

TOLSTOYAN CRITIQUE OF SOCIALISM AND THE SOVIET STATE IN 1917-1920

By

Yevgeniy Davydov

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Supervisor: Professor Matthias Riedl
Second Reader: Professor Stephen A. Smith

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Abstract

This thesis argues that Tolstoyans adopted and reproduced Tolstoy's critical discourse on socialism in 1917-1920. The first chapter stresses the peculiar moral character of Tolstoy's thought and reconstructs the main arguments of his critique of socialism. Tolstoy saw socialism as a false teaching which cannot liberate people but can only lead to a deepening of violence and state slavery. Tolstoy contrasted to socialism his own idea of liberation through moral personal transformation and disobedience to the state. Tolstoy hoped Russia was going to be the first to begin the non-violent revolution that would become an example to the rest of world. The second chapter analyzes the attitudes towards socialism and the soviet state as expressed in the periodical of Tolstoyans in 1917-1920, *Golos Tolstogo i Yedineniye* [The Voice of Tolstoy and Unity]. Despite the historiographical vision of ideological proximity of Tolstoyism to socialism, my analysis shows that it was distinct from socialism. Tolstoyans were not sympathetic to socialism but rather constantly stressed their distinct character from it. As an alternative to socialism they promoted Tolstoy's idea of non-violent character of the Russian people, his idea of rational morality of non-violence, and disobedience to the state as the only means for individual and social betterment.

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Introduction

Leo Tolstoy's personality and literary talent fascinated many Russian Marxists so much that they compared him to a force of nature. In his memoirs on Lenin, Maxim Gorky recalled a meeting with him at his residence. Lenin had "War and Peace" on his working table.

"What a bit of a rock," said Lenin. "What a huge man! There's an artist for you. And do you know what is so wonderful about him? There was no genuine peasant man in literature before this Count. Who in Europe could be put beside him?" And Lenin answered his own question: "Nobody."¹

Maxim Gorky himself passionately admired Tolstoy and wrote memoirs about him when they met in Crimea in 1902. In them Gorky wrote with an extraordinary fascination how he once saw Tolstoy on the shore.

It was a day of sun and cloud, and the shadows of the clouds glided over the stones, and with the stones the old man grew now bright and now dark. The bowlders were large, riven by cracks and covered with smelly seaweed; there had been a high tide. He, too, seemed to me like an old stone come to life, who knows all the beginnings and the ends of things, who considers when and what will be the end of the stone, of the grasses of the earth, of the waters of the sea, and of the whole universe from the pebble to the sun. And the sea is part of his soul, and everything around him comes from him, out of him.²

However, Tolstoy in his late years did not want to be either a great writer or a great man. He almost lost all of his passion for literature and wanted to feel a small part of something greater than himself. Tolstoy expressed these feelings in his diary note on December 6th, 1908. In it he noted a desire to write "something artistic" but he could not start anything. He lacked a necessary state of mind in which one "cannot but write."³ Tolstoy continued writing the note with skepticism towards his literary works and fame by calling "War and Peace" a "trifle" which "seemed important" to many people who falsely admired him for it.⁴ In contrast with this skepticism towards his literary self, Tolstoy proceeded with a written prayer in which he expressed joy for feeling himself a small part of universal life.

¹ Gorky, *V.I. Lenin*, 16.

² Gorky, *Tolstoy*, 295-296.

³ Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 56, 162.

⁴ *Ibid*: 163.

I clearly see and feel a joyful possibility to shift all my interest, meaning in life and all my desires to something that is always in my power and always brings good. I would not call it a spiritual development but rather getting closer with every step to fulfilling not my own will but that of the universe. Only now when I am on my ninth decade I began to teach myself and learn. God help me remember in every minute, in every action, in every thought: am I doing what I want to fulfill His will and not mine? Not for people but for myself, my spiritual self? And I remember. And I hope that I will reach that state when I do not even have to remember. Help me God.⁵

Tolstoy himself attributed his shift to religion to the late 1870s when he experienced an existential crisis after writing “Anna Karenina” (1875-1877). Before that he had at least two major crises that also happened after his literary success, namely after the publication of his autobiographical trilogy “Childhood”, “Boyhood”, and “Youth” (1852–1856) and his “War and Peace” (1865-1869). Both of these crises were caused by Tolstoy’s dissatisfaction with writing and his educated milieu. In both cases he solved the crises by giving up on a writer’s life, going to his Yasnaya Polyana estate and establishing peasant schools there. However, the crisis he experienced in the late 1870s was much more radical. As he was finishing “Anna Karenina” he felt a deep lack of meaning in life as he simply could not answer why he was doing anything at all. Tolstoy later reflected his torments in his “Confession” (1882):

Very well, you will have 6,000 desyatins in the Samara province, as well as 300 horses; what then?" And I was completely taken aback and did not know what else to think. As soon as I started to think about the education of my children, I would ask myself, "Why?" Or I would reflect on how the people might attain prosperity, and I would suddenly ask myself, "What concern is it of mine?" Or in the middle of thinking about the fame that my works were bringing me I would say to myself, "Very well, you will be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Moliere, more famous than all the writers in the world-so what? And I could find absolutely no reply."⁶

Looking for the answer to the crisis Tolstoy, as happened in previous crises, turned to the peasants of his estate. However this turn differed radically from those he was used to. Instead of establishing schools for the peasants he began to learn from them. Their hard labor, endurance in the face of suffering and absence of fear of death pushed Tolstoy to believe that his own life was a false type. It was rather the peasant worldview in which there was the meaning in life he

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Tolstoy, *Ispoved'* [A Confession], 11.

sought. Following Konstantin Levin, a protagonist from his “Anna Karenina”, Tolstoy adopted simple living of the peasants and their Orthodox faith. However, Tolstoy’s faith in Orthodoxy did not last long as he soon was dissatisfied with his new belief. What Tolstoy could not stand in Orthodoxy was its praise of military victories and its neglect of people with other religious views. After several pilgrimages and discussions with established priests, Tolstoy became fully convinced that Orthodoxy had nothing to do with his own understanding of Christianity. From that moment Tolstoy paid less attention to writing fiction but devoted his main efforts to studying Orthodox theology and reconstruction of the true meaning of Christianity as he understood it.

In the first half of the 1880s Tolstoy expressed his views on Christianity in a set of works, namely “Confession” (1882) and “What I Believe?” (1884). In these works, Tolstoy aimed to challenge the Orthodox church interpretation of Christianity. In Tolstoy’s view, Orthodoxy emphasized the role of rituals and eschatology and thus stripped off the ethical essence of Christianity. The latter, Tolstoy believed, was expressed in the thirty-ninth verse of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, ‘You have heard that it has been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist evil’. This expression of Christ, Tolstoy argued, should be taken literally and put into direct practice. In his view this was a law which Christ gave to people as a moral guidance in their daily behavior. This moral law, Tolstoy argued further, undermines the whole social order based on violence, while Orthodoxy justifies it. True Christianity, in Tolstoy’s view, does not allow getting involved or supporting the army, the police, the court system, and the government itself. Instead, Tolstoy claimed, Christians should aspire to the Kingdom of God that can only be achieved if only they adhere to the love and truth which reside in them and resist evil without violence.

Tolstoy never aimed to establish any church or organization in his name but his religious writings triggered some individuals, mostly of intelligentsia background, to "convert" to his

faith. They did not have a common name for themselves but were called “Tolstoyans” by outsiders. They did not have any formal leadership; however it was Vladimir Chertkov (1854-1936) who played the most important role in the development of Tolstoyism. Similarly to Tolstoy he came from a family of high nobility but felt his luxury lifestyle as a corrupting burden and aimed to find a way out of it. While serving the army he was reading the gospel and organized discussions on religious matters in his regiment. At some point he decided to retire and went to his family estate where he began to study the peasant way of life and tried to better their condition with different initiatives. In 1883 Chertkov met with Tolstoy and found his ideas “a better and more consistent understanding of the way to apply the teachings of Christ in life.”⁷ Chertkov became Tolstoy’s closest friend and later founded a publishing house called “Posrednik” [Intermediary] that was central for the dissemination of Tolstoyan religious ideas.

“Conversion to Tolstoyism” did not require belonging to any kind of organization or conducting any rituals but it primarily meant a personal moral transformation. The radicalism of this transformation may have differed from going vegetarian to becoming a mendicant working with the peasants and propagating Tolstoy’s message to them. Many Tolstoyans aimed to leave their intelligentsia milieu and live by land labor. The exact scale of this movement can hardly be measured but recently there were some estimates. It was recently estimated that between 1883 and 1917 there were at least ten land communes, ten farmer colonies and twenty-four individual settlements which saw from at least five hundred to around one thousand Tolstoyans.⁸

Although Tolstoyism at first focused primarily on personal moral transformation, it soon evolved into a broader movement that included forms of socio-political activism. Between 1891-1893 Tolstoy with his followers organized a charity campaign to help the peasants suffering from the famine in Povolzhie region. In 1897, Tolstoyans published a public appeal to help the

⁷ Cherkov’s Diary, 21 Jan. 1884 Quoted in *L.N. Tolstoi I Ego Sovremenniki* [L.N. Tolstoy and His Contemporaries], 606.

⁸ Yefim Agarin, *Trudami Ruk Svoikh: Tolstovskkiye zemledel’cheskiye kolonii v dorevolyutsionnoy Rossii* [By the labor of their hands: Tolstoy agricultural colonies in pre-revolutionary Russia] (Moscow: Common Place, 2019), 140-291.

Doukhobors, a Russian sect living in the Caucasus, that faced harsh repressions for refusing to serve in the army and burning their weapons. As a result of the publication, Chertkov was sent abroad and settled in Britain. Pavel Biriukov (1860-1931), an active member of “Posrednik” publishing house, was exiled but later allowed to go abroad and lived in Switzerland. In 1898, the Russian authorities permeated Doukhobors to leave Russia, and Tolstoyans organized their emigration to Canada.

In their exile abroad Chertkov and Biriukov began an active publishing campaign to spread Tolstoy’s ideas. In England Chertkov launched a publishing house under the name "The Free Press" and established a journal called “Svobodnoe Slovo” [Free Word] (1898-1905). Biriukov was involved in these projects but also published his own journal in Switzerland under the name Svobodnaya Mysl’ [Free Thought] (1899-1901). Tolstoy actively supported these initiatives and sent his material for their volumes. These journals primarily focused on writing about socio-political issues from the perspective of non-violence and gained popularity among the Russian sectarians.

In 1904 Chertkov published a brochure entitled “On Revolution” in which he developed a Tolstoyan political vision. In it he juxtaposed the violent revolutionary methods of socialists with Christian disobedience to the government. Chertkov claimed that violent uprisings fail and only strengthen the state oppression. Not only they worsen the condition of the people but also do not reach the root of the evil which lies in the minds of the people. The true way of liberation Chertkov saw not in the aspiration of bettering material conditions but in the growth of inner consciousness. The latter, he argued, would lead to non-participation in violence which would undermine the foundations of the state oppression. In the brochure he emphasized this contrast between socialist and Tolstoyan approaches to politics:

The revolutionaries are struggling with the external manifestation of evil, without getting to its internal source in the human soul. Free Christianity is fighting the very root of evil in human consciousness. Christian teaching first affects the main source of life within people. Then it is inevitably reflected in their external actions. And thus, at some point, it improves their social

structure for the better. Revolutionary activity begins from the opposite end. It primarily and mainly tries to change the external social structure. For this purpose it considers permissible any means, even the most objectionable. And this fundamentally undermines all the benefits that the revolutionaries would like to render to the people. Christian activity although on the surface is less visible, takes away deeper and is never wasted, does no harm to anyone. That is why people of a Christian understanding of life cannot act alongside with the revolutionaries.⁹

However, it was exactly a socialist sect with a belief in revolutionary force of violence that eventually overthrew the Old Russian regime in 1917. This is how the case looks like in the presentation of Yuri Slezkine in his *House of Government* (2017). In his book he portrayed the Bolsheviks as a millenarian sect anticipating the near-coming Apocalypse in a form of sacred violence which would destroy the old world of injustice and the old man of individualistic interest. The period of revolution and the Civil war, in Slezkine's presentation, looked like a fulfilment of the Bolshevik prophecy. The Bolsheviks, as he put it, "defined themselves in opposition to appeasement" and they acted accordingly in their calls for civil war, repressions against the peasantry and dictatorship of the proletariat.¹⁰

There is an ongoing historiographical debate on the roots of violence in the Russian revolution and the Civil war.¹¹ It can certainly be debated whether the Bolshevik ideology itself was a decisive cause of violence. Some scholars emphasize the structural roots of revolutionary violence as opposed to ideological ones. One of the examples of this approach is Peter Holquist's work on the Bolshevik surveillance.¹² In it he stressed the rootedness of the soviet modes of government in the First World War experience and the pan-European change in the operation of the state. Holquist showed this on the example of Bolshevik surveillance mechanisms that were inherited from the Imperial regime and did not radically differ from them.¹³

⁹ Chertkov, *O revolutsii* [On Revolution], 46.

¹⁰ Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 151.

¹¹ For an overview of this debate see: Steve A. Smith, "Violence in the Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1914–20: A survey of recent historiography," in *Circles of the Russian Revolution* ed. Łukasz Adamski and Bartłomiej Gajos (New York, NY : Routledge, 2019), 25-39.

¹² Peter Holquist, "'Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context," *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 3 (1997): 415-50.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 430.

Although Slezkine and Holquist saw the causes of revolutionary violence differently they both understood its function in a similar way. They both saw the peculiarity of the soviet state in its usage of violence for the purpose of moral transformation of the people. Holquist put the distinct character of the Soviet state as an “endeavor to perfect citizens in a fundamental manner and within a specified time span”.¹⁴ Slezkine described the same endeavor in terms of “Russia’s Reformation”. For him Bolshevism was an attempt to transform peasants into “self-monitoring, morally vigilant modern subjects”.¹⁵ For this purpose the Bolsheviks employed such means as “confessions, denunciations, excommunications, and self-criticism sessions accompanied by regular tooth-brushing, ear-washing, and hair-combing.”¹⁶ However, in Slezkine’s view, this Reformation proved to be a failure as most Russians perceived this disciplinarisation as externally imposed on them.

The research on the Tolstoyan movement during the revolution and the Civil war could certainly contribute to these broad debates on violence in this period. There recently emerged a detailed overview of Tolstoyism on the international scale focusing on the networks of dissemination of Tolstoyan ideas and various Tolstoyan establishments in the West with a specific emphasis on Britain.¹⁷ But when it comes to the history of Russian Tolstoyism in 1917-1921 our knowledge is still very scarce and fragmented. Few studies that exist on the topic concentrate mostly on pro-soviet oriented Tolstoyans or focus on some practical aspects of oppositional Tolstoyans who grouped around Chertkov.

The period of 1917-1921 was exactly a proliferation of this oppositional faction of Tolstoyans. They managed to create their first organized society called “Obschestvo Istinoi Svobody” [The Society of True Freedom] which functioned from 1917 until it was closed by the Bolshevik authorities in 1922. At the same time Chertkov founded and led an organization of non-orthodox

¹⁴ Ibid, 447.

¹⁵ Slezkine, *Op. cit*, 957.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Charlotte Alston, *Tolstoy and his disciples: The history of a radical international movement* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

sectarian Christians called “Ob’edinennyi Sovet religioznykh obshchin i grupp” [United Council of Religious Communes and Groups] which was in a union of sectarians who was mainly opposed to the soviet military conscription policies. Tolstoyans campaigned to introduce a conscientious objection law. Their central periodical at that time was “Golos Tolstogo i Yedineniye” [The Voice of Tolstoy and Unity] (1916-1920).

However, despite this opposition to socialism before and after revolution, their ideological views are largely neglected or blurred with socialism by contemporary scholarship. The present thesis aims to stress the ideological peculiarity of a Tolstoyan group that was oppositional to the soviet state during Revolution and the Civil War. This will be done by analyzing Tolstoyan attitudes towards socialism and the soviet state as they were expressed in their main periodical published in Moscow, “The Voice of Tolstoy and Unity” (1916-1920).

Initially the journal had a name “Yedinenie” [Unity] and began to be published in 1916 with close participation of Vladimir Chertkov. The main goal of the journal was to publish formerly censored texts of Tolstoy. Besides a section of Tolstoy’s texts it had a section discussing various Tolstoyan topics such as cooperation, vegetarianism, world language, physical labor, the fight against alcoholism and the chronicle of good deeds. From the third volume in September 1917 the magazine began to appear under the sole editorship of Vladimir Chertkov and received a new name “Voice of Tolstoy and Unity”. The section "Voice of Tolstoy", which still opened the magazine, contained a selection of texts of Tolstoy. The "Unity" section is the most relevant for my thesis as it included articles and notes of Tolstoyans. There emerged fifteen volumes of this journal from 1917 until 1920.

What has mostly attracted scholars of Tolstoyism in the last thirty years were biographies of Tolstoyans¹⁸ and the practical side of their movement, namely agricultural communes¹⁹ and their

¹⁸ Graham Camfield, “From Tolstoyan to terrorist: The revolutionary career of D.A. Khilkov 1900-1905,” *Revolutionary Russia* 12, no. 1 (1999): 1-43; Alexandra Popoff, *Tolstoy's False Disciple: The Untold Story of Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Chertkov* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2014).

pacifist protest²⁰ in the pre-revolutionary period and after the civil war. The focus on these timeframes and the emphasis on the practical side of Tolstoyism had a negative impact on our understanding of relation between Tolstoyism and socialism in the Civil War period. The problem is that most of the studies lacked an intellectual history dimension and thus downplayed important ideological differences between the pro-socialist and oppositional groups of Tolstoyans.

The emphasis on Tolstoyan communal project that was mostly pro-soviet and the lack of intellectual history dimension in the studies on the oppositional and pacifist Tolstoyan group made Tolstoyism look almost indistinguishable from socialism. Alexander Etkind in his article on Bonch-Bruievich's sectarian project drew a picture of an active Tolstoyan cooperation with the Bolsheviks in their attempt to get support of the sectarians.²¹ Irina Gordeeva in her article on the development of Tolstoyan identities in Soviet Russia emphasized the proximity of Tolstoyism with the Bolshevism.²² In her view, Tolstoyans recognized that there was not much difference between the soviet state and the imperial regime; however, they "were sympathetic towards socialism and the Bolsheviks themselves."²³ What made Tolstoyans close to the Bolsheviks were

¹⁹ Irina Gordeeva, *Kommunitarnoye Dvizheniye v Rossii v Posledney Chetverti XIX v.* [Communitarian movement in Russia in the last quarter of the 19th century] (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2003); Yefim Agarin, *Trudami Ruk Svoikh: Tolstovskiy Zemledel'cheskiye Kolonii v Dorevolyutsionnoi Rossii* [By the labor of Their Hands: Tolstoy Land Agricultural Colonies in Pre-revolutionary Russia]. Moscow, 2019. Tatiana Petukhova, *Kommuny i Arteli Tolstovtsev v Sovetskoy Rossii (1917-1929 gg.)* [Tolstoyan Communes and Artels in Soviet Russia (1917-1929)] (Ulyanovsk: UItGU, 2008); Alexander Etkind, "Russkie sekty i sovetskii kommunizm: proekt Vladimira Bonch-Bruevicha," [Russian Sects and Soviet Communism: Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich's Project] *Minuvshee*, vol. 19 (1996): 275-319. Elaine MacKinnon, "We Are Not Counterrevolutionaries!: Soviet Tolstoyans and Their Fate, 1917-1939," *Tolstoy studies journal*, no. 28 (2016): 44-54.

²⁰ Peter Brock, "A Light Shining in Darkness': Tolstoi and the Imprisonment of Conscientious Objectors in Imperial Russia," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 81, no. 4 (2003): 683-97; Peter Brock, "Russian sectarian pacifism: The Tolstoyans", in his: *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Irina Gordeeva, "The Evolution of Tolstoyan Pacifism in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, 1900–1937," in *The Routledge History of World Peace since 1750* (London: Routledge, 2018), 98-108.

²¹ Alexander Etkind. *Op. cit.*

²² Gordeeva, Irina. "Sovmestnost' i nasilie: «svobodnye hristiane» v usloviyah Sovetskoy Rossii 20 – nachala 30-h godov" [Coexistence and Violence: "Free Christians" in 1920s-early1930s Soviet Russia] *Vestnik RGGU. Seriya «Politologiya. Social'no-kommunikativnye nauki»* 81, no. 1 (2012): 74-83.

²³ *Ibid*: 77.

“the ideas of communism and internationalism”, while in building their social movement they “were willing to cooperate with the Bolsheviks”.²⁴

The intellectual dimension of the Tolstoyan movement has attracted much less attention as it might probably have seemed secondary in the shadow of Tolstoy. Few studies on its intellectual history shared this focus on pre-revolutionary and post-civil war period, as they were mainly concerned with Tolstoyans’ first periodicals of the early 1900s and their samizdat activities in the 1920s.²⁵ Tolstoyan ideology during the Civil War was not a subject of a specific study. However, the “Voice of Tolstoy and Unity” periodical is not unknown to the scholars. Yefim Agarin analyzed Tolstoyan proclamations against the First World War published in the periodical.²⁶

There is also one study of the periodical from the point of view of Tolstoyans’ relation to socialism and the soviet state. This was done by Tatiana Petukhova in her book on Tolstoyan communes and artels in the 1920s. In a chapter on the relation of Tolstoyans to October revolution she partly relied on this periodical. However, she did not analyze the whole body of volumes. Furthermore, she seems to have mixed sources from pro-soviet/communal and oppositional/pacifist Tolstoyans. As a result, in her presentation Tolstoyan attitude towards the October revolution looked “generally positive”, while their “social ideal was socialist.”²⁷ She claimed that the only difference Tolstoyans had with the Bolsheviks was in their methods, though “they regularly emphasized similarity of their aspirations with the demands of the maximum program of the Bolsheviks.”²⁸

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Antonella Salomoni, “Emigranty-tolstovtsy: Mezhdru Khristianstvom I Anarkhismom (1898–1905 gg.)” [Tolstoyan Emigrants: Between Christianity and Anarchism in 1898-1905] in *Russkaia Emigratsiia do 1917 Goda—Laboratoriia Liberal’noii Revoliutsionnoi Mysli* (Saint-Petersburg: Yevropeiskiy dom, 1997), 112–127; Irina Gordeeva, “Samizdat "tolstovcev" 1920-h - nachala 1930-h godov” [Samizdat of “Tolstoyans” in 1920s-early 1930s] *Acta Samizdatica* 92, no. 1 (2013): 199-209.

²⁶ Yefim Agarin, “” [Anti-war publications in Tolstoyans periodicals 1916-1918] in *Russkaya publicistika i periodika epohi Pervoj mirovoj vojny: politika i poetika. Issledovaniya i materialy* (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2013), 504-513.

²⁷ Tatiana Petukhova. *Op. cit.*, 30-33.

²⁸ Ibid: 33.

In my thesis I will employ precisely a different approach. I will take the whole set of issues of the journal and will be looking at the distinctiveness of Tolstoyism as opposed to socialism. The method of my thesis is to analyze Tolstoyans' expression of their attitudes on socialism in the context of Tolstoy's language. By doing so, my thesis will show if there were similarities between Tolstoy and Tolstoyans in their discourse on socialism. The first chapter will analyze the development of Tolstoy's views on socialism in the context of his spiritual crisis and religious views. I argue that Tolstoy's thought was primarily moral and his attitude to socialism was largely critical. The second chapter will analyze how Tolstoyans described their attitude to socialism and the soviet state in the periodical. In it I argue that Tolstoyans adopted and reproduced Tolstoy's critical discourse on socialism in the period of revolution and the Civil War.

Chapter One Tolstoy and Socialism

In order to trace the roots of Tolstoyans' attitudes on socialism this chapter aims to analyze the notion of "socialism" in late philosophical works of Tolstoy which were foundational for the Tolstoyan movement. Firstly, it will analyze Marxist relation to Tolstoy that influenced the soviet historiography. Secondly, it will analyze how Tolstoy's attitude on socialism was studied by contemporary scholars. Thirdly, it will justify the necessity of existentialist approach to Tolstoy's thought. Fourthly, Tolstoy's life experience and the development of his religious views will be analyzed on the basis of his diaries and his religious works, namely "A Confession" (1882) and "What I Believe?" (1884). Finally, Tolstoy's understanding of socialism will be analyzed on the basis of his writings on poverty and non-violence, namely "What Then Must We Do?" (1885-1886), "The Kingdom of God Is Within You" (1893) and "On the Meaning of the Russian Revolution" (1906).

This chapter challenges the historiographical visions of Tolstoy as an ideologue of peasant socialism or Christian anarchism/communism. What is missed in both visions is the peculiarity of Tolstoy's thought. The latter can be made clear with the help of an existentialist approach developed by Eric Voegelin. By using his approach this chapter argues that Tolstoy's thinking was not a reflection of the peasant condition or some political philosophies but rather was rooted in his personal experience. Tolstoy's thinking was primarily moral. It was united by and rooted in his experience of internal conflict which he understood in terms of "struggle" between "reason" and "body". The main problems Tolstoy was trying to cope with in his thinking were the mortality and the temptations of the body. Tolstoy's interpretation of Christianity as a universal rational morality of non-violence functioned as a "shelter", to use a Voegelin's term, that rescued him from the body's inevitable death and passions.

Tolstoy in no way was a socialist. He saw socialism as one of the main rivals to his idea of non-violence. In his view socialism was primarily a teaching that denied morality. Socialism

presented itself as being based on scientific observation of how people *actually live* and are driven by egoism. But the problem for Tolstoy was that it did not provide rational and moral guidance in how people *should live*. Socialism lacked this moral knowledge that in Tolstoy's view was the answer to all personal and social problems. The latter, Tolstoy claimed, cannot be solved by people striving to better their material condition and use state violence for that. Only once the people withdraw from caring about their bodies and start living according to moral law of non-violence the social problems will be solved. By contrast, the socialist revolution in Tolstoy's view could only lead to a deepening of state violence. The only true revolution that could liberate people from oppression, Tolstoy believed, could happen only in form of non-violent disobedience to the state. The best conditions for this revolution Tolstoy saw in Russia, for its majority was deeply religious, lived by land labor, and could see the falsity of the Western industrial way. Tolstoy believed that it would be the Russian people that would show the true way of non-violent liberation to the rest of the world.

Marxist Critique of Tolstoy

The perception of Tolstoy's thought in Russian Marxism dominated almost the entire soviet period and influences, although not directly, our understanding of it even today. Already before the Revolution in 1917 they developed an extremely negative image of Tolstoy's late thinking that was later appropriated by the soviet scholarship. Tolstoy's thought was seen as a reactionary ideology of patriarchal peasantry and thus inimical to the liberation cause of the working class. The soviet scholars were hardly interested in studying reactionary ideology. Instead they aimed to stress Tolstoy the novelist, while trying to marginalize his late religious views and Tolstoyans. A very limited number of soviet studies of Tolstoyism mainly reproduced what the Marxist leaders had to say about it before revolution.

What bothered Russian Marxists the most was the popularity of Tolstoyan ideas among sectarians. A Marxist political emigrant and a specialist in Russian sectarianism, Vladimir

Bonch-Bruевич (1873-1955) saw Tolstoyism as a political threat to the success of Social-Democratic ideas among sectarians. Since they were perceived as “the most politically conscious” layer of the peasantry, at the second social-democratic party congress in 1903 he stressed the need address them with Social-Democratic propaganda. He proposed to create a journal for sectarians in order to oppose “anti-revolutionary propaganda of Tolstoyans” with their “foolish in Christ, noble newspaper” and “knock them out from their positions”.²⁹ The party was positive at first but it refused to sponsor the journal after the fifth volume, as it soon proved to be not very successful.

Certainly at that time Russian Marxists did not see the influence of Tolstoyism on the peasantry as an important issue. What was crucial for them was to gain the minds of the proletariat that was hoped to be a hegemon in the future revolution. However, Tolstoy’s thought became an issue for them exactly after the failure of these hopes in the first Russian Revolution of 1905-07. The problem was that revolutionary force of the proletariat proved to be not enough to revolutionize the peasants, the overwhelming Russian majority. Many intelligentsia members became disappointed with the very idea of revolution and withdrew from socialism to the realm of private life. It was this context of the failure of the first Russian revolution of 1905-07 that made Russian Marxists see Tolstoyism as a political threat and write extensively on it.

Russian Marxists perceived Tolstoy and his idea non-violence as a reflection of different kinds of weaknesses that had to be overcome if socialism was to succeed in Russia. For Georgiy Plekhanov, a father of Russian Marxism, Tolstoyism was a reflection of weakness in thought. In his article “Karl Marx and Leo Tolstoy” (1911) he described Tolstoy as a “metaphysical thinker” whose “absolute consistency” did not allow him to understand the phenomenon of violence.³⁰ The sympathizers of Tolstoy’s understanding of violence in Plekhanov’s view were themselves an embodiment of weakness. He thus wrote harshly about them: “If in these “general abstract

²⁹ Bonch-Bruевич, *Raskol I Sektantstvo v Rossii* [A Schism and Sectarianism in Russia], 213.

³⁰ Plekhanov, *Karl Marx i Lev Tolstoj* [Karl Marx and Leo Tolstoy], 408-409.

statements” many “honest” and “educated” gentlemen see some kind of “strength”, that can only indicate their own weakness.”³¹ An opposition to this Tolstoyan weakness in thought Plekhanov saw in Nicolai Chernyshevski, a Russian revolutionary democrat of the late 19th century. For Plekhanov, it was Chernyshevski’s dialectical thought which treated violence as not some kind of an abstract evil but defined its meaning basing on “circumstances, time and space”.³² In Plekhanov’s view, Chernyshevski, if there were no censorship restrictions, could have said that there are cases in which “revolutionary violence directed against the archaic order is the most beneficent event in people’s history.”³³

For Lenin Tolstoy’s thought was a reflection of weakness of people’s political consciousness and unpreparedness for the struggle. In his “Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution” (1908) Lenin stressed the “glaring contradictions” in Tolstoy between his harsh critique of the imperial regime and his non-violence as an incompatible means to fight it. Tolstoy’s contradictory philosophy, Lenin believed, reflected the contradictory condition of the Russian peasantry. The latter was on the one hand tired of exploitation, but on the other hand did not develop enough to fight in a truly revolutionary manner. In Lenin’s words Tolstoy could not understand “either the working-class movement or its role in the struggle for socialism, or the Russian revolution.”³⁴ In Lenin’s view both peasants and soldiers acted as Tolstoyans, which eventually proved to be “a most serious cause of the defeat of the first revolutionary campaign”.³⁵ Describing the “Tolstoyan” behavior of the people, Lenin wrote:

Most of the peasantry wept and prayed, moralised and dreamed, wrote petitions and sent “pleaders”—quite in the vein of Leo Tolstoy...There was more than one case when authority in the armed forces passed to the mass of the rank and file, but determined use of this authority was hardly made at all; the soldiers wavered; after a couple of days, in some cases a few hours, after killing some hated officer, they released the others who had been arrested, parleyed with the

³¹ Ibid, 409.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lenin, *Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution*, 206.

³⁵ Ibid, 208.

authorities and then faced the firing squad, or bared their backs for the birch, or put on the yoke again— quite in the vein of Leo Tolstoy!³⁶

The followers of Tolstoy's thought in Lenin's view were themselves an embodiment of weakness. A typical Tolstoyan in Lenin's eyes was a "jaded, hysterical sniveler called the Russian intelligentsia" who wails about his practice of moral self-perfection which consisted in "avoiding meat and eating rice cutlets."³⁷ However, Lenin believed, this historical condition of the peasantry which gave basis for Tolstoyism would not last for long. Tolstoy's thought reflected the protest and despair of the peasantry but despair, he asserted, "is typical of the classes which are perishing". It was the proletariat that had "nothing to despair about."³⁸ The development of historical conditions, Lenin claimed, would lead to the growth of the proletariat "which alone is capable of destroying the old world which Tolstoy hated."³⁹ However, Lenin stressed, the success of the proletariat fully depended on its ability to learn the lessons of political violence of the October and December 1905 militant uprisings. The latter, he believed, "must serve as a beacon" for "training up new generations of fighters".⁴⁰

Although the proletariat learned these lessons and the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, the peasants were still a majority that had to be taken into account. The problem to gain the minds of "petit-bourgeois classes" did not go away but rather became more acute after seizing the power. The Bolsheviks tried to employ the idea of Bonch-Bruевич to attract sympathies of sectarians. The influence on the Russian sectarianism was crucially important for the Bolsheviks as they still hoped to make it their social base in the generally hostile peasantry. This was planned to be done through the distribution of land and providing support for their collective farms.

However, Tolstoyans organized sectarians precisely to oppose these soviet policies. In 1921, Tolstoyans organized an "All-Russian Conference of Agricultural and Industrial Collectives",

³⁶ Ibid, 207-208.

³⁷ Lenin. *Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution*, 205.

³⁸ Lenin, *L. N. Tolstoy and the Modern Labour Movement*, 332.

³⁹ Lenin, *Tolstoy and the Proletarian Struggle*, 354.

⁴⁰ Lenin, *Assessment of the Russian Revolution*, 62.

which stressed the independent character of sectarian communes. The Bolsheviks clearly saw the political importance of this. In reaction to that conference, Bonch-Bruevich published a critical brochure called the “False Mirror of Sectarianism” (1922). In the preface to its second edition he gave a harsh critique of this oppositional group of Tolstoyans by contrasting it to a pro-soviet one:

One part enclosed in itself, filled with sectarian spirit, leaning to backward forms of life, not wishing to move forward; another, more alive, directly connected with the masses, living the life of alive, realistic, seeking to find ways to unite with workers and peasants.⁴¹

In the body of the brochure, Bonch-Bruevich tried to undermine the status of this Tolstoyan-led Sectarian Conference. In his view, it did not reflect “the thoughts and will of sectarians” and was just a protest of a tiny numbers of people which had no relation to the masses. While the Conference’s proposals, such as a getting sectarians out of compulsory labor prescription, calls for anti-militarism and refusing to pay tax in meat, were mere “hypocrisy”.

Another high-ranking Bolshevik who acknowledged the distinct character and political significance of Tolstoyism was Anatoly Lunacharsky, People's Commissar for Education. From December 1919 to fall 1921, he participated in several public religious disputes with Tolstoyans defending a strict atheist position to them. In 1924, he made a public presentation called “Tolstoy and Marx” in which he gave a harsh critique of Tolstoyism. Lunacharsky repeated Lenin’s interpretation of Tolstoyism as a reactionary sentiment of the peasants towards capitalism. However, unlike Lenin, he did not downgrade its significance. In his view Tolstoyism stood along with Marxism in being “among the most fundamental ideologies dividing humanity nowadays”.⁴² Although, in his view, the worst enemy of Marxism was Menshevism as its “bourgeois distortion”, Tolstoyism went right after it in the list. Lunacharsky explained its significance in the following way:

⁴¹ Bonch-Bruevich, *Krivoje Zerkalo Sektantstva* [False Mirror of Sectarianism], 288.

⁴² Lunacharsky, *Tolstoy i Marx* [Tolstoy and Marx], 290.

Nevertheless, Tolstoyism is the worldview that should be in second place among our additional enemies — it does not have a very big influence on the proletariat, but it has a strong influence on the intelligentsia, and, in some cases more important, it may turn out to be our competitor in influencing the best part of the peasants, not only within Europe, but also in the depths of Asia.⁴³

In 1928 Lunacharsky organized a massive campaign to celebrate Tolstoy's 100th jubilee. In the article about this celebration he spoke about its ideological basis. It was Lenin's dualistic approach to Tolstoy that became this basis. Tolstoy's artistic talent was to be "praised" while his negative traits of a "peasant revolutionary" and "typical Tolstoyism" were to be "condemned".⁴⁴ It was in this dualistic spirit that the soviet scholarship on Tolstoy's thought developed.⁴⁵ The major step in this soviet campaign of the cult of early Tolstoy was the publication of all works of Tolstoy under the editorship of Chertkov. This publication lasted for thirty years and included ninety volumes. This included even the religious writings of Tolstoy, however, the prefaces to them were made in the spirit of "condemnation" of Tolstoyism. Thus Valentin Asmus, the soviet philosopher, in the preface to the volume which contained Tolstoy's religious works, characterized Tolstoy's thought as a deviated protest to capitalism:

Tolstoy's call for the restoration of religiosity was, above all, a peculiar form of protest against the ethical unprincipledness of the ruling classes of capitalist society, although it certainly does not come down to this protest alone, being at the same time an expression of the weakness, inconsistency of Tolstoy's thought, and the archaism of its aspirations.⁴⁶

Tolstoy's Relation to Socialism in Contemporary Historiography

This negative image of late Tolstoy and Tolstoyans began to change in the 1980s. At that time there was a slight increase of interest to the topic linked to the publication of two books edited by two soviet dissidents: Mark Popovskii's *Russian Peasants Remember: Followers of L.N. Tolstoy in the Soviet Union* (1983), which was based on the interviews later published by

⁴³ Ibid, 292.

⁴⁴ Anatoliy Lunacharskiy, *K predstoyashchemu chestvovaniyu L. N. Tolstogo* [For the upcoming celebration of Leo Tolstoy], 316.

⁴⁵ For a detailed overview of the Soviet studies on Tolstoyans see: Yefim Agarin, *Op. cit.*, 19-27.

⁴⁶ Valentin Asmus, *Religiozno-filosofskie traktaty L.N. Tolstogo* [Religious-Philosophical Treatises of Leo Tolstoy], IX.

Arseniy Roginskii in *Memoirs of Peasant-Tolstoyans*⁴⁷ (1989). In contrast to the soviet approach these books gave a more sympathetic view of Tolstoyans by portraying them as dissidents resisting the soviet system. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the archives, there was no more political pressure linked to studying the history of Tolstoyism. In contrast to the soviet approach these books gave a more sympathetic view of Tolstoyans by portraying them as dissidents resisting the soviet system.

However, the publication of these sources on Tolstoyan peasant communes seems to have strengthened the vision of Tolstoy as an ideologue of the peasant socialism. When it came to the discussion of Tolstoy's views on socio-political issues they were mostly described as a form of populist/narodnik peasant socialism. Ironically, in that way the contemporary Russian scholarship partly preserved the Marxist interpretation of Tolstoy's thinking as a reflection of peasant sentiment against capitalism. What was lost is the negative connotation which was usually attributed to it. Tolstoy's thought is still understood as an aspiration to preserve and reproduce the agricultural communes in new capitalist conditions but it is no longer considered "reactionary". For instance, Yelena Meleshko in her book "Tolstoy's Christian Ethics" described Tolstoyism as a worldview that was a "peculiar form of Populism (Narodnichestvo)"⁴⁸ and had "traits of theocratic socialism"⁴⁹. The commune ideal for Tolstoy, she claimed, was "the only form of life that does not oppress a person and does not provoke him on violence".⁵⁰

Yefim Agarin in his work on pre-revolutionary Tolstoyan communes followed the same line of argument. For him Tolstoyism was "a form of populism" and was a reaction to "the development of capitalist relations".⁵¹ Agarin tended to emphasize the independence of his narodnik type social views of Tolstoy from his religious thought. He stressed a fundamental distinction in

⁴⁷ For an English translation see: *Memoirs of Peasant Tolstoyans in Soviet Russia*. trans. William Edgerton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁴⁸ Yelena Meleshko, *Khristianskaya etika L.N. Tolstogo* [Christian Ethics of Leo Tolstoy], 260.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 261.

⁵⁰ Yelena Meleshko, "Tolstovskie zemledelcheskie kommuny," [Tolstoyan Agricultural Communes] in *Opyt Nenasiliya v XX stoletii* ed. Ruben Apresyan (Moscow: Aslan, 1996), <https://iphras.ru/uplfile/ethics/biblio/N/6.html>.

⁵¹ Yefim Agarin, *Trudami Ruk Svoikh: Tolstovskkiye zemledel'cheskiye kolonii v dorevolyutsionnoy Rossii* [By the Labor of Their Hands: Tolstoy Agricultural Colonies in Pre-revolutionary Russia], 206.

Tolstoy between these two spheres of thought. The development of Tolstoy's philosophy in Agarin's presentation looks like Tolstoy's constant oscillation between "abstract moral ideals" and a "social critique".⁵²

The Western scholars seem to have been attracted more to presenting Tolstoy's thinking as some form of socialist political philosophy. This presentation was done mainly by comparing Tolstoy to different socialist ideologies. After publishing many articles on Tolstoy, Alexandre Christoyannopoulos recently published the first monograph dedicated to the "political thought" of Tolstoy.⁵³ In it he presented Tolstoy's thought as that of "a Christian anarcho-pacifist iconoclast"⁵⁴ by comparing it to an anarcho-pacifist ideal. This comparison led Christoyannopoulos to downplay Tolstoy's Christianity and to emphasize his proximity to anarchism. Christoyannopoulos noted that Tolstoy considered his anarchist critique as following from Jesus and he spoke about "Christian society". However, he argued, what Tolstoy meant by that was "effectively a type of (pacifist) anarchist society".⁵⁵

Roland Boer in his analysis of Lenin's critique of Tolstoy claimed that Lenin failed to see in him a "heir of Christian communist tradition"⁵⁶. The latter, Boer noted was first coined by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kausky.⁵⁷ The nature of this Communist Christian tradition Boer saw expressed in the Acts of the Apostles. It consisted mainly in the belief "in the resurrection of Christ, communal living and communism of goods."⁵⁸ Tolstoy, Boer claimed, drew upon elements of this Christian communist tradition based on the Acts of the Apostles.⁵⁹

⁵² Ibid, 97.

⁵³ Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought: Christian Anarcho-Pacifist Iconoclasm Then and Now* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁵⁴ Ibid, 213.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 58.

⁵⁶ Roland Boer, "Lenin on Tolstoy: Between Imaginary Resolution and Revolutionary Christian Communism," *Science and Society*, Vol. 78, No. 1, January 2014, 55.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 53.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 51.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

What is problematic in these approaches, both Russian and the Western, to Tolstoy's thought is their tendency to neglect a distinct character of it. What had lost in these accounts were the attempts of Tolstoy himself to stress his distinction from either peasant communism or Christian anarchism/communism. Peasant communes were not at all central to his ideas and interpretation of Christianity. Tolstoy himself did not think that communal experiments were the primary and only form of Christian life. In a letter to a Tolstoyan who complained about the collapse of some communes Tolstoy wrote:

What trouble is that the communes have broken up? If we believed that these communes were the examples of how the teachings of Christ should be realized in the world and how to establish the Kingdom of God, then this would be terrible; then the collapse of the commune would show the failure of the teachings of Christ; but neither we as outsiders nor the members of the communes looked at them so. (If someone looked at them like that, then the collapse will correct this false view, and therefore in this sense it is even useful).⁶⁰

Moreover Tolstoy tended to abstain from the characteristics of him as a "political philosopher" or a Christian Anarchist/Communist. Instead he aimed to stress his disinterestedness in political matters, the Christian character of his outlook and the general unity of his thought which came from it. His "anarchism", he wrote in the diary, was only "the application of Christianity to the relationship of people".⁶¹ In one of his late diary notes he opposed his understanding of moral law to anarchism:

Anarchism that allows violence is ridiculous. There is only one rational Anarchism: Christianity, ignoring any external political forms of life and everyone's living for their "I", but not physical, but spiritual.⁶²

What was central to Tolstoy himself was the moral character of his thought. This seems to have been lost in contemporary scholarship. It tended to view his thought as a reflection of social conditions of the peasantry or as a form of socialist political philosophies rather than his own personal experience. Moreover, when speaking about the socialist character of Tolstoy's thought, historiography overlooked his own attitude on socialism expressed in his work. Tolstoy's

⁶⁰ Quoted in Biriukov. *Biographiya L.N. Tolstogo* [Biography of Leo Tolstoy], 121.

⁶¹ Tolstoy, *Diary August 24, 1906*, 239.

⁶² Tolstoy, *Diary April 30, 1907*, 27.

“socialism” was found beyond the texts of Tolstoy himself, either in the peasantry or in the philosophical influences. What I find fruitful for the discussion of Tolstoy is to apply an existentialist approach to his thought and look at his attitude on socialism as it was expressed in his own texts.

The existentialist approach on which I will rely was developed by Eric Voegelin, a German-American political philosopher. In 1940 he wrote an introduction to his abandoned project of “History of Political Ideas” in which he developed an existentialist approach to the study of political ideas. In his view the political ideas result from a precarious existential situation in which human being finds oneself. Human find the cosmos to be unstable, meaningless and undermining his/her existence. To face that challenge, Voegelin argues, he/she creates “a cosmic analogy, a cosmion” which functions as a “shelter in which man may give to his life a semblance of meaning”.⁶³ The political ideas are, thus, rationalizations of this shelter function of the “cosmion”. The primary purpose of a political idea is not to describe the world but to create a new one with the evocative power of language. As Voegelin wrote, “the linguistic symbols [contained] in a system of political ideas, by calling a ruler and a people by name, call it into existence”.⁶⁴ Voegelin called this evocative act “magical” since in using the language there is a presumption that its terms refer to an objective reality.

Voegelin contrasted this shelter function of a political idea to a religious view. Religion also deals with the problem of precarious human existence but considers attempts to build an earthly cosmion as futile. It does not see the meaning in the worldly life itself but perceives it as a preparation for the existence beyond this world. Instead of attempting to create meaningful structures like political cosmions in the finite world religion aims at the infinite absolute meaning. In the context of this religious view political cosmion for Voegelin becomes an experiment “to overcome the essential incompleteness and relativity of human life by means of

⁶³ Eric Voegelin, *Introduction to the “History of Political Ideas”*, 225.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 228.

an image of divine completeness and absoluteness”.⁶⁵ What becomes central for a political idea is the way it solves this conflict between relativity and absoluteness, finite and infinite. Voegelin brought examples of such solutions in polytheism which presents king as God’s representative, atheist theories which deifies the finite groups like nation or class and totalitarianism which tries to eliminate apolitical experience altogether.

In the subsequent parts of the chapter I will apply this approach to Tolstoy. I argue that Tolstoy’s rational morality was a type of religious apolitical “shelter” which he developed for himself. Tolstoy’s thought dealt with the same problem of a precarious existential situation which Voegelin wrote about. The conflict between infinite and finite, reason and body determined and united Tolstoy’s thought. Tolstoy found solution to the meaninglessness in his moral interpretation of Christianity. This interpretation helped him to overcome his fear of death and his bodily temptations. The moral law of non-violence was both eternal and provided rational guidance to overcome the bodily passions.

Tolstoy criticized Russian Orthodoxy precisely for the absence of this moral “shelter” of meaning. Orthodox “sacred history” could not provide meaning for life since everything was pre-determined. It did not provide a moral guidance on how to behave and be independent from the bodily temptations. He was critical of socialism on the same grounds. Socialism was based on scientific observation and overlooked this infinite meaning for human life. Furthermore it did not give moral guidance on how one should overcome one’s dependence to the body. Rational morality of non-violence was Tolstoy’s answer to his personal struggles and became in his eyes an answer to all social problems.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 227.

The Development of Tolstoy's Religious Ideas

The conflict between reason and body, individual freedom and external constraints seems to be central for Tolstoy's life as such and the development of his views. While finishing "Anna Karenina" Tolstoy began to write notes for his autobiography and wrote down his very first memory. In this he described how he was crying as a baby when being tied down:

I want to raise my arms, but I cannot do it, and I wail and weep, and my cry is disagreeable to myself; but I cannot stop...It seems to them necessary (that is, that I be tied down), while I know that it is not necessary, and I want to prove it to them, and I burst out into a cry disgusting to myself completely unrestrainable...And it was not my crying or my suffering that I retain in my recollections, but the complication, the contradiction, of the impression. I wanted freedom; it would not disturb any one, and I who needed strength was weak while they were strong.⁶⁶

One might see Tolstoy's life end as an attempt to overcome the same conflict between individual and external bodily constraints. In 1910 Tolstoy left his Yasnaya Polyana estate because of the long-going conflict with his wife Sofia Andreyevna who was jealous of his relations with his close friend, publisher and a leading Tolstoyan, Vladimir Chertkov. After Tolstoy found his wife rummaging among his papers he decided to leave his home. At first he went to the Optina pustyn' monastery where he hoped to protect himself from his wife and popular attention. He was even ready to become a novice if only he could avoid baptizing and participating in liturgy. He soon left the monastery, took the train to Caucasus but took ill and had to end his journey at a small Astapovo station. The station ranger let Tolstoy into his home and many doctors, journalists, Tolstoyans and his wife arrived to the place. He struggled for a week. Tolstoy's close friend and a doctor Dushan Makovitsky wrote down Tolstoy's last words uttered after a morphine injection: "I will now go to a place where no one can disturb me (or find me). Leave me alone... I need to get away, I need to get away somewhere."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Quoted in Andrey Zorin, *Zhizn' L'va Tolstogo: Opyt Prochteniya* [The Life of Leo Tolstoy: A Reading] (Moscow: NLO, 2020), 6.

⁶⁷ Quoted in: Andrey Zorin, *Op. cit.*, 106.

Two years before his death Tolstoy already knew where he wanted to get away and find shelter. He wrote in his diary that he wanted to be buried in the Yasnaya Polyana forest in the place of “the green stick”⁶⁸. In the childhood Tolstoy’s elder brother Nikolai told him that in that forest there was a green stick on which there was a secret truth written on. The one who finds the stick could bring happiness to the whole world. Young Tolstoy was fascinated by the story and remembered it. Over seventy years after Tolstoy wrote an article called “The green stick” in which he tried to give a popular account of his vision of Christianity. He believed that it was Christianity as a moral teaching to be the green stick he had finally found. It was this green stick of universal morality of love which he felt to be a shelter for him and an answer to all human problems. In his memoirs Tolstoy wrote about his belief in its force:

As I then believed that there was a little green stick whereon was written something which would destroy all evil in men and give them great blessings, so I now believe that such truth exists among people and will be revealed to them and will give them what it promises.⁶⁹

Tolstoy had to go a long way before he found that stick. He himself thought that he found it in the late 1870s after a deep existential crisis while the period before that was for him “nihilist” and “atheist”. However, as Andrey Zorin noted, Tolstoy’s diary provides us with a different picture in which Tolstoy was constantly “calling on the Lord for help and dreamed of believing for real”.⁷⁰ It is the very opening of Tolstoy’s diary, Zorin noted, that contained the scheme of his future life struggles.⁷¹ While studying at Kazan University Tolstoy visited brothels, as the result of one visit, he contracted gonorrhoea and was duly hospitalized. After six days in the hospital he began his diary with a praise of individual reason independent from external influences that can be a cure for disordered life of noble young people:

Let a man withdraw from society; let him retreat into himself, and his reason will soon cast aside the spectacles which showed him everything in a distorted form, and his view of things will become so clear that he will be quite unable to understand how he had not seen it all before. Let reason do its work, and it will illuminate to you your destiny and will give you rules with which

⁶⁸ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Andrey Zorin, *Op. cit.*, 58.

⁷¹ Ibid, 10.

you can confidently enter society. Everything that is consistent with the primary ability of man - the reason, will be equally consistent with everything that exists; the reason of an individual is a part of everything that exists, and a part cannot upset the order of the whole. The whole can kill a part. - For this, shape your reason so that it is consistent with the whole, with the source of everything, and not with the part, with the society of people; then your mind will merge into one with this whole, and then society, as a part, will not have an impact on you.⁷²

This conflict between Tolstoy's individual reason "that is a part of the whole" on the one hand, and his bodily temptations that depend on his belonging to society, on the other hand, defined his life and his spiritual search. His life before his existential crisis of the late 1870s seems to be a constant oscillation between these two spheres. His diary was full of self-condemnations for living immorally, on the one hand, and ambitions about coming to society and getting literary fame, on the other hand. Once Tolstoy enjoyed literary fame and praise by the "society" after the publication of his autobiographical trilogy "Childhood", "Boyhood", and "Youth" (1852–1856) he was soon dissatisfied with it. In the late 1850s he left circle of writers in St. Petersburg and moved back to his Yasnaya Polyana estate. There he opened his own school for the peasants and established a journal about education in which he wrote about his own methods of teaching.

The school did not last for long because of the government search in Tolstoy's estate that happened because of the false accusations of him having an illegal printing press. The second retreat to the peasants happened after his dissatisfaction with his second big literary success of *War and Peace*. He attempted to solve his crisis with an opening of a second peasant school in 1872 and writing popular books for reading. However, it was during the late 1870s that Tolstoy experienced the most severe of all. The problem he faced was not only the dissatisfaction with his writing or educated milieu but the lack of meaning in life. As Tolstoy later wrote his "Confession" (1882) he simply could not answer why he was doing anything at all.

I could not attach a rational meaning to a single act in my entire life. The only thing that amazed me was how I had failed to realize this in the very beginning. All this had been common knowledge for so long. If not today, then tomorrow sickness and death will come (indeed, they were already approaching) to everyone, to me, and nothing will remain except the stench and the worms. My deeds, whatever they may be, will be forgotten sooner or later, and I myself will be

⁷² Ibid.

no more. Why, then, do anything? How can anyone fail to see this and live? That's what is amazing! It is possible to live only as long as life intoxicates us; once we are sober we cannot help seeing that it is all a delusion, a stupid delusion! Nor is there anything funny or witty about it; it is only cruel and stupid.⁷³

Tolstoy was tempted to commit suicide but he felt it was not the right option. After overcoming the temptation for suicide Tolstoy tried to find the meaning which he assumed existed but was still unclear. In search for the clarity Tolstoy plunged into scientific discoveries, philosophical literature and discussions with his upper-class milieu. However, the answers he got from them did not satisfy him. As he wrote in *Confession*, what stroke him in the science was that it simply “ignored the question of life” and its pronouncements were getting “more obscure and unappealing” exactly when it tried to deal with this question⁷⁴. The problem with science for Tolstoy was that it brought causality to the study of historical and social phenomena. Instead the science in Tolstoy’s view should “completely eliminate questions about the sequence of causal phenomena and consider a human-being only with respect to the ultimate cause.”⁷⁵ Metaphysics in Tolstoy’s mind dealt with human beings precisely in this manner but it did not satisfy him as well.

As Tolstoy further developed his narrative of conversion, having failed to find the answer in knowledge he began to seek answers in life. He approached people of his milieu but did not find their explanations satisfactory. They proposed some options to cope with the problem which he could not accept, namely “being ignorant”, “enjoying pleasures of life” and “just proceed living with the knowledge of meaninglessness”⁷⁶. The only option appealing to Tolstoy was still to commit suicide. However, he could not do this because of a twofold contradiction which he felt. Namely, the contradiction between his own reason which strove for the meaning of life and the outcome of rational inquiry that asserted the meaninglessness of life. Moreover, there was a contradiction between him and his educated milieu unsatisfied with life on the one side and the

⁷³ Leo Tolstoy, *Isповед'* [Confession], 13.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 18.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 20.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 27.

rest of the living humanity who seemed to have had put some meaning in life. Although, as Tolstoy wrote, the majority of humanity knew the “argument about the futility of life” nevertheless it continued to live “making some sense out of it”⁷⁷.

The problem for Tolstoy was that the majority’s understanding of life relied on faith which was incompatible with reason. Tolstoy felt to be caught in some sort of deadlock. The outcome of his rational inquiry was that life was meaningless but he proceeded living. While the faith suggested that in order to get the meaning in life Tolstoy would “have to repudiate reason which needs the meaning”⁷⁸. Trying to get out of this deadlock Tolstoy examined his thinking and came to conclusion that the problem was that his question of meaning in life cannot be answered by scientific rational knowledge. This was due to that Tolstoy’s thinking was not in correspondence with the type of question he asked. As Tolstoy wrote, his question was “what is the timeless, extra-causal, non-spatial meaning of my life? And I answered the question: what is the temporal, causal and spatial significance of my life?”⁷⁹. In Tolstoy’s view rational scientific inquiry did not include the relation between the finite and infinite and that is why it could not answer the question of meaning in life. What could answer it, Tolstoy realized, was the religious faith because it is based on the relation between finite and infinite⁸⁰. Thus, Tolstoy had to accept that the answers given by faith - “however foolish and ugly they are” - as they in fact provide the meaning on which millions of working people rely.

Tolstoy was ready to accept any faith just to preserve his life. He met with Christians of his milieu but he did not find their way of living much different from himself and could not adopt their views. But when he drew his attention to the peasantry he saw in their life the correspondence between faith and the way of life which he was looking for. The hard labor of the peasants and their endurance in the face of suffering pushed Tolstoy to believe that they have

⁷⁷ Ibid, 30.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 33.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 33-34.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 34.

the faith which can save him. Although Tolstoy still had some unresolved doubts on religious faith, namely with the irrational rituals and dogmas, he decided to restrain himself, adopt Orthodoxy and observe all the rites and rituals following the example of the peasants. As he further wrote in *Confession*, every moment Tolstoy could not understand something in the faith he was blaming himself for it⁸¹. However, there grew two questions in his mind which made him finally abandon the Orthodox faith, namely its relation to other religious denominations and its relation to war. Its conflictual stance towards people with different religious views and its praise of Russian military campaigns convinced Tolstoy that Orthodoxy has nothing to do with his view of Christianity. He abandoned it as he was looking for faith as “power of life” while Orthodox clerics were looking for “the best means to fulfil certain human responsibilities for the people”⁸².

In his “What I Believe (1884) Tolstoy developed his own vision of Christianity and a critique of Russian Orthodoxy. For Tolstoy Christianity was primarily a moral teaching which can give a foundation for people’s behavior in daily life. The essence of Christian ethics in Tolstoy’s view was expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, namely in the principle of non-violence. In Tolstoy’s view the church interpretation of Christianity as a religion of rituals and eschatology stripped off its ethical essence. The problem for Tolstoy with Orthodoxy was precisely the absence of the struggle between these “reason” and “body”, “infinite” and “finite”. Orthodoxy, in Tolstoy’s view, shifted the inner struggle between “animal” and “rational” life of each human person to the particular event of Adam’s sin. Orthodoxy neglected any moral effort from an individual since everything was pre-determined by the original sin.

Our life here on earth, with all its joys, with all its charms, with all its struggles between light and darkness, the lives of all those who lived before, my own life with its inward struggles and consequent victories of reason, is not the true life, but a hopelessly spoiled, fallen life; the true life, the sinless life, according to this teaching, lies only in faith, i.e., in fancy, i.e., in madness.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid: 53.

⁸² Ibid: 55.

⁸³ Leo Tolstoy, *V chem moya vera?* [What I believe?], 376.

Tolstoy criticized Orthodoxy for that its ideal was in faith in some external forces that would bring salvation. Orthodoxy thus considered the moral law of Christ as impractical in real life. It looked at earthly human life as being fully dependent on external forces and impossible to change with human efforts. This kind of false outlook, Tolstoy argued, in fact became the basis of philosophy and modern science. The latter also perceive the teaching of Christ as impractical and see the human life as being governed by scientific laws independent from human will.

The doctrine of Christ, as an improvement of human life by the rational efforts of man, is impracticable because Adam sinned and the world is full of evil, says religion. Philosophy says that Christ's doctrine is impracticable because certain laws, which are independent of the will of man, govern human life. Philosophy and science say, in other words, exactly the same as religion does in its dogmas of original sin and redemption.⁸⁴

What was lost, Tolstoy stressed, due to that church teaching was the most important of all, namely the knowledge of how one should live and become better. Humans instead of using their own reason to find the moral knowledge and have better life began to use it for the knowledge of external world. Humanity thus withdrew from its task of solving the conflict between reason and body. Tolstoy put it in a way that can remind one of Gnostic interpretation of the original sin myth:

It is only through the influence of this false teaching, engrained in the minds of our generations, that we can explain how it is, just like man spitted out that apple of knowledge of good and evil that he ate in the Paradise according to the scripture, that man has forgotten that his whole history is but an endeavor to solve the contradictions between his rational and animal nature. Instead, he began to use all his reason to search for the historical laws of only his animal nature.⁸⁵

What Tolstoy opposed to this was the entire tradition of all world religions and philosophies. In his view their purpose was to make human life better by using their rational nature. The teaching of Christ was of similar kind, Tolstoy argued. The basis of all the Gospels was, in Tolstoy's view, the teaching on "the son of man". The latter he understood as "universal to all men striving after good and universal human reason, which enlightens man in his search."⁸⁶ True Christian life, according to Tolstoy's interpretation, consisted in becoming more conscious of this "son of

⁸⁴ Ibid, 378.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 379.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

man”, that was “light”. Tolstoy described this rational essence or “light” as the means to unite with life in a way that reminds of his very first diary entry in which individual reason was a “part of the whole”:

That which man acknowledges in himself as being free, is just what is born of the Eternal Being, of Him Whom we call God. This son of God in man, born of God, is what we must exalt in ourselves in order to obtain the true life. The human son is the begotten son of God (not singly-begotten). He who exalts in himself the son of God over all the rest that is in him, he who believes that life is in himself alone, will not find himself in contradiction/alienation with life. The contradiction/alienation only results from men not believing in the light that is in them; the light of which John the Evangelist speaks when he says, ‘In him is life, and the life is the light of men.’⁸⁷

This idea of reason as a divine part of human nature which only brings good, Tolstoy argued, can be found in the teachings of Brahmin teachers, the Hebrew prophets, Confucius, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus and “all truly wise men who were not compilers of philosophical theories, but who sought the truth for their own good and that of all men.”⁸⁸ However, both the church interpretation of Christianity with its idea of original sin and science with its objective material laws did not acknowledge this light. Both of them ignored the rational law of love and the inner “son of man” that must be exalted in us by our efforts and searched for something external. The believers search for the “nature of each person of the Trinity”, while the “unbelievers” look for the “laws the infinitesimal particle of substance moves in the endless expanse of endless time”.⁸⁹ Basing on this objection to modern science, Tolstoy further developed his critique of socialism.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 380.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 381.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Tolstoy's Views on Socialism

Although the critique of Orthodoxy is the main topic of *What I Believe?*, the text gives us a small hint on Tolstoy's views on socialism. It is in this text in which Tolstoy mentioned socialism for the first time. Although it is not clear whether he is positive about socialism or not it is certain that he brought it to underline the obsolescence of Orthodoxy. He mentioned socialism among other modern ideas "guiding the world" which were in fact "parts of the same teaching which without knowing it, the church carried with it the teachings of Christ"⁹⁰. In one of the sketches to the text Tolstoy had another note which was rather sympathetic towards socialists. In it he described socialists and communists as the only people who try to deal with the question of betterment of life. However, while they search for "true life" they are "considered to be enemies of religion, and the state, and humanity, and all that is holy"⁹¹.

Besides this one sentence and a sketch note Tolstoy did not mention socialism in any of his religious or even social writings in the 1880s. Tolstoy's first attempt to deal with social issues was treatise entitled *What Then Must We Do* (1885-1886) which was a reflection of his experience in working for Moscow Census in 1882. He was shocked by the level of urban poverty he saw. In this treatise Tolstoy aimed to understand its roots. In trying to understand this problem Tolstoy looked through the authors of "political economy", namely Marx, Lassalle, Proudhon and Bastia.

However, what Tolstoy found in "political economy" was a justification of the existing order, namely the existing system of the division of labor. This justification, Tolstoy argued, was based on Auguste Comte's metaphor of society as an organism in which different parts naturally have to perform different types of labor.

If some people command and others obey, if some live in opulence and others in want, this occurs, not by the will of God, and not because the State is a form of the manifestation of

⁹⁰ Ibid, 441.

⁹¹ Ibid, 512.

personality, but because in societies as in organisms a division of labor occurs which is necessary for the life of the whole: some people in society perform the muscular work, others the brain work.⁹²

The idea of society as organism triggered Tolstoy to compare it to Orthodox theology. The role of science for Tolstoy consisted in the same assuring people in the necessity of the organized violence and the necessity of sacrifices for it. If in Orthodox theology this imaginary being was God, in science it was the society. The trick which Tolstoy saw in science was that it derived its laws not from individual conscience but from the observation of empirical reality. Political economy falsely directed human mind to observation of empirical facts instead of using one's reason. The latter could clearly discern what kind of division of labor is justified. In Tolstoy's view this positivist approach of science led to mental demoralization in that people begin to perceive the good and evil as "subjective".

However, Tolstoy argued, even the mere observation of life contradicted the scientific theory of division of labor. Tolstoy brought an example of the Russian settlers' commune in which there was no division of labor but instead all factors of production were parts of one process of labor. For Tolstoy it was this condition of the Russian peasantry which was "natural and reasonable."⁹³ He contrasted this with the European society in which the division of labor was fully developed. But in Tolstoy's view this condition was irrational since it contradicted the natural conditions of labor. The natural conditions consisted in that laborer cannot be without the land and the tools. If the peasant does not have them, Tolstoy argued, it simply means that he/she was deprived of them by someone else.

Political economy which relied on observation wrongly claimed that this unnatural condition is in fact the law of production itself. Tolstoy saw the roots of this theory in the interests of a European particular class. Tolstoy traced the appearance of this scientific to the growth of power of the rich people who did not belong to any old powerful classes such as the clergy, the state or

⁹² Leo Tolstoy, *What then must we do?* 330.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 250.

the army. In the view of Tolstoy “political economy” gave these new people the justification for exemption from toil. This justification, in his view, began to play the same role as the old theological and philosophical ideologies used to play.

In this treatise Tolstoy came to the conclusion that the main reason of poverty is the state reforms of 1861 which deprived the peasants of land and put them under severe taxation. This Tolstoy perceived as the fundamental reason of that peasants hire themselves in factories. For him it was obvious that all work on other people’s land and at the factories would simply stop if the government “tried the experiment of not collecting direct, indirect, and land taxes for a year.”⁹⁴ In the end of the treatise Tolstoy urged his wealthy readers of the possible violent workers’ revolution if they do not go to live among people and work with them. However, Tolstoy firmly believed that these violent socialist revolutions cannot make the workers’ life better. Its betterment he saw in the adoption of Christian worldview and inner moral transformation. In practice for the peasants this meant to stay in countryside while the urban workers were to abandon urban life which for Tolstoy was essentially “irrational”.

Tolstoy’s critical attitude towards socialism developed and became more clear in his “Kingdom of God is Within You” (1893), a treatise aimed to apply his idea of non-violence idea to struggle with the state. It was the first time Tolstoy devoted a special attention to socialism. Tolstoy began his discussion of it with comparing socialist understanding of love to the Christian one. He argued that although socialism spoke about “the love for humanity” it lacked the necessary ideal foundation for it. Although socialists see a necessity of love for humanity, they, Tolstoy claimed, do not have appropriate understanding of human nature for it. In Tolstoy’s view the type of love which socialists stand for is based on “personal and social worldview” which cannot go “beyond the love to the state”⁹⁵.

⁹⁴ Tolstoy, *Kingdom of God is within you*, 281.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 84.

Tolstoy claimed, that love for humanity cannot be based on the personal benefit but requires a different understanding of human nature. The latter Tolstoy claimed, can be found only in Christianity. In contradistinction to socialism the Christian love for humanity does not arise from potential personal benefit but rather from the divine human nature. He explained it by saying that for a Christian the essence of soul is love and his good would be in “loving the beginning of everything - God, whom he recognizes as love in himself and therefore will love everyone and everything.”⁹⁶ By contrast, socialists, in Tolstoy’s presentation, thought of a personal benefit as a prime mover for the love for humanity.

Tolstoy’s critique of socialism went beyond the level of philosophy and was concerned with political issues as well. Tolstoy’s argument was that socialism could lead to dangerous outcomes for the freedom of the people. Namely, he asserted that all the political parties including socialists and communists would have to use violence for the materialization of their ideas and for the maintenance of their power. He claimed that violence would be even strengthened because “in consequence of the struggle, the hatred of men toward one another will be intensified, and at the same time new means of enslavement will be worked out and confirmed”⁹⁷. Moreover, Tolstoy argued further, socialism could be dangerous not only because of the intensification of violence caused by the political turmoil but of its intention to intervene in the sphere of economy. If the socialist struggles were successful the private sphere would be usurped by the state so that “labor and rest, the domicile, the attire, the food of men will by degrees be determined and directed by the governments”⁹⁸.

Tolstoy criticized not only the possible outcomes of socialists’ coming to power but the very means of liberation they proposed. These means seemed absurd to him since they did not suggest any change in personal individual behavior.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 85.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 156.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

These people advance the opinion that the amelioration of life, the bringing of the facts of life into harmony with the conscience, will come, not as the result of the personal efforts of individual men, but of itself as the result of a certain possible reconstruction of society effected in some way or other. The idea is promulgated that men ought not to walk on their own legs where they want and ought to go, but that a kind of floor under their feet will be moved somehow, so that on it they can reach where they ought to go without moving their own legs. And, therefore, all their efforts ought to be directed, not to going so far as their strength allows in the direction they ought to go, but to standing still and constructing such a floor.⁹⁹

Tolstoy firmly believed that the betterment of life cannot result from the external change of circumstances or a violent transformation of society. In Tolstoy's mind socialists while inventing common means of improvement of the situation continued to support the state structure. This in Tolstoy's view results only in "strengthening of the power, and consequently the intensification of the oppression"¹⁰⁰. True transformation in his view could result only from personal efforts of separate men to become better and individual acts of non-participation in the state affairs. For Tolstoy non-violence was much dangerous to the state than socialist activism since it did not aim to change the state for the better but rather undermined and questioned its existence as such.

The socialists, communists, anarchists, with their bombs, riots, and revolutions, are by no means so terrible to the governments as these scattered people, who from various sides refuse to do military service — all of them on the basis of the same well-known teaching. Every government knows how and why to defend itself against revolutionists, and they have means for it, and so are not afraid of these external enemies. But what are the governments to do against those men who point out the uselessness, superfluity, and harmfulness of all governments, and do not struggle with them, but only have no use for them, get along without them, and do not wish to take part in them?¹⁰¹

Tolstoy saw great prospects of this non-violent resistance in the Russian circumstances. Similarly to the argument of Russian Narodniks, it was the backwardness of Russia, Tolstoy thought, which gave it a bright future. He believed that the Russian peasantry due to its peculiarity could be the starting point of non-violent revolution which would have a universal significance for Europe and the rest of the world. When the first Russian revolution started in 1905 Tolstoy thought it was the moment for large-scale Christian revolutionary movement.

⁹⁹ Ibid: 171.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 182.

In one of his articles of this period called “On the Meaning of the Russian Revolution” (1906) he laid out his vision of the revolution and Russian position in it. Tolstoy claimed that the Russian people were faced with the most important choice in their history: whether to follow the Western example of violent social transformation or to choose their own path. In the mind of Tolstoy Russia, along with other non-Western countries, compared favorably to Europe and America as its people preserved wise skeptical attitude towards power and the state.

In the West, Tolstoy argued, any positive consequences of the struggle against power were destroyed by the fact that people continued to obey the authorities and participate in state affairs. The Russian revolution, as Tolstoy described, had an opposite approach in liberation. It consisted in “passive”, that is, religious disobedience to any government. For such a revolution, Tolstoy believed, the people of Russia still had an ideal condition. Those Russians who got the opportunity to participate in power, as in the democratic West, fell under its corrupting influence but the majority of the Russians were still detached from politics. This majority still lived predominantly by land labor and could take into account the negative experience of the industrialized West.

Most importantly, Russians had an internal condition for the success of the non-violent revolution, namely their “moral consciousness common to most people, established by a common religious understanding of people”.¹⁰² Tolstoy believed that the greatest revolution in human history was coming — non-violent spiritual liberation of peoples from obedience to earthly state power. Russia in his mind was going to be the first in it and would show the way to other peoples of Europe and the East.

To sum up, socialism at first interested Tolstoy as a sign of obsolescence of Orthodoxy. Tolstoy made his first attempt to deal with socialism when he began to write a treatise on the problem of urban poverty. In it he did not discuss socialism itself but gave a vehement critique of "political

¹⁰² Leo Tolstoy, *On the Meaning of the Russian Revolution*, 345.

economy" which included socialist authors, such as Marx and Proudhon. He compared political economy to Orthodox theology. In his mind it served to justify the system of division of labor but on different secular and scientific grounds. He dealt with socialism in detail for the first time in his *Kingdom of God is Within You*. In it Tolstoy viewed socialism as a teaching incapable of liberating the working people but that which could lead to the deepening of its enslavement. He contrasted socialism with his own vision of resistance through non-violent disobedience. Tolstoy believed in the future non-violent revolution that would start with the Russian peasantry and would destroy the state oppression as such. This kind of attitude towards socialism and Russian prospects of non-violence had a profound effect on Tolstoyans. In the next chapter I will look at how Tolstoy's followers adapted his discourse on socialism to the context of the Russian Revolution and the Civil War.

Chapter Two “What would Tolstoy say?” Socialism and the Formation of the Soviet State in the periodical “The Voice of Tolstoy and Unity” (1917-1920)

In this chapter I analyze Tolstoyan attitudes to socialism and the soviet state as they were expressed in their periodical “The Voice of Tolstoy and Unity” (1917-1920). My main argument is that Tolstoyans that grouped around this journal adopted Tolstoy’s hostility to socialism. By contrast to the historiographical vision in which Tolstoyans aimed to emphasize their similarity with socialism, my analysis shows exactly the opposite. In their periodical they constantly tried to stress their distinctiveness from socialism. They promoted Tolstoy’s idea of rational morality of non-violence and disobedience to the state as the only means for individual and, subsequently, social betterment. They opposed this to socialist violent methods which, they believed, were based on negation of morality and were detrimental to the country. They conceived an alliance with the Bolsheviks even in their pacifist protest as unacceptable and wanted to preserve the purity of their religious principles. They adopted Tolstoy’s vision of Russian people as especially suitable for non-violent revolution and saw the signs of it in the ongoing events.

The first issue of *Yedinenie* published in June 1917 was the first Tolstoyan journal published within Russian borders. In the “Editorial appeal” to this issue Tolstoyans compared it to their “Free Press” periodicals in England they were publishing twenty years before. In the appeal they expressed their attitude towards the revolution in March 1917. For them the “external overturn” that happened in Russia was more “delightful” than for many others since it stopped the long-lasting persecution of Tolstoyans for their religious views. Tolstoyans saw this “overturn” to be positive since it allowed developing their publishing activities that had been restricted by censorship. They expressed hope that the new revolutionary authorities would not be an obstacle for “preaching divine love and universal brotherhood”.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ “Ot Redaktsii,” *Yedinenie*, June, 1917, 9.

What was especially delightful for Tolstoyans in this revolution was that it happened “in general without violent struggle and mutual killing”¹⁰⁴. In line with the thought of Tolstoy on the Russian people as the most suitable for the future non-violent revolution, Tolstoyans tried to emphasize the “Russianness” of the recent political events:

We find it quite natural that this first example of such a peaceful revolution was given to humanity precisely by the Russian people which is distinguished by its astonishing natural geniality and kindness when it is not under the influence of drunkenness, provocation and military journal.¹⁰⁵

The appeal contrasted the non-violent character of Russian revolution to the behavior of the French masses that “having liberated themselves from the centuries of oppression, were gripped by hatred and revenge” and were “ruthlessly executing, robbing, tormenting in every way and dishonoring their former oppressors”.¹⁰⁶ By contrast the people’s representatives in Russia, Tolstoyans noted, asked not to use force against the oppressors. For Tolstoyans this kind of merciful behavior of the Russian people was a sign of its great abilities “for the future spiritual development.”¹⁰⁷

The appeal proceeded with the line of thought very characteristic of Tolstoy, namely that one should not overestimate the external change but the true transformation always happens within a person. The revolution for Tolstoyans was this very external change which liberated people from “the government oppression and its chains” but it did not take out the root of the problem. The new government, they stressed, did not mean the extinguishing of the “Old Man”. The old evils, Tolstoyans urged, would easily restore themselves in new forms. The ongoing war with Germany was a sign for them that “the true “overturn” still did not happen. The appeal ended with an urge of not falling over common enthusiasm around revolution and called for hard work for the Lord in order to fulfill “the mission of taking part in bringing about His Kingdom”.¹⁰⁸ In

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

particular this meant an active participation in the publishing work which is no more restricted by the censorship thanks to the revolution.

In the same volume Vasiliy Krasheninnikov published an appeal to socialists in which he discussed a problem of peace. In it he tried to stress the moral root of the problem which got lost in a variety of political events. Despite all the economic and political reasons that seem important the most fundamental reason of the war Krasheninnikov saw in “our relation to violence”.¹⁰⁹ Krasheninnikov stressed that it was not the material reasons that triggered the war but rather a particular form of education. The latter consisted in two things, namely inculcation of the belief that violence is a “state necessity” and the development of military school training. This school “makes Anarchism look like a fearful punishment and presents the state as God.”

The very existence of the state was necessarily linked with the war, in Krasheninnikov’s view. The new type of organized war with new technologies and millions of participants became possible only because of the development of state mechanism. “Chingiskhans with telegraphs”, he wrote, spread their influence across thousands of miles and thanks to the military education turned a free man into their tool”.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the possibility of war existed no matter the monarchic or republican state because of its very essence. The latter, he stressed, consisted in violence of one against the other, in the belief that “without a stick it is not possible to regulate human relations”.¹¹¹

Krasheninnikov stressed that the solution to the problem of war cannot be one-sided. If there is violence inside the state, it will get outside. The only solution to which Krasheninnikov wanted to draw the attention of the socialist government was the change of moral consciousness of the people. He wrote about it in a manner which reminds of Tolstoy’s thought about the reason as the means to unite with the whole life:

¹⁰⁹ Vasiliy Krasheninnikov, “O Procchnom mire: Obraschenie k sotsialistam,” *Yedinenie*, June, 1917, 10.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Only the change of our relation to violence as such whether it is inside or abroad, which means complete refusal to use it as a tool for reaching personal or social justice, can liberate humanity from international bloodletting”. However, this cannot be reached via the unity caused by external motives. The brotherhood of peoples will be real when they unite as the children of one Father, as the holders of common spiritual source of life.¹¹²

The Tolstoyan stance towards the war was elaborated further in the second issue published in July-August in Chertkov’s article “On the end of the war”. To the lively debates about whether or not the war should be led “until the victorious end” Chertkov opposed Tolstoyan position of absolute negation of war without any reference to material interests. Moreover, he noted the general fatigue of war in the Russian people which would not allow the socialist government to lead the war until the victory.

In the article Chertkov again stressed the non-violent character of the Russian people. In his view “the victorious end” anticipated by the Provisional government was unlikely to happen not due to the people’s lack of strength but rather because Russian people had “outgrown the low level of spiritual development needed for winning in a fist fight”.¹¹³ The victory, in Chertkov’s view, could only be possible if the spiritual condition of the Russian people were lowered to “the ruder and mentally-dumber level on which the western European people still stand”.¹¹⁴ New revolutionary socialist authorities, Chertkov noted, aimed precisely to lower that level. However, Chertkov doubted that this influence could stop “upcoming spiritual dawn of the Russian people.”¹¹⁵

Despite this strictly anti-war position Tolstoyans did not support any kind of pacifism. In the same volume Tolstoyans tried to stress their distinct ideological grounds of their protest to the war. In a journal section called “Exchange of Thoughts” which published excerpts of Tolstoyan letters, Nikolai Gusev, a former personal secretary of Tolstoy, in his letter stressed that the anti-war protest should not be based on materialistic justifications. What should be opposed to the

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Vladimir Chertkov, “O prekraschenii voyny,” *Yedinenie*, July-August, 1917, 7.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 8.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

war, he thought, is the protest to any killing as such. It is only on this basis one can build a firm argument against war. It is only the “realm of moral laws, following God’s voice”, Gusev stressed, that is autonomous from “external attacks”.¹¹⁶ Basing on that he objected Pavel Biriukov’s cooperation with the Bolsheviks who “protest to the outside war but preach the war within”.¹¹⁷

To justify his objection Gusev brought an accident when Biriukov in 1906 asked Tolstoy to publish his letter to Alexander 3rd in the “Byloe” journal dedicated to the history of terrorist revolutionary movement. Tolstoy agreed to do that though he did not know what the journal was about. After he had learned this, Tolstoy wrote a letter to Biriukov that he was horrified for participating in the journal “that makes a feat out of killing”.¹¹⁸ Gusev noted that Tolstoy would treat Biriukov’s cooperation with the Bolsheviks in a similarly unsympathetic way. This kind of cooperation, Gusev stressed, is based on the loss of “the most fundamental distinction”, and therefore is illusory and only “harms the cause of truth”.¹¹⁹

In the third issue the journal changed its name from “Yedinenie” to “Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie”. In the publisher’s note it was said that the change was done to distinguish it from “other newspapers with similar names”.¹²⁰ The issue was dedicated to the anniversary of Tolstoy’s birth. There was published a translation of an article about Tolstoyan worldview by a Finnish Tolstoyan, Arvid Ernefeldt.¹²¹ The article, as the preface noted, was known to Tolstoy and he approved it. In it Ernefeldt distinguished five “non-Tolstoyan world views” that propose different visions of social change, namely the church, the state, liberal, social-revolutionary and anarchist. In the socialist vision, Ernefeldt noted, the future society changes on the basis of “an imaginary ideal of comradery relations between people” and the state ownership of the means of

¹¹⁶ Obmen myslei,” *Yedinenie*. July-August, 1917, 14.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ It was not explicitly said what newspapers were meant but one can recall Georgiy Plekhanov’s daily newspaper called “Yedinstvo” [Unity] published from March to October 1917.

¹²¹ Arvid Yernefeldt, “Tolstoy,” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, September, 1917, 7-8.

production.¹²² The main method socialism sees for reaching that future society is revolutionary seizure of power.

Ernefeld criticized socialism along with the rest of “non-Tolstoyan” worldviews for the contradiction between “their future ideal and its realization in the present”.¹²³ All of the methods these worldviews proposed for the future society, Ernefeld argued, create hostile relations among people that only move away from the future ideal. By contrast, Tolstoy’s worldview, Ernefeld claimed, is the only one in which the means are identical to the ends. It is so because Tolstoyism emphasized the present moment as the only space of action. For Ernefeld that emphasis made impossible to act immorally for the sake of some future result. “An aspiration for the good deeds in the present, Ernefeld wrote, cannot be changed for some bad deeds for the future.”¹²⁴ In practice Tolstoyan worldview meant not only to refuse using power over people but also disobeying the commands of the rulers that demand hostile actions in the present for some future purpose.

The fourth issue published an excerpt from a book by Nikolai Emeliyanov entitled “The Organizational Basics of People’s Government” published in 1917 Petrograd. The book’s excerpt that was published was called “Failure of contemporary socialism”. The book was received by the editors of the journal and the information about its author is not clear. In the preface to the excerpt the editors stressed a “disagreement on the role of the state, war and the role of intelligentsia” with the author.¹²⁵ However, they noted, that the book contained “wonderful thoughts” about “the spirit of the Russian people and what it really needed.”¹²⁶

The excerpt presented a theoretical critique of social-democracy. Marxism was described as “one-sided materialistic” and “outdated” teaching. What it could only propose was a destructive

¹²² Ibid, 7.

¹²³ Ibid, 8.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Nikolai Yemeliyanov, “Nesostoyatel’nost’ sovremennogo sotsializma.” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, October, 1917, 8.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

idea of class struggle. All its predictions failed and it lost popularity in the Western world precisely because its negation of spiritual life. These materialistic ideas, Yemelianov stressed triggered only “egoistic” and “low” feelings in the Russian people.¹²⁷ This materialistic socialism, he argued, could be good for “materialistically minded Germans” but it was alien to the Russian people that had “a sublime and even religious” mood.¹²⁸

The soul of the Russian people, Yemelianov claimed, needed not the one-sided materialistic socialism but rather the noble one that speaks about “the higher all-human ideals”. The features of this soul for Yemelianov were mainly its “disrespect to formal laws” and “its aspiration to find laws in consciousness”. Because of these features the materialistic teachings of the Bolsheviks had an enormously dangerous impact on the Russians. Having lost the basis in consciousness, the Russians could not follow formal law and thus turned into beasts. The choice for Russians, Yemelianov urged, was either “living by consciousness” or “being a beast”.¹²⁹ He called to change the nature of socialism. Instead of emphasizing individual and class egoism it should put the interest of the spirit higher than that of the body and call for love and unity of all citizens.

This stress of the journal on the opposition between materialist and spiritual socialism can also be found in the article published in the fifth issue and entitled “Two Freedoms: True and False. An appeal to my fellow villagers”. It was written by a peasant and a close friend of Tolstoy, Mikhail Novikov. In Novikov’s view despite all the political activities, the revolution did not bring happiness to the people. He stressed that in fact revolution could never do this, since the external changes alone cannot bring “salvation, peace and good.”¹³⁰ Redistribution of land, socialization of production, winning elections by itself cannot bring happiness to the people. “when you get the external thing, it always turns into either beautiful soap bubble or a soulless

¹²⁷ Ibid, 9.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Mikhail Novikov. “Dve dushy: istinnaya i lozhnaya. Obraschenie k moim odnosel’chanam.” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, November, 1917, 9.

idol”.¹³¹ Using Tolstoy’s idea, Novikov stressed that it was the divine inner “I” which could provide meaning for life. The nature of this divine “I” allowed being “kind and loving to all living and surrounding, patiently and meekly endure all attacks, grievances, insults and consider any condition neither good nor bad.”¹³²

It was inner self-development, abstinence and spiritual aspiration that for Novikov were the basis of true freedom as opposed to socialist resolutions and programs “imposed by different parties”.¹³³ For Novikov “true socialism”, as the commonality of property, labor and interest, could only be possible if people practiced this Christian kind of freedom. By contrast, Marxist socialism goes against the basics of Christianity. It calls for the struggle and for “rude capture of the other’s property.”¹³⁴ Moreover, Marxist socialism denies spiritual human nature, and considers morality as being fully dependent on economic circumstances. This kind of socialism, even if established by violence, Novikov claimed, “cannot bring peace and well-being to the earth” and would not “last even for a year”.¹³⁵

Marxist socialism would not last, Novikov stressed, simply for the unpreparedness to “unite a personal interest with common interests” and “inability to subjugate the soul and thoughts of humanity to violence and make them universal and equally efficient”.¹³⁶ Moreover, the nature itself creates distinctions and inequalities which are not easy to control. What can possibly make them equal, Novikov claimed, was only the “brotherly love”.¹³⁷ However, in Novikov’s mind, it was exactly the socialist teaching that destroyed this possibility. Novikov saw the influence of socialism on people in their belief in the force of political parties that can make their life better. Similarly to Tolstoy’s criticism of socialism for denying the necessity of moral knowledge, for Novikov people because of socialism forgot that “all evil and good derived from a human

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 10.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

person”.¹³⁸ The salvation, Novikov stressed, lied not in the external political forces but only in the “human spiritual aspiration from the earth to the sky”.¹³⁹

The section of “Exchange of Opinions” in this issue contained a description of the Bolshevik October uprising which gave it a negative contrast with March revolution. The enthusiasm of the first March days was opposed to the October atmosphere of “wrecked buildings, traces of blood and dead bodies taken out”.¹⁴⁰ While the March revolution was done by “the will and consciousness of the people”, the October uprising was done by “party agitation”. The October uprising was presented as artificial and hostile to the religious nature of the Russian people.

That what is done by the people is in the full sense of the word serious and beneficial because it is natural and religious; all that what is done by agitators (an insane part of urban population) is harmful and unnecessary because it is especially alien to our people, God-seeker and freedom-lover.¹⁴¹

In the same section there was a letter of a military doctor about the popularity of the Bolsheviks in the army. In this letter one can see the same narrative of artificial and alien character of socialism. The popularity of the Bolsheviks was due to “deep despise towards the masters” and “people’s ignorance in political matters”.¹⁴² All the socialist initiatives, such as the soviets, committees, revolutionary courts, impose the participation in state affairs on the Russian people. That for the letter’s author was exactly the corruption by power which “Tolstoy wrote about”.¹⁴³ The best possible scenario for Russia he saw in the decay of the state which would allow Russians to define their lives by themselves. What had to be done first of all were the abolishment of compulsory military service and the distribution of land to the peasants.

The editors’ reaction to the October revolution was presented in the appeal called “To the warring Russian people” which originally came out as a brochure and was later published in the six issue. It drew a catastrophic picture of fights in Moscow between the Provisional government

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 11.

¹⁴⁰ “Po povodu bolshevistskogo vosstaniya,” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, November, 1917, 15.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² “O narodopravstve i sammoupravstve.” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, November, 1917, 14.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

and the soviets. In the appeal the editors addressed both sides of the conflict. They urged the supporters of the Provisional government to withdraw from fighting. They called the Provisional government to meet the demands of the workers. Otherwise, they urged, the struggle would only intensify because of the rising discontent among workers.

In their address to the workers and soldiers Tolstoyans reproduced all the basic ideas of Tolstoy. They emphasized that the means to change were in their hands alone. Acquiring peace, land and the liberation from capital, Tolstoyans stressed, depended fully on the will of the people themselves. There was no need to establish a government to acquire these. The new government although elected from the people would be oppressing the people simply because they acquired “violent means of state power”.¹⁴⁴

The violence itself as a method of change could not reach the root of the problem of people’s oppression. Its reason, Tolstoyans emphasized, was not the bourgeoisie but the lack of “agreement” and “conscious attitude towards life” in the people itself.¹⁴⁵ All the torments Russian people were going through Tolstoyans explained by the lack of moral knowledge, of ability to discern “evil and good”.¹⁴⁶ The only means to salvation Tolstoyans saw in “remembering god” that essentially meant “to exalt love and reason in oneself”.¹⁴⁷

The restoration of the death penalty in June 1918 was the most frightening for Tolstoyans. The eighth issue of their journal was almost entirely dedicated to it. Chertkov in his short note “On terror” contrasted the character of the Russian people to the violent repressions of the soviets.¹⁴⁸ He attributed all the Russian political success of the last years to non-violent methods. The peaceful protests in 1905 forced the monarchy to make concessions, while non-violent disobedience of the people triggered its collapse in 1917. The “Red Terror” for Chertkov was not compatible with the Russian character and undermined their support among Russian people.

¹⁴⁴ “K vrazhduyuschim russkim ludyam,” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, December, 1917, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Vladimir Chertkov, “O terrore,” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, July, 1918, 8.

It is necessary to be completely blind and alien to the spirit of the Russian people in order not to see that with such inhumane methods and in general with all the violence committed, the present representatives of the state authorities themselves chop the branch on which they sit.¹⁴⁹

In the same issue of the journal there was published a short note “Why is he not here?”. It was a cry from the heart about all the sufferings Russia was facing at that time: “the whites were tormenting the reds in Vyborg”, “Austrians and Germans rampaging in Ukraine” and CheKa terror against counter-revolutionaries in the center.¹⁵⁰ What could stop all these evils, the author wrote desperately, was the voice of Tolstoy that could “awaken and change the minds of those hiding behind a name of the peasants and workers”.¹⁵¹

The note was followed by Chertkov’s comment called “The help of Tolstoy”.¹⁵² In it he tried to support many Tolstoyans who felt lost and discouraged. Chertkov pointed to Tolstoy’s emphasis on the individual effort as the means of salvation. It was not Tolstoy who should come and bring the salvation but its source lied within each human consciousness. It was the weakness of consciousness that allowed the spread of evil. “All the evils of the socialist government”, Chertkov wrote, were due to “indulgence” and “connivance” of the Russian people.¹⁵³ The evil could be defeated, he argued, only by strengthening of moral consciousness within each person and by spreading “the true enlightenment among the working people”.¹⁵⁴

In fall-winter 1918 the soviet mobilization policies became a practical concern for Tolstoyans. In October 1918 there came a special decree on objectors from the military service that allowed them to serve in sanitary units. By the initiative of Chertkov, Moscow religious communities and groups organized several meetings in which they tried to develop an alternative project of this decree. They aimed to change the decree so that it did not require any service at all for those who object for religious reasons. They sent their appeal to the soviet government. After several

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ “Zachem ego net?” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, July, 1918, 9.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Vladimir Chertkov, “Pomosch Tolstogo,” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, July, 1918, 9.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

discussions in January 1919 there came a new decree on conscientious objection which took into account their proposal.

Due to the active Tolstoyan support of the conscientious objectors there was only one issue of the journal published in 1919. In an article of this issue “Which side would Tolstoy choose?” Nikolai Gusev gave a Tolstoyan position on the Civil War. In it he tried to discern the anti-war character of the Russian people from the military aspirations of the state. Tolstoy, in Gusev’s view, would choose neither the reds nor the whites but rather he would be with the Russian people who “did not want to fight for any state form or the victory of some political party”.¹⁵⁵ The people, Gusev argued, did not care at all for who would be in power, whether socialists or democrats. The people wanted only “its sons not to be conscripted and its produce not to be taken in large amounts”.¹⁵⁶ The form of government and ideology, whether it is socialist or liberal kadet, do not bother the Russian people as long as the state leaves it alone.

Despite all the fears of war and state oppression, Tolstoyans found positive moments in these events. These they noticed not in the external changes but rather in the transformation of people’s consciousness. Tolstoy’s copyist, Samuil Belenkiy, tried to develop this view on the events in his article called “On the Sense of the Russian Revolution”.¹⁵⁷ It’s specifically brutal character, Belinkiy claimed, was rooted in the Russian history. Among the influencing factors he mentioned extremely despotic government, wealth inequality and the total war “which involved and corrupted all the people”.¹⁵⁸

Another important factor for this cruelty, Belenkiy mentioned, was “theory of class struggle and dictatorship of the proletariat”. The meaning of that theory he saw in the principle that “only in violent struggle a worker can make his life better”.¹⁵⁹ Belenkiy described its spread in Russia for

¹⁵⁵ Nikolai Gusev, “Za kogo byl by Tolstoi?” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, January-March, 1919, 4.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Samuil Belenkiy, “O smysle russkoy revolyutsii,” *Golos Tolstogo i Yedinenie*, October-March, 1920, 12.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

the deep hatred towards the rich and the persecution of the state. Once the censorship restrictions fell it became widely spread and reached the places “where no one could read”.¹⁶⁰

Despite all the brutality of the revolution, its sense, Belinkiy stressed, lied in the progress of people’s consciousness which was hidden behind all the events. While the external “conquests” of the revolution might be lost, the most important was that the inner consciousness of the people made its progress. This kind of look makes insignificant the great events like “abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, Lenin and the Civil War.”¹⁶¹ What was of true value in revolution for Belinkiy was “the weakening of patriotism, objection of large masses of soldiers from war, revival of religious thinking in the people.”¹⁶²

Living in this kind of circumstances, Belinkiy noted, is a great happiness but it required a certain skill. The latter was not in trying to meet the momentary demands of the crowd but was rather in understanding the essence of historic movement of consciousness. In clarifying this essence he seems to have captured the general Tolstoyan attitude to life and the period of revolution and the Civil war:

The essence of the ongoing movement is one: to free oneself from the superstitions accumulated over centuries and to establish a new, more accurate understanding of life, and therefore new, better relations between people. And it is in this lies the meaning and purpose of our life in general, and in the time we are experiencing now in particular.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Conclusion

First, I underlined the peculiarity of Tolstoy's thought by using Eric Voegelin's existential approach. In contrast to historiographical visions of Tolstoy's thought as a reflection of Russian peasant condition or a form of political philosophy my first chapter showed it as a reflection of his personal experience. I argued that Tolstoy's thought was rooted in his own experience of conflict between reason and body, and his thought was primarily moral. In contrast to historiographical tendencies to label Tolstoy as some kind of socialist, I argued that Tolstoy was not a socialist but its critic. Tolstoy saw socialism as a false alternative which cannot liberate people since it justified the existing order and did not contain moral knowledge. Tolstoy contrasted to socialism his own idea of liberation through moral personal transformation and disobedience to the state. He saw Russian people as especially suitable for non-violent way of liberation and hoped for the non-violent revolution to happen in Russia.

Second, I showed that Tolstoyans adopted Tolstoy's idea of non-violent essence of the Russian people and his moral critique of socialism. In line with Tolstoy's thought Chertkov tried to emphasize the natural non-violent character of the Russian people in its behavior on the front and during the revolution. Tolstoyans tried to distinguish themselves from socialists and oppose morality to them as the only true means of solving the problems. Even in the protest against the war Tolstoyans tried to stress their ideological distinctiveness. They tried to base their protest on purely moral and spiritual grounds as opposed to socialist and materialistic justifications. When Birukov cooperated with the Bolsheviks it was a thought as forgetfulness of fundamental principles. They perceived the Bolshevik power and its violent methods as artificial and alien to the Russian people. Tolstoyans described socialism as alien to the religious nature of the Russian people. The latter in Tolstoyans' minds were "naturally religious". Death penalty, military

conscription and the Civil War were seen as catastrophic for Tolstoyans. However, they tried to look for deeper meaning of the events which they found in people's progress of consciousness.

By challenging the historiographical vision of ideological proximity of Tolstoyism to socialism, this work contributed to our knowledge of the diversity of religious-political discourses in the late Russian Empire and early Soviet Russia. Tolstoyism may be seen as a different form of "Russia's Reformation" opposed to the Bolshevik vision of based on revolutionary violence, urbanization radical state intervention into the life of the citizens. By contrast Tolstoyism aimed to moral transformation through non-violence, land labor and non-participation in the state affairs. Its anti-modernism and anti-militarism can be seen as an attempt to find moral autonomy in the times of growing militarism, which gave rise to new aspirations of the modern state to control the behavior of its citizens.

Due to the abundance of archival material and fragmentary character of scholarship on Tolstoyism the prospects for future research are broad. There may be further research on the ideology of Tolstoyism. For instance, what was left out of this thesis was the attitudes on socialism of Tolstoyans held prior to the 1917 revolution. It is probable that there might be a difference in the views on socialism between Tolstoy and Tolstoyans since they had close relations with socialists such as Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич and Vladimir Posse. Moreover there might be a difference in the attitudes towards socialism within Tolstoyans themselves in different periods.

The study of the periodical may also be better contextualized. There were many other periodicals in different regions, such as "Istinnaya Svoboda", "Bratstvo", "Obnovlenie zhizni", etc. These might be interesting to compare to the "Voice of Tolstoy and Unity". A fruitful research might also go out of comparison of ideologies of two groups of Tolstoyans, pro-soviet and oppositional. Personal documents of Tolstoyans could allow finding roots of their ideas in their everyday experience. Moreover, one could suggest that there might have been a difference

between their publicly expressed attitudes on socialism found in the periodicals and their opinions in their personal documents.

What is needed the most I think is a more detailed account of Tolstoyan activism in the period of the Civil War from the point of view of social history. This could answer our basic questions about the movement in that period. What was the scope of the movement at that time? Who got attracted to Tolstoyans' message of non-violence after the revolution? How did the local branches of "Societies of true freedom" interact with the people and local soviet authorities? How did Tolstoyan pedagogical experiments work in that time? All these questions are worth researching if one wants to see a more diverse picture of "Russian Reformation" and understand how it was possible for some people to keep and spread the ethics of non-violence in the times of Russian revolution and the Civil War.

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