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Tolstoy's Christian Anarcho-Pacifism: An Exposition

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In the last thirty years of his life, Leo Tolstoy wrote many books, essays and pamphlets expounding his maturing views on violence, the state, the church, and how to improve the human condition. Since then, these 'Christian anarchist' and pacifist views have often been dismissed as utopian or naive, and despite inspiring numerous activists, often forgotten or ignored. This chapter seeks to examine them in greater detail. Tolstoy's political thought is divided into four main themes: pacifism, anarchism, anticlericalism, and activist methods. For each theme, Tolstoy's main contentions are first summed up, then some of their criticisms are discussed, and then some reflections are offered on their ongoing relevance today. The chapter concludes that despite being an odd Christian, an odd pacifist, an odd anarchist and an odd activist, Tolstoy put forward: a compelling denunciation of violence which influenced numerous thinkers and activists; a condemnation of state violence and deception which can be extended to today's globalised political economy; a bitter critique of the church which can be extended to religious institutions of our time; and a method of activism through withdrawal which continues to generate debate and is increasingly adopted by a variety of activists today. In short: Tolstoy's Christian anarcho-pacifist political thought continues to deserve to be taken seriously.

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Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) produced two of the world's most acclaimed works of fiction in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, but at the time of his death was at least as famous for the radical religious and political views he propounded in the last thirty years of his life. These 'Christian anarchist' reflections are sometimes remembered today within pacifist and anarchist circles and in religious studies, but barely known by the general public outside these. This limited knowledge about Tolstoy's Christian anarchist writings might have as much to do with their eccentric radicalism as with their drowning in the downpour of mass violence that submerged the world in the years that followed his death. However, Tolstoy's thoughts, eccentric perhaps but also perceptive and stirring, continue to merit attention in a world in which the violence he abhorred, far from being eradicated, remains both present and threatening.

The aims of this chapter, after a brief contextualisation of Tolstoy's vocabulary, are to both present and muse on the relevance of four central themes emerging from a study of Tolstoy's thought. These are: his pacifism, his anarchism, his anticlericalism and his views on activist methods. Each core section is in three parts: first Tolstoy's main claims on the matter, then a discussion of the criticisms made of these, and then some reflections on how relevant those arguments remain today. What the chapter offers, therefore, is both a hermeneutical reconstruction and a normative evaluation of some thematic consistencies in Tolstoy's thought. My intention is to provide a taster as to why, even if eccentric in his Christianity, in his anarchism, indeed in his pacifism and in his anticlericalism, Tolstoy remains an engaging thinker when considering twenty-first century challenges.[1]

[1] The chapter thus presents a much shorter version of the discussion articulated in Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought: Christian Anarcho-Pacifist Iconoclasm Then and Now* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020). In the book, the more exhaustive presentations of what Tolstoy said are illustrated with numerous quotations from his writings; the discussions of criticisms and contemporary relevance are developed in greater detail and with extensive references to relevant scholarship; and a fifth central theme, asceticism (including his views on sex and marriage, intoxicating luxuries and meat-eating, and art), is presented and discussed. The book also sets Tolstoy's arguments in their historical and intellectual contexts. This chapter here summarises and presents in open access format several of the main arguments developed in the book.

Tolstoy's 'Christian' vocabulary

Before embarking on the main body of this chapter, however, a few words about Tolstoy's vocabulary and what led him to it are in order.[2] There is no space here to narrate in detail the biographical and intellectual trajectory that led Tolstoy to his Christian anarcho-pacifist conclusions, but in short: although several core arguments had been slowly germinating for decades, Tolstoy cemented his political views in the late 1870s, after an increasingly intense existential crisis which he eventually resolved through a renewed engagement with Christianity.[3]

However, the 'Christianity' to which Tolstoy thereby 'converted', and upon which his anarcho-pacifism would be based, was unconventional. Tolstoy was not interested in supernatural claims or even in Jesus' resurrection, but only in what he considered rational

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[2] To reiterate what I said in *Tolstoy's Political Thought* (xiii) about language: "I ought to confess that my command of Russian is very limited. I have, however, sought help from Russian speakers and consulted the best sources I could when particular translated words needed closer investigation. This also explains why my references to Tolstoy's writings are not to the 'PSS' (*Полное собрание сочинений*) or Jubilee Edition version, but to the translations I read and studied. As a polyglot, I am aware that to translate is also partly already to interpret. But good translations can convey an author's original intention faithfully. The English translations I have used have in most cases been widely praised by specialists, indeed sometimes by Tolstoy himself. It might be that sometimes the original Russian reveals a slightly different nuance to what I have presented, but I have tried my best to avoid misrepresenting Tolstoy's views."

[3] Tolstoy recounts his intensifying crisis in "A Confession," in *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, trans. Jane Kentish (London: Penguin, 1987). Good critical introductions to various aspects of Tolstoy's biographical and intellectual trajectory include: Rosamund Bartlett, *Tolstoy: A Russian Life* (London: Profile, 2010); E. B. Greenwood, *Tolstoy: The Comprehensive Vision* (London: Methuen, 1975); Richard F. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstóy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930); Inessa Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time: A Biography of a Long Conversion, 1845–1887* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008); Donna Tussing Orwin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Henri Troyat, *Léon Tolstoï* (Paris: Fayard, 1965); A. N. Wilson, *Tolstoy: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1988).

and helpful in the Bible, which essentially consisted in Jesus' ethical teaching and not much else. Anything that appeared irrational in the Bible and in the church's teaching, he discounted or explained away on rational terms. I have argued elsewhere that one could therefore classify Tolstoy as a 'deist': he reduced religion to morality, and from its cosmology could only keep what he deemed made rational sense.[4]

Tolstoy thus came to view a meaningful life as one which seeks to embody the kind of exemplary moral conduct preached and illustrated by Jesus. He would henceforth spend the remainder of his life expounding the political implications he derived from this ethical position. The political arguments he would elaborate would therefore frequently invoke Jesus and Christianity, but it is important to remember that what Tolstoy meant when he used such religious vocabulary was always filtered by his zealously rationalistic, moralising and deistic reading of those terms. Hence even if he did not mean what is conventionally understood by terms like 'God', 'resurrection', 'revelation', 'kingdom of God' and so on, he still used those words as if to deliberately appropriate and restore them to what he saw as their proper meaning. His embrace of traditional Christian vocabulary might also be partly tactical, donning the mantle of the prophet to entice his predominantly Christian readers to his political views.

The irony is that if his adoption of Christian vocabulary was an attempt to broaden his appeal and align a widespread worldview with his political agenda, precisely this religious content has since become a barrier to many readers. He meant to address all human beings, but his inclination to invoke Christian language can put off many potential converts to his *political* thought. Bearing in mind this caveat about Tolstoy's religious vocabulary helps unshackle Tolstoy's political thought from its apparent confinement to Christianity.[5]

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[4] Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, "Leo Tolstoy's Anticlericalism and Its Contemporary Extensions: A Case against Churches and Clerics, Religious and Secular," *Religions* 7/5 (2016); Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, introduction.

[5] A more thorough discussion of Tolstoy's treatment of traditional Christian terms can be found in Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, introduction and chap. 3.

I – Pacifism

The pivotal theme in Tolstoy's Christian anarchist writings is his rejection of violence.[6] Upon it rest his anarchism, his activist preferences and (indirectly) his anticlericalism.

Tolstoy's claims

The teaching of Jesus that influenced Tolstoy the most was his call, in the Sermon on the Mount, to "turn the other cheek" to whomever strikes you on the right cheek. Reflecting on this passage, on the many other sayings of Jesus on love and forgiveness, and on the violence that is plaguing human relations, Tolstoy came to the view that violence is always wrong, always a mistake, always counter-productive.[7] Violence, for Tolstoy, always generates more violence, because those to whom violence is done will feel anger and resentment, will not see the justice of the violence

[6] On Tolstoy's pacifism, see for instance: Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, "Turning the Other Cheek to Terrorism: Reflections on the Contemporary Significance of Leo Tolstoy's Exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount," *Politics and Religion* 1/1 (2008); Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), chap. 1; Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*; George Kennan, "A Visit to Count Tolstoi," *The Century Magazine* 34/2 (1887); Colm McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism* (Amherst, New York: Cambria, 2009). In his own writings, Tolstoy returns to his pacifist arguments repeatedly, but perhaps the more helpful introductions are the following: Leo Tolstoy, "The Beginning of the End," in *Tolstoy's Writings on Civil Disobedience and Non-Violence*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New York: Bergman, 1967); Leo Tolstoy, "The End of the Age: An Essay on the Approaching Revolution," in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. David Stephens, trans. Vladimir Tchertkoff (London: Phoenix, 1990); Leo Tolstoy, "I Cannot Be Silent," in *Recollections and Essays*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1937); Leo Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You: Christianity Not as a Mystical Doctrine but as New Understanding of Life," in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001); Tolstoy, "The Law of Love and the Law of Violence."

[7] For Tolstoy's exegesis, see in particular: Leo Tolstoy, *What I Believe <"My Religion">*, trans. Fyvie Mayo (London: C. W. Daniel, 1902); Leo Tolstoy, "The Gospel in Brief," in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

they suffered, and will therefore seek violent retaliation further down the line. Violence for Tolstoy only ever feeds a vicious cycle.

For Tolstoy, Jesus proposes a radically different, indeed revolutionary method to overcome this vicious cycle. That is, when violence or injustice is done against you, do not strike back, but respond with love, forgiveness and generosity. Only that way, Tolstoy interprets Jesus to have said, can the cycle of violence be broken.

Implicit in this response is the attempt to see, respect and address the human being in the person committing evil and violence – in other words a refusal to dehumanise that enemy. A loving and forgiving response is not what the violent enemy expects. Instead of treating that enemy with anger and disdain, a forgiving response treats them with unexpected magnanimity and respect, which in turn opens the possibility for reconciliation.

Tolstoy relates that teaching of Jesus with another theme which he returns to a number of times in the gospels: the counsel not to judge one another lest we be judged by that same measure, not to criticise our neighbour for a mote in their eye when there is a beam in ours, the related story of the adulteress about to be stoned, and so on. For Tolstoy, what Jesus means is that we are all imperfect and sinful ourselves, so we should refrain from judging others too quickly. This in turn makes it all the more important not to use violence in acting upon that potentially mistaken and hypocritical judgement.

Tolstoy's implicit hope is that a virtuous cycle of love and forgiveness can be superimposed on to the vicious cycle of violence and revenge. Both cycles are contagious and inspire responses in kind. With enough courageous forgivers, perhaps the cycle of violence can one day be overpowered and overcome.

What is also implicit in this Tolstoyan reading is that we should forego any attempt to teach morality top-down through the use (or threat) of coercion, but instead that we should seek to teach by example. Just as we learn to use coercive means to try to reach our ends in a world in which others do the same, the hope is that enough exemplars of patient love and forgiveness can just as mimetically inspire that same behaviour too.

Of course, that is not easy, and Tolstoy recognises that. Indeed it takes courage to respond lovingly to someone who commits

an injustice against you. The kneejerk reaction is to be angry and violent in return. More courageous is the attempt to rise above these feelings and respond with patience and hope, leaving yourself vulnerable yet resolute in the refusal to be driven by the understandable drive towards anger and retaliation. Responding to evil with love is an act of courage, not cowardice.

Criticisms

Is this teaching impossibly utopian? Certainly mainstream theology has laboured to argue that Jesus could not have meant this teaching literally, and that it is too difficult and unrealistic to follow in this life – as if there would be any need for it in paradise (or hell, for that matter).[8] For Tolstoy, such replies are copouts which betray Jesus' teaching. He writes:

> It may be affirmed that the constant fulfilment of this rule is difficult, and that not every man will find his happiness in obeying it. It may be said that it is foolish; that, as unbelievers pretend, Jesus was a visionary, an idealist, whose impracticable rules were only followed because of the stupidity of his disciples. But it is impossible not to admit that Jesus did say very clearly and definitely that which he intended to say: namely, that men should not resist evil; and that therefore he who accepts his teaching cannot resist.[9]

It might be foolish and difficult, but Jesus clearly calls his followers to respond to evil with love. Indeed, Jesus exemplified that teaching himself, right unto his very death. The essence of Jesus' teaching is about love and forgiveness, even if many of his official followers – despite otherwise venerating him as the Son of

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[8] Eric Mader, *Tolstoy's Gospel*, available from http://www.necessaryprose.com/tolstoysgospel.htm (accessed 16 September 2010); David Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels: A Critical Study* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992), 166–167; Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy: Later Years*, Second ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1911), 352–367; McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, chap. 4; Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Quest for God* (London: Transaction, 2007), 120–123; Alexander Root, *God and Man According to Tolstoy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," chap. 2.

[9] Tolstoy, *What I Believe*, 18–19.

God, as the Christ, as God incarnate – have decided that he could not have really meant that.

Still, Jesus may have preached this, but that does not mean the teaching is sensible – especially to non-Christians. Here, though, Tolstoy's argument is that surely, we have seen enough tit-for-tat violence in history, surely violence has been shown to have been such a catastrophic failure in teaching morality or approximating justice, that perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves of this (admittedly high) ideal which Jesus advocated. It might be near impossible, but does that mean that no attempts at all should be made in trying to approach it? It might be utopian, but at least, the Tolstoyan argument goes, it sets an ideal to try to genuinely work towards. Besides, perhaps Tolstoy's pacifism can also be considered 'utopian' in the less dismissive sense articulated by Ruth Levitas: as an invitation to think differently and reconsider prevalent automatic assumptions about violence.[10] Just because the maximalist programme might be unrealistic does not render ineligible any critiquing of the status quo and sympathising with some of the arguments gesturing towards a different direction.

There is, of course, a potentially more devastating criticism, and it usually comes in the form of a question. That is: what would you do, then, if a child was under attack? Or how do would you deal with Hitler? Surely there is a limit to how far you can be loving and pacific? Where, then, should that line be drawn?[11]

Tolstoy did consider this line of criticism. One response was to note that the choice is not necessarily a dichotomous one between violence and passivity. Other, more creative responses are possible

[10] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Second ed. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010); Mathias Thaler, "Peace as a Minor, Grounded Utopia: On Prefigurative and Testimonial Pacifism," *Perspectives on Politics* (2019).

[11] Iain Atack, *Nonviolence in Political Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 161; Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), 47–51; Dustin Ells Howes, "The Failure of Pacifism and the Success of Nonviolence," *Perspectives on Politics* 11/2 (2013), 429; McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, 116; Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Quest for God*, 119; Ronald Sampson, "Tolstoy on Power," *Journal of the Conflict Research Society* 1/2 (1977), 68; Ernest J. Simmons, *Tolstoy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1973), 174.

too. After all, Tolstoy's most famous follower was Gandhi (although Tolstoy was not Gandhi's only inspiration: the Bhagavad Gita, Buddhism, Jainism, Thoreau and Ruskin were important too), and Gandhi demonstrated that what might start as an uncompromising Tolstoyan line on nonviolence could be translated into a political tactic to resist injustice.[12] Whether Tolstoy preached absolute *non-resistance*, something closer to Gandhian *nonviolent resistance*, or indeed something more ambivalent, will be considered below. What is relevant here is that the first element of an answer is to point out that there are options between passive capitulation and enraged retaliation – such as interposing one's body, trying to engage verbally, calmly and rationally with the assailant, and indeed reacting by metaphorically turning the other cheek in an effort to expose the injustice and surprise the attacker into thinking again about the intended action.

However, this will not suffice in every situation. Such creative replies may transform the situation if only in the longer run, but equally they might not. What then? Would the nonviolent Tolstoyan cowardly let the injustice unfold? Tolstoy tended to avoid a frontal answer to this question. When he did confront it, he sometimes stuck to his unflinching pacifism, and other times wobbled and conceded that in the most extreme cases an exception may be needed.[13] He perhaps knew that he himself could probably not commit to turning his cheek in the worst and most challenging situations, but was wary of the thin edge of the wedge. Once the justness of violence is conceded in extreme situations, opportunists quickly emerge to expand the range of scenarios, and before long an aggressive act is justified as measured and appropriate when clearly, for Tolstoy, it is not.

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[12] Martin Green, *Tolstoy and Gandhi, Men of Peace* (New York, NY: Basic, 1983); Martin Green, *The Origins of Nonviolence: Tolstoy and Gandhi in the Historical Setting* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986); A. L. Herman, "Satyagraha: A New Indian Word for Some Old Ways of Western Thinking," *Philosophy East and West* 19/2 (1969); Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Gandhi: Aux Sources De La Non-Violence* (Paris: Félin, 1998), part 3; Janko Lavrin, "Tolstoy and Gandhi," *Russian Review* 19/2 (1960); Tolstoy, "Gandhi Letters"; Tolstoy, "A Letter to a Hindu".

[13] For a fuller exposition of this, see Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, 38–42.

Moreover, for Tolstoy, it is also worth reflecting on what is enabled when conceding the argument about exceptional predators needing exceptional measures. Tolstoy writes:

> I have never, except in discussions, encountered that fantastic brigand who before my eyes desired to kill or violate a child, but […] I perpetually did and do see not one but millions of brigands using violence towards children and women and men and old people and all the labourers, in the name of a recognized right to do violence to their fellows.[14]

In other words, according to Tolstoy, those child-attackers and Hitlers may exist and might need to be anticipated, but we also need to remember that the violence which, out of fear of relatively infrequent evildoers, we authorise the arms of the state to inflict, is carried out on an industrial scale, and much more regularly. This defence does not quite respond to the question directly, but it is worth remembering the dangers of cold, industrial, state-driven violence and the risks of it being misused when we readily legitimise the existence of such an armed administrative giant on the back of fears of exceptionally horrible people. Still, it is difficult to deny that Tolstoy's answer is not entirely satisfactory, and perhaps his uncompromising rhetoric on nonviolence does need to be relaxed in genuinely extreme cases.

In any case, much as Tolstoy generally takes an uncompromising line on his ideals, he does at times recognise that compromise is often likely in practice. This might seem paradoxical, but for him it is precisely because people will fall short in practice that the ideal must remain absolute. He writes: "It's impossible to admit the slightest compromise over an idea. Compromise will inevitably come in practice, and therefore it's all the less possible to admit it in theory."[15] For Tolstoy, "The whole point is in the constant effort to approach the ideal" – however stringent.[16] Something

[14] Tolstoy, "Introduction to a Short Biography of William Lloyd Garrison," 534.

[15] Tolstoy, quoted in R. F. Christian, "Introduction," in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 12.

[16] Tolstoy, quoted in M. J. de K. Holman, "The Purleigh Colony: Tolstoyan Togetherness in the Late 1890s," in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 218.

between non-resistance and nonviolence should therefore always be the aim, even it cannot always be achieved in practice.

A separate difficulty with Tolstoy's criticism of violence is that he provides no clear definition of what he means by 'violence'. It seems quite clear from his writings that he is mostly referring to physical violence (as illustrated by the smiting of cheeks), or at least the compelling of someone to do as another decrees. But this could be seen as too narrow. What about psychological, structural or verbal violence, for instance? Indeed, is Tolstoy, in his passionate denunciations, not arguably violent sometimes?[17] Possibly. But Tolstoy's primary concern is the physical violence that human beings inflict on their fellows. His arguments can often be extended to other forms of violence, and with his anarchism Tolstoy himself does extend it to some forms of structural violence in particular, but his primary wish was to reduce the injuries and suffering caused by tangible, physical violence.

Relevance today

As already noted, Tolstoy's writings on nonviolence influenced Gandhi – who in turn inspired many of the nonviolent activists of the twentieth century. They also encouraged numerous conscientious objectors to compulsory military conscription. Some commentators thus see Tolstoy as one of the significant (if often overlooked) ancestors of the pacifist movement, through which his thought therefore exerts an indirect influence today.[18]

There are also people nowadays who, like Tolstoy, see Jesus as an interesting moral teacher – people who are not necessarily comfortable with some of the doctrines of Christianity but who find in Jesus some worthy and thought-provoking ethical teachings.[19] And even if the Christian community at large has not

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[17] Charlotte Alston, *Tolstoy and His Disciples: The History of a Radical International Movement* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 161–162; McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, 195; Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, 672–673.

[18] Atack, *Nonviolence in Political Theory*; Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Peter Brock, *The Roots of War Resistance: Pacifism from the Early Church to Tolstoy* (New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1981).

[19] Neil Carter, *Five Times When Jesus Sounded Like a Humanist* (Patheos), available from http://www.patheos.com/blogs/godlessindixie/

quite led the pacifist revolution one could have expected from those who ostensibly took up their cross and followed Jesus, some Christian communities and individuals have nevertheless made efforts in that direction. Then again, the Christian tradition is also responsible for originating Just War Theory – for Tolstoy, a blatant betrayal of the teaching of Jesus.

In any case, it remains important to unmask and denounce the violence that can be committed by today's powers, especially when committed in our name. Democratic states have not always been honest and fair in administering their power over their own citizenry or indeed abroad, yet that violence is committed in the name of their citizens. Perhaps too few such citizens speak out against some of the miscarriages of justice, abuses of power, violent repressions and other violent actions carried out in the name of order and stability. Tolstoy would rail against those, and expect Christians to do so too. This is all the more important given that the instruments of industrial violence are much more lethal today: not just have nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons been invented and used since Tolstoy's death, but the tentacles of surveillance reach further than ever before. When human institutions can wield such power, it seems crucial than we reflect on the violence they can inflict and whether it is truly necessary.

Furthermore, the view that ethical behaviour can be taught by legislation ultimately resting on coercion has not subsided. Yet do we really behave morally only because deviance from those morals will be punished, or do we behave morally because of the intrinsic validity of moral standards and because others have taught us their value by their example? More generally, a variety of studies in social psychology, criminology, pedagogy, and indeed political science and thought have tended to reinforce the case against any rushed resort to violence in attempting to resolve particular

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2016/10/09/five-times-when-jesus-sounded-like-a-humanist/ (accessed 28 August 2018); Tom Krattenmaker, *Confessions of a Secular Jesus Follower: Finding Answers in Jesus for Those Who Don't Believe* (New York: Convergent, 2016); Peter Turner, *Zingcreed: A Christian-Atheist Polemic*, available from https://zingcreed.wordpress.com/ (accessed 24 August 2018 2018); Ken Schei, *An Atheist for Jesus: A Personal Journey of Discovery*, Second ed. (San Diego: Synthesis, 2008).

problems.[20] Tolstoy, in a sense, expressed a concern that anticipated these waves of scholarship.

In short, Tolstoy's pacifist thought invites us to reconsider our assumptions on how to approximate justice and morality. Whether individually or collectively, we readily assume that coercion, retaliation and punishment are appropriate methods, yet these methods frequently fail to prevent further violence. Given the harm that our own violence can cause, we could arguably be more reflective and probing before resorting to violence.

II – Anarchism

There have been enough hints of this so far: Tolstoy was an anarchist. That is, he saw it as an inevitable extension of his faithful pacifism that the state and its allegedly legitimate monopoly over the use of violence had to be denounced and rejected.[21]

Tolstoy's claims

The state, as Weber would famously observe years after Tolstoy's death, can be defined as the monopoly over the (allegedly) legitimate use of violence over a particular territory.[22] For Tolstoy, anarchism therefore follows logically from the teaching of Jesus:

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[20] Extensive references to these are given in Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, 52–54.

[21] On Tolstoy's anarchism, see for instance: Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, "Leo Tolstoy on the State: A Detailed Picture of Tolstoy's Denunciation of State Violence and Deception," *Anarchist Studies* 16/1 (2008); Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, chap. 2; Paul Eltzbacher, "Tolstoi's Teaching," in *Anarchism* (Radford VA: Wilder, 2011); Terry Hopton, "Tolstoy, God and Anarchism," *Anarchist Studies* 8 (2000); George Woodcock, "The Prophet," in *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975). Tolstoy's own writings particularly focused on anarchism include: David Stephens, ed., *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism* (London: Phoenix, 1990); Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You"; Tolstoy, "An Appeal to Social Reformers"; Leo Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," in *Essays from Tula*, trans. Free Age Press (London: Sheppard, 1948); Tolstoy, "On Anarchy".

[22] Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).

a consistent application of that teaching on violence cannot but threaten the state. In his own words: "Christianity in its true sense puts an end to the State. It was so understood from its very beginning, and for that Christ was crucified." [23] According to Tolstoy, Jesus' teaching was always implicitly subversive of structures resting on violence or the threat of it, which the authorities of his day understood and had to punish him publicly for.

Tolstoy is suspicious of the state, including when nominally democratic. Democratic or not, the state uses physical violence and the threat of it, does not love its enemies, and judges its citizens – all of which Tolstoy sees as clear contraventions of Jesus' teaching and as ultimately irrational and unjust. Indeed, majority rule, for Tolstoy, does not guarantee the attainment of justice any better than other systems:

> When among one hundred men, one rules over ninety-nine, it is unjust, it is a despotism; when ten rule over ninety, it is equally unjust, it is an oligarchy; but when fifty-one rule over forty-nine (and this is only theoretical, for in reality it is always ten or eleven of these fifty-one), it is entirely just, it is freedom! Could there be anything funnier, in its manifest absurdity, than such reasoning? And yet it is this very reasoning that serves as the basis for all reformers of the political structure.[24]

Put differently: the tyranny of a majority is still tyranny. In majority rule, laws can still be imposed on an unwilling minority.

For Tolstoy, however, "'[l]aws are rules, made by people who govern by means of organised violence for non-compliance with which the non-complier is subjected to blows, to loss of liberty, or even to being murdered.'"[25] Laws are enforced through violence or the threat of it. Yet for him, there is no way of justifying someone's violence as more legitimate than another's. In typically syllogistic fashion, he says:

> One of two things: either people are rational beings or they are irrational beings. If they are irrational beings, then they are all irrational, and then everything among them is decided by violence, and

[23] Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 259.
[24] Tolstoy, "The Law of Love and the Law of Violence," 165.
[25] Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," 112.

> there is no reason why certain people should, and others should not, have a right to use violence. In that case, governmental violence has no justification. But if men are rational beings, then their relations should be based on reason, and not on the violence of those who happen to have seized power. In that case, again, governmental violence has no justification.[26]

For Tolstoy, it is simply wrong to inflict violence on other human beings, because they are as capable as us of thinking rationally and being reasoned with. Moral behaviour cannot be taught by coercion – although what coercion might inadvertently teach is that coercion is a way of getting others to do as you wish.

Moreover, Tolstoy argues that the state system is so arranged that it becomes easy to think that somebody else is responsible for state violence:

> At the bottom of the social ladder soldiers with rifles, revolvers, and swords, torture and murder men and by those means compel them to become soldiers. And these soldiers are fully convinced that the responsibility for their deed is taken from them by the officers who order those actions. At the top of the ladder the Tsars, presidents, and ministers, decree these tortures and murders and conscriptions. And they are fully convinced that since they are either placed in authority by God, or the society they rule over demands such decrees from them, they cannot be held responsible.
>
> Between these extremes are the intermediate folk who superintend the acts of violence and the murders and the conscriptions of the soldiers. And these, too, are fully convinced that they are relieved of all responsibility, partly because orders received by them from their superiors, and partly because such orders are expected from them by those on the lower steps of the ladder.[27]

Because we are all mere cogs in a complex machine, we absolve ourselves from the less laudable 'outputs' of that machinery – if we even know about those at all. This is obviously dangerous in that the productive efforts of all the agents who constitute this structure can be harnessed towards goals which most of them

[26] Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," 119, Tolstoy's emphasis.
[27] Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 351.

would not pursue themselves, but which they let be pursued by the broader structure and those who control it.

Ultimately, Tolstoy joins other thinkers in reckoning that the real purpose of the state's coercive apparatus is to protect the loot of the elite, both that stolen in wars of adventure abroad and that stolen from the fruits of labourers' labour. Indeed for Tolstoy, the capitalist system amounts to wage slavery for the many. As he puts it:

> If the slave-owner of our time has not slave John, whom he can send to the cess-pool to clear out his excrements, he has five shillings of which hundreds of Johns are in such need that the slave-owner of our times may choose anyone out of hundreds of Johns and be a benefactor to him by giving him the preference, and allowing him, rather than another, to climb down into the cess-pool.[28]

The system is arguably more perverse, because, to most Western audiences at least, the fact of enslavement is mostly hidden. Today's slave Johns might be in China or Brazil, and today's slave-owners might be anonymous investments funds, but this merely hides better from the average saver and producer the raw implications of their relationship. The employment contract might allegedly be signed between equal parties, but it is not equal, because those who own property can own slaves and those who do not, cannot. Again like other Marxists, socialists and anarchists, Tolstoy sees property distribution as the basis of an asymmetric and unjust system. For him, though, private property is not nefarious only because of the unequal economic relations it institutionalises, but also because it generates greed, covetousness and a concomitant moral depravity – and this, among both the haves and the have-nots.

In the end, Tolstoy argued, the state works like a protection racket:

> Governments, justifying their existence on the ground that they ensure a certain kind of safety to their subjects, are like the Calabrian robber-chief who collected a regular tax from all who wished to travel in safety along the highways.[29]

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[28] Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," 95.

[29] Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," 124–125.

Each state justifies the maintenance of its army as a necessary defence against ill-intentioned foreigners, but "that is what all governments say of one another," so that in the end, "[t]he power of the State, far from saving us from attacks by our neighbours, is on the contrary itself the cause of the danger of such attacks."[30]

Tolstoy therefore despises the state because it is an institution which is violent, unjust and protects the interests of a narrow elite against those of the very masses that constitute it. Tolstoy's pacifism, along with his analysis of the political economy and the mechanics of collective actions, leads him to his anarchism.

Yet the state is also only 'what we make of it': it is constituted by its agents. In democratic states in particular, the violence committed by the state is violence we commit against one another through it – the state commits it in our name.

Tolstoy reckons we could do much better. It is evident from his corpus – not just the Christian anarchist parts – that he held much respect and admiration for the rural life of contemporary Russian peasants. For him, small communities organised around agricultural labour were far better politically and morally than modern industrial society.[31] One senses traces of Rousseau – whom he deeply admired – in Tolstoy's nostalgic eulogy for the smaller communities which have been increasingly swallowed by the onward march of industrial progress and political consolidation. Either way, Tolstoy advocates modes of communal life independent from the state.

Criticisms

One criticism that can be made of Tolstoy's anarchism, as for many of his views, is that it is too rigid in its black-and-white logic, too simplistic, too categorical. Tolstoy can indeed be a little disingenuous in his illustrations and comparisons, and perhaps he is wrong in rejecting every possible state just because it can

[30] Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 199.

[31] This partly explains his attraction to dissenting Christian sects like the Doukhobors: Matthew S. Adams and Luke Kelly, "George Woodcock and the Doukhobors: Peasant Radicalism, Anarchism and the Canadian State," *Intellectual History Review* 28/3 (2018).

sometimes be violent. Then again, what he says about state violence does seem to hold when the state is indeed violent, and every state – democratic or not – has shown itself capable of adopting such violence. Hence Tolstoy might be too quick to condemn the state, but his observations about state violence might still hold true when the state does adopt such violence – which might be more often than we like to remember.

Nevertheless, some might say, the state today is not just police and prisons and armies – at its best it is also health care and education and social and economic safety nets. Are these public goods not worth preserving? Tolstoy died before a lot of those emerged – would he not revise his rejection of the state now? Perhaps. Yet it is also worth remembering that ever since the rise of uninhibited 'neoliberal capitalism' in the 1980s, that facet of the state is being actively eroded (and this, in those instances where it was quite developed in the first place), whereas its machinery of surveillance, repression and war is decisively spreading its tentacles. Not all that the state does is bad from a caring and loving perspective, yet its core business remains law-making along with its apparatus of coercion and violence. States that fail to perform that protective role are seen as failing in their core mission. Whatever else the state does, it can only start operating if it does monopolise the officially legitimate mechanisms of violence.

Another line of criticism typically levied against anarchists consists in commenting that (representative) democracy, however imperfect, is still the best system we know. Churchill's words are often quoted: "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time".[32] Perhaps. Yet is this not a rather damning condemnation of human creativity and humanity's collective potential? If representative democracies plagued with voter disenfranchisement, fuelled by partisan funding and whipped by the media into a celebrity-spectacle is the best we can really do, then so be it. Yet some think democracy can be more than such a façade, that it can be more direct and participative, more ambitious and more accoun-

[32] Winston Churchill, *Churchill by Himself: The Definitive Collection of Quotations* (London: Ebury, 2008), 574.

table. More deeply democratic forms of government like these have been experimented with in smaller-scale towns and movements and various organisations. Could some such experiments not be improved and expanded? Is representative democracy as practiced in the West today really satisfactory enough to stop aiming for better? Tolstoy would encourage us to think otherwise, to be more ambitious and aspiring.

And yet, some have put it to Tolstoy, surely the state is needed to deal with criminals, with foreign aggression, and to regulate human interaction?[33] Perhaps. But does this really prevent criminality and aggression – does it really act as the deterrent it is proclaimed to be? Does it even come close to eradicating these problems in the long run? Human interactions do not necessarily require the threat of violence to follow certain agreed customs, and criminality and injustice are not that particularly successfully prevented by the state and its dedicated apparatus. Indeed various experiments in restorative justice have provided plenty of arguments for more creative approaches to dealing with criminality and aggression than the model which projects some sort of allegedly caring and wise, but strict and often authoritarian, parent.

Relevance today

Today's 'state' does, it is true, look very different to that of Tolstoy's day. It is bigger, more far-reaching, and can administer violence even more lethally and clinically, and it has depersonalised and institutionalised the functions of government even further. The agents of the state arguably have even less sight today of the eventual impact of the policies they contribute to as mere cogs of an extensive machine. In short: the state has evolved and looks very different today than in Tolstoy's Russia, yet its coercive machinery is stronger than ever.

Furthermore, the apparatus of oppression equivalent today to what Tolstoy criticises as the 'state' is broader and more complicated

[33] Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," 112, 118; Tolstoy, "The Law of Love and the Law of Violence," 210; Tolstoy, "Letter to Ernest Howard Crosby," 188; Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 197–199, 263–267.

than can be encapsulated by the notion of 'state'. Just as the target of anarchist criticism has evolved from the nineteenth-century focus on the state to a broader network of globalised structures of patriarchy and oppression underpinned by the state but also including economic, cultural and other elements, so can Tolstoy's anarchism be applied more broadly today to this broader variety of inter-related structures of oppression. Indeed Tolstoy's anarchist critique of political violence and deception might be even more important in the twenty-first century given the globalised scale of the phenomena he wrote about and given the critical analyses of capitalism, gender and ethnicity (among others) which have been articulated since his death. Even if it is no longer as central a focus of anarchist ire as it was among the anarchists of Tolstoy's days, the state underpins a variety of structures of oppression.

These days, nonetheless, concrete state violence – including in democracies – comes in many varieties, including for instance police at demonstrations, visible walls such as borders or invisible walls between classes, war, prisons, and the expanding criminalisation of deviant behaviour. In all these examples, agents of the state can and not-so-infrequently do inflict physical violence on human beings, directly and indirectly. And yet today perhaps more than ever before, those agents of the state are led to dissociate themselves from any responsibility in those acts: one person signs the form, another moves the outlaw, another decides how they shall be treated, and so on, such that the administration of state violence ultimately appears impersonal and anonymous, and its agents see responsibility resting elsewhere in the system. And yet in democratic states in particular, what the state does, it does in the name of its *demos*, meaning it is all the more important for that *demos* to be fully conscious of the full picture of state activity.

Some anarchists have questioned Tolstoy's inclusion in the anarchist tradition (for instance due to his 'Christianity' or to his absence from concrete contemporary anarchist struggles), but many consider him one of the many voices illustrating its sheer diversity.[34] His denunciation of state violence and deception did

[34] A fuller discussion of this, with extensive references, is provided in Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, 94–95.

also draw respect from anarchists such as Goldman, Guérin and Kropotkin. Tolstoy moreover constitutes one of the main voices within the *Christian* anarchist tradition. In the wider Christian community, he has helped establish the credibility of a specifically anarchist reading of Jesus' teaching and example. Furthermore, Tolstoy also helped clear the path for a specifically pacifist avenue to anarchism, preparing the ground for a *rapprochement* between the two perspectives in the 1950s and 60s. In short, although Tolstoy presents anarchist arguments that can be found in other anarchists too, he nevertheless articulates an anarchism which cohabits with a justifiable reading of Christianity, which is specifically pacifist, and which concentrates in particular on denouncing both state violence and the various processes and excuses that help the human agents of that violence evade their moral responsibility for it.

III – Anticlericalism

Tolstoy's conclusions about the central meaning of Jesus' teaching led him to reflect on why this understanding of it was not advocated more visibly by Jesus' official followers, and this in turn led him to the conclusion that the church (or at least most orthodox churches and certainly his contemporary Russian Orthodox Church) had belied and betrayed that teaching and its mission – a message he was eager for Christians in particular to hear.[35]

[35] For Tolstoy's views on religion and the church, see for instance: Christoyannopoulos, "Tolstoy's Anticlericalism"; Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, chap. 3; E. B. Greenwood, "Tolstoy and Religion," in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*; G. M. Hamburg, "Tolstoy's Spirituality," in *Anniversary Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels*; Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time*. Tolstoy's own writings articulating his anticlericalism include: Leo Tolstoy, "A Reply to the Synod's Edict of Excommunication, and to Letters Received by Me Concerning It," in *On Life and Essays on Religion*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); Lev N. Tolstóy, "Critique of Dogmatic Theology," in *The Complete Works of Count Tolstóy: My Confession; Critique of Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Leo Wiener, trans. Leo Wiener (Boston: Dana Estes, 1904); Tolstoy, "The Restoration

Tolstoy's claims

For Tolstoy, this betrayal of Jesus is typified by Emperor Constantine's 'conversion' to Christianity, when instead of adapting the empire to Christianity, the latter was adapted beyond recognition to suit the interests of the former. Ever since that conversion, the official church has cuddled up to state power, legitimising whatever regime happens to be protecting it. For Tolstoy, the mainstream church has thus become one of the major obstacles to the dissemination of Jesus' radical teaching.

Tolstoy also slates the sanctimonious tone with which the church preaches its corrupted interpretation. For instance, Tolstoy denounces the alleged infallibility of the church and of the Bible. The latter, for him, is just a collection of writings from very different authors cobbled together and tinkered with time and time again. The former is just a collection of men as likely to be fallible as any other.

Tolstoy is particularly dismissive of the various ways through which church theologians reduce the importance of Jesus' most important commandments. Tolstoy expects those who claim to follow Jesus to actually follow his teaching and example. Like other Christian radicals, he is therefore scathing of much of the official church for not doing so, indeed for even wilfully discounting the uncomfortable parts of Jesus' ethics and distracting its flock with fantastic dogmas and stupefying rituals. For Tolstoy, this amounts to a cowardly and despicable betrayal of the core teaching of the one whom Christians call God. Tolstoy's strong language attests to the extent to which he feels the church has betrayed its original mission – to teach and exemplify the radical morality preached by Jesus.

Tolstoy further accuses the church of deploying a broad arsenal of mental trickery to distract the masses from Jesus' revolutionary morality, including: the idea that miracles somehow provide proof of church creeds; the focus on external worship in which impossible propositions are repeated robotically (again as a distraction from the essence of Christianity); the deliberate mixing of truths with

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of Hell"; Tolstoy, "What Is Religion?"; Tolstoy, *What I Believe*; Tolstoy, "Reason and Religion."

falsehoods in order to drown the former in the latter; and the way in which all this combines to stifle reason and basically amounts to carefully planned hypnotism. All this, according to Tolstoy, is calculated precisely to dilute Jesus' revolutionary morality.

For such views, predictably enough, Tolstoy was excommunicated – though this excommunication came only in reaction to the publication of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* in 1901. If anything, the result was to spur Tolstoy into publishing even more blunt criticisms of the Russian Orthodox Church. The church did try to re-admit Tolstoy into its congregation on his deathbed – in the hope that it could parade a victory if it could claim that Tolstoy confessed his errors and returned to a church that magnanimously forgave him at the last gasp. Tolstoy, of course, refused.

Criticisms

One criticism of Tolstoy's account of religion is that it is too crudely rationalistic.[36] His dismissal of the resurrection in particular means to some that he cannot be considered a 'Christian', because he denies a central tenet of that faith. Besides, the exaltation of 'reason' typical of Enlightenment thought has come to be criticised more recently (e.g. by post-colonial and post-structuralist schools) for the questionable nature of reason's 'universality' and because such universalism can lead to forms of neo-colonial imperialism.[37]

Nevertheless, although 'reason' can indeed be criticised, the momentous achievements of science are based on it. Perhaps reason has too often been used as an excuse to impose Eurocentric policies instead of respecting local traditions (and this should be

[36] Georges Florovsky, "Three Masters: The Quest for Religion in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies* 3/2 (1966); Greenwood, "Tolstoy and Religion"; Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels*; G. W. Spence, "Tolstoy's Dualism," *Russian Review* 20/3 (1961); James Townsend, "The Theology of Leo Tolstoy," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 11/20 (1998).

[37] Benjamin Franks, "Postanarchism and Meta-Ethics," *Anarchist Studies* 16/2 (2008); Nathan Jun, "Deleuze, Values, and Normativity," in *Deleuze and Ethics*, ed. Nathan Jun and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

recognised and denounced), yet what other tool have we against superstitions, obscurantism, and other threatening ghosts whose harm haunts the annals of history? Is one of the central aims of education not to foster a critical and rational mind? Indeed how unpopular really is what Enlightenment thinkers called reason today? Do many critical citizens not use 'reason' to measure claims thrown at them? The critique of 'reason' and 'rationalism' articulated by post-structuralist scholarship in recent decades is rich and important, but even if it convincingly demonstrates that arguments founded on reason are not *'universally'* applicable, the reflections articulated by rationalist thinkers such as Tolstoy remain pertinent and applicable in at least some, perhaps many, historical contexts. Besides, perhaps Tolstoy went quite far in dismissing all of Christianity that he judged to be irrational, but he is not alone in this. Numerous agnostics and atheists will be sympathetic, as will indeed those Christians who are minded to filter some of the traditional package of Christianity in light of evolving science. Tolstoy's rationalism might be fairly extreme, but rationalistic approaches are still adopted by many nowadays. Tolstoy's thought, therefore, can still find sympathetic ears in the twenty-first century.

A separate criticism is that religion should not be reduced solely to morality: moral guidelines are important aspects of all religious traditions, but there is much more to religion, and Tolstoy is guilty of ignoring all those other aspects that make religions richer than a mere moral code can be.[38] However, it remains the case that ethical concerns are quite central to them. Every religious tradition advocates certain types of behaviour and frowns upon others. There may well be much more to Christianity than the moral teaching of Jesus, but that teaching is part of it too. Tolstoy might be rightly accused of ignoring or dismissing many Christian dogmas, but then could many avowed Christians today not equally be accused of ignoring or dismissing Jesus' moral

[38] Sergey Khudiev, *The Trouble with Tolstoy* (Pravmir), available from http://www.pravmir.com/the-trouble-with-tolstoy/ (accessed 18 February 2016); Pål Kolstø, "The Demonized Double: The Image of Lev Tolstoi in Russian Orthodox Polemics," *Slavic Review* 65/2 (2006); Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels*; Townsend, "The Theology of Leo Tolstoy".

teaching? Tolstoy's views on the facets of Christianity which he dismissed may not stir everyone's interests, but what he does say about Jesus' moral teaching might still be worth paying some attention to, because it is both central to the Christian story and, according to Tolstoy, actually rather rational and wise. Just because Tolstoy's Christianity was rationalistic and moralising need not prevent those whose religiosity is more mysterious or numinous from engaging with Tolstoy on morality.

Some have argued that not all institutional Christianity is that noxious, and that the Russian Orthodox Church in Tsarist Russia – clearly a central focus for Tolstoy's ire – was a particularly pronounced case of what he criticised.[39] There have also been many examples of Christian groups across time and place (including in Tolstoy's Russia) that were much closer to Jesus' teaching that the mainline church: the Christian tradition is not monolithic, and the potential for different Christian interpretations has been taken up by numerous offshoots over the centuries. Tolstoy indeed recognises and praises these. Moreover, morality-focused interpretations of the gospel similar to Tolstoy's have sprung up both before Tolstoy and since. Nevertheless, much Christianity does tend to come close to what Tolstoy criticises. Moreover, with time, many of even the more radical Christian sects which Tolstoy praises made compromises, became comfortable and gradually lost their radical aspirations. In other words, a process of institutionalisation does seem to systematically dampen the originally more radical offshoots of Christianity.

Relevance today

It may seem when watching from much of Western Europe today that anticlericalism has become largely irrelevant – religion, it is said, has been losing influence as society has gradually secularised. Yet, as recent scholarship on postsecularity has argued,

[39] Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*; Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels*; Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Quest for God*; Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You"; John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009).

it seems premature to expect it to disappear in the way much Enlightenment thought had expected it to.[40]

For a start, even in Western European countries – those often cited as the most secularised – state and church are rarely fully separated. In some European countries, the subsistence of the clergy is funded by the state; in others, Christian 'heritage' forms an integral part of national identity (church property might be maintained and preserved by state funds, for instance); in many, the symbols and iconography of one are present in the other, and so on. In short, religion still influences politics and vice versa, even in much of Western Europe.[41] The collaboration between church and state which Tolstoy criticises so vehemently still persists.

This is even truer outside Western Europe – not least in Tolstoy's own country. The clergy remains powerful and influential in much of the Christian world (as indeed do religious figures in other religious traditions). In other words, despite a degree of secularisation both in Western Europe and beyond, much of what Tolstoy says about institutionalised Christianity is no less apposite today than it was in Tolstoy's context. Indeed, church theologians continue to cite many of the arguments mocked by Tolstoy to downplay the radicality of Jesus' morality or to otherwise justify Christian submission to the established political and economic regime. Tolstoy's

[40] For instance: Joseph A. Camilleri, "Postsecularist Discourse in an 'Age of Transition'," *Review of International Studies* 38/5 (2012); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Fred Dallmayr, "Post-Secularity and (Global) Politics: A Need for Radical Redefinition," *Review of International Studies* 38/5 (2012); Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, eds., *Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Eduardo Mendieta and VanAntwerpen. Jonathan, eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[41] See for instance: Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999); Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*; Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

voice therefore still speaks to those contexts where mutually-beneficial partnerships between churches and political institutions survive and thrive, and in so doing adds to the many other voices, including but not limited to atheists old and new, calling for a firmer separation of religious institutions from political one.

At the same time, a considerable number of (in particular, but not only) Westerners have become visibly disillusioned by 'institutional' Christianity, especially since the Second World War. Whilst scholars still debate the extent of secularisation in the West, there is broad agreement that religiosity has evolved. Many have turned away from church attendance and been attracted by new, more personal, expressions of spirituality – and Tolstoy's critique of the church may well resonate with the views of those who have consciously moved away from the church, as well as with atheists and religious sceptics.[42] That said, Tolstoy was not interested in *spirituality* but in *morality*.

Either way, it seems likely that Tolstoy would wish to reiterate his arguments to those who consider themselves Christians today. His writings (including his detailed exegeses) invite Christians to reconsider Jesus' teaching anew, to question or bypass the exegesis traditionally preached from church pulpits and make up their own mind on whether Jesus did not quite clearly and deliberately call his followers to exemplify the morality he preached. Tolstoy might be an eccentric and anticlerical Christian thinker, but he contributes to Christian thought nonetheless. The main reason he was so hostile to the church was because he felt that it was diluting, dismissing and ignoring the very essence of Jesus' teaching. There is every chance he would feel similarly today, though he would also praise and encourage those Christians who question the veracity of the comfortable church's interpretation and who try to wholeheartedly follow Jesus' teaching and example. In short, Tolstoy's

[42] Jonathan Fox, *An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013); Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State*; Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World*; Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion* (Harrow: Pearson, 2007); Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, "The Postsecular in International Relations: An Overview," *Review of International Studies* 38/5 (2012).

anticlericalism is not as dated or limited to its narrow context as might seem. It is addressed to Christians then, but also today and tomorrow, for them to become more Christ-like and more critical of the self-appointed official intermediaries of God on Earth.

IV – Activist methods

If the global arena is so violent and its institutions are failing to deliver justice, how, then, are we to respond? What does Tolstoy expect from Christians and pacifists in particular? In other words, what is to be done, and how?[43]

Tolstoy's claims

Tolstoy was very concerned with the growing popularity of violent methods among the revolutionaries of his day – not least in Russia. This was the era of the anarchist wave of terrorism, of mounting tit-for-tat revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence. Tolstoy warned that violent methods would only lead to more violence, and that therefore revolutionaries must forego the use of violence lest they merely instigate a new, different but equally unjust dictatorship. For him:

> Anarchists are right in everything; in the negation of the existing order, and in the assertion that, without Authority, there could not be worse violence that that of Authority under existing conditions. They are mistaken only in thinking that Anarchy can be instituted by a [violent] revolution.[44]

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[43] For Tolstoy's thoughts on what is to be done, see for instance: Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, chap. 5; Kennan, "A Visit to Count Tolstoi." Tolstoy's own writings specifically on this question include: Tolstoy, "An Appeal to Social Reformers"; Lyof N. Tolstoï, *What to Do?*, trans. unknown (London: Walter Scott, n.d.); Leo Tolstoy, *An Appeal to Russians: To the Government, the Revolutionists and the People*, available from https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An_Appeal_to_Russians:_To_the_Government,_the_Revolutionists_and_the_People (accessed 24 September 2018); Tolstoy, "Bethink Yourselves!"

[44] Tolstoy, "On Anarchy," 68.

Tolstoy can understand the appeal of violence, nurtured as it is by a deep frustration against the cunning and resilience of the system. Besides, violent revolutionaries only employ the methods they have been 'taught'. But for Tolstoy, as explained above, violence was not the way to go. Surely, Tolstoy hopes, revolutionaries must be capable of devising "better means of improving the conditions of humanity than by killing people whose destruction can be of no more use than the decapitation of that mythical monster on whose neck a new head appeared as soon as one was cut off?"[45] Tolstoy would thus invite twenty-first century activists to think carefully about the tactics they adopt and about the risks of compromising with violence.

Injustice must be denounced, but for Tolstoy, the only truly revolutionary method is the one articulated by Jesus, and its "essence […] lies in substituting an inward aim (to attain which no one else's consent is necessary) in place of external aims (to attain which everyone's consent is necessary)."[46] According to Tolstoy, the only true revolution must be led by example. It must start within us, by a change of heart which leads to a refusal to be complicit in, or consent to, violence and injustice. In turn, our example might inspire others to follow it and do the same. The structures of violence and injustice would be incapacitated by the infectious defections of the human cogs that constitute them. Tolstoy has faith in the contagious power of such inner transformation:

> Men in their present condition are like a swarm of bees hanging from a branch in a cluster. The position of the bees on that branch is temporary and must inevitably be changed. They must bestir themselves and find a new dwelling. Each of the bees knows this and wishes to change its position and that of others, but no one of them is willing to move till the rest do so. […] It would seem that there was no way out of this state for the bees, just as there seems no escape for worldly men who are entangled in the toils of the social conception of life. […] Yet as it is enough for one bee to spread her wings, rise up and fly away, and a second, a third, a tenth, and a hundredth, will do the same and the cluster that hung inertly becomes a freely flying swarm of bees; so let but one man understand

[45] Tolstoy, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," 197.
[46] Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 413.

> life as Christianity teaches us to understand it, and begin to live accordingly, and a second, a third, and a hundredth will do the same, till the enchanted circle of social life from which there seemed to be no escape will be destroyed.[47]

Tolstoy thinks – or at least hopes – that the world can be transformed by enough pioneers adopting Jesus' method of refusing to be directly or indirectly complicit in any violence whatsoever. He hopes that enough people living and relating to each other differently might inspire others to do the same. For Tolstoy, however, the way forward also involves what could be described as a kind of ascetic self-control.[48] Tolstoy is critical of the material indulgences practiced by high society and envied by the rest: not only do they distract the mind and awaken intoxicating emotions, but their production relies on the ongoing exploitation of workers and limited resources. Gastronomic pleasures, alcohol, tobacco and the like should ideally therefore be tempered. The purest ideal is complete abstinence. Tolstoy also particularly frowns upon meat-eating given the cruel brutality of murdering animals to eat their flesh.

Against this, Tolstoy preaches the virtues of manual work to earn one's living. Cultivating the earth for one's food not only undermines the economic processes that allow some to stay idle and ride on the exploitation of others, but is in itself a source of health, self-sufficiency and contentment. This is why Tolstoy was a long-term admirer of the life of agricultural communes.

Tolstoy himself tried to transform the way he lived. He became a vegetarian, he laboured his fields, he donated most of his royalties, and he recurrently got into heated arguments with his wife about what to do with his property. As a campaigner, he tirelessly wrote dozens of books, letters, articles and pamphlets reacting to ongoing events, appealing to powerful people and institutions, pleading his contemporaries to reject violence and to disassociate themselves from the state and church. For this, predictably, his writings were censored, and his followers persecuted

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[47] Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 234–235.
[48] Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, chap. 4.

– though the authorities dared not persecute him lest they turn him into a martyr.

Some have remarked that Tolstoy, far from adhering to the *non-resistance* advocated by Jesus in the verse about turning the other cheek, in fact advocated a form of nonviolent *resistance*. Tolstoy spoke out against the regime, encouraged conscripts to refuse their conscription, and advocated a form of resistance to the state by withdrawing from it.

Yet it seems that Jesus did 'resist' in some sense too. He denounced religious authorities and overturned tables in the temple. In his actions, however, he remained nonviolent and forgiving (whether violence against humans was used in the temple cleansing episode is questionable)[49], even as he was being crucified. It seems, therefore, that some degree of 'resistance', or certainly some reaction to injustice, is part of what Jesus preached – though the spectrum of options probably lies between the temple cleansing and turning the other cheek.

What *Tolstoy* calls for is similar. His own writings display some ambivalence between non-resistance and nonviolent resistance: depending on whom he is addressing and the context he is reacting to, sometimes he seems to be calling for absolute *non-resistance*, sometimes for absolute *nonviolence* in clearly responding to, and in that sense 'resisting', evil. But even if what is called for is resistance, crucially, of course, Tolstoy insists on remaining nonviolent in that resistance. In fact, look closer at the text and even when Tolstoy speaks of 'non-resistance' he actually seems to have 'not resisting with violence' in mind. When Kennan asks Tolstoy whether resistance to oppression is justifiable, he replies: "That depends upon what you mean by resistance; if you mean persuasion, argument, protest, I answer yes; if you mean violence – no. I do not believe that violent resistance to evil is ever justifiable under any circumstances."[50] Elsewhere, Tolstoy insists that it is essential to "fight [...] by means of thought, speech, actions, life".[51] Clearly then Tolstoy is not advocating total non-resistance, but resistance, action, defiance – just never of a violent kind.

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[49] Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*, 102–106.
[50] Kennan, "A Visit to Count Tolstoi," 256.
[51] Tolstoy, "On Anarchy," 70.

Criticisms

Whether those seeking revolutionary change should always restrict themselves to nonviolent methods has long been a source of debate among anarchists.[52] One criticism is that nonviolent resistance does not work, that it has only ever worked when violent campaigners had also been fighting for the same cause too – every Martin Luther King has its Malcolm X, as the (excessively binary and simplistic) saying goes.[53] That may be true. And yet many a revolution hinged on the change of allegiance of key protectors of the regime – the army, the middle class, the commercial elite, and so on.[54] In those pivotal moments when revolutionary demands are conceded, does the courageous refusal to adopt violence by many – despite the reactionary violence inflicted on them in their attempt to improve things – not play at least some role in convincing those protectors of the status quo to withdraw their protection? Most pacifist campaigners had their violent counterparts, but the opposite is true too, and the refusal to adopt violence by many often played a significant part in helping convince regime protectors of the legitimacy of the argument for radical change, whereas revolutionary violence often hardened their resolve to preserve the regime.

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[52] April Carter, "Anarchism and Violence," in *Anarchism*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University Press, 1978); Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology*; Peter Gelderloos, *The Failure of Nonviolence* (London: Active Distribution, 2013); Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!: Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London: Pluto, 2008), chap. 4; Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings, "Anarchist Ambivalence: Politics and Violence in the Thought of Bakunin, Tolstoy and Kropotkin," *European Journal of Political Theory* (2016); Vernon Richards, ed., *Violence and Anarchism: A Polemic* (London: Freedom, 1993); Chris Rossdale, *Resisting Militarism: Direct Action and the Politics of Subversion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), chap. 7.

[53] Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology*, 55–57, 73–77.

[54] Atack, *Nonviolence in Political Theory*, 113–114, 123–124; Joseph Llewellyn, "Building Emancipatory Peace through Anarcho-Pacifism," *Critical Studies on Security* 6/2 (2018), 46–50; Howes, "The Failure of Pacifism and the Success of Nonviolence," 434–435; Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Nonviolent Struggle: Theories, Strategies, and Dynamics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 7.

Some argue that real and meaningful change cannot come only from mere changes of personal lifestyle, that it takes collective struggle and organising to get tangible improvements.[55] Yet even if that is true, lifestyle changes and collective struggles are not mutually incompatible. Perhaps Tolstoyan methods on their own will not suffice, but that need not mean that engaging in broader methods of campaigning need require dissent from Tolstoy's advice on personal lifestyle and a refusal to compromise with violence.

Some worry that Tolstoy's recommendations would lead to a collective suicide: if we all turn the other cheek in the face of evil, the worst people will take over, and civilisation will be sacrificed.[56] This seems true if indeed the evildoers and their supporters have no heart and would never repent, but of course, Tolstoy's hope is that their heart might turn in the face of a form of denunciation which displays unexpected and determined nonviolence and forgiveness. How else and why else would Tolstoyan methods gain any new converts anyway? Widespread suicide is only a logical consequence of Tolstoyan behaviour if one projects ahead an increasing adoption of Tolstoyan methods (which would mean hearts *can* turn) yet also a refusal to countenance that such ethical behaviour can be contagious (which now suggests the opposite). Therefore, Tolstoy assumes that way before it would lead to collective suicide, the seemingly logically suicidal but primarily principled and courageous commitment of nonviolent exemplars would transform humanity.

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[55] Bob Black, *Anarchy after Leftism* (Columbia: Columbia Alternative Library, 1997); Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh: AK, 1995); Laurence Davis, "Individual and Community," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, ed. Carl Levy and Matthew S. Adams (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Laurence Davis, "Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unhelpful Dichotomy," *Anarchist Studies* 18/1 (2010); Albert Meltzer, *Anarchism: Arguments for and Against*, available from https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/albert-meltzer-anarchism-arguments-for-and-against (accessed 12 September 2018); Laura Portwood-Stacer, *Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[56] Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology*, 47–51, 58, 86–87; Frazer and Hutchings, "Anarchist Ambivalence: Politics and Violence in the Thought of Bakunin, Tolstoy and Kropotkin," 18.

Some have also been critical of the austere and prohibitive self-denial of Tolstoyan asceticism.[57] It seems the only gratification Tolstoy tolerated was that of masochistically adhering to a particularly categorical morality. Some will prefer a less desolate way of life. But even if ascetic self-denial need not be imposed to such a rigorous degree, perhaps it is important to at least remain alert to the sometimes morally dubious production processes behind what one consumes, and to the distracting potential of hedonistic escapism.

Others could argue that, even were it to work, Tolstoy's method to improve the human condition is too slow, that it would take too long and we do not have such time.[58] This might be true, and the ecological crisis, to name but one, may indeed be a challenge that cannot wait to be addressed. At the same time, if a revised moral order is not one that is wanted and willed by all, if therefore coercive means are needed to enforce it, then more violence and injustice will ensue, rendering that moral order unstable again. For Tolstoy, transformations that are imposed are never stable or satisfactory.

Relevance today

The question of how to improve the world is no less important and debated today than in Tolstoy's era. Whatever the promises of secular (or indeed religious) ideologies, suffering, injustice and violence persist. Freedom, equality, indeed even true democracy remain closer to utopian aspirations than reality. Many have opted for formal institutional channels to try to improve things, but the

[57] Ronald D. LeBlanc, "Tolstoy's Way of No Flesh: Abstinence, Vegetarianism, and Christian Physiology," in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 84–91; Vernon Lee, "Tolstoy as Prophet. Notes on the Psychology of Asceticism," *The North American Review* 182/593 (1906); Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels*, 16–18; McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, chap. 6–7; G. W. Spence, *Tolstoy the Ascetic* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967).

[58] Leo Tolstoy, "Nobel's Bequest: A Letter Addressed to a Swedish Editor," in *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Nonviolence*, trans. Aylmer Maude (Philadelphia, PA: New Society, 1987), 237; Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 235.

global political economy is becoming more unequal, while weapons and their potential for mass destruction are spreading. Many good intentions seem to get diluted and lost in these institutional channels that are meant to help reach them. Many therefore face the uncomfortable realisation that our institutions are failing, and wonder how best to proceed. To those seekers of truth and justice, Tolstoy's writings on the dangers of violent methods remain worth reflecting upon. Tolstoy invites us to think carefully about how to bring about justice, about tactics and in particular about the dangers of compromising with 'violence'.

More generally, many today still concede that violence is sometimes necessary – whether to implement reforms through the state or to resist injustice outside it. Good ends can, in the eyes of many, justify violent means. In other words, the very same justifications of violence which Tolstoy criticised remain widespread nowadays. Yet one interesting development in the past century is the increasing popularity of nonviolent methods of activism and denunciations of violence. Gandhi, who was partly inspired by Tolstoy but who translated high Tolstoyan ethics into concrete and pragmatic tactics of nonviolent resistance, in turn inspired many after him. Since Tolstoy and Gandhi, nonviolent activism has been increasingly popular and increasingly successful – indeed interestingly more effective, some empirical work shows, than more violent methods.[59]

In any case, (at least) three colossal challenges face humanity: an ecological crisis, a deeply unstable and unsustainable global economy, and the security challenges posed by the continuing proliferation of weapons – both conventional and of mass destruction. These challenges are all potentially very dangerous, will not be contained within artificial human borders, and arguably require more radical solutions than those likely to come from established institutions. This calls for action, for a collective human awakening. Many campaigners and movements share

[59] Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Howes, "The Failure of Pacifism and the Success of Nonviolence."; Llewellyn, "Building Emancipatory Peace through Anarcho-Pacifism"; Nepstad, *Nonviolent Struggle: Theories, Strategies, and Dynamics*, 18–20.

those concerns, and to them Tolstoy would reiterate his warnings about consenting to or being complicit in violent means, whether bottom-up or top-down.

However, Tolstoy would not only address radicals and reformers. He would call on us all to awaken to the violence and suffering perpetrated within the global political economy, and crucially to our role in it by both legitimising it and staffing it. He would call us to choose carefully the role we play, however small, in this global context. Following Tolstoy, one could argue that there are at least four (overlapping) ways in which we all make choices: as producers, consumers, politically-active citizens and through everyday personal encounters.[60] As producers, we spend decades of our professional lives working in a particular sector. Tolstoy would urge us to think carefully about what that profession is dedicated to – is it public service, is it science, it is the weapons industry, fossil fuels, merely the interests of profit maximising? Similarly, we all consume, but do we consume ethical, local or organic products? Where and under what working conditions were these products produced? Did their production kill? Is our consumption too escapist or indulgent? And whose pockets do we fill? As citizens, we can vote, sign petitions, write letters and take part in campaigns – what choices do we make there?[61] And as community members, we have conversations with one another, we respond to remarks made by family members, friends or random encounters. How committed are we to truth and justice in such micro-political encounters? Tolstoy wants us to consider our role in the broader structures we constitute, to see the connections between our behaviour and the impact of it through these structu-

[60] Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, "Think the World's in a Mess? Here Are Four Things You Can Do About It," *The Conversation*, 16 November 2016, available from https://theconversation.com/think-the-worlds-in-a-mess-here-are-four-things-you-can-do-about-it-68789 (accessed 15 August 2017).

[61] Tolstoy of course did not believe in representative democracy, but he did petition politicians up to the Tsar, he corresponded with activists around the world, and helped organise campaigns such as famine relief and the emigration of persecuted Doukhobors.

res, and where appropriate, to withdraw from these structures, to stop furthering evil and to exemplify alternatives instead.

Some will argue we cannot all make our own choices. The jobs on offer may not be many, for instance, and organic food comes at a price. Yet this is why Tolstoy's remarks are addressed most pointedly towards the comfortable – those who have more freedom to make these choices. Those who are poor, less educated and oppressed have more limited choices in those four realms, but the richest are freer to choose. Indeed they often know, if not explicitly then at least deep down, that they are making choices which might hurt others. They might see those as deplorable or necessary, and they might note that the world is tough and will remain so whatever they chose at their individual level. In other words, and following Tolstoy, they might be deceiving themselves and desisting from their moral responsibilities. The higher up the pyramid of privileges, the harsher Tolstoy's gaze will be. But some degree of choice, most of us do have, to some degree.

Conclusion

It might be argued that Tolstoy was neither a Christian (because his thought strips away too many of its defining characteristics) nor an anarchist (because he seems to follow 'revealed' biblical authority). He is also too hard-line a pacifist for many pacifists, and his thoughts on activist methods remain controversial for those eager to improve the human condition. However, Tolstoy does arguably develop with remarkable logical consistency the radical pacifist implications of Jesus' teaching with regards to collective violence. He is therefore 'Christian' in the sense that his thought takes its cue from Jesus' morality, and he is an 'anarchist' in the sense that he rejected the state and the unjust economy which it patrols on that basis. It is, moreover, precisely because of his hard-line commitment to pacifism that he develops anarchist conclusions and favours activist methods that refuse any compromise with violence.

Some might see Tolstoy as somewhat confusing in terms of his ultimate motive: sometimes he seems to preach nonviolence out of

fidelity to what is divinely commanded, regardless of the impact it may or may not end up having on society; yet sometimes he seems more clearly driven primarily by a desire to transform society. The confusion is partly the result of Tolstoy adapting his language and his arguments depending on who he is addressing: when addressing Christians, especially the clergy, he tends to insist that nonviolence is what God (through Jesus) clearly demands; but when addressing secular interlocutors in secular and rational terms, his tactic is to defend nonviolence on similarly secular and rational grounds, and here the worthiness of nonviolence stems from its potential effect on society. Either way, it seems quite clear that Tolstoy was longing for social transformation. It also seems clear that he was aware it might not take hold, and in such a scenario he still seems to have favoured principled behaviour on the part of those who shared his views. In any case, the revolution he envisaged did rest on some pioneers' fidelity to nonviolence, so it should come as no surprise that he insisted on such fidelity come what may, and in the hope that what might come would be a nonviolent pacification of society. In short, Tolstoy's primary aim is social transformation, though even if it fails he still favours nonviolence, and to Christians he will repeat that it is what God commands.

Tolstoy's political writings are those of a critic – an iconoclastic prophet, as it were. He plays a role analogous to the Socratic gadfly about violence and about the suffering inflicted by structures which we constitute and legitimise. The world has changed dramatically since 1910, and Tolstoy's arguments are possibly too categorical, but much of his diagnosis remains painfully perceptive, even if his solutions are not necessarily more realistic today than in his time. Eccentric though his thoughts might be, they invite us to reconsider our role in the violence perpetrated upon others.

It might also be worth recalling that in the years that followed Tolstoy's death in 1910, both his native Russia and indeed the world witnessed conflagrations of violence on an industrial scale – precisely the horrors Tolstoy feared. The Russian Revolution and other dictatorships illustrated what a Left-wing revolutionary transformation of society from the top down could lead to, and two world wars illustrated the destruction which human beings justifying violent means to attain perceived laudable aims could

lead to. In the unstable balance of power that has followed the Cold War and 9/11, in a world facing an ecological catastrophe, the seemingly unstoppable proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and increasingly widening economic inequalities, in a world where economic, security and ecological imbalances are so acute that system collapse is not implausible, the risks of violent conflagrations are arguably greater than in 1910. For that reason alone if for no other, Tolstoy's Christian anarcho-pacifism remains worth paying attention to in order to reflect upon our choices and how they affect others today.

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