

Crisis of the World Split Apart: Solzhenitsyn on the West

The Mortal Danger. By Alexander Solzhenitsyn, trans. Michael Nicholson and Alexis Klimoff (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

East and West. By Alexander Solzhenitsyn, trans. Writers and Scholars International Ltd. (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

Warning to the West. By Alexander Solzhenitsyn, trans. Harris Coulter and Nataly Martin. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976).

From Under the Rubble. By Alexander Solzhenitsyn et al., trans. A.M. Brock et al. (Boston: Little Brown, 1975).

Solzhenitsyn's discussion of Marxism's influence on the politics of the East is certainly controversial, yet by comparison, his analysis of the contemporary West has stirred an even greater debate. He has been called "confused" and "uninformed." His views are said to be those of a "religious fanatic." He complains that after his commencement address at Harvard, he was told to "get out of the country." (*M*, 64)¹

Despite the storm of protest that his remarks have raised, Solzhenitsyn claims to be a friend to the West. (*E*, 39) However, he is not, as he says he once was, a worshipper of the West. (*W*, 106) A friend, it can be inferred, is likely to be more objective in his appraisal than one who worships. He would not, as a worshipper might, turn a blind eye to his friend's faults. In this regard, a friend of the West might acknowledge its strengths but also point out its weaknesses in hope of correcting them. A true friend might even be compared to a doctor. The medicine he prescribes may be "bitter" to taste, but it is given in the spirit of doing the patient some good. (*E*, 39) Solzheni-

1. The texts under review have been abbreviated as follows: *The Mortal Danger* as *M*; *East and West* as *E*; *Warning to the West* as *W*; *From Under the Rubble* as *R*. These texts contain the core of Solzhenitsyn's argument on the crisis of the West. However, since he *has* not systematically laid down his views, it has been necessary to refer to his other works as a way of better clarifying some of his points.

tsyn understands his criticism of the West in precisely this way. He explains:

I am not a critic of the West. I am a critic of the weaknesses of the West. I am a critic of a fact we can't comprehend: how one can lose one's spiritual strength, one's will power, and possessing freedom, not value it, not be willing to make sacrifices for it. (W, 106)

In this article I shall begin with a practical discussion of Solzhenitsyn's arguments against certain policies the West has adopted toward the East. I shall then investigate his views on the sources of "misunderstanding" which have led Western scholars and statesmen to make incorrect choices concerning the East. In particular, I shall focus on the theoretical problem that Solzhenitsyn sees as the root cause of the West's frailty. Finally, I shall examine some of Solzhenitsyn's prescriptions for the crisis of our time.

Why Aid Totalitarianism?

Almost from the outset, Solzhenitsyn claims, the West has aided the totalitarian government of the Soviet Union. Beginning with the first exploratory trips of Armand Hammer, Western capitalists have provided material assistance to a government incapable of furnishing even the bare necessities of life to its citizens. Without the foodstuffs and technological expertise of Western business, he says, "the clumsy and awkward Soviet economy could never cope with its difficulties." (W, 11)

Western capital has restored Soviet factories, helped with construction projects, built automotive and tractor factories, and provided foreign aid in the form of low interest loans. This assistance has been "economically indispensable," he maintains, because the "Soviet economy has an extremely low level of efficiency." "What is done" in the West "by a few people and a few machines ... takes tremendous crowds of workers and enormous amounts of material" in the Soviet Union. The system is so inept that it cannot deal with all the problems at once. "War, space (which is a part of the war effort), heavy industry, light industry, and the need to feed and clothe its people" all pull the economy in different directions. The gaps, those things that are lacking, are supplied by the West. (W, 84-87)

What sort of country is it, he asks, that has nothing to sell? Heavy equipment, complex technology, and even agricultural products are

purchased abroad. Except for military arms, the Soviet economy has nothing to sell except "that which God put in the Russian ground at the very beginning." (W, 85-86)

He argues that the aid given by Western business often is used to support the secret police in their never-ending crusade to crush their fellow citizens. (W, 12)² It is also turned into weapons of war, which, given the regime's long-term goals, are the means by which capitalism is to be destroyed. He claims that the shortsightedness of Western business people derives from "a burning greed for profit that goes beyond all reason." They seem destined to fulfill Lenin's prophecy that capitalists would be hung on the rope they once sold to socialists. (W, 12-13)

Business is not the only culprit, according to Solzhenitsyn. The governments of the West also have given substantial support to the Soviet Union. In World War II, for example, the democracies sent Stalin vast supplies. They raised up one dictator to defeat another. If the West had been truly steadfast, he argues, it could have conquered Hitler without building up the Soviet economy and bringing Stalin to world prominence. After all, what did the West gain by an alliance with Stalin? Germany was defeated, but as a consequence Europe was divided, its eastern half subjugated; and Poland, for whose freedom the war was begun and so many lives were sacrificed, was reduced to virtual slavery. In their own countries, he explains, Churchill and Roosevelt may be honored as statesmen, but in Eastern Europe they are considered "shortsighted" and "stupid" for having given away the freedom of so many people whose destiny was in their hands. (W, 20-25, 136; E, 197)³

It is "incomprehensible to the ordinary human mind," he argues, that the Western powers should have ceded so much to the forces of totalitarianism at the conclusion of World War II.

Victorious states always dictate peace: they create the sort of situation which conforms to their philosophy. Instead ... President Roosevelt... gave unlimited aid, and then unlimited concessions. Without any necessity whatever the occupations of Mongolia,

2. He tells of the greed of Western businessmen who exhibited sophisticated security equipment at a trade fair in Moscow. The devices, used to catch criminals in the West, became the means of spying on people in the hands of the KGB. W, 12.

3. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* 1-3 trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 259-60n.

Moldavia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania were silently recognized at Yalta. After that, almost nothing was done to protect Eastern Europe, [thus] seven or eight more countries were surrendered. (W, 23)

The West's situation since World War II has deteriorated even further, he maintains. "Country after country" has been yielded by the Western powers so as not to disrupt "their agreeable state of general tranquility." In particular, Western lack of resolve was exhibited in Vietnam, where "two of the great powers of the West—France and America—tried their strength" against the forces of communism "and both in turn have quit the field." Such wars of national liberation will become the wave of the future, he predicts, for they have shown Communist leaders the road to global domination.'

A "calm and impartial comparison" of the West's strength today and in 1945 shows that the West has slipped while the East has gained. The West's "spirit of resistance," its "position throughout the world," and "the confidence" which "the neutral 'Third World'—has in it, "have been weakened." On the other hand, "the communist system has spread over huge areas"⁵ and "its powerful enemies . . . have been destroyed." While some argue that communism "is ready to collapse," in fact, it "has always managed to keep its balance." Once it has gained a strong foothold, no nation has been able to shake off its yoke.

Solzhenitsyn contends that detente (the name is now in some disfavor, but the concept is not) is the contemporary example of the West's lack of prudence. He agrees that detente is necessary, "as air," since nuclear war is a horrible prospect, but he found that East-West relations, particularly during the 1970s, fell far short of detente. (W, 38)

The West's shortsightedness was best epitomized by the SALT accords, he maintains. In an effort to gain peace for themselves, the Western powers entered into agreements which accepted Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, effectively legitimizing the enslavement of half a continent. What sort of signal was this to send totalitarian rulers? If Europeans are unwilling to resist, even sym-

4. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "The Artist as Witness," trans. Michael Glenny, *Times Literary Supplement*, May 23, 1975, 561.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Communism at the End of the Brezhnev Era," trans. Alexis Klimoff, *National Review*, January 21, 1983, 34.

bolically, the encroachments of a tyrannical force of occupation against their fellow Europeans, one is led to wonder if they really have it in them to defend their own freedom.

There are even more serious problems with the concept of detente. First, he argues that detente does little to moderate the war communism wages against its own people. What sort of detente is it, he asks, that allows the Gulag to remain open, doctors to destroy dissidents' brains with injections of drugs, and the entire Helsinki human rights watch group to disappear? Can a government be trusted to keep its pledges to disarm or to observe its treaty agreements, when it does not obey its own constitution? (*W*, 39, 117-18, 137, 139; *E*, 63)'

Despite serious economic troubles at home, Solzhenitsyn argues that the leadership spares no expense to stir up trouble abroad. Although he recognizes the need for national defense, he maintains that the vast Soviet military capability can serve no rational purpose except that of an offensive tool. The West, he insists, does not wish to threaten Russia and would quickly reduce its arms if the Soviets showed some initiative.

The source of Soviet expansionist policies, he stipulates, is none other than the ideology which proclaims that socialism is truly possible only on a worldwide scale. Hence, the leadership has sought, wherever feasible, to expand its power, influence, and territory. It has supported any terrorist group that might be used to undermine the stability of the West. It has exacerbated local and regional conflicts to gain a foothold for its ideology everywhere in the world. (*E*, 84, 91, 113, 119-25) Tragically, it has done all this by depriving its own citizens of the necessities of life. Solzhenitsyn concludes that "the forces of the entire Soviet economy are concentrated on war." By its own momentum, such a system cannot avoid war. (*W*, 85, 114)

Second, detente, as it has come to be practiced in the West, depends on Soviet leaders' keeping their word. But, according to Solzhenitsyn, they never keep their word, or they do so only when it suits them or when they have to. Real detente is impossible unless the power of Soviet rulers is checked. But who can guarantee that "detente will not be violated overnight"? Soviet leaders are not controlled by public opinion. There is no adversary press and no freely elected parliament to ensure that agreements are not broken on a

7. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Koninent 2*, 352-53. Also in John Dunlop, "Solzhenitsyn in Exile," *Survey*, Summer 1975, 146.

whim. Thus, there is no "way to insure compliance." Solzhenitsyn's own experiences with the authorities during the forced labor camp revolts at Kengir and later, when he became world famous, have convinced him that the word of Soviet officials can never be taken at face value. There is always an intrigue. Every action, every position, is taken for the sake of some political advantage, or for propaganda purposes. Nothing is ever done for pure and selfless reasons. The goal is always to gain favorable publicity at home and, more important, abroad. (W, 38-49, 70-71, 73-74)⁸ He explains:

Khrushchev came and said, "We will bury you!" ... Now, of course, they have become more clever. . . . Today they don't say "We are going to bury you," now they say "Detente."

Nothing has changed in Communist ideology. The goals are the same as they were, but instead of the artless Khrushchev, who couldn't hold his tongue, now they say "Detente." (W, 14)

Third, real detente is possible only if some provision is made to reduce the ideological struggle conducted in the Soviet Union. Only the naivete of the West has kept the idea of detente alive, he counsels. In the Soviet Union there is no detente. Away from the main cities, in the places where the Western press is excluded, the media is continually presenting war propaganda. (W, 88) How is peace possible, Solzhenitsyn asks, if each day the state-run media decries the Western nations as aggressors and imperialists? Such propaganda creates an asymmetry of forces. In the West, the hope for a peaceful reduction of tensions tends to soften public opinion toward the Soviets. The need to stand firm is undermined and the need to support military preparedness is questioned; hence, the West is often "outplayed" at the bargaining table. The "ideological warfare" of the Soviet Union is intended to whip up hatred and fear of the West and thereby justify further sacrifices for military expenditures. The less obvious intent is to secure loyalty; fear of war is a powerful means of attaching people to the regime. An end to the ideological war is, therefore, the first step toward a lasting peace. (W, 39-40, 76-78)

There are policymakers and commentators on international relations who take a more "realistic" approach to the conduct of East-West relations. They argue that in foreign affairs it is not important to

8. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago II*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 320; Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago III*, trans. Harry Willetts (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 270-79.

consider a nation's ideology, for all nations have one in the same goal, to pursue their own interests. Proponents of this view would agree with Solzhenitsyn that it is foolhardy to depend on the good graces of Soviet leaders. Instead, they contend, Western policy should be based on the common interests of East and West. Accordingly, this group has sought to reduce tensions, to slow the arms race, and to divert resources into much needed domestic programs. Both sides would see the advantage in pursuing such goals, it was reasoned; hence, both would have an equal interest in detente.

Solzhenitsyn's analysis casts some doubts on the "realist school's" approach. He argues that the interests and actions of Communist rulers depend on the principles they espouse and on the character of the individuals involved. In both cases, the interests of Marxist leaders seem to be at odds with those ideals cherished in the West. For example, he explains that both the Soviets and the West accept economic prosperity as a worthy goal. This seeming agreement of interests disguises the fact that Soviet rulers pursue their goals ideologically. They continue to follow a policy of central planning, despite its having impoverished the nation. Surely it would be in the interest of party officials to abandon an economic program that has had an unbroken history of failure and to adopt a system, private ownership, that has had a phenomenal record of success. Solzhenitsyn concludes that they do not change to the more efficient model, choosing instead to deprive their own people, because their actions are dictated by ideology.'

Of course, much scholarly opinion in the West views the contemporary Soviet Union differently than Solzhenitsyn and even differently than it once did. For example, the Sovietologist Jerry Hough argues that the totalitarian structure initiated by Stalin has been transformed by Khrushchev and subsequent leaders. Choosing his words carefully, Hough states that "few scholars today think the totalitarian model is an accurate summary of the contemporary Soviet Union. Indeed, it seems that "many will not even use the word totalitarian." "The term most often used," he states in a parenthetical remark, "is ... authoritarian, which denotes a more conservative and limited repressive regime."¹⁰ The image one gets from Hough is that of a bureaucratic state, which is slow to change, slow to act, and extremely careful to alter the status quo.

9. "End of the Brezhnev Era," 28-33.

10. Jerry F. Hough, *Soviet Leadership in Transition* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1980), 4.

If Hough is correct, the opinion of "scholars today" differs markedly from the ideas presented by Friedrich and Brzezinski in their classic study of totalitarian dictatorship. They offer six fundamental attributes of totalitarian societies which, taken together, differentiate them from autocracies and tyrannies. The criteria are: (1) an official ideology or doctrine that claims to cover all vital aspects of human existence; (2) a single mass party, usually headed by one person; (3) a system of terroristic police control; (4) monopoly control of all means of communication, and (5) of all means of effective armed combat; and (6) a centrally managed and directed economy. The authors acknowledge that this list may not be complete. In fact, they seem to add the notion that totalitarian governments keep their citizens stirred up and ready for action, "continually on the march," as it were."

Solzhenitsyn's description of the Soviet Union places it squarely in the totalitarian camp, although he recognizes that there are better and worse forms of totalitarianism. Repression has softened since the grisly reign of Stalin, he reasons, but not enough to transform the character of the state. He suggests that Marxist regimes pass through certain stages. At first the leaders of the revolutionary struggle foster an urge to equalize social conditions, which results in a great movement within society. A second stage features the strengthening of the state, with the ascendancy of a dictator who is worshipped by his followers. Finally, the tasks of government become routine and less emphasis is placed on upheaval and change.

This position is in line with that of Hannah Arendt, who was the first to recognize that the revolutionary fervor of totalitarian states would eventually cool. She remarks that once faced with "the everyday business of government," totalitarian governments would gradually lose their revolutionary momentum and utopian character. Practical reality would "destroy the fictitious world of their organizations."²

Despite the fact that the Soviet government has undergone some modifications and although the present stage is not as outwardly brutal as were its predecessors, Solzhenitsyn argues that all the main ingredients of a totalitarian state are still in place. The ideology is made

11. Car's Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 11-12, 40.

12. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), p. 378.

to dominate people's minds and the secret police their bodies. The party exercises complete control over every aspect of a Soviet citizen's life. There may be some outward signs of greater freedom, but whenever that freedom is put to use in a way detrimental to the party's total control, or to further enhance the people's sphere of independent action, it is quickly crushed. (W, 62-64)¹³

Most commentators argue that the Soviet Union has changed because the top leadership has lost faith in the ideology. According to this theory, Marxism continues to be the official doctrine primarily because the party leaders, as representatives of that ideal, do not want to forfeit their high-paying jobs and special privileges.

Solzhenitsyn is the first to admit that the party has become corrupt and self-seeking. He points out that the obvious discrepancy between the actions and the espoused beliefs of Soviet rulers has made them cynical. A party of about three million people, controlling all the means of oppression and propaganda looms above a crushed populace. The upper caste is granted every privilege: special stores, secret payments of money, the best houses and apartments, private medical facilities, and free access to health resorts. As payment for these benefits, party members must give "unquestioning and obsequious service"-any hint of disloyalty and all the perks are taken away. At the center of this group is the ruling elite, "an oligarchy," numbering about 100,000. They enjoy unlimited access to material comforts, perhaps living better than the ruling class of Old Russia. Moreover, their special position allows them to pass on privileges to their children. (E, 126)¹⁴

How can such people still claim to be Marxist egalitarians? Solzhenitsyn speculates that in order to justify their high position and the brutal measures inflicted on ordinary Soviet citizens in order to maintain it, party members must cling ever more steadfastly to the ideology. Ironically, deviation from pure Marxist principles actually strengthens the power the ideology has over the society. If Marxism were abandoned, the party could no longer claim special benefits, and more importantly, past crimes committed in the name of the cause might be uncovered and the perpetrators punished.

The ideology may be dead in the Soviet Union, he states, "but its malignant poison floods our souls and all our life. Ideology is dead, but it still makes us slaves." Even if the leadership no longer believes in

13. *Gulag I*, 68n.

14. "End of the Brezhnev Era," 33.

Marxism, it is forced to behave as if it did. Why else would it continue to pursue policies such as collective farming, reckless industrialization, and a centrally planned economy? Why else arm terrorist groups everywhere in the world? "If no one believes and yet everyone submits," he reasons, "this demonstrates not the weakness of an ideology but its frightful, evil power." He concludes that "Marxist ideology is the fetid root of today's Soviet life. Only by cleansing ourselves from it can we begin to return to humanity.'

He complains bitterly that the ideology forces everyone to live in a sort of fabricated world. Lies are the form of existence within the Soviet Union, since the truth of life does not fit into the ideological principles. "A universal spiritual death" has touched the Soviet population. People are compelled to dismiss what they know to be true in order *not* to bring down the wrath of the state. Fear of retribution clutches the population so tightly that some proclaim their loyalty to the lie openly, thereby violating the first tenet of personal integrity. Indeed, what some fear most is "to lag behind the herd and to take a step alone.'

The obligatory ideological lie shows the insidious nature of Soviet society. Unlike authoritarian governments, past and present, which require of their citizens little more than supine acceptance of official directives, the Soviet state expects that its citizens make a positive commitment to the ideology. Attendance at ideological training sessions, membership in "voluntary" party associations, and continual public displays of loyalty are the only security against losing one's job, or worse. Furthermore, the lie conceals the violence by which the regime governs. "Violence quickly grows old," Solzhenitsyn says. People lose confidence in governments supported by it and "in order for it to maintain a respectable face it summons falsehood as its ally—since violence can conceal itself with nothing except lies, and lies can be maintained only by violence."¹⁵ Thus the Soviet state asks more than mere compliance: it seeks to possess people's souls. (E, 34, 129; W, 7; R, 23, 117, 275, 278)

Another proposition put forward to support the idea that the Soviet Union has changed holds that the leaders are now more "liberal." Their main concerns, it is said, are to build a healthy economy at

15. Quoted in Dunlop, "Exile," 135-36.

16. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Live Not by Lies," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 1974, A26.

17. *Ibid.*

home and to avoid a tragedy similar to that which took the nation suffered during World War II.

Solzhenitsyn rejects this view as bad scholarship. The system, he argues, encourages a brutal and despotic leadership. Soviet rulers wrap themselves in the cloak of Progressive Mankind, but in truth they learned how to treat people under the heavy hand of Stalin. Before Gorbachev, at least, all the top leaders had gained promotion by stepping over the backs of their interned superiors. Their first successes came by crushing the opposition (mostly imagined) or by mercilessly carrying through the harsh edicts of collectivization.

What of the present leader, Gorbachev? Solzhenitsyn has said very little on this question directly, but he has maintained that it is naive to expect a softer variety of Soviet ruler. The bureaucracy from which any leader must arise is replete with patronage and corruption. The process by which one comes to dominate such an organization, therefore, is savage. People of good character are inevitably excluded. He explains:

Never has the Politburo numbered a humane or peace-loving man among its members. The Communist bureaucracy is not constituted to allow men of that caliber to rise to the top—they would instantly suffocate there. (M, 22; Also W, 36-37)

Moreover, he argues that because Soviet rulers have gained advancement and maintain their position through such brutal measures, they are really all the same. There is a struggle for power among them, based solely on personal ambition, "but on essentials they all agree." (W, 36)

But surely, some will ask, what of Khrushchev? He did not agree with his predecessor. He even denounced Stalin. Solzhenitsyn was a beneficiary of Khrushchev's thaw, and he admits that the volatile leader was out of the ordinary. This, he adds, is the reason Khrushchev was so quickly removed from office and why he is still a forgotten man in the nation he once governed. (E, 76-77)¹⁹

18. Also *Gulag III*, 477, 518, 525; Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*, trans. Thomas Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 84. James Ceaser's fine book on the American selection process shows that the conduct which potential leaders are made to adopt while seeking office influences how they will exercise power once in charge and even the character of those chosen. James W. Ceaser, *Presidential Selection: Theory and Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

19. *Gulag III*, 492; Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*, trans. Harry Willetts (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 42.

Today, no less than in Stalin's time, Solzhenitsyn complains, despotic rule has filtered downward so that each province, each factory, each labor union, is the petty fiefdom of some party official. (*M*, 32-33) Even beyond that, the style of leadership has left its mark on the mores of the Soviet populace. The ruthlessness with which the party retains its privilege and position has taught many an important lesson: might makes right. Little wonder crime is so rampant in Soviet society. The example the leaders have set is interpreted to mean: if you can get away with it, do it. Only the massive force of the state keeps this impulse at bay. Particularly troubling to Solzhenitsyn are the youth, who seem at times to have learned little from their Soviet education except to take pleasure in cruelty towards the meek and downtrodden. (*E*, 117, 223)²⁰

Solzhenitsyn allows that some changes have been made since Stalin's death-the excesses are gone. However, he indicates that the Soviet state could not remain in power without massive repression. Today, the camps are still open and functioning, helping to bring natural gas to the West; the insane asylums are still treating people crazy enough to doubt that the Progressive Doctrine is the basis of the ideal life, believing instead what their own eyes and ears tell them; and the secret police is still the most powerful branch of government. As Solzhenitsyn puts it:

Rulers change, the Archipelago remains.

It remains because that particular political regime could not survive without it. If it disbanded the Archipelago, it would cease to exist itself²¹

Furthermore, Marxist ideology has spread its influence far beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. It was not the Soviets, but indigenous Communists, who were responsible for the Cultural Revolution in China, the genocide in Cambodia, the repression in Vietnam, and the crackdown in Poland. When the same types of events occur with frightening regularity in lands separated both geographically and culturally, what else could be to blame but the ideology? (*W*, 33)²²

20. See, especially, "The Easter Procession," Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Stories and Prose Poems*, trans. Michael Glenny (New York: Bantam, 1973), 102-6. Also *Oak*, 209. Stephen Carter, *The Politics of Solzhenitsyn* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977), 53; Andrej Kodjak, *Alexander Solzhenitsyn* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1978), 121-22.

21. *Gulag III*, 494.

22. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Solzhenitsyn Speaks Out on Poland," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 24, 1982, 7-AA.

Can the leaders who orchestrate such incidents remain free from their poisonous effects? For the most part, the experience of Communist rulers consists either of bloody revolutionary struggles or vicious and occasionally deadly bureaucratic intrigues for power. Upon obtaining rule, Communists have invariably sought to oppress their own people. Can people such as this be trusted? Solzhenitsyn makes *us* wonder. Will not the same mentality that fosters oppression at home necessarily be reflected in attitudes toward international affairs? If the interest of people who proclaim themselves to be the salvation of mankind, yet who cynically preside over a totalitarian system intent on stripping the very soul from humanity, truly to be measured by the same standards applied to the West?

For Solzhenitsyn, the answer to these questions is clear. He declares that it is incorrect to attribute a rational, Western calculation of interest to Communist rulers, since they are dedicated to a program of internal oppression and external expansion. "The main goal of Communism," he writes,

is an irrational and fanatical urge to swallow the maximum amount of external territory and population, with the ideal limit being the entire planet.... And it is symptomatic that Communist imperialism (in contrast to the earlier colonial variety) does not benefit or enrich the nation that it [conquers].

Unlike tyrants of old, who were restrained in their designs by practical limitations, Communist leaders are spurred on by an ideology that justifies global conquest as a means of fulfilling its historical promise. Solzhenitsyn explains:

No personal tyranny can compare with ideological Communism, since every personal tyrant attains a limit of power that satisfies him. But no single country is enough to satisfy a totalitarian Communist regime. Communism is a type of virtually incomprehensible regime that is not interested in the flourishing of a country or in the welfare of its people. On the contrary, Communism²⁴ sacrifices both people and country to achieve its external goals.

The true interests of the West can be served, he insists, only when Western policymakers act on the supposition that

23. "End of the Brezhnev Era," 34, where he warns that any Communist government is "restrained in its behavior ... merely because it has not yet gained military strength."

24. *Ibid.*

Marxism is hostile to the physical existence and the spiritual essence of every nation. It is futile to hope that a compromise with Communism will be found, or that relations will be improved by concessions and trade."

In light of this premise, Solzhenitsyn lays down a number of policy recommendations which the West might pursue to forward its long-term interests. First, he calculates that diplomacy, no matter how clever, and concessions, no matter how broad, can never serve to fully civilize the Soviet leadership. (M, 20-21) He attacks the carrot-and-stick approach formulated most clearly by Henry Kissinger during his tenure in office. Of course, Kissinger did not suppose that the United States could influence the internal practices of the Soviet Union. But he did argue that the Soviet leaders' conduct of foreign affairs could be altered, their aggressive impulses blunted, and their actions toward other nations made to conform to the standards of the world diplomatic community. When they acted civilly and kept their word, Kissinger proposed, they would be rewarded with trade, loans, and technology. When they acted badly, they would be punished by having the flow of these things cut off. Kissinger realized that for the short run Western assistance might be used to build up the Soviet military, but he calculated that in the long run the leadership would be taught to keep their trust and to become a partner in the diplomatic community—playing by the rules. In sum, the leverage gained by aiding the Soviets could be used to humanize their international conduct"

Solzhenitsyn stipulates that diplomacy alone cannot tame the grand designs of Soviet rulers, but necessity can. If only the West would stop helping the Soviet government and refused to sell it the things it needs, it would be forced to loosen its grip. It would make real concessions or face total collapse. It would become part of the world diplomatic community, not on account of the skills of a single statesman, but because objective conditions would have compelled it to moderate its behavior. In that regard, Solzhenitsyn lays down one of his ironic challenges to the East by asking the West to

at least permit this socialist economy to prove its superiority...
Allow it to show that it is advanced, that it is omnipotent, that it has

25. *Ibid.*

26. Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little-Brown, 1979), 112-62, 215-16, 552-57.

defeated you.... [S] top selling to it . for ten or fifteen years ... [and] then see what it looks like. When the Soviet economy is no longer able to deal with everything, it will have to reduce its military preparations ... the system will be forced to relax [S]top help'ing it. When has a cripple ever helped along an athlete? (W, 33)

Upon reflection, it could be argued that Solzhenitsyn does not disagree with Kissinger's goals, but he reasons that they are impossible to achieve unless a crisis of the severest form shakes Soviet leaders from the security of their mighty perch. (M, 20-21)

Along with an economic boycott, Solzhenitsyn suggests that the West use its "mightiest weapon"-radio broadcasts to the East-and engage in a war of ideas. He would have the West put a wedge between Communist governments and their people by encouraging feelings of nationalism. He deduces from past experience that strong feelings of nationalism would undermine the stability of every Communist state, forcing the leaders to moderate their actions both at home and abroad. (M, 53, 71) ²⁷

Critics of such a policy do not doubt that the West could stir up turmoil in the Soviet Union and even more in Eastern Europe, but they worry that social unrest may drive the rulers to take desperate measures. Rather than lose their power and privilege, party leaders might be willing to take reckless action against the West.

Solzhenitsyn understands that to engage the East in a verbal conflict entails some risks, but he claims that the dynamics of communism make the quest for expansion and global domination inevitable. (W, 111; E, 40) ²⁸ Some sort of confrontation looms on the horizon. The West can be victorious in that struggle only if it enlists the support of the enslaved peoples of the Communist world, who presently outnumber the Western alliance. (W, 46-47) ²⁹ The West cannot avoid a confrontation with the East, but can only choose when and with what weapons-ideas now, military force later-the battle should be con-

27. He says that at the very least the West ought to be able to distinguish "the enemies of humanity from its friends." M, 53, 71.

28. His argument is similar to Lincoln's. The world cannot exist half slave and half free. As long as one island of freedom is left in the world from which the truth about Communist practices can be told, Communist leaders will not be secure. Hence, the aspiration for global conquest

29. W, 46-47. He explains: "[U]nder the cast-iron shell of Communism ... a liberation of the human spirit is occurring. New generations are growing up, steadfast in their struggle with evil, unwilling to accept unprincipled compromises, preferring to lose everything . . . so as not to sacrifice conscience."

ducted. With a certain rhetorical flourish, Solzhenitsyn sums of the point as follows:

Communism is a denial of life; it is a fatal disease of a nation and death of all humanity. And there is no nation on earth that has immunity against Communism.

To improve or correct Communism is not feasible. Communism can only be done away with by the joint efforts of the many peoples oppressed by it.

As a final practical suggestion, Solzhenitsyn argues that the West should deal with Communist nations from a position of strength and with a policy of firmness. Firmness, he claims, is the one tactic that Communist rulers understand. The rough and tumble of bureaucratic politics and the harsh necessities of keeping a totalitarian government in power have taught them to take advantage of any weakness and to respect only strength. When confronted with resoluteness and determination, Solzhenitsyn extrapolates from his own tumultuous experience, they will retreat. (W, 40-44)

On the other hand, "practical calculations" of interest are not sufficient to forestall an advance by the East or to avoid a "catastrophe" for the West. Behind any successful policy, he maintains, there must be a purpose that makes that policy worth defending. Hence, the West must realize that by opposing communism it is not merely promoting its "own way," but is protecting morality. If the West refuses to take a moral stance, relativism poisons its capacity to defend itself. (We employ arms, they employ arms; thus both sides are equally evil, or more rightly, foolish.)

We might infer, then, that Solzhenitsyn does not agree with the "realist" school of international relations. By focusing exclusively on power relationships between states, the realists fail to recognize the true nature of communism, and therefore are incapable of maintaining a steadfast resistance to that movement. After all, if one teaches that all states pursue pretty much the same goals and that the character of states must be discounted when considering foreign affairs (our side is not much different than their side), it is natural that people should become bewildered as to the need for sacrifice. Without a moral perspective from which to judge, the global conflict being waged for the soul and mind of the human race resembles a self-centered game, played to gratify the egos of the superpowers.

30. "End of the Brezhnev Era," 34.

Therefore, Solzhenitsyn recommends that in the conduct of external affairs: "One cannot think only on the level of political calculation. It is also necessary to think of what is noble, and what is honorable?" (W, 45, 100)

In the end, decisions that take their "bearing" from moral principles actually may serve the interests of the West better than those based solely on practical considerations. Only if the West casts its struggle against communism in terms of "good" and "evil," he argues, will it be able to muster sufficient will to withstand the "inhuman strength" that threatens to extinguish its way of life. "And how surprising it is," he says, "that a practical policy computed on the basis of moral considerations [turns] out to be the most farsighted, the most salutary." (W, 80-81; E, 59)³¹

Sources of Western Misunderstanding

If Solzhenitsyn's analysis is correct, many in the West have seriously misjudged their adversary. How could this have happened? Solzhenitsyn argues that a major triumph of communism has been to gain a foothold in the West through misunderstanding and deceit.

An important component in that victory has been the ability of Communist nations in general, and the Soviet Union in particular, to control the flow of information to the West. (M, 7)³² Little is known of what actually goes on in that country, because Westerners are not

31. Solzhenitsyn makes this point by criticizing the realism of George Kennan. Kennan's argument, that one "should not apply moral criteria to politics," results in the mixing of "good and evil, right and wrong, and make[s] room for the absolute triumph of absolute evil." "Only moral criteria can help the West against communism's well planned strategy." "Practical and or occasional considerations . . . will inevitably be swept aside by strategy. After a certain level is reached, [realism] induces paralysis; it prevents one from seeing the scale and meaning of events." See E, 59.

32. Since certain "topics" are "hidden and carefully hushed-up" by the Soviet government, Western scholars have no choice but to "unwittingly adopt the Procrustean frame-work provided by official Soviet historiography." M, 7. Solzhenitsyn capsulizes the ability of Communist governments to manage information in a delightful chapter (54), entitled "Buddha's Smile," of his novel, *The First Circle*. He writes of a visit to a Soviet prison by the activist wife of an American president during World War II. Miraculously, before she arrives, the tattered clothes, the bedbugs, the slop buckets, and the overcrowding are all made to disappear by the quick work of the prison guards. In their place is a clean, well-stocked cell inhabited, the Soviet translator explains, by unusually happy prisoners. The president's wife is astonished at the humane conditions and returns home believing the Soviet penal system is the most progressive in the world. After her departure, everything, except a forgotten statue of Buddha, reverts to its unsanitary norm.

allowed to travel freely or given access to areas outside the major cities. When impromptu meetings do occur between Western journalists and the average Soviet citizen, either they are staged by the KGB or an agent is close at hand to ensure that nothing derogatory is said. Indeed, reporters are consistently fooled into believing conditions are better than they actually are. In the countryside, from which outsiders are prohibited, the real poverty and oppression exist. Even clandestine meetings with dissidents are an insufficient means of collecting unbiased information, since most are urban dwellers who are in the dark themselves about what goes on elsewhere. (W, 34-36; M, 26-27)

To reinforce his point, Solzhenitsyn explains that the full extent of Stalin's fanaticism was not recognized in the West for many years, that the 1962 Tambov peasant revolt was never reported, and that even today the vast majority of Soviet dissidents, not to mention non-Soviet resisters, are not sought out and their views are rarely heard.³³

Second, there is a tradition in the West of speaking ill of national Russia. The faults of the Soviet system are said to be a manifestation of Russian character and of the Russian people's willingness to endure tyrants. Soviet expansionism is blamed on the traditional geopolitical interests of the nation-the desire for warm-water ports, for example -or on the legacy of oppression and imperial adventure held over from the tsars.

Perhaps these factors do play a role in forming Soviet behavior, but Solzhenitsyn asks why the analogy to the past is made only in the case of Russia. Did not all the nations of Europe-indeed, virtually every nation on earth-have a tyrant in its *past*? Why in the case of Russia do despotic tsars explain and exculpate Soviet dictators? France had Napoleon, Italy the Caesars, but no one suggests that such examples would give a satisfactory explanation of present-day tyrants in those countries; Moreover, blaming Soviet expansionism on the past misrepresents European history. When the Russian Empire was at its height, every other European power also was engaged in empire building. If the logic by which Soviet expansionism is explained were applied universally, then the sun would still be refusing to set on the British Empire. In fact, Soviet designs are far greater than were those of any tsar, Solzhenitsyn argues. The Soviet Union has endeavored

33. "The Artist as Witness," 561; Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Solzhenitsyn Speaks," trans. Albert and Tanya Roberts, *National Review*, June 6, 1975, 604, 607.

to extend its influence and domain throughout every continent on earth. (M, 11-12)³⁴

Blaming Russia for the faults of communism "comforts the entire West." Solzhenitsyn reasons:

If the horrors of the U.S.S.R. stem, not from Communism, but from the unfortunate Russian tradition . . . then the West has nothing to fear. It follows that nothing bad will happen. If socialism does overtake them, then [it will be] a virtuous socialism. (E, 171-72)

Regrettably, the atrocities of the Soviet Union are not unique in the Communist world; and Russian national flaws cannot be held responsible for events in Albania, China, North Korea, Cuba, or Cambodia, to name just a few.

In a statement many in the West would likely consider either naive or an antiquated example of the Cold War mentality, Solzhenitsyn claims that communism is radically hostile "to mankind as a whole" and that it is "irredeemable . . . there exist no 'better' variants." He continues:

[I]t is incapable of growing "kinder," . . . it cannot survive as an ideology without using terror . . . consequently to coexist with Communism on the same planet is impossible. Either it will spread, cancer-like, to destroy mankind, or else mankind will have to rid itself of Communism. (M, 1-2)

In the West, such statements have long ago been discarded as anti-Communist hysteria. Sophisticated critics argue that communism is far from monolithic; it shows a divergence of views as varied as does the West.

Solzhenitsyn is aware of differences among the followers of Marx, yet he argues that in most important ways they are "frightening" in their "unity and cohesion." (W, 64) A fundamental goal of Communist parties, wherever they exist, is to destroy the social order of the West, he maintains. Even where they act as minority parties in

34. Solzhenitsyn complains that Richard Pipes attempts to show the defective character of Russian peasants under the old regime by citing a few particularly cruel and cynical folk proverbs. He writes that "Pipes wrests those half dozen . . . that suit his needs . . . from among some forty thousand proverbs, which in their unity and their inner contradiction make up a dazzling literary and philosophic edifice." "This method affects me in much the same way as I imagine Rostropovich would feel if he had to listen to a wolf playing the cello." M, 11-12.

constitutional democracies, their real purpose is to attain power and abolish all opposition. Their seeming loyalty to the nation is a ploy, made expedient by their lack of strength. (W, 63-67)

Once in command, "all Communist parties . . . have become completely merciless." (W, 64) Their aim, "(whether in the U.S.S.R., in China, or in Cuba), is to force the people to serve them unflinchingly as a work force, or, if need be, as a fighting force." (M, 37) It is as if Communist leaders were compelled by the inexorable logic of their ideology to proceed through the various stages of upheaval, dictatorship, and terror until finally achieving the status of bureaucratic repression-the current phase of Soviet development. (W, 63-64; E, 24, 83-84)

No doubt an objection can be raised against Solzhenitsyn's position. For example, it is inaccurate to say that the government in China is the same as that in South Korea, or that Yugoslavia does not grant its citizens more freedom than does Albania. An objective appraisal of Communist nations uncovers a great many differences among them. How can Solzhenitsyn claim that they are all the same?

Besides their hostility to the Western way of life, he implies, but does not spell out, that all Communist governments are united on the basis of their governing principles. From that perspective, they are all joined in the common hope of implementing the ideas of Marx. But, as history has repeatedly shown, Marx's ideas cannot be brought into being without tragic consequences; hence, all Marxist governments must oppress their own people. Communists are constrained in their ability to pursue Marxist goals, not by any limitation that the doctrine places on them, but either by the resistance of indigenous national cultures or by limits nature itself places on the activities of human beings. In the former case, for example, Communist leaders in Poland have found themselves faced with an enormously popular Catholic Church, while in Yugoslavia the various nationalities have been resistant to complete subjugation by the party. Thus, the party's appetite for complete domination is everywhere the same, but in some places it has been checked by the vestiges of the former culture. The Chinese are perhaps the best example of this cultural resilience. During the Cultural Revolution, the party attempted the creation of the new socialist man, a deed accomplished by equalizing all of Chinese society. The resultant confusion, lack of order, and loss of incentive caused a famine of vast proportions. When the party cadre themselves began to feel the shortages, enough momentum was gained to reform the system.

Does Solzhenitsyn's analysis, then, help us understand what is going on in China? There, the Communist party has led the way in introducing free-market reforms into the economy. It has loosened its political grip on the society and has even allowed some criticisms of Marxism to surface. Whether these initial liberalizations will bring true reform to China is still not clear-the interest the party cadre has in not losing its position may yet put an end to the reforms. What is clear, however, is that China has undergone changes that run directly counter to the ideology of Marx.

Critics of Solzhenitsyn explain these changes by pointing to the differences in national character of the Chinese, who could change, and the Russians, who could not. Solzhenitsyn doubts whether the reforms in China are anything more than a phase, similar to the NEP in the Soviet Union.³⁵ If the transition were long-lasting, he might explain it by pointing to Deng Xiaoping's trip through the Gulag. Perhaps the current leader of the world's largest Communist country learned something about Marxism on the inside that he could never have understood had he always retained his high party position.

Third, Solzhenitsyn argues that it is hard for any people to understand the suffering of another across national and cultural barriers. This is particularly true if one's own situation is safe and prosperous. He explains that it is difficult for the affluent to comprehend the suffering of others because they are too intent on prolonging their "well-being for as long as possible at any price." (E, 16-17; W, 81) In this regard, the West is not alone. It is simply an "appalling human characteristic" that people are often indifferent to the plight of others. To be caught up entirely in one's own concern is an aspect of human nature "against which religious books and many works of literature warns³⁶ us.

How many witnesses from Communist countries will it take, Solzhenitsyn asks, before the West is shaken from its easy-going attitude? How many stories of camps, of murder, and of repression are necessary for the West to comprehend the nature of Marxism and to understand the character of its adversary? Need another Berlin Wall be built? At some point, he argues, it must be admitted that Western

35. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Three Key Moments in Modern Japanese History," trans. Michael Nicholson and Alexis Klimoff, *National Review*, December 9, 1983, 1536-37, 1540, 1544, 1546.

36. "Artist as Witness," 561. He quotes the Russian proverb "The man with a full belly cannot understand the hungry man."

indifference and naivete about Marxism's vices are merely self-deceit. (W, 133)³⁷

Finally, and most important, he argues that a true awareness of the nature of Marxism has been clouded by the intellectual agreement which many in the West have with the ends or ideals of Marx's philosophy. The ideas that once were the foundation of Western culture, he maintains, have come under attack. As a result they have moved in a particular direction—a direction that has made Marx's principles of liberation, equality, and material well-being more and more acceptable as the sole criterion for judging the worth of human life. In order to fully comprehend the reasons for this acceptance, it is necessary to investigate Solzhenitsyn's analysis of the "general transition . . . of ideas" that has occurred in the West.

Crisis of the West

The Movement of Western Thought

According to Solzhenitsyn, today's world is facing a crisis of momentous proportion. The clearest manifestation of that crisis is the rift between East and West. Yet there is a fissure, he says, which "is both more profound and more alienating" than any "political conception." It is doubtful that this danger can "be eliminated through successful diplomatic negotiations or by achieving a military balance." Moreover, the rift threatens to swallow both East and West into its ever-widening chasm. He writes:

This deep and multiform split threatens us all with an equally manifold disaster, in accordance with the ancient truth that a kingdom—in this case, our earth—divided against itself cannot stand. (E, 40)

But what crisis could be worse than the present antagonism between the superpowers? What is the source of this crisis? How did it originate? What are its possible effects?

The source of our plight, holds Solzhenitsyn, is the result of modern culture having "lost the concept of a Supreme Complete Entity," (E,

37. For example, George Bernard Shaw, who, while millions starved in the Ukraine, commented from Moscow, "I never dined so well or so sumptuously as when I crossed the Soviet borders." W, 133. Also W, 35; Dunlop, "Exile," 146, 152; Carter, 38.

69)³⁸ At one time this concept had served "to restrain our passions and our irresponsibilities"; had given us the courage to resist evil; had supplied a criterion by which to judge actions right or wrong; had made us aware that there were more important things in life than the satisfaction of physical desires; and, not least important, had endowed our lives with meaning and purpose. One is led to wonder why a concept so beneficial to human life ever came into disrepute.

Solzhenitsyn maintains that the "spiritual" aspect of human existence was not overwhelmed all in one stroke; in fact, there are remnants of the spirit existing within Western culture today. However, belief in the spirit was challenged and finally undermined by ideas that came to be the fundamental premises of modern culture. (*E*, 65-71)

There are, he explains, certain nodal points in human history when people reassess their way of thinking and acting and set a new course for the future. One such shift occurred at the end of the Middle Ages as a reaction against an "intolerable despotic repression of man's physical nature in favor of the spiritual one." (*E*, 65) The philosophies of the Renaissance and Enlightenment recoiled from the "excesses of Catholicism"³⁹ and proposed that, instead of God or nature, man himself should stand as the center of the universe. (*W*, 129)⁴⁰ Medieval ideals, he writes,

pulled us, drove us toward Spirit, by force, and we naturally rejected this, jerked free, plunged into Matter. Thus began a long epoch of humanistic individualism. Thus did civilization begin to be constructed on the principle: man is the measure of all things. The whole inevitable path enriched the experience of mankind immensely.⁴¹

The ascendancy of the human species would be possible, the philosophers of the Enlightenment reasoned, only if what is said to be

38. What precisely Solzhenitsyn means by "a Supreme Complete Entity," he does not say. One suspects that he wishes to convey an idea that is not limited to the concept of the Judeo-Christian Cod.

39. Solzhenitsyn does not specify what the excesses were, but one supposes that they were the result of the Church's zealous attempt to enforce strict rules of natural law on all aspects of human life.

40. Machiavelli's advice that "imagined republics and principalities" are the source of our misunderstanding of politics (*Prince*, chap. 15), and Hobbes's assertion that there is no *summum bonum* (*Leviathan*, chap. 11) come to mind.

41. Quoted in Dunlop, "Exile," 145.

higher than human-hence, beyond human control-were rejected in favor of that which humans could sense-i.e., the material world, which could be brought under human command. This feat was to be accomplished on two fronts at once. Mankind as a whole was to be enlightened as to the benefits of intellectual pursuits. The ancient struggle between philosophy and the practical life was to be settled by stripping intellectual pursuits of their normative content and by using their discoveries as a means of increasing material bounty. As Hobbes put it, science is the way. At the same time, a stable political foundation was to be constructed by turning people's attention away from matters that were likely to make them combative-for instance, theological disputes-and toward those things that would make them peaceful-for instance, commerce. Dedication to religion and morality was to be replaced by a rational calculation of self-interest, and concern over spiritual matters was to be kept a strictly private matter. (E, 64-66, 69-71)

Once it was proclaimed and accepted that above man there was no supreme being, but instead that man was the crowning glory of the universe and the measure of all things, men's needs, desires, and indeed weaknesses were taken to be the supreme imperatives of the universe.... [I]n the course of several centuries this philosophy inexorably flooded the entire Western world, and gave it confidence for its colonial conquests. (W, 127-28)

The early twentieth century marked the high point of the Western ideal. Since that time, however, one catastrophe has followed another, until it seems that living at the brink is the norm of our age. Two world wars, the revolution of 1917 that initiated the struggle between East and West, the threat of nuclear annihilation, widespread crime in the midst of plenty, pollution, materialism, and alienation have all served to undermine the optimism so common when, at the beginning of this century, the promises of the Enlightenment seemed to be at hand.

What was the cause of this rapid, one might say breathtaking, decline? For Solzhenitsyn the reverses are the consequence of the Enlightenment's principles having reached their natural limits. He writes:

The West kept advancing steadily in accordance with its proclaimed social intentions, hand in hand with dazzling progress in

technology. And suddenly found itself in its present state of weakness.

This means that the mistake must be at the root, at the very foundation of thought in modern times. (E, 64)

Solzhenitsyn explains the process of Western decay as follows: a fundamental tenet of liberalism, the original political philosophy to emerge from the Enlightenment, held that human beings cannot, thus should not, be trained in virtue. As a replacement for virtue, liberalism proposed that people be taught law-abidingness. This was to be achieved in two ways. First, institutions would be constructed that, while not hindering people's desires, would channel them in ways conducive to public peace. Second, an environment favorable to acquisition would be created. Citizens would learn that their interest lay in the continued existence of the state. It was reasoned that people who enjoyed prosperity would be unlikely to engage in subversion or revolt.

The satisfaction of human desires could best be accomplished, according to liberalism, if people were left alone to pursue their own interests in their own way. All unnecessary hindrances standing as a barrier to ambition were to be removed. The government's major functions were to enforce contracts and to ensure that the contest for economic gain did not go so far as to upset the peace. The fundamental goal of such a state was to secure a realm of liberty so that in their private lives, people could live as they chose—hence, the name liberalism. (E, 64–71)

Despite the dazzling success that this philosophy has achieved in unleashing human ingenuity, Solzhenitsyn maintains that it also has set free some unsavory human traits. The freedom that liberalism so cherishes has given free reign to "pride, self-interest, envy, vanity and a dozen other defects," which, along with our positive attributes, are so much a part of human nature. This tilt toward evil seems to be at odds with what the original proponents of liberalism had expected. They reasoned that once people overcame prejudice, superstition, and, above all, the constant demands of natural necessity, they would use their newly won freedom to aid in the progressive betterment of the human condition. The advocates of liberalism held this belief, infers Solzhenitsyn, because their "anthropocentric" and "humanistic way of thinking ... did not admit the intrinsic evil in man." (E, 64–65, 69) Thus societies founded on liberal principles left

everything beyond physical well-being and the accumulation of material goods, all other human requirements and characteristics of a subtler and higher nature . . . outside the areas 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. (E, 65)

As support for his proposition, Solzhenitsyn points out that, despite their unprecedented wealth, every Western nation seems to face an intractable problem with crime. This unexpected phenomenon has occurred, he explains, because freedom is more easily abused by our lower passions than it is exercised wisely for the cultivation of our higher attributes. Without the requisite principles to limit and guide our ideas and actions, decadence easily overtakes virtue because good must be nurtured while evil flourishes all on its own.

A second unanticipated consequence of Enlightenment philosophy has been the rise of materialism, what Solzhenitsyn calls at one point "the cult of well-being." It is fair to say that the original premises of liberalism did not necessarily lead to an overly acquisitive society. Liberalism left open the question of the, proper ends of human life. Whether individuals sought to become wealthy or whether they sought some other goal-say, artistic creation or a life dedicated to the mind-was entirely a matter of personal choice. Yet, given the reality of what interests most people most of the time, it was a foregone conclusion that liberty would be used for personal gain.

Solzhenitsyn reminds us of a verity proclaimed by virtually every moral teaching: material goods, alone, cannot make people happy. Rather than satisfying people's needs, an overabundance of goods tends to sharpen the appetites. People lose sight of the proper limits of consumption. They dash madly about competing with one another to acquire more and more. "This active and tense competition," he explains, "comes to dominate all human thought and does not in the least give rise to spiritual development." Indeed, the quest for happiness through material gain is futile, for human desires are limitless. (E, 45-46) There is always a better stereo, a faster car.

The "humanism" of the modern world has done little to humanize mankind, Solzhenitsyn concludes. The unlimited freedom it bestows on people has come to undermine their ability to make moral judgments. Those who still insist that limitations be placed on human desires and passions are branded fanatics, intent on foisting their narrow-minded beliefs on an unwilling populace. With few moral

grounds for restraint, natural human desires (especially avarice) and passions (especially envy) have been unleashed to a degree unheard of in human history. Since World War II, Solzhenitsyn argues, the extent of industrialization has exceeded that of all previous ages. Humanity is awash in a sea of commercial goods, while corporations rush to introduce new products to satisfy even the most jaded desires. The world's natural resources are being used up in a futile attempt to satisfy fickle and limitless appetites. Placing himself squarely among the ecologists, Solzhenitsyn complains:

Having placed man as the highest measure-imperfect man, never free from self-interest, self-love, envy, and vanity, man has given himself up without measure or restraint to Matter—we have arrived at a littering, a surfeit of garbage. We are drowning in terrestrial garbage. This refuse fills and obstructs all spheres of our existence.

Although mankind gained much from the Enlightenment, Solzhenitsyn argues, it also lost something. At the core of that philosophy is nothing that elevates human beings above a concern for their physical needs. Human beings have become very smart animals who create an environment conducive to their well-being. As in the case of other animals, however, there is little beyond staying alive, commodiously if possible, which gives life purpose. Solzhenitsyn laments:

We have become hopelessly enmeshed in our slavish worship of all that is pleasant, all that is comfortable, all that is material—we worship things, we worship products.

Will we ever succeed in shaking off this burden, in giving free rein to the spirit that was breathed into us at birth, that spirit which distinguishes us from the animal world? (W, 145-46)

Solzhenitsyn acknowledges that the Enlightenment did not transform people into materialists all at once. He seems to agree with Tocqueville's assessment that the morals of an earlier age continued to hold great sway over the human conscience. In fact, the freedom secured as the result of the Enlightenment's political philosophy allowed religion to flourish as a private pursuit, acting as it always had to form people's character and restrain their desires. The vast edifice of the West's Judeo-Christian heritage continued to inform people

about the proper limits of their freedom and about the responsibilities they owed to each other and to the community.

Slowly but inexorably, however, the West's spiritual reserves were eroded. Concern over material gain, so much a part of Enlightenment principles, began to overwhelm people's regard for the spirit. The public ideals of easygoing morality, the quick profit, and unlimited freedom invaded people's private, religious beliefs. More and more the premises of the Enlightenment encouraged the hope that "politics and social reform" could bring about human happiness. Indeed, since Enlightenment ideals "did not admit the existence of intrinsic evil in man," many came to believe that religious restrictions were an unnecessary hindrance. They reasoned that religion could be discarded altogether and that human beings could create morality for themselves. (*E*, 65-66, 69)

The emancipation of the human race from moral constraints has proceeded apace with an ever-higher standard of living and ever newer and better technological marvels. Despite the increase in wealth and the widespread enjoyment of "the rights of man," the last few generations have discovered that the price to be paid for freedom from religious restraint is very dear. Every age has its cruelty and injustice—such is the nature of the race—but only in the twentieth century have people inflicted such vast crimes against humanity. No other era has seen such a momentous scale of suffering. No other period has succumbed to totalitarian movements. All this, Solzhenitsyn maintains, is the result of the diminution of religious belief. (*E*, 66)

The decline of Western culture's dependence on a "Supreme Spirit" has also driven more progressive elements within society to adopt more and more extreme positions on the public issues of the day. Ideas such as liberation, equality, and the possession of material well-being (often labeled development when applied to the Third World) have gained popularity and, in turn, have become the basis for social movements. Not only have these ideas served as rallying points for the overthrow of the hierarchical traditions of the aristocratic age, but they have undergone a transformation and radicalization themselves. Some social critics have come to believe that absolute freedom, full equality, and uninterrupted abundance are not only the birthright of humanity, but possible to achieve in practice. Without higher moral standards to serve as the ordering principles of human life, all restrictions on personal freedom seem illegitimate, every distinction between higher and lower desires is thrown into doubt, and a

dedication to anything other than physical well-being is thought to be unnecessary.

Once moral criteria clearly separated liberty from license. Those who persisted in abusing their freedom were thought to have it rightly taken away. But today those strictures have been loosened. All is permitted except that proscribed by law. But law, even when supported by sufficient force, has been shown an inadequate means of controlling human behavior. Without some notion of morality to give them guidance, those who make the laws have difficulty deciding right from wrong. Furthermore, as Solzhenitsyn points out, the law provides no basis for the internal check on behavior that is the hallmark of a civilized society. (E, 50-51, 58)⁴³ He states:

[I]n early democracies, as in the American democracy at the time of its birth, all individual human rights were granted on the grounds that man is God's creature.... [F]reedom was given to the individual conditionally, on the assumption of his constant religious responsibility: Such was the heritage of the preceding one thousand years.... [E]ven fifty years ago, it would have seemed quite impossible . . . that an individual could be granted boundless freedom with no purpose, simply for the satisfaction of his whims. (E, 65-66)

Once, standards existed by which to assess and to emulate great character and noble deeds. Today, Solzhenitsyn alleges, those measures have been eroded by the incessant demands for equality. This tendency toward leveling has occurred to the point that

an outstanding, truly great person who has unusual and unexpected initiatives in mind does not get any chance to assert himself; dozens of traps will be set for him from the beginning. Thus mediocrity triumphs under the guise of democratic restraints. (E, 49)

43. Solzhenitsyn reasons:

The center of your democracy and of your culture is left without electric power for a few hours only, and suddenly crowds of citizens start looting and creating havoc. The smooth surface film must be very thin, then, the social system quite unstable and unhealthy. M, 50-51, 58.

He seems to be arguing that without internal moral checks, only the law stands in people's way. They will be open to doing almost anything as long as they do not get caught. Unless a society is willing to employ sufficient force to continually frighten citizens into compliance-something unlikely under a liberal government-there must be reliance of self-restraint.

Once, people had faith that there were higher pursuits than the gratification of physical desires. Presently, Solzhenitsyn reproaches, belief in these goals has been weakened. Replacing the "higher view of life" is a hedonistic perspective based on the idea that "you only live once." But the quest for bodily pleasures can become a never-ending trap from which the human spirit finds it difficult to escape. (W 145-46; E, 70-71)

As demands for greater freedom, equality, and abundance have increased, Solzhenitsyn argues, the political expression of those demands has become more radical. Thus, there has been "a general transition from liberalism to socialism." (W, 132, 141-42) Solzhenitsyn never spells out in detail how this transition occurred, but much of his argument can be deduced from what has already been said.

Obviously, liberalism's vision of the world was realistic, since people did use their freedom to produce prosperity on a scale that transformed how the race lives. Yet liberalism set off a reaction against itself. The continual pursuit of money and the constant jarring of interests caused some people to draw back in horror. (E, 55-56) They saw that while liberalism tended to make everyone materialistic, it succeeded in making only a few people rich. Even more disturbing was the disparity in wealth endemic to a liberal society. Indeed, in its original and pure form, liberalism seemed incapable of fulfilling its promise to better the lot of mankind. The few rich used all their resources to oppress the many poor and to keep them in a state of economic dependency, making them a cheap source of labor.

The appeal to socialism was a direct result of the failures of liberalism. The latter sought to make people happy by increasing the stock of goods available to mankind, a feat made possible by giving material incentives to inventive genius. The former intended to make people content by equitably distributing the fruits of that human creativity. The essence of the dispute lay in this: liberalism depended on material rewards as the spur that would drive people to produce greater abundance. Socialism surmised that differences in wealth would result in differences in opportunity, making it impossible for all people to share equally in the material bounty.

Liberalism set forth no moral criterion or standard above the human will by which to justify the social hierarchy that the freedom to acquire property was likely to create. Of course, it did put forward the notion that the ingenious and diligent are entitled to the greater benefits their abilities could earn them. In other words, given equal

opportunity in the form of equal rights, natural talent and determination would provide a proper basis for distinction. There is some truth to this assertion, but socialism attacked liberalism by arguing that equal rights cannot ensure equal opportunity since some people have a greater advantage at birth because they are born into rich families. Hence, socialism concluded that all differences in rank were unjust.

The process of self-criticism within Western thought did not cease with socialism's assault on liberalism. Solzhenitsyn explains that the interrelationship among social philosophies is such that

the current of materialism which is farthest to the left, and hence more consistent, always proves to be stronger, more attractive, and victorious. Humanism which has lost its Christian heritage cannot prevail in this competition. Thus during the past centuries and especially in recent decades, as the process became more acute, the alignment of forces was as follows: Liberalism was inevitably pushed aside by radicalism, radicalism had to surrender to socialism, and socialism could not stand up to communism. (E, 67-68)

The absence of unifying moral principles has also led to the progression from liberalism to socialism in another way. In former times the inequalities that were a part of social life were thought to be ordained by God or nature. Putting aside the historical defense of social hierarchy for our purpose, one can see that moral principles of whatever kind justify inequality, since some people live up to moral standards while others do not. Without commonly held ideals, however, there is no basis for distinguishing between good and bad, better or best. All differences between people are illegitimate—all are conventional.

Finally, the very liberty from which liberalism derives its name has served to undermine that philosophy. If the belief that everyone is entitled to his or her opinion is taken seriously, then anyone's ideas are as good as anyone else's. There are no opinions of greater worth than others. The opinion that liberalism is the proper political order for mankind is thrown into doubt. And if there is no ground from which to make authoritative judgments, all ideas of morality merit the same respect—equality reigns. With no principles to support authority, even the authority underlying liberalism, all forms of inequality are suspect. Socialism is more consistent in recognizing this fact.

For Solzhenitsyn, the increased dependence on political and social movements as the way of finding purpose in life, the transition of

political ideals to more and more radical forms, and the barren hope of finding happiness in material possessions are all natural outgrowths of the "autonomous, irreligious humanistic consciousness " first established in Enlightenment philosophy. Thus there is an intimate connection between East and West. Both denigrate

our most precious possession: our spiritual life. It is trampled by Party hucksters in the East, by commercial ones in the West. This is the essence of the crisis: the split in the world is less terrifying than the similarity of the disease afflicting its main sections. (*E*, 69-70)

The Consequences of the Crisis to the West

What problems face the West as a result of the spiritual crisis of modern culture? According to Solzhenitsyn there are a number of troublesome ones.

First, he claims that the intelligentsia of the West has shown a marked sympathy for the aims of socialism. The newest, boldest, and most progressive abstract notions of social justice appealed to the intelligentsia's way of thinking. He writes that the "tendency of ideas to continue on their natural course made people admire them." (*W*, 132) The intelligentsia's infatuation with leftist causes, he alleges, made many of them turn a blind eye to the faults of the Soviet Union and other Communist nations:

The Communist regimes in the East could endure and grow due to the enthusiastic support from a number of Western intellectuals who (feeling the kinship!) refused to see communism's crimes, and when they no longer could do so, they tried to justify these crimes. The problem persists: In our Eastern countries, communism has suffered a complete ideological defeat; it is zero and less than zero. And yet Western intellectuals still look at it with considerable interest and empathy, and this is precisely what makes it so immensely difficult for the West to withstand the East. (*E*, 68)

No doubt it is an overstatement to say that Western intellectuals advocate the Soviet system-although during the 1920s and 1930s many certainly did. The vast majority abhor the repression and injustice so characteristic of Soviet life. On the other hand, as Solzhenitsyn points out, many Western intellectuals have been more reticent about blaming the Soviet Union's ills on its Marxist ideology. He explains:

Since the unmasking of the Soviet system, Western concepts have retreated from trench to trench. First they abandoned Stalin and

shifted all the blame into a mythical Stalinism which never existed. Then, with a heavy heart, they abandoned Lenin: if everything bad stemmed from Lenin, it was not, they argue, because he was a Communist, but because he was a Russian. Since these are all Russian perversions, what has the West to fear? . . . The West's intellectual sympathy [for Marxism] is also conditioned by the common source of their ideological origins: materialism and atheism. (*E*, 172)

Ideological affinity for progressive ideas has led many Western intellectuals to support Marxist movements, such as wars of national liberation. The process is almost always the same. A Marxist revolution stirs great empathy from among the intellectual class. Its goals are defended, its fervor supported. As the revolutionary fire cools and the centralized bureaucratic state comes to dominate all life in the nation, intellectuals loose faith and return to their theorizing-until the next revolution breaks out. Since intellectuals are the opinion leaders of society, the population in general has become confused in its capacity to recognize the founding of totalitarian regimes.

Intellectuals have backed Marxist uprisings, not so much because they are Marxists themselves, but because these movements have taken the "correct" stance on the issues of our time." They have attacked existing societies from the Left and have spoken out in favor of greater freedom,⁴⁵ more equality,⁴⁶ and increased material well-being.⁴⁷

44. That Solzhenitsyn understands the crisis of the West to be intellectual and not political or military is pointed out by Raymond Aron in his article comparing Sartre and Solzhenitsyn. Sartre, the "ruler of minds," immersed himself in leftist politics because he believed Marxism to be the "unsurpassable philosophy of our epoch." Raymond Aron, "Alexander Solzhenitsyn and European 'Leftism,'" *Survey* (Summer, 1979), 239.

Evidently, Solzhenitsyn is less influenced by the fashions of thought in our epoch. See his remarks to Western intellectuals in: W, 119; *Gulag II*, 51n, 57n; *Gulag III*, xi, 328n; *Oak*, 119n, 332; also R, 229-79.

45. For example, one Western intellectual, Melvin Gurtov, in criticizing Solzhenitsyn proclaims, "Liberation is the critical problem of our time." See *Detente: Prospects for Democracy and Dictatorship* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1976), 77.

46. For example, Francis Barker criticizes Solzhenitsyn for losing the "fierce equalitarianism" expressed in his early novels. Francis Barker, *Solzhenitsyn: Politics and Form* (London: MacMillan, 1977), 1.

47. For example, Lynn Turgeon holds that the Baltic areas are "flourishing" under Soviet rule and "have never enjoyed comparable well-being." *Detente*, 79.

48. "We in the East," he says, "never applauded the hangman who appeared in the West, but the Western intelligentsia for decades applauded our hangman." Quoted in Dunlop, "Exile," 136.

Of course, few intellectuals would attempt to force social reform as far as it has gone in the Soviet Union or in China under Mao. Yet many agree that socialism, purged of the excesses, is the true path to social justice. To this Solzhenitsyn retorts:

The decline of contemporary thought has been hastened by the misty phantom of socialism. Socialism has created the illusion of quenching people's thirst for justice: Socialism has lulled their consciences into thinking that the steamroller which is about to flatten them is a blessing in disguise, a salvation. And socialism, more than anything else, has caused public hypocrisy to thrive; it has enabled Europe to ignore the annihilation of 66 million people on its very borders. (W, 65, 141)

Obviously, there is a difference between socialism of the Soviet variety and that practiced in the West. Solzhenitsyn recognizes the difference, but maintains that socialists are guilty of not resisting communism as vigorously as they might, and certainly not as strongly as the more conservative groups have. Moreover, since the ideas behind socialism rest on Enlightenment principles-indeed, represent their culmination-they incline people to adopt a materialistic attitude toward life. In doing so, they diminish people's spiritual strength and, as we shall see in what follows, make them less inclined to lay down their lives in defense of freedom or any other principles. (W, 88)⁴⁹

But what of actual Communists in the West? Have not they shown themselves to be militantly opposed to oppression, especially against the poor, and in favor of liberation, especially for the downtrodden? Solzhenitsyn acknowledges that communism "disguises itself as humanitarianism," but he contends that the ideology somehow narrows and hardens people's souls such that they fail to recognize the suffering that they, themselves, inflict. As is his way, he tells a story to make his point.

For almost a year while he was still living in his native land, the Soviet media buzzed with stories of radical college professor Angela Davis's arrest and incarceration. The country was inundated with

49. This trend does not include every intellectual in the West, of course. Solzhenitsyn claims to admire certain academics "who could do much for the renewal and salvation of [their] country." However, because of the "fashions of thinking" that sweep over Western democracies and because the ideas of such people tend to run against the "current" of thought, they are rarely given the opportunity to quietly, if persistently, evoke the light in people's minds. E, 54-55.

news of the injustice done to her and of the suffering she experienced in prison. Soviet school children were asked to sign petitions for her release.

As we know, Angela Davis was released. Although U.S. prisons are far from perfect, her discomfort was minimal as compared to that of the inhabitants of the Gulag. Still, she was invited to recuperate at a Soviet resort. While there, some Soviet and Czech dissidents addressed an appeal to her in the hope that she might intercede on behalf of a number of people thrown into prison as the result of their protests against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. "Comrade Davis," they wrote,

You were in prison. You know how unpleasant it is to sit in prison, especially when you consider yourself innocent. You have such great authority now. Could you stand up for those people in Czechoslovakia who are being persecuted by the state?

Comrade Davis responded: "They deserve what they get. Let them remain in prison." To which Solzhenitsyn comments: That is the face of Communism. That is the heart of Communism for you." (W, 60-61)

Clearly, this one story does not prove that all Communists become hardened to the misery of others. Yet Solzhenitsyn maintains that it is indicative of a tendency among dedicated Marxists to become cruel in pursuit of their goals. Not every follower of Marx has become ruthless, yet, Solzhenitsyn points out, far too many have than can safely be ignored. All doctrines produce narrow-minded, self-righteous fanatics, but Marxism engenders more of them.

The second serious problem facing the West, Solzhenitsyn warns, is a loss of courage. During the 1970s, he argued:

A loss of courage is the most striking feature that an outsider notices in the West today.... Political and intellectual functionaries ... [offer] self-serving rationales as to how realistic, reasonable, and intellectually and even morally justified it is to base state policies on weakness and cowardice. (E, 44)

Solzhenitsyn recognizes the problem of liberal societies first brought to light by Hobbes: a way of life that rests on the protection of physical well-being has difficulty prompting people to the virtue of military valor. If life entails little more than the gratification of the objects of one's desires, why should-people endanger those pleasures by

placing their lives in jeopardy? After all, it is most difficult to partake of any of life's pleasures if one is dead. Yet, "[t]o defend oneself," Solzhenitsyn writes, reminding us of the harsher side of life, "one must also be ready to die; there is little such readiness in a society raised in the cult of well-being." (*E*, 62; also 46; *W*, 130-31)

All too often, he complains, the West has backed down from the challenges of totalitarianism. The "spirit of Munich" has infected our age. The West's once high principles are mocked and labeled reactionary. Its once high purpose no longer serves to rally its citizens from their private concerns. In the face of an implacable foe, the West has become increasingly confused and paralyzed. It has sought to gain a respite of peace and security by making concessions. According to Solzhenitsyn it has deluded itself into believing that compromises with evil are noble and moral attempts to avoid conflict. (*W*, 75-78; *E*, 63) "Behind all this," he warns, "lies that sleek god of affluence, now proclaimed as the goal of life, replacing the high-minded view of the world which the West has lost." (*M*, 70)

One of the most devastating effects of the West's loss of spiritual balance, Solzhenitsyn insists, is the ascendancy of nihilism. He is fond of saying that inhabitants of the present generation are left with the short change from the gold coins of their parents and grandparents. For ages people lived together with the understanding that some things were good and others bad. True, different countries and cultures held different things dear, yet all shared the belief that moral judgments were not only plausible, but were the ground from which all other opinions sprang. In the modern age, particularly the twentieth century, the idea that there are moral standards has come into disrepute. Choices between good and bad, noble and base, even true and false are said to be culturally bound, historically determined, or a matter of personal preference.

How did we reach such a state? How were the once so optimistic tenets of the Enlightenment turned into the disheartening notions of nihilism? Solzhenitsyn once again seems to find the answer in the "transition of ideas." More specifically, his argument in *August 1914* against the Kantianism of Tolstoy suggests that he understands the philosophy of Kant to be a critical factor in the introduction and general acceptance of nihilism into the mainstream of Western thought.

Stated briefly, Kant had been roused from his easy acceptance of liberal ideals by the attack made on those principles by Rousseau. In particular, Kant objected to the position, put forward most strongly by

Hobbes, that unless otherwise restrained by the state, people would always seek their own interest. Such a view of human motivation held as one of its corollaries that moral behavior, indeed the concept of morality itself, rested on the power of the state to compel citizens to act in ways not destructive of the public good; peace was founded on force, virtue on fear. Through his investigations Kant hoped to find a foundation for morality that did not rest on some force external to the individual making a moral choice. He claimed to have discovered that foundation in the categorical imperative.

The categorical imperative grows out of the constructs of human reason. It exists in human beings *a priori* and, therefore, makes the individual agent responsible for his or her moral choices, not some external power. It is also universal, and any reasonable person can understand its nature. Indeed, to rid itself of the charge that the individual agent may be acting from self-interest or as the result of some external threat of retribution, the agent acting under the provisions of the categorical imperative can have no thought of him- or herself nor of the consequences of the action. Therefore, it must be "contentless" and completely exclude, so as not to introduce a self-interest based on personal or cultural bias, any moral values that grow out of the experience of an individual or a particular culture. Facts can in no way affect one's values. Put simply, it is each thinking and acting in terms of all.

In order to maintain the validity of moral judgments based on the categorical imperative, Kant had to show that human beings could not make evaluative judgments based on empirical evidence (one could not infer the "ought" from the "is"), for this would mean that one people's moral code could be superior to another's, opening once again the wound that gave rise to the religious wars of Europe. Most of the philosophy and theology prior to Kant had made ethical judgments on the facts, of course. But Kant attempted to show that this was nothing more than idle speculation. Taking the place of an ethics grounded in practical experience and prudence was a universal moral code founded on the capacity of the human reasoning power to make entirely impartial judgments.

Despite the high hopes and good intentions of Kant's philosophy, it was quickly overwhelmed by the "transition of ideas." Marx attacked Kant's ideas on at least two fronts. First, Marx turned Kant back on himself by showing that even the *a priori* judgments, which Kant thought would be immune from bias, were actually determined by the economic structure of a particular historical epoch. Hence, there

were no grounds from which human beings could justify making moral decisions—all such choices were culturally and historically determined. Second, insofar as the universalism of Kant did reflect the future of the race, it was naive, for it provided no mechanism or historical agent, such as the proletariat, for its coming into being.

Now Solzhenitsyn's characterization of Tolstoy shows that his ideas were transcended in practice in exactly the same way Kant's were in theory. Tolstoy's universal "love commandment" helped undermine the traditional views of morality that had grown out of Russia's cultural past. But the more progressive of the Russian revolutionaries quickly came to see Tolstoy's views as antiquated and even dangerous to the cause of the revolution, for they inhibited social upheaval. Moreover, they were seen as naive, for the teaching of good-will toward others was ineffective when measured against the armed might of the government.'

The consequence of the "transition of ideas" has been the rise of (1) Marxism, which holds that all morality, except that which brings the revolution, is illegitimate; (2) social science positivism, which holds that values can never be inferred from facts; and (3) rationalistic humanism, which holds that only universal values are legitimate. The practical result of these three teachings is to make moral valuations impossible, or, in the case of humanism, to make valuations so difficult—since they abstract completely from self-interest—that they are all but impossible. Thus, all limits that traditional morality had placed on people have been undone. Despite the avowed humanism of the age, it has experienced inhumanity and brutality on a scale unknown in former times. Not even value-free science has been a total success. The discoveries that were intended to alleviate human misery have burst through those limits and now threaten to extinguish the race that created them. Evidently, the gold coins of our forebears have not been spent wisely. (R, 104-5)

Nihilism has also undermined the West's much-cherished principles of tolerance. Without some notion of morality, tolerance knows no limits and, therefore, is turned into indifference. If people deem themselves incompetent to make ethical judgments, or think that it would be wrong to impose their values on others, in fact, they are legitimizing the activities of those who, in Michael Novak's words,

50. Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals; Critique of Pure Reason*. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *August 1914*, trans. Michael Glenny (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), chap. 1-3, 5, 33, 42, 45; 142; *Gulag I*, 161; *First Circle*, 396-98.

"prefer torture, rapine, systematic murder, authoritarianism, and slavery." Despite these dire consequences, Novak maintains, in his defense of Solzhenitsyn's position, that "there are millions of people ... [i]n the vast middle range of our society" who refuse to acknowledge that any moral codes are "universal and binding upon us all."⁵¹

Solzhenitsyn concludes that nihilism is an ignominious end to the optimism of the Enlightenment. Not only does nihilism undermine all yardsticks human beings use to judge their actions, it also raises doubts that human life has any meaning and purpose whatever. The triumphant march of technological progress seems to have been a hollow victory, and the human race is left with little but emptiness.

The Turn Upward

Solzhenitsyn maintains that Enlightenment ideas have run their course. While they have "enriched" us along the way, they have now reached an impasse: "Today it would be retrogressive to hold to the ossified formulas of the Enlightenment. Such social dogmatism leaves us helpless before the trials of our time." (*E*, 70)

To Solzhenitsyn it seems that the world is facing a juncture similar in scope and intensity to the one that initiated the modern age. If an ecological disaster does not overtake us, surely a spiritual one will. Forces of inhuman strength are arrayed against the West and cannot be resisted adequately on the grounds that the Enlightenment set down. Human beings must know that there is something worth struggling for before they are willing to struggle in its defense.

A spiritual revival is necessary if the West is to avoid repeating the mistakes of the East. The rejuvenation of mankind can begin only when the central flaw of modernity's philosophy is exposed. Human beings cannot find meaning in existence or be made happy merely by acquiring material possessions and by nurturing their physical beings. Solzhenitsyn postulates: "If, as claimed by humanism, man were born only to be happy, he would not be born to die. Since his body is doomed to death, his task on earth evidently must be more spiritual." (*E*, 70) Once this fact is recognized, people will again see the value of the concept of a "Supreme Complete Entity." The realignment of human history will not be a simple process, of course. He holds that it

51. Michael Novak, "On God and Man," *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard: The Address, Twelve Early Responses, and Six Later Reflections*, ed. Ronald Berman (Washington, D.C.; Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980), 135.

will take great effort and much vision to plot a new course that neither curses "our physical nature, as in the Middle Ages," nor tramples "our spiritual being . . . as in the Modern Era." "This ascension is similar to climbing onto the next anthropological stage. No one on earth has any way left but upward." (E, 71)

Self-Limitation in the Modern World

What are the components of a spiritual revival? Solzhenitsyn argues that all nations are in need of self-limitation. Yet much of modern political philosophy is constructed on the idea that happiness can be attained by ensuring an ever-higher standard of living and thereby fulfilling people's every desire. New ways to produce more goods, it was hoped, could bring about infinite progress for the race. (R, 137)

Solzhenitsyn repeats the truth expressed most clearly in Aristotle's *Ethics*: it is not how much one has, but to what end one puts it that is important. Because acquisitiveness too easily becomes avarice, which knows no bounds, human beings can never be satisfied fully by material possessions. While Enlightenment philosophy held out the hope of gaining happiness by conquering the material world, Solzhenitsyn harkens back to a tradition that guided people to turn inward and conquer themselves.

In the ancient world people were constrained to limit themselves because there were not enough material things to go around. Either they practiced self-control or they coveted the fixed store of goods available to others. The philosophy of the Enlightenment attempted to end chronic shortages by unlocking the mysteries of nature. Science and technology were to increase nature's bounty.

To a great extent the experiment was a success, but, as is the case with almost all other things in life, there was a price to be paid. Citing the evidence of the de Chargin Society and the Club of Rome, Solzhenitsyn argues that the world may soon face an ecological disaster. (R, 123)⁵² The misguided optimism of the modern world, he asserts, has caused us to overpopulate, overproduce, and overindustrialize. We are polluting the world in a senseless effort to produce wares we really do not need. (R, 106-7)

At some point, he suggests, the earth will reach its productive

52. The "Third Rome" has nothing to do, it seems, with Russia's manifest destiny. Rather, it depends on the predictions of scientists. R, 123.

capacities. People will be forced once again to think in terms of limitation and not expansion. Their energies will have to be spent on the development of inner strength rather than on outward signs of success. To borrow a term from the study of political parties, Solzhenitsyn asks if there is not a critical realignment of human culture in the offing. If productive limits are reached, the shortage of goods is likely to precipitate a revolution against Enlightenment principles. A moral and spiritual revival would then occur, for people would be driven to despair, and they would have no place to turn "except . . . upward." (*R*; 106-7, 136-42; *E*, 176-77; *W*, 79, 133)

As with all predictions of impending doom, it is easy to criticize Solzhenitsyn.⁵³ After all, Malthus, the theoretical progenitor of modern-day ecologists, was proved wrong. And for that matter so were the suppositions of the de Chargin Society and the Club of Rome. The shortages of the 1970s did not lead to a re-evaluation of Western thought. Quite the contrary, it has become apparent that the market adjusted in such a way as to actually overproduce natural resources.

Yet, these signs of strength in the West do not entirely refute Solzhenitsyn's position. What will happen, he makes us wonder, if as forecast, the world's population doubles in the next twenty-five years? Under such conditions, can there be an ever-rising standard of living? Are there no outer limits to expansion and progress? Can human ingenuity overcome the inevitable depletion of the world's natural resources?

Solzhenitsyn insists that some adjustments to the Western way of life may be coming in the years ahead. The anxiety resulting from a serious economic or ecological crisis could very well initiate a period of soul searching. Thus, as Delba Winthrop points out, Solzhenitsyn's argument in favor of self-limitation rest on "the nature of nature" as well as "the nature of man."⁵⁴

Those who contend that Solzhenitsyn is conservative on every issue are wrong. In agreement with the "liberal" ecological movement, Solzhenitsyn would have us adopt a "small technology," which aims at a stable rather than an expanding economy and at cleaning up rather than polluting the environment.⁵⁵

53. As he notes in *R*, 106.

54. Delba Winthrop, "Solzhenitsyn: Emerging From Under the Rubble," paper delivered at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, New York, September, 1978, 14.

55. Barker asserts that small technology would codify existing social and economic in-

Furthermore, he argues that the optimism of Enlightenment philosophy is already beginning to wear thin. The more hopeful advocates of its ideas had promised that people and society would become better once they were emancipated from natural necessity and allowed to develop freely. The inaccuracy of that forecast is all too apparent if one considers the history of this century or looks at the problems facing virtually every Western society today. At the same time unprecedented standards of living have been achieved, crime of all kinds has actually risen. Rather than making people better, affluence seems to have weakened their moral fiber. (E, 95-101) Thus, the notion that people can be reformed merely by enhancing the material environment is now seriously in doubt. The recognition that the sources of human motivation run deeper than people's surroundings, Solzhenitsyn suspects, will lead to a re-examination of the very foundations of the modern edifice.

Repentance

Much of Solzhenitsyn's work is aimed at inculcating a sense of courage or spiritedness. Spiritedness directs people to assert their wills, defend their community, and resist injustice. However, it can become a source of arrogance that is used to injure others. While Solzhenitsyn wants to animate people's spirit, he does not want to weaken their moral responsibilities. In his essay "Repentance and Self-Limitation," he reiterates his oft-stated belief that the dividing line between good and evil runs through the heart of every person.

equalities. Francis Barker, *Solzhenitsyn: Politics and Form* (London: MacMillan, 1977), 61-62.

Barker's prediction may be true enough, but that does not necessarily condemn Solzhenitsyn's proposal. Barker judges political societies on the basis of how egalitarian they are. But if people could lead a satisfying life in which neither scarcity nor pollution threatens them, what need would they have of social equality? Furthermore, since nature has not given us comparable abilities, there can never be equality in the most important sense. Yet there is a deeper sense in which Solzhenitsyn's desire for a small technology might be criticized. Limitations on technology rest, to a large extent, on a nation's ability to curtail the international arms race. If competition exists to build ever more modern armaments, then necessity compels nations to (1) discover new technologies, (2) sustain scientific investigations, and (3) maintain an industrial base capable of supporting arms production. Will not the new inventions of technology and the new discoveries of science be used to establish a consumer society in which those who produce using economies of scale will have an advantage? Given that human beings normally choose the most cost-effective products, large industries seem inevitable.

No nation, class or party is totally good or completely evil. Such a truth demands that we "search for our own errors and sins" rather than placing every problem on the shoulders of others. Only when we acknowledge our own faults can "spiritual growth" begin.

History makes apparent that repentance is difficult. "All throughout the ages," he writes, people have "preferred to censure, denounce and hate others, instead of censuring, denouncing and hating" themselves. The hope for repentance is even dimmer today. Commercialism blinds people to the need for such an attitude, and Marxism vigorously rejects it altogether. Moreover, for "all countries which previously suffered oppression and now fanatically aspire to physical might," it "is the very last feeling they are about to experience." Yet given "the white-hot tension between nations and races we can say without suspicion of overstatement that without repentance it is ... doubtful we can survive." (*R*, 107-11)

Repentance is difficult not only "because we must cross the threshold of self-love, but also because our own sins are not easily visible to us." Overcoming our natural vanity requires courage, especially in a situation where we are the first to repent. The outward sign of repentance is forgiveness, and it may even induce generosity and magnanimity. (8, 115, 120, 127-29)

An attitude of repentance is likely to produce moderate, self-sacrificing, even pacific behavior. Does this not mean that Solzhenitsyn counsels people to accept evil? Clearly this seems to conflict with his earlier stated intention of making people spirited in defense of justice.

Repentance can become counterproductive, he claims, if, as in the case of the pre-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia, people acknowledge sins only within their own group or nation. This attitude may cause an intellectual paralysis that results in people abdicating their responsibility for making choices to others. Thus, it is equally a mistake, although a less common one, to see only good in others and overlook their evil. He concludes that full repentance is possible only when both sides limit themselves, when it is mutual. Obviously, an ideal of this type is impractical, especially in the anarchy of the international arena. The best one can hope for is a middle ground between the hardness of arrogance and the softness of surrender. (*R*, 120, 127, 137, 142)

In the West most of the criticism of Solzhenitsyn has come from those who consider his strident opposition to Marxism an indication of his fanaticism. He is strident, but, as his stance on repentance

makes clear, it is unfair to label him a fanatic. He asks that we strike a balance between assertiveness and self-sacrifice. Without searching the imagination too much, his position may be called prudence. Indeed, he calls for a "prudent self-restriction." (R, 137)

He is no less aware than other moral teachers of how complex making ethical decisions is. He understands that innocence and guilt are often difficult to sort out (as his views on Soviet-Polish relations and his attitude toward West Germany show). (R, 113, 128-32) He presses his case against Marxism so strenuously not because he is blind to the faults of communism's opponents or unaware of the dangers of righteous indignation, but because he has experienced, first hand, the full fury which that doctrine reserves for human beings of extraordinary character and those who resist its commands. He appreciates that the calculation of a prudent person must change from case to case, implying a knowledge of circumstances and, perhaps, wisdom about ends. Yet even the most moderate ought to take heed if their adversary is unusually vicious. While most situations call for a response roughly between temerity and timidity, in extreme situations only audacity will do. The evidence presented throughout Solzhenitsyn's work, but most clearly in *The Gulag Archipelago*, is meant to convince prudent people that Marxism tramples all that is finest in the human spirit and that, if they wish to protect human dignity, great difficulty lies ahead.

But how are people to decide when an action is appropriate? On what basis should they make such judgments?

Morality

By moving against the tide of "social sciences . . . particularly the more modern of them," (R, 104) Solzhenitsyn argues that it is possible for human beings to make correct moral valuations. For instance, he writes that the concept of justice is "inherent in man" and is not relative to one's "own way." The "voice of justice" can be "recognized" by those who "recognize the voice of their own conscience." Furthermore, "convictions based on conscience are as infallible as the internal rhythm of the heart."

56. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Letter from Solzhenitsyn to Three Students," in Leopold Labedz, *Solzhenitsyn: A Documentary Record* (London: Penguin Press, 1970), 101. Perhaps morality is not so easily derived from conscience. Human hearts are sometimes troubled by irregular rhythms and eventually stop altogether. The analogy, however, may have been sufficient to satisfy the three students to whom it was addressed.

Despite his reliance on conscience as the ground for morality, Solzhenitsyn does not seem to endorse fully St. Thomas's view that the capacity to distinguish good from evil is imprinted on the soul. Rather, he observes that it is a common human trait to evaluate things on the basis of whether they are "noble, base, courageous, cowardly, hypocritical, false, cruel, magnanimous, just, unjust, and so on." (R, 105) The argument against the ability to make such valuations holds that there is no natural or divine support for these distinctions. But Solzhenitsyn contends that human beings are also part of nature, and it is in their nature to make such judgments—man is an evaluating being. Of course, people's mores will differ from political community to political community, but this does not contradict the fact that moral judgments are possible. Rather, it points once again to the importance of political communities in helping to establish moral sentiments.

The argument that supports the ability to make moral judgments may never rest on apodictic demonstrations, but, he asserts, it is certainly no weaker than the argument put forward by those who claim such judgments are impossible. No one, in his or her private life, is a thoroughgoing skeptic. As a human being, one naturally holds some things better than others and, in doing so, shows that it is as reasonable to assume, if not more so, that standards for judgment do in fact exist.⁵⁷

Obviously, the natural argument in support of morality is far too

57. Sidney Hook writes that "the profoundest error" of Solzhenitsyn is his insistence that "moral responsibility derive [s] from belief in a Supreme Being, and that erosion of religious faith spells the end of moral decency." Hook reasons that "morality is logically independent of religion as Augustine, Kierkegaard and the authors of *The Book of Job* well knew." Sidney Hook, "Solzhenitsyn and Secular Humanism: A Response," *The Humanist* (November/December, 1978), 5.

Morality may be independent of religion, but what Solzhenitsyn recognizes and Hook fails to consider is the mechanism by which morality is inculcated. How many people will take morality seriously if it rests on a mere supposition concerning the nature of existence? If people create morality for themselves, others can choose to disregard it. The human race needs firmer ground from which to counteract the evil tendencies within it. Although organized religion has been, at times, the worst offender against its own principles, at the very least it has taught that there are proper limits to human action. For generations, those limits, though often breached in practice, served as a bulwark against our baser instincts. Has rationalistic humanism had any greater success? Its age has been the twentieth century, when, Hook's objections to the contrary notwithstanding, its ideals have been applied to society. The result has been to undermine the belief that any limits are needed on humanity. What other age in history has been threatened by the specter of universal tyranny?

subtle to hold great sway. Indeed, Solzhenitsyn is a staunch proponent of the religious way of thinking. For most of mankind, religion is the ultimate source of moral truth. It reminds people to abandon their earthly cares, at least for a while, and give their thoughts over to "life eternal." It raises them above the level of animals by making them aware that all who live are destined to die and that the meaning of life must have more to do with the development of the soul than the care of the body.⁵⁸

Solzhenitsyn is most often taken to be a spokesman for Christian ideals. There is no doubt that he understands and even fosters religious sentiments. Whether he is himself a Christian writer is a deeper and perhaps irresolvable question. He joined the Orthodox Church in 1970, rather late in life and only after his character had been formed in the camps.⁵⁹ We have no reason to doubt his piety in private life, but in his public works he rarely invokes the authority of revelation. He chooses instead to rely on appeals to unaided reason so

Having said this, it is important to note that Solzhenitsyn is less interested in stressing the differences between the religious and philosophic ways of thinking than he is in showing their similarities as against the modern understanding of life. As Charles Kesler points out:

He is, in many ways, the greatest living representative of the West, an avatar of the West's most ancient and honorable principles ... [H]aving witnessed the diminution of man by modern science, and . . . having known that greatness of which the human soul is capable even in the most terrible circumstances, it's not surprising that he could reappraise, indeed resurrect, the almost forgotten alternative to modernity: classical and early Christian political philosophy.

Solzhenitsyn reminds us of what is finest and noblest in the Western tradition. Contrary to positivist belief, for example, he argues

58. "A Journey Along the Oka," *Stories*, 214-15; *Gulag II*, 613-15; Olivier Clement, *The Spirit of Solzhenitsyn*, trans. Sarah Fawcett and Paul Burns (London: Search Press Ltd., 1976), 227-28.

59. He talks about religious people in the camps, but he never places himself among them. *Gulag II*, 612.

60. Scammell reports that Solzhenitsyn does not attend Orthodox services regularly, despite the fact that the rest of his family does. Michael Rummel, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1984), 991-92.

61. Kesler, *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, 55.

that morality is higher than law. Morality is not inchoate and amorphous, while the law is clear and complete. Law is the "human attempt to embody in rules a part of the moral sphere which is above us all." (W, 45)

He makes us face the once commonly held truth that people are responsible for their own souls and their own actions. No social arrangement, no matter how closely it approximates justice, can ever resolve every human dilemma. There can be little doubt of the importance of justice, yet there is a realm of human activity that transcends political life. Politics is only secondary to the development of human character (and perhaps even to fostering friendship). The form of government that allows and encourages the fullest development of human potential is the best regime. Yet no government can complete a task for which every individual is personally responsible. Politics is incomplete; it points beyond itself to the higher purposes of life. At best it can establish an atmosphere that may help people achieve integrity of character and in some instances may even induce greatness of soul. (R, 22, 106; M, 61)⁶²

He recalls to us that humanity cannot be "the creator of an autonomous spiritual world." If a person accepts nothing "above himself" and instead "hoists upon his shoulders the act of creating this world and of populating it, together with total responsibility for it," he or she "collapses under the load." Not even a "mortal genius can bear up under it." (E, 4)⁶³

Finally, Solzhenitsyn revives the idea that human beings are capable of using their intellects to distinguish good from evil. He attempts to show that we can make rational choices and that we can judge the relative worth of different forms of government. For example, we can perceive the difference between totalitarian, autocratic, and democratic regimes. We can then adjust our policy to aid the friends of freedom and dignity and to oppose their enemies.

Obviously, reason cannot fathom all of life's mysteries, but it can help guide people to choose the appropriate actions for any given situation. Perhaps more important, it can teach them the proper limits that life places on their expectations. In truth, the exercise of the

62. *Gulag I*, 226; *Gulag II*, 611; *First Circle*, 42, 340, 370.

63. Evidently, Solzhenitsyn objects to Nietzsche's philosophy, as well as that of Marx, although perhaps not as strongly. It seems he rejects Nietzsche's attempt to create a wholly human ground for nobility. For Solzhenitsyn human life has purpose only if it has a purpose beyond itself. Nietzsche's endeavor to raise man above himself has not always borne the intended fruit.

mind is a purpose all to itself. Since human beings are separated from other beasts by their capacity for speech and reason, it follows that those who develop those peculiarly human skills are the most fully human^s.

The Form of Government Solzhenitsyn Favors

Solzhenitsyn's insistence that he is not a political scientist has great credibility. For example, he does not present an ideal form of government by which to judge the relative worth of actually existing regimes. He has not made an attempt to collect his thoughts on politics into a unified whole. Despite his lack of organization, he does make many suggestions concerning the proper arrangement of political life.

He may have abjured the opportunity to proffer the ideal regime for practical reasons. The philosophy of the Enlightenment has led many people to believe that the ideal political order can be brought into being and that all human problems can be resolved by reforming political institutions. But, as we have seen, this aspiration steers people down the wrong path. It overlooks inner, spiritual improvement, which is a more important source of human motivation and for which the individual is personally responsible. In a sense, he wishes to diminish what people expect of politics, while raising what they expect of themselves. With such a goal in mind, presenting an ideal form of government might serve only to lead people astray.

His moderation in this respect derives from an almost Burkean conception of community. In *August 1914* he has one of his characters ask: "Who is conceited enough to imagine that he can devise ideal institutions? The only people who think that are those who believe that nothing of significance was ever done before their own time."⁶⁵ It is arrogant, his character asserts, to imagine a perfect social order can be instituted because "history is not governed by reason":

History is irrational ... a river, it has its own laws which govern its flow, its bends.... The bonds between generations, bonds of in-

64. *Gulag I*, 145, 595; *Gulag II*, 597, 607; *Gulag III*, 66, 104; *Oak*, 494; *First Circle*, 104.

65. *August 1914*, 472.

stitutions, traditions, customs, are what hold^{ss} the banks of the river bed together and keep the stream flowing.

The life of each nation, the argument continues, its somehow independent of those who wish to control it. A country's culture consists of millions upon millions of decisions concerning the proper way of life, made by generation after generation of its inhabitants. Tradition puts a check on what reformers can do to change the way of life of a people. Although Solzhenitsyn's novel admits that one kind of social order is "less evil than others" and that "perhaps there may even be a perfect one," it warns that "the best social order is not susceptible to being arbitrarily constructed, or even to being scientifically constructed."⁶⁷ Those who wish to alter society radically, according to some abstract ideal, are naive about the possibilities of positive change and ignorant of the wisdom expressed in the folkways of a nation. (*M*, 11-12)

Solzhenitsyn is not in total agreement with Burke, however. He rejects the absolute correctness of one's own way; he does not adhere to the belief that prejudice is of higher value than reason; and he claims that a return to the past would be foolish.⁶⁸

If there is a perfect form of government, bringing it into being is a matter of chance, he claims. In practice, the best one can hope for is to live in a decent society—one that forgoes the temptation to terrorize its citizens in order to make them reform their ways. Such a regime is a compromise between the ideals one hopes to attain and the traditions and habits people are reluctant to surrender. Only the foolish or the ruthless, he reasons, would attempt to build the future without giving the past its due. (*M*, 61-62; *R*, 274)

Although he is known as a proponent of conservatism, Solzhenitsyn would not have us become slaves of the past. He ridicules the suggestion that he proposes a reintroduction of "a patriarchal way of life" or the foundation of "a theocratic state." He explains that a careful reading of his "Letter to the Soviet Leaders" would not show that the state should give itself over to religion, but only that religion ought to make "an appropriate contribution to the spiritual life of the community."

66. *Ibid.*, 474-75. Carter, 71, notes that this is an attack on Rousseau. But Hegel and Tolstoy are mentioned in the chapter. Solzhenitsyn seems intent on formulating a notion of history somewhere between the two extremes of complete wisdom (Hegel) and utter ignorance (Tolstoy).

67. *August 1914*, 473-74. See also *Gulag III*, 477.

68. In sum, he objects to the historicism implicit in Burke's notion of community.

In no instances should it be suppressed, as is the case in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the Communist world. (M, 64)

It is also accurate to say that he rejects a return to the patriarchal way of life, although his attitude toward autocracy, the government which fostered that social order, is a bit more complex. He argues that for centuries people lived tolerable, even fruitful, lives within such societies, free from the turmoil that has so marked the democratic twentieth century. Like other types of government, autocracy has both its strengths and weaknesses. Its virtues of stability and continuity must be measured against its vices, which include "the danger of dishonest authorities, upheld by violence, the danger of arbitrary decisions and the difficulty of correcting them, the danger of sliding into tyranny." (R, 22) But autocracy need not become despotic if its leaders are correctly restrained. He explains that

authoritarian regimes as such are not frightening-only those which are answerable to no one and nothing. The autocrats of earlier, religious ages, though their power was ostensibly unlimited, felt themselves responsible before God and their own consciences. (R, 22)

Although autocracies have complete power over the lives of their citizens, they rarely use that power to control people's souls. The fearsome dictatorships Marxism has spawned are not interested in gaining mere compliance from their citizens. The Marxist state demands that people make a positive commitment to the goals of the party. Therefore, it must endeavor to wrest every last shred of freedom and independent spirit from the populace. It forces people to constantly concur in lies, thereby corrupting their personal integrity and leaving them little control over their individual wills. (R, 23; E, 123-24)

Solzhenitsyn's admiration for autocracy is partly due to his uneasiness with democracy. In many nations with no tradition of self-rule, democracy has led first to anarchy and then to tyranny. In fact, weak democracies have been the breeding ground for four totalitarian states: "the February Revolution in Russia, the Weimar and Italian republics, and Chiang Kai-shek's China." (M, 60) Other weaknesses of democracy include its tendency to produce politicians who pander to the masses instead of leading them, its feebleness in dealing with the violence of terrorists and criminals, its difficulty in raising people above mass culture, and its inability "to check unrestrained profiteering at the expense of public morality." (R, 20-21; E, 130-34)

Despite his criticism of democracy, he has a certain admiration for

that form of government He claims to be a critic only of democracy's weaknesses and does not oppose "good democracies." He goes so far as to encourage autocratic and totalitarian states to emulate some of the positive aspects of representative government. He calls for the separation of powers, complete freedom of speech and the press, government powers that are responsible to public opinion, and a decisionmaking process that promotes compromise and, above all, deliberation. (*E*, 23, 135; *M*, 62)⁶⁹ The thrust of Solzhenitsyn's suggestions leads one to believe that whatever the ultimate source of sovereignty within a nation, be it the people or some ruling class, it ought to be checked by institutions, laws, and moral restraints—preferably all three.

Solzhenitsyn's reluctance to present an ideal state does not keep him from showing his preference for small, inward-looking communities in which relations between citizens rest on mutual friendship and respect While he recognizes that the requirements of the modern age, and especially the challenges of foreign affairs, make the ideal of the small community impractical, he still wonders whether decentralization may not be a remedy for the impersonality and crassness that are so much a part of contemporary life. He restates the argument in favor of a society drawn together by patriotism and a dedication to the common good and of a government as committed to the inculcation of duties as it is to the protection of rights.⁷⁰

Because he places such importance on the common good, he questions the need for political parties. They represent, he says, the particular, rather than the general interest, and reflect material, rather than spiritual concerns. He asks—without giving a conclusive answer—if there are no "non-party paths to national development " (*W*, 17)

For those schooled in the virtues of representative government it is difficult to answer that question in the affirmative. After all, parties have existed in one form or another almost since the dawn of political life. As James Madison explains, to rid society of the "spirit of faction " it would be necessary to do away with liberty or to give everyone the same opinion. Since, under a decent government, the likelihood of

69. *Oak*, 460; *Gulag III*, 81, 92-93; "Live Not by Lies," A26.

70. "Matryona's House," *Stories*, 1-42. In his own country he favors the abandonment of Marxism; the retention of an authoritarian nationalist state; the institution of government by laws, of civil and religious liberties, and of the separation of powers; the development of Siberia instead of the support of client states; and the husbanding of Russia's natural resources. See *E*, 75-142, 181; *R 21*, 135-41; *M*, 55-62; *W*, 107.

taking either step is remote, it is safe to assume that parties will remain an important aspect of political life.

It is important to note that Solzhenitsyn's proposal for a nonparty state is left as a question. It is likely that he stated the proposition as he did because he is aware of the difficulty of such an approach. In fact, the real issue is not whether parties should be abolished, but whether the spokesmen of those parties can "rise above" the parochial and material interests they represent.

The answer to that question depends, to a large extent, on whether a moral revival is actually possible. Solzhenitsyn's optimistic remark that such a transformation of Western culture is in the offing may be more rhetorical than real. His analysis of modernity makes one wonder whether a change of this sort is still possible. Indeed, he has come of late to doubt whether people can actually learn from experience. Does this mean that the West is destined to re-enact the errors of the East? (W, -101)

Whether the revival is possible or not, Solzhenitsyn's grim account of Marxism makes us believe that Western culture has never confronted a greater challenge. In accordance with the "bitter truth" revealed by Tocqueville more than a century ago, mankind faces a choice between freedom and universal tyranny.⁷¹

Hampden Sydney College

JAMES F. PONTUSO

71. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 680.