

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

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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 colipses
from the start.

1 B. Jowett, *Plato*, 56.

2 Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of The Prophet*, 235. William Wordsworth, *Works of 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 ponder³
desolation and consolation⁴
"I to die and you to live"
in the spirit of wonder.

"I am more than piano key"⁵
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,⁶
swine and saint.

Pet, philosopher, physician
were they,⁷
even gadflies per se,
summoning peoples and lands,

3 Jean Pierre Yaudon, "Last day of The Gulug?" *National Geographic*, March 1990, 177, 3: 41.

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 self⁸
 and responsive to society.

Awe — the nature of human ontology⁹
 through the prism of prison to relieve.
 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/Nagasaki¹⁰
 we know what is at stake.”

Peoples on this one planet
 divided into six worlds:
 awoken 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.

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