LITERATURE AND WAR
Reflections and Refractions

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PATRIOTISM AND THE MILITARY IN TOLSTOY'S PHILOSOPHY

Even a quick inspection reveals that patriotism, militarism, war, and the armed forces were prominent among the themes which engaged Tolstoy's attention during the latter part of his life (i.e., the period 1880-1910). He considered each of these to be among the worst evils of his own or any time, and their eradication was one of the principal goals of his program for moral reform. These themes are also frequently encountered in the earlier period of Tolstoy's career (the period 1852-1880): the military tales of the 1850s; War and Peace in the 1860s; and part VIII of Anna Karenina, written in the mid-1870s. The present account of Tolstoy's approach to these themes, in his fiction and otherwise, begins with a sketch of his interest in them prior to his period of crisis in the 1870s. Next, I discuss the implications of that crisis for his treatment of these themes. Finally, I indicate the further development of these themes during the latter period of his career.

Tolstoy's second published work, "The Raid" ("Nabeg", 1852) was a tale of military life. In one of its surviving drafts we find the sentence: "War has always interested me." This statement was as true in 1910, when Tolstoy died, as it was when he wrote it as a young man of 24 in 1852. His entire career in letters shows a deep interest in the theme of war and the related themes of patriotism, the military establishment, and the life of the soldier.

One might almost say that Tolstoy was genealogically
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predisposed to the theme of war, for the extensive research into his ancestry has revealed the presence of numerous military notables on both sides of his family tree. Tolstoy was also a soldier himself. He joined the army in 1851 in the capacity of "Junker" and became a commissioned officer in 1854. He saw service in the Caucasus, on the Danube, and in the Crimea. Shortly before he retired from the army in 1856 he was awarded the Order of St. Anne (4th class) with the inscription "For Bravery." According to the accompanying citation this was for the "outstanding courage and valor" which he displayed at the battle of Chernaja Rechka during the Crimean campaign.

Tolstoy's literary legacy from the period to his crisis of the 1870s contains at least two dozen works devoted to or directly bearing upon military matters and patriotism. Among the scanty examples of Tolstoy's juvenilia which have come down to us is a composition in French from the period of 1839-41 entitled "Amour de la Patrie." The 1850s, not surprisingly in the light of Tolstoy's years with the army, are especially rich in works on military subjects. Besides several short stories ("The Raid," "The Woodfelling" ("Rubka lesa," 1855), the three "Sevastopol Stories" (1855), "Two Hussars" ("Dva gusara," 1856), Tolstoy also wrote numerous reports, plans, and petitions relevant to military life and the organization of the army. In 1854 he wished to publish a journal for enlisted men to be called The Soldier's Herald (Soldatskij vestnik). In 1854 he prepared a proposal for the reform of the organization of the army. In
1856 he wrote an essay on the army's penal code. As late as the mid-1860s he undertook the unsuccessful defense of one Shabunin on a capital charge in a military court. <3> Tolstoy retained an interest in schemes of military reform at least into the early 1870s. His most impressive treatment of war and the operations of armies from this period is, of course, his great novel of the 1860s-- War and Peace.

Throughout his career prior to 1878 Tolstoy's attitude toward war itself was consistently negative, and the crisis of the 1870s wrought no change in it. At the beginning of "Sevastopol in May" he wrote: "One of the following must be true: either war is madness, or (since they take part in this madness) people are not at all the rational creatures which we for some reason imagine them to be." <4> The title of War and Peace suggests a connection with P.J. Proudhon's La Guerre et la Paix (1861) and its portrait of war as a proof of man's innate nobility and capacity for extreme heroism and the ultimate sacrifice. <5> The connection is, however, polemical. One of the drafts of War and Peace, as though responding to Proudhon, has the following passage: "We are used to speaking about war as though it were a most noble activity...But what is war, really, and what is needed for its successful conduct?...First, supplies, i.e., organized robbery; second, discipline, i.e., barbaric despotism; third, intelligence, i.e., spying, deceit, and betrayal...What is war itself? Murder." <6>
Either of the two passages which I have just quoted might equally well have been written by the later Tolstoy. However, when we put his view of war in the abstract aside to consider his opinions on particular wars, we encounter a more complex state of affairs. The younger Tolstoy's attitude to particular wars varies as he beholds them from the point of view of the aggressor or the defender, especially the defender of the native soil. Thus, in "The Raid," there is a relatively caustic series of portraits of the Russian officers (the aggressors), but a comparatively positive view of the mountain tribesmen (the defenders). In the Sevastopol stories, however, where the Russian soldiers are the defenders, they are portrayed in a more favorable light. This apparent distinction between wars of aggression and wars of defense is characteristic also of War and Peace, of Tolstoy's support of the French in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, and of Levin's condemnation of the idea of sending Russian troops to fight in the Balkans in Anna Karenina. As late as the early 1870s Tolstoy was still able to write a saber-rattling letter to his friend, the poet A.A. Fet, in which he declares his willingness once again to take up arms against Russia's enemies.

Thus, for Tolstoy before the crisis war was madness and murder, but particular wars might be unjust or just depending on whether they were fought for aggression or defense. The same sort of distinction is made with respect to the motives of individual participants in war. There is a sharp contrast between the reckless bravery and
career-oriented patriotism of certain characters in "The
Raid" and the quiet and unpretentious courage of Captain
Tushin in War and Peace.

Tolstoy's crisis in the late 1870s and his subsequent
conversion to what he considered to be the original intent
and meaning of the teaching of Christ was, by his own
account, initiated by meditation upon the passage of the
Gospels which is called "The Sermon on the Mount" (recorded
in Matthew, chapters 5-7 and in Luke, chapter 6). From it
Tolstoy drew five moral commandments which he thereafter
considered to represent the essence of the Christian
teaching. These are: 1) do not be angry, 2) do not lust,
3) do not swear, 4) do not resist evil with violence, and
5) love all people alike. <7> The connection between these
commandments and the views of the later Tolstoy on war,
militarism, patriotism, and related subjects is direct and
profound. Not only is WAR evil, but even anger is. Not
only is war EVIL, but it is unmitigated and unqualified evil
since violence, whatever the apparent justice of its
motivation, is condemned. Not only does army life tend to
turn good men into idlers and debauchees (as Tolstoy had
always believed), but the enabling condition of that life,
the oath of allegiance and obedience, was itself an evil.
Thus, the effect of Tolstoy's newly elaborated religious and
philosophical beliefs on his later views of the themes under
discussion was to remove from them any trace of ambiguity or
qualification: war, patriotism, the army, militarism, and
the soldier's life were all to be condemned absolutely.
These were themes which Tolstoy treated frequently after 1880. The *Complete Collected Works* contains some twenty-five titles devoted to them, to say nothing of the wealth of comment in the letters, diaries, notebooks, and in accounts of Tolstoy's remarks in conversation. A brief descriptive listing of the major documents is appended to this paper.

I conclude with a brief summary of the later Tolstoy's views on these matters and a few exemplary quotations. I have divided my remarks by topic, excluding comment on war itself, since Tolstoy's view of this remained unchanged from the early period. First, his opinions on the army and on militarism. Tolstoy called the army the power of the state. He believed that the state as constituted in his time was illegitimate as an institution because it strove not for universal welfare but for the maintenance of the interests of the few in the face of the just demands of the many. The army is nothing more than the means for the defense, and all too often the increase, of these interests. The people are convinced of the need for an army by the state which tells them that it is the only means whereby they can escape being enslaved by their neighbor states. Thus, the peculiar situation arises wherein men, in order to escape the threat of slavery, willingly become soldiers, that is (for Tolstoy), slaves of the most morally abject kind. "The army is nothing less than a collectivity of murderers. Its training is instruction in murdering." <8>

A standing army, says Tolstoy, can be maintained only
through resort to military conscription. He considered the universal draft to be logically inescapable for any social system founded upon the use of force. The standing army is also the primary cause of militarism, i.e., an announced policy of willingness to resort to force of arms accompanied by a vigorous pursuit of the preparations needed to put the policy into effect.

For Tolstoy, the results of the maintenance of a standing army and the militarist attitude needed for its support were uniformly bad and included: 1) the placing of corrupting power in the hands of a few; 2) the breeding of injustice, oppression, and tyranny; 3) the creation of a state of permanent tension between nations leading to a vicious circle of arms increases; 4) the expenditure of enormous sums from the national treasury in order to support the army; and 5) the further impoverishment of the population through increased taxation in order to replenish the state's coffers.

Tolstoy included the soldier's life and the type of character bred by that life among the ills arising from the maintenance of a standing army. The young men who comprise the army are removed from the natural conditions of life at an age before they have yet gained a clear conception of morality and are "shut up together in barracks, dressed in special clothes, and under the influence of shouts, drums, music, and glittering objects...are brought into an hypnotic condition in which they cease to be people and become mindless machines submissive to the will of those who have
hypnotized them."  <9>

The soldier's life, with its servile obedience to those of higher rank, turns those who lead it into slaves and is thus a personal disaster for each one individually. It also prevents these young men from taking part in productive and useful labor and thereby represents an incalculable loss to the well-being of the nation as well. It seems to be a matter of principle with the later Tolstoy that such positive military characters as Captain Tushin and Kutuzov of War and Peace simply cannot exist.

Tolstoy's earlier tendency to distinguish between just and unjust wars completely disappeared after 1880. He came to believe that all wars were the product of the self-serving manipulations of governments, and his former sympathy for the defense of native soil left him. This attitude is radically expressed in the "Tale of Ivan the Fool..." already in the mid-1880s. Twenty years later, Tolstoy wrote of the war between Russia and Japan: "...whether not only Port Arthur but even St. Petersburg and Moscow have been captured...I still cannot either directly or indirectly take part in war. I cannot, I do not wish to, and I will not!"  <10>

As to patriotism, Tolstoy considered that its real function in the modern state was to provide justification and whip up enthusiasm for the state's present or prospective acts of violence. Patriotism was thus a potent cause of war, since its natural result is the fostering of ill will between nations. Within the context of Tolstoy's
analysis of the history of the moral development of humanity, patriotism occupies a middle position between the original evil of pure selfishness and the ultimate good of the commitment to universal welfare. Tolstoy believed that humanity had reached the stage of its development where it was already clear that universal welfare was its proper concern. Patriotism, thus, appeared to him to be a sort of moral atavism. Patriotism survives only because governments deliberately foster and cultivate it for their own ends. "Patriotism is maintained only by inertia and because governments and the ruling classes, feeling that their power and even their existence is bound up with it, persistently excite it among the people by cunning and violence." <11>

An individual's sense of patriotism may be perfectly genuine and sincere, according to the later Tolstoy, but the sentiment itself is unnatural and its very presence indicates that the individual has been hoodwinked by the state. Patriotism is nothing more than a powerful form of propaganda which governments use cynically to keep the people always in fear of their neighbors and always ready for war. Tolstoy explains it this way: "Governments give out that they want peace, but all the while they are busy whipping up enmity for other nations under the guise of patriotism. The governments are like the gypsy horse-dealer who, having sprinkled pepper under the animal's tail and given it a cruel beating in its stall, leads it out before the buyer, making a great show of keeping his grasp on the halter and pretending that it is only with the greatest
effort that he can restrain the spirited beast." <12>

I hope this brief summary has made it clear that the most distinctive feature of Tolstoy's later views on war and related subjects was their theoretical rigidity and his absolute refusal to acknowledge the validity of any special case or the desirability of making occasional qualifications. In this respect his views on these subjects reflect perfectly the general tenor of the career of the later Tolstoy as a whole. The debate continues as to whether Tolstoy's crisis of the 1870s represents a definitive turning point in his life and thought. Some have seen it to be so, others maintain that the later writings represent only an increased emphasis on certain aspects of Tolstoy's earlier thinking. The case of Tolstoy's views on war, patriotism, and the military suggests that his crisis produced above all a tempering of his will which made it possible for him to renounce the pluralist uncertainty of earlier years and to affirm unequivocally the truth of ideas which had formerly been presented in the context of a more broadly conceived and much more variegated and complex search for truth.

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NOTES

1. A select list of sources on this topic includes: Tolstoy, L. N. Polnoe sobranie sochinenij (hereafter, PSS ), 90 vols. (Moskva, 1928-58); Bulgakov, V.F. Kristianskaja etika: Sistematicheskie ochernki mirovozrenija L.N. Tolstogo (Moskva, 1917); Chubakov, S.N. Lev Tolstoy o vojne i militarizme (Minsk, 1973); Jankovskij, Ju. Z. Chelovek i vojna v tvorchestve L.N. Tolstogo (Kiev, 1978); Maude, A. Tolstoy and His Problems (London, 1902); Mittal, S. Tolstoy: Social and Political Ideas (Meerut, India, 1966); Noyes, G.R. "Tolstoy's View of War," Russian Student, vol. 5, no. 1 (September, 1928), pp. 8-17.


3. For further information see Kerr, W. The Shabunin Affair: An Episode in the Life of Leo Tolstoy (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982).


9. Ibid .

10. Ibid ., p. 122.

11. Ibid ., p. 127.

APPENDIX

Brief descriptive listing of the later Tolstoy's major works pertaining to patriotism and the military:

(1) Tsarstvo Bozhie vnutri vas ( The Kingdom of God Is Within You , 1893) is Tolstoy's most complete and radical presentation of his theories on anarchism and non-resistance to evil by violence. The state as presently constituted depends upon the use of force (i.e., violence) in the form of courts, police, prisons, edicts, and laws, all of which are ultimately backed by force of arms. Thus, the army is the basic ground of state structure and operation. The army is violence incarnate. It is immoral for citizens to support the state and its violence either directly or indirectly (e.g., by submitting to conscription or by paying taxes).

War is condemned, as is patriotism, which is used by the state to justify its acts of violence. Tolstoy traces the linkage between violence, the army, and patriotism as follows: (1) a willingness to resort to violence leads to (2) the establishment of an army to permit resort to violence and (3) the use of patriotism as a justification of the resort to violence.

(2) Religija i nравственность! (Religion and Morality, 1894) is an epistolary essay addressed to the members of a German ethical society who had written to Tolstoy to inquire about his opinions on two questions: (1) What is religion? and (2) Can there be morality independent of religion?

Tolstoy answers that "the essence of religion consists solely in the answers to the questions: Why do I live? and What is my relationship to the Universe around me?" He declares that there have been, historically, three basic forms of answer to the second question: selfishness, patriotism, and recognition of a supreme being or law. He defines patriotism as allegiance to one's group, however broadly the group may be conceived. Thus, humanism (=allegiance to the human race as a whole) is a form of patriotism.

(3) Kristianstvo i patriotizm (Christianity and Patriotism, 1894) is a summary and expansion of the portions of The Kingdom of God is Within You which deal with patriotism and the inherent contradictions between patriotism and Christianity. Tolstoy ridicules the enthusiastic fervor whipped up by the governments on the occasion of the visits of the Russian fleet to Toulon and the French fleet to Kronstadt. Tolstoy portrays the "patriotic enthusiasm" in both countries as a government ploy preparing the way for popular acceptance of Russian aid to France in a future war with Germany.

(4) Carthago delenda est (1898); Dve vojny (Two Wars, 1898) are both essays directed against the practice of
military conscription. Tolstoy urges young men to refuse to serve if drafted.

(5) Rabstvo nashego vremeni (The Slavery of Our Time, 1900) is a concise version of Tak chto zhe nam delat' (What Then Should We Do, 1886). The essay is mainly concerned with economic questions and social problems. The latter are traced to the state's being based on the threat of violence. The only effective solution to the economic and social ills plaguing the nation is non-cooperation with the government: refusal to pay taxes, to serve on juries, to be drafted, etc.

(6) Patriotizm i pravitel'stvo (patriotism and Government, 1900) is a denunciation of patriotism as a tool used by the government to foment war with other nations and to secure the support of the native population for the government's acts of violence.

(7) Odumajtes' (Bethink Yourselves, 1904) is a denunciation of the Russo-Japanese war.

(8) Doklad, prigotovlennyj dlja "Kongressa Mira" v Stokkol'me (Address to the Swedish Peace Congress, 1909). Here Tolstoy advocates (1) immediate cessation of all hostilities everywhere in the world and (2) immediate and total disarmament, including the disbanding of all armies. The address was sent to Stockholm to be read in absentia but was, in fact, never delivered.