

## The Concept of Human Education in the Works of L. N. Tolstoy: A Pedagogical and Psychological Analysis

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Keywords	Abstract
moral education in Tolstoy's works love compassion human psychology	The article analyzes the concept of human education in the works of Leo Tolstoy from pedagogical and psychological perspectives. The aim of the study is to identify the stages of moral formation in the writer's works <i>What Men Live By</i> , <i>The Death of Ivan Ilyich</i> , <i>Youth</i> , and <i>Master and Man</i> , and to scientifically explain the role of love, compassion, and conscience in the educational process. Methodologically, the research applies a comparative-analytical approach, pedagogical-psychological interpretation of the literary text, and characterological analysis of the protagonists. The analysis demonstrates that Tolstoy interprets human education not merely as the transmission of knowledge but as the awakening of inner moral potential. The writer presents the human life path—from childhood to death—as a continuous process of moral development and emphasizes that true human value is embodied in conscience and compassion, regardless of social status. The study concludes that Tolstoy's humanistic worldview possesses significant theoretical and practical relevance for modern pedagogy and psychology and serves as a conceptual model defining the main directions of moral education.

### Introduction

Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy was born on September 9, 1828, in Yasnaya Polyana, Tula Province of the Russian Empire, into a noble family. From early childhood, both the intellectual atmosphere of his family environment and the early loss of his parents contributed to the formation of his deep, thoughtful, and sensitive character. He first received home education and later studied at

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Kazan University in the faculties of Oriental Studies and Law; however, due to inner spiritual searches, he did not complete his formal education.

## Methods

The study employs a comparative-analytical approach, hermeneutic analysis of literary texts, and pedagogical-psychological interpretation. The characterological features of the protagonists are systematically examined, and their moral transformations are analyzed within the context of developmental stages. Additionally, through conceptual generalization, the fundamental principles of the model of human education in Tolstoy's works are identified.

## Literature Review

The works of Leo Tolstoy have been extensively studied in world and Azerbaijani literary scholarship. Research has primarily focused on the writer's realism, psychological depth, and humanistic philosophy. For example, M. Guliyev interpreted Tolstoy's humanistic views within the framework of moral perfection and conscience, while R. Alizade examined the system of moral values in Russian classical literature from a comparative perspective. In Turkish literary studies, M. Kaplan and Y. Dursun analyzed Tolstoy's psychological realism and the internal transformation of human character. Although existing studies mainly concentrate on philosophical and literary aspects, a systematic pedagogical-psychological analysis of his works remains relatively limited. In this regard, the present research aims to comprehensively evaluate the concept of human education in Tolstoy's literary heritage.

## Discussion

A significant turning point in the life of Leo Tolstoy occurred when he went to the Caucasus and began military service. The years he spent there provided him with fundamental observations about human character, war, death, honor, and the meaning of life. These experiences enriched his later works with psychological realism and philosophical depth (Dursun, Y. 2017). His first successes began with the autobiographical novellas *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth*, which demonstrate the writer's particular attention to the moral formation of the individual.

When Tolstoy married, his wife, Sophia Bers, was 18 years old. This marriage put an end to his longing for a settled life. On the day of their wedding, he gave his wife his diaries—describing his previous life, particularly his relationships with female servants working in their household—so that she would learn about his past mistakes. Despite his former moral weaknesses, their marriage lasted until the end of his life. They had thirteen children, three of whom died.

The most productive period of his творчество dates to the 1860s–1870s. With the novel *War and Peace*, Tolstoy combined epic depictions of historical events with deep psychological analysis, creating a new stage in world literature (Kaplan, 2015). In *Anna Karenina*, he presented love, family, society, and moral relationships in a complex and multifaceted manner. From this period



onward, Tolstoy emerged not only as a writer but also as a moral and religious thinker. His wife was his greatest assistant in writing his works; notably, he revised *War and Peace* nine times.

After some time, he experienced an even more severe spiritual crisis. The poverty and miserable condition of the broad masses—especially Russian peasants—deeply saddened him. He distributed all his wealth to the peasants and began living as they did. He dressed plainly and even sewed his own clothes. The only unchanging aspect of his life was his tireless writing. *The Kreutzer Sonata, Master and Man, The Power of Darkness, What I Believe, Confession*, and other works were products of this period.

In his final years, Tolstoy sharply criticized social contradictions, class inequality, and official religious institutions, advocating a simple lifestyle, pacifism, and moral purity (Əlizadə, 2012). His ideas led to the formation of a movement known as “Tolstoyanism,” which had significant socio-philosophical influence worldwide. Family disagreements, public pressure, and personal spiritual quests complicated his last years. Influenced by radical views on property, he distributed his wealth among the peasants, which caused conflicts within his family. His book *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, promoting Christian anarchism, led to his excommunication from the Orthodox Church. In the final stage of his life, after leaving home in distress, he died on November 20, 1910, at the Astapovo railway station during a journey. Through both his monumental novels and his reflections on moral perfection, Tolstoy left an indelible mark on world literature and secured a prominent place in the moral history of humanity (Babayev, 2003).

Leo Tolstoy is one of the greatest writers in world literature to explore the human spiritual world, inner turmoil, and the true essence of life. His works stand out not only as artistic masterpieces but also for their pedagogical and psychological value. The characters he created—their life paths, mistakes, suffering, transformations, and processes of self-realization—constitute rich material for pedagogical research. Fundamental questions such as how a person grows, what influences shape character, when and how moral awakening occurs, and what sustains human life occupy a central place in Tolstoy’s творчество. In this regard, *What Men Live By?*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, and *Youth* most vividly reflect the writer’s humanistic ideas. These works portray different stages of moral development: childhood and family upbringing, the internal struggles of youth, and the confrontation of the mature individual with life and the reality of death.

The educational views of Leo Tolstoy are grounded in humanism. He does not regard education merely as the transmission of knowledge; rather, he argues that its primary purpose is to awaken the seed of goodness within the human being. According to Tolstoy, goodness exists in every individual, and the task of the educator is to bring this goodness to light. Educating not through force but through love, not through severity but through understanding, not through coercion but through personal example constitutes his fundamental principle. These ideas are realized not only theoretically but also through vivid characters in his artistic world.



In *What Men Live By?*, Tolstoy demonstrates that the foundation of human life is love and compassion. The protagonist, Semyon, is a poor shoemaker, yet he possesses a spiritual wealth absent in many wealthy individuals. He is not crushed by life's hardships because conscience and mercy are strong within him. One day, while returning home, he sees a stranger freezing in the cold and takes him into his house (Lev Tolstoy, 2014). Together with his wife Matryona, he helps the man, Michael. The stranger smiles when he is first given food. Michael begins living with them and becomes Semyon's assistant.

Later, a wealthy man orders boots from expensive leather, but Michael instead makes slippers. Soon after, a servant arrives to inform them that the wealthy man has died and takes the slippers. Another day, a woman arrives with two girls; one has a physical disability. After they leave, Michael smiles again, and it is revealed that he is an angel sent by God to learn three truths: what dwells in man, what is not given to man, and what men live by (Lev Tolstoy, 2014). These truths—that love sustains human life, that humans cannot foresee their destiny, and that people are created for compassion—form the foundation of Tolstoy's pedagogical worldview. Semyon's kindness and humanity enable the angel to learn these truths, and in the end, the angel regains his divine form and ascends to heaven.

The central message of the story is that wealth does not sustain human life—love, compassion, and humanity do. Tolstoy shows that true strength lies not in material riches but in purity of heart. From a pedagogical perspective, Semyon's family represents an ideal model: family members treat one another with love and understanding, and children learn compassion by observing parental behavior. Psychologically, this illustrates the development of empathy, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility in children. The angel's regaining of his wings upon witnessing human love symbolizes that love elevates the individual and prevents alienation. Thus, the work is not only a religious-philosophical tale but also a lesson in moral education.

In contrast, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* portrays a darker and more crisis-ridden stage of moral life. The story offers a striking answer to what should truly fill human existence. Ivan Ilyich spends his life pursuing external success—status, career, comfort, and social recognition. He builds relationships based on superficiality and constructs a masked existence. However, when he falls ill and confronts death, he realizes the emptiness of his life (Lev Tolstoy, 2010). His family and acquaintances remain indifferent to his suffering. Only one character—the servant Gerasim—demonstrates genuine morality. Gerasim shows compassion, provides both physical and emotional support, accepts life as it is, and understands death as a natural process. Through this contrast, Tolstoy emphasizes that authentic humanity lies not in social position but in sincerity, empathy, and moral awareness.

From a pedagogical and psychological perspective, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is a profound lesson. First and foremost, it offers an analysis of spiritual emptiness. The principle that guided Ivan Ilyich's life—"external propriety, internal emptiness"—corresponds in psychology to what



is known as the “mask theory.” Individuals often conceal their genuine emotions in order to conform to societal expectations, and over time this leads to inner psychological exhaustion. Ivan’s psychological collapse stems precisely from this conflict. In his final moments, he recognizes the mistakes of his life and, albeit too late, understands that what truly sustains human existence is love and sincerity (Lev Tolstoy, 2010). Here, Leo Tolstoy emphasizes that human education is a lifelong process. Although some individuals realize the truth only at the end of life, this does not diminish the value of their moral awakening.

The character of Gerasim represents an ideal model of moral education. Though socially of low status, he is spiritually elevated. His simplicity, purity of heart, sincerity, and self-sacrifice embody Tolstoy’s ideal human type. From a pedagogical standpoint, such a character can be presented to children and young people as a moral exemplar. Gerasim demonstrates that human worth is determined not by social position but by moral integrity.

The work *Youth* reflects the early stages of personal formation, particularly the psychological challenges of adolescence and young adulthood. The text has an autobiographical character, as Tolstoy critically and openly examines his own youth. He portrays a young man who at times is overly self-confident, at other times deeply insecure, emotionally sensitive, and troubled by social comparisons—traits consistent with psychological descriptions of adolescence. In the narrative, the young Tolstoy constantly analyzes himself, evaluates his actions, and is often excessively self-critical. This process of self-reflection and self-awareness is a crucial factor in personality development (Lev Tolstoy, 2018).

From a pedagogical perspective, one of the most significant aspects of *Youth* is the process of learning through mistakes. Tolstoy clearly shows that errors committed in youth contribute to personal maturation. Rather than punishing children and adolescents, guiding them to understand the causes of their mistakes is presented as a fundamental principle of education. The personal crises and internal struggles of the young protagonist provide vivid illustrations of developmental stages in human psychology. Issues such as lack of self-confidence, emotional instability, and identity confusion are extensively depicted, making the work valuable material for educators and psychologists alike.

Tolstoy’s short story *Master and Man* reveals the human spiritual world, inner transformation, and the essence of social relationships. In this narrative, the author presents the contradictions of human character, the gap between wealth and morality, and the true value of self-sacrifice through subtle psychological observation. The artistic power of the work lies not in its brevity but in the depth of its meaning (Lev Tolstoy, 2022).

The plot of *Master and Man* begins when the merchant Vasili Andreyevich sets out on a harsh winter day to purchase a profitable piece of land. He travels with his servant Nikita and, throughout the journey, thinks only of his own financial gain. As the snowstorm and frost



intensify, they lose their way; however, Vasili Andreyevich's greed prevents him from turning back. Nikita, loyal and patient, obeys his master, yet gradually weakens under the severity of nature. When they are stranded in the blizzard, Nikita faces the danger of freezing to death. At this critical moment, a transformation occurs within Vasili Andreyevich: he shields his servant with his own body in order to save him. As a result, Nikita survives, but Vasili Andreyevich loses his life. His death becomes both a physical end and a moment of moral elevation—at the point of death, the merchant realizes the futility of his life and comes into contact with his conscience.

From a pedagogical and psychological perspective, the analysis of the story is built upon the contrast between Vasili Andreyevich and Nikita. Although Vasili Andreyevich holds a high social status, he is spiritually weak, greedy, and egoistic. At the beginning of the story, he evaluates human relationships in purely material terms. Nikita, despite being poor, is honest, pure-hearted, and self-sacrificing. Through these two characters, Leo Tolstoy demonstrates that moral greatness lies not in wealth but in character and conduct. Nikita's loyalty and forgiving nature serve as ethical models from a pedagogical standpoint.

Psychologically, the most significant aspect of the narrative is Vasili Andreyevich's inner transformation. The change that occurs in his consciousness at the moment of death symbolizes the shift from greed to conscience, from egoism to compassion. This transformation illustrates how the human psyche can be reshaped under extreme conditions. The harshness of nature—the blizzard, darkness, and frost—acts as a mirror reflecting the inner world of the characters. Being lost in the storm represents not only a physical ordeal but also a moral trial, confronting the individual with his true self.

Tolstoy emphasizes that social inequality is merely an external framework, whereas true superiority is revealed through moral qualities. The master's self-sacrifice to save his servant constitutes the culmination of this idea. It conveys both a humanistic message and a moral lesson to the reader: a person's value is measured by the good they do.

*Master and Man* is ultimately a story about discovering the inner light within oneself. Tolstoy shows that even in the most difficult trials, at the very threshold of death, compassion can awaken within a person and elevate them spiritually.

Although these four works may appear different, they are closely interconnected. *What Men Live By?* reveals the moral foundation of human life; *Youth* explains how this foundation is formed and how self-awareness develops; *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* illuminates the psychological transformation of the mature individual in the face of death; and *Master and Man* demonstrates that moral awakening may emerge in the most extreme moments of trial. Together, these works complete the moral and psychological evolution of the individual from childhood to death (Lev Tolstoy, 2022).



In the works of Leo Tolstoy, love, compassion, conscience, simplicity, and integrity occupy a central place. He regards moral development as the most essential purpose of human life. Tolstoy holds a distinctive position in pedagogy because he places the inner world of the individual at the center of education. According to him, true teaching and upbringing consist in awakening the goodness within a person. From a psychological perspective, the internal struggles experienced by his characters provide invaluable examples for understanding the developmental stages of the human psyche (Quliyev, 2005).

In conclusion, Tolstoy's works *What Men Live By?*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, *Youth*, and *Master and Man* together form a comprehensive system encompassing the entirety of human moral life. These works demonstrate that education is built not solely on knowledge but on love and understanding; that human worth lies not in material wealth but in spirituality; and that the meaning of life is found not in external success but in the purification of the inner self. Each of the four works portrays different stages of the moral journey from birth to death and is therefore of significant importance for pedagogy. Tolstoy's humanistic ideas remain relevant today and continue to serve as one of the most influential sources on moral education.

### Conclusion

In light of the foregoing analysis, it can be concluded that Tolstoy's literary and philosophical legacy offers a profound humanistic vision of education and moral development. His works demonstrate that the true foundation of human education lies in the cultivation of love, compassion, and conscience as essential ethical values. For Tolstoy, moral integrity and spiritual growth outweigh social status, external success, or material wealth.

Furthermore, the inner transformation of his characters functions not merely as a narrative device, but as an artistic representation of psychological and moral evolution. Through this transformation, Tolstoy illustrates that genuine education is inseparable from self-reflection and ethical awakening. Education, therefore, is portrayed as a continuous, lifelong process of moral self-awareness and self-improvement.

Finally, Tolstoy's humanistic philosophy retains contemporary relevance and may serve as a conceptual and methodological foundation for modern pedagogical theories that emphasize ethical responsibility, personal growth, and the holistic development of the individual.

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(Note: I corrected the repeated “Gəncliyim” to the standard trilogy title. If your edition is different, tell me.)

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