DOSTOEVSKY, SOCRATES, FRANKL: OF WHAT DO YOU SPEAK FROM A PRISON CELL?

George Schultze and Carol Miller — San Francisco

Charges, verdicts, sentences
crimes and punishments,
scaffold, hemlock, crematorium,
militarism, tzarism, nazism:
all crucibles of suffering
toward Transcendence.

Confinement in coldness
compelled them to question
the essence of existence
in its boldness.

Choices and circumstances
had compelling consequences.
No exit but death
faced each one
yet¹
and examined life
was about to become
because they thought²
intimations of immortality:
legacy, destiny, eternity
as one.

Ultimate questions
loomed in the dark
with colossal
from the start.

¹ B. Jowett, Plato, 55.
William Wordsworth, 487.
What is death?
What is life?
What is birth?
What is it all?

Fyodor, Socrates, Viktor
locked together in a cell:
labor camp and death camp
to ponder
desolation and consolation
"I to die and you to live"
in the spirit of wonder.

"I am more than piano key"
echoed from depths and heights
in their humanity and divinity
solitary and solidarity
as prisoners yet internally free.

Shackled in chains
they argued to and fro
struggling for significance
by creative synthesis:
decreasing physical eyesight
and increasing philosophical insight,
orthodoxy and revolutionary,
character and conduct,
bitter and better,
church and state,
vice and virtue,
good and evil,
swine and saint.

Pet, philosopher, physician
were they,
even gadflys per se,
summoning peoples and lands,

4 B. Jowett, Plato, 60.
5 Walter Kaufman, Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre, 75.
6 Viktor Frankl, Man’s Search For Meaning, 178.
7 B. Jowett, Plato, 6, 49.
seas and histories,
moving constitutions and institutions,
renouncing oppression,
announcing liberty
in order
to be
responsible for self\(^8\)
and responsive to society.

Awe — the nature of human ontology\(^9\)
through the prism of prison to reprieve.
Of what goodness, beauty, truth and justice
did they see?

This perennial ideal leads us to question
the relevance of these philosophical reflections.
Attitudes, aptitudes attributes they used
reaching masses of people who were destitute.

Their message was unique yet universal.
Peoples of Russia, Greece and Austria relate
as geographical compass and moral compass
what do these connections make?

"Since Auschwitz, we know what humanity
is capable of.
Since Hiroshima/Nagasaki\(^10\)
we know what is at stake."

Peoples on this one planet
divided into six worlds:
awaken to humanity
in its coldness,
in its boldness,
in its heights,
in its depths,
in its cries
for justice
and peace.

\(^8\) James Scanlon, *Dostoevsky: The Thinker*, 57.
\(^9\) Ibid., 14
\(^10\) Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*, 179.
Bibliography


