



## **#68 The Individual vs. Tyranny**

*“The simple step of a courageous individual is not to take part in the lie.” (The Gulag Archipelago)*

These are the words of Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, the 20th century Russian author most famous for his book *The Gulag Archipelago*, which documents the decade he spent as a political prisoner under Stalin. As a close observer of one of the most tyrannical regimes in history, Solzhenitsyn firmly believed that in combatting tyranny the individual plays a crucial role.

This belief in the power of the individual, not only to combat tyranny, but also to maintain the health of a society was shared by many other great thinkers of the past few centuries, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche, William James and Carl Jung. These days such a view is unfashionable.

Instead it is far more common to believe that social change results primarily from collective action and that an emphasis on the individual is selfish and will do little to improve the conditions of a society.

This video will put forth the argument that while collective action, in the sense of cooperation among groups of people to achieve common ends, is obviously an important vehicle for manifesting change, it will be ineffective at bringing freedom to an unfree world if people do not first strive to set themselves right, free their minds of the incessant indoctrination they have been exposed to and in the process develop into strong, independent and effectual beings.

For as Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

*“The antidote to this abuse of formal government, is, the influence of private character, the growth of the Individual.” (The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson)*

Looking back at recent history one will notice a commonality amongst the most brutal dictators of the 20th century, be it Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Castro, or Kim Il-Sung. Namely, they all stressed the importance of the collective over the value of



the individual. Examining why tyrants such as these, as well as politicians of today, are such proponents of collectivist ideologies will make it clear why one must look to the individual to counter tyranny.

Those who desire to rule over others do not espouse collectivist ideologies because they believe it will benefit those over whom they rule, rather they do so because it provides them with a secure source of power. The immense benefits of collectivism for those who desire power arise from the fact that collective ideologies are amorphous. In other words, given that a collective is merely a group of people, collectivist ideologies can be built around innumerable possible factors; be it race, ethnicity, wealth, religion, or what is most common today, the country in which one resides.

As Ludwig von Mises wrote:

*“There is no uniform collectivist ideology, but many collectivist doctrines. Each of them extols a different collectivist entity and requests all decent people to submit to it. Each sect worships its own idol and is intolerant of all rival idols.” (Theory and History, An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution, Ludwig von Mises)*

There is no denying that as social beings, humans have a natural yearning for community and a desire to attach themselves to some form of a collective. But those who desire to rule over others do not want people to attach themselves to any such collective, rather they want people to elevate to the position of superiority a specific collective.

Over the past several generations it is the nation state which has most commonly been elevated to the position of the supreme collective by those who desire and seek to rule over others. This has not been a spontaneous process as without indoctrination and heavy doses of propaganda it is far more likely that people would identify more closely with their local communities and others they have more intimate connections with – not millions of people in vast geographic areas.

But indoctrinating people to worship the collective of one’s nation is extremely valuable for politicians, as they are viewed as the leaders of these collectives –



and thus the more people who identify with the nation state, the more minds those in power have under their control.

But while offering immense benefits to the ruling elite of a nation, this form of collectivism paves the way for tyranny. As Carl Jung explained:

*“The increasing dependence on the State is anything but a healthy symptom; it means that the whole nation is in a fair way to becoming a herd of sheep, constantly relying on a shepherd to drive them into good pastures. The shepherd’s staff soon becomes a rod of iron, and the shepherds turn into wolves.” (Civilization in Transition, Carl Jung)*

The ability to indoctrinate people to believe in the supremacy of a certain collective and thus to be turned into what Jung called a ‘herd of sheep’ is crucial for a tyrannical regime to maintain control over a population.

This is evidenced by the fact that even in countries such as North Korea during the famine of the 1990s or the Soviet Union under Stalin’s reign, where the populations were starving, mostly unarmed, and where the rulers had at their disposal massive police forces, spy networks, and prison systems, these tyrannical regimes still found it necessary to make use of massive amounts of propaganda to glorify the collective of their nation.

What this shows is that brute force is not enough to maintain tyranny, rather a tyrannical regime will only maintain power if they can control the minds of their subjects. When one realizes that gaining control of the minds of individuals is the most vital means for controlling a population it becomes clear that the first step in countering tyranny is to undergo the difficult process of freeing one’s own mind.

As the psychologist Jordan Peterson wrote in his book Maps of Meaning:

*“Our petty weaknesses accumulate, and multiply, and become the great evils of state. As our technological power expands, the danger we pose increases – and the consequences of our voluntary stupidity multiply. It is increasingly*



*necessary that we set ourselves – not others – right, and that we learn explicitly what that means.” (Maps of Meaning, Jordan Peterson)*

Concentrating first and foremost on setting ourselves right should not be viewed as selfish, as those who preach the values of collectives would like people to believe. On the contrary, those who set themselves right and free their minds from state indoctrination provide great services to others. As human beings we all face similar struggles and therefore those who find solutions for themselves, act as role models for other members of a society.

The great historians Will and Ariel Durant emphasized that a study of history reveals that a healthy society depends upon “individuals with clarity of mind and energy of will. . .capable of effective responses to new situations.” Nietzsche wrote that “the self-reliant, independent, unprejudiced men [are] the pillars of a strong civilization”. While the historian Arnold Toynbee suggested that “a loss of creative power in the souls of creative individuals” is one of the key factors that leads to the breakdown of civilizations.

With this in mind it should be clear the crucial role that individuals must play in the creation of a free world. For what is needed most in a society dominated by oppressive government is role models who show by example what it means to be free. Without such people, no collective action, no mass movements, no election of a new leader who promises “change” will ever bring about anything but temporary and superficial relief.

As Butler Shaffer wrote:

*“This is the only way in which any meaningful social change can ever take place; it will either arise within each individual, or it will not occur at all...Those who insist upon change coming from above, as something to be imposed upon mankind by institutional authorities, have given up on people. They have lost their confidence in the life processes that exhibit themselves only within individuals...It is now time to give people a chance to bring order to the world by bringing themselves to order.” (Boundaries of Order, Butler Shaffer)*



While we are taught to believe that the individual is impotent in the presence of the great social problems which confront us today, the truth is the individual is far more powerful than commonly believed. One who has freed their mind, set themselves right, and in pursuit of the truth is unafraid to boldly speak their mind even in the face of severe opposition, has, in the words of Jung, “unknowingly and involuntarily become a leader” – a role model which others will naturally strive to emulate.

Such an individual will have become one less pawn in an oppressive system, and whether they are aware of it or not, will have assumed a crucial role in the regeneration of society. As Jung correctly observed:

*“The psychology of the individual is reflected in the psychology of the nation... Only a change in the attitude of the individual can initiate a change in the psychology of the nation. The great problems of humanity were never yet solved by general laws, but only through regeneration of the attitudes of individuals.” (Civilization in Transition, Carl Jung)*