

CHAPTER 11

TOLSTOY

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IN 1912, two years after Tolstoy's death, Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944), political economist and rising Orthodox theologian, edited a commemorative anthology, *On the Religion of Leo Tolstoy*. Bulgakov attributed his rediscovery of God and faith to his debates with Tolstoy. Among his own contributions to the volume was one titled 'Simplicity and Simplification', where Bulgakov traced the force as well as the occasional falseness of Tolstoy's worldview to its origins in a glorification of 'childlikeness' [*detskost'*]. Bulgakov suggests that the Biblical precept to receive the Kingdom of God 'like a child' (Luke 18: 17) resonated in Tolstoy with the radiant idealized world of his own childhood, a realm remembered as free from the diverse, perverse appetites that govern adults. For Tolstoy, 'simplicity is the religious health of the soul, in opposition to morbid complexity, the consequences of sin' (Bulgakov 1912, 283). This simplicity was more than bodily asceticism. Tolstoy insisted on equating it with the highest reaches of the human mind. To 'be as little children' was a logic, a weapon against the learned and the subtle, a slap in the face of science, material productivity, historical progress. And it fuels the most puzzling sides of Tolstoy as religious thinker.

Consider these paradoxes. In 1901 Tolstoy, an ardent Christian, was formally 'separated' (although not technically excommunicated) from the Russian Orthodox Church. He had come to reject the Trinity, the sacraments, original sin, redemption, salvation, Final Judgement, and all other 'supernatural ways of caring for men' that had turned his search for the meaning of life into an 'utter absurdity, incomparably worse than what presented itself to me by light of my unaided reason' (Tolstoy 1940, 'Conclusion to *Critique of Dogmatic Theology*', 87, 91). And yet Tolstoy's unaided reason had led him, again and again, to narcissistic self-loathing and despair. A deep admirer of Jesus, Tolstoy debunked all mysteries and miracles associated with His life. But he rejected also the secular biographies by Strauss, Bauer, Renan, and other 'freethinking exegetes' because they were ethically non-committal and thus useless (McLean 2008, 119–24). In his own 'quest for the de-historicised Jesus' (Greenwood 1978, 164), Tolstoy undertook to retranslate and 'harmonize' the Gospels, seeking

there not the divinity of Christ but a universally binding behavioural code. Incarnation, it would appear, was not the unqualified Good News. The mature Tolstoy aimed not at integrating body and spirit, nor at celebrating their complex mutual enablement, but at something simpler and more unforgiving: to liberate the spiritual from the animal in us to the utmost degree.

And yet the spiritual in us, understood as a unifying, ever-changing awareness that radiates out from our body but does not die with the body (in theological terms, the 'soul'), is nowhere given precise contour in Tolstoy's writings. The closest he comes is probably chapter 28 of his 1886 treatise *On Life*, where each person's synthesizing consciousness is identified as his or her 'character', one's unique relation with the world. This relation, once worked out, is eternal (Scanlan 2006, 57–8). But Tolstoy never affirmed the survival of personality after bodily death. Or rather, as the religious historian Vasily Zenkovsky noted, 'Tolstoy repeatedly acknowledged that there was no basis for denying individual immortality'—but his pride, disinterest in the religious experience of others, and idiosyncratic blend of 'mysticism, empiricism, and individualism' prevented him from affirming it (Zen'kovskii 1912, 519, 503). Tolstoy was charismatic in his appeal to common sense, to 'what we all know'. However, he devoted his final decades to separating what he called *razumnoe soznanie*, 'reasonable consciousness', from personality and personal memory, which had become a burden for him (Paperno 2014, 128–57). A rebel by temperament and a radical individualist, Tolstoy, paradoxically, came to believe that in their reasonable consciousness all people are the same.

For Tolstoy, the *concept* of God was invariably illuminating and always a relief. In his response to the Holy Synod's edict separating him from the Church, he declared: 'I believe in God, Whom I understand as Spirit, as Love, as the Origin of All... I believe that the authentic happiness of every person lies in the fulfillment of the will of God' (Tolstoy 1901, 354). But Tolstoy subjected this 'All' to a staggering number of redefinitions and relocations, grounding it successively in beauty, nature, art, self-perfectibility, and eventually bringing it home as a moral prompt inside each of us. This insistence on a 'Kingdom of God Within You'—Tolstoy's book of this title is his implementation of Luke 17: 20–1—puts a stop to all questions of historical timing, because the Advent of the Kingdom depends upon ourselves alone (Tolstoy 1894, 177). In terms of Erich Lippman's deft dichotomy in this volume, Tolstoy falls somewhere between a God-builder and a God-seeker, but without the consolations of either.

Such complexities of thought are formidable, not at all simple, but they pale alongside two final Tolstoyan paradoxes. The first is his theory of the just act. All his life Tolstoy was an energetic and engaged activist, easily roused to outrage. But he came to insist that we 'resist not evil' (at times qualified as 'resist not evil with further evil or violence'; at times so phrased that we resist not evil *at all*): a position that his harshest detractors equated with moral indifferentism and even (among Freudian critics) with masochism (Rancour-Laferriere 2007, 94–6). In a passionate rebuttal to Emile Zola in 1893, Tolstoy called for 'non-doing' [*nedelanie*]¹—because a Protestant work ethic invested in science

and thus morally neutral was likely to do more harm than good (Denner 2001, 11–16). This negative cautionary is characteristic. Affirmation and gratitude did not come easily to Tolstoy the philosopher. He was truer to himself as a naysayer [*netovshchik*]. He delighted in Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) in part because, unlike reformist political doctrines, it did not pose ambitious positive goals for humanity but instead reinforced the Beatitudes with injunctions to individuals not to do certain things. We are helpless, it seems, against an onslaught of bad thoughts, but bad deeds, bad habits can always be corrected. A case in point: the Orthodox Church acknowledged eight cardinal sins: gluttony, lust, avarice, melancholy, anger, despair, vainglory, pride. In his *Christian Teaching* (1894–1896) Tolstoy deleted the more recalcitrant sins of mood or attitude (the last five) and retained only the first three external actions—that is, physical appetites to which we could learn to say *no* (Hamburg 2010, 151–3). Proof of this point: although Tolstoy continually, and publicly, condemned his own personal behaviour as an idle and overfed member of the Russian titled nobility, he never conquered his anger, depression, or pride.

Most paradoxical of all, however, is Tolstoy as a theorist of Christian love. He worked to remove love from the causal nexus, that is, to replace a possessive 'love of' with the less greedy 'love for' (Gustafson 1986, 179–90). But as Tolstoy aged, his understanding of love seemed to require more and more distance and autonomy from actual living people. His was a pursuit of selflessness that aimed not only to get outside his own grasping, sinning, and repenting self, but also to get outside *all* selves (Herman 2015). The ideal (which infuriated many, including his wife) was to turn himself into a font that radiated love, but a font optimally disengaged, freed of the need for sustained or reciprocated emotional contact. This desire to help people without knowing them, without reacting to or interacting with them on their own terms, might have been Tolstoy's metaphysical extension of Mark 7: 15–19, Christ's injunction that what comes into a man's body, or what is cast at us by others, cannot defile or dishonour him, only what comes out of his heart. But in practice it became the paradox of one-way, impersonal loving. For saying no to bad things does not necessarily prepare one for loving. As the philosopher Vasily Rozanov (1856–1919) remarked in his article on Tolstoyan non-resistance to evil: 'Love seeks out, examines, is often angry, sometimes dissatisfied, sometimes even punishes... [But Tolstoy's love] does not console even its own carriers... It does not caress, it does not arouse, it is *dead*' (Rozanov 1896, 272). This is the economy that prompted Mikhail Bakhtin to call Tolstoy a 'monolithically monologic' thinker (Bakhtin 1984, 72)—that is, a person unable to tolerate a radical Other in his universe, unable to listen to that Other, and therefore a person who found it exceptionally difficult to love properly, or to pray.

This chapter addresses these paradoxes. After noting some varieties of religious experience in Tolstoy's great fiction, we consider Tolstoy as religious thinker under four rubrics: the crisis years and *What Then Must We Do?*; Tolstoy's Jesus and the assault on the Temple; *On Life* (and on the afterlife); and in conclusion, briefly, Tolstoy's standing among his fellow moral philosophers.

STATES OF GRACE IN THE GREAT FICTION

In Tolstoy's creative fiction, what induces a state of grace? First, there is the bliss of feeling loved. Konstantin Levin successfully proposes to Kitty (*Anna Karenina*, part four, chapter 14) and suddenly 'happiness gets into him', the entire world becomes cause for rejoicing, his rapture is infectious and his love spreads out mindlessly. Natasha Rostova, forever childlike in that she never doubts her right to be admired and loved, lives in just such a generously 'graced' state for most of *War and Peace*. Bereavement stuns her, but teaches her little. Then there are moments of oneness with nature, so intense and epically conceived that they can absorb, even neutralize, violence: Levin mowing with his peasants, the heightened beauty of a meadow before it becomes a battlefield, the Rostov siblings Nikolai and Natasha in ecstatic communion during and after the Hunt in *War and Peace* (II, four, chapters 3–6). Grace descends on those who let go and allow larger forces to take command (history, fate, the impersonal interplay of living creatures). The peasant Platon Karataev, prisoner of war, has no worries, no attachments, no memory of past utterances and no need of it, since his life 'had meaning only as part of a whole of which he was always conscious' (*War and Peace* IV, one, chapter 13). When the French begin their retreat from Moscow, Fieldmarshal Kutuzov lets go of his failures and successes alike, and weeps. Genuine prayer is always compatible with these moments.

An errant individual life can always be transformed by a revelation of 'pan-unity', the unexpected vision of a larger grid on which our personal acts at last make sense. Pierre Bezukhov, another prisoner of war in that French transit camp, gazes wonderstruck at the sky and affirms the freedom of his soul (*War and Peace* IV, two, chapter 14). Dmitri Nekhlyudov, parting with Katyusha in a Siberian prison at the end of *Resurrection* (1899), opens up Matthew 18 and the Sermon on the Mount and suddenly grasps the import of Christ's message, that evil men cannot correct evil in others (part three, chapter 27). In Tolstoy's peasant tragedy *The Power of Darkness* (1886), the hired hand Nikita, womanizer and infanticide, shocks his wedding guests by suddenly falling to his knees and confessing his crimes. In all these cases, for readers and spectators with eyes to see, an apparently sudden revelation has been meticulously prepared for by a mesh of tiny details, guiding the subject towards enlightenment.

Potent transformations occur on the brink of death. Ivan Ilyich, dying of cancer, finds his hopeless pain at last replaced by light. The merchant Brekhunov in 'Master and Man', lost and fatally freezing in a blizzard, thrills to the fact that his servant Nikita, kept warm beneath him, is alive. But shedding the body need not be peaceful, nor undertaken as an act of pacific sacrifice. The Chechen-Avar hero of Tolstoy's final novel *Hadji Murad* (1896–1904), pierced with bullets, cleft with a dagger, continues to kill Russians until his consciousness separates from his body, leaving his enemies to 'kick and hack at what no

longer had anything in common with him'. Tolstoy, for all his doctrinaire pacifism, approves of Hadji Murad's end. This courageous warrior is irreproachable because he lives in harmony with his own nature, with Nature writ large, and dies in full knowledge of the relation between human part and cosmic whole.

Being loved, letting go, fitting in as organic part to whole: these are moments of Tolstoyan grace. Tolstoy himself would have resisted the term. In his anti-clerical writings, Grace is yet another church falsehood, predicated on meaningless ritual that promises to 'save and sanctify a man' (Tolstoy 1940, 88). But the state of bliss experienced by his fictive heroes is the same as that which descends on believers in a sacrament, and these moments all share certain traits. They are fleeting (if their recipients survive them at all). They are reciprocal (that is, persons are interchangeable, both in enmity and in love: what you do to others is done to you). And they return us with savage purity to the present tense. Anxiety towards the future melts away, as does regret about the past. Part of Tolstoy's moral project was to take the hedonism out of the idea of 'living for the present'. At-oneness, reciprocity and presentness were always marks of authentic being for Tolstoy. But after his spiritual crisis of 1877–1885, these virtues began to assume specific religious meaning.

THE CRISIS AND WHAT THEN MUST WE DO?

For seven years after *Anna Karenina* (1877), so notes Tolstoy's close friend and English translator Aylmer Maude, Tolstoy, at the peak of his powers, ceased writing fiction and devoted himself wholly to a study of the Gospels, dogmatic theology ('although the latter subject repelled him'), and religious reflection (Maude 1951, vii). William James, in Lectures 6 and 7 of his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), diagnosed Tolstoy's dark years as pathological depression (James 1982). Tolstoy read this verdict and responded to it. Remarking in his diary for 1909 that the celebrated American psychologist and pragmatic philosopher had diagnosed him 'close to mental illness', he criticized James's book for its 'inaccurate relation to the subject—[too] *scientific*' (Orwin 2003, 59–60). From closer quarters, Tolstoy's wife actually did fear that her husband had gone mad. She also feared for the security of their family: her famous husband, appreciated at court for his literary genius, had become a 'religious dissident', which in Russia of that time could become a criminal offence (Basinskii 2016, 212). The most thorough and balanced account in English of this protracted crisis is by Inessa Medzhibovskaya (2008). She makes a strong case for Tolstoy's uninterrupted passion for literary art during and after this 'turning with Christ'—but in new forms and according to different principles: parables, folk hagiography, dramatized legends, all 'frugal, severe, entertainment-free art' (Medzhibovskaya 2008, 213, 263–72). The most frequently analysed narrative from these crisis years is *A Confession* (1882), Tolstoy's highly mannered, retroactive stratification of

his life-phases and personal failures. But more significant for his evolving religious philosophy than this self-lacerating reconstruction, I suggest, is his book length treatise from 1886, *What Then Must We Do?* (Tolstoy 1925). Its first half is taken up with bitter lessons that Tolstoy learned from the urban poor while participating in the Moscow Census of 1882. Its final ten chapters synthesize a moral worldview, familiar from the graced moments in Tolstoy's fiction but now based on his new sense of evolution, labour, society, true science, true art, the true church, and happiness [or well-being: *blago*].

Tolstoy builds his case for *What Then Must We Do?* on several core presuppositions. The first regards knowledge. Only an individual consciousness, not a group, can learn from experience—and even others' words are dangerously second-hand. Thus knowledge of my own well-being is not deduced from dogma, miracles, or the claims of experimental science, but from the intuitive workings of my self-conscious reason in all its interiority, fragility, and transience (Seifrid 2018, 511–13). This radicalized Kantianism is supplemented by two further assumptions. All minds, bodies, and cultural behaviours are equal (not as regards political rights but as regards value: all people reason the same and desire the same). The only time that exists is *now*. Speculation backward into evolution or forward into prediction is not only futile but also cowardly, for it distracts me from the moral impact of my present (timeless) act. The second presupposition regards property. The only property I own is my own body (Tolstoy 1925, 339–40). My consciousness can direct this body into four types of activity: heavy physical labour (muscular work); hands-and-wrists craftsmanship; mental labour; and social intercourse (322). As long as I remain aware in my body, I retain full agency. Out of this narrowed sense of true property comes the revolutionary potential of the treatise, its vision of an upcoming revolt of the working classes (331–2). And out of Tolstoy's sense that true consciousness must be individually experienced comes his checklist of obstacles to authentic religion.

For what, Tolstoy asks, is modern science (Darwin) and modern philosophy (Hegel, Comte, Spencer) now teaching us? That 'all mankind is an undying organism' (Tolstoy 1925, 238) and can be objectively studied as such. Of course humans cluster, swarm, and coordinate. But the 'organism' image is misleading and self-serving, argues Tolstoy, because it posits a mythical coordinating brain (no such over-mind exists), out-sources individual morality to laws or to a collective, and justifies the exploitative division of labour. This spatial error has a temporal, 'evolutionary' component. Positivist science and Malthusian Darwinism, proud of their ethical neutrality, justify acts of violence that benefit the powerful wealthy classes (243–5). Indeed, whatever panders to the prevailing social evil is conveniently considered infallible and 'scientific'. In a tour de force comparison, Tolstoy then equates these false scientific and sociological teachings with the 'Church-Christian creed' (250): the same evasion of personal responsibility, deferral of eyewitness evidence, and illogical claims of infallibility by Pope and Holy Synod. Opposed to this false creed is the true church, a church 'in the sense of people united in the highest truth accessible to man at any given period' (284). This church, at present obscured by institutions and (on the animal level) by bad habits and intoxicants, can be accessed easily if we do what we must do: reject the tyranny of money, regard physical work as a joy, and cleanse our minds of false science. Tolstoy is optimistic that

this time is close at hand. He compares our task to hauling a barge, ‘in the direction up-stream shown by the master. And so that the direction may always be the same, we have been endowed with reason’ (345). As Bulgakov notes in his discussion of this treatise, both its halves are ‘simplified’. The Census is one huge diary entry, its purview governed by Tolstoy’s personal feelings, and the social analysis, while responding to current conditions, is a century out of date: political economy as understood by the French physiocrats of the eighteenth century (Bulgakov 1912, 276).

There was much fascinating fallout from *What Then Must We Do?* and its later iterations, not the least in Tolstoy’s subsequent debates with the eminent pathologist and Nobel laureate Ilya Mechnikov on the religious purposes of science (Berman 2016). But a good place to take stock are the definitions of religion and faith in Tolstoy’s 1902 essay, ‘What is religion and in what does its essence consist?’ (Tolstoy 1987, 81–128). Religion is not a stage of human history that we outgrow, as the positivists claimed. It is not (of course) an institution, denomination, or sect. It has nothing to do with mystery, because true religion always clarifies (Tolstoy translated *Logos* not as the Word but as *razumenie*, his neologism for ‘awareness’ (Medzhibovskaya 2008, 203–6)). Because my religion is an outgrowth of my reasoned awareness, it seeks to know (not guess at, but know through experience) the relation between my self and a larger whole, or infinite Being. Here faith [*vera*], or better the meaning of faith, becomes crucial. To be a rational person, I must be governed by more than instinct, including the human instinct to despair. Only faith can keep instincts and reflexes under control. Faith, then, is a type of mindfulness. Because it encourages distance between stimulus and response, it facilitates patience, discipline, and the proper setting of priorities.

Tolstoy introduced this idea of faith as privileged knowing in one of his several (banned) Introductions to his Gospels Project in the early 1880s. ‘Faith is knowledge of a revelation . . . [it] opens out to us, when reason has reached its utmost limits, the contemplation of what is divine, that is, of truth that is superior to our reason’ (Tolstoy 1940, 103, 102). In chapter 8 of his *Gospel in Brief*, Tolstoy interpolates into the Apostles’ request to increase their faith (Luke 15: 5) his own gloss, spoken by Jesus: ‘Faith does not consist in believing something wonderful, but it consists in understanding your position and where salvation lies’ (Tolstoy 1940, 219). By 1902 this reason-friendly definition had become more muscular and activist. Faith—religion’s innermost core—‘is neither hope nor trust [...] but a spiritual state, an awareness that my position in the world obliges me to certain actions’ (Tolstoy 1987, 97). Thus faith-awareness is not mere feeling, nor logic, nor is it that state of hypnotic suggestion induced by priests during a church service (92). For Tolstoy, the Divine is above all a *binding*. It commits us to moral acts. This, again, was the reason Tolstoy repeatedly ridiculed the ‘Renans and Strausses’: their historical Jesus was an evasion, a search for the wrong thing. ‘What interest is there in knowing whether Christ went out to relieve himself? What do I care that he was resurrected? So he was resurrected—so what? [lit. *nu i Gospod’ s nim*: well, God be with him!]

(McLean 2008, 122–3). Tolstoy’s religion emerges as a mix of commonsensical naysaying to bad (or supernatural) things with Kant’s understanding of the human being as a responsible end in itself (Poole 2010). It narrows down Kant’s three questions—what can

I know, what should I do, what can I hope for—to a single insistent outcry: what should I (and thus what should each of us) do?

Let us now look more closely at Tolstoy's answer to that question. He found it by retranslating, editing and unifying the Gospels (1880–1881). This activity in turn necessitated his rejection of the institution of the Church—and eventually, the Church of him.

TOLSTOY'S JESUS AND THE ASSAULT ON THE TEMPLE

Intellectually, Tolstoy resembles a conventional, anti-clerical philosophical theist in the tradition of French eighteenth-century rationalism. But emotionally he remained wedded to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with all that implies: sentimentalism, an addiction to personal confession, the assumption that his personal path had unquestioned relevance to others, a hostility to the institutions of society and state, faith in the innate goodness of Nature, and full credence in the individual sovereign ego. It has been suggested that Tolstoy's mix of Rousseau's personalism and Kant's theism permitted him an exit out of psychological problems he confronted throughout his life: shyness, impatience, embarrassment, shame (Greenwood 1978, 152–5). However that may be, having embarked on his project to cleanse the Gospels, Tolstoy pursued it with all the imagination and confidence of a master novelist, blurring the line between subjective editorship and creative authorship (Kokobobo 2008, 2).

Tolstoy's plan was to publish his *Confession* as preamble to a four-part examination of Christianity and its foundational text. His full Gospel, with scholarly glosses and translation debates, was not approved for print in Russia. Parts of it circulated widely in (banned) page proofs until Tolstoy made a tidier 'Gospel in Brief' [*Kratkoe izlozhenie Evangelya*] for publication abroad (1883; in English, Tolstoy 1997). As he wrote in its original Preface, 'Together with this source of the pure water of life, I found, wrongfully united with it, mud and slime which had hidden its purity from me . . . I was in the position of a man who had received a bag of stinking dirt, and only after long struggle and much labor finds that amid that dirt lie priceless pearls' (Tolstoy 1940, 123). These pearls were Christ's own utterances: the Sermon on the Mount, the parables, the Lord's Prayer (separate lines of which became chapter titles for his Gospel) and the repeated summons to absolute non-judgement and love. Becoming was always more persuasive to Tolstoy than either Essence or Being. Thus he presents these utterances of Jesus as the result of painful tests and personal seeking. This 'son of an unknown father' had to earn his *razumenie*; he was not born into it. That an itinerant preacher, a 'flogged and executed pauper' (130) had conquered the world could be explained only by the blazing truth of his message. The wrathful God of the Old Testament had to be cast out, along with the Hebraic fascination with history, lineage, who begat whom, and the weight of the past (Gustafson 1986, 190–2). The truth of Christ's moral statements is for all peoples, *now*.

Tolstoy had long hungered for a religious truth that transcended historical time. His first recorded intent, at age 27, to ‘found a new religion, the religion of Christ, purged of [ritualistic] beliefs and mysticism’, occurs in a diary entry from early March 1855 (Tolstoy I 1985, 101). But this hunger peaked during a highly unstable, historically marked decade in Russian history, the 1880s (Medzhibovskaya 2008, 215–27): assassination of a tsar, rising terrorism and suicide rates, existential pessimism, a passion for Schopenhauer and theories of biological degeneration. Tolstoy both despaired and exulted. Extremes suited his sense of urgency. At last, the besieged and increasingly reactionary Russian government, hand in glove with the official Church, might ask him to answer for his utterances. In 1883, he ended one of his Gospel prefaces by declaring that there were only two ways out for Church creedal believers: either ‘renounce your lies, or persecute those who expose them’ (Tolstoy 1940, 133). And if you will not disavow your lies, he continues, then ‘persecute me—for which I . . . prepare myself with joy and with fear for my own weakness’.

The timing was electric. In itself, Tolstoy’s miracles-free Enlightenment ‘edition’ of the Gospels was hardly new. Thomas Jefferson’s *Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* preceded it in 1820, and Unitarian tradition had long regularized this reading of the Bible. Like Jefferson, Tolstoy does not condemn the Gospel authors for their ornamented accounts, and admits the appeal of the supernatural to early, uneducated Christian converts. But he insisted that our times deserved better—and not cold, non-committal, learned historicists like Strauss, Spencer, and Renan (Tolstoy 1894, 64). Tolstoy discussed church ritual with eminent men of the cloth, some of whom earned his respect. One stumbling block, however, was that Tolstoy, never at ease with the Sublime, would not grant the beauty or benefits of spiritual mystery *as mystery*, of metaphor as metaphor. On principle he resented allegories ‘not supported by any evidence’ and prone to be taken literally (Tolstoy 1894, 58). But (Tolstoy’s critics were quick to ask) what does it mean to support figurative language or mystic vision with ‘evidence’? Empirical evidence is precisely what these states of being, or saying, strive to transcend. Given the depth and publicity of Tolstoy’s provocation, the scandal around him was rather slow to ripen. Tolstoy had dared to revise the Holy Bible in an autocratic, Orthodox Christian state equipped with a complex system of secular and ecclesiastical censorship. (Tsar Alexander III, a great fan of Tolstoy, tried to intercede for him against Pobedonostsev, head of the Holy Synod, but did not always succeed.) Tolstoy had dismissed earlier Biblical scholarship—he did not trust specialists—and claimed a competency in Greek and Hebrew that he did not possess. He had not compiled his text for his own edification (as had the retired President Jefferson with his cut-and-paste *Life of Jesus*) but advertised the project widely, thrilled by the authority accruing to it when it was banned. And Tolstoy insisted, once he had arrived at a translation and condensation satisfying to him, that his version of the Gospels was the only legitimate one. He imitated the words he put into the mouth of his own Jesus, addressing the doubting Pharisee Nicodemus: ‘I am not talking any kind of mystery; I speak of what we all know’ (Tolstoy 1940, 155–6, for John 3: 9–10). And this presumption of speaking for all people was, as spokesmen for the Church repeatedly pointed out, not so much the sin of wrong thinking (which no mortal can avoid) as the sin of arrogance and pride.

There was some sense to the charge. In the 1880s, even while entertaining fantasies of escape from public view, Tolstoy began a conscious public self-fashioning of his persona into a repentant sinner, guru, and after a fashion, aristocratic holy fool (Orwin 2017, 85–6). He courted sculptors, painters, and photographers to portray him in peasant garb or barefoot; he wrote ‘private’ letters intended to be copied and circulated. To the dismay of his wife, pilgrims from around the world began to visit Yasnaya Polyana. The hospitable multilingual Count turned no one away, speaking his singular truth to them all. The final string snapped with Tolstoy’s travesty of the Orthodox liturgy in chapter 39 of a work of fiction, his novel *Resurrection* (1899). The Synod’s 1901 Edict on the separation [otlučenje] of Count Leo Tolstoy from the Church identified him as a ‘false teacher’ [lzheuchitel’], led astray by the ‘seduction of a proud mind’. In 2001, as a centennial gesture, the Church reconfirmed its Edict. To this day the charge of spiritual pride remains a central irritant.

Furiously sarcastic books continue to be written by Christian laymen against Tolstoy and his contribution to global cultural decay: his reinvention of God and Christ in his own image, his ‘metaphysical error’, his ‘ghoulish nihilism’ and crypto-violent call to disobey all laws (‘all the bolsheviks had to do was add a few murderous overtones’) (Boot 2009, 205–8). But thoughtful churchmen also comb relentlessly through the Tolstoyan legacy. One example from 2016 will suffice. In his massive spiritual biography of Tolstoy, Archpriest Georgii Orekhanov (b. Moscow 1962, holding scholarly degrees in mathematics, psychology, and Church history) raises the expected doctrinal complaints but returns repeatedly to Tolstoy’s refusal to let his experience remain *his* experience. Tolstoy’s religious crisis had causes that were valid for him, perhaps, but its ‘consequences he seeks to spread over all people’ (Orekhanov 2016, 93). A community of believers might presume to this authority. Collective wisdom might so presume. But one proud mind, no. By equating his personal experience with the ‘universality of religious experience’, Tolstoy assumes that all people everywhere share the same codes and values, and denies reality to anything that he has not himself witnessed (Orekhanov 2016, 580). Tolstoy had not seen anyone resurrect in the flesh, therefore the idea was false. But such universality is God’s realm, not man’s. In an Epilogue ‘Can the Church Forgive Tolstoy?’, Orekhanov claims that any move towards forgiveness would be disrespectful of Tolstoy’s own freely chosen position—and more: the Church’s statement on Tolstoy was ‘the sole serious, independent act of the Synod in almost 200 years of its existence’ (585–6). It had cost the Church a great deal. Everyone was against it: the Tsar, his government, the intelligentsia, the pious common people, the literature-loving public. The scandal that ensued gratified Tolstoy and gave him more reason to write, rant, attract followers, and be confirmed in the rightness of his own inflated self.

The most eloquent defence of Tolstoy—because constructed out of Tolstoyan parts—came from Vasily Rozanov, who otherwise criticized Tolstoy severely, especially his harshness towards sexuality and the body. In 1902, Rozanov commented on the Holy Synod’s edict. The ‘separation’ was impossible, he wrote. Being an institution, the Synod could not speak in an authentically religious, inner way (Rozanov 1902, 423). It had applied Salieri’s angry, merely technical ‘algebra’ to Mozart’s divine music. In its

condemnation there was nothing ‘personal, living, or free’—whereas Tolstoy, ‘for all his terrible and criminal fallacies, errors, defiant words, is a huge religious phenomenon, perhaps the greatest phenomenon of Russian religious history of the nineteenth century, although a distorted one. But an oak grown crooked is still an oak, and it is not for a mechanical-formal institution, which knows no growth at all, to judge it’ (423–4).

Among the ‘distortions’ implied by Rozanov were some paraphrases of Holy Writ possibly very disturbing to Orthodox believers. To be ‘the Son of God’ meant for Tolstoy no more than to be a conduit for that Divine Truth within us all, as personally identified by Tolstoy. Thus the ‘one and only Son’, given by God because He so loved the world (John 3:16), becomes a universally available interiority, ‘this son of his (this inner life)’ (Tolstoy 1940, 156). The Devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness is also strapped to the ‘inner life’ of each of us—but now it is the life of our appetites, becoming ‘the voice of the flesh’. This voice taunts Jesus with hunger and then cautions him against making light of such desires, ‘since they are placed in you and you must serve them’ (140). In chapter 4 of his Gospel, Tolstoy reiterates his Five Commandments on what acts we must avoid: anger, oaths, sexual gratification, retaliatory resistance to evil, and a preference for one’s own people over foreigners. Nowhere does Jesus speak the Commandments in this form. Tolstoy’s paraphrase stresses the ethical non-continuity between Old and New Testaments—perhaps unwisely in a nation (and a decade, the 1880s) prone to ugly anti-Semitism. Even more inflammatory was Tolstoy’s repeated rhetorical parallels between the deluded Russian Orthodox hierarchy of his own time and the high Orthodox priests of Judea, who insist (against an enlightened Pilate’s repeated wishes) that Christ be ‘crucified in the Roman way’. Everything in Tolstoy’s version of the Bible is brought down to the craving animal body, burdened with tribal loyalties and an eye-for-an-eye ethic, versus its luminous embattled opposite. The final chapter of *The Gospel in Brief*, which crowns Christ’s ‘non-doing’ on the Cross, is titled ‘The Victory of Spirit over Matter’.

In 1886, recovering from a near-fatal leg wound and in parallel with writing *What Then Must We Do?*, Tolstoy expanded on this victory in a treatise provisionally titled ‘On Life and Death’. Once he resolved that death did not exist, he renamed the work *On Life* [*O zhizni*] (Medzhibovskaya 2008, 334). Its thirty-five chapters carry his understanding of Christ’s teaching to an unprecedented degree of polarization. My carnal birth (which I know only as the onset of insatiable appetites) has nothing in common with my rational birth into true life, and does not mark the origin of my consciousness. Likewise, my carnal death is only the cessation of those appetites, and the cessation of the *visibility* of my life. For true life does not reside in the body, but rather (as per Tolstoy’s headnote to his chapter 28) in ‘every creature’s unique relationship toward the world’. This treatise might be seen as Tolstoy’s personal foray, via metaphysical impersonalism, into the huge enterprise pioneered by Vladimir Soloviev in his *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* (1877): an interrogation of science, philosophy, and religion that would coordinate the best in all three, making logic itself dynamic and organic, a truth to live by.

ON LIFE AND AFTERLIFE

Tolstoy prided himself on his indifference to academic philosophy. But for half a decade, urged on by close personal friendships with Nikolai Strakhov (1828–1896) and the Moscow University professor Nikolai Grot (1852–1899), he associated with Russia's most eminent idealist philosophers in the Moscow Psychological Society (Poole 2019). In March 1887, amid immense publicity, Tolstoy gave a reading from his manuscript 'On Life'. Banned at home, the book, translated by Tolstoy's wife as *De la vie*, was published in Paris in 1889. Responses to it ranged from guarded appreciation to withering ridicule. Within two years, Tolstoy had abandoned attempts to 'refute people's delusions' with logical argument, deciding that only epiphanies through creative art could 'capture the deluded person completely' and show people the proper way (Scanlan 2006, 66).

On Life redirects the socio-economic analysis of *What Then Must We Do?* into existential and metaphysical channels. The new text breathes a radical aloneness. In its early chapters, picking up on Levin's dilemma at the end of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy identifies, and then rejects, two ways to reconcile the experience of revealed truth through Scripture with the existence of other religions (Moulin 2017, 8–9). Either all religions, being incompatible, can be rejected (as secularist progressives recommend), or one religion can be embraced exclusively (as religious conservatives insist). The first group Tolstoy calls the 'Scribes', the second the 'Pharisees'. He then offers a third option, a revised Christianity compatible with the reasonable parts of all other faiths, which he proceeds to argue 'philosophically': that is, free of creed, doctrine, or the legal authority of a state.

Again Tolstoy rejects positivist science and objective, morally vacant human curiosity. He disdains chemical or metabolic definitions of life and dismisses as meaningless all theorizing about life's origins—or, for that matter, about the origin of species: Tolstoy is as indifferent to stories of Creation and evolution as he is to stories of Resurrection. By chapter 14, Tolstoy has redefined both true life and true love. He sets a dazzlingly high Apollonian bar for life: 'We cannot comprehend human life otherwise than making our animal individuality obedient to the law of reason' (Tolstoy 2018, 100). Dionysian behaviours that would soon become so fashionable in fin de siècle European culture are deplored, indeed, not acknowledged as human, not even as 'living'. Tolstoy insists that no one treats a person as alive who is in a 'state of delirium, a spell of madness or agony, or while intoxicated, or during a spasm of passion', no matter how vital or energetic their movements; and that even a weak and motionless body that is obedient to reason we recognize as living (100). This universal law of life-bestowing reason exists outside time and space. We are given a carnal life, or 'animal individuality', so that we can struggle against it and be born again.

The animal self is always, and by definition, in competition with other animal selves. It cannot be satisfied. Thus it is miserable—and modern science compounds the misery by filling this self with a sense of its needs and rights. Since Tolstoy does not entertain the

possibility that multiple animal selves might cooperate towards their mutual well-being, true life lived in reasonable consciousness must be selfless, that is, must strive solely for the well-being of others. But in chapter 21 Tolstoy makes a crucial distinction. It is important that we not renounce individuality, he insists. Rather we must subjugate it, redirect its energies, each person in their own way. He puts forward no homogenized collectivist vision. Recall that when his *On Life* project faltered, Tolstoy turned his proselytizing attentions to art in order to achieve the same goal of human harmony. And just as his infection theory of art holds that every person ‘infected’ by an artwork is infected uniquely, according to their specific competencies and needs, so are there infinitely varied, creatively individualized ways to reflect the good. Tolstoy was unusual among Realist writers in finding healthy, loving, joyous human traits just as interesting and worthy of serious representation as tragic and perverse ones. It is difficult to find a writer of fiction who sustains happiness over the long stretch better than Tolstoy, without falling into banality. Even in these dogmatic moral tracts, Tolstoy’s astounding wholesomeness cannot hide its light under a bushel.

So the singular ‘I’ is to be shorn of its selfishness but not simplified or renounced. Having understood (along with all the world’s great religions) that happiness for the animal individuality is impossible, the ‘I’ applies its particularizing energy to the happiness of others. Only with this redirection of energy ‘do the juices of life flow up into the ennobled scion of true love’, as Christ teaches (Tolstoy 2018, 132, chapter 24). For love is not mere ‘liking’. Nor is the root of love the madness of Plato’s Eros, ‘an impulsive emotional burst that clouds reason... Love is a most reasonable, luminous, and therefore quiet and joyous state, which is natural for children and reasonable people’ (133). Here and elsewhere in this treatise, we note the trait that Bulgakov remarked upon in 1912: Tolstoy’s idealization of childhood and the childlike. Below the adult threshold, it seems, some bad things simply do not register. Young creatures intuitively know that bodily pain ‘protects the animal individuality’, and thus they tolerate pain without torment and rarely remember it later. ‘In animals and in children, pain is very specific and small in size... The impression made on us at the sight of suffering children and animals is more our suffering than theirs’ (175, chapter 35). The dialogue here with Dostoevsky could not be more marked.

True life, then, is learning to live reasonably. True love is the waning of one’s own wants. The immediate result of letting go of desires is the disappearance of all ill will towards others, followed by a fading away of all fear of death. Tolstoy’s final ten chapters systematically dismantle that dread, and then set to dismantling the idea of death itself. The argument satisfied neither the Church nor the idealist philosophers, but Tolstoy borrows wisdom from both. ‘There is no Death’—thus opens chapter 27—because we know nothing about it. We know only the present. And what the *now* tells us is that there is no permanence anywhere. Both body and spirit are in constant flux: material cells are replaced every moment in the body, immaterial consciousness is regularly interrupted by sleep. The sole thread connecting these moments of changing identity is our predisposition or attitude towards the world. Those relations do not cease with carnal death. Reasonable consciousness exists on both sides of our visible lifespan. Life’s infinite

movement is much larger than anything one perspective can grasp, and each of us dies in the body when it is indispensable for our well-being to do so. Tolstoy ends on a note of astonishment. Just look around at the world, its fire, cold, diseases, exploding bombs; it can only be ‘perfectly unnatural for someone to live a life in the flesh amid these fatal conditions’ (166, chapter 33). But as long as we do live, physical suffering will prod us towards higher reason. We should react to this state of affairs with wonder and awe, as did Pierre Bezukhov, fleetingly, in his dream-vision of the liquid globe.

Tolstoy’s *On Life* was banned by ecclesiastical censorship. But its argument disappointed Russia’s professional philosophers as well. They noted its exclusion of ordinary life-experiences from ‘life’, its exclusion of preferential love-experiences from ‘love’, and the inexplicable pleasure Tolstoy seemed to receive from denying reciprocal gratification (what one exasperated Russian critic called his ‘hedonistic asceticism’ (Scanlan 2006, 63)). This, then, was life, and its precepts seemed to spill over into a before-life and an afterlife. In mainstream Tolstoy scholarship, it has long been assumed that Tolstoy’s views in this tract are either mystically archaic, or else rooted in the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Recently, a powerful case has been made by Igor Evlampiev and Inga Matveeva that to the contrary, Tolstoy’s *On Life* was cutting-edge nineteenth-century *Lebensphilosophie*: in its treatment of time and metaphysical memory, Tolstoy’s thought displays intriguing parallels with Henri Bergson’s 1896 *Matière et mémoire* and even more with the 1907 *L’Évolution créatrice* (Evlampiev and Matveeva 2017, 2018).

In 1912, after Tolstoy had already resolved the death paradox for his own person, Zenkovsky addressed ‘immortality in Tolstoy’ through a close look at *On Life* and the earlier tract ‘What I Believe’ (1884). Since Tolstoy claims that Christ never promised resurrection in the flesh nor ‘eternal personal life’, Zenkovsky concludes that Tolstoy had no objective interest in the message of the Gospels. Tolstoy’s deeply personal quest was to link up the powerful, mystical out-of-time moments that had rescued him during his crisis—all facts of his own experience—with an authoritative carrier free of his own inconsistencies and thus true [*istinnyi*], a ‘reasonable universal I’. He found such a carrier in his simplified, selectively edited Jesus. Individualized survival in some linear time scheme, even with markers as blunt as ‘before carnal birth’ and ‘after carnal death’, could only complicate true life thus defined. After 1884, the question of survival or resurrection plays no role in Tolstoy’s religious worldview. But Zenkovsky too marvels at the degree of spite, intolerance, and mockery that accompanied Tolstoy’s rebirth into love. It’s as if Count Tolstoy had suddenly found himself in a crowded church, Zenkovsky remarks. He couldn’t breathe. And so he loudly, crudely elbowed his way out into the fresh air, indifferent to the experience or needs of other worshippers. ‘And may God forgive him!’ (Zen’kovskii 1912, 504–19).

Zenkovsky saw Tolstoy not as a rationalist but closer to a mystic—or better, a ‘mystic of the mind’ who, in the name of human dignity, demanded above all that life make sense (Orwin 1993, 217). Thus his personal eschatology remains enigmatic. Among those who were not persuaded by it was Anton Chekhov. In the spring of 1897, Chekhov, recovering from a tuberculosis attack in a Moscow clinic, noted in a letter to a friend that Tolstoy had paid him a visit. ‘We discussed immortality’, Chekhov wrote. It seems that

we ‘will continue to live on in some primal state (reason, love),’ but ‘this primal state or force appears to me to be a shapeless mass of jelly, into which my “I”, my individuality, my consciousness would be absorbed... I don’t feel any need for immortality in this form. I don’t understand it, but Lev Nikolaevich finds it astonishing that I don’t understand it’ (Chekhov 2004, 369–70).

Tolstoy’s inspiration for an afterlife was indeed less theological than metaphysical and figurative. In her concluding chapter, Medzhibovskaya connects Tolstoy’s *razumnoe soznanie* with Plato’s *Phaedo* (the soul’s liberation) and with the spiritual structure of Tolstoy’s novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. ‘Reasonable consciousness neither vanishes with the physical cessation of being nor is dispelled by posthumous revelations,’ she writes. It is ‘the identification of one’s own unique supra-personal relationship with life...’. For this higher awareness, ‘mimetic truthfulness to visible life is a sham’ (Medzhibovskaya 2008, 333–9). Any resemblances here between late Tolstoyan ethics and Eastern faith systems—Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism—are more incidental than evidence of influence. When, in his personal correspondence and *Cycles of Reading*, Tolstoy excerpted from Eastern wisdoms such concepts as renunciation and karma, it was always to bend them to fit his Christian core. But the evocative insect imagery of *War and Peace* provides some clues to the topography of this afterlife that are not sham. The persistent Tolstoyan image of a swarm—a mass of fully alive, purposeful organisms that interact, but without self-protective egos—has been suggested by one scholar as the best conceptual model for the transition from animal individuality to ‘spiritual communal existence’ (Denner 2016).

TOLSTOY AMONG FELLOW RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS THINKERS

It remains to comment briefly on the place of Leo Tolstoy in the pantheon of Russian religious thought. The task is vast, perhaps (like the Synod’s Separation edict) even impossible. By his final years, Tolstoy had come to be seen as a force of nature: unstoppable, incorrigible, always able to command an audience but unable to be shamed, silenced, laughed down, or engaged against his will. Tolstoy’s flight from home and subsequent death at age 82 in November 1910 was the world’s first media event, covered by the latest technologies of film and newsreel. Every thinking Russian had an opinion on this event, provided a tribute, assessed the damage. (For informative surveys, see Nickell 2010; Hamburg 2013; and Poole 2019). The Church was divided on its duties to its ‘separated’ son. Tolstoy’s most virulent opponent, the charismatic Archpriest Ioann of Kronshtadt (1829–1909), had predeceased his nemesis by one year, and other high-ranking Orthodox churchmen tried, unsuccessfully, to gain access to his deathbed (Nickell 2010, 57–87). The celebrity status of Tolstoy was such that he both belonged to the world (he was above any nation) and, at the same time, represented Russia to the world. Paul

Valliere opens his essay for this volume on the observation that ‘the first [Russian] religious thinker to find an audience in the West was Leo Tolstoy’ (Chapter 39 in this *Handbook*).

We have already sampled three influential Russian thinkers who weighed in on the Tolstoy Phenomenon—Bulgakov, Rozanov, and Zenkovsky; in closing we provide several more voices out of a huge and often scandalized pool. The first is Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900). Twenty-five years Tolstoy’s junior but predeceasing him by a decade, Soloviev tried hard to find common ground with Tolstoy, requesting a meeting with him as early as 1875 (Isupov 2000, 877–8). Tolstoy was unimpressed with the young philosopher, calling *Lectures on Godmanhood* ‘nonsense’ and returning to his friend Nikolai Strakhov a copy of *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*, which he had found ‘unbearably tedious’. Soloviev kept his distance, carrying on his polemic with Tolstoy ‘cautiously and sometimes indirectly’. During what turned out to be his final year, Soloviev embedded a critique of Tolstoyan non-resistance in the first of his *Three Conversations*, a lengthy Platonic-style dialogue on war, Christianity, and government that ended with a story of the Antichrist. It was conducted over several evenings among a politician, a general, a society woman, a certain Mr. Z (Soloviev’s moderating persona), and a ‘young Prince, a moralist and “man of the people” [*narodnik*], who published various more or less good brochures on moral and social issues’ (Soloviev 1899, 163). This Prince is a Tolstoyan. The General makes the case for Christian war; the politician, the case for the Christian state. When the Prince insists that all war-making [*voen-shchina*] is an ‘extreme unconditional evil’, Mr. Z counters that there are ‘good wars and bad peaces’ (170). When the Politician points to some historical justification for organized retaliatory violence, and when Mr. Z hints at possible divergences between reason and conscience, the Prince grows impatient with ‘special cases’: ‘just don’t kill’ (176). The problem with his learned interlocutors, so intimates the Prince, is the problem with all recourse to hypothesis, history, or chronicle: none resolve for us ‘what we must do *now*’ (178). Thus does Soloviev air the Tolstoyan position, but not advance it. In a 2008 Russian-language audiobook of *Three Conversations*, the narrator Aleksei Yarmilko, who reads all male parts, creates for the Prince a high-pitched hysterical voice with a nervous lisp: not calculated to encourage sympathy (Soloviev 2008). It is, of course, singularly unjust to Tolstoy to place his mature religious thought in the context of opinions exchanged during an idle gathering of upper-class intellectuals, however articulate and enlightened. Tolstoy deplored such society forums, considering all of us to be at our moral and most reasonable best only at work, with children, in isolation or at home.

Soloviev’s reservations were shared by the next generation of religious thinkers. Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948) was philosophically more interested in Dostoevsky than Tolstoy. Neither of those great writers could be called a moderate, but one criticism remained constant: Tolstoy’s simplifications were a disaster, for him and for Russia. ‘Maximalism is deeply contrary to Christianity’, Berdyaev wrote a year before Tolstoy’s death. ‘A person reaches maximalism by way of an exiting from history, by way of a defiance of history, a denial of history. And L. Tolstoy manifests the typical maximalist’ (Berdyaev 1909, 108). Tolstoy’s sin was to strive not for a universal maximum

but for an 'individual maximum', which will always think 'more about itself than about the world'. History, culture, and art are products of the world and cling lovingly to it. Berdyaev's hero is the Apostle Paul, a man wholly free of 'false maximalism'; with Saint Paul, 'as with every God-inspired man there was a sense of times and seasons, a religio-cosmic sense of history, of breadth and spaciousness of soul'. Berdyaev calls upon us to become modest and humble, since 'growth in life is organic and slow' (Berdyaev 1909, 110–11).

The message of this 1909 essay, written after the first Russian revolution but before the *Landmarks* anthology, became more shrill and extreme in the dark year 1918. In his grim tract 'Specters [or ghosts, spirits: *dukhi*] of the Russian Revolution', Berdyaev blamed Russia's catastrophe not on poverty, famine, collapse of civil society, or total war—but on classic Russian writers: Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy. Berdyaev does not touch the art of Tolstoy's great novels, set in a 'crystallized past' (Berdyaev 1918, 55). But the tyrannical moral maximalism of the late Tolstoy 'paved the way for the historical suicide of the Russian people' by rejecting everything individual and diverse. Russian culture was lost in the revolution—in the spirit of Tolstoyan teaching, because for Tolstoy 'the rise of culture, just like the rise of the state, was a fall'. Furthermore, 'the world war was lost by Russia because the Tolstoyan evaluation of war prevailed in it... Tolstoyan morality... killed the instincts of power and glory in the Russian breed, but it left the instincts of egoism, envy, and outrage'. Berdyaev concludes that Tolstoy was deprived of a sense of radical evil and thus helpless to counter it. 'Tolstoy had no need of religious redemption and did not understand it' (Berdyaev 1918, 59).

Berdyaev, a mystical pluralist, could only be exasperated by Tolstoy's rationalistic and solitary religious utopia. But a more reasonable balance sheet is possible. In 1929, a year after Tolstoy's centennial had been loudly celebrated in Soviet Russia, the émigré critic Prince D. S. Mirsky published 'Some Remarks on Tolstoy'. He reinforced Bulgakov's assessment of 1912, that Tolstoy was, above all, a simplifier. The problem of Tolstoy is complicated, Mirsky admits, but not the man himself. 'He was one of the most simply composed of great men' (Mirsky 1929, 304). Tolstoy's mind was dialectical—but unlike Hegel, he never surmounted the contradiction of thesis and antithesis with a synthesis. 'Instead of Hegel's "triads," Tolstoy was all arranged in a small number of irreducible and intensely hostile "dyads"... Dualism is the hall-mark of the ethical man,' Mirsky wrote. 'Tolstoy remained ethical to the end, that is to say in a perpetual state of war with himself'. From this perspective, Tolstoy's final diaries make heart-wrenching reading. Locked in hopeless conflict with his wife during his last year, Tolstoy writes in his diary: 'It's very good that I feel how worthless I am' (3 August 2010) (Tolstoy II 1985, 678). And five days later: 'My memory is gone, quite gone, and the astonishing thing is, I've not only not lost anything, but have actually gained a tremendous amount—in clarity and strength of *consciousness*' (Tolstoy II 1985, 679). An entry from October 17, one month before his flight from home, reads in part: 'Thought well about death... I can't work or write, but thank God I can work on myself. I'm still making progress'. Perhaps this was a synthesis. But if so, it was not for Russia, and not for any system of faith, but for the single forum he could trust: himself alone.

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