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Leo Tolstoy's Critique of Socialism in the Context of his Religious Ideas

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Abstract

Despite the religiosity of late Tolstoy, the studies of his socio-political thought tend to neglect its religious basis and instead draw parallels with socialism. This paper aims to challenge the image of Tolstoy as a socialist by analyzing the latter's attitudes on socialism in the context of his religious ideas. Using Eric Voegelin's approach, the paper shows that Tolstoy's thought cannot be called political but rather moral. Tolstoy saw politics themselves as problematic and promoted the idea of moral self-transformation. The analysis of Tolstoy's two works, *What Then Must We Do?* (1885–1886) and *The Kingdom of God is within You* (1891), shows his hostility towards socialism. He claimed that it could not solve social problems and stressed that the only true means of resistance lay in personal moral growth and individual acts of disobedience.

Keywords

Leo Tolstoy, socialism, Christianity, anarchism, non-violence

Introduction

In the late 1870s, Leo Tolstoy experienced a severe existential crisis from which he found recovery in the Christian faith. After a short period of being Orthodox, he began to develop his own understanding of Christianity as ethical teaching based on non-violence. What triggered Tolstoy's insight, as he wrote in his *What I Believe?* (1884), was the saying from the Gospel of 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" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958b: 310). Tolstoy began to think that this moral law was the essence of Christianity. A true Christian, Tolstoy thought, should take the saying from Matthew literally and put it into practice. In practice, this meant that a true Christian cannot be involved or support the army, the police, the court system, and even the government itself.

Despite the strong connection between the religious and the socio-political aspects in Tolstoy's thought, the dominant approach lies in separating these two domains. The problem with this approach is that it stresses the critical anti-capitalist aspect of Tolstoy's thought but removes its religious basis. This creates a picture of Tolstoy as a sort of socialist but non-progressive political thinker. This approach was first developed by Lenin and later became the basis for the cult of Tolstoy organized by the soviets. For instance, in 1928, during the celebration of

Tolstoy's 100th jubilee, the soviets stressed this dualism of Tolstoy, namely his anti-capitalist protest on the one hand and his religiosity on the other. In a text dedicated to the jubilee Anatoliy Lunacharsky, People's Commissar for Education, stressed that Tolstoy's artistic talent was to be "praised" while his traits of a "peasant revolutionary" and "typical Tolstoyism" were to be "condemned" (Lunacharsky, 1963: 107).

This dualism was also promoted in the soviet publication project of all of Tolstoy's works. Although the collected works included religious writings of Tolstoy, the prefaces to them were made in the dualistic spirit. They tried to present Tolstoy as an anti-capitalist thinker with wrong religious prejudices. In a long preface to the collection of Tolstoy's religious works, Valentin Asmus characterized his thought as a deviated and weak protest against 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. (Asmus, 1957: IX)

The main purpose of the paper is to challenge the dualistic approach which emphasizes the anti-capitalist critique of Tolstoy but makes Tolstoy's religiosity look like an unnecessary deviation in contrast to his progressive and scientific socialism. Instead, the paper aims to stress the unity of Tolstoy's thought and its moral and religious basis. Tolstoy's social critique cannot be detached from his religious and moral outlook. Moreover, Tolstoy was familiar with socialism and devoted much attention to it in his works. He developed a moral critique of socialism and saw it as the only appropriate method of resistance to order in moral development and individual non-violent disobedience.

In the following part of the paper, I will provide a more detailed account of the dominant historiographic approach to Tolstoy, which traces back to soviet dualism. In order to highlight the moral character of Tolstoy's thought, I will further discuss Eric Voegelin's existential approach to ideas and the development of Tolstoy's religiosity. The final part of the paper will analyze Tolstoy's critical attitude on socialism as it is expressed in his two treatises on social issues, namely *What Then Must We Do?* (1885–1886) and *The Kingdom of God is within You* (1891) and Marxist reaction to Tolstoyism.

Leninist Critique and Contemporary Historiography on Tolstoy

The tendency to divide Tolstoy's thought into seemingly opposite parts, namely anti-capitalist critique and religiosity, goes back to Lenin's critical article entitled *Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution* (1908). In it, Lenin claimed that Tolstoy's philosophy was full of "glaring contradictions" (Lenin, 1973a: 205). For Lenin, the contradiction was between Tolstoy's harsh critique of the imperial regime and his non-violence as a non-adequate tool to struggle against it. For Lenin, Tolstoy's non-violence and religiosity was a reflection of specific social conditions of the Russian peasantry. In Lenin's words, Tolstoy reflected "both the inevitable

beginning of the revolutionary struggle of the masses and their unpreparedness for the struggle” (Lenin, 1973a: 208). In an article entitled *L. N. Tolstoy and the Modern Labour Movement* (1909) Lenin contrasted Tolstoysim and the peasantry with the developing and growing proletariat. For Lenin it was the proletariat that was “becoming strong” and was “capable of struggle”, and, by contrast, Tolstoy reflected the despair of the “perishing class” (Lenin, 1973b: 332).

The Leninist approach to Tolstoy was dominant in the soviet studies of Tolstoy and Tolstoians, and still remains influential in the post-soviet scholarship. The recent studies of Tolstoy’s thought on society and politics still describe it as some form of peasant socialism and neglect its religious context. For instance, Yelena Meleshko (2006: 260-261) in her book on Tolstoy’s ethics described Tolstoyism as a worldview that was a “peculiar form of Populism (Narodnichestvo)” and had “traits of theocratic socialism”. Yefim Agarin in his work on pre-revolutionary Tolstoyan communes followed the same line of argument and described Tolstoyism as “a form of populism” and a reaction to “the development of capitalist relations” (Agarim, 2019: 206). Furthermore, Agarin separated two spheres of thought in Tolstoy, namely his religiosity and his social views, and stressed the independence of each sphere. In his presentation, the development of Tolstoy’s philosophy looks like a constant oscillation between “abstract moral ideals” and a “social critique” (Agarim, 2019: 97).

This stress on the social and political and neglect of the religious is also characteristic of the Western historiography on Tolstoy. Unlike the Post-soviet, it does not characterize Tolstoy’s thought as populist-socialist but stresses parallels with other radical political philosophies. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos in his recent monograph on the political thought of Tolstoy described him as “a Christian anarcho-pacifist iconoclast” (Christoyannopoulos, 2019: 213). In his book, Christoyannopoulos also downplayed the role of religion in Tolstoy’s political thought. He noted that although Tolstoy considered his anarchism as following from Christianity, what Tolstoy meant by that was “effectively a type of (pacifist) anarchist society” (Christoyannopoulos, 2019: 58).

Eric Voegelin’s Approach to Ideas

In order to distinguish Tolstoy’s thinking from some kind of peasant political sentiments and some forms of socialist political philosophies I will use the approach of Eric Voegelin, a German-American political philosopher. The Voegelinian notion of the political makes it easier to distinguish Tolstoy from political philosophy and highlight the peculiar moral character of his thought. Voegelin developed an understanding of political philosophy as a reaction to precarious human existential situation and distinguished it from religion. While the first attempts to build a “shelter” in the world, the latter abandons this idea and aims for personal transformation.

Voegelin developed his existentialist approach in a draft written in 1940 but discovered only in the 1990s (Voegelin, 1997). The text was apparently meant to be an introduction to his abandoned project of *History of Political Ideas*. In the text, Voegelin described political ideas as a means to overcome the specific human existential situation. Humans find the world to be unstable, meaningless

and undermining their existence. To face that challenge, humans create some sort of a small copy of this world to protect themselves from the precariousness. In Voegelin's words, humans create "a cosmic analogy, a cosmion" which functions as a "shelter in which man may give to his life a semblance of meaning" (Voegelin, 1997: 225). Thus, political ideas for Voegelin are 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, to create a small world or a cosmion in which humans can feel safe and find meaning. This creation becomes possible with the evocative power of language. Voegelin called this evocative act "magical" since in using the language there is a presumption that its terms refer to an objective reality. 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" (Voegelin, 1997: 228).

Voegelin contrasted political ideas with a religious or apolitical 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 organization of the personal life", Voegelin wrote, "this belief may lead to the ideas of hard work, poverty, celibacy, silence, and prayer, in community or even in solitude" (Voegelin, 1997: 227).

In the context of this religious view, political cosmion becomes for Voegelin an experiment "to overcome the essential incompleteness and relativity of human life by means of an image of divine completeness and absoluteness" (Voegelin, 1997: 227). 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 presenting a king as God's representative, atheist theories deifying finite groups like nation or class and totalitarianism trying to eliminate apolitical experience altogether. (Voegelin, 1997: 227).

The Development of Tolstoy's Religious Ideas

If we look at Tolstoy's life and thought from Voegelin's perspective, we will find that Tolstoy was dealing with the same problem of meaning and the relation between finite and infinite. However, his solution to the problem was never political but religious and rather anti-political. To put it in Voegelin's terms, Tolstoy's solution was not to create a "cosmion" but to unite with the cosmos by retreating from artificial human forms of society, politics and knowledge. In the following part of the paper, I will describe the development of Tolstoy's thought with a specific emphasis on his critical attitude to society, politics, and science.

Tolstoy attributed his shift to religion to the late 1870s and described his life before that as "nihilist" and "atheist". However, even before the shift, one can find examples of Tolstoy's religiosity. As Andrey Zorin noted, Tolstoy's diary provides us with a different picture in which young Tolstoy was constantly "calling on the Lord for help and dreamed of believing for real" (Zorin, 2020: 58). It is the very opening of Tolstoy's diary, Zorin noted, that contained the scheme of his future life struggles

(Zorin, 2020: 10). While studying at Kazan University, Tolstoy visited brothels, and as the result of one visit, he contracted gonorrhoea and was duly hospitalized. After six days in the hospital, he began his diary with praise of individual natural reason that can be a cure for external social influences causing disorder in the life of noble young people. Already in the beginning of Tolstoy's diary, one can see his tendency to oppose social norms to absolute reason. To put it in Voegelin's terms, early Tolstoyan thinking was not directed to active social life and creation of the "cosmion" but was rather centered on the idea of personal transformation through the unification with the cosmos.

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 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. (Leo Tolstoy, 1928–1958a: 3-4)

The opposition between reason and society became even more dramatic for Tolstoy after his trip to Paris in 1857, where he witnessed an execution. In his letter to his friend Vasilij Botkin, he wrote about this shocking experience and stressed a sharp divide between morality and politics.

The law of man – rubbish! The truth is that the state is a conspiracy not only for exploitation, but chiefly to corrupt its citizens. But all the same states exist, and moreover in this imperfect form. And they cannot pass from this system into socialism. (...) For my part, I can only see in all this repulsive lie what is loathsome, evil, and I do not want to, and cannot, sort out where there is more and where there is less. I understand moral laws, the laws of morality and religion, binding on no one, that lead people forward and promise a harmonious future; I feel the laws of art which always bring happiness; but the laws of politics constitute for me such an awful lie that I cannot see in them a better or worse. All this is what I felt, understood, and recognized today. And this recognition at least to some extent relieves the burden of the impression for me. (...) From this day forward I will not only never go to see such a thing again, but I will never serve any government anywhere. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958b: 168)

It was during the late 1870s that Tolstoy's religious tendencies became stronger. At that time he experienced the most severe existential crisis which made him look for the answer in religion. 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 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. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958c: 13)

Tolstoy was tempted to commit suicide but managed to overcome the temptation and tried to find the meaning in scientific discoveries, philosophical literature and discussions with his upper-class milieu. However, the answers he got did not satisfy him. As he wrote in *Confession*, what stroke him in 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 question (Tolstoy, 1928–1958c: 18). Tolstoy came to the conclusion that the problem was that his attempts to find meaning in science were 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?” (Tolstoy, 1928–1958c: 33–34). In Tolstoy’s view, the 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 the question of meaning, Tolstoy realized, was the religious faith because it is based on the relation between finite and infinite (Tolstoy, 1928–1958c: 34). Thus, Tolstoy had to accept that the answers given by faith – “however foolish and ugly they are” – in fact, provide the meaning on which millions of working people rely (Tolstoy, 1928–1958c: 34-35). As he further described, Tolstoy met with the Christians of his milieu but he did not find their way of living much different from his own 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 the faith which can save him:

I grew to love these people. The more I learned about the lives of those living and dead about whom I had read and heard, the more I loved them and the easier it became for me to live. I lived this way for about two years, and a profound transformation came over me, one that had been brewing in me for a long time and whose elements had always been a part of me. The life of our class, of the wealthy and the learned, was not only repulsive to me but had lost all meaning. The sum of our action and thinking, of our science and art, all of it struck me as the overindulgences of a spoiled child. I realized that meaning was not to be sought here. The actions of the laboring people, of those who create life, began to appear to me as the one true way. I realized

that the meaning provided by this life was truth, and I embraced it. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958c: 40)

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 it (Tolstoy, 1928–1958c: 53). 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 while claiming he was looking for faith as the “power of life” while Orthodox clerics were looking for “the best means to fulfil certain human responsibilities for the people” (Tolstoy, 1928–1958c: 55).

After some years of biblical studies, Tolstoy developed his own vision of Christianity and a critique of Russian Orthodoxy in his *What I Believe?* (1884). In the book, he described Christianity as primarily 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. Orthodoxy, in Tolstoy’s view, shifted the inner struggle between the “animal” and “rational” life of each human person to the particular event of Adam’s sin. Since everything was pre-determined by the original sin, Tolstoy stressed, Orthodoxy neglected any moral effort from an individual:

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. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958d: 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 perceives the teaching of Christ as impractical and sees 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. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958d: 378)

What was lost, Tolstoy stressed, due to that church teaching was the most important thing of all, namely the knowledge of how one should live and become better. Humans instead of using their own reason to find moral knowledge and have a better life began to use it for the knowledge of the 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 interpretations 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. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958d: 379)

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 reason. The teaching of Christ was of a 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" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958d: 379). The true Christian life, according to Tolstoy's interpretation, consisted in becoming more conscious of this "son of 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.' (Tolstoy, 1928–1958d: 380)

According to Tolstoy, 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 were oriented to the external world and ignored the rational law of love and the inner "son of man" that must be exalted in us by our individual efforts. As Tolstoy put it, 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" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958d: 381).

Tolstoy's Critique of Socialism

In the early 1880s, the polemics with Orthodoxy were at the center of Tolstoy's attention. He was mainly concerned with his critique of Orthodox theology and his own translation of the Gospels. In his *What I Believe?* (1884), Tolstoy mentions socialism only once. Although it is not yet 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' (Tolstoy, 1928–1958d: 441).

Besides this one sentence, Tolstoy did not mention socialism in any of his religious or even social writings in the early 1880s. Tolstoy's first attempt to deal with social issues was a treatise entitled *What Then Must We Do* (1885–1886). It was a reflection of his shock from the urban poverty he saw during the Moscow Census in 1882. In trying to understand this problem Tolstoy had to deal with "political economy" and some socialist authors such as Marx, Lassalle and Proudhon.

Tolstoy did not find the answer to his question in "political economy" but instead he began to think of it as a justification of the existing order, namely the existing system of the division of labour. Tolstoy saw the roots of "political economy" in the interests of a new class of scientists and artists that did not belong to the clergy, the state, or the army. In Tolstoy's view, "political economy" served as a justification for exemption from toil for this new class. 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 labour.

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 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. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958e: 330)

This scientific justification, in his view, began to play the same role as the old theological and philosophical ideologies used to play. The role of political economy for Tolstoy consisted in the same assuring people in the necessity for organized violence and the necessity of sacrifices for it. If in Orthodox theology this imaginary being was God, in science it was 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. Therefore, Tolstoy concluded that political economy falsely directed the human mind to the observation of empirical facts instead of using one's reason. In Tolstoy's view, this positivist approach of science leads to demoralization:

How much more unjust and senseless will it be to compel millions of people to make sacrifices for an aim that is unintelligible, intangible, and often indubitably harmful, as is the case with military service and the payment of taxes. But according to science what appears to everyone an evil is

a common good; it seems that there are people, a tiny minority, who alone know wherein the common good lies, and, though all the rest of the people consider this common good to be an evil, this minority, while compelling all the rest to do this evil, can consider this evil to be a common good. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958e: 288)

Tolstoy argued, even the mere observation of life contradicted the scientific theory of division of labour. Tolstoy brought an example of the Russian settlers' commune in which there was no division of labour but instead, all factors of production were parts of one process of labour. For Tolstoy, it was this condition of the Russian peasantry which was "natural and reasonable" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958e: 250). He contrasted this with the European society in which the division of labour was fully developed. The political economy, which relied on observation of European societies, claimed that this unnatural condition is in fact the law of production itself. Tolstoy argued that this condition was irrational since it contradicted the natural conditions of labour which consisted in that labourers cannot be without the land and the tools:

The conception of a labourer includes the conception of the land on which he lives and of the tools he works with. If he did not live on the land and had no implements of labour he would not be a labourer. There never has been or could be a labourer without land or implements. (...) If a peasant has no land, horse, or scythe, or a shoemaker has no house, water, or awl, this means that someone has driven him off the land and taken from him, or cheated him out of, his scythe, cart, horse, or awl, but it does not mean that there can be an agricultural labourer without a plough, or a shoemaker without tools. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958e: 251)

In the treatise, Tolstoy came to the conclusion that the main reason for urban poverty in Russia was the state reforms of 1861 which deprived the peasants of land and put them under severe taxation. Tolstoy perceived this as the fundamental reason 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" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958e: 281).

At the end of the treatise, Tolstoy proposed his own solution to deal with urban poverty. Tolstoy believed that it can be dealt with if the rich stop exploiting the working classes and begin to work for themselves. Tolstoy stressed that it is necessary not only for the personal well-being and moral good of the rich but for their very existence. Tolstoy urged his wealthy readers of the possible violent workers' revolution if they do not go to live among people and work with them.

The hatred and contempt of the oppressed masses are growing and the physical and moral forces of the wealthy classes are weakening; the deception on which everything depends is wearing out, and the wealthy classes have nothing to console themselves with in this deadly peril. To return to the old ways is impossible, to restore the ruined prestige is impossible; only one thing is left for those who do not wish to change their way of life, and that is to hope

that 'things will last my time' - after that let happen what may. That is what the blind crowd of the rich are doing, but the danger is ever growing and the terrible catastrophe draws nearer. The rich can avoid this danger only by changing their lives (Tolstoy, 1928–1958e: 394-395).

Tolstoy devoted special attention to socialism 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. Tolstoy began his discussion of socialism by comparing the 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 an appropriate understanding of human nature for it. In Tolstoy's view, the type of love which socialists stand for is based on a "personal and social worldview" which cannot go "beyond the love to the state" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958f: 84).

Tolstoy claimed that love for humanity cannot be based on 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 the 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" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958f: 85). 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 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" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958f: 156).

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 the economy. If the socialist struggles were successful, the private sphere would be usurped by the state so that "labour and rest, the domicile, the attire, the food of men will by degrees be determined and directed by the governments" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958f: 156).

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 individual personal behaviour:

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 affected 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. (Tolstoy, 1928–1958f: 171)

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" (Tolstoy, 1928–1958f: 171). 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 a more efficient way to resist 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? (Tolstoy, 1928–1958f: 182)

There was no direct polemics between Tolstoy and Russian Marxists, but the Tolstoyan idea of non-violent resistance triggered a lot of concerns from the Marxists. Tolstoyism was a political threat for them mainly because of its popularity among sectarians whom they perceived as the most conscious layer of the peasantry. At the second social-democratic party congress in 1903, a Marxist political emigrant Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич (1873–1955) stressed the need to address sectarians with Social-Democratic propaganda. He proposed to create a journal for them to spread social-democratic ideas and oppose Tolstoyism. As he put it in the report for the party congress, the journal was to oppose "anti-revolutionary propaganda of Tolstoyans" with their "foolish in Christ, noble newspaper" and "knock them out from their positions" (Bonch-Bruевич, 1973: 213). Although the party was positive at first but it refused to sponsor the journal after the fifth volume, as it soon proved to be not successful.

Certainly at that time the influence of Tolstoyism on the sectarian peasantry was not that important for Russian Marxists since they considered peasantry to be largely counter-revolutionary class. They were primarily preoccupied with

gaining the minds of the proletariat which was hoped to be a hegemon in the future revolution. However, after an unsuccessful revolution of 1905-07 in which peasants played a huge role, Marxists became more interested in peasantry and Tolstoyism.

As it was already noted, Lenin thought that peasant sentiments were mirrored by late Tolstoy and his idea of non-violence. For Lenin it was exactly this “Tolstoyan” non-violent behaviour of peasants and soldiers which eventually proved to be “a most serious cause of the defeat of the first revolutionary campaign” (Lenin, 1973a: 208). But this Tolstoyan political behaviour, Lenin believed, would fade away with the development of economic conditions. As Lenin put it, the development would lead to the growth of the proletariat “which alone is capable of destroying the old world which Tolstoy hated” (Lenin, 1973c: 354). The success of the proletariat, however, 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” (Lenin, 1973d: 62).

For Russian Marxists Tolstoyan non-violence reflected not only the economic and political backwardness of the masses but also the gloomy state of intelligentsia. After the failed revolution of 1905-07 many intelligentsia members became disappointed with the very idea of revolution and withdrew from activism to the realm of private life. In the view of Russian Marxists, Tolstoyism was an embodiment of weakness in thought and intelligentsia individualism. In order to restore the revolutionary forces of intelligentsia they used the ideas and ideals of the 1870s, the golden age of intelligentsia activism.

Maxim Gorky in his essay *Destruction of the Individual* (1908) compared post-revolutionary intelligentsia's betrayal of socialism and its retreat to individualism with Tolstoyan ideas of self-development that emerged after the failure of revolutionary struggle in the 1870s. What could restore the forces of intelligentsia, Gorky claimed, was the idea of socialism. He believed socialism was the only idea that could enforce intelligentsia and heel its individualism. The political activism of the 1870s for Gorky was exactly proof of such influence of socialism on intelligentsia:

The seventies stand before us as an undisputable evidence of that fact: it is only social idea that can uplift the random fact of individual human being to the level of historical necessity, it is only social idea that poeticizes individual being and by charging one with collective energy gives a deep and creative meaning to individual being. (Gorky, 1997: 66)

Gorky contrasted how socialism brought transformation of intelligentsia into a “militant type” of the 1870s with the psychological corruption of intelligentsia under the influence of individualism in Tolstoyan agrarian colonies of the 1880s:

The drama of these colonies appeared after their very creation: as soon as the group of seeking for ‘simple-living’ began to ‘settle on the land’ – the painful hysterical feeling of ‘self’ and I would erupt with green fire in all of them. The people behaved as if their skin was stripped off, their nerves were out and each interaction with one another would cause unbearable bodily pain.

‘Self-development’ took the form of cannibalism – by promoting some kind of morality people were in fact eating each other. (...) In several months physically healthy people turned into neurotics and being mentally broken they would break up keeping more or less open disdain to each other. (Gorky, 1997: 72)

Tolstoyism for Russian Marxists was not only an example the corruption of intelligentsia’s psychology but also a sign of weakness in their thinking. Georgiy Plekhanov in his article *Karl Marx and Leo Tolstoy* (1911) criticized socialist sympathizers of Tolstoy and tried to bring a sharp division between Marx and Tolstoy. Plekhanov characterized Tolstoy’s thinking as “metaphysical” which means he took things as absolute stable opposite entities. For Plekhanov, Tolstoy’s abandonment of violence as a method of struggle for the good is an example of “metaphysical thinking” which “perceives the relative concepts of the evil and the good as absolute” (Plekhanov, 1952: 407). Plekhanov opposed Tolstoy’s view of 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 concrete circumstances. 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” (Plekhanov, 1952: 409).

Conclusion

In contrast to the image of Tolstoy as a peasant-socialist, the analysis of his socio-political views in the context of his religiosity showed that he was primarily a moral thinker. The analysis based on existentialist framework of Eric Voegelin shows that Tolstoy’s thinking was not a reflection of the peasant condition or some form of political philosophy. His philosophy was rooted in his personal experience and was preoccupied with problems of meaning and absolute. Unlike political philosophers, Tolstoy never aimed to solve the problem of human existence with the political transformation of the world. Instead of creating a cosmion, Tolstoy aimed to unite with the cosmos through his individual reason and moral law. Even before his conversion, he was highly skeptical about society, politics and existing forms of knowledge. In his interpretation of Christianity, Tolstoy developed his own solution to the problem of meaning which lay in the growth of reason as a part of divine nature in all human beings. He criticized Orthodoxy since it did not require the growth of moral reason and put emphasis on eschatology.

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 economy” which included socialist authors, such as Marx and Proudhon. Tolstoy compared the political economy to Orthodox theology since it was looking for social laws but did not provide rational and moral guidance in how people should live. In his mind, political economy served to justify the system of division of labour and did not give answers on the betterment of society. It was morality Tolstoy believed to be the solution to 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 the moral law of non-violence, the social problems will be solved.

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