

Tolstoy and Spirituality



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Tolstoy's Philosophical Legacy

An Interview with Abdusalam A. Guseynov*

Predrag Cicovacki [PC]: You believe that Tolstoy was not just an outstanding writer but also an important thinker. He was furthermore a thinker who was grounded in the long intellectual tradition of philosophers and religious prophets. Among his philosophical predecessors who made a significant impact on him, Tolstoy mentioned especially Rousseau and Schopenhauer. How exactly did they impact him? In your opinion, did they impact him equally, or was one of them more important for the formation of Tolstoy's own thoughts?

Abdusalam Guseynov [AG]: When we speak of the philosophical sources of the worldview of Leo Tolstoy, of the ideological influences he experienced, it is necessary to keep two facts in mind. First of all, Tolstoy was not a philosopher in the traditional European idea of this occupation. He was interested in philosophy only to the extent that it constituted a teaching about life, answered the question regarding what a human being must do in order to live out his or her life in accordance to reason and conscience. Here he was concerned not about the overall truth of how life must be arranged, but rather about the vital problem of how he himself was to live. He was not satisfied with logical persuasion and the factual veracity of philosophical statements; he also tested them on himself. Tolstoy elevated his personal life to the level of an experiment, attesting to philosophical truth. It is not that he strove to build his life according to his philosophical convictions, but the opposite: he sought those convictions that corresponded to life, not to the abstraction of life but life itself, as it is revealed in his own individual experience.

Second, Tolstoy was exclusively a self-willed thinker. He figured everything out himself. He trusted reason absolutely. But only his own reason. He had a

strong immunity against universality as a criterion for truth. He took nothing on faith and could oppose the opinion not only of the majority but even of the whole world if he found it false. This was discovered, for example, in his evaluation of Shakespeare, who, he thought, could not be recognized even as the most mediocre writer, and his pejorative opinion of Napoleon. The philosophical influence that Tolstoy experienced also depended little on the place of the philosopher in the commonly accepted table of ranks. So, for example, he did not regard Aristotle or Hegel very highly. We can say it as follows: Tolstoy himself decided who of the philosophers could have an influence on him.

Rousseau and Schopenhauer, perhaps, influenced Tolstoy more than other philosophers, having had a rational and emotional impact on him. They became close people for him, those with whom he willingly spent time. For fifteen years, instead of a cross, he wore around his neck a medallion with an image of Rousseau. A portrait of Schopenhauer hung in his study for many years, attracting the attention of visitors. The relationship of Tolstoy to Rousseau and Schopenhauer, their influence on him—this is a major topic, demanding specialized (partially already realized) work on the specific analysis of the heritage of Tolstoy, including his artistic creations. Speaking of this, I am obligated to limit myself to the most general considerations.

A great deal attracted Tolstoy to Rousseau: the idea of individual freedom, the emotional emancipation of the individual, the criticism of the sciences and arts in their corrupting influence on morality, the contrast between the state of nature and the vices of civilization, the cult of rural labor and, of course, the rejection of violence in the process of bringing up children. The clarity and sincerity of the style of Rousseau had great significance. It was not only the individual ideas of Rousseau, but first and foremost the overall spirit of his philosophy, aimed at the moral perfection of man, that had an influence on Tolstoy. I also think that, for Tolstoy, Rousseau's own relationship to his philosophy was important: the fact that for him, philosophy was not a type of thinking but a deep personal undertaking.

Tolstoy became acquainted with the work of Schopenhauer in the late 1860s. Here began his continuous interest in philosophy. It is possible that it was he who gave Tolstoy a push toward his interest in Eastern religions, in particular Buddhism. In Schopenhauer, as in Rousseau, he was attracted by the overall ethical nature and the critical direction of the teachings. The idealistic metaphysics of Schopenhauer also attracted him, suggesting a view of the world as a living whole, as will and representation, and seeing the falling away from it in the form of individual will as a degradation. What turned out to be particularly important

* Professor Guseynov's answers are translated from Russian by Diana Dukhanova.

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for him was Schopenhauer's ethics, with its ascertainment of life as inescapable suffering, and the idea of compassion as an adequate answer to the existential situation and a positive program of action. Tolstoy interpreted compassion as a form of love and a way of overcoming the egoism of the animal personality, which isolates people from each other. Tolstoy's attitude toward Schopenhauer changed over time. After the first ten years of enthusiasm, he subjected to criticism and sharply distanced himself from the pessimism of Schopenhauer, from his idea about the meaninglessness of life. Tolstoy came to the conclusion that the claim about the absence of an intelligible meaning in life is logically incorrect because it is, in itself, a conclusion of reason, and it is ethically false, because if he were serious about this claim, he would have ceased living before he made it. The critique of Schopenhauer, in this aspect, became one of the important moments in the process of Tolstoy's working out of his own teaching about non-resistance to evil by way of violence. Another factor in Tolstoy's cooling toward Schopenhauer became his rather late (1887) encounter of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which showed him that the real Kant strongly differs from his interpretation by Schopenhauer. Overall, Schopenhauer remained an important philosophical interlocutor of Tolstoy.

As far as the question of who influenced Tolstoy more strongly, Rousseau or Schopenhauer, I am not sure that it is possible to have an answer to this question or, indeed, if it is a correct question. When an artist creates a painting, does it matter where he gets his paints and which ones? It was not the art of Rousseau or Schopenhauer that determined what would enter into Tolstoy's worldview, but Tolstoy himself decided what he would take from them and what, in consequence, would become not their but his achievement.

PC: Who else, in the long philosophical tradition, had a significant impact on Tolstoy and in which ways? Socrates and Plato? Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius? Kant and Spencer?

AG: Spencer should be excluded from this list, as he was totally alien to Tolstoy. Tolstoy considered Darwin with enthusiasm (Spencer, with his attempt to rethink all of culture in the spirit of Darwin's ideas is an especially clear example of this enthusiasm) to be a form of hysterical contagion. All the other philosophers you named were part of that philosophical treasury from which Tolstoy amply and readily gathered ideas, but not only them. Here a number of other names should be added—for example, Ruskin, Seneca, Skovoroda, Spinoza, Thoreau, Emerson.

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Tolstoy's friend and secretary Dushan Makovitsky recounts that on August 16, 1910, a few months before the departure and death of the writer, a game was undertaken in his home: those present were asked to write on one piece of paper the names of twelve great people, and on another piece of paper, the names of their favorites, excepting Christ and Tolstoy. Tolstoy had one list, because in his opinion, the names of the great people and the names of his favorite people were one and the same. These were: Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Socrates, Plato, the Buddha, Confucius, Lao-Tzu, Krishna, Francis of Assisi, Kant, Schopenhauer, Pascal. This concurrence is telling: Tolstoy only considered his favorite philosophers to be great. For Tolstoy, there was not among them an unconditional figure. He examined every thought of this or that philosopher not in terms of general logic and the context of the corresponding philosophical system, but in the light of his own Tolstoyan teaching. He saw his task not in assessing the philosopher in question from all sides, to remark on his weak and strong aspects, but to pick out the life wisdom contained in their work. The free treatment of the texts that appealed to him was characteristic of Tolstoy; in popularizing them he might shorten something or reformulate it. In a word, he approached them not as authorial but as collective property. He saw all philosophers and spiritual teachers as wise people writing the same book. It is fully logical that all of them, together with Tolstoy himself, became the authors of the same book, which he composed in the last years of his life. This is the book for reading in different versions, constituting four volumes of his complete 90-volume collected works: *Ideas of Wise People for Every Day* (1903); *The Circle of Reading* (1904); *For Every Day* (1909); *The Path of Life* (1910).

PC: One of Tolstoy's central preoccupations, in the last several decades of his life, was to develop an ethical view that would serve as a guideline for his life—something to “live with.” In thinking of Tolstoy's ethics, perhaps the first thing that comes to mind is his reconstruction of the words and message of Jesus. Why was Jesus such an important figure for Tolstoy? What is the central lesson that Tolstoy learned from Jesus? Was the Jesus that inspired Tolstoy the historical Jesus? The Jesus of the four Gospels? Tolstoy's own invention of Jesus?

AG: It is sometimes considered that an answer is straight when it is no longer than the question. I will attempt to follow this rule.

Why Jesus? —Because he expressed more fully than anyone else the idea of love as the basis of life.

216 What is most important for Jesus? —Nonresistance to evil through violence.

Is it about the historical Jesus (the real Jesus), the Jesus from the Four Gospels, or the Jesus of Tolstoy himself? —They are all the same, Tolstoy's personal Jesus was simultaneously the historical Jesus, and the Jesus of the four Gospels.

Now, in a bit more detail.

Among those who influenced Tolstoy, Jesus of Nazareth truly held a special place. Tolstoy chose Jesus in the capacity of teacher and called himself his follower—a Christian. Above I said that among philosophers there was no absolute figure for Tolstoy. Jesus Christ was an absolute authority for him. He did not, at that, consider Jesus as God; he rejected any forms of idolization. Moreover, Tolstoy supposed that for one who truly believes in God, Jesus Christ is not God. He was a real person, a spiritual reformer, speaking his teaching.

Tolstoy's path to Jesus was sinuous and difficult. Born in an Orthodox environment, he absorbed Christianity, as it is said, with his mother's milk. Nevertheless, as a sixteen-years-old he already ceased to attend church and set out to swim upon the waves of worldly success. This swimming, on the one hand, was very successful in terms of worldly renown, wealth, health, family prosperity; on the other hand, it turned into a spiritual catastrophe and led Tolstoy to the brink of suicide. Wishing to come out of the spiritual crisis that occurred on the eve of his fiftieth birthday, Tolstoy decided to return to the bosom of the official religion and, in the course of the year, led the life of the most traditional Christian, meticulously observing all of the Church's instructions, but this did not in any way ease his condition and did not return the lost meaning of life. Then Tolstoy decided to seek for himself the answer to the question of the meaning of life, turning with this goal to all the sources of human wisdom: to the founders of religions, to the great philosophers and moralists, as well as to the worldview of simple working people who are free from the grief, which stood in his way. He took from all sources; and everywhere, among all wise people from Confucius and the Buddha to the Tver province Christian Vasily Siutaev, he finds the same idea: that the meaning of life is love. The idea of love received its fullest and most consistent development in the teachings of Jesus Christ in his Sermon on the Mount.

In this way Tolstoy revealed to himself once again the clear meaning of Sermon on the Mount concerning salvation, establishing that the Christian churches had perverted it, had deprived it of its life-giving principle and replaced it with the symbol of the faith. Having revived his knowledge of Ancient Greek,

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Another important conclusion to which he came was that the focus of the teaching of Christ was a proposition that had been perverted to a greater extent than all the rest: the commandment about nonresistance to violence. It was not allegorical, not complicated, not suggesting and demanding additional clarifications and explanations, but a straightforward and literal understanding of the commandment of nonresistance to evil, bolstered by the demand to forgive one's enemies, an understanding that means the total rejection of violence in all its forms and manifestations: this is the type of understanding that expresses the innermost teachings of Christ, that newness that he brought into the understanding of life as compared to Moses. Thus Tolstoy, in his capacity as a humble disciple of Christ, found the lost meaning of life, and he dedicated his remaining thirty-odd years to the practice of the newly acquired truth, comprehending it and telling others about it.

The rejection of violence, of nonresistance to evil, is the touchstone of Christian love in its most pure and honest expression. The internal harmony of the teaching of Tolstoy, his moral impeccability and logical evidence, is based on the idea that only human beings force others to live according to their will by way of power, threats, and physical coercion. At its basis the striving to subject people around oneself, and the world, to one's own interests is the most extreme form of egoistic self-assertion. The formula of violence is: *as I wish, and not as you wish*. Love represents a movement opposite to that of violence: it is the service of other people. The formula of love is: *not as I wish, but as you wish*. Jesus expressed it when he, on the night before his execution, overcoming the doubt that was taking over him, concluded, in addressing God: *let not my, but thy, will be done*. To love is to follow the will of God.

The problem lies in discerning this will. It is this, according to Tolstoy, that cannot be known. God is the limit of our understanding. The human being, in the parameters of the rational knowledge of the world, can and inevitably does come to a conclusion about his or her boundless foundation, which is called God, but the human being, remaining in the sphere of responsible judgments,

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can say nothing about what this foundation constitutes. Therefore, in the formula of love—*not as I wish, but as God wishes*—what is truly, really accessible to the human being is only the first part: *not as I wish*. To follow it means to reject violence. Rejecting the law of violence, we follow the law of love—this is the cornerstone of the entire rational-spiritual construct of Tolstoy.

Tolstoy was moved by the pathos of truth. He could not in any sense agree that his judgments had the status of opinions, that they represented one point of view. When Tolstoy decided to reach an understanding of the meaning of life, his own life was at stake. He was talking not about curiosity, not about new rational pursuits, a change of occupation and so forth; this was about life itself, about whether he should continue to live or take his own life. He could in no way be satisfied with a point of view. No, he needed the truth, only one truth. That is why, for him, Jesus is real, the Jesus of the Gospels and his own personal Jesus—it is one and the same person. But the Jesus of theology, the Jesus declared as God, the Jesus who gives permission to swing a sword in certain circumstances, sanctioning State violence, the Jesus who rose after his execution, whose Second Coming is awaited—these are not simply opinions, hypotheses, points of view, but genuine, straightforward falsehoods and lies.

PC: Tolstoy took faith far more seriously than religion, if by faith we do not mean any doctrinal creed but rather "one's awareness of one's place in the world, which imposes responsibility for certain deeds." As you yourself commented on it, "Tolstoy's faith looks odd." It is not something that can be institutionalized, nor is it based on any mysticism. Tolstoy's faith is not something that can be proved by scientific means, nor does it seem to relate to our technology-obsessed world. What good is faith, then? Why should faith be the central preoccupation of our lives?

AG: I cannot agree with the assertion that Tolstoy saw faith as something more serious than religion. For him they are both highly important things, and both are inextricably connected. For Tolstoy, religion is the fundamental, basic characteristic of human existence. It expresses the relationship of the human being to the boundless foundation of life, which can be different—both true and false—but outside of which the human being cannot live a rational, conscious life.

The religious relationship of the human being to the endless life that surrounds him or her is genuine when it is established in accordance with and on the basis of reason and knowledge; and it is false when it contradicts reason

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and knowledge, as happens in religions of revelation. Religion, Tolstoy says, answers the question about the meaning of life if the question itself is adequately understood. When a person asks themselves the question about the meaning of life, he or she is actually interested in whether there exists in our lives some kind of meaning besides life itself, beyond its borders. Does there exist in it some kind of meaning that does not disappear with the perishing of life itself? By answering this question, the human being enters the sphere of religion; he or she even enters this sphere as an atheist, because in this case atheism itself represents a sort of religion. Being a rational being, the human cannot help but think about the consequences of his or her actions, including the most remote; cannot help but formulate a relationship to the world as a whole, reflecting on whether this world, accessible to us, is the ultimate reality, or whether behind it there is another boundless reality inaccessible to reason. Similar to the way in which, in his or her capacity as a physical being, the human enters into relationships of the exchange of substance with the surrounding empirical (visible, audible, and so on) world, so in the same way, in his or her capacity as a rational, spiritual being, he or she enters into a religious relationship with the world as a whole. As a matter of fact, faith is religion, with the only difference being that religion is directed outwards in its relationship to the world and its boundlessness, and faith is the internal predetermination of this relationship, its experience in itself.

Tolstoy believes that in order to understand what religion truly is as a form of knowledge and a responsible position on life, it is necessary to reject the false religious ideas and practices cultivated by the Church. In the same way, in order to understand what faith is as a real, important, and integral element of human life, it is necessary to reject the Apostle Paul's (Hebrews 2:1) perverted ideas about faith as the realization of the awaited and as certainty about the invisible. Tolstoy decidedly rejects faith in its common understanding as trust, the appeal to miracles, supernatural powers; as something irrational.

Tolstoy, in fact, revealed faith anew as an indispensable basis for conscious human existence. He determines faith as the consciousness of the meaning of life, as the power of life, as something thanks to which the human being exists. This is not something that one finds as a result of special efforts such as learning, but something that is inherent to the human being, given to him or her along with consciousness. If a human being lives, Tolstoy said, he or she believes in something. If the faith of the Church removes from the human being the responsibility for what he or she does, then true faith, faith in the form in

which it is given to each human being and practiced by him or her, makes possible his or her life in a personal sense.

In the Tolstoyan teaching about faith, we should underline two points. The first consists in the fact that faith corresponds with that which the human being does. It is developed in his or her actions, it represents a certain thread upon which his or her deeds are strung. For this reason, in fact, it is fitting to distinguish between faith itself, imprinted in the factual life and vital function of the human being, and ideas about faith, as well as to examine these ideas in the context of vital activity. Faith without works is dead. The basic argument of Tolstoy as a true Christian, in opposition to a Christian of the Church, consisted in the fact that the Church exchanged the Sermon on the Mount for the symbol of faith.

The second point is as follows: faith cannot contradict reason. Faith is also knowledge, but it is a particular type of knowledge, the type of knowledge to which the human being comes through reason, recognizing its limit. It is possible to formulate the following paradoxical affirmation: faith, in Tolstoy's understanding, consists in taking nothing on faith. A wonderful example of the combination of faith and reason is the Tolstoyan teaching on nonresistance to violence, which, being the result of basic exploratory work, was at the same time the faith of Tolstoy himself, his deep personal conviction.

Among Tolstoy's various definitions of faith there is also the following: the assessment of all the phenomena of life. In it is the answer to our questions: "What good is faith, then? Why should faith be the central preoccupation of our lives?" Faith can be understood as a general axiological basis of vital activity of the human being. It is, first of all, a given system of moral coordinates, by which human deeds, all of human life, is organized. Faith, speaking in short, is the sensibility of life, it is its own type of compass swimming in the sea, a lantern in the hands of one walking at night. I think it would be accurate to express Tolstoy's thought and the essence of the topic itself as follows: faith is that by which the human being lives.

PC: Although Tolstoy considered himself a true follower of Jesus, he was also well-informed about other world religions and spiritual traditions. He held Buddhism and Taoism in high esteem. Is his religious thought a synthesis of various religious traditions, or is his thought something new and unique for himself?

AG: Tolstoy considered himself a follower of Jesus. He knew well and valued highly Buddhism, Taoism, and not only those; he also studied and valued

Confucianism, Brahmanism, Judaism, Islam. One did not contradict the other: he valued the common ethical basis in all world religions, which is the ethics of love, and which can be expressed by the common human truth of not doing unto others what one would not want done onto oneself. The teaching of Jesus Christ speaks of the same thing, only more fully, clearly and consistently.

The religious-moral teaching of Tolstoy is universal and acceptable for any person as a living rational being; it has no cultic, nationalist, class-related, historical, or other boundaries, which would have made him unacceptable to representatives of any particular religion. Nevertheless, this cannot be considered a variant of religious syncretism. Tolstoy is not interested in the differences between religious-cultural traditions and the possibility of combining them in some sort of synthesis. He is interested in the primary truth of human life that they contain, that common seed from which different ancient world and national religions grew. Tolstoy was occupied with different religions not in order to find out what they represent in themselves and to attempt to juxtapose them, but rather in order to find in them that which he seeks, to find in them the answer to the question about the meaning of life, which stood before him. This discovery and joyful surprise consisted in the fact that all the religions without exception answer this question in the same way. Everywhere, as I already said above, he found the idea of love and nonviolence as its adequate expression, and that became his Gospel.

PC: Tolstoy was a harsh critic of the institution of church and state. It is interesting that we live at the time when these institutions, and perhaps institutions in general (banks and media included) have lost their credibility and any robust sense of authority. Does Tolstoy's criticism still apply to our time, or are we undergoing a different crisis of institutional authority?

AG: "The Kingdom of God is within you" — Tolstoy took these words for the title of the composition in which he explores why neither the State nor the Church, nor any external powers can arrange and correctly direct human life, which is principally fragile, full of suffering and accidents. The one thing that is given to the human being and which exists in the fullness of his or her power is the rational consciousness, the ability to recognize truth and be guided by it. The truth of nonviolence is realized in the regime of individual responsible action, and there is no other way of overcoming violence apart from the refusal to commit it, and nothing can stop the human being, having recognized this truth, from following it if he or she has decided to do so. Also, nonviolence,

being a strictly internal individual decision and action, is simultaneously a form of unity with other human beings and with the spiritual universe. This is, if we may so express it, the non-egoistic self-affirmation of the individual; it is self-denying egoism, egoism in reverse. Namely, on the basis of the conviction that the kingdom of God is within the human being, Tolstoy critiques the Church and State, justly considering them to encroach on the moral autonomy of the human being, to carry out coercive power over people. Thus, the Church, in his opinion, rests upon three positions: the recognition of the existence of special people who constitute intermediaries between the human being and God; the recognition of miracles, called upon to affirm the role of these intermediaries; and the recognition of certain propositions that supposedly express the will of God and are considered holy. As far as the government is concerned, it is founded completely on lies, as if violence can be overcome by violence, and represents the organized repressive machine in its internal politics and in the implementation of war in external politics.

Tolstoy's criticism of Church and State preserves its power, and even becomes more vital in our time. This criticism similarly concerns other institutions, because each of them in their own way carry out the dominance and manipulation of people. Tolstoy's position in this matter can be designated as "ethical anarchism." It comes from the conviction that the social life of the human being and his or her moral life are two different things. Social life as a form of organizing large masses of people proceeds, if we use the terminology of the well-known sociologist and writer Alexander Zinoviev, based on the law of "existential egoism"; its goal is external prosperity, benefits, and interests; it is inescapable that some people in society rule others. The vector of moral life is the opposite: nonresistance to violence, the voice of the conscience, love, brotherhood. For this reason the human being, wishing to live a moral life, cannot but step into conflict with social institutions, to strive to go beyond their forms. Tolstoy's relationship to the State can be compared to his relationship to the lust of the body: both deserve moral criticism. Moral law is not the continuation either of the natural process or the social process; it is autonomous in relation to them and posits a different level of human existence.

PC: Out of the entire New Testament, perhaps the most important piece for Tolstoy was the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew's gospel. Jesus there preaches nonviolence and nonresistance to evil (by means of violence). Although there are more than one billion people in the world who consider

themselves Christian, very few accept Jesus's teachings on nonviolence and nonresistance to evil. Why is Tolstoy such a vehement proponent of these views, and why should we follow him in this regard?

AG: Tolstoy was indeed vehement in upholding the idea of nonviolence, having placed upon it all of his rational, spiritual and physical powers, all his life. Why? Simply because he believed in it. Because it is the truth. Because it had led him out of a deep spiritual crisis. For me personally, along with all the arguments and careful investigations that Tolstoy undertook to find a rationale for the truth of nonresistance, an important additional argument is exactly the perseverance and outrage with which he did this. I think that there have been few people in the world who have lived such an intense spiritual and rational life as did Tolstoy, and for whom rational pursuits had such a direct personal meaning, as they did for him.

One might bewail the fact that over a billion people consider themselves Christians and yet do not accept so clearly and unequivocally the ideas expressed in the Sermon on the Mount about nonresistance to violence, but this cannot be considered an argument against Tolstoy and his teachings. These billions of people, in contrast to Tolstoy, consider Jesus to be God; they believe that he ascended to the Heavens and await his Second Coming. Whom, then, do we consider to be in the right here—Tolstoy, or these billions?

Tolstoy talked of three types of truths. Some have become a habit; they do not fully constitute truth. Others have a vague appearance; they are not yet truths. Those of the third category are clearly truths; they are recognized, but they do not enter into everyday life, habit; they constitute the sphere of freedom. It is to this third category that the truth of nonviolence and nonresistance belongs. Its truth is evident to everyone, it is recognized even by those who consider it permissible in certain cases to stray from it, but it did not become a foundation of life, a habitual form of behavior. Tolstoy carefully studied the question of why it is so difficult for humanity to adapt this truth; he analyzed the huge role that historical inertia played, as well as the position of the Church, the interests of the ruling classes; he examined the main objections usually put forward in opposition to nonviolence; and so on. In his approach to the given question, he was, to the highest degree, sober and realistic. At the same time, he was totally sure that the truth of nonviolence will forge its path. In any case, it is undoubtable: his efforts and works made a huge contribution to it and became an example that inspired

224 Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Albert Schweitzer, and many other people. Tolstoy did not fully change the state of affairs the world, but he created a new, more favorable situation in relation to nonviolence as the basis of human coexistence.

PC: Our usual approach to faith and religion is that they stand in sharp opposition to reason and rationality. Tolstoy would strongly disagree. Yet what could possibly be rational about faith? What is Tolstoy's conception of reason and rationality and is there something about his understanding of the relationship of faith and rationality that we should learn from Tolstoy?

AG: On faith, as Tolstoy understood it, and why from his point of view it could only be rational, I already spoke above. Here I will just add one important point.

In his understanding of rationalism, Tolstoy held to general accepted scientific ideas. Everything that we know, we know only thanks to reason, which is in its judgments guided by facts and logic. If there is something inaccessible to reason, it is so only because it is evidenced by reason itself. There are no shortcuts to knowledge.

Reason finds its limit in the fact that it pertains to the world as a whole, to its boundless framework. This is the limit of reason, the limit of our knowledge, which, of course, can constantly be pushed back, but can never be overcome: it is called God. About God as the limit of our knowledge we can say that he is, he exists, but we cannot say anything specific and meaningful about him, nothing about him in himself, about what he represents, because he is that about which we cannot know anything. Although we can know nothing of God, nevertheless, we must live with the knowledge that he exists. The human, rational being, guided by the rational consciousness, cannot act and live without formulating his or her own relationship to the world as a whole, to its very basis. That is why he or she thinks not only about what he or she must do in order to live, but also about the meaning of life itself. The bee that gathers honey, reasons Tolstoy, does not doubt whether or not it acts well. It corresponds with its livelihood. The human being, occupied with sustenance, thinks about different things that go beyond the framework of what he or she does, for example, whether or not he or she brings too much harm upon others, whether he or she does not take food away from others, what will happen to his or her children, about whose sustenance he or she is concerned, the milieu that surrounds him or her, etc. The human being does not only live, he or she also works out a relationship to life and evaluates it. He or she cannot act and live without knowing what he

225 or she lives for, without placing his or her deeds and self in a particular semantic context, which is given by his or her faith and common moral orientation. It behooves us to differentiate between the question of the rational organization of life, its moral livability, and the question of the meaning of life, its moral basis. In the first case we are speaking about scientific reason answerable for our knowledge, skills, technical abilities; in the second case—about faith, responsible for the meaning of life, its common moral basis.

We are speaking of two aspects of reason: the scientific-technological and the moral. Tolstoy clearly designated these differences and sharply posed the question of their relationship. European reason, he believed, developed one-sidedly with an emphasis on the intrinsic value of knowledge and the expansion of the material opportunities of the human being and the society, carried away by the most multifaceted questions, leaving in the shadows that which all people had previously considered the most important: the teaching about life. It is specifically this deformation that became the focus of Tolstoy's criticism, and he, recognizing the absolute nature of reason as the single source of knowledge, strove to direct it to the moral channel that is posed by reason itself. The adequate posing of the question of what reason must do presupposes an answer to the question of why this must be done. Tolstoy did not limit himself to the abstract posing of the question; he simultaneously developed his understanding of faith, which he considered true and which must become the goal of the efforts of human reason.

Speaking today about the heritage of Tolstoy in relation to this question, and about his relevance for modern philosophy, we must remark on the fact that, at the very least, two important questions have no clear answer and, in essence, remain outside the boundaries of philosophical discussion. The first concerns the relationship between morality and knowledge, specifically: can the human being think without his or her thought being constrained by axiological hoops and without setting a certain direction for life; is it possible to consider human life to be rationally organized if it is not based on the correct understanding of that for which the human being lives, why he or she came to this world and exist in it? The second question: if the understanding of that for which one must live is the necessary and limiting condition of the rational organization of life, to what extent does philosophy purposefully occupy itself with this question and how does it answer it?

PC: The seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries were an era in which numerous utopias were presented. There were even attempts to implement some of

them, with more or less tragic outcomes. Tolstoy did not invent a new utopia, but he did take seriously the biblical idea of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps Tolstoy's most important work of nonfiction, a book of about 350 pages, was *The Kingdom of God Is within You*. First of all, is there not a contradiction in that very title: a kingdom is a political category that is realizable only in space and time, while Tolstoy is inviting us to think of a kingdom as something internal (psychological and spiritual). Does not Tolstoy invite some kind of quietism here? Or a passive acceptance of destiny and the evil forces that may dominate our lives? What could possibly be appealing about an internalized version of the Kingdom of God in the face of undeniable evil that spreads through the world like a deadly disease?

AG: Was Tolstoy's teaching not a utopia or a type of quietism?

It is not a utopia. Utopias, beginning with Atlantis, and including also the utopias of the new era, are types of societies. The teaching of Tolstoy has as its subject the individual life of the human being; it answers not the question of how society should be, how it should be organized in a more desirable manner, but the question about what to do, how the individual being is to build his or her life. Further, utopias, as is incorporated into the concept, are non-existent, unrealizable ideas. Tolstoy suggests a solution that is within the power of the human being, within the boundaries of his or her responsible decisions. He appeals to real-life experiences and builds his own life in accordance to the teaching. That formula of Jesus that Tolstoy liked so much—"the Kingdom of God is within you," used by him as the title of a book—speaks about the fact that the human being need not wait for the Kingdom of God (the fulfillment of his or her aspirations) in the future and seek it somewhere in the heavens; it is already here, in the human being, in his or her soul, in his or her rational conscience. Tolstoy suggests a program of moral improvement, a new understanding of the meaning of life, but not a utopia. He insistently underlines that the truth of nonresistance to violence is that new height of morality toward which humanity had been moving for almost two thousand years and which it must adopt by the efforts of each human being, each having recognized its truth. A human being always proceeds in his or her life based on one or another understanding of the meaning of life, on one or another ideal conceptualization of life. Tolstoy only suggests another understanding of the meaning of life, another ideal; we are talking, then, not about the need for the human being, deprived of an ideal, to accept Tolstoy's ideal, but about the need for them to reject a false ideal.

Today, we have a vital question that consists of the following: can the ideal of nonviolence, becoming a reality not in institutions and principles of government, but in individual human experiences, be considered a social ideal in our epoch? My answer would be: I see no other perspective on the development of humanity, or not even the development but the vitality of humanity.

Modern societies have no future, no social future in a different, justly arranged state, which would be free from all that inspires moral disturbance in people today. It is, in fact, so: the lowest views prevailing in society, and the officially proclaimed strategies, emerge from the fact that the future is the prolongation of the present, only in an improved, cleansed form. Social science sanctions the view suggesting that the societies that would be ideal in a moral sense—or, in other words, that would exclude the ruling of people by other people and would be characterized by a brotherly relationship between them—cannot exist as a matter of principle. From here it follows: if the idea of moral improvement preserves its meaning, then its content is not the social medium and its external organization but the rational individual and his or her internal spiritual life.

Here we come to the second part of your question about Tolstoy's quietism. Quietism as a religious-philosophical doctrine did not attract Tolstoy's attention. Several times, in letters to Nikolai Strakhov, he mentions the name of Madame Guyon, remarking that he does not share the view of removal from the world as a goal (December 1885), and of Fenelon, underlining that the latter gave him nothing (July 6, 1891). In the Yasnaya Polyana library there is an almost uncut three-volume collection of the compositions of Fenelon. Tolstoy included in his collection of wise thoughts also three sayings of Fenelon about the liberating role of the internal work of the human being upon the self. This testifies to the fact that quietism was on the far periphery of Tolstoy's occupation and thought. In essence, the views of Tolstoy also cannot be qualified as quietism, although such reproaches were made against him, including those from the point of view of Marxist criticism. He speaks not of retreat from the world for the sake of unity with God, but of changing one's way of being in the world. You find the affirmation that "the kingdom of God is within you" to be contradictory because a kingdom, as a social political category, exists in space and time, and that which is within us (the soul) is outside of space and time. Tolstoy truly saw the meaning of life in the human being's care for his or her own soul and not the body, because through bodies human beings separate from one another, and through souls they come together. Besides, he also clearly understood that the soul does not exist outside the body and without the body, which, it is supposed, has its own coordinates in space and time. The care of the soul, the building of

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the Kingdom of God within oneself, consists in the body becoming a tool of the soul, and not the other way around. The unusually active lifestyle of Tolstoy after finding his faith, the uncompromising battle that he waged against the institutions and heralds of violence, his restructuring of the whole character of his own activities with the inclusion of physical labor, his titanic striving to learn and interpret ideas of nonviolence, his very physiognomy, which recalls more readily the biblical Samson tearing apart the jaws of lion than an Indian yogi who has retreated within himself—all this in no way fits with quietism.

It is totally impossible to agree with the proposition that, in thinking about the soul, Tolstoy factually recognized the dominance of evil in the world and gave the world over to the hands of the devil. No, according to Tolstoy, the world belongs to God, there is a good meaning to it. Tolstoy rather adhered to the idea that there is no evil, than that it is omnipotent. For one who understands the true content of life, Tolstoy believed, there is no evil. When he connected evil with the condition of the soul, he meant that it is possible to liberate oneself from it. The very idea of nonresistance to violence meant the rejection of violence: the rejection of the striving to defeat evil with evil. A stranger to all mysticism, Tolstoy was least of all inclined to mystify evil.

PC: It is often claimed that one of the greatest achievements of Western culture, and one that is moreover connected to the unique personality of Jesus Christ, is the development of individualism. Tolstoy was well aware of this view, but his teachings seem to be opposed to individualism. Despite being a pretty unique individual himself, Tolstoy emphasized what is of value for humanity in a general sense, regardless of our individual differences. What do you think of this aspect of Tolstoy's view, and is this one of the reasons why he is often dismissed as a serious thinker?

AG: Individualism is a sociological or, at the very least, an ethical and sociological category. Whatever is meant by the individual, we are speaking about how the good of one (given, concrete) human being correlates with the good of other people, all of society. It is not a matter of how to behave toward others, how to arrange one's interactions with them, but about how to correctly behave oneself, about what constitutes the true meaning of life, worthy of human predestination: this is what interests and concerns Tolstoy in the liveliest manner. In this approach, what comes to the forefront is not the sociology and psychology of the relationship of individuals toward each other, in their dispositions in the parameters of society, but the ethical philosophical problem

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of the relationship of the human being to themselves, or more concretely, the relationship of the soul, the rational consciousness of the human being and his or her body, the physical and social demands. The body, the necessity of meeting its needs, the provision of its safety, comfort, and convenience, separates the individual as a private person within his or her own place and time, with natural ties and so on; it demands from people self-assertion in the world, demands feelings and thoughts that lead them to such self-assertion. The soul, the rational consciousness of the human being, connects him to life as a whole, with the immortal basis of the world. They are united in the soul, because it is the same for everyone. The problem of the meaning of life, which stands before the human being, and which he or she decides in the activity of their own lives, consists in the alternative between subordinating one's life to egoistic (individualistic) self-affirmation in the world, the good of one's own frail body, or to think of the immortal soul and not stand on the path of evil and violence for the sake of one's animal personality.

We should keep in mind that this position of Tolstoy's, even if it may be called anti-individualistic, acts and realizes itself as the choice of the individual; it is personal decision and action. We should note that one of the sayings of Fenelon that Tolstoy adopted reads as follows: "Only self-denial gives us true freedom." A separate and very special question is the question about individualism as one of the most important attributes of the human being. It is about individualism not as uniqueness, as singularity signifying the difference between one human being and others and their particular position among people. It is not about individualism as uniqueness. Let us ask ourselves, where does this individualism, this uniqueness come from? Is there something in the world that possesses individualism, apart from the world itself, and if we speak of history, of humanity, then is there here something singular, individual, except history itself and the human beings themselves? Is not, finally, the understanding of God one of the forms of comprehension and postulation of that singularity (individualism) of the world, which reason cannot find in the world itself? And if the human being has aimed for uniqueness, having justly observed it in the singularity of eternal life, then he or she has no other choice but to hold to that thread of personal life that connects him or her to the immortal beginning of life. That, I believe, is how Tolstoy thought.

PC: Are the differences between Tolstoy the writer and Tolstoy the thinker reconcilable? Or is there at least a partial overlap between them? If we have to choose between them, which one would you prefer and why?

AG: How Tolstoy the thinker is related to Tolstoy the artist is a difficult question; it remains a subject of debate. After the spiritual revolution that he underwent at the age of fifty, when he—by his own admission—became like a person who leaves the house to acquire something and, having remembered that he forgot something, turns back, as a result of which, what was at the left turns out to be at the right, and what was at the right turns out to be at the left, Tolstoy, with a small exception, turns away from his literary creativity, including the great novels that brought him international fame, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Later, Tolstoy saw the value of his artistic creations in their useful potential to attract people to his teachings.

In the stories, tales, and novels of Tolstoy from the first period, one may find those ideas, including the idea of nonresistance, which later became the content of his faith teachings. There, as in the personal life of Tolstoy, these ideas were fragments along with others, including completely opposite ideas and positions on life. Renouncing these works, Tolstoy renounced the underlying values, the general way of life affirmed in them, exactly as he renounced everything (thirst for glory, wealth, success in society, feats of self-assertion and so on), by which he had previously lived. These were consecutive stages. Nevertheless, the first (let's call it his conditionally worldly, pagan) period of creation and life of Tolstoy was necessary for the second (spiritual, God-pleasing) period; it was necessary, if only in the sense that the second period, the spiritual revolution, could commence only as a result of the rejection of the first, and would have been impossible without it. In *War and Peace* Tolstoy, by his own admission, examined the national idea, and in *Anna Karenina*—the idea of family. He examined, in artistic form, whether the human being can find meaning in life for the sake of the people and for the sake of the family. He came to the negative conclusion, imprinted in the story of the Rostov family and the fate of Anna. Without this, the step later becoming the basis for the transformation that he experienced, and that brought him to the realization that the meaning of life is in the service of God, would have been impossible. This logic also ties together the two periods of Tolstoy's life. The strange conditions of life that brought him to the brink of suicide became obsessions when Tolstoy had everything that constitutes the understanding of earthly happiness: great health, a happy family, wealth, immense recognition in society, influence, international fame—in a word, everything about which, as they say, one may dream. It is precisely because the consciousness of the meaninglessness of perishable life dominated him in spite of everything, Tolstoy turned in the opposite direction.

The writer Tolstoy is known to the world, but the thinker Tolstoy has not yet been revealed. As a writer, he exists in the familial surroundings of other Russian and non-Russian writers. As a thinker, he is alone. His rational achievements are, in my view, significantly higher than his artistic ones. When they are understood in their true depth, then, perhaps, the comparison and contrasting of his literary works and his teachings will cease; then it will become clear that the first is a necessary step to the second, just as crawling on all fours is the first step to walking on two legs.

PC: What are your most serious objections to Tolstoy the thinker? What do you most admire about his thinking? What is Tolstoy's legacy as a thinker? What should we remember him for? Should we remember him as thinker at all?

AG: I dare not make critical remarks about Tolstoy. It is difficult for me to do this even, for example, in relation to such pure theoreticians as Hume or Kant, to say nothing of Tolstoy, who not only thought through to the end but suffered through his teaching. The only thing that comes to me with difficulty and perplexes me in his thought is his use of the terms "God" and "religion." But in this, too, I attempt to understand him: he, we must suppose, did not want to surrender these concepts to those who gave them a completely false interpretation. After all, we cannot reject the concept of honor because it was perverted for centuries by the practice of the so-called noble classes.

When we speak of Tolstoy the thinker, we must keep in mind one significant circumstance. He is not a philosopher in the sense prevalent today and is not part of that milieu in which the "law-givers" are Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Hegel, Russell, Heidegger.... His milieu is different: Confucius, Lao-Tzu, the Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Francis of Assisi, Luther, Thoreau... those who brought, with their teachings and their activity, a new understanding of life; those who, being thinkers, were also teachers of humanity. I cannot imagine a systematization of philosophical knowledge in which Tolstoy could find a rightful place and which would be flawed without his teaching. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine a compendium of religious and moral teachings that could do without Tolstoy. Tolstoy studied philosophy from a young age, occupied himself with it a great deal and thoroughly (especially in the second period of his life); the index of names in his collected works contains such a number of philosophers' names from Heraclitus to Nietzsche and Emerson, which one will not find in many works of professional philosophers. In philosophy, he was chiefly concerned with moralists; for example, he valued

Epictetus, even Spinoza, but, as I already said, he did not like Aristotle and Hegel very much.

Tolstoy's main reproach to philosophy, especially the professorial philosophy contemporary to him, consisted in the fact that it does not give the proper meaning to the question that is at its center: "What am I to do?" Today this reproach sounds more relevant than it was in Tolstoy's time (in order to verify this, it is sufficient, for example, to juxtapose Tolstoy's understanding of consciousness with the modern interpretation of consciousness on the basis of cognitive sciences). This question, the understanding of its paramount place in the lives of human beings and in philosophy, is connected to the future of Tolstoy as a thinker and as a son of humanity.

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