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## Political and moral themes in the works of Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Isaiah L. Parnell

*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

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Political and Moral Themes in the Works of Alexander Solzhenitsyn  
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A Thesis

Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Government  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirement for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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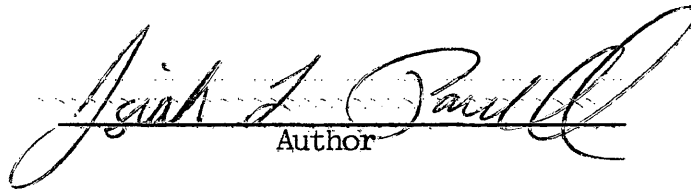
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Isiah L. Parnell

1980

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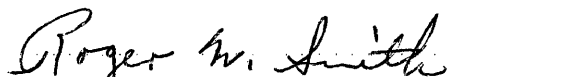
Master of Arts

  
Author

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Ronald Rapoport

  
Roger W. Smith

To The Gang: Michelle, Shawn, Anita, April, and Corey.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine the major political and moral themes that appear in the works of Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

The study examines all of Solzhenitsyn's works that have been published in the United States through 1978. Five major issues were addressed throughout his literature, essays, and speeches. All of the issues focus upon the moral responsibilities of individuals and nations. The issues include: the question of "What men live by"; the notion of self-deception; the concept of suffering; the role of the artist in society; and the West's role in world affairs.

Solzhenitsyn suggests that individuals and nations have definite moral responsibilities and that they must be willing to distinguish between actions that are "right" and those that are "wrong". He thinks that actions should be guided by moral imperatives rather than expediency. Additionally, he argues that individual suffering may have positive impacts on those who are punished. Finally, Solzhenitsyn thinks that Western nations should play a more influential role in world affairs to help defeat Soviet initiatives, and must come to understand the nature of Communism.

Political and Moral Themes In The Works of  
—  
Alexander Solzhenitsyn



## INTRODUCTION

Alexander Solzhenitsyn has been a prominent international personality since the publication of his first novel, One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich, in 1962. The controversial subject matter and the powerful literary style that is evident in One Day brought him a large amount of critical acclaim. Since 1962 Solzhenitsyn has continued to publish a large number of works. His willingness to address controversial issues with the style of an accomplished artist has kept him in the forefront of the world's writers. When Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973, his stature and influence were enhanced further.

This thesis centers around the notion put forward by Stephen Carter in his book entitled, The Politics of Solzhenitsyn. He writes: "My main reason for writing this book is simple: Alexander Solzhenitsyn is saying something which is important, not only for Russia and the USSR but also for the West."<sup>1</sup> Solzhenitsyn's work is important to the political scientist because he addresses social issues that affect people from the East and West and he offers advice to both individuals and nations on important social, economic, and political questions. Moreover, Solzhenitsyn's literature and speeches have been deeply critical of the Soviet Union and the United States. His works

have continually criticized both societies' art, foreign and domestic policy, and moral values. In confronting the social and political issues of the day, Solzhenitsyn has not been content with general, abstract, critiques; he has also attempted to suggest what the concrete responsibility of nations and individuals are in dealing with various problems in the contemporary world.

This paper attempts to identify and to analyze the major themes in Solzhenitsyn's literature. The underlying assumption behind this thesis is that Solzhenitsyn has several consistent themes that he has presented in a variety of contexts over the years. The paper will identify those themes and show how they are forwarded in Solzhenitsyn's fiction, essays, and speeches.

While there are a large number of short articles on Solzhenitsyn's literature, there are not many works that discuss the entire range of his writings. My own approach will be to take a fresh look at Solzhenitsyn's writings in an attempt to get at his basic themes, and while I shall make use of previous commentaries, I shall be concerned primarily with an explication of Solzhenitsyn's ideas, rather than with the adequacy of the existing studies.

#### Criteria for Selection of Major Themes

I used two methods to help select the major themes in this paper. First, I have regarded as major themes those issues that have been consistently addressed in Solzhenitsyn's works. The issue had to be a prominent theme in a number of works rather

than in just one or two of his writings. The central themes that appear repeatedly and are discussed in the paper are: the question of "What men live by"; the notion of self-deception; the concept of suffering; and the role of the artist in society.

The second method that I used to help select major themes was to examine the characters in Solzhenitsyn's works who could be clearly defined as heroes and to look for similarities in their moral outlooks. I found that different heroes have consistent responses to the challenges depicted in the various works. The responses are in accord with Solzhenitsyn's views expressed directly in essays, interviews, and the like. Thus, it seems appropriate to regard the heroes of the novels as embodying projections of Solzhenitsyn's own views. The first criterion for selection of major themes helped to determine the issues that were important to Solzhenitsyn. The second criterion helped to determine his response to those issues.

### Scope

The thesis deals with all of Solzhenitsyn's works that have appeared in English, from his first novel, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich published in 1962 through his most recent book, The Gulag Archipelago Three, published in 1978. The essay also, as stated, makes use of a limited number of secondary works.

The essay, however, is not an attempt to discuss or analyze Solzhenitsyn's literary style nor does it attempt to determine

if the events that Solzhenitsyn describes in his non-fiction actually occurred. The purpose rather is to identify and explore the major themes of Solzhenitsyn as they are articulated by the major characters in his works, and, further, in the essays, so that readers will have a clear understanding of the structure of his thought, his view of the world, and his vision for national and individual moral responsibility.

### Content

The first chapter of the paper discusses Solzhenitsyn's conception of the role of the artist. He addresses this topic in his Nobel Prize Speech and in a wide variety of his other works. The essential conclusion of the chapter is that the artist's work must concern itself with relevant social issues. Solzhenitsyn's secondary assertion is that the artist can have a positive effect on individuals and society.

The theme that is discussed in Chapter Two is the question "What men live by." Solzhenitsyn's literature offers a wide range of characters who discuss this question. The chapter attempts to draw inferences from those characters. The main conclusion is that men should value their moral integrity over material wealth.

The third chapter discusses the notion of suffering in Solzhenitsyn's works. The chapter makes distinctions between the type of suffering that can have positive consequences and suffering that can have negative results. The chapter also discusses the idea of suffering as an opportunity to develop

spiritually. It concludes that Solzhenitsyn thinks suffering can be positive and have desirable long-run consequences.

Chapter four is an attempt to describe Solzhenitsyn's criticisms of Soviet society. It discusses Solzhenitsyn's views on the Soviet Union's rapid technological and military achievements since World War II. Chapter four also has a section that is devoted to Solzhenitsyn's criticism of the Soviet citizenry. He accuses them of refusing to be aware of the social and political crisis that surrounds them.

The fifth chapter concerns itself with Solzhenitsyn's indictment of the West. It discusses his feeling about the moral responsibility of Western nations to become more actively involved in world affairs. The chapter outlines Solzhenitsyn's basic challenges to the West. First, he challenges the West to confront the military and economic threats of the Soviet Union. Second, he encourages the West to examine the Soviet Union's past record of non-compliance with a variety of treaties that have been made between the two societies. Finally, he challenges the West to come to a clear understanding of what the word "communism" represents.

The final chapter attempts to summarize Solzhenitsyn's major themes. The chapter also examines how, in the final chapters of Gulag Three, Solzhenitsyn himself views his writings.

## NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

1. Stephen Carter, "Preface," The Politics of Solzhenitsyn (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc. 1977) p. xi.

CHAPTER I  
THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

Solzhenitsyn, like many other prominent artists, has attempted to examine his role as a writer. He has tried to analyze the various functions and definitions of art and the artist throughout history and develop a personal conception of the issues that his art should address and his responsibility as an artist. What is Solzhenitsyn's conception of art? What does Solzhenitsyn think his role is? What are his motives as a writer? These are the questions we must begin with.

In the essay entitled "Why I Write" George Orwell stresses the importance of recognizing an artist's background when trying to understand his work. He writes:

I give all this background information because I do not think one can assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development....His subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in--at least this is true in tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own--but before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional form which he will never completely escape.<sup>1</sup>

After reading Solzhenitsyn's works that have been published in English, it seems apparent that his conviction in 1945 for "disrespectful remarks about Stalin", his subsequent years in Soviet prison camps and his three years in exile played the most critical role in determining what he has written. The vast majority of his works make some reference to his Soviet

camp experiences. Additionally, five of Solzhenitsyn's seven major works deal directly with the Soviet camp system and the lives of its inmates. Solzhenitsyn writes:

...But the day when I deliberately let myself sink to the bottom and felt it firm under my feet--the hard, rocky bottom which is the same for all was the beginning of the most important years of my life, the years which put the finishing touches to my character. From then onward there seem to have been no upheavals in my life, and I have been faithful to the views and habits acquired at that time.<sup>2</sup>

Solzhenitsyn was in constant conflict with the Soviet leadership because of the negative comments that his art made about modern Soviet society. Many of his works could not be published in the Soviet Union and his manuscripts had to be smuggled out for publication in the West. His willingness to address consistently controversial themes led to his exile from the Soviet Union in 1974. Since his exile to the West he has made several speeches around the nation and has written a number of essays concerning his view of Western society and East-West relations. Just as Solzhenitsyn became a controversial literary and political figure in the Soviet Union because of his willingness to challenge the nation's existing political and social norms, he has also become a polemical figure in the United States because of his criticisms of Western values and its parochial priorities.

#### THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF ART AND THE ARTIST

Solzhenitsyn shares the traditional view of the role of art in society. The two basic characteristics of the traditional view of art are: art must address contemporary social issues; and



art must teach and encourage people to lead moral lives. The notion of the artist as moralist and teacher goes back to pre-socratic Greece. John Gardner in his book entitled On Moral Fiction writes:

My basic message throughout this book is as old as the hills, drawn from Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Dante, and the rest, and standard in western civilization down through the eighteenth century;...

...The traditional view is that true art is moral: it seeks to improve life, not defile it. It seeks to hold off at least for a while, the twilight of the gods and us...Art is essentially serious and beneficial, a game played against death and entropy.<sup>3</sup>

Solzhenitsyn believes that art must focus on the social and political issues of the day rather than operate in a vacuum of art for its own sake, content itself with what is fashionable, or what will sell a large number of books. This view of art is not only consistent with the traditional ideas concerning art, but is also similar to the beliefs forwarded by Soviet realists. C. Vaughn James notes in the book entitled Soviet Socialist

Realism:

All genuine art contains an objective reflection of at least some basic aspect of the life of the society of the times, and this is the criterion of its realism and its social significance. The "classness" of a work of art is expressed in the manner, extent and profundity of its conscious reflection of reality, and especially of the contradictions in society. In other words, the social significance of a work of art is directly related to its objective reflection of reality.<sup>4</sup>

Solzhenitsyn seems to meet the criterion of socialist realism and the traditionalists. His literature and essays have addressed the social and political issues of his environment, the "contradictions" of Soviet society, and, additionally, he has

attempted to make moral demands on his readers. He tells an interviewer:

By intuition and singular vision of the world, a writer is able to discover far earlier than other people aspects of social life and can often see them from an unexpected angle...It is incumbent upon the writer to inform society of all that he is able to perceive and especially all that is unhealthy and cause for anxiety.<sup>5</sup>

#### SOLZHENITSYN'S POLITICAL PURPOSE

George Orwell writes that some artists "desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after."<sup>6</sup> It seems that Solzhenitsyn attempts to accomplish Orwell's political purpose on both the individual and national levels.

On the individual level, most of Solzhenitsyn's fiction centers around some particular moral crisis that requires a personal response by the characters he has created. His literature provides the reader with a clear answer to the moral question. His heroes indicate that there is a correct response to moral problems. When his heroes take consistently positive stands in favor of truth and justice, proclaim that individual actions can be judged morally, and disavow the ultimate value of material wealth, Solzhenitsyn thinks that his readers may be transformed and act likewise.

On the national level, Solzhenitsyn believes that literature ensures that all nations do not have to learn through direct experience, but can gain from the past mistakes and triumphs of other cultures. Solzhenitsyn writes;

More important, much more important; countries and whole continents belatedly repeat each others' mistakes, sometimes after centuries when, it would seem, everything should be so clear! No: what some nations have gone through and rejected, suddenly seems to be the latest word in other nations.

. . . the only substitute for what we ourselves have not experienced is art and literature. . . They have a marvelous capacity of transmitting from one nation to another—despite differences in language, customs, and social structure—practical experience, the harsh national experience of many decades never tasted by the other nations. Sometimes this may save a whole nation from a dangerous or mistaken or plainly disastrous path, thus lessening the twists and turns of human history.<sup>7</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's goal when viewed from this perspective, particularly the Gulag volumes, is to outline explicitly the details of the Soviet system to make sure that people from other nations do not fall into the same trap. His objective is to inform readers about what happened under a particular form of government and to encourage them to choose an alternative form of rule.

Solzhenitsyn believes that the Soviet nation is the real loser when it refuses to let artists write about contemporary Soviet life. He notes:

But woe to the nation whose literature is cut off by the interposition of force. That is not simply violation of "freedom of the press"; it is stopping the nation's heart, carving out the nation's memory. The nation loses its memory, it loses its spiritual unity—and, despite their supposedly common language, fellow countrymen suddenly cease understanding each other... That such masters as Akhmatova and Zamyatin were buried behind four walls for their whole lives condemned even to the grave to create in silence, . . . is not only their personal misfortune but a tragedy for the whole nation—and, too, a real threat to all nationalities.<sup>8</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's Western essays are another example of his

attempts to "push the world in a certain direction". He not only forwards a critique of the West and its social, foreign, and domestic policies, but he offers suggestions for changing its perception of its role in world affairs. Just as his Letter to Soviet Leaders suggested a rethinking of Soviet policies, his Western essays have encouraged its leaders to examine their foreign and domestic policies and make them consistent with concerns that stress an active participation in world affairs, conservation of the world's natural resources, and the protection of traditional moral values. Solzhenitsyn accomplishes Orwell's political purpose by encouraging both individuals and nations to adopt his perception of the world and their roles in it.

#### SOLZHENITSYN AS AN HISTORIAN

In a very real sense Solzhenitsyn is both artist and historian. George Orwell defines the artists' historic impulse as the "desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity."<sup>9</sup> In his effort to address contemporary social issues, Solzhenitsyn acts, in part, as a type of historian, a chronicler of his society's life and a witness of what the culture has gone through. Solzhenitsyn's works, particularly the Gulag volumes, are attempts to record and document some of the important events and individuals in the life of the Soviet prison camp system.

Nevertheless, for Solzhenitsyn, as well as for a variety of other artists, there is a fundamental distinction between the

artist and the historian. In the essay entitled "What is Art" Leo Tolstoy notes his conception of the primary role of art:

Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, so that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them.<sup>10</sup>

Both the artist and the historian are concerned with the truth, but they approach it with different techniques and different purposes, and the truth itself differs in terms of meaning for the individual, as opposed to patterns in the world.

The implication is that works of art not only describe events, personalities, and the society they are a part of, but the artist makes his readers live through the situations depicted, while the historian will just give a factual account of what happened during a particular time. The artist writes, so to speak, from the inside, the historian from the outside. The historian can write without emotion or a sense of involvement in the event that he describes. The artist cannot. He must almost become a part of the event he writes about.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Solzhenitsyn's first novel entitled One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich is the impression that he is not just entirely relating events of a totally fictional day, but that he is sharing an experience that he is intimately familiar with. Through his fictional character he is able to talk about events that did actually occur and people who really lived. Solzhenitsyn uses his literature to give a historical account of what happened to the average Soviet political prisoner on an average day. He also uses his gifts as an

artist to paint the account in terms that make his readers share that day. He writes in terms that make readers feel the cold with Ivan Denisovich as he worked in sub-zero weather, feel disgust at the prison thieves and administrators whose regard for the prisoners seemed to be much less than human, and to feel envy and pity for Ivan Denisovich as the day ends.

When One Day was first published it would have been easy to look at the book from only a historical perspective, to appreciate the book because it was one of the first to deal so intimately with Soviet camp life. Although the validity of the claims about the Soviet camps is a legitimate area of concern, the value of the book can be noted from an entirely different point of view. One critic advises:

In his analysis Lakshin managed to find and to name the crux of the author's art, that which helped Solzhenitsyn's narrative become a literary event. Solzhenitsyn writes so that we see and learn about the life of a convict not from the sidelines but from within, from him.

... Suddenly someone takes the reader firmly by the hand, leads him behind the barbed wire and into a day of prison life. And, without releasing the reader's hand, he comments upon this day in a confidential manner that charms the reader.<sup>11</sup>

Solzhenitsyn claims that meaningful art must address topics that are relevant and worth remembering. Additionally, meaningful art must be cognizant of how the concern is being presented. It is through the artist's ability to document significant historical events for present and future generations in a manner that helps to transport the reader to the scene of the action that Solzhenitsyn succeeds in satisfying the artist's historic

impulse. In a discussion of the nature of art in The First Circle a character explains the dual responsibility of the artist.

In other words, the painter doesn't simply copy? Of course not! In fact, with every landscape, and every portrait, too, you begin by feasting your eyes on nature and thinking, "How wonderful! How perfect! If I could only succeed in getting it just as it is!" But as you go more deeply into your work, you suddenly notice in nature a sort of ungainliness, non-sense, incongruity. . . so that is the way you paint it.

. . . Externally yes. There must be some resemblance in the proportions of the face, the shape of the eyes, the color of the hair. But isn't it rash to believe that one can see and know reality? . . . And if I, in looking at the model, see something more than what has up to now been displayed in his life, then why shouldn't one help a man find himself and try to do better?<sup>12</sup>

### Solzhenitsyn As A Prophet

Some of Solzhenitsyn's critics claim that he not only has the traditional view of the artist and his role in society, but that he also has a prophetic vision of his task as an artist. The three primary characteristics of the Old Testament prophets are their belief that they have received a divine commission to say or write particular things, their belief that they must speak the truth about societal issues, and their hope for repentance. Jeremiah remarks concerning his call to prophecy:

Then the word of the Lord came unto me saying.

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee; a prophet unto the nations.<sup>13</sup>

There are several passages from Solzhenitsyn's works that imply that he thinks that he has been commissioned to write.

...As for me, I kept quiet for one further reason: because those Muscovites thronging the steps of the escalator were too few for me, too few. Here my cry would be heard by 200, but what about the 200 million? Vaguely, unclearly, I had a vision that someday I would cry out to the 200 million.<sup>14</sup>

How easy it is for me to live with you, Lord!  
 How easy it is for me to believe in you.  
 When my spirit is lost, perplexed and cast down.  
 When the sharpest can see no further than the night,  
 And know not what the morrow they must do  
 You give me a sure certainty  
 That you exist, that you are watching over me  
 And will not permit the ways of righteousness to  
 be closed to me.  
 Here on the summit of earthly glory I look back  
 astonished.  
 On the road which through depths of despair has  
 led me here  
 To this point from which I can also reflect to men  
 your radiance  
 And all that I can still reflect - you shall grant me.  
 And what I shall fail you shall grant to others.<sup>15</sup>

The Old Testament prophets also thought they had a social responsibility. They criticized the immorality and injustices that were prevalent in their societies. Amos writes:

Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not live in them; ye have planted vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them.

For I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.<sup>16</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's Gulag volumes offers a harsh criticism of Soviet society. He sees the same type of moral corruption that Amos condemns. His short story entitled The Right Hand speaks of the indifference that the society exhibits towards those who are sick and without social standing. In an essay he writes:



Step by step we have lost that radiant ethical Christian atmosphere which for a thousand years shaped our mores, our way of life, our beliefs, our folklore...We are losing the last traces of a Christian people.<sup>17</sup>

The final similarity between some of the prophets of the Old Testament and Solzhenitsyn is their belief in the society's ability to repent and save itself. They both suggest that if the people would recognize the immorality of their societies and make an honest attempt to change their ways their nations could survive and prosper. The prophet Ezekiel writes:

But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die: and not that he should return from his ways, and live.<sup>18</sup>

Solzhenitsyn encourages the Soviet leaders to change their ways and to disavow their domestic and international policies of the past. He wants them to give the Soviet citizenry the opportunity to live, work, and think freely. He feels that this type of domestic policy is worthwhile for both citizens and leaders. He writes:

So that the country and people do not suffocate, and so that they all have the chance to develop and enrich us with ideas, allow competition on an equal and honorable basis—not for power, but for truth—between all religions. . . allow religious youth organizations, grant them the right to instruct and educate children, and the right to free parish activity.

. . . Allow us free art and literature, the free publication not just for political books. . .; allow us philosophical, ethical, economic and social studies, and you will see what a rich harvest it brings for the good of Russia.

. . . You may dismiss the counsels of some lone individual, some writer, with laughter and indignation. But with each passing year—for different reasons, at different times and in different guises—life itself will keep on thrusting exactly the same suggestions at you, exactly the same. Because this is the only feasible and peaceful way in which you can save our country and our people.<sup>19</sup>

Just as there is that similarity between Solzhenitsyn's conception of the true artist and the traits of the true prophet of biblical days, there is also, for Solzhenitsyn, a similarity between the artist who doesn't live up to his moral responsibility to address relevant issues and the false prophets of the Old Testament. The resemblance lies in their willingness to let their works be shaped by the beliefs of those in power rather than by the social climate in which they write or speak.

Solzhenitsyn explains his feelings about an artist who is not living up to his responsibility in The First Circle and The Cancer Ward. His characters state:

. . . each time he started some strange new work, he would take fire, swear to himself and to his friends that he would make concessions to no one, that this time he would write a real book. He would sit down to the opening pages with enthusiasm. But very soon he would become aware that he was not writing alone—that the image of the person for whom he was writing had arisen before him, looming more and more distinctly. . .

. . . And so trying paragraph after paragraph to anticipate the counter-arguments of the country's chief literary critic, he would quickly weaken, remove the angularities and the book itself would roll along cravenly, everything smoothly falling into place.<sup>20</sup>

From the Cancer Ward a character states:

. . . Water of Life by one Kozhenikov, a recipient

of a Stalin Prize. This was A. Kozhenikov, but there was also a S. Kozhenikov, and a V. Kozhenikov besides. Demka was awed by how many writers there were. In the previous century there had been about ten, and all of them great; in this one there were thousands: If you just changed one letter you had another writer. . . . Nobody could manage to read all of their books. And whichever you read it did not matter. . . . 21

Solzhenitsyn would claim that his character is wrong about the number of writers that actually exist. Just as there were only a few genuine writers in the past, writers who addressed social concerns, he feels that there are even less today. There may be many who claim to be legitimate artists or who may hold that title but there are in fact very few. The point is that the thrust of these writers' work is not aimed at speaking the truth or with addressing relevant social issues but at making sure their works are accepted, and their books published. In his essay entitled "Letter to the Fourth Congress of Soviet Writers" he writes:

Many members of the Union and even delegates to this Congress know well how they themselves have buckled under pressure from the censors and how they have made concessions in the structure and spirit of their books, replacing chapters, paragraphs and phrases, supplying drab titles--all for the sake of seeing their works in print--and thereby irremediably distorting them. . . . 22

These are also the descriptions for the false prophets of old who presented viewpoints that were well-received and highly respected because of their lack of controversy and their unwillingness to condemn the social environment at a time when condemnation was warranted.

From the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness, and from the prophet even unto the priest everyone dealeth falsely.

They have healed also the hurt of my people slightly, saying, peace; when there is no peace.<sup>23</sup>

### Literature As A Memorial

When Solzhenitsyn opens The Gulag Archipelago with the statement: "I dedicate this to all those who did not live to tell it. And may they please forgive me for not having seen it all nor remembered it all, for not having divined all of it",<sup>30</sup> he is implying several things about his role as an artist.

First, he is saying that his primary responsibility is to those people who suffered along with him in the Soviet camps. His duty is to speak for all of the "Ivans" who perished in the camps or in route to the camps. He emphasises this responsibility in the Nobel Prize Speech when he writes:

To reach this chair from which the Nobel Lecture is delivered—a chair by no means offered to every writer and offered only once in a lifetime—I have mounted not three or four temporary steps but hundreds or even thousands, fixed, steep, covered with ice, out of the dark and the cold where I was fated to survive, but others perhaps more talented, stronger than I, perished. . .

A whole national literature is there buried without a coffin, without even underwear, naked, a number tagged on its toe. . . Where a harmonious forest could have grown, there were left, after all the cutting, two or three accidentally overlooked.

And today how am I, accompanied by the shades of the fallen, my head bowed to let pass forward to this platform others worthy long before me, today how am I to guess and to express what they would have wished to say?

The obligation has long lain on us, and we have understood it. . . But even chained, we must ourselves complete that circle which the gods have preordained.<sup>24</sup>

Solzhenitsyn believes that as an artist, he must not only paint a picture that describes his plight, his agonies, and his joys but that he must also speak for all those who would have spoken given the opportunity and the gift to write well. A character from his novel entitled The Cancer Ward states while searching for artists and books that discuss the social problems of the era.

. . . I don't know any modern books that wouldn't irritate me. Some of them take the reader for a fool. Others don't contain lies, and their authors are very proud of themselves. They carefully studied which rural road a great poet traveled in 1800 - and something, which woman he mentioned on page such and such. Perhaps it was difficult for them to track all this down, but how safe it was! They chose harmless themes! They simply avoided having anything to do with today's living and suffering people.

. . . Why should I read Anna Karenina? Perhaps I've had enough. Where can I read about us? Will that be only a hundred years from now?<sup>25</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's criticism of fictitious art, art that does not deal with contemporary issues, is very similar to John Gardner's remarks. Gardner writes:

The trivial has its place, its entertainment value. I can think of no good reason that some people should not specialize in the behavior of the left-side hairs on an elephant's trunk. Even at its best, its most deadly serious, criticism, like art, is partly a game, as all good critics know. My objection is not to the game but to the fact that contemporary critics have, for the most part, lost track of the point of their game, just as artists, by and large, have lost track of theirs. Fiddling with the hairs on the elephant's nose is indecent when the elephant happens to be standing on a baby.<sup>26</sup>

Solzhenitsyn thinks that the Soviet political judicial and system is equivalent to an "elephant standing on a baby". The Gulag volumes paint a gruesome picture of a lawless society

operated by violence and coercion. He thinks that true art must address these injustices.

We will not trample on the artist's right to express exclusively personal experiences and observations, ignoring everything that happens in the rest of the world. We will not demand anything of the artist, but we will be permitted to reproach him, to make requests, to appeal to him, and to coax him.<sup>27</sup>

Solzhenitsyn implies that he is obligated to remember all of the important events of his camp life. He stresses this belief in Gulag Three when he notes the efforts of inmate artists that tried to write while they were in camp. His point is that there were a variety of artists that tried to record accurately the events that affected their lives.

I realized that I was not the only one, that I was party to a great secret, a secret maturing in other lonely breasts like mine on the scattered islands of the Archipelago to reveal itself in years to come, perhaps when we were dead, and to merge into the Russian literature of the future.

... How many of us were there? Many more, I think than have come to the surface in the intervening years. Not all of them were to survive. Some buried in bottles, without telling anyone where. Some put their work in careless or, on the contrary, in excessively cautious hands for safe-keep. Some could not write their work down in time.<sup>28</sup>

Solzhenitsyn notes the work of Varlam Shalamov when describing artists that felt an obligation to write while they were in camp. He quotes from Shalamov's literature:

I know, none better, this is not a game-  
or else a deadly game. But like the sage  
I'll welcome death rather than drop my pen,  
Rather than crumple my half-written page.

... A long, long row of lonely graves  
Are all I remember now.  
And I should have laid myself there,  
Had I not taken a vow:

To sing and weep to the very end  
 And never heed the pain,  
 As though in the heart of a dead man  
 Life yet could begin again.<sup>29</sup>

While it seems that Solzhenitsyn feels a definite sense of obligation to other camp inmates his works are also focused toward the Soviet masses. C. Vaughn James notes that the Soviet realist tradition emphasises the importance of writing in a style that could reach ordinary people, people that were not highly educated or members of the Soviet elite. He writes:

In nineteenth century Russia, the critic Dobrolyubov demonstrated that the precious "popular" elements in the works of the great prose writers of the times were essentially inaccessible to the masses, and the poet Nekrasov dreamed of the time when the peasant would return from the market with the works of Belinsky and Gogol in his bag. In the twentieth century Lenin took up the theme, laying the foundations of subsequent Soviet policy"... Art must have its deepest roots in the very depths of the broad masses of the workers. It must unite the feelings, thoughts, and will of the masses and raise them up. It must arouse the artists among them and develop them."<sup>30</sup>

Solzhenitsyn seems to obey this basic principal of Soviet realism. He frequently writes in the style of the Russian peasant. In his book entitled Solzhenitsyn Christopher Moody notes:

Of Solzhenitsyn's earlier stories it has been said that his most important achievement is that he has broken through the barrier as an interpreter of the popular mind. The authenticity and expressiveness with which he conveys the idiom of the common people, and particularly peasants, is one of the ways which he has managed to do it.

. . . By choosing peasants as the central protagonists of his first two stories, Solzhenitsyn was upholding one of the enduring traditions of Russian literature. . . 31

Moreover, the implications of Solzhenitsyn's feelings about art and the

artist go deeper than a first glance might suggest. It would be easy to assert that all of the responsibility lies solely with the artist, to believe that readers have no type of obligations at all. On the other hand, the claim could be made that just as it is the moral responsibility of the true artist to abide by certain moral standards while engaging in his craft, it is also the obligation of the reader to reject those works that are entirely counter to what they see and feel all around them. Readers must reject those writers who depend upon the wishes of those in power and the apathy of the public in order to have their work published.

While it is true that the explicit challenge of this chapter has been directed toward the artist, Solzhenitsyn's implicit challenge includes a request that people take an interest in the world around them, seek the truth at all times, and be willing to reprimand those who wish to be false prophets.



## NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

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3. John Gardner, On Moral Fiction (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), pp. 5-6
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21. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, The Cancer Ward, trans. Rebecca Frank (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1968), p. 139.
22. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Letter to the Fourth Congress of Soviet Writers," in Alexander Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials, ed. John Dunlap, Richard Haugh and Alex klimoff, p. 464.
23. Jeremiah 6: 13-14.
24. Solzhenitsyn, Nobel Lecture, pp. 8-10.
25. Solzhenitsyn, The Cancer Ward, pp. 553-555.
26. Gardner, On Moral Fiction, p. 4.
27. Solzhenitsyn, Nobel Lecture, p. 21.
28. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Three, pp. 104-105.
29. Ibid.
30. C. Vaughn James, Soviet Socialist Realism, p. 6.
31. Moody, Solzhenitsyn, p. 54.

## Chapter II

### SOLZHENITSYN'S MORAL VISION

One of the most important qualities of Solzhenitsyn's literature and essays is his willingness to confront difficult moral problems and his efforts to offer solutions to those concerns. While Solzhenitsyn's works attempt to recognize the complexity of human motivation and behavior and the difficulty of following absolute moral guidelines during trying times, he offers clear moral suggestions for his readers. His literature does not attempt to provide his readers with moral alternatives, but rather with Solzhenitsyn's own conception of the correct moral response. This chapter will attempt to detail his expectations concerning individual moral behavior as it is sketched in his literature and essays.

#### MATERIALISM

One theme that is prevalent throughout Solzhenitsyn's work is the question presented in Leo Tolstoi's book entitled: What Men Live By. Through his characters, Solzhenitsyn presents several answers to this question. The variety of answers identifies the different perspectives that Solzhenitsyn would expect to find in the Soviet citizenry.

In What Men Live By Tolstoi writes;

. . . And the man came and ordered boots - that would last a year and neither loosen nor split. And I looked at him, and suddenly I saw behind him the Angel of Death. No one but me saw this angel, but I knew him; and I knew also that before the sun went down he would take away the soul of the rich man. I thought to myself, "This man makes plans for a year, and he knows not that he will die before tonight", and I remembered the second lesson of God: Thou shalt learn what is not given to men...It is not given to men to know their own needs.<sup>1</sup>

Solzhenitsyn agrees with this passage from Tolstoi. A character in his play entitled A Candle in the Wind is eulogized at the end of the play with a passage from the New Testament that describes Solzhenitsyn's view of material wealth. It reads:

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?<sup>2</sup>

That passage accurately describes Solzhenitsyn's view on material wealth. In his writings, there is never a connection between material well-being and moral stature; rather, it is essentially the opposite. It is the camp thieves in Gulag One and Two, the informers in the First Circle and One Day and the aristocrats in August 1914 who are well-off materially, but who also lack moral character. Solzhenitsyn criticizes them because they would stoop to any level in order to survive financially and physically. His claim is that the people who are doing well materially never realize that as they blossom physically they usually die spiritually. In an effort to try to explain the spiritual decay of those who did well materially he writes:

. . . And what would one then have to say about our so evident torturers: Why does fate not punish them? Why do they prosper?

. . . And the only solution to this would be that the meaning of earthly existence lies not, as we have grown used to thinking, in prospering, but. . . in the development of the soul. From that point of view our torturers have been punished most horribly of all: they are turning into swine, they are departing downward from humanity. From that point of view punishment is inflicted on those whose development. . . holds out hope.<sup>3</sup>

Solzhenitsyn argues that while it seems that those people who have no conception of right and wrong are prospering, in the final analysis they are not gaining at all because they disregard their souls, their spiritual lives. The notion is similar to that presented in the New Testament.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust do corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.<sup>4</sup>

Solzhenitsyn implies that evil people often go unpunished in this life, but are nevertheless harming themselves because of the damage that is being done to their souls. To be sure, persons may not be aware of the harm they inflict upon themselves, and critics may, therefore, question whether such damage can ever act as a deterrent to this type of behavior. Despite this, Solzhenitsyn believes that it is only those who realize the ultimate worthlessness of material possession and strive for the freedom that comes through a total disregard for the material, who can begin to be autonomous, free individuals. There are a variety

of characters in his works who hold this view. The hero of Candle in the Wind notes while discussing material wealth:

What do we want wealth for? Does wealth better a man? I haven't noticed it.

. . . We can argue about the fact that when we boast about the quantity of material goods we produce, no one mentions what their production costs us. The answer is frightening: Our entire human intellect down to the last fraction is devoted to the production of material goods! All our spiritual forces down to the last drop...<sup>5</sup>

The point is also emphasized in the short story entitled Matryona's House. In the story the heroine of Solzhenitsyn's work is also a very poor person. The claim is that regardless of her material and social position she is the morally pure person in the story. Solzhenitsyn believes that she is the one to be looked up to, imitated and admired. A character in the play comments about Matryona:

Only then, listening to the disapproving comments of her sister-in-law, did I see an image of Matryona which I had never seen before, even while living under her roof.

It was true: every other cottage had its pig, yet she had none. What could be easier than to fatten up a greedy pig whose sole object in life was food. Boil it in a bucketfull of swill three times a day, make it the center of one's existence, then slaughter it for lard and bacon. Yet Matryona never wanted one. . .

She was a poor housekeeper. In other words she refused to strain herself to buy gadgets and possessions and then guard over them and care for them more than for her own life.

She never cared for smart clothes, the garments that embellish the ugly and disguise the wicked.

Misunderstood and rejected by her husband, a stranger to her own family despite her happy, amiable temperament, comical, so foolish that she worked for others for no reward, this woman, who had buried all her six

children, had stored up no earthly goods. Nothing but a dirty white goat, a lame cat, and a row of fig plants.

None of us who lived near to her perceived that she was that one righteous person without whom no city can stand. Neither can the whole world.<sup>6</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's heroes in The First Circle are content despite the fact that they are about to be moved from a relatively easy-going camp to one that is much more harsh because of their refusal to sacrifice their principles. He writes:

Concentrating on the turns the van was making, the Zeks fell silent.

Yes, the taiga and the tundra awaited them, the record cold of Oymyakon and the copper excavations of Dzhekazgan, pick and barrow; starvation rations of soggy bread; the hospital; death. The very worst.

But there was peace in their hearts.

They were filled with the fearlessness of those who have lost everything, the fearlessness which is not easy to come by but which endures.<sup>7</sup>

For Solzhenitsyn, individuals must be able to disavow material possessions if they are to be true to themselves.

Another of his characters states:

. . . Shout at your colonels and generals. They have too much in life they're afraid of losing. . .

I have nothing - not a thing! You can't get your hands on my wife and child - a bomb got them first: My parents are already dead. My entire property on earth is my handkerchief; my coveralls and my underwear that has no buttons are government issue. You took my freedom away long ago, and you don't have the power to return it because you don't have it yourself. I am forty-two years old, and you have dished me out a 25 year sentence. I have already been at hard labor, gone around with a number on, in handcuffs, with police dogs, and in a strict-regime work brigade. What else is there to deprive me of?<sup>8</sup>

In Solzhenitsyn's view the prison officials had made a serious mistake by taking everything away from the inmates and by punishing them very severely at the beginning of their sentences. By putting the inmates in a situation with no hope at the outset they could not expect to have any real control over those who knew that there were no real chances of survival. The officials should have left a glimmer of hope - something for the inmates to fight for. They should have been sure to use the "stick" to coerce the prisoners into doing what they wanted them to do but they should also have kept a "carrot", some material rewards to dangle in front of those smart prisoners who would realize the futility of a no-hope system and essentially behave in prison as they wanted to, with no real respect for authority. A prisoner notes:

. . .Just understand one thing and pass it along to anyone at the top who still doesn't know that you are strong only as long as you don't deprive people of everything. For a person you have taken everything from is no longer in your power. He is free all over again.<sup>9</sup>

That is Solzhenitsyn's message to prisoners. In order to survive morally in prison, to be able to refuse to take bribes, to refuse to testify against fellow-inmates, in order to remain at peace with oneself, in order to be free, a person must rise above the material. He must realize that it is better to do without that extra ration of bread, the article of clothing that would keep him just a little bit warmer, the soft work detail that would give him a greater probability of surviving his sentence, those close family relationships that he has left behind in



freedom, than to betray his conscience. The prisoner must disregard all of those things if they mean losing his morality. He writes:

So what is the answer? How can you stand your ground when you are weak and sensitive to pain, when people you love are still alive, when you are unprepared? What do you need to make you stronger than the interrogator and the whole trap?

From the moment you go to prison you must put your past, your cozy past firmly behind you. At the very threshold, you must say to yourself: 'My life is over, a little early to be sure, but there is nothing to be done about it. I shall never return to freedom. I am condemned to die—now or a little later. But later on, in truth, it will be even harder, and so the sooner the better. I no longer have any property whatsoever. For me those I love have died, and for them I have died. From today on, my body is useless and alien to me. Only my spirit and my conscience are important to me.'

Confronted by such a prisoner, the interrogator will tremble. Only the man who has renounced everything can win that victory.<sup>10</sup>

The notion is Christian to a very large extent. Solzhenitsyn's concern is his belief that an individual's soul and his integrity should be of more importance than material or physical well-being. One of the primary messages of the New Testament is the emphasis on Christ as a poor servant, as an individual who had the treasures of the world offered to him, but who refused them because of his desire to be a moral being. Christ was not great because of the things he owned but because of the way in which he lived.

Riches profit not in the day of wrath:  
but righteousness delivereth from death.

He that trusteth in his riches shall fall!

But thou, O man of God, flee these things;  
and follow after righteousness, godliness,  
faith, love, patience and meekness.<sup>11</sup>

This is also the view of heroes in Solzhenitsyn's work. They came to understand life from the moral rather than from the practical perspective. The implication is not that the two perspectives always differ, that they always lead to differing modes of behavior, but that when they do imply varying types of action, the moral perspective must be the one that is followed. The apostle Paul notes:

I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God, that ye may present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, and perfect will of God. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. <sup>12</sup> Abhor that which is evil; lean to that which is good.

Indeed, the change of perspective that both Solzhenitsyn and Paul encourage could be described as transformations. Solzhenitsyn believes that people must change from their concern with the material to an appreciation of the more fundamental things of life. These include the beauty of nature, the appreciation of good health, friendship, and a desire to do those things that are morally right. It is only those people who are willing to sacrifice themselves, disavow the stockpiling of material goods, and realize that the beauty of nature is something that is to be enjoyed, appreciated and even held in awe who are able to lead authentic lives.

If one looks at Solzhenitsyn's poetry, there is, for example, the contrast between the materialism and industrialism of big city life with the solemnity, quietness, and the near reverence of nature that is characteristic of the country. In the poem Lake Segden he writes:

No one writes about the lake and it is spoken of only in whispers. As though to an enchanted castle, all roads to it are barred and over each hangs a forbidding sign, a plain, blunt, straight line.

Man or beast, faced by that sign, must turn back. Some earthly power has put that sign there; past it none may ride, none may walk, crawl or even fly.

. . . A secret lake in a secret forest. The water looks up and the sky gazes down upon it. If there is a world beyond the forest, it is unknown, invisible; if it exists, it has no place here.

Here is someplace to settle forever, a place where a man could live in harmony with the elements and be inspired.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the emphasis of the first part of the poem on the power of the state to keep people from entering the lakeside area, another important focus of the poem is Solzhenitsyn's belief in the sanctity of nature, its power to inspire and its ability to encourage men to reflect. Again the heroes from his novels take a posture that is similar to that presented in the poem. In The First Circle several prisoners would go out in the cold early morning hours to cut wood although they were not required to do so by prison officials. They just wanted to enjoy the morning. Solzhenitsyn writes:

This I believe, is the single most precious freedom that prison takes away from us; the freedom to breathe freely, as I now can. No food on earth, no wine, not even a woman's kiss is sweeter to me than this air steeped in the fragrance of flowers of moisture and freshness.

No matter that this is only a tiny garden, hemmed in by five-story houses like cages in a zoo. I cease to hear the motorcycles backfiring, radios whining, the burble of loudspeakers. As long as there is fresh air to breathe under an apple tree after a shower, we may survive a little longer.<sup>14</sup>

These comments from Solzhenitsyn can be viewed as not only indictments against individual materialism but against the whole concept of massive full-scale industrialization and technology. His contention is that nature offers men a path to their redemption and their salvation. It gives them the opportunity to be morally, spiritually, and intellectually free. His essential focus is the belief that men must value their integrity and their moral decisions more highly than food, clothing, money, and even their families. The most prevalent answer by Solzhenitsyn's heroes to the question "What men live by?", is that they do not live for material possessions, but that they should be concerned with their souls.

The theme "What men live by?", is also examined in a variety of other works by Solzhenitsyn. In The Cancer Ward he talks about the answers that a group of dying men give to the question. These are some of the answers that patients give.

"By general issue: rations and wear."

"By their wages, what else?"

"First of all air. Then water. Then food."

"A trade."

"Home, the place where you were a boy, to live where you were born."

"People live by their ideology and social interest."<sup>15</sup>

The variety of answers and the differing backgrounds of each of the patients also has one more important implication. The implication is that these answers are not atypical. They are the answers that he would expect to get if he moved from the cancer ward into the general population. If dying men from the various walks of life do not understand the meaning of life then what would he expect from people that lead somewhat normal lives?

What would he expect from people who do not have to ponder the question of their existence everyday because of a fatal tumor that they can feel growing daily? Rather than the dialogue and its implications relating to those of the cancer ward only, Solzhenitsyn suggests that it has implications for everyone.

Just as it is the case with the heroes of Solzhenitsyn's novels and short stories, Solzhenitsyn views himself as an individual who has learned how to live. He knows the important things in life. He views himself as the kind of morally independent person that is portrayed by the various characters throughout his works. Solzhenitsyn describes himself as:

One who does not stand on a ladder subordinate to your command, who can neither be dismissed from his post, nor demoted, nor promoted, nor rewarded by you, and from whom therefore you are almost certain to hear an opinion sincerely voiced, without any carrerist calculations, such as you are unlikely to hear from even the finest experts in your bureaucracy.<sup>16</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's claim is that it is only because he has no ax to grind, no image, salary or job to protect, that he is able to speak and think freely. Even the "experts in your bureaucracy", who would supposedly base their statements on objective, scientific data are afraid to speak as openly as he does. Solzhenitsyn feels that the experts will surrender or compromise their views to the notions of self-preservation and personal advantage.

He who is deprived of all material strength always achieves victory in sacrifice. Such martyrdom, worthy of the first centuries, was accepted by many of our priests and fellow believers within our living memory. But at that time they were thrown to the lions, today one can only lose one's well-being.<sup>17</sup>

A second aspect of Solzhenitsyn's moral vision is his belief that individuals are required to take positive moral stands during difficult times. His heroes forward the view that their ability to forsake materialism is not an end in itself but a necessary prerequisite to becoming free moral beings. One of Solzhenitsyn's characters in the novel August 1914 asserts in regard to his responsibility to give an accurate account of the Russian army's defeat in spite of the risk of ruining his future military career:

To speak out once and for all and to say what one really thinks - it is more than a pleasure, it is a sacred duty! One ought to get it all off one's chest and then die afterward if necessary.<sup>18</sup>

In response to the objections of his friend who claims to have the hero's best practical interests at heart he explains:

But if you had only been through what I have just been through. . . No I'm sure this is a state of mind which comes to us only once or twice in a lifetime. I'm determined to see to it that, come what may, the truth and nothing but the truth gets hammered out today. . . You might have convinced me and I might have kept my mouth shut if this were purely a military problem, don't you see? It is a moral issue.<sup>19</sup>

In Gulag One Solzhenitsyn deals with the role of the executioner in the Soviet camp system. He notes that most of the executioners act as if they are not morally responsible for what they are doing but are only following superior orders. Again the desperate urge to speak the truth at all costs comes through in one of the heroes.

For myself, I've decided one thing only. I'm going to tell the executioner: You alone, not the judges, not the prosecutors, you alone are guilty of my death, and you are going to have to live with it! If it weren't for you willing executioners, there would be no death sentences.<sup>20</sup>

There is another passage in Gulag Three that exhibits Solzhenitsyn's moral vision. He writes:

This was not a hunger strike called by well-fed people with reserves of subcutaneous fat, but by gaunt emaciated men, who had felt the whip of hunger daily for years on end, who had achieved at some difficulty some sort of physical equilibrium, and who suffered acute distress if they were deprived of a single 1000-gram ration. . . The food which we had refused and which we had always thought so beggarly, was a mirage of plenty in the feverish dreams of famished men.

. . . This was a hunger strike called by men schooled for decades, in the law of the jungle: "You die first and I'll die later." Now they were reborn, they struggled out of their stinking swamp, they consented to die today, all of them together, rather than go on being the same way tomorrow.

. . . Hut nine. . . Nine had surrendered. Nine's going to the mess hall!

. . . They went into the mess hall, and it was as though they had decided to forgive the murderers in return for their bread ration and some mush.

. . . The polish engineer, Jerzy Wegierski, who I have mentioned before, was now in our team. He was serving his ninth and last year. Even when he was a work assigner no one had ever heard him raise his voice. He was always quiet, polite, gentle. But now his face was distorted with rage, scorn and suffering, as he tore his eyes away from that procession of beggars and cried in an angry, steely voice:

"Foreman! Don't wake me for supper! I shan't be going."

That night we went to eat - but he wouldn't get up! He never received parcels, he was quite alone, he was always short of food - but he wouldn't get up. In his mind's eye the steam from a bowl of mush could not veil the idea of freedom.

If we all had been so proud and so strong, what tyrant could have held out against us.<sup>21</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's moral vision would encourage individuals to stand up and fight for what they believe in. It might be a moral

vision for the superhuman rather than common citizens. Solzhenitsyn may be asking people to adopt a position that they are incapable of meeting successfully. An example of the difficulty of Solzhenitsyn's moral perspective is noted in Gulag Three.

If this is so - what prevented us from gaining their respect earlier? All through the twenties, thirties, and forties, we blinkered philistines, preoccupied as we were with our own importance to the world, with the contents of our duffel bags, with the shoes or trousers we had been allowed to retain, had conducted ourselves in the eyes of the thieves like characters on the comic stage! When they plundered men of world importance like ourselves, we shyly looked the other way and huddled together in our corners;. . . Perhaps when we first stepped into the cell of a transit prison we should have been prepared, every man of us in the place, to take a knife between the ribs and slump in a wet corner on the slime around the latrine bucket, in a sordid brawl with those ratmen whom the boys in blue had thrown in to gnaw our flesh. If we had, perhaps we should have suffered far fewer losses, found our courage sooner, and, who knows, shoulder to shoulder with these very same thieves smashed Stalin's camps to smithereens. What reason, indeed, had the thieves to respect us?<sup>22</sup>

It seems unreasonable to believe that many individuals will be able to make this and other kinds of sacrifices that Solzhenitsyn calls for. Nevertheless, it would be doing the reader a disservice if this essay failed to include Solzhenitsyn's recognition of the complexity and difficulty of making moral decisions during trying times. For Solzhenitsyn and for his heroes as well, moral decision-making is not a process that could be handled at the spur of the moment without serious reflection, without doubt and a sense of anxiety, and maybe even regret. Just as there are a variety of characters who are successful at coming to a moral problem and deciding to hold their ground, (examples



of such characters are Gleb Nehzrin in The First Circle, Colonel Vorotyntsev in August 1914, Vasily Grgorvevich Vlasov in Gulag One and the patient Kostoglotov in The Cancer Ward), there are many more who face moral problems and fail to address them correctly. To condemn those people immediately without a sense of compassion, without the slightest examination of the motives of those who fail would be the mark of a fanatic.

Solzhenitsyn does not take this route. Just as he is able to picture the moral hero, he is also able to describe accurately in his works those who don't meet his expectaions. He has one of his main characters in August 1914, General Samsenov, say about making choices in difficult situations, "Go to the left -- and death awaits you. Go to the right -- and death awaits you."<sup>23</sup> The proper response is not always obvious and clear-cut, and Solzhenitsyn refuses to imply that it is.

In the long narrative poem Prussian Nights, Solzhenitsyn describes the reactions of a young Soviet officer to the destruction that he witnesses all around him. Throughout the poem there are scenes of death, looting, burning, and rape; men are behaving like animals. For the most part the soldiers have forgotten any type of moral standards they may have known and have moved into a "free-for-all" where not only is every type of moral action tolerated, but wrongs are also encouraged by commanding officers.

The focus of the poem is not entirely on the soldiers who have "fallen" morally, who have no regard whatsoever for those around them, but rather emphasis is placed on the young officer.

The question throughout the poem is, "Would he succeed in refusing to become like the other soldiers or would he too lose his moral restraints?" In the end the young officer falls too, unwillingly, and with regrets, but he falls. The one upright man is not able to survive the moral crisis that surrounds him. Solzhenitsyn doesn't leave the impression that the young officer is wicked or evil, that he is someone to be condemned or ridiculed. The poem is more of a comment on the corrupting influence of war rather than a comment on the officer, and on people in general rather than on the officer in particular. The call is for more understanding and compassion for those involved in difficult moral questions rather than for easy condemnation without any regard to the surrounding circumstances.

In Gulag One Solzhenitsyn speaks of the change in his life. In the first part of the book he criticizes the role of the camp thieves. He notes how they would do practically anything in order to gain some advantage over the other inmates. After spending several days in camp Solzhenitsyn notices that he had also become hardened and would do many of the same things as the thieves he criticized. He relives an incident to make the point. He speaks of a situation where he is beaten and robbed on the prison train on the way to camp. Rather than confront the people who had actually done him harm, he took out his anger and frustration on a group of innocent, more passive prisoners. He notes concerning the complexity of human behavior and distinctions between "good" and "evil":

So let the reader who expects this book to be a political expose to slam its covers shut right now.

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the lines dividing good and evil cut through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

. . . For it is after all only because of the way things worked out that they were the executioners and we were not.

From good to evil is only one quaver, and correspondingly for evil to good.<sup>24</sup>

Solzhenitsyn felt that the argument that asserts that there are basically two types of people -- good and evil -- is too simplistic. He states:

. . . The trouble lies in the way these classic evil-doers are pictured. They recognize themselves as evil-doers, and they know their souls are black. And they reason; "I cannot live unless I do evil".

. . . But no; that's not the way it is! To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he is doing is good, or else that it is a well-considered act in conformity with natural law.<sup>25</sup>

Again, several of Solzhenitsyn's characters have these traits. They think they are being patriotic rather than feeling that they are actually betraying a friend. Pavel Nickoyovich, the informer from The Cancer Ward feels that he is doing his country a service, as did the character in The Incident at Krechetovka Station who initiates the arrest of an innocent man. He does not do it because he is evil, because he wants simply to do something that would harm the other character, but because he is mistaken, overzealous and confused about what it means to be a morally responsible individual. For these informers there is no real distinction between being a moral agent and doing whatever the state requires a person to do. The characters are unable to

to make a distinction between what is legally right and what may be morally right.

The point is not that because of the complexity in determining human motivation that actions can not be judged by some absolute moral standards, but that people should first make an effort to understand individual actions as they relate to a particular social environment rather than judge people by standards that may not be appropriate. So that while absolute moral standards are by definition always appropriate, Solzhenitsyn can still sympathize with the person who is unable to confront an authoritarian regime.

In Gulag Three Solzhenitsyn writes about how political prisoners killed those inmates they thought were informers. A large part of a chapter is an attempt by Solzhenitsyn to explain the murders. In the end he leaves the reader with the impression that although the killings were justified from a practical point of view, they were still morally wrong. He encourages his readers to evaluate the murders in their proper perspective, to take note of why the informers were killed, and try to put themselves into that situation before they make their evaluations. He writes:

Kill the stoolie! That was it, the vital link! A knife in the heart of the stoolie! Make knives and cut the stoolies' throats - that was it!

Now, as I write this chapter, rows of humane books frown down at me from the walls, the tarnished gilt on their well-worn spines glinting reproachfully like stars through cloud. Nothing in the world should be sought through violence! By taking up the sword, the knife, the rifle, we quickly put ourselves on the level of our tormentors and prosecutors. And there will be no end to it. . .

There will be no end. . . Here, at my desk, in a warm place, I agree completely.

If you ever get twenty-five years for nothing, if you find yourself wearing four number patches on your clothes, holding your hands permanently behind your back, submitting to searches morning and evening, working until you are utterly exhausted, dragged into the cooler whenever someone denounces you, trodden deeper and deeper into the ground - from the hole you're in, the fine words of the great humanists will sound like the chatter of the well-fed and free.<sup>26</sup>

In a very real sense it is this ability to capture the intricacies of moral action that has helped to make Solzhenitsyn an artist of international acclaim. For even while holding strong moral beliefs about how men should live and what they should do when faced with difficult moral decisions, he is also able to paint an accurate picture of those men who are not able to make difficult decisions. For the most part he paints it with compassion, sympathy, and a certain amount of respect. In his works Solzhenitsyn may criticize a character who does not share his moral perspective, he may let one of his characters say that he is wrong, but Solzhenitsyn does not make fun of the character that is mistaken in his moral outlook. When Pavel Nickolayvich and the informer from The Incident find that they had accused an innocent man, the feeling that Solzhenitsyn leaves with his readers is more one of pity than of contempt or disgust.

The same problem is discussed in the play Candle in the Wind. Two characters have had the same experiences but have entirely different moral outlooks. The first character shared Solzhenitsyn's moral philosophy while the second has a perspective on life that is entirely different. They state:

Alex:

I don't know. I'm not ashamed of the years I spent in prison. They were fruitful years. . . There are moments when I say God Bless you prison.

Phillip:

Fruitful? How can you bring yourself to say that? They take a pair of shears-like for cutting sheet metal - and they sliced a piece out of our lives! Tender nerves! Crimson blood! Young flesh! You and I were hauling wheelbarrows in a stone quarry, breathing copper dust, while they were tanning their white torsos on the beaches! No, Alex, its the other way around. We must make up for lost time! Make up for lost time with every ounce of our strength! We have to get a double share, a triple share out of life. Its our right! You and I know about our past -- and that is enough!<sup>27</sup>

Solzhenitsyn is conscious of the fact that even individuals with the same backgrounds and the same experiences may arrive at radically different perspectives on fundamental moral questions. While Solzhenitsyn's character Alex may disagree with Phillip, may try to make him change his mind throughout the play, may attempt to persuade his readers to feel affinity for Alex's moral point of view, he presents Phillip's moral claims in colors that people can identify with and understand. The claim is that moral decisions and outlooks are very difficult to evaluate without an in-depth analysis of a variety of factors. Additionally, even a thorough analysis could fail to explain the variance in findings between individuals.

Solzhenitsyn can best be described as a moral absolutist with compassion. He feels that there is essentially one right course of action, one morally legitimate response to fundamental questions, but he can also see how a variety of other considera-

tions can lead people to act in a wrong or evil fashion. He feels that the primary obligation of the individual is to realize that he only has one conscience and that moral action should strive to be consistent with this inner arbiter.

In the final analysis the argument can be made that for Solzhenitsyn there is a fundamental difference between a person being wrong and his being evil. A person is wrong if he is mistaken, if he just has the incorrect outlook about life, its purpose, and how he should live. People just do not understand. They don't comprehend the fundamentals of existence.

On the otherhand, the evil man is the individual who may have a clear conception of how he should live, he may know what is demanded of him in a moral situation, but just refuses to adhere to those standards. Solzhenitsyn describes the type of character that belongs in this category:

The cage was empty. . . The sign read - The monkey that lived here was blinded by the senseless cruelty of a visitor. A mean person threw tobacco in the eyes of the Rhesus Macaque Monkey.

. . . It did not say that the unknown person, who had gotten away safely, was inhumane. It did not say that he was an agent of American imperialism. It said simply that he was mean. This was what hurt: Why was he simply mean?<sup>28</sup>

One character that falls in this first category explained his willingness to work in the KGB:

I don't know any Beria (the head of the Soviet secret police)!

It isn't my affair who is put at the top, my job was a small one. I was drafted, I swore the oath, and I served. When you are told to do your duty you serve.<sup>29</sup>

One lingering question remains to be answered. Has this section of the paper been a message of hope or a message of frustration? Is it reasonable for Solzhenitsyn to expect people to come to terms with his moral principles and to act accordingly or is everybody destined to be a moral relativist with millions of differing views? This reader thinks Solzhenitsyn would argue that his message is definitely one of hope, that although there may be a large number of people who take the wrong course, who believe that self-preservation, materialism, and happiness are the only things in life worth pursuing, some men will come to see that these things are not the ultimate.

The message is one of hope in that Solzhenitsyn thinks that whenever people finally come to realize the validity of his point of view they will be able to lead full lives. Their lives are full to the extent that they measure the value of their existence in terms of quality rather than quantity. They measure their relationships with people by determining how well they communicate with other individuals rather than with how many people they casually know, by how well they use what they have rather than by how much they have. So that while it is important that Solzhenitsyn recognizes the complexity of human motivations and moral decisions in his works and that he presents these characters as everyday people rather than as exceptions at the very ends of the spectrum of behavioral possibilities, the dominant theme is to look at the heroes and see what people can potentially be. A hero notes:



. . . You remember you once said that you felt like a relay runner - that you would be proud to hand on the baton of Great Physics to the twenty-first century?

. . . Well, I would like to pass on to the next century one particular baton - the flickering candle of our soul. Let them do whatever they want to with it in the twenty-first century. Just so they don't blow it out in our century of steel and the atom, of space, electric power, and cybernetics.<sup>30</sup>

The message from this character is one of hope and promise. The belief is that some people become morally upright beings. The challenge is for individuals to pass on to the next generation moral standards and a way of life that are positive, that can be beneficial to them, and that can act as a set of guidelines for their behavior as moral beings. Solzhenitsyn would suggest that his readers share that perspective and attempt to act decisively when faced with moral difficulties. In Gulag One Solzhenitsyn concludes:

What about the main thing in life, all its riddles:  
If you want, I'll spell it out for you right now.  
Do not pursue what is illusory - property and  
position: all that is gained at the expense of  
your nerves decade after decade, and is confiscated  
in one fell night. Live with a steady superiority  
over life - don't be afraid of misfortune, and do  
not yearn after happiness; it is, after all, all  
the same? the bitter doesn't last forever, and the  
sweet never fills the cup to overflowing. . . Rub  
your eyes and purify your heart - and prize above  
all else those who love you and wish you well.<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER II

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3. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Two 1918-1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation III-IV, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 613.
4. Matthew 6: 19-21.
5. Solzhenitsyn, Candle in the Wind, pp. 48-49.
6. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Matryona's House," in Short Stories and Prose Poems, trans. Michael Glenny (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), p. 52.
7. Solzhenitsyn, The First Circle, p. 579.
8. Ibid., p. 83.
9. Ibid.
10. Solzhenitsyn. The Gulag Archipelago One, p. 130.
11. Proverbs 11: 4, 28; 1 Timothy 6: 11.
12. Romans 12: 1, 2, 9.
13. Solzhenitsyn, "Lake Segden," in Short Stories and Prose Poems, pp. 244-245.
14. Solzhenitsyn, "Freedom to Breathe," Short Stories and Prose Poems, p. 243.
15. Solzhenitsyn, The Cancer Ward, pp. 119-121.
16. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Letter to the Soviet Leaders, trans. Hilary Sternberg (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 7.

17. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "To Patriarch Pimen of Russia. Lenten Letter" in Alexander Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials, edited by John Dunlap, Richard Haugh, Alexis Klimoff (Belmonte, Mass: Nordland Publishing Company, 1973), p. 477.
18. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, August 1914 trans. Michael Glenny (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), p. 601.
19. Solzhenitsyn, August 1914, pp. 603-604.
20. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago One, p. 452.
21. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Three, pp. 258-265.
22. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Three, pp. 290-291.
23. Solzhenitsyn, August 1914, p. 440.
24. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago One, p. 168.
25. Ibid., p. 173.
26. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Three, pp. 258-265.
27. Solzhenitsyn, Candle In The Wind, p. 43.
28. Solzhenitsyn, The Cancer Ward, p. 585.
29. Solzhenitsyn, The Cancer Ward, p. 531.
30. Solzhenitsyn, Candle In The Wind, p. 134.
31. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago One, p. 591.

### CHAPTER III

#### SUFFERING AS A THEME IN THE WORKS OF ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN

The notion of individual suffering is another prominent theme in Solzhenitsyn's work. The concern with the actual physical and mental pain of inmates of the Soviet prison camp system is an important part of two of Solzhenitsyn's fictional works One Day and The First Circle, and his three Gulag volumes. Solzhenitsyn spends a number of pages giving descriptive details of the cold weather, the severely overcrowded conditions of the cells, the lack of food, the filth, the brutality, and the almost total lack of concern that one person has for another in the camp atmosphere. He notes about the transit prison camps:

...The prison was unheated and the prisoners not only did not freeze to death but on the upper bunks they lay there undressed. And they knocked out all of the windowpanes so as not suffocate. Instead of the twenty men Cell 21 was supposed to contain, there were three hundred and twenty three! There was water underneath the bunks, and boards were all laid in the water and people lay on those boards. It was like an Arctic night down under the bunks. There was no light down there either because it was cut off by people lying on the bunks above and standing in the aisle. It was impossible to walk through the aisle to the latrine tank, and people crawled along the edges of the bunks. They didn't distribute rations to individuals but to units of ten. If one of the ten died, the others shoved his corpse under the bunks and kept it there until it started to stink. They got his rations.<sup>1</sup>

Solzhenitsyn looks at suffering as it relates to his experience

in the Soviet camps from two perspectives. The first is concerned with the notion of retributive punishment. In this view the people in the Soviet Camp system are actually guilty of some crime against the state and their punishment is justified. It seems that one of the primary goals of Solzhenitsyn's works is to refute this line of reasoning. One of the essential themes is that innocent people were being persecuted. People who have committed no crimes are being arrested, tried, and punished under Soviet law.

The harsh descriptions of camp life are not outlined solely to act as a criticism of the camps, the prime injustice is the fact that millions of innocent people are being subjected to the camp atmosphere. While emphasis on the first claim is that the severity of the punishment does not fit the mediocrity of the crime, the second claim begins with the assertion that there is no crime and therefore any type of limitations on individual freedom are unjust.

And what if there is nothing for a person to be corrected of? If he is not a criminal at all in the first place? If he has been imprisoned because he prayed to God, or expressed an independent opinion, or because he became a prisoner of war, or because of his father,<sup>2</sup> or simply to fulfill the prison arrest quota...

The point that Solzhenitsyn makes is that innocent people are the ones who suffered. The Soviet system deliberately devises methods and laws that will help it to convict and punish any person that its leaders consider a threat to their authority and ideology. The purpose of the system is to convict those who have done wrong and to convict those who have the potential to do something that the government does not agree with. Chief prosecutor Krylenko notes:

A tribunal is an organ of the class struggle of workers directed against their enemies and must act from the point of view of the interests of the revolution...having in mind the most desirable results for the masses of workers and peasants. No matter what the individual qualities of the defendant, only one method of evaluating him is to be applied; evaluation from the point of view of class expediency.<sup>3</sup>

A primary theme that Solzhenitsyn addresses in regard to human suffering is the notion of the punishment of the innocent. A second theme in his works takes a completely different view that nobody is absolutely free from guilt.

Although Solzhenitsyn believes that masses of people were imprisoned without any reason, several of his characters do have different perspectives. Some of his characters have an "original sin" perspective concerning the idea of punishment. The notion is that although the prisoners had not committed the specific crime in question, that in their lifetimes they had undoubtedly done something that they deserved to be punished for. A conversation from A Candle in the Wind stresses this view. The conversation is between a former prisoner and an Army general. They state:

Alex

Well, I came to see you once. To make a protest on behalf of the convicts.

General

The convicts?!...And you are not ashamed to refer openly to your having been there.

Alex

As long as you're not ashamed—I have been acquitted. Someone else turned out to be guilty of the murder I was accused of.

## General

You know you really shouldn't flaunt your "acquittal" in everyone's face. You should not interpret it to mean that you weren't guilty at all.<sup>4</sup>

This perspective leads to almost a passive view toward suffering. The implication is not that suffering is an inevitable part of every person's life and that there is no way to avoid it, but that if a person does encounter suffering he should not necessarily feel that he is suffering without reason. He should not feel that he is completely innocent and does not deserve to suffer. A character from Gulag II notes:

And on the whole, do you know, I have become convinced that there is no punishment that comes to us in this life on earth which is undeserved. Superficially it can have nothing to do with what we are guilty of in actual fact, but if you go over your life with a fine tooth comb and ponder it deeply, you will always be able to hunt down that transgression of yours for which you now have received this blow.<sup>5</sup>

The notion is very similar to that expressed in the Book of Job. The book is largely a conversation between Job and three other people who claim to be servants of God. They assert, as does the first view presented above, that Job is suffering because of some sin that he has committed. The implication is strictly retributive. Job is punished because he has done something wrong. Although in the end, as in the cases that Solzhenitsyn describes, Job is innocent and has not done anything wrong, he still is to accept the punishment without griping. The point is not that all punishment or types of suffering stem from some wrong that has been committed, but that the innocent suffer too, and that in the final analysis they are not innocent. Paul notes

in his letter to the Romans:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.<sup>6</sup>

Solzhenitsyn could viably argue that just as there is that similarity between the theme of the suffering of the innocent in the Book of Job and his work, there is also a fundamental difference. For Job there is essentially nothing that he, his friends, or society at large could do about his suffering, whereas in the case of the prison-camp, a collective response on the part of the Soviet society could have prevented the type of suffering that they went through. For Job the suffering was unavoidable, for the camp inmates it was not, people could change things.

The most important theme concerning suffering that is brought forth in Solzhenitsyn's work is his belief that suffering can be useful. It is useful in the sense that it causes people to reflect on their lives, their surroundings, the existence of others, and their circumstances. Again, throughout the works a variety of his heroes share this perspective. Suffering has the potential ability to purify, to give men the right outlook on life, and to help them to learn "what men live by". In a conversation taken from The First Circle the following dialogue takes place:

When is it best to be imprisoned? Was it better in one's youth or in one's declining years? The young prisoners thought that it was better to be imprisoned in one's youth. Then a person had a chance to learn what it meant to live, what really mattered and what was crap; then at the age of thirty-five, having knocked off a ten-year term, a man could build his life on intelligent foundations. A man who'd been imprisoned in old age could only suffer because he had not lived right, because his life had been a chain of mistakes, and because those mistakes could no longer be corrected.



Usually the older men would maintain that being imprisoned in old age is best... that a person had already drawn everything from life in his best years. They went on to prove that in camp you couldn't take much hide off of an old man, so that afterwards he "wouldn't even want to get on a woman".<sup>7</sup>

Although Solzhenitsyn doesn't explicitly take a stand on the question, he does seem to imply that it is indeed the case that if a person has to suffer, it is best if he suffers while he is young. He notes that when the older prisoners argue that a young man should experience "everything in life" that the term "everything" is narrowed to mean the possession of a female body, good clothes, good food and liquor.<sup>8</sup> For Solzhenitsyn the older prisoners have the wrong idea of what it means to really exist. It is not the things that a person may own, but his perspective, his outlook on life. He believes that suffering, that prison-camp, could give people the right perspective. His heroes from the short story Matryona's House and A Candle in the Wind are men who have gone to camp and have returned to society with a new outlook on life, their work, money, clothes, food, everything. The suffering of camp has taught his heroes how to live. They state:

Alex

We were freed and given an official apology--  
but who can give us back nine years?

Maurice

Lost years!

Alex

No, not really lost. Perhaps those years were  
necessary.

Maurice

What do you mean "necessary"? You mean you believe that its necessary for man to spend time in prison?

Alex

No, its not as simple as that. There are moments when I say God Bless You Prison.<sup>9</sup>

When I was free and used to read books in which men pondered the meaning of life and the nature of happiness, I understood very little of those passages. I gave them their due: wise men are supposed to think. It's their profession. But the meaning of life? We live; that is the meaning. Happiness? When things are going well that's happiness, everyone knows that, Thank God for prison! It gave me the chance to think...<sup>10</sup>

The implication is that although Alex had "lost" those years of his life when he could have been free to do whatever pleased him, he had gained much from his imprisonment. Solzhenitsyn believes that suffering offers people the opportunity to consider seriously life's fundamental questions. For his heroes it is only this serious contemplation and an appropriate answer that leads to any kind of lasting happiness. A hero notes; "For those who understand, human happiness is suffering".<sup>11</sup>

The claim is that the harsh camp life can cause people to view their life form a moral rather than from a physical perspective. Solzhenitsyn would want to remind his readers that there is a fundamental difference between the traditional theory of imprisonment and its concern with changing the individual and the type of shift of perspective that he is talking about. The traditionalists begin with the notion that people are in prison because they have committed a crime. Prison sentences are not only meant to punish individuals but also to make the prisoner think about the immorality of the crime. It was hoped that this combination of punish-

ment and reflection would discourage the prisoner from committing any crime in the future. In a sense the objective is to make the prisoner act like everyone else in the society once he is released. Solzhenitsyn's claim is that there is a difference between this change of perspective and the change that he sees and encourages.

First, a very large percentage of the camp's inmates are not criminals, but are political prisoners, so that the change that he sees taking place in prison is entirely different. Rather than making the prisoners conform to the Soviet society at large, the new perspective sets them apart. The change is not a rejection of basic social norms, (no stealing, no killing), but rather the attainment of a wholly new concept of how to live.

The challenge of suffering is its call to the human conscience. Solzhenitsyn believes that the first step of a person's new perspective that suffering causes him to recognize is the belief that it is better to lose his life than to be untrue to his conscience. Individual integrity becomes the dominant theme of existence. The concern is almost like being outside oneself. Solzhenitsyn believes that suffering encourages people to disregard the physical and to make all decisions in accord with moral maxims.

Solzhenitsyn's ideas on suffering and its potential purifying effects are very similar to the teachings of the Bible. The idea that there is a kind of divine purpose in suffering and punishment is a prominent theme in the Bible. The implication is that God is not only punishing individuals and nations because they have sinned against his will but that because of the punishment they will not

sin again. They will see that his ways are correct and will follow them. The objective is to make suffering a learning experience.

The wisdom literature of the Old Testament speaks of the concept of suffering in positive terms.

It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.<sup>12</sup>

Although Solzhenitsyn does not explicitly say that there is a divine purpose behind suffering, he does agree that there is a lesson to be learned from suffering. People can lead more authentic lives, devoid of greed, envy, and materialism. They must take the time to learn from these periods of discomfort and suffering. He writes about his own change of perspective:

Looking back, I saw that for my whole conscious life I had not understood either myself or my strivings. What had seemed for so long to be beneficial now turned out in actuality to be fatal, and I had been striving to go in the opposite direction to that which was truly necessary to me. But just as the waves of the sea knock the inexperienced swimmer off his feet and keep tossing him back to the shore, so also was I painfully tossed back on dry land by the blows of misfortune. And it was only because of this that I was able to travel the path which I had always really wanted to travel.<sup>13</sup>

Another fundamental implication of Solzhenitsyn's thoughts concerning suffering is the distinction he makes between happiness and joy. At first glance there might not seem to be a very substantial difference, but for Solzhenitsyn and for Christian thinkers

there may be a great difference. For both groups it appears that the term "happiness" is used to describe a definite situation, a definite reaction to a particular occurrence. One character notes; "But the meaning of life? We live - that's the meaning. Happiness? When things are going well, that's happiness, everyone knows that".<sup>14</sup>

For this character a person is happy when he is well-off materially, socially, and academically. Any change in any one of those areas would change that person's happiness to sadness and despair. "Joy" is an entirely different concept. The term connotes a feeling that is almost outside of space and time. The implication is that regardless of one's social status or material possessions that he can still have the inner satisfaction about life in general and his life in particular. So that while a camp inmate may not be "happy" with the situation that prevails in prison he can still have inner "joy". Christians note:

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace and joy..<sup>15</sup>

For Solzhenitsyn as well as for the Christian thinker inner joy is distinct from the feeling of happiness. While the former is a comment on a person's individual perspective, how he views his life, his mission, the latter is an evaluation of a person's material possessions and social status.

Additionally, Solzhenitsyn may want to make a distinction between varying degrees of suffering. Although his belief is that suffering has the potential to improve people, it does not necessarily follow that he would say that the more severe the suffering or punishment the better the individual in question will ultimately

become. Critics of his view that the suffering they endured in Soviet camps had positive effects argue that there is a distinction between ordinary prisons and camp life.<sup>18</sup> While ordinary prisons punish people, they still regard the inmates as human beings. Prisoners are not tortured or beaten as part of the prison routine. Prisoners are fed, provided with an adequate amount of shelter, allowed to go to the bathroom on a somewhat regular basis, and treated as individuals rather than strictly as members of a group. Varlam Shalamov, also a camp inmate, notes a difference between prison and camp.

In the camp situation human beings never remain human beings - the camps were created to this end.

All human emotions - love, friendship, envy; love of one's fellows, mercy, thirst for fame, honesty - fell away from us along with the meat of our muscles. . . We had no pride, no vanity, and even jealousy and passion seemed to be Martian concepts. . . The only thing left was anger - the most enduring human emotion. . . Ascent, growth in profundity, the development of human beings is possible in prison. But...camp is a wholly and consistently negative school of life! There is nothing either necessary or useful that anyone derives from it. The prisoner learns flattery, falsehood, and petty and large-scale meanness... When he returns home, he sees not only that he has not grown during his time in camp, but that his interests have become meager and crude.<sup>16</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's critics claim that camp life is so hard that people don't have a chance to think about anything other than survival. People actually fight each other for food. It is that constant struggle merely to exist that separates the kind of suffering that may lead to a positive change in perspective concerning life experienced in prison and the totally different situation that is found in the Soviet camp environment.

The point is that there seems to be something of an inconsistency. On the one hand there is the notion that suffering purifies, while on the other hand there is the contention that too much suffering causes a hardening of the soul. Solzhenitsyn doesn't really solve this problem. He notes that for the most part people become more desperate and cruel rather than reach that new outlook on life that he advocates. He believes that more people are corrupted by their camp experiences than are changed.<sup>17</sup>

The interesting part of the work on suffering and Solzhenitsyn's views on its positive nature is his admission that he does not understand why some people are corrupted and a few are not. Several of his characters show this confusion. Rubin, a character from The First Circle notes:

I'm the same kind of prisoner as you- from the draft of 1945. And four years at the front, a shell fragment in my side, and five years in prison. So I see things just as well as you.<sup>18</sup>

Rubin had arrived at an entirely different view on how to live than had Solzhenitsyn's hero.

In the final analysis Solzhenitsyn's comments on suffering can be viewed as a negative statement on human behavior. The implication is that people only ponder the fundamental questions of their existence when they are forced to do so. Without suffering they refuse to live authentic lives, for the most part they all engage in profit-maximization, materialism, and consumption rather than making any attempt to see that life is actually more than that. It is not that people are incapable of meaningful contemplation without suffering and material deprivation but that they don't take the opportunity to mature outside the realm of suffering.

What about the people who have the new perspective? What is their role outside of camp? In Solzhenitsyn's plays and short stories the basic scenario deals with a former political prisoner who has been released and is now back in the real world, and how he handles himself. The former prisoner has the new perspective on life. Solzhenitsyn gives the impression that the prisoner feels that he could have an impact on the world around him, that now that he is back in society he can help to show other people how to live. The essential problem, though, is that they don't know how to go about showing how to change the others' perspectives.

Alex

Well, I'd like to pass on to the next generation one particular baton - the flickering candle of our soul. Let them do whatever they want to in the twenty-first century, in our century of steel and the atom, electric power, and cybernetics. . .

Phillip

And what are we supposed to do to achieve that, in practical terms?

Alex

That's the problem. . .<sup>19</sup>

Solzhenitsyn implies that he knows how people "should" be living their lives, but it is extremely difficult to move from the articulation of those beliefs to making actual proposals for people to guide their lives by. He believes that changing human nature is something that is very difficult to do. People can't change overnight. His philosophy of moral change is one of evolution rather than revolution.

It was granted me to carry from my prison years. . . one essential experience: how a human being becomes evil and how good. . . Gradually



it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either - but right through every human heart - and through all human hearts...

Since then I have come to understand the truth of all religions of the world: They struggle with the evil inside of human beings. It is impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person.

And since then I have come to understand the falsehood of all the revolutions in history: They destroy only those carriers of evil contemporary with them...And they then take to themselves as their heritage the actual evil itself, magnified still more.<sup>20</sup>

If viewed from the proper perspective those statements are ones of hope. The claim is that a society's moral perspective cannot be changed suddenly, not that it can't be changed at all. Solzhenitsyn believes that the individuals who had suffered and have reached the new perspective on life have a moral responsibility that is very similar to that of the artist. For just as the artist is able to translate the experience of a particular culture and generation into forms that others can appreciate and learn from, so too can those people who have already suffered and know how to lead their lives help those who have not had those difficult experiences. Solzhenitsyn's real challenge has several different targets. The first ultimate responsibility requires those who have undergone hardships to use those experiences to achieve something positive in their lives. Additionally, they must attempt to show others. They must try to persuade others that their moral perspective is the right one and one that deserves their allegiance. The secondary responsibility rests with those who have not suffered.

They must be willing to evaluate what the former prisoners are suggesting as standards for their lives.

Solzhenitsyn implies that most people in society will not be willing to give the former prisoners a fair chance to change their perspectives. They regard the changed prisoners with disdain and most don't take the time to learn from what the prisoners have experienced. The heroes from The Incident, A Candle in the Wind, and Matryona's House fail to have a significant impact on the majority of those in their communities.

Solzhenitsyn does not leave his heroes as complete failures. He views them as heroes from two vantage points. First, the characters are heroes because they have the new perspective. They realize what is important in life and what is not. Second, in each of the short stories one other character is changed by the hero's perspective. The hero is unable to convince most people of the validity of his views but he is always able to convince at least one person.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER III

1. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago One, pp. 534 - 535.
2. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Two, p. 630
3. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago One, p. 308.
4. Solzhenitsyn, Candle in the Wind, p. 97.
5. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Two, p. 612.
6. Romans 3:23
7. Solzhenitsyn, The First Circle, p. 315.
8. Ibid.
9. Solzhenitsyn, Candle in the Wind, p. 24.
10. Solzhenitsyn, The First Circle, p. 33.
11. Ibid., p. 34.
12. Ecclesiastes 7: 2-4.
13. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Two, p. 615.
14. Solzhenitsyn, The First Circle, p. 35.
15. Romans 14:17
16. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Two, pp. 618-619.
17. Ibid., pp. 618-628.
18. Solzhenitsyn, The First Circle, p. 35.
19. Solzhenitsyn, Candle In the Wind, p. 134.
20. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Two, p. 615.

CHAPTER IV  
SOLZHENITSYN'S LITERATURE AS A LAMENT  
FOR THE SOVIET UNION

Solzhenitsyn's belief that the true artist must address the social and political issues of his particular environment is evident in his literature and essays. The vast majority of his works deal with the negative effects of the communist revolution on the Soviet citizenry, Soviet morality, and the Soviet natural environment. This chapter will attempt to outline Solzhenitsyn's concern for the Soviet Union on a national and individual scale.

SOLZHENITSYN'S CONCERN FOR THE SOVIET NATION

Solzhenitsyn's criticism of the Soviet Union assumes two forms. First, he thinks that the Soviet leaders have a basic misconception concerning the nation's economic priorities. He thinks that Soviet leaders are too concerned with economic development and rapid technological progress and that they have exploited the nation's people and natural resources in an effort to reach these objectives. Solzhenitsyn believes, for example, that the imprisonment of millions of Soviet citizens after the revolution was a way for the nation's leaders to get free labor to help build the necessary economic infrastructure for industrialization. He writes:

...But when the concept arose of stirring up the whole 180 million with an enormous mixing paddle, when the plan for superindustrialization was rejected in favor of a plan for supersuper-super-industrialization, when the liquidation of the Kulaks was already foreseen along with the massive public works of the First Five-Year Plan - on the eve of the Year of the Great Fracture the view of the Archipelago and everything in the Archipelago changed too.

... forced labor should be set up in such a way that the prisoner should not earn anything from his work but that the state should derive economic profit from it.<sup>1</sup>

The economic end manifested itself, as always, openly and greedily; for the state which had decided to strengthen itself in a very short period of time and which did not require anything from outside, the need was manpower:

... It was possible to obtain such manpower only by swallowing up one's own sons.<sup>2</sup>

Solzhenitsyn believes that Soviet leaders have mistakenly adopted the Western notion of infinite economic progress. He claims that Soviet planners believe that they can exploit the nation's natural resources at a fantastic rate without totally depleting them. Solzhenitsyn does not believe in perpetual economic progress. The aim of the Soviet society should not be geared to annual increases in the gross national product, but on methods of conserving the country's limited resources. He believes that even if the Soviet Union has the technology to increase productivity several-fold and that if new methods of producing energy are discovered, the cost to the environment would be devastating. He has a zero-sum game model for economic development; what is gained in terms of productivity and output is lost through its negative effects on the Soviet citizenry and its environment.

He writes:

One might have thought that, with the central planning of which we are so proud, we of all people had the chance not to spoil Russia's natural beauty, not to create anti-human, multimillion concentrations of people. But we've done everything the other way round; we have dirtied and defiled the wide Soviet spaces and disfigured the heart of the Soviet, our beloved Moscow. The implacable face of the city and all ancient city plans have been obliterated, and imitations of the west are being flung up, like the new Arbat; the city has been so squeezed, stretched, and pushed upward that life has become intolerable—...

We have squandered our resources foolishly without so much as a backward glance, sapped our soil, mutilated our vast expanses with idiotic "inland seas", contaminated areas of wasteland around industrial centers.<sup>3</sup>

Solzhenitsyn thinks that Soviet leaders need to rethink their economic objectives. The new economic strategy should rely on production techniques that are small-scale, labor intensive, and aware of the environmental limitations of the nation's natural resources.

What must be implemented is not a "steadily growing economy", but a zero-growth economy, a stable economy... We must set ourselves the aim of not increasing national resources, but merely of conserving them. We must renounce, as a matter of urgency, the gigantic scale of urban development... which requires an increase, not a reduction, in manual labor, uses the simplest of machinery and is based purely on local materials.<sup>4</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's second area of concern for the Soviet nation is its foreign and domestic political decisions. On the domestic front, he thinks that Soviet leaders do not give the Soviet citizenry the opportunity actively to participate in the country's decision-

making process. He also disagrees with the leadership's censorship of books and other materials that may offer perspectives that differ from their own. Finally, Solzhenitsyn thinks that the Soviet leadership should allow its citizens to have religious freedom.

In the area of foreign politics Solzhenitsyn thinks that the Soviet Union is too involved in the internal affairs of other nations. Additionally, he believes that the leaders are overspending on the military rather than investing the resources in its undeveloped northeast. He writes:

We must not be governed by considerations of political gigantism, nor concern ourselves with the fortunes of other hemispheres: this we must renounce forever... Let us hear no more about outer space and the cosmos, no more historic victories of universal significance, and no more dreaming up of international missions...<sup>5</sup>

#### SOLZHENITSYN'S LAMENT FOR THE SOVIET INDIVIDUAL

If Solzhenitsyn shows concern for the Soviet Union because of what it has lost culturally, and environmentally over the past half-century, his concern becomes even more pronounced when he depicts what citizens have become morally.

One of the major criticisms that Solzhenitsyn makes of the Soviet citizenry is its willingness to accept the lies of the government without any attempt to scrutinize its actions. The art of lying, he believes, has played a major role in Soviet life since the revolution. Party officials are constantly lying to the citizenry about the goals of the State, its activities in world affairs, and the role that ordinary people can play in governmental decision-making. The focus of Solzhenitsyn's criticism does not

concern itself with the political leaders who engage in lying but on the individual members of society who listen to, accept, and support the politicians though they realize they are being lied to. They agree to give false testimony against their neighbors, they stand and applaud the prosecution of innocent people, and they refuse to be anything that resembles autonomous human beings.

One of his characters from The Cancer Ward notes his embarrassment at his willingness to lie to support the government.

... At least you lied less, do you understand?  
 At least you cringed less. Be glad of that?  
 You were arrested, but we were forced to  
 stand and applaud the sentences that were  
 being pronounced. You were jailed. But we  
 were herded into meetings and forced to curse  
 and denounce you. Not just applaud, but to  
 demand execution, to demand it!... We had to  
 hold our hands high when we applauded, so our  
 neighbors would be sure to see, and the  
 presidium would see too. Who doesn't want  
 to live? Who stood up in your defense? Who  
 protested? Where are they now?<sup>6</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's point is that, while he may be able to sympathize with the character, while he can see and understand his moral crisis, in the final analysis his choice should have been quite obvious-- he should have refused to lie. The same character goes on to note:

How many were there who believed. How many were really unaware of what was happening? You can't expect a child to understand, but I can't imagine that our entire people suddenly became stupid... Suddenly all of the professors and all the engineers turned out to be saboteurs-- and they believed it? Suddenly, the best division commanders of the Civil War were German-Japanese spies,-- and they believed it?... When history pauses at our graves to ask about each of us! Who was he?



In this age of infamy,  
 Man's choice is but to be  
 A tyrant, traitor, prisoner;  
 No other choice has he.<sup>7</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's lament for Soviet citizens stems from his fundamental belief that individuals do have a choice. The choice may be difficult. The choice may imply personal hardship and pain, but there is an opportunity to choose between what is right and what is wrong. One of his characters from The First Circle notes: "If one is forever cautious, can one remain a human being?"<sup>8</sup>

An individual always has the opportunity to be true to himself. A person has the opportunity not to live by lies. Solzhenitsyn's grief stems from the fact that the reactions of this character from the The Cancer Ward are the rule rather than the exception. People want to be lost in the crowds. They want to be conformists at all costs. They pretend that they have no choice other than to lie and to be untrue to their fellows when in fact they do have a choice. His ultimate admonition to people is to "know yourself and to be true to yourself". He encourages all those people who feel that they are doing the right thing when they support the government to continue to do so, but for those who do not, to not participate. The challenge is not a call to arms but a call to consciousness. He shouts: "Don't live by lies!"

Another prominent aspect of Solzhenitsyn's lament for the Soviet individual is the notion of self-deception. Solzhenitsyn frequently presents a variety of characters who refuse to recognize the social and physical conditions that surround them. He realizes that it is relatively easy to speculate on how people will act during a particular situation. He implies that people may imagine themselves

in trying or dangerous situations and pretend that they would act bravely. Unfortunately, people can never be certain how they will respond during a crisis until it presents itself. It is only after they have had a chance to examine their actions that they can be sure of what their response will be in a similar situation. In Solzhenitsyn's works there are not only a variety of characters that fail to react positively when they are confronted with moral and physical hardships, but there are also those who refuse to recognize that they are involved in a crisis. Throughout his work he seems to feel disgust for this group of people who refuse to see and understand their world and what is happening in it.

Solzhenitsyn's characters exhibit this blindness in a variety of different contexts. The prisoner's feelings about amnesty is a theme that he uses frequently throughout the three Gulag volumes. He states that although the prisoners know that there has never been any cases of a general amnesty they keep hoping that it will come. He implies that many prisoners actually felt that they would be released and did not view their hopes and dreams concerning amnesty as wishful thinking; to them amnesty was inevitable. Solzhenitsyn notes his own misconceptions concerning the prospects for a general amnesty. He writes:

... It just could not be that so many people were to remain in prison after the greatest victory in the world! It was just to frighten us that they were holding us for the time being; so that we might remember and take heed. Of course there would soon be a total amnesty and all of us would be released...<sup>9</sup>

... For decades, wave after wave of prisoners has thirsted for and believed in either an amnesty, or a new code, or a general review

of cases. The prisoner's imagination sees the ardently awaited arrival of the angel of liberation in just about everything; the next anniversary of the October Revolution, Lenin's anniversary, Victory Day, Paris Commune Day, the end of the five-year plan! And the wider the arrests, the more massive and mind-boggling the scale of the waves of prisoners, the more they inspired not sober-mindedness but faith in amnesty.<sup>10</sup>

Significantly, the theme of self-deception also plays a notable role in Solzhenitsyn's novel entitled The Cancer Ward. Two levels of self-deception can be seen in this novel. First, Solzhenitsyn has a variety of characters in the book who refuse to believe that they not only do not have cancer but believe that they are not sick at all. He presents characters who believe that everyone in the ward has cancer and is doomed to die, except them. Most of his characters feel that there must be some mistake in their diagnoses, that life, while it may be cruel to everyone else, could never be so cruel to them. Thus, Solzhenitsyn presents two patients in the ward having the following dialogue. One of the characters is a hero and has come to terms with his illness and his eventual death. The second character presents the attitude that is most common among the people in the ward. It is the attitude of self-deception.

Listen, brother, what kind of cancer have you got? Cancer of the what?

Cancer of the nothing. I don't have cancer.

Now there is a fool! If he did not have cancer, why would they put him in here.<sup>11</sup>

Another patient notes:

It was only now that he was able to fire out the word "cancer". For a long time he had pretended to himself that there was nothing

to the whole business, that it was nonsense; and he put off going to the doctor as long as he could bear it. When he at last went and was sent from dispensary to dispensary until he reached the hospital, and there heard every patient without exception, declare that he himself did not have cancer, he was still unwilling to admit to himself what he really had, to believe his native intelligence, he preferred to believe what he wanted to believe, that he did not have cancer and all would be well.<sup>12</sup>

The first perspective of self-deception that is described in The Cancer Ward is similar to the attitudes of those characters who do not realize that there is an actual social and political crisis in the Soviet Union. One of the initial questions that arises while reading the Gulags is: How could people in the Soviet Union just stand around and pretend that millions of people are not being killed or imprisoned for years on end? Solzhenitsyn implies that they simply refuse to see the obvious. Just as the patients in The Cancer Ward convince themselves that nothing is wrong with them, the Soviet citizenry believes that it is not sick. Symbolically speaking, cancer is a moral and political disease, and Soviet society is a gigantic cancer ward.

The first level of deception can be seen in characters that believe that while others may be falsely accused and convicted, it can never happen to them. They feel comfortable about providing false testimony against their neighbors because they never realize that someone may later make the same allegations against them. They deal with the world on a short-run basis. If a particular social policy does not have an immediate negative effect on them, then they will not act to change it, regardless of the negative effects that it may have on other sectors of the society. More significantly,

people are not able to see the long-run consequences of their inaction. They fail to recognize the possibility that the injustices that affect one part of the society may affect them also.

Although the poem entitled We Will Never Die does not deal with social injustice, its central theme revolves around the belief that people refuse to come to terms with life's difficult problems. They are afraid to acknowledge the existence of the problem and take the time to think through a proper response to it.

He writes:

Above all else, we have grown to fear death  
and those who die.

... If there is a death in the family, we try  
to avoid writing or calling, because we do not  
know what to say about death...

... If you stop and think about the dead, who  
is to build the new world? In three wars we  
have lost husbands, sons, and lovers, yet to  
think of them repels us. They are dead,  
buried under painted wooden posts-- why should  
they interfere with our lives? For we will  
never die!<sup>13</sup>

Finally, Solzhenitsyn has a devastating passage in Gulag Three that clearly indicates his feelings concerning the concept of self-deception. The passage has tones of sympathy for those who fool themselves into believing that things are positive when they are not. The passage centers around innocent Soviet peasants who are tried as political prisoners and are either exiled to distant lands or are forced to suffer in prison camps. He writes:

This was how they lived in that plague-stricken  
winter. They could not wash. Their bodies were  
covered with festering sores. Spotted fever  
developed. People were dying. Strict orders  
were given to the people of Archangel not to  
help the special resettlers!

Dying peasants roamed the town, but no one could take a single one of them into his home, feed him, or carry tea out to him; ... A starving man would stagger along the street, stumble, fall and die.

... They were buried in an organized fashion: by the sanitation department. Without coffins, of course, in common graves, next to the old city cemetery on Vologda street-out in open country. No memorials were erected.

... True when during the war there was a shortage of reckless Soviet fighting power at the front, they turned among others to these 'kulaks:... They were invited to leave the special settlements and the camps for the front to defend their sacred fatherland.

And They Went!<sup>14</sup>

It is almost unbelievable that those innocent people who have suffered so much and for so long under Soviet rule could voluntarily choose to fight for the Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn seems to share this feeling of unbelief, but he also seems to realize that the willingness to fight for the system is just more evidence of the mistaken mentality of those who are forced to suffer. They desperately want to believe that their countrymen cannot be all bad and that things will get better soon. Throughout his works Solzhenitsyn argues that the peasants are wrong. Things do not get better, the society is still sick, and there has still been no general amnesty.

Solzhenitsyn's ultimate challenge to those individuals who continually deceive themselves about the social and moral climate in the Soviet Union is to wake up and be aware of what is happening around them. He thinks that it is only through a truthful evaluation of events that people can make any positive moral progress. If

cancer victims are ever going to know how to live, they must realize that they are sick, finite human beings. Political prisoners must not put their faith in general amnesty but must come to terms with their plights and become the best people possible under adverse circumstances. Finally, Soviet society must be willing to recognize the evils of the political and judicial system and then refuse to participate rather than either pretend that the system does not exist or that it will somehow self-destruct. The implication is that evil does not simply disappear, but that people must be willing to recognize its existence, confront it, and defeat it.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

1. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Two, p. 71.
2. Ibid., pp. 142-143.
3. Solzhenitsyn, Letter to the Soviet Leaders, pp. 25-26.
4. Ibid., p. 22
5. Ibid., p. 55
6. Solzhenitsyn, The Cancer Ward, p. 501.
7. Ibid., pp. 502-503
8. Solzhenitsyn, The First Circle, p. 3.
9. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Two, pp. 523-524.
10. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago One, pp. 272-273.
11. Solzhenitsyn, The Cancer Ward, p. 11
12. Ibid., pp. 109-110.
13. Solzhenitsyn, "We Will Never Die," in Short Stories and Prose Poems, p. 266.
14. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Three, pp. 359-365.



## CHAPTER V

### SOLZHENITSYN AND THE WEST

Alexander Solzhenitsyn also has a variety of things to say about the Western world. The focus of this chapter will be to outline his critique of the West and to judge its consistency with the rest of his work.

Solzhenitsyn believes that there are several positive things that can be said about the West. He notes that the governments of the West are freely chosen from a variety of candidates with differing political viewpoints. People have the ability to dismiss the public officials who fail to meet with their expectations, and they are free to think and speak openly about the political issues of the day. He notes that it is the people of the West who usually come to the economic and material aid of the countries that are underdeveloped or have endured a variety of natural or manmade disasters. He notes that the United States has a particularly positive record in coming to the aid of countries that are in dire distress, under threat of attack, or recovering from the devastation of war.

I have to say that the United States, of all the countries of the West, is the least guilty in all this and has done the most in order to prevent it (communist aggression). The United States has helped Europe to win the First and Second World Wars. It twice raised Europe from post-war destruction - twice - for 10, 20, 30 years it has stood as a shield protecting Europe...<sup>1</sup>

Paradoxically, most of Solzhenitsyn's criticisms of the West stem from his list of its attributes. He argues that although Westerners, particularly Americans, have the golden opportunity to be very influential parts of their countries' decision-making processes they squander those opportunities and, for the most part, refuse to participate. He claims that while the intellectual freedom that Americans enjoy should encourage them to be aware of not only provincial concerns but should also prompt them to have a world outlook, Americans fail to view things from that perspective. He believes that they fail to take adequate note of the world around them. Solzhenitsyn admits that after being in the United States for only a short time that even he finds it difficult to relate to the far-away concerns of Europe or of Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> He still feels that distance is no excuse for apathy and that Americans must try harder to relate to the problems of their distant neighbors.

Additionally, Solzhenitsyn argues that when Westerners do attempt to play an active role in the international sphere in Third World countries, they fail to recognize the cultural, historical, and political legitimacy of each particular country. Western society tends to evaluate a country's merit by how closely it reflects the cultural, political and economic policies of the West. Western political initiatives in the developing world have been an effort to transport the West to the East rather than making a sincere attempt to understand its diverse cultures and histories, and developing foreign initiatives that address those concerns. Solzhenitsyn thinks that it is this

unwillingness to attempt to understand the societies of the developing world and the belief in Western superiority that has caused the strained relationships that exist today between the West and the Third World. He writes:

But the persisting blindness of superiority continues to hold the belief that all vast regions of our planet should develop and mature to the level of contemporary Western systems. . . Countries are judged on the merit of their progress in that direction. But in fact such a conception is a fruit of Western incomprehension of the essence of other worlds, a result of mistakenly measuring them all with a Western yardstick. The real picture of our planet's development bears little resemblance to all this.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE WEST'S MORAL VOID

Solzhenitsyn argues that people in the United States do not have any concrete moral standards by which to run their lives. Just as the Soviets have no absolute moral standards neither do Americans. The only concern of the average American citizen is profit maximization. Solzhenitsyn thinks that businessmen neither worry about how their products will be used nor about their damaging effects on the environment. Solzhenitsyn notes that American businessmen actively compete with each other to sell counter-intelligence devices to the Soviet KGB even though they know those products will be used to oppress the Soviet citizenry.<sup>4</sup> Solzhenitsyn's claim is that modern-day Western moral values don't permit American businessmen to notice that something may be wrong when they sell products for immoral purposes.

On the national level Solzhenitsyn sees that same moral void. He sees that same inability to separate the expedient

and the practical from the moral. The belief is not that every time the two perspectives will be distinct, but that when they are, the political and economic philosophies of American society do not encourage people to choose the moral alternative. He notes that although the American presidential administrations of the 1930's and early 40's knew that the Soviet Union had concentration camps and oppressed millions of it's citizens, the United States still decided to become allies with it. He writes:

At the height of Stalin's terror in 1937-38; . . . , we get more than 40,000 persons shot per month; . . . Thus, that which had made it difficult for the democratic West to form an alliance with pre-revolutionary Russia had, by 1941, grown to such an extent and still did not prevent the entire united Democracy of the world . . . from entering into a military alliance with the Soviet Union. How is this to be explained? How can we understand it? . . .<sup>5</sup>

Solzhenitsyn thinks that there were two reasons for the Western alliance with the Soviet Union in World Ward II. First, he believes that the West was not willing to make the necessary economic and military sacrifices to defeat Germany. Second, Solzhenitsyn thinks that Western statesmen were afraid that they could not defeat Hitler by themselves.

Solzhenitsyn claims that after World War II, the United States and the remaining countries of the West were economically and spiritually drained. They had lost so much during World War II that they did not have the will to confront the Soviets when they were pressed by them in the international sphere. When the Soviet Union made its expansionist initiatives after World War II in Eastern Europe, the United States made no effort to thwart those plans.

Something that is incomprehensible to the ordinary human mind has taken place. . . England, France, the United States, were the victors in World War II. Victorious states always dictate peace;. . . Instead of this, beginning in Yalta, your Western statesmen for some inexplicable reason signed one capitulation after another. . . Without any necessity whatever, the occupation of Mongolia, Moldavia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania was silently recognized in Europe. After that, almost nothing was done to protect Eastern Europe, and seven or eight more countries were surrendered.

Solzhenitsyn thinks that this willingness on the part of the West to do anything to keep peace was not only evident during the late 40's and 50's but has also been the foreign policy of the United States, the leader of the West, in the 60's and 70's. He sees the American troop withdrawal from Vietnam as an example of lack of resolve on its part to confront Communist aggression. For Solzhenitsyn, the commitment of the United States to South Vietnam was a moral question and the United States had no moral grounds for leaving the struggle. He implies that once the struggle in Vietnam got complicated and expensive the United States pulled out. The United States took the course that was the most practical rather than doing what was morally required.

It seems that Solzhenitsyn's primary claim is that there were a variety of legitimate reasons for getting out of Vietnam, but that a strict benefit-cost analysis for determining participation should not have been the ultimate claim. For Solzhenitsyn the primary concern centers around whether the United States had a moral obligation to help South Vietnam preserve its independence. Given the belief that there is a moral responsibility to support South Vietnam, he argues that questions of costs were secondary

issues. On the other hand, if the American public decided that their involvement in Vietnam was wrong, that the struggle was an internal conflict that should have been solved by the Vietnamese people, or that Americans were helping to thwart the will of the people of Vietnam by helping to sustain a government that its citizens did not want, then the decision to leave was correct. Solzhenitsyn criticizes America because he feels that its ultimate reason for its troop withdrawal was that the war was getting difficult and its casualties were high.

Solzhenitsyn's views might be usefully compared with those of Phillip Slater, a longtime opponent of the Vietnam War. Slater notes a willingness of Americans to become apprehensive when faced by a viable adversary. He writes:

... It does not prepare them, however, for the slightly more equal contest of bombing North Vietnam in the face of anti-aircraft fire, where planes are lost in huge numbers and downed pilots are captured by the enemy. American pilots were most anxious to bomb North Vietnam until they actually experienced the ground fire, at which point their motivation lessened markedly... Killing in a dubious war is apparently more palatable than getting killed, and Americans are not used to fighting with anything approaching equal odds... In the Delta, pilots seem surprised and almost indignant when their massive weaponry is countered with small-arms fire...<sup>7</sup>

Slater disapproved of American involvement in Vietnam on grounds other than expediency. First, he thought that the conflict was a civil war. Second, he argued that most Vietnamese supported the Viet Cong's political movement. He writes:

We have been repeatedly trapped in our own rhetoric on this matter--initially by portraying ourselves as aiding a friendly Vietnamese majority against a small, alien and sinister minority. This created the expectation that villages "liberated" from the Viet Cong would

welcome us with open arms, as Paris did in World War II. When it turned out that they were not pleased to be rescued from their husbands, sons, and fathers, we burned the villages and destroyed their crops. . . To be traced to our unwillingness to admit that we are fighting the people of South Vietnam.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, Slater opposed the Vietnam War because of the "reckless, inhumane" way that America was fighting the war. He opposed America's bombing of the North, its dependence upon body counts as an indication of the success or failure of its military strategy, and its indiscriminate use of defoliation, napalm and cluster bombs to "exterminate" the Vietnamese population. Solzhenitsyn could accept these as legitimate reasons for troop withdrawal from Vietnam. America would have been justified in leaving Vietnam if it thought that its foreign policy was wrong in a moral sense rather than simply impractical.

#### THE WEST'S MISCONCEPTION OF COMMUNISM

Solzhenitsyn's warning to the West about Soviet communism assumes two forms. The first perspective, outlined throughout the thesis, places emphasis on Soviet wrongs of the past. The argument is essentially that the West should not trust the Soviet Union or become allies with it because of all the things that its leaders have done in the past. He notes in the speech

#### Communism: A Legacy of Terror:

How many witnesses have been sent to the West in the last 60 years? How many waves of immigrants? How many millions of persons? They are here. You meet them everyday. You know who they are: if not by their spiritual disorientation, their grief, their melancholy, then you can distinguish by their accents, by their external appearance. Coming from different countries and without consulting with one another,

they have brought to you exactly the same experience; they tell you exactly the same thing; they warn you of what is already happening, what has happened in the past...<sup>9</sup>

The advice that Solzhenitsyn gives to the West has been to take an active concern in the world, look at it, and examine what has happened in it since the Russian revolution. He encourages the West to play an active role in thwarting Communist aggression by refusing to give economic or military aid to Communist countries.

Second, Solzhenitsyn encourages the West to examine the concept of Communism and become aware of what the term actually means. The founding fathers of the Communist ideology, he believes, have always stated that their objective is to spread Communism throughout the world and that armed struggle is a legitimate means toward that end. He notes:

Its an astonishing phenomenon that communism has been writing about itself in the most open way - in black and white - for 125 years. And even more openly and candidly in the beginning. The Communist Manifesto . . . contains even more terrible things than what has actually been done.<sup>10</sup>

Try asking a malignant tumor what makes it grow. It simply cannot behave otherwise. The same is true of Communism; driven by a malevolent and irrational instinct for world domination, it cannot help seizing ever more lands, Communism is something new, unprecedented in world history; it is fruitless to seek analogies. All warnings to the West about the pitiless and insatiable nature of Communist regimes have proved to be in vain because the acceptance of such a view would be too terrifying. . . For decades it has been standard practice to deny reality by citing "peaceful coexistence," "detente", the Kremlin leadership's pursuit of peace. Meanwhile Communism envelops country after country and achieves new missile capabilities. Most amazing is that the Communist themselves have for decades loudly proclaimed their goal of destroying the bourgeois world (they have become more circumspect lately), while the West merely smiled at what seemed to be an extravagant joke. Yet destroying a class is a process that has already been demonstrated



in the U.S.S.R. So has the method of exiling an entire people into the wilderness in the space of 24 hours.<sup>11</sup>

Solzhenitsyn thinks that from Marx to Lenin to Stalin to the Soviet Union's present-day leadership Communism has always stood for political intolerance, the belief that ends justify means, and a dependence upon force to initiate and implement social policy.

Solzhenitsyn writes:

... But there never was any such thing as Stalinism. This was contrived by Krushchev and his group in order to shift onto Stalin all of the characteristics and all the principal defects of communism. It was Lenin who deceived the workers about self-management. He is one who turned the trade unions into organs of oppression. He is the one who created the Cheka, the secret police. It is he who sent troops out to the border areas to crush any national movements for liberation and to set up an empire.<sup>12</sup>

Solzhenitsyn believes that while the Soviet Union may adopt various postures to suit the differing international climates that may exist at particular times, its basic objectives are still the same. He notes that before the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons it was for a type of peaceful coexistence rather than a policy of armed confrontation. He believes that the Soviet disavowal of war was just a disguise of their true intention to dominate the world.

But unfortunately for communism, this policy ran up against your atomic bomb. Then the Communists changed their tactics. They then suddenly became advocates of peace at any costs. They started to convoke peace congresses, to circulate petitions for peace, and the Western world fell for this deceit. But the goal, the ideology remained the same. To destroy your society. To destroy the way of life known in the West.<sup>13</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's belief is that while the methods of the Soviet communists may have changed over the years, their essential goal

has always remained the same. The aim of the communist ideology is to destroy the societies of the West.

To a large extent Solzhenitsyn sees the same self-deception in the West as he describes in his own works. Just as political prisoners failed to realize that there would be no amnesty and just as most patients in The Cancer Ward failed to believe that they were fatally ill, the countries of the West refuse to recognize the signs of the times. Despite the unwillingness of the political leadership in eastern Europe to tolerate political opposition, despite all of the evidence of Soviet brutality and despite the massive Soviet arms buildup since 1945, the West refuses to believe that its way of life is threatened.

Solzhenitsyn claims that although the Soviet Union has violated the arms treaties of the past the United States still wants to trust them, wants to hope for peace when both past experience and present circumstances point to eventual confrontation.

But if I were to enumerate all the treaties that have been violated by the Soviet Union, it would take me another whole speech. I understand that when your statesman sign some treaty with the Soviet Union or China you want to believe that it will be carried out. But the Poles who signed a treaty in Riga in 1921 with the Communists also wanted to believe that the treaty would be carried out, and they were stabbed in the back. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, who signed treaties of friendship with the Soviet Union, also wanted to believe that they would be carried out, but these were all swallowed.<sup>14</sup>

... Take the SALT talks alone: in these negotiations alone your opponent is continually deceiving you. Either he is testing radar in a way which is forbidden by the agreement; or he is violating the limitations on the dimensions of missiles; or he is violating the conditions on multiple warheads.<sup>15</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's claims about the fundamental meaning of the communist ideology has some interesting implications. The first implication is that his criticism is not meant to be addressed solely to the government of the Soviet Union, but are aimed at all communist societies. His claim is not only Soviet communism is bad but that all communism is bad. He believes that just as Soviet communism led to massive restrictions on individual freedoms, so will other forms of communism in other areas of the world. He writes:

I would particularly want to remind you today that communism develops in a straight line as a single entity, without altering as people now like to say...

But China is simply a delayed phase of that so-called "war communism" established by Lenin in Russia, but which was in force only until 1921... In China the initial phase simply lasted longer. China is characterized by all the same traits: massive compulsory labor which is not paid in accordance with its value; work on holidays, forced living communes and the incessant drumming in of slogans and dogmas that abolish the human essence and deny all individuality to man.<sup>16</sup>

Communism is inimical and destructive of every national entity. The American antiwar movement long nurtured the hope that in North Vietnam nationalism and Communism were in harmony, that Communism seeks the national self-determination of its beloved people. But the grim flotilla of boats escaping from Vietnam even if we count only those that did not sink-may have explained to some less ardent members of the movement where the national consciousness resides and always did reside. The bitter torment of millions of dying Cambodians (to which the world is already growing accustomed) demonstrates this even more vividly. Take Poland; the nation prayed for just a few days with the Pope; only the blind could still fail to distinguish the people from Communism. Consider the Hungarian freedom fighters, the East Germans who keep on dying as they try to cross the Wall, and the Chinese who plunge into shark-infested waters in the hope of reaching Hong Kong. China conceals

its secrets best of all; the West hastens to believe that this, at least, is "good, peace loving" Communism. Yet the same unabridgeable abyss, the same hatred separate the Chinese regime and the Chinese people.<sup>17</sup>

Solzhenitsyn warns the West that the Communist ideology will have the same effect on any other nation that adopts its political perspective. He points to the recent activities of the Cambodians and Vietnamese as support for his claim that Communism corrupts.

This same warning about Communism is also appropriate for those Western nations that feel that they may be able to elect a communist government that would display essentially liberal democratic perspectives concerning individual freedoms and political opposition once they are elected. Solzhenitsyn would accuse those people who feel comfortable with the notion of electing a communist government as being either unaware of what communism means or its past history of wrongs, or foolish in believing that their particular brand of communism will be different from all of the others.

Just as with the case of the artist and with individual behavior, Solzhenitsyn would argue that his moral view also would have the best practical results for the West. He feels that by the West making all of the territorial concessions to the Soviet Union over the last 30 years it has only postponed the day of reckoning, rather than helped to avoid it completely. He thinks that when the ultimate confrontation takes place between the Soviet Union and the United States, the United States will be in such an inferior position because of its early mistakes and concessions that it will be in no position to offer a serious challenge.

For Solzhenitsyn it is not only a moral duty for the United States and its Western allies to put up some sort of resistance to the challenge of Communism on the economic and political front, but also the course that the political realist should take.

Solzhenitsyn's call is not for the United States to become militarily involved in the wide variety of political struggles that are taking place in the world today, nor is his advice to get actively involved in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union. His challenge to the West and the United States in particular, is that when confronted with a specific challenge, these countries should not back down, but respond to it. He also discourages the United States from engaging in trade or giving the Soviet Union economic loans that would help that system to prosper simply to make an economic profit. His call is for the United States government and private businesses to view human rights and other moral concerns as more valuable than profit-maximization.

His second challenge to the West is that it prepares itself to meet the challenges of Communism and the Soviet Union more aggressively. Solzhenitsyn believes that the ultimate goal of the West must not be "peace at all costs" but that some basic moral standards must either be recognized by the Communists or fought for. The belief is that moral principles can not be sacrificed and that the West must realize this if it is to survive.

The major themes that Solzhenitsyn addresses to the West are consistent with what he has written before. His focus is the same as always—only his audience has changed. Even the change of audience is consistent with Solzhenitsyn's conception of his role

as an artist. The artist must address his constituency. A passage from Solzhenitsyn implies that one of his tasks during his exile in the West is to address its particular social and political concerns. He writes:

If I were today addressing an audience in my country, in my examination of the overall pattern of the world's rifts I would have concentrated on the calamities of the East. But since my forced exile in the West has now lasted four years and since my audience is a Western one, I think it may be of greater interest to concentrate on certain aspects of the contemporary West, such as I see them.<sup>18</sup>

Solzhenitsyn thinks he has a moral responsibility to address the concerns of the West. However, the concerns that he writes about regarding the West are essentially the same as those he wrote about while he lived in the Soviet Union. The primary claim is that Western individuals and nations should have definite moral principles that guide their behavior. He offers that advice from both the moral and utilitarian perspectives just as he did in discussing the Soviet Union's concerns. He criticizes the West's concern with the excessive desire to obtain material goods and temporal happiness at the expense of the natural environment and its citizens' lives.

Solzhenitsyn claims that just as individual spiritual concerns have been drowned by an all powerful central government in the East, they have been forgotten and lost in the West's commercial society, which is filled with wealth and unrestrained freedoms. While there may be different causes, both societies are in a moral void. Neither society presents itself with the opportunity to provide moral alternatives to the crises that arise in both the domestic

and international spheres.

Additionally, just as Solzhenitsyn encourages the Soviet citizens to rise above the material and to realize that man's challenge in life is to leave life a better human being than when he started it, he also challenges Westerners to do likewise. His ultimate challenge to the West is for its members to attempt to lead positive lives based on moral standards. He writes:

If the world has not approached its end, it has reached a major watershed in history, equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. It will demand from us a spiritual blaze; we shall have to rise to a new height of vision, to a new level of life, where our physical nature will not be cursed, as in the Middle Ages, but even more importantly, our spiritual being will not be trampled upon, as in the Modern Era.

This ascension is similar to climbing onto the next anthropological stage. No one on Earth has any other way left but--upward.<sup>19</sup>

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

1. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "America: Think About the World," in Detente. Prospects for Democracy and Dictatorship, ed. Alex Simirenko, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1976), p. 21.
2. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
3. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, A World Split Apart. Commencement Address Delivered at Harvard University. June 8, 1978, trans. Irina Alberti (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 7.
4. Solzhenitsyn, "America: Think About the World," in Detente. Prospects for Democracy and Dictatorship, ed. Alex Simirenko, p. 11.
5. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
6. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
7. Philip Slater, The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 34-37.
8. Ibid., p. 35.
9. Solzhenitsyn, "Communism: A Legacy of Terror," in Detente. Prospects for Democracy and Dictatorship, ed. Alex Simirenko, p. 39.
10. Ibid., p. 40.
11. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Solzhenitsyn On Communism. Advice to the West in an Hour of Extremity". trans. Alex Klimoff. Time. February 18, 1980. pp. 48-49.
12. Solzhenitsyn, "Communism: A Legacy of Terror," in Detente. Prospects for Democracy and Dictatorship, ed. Alex Simirenko, p.46.
13. Ibid., p. 53.
14. Ibid., p. 54.
15. Ibid., p. 56.
16. Ibid., pp. 45-46.
17. Time, "Solzhenitsyn On Communism. Advice to the West in an Hour of Extremity." p. 49.
18. Solzhenitsyn, A World Split Apart, p. 9.
19. Ibid., pp. 59-61.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Kurt Vonnegut begins the novel Jailbird with a passage from one of his fan letters. The letter is from a high school student who claims that he is a big fan of Vonnegut's and that he has read all of his novels. He concludes that the essence of Vonnegut's works can be summarized in only a few words. Vonnegut replies that if he had only known that, he would have sent a telegram rather than waste time and money writing a stream of novels.<sup>1</sup> This final chapter is not an attempt to summarize Solzhenitsyn in three words or less, but it intends to identify the perspectives of those who criticize him and present some final comments concerning his art.

#### Soviet Critics

Solzhenitsyn notes that critics of his work usually argue from one of three perspectives. First, a very few of his critics assert that the events that Solzhenitsyn describes in his literature never really occurred. They suggest that while there may have been camps, everyone in them was guilty of some crime.<sup>2</sup>

Second, Soviet critics accuse Solzhenitsyn of living in the past. They argue that special camps only existed during Stalin's era and that they are a thing of the past. The events of the

era should be remembered in Soviet literature as a precaution against another "personality cult", but Soviet artists should also address the many positive things that happened during the time.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, there are those Soviet critics that argue that even if Solzhenitsyn's accounts are accurate, there are still no grounds for citizens of the Soviet system to feel guilty. They argue that the cruelties of the past were a necessary step in the evolution of the Soviet Union. One critic writes:

History has no need of the past,  
and the history of the socialist culture  
needs it least of all.<sup>4</sup>

Hear me, O Russia  
Our souls are unspotted -  
Our conscience unblemished! . . .<sup>5</sup>

### Western Critics

Western critics of Solzhenitsyn also argue from several perspectives. First, they note that Solzhenitsyn does not fully understand Western foreign policy. In his speeches in the West, Solzhenitsyn has implied that Western foreign policy is primarily concerned with helping underdeveloped nations while Soviet foreign policy is aimed at the domination and exploitation of these countries. Western critics argue that the foreign policy strategies of the two societies are not that distinct. The critics claim that Solzhenitsyn has a very naive view of American foreign goals. The claim is that both American and Soviet foreign policy are primarily concerned with promoting their respective national interests rather than being determined by moral guide-

lines. Melvin Gurtov in his essay entitled "Return To The Cold War" writes:

As for the United States, he seems unaware of the American share of responsibility for bringing on the Cold War between 1945 and 1947; of the numerous United States interventions in the Third World; of the long period of hostility toward China; of the "Lost Crusade" in Indochina(are the Pentagon Papers unavailable in Russian?); and within the United States, of Watergate and various economic "crises" manipulated by corporate blocs.<sup>6</sup>

Lynn Turgeon suggests that American foreign aid to the Third World is more an effort to keep the United States' economy at full employment than an altruistic response to the problem of poverty in underdeveloped nations.<sup>7</sup> The critics argue more generally that Solzhenitsyn fails to recognize the realities of international relations. The world is not divided into good guys and bad guys as Solzhenitsyn implies, but into two supercultures that want to be as influential as possible in the world.

Finally, Western critics argue that Solzhenitsyn encourages a return to the Cold War. They argue that Solzhenitsyn encourages confrontation with the Soviet Union at every opportunity rather than realizing the utility of negotiation and compromise in the settlement of international disputes.<sup>8</sup> The critics suggest that with the destructive capability of nuclear arms it is a fatal mistake to encourage dependence on economic and military confrontation as the primary tool for settling international differences.

What Are We To Do?

On Moral Fiction by John Gardner is a critique of modern

Western literature. He states that contemporary Western literature takes a neutral stance when the central characters face moral crises. Their characters "Refuse to take any bold, potentially embarrassing moral stand."<sup>9</sup> For Gardner great art must address one essential question: "What are we to do?".<sup>10</sup>

Solzhenitsyn does not shy away from this question. His heroes attempt to think through answers to their moral problems. Individuals may always criticize Solzhenitsyn for the perspectives that his characters adopt, but they cannot legitimately say that they refuse to address the moral issues. Solzhenitsyn attempts to identify the problems of his society. Solzhenitsyn's literature does not allow its readers to claim that they are either unaware of events that are happening in the world or that they have no idea of the "proper" moral response given a particular moral crisis. His literature offers no room for moral blindness. His literature and speeches dare to say that something is wrong in the world and he attempts to provide his readers with solutions. To that extent Solzhenitsyn has given his readers his best.

Readers must evaluate Solzhenitsyn's moral claims for themselves. Some readers could decide that Solzhenitsyn is just another in the long line of contemporary Jeremiahs that predict the downfall of the West. Solzhenitsyn's warnings and advice have few, if any, significant impacts for those readers.

Alternatively, some readers may find that they agree with Solzhenitsyn's view of the world and his moral standards. They should try to lead lives that are consistent with the

principles outlined in his literature. His literature provides a standard by which some actions may be judged.

## NOTES FOR CONCLUSION

1. Kurt Vonnegut, Jailbird (New York: Delacorte Press Seymour Lawrence, 1979), p. x.
2. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago Three, p. 437.
3. Ibid., p. 474.
4. Ibid., p. 475.
5. Ibid.
6. Melvin Gurtov, "Return to the Cold War," in Detente. Prospects for Democracy and Dictatorship, ed. Alex Simirenko, pp. 75-76.
7. Lynn Turgeon, "In Defense of Detente," in Detente. Prospects for Democracy and Dictatorship, ed. Alex Simirenko, p. 82.
8. Gurtov, "Return to the Cold War," in Detente. Prospects for Democracy and Dictatorship, ed. Alex Simirenko, pp.75-78.
9. Gardner, On Moral Fiction, p. 89.
10. Ibid.

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