of the lack of education among working people unable understand the whole deep meaning of science; scientists themselves constantly deny each other. Some scientists consider philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, political economy to be the science of sciences; others - experimental scientists - consider all of that the most empty, unscientific, and, vice versa, what positivists consider important, spiritualists, philosophers and theologians - useless exercises, if not even harmful. In addition, even in the same field, among priests themselves, every system has its own hottest defenders and opponents, equally competent, claiming something diametrically opposite. Moreover, in each field, many scientific findings appear, exist sometimes for a year, sometimes for decades, and then suddenly get classified as misconceptions and quickly forgotten by very those who promoted them.

We all know that what was considered to be entirely scientific and of great importance with the Romans, what they were proud of, without which a person considered barbarian, was rhetoric, i.e. such an exercise, which we now laugh at, and consider to be not only not a science but trivia. We also know that what was considered a science and the most important thing in the Middle Ages was scholasticism, which we now also laugh at. And I think, having recalled the descriptions of the seriousness with which we were engaged in our rhetoric and scholastics, one doesn't need special courage of thought to be able, from the vast amount of knowledge which is considered an important matter in our world and which is called science, to anticipate those subjects which are recognized as science in our time, over which our descendants will shrug, too.

Nowadays people, having freed themselves from some superstitions, without having noticed this yet, fell under others, equally groundless and harmful superstitions than those from which they have just freed themselves. After getting rid of the superstitions of outdated religions, humans fall under the superstition of science. At first it seems that there can be nothing in common between the beliefs of the ancient Jew that the world was created in 6 days, that the sins of the fathers will be blamed on children, that some diseases are cured by contemplating on snakes, and beliefs of the people of our time that the world has appeared out of the rotation of matter and the fight of creatures, that affinity for crime is inherited and that there are some microorganisms which look like commas, from which such and such diseases appear, etc. It seems that there is nothing in common between these beliefs, but it only seems so.

It's enough to transfer to the mental state of the ancient Jew, at the time his beliefs were first offered to him by his priests, to realize that the grounds on which he adopted the assertions about the origin of the world, and those based on which people of our time accept the assertions of science, not only similar, but totally identical.

Just as a Jew believed not exactly in the six-day creation and in the healing snake, but he believed that there are people who without a doubt know the highest truth available to man, and that therefore it is good to believe in them, in the same way people of our time believe not in Darwin's theory of heredity and commas but in all of that which the priests of science give them out as the truth, although the grounds for their work remain just as mysterious for the believers in science, as the grounds for knowledge of their preachers remained for the Jews.

I'll even allow myself to say that I have repeatedly noticed, that, just as ancient priests, having not been attested by anybody but the priests themselves, boldly lied and presented as truth whatever came into their mind, exactly the same so called people of science often happen to do so.

The entire speech of Mr. Zola is directed against the teachers of youth who persuade them to return to old beliefs, and Mr. Zola considers himself to be their opponent. In fact, those, against whom he is arming, i.e. the believers or rather wanting to believe in the outdated religion, and those for whom Mr. Zola fights, i.e. the representatives of science, are people of the same camp, and if they thoroughly think over their aspirations, they have nothing to argue about: querelles d'amoureux [quarrels of lovers], as Dumas says. Both are looking for the bases of life, engines not in themselves, not in their minds, but in the external forms of human life: one - in what they call a religion, and others - what is called science. Those who seek salvation in religion, take it out of the ancient knowledge of others and want to believe in that someone else's ancient knowledge; others, those who seek salvation in what they call science, take it not from their own knowledge but from the knowledge of others and believe in that someone else's knowledge. Some see the salvation of mankind in amended, renewed, or cleansed semi-Jewish Christianity; others see it in an aggregate of the most random, disparate, and unnecessary knowledge which they call science and consider it being something original, beneficent, and therefore inevitably necessarily, able to fix all the flaws of life and give humanity the highest possible benefit. Some, as on purpose, don't want to see that the thing they want to recover and call religion is only an empty cocoon from which the butterfly flew away long ago and which now puts her eggs in another place, and that the restoration of such a religion not only cannot help with the troubles of our time, but can only worsen them, by moving the eyes of people away from the truly important matter. Others do not want to see that the thing they call science, which is a random collection of some knowledge that currently attracts interest a few idle people, may be either an innocent time spending for the rich or, at best, only a tool for evil or good, depending on in whose hands it will get, but, by itself it can fix nothing. In essence, deep down in their souls, neither of them believe in the power of that remedy they offer, but both equally want only to avert their eyes away from the abyss before which the humanity now stands and if the humanity will continue to go down that path, it must inevitably crash. Some see this lulling remedy in mysticism, religion; others, the representative of whom became Zola, in the stupefying effect of the work for science.

The difference between people who believe in religion and science is only that some believe in the old wisdom, the lie of which was already exposed, and others - in a new, which lie is not yet exposed and which therefore still inspires awe in some naive people. Meanwhile, the superstition

called science is hardly less than what is called religion. The only difference is that the first one is the superstition of the past, the other – the superstition of the present.

And therefore, wouldn't it be just as dangerous to follow the advice of Mr. Zola and to dedicate your life to serving that what in our time, in our world, is called science? What if I will devote my life to the study of the phenomena such as the inheritance according to the teachings of Lombroso, or some liquid, or fertilizing of soil by means of activities of worms, etc., and all of a sudden I'll find out just before my death that what I have devoted my entire life for was silly, and perhaps even harmful, trivia, and I had only one life.

There is a little known Chinese philosopher Laozi (the first and the best translation of his "The Book of the Way and Virtue" by Stanislas Julien). The essence of the teaching of Laozi is that the highest well-being of individuals in particular, as well as of the collection of peoples, can be acquired through knowledge "Tao" - a word, which translates to "by way, by virtue, by truth"; and the cognition of "Tao" can be acquired only through inaction, "le non agir", as Julien translates it. All the disasters of people, according to the teaching of Laozi, come not so much from what they have not done out of what was needed, as much as what they do out of what they shouldn't. And therefore people would have got rid of all the disasters, personal and especially public which the Chinese philosopher mostly referred to, if they have maintained the inaction (s'il pratiquaient le non agir).

And I think he is absolutely right. Let everyone work hard. But what? Punter, the banker returns from the exchange where he worked hard; colonel - from training people to murder, manufacturer - from his enterprise where thousands of people ruin their lives over producing mirrors, tobacco, vodka. All these people work, but is it possible to approve their work?

But maybe we should only talk about people working for science?

I keep receiving numerous notebooks from different authors, often - books with works, artistic and scientific. One of the authors has resolved in its final form the question of Christian epistemology, another - printed a book on the space ether, third - resolved a social question, fourth - political, fifth - Eastern question, sixth publishes a magazine dedicated to the research of the mysterious forces of spirit and nature, seventh solved a problem of a horse.

All these people work tirelessly and diligently for science, but I think that the time and work of not only all these writers, but also many others, is not only wasted, but even harmful. Harmful, firstly, because to prepare these writings thousands of other people made the paper, font templates, typed, printed and, more importantly, fed and dressed all this workers of science, and also because of the fact that all these writers, instead of feeling guilty before society, just as they would feel if they'd gamble, play cards, continue with a calm conscience to do their good for nobody business.

Who doesn't know those hopeless for truth and often cruel people who are so busy that they never have time, especially - they have no time to see if anybody at all needs the cause they are working so hard on and to make sure it is not harmful. You tell them: "Your work is useless or harmful because of so and so, hey, wait, let's discuss this case"; they don't listen to you and even sarcastically object: "Well, it's easy for you to talk, when there's nothing to do, but I'm working on a study of how many times this word has been used by this ancient writer, or to identify the shape of atoms, or on telepathy", etc.

Besides, I've always been shocked by the astonishing, dominating especially in Western Europe, opinion that work is something like virtue; I was often surprised at this strange value

attributed to work, even before reading the speech of Mr. Zola, who clearly expressed this opinion.

Because only an ant in a fable, as a creature deprived of reason and desire to do good, could think that work is a virtue, and could be proud of it.

Mr. Zola says that work makes a person good; but I always noticed the opposite: determined work, ant-like pride of one's own work makes not only an ant, but a human cruel. The greatest villains of mankind, such as Nero and Peter the First, have always been particularly busy and preoccupied, not leaving a moment to stay with themselves without occupation or amusements.

But even if the love of work is not an obvious vice, it can under no circumstances called a virtue. Work can be just as little virtue as food. Work is a need, denial of which causes suffering, but it is not a noble cause. Exalting work to a virtue just as ugly, as exalting of food taking to goodness and virtue. The value attributed to work in our society could only occur as a reaction against idleness, exalted to a sign of nobility and is still considered to be a sign of dignity among the wealthy and little educated classes. Work, an exercise for our body parts, is always a need for a human, just as it is demonstrated by calves, galloping around the stake to which they are tied, and by people of wealthy classes, martyrs of gymnastics, - all kinds of games: chess, cards, lawn tennis, etc., as they're unable to find a more sensible exercise for their body parts.

Work is not only not a virtue, but in our wrongly organized society is primarily a morally anesthetic means, just like smoking or drinking alcohol, for hiding the wrongness and depravity of your life from yourself.

"When do I have time to talk to you about philosophy, morality and religion? I have to publish a daily newspaper with half million subscribers, I need to organize an army, I need to build the Eiffel Tower, to organize an exhibition in Chicago, to dig the Panama Channel, to write the twenty-eighth volume of my writings, my picture, opera." If people of our time didn't have excuses for constant, all-absorbing them work, they might not be able to live the way they do. Only because they use empty and for the most part harmful work to hide from themselves those contradictions with which they live, only because of that people can live the way they do.

Mr. Zola presents work as that exact kind of means to his audience. He says: "It is only an empirical means to honestly and almost peacefully live ones' lives. But is it too little - to obtain the moral and physical health, to avoid the risk of dreaming by resolving through work the hard question of acquiring the greatest happiness available to a human?"

This is the advice given to young people of our time by Mr. Zola!

Dumas says quite the opposite. Here is his letter written to the editor of "Golua."

"Dear Sir!

You ask my opinion in regards to aspirations that seem to show among school students in regards to the disputes that preceded and accompanied the incident at the Sorbonne. I would have preferred not to give my opinion on anything whatsoever, having known very well that it will lead to nothing. People who were already of the same opinion with us will keep it for some time; those who were of the opposite opinion, will persist in it even more. It would be better not to argue at all. "Opinions are like nails:" - one of my moralist buddies said, - "the more you bang on them, the deeper they go."

It's not that I don't have my own opinion on what is called the great global issues and on the various forms with which human mind instantly dresses those things of which he speaks. The opinion is so firm and unconditional that I would prefer to save it for my personal guidance, as I have no desire neither to create anything, nor to destroy. I would need to return to those great political, social, philosophical, religious issues, and this would take us too far if I followed you in the study of the minor external phenomena caused by these issues in every new generation. In fact, each new generation comes with thoughts and passions that are old as the world, although it thinks that no one before had these thoughts, because this generation is under their influence for their first time, and it is convinced that it is about to transform everything existing.

While mankind in the continuation of the millennia tries to resolve this great task of cause and effect, which can hardly be solved even thousands of centuries later, even if we admit, which I don't admit, the possibility for solving it, twenty-year-old children declare that they have the undeniable solution of it in their utterly young brains. And as the first argument in the first dispute, they start pounding on those who disagree with them. Does it mean we have to conclude from this that this is a sign of the return of the whole of society to a religious ideal, which was obscured and abandoned for a while? Or these young apostles are driven by a pure physiological matter, the fever of blood, the strength of muscle, and ardor which moved young people twenty years ago in the opposite direction? I'm leaning toward the latter hypothesis.

The one who wants to see in the expression of young age, full of energy, a proof of final development or at least a sustainable one, would be very wrong. This is just an outburst of the fever of growth. Whatever type of ideas there were, for the sake of which young people bang each other, you can bet that they will become the opponents of these ideas as soon they will see them in their children. Age and experience will make it.

Many, many of the warmongers and enemies of the present hour will sooner or later meet at country roads of life, partly tired, partly disillusioned by their battle with reality, and will, hand in hand, return back to the high road, recognizing with sadness that, despite their former beliefs, the Earth stays round and it turns into the same direction, and that the same horizons spread under the same endless closed sky.

After having argued and fought, some - in the name of faith, others - in the name of science, to prove that God exists as much as to prove that He doesn't, - two assertions, about which people can fight forever if they decide not to disarm until they prove the point, - they'll finally agree that one group does not know any more about it than the other, but they firmly know that in the end a person needs to hope for, just as much as, if not more than, to know, and that he suffers terribly from the obscurity in which he lives about things more interesting for him, that he is constantly looking for a better condition than in which he is now, and that he has to be given full freedom to search in the field of philosophy the means to become more happy.

There was a world in front of him, which existed before him and will remain after him, and he knows that this world is eternal and that he wishes to participate in this eternity. As he was called to life, he demands his share in the eternal life that surrounds him, stimulates him, makes fun of him, and destroys him. Because he knows that he has began, he doesn't want to end. He loudly calls, he softly prays for the confirmation, which constantly eludes him for the sake of his own happiness, because the confirmed knowledge would make him immobile and dead. Because the strongest engine of human energy is unknown, because it cannot be established with veracity, he runs with vague ideals, and no matter how far he would deviate in skepticism and denial as

a result of pride, anger, curiosity, fashion, he always returns to hope, without which he cannot live. It's like a quarrel between lovers: doesn't last for long.

So sometimes the darkening comes, but it is never a complete disappearance of the human ideal. Philosophical fogs pass through it like clouds in front the Moon, but the white luminary continues its procession and suddenly appears from behind them, pristine and shiny. This unstoppable human need for an ideal explains the reason why human jumped with such trust, such enthusiasm, without reasoned control, in various religious formulas that promised him the infinite and offered it to him according to his nature, and put him in the known limits, always necessary even for the ideal.

But on each station of the movement of mankind, already for a long time, new people appear from the darkness in greater and greater numbers, especially for the last 100 years, and these people in the name of reason, science, and observation deny truths, declare them relative, and want to destroy those formulas that contain them.

Who is right in this dispute? Everybody, as long as everyone is searching, and nobody, once they start to threaten. Between the truth, which is the purpose, and a free study, which everyone has right to do, there's no place for power, regardless of the notorious examples of the opposite. Power only distances the goal, that's all. It is not only cruel, it is useless, which makes it the biggest limitation in the matter of civilization. No punch of the fist, no matter how strong it may be, can prove neither the existence nor nonexistence of God. And, finally, that force, whatever it may be, which has created the world, as it seems to me that the world couldn't still create itself, having made us its own tools, reserved the right to know why it made us and where it leads us. This force, despite of all those intentions which people attributed to it, and of all the requirements that people made to it, this force, as it seems, wants to keep it a secret, and therefore (I'll tell here everything I think) it seems to me that mankind starts to abandon the desire to penetrate it. Humanity was drawn to religions which proved nothing because they were all different; refer to philosophies that explained not more than that because they were inconsistent with each other; humanity will now try to handle its own simple instinct and common sense, and because it lives on the Earth, not knowing why and how, it will try to be as happy as possible by those means which our planet provides it with.

Recently Zola in his remarkable speech to the students, recommend them work as a medicine, even a panacea, against all difficulties in life. *Labor improbus omnia vincit* (Tireless work wins everything.) This medicine is known and it doesn't become any worse because of that, but it has always been and continues to be insufficient. Let a man work with his muscles or mind, yet his concerns can never be limited to the purchase of food, the acquisition of property, or the attainment of fame. All those who limit themselves to these goals, feel, even when they have reached them, that they still lack something: the fact is, whatever a human produces, whatever he is saying, whatever he is told, he does not only consist of a body which he must feed and mind which needs to be educated and developed; he undoubtedly has a soul which claims its own demands. This soul is in unceasing work, in constant development, and in the pursuit toward light and truth. Until it receives all the light and wins the entire truth, it will torment man.

And here it is – it has never occupied that much, never imposed with such vigor its power on man as in our time. It is, so to speak, poured into the air that the world breathes. Those few individual souls, who separately from each other wished for the social rebirth, gradually found and called each other, got closer, connected, understood themselves, and formed a group, a center of attraction, to which other souls now lean from four sides of the world, like larks

flying on mirror: they have composed such shared, collective soul, to help people ahead to fulfill together, deliberately, the unstoppably imminent unification, and to do the right progress of the nations who were just recently hostile to each other. This new soul I see and recognize in the events that seem to be denying it.

The arming of all nations, the threats that their representatives make to each other, the persecutions of the people of certain nations, the hostility among countrymen, and even the childishness of Sorbonne are all the phenomena of bad nature but not of bad omens. They are the last convulsions of what must pass. The disease in this case is just an energetic effort of the body to free itself from the deadly source.

Those who used the misconceptions of the past, and hoped to continue using them for much longer time and forever, are now getting together to prevent any change. As a result – these armings, these threats, these persecutions; but, if you look closer, you will see that all this is only superficial. All of this is colossal, but it is hollow.

In all of this, there's no soul anymore: it has moved to another place. All those millions of armed men, who every day practice to prepare for an all-destroying war, already don't hate those with whom they must fight, and none of their superiors dare declare a war. In regards to the contagious reproaches that are heard from the bottom, from the top a great and sincere compassion starts to respond, which recognizes the fairness of the reproaches.

Mutual understanding will inevitably come at a certain time, and sooner than we think. I don't know whether it's because I will soon leave this world, and that the light, which is coming from beneath the horizon and is shining at me, is already obscuring my sight, but I think that our world is entering the era of implementation of the words: "Love one another", without arguing about who said these words: God or man.

The spiritualistic movement, evident from all sides, and which so many proud and naive people think to control, will be humane, without a doubt. People, who can do nothing with moderation, will be caught by the insanity, madness of love to each other. At first, this obviously will be not accomplished by itself. There will be misunderstandings, possibly even the bloody ones: that's how we are brought up and conditioned to hate each other, often by the very people who are supposed to teach us to love. But because it is obvious that this great law of fraternity must be implemented at some time, I am confident that time comes when we will irresistibly wish for it to happen.

A. Dumas

June 1, 1893"

The main difference between the Dumas' letter and Zola's speech, not to mention the outward difference - the fact that speech of Zola is turned to youth and is flattering it (which became common unpleasant phenomenon of our time, just as flattering women by writers), while Dumas's writing is not drawn to youth and is not telling it compliments, but, on the contrary, points out to its common error of arrogance, and consequently, rather than influencing young people that they are very important and that they have all the power in them, which they should never think in order to be able to do something worthwhile, Duma teaches a great deal not just youth but also adults and the old, - but the sound difference is that Zola's speech lulls people, detains them on the path they stay, by assuring them that they already know what they need to know; while Dumas' letter awakes people by pointing to them that their life isn't going the way it should, and that they do not know what is the most important they need to know. Dumas just as little believes in the superstition of the past as in the superstition of the present. But precisely because he

believes in the superstition of neither past nor present, he observes by himself, thinks for himself, and therefore clearly sees not only the present but also the future, just as those who were called prophets in ancient times have always seen. Strange as it may seem to those who while reading the essays of writers see only the outer side of the writing and not the soul of the writer, that same Alexandre Dumas, fils, who wrote "La Dame aux camélias", "L'Affaire Clemenceau" ("Lady with the camellias", "Case of Clemenceau") and others, the same Dumas now sees the future and prophecies about it. Strange as it seems to us, who is used to imagine a prophet in an animal skin and in the desert, prophecy remains the prophecy, regardless of the fact that it is pronounced not on the banks of the Jordan, but is printed on the banks of the Seine in typography "Golua", and the words of Dumas are the actual prophecy and carry all the essential signs of prophecy: firstly, these words are absolutely opposite to the popular opinion of the people among whom they are said; secondly, despite of this, people who hear these words, without knowing why, find themselves agreeing with them, and, thirdly, the important thing is that prophecy assists the achievement of what it predicts.

The more people will believe that they can be brought by something external, which acts by itself, regardless of their will, e.g. by religion or science, to a change and improvement of their lives, the harder it is for this change and improvement to come true. And this the major drawback of the Zola's speech. But, on the contrary, the more they will believe in what Dumas predicts - that inevitably, and soon, time will come when people will become passionate about loving each other, and by giving themselves to this love, they'll inadvertently change the whole present life, - the sooner this time will come. And this is the main advantage of Dumas's letter. Zola advises people not to change their lives, but only to increase the activity in the direction once adopted, and by saying this he influences them not to change their lives. But Dumas, by predicting internal change of the feelings of people, inspires them with this change.

Dumas predicts that people, having tried everything, finally will - and very soon - take the application to life of the law "love each other" seriously, and will, as he said, be caught by "insanity, madness" of love. He says that he already sees in events seeming very threatening the signs of this new emerging loving mood of people; he sees that fully armed peoples do not hate each other anymore; he sees that in the fight of the wealthy classes with the poor there's no longer the triumph of winners but a sincere compassion of the winners for the losers, and dissatisfaction of and shame for their victory; he sees, most importantly, as he says, that the centers of loving attraction will form and grow like a snowball, and they must inevitably attract to themselves everything that lives that is not yet connected to them, and, by means of changing of the mood, the evil, from which people suffer, will disappear.

I think that even if the proximity of the transformation that Dumas predicts can be questioned, as well as the possibility itself of such enthusiasm among people toward each other, but no one would argue that if that happens, then humanity would rid itself from the most of the distresses that pressure and threaten it. It can't be denied that if people did what they were prescribed to do thousands years ago, not only by Christ, but by all the sages of the world, i.e. if not loved others like themselves, but at least did not do to others what they don't want to be done to them, that if people instead of selfishness would buy into altruism, if their life habits would change from individualistic to collectivistic, as people of science in their bad lingo express the same idea, then people's lives would become happy instead of being distressed. Moreover, everybody also recognizes that life, having carried on these pagan bases of fight as it does now, will inevitably lead mankind to the greatest disasters, and that time is already near. All people see that the more

and more vigorously they will take each other's land and products of work, the more angry they'll become, and the more unavoidably, sooner or later, those people from whom the most was taken will take from the robbers everything that they have been deprived from for so long, and will brutally repay for all the deprivation they have suffered. Everybody, already for long time, sees this ridiculously obvious absurdity of mutual arming of the people, which inevitably must end with either horrible killings or with already ongoing worldwide bankruptcy and the extinction of all people involved in this circle of arming. Besides, all people of our world recognize as mandatory for themselves either the religious Christian law of love or the secular law, based on the same Christianity, of respect for other's life, for identity, and for human rights.

People know all this, and yet they build their lives contrary to their own benefits, and security, and the law that they profess.

Obviously, there's some sort of hidden but important reason that prevents people from performing what is profitable for them, which would save them from the obvious danger, and which they recognize as mandatory for themselves, religious or moral law. Isn't it not to deceive each other that the love for each other was praised for so many centuries, and is now preached from thousands of different religious and secular high places. Because it's time for people to decide that the love for each other is advantageous, useful, and kind, and to arrange their lives based on it, or, having recognized that love is an impossible dream, stop talking about it. But people are not doing either of that: they continue to live contrary to love and continue to praise it. Obviously, they believe that love is possible, desirable and natural to them, but cannot fulfill it. Why is this happening?

All epy great changes in life of one person or the whole mankind begin and are committed only in a thought. Regardless of the external changes that will take place in people's lives, no matter how much people would preach on the need of change of feelings and actions, people's lives will not change until they change their thoughts. But once a change in thoughts happens, sooner or later, depending on the importance of the change, it will echo in feelings, and actions, and lives of people just as inevitably as a ship turns after the turn of the steering wheel.

From the first words of his sermon, Christ did not tell people: do this or that, have such and such feelings, but he told them: think again, change your understanding of life. He did not tell people: love one another (these words he spoke to his disciples, people who understood his teaching); but he told all people the same what his predecessor John the Baptist told: "Repent, that is, think, change your understanding of life, think again, otherwise you'll all perish," he said. "The meaning of your life cannot reside in each of you looking for the individual benefits of your own personality or the benefits of a known collection of people," he said, "because the benefit that is purchased at the expense of other individuals, families, peoples, who are looking for the same by the same means, obviously not only can't be achieved, but inevitably must lead you to perdition. Understand that the meaning of your lives can only be in fulfilling the will of the One Who sent you to this life and requires you to serve not your personal goals but His goal, which is in the establishment of unity and love among all creatures, in the establishment of the Kingdom of heaven, when the swords will be melted into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, and when the lion will lie with the lamb, as prophets expressed that. Change your understanding of life, otherwise you'll all perish, he said. But people did not listen to Christ and have not changed their understanding of life back then, and still hold to it. And this false understanding of life held by people, despite the increasing complexity of life forms and the development of consciousness of people of our time, is the exact reason why people, being aware of the blessings of love and

the dangers of the life that opposes love, and having recognized love being the law of their God or the law of life, still cannot follow it.

And, what possibility there is for a person of our world, - the one who assumes the purpose of his life in his own personal, or family, or the nation's benefits achieved only by an intense fight with other people who also strive for the same, in the midst of the institutions of the world which legitimize every fight and violence, - to really love those who are always on his way, and who he must inevitably ruin, in order to achieve the goals he set for himself?

In order for the change of feelings and actions to happen, change in thoughts must happen first. And in order to the change in thoughts to happen, a person must stop, and pay attention to what he needs to understand. In order for people, who with a shout and roar of wheels rush to abyss, to be able to hear what those, who want to save them, shout to them, they must stop, first of all. Otherwise how can a man change his thoughts, his understanding of life, when he - relentlessly, with passion, also hurried by the people who assure him that this is all he needs - works based on that same false understanding of life that he needs to change?

Human sufferings, which arise from the false understanding of life, are fully-grown; blessing given by the true understanding of life became so clear and obvious to all; so that for people to change their lives, in accordance with their conscience, they don't need to undertake anything nowadays, to do anything, but they only need to stop, to stop doing what they're doing, to focus and reflect.

People of our Christian world are in the same condition as people who are struggling over moving a fairly light weight just because they, in a rush, can't come to an agreement with each other, and are relentlessly pulling the weight in different directions.

If at previous times, when people still haven't realized the calamity of pagan life and the blessing promised by love, they could unconsciously continue to support slavery, oppression, executions, wars, and could by use of reasoned arguments defend their status, now it has become completely impossible: the people of our time can live the pagan life, but can't justify it anymore. It's enough for the people of our Christian world only to pause in their activities for a moment, to reflect on their situation, to apply the requirement of their reason and heart to the surrounding conditions of life, to see that their entire life, all their actions is a constant glaring contradiction with their conscience, mind, and heart.

Ask each person of our time separately about what he is guided by, and what he considers necessary to be guided by in his life, and almost everyone will tell you that he is guided if not by love, then by justice, - he will tell you that he personally, having recognized either the necessity of the Christian teaching or the moral secular principles based on the same Christianity, needs neither violence, nor the courts, nor executions, nor war, and he obeys these conditions of life only because they are needed for other people; ask another person, the third, and almost all of them will say the same. And they all are sincere. By the nature of their consciousness, most people of our time for long time already must have lived among each other as Christians. Look how they live in reality: they live like beasts.

So, most people of the Christian world our time live pagan lives not so much because they want to, but because this order of life, which was some time ago useful for people with totally different consciousness, has remained the same, and is kept this way by means of constant hustle of people, which leaves no time for them to come to their senses and to change their order of life according to their conscience.

It is enough for people to stop, even only for a while, doing that what is advised to them by Zola and his imaginary opponents - all those who, under the pretext of a slow and gradual progress wish to retain the existing order - enough to stop stupefying themselves with false religions or science, and, mainly, with the incessant self-exhaling work on cases that are not approved by their conscience, and they would immediately see that the meaning of their lives cannot be in this obviously deceptive quest for a single, built on the fight with others, benefit for their own person, family, nation or state; they would see that the only possible reasonable meaning of life is the one that was already 1800 years ago open to humanity by Christianity.

Feast was ready for a long time, and everybody was long time ago called to attend it; but one has bought land, another - married, third - tests his bulls, fourth - builds a railway, factory, busy with missionary in India or Japan, reads sermons, pushes a military law or fails it, takes an exam, writes an academic essay, a poem, a novel. All are busy, have no time to wake up, come to their senses, look at themselves and the world and ask themselves: what do I do? What for? Because it can't be that the force which has produced me into the world with my reasoning and loving properties, would produce me with them only to cheat, so that I, - having imagined to myself, that in order to achieve the greatest good for my own dying personality I can manage my own and others' lives as I wish, - would have finally convinced myself, that the more I try to do all this, the worse it is for me, and for my family, and for my nation, the farther I digress from the demands of love and reason, which are instilled in me and which don't stop for a moment asserting their demands, and from the true blessing. It can't be that these higher properties my soul were assigned to me just in order for them to be like shackles on the legs of a prisoner, just to hinder me in achieving my goals. Isn't it more likely that the force, which have produced me to the world, have produced me with my mind and love not for my random instantaneous goals, always opposing to the goals of other creatures (which it couldn't do, because I didn't exist neither did my goals before it has produced me), but for the achievement of its purpose, and to assist me with that purpose it has given me those essential properties of my soul. And therefore isn't it better to me, instead of persisting in following my own will and the will of other people, which are opposite to these supreme properties and leading me to disasters, to recognize once and for all that the goal of my life is the fulfillment of the will of the One Who sent me, in everything and always, in spite of any other considerations, and to follow only those instructions of reason and love that He put into me for the fulfillment of His will?

This is the Christian understanding of life, which is asking to sink in the soul of every man of our time. In order for the Kingdom of God to come true, it's necessary for all the people to begin to love each other without making distinctions between individuals, families, peoples. For people to be able to love each other that way, it's necessary for them to change their understanding of life. In order to change their understanding of life, it's necessary for them to come to their senses; and in order for them to come to their senses, they need first of all to stop for a while in that burning activity in the name of the affairs required by the pagan understanding of life, to which they give themselves; they need at least for a while to break free from that which Indians call "sansara", from the hustle and bustle of life, which more than anything else prevents people from understanding the meaning of their existence.

The deficiency of the pagan life, and the clarity and the prevalence of Christian consciousness in our time have reached such an extent that it's enough for people only to pause in their fuss, and they'll immediately see the futility of their activities; and, just as water inevitably freezes in the cold as soon they stop stirring it, the Christian understanding by itself will inevitably

settle in their minds. And as soon as people assimilate this concept, their love for each other, for all people, for all living things, having been currently in a hidden state, will, too, inevitably manifest itself in their activities, and will become an engine for all their deeds, just as now, with the pagan understanding of life, the love is manifested for oneself, for one's exclusive family, for an exclusive nation.

But as soon as the Christian love will show itself in people, and immediately, by themselves, without the slightest effort, old forms will disintegrate and those new forms of the good life will form, the lack of which seems to people the main obstacle to implementing of what their minds and heart have been demanding for long time.

If only people reserved one hundredth of the energy which they now expend on the commitment of various unwarranted carnal and therefore dimming their consciousness matters, and used it on the understanding of the consciousness itself and on the execution of what it requires from them, then much sooner and easier than we can even imagine, the Kingdom of God would establish, which He demands from people, and people would have found that well-being that was promised to them.

Look for the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and the rest will follow you.

9 August, 1893.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Leo Tolstoy
Non-Activity
1893

Original text from RevoltLib.com, 2021. Translated by EarthlyFireFlies and WikiSource.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net