Tolstoy’s Christian Anarchism

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**Introduction**

In this paper I will analyze Lev (Leo) Tolstoy’s arguments for Christian Anarchism which is found in his book *Царство Божие Внутри Вас* (tr. *The Kingdom of God is Within You*). By analyzing his arguments, I will present why Tolstoy believes that Christianity inevitably leads to a belief and practice of pacifism and anarchism. In other words, Tolstoy is attempting to prove that capitalism and governments of any kind are incompatible with Christian ethics. Thus, what this paper attempts to achieve is to analyze whether Tolstoy is correct in his claims: does capitalism, as an economic system, and governmental authority conflict with Christian morality. I am not interested in proving that capitalism and governments are, in general, morally bad, or wrong systems but rather or not they contradict Christian doctrine. Many commentators have mentioned that Tolstoy’s philosophical works and arguments are ‘naïve’ and or ‘lacking.’[[1]](#footnote-1),[[2]](#footnote-2),[[3]](#footnote-3) However, in this paper, I will prove that this is not entirely the case. That in fact, Tolstoy’s philosophical arguments are highly focused and more complex than what people present them to be. He is also no lesser of a philosopher for having no formal or academic philosophical education. For we should not restrict the title of ‘philosopher’ for only those who belong in academia or the institutions.

Tolstoy maintains that capitalism and governments are at odds with Christian moral tenets. As a result, it is important to understand concisely what Tolstoy considers to be the quiddity of Christian ethics. Tolstoy asserts that morality can only be derived from religion and to derive it from elsewhere would be preposterous and illogical. As J. H. Abraham writes, “Tolstoy wishes to maintain that religion embraces all the other activities and thoughts of man. The attempt, therefore, to build a morality without and independent of religion is an absurdity… Morality flows directly from religion…”[[4]](#footnote-4) To put it simply, Tolstoy wishes to ground morality within the boundaries of religion opposed to grounding it purely within reason. One will see in this paper many similarities between Tolstoy’s Deontological ethics and Immanual Kant’s Categorical Imperative. Yet, while Kant attempts to ground ethics in the realm of reason alone, Tolstoy attempts to build an ethical system from biblical text. Kant thus reaches a broader audience. However, that is not Tolstoy’s intended goal. Tolstoy’s ethical system has a level of precision which focuses upon inconsistencies or contradictions within Christian individuals. Example given, is the idea of a Christian Capitalist absurd?

**The Sermon on the Mount**

Tolstoy argues that the fundamental teachings of Christ’s moral doctrine can be found in his Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount takes place within the Jesus narrative chronologically after his baptism from John and his spiritual retreat into the desert where he was tempted by Satan. Both events acted as a religious awakening which would propel Christ to give his first sermon. The Sermon on the Mount is where Jesus Christ gives his Five Commandments. The Five Commandments given in the Book of Matthew, Chapter Five, are as follows: 1. Do not kill. 2. Do not be angry at another without cause. 3. Do not commit adultery. 4. Do not resist evil by violence. 5. Love your enemies.[[5]](#footnote-5) It is Christ’s last two commandments which Tolstoy develops his two theories from. Those two commandments are as follows[[6]](#footnote-6): «А Я говорю вам: не противься злому. Но кто ударит тебя в правую щеку твою, обрати к нему и другую…»“But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” [[7]](#footnote-7) «А Я говорю вам: любите врагов ваших, благословляйте проклинающих вас, благотворите ненавидящим вас и молитесь за обижающих вас и гонящих вас…»“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you…”[[8]](#footnote-8) The two theories which Tolstoy formulates from the Sermon on the Mount are «Непротивление злу» (Non-Resistance to Evil) and «Закон Любви» (the Law of Love).

«Непротивление злу» literally translates as ‘Not to resist/oppose evil.’ Another way we can state this is that we ought not to resist evil by violent means; i.e., the belief in pacifism. As Tolstoy beautifully writes, «Истинное непротивление есть единственное настоящее сопротивление злу.»[[9]](#footnote-9) “True non-resistance is the only real resistance to evil.” [[10]](#footnote-10) «Закон Любви» is the ‘Law of Love, ’ which states that we ought to love our enemies. Tolstoy writes,

Христианское учение во всем его истинном значении, как оно все более и более выясняется в наше время, состоит в том, что сущность жизни человеческой есть сознательное, все большее и большее проявление того начала всего, признак проявления которого в нас есть любовь, и что поэтому сущность жизни человеческой и высший закон, долженствующий руководить ею, есть любовь.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The whole true significance of the Christian doctrine, as it is being elucidated more and more in our time, consists in this: the essence of human life is the conscious, progressive manifestation of that principle or source of everything, the manifestation of which in us is signified by love; thus love is the essence of human life and the supreme law that should guide it.[[12]](#footnote-12)

However, Tolstoy sees the ‘Law of Love’ as also stating that we ought not cause suffering to other human beings. Another way to put it is that Tolstoy is taking a strong Deontological stance on ethics. In other words, Tolstoy is focused on whether the act itself is morally permissible. For example, murder, adultery, violence, hatred, etc. are all morally wrong acts. It does not matter if the violence topples the corrupt Czar Nikolai I. Violence of any kind is still morally wrong.[[13]](#footnote-13) Thus, the contradiction, which Tolstoy sees, is when the Church or the Christian individual does not abide by Christ’s teachings. Abraham writes, “There is nothing Tolstoy thinks which is more immoral and unreasonable than some of the doctrines preached by so-called Christians and said to be at the very basis of their religion, the fundamental principle of which, however, as of all other true religions, is the equality of all men as sons of God.”[[14]](#footnote-14) This is why Tolstoy presents this argument at the beginning of his book *Царство Божие Внутри Вас*.

1. The Church[[15]](#footnote-15) accepts the validity of the Sermon on the Mount.
2. If the Church accepts the validity of the Sermon on the Mount, then the Church must accept the belief in non-resistance to evil and the law of love.
3. It is not the case that the Church accepts the belief in non-resistance to evil.
4. If it is not the case that the Church accepts the validity of the Sermon on the Mount, then the Church deprives Christ’s teachings.

∴The Church deprives Christ’s teachings.

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|  |  |  |  |
| 1 | *A* |  |  |
| 2 | *A* → (*B* ∧ *C*) |  |  |
| 3 | ¬*B* |  |  |
| 4 | ¬*B* → *D* |  |  |
| 5 | *D* | →E 3, 4 |  |

In the original Russian Tolstoy uses the word “лишают” which Constance Garnett translates as ‘deprives.’ However, the Russian language is filled with nuance and ambiguity. The verb “лишать” not only means ‘to deprive’ but also ‘to rob’ or ‘to lack.’ The verb is also used in indication of ‘taking a life.’ For example, the phrase ‘лишать жизни,’ which means ‘to kill someone’ or ‘to take someone’s life.’ In a way then, when a Christian contradicts Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, they not only devalue Christ’s teachings but they are also killing the image of Christ.[[16]](#footnote-16) The original quote is as follows: «В книге моей я обвиняю церковных учителей в том, что они учат противно заповедям Христа, ясно и определенно выраженным в нагорной проповеди, и особенно противно заповеди о непротивлении злу и лишают этим учение Христа всего его значения.»[[17]](#footnote-17)

It was important to show this argument by Tolstoy because it is by this argument that we see Tolstoy strong view on Christians contradicting Christ’s teachings. As Tolstoy writes, «что признание необходимости противления злу насилием есть не что иное, как. только оправдание людьми своих привычных, излюбленных пороков: мести, корысти, зависти, честолюбия, властолюбия, гордости, трусости, злости.»[[18]](#footnote-18) “the claim that it is necessary to resist evil by violence is nothing more than an excuse men give for their pet habitual vices: vengeance, avarice, envy, ambition, love of power, pride, cowardice, and spite.”[[19]](#footnote-19) The next question then becomes, in what way does capitalism and governments contradict the doctrine of the ‘non-resistance to evil’ and the ‘law of love’? I will discuss more critical problems with Tolstoy’s definition of Christian ethics later in this paper but for now we can leave it as being sufficient. While we might debate on what defines Christian morality, I believe that Tolstoy makes a reasonable assertion that the main components of Christian ethics can be found in Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. Christ explicitly states that we are to ‘not resist evil with violence’ and to ‘love our enemies.’ To say that Christ does not make these claims in Mathews Book V, would not only be difficult but absurd. Thus, Tolstoy using the Sermon on the Mount as the ‘Christian standard’ for morality is not necessarily unsound. However, it is the next step, proving that Christian morality contradicts capitalism and governments, which will be difficult for Tolstoy to prove.

**The Economic Contradiction**

There are what Tolstoy calls the ‘economic contradiction’ and the ‘political contradiction.’ The economic contradiction is the argument that capitalism goes against the law of love. Tolstoy argues that we cause suffering on to others even though we ought to know that we are all equal under God. Few live-in luxury while many people live-in poverty. Tolstoy believes that the master and slave dynamic of ancient history has not gone away but has only changed its outer form. In other words, Tolstoy, perceives capitalism as nothing more than a new form of slavery.

Всякий знает это несомненно твердо всем существом своим и вместе с тем не только видит вокруг себя деление всех людей на две касты: одну трудящуюся, угнетенную, нуждающуюся и страдающую, а другую — праздную, угнетающую и роскошествующую и веселящуюся, — не только видит, но волей-неволей с той или другой стороны принимает участие в этом отвергаемом его сознанием разделении людей и не может не страдать от сознания такого противоречия и участия в нем. Будет ли он господином или рабом, человек нашего времени не может не испытывать постоянного мучительного противоречия сознания с действительностью и вытекающих из него страданий.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Yet at the same time everyone sees all round him the division of men into two castes – the one, laboring, oppressed, poor, and suffering, the other idle, oppressing, luxurious, and profligate. And everyone not only sees this, but voluntarily or involuntarily, in one way or another, he takes part in maintaining this distinction which his conscience condemns. And he cannot help suffering from the consciousness of this contradiction and his share in it. Whether he be master or slave, the man of to-day cannot help constantly feeling the painful opposition between his conscience and actual life, and the miseries resulting from it.[[21]](#footnote-21)

For some people hearing Tolstoy claim capitalism to be a new form of slavery might seem extreme. However, claiming that capitalism is a new form of slavery is not too bizarre if you know anything about the Russian language. The Russian word for work is работать (v.impfv.). But the derivative of работать, раб-, literally means slave. Also, the words for employer and slave trader also have the same derivative; работодатель (employer) and работорговец (slave trader). So, it is very possible that Tolstoy is making a Russian play on words in comparing Capitalism to slavery.

As Tolstoy had stated, capitalism exploits the majority of workers, and this exploitation contradicts Christian morality.[[22]](#footnote-22) For Tolstoy this contradicts the fifth commandment given by Jesus Christ and goes against ‘the Law of Love.’ Capitalism, as seen by Tolstoy, causes suffering by exploiting the working class by providing the most minimal requirements to live. For Tolstoy, this exploitation is nowhere near love and compassion. If the majority of people struggle to survive and lack upward economic mobility, then there is a majority of people suffering. But even increasing wages to something livable would not be enough, Tolstoy says, to stop the suffering caused by capitalism. Tolstoy argues that the working class experience a sense of alienation from their labor. This is similar to Karl Marx’s theory of the alienation of labor but I am uncertain of whether or not Tolstoy studied or met Marx.[[23]](#footnote-23) The only philosophers which Tolstoy is known to have had an affinity towards was Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Arthur Schopenhauer. Capitalism and the employers, Tolstoy argues, use the workers as merely means to an end; in other words, tools to be used. Tolstoy writes the following:

Рабочий нашего времени, если бы даже работа его и была много легче работы древнего раба, если бы он даже добился восьмичасового дня и платы трех долларов за день, не перестанет страдать, потому что, работая вещи, которыми он не будет пользоваться, работая не для себя по своей охоте, а по нужде, для прихоти вообще роскошествующих и праздных людей и, в частности, для наживы одного богача, владетеля фабрики или завода, он знает, что всё это происходит в мире, в котором признается не только научное положение о том, что только работа есть богатство, что пользование чужими трудами есть несправедливость, незаконность, казнимая законами, но в мире, в котором исповедуется учение Христа, по которому мы все братья и достоинство и заслуга человека только в служении ближнему, а не в пользовании им.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The laborer of the present day would not cease to suffer even if his toil were much lighter than that of the slave of ancient times, even if he gained an eight-hour working day and a wage of three dollars a day. For he is working at the manufacture of things which he will not enjoy, working not by his own will for his own benefit, but through necessity, to satisfy the desires of luxurious and idle people in general, and for the profit of a single rich man, the owner of a factory or workshop in particular. And he knows that all this is going on in a world in which it is a recognized scientific principle that labor alone creates wealth, and that to profit by the labor of others is immoral, dishonest, and punishable by law; in a world, moreover, which professes to believe Christ’s doctrine that we are all brothers, and that true merit and dignity is to be found in serving one’s neighbor, not in exploiting him. All this he knows, and he cannot but suffer keenly from the sharp contrast between what is and what ought to be.[[25]](#footnote-25)

We can find other quotes from the New Testament which appears parallel to what Tolstoy has stated. In the Book of James, chapter 5 we find the following lines:

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.[[26]](#footnote-26)

**The Political Contradiction**

The political contradiction proceeds to argue that governmental authority also go against Christian ethics. This is because governments consolidate their power through four methods. The four methods are: intimidation, corruption, propaganda, and militarization. These methods in which governments hold their authority is what causes suffering and misery upon their constituents. Tolstoy writes the following:

Первое, самое старое средство есть средство устрашения. Средство это состоит в том, чтобы выставлять существующее государственное устройство (какое бы оно ни было — свободное республиканское или самое дикое деспотическое) чем-то священным и неизменным и потому казнить самыми жестокими казнями все попытки изменения его... Второе средство есть средство подкупа. Оно состоит в том, чтобы, отобрав от трудового рабочего народа посредством денежных податей его богатства, распределять эти богатства между чиновниками, обязанными за это вознаграждение поддерживать и усиливать порабощение народа... Третье средство есть то, что я не умею назвать иначе, как гипнотизация народа. Средство это состоит в том, чтобы задерживать духовное развитие людей и различными внушениями поддерживать их в отжитом уже человечеством понимании жизни, на котором зиждется власть правительств... Четвертое средство состоит в том, чтобы посредством трех предшествующих средств выделять из всех таким образом закованных и одуренных людей еще некоторую часть людей для того, чтобы, подвергнув этих людей особенным, усиленным способам одурения и озверения, сделать из них безвольные орудия всех тех жестокостей и зверств, которые понадобятся правительству.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The first and oldest method is intimidation. This consists in representing the existing state organization as something sacred and immutable, and therefore following any efforts to alter it with the cruelest punishments… The second method is corruption. It consists in plundering the industrious working people of their wealth by means of taxes and distributing it in satisfying the greed of officials, who are bound in return to support and keep up the oppression of the people… The third method is what I can only describe as hypnotizing the people. This consists in checking the moral development of men, and by various suggestions keeping them back in the ideal of life, outgrown by mankind at large, on which the power of government rests… The fourth method consists in selecting from all the men who have been stupefied and enslaved by the three former methods a certain number, exposing them to special and intensified means of stupefaction and brutalization, and so making them into a passive instrument for carrying out all the cruelties and brutalities needed by the government.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Tolstoy is arguing that the political contradiction lies in the fact that laws and governments, for them to exists, they most employ these unjust acts or power structures. It is these power structures which governments have to employ that contradict Christian ethics. However, it is militarization which Tolstoy has the greatest problem with. Tolstoy believes that pacifism is a fundamental part of Christianity and therefore a Christian soldier is inevitably contradictory and irrational. Tolstoy’s justification for this argument comes from the first and forth commandments given from the Sermon on the Mount.[[29]](#footnote-29) It is interesting to point out, that a fellow Russian writer and Christian Anarchist, Maxim Gorky, argues that Tolstoy’s philosophy is impractical and that his pacifism is unable to bring about real change. Gorky, a supporter of anarchism and communism, believed that pacifism was incompatible with these political philosophies. The only way to bring about real political change was through violence. “Russians, he [Gorky] thought had been passive long enough; it was time for more direct and more promising forms of action… ‘Can a man engage in perfecting morally his own personality on days when the streets of our cities men and women are being shot and after the shooting for some time were not allowed to gather their wounded?’”[[30]](#footnote-30) Gorky is speaking of ‘Bloody Sunday’ which he witnessed in St. Petersburg. However, Tolstoy disagreed with this notion completely. Tolstoy writes the following:

In order, therefore, that slavery should disappear, it is necessary in the first place to abolish governments. But how are governments, and with them all the evils of which they are the authors, going to be abolished? By organizing a revolt and overthrowing them by force of arms? This is merely to replace one form of violence by another. No. Resist not him that is evil. It is only by a moral revolution that governments can be overthrown, a moral revolution which consists merely in exposing before the whole world the fraud on which their existence depends, and by a resolute refusal to participate in anything that is maintained and supported by governmental violence.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Nonetheless, it is a valid question to consider: Can passivism bring about real change, i.e., the Christian anarchist utopia which Tolstoy and Gorky both wish for? For it is clearly stated in the Sermon on the Mount that one ought not to act in violence, especially murder and killing which are inevitable outcomes of wars and revolutions, but to ‘love thine enemy.’

This is why Tolstoy argues that Christ’s commandments cannot be followed if one joins or supports a government’s military or militarization. Kant writes something similar in his essay *Perpetual Peace*. He writes “Moreover, paying men to kill or be killed appears to use them as mere machines and tools in the hands of another (the nation), which is inconsistent with the rights of humanity.”[[32]](#footnote-32) Now one might argue, such as Thomas Hobbes, that without a government, life would be in a ‘state of nature.’ Life in a state of nature, as Hobbes writes, would be “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”[[33]](#footnote-33) However, Tolstoy would rebuttal this by stating that, even with the so-called protection of governments, we are in a state of nature. Government’s already cause violence, execution, unjust imprisonment, and wars. Tolstoy writes “And thus to the question of what life would be without authority and without government, there can be only one answer – namely, that there will certainly be none of that evil which government produces…”[[34]](#footnote-34) Ergo, we are still in a Hobbesian state of nature even with governmental supervision.

**Analyzing the Argument**

Tolstoy’s argument can be formally written as such:

1. Christianity teaches the ‘law of love’ which states that one ought to not cause suffering to another human being.
2. Capitalism inherently causes suffering by exploiting laborers.
3. Governments inherently cause suffering by enacting violence (i.e., wars and militarization).
4. If capitalism inherently causes suffering by exploiting laborers and governments inherently cause suffering by enacting violence, then they contradict the ‘law of love’ which is taught to us by Christ’s Sermon on the Mount.
5. If they contradict the ‘law of love’ which is taught to us by Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, then capitalism and governments are incompatible with Christian ethics.

∴Capitalism and governments are incompatible with Christian ethics.

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| 1 | *A* |  |  |
| 2 | *B* |  |  |
| 3 | *C* |  |  |
| 4 | (*B* ∧ *C*) → *D* |  |  |
| 5 | *D* → (*E* ∧ *F*) |  |  |
| 6 | *B* ∧ *C* | ∧I 2, 3 |  |
| 7 | *D* | →E 4, 6 |  |
| 8 | *E* ∧ *F* | →E 5, 7 |  |

There are two premises which need to be accepted for the argument to be sound: 1.) Tolstoy is correct in his definition of Christian ethics and 2.) that capitalism/governments inherently cause suffering.

**The First Premise**

First, one must accept that Tolstoy is correct in assuming that the Sermon on the Mount is a fundamental aspect of Christian ethics. To some degree, I believe this to be a fair postulate. Because it would be difficult for a Christian to claim that Christ did not explicitly state ‘resist not evil’ and to ‘love thine enemy.’ It is also fair to say that Jesus Christ is a core component of Christianity. In other words, to be a Christian, one must believe in some aspect of Christ. If a Christian stated that they did not believe in Christ, then it might be questionable whether they are a Christian. However, one might say that Tolstoy jumps from these explicit claims made by Christ to a general claim of ‘not to cause suffering onto others.’ As I mentioned earlier, when discussing the difference between Tolstoy and Kant, basing a ethical system on biblical text might be unsound. One can find many inconsistencies within the Bible. For example, Jesus Christ states in the Sermon on the Mount ‘to do no violence.’ Yet later, in the Book of Matthew Chapter 21, we see Jesus Christ chase merchants out of a temple by overthrowing tables.[[35]](#footnote-35) Is the destruction of property not a form of violence? However, to return to the Sermon on the Mount, I do not think that this is an erroneous jump made by Tolstoy because the underlining theme of the Sermon on the Mount is to not cause suffering onto others. When one writes out the Five Commandments as follows: 1. Do not kill. 2. Do not be angry at another without cause. 3. Do not commit adultery. 4. Do not resist evil by violence. 5. Love your enemies (in other words, love all of humanity). One could easily summarize Christ’s Sermon on the Mount as stating ‘one is to not cause suffering onto others.[[36]](#footnote-36)

**The Second Premise**

The second premise that Tolstoy assumes is the one that I believe Tolstoy has the greatest problem with. Tolstoy assumes that suffering is an inherent quality within capitalism and governments. But I find myself asking if this is truly the case. Tolstoy believes that Capitalism cannot be independent from suffering because it relies on a working class (работник) which is used and exploited by the wealthy (работодатель). But the competitive market allows for innovation, advancement, and growth. Some might argue that the net good of capitalism out ways its disadvantages or suffering. However, one would then have to take a Utilitarian approach of ethics which would go against Tolstoy’s assumption that Christian morality is fundamentally Deontological in nature. Thus, it might be fair in saying that an altruistic religion, such as Christianity, is incompatible with a competitive economic system. Ayn Rand at least believed so. “The economic value of a man’s work is determined, on a free market, by a single principle: by the voluntary consent of those who are willing to trade him their work or products in return. This is the moral meaning of the law of supply and demand; it represents the total rejection of two vicious doctrines: the tribal premise and altruism.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Capitalism for Rand, is founded upon an ethical egotism, which she believes is incompatible with altruism and collectivism. If Christianity, as Tolstoy is implying, is fundamentally altruistic, then it would be hard to argue that Christ would promote a competitive, albeit cutthroat, economic system that promotes individualism.

Furthermore, if we agree with Tolstoy, that capitalism exploits the working class by using them as means to an end, then we cannot help but coincide that this causes suffering and alienation. And therefore, conflicting with Christian morality. However, a rebuttal might be that working class citizens freely sign a contract and thus no one is necessarily used or forced to work a job they feel alienated from. Nonetheless, I disagree with this rebuttal since the alternative to working, for the working class, is being jobless and lacking financially stability, there is a sense of manipulation. In other words, you are forced to labor on because the alternative is homelessness and starvation. And you cannot receive a higher education in order to receive a more enjoyable or better paying job when you are being paid the bare minimum to survive. Not only that, but I also believe that one cannot promote virtues, crafts, hobbies, or art, when working long arduous shifts that destroy the body. After such a long shift, you have no energy to read philosophically enrich text or other hobbies and if you did it would be spent on cleaning your home and doing other chores. Thus, the work never ends. For the working class, it is a struggle to find enough time and energy to promote personal and spiritual growth.

Tolstoy’s claim that an inherent quality of governments is suffering, is not only incredibly pessimistic but possibly unfounded. Just because the current or past state of governments have done acts of violence and have used militaries does not necessitate that future potential governments have to. For example, I can imagine a hypothetical government that does not use a military or violence to hold political power. In fact, I believe that we can find proof of this in micro-governments. By micro-government, I mean to imply small communities or societies that have some sort of governmental organization. For example, religious monasteries are a form of micro-governments. They have rules and regulations and sometimes a figure who acts as the authority. If these monasteries can be classified as forms of micro-governments and they do not cause suffering or violence, then Tolstoy is wrong with his assumption. However, the peaceful commune like societies that are found in religious monasteries might be exactly what Tolstoy envisions in his Christien Anarchy.

Now one might argue that for a government to exist it must have some form of power structure and that these power structures inherently cause suffering. However, Tolstoy does not explicitly state this in his *Царство Божие Внутри Вас*, and therefore his argument is lacking. But I believe that the four methods,[[38]](#footnote-38) which Tolstoy describes governments using, implies that governments need power structures in order to survive. In fact, another fellow Russian anarchist who lived during the same time as Tolstoy seems to also imply that governments use power structures or military force to hold authority. Michael Bakunin, while many ways opposite to Tolstoy,[[39]](#footnote-39) wrote in his book *Государственность и Анархия* (tr. *Statism and Anarchy*) the following:

Всякая эксплуатация народного труда, какими бы политическими формами мнимого народного господства и мнимой народной свободы она позолочена ни была, горька для народа. Значит, никакой народ, как бы от природы смирен ни был и как бы послушание властям ни обратилось в привычку, охотно ей подчиняться не захочет; для этого необходимо постоянное принуждение, насилие, значит, необходимы полицейский надзор и военная сила.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Any exploitation of the people’s labor is a bitter pill for them, whatever the political forms of sham popular sovereignty and sham popular freedom that may gild it. Therefore no people will readily submit to it, however docile they may be by nature and however accustomed they may have grown to obeying authority. It requires constant coercion and compulsion, meaning police surveillance and military force.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Nonetheless, it is difficult to believe that the four methods, that Tolstoy describes, in which governments hold power is an inherent quality of governments because the only evidence we are given is empirical evidence. In other words, just because I have only empirically observed *X*1 type of governmentdoes not mean that *X*2 or *X*n type of government does not exist. It simply means that I have only empirically observed *X*1 type of government. In the context of Tolstoy, just because the current governments in which he empirically observes causes some form of suffering does not mean that there is not a future potential government which does not cause suffering. If anything, it only proves that suffering is a contingent quality of governments, not an inherent one.

**Conclusion**

While further study is warranted, what I think that Tolstoy excels at is his analysis of Christian ethics in regard to pacifism and his critiques of capitalism. However, I question his solution to the problem of capitalism and governments being communistic anarchism. Nonetheless, the Golden age of Russian literature saw the beautiful marriage of philosophy and fiction. Akin to what Plato attempts in his *Dialogues*, Friedrich Nietzsche in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Jean-Paul Sartre in his *No Exit*, or Albert Camus in his *Exile and the Kingdom*. The Russian writers of Tolstoy’s time, such as Ivan Turgenev and Fydor Dostoevsky, had become the poets and artists of philosophical discourse and inquire. While I have shown that Tolstoy’s argument for Christian anarchism is lacking, it does not negate the fact that I believe him to still be a legitimate philosopher. Although, Tolstoy is primarily known for his fiction, his philosophical methodology is comparable to that of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Tolstoy’s arguments are still important works in the discussion of philosophy, religion, and politics. The philosophical works that he wrote near the end of his life, was the conglomeration of all his fictional works coming together. J. H. Abrham, Nicholas V. Riansanovsky, and Robert Higgs who wrote off Tolstoy’s philosophical works as being ‘naïve,’ simply misunderstood his works. Thus, I believe that Tolstoy is still a viable philosopher to read and to translate for further understanding of the Russian philosophical spectrum.

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1. “Perhaps a lack of erudition and the possession of a strong personal bias may partly explain the fault, which may be described as a tendency to oversimplification of what was in reality a highly complex set of facts, in consequence of which he is too prone toward the adoption of facile and sweeping generalizations.” J. H. Abrham, *The Religious Ideas and Social Philosophy of Tolstoy*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1929), 117-118. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “But, whatever can be said against Tolstoy as thinker – and much has been justly said about his extraordinary naivete, his stubborn and at the same time poorly thought-out rationalism, and his absolute insistence on such items as vegetarianism and painless death as parts of his program of salvation – Tolstoy as writer needs no apologies.” Nicholas V. Riansanovsky, *A History of Russia*, (Oxford University Press, 1984), 443. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “In stark contrast to Tolstoy’s acute analysis of the state, his understanding of economics is abysmal – seemingly a blend of Marxism and man-in-the-street fallacies and prejudices – and leads him into foolish notions of equivalence between state acts and capitalist acts.” Robert Higgs, *Tolstoy’s Manifesto on the State, Christian Anarchy, and Pacifism*¸ (Independent Institute, 2015), 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. J. H. Abraham, *The Religious Ideas and Social Philosophy of Tolstoy*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1929), 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *English - Russian Parallel Bible: Authorized Version (KJV)*, (Russian Bible Society, 2015), 1649-1651. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I give both the Russian and English translation of these two commandments since it is most likely that Tolstoy read a Russian translated bible. I also give the Russian translation because we can see linguistically where Tolstoy derived his theories from. Therefore, I will highlight the words from the Russian translation which are important for this discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 1651. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 1651. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Лев Николаевич Толстой, *Царство Божие Внутри Вас*, Kindle (Общественное Достояние, 2014), 20 of 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, tr. Constance Garnett, Kindle (The Cassell Publishing Co., 1894), 283 of 5393. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Лев Николаевич Толстой, *Закон Насилия и Закон Любви,* Kindle (Общественное Достояние, 2014), 25 of 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Edie, James M., James P. Scanlan, and Mary Barbara Zeldin, *Russian Philosophy: The Nihilists, The Populists, Critics of Religion and Culture. Vol. 2*, (The University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In many ways, Tolstoy shares a lot with Kant’s Categorical Imperative; specifically, the first two formulations. The first formulation of the Categorical imperative states, “act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34. The second formulation states that “every rational being exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means…” Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 40. Tolstoy’s law of love coincides with this, in which Tolstoy believes that we ought not cause suffering to other human beings because we are all equal under God. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. J. H. Abraham, *The Religious Ideas and Social Philosophy of Tolstoy*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1929), 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. By ‘Church’ (capital ‘C’) we can understand this to be organized Christianity in general. Thus, this does not simply refer to the church in Moscow or the church in New York but the general Christian Church; i.e., the organization which identifies itself as Christian. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Kenneth Katzner, *English-Russian, Russian-English Dictionary*, (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1994), 721. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Лев Николаевич Толстой, *Царство Божие Внутри Вас*, Kindle (Общественное Достояние, 2014), 37 of 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Лев Николаевич Толстой, *Закон Насилия и Закон Любви,* Kindle (Общественное Достояние, 2014), 82 of 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Edie, James M., James P. Scanlan, and Mary Barbara Zeldin, *Russian Philosophy: The Nihilists, The Populists, Critics of Religion and Culture. Vol. 2*, (The University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Лев Николаевич Толстой, *Царство Божие Внутри Вас*, Kindle (Общественное Достояние, 2014), 122 of 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, tr. Constance Garnett, Kindle (The Cassell Publishing Co., 1894), 1660 of 5393. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This is not necessarily an alien concept for Christianity. There have been other Christian philosophers who have argued that Christian ethics contradicts capitalism. For example, one could think of the modern Christian Marxist and philosopher Jose Miguez Bonino. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Tolstoy makes a statement that appears like Karl Marx’s theory of the alienation of labor. “What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour? First, the fact that labour is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx - Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, (W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1978), 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Лев Николаевич Толстой, *Царство Божие Внутри Вас*, Kindle (Общественное Достояние, 2014), 123 of 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, tr. Constance Garnett, Kindle (The Cassell Publishing Co., 1894), 1674 of 5393. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *English - Russian Parallel Bible: Authorized Version (KJV)*, (Russian Bible Society, 2015), 2092. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Лев Николаевич Толстой, *Царство Божие Внутри Вас*, Kindle (Общественное Достояние, 2014), 204-206 of 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, tr. Constance Garnett, Kindle (The Cassell Publishing Co., 1894), 2721-2748 of 5393 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. 1. Do not Kill. 4. Do not resist evil by violence. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Hugh McLean, *A Clash of Utopias: Tolstoy and Gorky*, (Academic Studies Press), 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. J. H. Abraham, *The Religious Ideas and Social Philosophy of Tolstoy*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1929), 115-116. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, tr. Ted Humphrey, (Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*¸ (Barnes & Noble, 2004), 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Edie, James M., James P. Scanlan, and Mary Barbara Zeldin, *Russian Philosophy: The Nihilists, The Populists, Critics of Religion and Culture. Vol. 2*, (The University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 228-229. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. “And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, it is written, my house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.” *English - Russian Parallel Bible: Authorized Version (KJV)*, (Russian Bible Society, 2015), 1685. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., 1649-1651. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ayn Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, (New American Library, 1967), 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Intimidation, corruption, propaganda, and militarization. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Bakunin was an atheist, materialist, and not opposed to violent revolutions. It would be an interesting paper in itself to do a comparative study of Bakunin and Tolstoy. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Михаил Александрович Бакунин, *Государственность и Анархия*, Kindle (Общественное Достояние, 2014), 18 of 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, ed. Marshall Shatz (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)