

First, you defend your homeland against the Nazis, serving as a twice-decorated soldier on the Eastern front in the criminally ill-prepared Soviet Red Army. Then, you're arrested, humiliated, stripped of your military rank, charged under the auspices of the all-purpose Article 58 with the dissemination of "anti-Soviet propaganda," and dragged off to Moscow's infamous Lubyanka prison. There, through the bars of your cell, you watch your beloved country celebrating its victory in the Great Patriotic War. Then you're sentenced, *in absentia*, to eight years of hard labor (but you got away easy; it wasn't so long afterward that people in your position were awarded a "tenner"—and then a quarter of a century!). And fate isn't finished with you, yet—not by any means. You develop a deadly cancer in the camp, endure the exile imposed on you after your imprisonment ends, and pass very close to death.

Despite all this, you hold your head high. You refuse to turn against man or God, although you have every reason to do so. You write, instead, secretly, at night, documenting your terrible experiences. You craft a personal memoir—a single day in the labor camps—and, miracle of miracles! The clouds part! The sun shines through! Your book is published, and in your own country! It meets with unparalleled acclaim, nationally and internationally. But the sky darkens, once again, and the sun disappears. The repression returns. You become (once again) a "non-person." The secret police—the dread KGB—seize the manuscript of your next book. It sees the light of day, nonetheless; but only in the West. There, your reputation grows beyond the wildest of imaginings. The Nobel Committee itself bestows upon you its highest literary honor.

The Soviet authorities, stripped of their camouflage, are enraged. They order the secret police to poison you. You pass (once again) near death. But you continue to write: driven, solitary, intol-erably inspired. Your *The Gulag Archipelago* documents the absolute and utter corruption of the dogmas and doctrines of your state, your empire, your leaders—and yourself. And then: that is printed, too! Not in your own country, but in the West—once again—from copies oh-so-dangerously hidden, and smuggled across the borders. And your great book bursts with unparalleled and dreadful force into the still-naïve and unexpected literary and intellectual world. You are expelled from the Soviet Union, stripped of your citizen-ship, forced to take residency in a society both strange to you and

## Foreword

Once we have taken up the word, it is thereafter impossible to turn away: A writer is no detached judge of his countrymen and contemporaries; he is an accomplice to all the evil committed in his country or by his people. And if the tanks of his fatherland have bloodied the pavement of a foreign capital, then rust-colored stains have forever bespattered the writer's face. And if on some fateful night a trusting Friend is strangled in his sleep—then the palms of the writer bear the bruises from that rope. And if his youthful fellow citizens nonchalantly proclaim the advantages of debauchery over humble toil, if they abandon themselves to drugs, or seize hostages—then this stench too is mingled with the breath of the writer. Have we the insolence to declare that we do not answer for the evils of today's world? ...

The simple act of an ordinary brave man is not to participate in lies, not to support false actions! His rule: Let **that** come into the world, let it even reign supreme—only not through me. But it is within the power of writers and artists to do much more: to **defeat the lie!** For in the struggle with lies art has always triumphed and shall always triumph! Visibly, irrefutably for all! Lies can prevail against much in this world, but never against art. ...

One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world.

—From the speech delivered by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to the Swedish Academy on the occasion of his acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Literature

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✓ resistant, in its own way, to your prophetic words. But the power of your stories and the strength of your morals demolish any remaining claims to ethical and philosophical credibility still made by the defenders of the collectivist system that gave rise to all that you witnessed.

Years pass (but not so many, from the perspective of history). Then? Another miracle! The Soviet Union collapses! You return home. Your citizenship is restored. You write and speak in your reclaimed homeland until death claims you, in 2008. A year later *The Gulag Archipelago* is deemed mandatory reading by those responsible for establishing the national school curriculum of your home country. Your impossible victory is complete.

The three volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago*—one continuous, extended scream of outrage—are, paradoxically, brilliant, bitter, disbelieving, and infused with awe: awe at the strength characterizing the best among us, in the worst of all situations. In that monumental text, published in 1973, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn conducted “an experiment in literary investigation”—a hybrid of journalism, history, and biography, unlike anything ever written before or since. In 1985, the author bestowed his approval upon Edward E. Ericson, Jr’s single-volume abridgement—republished here, on the fiftieth anniversary of the completion of the full three-volume edition and centenary of the author’s birth—and sold some thirty million copies, in thirty-five languages. Between the pages of Solzhenitsyn’s book—apart from the documentation of the horrors of the legions of the dead, counted and uncounted, and the masses whose lives were torn asunder—are the innumerable soul-chilling personal stories, carefully preserved, making the tragedy of mass betrayal, torture and death not the mere statistic Stalin so disdainfully described but individual, real and terrible.

It is a matter of pure historical fact that *The Gulag Archipelago* played a primary role in bringing the Soviet Empire to its knees. Although economically unsustainable, ruled in the most corrupt manner imaginable, and reliant on the slavery and enforced deceit of its citizens, the Soviet system managed to stumble forward through far too many decades before being cut to the quick. The courageous leaders of the labor unions in Poland, the great Pope John Paul II and the American President Ronald Reagan, with his blunt insistence

Loch Wiles -  
Margaret Thatcher

that the West faced an evil empire, all played their role in its defeat and collapse. It was Solzhenitsyn, however, whose revelations made it positively shameful to defend not just the Soviet state, but the very system of thought that made that state what it was. It was Solzhenitsyn who most crucially made the case that the terrible excesses of Communism could not be conveniently blamed on the corruption of the Soviet leadership, the “cult of personality” surrounding Stalin, or the failure to put the otherwise stellar and admirable utopian principles of Marxism into proper practice. It was Solzhenitsyn who demonstrated that the death of millions and the devastation of many more were, instead, a direct causal consequence of the philosophy (worse, perhaps: the theology) driving the Communist system. The hypothetically egalitarian, universalist doctrines of Karl Marx contained hidden within them sufficient hatred, resentment, envy and denial of individual culpability and responsibility to produce nothing but poison and death when manifested in the world.

For Marx, man was a member of a class, an economic class, a group—that, and little more—and history nothing but the battleground of classes, of groups. His admirers regarded (continue to regard) Marx’s doctrine as one of compassion—moral by definition, virtuous by fiat: “consider the working classes, in all their oppression, and work forthrightly to free them.” But hate may well be a stronger and more compelling motivator than love. In consequence, it took no time, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, for solidarity with the common man and the apparently laudable demand for universal equality to manifest its unarticulated and ever-darkening shadow. First came the most brutal indictment of the “class enemy.” Then came the ever-expanding definition of that enemy, until every single person in the entirety of the state found him or herself at risk of encapsulation within that insatiable and devouring net. The verdict, delivered to those deemed at fault, by those who elevated themselves to the simultaneously held positions of judge, jury and executioner. The necessity to eradicate the victimizers, the oppressors, *in toto*, without any consideration whatsoever for reactionary niceties—such as individual innocence.

Let us note, as well: this outcome wasn’t the result of the initially pristine Marxist doctrine becoming corrupt over time, but something apparent and present at the very beginning of the Soviet state itself. Solzhenitsyn cites, for example, one Martin Latsis, writing

for the newspaper *Red Terror*, November 1, 1918: "We are not fighting against single individuals. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. It is not necessary during the interrogation to look for evidence proving that the accused opposed the Soviets by word or action. The first question you should ask him is what class does he belong to, what is his origin, his education and his profession. These are the questions that will determine the fate of the accused. Such is the sense and essence of red terror." It is necessary to *think* when you read such a thing, to meditate long and hard on the message. It is necessary to recognize, for example, that the writer believed that it would be better to execute ten thousand potentially innocent individuals than to allow one poisonous member of the oppressor class to remain free. It is equally necessary to *pose the question*: "Who, precisely, belonged to that hypothetical entity, 'the bourgeoisie'?" It is not as if the boundaries of such a category are self-evident, there for the mere perceiving. They must be drawn. But where, *exactly*? And, more importantly, by whom—or by what? If its hate inscribing the lines, instead of love, they will inevitably be drawn so that the lowest, meanest, most cruel and useless of the conceptual geographers will be justified in manifesting the greatest possible evil, and producing the greatest possible misery.

Members of the bourgeoisie? Beyond all redemption! They had to go, as a matter of course! What of their wives? Children? Even—their grandchildren? Off with their heads, too! All were incorrigibly corrupted by their class identity, and their destruction therefore ethically necessitated. How convenient, that the darkest and direst of all possible motivations could be granted the highest of moral standings! That was a true marriage of Hell and of Heaven. What values, what philosophical presumptions, truly dominated, under such circumstances? Was it desire for brotherhood, dignity, and freedom from want? Not in the least—not given the outcome. It was instead and obviously the murderous rage of hundreds of thousands of biblical Cains, each looking to torture, destroy and sacrifice their own private Abels. There is simply no other manner of accounting for the corpses.

What can be concluded in the deepest, most permanent sense, from Solzhenitsyn's anguished *Gulag* narrative? First, we learn what is indisputable—what we all should have learned by now (what we have nonetheless failed to learn): *that the Left, like the Right, can go too*

*far*; that the Left has, in the past, gone much too far. Second, we learn what is far more subtle and difficult—*how and why* that going too far occurs. We learn, as Solzhenitsyn so profoundly insists, that the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And we learn, as well, that we all are, each of us, simultaneously oppressor and oppressed. Thus, we come to realize that the twin categories of "guilty oppressor" and "justice-seeking victim" can be made endlessly inclusive. This is not least because we all benefit unfairly (and are equally victimized) by our thrownness, our arbitrary placement in the flow of time. We all accrue undeserved and somewhat random privilege from the vagaries of our place of birth, our inequitably distributed talents, our ethnicity, race, culture and sex. We all belong to a group—some group—that has been elevated in comparative status, through no effort of our own. This is true in some manner, along some dimension of group category, for every solitary individual, except for the single most lowly of all. At some time and in some manner we all may in consequence be justly targeted as oppressors, and may all, equally, seek justice—or revenge—as victims. Even if the initiators of the revolution had, therefore, in their most pure moments, been driven by a holy desire to lift up the downtrodden, was it not guaranteed that they would be overtaken by those motivated primarily by envy, hate and the desire to destroy as the revolution progressed?

Hence the establishment of the hungrily growing and most of ten fatal list of class enemies, right from the very first moments of the Communist revolution. The demolition was aimed first at the students, the religious believers and the socialists (continuing, under Stalin, with the old revolutionaries themselves), and was followed soon thereafter by the annihilation of the successful peasant farmer "kulaks." And this appetite for destruction wasn't of the type to be satiated with the bodies of the perpetrators themselves. As Solzhenitsyn writes, "they burned out whole nests, whole families, from the start; and they watched jealously to be sure that none of the children—fourteen, ten, even six years old—got away: to the last scrapings, all had to go down the same road, to the same common destruction." This was driven by the perceived—even self-perceived—guilt of all. How else was it possible for the hundreds of thousands or perhaps even millions of informants, prosecutors, betrayers and unforgivably mute observers to spring so rapidly into being in the tumult of the Red Terror?

Thus the doctrine of group identity inevitably ends with everyone identified as a class enemy, an oppressor; with everyone uncleanly contaminated by bourgeois privilege, unfairly enjoying the benefits bequeathed by the vagaries of history; with everyone prosecuted, without respite, for that corruption and injustice. "No mercy for the oppressor!" And no punishment too severe for the crime of exploitation! Expiation becomes impossible because there is no individual guilt, no individual responsibility, and therefore no manner in which the crime of arbitrary birth can be individually accounted for. And all the misery that can be generated as a consequence of such an accusation is the true reason for the accusation. When everyone is guilty, all that serves justice is the punishment of everyone: when the guilt extends to the existence of the world's misery itself, only the fatal punishment will suffice.

It is much more preferable, instead—and much more likely to preserve us all from metastasizing hells—to state forthrightly: "I am indeed thrown arbitrarily into history. I therefore choose to voluntarily shoulder the responsibility of my advantages and the burden of my disadvantages—like every other individual. I am morally bound to pay for my advantages with my responsibility. I am morally bound to accept my disadvantages as the price I pay for being. I will therefore strive not to descend into bitterness and then seek vengeance because I have less to my credit and a greater burden to stumble forward with than others."

Is this not *a* or even *the* essential point of difference between the West, for all its faults, and the brutal, terrible "egalitarian" systems generated by the pathological Communist doctrine? The great and good framers of the American republic were, for example, anything but utopian. They took full stock and full measure of ineradicable human imperfection. They held modest goals, derived not least from the profoundly cautious common-law tradition of England. They endeavored to establish a system the corrupt and ignorant fools we all are could not damage too fatally. That's humility. That's clear-headed knowledge of the limitations of human machination and good intention.

But the Communists, the revolutionaries? They aimed, grandly and admirably, at least in theory, at a much more heavenly vision—and they began their pursuit with the hypothetically straightforward and oh-so-morally-justifiable enforcement of

economic equality. Wealth, however, was not so easily generated. The poor could not so simply become rich. But the riches of those who had anything more than the greatest pauper (no matter how pitiful that "more" was)? That could be "redistributed"—or, at least, destroyed. That's equality, too. That's sacrifice, in the name of Heaven on Earth. And redistribution was not enough—with all its theft, betrayal and death. Mere economic engineering was insufficient. What emerged, as well, was the overarching and truly totalitarian desire to remake man and woman, as such—the longing to restructure the human spirit in the very image of the Communist preconceptions. Attributing to themselves this divine ability, this transcendent wisdom—and with unshakable belief in the glowing but ever-receding future—the newly-minted Soviets tortured, thieved, imprisoned, lied and betrayed, all the while masking their great evil with virtue. It was Solzhenitsyn and *The Gulag Archipelago* that tore off the mask, and exposed the feral cowardice, envy, deceit, resentment, and hatred for the individual and for existence itself that pulsed beneath.

Others had made the attempt. Malcolm Muggeridge reported on the horrors of "dekulakization"—the forced collectivization of the all-too-recently successful peasantry of the Ukraine and elsewhere that preceded the horrifying famines of the 1930s. In the same decade, and in the following years, George Orwell risked his ideological commitments and his reputation to tell us all what was truly occurring in the Soviet Union in the name of egalitarianism and brotherhood. But it was Solzhenitsyn who truly shamed the radical leftists, forcing them underground (where they have festered and plotted for the last forty years, failing unforgivably to have learned what all reasonable people should have learned from the cataclysm of the twentieth century and its egalitarian utopianism). And today, despite everything, and under their sway—almost three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the apparent collapse of Communism—we are doing everything we can to forget what Solzhenitsyn so clearly demonstrated, to our great and richly deserved peril. Why don't all our children read *The Gulag Archipelago* in our high schools, as they now do in Russia? Why don't our teachers feel compelled to read the book aloud? Did we not win the Cold War? Were the bodies not piled high enough? (How high, then, would be enough?)

Why, for example, is it still acceptable—and in polite company—to profess the philosophy of a Communist or, if not that, to at least admire the work of Marx? Why is it still acceptable to regard the Marxist doctrine as essentially accurate in its diagnosis of the hypothetical evils of the free-market, democratic West; to still consider that doctrine “progressive,” and fit for the compassionate and proper thinking person? Twenty-five million dead through internal repression in the Soviet Union (according to *The Black Book of Communism*). Sixty million dead in Mao’s China (and an all-too-likely return to autocratic oppression in that country in the near future). The horrors of Cambodia’s Killing Fields, with their two million corpses. The barely animate body politic of Cuba, where people struggle even now to feed themselves. Venezuela, where it has now been made illegal to attribute a child’s death in hospital to starvation. No political experiment has ever been tried so widely, with so many disparate people, in so many different countries (with such different histories) and failed so absolutely and so catastrophically. Is it mere ignorance (albeit of the most inexcusable kind) that allows today’s Marxists to flaunt their continued allegiance—to present it as compassion and care? Or is it, instead, envy of the successful, in near-infinite proportions? Or something akin to hatred for mankind itself? How much proof do we need? Why do we still avert our eyes from the truth?

Perhaps we simply lack sophistication. Perhaps we just can’t understand. Perhaps our tendency toward compassion is so powerfully necessary in the intimacy of our families and friendships that we cannot contemplate its limitations, its inability to scale, and its propensity to mutate into hatred of the oppressor, rather than allegiance with the oppressed. Perhaps we cannot comprehend the limitations and dangers of the utopian vision given our definite need to contemplate and to strive for a better tomorrow. We certainly don’t seem to imagine, for example, that the hypothesis of some state of future perfection—for example, the truly egalitarian and permanent brotherhood of man—can be used to justify any and all sacrifices whatsoever (the pristine and heavenly end making all conceivable means not only acceptable but morally required). There is simply no price too great to pay in pursuit of the ultimate utopia. (This is particularly true if it is someone else who foots the bill.) And it is clearly the case that we require a future toward which to orient ourselves—to provide meaning in our life, psychologically speaking.

It is for that reason we see the same need expressed collectively, on a much larger scale, in the Judeo-Christian vision of the Promised Land, and the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. And it is also clearly the case that sacrifice is necessary to bring that desired end state into being. That’s the discovery of the future itself: the necessity to forego instantaneous gratification in the present, to delay, to bargain with fate so that the future can be better; twinned with the necessity to let go, to burn off, to separate wheat from chaff, and to sacrifice what is presently unworthy, so that tomorrow can be better than today. But limits need to be placed around who or what is deemed dispensable.

And it is exactly the necessity for interminable sacrifice that constitutes the terrible counterpart of the utopian vision. “Heaven is worth any price”—but who pays? Christianity solved that problem by insisting on the sacrifice of the self; insisting that the suffering and malevolence of the world is the responsibility of each individual; insisting that each of us sacrifice what is unworthy and unnecessary and resentful and deadly in our characters (despite the pain of such sacrifice) so that we could stumble properly uphill under our respective and voluntarily-shouldered existential burdens. But it was and is the opinion of the materialist utopians that someone else be sacrificed, so that Heaven itself might be attained; some perpetrator, or victimizer, or oppressor, or member of a privileged group. A cynic might be forgiven, in consequence, for asking: “Is it the City of God that is in fact the aim? Or is the true aim the desire to make a burning sacrificial pyre of everyone and everything, and the hypothesis of the coming brotherhood of man merely the cover story, the camouflage?” Perhaps it is precisely the horror that is the point, and not the utopia. It is far from obvious in such situations just what is horse and what is cart. It is precisely in the aftermath of the death of 100 million people or more that such dark questions must be asked. And we should also note that the utopian vision, dressed as it is inevitably in compassion, is a temptation particularly difficult to resist, and may therefore offer a particularly subtle and insidious justification for mayhem.

Here’s some thoughts—no, some facts. Every social system produces inequality, at present, and every social system has done so, since the beginning of time. The poor have been with us—and will be with us—always. Analysis of the content of individual Paleolithic gravesites provides evidence for the existence of substantive variance

in the distribution of ability, privilege, and wealth, even in our distant past. The more illustrious of our ancestors were buried with great possessions, hoards of precious metals, weaponry, jewelry, and costuming. The majority, however, struggled through their lives, and were buried with nothing. Inequality is the iron rule, even among animals, with their intense competition for quality living space and reproductive opportunity—even among plants, and cities—even among the stellar lights that dot the cosmos themselves, where a minority of privileged and oppressive heavenly bodies contain the mass of thousands, millions or even billions of average, dispossessed planets. Inequality is the deepest of problems, built into the structure of reality itself, and will not be solved by the presumptuous, ideology-inspired retooling of the rare free, stable and productive democracies of the world. The only systems that have produced some modicum of wealth, along with the inevitable inequality and its attendant suffering, are those that evolved in the West, with their roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition; precisely those systems that emphasize above all the essential dignity, divinity and ultimate responsibility of the individual. In consequence, any attempt to attribute the existence of inequality to the functioning of the productive institutions we have managed to create and protect so recently in what is still accurately regarded as the Free World will hurt those who are weakest and most vulnerable first. The radicals who conflate the activities of the West with the oppression of the downtrodden therefore do nothing to aid those whom they purport to prize and plenty to harm them. The claims they make to act under the inspiration of pure compassion must therefore come to be regarded with the deepest suspicion—not least by those who dare to make such claims themselves.

The dangers of the utopian vision have been laid bare, even if the reasons those dangers exist have not yet been fully and acceptably articulated. If there was any excuse to be a Marxist in 1917 (and both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche prophesied well before then that there would be hell to pay for that doctrine) there is absolutely and finally no excuse now. And we know that mostly because of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and *The Gulag Archipelago*. Thank Heaven for that great author's outrage, courage, and unquenchable thirst for justice and truth. It was Solzhenitsyn who warned us that the catastrophes of the Soviet state were inextricably and causally linked to the deceitful blandishments

of the Marxist utopian vision. It was Solzhenitsyn who carefully documented the price paid in suffering for the dreadful communist experiment, and who distilled from that suffering the wisdom we must all heed so that such catastrophe does not visit us again. Perhaps we could take from his writing the humility that would allow us to understand that our mere good intentions are not sufficient to make us good men and women. Perhaps we could come to understand that such intentions are instead all too often the consequence of our unpardonable historical ignorance, our utter willful blindness, and our voracious hidden appetite for vengeance, terror and destruction. Perhaps we could come to remember and to learn from the intolerable trials endured by all those who passed through the fiery chambers of the Marxist collectivist ideology. Perhaps we could derive from that remembering and learning the wisdom necessary to take personal responsibility for the suffering and malevolence that still so terribly and unforgivably characterizes the world. We have been provided with the means to transform ourselves in due humility by the literary and moral genius of this great Russian author. We should all pray most devoutly to whatever deity guides us implicitly or explicitly for the desire and the will to learn from what we have been offered. May God Himself eternally fail to forgive us if in the painstakingly-revealed aftermath of such bloodshed, torture and anguish we remain stiff-necked, incautious, and unchanged.

Jordan B. Peterson  
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