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The Life Practice of Jesus: Nietzsche and Tolstoy on Nonresistance as a Source of Meaning

By

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Abstract:

The problem of nihilism in the contemporary world stems from individuals' inability to find meaning in their external environment, leading them to withdrawal entirely into the private sphere. Weber notes that political solutions to this problem of public meaning often lead to catastrophe, as exemplified by the rise of fascism in the 20th century. Under these conditions, how can individuals form meaning for their lives without fully retreating from public life? This paper argues that Jesus' practice of nonresistance, as conceptualized by Tolstoy and Nietzsche in their texts, *What I Believe* (1940 [1884]) and *The Anti-Christ* (2010 [1888]) offers a source of meaning that reconnects individuals to the external world and their communities without falling into the dangers of politicized meaning. Both thinkers critique Christianity's belief in the Kingdom of Heaven and personal immortality, asserting that these beliefs catalyze the isolating effects of nihilism by removing the need for people to affirm life on earth and their position within their broader communities. Moreover, they assert that Jesus never taught either of these ideas. Instead, Tolstoy and Nietzsche present Jesus' practice of nonresistance as a source of meaning for individuals that is both life-affirming and community-affirming. However, Nietzsche points out vulnerabilities in the practice of nonresistance, such as its tendency to detach from reality, and its inability to participate in the resistance necessary for creation. This study offers nonresistance as an alternative source of meaning-making that affirms communal and earthly life without depending on politics.

I. Introduction

In 19th century Europe, intellectuals were overcome with a sense of malaise, one that persists to this day. Max Weber (2004 [1919]) explains this condition of modernity through the “disenchantment” of the world. While previous periods of history had magical explanations for existence, such as divine creation stories, the process of intellectualism and rationalization has made the world calculable for the modern individual (Weber 2004 [1919], 14). In a disenchanted world, people rely on technology and calculation for substantive meaning, but these are specialized forces that no individual can enter into entirely. Science’s supremacy over religious impulses results in a universe that feels impersonal to the individual.¹ Science overcame religion but could not replace the human need for meaning and value.

The inability to resolve the tension between the intellect and religious longing results in despair at the realization that the external world has no meaning or value. Society has succumbed to nihilism. Although the term nihilism carries different meanings, Lawrence Hatab attempts to formulate a unifying definition of nihilism that encompasses its many different facets. He describes it as the belief that the world has no value, human existence is ultimately meaningless, and knowledge claims are without foundation (Hatab 1987, 91). The retraction from the external world in search of meaning poses a problem for contemporary politics: nihilistic disbelief makes it difficult to find meaning in shared life, including politics. The 20th century’s attempt to re-insert meaning into the political realm had catastrophic results. Weber hauntingly predicted the rise of fascism in the 20th century when he wrote that the “most ultimate and most sublime values have withdrawn from public life...it is no accident that our greatest art is intimate rather than monumental...if we attempt to ‘invent’ a sense of monumental art, this leads only to wretched monstrosities” (Weber 2004

¹ Richard Jenkins (2000) discusses the process of rationalization as it relates to disenchantment in his article *Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium*.

[1919], 14). How, then, can people find meaning in shared life that does not lead to dangerous political regimes? I propose that Leo Tolstoy and Friedrich Nietzsche, through their various interpretations of Jesus' nonresistance, offer a potential response to the problem of nihilism that makes it difficult for people to find meaning in shared life.

Tolstoy and Nietzsche both felt the malaise of modernity and tried to find solutions to the nihilism that engulfed Europe and Russia alike. Tolstoy's *What I Believe* (1940 [1884]) and Nietzsche's *The Anti-Christ* (2010 [1888]) are potentially enlightening because of their joint interest in the life and teachings of Jesus as a potential solution to the persistence of nihilism. Tolstoy departed from the Russian Orthodox tradition in his interpretation of the Bible because he believed the Church's focus on the afterlife failed to generate meaning for life on earth. Instead, he formed his own religion based in the moral teachings of Jesus Christ. *What I Believe* offers Tolstoy's articulation of the true meaning of Christianity. Through Jesus' moral teaching of nonresistance, Tolstoy presents the only meaningful practice of life—one that values earthly life above all else.² Tolstoy rejects the idea that Jesus preached a divine Kingdom of Heaven or personal immortality because such notions alienate people from their lives on earth and their placement within humanity. To Tolstoy, nonresistance is a practice of life that affirms life on earth and leads to gratitude and service to humanity.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, rejects Christianity outright and blames it for the rise of nihilism in the 19th century.³ To live in a post-God world, Nietzsche asserts that individuals must learn to overcome Christian values in order to create new values that affirm life on earth. Nietzsche wrote extensively on alternative sources for meaning-making, such as in *The Gay Science* (1974 [1882]).

² *What I Believe* was intended as the fourth installment of a collection of works that critiqued Russian Orthodoxy. The first installment was *Confession* (1882), but the middle two, *Investigation of Dogmatic Theology* and *Union and Translation of the Four Gospels*, were never published (Bartlett 2011, 301).

³ Nietzsche writes in *Genealogy of Morality* that "it is still a *metaphysical* belief on which our belief in science rests...but what if precisely this is becoming ever more implausible, if nothing proves divine any longer..." (Nietzsche 2009 [1887] III.24).

However, *The Anti-Christ* includes a detailed interpretation of the life of Jesus that adds a unique insight to Nietzsche's account of meaning-making. Thomas Brobjer (1997), a scholar who emphasizes Nietzsche as a reader, found that Nietzsche read *What I Believe* and listed it as one of the texts that influenced Nietzsche—and that he annotated the most—when he was writing *The Anti-Christ* (Brobjer 1997, 667).⁴ While it is unknown how directly he was responding to Tolstoy, Nietzsche constructs a profoundly similar account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. However, Nietzsche departs from Tolstoy by characterizing nonresistance as a pathological drive rather than an exemplary practice of life. Nietzsche credits Jesus' nonresistance to a pathological oversensitivity that made any act of resistance too painful for Jesus. As a result, Jesus formulated a rich inner life that he relied on instead of engaging with the reality of the external world. His aversion to resistance led to a complete affirmation of life, whereby Jesus could accept and love everything in lieu of resisting anything. Still, this affirmation could not embrace the external world in the way Nietzsche thinks is necessary to create values and live a powerful life. Any act of creation, including meaning-making, requires a resistance that Nietzsche thinks is necessary to live a powerful life. Nietzsche also agrees with Tolstoy that the Church contradicts the teachings of Jesus by inserting an otherworldly Kingdom of Heaven and personal immortality into Christian doctrine. Gratitude for one's lineage and service to the community is important for true meaning-making, but he is simultaneously worried that nonresistance can limit the creativity necessary in meaning-making.

Nietzsche and Tolstoy's closely aligned accounts of the life of Jesus make it plausible to read *The Anti-Christ* as a response to *What I Believe*, which is the task I undertake in this paper. Exploring the substantive connections and differences between *The Anti-Christ* and *What I Believe* potentially illuminates both texts, as well as Nietzsche's and Tolstoy's treatments of nihilism and the possibility

⁴ Brobjer alludes to a future project that would describe in more detail the other books that influenced Nietzsche when he wrote *The Anti-Christ*, but I could find no evidence that this work has been published.

of meaning, whether through or beyond Christianity, in late modernity. I argue that Tolstoy and Nietzsche's accounts of Jesus, through his life practice of nonresistance, placement of the Kingdom of Heaven, and view of personal immortality, help formulate options for meaning-making under conditions of nihilism. Tolstoy embraces nonresistance in its entirety. He positions it as the only path to meaning because it is the only way to affirm the world and a person's position within their community, while also rejecting the political realm. Nietzsche is far more hesitant about the power of nonresistance. Although he respects Jesus' ability to affirm life, Nietzsche points out the potential problem of nonviolent positions that do not allow for the resistance involved in creating meaning, a limitation that must be carefully examined. Moreover, Nietzsche saw the pathological condition of Jesus as a deeply internal and personal reality, meaning that Jesus was not as engaged with the external world as Tolstoy suspects. Nietzsche suggests a balance between nonresistance and resistance that still allows for individual meaning-making. The practice of nonresistance offers a way for people to formulate meaning for their lives under the condition of nihilism, which makes it difficult to find meaning in the external world. It is a practice that situates individuals as members of their broader society, without entering the dangerous sphere of political meaning, as warned by Weber. Nonetheless, nonresistance is an effective and even radical, form of political engagement. Although Tolstoy frames nonresistance as an unpolitical source of meaning, it influenced political movements across the world. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. were both directly influenced by Tolstoy's nonresistance and deeply integrated the practice into their nonviolent political movements. In a world where people are increasingly isolated from the external world, and political solutions are potentially dangerous, nonresistance offers a source of meaning that can reconnect individuals with their external environment and community.

To make my argument, I will: (1) outline Nietzsche's and Tolstoy's broad critiques of Christianity that set up their arguments for meaning, as well as situate myself within relevant

literature; (2) analyze Tolstoy's and Nietzsche's account of the life practice of Jesus through his doctrine of nonresistance; (3) explain the implications of Jesus' doctrine of nonresistance that places the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, according to Tolstoy and Nietzsche; (4) and discuss Tolstoy's and Nietzsche's view that personal immortality is incongruent with Jesus' teachings and alienates individuals from humanity; and (5) consider the personal and political implications of my argument.

II. A Case for Tolstoy and Nietzsche

Before I can delve into Tolstoy's and Nietzsche's account of Jesus, I first must establish their respective starting assumptions for their critiques of Christianity as well as how scholarship engages with them.

Nietzsche read *What I Believe* when he wrote *The Anti-Christ*. However, Nietzsche and Tolstoy did not engage with one another directly, and when they did reference one another it was with distaste.⁵ Still, their similar diagnoses of the problems of modernity and overlapping interpretations of Jesus make them pertinent figures to study together. Both Nietzsche and Tolstoy rejected modernity and blamed Christianity, at least in part, for the rise of 19th century nihilism. It is worth noting that Tolstoy and Nietzsche have different target audiences for their critiques of Christianity. Tolstoy writes to a Russian audience that is growing wary of Russian Orthodox explanations for life and meaning. Orthodoxy was an insufficient source of meaning for Tolstoy and his peers, but the intellectual and atheistic path his peers pursued were no more meaningful. Nietzsche, on the other hand, speaks to a broader conception of Christianity across Europe, and argues that meaning must be rooted in a realism that Christianity cannot offer.⁶

⁵ Despite calling Nietzsche a "miserable madman", Tolstoy Read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and noted in his journal that a passage on marriage and child rearing was "wonderful" (Paperno 2014, 98). Nietzsche wrote even less on Tolstoy, describing him in his notebooks as a "Russian Pessimist", and in *The Anti-Christ* he simply categorizes him as a "literary decadent" (Nietzsche 1968, 51; Nietzsche 2009 [1887] 7).

⁶ Although I refer to Nietzsche and Tolstoy as responding to the 'Church' when discussing their particular accounts, it is important to note that Tolstoy is responding to Orthodoxy, and Nietzsche is speaking more broadly about Christianity.

Tolstoy's religious conversion raises an important question concerning his overall life and works: are Tolstoy's works the representation of a single, continuous thinker, or are they split into two distinct periods after his conversion? Contemporary scholarship on Tolstoy generally supports the idea of a continuous Tolstoy. Medzibovskaya (2008) argues that Tolstoy's conversion was the result of a long philosophical journey that reflects the cultural environment of his time. G.M. Hamburg (2010) also adopts a unified view of Tolstoy, whereby Tolstoy wrestled with his religious identity his whole life. However, Hamburg acknowledges that Tolstoy experienced a 'break' during his conversion that he had to grapple with the rest of his life (Hamburg 2010, 142). I follow Medzibovskaya's (2008) reading of Tolstoy's conversion as a continual process that was shaped by his cultural surroundings. Medzibovskaya argues that Tolstoy, like Nietzsche, was a "quintessentially modern phenomenon" (Medzibovskaya 2008, xxxvi).

Tolstoy opens his *Confession* (1882) with a general observation on the decline of religiosity among his educated peers, including himself. "My lapse in faith occurred as is usual among people on our level of education...religious doctrine is professed far away from life and independently of it. If it is encountered, it is only as an external phenomenon" (Tolstoy 1940 [1882] 4). The lives of men had little to do with the principles of the Church, thus everyday life and religion appeared to have nothing to do with one another. Tolstoy observed a spiritual crisis, but did not believe the Russian Orthodox Church of his time provided an answer.

Tolstoy asserts that Orthodox Church doctrine is based in contradiction and hypocrisy. The Church, to Tolstoy, preaches that the teachings of Jesus Christ are sacred and good, but does not recognize his teachings as necessary for people to follow on earth. Jesus instructs people to: (1) refrain from judgment entirely, including legal judgment; (2) remain faithful to one woman and to never abandon her; (3) give no oath to anyone besides God; (4) love all people of all nations equally,

and, most importantly; (5) to practice nonresistance.⁷ Taken together, Tolstoy reinterprets Jesus' commandments as commandments of peace (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 406). However, he sees that the Church argues that men are weak and continue to "do worse though they wish to do better, and that therefore they cannot do better" (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 408). In other words, the commandments of Christ are too demanding for individuals to realistically pursue. Tolstoy cites this as a contradiction and intentional misinterpretation of Christ's commandments so that early members of the Church could justify their erroneous lives. He writes that "the meaning of Christ's teachings are plain and simple, and its statements are important, but the interpretations of it, based on a wish to justify existing evil, have so obscured it that it has to be rediscovered with difficulty" (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 385).

Tolstoy points to the Church's belief in original sin and the salvation of man as the primary reason why people cannot live good lives under the Church's misinterpretation of Christ. The Church teaches that man was corrupted by Adam in paradise.⁸ Tolstoy views the story of the fall of man as justification for people to no longer consider for themselves what is good. Adam's choice to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil means that man no longer needs to determine what is good or evil for himself—he is already condemned to a life of sin. Under Church doctrine, Man's only path to redemption is through Jesus. Tolstoy writes, "Adam has once and for all done for me what is bad, and Christ has, once and for all, corrected that evil done by Adam, and therefore I, as a spectator, should grieve for the fall of Adam and rejoice in the redemption of Christ" (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 412). In other words, the Church reduced the individual to a mere spectator in their own life: man cannot help but be evil, not by his doing but by Adam's, and that his redemption is not his but Christ's.

⁷ For Tolstoy's complete restatement of Jesus' five commandments, see Chapter VI of *What I Believe*.

⁸ Eve is absent from Tolstoy's account of the the fall of man. Because of this peculiar omission, I will only refer to Adam in this paper when discussing the fall of man.

The move to spectatorship means that man no longer needs to struggle between what Tolstoy refers to as animal instincts, or base desires, and rational instincts, as man's desire for truth and goodness (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 412).⁹ To the Church, Christ's crucifixion absolves man of his need to reflect on his life. Tolstoy writes that "since Christ's time man need no longer shed the light of reason on his path through life and choose what is best. He only needs to believe that Christ has redeemed him from sin, and then he is always sinless" (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 231). The need for man to struggle between his animal instincts and a rational life is rendered unnecessary (Tolstoy 1884, 214). Under Christian doctrine, the essence of life, the struggle for goodness, is dulled by the promise of an afterlife. Life on earth, under the Church's doctrine, is pointless to Tolstoy. In response, Tolstoy formulates his own religion that is based in complete adherence to the peaceful doctrine of Jesus that leads to a meaningful life.

Tolstoy is well known for his peculiar conversion to the literal teachings of Jesus, but scholarship on Tolstoy is less certain that his conversion was truly a Christian one. Hugh McLean (2019) argues that Tolstoy was not concerned with reconstructing a historical Jesus. Tolstoy sees those who focus on such trivial things as distracting themselves from the urgency and magnitude of his message (McLean 2019, 108). McLean suggests that Tolstoy was not looking for a hero in Jesus. Instead, Tolstoy admired that Jesus correctly identified how to live a meaningful life and attached himself to him on this accord. According to McLean, Tolstoy's attachment to Jesus' commandments is moral and not theological.

Inessa Medzhibovskaya (2008) also rejects the idea that Tolstoy adopts Jesus's teaching for theological purposes. However, she suggests that Tolstoy's reading of Jesus is an artistic task (Medzhibovskaya 2008, 213). She argues that Tolstoy's unique reinterpretation of the Bible reflects an aesthetic vision rather than theological perspective. Medzhibovskaya notes that Tolstoy interprets

⁹ Tolstoy provides opaque conceptions of reason and rationality. I will discuss these terms in more detail in section III.

key Greek religious terms, such as *metanoia* (will to change), with aesthetic meaning (Medzhibovskaya 2008, 2012). Tolstoy interprets *metanoia* as a “spiritual dynamism to the search for meaning” that makes meaning and artistic projects possible (Medzhibovskaya 2008, 210). On the other hand, I. I. Evlampiev (2018) argues that Tolstoy instead realigns his religious views with Gnostic Christianity and reflects a more ancient strand of Christianity. While I agree that Tolstoy is greatly influenced by older strands of Christianity, my paper continues on the interpretive line of McLean and Medzhibovskaya. Tolstoy was far more concerned with the moral and aesthetic teachings of Christ than he was with Christianity.

Nietzsche develops a critique of Christianity that is distinct from Tolstoy’s. Nietzsche’s concern with Christianity, shaped by his observation of modern European nihilism, is that Europe’s steadfast commitment to Christian values is not backed up by a genuine belief in God.¹⁰ The Christian quest for truth inevitably led to the Church’s decline and the rise of scientific research (Nietzsche 2009 [1887] III.23). Nietzsche’s fundamental problem with Europe is its dependence on God—even after it explained Him away via science. Living a virtuous life is dependent on the rewards one will receive in heaven, but without genuine belief motivating people, the morality they follow becomes hollow, and even disingenuous.¹¹ The human life in modernity is marked by contradiction: natural instincts are suppressed in favor of divine promises that people no longer believe in.¹² The rise of scientific research removed God, but did not uproot Christianity’s moral values.

While most scholars agree that Nietzsche is anti-Christian, they disagree on Nietzsche’s primary critique of Christianity. David Mitchell (2017, 527) outlines two broad camps of interpretation:

¹⁰ Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science* that “the great recent event—that ‘God is dead,’ that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable, is already beginning to cast its fine shadow over Europe” (Nietzsche 1974 [1882], 343).

¹¹ This account of genuine belief mirrors Mill’s account of dead dogmas. Mill writes that, “however unwillingly a person who has a strong opinion may admit the possibility that his opinion may be false, he ought to be moved by the consideration that however true it may be, if it is not fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as a dead dogma, not a living truth.” (Mill 2015 [1859], 35).

¹² Nietzsche writes that “Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, failed, it has made an idol out of everything that contradicts the preservation instincts of a strong life” (Nietzsche, 2010 [1888], 5).

internalized and non-internalized readings of Nietzsche. Internalized interpretations, such as Ridley's (1998), emphasize the suppression of acting on natural instincts and internalization of the will that Christianity perpetrated. This line focuses on the "bad conscience" and the resulting slave morality in the second treatise of *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1998 [1887]) as the foundation of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. However, non-internalized readings of Nietzsche de-emphasize the importance of bad conscience as Nietzsche's foundational problem of Christianity. Brian Leiter (2002) argues that Christian slave morality is damaging to the production of higher beings. The base values of the masses eventually poison the capacity for higher beings to distinguish themselves (Leiter 2002). Poellner (1995) presents another non-internalized view, that focuses on the deceptive quality of Christianity that makes it difficult for Christians to trust their experiences with the external world. Instead, Christians must trust in metaphysical ideals, rendering them incapable of valuing the world based on lived experience (Poellner 1995). My interpretation of Nietzsche's primary critique of Christianity follows non-internalized lines, as expressed below.

Nietzsche's distaste for Christianity, particularly in his later writings, lies in its indulgence of decadent values.¹³ While Nietzsche does not provide a clear definition of decadence, I follow Daniel Conway's (1999) interpretation of decadence in Nietzsche's thought as a "physiological disarray" of one's system of instincts that leads people to inadvertently live bad and self-destructive lives (Conway 1999, 25). Nietzsche writes, "I call...an individual corrupt when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it *prefers* things that will harm it" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 6). Decadent values, then, belong to those who cannot trust their instincts to understand the world and have turned to "*Nibilistic* values" (Nietzsche 2009 [1888], 6). The theologian, to Nietzsche, gains influence by capitalizing on the nihilistic spirit of decadence to proclaim decadent values as the truth. The theologian holds "all the great concepts in his hand; he plays them with a sort of good-natured

¹³ The term decadence first enters Nietzsche's writings in 1888, one year before his mental collapse. (Conway 1999, 24).

distain for ‘understanding’, the ‘senses’, honour’, ‘the good life’, ‘science’; he thinks these sorts of things are *beneath* him” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 8). In other words, the theologian rejects the sensual world as crude in comparison to the truth of the spiritual world, which Nietzsche describes as placing the truth in nothingness. Out of the theologian, a more concerning pathos was born: Christian faith. Nietzsche describes Christian faith as the final turn away from the “incurable mendacity” of life (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 9). Instead of embracing the suffering of human life that is incurable, faith allows the individual to deceive themselves by embracing an inverted sense of what is ‘true’ and ‘false’ that pads the pain of living. Nietzsche writes that “whatever hurts life the most is called ‘true’, and whatever improves, increases, affirms, justifies, life or makes it triumph is called ‘false’” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 8). Ultimately, Nietzsche categorizes the will toward Christian faith as the “nihilistic will willing power,” meaning that this faith only inclines people to embrace life denying values (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 9).¹⁴

Nietzsche describes Jesus as a decadent, but he does not condemn Jesus like he does Christianity.¹⁵ Nietzsche, like Tolstoy, has a unique reading of Jesus that departs from Christian tradition. Marc Lucht (2013) finds that Nietzsche’s and Tolstoy’s interpretations overlap significantly. They both reject Christianity but do not outright discard Jesus. Lucht outlines the converging opinions that Nietzsche and Tolstoy have over the Church’s hypocrisy and misuse of Jesus’s teachings as a life practice rather than religious belief. Ronald Carson (1971) addresses Nietzsche’s Jesus in *The Anti-Christ*, and he argues that Nietzsche’s description of Jesus as an “idiot,” from the Greek *idiotes*, means that Jesus constructed a radically private form of existence (Carson 1971, 46). According to Carson, Jesus cannot be a fully formed human in Nietzsche’s eyes because

¹⁴ In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche describes the will toward life-preservation as faith and generally sees faith as an inescapable part of life. He writes that “man must from time to time believe he knows why he exists; his race cannot thrive without periodic thrust in life—without faith in the *reason in life*” (Nietzsche 1974 [1882] I.1).

¹⁵ Nietzsche writes in *The Anti-Christ* that Jesus is a “most interesting decadent” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 31). More on this in section III.

he cannot face the action and communal engagement that is required for human activity. John Evans (1995) similarity focuses on Jesus in *The Anti-Christ*, but emphasizes Jesus' ability to affirm life through his practice of nonresistance. David Mitchell (2017) expands on Evan's argument and highlights the importance Jesus has in Nietzsche's larger critique of Christianity. Mitchell argues that Nietzsche separates his account of Jesus from his account of Christianity, which is based in belief to make a case for the lived understanding of life that Jesus sought, instead of the static belief of the Church (Mitchell 2017, 539).

Scholars have long noted the similarity between Tolstoy Nietzsche's general dissent from modernity. Otto Heller (1918) describes Nietzsche and Tolstoy as "prophets of dissent," whereby both were recognized as critics of their contemporary world and reformers of society. More recently, John Riser (2006) evaluates Nietzsche and Tolstoy as thinkers who refused modern life. Nietzsche, to Riser, rejects modernity as overly optimistic and dependent on a quest for the Truth, which Nietzsche rejects as a futile task. However, he sees Tolstoy's dissent as a response to the self-seeking materialism of modernity. Helen Davis (1971) compares Nietzsche's conflict-philosophy to Tolstoy's doctrine of nonresistance. She views their work as personal and biographical, and discusses their ethical concerns with modernity from a psychological level. She evaluates what she labels as Tolstoy's altruism and Nietzsche's egoism based on the life experiences they had that she could glean from their writings. Similarly, Maurice Adams (1900) compares Nietzsche and Tolstoy's ethical stances. Adams positions Nietzsche and Tolstoy as opposites—Tolstoy ultimately commits to asceticism, while Nietzsche embraces the health and expression of individual instincts.¹⁶ existing scholarship on Nietzsche and Tolstoy reveals how their related discontent with modernity informs their philosophies.

¹⁶ Categorizing Nietzsche as a pessimist is not generally agreed on in the literature. See Joshua Foa Dienstag's "Nietzsche's Dionysian Pessimism," which argues against categorizing Nietzsche strictly as a pessimist (Dienstag 2001).

My project aims to contribute to this modest literature on Nietzsche and Tolstoy and their critiques of Christianity and modernity. Their broad critiques of Christianity reveal how the Church has directly contributed to the problem of nihilism that they believe hangs over modernity. However, literature on Tolstoy and Nietzsche have not yet addressed how Nietzsche and Tolstoy's interpretations of Jesus's nonresistance function as a source of meaning under the conditions of nihilism. While Riser, Davis, and Adams explore various ways Tolstoy and Nietzsche have rejected modernity, they do not engage with the overlap between Nietzsche and Tolstoy's conception of Jesus and how their interpretation of his life relate to their solutions to nihilism. Further, the literature on Nietzsche, Tolstoy, and Jesus, do not connect back to its relevance to nihilism nor do they fully address the relevance of nonresistance as a potential way to generate shared meaning under conditions of nihilism. Lucht perhaps is the closest to my project, but he does not acknowledge the vulnerabilities that Nietzsche saw in Jesus' nonresistance as a source of meaning. In the following sections, I will elaborate on Tolstoy's and Nietzsche's interpretations of the life practice of Jesus, the Kingdom of Heaven, and personal immortality.

III. The Life Practice of Jesus

To Tolstoy and Nietzsche, Jesus' life practice is his commitment to the practice of nonresistance. While Tolstoy emphasizes all of the commandments of Christ, he believes that nonresistance sits at their foundation as Jesus' source of meaning for life. Nietzsche similarly suggests that Jesus' nonresistance is the guiding principle of Jesus' life. However, Nietzsche explains Jesus' commitment to nonresistance as a psychological reality rather than an exemplary life practice, as Tolstoy describes it. Tolstoy and Nietzsche both use Jesus' teachings as a foil to Christianity to assert that the Church distorts Jesus' message to justify a bad way of living. They emphasize the life practice of Jesus as a key component of living a life that can affirm the suffering of living. However,

Nietzsche points out the vulnerability of Jesus' life practice. Although Jesus can affirm living, he cannot recognize external realities, nor can he participate in the resistance involved in creation.

As mentioned in the previous section, Tolstoy believed that the Church altered Jesus's teachings to justify their base animal desires. Tolstoy rediscovers the words of Christ by going back to the original Greek Bible. He claims that the commandments of Christ are not only possible to live by but are also choice-worthy in themselves (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 386). Tolstoy's primary focus is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48). While Tolstoy contends that the Orthodox Church attempts to reconcile the Old Testament with the New Testament, Tolstoy points to the Sermon on the Mount as an example of how Jesus' mission was to break down Mosaic tradition, not fulfill it. Jesus, as a teacher, cannot teach without destroying the former law (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 361). Christ's doctrine was necessarily destructive of established life.

Jesus' commandments contradicted all established social and legal systems according to Tolstoy's explanation. If we reflect back on Tolstoy's reinterpretation of Jesus' five commandments, we can see that they suggest a new framework for operating in the social and political world. Tolstoy's Jesus instructs people to refrain from all judgment, *including legal judgment*. Additionally, men must love all nations equally and to never take an oath outside their oath to God. These commandments pose a dilemma to a citizen living under any nation. Commitment to Christ's doctrine is a refusal of the organized state. Yet, judgment, war, and violence are powers of the state that a follower of Christ must abstain from *entirely*. This tension between the state and Christ is precisely why the founders of Christianity softened his commandments: they saw the life of Christ as a hinderance to their roles as members of a political society. Tolstoy believes that the evils of the world have become so prevalent, so *institutionalized*, that people cannot see a peaceful alternative to the conditions of society. However, Tolstoy asserts that acceptance of evil in the world is a misunderstanding of human nature.

Tolstoy argues that Jesus' commandments are possible because they are based in an understanding of human nature. Tolstoy quotes Jesus, saying "the law of resistance by violence to him that is evil which you have made the basis of your lives, is false and *unnatural*" (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 345; emphasis added). While Tolstoy does not provide a definition of what he means by natural, S. K. Wertz (1998) distinguishes between two kinds of human nature that Tolstoy describes in *What is Art?*, sensitive human nature and rational human nature. The former is the capacity to feel in unity with mankind and with your community, and the latter is the calculating part of man that is unsympathetic toward others (Wertz 1998, 78). Wertz argues that both are important to human life to Tolstoy, but the subversion of sympathy under rationality led to the breakdown of the community in modernity. From this description, it appears that Tolstoy referring to the lack of natural sympathy in modern society, which is overrun with rationality, when he refers to the unnatural lives of men.

Tolstoy's account of reasonability is distinct from his conception of rationality. Again, Tolstoy does not provide a clear account of reason in *What I Believe*, but he does elaborate on it in *On Life*. While rationality encompasses the calculating part of man, reason, to Tolstoy, is the "law recognized which his life must be perfected" (Tolstoy 1902 [1888], 60). He continues that reason needs no definition because it is so ingrained within life, stating that "It is a law analogous to that of the animal, according to which it feeds and reproduces its species; like the law of growth and efflorescence in herb and tree, as also the law of the heavenly bodies, by which the earth and stars move" (Tolstoy 1902 [1888], 60). Tolstoy suggests that reason is an individual's capacity to understand themselves as member of and contributor to a larger community. On the other hand, he writes that rationality is the individuality of man, the "spade given to the rational being to dig with, and, in digging, to blunt and sharpen, and wear out; but not polish and carefully preserve. It is a talent given to him for increase, not for preservation" (Tolstoy 1902 [1888], 86). It appears that, to Tolstoy, rationality is the desire for perfection, growth, and order for our lives. Rationality also

appears to be a critical component of our ability to see what is reasonable. “As soon as he argues he acknowledges that he is a rational being, and admitting that, he cannot but admit the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 408). Tolstoy’s argument is that once man uses his reason, he is acknowledging that he is more than just an animal and is a member of a community of individuals like himself. After which, he must acknowledge his reasonable consciousness, that is, his intimate connection with the external world around him. Tolstoy appears to present a difficult relationship between reason and rationality, whereby rationality, as our calculating faculty, allows us to order the world and comprehend ourselves as individuals within a larger community of individuals. However, it can similarly alienate us from our surroundings if it subverts the sympathetic world under itself.

The man who follows his reasonable consciousness will see that nonresistance is the best practice of life. Tolstoy outlines the commandment of nonresistance by stating: “Never resist the evil-doer by force, do not meet violence with violence. If they beat you, endure it; if they take your possessions, yield them up; if they compel you to work; work...” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 393). A nonresistant life is difficult and requires an individual to relinquish the value they place on their own personhood.¹⁷ However, Tolstoy asserts that this practice of nonresistance is a reasonable way to live because one who practices it understands that they are a member of the broader community of men. While Church doctrine allows the Christian to indulge in their base desires and to become a spectator of their own life under the conditions of society, the life of Jesus allows men to live based on their own reasonable efforts. Nonresistance is the conclusion one draws when they view life from Tolstoy’s conception of reason, that life is based in the improvement of the community of men.

¹⁷ More on this point in section V.

Of course, Tolstoy acknowledges that his account of human nature is contrary to many people's life experiences—where violence and war are abundant. Tolstoy posits that this perception is the result of largescale institutions that make human life appear violent and vicious. He writes that “the whole order of our life and the whole complex of mechanism of our institutions designed for the infliction of violence, witness to the extent to which violence is contrary to human nature” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 349). Despite the violence that is inherent to the structure of society, Tolstoy claims that not a single person would take it upon themselves to carry out the task of the system. The largescale institutional structure of modern society has made it easy for people to ignore their sympathetic connection to their peers. He writes that “not a single judge would decide to strangle with a rope the man he condemns to death from the bench” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 349).

Orthodox doctrine agrees with Tolstoy's assertion that it is good to live a peaceful life, but Tolstoy asserts that the church diverges in application. To him, the Church thinks that it is good to live peacefully, like Jesus, but his life does not suit men's capabilities on earth. Tolstoy observes that all rational efforts are dulled by the promise of a better life to come. “All the love of goodness and truth which lies in the soul of man, all his efforts by reason to shed light on life's phenomena...is not merely unimportant according to this teaching, but is a snare or an arrogance” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 412). In other words, the Church has removed the need to live reasonably on earth. Instead, the Church believes of in a world “hoped for”: the afterlife (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 409). The Church places the substance of life beyond reality. Tolstoy writes that the Church (particularly Paul) acknowledged the “unreal as real”, which led men to believe that “though Christ's teaching is good for men, it does not suit men” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 409). In other words, by placing the substance of life beyond reality, men stopped caring for the betterment of life on earth.

One may ask Tolstoy what the point is of living the life outlined by Jesus if you must still exist in a world of evil. Tolstoy responds to this claim by outlining the benefit of living according to

Christ's commandments. Tolstoy asks whether it is better to follow the disciples of Jesus or the disciples of the world: "The disciples of Christ, doing harm to no one, would only be persecuted by evil men, but the disciples of the world would be persecuted by all, since the law of their life is the law of strife" (Tolstoy 1884, 468). Christ's disciples will "be prepared for the sufferings, but the world's disciples will employ all the powers of their soul to escape them; and that Christ's disciples when suffering will think that the world needs their suffering, but the world's disciples when suffering will not know why they suffer" (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 468). For Tolstoy, the value in Jesus' teaching of peace above all else is that it is rooted in a sympathetic human nature that places man's rationality, his ability to strive for the good despite his animal instincts, as the foundation for a well lived life. This path may include personal suffering, but it is the only meaningful path.

Nietzsche similarly conceives of Jesus' life as based in nonresistance, but the German philosopher is far less willing to concede that Jesus' life is the best practice of life. Instead, Nietzsche is hesitant on the grounds that he sees Jesus' life practice as a psychological condition, a coping mechanism against the constant suffering of life, that makes it difficult for Jesus to interact with the physical world. Jesus, to Nietzsche, constructs a rich inner life that allows him to love and embrace the suffering involved in living, but this internal world shields Jesus from needing to acknowledge the physical world as a real place.

While Nietzsche harshly criticizes Christianity, he does not find its fault in Christ himself. Nietzsche gives Jesus the title of free spirit, an archetype of man that Nietzsche admires, but he does so conditionally. He writes that "Jesus could be called a 'free spirit', using the phrase somewhat loosely—he does not care for solid things" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 32). The free spirit is described in section 13 of *The-Anti-Christ*, as a "*living* declaration of war on and victory over all old concepts of

‘true’ and ‘untrue’” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 13).¹⁸ They are people who have what Nietzsche describes as “scientific character” (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*). A scientific character, to Nietzsche, is capable of resisting the propensity to believe in stagnant truths (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 13). Nietzsche’s free spirit is a human capable of living a life of practice, akin to living based on a scientific method as opposed to living based on a scientific theory. How, then, does Jesus fit into this description? Understanding how Nietzsche can characterize Jesus as a free spirit, and the boundaries of this characterization, are key to understanding Nietzsche’s conception of a meaningful life that conflicts with the hollow meaning he sees in Christianity.

Nietzsche evaluates Jesus on a psychological level, categorizing Jesus as an overly sensitive figure. He writes that “we are familiar with a condition where the *sense of touch* is pathologically oversensitive and recoils from all contact, from grasping any solid objects” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 29). These people feel the suffering of life too acutely, and as a result, develop a hatred for reality. He writes: “*The instinct of hatred for reality*: the consequence of an extreme oversensitivity and capacity for suffering that does not want to be ‘touched’ at all...” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 30). Consequently, the overly sensitive perceive any resistance as an “unbearable *pain*, and only experiences bliss when it stops resisting everyone and everything, including evil, —love as the only, the *final* possibility for life...” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 29). The overly-sensitive retract into themselves—they flee from any solid form of reality and construct a rich and ‘true’ internal world. Their hatred for reality and aversion to resistance are the “psychological realities” that formulate the doctrine of redemption that is based only in love. This is the basis of Nietzsche explanation for Jesus’ life practice (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 30).

¹⁸ Nietzsche discusses the free spirit across several works, most notably in *Human, all too Human* (1878) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886). Because this paper aims to evaluate Jesus as a free spirit in *The Anti-Christ*, I will limit my definition of the free spirit to this text only. For more information on the free spirit across his various texts, see Ansell-Pearson’s chapter “Free Spirits and Free Thinkers: Nietzsche and Guyau on the future of Morality” in *Nietzsche, Nihilism, and the Philosophy of the Future* (Metzger 2009).

Following the psychology of the overly sensitive, Jesus formulates a rich inner life that necessary deflects any ‘solid things.’ According to Nietzsche, Jesus only spoke about “what was inside him most deeply: ‘life’ or ‘truth’ or ‘light’ are his words for the innermost” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 32).¹⁹ Jesus repels everything else, including faith, dogma, belief, history, knowledge, politics, books: any worldly conception. However, even though Jesus repels worldly things, he is not *negating* them. Nietzsche states that Jesus created such a consistent inner world that is based in the ‘proof’ of his ‘inner light,’ that he *cannot* contradict. Nietzsche writes that his teaching “has no idea how to even form the thought of an opposing judgment...if it comes across an opposing judgment, it will feel deeply sympathetic and grieve over this ‘blindness’—since it sees the ‘light’— but it would not offer any objections...” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 32). In other words, Jesus is affirming his life without having to negate anything. Jesus’s inability to negate leads to his primary life practice: non-resistance.

Christianity misunderstood this detail about Jesus’ life according to Nietzsche—it saw faith (*Glaube*) where he taught practice. He did not promise ‘blessedness’ to his followers, in the way that the Church described him as doing, because blessedness was the only reality for Jesus. Nietzsche notes that the symbols Jesus used to describe his life practice were taken literally by his followers—turning his teachings about life into teachings of faith. He writes that “the first disciples in particular: when faced with a being awash in symbols and incomprehensibilities, they had to translate it into their own crudeness in order to make head or tail of it—the type did not exist for them until they reduced it to familiar forms...the prophet, the Messiah, the future judge...” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 31). Jesus’ disciples introduced Jesus as the Messiah because they misunderstood the symbolism of his teachings. Nietzsche continues that: “Guilt and punishment are completely missing from the psychology of the ‘evangel’; so is the concept of reward. ‘Sin’, any distance between God and man:

¹⁹ Nietzsche equates Jesus’ philosophy to the Sankhya system of philosophy. This philosophy bases reality in the intellect. The intellect is the *causa materialis* of the world. See Everitt (1899) for more on Sankhya philosophy.

these are abolished, — this is that the ‘glad tidings’ are all about. Blessedness is not a promise, it has no strings attached: it is the *only* reality—everything else is just a symbol used to speak about it...” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 33). Blessedness to Jesus, is not a future promise but an internal state of being.

The internal nature of Jesus’ blessedness is marked by his commitment to nonresistance. The true Christian who practiced Jesus’ message, according to Nietzsche, would not get angry, would not get divorced, and would not get involved in courts of law because this was how they could act to reach internal blessedness. Nietzsche solidifies this point by writing that: “The life of the redeemer was nothing other than *this* practice...he knew how the *practice* of life is the only thing that can make you feel ‘divine’, ‘blessed’, ‘evangelic’” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 33). Even Jesus’ death on the cross was an example of his practice. “He does not offer any resistance, he does not defend his rights...what’s more, *he invites it*...and he begs, he suffers, he loves *with* those, *in* those people who did him evil” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 35). Nietzsche points to Jesus’ interaction with the thief on the cross to embody his practice. When the thief cried to Jesus that he was a divine man, a child of God, Jesus replied “if this is how you truly feel...*then you are in paradise*” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 35). Jesus could affirm life, including its suffering, through radical love and nonresistance.

To Nietzsche, an individual’s ability to affirm their life is integral to their ability to live powerfully. However, Nietzsche also believes that no-saying is important to living, but it is difficult to track the role that no-saying has in Nietzsche’s philosophy of life affirmation. Nietzsche’s emphasis on life affirmation appears contrary to the idea of no-saying, as the act of saying no is traditionally seen as a rejection of some aspect of life. Yet, Nietzsche writes that Zarathustra, his archetypal higher human, is a nay sayer in *Ecce Homo*, stating that “the psychological problem apparent in the Zarathustra type is how someone who to an unprecedented degree says no and *does* no to everything everyone had said yes to so far—how somebody like this can nevertheless be the

opposite of a no-saying spirit” (Nietzsche 2008 [1883], “Zarathustra” 6). By this, Nietzsche is referring to Zarathustra’s creative *may*: a no-saying that is necessary for creation. Bernard Reginster (2006), in his book *The Affirmation of Life*, writes that “Nietzsche himself often grants value even to those practices and ideas he most vehemently condemns, if only as opportunities for polemics” (Reginster 2006, 246). Nietzsche’s *may* is still life serving, he is capable of no-saying in the pursuit of making something new.

A complete inability to say no has its own downfalls. Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science* of an individual who cannot say ‘no.’ This person cannot adopt Nietzsche’s philosophy because “he would *suffer* too much, for my way of thinking requires a warlike soul, a desire to hurt, a delight in saying no, a hard skin; he would languish from open and internal wounds” (Nietzsche 2004 [1882], 32). This person’s sensitivity makes no saying too painful—any *no* in creating or shaping is too painful to this type.

The question is, is Jesus capable of Nietzsche’s *may* saying, even if he cannot negate or contradict? Nietzsche describes Jesus as capable of repelling ‘solid things,’ but what he repels has no value. Nietzsche describes this as “*pure stupidity* concerning the fact *that* things like this [politics, knowledge, books, history] exist” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 32).²⁰ Reflecting back on Carson’s (1971) account of Jesus as an *idiot*, we can see clearer how Jesus’ ignorance of the outer world is a reflection of his retraction into his inner world. The meaning of Jesus’ life is *only* internal. This is a problem for Nietzsche. The values and ideas that Zarathustra says no to still exist to him. They are still incorporated into his creative field. Jesus does not have this warlike, *creative*, quality. He can say *yes* to living, but he is incapable of the *no* saying required to shape the world around him. Jesus cannot even conceive of the world around him as *real*. To clarify, Jesus was not opposed to the suffering

²⁰ It is worthwhile to note that the ass in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is incapable of saying ‘no’, and Zarathustra similarity refers to it as a ‘yea saying’ based in stupidity. See Zarathustra book III “The Ass Festival.”

involved in living, and even embraced it on the cross, but he could not conceive the external world as having any value—only his inner world existed.

Jesus' ability to affirm and not to negate is key to understanding how he both is and is not a free spirit. Jesus could hold values outside of conventional morality and could live according to a life based in practice and not doctrine, like a free spirit. Jesus' 'faith,' according to Nietzsche, "does not formulate itself...its *lives*, it resists formulas" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 32). His faith here is characterized by a way to live. The faith of the theologian is nonexistent to Jesus. Jesus, much like the free spirit, holds distaste for 'solid things,' but Jesus does not have their warlike spirit. The free spirit holds everything 'true' and 'untrue' in their hands and can form them to their will (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 13). Jesus is incapable of conceiving anything as 'false.' He is a free spirit in his ability to affirm suffering, but his inability to negate makes him only a conditional free spirit. The good life to Nietzsche does not just consist in life affirmation—it also consists of a *no* necessary to create meaning for oneself using all of the contents of their surroundings.

Nietzsche and Tolstoy slowly construct a picture of what a meaningful life looks like through their evaluations of the life of Jesus and his practice of nonresistance. Both thinkers' laud Jesus for emphasizing practice over faith. However, this is not a surprising revelation and only agrees with Lucht's (2013) account of Nietzsche and Tolstoy. But we can further glean from Tolstoy and Nietzsche's interpretation of Jesus' practice of nonresistance is its ability to affirm life on earth. Tolstoy positions nonresistance as the only way to live a real, natural life, based on human rationality and reason. Nietzsche's account, on the other hand, takes nonresistance to its most extreme conclusion in his depiction of Jesus' inability to resist anything, including doctrines, knowledge, and history. Jesus constructs an entirely private existence that does not place value in the physical world. Yet, Nietzsche still commends Jesus because he found a way to embrace a way of life that loves suffering instead of avoiding it. Tolstoy does not appear to agree that nonresistance manifests as an

inability to resist worldly concepts. Nietzsche might say that Tolstoy takes Jesus too literally on this account, since Tolstoy sees Jesus' doctrine as world affirming. However, Tolstoy does suggest departure from his strict stance on nonresistance in his depiction of Jesus' departure from Mosaic Law. Jesus' commandments as a new teaching that necessarily destroys the old Mosaic Law. This suggests that Tolstoy agrees with Nietzsche that there are artistic forms of resistance that are important in life. Still, Tolstoy's nonresistance allows for the complete destruction of the individual. Personal injury does not concern the person who lives according to Jesus' nonresistance since they can see themselves as members of an ever-expanding community. Personal suffering in the pursuit of higher, even communal goals, is ultimately important to both Tolstoy and Nietzsche, and will unfold in more detail throughout the rest of the paper. Ultimately, Tolstoy and Nietzsche critique the Churches of their time for attempting to turn away from the suffering of the world placing the emphasis of life in a world still to come: the Kingdom of Heaven.

IV. Kingdom of Heaven²¹

Under conventional Christianity, the Kingdom of Heaven is all that God rules over from his seat in heaven, which includes all of heaven, earth, space, and time.²² Relatedly, there is a spiritual aspect to the kingdom, whereby individuals must submit themselves entirely to God to reach his eternal kingdom in heaven, giving God rulership over their temporal life. Here, salvation is of particular importance since it is the gateway to eternal life, where eternity lies beyond the confines of earth.²³ The Kingdom of Heaven is also referred to in Revelation as the last coming of Christ, where

²¹ The kingdom of Heaven is also referred to as the kingdom of God. Both Nietzsche and Tolstoy use these terms interchangeably.

²² "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all" (Psalms 103:19); "How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation" (Daniel 4:3)

²³ "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." (John 3:5-7)

Christ will return to earth and rule for a millennium.²⁴ In sum, the Kingdom of Heaven is all that God reigns over, but it distinctly separates the temporal world from the eternal afterlife, where an individual can only enter the heavenly kingdom via salvation, and the convergence of heaven and earth will only occur at Christ's second coming. Nietzsche and Tolstoy engage with the Christian concept of the Kingdom of Heaven, and critique it over its explicit denial of the earth as real life. They further insist that an other-worldly Kingdom of Heaven is not from the teachings of Jesus. Tolstoy positions Jesus' Kingdom of Heaven as an earthly possibility, while Nietzsche sees the Kingdom of Heaven as only an internal reality for Jesus.

Tolstoy re-centers Jesus' life around life practice rather than belief, which subsequently leads Tolstoy to reconstruct what the Kingdom of Heaven is. Still focusing on the Sermon on the Mount, Tolstoy also attacks the location of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Church asserts that man's life on earth is not *real* life—it is only a holding location until they can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Tolstoy's conception of Church doctrine is that life on earth is only an imitation of the true life, which will only come after death (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 421). The Beatitudes offer the most glaring emphasis on future rewards to those who suffer for God. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for there is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew V 3-5).²⁵ However, Tolstoy parts with this interpretive tradition—suggesting not only that Jesus rejects the idea of a future kingdom, but also that belief in such a kingdom is destructive to life on earth.

Earlier, I established that Tolstoy saw the Church's doctrine as instilling in men a belief that their life should be blissful, and that their earthly conditions are incongruent with a blissful life. This

²⁴ "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6)

²⁵ Margaret Pamment (1981, 213) writes in her article *The Kingdom of Heaven According to the First Gospel*, that the present tenses of 5.3 and 5.10 still refer to future presents and are not indicative of an internal Kingdom of Heaven.

perception, according to Tolstoy, breeds in men a desire to extract from the temporal world what they can to make their earthly life better. The promise of heaven and the temporary condition of earthly life removes any need for moderation in the consumption of their surroundings. The Church asserts that the world is evil and unsalvageable. It says life on earth is bad because it is false, but Tolstoy instead insists that the world is bad because people have abused what has been given to them. To make this point, Tolstoy conceives of hypothetical farm that is stocked with everything one could need to live, and people from all over came to make use of the farm. However, they think not of what others need. Despite the fact that the farm has enough to sustain each person, they selfishly hoard all the resources available—careful to keep their neighbor from getting anything. Having created an environment of hostility and torment, the people scold the farm for providing them with bad conditions. “No one eats a morsel quietly, he eats and snarls; a stronger than he comes and takes the piece away, and another takes it from him. Having tormented themselves, these people, beaten and hungry, leave the place” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 422). After their departure, the master of the farm arranges it again with abundance, but again and again people come and ransack it, each time leaving in anger that their master arranged such a bad place for them.

Eventually, a group of people come to the farm with a teacher among them. He saw that the farm is abundant only if those who inhabit it live reasonably (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 422). He suggests that they plow and sow the fields and tend to the cattle and they will be able to live well. The teacher says that “Your life at this farm is bad; live better and your life will become good,” but the people began to see him as God and could only interpret him as condemning the farm and promising them a better one later (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 423). In response, they continued to hate and abuse the farm while also staying attentive to the arrival of better conditions. Tolstoy writes that “Men have heard all and understood all; but have let slip past their ears that the teacher said that men must create their own happiness” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 424). The promise of a future life only negates the

need for men to care for their present life—they seek a savior to avoid having to make their life better. “They only need,” Tolstoy writes, “instead of expecting anything from heaven or from earth, to cease to destroy themselves” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 424). In other words, if his life is bad, man must resolve to make it better, not lie in wait for life to change for him. Happiness, to Tolstoy, lies in the content of our life practice and not in the ease of our external world. However, Tolstoy does not conceive of happiness as an individual experience. He adopts a broader conception of happiness, as the happiness of a well functioning society. Those at the farm, those who follow Christian doctrine, destroy the peace and order of the life around them.

Under the promise of heaven, fulfilling Jesus’ doctrine is futile. “Christ will come in his own time,” says the Tolstoy that once believed in Church doctrine, “to judge the living and the dead and establish the kingdom of God, independently of our life” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 404). However, the Tolstoy that takes Jesus literally only sees the Kingdom of Heaven as it could exist on earth—not through God’s power but through man’s. “The whole of Christ’s teaching consists in giving the kingdom of God, that is peace, to man...Christ speaks only of the things that divide men and hinder them from being at peace and entering the kingdom of God” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 404). In other words, the kingdom of God can only be realized through Jesus’ commandments of peace. If the world were to universally recognize Jesus’ commandments, “All men will be brothers, and everyone will be at peace with others, enjoying all the blessings of the world during the term of life appointed to them by God” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 406). Jesus *is* the Messiah under Tolstoy’s conception of the Kingdom of God. He has thrown open the doors to the kingdom of God and made it accessible to man through his teachings. It is man who refuses to enter because the path is difficult.

Of course, Tolstoy presents an overly simple, and highly unrealistic, conception of peace on earth. If only everyone could adopt the practice of nonresistance, then we would reach the kingdom of God on earth: a statement perhaps only children and madmen may think is realistic. Tolstoy is

not ignorant of this fact, but he still contends that it is better for even one person to live according to Christ's commandments, even if it leads to death and torture. Outside of the practice of life that Jesus articulates, there is no meaning in one's life. However, to fully understand this, we must wait for Tolstoy's account of personal immortality.

Nietzsche agrees that Christ did not teach that the Kingdom of Heaven is a literal afterlife for the faithful Christian. However, Nietzsche is implicitly critical of Tolstoy's reading of the Kingdom of Heaven as a worldly place. Nietzsche asserts that the Kingdom of Heaven is only a symbol of the inner reality Jesus lives by, and Tolstoy's picture of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth is the result of taking Jesus' symbols too literally.

According to Nietzsche, Jesus, as the great symbolist, can only speak in parable about his internal reality. The idea of the 'son of man', the 'Kingdom of Heaven', and 'holy trinity', were not meant as literal representations of God when Jesus spoke about them, but as an "eternal faculty, a psychological symbol" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 34). *Eternal*, in that his reality holds no placement in time or space—it only exists as a state of the mind. However, his followers could not understand that Jesus' symbols were only an attempt to describe an inner philosophy and instead took him literally when He spoke of God or heaven. This misunderstanding condemned Christianity to crude contradiction. By personifying God and placing heaven in the *beyond*, Christians subvert the entire bases of Jesus' teaching by making his symbols real. Nietzsche writes that "nothing is less Christian than the *ecclesiastical crudity* of God as a *person*" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 34). Christians made God temporal and divine, which only took them further away from Jesus' teachings of eternal, psychological faculties, where neither the temporal nor the divine have any value.

The Kingdom of Heaven, then, is only a state of the heart to Jesus (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 34). While Tolstoy placed the Kingdom of Heaven as a possibility on earth, if each man adopts Jesus' practice of life, Nietzsche's Jesus can only experience the Kingdom of Heaven internally—apart

from any worldly experience. Here, Nietzsche may venture to say Tolstoy took Jesus too literally, and missed that Jesus had no concern for the external. The idea of death itself is inconceivable to Jesus, in Nietzsche's account, precisely because it belongs to the body. "The kingdom of God," Nietzsche writes, "is not something you wait for; it does not have a yesterday or a day after tomorrow, it will not arrive in 'a thousand years'— it is an experience of the heart; it is everywhere, and it is nowhere" heart (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 34). The difficulty in understanding Jesus' inner reality is precisely linked to how Christianity has so terribly misunderstood him. As mentioned in the previous section, Jesus used symbols to describe his inner reality, but these symbols were not literal reflections of his inner world (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 31). Jesus' truth is not one that can be passed on in words. Nietzsche writes that Jesus was the only true Christian because of the depth of Jesus' inner world and his inability to communicate it. "There really was only one Christian, and he died on the cross...what was called 'evangel' after that was the opposite of what *he* had lived: a 'bad tidings', a *dysangel*" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 38). The Christians who followed after Jesus turned his life practice into belief, into a set of claims taken as true. Thus, heaven to the Christian became a divine place, and they never considered its true placement within themselves.

Christianity's misinterpretation of Jesus' Kingdom of Heaven created a "*crude fable of a miracle worker and redeemer*," that only made Christianity "*barbaric*" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 37). Nietzsche is not opposed to gods created by healthy peoples; that is, Gods that reflect the image of a people back to themselves (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 16). Healthy gods were particular—they were creations of and for a select group and culture: a 'chosen people'. However, when Christianity canonized Christ as a redeemer, it lost its strength and became a religion for the weak; the many. "What does this sort of transformation tell us? This sort of *diminution* in the divine? – Of course: this will increase the size of 'the kingdom of God'" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 17). Nietzsche writes that the Christian God became the "great cosmopolitan" and was not content until he had "half the world on his side" (Nietzsche

2010 [1888], 17). The broader Christianity got, the more it vulgarized Jesus' teachings. "Every time Christianity expanded to greater and cruder masses of people whose presuppositions were increasingly remote from the presupposition under which it arose, it became increasingly necessary to *vulgarize Christianity and make it barbaric*" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 37). In other words, God became decadent and allowed the weak masses to negate life in the pursuit of their God, their savior. Nietzsche writes that God "degenerated into a *contradiction of life* instead of its transfiguration and eternal yes...God as the deification of nothingness, the canonization of the will to nothingness" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 18).

However, Nietzsche's criticism of the vulgarization of Jesus' Kingdom of Heaven does not mean that Jesus' *internal* Kingdom of Heaven did not have its faults. Jesus' internal Kingdom of Heaven is more affirmative of life than the supernatural Kingdom of Heaven that Christianity contrived, but it is still not *of* the world. Jesus' pathology lacks engagement with the creative world and cannot acknowledge the reality of the anything external. Nietzsche's focus on the body reveals his problem with Jesus' life practice.

The body has no value to Jesus, but to Nietzsche the body is integral to one's perspective and interpretations of the world. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes "body I am entirely and nothing else: the soul is only a word for something about the body" (Nietzsche 2008 [1883] pg.) Bill Hughes (1996) outlines the importance of the body in Nietzsche's thought, particularly as a response to modern decadence, which removed the individual from their physical life. I follow Hughes's argument, paying particular attention to the creativity that is allowed when one embraces the bodily origin of 'truths' as the result of perspective and interpretation.²⁶ For Nietzsche, there needs to be an *external* expression of power to truly reach greatness. Self-formation requires not just the affirmation

²⁶ Hughes writes that "for Nietzsche, all of inner psychical life is essentially an excursus, a cultural product of the inhibited body. The body turned against itself, the body denied creative space and the possibility of self-overcoming through constitutive activity" (Hughes 1996, 37)

of life, but also a bold willingness to inflict pain. Zarathustra saw creation as the “great redemption from suffering, and life’s becoming lighter. But that the creator may be, that itself requires suffering and much transformation” (Nietzsche 2008 [1883], II.2.) Here, Nietzsche is referring to the pain involved in creating. Like how a sculptor must chisel away at a block of marble to execute his artistic vision, the creative person inflicts violence upon themselves and is willing to inflict itself upon the form. Every interpretative and creative act is violent against alternative truths or perspectives.

Jesus’ inability to see the body as holding any importance means he relies only on his internal world—his Kingdom of Heaven—and meant he could not reach the heights that Nietzsche thinks are necessary to become great. Jesus could endure suffering and learned how to radically love life but could not understand that his truth is the result of his perspective and interpretation. Jesus could not compress the world into a creative field of vision.

Nietzsche’s and Tolstoy’s critiques of the Kingdom of Heaven reveal that meaning cannot be found outside of life on earth. In fact, placing meaning beyond earth aggressively destroys the world and the potential to extract meaning from it. To Tolstoy, this destruction comes from abusing the world. If life on earth is not real, humans can mine it for temporary bliss. Nietzsche’s concern is far more psychological. When the Christian God became cosmopolitan, He lost any regional meaning. Christianity became meaningless for the masses and created a widespread belief in a world beyond. The Kingdom of Heaven to Nietzsche is destructive as an internal *or* external manifestation, as both detract from the importance of the temporal body as the source of all meaning. Tolstoy disagrees. To Tolstoy, anything that is personal is contrary to the meaning of life.

V. Personal Immortality

Related to the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven is the immortality of the soul. The diligent Christian will reach a blissful eternal life if they declare Jesus as their Lord and savior. The emphasis here is that the Christian is focused on their salvation status, as redemption from earthy suffering,

above all else. Tolstoy and Nietzsche reject the idea that individual salvation is a proper source of meaning. Instead, they find that communal life is how a person can enter into an eternal, meaningful process of life. However, while Tolstoy proposes humble servitude to mankind, Nietzsche proposes that individuals can contribute to humanity via their pursuit of great projects that enhance humanity. Personal immortality, to Nietzsche, means widespread equality that precludes the need for great humans that would enhance society.

In *What I Believe*, Tolstoy anticipates the question: “what is the point of living like Christ even if no one else does? Peace on earth is unattainable, so I might as well live a blissful life.” Tolstoy’s response is that following the doctrine of Jesus is worthwhile because it is the *only* way to live a meaningful life. To Tolstoy, meaning on earth is not only obscured by the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven as a real location beyond earth, but also by the idea that the individual life is eternal. Christianity promises their followers that the godly path is meaningful and worthwhile because of the eternity of the soul—follow the Christian way, and your life will be saved, you will be granted eternal bliss. However, Tolstoy rejects the immortality of the soul outright because he does not think that individuals can preserve their lives. Tolstoy proposes that any personal possession, including one’s life, is meaningless because it is temporary. The true meaning of life must be based in an external immortal process.

Tolstoy asserts that Christianity’s conception of life is a misunderstanding of what true life is. Life, to the Christian, is something they *possess*. Tolstoy explains how Christians misunderstood life via the parable of the husbandman from Matthew 21:33-34. In the parable, a group of men live in the garden of a householder, but they get the idea that they own the garden. They become cruel toward the garden to preserve their possession of it, even killing the householder’s son to retain possession (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 431). Ultimately, their actions led to their expulsion from the garden. Humans are no different toward life on earth, acting cruelly to preserve themselves. Yet,

their end is no different than the husbandmen—both expelled from life. Tolstoy writes that “One may, as Pascal expresses it, disregard the matter and carry a shield before one to hide the abyss of death towards which we are all running; but one only need to consider what man’s isolated personal life is, to convince oneself that this whole life, if it be only a personal life, has for each separate person no sense or meaning, but is a malicious mockery of one’s heart and reason and of all that is good in man” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 426). In other words, the emphasis on personal preservation is futile and lacks meaning because death cannot be avoided. Men attempt to secure their future for themselves, either through tangible possessions or spiritual security, but nothing can prevent their inevitable end. Their pursuits themselves become futile. Tolstoy writes that death will always come sooner than worldly bliss (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 428). The man who lives a worldly life lives for himself, but he is destructible. No matter how much someone tries to accumulate wealth or security, they can in no way “add a single second to their life” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 428). “Death, death, death awaits you every second,” Tolstoy writes, “Your life passes in the presence of death...and that death ruins all you work for. Consequently, life for oneself can have no meaning” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 430). The emphasis on the preservation of the individual life under Christianity leads men unknowingly toward a meaningless existence.

However, Tolstoy agrees with the idea that meaning needs to come from an eternal process. “If there is a reasonable life,” he writes, “it must be found elsewhere...To live rationally one must live so that death cannot destroy life” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 430). Tolstoy makes a case for what eternity is by correcting the Christian definition of ‘life.’ Tolstoy clarifies what true life is: “that only is true life which accrues on the life of the past, promotes the welfare of the present, and prepares the welfare of the future” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 432). In other words, true life is that which sees itself as a product of, and a contributor to, the continuation of humanity. “The will of the father,” Tolstoy clarifies, “is not the life of an individual man, but of the only son of man dwelling

within men” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 432). Life, under this conception, is not a possession but a *gift*—something to be grateful for and that can only be truly appreciated if you understand your role in life, rather than what it can do for you. Tolstoy states that “those who serve life merge with the source of life, while those who do not serve life are deprived of it” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 433). A person can merge with life when they see themselves as one of many. They can be grateful for what the world has provided them with and will in turn seek to give back to others what has been given to them. This person will not have “lived the personal life, but the life of the son of man; therefore, you have eternal life” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 433). The life of the son of man, the life of Christ, is the only way to reach eternity.

Jesus refers to himself as the son of God, but Tolstoy does not conform to the idea that Jesus asserted himself within the trinity. “What Christ taught,” Tolstoy asserts, “was to exalt the son of man; that is to say, the essential life of man, and to acknowledge oneself a son of God.” Jesus saw himself as a son of man, as one who understood himself as part of the whole of life. Tolstoy writes that, as strange as it may be for the Christian to hear, Jesus never promised personal immortality or his own resurrection. Tolstoy writes that “Christ denies the personal, the corporal resurrection, but acknowledges a restoration of life in a man who merges his life into God’s” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 435). Jesus told his disciples that he will be tortured and killed, but that the son of man would re-establish himself in the world. Tolstoy rejects that this is a prophecy for his resurrection and instead asserts its Jesus’s knowledge of where eternity lies: in the whole of life.

Personal immortality only entered Church doctrine posthumously. “Our conception of the resurrection is so different from the Jewish conception of life that it is impossible to even imagine how Christ could have spoken to the Jews about resurrection” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 439). Tolstoy asserts that a truer conception of life comes from the Hebrew word for eternal life *khaye-olam*. *Olam* means both endless and unchanging, and the world, cosmos, and life. *khaye-olam* represents the

attribute of God as living and eternal (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 439). However, unlike God, man is mortal. Tolstoy refers to the fall of man, emphasizing that Adam was banished from paradise before he could eat from the tree of life and become immortal (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 440). Adam in paradise ate from the tree of knowledge and could participate in the essence of life, the struggle of it, but the fate of the individual is still mortal, just as all the other animals God created are.²⁷

The pursuit of personal immortality to Tolstoy is only a smokescreen of eternity. People are deceived by a desire for personal protection and redemption—but no such redemption will come. Those seeking to live for themselves will be locked out of eternity by placing their life in something as meaningless as their own skin and soul. Not only that, but their selfish pursuits lead the world toward destruction. Men ravage the farmer's land, the housekeeper's garden, and God's earth in a desperate attempt to save themselves—but they only destroy the thing that has meaning: the continuation of humanity. Tolstoy otherwise describes a burning building full of people pushing against the door in a desperate attempt to save their lives. What they do not realize, is that by trying to save themselves, they block the way out and condemn everyone to death (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 448). Tolstoy succinctly writes that “the meaning of human life does not lie in personal happiness, but in serving all, in humiliation before all” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 439). Tolstoy's conclusion on the meaning of life is that it must be based in one's role within mankind, which is only achieved through the practice of nonresistance that allows for self sacrifice for the sake of humanity.

As moral as man might be, immortality is reached through the continuation of the species. Tolstoy writes, “when God says: ‘You shall live and not die’, he speaks to the race” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 441). Though Christianity, Tolstoy posits that man is taught to see his lineage as fallen and fake—the continuation of it is a curse. But through his understanding of Judaism, Tolstoy

²⁷ Previously, Tolstoy stated that “the struggle between the inclination towards an animal life and a rational life, which lies in the soul of each man forms the essence of each life...That struggle is relegated to an event which happened to Adam in paradise at the time of the creation” (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 412).

understood life itself as real and eternal, whereby *men* can participate in its eternity, but only if *man* chooses to live according to God's will, that is, the practice of nonresistance. Tolstoy writes that "by Christ's teaching eternal life continues in the son of man, and what is needed to preserve it is the observance of the laws of Christ which express God's will for the whole of humanity" (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 439).²⁸ As mentioned above, nonresistance is the reasonable practice of life for man because it aims to improve mankind.

Nietzsche, however, critiques personal immortality for its inability to allow for difference, as opposed to Tolstoy's argument for oneness. Nietzsche similarly rejects the idea of personal immortality and asserts that it was only the result of the vulgarization of Jesus' teachings that Christianity adopted it. The idea that God sent Christ as an innocent sacrifice on behalf of the guilty brought "the evangel" to an end (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 41). When Christianity made Jesus a savior, they subverted his very teachings, which only promoted a way of life. The idea that Jesus died for the guilty would be inconceivable to Him. Nietzsche writes that "Jesus had done away with the very idea of 'guilt, —he denied that there was any gap between God and man, he *lived* this unity of God as man as *his* 'glad tidings'...And *not* as his privilege" (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 41). Jesus' teachings soon became entirely vulgarized until the doctrine of resurrection entirely wiped-out Jesus' teachings. Jesus' disciples needed justification for his death and could only conceive of it as a revolt against the Jewish order. His death as retaliation, to the disciples, was not enough—they needed *revenge*, to pass judgment on the wrongdoers. The disciples enacted their revenge by placing Jesus above themselves. They created Jesus as the literal son of God and made him a symbol of *resentiment*.

²⁸ Tolstoy sets Christ's mission apart from the Jewish mission here. The Jewish people were only concerned about eternity for themselves as Gods chosen people, but Christ expanded the mission to all of mankind (Tolstoy 1940 [1884], 442).

Saint Paul most notoriously misconstrued Christ by introducing the logical form “if Christ did not rise from the dead, then our faith is in vain” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 41). Nietzsche blames Paul for the introduction of personal immortality, of an unfulfillable, unrealistic, promise into Christianity. Nietzsche writes that Paul nailed Jesus to his own cross, and “invented for himself a history of the first Christianity” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 42). Paul made Christ into whatever he wanted him to be, according to Nietzsche, Paul made Jesus his own redeemer—but Paul’s redeemer was only important for his death. All of Jesus’ teachings of life practice became only a representation for an unattainable promise of happiness and salvation. However, it was not enough for Paul to manipulate the teachings of Christ, he needed to extract power from them (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 42).

The old Jewish priests, according to Nietzsche, used the concept of God to extract power by posing as his arbitrator. The priest created the will of God to determine, once and for all, how humans ought to act (Nietzsche 23, 2010 [1888]). By substantiating their power in an ethereal and unknowable being, the priests could assert their power without having to justify themselves to the physical world. The priest situates himself as the arbitrator of God’s will and makes himself indispensable to the masses as the only one who can ‘redeem’ them of their sin (Nietzsche 23, 2010 [1888]). Sin, then, becomes indispensable to the priest for his own dominion. Paul brought back the priestly spirit though imbuing in Jesus a promise of personal immortality that is based in judgment. Paul instituted a priestly tyranny to “form the herds” and used the doctrine of judgment, of immortality, to create a mob over which he could rule. Nietzsche blames Paul for the return of the priestly power by creating the belief in immortality, or as Nietzsche otherwise refers to it as: the *doctrine of judgment*.

These sentiments of revenge and judgment are antithetical to Jesus’ life practice. Nietzsche blames the *doctrine of judgment* on the priestly *ressentiment* of Paul. *Ressentiment* is a consistent pattern of

hatred toward noble or higher beings. Bernard Reginster (1997) describes the character of this “man of *ressentiment*.” This man is marked by a feeling of repressed vengeance, whereby the individual wants to live a certain kind of life they see as valuable but are incapable of reaching it by their own means (Reginster 1997, 286). However, his will to power and arrogance remain, and he uses judgment against higher beings to reduce the distance between themselves by deeming all that is noble or superior as *evil*. Their judgment becomes their power since they are unable to reach the heights they want to. In other words, if they cannot have true strength, their next best option is to condemn what is strong as undesirable.

The creation of an afterlife at Jesus’ crucifixion means that the weak life of a Christian does not matter—only their afterlife has value. “The enormous life of personal immortality destroys all reason, everything natural in the instincts, everything that guarantees the future, now arouses mistrust” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 43). The Christian faith allows the Christian to turn away from their instincts, from their strength, and it also allows them to entirely devalue any strong quality of life on earth. “As immortal souls,” Nietzsche writes, “everyone is on the same level everyone else, that in the commonality of all beings, the ‘salvation’ of *each* individual lays claim to an eternal significance, that the small-minded and half-mad can think well of themselves, that the laws of nature are constantly broken for their sake” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 43). The sweeping salvation that personal immortality promises to those who believe means that the Christian no longer needs to contemplate the quality of their life. After all, their life on earth doesn’t matter if they simply believe in Christ their savior. This critique is akin to Tolstoy’s critique of the Christian spectator—under salvation quality of life ceases to be a question. The well lived life gets no greater reward in heaven than the poorly lived life, if they are both redeemed.

Further, personal immortality removes the need for co-creators or gratitude for one’s history. By moving the meaning of life to the ‘beyond,’ life on earth no long means *anything*. Nietzsche writes

“what is the point of public spirit, of being grateful for your lineage or for your ancestors, what is the point of working together, of confidence, of working towards any sort of goal or even keeping one in mind?” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 43). The Christian has no need for anyone else if they have faith. The temporal world and all that is in it is nothing compared to the salvation status of their soul. “Christianity owes its *victory* to *this* miserable flattery, of personal vanity... ‘salvation of the soul’—in plain language: ‘the world revolves around *me*’” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 43). The Christian life, to Nietzsche, is weak and means nothing, but still retains an arrogance that it is the most important thing in the world.

Personal immortality not only allows the poorly lived life to live uninhibited, but they can also live in equality. Nietzsche writes that “Christianity has waged a deadly war on every feeling of respect and distance between people, which is to say the *presupposition* of every elevation, of every growth of culture,—it has used the *ressentiment* of the masses as its *main weapon* against *us*, against everything on earth that is noble, joyful, magnanimous, against our happiness on earth” (Nietzsche 2010 [1888], 43). Under equality, all that is great is despised. *This* is its *ressentiment*. The Christian’s judgment is turned toward those who live powerful lives. It wishes to assassinate their higher spirits. Christianity, to Nietzsche, officially became a religion of lowly character. Its desire to make all equal eventually penetrates politics and instituted the ‘privileges of the majority’ above all else. The will to power of Christianity is to reduce the world to its most lowly position. The qualities of a powerful life, of the free spirit, are entirely tossed aside to make room for the contentment of the poorly lived life.

While Nietzsche is traditionally seen as a champion of individual life, a closer examination of his work reveals that his is still concerned with communal life as integral to living a meaningful life. Nietzsche agrees with Tolstoy that man only has meaning insofar as he can place himself among humanity. Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science* that “man has worth and sense only in so far as he is *a*

stone in a great edifice” (Nietzsche 2004 [1887], 356). Nietzsche believes the enhancement of the species lies in great men who have long-lasting plans. He sees the remnants of these sorts of plans in the architecture of the city of Genoa, writing: “I see *faces* that belong to past generations; this region is dotted with images of bold and autocratic human beings. They have *lived* and wish to live on—that is what they are telling me with their houses, built adorned to last for centuries and not for the fleeting hour: they are well disposed towards life” (Nietzsche 2004 [1887], 291). The long-lasting and well-planned creations of great men continue to live and have not been destroyed by the ruthlessness of time. Yet, Nietzsche is doubtful that these projects are possible anymore. Nietzsche writes that “*we are no longer material for a society*” (Nietzsche 2004 [1887], 356). By this, he means that under modernity, man has lost all sense of his role in the external world. The desire to create something that outlasts an individual life requires a belief that man has value. Personal immortality, by placing the meaning of life beyond reality and equalizing men on earth, has squashed the need for communal enhancement or generational projects.

To Tolstoy and Nietzsche, the idea of personal immortality detaches people from their position within their society and the need to contribute to life beyond themselves. Tolstoy emphasizes the value of seeing oneself as a member of their community, but this involves devaluing the importance of one’s own life. To participate in true eternity, the eternity of mankind, men must see that they are only one of many. A person’s mortal life has no value or meaning independent of their placement within mankind. The direct implication of this supposition is that man needs the external world, his community, to have a meaningful life. If people are only concerned about their acceptance into the afterlife, then their role within their temporal community dissolves. Nietzsche in many ways agrees with this idea. Alone, man has no reason to pursue any plan that extends beyond himself. The enhancement of society depends on a belief that man has value and is worth investing in. Both

thinkers embrace service and sacrifice to humanity, but through different means. Tolstoy through subservience to humanity, and Nietzsche through the projects of great men and enrich humanity.

VI. Implications

Tolstoy's and Nietzsche's interpretations of the life practice of Jesus, and the implications that his practice has on the Kingdom of Heaven and personal immortality, offer a potential solution to the problem of nihilism in contemporary politics. Nonresistance, as Tolstoy interprets it, is a source of meaning for life that attempts to satisfy our spiritual desire for eternity, and our intellectual desire to understand the world as it is, without devolving it into dangerous political implications. The religious doctrine of salvation-based religions, such as Christianity, attempt to provide meaning to individuals via the promise of a blissful afterlife—thereby turning away from the suffering that is involved in living on earth. Tolstoy and Nietzsche view the affirmation and acceptance of suffering as integral to living an earthly life. Jesus' practice of nonresistance is none other than a complete affirmation of life. Tolstoy views nonresistance as the only source of meaning because it is the only way of life that is based in man's sensitive nature. However, Nietzsche is careful to point out the vulnerability of Jesus' particular brand of nonresistance. Nonresistance as a pathological response to suffering tends to result in an inability to acknowledge the external world as real. Moreover, nonresistance under these conditions cannot resist anything, including the resistance involved in creating meaning for one's life. Regardless of their divergence, Tolstoy and Nietzsche agree that belief in the community is integral to meaning. Tolstoy suggests that complete service to the community is the only way to formulate meaning for one's life. Nietzsche agrees. However, Nietzsche thinks that individual creative tasks that are built to last generations are ultimately how people can enter into and contribute to the eternal thrust of humanity. The overlap between Tolstoy and Nietzsche's theories suggests a balance between the nonresistance that is necessary for life affirmation, and the resistance that is critical to creativity and life formation.

Moreover, nonresistance does not close off the political world entirely. Tolstoy intends nonresistance as an unpolitical source of meaning, but its very refusal of state violence necessarily acts political protest. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are two examples of the powerful role nonresistance has in shaping the political landscape without resorting to violence. In a contemporary landscape, nonresistance is potentially a source of meaning and political strategy that avoids the pitfalls previous sources of meaning have fallen into.

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