

On Reason and the Power of Life (Tolstoy contra Spinoza)

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Abstract. In his search for the meaning of life, Tolstoy turned to Spinoza's rationalist teaching about freedom, reason, morality, and religious faith. Spinoza created a philosophy where beliefs are in union with deeds, logic unites with ethics, and knowledge joins faith. According to Tolstoy, it is art that makes a synthesis of all the best attempts of the real, true philosophy. I argue that Tolstoy's artistic method of linkage (*stseplenie*) was probably borrowed from Spinoza. Inspired by Spinoza's "theorems of reason," Tolstoy created his own "axiom of life" and elaborates on the concept of the "power of life" as a core of religious faith. Tolstoy endorsed Spinoza's rationalistic critique of religion which helped to liberate true faith from the power of superstition and church dogmatics, but he criticised the geometric form in which Spinoza put the truths he discovered.

Keywords: faith, reason, the power of life, the meaning of life, linkage, rationalism

Apie protą ir gyvenimo galią: Tolstojus prieš Spinozą

Santrauka. Ieškodamas gyvenimo prasmės, Tolstojus atsigrėžė į racionalistinių Spinozos mokymą apie laisvę, protą, moralę ir religinį tikėjimą. Spinoza sukūrė filosofiją, kurioje tikėjimai susilieja su darbais, logika susivienija su etika, o žinios susijungia su tikėjimu. Pasak Tolstojaus, būtent menas sudaro visų geriausių tikrosios filosofijos bandymų sintezę. Tolstojaus meninis ryšio metodas (*stseplenie*) tikriausiai buvo pasiskolintas iš Spinozos. Įkvėptas Spinozos „proto teoremų“, Tolstojus sukūrė savo „gyvenimo aksiomą“ ir išplėtojo „gyvenimo galios“, kaip religinio tikėjimo branduolio, sampratą. Tolstojus pritarė racionalistinei Spinozos religijos kritikai, padėjusiai išlaisvinti tikrąjį tikėjimą iš prietarų ir bažnytinės dogmatikos valdžios, bet kritikavo geometrinę formą, kuria Spinoza išdėstė savo atrastas tiesas.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: tikėjimas, protas, gyvenimo galia, gyvenimo prasmė, sąryšis, racionalizmas

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Introduction

Lev Tolstoy is well-known as a person with vast knowledge; all the main streams of scientific, religious, and philosophical thought were of interest to him. He displayed, however, a very sceptical stance towards science and rejected strongly any sort of “half-science.” It was not because he was an “anarchist” or “nihilist,” as some of researchers believe, nor because he had no classical education so could not see the point of scientific matters. Hardly anyone would dare to call him ignorant of history, medicine, or law given that he wrote *War and Peace*, *Hadji Murat*, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, and *Resurrection*.

On the one hand, Tolstoy saw principal differences between the spheres of science, philosophy, and religion. On the other hand, he could justify the very existence of these spheres only through making them united. For whichever sphere, Tolstoy’s criterion of truth was its relation and attitude towards human being. Whether in science, in philosophy, or theology, he looked for the same thing, namely, he sought to understand the meaning of life for every single person. This “common subject” should abolish any contradictions between science, philosophy, and religion. He supposed the world is important not by its external features, but by internal features of the subjective, inner world of a human being. Knowledge of the human body molecules or the movements of celestial bodies does not make a person happier, nor does it make a person’s life more meaningful. Ideally, science, philosophy, and religion must translate the “secundarity and insignificancy of experiential knowledge, and primacy and importance of religious, moral and social knowledge” (Tolstoy 1951 v. 30: 193).

In fact, Tolstoy had not found such attitude in any of these three spheres of knowledge.

In his *Confession* Tolstoy divided science into experiential (empirical or positive), half-science (jurisprudence, history, social science), and speculative; and showed that none of these divisions gave an answer to the main question – *what does a human being live for?* More to that, all the sciences are in opposition to each other and they provide contradictory answers to the questions of life and death, and philosophy is no exception.

In his diaries and letters from the 70s, Tolstoy divides philosophers into three types (much like science): materialist (positivist), idealist (spiritualist), and religious philosophers—these being the closest to truth. He makes up an “ethical” typology of thinkers, too, by dividing them into *factitious* and *real*. Those who “killed” life and dissected it into parts in the manner of natural science and then attempted a mechanical synthesis, belong to factitious thinkers. He thus blacklisted Aristotle, Bacon, positivists like Comte and Mill, and Hegel, whom he disliked the most. *Real philosophers* are “religious wise men and prophets” like Lao Tzu, Buddha, Solomon, “even Christ” (Tolstoy 1936 v. 26: 327), as well as classical philosophers from Plato to Spinoza and Kant. Having placed religious prophets and scientifically oriented philosophers, Tolstoy definitely showed his understanding of the real tasks of science, philosophy, and theology. “The reality of work” is based upon the equal ability of different spheres of knowledge to give: “the best possible answers to questions about the meaning of human life and death” (Tolstoy 1953 v. 62: 229).

Science is “a collection of all the human knowledge, divided,” philosophy is “a collection and a result of all the knowledge without division and with refutation of all the other agglomerations of knowledge,” and religion is: “a collection and a result of all knowledge without division and without refutation of all the other agglomerations of knowledge” (ibid.).

Tolstoy saw the “mistakes” of false science and philosophical speculations connected with “false” objects and “false” methods of cognition. There is no scientific or philosophical world picture objective and rational enough to interfere with knowing Christ or practical realization of His commandments. There cannot be a religion, as well, to contradict the reasonable judgements of “real” science.

In science, philosophy, or theology, there should be like-minded thinkers for Tolstoy to look for, there should be those who proceeded, similarly, towards the true knowledge of the meaning of life. The ideas of the “real philosophers” appealed to him most, as he saw their value in the unity of rational and religious understanding of the meaning of life. The real philosopher not only produces real, authentic knowledge of meaning, but lives his or her life in accordance with this meaning. One of those really like-minded thinkers was Spinoza. Comparing the non-classical philosophy of Tolstoy to the philosophies of the Enlightenment (and Spinoza’s is the one of them) benefits our understanding of the specificity of the Russian philosophy of life and Tolstoy’s place and role in it.

Tolstoy and Spinoza: “Close Thinkers”

It took years for Tolstoy to come to his idea of the reunion between reason and faith into a new religious consciousness, a true Christianity beyond the church. The philosophical support he found in the writings of Spinoza was of a great use on this path. Tolstoy highly appreciated Spinoza’s devotion to reason along with the preservation of religious feeling. Tolstoy called Spinoza a “close and dear thinker” (Tolstoy 1934 v. 63: 318), even “an elephant of thought” (Tolstoy 1956 v. 75: 191).

In the Yasnaya Polyana Tolstoy House-Museum Library, there are several Spinoza editions which were studied thoroughly by Tolstoy. There is the 1886 print of *Ethics* in Russian (Modestov 1886) and a full version of the 1904 edition. In the Yasnaya Polyana library catalogue (Kotrelev 1999: 387/390) there is a three-volume Emile Saisset 1861 French edition of Spinoza, where a number of Tolstoy’s marks and crossings are left (Saisset 1861). “*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*” was of a special interest to Tolstoy.

What attracted Tolstoy to Spinoza? Definitely they belonged to different times, and differed in biographies, temperaments, and talents. Spinoza was the incarnation of an ideal, lonely, and passionless rationalist. He lived by thought alone, indifferent to his religious opponents, authorities and society. Tolstoy was an artist, in opposition to authorities, a religious reformer. He wished to live a Christian life, “in God,” and God for him meant the same as the Truth. The “Truth of God” is the only thing that allows a person to acquire an imperishable meaning in his or her existence.

The said differences, however, do not prevent these thinkers from being allies. They were both victims of religious fanaticism: in 1656 Spinoza was excommunicated, cursed, and damned by the Talmud Torah congregation of Amsterdam. Tolstoy was “excommunicated” in 1901 from the Russian Orthodox Church. The real cause in both cases was their wish to read canonical texts independently and not to take whatever dogmatic truths for granted without “filtering” them first through one’s own “critical doubt” of reason. They both understood the difference between the sacred texts’ teachings and the teachings of the Church. Tolstoy recognized in Spinoza an honest and independent thinker. Taking ground in Spinoza’s ideas, Tolstoy looked for the meaning of the concepts of necessity and freedom, moral life, rational and religious understanding of God, ethics, and religion as a whole.

Both Spinoza and Tolstoy saw that the root of truth was grounded exclusively within reason, so we should reason freely and consciously to solve logical, social, or religious and ethical problems. But they treated rationality differently. If Spinoza demonstrated his ideas geometrically, then Tolstoy constantly used artistic metaphors: “linkage,” “the Ocean of Love,” “Life,” etc., making these notions the new way of reaching the truth. Tolstoy considered that the classical rationalist philosophy had turned into a fiasco. He opens up a new way to truth— a way through art.

Descartes rejects all forcefully and correctly, and erects again deliberately, dreamily. Spinoza does the same. Rant the same. Schopenhauer the same. – But why erect? The work of thought brings along with it the vanity of thought. It is not necessary to come back to thought. *There is another instrument – art* (my italics. – S. K.). Thought asks for numbers, lines, symmetry, movement in space and time, and kills itself with it all. Science, chemistry, astronomy, especially the most fashionable zoology – what do they do? They bring all to their requirements – of symmetry, continuity – of the circle and come to thought, and the essence is left alone. Art singularly knows no conditions of time or space, or movement, – art alone, always hostile to the symmetry-circle, gives essence (Tolstoy 1952 v. 48: 118).

Tolstoy never forgives schematic formal constructions, not to anyone, Spinoza included:

Even with great thinkers, those who give systems, the reader tears the system apart hard to assimilate the essence of the writer and it is those torn parts, relating the reader to a human being, that the reader takes for himself. That is with Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant ... the mob likes the system. The mob wants the whole truth to be caught, and as it cannot understand the truth, it eagerly believes (Tolstoy 1952 v. 48: 344/345).

Tolstoy is not unique in his rejection of the system. It is very much a Russian feature. Both Slavophiles and Westernizers had been criticizing the systemic character of Western European thought. Russian philosophers had been dressing their distaste for mathematically stern thought into a dislike for “dead letters” and into the desire to bring “the living Word of God” into the discourse. Hating formal logic, scientific thought, theory in general, “the mind of Euclides” (as Dostoevsky puts it) are characteristic features of the whole of Russian non-classical philosophy. The inclination of Russian philosophy towards holism and its religious and existential attunement to the human being expresses

itself here. Russian thinkers wanted to talk with “the Primal” in a “discourse of the heart,” not reason, in a discourse of the whole, not the parts. Inevitably it made them refuse the discourse of science for the discourse of religion and art. So Tolstoy comes as a “child of the Epoch.” He disliked, however, some Russian “empty concepts” like “*sobornost*” (a spiritual community of people living jointly), “*dukhovnost*” (roughly “spirituality”), “the Russian idea,” etc. because of their “fruitless expectations” of eschatology in history, and because of a false providentialism in Russian life.

Thus, whence Spinoza relies upon the objective world, progress, and the geometrical mode of knowledge, Tolstoy strives to create a philosophy where not systems would prevail, but the subjective world and life itself. Spinoza joins science and philosophy. Life is an abstract and rational concept for him, and the meaning of life he understands on the same level of abstraction, where it means rational preservation of society and self as a part of society. Tolstoy flees from the Enlightenment tradition of opposing reason and faith while speaking on life. Tolstoy speaks on the philosophy *of life*, the subject of which it is impossible to decompose into parts. *Life, death, desire, suffering* are absolutely holistic principles, they:

cannot be subjected to logical inference, they are equal to each other and have no logical connection ... they cannot be reached by logical inference but only by harmonious connection of all these non-logical concepts into the whole, so they can be reached momentarily, without inferences and demonstrations, they have but one means of demonstration – namely, that any connection other than the given is meaningless (Tolstoy 1953 v. 62: 233/234).

In the very word “Life” both reason and faith are comprised with no necessity to decompose and systematize. If reason is the logic of life, then belief is life’s “power” and “a priori feeling” and “meaning.” It can be understood best through art.

So Tolstoy connects philosophy and religion with art, and in the language of art do we understand the meaning of life. Tolstoy tries to show that art has stern laws and methods and in that it resembles science. The most important method of art is “an infection (*zarazhenie*) with the Good” which comes from the intention of the work of art, and the method of “linkage” (*stseplenie*) of an external word with an internal meaning.

In almost all I have written, I was led by the necessity to gather thoughts connected with each other, to express myself, but every idea, expressed by itself in words, loses its meaning, is terribly debased, when taken alone out of that linkage in which it is found. The linkage itself is not constituted by an idea [...] but by something else, and to express the basis of this linkage directly in words is quite impossible; but it is possible only indirectly – in words describing images, actions, situations (Tolstoy 1953 v. 62: 269).

The linkage is a non-verbal and intuitive grasping of the singular *meaning* of different *life situations*, narratives, and conditions. Tolstoy compares the linkage to an image of a circle, or a sphere with neither beginning nor end; they are symbols of God-Reason, God-Ocean of wisdom. This image is: “a philosophical outlook spawned directly from life is a circle or a sphere with no end, middle, or beginning” (Tolstoy 1953 v. 62: 235).

The method of linkage allows us to achieve the religious and spiritual ground of life and thus helps to find the answer to the question about the meaning of life. It is here where science and philosophy are to come while creating similar methods and trespassing formal limits of abstract thought.

It is interesting that we find the notion of linkage in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which Tolstoy studied thoroughly in its French edition. In Chapter Three, bearing numerous marks of Tolstoy's hand, we read: "By *God's guidance* I understand the fixed and immutable order of nature, *or* the linkage of natural things" (Spinoza 2016: 112).

Surely Spinoza was no less able to grasp harmoniously the whole within the different parts of the subject in study, but Tolstoy disliked the language of Spinoza's metaphysics, the "geometrical mode" of telling the truth, its scientific rationalism. Tolstoy thought this very language, the misguiding language of mathematics had brought up the situation where the greatest ideas of ethics and religion are inaccessible to the majority of people.

Tolstoy and Spinoza: The God-Reason-Consciousness of Life

Tolstoy's criticism of Spinoza did not mean an essential antagonism. However different their understanding of "the order" or "the law of linkage" of things are, Tolstoy, it seems to me, followed Spinoza's most important thought about the Highest Law underlying existing things, the one we name God or Nature. Tolstoy equates these concepts with the notion of Life.

Spinoza's God and Nature are the same and can be described in the language of reason. Tolstoy feels this language to be deficient for understanding what we are living for. Tolstoy's *Confession* is built around the internal contradictions and limits of the reason itself. Here he speaks of reason close to Spinoza, within the classical tradition. Only reason, Tolstoy maintains, is capable of explaining meaning, but in the end it brings a human being to the meaninglessness of life, crossing over the powers of its own. Eventually, Tolstoy realized that there is something above reason in the human being. It is some different, irrational force which Tolstoy called a *power of life*, a "consciousness of life" or a "feeling of life." This power is equivalent to "irrational knowledge," or religious feeling, primarily present in a human being alongside rational knowledge. It is about *faith*, *another knowledge* of the meaning of life, that does not coincide with rational knowledge. Thus, an opposition of *reason and consciousness synonymous to faith* begins. Tolstoy paints his definition of consciousness existentially to avoid the irrationalist hues he detested.

Reason and Consciousness of Life are two "staples of human existence" for Tolstoy. Reason is basic for an external life, and consciousness of life – the same for all human beings – allows them to ground themselves upon their internal feeling of life. This very power of life allows one to transcend the boundaries of one's own self towards the Other as well, that is, towards the bearer of the same consciousness of life, that is, God within. The whole world with God and the human being becomes the Other. God within each of us is the power of life. It is the spiritual forces incarnated in the human being charged with the energy of God's work.

Tolstoy again relies on Spinoza who “showed what the true life is”:

The true life is the life where all the energy and all the passion of existence is transferred outwards from the self onto the service for the process of union and concord, onto the service for more and more rational relationships which are the life of the world. ... For the true life all conditions are good, because under whatever conditions rational love and service for god, that is, the law of the world, is possible (Tolstoy 1953, v. 64: 114/115).

Tolstoy’s questioning the meaning of life is connected with an understanding of freedom and necessity. On the one hand, he obviously agrees with Spinoza about the deterministic evolution of the world following the laws of necessity, and upon the thesis that knowing these laws sets a human being free. On the other hand, Tolstoy criticizes all the philosophers (and Spinoza, too) because of their inability to definitely tell whether a human being is free or not.

In the drafts of *War and Peace* Tolstoy remarked:

In the field of philosophy it is worth mentioning that the best minds in the last period of their activity tend towards the law of necessity and to negation of freedom, and else that notwithstanding the fullest demonstrations of thinking the impossibility of freedom, new thinkers start again the Penelope work of their predecessors. So did Spinoza, Hume, Priestley, Kant, Schopenhauer ... all the open minds who have been solving the problem from the viewpoint of reason and have been killing the notion of freedom, the greater value from the other side they have been reserving as unknown. It is X, Spinoza’s Substantia, Kant’s das Ding an sich, Schopenhauer’s der Wille (Tolstoy 1955 v. 15: 226).

Freedom for Tolstoy is not substantial like in Spinoza and not a “thing in itself” like in Kant. It is a sort of power or *consciousness of life*; freedom follows no natural laws nor laws of reason; on the contrary, it is a fleeting moment of a human being’s absolute independence from any external force, a moment of internal autonomy from external determinism. Tolstoy tries to solve the freedom – necessity antinomy with the concept of time. He divides time into Eternity (synonymous with God), “the greater” – a historical time where millions of individual lives perished (the laws of necessity) and “the smaller” – “the personal” – subjective time. It is here, within this subjective time, where the self feels and behaves freely.

Whatever general laws are governing the world and humanity, the infinitely small moment of freedom is indispensably mine. This infinitely small moment of freedom in time is the soul in life. Ceasing the conditions of time is death. The infinitely great sum total of moments of time is the essence of freedom, and beyond time is God (Tolstoy 1955 v. 15: 239-240).

Tolstoy escapes the classical freedom – the antinomy of combining freedom and determinism is the fate of compatibilism. In the sphere of reason, the law of necessity is operative, but a human being lives free, for “from the point of view of *consciousness of life* we feel the power that creates the world within ourselves” (Tolstoy 1955 v. 15: 244). This very power is the sought-for “Kingdom of God,” the only one that makes us participants in Eternity and lets us understand the meaning of finite life. The main point

is that a human being lives not by his own will, but after the Higher will and in one's life this human being realizes some higher, unknown end. The point is not to know, with the help of science, philosophy, or the church, the meaning of God's Will and end and to reproduce it automatically. The point is that only by rationally and practically doing God's work can a human being uncover the Higher end and one's personal meaning of life within oneself. Freedom reveals itself in deeds, not from external prompts, but from one's moral responsibility in the face of the Other. The Other can mean God, the World, another human being but never the State or the Church. Tolstoy would illustrate artistically his theoretical meditations, viz. *After the Ball*, *Alyosha Gorshok*, *God Sees the Truth, but Waits To Tell*.

Spinoza had different ideas about freedom and necessity. He was apologetic towards determinism and "free necessity." Freedom for Tolstoy meant the realization of consciousness of life in deeds, while Spinoza contemplated passively the objective laws of evolution. It is most important for him to know these laws with no attempts to change.

In his teaching of freedom Spinoza leaves understatements and even a contradiction. The necessary condition for freedom seemed to be an activity of the subject of cognition. On the contrary, the intellectual intuition of eternal and endless Substance, which is basic for Spinoza's theory of freedom, appeared to be contemplative. It is not only an extremely rare, but perfectly passive state of the mind of a singular philosopher who had achieved its heights (Asmus 1995: 50).

Tolstoy "Discovers His Own" Spinoza

The contradictions between Spinoza and Tolstoy mentioned above, show the special way of Tolstoy's reading of his favourite philosopher. Tolstoy "discovers his own" Spinoza – *a religious philosopher speaking about God*, teaching people to live a rational and responsible life. "Not only in fiction, but in scientific philosophical works, no matter how one tried to stay objective, – be it Kant, be it Spinoza, – we see, I see but the soul, the mind, the character of the writer" (Tolstoy 1953, v. 66: 253/254).

Meanwhile, in Western Enlightenment tradition it is impossible to treat Spinoza as a religious philosopher.

For Tolstoy, Spinoza constantly addresses God, equals God to reason and to moral power, that is, to Truth (or the Good). In his copy of the French edition, in Chapter Three of *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Tolstoy underlines the key phrase of Spinoza: "The true happiness and blessedness of each person consists only in the enjoyment of the good" (the sentence runs on, but Tolstoy underlines only this – *S.K.*).

Whatever similarities, Spinoza and Tolstoy think of God differently. For Spinoza, the main point is a logical basis of both ethics and religion. For Tolstoy, by contrast, the main point is the primacy of the ethical, the religious, the spiritual, and the practical over impersonal laws of nature. While Spinoza synonymizes God, Substance and Nature, he distinguishes the term "God."

Why Spinoza preferred to write about the intellectual love for God, not the Nature or Substance? For Spinoza himself these three words are synonymous, but for the mob, the word “God” produces a powerful effect, which Spinoza used to emotionally amplify “the voice of truth” ... If the word “Substance” appeals to reason, to intellect exclusively, with the word “God,” Spinoza evidently tried to incur a beneficial *effect* in the reader. Being a person averse to hypocrisy, he thoroughly depicts the non-religious, purely philosophical meaning of the term (Maidansky 2012: 14).

Tolstoy understands the word “God” in a religious and practical way, putting the word near the name of Christ, the fables from the Gospel and “rules” (Tolstoy sometimes calls commandments “the rules”), which offer the possibility to see the relationships between God and human beings like the relationships between the Master and His men. However, if we follow all Tolstoy’s meditations over Christ, faith, the religious principles of history, we shall see “his God” as moral, and as philosophical, very much close to Spinoza’s. He is impersonal, does not bother Himself with dogmatism or rituals, has no mystical features, is not teleological, and is not the object of worship, but the task for rational understanding and emotional compassion; it is connected not with the idea of immortality but with the idea of a practical path only, and the human being finds salvation and the meaning of one’s life only upon having gone through one’s path.

At the same time communication with God, which is a basis for metanoia, metamorphosis, is what Tolstoy understands in a Spinozian air, that is, rationally:

Our changes happen not through the communication with people (those changes are surface deep), but through communication with God, with rational understanding, through a communication with thought, with truth, through our immersion in it. Human thought, human consciousness is the lever, with which a human being turns up (Tolstoy 1958 v. 90: 262).

And the human turns up to ethics exclusively. Spinoza understood ethics as getting the knowledge of God, therefore gaining knowledge of the laws of natural evolution, thus ethics was for him a confirmation or confutation of the human’s ability to use one’s mental “lever” to “swivel, to turn up” one’s face to life.

Tolstoy seeks in Spinoza the sight of *Christ: The Human* who teaches first of all the true way of life and moral principles of conduct, those following, for Tolstoy from two basic ideas – “*non-resistance to evil by force*” and “*love for one’s neighbour*”.

In his *Calendar of Wisdom*, Tolstoy quotes Spinoza several times, like these (Tolstoy 1957 v. 41: 514, 531):

The Goso c gahē Mth ’he h

so t Mth

i MG□ m

that is, that eternal wisdom of God which reveals itself in all the things and principally in the human soul, and most of all, in Jesus Christ. Without this wisdom no one can reach bliss, for it alone shows what is true and what is false, what is good and what is evil.

For Tolstoy, Spinoza's call to "love one's neighbour" becomes the grounds for the spiritual and practical metamorphosis of his own self. And here lies the foundation for the principal disagreement between Tolstoy and Spinoza. For Spinoza, there is not much difference between rational knowledge of the world and the construction of life grounded in traditional and religious principles. He saw but two most important religious tasks: the obedience (of the populace) to authorities, and the maintenance of the morals (of the mob, again). A fierce enemy of passions, harmful effects, the philosopher calls to support social equilibrium, and to avoid conflicts, for the inability of the mob to think reflexively points to tumult and authorities to govern the mob. He says outwardly in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* that "the purpose of Scripture is only to teach obedience" (Spinoza 2016: 264).

Spinoza was quite satisfied with these functions of religion and faith.

Tolstoy was a religious, political, and spiritual opposition. Unlike Spinoza, he took first the way of a confession, and then came to profession. The ability to change the vector of interest *from one's own self* (from one's own animal self) *to the Other* with the instruments of confessional writing is the first step for one's own Self to transcend its limits into another dimension of communal life. But the art of confession is not enough; *reflection and emotional empathy* are needed, that is, a much more powerful internal move to discover the Other within one's self. This universal Other is, for Tolstoy, his religious faith and the practice of life after Christ.

Obeying Christ, one cannot "participate in the evil" of the system, and this *non-participation* is the only method to overcome the evil of civilization unarmed, with no uprisings or revolts.

Again, with all the similarities, Spinoza and Tolstoy read the Gospel differently. Tolstoy derives the deeper philosophical meaning of the Gospel from the text itself and claims for the direct and immediately rational acceptance of Christ's words due to the simplicity and evidence of the words said, and follow the words practically. Tolstoy publishes "The four gospels harmonized and translated," excluding from his interpretation all the irrational elements: all the mysteries, mystics, the supernatural virgin birth of Christ, etc. He seeks, however not to reject the teachings of Christ, but its best possible rationalization without which there is no ground to follow Christ in practical life. "The beginning of all was rational understanding of life. And this rational understanding of life had come to stand for God" (Tolstoy 1957 v. 24: 25).

Tolstoy's Gospel proclaims, in fact, the coming of God – God-practical reason, or Reason *of life*.

Spinoza, instead, separates faith from philosophy for this very reason:

But since I found nothing in what Scripture expressly teaches which did not agree with the intellect, or which would contradict it, and moreover, since I saw that the Prophets taught only very simple things, which everyone could easily perceive, and that they embellished these

things in that style, and confirmed them with those reasons, by which they could most readily move the mind of the multitude to devotion toward God, I was fully persuaded that Scripture leaves reason absolutely free, and that it has nothing in common with Philosophy, but that each rests on its own foundation” (Spinoza 2016: 72).

Tolstoy does not accept this Spinozian view of religion as of a custody. He crosses out energetically in his copy of *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* a fragment from Chapter fourteen where Spinoza says that “each Testament is nothing but a training in obedience ... All these are means only for obedience, not knowledge. As for trust in God, and to revere him, or (what is the same thing), to obey him” (Spinoza 2016: 264). For Tolstoy a submissive, trained obedience even to God sounds like violence which brings forth passivity. Moreover, Tolstoy did not tolerate abandoning the practical knowledge of Christ’s teachings, whereas for Spinoza this teaching is nothing more than the object of faith. Not to believe, but to understand is the most important thesis for Tolstoy. To believe within religion, and separately to understand within philosophy – that Spinoza would perhaps say.

Where Spinoza demonstrates rationally the link between obedience and love for one’s neighbour to hold the mob in constraint of religious custody, there Tolstoy tries to make religion the grounds and meaning of life – hence his uncompromising attempts of installing faith as truth. The Gospel of this Russian reformer did not promote lowliness and obedience; on the contrary, it made him the leading rebel of the “new religious consciousness” in the 20th century Russia.

Conclusion

Having reviewed some points Tolstoy shared with Spinoza, we come to the following.

Writings of Spinoza helped Tolstoy to clarify his views of truth, reason, and consciousness and power on life, the latter being understood as the religious feeling pertaining to all human beings. The fact Tolstoy chooses Spinoza demonstrates his rationalistic inclinations – he never betrayed the ideals of rational arrangement of life. These rationalist ideals warranted a similar understanding of God, the Gospels, and faith of the two thinkers. At the same time the disagreement of Tolstoy with Spinoza in the questions of Law, Life, freedom and necessity, linkage, etc. reveals the non-classical character of Tolstoy’s rationalism, infused with religious and existential themes. Tolstoy is the founder of the non-classical philosophy of life. Here reason joins the “power of life”, which is an existential equivalent of faith. Tolstoy tries, somewhat deliberately, to find in Spinoza some motifs to express ideas of his own.

Comparing Tolstoy to Spinoza can show the way the artist connects scientific, philosophical and literary discourses to describe the life-faith of a human being. Tolstoy borrows from Spinoza the notion of “linkage” and uses it as a non-verbal means of verbal meaning in the artistic narrative. Art for Tolstoy is a model of the true understanding of the primal and the principal in science, in religion, and in philosophy, that is, it is a means *to understand the meaning of life*.

Though Tolstoy took part in all the theoretical discussions of his time, he was not a scientist, nor was he a historian of philosophy or theologian. In his religious and philosophical teaching, he remains an artist, trespassing the limits of whatever formal discipline. The main task of Tolstoy is to give a human being some definite knowledge about the meaning of life, that is, about salvation.

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