

THE SOLZHENITSYN READER

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*New and Essential Writings*

1947–2005



EDITED BY

*Edward E. Ericson, Jr., and Daniel J. Mahoney*

ISI BOOKS  
2006

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Second Printing, January 2007

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Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr Isaevich, 1918–

The Solzhenitsyn reader : new and essential writings, 1947–2005 /  
edited by Edward E. Ericson, Jr. and Daniel J. Mahoney. — 1st ed. —  
Wilmington, DE : ISI Books, c2006.

p. ; cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-933859-00-2

ISBN-10: 1-933859-00-8

1. Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr Isaevich, 1918– —Translations into  
English. 2. Russian literature—Translations into English. I. Ericson,  
Edward E. II. Mahoney, Daniel F. III. Title.

PG3488.O4 A2 2006

2006929181

891.78/4209—dc22

0611

Published in the United States by:  
ISI Books  
Intercollegiate Studies Institute  
Post Office Box 4431  
Wilmington, DE 19807-0431

Interior design by Beer Editorial and Design  
Manufactured in the United States of America

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## Acknowledgments

This book was conceived in the winter and spring of 2003, in the months leading up to a conference that was held at Harvard University to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's much-discussed Harvard commencement address. Prior to participating in that exhilarating conference, we coeditors had, in solo performances, shared our knowledge of and appreciation for Solzhenitsyn in many classrooms, at scholarly conventions, to various public gatherings large and small, via radio and television, and through numerous publications. We repeatedly encountered, to our deep satisfaction, a high level of interest and engagement among our audiences. When an auditor would ask what to do next, however, we found ourselves resorting to book lists too bulky and diffuse to be immediately useful. If only, we would sigh to ourselves, there were a single volume that brought together a wide range of the variegated output of "our" prolific writer. This book answers that felt need.

Our collaboration is rooted in a personal friendship of more than a dozen years. It began with a shared intellectual interest in Solzhenitsyn. Then, as a stone dropped in water sends circles of little waves rippling out, we discovered countless other mutual affinities and loyalties, and our friendship broadened and deepened. Even so, Solzhenitsyn has remained our core interest. Working together closely has brought surprisingly little tension into the alliance of two independent-minded men. Instead, the predominant mood has been—as improbable as it may sound—one of joy. We were working eagerly and contentedly on a project in which we believed deeply. Furthermore, our initial high hopes for the project have been greatly exceeded by the result.

This happy outcome owes much to others. We offer sincere thanks to Carmella Murphy and Janet Truscott of Assumption College for their generous interventions on the computer and for helping with various clerical matters. We are similarly indebted to student assistant Leslie Harkema of Calvin College, who, among her tasks, worked what her "boss" considered

computer magic as she put hard-copy texts through the scanner and brought them forth in electronic type. Our faithful friend Alexis Klimoff of Vassar College put his superior translation skills at our disposal for parts of *Two Hundred Years Together*, and his points of advice and encouragement are too numerous to list. Various other translations by Alex are noted in the section of credits below. Michael Nicholson of the University College at Oxford University, another exceptionally gifted translator, prepared the English texts of those parts of *March 1917* and *April 1917* that appear in this volume. We pay special homage to the primary English-language translator of Solzhenitsyn's literary works, Harry Willetts, who, shortly before he died in 2005 at the age of eighty-two, finished his work on the complete ninety-six-chapter version of *The First Circle*, parts of which are first reaching English readers through this volume. Other Willetts translations are mentioned in the subsequent list of credits. And Yermolai Solzhenitsyn, firstborn son of Aleksandr and Natalia Solzhenitsyn, took time from his hectic schedule to render a new translation of *Live Not by Lies!* As the credits indicate, he also translated "We have ceased to see the Purpose," his father's address to the International Academy of Philosophy in Liechtenstein.

For the contributions of the other two sons, Ignat and Stephan Solzhenitsyn, it is next to impossible to express adequately our heartfelt gratitude. Initially, they volunteered, despite their demanding careers, to translate a considerable number of items for the *Reader*. Ignat took on the taxing task of translating some poetry: a chapter from the long narrative poem, *The Trail*, and the three lyric poems appearing under the rubric "Poems: Prison, Camp, and Exile." In addition (and in order of their placement in the volume), he translated a new version of the "Open Letter to the Secretariat of the RSFSR Writers' Union"; also, from *Miniatures, 1958–60*, a new version of "A Prayer," the hitherto-untranslated "Means of Locomotion," and a substantial revision of "The Old Bucket" (originally translated by Michael Glenny); and, from *Miniatures, 1996–99*, the hitherto-untranslated miniatures "In Twilight," "Rooster Song," "Nocturnal Thoughts," and "A Prayer for Russia." Stephan's translating burden was similarly substantial: in order of appearance in the volume, the not-so-short story "No Matter What"; selections from *Russia in Collapse*; parts of *Two Hundred Years Together*; the "Cavendish Farewell"; the "Greeting at Vladivostok"; the "Message at the Opening of the Center for Russian Culture Abroad"; and, to complete the *Miniatures, 1996–99*, "Remembrance of the Departed." The two brothers combined their efforts to translate "Playing Upon the Strings of Emptiness" and the "Reflection on the Vendée Uprising." In addition, the pair cleaned up many translations by others, usually for accuracy, sometimes for elegance.

Then, as if the great loving care and keen attention to detail with which Ignat and Stephan performed these onerous labors were not enough, we

## Acknowledgments

coeditors found ourselves unable to resist tapping their encyclopedic grasp of their father's *oeuvre* and began peppering them with questions. A four-sided friendship that had been firmed up at the Harvard celebration of 2003 blossomed into a collegial working relationship that we two academics could only wish were characteristic of the academy at large. Even as Ignat and Stephan assiduously avoided usurping any prerogatives of the editors, we editors kept soliciting their counsel because it was uniformly wise. To us, if not necessarily to them, it felt as if decisions were growing organically out of four-way conversations. (And we all learned what an astonishingly supple medium e-mail can be!) It is not false humility to say that the editors alone are responsible for any and all faults in this volume; it is simply true to say that for the volume's virtues credit goes to four friends with one shared purpose.

The editors' greatest indebtedness is to two people with whom they never spoke directly: the author and his wife. Every item in this *Reader* appears with the Solzhenitsyns' explicit permission. The editors proposed the contents; the author said yes or no (rarely no, and then with compelling reason). Solzhenitsyn and his wife never saw—and Ignat and Stephan saw only a relatively small part of—the editors' commentary. Nor did the Solzhenitsyns exercise control over the project. Rather, they willingly and generously supported the editors' work. For their help and for the trust they freely demonstrated the editors are profoundly grateful.

We would be remiss if we failed to thank Solzhenitsyn's literary agent Claude Durand of Editions Fayard in Paris. At a crucial moment he acted as an intermediary with "Moscow" and provided helpful information along the way. His support and encouragement are much appreciated.

As the volume made its way through press, the editors incurred one more major debt, to Jeremy Beer, editor in chief of ISI Books, as well as to his staff. Jeremy fully shared our enthusiasm for this project and brought his considerable intellectual and editorial talents to bear on the final shape of the *Reader*. For that partnership, too, we are very grateful.

Daniel Mahoney would also like to thank *First Things*, *Society*, and *National Review* for permission to use small segments from pieces of his that originally appeared in those magazines. He is also grateful to the Earhart Foundation for the generous support it provided for work on the *Reader* during the summer of 2004.

The editors wish to thank several publishers and copyright holders for permission to reprint their materials; they also wish to acknowledge the translators of those works. Thanks for previously published material follows:

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- “The Larch,” “Lightning,” “The Bell at Uglich,” “The Belltower,” “Growing Old,” “Shame,” “Ill Weeds,” “Morning,” and “The Curtain,” all from *Miniatures, 1996–99*, are reproduced with the permission of their translators, Michael Nicholson and Alexis Klimoff, as well as Editions Arthème Fayard. They originally appeared as an appendix to Joseph Pearce, *Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile* (London: Harper Collins, 1999).
- Harry Willetts’s translations of the *Miniatures, 1958–60*, originally appeared in *Encounter* magazine in 1963.

## Acknowledgments

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The editors are also grateful to Editions Arthème-Fayard for permission to publish the following material that is appearing in English for the first time in this volume:

- The short story “No Matter What,” and “In Twilight,” “Rooster Song,” “Nocturnal Thoughts,” “Remembrance of the Departed,” and “A Prayer for Russia” from *Miniatures, 1996–99*.
- “Besed,” the excerpts from *March 1917* and *April 1917*, the excerpts from *Russia in Collapse*, and the excerpts from *Two Hundred Years Together*, as well as Ignat Solzhenitsyn’s new translation of “A Prayer.”
- “A Reflection on the Vendée Uprising,” “Cavendish Farewell,” “Greeting at Vladivostok,” and “Message at the Opening of the Center for Russian Culture Abroad,” in addition to Yermolai Solzhenitsyn’s new translation of “Live Not By Lies!”

Finally, the Solzhenitsyn family has kindly allowed us to reproduce the following material, which also appears here for the first time in English:

- The three selections included in “Poems: Prison, Camp, and Exile.”

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- The early miniature “Means of Locomotion.”
- The excerpts from the ninety-six-chapter version of *The First Circle*.
- Ignat Solzhenitsyn’s new translation of the “Open Letter to the Secretariat of the RSFSR Writers’ Union.”

A full list of translation credits follows: 1. *The Trail*—Ignat Solzhenitsyn; 2. Poems: Prison, Camp, and Exile—Ignat Solzhenitsyn; 3. Stories. *Matryona’s Home*—H. T. Willetts. *The Easter Procession*—Michael Glenny. *What a Pity*—Robert Chandler. *No Matter What*—Stephan Solzhenitsyn; 4. *The Oak and the Calf*—H. T. Willetts; 5. *The First Circle*—H. T. Willetts; 6. *Cancer Ward*—Nicholas Bethell and David Burg; 7. *The Gulag Archipelago*—Thomas P. Whitney (Parts I-IV) and H. T. Willetts (Parts V-VII); 8. *The Red Wheel*—H. T. Willetts (*August 1914, November 1916*) and Michael Nicholson (*March 1917, April 1917*); 9. *Russia in Collapse*—Stephan Solzhenitsyn; 10. *Two Hundred Years Together*—Alexis Klimoff and Stephan Solzhenitsyn; 11. Essays and Speeches. *Open Letter to the Secretariat of the RSFSR Writers’ Union*—Ignat Solzhenitsyn. *Nobel Lecture*—Alexis Klimoff. *Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations*—translated by a team under the direction of Michael Scammell. *Live Not by Lies!*—Yermolai Solzhenitsyn. *Harvard Address*—Irina Alberti. *Templeton Lecture*—Alexis Klimoff. *Playing Upon the Strings of Emptiness*—Ignat Solzhenitsyn and Stephan Solzhenitsyn. *We have ceased to see the Purpose*—Yermolai Solzhenitsyn. *A Reflection on the Vendée Uprising*—Stephan Solzhenitsyn and Ignat Solzhenitsyn. *Cavendish Farewell*—Stephan Solzhenitsyn. *Greeting at Vladivostok*—Stephan Solzhenitsyn. *Message at the Opening of the Center for Russian Culture Abroad*—Stephan Solzhenitsyn; 12. Miniatures. *Breathing, Lake Segden, The Duckling, A Poet’s Ashes, The Elm Log, Reflection in Water, A Storm in the Mountains, The City on the Neva, Sharik, Yesenin’s Birthplace, The Kolkhoz Rucksack, The Fire and the Ants, We Shall Never Die, Approaching the Day, Along the Oka*—H. T. Willetts. *The Larch, Lightning, The Bell at Uglich, The Belltower, Growing Old, Shame, Ill Weeds, Morning, The Curtain*—Michael Nicholson and Alexis Klimoff. *Means of Locomotion, A Prayer, In Twilight, Rooster Song, Nocturnal Thoughts, A Prayer for Russia*—Ignat Solzhenitsyn. *The Old Bucket*—Michael Glenny and Ignat Solzhenitsyn. *Remembrance of the Departed*—Stephan Solzhenitsyn.

Edward E. Ericson, Jr.  
Daniel J. Maboney

August 18, 2006

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## Editors' Introduction

**B**y all Soviet standards, the life of Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn should never have happened. By any standard, it is a sensational life—action-packed and dramatic. At its core were thoughts that strayed outside officially established boundaries, thoughts that led to words which placed him in direct conflict with state authority.

The purpose of this book is to make the broad sweep of Solzhenitsyn's remarkable *oeuvre* available to English-speaking readers, most of whom are at best only vaguely familiar with his personal story and various works. The purpose of this introduction is to present enough of Solzhenitsyn's life and thought to support a knowledgeable reading of the texts that follow. Misstatements about his life abound. Accurate information is plentiful, however, and much of it comes from the author himself. Many of his literary works are autobiographical in inspiration. In addition, he has written a long narrative poem about his youth and two books of memoirs, covering roughly two decades apiece. (An autobiography covering 1918–74 remains unpublished.) The many misrepresentations of Solzhenitsyn's thought have been even more problematic. The second half of this introduction provides a summary of his basic convictions. After this groundwork the volume is devoted to Solzhenitsyn's own texts, accompanied by editors' introductions.

Writing without letup for more than a half century, no matter how dire his circumstances, Solzhenitsyn has produced a prodigious corpus comprising an extraordinarily wide range of genres. All phases of the author's career and almost all of his genres are represented in this volume. Its sampling includes early poems (though not the plays), early and late short stories, early and late "miniatures" (or prose poems), essays and speeches, and selections from long works: novels, memoirs, books of political analysis and historical scholarship, and long literary masterpieces that defy generic classification (namely, *The Gulag Archipelago* and *The Red Wheel*). This volume gathers together well-known and little-known texts, some of which have not until now appeared within any book. Of special interest are the previously untranslated materials; more than a quarter

of this volume is given over to writings that make their English-language debut here. In addition, some previously available texts appear in new translations done specifically for this volume. Although the editors do not try to camouflage their respectful admiration of the man and his writings, their main burden is to let Solzhenitsyn speak for himself.

➤ **LIFE** ◀

Solzhenitsyn's life is rich with paradoxes. A small-town high-school teacher, Solzhenitsyn reached the pinnacle of world fame. He earned enthusiastic acclaim worldwide for the power of his literature, kudos for his courage in standing up to a criminally unjust regime, and recognition for his vital role in changing the course of history. He also was viciously attacked, at home and abroad, as few writers of any time have been. He passed many of his prime years caught up in a whirlwind of controversial activity that deprived him of the quiet solitude necessary for a writer and threatened his very survival. Amid the exceptional flux of his life, one thing remained constant: He remained committed to exploring the subject he had chosen in youth as the topic of his magnum opus, namely, the Bolshevik Revolution and its causes. Yet here, too, paradox reigned, for his attitude toward the revolution took a 180-degree turn.

**LIFE IN THE SOVIET UNION**

Solzhenitsyn was born on December 11, 1918, in Kislovodsk, a resort town in southern Russia, to parents of peasant stock who had nevertheless obtained university educations. The timing of his birth made him a virtual son of the revolution, a member of the generation known as October's children, in whom the Bolsheviks invested their highest hopes for advancing their cause. His father, Isaaki Semyonovich Solzhenitsyn, a decorated artillery officer during World War I, died as a result of a hunting accident six months before his son was born. The author's mother, née Taissia Zakharovna Shcherbak, was the daughter of an enterprising Ukrainian farmer whose extensive holdings were expropriated by the Bolsheviks. When the impoverished woman went to Rostov-on-Don to seek work as a stenographer, little Aleksandr was cared for by his maternal grandparents, with help from two of his aunts, his mother's sister Maria and sister-in-law Irina Shcherbak. The growing boy was strongly influenced by his Aunt Irina, a feisty woman who shared with him her love of Russian literature and devotion to Russian Orthodoxy. From age six, the boy lived with his mother in Rostov in a tumbledown building, within which their living quarters measured twelve

## Editors' Introduction

feet by nine and included no plumbing. He passed several summers with Aunt Irina.

At the tender age of ten, Solzhenitsyn began keeping a journal containing his literary writings, to which he affixed the grandiose title *The Twentieth Century*, with a subtitle to match: "On the Meaning of the Twentieth Century." Although the collection contained a good share of ephemeral juvenilia, the high ambition that framed his boyish exercises was destined to be enduring. By age eighteen, he began to turn this vision into reality by writing on the run-up to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which he considered the most earth-shaking event of modern world history. Only when he was in his seventies would he stop working on this mammoth literary project, by then named *The Red Wheel*.

At school Solzhenitsyn inevitably experienced conflicts between his extended family's Christian values and his teachers' ideological indoctrination. He gradually acquiesced to Marxism-Leninism and joined the standard Communist youth organizations. His increasingly heartfelt ideological commitment shaped his youthful literary interpretation of the revolution. Nevertheless, the battle for his heart and mind waged by two competing worldviews was in only its early stages and would become the central inner drama of his life. In adulthood his firsthand experience of Soviet reality would eventually cause an about-face in his attitude toward the revolution. He remained convinced that the totalitarian experiment inaugurated by the Bolsheviks gave the twentieth century its distinctive character, but he came to believe that it must be resisted on behalf of the human spirit. He returned with adult thoughtfulness to the Christian worldview of his rearing. Solzhenitsyn's mature articulation of Christian truths was deeply informed by his experience in the prison camps. There he witnessed human nature *in extremis* and learned about the heights and depths of the human soul. His was a faith rooted in experience and severed from every form of sectarianism. With a similar reliance on experience, he described the dehumanizing consequences of the revolution by using his own life narrative as a microcosm of his people's tumultuous story. Indeed, the turmoil of his life served as a simulacrum of the turbulence not only of Russia but of the twentieth century as a whole.

The normal adolescent process of loosening the bonds of parental control was complicated in Solzhenitsyn's case by the poor health of his mother, who had contracted tuberculosis in the early 1930s and would die prematurely in 1944. So, instead of following his dream of studying literature at a university in Moscow, he stayed at home to care for her and in 1936 enrolled in a standard five-year curriculum at Rostov University, where, for lack of a literature program, he majored in mathematics and physics. This curricular

second choice would later seem to him providential, for his science background would help him draw better assignments in the army and in prison. He developed his literary interests by registering in 1939 for a correspondence course offered by the prestigious Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature, and History (MIFLI). Also while at the university, he met Natalia Reshetovskaya, a chemistry major whom he married in 1940. His plan to move to Moscow for advanced study at MIFLI fell through when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.

Solzhenitsyn's first military posting was to a horse-drawn transport unit, where his ineptitude with horses gave other soldiers much mirth. Then he was switched to artillery, soon was leading a front-line battery, and, like his father before him, became decorated for heroism and promoted to captain. Wartime brought Solzhenitsyn many observations of the Soviet regime's viciousness that shook but did not demolish his faith in Marxism. His long narrative poem *The Trail* records some of these occasions for doubt. His career as a soldier ended disastrously in 1945 when military censors inspected letters he was exchanging with a boyhood friend in which they wrote disparagingly of Stalin and speculated about how to reform the Soviet state. Thus commenced Solzhenitsyn's own procession through the stages of arrest, interrogation, and incarceration that he was later to reveal to the world through *The Gulag Archipelago*. He was sentenced to eight years in forced-labor camps, to be followed by "perpetual exile" far from home.

The first prison camps to which Solzhenitsyn was assigned were located in the Moscow area. His health deteriorated seriously, but worse were his psychological bewilderment and the mortifying moral compromises that he could not withstand. As he gained hitherto unimaginable insights into the Soviets' systematic brutalization of innocent people, his faith in Marxist dogma, which wartime had undermined, now crumbled completely. By contrast, he encountered personal nobility in many of the so-called "enemies of the people." Serene, radiant Christians particularly impressed him. This first, perplexing phase of his imprisonment provided materials for two early plays, *Prisoners* and *The Republic of Labor*.

The next stage, which lasted from 1946 to 1950, found Solzhenitsyn in one or another *sbarashka*—first for a year at Rybinsk on the Upper Volga, and then for three years at Marfino, located in suburban Moscow and formerly a seminary complex. The term *sbarashka* refers to a prison research institute, at which incarcerated scientists and engineers were brought together to work on technical projects for the government and in turn were allowed relaxed conditions and generous amenities by gulag standards. Solzhenitsyn took advantage of the relative leisure and the presence of other well-educated *zeks* (prisoners) to ponder his recent experiences and their larger implications. *The First Circle* is based on his Marfino years. As the novel

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makes clear, by the time Solzhenitsyn left Marfino he had definitively rejected his youthful Marxism and was moving toward, though not quite to, a renewed embrace of Christianity. He assigned to his alter ego, Gleb Nerzhin, his own Socratic quest for a principled point of view that would do justice to his desire “to temper, to cut, to polish one’s soul so as to become *a human being*.”

In 1950 a conflict with the authorities caused Solzhenitsyn to be reassigned to hard labor at a large new prison camp at Ekibastuz in Kazakhstan, a camp that housed political prisoners exclusively. This location provided the materials for *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. At this site Solzhenitsyn witnessed increasingly rebellious *zeks* systematically assassinating camp informers and participated in a general strike in 1952. *The Gulag Archipelago* recounts this uprising, as well as a much more serious one in 1954 at the nearby Kengir camp.

Solzhenitsyn eluded punishment for striking because he had to undergo surgery for abdominal cancer. In the recovery room the still-groggy patient listened to Dr. Boris Kornfeld’s fervent account of his own recent conversion to Christianity. Later that very night, Kornfeld was killed by persons unknown for reasons unknown. This unforgettable episode, recounted in “The Ascent,” a crucial chapter in *Gulag*, was a key event in reigniting Solzhenitsyn’s Christian faith.

Solzhenitsyn’s sentence ended on February 9, 1953, the precise eight-year anniversary of his arrest. He was exiled to Kok-Terek, a village in Kazakhstan, and was forbidden any contact with persons from his past. His wife had earlier (with her husband’s permission) filed for divorce in order to escape the unbearable discrimination that accompanied being a prisoner’s spouse; by 1952 she had married another man. Solzhenitsyn survived in exile by teaching high school students mathematics and physics. In every spare moment he wrote, first putting onto paper what he had mentally composed while incarcerated. Later in 1953 his cancer recurred, and soon it was diagnosed as terminal. Given only a few weeks to live, unable to eat or sleep, he received permission to travel three hundred miles to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, for treatment. Before the trip he jammed his manuscripts into a bottle and—in a unique twist on the Soviet-era concept of “writing for the drawer”—buried it. The treatment at the clinic was successful, and he resumed his routines at Kok-Terek. His time at Tashkent formed the basis for another novel, *Cancer Ward*.

In 1956 Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, in an effort to consolidate his hold on power, gave a now-famous secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union denouncing Stalin for deviating from Leninist principles. This wide-ranging attack rocked both the Soviet leadership and Communists abroad. It called into question the Soviet

Union's monolithic impregnability. Soviet citizens experienced the after-effects in an unpredictably changeable cultural liberalization known as the "Thaw." The somewhat relaxed atmosphere benefited Solzhenitsyn directly. Shortly after the government ended the practice of "perpetual exile" in April 1956, he moved to a village in Russia named Miltsevo, where he continued to teach school and write, finishing the first draft of *The First Circle*. His much-praised story "Matryona's Home" is set in Miltsevo. In early 1957 he was officially "rehabilitated," with the 1945 charges expunged from his record. Then he remarried Natalia Reshetovskaya and moved with her to the provincial city of Ryazan, where again he taught and wrote.

Addressing another Congress of the Communist Party in 1961, Khrushchev vigorously urged the intensifying of liberal reform. Also speaking on behalf of reform was Aleksandr Tvardovsky, the editor of *Novy Mir*, who implied that his prestigious journal would accept submissions previously deemed too controversial. Seeing his opening, Solzhenitsyn decided to try to pursue publication, choosing the manuscript now known as *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. The manuscript made its way through intermediaries to Tvardovsky, who, as was his custom, took it home to read. He put on his robe, sat on his bed with pillows propping him up, and started reading. Having barely begun, he got up, put on his office clothes, and resumed reading. He knew he was in the presence of a masterpiece; the occasion required dignified attire. He read it through twice. Solzhenitsyn, despite having second thoughts, had irreversibly entered a long period of conflict pitting a lone unshielded citizen against untrammelled state power.

Tvardovsky approached Khrushchev personally for approval to publish the new work, arguing that its anti-Stalinism would buttress the leader's initiatives. Khrushchev, in turn, gave copies to the members of the Party presidium and called a meeting at which each one had to speak for or against publishing. Solzhenitsyn had no doubt whatsoever that *One Day* was laden with political significance. But Khrushchev had his own ideas of how to appropriate the book for political purposes: The responses of the presidium members allowed him to determine who was with him in his de-Stalinization campaign and who was not. Thus, before a word of Solzhenitsyn's had ever been published, his writing was misused, or abused, for extraneous political purposes—in this case, to distinguish the sheep from the goats, Khrushchev style. Having his work treated in narrowly ideological terms has been the bane of Solzhenitsyn's reception everywhere ever since.

*Novy Mir* published *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in November 1962. Establishment writers followed Khrushchev's lead in praising the little book and politicizing its significance. The depiction of prison-camp life, a prohibited subject that was nonetheless known by myriad Soviets through their family members' experiences, created a sensation among ordinary citi-

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zens. Millions of copies circulated from hand to hand. The work was a bombshell abroad, as well. The West hailed the author as a truth-telling freedom fighter and the text as great art. At a stroke, an unknown provincial schoolteacher became famous worldwide. This fame protected Solzhenitsyn somewhat through the long struggle to come. One unexpected but particularly welcome consequence was the flood of letters that ex-*zeks* sent to Solzhenitsyn. These eyewitness accounts were just what he needed to resurrect his plans to write *The Gulag Archipelago*.

Solzhenitsyn was inducted into the Soviet Writers' Union, but his efforts to follow up *One Day* with other publications resulted in the appearance of only a few stories and an essay on language. Official favor was soon transformed into open hostility. Harassment by the KGB became ever more intense. Solzhenitsyn fought back by publicizing the KGB's maneuvers, often through Western media. His handling of the conflicts during the 1960s established his reputation as a tough, effective infighter with a courageous spirit. His climactic battle to be published came at meetings with establishment writers over *Cancer Ward*. A 1966 meeting was amicable and encouraging; but when nothing happened, in May 1967 he poured his frustration into a scalding letter that sternly attacked censorship and the literary establishment's craven complicity in it. Four months later, the writers' union refused to recommend *Cancer Ward* for publication. During this intense period Solzhenitsyn began keeping notes on events, and these were the raw materials that went into his memoir, *The Oak and the Calf*.

While the public skirmishes proceeded in one dizzying round after another, Solzhenitsyn was living virtually a second life in private. As an "underground" writer he was working on *The Gulag Archipelago*. Only when *Invisible Allies* appeared in 1991 did readers learn the spellbinding story of how he composed this immense work in the face of seemingly unbearable constraints, all the while keeping so occupied with other work that the authorities could never guess he was managing this project, too. Although his intermittent labors on *Gulag* ran from 1958 to 1968, during the mid-sixties he made four visits to a "Hiding Place" in Estonia provided by old gulag mates of his and their friends; and there, he reports, he worked as he never had before. He sent a microfilm of *Gulag* to the West in 1968, the same year in which *The First Circle* and *Cancer Ward* were published in the West.

In 1969 Solzhenitsyn was finally expelled from the Writers' Union, an action that left him formally unemployed and thus vulnerable to legal sanctions for "social parasitism." This action drew fresh protests from Western writers, whose support had repeatedly helped restrain his persecution by the state. Also in 1969 Solzhenitsyn turned his attention to the intended masterwork that he had envisioned and commenced in his youth, *The Red Wheel*. The first installment, or "knot," entitled *August 1914*, appeared in Paris

in 1971 and in an unacceptable English translation in 1972. The considerably expanded final version appeared in 1983 and in an excellent English translation in 1989. Further “knots” were to dominate his writing time throughout his exile in the West.

Solzhenitsyn returned to world headlines in 1970 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. The West cheered the announcement, but uniform howls of umbrage filled the Soviet press. He did not travel to Stockholm to participate in the public celebration, because the Soviet government would not guarantee that he could return home. His *Nobel Lecture* did not appear until two years later, and only in 1974, after he had been exiled, did he receive the Nobel insignia in person.

The conflict between author and authorities that persisted through the 1960s reached its highest pitch in the early 1970s. Libraries followed orders to destroy their copies of *One Day* and the few other published works by Solzhenitsyn. KGB actions against him included ransacking his cottage and severely beating a friend of his who happened to be there, mailing him and his wife threatening letters, and—the topper—attempting to kill him by poisoning. With no reason left to conceal his personal opinions and attitudes, in 1972 he publicized a letter to Patriarch Pimen criticizing the Russian Orthodox hierarchy for its accommodations with the energetically atheistic Soviet regime.

In 1970 Father Alexander Schmemmann, an American Orthodox theologian, had written an insightful essay on Christian themes in Solzhenitsyn’s writings, which, had it been heeded, could have forestalled much of the critical confusion that was soon to envelop Solzhenitsyn. This puzzlement surfaced in the West when the first version of *August 1914* appeared. Some reviews were favorable or ambivalent, but disappointment was the prevailing mood. Solzhenitsyn noticed among Russians, as well, a “schism among my readers.” In *August 1914* the signs of Solzhenitsyn’s patriotic and Christian commitments were too clear to be ignored and bothered some reviewers. Plainspoken critic Mary McCarthy encapsulated the rising qualms in her complaint that Solzhenitsyn was “rude and unfair” toward the liberal “advanced circles” of 1914: “He has it in for those people, just as he would have it in for you and me, if he could overhear us talking.” Thus were the terms set for a major defection from Solzhenitsyn.

Meanwhile, Solzhenitsyn’s remarriage to Reshetovskaya was coming apart. He entered a relationship with Natalia Svetlova, a Moscow mathematician who was one of his “invisible allies.” Reshetovskaya attempted suicide. A divorce petition was first rejected by the authorities but then accepted in early 1973. Afterward, aided by Novosti, the KGB-related press agency, Reshetovskaya wrote a memoir that cast Solzhenitsyn in an unflattering light. Solzhenitsyn has never tried to absolve himself of all guilt for the divorce.

Nevertheless, his second wife became, with respect to their family life and his mission as a writer, a partner in every sense of the word.

In mid-1973 the KGB, having gotten wind of *The Gulag Archipelago* and hunting for a copy, hauled in for interrogation Elizaveta Voronyanskaya, a Leningrad woman who had served Solzhenitsyn as an amanuensis. Against Solzhenitsyn's instructions, she had not destroyed her copy, lest all others be confiscated and the work lost to posterity. After five days and nights of non-stop questioning, she cracked. The KGB got its manuscript. Shortly thereafter, she died, either by suicide or (as Solzhenitsyn thinks more likely) by murder. Knowing the KGB's skill at quoting out of context to reverse intended meanings, Solzhenitsyn signaled his Swiss lawyer to publish *Gulag* in the West. His decade-long war with the authorities was entering its final battle. The publication of *Gulag* led directly to his expulsion from his homeland.

On February 12, 1974, came the knock on the door. Such had been his consistent success in outfoxing the authorities that even an attempted delivery the day before of a summons from the prosecutor's office did not set off Solzhenitsyn's mental alarm bells. So on the fateful day of his arrest, he found himself in a state of "witless shock." He was about to lose his Soviet citizenship and be charged with treason, a crime that could draw a sentence of capital punishment. At Lefortovo prison he again went through the ignominies accompanying arrest and wondered what would happen next. Another prison sentence or an execution, even one staged to look like an accident, probably would have made him a martyr figure in perpetuity. Shrewdly, then, the authorities packed him onto an airplane and sent him West, where the prickly fellow could soon enough become a burr under the West's saddle. Moreover, as he knew, being cut off from his homeland could not possibly be good for his ongoing work as a Russian writer. He did not know where his plane was headed until, upon landing, he saw the sign for Frankfurt-am-Main in West Germany. The world press avidly relayed all the developments of his unfolding saga. In virtual unison, Western commentators, including Western Communists, condemned the Soviet action against Solzhenitsyn and praised his personal courage and literary achievement. He left behind for the Russian public a brief exhortation entitled "Live Not by Lies!"

## LIFE IN EXILE

The West welcomed Solzhenitsyn warmly and enthusiastically. Well-wishing crowds surrounded him wherever he went. Telegrams of encouragement and invitations to speak poured in. So did messages from numerous countries offering him residence. *The Times* of London declared him "the man

who is for the moment the most famous person in the western world.” He relished the prospect of speaking without constraint to audiences clamoring to hear him. The first sour note to mar the good feelings came within days of his arrival in the West, as journalists began to irritate him with their incessant badgering and errors in reportage. The earliest interviews did not help. A 1974 interview conducted by the American TV fixture Walter Cronkite was notable for its ill-informed, uncomprehending questions. Sometimes Solzhenitsyn divulged political attitudes that caught his interlocutors off guard and discomfited them. Nagging second thoughts about this exile started spreading among Westerners.

Solzhenitsyn made Zurich, Switzerland, his first Western residence. His wife and sons joined him there. Their house, close to the street, offered no cushion from noise and well-meaning tourists. One of his various favorable impressions of Switzerland came when he observed direct democracy in action in the canton of Appenzell. He saw a connection between the localism of Swiss-style politics and the grassroots democracy of Russia’s nineteenth-century *zemstvos*, and the town-hall meetings he later witnessed in Vermont would further reinforce his sympathy for democracy from the bottom up. Years later, these various models would guide his specific democratic proposals for post-Soviet Russia in *Rebuilding Russia*. While in Switzerland, Solzhenitsyn also set up the Russian Social Fund to hold all royalties earned worldwide from *The Gulag Archipelago* and to disburse the money covertly to political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, along with their families. Later, former *zeks* were included among the beneficiaries.

By 1974 the reservations about Solzhenitsyn among Western elites were congealing into a negative consensus. As the monumental *Gulag Archipelago* was appearing, so was *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*, initially sent privately to its intended audience in 1973 but released to the public when it received no acknowledgment. Oddly, Western opinion about him was affected less by the big book than by the little letter. This brief proto-programmatic statement urged the Soviet leaders, who could hardly be asked to relinquish power, simply to drop their pretenses of truly believing in Marxism anymore and, for starters, to embrace moderate reforms. Westerners commonly interpreted his gradualist proposals as evidence of his “authoritarianism.” This charge was to become an endlessly repeated staple in the solidifying caricature of Solzhenitsyn. Journalist Jeri Laber, who in 1972 had praised Solzhenitsyn as a person and a writer, in 1974 declared his art dull and his politics reactionary. Her memorable generalization, “he is not the ‘liberal’ we would like him to be,” was echoed in other commentaries, often with eerily similar wording.

After having gotten settled into the West, Solzhenitsyn fulfilled a sense of obligation by hitting the lecture circuit. In 1975 he delivered addresses in

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New York and Washington to the AFL-CIO, America's leading labor organization; he also spoke to an appreciative group of US senators. These discourses, along with two presentations he made in England in 1976, are available in the collection entitled *Warning to the West*. By this time, the press's coverage of Solzhenitsyn had become decidedly chilly. President Gerald Ford, prompted by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, refused to invite Solzhenitsyn to the White House, privately calling him "a goddam horse's ass." Ford's snub was universally condemned, and the Republican Party's platform of 1976 included a Solzhenitsyn-inspired plank called "Morality in Foreign Policy." The one Western country where Solzhenitsyn had a profound and enduring influence was France, where the revelations in *The Gulag Archipelago* led a whole generation of young intellectuals to abandon Marxism.

By early 1975 Solzhenitsyn was hunting for a new home in North America. After searching fruitlessly in Ontario, he accepted, sight unseen, a friend's recommendation of a fifty-acre wooded hillside property above the village of Cavendish, Vermont, and took occupancy in 1976. Alongside its ample but not extravagant chalet, he ordered built a three-story library, including a small chapel. This location provided quiet for writing, access to America's extensive interlibrary loan service, and education in a major language for his three sons, Yermolai, Ignat, and Stephan. (Mrs. Solzhenitsyn's son by a previous marriage and her mother also were part of the household.) Solzhenitsyn had a simple chain-link fence put up around the property to keep out hunters and snowmobilers—and, Mrs. Solzhenitsyn smilingly added later, journalists. The modest fence led some journalists to speculate wildly—and from a distance—about why the ex-prisoner felt he needed it. The sons went to American public schools. The family went to the Orthodox church in nearby Claremont, New Hampshire. Mr. and Mrs. Solzhenitsyn attended a Cavendish town meeting to introduce themselves and explain their situation, were welcomed by a warm ovation, and established easy relations with the locals, who casually but carefully guarded the newcomers' privacy. Solzhenitsyn had finally attained optimum conditions for his life as a writer, and he took full advantage of them.

In 1978 Solzhenitsyn agreed to deliver the commencement address at Harvard University. The speech itemized the West's current failings, located their genesis in Enlightenment thought, and cast its proposed remedies in philosophical and religious terms that extended even to the proper relationship between body and soul. Before the well-represented press and intelligentsia, he spoke of journalists' hasty and superficial judgments and intellectuals' loss of will and decline of courage. This address immediately became Solzhenitsyn's best-known utterance; and, although it elicited numerous appreciative responses, they were overshadowed by the many vocifer-

ous objections. This address confirmed the media's negative view of Solzhenitsyn. More importantly, press coverage of the event implanted wariness about him in the public consciousness.

Solzhenitsyn returned to his seclusion and his writing. But he was not as withdrawn as he may have seemed. *The Little Grain Managed to Land Between the Millstones*, memoirs about his two decades in exile, chronicles many experiences he had and persons he dealt with. Quite a few events took place in public but drew little press attention. In 1982 he presented speeches in Japan and Taiwan. Somewhat greater notice attended his 1983 visit to England to receive the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. While there, he also met with many luminaries: Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher for a substantive conversation, the archbishop of Canterbury for a dinner, Prince Charles and Princess Diana for a luncheon. Also, he sat for a television interview with Malcolm Muggeridge. Later in 1983 he gave an interview to Bernard Pivot for a highly regarded French television program. In all, Pivot interviewed him four times; these appearances responded to French interest in the Russian author and fueled it further.

In the second half of the 1980s, Solzhenitsyn followed closely the momentous events unfolding in the Soviet Union. For twenty years he had been predicting, as few had been, that Soviet communism was on its way to dying. He had also been anticipating that during his lifetime he would return home in the flesh—which, all things considered, was essentially the same forecast. Not even his close friends could bring themselves to believe him, but now it seemed increasingly possible that his prophecies would be fulfilled. In 1988 a Moscow periodical tested Mikhail Gorbachev's announced new policy of *glasnost* ("openness," or "publicity") by advocating that Solzhenitsyn's citizenship be restored and the treason charge dropped. The third of his three requirements for returning home—the domestic publication of all his writings—also seemed to be in the works. He granted *Novy Mir* permission to publish parts of *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1989, with other books to follow. At this point, the Communist Party's chief ideologist intervened, declaring that to publish these works would be "to undermine the foundations on which our present [Soviet] life rests." But the powers proved powerless to stop the appearance of some Solzhenitsyn texts, first in obscure outlets and soon in mainstream ones. These publishing events snowballed to the point that *Novy Mir* declared 1990 to be "the year of Solzhenitsyn." Public events moved with apparent inexorability, from the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 to the death of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, when the red flag over the Kremlin was lowered for the last time. The foreshortened twentieth century that began in 1914–17 ended in 1989–91. Solzhenitsyn was ready, and in July 1990 he dispatched a long essay known in English as *Rebuilding Russia*, which sketched practical short-term and long-term propos-

als for Russia as it emerged from under the Soviet rubble. This essay can be considered a sequel to his 1973 *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*, but this time he addressed not the leaders fading from power but the Russian citizenry on the verge of coming into its own.

Solzhenitsyn also was making plans to move back to Russia. The family contracted for a house to be built just outside Moscow, and his wife made three trips to Russia to prepare for the move. Meanwhile, the media, eager to see what political role he might play, impatiently asked why he was dallying in Vermont. One reason was that, before he could allow himself to be caught up in the public life of Russia, he had to tie up loose ends on *The Red Wheel*. Only in 1994 could he refer to his intended masterpiece as “this huge beast now felled.” In addition, as he eventually explained, he thought that entering the arena of practical politics was not the best way for him to help Russia, that his greatest power would continue to reside in his words.

Solzhenitsyn said his farewells to the West in some speeches in Europe. His largest audience gathered at a ceremony in France observing the two-hundredth anniversary of the massacres of opponents of the French Revolution. His most important address, which rehearses some themes in his “Harvard Address” in a more subdued way, was presented at the International Academy of Philosophy, a Roman Catholic institution in Liechtenstein. In the United States he gave a few interviews and showed up to say thanks and farewell at a Cavendish town meeting, where the locals bookended his sojourn among them with a hearty ovation that matched the one he had received seventeen years earlier.

## LIFE IN RUSSIA

Solzhenitsyn landed on Russian soil on May 27, 1994. The euphoria prompted by the collapse of the Soviet Union had subsided. An assessment of the recent world-transforming events was underway, but few Western Sovietologists showed interest in revisiting their erroneous analyses. Nor were Solzhenitsyn's detractors inclined to reassess either his prescience regarding the death of the Soviet Union or his role in bringing it about. Nevertheless, journalists did take notice of his return to Russia. And they were immediately startled by his decision to enter not through a Moscow airport but through the back door, as it were, of the Pacific coast, an entry that was not only dramatic but symbolic. His plane touched down at Magadan, the capital of the region of Kolyma, where the harshest gulag camps had been located, and thus the symbolic capital of the gulag as a whole. He flew next to Vladivostok, Russia's main Pacific port of entry, where four thousand citizens stood in the rain for hours to give him a hero's welcome. Then commenced a train trip, filmed by a BBC-TV crew, that took two months and

ended at Moscow. At whistle stops all along the way, crowds were on hand to greet him. These stops featured lively give-and-take sessions rather than lectures. The purpose of the trip—as well as of a subsequent one-month tour to revisit old haunts and follow-up journeys in 1995, 1996, and 1997—was to meet ordinary citizens and jot down their descriptions of current conditions, so that later he could represent this “other” Russia to Moscow’s ruling elites.

Solzhenitsyn was greatly disappointed to learn how little his fellow Russians had read him, even after his works had been published. The practice of the Russians’ great indoor sport of reading had declined precipitously—as had magazine circulation numbers—in the roiling early 1990s. Furthermore, many Russians wanted simply to forget the tragedy of the Soviet past, in which almost all of them were to some degree implicated. Some had taken him as their moral guide, and others were ready to learn from him. But, broadly speaking, Russians were equally eager to acclaim him for his heroism and to consign him to the sealed-off past. The pattern of reception was generally similar among Western commentators: The man formerly dismissed as wrongheaded was now dismissed as irrelevant.

During his first year in Moscow, Solzhenitsyn made almost a hundred public appearances. He addressed the Duma, Russia’s legislature, and endured jeering disdain from some members. He met privately with President Boris Yeltsin for two hours and met with other politicians at their request. Probably his greatest direct influence on the rebuilding of Russia came through a couple of conferences on local government, at which participants from the provinces were particularly receptive auditors. Whether the issues were political or cultural, his coolest reception came from Moscow’s elites. His highest visibility came through the regular television program that he was granted in early 1995. This program, in which he did not hesitate to criticize certain government policies, was canceled after about eight months, allegedly for low ratings.

Within a year’s time, the novelty of Solzhenitsyn’s presence wore off, and he faded from public view, a process abetted by a certain decline in his health. Although he continued to make sporadic public appearances, much of his time went into producing an impressively large and varied body of old-age writing. He discovered that, now that he was back home, he could again write miniatures. He wrote experimental short fiction that he called “binary tales.” He wrote *Russia in Collapse*, a sequel of sorts to *Rebuilding Russia*. He wrote a two-volume study of the thorny relationship between Russians and Jews, entitled *Two Hundred Years Together*, exerting every effort to treat the controversial subject matter evenhandedly. He prepared for publication the extensive memoirs of his life in exile, *The Little Grain*. And he added to *Literary Miscellany*, his commentaries on Russian writers.

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A surprising development in 2006, however, is a reminder that, since the future is unpredictable, Solzhenitsyn's reputation is subject to change. A Russian television network carried a ten-part series of Solzhenitsyn's novel *The First Circle*, for which the author served as the screenwriter, consulted on the production, and provided the voiceover. The first installment racked up the largest audience share of the week, and the series attracted roughly 15 million viewers per show.

Furthermore, the television screening of *The First Circle* did not arrive out of the blue. Solzhenitsyn's social and political ideas are finally gaining influence among the Russian public and are helping to shape a new consensus in society and government. In the years immediately after the fall of communism, Solzhenitsyn was nearly alone in drawing attention to Russia's demographic crisis and to the lamentable neglect of the 25 million Russians in the "near abroad." All that has now changed. His notion of a strong, traditional, yet noncommunist and nonimperial Russia is no longer subject to derision, as it was during the 1990s. At the same time, Solzhenitsyn has in no way succumbed to the temptation of normalizing the Soviet past by treating it as a defective but legitimate expression of the Russian national tradition.

The sheer drama of Solzhenitsyn's life cannot be overstated. The story he has lived is on a par with those which he has put down on paper. His courage is legendary. Through many ordeals he has remained steadfastly faithful to his sense of mission. This dedication has given his life an exceptional coherence; seldom has a human life had such a seamless quality. He has earned every bit of fame he has received. The future will cast its own judgment about his writings. But he is indubitably that uncommon man whom common men struggle to fathom.

### ✦ THOUGHT ✦

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn understands himself to be, above all, a writer and artist. But the remarkable range of his intellectual concerns and the dramatic impact of his work go far beyond anything that is typically associated with "art" in the Western world today. In fact, it is hard to think of another belletrist who has had a comparable impact on the politics of the twentieth century. No other writer could plausibly claim to have brought down an "evil empire" built upon the twin pillars of violence and "the lie." Solzhenitsyn is a "living classic" in the tradition of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. He is also a moralist who defends the age-old distinctions between good and evil and truth and falsehood, and a historian whose writings have done much to illuminate the complex sources of the Soviet tragedy. He has wisely eschewed any direct political role for himself and has pointedly warned against reductively political readings of his texts. At the same time, he has been a

subtle and effective practitioner of “great politics.” He can be described as a writer who, in the words of one of his characters, assumed the role of a “second government” by guarding his people’s memory, language, and soul when they were in mortal danger from an unprecedented form of despotism. If it is a mistake to judge Solzhenitsyn by narrowly political criteria, it is also inadvisable to understate the political dimensions of his work, especially if we understand politics in the most capacious sense of the term.

The contemporary West increasingly takes for granted a subjectivist understanding of the writer’s calling. It is enamored of the “creative artist” who follows his genius where it leads and who “creates” imaginary worlds that transport and titillate his readers. This identification of the literary vocation with creativity and “authenticity” as ends in themselves makes it difficult for readers to understand Solzhenitsyn’s own literary practice, in which he combines the multiple and complementary roles of writer, historian, and moralist. He self-consciously adheres to a Russian literary tradition that recognizes no essential distinction between the concerns of art, morality, and politics. The distinguished Solzhenitsyn scholar Alexis Klimoff has ably captured the difference between these two approaches: “in contrast to the Western tendency to draw a sharp distinction between fiction and nonfiction, the great Russian prose writers of the [nineteenth] century took pride in the way that their works addressed and reflected the actual historical, social, or moral conditions of their homeland. Literary achievement was not seen in the ability of a powerful imagination to create a vivid fictional world ex nihilo, but rather in the writer’s skill in selecting, shaping, and ordering the data of reality, in this sense re-creating it in aesthetically compelling ways.” Like his great nineteenth-century predecessors, Solzhenitsyn forgoes inventing fictive worlds and, instead, depicts Reality in its grandeur and misery. In particular, he presents the tragic dislocations of a century overrun by Dostoevsky’s “Devils,” those architects of a “progressive” future who tore the world asunder and scattered salt on its wounds. Solzhenitsyn’s art is deeply rooted in personal experience but is never solipsistic or narrowly self-referential.

Of all his writings, the *Nobel Lecture* (1972) best conveys the unity of Solzhenitsyn’s “social” and “artistic” concerns. (All references to the *Nobel Lecture* are to Klimoff’s authoritative translation, which appeared in Solzhenitsyn’s *East and West* [1980] and is reprinted in this Reader). As Solzhenitsyn explains in an absorbing chapter of his autobiographical *The Oak and the Calf* entitled “Nobeliana,” he labored long and hard to achieve a judicious balance between his theory of art and his view of the moral and political responsibilities of the writer. His initial attempts to combine “the two themes—society and art” failed, since “the two overstrained shafts sprang apart again and would not be bent into line.” He did not release the lecture

to the public until two years after he was awarded the Nobel Prize, for only then was he satisfied that he had successfully fused these two themes. Thus, a close examination of this carefully wrought text serves effectively as an introduction to the author's thought and work as a whole.

The *Nobel Lecture* provides a near-perfect encapsulation of Solzhenitsyn's artistic and moral-political concerns and their essential harmony. It does justice to both without politicizing art or ignoring the duty that the writer owes to society out of both gratitude and self-respect. It also provides a limpid statement of Solzhenitsyn's theory of art, which reaffirms the traditional notion of the essential unity of truth, goodness, and beauty, and provides an original reflection on the relations between the universal and the particular, between the universal moral law and the distinctive national cultures within which human beings live. He brilliantly articulates the social responsibility of the artist and highlights the salutary role that "world literature" can play in providing a "common scale of values" for a world that is for the first time experiencing "universal history," the sense of belonging to *one* history and *one* world. The speech concludes with a particularly memorable and prophetic discussion of the power of the word to overcome and "to defeat" violence and the lie.

### TWO UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE ARTIST'S VOCATION

The *Nobel Lecture* is divided into seven discrete parts. The first two sections introduce Solzhenitsyn's conception of art as a gift that finally resists every human effort to master it. Human beings have repeatedly attempted to use it for low or trivial purposes and to "adapt it . . . toward transient political or limited needs." But art transcends such self-serving efforts: "each time and in every usage it bestows upon us a portion of its mysterious inner light." There is something mysterious and transcendent about this gift, so much so that it resists all efforts at definition. Rather than attempting to define art or to enumerate its various facets, Solzhenitsyn begins by sketching two competing self-understandings of the artist. (It should be noted that when Solzhenitsyn speaks about art in the *Nobel Lecture* he almost always has the written word in mind.)

The first kind of artist, taking what may be called the "modern" view of his role, "imagines himself the creator of an autonomous spiritual world; he hoists upon his shoulders the act of creating the world and of populating it, together with the total responsibility for it." But this heady articulation of the artist's task expects too much of mortal men. No human being, not even a "mortal genius," can build a "balanced spiritual system" upon the illusion that man is "the center of existence." The *Nobel Lecture* thus begins with a rejection of that "anthropocentric humanism" that Solzhenitsyn would later argue (in his Harvard Address of 1978) was responsible for the fateful turn

that Western humanity took at the beginning of the modern era. This willful confusion of man with God is the characteristic spiritual perversion at the heart of distinctively modern and postmodern reflection.

Solzhenitsyn openly identifies with the second understanding of the artist's vocation. In this view, the "artist recognizes above himself a higher power and joyfully works as a humble apprentice under God's heaven." Remarkably, his responsibility is "graver and more demanding" than the first sort, because he takes "responsibility for all he writes and paints—and for the souls which apprehend it." But the second sort of artist rejects every form of subjectivism and self-assertion. He knows that he did not create the world and rejects any hubristic claim that he can "control it." Above all, he has "no doubts about its foundations." To be sure, this artist recognizes that the world is shrouded in mystery. But he also understands that the created world nonetheless has an order and structure, an underlying harmony, that he must aim to "vividly communicate" to others. This "apprentice under God's heaven" is acutely aware of "the beauty and ugliness of man's role" in the world and has no illusions about the persistence of evil or imperfection in the human heart. One of the principal themes of Solzhenitsyn's art (in the famous words of *The Gulag Archipelago*) is that the line between 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." But "even amid failure and at the lower depths of existence—in poverty, in prison, and in illness," an artist with this second kind of self-understanding experiences "a sense of enduring harmony" that "cannot abandon him." Rather than attempting to impose his will on reality, he responds with receptivity and gratitude to the mystery of God's creation.

As the *Nobel Lecture* makes clear, Solzhenitsyn is a realist who affirms the underlying intelligibility of the world. In his view, speech and reason can make sense of personal experience and relate it to benevolent "foundations" that finally elude all human manipulation and control. Solzhenitsyn accepts the validity of a classical Christian cosmology and anthropology, one that has nothing in common with the facile modern (and postmodern) belief that the universe is indifferent or even hostile to human purposes. If Solzhenitsyn is a "realist" who believes in the objective character of Reality, he never confuses Art with some didactic or rationalistic articulation of the nature of things. Through reason and experience human beings have access to unchanging human nature and to a moral order that transcends cultural and historical relativity. But Solzhenitsyn acknowledges the important respects in which art transcends discursive reasoning. It is through its "dazzling convolutions" and "unforeseeable discoveries" that art has such a "powerful impact on men." Its "magical" qualities cannot be "wholly accounted for by the artist's view of the world, by his intention, or by the work of his unwor-

thy fingers." The artist-as-"apprentice" comes to appreciate that he is a caretaker of a truly ineffable gift. Art allows us to see that "not everything can be named. Some things draw us beyond words." However "indistinctly" or "briefly," art gives human beings access to "revelations the likes of which cannot be achieved by rational thought." At its most sublime, art provides human beings with a momentary glimpse of the "Inaccessible" without in any way undermining the intelligibility of the created order. Solzhenitsyn's model artist thus draws upon the best resources of reason and revelation. He remains in touch with the underlying harmony of the world and attempts to make sense of its "givenness." This view of art is far from the vain and platitudinous emphasis on autonomy or self-creation that dominates contemporary discussions of art and literature.

Solzhenitsyn is not a dogmatic thinker. But his major writings demonstrate that he has no doubts about the ultimate goodness or intelligibility of the world. For Solzhenitsyn, every authentic understanding of the artist's responsibility moves toward such an affirmation. There can be no humane or humanizing art without confidence in the ultimate integrity of the natural order of things. Otherwise, art collapses underneath its own pretenses, even if the modern artist is tempted to blame his failure to sustain a project of human autonomy on "the chronic disharmony of the world . . . the complexity of modern man's divided soul, or . . . the public's lack of understanding."

The insights of section one are the bedrock of the *Nobel Lecture* as a whole. Thus, they necessarily resurface in various subsequent sections.

### "BEAUTY WILL SAVE THE WORLD"

The second section of the lecture provides a remarkably suggestive discussion of Dostoevsky's "enigmatic remark" that "Beauty will save the world" (words that are attributed to Prince Myshkin by Ippolit in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*). Solzhenitsyn admits that these words puzzled him for the longest time, since beauty has surely "ennobled" and "elevated" human beings without in any way saving them from themselves. But on further consideration, Solzhenitsyn came to appreciate the profound depth of insight of Dostoevsky, a man to whom "it was given to . . . see many things."

In a particularly eloquent formulation, Solzhenitsyn evokes "the old trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty," which "is not simply the decorous and antiquated formula it seemed to us at the time of our self-confident materialistic youth." Solzhenitsyn is by no means a naïve thinker who *conflates* beauty with truth and goodness or closes his eyes to the manifold tensions inherent in the human condition. But in no small part because of his experience in the camps, Solzhenitsyn came to appreciate that art can complete the work

of Truth and Goodness by restoring the lost unity of life and truth. He suggestively compares the old trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty to trees no longer allowed to flourish in our modern and postmodern worlds. When “the overly straight sprouts of Truth and Goodness have been crushed, cut down, or not permitted to grow,” then perhaps the “whimsical, unpredictable, and ever surprising shoots of Beauty will force their way through and soar up to *that very spot*, thereby fulfilling the task of all three.” The modern conceit is to reduce art to a mere product of human making or to discern in it an epiphenomenal reflection of underlying historical or socioeconomic determinants. The radically modern theorist reduces beauty to one idiosyncratic “value” among others and denies its capacity to give human beings access to an order of goodness and truth.

In Solzhenitsyn’s view, there is too much self-indulgence and willful despair in this attempt to define the world as an inexpiable struggle among irreconcilable values. The modernist fails to appreciate the ways in which beauty provides an existential verification of the natural order, or at least allows truth and goodness to retain a tenuous foothold in the human world. Moreover, Solzhenitsyn’s own life and witness serve to vindicate the Dostoevskyan insight about the capacity of beauty to save the world. From the early 1920s through the late 1960s, there had been no shortage of books written about totalitarianism or the Soviet camp system. But none had come close to moving hearts and minds the way *The Gulag Archipelago* did upon its publication. *The Gulag Archipelago* is faithful to the facts and contains many instructive discussions of historical, legal, and philosophical matters related to the rise of the Soviet “sewage disposal system.” But it is first and foremost a work of art, “an experiment in literary investigation.” Its often sardonic authorial voice, as well as its artful weaving together of Solzhenitsyn’s personal experience and the testimony of 256 *zeks* with historical research and profound spiritual reflection, allowed it to capture precisely what was entailed in the ideological deformation of reality.

There is every reason to welcome new works of historical scholarship that draw upon previously inaccessible material from the archives of the Soviet state, party, and secret police. Solzhenitsyn has certainly done everything to encourage and support such endeavors. But an excellent work of recent scholarship such as Anne Applebaum’s *Gulag: A History* (2003) will never displace *The Gulag Archipelago* because it serves different, if ultimately complementary, purposes. Because Solzhenitsyn brought beauty as well as philosophical reflection to bear upon the truth, *The Gulag Archipelago* was able to convey magisterially the sheer monstrousness of the ideological Lie. It illumined the truth about “the soul and barbed wire” precisely because it transcended the concerns of historical scholarship, narrowly understood. To his great credit, Solzhenitsyn understood that the elaborate ideological fic-

tions that defined Soviet communism would collapse once they were confronted by a truly artful rendering of “the soul of man under socialism” (in conjunction, that is, with a critical mass of citizens who had opted for “nonparticipation in lies”). With the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* on December 30, 1973, Solzhenitsyn could plausibly maintain that this was the moment foretold by the “foul midnight hags” of *Macbeth*, the fateful moment “when Birnham Wood shall walk.”

### BRIDGING THE DIFFERENT “SCALES OF VALUES”

The central sections of the *Nobel Lecture* are dedicated to an exploration of the indispensable role that literature can play in bridging the “yawning chasm” that separates peoples and cultures in the contemporary world. Solzhenitsyn’s “theoretical” exploration of the problem is clearly inspired by the great practical difficulty that people in the Communist bloc had in making the totalitarian experience “visible and understandable” to an uncomprehending Western world. Solzhenitsyn sets out to explain this insensitivity, this inability of people who address each other to make out “distinct speech.” The fact that words of warning “ring out and fade away . . . leaving no taste, no color, no smell” is not simply the fault of a West that has succumbed to “the spirit of Munich,” which is “a malady of the will of affluent people.” More fundamentally, it reflects the way human beings come to comprehend the world and to forge their “scale of values,” the “actions and intentions” that shape them as individuals and peoples. Human beings are so constituted to be most attentive to what is closest to home, to see the world through their experience as individuals and as “members of groups.” For millennia, humanity was dispersed within particular communities whose contact with the rest of the world was intermittent at best. Human beings lived within “the scattered nations” and formed “scale[s] of values” and moral judgments based upon their particular individual and collective experiences. They were rarely cognizant of the rest of the world or of fundamental disjunctions between cultures and values.

Solzhenitsyn is not a relativist who believes that something is “true on this side of the Pyrenees, false on the other.” Along with speaking confidently about the unchanging features of human nature, he derides fashionable denials of the existence of moral law. But he also knows that human beings are constituted to live within specific nations and traditions whose disappearance “would impoverish us not less than if all men should become alike, with one personality and one face.” In a profoundly unfashionable discussion, Solzhenitsyn articulates the crucial place of nations in God’s providential design: They are “the wealth of mankind, its generalized personalities; the least among them has its own unique coloration and harbors

within itself a unique facet of God's design." Solzhenitsyn does justice to both our common humanity and the dignity of a world constituted by a variety of national forms and cultural traditions. He rejects facile cosmopolitanism, even as he acknowledges the crucial necessity of rectifying the dangerous myopia that prevents peoples from judging reality according to a common scale of values.

In the fifth section of the *Nobel Lecture* Solzhenitsyn places great—perhaps inordinate—hope in the ability of “world literature” to reconcile the various scales of values and to provide humankind with a “single system of evaluation for evil deeds and good ones.” Literature alone is able to “direct man’s power toward that which is more fearsome rather than that which is closer at hand.” It alone has the spiritual density to “impress upon a sluggish and obstinate human being someone else’s far-off sorrows or joys.” Solzhenitsyn insists that “propaganda, coercion, and scientific proofs,” the chosen tools of a deformed modernity, “are all equally powerless here.” Art, in contrast, can reach into the depths of men’s souls and can facilitate and transmit experiences that were previously unavailable to them. Solzhenitsyn does not hesitate to call “miraculous” this ability of literature to convey collective experiences despite “differences in language, custom, and social structure.” In this regard, Solzhenitsyn makes clear that his “dissident” opposition to censorship and the repression of national literature had nothing to do with a libertarian commitment to “freedom of expression.” Rather, it was rooted in his recognition of the crucial role that literature plays in conveying memories and experiences across generations and among peoples. Literature has a unique capacity to conserve the *soul* of a people and to allow lived experiences to become comprehensible across the bounds of time and space. The destruction of a free, high-minded, and morally serious national literature is nothing less than an affront to the common cause of humanity.

World literature builds upon “well-established traditions of national literatures” and allows the “peaks” of that literature to speak to the whole of humanity in a way that was unthinkable even two or three generations ago. It is by no means an “abstraction” invented by literary critics but rather a concrete manifestation of the “growing spiritual unity of mankind.” Solzhenitsyn welcomes the interest that people all over the world evince for the “internal affairs” of faraway nations, for “the salvation of mankind lies only in making everything the concern of all.” But as Solzhenitsyn makes clear elsewhere, this is a far cry from inviting one nation to impose its political system, even a democratic one, by force.

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WRITER

In the sixth section of the *Nobel Lecture*, Solzhenitsyn addresses the moral and political responsibility of the artist. Solzhenitsyn does not question “the *right* of an artist” to “express nothing but his personal experience” or to withdraw into “self-created worlds or into the realms of subjective whim.” But this refusal on the part of the self-absorbed artist to come to terms with the responsibilities inherent in his vocation reflects a profound absence of self-knowledge. In withdrawing into himself, this sort of artist forgets that the “greater part” of his gift “has been breathed into him ready-made at birth.” With his God-given talent comes a “responsibility” that “has been imposed upon his free will.” The artist thus misinterprets the nature of his gift and derogates his weighty responsibility for shaping a truly common or public world. His abdication of responsibility is all the more troubling in an ideological age when “the same old atavistic urges—greed, envy, unrestrained passion, and mutual hostility”—tear apart the common world under the guise of “respectable pseudonyms like class, race, mass or trade union struggle.”

In an anticipation of the principal themes of his 1978 Harvard Address, Solzhenitsyn takes aim at the mendacities of the Communist East, where “a primitive rejection of all compromise is given the status of a theoretical principle,” and at the erosion of self-restraint and authoritative institutions that threatens the integrity of Western rule-of-law societies. In a discussion that won him few friends in left-liberal intellectual quarters, Solzhenitsyn expresses nothing but contempt for what Dostoevsky called the “subservience to progressive little notions,” which has widely characterized intellectual life in the modern democratic world. Solzhenitsyn laments a civilizational crisis marked by indulgence toward revolutionary violence, an excessive deference to the most irresponsible demands of the young, and contempt for anything that smacks of “conservatism.”

As the great Polish poet and Nobel Laureate Czeslaw Milosz observed in a penetrating commentary on Solzhenitsyn’s *Nobel Lecture*, the Russian writer’s harsh evaluation of the New Left and the cultural dislocations of the 1960s has more in common with the “commonsensical” judgments of the typical blue-collar worker than it does with the “progressivism” of Western intellectual elites. In Solzhenitsyn’s view, the writer’s engagement with society entails something much more demanding than deference to the liberationist and antinomian currents at work in contemporary culture.

In a manner reminiscent of Burke’s *Reflections* or Dostoevsky’s *Devils*, Solzhenitsyn defends the civilized inheritance that is a precondition for the responsible exercise of human freedom. If art is a gift from on high that tests the free will of the artist, so liberty provides a spiritual challenge for free men and women to find a principled mean between coercion and license.

The public-spirited writer must resist the ideological deformation of reality in both its totalitarian and its Western “progressivist” forms. The writer must answer for “the evils of today’s world” even if they did not enter the world as a result of his own efforts. He takes responsibility for the world by speaking the truth and calling “good and evil” by their names.

### DEFEATING THE LIE

Despite what appears to be a deeply pessimistic evaluation of the course of modern civilization, Solzhenitsyn ends the *Nobel Lecture* on a characteristically hopeful note. He concludes his text by invoking the capacity of literature to undermine a totalitarian world built upon the twin pillars of violence and lies. Unlike the conventional analysis of academic political scientists and historians, Solzhenitsyn never understood the Soviet Union to be one tyranny among others. Rather, it was an *ideological regime* built upon lies that could only be maintained through the most hyperbolic violence. At the beginning of an ideological adventure flush with revolutionary fervor for the creation of a new man and society, violence “act[ed] openly and even [took] pride in itself.” But as revolutionary expectations became routinized, the regime increasingly lost its ideological self-confidence. It relied less upon repeated displays of physical violence and more upon the coerced and voluntary participation of its subjects in a phantasmagoric world of lies.

At the end of the *Nobel Lecture*, Solzhenitsyn sketches a path to the comprehensive de-totalitarianization of the Communist world. He places his hopes not in armed revolution but in the self-conscious refusal of decent men and women to “participate in lies.” This is the path of civic salvation. Solzhenitsyn would reiterate this claim even more emphatically in his 1973 *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* and in the manifesto “Live Not by Lies!” that was released to the Western press and in *samizdat* on the eve of his involuntary exile from the Soviet Union in February 1974. All these texts demonstrate that Solzhenitsyn was among the first to appreciate the terrible vulnerability of an “empire of lies” to “ordinary brave” men and women who would opt for “spiritual integrity” over “spiritual slavery.” His insight would be developed with considerable theoretical sophistication by the Czech dissident playwright Václav Havel in his 1979 essay “The Power of the Powerless.” Havel freely acknowledged that his analysis was fundamentally indebted to Solzhenitsyn’s original insight.

If Solzhenitsyn exposed the intrinsic vulnerability of a regime based upon lies, he also highlighted literature’s unique capacity “to defeat the lie,” to expose its violence for what it really was. Solzhenitsyn’s life and work amply confirm the wisdom of the Russian proverb that he cites at the conclusion of his *Nobel Lecture*:

*One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world.*

For Solzhenitsyn, this proverb is no literary flight of fancy. The ideocratic regime was based upon something far more destructive of the human soul than mere violence or physical coercion. It *spiritualized* despotism through its requirement that its subjects lie about a whole range of matters great and small. These lies were rooted in the more fundamental “illusion that men and social organizations can be transformed at a stroke” (Raymond Aron). Art—with its words of truth—exposes this lie in all its sordid reality and thus allows human beings to come to terms with the common human world of freedom and responsibility.

### THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF SOLZHENITSYN

Today most informed observers appreciate the central role that Solzhenitsyn played in the defeat of communism. More than any other figure in the twentieth century, he exposed the ideological “lie” at the heart of Communist totalitarianism. The French historian Alain Besançon has suggestively compared the Solzhenitsyn of *Gulag* to St. George, the semi-mythological spiritual warrior and slayer of dragons. This image undoubtedly captures the courage and intensity of Solzhenitsyn’s efforts to delegitimize a regime that killed tens of millions of its own citizens in a misguided effort to create a “socialist” utopia, freed of conflict and human imperfection. Thanks to Solzhenitsyn, far fewer people today defend the good intentions of the original Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 or blame the Soviet tragedy primarily on the depravity and will-to-power of Joseph Stalin. With unmistakable genius, Solzhenitsyn has put ideology—and ideological terror—on the cognitive map of contemporary man. Martin Malia is right to suggest that *The Gulag Archipelago* is the closest we are going to come to a Nuremberg trial for the other great totalitarian regime of the twentieth century.

Yet a legend persists that Solzhenitsyn is somehow not a true friend of human liberty. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, he is a political moderate and a strong proponent of conservative constitutionalism. In a series of writings, beginning with his *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* (1973) and culminating in *Russia in Collapse* (1998), he has been a consistent advocate of the rule of law, economic development fueled by human-scale technology, and revived local self-government in Russia along the lines of the prerevolutionary *zemstvos* (local and provincial councils). But, with some admirable exceptions, journalists and academics have failed to make the requisite effort needed to understand Solzhenitsyn’s judicious melding of the best of Western thought and Russia’s native cultural and intellectual traditions.

Solzhenitsyn is ritualistically dismissed as a Slavophile, romantic, agrarian, monarchist, theocrat, even anti-Semite. There are few major intellectual figures who have been so systematically misunderstood or have been the subject of as many willful distortions. It is an axiom among progressive-minded cultural elites in both Russia and the West that he has little or nothing to say to or about the “modern world.” Yet Solzhenitsyn has never called for the restoration of monarchy and explicitly denies being a “Slavophile.” He does not share the nineteenth-century Slavophiles’ indulgence toward autocracy (however liberal-minded), their excessive sense of Russian national exclusiveness, or their romantic support for the peasant commune instead of a system of individual land ownership. Solzhenitsyn is better understood as the latest in a distinguished line of what the intellectual historian of Russia Donald Treadgold has called “syncretistic” thinkers. These thinkers have tried to combine “ideas from the West with ideas coming from the indigenous tradition.” Solzhenitsyn’s true forebears and inspirations include Russian Christian liberal thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Vladimir Soloviev and Sergei Bulgakov. Like them, Solzhenitsyn admires and draws upon the spiritual and intellectual resources of the wider Western tradition while rejecting those currents of scientism, atheism, and subjectivism that identify human progress with the triumph of secular humanitarianism.

What accounts for the widespread hostility to Solzhenitsyn in both Russia and the West? To begin with, some on the Left undoubtedly refuse to forgive Solzhenitsyn for his pivotal role in defeating the Communist behemoth. In addition, Solzhenitsyn is one of a series of conservative-minded thinkers who brings together a measured critique of philosophical modernity, of what he has termed “anthropocentric humanism,” with an appreciation of the liberty that is the centerpiece of Western civic life. But it is difficult for either the demi-educated or progressive-minded to understand the politics of prudence. Others, including many Western journalists and secular-minded Russian intellectuals, reflexively identify patriotism and religion with reaction, with insular attitudes that are incompatible with a forward-looking society. In *November 1916*, Solzhenitsyn writes appreciatively about the leader of the *zemstvo* movement, D. M. Shipov, who combined support for self-government with a deep respect for Russia’s spiritual traditions. He was a partisan of liberty who did not want Russia slavishly to imitate the secular West. But Solzhenitsyn notes that the pernicious habit had already developed of dismissing such men as “Slavophiles,” reactionaries. Solzhenitsyn’s comments about the distorted reception of Shipov’s ideas apply equally well to the standard characterizations of Solzhenitsyn’s own position:

## Editors' Introduction

Shipov was trying to show the majority that making rights and guarantees the basis of reform meant destroying, frittering away the religious and moral idea which was still intact in the mind of the people. In return, his opponents in the majority called him a Slavophile, although he did not recognize either the divine origin of absolutism or the superiority of Orthodoxy to other forms of Christianity—but it had become the custom half a century earlier (and remained so a half a century later) to call anyone who chooses to deviate from direct imitation of Western models, anyone who assumes that Russia's path . . . might be peculiar to itself—a reactionary, a Slavophile.

How does one begin to break out of the interminable recycling of distortions and misrepresentations that are relentlessly directed at Solzhenitsyn? To begin with, it is necessary to recognize that the defense of human liberty and dignity is not exhausted by the categories or assumptions of late modernity. Solzhenitsyn is a liberal in the sense that he is acutely aware of the myriad moral and cultural prerequisites of human liberty. As a careful reading of his Harvard and Liechtenstein addresses makes clear, Solzhenitsyn's alternative to the "calamity of an autonomous, irreligious humanistic consciousness" has never been a romantic communal or theocratic society, but rather a free one where individual rights are limited by "the moral heritage of Christian centuries with their great reserves of mercy and sacrifice." Solzhenitsyn's real target in those speeches was never democratic liberty (he has been an indefatigable advocate of local self-government and a critic of "oligarchy" in the new Russia) but rather the diminution of "man's responsibility to God and society." In Solzhenitsyn's striking formulation from his 1983 "Templeton Lecture," the terrible calamities of the twentieth century all derive from the fact that "men have forgotten God." Solzhenitsyn is a partisan of "liberty under God" against the pernicious illusion that men can build a world that defers to no limits above the autonomous human will.

Solzhenitsyn has meditated on the problem of conjugating liberty and the moral contents of life with great penetration and finesse in the various volumes of *The Red Wheel*. These books include profound reflections on the character of political moderation and the requirements of a statesmanship that would unite Christian attentiveness to the spiritual dignity of man with an appreciation of the need to respect the unceasing evolution of society. Solzhenitsyn takes aim at reactionaries who ignore the inexorability of human "progress," at revolutionaries who take nihilistic delight in destroying the existing order, and at "false liberals" who refuse to explore prudently the necessarily difficult relations between order and liberty, tradition and progress.

In nearly all of his major writings, Solzhenitsyn appeals to the indispensability of the spiritual qualities of “repentance” and “self-limitation” for a truly balanced individual and collective life. But he never turns the classical or Christian virtues into an antimodern ideology that would reject the necessity of living with the tensions inherent in a dynamic, modern society. He is not, however, unduly sanguine about the prospects for these virtues in the contemporary scene. As he writes in *November 1916*, “In the life of nations, even more than in private life, the rule is that concessions and self-limitation are ridiculed as naïve and stupid.” Solzhenitsyn thus has no illusions about repentance and self-limitation becoming the explicit and unchallenged foundation of free political life. His more modest hope is to obtain a hearing for the Good amidst the cacophony of claims that vie for public notice. Neither genuflecting before progress nor irresponsibly rejecting it, Solzhenitsyn insists, as he put it in the 1993 Liechtenstein address, that we must “seek and expand ways of directing its might towards the perpetration of good.” Solzhenitsyn’s moral vision has too often been politicized in ways that mistake his rejection of progressivist illusions for a reactionary refusal to admit the possibility of authentic progress.

Solzhenitsyn is, in truth, a liberal conservative who wants to temper the one-sided modern preoccupation with individual freedom with a salutary reminder of the moral ends that ought to inform responsible human choice. Like the best classical and Christian thinkers of the past, he believes (as he put it in *November 1916*) that human beings should not “neglect their spiritual essence” or “show an exaggerated concern for man’s material needs.” Thus, while he displays a rich appreciation of the limits of politics, he also recognizes that “a Christian must . . . actively endeavor to improve the holders of power and the state system.” And when Solzhenitsyn addresses specifically political questions, he does so as a principled advocate of political moderation. His portrait in *August 1914* of Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin’s efforts to establish a constitutional order that would be consistent with Russia’s spiritual traditions and that would keep Russia from falling into the revolutionary abyss contains some of the wisest pages ever written about statesmanship. Solzhenitsyn self-consciously writes as a defender of the “middle line” of social development and in the service of human liberty and dignity.

Contrary to legend, then, Solzhenitsyn is no cranky reactionary who rejects the modern world *tout court*—he would have no difficulty appreciating the wisdom of Nietzsche’s rebuke to conservatives: “whisper to the Conservatives . . . only a crab can crawl backwards.” Nor is he a brooding pessimist who is given over to apocalyptic speculations and cynical despair. The final note in his work is in fact one of hope—precisely because he believes that the givenness of reality is the most fundamental fact about the world we human beings are privileged to inhabit. Life is a gift to be cherished despite

the reality of evil, which can never be wholly extinguished from the world or from the human soul. The struggle between good and evil in every human heart should not be seen as a reason for despair but rather as evidence of a “trial of our free will” that allows for both intellectual and moral virtue to emerge.

Solzhenitsyn told his most recent biographer, Joseph Pearce, that contrary to common opinion he understands himself to be first and foremost an optimist. Despite everything, he has never lost faith in the Providence of God or in the decency and courage of ordinary human beings. It is important to remember that *The Gulag Archipelago* ends on a note of both hope and catharsis. The dramatic third volume pays eloquent tribute to the spirited resistance of many of his fellow citizens to the evils of Soviet totalitarianism. Even *Russia in Collapse*, despite its undeniably bleak description of contemporary Russia, acknowledges those myriad decent souls who refuse to accommodate themselves to post-Communist corruption or to succumb to a pernicious nostalgia for the monstrous Communist past. Solzhenitsyn reminds us that, even after seventy years of totalitarianism and more than ten years of misguided reforms, Russia still has its fair share of patriotic citizens, public-spirited entrepreneurs, and morally upright people of faith. There is still time to chart an alternative path toward self-government and self-limitation. Time and again, then, Solzhenitsyn has refused to despair, because he knows that the future is open and that evil can never triumph once and for all. This salutary emphasis on free human agency is at the heart of Solzhenitsyn's magnum opus, *The Red Wheel*. The tragedy of nihilistic revolution could have been averted if more Russians had chosen the path of moral and political responsibility. There was thus nothing inevitable about the success of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

Solzhenitsyn was the most eloquent scourge of ideology in the twentieth century. His work makes abundantly clear why we should not wish the calamity of a “great revolution” on any nation or people. As Solzhenitsyn puts it in his moving Vendée address of September 29, 1993, “we have all lived through the twentieth century, a century of terror, the chilling culmination of Progress about which so many dreamed in the eighteenth century.” But Solzhenitsyn's critique of ideological revolution, his assault on the politics of that Progress, is ultimately at the service of restoring hope to acting man. Only by freeing ourselves from a false confidence in the inevitability of Progress will we “be able to improve, patiently, that which we have in any given ‘today.’” Solzhenitsyn's work and witness teach us that the true alternative to revolutionary utopianism is not postmodern nihilism but gratitude



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for the givenness of the world and a determined but patient effort to correct injustices within it. It is certainly “vain” to hope that revolution can change human nature, but it is by no means presumptuous to believe that “the social improvements which we all so passionately desire can be achieved through normal evolutionary development.”

That said, Solzhenitsyn rightly insists that we must never forget the ultimate limits of the political realm. The search for truth and the moral self-development of the individual finally transcend the scope of politics. While recognizing its central place for human freedom and dignity, Solzhenitsyn never gives politics the last word.