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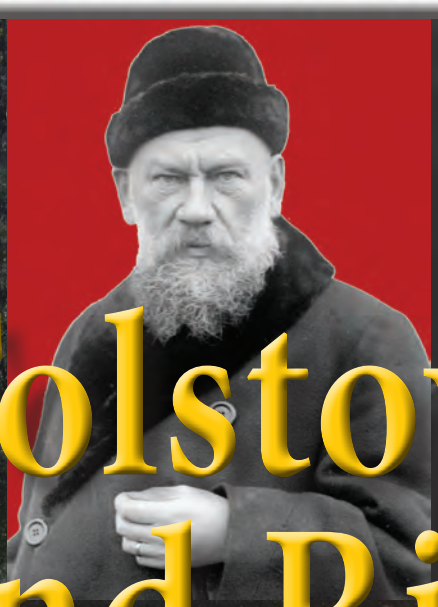
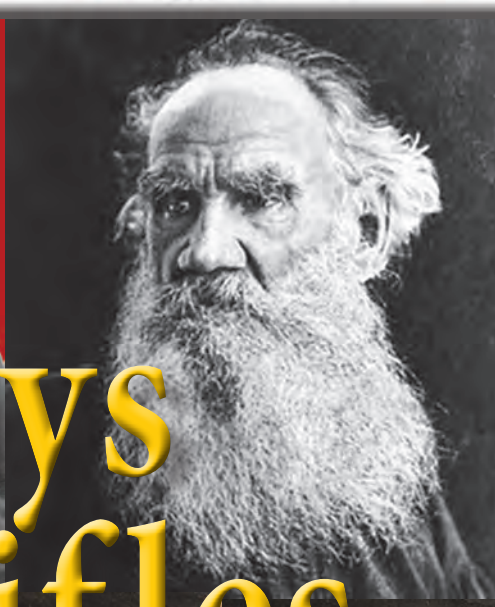
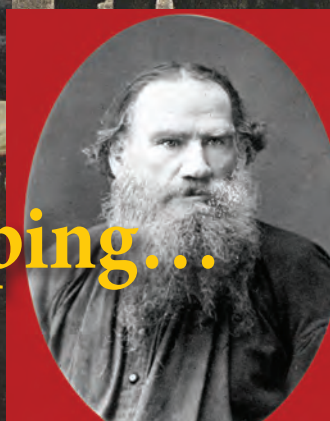




Tolstoys and Rifles

Special Issue

Seven Tolstoys, Inflate/Invert/Shake the Patient, German Military Rifle Chest-Slapping…



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A Theory of Absolutely Everything

by I. Tolstoy[1], P. Tolstoy[2], M.M. Tolstoy[3], A. Tolstoy[4], I. Tolstoy[5], E. Tolstoy[6], and M. Tolstoy[7]

The thoughts sketched in this paper are preliminary and, while we expect our readers, if any, to approach the subject matter in a properly guarded and skeptical, i.e., scientific spirit, we trust they will also be guided by the respectful and generous mindset so characteristic of our colleagues.

* * *

A fundamental question facing 21st-century science is this: can there be such a thing as a truly all-embracing theory of everything i.e., a theory of *absolutely* everything? Or is this a futile fantasy, a dream of fathoming the unfathomable, of embracing the unembraceable? Examination of current, woefully inadequate, efforts at creating theories of everything has led us to examine this important issue.

Today's high regard for interdisciplinary thinking makes such an examination especially timely. The pressing nature of the question is further highlighted by a remarkable convergence of notably tangential areas of research pursued by this group of authors (see listings below).

Can we actually conceive a general field theoretic approach unifying such seemingly distinct domains as Plate Tectonics and Art History, Astronomy and Theology, Anthropology and Wave Theory? In an effort to address that question, we embarked some years ago on a privately funded program of research.

We noted that today's practitioners at the cutting edges of so-called hard sciences such as astrophysics, cosmology, or theoretical physics, while using a great deal of rigorous mathematics, exhibit a growing tendency to involve themselves with speculative, philosophical issues. Reputable scientists are beginning to ask questions like: *What came before the Big Bang? How many universes are there? What are the limits of science? What is art? Why are we here?*

This suggests that, rather than building further novel and esoteric mathematical structures, attempts at constructing a seriously eclectic theory of everything should first look to philosophy for guidance. As Kant declares, art is "purposiveness without purpose,"[1] an insight we feel is equally applicable to much of today's scientific literature. We also found a lot to interest us in twentieth century trends in the philosophy of science, which implied that there is no such thing as a scientific method. We were, for instance, greatly encouraged by Feyerabend's admonition that "anything goes,"[2] seemingly giving us carte blanche to pursue a variety of unorthodox lines of thought. Interesting too is Wittgenstein's famous advice: "Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must remain silent,"[3] which allowed us to ignore many awkward questions.

These and similar philosophical aphorisms prompted us to pursue a number of loose-jointed, seemingly promising lines of thought. We shall deal with these in a forthcoming paper. But, while the work shows promise, there remain contradictions and inconsistencies about which we shall, for the moment, remain prudently silent. (They could suggest to some that in fact *nothing goes*, a proposition we reject as oxymoronic.)

Readers should keep in mind that the creation of theories of absolutely everything has a long and complex history. Over three millennia BCE, the Mesopotamians wove imaginative theories explaining pretty much everything by the behaviour of capricious deities, theories which ran into trouble in dealing with droughts, earthquakes, tornadoes, and other natural disasters. In the Americas pre-Columbian cultures made similar attempts, with at times unfortunate results—as in the case of the Aztecs who, in attempts to cut through their difficulties, practiced human sacrifice—a warning, perhaps, to our 21st-century academic colleagues intent upon entering this arena.

Conclusions

It is difficult to state in concrete terms precisely what we have achieved so far. We agreed that, whilst this work might appear to have little purpose, it displays a lot of purposiveness. As such it seems to satisfy Kant's aphorism and should have artistic merit. While we attempted to incorporate the problems of computational intractability (P?=NP), we have yet to reach the goal of a scientifically respectable theory of absolutely everything. However, negative results in science and inadequate theories in the social sciences can be as important as positive ones: they shed light into dark alleys into which others may dread to go and could spare future researchers from repeating the same mistakes.

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A photo showing several of the authors. From left to right, E. Tolstoy, K. Vaughn [not an author], P. Tolstoy, I. Tolstoy, M. Biggar [not an author], M. Tolstoy, M.M. Tolstoy. Photo credit: Filippo Fraternali (partner of E. Tolstoy).

References

1. *Critique of Judgement* [1790], I. Kant, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1951).

2 *Against Method*, . P. Feyerabend, (Verso, 1978).

3. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 7, L.Wittgenstein, (Routledge, 1961).

Contributions of Authors

I. Tolstoy (of Knockvennie, though formerly of Columbia University) led the discussions on ocean acoustics and the deep seafloor, as well as largely unrecognized contributions in general relativity.

P. Tolstoy was the leading intellectual force behind extensive discussions held on bark cloth in Polynesia and pre-classic culture in Mexico, Central and South America.

M.M. Tolstoy led the group's efforts to understand feminist theology and its role in shaping our political philosophies.

A. Tolstoy co-led work with I. Tolstoy on ocean acoustics, and was responsible for incorporating the theory of matched field processing into absolutely everything.

I. Tolstoy (of Columbia University) provided insight into relevant aspects of the history of art with particularly illuminating ideas on the depiction of angels' feet in Venetian painting.

E. Tolstoy, ever casting her eyes to the heavens, shared with us a priceless trove of insights into galaxies, dwarf galaxies, and oddball star clusters.

M. Tolstoy returned us frequently to the depths of the oceans by contributing her extensive experience of seafloor geology, black smokers, earthquakes, and ocean noises.