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# THE INTELLIGENTSIA IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE INTELLIGENTSIA! ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN ON SOVIET DISSIDENCE AND A NEW SPIRITUAL ELITE

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## Abstract

This article explores the peculiar intermeshing of continuity and discontinuity in Russian culture through the prism of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's essay, 'Obrazovannshchina' ('The Smatterers'). Written in 1974 for the collective volume *Iz-pod glyb* (*From under the Rubble*), Solzhenitsyn drew on arguments advanced by contributors to the famous pre-revolutionary work *Vekhi* (*Landmarks*, 1909), both as a polemical tool to distance himself from his immediate contemporary rivals and as a template in his bid to establish a new spiritual elite in Brezhnev's Soviet Russia. This article suggests that if one intention of Solzhenitsyn's essay was to declare an irrevocable break with the culture of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia tradition, the discursive tools he used to do this (intertextual devices, ad hominem polemics, selective historical and ideological narratives) remained firmly anchored within that tradition.

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Сегодня мы читаем ее с двойственным ощущением: нам указываются язвы как будто не только минувшей исторической поры, но во многом – и сегодняшние наши. И потому всякий разговор об интеллигенции сегодняшней [...] почти нельзя провести, не сравнивая нынешних качеств с суждениями “Вех”. Историческая оглядка всегда дает и понимание лучшее. (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 217)

(We read *Vekhi* today with a dual awareness, for the ulcers we are shown seem to belong not just to an era that is past, but in many respects to our own times as well. That is why it is almost impossible to begin talking about today’s intelligentsia [...] without drawing a comparison between its present attributes and the conclusions of *Vekhi*. Historical insight always offers a better understanding.)

Among the canonical texts about the Russian intelligentsia, Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s famous 1974 essay ‘*Obrazovanshchina*’ (‘The Smatterers’) is, without question, one of the most brutal and legendary indictments of its failures. Taking his cue from the 1909 *Vekhi* (*Landmarks*) critique of the late nineteenth-century radical intelligentsia, Solzhenitsyn set out to demonstrate the degree to which both the educated elite and so-called dissidents or oppositional thinkers of his generation had lost sight of their original purpose as a critically thinking elite.<sup>1</sup> If a lack of religious faith and patriotism – in Solzhenitsyn’s reading of the *Vekhi* critique – accounted for the multiple flaws afflicting the original radical intelligentsia (a long list comprising: moral cowardice, intellectual mediocrity, intolerance, hatred, fanaticism, naïve idealism, an inadequate sense of reality, mental inertia, pretentiousness, moral posturing, hypocrisy, self-deification, and a tendency to idolize the common people [*narod*] about whom they knew nothing), this first generation did still, in Solzhenitsyn’s opinion, exhibit a number of virtues. The original *intelligent’s* personal asceticism, his capacity for selflessness, self-sacrifice, and moral judgement were by far preferable to the moral and spiritual stasis which, he claimed, was rife among his present-day peers. The Soviet educated stratum had become conformist, compromised by its penchant for a comfortable, untroubled existence. It was specifically the “rank and file” intelligentsia’s investment in its self-preservation and material wellbeing which Solzhenitsyn had in mind when coined his famous neologism: “*obrazovanshchina*”.

По словарю Даля *образовать* в отличие от *просвещать* означает: придать лишь наружный лоск.

Хотя и этот лоск у нас довольно третьего качества, в духе русского языка и верно по смыслу будет: сей образованный слой, всё, что самозванно или опрометчиво зовется сейчас “интеллигенцией”, называть ОБРАЗОВАНЩИНОЙ. (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 228)

(In Dal’s dictionary, the word *obrazovat’* as opposed to the word *prosveshchat’* is defined as meaning: “to give merely an outward polish.”)

Although the polish we have acquired is rather third-rate, it will be entirely in the spirit of the Russian language and will probably convey the right sense if we refer to this “polished” or “schooled” stratum, all those who nowadays falsely or rashly style themselves “the intelligentsia”, as the *obrazovanshchina* — the semi-educated estate — the SMATTERERS.)

True, he conceded, the Soviet oppositional elite (central smatterers / leading smatterers are the terms he uses) had inherited certain “qualities” from the original tsarist intelligentsia – pretentiousness, posturing, constant recourse to “principles”, self-deification – and might well have preserved others for posterity “если бы сама ИНТЕЛЛИГЕНЦИЯ еще оставалась быть” (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 221; “if the *intelligentsia itself* had remained in existence”).

As one of the most prominent and internationally renowned figures of the Brezhnev era, Solzhenitsyn’s opinions on the “intelligentsia question” are well documented in studies of his life and work and have featured frequently in scholarship charting developments in “dissident” and non-conformist thought. By contrast, the discursive tools which he deployed, and indeed the lexicon of intelligentsia debate more broadly, has, with the exception of a handful of more recent studies, received relatively little attention. The intention of the present article is to contribute to this developing scholarship. Focus on the “textual scaffolding” of Solzhenitsyn’s essay – its ad hominem rebukes, intertextuality, and, in particular, its appeals to “historical insight” mentioned in the introductory quotation above – may provide a pathway for a broader reflection on the nature of Russian intelligentsia culture since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century. To begin, however, it is worth mapping out the broader contours of the “intelligentsia question” itself and the forms it was taking in the early 1970s when Solzhenitsyn returned his verdict on the moral disinheritance of his peers.

## The Intelligentsia Question

From roughly the mid-1960s, and especially in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, a major point of discussion among the intelligentsia in samizdat concerned its *raison d'être* as a representative culture. For the sake of brevity, we may phrase this in the lexicon of the intelligentsia's canonical "accursed questions": What is to be done? Who are we? The essence of the first of these questions is captured in the rise of the human rights movement in the mid-1960s. Spotlighted in public protests and open letters addressed to the party leadership, these examples of activism characterise a socially engaged and morally potent intelligentsia intent on instituting legality and "openness" (*glasnost*). By contrast, the years 1968–1985 have been described as the "long decline" in the history of the intelligentsia (Zubok, 2009, p. 297). Although observance of human rights continued to be managed through various initiatives, there is broad consensus that the restoration of a Stalinist-style party leadership in the aftermath of 1968 saw the active participation of the intelligentsia in the public sphere vastly diminished.<sup>2</sup> Alone, the expulsion of high-profile critics of the regime — including Solzhenitsyn himself in February 1974 — was symptomatic of this political sea change.

In a climate marked by growing introspection and scrutiny of purpose as the educated elite, samizdat dating from this period became increasingly preoccupied by the question of group identity: Who are we? Of note here, however, and of direct relevance to the focus of this article, is that both human rights activism and the soul-searching reflections about the meaning of the intelligentsia found self-validation in the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia tradition. Broadly speaking, expressions of a lineage with the past took two closely related yet distinct forms: first, as a model to emulate; second, as a resource for a reflection on collective identity and accountability in light of the intelligentsia's historically self-ascribed mission to serve the people.

These motifs in intelligentsia self-representation created a discursive field and a set of discursive conventions which, to a degree, informed approaches in contemporary Western studies dating from the Cold War era and Gorbachev's *perestroika* (Pipes, 1961; Cohen, 1982). As if somehow tracking "dissident" discourse, North American and West European historians and sociologists repeatedly drew analogies between the Soviet dissidents of the Brezhnev years and the revolutionary intelligentsia of tsarist Russia. The former notion of an aspirational model played into analyses by outside observers of human rights activism, in which attention was focused on public protests and the arrest of high-profile figures; the latter thematic of identity formation sat well with sociological analyses that were developed with reference to deep-rooted "totalitarian" political and social structures in a broad timeframe. This approach

considered both the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia and Soviet dissidence as the product of a paternalistic regime, or service state, which required an educated elite to support its drive towards modernization: “The contemporary Soviet educated elite”, wrote Marshall Shatz in his study of the history of the intelligentsia, “is, in many respects, the counterpart of the Western-educated nobility of imperial Russia” (Shatz, 1980, p. 139; Dunlop, 1983). Such authors were, of course, conscious of the ideological splits between, on the one hand, the Westernizing, philo-Semitic human rights campaigners, led by figures such as Andrei Sakharov and Andrei Amalrik, and those appealing to a nativist cultural tradition, of which a principal figure was Solzhenitsyn, on the other. But their broad-stroke analyses of intra-community fractures originating in the quarrels between Westernizers and Slavophiles during the 1830s and 40s, coupled with a focus on governmental and social structures across the revolutionary divide, provided a perfect setting within which to trace lines of continuity between the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia and its modern-day iteration.

For Western scholarship, parallels between the pre-revolutionary and Soviet intelligentsia in their respective critiques of the existing political order or in their expressed goals to establish social justice, were evidenced in open letters penned by “dissidents”, editorial mission statements in samizdat journals, and various calls to action dating from the “campaigning years” of the 1960s (Bergman, 1992<sup>3</sup>; Pospelovsky, 1979; Saunders, 1974; Kagarlitsky, 1988). These source materials confirm perceptions of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia as a positive force in Russian history, a model of social opposition and spiritual fortitude to emulate, particularly when dissenting individuals of the Brezhnev era themselves faced state persecution. “The Decembrists”, as Len Karpinskii, founding member of the “real communism” group, put it, are “our forefathers” (Bergman, 1992, p. 24). The arrest of high-profile figures and major events such as the crushing of the Prague Spring were almost visceral reminders of historical precedents. For example, government responses to demonstrations in Moscow’s Pushkin Square protesting the use of military threat in Czechoslovakia prompted the literary critic, poet, and founding member of the Initiative Group on Human Rights in the USSR (1969), Anatoly Jakobson, to draw parallels between the fate of those currently facing prosecution and the conservative-led attacks in 1863 against Aleksandr Herzen (deemed traitor to the Russian fatherland) after he had publicly condemned the tsarist repression of the Polish revolt.<sup>4</sup> An open letter signed by Piotr Iakir, I. Gabai, and Iulii Kim protesting the conviction of Aleksandr Ginzburg and Iurii Galanskov in January 1968 for their involvement in samizdat publications (the so-called “trial of the four”<sup>5</sup>) evoked an image of the original intelligentsia

as a reminder to present-day intellectual activists of their moral obligation to resist complicity with the Soviet regime:

You are the heirs of the great humanistic traditions of the Russian intelligentsia [...]. There is indeed no choice between courage and cowardly complicity or filthy deed [...] between committing a few good deeds or lining up with the yellow pen-pushers of *Izvestiya* and *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* who [...] take part in public slander of those who have been persecuted (Bergman, 1992, p. 24).

Similarly, the following editorial statement from the first issue of *Russkoe slovo*, launched in 1966, is almost entirely underpinned by motifs of historical precedent, parallels with the past, claims to lineage and rightful inheritance:

We call on you, the youthful Russian intelligentsia. To you is entrusted the splendid mission to struggle for truth and light, to struggle for a transformed and regenerated Russia, [...] so that she can take her rightful place in the future in the universal, free, socialist society.

This mission has been passed on to you by the greatest Russians, such as Radishchev and the Decembrists, Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov, Lavrov, Bakunin, Mikhailovsky, Plekhanov and Lenin, and by great Russian writers such as Pushkin and Lermontov, Nekrasov and Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Tolstoi, Chekhov and Korolenko, Tyutchev and Briusov, Blok and Esenin, Platonov and Pasternak (Bergman, 1992, p. 24).

For the student of Russian intellectual culture, the list of historical precedents mentioned in these various examples suggests an attempt at self-legitimization on the basis of a cultural legacy that seems to have been concocted for rhetorical effect. Alone, the naming of Chernyshevsky alongside Dostoevsky as representatives of a single “splendid mission” to transform Russian society is puzzling: recall Dostoevsky’s quarrel with Chernyshevsky’s utopian vision in *Chto Delat’?* [*What Is to Be Done?*] and the dangers of a socialist utopia which he warned against in Ivan Karamazov’s poem, ‘Velikii inkvizitor’ [The Grand Inquisitor]. The pairing of Pushkin, Tolstoi, Chekhov and the symbolist poets with the populist thinkers, Lavrov and Mikhailovsky (not to mention the Marxists) as champions of a “future, free, socialist society” is, likewise, nonsense. But the intention of the editorial was not so much historical accuracy as a bid to rally support in the task of (re-)building socialism with a human face and to call for observance of Soviet laws as inscribed in its constitution.

It was motivational appeals of this kind which helped cement among Western observers (possibly viewing events through the lens of the civil rights movement) the idea of an oppositional elite community unified by shared resistance to the threat of re-Stalinization associated with Brezhnev's rise to power. Symptomatic of contemporary appraisals in the Western press was, as Zubok (2009, p. 261) argues, a tendency to lionize a number of exemplary defenders of human rights – dubbed “dissidents” (Zubok, 2009, p. 261) or freedom fighters – while ignoring the antagonisms which divided the left, neo-Westernizing branch of the intelligentsia leading the human rights initiative, and the nationalist or patriotic sensibilities of those on the right, who, by and large, sidelined the issue of human rights. A case in point are Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, whose names were frequently paired in the literature (Horvath, 2007, p. 880). Both men were awarded the Nobel Prize: Andrei Sakharov, scientist and famous human rights activist, author of the programmatic essay ‘Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom’ (published in the New York Times in 1968), received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975; Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Literature Prize in 1970 and consolidated his international acclaim with his “literary investigation” *Gulag Archipelago* (published in the West in 1973). And yet, we know, they disagreed with each other on many counts. Zubok singles out the Jewish question and the liberal intelligentsia's support for Jewish emigration in the 1970s which so irked Solzhenitsyn as a betrayal of Russia; indeed, in *Iz-pod glyb* he included an earlier piece originally addressed to Sakharov in which he refuted, one by one, the latter's reformist ideas.<sup>6</sup>

Vladislav Zubok's analysis of the “Thaw generation” is one of the more recent studies to revisit these issues of fragmentation and sharp divisions within the intelligentsia (Zubok, 2009; Komaromi, 2012; Oushakine, 2001; Yurchak, 2006; Nathans, 2007). Using tools of cultural historical and historical anthropological enquiry, as well as extensive archival research into the biographies of individual personalities, they prompt reconsideration of the public function of intelligentsia discourse and activism, and, indeed, of the nature of intelligentsia discourse itself. For example, Ann Komaromi (2012, p. 87), in her work on samizdat literature and its readership, asks that we challenge the notion that dissidents represented simply a “grassroots” movement whose debating partner was exclusively the Soviet state: as an “internally differentiated collection of publics”, she writes, Soviet dissidents found readerships across wider international networks – especially from the second half of the 1970s when they began addressing open letters to leaders of the Western world. But they were primarily writing to and for (or against) each other, a point echoed by Zubok, who argues that fissures within the intelligentsia movement had existed since the early 1960s and were only temporarily masked during mo-

ments of high intensity, such as the Prague Spring or to protest the arrest and unjust sentencing of key figures (the famous trial of Daniel and Sinyavsky in 1966, for example). After 1968, the cracks between the Westernizing, neo-liberal intelligentsia and Russophile thinkers opened up again when, Zubok (2009, p. 310) writes: “instead of looking to the future, many antiregime intellectuals squabbled and split over historical and ideological narratives from the pre-revolutionary past”. Questions of lineage and entitlement fuelled identity politics: who belonged to the “true” intelligentsia? Some authors, Zubok (2009, p. 300) suggests, presented the “dissidents” as the only real *intelligenty* of that time, the people who came closest to embodying the Russian intelligentsia’s moral standards and ideals: “And the so-called dissidents themselves [...] consistently imagined themselves to be the ‘true’ intelligentsia”, that is, in contrast to Soviet establishment intelligentsia, who, as fully employed scientists and academics, did not partake in oppositional activities. On this point, Zubok (2009, p. 300) builds on findings by Bergman and Kagarlitsky to suggest a slight shift, between the 1960s and early 70s, in the use of intellectual models: after 1968, the “dissidence” self-identification with the vanguard of the post-revolutionary decade was gradually eclipsed by a quest to legitimize itself with reference to its pre-revolutionary origins, especially the “radicals who opposed the state and addressed society as moral and social prophets”. As I discuss below, it was such uses of pre-revolutionary models which provided Solzhenitsyn with the grist for his diatribe against the intelligentsia elite in its quest to restate its identity, together with corollary arguments about the nature of its relationship with the people.

### **Modus Operandi of Solzhenitsyn’s Polemics**

Beyond his sweeping characterization of the mainstream intelligentsia as “smatterers”, the real force of Solzhenitsyn’s polemic was targeted at named, predominantly pseudonymous authors, all of whom confirmed an unbroken connection between the old intelligentsia and the modern-day oppositional elite. Sarcasm was an important weapon here. For example, he dismissed with relative ease the case put forward by a certain Semyon Telegin (pseudonym for the physicist G.I. Kopylov) in a piece intitled ‘What Is to Be Done?’ (1969). In Solzhenitsyn’s summary, Telegin’s prescription merely rehearsed the same naïve measures embraced by the original populists who championed the “going to the people” movement in the 1870s: disseminate culture among the people; find a common language with them, “after all, we find a common language with the people when we talk about football and fishing – we must find concrete ways of going to the people” (“находим же мы с народом общий язык, говоря о футболе и рыбалке, – надо искать конкретные формы хождения



в народ”); Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 241). The gist of other, more nuanced analyses of the plight of the intelligentsia – by the Orientalist Grigorii Pomerants, and in two pseudonymous neo-Westernizing contributions (O. Altaev and V. Gorskii) to an issue of the Paris-based *Vestnik RSKhD* (*Herald of the Russian Student Christian Movement*) (No 97, 1970) – was to safeguard the integrity of an intelligentsia “inner core”, and to suggest that the people recognize their guilt for having obstructed the creative work of the intelligentsia as the Soviet Union’s only real hope of salvation.<sup>7</sup> In this interpretation, it was “the people”, viz. the Christian peasants, who no longer existed. Solzhenitsyn (1974, p. 248) quotes Pomerants, who writes: “Народа больше нет. Есть масса, сохраняющая смутную память, что когда-то она была народом и несла в себе Бога, а сейчас совершенно пустая... Народа в смысле народа-богоносца, источника, духовных ценностей, вообще нет” (“There is no longer a people. There is a mass with a dim recollection that it was once the people and the bearer of God within itself, but now it is utterly empty... The people in the sense of Chosen People, a source of spiritual values, is non-existent”).

Solzhenitsyn explores the repercussions of Pomerants’ statement on the national question and in the process demonstrates his mastery of sarcastic mimicry, exposing what, to him, was a morally repugnant logic. He suggests that in order to find out how the “central smatterers” view the national question, suffice it to visit their homes and ask what names they choose for their pedigreed dogs: “Узнаете (да с повторами): Фома, Кузьма, Макар, Тимофей... И никому уха не режет” (“You will hear (many times over): Foma, Kuz’ma, Potap, Makar, Timofei... and this grates on nobody’s ears”). The list he provides is made up exclusively of peasant names. “After all, peasants are only something you see in the operas” (“ведь мужики – только ‘оперные’” [Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 247]).

In addition to sarcasm and vitriol, Solzhenitsyn appropriated the interpretations advanced by colleagues and simply inverted their terms of reference: a) it was the intelligentsia that no longer existed, and b) a redemptive path for the intelligentsia mission depended on the simple folk as a spiritual elite. Doing so, he also reset the terms of elite culture from that predicated on reason (in the enlightenment tradition) to one principally engaged with moral injunctions as captured in his overriding command not to lie: “НЕ ЛГАТЬ! НЕ УЧАСТВОВАТЬ ВО ЛЖИ! НЕ ПОДДЕРЖИВАТЬ ЛОЖЬ!” (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 256) (“DO NOT LIE! DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE LIE! DO NOT SUPPORT THE LIE!”). His choice of *Vekhi* as one of the building blocks of this central argument was, moreover, no mere coincidence, since the 1909 collection had been alluded to by neo-Westernizers (the pseudonymous Altaev and Gorskii), and used by Pomerants as confirmation of their rightful

place in the tradition. Co-opting the same source as part of his polemical arsenal was, then, a powerful way to discredit their claims.<sup>8</sup> On the flip side, however, given that Solzhenitsyn also used *Vekhi* as a resource, and not just as a polemical weapon, the divisions within the debate itself were at risk of becoming blurred. I will return to this point presently.

Solzhenitsyn (1974, p. 255) juxtaposed the term “intelligentsia” and his own notion of *pravedniki* (“righteous ones”) in the following passage:

Слово “интеллигенция”, давно извращенное и расплывшееся, лучше признаем пока умершим. Без замены интеллигенции Россия, конечно, не обойдется, но не от “понимать, знать”, а от чего-то *духовного* будет образовано то новое слово. Первое малое меньшинство, которое пойдет продавливаться через сжимающий фильтр, само и найдет себе новое определение – еще в фильтре или уже по другую сторону его, узнавая себя и друг друга. Там узнается, родится в ходе их действия. Или оставшееся большинство назовет их без выдумок просто *праведниками* [...]. Не ошибемся, назвав их пока *жертвенною элитой*. [...] Из прошедших (и в пути погибших) одиночек составитя эта элита, кристаллизующая народ.<sup>9</sup>

(It would be better if we declared the word “intelligentsia” – so long misconstrued and deformed – dead for the time being. Of course, Russia will be unable to manage without a substitute for the intelligentsia, but the new word will be formed not from “understand” or “know”, but from something *spiritual*. The first tiny minority who set out to force their way through the tight holes of the filter will of their own accord find some new definition of themselves, either while they are still in the filter, or when they have come out the other side and recognize themselves and each other. It is there that the word will be recognized, it will be born of the very process of passing through. Or else the remaining majority, without resorting to a new terminology, will simply call them the *righteous*. It would not be inaccurate to call them for the moment a *sacrificial elite*. [...]. It is of the lone individuals who pass through (or perish on the way) that this elite to crystallize the people will be composed.)

Scholars have located the origins of this idea about the *pravednik* in a personal quest dating back to the early 1960s (if not before) when, drawing on his Orthodox faith and the pre-revolutionary current of conservative religious thought, Solzhenitsyn began to think about how one should live. Already at that time, he believed that this process of self-discovery required a return to the base soil of ancient Russian culture and an exploration of the ideal of that cul-

ture, which he did through the medium of creative literature (Zubok, 2009, p. 254). His famous fictional protagonists dating from this period – Ivan Denisovich (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, 1962) and Matriona (*Matriona's Home*, 1963) – encapsulated the lifestyle of a vanishing Russian type as an ethos to be emulated by the entire country. Specifically, it was in his tale about a simple peasant woman, Matriona, that Solzhenitsyn used the term “*pravednik*” – a righteous person – to convey a sense of her deep religiosity. That, one decade later, he chose to make this a central motif in the setting of his quarrel with the self-styled “true” cosmopolitan urban intelligentsia would seem to confirm the suggestion made above, that *Vekhi* served him primarily as a polemical tool (foil) or discursive repository, and only secondarily as a model for his moral programme (a resource). The former strategy consisted in crafting intertextual links between the 1909 volume and his own; the second relied on a selective reading of its content. In this latter connection, he tended to privilege remarks by Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, and Mikhail Gershenzon, all of whom, if largely free of any conspicuous anti-Westernism, tended to adopt a Slavophile, or nativist, “ethos”.<sup>10</sup> In view of the importance that these *Vekhovtsy* contributors attached to a religiously inspired worldview, we may appreciate why Solzhenitsyn drew on their example in his bid to safeguard what he believed was the true essence of the intelligentsia against the distorted forms engendered by the tsarist radical intelligentsia and the October revolution. By contrast, in this essay (unlike later in *March 1917: The Red Wheel*) he made virtually no reference to the (marginally) more pronounced Westernizing values of good governance, or democratic constitutionalism, which Semen Frank, Bogdan Kistyakovsky, and Petr Struve endorsed as part of their pledge to protect the sovereignty of the individual and personal freedom.

### From Foil to Resource

В “Вехах” подразумевается, а у последователей “Вех” укореняется, что крупнейшие русские писатели и философы – Достоевский, Толстой, Вл. Соловьев, [...] не принадлежали к интеллигенции! (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 221)<sup>11</sup>

(*Vekhi* implies, and in the writings of *Vekhi*'s disciples the implication becomes a firmly rooted conviction, that the greatest Russian writers and philosophers – Dostoevsky, Tolstoi, Vladimir Solov'ev – [...] did not belong to the intelligentsia!)

*Vekhi* provided Solzhenitsyn with a rich reserve of terminology. First, his identikit portrait of the radical intelligent, referred to at the beginning of this

article, was drawn almost entirely from remarks made by Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Gershenzon. Similarly, his conception of a new spiritual elite untarnished by the posturing of the “*obrazovanshchiki*” echoed the distinctions made by the same three contributors (as well as A.S. Izgoev in this instance) between the intelligentsia as a mass phenomenon and the existence of genuine thinkers who, more often than not, were despised by the intelligentsia as socially and politically irrelevant. Gershenzon and Izgoev, for example, had opposed the common or garden *intelligent* (rendered as “the intelligentsia mass”, “the average *intelligent*”, “the average mass *intelligent*”) to the élite Russian thinkers, Chaadaev, the Slavophiles, and Dostoevsky (Iakovlev, 1991, p. 92, p. 119).<sup>12</sup> Only scattered individuals, Berdyaev argued, possessed a high philosophical culture, and this alone set them apart from the world of the intelligentsia (*intelligentshchina*), a label which may well have anticipated Solzhenitsyn’s own neologism, *obrazovanshchina*, which he coined for a similar purpose.<sup>13</sup>

A third textual echo concerned the challenge of self-definition. Irrespective of their disavowal of the intelligentsia, the *Vekhi* contributors remained no less committed than the radical *intelligenty* to raising public awareness about the need for social change. Yet they struggled to classify their own self-ascribed role as a “critically thinking élite” under a single term resorting instead to a variety of circumlocutions – *mysliteli* (thinkers), *liudi glubokoi obrazovannosti* (people of profound education), *glubokogo uma* (of profound intelligence), or *osobo darovitye* (especially talented). Otherwise, they tended to place the term “intelligentsia” in inverted commas to signify a cultural élite that admonished revolutionary extremism while still actively deliberating on questions of social justice. Likewise, Solzhenitsyn was confronted by problems of self-designation. His *pravedniki* (the righteous ones) was, at his own admission, provisional; it applied to a small number of scattered individuals who did not as yet constitute a recognizable group but whose common “striving for the pure life” set them apart from the “worldly wisdom of the cultured academician or the artist” (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 253). However, on this last point, if the parallels, or echoes, between the *Vekhi* authors and Solzhenitsyn speak to a rich intertextuality, the underlying thrust of their respective arguments evidence quite distinctive socio-political and moral agendas. In the following quotation we see how Solzhenitsyn’s claim to an affinity with *Vekhi* was actually a segue into his own personal project for the renewal of the intelligentsia, the candidates for which, though, were not the beneficiaries of higher education (the civilized) but those closest to God and the soil (the bearers of spiritual culture):

[И]нтеллигенцию Померанц выделяет и отграничивает *по умственно-му развитию*, лишь **желает** ей – иметь *и нравственные качества*.

Да не в том ли заложена наша старая потеря, погубившая всех нас, – что интеллигенция отвергла религиозную нравственность, избрав себе атеистический гуманизм, легко оправдавший и торопливые рев-трибуналы и бессудные подвалы ЧК? Не в том ли и начиналось возрождение “интеллигентного ядра” в 10-е годы, что оно искало вернуться в религиозную нравственность – да застукали пулеметы? И то ядро, которое сегодня мы уже, кажется, начинаем различать, – оно не повторяет ли прерванного революцией, оно не есть ли по сути “младовеховское”? Нравственное учение о личности считает оно ключом к общественным проблемам. По такому ядру тосковал и Бердяев: “Церковная интеллигенция, которая соединяла бы подлинное христианство с просвещенным и ясным пониманием культурных и исторических задач страны”. И С. Булгаков: “Образованный класс с русской душой, просвещенным разумом, твердой волею”. (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 253)

(Pomerants distinguishes the intelligentsia and sets it apart in terms of its *intellectual development*, and only *hopes* that it will *also* possess moral qualities.

Was this not at the heart of our old error which proved the undoing of us all – that the intelligentsia repudiated religious morality and chose for itself an atheistic humanism that supplied an easy justification both for the hastily constituted revolutionary tribunals and the rough justice meted out in the cellars of the Cheka? And did not the rebirth of a “nucleus of the intelligentsia” after 1910 arise out of a desire to return to a religious morality – only to be cut short by the chatter of machine guns? And is not that nucleus whose beginnings we think we already discern today a repetition of the one that the revolution cut short, is it not in essence a “latter-day *Vekhi*”? [*“mladovekhovtsy*”]. For it regards the moral doctrine of the value of the individual as the key to the solution of social problems. It was a nucleus of this kind that Berdyaev yearned for: “An ecclesiastical intelligentsia which would combine genuine Christianity with an enlightened and clear understanding of the cultural and historical missions of the country.” So did Sergei Bulgakov: “An educated class with a Russian soul, an enlightened mind, and a strong will.”)

Building on the idea of spiritual renewal envisaged by Berdyaev and Bulgakov, Solzhenitsyn then outlines the attributes of his own hoped-for elected few. “What links them”, he tells us, “is not intelligent-hood (*intelligentnost*’), but a thirst for truth, a craving to cleanse their souls, and the desire of each one to preserve around him an area of purity and brightness” (“И не

интеллигентность их роднит – но жажда правды, но жажда очиститься душою и такое же очищенное светлое место содержать вокруг себя каждого”; Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 253). Unlike the “covetousness and worldly wisdom” of the educated stratum, which, he claims, steered it “backward into the familiar lurid darkness of this half century”, those closest to the Russian soil possessed a moral purity.

The “native-soil” ethos underpinning Solzhenitsyn’s thought here (and more generally in his writings) explains why his envisioned spiritual elite privileged “illiterate sectarians” (*negramotnye sektanty*) and the obscure milkmaid on the collective farm as candidates over and above the educated stratum. But that he positioned his views as a natural corollary of the *Vekhi* call to reconsider the role of the intelligentsia as a representative culture is, arguably, to have misappropriated or rechannelled its arguments for mutually exclusive ends. Granted, the ambition to establish an equilibrium between faith and reason is recognizably the gist of Berdyaev and Bulgakov’s remarks, which Solzhenitsyn cites, and yet he seemed to ignore the implications of their message as he made his own case for spiritual renewal. Premised on an outright rejection of “rationalistic” viz. “secular” humanism, or “humanistic autonomy”, which, to his mind, constituted a defining feature of the political culture in the West, Solzhenitsyn’s idea of personal inner autonomy was, if anything, much closer in spirit to the Slavophile and Dostoevskian worldview than to that of his named antecedents.<sup>14</sup> In other words, in making his case for a disinherited intelligentsia, and in his advocacy of a spiritual elite, Solzhenitsyn, like his peers, whom he singled out for criticism, was less interested in history than in constructing a usable past.

### Mutual Exclusions?

One of the distinctive features of the *Vekhi* symposium was, as Marshall Shatz (1976, p. 115) suggests, “that it did not draw a line between ‘spiritual life’ and ‘the external forms of community’ and did not assert the primacy of one over the other. Instead, it maintained that moral and spiritual truth must manifest itself in the objective cultural and institutional forms of civilization”. In other words, the importance that the *Vekhovtsy* invested in man as a moral being served as the starting point in their bid to reshape society in line with religious and liberal principles as they took stock of the failed expectations of the 1905 revolution and the responsibilities of the intelligentsia in this. As signed-up members of the Kadet party, they set great store by the notion of statehood (*gosudarstvennost’*), rule of law, and the apparatus of democratic constitutional social life (a kind of “welfare state socialism” *avant la lettre*; Walicki, 1992). They did not attack Western political and philosophical val-

ues per se; rather, the Russian intelligentsia's overly zealous appropriation of them and the distorted forms that resulted from this process of imitation. In addition, their call for an act of repentance/atonement by the intelligentsia was as a collective body for failing in its self-ascribed mission to serve the people.

In Brezhnev's Soviet Russia, by contrast, the realities of "developed socialism" – namely an atomized society, censorship, a culture of mutual suspicion – meant that this act of self-examination and repentance was, perforce, assumed by isolated individuals, often on the margins of society, and almost entirely focused on questions of a spiritual and/or existential nature (Raeff, 1975, p. 486). Political liberation was thus of secondary importance compared to the liberation of the soul from the lie of Marxist ideology as practised in the Soviet Union. Requiring a moral decision on the part of the individual, rather than the mobilization of group actions through strikes and trade unions, Solzhenitsyn believed that inner freedom was attainable in an authoritarian state and, as more and more 'average people' (*srednii chelovek*) followed this path it could eventually evolve into a powerful form of resistance to it. Alluding to recent events in Czechoslovakia (including the terrible act of self-immolation by the student Jan Palach), he wrote: "Именно только мы, знающие нашу систему, можем вообразить, что случится, когда этому пути последует тысячи и десятки тысяч – как очистится и преобразится наша страна без выстрелов и без крови" (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 259; "Only we, knowing our system, can imagine what will happen when thousands and tens of thousands of people take this path – how our country will be purified and transformed without shots or bloodshed"). It was this type of reasoning, some commentators suggest, which also fuelled his critique of Western civilization: multiparty democracy and economic pluralism were, he believed (at the time of writing, that is), inappropriate for his country (Confino, 1991, p. 614, p. 627).<sup>15</sup> In sum, Solzhenitsyn's disregard for institutional protection and guarantees of material wellbeing, and his advocacy of some form of authoritarianism as the best way to protect the inner freedom of the individual seemed to contradict the very *raison d'être* of the intelligentsia as its successive generations – from populists to liberals and Marxists – had conceived it.<sup>16</sup>

Critics have traced the origins of Solzhenitsyn's apolitical (and anti-Western) standpoint in both the Slavophile idea of a spiritual life and in a Tolstoian-style renunciation of evil. Suffice it to mention Konstantin Aksakov's famous memorandum to Tsar Alexander II at the moment of his accession to the throne in 1855. In his letter, Aksakov advocated the removal of society from politics, and defended authoritarianism as the best possible regime for the preservation of one's inner freedom and moral elevation (Aksakov, 1888; Confino, 1991). Marc Raeff explored parallels between the almost fetishized sense of isolation framing Solzhenitsyn's account of the struggle by

the individual to resist “the lie” with Tolstoi’s ideas about non-violent resistance as a path to individual redemption. Whether the accent in Solzhenitsyn’s writing was more Slavophile or Tolstoian is a matter for debate, but both interpretations (if accepted) confirm a pattern of thinking predicated on a separation of inner and outer freedom, a life led according to an inward moral imperative, and that it was these motives, rather than the political thought and religious philosophical currents of Russia’s Silver Age, which commanded Solzhenitsyn’s approach to the intelligentsia question. In a way, then, the title of the volume in which ‘The Smatterers’ appeared, *Iz-pod glyb*, is slightly misleading. It was intended as an allusion to *Iz glubiny*, the doomed 1918 sequel to *Vekhi* that was seized by the Bolsheviks just prior to the distribution of its first print run. This affiliation is warranted in as much that *Iz-pob glyb* reiterated the *Vekhi* and *Iz glubiny* call for spiritual regeneration in the wake of significant turning points in the nation’s political history: the revolutions of 1905 and 1917; the brutal oppression of the Prague Spring. But the fact remains, as Schatz and Bergman have argued, that the three volumes operated in quite different registers which were largely dependent on the social and political contexts in which they were written. Ultimately, then, any points of convergence between ‘Smatterers’ and the *Vekhi* contributors existed only insofar as these derived from a deeper shared affinity with the religious thought of the nineteenth century.

The initial reception of Solzhenitsyn’s essay when it first appeared in the West in English translation was quite critical. Even though in the essay Solzhenitsyn stressed the importance of history (“Historical insight always offers a better understanding”) and included many references to the national past, his a priori arguing and the prophetic tone he adopted were taken as a disregard for the marshalling of historical evidence. Geoff Gallas (1976, p. 195) in his review for *The Justice System Journal*, for example, called it “crudely polemical, unscholarly, occasionally inconsistent and always unempirical”. For Theodore H. Friedgut (1976, p. 544), the uneven quality of the contributions was “painful evidence of the paralyzing pressure of the ‘rubble’ – the manifold barriers to independent thought that exist under the Soviet regime”. The facility with which Solzhenitsyn co-opted past models to address contemporary concerns was, as Raeff claims, “profoundly ahistorical”, symptomatic of an “unresolved past”, as another reviewer put it. At best, his engagement with elective intellectual masters as interlocutors was testament to the ways in which non-conformist thinkers and dissidents worked creatively in circumstances marked by the suppression of historical understanding and knowledge; at worst, it exposed the degree to which Solzhenitsyn, like so many of his generation, was a casualty of processes marked by major upheavals and breaches in societal development and politics.<sup>17</sup>



By way of a coda, we might query how justified this original criticism of *Iz-pod glyb* was. The real driver of Solzhenitsyn's polemic was, after all, not history, but an ideological struggle to rethink and/or safeguard Russian values – a task made all the more urgent by 1968 as the intelligentsia felt compelled to take stock of its socio-political and moral role. Few would deny that the real power of Solzhenitsyn's essay stemmed from his “voice” – the strongly inflected tones of his irony, anger, and satire – rather than from the historical validity of his claims. To this point, it is also worth restating that an important determinant of the position occupied by many so-called dissidents on the intelligentsia question was not so much the viability of one historical interpretation over another as the degree of legitimacy that competing camps ascribed to “October” as the founding principle of Soviet communism. Well into the 1960s, the dominant motif of dissent in the USSR took the form of a “return to Leninist norms” in line with Khrushchev's reform programme. But, for Solzhenitsyn, we know, the origins of the Soviet Union's current spiritual malaise could not be explained by the Stalinist deviation from Leninist principles nor remedied through their restoration. (He regarded Lenin as a traitorous opportunist who had spent twenty-five years living abroad). Rather, it should be traced back to the fall of tsarism in February 1917: the collapse of the Romanov dynasty was a tragic mishap, the fault of a weak leader (Nicholas II) for failing to heed the counsel of his Minister, Stolypin, in the years following the first Revolution of 1905 (Martin, 2019). Albeit tangentially, these baseline differences between Solzhenitsyn (along with other Russophiles) and neo-Westernizers go some way to explaining why many intellectuals, advocates of Leninism, pitched their hopes for a reformist evolution of the Soviet project in the language of civil and human rights, whereas Solzhenitsyn set the terms of his project for renewal within the moral sphere. For no one, though, was it ever really a matter of openly challenging the political authority of the Communist Party.

Finally, there are several reasons why *Vekhi* resonated with the intelligentsia of the Brezhnev era on both sides of the controversy, even if this was at the expense of blurring the debate as it developed during the 1970s – yet a further point of criticism among early reviewers of *Iz-pod glyb*. As an exercise in rethinking the *raison d'être* of the intelligentsia, *Vekhi* resonated with the broad spectrum of Brezhnev-era intelligentsia opinion in terms of a shared advocacy of freedom of speech, rights of man, and also defence of religion; as a compendium of Slavophile and westernizing viewpoints, the 1909 collection gave both contemporary neo-Westernizers, such as the *Vestnik* authors, and Russophiles licence to claim spiritual parentage in its pages. But also, the divisions within *Vekhi* itself (Struve, for example, was notoriously critical of the sentiment expressed in Gershenzon's essay), and especially the almost

universally negative reaction it received among contemporaries (from Lenin to Kadet leader Miliukov, and many more besides)<sup>18</sup> are instructive of the nature of intelligentsia debate which, again, we find replicated in the setting of Brezhnev-era stagnation. In each setting, the terms of reflection about identity, moral obligation and blame were often adversarial, meaning that motifs of “rifts” or “breaches”, continuity versus discontinuity in the nation’s history, which Solzhenitsyn used in his critique of arguments advanced by his rivals were, paradoxically, integral to the longstanding discursive practices of Russian intellectual culture.

In a similar vein, the principally axiological concerns to which successive generations of intelligentsia sought solutions were developed through paired oppositions which originated in the quarrels among Slavophiles and Westernizers during the 1830s and 40s: the individual and the collective, Russia and the West, religious belief versus atheism, spiritual freedom versus material gain, the state and the people; these all register dichotomies which, in turn, have informed narratives about the nation’s social, political and intellectual history predicated on notions of schism and discontinuity. In addition, the various platforms commonly used for articulating ideas in the public sphere (*obshchestvennost’*) – polemic, letter, speech, or debate – all of which required an “addressee”, whether explicit or implied, undoubtedly helped reinforce this impression of “break”, “crisis”, or the dynamics of “us versus them” as a defining characteristic of its intellectual culture.<sup>19</sup> Solzhenitsyn’s diatribe was thus hardly exceptional; presented in terms of a sharp opposition between truth and “the lie”, and developed through ad hominem polemics, his own prescription for a meaningful existence sits firmly within the intelligentsia’s discursive tradition.

## Notes

1. The term “dissident” is widely and perhaps indiscriminately used in Western literature, particularly in monographs and essays dating from the Cold War era, to refer to intellectuals who were critical of the regime. Solzhenitsyn himself did not use the term in his essay, and by all accounts did not regard himself as one. I would like to thank one of the anonymous readers of an earlier draft of this article for drawing my attention to this fact.
2. Among the best-known organizations were: the Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights in the USSR (1969); the Committee for Human Rights in the USSR (1970), and the Helsinki Watch Groups in Moscow, Kiev, Vilnius, Tbilisi, and Erevan (1976–77). The United Nations Covenant on Human Rights had been ratified by the Soviet Union in 1966.

3. Though published in 1992, the references to Gorbachev and remarks about “the Soviet Union today” suggest that it was written before the collapse of the regime.
4. The conservative press in question was Mikhail Katkov’s *Moskovskie vedomosti*. In his response, Herzen spoke of the unheard voice of a lone, yet defiant dissenting figure: “We stand alone in our dissent, we do not rescind it. We will continue to repeat our beliefs to serve as testaments to the fact that in times of a nearly universal intoxication with narrow-minded patriotism, there were still some who found the strength to object to a rotting empire in the name of an emerging Russia, who weren’t afraid to be called traitors in the name of their love for the Russian people” (Yanov, 2012).
5. Along with Alexei Dobrovolskii and Vera Lashkova, Ginzburg and Galanskov were sentenced to terms in strict regime labour camps.
6. ‘Na vozvrate dykhanii i soznaniia’ (‘As Breathing and Consciousness Return’) in *Iz-pod glyb*, pp. 7–28.
7. O. Altaev [V.F. Kormer], ‘The Dual Consciousness of the Intelligentsia and Pseudo-Culture,’ [Dvoinoe soznanie intelligentsii i psevdokul’tura]; V. Gorskii (E.V. Barabanov), ‘Russian Messianism and the New National Consciousness’ [Russkii messianizm i novoe natsional’noe soznanie]. Translations of the Altaev and Gorskii essays appeared in Michael Meerson-Aksenov and Boris Shragin, eds., (1977), *The Political and Religious Thought of Russian “Samizdat” — An Anthology*, Belmont, Mass., pp. 116–147, 353–393. Barabanov also contributed an essay to *From under the Rubble* under his own name intitled ‘Raskol Tserkvi i mira’ [The Schism in the Church and the World], but it appears that Solzhenitsyn was unaware of his pseudonymous identity.
8. Solzhenitsyn was not unique in taking this approach; references to the collection also served the nationalist thinker, Leonid Borodin, in his critique (in the samizdat journal *Veche*) of the *Vestnik* contributions. See Dunlop, ch. 9, ‘Ideological Struggles’.
9. The “filter” metaphor appears just prior to the passage cited. It refers to a voluntary sacrifice by the individual and involves the difficult process of spiritual cleansing. (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 254).
10. See, for example, Aileen Kelly’s discussion on this point: ‘Which Signposts?’ in Kelly (1998), *Toward Another Shore. Russian Thinkers between Necessity and Chance*, Yale, pp. 155–200. On the background to and the immediate reception of *Vekhi*, see: M.A. Kolerov (1991), ‘Arkhivnaia istoriia sbornika “Vekhi” (1909)’, *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta*. Serii 8: Istorii. No 4, pp. 11–17; P.P. Gaidenko (1992), ‘*Vekhi*: neuslyshannnoe predosterezhenie’, in *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 2, February, pp. 103–22; also see Aizlewood and Coates (2013).

11. In speaking of “disciples”, Solzhenitsyn had in mind the émigré thinker, Nikolai Zernov, author of *The Russian Religious Renaissance in the Twentieth Century* (1963).
12. “*Intelligentskaia massa*” is Gershenzon’s expression; “*srednii massovyi intelligent*” is Izgoev’s.
13. By “scattered individuals”, Berdyaev meant figures such as Solov’ev, Bukharev, and Sergei Trubetskoi. For his part, Gershenzon spoke of the disdain that isolated figures / scattered individuals felt for the mass intelligentsia: “Силу художественного гения у нас почти безошибочно можно было измерять степенью его ненависти к интеллигенции: достаточно назвать гениальнейших – Л. Толстого и Достоевского, Тютчева и Фета” (Iakovlev, 1991, p. 11, p. 85; “In Russia, an almost infallible gauge of the strength of the artist’s genius is the extent of his hatred for the intelligentsia. We need mention only the greatest of them: Lev Tolstoi and Dostoevsky, Tiutchev and Fet”).
14. Solzhenitsyn’s anti-Western views are well documented. See, for example: Confino, 1991; Rowley, 1997; Emerson, 1995.
15. See also: C. Emerson (1995, p. 70), who notes Solzhenitsyn’s “paradoxical ‘authoritarian humanism’ namely, the conviction that the irreducibly individual quality in each of us (our ethical core) is best shaped when tested under totalitarian conditions”.
16. Most critics note the importance of Dostoevsky for Solzhenitsyn, but again, as Raeff points out, Dostoevsky’s message of moral regeneration and love of one’s neighbour assumed a societal framework, which was largely missing in Solzhenitsyn’s prognosis for spiritual rebirth.
17. Raeff compares Solzhenitsyn’s stance to early Christian mysticism. However, while Raeff (1975, p. 480) concedes that man is free in his choice of actions and thoughts, “the natural and sociocultural world around him places definite limits to this choice and imparts concrete forms to it. These forms and these limits are for the most part the product of history, and a memory and a sense of history are necessary for understanding their significance and dynamics”. All of this, he notes, is absent from Solzhenitsyn’s quest for truth as a self-understood value, hence his simple command: do not engage in the lie. For a slightly different interpretation, see: T.M. Perlin (1977, p. 121), who writes: “At the book’s core is a bizarre religious consciousness, a desire to return to a purer age of virtue and sacrifice, of ritual and tradition. [...] *From Under the Rubble*’s admonitions to sinners are clear echoes of an unresolved past”.
18. It is not without irony that Lev Tolstoi, like so many of his generation (with the exception of the Far Right) was highly critical of *Vekhi* when it was first published. See also: M. Shatz (1976, p. 114), who notes that,

ideologically, of the *Vekhi* authors, Mikhail Gerzhenson came closest in spirit to Tolstoi's views, but his arguments were famously contested by the other contributors.

19. As a side note, it is worth mentioning that these formats also provided considerable scope for the vocal inflections of a given author, from caustic irony, sarcasm, to an imploring or prophetic tone, which Solzhenitsyn mastered. For a discussion of Solzhenitsyn's verbal experiments and unique idiom, see, for example, Koehler (1967).

### Declaration of competing interest

I, the author, declare that I have no financial or personal relationships with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence (bias) my work.

Declarations of interest: none.

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