

A Faith that Stands to Reason

The intersection of faith, love, and reason in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*

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Introduction

Although Leo Tolstoy's 1873 fictional novel *Anna Karenina* takes its title from one of its primary characters, the 817-page Russian novel follows at least five characters at a time, documenting their perspectives, their inner thoughts and desires, and their relationships with each other. As Tolstoy intertwines his own voice among his characters' he proposes a meaning of life that seems to align perfectly with the Christian tradition. But a closer look at his thesis on faith and reason, and their relations to love, reveals the difference between his paradigm and the Christian one. In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy expects a powerful understanding of love and a distancing from reason in his meaning of life. Tolstoy posits real love is not reasonable, but faithful. It is faithful in the sense that it is full of belief; love believes in the inherent meaning of life, that all souls have value. It believes according to faith alone, without reason, because reason distracts and subtracts from preexisting knowledge of truth. This paper will explore Tolstoy's understanding of love by faith alone, without reason, as the meaning of life, and test his heterodox thesis against Christian orthodoxy.

Arriving at the universal truth by faith, sans reason

As his wife Kitty would say, Konstantin Levin is a funny man. Although he completely loves Kitty, who is a faithful believer, he himself cannot come to love or believe in God and the tenets of the church. His attempts to ignore this dissonance between his wife's strong conviction and his stubborn unbelief finally fail at the birth of his son. Terrified as Kitty goes into labor, Levin cries out to God, acknowledging his Creator for the first time in his life. Curious now, he

begins to read literature about the church, which eventually dissatisfies him with its multiple perspectives. Confused,

... he [is] not himself and [lives] through terrible moments.

‘Without knowing what I am and why I’m here, it is impossible for me to live. And I cannot know that, therefore I cannot live,’ Levin would say to himself.

‘In infinite time, in the infinity of matter, in infinite space, a bubble-organism separates itself, and that bubble holds out for a while and then bursts, and that bubble is—me.’ ...

This was the latest belief on which all researches of the human mind in almost all fields were built. This was the reigning conviction, and out of all other explanations it was precisely this one that Levin, himself not knowing when or how, had involuntarily adopted as being at any rate the most clear.

But it was not only untrue, it was the cruel mockery of some evil power, evil and offensive, which it was impossible to submit to.

It was necessary to be delivered from this power. And deliverance was within everyone’s reach. It was necessary to stop this dependence on evil. And there was one means—death.

And, happy in his family life, a healthy man, Levin was several times so close to suicide that he hid a rope lest he hang himself with it, and was afraid to go about with a rifle lest he shoot himself.

But Levin did not shoot himself or hang himself and went on living.¹

Levin’s lack of faith confronts him with the reality of “infinite time, [...] matter, [and] space” looming over the present meaninglessness of his own fleeting life, inaugurating a frantic and haunting existential crisis. “All researches of the human mind in almost all fields” of reason and explanations have finally disappointed him, not only as a belief “untrue” and false, but as an “evil power” that has convinced him subconsciously of its “evil and offensive” agenda. Suddenly aware of his dangerously, “involuntarily adopted” beliefs founded on deceitful reason, Levin identifies a deliverance “necessary to stop this dependence on evil.” According to reason, which ignores a man’s circumstantial happiness, a meaningless death offers the most appropriate deliverance from a meaningless life. However, reason fails to completely convince Levin that

¹ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 788-9.

suicide is the answer; for the sake of something outside of reason itself, he continues living despite his despair. Thanks to his faculties of reason, Levin discovers the best escape from the power of death is death itself—a conclusion close to Christian orthodoxy, but not quite accurate.

His existential questions continue to plague his thoughts during harvest time, and manifest during a casual conversation with Fyodor, a muzhik who works for him. They talk about “... an upright old man [who] lives for the soul [and] remembers God,” and Levin can’t help but ask, “ ‘How’s that? Remembers God? Lives for the soul?’ ” to which Fyodor replies, “ ‘Everybody knows how—by the truth, by God’s way. People are different.’ ”² This simple statement, that everyone inherently knows to live for God, by God’s truth, quickens a sudden joy of understanding that Levin later processes and recognizes as the purpose of life:

To live not for one’s own needs but for God. ...

Fyodor says it’s bad to live for the belly and that one should live for the truth, for God, and [Levin understands] him from a hint! And [Levin] and millions of people who lived years ago and are living now, muzhiks, the poor in spirit, and the wise men who have thought and written about it, saying the same thing in their vague language—[Levin and all people agree] on this one thing: what [humankind] should live for and what is good. [He] and all people have only one firm, unquestionable and clear knowledge, and this knowledge cannot be explained by reason—it is outside it, and has no causes, and can have no consequences. ...

Therefore the good is outside the chain of cause and effect.”³

Unlike the lofty “researches of the human mind”⁴ with all its reasonableness, logic, and death, Levin finds the true purpose for living is accessible to “all people” and “cannot be explained by reason” at all. Unlike a knowledge attained by the selfish, appetitive logic of the belly or the logic of cause and effect, this knowledge communicates in its own universal “vague language” a “firm, unquestionable and clear knowledge.” This simple truth contains a purpose for living—

² Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 794.

³ *Ibid.*, 795.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 789.

living for God—and a standard of “what is good,” which shifts Levin’s paradigm to understand the true good lies “outside the chain of cause and effect.” That living is for God, and for what is good associates the two: God is good, and therefore the truth, or “God’s way,” is altogether good as well. Fyodor’s response not only solves Levin’s internal conflict about his own purpose in life, but also his disbelief of God’s existence. This recapitulated knowledge delivers him from despair in uniting his purpose with God’s existence, placing that relationship outside of reason and rendering it unaffected by cause and effect.

This nullifies any sort of utilitarianism between humanity’s purpose and God’s existence. When Levin considers Jesus’ second-greatest commandment in light of this discovery, he asks himself, “ ‘Was it through reason that I arrived at the necessity of loving my neighbour and not throttling him? ... Reason could not discover love for the other, because it’s unreasonable. ... And not only the pride of reason, but the stupidity of reason. And, above all—the slyness, precisely the slyness of reason. Precisely the swindling of reason.’ ”⁵ Here he revisits his initial conclusion about reason—a false imitation of evil power that requires a suicidal deliverance—and cannot reconcile it with the love that God commands. Since his conversation with Fyodor, he’s decided that the existence and truths of God are good in themselves, which makes loving his neighbor a “necessity,” instead of a utilitarian choice of cost-benefit analysis. Along with the simple truth of God’s existence, loving others has become a simple task that omits reason so entirely that he calls it “unreasonable.” Instead of guiding Levin to the truth, reason swindles him, promising a purposeful, reasonable life without the simple truth of loving one’s neighbor.

⁵ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 797.

So far, Tolstoy has established a universal truth that has nothing to do with reason, everything to do with faith, and ought to govern and direct all of humankind: live for God, the good. He connects this truth to knowledge and the Church when Levin begins to consider his own epistemology, telling himself, “ ‘what I know, I do not know by reason, it is given to me, it is revealed to me, and I know it by my heart, by faith in that thing that the Church confesses.’ ... And now it seemed to him that there was not a single belief of the Church that violated the main thing—faith in God, in the good, as the sole purpose of man.”⁶ Levin says faith, not reason, has revealed all knowledge to him, including knowledge of the Church. He traces the truths of the Church’s tenets back to the “main thing,” and realizes they not only agree, but completely align with his verdict, that faith in God, in the good, is the sole purpose of man. Faith is *the* tenet of the Church, of mankind, of life. In astonishment at the inherent value of faith, Levin asks, “‘Can this be faith?’ he wonder[s], afraid to believe his happiness. ‘My God, thank you!’ he [says], choking back the rising sobs and with both hands wiping away the tears that filled his eyes.”⁷ Compare this to Anna’s distraught, meaningless “‘My God! My God!’”⁸ after finally communicating honestly with her husband about her affair. Levin means it. Why? He’s renounces reason in exchange for intrinsic faith that informs his whole meaning of life, including the existence of God, the command to love, and his inherent knowledge.

⁶ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 799.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 800.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

Applying the lens: Levin

The meaning of life involves a man reclaiming the inherent truth of God and goodness, which then equips him to obey the second-greatest commandment and love his neighbor as himself. With such a revelation, Tolstoy provides a lens to evaluate his other characters' paradigms of purpose through as we study four characters' relationships and obedience to this command: pre-conversion Levin, Kitty Shcherbatsky, Anna Karenina herself, and Arsény Lvov.

When Levin returns to his countryside home, Tolstoy pays special attention to his bachelor worldview of love before his conversion:

If Konstantin Levin had been asked whether he loved the peasantry, he would have been quite at a loss to answer. He loved and did not love the peasantry, as he did people in general. Of course, being a good man, he tended to love people more than not to love them, and therefore the peasantry as well. But it was impossible for him to love or not love the peasantry as something special, because not only did he live with them, not only were all his interests bound up with theirs, but he considered himself part of the peasantry, did not see any special qualities or shortcomings in himself or in them, and could not contrast himself to them. ...

He had no definite opinion of the peasantry and would have had the same difficulty replying to the question whether he knew the peasantry as to the question whether he loved the peasantry. To say that he knew them would be the same for him to as to say that he knew people. He constantly observed and came to know all sorts of people, muzhik-people among them, whom he considered good and interesting people, and continually noticed new traits in them, changed his previous opinions and formed new ones.⁹

His knowledge of people dictates his love of people; the two are one for him. He aligns himself with all kinds of people. Because all people, including himself, are the same, he gives the same love to all people. Indeed, he has a preexisting value system of loving his neighbor as himself, and he seems to value the souls of mankind, but he has no objective standard or value system of love. His knowledge of people is ever-increasing according to his observations, and they change

⁹ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 238.

constantly. He loves them with a limited love, so to speak, especially since there is nothing special about his love towards them, or towards humanity in general.

Levin's brother presents a more static view of the peasants, and they butt heads in the guise of an intellectual conversation. To cool down, Levin works the fields with the peasants, where he

lost all awareness of time and had no idea whether it was late or early. A change now began to take place in his work which gave him enormous pleasure. In the midst of his work moments came to him when he forgot what he was doing and began to feel light, and in those moments his swath came out as even and good as Titus's. But as soon as he remembered what he was doing and started trying to do better, he at once felt how hard the work was and the swath came out badly.¹⁰

Now this requires no intellectual input or stimulation, just the work of his hands. In fact, joining the company of manual laborers stands so opposed to intellectual activity that he successfully begins to forget not only about his disheartening conversation with his brother, but also about the basic rational elements of the day, like the time of day, the technical particulars involved in mowing the fields, and the quality of his work. As he works, the rhythm of his scythe becomes quality work in itself, and thinking becomes unnecessary. In fact, thinking becomes detrimental and distracting. Instead of becoming bored with the methodical work of the field, he submits to it and lets it consume him, because only when

these moments of unconsciousness came, when it was possible for him not to think of what he was doing. The scythe cut by itself. These were happy moments. ...

The longer Levin mowed, the more often he felt those moments of oblivion during which it was no longer his arms that swung the scythe, but the scythe itself that lent motion to his whole body, full of life and conscious of itself, and, as if by magic, without a thought of it, the work got rightly and neatly done on its own. These were the most blissful moments.

¹⁰ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 251.

It was hard only when he had to stop this by now unconscious movement and think, when he had to mow around a tussock or an unweeded clump of sorrel.¹¹

Tolstoy describes Levin's habitual manual labor as an unconscious one, further implying a nullification of rational thought in this activity. Tolstoy links this to happiness and bliss, that Levin could wholly rely not only on his natural body, but also on the strength of his tools to complete these tasks, and have faith in its functions and effectiveness. When the appropriate tools are provided for the task at hand, Tolstoy is consistent to maintain his thesis, that reason has no place in such a scenario. Faith alone is necessary for a job well done. Furthermore, when Levin doubts his strength, and thinks "that he would surely fall, going up such a steep slope with a scythe, where it was hard to climb without a scythe [... he climbs] it and [does] what was needed. He [feels] that some external force moved him."¹² When Levin acts on what he inherently knows, without overthinking it, an external force unknown to him, empowers him to complete his task. Although Tolstoy refrains from labeling this external force as God Himself, he foreshadows Levin's conversion here.

Kitty Shcherbatsky

Kitty's path to recognizing the meaning of life inherent to her soul begins in Book I at a ball, where she waits with eager anticipation in hopes of a romantic love requited. The night begins, and "Kitty was having one of her happy days. ... Kitty also smiled here at the ball as she glanced at it in the mirror. In her bare shoulders and arms she felt a cold, marble-like quality that she especially liked. Her eyes shone, and her red lips could not help smiling from the sense of

¹¹ Ibid., 252.

¹² Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 256.

her own attractiveness.”¹³ She has an idea of the meaning of her own soul, but so far only in the material and aesthetic sense. She recognizes the value of this, and revels in it. Her happiness is dependent on her circumstances and relies on a utilitarian system of the “chain of cause and effect,”¹⁴ to use Levin’s language at his conversion. When Vronsky chooses Anna over her, Kitty’s broken heart becomes a physical illness that sends her on a trip abroad. She meets Varenka, who introduces her to the joys of loving one’s neighbor on Christian values, and here

It was revealed to her that, besides the instinctive life to which Kitty had given herself till then, there was a spiritual life. This life was revealed by religion, but a religion that had nothing in common with the one Kitty had known from childhood and which found expression in the liturgy and vigils at the Widows’ Home, where one could meet acquaintances, and in learning Slavonic texts by heart with a priest; it was a lofty, mysterious religion, bound up with a series of beautiful thoughts and feelings which one could not only believe in because one was told to, but could also love.¹⁵

Like Levin, Kitty begins to understand what her childhood tenets of religion truly appealed to. She starts to compare her old, familiar, “believe in because one was told to” paradigm of religion with this new one of love that engages the heart. Like Levin working for an overseer on the land, Kitty sees Varenka as the example, from whom

she understood that you had only to forget yourself and love others and you would be calm, happy and beautiful. And that was how Kitty wanted to be. Now that she had clearly understood what was most important, Kitty did not content herself with admiring it, but at once, with all her soul, gave herself to this new life that had opened to her.¹⁶

Varenka is the first to teach Kitty by example the ramification of believing by faith that life is about God and His value system of human souls: love your neighbor as yourself. However, Kitty’s vision of religion is not perfectly clear yet. She has seen merely the fruits of religion in

¹³ Ibid., 77.

¹⁴ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 795.

¹⁵ Ibid., 224.

¹⁶ Ibid., 224.

Varenka's peace, happiness, and beauty, and Kitty wants the fruits. In her sickness, she sees these fruits and pursues its origin with her whole soul. This becomes the start of her conversion, of new life, that consummates in a rebuke of her heart. Before Kitty leaves the German spa, her father visits and pokes at the fruits Kitty desired, telling her those actions would be better conducted humbly and unknown to those around her. This sparks Kitty's anger, and she lashes out at Varenka, irritably telling her

'It serves me right because it was all pretence, because it was all contrived and not from the heart. What did I have to do with some stranger? And it turned out that I caused a quarrel and that I did what nobody asked me to do. Because it was all pretence! pretence! pretence! ...'

'But what was the purpose of pretending?' Varenka said softly. ...

'So as to seem better to people, to myself, to God—to deceive everyone. No, I won't fall into that any more! Be bad, but at least don't be a liar, a deceiver! ... It's all not it. I can only live by my heart, and you live by rules. I loved you simply, but you probably only so as to save me, to teach me!'¹⁷

Upon realizing her heart had not the proper motivations to live honestly "by rules," the rules of Christian teachings, truly forgetting herself and loving others as Varenka does, Kitty points out her own pretentiousness with frustration. Merely doing the fruit by action alone did not guarantee a change in her heart. Rather, it only provided Kitty the opportunity to improperly practice empathy and instead project her own desires onto Varenka. She presumes Varenka's motivations in teaching Kitty were also self-serving, to play the higher, more respectable part and look down on Kitty's position. She accuses Varenka of taking advantage of the simple affection Kitty had to offer, but Varenka's confusion and gentleness speak louder than words could. Eventually, they reconcile, Tolstoy writes, and the cost of Kitty's realization is humbling indeed, but necessary.

¹⁷ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 235.

She did not renounce all that she had learned, but she understood that she had deceived herself in thinking that she could be what she wished to be. It was as if she came to her senses; she felt all the difficulty of keeping herself, without pretence and boastfulness, on that level to which she had wished to rise; besides, she felt all the weight of that world of grief, sickness and dying people in which she had been living; the efforts she had made to force herself to love it seemed tormenting to her, and she wished all the sooner to go to the fresh air, to Russia ...¹⁸

Regardless of her pretentiousness and wrong heart intentions, Tolstoy writes that Kitty still believes in what she learned, and doubly learned humility from her self-deception. Instead of a thing of mere forceful habit of actions, learning to love is a thing of self will. Although exterior forces may lead you to love, it must be unlocked and engaged intrinsically to ensure its authenticity and humility.

Kitty's fight to understand the meaning of life and the meaning of love completely abandons reason. Her conversion involves her internal struggle to first identify the truths of the church she blindly believed prior, then understand the connection between the church, forgetting oneself, and loving others, and finally testing the desires of her heart against the final meaning of a humble, intentional, unadulterated love.

Anna Karenina

Unlike Levin and Kitty, Anna's case does not progress—it regresses. She seems to understand the value of souls, and loving souls at the start of the novel, but meeting Vronsky sparks a downward spiral of an improper devaluing of souls until she eventually cheapens the value of her own soul and kills herself. When Dolly Shcherbatsky discovers her husband Stepan Arkadyich's unfaithfulness, Tolstoy introduces Anna Arkadyevna Karenin, Stepan's sister, as the

¹⁸ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 236.

savior of their marriage. Before Anna comforts her, Dolly rejects “ ‘All these consolations and exhortations and Christian forgiveness—[she’s] already thought of it all a thousand times, and it’s no good,’”¹⁹ a telling expression of Dolly’s Christian paradigm, or lack thereof. Dolly suspects that Stepan is using her just to have children, and she becomes paranoid that he has begun to invest all of his romantic love in another woman. She doubts the purpose of educating their children at the thought of Stepan’s potentially utilitarian attitude towards her, and Anna has the boldness to draw attention to the wool over Dolly’s eyes (“ ‘You’re so offended, so agitated, that you see many things wrongly.’”²⁰) and convey Stepan’s remorse and desire for forgiveness. Dolly withholds forgiveness until she asks Anna,

‘... but would you forgive?’

‘I don’t know, I can’t judge ... No, I can,’ said Anna, after some reflection; and having mentally grasped the situation and weighed it on her inner balance, she added: ‘No, I can, I can. Yes, I would forgive. I wouldn’t be the same, no, but I would forgive, and forgive in such a way as if it hadn’t happened, hadn’t happened at all.’

‘Well, naturally,’ Dolly quickly interrupted, as if she were saying something she had thought more than once, ‘otherwise it wouldn’t be forgiveness. If you forgive, it’s completely, completely.’²¹

Presently unknown to both of these women, Anna will soon reevaluate her inner balance, put her own husband in Dolly’s position, and find that she has no place to even consider her husband’s value under her new valuation of souls. For now, however, Anna’s hypothesis of complete forgiveness is the deciding factor for her sister-in-law to reconsider the Christian precept of forgiving Anna’s brother completely, completely.

Like Kitty, Anna’s transformation involves a pursuit of knowledge of herself, of her inner being. However, Anna does not appeal to her traditional Christian upbringing, but to her

¹⁹ Ibid., 66.

²⁰ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 69.

²¹ Ibid., 70-71.

unreliable feelings. Although Tolstoy writes of Anna's charming and curiously enchanting presence in Book I, he dedicates Book II to exploring Anna's struggle against knowing the right thing to do, knowing the desires of her heart, and deciding to follow the latter (instead of following the former, like Kitty did in Germany). Back at home in St. Petersburg, Anna returns to her bed with her husband, but "For a long time she waited motionless and then forgot about him. She was thinking about another man, she could see him, and felt how at this thought her heart filled with excitement and criminal joy."²² She is fully aware that her love for Vronsky has become an improper one, yet she still chooses to love his soul, and her thoughts of his soul. She attempts to believe an illusion, for

At first Anna sincerely believed that she was displeased with him for allowing himself to pursue her; but soon after her return from Moscow, having gone to a soiree where she thought she would meet him, and finding that he was not there, she clearly understood from the sadness which came over her that she was deceiving herself, that his pursuit not only was not unpleasant for her but constituted the entire interest of her life.²³

This passage captures Anna's thoughts before she begins her liaison with Vronsky. At this point, she takes time to process her inner thoughts and recognize where she has deluded herself. Her sadness at his absence becomes an indicator of her true feelings, Vronsky's attention is not at all an annoyance to her. Rather, her self-delusion has caused his efforts to fester into the most valuable aspect of her life. At this stage, Anna is aware of the truths and lies she tells herself about her value system of others' souls. Vronsky's value has steadily increased since his pursuit began, and she has yet to recognize how the value of the other souls in her life, especially that of her husband, have diminished because of Vronsky's efforts. His value reaches a godhood status,

²² Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 148.

²³ *Ibid.*, 28.

and the value of others dramatically drops when they fall, and when she first cries out to God, saying

‘My God! Forgive me!’ she said, sobbing, pressing his hands to her breast.

She felt herself so criminal and guilty that the only thing left for her was to humble herself and beg forgiveness; but as she had no one else in her life now except him, it was also to him that she addressed her plea for forgiveness. Looking at him, she physically felt her humiliation and could say nothing more. And he felt what a murderer must feel when he looks at the body he has deprived of life. This body deprived of life was their love, the first period of their love. There was something horrible and loathsome in his recollections of what had been paid for with this terrible price of shame. Shame at her spiritual nakedness weighed on her and communicated itself to him. But, despite all the murderer’s horror before the murdered body, he had to cut this body into pieces and hid it, he had to make use of what the murderer had gained by his murder. ...

‘Everything is finished,’ she said. ‘I have nothing but you. Remember that.’

‘How can I not remember what is my very life? For one minute of this happiness...’

‘What happiness?’ she said with loathing and horror, and her horror involuntarily communicated itself to him. ‘For God’s sake, not a word, not a word more.’²⁴

This is the Fall, the inciting incident of Anna’s regression into devaluing souls. The only person in her life whose soul matters is now Vronsky alone. Seryozha may have some hold, but she has sacrificed everything for one soul, and one person: Vronsky. She cannot ask God for forgiveness, because she completely surrenders to Vronsky, not to God. Thus her liaison becomes her god, which determines how she values other people, her husband, and herself.

Testing the lens: Arsény Lvov

Arsény Lvov, Levin’s brother-in-law, exemplifies well Tolstoy’s notion that the most valuable knowledge of reality is that inherent knowledge of the soul. But instead of distancing himself from reason Lvov values the pursuit of the intellect and regards the intersection between

²⁴ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 149.

inherent and acquired knowledge as essential to encouraging a proper moral education. He remarks with Levin,

‘Ah, yes! I feel now how little learning I have. For my children’s education I even have to refresh my memory a good deal and simply study. Because it’s not enough to have teachers, there must also be a supervisor, just as in your farming you need workers and an overseer. See what I’m reading?’ he pointed to Buslaev’s grammar on the lectern. ‘It’s required of Misha, and it’s so difficult ... Explain this to me now. He says here ...’

Levin tried to explain to him that one cannot understand it but must simply learn it, but Lvov did not agree with him.²⁵

Lvov offers a farming parable to his brother-in-law familiar with the manual labor required of the fields. As Levin, in the role of worker, followed his overseer’s lead unconsciously without engaging much of his intellect, he began to instinctively learn by example. His overseer became the model of the pace, technique, and discipline required of the task, and kept the worker, Levin, accountable to himself. Similarly Lvov seeks to set an example for his children of disciplined, dedicated study, even when the task to “simply study” concepts he’s previously learned challenges even him.

In fact, he disagrees with Levin here because he believes simply studying involves understanding it as well. Lvov’s case for education involves some inherent aspects tied to the formal cultivation of knowledge via study. Simply learning without understanding is impossible for Lvov, because he believes a child’s inherent knowledge will guide him to understanding, granted his studies align with the spiritual truth natural to his soul. Even before the transformation, Levin recognizes

‘... Above all—moral education. That’s what I learn from looking at your children.’

‘Moral education, you say. It’s impossible to imagine how hard it is! You’ve just prevailed on one side when something else crops up, and the struggle starts again.

Without support from religion—remember, we talked about it—no father, using only his

²⁵ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 682.

own resources, would be able to bring up a child.’²⁶

Lvov presents the moral education of his children as a struggle between two opposing sides. Although he doesn’t expressly name what these sides could represent, he may be referring to the two warring sides of right and wrong within a child’s soul. Strengthening the discipline to choose the right side involves both inherent and acquired knowledge, as Lvov himself demonstrates to Levin. The discipline of formal study confirms his inherent knowledge and his prior acquired knowledge, which cumulatively establish a child’s moral education. While human parenting alone cannot properly raise a child, Lvov would be slow to support for his children a purely religious education, sans parents. For Lvov, faith and reason can mutually support each other.

Conclusion

While Lvov’s statement aligns with most of Christian orthodoxy, Tolstoy only grants him one noteworthy appearance in *Anna Karenina*, and instead dedicates a significant amount of attention to Levin’s unreasonable experience of faith alone. Despite Tolstoy’s zeal for the faith-alone means of revelation, the tradition of Christendom does not support his thesis. Writers like Pseudo-Dionysius might add an asterisk to Tolstoy’s language and clarify faith as the most reasonable thing—not a-reason, as in “without reason,” but unreasonable in the sense that faith is the most ultimately reasonable thing that stems from the preeminent, transcendent, uppercase Reason. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, faith could only be described without reason if the human limitations of language are considered in the verdict.

²⁶ Ibid., 683.

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