

# From *The Gulag Archipelago* Part I

By Aleksander I Solzhenitsyn

It is permissible to portray evildoers in a story for children, so as to keep the picture simple. But when the great world literature of the past -- Shakespeare, Schiller, Dickens -- inflates and inflates images of evildoers of the blackest shades, it seems somewhat farcical and clumsy to our contemporary perception. The trouble lies in the way these classic evildoers are pictured. They recognize themselves as evildoers, and they know their souls are black. And they reason: "I cannot live unless I do evil. So I'll set my father against my brother! I'll drink the victim's sufferings until I'm drunk with them!" Iago very precisely identifies his purposes and his motives as being black and born of hate.

But no; that's not the way it is! To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he's doing is good, or else that it's a well-considered act in conformity with natural law. Fortunately, it is in the nature of the human being to seek a justification for his actions.

Macbeth's self-justifications were feeble -- and his conscience devoured him. Yes, even Iago was a little lamb too. The imagination and the spiritual strength of Shakespeare's evildoers stopped short at a dozen corpses. Because they had no ideology.

*Ideology* -- that is what gives evil-doing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others' eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors. That was how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills: by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands, by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland; the colonizers, by civilization; the Nazis, by race; and the Jacobins (early and late), by equality, brotherhood, and the happiness of future generations. Thanks to ideology, the twentieth century was fated to experience evil-doing on a scale calculated in the millions. This cannot be denied, nor passed over, nor suppressed.