



MORAL/ ETHICAL DILEMMA AND CONSCIENCE IN ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN'S THE FIRST CIRCLE

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Abstract

*Alexander Solzhenitsyn is a socially conscious writer and is acutely aware of the spiritual dilemmas of modern man. In the novel *The First Circle*, Innokenty Volodin faces Moral/Ethical dilemma. He sticks to his conscience. Gleb Nerzin also holds the Volodins views of conscience.*

Keywords: Moral/ Ethical Dilemma, Conscience, Alexander Solzhenitsyn



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Alexander Solzhenitsyn is a socially conscious writer and is acutely aware of the spiritual dilemmas of modern man. Western intellectuals considered him as a champion of freedom.

Volodin's Moral/Ethical dilemma

The character Innokenty Volodin (in the *First Circle*) faces a moral/ethical dilemma over the issue whether or not to share secret Soviet information to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. He is a young diplomat who knows that in a few days he will be assigned to a new post in Paris. As an official working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he also knows the government's secret plan to trap an innocent man, Dr. Dobroumov, who happens to be a family friend. Should he telephone his friend and expose this secret or not? This question has captivated him for several hours. It is a matter of conscience.

Volodins conscience developed when he was reading the diaries of his deceased mother. The diaries speak directly to him : "Pity is the first action of a good soul... What is the most precious thing in the world? Not to participate in injustice... You also have only one conscious. And just as you cannot recover a lost life, you cannot recover a wrecked conscience." (*First Circle*, 397-98) This awareness of consciousness makes Volodin realize that he cannot ignore the injustice of the trap intended for Dr. Dobroumov and that he should save the life of the innocent man despite the danger of his own life. Thus he comes to believe that one cannot "remain a human being" without conscience. (*First Circle*, 4)

Finally he decides to share the information. He asks himself: “If we live in a state of constant fear, can we remain human?” The question he asked the Soviet Government. Finally he was arrested and exiled in 1974. This leads to the publication of his essay, “Live Not by Lies.”

A person of religious understanding will exactly understand Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn’s basis for human freedom is the human dignity that comes from a person’s bearing the image of God in creation. (Ericson, 2010, 3)

Nerzhin holds Volodin’s views on conscience

Gleb Newzhin is the main character and is often identified with Solzhenitsyn himself. Towards the end of *The First Circle* Nerzhin defines his perception of conscience : “I had no idea what good and evil were, and whatever was allowed seemed fine to me. But the lower I sink into this inhumanly cruel world the more I respond to those who, even in such a such a world, speak to my conscience. (*The First Circle*, 600)

Both Volodin and Nerzhin are willing to experience physical suffering in order to live according to their consciences. For both the characters it is conscience that enables them to live as human beings.

According to Shin, Solzhenitsyn thinks that conscience is a moral quality “inherent” in the human heart, a moral quality that must be awakened and polished, however, For those who takes it seriously, conscience provides a tremendously strong inner force that asserts the meaning of life even in unendurable situations. Until Volodin read his mother’s diaries, Volodin’s conscience was dormant. Once awakened, though, it rebelled against injustice. (Shin, 1985, 344-345)

Conscience and injustice are integrated concepts in Solzhenitsyn. In the other words conscience and justice as axiomatically absolute : conscience is related to the personal whereas justice is related to the social and “the whole of humanity.” Thus, an individually conscientious man can be a socially just man without any internal conflicts. (Shin, 1985, 345)

Conclusion

Conscience and injustice, axiomatically absolute concepts created Moral/Ethical dilemma in Solzhenitsyn and forced to ask himself “If we live in a state of constant fear, can we remain human?” The same question he asked the Soviet Government. Finally he was arrested and exiled in 1974.

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