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El relato corto de Tolstoy "¿Cuanta tierra necesita un hombre?" es un cuento ético-moral que puede ser interpretado de diversas maneras, pero que parece relacionado primariamente con las consecuencias destructivas de la ambición humana.

La historia trata sobre un hombre llamado Pahom -un granjero campesino- que desea obtener más tierra, consigue ampliar sus propiedades, pero no esta satisfecho y necesita adquirir más. Esta deriva le llevará en un camino marcado por el sacrificio. El mensaje de la historia puede ser tan simple como el de no morder más de lo que puedas tragar.

Se puede decir que la naturaleza humana nos empuja al deseo de acaparar y conseguir cada vez más. El sentimiento de no estar nunca contentos con nuestras vidas es común en los seres humanos y esa insatisfacción nos puede llevar a arriesgar todo lo valioso que tenemos por algo meramente material.

Pero el mensaje puede tener una complejidad mayor.

Tolstoy nos ofrecee un cuento didáctico, que pretende enseñar una lección moral. Su proposito era el de mostrar como la avaricia y el deseo excesivo por riquezas mundanas pueden destruir a una persona. Junto a esto, Tolstoy habla sobre las consecuencias de ignorar las necesidades

What Tolstoy gives us is a didactic tale, a story meant to teach a moral or religious lesson. His purpose likely was to show how greed and an excessive desire for earthly wealth can destroy a person. Along with this, Tolstoy offers a lesson about the consequences of ignoring spiritual needs and the state of one's soul, in favor of acquiring more and more material wealth. In general, it is a story of what can happen when humans become too ambitious and greedy. There are similar stories in myth, religious scripture, and secular literature. For example, the story of King Midas and his "golden" touch. In *Genesis*, the Tower of Babel is a brief account of how the excessive ambition of humans is struck down by God.

An important element in Tolstoy's story is a boast by the farmer, Pahom, that if he had enough land he would not fear anyone, not even the Devil. This is heard by the Devil who says to himself:

"All right! We shall see about that. I'll give you land enough; and by means of that land I will get you!"

The Devil then sets in motion the series of events that eventually end as Pahom forfeits everything including his life.

So we have a story in which Tolstoy teaches a lesson about humility and the need to fear and respect the Devil, or at least recognize the power he can exert over us. For those who don't believe in the Devil, the mythical character can be seen as personifying those aspects of our nature which are destructive and can eventually lead to our complete demise. This is probably how Tolstoy would have us read the story.

But there are different ways that we can interpret and react to the story. For example, w can take it in terms of a philosophical/ethical teaching, or maybe in terms of a teaching about social good. Today, we can even see it as making a point about our ecological awareness; and we can read it in the context of our consumer-driven economic system.

Let's take each of these in turn.

- **Philosophical/Ethical** aspect: We could read the story about the need for moderation in one's life. In this light, consider Aristotle's ethical teaching that reason aims at a mean between the extremes of defect and that of excess. Pahom was never satisfied with what was enough land, and allowed his compulsion for more and more to ruin everything. He sought ever more land and the sense of security and pleasure that would ensue, or so the thought. He did not observe the recommendation from Epicurus that the pleasure worth having is that which is consistent with reason and moderation. Here the question is one of asking whether the drive for personal wealth really benefits the individual is an detriment to true human fulfillment. We could also raise the question of moral justice and fairness. How did Pahom's drive for more land affect others? Were their interests and needs respected?

  When you own so much (stuff) that you lose track of all that you possess, you have passed the point of owning too much. When you become so enslaved to acquiring more and holding on to what you have, you have lost sight of the real purpose of living.

  Pleonexia Plato add

- **Social** aspect - Here we would ask how the ambitions of an individual to acquire great wealth affects the greater affected? Does Pahom have any responsibility to the human community of which he is part? Or is it true that individual effort to improve one's prospects is his only thing that should concern each person, and that others have to look out for themselves?

- **Ecological** aspect - In today's world, a world of overpopulation, dwindling natural resources, and the increasingly destructive affect that human activity has on the environment, we can raise the question of how the drive to acquire more and more wealth by the many individual's and groups of individual's affects the natural environment of which we are all part. In other words, we can point out that nobody acts in a vacuum, isolated from natural world. What we do has significant effect on the quality of our environment (air, water, land). We use up the earth's resources and add to the waste that accumulates in our lands and oceans. When our contemporary Pahoms work to accumulate more and more wealth, are the needs of the earth and environment respected?

  Mike David, Op-Ed: Just as a virus's only reason for existence is to expand, without regard or awareness of the effect of its expansion on its host body, our economic system pursues its infinite expansion without regard or awareness of its effect on human welfare or the environment. Though the earth is finite, it is sustainable, so we reject, in the words of Michael Nagler, "the inherent contradiction of an economy based on indefinitely increasing wants – instead of on human needs that the planet has ample resources to fulfill."

- **Economic** aspect - As a last set of considerations, we could ask about the propriety of our behavior (or seeking to enrich ourselves) in the context of the economic system. In a capitalist economy like exists in the US, people are seen as consumers. As consumers we're expected to buy things so that the economy can grow. The more we buy, the better the state of economy. So a wealthy person who buys expensive things would be good for the economy. And, finally, in a capitalist system, people are inclined to think that a person has the right to whatever he earns or works to accumulate. In other words, if Pahom worked for his greater share of land and was willing to make the legal deals necessary to purchase his land, nobody had any business in stopping his from his purchases. In short, Tolstoy's story would fall on deaf ears.

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As an additional exercise, the reader might try different applications of the question,

How much X does a person (or person's) need?

In asking these questions, you might also distinguish between need, desire, and merit. In short, how much is the mark of a wise person and how that of thoughtless acquisitiveness?

Debate in class

- How much wealth does a person need?
- How large a house does a person need? With number and kind of rooms.
- How much free time does a person need to be happy?
- What kind of vehicle of transportation (viz., car) does a person need?
- How powerful a military does a nation need?
- How many nuclear warheads does a nation need?
- How much wealth and power does a society need? At what point does it become inconsistent with a good life for the citizens?
- Do the requirements of economic expansion require that we consume ever more?
- How much population that the earth need?

Take great care in how you respond. Remember, the Devil might be listening!

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* A brief summary of Tolstoy's "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"

The main character is a man named Pahóm. At the beginning of the story, he is a peasant farmer, a man of humble means who lives a decent life. But, after his sister-in-law has bragged that city folk have a much better life than country peasants, Pahom bemoans the fact that he does not own land. He states that "if I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself!" Little does he know that the Devil is sitting close by and listening.

The Devil says: "All right! We shall see about that. I'll give you land enough; and by means of that land I will get you into my power."

Shortly thereafter, Pahóm manages to buy some land from a lady in his village. He works hard, makes a profit and is able to pay off his debts and live a more comfortable life. But he is not satisfied and, after a **peasant** told him about the opportunity to own more land, he moves to a larger area of land.. Pahóm grows more crops and amasses a small fortune, but it is still not content. Now another character tells him of another opportunity to own more land.

Pahóm hears (from a **tradesman**) about the Bashkirs, a simple people who own a huge amount of land deep in Central Asia. After a long trek, Pahóm meets the Bashkirs on the vast steppe. He is prepared to negotiate a price for as much land as possible, but before he can do so, the Bashkirs make him a very unusual offer, the same one that they make to anyone who wishes to buy land from them.

For one thousand rubles (a large sum in those days), Pahóm can buy as much land as he can walk around in one day. He has to start at daybreak and mark his route with a shovel at key points along the way. As long as he returns to the starting point before sunset, the land that he has marked off will be his. If he fails to return on time, the money is forfeited.

Pahóm is thrilled. He is certain that he can cover a great distance and that he will have more land than he could have ever imagined. That night, Pahóm has a foreboding dream in which he sees himself lying dead at the feet of the Devil (who changes appearances – **peasant**, **tradesman**, **chief of the Baskirs**), who is laughing.

The next day, with the Bashkirs watching from the starting point, Pahóm sets off at a good pace as soon as the sun crests the horizon. He covers a lot of ground, marking his way as he goes. At various points he begins to think that he should change direction and work his way back, but he is constantly tempted by the thought of adding just a bit more land. The day wears on and, as the sun begins to set, Pahóm discovers that he is still far from the starting point. Realizing that he has been too greedy and taken too much land, he runs back as fast as he can to where the Bashkirs are waiting. He arrives at the starting point in the nick of time just before the sun sets. However, as the Bashkirs cheer his good fortune, Pahóm drops dead from exhaustion.

Tolstoy concludes: “The Bashkirs clicked their tongues to show their pity. His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahóm to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.”

The story addresses the age-old question of how much wealth does a person need. How much is enough? In this story, all that was required was a plot large enough in which to bury the man who wanted too much.