LEV TOLSTOI, PETR STRUVE
AND THE “AFTERLIFE” OF *VEKHI*

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When did Tolstoi first read *Vekhi*, and how did he react to the anthology? According to the great literary critic Boris Eikhenbaum, Tolstoi read the volume in late April 1909—a month after the book’s publication—and immediately began to write a response to it. This response, the draft article “On *Vekhi*,” was never published in Tolstoi’s lifetime: it appeared in print only in 1936, in volume 38 of his collected works.¹

The draft article, “O *Vekhakh*” (“On *Vekhi*”), consisted of four parts: a pair of epigrams on the role of teaching and scholarship in society; criticisms of *Vekhi*; a long excerpt from a letter written to Tolstoi by the “illiterate” peasant Ivan Vasil’evich Kolesnikov; and a final commentary on the role of educated Russians in contemporary life. The argument of “On *Vekhi*” was straightforward: the authors of the *Vekhi* anthology had proven themselves unable to teach the Russian people how to live. Tolstoi suggested that the *Vekhi* anthology was badly written, its style being an awkward mixture of un-Russian neologisms and fashionable political jargon. This bad writing, he argued, was proof of the *Vekhi* authors’ intellectual obtuseness and of their incompetence as teachers. Furthermore, according to Tolstoi, the authors had shown themselves to be unforgivably arrogant in assuming that the fate of Russia lay in the intelligentsia’s hands, yet nowhere in the anthology had they explained the “one necessary thing”: namely, of what the “inner” or “spiritual work” of individuals should consist. True, Nikolai Berdiaev had demanded that educated Russians show humility before the truth, but he had not explained the precise nature of this truth. Sergei Bulgakov had called upon the intelligentsia to return to the Church,

but Tolstoi considered Bulgakov's "solution" to Russia's problems "strange" and unrealistic. According to Tolstoi, there was more wisdom in the peasant Kolesnikov's call for Christian love than in the entirety of *Vekhi*. Tolstoi concluded his draft article by describing *Vekhi* as a symptom of the intelligentsia's "increasing confusion and perversion."²

According to Eikhenbaum, Tolstoi probably finished writing "On *Vekhi*" on 8 May 1909. Although Tolstoi was very unhappy about the content of *Vekhi*, he decided not to publish his response to the anthology: he told his secretary Nikolai Gusev that he did not want to offend the "young intelligentsia" and did not want to contribute to the public debate which *Vekhi* had stirred up.³ Nevertheless, on 20 May 1909, Tolstoi gave an interview to Sergei Spiro, correspondent for the newspaper *Russkoe slovo* (*Russian Word*), in which he summarized his unpublished draft article, telling Spiro that the intelligentsia had lost its way and had lost the capacity to formulate the main questions of life.⁴

Unfortunately, Eikhenbaum's "canonical" account of Tolstoi's reaction to *Vekhi* is both inaccurate and seriously oversimplified, for three reasons.

First, Eikhenbaum's commentary underestimates the importance of Tolstoi's contacts with the *Vekhi* authors before the anthology's publication. Both Mikhail Gershenzon and Bulgakov had met Tolstoi personally on more than one occasion: Gershenzon at Iasnaia Poliana in July 1904 and again in January 1909; Bulgakov at Iasnaia Poliana in January 1897 and at Gaspra in May and June 1902. Tolstoi had read Petr Struve's journal *Osvobozhdenie* (*Liberation*) since its initial publication in 1902,⁵ and he was familiar with Struve's Great Russian nationalism. It goes without saying that the *Vekhi* authors had read Tolstoi's great novels and his religious writings. Berdiaev had studied Tolstoi from childhood and had internalized the master's literary characters as intellectual reference points.⁶ Bulgakov had written about Tolstoi's religious conversion in his 1901 lecture "Ivan Karamazov kak filosofskii tip," ("Ivan Karamazov as a Philosophical Type"),⁷ in his 1903 article on Vladimir Solov'ev's philosophy,⁸ in his 1903 inaugural lecture at Kiev University on political economy,⁹ in his article "O sotsial'nom ideale" ("On the Social Ideal") for the journal *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* (*Questions of Philosophy and Psychology*),¹⁰ and in his essay on Thomas Carlyle in the anthology *Dva grada* (*Two Cities*).¹¹ The young

Semen Frank was keenly interested in Tolstoi's moral teaching, especially Tolstoi's idea that moral authority and political power are independent phenomena—which he criticized in a 1905 essay, “Problema vlasti” (“The Problem of Power”).¹² Frank analyzed Tolstoi's ethical teachings in two 1908 articles which also explored the intelligentsia's attitude to Tolstoi.¹³ Tolstoi's familiarity with the intellectual position staked out by the *Vekhi* authors before 1909, and their knowledge of his works, suggests that his reaction to *Vekhi* was to some degree already determined before he actually read the anthology.

Second, Eikhensbaum's account of Tolstoi's reaction to *Vekhi* was based in part on an error in dating. In fact, Tolstoi had acquired *Vekhi* not in mid-April 1909, but on 18 March 1909—a month earlier. We know this from the diaries of Tolstoi's physician Dushan Makovitskii, who summarized Tolstoi's initial response to the anthology.¹⁴ After beginning to read *Vekhi* in mid-March, Tolstoi planned an essay or manifesto in which he would reformulate his philosophy of non-resistance to evil. This essay/manifesto took shape in Tolstoi's long draft article, “Neizbezhnyi perevorot” (“The Inevitable Revolution”), which was written between March and 2 June 1909. This essay/manifesto was published in abridged form in *Russkie vedomosti* (*Russian News*) in September 1909, and in unabridged form in Tolstoi's collected works in 1936.¹⁵

Tolstoi's “The Inevitable Revolution” summoned readers to follow the “law of love” instead of the “law of violence.” If they did so, he predicted a “universal, sweeping revolution [*vsemirnyi velikii perevorot*],” a new joyous life for humanity.¹⁶ In Tolstoi's opinion, the chief obstacles to the coming of the new era were governments and their revolutionary opponents, who engaged in absurd violence in the pursuit of mistaken objectives. In addition, however, two groups of intellectuals also constituted obstacles to the new order: the “so-called scholars” who studied “sciences” that excluded ethical questions bearing on how people should live, and members of educated society who did address ethical questions but nevertheless lived in a conformist fashion that actually supported the “superstition” of violence. In this latter group Tolstoi placed nationalist patriots and supporters of the institutional Russian Orthodox Church. In chapter eight of “The Inevitable Revolution,” Tolstoi argued that most intellectuals translated the question

"What is to be done?" as "How shall I arrange the lives of others?" rather than as "What must I do to change myself?" This erroneous translation bespoke arrogance, for it placed intellectuals above others and imputed to these intellectuals the right to transform the supposedly benighted common people. In effect, Tolstoi contended, the "superstition" that one group of people can and must organize the lives of others was nothing but a summons to violence. Tolstoi claimed that the alternative to participation in such coercion could be found in a simple set of rules: 1. Do no violence; 2. Take no part in the violence being done by others; 3. Do not approve of violence in any form. Tolstoi regarded these rules for non-violent living as manifestations of self-restraint, a virtue that could be practiced by anyone who wished to escape "slavery" to church and state. His criticism of the Russian intelligentsia, including the *Vekhi* authors, was clear: the "old" and "young" *intelligenty* imagined themselves to be opponents of the existing order, but they were actually defenders of violence, secretly attached to the worst abuses of the existing system. To escape the way of violence, they would have to recognize the law of love.

Third, Eikhenbaum's account of Tolstoi's response to *Vekhi* neglected the most interesting episode in that response: Tolstoi's conversation with Struve at Iasnaia Poliana on 12 August 1909. In the remainder of this essay I intend to examine in detail that conversation and its aftermath. The essay will be divided into four parts: a description of the primary sources from which we can reconstruct Tolstoi's conversation with Struve on 12 August 1909; a reconstruction of the conversation; an analysis of one of Struve's late 1909 articles criticizing Tolstoi; and a reflection on the significance of the Tolstoi-Struve conversation as an indicator of the "afterlife" of *Vekhi*.

I

On 4 July 1909, the same day that Tolstoi gave the manuscript of "The Inevitable Revolution" to his editor Nikolaev, Makovitskii reports that he discussed with his family the fact that "everyone is reading *Vekhi*, because the intelligentsia has [just] discovered that God exists." During this discussion Tolstoi agreed to meet the following month with Struve and the politician Aleksandr Stakhovich. His comment, "It would be better to allow

Struve [and Stakhovich] to visit,” indicates that his family was of divided opinion about the wisdom of such a visit, for one result would surely be a dispute between Tolstoi and Struve over *Vekhi*.¹⁷ For his part, Struve was anxious to meet Tolstoi. Stakhovich had solicited his company on a trip to Iasnaia Poliana in a curious letter, which stated that, “I want very much to visit Tolstoi, although I’m anxious about it. This [Tolstoi] is a grand and terrible being who has lived not one, but several human lives of the sort that for a single human being to endure would be strange and terrible.” Struve, who had never seen Tolstoi before 1909, claimed to have “sensed that I must meet him. I understood that soon it would be too late to do so.”¹⁸ Struve accepted Stakhovich’s invitation to accompany him to Iasnaia Poliana.

From the two principals we have terse written reactions to the meeting, which occurred at Iasnaia Poliana on 12 August 1909. In an article written after Tolstoi’s death the next year, Struve reported his “strongest impression [of the meeting]” as being that “Tolstoi lives by the thought of God alone, by the idea of his proximity to God.” According to Struve, Tolstoi was physically present in August 1909, but “psychologically and spiritually he had already gone to that place across the grave where the majority of human beings go, unseen and unknown to the living. But he had already gone there and I *saw* this.” Struve’s sole allusion to the conversation’s content came when he recalled Tolstoi’s statement, “It is not surprising that we disagree, since I am more than twice your age.” At this, Struve had nodded assent, “for I felt that into these words Tolstoi himself packed not just a reference to his age, but to the very feeling of having lived several lives.”¹⁹

Perhaps, in retrospect, the meeting was more significant to Struve than it had been to Tolstoi, who recorded his reaction in his diary on 13 August. “Stakh[ovich] A[leksan]dr and Struve visited [yesterday]. They were little interesting and were ponderous, especially Struve. I read them ‘On Science’ to no effect and spoke to them to no effect.”²⁰ Tolstoi’s muted response to the conversation in his diary was perhaps not entirely faithful to his mood, as perceived by others, immediately after the meeting. Makovitskii, who had listened to the conversation, reported: “On parting, Lev Nikolaevich told Struve he would always be happy to be in communication with him. It seems he [Tolstoi] even kissed him [Struve]. Struve was somewhat

confused; he listened, did not argue and sought explanation [from Tolstoi] and [he sought] the truth rather than [to justify] his own correctness. Lev Nikolaevich obviously liked him."²¹

Besides the short reactions from the principals, we have two eyewitness accounts of the conversation between Tolstoi and Struve—one from Tolstoi's physician Makovitskii and the other from his friend, the musician Aleksandr Gol'denveizer. Of the two, Makovitskii's account was the fuller, since he was present from the conversation's beginning, at 1:30 p.m. on the terrace, to its end late at night in the manor house. Gol'denveizer heard the latter portions of the conversation; however, his account was perhaps more astute, because he had a clearer grasp of the issues at stake.²² Both Makovitskii and Gol'denveizer understood that the conversation was an important intellectual event, and so both allotted considerable space in their diaries to its recording. By comparing these two accounts, we can reconstitute the flow of the conversation, and at moments we can even "hear" the two participants.

II

According to Makovitskii, Tolstoi asked Struve from which direction he had traveled to Iasnaia Poliana. Struve's answer—that he had come from the White Lake district in Iaroslavl' province where there were many famous monasteries—provoked Tolstoi to observe that a monastery is a "useful and essential haven [from the world]." Struve then noted that, in Kazan', he had once seen Vasilii Polenov's "wonderful" series of paintings on the life of Christ. Tolstoi apparently let this remark drop without comment; at least Makovitskii did not record a response on this point.²³ Unbeknownst to Struve, however, Polenov's paintings had been the subject of extended conversations in Tolstoi's household. On 17 March 1909, Makovitskii reports, Tolstoi recalled seeing the paintings at an exhibit in St. Petersburg: he had not been impressed.²⁴ But the next day, he had expressed interest in seeing them again.²⁵ In late April, Sofia Andreevna and Tolstoi's son Sergei had seen Polenov's exhibit, and they had praised the paintings for their naturalism and "avoidance of the mystical."²⁶ Tolstoi himself had studied the album of the exhibition, pronouncing the reproductions of *Mysterious*

Evening and *Crucifixion* “good,” and the entire series “in general, good.”²⁷ In November 1909, nearly three months after the conversations with Struve, Sofiia Tolstaia and Sofia Stakhovich again discussed Polenov’s paintings in Tolstoi’s presence, prompting him to say, “[The life of Christ] is so dear to us, that it is better not to touch on it [*etogo ne trogat*].”²⁸ Thus, the first exchanges between Struve and Tolstoi dealt with the phenomenon of religion: Struve established his credentials as a “new” *intelligent* interested in the subject; Tolstoi acknowledged that interest but without opening up his own emotions on the subject.

Tolstoi then turned to the theme of the intelligentsia and *Vekhi*, asserting that of the vast number of books now being published, “not a single one is useful.” He told Struve that he agreed with the chief point made in *Vekhi*. “On your main idea [“inner work” in preference to political action], I am *plus royaliste que le roi*,” but, he added, “I find *Vekhi* too superficial.” He told Struve, “There are more profound reasons for this” that he would discuss later, after a walk. Struve also lamented that journals had “lost their former significance and now played to the common denominator.” Tolstoi complained that he had said many times that one should write for the people, but “everyone persists in writing for the intelligentsia.”²⁹ By this second stage of the conversation, Tolstoi had indirectly reproached Struve twice—once for his superficiality and again for his failure to write “for the people.” Struve read these reproaches as opening gambits in Tolstoi’s attack on *Vekhi* and awaited further developments. Tolstoi promised to speak himself out: “The word is an important thing, so one must say everything, not just half of it.”³⁰ For Struve, the prospect of hearing Tolstoi “speak himself out” must have been thrilling but also daunting.

Tolstoi excused himself to ride in the forest with his daughter Aleksandra. After returning from the forest, he rejoined Struve for a late afternoon/early evening meal. The group, now including Goldenevizer, adjourned to the balcony for continued conversation. Makovitskii recorded an observation of Tolstoi: “When I ride in the forest, the feeling is very Christian. I want others to exalt in nature, and I regret that we alone do so.”³¹ Tolstoi’s “very Christian feeling” was probably the result of two impulses: his belief that God is in everyone and everything, and his Christian desire to share with the less fortunate (in this case, city dwellers) his sense of

religious unity with creation. The effect of this observation was to reconnect the collocutors to the subject of religion.

Makovitskii and Gol'denveizer agreed that the conversation then turned quickly to the religious views and intellectual significance of the "old" intelligentsia, specifically to Aleksandr Herzen, Nikolai Ogarev, and Mikhail Bakunin. Tolstoi compared Herzen to the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. According to Tolstoi, "[Herzen,] in spite of his philosophical-political beliefs, enunciated religious truths of universal human significance," whereas in the thought of Schopenhauer, an atheist, "one can find more propositions about the unavoidability of religion than in [the catechism of Metropolitan] Filaret."³² In praising Herzen's religiosity, Tolstoi probably had in mind two epigrams he had quoted in "The Inevitable Revolution," in chapters seven and nine. In the latter, Tolstoi quoted Herzen as writing, "If only people wanted, instead of saving the world, to save themselves; instead of liberating humanity, to liberate themselves—how much they could do to save the world and to liberate humanity."³³ Under questioning by Struve, Tolstoi pronounced Ogarev "an insignificant man." He described Bakunin as "some sort of crazy man [*kakoi-to shal'noi*]," but conceded that "much in him [Bakunin] was attractive."³⁴ At this moment in the conversation, Struve was trying to draw Tolstoi out on one of *Vekhi*'s subjects, the irreligion of the "old" intelligentsia, but Tolstoi was refusing to play along; rather than indict Bakunin and company for their shallowness and militant atheism, Tolstoi pointed toward Herzen's spiritual sensibility and Bakunin's charisma. He hinted that the difference between the "old" and "new" intelligentsia was perhaps not so dramatic as Struve and the other *Vekhi* authors had imagined. Tolstoi's allusion to Filaret's catechism also alerted Struve to Tolstoi's hostility toward the institutional church and to Tolstoi's assessment of the costs of churchliness [*tserkovnost'*]. Behind this barb was Tolstoi's criticism of two *Vekhi* authors, Berdiaev and Bulgakov, whose essays in *Vekhi* had espoused a return to the Orthodox Church.

From 8:30 to 10:00 p.m., Tolstoi read to Struve and eight others his draft article "O nauke" ("On Science.")³⁵ We know from Gol'denveizer's diary entry of 10 August that Tolstoi had contemplated this step in advance. He had told Gol'denveizer that the conclusions of "On Science" needed to be widely known, and he admitted his pride over having written the essay:

"It suddenly struck me how deeply I feel this ... If you assign grades [to articles], you sometimes see a 'two' or a 'three,' but then you run across a 'five plus.' That is what I think about the article 'On Science.'"³⁶ Tolstoi apparently believed that reading the article to Struve would demonstrate why the educational mission of the "new" intelligentsia was suspect.

"On Science" made the point that science as usually defined by intellectuals is "the knowledge of everything in the world except the one thing necessary to each individual to live a good life."³⁷ In contrast, Tolstoi believed that genuine science "is knowledge of what every individual must do to live better in this world during the short time allotted him by God, by fate or by the laws of nature—whatever you wish to call it."³⁸ The experimental sciences are flawed, according to Tolstoi, because the meaning of experiments depends on subjective interpretation of the data by observers. Even if one were to eliminate subjectivity in reporting experimental results, Tolstoi thought, scientists would remain unable to interpret the meaning of experiments for human life properly, because each experiment yields only a discrete result, a description of a certain causal sequence that, in principle, is only a finite portion of an infinitely long sequence of causes that constitute the natural world.³⁹ He regarded applied sciences like physics and medicine as instruments whereby "the rich increase their power over enslaved workers and intensify the horrors of warfare."⁴⁰ Tolstoi emphasized the harm done to the people not only by theological and "quasi-philosophical" deceptions, but also by "military-patriotic lies."⁴¹ He compared "what is now called science" to a handbook for vandals and thieves, aimed at defining "the best scientific way to assault and rob the people."⁴² Tolstoi saw the false sciences as profoundly anti-human: they were based neither on love nor on respect for others, and thus "nothing good can come from them, only harm."⁴³ Those who embraced the false sciences would only survive "as long as the falsity of their science remains hidden." Tolstoi called on common people to "place no trust in science introduced by coercion [from above] and by government grants."⁴⁴

Tolstoi sought to put Struve on the defensive with the force of this article, and to damn the entire mission of the Russian intelligentsia, whose self-selected mission was "to serve our unhappy Russian people" through scientific education.⁴⁵

Struve offered two objections to Tolstoi's article. First, he argued that the division of society into two "castes"—the educated and the uneducated—"exists only in Russia"; in the West, this division did not obtain. According to Struve, "in America the labor of a teacher and of a factory worker ... are identically compensated."⁴⁶ In Germany, he said, "A train conductor earns more money than a *Privatdozent*." Second, Struve argued, medicine does not aim to harm or to enslave people: "The preservation of human life might be posited as its goal."⁴⁷ Struve insisted on the utility of crutches in helping the lame and of chemical remedies for curing the ill. He pointedly asked Tolstoi: "Don't you value science aiming at the prolongation of human life?"⁴⁸ Struve's intention was to vindicate science by denying any necessary link between scientific research and violence or social exploitation, and by showing its value to common laborers. In the process, he sought to blunt Tolstoi's insinuation that the intelligentsia's "arrogant" *kul'turtregerstvo*, bringing of culture to the masses, is harmful.

The two collocutors had now arrived at the heart of their disagreement over *Vekhi*. In Tolstoi's opinion, the disagreement over science was a manifestation of a deeper dispute about action in the world. According to Goldeneveizer, Tolstoi told Struve: "Of course, 'thou shalt not kill' is the first moral law in relationship to others. But if I set myself the goal of preserving human life, then I must kill a person who wants to throw a bomb, so as to prevent the death of a hundred others, and from this [postulate] one can derive all the sophisms on which the current violent order is based."⁴⁹ According to Makovitskii's account, Tolstoi said the following:

So by your reckoning, if one wants to save a hundred people, it is permissible to kill one of them. [But] the sense of moral law cannot be made contingent on the presumed utility of actions, but [must derive] only from the imperative of conscience. The goal of actions undertaken by a religious person is the observance of the moral law. [On the other hand,] the scientific superstition holds that, in the future, in a better-ordered society, the people's welfare can be secured, just as the Church superstition holds that one will receive one's reward in the next life. Your mission is action; you seek to transform the lives of people by external means, but by what methods? By socialistic methods? By anarchistic methods? I think that change occurs entirely in the realm of ideas, that an individual obeys an inner law, conscience, God.⁵⁰

Tolstoi maintained that in the “simple non-violent life of the future,” there would be no science of the currently existing type. “What sort of science will exist I don’t know, but the current kind will not exist.”⁵¹

After a (very late) tea, Tolstoi returned to the subject of *Vekhi*. He told Struve apropos of Berdiaev’s and Bulgakov’s articles: “I will never succeed in understanding the Orthodoxy of people such as [Vladimir] Solov’ev and those like him.”⁵² According to Makovitskii’s account, Tolstoi said, “One has to choose between two possibilities: either to believe in the [institutional] Church’s teaching, or to accept as Christian what is taught in common by all religions.”⁵³ In Tolstoi’s opinion, the modernist Orthodoxy espoused by Solov’ev, Berdiaev, and Bulgakov was a false third option—*ne ryba, ne miaso*. According to Makovitskii, Tolstoi told Struve: “I understand the Orthodoxy of my sister [Mariia Nikolaevna] ... She has a relationship to God who is the foundation of everything—that is, [she renders] loyalty and obedience to him.”⁵⁴ According to Gol’denveizer, Tolstoi sympathized with his sister’s brand of Orthodoxy because “here is a person whose highest need is the religious posture toward life, but who does not have the capacity to regard critically the existing religious creeds, who simply takes them on faith, and thus satisfies her religious requirements. But when a person who has once succumbed to doubt then resorts to sophisms to justify the Church faith in which he was raised—that I cannot understand. As Kant said, having once assimilated certain views, a man then becomes a sophistic apologist for his mistaken ideas.”⁵⁵

Struve attempted to parry this attack on *Vekhi* by saying that only Berdiaev and Bulgakov deserved the reproach of Orthodox *tserkovnost’*: “Of the other contributors, two for example are Jews [Gershenzon and Frank], who are completely innocent of ascribing themselves to any sort of Orthodoxy.”⁵⁶ Significantly, Struve was silent about his own belief. Frank, in his biography of Struve, described Struve’s faith *circa* 1909 as a generalized, non-dogmatic belief in God. According to Frank, Struve acknowledged the mystical side of religion without subjecting it to searching analysis. Indeed, although Struve considered religious faith a natural impulse, “he never studied religious questions nor did he discuss the problems and concepts of religion.” In Frank’s opinion, Struve’s belief system corresponded to “the spirit of liberal Protestant theology.”⁵⁷

In May 1909, Struve had published an article in *Russkaia mysl'* (*Russian Thought*) attacking religious dogmatism. In it he wrote that "[d]ogmatism is the pretension of a finite consciousness to complete possession of an infinite or final truth. And as paradoxical as it may sound, I claim that for contemporary consciousness the only way to strengthen genuine *religiosity* is the gradual overcoming of dogmatism."⁵⁸ Struve took as an example of religious anti-dogmatism none other than Tolstoi, in whose teaching Struve could find "not a single dogma." However, in the same article, Struve classified Tolstoi as "genuinely dogmatic in the sphere of morals." He accused Tolstoi of issuing absolute prescriptions for new ways of living based on religion, yet of refusing responsibility for the implementation of those prescriptions.⁵⁹ At the same time, Struve criticized Tolstoi for inconsistently taking a gradualist approach to social change and for pretending that this social change could occur suddenly, "in the blink of an eye."⁶⁰ By these obscure formulas Struve apparently sought to indict Tolstoi for absolutely rejecting violence, for laying on individuals the responsibility of refraining from violence, and for assuming that the non-violent movement might change Russia virtually overnight.

Struve himself embraced a faith based on personal responsibility and gradual change. In his March 1909 lecture on "Religiia i sotsializm" ("Religion and Socialism"), he endorsed a "genuinely religious worldview in which old religious motives growing out of Christianity, and out of liberalism, would combine with the idea of personal religious mission [*podvig*] and personal responsibility, compounded of a new motive—the motive of the freedom of the individual understood as *creative* autonomy."⁶¹ This vague formula amounted to an endorsement of the intelligentsia's mission of gradual cultural enlightenment of the masses, and also to the privileging of intellectual freedom as a prerequisite for cultural progress.

Given this personal religious perspective, which was alien both to traditional Orthodoxy and to Tolstoi's brand of Christianity, Struve's choice in August 1909 to keep quiet about his own religious beliefs made sense. However, Tolstoi had not yet said all that was on his mind concerning the *Vekhi* authors' religiosity. According to Gol'denveizer, Tolstoi said to Struve: "Yes, but I don't see [in *Vekhi*] any well-defined religious foundation of any kind. Your reproaches to the intelligentsia for irreligion are justified, and

I would add that they [the *intelligenty*] should also be reproached for their appalling arrogance [*v uzhasaiushchei samouverennosti*]. But, in any case, I don't see the religious foundation in the name of which all this [in *Vekhi*] is being said, and that is the main thing."⁶² In Makovitskii's diary, Tolstoi's account was more pointed: "I see here [in *Vekhi*] a kind of superficial attitude [toward religion]. [You] don't want to say everything [about your faith]. But this is not religiosity: it is appalling arrogance. 'We don't need this Christianity.' But you should have a more precise position [*nado bolee tochnuiu tochku*] from which to attack the intelligentsia."⁶³

According to Makovitskii, Struve then began to speak about social progress, about how in the future a well-ordered society would appear. He may have hinted at his doubt about whether Tolstoi's own variety of Christianity would produce positive results: Makovitskii's diary is opaque on this matter, and Gol'denveizer did not mention Struve's commentary on social progress. However, if we believe Makovitskii, Tolstoi cut off Struve's train of thought by asserting that "I am not talking about the consequences [of belief], but rather about genuine knowledge of how I can obey the will of Him who sent me [into the world]."⁶⁴

Gol'denveizer and Makovitskii agreed that the conversation ended with a discussion by Tolstoi of a critical letter he had just received from Petr Velikanov. According to Makovitskii, Tolstoi informed Struve that "there are people who know how to write belligerently and poisonously, and who take advantage of that ability. When they criticize me, I rejoice because I see that I do not live in God when I catch myself becoming angry."⁶⁵ According to Gol'denveizer, Tolstoi observed that Velikanov "was always writing me nasty letters [*rugatel'nye pis'ma*]." "I wanted to tell him not to write again so as not to stir up negative emotion in himself.... He writes caustically apropos [Nikolai] Gusev's exile that I hide behind the backs of my friends and that, just as behind [Prime Minister Petr] Stolypin there is Nicholas II, so behind my friends there is Lev I, and so on. My prayer is: 'Rejoice when they slander you. When you are alone and in a good mood that suffices,... but when you are in a bad frame of mind, it becomes depressing.'"⁶⁶

At first glance, this closing episode in the Tolstoi-Struve conversations seems unrelated to the matter at hand. At the end of a very long day, the old man could not help complaining about an unpleasant letter, perhaps

because he sought Struve's sympathy, perhaps because he wanted to remind Struve that his religious dissent carried heavy personal costs (such as Gusev's exile and his own exposure to "poisonous" correspondence). But we might contemplate at least one other explanation for Tolstoi's comment at the end of the conversation. Tolstoi was disappointed with *Vekhi* and exasperated with Struve, whom he found a "ponderous" or "heavy" passenger. Of course, Tolstoi, ever the *barin*, hid that exasperation beneath a polite visage. He told Struve he would be "always glad" to see him and to hear from him.⁶⁷ As we noted above, he even kissed Struve on the latter's departure from Iasnaia Poliana.

However, for Tolstoi the conversation had indeed been futile. Recall his diary entry of 13 August: "I read them 'On Science' to no effect and spoke to them to no effect."⁶⁸ Perhaps this futile conversation reminded Tolstoi of the pointlessness of corresponding with the "poisonous" Velikanov. We have on record three unsent letters from Tolstoi to Velikanov, drafted on 12 August 1909. In the third variant, Tolstoi wrote: "Each person has his own convictions, and therefore I think it completely useless to write poisonous letters to people holding opposed views. Besides being a waste of time, it only produces negative emotions, one of the most harmful things in life."⁶⁹ The conversation with Struve had not been exactly poisonous—Struve had conducted himself tactfully enough—but it had obviously stirred in Tolstoi "negative emotion."

In general, the conversation with Struve on 12 August 1909 followed the intellectual line on *Vekhi* set down by Tolstoi in the draft article "On *Vekhi*" and in the unpublished "The Inevitable Revolution." In Struve's presence Tolstoi attacked the "terrible arrogance" of the *Vekhi* authors, the "strangeness" of Berdiaev's and Bulgakov's modernist Orthodoxy, and the absence of a well-defined religious perspective in *Vekhi*. Tolstoi strongly implied that Struve's failure to accept non-violent Christianity indicated acceptance of "all the sophisms on which the current violent order is based." Tolstoi pressed Struve not to calculate the external consequences of genuine Christian belief in advance of adopting it, and warned Struve that the *Vekhi* authors had actually assumed the same posture as the "old" intelligentsia: "Your mission is action; you seek to transform the lives of the people by external means." Tolstoi tried to persuade Struve that *Vekhi*,

which had ostensibly justified “inner” work over political activism, actually showed its authors to be enemies of the “inner law, of conscience, of God,” as Tolstoi understood those things. In sum, Tolstoi accused Struve and the other *Vekhi* authors of contributing to the “illusion” of the necessity of violence rather than to the dissipation of that illusion. They had said “half a word” about religion in criticizing the intelligentsia’s godlessness. Tolstoi wanted them to “say everything.”

III

An excerpt from Tolstoi’s “The Inevitable Revolution” appeared in *Russian News* on 10 September 1909, less than a month after Tolstoi’s meeting with Struve at Iasnaia Poliana. Struve responded to the excerpt with a short analysis in *Russian Thought* under the title “Rokovye voprosy” (“Fateful Questions”).⁷⁰ Although Struve characterized his response “not as a ‘polemic’ in the usual sense of the term,” his commentary on Tolstoi’s thinking was a continuation of the conversation at Iasnaia Poliana, this time in a forum Struve could control.

Struve credited Tolstoi for raising fundamental questions, questions of a “fateful character,” that deserved the intelligentsia’s attention. At the same time, he underlined what he took to be the “illogic” and “contradictoriness” of Tolstoi’s thinking. On the one hand, Struve observed, Tolstoi insisted on personal responsibility for one’s actions and on the primacy of “inner work” over external action. On the other hand, Struve contended, Tolstoi argued that “the cause of the evil from which we all suffer [i.e. violence] is not within people, but in a false order of life based on violence, which people consider necessary.”⁷¹ Struve considered these two propositions contradictory. He saw Tolstoi’s emphasis on personal responsibility for actions as incompatible with the notion that people bear no responsibility for structural violence stemming from social arrangements into which they are born.

Struve suggested that there are two possible explanations for the corrupt social order in which people live. Either they live badly because they themselves are bad or corrupt, or they live badly because they *do not know how* to organize their lives properly. Struve asserted that, from

a religious perspective, only the first possibility makes sense. Tolstoi had written repeatedly that the "kingdom of God is within you"; Struve wrote that the "kingdom of the devil or of evil is also within us in an organic sense."⁷² In other words, Struve argued, "If human beings are not 'evil' or 'guilty [of vice],' they are certainly [morally] weak."⁷³

For Struve, the implication of the fact that human nature is neither wholly good nor innocent was that "the perfection of life and the improvement of human character cannot be accomplished through mere 'education,'" or by "a simple sermon" of the sort Tolstoi routinely delivered. Human perfectibility, the overcoming of evil, required instead "a complicated, multi-front effort encompassing all of life and the strengthening of an individual's entire character." According to Struve, the problem with *tolstovstvo* lay not in Tolstoi's ultimate goal of avoiding violence, but rather in a "more difficult, and damnably puzzling problem: how to make human beings *strong* enough for 'love excluding violence'?"⁷⁴

Struve's contention—that Tolstoi had failed to understand evil or to fathom the weakness inherent in human nature—had been levelled at Tolstoi by Solov'ev in *Tri razgovora* (*Three Conversations*, 1899), as Struve surely knew. Here, in "Fateful Questions," Struve alluded both to Solov'ev's critique of Tolstoi and to what Struve regarded as a universally accepted religious proposition—that evil is part of human nature. The idea was to rebut Tolstoi's assertion of 12 August that there was "no religious foundation whatsoever" behind *Vekhi*, while simultaneously defending Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and himself against the charge of modernist superficiality in matters of faith. The charge that Tolstoi's concept of personal moral responsibility contradicted his critique of violence enabled Struve to pose as a "realist" sympathizing with Tolstoi's long-term objective of a violence-free society while wondering whether "weak" human beings could ever be "*strong* enough for 'love excluding violence.'" Although Struve did not say so, his doubts about the "strength" of human nature implied the need for coercive measures against criminals of every sort, at least until humanity showed itself morally worthy of a non-violent society. This was Struve's answer to Tolstoi's accusation that licensing the killing of one person "to save a hundred others" was a "sophism" on which the entire violent social order rests. Struve was telling Tolstoi that, in view of the evil within human

beings, it was a “sophism” to pretend that a non-violent social order could easily be established.

Struve did not realize that Tolstoi had repeatedly pointed in “The Inevitable Revolution” to those people—workers, government officials, *intelligently*—whose beliefs and actions sustained the “illusion” that violence is a necessary component of the social order. Surely this proposition indicated Tolstoi’s awareness that the evil of violence is a product of human volition, and that this evil “illusion” and its manifold justifications come from *within* human beings. Tolstoi’s profoundest idea was perhaps that, since this element of the external social order sprang from within human beings, those same individuals might, by exerting spiritual self-discipline, extricate it from their characters by refusing to do violence and by refusing to approve of its being done. Tolstoi knew from personal experience that exercising spiritual discipline is not easy, but he also knew that it is possible to exercise such discipline. His far-flung network of correspondents told him that even common people could manage such discipline.

In Struve’s “Fateful Questions” there was an unbecoming arrogance that manifested itself in condescension toward Tolstoi as a thinker and toward human nature itself. In Struve’s pleas to take cognizance of human *weakness*, one hears the echoes of Dostoevskii’s Grand Inquisitor, for whom pity toward human weakness served as a justification of coercion. The article “Fateful Questions,” like Tolstoi’s early reactions to *Vekhi*, showed why no full meeting of minds between Tolstoi and the *Vekhi* authors was possible. Tolstoi was a resolute opponent of not only the “old” intelligentsia but also the “new” one. Being “*plus royaliste que le roi*” in advocating inner work did not make Tolstoi amenable to Struve’s political “realism.” Struve was right to acknowledge that, alongside the Russian public’s “idol-worship” of Tolstoi, there was on the educated public’s part a “lamentable absence of interest in his thinking.”⁷⁵ Struve should have admitted that, even among the *Vekhi* authors, there was little real *sympathy* for Tolstoi’s spiritual worldview.

IV

One might have predicted that Struve’s 1909 visit to Iasnaia Poliana would come to naught, or worse, that it would set off an unpleasant polemic

between himself and Tolstoi. After all, the two men were very different creatures: Tolstoi was an autodidact, a literary artist turned religious radical, the most distinguished survivor of Russia's "golden age," and Struve was a radical political economist turned conservative, a religious *naïf*, a figure embodying the contradictoriness of Russia's on-going "silver age." Aside from these stark personal differences, Struve appeared at Tolstoi's estate as representative of a cohort of intellectuals with whom Tolstoi had uneasy relations. Tolstoi had met Bulgakov in 1897, but had offended him mortally in 1902; he had helped Gershenzon by providing materials for the latter's books on the intelligentsia, but had quarrelled with him in early 1909, before the publication of *Vekhi*. Tolstoi had never met Berdiaev, but, as we have seen, he found his brand of modernist Orthodoxy preposterous. Thus, Struve was not only personally disagreeable to Tolstoi, he was guilty by association.

Intellectually, the differences between Tolstoi and Struve could not have been greater. Because Struve was a true believer, perhaps the last and most eloquent one, in the manifest destiny of the Russian empire, he believed in the kind of strong government that Tolstoi felt to be a practical disaster and a moral abomination. Struve's nationalism, which combined reverence for the "creative process of national life" with an elitist condescension toward the uncultured *narod*, struck Tolstoi as not only a false posture typical of the "old" intelligentsia but as an attitude likely to perpetuate the structural violence then afflicting Russia and the world. Struve's deeply held faith in science seemed to Tolstoi both naive and unexamined; it was also repellent to him because, in the thought of Struve and other *Vekhi* authors, it was linked to a contradictory philosophy of life that justified killing under the banner of avoiding killing. On the other hand, in Tolstoi Struve saw a creative artist of the first rank and a religious thinker who had upheld the spirit's banner in trying times; however, by 1909, Tolstoi was also, in Struve's view, an old man with one foot in the grave, an intellectual curiosity because, while physically alive, he had nonetheless already passed into the afterlife. Moreover, Tolstoi's spiritual outlook, as Struve understood it, was flawed by dogmatic moralism and hyper-rationalism. Tolstoi's political views seemed to Struve pitifully naive about the realities of human evil and the imperatives of power, which Struve and his liberal friends fancied

that they understood. In Struve's eyes, Tolstoi's opinions about science and about the uses of technology seemed obscurantist, even hopelessly anti-modern. In Struve's view, Tolstoi wanted to lead the Russian people backward, rather than forward toward a more civilized and radiant future. Therefore, Struve's August 1909 polemics with Tolstoi only demonstrated why, despite the *Vekhi* authors' support for "inner work" over political action, no agreement between his group and Tolstoi concerning the means of transforming Russia was in principle possible.

By attacking the intelligentsia's obsession with external political change, the *Vekhi* anthology recalled to Russians' attention the very different ethical assumptions held by the intelligentsia and by its nineteenth-century critics. On the one hand, as the outpouring of newspaper and journal articles on *Vekhi* after its publication in March 1909 had shown, the *Vekhi* authors' condemnation of the intelligentsia elicited strong defensive reactions from those committed to political change through violence. Yet, as the Struve-Tolstoi polemics demonstrated, *Vekhi* also evoked from Tolstoi, Russia's leading proponent of non-violence, an attempt to restate his own criticisms of the intelligentsia and to apply these same criticisms to its authors. The history of the debate over *Vekhi*, of which the Struve-Tolstoi debate was an important part, therefore suggests that the "afterlife" of *Vekhi* was a recapitulation, in a shorter time frame, of the nineteenth-century Russian debate about the ends of life and about the means of achieving a just society. It was as if all the fury of the preceding century were suddenly concentrated within a few months and focused on a single document.

NOTES

- 1 B. M. Eikhenbaum, "Kommentarii. O *Vekhakh*," in L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 38 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1936), 571–73. The Western historian Nikolai Poltoratzky has argued that Tolstoi obtained and read *Vekhi* "no earlier than 15 April [1909]." See Poltoratzky, "Lev Tolstoi and *Vekhi*," *Slavonic and East European Review* 42, no. 99 (June 1964): 334. For a longer, more systematic analysis of Tolstoi's immediate reaction to *Vekhi*, see G. M. Hamburg, "Tolstoy and *Vekhi*," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* XXII (2010): 1–16.

- 2 Tolstoi, "O Vekhakh," PSS 38, 285–90.
- 3 N. N. Gusev, *Dva goda s Tolstym* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1973), 253: entry of 8 May 1909.
- 4 Gusev, *Dva goda s Tolstym*, 256: entry of 20 May 1909.
- 5 Tolstoi, PSS 73, 252: letter to M. L. Oblonskaia, 31 May 1902.
- 6 See N. A. Berdiaev, *Samopoznanie: opyt filosofskoi avtobiografii* (Paris: YMCA, 1949), passim.
- 7 S. N. Bulgakov, "Ivan Karamazov kak filosofskii tip," in *Ot marksizma k idealizmu. Sbornik statei (1896–1903)* (St. Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo "Obshchestvennaia literatura", 1903), 83–112, especially 84, 110.
- 8 S. N. Bulgakov, "Chto daet sovremennomu soznaniu filosofii Vladimira Solov'eva?," *Ot marksizma k idealizmu*, 259–62.
- 9 S. N. Bulgakov, "Ob ekonomicheskom ideale," *Ot marksizma k idealizmu*, 273, 286
- 10 S. N. Bulgakov, "O sotsial'nom ideale," *Ot marksizma k idealizmu*, 288–316, especially 297–98.
- 11 See S. N. Bulgakov, "O sotsial'nom moralizme (T. Karleil')," *Dva grada. Issledovaniia o prirode obshchestvennykh idealov*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Tovarishchestvo tipografii A. I. Mamontova, 1911), 106–49.
- 12 See S. L. Frank, "Problema vlasti (Sotsial'no-psikhologicheskii etiud)," *Voprosy zhizni* no. 3 (March 1905): 205–50.
- 13 See S. L. Frank, "Nravstvennoe uchenie L'va Tolstogo," *Filosofia i zhizn'. Etiudy i nabroski po filosofii kul'tury* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo D. E. Zhukovskogo, 1910), 289–302, and "Lev Tolstoi i russkaia intelligentsiia," *Filosofia i zhizn'*, 303–11. Frank's attitude toward Tolstoi has been analyzed by Inessa Medzhibovskaya, "Dogmatism or Moral Logic? Simon Frank Confronts Tolstoy's Ethical Thought," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* XVI (2004): 18–32.
- 14 D. P. Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo 1904–1910. "Iasnopolianskie zapiski" D. P. Makovitskogo. Kniga tret'ia. 1908–1909 (ianvar'–iiun')*, *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 90 (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), 362, entry of 19 March 1909.
- 15 L. N. Tolstoi, "Neizbezhnyi perevorot," PSS 38, 72–99.
- 16 Ibid., 98–99.
- 17 See D. P. Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo 1904–1910, "Iasnopolianskie zapiski" D. P. Makovitskogo. Kniga chetvertaia. 1909 (iiul'–dekabr')–1910, Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 90, 10: entry of 4 July 1909.
- 18 P. B. Struve, "Smysl smerti Tolstogo," in *Patriotica: politika, kul'tura, religiia, sotsializm*, ed. V. N. Zhukov (Moscow: Respublika, 1997), 303. Volume originally published in 1911.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 L. N. Tolstoi, "Dnevnik," PSS 57, 115: entry of 13 August 1909.

- 21 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 10: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 22 Ibid., 37–40; A. B. Gol'denveizer, *Vblizi Tolstogo* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1959), 287–93.
- 23 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 37: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 24 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga tret'ia*, 360: entry of 18 March 1909.
- 25 Ibid., 363: entry of 19 March 1909.
- 26 Ibid., 397: entry of 1 May 1909.
- 27 Ibid., 418: entry of 24 May 1909.
- 28 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 94: entry of 2 November 1909.
- 29 Ibid., 38: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.; Gol'denveizer reported Tolstoi saying: “Both, thanks to their intelligence and sensitivity, enunciated universal truths,” *Vblizi Tolstogo*, 287: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 33 Tolstoi, “Neizbezhnyi perevorot,” 86, 95: here, 95.
- 34 Gol'denveizer, *Vblizi Tolstogo*, 287: entry of 13 August 1909.
- 35 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 38–39: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 36 Gol'denveizer, *Vblizi Tolstogo*, 284: entry of 10 August 1909.
- 37 Tolstoi, “O nauke,” PSS 38, 137.
- 38 Ibid., 135.
- 39 Ibid., 140–41.
- 40 Ibid., 141–42.
- 41 Ibid., 144.
- 42 Ibid., 144–45.
- 43 Ibid., 147.
- 44 Ibid., 148–49.
- 45 Ibid., 138.
- 46 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 39: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 47 Gol'denveizer, *Vblizi Tolstogo*, 288: entry of 13 August 1909.
- 48 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 39: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 49 Gol'denveizer, *Vblizi Tolstogo*, 288: entry of 13 August 1909.
- 50 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 39: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 51 Ibid., 39–40: entry of 12 August 1909.

- 52 Gol'denveizer, *Vblizi Tolstogo*, 289: entry of 13 August 1909.
- 53 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 40: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Gol'denveizer, *Vblizi Tolstogo*, 289: entry of 13 August 1909.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 S. L. Frank, *Biografiia P. B. Struve* (New York: Izdatel'stvo im. Chekhova, 1956), 225-26.
- 58 P. B. Struve, "'Vekhi' i 'Pis'ma' A. I. Ertelia. Po povodu stat'i Kn. D. I. Shakhovskogo," *Patriotica*, 247.
- 59 Ibid., 247-48.
- 60 Ibid., 249-50.
- 61 P. B. Struve, "Religiia i sotsializm," *Patriotica*, 333.
- 62 Gol'denveizer, *Vblizi Tolstogo*, 290: entry of 13 August 1909.
- 63 Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 40: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Gol'denveizer, *Vblizi Tolstogo*, 290: entry of 13 August 1909.
- 67 Ibid.; Makovitskii, *U Tolstogo. Kniga chetvertaia*, 40: entry of 12 August 1909.
- 68 Tolstoi, "Dnevniki," 115 (see note 20).
- 69 Tolstoi, "Pis'ma," *PSS* 80, 282.
- 70 Struve's article was reprinted as "Rokovye voprosy. Po povodu stat'i L. N. Tolstogo 'Neizbezhnyi perevot,'" *Patriotica*, 304-08.
- 71 Ibid., 305-06.
- 72 Ibid., 308.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid., 304.