

Karl Marx and Leo Tolstoy: Prophets of Anarchism

An Analysis of Theory and Practice

Abstract:

Karl Marx and Leo Tolstoy never met each other, yet within their social criticisms, there is a component of anarchism. This paper asks if Marx's and Tolstoy's anarchistic ideas be better understood if we think of them as a form of social prophecy. This paper establishes a three component set of criteria. I analyze Marx and Tolstoy on three criteria: prophetic revelation, revolutionary doctrine, and positive action towards an anarchistic society. Marxist texts analyzed include his essay on *Alienated Labor*, *The German Ideology*, *Theses on Feuerbach*, *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, and *The Civil War in France*. Tolstoyan texts analyzed include *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, *What Then Must We Do*, as well as the essays Church and State and The End of an Age. In addition to primary texts, I also incorporate an analysis of secondary scholarly research as well as correspondence. This paper concludes by assessing the strengths and weakness of each of Marx and Tolstoy's prophetic criteria. Moreover, it concludes by an observation on the benefits and disadvantages of simultaneously assessing the practice and theory in terms of prophecy. Ultimately, it concludes by determining Marx and Tolstoy's theories of anarchism become less understood if we regard them as social prophets since the breadth of information on both theory and practice is too large to practically to be understood comprehensively.

Note:

There are various references to the Marx-Engels Collected works throughout this paper. This has been abbreviated at MECW for the sake of convenience.

Leo Tolstoy and Karl Marx never met each other. Born ten years apart from one another, the likelihood of these men reading each other's works is fairly low, so their effects on each other's writing can be considered negligible. Nonetheless, the writings of both philosophers display anarchistic characteristics. Albeit for different ends, both Tolstoy and Marx advocated the removal of a centralized state and "some form of non-governmental cooperation between free individuals." (Woodcock 2004: 14) Although Karl Marx is most renowned for his theories of political economy and the division of labor, there is an anarchistic component to his theory of the state and revolution. Marx's anarchism derives from the dialectical method of analysis he uses to analyze the progression of society. Tolstoy's anarchism derives from his interpretation of religion and how the State's – specifically the Russian Empire's – cooption of religion is anathema. In order to gain a greater understanding of Marx and Tolstoy's theories of anarchism, this paper asks if Marx's and Tolstoy's anarchistic ideas be better understood if we think of them as a form of social prophecy. Significantly, Marx and Tolstoy assumed the role of prophets with their creation and application of their concepts of anarchism. By assessing their theories and practice under a framework of social prophecy, we can assess how Marx and Tolstoy placed their theories of anarchism into practice.

By putting social theory into practice, one actually utilizes sociological perspectives to actively change society. There are several criteria which we can consider through which we can analyze the theories and actions of Marx and Tolstoy to accurately assess whether or not they were in fact prophets. A sociological view of prophets is not simply a person who has a vision of the future; this paper suggests a three-part criterion for determining whether one is a prophet. Firstly, a prophet has a moment or process of revelation whereby they see a fatal error in the functioning of society. Secondly, a prophet provides a doctrine serving two purposes: explaining the development of society up to the present, as well as the eschatological future course for society. Within the context for Marx and Tolstoy, eschatological refers to the references to impending revolution in their theories. The third prophetic

criterion sets social prophets apart from their social critic counterparts. This criterion involves taking active and positive steps to pursue an active realization of this social vision. This paper begins by defining prophets and anarchism then proceeds to discuss the writings and actions of Marx and Tolstoy within this context. I will analyze Marx and Tolstoy on three criteria: revelation, doctrine, and action. I will start with Marx and then analyze Tolstoy on these three axes. In addition to primary texts, I also incorporate an analysis of secondary scholarly research as well as correspondence. Ultimately it concludes Marx and Tolstoy fulfill each of these criteria and thusly deserve to be recognized as prophets of anarchism. As such, it would be an injustice to disregard these men as mere social critics, but as social reformers in the truest sense of the term.

Defining Prophets: Religious Roots

I derive my three-part prophetic criterion from research conducted by various academics on prophets from a religious studies perspective. Gerald T. Sheppard and William E. Herbrechtsmeier provide a brief overview of various prophetic criteria and history in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Firstly, all prophets “conceived their activity as a result of divine commission.” (Jones 2005: 7425) Prophets have been given a mission by a deity. Secondly, since the eighth century BCE, there was a unique progression of prophets chronicling their oracles. (Jones 2005:7424) Historians have debated the cause for this development; however they are in consensus about its effects. Documented oracles allowed for prophets to “disseminate their written oracles among various groups with whom [they] originally had no connection.” (Jones 2005: 7425) Thirdly, prophets “helped both to maintain and to reform religious tradition.” Thus, prophets attempt to actively change pre-existing or create completely new schools of belief. (Jones 2005: 7426) From these three points I derive my criteria of revelation, doctrine, and action.

Defining Anarchism: Proudhon's natural right argument

George Woodcock, author of *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* defines anarchism,

“as a system of social thought, aiming at fundamental changes in the structure of society and particularly – for this is the common element uniting all its forms – at the replacement of the authoritarian state by some form of non-governmental cooperation between free individuals.”
(Woodcock 2004: 14)

There two similar yet differing theoretical approaches to anarchism: a liberty-based approach and community-based approach that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In order to illustrate these two approaches, I will discuss an exchange of letters between Karl Marx and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon starting on May 5, 1846. On his 28th birthday, Marx sent a letter to Proudhon requesting he participate in open multi-national correspondence with various European socialists. This was Marx's attempt to induct Proudhon into the Communist Correspondence Committee, a loosely-structured organization formed by Marx and Engels for the purposes of creating the foundations for “an international proletarian party.” (MECW vol. 38 1975: 574) Moreover, Marx adds to his letter,

“And when the moment for action comes, it will clearly be much to everyone's advantage to be acquainted with the state of affairs abroad as well as at home.” This is a clear allusion to impending revolution advocated by Marx and other communist thinkers. (MECW vol. 38 1975: 39) Proudhon crafts a reply where he initially agrees to engage in correspondence. However, near the end of letter, he states:

I applaud with all my heart your thought of bringing all opinions to light; let us carry on a good and loyal polemic; let us give the world an example of learned and far-sighted tolerance, but let us not, merely because we are at the head of a movement, make ourselves the leaders of a new intolerance, let us not pose as the apostles of a new religion, even if it be the religion of logic, the religion of reason.
(Woodcock 1977: 139) emphasis added

Moreover, Proudhon replies to Marx's allusion of revolution by stating he himself was not in favor of such actions. He writes, “we should not put forward *revolutionary action* as a means of social reform,

because that pretended means would simply be an appeal to force, to arbitrariness, in brief, a contradiction.” (Ibid) In order to elucidate Proudhon’s meaning, I will continue his reply:

I myself put the problem in this way: to bring about the return to society, by an economic combination, of the wealth which was withdrawn from society by another economic combination. In other words, through Political Economy to turn the theory of Property against Property in such a way as to engender what you German socialists call community and what I will limit myself for the moment to calling liberty or equality. (Woodcock 1977: 139-140) emphasis added

Proudhon’s differentiation of the meaning of property to French and German socialists also serves as a method of differentiating between two mainstreams of anarchist thought. Proudhon, the Frenchman, limits his analysis of property as a matter of “liberty or equality.” In *What is Property* published in 1840, Proudhon discusses the strange nature of property in regards to its failure to not resemble the other natural rights of liberty, equality, and fraternity guaranteed by the declaration of rights of 1793. (Proudhon 1994: 37) To Proudhon, the right to property “is as sacred as [his] person; it is in [his] blood.” (Ibid) \

Proudhon grounds his anarchism in the protection of fundamental individual rights, such as property. Marx, in opposition, grounds his anarchistic beliefs within a notion of a self-governing community. Marx had already published *The German Ideology* in 1844, where he presents a comprehensive summation of his theories on property as well as the trajectory of history. As will be explained later, Marx’s notion of anarchism grounds itself in the notion of a furthering of society. Conversely, classical anarchistic thinkers, such as Proudhon and Tolstoy, see anarchism as the ultimate end for society.

Revelation: Goodbye Law, Hello Revolution

Two events in Karl Marx compose his revelation of the fatal error in the functioning of society: his initial forays into Hegelian philosophy while a student at Berlin and his time spent in Paris. In 1837 at age 29, Marx wrote a letter to his father while studying law at the University of Berlin. Within this

letter, Marx updates his father on the progress of his studies on law as well as telling him about his burgeoning interest in Hegelian philosophy. He writes:

I had read fragments of Hegel's philosophy, the grotesque craggy melody of which did not appeal to me. Once more I wanted to dive into the sea, but with the definite intention of establishing that the nature of the mind is just as necessary, concrete and firmly based as the nature of the body. My aim was no longer to practice tricks of swordsmanship, but to bring genuine pearls into the light of day. (MECW vol. 1 1975: 18)

By no longer wishing to “practice tricks of swordsmanship,” Marx does not wish to analyze philosophy for the purpose of mere intellectual exercise. Rather, by bringing “genuine pearls into the light of day,” Marx wishes to utilize philosophy for the purpose of revealing genuine truths about the progress and future course of society. Thus, his initial affinity to Hegel’s philosophy marks the point where Marx has the means necessary to prophesize on the future state of society.

Marx’s arrival in Paris in 1843 is a true turning point in his progression towards becoming a full-blown prophet. He arrived in Paris with two intents: starting a new periodical, the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, and gaining a comprehensive understanding as to why the French revolution ultimately failed. (Berlin 1963: 85-86) The revolutionaries in 1789 sought to remove the *ancient regime*, yet ultimately a similar governmental system of empire was established only 10 years later. (Price 2005: 150) Thus, Marx immersed himself in any sort of literature he could find pertaining to the revolution. By conducting this research in Paris, Marx also became exposed to the ideas of French socialism that were of the fashion at the time. (Berlin 1963: 82) Thus, Marx begins to incorporate the notions of idealistic French socialism into his Hegelian approach of analyzing society. (Berlin 1963: 87) This is most evident in his 1844 selection from his economic manuscripts on *Alienated Labor*. This manuscript shows Marx’s notion of the fatal flaw within society: the dehumanizing and dissocializing condition of the working class.

Within *Alienated Labor*, Marx's relentless critique of the dehumanizing effects of capitalism begins with the simple economic fact that the worker becomes worth less the more he produces. (MECW vol. 3 1975: 271) From this starting point, Marx argues how capitalistic forces within society unnaturally force men into working in order to live, where ideally men should live to work as natural "species beings". In addition, the forced labor an individual endures systematically alienates the worker from his fellow workers as well as him or herself. In order to break from this systematic process of alienation, an "emancipation of labor" must occur that will bring about true equality amongst proletariat and bourgeoisie alike. Marx states the emancipation of labor does not only free workers from the inhumane situation they are bound to, but "in the emancipation of the laborer is contained universal human emancipation." (MECW vol. 3: 280) His reasoning for this "universality is that the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are nothing but modifications and consequences of this relation." (Ibid) Marx writes this manuscript in 1844, yet he explicates this claim further with his dialectical development of society in *The German Ideology* written in 1845. Marx regarded the condition of the worker as abjectly intolerable and, as such, set about building a philosophical framework that could be used as a guide for remedying this situation and bringing humanity back to its natural state.

Marx's revelation involves two parts; his decision to reread Hegel's philosophy and his time spent in Paris. It can already be witnessed in the letter to his father in 1937 that he wished to use philosophy as more than just an intellectual exercise. Marx sees philosophy as an instrument he can use to "bring genuine pearls of truth into the light of day." Moreover, his time in Paris allowed him to be an extremely intellectually stimulating environment where idealistic theories of French socialism were the norm. Thus, it is not surprising Marx wrote his essay on alienated labor in Paris. His writings on the estrangement of labor mark the point where Marx deems the condition of the worker, and by extension

society, wholly intolerable. Thus, his subsequent writings on the historical progression of class divisions provide a prophetic explanation how society reached its current state. Moreover, in regards to the anarchistic element to his writings, Marx develops a theory linking the state, or civil society, to bourgeois capitalistic interests. Therefore, in order to eliminate class, the state must be eliminated as well.

Marx's Doctrine: Theses X and XI, Historical Materialism, and *Aufhebung*

Marx builds his theory of anarchism with an application of Hegel's dialectic. He used the ongoing processes of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis as a means to analyze the past, resulting from Hegel's belief that the philosophy could only be used to define actions in hindsight. This is illustrated with his comment in the preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of the Right* that "when philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk." (Hegel: 1991 23) In opposition to Hegel, Marx believes philosophy must be used for the furthering of society. Theses X and XI of his *Theses on Feuerbach* illustrate Marx's intent to transform philosophy from passive analysis to active prognosis of society.

- (X) *The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or socialized humanity*
 (XI) *The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it*
 (MECW vol. 6 1975: 8)

Marx's intent with thesis XI is fairly straight forward and does not require any further explanation. Thesis X addresses the division between politicized society and what Marx calls "human society." "Old Materialism" analyzed society from a primarily limited political science perspective concerning itself with regime changes. Marx's new materialist standpoint, however, analyzes society from a holistic sociological perspective that regards the economic development of society as base from which all else

grounded. With the new materialism, Marx intends to remove the distinction between state-oriented civil society and “human society.” In concrete terms, Marx analyzes the development of history as the development of private property. By analyzing the development of private property, Marx develops a theory on the progressively complex division of labor. This starkly different historiographical approach allows Marx to show how society inevitably will develop towards a distributive communistic society, not before undergoing a phase of anarchism.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx applies the dialectic to the development of private ownership in order to show how society progressed. The development of private ownership also coincides with the development of the division of labor within society. Marx writes:

The various stages of development in the division of labor are just so many different forms of ownership, i.e. the existing stage in the division of labor determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labor (MECW vol. 6 1975: 32)

The previous passage describes Marx’s notion of historical materialism; the excerpt how every detail within society can be explained as a result of the economic means of production. Marx provides three different stages in the development of the private property: tribal, ancient, and feudal. In the tribal stage, the division of labor “is still very undeveloped...therefore, limited to an extension of the family: patriarchal chieftains, below them the members of the family, finally slaves.” (MECW vol. 6 1975: 33) This is due to the primarily agricultural form of production within this stage of ownership. In the following ‘ancient’ stage of production, the state is created “especially from the union of several tribes into a *city* by agreement or by conquest; and which is still accompanied by slavery.” (Ibid) When society develops into the feudal stage of ownership, “property...consisted on the one hand of landed property with serf labor chained to it, and on the other of the personal labor of the individual who with his small capital commands the labor of journeyman.” (MECW vol. 6 1975: 34) Marx demonstrates since the first tribal stage of ownership, there has always been a ‘slave’ class of individuals. The existence of this class has been perpetual within society; change has only been in name only. The title of slave applies equally

to peasant serf and urban laborer. Thus, society further develops in terms of its material means; it remains as static as it once was in the tribal stage. Moreover, Marx writes the following about the emergence of civil society.

The word “civil society” [Bürgerliche Gesellschaft] emerged in the eighteenth century, when property relationships had already extricated themselves from the ancient and medieval communal society. Civil society as such only develops with the bourgeoisie; the social organization evolving directly out of production and commerce, which in all ages forms the basis of the State and of the rest of the idealistic superstructure, has, however, always been designated by the same name. (MECW vol. 6 1975: 89)

As can be seen in this passage, the development of civil society mirrors class relationships. The bourgeoisie is progression of the master/slave relationship from the tribal and ancient forms of private property. Most importantly, the final portion of this passage states the “social organization evolving directly out of production and commerce” is analogous to “State and the rest of the idealistic superstructure.” As such, the state was created out of necessity to perpetuate the pre-existing master/slave relationship within society. Therefore, the state’s explicit purpose is to guarantee the interests of the ruling class.

Now knowing how Marx establishes his theory of the state, we must now analyze how he goes about eliminating it. Shlomo Avineri defines Marx’s term he uses in regards to the disestablishment of the state as *Aufhebung*: abolishment or transcendence. (Avineri 1968: 203) Coincidentally, *Aufhebung* is also a term used within the Hegelian dialectic.¹ Put simply, *Aufhebung* is the unofficial fourth part of the dialectic after synthesis and before thesis. Thus, the anarchism within Marx’s theory is merely a transition phase. Marx details how the state reaches *Aufhebung* in *Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State*. Here, he writes about voting in civil society stating “the election is the immediate, direct relation civil society to the political state.” (MECW vol. 3: 121) Moreover, when all members of society possess the ability to vote, no one class of people has more political power than another. Thus when all

¹ “*Aufhebung*: something or some position is negated or cancelled; we transcend that something or position in this act of cancelling; but in that act of surpassing, what is cancelled is also preserved, contained as a necessary condition of the transcending move. (Desmond 1986: 95)

members within society attain universal suffrage, the state achieves a level of abstraction. (Ibid)

Therefore, the idea of a state becomes unnecessary and can be removed when universal suffrage is achieved.

Marx's develops his prophetic doctrine extensively utilizing the dialectic. His novel application of the Hegelian dialectic allowed him to analyze the history of human society by linking historical progression with advancements of property ownership. Thus from the earliest forms of "tribal" society, there has always existed a master class and a slave class. Through the progression of society, this relationship had always existed. Moreover, the notion of the State developed simultaneously with the bourgeoisie. Thus, Marx writes the state will undergo a process of *Aufhebung*, or transcendence, when all members within society are able to vote. The state becomes an abstraction, a figment of the mind; an appendage no longer necessary. Therefore, it is only logical the state is removed.

The prophet acts: *The Civil War in France*

For Marx, the abolition of the state is only the first step towards reaching the inevitable communist formation of society. Moreover, Marx believes the progression of communist society "parallels the stages of the development of communist ideas." (Avineri 1961: 222) There exists an aspect of an overarching determinism to the progression of communist ideas. It is inevitable society will transition from a crude form of communism to a sophisticated form. In his appraisal of the Commune, Marx presents its history as if it were on this track inevitably reaching the sophisticated form of communism.

The Paris Commune was an anarcho-socialistic regime created as a result of the French loss in the Franco-Prussian war. The greater portion of the French army, as well as emperor Napoleon III, surrendered to the Prussian in Sedan 1870. Expecting the Prussians would be staging an assault on Paris, the National Guard sat in wait. Placed on guard duty of Paris, the National Guard was composed of

middle class and working class men. (Edwards 1973: 21) However, the Prussian never assaulted Paris and the National Guard grew weary of just waiting. Their weariness turned into a resentment of the Parisian provisional republican government. (Edwards 1973: 22) This resentment transformed into outright defiance when the government signed a peace treaty with the Prussians on the 1st of March. (Edwards 1973: 25) Thus on the 18th of March 1871, the government attempted to disarm the disgruntled National Guard. (Ibid) These actions commenced a short-lived scuffle between the provisional republican government and the National Guard. The National Guard emerged victorious and on the 10 days later on the 28th of March, the popularly elected Commune was officially granted power. (Edwards 1973: 27) For a period of 3 months, the Commune served as a body of oversight over the various *arrondissements*, or districts, of Paris who engaged in self-governance. The success of the Commune lied in gaining popular support throughout all of France. Unfortunately, insurrection only occurred in isolated cities and the Commune never gained universal popularity. The republican government regained its strength, and on the 21st of May, the republican army entered Paris removing the Commune from power. (Edwards 1973: 41)

One of Marx's first descriptions of the Commune was that it was "the positive form" of a republic "that was not only to supersede the monarchial form of class rule, but class rule itself." (Marx 1934: 82) From its conception, the Commune was to assume the role of "the glorious harbinger of a new society." (Marx 1934: 120) The subsequent disestablishment of the standing army, police, and church exemplifies the Commune's collective *Aufhebung* of pre-existing institutions. Members of the Commune were elected through a means of universal suffrage. (Marx 1934: 83) The first stage of communism occurred with the adoption of a universal workers wage for public workers. (Ibid) Marx writes the Commune's "true secret" was that it was "essentially a working class government...the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor." (Marx 1934: 88) With labor emancipated, everyone assumes the status of worker. The class barriers estranging

man from his fellow man disappear. Marx exclaims tongue-in-cheek “the Commune...intends to abolish property, the basis of all civilization!” (Marx 1934: 89) The Commune’s intention to transform labor into a cooperative endeavor demarcates the last stage of the development of true communist society.

It is important to note Marx held some reservations about the high level of praise he gave to the Commune. (Thomas 1980: 94) In a letter, Marx wrote “the majority of the Commune was in no sense socialist, nor could it be.” (Marx to Nieuwenhuis February 22, 1881) For Marx, it was imperative to stress the historical importance of what the Commune represented intellectually. (Thomas 1990: 95) The Paris Commune provided Marx with a historical example of a successful example of what a successful worker’s revolution would appear to be. Moreover, it was imperative Marx “claim” the Paris Commune as his own doing. It was rumored Marx “masterminded” the Commune by “pulling the strings of [the International Workingman’s Association] (Thomas 1980: 194) Although limited to a letter sent to French member of the Commune who was also a member of the International, Marx was indirectly attached to the events of the Commune. (Marx to Frankel and Varlin, May 13 1871) In this letter, he advises Leo Franckel, a member both of the International and the Commune, to foment workers uprisings in places other than Paris stating, “it is absolutely necessary that whatever you want to do outside Paris, in England or elsewhere, you should do it quickly.” (MECW vol. 44 1975: 149) In all reality, the Commune was organized by individuals who championed the ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, rather than Marx. (Thomas 1980: 194) Yet, the impact of Marx describing the actions of the Commune as a mirror reflection of his theory of future society is earth shattering. By applying his abstract, and rather utopian, notion of future society as a concrete historical occurrence, Marx successfully co-opts the Paris. Thus through his slightly embellished description of the Commune, Marx takes active and positive steps towards an active realization of his social vision.

The story of the Paris Commune of 1871 presented Marx an ideal opportunity to present a tangible example of his theory of future society. In its brief 3 month lifespan, the commune had

achieved universal suffrage as well as a disestablishment of the army, state, and church. Marx delivered his address to the International only two days after the Commune had been removed from power.

(MECW vol. 22: 1975: 666) The fact that there was barely any time between the fall and the address to the International demonstrates Marx's eagerness to "claim" the Commune as his own. Thus, through his interpretation of the events at Paris, Marx acts as a prophet of anarchism.

Ever since his years at Berlin, Marx desired to turn philosophy from an exercise in logic to a utility for changing society. Marx's theories of the dehumanizing effects of capitalism solidified during the time he spent in Paris. As such, it was here where Marx's process of prophetic revelation was completed. Moreover, it was here where he applied his new theoretical approach of historical materialism to human history in *The German Ideology*. There is a direct application of thesis X of his *Theses on Feuerbach* within his description of the emergence of civil society. As seen in *The German Ideology*, Marx explicitly links the creation of the state to the development of the bourgeoisie class, which is a further perpetuation of the master class within society. Thus within his prophetic doctrine, in order to remove class conflicts, the state must be removed as well. Marx seized his opportunity of prophetic action with his address to the International on the Paris Commune of 1871. Within *The Civil War in France*, Marx describes the history of the Commune in a fashion directly mirroring his vision for the future, which commences with a period of anarchism. Thus, Marx meets the three prophetic criteria of revelation, doctrine, and action.

Tolstoy's Revelation: *Confession*

Prior to his years as a religious writer, Leo Tolstoy achieved international renown for novels such as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. He wrote an account of the Siege of Sevastapol, for which he was present during the Crimean War in 1854. Czar Nicolas I was so impressed by Tolstoy's writing, he gave orders to "take care of the life of that young writer." (Tolstoy 1912: x) This is ironic considering the highly antagonistic relationship Tolstoy developed with the empire later in life, which eventually led to his excommunication from the State religion Russian Orthodox Church.

Tolstoy's self-proclaimed "conversion" served as a springboard to his ideas that eventually solidified into a Christian form of anarchism. In 1874, at age 46, he suddenly became discontented with his life. In his 1879 literary work *Confession*², Tolstoy recounts how his "life came to a stop" due to an obsessive inquiry into the meaning of life. (Tolstoy 1983: 27) This question ate at his soul; especially since he was convinced life did indeed have some sort of greater purpose.

Thus, for a period of five years, Tolstoy set out to find the answer. Leaving no stone unturned, he examined the fields of "physiology, psychology, biology, sociology" as well as philosophy and eventually theology. He reaches the conclusion that seeking a solution to the answer of life via "rational" forms of scientific inquiry, including philosophy, is fruitless. The resultant answer "is only a vague one or an identity; $0 = 0$, life that presents itself to me as nothing is nothing." (Tolstoy 1983: 59) Tolstoy defines irrational knowledge as faith, "which all of humanity had...which provides us with the possibility of living." (Tolstoy 1983: 60)

At this point, Tolstoy writes, "I was now prepared to accept any faith, as long as it did not demand of me a direct denial of reason, for such a denial would be a lie." (Tolstoy 1983: 64) Tolstoy goes to extraordinary lengths to show the reader that each stage of his conversion was purely rational. On a day in the early spring, Tolstoy finally finds what he is seeking:

I remembered that I had lived only when I believed in God. Then, as now, I said to myself, "As long as I know God, I live; when I forget, when I do not believe in him, I die." What are these deaths

² It must be noted that the first edition of *Confession* was censored by the Russian Empire and was published in Geneva as a result. For the remainder of Tolstoy's life, nearly all of his religious treatises were strictly scrutinized by the Imperial censor.

and revivals? It is clear that I do not live whenever I lose my faith in the existence of God, and I would have killed myself long ago if I did not have some vague hope of finding God. I truly live only whenever I am conscious of him and seek him. "What, then, do I see?" a voice cried out within me. "He is there, the one without whom there could be no live." To know God and to live come to one and the same thing. God is life. (Tolstoy 1983: 74)

After this epiphany, the rest of Tolstoy's *Confession* assumes a morally self-righteous stance. He renounces the luxury of his class and embraces the working class. He writes "the simple working people all around me were the Russian people, and I turned to them and to the meaning they gave life."

(Tolstoy 1983: 77) Tolstoy sees the peasant way of life as an ideal way of life. For him, the peasantry symbolized what a pure and natural life resembled. Conversely, the privileged aristocratic class he was part of resembled a tainted and obtuse version of life. He writes the life of the upper class "is not life but only the semblance of life, that the conditions of luxury...make it impossible...to understand life."

(Tolstoy 1983: 76) As will be seen when he travels to Moscow in 1881, this vast disparity of wealth between the classes becomes one of the greatest issues Tolstoy discusses.

Previously in *Confession*, Tolstoy states he considered other faiths such as Buddhism and "Muhammadanism", but ultimately settled on Russian Orthodoxy since it was easiest to consult Orthodox theologians on matters of faith. (Tolstoy 1983: 64) In his search for the truest form of life, he makes a realization the "teachings of faith with which [he] had associated [himself] were not all true."

(Tolstoy 1983: 89) With Russia at war with Turkey at the time, Tolstoy writes:

And in the name of Christian love Russians were killing their brothers. There was no way to avoid thinking about this. There was no way to ignore the fact that murder was evil and contrary to the most fundamental tenets of any faith. Nonetheless, in the churches they were praying for the success of our weapons, and the teachers of faith looked upon this murder as the outcome of faith...I turned my attention to everything done by people who claimed to be Christians, I was horrified. (Ibid)

Thus Tolstoy began to question the infallibility of the Orthodox Church. Earlier, Tolstoy comments "the fundamental dogma of faith is rooted in the infallibility of the church" (Tolstoy 1983: 79) As such, Tolstoy begins a critical examination of the various dogmas within Orthodoxy.³ In his research, he

³ Tolstoy was working on *Criticism of Dogmatic Theology* contemporaneously with *Confession*. Only the conclusion of *Criticism* was translated into English and included into a collection of Essays.

discovers dogma such as the Holy Trinity, and the fall of Adam were not included within Synoptic Gospels. (Maude 1930: 31) This sowed the seeds for Tolstoy's literal reading of the bible. Tolstoy critically regarded the role of dogma as means of control by the State. Thus, Tolstoy's discontent with Orthodoxy was transferred to a discontent with the Russian Empire.

Tolstoy grounds his interpretation of Christian moral teachings, as well as his theories of anarchism, from a literal reading of The Sermon on the Mount.

- (1) *Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment.*
- (2) *Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that everyone that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*
- (3) *Again, ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all...but let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay,nay.*
- (4) *Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right check, turn to him the other also.*
- (5) *Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies...that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them that love you...what do ye more than others? Do not even the Gentiles [foreigners] the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

(Matthew 5:21-48 as recounted in Maude 1930: 33-37)

The five commandments that Tolstoy derives from these verses are: do not be angry, do not lust, “do not give away the control of your future actions,” restrain from the use of physical force, and honor the supreme law of love. (Ibid) The reasoning behind his interpretation third commandment is unclear, where all the others appear to be straight forward. The two commandments from these five which truly embody his anarchist doctrine are the third and the fifth. Considering these verses are being read literally, Tolstoy's interpretation of the third commandment implies that is not moral to swear oaths, and by extension allegiance, to any person. If it is immoral to swear to a person, then it must be immoral to swear to a country. The fifth commandment, the law of love, states by the virtue that God loves us, we must love all those around us, whether they be enemy or friend. Moreover, Tolstoy believes a universal recognition of “and its recognition as a rule of conduct in all our relations with friends, enemies,

offenders...inevitably brings about the complete transformation of the existing order of things, and does this not only among Christian nations but among all populations of the globe.” (Tolstoy 1948: 38)

In September of 1881, Tolstoy and his family moved from his country estate to urban Moscow for the sake of his children’s education. (Maude 1930: 82) In the beginning of *What Then Must We Do*, he comments he “knew country poverty, but town poverty was new and incomprehensible to [him].” (Tolstoy 1991: 1) This poverty affects him so deeply that he requested to become involved with the upcoming census so he could “arouse sympathy for town poverty among the rich; to collect money, enroll people willing to help in the affair...besides compiling the Census, get in touch with the unfortunates and investigate their needs.” (Tolstoy 1991: 10) After the census, Tolstoy exclaims he “wants to do good, to arrange that people should not be cold or hungry but should live in a way fit for human beings.” (Tolstoy 1991: 61) His decision is predicated on his interpretation of the division of labor within Moscow. The division starts with the disproportionately small number of well-off industry tycoons all the way down to the disproportionately large number of impoverished “factory-hands and peasants, who in number are to the others as ten to one.” (Ibid) Tolstoy is simultaneously mystified and furious members of his class can be so apathetic to the plight of the worker. Thus at this point he begins to change the way he lived his life, dropping his title of count (Maude 1930: 127), as well as becoming a vegetarian, forgoing alcohol, to the point where eventually lived the life of a peasant by the time he died in 1910. Thus, Tolstoy commences a grand endeavor to change Russian society by spreading literature appealing to the moral sense of all of Russia.

Tolstoy's prophetic revelation manifests in an epiphany where by a process of rational deduction, he determines "God is life." Thereafter, he begins to read theological texts and become more involved with the Church. It is at this point where Tolstoy crafts a theory of Christian anarchism from a literal reading of the Sermon on the Mount. Moreover, he begins to believe the peasant working class lives a purer life in comparison to the upper class whose exorbitant lifestyle precludes them from truly knowing

God. The urban poverty Tolstoy witnessed in Moscow only intensified his disdain for the upper class. Tolstoy sees that the Russian Empire does care for the welfare for the vast majority of its citizens, those being country peasants and urban laborers. Thus, Tolstoy believes the state acts immorally and it must be removed.

Tolstoy's Doctrine: Dogmas, Coercion, and Revolution

Tolstoy commentary on the development is limited to the state's immoral cooption of religion. In the essay Church and State, Tolstoy's conceptualization of history begins with the adoption of Christianity as the official state religion of Rome by Emperor Constantine. (Maude 1930: 340) Tolstoy indicts the Roman Empire for engaging in acts of "robbery, violence, [and] murder" prior to and after becoming a Christian nation. (Maude 1930: 339) When Constantine rose to power, he decided he "preferred certain Christian dogmas" more so than the existing Roman dogmas. Upon adopting these new 'Christian dogmas,' Tolstoy writes Christianity was "arranged" for Constantine so he did not need to change any of his previous Roman behavior of philandering and otherwise immoral activity. (Ibid) This is the departing point for Tolstoy's Christian Anarchism. The state engages in the same acts of violence even after adopting a religion that explicitly prohibits it. Moreover, the church not only doesn't condone these acts of violence, but legitimizes them by sanctifying them. Church and State was written in about 1882, but it was published in 1904, only after Tolstoy's excommunication. This shows Tolstoy held these highly caustic opinions of the state relatively early after his 'conversion.' Moreover, within Church and State, Tolstoy applies his analysis to the development of all Christian nations. This is problematic for context for his anti-statist writings is the Russian Empire. From here, he attempts to assess the methods the State uses to perpetuate their coercive actions.

Thusly, Tolstoy provides a systematic theory for how governments sustain this power. In his magnum opus *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy indicts the state on four interconnected

methods of coercion encompassing a “chain of violence.” (Tolstoy 1984: 192) “The first and oldest method is intimidation.” (Ibid) The state intimidates its citizens by presenting the organization of the state as “something sacred and immutable.” (Ibid) Tolstoy’s second method is corruption via the “plundering the industrious working people of their wealth by means of taxes.” (Tolstoy 1984: 193) He continues by stating agents of the state “become the richer the more submissively they carry out the will of the government.” (Ibid) Tolstoy’s refers to the third link of the chain of violence as the hypnosis of the people. The state engages in the moral indoctrination of its citizens from a young age, effectively removing the ability to question. (Ibid) Later in life, this process is perpetuated by the addition of “religious and patriotic superstitions.” (Tolstoy 1984: 194) To Tolstoy, upholding a sense of patriotism or religious devotion is equally immoral. His final method is a criticism against the conscription of men into the army. Since these men are indoctrinated by the state, they are essentially enslaved to do the bidding of the state. (Tolstoy 1984: 195) The army engages in the intimidation of the people thereby perpetuating the circle of violence. The circle of violence that forces its citizens to either engage in or support immoral unnatural acts.. He summarizes this circle by stating, “intimidation, corruption, and hypnotizing bring people into a condition in which they are willing to be soldiers.” (Ibid) Tolstoy theory of the circle of violence cannot be understood without context of the social conditions regarding education within the Russian Empire.

In 1833, five years after the birth of Leo Tolstoy, a groundbreaking educational policy was introduced during the reign of Czar Nicolas I. His educational minister introduced the “dogmatic trinity” of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” as the official state doctrine for education⁴. This policy remained intact until the fall of the empire. Applying Tolstoy’s theory of the circle of violence with this prior knowledge elucidates the third step in the circle of violence, which is the hypnosis of the people. In

⁴“Our common obligation consists in this that the education of the people be conducted, according to the Supreme intention of our August Monarch, in the joint spirit of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality. I am convinced that every professor and teacher, being permeated by one and the same feeling of devotion to throne and fatherland, will use all his resources to become a worthy tool of the government and to earn its complete confidence.” – Educational Minister Sergey Uvarov quoted in Riasanovsky 1960: 38

order to be authentically Russian, one must be unequivocally devoted to these principles, and by extension, the Russian Empire. Tolstoy took great issue with this, for he earnestly loved Russia, but not this prescribed sort. Tolstoy always referred to Russia as “his own subjective Russia.” In a letter sent in 1861, Tolstoy writes to an acquaintance, “you say I don’t know Russia. No, I know my own subjective Russia which I look at through my little prism.” (Christian 1978: 145) Thus it may come as no surprise Tolstoy believes Russia can overcome its economic and political woes not by adopting “American constitutions, or from socialistic programs.” (Tolstoy 1948: 256) Rather, the Russian can seek the answer to the social and political woes by a process of social self-reflection.

Written in 1905, The End of an Age, advocates Tolstoy’s notions on the impending revolution. “The Russian 1848 occurred...in 1905.” (Berlin 1978: 3) Russia was in a veritable state of chaos upon losing the Russo-Japanese war. (Seton-Watson 1988: 598) Tolstoy writes the only way Russians can avoid a tumultuous and violent revolution is by “first of all being [Russians].” (Tolstoy 256) He envisions a peaceful Russia in the form of small agricultural communes. He writes:

Wherever Russian people settle down without the intervention of Government they have always established an order not coercive, but founded upon mutual agreement, communal, and with communal possession of land, which has completely satisfied the demands of peaceful social life. (Tolstoy 1947: 260)

Tolstoy is writing about the *obshchina*: a system of communal peasant living prevalent throughout Imperial Russia. These *obshchinas* were “based on principles of common ownership of property, extended family unity, and the periodic redistribution of arable land.” (Barnett 2004: 1037) The “communal possession of land” Tolstoy writes about implies that he promotes communal living grounded in an agricultural community. Most importantly, this form of communal living is uniquely Russian. Baron August von Haxthausen, a preeminent authority of Russian culture (von Haxthausen 1972: vii), once wrote “in order to understand the nature of [Russian communal living], one must carefully examine the fundamental character of...the Russians in particular.” (von Haxthausen 1972:

277) Thus it is no surprise Tolstoy wishes to bring back a return to a fundamentally Russian form of society.

As such, Tolstoy believes the rest of the world must follow Russia's older model of communal living in order for true peace to subsist. (Tolstoy 1947: 279). He believes the impending revolution will result universally due to the "universal dissatisfaction of the working people owing to their natural right to the land." (Ibid) Tolstoy drastically frames this crisis as one facing all the Christians in the world. Thus, he believes in order to remedy this situation, it is of the utmost importance that all people, worker and aristocrat alike, unite in brotherly Christian love.

The ferocity of Tolstoy's prophetic doctrine results from his interpretation of the highly immoral actions of the state. Within Church and State, Tolstoy unabashedly calls Constantine and the Roman Empire robbers and murders for adopting pacifistic Christianity yet still retaining their violent culture. From these Roman roots, Tolstoy creates the theory of the circle of violence: a systematic method where citizens are intimidated, corrupted, hypnotized, and enlisted into the army. Even though Tolstoy claims the circle of violence is universal for all nations, its only clear application is present in the actions of Russian Empire. The official czarist education creed of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality" ensured anyone who was educated in the true Russian manner was unequivocally devoted the Russian Empire. Thus, Tolstoy set out to take out only the moral teachings from Russian Orthodoxy, specifically The Sermon on The Mount, and utilize them as a framework for an ideal anarchist society grounded in Christian morality. In his criticism of the revolutionary actions of 1905, Tolstoy urged Russians to "first of all be Russians" and to look inward for a solution to their political and social woes. As such, he believes the ideal form of society should model itself off of the *obshchina*: a preexisting system of self-governed agricultural peasant communes. Tolstoy believes the rest of the world should adopt this form of society in order to live in a true state of peace, and to avoid the approaching revolution.

Tolstoy Acts: Publishing and Communes

In 1885, Tolstoy assumed an active role in the establishment of the Posrednik (Intermediary) publishing house. It was through this venue Tolstoy disseminated massive numbers of religious pamphlets and other reading material designed “for moral upliftment, social betterment, and the sharing of love.” (Wenzer 1997: 639) The target audience for this literature was the peasantry so the price of these books was approximately a penny each. (Ibid) These works are typically shorter and written in plainer language than his other religious tracts. Tolstoy achieves an interesting effect by writing and disseminating such literature to the working class. His attempts to improve the morality of the working class allow him to convince his audience the Russian Empire must be removed on moral grounds. Tolstoy published various essays on how to interpret the gospels in his lifetime. In fact, Tolstoy accumulated quite a few disciples in his lifetime that proceeded to live by the moral standards Tolstoy promoted.

Within ten years, like-minded individuals began establishing colonies grounded upon Tolstoy’s moral teachings. In a letter written March 12th 1895, Tolstoy writes that it brought him “great joy” that individuals began living to the standards he set out. Communes sprouted up in Russia, England, Hungary, Budapest, and Finland. (Christian 1978: 515) These communes usually took the form of small farming communities. Unfortunately, most of these communes ultimately wound up failing. These failures were mostly due to practical issues where commune members were introduced with situations where Tolstoy’s moral guidelines restricted them from acting logically. For example, there was an incident in one colony where an individual claiming to be a “teacher of life” ordered all the inhabitants of the commune to leave after declaring he was now the master of the land. Bound to the commandment of “non-resistance to evil” forced the residents to leave without any objection. (Maude 1930: 226) Such incidents show the impracticality of a pure implementation of Tolstoy’s principles.

By creating a publishing house, Tolstoy acts like a prophet to the fullest degree. His decision sell books and pamphlets of moral teachings for a penny allowed him to spread his doctrine to a vastly large

audience. V.K. Heins, an ex-member of the Russian army who left for America in 1868 and returned in 1885 commented:

“Last summer I went to Russia, and only there heard for the first time of Tolstoy's activity, of his immense influence on the live part of Russian society, and of his manuscripts circulating by thousands of copies. (Maude 1930: 169)

Tolstoy's influence in Russia was widespread and as a result, communes began forming throughout Russia and rest of Europe structuring themselves on Tolstoy's moral teachings. However, most of these communes ultimately failed due the strictness of Tolstoy's moral code.

In his *Confession* Tolstoy's prophetic revelation manifests as an epiphany where he realizes knowing God is the true purpose of his life. Yet, Tolstoy was cut deep to the core to see the Orthodox Church, an institution founded for the promotion of moral life, engaged in immoral acts. Moreover, he was moved by the disproportionate number of urban poor when he moved to Moscow. Tolstoy concludes the suffering of the worker and the peasant resulted from the Russian Orthodox Church's attachment to the Russian Empire, and thus began to structure a theory of Christian anarchism. Tolstoy derives his prophetic doctrine from an interpretation from the immoral cooption of religion by the Roman Emperor Constantine. Tolstoy attempts to divorce the moral teachings of Christianity from its dogma, which he understood is used as means of coercion. Thus, he crafts a theory of Christian anarchism from a literal reading of the Sermon on the Mount. Taking these moral ideals, Tolstoy creates a publishing house to spread his notion of a good and moral life. At the same time, communes began forming around Tolstoy's moral guidelines. Thus, Tolstoy fulfills the three prophetic criteria of revelation, doctrine, and action.

Conclusion: Do we gain a better understanding of Marx and Tolstoy as anarchists if we regard them as prophets?

At the beginning of this paper, I regarded common traits among religious prophets and used them to create a three-part criterion for social prophets. I determined social prophets undergo some form of revelation, promote a doctrine explaining the course progression of society leading to an inevitable revolution, and taking active and positive steps pursuing an active realization of their social vision.

While assessing the revelation criterion for both Marx and Tolstoy, it became apparent both men did not undergo an instantaneous revelation. Rather, it was a process that took years of research. From 1837 to 1844, Marx read Hegel's philosophy and honed his materialist dialectic. For Tolstoy, he studied physiology, psychology, biology, sociology, and then finally theology during his five year conversion. Moreover, both men traveled to large urban industrial centers in the final phases of their revelation. Marx had already been exposed to an urban environment while a student at Berlin, yet it was in Paris he became to prevailing socialist theories that ultimately sublimated into his theories of distributive communism. Having lived on a country estate for the better part of his life, Tolstoy experienced extreme culture shock when he witnessed urban poverty in Moscow. Marx and Tolstoy's revelation were the defining moment in their lives when they decided to utilize the theories they crafted for the purposes of social justice.

The starkest difference between the prophetic doctrines of Marx and Tolstoy lies in depth of Marx's approach and the one-dimensionality of Tolstoy's. Specifically within *The German Ideology*, Marx's utilizes the dialectic to provide a thoroughly convincing argument that the development of the state is inextricably linked to that of class. Yet, Tolstoy limits himself to a moral framework for his arguments which hinder him greatly. Even though he begins his theories of anarchism from a literal reading of The Sermon on the Mount, it is still *his* interpretation of it. Moreover, by claiming his interpretation is literal, there leaves little room for any sort argument against it. In addition, Tolstoy's moral framing of his argument only allows for a binary interpretation of any social phenomena: moral or immoral. The weakness in Tolstoy's doctrine can be accounted by his desire not to create a complex of

anarchism. He wished his ideas would be put into practice, and as such, he attempted to make them as straight forward as possible. In terms of intellectual depth, however, Tolstoy's Christian anarchism is lacking.

An assessment of the prophetic criteria of action shows Tolstoy engaged in activities of spreading his social vision of anarchism to a greater degree than Marx. Tolstoy's Posrednik publishing house was created with the explicit purpose of "moral upliftment and social betterment." (Wenzer 1997: 639) Thus, by promoting how to live a moral life, he simultaneously promotes his ideas of anarchism since he structures his ideas on moral grounds. Moreover, the Tolstoy communes founded upon his moral framework were not entirely radical, for they were a variation of the *obshchina* agricultural communes already existing within Russia. Marx's active promotion of anarchism was limited to his comments of the Paris Commune in *The Civil War in France*. Considering the disestablishment of the state was only a transition stage in Marx's theory for future society, it is not surprising Marx did not heavily promote this aspect of his theory.

Overall, assessing the theories and actions of Marx and Tolstoy within a framework of social prophecy possesses both advantages and disadvantages. First and foremost, using a prophetic framework allows for a comprehensive longitudinal analysis of both theory and practice. By claiming either Marx or Tolstoy was a prophet, we can regard the theory and practice of their concepts as one in the same. Prophets seek to change society via their theory and practice. For instance we can compare the earlier anarchistic theory of Marx to his practice in later life. Marx was 26 in 1844 when he wrote his commentary on universal suffrage and the subsequent *Aufhebung* of the state in his *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*. In 1871, 27 years after he wrote his *Critique*, Marx's depiction of the Commune included an exact replication of his concepts of universal suffrage. The greatest disadvantage of assessing Marx and Tolstoy as prophets stems from the previous advantage that being there exists a vast amount of information on both their theory and practice it is extremely difficult to discern what is

significant and what is not. Practically speaking, it is nearly impossible to assess the entirety of a theorist's life work as well as action within a single analysis. Thus, analyzing the theory and practice in terms as a form of social prophecy ultimately makes it harder to grasp a better understanding of their concepts of anarchism. By regarding Marx and Tolstoy as social prophets, we best understand the passion of their cries for social change that only can only be realized through revolution.

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