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LEO TOLSTOY AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: A MODERN LOOK

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The article analyzes the main points of the 'indictment' against the religious teachings of Tolstoy. As the main arguments for the inconsistency of Tolstoy's true religiosity, there was always, first, the absence of a mystical element in his teaching, without which religion is impossible (known statements of the writer's 'formalism' of ethics) and, second, his denial of immortality, which is also an axiom for any religion. The reason for this kind of accusations, in our opinion, is a misunderstanding of the basic principles of Tolstoy's religious teachings.

Careful study of religious treatises and journalism Tolstoy leads to the conclusion of the mystical nature of his religious teachings. Tolstoy not only does not deny, but also completely accepts the mysticism, typical of the great systems of philosophy: from Plato and Plotinus to Fichte and Schopenhauer. Genuine, serious mysticism, having a justification in complex philosophical systems, suggests the possibility for a person to move from the terrestrial reality existing in space and time to another reality where the higher meanings of human life are realized. The article argues that the deep understanding of Tolstoy's religious and philosophical doctrine makes the conclusions about Tolstoy as the main ideologist of the revolution unfounded.

Key words: Leo Tolstoy, the religious teachings of Leo Tolstoy, Russian philosophy, Russian revolution

The year 2017 – the 100th anniversary of the Russian revolution – resurrected with renewed vigor one of the eternal Russian questions: 'Who is to blame?' Among the numerous answers broached, V.V. Rozanov's famous accusation, one addressed to Russian classical literature, still holds sway:

We are, in essence, played out in literature. 'So well written'. And the whole thing concerned the fact that he 'wrote well', and what he 'wrote' – nobody cared about it. In content, Russian literature is just such an abomination – an abomination of shamelessness and impudence – like no other literature.¹

¹ Vasilii V. Rozanov, 'Apocalypse of Our Time', in Vasilii V. Rozanov, *Collected Works*, (Moskva: Ephemeral, 1994), p. 415.

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The common intention of Rozanov's work – that Russia was ruined by Russian literature – was picked up by V.T. Shalamov half a century later:

Russian humanist writers of the second half of the 19th century bear the great sin of the human blood shed under their banner in the 20th century. All the terrorists were Tolstoians and vegetarians, all fanatics are the pupils of Russian humanists' (from the 'Manifesto on «New Prose»').²

In the opinion of many thinkers and publicists, it is Russian literature, which in generating destructive ideas, provoked the grandiose historical upheavals experienced by Russia in the 20th century. The name of Leo Tolstoy in these accusations takes almost the first place.

One of the main 'reproaches' for Tolstoy, contained in the writings Russian philosophers, was his denial of culture. According to P.B. Struve, Tolstoy betrayed 'almost all art anathema'.³ A little later N.A. Berdiaev in the article 'The Spiritual Bases of the Russian Revolution' (1918) repeated the traditional accusations against Tolstoy with maximum sharpness, unambiguously linking his name to the revolution: 'The Russian revolution was to exterminate our entire cultural layer, drown it in a natural folk darkness. And Tolstoy is one of the perpetrators of the defeat for Russian culture.'⁴

Another major accusation was Tolstoy's 'numbness' as a thinker and writer in relation to a stranger. According to Berdiaev, 'in the name of the happy animal life for all, he rejected the person and rejected any super-personal values'.⁵ The absolute will of the author, which does not accept any other will or personality, was singled out in Tolstoy's works by D.S. Merezhkovskii:

One could almost say that in all his works there is only one person, the only hero is himself. From Nikolenka to the old man Akim, from Levin to Pierre Bezukhov, from Platon Karataev to Uncle Ieroshka, he is all the same, Tolstoy. His face is reflected in all these faces, as in mirrors, it dissolves into all of these faces, like a white ray of sun turns into a multicoloured rainbow.⁶

² Varlam Shalamov *o literature: Pis'ma A. Iu. Shreideru [Manifest o 'novoj proze']*; *Koe-cto o moikh stikhakh*, ed. Shreider, in *Voprosy Literatury*, 5/1989, p. 241.

³ Petr B. Struve, *Leo Tolstoy*, in *Russkie mysliteli o Lve Tolstom*, (Tula: Iasnaia Poliana, 2002), p. 215.

⁴ Nikolai A. Berdiaev, 'Dukhi russkoi revolutsii', in Nikolai A. Berdiaev, *O russkikh pisateliakh*, (Moskva: Vysshaja Shkola, 1993), p. 101.

⁵ Berdiaev, 'Dukhi russkoi revolutsii', p. 98.

⁶ Dmitrii S. Merezhkovskii, 'Leo Tolstoy i revolutsiia', in Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii. Griadushchii kham*, (Moskva: Respublika, 2004), p. 350-351.

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In Tolstoy's religious views, they saw the reduction of the teachings of Christ to a set of ethical rules and norms. According to A. L. Volynskii,

Tolstoy takes the teaching of Christ beyond his marvellous metaphysical basis. Tolstoy cuts, so to speak, with the knife of reason, the doctrine that appeared before people in the mystical light of eternal life, of immortality.⁷

It is for this reason that most of the thinkers refuted that Tolstoy had a 'metaphysical imagination'.⁸

In modern works, the publicist pathos of these accusations does not weaken, and the origins of the Russian revolution continue to be directly considered in connection with Tolstoy's work and activity. According to the opinion of the publicist and writer D.L. Bykov, 'without Leo Tolstoy no revolution could have occurred'; The Lord, through investing in a prosperous landowner and aristocrat, Leo Tolstoy, the fantastic talent for creating the grand Russian work 'War and Peace', comparable to the 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey', 'thought to obtain a Russian novel, but received a Russian revolution'.⁹

Why is Tolstoy invariably ranked as the culprit, the ideological instigator of social upheaval in Russia? The revolutionary situation at the beginning of the 20th century coincides with Tolstoy's incredible popularity and influence both in Russia and abroad. Tolstoy is a world renown writer, the creator of a whole religious trend – Tolstoism, and at the same time is a constant character in all periodicals. According to N.N. Strakhov,

the slightest news of what is being written and how they live in Iasnaia Poliana, newspapers place on a par with the best delicacies they treat their readers to, that is, on a par with political news, with fires and earthquakes, scandals and suicides.¹⁰

Tolstoy turns into an object of close attention – a figure that largely determines the mass consciousness. Indeed, any word of the elderly man from Iasnaia Poliana was, in the 1900s, immediately picked up by the writer's numerous visitors, the followers of his ideas and thinkers of opposing convictions. This is how the detailed sophisticated mythology about Tolstoy the writer and activist was to be created.

⁷ Akim L. Volynskii, *Nravstvennaia filosofia gr. L'va Tolstogo*, in *Russkie mysliteli o Lve Tolstom*, (Tula: Iasnaia Poliana, 2002), p. 60.

⁸ Struve, *Leo Tolstoy*, p. 214.

⁹ Dmitrii Bykov, *Russkaia revoliutsia kak zerkalo L'va Tolstogo*, in Dmitrii Bykov, *Blud truda. Esse*, (Sankt -Petersburg: Limbus Press, 2007), p. 244-245.

¹⁰ Nikolai N. Strakhov, *Tolki o Lve Tolstom*, in *Russkie mysliteli o Lve Tolstom*, (Tula: Iasnaia Poliana, 2002), p. 67.

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In Russian literature, 'Tolstoy's mythology' is comparable only with Pushkin's (on a world scale - with the 'mythology' of Goethe). But if Pushkin left a lacuna, not saying all 'about himself' forcing the writers and explorers of his life and work to reconstruct the poet's inner world, in the case of Tolstoy everything was different. Tolstoy is one of the most outspoken writers; he himself said everything he could about himself. However, despite the amazing openness of his inner world, the possibilities of 'mythologization' proved inexhaustible. Only here the mythmakers did not follow the path of reconstruction, but the path of interpretation. Russian writers, philosophers, public figures and painters laboured to create the complex, detailed 'mythology' of Tolstoy: Tolstoy's life and work used to be and continues to be an inexhaustible source of memoirs and artistic interpretations, fundamental academic research, and countless articles.

Tolstoy was for the whole generation of his closest and younger contemporaries a pillar, a foundation, a guarantee of world stability. One can provide plenty of statements of the way Tolstoy's contemporaries expressed this notion. I.A. Bunin recalled his dialogue with A.P. Chekhov: 'When Tolstoy dies, everything will go to hell! (...) – Literature? Bunin asks. 'Including literature' answers Chekhov.'¹¹ In an article devoted to the Tolstoy's 80th birthday, A.A. Blok inquired anxiously: 'And if the sun goes down, Tolstoy dies, the last genius passes away – and then what?'¹²

The words of T. Mann can be considered as the apotheosis of this kind of evaluation: 'In the days when the war raged, I often thought that it would hardly have dared to break out if in 1914 the sharp and penetrating gray eyes of the old man from Iasnaia Poliana were still looking at the world.'¹³

In Russian journalism, with the development of revolutionary events from the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea that Tolstoy was one of the inspirers of these events, that his views had led not to the moral renewal of mankind, but to the destruction of order and the reign of chaos and anarchy, was to arise increasingly often. Tolstoy's confrontation with the existing social system and power is expressed in the famous words of A.S. Suvorin (May 29, 1902): 'We have two tsars: Nicholas II and Leo Tolstoy. Which of them is stronger? Nicholas II can do nothing with Tolstoy, cannot shake his throne, whereas Tolstoy undoubtedly shakes the throne of Nicholas and his dynasty.'¹⁴ Tolstoy's position in Russian social life was to inseparably link his name and his sermon with the coming upheavals.

¹¹ Ivan A. Bunin, 'O Chekhove', in Ivan A. Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii. Okaiannye dni*, (Sankt-Peterburg, 1994), p. 317.

¹² Aleksandr A. Blok, *Solntse nad Rossiei. (Vos'midesiatiletie L'va Nikolaievicha Tolstogo)*, in Aleksandr A. Blok, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1955), p. 73.

¹³ Tomas Mann, 'Tolstoy. (K stoletiiu dnia rozhdeniia)', in Tomas Mann, *Sobranie sochinenii v desati tomakh*, vol. 9, (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959-61), p. 621.

¹⁴ Aleksei S. Suvorin, *Dnevnik*, (Moskva: Novosti, 1992), p. 316.

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P.B. Struve recognized as unprecedented the powerful influence of Tolstoy on the generation that had matured in the 1880s and who had entered social life in the 1890s. However, according to Struve, this influence was destructive:

... Tolstoy is one of the most powerful destroyers of our old order. He was indifferent to politics in the narrow sense, he preached such general ideas and expressed such thoughts on private issues that were of immense political importance, and this preaching was inherent in all the power that the genius and authority of the genius gave. (...) According to his social ideas, Tolstoy in relation to existing society is a great revolutionary.¹⁵

Lev Shestov used the 'zoological' metaphor borrowed from Heine to designate Tolstoy's 'destructive' aspirations: '... Negroes have a belief that a sick lion tries to catch a monkey and tear it apart, and in this way is cured. Tolstoy, usually, also gets cured this way'.¹⁶ The severe criticism which Tolstoy directs towards the state, the Church, the institution of marriage, etc., is explained by Shestov as purely motivated by selfish reasons – by the great writer's desire to get rid of the fear of death: 'He attacked cultured society, progress, medicine, the Church and here with the indefatigability and force of a man who had just looked death in the face, who struck right and left, showing no mercy to anyone and anything'.¹⁷

In its final form, the 'guilty verdict' on Tolstoy was formulated only in emigration, and most vividly in I. Il'in's work 'On the Resistance to Evil by Force' (1925). This work is especially important for our topic: in analyzing the ethical and religious teachings of Tolstoy in detail, Il'in attempts to show 'strictly theoretically' which of Tolstoy's principles are the cause of his 'nihilistic' attitude toward religion, the state, and law.

The Il'in's main thesis lies in the fact that Tolstoy's teachings do not offer a clear and consistent attitude in relation to the problem of evil and the higher goals of human life. 'Count L.N. Tolstoy and his adherents accept and consider their flight from this problem as a way of resolving it'.¹⁸ In Il'in's opinion, Tolstoy's mentality is internally contradictory and easily refuted by strict philosophical criticism. Considering that the whole positive part of Tolstoy's teaching is reduced to a formal morality of personal self-improvement, Il'in concludes: 'Tolstoy's morals as a philosophical doctrine have two sources: firstly, the living feeling of merciful compassion, called 'love' and 'conscience' by him and, secondly, the

¹⁵ Struve, *Leo Tolstoy*, p. 220-221.

¹⁶ Lev Shestov, *Razrushaiushchii i sozidaiushchii miry (po povodu vosmidesiatiletija Tolstogo), Russkaia mysl'*, 1/1909, p. 43.

¹⁷ L. Shestov, *Razrushaiushchii i sozidaiushchii miry*, p. 43.

¹⁸ Ivan A. Il'in, 'O soprotivlenii zlu siloiu', in Ivan A. Il'in, *Sobranie sochinenii v desiaty tomakh*, vol. 5, (Moskva: Russkaia kniga, 1993-1999), p. 89.

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doctrinaire reason, called by him 'mind'.¹⁹ It is the dominance of formal reason, according to Ilyin, that does not allow Tolstoy to see the complexity of life and leads to the dominance of abstract concepts and principles in his teaching.

Paradoxically, the opinion of this émigré fighter against Bolshevism, the ideologist of the white movement, converges with the opinion of the main ideologist of Bolshevism, V.I. Lenin. In the famous article 'Leo Tolstoy as a Mirror of the Russian Revolution' written to mark Tolstoy's 80th birthday (1908), Lenin recognizes the main feature of the writer's views as his internal contradictions, and, like Il'in, emphasizes his ideal of personal righteousness as the most important negative feature in Tolstoy's worldview:

The contradictions in works, views, teachings, in Tolstoy's school really scream out at one . On the one hand, he is a brilliant artist who has produced not only incomparable pictures of Russian life, but also first-class works of world literature. On the other hand, he is a landlord who fools for Christ's sake. On the one hand, he represents a remarkably strong, direct and sincere protest against public lies and falsity, on the other hand, a Tolstoyan, that is a dissipated, hysterical whiner, is how a Russian intellectual is called who, in publicly beating himself on the chest, says: 'I'm foul, I'm nasty, but I'm making moral self-improvements; I do not eat meat anymore but eat rice cakes instead.'²⁰

It is clear that in Soviet times the viewpoint of Lenin completely determined the attitude towards Tolstoy, however, with the revival of Russian religious philosophy and its heritage post 1990, the opinion of Il'in and his close thinkers, such as D. Merezhkovskii, P. Struve, V. Zenkovskii and others, came to the fore in the comprehension of the topic 'Tolstoy and the Revolution.' But the general vector of assessments remains the same: Tolstoy is still recognized as being the most important ideological provoker of revolutionary events, even though an 'inconsistent' thinker. In the Soviet period, this led to a general positive assessment of Tolstoy the thinker, nowadays, on the contrary, to a negative one (in the manner of D. Bykov as quoted above).

However, an attentive attitude to the accumulated historical experience forces us to be cautious about judgments that repeat only what was said a hundred years ago.

The main points of the 'indictment' against Tolstoy, contained in the works of his critics, we would formulate as follows:

First, Tolstoy sharply criticized the autocratic regime in Russia and thereby contributed to the protest moods in society.

Second, Tolstoy denied state power and the state system, that is, he was an adherent of anarchism.

¹⁹ Il'in, 'O soprotivlenii zlu siloiu', p. 90.

²⁰ Vladimir I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 55 tomakh*, vol. 15, (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1958-1966), p. 181.

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Third, he preached an individualistic morality that called people to personal perfection, but ignored the spiritual unity of people and their social solidarity.

Fourth, Tolstoy eliminated religion from people's lives (replacing it with a kind of 'surrogate'), and along with it all spiritual values, and this contributed to the spread of nihilism, the rejection of all values. Tolstoy sees only the 'animal' personality of man, but does not see its highest destiny.

Fifth, Tolstoy did not recognize the existence of a significant evil in the world and therefore did not expect any struggle to arise with it.

On the first point there can be no doubt – Tolstoy's journalistic articles and much of his fiction (especially the novel 'Resurrection') criticize the existing power and the existing social order uncompromisingly and, strictly speaking, call for their destruction. The contemporary state of Russian society is seen by Tolstoy as a situation of 'terrible choice':

(...) whether to continue, despite all the disasters that have been undergone, obey, following the example of the Eastern nations, its irrational and depraved government or, as all Western nations have been doing so far, who recognized the harm of the existing government, overthrow it by force and establish a new one.²¹

A glance at Western countries makes people (non-working) who are accustomed to their prosperous, well-off life think that the way of overthrowing the government and establishing a new government is quite acceptable and natural especially if we consider the good 'the military might and success of industry, trade and technical improvements and that external brilliance, which, with their changed governments, the Western nations have reached'.²² However, the very idea of 'establishing a new power', according to Tolstoy, will not lead to change, an improvement in life, if we are to bear in mind the good for all. The main principles, to which any power sticks according to Tolstoy, are violence, deception and robbery. And the change of power, that is, the change of the monarchy to a government of any kind and nature, can lead to nothing, for 'people who limit the arbitrariness of power and make up the congregations, being the owners of power, naturally fell within the same power-corrupting influence that the autocratic rulers had'.²³ According to Tolstoy, wherever there is power, there will be manifest the violence of some people over others, therefore 'power itself must be destroyed'.²⁴

²¹ Leo N. Tolstoy, 'O znachenii russkoi revolutsii', in Leo N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh*, vol. 36, (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1928-1958), p. 320-321.

²² Tolstoy, *O znachenii russkoi revolutsii*, p. 321.

²³ Tolstoy, *O znachenii russkoi revolutsii*, p. 322.

²⁴ Tolstoy, 'K politicheskim deiateliam', in Leo N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh*, vol. 35, (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1928-1958), p. 205.

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It seems that Tolstoy's second point of reference is undoubted; it rejects not only Russian autocracy, but any state power in general, considering even that a despotic regime is less harmful than a democratic one, because the latter is trying to involve the whole nation in the political process and thus 'corrupts' it.

With regard to the third point of the 'accusations', one very typical of Tolstoy's critics, one can note that the same Il'in who unequivocally accused Tolstoy of individualism and subjectivism in the book 'On the Resistance to Evil by Force', in his earlier article 'The Basic Moral Contradiction of War' (1914) gave a very different characterization of his ethics. Il'in acted as a sincere 'defender' of the writer from the unfair criticism of V. Soloviev in his work 'Three Conversations on War, Progress and the End of World History: 'according to Il'in, in Soloviev's work 'the deep and substantive moral aspirations of Leo Tolstoy were transferred without understanding to the form of an unjust caricature.'²⁵

The main moral contradiction of the war, according to Il'in, is generated by the requirement to kill the enemy, whereas in the act of murder there is a destruction of spiritual unity, connecting people and making their life meaningful and good. Il'in sharply contrasts 'love' that connects people, and 'violence' that destroys this connection ('continuity', 'soul affiliation'). 'Violence', according to Il'in, is terrible because

every tear in the social and spiritual stuff, every act of rejection, resentment and violence multiplies in the souls of people (...), is transmitted from the soul to the soul, especially if the power of love does not have time to extinguish its destructive flames and heal the gaps that have arisen.²⁶

Il'in rightly sees the reason for Tolstoy's rejection of violence, not in the ideal of personal righteousness, but in the need to preserve and strengthen people's universal spiritual connection.

As the central principle of his ethics, Tolstoy believed in the inseparable spiritual unity of people, as opposed to the widespread opinion of the individualistic character of his morality; it is this unity (which he calls God) who lives in man. The idea of the unity of people is most clearly expressed in the ethical-philosophical book 'The Way of Life' (1910).

All living creatures are separated from one another by bodies, but what gives them life is one and the same in all. (...) It is not enough to say that in every person there is the same soul as in me: in every person lives the same thing that lives in me. All people are separated from each other by their bodies, but all are connected by that only spiritual principle, which gives life to all. (...)

²⁵ Ivan A. Il'in, 'Osnovnoe nravstvennoe protivorechie voiny', in *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, vol. 5, (Moskva: Russkaia kniga 1993-1999), p. 25.

²⁶ Il'in, *Osnovnoe nravstvennoe protivorechie voiny*, p. 15.

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When you think about those millions and millions of people who live the same life as me, somewhere tens of thousands miles away about whom I will never know anything and who do not know anything about me, then involuntarily you ask yourself: if there is really no connection between us and we will die without knowing each other? It cannot be. The truth is that this simply cannot be. Strange as it may seem, I feel, I know that there is a connection between me and all the people in the world, both living and dead. What exactly this connection is, I can neither understand nor express, but I know that it exists. (...) Only then does a person understand his life when he sees himself in every person.²⁷

A principle not allowing one to call the ethical and philosophical system of Tolstoy 'individualistic' and 'subjective' is herein expressed. If in their spiritual essence people are in a certain unity, personal efforts to strengthen and improve their own spiritual essence lead to the perfection of all. For Tolstoy, love is the main force that connects people, and it has not an animal, but a spiritual and even a divine-mystical character. Love leads a person to understand that his being is not limited by his body and is infinite, that is, it encompasses all that is living.

The views of Tolstoy understood in this way have an obvious religious meaning, in connection with which the fourth 'accusation' is also false. Church critics of the writer persistently argued that he had no deep religiousness; but in fact, the goal of Tolstoy's religious teaching was not an opposition to the official Church, but the desire to clear the original meanings of the Christian teaching from later historical distortions and stratifications.

As the main arguments for inconsistency within Tolstoy's true religiosity, was always, first, the absence of a mystical element in his teaching, without which religion is impossible (the known statements on the writer's 'formalism' of ethics) and, second, his denial of immortality, which is also an axiom for any religion. The presence of mystical elements in the religiousness of Tolstoy has only been touched on but will be discussed later. As for the idea of immortality, in Tolstoy's texts we find contradictory statements on this subject, but the categorical denial of the idea of immortality invariably arises only in connection with criticism of Church dogmas.

In Tolstoy's later diaries, we find numerous pieces in which the idea of immortality becomes the starting point for an explanation of the various phenomena of ordinary human life. For example, in the entry for December 7, 1895, we read:

²⁷ Leo N. Tolstoy, 'Put' zhizni', in Leo N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh*, vol. 45, (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1928-1958), p. 47-49.

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Life is an increase of love, the expansion of one's limits, and this expansion takes place in different lives. (...) This expansion is necessary for my inner life, and it is necessary for the life of this world. But my life cannot be manifested in this form, it manifests itself in innumerable forms. I am able to see only just this one.²⁸

Here is how Tolstoy relates the idea of immortality to the possibility of suicide:

It would be good to write a story of what is experienced in this life by one who had killed himself in a preceding one: how he, stumbling upon the same demands he had had in the previous life, perceives what it is necessary to fulfil. And in this life he is more intelligent than others, for remembering this lesson.²⁹

Finally, the accusation laid against Tolstoy that he does not recognize the evil in the world and denies the struggle with it must also be recognized as unfair, conditioned by a reluctance to understand the writer's teachings in their entirety. In one of Tolstoy's most important philosophical works, the treatise 'On Life' (1887-1888), the theme of the permeability of earthly human life with evil and suffering sounds like a refrain. In this book, 'life' itself is repeatedly defined by Tolstoy as 'the pursuit of evil for good', but the author does not suggest that we ignore the evil, he considers it quite natural for a person immersed in earthly life to experience the surrounding evil and suffer from it:

My whole life is a desire for good for myself, (...) my mind tells me that the good cannot be for me, and whatever I do, whatever I achieve, everything will end with the same thing: suffering and death, destruction. I want the good, I want life, I want a reasonable sense, but there is just evil, death, nonsense in me and in everything around me. How to be? How to live? What should I do? 'And there is no answer.'³⁰

Many people realizing the power of evil in the world decide to fight against it using the methods of this world, that is, through 'resistance to evil by force', but Tolstoy believes that such a position signifies a retreat from the solution of the problem: the elimination of one manifestation of evil with the help of violence which generates other manifestations of it and does not lead to the eradication of evil in the world. According to Tolstoy, the goal is to make efforts aimed at revealing the highest, spiritual, divine, virtuous life within a man and the directly in his earthly existence. The higher life does not have space-temporal certainty,

²⁸ Leo N. Tolstoy, 'Dnevnik 1895', in Leo N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh*, vol. 53, (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1928-1958), p. 74.

²⁹ Tolstoy, 'Dnevnik 1895', p. 79.

³⁰ Leo N. Tolstoy, 'O zhizni', in Leo N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh*, vol. 26, (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1928-1958), p. 339-340.

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as does the earthly life, and its laws cannot be understood within the earthly life. Here is how Tolstoy describes the transition from earthly, animal life to a higher, intelligent life:

Spatial and temporal forces are definite forces, finite, incompatible with the concept of life; the power of striving for good through submission to the brains is a force that rises to the height – the very power of life for which there are no temporal or spatial limits. (...) A person begins to live a true life, that is, he rises to a certain height beyond the life of an animal and from this height sees the illusory nature of his animal existence, which inevitably terminates with death.³¹

This central element in Tolstoy's religious philosophy helps to clarify many of the misunderstandings associated with the evaluation of his work. In the traditional descriptions of the writer's religious teachings, his main characteristics are recognized as follows: formalism, pure moralism, rationalism and, as the most important, denial of the mystical element of religion. The latter seems especially obvious, taking into account the numerous fragments of Tolstoy's writings, in which he severely criticizes the false 'mysticism' of traditional Christianity.

However, a careful reading of Tolstoy's treatises leads one to the directly opposite conclusion: Tolstoy's teachings are radically mystical in nature. Tolstoy not only does not deny, but also completely accepts the mysticism, typical of the great systems of philosophy: from Plato and Plotinus to Fichte and Schopenhauer. Genuine, serious mysticism, having a justification in complex philosophical systems, suggests the possibility for a person to move from the terrestrial reality existing in space and time to another reality where the higher meanings of human life are realized. The higher reality is 'mystical', since it is impossible to comprehend and describe it with the help of the traditional forms of rational knowledge that science practices. It is not accidental that the most important theme of Tolstoy's philosophical contemplations is the denial of the claims of science to an absolute knowledge about life and all the basic components of human existence.

After we have understood the main idea of Tolstoy's religious-philosophical doctrine, it is not difficult to see the internal justification of the principle of 'non-resistance to evil by violence'. After all, evil is the 'law' of the earthly world and of our earthly life – in this life there is also a 'law' of resistance to evil. But if a person has reached the highest, spiritual life, he has passed into another reality, where the laws of earthly existence no longer function. And just as in this higher reality there are no characteristics of space and time, so there is neither the law of the fundamental nature of evil, nor the law of the resistance to evil within it.

³¹ Tolstoy, 'O zhizni', p. 361.

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Thus, only people completely immersed in earthly reality and in ordinary (animal) life can give earthly evil an absolute value and accordingly consider the physical struggle with evil ethically necessary and obligatory for everyone. If we admit the existence of a higher spiritual and mystical life, to which the true religion reveals the path, then we must recognize that neither evil itself nor the principle of (physical) resistance to evil is religiously justified, and the rejection of it, as Tolstoy does, is necessary for the acceptance of this true religion.

We have already said that D. Merezhkovskii, in his early work, addressed Tolstoy with accusations that he was unaware of the 'mysteries of the spirit' area and that he knew only the 'world of the flesh', that is our earthly world. However, in later works, written in exile, Merezhkovskii offered a completely different, much deeper understanding of Tolstoy's world outlook. In his reflections on Tolstoy there is a fundamental turn, he realizes the need to separate the ethical norms governing human behavior in the earthly world from the religious ones that describe our being in the higher spiritual world: '... non-resistance to evil by violence' is a doubtful truth in ethics, but unquestionable in religion. From great violence to little – this is the ethical way, and the religious goal – the denial of violence is absolute.³² This correctly reflects the meaning of the correlation of the ethical and religious components in Tolstoy's teachings.

In his book 'The Kingdom of God Within You' (1890-1893), Tolstoy claimed that the transition from the lower life to the higher life is a long and difficult process, and very few people could fully realize it. All people are, in this sense, on different levels of perfection; therefore, the moral precepts for people are different. This means that the principle of 'non-resistance to evil by violence' must be understood as a limiting requirement. Those who are only moving towards perfection must be guided by 'commandments', which do not require complete removal from the laws of the lower being.

In the Sermon on the Mount Christ has expressed the eternal ideal toward which it is proper for men to tend, and that degree of its attainment, which can be reached even in our time.

The ideal consists in having no ill-will against any one, in calling forth no ill will, in loving all; but the commandment, below which, in the attainment of this ideal, it is absolutely possible not to descend, consists in not offending any one with a word. And this forms the first commandment.

(...)

The ideal is never, under any condition, to make use of violence; the commandment which points out the degree below which one should not descend to - not to pay for evil, but to suffer insults, to share the last penny. And

³² Dmitrii S. Merezhkovskii, 'Leo Tolstoy i bolshevizm', in Dmitrii S. Merezhkovskii, *Tsarstvo Antikhrista. Stat'ii perioda emigratsii*, (Sankt-Peterburg: RKhGI, 2001), p. 150.

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this is the fourth commandment. The ideal is to love enemies, who hate us; the commandment which points out the degree of the attainment below which it is possible not to descend, is to do no evil to our enemies, to speak well of them, to make no distinction between them and our fellow citizens.

All these commandments are indications of what we are fully able not to do on the path of striving after perfection, of what we ought to work over now, of what we must by degrees transfer into the sphere of habit, into the sphere of the unconscious. But these commandments fail to form a teaching, and do not exhaust it, and form only one of the endless steps in the approximation toward perfection.

After these commandments there must and will follow higher and higher ones on the path of perfection, which is indicated by teaching.³³

Apparently, here Tolstoy is flexible enough to understand moral precepts and norms. The commandment of 'non-resistance to evil by violence' he recognizes as an ideal requirement, which refers only to the transformed, perfect state of man.

Thus, if we pay due attention to Tolstoy's religious and philosophical teaching, all the accusations from which drawn are conclusions as to him being almost the main ideologue of the revolution lose their validity. There remains only his publicism directed against autocratic power, but in it Tolstoy did not say anything new regarding the criticism of the tsarist regime that had not been expressed both before and after him. Contemporary accusations of Tolstoy as one of the main 'provocateurs' of the revolution clearly demonstrate, on the one hand, the reluctance to truly understand and accept the heritage of this great writer and thinker and, on the other hand, a continuing misunderstanding of the true causes of revolutionary events.

³³ Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom of God is Within You', in trans. L. Wiener, *The Complete Works of Count Tolstoy*, vol. 20, (Boston: L. C. Page and Company Inc., 1905), p. 104-105.