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# Encountering Finitude, Confronting Infinitude: Leo Tolstoy, Emmanuel Levinas, and the Ethics of Non-Resistance

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## Abstract

This article follows a strand of ethical thought that weaves itself throughout Leo Tolstoy's religious writings: the injunction of non-resistance. This ethical position has been described by some critics as a form of religious idolatry in Tolstoy's work. I challenge that claim in this article by deploying the work of Emmanuel Levinas to provide much needed nuance to Tolstoy's call for non-resistance. Via the ethical framework provided by Levinas, I contend that Tolstoy's positions are built upon a conception of the finite world that sees a proper comportment to finitude as the mode by which one engages the infinite. This ethical call is one that escapes satiation by demanding a ceaseless act of non-resistance—which is, for him, the essential kernel of the Christian message. Tolstoy's God, I argue, is this infinite demand; something akin to an ethical claim that marks the subject—a mandate that is met when one enacts the ethical obligation of non-resistance.

## Keywords

Christian ethics, continental philosophy, Emmanuel Levinas, Leo Tolstoy, non-resistance

## Introduction

What does it mean, precisely, to be ethically responsive to another person—that is, to treat another human being in a morally dignified manner? Are there limitations to this ethical response? Or, is one inexhaustibly obligated to ethically relate to one's neighbour in a conduct that necessarily promotes positive ethical outcomes? These questions are central to the ethical and moral concerns of two thinkers separated by a diverse set of historical contexts, nationalistic tensions, religious outlooks

and political motivations: Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) and Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995). Key to Tolstoy’s theologically grounded ethical system is his adherence to Matt. 5:39 in which Jesus incites his followers to “resist not evil.”<sup>1</sup> For Tolstoy, this command served as something like an absolute point, a foundational ground, from which all of one’s ethical actions necessarily emanate. We must, Tolstoy argued, oppose all forms of violence in our relationships with other persons; only by fully embodying this commandment of non-resistance to one’s neighbour can one fully adhere to a proper Christian ethic.<sup>2</sup> For Tolstoy, I argue, Christ’s injunction of non-resistance resists exhaustion—which is to say, there is an *infinite* ethical claim of non-resistance that the ‘other’ places upon the Christian which can never fully be satiated in Tolstoy’s system. Likewise, for Levinas, the underlying ethical concern emerges out of the infinite call of the neighbour, the Other, inexhaustibly.<sup>3</sup> According to Levinas, what we encounter in the Other is not simply another *object* in the world but, instead, in the Other we encounter an ethical obligation that resists closure and/or finality.<sup>4</sup> For Levinas, as will be enumerated below, this infinite call of ethical responsibility emerges **from the ultimate ‘transcendent’ ‘authority’ of the others face**<check wording and use of quote marks>.<sup>5</sup>

Tolstoy, via his reading of the Christian tradition, and Levinas, drawing on elements of the Talmudic tradition, both advance ethical systems that find their ultimate expression in the finitude of

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *My Religion: What I Believe* (EBook: White Crow Books<place of publication?>, 2009), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Importantly, Levinas’s ethical system circumvents a rigidly structured set of mores and/or principles. Thus, unlike Tolstoy, Levinas does not build an ethical artifice around a set of pre-established injunctions. Indeed, as Levinas notes in a lecture given in 1975, ‘Ethics is a relationship with another [*autrui*], with the neighbor... “Neighbor” emphasizes firstly the contingent character of this relationship; for the other [*autrui*], the neighbor is the first come. This relationship is a nearness that is a responsibility for the other [*autrui*]; see Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 138. In this very precise sense, then, for Levinas an ethical response is a response to an ethical domain that precedes and informs the very condition of possibility for the ground of relation in the first place. On this claim I would echo Graham Ward who, in an insightfully clear article that compares Levinas with Karl Barth, sees this ethical call as a ‘transcendent priority’ which seeks, ‘A reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being.’<check quote mark> The metaphysics of being requires a *tertium quid* that mediates both the other and the same, drawing them into a common relationship which domesticates alterity<add closing quote mark?>; see Graham Ward, ‘The Revelation of the Holy Other as the Wholly Other: Between Barth’s Theology of the Word and Levinas’ Philosophy of Saying’, in Claire Katz and Lara Trout (eds.), *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers Vol. 1* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 316.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2012), pp. 79–80.

<sup>5</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 81.

the other <Other?> rather than the infinitude of the transcendent.<sup>6</sup> This article aims to articulate the ethical similarities that motivate each thinker via this finite/infinite parallel. The intended outcome of this analysis is to provide a reimagining of Tolstoy's ethical claims via Levinas's immanent ethical formulations—to think the claims <to think about...?> of the infinite via its expression within the finite.<sup>7</sup> Hence, I examine the theologically motivated moral claims of Tolstoy via Levinas's position that one's ethical response to the finite Other emerges from the infinite call of finitude itself. For Tolstoy, I suggest, the obligation of peaceful and just action toward one's neighbour is an obligation that is never exhausted. It is an infinite claim. Despite interpretations of Tolstoy that situate his ethical claims via transcendent injunctions, I show that throughout Tolstoy's various theological texts he in fact makes God, and one's relation to God, a product of finite action. It is, indeed, how we act in *this* world that we encounter Tolstoy's conception of God.

In order to examine the issues raised thus far, this article is organized as follows: first, I briefly consider Levinas's understanding of finitude, ethics, and his notion of the Other. Importantly, in this article Levinas's philosophy serves as a heuristic device through which Tolstoy's thought will be considered—for that reason, a detailed and critical examination of Levinas escapes the focus <OK?> of this study. Next, I turn to Tolstoy's understanding of religion in general and Christianity in particular. My objective here is to show exactly what it is Tolstoy thinks religion and religious thought offers in its modern form. I then turn to Tolstoy's theory of non-resistance and its relationship to Levinas's thought. In the final section I show how, for Tolstoy, non-resistance towards finite actors in its religious display is fundamentally rooted in an appeal to infinity—but a conception of infinitude that emerges from finitude itself. I end by considering several ways in which Tolstoy's God, one revealed in the *actions* of those who respond to the inexhaustible injunction of 'resist no evil' to the other <Other?>, might be productively brought into contemporary Christian ethical concerns.

## Levinas: Ethics and Finitude

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<sup>6</sup> On the nature of the Jewish and Talmudic influences on Levinas specifically, see Roger Burggraeve, 'The Bible Gives to Thought: Levinas on the Possibility and Proper Nature of Biblical Thinking', in Jeffrey Bloechl (ed.) *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> As a side note, I want to stress that it is not my intention in this article to problematize Tolstoy's ethical system, nor is this analysis aimed at evaluating Tolstoy's capacity to live within the ethical boundaries that he articulated. Instead I am merely attempting to think through how Tolstoy interpreted and conceptualized an infinite ethical demand within a finite economy of relationality.

The force which compels Levinas's ethical philosophy is generated by a concern for how one ought to expand one's primordially emergent ethical responsibility towards the Other.<sup>8</sup> This theory of the Other, whose philosophical lineage can be traced to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological project, is grounded in two basic deductive premises.<sup>9</sup> First is the claim that the modern subject seeks stability in the world by establishing grounded and stable epistemological assurance—i.e. something like empirical rationalism.<sup>10</sup> Second, the world in its very ontological form resists stable epistemological certainties.<sup>11</sup> We thus seek and desire stability—'clear and certain' ideas—in a world that resists stability. One name that Levinas gives to the ontological space from which this 'resistance' to a stable epistemic ground emerges is 'the Other'.<sup>12</sup> This ontological resistance does not emerge from an epistemological gap or limitation innate to the knowing subject; Levinas is not arguing that this epistemic limit is somehow constitutive of the **subject themselves**<subject itself?>.<sup>13</sup> Rather, the Other's unknowability, or alterity, surfaces from what Levinas calls the infinite impenetrable 'horizon' that inexhaustibly compels the subject towards its alterity, while at the same time eluding

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Purcell, *Levinas and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 34. **Because I will be referring to the 'Other' throughout this article in various contexts, I will, for clarity's sake, use a capitalized 'O' Other whenever referring to Levinas's Other. For Tolstoy, I will use a small 'o' other.**<move this to note 6?>

<sup>9</sup> This is not to say, however, that Levinas simply echoes Husserl's thought, but, rather, that Levinas critiques and builds upon Husserl's phenomenology; see Emmanuel Levinas and Sean Hand (eds.), *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 42; Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993), p. 23. Levinas is here echoing not just Husserl, but Martin Heidegger as well. As Heidegger writes, 'The metaphysics of the modern age begins with and has its essence in the fact that it seeks the unconditionally indubitable, the certain and assured [*das Gewisse*], certainty. It is a matter, according to the words of Descartes, of *Firmum et mansurum quid stabilire*, of bringing to a stand something that is firmly fixed and that remains'; see Martin Heidegger, 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead"', in **<editors?>***The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 42; Peperzak, *To the Other*, p. 23. For the purposes of this article, Husserl's basic claim is that the external world resists immediate and complete grasp of itself by cognition. For Husserl, it is the very nature of objects and phenomena to manifest in determinably indeterminate ways—that is, to resist totalization. As Husserl writes, 'Everything that genuinely appears is an appearing thing only by virtue of being intertwined and permeated with an intentional empty horizon, that is, by virtue of being surrounded by a halo of emptiness to be filled out'; see Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. A. J. Steinbock (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic, 2001), p. 42. In this way, a profound openness marks an object's perspectival horizon according to Husserl—an openness which serves as the ground from which Levinas's notion of alterity emerges.

<sup>12</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Bernasconi, 'The Alterity of the Stranger and the Experience of the Alien', in Jeffrey Bloechl (ed.), *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), pp. 62–64.

the subject's grasp.<sup>14</sup> Important for the present study, this ontological horizon of 'the Other' is, Levinas argues, uniquely 'concretized in the face of another human'.<sup>15</sup> As Levinas writes:

The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched—for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content.<sup>16</sup>

Levinas's position is that the other in general and the face in particular is a site of pure alterity that resists total comprehension.<sup>17</sup> That is, the subject wants or desires to comprehend the Other as a complete *thing*, but the face—the site of alterity—resists stable meaning or understanding.<sup>18</sup> Hence, for Levinas, an ethical act is emergent from an awareness of an excess innate to the subject, specifically the face of the subject; our finitude, as it were, is the site through which the ethical emerges and upon which the ethical is situated.

If the face represents a concretized expression of alterity of the Other, what, then, is the ethical system that Levinas develops from this claim? That is, how does one enact their primordially grounded ethical responsibility to this Otherness? One productive starting point to consider this question would be in Levinas's understanding of the concept 'obligation'. In an essay entitled 'God and Philosophy', Levinas discusses the degree to which the neighbour, or the Other, affects and calls the subject to an ethical obligation.<sup>19</sup> Levinas writes,

...in the empirical event of obligation to another, as the impossibility of indifference impossible without fail before the misfortunes and faults of a neighbor, the unexceptionable responsibility for him<please check wording matches original>. *It is impossible to fix limits or measure the extreme urgency of this responsibility.*<sup>20</sup>

Note Levinas's basic claim here: the Other, or the neighbour, is that being towards, which one is 'without fail' compelled to act for<check wording OK>.<sup>21</sup> The Other as pure alterity contains, within its very form, a sort of disruptive but desirous quality about it, a quality that compels an ethical obligatory response from the Levinasian subject.<sup>22</sup> Stated otherwise, we are obligated to

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<sup>14</sup> Peperzak, *To the Other*, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Peperzak, *To the Other*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 194.

<sup>17</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 194.

<sup>18</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 17–19, 139. For Levinas, a desire is when the subject is 'positively attracted by something other not yet possessed or needed' (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 19).

<sup>19</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 180.

<sup>20</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 180; emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 180.

<sup>22</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 180.

respond to the ‘refusal’ of the Other’s face. In this way, for Levinas, the call of the Other—the neighbour—is an inexhaustible call whose *excessive* claim on one’s existence disrupts internal cohesive unity, a disruption whose by-product is an ethical and moral response to this Other.<sup>23</sup> Thus, for Levinas, we do not simply respond to this ethical claim; we are, rather, captivated by it and obligated towards it. In this very precise sense, then, our call to ethical action is not one born from mere subjective freedom but, rather, via the injunctive ethical claim that the Other places upon us.<sup>24</sup> Levinas’s ethics of the Other—especially his claim regarding our obligation to this Other—will be considered in greater detail below; however, I want to now turn to Tolstoy and flesh out the tensions that motivate his ethico-religious worldview.

## Tolstoy: Religion, Christianity, and Non-Resistance

Whereas Levinas’s philosophy is situated within an implicit critique of reason and the inability of the subject via reason to fully understand the world and its obligations, Tolstoy’s thought, in contrast, is rooted in an appeal to the individual rational actor who *can* gain certain knowledge about the world. For example, consider Tolstoy’s definition of religion:

Thus, the essence of religion has been, and still is, understood by people with the highest human faculty, as the establishing by man of a relationship with the infinite Being, or beings, whose power he feels over him. No matter how this relationship has varied, for different peoples and at different times, it has always defined man’s destiny in the world, from which guidance for conduct followed naturally.<sup>25</sup>

First, note here Tolstoy’s basic inference that religion, in its formal structure, is permeated by an identifiable ‘essence’. That is, Tolstoy argues that an essential connective unity binds religious expression across and within time. In this way, then, Tolstoy is claiming that a basic essential quality links, for example, early first-century Christianity with nineteenth-century Christianity—a claim that, as will be explored below, is central to Tolstoy’s faith in Jesus’ injunction of non-resistance. A second theme from the above quote is Tolstoy’s argument that his definition of religion resonates with rational and reasonable men, that is, those with the highest mental faculty. The authority which he appeals to for the legitimacy of his claim is to be found within the nature of reason itself and, by extension, those who he believes deploy this reason in the most fruitful manner. Hence, reason, not spirituality, is the signpost for authentic religious expression according to Tolstoy.<sup>26</sup> Finally,

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<sup>23</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 213; Victoria Tahmasebi-Birgani, *Emmanuel Levinas and the Politics of Non-Violence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 88.

<sup>26</sup> Tolstoy does not, it should be noted, disregard spirituality as a means to encounter religion. What is being argued here, however, is that Tolstoy frames his conception of what religion is within a definition that privileges the use of reason by

Tolstoy's definition of religion is highly individualistic. Religion for him, in its basic structure, is the establishment of a relationship between the individual—unfettered by the Church—and God.

Religion is thus an essential *fact* of the human condition; it affects all of humanity, and—perhaps the most notable suggestion from the above quote—religion is an individualistic endeavour that is fundamentally grounded in reasonable expectations and laws. Tolstoy's essentialist conception of religion carries with it the assumption that although, on the surface, there appears to be religious diversity throughout the world, in reality all religion speaks to a similar deep 'truth'.<sup>27</sup> As Tolstoy writes,

Brahmanism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity—are one and the same: an acceptance of an inscrutable Source on which our life depends, an acceptance of a reflection, or a particle, or a manifestation of this source <Source?> in oneself, and a consequent fulfilment of the will, the good will of this good Source.<sup>28</sup>

Of note here, for the present analysis, is that for Tolstoy true religious claims always refer to a universal good-willed 'Source'—conversely, any doctrine that negates this universal and essential 'good will' feature of religious truth is not proper religious expression.<sup>29</sup>

If Tolstoy appeals to the universality of religion and religious experience, why or how does he emphasize the uniqueness of Christianity? One insight into this question is given in the opening sections of Tolstoy's book *My Religion* where he discusses how it is that the decision to become a Christian arose within him. He writes,

From my childhood, from the time I first began to read the New Testament, I was touched most of all by that portion of the doctrine of Jesus which inculcates love, humility, self-denial, and the duty of returning good for evil. This, to me, has always been the substance of Christianity; my heart recognized its truth in spite of scepticism and despair.<sup>30</sup>

For Tolstoy, Christianity's appeal lay in its capacity to rightly signify how one ought to properly relate to others in *this* world. As Tolstoy notes, though Jesus died 'perhaps to find salvation beyond the grave', Jesus' real influence in history is the impact he had on how one is to understand the

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an individual who is attempting to comprehend matters of practical and moral realities about the world. But, as will be discussed below, Tolstoy's thought is rooted within a certain kind of existential angst; his religious motivations are themselves born from this angst. See Inessa Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time: A Biography of a Long Conversion, 1845–1887* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), p. 169.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Quest for God* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Quest*, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Quest*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 14.

‘mystery’ of this life and this world.<sup>31</sup> For Tolstoy, there is no better example that Jesus’ true teaching emphasizes the finitude of this world over the infinite than in the Sermon on the Mount of Matthew 5–7.<sup>32</sup> As he writes,

Of all the portions of the Gospels, the Sermon on the Mount always had for me an exceptional importance ... Nowhere does Jesus speak with greater solemnity, nowhere does he propound moral rules more definitely and practically, nor do these rules in any other form awaken more readily an echo in the human heart ... if there are any clear and precise Christian principles, one ought to find them here.<sup>33</sup>

Notice here that the value Tolstoy places on Jesus’ teaching emerges from its clear, precise and practical moral guidelines. He is thus not arguing that the Sermon on the Mount’s veracity emanates innately from Jesus as a divine figure who, necessarily imbued with authority, commands obedience. Instead, what makes the Sermon on the Mount and, therefore, Christianity true for Tolstoy is that it aligns with the inner moral and rational properties of the individual who, when hearing Matthew 5–7, recognizes *for themselves* the moral truths found therein.<sup>34</sup> Christianity’s appeal for Tolstoy, therefore, is its capacity to highlight ethical principles that accord with one’s own innate moral character; moral truths that are made obvious via one’s own rational agency, not by God’s sovereign authority.<sup>35</sup>

It is, then, precisely because the validity of the Sermon on the Mount is announced by human agency, reason and moral capacity, that Tolstoy emphasizes their worth. For, as Tolstoy notes, what he came to realize is that teachings like the Sermon on the Mount are not idealistic prescriptions that escape the realm of human possibility, therein functioning as mere suggestions. Instead, Tolstoy argues that what makes the Sermon on the Mount so profound is that it can be put into practice by

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<sup>31</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> It is no coincidence that Tolstoy seems to be echoing Immanuel Kant’s moral and religious philosophy here. For, indeed, Tolstoy studied Kant texts such as *Critique of Pure Reason* (Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy*, p. 36). Kant’s dictum that the proof of any metaphysical claim simply lay beyond the grasp of reason, dramatically affected Tolstoy’s ethical and moral philosophy (Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy*, pp. 35–36). Simply stated, Kant argued that one must appeal to the moral laws that can be found within the subject as a means to encounter the transcendent. It is, therefore, via one’s moral and rational means that God is encountered for Kant (Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy*, p. 36). Thus, although for Kant, one cannot know of God’s existence via reason, one can appeal to the ethical and moral realm as a means of religious knowledge. Therefore, in a similar way to Kant, Tolstoy’s philosophy does not appeal to God’s transcendence, but to the subject’s finitude, rationality, and moral action in this world.

anyone, *now*. As he writes, ‘Then as I read these maxims [i.e. the Sermon] I was permeated with the joyous assurance that I might that very hour, that very moment, begin to practice them’.<sup>36</sup>

However, it should be noted that Tolstoy’s promotion of the Sermon on the Mount does not simply emerge from its rational or logical sensibility.<sup>37</sup> As texts like the *Confession* highlight, Tolstoy’s religious convictions also surface from a heartfelt and deeply personal struggle with the question of death and the meaning of life.<sup>38</sup> An example of this struggle can be found in a diary entry he composed in 1876, where he writes ‘How shall I save myself? I feel as if I will perish—I live and I die, I love life and I fear death—How shall I save myself?’<sup>39</sup> Thus, despite the somewhat formulaic structure and rational tone of Tolstoy’s thought, his religious and spiritual motivations do surface from a profound existentialist anxiety.<sup>40</sup> Even this angst, though, as will be explored below, finds elucidation in Tolstoy’s ethical convictions.

One tension that requires further exposition, before I turn to a consideration of Tolstoy’s actual ethical pronouncements, concerns his reading of Lk. 17:21. Tolstoy argues that this passage, in which Jesus tells his followers that ‘the kingdom of God is with you’, reflects something like the pure and ‘uncorrupted’ form of Jesus’ teachings.<sup>41</sup> This claim, that a pure kernel of Christian truth exists uncorrupted within its teachings, necessarily implies that there is a corrupted element. For Tolstoy, this corrupted element is the institutional structure of the Church.<sup>42</sup> As he writes in his 1894 book *The Kingdom of God is Within You*: ‘The Church as a church, whatever it may be—Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian—every church, in so far as it is a Church, cannot but ... *conceal the real meaning of Christ’s teaching* and to replace it with their own.’<sup>43</sup> According to Tolstoy, true Christian religion was corrupted by the established Church—a corruption that was exacerbated by the Church’s ties to the economic and political establishment.<sup>44</sup> The real meaning of Jesus’ message, according to Tolstoy, is not the excessive ‘rituals of the church’ that destroy the true ‘revelation of

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<sup>36</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy*, p. 169.

<sup>38</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, trans. Jane Kentish (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy*, p. 169.

<sup>40</sup> Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy*, p. 170.

<sup>41</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You: Or, Christianity Not as a Mystical Teaching but as a New Concept of Life*, trans. Leo Wiener (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1961), p. vii.

<sup>42</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You: Or, Christianity Not as a Mystical Teaching But as a New Concept of Life*, trans. Constance Garnett (reformatted and edited by www.nonresistance.org, 2006) (New York: Cassell, 1894), p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> Tolstoy, *Kingdom* <add [2006]?>, p. 34; emphasis added.

<sup>44</sup> Tolstoy, *Kingdom* <add [2006]?>, p. 34. Here, Tolstoy’s critique is not aimed at a specific church, i.e. Orthodox, Catholic, etc. Rather, his critique is aimed more directly at the establishment of the Church in general.

love’;<sup>45</sup> instead, it is a religious doctrine that proclaims that God can only be found in uninterrupted progress towards the attainment of ever-higher truth, towards establishing more and more firmly an ever-greater love within oneself, and establishing more and more widely the kingdom of God outside oneself.<sup>46</sup> Jesus’ true message then, for Tolstoy, is the claim that one must love oneself and love the world since both equally function as markers for the immanent and finite nature of God in this world.<sup>47</sup>

The intent of the preceding analysis has been to show several foundational suppositions that undergird Tolstoy’s philosophical and theological arguments. Central to the above discussion, and key to the ensuing analysis, is Tolstoy’s argument that real religion in general, and real Christianity in particular, are dimensions of human experience that emerge organically when the subject interacts rationally within the finite world.<sup>48</sup> This is in contrast, Tolstoy argues, to religious and Christian assertions that true religion is one that emphasizes other-worldly salvation.<sup>49</sup> Central to these finitely grounded religious assumptions is Tolstoy’s emphasis on reason and his faith that reason is the principal authorial arbiter which understands the truth of religious expression.<sup>50</sup> The importance of this, as I have argued, is that for Tolstoy it is not one’s transcendentally oriented experiences—i.e. those that announce another world—that are important; instead, it is *this world* that reason and true religion announces. That said, what is it specifically about the finite world that propels and motivates Tolstoy’s ethical vision of non-resistance? That is, how exactly does the injunction of ‘resist not evil’ actually affect the subject and instantiate an ethic of non-resistance? It is towards clarifying these questions that my analysis will now turn.

## Tolstoy and the Ethics of Non-Resistance

In 1885 Tolstoy wrote a letter to his friend, Leonid Obolensky, in which he bemoaned the calm and, what he felt to be, seemingly apathetic individuals that modern Christianity had produced. He writes:

If Christian teaching and love (which I hate, because it has become a pharisaical word) leads to people calmly smoking cigarettes and going to concerts and theatres and arguing about Spencer and Hegel, then the devil take such teaching and love. I would rather accept bourgeois morality; at least it lacks pharisaism.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Tolstoy, *Confession*, p.79.

<sup>46</sup> Tolstoy, *Kingdom* <add [2006]??>, p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> Tolstoy, *Kingdom* <add [2006]??>, pp. 22–23.

<sup>48</sup> Tolstoy, *Kingdom* <add [2006]??>, p. 22.

<sup>49</sup> Tolstoy, *Kingdom* <add [2006]??>, p. 42.

<sup>50</sup> Tolstoy, *Kingdom* <add [2006]??>, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted from Colm McKeogh, *Tolstoy’s Pacifism* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), p. 89.

For Tolstoy, instead, Jesus' teachings should impose on his followers a sort of perpetual dis-ease with the world and the self. Jesus' teachings, Tolstoy claims, requires more of the subject than a simple proclamation of Jesus' divinity and the subject's faith in that divinity.<sup>52</sup> Instead, for Tolstoy, Jesus' teachings demand a continued and sustained ethical effort—both in one's life and in one's treatment of others. Tolstoy's argument then, that Christianity teaches works before faith, resulted in his claim that outward signs such as poverty and pacifism become indicators of one's inward devotion to Jesus.<sup>53</sup> Central to Tolstoy's understanding of remaining faithful to Jesus' injunction of 'resist not evil' is his stance of violent non-resistance. What then, for Tolstoy, does non-resistance actually entail?

Chapter two of Tolstoy's *My Religion* begins with the following discussion regarding the significance of non-resistance for Tolstoy:

When I apprehended clearly the words 'Resist not evil' my conception of the doctrine of Jesus was entirely changed; and I was astounded ... the true significance of the doctrine of Jesus was comprised in the injunction to love one's neighbor. When we say, 'turn the other cheek', 'Love your enemies', we express the very essence of Christianity.<sup>54</sup>

Key here is Tolstoy's claim that the 'essence' of Christianity, its true kernel, is expressed via the maxim of 'resist not evil'. For, as discussed above, Tolstoy is grounding his arguments concerning the necessity of non-resistance within the presumptive original and authentic teaching of Jesus.<sup>55</sup> So, what then does non-resistance, in its Christian form, signify for Tolstoy here? Immediately after the above quote, Tolstoy notes that 'resist not evil' 'means never resist, never oppose violence; or, in other words, never do anything contrary to the law of love'.<sup>56</sup> The law of love then, for Tolstoy, is non-resistance to any form of aggression or violence that occurs *from* another person *upon* oneself.<sup>57</sup> This response to violence, Tolstoy argues, 'is the central point of Jesus' doctrine' and, to do contrary to its decree, is to contradict the core teaching of Jesus himself.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, Tolstoy argues that one should never use violence to counter violence—even if that violence could potentially result in an apparently good end.<sup>59</sup> For Tolstoy, Jesus' teachings from the

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<sup>52</sup> McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, p. 89.

<sup>53</sup> McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, p. 89.

<sup>54</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> Tolstoy, *Kingdom* <add [2006]?>, p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 21.

<sup>57</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 21.

<sup>58</sup> Tolstoy, *My Religion*, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, p. 102.

Sermon on the Mount are to be taken literally and absolutely.<sup>60</sup> If it is taken literally, then one is able to make the ‘kingdom of God’ come from within oneself—by not resisting evil—and make it visible within the world.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, for Tolstoy, offering non-resistance to an aggressor is tantamount to reflecting fully and completely Jesus’ ‘essential’ and ‘undefiled’ teaching. A teaching which, as I show below, is something that Tolstoy argues can never *fully* be fulfilled; it is, as Levinas would argue, an infinite claim that holds the subject in a continual state of being responsible to everyone. However, before I expand on the similarities between Levinas and Tolstoy, I want to briefly consider some critiques in the secondary scholarship as regards Tolstoy’s ethics of non-resistance.

## Tolstoy’s Non-resistance: Response and Context

There are several consistently made criticisms of Tolstoy’s understanding of non-resistance; my intent with the following is to focus on one of those critiques. Lloyd Steffen, in *Holy War, Just War*, argues that Tolstoy’s adherence to Christ’s non-resistant ethics results in an inflexible ethical position that is absolutist in output.<sup>62</sup> Tolstoy, according to Steffen, takes his non-resistance ethics to such an extreme that there exists within its demand no ambiguity—no interpretive play. In addition, it offers, he argues, little critical reflection on the actual political and social reasons for war and violence.<sup>63</sup> Similar to Steffen, Colm McKeogh, in his 2009 book *Tolstoy’s Pacifism*, argues that Tolstoy’s non-resistant ethic is too legalistic and is not ‘love based’.<sup>64</sup> McKeogh argues that one practises Tolstoy’s non-resistance not out of an appeal to the necessity of true and faithful Christian love of and for the neighbour, but out of blind obedience to a rule.<sup>65</sup> In what follows I briefly consider these assertions and name one of the problematic assumptions that emerge from this reading of Tolstoy.

Steffen’s analysis, I would suggest, privileges a reading of Tolstoy that makes primary the injunction of transcendence and fails to properly account for the role of the finite in Tolstoy’s thought. His basic argument is that Tolstoy should be responding to the transcendent ‘word of God’ when he formulates his ethical laws, rather than the ethical maxim of ‘non-resistance’.<sup>66</sup> The problem that emerges here, I would argue, is that Steffen pays little attention to the way in which *finitude* itself is actually conceived of by Tolstoy. For example, Steffen writes:

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<sup>60</sup> McKeogh, *Tolstoy’s Pacifism*, p. 102.

<sup>61</sup> McKeogh, *Tolstoy’s Pacifism*, p. 103.

<sup>62</sup> Lloyd Steffen, *Holy War, Just War: Exploring the Moral Meaning of Religious Violence* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) p. 154.

<sup>63</sup> Steffen, *Holy War, Just War*, p. 154.

<sup>64</sup> McKeogh, *Tolstoy’s Pacifism*, p. 103.

<sup>65</sup> McKeogh, *Tolstoy’s Pacifism*, p. 103.

<sup>66</sup> Steffen, *Holy War, Just War*, pp. 154–55.

Tolstoy was a Christian, but he had rejected the divinity of Christ as the true core or source of ultimacy in his revised version of Christianity. Tolstoy posited ultimacy in non-resistance itself. Non-resistance, then, not Christ or Christianity, was the true Center <cap C in original?> of Tolstoy's absolutism, the core of his religion, the actual object of his 'ultimate concern' from which all other things religious and ethical flowed.<sup>67</sup>

Steffen, ignoring Tolstoy's own definition of religion in general, and Tolstoy's own conception of how it is one experiences Christianity in particular, argues that Tolstoy's ethics of non-resistance fails because it ignores how Christ's divinity is the 'true core' of Christianity. It is my position that if Steffen considered what it is precisely that Tolstoy sees in the finitude of the other, then he would see that Tolstoy is arguing—again and again—that Jesus' transcendence results *only* from the finite moral obligation of non-resistance itself. That is how Tolstoy argues the 'kingdom of God' is to be expressed: in peacefully encountering the other. Thus, non-resistance is not the absolute for Tolstoy; instead, what is absolute is *the relational expression of not resisting evil to the other*—a dramatically different claim. Steffen's analysis would benefit, then, by considering Tolstoy's actual ethical claims and situate them within their suppositions of finitude, as opposed to testing the validity of Tolstoy's ethical maxims via a certain reading of how one is to relate to the transcendent. For Tolstoy is not rejecting Christ's 'divinity' and worshipping 'non-resistance'; rather, he is arguing that that 'divinity' expresses itself in peaceful finite relations.

Steffen, like McKeogh, makes the mistake of overlooking how Tolstoy's religious claims are always grounded in an appeal to this world and the finite ethical claims that emerge therein. Furthermore, critics of Tolstoy's religiously motivated ethics of non-resistance should acknowledge the historical context of Tolstoy's arguments. As Guy Oakes notes in his article 'The Antinomy of Values: Weber, Tolstoy and the Limits of Scientific Rationality', thinkers like Tolstoy are illustrative of the radical social, political and economic changes that eighteenth- to nineteenth-century European society underwent.<sup>68</sup> Tolstoy's thought was nurtured in the decline of the industrial revolution and the beginning of a technological revolution—social changes that had a drastic impact on how one thought about God, religion and morality.<sup>69</sup> Tolstoy's response to this modernization and mechanization was one of existential angst and spiritual questioning. As Tolstoy writes, 'If nothing lies ahead but "the reality of suffering and death, and of complete annihilation" and if "nothing will

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<sup>67</sup> Steffen, *Holy War, Just War*, p. 160.

<sup>68</sup> Guy Oakes, 'The Antinomy of Values: Weber, Tolstoy and the Limits of Scientific Rationality', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 1.2 (2001), p. 200.

<sup>69</sup> Oakes, 'The Antinomy of Values', pp. 195–96.

remain except the stench and the worms” what is the point of doing anything at all?’<sup>70</sup> The answer that Tolstoy gives to this problem, Oakes argues, was a common modernist response: we do not know what ‘lies ahead’, but what Christianity offers here, and now, is a rational system that provides moral and ethical instructions for how to live in this world; its validity is thus not to be sought in its spiritual assertions, but in how one makes this world better.<sup>71</sup> Tolstoy, therefore, prioritizes human life in its *relation* to the Other<other?>—that is where Tolstoy finds meaning in the shifting cultural and social milieu that surrounded him.<sup>72</sup> In order to draw out with sharper focus the theological and ethical claims asserted here, I will now turn to a more careful analysis of Tolstoy as read through Levinas.

## Tolstoy, Levinas, and Infinity of Finitude

Until now, this analysis has been concerned with providing a comprehensive picture of Tolstoy’s understanding of religion and his philosophy of non-resistance; I have argued, chiefly, that Tolstoy is a thinker of finitude not, as some Tolstoy scholars suggest, transcendence.<sup>73</sup> In addition, I have emphasized what I argue is a uniquely Levinasian element in Tolstoy’s morality. How then, precisely, do Levinas’s and Tolstoy’s philosophical and ethical claims cohere? It is the clarification of this question that is the focus of my final analysis. To accomplish this, I will, in what follows, discuss the role of the Other<other?> in Tolstoy’s thought and flesh out in greater detail my claim that Tolstoy’s idea of non-resistance is best understood via a Levinasian lens.

As discussed above, for Levinas, the finite other<Other?> is a site of alterity through which one encounters the infinite—the mysterious.<sup>74</sup> Levinas’s conception of the subject, I showed, initiates from the claim that there is no isolated existent subjective ‘I’; instead, what the subject is, is

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted from Oakes, ‘The Antinomy of Values’, p. 203.

<sup>71</sup> Oakes, ‘The Antinomy of Values’, p. 203.

<sup>72</sup> Tolstoy, *Kingdom*<add [1961]?>, pp. 50–52. Indeed, in this particular section of Tolstoy’s work he directly confronts the issue of modernization and the relevance of Christian ethics to this changing social dynamic (Tolstoy, *Kingdom*<add [1961]?>, p. 50). For Tolstoy, however, Christianity itself may be proven wrong as a legitimate ethical response to the ethical challenge of modernity: ‘It may be found that Christ’s answer is not correct: it may be possible to put in its place another, better answer, by finding a criterion which would indubitably and simultaneously for all’ define evil and goodness (Tolstoy, *Kingdom*<add [1961]?>, p. 52). Tolstoy makes this claim, as analysed above, because he appeals to the necessity of reason when evaluating the veracity of an ethical assertion. Thus, another more reasonable response to the problem of evil may arise (Tolstoy, *Kingdom*<add [1961]?>, p. 52). But the ethical injunctions that flow from Christianity as he understood them, Tolstoy argued, provides an immediate this-worldly response to the ills.

<sup>73</sup> E.g. Alexander Boot, *God and Man According to Tolstoy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Ronald Victor Sampson, *The Discovery of Peace* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973); McKeogh, *Tolstoy’s Pacifism*; Steffen, *Holy War, Just War*.

<sup>74</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 43.

a relationally situated being that is morally compelled toward the Other.<sup>75</sup> However, this relational process is not undergirded by peaceful unity for Levinas—instead, he stresses the way in which tensions undergird this relational dynamic. As he writes in *Time and the Other*,

The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery. The other's entire being is constituted by its exteriority, or rather its alterity, for exteriority is a property of space and leads the subject back to itself through light.<sup>76</sup>

The Other, via their alterity, compels a relational response—this is the tension he alludes to. The dynamic noted by Levinas here is nicely captured by the philosopher/theologian Jean Greisch when, in an article on Levinas entitled 'Ethics and Ontology: Some Hypocritical Reflections', writes,

What is novel here is not the theme of otherness, a staple of personalist philosophies, but the decisive discovery that close or distant, stranger or travelling companion, 'the other concerns me', with the effect that I must consider myself the 'hostage' of the other, who becomes a presence 'more intimate to me than myself' (to pillage Augustine). Subjectivity is here redefined as hospitality towards the other.<sup>77</sup>

We are, as Greisch stresses and as Levinas claims in the above quote, gripped by the 'mysterious' impossibility of the Other.<sup>78</sup> This *pull*, Levinas further argues, is precisely what the infinite is: an Other of whom and by whom we encounter as proximate precisely via its distanced otherness, its **μυστήρια**.<sup>79</sup> That said, this is a characterization of infinitude as manifest via the desire and condition of finitude. In one's ethical response to the Other, Levinas is suggesting, they align their actions with a mode of being human that the Levinasian scholar Jeffrey Kosky argues can be summed up in one word: responsibility.<sup>80</sup> We are pulled beyond ourselves into being responsible towards that which we

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<sup>75</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 43.

<sup>77</sup> Jean Greisch, 'Ethics and Ontology: Some Hypocritical Reflections', in Claire Katz and Lara Trout (eds.), *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers Vol. 1* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 220; emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 43.

<sup>79</sup> Levinas, *Levinas Reader*, p. 43. Note here the religiously motivated theme of the Jewish people's struggle with God that propels Levinas's philosophy. The Other, as related in the Jacob saga of Genesis, is encountered not via harmonious exchanges, but in tension. For example, consider Gen. 32:22-32 in which Jacob wrestles and struggles with the divine Other. For more on this, see Hilary Putnam, 'Levinas and Judaism', in Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>80</sup> Jeffrey Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. xix.

are compelled—a beyond that is transcendent in force but immanent in practice. As Adriaan Peperzak writes, for Levinas:

A need can be filled and satisfied; but the hunger of a desire grows the more it approaches the desideratum. Desire is a dynamic relation towards something that cannot be contained, encompassed, assimilated, or integrated by the desiring subject.<sup>81</sup>

Or, as Claire Katz frames the issue of desire and ethical obligation in Levinas, we meet the Other indicated by the desire (ἔρος) we have for the transcendent when we commune via the desire of hospitality (ἀγάπη) towards the finitude of the stranger.<sup>82</sup>

How, then, does the above description of the Levinasian Other relate to Tolstoy's thought? Consider, as an example, a quote from the epilogue of Tolstoy's 1889 novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*:

An ideal is only then an ideal when its realization is possible in the idea only, in thought, when it *presents itself as attainable only at infinity, and when, therefore, the approach to it is infinite*. If an ideal were not only attainable, but we could imagine its realization, it would cease to be an ideal. Such is Christ's ideal, the establishment of the kingdom of God upon earth ... The whole meaning of the human life consists in a motion towards this ideal...<sup>83</sup>

Here, in this quote, Tolstoy presents what I suggest is his most clear description of what exactly it is that Jesus' teachings calls individuals to respond to—as well as its similarity to Levinas's ethical claims. Note first how Tolstoy conceives of an 'ideal' and its relation to thought. A thought, he argues here, is something that moves in the direction of the infinite, but never fully ascertains this infinite. Hence, what the infinite *is* is something that cannot be grasped in totality by the finite; it is akin to a horizon *towards which* one is compelled, but *of which* one does not ever fully encounter—a position that mirrors Levinas's conception of the Other. We desire it precisely via the economy of desire—not via its attainability.<sup>84</sup>

An ideal then, like the ideal of non-resistance, is an ideal only insofar as it can never be fully actualized. Instead, these ideals represent 'infinite' possibilities for Tolstoy. Indeed, and to state this position clearly, he argues that if one could fully actualize the ideal it would cease to be an ideal as such—i.e. it would be real, and therefore not ideal. Likewise, Tolstoy argues, this is what Jesus

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<sup>81</sup> Adriaan Peperzak, 'Levinas' Method', in Claire Katz and Lara Trout (eds.), *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers Vol. 1* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 361.

<sup>82</sup> For extended commentary on the tension between agape and eros in Levinas, see Claire Katz, 'Levinas between Agape and Eros', *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy* 11.2 (2007), pp. 333–50.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted from McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, p. 70; emphasis added.

<sup>84</sup> Peperzak, 'Levinas' Method', p. 346.

establishes with teachings like ‘resist no evil’, or the ‘kingdom of God is within you’. These are ideals whose veracity lay in the infinite and persistent claim that they hold upon one’s ethical and moral imagination. It is, then, the insistent claim of their ideal structure that grips one’s finite action and compels one’s ethical stance. Stated otherwise, it is only in the *continual attempt* to concretize this ideal that Jesus’ injunction is actually followed. For, as Tolstoy notes above, to be ethical is to participate in the movement towards this ideal—constantly.

As the above analysis suggests, then, Tolstoy’s understanding of Jesus’ ethical injunctions is hinged not upon their absolute existent and transcendent reality, but upon the claim that these moral maxims have upon one’s life—how we live and pursue those ideals. We are, as Tolstoy suggests, called by Jesus to respond to his infinite moral ideals. These ideals, though, cannot ever be fully actualized, or made absolutely concrete. For, if these ideals were concretized, they would ‘cease to be an ideal’ and therefore cease to have an affective hold on our lives.<sup>85</sup> This emphasis on the inability to actualize or fully engage with this other is analogous to Levinas’s conception of the face of the other, and its pull on the subject. For, in our enactment of ‘resisting no evil’ to the other we follow the true teaching of Jesus—his essential ideal—of non-resistance. For Tolstoy, then, in following the infinite injunction of non-resistance to the other one participates in the call of the infinite ideal of Jesus’ teaching—a call whose liberative value erupts from its inexhaustible demand to ethically respond to the world.

## Final Thoughts and Conclusion

Tolstoy and Levinas, as shown above, share a similar moral and philosophical perspective: both argue that it is in one’s *relationship* with the finite Other that one encounters or experiences the claim of the infinite on one’s life. One is compelled, they both argue, to respond to the finite via an infinite injunction; for, only then, is the infinite encountered. This infinite is itself not actualized as an understandable or comprehended ‘thing’ but is instead an inexhaustible horizon that grips and ethically compels the subject.

Nevertheless, despite the similarities that Tolstoy and Levinas share, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge an obvious difference between their positions. Principal to Tolstoy’s religious claims is his essentialism, as explored above. For Tolstoy, this essentialism is the ground upon which Jesus’ moral injunctions gain authority within a modern context. As Tolstoy makes clear throughout his *Confessions* and *My Religion*, Jesus’ true teaching, its essential uncorrupted message, is to ‘resist not evil’—a truth that he argues we are compelled to follow. Despite my contention that Tolstoy makes the individual and their rational faculties central to his understanding of religious and Christian truths, he still, nonetheless, grounds Jesus’ message within an essentialist religious

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<sup>85</sup> Quoted from McKeogh, *Tolstoy’s Pacifism*, p. 70.

framework. Despite this essentialism, these religious and moral injunctions for Tolstoy are expressed and encountered *only* via finite actions and finite actors. In contrast to Tolstoy, Levinas does not make an appeal to an essential religious or moral absolute. Instead, for Levinas, it is precisely from the inexhaustible alterity of the finite itself—from the face of the other—that one is compelled to act morally. Therefore, there does exist clear distinctions between Tolstoy and Levinas, especially as it regards an essentialist conception of religion—a full and detailed account of this difference obviously escapes the scope of the present analysis.

What then can an analysis of these two thinkers tell us about ethical commitments and non-resistance in modernity? First, I would suggest that a principal theological theme or notion that unifies Tolstoy and Levinas's project is that God is the name for an action, the name of a deed—specifically, the name for the act of non-resistant relation. Hence, praxis is ascribed more importance than is doxa in their speculations. This is not to say, of course, that doxa is denied its place of importance for these thinkers. But, as for many modern peoples, the results of the doxa, what we *do* as an outcome of the religious call, have been assigned more authority than the mere identification with a doxastic claim. With that in mind, allow me to provide two brief suggestions for a possible enactment of the Tolstoyan/Levinasian ethical vision considered in this analysis. One possible productive avenue of ethical thought that this more praxis or deed-oriented type of theological exploration could be applied to are environmental issues, specifically as they concern climate change. By engaging the environment as something like the image of the finite Other that Tolstoy and Levinas invite us to imagine in our everyday encounters, one might foster the growth of a theological system grounded in establishing right relation with the finitude of nature as a means to encounter the Other of God. Indeed if, as Tolstoy seems to suggest, God is met in right relation, then perhaps seeing the kingdom of God as located in the relation that one establishes with nature is a possibility opened up by this theological exploration.<sup>86</sup> Here, for example, the demands of nature as heard in contemporary climate-change discourse—the 'cry coming from the wilderness'—would signal a new space for right-relation with an Other whose ethical and relational injunctions certainly demand recognition.<sup>87</sup> Second, in Tolstoy's and Levinas's claims we see, I would contend, a

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<sup>86</sup> The claim being advanced here is not meant to enshrine nature itself with a divine quality. Rather, via Tolstoy, the position being advocated for is one that seeks to instantiate finite relation itself as the site within which the infinite is encountered. In this instance, I am claiming, our *relation* to nature itself might be one way in which to enact Tolstoy's ethical claims.

<sup>87</sup> Many scholars on Levinas have already considered the implications of a proper environmental ethics framed via Levinas's ethical claims—to consider, as it were, the call of the 'face' of nature. For example, see Christian Diehm, 'Natural Disasters', in Charles Brown and Ted Toadvine (eds.), *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003); J. Aaron Simmons, 'Toward a Relational Model of Anthropocentrism: A Levinasian

productive extension of the call to hospitality that runs throughout the biblical text.<sup>88</sup> Hospitality, or the engagement of purposeful openness to the stranger, is certainly an ethical commitment that seems relevant to the contemporary political and social climate. It is an engagement that highlights the necessity of grounding a theology within the call of non-resistance; for, in the resistance of hospitality to the stranger, the refugee, the outsider, is not a form of violence inflicted upon them? That is, the violence of abandonment and estrangement? Perhaps then, via the ethical directives articulated by thinkers like Tolstoy and Levinas, practices of purposeful openness to the stranger can be enacted so as to include both refugee and climate concerns.<sup>89</sup> These are ethical acts that, as is key to both thinkers, are nested within an infinite call of right-relation within finitude itself; acts in which the subject is compelled to restlessly strive for their implementation. Likewise, these ethical commitments are, as was noted by Tolstoy above, ways of being in the world *now*, in *this world*, so as to live the ideal instantiated by the hope inscribed in Jesus' call to see the kingdom of God in this world.

In conclusion, in this article I have argued that Tolstoy's ethics of non-resistance emerges not via the injunction of the infinite *per se*, but from the claim of the finite other. In order to demonstrate this position, I heuristically deployed Levinas's basic finite/infinite binary so as to think through Tolstoy's central ethical suppositions. My use of Levinas in this article has not been intended to demonstrate the 'Levinasian' structure of Tolstoy's thought—Tolstoy is *not* a 'Levinasian'. Instead, by using Levinas's moral ontology and deploying his philosophical nomenclature I have been able to demonstrate that Tolstoy's ethical decrees of non-resistance are grounded within an appeal to the inexhaustible moral claim of the finite other. We are infinitely responsible, Tolstoy is arguing, to be absolutely non-resistant to the finite face of violence and evil—this infinite responsibility is, stated simply, God for Tolstoy. Additionally, I have shown that Tolstoy's thought emerges from a rather classical understanding of religion, i.e. that religion is an essential human quality that one is innately wired to respond. However, this essential structure, according to Tolstoy, is vulnerable to the intersections of economy, power and culture—claims that were evidenced by his argument that the Church corrupted Jesus' true message of 'resist not evil'. Tolstoy's essentialism is, I suggested, vital to Tolstoy's theory of non-resistance. It is precisely in Tolstoy's claim regarding the 'real' and

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Approach to the Ethics of Climate Change', in William Edelglass, James Hatley and Christian Diehm (eds.), *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2012).

<sup>88</sup> Here I am influenced by John Caputo and his reading of Levinas, in John Caputo, 'Adieu—sans Dieu: Derrida and Levinas', in Jeffrey Bloechl (ed.), *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

<sup>89</sup> For a specifically Levinasian analysis of this issue, see Kathleen R. Arnold, *Homelessness, Citizenship, and Identity: The Uncanniness of Late Modernity* (New York: State University of New York, 2004), pp. 167–69.

‘uncorrupted’ form of Christianity that he grounds the authority for his ethics of non-resistance. However, this essential and ‘true’ teaching is a teaching that can only unfold within *this* world when one responds in a non-resistant manner to the violence of the other—that is, the relational ground upon which Jesus’ true message surfaces. For Tolstoy, therefore, if we enact Jesus’ essential uncorrupted ethics of non-resistance, absolutely, then we can experience the ‘kingdom of God’ within us. In this very precise way then, for Tolstoy, God’s presence is felt when one ethically responds to the infinite claim of non-resistance that the finite other has upon us.