

FROM DISSIDENCE TO STATESMANSHIP:
ALEKSANDR SOLZHENTSYN, VÁCLAV HAVEL, & THE 'IDEOLOGICAL LIE' IN THE 20TH CENTURY

by

Troy R. Arnold

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APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

_____ 2nd December 2005 _____

George Gutsche

Date

Professor of Russian and Slavic Studies

DEDICATION

During the course of the research and composition of this work, my father passed from this sphere to the next. Though not my father by blood, he fulfilled every facet of the role to the very end. Without his support and devotion, this work would have never been possible. He possessed all of the characteristics that one witnesses in Havel and Solzhenitsyn's respective lives and works; he was a pillar of morality in the face of adverse circumstances. Just as the rest of the world had tossed me aside, he assumed responsibility to be the guide, thereby rescuing me from that world. Along the way, he cared for me when no one else would, provided for me when he had no personal stake in it other than just me. He taught me that life was about much more than the quotidian banalities with which we are too often consumed, but by our strength of character, and by the number of lives we affect. It is the most invaluable lesson we can ever learn, and served as the prime inspiration for the work that follows. So then, this work is another phase in the cycle of life – and is dedicated to the one who taught me how to 'live in truth'.

IN MEMORIAM:

ROBERT OWEN BELLAIRE

19th November, 1942 – 27th November, 2004

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ABSTRACT

In the following work, I intend to illuminate the importance of the lives and the works of Václav Havel and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. I have chosen to employ a multi-disciplinary approach - one that will include elements of political philosophy, educational theory, cultural theory, and literary criticism. I will analyze and compare their works, the convergence and divergence of their views, their shared emphasis on the theme of the 'ideological lie', and the lack of an alternative view in Post-Communist societies. I will demonstrate that their philosophical framework is not fundamentally or properly understood by the archaic dialectic between capitalism and communism that has shaped academic discourse for the last two centuries. For that reason, their works and central themes are still relevant; indeed the conceptual framework they have constructed can help illuminate the continued struggles faced by 21st century global society.

“Ideology, in creating a bridge of excuses between the system and the individual, spans the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims of life.”

– Václav Havel, *Moc Bezmocných*

“Thanks to ideology, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale calculated in the millions.”

– Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Архипелаг ГУЛАГ*, Vol. I

I. FOREWORD / METHODOLOGY

Foreword

In January 1990 Václav Havel delivered his first New Year’s address, having been newly elected as the first post-Soviet Czechoslovak President. The man who stood before his new constituents could not have been a more stark contrast from his predecessors – politically, economically, philosophically, or socially – as he mused: “I assume you did not propose me for this office so that I, too, would lie to you.”¹ Among the first authoritative utterances of the post-Communist era in what was then still Czechoslovakia, Havel immediately began – nay, continued – to proffer the themes to the people that so dominated his writings: the phenomenological replaced the ideological, the dystopian replaced the utopian, complexity replaced simplicity, and the grey post-Communist present replaced the radiant Socialist future. In the process of doing so, he entreated his people to embark on the

¹ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 390.

long road to reversing the decay. Indeed, Havel was standing on the rubble of that against which he had so long rebelled, on the precipice of the end of an era in modern history. If one event symbolizes that end, particularly the end of an era of modern intellectual history, it would necessarily be the collapse of the Soviet Union. The explanation of this assertion will permeate the pages that follow, focused as they are on two of the men most responsible for bringing about the end of that era: Václav Havel and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

On the other side of the Atlantic from Prague, from his enclave in Cavendish, Vermont, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was putting the finishing touches on *Rebuilding Russia*, in which he proposes the complete reconstruction of the Russian (Soviet) political entity from the ‘bottom up’, and predicts his imminent return to his native land after 20 years in exile. The former proposal represents well Solzhenitsyn’s adherence to a sort of ‘Tocquevillian’ system of local self-government, and the latter the bold declaration of his confidence that the systemic opposite of it was soon to fall. In contrast to the derision it received at the time, this prediction would prove prophetic sooner than anyone would have imagined, except perhaps Solzhenitsyn himself. The Soviet Union in fact collapsed soon thereafter, and just prior to his actual return to Russia four years later, Solzhenitsyn too gave a remarkable speech to mark the triumph of his prediction. The speech was on 14 September 1993, in Liechtenstein, and in it he espouses the legitimacy of the role of morality in politics, whilst simultaneously addressing earlier misgivings about the West raised in the aftermath of his June 1978 commencement speech at Harvard. It was much more measured in tone than the Harvard address, and in it he outlines his balance of a Pascalian ‘existentialism’ with classical realism – at the center of the order of things is the destiny, fate, and progress of the individual soul. In doing so, he effectively asserts the universality of his theme, as he was

addressing it not only to Russia, but also to the world at large. Solzhenitsyn posits that democracy is inevitable, and chooses it “not because it abounds in virtues but only in order to avoid tyranny.”² In other words, Solzhenitsyn is a cautious advocate of democracy – espousing it only to the point where it approaches his most loathed concept: what he came to call ‘anthropocentrism’, i.e. the primacy of man above all matters natural and supernatural, favoring instead the concepts of self-limitation and penitence. Thus, he varies only slightly from the beliefs of Havel in this regard – he remains terminologically sectarian in that he qualifies himself as an Orthodox Russian Christian, where Havel is careful to keep his philosophical outlook relatively ecumenical. This topic will be addressed later, in much greater detail.

The work(s) of these two men may very well end up being the most important of the 20th century. Simultaneously writers, socio-cultural and political commentators, and statesmen alike, they stood as pillars of a moral philosophy seldom seen since World War II, a deeply self-responsible and self-accountable philosophy that involves every aspect of the human condition – what Havel refers to as ‘žit v pravdě’ (lit. ‘to live in truth’, but translated as ‘living in truth’). Both are the rare type of individual so committed to their convictions that they are willing to risk everything for them, even their own lives. In that way, they both demonstrate the strongest of all human wills, emphasizing what Czech Philosopher Jan Patočka – a close friend of Havel and co-signatory of Charter 77, the 1977 petition that outlined the desire of the Czech people to live according to democratic principles – declared

² Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York: 1991, 63.

to be “not the spirit of revenge, but the will to truth.”³ The strength of their respective beliefs certainly finds resonance in the fact that they both outlived the subject of their most ardent agitation, or at least the most perverse manifestation of it to date, that of Marxist-Leninist Communism.

However, as we soon approach the 15-year anniversary of the Soviet collapse, the world is becoming increasingly unstable. Though the geopolitical map is markedly different, most of the world is still struggling, ironically against the ideological perversions of the Cold War victor(s). That is a struggle that may have even graver consequences, as its effects are much less overt in nature than those of the regime about which Havel and Solzhenitsyn were writing. This is also the precise reason why it is paramount that their writings not fade into historical irrelevance.

It is of less interest to apply their themes to their own context, as they have accomplished that end admirably enough on their own. It is far more interesting to consider the ramifications of their philosophy when extrapolating those forms into post-modernity, i.e., the post-Soviet period. It is highly debatable whether it was more productive for the sphere of intellectual discourse, as far as it relates to the whole of human intellectual development, to be mired in the dialectical dance between capitalism and communism, or the current state of affairs, which espouses no alternative political philosophy. To wit, no alternative unless one considers the perverse sort of clash of religious fundamentalisms that prevails in current political discourse. Again, some lessons from the past are quite useful

³ Patočka, Jan, quoted by Battěk, Rudolf. “Spiritual Values, Independent Initiatives and Politics”. The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe. John Keane, ed. Hutchinson, London: 1985, 97.

here, especially since the nature of current discourse remains woefully misguided. Specifically, the Western ‘democracies’, to varying degrees, do not recognize that there exists a stark contrast between their markets and markets that are truly ‘free’. Dating all the way back to colonialization and forward to the present, the exploitation of Third World countries continues – debts are massive, resources are being rapidly depleted, poverty is not subsiding, corruption, dictatorships and genocide are rampant, and the peoples of those countries are becoming increasingly more desperate. For those reasons, the West should not be surprised at the current ire in the Muslim world, as those countries have long suffered under any and all of the conditions above, and to those conditions have added the affliction of religious extremism, which only serves to exacerbate the situation. Such inquiry is beyond the scope of concern here, but the relevance of the subject matter that follows to these matters should be considered throughout. In any case, such discussion raises a crucial question – that of what methods are useful in such an undertaking.

Methodology

With subject matter as complex as the relationship of the polity to the individual, namely in matters relating to the constant engagement of one with the other, it is essential to shed some light on the reasons for (not) selecting this or that approach. Some chapters will naturally require more explication than others regarding their inclusion here. I have elected to look upon the works and lives of Havel and Solzhenitsyn more or less chronologically. Thus the first chapter is devoted to the exposition of the historical and biographical background of each figure. Insofar as they are both exceptional men who have experienced equally exceptional life events, such an exposition is the key to understanding the enormity

of their accomplishments vis-à-vis such events. The next chapter, which is an analysis of the philosophical precursors to their work, is not so obviously relevant.

Since both writers are also deeply philosophical thinkers, the inclusion of an historic background of philosophical theory is quite useful in understanding the foundations upon which their work rests. Havel's work is intermittently steeped with Hegelian, Husserlian, and Machiavellian thought, whether he emulates these philosophers or uses their work to form an antithesis. Solzhenitsyn also proceeds referentially, at various points advocating a sort of Gaullist view of the role of the presidency (one that advocates national independence in international affairs and a light populist, *laissez-faire* approach in domestic matters), the aforementioned Tocquevillian view of local self-government (reflected in his positive view of the Russian *zemstvo*), and the humanist philosophies of Erasmus. Further, his indictments of 'false prophets' and other Marxist philosophers are so obvious as to not even warrant mention here.

The two chapters that follow directly address the works of each writer, and demonstrate that they are in constant dialogue with one another. Largely contemporaries and leading voices of dissent among their respective cultures, there is a lot of interplay in their collective *oeuvre*. This is particularly the case with Havel, who unabashedly exhibits his respect and/or admiration for Solzhenitsyn on a number of occasions. In fact, he mentions him by name several times, and never in a negative manner. The corpus of each writer's work is obviously too great to explore entirely, thus I have elected to include a cross-section of their work according to topical relevance and importance. As such, the analysis of Solzhenitsyn's work will be centered on the Liechtenstein and Harvard addresses, where for Havel the concentration will be mainly on "Moc Bezmocných" ("Power of the Powerless" -

1978) and “Politika a svedomi” (“Politics and Conscience” - 1984), but in neither case will it be strictly limited to those works.

After analyzing their respective works, I will then take an in-depth survey of Czech and Russian societies in the post-Soviet era and examine the extent to which existing problems mirror those of the past when weighed against the major themes prevalent in the work of both writers, as well as whether those problems are unique to the present systems. In the former case, it can be argued that change takes time, and the younger generation, emerging in a relatively ‘free’ society, will eventually render those problems obsolete. This is a hopeful stance, but problems do not simply dissolve under the cover of a new political system. In fact, it can be argued that the present system is just as fundamentally flawed as the previous one, albeit in a much more subtle way. That notion is alarming, in that when subjugation to an ideology is covert, it necessarily becomes that much more difficult to detect and vanquish. Havel had this notion in mind when he admonished: “[d]issident movements, [...] understand systemic change as something superficial, something secondary, something that in itself can guarantee nothing.”⁴ This statement certainly carries as much weight today as it did when he wrote it, as systemic change throughout the entire former Eastern Bloc has done little more than change the mask being worn by the system. Thus we arrive at the concern of this analysis at its very core, which is that the essence of moral codes developed and espoused by Havel and Solzhenitsyn, *viz.*, the ‘will to truth’, is stage center in the struggle for peace in the 21st Century.

⁴ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 184.

The final chapter thus departs from concerns that had theretofore been regional, and shifts those themes developed throughout into the global sphere of current geopolitics and political philosophy. In doing so, it becomes evident that there is a marked dichotomy between those societies in the world with the greatest power (*viz.*, the United States), and those societies with the highest standard of living (*i.e.*, Scandinavian)⁵. Such a digressive manner of discourse may seem deflective at first, but in the end may reveal interesting (and pertinent) conclusions. Firstly, it seems obvious that certain sacrifices are made to maintain global power, and that a higher standard of living is only achieved when a country and its people decide to turn their concerns inward. Both of our writers knew this notion well, as demonstrated by Havel's constant indictment of the Československá Socialistická Republika (hereafter ČSSR) government for their docility and complacency before the Soviets in favor of their own citizens, and in Solzhenitsyn's numerous references to the inward casualties Russia suffered for her imperial ambitions, as outlined in his dense historiography 'Русский вопрос' к концу 20-ого века (*The Russian Question: At The End Of The 20th Century* – 1995). Secondly, this notion is quite useful in charting the rightful course for those nations in the former Soviet sphere of influence – namely, that said rightful course does not lie on the beaten path of wild capitalism and the resulting oligarchy, but on a relatively more measured path of development. The latter approach is much closer to the desired end of escaping the ideological lie, and thus inherently closer to 'living in truth'.

⁵ Data compiled from: [United Nations Development Programme](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/). Human Development Report. 2002. 25 Nov. 2005. <<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/>>

II. THE LIVES AND WORKS OF HAVEL AND SOLZHENITSYN

What follows is a relatively brief synopsis of the significant events in the lives of both authors, illuminated by their historic context. The aim of their inclusion is to highlight the particular qualities of their accomplishments, with particular emphasis on how specific events relate to their works, shaped them, or both. After such an exposition, it should be clear that the events that shaped the lives of these two authors occurred under unprecedented conditions, and thus add significance to the works those events helped to create.

*The Life and Works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn*⁶

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was born in Kislovodsk, in the south of Russia, on 11 December 1918, just over a year after the Russian Revolution(s) of 1917. His father died in a hunting accident six months prior to his birth, and his mother raised him under the very harsh conditions endured by those who were declared ‘class enemies’ by the Bolshevik regime. In 1936 he enrolled at Rostov University in Southern Russia, where he studied physics and mathematics. Three years later, he continued his education by enrolling in a correspondence literature course at the Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature and History, which he completed in 1941. In the meantime, he married Natalya Reshetovskaya, whom he divorced during his prison years, remarried in 1957, and divorced again in 1973.

From 1942-45, he was commissioned as an officer in the Red Army, and saw action near the end of World War II. On 9 February 1945, he was arrested for critical comments

⁶ Biographical information and dates taken from: Mahoney, Daniel. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: The Ascent from Ideology. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, USA: 2001, xi-xiv.

made about Stalin, which were written in letters to his boyhood friend Nikolai Vitkevich. For this, he was confined to a labor camp at first, then a special prison research institute (sharashka), and finally a special camp for political prisoners in Kazakhstan. He was released from prison in 1953, but sentenced to compulsory exile in Kazakhstan, which served as his inspiration for the story “Матрѐнин Двор” (Matryona’s Home – 1963), a story about his return from exile and subsequent dismay at the conditions he witnessed following that return. Shortly thereafter, he was diagnosed with cancer and treated in a ‘cancer ward’ in Tashkent, where he recovered ‘miraculously’ from malignant cancer. One year after Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’ at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956 (at which Khrushchev famously denounced Stalin and revealed the contents of Lenin’s last testament), Solzhenitsyn was officially rehabilitated.

From his rehabilitation to his exile in 1974, Solzhenitsyn’s story was marked by literary successes and, later, increased pressure from the authorities. The first such example was the appearance of the novel *Один день Ивана Денисовича* (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*) in the literary journal *Новый Мир* (*Novy Mir*, or “New World”) in November 1962, which was approved by then General Secretary of the Communist Party (hereafter, GSCP) Khrushchev. Thinking that its publication would be good for his image, and amid dissatisfaction among the people with the pace of reforms during the post-Stalin ‘Thaw’, he found that his move backfired; it was one of the many considerations that led to Khrushchev’s ousting just two years later. The notoriety Solzhenitsyn had gained ensured his safety. The ascension of Brezhnev to the post of GSCP meant the reversal of many aspects of Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw’. One such result was the KGB seizure of key manuscripts

and papers written by Solzhenitsyn in a raid on the apartment of Venianim Teusch, a friend of Solzhenitsyn, in 1965.

Three years later, *В круге первом* (*First Circle*) and *Раковый корпус* (*Cancer Ward*) were published in the West, and on 4 November 1969 Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Soviet Writer's Union. The following year, on 8 October, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his works that were published abroad in the 1960's, though he chose not to attend the ceremony due to his fear of being barred from returning. In 1973, he married Natalya Svetlova, and after the KGB discovered a clandestine copy of *GULag Archipelago*,⁷ he ordered its publication abroad. Volume I was published on 28 December 1973, and was met with sweeping international interest. Soon thereafter, on 12 February 1974, he was arrested, charged with treason, and deported. His wife and children followed not long after, and they briefly settled in Zurich. Later that year, *Письмо вождям Советского Союза* (*A Letter to the Soviet Leaders*) and *Из-под глыб* (*From Under The Rubble*) were published, which aroused even more controversy about Solzhenitsyn's political views.

In 1975, the same year of the declaration of parity between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. as outlined in the Helsinki Agreement, Solzhenitsyn warned about the danger of the policy of detente in addresses to the AFL-CIO in Washington D.C. and New York City. In September of the following year, he settled in Cavendish, Vermont with his family, where they remained until his return to Russia in May 1994. He spent the next several years

⁷ ГУЛаг stands for *Главное Управление исправительно-трудовых Лагерьей и колоний*, or Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps –
<<http://www.memo.ru/history/NKVD/GULAG/abbrev.htm>>

concentrating on the completion of *Красное колесо* (*The Red Wheel*)⁸, his epic historical work that meticulously analyzes Russia's role in World War I. On 8 June 1978 Solzhenitsyn delivered the commencement address at Harvard, which was titled "A World Split Apart". In May 1983, Solzhenitsyn visited England to accept the Templeton Prize for progress in Religion, during the course of which he delivered the Templeton Address, "Men Have Forgotten God" on 9 May and met Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Prince Charles, and Princess Diana.

As the Soviet Union began to crumble under Gorbachev, the augmented edition of *August 1914* (including the so-called "Stolypin cycle") was published in English in 1989. In October of the same year, a long extract from *GULag* appeared in *Novy Mir*. In 1990, Gorbachev restored Solzhenitsyn's Soviet citizenship. *Rebuilding Russia* was published the same year (the following year in English), and most of his major works were serialized in Russian journals throughout 1990-91. On the route back to Russia in September and October 1993, he toured Western Europe, where he met the Pope in Rome and later delivered the Address to the International Academy of Philosophy in Liechtenstein. Afterward, he spoke at Lucs-sur-Boulogne in France, for the occasion of the bicentennial of the Vendée massacre of the French Revolution. In May 1994, he landed at Vladivostok and took the Siberian Railroad back to Moscow in order to gather information on the state of affairs in post-Communist Russia. From 1994-95, he hosted a bi-weekly 15-minute TV program, which was cancelled in October 1995 after criticizing the Yeltsin reform campaign. In June 1998, *Россия в обвале* (*Russia in Collapse*) appeared, just two months before the ruble

⁸ Published in four volumes, each focused on a different critical moment in the WWI era. The volumes are: *August 1914* (1971), *November 1916* (1984), *March 1917* (1986) & *April 1917* (1991), respectively.

collapsed in the August crisis. In 1999, the second volume of *The Red Wheel*, titled *November 1916*, was published in the U.S. In October 2000, he met with President Vladimir Putin, and was awarded the Grand Prize of the French Academy of the Moral and Political Sciences at the French Embassy in Moscow on 13 December. He currently lives on the outskirts of Moscow.

The Life and Works of Václav Havel⁹

Václav Havel was born on 5 October 1936 in Prague, Czechoslovakia to a well-known family with an established intellectual and cultural history; his grandfather built the famous Lucerna Theatre, which was one of the many sites frequented by Franz Kafka. Because of his familial links in the Czechoslovak cultural sphere, the Communist government prevented him from continuing formal study after he had completed his required schooling in 1951. Owing to this restriction, Havel entered into a four-year apprenticeship in a chemical laboratory, whilst concurrently enrolling in evening classes to complete his secondary education, which he did in 1954. He was then prohibited from enrolling in any post-secondary institution with a humanities program, so he chose to study in the Faculty of Economics at the Czech Technical University in Prague, which he left after two years.

Following the tradition of his family, Havel remained committed to humanitarian values via his involvement in Czech cultural life. After serving two years in the military, he went to work as a stage technician. His first position was at Divadlo (Czech for ‘theatre’)

⁹ Biographical and historical information compiled from the following sources: <http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/index.php?sec=1&id=1>, <http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/index.php?sec=1&id=2>, <http://interconnected.org/notes/2004/11/prague/timeline.txt> & <http://fmv.vse.cz/cz/cz/havel.html>.

ABC, which he left for Divadlo na Zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade) in 1960. Beginning in 1962, he studied dramatic art theory by correspondence at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. The first production of his most famous play *Zábradní slavnost* (*The Garden Party*), took place in 1963. The work portrayed the regenerative tendencies inherent in Czechoslovak culture and society in the 1960's, a reaction to the restrictions of the previous decade.

The following year, he married Olga Šplíchalová, and he continued to become more deeply involved in the cultural advancement of the democratic principles latent in the public life of Czechoslovak society throughout the 1960's. *Vyrožumení* (*The Memorandum*) was first performed in 1965; a year later, Havel completed his correspondence course at the Academy of Performing Arts. As his final project, he wrote a commentary on the play *Eduard*, which served as the inspiration for *Zitížená možnost soustředění* (*The Increased Difficulty of Concentration*), first performed in 1968. The cultural inertia of the 1960's led to the "Pražské Jaro" (Prague Spring) of 1968, which began with the appointment of Alexander Dubček to the post of First Secretary of the Communist Party.

Following his appointment, Dubček implemented a reform policy that emphasized basic human rights and liberties. An important essay written by Ludvík Vaculík, entitled "2000 Words," surfaced around this time, which called for the people to confront Communist ideology and regain control of their own lives. The cumulative result was that the previously repressed cultural life of Czechoslovakia began to surface; music and fashion moved to the fore with jazz, rock, pop and miniskirts all gaining popularity.

Terminologically, Dubček called the period of reform during the Prague Spring "Socialismus s lidskou tváří" (Socialism with a Human Face). By mid-summer 1968, the reforms had

attracted attention in Moscow, and in the evening on 20-21 August 1968, Soviet tanks rolled through Prague with the intent of reversing the reform process. They were met by one of the most impressive displays of passive resistance ever known – the Czechoslovak people refused to take up arms, nearly all towns throughout the countryside were renamed “Dubčekovo,” and most highway signs were torn down, with the exception of those leading back to Moscow.

The Soviet invasion began the period known as “Normalization.” Havel was far from a passive observer in this process – he lauded the reform process and likewise criticized the Soviet invasion and the resulting reversal of those reforms. In late 1968, Havel was elected Chairman of the Circle of Independent Writers, and became a Member of the Czech PEN-Center Committee. Shortly thereafter, in January 1969, the most famous of the protests to Normalization took place in Prague’s Václavské Náměstí (Wenceslas Square), as Jan Palach, a philosophy student, self-immolated on the steps of Národní Muzeum (the National Museum). This event marked a wave of new protests, which were again put down by the authorities. Hard-line Communists replaced reformers at every level of Czechoslovak Government, and the production of Havel’s plays was banned indefinitely. In April 1969, Dr. Gustáv Husák replaced Dubček as First Secretary, thereby finalizing the structural changes of Normalization.

It was also during this period that Havel, whether intentionally or otherwise, became the voice of the Czechoslovak intellectual opposition in the eyes of the international public. Having moved from Prague to the countryside in 1969, he tirelessly protested, in his writings and his actions, the oppression that shaped the years of Normalization that followed. His primary form of protest, as ever, was the pen – as evidenced by his “Open Letter to Dr.

Gustáv Husák” in 1975, which outlined the critical state of Czechoslovak society and blamed the leadership for those conditions that comprised it. A second manner of protest was his hosting of concerts by bands whose music had been banned, which proved important in the reaction to the 1976 arrest of the underground rock group “The Plastic People of the Universe” for crimes against the state. Their arrest led Havel, Jan Patočka, and Jiří Hájek to form an underground group that became known as Charter 77, once again outlining the desire of the Czechoslovak people to live according to the democratic principles that had taken center stage in the Prague Spring nearly a decade prior. The arrest also led to the formation of Výbor na Obranu Nespravedlivě Stíhaných (Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted), or VONS, founded by a group of those who signed the 1977 petition.

In a further sign of the debilitating effects of Normalization, only 1000 people signed Charter 77. Many surely espoused the principles held within it, but were reluctant to abandon their reticence because of fear of persecution. These events all led Havel in October 1978 to draft his most poignant work, titled “Moc Bezmocných”, which some regard as one of the most important works of political philosophy ever written. The essay was dedicated to the memory of Charter 77 co-founder Jan Patočka, who died during interrogation by the authorities and under dubious circumstances. The essay was supposed to be a part of an intellectual exchange between leading dissidents in Czechoslovakia and Poland, for which twenty participants were picked on either side, and their responses were to be published in one volume upon completion. Only the Czechoslovak side was completed; Havel and other members of VONS were arrested on 29 May 1979, at which point the decision was made to publish those responses that were already finished. Havel’s essay

reached a wide audience, including dissidents in the other Soviet satellites, playing a particularly crucial role in Lech Walesa's famous Solidarity movement in Poland.

For his role in these "offenses" (drafting Charter 77, forming VONS, writing "Moc Bezmocných" and then proceeding to distribute it abroad), Havel would serve three prison terms totaling nearly five years, before his release in 1984. He devoted much of the mid to late 1980's to writing political essays, most importantly "Politics and Conscience" (February 1984), "Six Asides About Culture" (August 1984), "Anatomie Jedné Zdrženlivosti" (Anatomy of a Reticence – April 1985), and "Příběh a Totalita" (Stories and Totalitarianism – April 1987).

By the time the petition "A Few Sentences" appeared on 29 June 1989, it had become clear that the lines between the various human rights groups, Charter 77 signatories, and 'ordinary' citizens had become blurred. Havel was instrumental in the process of uniting various opposition groups, which resulted in founding and leading the Civic Forum in November 1989, leading to the so-called "Sametová Revoluce" (Velvet Revolution) later that same month, and finally in the declaration of Czechoslovakia's independence. For his role in all these events, Havel was elected President of Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic as of January 1993) in December 1989, a post he held until February 2003, with the exception of the brief period in the latter half of 1992 when the Czech Republic and Slovakia split. His wife Olga passed away in 1996, and he remarried actress Dagmar Veškrnová just a year later, a widely unpopular move. Since the end of his second term, he has focused on his organization, Vize 97, and currently he and his wife split their time between Prague and the Portuguese countryside.

III. CULTURAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEORIES

The themes that permeate the work of both authors have their roots in Marxist and neo-Marxist cultural and philosophical theories, which shaped the authors' respective discourse as much as the immediate historical events to which they were reacting. For that reason, their works and the events surrounding them are not properly understood without elucidating various elements of those theories.

Political Philosophy and Property Issues

Using the popular slogans of "Peace, Land, Bread" and "All Power to the Soviets," the Bolsheviks swept to power from relative obscurity the year before the Russian Revolution of October 1917. In essence, both these slogans center on issues of property. The squalid living conditions for the majority of the Russian people by the turn of the 20th century had led to popular discontent with bourgeois, 'elitist' control of property. This discontent was, in different terms, rooted in the widespread public acknowledgement that the Romanov dynasty had allotted the product of the work of many into the hands of the few, thereby creating the Leviathan against which Hobbes cautioned.

Lenin appropriated Marx's notion of state control of the means of production, i.e. property, into his model of the new Russian state. His interpretation of Marxist theory provided the rationale for using the power of the state to redistribute collective wealth equally among the people, a policy that gained credence in light of the discontent prior to the Russian Revolution. The crucial question at that time would once again be asked at the time of the fall of the Soviet Union: who should control the means of production? In contemporary terms, this came to mean who assumes ownership of property, and how does

this process of assuming ownership come to pass? In the Soviet example, what inevitably came to pass was the entrenchment of a system of favors conferred on those Lenin referred to as the ‘vanguard elite’, the group that would oversee the transition to a ‘radiant Socialist future’. In an attempt to keep internal disputes from becoming public, Lenin decreed that within this ‘vanguard elite’ there was to be no factionalism or dissent. However, transitory oversight eventually gave way to Stalin’s machinations. Contrary to all stated intentions of the Russian Revolution, another form became manifest.

As Stephen Cohen persuasively argues in his excellent biography of Nikolai Bukharin, there was little agreement on how to implement social and economic change following Lenin’s death.¹⁰ Bukharin abhorred the idea of implementation from above, pragmatically noting that rapid industrialization did not mesh with a population that was largely peasant. Instead, he favored a more ‘organic’ approach, one that would grow healthily without unnatural pressure from above. The debate also extended to the transfer of property from private to state-owned, though Stalin’s brutal means eventually managed this as well. As time wore on, Lenin’s ‘vanguard elite’ became increasingly bureaucratized, creating yet another instance of Hobbes’ Leviathan, the Soviet version arguably more bulky than the Romanov one. Additionally, the control vested to the bureaucrats eventually propagated what came to be known as the ‘second economy’. Increasing acknowledgement of the dichotomy between the stated and actual functioning of the Soviet state led to the cynical mantra of post-Stalinist times: “I’ll pretend that I’m working and you can pretend that you’re paying me.” There were, of course, various fluctuations, and the state did

¹⁰ Cohen, Stephen. *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography 1888-1938*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York: 1980.

provide for the citizens on at least a minimally acceptable level, but said provision was largely inadequate. In time, the Soviet people were largely separated from their labor yet again.

By the time of Gorbachev's introduction of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Russian society was in a state of economic decline, owing largely to: years of substandard agricultural methods, an economy that was too dependent on a technologically outdated military-industrial complex, and virtually no growth in the light industrial sector. This in turn led to moral decline, and Gorbachev's attempt to finally implement what he regarded as Lenin's vision of the Marxist state was a futile undertaking at best. This was, in no short order, the result of the entrenchment of the 'second economy', rife as it was with corruption among the 'vanguard elite' and the systematization / institutionalization of favors that would also surface elsewhere in post-Soviet society. It was also the result of the separation of the people from their labor, and disillusionment with the minimally accepted levels of provision previously mentioned. In short, the supposed provisions made by the Soviet state to its people (universal literacy, free health care, free education, full employment, and rule of law) fell far short of being fulfilled. Also, the transfer of public ownership to private ownership would prove much easier than the reverse.

The case of Czechoslovakia is similar to that of Russia in many ways, as the Czech and Slovak peoples were as much subjects of Soviet rule as were Russians. Up until 1918, Czechoslovakia was subject to the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the defeat of which in WWI made the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic possible. There were naturally ethnic problems due to varying socio-historical conditions between Czechs and Slovaks, but efficient government management overcame those differences for the most part. The area of Bohemia (the present-day Czech Republic) was very valuable because it

was heavily industrialized. Stability was to last only 20 years. The events surrounding WWII are complicated and only warrant mention as far as their effects are concerned. These effects include the Czechoslovak government, headed by Eduard Beneš in exile in London, conceding control of industry to the Communists, in order to bring them in line. The three years following WWII employed a system of mixed private control (agriculture, trade) and socialist control (industry). Beginning in 1948, Czechoslovakia had nationalized remaining sectors, mimicking the Soviet Union thereafter. By the 1960's, Czech economists had noted some limitations in the Soviet model, and began implementing new measures in 1965. This is a crucial period in Czechoslovakia's development, as an attempt was made to return to a more privatized system through gradual reform. In the Czech example, this was an acknowledgement that a mix of public and private control over property was the most effective. Unfortunately, it was never fully implemented because of the events of the Prague Spring of 1968, when the reform movement was crushed by force. Though it took 20 years to manifest itself, the ineffectiveness of the Soviet model (as in the U.S.S.R. also) was plain by the time of the Velvet Revolution in November 1989.¹¹

An Aside About Cultural Theory

The distinction between 'elite' culture and popular culture has purely Marxist origins, as put forth by scholars Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*. Members of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School of Social Theory, they persuasively argue that culture had historically been an instrument of social

¹¹ For further reading on the events surrounding the Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution, refer to Eyal, Gil. *The Origins of Postcommunist Elites: From Prague Spring to the Breakup of Czechoslovakia*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN: 2003.

hegemony. Following this view, it was merely the transference of the notion of ‘oppressor and oppressed’, standing in constant opposition to and agitation with one another, to the cultural framework. Within this framework, the ‘oppressor’ becomes the determinant of what receives the ‘elite’ label, and what is subsequently left over is disseminated among the ‘oppressed’. At exactly that point popular culture becomes either some product handed to the ‘oppressed’ as a diversionary tool, or perhaps a product created by the ‘oppressed’ in order to antagonize the ‘oppressor’. Adopting this model is tantamount to the admission that the ‘oppressed’ have no concept of culture on their own, and moreover that they do not even need to have one. More importantly, this model fails to address the most important question: who makes ‘popular’ culture (or culture, ‘popular’)? In following the assertion that the ‘elite’ are free to choose and discard whatever culture they please (e.g. the ‘left over’ theory), another question arises: does some element within the ‘elite’ produce the culture or do they obtain it from some other element? The ‘left over’ theory is indeed one that emanates from the top down in a two-tiered system, one that becomes anachronistic and obsolete once a third element is introduced, much less once societies become stratified further.

As a further point of reference regarding cultural theory, one can look to Jean Baudrillard, who conceptualized and made famous the idea of *simulacra*, itself an extension of Marx’s notion of *commodity fetishism*. *Simulacra* refer to the idea that material adornments have acquired the character “of endless copies that no longer allude to any original,” and comprise his formulation of *hyperreality* – the idea that one’s entire world need not refer to any original,

either.¹² Following the theories of Baudrillard, Adorno and Horkheimer, somewhere along the evolutionary trail toward the capitalism of today, we witness the supplanting of the intellectual elite by the economic elite in the public conscience. As capitalism progresses further, the gap between the two inherently widens. This was particularly important in that it actualized the possibility for the replacement of aesthetic fulfillment with that of material acquisition as the systematic element to which the *populus* can aspire. The old system is thus rendered inferior, since anyone with the desire for any material object is able, at the very least, to own his or her own version of that object, however simulated in form. The overproduction and ready availability of material adornments that the capitalist system furnishes thereby comprises a fabricated reality, predicated itself on the notion that acquisition of those adornments leads to some sense of wholeness. In the process of forging this system, the ordinary individual's needs, feelings, and desire to live in normalcy are superceded by the 'dream'. In order to live that dream, one necessarily begins to 'žít v leži' (live in a lie), which Havel formulated as the obvious antithesis to 'living in truth'.

In the Soviet era, that lie took the form of Marxist-Leninist ideology, with its semantically empty slogans and illusory promises. As Havel notes, "a slogan is really a sign."¹³ These signs make up a larger body of deflection, and the study of what semantic values are placed upon them (called *semiotics*) is quite useful in analyzing the mechanisms of the ideological lie. In the ideological context one would look at a common slogan, such as the GSCP declaring "Вперед!" ('vpered' – literally, 'Forward!' but understood to imply 'to

¹² Baudrillard, Jean. "On Consumer Society." Rethinking the Subject: An Anthology of Contemporary European Social Thought. Edited by James Faubion, Westview Press, Boulder, CO: 1995, 193.

¹³ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 132.

the radiant Socialist future'), and deconstruct it according to the semantic value attached to it. In the same way, one would look at advertisements in modern media, or the constant references to catch words such as 'freedom' and 'democracy' less for their actual semantic value, which is practically nonexistent, than the pragmatic purpose they serve. An excellent historical example of such deconstruction follows:

“Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité! –

Freedom in the shirt unbuttoned before execution.

Equality in the constant speed of the guillotine’s fall on different necks.

Fraternity in some dubious paradise ruled by a Supreme Being!”¹⁴

Havel, who I doubt had semiotics in mind when writing this, thus dismantles the slogan that drove the French Revolution in one fell swoop, with Robespierre likely turning in his grave. In any case, both Havel and Solzhenistyn are meticulous practitioners of such deconstruction; the practice is ubiquitous in their writing. The result of such an approach when analyzing any society or movement, present or past, intrinsically separates truth from lies in that society or movement, which renders the approach quite effective.

From this, it should now be apparent that the steady accumulation, observation, and interpretation of such signs/symbols will help the astute 'reader' to understand that elements of a system are built on half-truths and misrepresentation. Alienated thus by the superficiality of such a system, certain self-responsible and independent societal elements within that system naturally react by creating alternate societal structures as necessary; a process Václav Benda (Czech philosopher and dissident and contemporary of Havel) has referred to as the ‘development of parallel structures’, an expression that Havel repeatedly

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 384.

references in “Moc Bezmocných.”¹⁵ The whole of this parallel structure finds itself manifest in what we know now as subculture, the descendant or extension of subversive movements around the globe throughout history, such as Dada and the dissident movement, to name but a few recent examples. At their base, they are manifestations of the *populus* seeking a common understanding through means outside the established system, to the extent that it is possible. It was in precisely from these ‘structures’ that the most powerful works of Soviet times were created, bearing no official stamp whatsoever.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 192.

IV. A DIALOGUE WITH SOLZHENITSYN

Solzhenitsyn puts forth consistently the argument that the Bolshevik (Leninist) implementation of Marxist theory was doomed from the outset. One of the keys to understanding Solzhenitsyn is to know that he is wholly unapologetic regarding the Soviet regime, though he is careful to avoid endorsement of the notion that he is the world's foremost 'anti-Communist', which he viewed as a negative reaction to a negative premise. Throughout his work he challenges ideologues on both sides of the political spectrum, and holds no cause in higher regard than the truth and the individual human responsibility to preserve that truth. There are three crucial points of focus that serve to illuminate Solzhenitsyn's view of the individual path to self-realization: the demystification of and fundamental flaws inherent in the Soviet ideology, the perseverance of human nature and self-responsibility, which I have here termed 'reconstructing the self', and Solzhenitsyn's model of statesmanship in the figure of Petr Stolypin.

Deconstructing The Lie

I would suggest that the first step in demystifying the Soviet ideological lie is to analyze the points where it runs counter to human nature. The first of those is that of property ownership – humans generally prefer to own something, particularly land and/or their own home. The Soviet model did not permit such ownership. Secondly, without a space in which to maneuver, artistic freedom and philosophical exploration fade into memory. The lack of freedom of thought and/or creative expression should be met with incredible hostility, particularly in a country with such rich artistic and intellectual traditions as Russia. The consequences of objecting to Soviet censorship did not permit such hostility.

Finally, people lose their voice – what Solzhenitsyn referred to as their ‘point of view’. He used Berdyaev (one of the many figures interrogated by the authorities in *GULag Archipelago*) as his exemplar of what happens when people retain their ‘point of view’:

“Но Бердяев не унижался, не умолял, а изложил им твёрдо те религиозные и нравственные принципы, по которым не принимает установившейся в России власти – и не только признали его бесполезным для суда, но – освободили. ТОЧКА ЗРЕНИЯ есть у человека!”¹⁶

“But Berdyaev did not humiliate himself. He did not beg or plead. He set forth firmly those religious and moral principles which had led him to refuse to accept the political authority established in Russia. And not only did they come to the conclusion that he would be useless for a trial, but they liberated him.

A human being *has a point of view!*”¹⁷

However, even Solzhenitsyn notes that Berdyaev was an exception. When human beings are no longer politically inclined or active, they lose control of their own right to protest their condition, not only in action, but in thought as well. The above are the three means of inculcating the population with its ideology, which I’ve dubbed the ‘systematization of the lie’, and Solzhenitsyn was well aware of their impact. He notes that “[f]rom this thundering and triumphant ideological mastication, the moral and intellectual level of the population slipped further and further.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *Archipelag GULag*. YMCA Press, Paris: 1973, 139.

¹⁷ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *The Gulag Archipelago*. Perennial Classics, New York: 2002, 64.

¹⁸ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *The Russian Question: At The End of the Twentieth Century*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York: 1995, 82.

Solzhenitsyn argues that this systematization took hold from the very beginning of Soviet rule, and not a decade later under Stalin. He refers to the sophistry inherent in the idea of the ‘well-intentioned’ Lenin and the Stalinist ‘perversion’: to wit, the dismissal of socialist ‘believers’ of the failures of socialism as ‘mere policy blunders’.¹⁹ He points to Lenin’s demonizing of all forms of opposition, and to those whom Lenin referred as “class enemies” – indeed, to his own experience, as Solzhenitsyn and his family were labeled thus, though not by Lenin himself. In doing so, he demonstrates that those so-called enemies were sometimes real, but most often imagined. What is more, he is far from hesitant to point to various “idolaters of progress,” offering as prime examples Gorky and Sartre. The former he referred to as the “literary exemplar of the lie,” who in his works described “the spiritual corruption that accompanies the revolutionary displacement of standards of good and evil by ideological criteria of progress and reaction.”²⁰ The latter he criticized as one who “saw in one of the most inhumane regimes in history the first necessary step in the reconciliation of man with man.”²¹ The notion that the blame for the failures of socialism lay not only with Stalin is paramount to properly understanding Solzhenitsyn.

As a true child of the Revolution, Solzhenitsyn admits he would have likely become one of those unquestioningly obedient Soviet lackeys – spying on his neighbors, leading them to their imprisonment or execution, whether directly or indirectly – if it were not for his experience in the *GULag*. That experience led him to philosophical and moral convictions that resulted in his embarking on the moral mission of describing the precise

¹⁹ Mahoney, Daniel. *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: The Ascent from Ideology*. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, USA: 2001, 3-4.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*

nature of the lie in great detail. Upon exiting the *GULag*, through the vehicle of first person narration in the story “Matryona’s Home,” he mused:

“Летом 1956 года из пыльной горячей пустыни я возвращался наугад – просто в Россию. Ни в одной точке её никто меня не ждал и не звал, потому что я задержался с возвратом годиков на десять. Мне просто хотелось в среднюю полосу – без жары, с лиственным рокотом леса. Мне хотелось затесаться и затеряться в самой нутряной России -- если такая где-то была, жила.”²²

“In the summer of 1953 [sic] I was coming back from the hot and dusty desert, just following my nose – so long as it led me back to Russia. Nobody waited or wanted me at any particular place, because I was a little matter of ten years overdue. I just wanted to get to the central belt, away from the great heats, close to the leafy muttering of forests. I wanted to efface myself, to lose myself in deepest Russia...if it was still anywhere to be found.”²³

On the metaphorical level, this passage describes Solzhenitsyn’s vision of the true Russia, and contrasts it with the one that he actually saw before him. Solzhenitsyn’s Russia is the dense forest, with all its unpredictability and mysteriousness, and also the field, meant to be cultivated with great care, so as to produce bountifully. Needless to say, the Russia before him was hardly that which he envisioned her to be. It vexed him to such an extent that he was implacable in detailing its shortcomings, an activity that eventually led to his exile.

By the time of the Harvard address in June 1978, he had developed a reputation that alternated between theocrat, tsarist, anti-Semite, and imperialist, if not several of them at once. One can clearly discern his topical concerns from the subdivisions of the Harvard

²² Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *Один День Ивана Денисовича – Матренин Двор*. YMCA Press, Paris: 1973, 125.

²³ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. “Matryona’s Home.” *The Portable Twentieth-Century Russian Reader*. Ed. Clarence Brown. Penguin Classics, New York: 2003, 438.

speech, a few of which follow: Contemporary Worlds; A Decline In Courage; Well-Being; Legalistic Life; The Direction of Freedom; The Direction of the Press; A Fashion in Thinking; Socialism; Shortsightedness; Loss of Willpower; Humanism and Its Consequences; An Unexpected Kinship; and Before The Turn. The Western reaction to Solzhenitsyn's address was littered with some of the very characteristics to which he was referring: insecurity wrought by the safety net of 'material aggrandizement', cowardice when confronted with challenges to their moral composition, and the anthropocentrism of those consumed by excessive pride and self-importance. As Charles Kesler noted in his essay response to the Harvard address: "[n]othing Solzhenitsyn said at Harvard, however, was as startling as what his critics thought he had said."²⁴ Reactions in mainstream media, most notably *The New York Times*, were mostly negative, ranging from calling him a 'theocrat', simply mad, or a 'zealot'.²⁵ What the mainstream media did not realize, however, was that Solzhenitsyn was not simply anti-Western, he was "anti-modern"; as Kesler noted, "they miss[ed] his whole point," and as in the Soviet example years later, Solzhenitsyn proved to be more right than anyone would concede at the time.²⁶ Indeed, when reading the Harvard speech one cannot help but wonder if it seems more relevant today than it did at the time it was delivered.

²⁴ Kesler, Charles. "Up From Modernity." Solzhenitsyn At Harvard: The Address, Twelve Early Responses, and Six Later Reflections. Ed. Ronald Berman. Ethics and Public Policy Center. Washington, D.C.: 1980, 48.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 48-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Many of Solzhenitsyn's arguments about Communism and the ideological lie would find a home much later on, when the *Black Book of Communism* was published in 1997.²⁷ It is a collection of essays published by ex-radicals and sympathizers, most of them French, who were shaken by the failure that accompanied the 'revolutionary psychodrama' of 1968, when attempts at reform failed (such as the Prague Spring). It is, among other things, essentially a body count of Communist victims – figures vary from 65 to 100 million, a number that is quite staggering either way. One of the central themes in the book is that the environment in which Communism took hold mattered not, that in every instance it was characterized by a monolithic party system, a mendacious ideology, and empty rhetoric that aimed to demonize the 'enemy'. From there, the book puts forth the hotly contested scholarly notion that Communism is morally akin to Nazism, different only in the desire of the former to eliminate on the basis of class instead of race, i.e., it is an 'eliminationist', not 'exterminationist' ideology. The backdrop of the so-called de-kulakization campaign and the attempts of Lenin's vanguard elite and their successors to socially engineer and transform the peasant and poor alike support this argument. Naturally, its claims, when supported by relevant data and arguments, serves to legitimize much of Solzhenitsyn's previously more controversial assertions.

The final step in deconstructing the lie is to understand the sum effect of technological progress on the human soul. Solzhenitsyn offers three objections to the modern notion of progress. The first of these is environmental – the notion that man can conquer nature; it is disproved by such ecological disasters as the drying of the Aral Sea,

²⁷ Courtois, Stéphane, Ed. *The Black Book of Communism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Chernobyl, and toxicity in former industrial towns throughout Russia and the former Soviet Republics. Here are additional examples of such disasters:²⁸

- A nickel smelter on the Kola Peninsula is poisoning the environment. Nothing grows within 18 miles of the plant.
- In the Barents Sea off Murmansk lie 71 decommissioned nuclear subs. Nuclear waste piles up both on land and in the ocean.
- In the Russian republic of Komi, an oil pipeline burst in August [1994], northeast of Usinsk. The spill continued for at least a month.
- Thirteen naval reactors and at least 17,000 containers of liquid nuclear wastes have been dumped in the Kara Sea.
- In 1957, a tank exploded at the Chelyabinsk nuclear-reprocessing plant. In all, 250,000 people were exposed to radiation.
- In 1989, 500,000 tons of oil spread out over the land from the Tyumen oil fields in western Siberia.
- Because of an accident at the Tomsk-7 reactor in 1993, 77 square miles of forest were polluted with radiation.
- In the Irkutsk region, clear-cutting for lumber threatens the southern forest.
- Foreign lumber companies are destroying large areas of the forest in the Khabarovsk region.
- Between 1966 and 1991, the Soviet Union dumped radioactive wastes at 10 locations in the Sea of Japan.
- The Aral Sea was 2/3 drained over the last three decades of Soviet rule for the purpose of growing cotton, which has resulted in thirst, malnutrition, and disease, as well as altering the climate, excess salt deposits destroying arable land, and depletion of fish supplies.²⁹

Clearly, Solzhenitsyn's claim is not without ample evidence.

The second objection is the idea that human nature will somehow 'soften' because of technological progress. However, this progress leaves one vulnerable to the new inventions which the new tools of modernity provide, and thus vulnerable to the nefarious utilization of those instruments by those who possess them. His final objection rests on the idea that one

²⁸ List compiled in: Jorg Albrecht, Patricia Faller, Dirk Kurbjuweit, and Walter Saller. "Russia's Environmental Mess." *Die Zeit*, Hamburg. 11 Nov. 1994. Full text reprinted in *Infomanage International*. Feb. 1995. 24 Nov. 2005. <<http://www.infomanage.com/environment/russia.html>>

²⁹ Kriner, Stephanie. "Aral Sea Ecological Disaster Causes Humanitarian Crisis." *American Red Cross*. 10 Apr. 2002. 24 Nov. 2005. <<http://www.redcross.org/news/in/asia/020410aral.html>>

no longer needs to nourish and explore one's soul, so long as material possessions are available. This anthropocentrism, unimaginable in previous eras, whereby man no longer regarded himself as answerable to any higher authority than himself, represents the solipsistic worldview that Solzhenitsyn sought to dismantle.

Reconstructing The Self

The first step in the reconstruction of the self, according to Solzhenitsyn, is the admission of one's complicity in the construction of those conditions that lead to that complicity. In the Soviet case, he denounces his fellow countrymen for their compliance with the system, and puts forth his belief that Russia must follow her own path following the Soviet collapse. In doing so, he emphasizes the idea that at the center of the order of things is the destiny, fate, and progress of the individual soul. He points to the scientism of the Enlightenment ideal as the culprit, leading to man's 'anthropocentrism' – "the proclaimed and practiced autonomy of man from any higher force above him."³⁰ As an alternative to scientism, he cites the importance of self-restraint, that such restraint and self-limitation is voluntary in nature, and that an effort must be made by every individual to adhere to it. That effort, by its nature, runs counter to the demands of ideology: to expunge oneself of the lie, one must prepare to deemphasize the bodily preservation of the individual. More succinctly, reconstruction of the self requires liberation from participating in the lie, no matter what the political system.

³⁰ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. "A World Split Apart." Solzhenitsyn At Harvard: The Address, Twelve Early Responses, and Six Later Reflections. Ed. Ronald Berman. Ethics and Public Policy Center. Washington, D.C.: 1980, 16.

In essence, such an undertaking begins with individuals, with their capacity for repentance and self-limitation: “self-limitation is the fundamental and wisest step of a man who has obtained his freedom.”³¹ He notes that it is impossible to completely rid the world of evil, so the effort must center on the constriction of evil within us. This is the topic of his most oft quoted lines: “Даже в сердце, объятom злом, она удерживает маленький плацдарм добра. Даже в наилучшем сердце – неискоренный уголок зла.”³² (And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains...an unrooted small corner of evil).³³ Solzhenitsyn issues a challenge here to anyone who dares to undertake the attempt – to tread the path to self-reconstruction. The most difficult question is one of sacrifice, namely that of eradicating the habitual inclination toward the comforts of self-preservation and/or endless material accumulation. Once such a sacrifice is made, people need the collective courage to confront ideology head-on, to abandon its tenets and shout out against its machinations. To do so, they must recognize what allowed for its acceptance in the first place, and admit that:

“[t]his realm of darkness, of falsehood, of brute force, of justice denied and distrust of the good, this slimy swamp was formed by us, and no one else.

We grew used to the idea that we must submit and lie in order to survive – and we brought up our children to do so.”³⁴

³¹ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. “Address to the International Academy of Philosophy: Liechtenstein, 14 September 1993.” The Russian Question: At The End of the Twentieth Century. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York: 1995, 125.

³² Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. Archipelag GULag. YMCA Press, Paris: 1974, 603.

³³ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. The Gulag Archipelago II. Harper & Row, New York: 1975, 615.

³⁴ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. From Under The Rubble. Little, Brown: 1975, 118.

Such an admission necessarily begins the process of reversal, though it must be considered that any given entity is far easier to destroy than to build. However, Solzhenitsyn is convinced that it is not only possible but also likely, given his observation of the impossibility of ideology transforming or conquering human nature whilst in the *GULag*. He cites several examples of such displays, from escapees to the simply implacable will of the unwavering: “[е]сли бы все были вчетверть такие непримиримые, как Анна Скрипникова – другая была б история России.”³⁵ ([i]f everyone were even one quarter as implacable as Anna Skripnikova [another of the prisoners interrogated by the Soviet authorities in *GULag Archipelago*] – the history of Russia would be different).³⁶ It goes without saying that such individuals were rare.

Solzhenitsyn notes that one of the primary obstacles to this reconstruction is the ease of deflecting blame; that the process of attacking the ‘other’ is easier than searching “for our own errors and sins.”³⁷ He then expands this idea to the national level, and anticipates three possible objections to such repentance: that the sin or vice to repent is one of an entire nation, that there can in fact be collective responsibility for the misdeed, and that it is difficult to know exactly how to express that repentance. And true to his conviction of self-responsibility, he puts forth answers to those anticipated objections. He argues first that one must separate the concept of the nation (Russia) from the “ideocracy” (U.S.S.R.). Having done so, one may distinguish between the guilt of the nation and the guilt of the political entity; this distinction helps the nation to recognize the errors of that entity and address

³⁵ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *Archipelag GULag*. YMCA Press, Paris: 1974, 650.

³⁶ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *The Gulag Archipelago II*. Harper & Row, New York: 1975, 661.

³⁷ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *From Under The Rubble*. Little, Brown: 1975, 108.

them appropriately. Solzhenitsyn counters the second objection by noting that every generation has to bear responsibility for their forebears, at the very least must maintain the memory of their misdeeds. Finally, Solzhenitsyn points to the example of the Germans and their recognition, guilt, and subsequent actions for their Nazi past, illustrating that national repentance is indeed possible.

Solzhenitsyn's discourse here takes the form of the dialectic between humility and magnanimity, with the former presenting a more attractive option. Such discourse is essential for the reconstruction of the self, the recovery of morality, and the path to self-realization through the disavowal of the ideological lie, regardless of the specific political system or ideocracy. Expanding the scale beyond the individual, Solzhenitsyn's philosophy draws from the *zemstvo* system of the 19th century and the *sobornost*³⁸ of the Russian countryside.³⁹ As the prototype for a leader of such communities, Solzhenitsyn even provides an historical exemplar, that of Petr Stolypin, Prime Minister under Nicholas II prior to his assassination in September 1911.

Stolypin As Model Statesman

Was there an alternative model evident in the historical currents that led to the Russian Revolution? Solzhenitsyn certainly believes that there was, as evidenced by his selection of Prime Minister Stolypin as his model statesman, to whom he devotes nearly 100 pages in his novel *August 1914* (dubbed "The Stolypin Cycle"). Grounding himself, as always,

³⁸ *Sobornost*' refers to the Orthodox notion of community spirit that is nearly impossible to define with only one English word.

³⁹ Berman, Harold J. "The Weightier Matters of the Law." Solzhenitsyn At Harvard: The Address, Twelve Early Responses, and Six Later Reflections. Ed. Ronald Berman. Ethics and Public Policy Center. Washington, D.C.: 1980, 108.

in the real world of life events, Solzhenitsyn notes: “I am not simply a belletristic writer, but ... in all my books I place myself in the service of historical truth,” as quoted by Mahoney in *The Ascent From Ideology*.⁴⁰ Thus the choice of Stolypin as a practitioner of the novel concept of ‘politics as moral service’ is a choice that makes Solzhenitsyn’s message that much more practical and relevant. He notes that such a choice makes sense, given that the Russian intelligentsia typically “revel[s] in their intellectual superiority to an obtuse and decrepit government which had never, as far as anyone could remember, produced an orator, a thinker, or statesman.”⁴¹ In the conception of ‘politics as moral service’, the statesman must be as perfectly balanced and as stubbornly assertive as the individual striving to eradicate the lie, with the added burden of political pressure from above and below, from the political left as well as from the political right. Stolypin was precisely such a figure.

Born in Dresden on 14 April 1862, Stolypin was of mixed ancestry, mainly Russian and Lithuanian. He spent his childhood years just outside Moscow, joined the Ministry of State Domains at 23, was appointed marshal of the Kovno province (now Kaunas, in Lithuania) at age 27, and then to the governorships of Grodno (1902-03) and Saratov (1903-06). At 44, he was appointed Minister of the Interior, and three months later Nicholas II appointed him Prime Minister. His steadfastness and unwavering character were manifest early on, as writer and philosopher Vasily Rozanov noted:

“There was not a single blot on Stolypin, a rare and near-impossible thing for a political figure. The peaceful and self-doubting nation came to love him – his personality, his image, spiritual and, I suspect, even physical, that of a

⁴⁰ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *Solzhenitsyn in Exile: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials*. Eds. John B. Dunlop, et. al. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press. Palo Alto, CA, USA: 1985, 338.

⁴¹ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *August 1914*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York: 1989, 536.

hardworking and unblemished provincial man who stepped, uncouthly and uncertainly, onto the national scene and started doing, the way he did in his 'province', his Saratov, the job he was given in St. Petersburg, a job that was always tangled, devious and a bit unclean.”⁴²

The traits about which Rozanov writes here would become necessary for his survival, both politically and physically.

Stolypin’s task was enormously difficult – if not impossible. His two main policy concerns were land reforms and the growing problem presented by the revolutionaries. Tackling both problems required an iron will and resolve with which only a few strong individuals are blessed. Stolypin had to balance the concerns of the conservative bourgeois monarchists and the more liberal elements of the newly formed State Duma, many of whom moonlighted as revolutionary agitators. Though he himself was an unwavering monarchist from a rich (in the historic and economic senses) ancestral line, he was somehow able to pragmatically channel his disdain for the revolutionaries so that it did not interfere with his duties as Prime Minister. In doing so, he sometimes found himself isolated, carefully walking a line between the Monarchists and Revolutionaries, in fact on the side of no one.

In confronting the problem of land reforms, he was determined to break the repartitional commune established by the Emancipation Edict of 1861, strongly believing that the peasant would only be productive given the prospect of private land ownership. The structure of the village communes that replaced the serf-owner model was such that the peasants never settled on their own plots of land, because the communes would ‘repartition’

⁴² Quoted by Osipov, Georgy. “Peter Stolypin. The Mason Throws Out The Keystone.” New Times. May 2002. 19 Nov. 2005 <http://www.newtimes.ru/eng/detail.asp?art_id=469>

land and move them to other plots. The problem was that a limited sense of contact led the peasants to neglect their plots, ultimately resulting in hopelessness deriving from loss of pride. Changes in this model were met with fierce resistance by the petty bourgeois and village councils alike. So, as a proof of his conviction, Stolypin initiated an effort for peasants to take advantage of state funds and resettle on government plots of land east of the Ural Mountains. He was empowered to allocate both the monies and the land through his position as Prime Minister, and the peasants were free to participate of their own volition. Though he was not able to fully implement the program to his satisfaction, Stolypin's reforms outlasted his physical life – his faith in the individual will of the peasant was evidenced by the successful resettlement of four million people east of the Urals by 1914.

His other vexing problem was that of how to handle the growing problem of the revolutionaries, as evidenced by the 1905 Revolution and the subsequent concessions Nicholas II was forced to make. In order to allow himself some time to formulate a solution, Stolypin invoked Article 87 of the newly written Constitution, which basically empowered him to issue orders of execution for the most extreme elements. Solzhenitsyn observes that this move also invoked another crucial concern, that of the “correct relation between parliamentary procedure and the individual will of the responsible statesman.”⁴³ The end result of his policies was dual: Stolypin was responsible for the signing of 5,500 orders of execution from 1906-11, and thus incited the revolutionaries. His actions also provided the more conservative elements with a scapegoat.

⁴³ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. August 1914. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York: 1989, 591.

Having to constantly mind the differing reactions of the conservative and revolutionary factions, Stolypin had to tread quite carefully, and he did so with great acumen. He was one of those rare civil servants who were not at all interested in the prestige of the position, opting instead to focus on his obligations to the Russian people. As one of his colleagues observed: "The man was really undaunted.... If he could not convince someone, Stolypin would leave his post. He would not hear of compromise."⁴⁴ He was also intensely private, and refused to merge his personal life with his enormous civic responsibilities. He held a point of view essential to his responsibilities, counting every day as his last and thanking God nightly for the ability to see the next. This was in part necessary, as no fewer than ten attempts were made on his life before the final successful one in 1911. He had a physical deformity (often viewed figuratively as well) in his right hand, one that required him to write with the help of his left hand. He was of remarkable physical stature, which provoked the insecurities of Nicholas II, and the admiration of those to whom the utility of such a stature was more important. In particular, the Empress Maria Federovna (mother of Nicholas II, the last Romanov Tsar) believed that Stolypin alone could chart Russia's future course and avert imminent disaster.

Along the way, he embarked on a program of reform that was nothing short of visionary. Among his proposals was the creation of a new ministry for the *zemstvos*, giving them help with educational, administrative, and welfare tasks. He also proposed a new Ministry of Labor, which would give the monarchists a practical alternative in order to counter radical proletarian rhetoric, thereby making a partner of their primary constituents.

⁴⁴ Osipov, Georgy. "Peter Stolypin. The Mason Throws Out The Keystone." New Times. May 2002. 19 Nov. 2005 <http://www.newtimes.ru/eng/detail.asp?art_id=469>

Other reforms, aimed at the issues of education and taxation, were blocked by more reactionary elements in the Duma, in spite of Stolypin's usurpation of the 1906 Constitution in establishing a new electoral law that assured a right-wing majority in the Duma. Solzhenitsyn has even argued that had Stolypin not been assassinated, the revolution may not have happened at all. This is a provocative claim indeed, but one that definitely deserves more careful examination. So effective were Stolypin's reforms that the *Times of London* observed that he "had adapted the political life of Russia to representative institutions more quickly than any country in history."⁴⁵ Dmitri Bogrov, a dual agent of the Secret Police and member of the Socialist Revolutionaries, assassinated him at the Kiev Opera house in September 1911, with Nicholas II seated within sight. One would do well to take to heart the words of his final speech to the Duma, in which he fired his final salvo: "[f]or people in power, gentlemen, there is no sin greater than shying away from their responsibilities".⁴⁶ It is no wonder then, that Solzhenitsyn chose such a man as his model statesman, one who would make such a proclamation, braving all the inherent dangers and shunning all the temptations of abusing the privileges of his position along the way.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Quoted by Osipov, Georgy. "Peter Stolypin. The Mason Throws Out The Keystone." *New Times*. May 2002. 19 Nov. 2005 <http://www.newtimes.ru/eng/detail.asp?art_id=469>

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ For more information on Stolypin and the events leading up to the Russian Revolution, refer to Treadgold, Donald W. *Twentieth Century Russia*, 2nd Ed. Rand McNally, Chicago: 1966, 105-09.

V. DIALOGUE WITH HAVEL

The discourse on the nature of the ‘ideological lie’ in Havel’s writing is more philosophical in nature, and thematically more ecumenical than Solzhenitsyn’s. Havel observed the nature of the system and extrapolated those observations to a conception that was more universal than one finds in Solzhenitsyn’s writing, a conception that did not limit itself to his own time/experience/culture, but rather served as a warning for following generations. Like Solzhenitsyn, he too points to ideology’s role in the entrenchment of what he calls the ‘post-totalitarian’ system, and further notes that “ideology no longer has any great influence on people, at least within our bloc (with the possible exception of Russia).”⁴⁸ In doing so, he posits that ideology only had continued to exert its influence on the people due to the leaders’ understanding of its utility in terms of “the Machiavellian conception of politics as the technology of power.”⁴⁹ To wit, leaders used ideology as the instrument of power via the means of their respective political positions. Havel notes that the leaders hid “behind the façade of something high. And that something is ideology.”⁵⁰ In that way he demonstrates the exact nature of the ‘ideological lie’ – by detailing the various elements of its use. His gift as a writer is that he vividly describes the inner workings of what he calls the ‘post-totalitarian’ system, how it leads to automatism and the atomization of society, the effects of that system on the spiritual and cultural life of society, and the only way out of that system: ‘žít v pravdě’.

⁴⁸ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 130.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 259.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 133.

The Post-Totalitarian System

Throughout his work, Havel developed the notion of the ‘post-totalitarian’ system, reaching the climactic apex of his formulation during his most eloquent and poignant work – “Moc Bezmocných.”⁵¹ Havel points to five features of the ‘post-totalitarian’ system that prompted him to coin the term as a way of distinguishing it from ‘classical dictatorships’: one – such a system was not limited to a local, geographic region; two – it was rooted in those social movements which originally gave birth to it, giving it historicity, whereas ‘classical dictatorships’ were “historical freaks”; three – it employed an “extremely flexible ideology that [... was] almost a secularized religion”; four – it utilized mechanisms of power for both indirect and direct control of the people that had been tested over a long period of time, dating back to Czarist absolutism; and five – it was not sealed off from the rest of the world, but in fact displayed several of its elements, for example “the consumer and industrial society”.⁵² The time period to which Havel referred necessarily came after the onset of the Cold War, as he mentions ‘two superpowers’ in his account, and was ongoing at the time of his writing of “Moc Bezmocných.” His main clarification comes with the following: “I do not wish to imply by the prefix ‘post-’ that the system is no longer totalitarian; on the contrary, I mean that it is totalitarian in a way fundamentally different from classical dictatorships...”⁵³ That is to say, its machinations were far more advanced than just a simple, brutish dictatorship, which he went on to eloquently demonstrate in his defining work.

⁵¹ Havel, Václav. *Moc bezmocných*. October 1978 (samizdat).

⁵² Havel, Václav. *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 128-131.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Using the example of the common greengrocer to illustrate his observations, he outlines every element of the subjugation of the individual before the state. In establishing a 'world of appearances', the system replaces the primacy of the individual's spiritual development with the false security of empty ritualistic signs, whether via material acquisition, participation in predetermined ceremonies celebrating the events that led people to their current illusory state, predetermined gestures (such as the greengrocer hanging a sign with slogans like "Workers of the world, unite!"), the complacency of inaction, or any and all of the above. The system creates the illusion of providing for its citizens, whereas in fact it "serves people only to the extent necessary to ensure that people will serve it."⁵⁴ One of the many methods by which the Czechoslovak Communist Party ruled was by the monopolization of ideas (as in any ideocracy), which contributed to the inculcation of fear into the people. The state could use censorship to augment that fear, in addition to other tactics such as the constant threats of arbitrary violence, depriving people of their jobs, raiding their homes, and incarceration. So smothering did the fear become that only the exceptionally strong-willed, such as Havel, Patočka, and others were able to stand up to its deceit and thus attempt to regain a modicum of their dignity as human beings by speaking out against the system. Meanwhile, the system continued to advance a positivist worldview through all means of communication and at all levels of society, to the point of mechanization.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 135.

Havel's greengrocer is a useful example. Having resigned himself to his fate, he continually performs the rituals required of him, so as to be left alone (an idea that Havel notes consistently is the basic desire of every individual vis-à-vis the state):

“I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace. [...] I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient.”⁵⁵

In this way, by detailing the various elements of its use, Havel demonstrates the exact nature of the ‘ideological lie’.

So, Havel's depiction of the common greengrocer demonstrates the extent to which the citizens under such a system are willing to compromise so as to be left alone, thus ignoring the concomitant repercussions on their identity and dignity. He notes that part of this repetition of ritualistic practices entails the replacement of history “by pseudo-history, by a calendar of rhythmically recurring anniversaries, congresses, celebrations, and mass gymnastic events.”⁵⁶ People no longer observe holidays, celebrations and other such events according to their want and will, but rather according to their desire to avoid a ‘knock on the door’. Their natural inclination to healthy and useful activity is replaced “by the kind of artificial activity that is not an open-minded play of agents confronting one another but a one-dimensional, transparent, predictable self-manifestation (and self-celebration) of a single, central agent of truth and power.”⁵⁷ Instead of confronting the risks involved with counteractive measures, most are content to merely be left alone.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 133.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 333.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Havel's greengrocer puts the sign in the window not because he believes in the semantic content of the sign, or because he is a part of the unification of the 'workers of the world', but as a gesture that signifies "a world of appearances, a mere ritual, a formalized language deprived of semantic contact with reality and transformed into a system of ritual signs that replace reality with pseudo-reality."⁵⁸ In undertaking this one seemingly small gesture, the greengrocer validates this 'pseudo-reality', and in the process allows himself to be distracted. This is then yet another post-totalitarian instrument of control, that "[i]n the interest of the smooth management of society, then, society's attention is deliberately diverted from itself, that is, from social concerns."⁵⁹ The greengrocer is more concerned with the participation in empty ritual than in questioning policy initiatives, infrastructure decisions, in short – tangible, concrete societal concerns. Without such inquiries, and without the objections of others in similar positions to that of the greengrocer throughout society, the system achieves its primary goal: "to make everything totally the same."⁶⁰ In such a way, the whole of society becomes a grey, mechanized dystopia.

Automatism / Atomization

Havel frequently refers to this loss of self-identity as 'automatism'. Every day becomes exactly the same as the last, as the participation of each citizen in the aforementioned ritualistic behaviors effects a steady but gradual disinclination toward their own concerns. The cumulative societal result is a standardization of life, and "[s]tandardized

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 138.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 340.

life creates standardized citizens with no wills of their own.”⁶¹ Eventually, by varying degrees, each individual becomes an automaton – doing exactly the same thing, exactly as they are told they should do. Individual expression, independent thought, indeed individuality as a whole ceases to exist. Each individual is systematically demoralized, torn between natural inclination toward humanity, integrity, dignity, and the like, and fear of the consequences of acting upon that inclination. This notion is central to the continued functioning of the system – in fact, the system “depends on this demoralization, deepens it, is in fact a projection of it into society.”⁶² Havel again rightly notes that this automaton behavior runs counter to the individual’s “longing for humanity’s rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existence.”⁶³ In becoming automatons, consciously or not, willingly or not, individuals subject themselves to their own demoralization.

This demoralization is one of the most startlingly troublesome aspects of the post-totalitarian system. The outside observer living in a rational world (not subject to those conditions) would issue a call to action, a call to mass assembly. Of course when riot police and tanks disperse such assembly, each citizen then considers the potential consequences of his or her actions, and becomes willing to make sacrifices in order to compromise. It is in precisely this manner that the system “draws everyone into its sphere of power, not so they may realize themselves as human beings, but so they may surrender their human identity in

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.* 153.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 145.

favor of the identity of the system.”⁶⁴ Having thus surrendered their identity and yielded to the system, they are led to another condition: their ‘atomized’ status in that system.

‘Atomization’ is the final phase of the post-totalitarian system. Society becomes entrenched in such a state of fear that even familial ties begin to break down. No relationship is sacred anymore – children report the ‘suspicious’ activities of their parents and husbands report their wives. Society as a whole distrusts itself, and as a result, turns on itself. Such a system eventually breaks down because atomization runs counter to the inclinations of the individual and his/her own dignity, integrity, and morality. In the interest of self-survival, then, the system must employ all means at its disposal to delay this eventuality. In his most scathing and telling indictment of the post-totalitarian system, Havel eloquently characterizes “the lie”:

“This is why life in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies: government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called the public control of power, and the arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom; farcical elections become the highest form of democracy; banning independent thought becomes the most scientific of world views; military occupation becomes fraternal assistance. Because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything. It falsifies the past. It falsifies the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 143.

present, and it falsifies the future. It falsifies statistics. It pretends not to possess an omnipotent and unprincipled police apparatus. It pretends to respect human rights. It pretends to persecute no one. It pretends to fear nothing. It pretends to pretend nothing.”⁶⁵

It should be evident that the extremity of the conditions in the post-totalitarian system was such that an equally extreme set of reactions would be necessary to bring about its eventual collapse. One would think that the absurdity inherent in escaping the extremity of those conditions would be immediately clear to its people, and that this recognition alone would be enough to subvert the system. However, when a society is subject to the automatism and subsequent atomization that the post-totalitarian system engenders, it must first reinvent itself in order to confront that system. The reversal of those two concepts is decidedly more complex than their entrenchment; it occurs on the level of the individual, and requires a proportionally complex process of reevaluation and reinvention of the self. In his response to the question of how to counteract the ideological lie and the system’s perpetuation of it by its various machinations, Havel points to a seemingly simple initiative each individual can undertake. He calls it ‘žít v pravdě’.

Living In Truth

The concept of ‘living in truth’ takes center stage in Havel’s writing, especially in “Moc Bezmocných.” Understanding this concept, then, is integral to understanding his work. In his writing, he envisioned the individual struggle of humanity in terms of the vacillation between ‘living in truth’ and submitting to the ‘ideological lie’. He points to the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 135-6.

notion of self-sacrifice that must precede any effort to escape the ‘ideological lie’, to the idea that one must somehow regain the dignity, integrity, and morality that was originally lost when submitting to the lie. In perhaps his most stunning quote (in terms of sheer poetic beauty), Havel remarks: “There are times when we must sink to the bottom of our misery to understand truth, just as we must descend to the bottom of a well to see the stars in broad daylight.”⁶⁶ Havel acknowledges the difficulties of that descent and promotes the value of the struggle:

“...that one can stand up to lies; that there are values worth struggling for; that there are still trustworthy leaders; and that no political defeat justifies complete historical skepticism as long as the victims manage to bear their defeat with dignity.”⁶⁷

Of course, the essential question is: how does one begin to ‘live in truth’? In a (post-) totalitarian system, the lines between reality and pseudo-reality have been blurred to such an extent that one can no longer be sure what is real and whom to believe.

He believes the responsibility lies with the individual – each individual must seek out the truth, and continue to do so no matter how difficult it may become, and no matter how many efforts are made to distract him. Havel was perfectly aware of how essential this idea was to his conception of ‘living in truth’: “In other words, it amounts to speaking the truth, keeping to it, and rejecting everything that stands that truth on its head.”⁶⁸ Thus, one must be steadfast and unwavering in one’s commitment to that truth in order to live within it, and be prepared to accept the responsibility for, resistance to, and consequences of living in it.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 180.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 43.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 42.

One such example of this steadfastness comes from Havel's essay about the 1976 trial of the rock group "The Plastic People of the Universe," in which he notes that the idea that "there are still people among us who assume the existential responsibility for their own truth and are willing to pay a high price for it" was an "exciting realization."⁶⁹ He was speaking of a remark made by one of the observers of the trial, Svatopluk Karásek, that: "if [Ivan] Jirous (the lead singer) was found guilty, [I] wanted to be found guilty, too."⁷⁰ This example may seem a bit extreme, but so is taking a rock group to trial for crimes against the state for merely performing. When speaking of his role as a writer, he mused:

"Equipped with my view 'from below', the experience of Franz Kafka and the French theatre of the absurd, and somewhat obsessed with a tendency to elaborate on things rationally to the point of absurdity, I found in those remarkable social conditions (hitherto unprecedented and therefore undescribed) a wonderful horizon for my writing."⁷¹

Certainly, the "Plastic People of the Universe" trial provided ample evidence of the relevance of his musing. That the mere performance of a rock group was considered threatening only renders one of Havel's most staunch assertions valid: that culture could and should play a central role in paving the path of reversal necessary to escape the post-totalitarian yoke.

Being a playwright himself, Havel naturally views the sphere of culture as vital, but also as the area in which the most important advances were possible for confronting and counteracting the system. He viewed "the role of culture as the agent of social self-

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 106.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 5.

awareness,” and also held that “[e]very meaningful cultural act – wherever it takes place – is unquestionably good in and of itself.”⁷² In place of the system under which he lived, he saw a different world: a world of self-responsibility, a world in which ‘living in truth’ was not only possible, but encouraged. To Havel, this was: “the world of our lived experience, a world not yet indifferent since we are personally bound to it in our love, hatred, respect, contempt, tradition, in our interests and in that pre-reflective meaningfulness from which culture is born.”⁷³ This is a critical element in Havel’s philosophy, because he describes a notion that is so profoundly universal and timeless as to give one pause. In citing the notion of experiential knowledge, he turns the idea that the struggle of his time and people was somehow esoteric or limited to itself on its head. He thus widens the struggle as one that concerns the whole of humanity, lest the lessons of his own time and people be lost for subsequent generations. This crucial element of his philosophy is often overlooked, as his work is often viewed in temporal context and weighed according to an obsolete politico-systemic terminology; this issue will be revisited later.

From the above it is clear that culture is central and vital to Havel’s message about ‘living in truth’. In place of the post-totalitarian view, which he notes was “far more suited to the role accorded to culture in the consumer philosophy: not to excite people with the truth, but to reassure them with lies,” Havel was more concerned with the notion of culture as an agent of social self-awareness.⁷⁴ He flatly rejected the view that culture must be somehow intertwined and infused with political underpinnings, noting instead that: “the

⁷² *Ibid.* 67, 284.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 250.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 66.

degree to which politics is present or absent has no connection with the power of artistic truth.”⁷⁵ He saw the need for culture to serve as the point of departure from which man would recover his own identity, dignity, and morality. He found it necessary for man to use culture as the vehicle by which he could “desecrate the altar, as Bakhtin so aptly put it.”⁷⁶

He recognized that every cultural act contributed to the desecration of that altar:

“...every such act of social self-awareness – that is, every genuine and profound acceptance of a new work, identification with it, and the integration of it into the spiritual reality of the time – immediately and inevitably opens the way for even more radical acts.”⁷⁷

Instead of armed revolt, or political action, Havel advocated a cultural uprising, through which self-conscious and self-responsible citizens would be able to build a new society.

Such a society would be the polar opposite of the one in which Havel lived and wrote. Instead of atomized citizens who were used to persecuting “everything unusual, risky, self-taught, and unbribable, everything that is too artless and too complex, too accessible and too mysterious, everything in fact that is different from itself,” you would have citizens who are concerned with the ‘self’, not the ‘other’.⁷⁸ It would be a “world where ‘truth’ flourishes not in a dialectic climate of genuine knowledge but in a climate of power interests,” because as Havel notes, that is “a world of mental sterility, petrified dogmas, rigid and unchangeable creeds leading inevitably to creedless despotism.”⁷⁹ A society focused on ‘living in truth’, as history has since proven, indeed existed beneath the

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 282.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 310.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 103.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 64.

surface of the post-totalitarian system. Those who believed that the system must be changed before society could change were also proven wrong by history, as: “the opposite is true: only by creating a better life can a better system be developed.”⁸⁰ As Havel noted, the point at which:

“living within the truth ceases to be a mere negation of living with a lie and becomes articulate in a particular way is the point at which something is born that might be called the ‘independent spiritual, social, and political life of society.’”⁸¹

A substratum of society was brave enough to sink to the bottom of its misery to understand truth, to adhere to it, find its root in culture, and to gradually pick away at the post-totalitarian machinery in the face of great adversity. It was precisely this substratum comprising the parallel life of society that stood in front of the crowd when Havel gave his New Year’s Address on that cold day in 1990. It was this placid element of society that chose to live in truth and follow Havel’s lead in bringing about the bloodless Velvet Revolution.

On Dissidence & Solzhenitsyn

As has already been noted, other thinkers influenced Havel, and chief among those influences (outside Czechoslovakia) was most assuredly Solzhenitsyn, whose name comes up with some frequency throughout Havel’s work. It arose most often when he wrote about the so-called ‘dissident’ movement in the Former Eastern Bloc, his place in it, or some other context relative to dissent. Havel was particularly bothered by the term ‘dissident’, as

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 162.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 176.

evidenced by the fact that he consistently puts the term in quotes throughout his writing. He was not inclined to label himself in such a way. Instead, he sought to explain what was characteristic of so-called dissidents, and why the ordinary conception of a dissident did not match reality. Addressing the idea that becoming a dissident is some sort of career decision, he counters: “you do not ‘become a dissident’ just because you decide one day to take up this most unusual career. You are thrown into it by your personal sense of responsibility, combined with a complex set of external circumstances.”⁸² In so doing, he demonstrates that the focus should not fall on one’s status as a dissident, but rather what one does in dealing with these circumstances. Again, he points to the steady adherence to a moral code, to ‘living in truth’, to the idea that to “maintain one’s position silently and constantly means more than shouting it out and then quickly abandoning it.”⁸³ Thus, he consistently adheres to those principles that he sets forth throughout his writing, thereby strengthening his message. It can be concluded that he understood that simply viewing himself as a dissident, regardless of the fact that he possessed all the relevant characteristics, was deflective and therefore irrelevant.

Nonetheless, Havel finds great relevance in his Russian counterpart, evident in the following passage, in which he addressed the notion that Solzhenitsyn possessed some sort of tangible political power:

“I have already mentioned Solzhenitsyn’s political influence: it does not reside in some exclusive political power he possesses as an individual, but in

⁸² *Ibid.* 174.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 236.

the experience of those millions of *GULag* victims which he simply amplified and communicated to millions of other people of good will.”⁸⁴

He obviously admired Solzhenitsyn’s bravery in standing up to the Soviet regime, and elaborated on this point variously throughout his writing. In that bravery, Havel found support for his own conception of ‘living in truth’, relevance in the idea that culture and specifically cultural works serve as agents of social self-awareness, and inspiration and motivation in continuing the struggle. He notes with a touch of irony that: “it is possible to oppose personal experience and the natural world to the ‘innocent’ power and to unmask its guilt, as the author of the *GULag Archipelago* has done.”⁸⁵ While one would be foolish to purport that Havel would not have done as he did without Solzhenitsyn’s influence, it is clear that he found in Solzhenitsyn an exemplar of the potential positive results of opposition to the system, even if their fates were dramatically different. In any case, history would prove that even after their political objectives were obtained, the basic values expressed in their work would continue to prove relevant long after the regimes about which they wrote were no longer in power.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 171.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 270.

VI. THE SOVIET COLLAPSE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

One of the basic tenets of a functioning democratic system is the age-old notion that there is no freedom without equality before the law, and there is no equality before the law without freedom, which is to say, a system where there exists the entrenchment of the rule of law. Without the entrenchment of rule of law, arbitrary abuses become not only possible, but also likely. Thus each individual in society becomes a potential victim, and as Havel notes: “every human suffering concerns every other human being.”⁸⁶ The system that remains focused on the entrenchment of rule of law is a system that does not permit such suffering, it is a system that eventually builds a “humane republic which serves the individual and which therefore holds the hope that the individual will serve it in turn.”⁸⁷ In both Russia and the Czech Republic, one witnesses the continual triumph of the latter set of thinking over the former, regardless of the political system. Otherwise, “from where did the young people who never knew another system take their desire for truth, their love of free thought, their political ideas, their civic courage and civic prudence?”⁸⁸ This notion continues to surface throughout the post-Soviet period.

Russia: The Post-Superpower

Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, both Russia and Czechoslovakia (later, the Czech Republic) faced several dilemmas: the privatization of state assets, the switch to parliamentary democracy, the inception of free elections, and maintenance of social

⁸⁶ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 394.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 396.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 393.

programs such as pension funds, to name but a few. By the time of the collapse, certain systemic changes had been implemented already, most of which expedited its demise. In early 1991, Gorbachev amended Article Six of the 1977 Soviet Constitution to allow the formation of competing political parties. A year earlier, he brought a proposal before the Congress of People's Deputies calling for the establishment of an Executive Presidency, which was subsequently approved. Also, in the final two years of the Soviet Union's existence one witnesses the Congress and Supreme Soviet functioning more and more as the Duma and Federation Council do today (as a bicameral legislative body), though throughout the process of transition the concerns about which Havel and Solzhenitsyn wrote remain relevant.

Through the 1990's in Russia, the system under Boris Yeltsin experienced growing pains in nearly every area. From Gaidar's economic shock therapy to deteriorating social conditions, from the loss of its superpower status to the conflict(s) in Chechnya, the transition phase in Russia was/has been rocky. This has led to a further damaging of the collective Russian psyche, already significantly damaged after 70 years of socio-psychological trauma suffered under Soviet rule. However, as Solzhenitsyn observed at his Liechtenstein Address, "[a]mong the Russian people, for one, this concept – understood as an ideal to be aimed for, and expressed by the word *truth* (*pravda*) and the phrase *to live by the truth* (*zhit' po pravde*) – has never been extinguished."⁸⁹ The parallel to Havel's conception of 'living in

⁸⁹ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. "Address to the International Academy of Philosophy: Liechtenstein, 14 September 1993." The Russian Question: At The End of the Twentieth Century. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York: 1995, 115.

truth' is obvious, but more importantly, Solzhenitsyn focuses on Russia's need to finally focus her concerns on herself.

As regards the loss of her superpower status, in *The Russian Question* he stresses, "there is no need to be world arbiter, to compete for international leadership (stronger volunteers will surface); all our efforts must be directed *inwards*, towards assiduous *inner* development."⁹⁰ He goes on to lament the 'diaspora' caused by the breakup of the U.S.S.R., namely the 25 million Russians who suddenly found themselves outside Russian borders. In addition to this concern, there has developed a serious problem with human trafficking (notably because of economic conditions), which leads thousands of Russians (mainly women) to sell themselves into slavery each year, most of them unwittingly. Their desperation lands them in brothels and black/grey market criminal enterprises, and most are not seen or heard from again. The overall economic situation has begun to improve under Putin, who has taken measures (such as the seizure of mass media holdings and tighter controls on tax collection) to curb the power of the oligarchy, itself another vanguard elite group, one with the same economic privileges as the Soviet *nomenklatura*. Nonetheless, trafficking issues persist. Also, there are serious concerns about the rapidly dwindling Russian population since 1991, due to declines in birth rate and life expectancy weighed against an increase in the mortality rate over the same span. If this is to improve, conditions must be created which allow for it.

Another major lamentation of Solzhenitsyn in *The Russian Question* involves the transplanting of the old-line *nomenklatura* into the new institutions. He called the deliberation

⁹⁰ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *The Russian Question: At The End of the Twentieth Century*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York: 1995, 89.

that resulted in the Federation Treaty of 1992 (which established three levels of republic: *avtonomnaya*, *oblast*, and *krai*) ‘buffoonery’, due to its incitement of separatist tendencies in those republics with strong ethnic minorities, such as the Tatar and Bashkor Republics. Further, he laments the establishment of the ‘party list’ system, whereby the political party, not the local electorate, selects electoral representatives for each district. Finally, he bemoans the inability of the Russian people to organize ‘from below’, observing that they “are inclined to wait for instructions from a monarch, a leader, a spiritual or political authority.”⁹¹ He also notes that there are “too few statesman who might simultaneously be wise, courageous, and disinterested – these three qualities, it seems, refuse to coalesce into a new Stolypin.”⁹² With the steady socio-economic improvements made under Putin, it can be argued that one witnesses at least the first two of these traits, though the takeover of NTV, the ongoing conflict in Chechnya, and the jailing of oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky have all been controversial moves that have called Putin’s impartiality into question. After the longstanding entrenchment of bureaucratic exploitation, Russians apparently just seem to cynically accept whatever Putin does.

The last of Solzhenitsyn’s concerns put forth in *The Russian Question* involves the corrupt methods used in the transition to a market economy. The state yet again exploited its citizens for the gain of the few, yet in the name of all. The profiteering that resulted created Russia’s present-day oligarchy. Public trust in the state thus sank even lower, due to the perception that state assets were virtually given away to those with the right connections. The people made the decision to transfer authority to a new regime, and that regime was

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 98.

⁹² *Ibid.* 105.

supposed to empower the individual anew. To a certain extent, the balance did shift over to the individual, but only those in a certain sphere of influence and not for the greater good of the biggest number of people. As Solzhenitsyn and many others are aware, Russia's attention needs to remain internal for some time.

The Czech Republic: Rejoining Europe

As mentioned previously, Charter 77 outlined the desire of a particular group of intellectuals and philosophers to implement a political system based on actual democratic principles in place of the farcical system of appearances that was in place at the time of its drafting. The alternative 'system' (a term used loosely here) proposed in Charter 77 is best referred to as an existential democracy, or what Havel would later describe as "the question of whether or not it is possible to live like a human being."⁹³ Such a system was the antithesis of the one that existed at that time, one that allowed GSCP Brezhnev to declare at the 25th Congress of the Communist Party in 1976 that Soviet society was "without crises, with a constantly growing economy, a society of mature socialist relationships, of genuine freedom" only a year prior to the drafting of Charter 77.⁹⁴ As it happened, the people wanted democracy, not top-down democratization; they wanted genuine pluralism instead of its socialist variant. Havel would have never imagined at the time of the charter's drafting that his participation would land him a seat in Prague Castle, the very same building from

⁹³ Havel, Václav. *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 161.

⁹⁴ Brezhnev, Leonid. *XXV S'ezd KPSS*. 24th February - 5th March, 1976. *Stenograficheskii otchet*. Polizdat, Moscow: 1976, 113.

which he was hunted for years. One of his first acts as President was to open Prague Castle to the public for the first time – a symbolic gesture at exorcising its demons, perhaps.

When Havel took office as the first Czech President after overseeing the Czech/Slovak split in 1992, he set out to establish the system that he had described in his writing. Articles 62, 63, and 64 of the Czech Constitution bestow upon the Czech President significant authority, including the appointment of common court judges and professors at higher education institutions. He swiftly moved to establish an internationally recognized parliamentary democracy, appointing the government of the country four times (in 1996, twice in 1998, and in 2002), gaining approval by the Chamber of Deputies on the first attempt on all four occasions.⁹⁵ In addition, a system of checks and balances was established straightaway, as the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Prime Minister, and President must approve legislation after it is passed by Parliament. The President also may return legislation to the Chamber of Deputies and propose to repeal laws by presenting them to the Constitutional Court. Along the way, Havel had to involve himself in domestic issues a little more than he would have liked in order to establish the letter of law. In doing so, he was forced to make some difficult policy decisions that displeased one societal group or another. Thus his domestic approval ratings were not stellar, as most Czechs were more concerned with their own personal issues than the more ‘cosmopolitan’ issues on which Havel preferred to focus.

One of the other areas in which Havel separated himself from most statesmen was his continued devotion to the civil service sector and human rights. The foremost example

⁹⁵ Vaclav Havel. 2005. 27 Nov. 2005. <http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/politikad_uk.html>

of this devotion was the establishment of his own organization, Vize 97, with his wife Dagmar. The foundation generally focuses on issues of improving social care, healthcare, education and culture. Some examples of sponsored programs include: Early Diagnosis and Prevention of Colon Cancer, the Fund of Understanding (for senior citizens living on their own, the mentally or physically handicapped, the gravely ill, foster families and destitute citizens), Help to Children in Chechnya, the Vize 97 Prize (given to an intellectual who integrates science and culture to broaden 'human horizons'), the Prague Crossroads Project (aimed at architectural restoration), and Education Support for Czech students to study abroad.⁹⁶ In addition to the activities of his own organization, NGOs have flourished since he took office. One telling example is the resettlement of refugees from war torn areas (especially from the Balkan conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo) who were welcomed with offers of asylum facilitated by Havel's government.

In any case, his accomplishments in foreign policy were impressive, as he secured North Atlantic Treaty Organization entry in 1999 and an invitation to European Union membership prior to the end of his Presidency in 2003 (actualized in May 2004). Much of the legislative activity from 2001-2003 was concerned with the preparations for entry into the EU, particularly in the spheres of agriculture and commerce. In sum, though there has been a fair amount of corruption among some in the Czech government, Havel remained steadfastly committed to the principles about which he wrote. In spite of fairly low approval ratings in his domestic policy, Havel achieved demonstrable progress in his tenure, and the Czech people have finally been able to turn their focus to inward concerns. Since Havel

⁹⁶ Vize 97. 2005. 27 Nov. 2005. <<http://www.vize.cz/>>

stepped down in 2003, Václav Klaus has attempted to continue steering the country in the same direction, with debatable success.

VII. THE CRISIS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

In his foreword to Havel's "Open Letters", Paul Wilson notes: "It is a tribute to the vitality and depth of Vaclav Havel's writing that, though these essays were written in a different world and a different time, they still illuminate the present."⁹⁷ Indeed, when one is reading both Havel and Solzhenitsyn, one often finds that their respective works are timeless, that they apply to any society in which there exists the individual struggle for one's own dignity, integrity, and morality. Theirs is a world that illuminates "the daily lot of anonymous man on his journey through life."⁹⁸ The varied utility of their respective messages has been demonstrated throughout this exposition, and such dynamic application of a writer's work only validates the universality of his or her themes. They both found politics to exist not in empty rituals, stuffy suits, backroom dealings between nations, or mechanisms of power, but in the natural, everyday world, in the idea of "the natural world as the true terrain of politics."⁹⁹ They practiced and preached moderation and humility, in Solzhenitsyn's case through his commitment to moral principles, in Havel's through his adherence to his conscience and self-responsibility as a global citizen. They both encouraged this humility to take the place of the self-satisfaction of the material, with Havel even noting that the "far-reaching adaptability to living a lie and the effortless spread of social auto-totally" was inherently connected to "the general unwillingness of consumption-oriented people to sacrifice some material certainties for the sake of their own spiritual and moral

⁹⁷ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, xii.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 111.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 263.

integrity.”¹⁰⁰ They were both acutely aware of the notion that the “grayness and the emptiness of life in the post-totalitarian system” was nothing more than “only an inflated caricature of modern life in general”.¹⁰¹ In combating this grayness, they advocated, “sacrificing something, [...] for the sake of that which gives life meaning.”¹⁰² Though we in the ‘West’ are still not really aware of it, the fall of the Soviet Union was not the victory of one political entity or philosophy over another, but rather a victory of one superior, and thus more subtle, system of manipulation over another, which will be demonstrated below.

The end of the so-called Cold War featured the supposed triumph of capitalism over socialism, or rather that one political philosophy was rendered superior to another: the U.S. model of capitalism over the Leninist-Stalinist interpretation of Marxism. Essentially, this terminology turns the debate into an ideological one. Even a cursory analysis of the modern state of affairs renders it obvious that this debate is archaic and anachronistic, as Havel noted with the following observation: “It seems to me that these thoroughly ideological and often semantically confused categories [socialism and capitalism] have long since been beside the point.”¹⁰³ In fact, a brief look at current living standards around the globe supports this assertion. The following – the top 5 countries in the world in terms of standard of living:¹⁰⁴

1. Norway
2. Sweden
3. Canada
4. Belgium
5. Australia

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 145.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 263.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Report. 2002. 25 Nov. 2005.
<<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/>>

From this list, it is obvious that the country with the most global power (now indisputably the United States, which ranks at #6) does not necessarily enjoy the highest standard of living. Further, it can thus be concluded that the countries that do enjoy the highest standard of living must have in place a system that better provides for their citizens. It is interesting to note that the countries listed above are, to varying degrees, *socialist* democracies. For purposes of definition, these countries have market or mixed economies, and have socialist features in terms of education, health care, and social services. From this, it becomes evident that the countries with the highest standards of living employ elements of both political philosophies in their governments, and have both socialist and conservative political parties. In light of Solzhenitsyn's anti-modern views and Havel's assertion that the debate about the relative superiority of capitalism or socialism is "beside the point," it may be concluded that they would view the issue as being too complicated to reduce to those terms, thus rendering the debate irrelevant.

The "New" Ideology

Rarely in history has there been a society where the traditional lines of culture have been blurred and so inextricably intertwined as in the United States today. As such, the ideological mechanism to which varying societal strata are subjected has to be proportionally more complex than the Soviet variant ever was. Solzhenitsyn, drawing from his experience living in both societies, noted in his Harvard address: "I could not recommend your society

as an ideal for the transformation of ours.”¹⁰⁵ In many ways similar to the Soviet version of the ideological lie, the capitalist system in America “is a veil behind which human beings can hide their own ‘fallen existence’, their trivialization, and their adaptation to the status quo,” at least in its current stage of development.¹⁰⁶ Though the system to which Havel was referring was that of the ailing U.S.S.R., this observation still finds a rather eerie resonance in the present-day U.S. The veil about which Havel was writing represented Soviet ideology; but it could just as fittingly represent advanced capitalism. In adapting this concept to capitalist forms, the veil becomes capitalist ideology, with all its concomitant material adornments. The pursuit of these adornments becomes the vehicle of the system’s automatism, and the *populus* as a whole can only be assessed accurately according to the extent to which it adopts this pursuit. Circumventing the system’s control mechanisms is complex, and requires no small amount of sacrifice and courage. Solzhenitsyn noted at Harvard: “the Western world has lost its civic courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, in each government...” – referring to its allowance of the brutal events of the 20th century, such as the Holocaust.¹⁰⁷ In any case, as long as material pursuits are still possible, the society of consumers is sated. Hence the reason for focusing on the individual reaction to the system as a criterion, in that every individual reacts to the system in some

¹⁰⁵ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. “A World Split Apart.” Solzhenitsyn At Harvard: The Address, Twelve Early Responses, and Six Later Reflections. Ed. Ronald Berman. Ethics and Public Policy Center. Washington, D.C.: 1980, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 133.

¹⁰⁷ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. “A World Split Apart.” Solzhenitsyn At Harvard: The Address, Twelve Early Responses, and Six Later Reflections. Ed. Ronald Berman. Ethics and Public Policy Center. Washington, D.C.: 1980, 5.

way, even if that reaction is to not react, and the current makeup of society is too complex to focus on this or that substratum.

In the current political climate, echoes of the past resonate through U.S. foreign policy, prompting comparisons to works that were written about its former ‘foe’, such as the following:

“It’s definitely a law with a future.
 You might call it the law of the future.
 The law of 1984.”¹⁰⁸

Though Havel was referring to Communist Czechoslovakia, many elements of the totalitarian past still carry through to our time, such as the current U.S. Administration’s “peculiar dialectical dance of truth and lies...” as Paul Wilson notes.¹⁰⁹ Specific examples of this idea have received sufficient ink so as to not even need mention here.

Current U.S. policy parallels Soviet methods to no small extent, as regards its imperial ambitions and systematic inculcation of the ideological lie upon its populace. The chief difference here is that the methods are subtler and more evolved – whereas the Soviet system replaced a monarchy, the U.S. has always been a representative republic with a capitalist system. It could be argued that U.S. citizens follow an endless procession of predetermined dates, celebrations, and ritualistic behaviors just as Soviet and Communist Czech citizens were forced to, except that those rituals wear the mask of capitalism, of Hallmark holidays and other such celebrations of corporate endorsement. In his response to Solzhenitsyn’s Harvard address, George Will remarked that: “[m]odern politics emphasizes

¹⁰⁸ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 116.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Paul Wilson, from Prologue. ix.

the sameness, not the diversity, of people. It seeks to found stable societies on the lowest, commonest, strongest passion: self interest that is tamed by being turned to economic pursuits.”¹¹⁰ Western governments, particularly the U.S., perpetuate this notion to its very end – assuring us that everything is under control, and encouraging us to keep shopping.

Havel was astute enough to even warn the ‘West’ (i.e., the U.S.) of the example his society could and would serve to theirs: “...do we not in fact stand (although in the external measures of civilization, we are far behind) as a kind of warning to the West, revealing its own latent tendencies?”¹¹¹ He foresaw the dangers of rampant consumerism just as Solzhenitsyn observed it in exile, and elaborated: “[a]s for myself – should anyone care to know – I have no great illusions about America, about the American establishment, and about American foreign policy.”¹¹² In today’s context, it is useful to remember that: “[n]o evil has ever been eliminated by suppressing its symptoms.”¹¹³ In *The Russian Question*, Solzhenitsyn prophetically warned that “In the twenty-first century, the Muslim world, growing rapidly in numbers, will doubtless undertake ambitious tasks, and – must we really meddle in that?”¹¹⁴ Those sitting in London and Washington, themselves part of the economic elite, would have benefited from taking careful note of this, as this warning is a prime example of the dangers inherent in heeding only economic interests.

¹¹⁰ Will, George F. “Solzhenitsyn’s Critics.” Solzhenitsyn At Harvard: The Address, Twelve Early Responses, and Six Later Reflections. Ed. Ronald Berman. Ethics and Public Policy Center. Washington, D.C.: 1980, 34.

¹¹¹ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 145.

¹¹² *Ibid.* 319.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 261.

¹¹⁴ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. The Russian Question: At The End of the Twentieth Century. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York: 1995, 89.

Transcending Ideology

Throughout the course of this exposition, I have attempted to demonstrate that the works of these two authors serve as an excellent compass by which an individual may chart his or her own course toward ‘living in truth’, a concept that carries with it the potential for transcending any society’s ideology. Though much has been written on their respective influence on their own societies, and their work has been analyzed in its historical context, little has been put forth regarding the universality of their works. Havel once mused: “I must admit that even I am taken aback by the extent to which so many Westerners are addicted to ideology.”¹¹⁵ He was astounded by the intensity with which the ‘West’ pursued the capitalism-socialism debate in particular. After such a wholly negative experience under the influence of the ‘ideological lie’, neither Havel nor Solzhenitsyn ever understood the Western fascination with the very conceptual framework that they held in such contempt. Further, he notes: “if history, by unfolding unpredictably, were allowed to demonstrate that ideology is wrong, it would deprive power of its legitimacy.”¹¹⁶ Thus we arrive at the core of the matter, that the ‘West’ is so concerned with ideology because its governments still understand that very ideology as an instrument of power, a mechanism of control.

Though by its nature a radical tactic, challenging the status quo is a prerequisite to ‘living within the truth’, due to the nature of the system and its foundation on the material ‘lie’. As Solzhenitsyn noted at Harvard, “This debilitating dream of a status quo is the symptom of a society that has ceased to develop,” and later at Liechtenstein, “The endless

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 305.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 336.

accumulation of possessions? That will not bring fulfillment either.”¹¹⁷ He continued to describe the adverse effect of materialism on culture, saying that it “grows poorer and dimmer, no matter how it tries to drown out its decline with the din of empty novelties.”¹¹⁸ With this in mind, the assertion that “[c]ulture, therefore, is a sphere in which the ‘parallel structures’ can be observed in their most highly developed form” seems to be a valid one.¹¹⁹ This is another Soviet-era concept, originally formulated to describe the state of affairs in Czechoslovakia, which applies equally well to the present U.S. situation. It is here, once again, that we find the notion of a ‘parallel structure’, or the independent life of society – as the point of departure for escaping the ideological lie. These ‘parallel structures’ in practice, and in their proper context among the *populus*, seem to form the true life of modern society. It is not to be found in those commercialized holidays, in the manufacture of our humanity on our behalf, but within us. In yet another response to Solzhenitsyn’s Harvard address, Jack Fruchtman, Jr. noted that the “true challenge is with ourselves: to overcome the failings and the weaknesses in our Western way of life.”¹²⁰ So then, the responsibility lies within each of us: to steadfastly refuse that which we do not accept, to think for ourselves, to not needlessly submit to endless material accumulations, to be self-responsible, and to turn empty conventions on their head. It is the only way in which one can transcend ideology.

¹¹⁷ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. “A World Split Apart.” Solzhenitsyn At Harvard: The Address, Twelve Early Responses, and Six Later Reflections. Ed. Ronald Berman. Ethics and Public Policy Center. Washington, D.C.: 1980, 15, & “Address to the International Academy of Philosophy: Liechtenstein, 14 September 1993.” The Russian Question: At The End of the Twentieth Century. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York: 1995, 118.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 119.

¹¹⁹ Havel, Václav. Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. Edited by Paul Wilson, Vintage Books, New York: 1991, 193.

¹²⁰ Fruchtman, Jack Jr. “A Voice From Russia’s Past At Harvard.” Solzhenitsyn At Harvard: The Address, Twelve Early Responses, and Six Later Reflections. Ed. Ronald Berman. Ethics and Public Policy Center. Washington, D.C.: 1980, 47.

One can only hope that the messages in the writings of Václav Havel and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn can still teach us the methods by which we may escape the ideological 'lie', and begin to 'žít v pravdě'.

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