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Leo Tolstoy and the Tradition of Critical Thinking

In one of Leo Tolstoy's drafts to his novel *Resurrection*, the main character Nekhliudov returns to Moscow to submit a request to the government „On the necessity of abolishing criminal proceedings and replacing them with moral education of the masses.”¹ Much earlier in his educational writings, Tolstoy observes in passing that „schools ... [are] built on the plan of prisons.”² While there are major generic, stylistic and other differences between Tolstoy's articles on education and his literature, there is a common element in addressing the interrelationship between social and educational practices, such as the penitentiary and school systems. In this paper I will look at Tolstoy's fiction and pedagogical essays taken together and side by side rather than separately, as has been the case up to now. As Simmons points out, Tolstoy's writings on education, written mostly at the outset of his literary career, „clearly anticipate in intellectual quality and style the much larger body of religious and philosophical works” written later.³ Reading his novels in light of his pedagogical essays and vice versa helps to contextualize Tolstoy's pronouncements on the nature of education in the overall body of his oeuvre. In order to weave together Tolstoy's literary and pedagogical works, I will look at them through the lens of critical thinking as an educational tradition established towards the end of the 20th century.

In a number of ways, Tolstoy's views on education anticipate our latest approaches to teaching. For example, his emphasis that teachers must, first of all, fulfill students' needs is an essential component

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¹ E. N. Kupreianova, notes, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh*, by Leo Tolstoy. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), pp. 13:511, p. 523.

² Tolstoy, “Popular” 16.

³ Ernest Simmons, *Introduction to Tolstoy's Writings* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968) 43.

of the modern student-centered approach to learning. Most importantly, Tolstoy's belief that education must liberate students' minds from various forms of abuse and indoctrination is an important principle of critical thinking as it is taught today in colleges around the world. However, I would like to argue that Tolstoy's free thinking had its own ideological nuances that make it fundamentally different from the modern idea of critical thinking.

In North America, John Dewey is considered to be the founding figure of critical thinking in education. His long standing definition of critical thinking was „active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends [It] includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality.”⁴ However, on international comparative terms, Tolstoy in Russia is thought to have had anticipated Dewey's educational thought in his essays and teaching practice, emphasizing clear and rational thinking as the basis for an intellectual freedom of man. „There are important aspects of [Tolstoy's] thoughts on education that can be seen as precursors of the central ideas in modern educational theory, however, particularly in those of Dewey.”⁵

This parallel between Tolstoy and Dewey's educational thought can be extended to our present time. On their surface, some of the examples used by modern advocates of critical thinking are strikingly similar to those of Tolstoy, who criticized the contemporary European and Russian systems of education. For example, Halpern argues in 1996 that the traditional American way of teaching „students to learn, remember, make decisions, analyze arguments, and solve problems” is based on the „tacit assumption” that students automatically develop the ability to think in the process. ⁶ However, such an assumption „is not warranted” since only a quarter of students, according to a 1971 study, could answer abstract reasoning questions of „what

⁴ Quoted in Daniel Fasko Jr. , ed. , *Critical Thinking and Reasoning: Current Research, Theory, and Practice* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2003) 7.

⁵ Reginald Archambault, introduction, *Leo Tolstoy on Education*, trans. Leo Wiener (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967) xv.

⁶ Diane Halpern, *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*, 3rd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996) 4.

would happen if..." type which builds on the facts already familiar to students.⁷

Tolstoy expresses the same concern over reasoning abilities as a result of his exchanges with French pupils: „[t]o questions from the history of France they answered well by rote, but if asked at haphazard, I received such answers as that Henry IV had been killed by Julius Caesar.”⁸ In the same manner, the pupils could multiply by heart thousands „with ease and rapidity” yet could not solve a „simplest problem in addition and subtraction.”⁹ Tolstoy’s characteristic impression was that pupils could not transfer their knowledge beyond their disciplines into actual life to the extent that some of the pupils „cannot read any other books than those they have studied.”¹⁰ Such a concern is also typical of modern educators who wish to see students carrying their skills over across various disciplines and into their practical lives.

Another similarity between Tolstoy and modern educators is the concern that teaching methods and content will become obsolete in the changing environment. Halpern wrote that „many of today’s young adults will be working at jobs that currently don’t exist” and examines how students need to be prepared to face the future changes.¹¹ Likewise, Tolstoy insisted that education should be modeled not on „the elder generations” but meet „the needs of the younger generations”.¹² Tolstoy recognizes the inherent obsolescence of contemporary teaching methods, finding it „obvious that the courses of instruction in [the 19th century] higher institutions of learning will in the twenty-first century appear ... strange and useless.”¹³

Tolstoy’s writings on the nature of education were not consistent as a theory. In fact, the lack of a „unified and logically related doctrine” in his views on education makes them an „anti-theory.”¹⁴ His own contemporaries, such as Markov, have pointed out some of the

⁷ Halpern 4

⁸ Tolstoy, “Popular” 22.

⁹ Tolstoy, “Popular” 22.

¹⁰ Tolstoy, “Popular” 22.

¹¹ Halpern 4.

¹² Tolstoy, “Popular” 11.

¹³ Leo Tolstoy, “Education and Culture,” *Leo Tolstoy on Education*, trans. Leo Wiener. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967) 112.

¹⁴ Archambault xv.

inherent confusions and contradictions of Tolstoy's ideas. The weaknesses of Tolstoy's thought on education can be explained, in part, by his own reluctance to give it a definitive and streamlined shape. Tolstoy found that „definition of pedagogy and of its aims in a philosophical sense [was] impossible, useless, and injurious.”¹⁵

A major stumbling block in Tolstoy's ideas on education has to do with the role of religion. While Tolstoy vehemently argued that education should not be compulsory but free, he seems to reserve an exception for religion. Tolstoy wrote that religious education with the aim „to convert” pupils even „by force” is „lawful and sensible.”¹⁶ For Tolstoy, „the truth and legality” of religion is beyond doubt, and so it must „indisputably be inculcated on the people, and in this — only in this — case is violence legal.”¹⁷ Even this exception cannot be established with certainty because he makes contradictory statements in one and the same article. In „Education and Culture” he wrote that „religion is the only lawful and sensible basis of education.”¹⁸ A few pages later in the same article, we read: „We do not recognize the right of a religion to educate; we exclaim against the seminaries and monastic schools.”¹⁹ The contradiction inherent in his justification of religious indoctrination would later acquire far greater scope in Tolstoy's literary and philosophical writings.

One of Tolstoy's main ideas on education was that education cannot be forced upon people and, therefore, should not be compulsory. He attacked the legal right of educators (and, by inference, the elite) to determine the mindset of the pupils. He objected to the „right, delegated to one man, or to a small group of men, to make of other people anything they please.”²⁰ As already mentioned, he made an ambiguous exception for religion, which is justified by the truth and salvation that it supposedly brings to those who study it. Tolstoy did not see religious education as something that represents opinions of a small group of people, but as universally applicable. In other words, the subject of religion is not the mere opinions of a minority, but universal facts.

¹⁵ Tolstoy, “Popular” 29.

¹⁶ Tolstoy “Culture” 115.

¹⁷ Tolstoy “Popular” 8.

¹⁸ Tolstoy “Culture” 115.

¹⁹ Tolstoy “Culture” 118.

²⁰ Tolstoy “Culture” 118.

According to the concept of critical thinking, the difference between facts and opinions is that facts are objectively verifiable by most people, either directly or through external trustworthy parties, whereas opinions are privately held beliefs awaiting such verification.²¹ In critical thinking and in Tolstoy's argumentation alike, facts can be agreed upon by most people who are given the necessary information whereas opinions reflect personal preferences that vary from person to person. By inference, facts remain constant regardless of the person who observes the fact, given that s/he observes it in the same manner. This is the basis of scientific replication and scientific truths. To state that facts differ from person to person is to blur „the distinction between logic and illogic.“²²

In *Anna Karenina* there is an instance where Tolstoy's character Levin explicitly blurs the distinction between a scientific fact and a personal opinion. Levin contemplates the gradual movement of the stars in the night sky to ponder on the scientific fact of the earth's rotation. He „knows“²³ that the stars „do not move“ but the earth does, however, he cannot imagine „the earth's rotation“ while he can see it with his own eyes that the stars have changed their position.²⁴ His subjective perception, however illusory in light of scientific knowledge, was the same for „millions of people throughout centuries“ and will remain this way.²⁵ In other words, Levin's opinion takes on the characteristics of a fact in that such a perception „had been and would be always the same.“²⁶ Moreover, Levin goes on to conclude that the very scientific facts of astronomy, such as that of the earth's rotation, were established owing to direct observations of the „visible movement of the stars around the immovable earth.“²⁷

The gradual movement of the stars observed by Levin runs parallel to his placing subjective perception and objective facts on the same continuum of historical knowledge. Such a fusion of facts and opinion has the potential of turning into an oppressive ideology when

²¹ Halpern 201.

²² Fasko, ed. 373.

²³ Translations from Russian are my own unless otherwise indicated.

²⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh*, vol. 20 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964) 9:415.

²⁵ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 9:415.

²⁶ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 9:415.

²⁷ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 9:415.

someone's opinion is forced onto the minds of others as a fact. Levin contemplates the borderline between plurality of beliefs exemplified by „Jews, Mohammedans, Confucians, Buddhists“ on the one hand and the „single community“ of those who found ultimate „goodness“ in Levin's sense.²⁸ He wonders if „millions of people are deprived“ of the meaning in life which he had just found and if they are somehow wrong.²⁹ Nevertheless, Levin remains tolerant of other opinions when he admits that he „has no right and opportunity“ to decide upon other people's beliefs.³⁰

Levin has been regarded as Tolstoy's alter ego reflecting the author's own search for truth.³¹ Levin's spiritual search can be seen as a „prelude“ to Tolstoy's spiritual catharsis described in *Confession*.³² In this work and the similarly philosophical-religious *What Is My Belief*, Tolstoy's thought breaks the boundaries of a personal belief and turns into a universal dogma which speaks through, in addition to Tolstoy, the well-known philosophers in history, from Lao-Tzu to Immanuel Kant. All of these thinkers, in Tolstoy's interpretation, „sing in unison“ with him.³³ Re-working the Biblical texts, Tolstoy was denouncing the extant reading of it by the official church and arguing that „only his view“ of Christianity is correct.³⁴

If in *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy was still reluctant to infringe on the minds of his readers, in *Resurrection* he turns much more dogmatic. In the latter novel, Tolstoy argues against compulsory imprisonment of criminals by the state. In doing so, he is at the same time infringing on the intellectual integrity of his readers, by leading them to accept his private impressions as objectively verifiable facts. The main protagonist's visits to prison are used to show that prisoners are „no more guilty or dangerous to society than those who remain at large.“³⁵ The conditions of prisons are shown as conducive to developing criminal inclinations in the inmates so that prisons, Tolstoy argues, are „spe-

²⁸ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 9:415.

²⁹ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 9:415.

³⁰ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 9:416.

³¹ Alexander Men', foreword, *Isповед'. V chem moia vera?*, by Leo Tolstoy (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1991, 5–27) 7.

³² Men' 7.

³³ Men' 18.

³⁴ Men' 19.

³⁵ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 13:458.

cially created institutions” for propagating crime in society instead of curtailing it.³⁶ Tolstoy’s overtly selective and biased portrayal of prisoners, one-sided description of state bureaucracy, moral profiles of the members of the elite, and other features of the novel are all intended to convince the reader that solutions to social ills lie not in the hands of the state, but in the „direct” meaning of the Biblical text.

The ideas developed in *Resurrection* were voiced earlier in Tolstoy’s pedagogical articles in which he tries to show that there is no law consistently applied either to citizens, or to students — both judiciary and educational systems are guided by the interests of people in power. „The whole apparatus of our life is based not on any...judicial beginnings, but on the most simple, crude violence.”³⁷ Considering that Tolstoy justified the intellectual violence of imposing a religious belief on students, and that his religion was largely a product of his personal ambition, we can see how his philosophical and literary works were his tools to indoctrinate his readers with his own opinions rather than enlighten them about some objective facts. Tolstoy clearly objected to intellectual violence, yet, through the exceptional case of religion, he tried to enforce his belief onto others under disguise of facts.

Resurrection was written as an account of the true state of affairs in Russian society and was not intended to be taken as a mere work of fiction. The novel was a realization of „the absolute humanistic truth” which must be accepted by the elite and the masses alike for the sake of their „salvation.”³⁸ „The whole novel” was based on „concrete facts” of Russian society in the 1880—90s.³⁹ In preparation for writing this novel, Tolstoy had visited prisons and conversed with the inmates and the guards. Some of their stories were reflected in the novel. A number of characters in *Resurrection* have contemporary real life prototypes. The factual veneer was supposed to present the novel as a „horrible truth” about Russia.⁴⁰

While writing *Resurrection*, Tolstoy expressed his dissatisfaction with fiction as a genre. He felt that novel’s form was „passing” and

³⁶ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 13:459.

³⁷ Quoted in E. N. Kupreianova, notes, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh*, by Leo Tolstoy. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964) 13:511.

³⁸ Kupreianova 504.

³⁹ Kupreianova 529.

⁴⁰ Kupreianova 529.

that he did not want to „write untruth,” according to his diary entry.⁴¹ In a letter to a friend he confesses his „shame” to create characters who „did not exist.”⁴² Commenting on the process of writing *Resurrection*, Tolstoy writes: „I have long been writing my novel, but lately I’m disgusted by it. Fiction [*sic*] – unpleasant. All is invention, lie. And I have so much of unexpressed truth in me.”⁴³

There is an implicit coercive logic in asserting that something should be regarded as „fact.” The very insistence that a certain portrayal of reality is factual and, therefore, correct, implies that those who disagree are wrong. Moreover, those who disagree are not simply wrong by any personal standards, as when two personal views clash, but the fault is now elevated to a universal order. In other words, one no longer has merely a different opinion, but is objectively wrong in his conception of facts and universal truths.

Tolstoy tried to convince his readers of the infallibility of his ideas by presenting them as logical arguments. In his arguments, he typically described either the actual, as in *So What Is To Be Done?*, or the fictional, as in *Resurrection*, to illustrate a point. Gradually, Tolstoy gathered his points to make a conclusion on the current state of affairs. He relied on logic, in addition to literary effect, to drive home his arguments. Very often he made a point by proving that the existing beliefs were false and his opponent’s arguments were flawed. In either case, he proceeded with critical thinking to show why some argument is corrupt. In Tolstoy’s writings we often find the material of a standard critical thinking course, which includes „identification and classification of errors in thinking, clarifying and extending the rules of inference, and elucidating the requirements of logical argument.”⁴⁴

For example, in arguing against compulsory education, Tolstoy asked about the justification for its existence. He appealed to his potential opponents to prove the right to enforce education „by any other argument than by the fact that the abuse of power has always existed.”⁴⁵ In this, Tolstoy pointed out the fallacy of „appeal to tradition,”

⁴¹ Kupreianova 509.

⁴² Kupreianova 509.

⁴³ Kupreianova 509.

⁴⁴ Fasko, ed. 372.

⁴⁵ Tolstoy, „Culture” 112.

as it is called by teachers of critical thinking.⁴⁶ This fallacy is based on the „unstated assumption that what exists is best.”⁴⁷ Tolstoy, in asking for reasons other than tradition to justify the current methods of education, essentially challenged the validity of tradition.

When Tolstoy criticizes the idea of a universal historical progress, he recognized the fallacy of generalizing to the whole world from a sample of only a few Western European nations. His opponents „deduce a general law for all humanity from ... one small part of European humanity ... [p]rogress is a common law of humanity, they say, except for Asia, Africa, America, and Australia.”⁴⁸ Such an inductive generalization has as much validity, Tolstoy pointed out, as a statement that „all people are blond except the dark-complexioned ones.”⁴⁹

When Nekhliudov in *Resurrection* engages in an argument over land ownership with his brother-in-law Ignatiy Nikiforovich, the latter merely repeats „that usual argument” that „greedy desire for land ownership is a sign of its necessity.”⁵⁰ Tolstoy was quick to show the fallacy of deducing necessity from desire in this case. In addition, the very wording of Ignatiy Nikiforovich’s ideas shows this character commits the fallacy of appeal to tradition: „[w]e ... have to support those conditions of living which we were born into and inherited from our ancestors.”⁵¹ Tolstoy had long ago dealt a blow to such arguments in his educational writings: „[i]f people have always killed each other, it does not follow that it ought always to be that way, and that it is necessary to raise murder to a principle.”⁵²

Generally, Tolstoy’s literature is interspersed with arguments. If they are not held up as theses, as in *Resurrection*, we find them as philosophical inserts, as in *War and Peace* (on the meaning of history), or read them as part of a character’s consciousness as in *Anna Karenina* (Levin’s economic and spiritual quest). Perhaps of all his novels, *Resurrection* has the largest number of critical assessments of extant beliefs. Even though *Resurrection*, as a novel, should not necessarily

⁴⁶ Halpern 201.

⁴⁷ Halpern 201.

⁴⁸ Tolstoy, “Progress” 162.

⁴⁹ Tolstoy, “Progress” 163.

⁵⁰ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 13:359.

⁵¹ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 13:360.

⁵² Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 13:113.

be subjected to a logical analysis, Tolstoy constructed it as a critical argument and a practical guide to action. The novel systematically supports the clearly identifiable thesis — that people have no right to judge or punish others — and closes by the final restatement of it. Nekhliudov's experiences from meeting prisoners and state officials are used to provide evidence for the author's conclusions.

It was not only Tolstoy's opponents who proposed invalid arguments. Tolstoy's own arguments can be analyzed critically to reveal fallacies, too. In *What Is My Belief?* as well as in *Resurrection* Tolstoy argued that one of the main Christian postulates uttered by Jesus Christ — do not judge — is consistently violated by the state judiciary system and this violation is raised to a social principle. Alexander Men' pointed out that Tolstoy took a body of moral laws as prescribed to an individual, and applied it to society. Tolstoy „mechanically transferred“ the moral duties of a „person“ to „the whole social order.“⁵³ However, there cannot be a „complete analogy“ between a particular individual and a state, in Men's words.⁵⁴ In the terms of critical thinking, Tolstoy committed the fallacy of „false analogy.“ The analogy is false, according to Men', because the judicial measures transcend matters of the „inner world of a man“ but deal with social consequences of evil whereas the original statement by Jesus referred strictly to the personal „thoughts and feelings.“⁵⁵

In *What Is My Belief*, Tolstoy described a scene in which a soldier forces a beggar away from the street. When Tolstoy reminds the soldier of the Biblical rule to „feed the hungry,“ the latter tells him he is following the orders of his commandment.⁵⁶ Tolstoy used the scene to attack the widespread opinion that Christian norms apply only to „personal salvation“ and not the „general, state“ issues.⁵⁷ For Tolstoy there can be no exceptions as to application of the sacred text. He argued it is equally valid in the personal and public domains. This is also the underlying idea of Tolstoy's letter to tsar Alexander III, in which he wrote that „before the duties of the tsar there are the duties of man“ and that „God will not ask [the tsar] about fulfillment of

⁵³ Men' 21.

⁵⁴ Men' 21.

⁵⁵ Men' 22.

⁵⁶ Leo Tolstoy, *Ispoved'. V chem moia vera?* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1991) 135.

⁵⁷ Tolstoy, *Ispoved'* 136.

tsar's duties" but will first of all ask about „fulfillment of human duties." ⁵⁸ Tolstoy's assumption is that what Bible says in regards to individuals must also be applied to state matters. Tolstoy asked the tsar's aide Pobedonostsev to pass this letter to the tsar, which the former refused to do. In his explanatory note, Pobedonostsev wrote that he and Tolstoy did not believe in the same God. In effect, Pobedonostsev refused to allow Tolstoy to impose his interpretation of the Bible on him and the tsar. The very formulation of Tolstoy's letter to tsar assumes that Tolstoy's ideas and understanding of the Biblical text are the same for the tsar. The letter to the tsar is another example that Tolstoy believed his opinion was to be taken as a fact by others.

Just as Tolstoy's critical analysis can be reversed and focused on his own argumentation, so can his accusations of the elite and the state, whom he accused of forcing their will upon the people. Tolstoy's arguments force their assumptions on his opponents not by any power of logic but sheer will of the author. As has been noted earlier, Tolstoy saw contemporary education as driven by the needs of the state and government, rather than the needs of the people. In the same manner, he perceived other social institutions, such as the penitentiary system, to be serving the needs of the elite. Nekhliudov expressed Tolstoy's own belief that people were imprisoned not because they „committed crimes" but because they „put obstacles in the way of the officials and the rich to possess their riches which they collected from people."⁵⁹ When Nekhliudov visits Toporov who directed the state protectorate of the church, the visit and the ensuing conversation convinces Nekhliudov that Toporov is concerned only with his own interests and not those of people. ⁶⁰ We can say that Tolstoy was also concerned with his own truth, rather than the truth of other people, when he was putting forth his arguments. The arguments in which he engaged with others were often not genuine arguments, in the sense that Tolstoy did not fully understand his opponent's position before refuting it.

In the critical thinking tradition, a genuine argument can occur only if people in a debate agree on definitions and the meaning of the premises used in the argument. Then the logical conclusions reached

⁵⁸ Tolstoy, *Sobranie*. 17:522.

⁵⁹ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 13:336.

⁶⁰ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 13:336.

by one person will have equal validity for another. But in Tolstoy's case, he simply assumed that his premises were equally true for his opponents, that his God was also the God of others. When he declared in his pedagogical articles, asking his „future critics not to shade down“ his statements, that „either [he is] talking nonsense, or else the whole pedagogy is at fault,“ he did not leave room for a genuine disagreement between him and the other pedagogues.⁶¹ It did not occur to him that he would be a winner in the pedagogical debate only if others derive the same meaning from his rather loose definition of education as „that activity of man which has for its base the need of equality and the invariable law of educational progress.“⁶² Tolstoy simply assumed that his definition is universally correct and is the same in „the whole pedagogy.“⁶³ When Nekhliudov supposes in *Resurrection* that either he is a „madman“ or „mad people are those“ around him, he is not evaluating the others on their own terms but strictly his personal normative assumptions.⁶⁴ Tolstoy's discussions are, formally, discussions with himself, or discussions with imaginary opponents who are „dressed in Tolstoyan clothes.“⁶⁵ Such discussions left little „room for a dialogue“ with the authentic other point of view.⁶⁶ Someone like the figure of Toporov who disagreed with Tolstoy's literary ambassador to society, Nekhliudov, was „dumb and lacking moral sense.“⁶⁷

Tolstoy's inherent intolerance towards different points of view was also expressed in his tendency to make categorical statements, which are his intellectual ultimatums for opponents to resign. His fundamental questions in pedagogy well before the spiritual crisis were posed with the demand that „[o]ne must say directly, 'Yes,' or 'No.'“⁶⁸ Tolstoy often saw „no middle way, not merely theoretically, but even in practice.“⁶⁹ Such a dualistic view does not do justice to the multiplicity and variety of views which can have fine shades of dif-

⁶¹ Tolstoy, „Culture“ 114.

⁶² Tolstoy, „Progress“ 153.

⁶³ Tolstoy, „Culture“ 114.

⁶⁴ Tolstoy, *Sobranie* 13:458.

⁶⁵ Men' 18.

⁶⁶ Men' 20.

⁶⁷ Tolstoy *Sobranie* 13:332.

⁶⁸ Tolstoy „Culture“ 112.

⁶⁹ Tolstoy „Culture“ 112.

ference. Such positions are called „false dichotomies“ in critical thinking since they suggest „to decide between two positions, without allowing other alternatives or ‘gray areas’ that would combine aspects of both choices.”⁷⁰

Tolstoy deems intellectual freedom of pupils to be the highest value in education, citing freedom as fundamental to educational progress. At the same time, he denies such freedom to his readers, presenting his ideas in fiction and journalism as facts to be taken for granted by his reading audience. Tolstoy’s educational writings have seeds of critical thinking as it would develop in the twentieth century pedagogy. Yet, he tends to undermine the audience’s freedom to think independently and decide for itself.

A sense of continuity in Tolstoy’s writings and his life periods before and after his spiritual crisis emerges if we consider that „freedom“ in his educational thought meant a very specific kind of freedom exercised by those who live outside state structures in an anarchic society. The normative context of Tolstoy’s talk about education and religion was not the state — he saw the state as the root of social evil — but anarchic self-organization of people. Therefore, when Tolstoy talked about freedom in pedagogy and elsewhere, one should bear in mind that the state did not enter the envisioned future of Tolstoy.

Tolstoy’s idea of freedom in education should be understood in the strictly Tolstoyan sense of anarchic freedom. He believed that people, once they are free in thought and action, would form anarchic self-sustaining and self-governing units. So, ironically, the anarchic utopian society can be the *only* expression of people’s free will, according to Tolstoy. Freedom in Tolstoy’s public school at his estate Iasnaya Poliana was a tool to let pupils realize that „order was essential and that self-government was necessary to preserve it.”⁷¹ The dissolution of prisons and the state itself go hand in hand with free and moral education of the masses because, for Tolstoy, a freely educated person will invariably arrive at an anarchic social outlook.

⁷⁰ Halpern 195.

⁷¹ Simmons 50.

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