

TOLSTOY / WAR AND PEACE / LONG ESSAY

Who owns tomorrow in 1812?

Leo Tolstoy and War and Peace as a prism of power, freedom and responsibility

A comparison of people and institutions from the Russian Empire to Europe and North America

CENTRAL QUESTION

How much of a person's tomorrow really belongs to them?

In dialogue with A Pocket Guide to Capita(feuda)lism, Emil Venn 2026

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Summary

In European memory, 1812 is the year of Napoleon, Moscow, retreat and fire. In the memory of the United States of America it is the beginning of the war with the United Kingdom. In Spain it is the year of the Cádiz Constitution and a struggle for political legitimacy amid the war against Napoleon's French Empire. In New Spain, in the territory of present-day Mexico, it is the year of the siege of Cuautla and the continuation of the insurgency against Spanish colonial rule. At the same time, on New Spain's northern frontier, in Spanish Florida and along American Louisiana, Spanish, American and insurgent interests are already becoming entangled. In the memory of an ordinary person, however, the year has no such shape. A peasant does not live in a textbook chapter. He lives in a Monday. He tries to know whether he will plough tomorrow, who will fall ill, how much grain will remain after dues, whether his son will be at home, and who has the right to alter his plan.

This essay reads Tolstoy's *War and Peace* as its central literary prism and microscope for asking how human action, social order and historical consequences arise. Tolstoy shows the human being from within: body, shame, pride, love, faith, fear, habit, self-deception and sudden reversal. Historiography adds institutions, law, property, war, taxation and regional difference. Economics asks who creates the surplus, who bears the risk and how much reserve remains after obligations. Sociology reveals networks of status, family, community, church, market and state. "Mechanics", in turn, reads all this as a system of forces, friction, feedback loops, transmitted commands and limited capacities.

The comparison begins in the Russian Empire and the Ukrainian lands, continues through the Slovene-speaking lands of the Austrian Empire and the Illyrian Provinces, then moves through the Kingdom of Prussia, the French Empire, the politically divided Italian lands, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Across the Atlantic it compares the United States of America through the Northeast, South and West, and New Spain in the territory of present-day Mexico, chiefly through its relationship with Spain, the USA and the European war. It does not seek a civilisational winner. It looks for the different ways in which law, land, labour, war, the state, family and the market allocate a person's tomorrow within the same year.

For clarity, when discussing the Ukrainian lands I shall consistently speak of Ukrainians and Ukrainian lands, whether in 1812 they lived under the Russian or Austrian Empire. For our analysis, it matters more which rules, land regimes and administrative chains governed their lives than what any particular imperial administration called them.

The essay's central measure is the practical availability of the future. Freedom is not an empty calendar. Human life consists of obligations to children, partner, community, state, contract and work. What matters is whether claims on the future are visible, limited, predictable and contestable; whether a person can leave, object, carry rights with them and survive a mistake. Wealth, in this light, is also the capacity to survive several wrong decisions. Power is the capacity to create a binding claim on another person's time, labour, body, property or possibilities.

The essay therefore does not seek a single answer to the question of who is "freer". It seeks the composition of freedom. It compares who can decide about tomorrow, who bears the consequences when a plan fails, and how millions of small decisions combine into an event that history later names with a single year.

Introduction: why 1812 still speaks to us

Some years in history contract into symbols. 1812 is one of them. On a map of the Russian Empire we see the arrows of Napoleon's Grande Armée, Borodino, Moscow and the retreat. In western Europe we see the French Empire at its height, and the Kingdom of Prussia and Austrian Empire reforming their societies under the pressure of military defeat. On the Iberian Peninsula we see war, French dynastic rule and, at the same time, the Cádiz Constitution. In the United Kingdom we see the navy, public debt, early industrialisation and the

Luddite disturbances. In the Italian lands we see the Kingdom of Italy, Napoleon's Kingdom of Naples, territories annexed to France and Sicily outside Napoleon's direct rule. Across the Atlantic we see war between the United States of America and the United Kingdom, and insurgency in New Spain, where the crisis of Spanish authority intersects with the European war and American expansion along the northern frontier. In the Ukrainian lands we see the boundary between the Russian and Austrian Empires, and differing legacies of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Cossack political order, local land arrangements and imperial reforms.

This view is correct. Its scale is simply large.

Let us reduce it.

What did the year 1812 mean to a person who woke that morning without knowing that he or she was living in a year that would acquire its own chapter in history? To a woman on a farm counting the flour left in storage? To a serf in the Russian Empire trying to reconcile his lord's demand with his own harvest? To a Ukrainian peasant in Galicia under the Austrian Empire? To a small farmer in eastern Styria living in the Austrian Empire, while a Slovene-speaking person in Carniola might be living under the French administration of the Illyrian Provinces? To a Prussian peasant who had been legally freed from personal serfdom but had not necessarily become an unencumbered landowner? To a French household from which the state had taken a son for the army? To a weaver in England who saw in a machine a change in bargaining power, while the state saw in the breaking of the machine a criminal offence? To a merchant in Boston, an enslaved person in Virginia, a settler in Ohio or a member of the Shawnee? And to a family in New Spain living between royal authority, Morelos's insurgency, the Cádiz Constitution and the proximity of the frontier with the expanding United States?

That is the purpose of this essay. I want to show that history becomes more intelligible when a large event is taken apart into everyday mechanisms, and that everyday life becomes more intelligible when it is placed back inside large institutions. By the end, the reader should have a clearer grasp of four things.

First, human conduct is not explained by a single motive. A person is simultaneously a body, a memory, a social position, a family member, a believer or non-believer, a debtor, an owner or non-owner, a worker, a neighbour and a member of a political order. Tolstoy is especially acute at observing the moment when these levels meet in one decision.

Second, institutions are not background scenery. They are rules, expectations, property rights, customs and modes of enforcement that determine which possibilities are expensive, which cheap, which honourable and which almost unthinkable. Douglass North described them as humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction. In his later work another distinction matters: institutions are the rules of the game, while organisations are players that survive, learn and try to change those rules. Tolstoy shows the same thing without a definition: a person's position in a family, regiment, salon or estate changes what he or she can do at all.

Third, the future is a practical resource. A person is freer when he or she can still allocate a significant part of tomorrow's time and risk. This does not require a life without obligations. It requires a sufficiently large remainder after them. In *A Pocket Guide to Capita(feuda)lism* I called this problem temporal sovereignty: enough predictable and secure time for a person to refuse, wait, care, change direction or survive a bad outcome. Here we shall move that measure back to 1812 and test it on much harder ground.

Fourth, the names of political spaces are not innocent labels. The political map of 1812 was not today's map. There was the Russian Empire, not the present Russian Federation; the Austrian Empire, founded in 1804, not the later Austria-Hungary; the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, not simply 'Great Britain'; the United States of America, not the Confederacy, which would not exist until half a century later. The territory of present-day Mexico formed the Viceroyalty of New Spain. I shall therefore use New Spain for 1812, and Mexico when referring to the present-day geographical space or to the later state. For clarity in the Ukrainian lands I

shall consistently use Ukrainians and Ukrainian lands, and focus on the differences between the regimes under which they lived.

This essay is written for a reader interested in Tolstoy and War and Peace, history, economics, social institutions or the question of freedom, but unwilling to remain within the boundaries of a single discipline. The literary work will be used as an instrument of observation, not as a census. Historical sources will set the limits of comparison. Psychology will explain motive, sociology position and network, economics surplus and risk, and mechanics the relation between force and consequence.

I use the word mechanics deliberately. A human being is not a projectile. Pride has no mass and grief no velocity. Yet social systems have limited capacities, friction, inertia, feedback loops and thresholds. A command changes as it travels. A bad road reduces speed. Lack of fodder kills a horse; a dead horse reduces supply; reduced supply slows an army; a slower army consumes more stores. At the other end of society, debt reduces the ability to refuse; a reduced ability to refuse increases subordination; subordination weakens bargaining power; weaker power can increase the next debt. Mechanics is used here as a language for asking how intentions become consequences.

The year 1812 is almost too well suited to such an analysis. At the same time we find an old seigneurial order, reforms of personal status, accelerating state administration, warfare by mass armies, Atlantic trade, early industrialisation, slavery, settler expansion, anti-colonial uprisings and several different forms of political belonging. These spaces will not compete for the title of 'best system'. They will serve to compare mechanisms. **The historian sees empires, kingdoms, republics and uprisings. We shall first look at who opened the door that morning, who was waiting outside, and who already had a claim on the day that had only just begun.**

1. Tolstoy before War and Peace: position, motives, values and a brief map of the novel

1.1 Aristocrat, soldier, landowner and moral observer

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy wrote War and Peace from a position privileged enough to open the world to him and contradictory enough never to let him rest. He was born in 1828 into a noble family. He owned land in a society built upon serfdom. He served as an officer in the Caucasian War and later in the Crimean War, where he learnt at close quarters the difference between a military plan and a soldier's experience. Before becoming a great moral critic of power he had been part of it: nobleman, officer, landowner and a man with access to education, travel and a cultural world beyond the reach of most inhabitants of the Russian Empire.

That is precisely why his perspective is valuable. Tolstoy does not observe hierarchy only from below. He knows its comforts. He knows what it feels like to issue an order and see another person carry it out. He knows the prestige of the officer. He knows the material security that permits an existential crisis without immediate hunger. He also knows war closely enough not to be entirely persuaded by grand rhetoric.

In his early military writing he is interested in the concrete reality of violence, the everydayness of danger, the confusion of the battlefield and the fact that for most of a war a person does not experience 'great history' but hunger, boredom, waiting, fear, jokes, dirt and sudden noise. The later War and Peace expands this experience into an entire theory of history. Gary Saul Morson has drawn attention to Tolstoy's almost obsessive ability to connect the smallest bodily or mental movement with the largest scenes of society and war (Morson 2002). In Tolstoy, the body sometimes decides before the explanation does. A smile remains on the face after the thought that caused it has passed. A person steps forward because everyone else has already stepped forward, and only then discovers a reason within themselves.

Tolstoy's relation to serfdom was equally contradictory and therefore revealing. In 1856 he tried to offer his peasants a route out of serf dependence and a new arrangement of land tenure, but they received the proposal with distrust. The episode is almost a Tolstoyan experiment: a well-intentioned landowner assumes that his proposal is intelligible; the peasants read it through a long history of asymmetry and suspect a concealed interest. The institution has already entered psychology. A legal possibility does not by itself create trust. Past experience becomes part of present interpretation.

War and Peace began as something else. Tolstoy wanted to write about a Decembrist returning to Russia after decades of exile. To understand the man of 1856 he had to return to 1825. To understand the Decembrist of 1825 he had to return to his youth and to 1812. Then farther still, to 1805, to a time of defeat rather than victory alone. The shift matters. Tolstoy does not wish to explain a character only by the moment at which he becomes historically visible. He is interested in how a person is made through time.

Here we already find his first great motif: the present has a biography.

His second great motif is freedom. Tolstoy continually thinks about the relation between will and necessity. Why does a person do something? How much of a decision is truly his? How much is produced by position, habit, body, crowd and circumstance? In the epilogue he almost turns the question into a philosophy of history. The more causes of an action we know, the less miraculous absolute freedom appears; yet without a sense of personal responsibility, human life loses its moral structure. Tolstoy keeps the tension between the two.

His third motif is truthfulness. Tolstoy is rarely impressed for long by people who master the social game and therefore live through a mask. A French-speaking salon, ceremonial courage, an elegant political phrase or a perfect military disposition soon begin to trouble him when they drift too far from lived reality. His moral compass often points towards people and moments in which speech, body and action draw closer together again.

His fourth motif is ordinary life. Tolstoy can spend pages on a battle and then treat a dinner, a hunt, a dance, a child's cry or the discomfort after an ill-judged remark with equal seriousness. He does not diminish history by doing so. He enlarges the everyday. His novel assumes that the great forces of society ultimately materialise in a particular body on a particular day.

These are the values and tensions through which we shall read the novel: freedom and necessity, truthfulness and role, individual and crowd, moral responsibility and limited knowledge, hierarchy and dignity, family and history.

1.2 A brief map of War and Peace

The novel begins in 1805, when the Russian nobility speak about Napoleon, Europe, war and social position, while relationships are already forming among families that will matter more than many political pronouncements. We meet Pierre Bezukhov, the awkward illegitimate son of a wealthy count who unexpectedly becomes a great heir. We meet Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, an intelligent and dissatisfied aristocrat who seeks in war something greater than salon life. We meet the Rostov family, emotionally warm, socially open and increasingly undisciplined in its finances, and the young Natasha, whose coming of age becomes one of the novel's emotional centres.

The war of 1805 takes Andrei to Austerlitz. Beneath the immense sky of the battlefield his desire for glory suddenly shrinks. Tolstoy is already announcing his method: an idea that is enormous in the salon can contract within seconds when it meets physical reality.

Pierre meanwhile inherits wealth, marries Hélène and discovers that property and status do not produce meaning. He looks for it in Freemasonry, reforms of his estates, friendship and attempts at moral renewal. His good intentions repeatedly collide with organisational reality: between the owner's idea and the peasant's life stand stewards, habits, information and interests.

Natasha matures through family, dance, love, engagement, temptation and crisis. Her story matters to the novel's psychology because Tolstoy shows how quickly a person's inner world can change under the influence of presence, time, music, attention and expectation. Motive is not a metal lever. It is a living composition.

In 1812 Napoleon invades Russia. The Battle of Borodino is presented as an immense mass of local actions in which no commander has complete control. Moscow is abandoned and burns. Pierre remains in the city, experiences the French occupation and captivity, and meets Platon Karataev, a man who in the novel represents a radically different relationship to meaning, property and death. Andrei is wounded and dies. After the war, Natasha and Pierre find a life together.

At the level of history, Napoleon's campaign ends in catastrophe. At the level of Tolstoy's philosophy, what matters more is what happens to the explanation of that catastrophe. Tolstoy rejects the comfortable notion that Napoleon, as one man, 'moved' European history. His power was real, but it was mediated through an enormous organisation and millions of decisions. An order needs a soldier. A soldier needs bread. Bread needs a cart. A cart needs a horse. A horse needs fodder. Fodder needs space and time. Somewhere along that chain, the grand idea becomes a muddy road.

The novel can therefore be read on two scales at once. The first asks: what does it mean to live well? The second: how does history arise from a multitude of individual lives?

This essay will add a third. Who has the right to plan whose tomorrow?

2. How we shall look: the human being between motive, institution and consequence

Take a simple scene. A peasant intends to plough on Wednesday. In the morning a demand arrives from the lord, the state or the army. A man, a horse, a cart or money is required. The peasant changes his plan.

Psychology asks what he feels and how he decides. Sociology asks what position he occupies in the community and in relation to authority. Economics asks what the delay costs and how much reserve he has. Law asks whether the demand is valid. History asks from which system the demand arose. Mechanics asks what happens elsewhere in the system because one day has been displaced.

No discipline sees the whole by itself. Together, however, they give us a useful picture.

2.1 Motive as a resultant

We shall treat human action as the resultant of several forces, not as the direct translation of a single desire. Nikolai Rostov may speak of honour, while his conduct is simultaneously shaped by regimental culture, the eyes of his peers, youthful adrenaline, the family name, fear of shame and actual danger. Natasha may speak of love while her choice is influenced by proximity, waiting, loneliness, attention and an image of the future. Pierre may speak of reform, but his ability to carry it out travels through an organisation with filters of its own.

A motive is not a command. It is a resultant.

2.2 The institution as stored past

Douglass North described institutions as formal rules, informal norms and the characteristics of their enforcement. It is worth translating this definition into ordinary language.

An institution is the past endowed with the ability to decide tomorrow as well.

Inheritance law determines who will one day inherit the farm. Estate custom determines whom it is proper to marry. A military regime determines who may be conscripted. Land law determines who may collect rent. Village reputation determines to whom neighbours will lend a horse. A religious calendar determines when

work is proper and when the community gathers. Slave law determines whether a person is the legal bearer of his or her own future or the object of another person's right.

North's emphasis on time is especially useful for 1812. Rules can change faster than habits. A new administration may introduce a new form while the old network of trust remains. An emperor may proclaim reform and a local official translate it in his own way. A revolution changes the summit; the household farm still needs hay the next morning.

2.3 Power as a claim on the future

Power can be measured in many ways: weapons, property, rank, money, law or information. For our purposes we shall add another measure.

Who can create today a valid claim on another person's conduct tomorrow?

A lord can demand corvée labour. The state can demand tax or military service.

An enslaver in the American South of 1812 can demand the labour of an enslaved person and, to a very large extent, determine movement and the security of that person's family.

A family can expect care. A church can shape moral obligations. A creditor can demand payment.

Each claim rests on a different legal and moral foundation. Comparison therefore requires more than asking whether a claim exists. We need to know its extent, duration, the possibility of objection, the possibility of exit and the consequence of failure.

2.4 Freedom as the available remainder

Freedom in this essay will not mean the opposite of all obligation. A person with obligations to no one would often be a person without relationships, community or mutual assistance.

The more useful question concerns the remainder.

After work, care, tax, dues, debt, religious duty and necessary rest: how much time, energy, property and possibility remain for a person to change direction?

That remainder has several components:

- exit: can the person leave the relationship;
- voice: can the person object and participate in the rules;
- portability: on leaving, can the person take rights, reputation, savings and knowledge with them;
- security: does one mistake cause complete collapse;
- time: is there enough predictable room for decision;
- ownership or durable support: are there assets that reduce everyday dependence;
- the possibility of failure without erasure: does defeat in one role destroy all the others as well.

We shall use this measure for a serf in the Russian Empire, an Austrian peasant, an American merchant, an enslaved person and a western settler. The result will not be a single number. It will be a profile.

2.5 History as emergence

When millions of profiles meet, history emerges.

The word emergence describes a property of a system that cannot simply be attributed to one of its parts. A traffic jam does not have one driver who 'created' it in its entirety. A market price does not have one buyer. Panic in a crowd is not merely the sum of individual fears. Military collapse is not necessarily the result of a single order.

Tolstoy often understands history in just this way. Leaders alter conditions and probabilities. Their effect can be enormous. But an outcome arises only when an order enters a system of people, information, material and habits.

This is the difference between power and control. Napoleon has enormous power. He does not have complete control. That distinction will be central to everything that follows.

3. The Russian Empire: farm, estate, army and a calendar shared with authority

In 1812 we shall call the state the Russian Empire (imperial Russia). I shall use 'imperial Russia' for the political order and its elite, not as an ethnic label for all its inhabitants. The empire was multilingual, multi-confessional and regionally uneven. For our comparison, the crucial point is that supreme sovereignty alone does not tell us how deeply authority reached into a particular household.

The Russian Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century is an enormous political construction with a highly uneven density of power. At the top stands the autocrat; beneath him are the army, bureaucracy, nobility, different regional arrangements and local communities. For a large part of the rural population, however, the state does not first appear as an abstract constitution. It appears through the landowner, a tax obligation, conscription, an official, a priest and the village commune, the mir.

3.1 The estate as a political-economic system

Russian serfdom was not a single uniform contract. Private serfs, state peasants and other categories lived under different regimes. Obligations also varied from one private estate to another. For our purpose, the basic structure matters: part of the rural population lived in a relationship in which the landowner was not merely the owner of an economic asset. His authority reached deeper into personal status, mobility and the organisation of labour.

Obligations could take the form of labour services or dues. The difference is greater than it appears.

A monetary or in-kind obligation specifies an outcome: by a certain time a sum or a quantity of produce must be delivered. A labour obligation also claims part of the calendar. In an agrarian economy, time is a means of production. A dry day during harvest is worth more than a rainy day in November. If someone else disposes of the most valuable day, they are not taking only hours. They are intervening in the household's ability to use weather, people and animals to best effect.

Corvée is therefore a political-economic claim on the future. The farm has to survive alongside it.

3.2 The peasant household as an organisation

A peasant house is a home, but it is also an organisation. Food, labour, care, reproduction, knowledge and risk are concentrated in the same unit. The person who runs the holding must allocate people and resources. His wife often manages a large part of the internal economy - food, textiles, livestock, children and invisible work without which the field has no worker the next day. Children gradually move from requiring care to contributing labour. Older people may lose physical strength while retaining knowledge, reputation or a caring role.

Upwards, the peasant is subordinate; downwards, he is an organiser.

This duality matters. Social position is not merely a vertical label. The same person can be weak before the landowner and very powerful inside his own household. Serfdom therefore does not produce a world with one master and a mass of wholly passive subordinates. It produces a chain of different asymmetries.

Violence, too, can travel down the chain. A person who is subordinate all day may exercise power over someone weaker in the evening. Hierarchy is reproduced sideways as well as downwards.

3.3 The mir: security and control in the same space

The village community, or mir, could provide a peasant with mutual assistance, local identity and a protective mechanism. At the same time it could help distribute obligations, monitor households and limit individual exit. This is a typical institutional duality.

A community that knows you can help you faster than a distant state.

A community that knows you can also find it harder to forget you.

Reputation is therefore capital. A person without money may still have a credit of trust. A person with a bad reputation may lose help, a recommendation and the chance to make a good bargain. The psychological pressure of the community is real even without formal punishment.

Tolstoy knows this world mainly through the literary optics of a nobleman, yet he clearly perceives the difference between an abstract decision and local life. When Pierre wants to improve the peasants' condition, he discovers that a landowner's good intention is not yet an implemented reform. Between the two stand estate administration, information, local interests and his own need to believe that he has already put something right.

This is an organisational law we still encounter today: a report that something has been implemented can travel faster than the implementation itself.

3.4 Conscription: when the state demands not a day but years

Military obligation is the sharpest example of a claim on the future. In the early nineteenth century a recruit in the Russian Empire could serve for an extraordinarily long period; the twenty-five-year service system meant for a peasant household something close to the permanent loss of an adult male from the local production unit.

That changes the household economy before the man ever puts on a uniform. Who will plough? Who will care for the parents? Who will take over the holding? Who will replace the lost capacity for work?

Conscription is therefore a military, demographic and economic institution at once. The state removes a person from a local household and places him inside an organisation where he becomes part of a larger system of command. His time becomes almost wholly military time.

To the state, the recruit is a unit of capacity. To the household, he is an absent person. Both statements are true. The distance between them is the social cost of mobilisation.

3.5 Noble freedom and the luxury of a wrong decision

Tolstoy's aristocrats inhabit a substantially wider field of possibilities. They can travel, be educated, enter the army or state service, manage estates, marry into powerful households and lose large sums of money without necessarily facing hunger the next morning.

That does not mean they have no obligations. Their calendars are filled by honour, family name, court, service, marriage, social life and the expectations of their estate. The Rostovs are a good example of a family in which a culture of status consumes more than the economy can sustain in the long term. Hospitality is a virtue and a cost. Horses are pleasure, symbol and expense. Nikolai's gambling is a psychological event, but it becomes a shock to the family balance sheet.

Here we obtain an important definition of wealth. Wealth is not merely more things. It is more mistakes survived.

Pierre can spend a long time searching for meaning because his material system allows him to experiment. A small farmer has less room for a philosophically unsuccessful project if that project also destroys seed, livestock or the capacity to survive the winter. Class difference is therefore also a difference in a system's tolerance of error.

3.6 Women and the different geometry of exit

A woman's position is legally, economically and socially different from a man's. Among the nobility, marriage links emotion, property, status and family strategy. In a peasant household, marriage directly affects labour capacity, succession and care. A woman who loses her husband may in one event lose a partner, an economic organiser and part of her legal position in relation to the holding. A man who loses his wife loses a central part of the household's reproductive economy.

Tolstoy sees women psychologically far better than formal political history measures them. Natasha, Marya, Hélène and others are not merely illustrations of status. Their desires, fears and moral worlds alter family networks. The novel therefore helps us see something statistics often conceal: society reproduces itself through relationships that do not always possess an accounting category of their own.

A farm does not produce grain alone. It also produces tomorrow's human being.

4. Psychology: people act first, then explain to themselves who they are

Tolstoy is dangerous to overly tidy theories of human beings. His characters have plans, values and identities, yet their actions often arise a few inches away from those explanations.

4.1 The body participates in the decision

In War and Peace the body is not a vehicle for reason. It is part of reason. Fatigue narrows moral range. Hunger alters patience. Music opens an emotion. The presence of an attractive person changes a future that seemed settled only an hour before. Fear on the battlefield changes the meaning of an order.

This is a strikingly modern observation. A person is not a perfectly informed calculator. A person has limited attention, a physiological state, habits and social signals.

That is why the situation in which a decision arises matters. Courage in safety is not the same phenomenon as courage under fire.

Morality with a full granary is not the same test as morality in hunger.

Freedom after a good night's sleep and with a reserve is not the same practical capacity as freedom in exhaustion and debt.

4.2 Shame, honour and the eyes of others

Much social control does not need a police officer. It needs an audience.

The officer's world is built on the gaze of other officers. A noble family has a reputation transmitted across generations. A peasant community knows the history of a household. Marriage is at once a private relationship and a public classification.

People therefore often behave economically 'irrationally' if rationality is measured only in money. A person may spend more to preserve status. Risk a life to avoid shame. Reject a profitable opportunity because it would break belonging. Remain in a bad relationship because the social cost of exit is greater than the economic remainder.

Reputation is an invisible currency. Its exchange rate is set by the community.

4.3 Inner conflict: thought, action and explanation

A person wants to believe that beliefs, role and actions are consistent. Tolstoy repeatedly shows the moment when they come apart. Thought notices one thing; the body or social position does another; then an explanation arrives that must bring both parts back under the same name: I.

Such a conflict is not merely hypocrisy. Nikolai Rostov may see the chaos and suffering of war, yet he needs an officer's world in which obedience preserves the meaning of his role. Pierre may sincerely wish to improve the condition of the peasants while depending on stewards, reports and his own need to see himself as a good reformer. Andrei may desire glory, then experience it as empty at Austerlitz, yet that insight does not at once assemble a new life. Insight and action move at different speeds.

Inner conflict is often resolved not by changing the action, but by changing the explanation of the action.

Self-deception therefore has an organisational function: it reduces inner conflict and preserves the role. It also has a political consequence. If a person understands their own power as entirely deserved, their silence as wholly reasonable and their obedience as merely technical, it becomes harder to see the system that has already assigned value to all three possibilities. In judging ourselves, we often compare our actions not with a principle but with conduct our group regards as normal.

4.4 Fromm: freedom needs support

Erich Fromm, in *Escape from Freedom*, distinguishes liberation from an old bond from the capacity to live freely. The breakdown of inherited medieval ties brings greater individual autonomy, but also loneliness, uncertainty and a new burden of responsibility. A person may be freed from an old master without yet possessing enough inner support, knowledge, property, social network or self-confidence to make positive use of freedom. The temptation can then arise to exchange openness once again for authority, destructive escape, or conformity in which the safest course is to become what one's surroundings already expect (Fromm 2020; original 1941).

This perspective is useful for 1812 precisely because several societies stand between an old order and a new one. A Prussian peasant may acquire personal legal freedom before land relations have been fully rearranged. A subject in the Austrian lands may acquire stronger legal personality while seigneurial obligations remain. A white American settler may gain a wider exit from an old local hierarchy, while that new opportunity simultaneously narrows the space available to Indigenous communities. The transition removes part of the old answer to the questions of who I am and what I must do before it provides a new and secure way of living.

Formal freedom opens the door. Positive freedom requires enough support for a person to walk through it and still remain capable of living with the choice.

Fromm's idea of automaton conformity adds something important. A command need no longer be spoken from outside. A person may begin to act according to the pattern 'that is how things are done' because cultural expectation saves the effort of deciding and the risk of standing apart. The sense of personal responsibility diminishes with it: if the role has supplied the answer in advance, one's own action is more easily experienced as fulfilment of an expectation than as a choice. This does not abolish responsibility; it helps explain why responsibility is so easily delegated psychologically.

4.5 Reich: the little man and the microphysics of delegated responsibility

Wilhelm Reich, in his polemical essay *Listen, Little Man!* (1948), attacks precisely the tendency of the ordinary person to hand the future over to leaders, fear self-criticism and then seek compensation in whatever small authority lies within reach. For this essay, his strongest image is one of a double position: the same person

may be subordinate upwards and domineering downwards. A subordinate clerk receives a counter. A junior officer receives a soldier. The head of a farm household receives servants. A senior worker receives a junior one.

A sense of small authority can compensate for a sense of personal powerlessness. More importantly, the role supplies an alibi: upwards the person 'only follows the rules'; downwards the same person actively enforces them. Responsibility is thereby divided into so many small pieces that each individual piece appears almost harmless, while the systemic result can be very hard indeed.

Tolstoy has an extraordinary ear for this phenomenon. His characters change with their role. A person speaks differently before a superior than before a subordinate; posture, voice and even the amount of doubt one permits oneself change. Position literally enters the body. Hierarchy is therefore most stable when it demands not only obedience but also distributes enough small shares of authority for people to reproduce it themselves.

4.6 When doubt does not change action

Slavoj Žižek, in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), points to a form of ideology that no longer requires naive belief. A person may know perfectly well that the official story is incomplete, exaggerated or even absurd, and still continue the practice as though the rule applied without difficulty. The distance between belief and action is therefore not, by itself, freedom.

A Tolstoyan example is simple. A soldier may doubt the plan and still march because the unit is moving. A clerk may privately ridicule a decree and publicly implement it because the file continues on its way. A merchant may distrust the monetary or political order and still shape decisions around its prices, deadlines and sanctions. A family member may doubt a custom while imposing it on a child because he or she knows how the community will judge deviation.

When this is repeated across large numbers of people, a peculiar equilibrium emerges. Many are dissatisfied, yet few expect others to act differently at the same time. Each therefore maintains a rule whose future he or she privately doubts. If exit is costly and feedback is poor, ignorance is not merely a lack of information; it is also a narrowed horizon of what appears feasible at all.

A system can lose belief before it loses routine. Cynics are not necessarily outside ideology; sometimes they are simply its tired executors.

5. Society: position, reputation, faith and networks as invisible infrastructure

Society is not merely a collection of individuals. It is a network of relationships in which information, help, sanctions and opportunities move along paths that are not equally open to everyone.

5.1 Estate is not merely a label but a package of possibilities

Nobility means access to office, education, society and property. Peasant status means different rights, obligations and expectations. Clerical status opens one kind of influence. Military rank another.

An estate is therefore more like an operating system than a label. It determines which functions are available at all.

Tolstoy shows this already through Pierre's inheritance. His personality does not change overnight. The attitude of those around him does. The same awkward man becomes interesting once property stands behind him. Society revalues his face.

Property changes not only what a person has. It changes what others expect from that person.

5.2 Language as boundary and bridge

The Russian nobility speak French. This is not merely a detail of fashion. It signals cultural membership of a European elite and distance from most of the population. In 1812 language suddenly becomes political. What yesterday signified culture can tomorrow signify suspicious proximity to the enemy.

Identity can therefore change very quickly when the environment of rewards and sanctions changes.

This matters more broadly when we compare the Ukrainian and Habsburg lands, where language, religion, estate and political authority often do not coincide. A person may speak one language at home, need another at an office and encounter a third among the elite. Society is not organised by nationality alone. It is organised at the intersection of several affiliations.

5.3 Church as infrastructure of meaning and record

For a person around 1812, religion is not merely a private belief. Organised religion structures the calendar, sacraments, marriage, burial, moral language and much of local community life. At the same time, it produces records.

Baptism is a spiritual event and a record. Marriage is a relationship and a legal-social transition. Death is grief and an administrative datum.

In the Habsburg world, parish registers by the end of the eighteenth century are already closely tied to the state's need for reliable information. In the Russian Empire, the Orthodox Church has a different institutional history, but its local role in life's major transitions is similarly large.

A piece of information created for the sake of the soul can later serve taxation, inheritance or the army.

This is a general rule of organisations: data like to outlive their original purpose.

5.4 The network is insurance against market, state and misfortune

Before the modern welfare state, most everyday risk is borne by the household, kin, neighbours, the church and local charity. Social capital is therefore very concrete.

A good relationship with a neighbour can mean help at harvest. A relative can mean a roof after a fire. Godparenthood can connect households. A family marriage can mean access to land.

A person with a strong network is therefore materially safer even without much money. A person who loses reputation loses part of their insurance.

The modern world transfers much of this function to contract, market, insurance and the state. In 1812 security is far more personal.

Personal security, however, requires personal belonging.

5.5 Faith and meaning: a person needs explanation even without control

Institutions organise actions. A worldview organises meaning.

For a person around 1812, the question of why something happened often had no separate psychological, moral and religious answer. Illness was a bodily event, a family crisis and a question of meaning. The death of a child is a demographic loss only in statistics; inside the household it is a broken relationship, a religious rite and a change in the future that had been expected. War is a geopolitical process, but for a soldier it can become a test of honour, faith, loyalty or fear of the judgement of others.

The Orthodox world of the Russian Empire gives a person a language of sin, mercy, suffering, death and community. The Catholic Habsburg world organises the same basic human problem through a different church structure, yet likewise inscribes the year deeply into feast days, fasting, sacraments and the local parish. Protestant and republican cultures in the north-eastern United States connect religious discipline with ideas of

self-government, work, literacy and moral character. Among enslaved African Americans, Christian ideas intermingle with their own communal experience and can become both a language of consolation and a language of freedom. Indigenous communities have their own moral and cosmological maps in which land is not merely a marketable asset but part of a political, generational and spiritual relationship.

These differences matter because people do not choose only among material possibilities. They choose among possibilities to which they attach different moral meanings.

A person can reject a material benefit if it is seen as shameful. A person can accept great risk if it is understood as duty. A person can persist through suffering if it is placed within a larger meaning.

A person can rebel if a new interpretation of the world translates old obedience into injustice.

Ideas are therefore part of material history. When they change the meaning of an action, they also change the probability of that action.

5.6 Tolstoy's faith in the reality of direct relation

In War and Peace, meaning often appears when the social scenery falls away. Andrei's sky at Austerlitz diminishes the importance of glory. Pierre's captivity diminishes the importance of status. Proximity to death rearranges the value of things that seemed enormous in the salon. Karataev matters in the literary architecture of the novel because he represents a person whose world depends radically less on an abstract self-image.

Tolstoy risks romanticising simplicity here, but he reaches a psychological core: a person's hierarchy of values changes when the horizon changes.

Over a peaceful breakfast, identity can be built from status. In immediate danger, the body resets the order of priorities.

In this sense, war for Tolstoy is not merely a political event. It is a laboratory of values. Within hours it reveals which ideas were decoration and which can carry a person when the decoration falls away.

5.7 Honour, duty and obedience are not the same thing

In traditional societies, honour, duty and obedience often overlap, but they work through different mechanisms. Honour needs the gaze of the community. Duty needs a norm that a person recognises as valid. Obedience needs a relationship of authority.

An officer can obey an order and still regard it as dishonourable. A peasant can pay a due because it is enforceable, not because it is thought just. A believer can accept care for the sick as a duty even though nobody can compel it. An enslaved person can obey outwardly while never inwardly recognising the legitimacy of the relationship.

This distinction is crucial to understanding the stability of a system. Power that people understand as legitimate needs less direct coercion. Power experienced as naked coercion expends more energy on control.

Legitimacy is therefore an organisational saving. And at the same time a moral question.

5.8 Meaning and collective memory

The year 1812 acquires meaning even for people who did not experience it. In Russia it becomes a patriotic memory and later one of the foundations for debates about nation, freedom and the Decembrists. In the United States the war helps consolidate a narrative of a second war of independence, although its regional interests and outcomes were far more complicated. In the Slovene lands, memory of the Illyrian Provinces becomes part of later reflection on language, administration and Napoleon's legacy. For Indigenous communities, the same North American conflict can be remembered as a lost political possibility and an acceleration of territorial dispossession.

Collective memory does not merely store an event. It selects the meaning of the event.

In doing so, it influences later generations, which will understand their present decisions through a past that has already been arranged into a story.

5.9 A culture of expectations: when the answer arrives before the question

Expectation is one of the most effective social technologies because it works before a command is needed. A child learns what is proper. An officer knows what is expected of him. A clerk knows which case is 'normal'. A peasant knows which dispute is worth opening and which will be punished by the village through reputation. Such a culture reduces the cost of everyday decision-making: the world need not be invented anew each morning.

Yet the same quality also relieves a person of the sense of responsibility. If the collective has already judged what is reasonable, honourable, serious or successful, an individual may experience a personal decision as mere adjustment to the standard. The fetters of expectation are therefore both support and constraint: they protect a person from endless uncertainty, but can take away the habit of asking whether the expectation still makes sense.

Here a particular form of power appears in entrepreneurs, commanders and managers of states or institutions. Their power lies not only in issuing orders but in setting a deadline, a standard, a measure of success, a category, a payment rule, or an idea of what will be normal tomorrow. Whoever sets expectations for others organises part of their future before direct coercion ever becomes necessary.

Culture frees a person from having to decide everything. For that very reason, the questions of who set the expectation, who can change it, and who bears the loss when it becomes wrong must remain open.

6. Economics: surplus, reserve, debt and the capacity to survive a mistake

Economics often remains in the background of the novel, yet it moves people almost as effectively as love.

Pierre inherits wealth and with it a new position. The Rostovs spend more than their system can sustain in the long run. Nikolai's gambling debt is not merely a moral episode but the forced transfer of a family's future into a single evening. War consumes horses, food, money and transport. Moscow, besides being a symbolic city, is also an immense concentration of stores, buildings, carts and property.

6.1 The granary as a balance sheet

A peasant household has a granary. It contains more than food. It contains today's consumption. Seed for next year. Fodder. Dues. Perhaps a tithe or another religious obligation. Tax liabilities. A reserve for illness, damage or a poor harvest. Whoever opens the granary opens the future.

The question of surplus is therefore very concrete: what part of the result of labour can a household surrender without reducing its capacity to reproduce itself? Marx would later pose this question within a different, capitalist framework. For 1812, his impolite intuition is enough: who worked, who can claim the result, and what remains after the claim?

6.2 Reserve is time in material form

A store of grain, savings, an extra animal, a relative with land, the possibility of supplementary work - all are forms of reserve.

A reserve buys time.

A person with a reserve can wait for a better price. Refuse a bad bargain. Survive illness. Move. Leave a field alone for a day if necessary.

A person without a reserve accepts the next available option. Poverty is therefore also a problem of time. It shortens the horizon of decision.

6.3 Debt as prior consumption of the future

Debt turns future income into a present resource. That is its power and its danger.

For the Rostovs, debt constrains future marriages, the life of the estate and the choices of the children. For a peasant, debt can mean the loss of livestock or land. For a state, war debt makes present mobilisation possible in exchange for future taxation.

Debt is therefore a contractual bridge between present and future. Whoever controls it participates in the distribution of future surplus.

6.4 War as a press on the same surplus

In peace, several institutions may claim a part of the surplus, but their demands are relatively predictable. War compresses the claims.

The army needs people. People need food. Transport needs horses. Horses need fodder. The state needs money.

An increase in one capacity increases the burden on another. An army with additional soldiers is stronger on paper and more expensive in motion. A long supply line requires additional carts, which themselves consume part of the resources they carry.

Here material begins to limit strategy.

War is the moment when the state tries to enlarge its share of the future of a great many households at once.

6.5 Marx: surplus, the working day and the reproduction of human life

Marx is most useful for this essay where he prevents us from forcing all forms of labour into the same category. Under *corvée*, part of the surplus may be extracted directly as labour or dues. Under slavery, labour power is bound to the person's status as property. In a capitalist wage relationship, by contrast, the worker legally disposes of his or her own capacity to work and sells it for a given period because access to the means of life and production is not the same as that of the owner of capital. Legal freedom and material dependence can therefore coexist.

In *Capital*, the working day becomes a dispute about a boundary. If labour power has been bought for a day, it does not follow automatically how much of that day the buyer may actually use. The body needs sleep, food, care, family and time to recover; the organisation has an incentive to lengthen the interval it has purchased. The reproduction of labour power is therefore also a question of how much life must remain outside the claim of production.

Marx's idea of commodity fetishism adds a third layer. Social relations can begin to appear as properties of things, prices and contracts. What was personally visible under the landowner as one person's claim upon another can, in a more developed market world, more readily appear as 'the price', 'the cost', 'the market' or 'the return'. Power is not necessarily smaller as a result; it may simply be less personally visible.

Surplus is not only the quantity that remains. It is also a relationship that determines who is allowed to decide about what remains after the necessary reproduction of life.

7. The mechanics of history: command, friction, feedback and a million small decisions

Tolstoy's criticism of "great men" is often read as an attack on the historical individual. It is more useful to read it as a theory of transmission.

A leader can make a decision. A chain leads from decision to result.

7.1 A command is a packet of information

Napoleon issues an order. The order must be written down or conveyed. Someone must understand it. Translate it into a local task. Find people. Time. Horses. Space. And the actual situation must still exist when the order arrives.

Every link is a filter.

A large organisation therefore never operates by authority alone. It operates through an information system.

On the battlefield Tolstoy shows how quickly information ages. A report may be correct when it is sent and false by the time it reaches the commander. A commanding officer can therefore make a rational decision on the basis of a world that has already ceased to exist.

7.2 Friction is the price of reality

Clausewitz used the word friction for the multitude of small difficulties that make war in practice different from war on paper. Tolstoy expands the idea in literary form.

Friction is mud. The wrong time. A lost courier. A hungry animal. The pride of a subordinate. A soldier's fear. A bad translation. A peasant's distrust.

In civil life, friction may be a form, distance, a bad road, an unclear property right or local custom.

A system without friction exists chiefly in the presentation of the system.

7.3 Feedback loops

Napoleon's campaign in the Russian Empire is full of negative loops. A longer supply line reduces the reliability of supply. Worse supply reduces health and speed. Slower movement increases the time of consumption. Greater consumption worsens supply.

Peasant debt can work similarly. A poor harvest causes debt. Debt forces the household to sell livestock or accept worse terms. Fewer animals reduce future productive capacity. Lower capacity increases the probability of new debt.

A positive feedback loop can work in the opposite direction. A small reserve makes investment possible. Investment increases yield. A larger yield increases reserves. Reserves widen choice.

History is full of both.

7.4 Thresholds and collapse

A system can absorb pressure for a long time and then suddenly fail. A farm survives one bad year. Perhaps two. In the third year illness arrives and a horse dies. An apparently small additional shock pushes the household across a threshold.

An army can absorb losses as long as it maintains supply, communication and cohesion. When several subsystems fail at once, the nature of the whole changes.

A historical rupture therefore often looks sudden even though its causes accumulated slowly.

7.5 Kutuzov and the art of less perfect control

Tolstoy's Kutuzov is interesting not because he possesses secret omniscience, but because he is less seduced by the appearance of total control. He listens to the movement of the system. He understands that not every uncertainty can be abolished by another order.

This can be romanticised too easily. Command still matters. Decisions matter. Logistics matters. Yet Tolstoy's intuition remains useful: in a sufficiently complex system, the manager who knows the limits of management may sometimes understand more than the one who multiplies commands.

The first duty of control is to know where control ends.

8. The Ukrainian lands: different imperial regimes, different rules of the game

The Ukrainian lands are methodologically decisive for this essay because they show how little the colour on a political map tells us by itself. For clarity I shall consistently speak of Ukrainians and Ukrainian lands, whether in 1812 they lived under the Russian or Austrian Empire. For our analysis it matters more which rules governed people's lives, who held the land, who judged, who collected dues, and how costly exit was.

The Ukrainian space was divided among different political and land regimes. The Right Bank of the Dnipro was strongly marked by the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and by the large role of Polish or Polonised nobility. The Left Bank carried the institutional memory of the Cossack Hetmanate, even as the Russian Empire integrated it ever more deeply into its administrative and noble order during the eighteenth century. The southern lands were a zone of military frontier, migration, new land grants and struggle over space. Galicia, meanwhile, entered the Habsburg - and after 1804 Austrian - state framework after 1772.

The same linguistic and historical space can live under different rules of the game.

8.1 The Right Bank: imperial authority over an inherited landed hierarchy

After the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, much of the Right Bank of the Dnipro came under the authority of the Russian Empire. The local structure of landed power did not overnight become a copy of the central Russian gubernias. Polish or Polonised nobility retained an important share of landholding and local social power, while much of the peasant population was Ukrainian. Towns and trade added Jewish, Polish, Armenian and other layers.

An ordinary person could therefore live in several overlapping worlds at once. Supreme authority was imperial. The landowner was local. The church had its own network. The village its own memory. The market its own prices. If we look only at the tsar, we miss a large part of everyday power.

The empire may be far away. The lord, the debt and the harvest are close.

For the peasant, the crucial questions are who can demand labour, dues and obedience, and through which institution protection can be sought. Where landed power is strong, exit limited and local social distance great, the practical future is deeply structured by the estate even if the supreme symbol of state power changed in the previous generation.

8.2 The Left Bank: a Cossack political legacy inside the Russian Empire

The Left Bank has a different history. The Cossack Hetmanate created political and landed institutions, military statuses and local elites that the Russian Empire gradually integrated during the eighteenth century into its administrative and noble order. In 1783 imperial authority consolidated serf relations across a significant part of the region, while the Cossack elite increasingly became recognised nobility of the empire.

Yet an institution does not disappear in the year an order abolishes it. It remains in property, memory, local positions and expectations about what may be demanded from the state. On the Left Bank, the composition of peasant and Cossack categories differed from that on the Right Bank or in the central parts of the Russian Empire. A person could live under the same tsar and still have a different profile of obligations, mobility and local voice.

A political boundary tells us who the supreme sovereign is. It does not yet tell us how deeply authority enters the household.

8.3 The state learns to count space

The Rumiantsev census of the Left Bank in the 1760s is a fine example of administrative transformation. The state wants to know who lives where, what property exists, who has which right and who bears which obligation. A local world intelligible through memory, custom and personal relationships is translated into data that can be used by distant authority.

James C. Scott draws attention to an important distinction in such processes: the centre does not necessarily acquire more knowledge than the local inhabitant. It acquires fewer kinds of knowledge in a more standardised form. The peasant knows which field holds water after rain. The register knows its acreage. The villager knows about the dispute between two families over a path. The cadastre sees a line.

The state does not see everything. It sees less - but it sees the same thing farther away.

This is administrative power. It enables taxation, conscription, courts, property records and more uniform administration. At the same time, it can reduce the arbitrariness of local intermediaries because a right begins to be provable in a wider system. The same register can expand state capacity and the individual's capacity to prove a claim. The question is who can do what with it.

8.4 The south: a colonising frontier is not empty land

During the eighteenth century the southern Ukrainian lands were an area of intensive imperial colonisation by the Russian Empire. Greater availability of land, new settlements, military frontiers and shortages of labour could increase mobility and alter bargaining power. At the same time, the state granted land to nobles, settlers and military projects, thereby creating new hierarchies.

Before imperial parcelling, the space was not empty. It contained Cossack, Crimean Tatar, Nogai, Ottoman and other political and lived geographies. A new authority's land register is therefore not merely a technical description. It can become a way in which one authority converts earlier uses of space into a new legal reality.

A settlement frontier is not a void. It is a dispute over whose present will become the land register of the future.

We shall see the same mechanism in the United States of America.

8.5 Galicia: the Ukrainian peasant under the Austrian Empire

After the First Partition of Poland in 1772, Galicia came under Habsburg rule and in 1812 formed part of the Austrian Empire. Maria Theresa and especially Joseph II sought to limit the seigneurial order administratively and make it more predictable. Reforms measured obligations, intervened in *corvée*, reduced personal subordination and gave peasants greater opportunities for legal protection, although implementation was uneven and some changes were later curtailed.

For our comparison, the crucial point is this: a Ukrainian peasant on the Austrian side of the frontier could have a different relationship to the landowner, the court, the state and the church from a Ukrainian peasant on the Right Bank under the Russian Empire. Language and related culture alone do not determine the price of exit. Institutions determine who may demand how much, how a claim can be challenged and who bears the consequences of error.

The Austrian state thus becomes a third actor between lord and peasant. It can constrain local arbitrariness while acquiring more records and direct claims of its own.

The modernisation of power often involves precisely such an exchange: less depth in one master, more breadth across several institutions.

8.6 What the Ukrainian lands tell us about psychology

Long-lasting institutional differences create different rational strategies. Where personal authority is strong and exit is expensive, it is useful to know how to read a person, improvise, use an informal network and choose the moment to object. In a more standardised environment, it becomes useful to read the rule, know the procedure and prove the right.

When such strategies are transmitted across generations, they begin to look like culture. Culture is often also stored history of incentives. The Ukrainian lands therefore help us separate two things we easily confuse: cultural proximity and institutional sameness. People may be culturally close yet live under rules so different that their everyday experience of authority, risk and future is substantially different.

For this essay, therefore, a better question than 'who were they?' is: under which rules were they able to live their tomorrow?

9. The Slovene lands between the Austrian Empire and the Illyrian Provinces

For 1812, the term 'Habsburg Monarchy' is useful as a historiographical label for a dynastic space, but it is not the most precise political name. Emperor Francis proclaimed the Austrian Empire (Kaisertum Österreich) in 1804; two years later, as Francis II, he laid down the crown of the Holy Roman Empire and, as Francis I, remained Emperor of Austria. When speaking of the state in 1812, I shall therefore normally use Austrian Empire. 'Habsburg' will refer to the dynasty, the broader historical tradition or comparisons across a longer period.

The German name Österreich is older than the empire. A charter of 996 contains the form Ostarrîchi, historically associated with an eastern territory or 'eastern domain'. The etymology is not a theory of the Austrian Empire in 1812, but it is a useful reminder that political names, too, carry sediments of older geographies.

The Slovene-speaking population in 1812 did not live in a single political unit. Most of the Slovene lands were in the Austrian Empire, while an important western and central part belonged between 1809 and 1813/14 to Napoleon's Illyrian Provinces. A person could speak the same language as someone a few dozen kilometres away and live under a different administration, a different tax system and a different military-political connection.

This is an excellent exercise against premature national generalisation.

9.1 The Austrian Empire: the state acquires an official name and an ever longer memory

During the eighteenth century, Habsburg authority increasingly learns to govern the population directly. The reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II increase the importance of state administration, censuses, schooling, military organisation, vital registers and standardisation. The estates lose part of their old administrative weight. The Church remains crucial, but the state more strongly determines what the system must know and how it must operate.

The year 1812 is surprisingly literal here. The General Civil Code, the ABGB, promulgated in 1811 for the German hereditary lands of the Austrian monarchy, came into force on 1 January 1812. Section 16 speaks of

innate human rights, treats the human being as a legal person, and explicitly rejects slavery or personal serfdom in the lands where it applies.

That sentence does not abolish every old relationship. A peasant in 1812 does not thereby become the modern unencumbered owner of his land. Seigneurial dues, *corvée* and patrimonial structures in the Austrian lands will not be abolished until 1848. Yet the legal change is substantial.

In the legal code, the person begins to be separated from the obligation attached to land. Status loses its right to swallow the whole person.

This is an important step in the transition that concerns us: from power as a personal bundle towards power as a set of more distinct functions and legal relationships.

9.2 The house number: the state acquires an address

A house number looks like a small technique. In fact, it is a political innovation.

Before it, the community can find a person. After it, the system can find that person more reliably.

In the Austrian lands, conscription house numbers were introduced more widely from the late 1760s; local implementation could follow a few years later. In one eastern Styrian parish preserved in a private microhistorical chronicle, numbers are documented from 1771. The reason was not aesthetic. The state needed population, houses and men in a form that could be found again for administration, taxation and military organisation.

James C. Scott helps formulate precisely what the centre gains from such a change. The local person has more context. The centre needs greater portability.

A name says who you are. An address says where the system can find you. A parcel says which piece of land it can assign to your household.

The state does not see better than the neighbour. It sees at a distance.

9.3 Dues, *corvée* and the calendar

Josephine reforms attempted to limit and measure peasant obligations. This does not mean that the seigneurial relationship had disappeared by 1812. The peasant still allocates the harvest among several claims: seed, food, livestock, lord, state, Church, debt and reserve.

Here we return to Thompson. Agrarian time is not simply 'free natural time' later destroyed by the factory. Work on one's own farm is often organised around tasks, weather and season. But service to another person, *corvée*, division of labour and contractual work already create time-discipline. The factory does not invent discipline from nothing.

The factory increases its reach and precision.

The landowner can claim a day. The factory will later claim an hour. The office will set a deadline. The railway will demand a minute. One day, a digital system will measure the second.

At the beginning of this sequence, however, the same question remains:

who has the right to say that the most valuable working moment of your day no longer belongs to you?

9.4 An anonymous East Styrian microhistory: how large is one "ordinary" world?

Microhistory is useful if it does not require one family to represent an entire land. A private chronicle from the area around Velika Nedelja documents a small farmer, born in 1776, who by 1804 was recorded as the tenant of a small farm subject to the Muretinci estate. He died in 1810. Two of his four documented sons died very young. For the same holding, the chronicle gives about 3.36 hectares in the Franciscan cadastre of 1825, mostly arable land.

We should not mechanically project the area recorded in 1825 back to 1804. But the scale is valuable. We are speaking of a household in which one illness, the loss of a worker, an animal or part of the crop is not an accounting note but a change in future productive capacity.

This is the human world just before 1812.

Vienna sees an empire. The cadastre sees parcels. The lord sees an obligation. The household sees who will plough tomorrow.

The micro-example is therefore not evidence for the whole Austrian Empire. It is a measure of the distance between the administrative category 'small farmer' and the actual life concealed by that category.

9.5 The Illyrian Provinces: modernisation that arrives with an army

In 1812 part of the Slovene lands lay outside the Austrian Empire and inside the French Illyrian Provinces. Ljubljana was the administrative centre of the French project, which brought a different administrative logic, legal reform, a larger role for the secular state, and changes in schooling and official language.

For the local person, however, modernisation did not arrive as an abstract idea.

It arrived with an army. With taxes. With demands for horses. With new officials. With a new rulebook.

This is a useful correction to our instinct to associate modernisation automatically with a lighter burden. Standardisation can curb old arbitrariness while at the same time increasing the state's capacity to demand more effectively.

9.6 Faith, family and local order

The Catholic parish is at once a religious community, an information network and an archive of life's transitions. The priest baptises, marries, buries and records. As the state increases its supervision of vital registers in the late eighteenth century, religious infrastructure becomes part of a wider administrative infrastructure.

This is a classic case of functional overlap.

An institution collects a piece of information for one purpose. Another authority discovers that the information is useful for another.

The family, meanwhile, remains the basic productive and social unit. Inheritance, marriage, servants and the size of the holding determine who stays, who leaves and who can establish a household of their own. The modern language of an individual career is too narrow here. A life course is an allocation of limited family space.

9.7 The Austrian profile of freedom around 1812

Compared with a private serf in the Russian Empire, a peasant in the Austrian hereditary lands generally has greater personal legal autonomy and a more regulated relationship with the lord. In 1812 itself, the ABGB further emphasises this normative separation.

Practical freedom nevertheless remains constrained by land, obligations, family, lack of reserve, local status and the state's military-fiscal claims.

The person is being freed from the personal lord. At the same time, the person is becoming more precisely visible to the state.

This is not a contradiction. It is one of the main forms of European modernisation.

10. The western arc of 1812: Prussia, the French Empire, the Italian peninsula, Spain and the United Kingdom

As we move west from the Ukrainian lands and the Austrian space, another useful feature of 1812 appears: modernisation has no single political face. It can arrive as reform after defeat, as centralisation under a victorious empire, as a constitution under siege, as industrialisation during war, or as legal reform in a country that is simultaneously a French satellite.

The same year can therefore mean more state, more contract, more army, more market and more political voice — but not necessarily for the same person.

10.1 The Kingdom of Prussia: when military defeat opens the legal question of the peasant

Prussia in 1812 is not yet Germany. It is the Kingdom of Prussia, a state whose defeat by Napoleon in 1806 accelerated reform. The October Edict of 1807 abolished personal serfdom or hereditary subjection; from Martinmas 1810 the kingdom was to contain only free persons. Yet the same legal change preserved obligations arising from possession or contract, and the question of how dependent peasant holdings were to be converted into genuinely free property required further regulation. The Regulation Edict of 1811 therefore provided for the conversion of certain peasant tenures into hereditary property with compensation for former lords.

This is almost a laboratory case of the distinction between personal freedom and the material structure of freedom.

A law can free a person from status in one sentence. It cannot in the same sentence redistribute land, debt, capital and bargaining power.

The Prussian reforms were also a response to state weakness. Military defeat revealed that the old order did not produce a state, economy and army flexible enough for the new strategic environment. Freedom therefore entered the language of reform partly as a question of state effectiveness.

That matters. Authority can enlarge personal freedom not only because it has become morally better, but because it discovers that, under certain conditions, a freer and more mobile person is economically and militarily more useful.

The motive for reform does not cancel its effect. But it helps explain why that effect stops where it begins to threaten the holders of old property too severely.

10.2 The French Empire: a state that knows how to turn space into a department

The French Empire in 1812 is the strongest example of administrative legibility in our western European arc. At its height it was divided into 134 departments, many of them outside the borders of present-day France. The prefect, appointed from the centre, was the principal executive agent of the department: supervising administration, police, taxation and implementation of state policy, and participating in the machinery of conscription.

Scott's language almost asks to be used here.

Napoleon cannot personally know millions of people. But his state can know a department, an arrondissement, a commune, a tax category and a conscription class.

This is a different kind of power from that of a landowner. The lord knows the village more deeply. The prefect knows it more shallowly, but can place it in a state table that travels to Paris.

In 1812 that administrative capacity reaches a brutally practical point. The Grande Armée moving towards the Russian Empire is not simply a French army in a national sense. It contains contingents and soldiers from

numerous states and lands of Napoleon's system, including the Kingdom of Italy and other allied or subordinate political units. The empire converts local sons, horses, taxes and roads into a single military project.

Greater state capacity means a greater capacity for public goods. It also means a greater capacity to mobilise for the wrong objective.

This is a morally important correction to technical admiration for the efficient state. Capacity is not the same thing as legitimacy. A well-organised order can still be a bad order.

10.3 The Italian peninsula: one geography, several states and several compulsory calendars

"Italy in 1812" resembles "Slovenia in 1812": culturally and geographically intelligible, politically divided. There is Napoleon's Kingdom of Italy, centred on Milan and governed by Eugène de Beauharnais as viceroy. There is the Kingdom of Naples under Joachim Murat. Parts of the former Papal States and the north-western peninsula are incorporated directly into the French Empire. Sicily remains under the Bourbons, outside Napoleon's direct control and strongly linked to British protection.

The Kingdom of Italy adopted French legal and administrative institutions, roads, courts and codes. At the same time, in 1812 it sent military units into the campaign in the Russian Empire; Eugène commanded the IV French-Italian Corps of the Grande Armée.

For an ordinary person, this is the essential paradox of Napoleonic modernisation.

Law can become more uniform. Administration more predictable. Feudal privileges can be restricted. And the very same state can move your body a thousand kilometres away more efficiently.

Modernity is therefore not a simple story of diminishing coercion. It is also a shift from local and personal coercion towards more standardised, territorial and functional coercion.

10.4 Spain: when the same state has two answers to the question of who is sovereign

Spain in 1812 lives inside a war of independence against Napoleonic rule and inside a constitutional revolution at the same time. Joseph Bonaparte sits on a throne given to him by the Napoleonic system; resistance and the Cortes at Cádiz invoke the absent Ferdinand VII while simultaneously transforming the very idea of sovereignty.

On 19 March 1812 the Cortes adopted the Constitution of Cádiz. Its political novelty was considerable: sovereignty was attributed to the nation, authority was to be divided, and a representative system received constitutional form. The state attempted to redesign itself in the middle of war.

This is almost the inverse of Tolstoy's problem with planning. The legal text is enormous in ambition. Its reach on the ground is uneven because part of the country is under French control, local authorities are divided, communication is wartime communication and legitimacy competes with itself.

A constitution is strongest when its rule can be translated into ordinary life. In Spain in 1812 it is still chiefly a promise, a programme and a weapon of legitimacy.

Yet its significance reaches across the Atlantic. Cádiz does not speak only to the peninsula. Its constitutional geography encompasses the Spanish monarchy on both sides of the ocean; for our comparison, what matters is that it therefore directly enters the political future of New Spain as well.

10.5 The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland: a state that finances war and measures work

Since 1801 the correct state name is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. "Great Britain" remains the geographical name of the island and a common shorthand for its political tradition, but for the state of 1812 we shall use the United Kingdom.

The kingdom is simultaneously waging a global maritime war against Napoleon's system, supporting land war on the Iberian Peninsula and, from June 1812, fighting the United States of America. Its power depends less on direct control of continental Europe and more on the Royal Navy, credit, taxation, trade and the ability to finance war over a long period.

The Royal Navy, however, needs men. The impressment of sailors is one of the principal American grievances before the War of 1812. Between 1793 and 1812 the number of men in the Royal Navy increased dramatically; a state protecting trade routes therefore built part of its naval capacity upon a very direct claim to sailors' bodies and time.

On land another conflict is developing. Luddite disturbances, which began in 1811 and spread strongly through Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire and Lancashire in 1812, are not a simple war of people against technology. Artisans and textile workers attack the use of machinery in circumstances where new technology alters wages, skill, bargaining power and rules of work. The state answers with troops and in 1812 makes machine-breaking a capital offence.

Thompson's problem of time acquires flesh here.

The machine does not merely measure time. It changes who can set the rhythm of work and how much an old skill is worth.

The United Kingdom is therefore, in our year, simultaneously a state of Parliament, credit and legal tradition and a state of war, naval coercion, social conflict and early industrial discipline. Modernity once again arrives in a bundle.

10.6 What the western arc adds to the comparison

Prussia shows that personal emancipation can arrive as a reform of state effectiveness.

The French Empire shows that administrative rationality can increase both legal uniformity and the capacity for mass mobilisation.

The Italian peninsula shows that legal modernisation and political dependence can inhabit the same institution.

Spain shows that a constitution and effective control are not the same thing.

The United Kingdom shows that war power can be built upon credit, navy, market and industrialisation while producing new domestic conflicts over labour and time.

The West in 1812 is not "more modern" in one direction. It is a denser laboratory of different ways in which old personal authority is being transformed into law, contract, office, market, machine and state capacity.

11. The United States of America in 1812: one republic, several regimes of freedom

In 1812 the state is the United States of America, or the USA. The term Union is appropriate when referring to the constitutional union of the states. Confederacy, however, is not the correct political name for the American South in 1812: the Articles of Confederation had ceased to govern with the new constitutional order in 1789, while the Confederate States of America would not be formed until 1861. The South in 1812 is part of the USA.

This terminological precision is substantive. The republic is one, but it does not contain a single regime of practical freedom.

If we were looking for a country that most effectively breaks apart the simple story of 'modern freedom', the United States around 1812 would be an almost ideal example.

The republic has a constitution, elections, a powerful rhetoric of individual liberty and an exceptionally dynamic market in land. At the same time, it contains hereditary racial slavery, a legally restricted position for married women, rapid settler expansion into the territories of Indigenous political communities, and major regional differences in economic life.

The 1810 census counts 7,239,881 inhabitants. Of these, 1,191,362 are enslaved people - about one sixth of the total population. The same republic therefore produces some of the most open opportunities for property among part of the white male population and one of the most total forms of legal control over the future of another part of the population.

The USA in 1812 is not one regime of freedom. It is a laboratory of several regimes under the same flag.

11.1 The Northeast: trade, farming and the beginnings of clocked work

The Northeast is still heavily agrarian and commercial, but the beginnings of industrial change are most visible here. Samuel Slater had established a successful mechanised cotton-spinning mill at Pawtucket in 1790. During the opening years of the nineteenth century smaller water-powered mills spread through New England. The mature Lowell system of large textile factories would come somewhat later, after 1814, but the transition is already visible.

In the farm household, much work follows the task, the season and the biological rhythm of production. In the mill, more tasks begin to synchronise with the machine, the division of labour and the common start of a process. This is a change in the density of synchronisation.

E. P. Thompson connected industrialisation with the transition from predominantly task-oriented work to the more exact discipline of measured time. His more important qualification, however, is that the transition is not binary. A small farm can be task-oriented as a whole while already containing a relationship between the person who allocates work and the person whose time is allocated. Hired labour, day wages, market deadlines and the coordination of several people create measured time before the industrial clock. Around 1812 the American Northeast therefore lies across overlapping regimes: spinning is being mechanised, much weaving remains household work, and the family is simultaneously a production unit and a supplier to a wider market.

Thompson's deeper contribution is moral. When time is separated from the concrete task and becomes a measurable interval, the way we judge a person changes as well. Lateness is no longer merely an unfortunate encounter with rain or an animal; it can become a sign of indiscipline. Punctuality becomes a virtue, and 'wasting time' a moral fault. Once the employer's time is clearly separated from the worker's, the clock does more than measure duration. It helps decide who is reliable, serious and worth paying.

Measuring time turns into measuring the person. An external timetable becomes an internal standard of self-discipline.

The factory does not invent discipline. It enlarges its reach and precision.

11.2 Embargo and war: the merchant discovers geopolitics

New England is closely connected to Atlantic trade. Jefferson's embargo of 1807 and later commercial measures were intended to protect American sovereignty from British and French interference, but they badly hurt regions whose economic lives depended upon shipping, exports, imports and credit.

For the merchant, foreign policy suddenly becomes local economics. The ship is idle. The sailor has no work. The goods have no buyer. Credit becomes a problem.

The War of 1812 deepens regional discontent. Federalist New England often opposes the war; the Hartford Convention of 1814 becomes the strongest expression of the feeling that a national decision does not distribute costs evenly.

This is an important lesson for Tolstoy's question of history. "The United States decides to go to war" is a politically correct sentence. But the decision has different local prices. National will is an aggregate, not a single psychology.

11.3 Northern freedom has its own limits

The Northeast is often contrasted with the South as a "free" region. The difference is fundamental, but the early republic still contains remnants of slavery in some northern states and a legal order in which a married woman, under the rules of coverture, does not possess the same independent property and contractual personality as an adult man.

Practical freedom is therefore unevenly distributed even within the Northeast. A white male farm owner. A hired labourer. A child in a spinning mill. A married woman. A free Black person. An enslaved person in a state that has not yet completed gradual emancipation.

All live in the same regional economy, but tomorrow does not have the same legal protection for each of them.

11.4 The South: property that includes a human being

In the American South the question of who owns tomorrow appears in its most brutal form.

Hereditary chattel slavery gives the owner a legal claim upon the labour of an enslaved human being and, to a very large extent, upon that person's movement, residence and family security. Slave codes restrict assembly, movement, education and numerous other possibilities. Sale can divide a family. A child is born into a status that he or she did not choose.

This approaches a total claim on the future more closely than most other relationships in our comparison.

For that reason, comparison with serfdom in the Russian Empire must be precise. Peter Kolchin has shown that the two systems can be compared as forms of unfree labour and economic domination, but they possess different legal, racial, familial and landed structures (Kolchin 1987). A serf in the Russian Empire could be deeply personally subordinated to a master; American chattel slavery, however, placed the person legally within a property regime with a powerfully racial and hereditary status. The differences are part of the mechanism, not a footnote.

11.5 Cotton: the machine that increases the value of coerced labour

After the 1790s the cotton gin greatly increases the efficiency of cleaning short-staple cotton. One might expect technology to reduce the need for labour. The economic effect is different: increased profitability expands acreage, production and demand for enslaved labour.

This is a lesson about technology. A machine does not determine its social consequence by itself.

Institutions determine who appropriates the gain, who supplies the labour and how production expands. **The same technology under a different property regime would produce a different society.**

11.6 The plantation as organisation and domain of power

A plantation is a productive organisation, a household and a domain of authority. An owner or overseer allocates labour, food, punishment, time and movement. Enslaved people nevertheless create their own family, religious, cultural and economic networks under repression. Their agency exists within an extraordinarily narrow formal space and appears in negotiation, slowing work, escape, care, community, preservation of knowledge and other forms of everyday action.

Subordination must therefore not be confused with the absence of action.

A person can act even within a system that almost entirely denies that person the right to choose the rules.

Precisely for that reason the cost of the system becomes more visible: an enormous quantity of human intelligence is spent on survival and navigating power rather than on freely choosing direction.

11.7 The West: land as exit

When we speak of the American “West” in 1812, we mean chiefly the country beyond the Appalachians, the Old Northwest, Kentucky, Tennessee and emerging settlements towards territories that the republic would only later incorporate more fully. This is not the later Pacific West.

For many white settlers, the West is a promise of exit. More land means the possibility of a farm of one's own.

A farm of one's own means less direct dependence on a landlord or an old local hierarchy.

Moving requires capital, labour, family and risk, but it can enlarge the material remainder. In his economic history of the early United States, Douglass North emphasised the transition from pioneer subsistence towards an ever wider market economy and regional specialisation (North 1961). In this story the West is a space in which land, transport and markets gradually transform the subsistence household into part of a national economy.

11.8 The federal state makes land legible

Land as opportunity requires a legal and surveying system. The Northwest Ordinance, land ordinances, survey grids and the sale of public land turn enormous expanses into measurable plots, contracts, tax units and future states.

This is the American version of Scott's legibility. Forest becomes section. Road becomes boundary. A parcel receives a number. A right becomes a deed. For the settler, this is security of property. For the state, it is governable space.

11.9 The empty parcel has a previous user

The greatest danger in the language of “free land” is that it erases the person who was already there.

For Shawnees, Miamis, Creeks and other Indigenous peoples, the western country is not unused land waiting for a surveyor. It is home, hunting ground, political geography, sacred landscape and the basis of the community's future.

The Northwest Ordinance promised “utmost good faith” towards Indigenous peoples and protection of their land, but the republic's actual expansion often proceeded through pressure, treaties made under unequal conditions, settlement and war. Tecumseh tried to build a broader Indigenous coalition because he correctly understood the mechanics of separate land cessions: if each community negotiates separately, common territory is broken into pieces.

Here the concept of exit reverses. For the settler, the West is an exit.

For the Indigenous community, that same exit for somebody else can mean its own loss of territory.

One person's freedom can be financed by reducing another person's future.

11.10 The War of 1812: the same year, another front

As Napoleon crosses the frontier of the Russian Empire, the United States goes to war with the United Kingdom. The causes include British interference with American trade, the impressment of sailors into the Royal Navy, questions of sovereignty, western expansion, relations with Indigenous nations and ambitions towards British Canada.

The war reveals the regional structure of the republic with great clarity. New England sees commercial damage and blockade.

Western politicians see British presence and Indigenous resistance as obstacles to expansion.

The South sees its interests through a different combination of trade, land and politics.

Indigenous communities read the war as a struggle for their own political future.

After Tecumseh's death in 1813, the prospect of a large Indigenous alliance in the Old Northwest diminishes sharply. In the South, the defeat of the Creek insurgent faction known as the Red Sticks at Horseshoe Bend and the Treaty of Fort Jackson force the Creek to cede more than twenty million acres of land. The war therefore ends without major formal changes to the US-British boundary, but with major consequences for the internal geography of power.

As in Tolstoy, the greatest consequence may lie elsewhere than on the official peace map.

12. New Spain in 1812: Mexico between Spain, the USA and the European war

In this chapter I use Mexico as a present-day geographical orientation. The political unit in 1812 is the Viceroyalty of New Spain. The distinction is useful because the territory of present-day Mexico stands at the intersection of four dynamics: Spain's war in Europe, the crisis of Spanish authority in New Spain, American territorial expansion, and emerging contacts between Mexican insurgents and the United States.

New Spain in 1812 is not a distant appendix to European history. It is a place where European war, imperial legitimacy and North American expansion meet in the same calendar.

12.1 Spain and Europe: an empire defending itself at home

After the French invasion of 1808, the Spanish monarchy is in crisis. Ferdinand VII is a prisoner, while the war against Napoleon's French Empire demands an army, money and political improvisation. In the midst of war, the Cortes at Cádiz attempts to create a new foundation of legitimacy and on 19 March 1812 adopts a constitution that speaks the language of national sovereignty, representation and the separation of powers.

Across the Atlantic this does not travel as a pure idea. In Europe Spain fights alongside the United Kingdom against Napoleon; in June 1812 the United States goes to war with that very United Kingdom. The same Atlantic space is therefore composed of intersecting alliances: Spain needs British power in Europe, the USA confronts British power, and New Spain must determine from afar which Spanish authority is legitimate and how much capacity it still has to enforce its commands.

When the centre is fighting for its own survival, the periphery does not merely receive less control. It receives more room for competing visions of the future.

12.2 New Spain: insurgency, constitution and several futures at once

The insurgency begun by Miguel Hidalgo in 1810 does not end with his defeat. By 1812 José María Morelos is already a central military and political figure. For an inhabitant of New Spain, therefore, the options are not simply 'Spain' or 'independence'. Restored royal order, the constitutional monarchy of Cádiz, local corporate and estate rights, and different insurgent visions of the political future are all present at once.

This is almost a laboratory of inner and collective conflict. A person may privately doubt royal authority while depending on it for an official post. One may support the constitution but fear the insurgency. One may sympathise with the insurgency but be counselled to caution by family, trade or local position. Thought, interest, identity and action do not align automatically.

12.3 Cuautla: politics translated into water, bread and time

The siege of Cuautla between February and May 1812 shows what happens when a dispute about legitimacy is translated into physical mechanics. Morelos fortifies the town, gathers supplies and organises its defence.

Royalist forces under Félix María Calleja besiege and bombard it and try to cut off the water supply. A political idea becomes a question of how many days a community can endure, who carries food, who stands guard, who risks a life, and who still believes that tomorrow the order for which sacrifice is made today will still exist.

In a besieged town, a great political word contracts into very small units: a litre of water, a piece of bread, a cartridge, an hour of sleep and a neighbour's trust.

12.4 The USA and the Spanish frontier: when official policy is not the only player

Relations between Spain and the USA are already tense in 1812 over the boundaries of Louisiana and Florida. American expansion after the Louisiana Purchase raised the question of where American space ended and Spanish space began; in Florida, American state interests became entangled with local rebels and military interventions. To the west, Spanish Texas becomes a place where Mexican insurgent aims meet American volunteers, private ambitions and a state policy that is not entirely unified.

The Gutiérrez-Magee expedition of 1812-13 is a good example. José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara seeks support in the United States and then, together with Augustus Magee and a group of American and Mexican participants, enters Spanish Texas. This is not simply an official war of the USA against Spain. It is a frontier in which individuals, local officials, merchants, volunteers and political projects create an effect that no capital fully controls.

Tolstoy would recognise such a frontier. The state has a policy, but history also arises in the space between command, toleration, private interest and local improvisation.

12.5 North's Atlantic problem: rules that cross the ocean

Douglass North compared British and Spanish institutional legacies in the Americas to show how formal rules, informal norms and modes of enforcement create different development paths. His question is more useful than a hasty civilisational judgement: which rules reduce uncertainty enough for people to invest in the future, and which reward chiefly access to authority, privilege or protected rents?

New Spain in 1812 also shows the limit of that comparison. Institutions are not suitcases that an empire simply carries across an ocean. On arrival they encounter local society, old rights, distance, conflict, religion, economic interests and new political ideas. The same Spanish constitution therefore cannot have exactly the same practical life in Cádiz and in New Spain.

12.6 What Mexico adds to the question of 1812

The Russian Empire in 1812 shows how a large centre can mobilise people and space against an external attack. New Spain shows the reverse danger: the centre is itself at war and in a crisis of legitimacy, and the question of authority therefore opens outwards. Who represents the sovereign? Which constitution applies? Who collects dues? Who organises defence? Who can count on help across the frontier?

At the same time a North American triangle emerges. Spain fights Napoleon's French Empire in Europe and relies on the United Kingdom. The USA fights the United Kingdom and presses upon Spanish borderlands. Insurgents in New Spain seek contact and support in the United States. None of these connections is sufficient on its own to explain the outcome, but together they show how a local Monday can be altered by a decision made on the other side of an ocean.

The international system is not background scenery to everyday life. In a year of crisis it enters the price of goods, the route of a courier, the validity of a document, the security of a frontier and the probability that the same office will still exist tomorrow.

13. North meets Tolstoy: the rules of the game and life on a Monday

Douglass North and Leo Tolstoy come from different worlds. One is an economist of institutions, the other a novelist. One seeks an analytical framework for economic change through time; the other punctures the confidence of any framework that simplifies the human being too quickly.

Together they are useful precisely because they correct each other.

13.1 North explains why rules matter

North's basic idea is simple and stronger than it first appears: institutions are the rules of the game — formal rules, informal norms and the way they are enforced — while organisations are the players. A lordship, village, church, merchant house, army, political party or company operates within rules while also trying to change them when doing so would improve its position.

If a system rewards rent-seeking, capable people will invest in rent-seeking.

If it rewards trade, they will build trading organisations. If property is secure, the time horizon for investment lengthens.

If authority is unpredictable, personal connections and short-term gain become more valuable.

This is a powerful explanation of regional differences in 1812.

Here a feedback loop arises that is essential to history. Institutions determine which skills and organisations pay. Organisations then invest in knowledge, connections and capacities that help them survive. When they become powerful enough, they try to alter the institutions. Rules create players, and players gradually reshape the rules.

An institution is therefore not a fence around society. It is part of its engine.

13.2 Tolstoy explains why a rule is never the whole of life

An institution sets an incentive. A human being must perceive it. This is where Tolstoy enters.

People act with incomplete information, emotions, bodies, habits and mental models of the world. In his later work North emphasises that individuals interpret the same information through cultural inheritance, local problems, previous experience and acquired knowledge. Tolstoy shows us what such a model looks like inside a person: fear, pride, trust, shame, family memory and an expectation of what will follow an action.

A rule can say that something is in a person's interest. Pride can prevent the person from doing it. Family changes the calculation. Faith changes the acceptable option. Fear changes the probability a person subjectively sees. Institutions therefore do not produce behaviour automatically. They produce a field of probabilities.

Two societies with the same formal rule can therefore develop differently. If people do not trust the rule because of earlier experience, they will use it differently. If organisations invest in circumventing the rule, the rule acquires another practical life. If feedback about consequences arrives slowly or ambiguously, a false model of the world can survive for a very long time.

13.3 The rules of the game are not written only in a code

For a serf in the Russian Empire, the master's habit is also a rule. For the Styrian farmer, local custom. For the New England merchant, credit reputation. For an enslaved person, the combination of law, violence and the owner's practice.

For the American settler, the survey system, contract, local community and the military security of the frontier.

For a member of an Indigenous nation, the rules of his or her own political community and, at the same time, an increasingly powerful external system that understands land differently.

An institution is therefore broader than the state.

The state is only one of the organisations that create and enforce rules.

13.4 Path dependence: why the past remains in the future

North's concept of path dependence explains why a society does not change completely when it changes a law. Old investments, organisations, habits, knowledge and relationships remain; complementarities and network effects also grow among them. Once many people, assets and bodies of knowledge are adapted to one way of operating, change becomes more expensive even when the new possibility is better on paper.

A lord loses one right. The size of his estate remains. A state border changes. Local languages and networks remain. A new constitution is introduced. Unequal initial distributions of land and capital remain. The international slave trade is prohibited. The domestic slave regime and the economic incentive of cotton remain. That is why history is so persistent.

Institutions do not travel through time alone. They are carried by people, organisations, property, knowledge and beliefs. North therefore stresses learning: society tries to reduce uncertainty through models of the world, and those models are stored in language, custom, myth, professional knowledge and organisational routine. Path dependence is also memory that has acquired infrastructure.

13.5 Tolstoy adds the microfoundation of the path

What is path dependence in a single person's life? Habit. Reputation. A family story. A fear that once proved useful. The way a father dealt with the lord. The way a mother bargains at the market. Memory of war. A belief that authority is not safe to trust.

Tolstoy shows how large institutional paths are stored in small human reactions. Microhistory and macrohistory are therefore the same process under two magnifications.

13.6 Knowledge that migrates: know-how and the horizon of the possible

North's later institutional theory uses better language than bare 'information': it speaks of skills, knowledge, learning and mental models. This matters in migration as well. A person does not carry only hands and labour power into a new environment. He carries a way of doing something, experience with tools, a feel for the sequence of work, a network of acquaintances, an idea of good procedure and, above all, a list of solutions he already knows to be possible.

In the old, more densely hierarchical world, a capable craftsman, technician or assistant may be constrained by his place in a guild, firm, administration or army. We can picture the mechanism in canal construction: a person who in Europe, as a junior assistant, observed surveying, embankments, locks, the supply of materials and the allocation of work crews may, in an environment short of experienced personnel, take responsibility for an entire section or a much larger part of a project. He did not become more intelligent on the ship across the Atlantic. What changed was the value of his practical knowledge, the scope of his task, and the horizon of what others would permit him even to attempt.

This matters especially to the story of the American West and transport, but we must remain precise about time. Large canal projects and larger immigrant flows from the United Kingdom, Ireland and the German lands accelerate chiefly after 1812. Construction of the Erie Canal begins in 1817. In 1812, therefore, we are not describing an already completed world of canals, but the institutional and demographic conditions from which that world will emerge over the following decades.

When a new road or canal lowers the cost of travel between the eastern market and what was then the West, it changes more than transport prices. It changes the horizon of the possible. Land that was too distant for

profitable sale of its produce becomes part of the market. Knowledge that was an auxiliary skill in Europe can become the organisational core of a project in the new setting. North's emphasis on incentives can therefore be extended: institutions determine not only what is worth doing, but which knowledge will have the opportunity to become leading knowledge at all.

Migration is therefore not an exit from a culture of expectations into empty space. A migrant exchanges one set of expectations for another: land law, the market, family obligations, religious community, credit, local reputation and, at a frontier, violence and political uncertainty as well. The difference may be that the new order has not yet hardened every position. A person may therefore renegotiate his role. In doing so, an entrepreneur organises not only capital and labour but also sets an expectation for others that a road, canal, settlement or enterprise will still exist tomorrow; with a surveyor, deed and rule, the state turns the same future into something on which more people can rely. New freedom therefore does not arise from the absence of expectations, but from the possibility that their distribution and one's own place within them can still be changed.

Migration moves more than people. It moves know-how, confidence and the boundary of what a community can imagine as feasible.

14. Family, women and the invisible economy of everyday life

If we reduce the economic history of 1812 to land, trade, taxes and production, we lose the system that reproduces the capacity to work every day.

That system is the household.

14.1 Reproductive labour is productive infrastructure

Someone must prepare food. Care for a child. Nurse the sick. Clean and mend clothes. Preserve seed and stores. Process milk, grain, wool or flax. Maintain relationships that will become a network of help in misfortune.

Historically, much of this work fell to women and was often not visible as an independent economic category.

But production needs the next working day. Reproductive labour prepares it.

14.2 The Russian noblewoman and the peasant wife

With an aristocratic woman Tolstoy can show a broad emotional life and, at the same time, the very real limits of her social space. Marriage, family name and property shape her possibilities. For a peasant woman the economy is tied still more directly to labour and survival.

The difference between them is enormous.

What they share is society's expectation that both reproduce relationships and household life.

One does so with servants and greater material room. The other with far less reserve.

14.3 New England: household production inside a market system

In the northeastern United States around 1812, the textile market still relies heavily on household labour. Spinning is moving into water-powered mills while weaving and other tasks remain dispersed. A woman working at home is therefore not outside the market. The market enters the household through raw material, piecework, the sale of surplus and consumption.

This is an important transition.

Work remains domestic in space and becomes increasingly commercial in purpose.

The later industrial factory will alter this relationship: the person will increasingly have to go to the machine and to its timetable.

14.4 The American South: family under property risk

For an enslaved woman or man, the family is additionally vulnerable because the law permits the owner to sell people. An intimate relationship has no complete protection from an economic transaction. A child can be a loved member of a family and at the same time be entered in the property system as somebody else's asset.

This is an extreme form of the fusion of economy and human status.

Families nevertheless create their own bonds, rituals, memories and strategies. Their resilience is an answer to a system that can divide them.

14.5 The West: family as a migration enterprise

Settlement in the West often requires family organisation. Travel, building a house, clearing land, sowing, caring for children and animals and producing basic goods form a project in which the line between "economic" and "domestic" work is almost artificial.

Family is capital in the form of cooperation.

It is also a risk, because the illness of one member changes the burden on all the others.

14.6 Child mortality and a different relationship to risk

High child mortality does not mean shallow love.

It means life in which bereavement is more frequent and the future composition of the household less predictable.

This is demographic uncertainty experienced as personal pain. Statistics smooth it into a rate. The family lives it with a name.

15. Twelve tomorrows: a comparison of ordinary lives

We can now compress the comparison into a single day. Not because twelve figures could represent everyone who lived in 1812, but because the same questions become visible when we bring them close enough to the individual.

15.1 A private serf in the central Russian Empire

In the morning he first looks at the weather. Then he decides not only what his own field needs. His day already contains the lord, estate obligations, village, family and the possibility of military mobilisation. Land is the basis of his life and at the same time part of the system of subordination. Real estate is small, the master's personal power large, and reserve determines how many bad weeks the household can absorb.

His tomorrow is divided before it begins.

15.2 A peasant on the Right Bank of present-day Ukraine

His world is even more layered. He lives under the supreme authority of the Russian Empire, perhaps beneath a Polish or Polonised landed elite, within a Ukrainian village community and within his own religious network. The state frontier changed faster than local property.

For him, empire is not necessarily the same person as the master. Power arrives in layers.

15.3 A Ukrainian peasant in Galicia

On the other side of the imperial frontier is a Ukrainian peasant in Galicia under the Austrian Empire. Austrian administration regulates the relationship between lord and peasant more strongly, while church and local community remain crucial.

His position shows how a related language and culture can coexist with different rules of the game.

A national map does not by itself determine the price of exit.

15.4 A small farmer in eastern Styria in the Austrian Empire

Landed obligations remain, but personal legal subordination is less deep than in the classic serf relation of the Russian Empire. The state knows him by house number, parish register, military record and increasingly by parcel. From 1 January 1812 the ABGB in part of the Austrian lands legally emphasises human personality and innate rights.

His problem is material: a small holding, seasonal time, family and limited reserve.

More legal personality does not yet mean abundant free capital.

15.5 A Prussian peasant after the reforms

On paper he is personally free. The October Edict abolished hereditary subjection, while the regulation of 1811 opens the path to converting peasant holdings into property in return for compensation to former lords.

That is precisely why his Monday is interesting. Freedom has already been written down; material settlement is still in progress.

The law has opened the door. The question is how much land and debt a person carries through it.

15.6 A household in the Napoleonic French-Italian system

A son can be a citizen of a state with more standardised law than his grandparents knew and at the same time a soldier in an army moving towards Moscow. The prefecture, the conscription list and the road are parts of the same state capacity that can issue civil acts and mobilise bodies.

Modern paper does not abolish coercion. It changes its organisation.

For an Italian family in the Kingdom of Italy, the campaign in the Russian Empire can be a French geopolitical plan and the very local absence of a son.

15.7 A textile worker in the United Kingdom

He may be a skilled weaver or stockinger in Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire or Lancashire. His problem is not merely the machine. The problem is that the machine changes the value of skill, control over rhythm, wages and bargaining power. If he takes part in machine-breaking, in 1812 he can face the severest punishment of the state.

For him, industrialisation is not a productivity graph. It is the question of whether an old skill will still buy tomorrow's supper.

15.8 A New England farming or artisan family in the USA

Compared with most European dependants, the family has wide scope for contract, property and local political participation. But war with the United Kingdom changes trade, credit, insurance and maritime risk. Early industrialisation is already altering the relationship between household time and factory time.

Its freedom is real. It is not isolated from geopolitics.

15.9 An enslaved person in the American South

His or her legal position is the deepest negative of our measure. Another person possesses a legal claim to this person's labour, mobility, family life and, in the extreme, the sale of his or her body as property.

The republic speaks the language of liberty. This person's calendar exists inside another person's property regime.

That contrast is not a marginal anomaly. It is a constituent part of the American political economy of 1812.

15.10 A white settler in the western USA

He sees land as an exit from old hierarchy. Survey grid, land office and federal title allow him to convert mobility into property. Yet the freedom of his exit is partly built on the political and military capacity of the state to open for settlement territory that he sees as a parcel of the future.

His door opens on land that is already somebody else's home.

15.11 A member of an Indigenous nation in the Old Northwest

His political community possesses its own law, diplomacy, memory and territory. For him, the War of 1812 is part of the larger question whether the expansion of the United States will destroy the material basis of that political autonomy. Alliance with the United Kingdom or Tecumseh's confederative vision are not exotic additions to the American story. They are strategies of survival in a space where an alien system of property is advancing towards his home.

What is "the West" to one person is the centre of the world to another.

15.12 An inhabitant of New Spain in the midst of insurgency

He or she may live in a town under royal administration, in the countryside under the shadow of insurgent movements, or in a place where political control changes hands. The Constitution of Cádiz promises a new language of political belonging, while Morelos speaks of another future. Food, taxes, local security and troop movements remain more immediate than constitutional theory.

The problem is not only who is right. The problem is whose rule will actually be enforced tomorrow.

15.13 What the twelve Mondays show

The differences are enormous. One person has legal personality, another is a legal object of property. One possesses land as support, another cultivates it under a lord, a third receives it through a state settlement project, and a fourth loses it because of that same project. One lives under an emperor, another under a constitution, another under both at once, another in a space where a new constitution is still searching for a state capable of enforcing it.

Yet the same questions return.

How much of your own time can you allocate? Who can alter your plan? What does exit cost you? What information about your life travels to the centre? Who bears the risk of a bad decision? What can you lose if you object? And what remains after you have met all obligations?

Here the principal result of the comparison appears. Freedom is not one institution and not one word in a constitution. It is a composite capacity produced by law, property, time, voice, security, mobility, family relations and the ability to survive a mistake.

16. Freedom as practical capacity

After all these comparisons, the historical cases themselves allow us to sharpen the definition of freedom. **Freedom is not one right. It is a system of alternative paths.**

16.1 Exit

Can a person leave? A serf in the Russian Empire has very limited exit.

An enslaved person in the American South has exit almost exclusively through escape, manumission or exceptional circumstances.

A small farmer in the Austrian Empire has greater personal legal mobility, but land, family and the economy still bind him strongly.

The white American settler has, by comparison, broad geographical mobility.

Exit changes bargaining power even when a person does not use it.

A door through which you can leave changes the conversation inside the room.

16.2 Voice

If exit is impossible or too expensive, it matters whether a person can influence the rules.

A village community provides certain forms of voice. An appeal procedure in a reformed monarchy provides another.

Republican politics gives political voice to part of the adult male population while excluding others.

An enslaved person has no formal political voice but creates informal forms of influence and resistance.

Voice is therefore more than a ballot. It is the possibility that your information returns into decision-making.

16.3 Portability

What can a person take along when changing position?

If a servant who leaves also loses shelter, food, a reference and a social network, exit is expensive.

If a peasant who moves loses rights to land and local common resources, mobility is constrained.

If a merchant can transfer capital, knowledge and network to another town, his exit is stronger.

Portability converts formal possibility into real possibility.

16.4 Security

A person needs the capacity to survive transition. One bad year need not mean the end of the household. One illness need not destroy all other roles.

In 1812 such security is chiefly private: land, stores, kin, community and property. Much later, the modern welfare state will collectivise part of this risk.

That is why reserve is politically important. It gives a person time to say “no”.

16.5 Time

Time is a special component because it enables the use of all the others.

A right of appeal is worth less if a person has neither the time nor the means for the procedure.

A right to move is worth less if every day is consumed by bare survival.

Property is less secure if one delay can immediately destroy it.

Temporal sovereignty means enough predictable room for a person to shape a sequence of actions rather than merely react to the nearest necessity.

16.6 Ownership and durable support

Land, a house, tools or savings reduce the number of domains in which a person must ask another for permission.

But ownership has two faces. Dispersed ownership can increase autonomy. Concentrated ownership can create a gatekeeper.

The American West and the American South show both at once: property can free a white farmer from an old hierarchy while, under slavery, including another human being inside the object of property.

16.7 Failure without erasure

The deepest test of freedom is often what happens after a mistake.

A noble with a large estate can lose money at cards and still remain in society.

A small farmer can fall below subsistence after losing livestock. A settler can lose a crop through illness and need community assistance. An enslaved person can suffer corporal punishment or sale for a “mistake”.

A freer system is one in which defeat in one function does not erase the person from all the others.

17. What 1812 tells us about the transition to modernity

The year 1812 is neither the beginning of modernity nor the end of the old world. It is an exceptionally good intermediate station.

Old personal relations of authority are still very much alive. States are already building much more impersonal machines.

17.1 From person to function

In a seigneurial world, power is often attached to person, land and status. In a more modern state, functions become increasingly separated from the private household of the person who holds office. In his ideal type of bureaucracy, Max Weber emphasises fixed jurisdictions, a hierarchy of offices, general rules and expert training - above all, the distinction between an office and the person who currently occupies it. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* he shows another side of the same shift: an external command can gradually become the internal discipline of vocation, time and systematic conduct of life (Weber, Slovene ed. 1988).

The judicial function separates from the property interest. The office becomes more durable than the official. The army standardises rank. The state standardises fiscal and population records. Contract gradually replaces part of status relations. This is a civilisational shift because it limits personal arbitrariness.

When official activity, files and the means of office are no longer the official's personal property, authority gains continuity without the inheritance of office. A successor can take over the file, jurisdiction and procedure without inheriting the previous holder's private house. This is one of the crucial shifts from personal master to impersonal function.

Here Weber's important paradox appears. An order may historically arise from a powerful religious or political conviction, yet its procedures can survive the original motive. A person later works in a disciplined way not because he repeats the theology of his forebears, but because vocation, market, office and reputation are already organised around discipline. The idea may weaken while its organisational trace remains.

The most durable institution is not necessarily the one in which everyone fervently believes. It is often the one around which so many everyday paths have already been built that people repeat it even without the original reason.

The official is replaceable. The office is meant to remain.

At the same time this means that a person begins to be governed by more institutions, each within its own sphere.

17.2 From local memory to data

The village priest or neighbour knows the story. The register knows the category.

Local knowledge contains context and is difficult to transfer. Data contains less context and has greater reach. Scott's legibility therefore does not mean that the centre knows more than the local inhabitant. The centre knows fewer things in a standard form that can travel. The modern state grows together with its ability to convert part of a person, land and obligation into an administratively legible category.

House number. Surname. Parcel. Age. Status. Military capacity. Every category loses part of reality and gains a great deal of governability for the centre.

What is simpler for the state can be more abstract for the person who lives inside the category.

17.3 From status to contract

A contract can limit an obligation to a specified object, time and relationship. A person who sells labour remains a legal person outside the contractual relationship, which is a major difference from a status that defines his or her position from birth. But the European history of wage labour shows that contract alone does not yet guarantee broad exit.

Jane Whittle and Thijs Lambrecht's comparative study of labour laws between roughly 1350 and 1850 shows how states and local regimes continued, even after the weakening of serfdom, to regulate length of service, termination of contracts, mobility, pay, compulsory service and the treatment of people without settled employment. The historical transition is therefore described more accurately as a movement from one bundle of dependencies into a more contractual, but still regulated, field.

The legal person appears before the completely free labour market. Yet 1812 shows that the transition is uneven. In the American Northeast the labour market and contract are gaining importance.

In the American South a large part of the labour force remains in the hereditary status of slavery.

In the Russian Empire, serf status remains central.

In the Austrian lands personal subjection is diminishing while landed obligations remain.

Modernity is therefore not a single train arriving everywhere at the same hour.

It is a multitude of transitions among different regimes.

17.4 From subject to citizen — and from invisible to measurable

Citizenship promises the right to participate in a political community. But the citizen is also a much more extensively recorded subject. Modern rights require proof.

A pension will later require a record of contributions. An election a register of voters. Property a land register. A social right a category of eligibility.

Liberation from the personal master therefore does not mean the disappearance of organisation. It means a transition towards more divided, formalised and supervised forms of authority.

This is one of the greatest advances of modern society.

Its permanent task is to prevent separate functions from sticking together again into a single gatekeeper.

17.5 When a system outlives its own belief

A system can begin to stagnate before it formally breaks. People may lose faith in its promise of the future, while organisations continue to carry out old procedures because their investments, careers, rights, debts and

expectations have been built around them. North understands this as path dependence: the existing institutional matrix is simultaneously a constraint and the basis on which organisations survive. Change is therefore not only a question of whether a new proposal is better, but of who can survive the transition to it.

Žižek adds an uncomfortable psychological possibility: an order can function even when people no longer believe in it naively. An individual may mock a measure, a form or an ideology and still reproduce it every day. Weber shows how an impersonal procedure continues without personal belief. Fromm shows why the uncertainty of exit encourages the search for safety in conformity. Reich shows how a small share of authority gives a person a reason to defend an order even when it constrains him from above. Marx, meanwhile, warns that social relations can appear as objective necessities of things, prices and contracts.

Together these produce an equilibrium without enthusiasm. People do not repeat the system because they all believe in its future, but because each expects others still to use it tomorrow. The clerk completes the form because the next office will require the form. The worker optimises a measure he regards as pointless because he will be judged by it. A firm follows a rule because market access depends on it. A citizen accepts a procedure because he cannot see a sufficiently credible path by which he himself might change it.

Such an order can persist for a long time on low expectations. Its weakness appears when enough people lose not only belief, but also the expectation that others will continue; or when a new organisation, technology, leader, migration option or institution makes another path credible. The horizon of the possible then expands, and a change that seemed unrealistic yesterday can very quickly become the new normal.

The hardest fetter is not necessarily the belief that a system is good. It may be the shared expectation that there will still be no other system tomorrow.

18. What Tolstoy can see that a table cannot — and what a table sees that Tolstoy cannot

After a long comparison, we must test our instrument as well.

Tolstoy is an extraordinary observer of the human being. He is not a census. His image of the Russian Empire is built around noble families and a world he knew well. Peasants are present, but we often see them through the moral and literary optics of an educated aristocrat. Karataev is a powerful literary figure, not the average peasant of the Russian Empire.

A historical table can correct our scale. It can tell us how many people lived in a given status; what rights existed; how long military service lasted; what share of the American population was enslaved; where reforms were introduced; which region had a different land regime. But a table does not see the moment when a person feels shame. It does not see the face change. It does not see the feeling when news of a death enters a house.

It does not see that the same tax has a different psychological meaning for a person with reserves and for a person without them.

We need both. Literature without historiography can too quickly turn a character into a representative human being. Historiography without human interiority can too quickly turn a human being into a category. A good essay must breathe between the two.

18.1 The limit of national psychology

Tolstoy speaks of Russian spirit, patriotism and the people. The year 1812 did indeed create a powerful common symbol. But the empire contains different regions, languages, faiths and statuses. A Russian in a St Petersburg salon, a private serf in a central governorate and a Cossack descendant on the Left Bank do not inhabit the same institutional life.

Similarly, “American” in 1812 does not tell us enough.

A New England merchant, an enslaved woman in Virginia, a settler in Ohio and a Shawnee person live in different political realities of the same geographical project.

Nation is an important level of identity. It is not the smallest unit of explanation.

18.2 The boundary of rational interest and the horizon of the possible

North helps us understand incentives. Tolstoy reminds us, however, that people do not perceive every incentive correctly or weigh them coolly. Ideologies, myths, faith, shame and false beliefs alter perceived advantage. More importantly, a person does not choose among all options that objectively exist, but among those that his or her mental model recognises as possible at all.

North's later institutional theory therefore moves from the simple economic actor towards beliefs and learning. A mental model is not merely an opinion about the world; it is a map that determines which paths a person can see. The old world may teach someone that the highest role open to him is that of an assistant. Migration, war, reform or contact with another institution may show that the same skill elsewhere opens a substantially wider position. Ignorance is therefore often a limited horizon, not an empty head.

Tolstoy specialises in the moment when the model is wrong - and in the moment when a person already senses the error but still lacks the language, courage or path to act upon the new insight.

18.3 The limit of mechanics

The metaphor of forces is useful until it turns the human being into an object. People understand, interpret and alter rules. They can resist, cooperate, lie, improvise and create a new institution.

Social gravity is therefore not a law of nature. It is a habit stable enough for people to experience it as natural.

Politics arises precisely here: at the moment when somebody realises that the rule is human work and can be changed.

19. Conclusion: have we found the ordinary person of 1812?

At the outset we set ourselves four tasks. We wanted to understand human motive, the institutions that shape the possibility of action, the economic reserve that determines the price of error, and the mechanics through which millions of local actions become history. We then carried the same measure from Tolstoy's Russian Empire to the Ukrainian lands, into the Austrian Empire and the Illyrian Provinces, through Prussia, the French Empire, the Italian lands, Spain and the United Kingdom, and across the Atlantic to the USA and New Spain in the territory of present-day Mexico.

Have we reached the ordinary person? Not one single person. But we have reached a better method for finding that person.

The 'ordinary person' has proved to be a dangerously large category. A privately owned serf and a nobleman in the Russian Empire are contemporaries, but their practical futures cannot be compared without further qualification. A Ukrainian peasant in Galicia and a Ukrainian peasant on the Right Bank of the Dniro may belong to the same broader cultural space while living under different rules. A Slovene-speaking peasant in Carniola under the Illyrian Provinces and a small farmer in eastern Styria belong to the same broader cultural space but live under different administrative regimes. A Prussian peasant may be personally free before the question of his land has been fully settled. A Spanish constitution may proclaim national sovereignty in a state much of which is in the midst of war. The USA may simultaneously expand a settler's freedom of property and legally protect a slaveholder's claim over another human being. New Spain, in the same year, can contain old

imperial administration, the Cádiz Constitution, armed insurgency and growing pressure from the North American frontier.

The first thing worth keeping, therefore, is the measure.

When we look at the past, let us ask: Who can claim time? Who can claim the result of labour? Who bears the risk? Who has an exit? Who can object? What can a person take with them if they leave? Who decides which name and category are assigned to them? What happens after a mistake?

These questions do not replace history. They help take it apart into mechanisms.

19.1 Did we fulfil the promise of the introduction?

In the introduction I promised that we would reduce the great event to the human being and then place the human being back inside large institutions. I think that promise has survived the test — with one important correction.

We began as though we were going to compare life in different states. We ended by finding that the state alone is not a good enough unit. We need household, status, gender, property, faith, local law, market, army and position in a network. We also need historical precision in names. 'Russia', 'Austria', 'America' and 'Italy' can be useful shorthand, but 1812 requires the Russian Empire, the Austrian Empire, the United States of America, New Spain and the politically divided Italian lands. For the Ukrainian lands, our purpose is served by one clear and consistent designation: Ukrainians living under different imperial regimes.

The first self-reflection is therefore methodological: the more precise we became, the less useful one large label became.

That is a good sign. The essay has not succeeded if our initial model has remained untouched. It has succeeded if the model has improved.

19.2 What we have learnt about Tolstoy

Tolstoy gave us the strongest part of the method: human interiority and historical structure are not two separate stories. A soldier's fear is logistical information when it causes a unit to break. An aristocrat's pride is economic information when it makes a family spend more than it has. A peasant's distrust is institutional information when it makes a reform fail. Love is political-economic information when it changes marriage, inheritance or alliance. The body is political information when the state conscripts it.

Tolstoy's criticism of the great man has survived, but in a more precise form. Leaders possess real power. They alter probabilities, allocate resources, establish objectives and can set catastrophic processes in motion. Yet their power travels through a system they do not control in full.

Responsibility and limited control can therefore be true at the same time.

That matters today as well. The claim that no one fully controls a complex system is not an excuse for the person who chose the objective, initiated the process or ignored warnings.

19.3 What we have learnt about institutions

North helped us see that motives always meet the rules of the game. Institutions are not merely laws but formal rules, informal norms and enforcement; organisations learn within them, invest in knowledge and then exert pressure on the rules. The key addition in this revision is the horizon of the possible: people and organisations respond not only to prices and sanctions, but to what their past knowledge and experience allow them to imagine as feasible at all.

Scott shows the other half. A large state or organisation must simplify complex reality in order to administer it. Cadastre, house number, department, conscription list, tax class and statistic are forms of power because they make part of the world transferable.

Weber adds a third transformation: the office separates from the person. The function is meant to outlive its holder. The file remains when the official leaves. That limits personal arbitrariness and enables continuity.

Whittle and Lambrecht prevent an overly smooth story. A personal serf bond can weaken while labour is still not necessarily “free” in the modern sense. Service, mobility, contract and people without property remain regulated and sometimes coercively disciplined.

Modernity is therefore not the disappearance of power. It is its differentiation, formalisation and often its increased reach.

19.4 What we have learnt about time

Thompson is useful precisely because he spoils the simple tale. The agrarian world is not a world without discipline, and the industrial world is not the first to invent it. Peasant, servant, serf and soldier already live under different regimes of other people's time. Industry increases measurability and synchronisation.

The factory does not invent discipline. It enlarges its reach and precision.

From here we can better understand my metaphor of a “subscription to somebody else's calendar”. Corvée, military service, domestic service, the factory shift and the modern calendar are not the same institution. They are connected by a narrower question: who may decide when a particular part of your time is available to somebody else, and under what conditions can you say no?

That formulation is firmer than an equation among historical statuses.

19.5 What we learnt about the Ukrainian lands

The Ukrainian chapter forced the essay into a second kind of self-discipline: the same historical space does not mean the same institutional position. Ukrainians on the Right Bank, Left Bank, in the south and in Galicia in 1812 did not live under one administration, so their everyday lives cannot be explained by a single state label.

The same people can live under different rules. Over time, different rules create different habits, risks and possibilities of exit.

For this essay, that matters more than historical nomenclature. Crossing an imperial frontier can change the court, the land regime, the tax route, military obligation, church organisation and the price of objection even when the language spoken in the house does not change.

The political map shows who is at the top. The institutional map shows who arrives in the farmyard.

19.6 What we have learnt about wealth

We began wealth as a question of land, grain and money. We ended with time.

Property buys reserve. Reserve buys the ability to wait. Waiting improves bargaining power. Bargaining power enlarges the possibility of exit.

Inequality is therefore also a difference in the number of futures a person can try without being erased by the first mistake.

A noble can afford the wrong evening. A small farmer may be unable to afford the wrong week. An enslaved person can pay for an owner's will even without making any mistake at all. An Indigenous community can lose its future because of a land system it did not choose. A worker can lose the value of a skill because the organisation of production has changed the measure of efficiency.

This is a deeper economics than asking who owns more things.

19.7 What is worth remembering when we look at the present

In legal, political and material terms, people today are in many respects substantially freer than most people in 1812. Functions of authority are more separated. Legal protection is broader. Physical coercion is far more

constrained. Political participation is wider. Education, medicine, communication and mobility have enlarged the range of possible lives.

For that very reason we can apply a stricter measure today.

It is no longer enough to ask whether we are allowed to leave. We can ask whether we can afford to leave. It is not enough to possess the right to object. We can ask whether the system hears us. It is not enough to be the formal owner of our own time. We can ask how much of it has already been allocated among work, debt, care, administration and responses to systems whose rules we did not design.

It is not enough to have many choices. We can ask how many different gatekeepers in fact control the same sphere of life.

The year 1812 does not teach us that the world has returned in a circle to feudalism. It teaches something more useful: forms change, but mechanisms can be compared.

Where functions concentrate, attention is required. Where exit is merely formal, material support is required. Where responsibility is dispersed, the chain of decision must be reconstructed. Where a data category begins to look like a person, context must be restored.

19.8 What is worth remembering about ourselves

Historical power is easiest to see in somebody else.

The lord in the castle is visible. The slaveholder is visible. The emperor is visible.

It is harder to see the small forms of power we use ourselves: family position, organisational rank, access to information, ownership, credit, expert language, or the right to set a deadline for someone who cannot refuse it. Harder still is to see the moment when we use a role as an excuse. 'That is the rule', 'that is how things are done' and 'that is what is expected of me' may explain an action; by themselves they cannot remove responsibility for its consequence.

Here Tolstoy is at his most uncomfortable and most useful. His people are not merely victims of a system. They carry it within themselves. The same person can be subordinate in one room and an authority in another.

Self-reflection, then, is not a question of whether we are "good people". A better question is: which of my decisions become an obligation in somebody else's calendar? And when that happens: do I bear part of the consequence?

19.9 What is worth remembering about the collective

A collective does not have a single will as simply as a single voice does. Nation, firm, army, market and state are systems in which many people perform partial tasks. A culture of expectations coordinates them and thereby frees them from having to decide everything from the beginning. But the same coordination can conceal responsibility: the individual sees a small step, not the outcome produced by a thousand correctly performed steps.

That does not abolish responsibility. It changes its map.

In a large system we must ask: who sets the objective; who chooses the measure; who allocates the resources; who carries it out; who can stop the process; who receives feedback; who bears the harm.

In Napoleon, Tolstoy would look for the difference between the appearance of control and the actual chain of action. The same method is useful in a modern organisation, state, platform or military system.

19.10 What is worth remembering about the future

The future is not a blank page. It never was. But it is not determined only by what already exists; it is also determined by the horizon of what people believe to be possible. When a society loses the ability to imagine a credible exit, it may continue for a long time to reproduce an order in which it no longer believes. When a new feasible path appears, the standard of normality can change just as quickly.

It is apportioned in advance by biology, family, debts, contracts, institutions, infrastructure, past investment and political decisions. Human freedom arises in the part that remains open enough, after those claims, for action still to change direction.

A good society therefore does not require a person without obligations. It requires an arrangement in which no claim becomes total.

Enough exit that power feels the possibility of departure. Enough voice that the system receives information from below. Enough portability that change does not mean erasure. Enough security that a mistake is not a catastrophe. Enough independent support that a person need not ask the same gatekeeper for everything. Enough time to choose more than the next necessity. And enough responsibility that those who allocate other people's risk bear part of its cost.

At the outset we asked what the year 1812 meant to a person who did not know that he or she was living in a historical year.

We can now answer.

It meant what almost every year means: a combination of work, relationships, fear, hope, rules and a limited quantity of tomorrow. The difference lies in who holds a valid claim upon that tomorrow.

Tolstoy shows us that no one controls it completely. History shows us that some can claim substantially more of it than others. Economics shows who can survive when the plan fails. Institutions show why the same patterns recur even without the same person at the top. And comparison among empires, kingdoms, republics and insurgencies adds one final point: a political community is most legitimate where it does not demand that a shared past be converted into a right over somebody else's future.

Progress is therefore measured not only by how much a society can produce. It is also measured by how much unappropriated future it knows how to leave to a person and a community, so that they can still make a life of their own from it.

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- Morson, Gary Saul. "War and Peace." In Donna Tussing Orwin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 63-79.
- Tolstoy, Leo N. *War and Peace*. First complete book edition, 1869. Electronic editions of the Tolstoy Museum's collected works and publicly available translations were also used when checking the structure of the novel.
- Tolstoy, Leo N. *Drafts and variants of War and Peace in the Tolstoy Museum collected works*, especially material on the novel's origin in the plan for a Decembrist and the movement of the narrative from 1856 to 1825, 1812 and 1805.
- Tolstoy, Leo N. *Materials from 1856 on the attempted agreement with the Yasnaya Polyana peasants concerning emancipation, corvée, quitrent and land*. Electronic collection of the Tolstoy Museum.
- Wachtel, Andrew. "History and Autobiography in Tolstoy." In Donna Tussing Orwin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 176-190.

Institutions, labour, time and social organisation

- Fromm, Erich. *Beg pred svobodo*. Ljubljana: UMco, 2020, trans. Miriam Drev; original *Escape from Freedom*, 1941. Also 'Foreword II in *Escape from Freedom*' (1965), digital archive of the Literary Estate of Erich Fromm. Used for the distinction between liberation from old bonds and the positive capacity for free action, anxiety, authoritarian escape and automaton conformity.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital*, Volume I. In particular the chapters on commodity fetishism, the buying and selling of labour power, and the working day. Used to distinguish legal freedom from material dependence, to examine surplus and the reproduction of labour power, and to show how social relations can appear as objective properties of prices, things and contracts.
- Reich, Wilhelm. *Listen, Little Man!* New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1948; the uploaded Slovene version *Poslušaj, mali človek!* was also consulted. Used for the polemical question of personal responsibility, fear of self-criticism and the reproduction of hierarchy through 'small' holders of authority.
- North, Douglass C. *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790–1860*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1961. For regional specialisation, market expansion, the transport connection between East and West, the role of cotton exports, and later immigration and demographic development; in this essay linked to North's later emphasis on skills, knowledge and learning.
- North, Douglass C. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- North, Douglass C. "Institutions." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (1991): 97–112. For the definition of institutions as formal rules, informal constraints and enforcement, and their role in reducing uncertainty and shaping incentives.
- North, Douglass C. "Institutions and the Performance of Economies Over Time." In *Handbook of New Institutional Economics*, ed. Claude Ménard and Mary M. Shirley. Springer, 2005, 21–30. For the distinction between institutions and organisations, mental models, learning, competition among organisations and path dependence in institutional change.
- North, Douglass C. "Economic Performance through Time." Nobel Lecture, 9 December 1993. For institutions as formal rules, informal norms and enforcement, bounded rationality, learning and path dependence.
- Scott, James C. "State Simplifications: Nature, Space and People." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 3, no. 3 (1995): 191–233. For administrative legibility, standardisation of measures, cadastres and property, and the distinction between local context and information transferable to the centre. In the broader background also *Seeing Like a State* (1998).
- Thompson, E. P. "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism." *Past & Present* 38 (1967): 56–97. For task-time, the synchronisation of work and the gradual transition towards measured working time; especially important is his observation that time-discipline also appears in employed labour within a predominantly agrarian world.
- Weber, Max. *Protestantska etika in duh kapitalizma*. Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis, 1988, trans. Pavel Gantar and Štefan Vevar. Used for vocation as internal discipline, the rationalisation of conduct, and the question of how organisational forms can survive their original religious motives.
- Weber, Max. "Bureaucracy." In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946. For fixed jurisdiction, the hierarchy of offices, expertise and the separation of official activity, files and office resources from the official's private household.
- Whittle, Jane, and Thijs Lambrecht, eds. *Labour Laws in Preindustrial Europe: The Coercion and Regulation of Wage Labour, c.1350–1850*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2023. Open-access edition. For legal regulation of service, mobility, contracts and wage labour, and for the warning that the end of serfdom did not mean a simple transition to a fully free labour market.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989. Used for the question of cynical distance: social practice can remain effective even when people no longer naively believe its official explanation; important to the relationship between belief, routine and responsibility.
- Venn, Emil. *A Pocket Guide to Capita(feuda)lism: A Short History of the Master Who Disappeared by Multiplying*. 2026. Earlier work by the author from which the concepts of temporal sovereignty, the available remainder, exit, voice, portability, security and failure without erasure are developed.
- Venn, Emil. *Who Owns Tomorrow? Capitalism, Feudalism and the Multiplied Master*. Extended essay, 2026. An earlier version of the same authorial question about dispersed power and the practical availability of the future.

The Ukrainian lands and the Austrian Empire

- Encyclopedia of Ukraine, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. Entries 'Peasants', 'Serfdom', 'Land tenure system', 'State peasants', 'Left-Bank Ukraine', 'Right-Bank Ukraine', 'Galicia', 'Rumiantsev census' and 'Joseph II'. For regional differences in peasant status, land regimes and imperial administration.
- Plokhy, Serhii. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York: Basic Books, 2015, later editions. For the long-term Ukrainian historical framework and the positioning of individual regions between different empires.
- Godsey, William D., and Petr Maťa, eds. *The Habsburg Monarchy as a Fiscal-Military State: Contours and Perspectives, 1648–1815*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. For the fiscal-military and administrative transformation of the Habsburg lands.
- Ingrao, Charles W. *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618–1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, various editions. For the political and administrative framework of the Habsburg lands to 1815.
- Die Welt der Habsburger. "The foundation of the Empire of Austria in 1804" and biographical material on Francis II/I. For the distinction between the broader Habsburg Monarchy and the official Austrian Empire after 1804.
- Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes (RIS), Austria. Allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (ABGB), especially § 16, effective from 1 January 1812. For innate rights, legal personality and the express rejection of slavery and Leibeigenschaft within the code's field of application.
- Austrian Federal Chancellery. Material on the Ostarrichi charter of 996. For the etymological note on the name Österreich, not as an explanation of the political structure of 1812.
- Melik, Vasilij. "Ilirske province v slovenski zgodovini." *Zgodovinski časopis* 40, no. 4 (1986). For a Slovene perspective on the period of French administration.
- Mugerli, Marko. "Napoleon in kranjski konji." *Zgodovina za vse* 12, no. 2 (2005). For concrete material and military burdens imposed on the region.
- Anonymous private family chronicle from eastern Styria. Unpublished material; used only as a microhistorical example of a small peasant household, house numbering, hereditary tenancy and the scale of the 1825 cadastre. The individual case is not used as representative statistics for the province.

Prussia, the French Empire, the Italian peninsula, Spain and the United Kingdom

- German History in Documents and Images. "The Prussian October Edict of 1807" and "The Prussian Regulation Edict of 1811". For the abolition of personal serfdom, the legal transition to free persons, and the separate issue of converting peasant holdings and obligations.
- Fondation Napoléon. Materials on the 134 departments of the French Empire in 1812 and on the prefecture under the Consulate and Empire. For centralisation, the department, prefect, taxation, police and conscription.
- Fondation Napoléon. Biographical material on Eugène de Beauharnais and the Kingdom of Italy. For administrative reform and the participation of Italian units in the 1812 campaign in the Russian Empire.
- Library of Congress. Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy, Enacted in Cádiz on March 19, 1812. For national sovereignty, separation of powers and the liberal reorganisation of the Spanish monarchy during the Peninsular War.
- UK Government. Toponymic Guidelines for the United Kingdom. For the historical state name United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland after the Act of Union 1801.
- The National Archives (UK). "The proclamation of Ned Ludd" and educational materials on the Luddite protests. For the spread of protest in 1812, labour conditions and the repressive response of the state.
- U.S. National Archives and U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command. Materials on impressment and the War of 1812. For naval coercion, trade and the broader Napoleonic context of the Anglo-American conflict.

The United States of America, slavery, the West and the War of 1812

- Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998. For the development of different slave regimes and the everyday life of enslaved communities.
- Kolchin, Peter. *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987. A key comparative source for similarities and differences between American slavery and serfdom in the Russian Empire.

- National Archives and Records Administration. Northwest Ordinance (1787). For the legal ordering of the territory, compacts, property, political organisation and the formal pledge of good faith towards Indigenous nations.
- National Park Service. Materials on Slater Mill and early American textile production. For the beginnings of mechanised spinning in New England, child labour and the transition from household to industrial production.
- National Park Service. Materials from the War of 1812 project, especially on the causes of the war, Indigenous peoples, Tecumseh and the Creek War. For western expansion, Indigenous diplomacy and the consequences of war for land relations.
- Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State. “War of 1812-1815.” For the commercial background, naval impressment, regional interests, western expansion and the territorial question.
- Taylor, Alan. *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies*. New York: Knopf, 2010. For a regional, borderland and multi-identity understanding of the war.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 1810 Census Historical Facts. For the total population in 1810 and the number of enslaved inhabitants.
- White, Richard. *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. For relations among Indigenous political communities, empires and the American republic in the Great Lakes region.

New Spain (Mexico), Spain and the USA

- Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). Materials on Cuautla and the siege of 1812. For the logistical, military and social dimension of Morelos’s resistance in New Spain.
- Library of Congress. *The Mexican Revolution and the United States*, section ‘Independence from Spain to President Porfirio Díaz’. For the development of the insurgency from Hidalgo to Morelos, contacts with the USA and the political transformation of New Spain.
- Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State. Materials for 1801-1829 on the Napoleonic Wars, the War of 1812 and the acquisition of Florida. For the relationship between American expansion, Spanish authority, the United Kingdom and the European wartime context.
- Texas State Historical Association, *Handbook of Texas*. ‘Gutiérrez-Magee Expedition.’ For the 1812-13 frontier expedition into Spanish Texas and the interweaving of Mexican insurgent aims, American volunteers and an inconsistent state policy.
- North, Douglass C. ‘Institutions.’ *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (1991): 97-112. For comparison of the institutional legacies of British and Spanish America, and as a warning that development paths arise from rules, enforcement and historically formed incentives, not from an assumed ‘national character’.

Note on method

- The literary interpretation in this essay is based on *War and Peace* and secondary scholarship on Tolstoy. Comparative claims concerning the Russian Empire, the Ukrainian lands, the Austrian Empire, Napoleonic Europe, the United Kingdom, the USA and New Spain are grounded in historiography, legal sources and institutional literature. Modern theories of institutions, time, bureaucracy, ideology and freedom are used as analytical measures; the historical differences among serfdom, slavery, seigneurial obligations and wage labour remain part of the explanation itself.