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## The Concept of A.I. Solzhenitsyn's Historical Process: Cultural and Philosophical Context

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**Abstract.** Expressing his opinion on a particular occasion, event or problem in numerous interviews, public statements, letters, and articles A. I. Solzhenitsyn at the same time transmitted his conceptual considerations about the patterns and features of the course of historical process and the role of relevant actors (including individuals, nations, parties, and political figures) in it.

A tendency towards cultural and philosophical understanding of historical processes and events, as well as interpretation of the latter in literary works and works of fiction, many of which are recognised as classic works of Russian literature, is typical for the Russian authors of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Based on the publicist works by A. I. Solzhenitsyn, the author in a cultural and philosophical context consistently reveals the concept of the writer's historical process which is constituted by the following aspects: the role of rulers in history, the relationship between history and God, the value of truth in history, unpredictability of history, and the need to treat history carefully.

**Keywords:** history, cultural philosophy, culture, literature, personality, nation, historical truth, The Red Wheel.

Research area: history and culturology

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## Концепция исторического процесса А.И. Солженицына: культурфилософский контекст

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**Аннотация.** В многочисленных интервью, общественных заявлениях, письмах, статьях, высказываясь по тому или иному поводу, событию или проблеме, А.И. Солженицын попутно транслировал свои концептуальные соображения о закономерностях и особенностях хода исторического процесса и роли в нем соответствующих акторов (в том числе личности, нации, партии, политических деятелей).

Для русских писателей XIX–XX вв. характерно тяготение к культурфилософскому осмыслению исторических процессов и событий, интерпретация последних в литературно-художественных трудах, многие из которых признаны классическими произведениями русской литературы.

На материале публицистических произведений А.И. Солженицына автором в культурфилософском контексте последовательно раскрывается концепция исторического процесса писателя, конституируемая следующими аспектами: роль правителей в истории, взаимосвязь истории с Богом, значение правды в истории, непредсказуемость истории, необходимость бережного отношения к освещению истории.

**Ключевые слова:** история, культурфилософия, культура, литература, личность, нация, историческая правда, Красное колесо.

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### Introduction

Russian writer A. I. Solzhenitsyn is known not only as an outstanding master of the literary word and public figure, but as a researcher who represented cultural and philosophical layers of the Russian history in the pages of his documentary works. Recently, an interest in the literary and publicist heritage of A. I. Solzhenitsyn has been steadily growing. In the author's opinion, it is determined by wide coverage of the enduring problems of public life the writer reflected about, and the depth of his thought, based on the encyclopaedic knowledge of Russian history.

It is a wide known fact that in the post-war period the Soviet authorities extensively used violent actions such as arrest, imprisonment, exile, and deportation from the state against A. I. Solzhenitsyn. In a persistent and bold letter to the 4<sup>th</sup> All-Union Congress of

the Union of Soviet Writers (1967) A. I. Solzhenitsyn outlines the infringement of his rights as a writer, including the fact of the seizure of the novel *In the First Circle* by the state security authorities, as well as confiscation of his literary archive, and denigration of his military past (allegedly he surrendered and betrayed his native country). In sketches of his literary life, recalling the circumstances of writing this letter, the writer recorded that he did not know what might happen after the letter had been sent: «even if I stay alive. Either a noose or a neck away» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996a). Solzhenitsyn was arrested on February 13, 1974, and in a statement prepared back in August 1973 it was stated that «I leave them a simple opportunity for explicit abusers: to kill me shortly for writing the truth about the Russian history» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996b: 70).

Despite this situation, the writer expresses confidence that he will fulfil his writing mission against all the odds, even if he is not alive, since, according to the existing Russian tradition, writers are always barred from creative paths, «but maybe numerous lessons will finally teach us not to stop a writer's pen during his lifetime? It has never graced our history yet.» In the aforementioned letter A. I. Solzhenitsyn also regrets that writers in Russia are not endowed with the right to express prospective judgments about the existence of a person and society, to interpret and offer solutions to social issues and historical experience, and «pieces of writing that could express a pressing national issue and have a timely and beneficial effect on the spiritual field or public consciousness development are prohibited or deformed by censorship for petty, egoistic, and short-sighted for the people's life reasons» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996c: 27–28, 33).

In interviews Solzhenitsyn was sometimes asked whether his artistic comprehension, having passed through his rich life experience and cultural and philosophical reflection, harms the accuracy of expression and historical material reliability. Solzhenitsyn replied: «You are right in a sense that I cannot disengage from the system of my feelings. But it never hinders the historical material presentation. On the contrary, it can benefit to storytelling since I scrupulously follow every historical detail. I never go beyond them. A historian who writes about the same thing will not endow it with the warmth of feeling. One can argue with my feeling, but it does not contradict facts, it organically, like living tissue, enters the historical narration» (Solzhenitsyn, 1997a: 453).

Despite the extensive interest in the writer's creative heritage, there are currently few studies in which A. I. Solzhenitsyn is considered as a historian and, accordingly, his views on the historical process and the role of an individual and other participants of the process (Between Two Anniversaries, 2005; Solzhenitsyn's Way in the Context of Big Time, 2009; Solzhenitsyn: Thinker, Historian, Artist, 2010).

### **Theoretical framework**

Russian literary and philosophical tradition is distinguished by the depth of thought, variety of genres and approaches, powerful patriotic and religious principles, as well as breadth of coverage of eternal problems. This tradition was objectively «authentic to the historically formed national self-consciousness and the national culture peculiarities» (Sizemskaya, 2019: 190–191).

Russian philosophical thought is intricately connected with literature (including publicistic writing), spreading cultural and philosophical ideas through fictional comprehension in a language accessible to the ordinary reader. N. P. Koptseva studies this issue from the standpoint of cultural symbiosis and dialectical unity of literature and philosophy, pointing out that in Russian culture the unity of philosophy and literature originates from the moment philosophy becomes an independent and significant cultural phenomenon (Sukhov, 2018, Koptseva, 2000: 168).

Therefore, Russian cultural philosophy is an integral phenomenon with a single source of artistic depiction: history, persons, and the world around them. At the same time, among writers, the unification and collaboration of literature and philosophy follows the path of intention, when philosophical reflection along with imagery of thinking are equally a deep source of inspiration. It permeates literary creativity and exists in it as its specific obligatory, and content-forming element (Potapenkov, 2009; Spivak, 2020; Fedyukova, 1982). In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Russian literature became a specific form of considering challenges of various social phenomena and processes through the prism of culture and philosophy, fulfilling the most important cultural and historical task of shaping a Russian person consciousness.

### **Statement of the problem**

According to Solzhenitsyn, the course of history and human existence in it is a «tangle of contradictions» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996d: 323) which, among other things, is expressed in appearance of an anti-cultural phenomenon in different periods of history, which essence is

obscuration and denigration of cultural heritage and traditions. At the same time, the writer fairly stated that the historical reflection of generations is best transmitted and preserved from people to people with the help of art, and therefore, if it is possible for some people to avoid repeating the difficult experience of another people, then the easiest way is probably to warn and tell them through art, in particular literature. History can send warnings to a society that is in danger, for instance, in the form of a decline in arts or a lack of culture of life (Solzhenitsyn, 1997b: 387; Solzhenitsyn, 1996e: 287; Solzhenitsyn, 1995a: 320). This implies the fact that Solzhenitsyn attached great importance to history and the historical process precisely within the boundaries of the cultural and philosophical traditions of existence.

In the article «The Russian Question at the End of the Twentieth Century» (1994) A. I. Solzhenitsyn positions each moment of the Russian history as «a point on its axis», therefore the historical process is interdependent and each subsequent event certainly originates from previous experience, which means that we should «be alert to numerous mistakes of our previous history» (Solzhenitsyn, 1995b: 616). For progressive development, citizens should treat national history with sympathy and compassion, and have a sense of blood connection with it. Without an active basis, we will remain victims of history that happened before us (Solzhenitsyn, 1995c: 90, 109). Salvation consists in turning to history – this is our right and duty. When referring to history, we should treat historical material as sacred – do not trample it down or distort neither its spirit (even if it is alien and unpleasant to us), or its internal proportions and its fabric (Solzhenitsyn, 1997c: 158).

### Methods

The methodological basis of the research was formed by both general scientific methods (induction, deduction, analysis, and synthesis) and interdisciplinary methods (systemic functional, biographical, and intertextual). The author also used cultural analysis, content analysis of literature and cultural and philosophical tradition.

### Discussion

#### *We are history*

Origin, development, ups, mistakes, the final period, and emergence of new forms and actors are equally typical both for history (in the narrow sense) and human life. He offers us to look at our own life, «maybe you are still young to notice a number of your mistakes. When you live up to fifty or sixty, you will grab your head: how many mistakes you have made. Almost all life is made up of mistakes. The same applies to humanity. Humanity has not exhausted its historical path yet». Many people want our political and ideological system not to change and remain the same for centuries. But this does not happen in history. Each system either finds a path for development or declines» (Solzhenitsyn, 1997d: 152; Solzhenitsyn, 1995d: 185).

In this regard, it should be recognised that the mosaic of history (in a broad sense) is much more diverse than human life, hence, it is more complicated and hindered to understand and, as a result, to explain, «history is irrational for us, we really cannot understand it». One should never think that «history develops in a hopeless way, only we go through trials which can make us grow», and we should grow in a real, natural way, for example, like a tree, like a river flow, and «every break ... is painful is unnatural.» History cannot endlessly forgive and conceal the mistakes of humanity, and we ourselves must create it, constituting and developing the institutes of civil society we need, not forgetting about spirituality and culture, but expecting the gift of freedom and other gifts from history, we risk never get them, since we are history, therefore it «loves to laugh at those who do not see and cannot look ahead» (Solzhenitsyn, 1997e: 190–191; Solzhenitsyn, 1997f: 325; Solzhenitsyn, 1997g: 315; Solzhenitsyn, 1997h: 488).

In his interview to the Associated Press and the newspaper *Le Monde* (1973), the writer noted that «it cannot be agreed that the disastrous course of history is irreparable and the most powerful Force in the world cannot be influenced by a self-confident Spirit.» Based on historical experience, Solzhenitsyn believed that only unbroken human spirit unacceptable to violence and readiness to defend the world

can withstand the challenges of history (Solzhenitsyn, 1996f: 59).

The writer assigns an active and transformative role in history to personality since history is not fatal. History is created by personalities and their small alliances – «initiative minorities», since detailed study of history allows to conclude that «every major social or national turn is always preceded by one, two, or three names that are ahead of the course of events by almost a century, or a half of it», «there is no history and no historical narration without them.» Personality is the primary impulse of history, but there is a party struggle, chaos of the crowd with its emotional lability, irrationality, and unpredictability, as well as economics as a system of production, distribution, exchange and consumption, next to it (Solzhenitsyn, 1997i: 124,126; Solzhenitsyn, 1996g: 438; Solzhenitsyn, 1997g: 303, 317). These factors act in an inextricable connection and synergy.

Annotating the collection of short essays *From Under the Rubble* at a press conference in Zurich on November 16, 1974, the writer said that «the history of people is like a person's biography. At any given moment, none of us is the whole «I», we manifest ourselves somehow worse, better, fuller, or poorer, and only our whole biography, our whole life expresses our personality. In the same way, people at any given moment are not the entire national personality, but they express their personality only through their history» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996h: 144).

Based on the role of a specific person in history, A.I. Solzhenitsyn attached great importance to recording historical events from the words of specific individuals, direct participants of historical events, although they were not globally significant historical figures. For these purposes with the aim of collecting, systematising, and cataloging various personal memories of his compatriots, in 1974 A. I. Solzhenitsyn set up the Russian Public Fund. In this way, when the technical preparation for receiving the relevant materials was completed in the author's house (Cavendish, Vermont), in his Address to Russian emigrants in September 1977 the author wrote that «people who have

experienced a lot ... have an opportunity to put on paper much of their memories, especially what is of public interest, or has a cognitive meaning for descendants. The most «ordinary» lives have experienced something unique, and carry an important fragment of history, sometimes this is only one person; but without recording the experience and informing their compatriots it will go into oblivion. However, most of these memories are usually not recorded due to disbelief in their own strengths or its unclear purpose» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996i: 471). The above reasoning demonstrates A. I. Solzhenitsyn's attitude to collecting and evaluating historical evidence, since history can be recorded not only by official and professional historians and scientists, but also by ordinary people as its direct creators and participants.

### ***Leaders and History***

Solzhenitsyn blames the ruling class for the global historical problems and cataclysms, since «they have that responsibility in history; they run the country, and even if each of them is accused as the others, then, being above the others, they are guilty more than the others». The Russian history has that feature when the rulers caused troubles mainly not outside their country, but inside, and not to the foreigners, but to their people (Solzhenitsyn, 1997j: 265; Solzhenitsyn, 1995e: 61).

When analyzing the rulers, the Russian historians give their favor to Ivan the Terrible and Peter I – both, either directly or indirectly, mean basically the whole Russian history. A. I. Solzhenitsyn refuses this approach, since two or even three not less murderous kings were in English, French, Spanish, and any other history, but no one explains the history by their decisions – not a king can make the history of a thousand-year country (Solzhenitsyn, 1995f: 324).

In a 1973 «On Returning Breath and Consciousness», written for polemics with A. D. Sakharov, the author notes that for the historians a landmark of Stalinism, which makes it to be one of anti-human ideologies, is that repressions done by I. V. Stalin to the party members, including the time of «Great Terror». But looking more closely into the modern history,

one can say: there was no Stalinism – neither as a doctrine, nor a lifestyle, or a state system. Stalin was, although very incompetent, but a very consistent and loyal follower of Lenin's ideas. As far as the history knows, any party always defends these interests against – whom? – against the rest masses. In its fights with other parties, it chooses profit, and neglects fairness. Besides, some politicians can repent, as they are still with a hint of being human, while parties, being completely ruthless machines, are not able to regret by the very purpose of their existence (Solzhenitsyn, 1995g: 34, 35, 42; Solzhenitsyn, 1995e: 52–53).

### **History and God**

In difficult and almost black moments in the history, much as in a person's life, one should not think that God has left us or the situation is hopeless: «God gave us a free will, so we have the right to act this or that way. And if humanity – one generation after another, one nation after another, one government after another – makes mistakes, then it is not God who does mistakes with us, it is merely we who do». History is how the God's will communicates with people's wills; history per se is difficult and irrational to comprehend, and life is organic – we generate it and develop as a tree, or as a river stream; any breakage is painful and against any nature (Solzhenitsyn, 1997e: 190–191; Solzhenitsyn, 1997k: 141; Solzhenitsyn, 1997f: 325).

History is not hopeless. Even when everything is wrong and it seems that there is no bright spot to come, then one may suddenly realize that «there was the highest and rightest choice done for people»; but, in fact, there were exactly the fate and God which led and directed the men. And this rule does work not only to a person, but also to nations, and more – to the whole humanity. A. I. Solzhenitsyn emphasized that this conclusion is purely individual, since «For many times in my life I have watched. By myself, I would fail to build my life the way it was pre-designed – not with my hands». But there is a danger waiting for us around the corner, as «we have no right to say: oh, let's calm down – God will save us! No. We must fight. This is what life means on

the Earth. We fight to our best efforts, to how we understand, how far our vision, courage, and mind are capable of battling. Undoubtedly, history has a divine essence, divine point. But one can neither foresee, nor leave everything to God, with one's arms folded» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996j: 374).

### **What does truth mean to history?**

Solzhenitsyn says that a better understanding of history is impossible without a retrospective, a historical care. To evaluate any event in accurately, one need time to cool passions and emotions. In history, there always comes a triumph of truth and fairness; history is a universal filter, that can keep everything true and real. Regardless of any challenges or political situations, we all should tell the truth (Solzhenitsyn, 1995c: 87; Solzhenitsyn, 1997l: 410; Solzhenitsyn, 1997m: 63; Solzhenitsyn, 1995h: 613).

Justice and truth are always primary; therefore, they are always an acid test used to assess an intended act. Since, «our consciousness is usually not enough to explain, understand and foresee the history, one will stay right if they behave fairly in any social situation (the old Russian saying – to live in the truth)» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996k: 34).

Solzhenitsyn assumes that historical modeling could be a positive epistemology since it allows «to better grasp the meaning of events». The researchers could do insights in the milestones of history and move along the plots not chosen by history, deepening our understanding of events with different narratives. But they have banned *conditionalis* in the stories about the past, so there is no need to wonder what would have happened if the Tsar had stayed in Tsarskoe Selo on February 23 and 24 (Solzhenitsyn, 1995i: 458).

Any disturber of the history's forward course should remember that «the whole world history has never had (and never will have) such a force that could not be countered – a forest has grown, so has a hatchet». Any attempt must begin by awaking and purifying the soul. Even before one cleanse the country, they cleanse themselves – this is the only historical order, as why to clear the air in the country if

people remain dirty? (Solzhenitsyn, 1995d: 153; Solzhenitsyn, 1995c: 132).

### ***Unpredictability of history***

The humanity, and even wisemen, are not able to foresee the history – neither in the medium, nor in short perspective – since life is constantly changing and there can be any combinations and resolutions, even those when the consequences of our most accurate actions result against our expectations (Solzhenitsyn, 1997n: 55; Solzhenitsyn, 1995i: 457).

The writer projects this idea forward to his binding desire to return to Russia in his lifetime: «I just live in this feeling: that I will definitely come back during my life. By this, I mean a return as a living person – not in the books; the books, of course, will make their return. This contradicts all commonsense reasoning; I cannot say, what external reasons can explain this, since I am no longer a young man. But after all, and quite often, the history twists so unexpectedly that we cannot see the simplest things» (Solzhenitsyn, 1997k: 140).

### ***On the need of careful revealing***

In a critical sketch dedicated to «Andrei Rublev» (1966, Mosfilm, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky), A.I. Solzhenitsyn expresses his ideas on why one should be careful reflecting the history in the arts. The writer says that this film allegorically broadcasts dissatisfaction with the Soviet period, but by «the clothes and symbols of the Russian ancient history». As known, this approach designed «a trend in the Soviet art: to dare to criticize the regime not directly, but quite remotely – from the depth of Russian history, or an individual interpretation of the Russian classical literature, i. e. to make it biased, with accents, disproportions, even direct distortion, but thereby more distinctively highlight the present days». Solzhenitsyn expresses his negative attitude towards such trends, since he not only demonstrates insensitivity to the history, but also disrespects «the past history and literature»; he becomes vicious «to the very essence of art», since «to refer to the history not being eager to study that period, but to search for an analogy, for a key, for one's current goal, or to ensure one's thoughts»

is beyond the pale (Solzhenitsyn, 1997c: 158). This approach testifies to the professionalism and principles of A.I. Solzhenitsyn towards historical studies; to the importance of careful and accurate handling of historical facts and figures; to the unacceptability of ideological re-interpretations and influence of emotions and circumstances when reflecting the history, even in the works of art.

A.I. Solzhenitsyn exemplifies an episode of «a mandatory chain of a joyless, hopeless, and dull life, drawing on reprisals and severities». The film does not only show «massacres, torture, burnings, pouring molten metal into the mouth, horse dragging, and racks», but also «gouging out the eyes of artists – a well-known world plot – not Russian originally, since it did not exist in any Russian chronicles. Moreover, the author should have known that the artists, such as Theophan, and Rublev, could freely move from one church to another; they could work in churches, and in the princely palace, or to paint the books, and no one gouged out their eyes for that. If it were that way, who would build and paint so many churches in Russia? Why does the film show that? To doom the ruins and disgust of Russia? Or (which is likely to be truth) hint at the massacre of artists in the USSR? This is how the history is trampled on» (Solzhenitsyn, 1997c: 162–163).

### ***Writer and history***

Writers play a special part for the history, as «every writer has something that is inherent with the history of his country, language, and nation. But there is necessarily something mutual, especially because we are all being drawn into the same great global crisis. These are always the main psychological and spiritual essences» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996j: 381). In other words, Solzhenitsyn says that the writer genetically belongs to the country and nation through a single spirit and common destiny.

Thus, A.I. Solzhenitsyn outlines his responsibility to the Russian people and its history; an understanding that his literary, analytical, and organizational talent, public recognition, and cultural significance should serve the people, Russians, above all: «First of all, I wrote all books to my people, to Rus-

sians, because we do not know our history, and that's what scares me ... I generally restored the truth, every truth about my country, and about my nation» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996l: 97). His future life, no matter where he lived, the writer always associated with Russia: «My future interlinks with the fate of my country. I am working and have always worked only for her. Our history is hidden, misinterpreted, and I am trying to rescue it primarily for my nation; indeed, to some extent, it may well be useful for the West». To comprehend and broadcast the history of one's country, the writer must «feel the native language, native land, and native history – and they will thank him back with the ideas and materials, which, in turn, by interaction, will suggest the form» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996m: 345, 491).

In a radio interview about «The Red Wheel» for Voice of America (1984), Mark Pomar asked A. I. Solzhenitsyn about the problem of sizing the historical figures and imaginary characters in the fiction: for example, Leo Tolstoy in «War and Peace» relied on purely on fictional characters; they helped to express his philosophical theories and understanding of the Russian history. And here again, A. I. Solzhenitsyn demonstrated his consistency to the historical material for the case of a documentary. The writer replied that he could not build his works only on fictional characters – this would give too much freedom to feelings and desire to write something that did not exist. So, for the whole story, fictional characters are relatively rare, and all the rest are real historical figures (Solzhenitsyn, 1997o: 255). Further, the writer explained that fictional characters are created to establish a personal link, to feel that, despite all the great historical events, personal life is flowing – there is still a place for human dramas, tragedies, and joys. For this goal, a historical figure is to reveal his psychology, by his language, documents, and biography. The author can speak a psychological interpretation out, because not all historical persons are transparent, as many people lie in their memoirs, and the writer has every right to say his own vision to the reader (Solzhenitsyn, 1997o: 256).

In another interview with David Aikman for *Time* (1989), commenting on a large vol-

ume of «The Red Wheel», A. I. Solzhenitsyn said that «the French have a series of 20-volumed novels. So, the Russian novels are not the biggest ones: «War and Peace» is just one of the cases of a long epic novel. The novels of Dostoevsky or Turgenev are small. There is no such tradition in Russia. But I have really written a huge thing ... still, for the reader, the length of the book is not the number of pages, but the density of thought, material, and artistic competence» (Solzhenitsyn, 1997f: 355). Understudied and underexamined history will inevitably push to repeat those mistakes, again and again reminding us of the lessons and undigested theories.

### Conclusion

That all brings us to say that, when studying the history, the cultural and philosophical context insures against distortions, since even if it is possible to distort historical facts and circumstances, then the cultural context will delete such changes, and the modified artifacts will look alien and inappropriate to the culture, and, thus, will be rejected. That is why when considering the historical process and its certain events through the cultural-philosophical perspective, one is ensured not only from deliberate, but also unintentional misinterpretations. This was the approach A. I. Solzhenitsyn was following to, saying that «in our country, where the history is completely distorted, where the generations of witnesses and documents have been destroyed, it is necessary to reconstruct the past, because the history is going on, and the key point is not to lose its internal connection with the people» (Solzhenitsyn, 1996j: 369).

Solzhenitsyn saw his artistic duty in bringing up the historical memory in the readers, since «without this memory, the history will no longer matter anything for the people. Memory cannot be cut off and reduced with no impact for the people's fate. But young people sometimes are frivolous and poorly comprehend their role in the history. Yes, my task is – to foster this memory and in people» (Solzhenitsyn, 1997p: 423).

The literary and historical heritage of A. I. Solzhenitsyn remains relevant in these



days. The writer's work was essential and popular in the Soviet period, since it dared to broadcast the inaccessible truth about the political crimes; it defended the trampled human rights, and gave people hope for justice in the historical perspective.

Today, this literature can be a reference to moral and patriotic education of the younger generation; be an example of the people's resil-

ience and courage when fighting the state system and handling everyday challenges; be an inexhaustible source of facts about the history of Russian statehood, by analyzing which one can avoid bloody mistakes in the future. Just by these aspects A. I. Solzhenitsyn investigated the historical course, which, as he assumed, is inextricably linked with the history of culture and art.

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