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Coping with a Disenchanted World: The Portrayal of Enlightenment in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*

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While traditional interpretations of *War and Peace* have snubbed its philosophical elements, and only a handful of scholars have taken seriously Tolstoy's philosophical ideas, this paper claims that a sophisticated critique of the Enlightenment is the *leitmotiv* of his book. By means of a close reading of Tolstoy's descriptions of some of the most controversial effects associated to the Enlightenment (*i.e.*, the disenchantment of the world, concept fetishism, the decline of the individual, bureaucratization, the erosion of traditional solidarity, and the reduction of reason to its instrumental dimension), and by comparing Tolstoy's ideas with some of the most accomplished analysis of the Enlightenment and its effects, this paper offers a novel reading of *War and Peace*: Tolstoy's book should not be read exclusively as a chauvinist and aristocratic depiction of the nineteenth-century Russian society. Above all, *War and Peace* is an insightful assessment of one of the most momentous transformations of human societies.

Keywords: Disenchantment; modernity; instrumental rationality; individuality; concept fetishism; bureaucratization.

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Lidiando con un mundo desencantado: la representación de la Ilustración en *Guerra y paz* de Tolstói

Mientras que las interpretaciones tradicionales de *Guerra y paz* han despreciado sus elementos filosóficos, y solo un puñado de estudiosos se han tomado en serio las ideas filosóficas de Tolstói, este artículo afirma que una sofisticada crítica de la Ilustración es el *leitmotiv* de este libro. Mediante una lectura detallada de las descripciones presentadas por Tolstói sobre algunos de los efectos más controvertidos asociados a la Ilustración (i.e., el desencantamiento del mundo, el fetichismo de los conceptos, el ocaso del individuo, la burocratización, la erosión de la solidaridad tradicional y la reducción de la razón a su dimensión instrumental), y comparando las ideas del escritor ruso con algunos de los análisis más acabados de la Ilustración y sus efectos, este artículo ofrece una lectura novedosa de *Guerra y paz*: el libro de Tolstói no debe leerse exclusivamente como una descripción chovinista y aristocrática de la sociedad rusa del siglo XIX. Por encima de todo, *Guerra y paz* es un diagnóstico perspicaz de una de las transformaciones más trascendentales experimentadas por las sociedades humanas.

Palabras clave: desencantamiento; modernidad; racionalidad instrumental; individualidad; fetichismo del concepto; burocratización.

Lidando com um mundo desencantado: a representação do Iluminismo em *Guerra e Paz* de Tolstói

Embora as interpretações tradicionais de *Guerra e Paz* tenham desprezado seus elementos filosóficos, e embora apenas alguns estudiosos tenham levado a sério as ideias filosóficas de Tolstói, este artigo afirma que uma crítica sofisticada do Iluminismo é o *leitmotiv* de seu livro. Por meio de uma leitura atenta das descrições de Tolstói de alguns dos efeitos mais controversos associados ao Iluminismo (*i.e.*, o desencantamento do mundo, o fetichismo do conceito, o declínio do indivíduo, a burocratização, a erosão da solidariedade tradicional e a redução da razão à sua dimensão instrumental) e comparando as ideias de Tolstói com algumas das análises mais bem-sucedidas do Iluminismo e seus efeitos, este artigo oferece uma nova leitura de *Guerra e Paz*: o livro de Tolstói não deve ser lido exclusivamente como um retrato chauvinista e aristocrático da sociedade russa do século XIX. Acima de tudo, *Guerra e Paz* é uma avaliação perspicaz de uma das mais importantes transformações das sociedades humanas.

Palavras-chave: desencantamento; modernidade; racionalidade instrumental; individualidade; fetichismo de conceitos; burocratização.

Introduction

This paper focuses on tolstoy's portrayal of Enlightenment in *War and Peace*. Despite canonical interpretations, *War and Peace* is not only a truthful depiction of early-nineteenth-century Russian society, but also a philosophical critique of one of the most controversial sociocultural processes of modern history: the Enlightenment. By analyzing some of the many instances in which Tolstoy engages in a critical appraisal of Enlightenment and its consequences, it will be possible to underscore the philosophical complexity of *War and Peace*. Additionally, by analyzing some of the most nuanced psychological characterizations offered by Tolstoy, this paper underscores that the Tolstoian philosophical critique is not confined to *War and Peace*'s digressions. The main characters of this book are permanently confronted with the "disenchantment of the world", one of the major consequences of Enlightenment. Thus, by describing his characters' existential concerns, Tolstoy is continually sketching and resketching a philosophical critique of his present. In the first section of this paper, I will analyze how Tolstoy engages with some of the most salient features of Enlightenment. In the second one, I focus on the different strategies that the Tolstoian characters deploy to cope with the disenchantment of the world. Finally, in the third section, I offer some concluding remarks about the close relationship between *War and Peace* and philosophy.

Enlightenment and its repercussions

In this paper, I take as my point of departure Horkheimer and Adorno's characterization of the Enlightenment:

> Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1)

Enlightenment is a Janus-faced historical and cultural process that has profoundly influenced the way we relate to nature, to other human beings, and to ourselves. By means of this process, thought has become a highly sophisticated tool aimed to conquer the forces of nature. But although the means for complete emancipation from fear and necessity have become increasingly powerful and highly developed, individuals nowadays experience an unheard-of helplessness. Our own technique has become the crux of our subjugation. Though the world has been disenchanted, Enlightenment has resulted in a failed promise.

But why has the liberation of humanity been consistently frustrated? According to Horkheimer and Adorno, if the Enlightenment seems to be driven by a destructive tendency, this is because it has forgotten its original goal. By committing itself to the mastery of nature, reason has blinded itself to its human origins and its human aims. The unqualified disenchantment of the world produced an unwelcome but inevitable side effect: humans too were forced to yield to the scalpel of science. Individuals were reduced to the status of means because domination became an end in itself:

> What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts. Ruthless toward itself, the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness. Only thought which does violence to itself is hard enough to shatter myths. (Horkheimer and Adorno 2)

This does not mean that the project of Enlightenment should lead inevitably to the tyrannical subjugation of nature, both human and non-human; but it does mean that the reification of reason, its lack of self-reflection, will taint the world with violence.

One of the most conspicuous consequences of Enlightenment is the dwindling of individuality. Tolstoy's philosophy of history is one closely associated with this conception of individuality. History cannot be explained by the volition of a single individual. On the contrary, those human beings who assume that individuality is better realized through their actions are the most constrained by factual conditions: "A king is a history's slave" (Tolstoy 537). Beyond the sphere of strictly individual actions, the individual is reduced to impotence and overwhelmed by predetermination. "Man lives

consciously for himself, but is an unconscious instrument in the attainment of the historic, universal, aims of humanity" (Tolstoy 537). The more connected with people an individual is, the more her will is impotent and compelled by unavoidable laws.

But individual impotence is not only the inexorable consequence of the infinite causes that shape history. It is also related to strictly modern conditions. The individual has become increasingly incapable of determining her own fate. Tolstoy underscores that the time for heroes is long gone. At least, to think of heroes in terms of the Greek tradition is no longer possible. Heroes may have existed in antiquity, but not in modern times: "The ancients have left us model heroic poems in which the heroes furnish the whole interest of the story, and we are still unable to accustom ourselves to the fact that for our epoch histories of that kind are meaningless" (Tolstoy 672).

But why are individuals increasingly constrained by this apparent fatalism? In addition to the ever-growing complexity of human societies, individuality has been driven towards impotence by rationalization and science. Instrumental rationality has become a synonym for human knowledge. By focusing on perfecting technical means, and by neglecting the morality of the ends and consequences towards which technification is supposed to lead us, individuals have been rendered expendable (Horkheimer 105, 128, 151). According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the same will of domination that was supposed to free humankind from the tyranny of nature has turned itself against our own individuality:

> Not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects, but the relationships of human beings, including the relationship of individuals to themselves, have themselves been bewitched by the objectification of mind. Individuals shrink to the nodal points of conventional reactions and the modes of operation objectively expected of them. Animism had endowed things with souls; industrialism makes souls into things (Horkheimer and Adorno 21).

To achieve mastery over nature, Enlightenment has favored rationalization and abstract thinking. But this particular way of relating ourselves to nature has also amounted to the reification of reality. The fungibility of all beings (including humans) is the price to pay for greater predictability and control.

Bureaucratization is one of the manifold procedures developed to master nature. Accordingly, Enlightenment also leads to the subordination of individuals in favor of bureaucratic procedures. By describing the disastrous consequences of the French army's incursion into Russian territory, Tolstoy demonstrates how bureaucrats are always willing to sacrifice human beings for the sake of their abstract plans. Clausewitz, the great German theorist of war who embodies concept fetishism, explains this with no qualms: "The war must be extended widely. This is a view I cannot esteem highly enough […] the goal is only to weaken the enemy, so of course one cannot take into account the loss of private individuals" (Tolstoy 690).[1] Once bureaucratic planification has eliminated any other alternative, human beings become mere statistics. Extending war may have been strategically reasonable, but it was cruel and cold-hearted. Andrew embodies Tolstoy's revulsion for modernization by underscoring that it is because of these theories, simultaneously impeccably logical and inhumane, that his family had suffered so much. The overhyped faith in expertise and abstractions allowed the strategists and war technocrats to remorselessly sacrifice flesh and blood individuals. Once war theory has been hypostatized, asking if the ends justify the means becomes superfluous.

The fate of the individual under military bureaucracy portrayed by Tolstoy is similar to the fate of the individual under the Enlightenment. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, a byproduct of bureaucratization is the increasing fungibility of the individual:

> Through the mediation of the total society, which encompasses all relationships and impulses, human beings are being turned back into precisely what the developmental law of society, the principle of the self, had opposed: mere examples of the species, identical to one another through isolation within the compulsively controlled collectivity. (29)

This does not amount to saying that individuals have no place in modern societies, but rather that they are constrained to play the role of means.

1 Originally, Tolstoy wrote the quoted words in German: "Der Krieg muss im Raum verlegt werden. Der Ansicht kann ich nicht genug Preis geben. […] [D]er Zweck ist nur dem Feind so schwächen, so kann man gewiss nicht den Verlust der Privat-Personen in Achtung nehmen" (Tolstoy 690).

The relationship between the soldier and the army, the model on which modern bureaucracies were based, is analogous to the relationship between the individual and society. According to Tolstoy, soldiers are insignificant atoms, drops in the ocean of men. But when put together in an army, they are parts of an enormous and powerful whole (Tolstoy 212–213). This relationship between the particle and the whole does not make individual human beings any more powerful. On the contrary, soldiers are mere cogs in a machine; they join "the common motion the result and aim of which are beyond [their] ken" (Tolstoy 224).

However, maybe the most striking example of how Enlightenment annihilates individuality is Pierre's imprisonment by the French army. The driving force that moves this bureaucratic machinery is the unrestricted logic of equalization. Perfect equality not only voids titles and hierarchies; it also erases personal characteristics. As the shadow of this monstrous machine looms over his head, Pierre becomes a mere number.[2] For Tolstoy, the most distressing effect of absolute equality is not that Pierre receives the same treatment as the other prisoners despite his noble status —this is merely a symptom that something is profoundly wrong; once *égalité* is driven to its ultimate consequences, individuals are rendered dispensable. By becoming the *non plus ultra* of human relations, this bureaucratic logic reduces individuals to manageable and disposable objects. Through the lens of these impersonal procedures, the former human beings are reduced to data. And once "human affairs and lives [are] indicated by numbers, Pierre [is] merely a circumstance" (Tolstoy 852). These equalizing procedures may allow for more effective resource management, both of humans and material objects, but they also undermine human dignity. If humans no longer relate to each other; if managers deal only with ciphers, documents, and interchangeable resources, human lives become yet another item in an inventory. This is what allows Davout, the French bureaucrat/executioner *par excellence*, to dispose of the lives of the prisoners "without burdening his conscience" (Tolstoy 852).

2 It is interesting to observe how numerical (and fungible) identity becomes a trope for Tolstoy and his contemporaries. For Victor Hugo's Jean Valjean, escaping his fate as prisoner 24601, redeeming his soul, and finding an alternative to the most dehumanizing effects of Enlightenment, amount to the same thing.

This new system, smuggled into Russia by the French representatives of Enlightenment, has profound consequences over how individuals relate to social institutions. As traditional bonds of solidarity get replaced by objectified and instrumental relations, the state institutions become distant and estranged entities. Even though these institutions are definitely a product of human relations, the individual experiences them as a "mysterious power" (Tolstoy 850). Pierre is aware that the decisions made by this mysterious power are not inconsequential; Pierre's own life is subjected to trial, but these arcane and impersonal procedures are beyond his ken and influence. And although this human machine has become dubiously related to human well-being, individual will is incapable of stopping its uncontrollable motion: "Pierre felt himself to be an insignificant chip fallen among the wheels of a machine whose actions he did not understand but which was working well" (Tolstoy 851). In an enlightened dystopia, bureaucratic efficiency and dehumanization go hand in hand.

Moreover, once bureaucracy has engulfed interhuman relationships, the notion of moral agency loses whatever meaning it had left. An impersonal machinery, where procedures, regulations, and orders are mindlessly followed, is incompatible with traditional moral judgments. It is not only the anti-aristocratic and anti-Russian effects of the Enlightenment that worry Tolstoy. He is also concerned about how bureaucratization nullifies moral agency. Pierre's impotence does not only result from his condition as a prisoner, nor from the fact that he is unfamiliar with French administrative procedures. He feels overwhelmed by the French bureaucratic machine because it is impossible to assess its immorality by the standards of an individual-centered ethics.

> Then who was executing him, killing him, depriving him of life —him, Pierre, with all his memories, aspirations, hopes, and thoughts? Who was doing this? And Pierre felt that it was no one. / It was a system— a concurrence of circumstances. / A system of some sort was killing him —Pierre—depriving him of life, of everything, annihilating him. (Tolstoy 853)

What is so disquieting for Tolstoy is not only the fact that bureaucracies sentence to death innocent human beings. Similarly to Hanna Arendt, Tolstoy notices that the idea of moral responsibility and moral intention

crumble under the weight of blind obedience and impersonal procedures (Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* 288). Even though its effects may be atrocious, a machine cannot be held responsible for its mindless motion. The rise of bureaucratization, scientization, and abstraction amounts to the hypertrophy of society and the debasement of the individual.

To emphasize that bureaucratization and rationality are progressively engulfing and radically transforming social relations does not amount to saying that technique, science, or bureaucratic expertise have dealt successfully with the problems the individual is unable to solve by herself. On the contrary, even though the drive to scientization is stronger than ever, human societies are not better endowed to deal with uncertainty despite their exaggerated confidence in instrumental rationality. For Tolstoy, the science of war is the quintessential example of this phenomenon. Abstract plans are ever more frequently becoming the scheme through which war/life is undertaken.

The character of Pfuel, a German general who is profoundly devoted to ideas, allows Tolstoy to characterize the abstract military science. Pfuel is a devotee of the most meticulous planification who accepts no improvisation: "The principles laid down by me must be strictly adhered to" (Tolstoy 570). However, when abstractions accept no deviation, they become hypostatized. Pfuel's expertise is inherently flawed because he is unable to discern the profane origins of his immaculate abstractions: "He imagines that he knows the truth —science— which he himself has invented but which is for him the absolute truth" (Tolstoy 568). By conflating planification and perfection, this acolyte of science rejects all the empirical data that cannot conform to his hyper-idealized theories. That is to say, he sacrifices reality in favor of abstract theories. Whatever does not fit his ideal models is regarded as an abomination. This is the exact reason why Pfuel's science is useless: he has lost "sight of the theory's object —its practical application" (Tolstoy 569).

Tolstoy's critical appraisal of science is similar to one of the most salient themes of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. In this book, Adorno analyzes a major offshoot of Enlightenment: concept fetishism. Concepts are fetishized when they are assumed to be self-sufficient totalities (Adorno 11). Although the act of thinking is in itself the mutilation of particular content, fetishism of the concept takes place wherever abstractions are believed to

be independent from non-conceptual reality. The autarky of the concept is what leads Enlightenment to its most lethal and dehumanizing consequences. Everything becomes fungible once abstractions have declared the triviality of nonconceptualities.

Still, military strategy is not the only example of modern technique's incapability of dealing with reality. Science, "the supposed knowledge of absolute truth" (Tolstoy 568), is equally powerless when it comes to healing human beings. Tolstoy's skepticism towards science is also present in the way he portrays modern medicine. According to him, doctors are pseudo-healers. Regardless of their knowledgeable prescriptions, they are unqualified for dealing with human diseases. Natasha is unable to heal despite all the remedies recommended by her doctors. Not unlike military science, medicine fails to achieve its purpose because it fetichizes the concept. According to Tolstoy, medicine has lost its way by overemphasizing abstract remedies and by neglecting the irreducible differences between each individual case:

> Doctors came to see her singly and in consultation, talked much in French, German, and Latin, blamed one another, and prescribed a great variety of medicines for all the diseases known to them, but the simple idea never occurred to any of them that they could not know the disease Natasha was suffering from, as no disease suffered by a live man can be known, for every living person has his own peculiarities and always has his own peculiar, personal, novel, complicated disease, unknown to medicine. (Tolstoy 582)

However, Tolstoy does not disallow science and medicine altogether. He assigns them a more modest goal: science/medicine must acknowledge that solving the desperate conditions of human existence is beyond its reach; it must constrain itself to bringing comfort.

> Their usefulness did not depend on making the patient swallow substances for the most part harmful […] but they were useful, necessary, and indispensable because they satisfied a mental need of the invalid and of those who loved her […] They satisfied that internal human need for hope of relief, for sympathy, and that something should be done, which is felt by those who are suffering. (Tolstoy 582)

Science may not be very different from a placebo, but even placebos are useful under certain circumstances. By reassessing the capabilities of modern technique, Tolstoy is offering an alternative to concept fetishism.

While faith in science's capabilities has proven itself to be misplaced, the traditional mechanisms for coping with existential anxiety have become steadily inadequate for providing satisfactory answers. In the past, religions amounted to metanarratives that provided human societies with an answer for their existential concerns; similarly, they offered human beings a common cultural referent that provided unity and a sense of community despite difference. But modern religions are not able to play the same roles. Although ancient rituals and old religious formulas are still performed, they have become the shell that surrounds a hollow kernel. In other words, religion does not fill the spiritual needs of society as it did in the past. Tolstoy portrays this transformation by various means. For example, by means of Hélène's hypocritical religiosity. Hélène, as a good disciple of modern times, has understood that "the aim of every religion was merely to preserve certain properties while affording satisfaction to human desires" (Tolstoy 744). That is, religion does not play a metaphysical function anymore, nor does it strengthen mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* 92). If, according to Durkheim, traditional religions are expressions of a collective reality (*The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* 10), religion in Tolstoian Russia was slowly becoming a hollow set of rules subordinated to self-indulgence and individualistic pleasure.

Of course, religion for Tolstoy is more than a half-hearted alibi contrived to conceal base ambitions. This is the case of Natasha's rediscovery of religion after she breaks off her engagement to Andrew, and after she fails to elope with Anatole. However, even this non-hedonistic way of experiencing religion has been radically altered by Enlightenment. Natasha's religiosity is a means to mend *her* soul, not a means to commune with society. This is revealed by how she experiences mass and the special prayer delivered as the French army heads towards Moscow:

> She shared with all her heart in the prayer for the spirit of righteousness, for the strengthening of the heart by faith and hope, and its animation by love. But she could not pray that her enemies might be trampled under foot

> when but a few minutes before she had been wishing she had more of them that she might pray for them. (Tolstoy 590)

Natasha's ambiguous assessment of the special prayer should be explained by the shifting role of religion in modern societies. If she is unable to partake in the belligerent message of the prayer, it is because she does not fully experience the social dimension of religion. Her religiosity may be authentic, but its foundations are rooted in the private sphere. Once Enlightenment has stripped life of transcendent meaning, religiosity becomes an individual choice.[3] According to Weber, rationalization and intellectualization have forced sublime values out of the public sphere. Although these values have not been completely vanquished, they no longer weld communities together. The influence of religions has shifted from the great communities to small and intimate circles and personal situations (Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* 155). Once Enlightenment has swept through our societies, "the *individual has to decide* which is God for him and which is the devil" (Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* 148)[4]. Nevertheless, this individual palliative is a fragile surrogate for the existential certainties of yore. Another consequence of Enlightenment closely related to this one is the undermining of the common elements that held together the traditional Russian society. *War and Peace* is also a nostalgic reassessment of the mythical Russian solidarity. If characters like Pierre and Andrew experience such an ardent desire for reconciling themselves with the peasants and with rank-and-file soldiers, it is because they lament the passing by of the harmonious golden age of Russian society. In contrast with this ideal, it is impossible for them, two noblemen who have been imbued with enlightened ideals and with European values, to establish a straightforward communication with the rest of their society.

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3 This process depicted by Tolstoy is analogous to what Charles Taylor understands by secularization. According to Taylor, secularization does not mean that religion is slowly but relentlessly decaying away; people are not inevitably becoming unbelievers. For Taylor, the conditions of belief have changed. While in non-secular societies believing in God is unchallenged and unproblematic, individuals in secular societies experience faith as just one option among others: "Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives" (Taylor 3). Thus, secularization is one the manifold effects brought forth by Enlightenment that Tolstoy chose to depict and criticize in *War and Peace*.

4 Emphasis added.

Pierre fails to persuade his fellow freemasons about his reformation proposal because there is no common ground over which genuine communication is possible (Tolstoy 381–383). Although freemasons nominally share the same ideals, these ideals do not amount to the basis of a community. As Pierre himself explains, the majority of the freemasons (and, by analogy, the majority of Russian high society) are altogether indifferent to the mystical aspects of their order. Most of them see in freemasonry nothing "but external forms and ceremonies" (Tolstoy 382); even though they are zealous guardians of these forms, they are largely indifferent to their significance. Even worse, for the more recent members of the brotherhood, freemasonry is little more than an opportunity for networking.

Similarly, despite his attempts to distance himself from his noble milieu and its suffocating forms, Andrew is unable to establish a genuine bond with the lower strata of Russian society. Although Bolkonski is respected and well-regarded by the soldiers in his regiment; although "he realized the existence of other human interests entirely aloof from his own and just as legitimate as those that occupied him" (Tolstoy 627), he is still too worried about the cleanliness of the water in which his company bathes. At the same time, the fact that the rank-and-file soldiers continuously refer to him by his title of nobility illustrates the insuperable barrier that frustrates authentic communion (Tolstoy 627–628). The distance that separates the peasantry and the nobility seems only too overwhelming. This is exactly why Princess Mary is unable to reach a friendly understanding with her family's serfs. There is an insurmountable cleavage and misunderstanding that separates them, and this estrangement cannot be overcome through rational means (Tolstoy 647–648).

These byproducts of Enlightenment —the decline of individuality and the collapse of a common ground— are so deleterious for Tolstoy because they undermine what Hanna Arendt would have called the "world". According to Arendt, the public realm or the world is what keeps people together; it is a world of things that humans have in common and that relates them to each other (*The Human Condition* 52). There is no togetherness where there is no public realm. This world is not natural; it is not identical to nature or to the earth because it cannot be reduced to a physical space. The public realm is a human artifact that relates and separates human beings at the same time. This last characteristic of the public realm is particularly important

because it underscores that both a common identity and diversity are part and parcel of the world. Without the coexistence of a common meeting ground and utter diversity, without sameness and multiple perspectives, the public realm cannot reliably appear (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 57). The Tolstoian characters experience an existential crisis because they either face the threat of an absolute and dehumanizing equalization, or they are "imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 58). And it is the Enlightenment that has laid the underpinnings of this twofold threat.

The distressing encounter with disenchantment

Given that Enlightenment drastically alters the way in which human beings engage with their own world, it is not surprising that *War and Peace* pays particular attention to representing one of its most emblematic features: the disenchantment of the world. But what is this disenchantment and how does it relate to Enlightenment? According to Max Weber, disenchantment is a process that has radically changed how human beings conceive their own lives.[5] By means of an increasing intellectualization and rationalization, and assisted by increasingly sophisticated technical means, disenchantment has rendered our lives meaningless:

> [C]ivilized man, placed in the midst of the continuous enrichment of culture by ideas, knowledge, and problems, may become "tired of life" but not "satiated with life". He catches only the most minute part of what the life of the spirit brings forth ever anew, and what he seizes is always something provisional and not definitive, and therefore death for him is a meaningless occurrence. And because death is meaningless, civilized life as such is meaningless; by its very "progressiveness" it gives death the imprint of meaninglessness. (Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* 140)[6]

5 The Weberian concept of *Entzauberung der Welt* has sparked numerous discussions since its inception. Contemporary scholars in fields such as sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and history still find this concept useful. See, for example, Gauchet; Carroll; Jenkins; Grosby.

6 Although Weber borrowed the phrase "disenchantment of the world" from Friedrich Schiller, in the above cited passage he is thinking explicitly about Tolstoy.

Intellectualization and rationalization, two of the prodigy children of Enlightenment, have stripped public life of its mysteries and ultimate values. As mentioned before, this does not necessarily mean that modern societies are beyond good and evil; this means that disenchantment has expelled these values from the public sphere. The individual has been forced to live her life according to her own personal and precarious assessments.

This sense of meaninglessness is continuously portrayed in *War and Peace*. Pierre offers one of the best examples of how the individual's certainties are rendered asunder by Enlightenment. Pierre is continuously experiencing existential dilemmas. For example, in the first chapter of Book VIII, he faces the following crisis:

> "What for? Why? What is it going on in the world?" he would ask himself in perplexity several times a day, involuntarily beginning to reflect anew on the meaning of the phenomena of life; but knowing by experience that there were no answers to these questions he made haste to turn away from them. (Tolstoy 477)

Pierre's state of mind is unbearable not because of his amorous deceptions or because of his benefactor's death. The questions that haunt him are symptomatic of a deeper crisis to which there is no transcendental answer.

This is not the only means by which Tolstoy depicts Pierre's existential concerns. The allegory of the "position" underscores the existential aimlessness experienced in the face of an uncertain reality whose elements are no longer bound together by a transcendental meaning. Just before the battle of Borodino, Pierre travels towards the battlefield and looks for the position occupied by the army. However, he is unable to make sense of anything despite all his efforts:

> All that Pierre saw was so indefinite that neither the left nor the right side of the field fully satisfied his expectations. Nowhere could he see the battlefield he had expected to find, but only fields, meadows, troops, woods, the smoke of campfires, villages, mounds, and streams; and try as he would he could descry no military "position" in this place which teemed with life, nor could he even distinguish our troops from the enemy's. (Tolstoy 678)

This allegory is revealing both of Tolstoy's metaphysical conception and of Pierre's existential crisis. The image registered by Pierre is that of utter chaos. The field/reality is marked by indefiniteness and by a tumultuous heterogeneity. As he contemplates a field teeming with life, *i.e.*, the place where reality is more "real", Pierre experiences an intense sense of disorientation. Life is certainly not what he has been told nor what he expected. The fact that Pierre is not even capable of distinguishing between the Russian troops and the enemy's reveals to what extent he lacks a moral compass to clearly discriminate good from evil. This anarchic experience is exactly what human beings endure when their world has been disenchanted.

But human beings do not face passively the disenchantment of the world. To guarantee their self-preservation, individuals are constrained to cope with the conditions imposed by the Enlightenment. However, there is not a single way to try to avoid the most uncomfortable effects of a disenchanted world. Once the powerful metanarratives of the past have collapsed under the weight of the Enlightenment, human beings make use of heterogeneous individual strategies to reenchant the world.

One of these multiform strategies depicted in *War and Peace* is Nicholas Rostov's cult for Alexander I. His devotion for the czar is not an innate belief nor does it sprout spontaneously. It is a reaction that develops as Nicholas undergoes war and its horrors. Nicholas's experience with the war in 1805 is neither heroic nor successful. Even worse, when he pays a visit to his injured comrade Denisov at a military hospital, he becomes a first-hand witness of the most appalling effects of war/life. Unforeseen death, maimed soldiers, and unjustifiable misery are just some of the gruesome consequences that present themselves unmediated to Nicholas. How can we maintain our impulse towards self-preservation despite such a ruthless and chaotic reality?

Nicholas finds the answer to this poignant question in the cult of the Emperor. His is not mere loyalty nor bureaucratic subordination. Rostov discovers godlike features in Alexander, for example, omniscience. This superhuman characterization becomes visible when Rostov attempts to deliver Denisov's petition to the Emperor. His friend has been thrown in a dire position after commandeering Russian army's provisions. Although Denisov's intentions were irreproachable, military discipline demands that he is punished. Denisov pleads his case to the czar because he is the only one who can reestablish justice. So, Nicholas commends his friend's acquittal

to the omniscience of Alexander I: "He would understand on whose side justice lies. He understands everything, knows everything. Who can be more just, more magnanimous than he?" (Tolstoy 359). And even though the czar refuses to perform the miracle, Rostov's faith does not dwindle (Tolstoy 361). The contradictory answers and deeds of god are not a strong enough reason for doubting his majesty. His mysterious behavior only increases the faith of those who believe. God works in mysterious ways, and even though his miracles are never performed when they are most needed, his divinity never fades away.

But what is the point of resuscitating god when he proves over and over again to be so unreliable? Why do human beings hang on to contradictory idols who are unable to withstand the hammer's philosophizing? In other words, what is the point of reenchanting the world? Tolstoy provides a very cogent answer: individuals reenchant the world because otherwise they would be forced to deal with nothingness. After the Treaties of Tilsit were signed, after Buonaparte is transformed by imperial decree in the Emperor Napoleon, and after the Antichrist is officially honored as an ally, the divine incongruities become more salient than ever. Nicholas is presented with an excruciating dilemma: accept that god is dead and plunge himself into a disenchanted world, or drown his doubts in alcohol to escape the overbearing weight of uncertainty. He chooses the latter:

> "How can you judge what's best?" He cried, the blood suddenly rushing to his face. "How can you judge the Emperor's actions? What right have we to argue? We cannot comprehend either the Emperor's aims or his actions! […] We are not diplomatic officials, we are soldiers and nothing more," he went on. "If we are ordered to die, we must die. If we are punished, it means that we have deserved it, it's not for you to judge. If the Emperor pleases to recognize Bonaparte as emperor and to conclude an alliance with him, it means that that is the right thing to do. If once we begin judging and arguing about everything, nothing sacred will be left! *That way we should be saying there is no God—nothing!* […] Our business is to do our duty, to fight and not to think. That's all …" (Tolstoy 364-365)[7]

7 Emphasis added.

Although tormented by doubts, Rostov choses to drown them with wine because he knows all too well what it is like to live in a godless world. Silencing one's own doubts is so important because if god were revealed as fake or non-existent, we would have to face a disenchanted world and, even worse, nothingness. Rostov's secular religion is a means to cope with uncertainty. And even though uncertainty is a permanent trend of human existence, and even though god-like humans are not untraditional, his religious reaction is new because his existential anguish is a byproduct of Enlightenment. His reaction is even more modern because this cult is strictly personal.

Modern uncertainty is so unpalatable because it is the result of a disenchanted world. And if this means that the traditional metanarratives are increasingly unconvincing and ineffective, it also means that evading the disenchanted world can be accomplished through unorthodox means. Nicholas, once again, offers an interesting example. His strong attachment to the army is not merely produced by his sense of duty:

> [H]ere was none of all that turmoil of the world at large, where he did not know his right place and took mistaken decisions […] Here, in the regiment, all was clear and simple. The whole world was divided into two unequal parts: one, our Pavlograd regiment; the other, all the rest. And the rest was no concern of his. In the regiment, everything was definite: who was lieutenant, who captain, who was a good fellow, who a bad one, and most of all, who was a comrade […] there was nothing to think out or decide, you had only to do nothing that was considered bad in the Pavlograd regiment and, when given an order, to do what was clearly, distinctly, and definitely ordered— and all would be well. (Tolstoy 345)

Nicholas finds in the army a place where everything is defined and ordered. The outer world's uncertainties have been exorcised by means of a straightforward chain of command and undisputable hierarchies. There are no ambiguities and no need to make any choice in this brave new world. Thinking and free will have been rendered unnecessary, even undesirable. In other words, Nicholas's regiment is a refuge against the anxiety of existence.

However, maybe the most accomplished portrayal of one of such unorthodox strategies for coping with modern uncertainty can be found in Pierre's conversion to freemasonry. It is telling that Pierre decides to join

this new faith as his world begins to fall apart after his bitter separation from Hélène. It is also telling that Bazdeev underscores both the limits of human understanding and the possibility of overcoming these limitations by means of freemasonry (Tolstoy 305–309). Bazdeev discourse is so persuasive because his message about a hidden meaning to life reaches Pierre in the precise moment his life seems so meaningless. Bazdeev's words resemble those of modern sects. He highlights human ignorance and the difficulty of obtaining knowledge about the divine. He claims to have a better hold of truth than most humans do, and he asserts that he even knows Pierre's history. Pierre is seduced by freemasonry because of his existential crisis, his dissatisfaction with himself, and his need to believe in something. Similarly to Rostov, Pierre is an example of how human beings deal with uncertainty in modern times.

But freemasonry is not only a strategy for coping with uncertainty; it is also a discourse tailored to produce it. In the second chapter of Book v, Tolstoy portrays the masonic initiation ceremony. This ritual has been carefully designed and performed to instill awe and veneration among the newcomers. Blindfolds and darkness, esoteric symbology, the sense of being alone and afraid in an unknown place; these are all resources to exploit the individual's feeling of uncertainty and helplessness. But it is the aims of the Order that which offers a better picture of how this kind of modern efforts to reenchant the world works. In this section, which could have been written by Nietzsche or Foucault, Tolstoy portrays the intimate relationship between knowledge and power. His dissection of sects and their discourses offers us a vivid outline of how these organizations both construct and manage the spiritual needs of human beings.

The primary aim of freemasonry amounts to creating truth:

> The first and chief object of our Order, the foundation on which it rests and which no human power can destroy, is the preservation and handling on the posterity of a certain important mystery … which has come down to us from the remotest ages, even from the first man— a mystery on which perhaps the fate of mankind depends. (Tolstoy 312)

Sects become relevant because they convey an important revelation: life has a meaning. Reality and the fate of humankind are structured according

to this mysterious principle. In other words, it is by means of this mystery that we are able to make sense of a chaotic reality and to understand our purpose in life. This important principle is what normally allows human beings to distinguish what is valuable from what is worthless, what is good from what is evil, what is true from what is false. Ultimately, this mystery amounts to knowledge.

But this mystery/knowledge is not acquired spontaneously nor is it available immediately to everyone everywhere. Sectarians are not only prophets; they are also teachers and disciplinarians. This is precisely what the secondary aim of the Order stands for:

> [S]ince this mystery is of such a nature that nobody can know or use it unless he has been prepared by long and diligent self-purification, not everyone can hope to attain it quickly. Hence we have a secondary aim, that of preparing our members as much as possible to reform their hearts, to purify and enlighten their minds, by means handed on to us by tradition from those who have striven to attain this mystery, and there fight to render them capable of receiving it. (Tolstoy 312)

To access the important mystery, the prospective members of the Order must accept the epistemic authority of freemasons. Thus, this secondary aim implies a hierarchization of the relationships among human beings. Initiates acknowledge their superiors' authority because they assume that it is only through obedience that they will be able to access that eternal and unchangeable mystery. Moreover, this second aim also illustrates that sects play an important disciplinary role. To attain the mystery, the individual must subject her human nature to a reform. Enlightenment, preparation, and purification are little more than synonyms for describing the same process: a successful escape from the horrors of chaos and uncertainty can only be achieved by means of discipline. Borrowing from Foucault's terminology, we might say that the Tolstoian freemasons knew all too well that the production of a set of truths was necessary for establishing a certain way of governing themselves (Foucault 79).

However, discourses and discipline are not sufficient conditions for reenchanting the world. It is the third and last aim of the order which is more directly related with reenchantment:

> By purifying and regenerating our members we try, thirdly, to improve the whole human race, offering it in our members an example of piety and virtue, and thereby try with all our might to *combat the evil which sways the world*. (Tolstoy 313)

According to Weber, one of the key features of a disenchanted world is its repudiation of magical thinking (Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 320). If religious movements such as puritanism played a key role in the process of disenchantment, it was because they radically changed the way human beings thought about their world. While in primitive religions human beings interacted with their reality through magic, modern worldviews categorically reject that either magic or its surrogates can produce practical effects or influence practical outcomes (Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 398). Disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) amounts to "demagication" because magic is no longer a means for salvation. But Tolstoy's freemasons refuse to abandon magical thinking. Just as Catholic sacraments are residues of the yearning to attain salvation through magical means, the belief that masonic purification and regeneration can combat evil is a surrogate of magic. The Tolstoian freemasonry is an attempt to reenchant the world because it rests on the conviction that human beings can still strive for salvation.

Of course, freemasonry is not the only example of Pierre's attempt to reenchant the world. Count Bezukhov's faith in numerology is another strategy for coping with uncertainty. The fact that Pierre resorts to numbers to anticipate future events accounts for two things: on the one hand, Bezukhov is partially aware that history is too unpredictable and chaotic, but he refuses to fully accept this fact because he is still unable to bear the weight of utter contingency. It is no coincidence that Pierre (and the rest of the Tolstoian Russians in the face of the Napoleonic invasion) resorts to numerology when his existential conditions are most dire. Tolstoy describes this critical moment in Pierre's life as follows:

> latterly, when more and more disquieting reports came from the seat of war […] an ever-increasing restlessness, which he could not explain, took possession of him. He felt that the condition he was in could not continue long, that a catastrophe was coming which would change his whole life, and

> he impatiently sought everywhere for signs of that approaching catastrophe. (Tolstoy 591)

It is under these conditions that he finds solace in numerology. On the other hand, Pierre does not only believe that correctly reading the numbers amounts to making sense of the world's order; he is also convinced that revealing their secret will ultimately allow him to influence historical events. If he decides to assassinate Napoleon, it is because he believes in the magical properties of numbers and prophecies.

Concluding remarks

I have argued throughout this paper that, to fully account for Tolstoy's intentions in *War and Peace*, his critique of the Enlightenment must be acknowledged as one of the key elements that binds together the whole book. Nonetheless, this dimension of *War and Peace* has remained understudied.[8] Moreover, this book's contribution to philosophical debates has not always been taken seriously.

Right after its publication, the philosophical dimension of *War and Peace* was spurned by Tolstoy's contemporaries. Although Turgenev praised the book, he simultaneously criticized its "deformities". In his correspondence, the Russian novelist characterized Tolstoy's philosophizing as a "misfortune", as "unpleasant", and as "childish" (qtd. in Tolstoy 1107). It is also telling that the third edition of *War and Peace*, published in 1873, removed the philosophical passages from its original place and grouped them in an appendix. Even those who acknowledged the value of Tolstoy's philosophy were reluctant to accept the compatibility of his philosophical digressions with the rest of the book. Nikolay Strakhov claimed that the philosophical vein should be removed from *War and Peace* and published as a separate book (qtd. in Ginzburg 254). Similarly, the fact that the book's contemporary cinematic adaptations efface Tolstoy's philosophical disquisitions suggests that his legacy belongs exclusively to the literary realm.

8 Isaiah Berlin's parallel between Tolstoy and de Maistre shows that the anti-Enlightenment elements of the Tolstoian corpus have not gone completely unnoticed (Berlin 53–90). A similar insight is to be found in Robert Grant (205–208). However, this interpretation is better characterized as an anomaly and deserves to be further explored.

Fortunately, this has not been the only interpretation of *War and Peace*'s philosophical streak. For instance, Boris Eikhenbaum (226–228) reassessed the importance of the book's philosophical digressions. Eikhenbaum argued that these digressions constitute a structural element, and that they allowed Tolstoy to transform the novel into an epic. Digressions became key stylistic devices that redefined the genre of *War and Peace*. And although this claim may suggest that the digressions are only means to a literary goal, it can allow us to reassess the role that philosophy plays in this book. A somewhat similar approach is given by Saul Morson, who has praised Tolstoy as a "philosopher of the present" (*Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in 'War and Peace'* 270). By focusing on change, uncertainty, and the ordinary, Tolstoy offered an alternative to those philosophies that construct interpretative telescopes and that deal only with abstractions. However, Morson underscores that Tolstoy's philosophical considerations are present throughout *War and Peace*. The form of the novel, its plot, and its psychological characterizations are informed by his philosophy. Thus, Tolstoy's literary artistry is not separate from his philosophical ideas, nor are the latter constrained to the digressions. *War and Peace* was profoundly shaped by Tolstoy's philosophy (Morson, "War and Peace" 66, 78).

Jeff Love's *The Overcoming of History in 'War and Peace'* is a further example of how to read this book in philosophical key. In this text, Love analyses *War and Peace*'s philosophy of history. Not only are Tolstoy's philosophical views coherent and complex; he seems to be engaged in a close dialogue with different philosophical traditions. For example, by borrowing concepts from calculus to restructure historiographic narrative, Tolstoy deals with theoretical problems that also occupied philosophers such as Zeno, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Hegel, and Schopenhauer (Love 69–85). Moreover, Love (90–95) argues that the formal organization of *War and Peace* was configured in accordance with Tolstoy's philosophy of history. This means that *War and Peace* has far-reaching aesthetic consequences. Tolstoy's narrative innovation —using various kinds of juxtapositions of smaller narrative configurations— is at odds with traditional narrative approaches that underscore the importance of causal progression and causal coordination of action. For centuries, Aristotelian poetics defined how a good plot should be structured. Nevertheless, *War and Peace* deliberately offered a narrative structure that is both at odds with Aristotelian poetics and that is

compatible with Tolstoy's philosophy of history. Thus, in addition to offering a sophisticated philosophical argument about how history works, *War and Peace* presents a narrative model that partakes in major aesthetical debates.

This paper shares the conviction that *War and Peace* should be read in philosophical key. Tolstoy's book could not be fully understood without paying close attention to its philosophical ideas. These ideas are not superfluous appendices nor deformities that compromise the artistic merit of the novel. On the contrary, they are inextricably linked to the book's spirit and cannot be innocuously detached from it. However, this paper also tries to focus on a philosophical problem that has received limited attention from scholarly literature: *War and Peace*'s critique of the Enlightenment.

Tolstoy's skeptical appraisal of the social changes that threatened Russian traditional culture have not gone unnoticed in scholarly literature. For instance, Nikolay Strakhov argued that the leitmotif of *War and Peace* was the antithesis between two kinds of heroism: the one ingrained in the Russian people and the one boasted by the European invaders (qtd. in Tolstoy 1103–1106). While Russian heroism is characterized by its modesty, simplicity, goodness, and truth, the European one is defined by acting out of evil, by the exaggeration of its own significance, and by its falseness. More importantly, this latter heroism, represented by Napoleon and the French invaders, is predatory and directly threatens Russian simplicity. Thus, according to Strakhov, *War and Peace* is defined by the conflict between the Russian spiritual order and the European sociocultural trends that threatened its existence. A more recent example is the one offered by Kathryn Feuer. This author underscored Tolstoy's personal experience with the developments of 1856 as the driving force that inspired *War and Peace*. According to her, the book was conceived as a reaction to factors such as the anti-aristocratic effects of the emancipation of the serfs; the unstable class relationships of this period; or the rise to prominence of an *intelligentsia* without ties to the gentry (*i.e.*, the *raznochintsy*) (Feuer 138). In other words, Feuer claims that one of the main reasons why *War and Peace* deals with sociocultural changes is Tolstoy's aristocratic prejudices.

Nevertheless, to scorn the *raznochintsy* or Europeanizing trends does not amount to problematizing the Enlightenment. Accordingly, these interpretations leave out an aspect that is crucial for understanding *War and Peace*. Even though they are partially true, they fail to address important

elements of Tolstoy's critique. Tolstoy was certainly driven by aristocratic pride, and there is no doubt that the clash of civilizations shaped his worldview. But neither classism nor Russianness account satisfactorily for that other force that gave birth to the existential conflicts depicted throughout *War and Peace*. One of the major themes of this book is the increasing tensions between individuals and their disenchanted world. The examples analyzed in this paper show that there is something more behind Tolstoy's distrust of the process that was unrelentingly undermining the existential certainties so dear to him and to his society; that something could be called Enlightenment. Thus, one of my chief aims in this paper was to present and examine various examples that allow us to acknowledge Tolstoy's distrust of Enlightenment as one of the central forces that brought forth *War and Peace*. This paper also shows that Tolstoian philosophy foreshadows many of the discipline's still ongoing debates. Many of the elements of Tolstoy's critique of the Enlightenment prefigure the arguments of philosophers such as Adorno, Arendt, Foucault, Horkheimer, or Weber. In cases like the concept of disenchantment, the influence of Tolstoy was even made explicit by Weber himself.

However, it should be acknowledged that Tolstoy did not reject the Enlightenment *tout court*. As some researchers have argued, we can find in the Tolstoyan corpus a considerable number of instances in which the Russian writer explicitly endorsed the ideas of the *encyclopédistes* (Polosina and Polyana 53–60). Moreover, as Lina Steiner (775, 778, 794) has argued, Tolstoy regarded himself as a cultural and moral reformer, and he was intellectually drawn to the *Aufklärung*.

How can we make sense of these seemingly contradictory interpretations? As has been pointed out a number of times, the Enlightenment is a Janus-faced historical process. Only a handful of insightful twenty-century observers were able to grasp the tensions between the most repulsive consequences of a disenchanted world and the seemingly altruistic ideals associated with Modernity. Even today, many people adhere to some of the values of the Enlightenment while simultaneously rejecting its inhumane effects. The somber effects of modernization do not necessarily resemble the luminous ideals promoted by the *encyclopédistes*. Despite Tolstoy's keen understanding of the consequences of *Entzauberung*, he might have been unable to fully understand the relationship between these ideals and their effects.

More importantly, we should also keep in mind that the Enlightenment, as a heterogeneous sociocultural project, does not necessarily lead to a dehumanized world. In fact, it would be more accurate to speak of different kinds of modernities or different modern *ethea* (Echeverría 38–39). Not all of the projects that are usually included under the rubric of Modernity produce the same effects; even more, some of them are incompatible. Tolstoy embraced a particular set of enlightened values. This strain, probably inspired by Herder and a sentiment of brotherly love (Steiner 779–787, 793), was at odds with the actually existing Modernity. In any case, further research is needed to better understand the nuances of the relationship between Tolstoy and the Enlightenment throughout his life.[9]

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9 It could be argued that Tolstoy subscribed to the same pessimistic assessment of modern societies when he wrote *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886). In this novella, his negative portrayal of bureaucracy, of modern medicine, of the fungibility of the individual, and of a frenchified society reiterates the same critique of a disenchanted world that characterizes *War and Peace*. In other words, Tolstoy's critique of the Enlightenment should not be brushed aside as a juvenile mistake.

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