

938 Leo Tolstoy, the truth and non-violence (*see also my blogs 938 and 482 the truth*)

Leo Tolstoy says in his book *The Kingdom of God is within You*: "The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity by contributing to the establishment of the Kingdom of God within, which can only be done by the recognition of the truth (and should be done) by every human." I quote him again in the footnote to my essay FREE WILL: "The champions of the metaphysics of hypocrisy say: 'Man cannot change his life, because he is not free. He is not free, because all his actions are conditioned by previously existing causes; so whatever he does, these acts mean that man cannot be free and change his life. And they would be perfectly right if man were a creature without conscience and incapable of moving toward the truth; that is to say, if after recognizing a new truth, man remained always at the same stage of moral development. But man is a creature of conscience. Thus man is capable of attaining a higher and higher degree of truth. And therefore, even if man is not free as regards performing certain acts because of pre-existing causes, the very causes of his acts, consisting as they do of the recognition of truth, are within his own control'." He continues, "whatever the conscious man does, he acts just as he does, and not otherwise, only because he recognizes that to act as he is acting is in accordance with the truth, or because he has recognized it at some previous time, and is now only through inertia, through habit, acting in accordance with his previous recognition of truth." Leo Tolstoy (1828 - 1910), was a champion of truth and an advocate of peace and non-violence, even in the face of evil. Born to an aristocratic Russian family, Tolstoy is best known for the novels *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1877). In 1844 he began studying law. His teachers described him as "both unable and unwilling to learn." Tolstoy left university in the middle of his studies and, after running up gambling debts, he and his brother joined the army. It was about this time that he started writing. Tolstoy was promoted to lieutenant for "outstanding bravery and courage". His conversion from a dissolute and privileged society author to the non-violent and spiritual anarchist of his latter days was brought about by his experiences in the army. Tolstoy witnessed a public execution in Paris, a traumatic experience that would mark him for the rest of his life. Writing in a letter: "The truth is that the State is a conspiracy designed not only to exploit, but to corrupt its citizens ... henceforth, I shall never serve any government anywhere." Tolstoy's concept of non-violence was instilled in Mahatma Gandhi through his *A Letter to a Hindu* when young Gandhi corresponded with him seeking his advice. His European trip shaped both his political and literary development and Tolstoy wrote his educational notebooks. Fired up by enthusiasm, Tolstoy returned to Russia and founded 13 schools for the children of Russia's peasants, who had just been emancipated from serfdom in 1861. Tolstoy's educational experiments were short-lived, but as a direct forerunner to A. S. Neill's Summerhill School, the Yasnaya Polyana school is claimed to have been the first example of a coherent theory of democratic education. I am interested in these developments in view of my UNITY project (p. XXVII).