

Science, Freedom and Modern Ideology:
The Conscience and Truth in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's Political Theory

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Alexander Solzhenitsyn's political theory is not widely known, even among those who are “expert” in his fiction. Generally, literary critics aren't trained in the philosophical and historical problems inherent in all Russian literature. A critic reading Solzhenitsyn without being an expert on the USSR is an absurdity. Few critics are. So much of the profundity of his political and social vision is lost because literary writers know so little about Russia and worse, about the Orthodox tradition that is at the core of her being. Some will go so far as to say that Russia and the Soviet Union are one continuum, denying even the words of Soviet leaders themselves.

This paper is an analysis of Solzhenitsyn's politics through the medium of three works: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963), *The Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*, both published in English in 1968. There are so many subtle historical and ideological references that are critical to understanding these books, but are rarely if ever mentioned. Making matters even worse, the American academic world has been hostile to Solzhenitsyn for his anti-communism and Russian nationalism. Most reviews of Solzhenitsyn's political works have been hostile. Mainstream critics stick to the merely literary aspects of his work, and hence deliberately miss the point.

His social and political theory revolves around the dialectic of freedom and the state. The state here isn't just any coercive power, but a state that derives from the Enlightenment mind, the mind of science and the belief that man can dominate nature for “his” benefit. Without this basic approach, nothing in the modern world will make sense. The modern world prides itself on reason, and yet, it has seen the most institutionalized irrationality in history. Objective reason is the imminence of rational “concepts” in the natural order. Men are not rational, but the natural order is. The natural “order” is just that – a manifestation of reason. The development of secular and materialist thinking destroyed this concept.

Subjective reason implies that the human brain (really the elite brain), confronts an irrational and hostile universe. The human brain is the sole locus of reason. Modernity has removed all rational content from the natural world. This has led to a ruling class whose interest was served by imposing a technological grid on “nature,” (really, the external world) creating a new order in place of the old. The Stoic and medieval Christian view of Logos in the universe was called “superstitious.” the new order saw nature as hostile and in desperate need of replacing. It needed to be “fixed.”

Ultimately, the Enlightenment reduced reason to a blunt instrument. It is unrelated to any objective content and thus, can be used on anything. It can take content from anywhere. This means anything can be controlled. Having given up autonomy, reason has become an instrument. Reason has become completely harnessed to capitalism and production and contains no autonomy. It exists solely for the sake of dominating all that comes before it. Even ideas are considered commodities. Language itself is just one tool among many others. It is just a product.

This is the general understanding of modernity and the Enlightenment that Solzhenitsyn

attacks, and that so few understand. This is the common ideology of both socialism and capitalism, two sister worldviews. Commonly accepted as opposites, Solzhenitsyn showed clearly that they are almost ideological except in how they use force. Modernity was never about “liberation,” it was about reducing the entire planet to one large factory, as Lenin once said.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich is well known, as is its author. Solzhenitsyn used the character of Ivan Denisovich Shukhov to describe the daily life in the GULag, or the “corrective labor” camp system of the former USSR. The proper spelling would be GULag because its an acronym for *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*, or Main Camp Administration, with the first three letters of the last term spelled out.

As an Orthodox believer, Solzhenitsyn deals with the questions of faith and belief within the context of an officially atheist and materialist system. Like Solzhenitsyn himself, Ivan was imprisoned on the charge of working for the Germans during World War II. Both the author and Ivan were prisoners of war in Hitler's Germany and thus were seen as inherently contaminated by that government and weren't charged with a specific crime. Being there was bad enough. Both men were innocent, and in the story, Ivan is sentenced to a decade of imprisonment. In the GULag system, this almost always meant forced labor and severe damage to the prisoner's health.

As the title indicates, the story is over a single day. Given the harsh climate and arduous physical labor without proper nourishment, Ivan awakens quite ill. He is not on time for his work detail, so he is sent to clean the front guard's quarters. Ivan is concerned with his daily food ration, which is quite understandable under this system. It's meager, but it quickly becomes the prisoner's main source of pleasure. It's this obsession with food that serves as the foil for the religious elements in the novel.

The very fact that the issues of belief and truth emerge in such a system is not difficult to grasp. When confined and treated harshly in this climate, the prisoner can focus on one of two directions: either he can focus on his stomach, or, given the fact that all elements of normal life (and even their humanity) has been stripped from them, they can focus on God, the spirit and in what true happiness consists. They have nothing else.

The nature of labor is worth noting only in that it suggests the rudimentary elements in a healthy community. The detail is administratively seen as a “unit.” This means that when a project is left undone, or accomplished poorly, the entire unit is punished, even if it's clear that one member is at fault. The positive element of this way of thinking is that labor is rationally and fairly allocated so that each does his share. Punishing the whole unit forces each member to watch every other. This is a form of coercion, but also a means of generating cooperation. As it turns out, this solidarity can backfire on the camp guards since it builds a sort of camaraderie that can turn against the system.

Faith does not really become an issue until the second half of the novel. Ivan uses a semi-mocking tone to play with the foreman of the work detail. This man, while often fair, is an atheist, calling believers “savages” and “stupid.” Of course, since God cannot be seen, He must not exist. Playfully, he says to the captain that the moon, when its in its “new” phase, cannot be seen either. He torments the captain with half-joking comments like “so, if you can't see it, how do you know it's there?”

Behind this banter is a serious point. All perception is based on faith. There is no proof

whatsoever that what our senses report is really “out there.” It's just as easy that it register what our brain generates or worse, that it is a mere virtual world controlled by some sinister power.¹

The prisoner Alyoshka is the main figure where faith is concerned. His primary quality is that the faith he possesses makes him the better prisoner. The Scriptures he carefully hides keeps him resilient in the face of impending death. Importantly, he does favors for others, often without any expectation of reciprocation. For the camp system and the USSR in general, he is a remarkable character.

Near the end of the novel, the issue of faith takes center stage. Ivan states “Thanks be to Thee, O God, another day over!” His bunk-mate Alyoshka, a Protestant, a rarity in the USSR, kept a New Testament in the camp. The Bible he keeps is, in fact, a hand-written copy which makes it easier to hide. He keeps it in a small crack in the wall near his bunk, and is well aware of the punishment such contraband will earn.

Upon hearing the above prayer, he states to Ivan, “There you are, Ivan Denisovich, your soul is asking to be allowed to pray to God. Why not let it have its way, eh?” Ivan responds “Because, Alyoshka, prayers are like petitions — either they don't get through at all, or else it's 'complaint rejected.’” Then Alyoshka remarks “That's because you never prayed long enough or fervently enough, that's why your prayers weren't answered. Prayer must be persistent. And if you have faith and say to a mountain, 'Make way,' it will make way.” Ivan replies, “Don't talk rot, Alyoshka. I never saw mountains going anywhere. Come to think of it I've never seen any mountains. But when you and your whole Baptist club did all that praying in the Caucasus, did one single mountain ever move over?” To that rejoinder, Alyoshka states:

We didn't pray for anything like that, the Lord's behest was that we should pray for no earthly or transient thing except our daily bread. 'Give us this day our daily bread. . . . We shouldn't pray for somebody to send us a parcel, or for an extra portion of *skilly*. What people prize highly is vile in the sight of God! We must pray for spiritual things, asking God to remove the scum of evil from our hearts.

Ivan then relates a story about the priest at the parish in Polomnya, apparently the wealthiest person in the region. The response of the locals was to charge him for services (he mentions “roofing”) more than an ordinary client. He relates that the priest was forced to pay alimony for at least three women and the priest, according to Ivan, was living with his “fourth family.”

The author narrates “Poor devils. What harm does their praying do anybody? Collected twenty-five years all around. That's how things are nowadays: twenty-five is the only kind of sentence they hand out.” This aside from Solzhenitsyn just furthers the idea of the book: that the camp system can rescue man from the insanity of war and materialism. It does this through total dehumanization. When one has nothing, one either dies or turns to God. Like Dostoevsky, prison can do great things for a man.

Finally, Ivan says that God is not the problem. What he refuses to believe in is the afterlife based on rewards and punishment. The Baptist prisoner then switches the theme to the nature of freedom. He states that to be in prison is not a terrible thing, especially since one can have the

1 For the view that Ivan really believes these things, cf Bloom, 2001: 8-9

time to search one's soul. Apart from the world and its daily cares, the prisoner can focus on what little he does have. It forces the poor soul to attach itself to God since nothing else remains.

One of the more remarkable passages comes soon after this. Solzhenitsyn narrates, “Alyoshka wasn't lying, though. You could tell from his voice and his eyes that he was glad to be in prison.” It is there where the soul is exposed. Without physical pleasures, what else is there? This is one of the main theses of the novel. In the outside world, the daily grind becomes the sole concern. One's freedom quickly evaporates as one climbs some institutional ladder or impress someone with power. On the other hand, the camp is about survival. Its about being cut off from even the smallest forms of freedom that show themselves in the urban daily world. The camp also holds out the promise of death, often violent or painful. In this case, the spiritual aspects of the GULag begin to show (Klimoff, 2007: 74-78ff).

The essential truth of faith in this novel is that Alyoshka's handwritten New Testament is the most effective means of keeping some dignity in prison. Regardless of the materialist ideology of the USSR which is the origin of the GULag, God still exists, still cares for man and still sees human beings as His own. Dignity is impossible under materialism, since that ideology can only see human beings as bundles of nerve endings to be manipulated. One is as good as another, and the death of one is meaningless. It is just the “spark” animating a hunk of flesh going out. There is no more moral content than that (Pannekoek, 2003: 80-89).

To conclude, the novel is straightforward about matters of faith. The camp is humanity under extreme conditions. Only there is the soul forced to make peace with its own coming death. Ivan himself is not inherently atheistic, but seems to maintain a “folk religion” that has no grounds in clericalism or institutionalism. Yet, the Scriptures are an “institutional” form of religion since it is written down and permanent, so the two elements come together in Ivan at the end of the novel.

Ivan might well be the symbol of the demoralized human soul under this regime. All materialist regimes, communist or capitalist, create this overworked, cynical type only concerned with what he can see or hear. It is Alyoshka, the symbol of the Scriptures rather than Protestant theology is what awakened this element of the human soul in Ivan deadened by war, materialism and the camp.

The awakening of this spiritual side of Ivan's mind is in Alyoshka's clear self-sacrificial nature. He is constantly giving parts of his ration away. When Ivan finally does this – by giving a biscuit to Alyoshka. A biscuit is a valuable thing under such conditions, and represents a severe form of deprivation. This is the road to inner peace and, in reality, making the camp bearable. It is the prison that permits the spirit to show itself, whereas in daily life it will be buried in the mundane.

Solzhenitsyn's novels explore the concepts of freedom in relation to conscience. These, in turn, relate to the state, and the nature of both ideological and party rule. All of these ideas, regardless of the rather skeletal plots of these novels, are intertwined and brought together to create a theory of moral psychology that has yet to be fully understood, partially because they are aimed at all those who accept the Enlightenment assumptions at face value.

The First Circle, named for the rather painless part of hell from Dante, refers to the question of prison, technology and, in turn, its relation to conscience. Freedom and man's

conscience are the central core of Solzhenitsyn's early work. The basics of the plot are of secondary importance, but need to be mentioned: in the Circle, Innokentii Volodin makes a phone call to France to warn about a visiting doctor, Dobroumov, who is presenting research on atomic energy in Paris. A trap is being laid for him. The call is traced. By warning the French government, he is alerting them to the sting operation being hatched by foreign NKVD agents.

The phone call, and the spy apparatus of the NKVD that it provokes are far more important than the plot itself. When this call is made, from a "public" phone, the entire apparatus of the NKVD is alerted. It's described as a "spider web" of cause and effect (with Stalin at the center of the web) as the voices on the phone are being recorded, and the (at the time) hi-tech materials of the Soviet system are simultaneously activated. It is a Gnostic imitation of nature, of the interpenetration of each element of the system to create a seemingly "organic" whole. In this case, it is an inorganic whole aimed at enslavement of labor.

As it turns out, the central core of this rather lengthy novel is not the phone call itself, but the "voice recognition" software that is being developed in an NKVD prison, euphemistically referred to as the Mavrino Institute. It is part of the GULag system, though one where the labor is in a high-tech field. Most in the west were ignorant of the fact that the prison economy also included upper class and well treated prisoners that seemed to lead a generally normal life. He did this to stress the idea that these things don't in any way negate the fact that they were in the GULag.

The nature of the phone call is Solzhenitsyn's first systematic attempt to create an "anti-Soviet," or more broadly, an "anti-Enlightenment" metaphysic. The voice is captured by Soviet recorders and voice recognition technology. It's "broken down" into its "component" parts and recreated so as to isolate its more characteristic features. This is classic Enlightenment ideology. Things are no more than the sum of their parts.

Marx fully believed himself to be the very end of the Enlightenment orientation. This is what separated him from the anarchist movement. Marx was the fulfillment of the Enlightenment, as the anarchists were its negation. Many of them were anti-modern in many respects. Legitimate, philosophical anarchism is the opposite of Enlightenment mechanization.

The Soviet vision believed that it was the last incarnation of Prometheus, and sought the complete manipulation, domination and control over nature. Nature was to become, quite literally, human, and to function at the command of man, or rather, the party, in precisely the same way as our fingers obey our volition.

In the USSR, the Promethean myth was being proved for what it really is: a method of not merely controlling nature, but of controlling man, who is, after all, a part of nature, and its' integral part. It shows the "double talk" of Promethean ideology by making reference to the liberating nature of technology, i.e., control over nature, while deceitfully ignoring (or misdirecting) attention away from the idea that man is a part of nature.

"Nature" was defined by Trotsky as the "peasantry," the "ignorant, dark masses" in need of liberation, which, in this Janus world, is regimentation within the factory system. So just as the NKVD voice recognition software creates a catalog of human voice though breaking down its vibrations, Solzhenitsyn is breaking down the Promethean mythology of the Enlightenment and its final manifestation in the USSR.

At the same time, part of this Mercurian "breaking down process" also points out the

Enlightenment idea of man as merely a series of atoms. It should be noted that Marx's doctoral dissertation at Jena was on atomism and Democritus of Athens. Man is nothing more than a series of atoms that create the "personality." Hence, the NKVD's voice recognition is a part of science as a means of control. By treating the human voice as distinct from personality, treating it as merely a series of vibrations rather than as embedded into a personality and moral conscience, technology has been stripped of any liberating properties and rendered as a servant of the state, though the USSR was far from alone in this approach.

But the *First Circle* is really about the Institute that developed this software, an Institute that is both a scientific research facility of the first order, as well as a prison. The fact that these two ideas can be combined together is a characteristic idea of the USSR. It's a comfortable prison, since all its inmates are well educated in the sciences and are put to work building the technology of domination, the technology of the security state, the technology of the Enlightenment itself. All the inmates, the *zekii*, are treated well. They are an integral part of the Soviet machine.

There seems to be two types of prisoners here: the first is the misunderstood party member, here represented by Rubin. Then there is the idealistic dissident, represented by Nerzhnin. Rubin is the scientist ordered by Stalin personally to analyze the tape recorded by the spy apparatus that ends up getting Volodin arrested. Rubin had been an NKVD spy during the war, and, as was typical of the era, promised good treatment in exchange for loyalty while at Mavrino. He was put in prison after the war, because he had refused to put into practice Stalin's orders to kill all POWs. This earns him a ticket to the camps, but because of his technical education, he is sent to Mavrino. He knew Volodin, and liked him very much, but Rubin is a very typical Solzhenitsyn-style character: his conscience is externalized into science and the party, which always manifested itself as the final word on science. The party was the truth.

The "externalization of conscience" is the central core of the "anti-Soviet" metaphysic, and will recur over and over through Solzhenitsyn's career. It is the removal of moral judgment from the individual to some other, externalized entity which could be the Enlightenment ideology, a party, even a person. For Rubin, it is the party as the embodiment of science, its final expression. Hence, he follows orders without question because the party is greater than he, and represents Marx's understanding to be the last stage in scientific progress, beyond which was nothing but bourgeois distortion.

Because everything is material in Rubin's world, there is no conscience outside of science, and a science whose final word is being pronounced by the party and the interior cult. The party is the exo-skeleton that holds the chaos of atoms together: atoms within the brain, within the human body, within society. The party is the skeleton of the New Soviet Man.

The *First Circle* itself is a dialogue, a dialogue between Rubin, and his idealist opponent, Gleb Nerzhnin. The latter upbraids Rubin by pointing out the strange inconsistency in Rubin's thinking, an idea that Solzhenitsyn will carry as central through his career: that the state somehow is exempt from the moral laws that are regularly imposed on individuals. Solzhenitsyn will spend the remainder of his career in working out the political ramifications of that notion, that the state is even more subject to morality as the person, and thus can be judged by the same criterion; a simple concept, but radical in its implications.

Nerzhnin represents the idea that there is a part of man that is not reducible to material

atoms or their vibrations like the voice, the conscience. If this is true, freedom is possible regardless of one's physical surroundings, a common idea for a man in prison. Conscience is inviolable in that it can not be externalized, those who seek this externalization are performing it out of bad faith. In other words, one cannot hide motivations behind some “force” that overcomes the free will.

Nerzhnin is the most poorly treated person in the prison, yet he remains the happiest, because there is something other than his physical body that he can make reference to and celebrate. Like Ivan above, it is strengthened by imprisonment. Happiness does not depend on physical surroundings, it depends on the guarding of the soul, the freedom that exists solely because this soul is not material, and is not amenable to manipulation by the state. The most important element of this character is the idea that freedom is happiness, and happiness can only exist when the soul remains itself, and is not distorted by external elements. To deny the soul, as Rubin does, is to destroy the personality. To externalize it to a fallible institution like the party is to make it even worse. It is this externalization that made the tyranny of the USSR possible.

Nerzhnin is offered his freedom, but he refuses. He would rather be sent to Siberia, where he “can be free.” The fact that Mavrino is the creation of the state, of the materialist, Enlightenment anti-culture, the treatment there can never be equated with happiness, but only of comfort. He is a slave regardless of his treatment, since he is merely a cog in the wheel of the modern world. He is offered his freedom to become a full time cryptographer, but since this necessitates taking orders from the state, he refuses.

He can never be free if his abilities are merely part of the state security apparatus. Only in Siberia can he be free, for, in the USSR, the harshest prisons alone are conducive to freedom and happiness, since it is here where one can actually live as a full human in permanent opposition to the state and to the Enlightenment which created it. The prison protects man from the reality of the external world.

As in *Ivan*, the beatings, the starvation rations and the cold are constant reminders that only here can the soul be left alone and subject only to itself: the demands of conscience. He is in prison precisely because he rejected the idea that the party, or the Enlightenment, is his conscience, he retains his integrity. Solzhenitsyn is building a moral vision. It is vision, in the *First Circle*, comprised of nine elements:

1. That happiness (but not comfort) can be found anywhere except the bourgeois order of self-interest. It is a state of mind, one that is independent of external factors. These external factors such as money, markets or reputation are the sole barrier against happiness. He turns the western utilitarian myth on its head. The soul is distorted by its dependency on external contingency. The attachment to things of this world force the “materialization” of the soul such that the happiness of man is contingent on the external world over which he has little control. If the soul is immaterial, it can't be materialized, as Rubin shows.

2. There is an immediate connection between the state and the Enlightenment. The latter constructed a world built on material objects. The control over the (unexplained) motion of such objects is the job of science, which can analyze their motion and predict their course in relation to man. Once this is done, a set of institutions can be built around “happiness” that use these

discoveries as their foundation. For example, men desire money, so if fines are levied for anti-social behavior, such behavior will stop, given the axiomatic claim of man's wanting money, and so on. This is the basic Victorian morality based on utility and the pursuit of pleasure. It's the foundation of the "free market."

3. As the Enlightenment is based on the interconnection of all external stimuli (since they are all reducible to atoms and their vibrations), so totalitarianism is a practical and scientific necessity. If force applied in one direction will eventually affect all elements, then everything is connected. This is graphically shown in the beginning of the novel when the vibrations of Volodin's voice create a chain reaction of activation of the NKVD's entire apparatus in an inorganic dystopian anti-nature. All is motion, all is cause and effect, hence all is connected and there is no autonomous part of life. This is the main thesis of the work as related to the USSR and all materialist ideologies, and is the foundation of the dialogue between Rubin and Nerzhnin. The Enlightenment, as a result, must become the totalitarian state: Lenin is the proper successor, so to speak, to Bacon, Comte, Darwin and Huxley.

4. Nerzhnin is a humanist in the best sense of that word. He is not motivated by ideology or any externalized sense of identity. If Rubin is Huxley, then Nerzhnin is Tolstoy: questioning, suffering, searching, but always cheerful, for this is the proper state of man, a man striving to understand. This impulse is snuffed out by ideology, or the full identification of society with a set of concepts by which all men must live. All ideologies claim to be the "end of history."

5. The janitor, Spiridon Yegorov, is another example of the happy life, the only one possible in the USSR. He fought for both the Reds and the Whites in the civil war and went from high society to prison after it. He remains barely literate, and yet, like Nerzhnin, retains his basic cheerfulness. He is the wisest of all, since he has learned that he cannot base happiness on external fortune. He has experienced everything and has come to the conclusion that sadness is possible mainly in the highest and most exalted positions.

6. Material progress is not related to happiness. This is a radical proposal that would cause the questioning of all modern institutions and social theories. If happiness is a certain peace of soul, a soul that has freed itself from the "spinning atoms" of the external world, then material progress is not just unrelated to happiness, but becomes a barrier to it. The more production develops, the more the society comes to identify with its "progressive nature," which soon distorts the moral intuition of social actors. It creates the moral axiom that the more one has, the happier one will be.

7. Siberia becomes the symbol of freedom, a concept certainly not new in Russian literature. It becomes the symbol of freedom because prison is the only place in the Enlightenment mentality where one is freed from all attachments to "spinning atoms." If atoms are directionless (of themselves, in a vacuum), then science has taken its role as providing order with the goal of "maximum pleasure," but again, there is the other face of Janus, the face that says that if all is material, then science is totalitarian. Science by its own self-definition is in charge of placing

order on the chaos of the material world, which must be everything. Hence, utilitarianism is totalitarianism. Prison then becomes freedom, because it implies rejection and resistance.

8. The incomprehension of the Janus-like nature of modernity is graphically illustrated near the end of this novel where Nerzhnin is being taken to Siberia in a truck. The truck is disguised as it rolls through the Russian landscape, disguised by the word “meat” written on the side. It is disguised as a food truck delivering meats to local groceries. A French journalist, writing on the USSR, dispatches a story home which rhapsodizes about the “plenty” to be found in the USSR, given the large number of “meat” trucks he has seen since he’s been in Russia. This black humor is brilliant, but it shows in a pathetic way the nature of western reactions to the USSR. It has yet to understand the relation between Victorian Darwinism and totalitarianism. The liberal-conservative nexus, the two pillars in the Masonic Temple of Solomon that undergird the two wings of modern life.

9. If the pure soul is at the basis of happiness, then the ability to make moral decisions is a part of this. Similar to Kant’s vision of autonomy, material distortions vitiate the nature of moral choice. This is because, if the soul is being influenced by external forces, then moral choice will be based on unfree factors. Moral law exists precisely in that it is not dependent on external things, but exists in itself and is self-defined as an integral part of the personality. Moral idealism is radically incompatible with the Enlightenment, since the latter bases its own identity in the progressive nature of production. On the other hand, if the pure soul is the autonomous one, happiness and moral action is possibly anywhere.

Moral purity comes to exist only through suffering because the usual props and buttresses of external comforts are removed. Suffering disrupts the daily grind and forces us to think of the fundamentals. A man who has lost everything has no choice but to reconsider how he defines himself and what he considers “success” to be. Autonomy, then comes through suffering, and Solzhenitsyn has now built the structure of a moral idea by equating freedom with suffering, and this freedom with happiness.

Cancer Ward deals with very similar ideas. The Ward itself is in Uzbekistan and the action takes place after Stalin's death. In place of Rubin, there is Pavel Rusanov, nearly identical characters expressing the same idea: the evils of placing one’s trust in external things such as ideology, theory, the party or the state. Rusanov is a servile informer. He exemplifies the “externalized conscience.” The book is about a group of cancer patients as they are “treated” at a makeshift, unsafe hospital. The “doctors” didn't have an MD degree, as was the case in Solzhenitsyn's own cancer treatment in Kazakhstan.

The Soviet bureaucracy in Stalin's regime are the central theme, of course. Rusanov's son shows some “humanist” tendencies, for which his father gets very upset. He too has cancer and is largely terminal, though he fears death despite his public materialism. It is as if Soviet dogma soothes him somewhat. It's hard to imagine these people curing anyone. Cancer, as is made abundantly clear, represents not just Stalinism or corruption, but the very presence of the USSR in the world.

Oleg Kostoglotov, the main character (and with a name meaning the “swallowing of

bone”), is now living in the post-Stalin world. Rusanov, in the process of de-Stalinization, fears for his own life given how many men are rehabilitated. Part of the conclusion of the story is that Kostoglotov comes to accept that the Soviet experiment has changed Russia forever, and for the worse. Like cancer, it isn't just cured, but it leaves sometimes substantial mental and physical scars behind. Famously, he visits a zoo once he's released and realizes that captivity has destroyed them. They wouldn't know what to do in the wild anymore just like Russians now have no idea how to lead a rational life. He's also now impotent because of the hormones used to treat him.

It gets worse for him as he firmly comes to believe he's worthless. He has nothing to offer a woman or, in this case, Russia herself (which is often depicted as a female). Russia is permanently damaged by Stalin regardless of what comes after him. In the zoo, there's an empty cage that housed a monkey. A visitor threw tobacco in its eyes and severely injured it. “Tobacco” was unheard of in pre-Petrine Russia and was a western import the Old Believers hated. The monkey was him, a prisoner, and Stalin has damaged the “sight” of all Russia, not just those imprisoned by his agents.

Solzhenitsyn makes a point of connecting the Ward to the GULag. Having cancer means your status in society is radically altered. You become a “patient,” that is, the opposite of an actual citizen. You become an object. It removes the sufferer even from close family given the irrational fear this disease inculcates in others. The patient is physically changed to a severe degree. They become paranoid, thinking they too might have it. This is common for both patients and those who might love them.

A very famous quote from the book comes from the hero:

Should a man, to preserve his life, pay everything that gives life color, scent and excitement? Can one accept a life of digestion, respiration, muscular and brain activity-and nothing more? 'Become a walking blueprint? Is this not an exorbitant price? Is it not a mockery? Should one pay? Seven years in the army and seven years in the camp, twice seven years twice that mythical or biblical term, then to be deprived of the ability to tell what is a man and what is a woman – is not a price extortionate?

Of course, official Soviet psychology says exactly this. That's all man is. For medical science, the assumption is that man's body is a machine rather than an organism. To become a “blueprint” is no different than to become an ideologue, parroting the official slogans as Rusanov does. The system destroys all that is human and retains all that is mechanical.

As usual, he won't confine his attacks to just Stalin, but to capitalism, its sister ideology: “It's true that private enterprise is extremely flexible, But its only good within very narrow limits. If private enterprise isn't held in an iron grip it gives birth to people who are no better than beasts, those stock-exchange people with greedy appetites beyond restraint” he has his hero say in the novel. Capitalism and Marxism are identical except for the latter's rejection of individualism. Yet, the “commune” isn't actually communal, its a “collective,” the opposite of a community. Those were deliberately destroyed by the regime as I detail in my latest book, *The Soviet Experiment*.

Capitalism agrees with socialism on the nature and purpose of man and this lies only in productive capacity. Men have no worth outside it. Late capitalism is driven by both finance capital and the total commodification of society. Man's worth is quite literally seen in terms of his wealth at the expense of all other virtues. In the capitalism he speaks of here, it is only vice that makes the successful man. This too is identical in the USSR and can be found in all dissident writers without exception.

Solzhenitsyn's writings are not attacks, per se, on the USSR, but the absurdities of the Soviet are merely an excuse for an attack on the Enlightenment and its open worship of Prometheus, the "light bearer," that will permit the domination of nature in exchange for sacrifice, that is, the slavery and dehumanization of labor. The USSR is just the greatest and most blatant manifestation of this ancient ideology.

The sacrifice also includes the huge power grid that must come into existence in order to keep the wheels of industrial society running: a huge, regulatory state, foreign wars and colonies, maintenance of cheap fuel sources, the continuing battle between the boss and worker and the continuing exploitation of labor. In addition, a system is formed where private, state and quasi-private capital all create a authoritarian grid of thought and action that is put in the service of power.

The veneration of progress, of which the USSR was its highest achievement, means the creation of an entire complex, a maze of foreign and internal entanglements that demands complete regimentation. Technology must be served by an entire web of forces that keep the system going. It is this reality that Rusanov manifests. This system, that of modern science, requires servility, the bureaucratic mentality and struggles to come to terms with criticism.

Rusanov has a nightmare where he is crawling through a pipe of some kind. At the end, he sees a small girl, the daughter of a man who Rusanov had placed in prison, a man against whom he concocted crimes in exchange for a better apartment. As it turns out, Rusanov had become quite famous for informing on people whose goods he wanted. Therefore, regardless of the long-time habitual materialization of the conscience, a spark still exists, though one which can only manifest itself during dreams. It is a hospital environment not unlike the prison in the earlier novel, and all the main characters in it have cancer, excepting the doctors.

Like Chekhov before him in *Ward Number 6*, the hospital is a metaphor for social life, the state, and the system that encapsulates both. There is an interesting exchange between Rusanov and Poduev, another inmate of the ward. There is some discussion of the nature of "spontaneous" healing, or, more accurately, a direct action of God upon the human body. Here, Poduev is saying, in good Old Believer tradition, that a pure soul is capable of self-healing. Asceticism is the key and a strict regimen of fasting can cure most diseases and the body will begin consuming diseased cells and tissues. There is a solid secular and legitimately scientific understanding of fasting, but the more spiritual understanding is that it brings people beyond the here and now, beyond the vulgar world of cause and effect. Fasting opens the senses, permits greater insights and deeper concentration. It does for others what the prison or the ward does for the characters here.

Purity of life and conduct do have a central healing quality. It is a secular reason why all traditional religions, Orthodoxy and Islam, practice fasting. Once one departs from the cause and effect nature of fallen objects, the ultimate, religious and spiritual core of the world can be

apprehended. Over a long time, such things become a normal part of life and the ascetic begins to live in a different, more real world. “The Holy Spirit cannot be perceived on the full stomach,” as all the church fathers say. The mind’s eye must be heightened in the action of ritual, a strict regimen of fasting and manual and intellectual labor. This leads to a completely new relationship to created objects.

Rubin and Rusanov are believers in “doctrine,” in the very worst sense, that reality can be expressed through written manifestos and ideological pamphlets. This is the cardinal sin of modern ideology. The hero of this novel is Kostoglotov, very much like Nerzhnin in the former novel. It is this parallel that permits the literature in this field to deal with these two novels as almost one. Plots are not significant, rather, they are excuses to deal with the very serious philosophical problems brought up by the Enlightenment: progress, the state and the industrial economy.

The USSR is different in this respect because Stalin demanded that his country overtake the west in industrial production in only a few years. This was the true purpose of the camps. When the “normal” economy slowed, the slack was taken by the camp population. Later, the camps became an important prop to the economy, it alone gave the pretense of fulfilling the five year plans, and the camp population, dying at an alarming rate, needed to be refurbished by manipulated arrests from the outside. At the time of Stalin's death, about 15 million people were in the camps. From 1929 to 1953, about 18 million people were deported to the camps, and about 10 million others, sent away by Trotsky and Lenin, already existed.

Nikita Khrushchev convinced the western press that he dismantled the system in 1960. He did no such thing nor would he dare. He just changed the name, calling it, generally, the Corrective Labor Colony (the IK system) and, with lesser severity, the Colony Settlement (or the IP system). These actually different in no respect from the GULag. He certainly didn't dismantle the over 30,000 camps that the Soviet economy depended on to function. He just knew the western press would believe anything. The renamed GULag was actually closed in 1987.

Again, the concept of the relation between camp life and “normal” Soviet life is brought up, but also in a way that is applicable to any society whose elites have chosen the Enlightenment over traditional agriculture and home industries. Since only the former that creates the necessity for all-out social regimentation and centralization, the parallels between prison, and work life become too serious for comfort. Both these novels are utterly focused on the nature of freedom in the advanced Enlightenment.

Both the US and its allies, as well as the USSR, claimed to be the final word of Enlightenment, both believed themselves dedicated to “science” and its handmaiden “scientific rationality,” both believed production to be the greatest calling of man, both believed to be in the process of solving all social and medical problems through “progress” and “industrialization.”

Rusanov has not merely externalized his conscience, but, like all rationalists, has externalized his reason. The final point to both these novels is that rationalism becomes an idol, it creates institutions and movements that claim to be in the position of interpreting nature and history, providing it with a goal, a telos, to which all society needs to be oriented. The slang word “backward” takes this presupposition as axiomatic.

For Solzhenitsyn, the characters of Rubin and Rusanov are used to express the final guttering out of rationalistic approaches to “progress.” They speak in cliches, slogans taken out

of the party handbook. Such approaches to “knowledge” are very common in the post-Enlightenment age, where everything from evolutionism to “the woman question” is treated as coming from a canon, a catechism that needs to be quoted from. In so doing, the speaker becomes a “part of the system,” and in return, receives mainstream approbation, which certifies one as “reasonable.” Those who refuse become internet publishers.

Kostoglotov realizes something: such catechetical answers coming from those who definitely know better: politicians, bureaucrats, philosophers, scientists, clergy—is not a matter of epistemology, but is a matter of survival. Modern academics provide the best example of this. The young grad student comes into the academic world. She is called an “intellectual” and given captive audiences to lecture to. She is treated as part of the modern cognoscenti, given a high salary (certainly by comparison to others her age), an office with her name on the door, little work, and few classes. This is a comfortable life.

It is certainly no coincidence that anti-modernists, such as this writer, speak of the middle ages’ nearly complete lack of bureaucracy for all aspects of life. Even the Byzantine Empire and the papal curia pale in comparison to the modern state, the creation of the late Renaissance and its “Enlightened Absolutism,” whether parliamentary or royal. The state created modern relationships, contra the libertarians, and thus the state needs to regulate them. The state consciously destroyed traditional ways of living from the local, autonomous farm community to the urban *artel*, so as to clear the way for the new “rational and efficient” economic system.

Liberalism and capitalism, let alone socialism, are the creations of state power in conjunction with elite interests, eliminating the natural state of man: in a small, tightly knit farming community based on religion and the extended family; a general will far beyond the writings of Rousseau, a sort of contract far beyond that of Locke.

Solzhenitsyn asks the common sense question about technology and its proper use. Those with money commission technological innovation, done according to their wishes. They will then use it for their interests. This can be the state, private capital and semi-private capital such as the major tech companies of Northern Virginia. Science cannot think objectively, as their corporate myth demands they believe, because they require money, and money exists solely in the hands of the elite. And it makes no difference if that elite is party, state, or private, elites and the bureaucracies that serve them think alike, at least in the articulation of their interests and the corporate methods of manifesting it, such as Bilderberg, the WCC or the Party Plenum.

Solzhenitsyn is creating parallels between the state, the Enlightenment, party thinking, conformism, technology and freedom. He is convinced that the concept of freedom needs to be redefined in a situation where the omnistate is not going away, in fact, more and more mobilized interest groups are demanding favors from it. In fact, long ago, this writer made the claim that modern politics is easily reducible to bargaining agreements between the state on the one hand, and mobilized groups (feminists, banks, universities), on the other. The state provides favors, while the group promises loyalty.

Freedom is impossible here. In the early writings of Solzhenitsyn, prison and death are the two elements that manifest freedom. Death, or the end of one’s earthly life, forces a purely objective portrayal of life, hence the cancer ward, or the concentration camp. The other is the prison: where compromise is not necessary, because one is not directly working for the Regime, but is rather pronounced as its enemy, hence, prison promotes integrity. This is why Nerzhnin

prefers to be deported to Siberia rather than work as a cryptographer for the NKVD, with a high salary and great public prestige.

Thus there are several worlds, all nearly identical in content, but different in form: modern society at large, the prison, the hospital and political leadership. Each of these differs in form in obvious ways, but not in content. Like the wide-eyed assistant professor example, the more subtle forms of coercion are the most effective, when rewards are great and punishments more so. Freedom of conscience, in the non-cliche way it is appropriated in these works, is a very rare gift. The mind seems forcibly canalized given the world where one is forced to conform.

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What do these works say about his social theory more broadly? Solzhenitsyn begins with the idea that men are social. The human infant is helpless and totally dependent. Thus, no one is “born free.” We are born into a fragile state of dependency. This implies that societies and groups have to exist before any individual can. It implies a division of labor so the necessities of life can be had with minimal effort. It then implies that societies have to be unified in language so it can have the consensus necessary to function. Civic life exists only to the extent that all participants speak the same language and exist in the same universe of meaning.

We have been hearing all this talk about “human rights” ever since the Enlightenment era; they have been secured in a number of countries, but not always within the bounds of moral values and principles. Yet for some reason no one has ever urged us to defend “human obligations”. Even calling for self-restraint is considered to be ludicrous and absurd. Meanwhile, only self-restraint, self-denial can guarantee a moral and reliable resolution of any conflicts.

This is the same argument as condemning feminism because of its suspicious timing. There were no riots demanding that women can go down into the mines. There were no ballot initiatives to include women soldiers at the Somme. No women were demanding to serve a long day in the fields. There might be no atheists in foxholes, but it is certain there are no feminists during wartime.

What this means is that such abstract claims exist as parasites. Solzhenitsyn is stating here that abstractions such as the “right to assembly” can only exist because many millions of highly disciplined workers of all sorts created an advanced society that can afford such luxuries.

But human obligations, human duties, people forget. You cannot have rights without obligations. They must be in balance, if indeed obligations are not to be greater. Just as it is impossible to say to myself that I will breathe with my left lung, but I will not breathe with my right—they both need to work together—in such a way, duty and . . . right must go together. Our situation has become so twisted that we now even have the expression that there is an ideology of human rights. And what is that? That is anarchism, known for a long time, and so we are moving toward this anarchism (Solzhenitsyn's Address to the International Academy of Philosophy, Moscow 1993, from Pearce 1999: 83).

Asking a modern nominalist or empiricist to define and describe a “right” is a frustrating

experience. None of these modern ideologies can make sense out of a “right” since it is inherently a non-material, universal property inherent to human nature. If it is not this, than the word is useless. Today, it functions like a demand, from which there is no appeal. Abstractions are almost always a cover for a more fully expressible agenda. Most importantly, rights are entirely quantitative entities: they do not specify, of themselves, what is to be done. No materialist or utilitarian can ever make sense out of a right.

He states “Can external freedom for its own sake be the goal of conscious living beings? Or is it only a framework within which other and higher aims are realized?” (As *Breathing and Consciousness Returns*, 21). This question comes from *Rebuilding Russia*, a 1981 compilation he edited. The point is a powerful one. “Negative freedoms” don't make sense. JS Mill made the argument that the only real foundation for freedom of thought is to make it easier to reach truth. Yet moderns reject the idea of truth that is not enforced with extreme power. Therefore, these freedoms are not good in and of themselves. Mill's error, among many others, is that men care about truth at all.

James F. Stephen wrote an unread attack on JS Mill that is a classic in polemical philosophical literature. Because he destroys the foundations of Enlightenment politics, he cannot be found in university classes, despite his ability and accessibility to even modern students. He makes it very clear that “The incalculable majority of mankind form their opinions. . . and are attached to them because they suit their temper and meet their wishes, and not because and insofar as they think themselves warranted by evidence in believing them to be true” (Steven, 29).

This is essential to any anti-Enlightenment critique. A graduate student might pour over ancient texts seeking the truth on a profound question only to discover that no one cares. This doesn't mean the truths aren't worthwhile, they might be the most profound imaginable, its just that at a time of universal corruption, truth as such isn't important. Only self-interest is.

Therefore, the entire foundation for abstract freedom of thought is destroyed. Today, such arguments are put forth by major media conglomerates because they see their own monopoly on “truth” to be attacked by the state or even public opinion. Yet, none of these actors are motivated by truth as such. There's no cash value in truth.

Solzhenitsyn writes elsewhere on our ends of action:

Our life consists not in the pursuit of material success but in the quest of worthy spiritual growth. Our entire earthly existence is but a transitional stage in the movement toward something higher. . . . Material laws alone do not explain our life or give it direction. The laws of physics and physiology will never reveal the indisputable manner in which the Creator constantly, day in and day out, participates in the life of each of us, unfailingly granting us the energy of existence; when this assistance leaves us, we die. In the life of our entire planet, the divine spirit moves with no less force: this we must grasp in our dark and terrible hour (*The Times*, Nov. 20, 1982).

One cannot be a positivist and a materialist at the same time. This is because materialism is a universal, pre-scientific and precognitive notion and its laws are equally both. Materialism is

a rejection; it is a negative. Spirit is freedom since it cannot be determined the way matter is. Those calling themselves materialists blame others for their actions, maintain some kind of moral standards and constantly make reference to universals in their speech and thought.

It is not a serious idea but is rather a protest against something else. One of the most outrageous sins of the vulgar scientific mind is the claim that all the scientific establishment cannot have dominion over is non-existent. This is essential to Positivism. Materialism cannot deal with freedom or any universal, including “utility” or “rights.” The laws of matter must either have been created along with it or were later added to it. In both cases, it implies God, and a God with the power to create entire worlds with a purpose.

Not a return to religion but an elevation toward religion. The thing is that religion itself cannot but be dynamic which is why “return” is an incorrect term. A return to the forms of religion which perhaps existed a couple of centuries ago is absolutely impossible. On the contrary, in order to combat modern materialistic mores, as religion must, to fight nihilism and egotism, religion must also develop, must be flexible in its forms, and it must have a correlation with the cultural forms of the epoch. Religion always remains higher than everyday life. In order to make the elevation towards religion easier for people, religion must be able to alter its forms in relation to the consciousness of modern man. Of course, one cannot declare that only my faith is correct and all other faiths are not. Of course God is endlessly multi-dimensional so every religion that exists on earth represents some face, some side of God. One must not have any negative attitude to any religion but nonetheless the depth of understanding God and the depth of applying God’s commandments is different in different religions (Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Russia in Collapse* (Moscow: *Russkii Put’*, 2006).

He makes the common sense claim that a religious form must be congruent to an existing culture. However, the “culture” of the postmodern United States cannot have anything but corruption made congruent to it. Religion is inherently in rebellion against it. Solzhenitsyn is making reference to societies that are generally healthy.

Going to an earlier time is “absolutely impossible” because there is no current frame of reference that can make sense out of its laws. The agrarian village is a memory. Words have lost their original meanings even in the 20th century alone. Media manipulation has reduced man to a ADD patient. These institutions – such as the village, extended family or the monarchy – were not just brute givens. They altered our perception and changed the way man interpreted events. Social institutions do that. Without them reality is gone. For each step made in “progress,” many more things are forgotten.

The Iron Curtain of yesterday gave our country superb protection against all the positive features of the West: against the West’s civil liberties, its respect for the individual, its freedom of personal activity, its high level of general welfare, its spontaneous charitable movements. But the Curtain did not reach all the way to the bottom, permitting the continuous seepage of liquid manure—the self-

indulgent and squalid “popular mass culture,” the utterly vulgar fashions, and the by-products of immoderate publicity—all of which our deprived young people have greedily absorbed. Western youth runs wild from a feeling of surfeit, while ours mindlessly apes these antics despite its poverty. And today’s television obligingly distributes these streams of filth throughout the land (Rebuilding, 1991: 34-35).

The Stalinist system was not entirely bad. It protected Russians from the anti-cultural tripe of the west. Russians were cynical towards the ugly “realism” of their ruling class and equally dismissive of the decadent nonsense from the US. By the time the system collapsed in the early 1990s, Russians were uninfected by either Leninism or liberalism.

The only good news is that the sufferings of Russia in the 1990s, worse than anything under Stalin, mean that Russia will forever be at war with liberalism. There's no way that any Russian can fail to blame the near disintegration of his nation in anything but this imported monstrosity. Russia is the leader against the forces of globalization for this reason. Similarly in his “Russia in Collapse” we read:

Having left religion, man has forgotten that he is part of a unified creation. He has stopped thinking of himself as part of nature, and so we move to a destruction of the environment to such an extent that perhaps we will destroy the environment before we destroy society. As we can see by the number of international conferences where the United States and other leading countries are refusing to take measures to stem the destruction of the environment. This is a direct path toward the destruction of the world (From *Russkii Put*, ' 2006).

By “unified creation” Solzhenitsyn is referring to the notion that human beings are part of the created order and hence intrinsically contain mental structures to faithfully reproduce and understand it. This is an essential tenet of Personalism, one of the native Russian philosophical contributions. The entire “tabula rasa” theory is absurd. It assumes that the mind is not a part of the natural order. If it is – and it obviously is – then it is already fitted with the tools needed to understand it.

Modern industrialization is prefaced on the bizarre notion that man is god. This means that man's “reason” is “above” nature and exists to give it meaning. It is as close to granting man divine power as the Enlightenment dared to do. “Reason” is in quotes because this is not the function of the rational faculty. Rather, “reason” in this case is merely the handmaiden of the passions. Industry and its consequent destruction exist exclusively for the sake of satisfying the demands and appetites of the elite. It is the exploitation of the created order in such a violent and natural way that the very nature of humanity has been changed. The “default” epistemology of western man is that “reason” is not a part of creation but superior to it. It is merely a stage upon which the will measures which image excites the passions the most. Solzhenitsyn says:

The humanistic way of thinking, which has proclaimed itself our guide, did not admit the existence of intrinsic evil in man, nor did it see any task higher than the

attainment of happiness on earth. It started modern Western civilization on the dangerous trend of worshiping man and his material needs. Everything beyond physical well-being and the accumulation of material goods, all other human requirements and characteristics of a subtler and higher nature, were left outside the area of attention of state and social systems, as if human life did not have any higher meaning. Thus gaps were left open for evil, and its drafts blow freely today (Solzhenitsyn, 1980: 10).

The western academic and political elite turned on Solzhenitsyn due to this famous speech at Harvard. Rather, they created their own “dissident,” the Jewish, urban liberal Josef Brodsky as a substitute for him. This is nothing against Brodsky, but he was given a status he did not deserve due to the perception that he was more ideologically comforting to the western elites. Solzhenitsyn's solution ensured their suspicion. While too extraordinary to be anything other than respected, it became increasingly common to attack him. Among other sins, he stated the following in his *Russia in Collapse*:

In today's devastated, crushed, dazed and corruption-susceptible Russia, it is even more evident that we will not recover without the spiritual defense of the Orthodox faith. If we are not an irrational herd, we need a dignified foundation for our unity. We, Russians, must hold the spiritual gift of the Orthodox faith with great devotion and persistence, for it is one of our last gifts, a gift we are already losing. It was precisely the Orthodox faith, not the imperial power, that created the Russian cultural model. It is the Orthodoxy preserved in our hearts, traditions and deeds that will strengthen the spiritual meaning that unites the Russians above all tribal considerations. And even if we happen to lose our population numbers, territory, and even statehood in the upcoming decade, we will still be left with the only imperishable thing, the Orthodox faith and the noble perceptions of reality ensuing from it.

One of the more disturbing things occurring in that most depressing decade of the 1990s was how American elites welcomed not only the fall of the USSR, but also the total disintegration of Russia. The annihilation of the Russian ethnos was a matter of minor import. Western academics at Harvard are partly responsible for the deaths of millions through their authoring of the privatization schemes that were soon to destroy an entire country.

The facts are undeniable. In 2016, Jews make up 0.16 percent of the Russian population, yet the overwhelming majority of the oligarchs are Jewish, proving that it is a Jewish nationalist movement. Some of the wealthiest, as of 2010, include: Mikhail Friedman at \$17.6 billion, Viktor Vekselberg with a net worth of \$17.2 billion, Leonid Michelson who has a net worth of \$15.6 billion, German Khan who is worth of \$11.3 billion, Mikhail Prokhorov who is worth \$11 billion, and Roman Abramovich who sits at \$9.1 billion. Even better known are Boris Berzhovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and Alexander Smolensky who are so wealthy that accurate estimates are difficult to come by. All the above are very low estimates since they do not declare most of their income.

None of these Jews created anything. None assisted Russia in any way and are the most hated people in that country. Obviously, it is an ethnic movement. That the Ivy league cabal in the US is also Jewish and the Russia government was headed by Anatoly Chubais (rather than Yeltsin) who is also a Jew prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the annihilation of Russia was the result of an organized Jewish nationalist camarilla. Given these facts, the western press, academic establishment and politicians of both parties openly equated oligarchy with democracy. Solzhenitsyn confronted this conspiracy:

We are exiting from communism in the most unfortunate and awkward way. It would have been difficult to design a path out of communism worse than the one that has been followed. Our government declared that it is conducting some kind of great reform. In reality, no real reforms were begun, and no one at any point has declared a coherent program. The name of “reform” simply covers what is blatantly a process of the theft of the national heritage. In other words, many former communists, very flexible, very agile, and others who are basically almost confidence tricksters, petty thieves coming in from the sides, have together in unison begun to steal everything there is from the national resources. It used to belong to the state, but now under the guise of privatization, all of this has been pocketed.

For massive enterprises, for large factories, large firms, sometimes only one to two percent of its value is paid when they are privatized. The top, the oligarchy, are really so preoccupied with this fever of thieving that they really did not stop to think of the future of Russia. They didn't even think of trying to maintain the government treasury, to think of the government finances; it is simply a frenzy of thieving. Suddenly they realize that as the government they have to rule the country, but there's no money left. So now in a very humiliating way, they have to bend the knee and ask the West for money—not just now, but there has been an ongoing process. . . . And all these loans from abroad are merely stopgap measures designed to keep the oligarchy in power (Solzhenitsyn, 1996).

Solzhenitsyn's work on the Jews in Russian history remains blacklisted in the American academy, but they are identical to the above. His argument (among many other things) is that both the Bolshevik coup in 1918 and the rape of the 1990s were both Jewish ethnic movements. A mere listing of the names of offenders is sufficient to prove this. Academics have to make a choice to either a) bury this information in the interests of maintaining their careers or b) risk everything by stating these simple facts. The choice they made is well known.

The problem is that, given the abdication of responsibility of academics and journalists, the truth is put in the unsteady hands of amateurs who are well meaning, but ultimately incompetent. Regardless, the Jewish response to Solzhenitsyn's writings on the Jews was as laughable as it was predictable.

Solzhenitsyn's commitment to Russian Orthodox Christianity and his Slavophile rhetoric marred his heroism in standing up to the Stalinists and their successors.

Solzhenitsyn was a religious fundamentalist who yearned to overthrow the gains humanity made in modernity in the Renaissance, the Reformation and the French Revolution. If he did not specifically want to return Russia to the rule of the Czars, he did yearn for a pre-Bolshevik golden age in which the anti-Jewish, conservative Russian Orthodox Church would dominate politics, theology and morality (Kavon, Jerusalem Post, December 30, 2013).

The author here is Rabbi Eli Kavon. He is well aware of the Jewish nature of both Bolshevism and the former “Russian” oligarchy. This is a very tame version of what officially Jewish publications say about Solzhenitsyn.

The initial Bolshevik ruling class was almost exclusively Jewish while the oligarchs in Russia in the 1990s were equally so. Can this be a coincidence? Add to this the fact that they acted identically: they created an ideological mechanism that served as the intellectual cover for the mechanistic transmission system that conveyed the wealth created by the Russian worker into the hands of those who refuse to work, the Jewish elites themselves. On the question of property, he writes:

It is impossible to create a state governed by laws without first having an independent citizen. . . . But there can be no independent citizen without private property. After seventy years of propaganda, our brains have been instilled with the notion that one must fear private property and avoid hired labor as though they were the work of the devil: that represents a major victory of ideology over human essence. . . . The truth is that ownership of modest amounts of property which does not oppress others must be seen as an integral component of personality, and as a factor contributing to stability, while conscientiously performed, fairly compensated hired labor is a form of mutual assistance and a source of goodwill among people (Solzhenitsyn, 1991: 36).

There is some confusion about the term “property.” Marx used it to refer to capital rather than personal property. This comment above seems to be about a little of both: capital that is productive but small scale, or even personal possessions that have economic and other forms of value. The Soviets were the worst exploiters of labor. They were opposed to any kind of capital accumulation not because they were in favor of equality but rather that it was capital they didn't control. The Soviet system in practice was an extreme version of oligarchy. On commerce, he states:

We must learn to respect healthy, honest and intelligent private commerce (and to distinguish it from predatory dealings built on bribes and swindling of inept management): such commerce stimulates and unifies society. . . it is clear that in addition to strict environmental controls, and substantial fines for despoiling the environment, financial incentives should be in place for efforts aimed at restoring or protecting nature, as well as bringing back traditional crafts (Solzhenitsyn, 1991: 39).

It is always darkly humorous when apologists for the conglomerate and monopoly use metaphors drawn from a farmer's market to justify their domination of continents. Adam Smith assumed the market would be local, and with full knowledge of buyer and seller. He did not and could not envisage the present global regime. Global capitalism Smith rejected vehemently on the grounds that it wasn't a market in the sense he meant.

Modern capital is the dominant actor in all societies today: it is far more pervasive than the state and far more totalitarian than any party. Parties and "worker's states" were crude and clumsy; private capital, concentrated in a few hands with deep connections to Washington, can redefine terms like "tyranny" and convince people they are progressive and unable to be fooled. Capital is nuanced and sophisticated while secret police forces are unsteady and always short on manpower.

In a recent article by Mikhail Bernstam, he makes the idiosyncratic case that Solzhenitsyn was a "libertarian." Given that labels can mean anything and quotations can be multiplied selectively, this might not be impossible to suggest. Within the article is a strongly profound passage that is an excellent preface to Solzhenitsyn's worry about Russian life after 1991:

The process of socioeconomic implementation of the ideological model requires not only oppression of individual political opponents but, first and foremost, the mass destruction of whole social classes and ethnic groups who do not fit the new system. The older despotisms imposed additional constraints on human activities, but they did not try to impose a new model that would require fundamental changes in behavior itself. Behavior is determined by individual preferences rooted in human nature. Lenin's error, corrected later by an unappreciated economic whiz of the century, Joseph Stalin, lay in the fact that one cannot change basic modes of human behavior without making a so-called Cultural Revolution that would change human minds and human nature. Until this is done, ideological experiments on human guinea pigs are limited to negative selection, to the mass slaughter of the unfit groups of human raw material. From Lenin's and Pol Pot's experience we know that the more ideologues hurry, the more they kill. The era of detente, when the USSR, Romania, Poland, and East Germany began to exchange their undesirable subjects for Western subsidies (instead of murdering them), resulted in an implicit consensus that the slave-trade is a progressive improvement upon uncorrupted, idealistic communism (Bernstam, 2001: 120).

When Solzhenitsyn speaks of early 1990s Russia as traumatized and tortured, this is why. The problem for this author is that advanced capitalism does the same, except without camps and drug experiments. It does so by free trade, social sanction and the monopoly control over media. Beyond this, the profundity is that ideological movements, once in power, cannot subject their rule to a vote of the citizens. When coming across a "democratic socialist," this writer enjoys pointing out the pandering that takes place when they stress the "democratic" part of that phrase.

Treating the listener like a target for advertising, they drop a vague, meaningless but positively charged word before something more controversial like "socialist." The implication is

that socialism can and should be dismantled if voters demand it. The quote above shows the absurdity of “democratic socialism.” Once in power, it cannot do anything other than continuing to transfer capital to the party clique. If, in fact, Marx was correct that socialism is the key to history and is the goal to which all technological and ethical envelopment tends, then what relevance does the ballot box have? Or public opinion for that matter?

No system has been so dedicated to destroying any vestige of “human nature” than postmodern capitalism. The ideology must always be that the human person is border-less, endlessly fluid and constantly mobile: there is no self, soul or destiny. There is only credit and interest. Consumer capitalism far more than industrial socialism has to provoke the nerve endings and manipulate the stimulus response of consumers constantly. In *Cancer Ward*, Oleg says “how easy it was to stir human desires and how difficult to satisfy them, once aroused.” the context is the discussion of the mundane nature of most people's lives and what they consider important.

Capitalism functions largely by arousing desire and once aroused, channeling and controlling towards ideas and eventually, product and commitments. Oleg heard someone while standing in line at a department ask for a shirt with a specific collar size. Oleg stares in disbelief that something so minor could ever occur to someone. He says “If you had to remember your collar size, you'd have to forget something. Something more important!” (quoted from Emerson, 180).

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Solzhenitsyn attacked materialism, atheism and the nihilism that must exist in order for Marxism to flourish. Moreover, he was ever more concerned about the nature of those forces that fill the vacuum left by religion and tradition. Capitalism came into being at a fight to the death with monarchy, agrarianism and the church. It is every bit as revolutionary as Marxism, but differs radically in its ability to be subtle about it. Superficial people think they are “free” if there are no proverbial “guns to their heads.” They have not the introspection or desire to understand the origin of their alleged “preferences” or who actually decides what is “fashionable,” “mainstream” or 'real.” it is probably a good thing for them they do not.

The point here is that in the removal of reason from the universe, modernity has segregated it in the human mind. It is located only in the brain, but even this is a mystification: it is not in the “human” mind, but the positivist mind of the scientific establishment. Modern science, positivism and nominalism as three sides of the identical triangle. Science too, is a mystification, since it actually refers to a large and powerful establishment with its own bureaucratic imperatives and professional interests to protect. This leads to two totalitarian forces: liberal capitalism and Marxism, both are nearly identical in the assumptions it rests upon. This centralization of power and the domination of a scientific and technocratic elite has led to the creation of a uniform ideology: a sense of the power of science and the moneyed powers who control it.

The issue here is that the scientific ideology is the only one, and that all problems can be solved by the judicious application of the scientific method, only if they receive enough money and power to do it. Science, at first a limited method of solving problem, has resolved itself into

the domination of materialism and the creation of a scientific establishment, a set of institutions that identifies itself with “science” proper. In other words, the scientific establishment has taken the name of science and pinned it to themselves.

The domination of science and enlightenment capital relations has led to new forms of scientific consciousness like sociology, which has led to the standardization of society, and this standardization of social life has taken the form of labeling consumers. Creating consuming pockets of people who are seen not as people but as machines that buy the products that the capitalist technocracy has created. Citizenship has been replaced by consumption and being a part of the great chain of capitalist relations.

The ultimate point is that in the name of liberation and rationality, states become totalist, centralized and highly militarized. Technology meant domination both at home and abroad. For every libertarian use of technology, there is a totalitarian use. There is no progress here, since technology contains its own moral problems. However, since local and foreign elites clearly benefited from the development of the scientific technique in technological advances, the Enlightenment dominated over its rivals, then and now. Whether this knowledge can be made to serve liberty remains to be seen.

Western elites knew that Solzhenitsyn wasn't just talking about the Soviet GULag, but also of the more comfortable prison of western materialism, where men work until death to pay off debt whose interest enriches others. To call this exploitation is to understate it. It is an entirely new system, the postwar, postmodern, “virtual capitalism” that differs in no great way to the Soviet application of science. It is the surrender of the soul and thus, of freedom.

As with everything he's written, the issues are not so much a plot, but the intellectual ideas that derive from characters. It is ideas that develop rather than stories. Plots are decidedly secondary. The main issue of human freedom and its relationship to the external environment. Can happiness be found in the GULag? It can, insofar as happiness is defined as an internal state. This is a position made popular by Plato and, much later, Immanuel Kant, though for different reasons.

Kant's argument – which radically differs from Aristotle – is that if happiness depends on external circumstances, then it must be fraught with anxiety, something the Existentialists would later make the central part of their theory. If happiness is, at least in part, based on a minimum of possessions, as Aristotle argued, then there can be no happiness or contentment in prison or poverty. If one attaches their happiness to an external state, then one is attached to the world and its inherent instability.

This is the ultimate purpose of Solzhenitsyn: happiness is moral purity and the acceptance of tragedy as a part of life. Pain is not the worst thing that can befall a man. The worst thing is untrammelled prosperity, something shared by Plato. Prosperity, when you know nothing else, teaches you nothing except a sense of entitlement. All learning is through suffering, or a lack of something. The secret to happiness is creating an internal state of contentment rather than attaching yourself to the world around you, a world that will disappoint you every time.

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Solzhenitsyn's art illuminates the truth. It is, in a sense, subversive: Subversive of hypocrisy, subversive of delusion, subversive of the Big Lie. No man in modern times and very few in all of I. history have demonstrated as drastically as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn the power of the pen coupled with courage to free men's minds. We need that power today desperately. We need it to teach the new and the forgetful generations in our midst what it means not to be free. Freedom is not an abstraction; neither is the absence of freedom. Solzhenitsyn has helped us to see that, thanks to his ar Alexander Solzhenitsyn's political theory is not widely known, even among those who are "expert" in his fiction. Generally, literary critics aren't trained in the philosophical and historical problems inherent in all Russian literature. A critic reading Solzhenitsyn without being an expert on the USSR is an absurdity. Few critics are. So much of the profundity of his political and social vision is lost because literary writers know so little about Russia and worse, about the Orthodox tradition that is at the core of her being. Some will go so far as to say that Russia and the Soviet Mr. Solzhenitsyn is in fact one of the great libertarians of our time, and the lessons he has for us are not regional or narrowly historical. They are not intended for Russians alone. To a certain extent Mr. Solzhenitsyn has been something of an enigma to Americans. A great many who read of his difficulties with the Communist government in Russia were not able to understand his desire to stay on his native soil when he could easily have accepted a comfortable asylum in any number of countries. A great many could not understand his feeling of tragic loss at having to leave his homeland when it seemed so much simpler to wage his fight from a distant position of safety.