

Tolstoy & Isaiah

An Anarchist Critique of Isaiah's Revolution

-Or-

Developing an Anarchist Hermeneutic Within Biblical Studies

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Mark McHenry

(1002304)

Abstract

In light of the current political climate there has been a notable increase in the presence of academic anarchist research. This year saw the second Anarchist Studies Network (ASN) conference hosted by the Centre for the Study of International Governance (CSIG) at Loughborough University. The CSIG produces notable academic journals in anarchist studies and Continuum Press has recently released the introductory volume in the first peer reviewed series on anarchism by a mainstream publishing house.

This paper discusses Isaiah in relation to the political writings of Leo Tolstoy. I outline the parallels in their criticisms of human power structures and discuss their contrasting visions for society. I do this by examining prophetic images 'Day of Lord'. It is my premise that the 'Day of the Lord' is a revolutionary process as it envisages a total overhaul of society and removal of the existing power structures and that Isaiah, in his role as a mediator of YHWH, acts to garner support for the revolution and encourage people to behave according to ideals of the revolution.

I chiefly concern myself with how the revolutionary event is to be achieved and how the post-revolutionary society is to be organised. It is in discussing these questions that I engage the text with the works of Tolstoy. This leads me to question how political authority and power is presented in the text: how are the authorities of humans viewed in relation to the authority of YHWH? In discussing the authority of YHWH I must examine how YHWH's position as the national figurehead of Israel is harnessed to raise patriotic and nationalist sentiment. The authority of YHWH is also relevant to my treatment of the widespread violence that is customary amongst prophetic imagery of the 'Day of the Lord'.



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Introduction

The presence of anti-capitalist and anti-globalization protest movements has risen noticeably since the international financial crisis began. Mass demonstrations have been held across the globe against the different facets of the capitalist system. The successful 'Climate Camps' and the 'Occupy' movement have invited people to experience an alternative way of living and to rethink how we use space and how to build and sustain a community. In London we have seen numerous anti-capitalist demonstrations focusing largely on the public service cuts made by the current government. These demonstrations have not been organised by a masked band of anarchists but by teachers, nurses, and even politicians themselves. Whilst the London riots of 2011 were not politically motivated, they do go some way towards demonstrating dissatisfaction with the current social arrangement.

It is not just the capitalist West that has seen civil unrest. Massive demonstrations erupted across the Middle East in December 2010 and became known as the Arab Spring. The demonstrations have largely taken on a violent character and the response of the authorities has been heavy. A number of these protests have escalated into full blown civil war. The motivation and success of these movements is debatable. Even though leaders have been ousted in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen the situation of the common citizen has not improved. Attempts to build a new social order have only incited fresh violence as parties move to consolidate their own position by attacking those who present a challenge to their power. The revolutionary process adopted during the Arab Spring and the attempts to build post-revolutionary governments echoes Tolstoy's warnings that against violence as a means to an end, and also reflect his analysis of the corruptive nature of authority.

In light of the current political climate there has been a notable increase in the presence of academic anarchist research. This research comes not only from political and social sciences, but from fields as diverse as clinical psychology, geography, and the physical sciences. The rise in popularity of academic anarchist research was apparent at the second Anarchist Studies Network conference hosted in 2012 at the Centre for the Study of International Governance (CSIG) at Loughborough University.

The CSIG produces notable academic journals in anarchist studies, and recently the introductory volume in the first peer reviewed series on anarchism was published by mainstream publishing house Continuum Press.¹

Despite the burgeoning anarchist academic movement, there is currently no anarchist presence in the field of biblical studies. Although there are many Christian anarchists who actively engage with biblical texts, they unanimously focus on the New Testament and do not necessarily conform to the academic standards required by a university research department. The motivation behind my work is to demonstrate that there is a place, even a need, for an anarchist perspective within the field of biblical studies, and that such a position offers fresh insights for socially and politically motivated interpreters. The aim of this study is to develop an anarchist hermeneutic that is relevant to current academic discussion. In order to do this I adopt the political perspective of Tolstoy and bring the Hebrew Bible into the anarchist discussion of biblical texts by addressing the book of Isaiah.

The Place of Anarchism Within Biblical Studies

An anarchist approach to academic biblical studies sits comfortably alongside the work of feminist interpreters and the liberation theology movement. Modern feminist biblical interpretation and liberation theology arose from wider radical movements of the 1960's which challenged the distribution of power within dominant institutions such as the church and the academy. The feminist school was a reaction against the dominant, male orientated approach of traditional biblical studies, whilst liberation theologies confronted prevailing biblical interpretations in the face of extreme poverty, exploitation, and oppression. Studies motivated by both the feminist and liberation movements, like my own anarchist critique, confront images of violence, exploitation, and political dominance in biblical texts and ask how these relate to our own contemporary experience. The prevalence of violent imagery and political domination within the Hebrew Bible means that the work of the feminist and liberation movements engages heavily with these texts. Both groups demonstrate that

¹ Jun, N., *Anarchism and Political Modernity (Contemporary Anarchist Series)* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012)

the Hebrew Bible is flooded with militant and personal violence, with many authors accusing the texts of being misogynistic and exploitative.

Anarchists and the Hebrew Bible

There is noticeable antagonism towards the Bible and organised religion amongst modern anarchist writers. Despite this, there are several prevalent anarchists who openly equate their political beliefs with a biblical influence, but the Hebrew Bible is not included in this. The Hebrew Bible is explicitly nationalist, with prevalent themes of military violence, dominance, and support for monarchy, statehood, and political authorities, all of which contradict anarchist ideologies and prevent anarchists using the texts in their work. However, I believe it is these prevailing themes that warrant our attention: these issues are fundamental for the anarchist reader as it historically under these conditions that organised dissent and revolutionary movements emerge.

Historically, the Hebrew Bible has generally been overlooked by anarchist writers in favour of the New Testament due to its perceived message of Christian camaraderie and community. One of the only anarchist thinkers to tack Hebrew texts is Jaques Ellul. Although Ellul dedicates the majority of his discussion to the Christian texts, his work *Anarchy and Christianity*² presents his anarchist interpretation of the Bible beginning with the Hebrew canon and continuing through to the gospels and the Pauline epistles. Tolstoy too supports his political writings with biblical sources, and his own anarchist ideologies come as a direct consequence of his Christian faith. However, Tolstoy again can be accused of neglecting the Hebrew Bible in favour of New Testament texts, particularly the gospels, from which much of Tolstoy's anarchism originates.

In order to bring the Hebrew Bible into the anarchist discussion, it is the task of the anarchist interpreter to scour the texts for voices that challenge the extreme dominance of state and empire. It is within the prophetic literature that we find our voice, as these texts originate from periods of history during which the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were under the oppressive dominance of foreign empires and so too

² Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991) pp. 46-55

were the Israelite peasantry oppressed by the heads of their own state. As such, these texts challenge the questionable conduct of their potentates, both the foreign and domestic oppressors. It is under these conditions that I explore Isaiah as revolutionary literature.

The Intentions of this Paper

It is my premise that the Day of the Lord, the apocalyptic victory of Israel and their god over the pagan nations, is essentially a revolutionary process. The text describes a total overhaul of society and removal of the existing power structures and, whilst it is of global significance, it is essentially a local event centred on Judah/Israel with specific focus on Jerusalem. In his role as a mediator of Yahweh's words, it is Isaiah's task to garner support for the revolution and encourage people to behave according to ideals of the revolution. Isaiah leads the audience from a damning social critique through a cataclysmic revolutionary process and culminates in a utopian post-revolutionary society.

I discuss how the revolutionary event is presented in Isaiah, which leads me to question how different representations of authority are presented in the text. How are the religious and political authorities of humans viewed in relation to the divine authority of Yahweh, and, in what manner have the human authorities failed their people? I chiefly concern myself with how the revolutionary event is to be achieved and how the post-revolutionary society is to be organised. In discussing the authority of Yahweh, and his position as the revolutionary agent, I must examine how Yahweh's position as the national figurehead of Israel is harnessed by Isaiah to raise patriotic and nationalist sentiments. Tolstoy presents the perfect lens through which to interrogate the text as he displays a particular preference for the poor and oppressed, and for those uprooted from their ancestral plots of land; these concerns echo those of Isaiah who also challenges the power of a land holding elite. Tolstoy and Isaiah also make a similar critique of society and prescribe that only an entire restructuring of the social order can create a free and just society.

Reading Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah occupies a twofold role in the text that bears his name. Isaiah's first role is that of a narrative character who operates within the text, his second charge is that of a narrator who describes the events within the text. In his role both as a character and as a narrator, the actions and words of Isaiah are decided by the authors and editors of the text and are not the directly recorded actions of a historical figure. As such, when we talk about Isaiah's concern for social justice, we are in fact discussing the concerns of the authors and redactors who have shaped the text we receive today.

Isaiah's role as prophet bridges the gap between the authority of Yahweh and the authorities of man: he is called to deliver Yahweh's words and to warn of his judgement whilst also holding an administrative position within the royal court. He evidently has close access to the King and, in delivering his advice and prophecies, can address him openly and frankly. So too can we assume that, due to his relatively elevated social position, Isaiah lives a life of some comfort and does not share the experiences of the poor and oppressed for whom he is so concerned.

When reading Isaiah, many commentators discern a preference for those who are marginalized in the current social order: a preference for the people who live outside the current system and as a result are oppressed and abused by those in control. The logical consequence of this is that favouritism for those outside the social order implies distaste for the social order itself and those who sit at its administrative head. Gray acknowledges that Isaiah, speaking from the position of one inside the system, calls for solidarity with the weak and marginalized as represented by the widows and orphans (Is. 10:1-2). It is in his poetic speech that Isaiah describes how this might be achieved.³ What Gray has alluded to is the revolutionary nature of Isaiah's words. The text not only criticises the current social order in which Isaiah holds a position of some authority, but it goes on to suggest how a revolution led by Yahweh could transform Israelite society.

The text I have selected for my study consists of chapters 2-12, as together these form a single oracle block. The text identifies both the subject and the intended

³ Gray, M., *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah* (London: T&T Clark, 2006) pp.19-71 (p29)

audience as Judah and Jerusalem (2:1): this is not a warning to foreign empires but a criticism of the domestic situation. Those at the administrative head of Israel have colluded with foreign powers whilst oppressing their own people, and flaunt their own power whilst disregarding the commandments of Yahweh. Isaiah's criticism of society presents a comparison between the ideal of a fair and just society and the realities of living in an oppressive and exploitative system. This is followed by a description of how this is to be achieved: through a revolution lead by Yahweh. The way I have broken up the text largely follows natural breaks and the divisions of other scholars, however each section does not necessarily stand as a mutually exclusive block. The method behind my division of the text can be discerned by the emphasis on criticism, visions of utopia, or descriptions of the breakdown of society demonstrated in each portion. I follow these emphases in order to propose my revolutionary structure.

Issues of violence attract a lot of attention in contemporary biblical studies, particularly amongst politically motivated interpreters. Many authors seek to, in some way, justify violent texts by exploring the social and historical context or to dilute their impact through alternative translation and interpretations. The general outcome of these studies is that violent passages within biblical texts must be understood and justified in light of the historical conditions of the community or possible metaphorical meanings of the text. In contrast with past studies, I am not attempting to mediate with the violence of the text by contextualising it in terms of 8th century Israel, nor am I trying to reinterpret or dampen the impact of the violent passages. Instead I intend to explore the violence within the text in light of its use as a revolutionary method and in its relationship to authority. Unlike the violent actions of David recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel, or the clearing of Canaan recorded in Joshua, the violence documented in Isaiah 2-12 refers to the intention of Yahweh rather than actual events. I am not simply discussing an account of recorded actions, what I am discussing is an impassioned vision of possible future events and their implications for the common population.

Discussing Tolstoy as an Anarchist

Tolstoy never referred to himself or his philosophies as specifically 'anarchist'. This was due to his distaste with the violent revolutionary methods favoured by European and Russian anarchists of his time. None the less, Tolstoy is widely accepted within anarchist circles and his vision of a stateless world with no organised authority

structures is certainly an anarchist vision. Tolstoy was a descendent of Russian nobility and enjoyed all the advantages this station offered. He was well educated and continued on to study law at university before abandoning education and joining the army. It was his experience as a soldier, as well as his correspondence with seminal anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin and Mikhail Bakunin, that are said to have marked Tolstoy's transformation from a respected novelist and well-to-do member of society to a spiritually and politically motivated activist. Tolstoy's political works consistently challenge the existence of state, power and political authority; he judges both of these to be violent and exploitative arrangements that can only benefit those in power.

I adopt Tolstoy's criticisms of power and the state, as well as his pacifist stance, in his treatment of both authoritarian and revolutionary violence. By embracing the political philosophies of Tolstoy I construct my anarchist hermeneutic through which I shall 'deconstruct' the text of Isaiah. I briefly outline Tolstoy's social critique and his views on revolution, this shall define the direction of my anarchist approach and it is in this light I shall then evaluate Isaiah's critique of society and the vision the text holds for society. Finally I shall discuss the similarities and disparities between Tolstoy and Isaiah and what they can offer to the anarchist Bible reader. I outline the parallels in their criticisms of human power structures and discuss their contrasting visions for society as well as their suggestions for the revolutionary process.

There are in fact many similarities between Tolstoy and the character of Isaiah. The social critiques of Tolstoy and Isaiah both display a preference for the poor and oppressed whilst strongly berating the human authorities that forsake their citizens in order to further their own power. It can be said that Isaiah and Tolstoy display the same social concerns. It is also quite relevant that both operate from positions of relative social comfort and upbringing. Both come from positions within the very establishment against which they are so outspoken. It is the similarities between their social critiques, as well as their similar social standing, which I believe make Tolstoy and Isaiah ideal partners in developing an anarchist approach to the Hebrew Bible.

Other Relevant Works

Out of the vast wealth of commentaries available I have selected the work of Joseph Blenkinsopp (*The Anchor Yale Bible*), John D. Watts (*World Biblical Commentary*), and Christopher R. Seitz (*Westminster John Knox Interpretation Series*).

The work of these commentators discusses themes similar to those I am considering in my own anarchist reading; these commentaries have been particularly useful in my discussions of the post-revolutionary utopia and of the nationalism of the text. The work of these commentators has allowed me to construct an academic dialogue in which I introduce my anarchist perspective alongside the work of leading scholars such as Blenkinsopp and confront some of the challenges that may be levied against my approach. Into this discussion I also bring the work of a number of academics whose own interests reflect areas with which I am concerned.

The methodological approach of Mark Gray (*Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*, 2006) has been of particular interest as he relates issues of social justice to the poetic and literary composition of Isaiah. Walter J. Houston (*Contending for Justice*, 2006) provides a more general survey of social justice throughout the Hebrew Bible and offers some valuable insights into social stratification in ancient Israelite society. To explore the nationalism of the Hebrew Bible and the significance Israel's election has over the relationship Israel maintains with other nation states, I discuss the authority of Yahweh in relation to his governance over the people of Israel, his position as a national figurehead and his use of military violence in delivering judgement. The work of David Aberbach (*The Poetry of Nationalism*, 2003; *Nationalism and the Hebrew Bible*, 2005) on nationalist poetry supports my claim that the text demonstrates a nationalist cause. Further insight comes from Christo Lombaard (*No empire, No Bible? Aspects of the Relationship Between Biblical Texts and Current Anti-Empire Views*, 2011) and Geoffrey P. Miller whose recent paper on 'Leadership, Self-Governance and Nationhood in the Hebrew Bible' (2010) offers some insight into the Israelite understanding of statehood. Whereas Lombaard explores both negative and positive reactions to empires recorded in the Hebrew Bible and how these have informed the reception and translation of biblical texts in different political climates.

Tolstoy on Violence, Power, and Revolution

Each attempt at revolution begins, says Tolstoy, when “society has outgrown the view of life on which the existing forms of social life were founded.”⁴ At this time the contradictions between life as it is, and life as it should be become so evident to the majority of people that they feel it is impossible to continue existence under former conditions.⁵ Tolstoy understands the fundamental foundation of all revolutions to be a religious one, religion being before all else “the disclosure of a law common to all men which at any given time affords the greatest welfare.”⁶ Tolstoy purports that even amongst the most ancient communities there was proclaimed a supreme and universal religious law that “men should live not each for himself, but for the good of all, for mutual service.”⁷ However, customs founded upon violence and contrary to mutual service penetrated the institutions of human authority, whilst people recognized the beneficence of this religious law of mutual service they instead continued to live according to the laws of violence. Rulers were inevitably depraved by the power they used and then, being themselves depraved, instead of correcting men they pass on to them their own depravity. Those who obey the law of authority, and shun the law of mutual service, are themselves depraved by participation in the coercive actions of authority both by the imitation of the rulers and by their servile submission to them.⁸

Tolstoy on Revolution

The first cause of revolution comes when the violence and coercion of the state becomes so evident that people begin to question whether they should continue to obey the government.⁹ When people witness the violence and coercion that are necessary to uphold the authority of the state then they are forced to make a choice as to whether they can continue to support a regime that is committing such acts against

⁴ Tolstoy, L., ‘The End of an Age’ in *Government is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. by D. Stevens (London: Phoenix Press, 1990), pp. 21-52 (p. 22)

⁵ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.22

⁶ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.24

⁷ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.24

⁸ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.24

⁹ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.31

their own people. The second cause of revolution comes with the removal of the freedom of the land and to work the land for the financial benefit of one's own family. As plots of land are bought up by the wealthy and powerful, and field is joined to field to create vast estates, then such freedoms are lost.¹⁰ Whilst this reflects Tolstoy's own cultural setting in Russia at the dawn of the twentieth century, the abuse of the land by the wealthy and powerful was as relevant to the poor land workers of ancient Israel as it was to the agrarian peasantry of pre-revolutionary Russia. Land is acquired by the powerful as they possess the means to purchase and maintain several tracts of land simultaneously; land can also be acquired by confiscating it from debtors and having them work the land to pay off their debts in a manner befitting that of slave labour. The wealthy of any society are in the position to lend to those without their advantages, and when the less fortunate cannot repay their debt then they find their land, their possessions, and even their children and themselves at the disposal of their creditors.

An attempt at revolution is an attempt to escape from slavery, from the slavery of submitting to the authority of a government whatever form it takes. It is an attempt to escape the violence and coercion through which those in power secure their position and through which they maintain and defend their power. The power of the authorities is so great that nearly all attempts at revolution are doomed before they have even begun; the power of those in authority is organized precisely to deter attempts to overturn their privileged position. It is through military preparations, the coercion of law, and through fostering patriotic and nationalist sentiments that the authority of the state insulates itself and protects itself from any attempts that threaten to disrupt the structure of power. If a means to such ends exist, then it cannot be found by instigating fresh violence against the state but only by abolishing whatever renders governmental violence possible, that is the coercion of statehood itself.¹¹ It is only by abolishing the violence that secures authority and power, by diffusing the frenzy of patriotic nationalism that encourages obedience to the state, and in turn by disassembling the institutions that constitute the structures that uphold the power of the governmental administration.

¹⁰ Tolstoy, 'The End of an Age' pp.31-33

¹¹ Tolstoy, L., 'The Slavery of Our time' in *Government is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. by D. Stevens (London: Phoenix Press, 1990) pp. 111-156 (p.145)

Tolstoy on Violence

A fundamental component of Tolstoy's political beliefs is his pacifist stance as developed in his criticisms of violence. Tolstoy recognises that violence is the base upon which government is built and its means of protecting its own privileged position of power. For Tolstoy, violence is the universal tool of governments to encourage conformity and to discourage dissent, it is through violence that governments protect their position of power, and it is through violence that governments punish those who transgress their laws. The basis of authority therefore, Tolstoy notes, is physical violence¹² and the most obvious display of authoritarian violence is the provision of a standing army. Power lies in the hands of those who command the army, and as such governments become engrossed in sustaining and building their army.¹³ Vast amounts of resources are required to maintain a standing army, to manufacture weapons and armour, to train and feed soldiers, to build barracks and defences; these resources, critics claim, could be used to the benefit of the people, to advance some common good and to provide security for people, not security through military might but security through investing in institutions that benefit the general populous. Tolstoy's views on violence do not solely concern authoritarian violence but dismiss violence as a means in itself. As such, Tolstoy is just as critical of violence as a means of revolutionary change.

Revolutionary violence has always been a stereotype of the anarchist movement. Images of masked figures wielding bombs and images of vandalism and property destruction accompany the term 'anarchist' in many peoples' minds. For Tolstoy, however, revolutionary violence is not only futile but counterproductive. Tolstoy acknowledges that for people living in states founded upon and maintained by violence, it seems that the abolition of governmental power will necessarily involve the greatest of disasters.¹⁴ However, this view is fundamentally flawed by the belief that a peaceful end can be obtained by violent means. Tolstoy believes that violent means of revolution are immoral, false, and deceptive and in no means can they attain their end, Tolstoy goes on to note that the only outcome of violent attempts at revolution is to

¹² Tolstoy, L., 'The Kingdom of God is Within You' in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, ed. by Aylmer Maude (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2001) pp.3-421 (p.183)

¹³ Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom of God is Within You' p.184

¹⁴ Tolstoy, 'The End of an Age' p.33

furnish new justification for the violence of governments, and ironically increases their power.¹⁵

Tolstoy sympathises with the view of most anarchists that “without authority, there could not be worse violence than that of authority”, where many anarchists are mistaken is in the thought that anarchy can be instituted by a violent revolution.¹⁶ Violence is essentially a loss of freedom and as such it cannot be an effective tool for achieving freedom. Tolstoy reasons that by admitting violence on his part towards others, the revolutionary thereby justifies the violence against which they strive; even if the revolution is successful in overturning the current regime, by legitimising the use of violence the revolutionary is always in danger of being conquered by yet a stronger violence.¹⁷ In Tolstoy’s view all attempts to overturn a government by violence can only result in the situation whereby new regimes establish themselves in place of the recently deposed authorities, these new establishments will often turn out to be more cruel than those they replaced as they must increase violence in order to maintain their position.¹⁸ By using violence revolutionaries legitimise not only their own violence but also the violence against which they are acting, and also the violence that will inevitably be used to try to overturn the new order. If violence is an integral part of authoritarian power then it cannot possibly be part of the anarchist solution.

Violence is the embodiment of coercion and coercion is the modus operandi of authority. Coercion can be identified in many forms; for instance, laws coerce people into behaving a certain way and the means employed to enforce the law, and to punish those who break the law, inevitably involve the use of state sanctioned violence. Highlighting the relationship between violence, coercion, and loss of freedom that is characteristic of authority, Tolstoy warns revolutionaries against adopting violent and coercive methods in an attempt to win freedom or equality. Equality and freedom cannot be secured through coercion as coercion is in itself the most acute manifestation of inequality in that one must be stronger and more powerful in order to coerce the other.¹⁹ Again Tolstoy sympathises with the position of the revolutionary

¹⁵ Tolstoy, L., ‘An Appeal to Social Reformers’ in *Government is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. by D. Stevens (London: Phoenix Press, 1990) pp.53-66 (p.62)

¹⁶ Tolstoy, ‘An Appeal to Social Reformers’ p.68

¹⁷ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.26

¹⁸ Tolstoy, ‘The Slavery of Our time’ p.144

¹⁹ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.23

who, seeing violence committed by their oppressors, believes that it is only through violent retaliation that their oppression can be broken. Tolstoy admits that “some affirm that the deliverance from, or at least the diminution of violence would be effected if the masses destroyed by force the oppressing governments and replaced them with new organizations which would not require the use of violence or the enslavement of men”.²⁰ Violent revolutions only serve to increase the despotism of the authorities as the reaction of the state to revolutionary violence is a heavier use of violence in order to ‘protect’ itself. If the violence is successful in overturning the government then the new regime could not be less oppressive than the first, having to defend itself against all its defeated enemies the new regime would be more cruel and tyrannical using all existing methods of violence in order to maintain power and to instigate the new system of life.²¹ This circle of violence has been the downfall of all violent revolutions in the past; Tolstoy states that “in all revolutions and violent subversions of government, in all plots and attempts at revolution. Every struggle only increases the power of oppression in the hands of those temporarily in authority.”²²

So how does Tolstoy propose that governments are to be abolished if not through armed resistance? Tolstoy’s solution lies in his analysis of the nature of power which reflects his understanding of revolution as a religious movement. “Power and all the evil produced by it,” Tolstoy notes, “are but results of bad life in men, and that therefore for the abolition of power and the evil it produces, good life on the part of men is necessary.”²³ What Tolstoy prescribes, in a manner similar to Isaiah, is a change in the attitudes and behaviours of the general populous. For Tolstoy this is a religious change which requires people to adhere to a “universal law” and to act in a way that is to the benefit of all mankind. The other branch of Tolstoy’s nonviolent revolution is disobedience. Only by refusing to partake in the trappings of authority, refusing to take oaths, to pay taxes, to participate in politics or the army, can people attain freedom. This is what Tolstoy deems to be true freedom. The freedoms granted by governments and authorities, what we would today recognise as freedom of speech or freedom of the press, are not freedoms at all as the granting of freedom in one area necessarily implies that we lack freedom in another. True freedom cannot be granted to us by

²⁰ Tolstoy, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’ p.215

²¹ Tolstoy, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’ pp.215-216

²² Tolstoy, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’ p.216

²³ Tolstoy, ‘An Appeal to Social Reformers’ p.61

ministers or monarchs but can only be attained when we cease to rely on human authorities; Tolstoy states that “freedom... is attained not by barricades or murders, nor by any kind of new institution coercively introduced, but only by the cessation of obedience to any human authority whatever.”²⁴

Tolstoy on Post-Revolutionary Government and Authority

A criticism that many anarchists levy against revolutionary attempts is that after the revolution has succeeded a new regime is established according to the beliefs of the revolutionaries. As one state falls another rises in its place. For Tolstoy this is a fundamental flaw of any movement that does not seek anarchy as its goal, using Russia as an example Tolstoy describes the futile nature of statehood. Borders and states are established by a series of historical events that principally involve acts of violence, injustice and cruelty,²⁵ and as all human authorities are based on power and secured by violence they cannot guarantee freedom or equality. Tolstoy’s criticism of post-revolutionary states reflects his general criticisms of statehood and power which he sees as the cause of the majority of society’s ills:

“All the chief calamities from which men suffer, such as the accumulation of enormous wealth in the hands of some people and the deep poverty of the majority, the seizure of land by those who do not work on it, the unceasing armaments and wars, and the deprivation of men, flow only from the recognition of lawfulness of governmental coercion.”²⁶

Tolstoy defines a State as “an authority which is entirely based on violence, maintained by violence, and increasingly committing acts of violence.”²⁷ Tolstoy proposes that “whilst belonging to a state a man cannot be free. And the greater the state, the more is violence necessary; and the less is true freedom possible.”²⁸ Tolstoy sees violence and coercion as synonymous with power and authority, it is impossible to be free whilst living under the authority of another no matter what form it takes:

²⁴ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.24

²⁵ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.35

²⁶ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.34

²⁷ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.39

²⁸ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.47

“If the union of men is maintained by coercion, by the establishment by some people of laws forcibly applied to others, then there will always exist coercion, equal in extent, of some people over others. In one place it will manifest itself in coarse violence, in another in the power of money.”²⁹

It is the main concern of those in power to retain their position and this is best done in two ways. First is to unite the general populous in support of the regime; it is the government’s task to have people believe that the government is acting in the best interests of the many and serves to protect those who live under it. For Tolstoy the support of the people is achieved through the glorification of authority through the swearing of oaths of allegiance, by promoting the prestige of the state and Fatherland, and by encouraging obedience to the government in all areas.³⁰ The second means of maintaining a position of power is that of coercion, violence, and corruption. Tolstoy uses the metaphor of a bundle of wood to describe how state authority requires coercion to maintain its power; “to bind and keep together a bundle of wood, a strong rope is necessary and a certain degree of tension. So also to keep together in one state a collection of men, a certain degree of applied coercion is necessary.”³¹ The possession of power is a corruptive force and those in power are quickly contaminated by it. Despite the apparent best intentions of some in positions of authority, it is the chief purpose and the base instinct of the oppressor to reduce their victims to the extreme limit of exhaustion. The weaker those being oppressed are, the less effort is needed for their coercion.³² In proportion to the growth of authority in strength and duration, the apparent benefits are lost and the disadvantages are multiplied for those who submit to it. As the position of authority becomes more secure then the needs of the people become increasingly less important as the needs of authority take prevalence. Regardless of the form of government the substance of violence, in which the disadvantages of authority are greater than its benefits, always remains the same.³³

²⁹ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.48

³⁰ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.28

³¹ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.48

³² Tolstoy, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’ p.187

³³ Tolstoy, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’ p.189

It is the coercive and violent nature of power that means that one cannot work for the benefit of the population by partaking in politics considering that politics itself rests on power and authority. For Tolstoy there is no state authority which does not commit acts of violence, and which does not maintain itself by violence.³⁴ Governments by the nature of their activity are always composed of “the most audacious, unscrupulous and perverted people.”³⁵ Tolstoy sees a government entrusted with military power as “the most dangerous organization possible,”³⁶ it is an organization under which a peaceful society is impossible. Military power is used to coerce people into obedience and to punish those who transgress the edicts of the authorities; military power is also used to maintain the illusion that the state is necessary for the protection of the people and to expand the state through conflicts with bordering nations. Expansion of the state necessarily entails the horrific use of violence and although such expansions have been justified by the idea of a single universal state, the existence of which would remove all possibility of war, such expansions have historically only led to an increase of military conflict and state sanctioned violence. Tolstoy surmises that the pacification of men can only be attained by the opposite means, through the abolition of states entirely and by doing away with their coercive power.³⁷ The only route to a free and peaceful society, for Tolstoy, is “the destruction of those instruments of violence which are called governments, and from which humanity’s greatest evils flow.”³⁸

In light of these criticisms of power any post-revolutionary society should be free from all coercion of the state; this is only possible if the state as an entity is removed entirely. With any manifestation of the state the same “senseless and cruel wars”³⁹ shall occur, this is because of the essentially violent and corruptive nature of power itself. Tolstoy believes that anyone in possession of power will always become depraved by their power and shall therefore use their power, not for the common welfare, but for their own personal interests. In this way the post-revolutionary state shall always be similar to the deposed state and in an effort to retain its position shall

³⁴ Tolstoy, ‘An Appeal to Social Reformers’ p.61

³⁵ Tolstoy, L., ‘Patriotism and Government’, in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, ed. by Aylmer Maude (New Delhi, Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2001) pp. 501-529 (p.516)

³⁶ Tolstoy, ‘Patriotism and Government’ p.516

³⁷ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.36

³⁸ Tolstoy, ‘Patriotism and Government’ p.518

³⁹ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.38

often be more unjust.⁴⁰ So long as the state and the coercion necessary for its maintenance exist there cannot be true freedom.⁴¹ Tolstoy asks:

“Why should we accept that, contrary to all which has ever taken place, the power which has overturned another power can increase the liberty of men and become more beneficent than the one it has overthrown?”⁴²

The establishment of a post-revolutionary state, in whatever guise, solves nothing. Power, authority, and government are, by their very nature, violent and coercive and under these conditions freedom is impossible. The very existence of political and national states perpetuates a never ending cycle of violence as violence is used to establish, maintain, and overthrow governments. These concerns are at the heart of anarchist anti-statist philosophy and of Tolstoy’s revolutionary writings. A criticism often levied against the anarchist is the fear that without governmental power the worst men would triumph whilst the best would be oppressed, but this is precisely the situation that exists under any state authority. Only the worst men could do the devious and vindictive acts which are necessary for participation in power.⁴³ Again Tolstoy believes that it is only through disobedience to authorities and non-participation in any violence whatsoever that all coercion and the cycle of endless armaments and wars can be abolished.⁴⁴

Tolstoy on Patriotism and Nationalism

In order to maintain the authority of the state, governments must excite people to publicly support the state. The same is true of revolutionary movements which promise the glorification of the nation in the post-revolutionary state. Patriotism serves equally to unite those in support of an existing state or a distant revolutionary utopia, whilst at the same time it derides those who do not support the patriotic ideal. For Tolstoy patriotism is an unnatural, irrational, and harmful feeling. In response to those who claim patriotism is a harmless expression of national distinctiveness, Tolstoy argues that it is not the specific traits of a people that constitute patriotism, patriotism

⁴⁰ Tolstoy, ‘An Appeal to Social Reformers’ p.55

⁴¹ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.48

⁴² Tolstoy, ‘An Appeal to Social Reformers’ p.62

⁴³ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.34

⁴⁴ Tolstoy, ‘The End of an Age’ p.38

is when these peculiarities are employed by patriots in order to strengthen support for the state or, indeed, for the revolutionary movement.⁴⁵ Patriotism is essentially the preference for one's own people or state above all other peoples and states, and consequently the desire that said people or state obtains the greatest share of resources and power. These are obtainable only at the expense of the resources and power of other peoples or states.⁴⁶ Patriotism therefore necessarily entails division and conflict and fosters conflict between those within and without of the preferred state. For Tolstoy, and for anti-statists in general, it is obvious that patriotism as a sentiment is dangerous and harmful, and as a doctrine is stupid. Patriotism is an illusion that has each people and state considering itself the best of peoples and states, consequently all patriots live in a gross and harmful delusion.⁴⁷

I have briefly noted that for governments to justify their existence, and to consolidate their power, they must appear to defend their people from outside threats. Therefore governments, far from wishing peace, stimulate the anger of other nations against themselves, and, having excited other people's anger against themselves, and stirred up the patriotism of their own people, each government then assures its people that it is in danger and must be defended.⁴⁸ The ruling powers inflame patriotism by perpetrating injustices against other nations, their actions provoke enmity amongst other nations towards their own state, in turn they exploit this enmity and embitter their own people against the foreigner.⁴⁹ By presenting the foreigner as an 'other' patriotism creates an 'us vs. them' situation which unites a nation through the hatred of their neighbours, this is the coercive power of patriotism that makes it such an effective tool in maintaining the authority of the state. Patriotism and nationalism are inextricably tied to the violence that is required for upholding the state and perpetuate the circle of violence that accompanies statehood. The maintenance of the army and the defence of a nationality provoke the maintenance and defence of the bordering nation, every increase in the army of one nation obliges its neighbours to increase their armies, and in turn evokes a fresh increase by the first

⁴⁵ Tolstoy, 'Patriotism and Government' pp.502-503

⁴⁶ Tolstoy, 'Patriotism and Government' p.503

⁴⁷ Tolstoy, 'Patriotism and Government' p.503

⁴⁸ Tolstoy, 'Patriotism and Government' p.514

⁴⁹ Tolstoy, 'Patriotism and Government' p.509

nation.⁵⁰ State authority, instead of guarding us against the aggressions of our neighbours, actually creates the danger of such aggressions.⁵¹ Tolstoy explains that “having the power in their hands, the governments can both irritate other nations and excite patriotism at home, and they carefully do both the one and the other; nor can they act otherwise, for their existence depends on their acting thus.”⁵²

For Tolstoy it is vital that people who wish to destroy the violence of government should understand that patriotism, which supports the instrument of violence, is a harmful and immoral feeling.⁵³ Patriotism encourages the violence of state authority and violence is the only possible outcome of stirring up patriotism, every manifestation of patriotism in one nation provokes a corresponding reaction in another.⁵⁴ It serves not to harmonise and unite men, but to estrange and divide them more and more from one another.⁵⁵ It is only when people understand that “they are not the sons of some fatherland or other, nor of governments, but are sons of god,” that they can cease to be slaves to “those insane, unnecessary, worn-out, pernicious organizations called governments, and all the sufferings, violations, humiliations and crimes which they occasion would cease.”⁵⁶ Consequently, any revolution that seeks to establish a peaceful society free from the coercion of the government must eschew patriotism and nationalism as part of the revolutionary method. Patriotism and nationalism are integral parts of maintaining state authority and as such they have no place in a stateless anarchist society, in abandoning the state so too must all the coercive methods that are used to maintain and uphold the state be abandoned also.

⁵⁰ Tolstoy, ‘Patriotism and Government’ p.512

⁵¹ Tolstoy, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’ p.200

⁵² Tolstoy, ‘Patriotism and Government’ p.515

⁵³ Tolstoy, ‘Patriotism and Government’ p.518

⁵⁴ Tolstoy, ‘Patriotism and Government’ p.528

⁵⁵ Tolstoy, ‘Patriotism and Government’ p.503

⁵⁶ Tolstoy, ‘Patriotism and Government’ p.529

Reading Isaiah From an Anarchist Perspective

Isaiah 2-12: The Oracle to Judah and Jerusalem

Isaiah 2-12 encapsulates how Isaiah, and the prophets as a whole, demonstrates a revolutionary concern. The text is trying to effect a change in the minds and actions of society, in this way it is revolutionary as it is concerned with the moral and political wellbeing of society. It includes harsh criticisms of the ruling classes, the economic system, and the distribution of land and echoes revolutionary literature from across the world and from throughout history. Isaiah foretells of a coming event which shall devastate society as it stands in order to rebuild society according to the ideals of the one who instigates the devastation. In this way it is unarguably a revolutionary piece in that it seeks to garner support for the ideals that underpin the revolutionary goal. In this instance the goal of the revolution is to reorganise society by the ways of Yahweh. This new society shall be as just and righteous as Yahweh, in this time the poor shall be protected and not abused or oppressed. Isaiah follows a pattern of discussing the future utopia which is then contrasted by a damning social critique and moves on to consider the methods through which the situation will come to change. Because of the cyclical nature of the text, when we finish reading an account of Yahweh's devastating revolution, we are immediately presented with a further description of the glorious post-revolutionary world and the fulfilment of the revolutionary goal.

Isaiah's Critique of Israelite Society

I have identified three distinct sections within the text which I understand to be social critiques directed at the current political establishment (2:5-8; 5:1-4; 9:8-10:4). These sections concern themselves little, if at all, with the revolutionary process or with the establishment of the post revolutionary society, instead they are preoccupied with the past and present iniquities of the Israelite social and political elite. The first section (2:5-8) is chiefly concerned with influence of foreign religious practices and

idolatry that threaten the national religious institution. The second and third sections I have identified (5:1-4; 9:8-10:4) focus their attentions on the general disobedience of Israel and their ambivalence towards Yahweh's authority. The text is primarily concerned with the abuse of political power by those in positions of authority, it is they who have ruined the potential glory of the nation and have consistently ignored God's warnings and punishments. It is this prideful display of autonomy and ignorance which has invited the great levelling of society that Yahweh is preparing to deliver. The critical segments introduce the impending revolution and provide a justification for the means of the revolutionary process. This is not to say that these sections present the only contemporary critique in Isaiah 2-12, on the contrary the prophet's social critique runs throughout the revolutionary passages and demonstrates the gulf between Yahweh's utopian society and the political realities of Isaiah's audience.

2:5-8: The Influence of Foreign Practices

Chapter 2 opens with a vision of the post-revolutionary utopia, an example of how life should be, but the text now moves to expose life as it really is in a damning plea to the 'house of Jacob' to recognise the evidence of their unrighteous ways. The description that follows is of a people that live in complete contrast to the utopia that the revolutionary actions of Yahweh promise to deliver. John D.W. Watts notes that the entire passage from 2:5 through to the end of the chapter is a complex documentation of Israel's sin and judgement.⁵⁷ Watts does not distinguish verses five to eight as a distinct pericope in itself but I argue that, following the NRSV, there is a notable shift in tone between verses eight and nine. Verses five through eight are accusatory and descriptive of the current situation in Israel whereas from verse nine onwards the text is concerned with the fate that Israel has brought upon itself. Seitz agrees and describes a pattern where reasons for judgement are given in 2:6 and followed up with the supporting evidence in verses seven and eight.⁵⁸ Although Joseph Blenkinsopp, like Watts, does not highlight verses five to eight as a distinct section, he does discern the larger outline of a legal poem within the chapter where verses six to eight present an indictment against Israel and verses twelve to sixteen deliver the

⁵⁷ Watts, John D.W., *Isaiah 1-33* (Waco, World Books, 1985) pp.9-183 (p.33)

⁵⁸ Seitz, Christopher R., *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993) pp. 38-11 (p.40)

verdict of Yahweh's judgement.⁵⁹ I have addressed this second phase of Blenkinsopp's poem as part of the passages concerning the revolutionary actions of Yahweh.

As it stands, the Promised Land is full of foreign influences and foreign gods (2:6); the ruling elite obnoxiously display their wealth with trinkets of gold and silver, they parade their military might and trust in the tools of their own power for protection. The people have forsaken Yahweh and their own traditions, instead they seek alliances and riches to protect themselves and adopt foreign religious practices to imitate their neighbours. What the text presents here is an image of a fatherland that has fallen from glory and is in need of purification. The accusations of colluding with the enemy and worshipping foreign gods instigate the patriotic furore that shall stir up support for the revolutionary cause as all the problems of Israelite society, and the devastation that is to befall them, can be attributed to their neglect of the national godhead and of their national identity. This is the first of many incidents within the text where foreigners are portrayed as 'others' and as corrosive to Israel's election as a chosen people. These incidents of xenophobia reflect many of Tolstoy's criticisms of patriotism and serve primarily to justify a revolutionary war against those who have allowed the defilement of Yahweh's Promised Land.

Following Seitz, if we read verse six as the accusation against Israel then verses seven and eight demonstrate the truth behind the accusation by exposing the behaviours of Israel's wealthy and powerful elite. The land is filled with hoarded treasures (2:7) and people worship their own power and wealth, they parade their military to flaunt their status and make idols to worship their own works and resources. Having a standing military not only displays the wealth of the authorities but it also serves to protect their position of power and to discourage attacks against their administration. The worship of idols celebrates the wealth of the ruling class and their own ability to create; it turns their attention away from Yahweh and echoes the pride and arrogance that brought such an unfortunate end to the people of Babel. So too does the worship of idols threaten the national religious system of Yahweh, in the eyes of a nationalist revolution the corruption of such a significant national institution is unforgiveable. The damning tone of the passage however, does nothing to spoil the

⁵⁹ Blenkinsopp, Joseph, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Isaiah 1-39* (New Haven, Yale University, 2000) pp. 171-270 (p.194)

poetics of the text. Nowhere else, Watts believes, is the corrosive effect of wealth and the correlation between greed and idolatry more fluently portrayed.⁶⁰ Israel's materialism and idolatry have led her to lose her elect and privileged status, she has reverted to a depraved state of pride and arrogance that demonstrates how and why the attitudes of traditional (pre-revolutionary) Israel will have no place in God's new city (the post-revolutionary state). When we read these verses in light of the opening vision of Yahweh's utopia we can clearly chart the division between life as it should be and life as it is. Israel's election and the ideal of the Promised Land stands in great contrast to the corrupt, greedy, and abusive behaviour of the current authorities.

5:1-4: The Unfruitful Vineyard

The opening verses of chapter 5 introduce the Song of the Unfruitful Vineyard and illustrate Yahweh's establishment and original purpose of Israel.⁶¹ Blenkinsopp acknowledges that the passage acts as a prologue to the events that are to come.⁶² The initial stages of the song bring the reader from a description of the glorious post-revolutionary society to the devastating description of the revolutionary violence that shall establish the utopian vision related in the preceding chapter. The song is addressed to Judah and Jerusalem and allegorically demonstrates how the political entities representing the Promised Land have disappointed Yahweh and betrayed Israel. The passage recalls Yahweh's care and attention that went into preparing Israel, his vineyard, and relates his disappointment when it produced, instead of the finest fruits, nothing but "wild grapes".

Interpretations of these verses are particularly standardised and most commentators recognise the vineyard to be Israel, in both the geographical and spiritual sense, and the 'beloved' gardener to be Yahweh. These verses again relate to the nationalist ideal of Israel as an elected community, a position that they have clearly failed to live up to. This brief section, as with all the critical sections, buttresses the nationalist dimension of the revolutionary cause. The text delivers an image of a nation singled out for greatness and glory, a nation that was corrupted by the pride and excesses of the social elite and is in need of a definitive reorientation of its path away from devastation. Israel was established as a utopia, a testament to the natural law of

⁶⁰ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.37

⁶¹ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.52

⁶² Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, p.208

God, however Israel has lost its way through the behaviours of the authorities and leadership who have sought to abuse that position for their own gain, these are the people that are condemned throughout the text and to whom the present state of catastrophe is clearly attributed.

9:8-10:4: The Failures of Israel

The royalist vision that opens chapter 9 (see below, page 43) is swiftly followed by a most extensive description of the historical failures of Israel. It is a concise history of Israel's corruption and separation from the destiny of glory that Yahweh had intended and that the revolution shall fulfil; the people have survived one disaster only to encounter another. The confidence with which the people set about rebuilding the structures of the old regime is interpreted as a devastating display of pride in the face of Yahweh.⁶³ The decision to tough it out and cling to the failing regime is pure bravado, it is politically fool-hardy and spiritually reprobate.⁶⁴ The text focuses on the continued failures of Israel and the continuous anger of Yahweh. Each stanza concludes with the warning that "for all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still." Clearly their lesson had not been learned and as such their actions warrant further punishment, a punishment that will break down the old regime beyond the possibilities of renewal. The final verses of chapter nine (9:18-21) reveal the consequences of this widespread iniquity and it is through these deceptive prophetic oracles that the demise of Israel is sketched in graphic detail.⁶⁵ The anger of Yahweh, according to Watts, is not to be seen in terms of uncontrolled emotion, it is instead Yahweh's stimulus to provoke a response from Israel that he can deal with.⁶⁶ This is the ultimate purpose of the prophets and of all revolutionary literature, to provoke a response from the audience that the prophet or the revolutionary can channel into their cause, this again illustrates the place of nationalism and patriotism in the revolutionary process.

The whole passage reads like a courtroom transcript: accusations are made, a verdict is decided, and a sentence shall be delivered and the punishment meted out by the accuser. The initial verses of chapter ten drive these accusations home by bringing

⁶³ See also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, p.218

⁶⁴ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.143

⁶⁵ Seitz, *Isaiah*, p.91

⁶⁶ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.143

them into the present and directing them towards the ruling classes of Israelite society. The accusations are clear: they have written unjust and oppressive laws in order to exploit the poor (10:1) and they prey on the most vulnerable members of society represented here by widows and orphans (10:2b). If, like Blenkinsopp, we read these accusations in the light of the other complaints levied in the text then we can illustrate the correlation between the practice of manipulating the legal system by those in the position to do so, and the seizure of land and property, and of what little assets the peasantry possessed.⁶⁷ The complete incompetence of the government to react to the deepening crisis is pictured (10:1-4) and the accusations against the ruling classes are repeated and no mistake can be made as to the injustice of their actions. The flush of oppressive decrees and laws bring no order to those chaotic times but only increase the injustices of the authorities and as the current state dies the leaders shall have no choice but to share its fate. Thus the exploiters experience the weight of Yahweh's anger which was aroused by their own deeds.⁶⁸

It has been shown that the ruling classes are explicitly to blame for the fall of society and serve to demonstrate the need for the violence of the approaching revolution. In the revolutionary storm that is approaching, the wealth accumulated through their legalised robbery will do little good as the deposed leaders take their place amongst the prisoners or fall with those who are slain (10:3b).⁶⁹ There is no place in the new society for these people, either their death or their imprisonment is pivotal for the success of the revolution. Only through faith in Yahweh and adherence to the natural law of the revolutionary ideal can the people of Israel fulfil the glory that Yahweh had intended for Israel. The text aims to stress that the behaviours of those currently in positions of power are entirely contradictory to this goal.

Isaiah's Commentary on the Revolutionary Process

The passages concerning the revolutionary process sit at the crux of the critique of society as it currently stands and the glorious visions of society as it should be. These passages at once describe both the breaking down of Israelite society and

⁶⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, p.212

⁶⁸ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.144

⁶⁹ Seitz, *Isaiah*, p.91

the establishment of Yahweh's new world and as such they utilise the same emotive language and themes as the surrounding passages. It is in the descriptions of Yahweh's revolutionary process where the tension between life as it is and as it should be is explored. In contrast to the static images of the damning social critique and the glorious vision of the future, the revolutionary passages are dynamic and fluid as they move between the past, present, and future and between Israel's condemnation, punishment, and election. The images of horrific militant violence and glorified bloodshed are the mirror opposite to the peaceful international society envisioned in the introductory passages (2:4).

2:9-4:1: Introducing the Terror of the Lord

The transition from social critique to revolutionary action in chapter two pivots around verses 9-11. After the brief critique of the Israelite elite in vv.5-8, the use of the phrase "and so" (2:9) moves the text on to describe the consequences of their indulgences whilst making it explicitly that the events to follow are the result of the actions of the ruling classes. The text often utilises the language of a law court and emphasises that Yahweh's revolution is bringing a judgement upon Israel, it is the authorities, the princes and elders, who have lead the people astray and who shall be tried in Yahweh's court. The people are charged with embracing idols (2:8), symbols of the power and pride of the ruling classes, this illustrates the pollution of the national religion and exemplifies the poor leadership of the authorities. Pride and ambition are humanity's most devastating sins and idolatry is seen as the ultimate expression of this drive by which man seeks to exalt himself, it is the definitive symbol of man's ambition and pride.⁷⁰ Worse still, idolatry goes hand in hand with the adoption of foreign religious practices and the appropriation of foreign gods which threatens the national religious institution of Yahweh. The national religion is the foundation of the Israelite national identity and through the use of idols has been compromised. Therefore, the issue of idolatry is central to the nationalist cause; in the day of the revolution, idols and riches shall be futile; what good are figures of gold and silver in such a devastated world as they are about to witness?

The case has been made (2:5-8) and now the verdict is being delivered. These people shall be brought down low and humbled by the revolution (2:9) and their fall

⁷⁰ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.35

shall emphasise the rise of the revolutionary ideals. This levelling of the high and mighty instigates the revolution that follows and lays the foundation for the complete reversal of the current social order. The revolution shall be terrible and destructive, those targeted are advised to run and hide from what is to come (2:10). It is key to note that the devastating “terror of the Lord” is inextricably intertwined with the “glory of his majesty”, the text celebrates both the sovereign and unchallengeable authority of Yahweh and the violent and bloodthirsty terror that is required to establish his office (2:10). On the Day of the Lord, that is the day of the revolution, Yahweh shall be exalted and the revolutionary ideal shall be realised, all that is high and lofty and all that is held as eminent and elite shall be brought down and shown to be futile and worthless.

Merging descriptions of strength and power from the natural world and the world of men, the text describes cedars and oaks (2:13), high mountains and lofty hills (2:14), high towers and fortified walls (2:15), and, ships and crafts (2:16) to illustrate that “all that is proud and lofty... all that is lifted up and high” (2:12) is to be brought low and humbled by the revolution. The repetition of ‘haughty’ and ‘pride’, and, ‘humbled’ and ‘brought low’ cements the promise that the proud and lofty, that is the ruling classes who have abused their position and exploited their fellow countrymen, shall suffer during the levelling revolutionary process. The words ‘high’, ‘raised’, ‘lifted up’, and ‘exalted’ describe divine characteristics which humanity has tried to appropriate to itself, this has prevented the achievement of a genuine humanity and has led to repeated abuse of Yahweh and of the less fortunate in their own community.⁷¹ Verses 11 and 17 make it clear that as the proud and haughty are humbled and brought low it is Yahweh, the revolutionary ideal, alone who shall be exalted and raised up. Yahweh will rise in glorifying terror, he shall trivialize all the grand schemes of humanity and nothing that is high in the human realm will remain so.⁷² This compliments the vision of the mountain of the Lord rising above the hills of the nations in the introductory passages (2:2).

The revolution shall dismantle the structure of present society. All military and political support shall fall away leaving Israelite civilisation in tatters without the

⁷¹ Watts, *Isaiah*, pp.35-36

⁷² Seitz, *Isaiah*, p.41

hierarchical structures that support authority (3:1-8). It is a picture of an unjust and chaotic society. The power structures of the military, including the professional mercenary force, conscripts, and captains of fifty, shall be broken and so too will the nobility, the counsellors, the magistrates and elders, and the religious authorities (3:2-4). The chaotic ruins of society are the result of the violent revolution, but this is not the goal of the revolution and it is this state of destruction and ruin that provides the fertile ground for the post-revolutionary society. It is to be seen as a necessary period of turmoil and devastation after which Yahweh's glory shall spread across a united Israel, the state of the land after Yahweh's revolutionary work has been fulfilled serves to justify the need for a post-revolutionary state. The text has warned us what life is like in a vacuum of authority, with no leaders or institutions to govern the population. If scenes such as these are to be avoided then society must again be trusted into the hands of an authoritative figure but this time that figure is Yahweh and his administration. This scenario echoes Tolstoy's own concerns that peoples' fear that life without authority would prove to be so much worse than life under a coercive government that they hasten to establish a state with power structures that mirror the ones they sought to dissolve. As such, the cycle of power and violence continues.

The revolution absolutely stresses the sovereign authority of Yahweh, he is the righteous and legitimate authority and shall lead the revolution, and it is on this authority that the post-revolutionary society shall be built. His power to remove the supports that society has leaned on, the religious and political authorities, mocks the current regime which in light of the revolution shall appear like it was managed by children (3:4, 12). Oppression shall increase as the authorities fight to protect their position; the result is a society overturned which nobody shall want to take charge of. In this world turned upside down the land is in ruins and society has collapsed, the position of leadership over this broken scene can only be fulfilled by the revolutionary agent, this is Yahweh. This admonishments listed previously justifies this fate as the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel have become estranged from divine law of mutual compassion. It is the task of the revolutionary leader to seize the ruins and to rebuild society according to the revolutionary ideal. Again the text is justifying the violence that shall follow as the guilty have brought this on themselves (3:9) and the innocent are fortunate for they shall benefit from the revolution: at last they shall win

the freedom of the land and eat the fruit of their own labours (3:10). The authorities and social elite shall not fare so well and the violence against them is warranted by their actions, in typical revolutionary language we are reminded how the oppressors “crush” the people and “grind the face of the poor” (3:15), and the text warns that “what their hands have done shall be done to them” (3:11). It is clear that it is acceptable to use violence against the authorities as the authorities have used violence against the people; it is simply playing them at their own game. The leaders have misled the people and have confused their path as the chosen land (3:12); the task of the revolution is to get them back on track by purging the deceptive authorities.

5:5-30: The Destruction of the Vineyard

Chapter five continues the song of the vineyard (5:5) and describes how the military security of the state shall be broken. The hedge shall be removed and the vineyard devoured, the protective walls and fortifications shall be broken down and the fields trampled. The nation state shall be broken down to obliterate the corrupt system of authority that currently governs Israel and shall be rebuilt in light of the revolutionary ideal. It is due to the total corruption of the Promised Land that the revolution is necessary, in a land destined for greatness there is only bloodshed, not justice, the people cry out for there is no righteousness to be found. Blenkinsopp describes how these passages explain events of the recent past or the near future in terms of moral causality and of the divine plan that is to be carried out in the arena of international politics.⁷³

It is once again those in a position of power and authority that are singled out for the fate that Israel faces, the chapter goes on to admonish them heavily for their actions. It is they who have flaunted their arrogance in the face of God and who have trodden on their fellow man for their own gains. The offending parties are identified as the land owning elite who usurp the ancestral plots of the poor to create vast estates; they abuse the poor while they get rich off the rewards of their labour. Blenkinsopp, in a moment of political insight, argues that the text portrays the current situation of Israel as one “in which the system of patrimonial domain was being undermined by the rising state apparatus, hungry as always for land, and members of powerful families, a process eventuating in vast social changes including the formation of latifundia and the

⁷³ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, p.212

prevalence of rent capitalism.”⁷⁴ When the right to tribal inheritance, which guaranteed its members land to work, gave way to the greed of speculators- it created a class of landless unemployed who had simultaneously been stripped of their livelihood and their civil rights.⁷⁵ Again it is the authorities who are the focus of the revolutionary process. They are accused of being drunkards and gluttons (5:11-12, 22), they accept bribes and deny justice to the poor (5:23), they do what is evil in the guise of doing what is good (5:20), they oppress the vulnerable while they flaunt their own power through displays of grandeur and exhibitions of wealth. In the midst of the revolutionary violence these people shall receive their punishment: the large estates and houses shall be left empty and the land shall be rendered unproductive (5:9-10), as the land is ravished the nobility who survive off the labour of the poor shall starve and thirst to death (5:13). This being said, it is astounding to read that, despite acknowledging the specific crimes listed, Seitz finds it difficult to see how leaders of Jerusalem have been singled out for blame and punishment and reads the passage as relating to the whole of Israel.⁷⁶ I do not believe that the text warrants this reading as I have clearly demonstrated who is to blame for the fall of Israelite society. Many of the accusations levied by the text involve the exploitation of money, property, and land, or the abuse of bureaucratic positions and the legal system. The activities cited in the text can only be the activities of a wealthy and powerful social elite.

When these passages call upon Yahweh it is his role as a military leader with which the text is concerned. In his military role, Yahweh shall bring destruction upon the heads of the ruling classes who have abused and corrupted his chosen people. The authorities shall lose the luxury of their position when the people will no longer accept the injustice of their lot and turn to Yahweh for support. The military power of a foreign nation shall be employed against the domestic military that supports the oppressive regime and those that challenge Yahweh, those who denigrate his work and who cheat and oppress his people shall be unseated and cut down in the furore of the revolution. They have rejected the natural law of mutual benefit that informs the revolutionary ideal. The revolutionary ideal, and Yahweh as the revolutionary agent, shall be exalted by the revolutionary battle and in its success it shall demonstrate the

⁷⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, p.213

⁷⁵ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.60

⁷⁶ Seitz, *Isaiah*, p.50

justice and righteousness that are associated with Yahweh and were so lacking under the previous order.

10:27-11:16: Consolidating the Power of the Post-Revolutionary State

The final passage that concerns the day of action turns its attention to the final days of the revolutionary process. Now that Israel has been purified Yahweh's anger turns to the victorious Assyrian army, they are now the lofty ones who must be humbled. The destruction of the foreign army is vital to the promise of Israel's restoration under the authority of Yahweh's human representative. In light of the accusations of colluding with foreign powers the revolutionary force must distance itself immediately from the Assyrian forces who now pose a threat to the fledgling post-revolutionary state. In describing the fate of the Assyrian army, the text strengthens the nationalist concerns of the revolution: whilst it was strategic to utilise the might of a foreign army to clear out the oppressive government, it is not wise to allow a foreign power to occupy the land or to establish their own government to dominate Israel. Instead Israel shall come under the control of Yahweh's representative, the Davidic child king. The head of the post-revolutionary society is endowed with the qualities that one associates with Yahweh, he shall be wise and understanding (11:2), he shall treat the poor fairly and shall rule with righteousness and justice (11:4). His reign shall be one of peace where even the natural order becomes passive and harmonious, and in his day Israel shall become "a banner for the peoples" and the nations shall rally to him (11:10). The images of universal peace follow hot on the heels of violent military action against the very forces that made the revolution a success; this seems to justify violence as the only way to instigate peace. So too does it demonstrate that the primary objective of authority is to protect its own seat of power by quashing any threat to that seat.

After the devastating revolution, the attention turns to strengthening the nationalist cause by protecting borders and deprecating surrounding nations. By convincing the people of the wrong doings of those nations, even the violence of the revolution can be put on the shoulders of a foreign power; the post-revolutionary authorities can then justify further military campaigns in the name of peace and national security. Chapter eleven concludes with typical nationalist excitement in reiterating the promise that Israel shall become a guiding light to its neighbours. The

revolution has set the stage for the post-revolutionary administration to take charge of a broken, but liberated, Israel and to guide it towards its glorious destiny. Israelite society is now ready to be governed by the ideals of the revolution and to act as an example to the nations. The universal peace that is described can only be obtained if every nation subscribes to the revolutionary principle and follows the example that Israel has set. This envisages that Israel's campaigns against their neighbours shall not seize in the post-revolutionary world, if anything they appear set to escalate.

Isaiah on the Post-Revolutionary Society

The post-revolutionary state is consistently projected as a glorified reimagining of Israel which, under the authority of Yahweh's representative, shall raise above all other nations and become an example of society as it should be. It is a vision of peace and harmony, weapons have become so unnecessary that they are beaten into farming equipment (2:4b-4c) and disputes between nations and peoples shall be mediated by Yahweh and his decrees to maintain the peace of the post-revolutionary world. The post-revolutionary state shall be established from the success of the revolutionary movement on the Day of the Lord and shall be built up amidst the ruins of what the revolution tore down.

The whole text of Isaiah is a nationalist and patriotic reaction to life in Israel, at various stages in her history, under the influence of a variety of oppressive foreign and domestic regimes. In a final form reading, these separate instances of oppression combine to present a homogenised picture of exploitative and oppressive state authorities. The presence of mighty foreign empires on the scene goes some way to explaining the importance of nationalism in the separate prophetic and revolutionary movements encountered throughout the complete text of Isaiah.

2:1-4: The Mountain of the Lord's House

The introductory passage to the oracle to Judah and Jerusalem provides a brief summary of the ideal society that the revolution seeks to establish. In this way it provides an overture for the oracle. It does not matter how despairing the events of the text shall become because one is constantly reminded that it is all part of the

process that shall establish the Mountain of the Lord. The vision is of a society where war and violence have been abolished (2:4) and where Yahweh and his human administration shall instruct the world according to his ways (2:3). The phrase “in days to come”, which opens the vision, drives home that whilst this perfect society is certainly separated from the present by an undisclosed period of turmoil, this future vision is soon to be at hand.

The ‘Mountain of the Lord’s house’ (2:2) is the focal point of the brief passage and signifies the rise of Israel amongst the nations under the governance of Yahweh and the acceptance of his ways (2:3). The passage is a collection of Zion themes with the Mountain of the Lord taking its place at the centre of the world with the temple at its epicentre, the prominence of the temple is affirmed by the image of Gentiles converging on Jerusalem.⁷⁷ The description of the Mountain focuses on its superiority, it is the ‘highest of mountains’ and in its presence all other mountains appear to be mere hills (2:2). All nations shall flock to the Mountain of the Lord for instruction and shall try to emulate life within the post-revolutionary state for themselves (2:3), Yahweh and his law are finally exalted and universally recognised.

Yahweh and his representative take the position of an international judge who shall peacefully arbitrate disputes amongst the nations according to the ideals of the revolution. The position of Yahweh as judge of the world promises that the revolutionary ideal is just, fair, and righteous but simultaneously celebrates the authority of Yahweh and that of the post-revolutionary state. The superiority of the administration stands to be the reward of some revolutionary effort. The mountain does not rise up on its own accord but it ‘shall be established’ and ‘shall be raised’ with considerable effort, those who join the revolutionary cause and initiate the revolutionary process are working directly to establish such a lofty and idyllic regime. Yahweh shall lead the nations under one rule, one state, and one authority, but this begs the question of what will happen to those that wish to remain separate from Yahweh and Israel: are they doomed to death and imprisonment along with the ruling class that the revolution overturned? Does the option of living outside the Israelite jurisdiction even exist? The description of a post-revolutionary authority that governs

⁷⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, p.191

the nations from a centralised base and according to a universally binding law carries echoes of totalitarianism that cannot be ignored by the anarchist reader.

Watts claims that Zion's future, as described in these preliminary verses, is separate from nationalistic goals and that it is her reputation as Yahweh's dwelling that is the driving force behind the prophetic cause.⁷⁸ Watts could be correct if by this he is proposing that the explicitly nationalist elements of Isaiah were not originally part of the prophet's message and are instead the work of later editors, instead it appears that he does not see the word to Judah and Jerusalem as presenting a nationalist cause at all. I cannot see how this can be the case; even the brief introductory passages cannot help but display the nationalistic concerns that underpin the revolutionary call and the ideals of the post-revolutionary state. Whenever Yahweh is discussed in connection with the future of Israel it is always his position as the national figurehead which is stressed, he is the national patron and works towards the nationalist dreams of peace through superiority. Watts even alludes to this himself when he acknowledges that "Zion will be identified with Yahweh."⁷⁹ The state is consistently identified with the godhead; Yahweh is the nationalistic concern and he is celebrated in both the revolutionary ideal and as the authority behind the nationalist vision of the post-revolutionary government. The picture of the Mountain of the Lord taking its place at the centre of the world is explicitly nationalist and betrays intentions of political and religious superiority over surrounding nations. It is the temple that lies at the heart of the new administration as it is the dwelling of Yahweh and a physical embodiment of the revolutionary ideal. Everything in the world revolves around the mountain and every nation is centred by Jerusalem, in this way the mountain is clearly a symbol of the nationalistic hopes of Israel and indicates the political and religious dominance intended for the post-revolutionary state. Again one could levy accusations of totalitarianism against the image of the new state portrayed in the text.

Whilst Seitz does not go as far as to claim that the text is entirely disconnected from nationalist concerns, he does consider the oracle to be remarkable in its vision of levelling of national distinctions.⁸⁰ Certainly the text does present a levelling of national distinctions but this is only in relation to the rise of Zion. It is the surrounding

⁷⁸ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.28

⁷⁹ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.29

⁸⁰ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.38

nations that are blurred into a single entity and their own national identities are lost, meanwhile Zion is raised above the hoi polloi and becomes even more distinct and separated as an individual state. This levelling of national distinctions further fuels the 'us vs. them' mentality that patriotism and nationalism evoke. The distinction of Zion from the other nations of the world, and the resultant superiority, has consistently been a fundamental component of Zionist theology and of Israel's identification as God's chosen people. Yahweh and the Torah are what distinguish Israel from the other nations and are intrinsically entwined to its future state of glory and supremacy over its neighbours. But still Watts claims that there is nothing here of political dominance or of nationalism!⁸¹

Peace is obviously the end goal of the revolution and the post-revolutionary society is portrayed as a world where war is futile. Weapons are turned into farming equipment simultaneously demonstrating that this revolution will bring both peace and sustenance through the freedom of the land. Whilst Watts sees no nationalist concern in the glorious future of Israel, he does acknowledge that this is a Jerusalem which lies "beyond the battles", the immediate future is one of violence and turmoil which is instigated by Yahweh and in which he takes a primary role.⁸² The vision of the post-revolutionary state is inextricably bound to the violent revolution that seeks to establish it, to the nationalist and patriotic cause, and to the authority of Yahweh and of the post-revolutionary government.

4:2-6: The Branch of the Lord

In only six verses the fourth chapter of the text delivers a concise description of the post-revolutionary society concerning itself with those who are set to inhabit the purified Israel. Throughout this passage there is a distinct preoccupation with the nationalist cause as is reflected in the Zionist language and allusions to Israel's bespoke history as Yahweh's elected people. The national pride and glory of Zion is to be enjoyed by those living in the post-revolutionary society which is set to be a "beautiful and glorious" (4:2) reflection of Israel's idyllic past. The concern of the passage is the remnant of the people who are left in the land and have survived the revolutionary purge, they shall be called holy (4:3) and it is only to them that the post-revolutionary

⁸¹ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.29

⁸² Watts, *Isaiah*, p.29

society is open. These people are embodied by the innocent, the poor, and the oppressed, those who are faithful to Yahweh and the revolutionary ideal instead of being slaves to wealth and power. It is they who have been elected to fulfil the destiny of Israel. The necessary purge has taken place and the dream of becoming a holy nation that was at the heart of Israel's heritage is now set to become a reality.⁸³

Whilst the revolution itself shall break down the structure of Israelite society, the post-revolutionary society shall restore the pride and glory of Israel as Yahweh's elected nation. After Israel has been cleansed of the filth that polluted it and the bloodstains of the revolution have been washed away (4:1), the new society shall vanquish memory of the old state and of the horrors of revolutionary war shall fade under the light of the new Israel shall be a utopian society. Unlike the boastful pride of the old administration, this is not a destructive and infectious pride that is an insult to Yahweh, instead this pride supports the new administration and demonstrates a commitment to the revolutionary ideal and Yahweh's administration. It is a clear example of the patriotism excited by the revolution and transferred to the post-revolutionary administration. The national pride is rooted in motifs that reflect the glory days of Israel past, here it is the mention of a protective cloud and fire that recalls the days in the wilderness recorded in Exodus (Ex 13:21-22; 24:16; 4:38 cf. Num 9:15; Ps 105:39). The text is mining the national mythology of Israelite history as a guide to the post-revolutionary state; it projects an image of an idyllic historical society from a time before the corruption of Israel by the forbearers of the recently deposed regime. The post-revolutionary society shall reflect the wilderness origins of Israel as a political entity as the remnant that inhabits the land shall restore it to its rightful place as the nation that Yahweh elected above all other nations.

The Mountain remains a consistent figure in the descriptions of the post-revolutionary state. Blenkinsopp acknowledges that the temple operates as the real political and socioeconomic centre of Israelite society; this is why it is the central and emblematic point of reference.⁸⁴ The image of the Mountain again conveys the superiority of Israel above the nations; the nationalist utopia shall be protected and governed by the institution of Yahweh's administration, in the last section this was

⁸³ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.50

⁸⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, p.204

dominated by the image of the Temple but in this passage it is the protective canopy (4:5) that reflects Yahweh's authority. Yahweh shall place a canopy "over all the glory", that is over "the whole site of Mount Zion" (4:5), and it shall be "a refuge and a shelter" (4:6). Whilst, as Blenkinsopp points out, it is true that the temple reflects the political superiority of Yahweh's state, the canopy on the other hand reflects Yahweh's protective qualities and ensures the security and longevity of the post-revolutionary state.

The emphasis on the authority of Yahweh in the re-established Israel demonstrates that whilst the new society shall be arranged according to the revolutionary ideal, it is indeed to be an organised state that ultimately reflects the interests of statehood and not of freedom. In this particular passage the concern is for Yahweh's ability to protect the new state (4:5-6). The protection that the canopy offers must be understood in light of the threats to Israel's national distinctiveness as identified throughout the text, namely the poisonous religious and cultural influences of foreign nations. Watts notes that the contrast between Yahweh's protection and the earlier purge is marked by the image of the canopy as the passage stresses that the actions of Yahweh are to ensure the safety and permanence of the city and its people.⁸⁵ The raising of the canopy demonstrates the reinstatement of the political "support and staff" that the revolution had removed. The remnant that inhabit the land shall need not fear further invasion or violence as the state shall instigate defensive measures to protect the people. Despite the promise of everlasting world peace the post-revolutionary state shall nonetheless require protection which is to involve some degree of military action. The military are the 'staff' of the political system and are essential to the myth of national security that maintains the position of the authorities.

9:2-7 (Heb. 9:1-9:6): The Davidic Child King

Chapter nine turns away from images of the Mountain of the Lord and instead focuses on the human administration that shall govern the new state. The initial verse adopts a standard biblical dichotomy of darkness and light: the dark days of the old regime and the revolutionary violence are over and the foundation of the post-revolutionary society shall shine a great light on the community. The text is clear that

⁸⁵ Watts, *Isaiah*, pp.50-51

those who suffered under the previous regime shall suffer no more in the in post-revolutionary state. These are the remnant that embodies the revolutionary ideal, those who are recorded for life in Jerusalem (4:3). All the problems of the previous regime that are recorded in the critical sections shall be rectified; the people shall no longer work for an oppressor (9:4) and they shall share the rewards of their labours (9:3), war shall be abolished and the vestiges of the militant violence shall be destroyed forever (9:5 cf. 2:4).

The description of the post-revolutionary state pictures a place of happiness and rejoicing with an emphasis on the productivity of the land. The people shall increase in number and the land shall provide bountiful harvests which are likened to treasures, unlike the pre-revolutionary society the rewards of their labour shall not be hoarded by an elite social group but divided amongst the people (9:3). Whilst this is certainly not a socialist vision as such, it is indicative of the utopian society envisioned by all revolutionary movements throughout history and does bear a striking resemblance to the utopia envisioned by the socialist revolutionaries at the turn of the twentieth century. The passage concludes with the promise of a glorious and just leader who shall take the seat of David and lead the post-revolutionary state into a future of peace, justice, and righteousness (9:7). This monarchist vision describes a restoration of power and glory to the House of David⁸⁶ and, as Blenkinsopp acknowledges, the promissory tone reflects future aspirations rather than a contemporary political and military reality.⁸⁷ For the audience of the prophet this is the example of life as it should be that stands in such stark contrast to their experience of life as recorded in the social critique of other passages.

In this section the people are brought together with the land and it is the relationship between the people, the land, and the authorities that represents the post-revolutionary state. The state embodies the people who live within its borders and in obedience to its rules and ideals, it reinforces the patriotic sympathies of the nationalist revolution. An increase in population means that there are more people available to work the land and to produce goods or provide services; this also serves the nationalist cause and projects an image of security through numbers as there are

⁸⁶ Watts, *Isaiah*, p.134

⁸⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, p.249

also more people available to defend the state when necessary. Children are raised according to the revolutionary ideal, the remnant are no longer a few survivors but are blossoming into a fully functional populous in their Promised Land. The description of a fruitful and burgeoning post-revolutionary state fulfils the promises of land and progeny made by Yahweh to Abraham (Gen 13:14-15, 17:7-8). Again, this encourages support for the patriotic and nationalist ideals of the revolution, which shall in turn consolidate the surviving population into members of the post-revolutionary Israelite state under the authority of Yahweh's representative.

The child of the revolution described in verses six and seven is more than just a child, he is a figure of authority that shall lead the post-revolutionary state towards its glorious destiny as Yahweh's elected nation. Once again the history of Israel is recalled to convey how the new regime should be assembled, this time it is David who is heralded as the guide. The celebration of the Davidic monarchy also celebrates the nature of authority and statehood, the child king's eternal rule of justice and righteousness demonstrates the benefits of living under a strong authority figure in contrast to the earlier depiction of life without authority (3:1-7). The celebration of authority continues as the child is decorated with four titles of authority (9:6) that reflect a sense of divinity and express important attributes of the idyllic polity that the revolution seeks to establish. Blenkinsopp discusses how the titles reflect these attributes: 'Mighty God' is a divine title applied to the king and 'Everlasting Father' describes the duty of the sovereign to be a father to his people, 'Wonderful Counsellor' refers to the capacity to strategise whereas 'Prince of Peace' signifies the abolition of war and a public order founded on justice and righteousness.⁸⁸ The curious thing about these titles is the contradictory nature of a Prince of Peace who is known for his, assumingly military, strategies and embodies the might of God which has been portrayed throughout the text in a military context. The child king is laden with authority, there can be no doubt to his position over the people and the text claims that his authority shall grow continuously (9:7). There are again echoes of totalitarianism in the descriptions of the growing power of the post-revolutionary state. The text summons images of militant expansion at the expense of the independence of surrounding nations. It is essential to my study to note that whilst the

⁸⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, pp.250-251

text promises a future of peace, righteousness, and freedom, the post-revolutionary state still relies entirely upon the trappings of authority and a universal authority whose reach is continually expanding. It is apparent that universal peace is only possible under the submission to the complete authority of the leader of the post-revolutionary state, a position that Tolstoy would certainly take issue with.

10:5-27: Yahweh Turns on Assyria

The tone of the utopian passages from chapter ten is markedly different from those that preceded them. The attention is less on the establishment of a peaceful society under a righteous leader and more on the punishment of the Assyrian military, the very forces used to achieve the revolutionary goal. There is little in these passages to distinguish them from those that describe the revolutionary process as the text adopts the same themes in an attempt to erase the violence of the revolution by punishing those who actually committed the horrific acts and not Yahweh or his representatives who actually instigated the revolutionary process. The passages are laden with nationalist sentiment and set about exploring more deeply the nature of the universal and ever-growing authority of the child king. These passages mark the beginning of a circle of violence as the newly established state prepares to protect its position from those who pose a threat. We have already seen the Assyrian military demonstrate their ability to overturn another nation's government and there is nothing to say they could not do so again.

The nationalist fervour can be seen in the actions of Yahweh. He shall remove the boundaries and borders of surrounding nations. He shall usurp their resources and topple their authority figures. This derisive passage denigrates the integrity of neighbouring states and threatens them with dissolution. As the text belittles the surrounding nations it simultaneously raises the integrity of post-revolutionary Israel and celebrates the security offered by the state authorities. The whole section concerns the monopoly of power, especially in a means to justify taking power from others to protect one's own seat. The events described in chapter ten are a far cry from the universal peace we have been told to expect from the post-revolutionary society and one is forced to question whether violence shall really be abolished or just disguised beneath patriotic and nationalist sentiments. By attacking the other nations, even those that aided the revolutionary effort, the new regime is removing the threats

to their own power in order to protect their position of authority, this has become their only goal and the whole situation suggests a premeditated double cross.

Sickness and starvation, common by-products of war and sieges, shall visit these nations and bring down their mighty army and powerful leaders whilst the national glory of the post-revolutionary state burns bright (10:16). Characteristically the language is more aggressive and dynamic than the other post-revolutionary passages, for example the protective 'light' becomes a burning 'fire' that shall devour other nations (10:16-17). It is becoming increasingly hard to pick out the peaceful utopia from amongst the violent and warlike imagery. Throughout this passage it is clear that the successful revolutionary movement shall develop into an authoritative state increasingly resembling the one it sought to dissolve.

The second wave of violence seeks to emphasise the glory and security of post-revolutionary Israel. Once the revolutionary goal has been achieved there is no need to utilise the military might of foreign nations whose armies now pose a threat to the stability of the new regime, they must now be attacked in the name of national defence. By stirring up the hostility of neighbouring states the heads of state can justify not only the continuance of state violence but can even increase it in the guise of national security. This is the final step of consolidating the revolutionary process. The revolutionary band has become the state authorities and it is only now that people shall receive their freedom, a freedom that comes through complete submission to a political administration and after yet even more violence.

12:1-6: A Jubilant Finale

The closing passage of the Oracle to Judah and Jerusalem reflects the optimism with which it opened. Blenkinsopp describes how the passage provides the appropriate conclusion to the initial chapters of Isaiah by ending the threats and curses, the visions of disaster, and the subtle assurances of well being on a high note.⁸⁹ This concise passage serves to impress in the mind of the reader the image of the post-revolutionary society by praising Yahweh and the revolutionary ideal, and by drawing on the patriotic and nationalist fervour. Through the might of Yahweh, the revolutionary agent, salvation is promised and here it is fulfilled. Yahweh has fulfilled

⁸⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, p.269

his role as the force behind the revolutionary movement and it is through his military role that society has been rescued. The salvation that the revolution brings is not a personal or spiritual salvation but is an entirely national affair. The deliverance of Israel is a product of a political overhaul and the salvation that is earned serves to amalgamate the political, spiritual, and geographical facets of Israel's destiny. Again we encounter a patriotic attempt to raise Israel above all other nations. The passage consolidates the support for the revolution on the part of the reader, it concludes the revolutionary cause in a final promise of what the revolution shall achieve. The message is that national salvation is achievable so long as the people take up the revolutionary cause. Most significantly the passage cements the relationship between Yahweh as the revolutionary agent and the authority of the post-revolutionary state.

Reading Isaiah Through Tolstoy

It is interesting to read Isaiah's vision of revolution in light of Tolstoy's critique of revolutionary politics. In their critiques of society both Isaiah and Tolstoy demonstrate the same concerns. Isaiah's oracle to Jerusalem and Judah clearly comes at a time when "society has outgrown the view of life on which the existing forms of social life were founded,"⁹⁰ and as the contradictions between life as it is and life as it should be have become evident to the majority; a feeling of unrest is prevalent amongst the people. As I have discussed, Tolstoy proposes two fundamental causes of revolution: initially people realise the violence and coercion that are necessary to uphold authority and the corrupt nature of the state becomes so evident that people are led to question its legitimacy. The second cause of revolution comes with the removal of the freedom to work the land: first the wealthy and powerful cheat the poor out of their land in order to create vast estates, the poor then are required to work the land without reaping the rewards of their labour (cf. 5:8). The disparity between Isaiah and Tolstoy becomes apparent when it comes to evaluating the revolutionary process suggested in the text.

Images of Violence

In spite of its quest for peace, the Hebrew Bible is full of violence. Imagery of the restoration of the Israelite homeland is consistently accompanied by violence throughout the biblical corpus.⁹¹ Even Isaiah, who arguably paints a roseate picture of a distant world of peace and harmony, simultaneously imagines the total annihilation of Israel's enemies. As I have discussed, the vision of Yahweh's revolution rests heavily on graphically destructive and violent imagery and is informed by a strong patriotic component. There has been much work done within biblical studies on occasions of divinely authorised mass violence throughout the Hebrew texts, the work of Reuven Firestone is particularly of note. The underlying premise of Firestone's work is that the authorities will sanction violence when it is assessed to be an effective means of

⁹⁰ Tolstoy p.22

⁹¹ Aberbach, D., 'Nationalism and the Hebrew Bible' *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 11 No. 2 (2005) pp.223-242 (p.228)

realizing the goals of the collective, conversely when violence becomes counterproductive then it is condemned by the same authorities.⁹² Tolstoy identifies this behaviour as indicative of the coercive activity of authority.

Violence for Tolstoy is always immoral and deceptive. Violence is the defining characteristic of power and has no place in an anarchist society that is free from the trappings of authority. As such, violence cannot become a resource of the revolutionary for it can only replicate the behaviour of the authority which the revolution seeks to abolish. Firestone's functionalist approach identifies a "general organizing principle"⁹³ within the Hebrew Bible: for God to manage or control human behaviour in a way that is functional for the collective. This includes organizing and channelling human aggression and violence. When organized and properly channelled, Firestone agrees that violence can be beneficial for the collective.⁹⁴ There is room in Firestone's analysis for violence to have a positive role in society, to perform a 'function', and the text certainly seems to support this view. In the text it is Yahweh, the revolutionary agent, who determines that violence is necessary for the establishment of the post-revolutionary state but once this state is established then violence shall be declared harmful and unnecessary (10:12-27). Firestone's work echoes Tolstoy's analyses of authority in that violence is a tool of the authorities which they choose to adopt when they believe it to be necessary. However Firestone's conclusions demonstrate that he too has fallen prey to the belief that violence can be a productive means to an end. Tolstoy on the other hand staunchly refutes that violence can produce anything other than more violence.

Firestone notes that the "peace" described in 2:4 (cf. Mic 4) is a "peace of totalitarianism"⁹⁵ and is only achieved through violent and military force. The military title 'Lord of Hosts'- or 'God of Armies'- is used to describe Yahweh who establishes peace when all peoples in the world accept his autocratic authority.⁹⁶ The result of Israel's divinely sanctioned violence is a world where all nations shall live in peace under the authority of Yahweh; this peace comes only under complete submission to

⁹² Firestone, R., 'Divine Authority and Mass Violence: Economies of Aggression in the Emergence of Religions' *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* Vol. 9 No. 26 (2010) pp.220-237 (p.220)

⁹³ Firestone, 'Divine Authority and Mass Violence' p.220

⁹⁴ Firestone, 'Divine Authority and Mass Violence' pp.222-223

⁹⁵ Firestone, 'Divine Authority and Mass Violence' p.224

⁹⁶ Firestone, 'Divine Authority and Mass Violence' p.224

his instruction. Firestone refers to the *pax Romana*, a period of relative peace and stability under the authority of the Roman Empire, and describes this uneasy peace of totalitarianism under Yahweh as a *pax Israel*.⁹⁷ Firestone's work supports my own claims of totalitarianism and illustrates again, as Tolstoy discusses at length, that violence and control are the bedrock of any position of authority. Whilst Isaiah and Tolstoy disagree on the use of violence as a revolutionary method, what is recorded in the text of Isaiah certainly appears to support Tolstoy's criticisms of violence and authority. The text promises a harmonious future where weapons shall be destroyed and people shall live together in peace, but what the text actually describes is an ongoing spiral of violence and acts of oppression carried out by the administration of the day. Firestone makes another interesting observation that the vision of peace informs us that "*they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks*" (2:4), this announcement does not appear to include the people of Israel who shall continue to use violence as long as it is deemed beneficial to the collective. This is certainly reflected in the post-revolutionary violence against Assyria.

Norman Solomon identifies that biblical military action is divided into two camps. There are those wars that are directly mandated by Yahweh, for instance against the Canaanites, then there are all other wars.⁹⁸ Examples of this second category include national, tribal, or personal battles initiated solely by man for his own benefits. The modern distinction between defensive and offensive wars is considerably less marked in ancient texts and is inappropriate for discussing biblical accounts of war where the picture is often of one side taking the initiative to attack before somebody else does.⁹⁹ In this instance a strong offence is considered to be the best defence. Solomon's discussion of the war against the Canaanites engages with Yahweh's own justifications of his demand for war. Yahweh condemns the Canaanites on account of their immoral and idolatrous practices.¹⁰⁰ These are the same accusations that are pronounced by Isaiah to vindicate both the revolutionary and post-revolutionary violence. Solomon supposes that Deut 22:25-27 makes it clear that there is a duty to defend a threatened victim, the text in question specifically refers to a victim of rape

⁹⁷ Firestone, 'Divine Authority and Mass Violence' p.225

⁹⁸ Solomon, N., 'The Ethics of War in Judaism' in *The Ethics of War in Asian Civilisations: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. T. Brekke (Oxford: Routledge, 2006) pp.39-80 (p.40)

⁹⁹ Solomon, 'The Ethics of War in Judaism' p.40

¹⁰⁰ Solomon, 'The Ethics of War in Judaism' p.41

but the notion of hearing a victim cry out can be extrapolated beyond this as the text also draws close parallels between rape, violence, and murder.¹⁰¹ As such it is the duty of one who hears a victim's cry to defend the victim, if needs be by slaying the assailant.¹⁰² It is interesting to ask whether this duty of defence translates into a duty to defend the victims of an oppressive regime intent on robbery, exploitation, and violence. For Isaiah this is clearly a requirement of anyone who witnesses the aggressive and exploitative actions of the authorities being carried out against their own people, the rallying call is for the general populous of Israel to support the actions of Yahweh and his revolutionary cause in order to put an end to the atrocities of the ruling classes. This is to be accomplished through violence and even, if necessary, murder and war. Support for these aggressions is bolstered by the text which clearly places the revolutionary war in the first camp, it is a war directly mandated and directed by Yahweh.

The total destruction that is envisioned serves to prepare society to be rebuilt according to the revolutionary ideal. The violence was instigated by Yahweh and so shall the reconstruction be guided by his hand. The post-revolutionary state is absolutely inseparable from the violence of the revolution and again it is essential to recognise how the text ties together both the devastating 'terror of the Lord' and the 'glory of his majesty'. The totalitarian authority of Yahweh is qualified by the violence required to establish his administration. Amidst the violent imagery of the text is a plea to Israelites, those faithful to the revolutionary cause, not to fear the revolutionary violence or the reactionary violence of the authorities as it is a requisite part of the revolutionary process and that further violence shall be extracted upon those responsible. Tolstoy and Isaiah both appeal to the people to also not fear the violence of authority; but, where Isaiah encourages people to support the war against their oppressors, Tolstoy instead warns people not to respond with revolutionary violence but with passive but outright disobedience. Violent attempts at revolution serve only to further justify the violence of authority. As a means of revolutionary change violence is not only futile but counterproductive and can only increase the violence of authority. Both my own work and the work of Firestone demonstrate, considering the

¹⁰¹ Solomon, 'The Ethics of War in Judaism' p.45

¹⁰² Solomon, 'The Ethics of War in Judaism' p.45

revolutionary actions of Yahweh and the overarching authority of his human representative, that this is certainly the case within the text.

Nationalism and Patriotism in Isaiah's Revolution

The overtly nationalist concern of Isaiah's revolution requires the fostering of patriotic sentiment to fuel the momentum of the revolutionary cause. Such a feeling is apparently required by the people in order to stay strong and committed throughout the revolutionary period of turmoil and violence. The rewards for their efforts shall be delivered through the post-revolutionary state that shall fulfil the patriotic hopes for national glory and, after the revolution, shall spread Yahweh's glory across a united Israel and beyond. The text describes the devastated ruins of the land after Yahweh's revolution in order to justify the need for a system of authority to govern the post-revolutionary state. After Judah has been cleansed through the devastating military action, the text turns its attentions to the protection of the state and administration. The text envisages a world without structured authority, a world without leaders or civic institutions, the male population has diminished and nobody is willing to take charge in a world where chaos reigns. A vacuum of authority is deemed the worst thing that can happen to society; this is precisely the opposite of the anarchist perspective. If in the post-revolutionary state such a society is to be avoided, the text warns, then the people must trust in the governing figure that represents Yahweh and his administration. They must submit themselves completely to the authority of the Davidic child King.

Tolstoy acknowledges that people fear a world without authority and believe that it is better to live under a coercive government than under no government at all. He goes on, however, to demonstrate that any post-revolutionary power structure shall inevitably mirror the ones they sought to dissolve. They must seek to protect their position and shall inevitably impose rules and statutes upon the people to govern their behaviour and punish their transgressions. Violence, coercion, and nationalism are the identifying characteristics of authority and statehood. Aberbach identifies a number of nationalist motifs that are present throughout the Hebrew Bible and, I believe, are particularly pertinent to Isaiah. The importance of moral regeneration, attacks on internal and external enemies of the nation, and the unification of disparate

groups despite geographic dislocation,¹⁰³ demonstrate that Isaiah can be read as an archetypal nationalist document. By glorifying the history of Israel and simultaneously defaming the surrounding nations, and by turning the tables on the Assyrian army, the text bolsters the patriotic feeling necessary to carry out the revolutionary process and to secure support for the post-revolutionary state. In such a patriotic environment the post-revolutionary authorities can justify any further military campaigns in the name of peace and national security. This is true of the post-revolutionary violence against Assyria.

Aberbach has extensively explored nationalist poetry which, he claims, finds its roots in the Hebrew Bible. Aberbach asserts that the prophetic books demonstrate the extremes of liberty and violence, of justice and vengeance, and are amongst the most influential poetry in cultural history.¹⁰⁴ Nationalist poetry calls for moral regeneration and the poets (and the biblical prophets) inspire their people with memories of heroism, and with national myths.¹⁰⁵ Often the poetry originates in the face of defeat and anticipates national liberation and independence, in this way it is analogous with revolutionary literature which rises from a state of oppression and poverty to speak of freedom and prosperity. The liberation envisaged by national poets, much like that envisaged by Isaiah, is characterised particularly by the glorification of violence and a lust for revenge against oppressors.¹⁰⁶ The poets and prophets both use the language of the nation to describe its landscape, customs, paths, myths, and hopes for the future; they encourage pride in their national identity and promote self-criticism and shame, hatred and militancy.¹⁰⁷ Firestone ascertains that the overarching authority of Yahweh conveys an image of all the nation-tribes and their gods serving the national godhead of Israel.¹⁰⁸ The key here is the fact that Yahweh is seen as a god above gods, he shall have authority over the gods of other nations and in turn over their peoples in a situation that is conducive to the days of colonialism. Ultimately this depicts the increasing authority of the post-revolutionary Israelite state. Aberbach determines that nationalism is simultaneously the most creative and destructive of social

¹⁰³ Aberbach, 'Nationalism and the Hebrew Bible' p.223

¹⁰⁴ Aberbach, 'Nationalism and the Hebrew Bible' p.224

¹⁰⁵ Aberbach, D., 'The Poetry of Nationalism' *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 9 No. 2 (2003) pp.255–275 (p.255)

¹⁰⁶ Aberbach, 'The Poetry of Nationalism' p.255

¹⁰⁷ Aberbach, 'The Poetry of Nationalism' p.256

¹⁰⁸ Firestone, 'Divine Authority and Mass Violence' p.225

movements, which expresses both the most admirable and most despicable aspects of human nature.¹⁰⁹ Tolstoy would argue that there is no positive side to nationalism and those aspects of nationalism that we assume to be beneficiary are in reality illusions that allow nationalism and patriotism to be used so effectively as tools of coercion. The work of Aberbach and Firestone support my assertion that Isaiah is indeed a nationalist text and demonstrates that the passages I have discussed, contrary to Seitz and Watts, certainly do reveal the nationalist hopes that inform the text.

Aberbach also links nationalist poetry with resistance and political action and describes how it operates in a revolutionary context. For Aberbach, the poetry of the Hebrew Bible is the seminal example of revolt in the ancient world against cultural imperialism.¹¹⁰ All authority relies on patriotism to publicly support the state regime and revolutionary movements also rely on patriotism to garner support for the revolutionary cause and for the post-revolutionary state. Awareness of national identity is stimulated by the experience of an 'other', particularly through the turmoil of national exile, expansion through international trade, and through the conquest of others or the experience of being conquered. Patriotism and nationalism serve to unite members of an existing state or revolutionary movement, whilst simultaneously putting down those outside the patriotic ideal. The patriotic fervour of the post-revolutionary state is demonstrated by the actions of Yahweh, he shall remove the borders and fortifications of the surrounding nations and appropriate their resources, the patriotism of Mount Zion shall incite violence and animosity amongst neighbouring states. As I have demonstrated Tolstoy sees patriotism is an "unnatural, irrational, and harmful feeling" that sees the need to control the greatest resources and power and necessarily entails that division and conflict develop between nations all seeking the greatest power. If each peoples within each state consider themselves the best amongst peoples and act to display their superiority then violence is inevitable.

It is obvious now that the successful revolutionary movement shall establish an authoritative state that reflects the one it sought to dissolve. State authorities must appear to defend their people from outside threats and this encourages more authoritarian violence. Patriotism can be nurtured by provoking other nations as the

¹⁰⁹ Aberbach, 'The Poetry of Nationalism' p.255

¹¹⁰ Aberbach, 'The Poetry of Nationalism' p.257

authorities provoke enmity amongst other nations and in turn embitter their own people against the foreigner. By verbally and physically attacking the other nations, even those that aided the revolutionary effort, the new regime is removing the threats to their own power in order to protect their position of authority and establish the security of post-revolutionary Israel. By stirring up the hostility of neighbouring states the heads of state can justify not only the continuance of state violence but they can increase it under the guise of national security. Patriotism encourages the violence of state authorities and divides peoples by pitting them against each other in the guise of national pride. Tolstoy draws a clear connection between the efforts of authority to excite patriotism and the suffering, violation, and humiliation that are such an evident part of the nature of authority. Any revolutionary attempts to establish a peaceful and free society must be unburdened by the coercion of authority and must avoid adopting patriotism within the revolutionary method. Patriotism is an integral part in establishing and maintaining the control of the state authority, consequently patriotism can hold no place in an anarchist society. In abandoning the trappings of statehood so too must all the coercive methods that are used to maintain and uphold the authority of the state be abandoned also.

Isaiah's Vision for Post-Revolutionary Society

The establishment of the post-revolutionary state reflects the violent and coercive nature of power and authority. These conditions, the conditions of living under authority, make the achievement of freedom impossible. The violence that is utilised to establish, maintain, and overthrow governments is enough for Tolstoy to claim that any post-revolutionary society which aims for freedom should be free from all coercion of the state, the state as an entity must be entirely removed. Tolstoy believes that the nature of power is capable of depraving anybody in a position of authority and that they shall inevitably use their power for their own advantages and not the advantages of the general populous. It is the main concern of those in power to retain their position and this is best done in two ways: to unite the general populous in support of the regime through nationalism and patriotism, and to maintain control through coercion, violence, and corruption. Post-revolutionary states, by the very

nature of their statehood, shall always imitate the structures of the deposed state and, in an effort to protect their authority, shall often prove to be even more unjust.

The post-revolutionary passages consolidate support for the revolution, they evaluate the situation before and during the revolution and balance these with a depiction of what the revolution is set to achieve. The centrality of Yahweh in post-revolutionary Israel demonstrates that even a society structured according to the revolutionary ideal is still an organised state which shall reflect the interests of the state and not the freedom of its population. The mission of the revolution to lead all nations under the rule of Yahweh, as one state under one authority, does indeed reflect Tolstoy's concerns and plays dangerously close to promoting totalitarianism. The text claims that authority will bring peace and that a child shall grow to lead the post-revolutionary state according to the ways of Yahweh. The child is said to embody the justice and righteousness of Yahweh but the vision of the post-revolutionary society demonstrates that the child King shall also embody the coercion and violence of authority; like Yahweh, the text implies that the glory of the child king's majesty is inextricably intertwined with sanctioned terror. The terror of Yahweh is sanctioned by his position as the national godhead and the terror of the child king is sanctioned by his position as head of the state. Despite the fact that the text narrates violence within the post-revolutionary state it also promises that the Davidic line shall again take power of Israel and will inaugurate an era of peace and prosperity. This idea evokes a burst of patriotic fervour to distract attention from the reality of continued violence. The opening and closing passages of the oracle to Judah and Jerusalem serve to impress the image of a utopian post-revolutionary society upon the audience. However, as the text celebrates the peace and prosperity that shall come under the authority of Yahweh and the Davidic line, it also necessarily promotes the violent and coercive nature of authority itself.

Walter J. Houston identifies the ninth and eighth centuries as the time when society begins to become more complex, with a development in the reach and power of the states and the spread of cities, with social stratification and, as displayed in the texts, criticism of the relations between rich and poor.¹¹¹ Houston claims that

¹¹¹ Houston, W.J., *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2006 (2008 edition)) pp.1-16, 18-51, 77-80, 86-98 (p.18-19)

traditional society was organised according to an egalitarian ethos which survived the transition to statehood.¹¹² This seems highly unlikely as there is little evidence of what today we understand to be *egalitarian* beliefs throughout the Hebrew Bible. Whilst it could be argued that there is a preference for the poor and oppressed throughout the texts, this by no means speaks of social equality and the evidence often demonstrates more the concerns and beliefs of the ruling classes from which the biblical authors came than any particular hope for a levelling of social distinctions. Houston's claim also seems unlikely if we consider the mechanics of statehood as we have discussed them so far. Houston does go on, however, to discuss the stratification of society that characterised the eighth century in which the administration and defence of territories became paramount. To facilitate this kings built cities and centralised their power, a stratified society emerged in which distinct classes came into being and the areas in the neighbourhood of the capital cities fell into the hands of the wealthy urban elite.¹¹³

Throughout the period of eighth to fifth centuries, the Israelite-Jewish lands were under the direct or indirect rule of powerful empires that ravished their economies with constant demands for tribute and taxes. This is not to mention the devastation of the country and arable land more than once by the armies of their overseers.¹¹⁴ Houston surmises that all classical states in which the move to "ancient society" took place had already got rid of their kings, their aristocratic governments, and maintained minimal bureaucracies with no professional armies and no royal courts. The native Israelite monarchies on the other hand imposed all these burdens.¹¹⁵ Houston's examination of ancient power structures echoes Tolstoy's own analysis of the behaviour of power. Armies are established to protect from the state from outside threats and to enforce internal security, so too do they boost patriotic sentiments as they display national strength and revel in the glory of their victories. Royal courts and aristocratic governments serve to look after the needs of the powerful at the expense of the general populous that they claim to defend.

Even in Isaiah, which so strongly denounces the oppression carried out by the ruling classes, we still come across a supportive relationship between the text and

¹¹² Houston, *Contending for Justice* pp.48-49

¹¹³ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.49

¹¹⁴ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.35

¹¹⁵ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.35

authority represented by “the royal house of Judah and its citadel, the centre of state power and the main engine of class formation”.¹¹⁶ In this manner we can illustrate how Isaiah challenges one incarnation of authority only to glorify another; this is precisely the revolutionary situation that Tolstoy warns against. Replacing one set of power structures with another shall only recreate the same conditions as under the previous administration because the nature of organisational power is universal and the behaviour of those in power is governed by the need to protect their position, not the desire to liberate their subjects. Mark Gray’s own definition of social justice is a function of a governmental system which puts people before profits, with a significant preference for the poor, and affords them access to enough of the world’s resources to live a life of relative comfort and wellbeing.¹¹⁷ This is exactly what is promised for the post-revolutionary society, however the text confirms that this sadly is not what shall occur. We are soon introduced to a rather Orwellian scenario of all being equal but some (namely Israel) being more equal than others. Does Yahweh, as the voice of universal justice, adjudicate amongst the nations equally or is justice set aside for a list of preferred nations and therefore denied from what is assumed to be lesser nations.¹¹⁸ As we can see from the text, Yahweh does not treat all nations equally. Besides Israel being put on a pedestal, the nations and cities of Assyria, Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, Samaria, and Damascus (10:5-9) shall suffer greatly in Yahweh’s new age of peace and justice.

Gray places the responsibility of social justice squarely at the feet of Yahweh. “Since the effectual guarantor of this order of justice is God,” Gray notes, “then the divine self is open to the charge of injustice when the “system” does not function as expected.”¹¹⁹ There is a sense of disillusion in Gray’s writing: he is expecting the system to fail, in fact he appears to see its failure as inevitable. Tolstoy would certainly agree as he sees all incarnations of authority as inadequate and subject to eventual collapse. In light of this it is worth identifying the clear contrast between the different ideas of justice espoused in the text, the majority of which is applied to Yahweh’s care for Israel rather than for the poor, for the oppressed, or for the exploited.¹²⁰ This is not

¹¹⁶ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.78

¹¹⁷ Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah* p.23

¹¹⁸ Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah* p.21

¹¹⁹ Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah* p.21

¹²⁰ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.17

to say that Yahweh does not care for the poor and oppressed but instead that his preference is not for the poor as individuals but for Israel as a nation. This underscores even further the importance that nationalism plays in the revolutionary movement and in the text.

Houston identifies that during the periods covered by Isaiah three kings of Judah were assassinated leaving the throne of Israel under constant contention.¹²¹ Houston's own analysis echoes that of Tolstoy as he explains how a faction that had recently come to power would need to secure itself against its opponents and would require the support of the peasantry in order to consolidate their power and to damage the standing of their adversaries.¹²² It is advantageous to the ruling powers, and to those seeking to usurp such a position, to get the better of their rivals by appearing as defenders of the poor despite their own exploitative activities. Any enduring ideological expression of the leadership of a class in society will always carry with it concessions to the subordinate classes and in particular will contain moral ideas that are acceptable to them. It is essential to any ideology that it should claim to be universally and unquestionably true and this cannot be the case if such a position undermines the fundamental moral and theological ideas of the people.¹²³ It is through the public representatives of an administration, such as the official prophets, that the ideology of the ruling class is spread amongst the poor and throughout the communities that exist outside of the urban centres. Again we are reminded that the position occupied by an official prophet is a position that remains closer to the establishment than to the exploited masses which he claims to defend.

Royal or private patronage of prophets enabled one powerful group to make slanderous public attacks on other power centres within society.¹²⁴ Thus, when a prophet attacks the rich and powerful we must understand that this is not an attack on power and wealth itself but instead upon the culmination of power and wealth by a particular group within society. In the same manner, when prophets denounce their contemporaries as 'false prophets' it is likely that those deemed to be false are representative of the political opponents of the patron to the prophet. In the case of

¹²¹ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.13

¹²² Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.13

¹²³ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.14

¹²⁴ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.13

Isaiah we are informed by the text that his patron is none other than Yahweh, as such Isaiah paints an image of himself as champion of the poor and as a representative of the divine power fighting against the corrupt and oppressive human powers that are currently in a position of authority. A moral superiority is also given to Isaiah's words through his divine patronage. The ethical standards of Isaiah must, on the surface at least, conform to the highest expectations as they directly represent the work and words of the national godhead himself.

Ideological texts are often, if not always, utopian and Isaiah's vision of the post-revolutionary state certainly qualifies as a utopia. A utopian vision serves to break the bonds of the current existing order to bring a new order into being. It is in this light that Houston distinguishes between a utopian representation of the current realities and a utopian vision of the future. Whereas the former seeks to garner support for the current administration, the latter does not serve to justify the existing social order but undermines it by challenging its inadequacy.¹²⁵ Such are the visions of Isaiah. Isaiah does not present a utopia that is based on the current order, he does not paint the contemporary situation in a utopian light, instead he envisions a utopian world which is separated from the present experience by a cataclysmic event that shall break down the current order and shall establish its utopia according to the moral code espoused by the prophet. Houston identifies that a theme which runs through Isaiah like a red thread is that of Zion's final destiny. Zion is not only the place of the Temple but more it is the seat of the Davidic dynasty and the mother-city of the unified kingdoms of Israel. Houston identifies passages such as 9:2-7 and 11:1-9 as expressing this future orientated and theologically informed ideology.¹²⁶ I agree as this clearly demonstrates the nationalist concerns of Isaiah and again reflects his support for governmental authority and statehood, Houston picks up on this and notes that Isaiah is not uncritical of kings and their policies but this criticism is served from a position of close sympathy with authority.¹²⁷

After the revolution has been completed and the post-revolutionary state has been established then Isaiah is to extol the virtues of the child king who Yahweh shall place at the head of the united Israelite state. It is important to remember that the

¹²⁵ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.14

¹²⁶ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.77

¹²⁷ Houston, *Contending for Justice* p.77

text is written as an ideological piece that describes future events caused by the actions of Yahweh, as such Isaiah is recorded as the representative of Yahweh and his revolutionary ideal and not as the representative of an existing political power. Despite the focus on the child king throughout the post-revolutionary passages, it is important to clarify that whilst the king is to be the epitome of justice and righteousness, this justice and righteousness originates with Yahweh. It is only through Yahweh's action that the king may reign and his justice and righteousness are not a unique quality of his own but merely reflect the justice and righteousness of Yahweh, the national godhead.

Concluding Remarks

I believe that an anarchist approach to biblical texts, and indeed to other religious documents, is of critical importance in today's political climate. The recent surge of political demonstrations demonstrates that more people are asking the same questions, and coming to the same conclusion, as Tolstoy and Isaiah; our current social arrangement is unbalanced and unjust and is in need of a dramatic overhaul. The success of the Occupy movement, as well as the support it received from outside political circles, is a testament to importance of social criticism and of seeking opportunities for change. The widespread, and often violent, demonstrations that are still raging across the Middle East buttress Tolstoy's criticisms of violent revolution, however they also demonstrate that there is more than enough room for a religious or spiritual dimension to revolutionary movements. The revolutionary process adopted during, and in the wake of, these demonstrations enacts exactly what Tolstoy warns will happen and has always happened when government violence is countered with revolutionary violence. The reaction of the authorities is severe and their punishments heavy. Even when these movements are successful, as was the case with Egypt, the revolutions are followed by continued violence, looting, and destruction of property. When a post-revolutionary government is established it is the midst of these violent acts that they first go about consolidating their own position by vilifying and attacking those who present a possible future threat to their authority.

I have demonstrated that Tolstoy and Isaiah display the same concerns and make the same criticisms of their own society and political system. Where they differ however is in their treatment of how society should be reformed and what should follow such a reformation. Isaiah pronounces a violent military revolution that shall remove the existing power structures by force, following this Yahweh's representative shall establish a new kingdom over Israel that shall be governed by the values that underpinned the revolution. This kingdom shall have dominance over the nations of the world through a supposed moral superiority and extensive military campaigns. Tolstoy on the other hand warns against revolutionary violence. Violence is the tool of authority and Tolstoy, as well as the historical record, demonstrates that peaceful ends

can never come from violent means. So too does Tolstoy warn against post-revolutionary states as they only serve to repeat the behaviours of the deposed government as all authority is the same at heart, this is demonstrated in Isaiah's vision of a totalitarian and militant post-revolutionary state. The post-revolutionary state that Isaiah describes has little in common with the admirable manifesto of the revolutionary movement.

Between Isaiah and Tolstoy I have constructed a dialogue that considers the need for a revolution and evaluates the methods available to the revolutionary. So too does this dialogue discuss the reordering of society that follows a successful revolutionary movement. When reading Isaiah through Tolstoy we can observe how authority and power are corruptive and, besides the best intentions, any post-revolutionary administration shall inevitably become corrupted by the trappings of authority. Therefore, the establishment of a post-revolutionary state cannot be part of an anarchist solution. I believe Tolstoy has proved to be a suitable lens through which to explore the prophetic literature and that the prophets are of considerable value to the anarchist discussion. Whilst Isaiah is no anarchist, in his role as social reformer he certainly draws on issues that reflect Tolstoy's own position and that of most anarchists.

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