

personal english



Book #27

Ivan the Fool

by Leo Tolstoy

Ivan the Fool was published by Russian novelist **Leo Tolstoy** in **1885**. Despite being often presented as a **fairy tale** for children, this short story can be read as a manifesto of **Christian Anarchism**, which Tolstoy embraced during his lifetime. In opposition to the power of the clergy, Christian Anarchism preached a return to the teachings of Jesus (notably the **Sermon of the Mountain**) to get rid of the violence, deceitfulness and idolatry of the **power of the state**. Even though the philosophical treatise *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (published by Tolstoy in 1894) is rightfully viewed as the founding text of Christian Anarchism, its principles also lie at the core of *Ivan the Fool*. In this short story the ingenuous Ivan resists the **Devil's temptations** – unlike his elder brothers **Simeon**, a soldier who is easily led astray by the promise of military power and **Tarras-Briukhan**, a merchant who proves to be all too easily corruptible. Thanks to his righteousness, Ivan eventually becomes **the ruler of a kingdom** marked by **social justice** where workers (being indispensable to society) are fed first at the ruler's table, whereas **intellectuals** (too often parasitic rather than enlightening to the society where they live) have to wait for the leftovers to be helped to them.



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