Tolstoy's conception of art was closely aligned to his conception of life and religion. It grew into shape when he had formed a certain opinion of the meaning of life and religion, and thereby became a part of it. He did not believe in the commonly accepted definition of art that it was meant to entertain people. This conception of art he called false, empty, and corrupt. According to him, such conception was limited only to a few pleasure-seeking, idle rich. It did not lead to any meaningful conclusion. In his opinion art must represent the religious perception of any time. Art would be good if it conveyed the religious perception of that time, but bad if it did not. It was because the perception of life which art meant to convey was itself dependent upon the religious understanding of that time.

Tolstoy remarked that humanity moved forward from a lower understanding of life to one more general and lucid understanding. In that, as in every movement,
there were leaders - those who had understood the meaning of life more clearly than others - and of those advanced men there was always one who had in his words and by his life expressed that meaning more clearly, lucidly, and strongly than others. That man's expression of the meaning of life, together with those superstitions, traditions, and ceremonies, which usually formed round the memory of such a man, was called a religion. Religions were the exponents of the highest comprehension of life accessible to the best and foremost men at a given time in a given society - a comprehension towards which all the rest of that society must inevitably advance. Therefore, religions always served, and still serve, as the basis for the valuation of human sentiments. If feelings brought men nearer the ideal their religion indicated, they were good, if they estranged men from that they were bad. For example, if religion placed the meaning of life in worshipping one God and fulfilling what was regarded as His will, as was among the Jews, then the feeling flowing from love of that God and His law, transmitted through the art of poetry, psalms, or the book of Genesis, were good, high art. All opposing that, as for instance the transmission
of feelings of devotion to strange Gods, or of feelings incompatible with the law of God, would be considered bad art. Similarly if, as was the case among the Greeks, the religion placed the meaning of life in earthly happiness, beauty, and strength, then art transmitting the joy and energy of life would be considered good art; but art transmitting the feelings of effeminacy or despondency would be bad art. He wrote that:

In every age and in every human society there exists a religious sense of what is good and what is bad common to that whole society, and it is this religious conception that decides the value of the feelings transmitted by art. Therefore among all nations art which transmitted feelings considered to be good by the general religious sense was recognized as being good and was encouraged, but art which transmitted feelings considered bad by this general religious sense was recognized as being bad and was rejected. All the rest of the immense field of art by means of which people communicate one with another was not esteemed at all and was noticed when it ran counter to the religious conception of its age, and then merely to be repudiated. Thus it was among all nations—Greeks, Jews, Indians, Egyptians, and Chinese—and so it was when Christianity appeared.1

Referring to the religious perception of our time Tolstoy remarked that it consisted in the recognition by every man of his sonship to God and of the consequent union of men with God and one another. This religious perception was the consciousness that our well-being,

both material and spiritual, individual and collective, lay in the growth of brotherhood among men. This perception was not only particular to Christ and all the best men of past ages, but also it served as a clue to all the complex labour of humanity which consisted in the destruction of physical and moral obstacles to the union of men on one hand and in establishing the principles common to all men which would unite them in one universal brotherhood on the other. And it was on the basis of this perception that we were to appraise all the phenomena of our life including art, encouraging whatever transmitted feelings flowing from this perception and rejecting whatever was contrary to it.

According to him, the wrong conception of art that it was meant to give pleasure was due to the wrong conception of religion and the meaning of life it thereby imparted. In past when religion became corrupt and did not convey the true meaning of life, the governing and the upper class of society lost faith in its essentials and came to follow it in its external forms only to keep propriety to the established order of society. Not believing in religion seriously those people fell upon the conception of art that its purpose was not to
represent the highest understanding of life — that was
the religious understanding — but only to give pleasure. That was the beginning of the false conception of art.

Tolstoy entrusted art with a very essential role
for the welfare and progress of humanity. The welfare
and progress of mankind depended upon the true under-
standing of life which in itself was dependent upon
the true understanding of religion. False conception
of religion led to a false understanding of life. Accor-
ding to him, art conveyed the religious perception of
any time through feelings. If a speech conveyed the
same perception by means of intellect, art conveyed it
through feelings. Art, like speech, was a means of
communication of the religious perception and therefore
of progress of humanity towards perfection. Speech
rendered accessible to men of the latest generation
all the knowledge discovered by the experience and
reflection both of preceding generations and of the
best and foremost men of their own times; art rendered
accessible to men of the latest generation all the
feelings experienced by their predecessors and also
those felt by their best and foremost contemporaries.
And as the evolution of knowledge proceeded by more
true and necessary knowledge dislodging and replacing what was mistaken and unnecessary, so the evolution of feeling proceeded by means of art, feelings less kind and necessary for the well-being of mankind being replaced by others more kind and needful for that end. That was the purpose of art. The more art fulfilled it the better it was, and the less it fulfilled it the worse it was.

Tolstoy remarked that the conveying of any perception of life through feelings was fundamental to the activity of art. As he wrote: "To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked in oneself then by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling — this is the activity of art."\(^1\) Taken in another aspect art was a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings. As by means of this media a perception of life derived from the religious understanding of the time was conveyed, and upon which the evolution to a better life depended, art performed a very essential purpose towards the well-being of humanity.

\(^1\)Tolstoy, "What is Art?" What is Art? and Essays on Art, p. 188.
Further, Tolstoy put good art into two categories: the religious, and the universal. By religious art he meant that art which flowed from a perception of our sonship to God and of the brotherhood of man; and the universal art was which conveyed the simple feelings of common life accessible to everyone without exception - such as feelings of merriment, pity, cheerfulness, tranquility, and so forth. Both these kinds of feelings united men which was fundamental to the purpose of true art. Referring to this union of men with men by the medium of religious and universal art he wrote:

The feelings flowing from the perception of our sonship to God and the brotherhood of man - such as a feeling of sureness in truth, devotion to the will of God, self-sacrifice, respect for and love of man - evoked by Christian religious perception; and the simplest feelings, such as a softened or a merry mood caused by a song or an amusing jest intelligible to everyone, or by a touching story, or a drawing, or a little doll; both alike produce one and the same effect - the loving union of men with men. Sometimes people who are together, if not hostile to one another, are at least estranged in mood and feeling, till perhaps a story, a performance, a picture, or even a building, but often of all music, unites them all as by an electric flash, and in place of their former isolation or even enmity they are conscious of union and mutual love. And this effect is produced both by religious art which transmits feelings of love of God and one's neighbour, and by universal art transmitting the very simplest feelings common to all men.¹

¹Tolstoy though used the expression 'Christian art', which however he meant in the universal sense. As he wrote: "Christian art, that is, the art of our time, should be catholic in the original meaning of the word, that is universal...." (What is Art?, pp. 389-40.)

²Tolstoy, "What is Art?", What is Art? and Essays on Art, pp. 240-1.
According to Tolstoy, the religious and universal art differed from any other conception of art in the purpose that it united men rather than divided them. The religious art transmitting both positive feelings of love of God and one's neighbour, and negative feelings of indignation at the violation of love, manifested itself chiefly in the form of words, and to some extent also in painting and sculpture; and the universal art, transmitting feelings accessible to all, manifested itself in words, painting, sculpture, architecture, dances, and most of all in music. Citing examples of the highest art flowing from love of God and men in literature, both of the highest positive and the lower negative kind, he named: The Roberts by Schiller; Victor Hugo's Les Pauvres Gens and Les Misérables; the novels and stories of Dickens - The Tale of Two Cities, The Christmas Carol, The Chimes, and others; Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe; Dostoevski's works, especially his Memoirs from the House of Death; and Adam Bede by George Eliot. With qualification and only due to their inner content he cited as examples of good universal art: Don Quixote by Cervantes; comedies by Molière; David Copperfield and Pickwick Papers by Dickens;
end tales of Pushkin and Gogol. Of his own writings, to which though he did not attach much significance and considered not conforming to his definition of good art, he put his story God Rese the Truth, but Waits to the category of religious art and A Prisoner in the Caucasus to that of universal art.

Apart from the subject matter, Tolstoy laid emphasis on the essentials of the form of art as well. According to him, what differentiated real art from counterfeit art was its infectiousness. If a work of art created a mental condition in a person which united him with the artist and other people subject to the work of art, then it was a work of art. If it did not create such infectiousness and union with the author and other people then it was not art. And stronger the infection of conveying this state the better art it would be. From this point of view art had nothing to do with the religious perception of any time as the feelings conveyed may be of any time type. It was only the degree of infectiousness that mattered. The degree of infectiousness of art depended on three conditions: (1) on the greater or lesser individuality of the feeling transmitted; (2) on the greater or lesser clearness with
with which the feeling was transmitted; (8) on the sincerity of the artist, which meant the greater or lesser force with which the artist himself felt the emotion he transmitted. In brief, the last condition of sincerity encompassed the first two conditions also and expressed the degree of infectiousness most thoroughly.

Further, he made distinction between the counterfeit art of the upper class and the true or universal art of the people. He remarked that the work of art of upper class was incomprehensible to the mankind in general. This type of art was meant for the pleasure of upper-class people only. Those who admired this exclusive art did so because they trained themselves to admire it and not because it was necessarily a good art. Most often the feelings which formed the subject matter of this art were three insignificant ones: the feeling of pride; the feeling of sexual desire; and the feeling of weariness of life. Tolstoy disagreed with the conviction that art could be art and yet be incomprehensible to the masses. He was of the opinion that all great art was comprehensible to man in general. The majority of people could esteem the highest works of
universal art such as the epic of Genesis, the Gospel parables, folk legends, songs, tales, because they evoked the simple feelings of common life accessible to all. Art of this kind made people realize that they belonged to one human race and shared the feelings of common human nature.

In his exposition of the fundamentals of art Tolstoy also dealt with the relation of art to science. He remarked that the two were related closely. True science investigated and brought to human perception that truth and knowledge which the people of a given time and society considered most important; art transmitted this truth and knowledge from the region of perception to that of emotion. He further remarked that as art in general was the transmission of every kind of feeling but in the limited sense of the word one called it art only when it transmitted feelings acknowledged by us to be important, similarly though science in general was the transmission of all possible knowledge but in the limited sense of the word we named science that which transmitted knowledge admitted by us to be important. And the degree of importance both of the information transmitted by science and of the feelings transmitted by art was decided by the religious
perception of the time. He wrote:

Art is not a pleasure, a solace, or an amusement; art is a great matter. Art is an organ of human life transmitting man's reasonable perception into feeling. In our age the common religious perception of men is the consciousness of the brotherhood of men - we know that the well-being of man lies in union with his fellowmen. True science should indicate the various methods of applying this consciousness to life. Art should transform this perception into feeling. 1

Tolstoy summed up the function of art and its all-important relation to life in the following words:

The task for art to accomplish is to make that feeling of brotherhood and love of one's neighbour, now attained only by the best members of society, the customary feeling and the instinct of all men. By evoking under imaginary conditions the feeling of brotherhood and love, religious art will train men to experience those same feelings under similar circumstances in actual life; it will lay in the souls of men the rails along which the actions of those whom art thus educates will naturally pass. And universal art, by uniting the most different people in one common feeling by destroying separation, will educate people to union and will show them, not by reason but by life itself, the joy of universal union reaching beyond the bounds set by life.

The destiny of art in our time is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth that well-being for men consists in their being united together, and to set up, in place of the existing reign of force, that kingdom of God - that is, of love - which we all recognize to be the highest aim of human life. 2

Tolstoy was aware that his ideas on art being unconventional would raise protests, and that the majority of people would not agree with him. As he expected

1Tolstoy, "What is Art?" What is Art? and Essays on Art, p. 35.
2Ibid., p. 285.
it happened with the publication of *What is Art?*. His theory of art has been subjected to severe criticism by the majority of art critics.

The main controversy centres round the subject matter of art as propounded by him and also about certain of the opinion and examples he gave regarding good art. His denunciation of Shakespeare, Beethoven, and Wagner, exasperated the critics. And his argument that great art was within the comprehension and esteem of common man was found to be totally unacceptable.

But the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, who in practice was among the supreme of artists, could not be dismissed with disapprobation as some have done. Some of his ideas were of course unconventional, but they were original, setting mind to new course, full of merit, and deserving worthy consideration. If we made a distinction between Tolstoy's explanation of the form of art and the subject matter of art we could make an approach of sound estimate regarding his theory of art. His explanation that art was an activity by means of which one man having experienced a feeling intentionally transmitted it to others, was a very true explanation of the fundamental activity of art. He remarked aptly
that if a man was infected by the author's condition of soul and felt the same emotion and union with others, then the object which affected this was art; but if there was no such infection and union with the author and others then it was not art. This was his explanation of the form of art—what constituted the bare essentials of art.

According to this definition of art, the feelings to be transmitted might be of any sort—good or bad, religious or irreligious—the basic functioning of art was the transmission of feelings to others and their infection by it. So far he trod the safe ground.

But the disturbing of Hornet's neat case when he explained the type of feelings to be conveyed by art. His contention that the purpose of art was to transmit the religious perception of a time—upon which the true understanding of life depended, was vigorously contested. It was held that to superimpose the religious perception on the activity of art was to stifle its natural functioning, which consisted primarily in the transmission of feelings to others and to infect them with the author's experiencing of the same feelings.

In this context we may consider Aylmer Maude's
explanation to distinguish Tolstoy's form of art from the subject matter of art. In his introduction to *What is Art?* he has tried to argue that Tolstoy's explanation of the form of a work of art formed the fundamental basis of his theory of art, whereas the subject matter of art - the type of feelings to be transmitted - ought to be taken as optional. He takes the view that though the feelings beneficial for mankind would be preferable to those less beneficial or harmful, but it in no way affected Tolstoy's explanation of the basic activity of art. When he defined the form of a work of art he defined the essentials which constituted a work of art, and the rest may or may not be agreed to. As he put it:

> The need of distinguishing the form of a work - on which its powers of infection depend - from the feelings it conveys (the real subject-matter of a work of art) was to Tolstoy so obvious that though he expressed it, he does not specifically emphasize or insist on it but merely states it incidentally. Some readers have overlooked this essential point, and that no one may suspect me of having invented it ... let me draw attention to the passages in which he states it.

In Chapter XII he says: "Infection is only obtained when an artist finds those infinitely minute degrees of which a work of art consists, and only to the extent to which he finds them."

In Chapter XIV he says: "If a man is infected by the author's condition of soul, if he feels this emotion and this union with others, then the object which has affected this is art....And not only is infection a sure sign of art, but the degree of infection is also the sole measure of excellence in art.

"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 feelings it transmits."

These passages taken together are a plain statement that what constitutes a work of art is its excellence of form, and that on that its power to transmit feeling depends. Tolstoy puts this assertion in a distinct chapter from that in which he deals with the 'subject-matter' of art, that is to say, with the quality of the feelings art transmits, and argues that those feelings which make for the betterment of human life are preferable to those which make life worse, and should be encouraged if we wish the world to improve.1

But this point of view is not found acceptable if we take into consideration Tolstoy's whole argument on art. The subject-matter formed as essential a part of his theory as the form. He remarked categorically that art represented the religious perception of a time. Among the Greeks, for example, if religion placed the meaning of life in earthly happiness, beauty, and strength, then art — good art — must represent it. And as the religious perception of our time was 'Christian, art must inevitably convey it. This way art came to be a handmaiden of religion, whatever the defining of religion by Tolstoy. This aspect of his explanation of art has ruffled the sensibility of the critics a great deal. To circumscribe the working of art this way was to vitiate its very functioning. Art was supposed to perform an

1Tolstoy Introduction by Aylmer Mauds to What is Art? and Essays on Art, pp. xii-xiii.
independent activity.

Another statement of Tolstoy which irked the critics was that a common man could be as best a judge of great art as the most qualified in art. It was considered highly inappropriate that all great art was within the comprehension and esteem of man in the street. It was supposed to hand over the job of an art critic from the qualified to an ignorant.

Further, some of his examples regarding good art have been subjected to outright denunciation. His dethroning from the pedestal of good art such artists as Shakespeare, Beethoven, and Wagner, has been thought to be outrageous. But, consideration should be given to Tolstoy's statement that as his taste in art had become vitiated due to false training therefore his old, inured habits might have caused him to err for absolute merit the impression a work produced on him in his youth.¹

In conclusion, it may be remarked that Tolstoy's exposition of what constituted the prime functioning of art was masterly, but what art ought to transmit in the form of feelings was objectionable. Though it

¹Tolstoy, "What is Art?," What is Art? and Essays on Art, p. 946.
was appreciable to prefer those feelings which prompted the well-being of men, but the functioning of art was independent of any religious or moral pre-condition. No doubt by transmitting of religious perception he did not mean an external insculction of any religious truth in artistic guise, rather he meant the expression of a view of life corresponding to the highest religious understanding of a given period; nevertheless, art was not to be superimposed by any such understanding. The functioning of art was realized by the transmission of feelings to others and their infection by it, for the rest it was not to be conditioned by any purpose.