'The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor': The Utopian as Sadist

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> Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent.
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> —George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi"

The argument of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor is simple: man is a weak, pitiful creature unable to achieve peace or happiness unless he submits to the rule of the few superior beings capable of determining his social destiny for him. This argument has been seen—correctly, I think—as an adumbration of the totalitarian regimes that emerged in the twentieth century; but it also continues a tradition of utopian thinking that began with Plato. *The Republic* is generally accepted as the first utopia—a depiction, that is, of the ideal state. But the exact nature of that state—the premises on which it rests and the contempt that it displays for the abilities of ordinary men—is, because of Plato's great prestige, too seldom recognized. His utopia is predicated not on the great mass of mankind's becoming wise or good, only obedient. In this regard, the Grand Inquisitor stands as Plato's direct ideological heir.

The Republic, we recall, begins as an investigation of justice in the individual, of the nature of the just man; only subsequently does it address the matter of the just state. Plato's just state proves

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This essay is dedicated to the memory of my good friend and fellow Orwell scholar Erika Gottlieb.

"A multitude cannot be philosophical."

to be one in which the three strata of society—rulers, soldiers, and workers (banuistics)—each performs the specific social function that "nature" suited it for and *only that function*: rulers must rule, soldiers guard, workers work. The harmony that results from this natural division of social labor Plato calls justice. Analogously, the just individual is the one in whom the three faculties equivalent to the three social strata—reason, will, and appetite—are properly ordered. That person, the one ruled by his reason, nature meant to be a philosopher-king; those dominated by one of the other faculties belong in one of the other classes, which include, of course, the vast majority of the citizens of the Republic. Indeed, this distinction provides the rationale for the whole hierarchical arrangement of Plato's utopia, and the implication is unmistakable: *only* the philosopher-kings are truly just men, everyone else falling short, in varying degrees, of the ideal psychic structure. Only these figures, their inner lives properly regulated, are meant by nature to rule the rest, just as the head rules the body. "A multitude," Plato asserts, "cannot be philosophical," a capacity reserved for a select few.[1]

Plato's logic in *The Republic* thus leads him to posit a utopia composed of a great many unjust (or at least non-just) men ruled over by a very few just ones. Since most of its citizens can never discover for themselves what is right or wrong, their proper civic duty consists in unquestioning obedience. *Doxa* or belief is the highest form of understanding of which the ordinary man is capable, as distinct from the philosopher's *noesis* or appodictic knowledge, so that the task of the Republic's rulers is the inculcation in the citizens of "correct" beliefs: beliefs that promote the stability of the state. Plato's utopia thus poses, according to Raphael Demos, a paradox: that his ideal state is composed largely of un-ideal individuals. "Both the warrior class and the masses are deprived of reason and must be governed by the philosopher–king. How can one legitimately call a community perfect when so many of its members are imperfect?"

Professor Demos believes that he resolves the paradox by the following argument:

> What [Plato's] Socrates, in effect, is saying is that the perfection of the whole requires the subordination of the parts; and that the subordination of the parts contributes to the perfection of the whole. Going further he asserts that the parts would not be proper

[1] *The Republic*, trans. F. M. Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 201.

> parts if they achieved perfection independently of their place in the whole. For the parts are defined by their function in the whole—for instance, the eyes by their function of guiding the whole man . . . . The relative incompleteness (or imperfection) of the lower classes—indeed of all three classes—is logically entailed by the perfection of the city as a whole. The state would not be ideal if its parts, as such, were ideal.[2]

In Utopias from Plato to Comte, the individual good subordinated to that of the State.

This argument strikes me as significantly less persuasive than it apparently does Professor Demos, for it represents nothing more, of course, than a recasting of the hoary "fable of the belly"—most familiar, perhaps, from Menenius' use of it in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*—that the haves have traditionally used to mystify the have-nots:[3] only that in *The Republic* what the haves have is knowledge instead of wealth. Nevertheless, this line of argument represents Plato—and the long tradition of Platonic utopias—correctly: for in that tradition, the ideality of the state does not depend on the perfection of its individual members, but on the perfection of the system itself. Indeed, the good of the polity is paramount and the individuals who compose it are to be judged by how well they subordinate themselves to and mesh with the system. Or as Auguste Comte—in this regard the most Platonic-in-spirit of all the many nineteenth-century system-building utopists—writes in his *System of Positive Polity*, individuals "should be regarded, not as so many distinct beings, but as organs of one Supreme Being"—that is, of the State.[4]

II

The Grand Inquisitor argues for just such a conception of utopia, although Dostoevsky's presentation carries before it, of course, the negative sign of auctorial irony, opposed as he was to all the secular socialist movements of his century. In a prophetic anachronism,

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[2] "Paradoxes in Plato's Doctrine of the Ideal State," *Classical Quarterly*, n.s., 7 (1957), 164, 167. See also John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (New York: Scribners, 1970), 44. For an elaboration of this argument and its contradictions, see my "Imperfect Men in Perfect States: Human Nature in Utopia," *Philosophy and Literature*, 31 (2007), 280-293.

[3] See David Hale, "Intestine Sedition: The Fable of the Belly," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 5 (1968), 377-78. For a superb critique of Plato's method of argumentation, see Renford Bambrough, "Plato's Political Analogies," in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, ed. Peter Laslett (London: Blackwell, 1956), 152-69.

[4] *System of Positive Polity*, trans. J. H. Bridges et al. (London: Longmans, Green, 1875-77), I, 291.

Dostoevsky equated socialism with Catholicism.

Dostoevsky makes the spokesman for authoritarian utopianism a Catholic cardinal of sixteenth-century Spain; and, to give the Legend the fullest ideological significance, casts Christ, allegorically returned to Seville to witness the Inquisition, as his silent but compelling antagonist. Determining why Dostoevsky selects these two symbolic antagonists to enact the sociomachia of his Legend and what ideas he invests in each of them reveals the exact nature of his attitude toward utopianism. That Dostoevsky chooses a Catholic prelate to embody the secular chiliasm of the nineteenth century emphasizes the peculiar equation that he made of socialism with Catholicism, both of which he detested as pernicious Western heresies, agencies of the Anti-Christ. Given their historic opposition, the marriage arranged between them in the Legend appears a bizarre misalliance indeed, born of Dostoevsky's indiscriminate animus against anything non-Russian. Strange as it may strike the modern reader, this equation nevertheless figures centrally in his political thought, expressed nowhere more perfervidly than in *The Idiot* (1868) where he has Prince Myshkin exclaim:

> Roman Catholicism in its essence . . . . is not exclusively a theological question. For socialism, too, is the child of Catholicism and the intrinsic Catholic nature! It, too, like its brother atheism, was begotten of despair . . . in order to replace the lost moral power of religion, to quench the spiritual thirst of parched humanity, and save it not by Christ, but also by violence![5]

Extreme as Myshkin's attack appears, his views reflect exactly Dostoevsky's own, as witness this passage from *The Diary of a Writer*:

> The present-day French socialism itself—seemingly an ardent and fatal protest against the Catholic idea on the part of all men and nations tortured and strangled with it, who desire to live, and without its gods—this protest itself . . . is nothing but the truest and most direct continuation of the Catholic idea, its fullest, most final realization, its fatal consequence which has been evolved through centuries. French socialism is nothing else but a compulsory communion of mankind—an idea which dates back to ancient Rome, and which was fully conserved in Catholicism. Thus the idea of the liberation of the human spirit from Catholicism became vested there precisely in the narrowest Catholic forms borrowed from the very heart of its spirit, from its letter, from its materialism, from its despotism, from its morality.[6]

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[5] *The Idiot*, trans. David Magarshak (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1955), 586. For an elaboration of Dostoevsky's hostility toward Catholicism, see Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *Dostoievsky: A Study of His Ideology* (New York: Columbia University, 1921), 39-43.

[6] *The Diary of a Writer*, trans. Boris Brasol (New York: Scribners, 1949), 563.

The fear that a fusion of Catholicism and socialism might be effected, as the former strove to retain its temporal dominance in an age of secular ascendancy, haunted Dostoevsky for years before he distilled it into the allegory of the Legend. As early as 1864, he had entered in his notebook the sketch for an article "Socialism and Christianity"—never actually written—that in its content and phrasing anticipates the Grand Inquisitor's prophecy. The Papacy, he suggests there, is a dying force. But, he continues: "*Prove* that the Papacy has penetrated into *the entire West* much more deeply and completely than they think, that even the former reformations were a product of the Papacy, and Rousseau, and the French Revolution—a product of Western Christianity, and, finally, socialism with all its formalities and twigs—is a product of Catholic Christianity." Through its secular disguise—socialism—the Papacy will be restored, bearing openly the sword of Caesar rather than the keys of Peter, although the assumption of infallibility will remain the same: "The absolute logicality in the formation of the idea: that if the Pope is the spiritual ruler and if the church combines in itself the answers to everything and the keys to the future, then, consequently, to whom should everything be subordinated, if not to the Pope."[7] This conversion from sacred to secular domination posed no paradox for Dostoevsky, for the Church of Rome had always cared less for the souls of men and the Kingdom of Heaven than for men's political allegiance and earthly sway. Prince Myshkin again:

> Roman Catholicism believes that the Church cannot exist on earth without universal temporal power, and cries: *Non possumus*! In my opinion, Roman Catholicism isn't even a religion, but most decidedly a continuation of the Holy Roman Empire, and everything in it is subordinate to that idea, beginning with faith. The Pope seized the earth, an earthly throne and took up the sword; and since then everything has gone on in the same way, except that they have added lies, fraud, deceit, fanaticism, superstition, wickedness. They have trifled with the most sacred, truthful, innocent, ardent feelings of the people, have bartered it all for money, for base temporal power. And isn't this the teaching of Anti-Christ?

Indeed, "Roman Catholicism is even worse than atheism. . . . Atheism merely preaches negation, but Catholicism goes further:

[7] *The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks (1860-81)*, ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1973), I, 94.

it preaches a distorted Christ . . . . the opposite of Christ."[8] Since Catholicism was only atheism manqué and motivated by a ceaseless will-to-power, nothing but time, Dostoevsky feared, stood between its union with admittedly-godless socialism. In the figure of the Grand Inquisitor this union is imaginatively effected: Marx is mated with the Pope.

Grand Inquisitor prefigures the commissar.

While the prospect of a fusion of Catholicism and socialism was one of Dostoevsky's more aberrant conjectures, still his fear served to point up the ideological filiation between them: the principle of coercive authoritarianism. "It was the authoritarian idea of the 'compulsory organization of human happiness,'" wrote Philip Rahv, "that was the essential link in his conception of socialism and Catholicism as two aspects of the same heretical self-will driving toward the obliteration of human dignity and freedom of conscience."[9] In our age of (more or less) tolerant ecumenicism, the critique of Catholicism implicit in the Legend excites little interest; its relevance today resides, rather, in its anticipation of totalitarianism, in its anticipation of the central ideological conflict of the twentieth century. But the origins of the Legend in Dostoevsky's anti-Catholic animus and the Legend's being cast as a religious parable prove prophetic. His identification of Catholicism with the emerging authoritarian socialism of his day—wholly mistaken as historical analysis—nevertheless adumbrated the manner in which these movements, particularly as they culminated in Marxism, would adopt the attitudes, the structure, and even the assumption of infallibility of their apparent ideological opposite, the Church of Rome. Dostoevsky foresaw, that is, the rise of a new, secular form of Catholicism, for which the Grand Inquisitor stands as a perfect apologist. Beneath his cardinal's robes, he prefigures the commissar, heralds the coming of a new political clerisy.

Dostoevsky's prescience in this regard stemmed precisely from the almost paranoid animosity that he felt toward any religion other than his own, Orthodoxy. And a secularized religion he felt socialism to be. Or so it had come to seem by the 1870s when he was writing *The Brothers Karamazov*. This had not been the case in the 1840s when the young Dostoevsky had been drawn into the Fourierist Petrashevsky Circle, believing then that his Christian-

[8] *The Idiot*, 585.

[9] "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," *The Myth and the Powerhouse* (New York: Noonday Press, 1966), 157.

ity was compatible with socialism. "In those days the matter was seen in the very rosiest and angelically moral light," he wrote in 1873. "Really, truthfully, the Socialism then just being born used to be compared, even by some of its ringleaders, with Christianity, and was regarded merely as a corrective to, and improvement of, the latter in accordance with the century and civilization. All these ideas pleased us terribly in Petersburg, and seemed in the highest degree holy and moral and, most important, universal, the future law of mankind without exception."[10] Joseph Frank has shown that this same sentimental attitude marked the early stages of Utopian Socialism not only in Russia, but in the West as well: "Saint-Simon had entitled the last work he wrote before his death *Nouveau Christianisme*; and all of French Utopian Socialism may be summed up under that title . . . . All the Utopian Socialists of any importance in the 1840s saw Christ (much as Dostoevsky had in 1838) as a divine figure come to prescribe the laws governing the organization of earthly life in the modern world, and whose teachings, freed from centuries of perversion, were at last to be put into practice."[11] But this attitude changed, Frank continues, under the influence of the German Left Hegelians, and particularly of Max Stirner, who converted socialism into a doctrine of atheistic materialism. Nevertheless, as Dostoevsky perceived, its claims remained essentially religious, particularly in such grand schemes as Comte's Positivism and Marx's Communism. One wit described Positivism as medieval Catholicism minus the Christianity; and J. S. Mill condemned *The System of Positive Polity* as advocating a despotism rivaled only by that of Ignatius of Loyola, a new form of Jesuitism.[12] Dostoevsky wholly concurred, believing, however, that what was true of Comte was true of all the other chiliastic socialisms of his century which elevated *étatisme* to the status of a religion.

Comte's Positivism medieval Catholicism minus the Christianity.

Of Marx he knew very little—and despised, of course, what little he did know. His prediction, then, of the development of radical socialism into totalitarian Communism—and its alter-ego, fascism—rested on his reading of the future from the relatively

[10] *The Diary of a Writer*, 148.

[11] *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 184. See also Ellis Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: A Study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 5-22 and passim.

[12] *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 148-49. See also Mill's *On Liberty* (New York; Crofts, 1947), 13-14.

benign, sentimental socialism of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Cabet, Considerant and the like.[13] Even in them, however, he saw the shape of things to come, the seeds of what Camus later would call "the socialism of the gallows." Out of his antipathy toward the crypto-religious premises of socialism, that is, Dostoevsky wrote the mytho-history of Marxism before it happened, his prophetic power stemming precisely from his perception of a rival creed to Christianity, from that apocalyptic turn of mind that saw the Anti-Christ lurking in utopia and ensorcelling the century with a specious promise of salvation.[14] This Dostoevskian sociomachia culminated, of course, in Marxism which, as Berdyaev put it, "seeks to take the place of Christianity. It professes to answer the religious questions of the human soul and to give meaning to life."[15] Proclaiming itself—and long widely accepted as—a "science," Marxism is now more generally conceived as Dostoevsky conceived it, as a religion. Robert Tucker provides a representative contemporary assessment: "The old assumption that 'scientific socialism' is a scientific system of thought has tended more and more to give way to the notion that it is in essence . . . a religious system. It appears now . . . as the single most influential expression of a modern socialist movement that was inspired by fundamentally religious impulses and represented, in Martin Buber's phrase, a 'socialist secularization of eschatology.'"[16]

Although this view is now commonplace, Dostoevsky was among the earliest to argue its truth and out of his hostility to its eschatological claims adumbrated in his greatest fiction—*Notes from Underground, Crime and Punishment, The Possessed, The Brothers Karamazov*—much of the theory and practice of twentieth-century ideology with a prescience that few, if any, other writers of his time

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[13] See Yarmolinsky, *Dostoievsky: A Study of His Ideology*, 36-39.

[14] For an interpretation of Dostoevsky's religious-political vision in terms of the Revelation of St. John, see Vasily Rozanov, *Dostoevsky and the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* (1891), trans. Spencer E. Roberts (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), esp. 139-47, 159-71.

[15] Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Origins of Russian Communism*, trans. R. M. French (1937; rpt. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960), 158. The whole of Chap. 7, "Communism and Christianity," bears significantly on this point.

[16] *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 14. This view is now so commonplace that citing additional sources would be superfluous; but an exhaustive and indispensable account of the whole revolutionary tradition as a religion manqué is James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

possessed. Indeed, the major dystopian writers of the twentieth century—Zamyatin and Capek and Huxley, Koestler and Orwell and C. S. Lewis—will find most of their themes prefigured in the work of Dostoevsky. In particular, in the utopian scheme of Shigalov in *The Possessed* emerges that combination of humanitarian intention and despotic *modus operandi* that makes utopias such dangerous designs. Here is Dostoevsky's savage satire on the utopian mentality, Shigalov speaking:

Humanitarian intention and despotic modus operandi *bring unlimited despotism.*

> Dedicating my energies to the study of the social organization which is in the future to replace the present condition of things, I've come to the conviction that all makers of social systems from ancient times up to the present year, 187-, have all been dreamers . . . who understood nothing of natural science and the strange animal called man. . . . But, now that we are all at last preparing to act, a new form of social organization is essential. In order to avoid further uncertainty, I propose my own system of world organization . . . . [But] I must add . . . that my system is not yet complete. I am perplexed by my own data and my conclusion is in direct contradiction of the original idea with which I start. Starting from unlimited freedom, I arrive at unlimited despotism. I will add, however, that there can be no solution to the social problem but mine.

When Shigalov is shouted down by the audience of radicals, a friend continues expounding his "system":

> He suggests as a final solution of the question the division of mankind into two unequal parts. One-tenth enjoys absolute liberty and unbounded power over the other nine-tenths. The others have to give up all individuality and become, so to speak, a herd, and, through boundless submission, will by a series of regenerations attain primaeval innocence, something like the Garden of Eden. They'll have to work, however. The measures proposed by the author for depriving nine-tenths of mankind of their freedom and transforming them into a herd through the education of whole generations are very remarkable, founded on the facts of nature and highly logical.

"'[I]t's paradise, an earthly paradise, and there can be no other on earth,' Shigalov pronounced authoritatively"[17]—speaking in the true voice of authoritarian utopists down through the ages. A ridiculous figure, Shigalov debouches a muddled form of the new hieratic religion that the Grand Inquisitor, an awesome figure, raises in the Legend to full mythic resonance. The Grand Inquisitor, that is, is Shigalov taken seriously.

[17] *The Possessed*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Modern Library, 1936), 409-11.

III

Dostoevsky had his own utopia.

In this survey of his thought so far, Dostoevsky appears as implacably anti-utopian; yet he believed in a utopia of his own, and a socialist utopia at that—but one uniquely Russian, mystical in its inspiration, based on the principles of brotherhood and self-sacrifice, rather than (like Western ones) on coercion and self-interest. He initially sets forth his utopia in *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, that perversely brilliant piece of reportage occasioned by his first visit to Western Europe. There he declares Western-style socialism a fraud, its motto *liberté, egalité, fraternité* an untenable illusion, because it presupposed a condition that did not exist and, given the self-aggrandizing individualism of Western man, never would exist.

> The Westerner speaks of fraternity as of a great motivating force of humankind, and does not understand that it is impossible to obtain fraternity if it does not exist in reality. What is to be done? Fraternity must be obtained at any cost. But as it happens it is impossible to create fraternity, for it creates itself, comes of itself, exists in nature. But . . . in Occidental nature . . . it is not present; and you find there instead a principle of individualism, a principle of isolation, of self-determination of the *I* . . . .Well, fraternity could scarcely arise from such an attitude.[18]

Russia envisioned as nation of altruists without self-interest.

Against the illusory, self-defeating individualism of the West, Dostoevsky poses the "true individualism" of the Russian who, apparently alone among the human family, knows the meaning of love for one's fellow man:

> Understand me: voluntary, fully conscious self-sacrifice utterly free of outside constraint, sacrifice of one's entire self for the benefit of all, is in my opinion a sign of the supreme development of individuality, of its supreme power, absolute self-mastery and freedom of will. Voluntarily to lay down one's life for others, to crucify oneself or to be burnt at the stake for the sake of all—all that is possible only in the most advanced stage of individuality. . . . If there exists the slightest calculation on behalf of self-interest, all is lost.[19]

In a society composed of such truly altruistic members, the only concern of all is with the happiness of all. Everything will be shared, openly, freely, without calculation or coercion. All will be brothers, constantly seeking to increase the degree of "personal freedom and self-revelation." "There is a Utopia for you, gentle-

[18] *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, trans. Richard L. Renfield (New York: Criterion Books, 1955), 110.

[19] Ibid., 111-112.

men!" Dostoevsky concludes. "Everything is based on feelings, on nature, not on reason. Why, this actually humbles the reason. What do you think? Is this a Utopia or not?"[20] By way of contrast, Dostoevsky notes that within six months of Cabet's founding an egalitarian socialist commune, his fraternity brothers had dragged him into court, claiming breach of contract.

Now, the community of selfless brothers sketched in *Winter Notes* no more corresponds to the realities of Russian life in the 1860s than, say, Burke's panegyric to the British constitution in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* corresponds to the realities of English life in the 1790s: "One might gather from Burke," notes Irving Babbitt, "that England was almost entirely made up of Christian gentlemen ready to rally to the support of the majestic edifice of traditional civilization."[21] Both works are, in their way, idealizations masquerading as description. Still, we discover here an early indication of the belief, which will grow increasingly pronounced in Dostoevsky's thought, that Russia is the only truly Christian nation, the Russians the only "God-bearing people." Through the character of Shatov in *The Possessed*, he sets forth this nationalistic messianism most unambiguously, recapitulating his hostility toward Catholicism and "scientific socialism" as prologue to the claim: "[T]here is only one truth, and therefore only a single nation out of the nations that can have the true God. . . . Only one nation is 'god-bearing,' that's the Russian people." This is not, Shatov protests, to reduce God to an attribute of nationality, but rather to raise the people to God. The Russian people is "the body of God" and is "destined to regenerate and save the world in the name of a new God": to this people alone is "given the keys of life and of the new world."[22] Throughout the 1860s and '70s, in his letters and journalism, Dostoevsky affirms and reaffirms this passionate belief that "Russian thought is paving the way for the great spiritual regeneration of the whole world," that Orthodoxy, Christ and the Russian example would triumph over the decadent, diseased civilization of the West. In one of his last essays in *The Diary of a Writer*, published just before his death, Dostoevsky summed up his faith in the transforming power of "our Russian 'socialism,'"

"Only one nation is 'god-bearing,' that's the Russian people."

the ultimate aim of which is the establishment of an oecumenical

[20] Ibid., 114.

[21] *Democracy and Leadership* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 111.

[22] *The Possessed*, 255, 250.

> Church on earth in so far as the earth is capable of embracing it. I am speaking of the unquenchable, inherent thirst in the Russian for great, universal, brotherly fellowship in the name of Christ. And even if this fellowship, as yet, does not exist . . . nevertheless the instinct for it and the unquenchable, often unconscious, thirst for it, indubitably dwells in the hearts of millions of our people. Not in communism, not in mechanical forms is the socialism of the Russian people expressed: they believe that they shall be saved *through the universal communion in the name of Christ*. This is our Russian socialism![23]

The utopia sketched twenty-five years before in *Winter Notes* proves, then, not a passing fancy of Dostoevsky's but the very essence of a passionate idea that permeated his thinking until the very end of his life. Once true to her heritage, Russia, he believed, would become a semblance of heaven on earth. In "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," he concentrates these values—these Russian utopian values—in the figure of Christ, who stands for the idea of voluntary brotherhood arising out of love alone, for a socialism spiritual rather than material, uncoerced, self-sacrificial not self-interested.[24]

The Legend, then, ostensibly a religious parable, is actually a political *agon*, an allegorical confrontation between two of the century's contending ideologies. At issue above all for Dostoevsky, as Berdyaev notes, is the central overriding question of human freedom: "Every man is offered the alternative of the Grand Inquisitor or Jesus Christ and must accept the one or the other, for there is no third choice; what appears to be other solutions are only passing phases, variations on one or the other theme. . . . The two universal principles, then, confront one another in the Legend: freedom and compulsion . . . divine love and humanitarian pity, Christ and Anti-Christ."[25] Such is the Dostoevskian dialectic.

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[23] *The Diary of a Writer*, 420. For the xenophobic and jingoistic aspects of Dostoevsky's religio-nationalism, see, e.g., Hans Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples: Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), Chap. 5. David Goldstein in his study *Dostoevsky and the Jews* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981) attributes Dostoevsky's virulent anti-semitism to his nationalistic desire to substitute the Russians for the Jews as God's "chosen people."

[24] Of course the Christ of the Legend is himself a fictional character and even, it is sometimes suggested, an heretical creation. Dostoevsky, that is, is thought to subordinate theology to politics. See, e.g., Philip Rahv, "Dostoevsky in *The Possessed*," *Essays on Literature and Politics, 1932-1972* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1978), 110-11, especially the quotation from the theologian Konstantin Leontiev.

[25] *Dostoevsky*, trans. Donald Attwater (Cleveland and New York: Meridian,

IV

When Christ returns to sixteenth-century Seville, sadly to witness the burning of a hundred heretics *ad majorem gloriam Dei*, he is recognized by the Grand Inquisitor, arrested and thrown into prison. That night, when the Grand Inquisitor comes to his cell, he forbids Christ to speak: "you have no right to add anything to what you had said of old."[26] Although later he will urge Christ to speak, to justify his message, Christ never utters a word. The implication of Christ's remaining silent is clear: there *is* nothing more to be added to what he had said of old. His message has not changed, will not change, remains forever what it was, admits of no clarification or amendment. One accepts it, suggests Dostoevsky, as it is—a great and profound mystery, apprehensible only by faith—or accepts it not at all. Christ's silence, then, is essential to the Legend.

Christ's silence essential to the Legend.

The Grand Inquisitor, however, restates Christ's position "of old" accurately—at least by Dostoevsky's lights—as a prologue to rejecting it. Christ (he says) offered man freedom, demanded of him choice, made him individually responsible for the fate of his soul. "You wanted man's free love. You wanted him to follow You freely, enticed and captured by You. In the place of the rigid ancient law, man was hereafter to decide for himself with a free heart what is good and what is evil, having only Your image before him as his guide" (129). Thousands and tens of thousands through history rise to this example; but millions and tens of millions fail. The very exaltedness of Christ's expectations damns the vast majority of men, who are weak, pathetic, rebellious but servile.

> By showing [man] so much respect, You acted as though You had ceased to have compassion for him, because You asked too much from him—You who loved him more than Yourself! Had You respected him less, You would have asked less of him. That would have been more like love, for his burden would have been lighter. . . . You may indeed point with pride at those children of freedom, of free love, of free and splendid sacrifice for Your name. But remember that they are only some thousands . . . ; and what of the rest? And how are the other weak ones to blame, because they could not endure what the strong have endured? How is the weak soul to blame that it is incapable of appreciating such terrible gifts? (131-32)

1957), 188-89.

[26] All quotations from the Legend are taken from Ralph Matlaw's edition, *Notes from Underground and The Grand Inquisitor* (New York: Dutton, 1960). All further page references to the Legend will appear within parentheses within the text.

Such a pathetic creature will reject the gift of freedom and seek instead a limited but guaranteed security, "since nothing has ever been more insupportable for a man in a human society than freedom" (126). Man will do anything to escape having to choose and thus having to bear the consequences of his choice. The gravamen of the Grand Inquisitor is that Christ was a bad social psychologist, blind to the evidence of history. Had he understood man better, he would have offered him happiness, not freedom, and to that end would have accepted the powers that Satan tempts him with in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan, not Christ, knew what man truly desires and distilled that desire into the three temptations—bread, miracle, and the sword—in which, says the Grand Inquisitor, "the whole subsequent history of mankind is, as it were, foretold, and in [which] are united all the unresolved historical contradictions of human nature throughout the world" (126). Indeed, from the few spare verses in Matthew, Dostoevsky elaborates a symbolic mytho-history of man's fate.

Grand Inquisitor a materialist.

"If thou be the Son of God," Satan first tempts, "command that these stones be made bread." Christ refuses: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The Grand Inquisitor interprets Christ's rejection as the refusal to buy man's obedience with bread, his first fundamental error if he would have him virtuous: for the Grand Inquisitor stands squarely in the nineteenth-century tradition of thoroughgoing materialism—the tradition of Buckle and Buchner and Claude Bernard and even of Dostoevsky's one-time mentor Belinsky—that dismissed concepts like "free will" and "moral choice" as empty illusions exploded by science. Virtue and vice, in this view, were merely matters of man's conditioning, automatic responses to his material circumstances. In a letter of 1876, Dostoevsky explains the symbolism that he later uses in the Legend: "'Stones and bread' means the present social question of environment."[27] And it was on the environment, he elsewhere relates, that Belinsky placed all responsibility for the existence of evil: "[D]o you not know that it is impossible to charge man with sins . . . when society is organized so vilely that man cannot help committing crimes, when he is economically pushed into crime, and that it is stupid and cruel to demand from men what, by the very laws of nature, they cannot

[27] Cited in Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse*, 152.

accomplish even if they wanted to . . . ?"[28] The Grand Inquisitor reiterates Belinsky's idea that "bread" is the source of virtue, its lack the cause of vice. "Do you not know," he asks of Christ,

> that centuries will pass, and humanity will proclaim through the mouth of their wisdom and science that there is no crime, and therefore no sin, there is only hunger? "Feed men, and then demand virtue from them!" That's what they'll write on the banner, which they will raise against You, and with which they will destroy Your temple (127).

Christ rejected the guarantee of bread for man and, in turn, man will reject Christ for the guarantee of bread; he will turn at last to the new priesthood of materialism for secular salvation:

> In the end they will lay their freedom at our feet, and say to us, "make us your slaves, but feed us." They will understand themselves, at last, that freedom and bread enough for all are inconceivable together. . . . They will be convinced, too, that they can never be free, for they are weak, sinful, worthless and rebellious. . . . [B]ut in the end they will become obedient. They will marvel at us and look upon us as gods, because we are ready to endure the freedom which they have found so dreadful and to rule over them—so awful will it seem to them to be free (127-28).

In rejecting Satan's first temptation, "You rejected the one infallible banner which was offered to You, to make all men bow down to You alone—the banner of earthly bread" (128). Bread and obedience are, for the Grand Inquisitor, inextricably linked, the former securing the latter. For man needs, above all, something to worship—"to worship what is beyond dispute, so indisputably that all men would agree at once to worship" (128). Christ's mistake in rejecting the first temptation is compounded by his rejecting the second—the temptation to validate his divinity in the eyes of men by performing miracles.[29] Offering this temptation, Satan takes Christ to the pinnacle of the Temple and challenges: "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Again Christ

[28] Cited in Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt*, 193-94.

[29] This claim of the Grand Inquisitor (and, one assumes, of Dostoevsky) has always puzzled me. Christ, of course, performed miracles during his lifetime, according to the Gospels; furthermore, Dostoevsky has him perform two more in his "second coming," at the beginning of the Legend. Indeed, the crowd in the square in Seville recognizes him *because* he is performing miracles. I would guess that the distinction here must be that the miracles that Christ performs benefit others, while those that Satan would have him perform would serve only himself.

refuses the temptation: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Had Christ succumbed to this temptation, argues the Grand Inquisitor, he would have established his godhood beyond all doubt, so that all people would have been forced to acknowledge and follow him: his claim to their obedience, founded upon miracle, would have been absolute, indisputable. Instead, Christ chose to expect of them an act of faith, uncoerced.

> You would not enslave men by a miracle, and craved faith given freely, not based on miracle. You craved for free love and not the base raptures of the slave before the might that has overawed him forever. But here too You judged men too highly. . . . Look round and judge; fifteen centuries have passed, look upon them. . . . [U]nrest, confusion and unhappiness—this is the present lot of man after You bore so much for his freedom! (130-31).

"We have corrected Your work," continues the Grand Inquisitor, "and have founded it upon *miracle, mystery and authority*. And men rejoiced that they were again led like a flock and that the terrible gift that had brought them such suffering was, at last, lifted from their hearts" (132). By giving man something infallible to worship, by taking from him all choice and doubt, we—the secret priesthood, the new breed of philosopher–kings—show man more love, he argues, than had Christ, who expected them to act on the basis of faith alone, on the belief in things unseen. Man, however, cannot live by faith alone, but demands certainty: demands, that is, miracle, mystery and authority. And thus, concludes the Grand Inquisitor, "We are not working with You, but with *him*—that is our mystery" (132).

For, succumbing to the third temptation offered by Satan, "We took Rome and the sword of Caesar from him and proclaimed ourselves rulers of the earth, the sole rulers. . . . Oh, the work is only beginning. . . . [B]ut we will triumph and will be Caesars, and then we will plan the universal happiness of man" (132). The third temptation offered Christ had, of course, been precisely this—all the kingdoms of this world if "thou wilt fall down and worship me." What Christ refused, the Grand Inquisitor accepted.

> Had You accepted the third counsel of the mighty spirit, You would have accomplished all that men seek on this earth—that is, someone to worship, someone to keep his conscience, and some means of uniting everyone in one indisputable general and unanimous anthill, for the craving for universal unity is the third and last anguish of men. . . . Had You taken the world and Caesar's purple, You would have founded the universal state and have given universal

> peace. For who can rule men if not he who holds their conscience and their bread in his hands? We have accepted the Sword of Caesar, and in taking it, of course, rejected You and followed *him* (132-33).

Dostoevsky then sketches the utopia, the secularized theocracy (or, I suppose, satanocracy) that after centuries more of chaos and bloodshed and confusion, will finally come into being under the priesthood that the Grand Inquisitor prefigures:

> With us everybody will be happy and will neither rebel nor everywhere destroy each other anymore as they did under Your freedom. Oh, we will persuade them that they will only become free when they renounce their freedom to us and submit to us. . . . We shall show them that they are weak, that they are only pitiful children, but that childlike happiness is the sweetest of all. . . . They will marvel at us and will be awe-stricken before us. . . . They will tremble more weakly before our wrath, their minds will grow fearful . . . but they will be just as ready at a sign from us to pass to laughter and rejoicing, to happy mirth and childish song. . . . And they will have no secrets from us. . . . [T]hey will bring everything, everything to us, and we will have an answer for everything. And they will be glad to believe our answer, for it will save them from that great anxiety and terrible agony they now endure supplying a free, individual answer. And everyone will be happy, all the millions of creatures except the hundred thousand who rule them. For only we, we who guard the mystery, will be unhappy. . . . They will die peacefully . . . and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death. But we will keep the secret, and for their happiness we will tempt them with the reward of Heaven and eternity (133-35).

Grand Inquisitor the prototype of all Big Brothers.

The disjunction of freedom or happiness, choice or security, is nowhere posed more starkly than in this monologue. There are, of course, many more elaborate, more empirically grounded and better balanced presentations of this dichotomy, but none that cuts more directly and ruthlessly to the heart of the matter. The human anthills of twentieth-century dystopian fiction—Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, Victor Rousseau's *Messiah of the Cylinders*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano,* Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*—with their child-like, ovine citizens and paternalistic dictators, stem, directly or indirectly, from Dostoevsky's Legend: the Grand Inquisitor stands as the prototype of all the Big Brothers of literature—and of history.

V

But how accurate is the Grand Inquisitor's assessment of the human condition? D. H. Lawrence and others have argued that, whatever Dostoevsky's intent, the Grand Inquisitor speaks the truth about mankind, that his analysis is "unanswerable because borne out by the long experience of humanity."[30] If he is correct, then the mass of mankind—weak, pitiful, childish creatures—could hope at best for a Platonic utopia, in which their destinies would be controlled by the wise, strong few capable of bearing the burden of choice for all. But to accept the Grand Inquisitor's evaluation of man at face value, even in light of the plentiful evidence of history that lends it credence, is to ignore the fact that most social theorists define human nature in ways to validate their particular theories. Machiavelli in *The Prince*, for instance, propounds a view of man that necessitates the practice of *Realpolitik*. "For on men in general this observation may be made: they are ungrateful, fickle, deceitful, eager to avoid dangers, and avid for gain, and while you are useful to them they are with you, offering you their blood, their property, their lives and their sons so long as danger is remote . . . but when it approaches they turn on you."[31] Despite the claims made for Machiavelli's realism, he does not, in fact, describe how men behave—always and everywhere—as much as how they must behave if his political philosophy is to appear valid. His theory, that is, determines what the nature of man must be, not vice versa. And thus his highly selective, often radically distorted use of historical evidence is designed to support hypotheses arrived at *a priori*, not *a posteriori*. "In keeping with Machiavelli's didactic purpose in *The Prince*," writes one critic, "his historical illustrations function rhetorically as a means of persuading his audience that his theories actually have the status of historical fact."[32]

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[30] D. H. Lawrence, "The Grand Inquisitor," *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beal (London: Heinemann, 1955), 233-34. Edward Wasiolek, *Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964), 165, notes that, in addition to Lawrence, Leo Shestov and Vasily Razanov both contend that Dostoevsky stood secretly on the side of the Grand Inquisitor and concludes: "The revolt of so many distinguished readers against Dostoevsky's conscious intention is, whatever else, a testimony to the force and persuasiveness with which Dostoevsky was able to state the other case." But for Dostoevsky's own response to such criticism, see his comments cited in Ernest J. Simmons, *Dostoevski*: The *Making of a Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 383.

[31] *The Prince*, trans. T. G. Bergin (New York: Crofts, 1947), 48-49.

[32] Peter E. Bondanella, *Machiavelli and the Art of Renaissance History* (Detroit,

Like Machiavelli, the Grand Inquisitor greatly exaggerates the weakness of man: his servile nature, his inability to bear the responsibility of freedom, his need for paternalistic authority to restrain his "social cannibalism." And he does so, again like Machiavelli, because his analysis serves the goal of his political ideology. If man were not a weak, childish creature, incapable of freedom, what need would he have for Grand Inquisitors? The authoritarian's will-to-power thus determines his view of human nature, a view that justifies his tyranny. While the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century do lend some historical credence to the Grand Inquisitor's generalizations and qualify Dostoevsky as the reluctant prophet of terrible things to come, still they are counterbalanced by liberal democratic regimes that, whatever their manifold flaws, depend on a wholly different conception of man and have proved, historically, more viable.

The authoritarian exaggerates man's weakness to justify his tyranny.

Dostoevsky, as we have seen, conceived of the world in apocalyptic extremes, casting the mytho-history of the Legend as a Manichean sociomachia between Good and Evil. Not surprisingly, then, the Grand Inquisitor espouses an extreme, apocalyptic position, marked more by its power and vehemence than by its balance and discrimination. Even in the wake of the cataclysms of recent history, his reading of the human condition seems neither accurate nor fair. The preponderance of quotidian experience is left unaccounted for in his ideological melodrama, which nevertheless appeals to a certain kind of mentality because it reduces all human experience to simplistic antinomies: anarchy or despotism, superman or slave. If the philosophical anarchists, say, romanticize the goodness and strength of man, the totalitarian exaggerates the wickedness and weakness of man, in order to provide self-justification. Neither deals with complex, multidimensional historical beings, but with abstractions. In an essay that tests the Grand Inquisitor's claims

Inquisitor's reading of the human condition neither accurate nor fair.

MI: Wayne State University Press, 1973), 59. Bondanella amply demonstrates that Machiavelli played fast and loose with historical fact for what Bondanella charitably calls "artistic" purposes. Joseph Kraft, "Truth and Poetry in Machiavelli," *Journal of Modern History*, 33 (1951), 109-21, effectively dispatches the notion that Machiavelli is an "objective realist" by showing how he systematically distorted the historical record for ideological ends. Cf. John Dewey: "It would . . . appear that during the greater part of the history of European thought conceptions of human nature have been framed not with scientific objectiveness but on the basis of what was needed to give intellectual formulation and support to social movements." Quoted in "Introduction," *Human Nature in Politics*, eds. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 7.

"The flight from freedom is not inevitable."

against everyday experience, Neal Riemer arrives at a modest, unremarkable conclusion that has none of the awesome grandeur of Dostoevsky's Legend, but is merely truer: "we may still reasonably conclude that the individual, operating within the framework of a healthy, constitutional, democratic, pluralistic society, is strong enough to bear the burden of freedom. The flight from freedom is not inevitable. The rightful happiness does not necessarily rest upon [the Grand Inquisitor's] allegiance with the Devil. If democracy is never assured, it is, at least, not impossible."[33]

Despite the Grand Inquisitor's overgeneralizing distortions of the human condition, still the Legend must strike us as remarkably prescient in adumbrating the practice of totalitarianism, not always the same as its theory. To gauge the difference, compare, for instance, Trotsky's claim that under Communism "the average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe or a Marx" with life as it is lived in the Gulag in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Still, numerous parallels can be and have been drawn between his philosophy and the *modus operandi* of Lenin and Stalin, Hitler and Mao.[34] Among the most intriguing features of the Legend, in fact, is the remarkable precision with which it captures the psychology of totalitarianism—that of both the rulers and the ruled.

Men converted into slaves.

The Grand Inquisitor's characterization of man as a servile, pavid and sheep-like race seems borne out by the behavior of the masses under totalitarian regimes: a few strong souls may resist, but the great majority acquiesce in or, indeed, even relish their subordination to the Party or the Leader. However, totalitarian regimes arise not so much because it is man's nature to be a slave as because they find effective ways of converting men into slaves. That is to say, such regimes, in so far as they are able and through a variety of coercive means, create a man in the image of their ideology, the image advanced by the Grand Inquisitor. Rousseau anticipates this argument in the opening pages of *The Social Contract*:

Aristotle . . . said that men are by no means equal naturally, but that

[33] "Some Reflections on the Grand Inquisitor and Modern Democratic Theory," *Ethics,* 68 (1957), 254. See also David Reisman, "Individualism Reconsidered," *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1954), 26-38; and Andrew Hacker, "Dostoevsky's Disciples: Man and Sheep in Political Theory," *Journal of Politics*, 17 (1955), 590-613.

[34] See, e.g., Rene Fueloep-Miller, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: Insight, Faith, and Prophecy*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Scribner's, 1950), Chap. 7.

> some are born for slavery, and others for dominion. Aristotle was right; but he took the effect for the cause. Nothing can be more certain than that every man born in slavery is born for slavery. Slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire of escaping from them: they love their servitude. . . . If then there are slaves by nature, it is because there have been slaves against nature. Force made the first slaves. . . .[35]

Similarly, Bruno Bettelheim describes the psychological mechanisms through which the Nazi state sought to effect a slavish dependence on obedience to Party and Leader. Drawing the (by now) basic distinction between earlier despotisms and modern totalitarianisms, he writes:

> Like the totalitarians we know, despotic systems of the past permitted no opposition. Whoever tried to oppose the regime was crushed. But in the past, the despot did not demand agreement from his subjects, did not require an inner acceptance of his creeds and methods. It was possible for an opponent to survive and still to maintain a certain degree of self-respect. In the modern totalitarian State, on the contrary, it is not possible to retain that self-respect and live in inner opposition to the system.[36]

Such regimes deprive people, in Benjamin Constant's memorable phrase, of even "their right to silence"—that right that Winston Smith strives vainly to maintain in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This is so, Bettelheim continues, because "the inescapable power of the totalitarian regime rests exactly on its ability to reach into even the most minute and private life activities of the individual."[37] By forcing the individual into outward conformity to principles that he privately despises, the regime damaged or destroyed his inner integrity, "forced him to work on his own ego's destruction." Indeed, claims Bettelheim, "the very essence of totalitarianism . . . is that *it sets out to destroy the independent ego, as well as the independent superego*."[38] The state assumes the role of parent and, through its presumption of omnipotence (such as, to a child, the parent seems to possess), forces the individual to interject its values as his own ego-ideal.

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[35] *The Social Contract*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (New York: Dutton, 1973), 167.

[36] "Remarks on the Psychological Appeal of Totalitarianism," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 12 (1952), 89. For elaboration of the ideas in this essay, see Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart*: *Autonomy in a Mass Age* (1960; rpt, New York: Avon, 1971), esp. 97-107.

[37] "Remarks on the Psychological Appeal of Totalitarianism," 91.

[38] Ibid., 93 (emphasis in the original).

> The power to create unmanageable inner conflicts which the parent figure acquires for the child should be compared with the power of the totalitarian system which can create similarly unmanageable conflicts in the minds of the persons living in it. The child . . . originally hated the power that thus controlled him. But the power which is so strong also exercises a tremendous appeal . . . and successful power over the child has such a great appeal that it becomes internalized as a superego. . . . The inner desire to be loved by the superego is extremely strong, and the weaker the ego becomes, the stronger the desire. Since, in the totalitarian system, the most powerful superego surrogates are the rulers and their representatives, in short the system itself, one can be approved of by the superego only by going along with them and the system.[39]

In short, Bettelheim shows that the totalitarian state, like the Grand Inquisitor's utopia, seeks to keep its subjects in a state of perpetual childishness, insecure, seeking approval from authority, dependent upon the surrogate parent to make decisions for them. It does not, that is, *find* man slavish, servile, childish by nature, but attempts to *make* him so. Their ideology demands such a man, so their practice produces such a man—insofar as they can.[40]

The personality type thus engendered is, argues Erich Fromm in *Escape from Freedom*, masochistic. Defining masochism as not merely a sexual but a social phenomenon, Fromm suggests: "The different forms which the masochistic strivings assume have one aim: *to get rid of the individual self, to lose oneself*; in other words, *to get rid of the burden of freedom*. This aim is obvious in those masoch-

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[39] Ibid., 93-94. Cf. Robert Waelder, "Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism: Psychological Comments on the Problem of Power," in *Psychoanalysis and Culture: Essays in Honor of Geza Roheim*, ed. George B. Wilbur and Warner Muensterberger (New York: International Universities Press, 1951), 192-93: "Rebellion against the totalitarian power is inhibited not only by its overwhelming might but also by the fact that part of the superego sides with the totalitarian demands. Once rebellion is impossible, inner peace can only be won by destroying, or surrendering, the nonconforming parts of the superego. The impact of totalitarianism upon the mind of the pluralist within its power is likely to be this demoralization. Totalitarianism operates in the encounter with the pluralist like a scientifically devised breakup of personality." See also the remarkable account of the subconscious complicity with Nazism even by some hostile to it, as revealed in their dreams, in Charlotte Beradt, *The Third Reich of Dreams* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966).

[40] For a more detailed account of the psychological techniques of dominance in totalitarian societies, see T. W. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" (1951) in *Sigmund Freud*, ed. Paul Roazen (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 82-102; for his argument that such behavior is not man's "nature," see esp. 99-101. But see also David Reisman, "Some Observations on the Limits of Totalitarian Power," *Individualism Reconsidered*, 414-25.

istic strivings in which the individual seeks to submit to a person or power which he feels as being overwhelmingly strong."[41]

> The masochistic person . . . is saved from making decisions, saved from the final responsibility for the fate of his self, and thereby saved from the doubt of what decision to make. He is also saved from the doubt of what the meaning of his life is or who "he" is. These questions are answered by the relationship to the power to which he has attached himself. The meaning of his life and the identity of his self are determined by the greater whole into which the self has submerged.[42]

The concordance between Fromm's characterization of the masochistic personality fostered by totalitarianism and the Grand Inquisitor's of human nature in general is obvious. To this degree, then, the diagnoses of the psychoanalyst and the proto-totalitarian cardinal coincide precisely: except, of course, that what the former views as a particular socio-pathology, the latter holds to be the essential nature of humanity.

But if masochism describes the psychology of the ruled in totalitarian societies, what explains the psychology of the rulers? Fromm's answer is: sadism. Totalitarian rulers are sadists, he contends—again in the sociological, not purely sexual sense. I want to argue that the Grand Inquisitor stands as a paradigm of that psycho-social personality type, the utopian sadist. Initially, such a characterization appears to fly in the face of the cardinal's self-professed benevolence: he claims to have sacrificed his own happiness to that of the masses, to have accepted the terrible burden of freedom so that it might be lifted from them, to have suffered more for the sake of man than even Christ suffered. In the peroration of his monologue, the Grand Inquisitor rises to a frenzy of *amour propre* at his own selflessness. When, at the Second Coming, Christ returns with his elect,

> then I will stand up and point out to You the thousand millions who have known no sin. And we who have taken their sins upon us for their happiness will stand before You and say: 'Judge us if you can

[41] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (1941; rpt. New York: Avon, 1965), 173 (emphasis in the original).

[42] Ibid., 177-78. Cf. J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: Praeger, 1960), 39-40: "In recent times we have had examples of the strange combination of psychological ill-adjustment and totalitarian ideology. In some cases, salvation from the impossibility of finding a balanced relationship with fellow-men is sought in the lonely superiority of dictatorial leadership. The leader identifies himself with . . . absolute doctrine . . . ."

> and dare.' Know that I fear You not. Know that I too have been in the wilderness. . . . I too blessed the freedom with which You blessed men, and I too was striving to stand among Your elect, among the strong and powerful. . . . But I awakened and would not serve madness. I turned back and joined the ranks of those *who have corrected* Your work. I left the proud and went back to the humble, for the happiness of the humble (135-36; emphasis in original).

Thus everyone will be made happy, "all the millions of creatures," except those who must rule them: "For only we, who guard the mystery, will be unhappy," we who have taken on ourselves "the curse of the knowledge of good and evil." Quite moving, all that monumental self-sacrifice—and all of it a subterfuge.

Lust for power rooted in weakness.

Though one need not doubt that the Grand Inquisitor believes his own rationalization, we ought not share his delusion. "A great number of apparently insoluble problems disappear at once," Fromm notes, "if we decide to give up the notion that the motives by which people *believe* themselves to be motivated are necessarily the ones which drive them to act, feel and think as they do."[43] So it proves with the Grand Inquisitor: his benevolence, his paternalism, his self-sacrifice but mask the sadistic will-to-power over the lives of others. Not the infliction of pain per se, but the "wish for power," Fromm suggests, "is the most significant expression of sadism," which "appears frequently under the guise of love. The rule over another person, if one can claim that to rule over him is for the person's own sake, frequently appears as an expression of love, but the essential factor is the enjoyment of domination."[44] Indeed, the sadist may give his victim "everything—everything except one thing: the right to be free and independent," since "*He actually 'loves' them because he dominates them*."[45] The "love" that the benevolent sadist displays, that is, depends entirely on his ability to dominate; if this power ceases, so does his "love." Psychologically, then, sadism is the reverse side of masochism, both tendencies "the outcome of one basic need, springing from the inability to bear the isolation and weakness of one's own self." And both aim for *symbiosis*, "the union of one individual with another self . . . in such a way as to make each lose the integrity of his own self and make them completely dependent on each other. The sadistic person needs his object just as much as the masochistic needs his. . . .

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[43] *Escape from Freedom*, 158.

[44] Ibid., 183.

[45] Ibid., 168 (emphasis in original).

In both cases the integrity of the individual self is lost." Therefore, Fromm concludes perceptively, "in a psychological sense, *the lust for power is not rooted in strength but in weakness.* It is the expression of the inability of the individual self to stand alone and live."[46]

Illusion of selflessness masks will-to-power.

If we read the Legend in this light, one paradox disappears: why, that is, the Grand Inquisitor would sacrifice his own soul for the sake of a race that he most clearly holds in utmost contempt. He "loves" them merely because he needs them—needs their subservience, their weakness, their worship of him: he needs them to need him. The kiss that Christ bestows on the cardinal at the end and that "burns into his heart" should be read as Christ's understanding of his fatal weakness, his pathetic need to play God (and thus deny God) in his illusion of his own selflessness. The kiss burns because Christ sees through his rationalization to the sadistic motive that he has hidden even from himself. Fromm again notes: "The driving forces are not necessarily conscious as such to a person whose character is dominated by them. A person can be entirely dominated by his sadistic strivings and consciously believe that he is motivated only by his sense of duty."[47] Such is the case with the Grand Inquisitor, although his creator—a master, of course, at probing the unconscious dimension of human motivation—knew better. Dostoevsky was fully aware of the phenomenon of benevolent sadism, exemplified, for example, in the episode in *Notes from Underground* where the Underground Man destroys the defenses of the prostitute Liza and makes her emotionally dependent on him precisely through feigning pity, even "love" for her. The Underground Man, however, admits to himself that he is playing a game with Liza, designed to increase his importance in her eyes and motivated by his own crippling weakness: the game, he knows full well, is played for his sake, not hers.[48] The Grand Inquisitor, playing the same power game not with one fallen woman but with all mankind, is just as sadistic as the Underground Man, but not as honest with himself. He disguises his motive even from himself in the cloak of utopian benevolence.

It involves no great leap of imagination to see that the sadistic impulse to dominate others provides the motive force of totalitar-

[46] Ibid., 180, 184 (emphasis in original).

[47] Ibid., 185.

[48] See, e.g., I. Traschen, "Dostoevsky's 'Notes from Underground,'" *Accent*, 16 (1956), 255-64.

ian rulers. However much their theories may proclaim the good of mankind—or of the Party, or of the State—as their *raison d'être*, their brutal policies belie their pronouncements. In the face of the Holocaust, the Gulag, the Cultural Revolution and Cambodia's killing fields, sadism as an explanation of the psychological substructure of totalitarianism requires little defense. The term is so fraught, however, with connotations of overt cruelty—jack boots and torture chambers—that it may elicit resistance when applied to purely theoretical structures, like literary utopias, or purely fictional characters, like the Grand Inquisitor, whose protestations of benevolence have no actual history against which they can be tested. Even with Fromm's qualification that the sociological sadist may sublimate his drives so that they appear, objectively, like acts of concern, even of kindness toward frail humanity, still sadism may strike some as too pejorative a term.

But the reality itself, not the name given it, is what matters; and the illusion of benevolence disguising the will-to-power—disguising it even from those engaged most relentlessly in the quest for power—is not so unfamiliar as to unsettle our minds overmuch: Fromm's analysis merely provides the shock of recognition.[49]

If we grant, then, that sadism underlies the Grand Inquisitor's utopian benevolence, we will not be wholly confounded—as so many critics have been—when we encounter Orwell's ultimate reduction of the authoritarian will-to-power to its unsublimated essentials in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. O'Brien, there, removes the saintly mask worn by the Grand Inquisitor and reveals the face of totalitarian sadism without disguise:

> The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness; only power, pure power. . . . We are different from all the oligarchies of the past, in that

[49] Cf. Bertrand Russell's comment, *The Scientific Outlook* (1931; rpt. New York: Norton, 1962), 205, on attempts to create artificial societies (that is, utopias): "The pleasure in planned construction is one of the most powerful motives in men who combine intelligence with energy; whatever can be constructed according to a plan, such men will endeavour to construct. . . . They are likely to suppose themselves actuated by some idealistic motive, and it is possible that such may play a part in determining what sort of society they aim in creating. But the desire to create is not itself idealistic, since it is a form of love of power, and while the power to create exists there will be men desirous of using this power even if unaided nature would produce a better result than any that can be brought about by deliberate intention."

> we know what we are doing. All the others . . . were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just around the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes a revolution in order to establish a dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now do you begin to understand me?[50]

If we begin to understand O'Brien, we will, I think, begin to understand the Grand Inquisitor.

VI

In one of his aphorisms Nietzsche claims: "The Christian resolution to find the world ugly and bad, made the world ugly and bad." For the Grand Inquisitor's crypto-totalitarianism, a similar claim must be made: the resolution to find men weak and servile serves to make them weak and servile. The mechanisms of psychic manipulation through which such desired behavior is elicited from the ruled are, in turn, capable of explanation in terms of the social-psychopathic drives of the rulers, ideological heirs of the Grand Inquisitor. In an epigram in his *Fusées*, Baudelaire sums up the view that Dostoevsky excoriates in the Legend as the essence of authoritarian utopianism: "The true saint is he who flogs and kills people for their own good." The Grand Inquisitor is such a saint, the utopian as sadist.

[50] *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 386.