

SOLZHENITSYN: EMERGING FROM UNDER THE RUBBLE

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Alexandr Solzhenitsyn shocked and offended many Americans when he spoke at Harvard University's commencement in June, 1978. He attacked not only the country that now harbors him in his involuntary exile, but the West generally and, indeed, the modern world as a whole.¹ His essentially critical speech should not have shocked us, but if it did, it may yet serve a timely purpose. Whether or not it should have offended us and in what way are questions of the greatest concern to us all.

Solzhenitsyn is accused not merely of ingratitude, but of being a bitter and angry middle-aged man, who in his rage can no longer distinguish justified from unjustified anger. Or worse, he is a religious zealot, waging a holy war against not only communism, but modern materialism and even contemporary music. Yet Solzhenitsyn's public statements and writings do not support these charges of rage and religious fanaticism.

At the beginning of his commencement speech, Solzhenitsyn stated his intention in making it, and it is necessary to reflect on that statement for a moment.

Harvard's motto is "*Veritas*." Many of you have already found out and others will find out in the course of their lives that truth eludes us as soon as our concentration begins to flag, all the while leaving the illusion that we are continuing to pursue it. This is the source of much discord. Also, truth is seldom sweet; it is almost invariably bitter. A measure of bitter truth is included in my speech today, but I offer it as a friend, not as an adversary.²

If Solzhenitsyn can be taken at his word, he is our friend and a seeker of the truth. Indeed, if one examines the content of his speech, it can be seen as an argument that even if the West's politics seems superior to socialism, its chief opponent now, ultimately the modern Western political principle cannot be correct. The principle, he says, is that governments are meant to serve man and that man lives to be free and to pursue happiness. The states that have attempted to live by this principle no longer seem capable of maintaining their own existence. And the individuals who live in them are not whole human beings. Experience has thus shown the principle to be erroneous, for where governments serve men (and men do not serve governments) and where men live to pursue freedom and happiness (not human excellence), the true freedom and happiness of mankind cannot be secured.

Yet just as modern materialism will destroy itself, medieval spiritualism "had come to a *natural* end by exhaustion, having become an intolerable despotic repression of man's physical nature in favor of the spiritual one" (emphasis added).³ If neither of the alternatives with which we are most familiar — medieval and modern — is viable, then we must become seekers of truer principles or be more open to those who do seek them. Otherwise, we shall perish. This is the point of Solzhenitsyn's speech, and this concern for the true principles of human life and for how one begins to seek them pervades his writings. Hence the obvious question with which a study of Solzhenitsyn ought to begin is this: Why has Solzhenitsyn thought himself justified in criticizing modern Western principles, and can his assumption be defended? The question with which we might follow is: What, if any, alternative does he propose and on what ground?

For many years it has been gospel in the social sciences that there could be no principled determination of the human good. It may be a fact that human beings invariably do have values, but an evaluation of those values cannot be made in any more or less scientific way. This dogma, commonly known as the fact/value distinction, because virtually unchallenged by anyone but Marxists and a few anachronistic teachers of political philosophy, has gained ever more general acceptance.⁴ It may seem strange to mention this issue, seemingly peculiar to the social sciences, with reference to Solzhenitsyn, but the fact is that either during or because of his journey through Gulag, Solzhenitsyn found it necessary to examine the issue for himself. This examination may have provided the basis for his criticism of modern Western political, as well as analytical, principles.

It is chiefly in his essays in *From Under the Rubble*⁵ that Solzhenitsyn has challenged reigning academic

¹ The world split apart of which Solzhenitsyn speaks in the speech is not simply a world split politically (p. 3); rather, it is a world which separates the material from the spiritual (pp. 47-55). Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *A World Split Apart* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴ For a recent and informative example of the status of the dispute about this issue within political science see Eugene F. Miller, "Positivism, Historicism, and Political Inquiry," *American Political Science Review*, LXVI (Sept., 1972), pp. 796-817, and comment by David Braybrooke and Alexander Rosenberg, Richard S. Rudner, and Martin Landau.

⁵ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *From Under the Rubble*, translated by Michael Scammell (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975). References will be designated by *R*.

dogma. There he also offers suggestions about the cause of the present assumption that judgments about values cannot be scientific and thereby indicates the basis for its reappraisal. The heretical speculations following from his rejection of the dogma can be seen most clearly in *The First Circle*,⁶ his most overtly philosophical novel. The last half of *The Gulag Archipelago*,⁷ which is probably his most popular work in the West today, indicates some of the values Solzhenitsyn has come to hold and how and why he has come to hold them.

Solzhenitsyn begins an essay in *From Under the Rubble*, entitled "Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations," with a reference to "the blessed Augustine." Saint Augustine, in disagreement with modern social scientists, held it proper "to apply ordinary, individual, human values and standards to large social phenomena and associations of people, up to and including the nation and the state as a whole" (R., p. 105).⁸ Solzhenitsyn's position is that "it is in our human nature to make such judgments" (R., p. 105) and that "human logic can show no cause why, if we permit value judgments on the one mutable entity [the individual], we should forbid them in the case of the other [the nation]" (R., p. 110). If he is correct that logic cannot justify the present stance of the social sciences, then we must ask what can justify either it or the alternative position. Reasonably, resources other than logical proof might be arguments from experience or convictions which have been divinely or otherwise mysteriously revealed.

Someone might object at this point that I, with Solzhenitsyn, have begged a crucial question. Can we make value judgments with regard to *individuals*, much less nations? Solzhenitsyn in fact does not beg this question. The values, or as he puts it, categories of individual ethics, on which he focuses in his essay are repentance and self-limitation. He insists that repentance is a natural gift and even the one "which perhaps more than anything else distinguishes man from the animal world" (R., p. 107). At the same time, he acknowledges that the desire for and habit of repentance have been all but lost to modern man. In order to argue that repentance is a *fact*, a permanent aspect of human nature, as well as the value he holds it to be, Solzhenitsyn must first offer a plausible explanation of why this supposedly natural gift has been lost to modern man. This he attempts to do by giving an account of the modern errors that have deprived man of his human nature.

Certain errors, shared by virtually all modern intellectuals, are typified in the social sciences. These errors, we are made to see, are chiefly two, distinguishable for purposes of analysis, but ultimately related and derivative from the intransigent refusal to address scientifically or philosophically a third subject. One reason why social scientists assume that facts and values are dichotomous is that they have assumed that the reconciliation, if it can be made at all, must be made at the level of politics; perhaps, then, they have looked for an answer to their question in the wrong place. Another reason is that they have failed to understand what it means to be an intellectual, not to mention a human being; thus they might have incorrectly identified at least one fact. The subject they have not taken seriously in their capacities as intellectuals or scientists is whether their "atheistic humanism" is a defensible position. Solzhenitsyn addresses each of these issues directly or indirectly in his three essays in *From Under the Rubble*.

The first essay, "As Breathing and Consciousness Return," is an analysis of Andrei Sakharov's "Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom,"⁹ or of the position once held by Sakharov and still held by many dissidents and Western intellectuals. The greatest merit Solzhenitsyn finds in it is that the scientist Sakharov has shown that he has a conscience (R., p. 5). He has attempted in his capacity as a man of science to speak out about politics and morality, although in Solzhenitsyn's opinion he has failed to ground his prescriptions in a scientific theory (R., pp. 16, 17). Sakharov inadvertently reveals that his dream is of the rule of an intellectual elite, which he expects to be a moral elite as well. His acknowledged main conclusion, which is, according to Solzhenitsyn, his central error, is summed up in his praise of the "high moral ideals of socialism" and "the ethical character of the socialist path" (R., p. 14). This, Solzhenitsyn asserts, is really his "main pious wish," for "in no socialist doctrine . . . are moral demands seen as the essence of socialism — there is merely a promise that morality will fall like manna from heaven after the socialization of property" (R., p. 14).

When Sakharov does transcend the perhaps prudent idolization of socialism he does so as far as to recommend the political freedom of the West. He does not transcend the modern opinion that politics has as its end the freedom of the people and their happiness, that is, chiefly their material well-being. He with others holds, in effect,

⁶ Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*, translated by Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). References will be designated by C.

⁷ Alexandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Vol. I, translated by Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Vol. II, translated by Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); Vol. III, translated by Harry Willetts (New York: Harper & Row, 1978). References will be designated by G.

⁸ "The Blessed Augustine once wrote: 'What is the state without justice? A band of robbers'" (R., p. 105). The quote is from *The City of God*, Bk. IV, Ch. 4. Augustine's assertion is a criticism of Cicero. The criticism is made explicit in Bk. II, Ch. 21.

⁹ Andrei Dimitrievich Sakharov, *Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom*, translated by *The New York Times* (New York: Norton, 1968).

that "man is made for happiness as a bird is made for flight" (*R.*, p. 21).¹⁰ He does not see that political and intellectual freedom and happiness are not ends in themselves and that they may not even be the necessary precondition of man's true end. In the postscript to his criticism of Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn contends that the political freedom of the West is not really necessary for true freedom, which is the freedom of the will or choice that is "a gift to us at birth" (*R.*, p. 22). This freedom is possible even in an authoritarian regime so long as the regime does not demand "total surrender of our souls, continuous and active participation in the general conscious lie" (*R.*, p. 24).¹¹ Christ was correct in bidding us to render unto Caesar his due, "not because every Caesar deserves it, but because Caesar's concern is not with the most important thing in our lives" (*R.*, p. 24). The lie in which we of both Soviet Russia and the West are required or invited to participate is that a certain kind of politics is the necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of humanity.¹²

The significance of Sakharov's endeavor becomes clearer in the light of Solzhenitsyn's third essay, "The Smatterers," in which are found his reflections on the pre- and post-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia as a whole.¹³ As does its Western counterpart, the pre-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia conceived of itself as "humanistic, political, and revolutionary" (*R.*, p. 234). In attempting to define itself in this way, it came quite close to defining itself out of existence.

According to Solzhenitsyn, the intelligentsia bore ultimate responsibility for the revolutions of 1917 (*R.*, pp. 236, 243, 256). But the regime it created or helped to create could not tolerate its independent existence.¹⁴ The intelligentsia has nonetheless continued to insist upon its distinctiveness, and its members have in recent years tried and failed to define this distinctiveness.

We are made to see that the intelligentsia has been so unsuccessful in this attempt because it has lost its self-awareness, that is, an awareness of what the intellectual life and its end are. As a consequence of this loss of understanding, it has also lost its moral virtue, especially its courage and honesty. In practice, the intelligentsia distinguishes itself from the working class which it brands as philistine by preferring cognac to vodka (*R.*, p. 247) and by craving greater awards, prizes and titles (*R.*, p. 247). In other words, these smatterers smatter the

¹⁰ V. G. Korolenko (1853-1921). Solzhenitsyn's opinion of the correctness of this dictum might be inferred from one of his dicta in the commencement speech: "If, as claimed by humanism, man were born only to be happy, he would not be born to die" (p. 57).

¹¹ Solzhenitsyn's most recent restatement of his position on authoritarianism can be found in his "Misconceptions About Russia Are a Threat to America" in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Spring 1980), pp. 827-29. Solzhenitsyn goes no further than to say that authoritarian regimes are not *ipso facto* abhorrent and democratic party governments *ipso facto* unproblematic. Russia in particular has a longer tradition of benign authoritarianism than of viable Western style constitutionalism.

¹² From virtually the onset of modernity, both morality and philosophy have been made to derive from or have even been reduced to politics and political science. Cf. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by C. B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1968), Ch. 15, pp. 215-16; Ch. 46, p. 682 with Ch. 14, pp. 189-90. The tendency reached its culmination in Nietzsche. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, translated by Adrian Collins (Indianapolis, Ind.: Library of Liberal Arts, 1957), especially pp. 3, 65-70. Thus the "lie," while central to Marxism, is not limited to Marxism.

¹³ Solzhenitsyn begins the essay with a critical analysis of *Vekhi*, or *Landmarks*, a collection of articles published in 1909. Max Hayward, in his introduction (*R.*, p. vii), contends that Solzhenitsyn's book is modelled on it. In his analysis of *Vekhi*, Solzhenitsyn gives an extensive summary of the faults of the old intelligentsia which have become weaker or even reversed in the new, of the virtues of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, of faults at the time which now have the appearance almost of virtues, and of faults inherited in the present day. For our purposes, the most significant faults were alienation from the nation as a principle, outspoken opposition to the state; individual cowardice in the face of accepted opinion; an unwillingness to challenge and accept challenges to its own dogma; uncritical atheism; a greater love of egalitarian justice than of the truth; arrogance; and naive idealism. Their virtues were their search for a world view or faith, albeit secular; a desire to subordinate themselves to it; a concern for morality to which egoism was subordinated; and a sense of guilt toward the people. (In sum, they sought a place in an intelligible moral whole.) Their apparent virtues were a psychology of heroic ecstasy, almost a death wish, and "the aim of Universal equality, in whose interests the individual must be prepared to curtail his higher needs" (*R.*, p. 232). (Thus the apparent virtues were excesses of their true virtues). Faults bequeathed to the post-revolutionary intelligentsia were lack of interest in the history of their homeland and the consequent expectation of a social miracle, blame of outward structures and no sense of personal responsibility, exaggerated awareness of their rights, pretentious recourse to abstractness, unreasonable insistence on the distinction between themselves and the philistines, an overestimation of their importance to the country, and pessimism. (In sum, they misunderstood what political philosophy is and how it properly relates to politics and man's place in the whole.)

The intelligentsia excluded from its ranks not only those in the mathematical and technical sciences, but also the more philosophic writers who addressed spiritual questions — Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky.

¹⁴ In part, the intelligentsia contributed to its own destruction. Not only did its members have a very natural human concern for their physical survival, but they continued to find characteristic intellectual and moral temptations for accepting the Revolution and its consequences. They found in Marxist ideology a cosmological doctrine reconciling freedom and necessity, and they as human beings desired not only to understand, but to become parts of "the great Natural order" (*R.*, p. 238). They also desired to apply their abilities to the construction of the new society incorporating its principles. The technical intelligentsia, which experienced no such temptations, was demoralized by the regime's policies in the 30's. All of the intelligentsia lost its "self-awareness" (*R.*, p. 241) when in the 30's its members were classified and thereby identified with all other "employees." Finally, due to the increasingly technological composition of the Party, the ruling class allowed itself to be considered part of the intelligentsia as distinguished from the proletariat. By the 60's the intelligentsia could be said to include "every person who has been to school above the seventh grade" (*R.*, p. 242).

intellectual life in setting for themselves ends no higher than material well-being and fame. In the meantime, they bolster a tyrannical and deceitful regime by informing on friends, failing to defend slandered innocents, and acquiescing in lies. They do so not out of a mortal fear (which might excuse), but out of "devious calculations of vanity, self-interest, personal welfare and tranquility" (*R.*, p. 251). The strongest argument they offer in defense is that they act for the sake of their children. "Who has the right to sacrifice the material welfare of his children for the sake of an abstract principle of truth!" (*R.*, p. 249). Solzhenitsyn's retort is that the proper concern for children is for the welfare of their souls.

Rather than repenting their errors and vices or even conceding their weakness in the face of a cruel historical fate, the spokesmen for the smatterers excuse themselves with the insistence that they can and will "become spiritually aware of ourselves without abandoning our scientific research institutes" (*R.*, p. 253). Their program is explained and justified as follows:

'Under a regime of oppression,' . . . a new *culture* has arisen, 'a system of relationships and a system of thinking'; it is 'a colossus on two legs — art and science.' In the artistic sphere there are the guitarist-balladeers and independent *samizdat* literature. In the field of science there is 'the powerful methodology of physics' and stemming from it 'an entire philosophy of life.' (*R.*, p. 255)

There is no explanation of how art and science are related in a culture. The program, as derisively summarized by Solzhenitsyn, is to "philosophize in one's burrow, hand the results over to *samizdat*, and the rest will happen automatically!" (*R.*, p. 257).

Nor is there any serious reflection on how the methodology of physics can provide "an entire philosophy of life" or how this philosophy can become the national culture. For one thing, the smatterers remain in their scientific institutes, contributing their talents to the physical and moral strength of the existing tyranny. They do not act as if they understood that the end of any intellectual activity could be anything other than technology. Nor do they recognize that the people do not need to be brought either the method of physics or guitarist-balladeers and cannot be persuaded with the arguments of philosophy; they do not see how and why "the semi-literate preachers of religion have tackled successfully" the problem they hope to tackle because they appreciate neither spiritual power of any sort nor the people's respect for it (*R.*, p. 257).

The smatterers have lost the awareness that the intellectual life does not consist in the methodology of physics and that its purpose cannot be to improve the material well-being of themselves or others, and thus they have lost their self-awareness. Those who have grasped that the end must be something other than or in addition to material well-being have failed to comprehend what this something else might be, because in their arrogant assurance of their "spiritual awareness," they demand the right to teach the people about culture, assuming that they themselves have nothing to learn from the people. Worse, they have contributed to the people's destruction almost as effectively as their own. The smatterers teach that the people's understanding of religion is philosophically crude, that their culture is dead or dying, and even that nations are bound to disappear. Indeed, it would be absurd to deny that the people care about their material well-being, but Solzhenitsyn contends that their apparent concern is not merely that. "The masses longed for land and if this in a certain sense means freedom and wealth, in another (and more important) sense it means obligation, in yet another (and its highest) sense it means a mystical tie with the world and a feeling of personal worth" (*R.*, p. 21). "*The people on the whole takes no part in the official lie*" (*R.*, p. 268). Whether the people are as they are for precisely the correct reason may not be to the point; whatever virtue they might have and how it can be sustained ought at least to be appreciated and understood.¹⁵

It might seem necessary to conclude that the intellectual errors of the intelligentsia and the politics these errors created or support have caused the intelligentsia effectively to cease to exist, and endanger the people's existence. To this plausible conclusion, Solzhenitsyn responds:

But surely *someone* exists? And how can one deny human beings a future? Can *human beings* be prevented from going on living? . . . (*R.*, pp. 267-68)

A stratum, a people, the masses, the smatterers — they all consist of human beings, and there is no way in which the future can be closed to human beings; human beings determine their future themselves, and whatever point has been reached on the crooked, descending path, it is never too late to take a turn for the good and for the better.

The future is indestructible, and it is in our hands. If we make the right choices. (*R.*, pp. 269-70)

Human beings apparently still exist, but if they are to continue to do so, the principles necessary to sustain human existence must be defended or regenerated. The defense of the people and the regeneration of an intelligentsia, Solzhenitsyn insists, will be the responsibility of a new intelligentsia. Its task will concern "*the moral doctrine of the value of the individual as the key to the solution of social problems*" (*R.*, p. 271, emphasis added).

¹⁵ Solzhenitsyn's criticisms of twentieth century Russian intellectuals are strikingly reminiscent of Rousseau's criticisms of the encyclopedists in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), Vol. III, pp. 1-30.

This task presupposes or amounts to repudiation of *the* modern lie, which is precisely that the solution of social problems can be the key to the problem of the value of the individual.¹⁶

Yet Solzhenitsyn now traces the lie to a still more fundamental error.

Was this not at the heart of our old error which proved the undoing of us all – that the intelligentsia repudiated religious morality and chose for itself an atheistic humanism that supplied an easy justification both for the hastily constituted revolutionary tribunals and the rough justice meted out in the cellars of the Cheka? (*R.*, pp. 270-71).

Thus in Solzhenitsyn's opinion, the ultimate ground of "a moral doctrine of the value of the individual" must surely be either a religion or an utterly different kind of non-theistic principle than that accepted by both pre- and post-revolutionary Russian intellectuals. To understand the latter possibility we must return to a further consideration of the essay on repentance and self-limitation.

The essay begins, to repeat, with an invocation of the blessed Augustine as an authority against the modern social scientists who contend that moral standards applied to individuals cannot be applied to political entities like nations. Solzhenitsyn insists that this "transference of values is entirely natural to the religious cast of mind" (*R.*, p. 106). Immediately thereafter he observes that "even without a religious foundation, this sort of transference is readily and naturally made" (*R.*, p. 106). Similarly, just as the *natural* proclivity of some individuals and peoples to repent (*R.*, p. 130) was once and can still be for the Russians "powerfully reinforced by the Orthodox faith," so it is also "a natural proclivity," "a gift" (*R.*, p. 115). Self-limitation, too, is an old idea found among Christian thinkers (*R.*, p. 136), but the very term "*self-limitation*" (*samo-stesnenie*, emphasis added) suggests that man can impose limits on himself not at the behest of a superior authority. The true Christian definition of freedom, Solzhenitsyn asserts, is self-restriction. The definition is to be contrasted to both the modern Western ideal of unlimited freedom and the Marxist conception of freedom as acceptance of the yoke of necessity. But curiously, Solzhenitsyn states the Christian principle as: "Restriction of the self for the sake of others!" (*R.*, p. 136). This principle, "once understood and adopted" (*R.*, p. 136), will turn us from outward to inward development and mark a turning point, initiating a new era in history (*R.*, p. 137). The true spirit of Christianity has generally been understood as requiring restriction of the self for the sake of *God*, not other human beings.¹⁷ Perhaps this is why Solzhenitsyn speaks of the era as new, not as a return to the Middle Ages. In his specific recommendation of a new course for Russia, he says nothing of religion, but speaks rather of "healing its soul, educating its children, putting its own house in order," and even asserts that the school (not the Church) is the key to the future of Russia (*R.*, p. 140).¹⁸ Moreover, the essay which begins with deference to Saint Augustine does not fully endorse his position;¹⁹ it ends by showing respect for the arithmetic calculations of the Club of Rome – the epitome, if not the caricature, of modern science (*R.*, p. 143). Perhaps Solzhenitsyn's apparent deference to and delicate scepticism of religious authority can be understood when we consider his list of standards that can be applied to nations: "noble, base, courageous, cowardly, hypocritical, false, cruel, magnanimous, just, unjust" (*R.*, p. 106). Given that one would expect truth, not hypocrisy, to be opposed to falsity, one might surmise that for Solzhenitsyn the naked truth cannot be told to a whole people. Since not all individuals are equally inclined by nature to repentance and self-limitation (*R.*, p. 130), the powerful reinforcement of religious faith remains useful for the spiritual health of nations, if not for all individuals. Solzhenitsyn will not directly and obviously challenge that faith.

Nonetheless, the true ground of Solzhenitsyn's defense of repentance and self-limitation as virtues seems to be the one stated on the third and fourth pages of the essay.

The gift of repentance . . . perhaps more than anything else distinguishes man from the animal world . . .

. . . We start, however, from what seems to us beyond doubt: that true repentance and self-limitation will shortly reappear in the social sphere, that a hollow place in modern man is ready to receive them . . .

We have so bedeviled the world, brought it so close to self-destruction, that repentance is now a matter of life and death – not for the sake of a life beyond the grave (which is thought merely comic nowadays), but for the sake of our life here and now and our very survival on this earth. The end of the world, so often foretold by the prophets only to be postponed, has ceased to be the particular property of mystics and confronts us as sober reality, scientifically, technically, and psychologically warranted. It is no longer just the danger of nuclear world war – we have grown used to that and can take it in our stride. But the calculations of the ecologists show us that we are caught in a trap: either we change our ways and abandon our destructively greedy pursuit of progress, or else in the twenty-first century, whatever the pace of man's development, we will perish as a result of the total exhaustion, barrenness and pollution of the planet. (*R.*, pp. 107-08)

¹⁶ The extent to which the "lie" has been accepted by Western liberals as well as Marxist intellectuals might be inferred solely from the general academic acceptance of John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1971). See especially pp. 3-4, 312-13. Freudian thought and psychoanalysis seem to have done little to calm this passion for justice.

¹⁷ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Pt. V, 198.

¹⁸ Cf. "Misconceptions About Russia . . .," pp. 827, 829-30.

¹⁹ That nations cannot be held to such rigorous standards as can individuals is made explicit on p. 142. In fact, Solzhenitsyn's conclusion is closer to Cicero's, against which Augustine's argument was directed, than to Augustine's conclusion.

The concept of unlimited freedom — to which self-limitation is radically opposed — “is closely connected in its origin with the concept of infinite progress, which we now recognize as false” (*R.*, p. 137). Thus Solzhenitsyn implies that moral principles not only must not be taken for granted, but that they must be justified with arguments about the nature of nature as well as about the nature of man.

The repentance recommended for both individuals and nations is essentially a taking account of one’s own errors and vices and an acceptance of responsibility for them. Thus it requires or even *is* for individuals self-knowledge and for nations, historical knowledge.²⁰ To repent, especially to be the first to repent, requires courage (*R.*, p. 137). Repentance assumes the form of forgiveness as well as of asking forgiveness and tends toward generosity and magnanimity (*R.*, p. 115, 129, 133). Its most natural consequence is self-limitation, that is, moderation (*R.*, p. 135). It is antithetical not only to arrogance and self-righteousness, but perhaps even to the spirit of righteous indignation which supports what we commonly mean by a sense of justice.²¹ Since few individuals and no nations are absolutely free of evil, one always will and can justly blame others, but recognition of others’ guilt obscures the necessary awareness of one’s own failings (*R.*, p. 118).

Repentance is so hard “not only because we must cross the threshold of self-love, but also because our own sins are not so easily visible to us” (*R.*, p. 125). Self-love, as much as repentance, seems to be natural and necessary to man.²² Moreover, repentance is harder for nations than individuals. If nothing else, a nation always needs resources for defense (*R.*, pp. 142-43). Perhaps this is why Solzhenitsyn speaks so enthusiastically of the project for developing Russia’s Northeast, by which he means, of course, its material development.²³

Given these considerations, it appears that Augustine was wrong in insisting that the same standards be used to judge nations and individuals. But Solzhenitsyn has insisted throughout *From Under the Rubble* that the modern error is to seek the reconciliation of facts and values through politics, so he is only slightly hypocritical. His view is surely closer to Augustine’s than to that of modern social scientists. Whether he holds that facts and values can ultimately be reconciled in judgments about individuals is best seen by means of an examination of the individual characters in *The First Circle*.

Solzhenitsyn’s essays in *From Under the Rubble* appear at best to treat only the experience of recent history and at worst to do so in a rather impressionistic and sometimes visionary way. It is in *The First Circle* that Solzhenitsyn reveals his profound grasp of the history and significance of political philosophy. The title, *The First Circle*, of course refers to the first circle in hell, in which Dante placed the pagan philosophers. If the book can be said to have any particular heroes, they are Innokenty Volodin and Gleb Nerzhin. Volodin, a diplomat, courageously performs what can only be called an act of moral virtue: He informs his old family doctor, who is about to share his medical knowledge with foreign scientists for the sake of mankind, that he will be arrested for attempting to do so. For his action, Volodin is eventually caught and imprisoned. (Thus every Soviet citizen seems destined to remain in hell, since one is forcefully discouraged from doing good.)²⁴ Curiously, Volodin had been an epicurean and a student of Epicurus, the ancient philosopher; so this action of his seems uncharacteristic. Volodin is caught in part because of the technological efforts undertaken at the *sharashka* (a think-tank for prisoners) at which Nerzhin temporarily resides. Nerzhin (who takes no part in these particular efforts) is said to be a disciple of Socrates, the first political philosopher (*C.*, p. 157).

Lest we overlook the forest for the trees, let us begin with the following observations: Every individual in *The First Circle* is said or shown to desire or to love and take solace in, most of all possible goods on this earth, not merely his own life, but a woman, a family, a home, and a motherland of his own.²⁵ But the prisoners in the *sharashka* know another kind of solace.

In these Sunday evening hours solid matter and flesh no longer reminded people of their earthly existence. The spirit of male friendship and philosophy filled the sail-like arches overhead. . . . Perhaps this was, indeed, that bliss which all the philosophers of antiquity tried in vain to define and teach to others. (*C.*, p. 340)²⁶

²⁰ In the third section of the essay, Solzhenitsyn gives historical examples of the repentance of nations, and in the fourth he shows how Russian history had to have been distorted to conceal the naturalness of repentance. In the fifth section he gives his own survey of the history of Russo-Polish relations.

²¹ Cf. Plato’s *The Republic* (485a-486d, 487a, 490b-c) for an elaboration of the virtues of the philosopher.

²² On p. 138 Solzhenitsyn even goes so far as to concede the naturalness and desirability (in moderation) of what can be considered the natural extension of self-love — private property.

²³ Cf. “Misconceptions About Russia . . .,” p. 830.

²⁴ The issues raised in *The First Circle* remind us of Aristotle’s famous question: Is the virtue of the good man the same or not the same as that of the good citizen? (*Politics*, 1276b16-18).

²⁵ Lev Rubin, a prisoner who remains a Communist, embraces the cause of all mankind “as if it were his own family” because he has “lost all hope of personal success” (*C.*, p. 225). In attempting to overcome such desires Stalin dehumanizes himself (*C.*, pp. 131-34).

²⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1337b27-1338a32.

They take us on an excursion into political philosophy.²⁷ The evening's leisure is spent in creating a parody of Soviet justice set in another time.²⁸ This justice strikes the reader as so monstrous precisely because it punishes men for their natural love of their own. Even if this same criticism could not be leveled against all conceivable political orders (although perhaps it could be), it cannot be seen as a mere criticism of Stalinist justice. The fundamental premise of Marx's argument that communism will ensure the regeneration of man's wholeness and thereby his morality and happiness is that man is by nature a "species being."²⁹ *The First Circle* repeatedly and consistently rejects this essential premise of Marxism. Nevertheless, if Solzhenitsyn seems closer to modern liberals in his acceptance of human nature as we know it, he does not, as do they, attempt to demonstrate that self-love can provide the foundation of a regime in which morality and happiness will be secured.³⁰

If love of one's own is natural to man, a certain decency, scientific curiosity, a desire for and satisfaction in creativity, and a passion for truth are also found, even in Stalin. Although most of the inhabitants of the *sharashka* are, by training, mathematical or physical scientists and technicians, they exhibit a surprising knowledge of and interest in literature, if not in political philosophy.

Nerzhin, a mathematician, has become more interested in "the torments of man" than in mathematical topology (C., p. 47). He seeks passionately to understand the role of good and evil in human life, and he is led by his friend Sologdin to believe that it is possible to do so in prison and therefore that prison can be a blessing (C., p. 157).³¹ Nerzhin seeks his knowledge by "going to the people" in the best sense of that Russian tradition.³² He has come to see that both the people and the intelligentsia are comprised of human beings, and that a human being is made by the forging of his own soul.³³ Hence his friendship with the janitor Spiridon, a man with unequivocal, if unreflective, standards of right and wrong (C., p. 466). Hence also his ultimate refusal to commit adultery, not so much for love of his wife as out of gratitude and a recognition that those who speak to his conscience might teach him about good and evil (C., p. 600).

Nerzhin is still a self-proclaimed sceptic (C., p. 157), but he knows scepticism to be a mere way-station, ultimately insufficient because it cannot provide a firm ground under a man's feet (C., p. 78). One must love something as well as doubt (C., p. 78). Nerzhin's desire to know whether and what standards can guide human beings, his desire to contemplate (C., p. 31), causes him to choose to decline a new and important, but time-consuming assignment at the *sharashka*, although he knows that the likely consequence of his choice will be his return to a labor camp. Both Nerzhin and his wife Nadya can also see that his passion for philosophy will eventually and irrevocably separate them (C., p. 257), for "once a single great passion occupies the soul, it displaces everything else" (C., p. 236).

How then to choose the passion which is to fill one's soul? Let us grant Solzhenitsyn's contention that an inner freedom of will and moral courage are necessary components of humanity. As we learn from the characters of *The First Circle*, it is our attachment to the goods of this world, even and especially to the family, that keeps us in the circles of hell. Those who have lost everything are not shown to escape from hell, but they at least dwell in it in peace and with an enduring fearlessness.³⁴ Or perhaps it would be more correct to speak of

²⁷ The chapter is entitled "The Ark." The purpose of this ark is not to preserve all created beings, including man, through generation, but rather to lead them from concern for their natural sexual mates to philosophy.

²⁸ The parody presented in chapters 49 and 50 is of the legend of Prince Igor.

²⁹ "Man is a species-being, not only because he practically and theoretically makes the species — both his own and those of other things — his object, but also — and this is simply another way of saying the same thing — because he looks upon himself as the present, living species, because he looks upon himself as a *universal* and therefore free being . . .

"The practical creation of an *objective world*, the *fashioning* of inorganic nature, is proof that man is a conscious species-being, *i.e.* a being which treats the species as its own essential being or itself as a species-being. It is true that animals also produce. . . . But they produce only their immediate needs or those of their young; they produce one-sidedly, while man produces universally; they produce only when immediate physical need compels them to do so, while man produces even when he is free from physical need and truly produces only in freedom from such need; . . ." Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," in *Early Writings*, translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Random House, 1975), pp. 327-29.

³⁰ The argument of modern liberalism, stated most clearly by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, is that it is precisely the desire to preserve one's life and goods that will cause men to find it reasonable to conform to the natural law, or justice. Hence they will act morally. They will be happiest, however, in a regime in which the laws, or restrictions of their private liberties, are fewest. The most significant challenge to their position from within the liberal tradition came from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but his objection has had little effect on Western politics. See especially Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 14, pp. 189-90, Ch. 15, pp. 215-16, Ch. 21, p. 271, Ch. 30, p. 388.

³¹ Cf. *Gulag II*, pp. 616-17: "And that is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: 'Bless you, prison!' . . .

"All the writers who wrote about prison but did not themselves serve time considered it their duty to express sympathy for prisoners and to curse prison. I . . . have served enough time there. I nourished my soul there, and I can say without hesitation: 'Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!'"

³² The manner in which the nineteenth century Russian tradition of "going to the people" might be valuable to the political philosopher is considered in chapter 61.

³³ The assertion is, of course, opposed not only to nineteenth century Russian tradition, but to Marxism as well.

³⁴ The first quote from Yesenin, Nerzhin's beloved poet, implies the acceptance of mortality (C., p. 660).

those who have lost all apparent goods, for Nerzhin thinks he can continue to contemplate in a camp.³⁵

When Nerzhin returns from the first visit in a year with his wife, a visit he expects to be his last, he thinks of his deprivation.

You lived for years without the one thing men were put on earth for.

You are left whatever intelligence you might have had, your convictions if you are mature enough to possess any, and above all, your readiness to sacrifice and your concern for public welfare . . .

But there is no core to it.

The love of a woman, of which you are deprived, seems worth more than anything in the world (C., pp. 291-92)

Regaining his composure, he begins to converse with the artist Kondrashev-Ivanov, from whose conversation at least one intelligent friend of Nerzhin's is said always to learn something (C., p. 374). In his paintings Kondrashev always tries to capture "the highest synthesis of nature. This synthesis — comprehension, peace, the unity of all things — Kondrashev had never found in himself, in his most intense feelings, but he recognized it and bowed to it in nature" (C., p. 295). The paintings are landscapes of Russia, but in discussing them, Nerzhin and Kondrashev agree that the Russia they represent is the will of the Russian people (C., p. 296). Nerzhin, however, assures Kondrashev that one's will can be broken in the labor camps, to which Kondrashev responds that this must never be permitted. He continues,

A human being . . . possesses from his birth a certain essence, the nucleus, as it were, of this human being. His 'I'. And it is still uncertain which forms which: whether life forms the man or man, with his strong spirit, forms his life. Because — . . . because he has something to measure himself against, something he can look to. Because he has in him an image of perfection which in rare moments suddenly emerges before his spiritual gaze. (C., p. 297)³⁶

State Counselor Second Rank Innokenty Volodin was an epicurean (C., pp. 395, 411) until he became Epicurus' student (C., p. 411). He began to study Epicurus only after finding some letters belonging to his mother, whom he had never appreciated. She and her correspondents spoke in old-fashioned terms of "Truth, Beauty, Good, Evil: ethical imperatives" (C., p. 398). In reading these letters he "felt he had found something of what he lacked" (C., p. 398), and he began to read more and to have contempt for the vulgar epicurean ways of his wife. At a dinner party, after having had a bit too much wine, Volodin corrects the understanding of the other guests as to the meaning of Epicurus' materialist teaching. Epicurus taught that since common insatiable desires depend on fate and only bring pleasure after periods of dissatisfaction and pain, we should renounce all striving except the humblest; his teaching frees us from our fear of fate (C., p. 412). Soon thereafter, having become involved in a discussion of literature, State Counselor Volodin remarks to his brother-in-law, the famous writer Galakhov, that "a great writer is, so to speak, a second government" (C., p. 415).

It is only after his first government imprisons him that Volodin frees himself from both governments. In his first three hours in prison he acquires a new understanding of life (C., p. 624) and sees that his past life, which had seemed "a single harmonious whole" could also be viewed as "a clutter of mistakes, a black heap of refuse" (C., p. 611). Volodin is tormented by an alternation of terror and attempted recollection of his past errors. Perhaps because of this instability in his own soul, he is struck by the words stamped on the record of his finger prints: "Keep Forever." He finds "something mystical about them, something superhuman, supernatural" (C., p. 629). Reviving somewhat, he comes to believe that he would abandon any and every worldly pleasure for justice and truth, and he yearns to "exchange mind and spirit with other prisoners" (C., p. 630). He begins to recall Epicurus. He now considers "strained" Epicurus' interpretation that people fear death because they fear suffering after death; people fear death because they love life (C., p. 573). He recalls the dictum "Inner feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are the highest criteria of good and evil" (C., p. 643). That, he now knows is the philosophy of a savage, the babbling of a child — for Stalin finds his satisfaction in killing people. "Good and evil had now been substantively defined for Innokenty" and he could hold his head high (C., p.

³⁵ Someone might object that Solzhenitsyn's point in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* is to show that one cannot philosophize in a labor camp, because there one must preoccupy oneself with mere physical preservation. This is not clear, however. Ivan Denisovich is clearly not the sort to desire to philosophize: He works at odd jobs in every spare moment to earn an extra crust of bread (p. 17), he easily accepts folk tales about the waxing and waning of the moon (pp. 107-08), he values freedom only because freedom means home (p. 156), and his contentedness depends on chance (p. 158). In contrast, the Baptist Alyosha finds time to read his Bible and is happy in camp because he has time to think about his soul (pp. 51, 153-56). Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, translated by Ralph Parker (New York: New American Library, 1963).

³⁶ The artist cannot, of course, be assumed simply to speak Solzhenitsyn's own thoughts. In any case, the issue between Nerzhin and Kondrashev is not resolved in this chapter (42). But the central chapter of the book (44) is entitled "Life is No Love Story," and in it is exposed some of the frivolity of the women men love. In chapter 53, entitled "The Banquet Table," erotic love, art, nature, and objectivity are again thematic. At another banquet (chapters 56-57) literature, fame, and philosophy are discussed.

643).³⁷ Volodin's experience, we are tempted to surmise, enabled him more fully to appreciate his mother's old-fashioned discourse about ethical imperatives with capital letters and perhaps something of what Kondrashev tried to teach Nerzhin.

Solzhenitsyn's heroes are virtuous and free in living neither the private life of the sort Western liberalism seems to recommend nor the communal life held necessary by Marxism. They find contentment in seeking to satisfy the natural human passion for knowledge, at the risk of failing to satisfy the natural human passion for life and its comforts. Their quest and the decency it engenders or sustains are not shown to be dependent on religious belief.³⁸ Yet if their choices are ultimately to be deemed reasonable, they must be grounded in an opinion (rejected by both Western liberalism and Marxism) about nature similar to the one expressed by Kondrashev-Ivanov. Human dignity is not simply natural, but made by man as the image of a perfection, a standard that always exists to measure man, which his spirit perceives only at times.³⁹ To fail to grasp these elements of Solzhenitsyn's thought is to fail to see his fundamental departure from virtually all twentieth-century thought as well as traditional Russian Slavophilism and mysticism.

As for Solzhenitsyn himself, when he discusses exile in the third volume of *The Gulag Archipelago*, he portrays himself alone among the millions of exiles in the Russian East as happy; he lacked a bed, a lamp, and a job suited to his training and capacities, he could not return to his home, but he could write. He was truly free, precisely because of his compulsion to know and record the truth, and lived "the good life in exile."⁴⁰ At the same time, for Solzhenitsyn, the writer always has a responsibility to his country and to humanity, as well as to the truth.⁴¹ For him to try to teach us that we must not expect the most from politics⁴² is not for him to contend that differences in regimes are of no account whatsoever.

The third volume of *The Gulag Archipelago*, published here in 1978, is, according to its preface, about freedom and struggle (*G.*, III, p. ix). In fact, it seems to be a 500 page epic dedicated to those who have courageously struggled for freedom. Throughout *Gulag* it is clear that the horrors suffered by the inmates of the prisons and hard labor camps of the archipelago differ only in degree, not in kind, from the dehumanizing policies inflicted on all Soviet citizens.⁴³ In Volume II Solzhenitsyn makes much of the "thieves" in the camps — those who would debase themselves and abuse their fellow prisoners in any and every way in order to survive, or rather to live well. He recounts an incident in which one of the "thieves," imprisoned within Moscow in a residential neighborhood, perched on a third floor window ledge one night and began loudly singing his "thieves' songs."

³⁷ Volodin seems to have understood early on that Epicurus' materialism was intended to serve the moral purpose of freeing men from their fear of death by showing them that there could be no suffering after death to fear. But Volodin comes to see that the real problem is that men love life and fear or at least wish to avoid death anyway. Hence the materialism in Epicurus' teaching is neither necessary nor sufficient to achieve the desired moral end. The denunciation of material pleasures is a somewhat different question, however. Epicurus agrees with the idealist philosophers, who do not posit a materialist cosmology, that the philosophic life is more pleasant than the life devoted to the pursuit of material pleasures and honors. But he, according to Volodin's account, would include among man's "humblest" strivings the philosophic life. Yet if all is atoms in motion, before what do the atoms of the human mind, which seem capable of thought, humble themselves? Does he not point to the idealist position, which is that the human mind properly humbles itself only before eternal verities and that man's attempt to participate in them is properly deemed his noblest striving? The whole question of Epicurus may be more important to the understanding of *The First Circle* than is apparent, since it is said that Epicurus is a safe subject because Marx wrote his doctoral dissertation on him (*C.*, p. 411).

³⁸ Cf. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Matryona's House and Other Stories*, translated by Michael Glenny (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1971): Matryona, the "one righteous person without whom, as the saying goes, no city can stand" (p. 47) was not a true believer, but if anything, a pagan (p. 24).

³⁹ Cf. Plato, *The Republic*, 591e-592b.

⁴⁰ The chapter in which Solzhenitsyn describes his own exile is entitled "The Good Life in Exile" (*G.*, III, pp. 423-44). This, of course, refers only to his internal exile in the Soviet Union.

⁴¹ Cf. Alexandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Nobel Lecture on Literature*, translated by Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 23-24.

Solzhenitsyn is often attacked in the West for his pretensions to a divine mission and to prophecy. One need not even raise, much less settle, questions about the nature of his piety before understanding the nature of his "mission." The following observations can be made on the basis of Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*, translated by Harry Willetts (New York: Harper & Row, 1979, 1980): Solzhenitsyn, not unreasonably, finds his survival through Gulag, cancer, and criticisms of the Soviet government incredible. He finds in his suffering "a reminder from the Supreme Reason which no mere mortal can at first understand" (p. 146, emphasis added) that the purpose of his life is to speak and act on the basis of his knowledge of the truths of Russian history — which he believes to be universal and timeless truths (p. 503) — and for the sake of truth and justice. He seems to be sustained not so much by a simple religious faith as by a passion to complete his life's work (cf. pp. 66, 150, 219), and his contentment with his life comes with reflection on what he has already written (pp. 429-30). Whether originating in piety or desire, his mission is to know and speak the truth and to see justice done.

⁴² In the commencement speech Solzhenitsyn argued not that legality was undesirable, but that legalism was insufficient (p. 17).

⁴³ This point is made most thematically in a chapter entitled "Our Muzzled Freedom" (*G.*, II, pp. 632-55).

No one thought to shut him up, because what he said in his songs in no way threatened or even contradicted the Soviet way of life.⁴⁴ In the fourth of the seven sections of *Gulag* (in Volume II), entitled "The Soul and Barbed Wire," we learn that one can become free only if one does not choose to seek well-being or survival at any price (*G.*, II, pp. 602-10).⁴⁵ To come to see this and to be able to act upon it in the Soviet Union is very hard, however. But then if a regime makes the choice too hard for the vast majority of men, surely it must be opposed.

The fifth part of *Gulag* (the first part of Vol. III) is entitled "Katorga." *Katorga*, from the Greek "work down under" refers to the Soviet system of hard labor camps. From Solzhenitsyn's perspective it may also refer to politics. (This section is a descent from the preceding discussion of the soul.) In this fifth part, Solzhenitsyn describes with admiration men who fought for freedom against impossible odds because for them nothing, not even death, could be worse than slavery. He also suggests that the desire for freedom exists and will eventually find expression in every human being (*G.*, III, p. 507).

First there are the "committed escapers." Virtually all attempts at escape fail. The escapee cannot hope to secure his freedom without great and enduring courage and flawless planning. But he also needs good luck to escape the forces of evil, and perhaps as much force and evil. He also must trust and be wished well by other human beings.⁴⁶ The inference to be drawn from Solzhenitsyn's long account of escapes is, I believe, that one cannot escape politics or the Soviet regime altogether; one must do something to change such a regime. Otherwise, one cannot withstand either chance or the forces of evil.

The theme then switches to camp rebellions, which also require superior courage. They depend, moreover, on unity, devotion to a common good, and selflessness. Rebellions began to occur under Stalin when men given twenty-five years sentences became desperate and when political prisoners were separated from the thieves (*G.*, III, pp. 38, 42-43). The politicals found that they could now assert their "nobler conception of what life should be," speaking to their neighbors with trust about their political grievances (*G.*, III, p. 231-32). The first revolt discussed in detail, at Ekibastuz, was a hunger and work strike. Men risked their lives in a double sense — through starvation and through inevitable retribution. There was nonetheless such solidarity that even men whose sentences were almost up participated at the risk of an additional term of twenty-five years at hard labor. The revolt did eventually fail, for unity was destroyed by the hunger in each man's stomach and by the prolonged confrontation with the reality of death (*G.*, III, p. 264). The other major camp rebellion of which Solzhenitsyn knows and speaks was at Kengir. There the politicals reigned for forty days, this time with the help of the thieves in the camp, because in standing up for their principles, they made the thieves respect them (*G.*, III, p. 290). (This mixture of thieves and politicals would seem more closely to resemble the character of society as a whole.) At Kengir, the rebels armed themselves as well as possible and set up their own government to run the camp, in effect, creating a republic. That rebellion too finally succumbed to greater force and inhumanity. But I think the point of Solzhenitsyn's account of it is not merely to reveal to the West fascinating historical truths, previously unknown, but also to show us under what conditions political freedom is possible. *Political* freedom seems to mean republicanism of some sort, but this republicanism is sustained by political virtue, which presupposes more selflessness than selfishness.⁴⁷

Solzhenitsyn acknowledges with neither regret nor satisfaction that on several occasions he himself chose prudence over courage, or perhaps we should say rashness.⁴⁸ When the rebellion at Ekibastuz had ended it was "convenient" that his malignant tumor be removed (*G.*, III, pp. 266, 269). (Having been prominent in the revolt he otherwise faced certain death.) And on other occasions he did not say all that he might have because the

⁴⁴ The thieves are treated at length in a chapter devoted exclusively to them, "The Socially Friendly" (*G.*, II, pp. 525-46). Thieves are favored by the regime because, as *lumpenproletariat*, they seem to embody the spirit of communism: contempt for private property. Solzhenitsyn understands them to embody as well the spirit of the Soviet regime at its worst: utter selfishness and acceptance of the principle that might makes right.

⁴⁵ For Hobbes and his followers, in contrast, the greatest freedom is coextensive with precisely this choice; hence his image of the state of nature in Ch. 13 of the *Leviathan*, pp. 183-88. See also Ch. 14, p. 189.

⁴⁶ Georgi Tenno's attempted escape, described in a separate chapter (*G.*, III, pp. 154-92), failed first because of a chance occurrence — a power failure at the camp. An insufficiently prudent assessment of the meaning of its appearance caused a complete change of the escape plan (p. 152n.). Yet the chapter title, "The White Kitten (Georgi Tenno's Tale)," calls attention to the suggestion (pp. 178-79) that the escape ultimately failed because Tenno could not be as inhumane as those who had put him in the position of having to be inhumane to survive. Whether one can overcome chance with great power remains an open question.

⁴⁷ Ancient, as distinguished from modern, republicanism is grounded, if not in selflessness, then at least in a concern for the common good. Cf. Aristotle's *Politics*, 1279a25-b10. Modern republicanism is grounded in the greatest selfishness. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 14, pp. 189-90. For Solzhenitsyn's understanding of the connection between modern republicanism and partisanship, hence selfishness, see *R.*, p. 19 and "Misconceptions About Russia . . ." pp. 827-29.

⁴⁸ One of the major themes of Solzhenitsyn's memoir, *The Oak and the Calf*, is his growing awareness of his power because of his international reputation and his recognition of the limits of that power. Consider, for example, his calculated behavior after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in the light of Sakharov's fate after the invasion of Afghanistan (pp. 220-22).

size or nature of the audience did not warrant the risk (*G.*, III, pp. 266-68, 495-505). As a writer, of course, his potential audience, as his strength, is unlimited.⁴⁹

When Solzhenitsyn spoke at Harvard, he did risk the wrath or ill-will of those amongst whom he now lives, perhaps because he deemed that audience worthy of his words. To repeat, he presented himself as our friend: he wanted to warn the West that it must defend its freedom if it wishes to survive. In *Gulag*, Solzhenitsyn says in explanation of Tolstoi's writing style:

Such were the circumstances in which Tolstoi came to believe that only moral self-improvement was necessary, not political freedom.

Of course, no one is in need of freedom if he already has it. We can agree with him that political freedom is not what matters in the end. The goal of human evolution is not freedom for the sake of freedom. Nor is it the building of an ideal polity. What matter, of course, are the moral foundations of society. But that is in the long run: what about the beginning? What about the first step? (*G.*, III, p. 89)

Freedom must first be defended against communism, and defense may well require sacrifices we in the West have become unused to making. For the same reason, freedom must be defended against materialism, for people are too tempted to sacrifice freedom for material well-being.⁵⁰ If freedom is to be defended against materialism, freedom must have a meaning and an end other than material well-being. It is for our failure to see this, not for love of freedom, that Solzhenitsyn has criticized America. It is for the failure to help us see this that Solzhenitsyn criticized the fundamental principles of modernity.

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⁴⁹ We have already learned that "a great writer is, so to speak, a second government," because, as a teacher of the people, he is always a threat to its first government (*C.*, p. 415). Indeed, in *Gulag*, when answering the question "Why Did We Stand for It?" Solzhenitsyn contends not only that they (the political prisoners) did not stand for it, but that they would have stood for even less had public opinion stood for them, and that public opinion is governed by literature (*G.*, III, pp. 92-93). For emphatic and eloquent statements of the power of writers, see also the concluding portion of the Nobel Prize Lecture (pp. 32-38) and *The Oak and the Calf*, in which Solzhenitsyn holds himself at least indirectly responsible for the Czech liberalization of 1968 and expresses the desire to be responsible for a revolution in his own country (p. 222).

⁵⁰ The temptation was predicted and described long ago by Alexis de Tocqueville in *De la démocratie en Amérique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961). See especially Vol. II, ii, 14; II, iii, 22.

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